



Aesthetic Transcendence: Fashion's Evolution, Philosophical Reflections, and Societal Impact

Ankita Sharma

Department of Philosophy Punjabi University Patiala, India

*Corresponding Author Email: sharma66anki@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the evolution of fashion from its utilitarian origins over 170,000 years ago to its contemporary role as a symbol of cultural expression and individual identity. Tracing the historical trajectory through ancient civilizations, the Renaissance era, and significant societal shifts post-World War II, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between culture, external forces, and fashion. It also delves into the commodification of beauty in the contemporary era, examining the persuasive techniques used by beauty brands in advertisements, such as leveraging emotional states to connect deeply with consumers. The global impact of beauty standards and the perpetuation of white-centric ideals are scrutinized, emphasizing influential figures like Marcus Garvey, who challenged these norms. The study sheds light on the beauty industry's promotion of skin-lightening and hair-straightening products, particularly in Asian markets, and offers philosophical reflections on these beauty standards. Engaging with the works of Hume, Kant, Santayana, and Schiller, the paper dissects the subjective and objective dimensions of beauty, including Hume's emphasis on pleasure and pain, Kant's categorization of beauty, Santayana's concept of objectified pleasure, and Schiller's influence on German Idealism. It culminates with an exploration of Jean Baudrillard's "Death of the Real," examining the implications of a society immersed in creating identities detached from objective reality. This paper weaves together the historical evolution of fashion, beauty brand strategies, and philosophical reflections on beauty, offering a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between aesthetics, identity, and societal perceptions.

Keywords: Beauty, Fashion, Identity, Philosophical reflections, Societal perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In the tapestry of human experience, beauty has transcended mere aesthetic allure, weaving itself into the intricate fabric of identity, culture, and societal constructs. This research embarks on an illuminating journey through the realms of philosophy, aesthetics, and the dynamic landscape of the fashion industry. The elusive nature of beauty, as contemplated by eminent philosophers like Hume, Kant, and Santayana, beckons us to unravel its subjective nuances and its profound impact on the human psyche.

As we traverse the corridors of time, the fashion industry emerges as a kaleidoscopic mirror reflecting evolving societal values, trends, and consumer behaviors. The advent of fast fashion, epitomized by the disruptive force of brands like Zara and H&M, propels us into a realm marked by relentless shifts, challenging traditional models and propelling us into an era of unpredictability. This metamorphosis in the industry is not merely sartorial; it is a sociocultural phenomenon with far-reaching consequences.

However, the allure of beauty and fashion is not untouched by the thought-provoking theories of philosophers. Jean Baudrillard's provocative concept of the "Murder of the Real" casts a shadow over our contemporary understanding of beauty, posing existential questions about authenticity and the hyperreal within the domains of fashion and aesthetic ideals. In a world where the natural is eclipsed by layers of makeup, sculpted bodies, and societal standards of perfection, Baudrillard's lens challenges us to confront the disappearance of the real in the pursuit of an idealized hyperreality.

As we embark on this scholarly expedition, the intersections between beauty, fashion, and

philosophy beckon us to unravel profound insights, critique prevailing norms, and chart a course toward a nuanced comprehension of the aesthetic landscape. Through the synthesis of philosophical tenets, industry dynamics, and sociocultural implications, this research paper aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse, offering a multidimensional understanding of beauty's transformative journey in the ever-evolving tapestry of human existence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evolution of Fashion: From Utilitarian Necessity to Cultural Expression

"fashion" often evokes images of stylish trends, trendy attire, intricate hairstyles, fair complexions, and slender figures. The Cambridge Dictionary defines fashion as the prevalent style of a specific period, especially in clothing, hair, makeup, and related aspects (Cambridge University Press, 2020). On the other hand, according to the Collins Dictionary, fashion encompasses activities related to clothing styles and appearance (HarperCollins, 2020). Its significance lies in contemporary and traditional fashion images, thoughts, emotions, and cultural values. The symbolic expressions through clothing allow individuals to communicate aspects of their identity. This collectively contributes to placing them symbolically within a structured framework of status claims and lifestyle affiliations.

Fashion, originating as a practical necessity, evolved over 170,000 years from basic garments for protection to intricate expressions of identity. In ancient Greece and Rome, simplicity and comfort prevailed, with the wealthy donning vibrant silks. Medieval Europe showcased a stark social divide in attire, with peasants in practical wear and elites in opulent silks (Barnard, 2014).

The Renaissance democratized fashion, extending its influence to the middle class. Women's dresses became structured with corsets, and men's attire emphasized broad chests. Toxic makeup and elaborate hairstyles were prevalent. Laws restricted certain fabrics to royalty, but technological advancements made fashion more accessible. In subsequent centuries, we have witnessed rapid changes, reflecting historical events. The ebb and flow of styles in the Western world illustrated the interplay between culture, external forces, and fashion evolution.

Fashion's evolution spans millennia, from practical needs to intricate expressions. The Renaissance era marked a global fabric trade influenced by East-West interactions. Louis XIV and Charles II shaped European fashion, while the 19th century saw the rise of readymade clothing. World War I sparked societal shifts, influencing fashion (Stark, 2018). The post-World War II era witnessed transformative changes, from Dior's "New Look" to rebellious teenage styles. Fashion became a reflection of evolving societal roles and cultural acceptance.

In the latter half of the 20th century, they brought transformative historical events, global shifts, and economic highs and lows. Fashion adapted to these changes, reflecting the vibrancy and dynamism of each era. The internet revolutionized fashion dissemination, enabling instant global access and transforming how trends spread and evolve (Rissman, 2015).

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Fashion in Contemporary Times

Wars, women's rights, and economic shifts left an indelible mark on the fashion landscape. During World War I (1914-1918), the upheaval influenced every aspect of life, altering how people lived, worked, ate, and dressed. Women embraced newfound freedoms by adopting boyish flapper dresses, cutting off their long hair, and abandoning restrictive corsets. Military uniforms inspired fashion trends for both men and women. The early 1900s started with a vibrant and unconventional era, marked by significant societal changes and their direct reflection on fashion (Rissman, 2015).

We witnessed transformative historical events in the latter half of the 20th century. American schools desegregated, fueled by the civil rights movement promoting racial equality. Wars in Vietnam and Korea stirred political unrest and inspired global peace movements. The Beatles, British youth style and hippies dominated cultural scenes. Economic highs and lows marked the era. These changes were not exclusive to the U.S.; global shifts were underway. Amid these events, fashion continually adapted. From 1950 to 2000, clothing mirrored the era's vibrancy, boldness, and dynamism.

The 1930s established the foundations of fast fashion, disrupting the industry's traditional seasonal schedule (Arnold, 2009). The industry's volatility became evident, leading designers and manufacturers to diversify with licensing deals, ready-to-wear lines, and diffusion lines to stabilize market share. Financial strategies, including going public and stock market floats, became common from the mid-20th century onward. Luxury conglomerates in the late 20th century further protected against losses by diversifying across various industries, including wine, perfume, watches, and fashion brands.

Christian Dior's 1947 "New Look" embodied this shift with an hourglass silhouette, tight girdle, and wide skirt, signaling a return to feminine elegance. Men's fashion mirrored pre-war norms with dark suits, slim trousers, and narrow ties, projecting a refined image. The 1950s marked a break for teenagers, embracing casual and rebellious styles due to increased independence. Teen girls wore long skirts with bobby socks, while young men adopted a rebellious, motorcycle-gang-inspired look with blue jeans and leather jackets. These trends reflected broader cultural changes and the younger generation's desire for autonomy post-war (Arnold, 2009).

Notably, societal roles evolved for women and minorities. Increased freedoms and rights for women, gays, lesbians, and people of color were reflected in fashion. Attire from diverse cultures and lifestyles gained acceptance in mainstream society. Fashion, a timeless form of self-expression, became even more varied in the late 20th century, epitomized by the mantra "anything goes" as the sole fashion rule.

In the past, fashion trends evolved slowly, often initiated by royalty or wealthy individuals. These styles are disseminated gradually through word of mouth, pictures, or news stories. The advent of television expedited the process, but the internet has revolutionized the speed of fashion dissemination.

The internet enables instant global information exchange, profoundly impacting fashion. Once shared by travelers, styles from various corners of the world are now accessible online. Trends originating in Tokyo can swiftly gain popularity in Los Angeles. When Kate Middleton dons a dress, global customers flock online to purchase it. The internet has transformed the fashion landscape, allowing consumers to discover, buy, and adopt new styles within days (Arnold, 2009).

The fashion industry, rooted in change, has experienced a remarkable acceleration in the pace of transformation. Traditional seasonal collections give way to a constant, unpredictable shift—a relentless

and seemingly erratic paradigm. Fast fashion, characterized by rapid turnover and affordability, has disrupted the sector, with brands like Zara leading the charge.

This shift, while profitable, raises concerns. The success of fast fashion relies on consumers' constant purchasing, encouraging high inventory turnover and low prices. Strategies like limiting and restocking create scarcity, driving impulsive buying. The shopping experience has transformed from a leisurely activity to a continuous pursuit of novelty.

Empathy and Exploitation: Deciphering Emotional Tactics in Beauty Advertising

Beauty commercials often leverage emotions such as happiness, love, fear, confidence, passion, or disgust to connect with consumers. Interestingly, the irony lies in that brands may initially trigger an unpleasant emotional state related to appearance concerns to evoke a positive response. Beauty companies strategically tap into consumer anxieties by subtly implying feelings of inadequacy or showcasing images of exceptionally beautiful individuals. This psychological approach connects the consumer's emotional experiences and the product, influencing their purchasing decisions.

Various persuasive techniques are employed by beauty brands in their advertising messages to promote their products. Evocative language, demonstrations, dramatizations, and visual narratives are common approaches. Clé de Peau Beauté, positioning itself as "the premier luxury skincare and makeup brand from Shiseido Cosmetics," exemplifies this strategy by integrating figurative language into its promotions.

For example, a Clé de Peau Beauté eye shadow ad uses captivating copy such as, "Dancing in the shadows, eyes shimmer in irresistible shades of radiance. Lustrously dewy, yet impossibly light. Even up close, the mystery remains." This language evokes a sense of elegance, allure, and sophistication associated with the brand's products.

It's important to note that Clé de Peau Beauté's positioning as a luxury brand is reflected in its pricing, reaching as high as \$80 for eye shadows. This price point suggests that the product is likely to appeal more to status-seeking beauty consumers with higher discretionary income rather than budget-conscious consumers who may prioritize value over luxury in their beauty product choices. The brand strategically targets a demographic that values prestige and is willing to invest in high-end beauty products (Laham, 2020).

The promotional narrative and product description for the Ralph Lauren Tender Romance fragrance weave a story that taps into the emotional resonance of experiencing first love. The fragrance's description depicts a young couple embracing in a grassy field and emphasizes sweetness and innocence, aiming to establish a personal connection with the audience. If this messaging aligns with the consumer's emotions, they may be enticed to make Tender Romance with their signature fragrance (Models.com, 2016).

Brand names are crucial in conveying product benefits, as seen with examples from L'Oréal Paris and Estée Lauder. L'Oréal Paris uses names like Youth Code, Wrinkle Expert, Revitalift, Visible Lift, Excellence Age Perfect, and Root Rescue, each suggesting specific product benefits. Estée Lauder follows a similar approach with brand names such as Advanced Night Repair, Resilience Lift, Perfectionist, and Sumptuous, providing consumers with clear expectations about the products.

In addition to brand names, attention-grabbing logos are essential for quick brand identification, serving as a powerful communication tool. For example, the Garnier logo by L'Oréal incorporates the brand name, a green leaf symbolizing eco-commitment, and sometimes a tagline like "Take care." This multi-functional design aligns with the brand's promise of protecting people and the planet. Furthermore, slogans contribute significantly to a brand's identity, becoming the heart and soul of the brand and enhancing its image and awareness.

Numerous beauty commercials are shifting their advertising strategies to appeal to young women who have become fatigued or skeptical of traditional glamorous beauty ads. This trend involves advertising ad campaigns that focus on empowering women. Examples of such campaigns include Dove's #SpeakBeautiful, CoverGirl's #GirlsCan, and Procter & Gamble's Always brand's #LikeAGirl. These initiatives aim to connect with consumers deeply by promoting positive messages about self-confidence, breaking stereotypes, and challenging societal norms. Femvertising reflects a conscious effort by beauty commercials to align with contemporary values, champion diversity, and resonate with a more socially aware and empowered consumer base (Laham, 2020).

Renowned beauty brands have mastered crafting compelling taglines that resonate with consumers, subtly shaping perceptions of beauty and self-worth. L'Oréal Paris encourages individuals to embrace their intrinsic value with the tagline, "Embrace Your Worth," while Maybelline emphasizes enhancing natural beauty. MAC Cosmetics proudly celebrates diversity and individuality with the statement, "Celebrating Diversity and Individuality," while CoverGirl promises an aura of effortless elegance.

Estée Lauder boldly empowers women through their tagline, "Empowering Every Woman's Beauty," while Nivea instills confidence in one's own skin with "Confidence in Your Skin." Revlon encourages individuals to express their boldness with the tagline, "Express Your Boldness," Clinique ensures gentle care for all skin types with a commitment to allergy-tested and fragrance-free products.

Olay promotes timeless radiance with "Timeless Radiance," Neutrogena establishes itself as the dermatologist-recommended skincare brand worldwide. With its "Celebrate Authentic Beauty" tagline, Dove challenges conventional beauty standards. Benefit Cosmetics adds a touch of humor, asserting that "Smile is Your Best Accessory." Garnier focuses on nurturing the skin with "Nurture Your Skin," Chanel invites individuals to reinvent their essence with "Reinvent Your Essence."

Sephora encourages a collective exploration of beauty with "Discover Beauty Together," while Kiehl's, steeped in heritage since 1851, delivers skincare excellence. Too Faced urges individuals to embrace their unique beauty with "Embrace Your Unique Beauty," and Bobbi Brown champions the empowerment of one's authentic self with "Empower Your Authentic Self." Urban Decay boldly claims "Beauty with an Attitude," The Body Shop advocates for sustainable beauty with "Sustainably Nourish Your Beauty."

In their quest to sell beauty products, these brands subtly navigate the landscape of societal ideals, influencing perceptions of beauty and addressing perceived imperfections.

White standards of beauty

Marcus Garvey, in his writings, eloquently expressed his views on the degrading treatment of black individuals by whites, particularly concerning the humiliation associated with the black color. He emphasized that no one has the authority to dictate the criteria of beauty, as features such as color, hair, and skin are inherent aspects of nature. Garvey argued that the standard of beauty within a racial group should not be determined by comparing it to another race. To illustrate this point, he used the example of assessing the beauty standards of the Japanese people, highlighting the importance of evaluating them from a Japanese perspective rather than an Anglo-Saxon one (Garvey, 2023).

Garvey strongly rejected the notion that being a Negro equates to being ugly, asserting that it is impossible to determine any ugliness within the Negro race solely based on its color. He argued that if there is any perception of ugliness, it lies in the eyes of the beholder and not in the inherent qualities of individuals like the "little fat, black man with the big head," referencing himself or others with similar attributes. Garvey pointed out that the prevailing belief that anything black is inherently ugly, hideous, or monstrous has been constructed by societal perceptions rather than reflecting any inherent truth.

Garvey becomes important for us because he targeted the disturbing trend of advertisements, which are promoting the lightening of black skin and straightening of kinky hair to conform to white beauty standards. Asian countries are the big market for such products. These ads, prevalent in Asian newspapers and television commercials, targeted the vulnerable and unthinking masses, fostering dissatisfaction with their racial identity and encouraging them to aspire to a white appearance to be accepted in society. Numerous demeaning messages urged the blacks to alter their complexion as a prerequisite for social acceptance. Illustrations featuring two women, one with a black complexion and the other significantly lighter, carried captions such as 'Lighten your black skin,' implying that achieving perfection required bleaching to a white shade like the lighter woman. Other advertisements encouraged skin bleaching, with messages like 'Bleach your dark skin,' 'Remove the black from your face,' and 'Attain societal acceptance by lightening your black skin.' These promotions promised quick results, like 'Light skin beauty overnight,' 'Amazing bleach works under the skin,' and claimed to offer the 'only harmless way to bleach the skin white' or the 'most wonderful skin whitener (Garvey, 2023).' Additionally, advertisements were promoting the straightening of kinky hair, suggesting that adopting a more European aesthetic was essential for societal inclusion.

The Indian market has indeed been inundated with a variety of skin whitening products, with

some well-known brands including Fair & Lovely, Pond's White Beauty, Garnier Skin Naturals Light Complete, Lakmé Perfect Radiance Intense Whitening Day Cream, and Lotus Herbals Whiteglow Skin Whitening & Brightening Gel Crème. These products are often marketed to provide lighter and brighter skin.

One notable example is Fair & Lovely, known for its heavily aired television commercials. The advertisements for Fair & Lovely typically convey a narrative where a woman, initially portrayed as depressed with limited prospects, experiences a brighter future after using the skin whitening cream. The transformation is often depicted by showing the woman gaining either a boyfriend/husband or a job, and her success is correlated with becoming markedly fairer. This transformation is visually emphasized in the advertisements by using a silhouette of the woman's face transitioning from dark to light.

In a more recent development, Chinese authorities have uncovered concerning information about SK-II products, specifically their high-end skin whitening creams and powders. This revelation involves the detection of toxic heavy metals, namely chromium, and neodymium, in these cosmetic items. The findings prompted hundreds of outraged Chinese women to take to the streets of Shanghai, demanding refunds for the US-Japanese cosmetics in question.

According to a September 2006 report by Agence France Presse, the situation escalated to the point where security guards had to be summoned to control a crowd of approximately 300 individuals. The protestors were incensed not only by the presence of banned chemicals in the SK-II products but also by the delays in receiving promised refunds. These cosmetics, owned by the US consumer products giant Procter and Gamble, faced heightened scrutiny and public backlash due to the discovery of chromium and neodymium.

It is important to note that chromium and neodymium are heavy metals prohibited in cosmetics in China due to their potential to cause skin issues such as eczema and allergic dermatitis. Despite limited restrictions on personal care products in China, these harmful substances in a widely popular brand like SK-II have sparked significant concerns and triggered a public outcry for accountability and consumer safety (SK-II, 2007).

Products categorized as "skin fading/skin lighteners" pose significant concerns, with many identifying them as among the most toxic cosmetics in the Skin Deep database. A common ingredient in these products is hydroquinone, which functions as a skin lightener by reducing the production of melanin pigments in the skin. However, hydroquinone is a confirmed animal carcinogen and is known to be toxic to the skin, brain, immune system, and reproductive system.

Remarkably, while hydroquinone is banned in the European Union, it is permitted in products sold in the United States in concentrations of up to 2%. The US Cosmetic Ingredient Review panel has cautioned that this chemical is unsafe for use in products that remain on the skin, although this recommendation is not always heeded. For instance, Physicians Complex Skin Bleaching Cream, containing 2% hydroquinone and manufactured by CosMed, explicitly instructs consumers to apply it to clean skin twice daily for desired results despite the associated health risks.

This particular product raises further concerns as it contains a dozen problematic ingredients, including three chemicals that can potentially increase the risk of skin cancer by intensifying UV exposures in the deep layers of the skin. Notably, the package advises users that the application of Physicians Complex sunblock SPF #30 is mandatory daily, highlighting the importance of sun protection due to the potential adverse effects of the product's components. This underscores the need for heightened awareness and scrutiny regarding the ingredients present in cosmetics, particularly those designed for skin lightening, to ensure consumer safety (Manful et al., 2024).

Dermatologists emphasize that genetic factors primarily determine skin color, and no chemical can permanently lighten the skin. While certain substances like hydroquinone can generate temporary whitening effects, it is essential to note the potential risks associated with its use. Additionally, heavy metals such as chromium and mercury, both of which have been identified in skin whitening creams sold in Asia, can also contribute to temporary skin whitening but pose serious health concerns.

Major players in the cosmetics industry have pursued strategies to maximize sales by offering comprehensive "skin whitening regimes." These regimes go beyond traditional moisturizers, including cleansers, toners, day and night nourishers, and even facial cleansing wipes (Jung et al., 2019). By providing a range of products, companies aim to create a holistic approach to skin lightening, encouraging consumers to adopt a complete regimen for their desired results.

Anti-aging Technique

Due to the baby boomers' pursuit of defying the aging process, the anti-aging segment of the skincare market has become highly lucrative. Certain cosmetics companies assert that their anti-aging skincare products feature exceptionally potent ingredients, capable of remarkable feats such as resetting the "skin's aging clock." (Laham, 2020)

In advertising, cosmetics companies often employ sales messages to provide practical reasons for consumers to buy their products. These messages frequently involve making a claim—a product-specific strategy based on a prediction or promise regarding the product's performance. Claims typically require supporting facts, proof, or explanations to substantiate them. For instance, when a skincare product makes an anti-wrinkle or anti-aging claim, evidence, such as test results, research findings, consumer surveys, expert validation, or other external support, is usually necessary to validate the claim and enhance its credibility.

Luxury beauty products are no longer exclusive to affluent consumers, as many beauty companies have embraced the trend of premiumization to make luxury more accessible. Premiumization, a branding term, refers to the fusion of luxury desirability with the practicality of the mass market. Brands achieve premiumization through differentiation (standing out) and relevance (fitting into consumers' lives) (Anderson & Nelgen, 2021). An example of successful premiumization is the German color cosmetics brand BeYu, owned by the ARTDECO Cosmetic Group. Positioned as a *masstige* brand, BeYu has earned a reputation for high-quality color cosmetics and eye-catching packaging, all offered at an affordable price.

Dark Side of the Fashion Industry

Often alluring in its glamour, the fashion industry conceals a significant cost beneath its surface appeal. The pervasive issue of overproduction wreaks havoc on the environment, contributing to ecological damage. This excess production, driven by the relentless pursuit of meeting consumer demand, results in the overuse of resources and the generation of substantial waste.

Furthermore, the plight of laborers within the industry is a poignant concern. Many workers endure prolonged hours and challenging working conditions to fulfill fashion companies' demands. The race to produce more, faster often leads to the exploitation of labor, with consequences ranging from inadequate wages to compromising workers' well-being.

Despite their outward portrayal of poise and elegance, fashion models grapple with physical and emotional challenges. The industry's dynamic nature, with ever-evolving trends and expectations, takes a toll on these individuals. The pressure to conform to certain standards, coupled with the demands of constant reinvention, can lead to physical exhaustion and emotional distress among models.

These multifaceted problems extend beyond the runway and into our daily lives, encapsulated in the garments we wear, the cosmetics we use, and the jewelry we adorn. Each piece of clothing, cosmetic product, and jewelry item carries a complex narrative of environmental impact, labor exploitation, and the human cost of maintaining an industry driven by rapid change and mass production.

Exploring these issues in detail is imperative for fostering awareness and understanding the true toll of the fashion industry on our planet, its workers, and even those who symbolize its aesthetic ideals. It prompts reflection on the need for sustainable practices, ethical considerations, and a more conscientious approach to fashion consumption.

Environmental Degradation

Fast fashion is a major environmental offender, significantly impacting the planet. The fashion industry, known for its severe pollution, contributes to water and air pollution, deforestation, and extensive waste generation. Excessive clothing production strains resources, utilizing copious amounts of water, energy, and chemicals, polluting water bodies, and emitting greenhouse gases.

Fast fashion further fosters a culture of overconsumption and waste. The proliferation of inexpensive and disposable clothing encourages consumers to frequently purchase and discard items, resulting in a staggering 92 million tons of textile waste annually. This waste either ends up in landfills or is incinerated, contributing to environmental degradation and climate change. The detrimental impact of plastic pollution is well-documented, with plastics adversely affecting oceans, wildlife, and climate.

Synthetic materials in textiles, including those used in tights, significantly contribute to this problem.

The UNEP report highlights alarming statistics from The Ellen Macarthur Foundation, revealing that a truckload of abandoned textiles is either dumped in landfills or incinerated every second. A concerning trend exacerbates this staggering rate of textile disposal: people are purchasing 60% more clothes but wearing them for only half as long.

This rapid turnover in clothing consumption contributes to a myriad of environmental issues. Plastic fibers, ubiquitous in textiles, are major culprits in polluting oceans and wastewater. The Brooks (2019) production process involving toxic dyes further exacerbates environmental degradation. The fast fashion industry also often exploits underpaid workers, perpetuating social injustices (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

An ABC News documentary titled "The environmental disaster fueled by Used Clothes and Fast Fashion" highlighted that the aftermath of fast fashion, manifested in the form of second-hand clothes, has gained popularity in Ghana. The city is inundated with piles of these clothes, attracting people due to their affordability. However, not all these used clothes are suitable for wear, leading to a surplus that transforms into a dumping problem.

As landfills struggle to contain the vast quantities of discarded clothes, they spill into open spaces. During heavy rainfall, the water carries these textiles away, eventually reaching the sea. The disposal methods, including burning these landfills, contribute to air pollution, releasing toxic gases into the atmosphere. The environmental impact of the fast fashion cycle is evident in the challenges faced by regions like Ghana, where the repercussions extend from overflowing landfills to polluted air and waterways.

Chile's Atacama desert, once a marvel, has garnered a less enchanting reputation as one of the world's rapidly expanding repositories for discarded clothing. This is a consequence of the swift production of trendy, budget-friendly garments known as fast fashion. This trend has generated such a surplus of waste that the United Nations categorizes it as "an environmental and social emergency" for the planet. The imminent challenge lies in stemming this flow.

The figures paint a vivid picture. From 2000 to 2014, clothing production doubled, and consumers increased their purchases by 60 percent, wearing the garments for only half as long as before. Currently, three-fifths of all clothing ends up in landfills or incinerators within a year of production—a stark reality equating to a truckload of discarded or burned clothing every second. Predominantly, these facilities are situated in South Asia or Africa, where the receiving nations find themselves overwhelmed by the sheer volume (Bartlett, 2023).

Cheap Labour

Industrial workers, in other words, are not simply found but made. The fast fashion industry exploits these workers, particularly in developing nations. Leading brands frequently subcontract production to low-wage countries, subjecting workers to substandard conditions, prolonged work hours, inadequate wages, and sometimes forced labor. This perpetuation of the practice contributes to the existence of sweatshops, child labor, and unsafe workplaces, resulting in human rights violations and social injustice.

The common refrain of 'work faster or get out' echoes through the daily routine of garment workers globally. Prohibited from taking bathroom breaks, these workers endure relentless labor, sewing countless right-hand sleeves onto identical shirts for hours. At 11 am, a brief lunch break provides a momentary respite, but the cheap and low-quality rice with vegetables and minimal meat fails to alleviate hunger.

The workers endure extreme heat when returning to the stifling factory environment, characterized by four brick walls and an inadequate metal roof with few air vents. Nausea and faintness prevail as the temperature rises, leading some to lose consciousness. The day persists until 4 pm when the bell signals the end of the official workday. On good days, like today, overseas orders result in overtime opportunities, compelling workers to file back in for an additional two hours.

Workers arrive by half-past seven after a perilous journey home, often involving hazardous truck rides. Despite exhaustion, dinner preparation ensues – a simple rice meal with eggs – before succumbing to a deep and much-needed sleep. This grueling routine represents the daily reality for millions of garment workers worldwide, toiling six days a week or more annually (Parsons, 2023).

In Andrew Morgan's documentary "True Cost," the tragic incident of the Rana Plaza factory

collapse in Bangladesh takes center stage. This event stands as the most devastating accident in the history of fashion production. In 2013, an eight-story building housing garment factories collapsed, resulting in the loss of over 1,000 factory workers' lives and leaving more than 2,500 others injured (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017).

In the DW Documentary, "*The Dirty Business of Beauty*," the exploration delves into how social media influencers have played a significant role in increasing the demand for quartz and gemstones. However, the seemingly beautiful materials are extracted under dubious conditions in the Global South. However, people in Europe value gemstones for their beauty and supposed healing qualities, so mining them is harmful and detrimental to the overall well-being of the workers involved in the global mining industry.

Modelling Industry

The modeling industry, with its glamorous facade, harbors a darker side that adversely affects models. Many face exploitation through low wages, long hours, and unfavorable conditions. The relentless pursuit of unrealistic beauty standards often leads to unhealthy practices, including extreme dieting and mental health issues. Instances of sexual harassment and exploitation have been reported, highlighting power imbalances within the industry. Despite ongoing efforts, diversity remains challenging, and models may experience short-lived careers with limited job security. The pressure to conform stifles individuality, contributing to a lack of creativity and representation. Moreover, the competitive nature of the industry takes a toll on models' mental health, leading to issues like anxiety and depression. While strides are being made toward a more inclusive and ethical fashion industry, addressing these challenges requires ongoing advocacy and reform.

Calendar Girls, a film directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, explores the lives of five young women who become models for a prestigious calendar. The movie delves into the glamorous yet challenging world of the fashion industry, shedding light on the calendar girls' struggles, aspirations, and personal journeys. As their careers soar, they face the darker side of fame, dealing with issues such as exploitation, societal expectations, and the transient nature of success. The film provides a behind-the-scenes look at the high-pressure and competitive environment of the modeling world, offering a critique of the industry's impact on the lives of these young women. At the movie's end, it is shown that the new year has come. The old calendar is removed, and the new one is used with the five new calendar girls at various places. This movie is a true example of the fashion cycle, which is depicted by a metaphor for waves in the sea. Just as one wave reaches its peak and starts to subside, fresh waves emerge. These new waves, in turn, reach their zenith and may even surpass the preceding ones. (Brenninkmeyer, 1963)

Madhur Bhandarkar's *fashion* movie serves as a scathing critique of the fashion industry, laying bare its glamorous facade and delving into the harsh realities beneath. The film unfolds the journey of a hopeful model, revealing the exploitative and cutthroat nature of an industry obsessed with superficial success. It explores the complexities of relationships tainted by the pursuit of fame and exposes the detrimental impact of societal pressures on individuals. The darker side of the fashion world, including exploitation and the ephemeral nature of success, is highlighted, forcing viewers to confront the industry's questionable ethics and its toll on those within its grasp. The film provides a critical lens to examine the superficiality and consequences inherent in the fashion cycle.

Philosophical Perspectives on Beauty: From Subjectivity to Pleasurable Essence

In philosophy, the concepts of beauty revolve around subjective and objective notions. The subjective perspective suggests that beauty is a product of individual perception in the beholder's mind. At the same time, the objective stance asserts that beauty is an inherent quality within the external world. Traditionally, until the eighteenth century, many philosophical discussions on beauty treated it as an objective quality found within the beautiful object or its qualities.

Notable philosophers like Augustine, Plato, and Plotinus linked beauty to love and desire, locating its essence in the realm of Forms or the participation of particular objects in these Forms. However, eighteenth-century thinkers like Hume and Kant perceived a significant loss when beauty was exclusively regarded as a subjective state. They recognized that if beauty became entirely relative to individual experiences, it would lose its universal value across different individuals and societies.

Hume shifted from exploring the nature of beauty to examining what makes a critic credible.

According to him, refined judgment, devoid of prejudice, is crucial for critics to establish credibility. Kant, in contrast, argued that the judgment of beauty is disinterested and free from personal idiosyncrasies. For Kant, the genuine judgment of taste requires independence from normal human desires, such as economic and sexual interests.

Hume's definition of beauty asserts that it is an arrangement of parts that elicits pleasure and satisfaction, highlighting the essential role of pleasure and pain in shaping the essence of both beauty and deformity. The experience of delight and satisfaction stands out as a distinctive quality of beauty. At the same time, deformity, whether observed in animate or inanimate subjects, triggers feelings of discomfort and pain (Watts, 2019).

Hume contends that the pleasure derived from beauty and the discomfort stemming from deformity are universal experiences, transcending the specific nature of the observed subject. When these aesthetic experiences are applied to our bodies, the resulting pleasure or uneasiness transforms into emotional responses such as pride or humility. The connection between beauty/deformity and self is significant in Hume's perspective. The contrasting sensations are intricately linked to the contrary passions of pride and humility. Consequently, it is not surprising that our perception of our beauty elicits feelings of pride, while deformity prompts a sense of humility. The interplay of these aesthetic experiences with the passions of self-reflection further emphasizes the intricate and multifaceted nature of our emotional responses to the perceived beauty or deformity of ourselves and the world around us (Watts, 2019).

In Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, he introduces a nuanced distinction in the realm of aesthetics by categorizing beauty into two distinct types: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) and dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*) (Cassirer, 2020). This classification is a conceptual framework to explore the diverse ways we perceive and evaluate aesthetic experiences.

Free beauty, as Kant delineates it, is characterized by its independence from any predetermined concepts or expectations. Objects exhibiting free beauty are appreciated for their intrinsic qualities without the need for adherence to specific criteria or standards. These beauties are deemed "self-subsisting," existing in their own right and not contingent on external conceptual frameworks.

On the other hand, dependent beauty is contingent upon the presence of a concept or a preconceived notion of what the object should be. Objects falling under this category are evaluated based on their alignment with a particular concept or purpose. In this case, the aesthetic judgment of beauty is closely tied to the object's fulfillment of specific conditions or its correspondence with conceptual expectations.

Kant's ascription of free beauty to beautiful objects, independent of external criteria, contrasts with dependent beauty, which is associated with a conditioned beauty contingent upon adherence to specific concepts. This dual categorization enriches our understanding of aesthetic judgments by highlighting how we appreciate and evaluate the beauty of the world around us. In essence, Kant's distinction underscores the intricate interplay between the subjective nature of aesthetic experience and the influence of preconceived concepts on our perception of beauty.

In evaluating free beauty, particularly in mere form, we encounter the essence of the pure judgment of taste, untethered by the imposition of any preconceived concept regarding the purpose or end that the object should serve. This absence of a predetermined end liberates the imagination, allowing it to roam freely in the contemplation of the external form. Unencumbered by the constraints of a specific purpose, objects possessing free beauty become a playground for the unfettered imagination.

Contrastingly, a shift occurs when we consider the beauty of entities such as a human (encompassing men, women, or children), a horse, or a constructed edifice like a church or palace. This form of beauty presupposes a clear concept of the end or purpose that defines the nature of the object. It is, therefore, categorized as adherent beauty. In these cases, the aesthetic judgment is influenced by the inherent concept of perfection and the specific end the object aims to achieve.

Two distinct factors come into play in the context of adherent beauty. Firstly, the aesthetic normal idea is an individual intuition produced by the imagination. This normal idea serves as a standard against which we assess a human being as a representative of a particular species. Secondly, the rational idea enters the scene, dealing with the ends of humanity that transcend sensory representation. It transforms these abstract ends into a guiding principle for evaluating the outward form of individuals, providing insight into how these ends manifest in their visible and phenomenal effects (Cassirer, 2020).

According to George Santayana, beauty finds its essence in being 'objectified pleasure,' encapsulating a perspective that defines it as a positive, intrinsic, and objectified value (Santayana, 2019). For Santayana, an object's beauty is contingent upon its ability to evoke pleasure in individuals. The core tenet of this definition is that beauty is inherently tied to the pleasurable emotions it elicits.

Santayana's conceptualization further articulates beauty as pleasure when considered an object's inherent quality. It is not merely a perception grounded in factual observation or relational attributes but, instead, an emotion—an expression of our volitional and appreciative nature. In this light, beauty is a value, transcending the realm of empirical truths or relational aspects and residing firmly in human emotion.

Moreover, Santayana asserts that an object cannot be deemed beautiful if it fails to bring pleasure to anyone. The very essence of beauty is rooted in its capacity to evoke a positive emotional response. According to Santayana, considering beauty that remains indifferent to all individuals would be a logical contradiction. In essence, Santayana's definition crystallizes beauty as an emotional experience intrinsically linked to pleasure and underscores its subjective and affective nature in the realm of human appreciation.

Schiller's expression of a similar series of thoughts was fundamentally influential on the conceptions of beauty developed within German Idealism:

If such a concept is adduced, the pre-rational concept of Beauty can be drawn from no actual case—rather, it does itself correct and guide our judgment concerning every actual case; it must, therefore, be sought along the path of abstraction and it can be inferred simply from the possibility of a nature that is both sensuous and rational; in a word, Beauty must be exhibited as a necessary condition of humanity. Beauty makes man a whole, complete in himself (Schiller, 2016).

Murder of the Real: Jean Baudrillard

The concept of the Real implies a framework of origin, end, past, and future – a sequence of causes and effects, a sense of continuity, and a rational structure. Without these elements, the Real lacks objective discourse, and its disappearance entails the disruption of this entire constellation (Baudrillard, 2019). In our virtual world, grappling with the Real, the referent, the subject, and its object becomes an unanswerable question. The death of the real within the context of fashion and beauty signifies its demise and its complete vanishing act. In today's reality, the natural is elusive. Layers of makeup, meticulously styled hair, and sculpted bodies through various interventions dominate the scene. With their distinctive body shapes, the Kardashian sisters wield significant influence, shaping generations worldwide. Whether one is naturally thin or curvy seems irrelevant, as societal ideals dictate what is perceived as perfection. The pressure to conform to these standards has led to a relentless pursuit of artificial enhancements.

Celebrities appear ageless, as aging is deemed undesirable. Embracing the natural aging process has been replaced by injecting chemicals to maintain a youthful appearance. The desire to stay forever young has given rise to a capitalist industry capitalizing on our insecurities, from pimple-free teenage years to wrinkle-free aging. Accepting the natural cycle has become a societal challenge.

No individual, class, group, or subject can be solely held responsible for this pervasive hyperrealization of things. It's as if everyone is simultaneously a perpetrator and a victim, intertwined like a Möbius strip. This warped effect of irresponsibility is a unique facet of Perfect Crime. Our presence is never precisely defined – not to ourselves or others. Consequently, we are not entirely real to one another, nor are we entirely real even to ourselves (Iser, 2022)

CONCLUSION

The research delves into the philosophical underpinnings of beauty, examining the subjective and conceptual dimensions through Hume, Kant, and Santayana. It scrutinizes the paradigm shift in the fashion industry from traditional models to fast fashion, exemplified by Zara's dynamic strategies. The study reveals the psychological tactics of beauty commercials manipulating consumer behaviors and emotions and highlights the environmental and labor issues in fast fashion. Introducing Baudrillard's "Murder of the Real" theory, the paper explores the hyperreal ideals in beauty and fashion, urging readers to critically engage with the intricate relationships between aesthetics, consumerism, and authenticity in the modern era. Through a multidisciplinary lens, it contributes nuanced perspectives to the discourse on aesthetics, consumerism, and reality in beauty and fashion

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