

GARMENTS / ETRUSCANS

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A garment customarily has an inside and an outside; it can be inverted. It has dearness. It can be handed down. Garments are fragile, formal and mysterious, therefore valuable.

A habit is a suit of clothes. Karl Marx began *Capital* with a description of the development of value in relation to the stages of construction of a kind of coat called a habit.

If something did not previously exist in *this* form, how would we recognize it as form? Part of a garment's value derives from the recognizable iteration of a supple, reversible shape. It is an inhabitable kind of precarious speaking.

As etymologists we'll venture this: form is amateur or Etruscan. The Etruscan language had no precedents or antecedents. It was not Indo-European. It sometimes borrowed and loaned concepts and their words, but did not develop from or toward any neighbouring or even distant language. There is a theory that Etruscan was a secret ceremonial language constructed on inversions. The Etruscan word "form" is the Greek *morphe* loosely spelled backwards. The Etruscans borrowed it, inverted it, then handed down the word to Latin.

Marks and traces of construction are often hidden on the insides of garments. Snags and darts and seams and threads latently cluster: untidy, like sentiment. Every seamstress will want to finger the inner expressions of seams. As she inverts the garment with a little thrill, seeking its formal secrets, its hidden linings, its instructions for care, every fetishist will recognize the fonts of the Jacquard-woven labels.

One meaning of form is "the resting place of a hare." Surely a hare doesn't stop for long. Form only pauses. Well, the earth is not different than ornament. Using the medium of our bodies, we dress in its fibrous elements and mix them around. The web, the fleece, the skin, the stem, the gauze, the seed fluff, the petal and leaf tinctures fixed by mineral and che-

mical mordents; we're wearing the spun-out elements of the teeming surface we've endangered. Clothed, we're shuttle-like. Even a city is woven with our transactions. A loom is the fundamental unit of architecture and economics.

Aristotle says that when we think of the physical world, we must structure our thought in terms of elements and causes. We imagine that these terms are similar to the fixed warp and the mobile weft. A pause is between an element and a cause. There is a physics of garments. When we say that form is amateur, we're suggesting that form is unlimited and undetermined. The extreme variousness of the history of garments suggests this is so. It is possible that our habits and thoughts—in proliferating combination with the earthly elements and accompanied by our spatial sense of interiority and exteriority—will produce a garment that belongs to no institution.

Here folded, there skirted, occasionally veiled, between garland and garnish, unutterable mysteries variegate a vocabulary of form. We must be dressed to be able to think. Spirit is what flutters the cloth.

With attentive passiveness, hooked and buttoned together, tucked-in, fluffed, smoothed, with strictest tailoring, impeccably darned, ritually torn, privately

unfolded with widest vibrating frock-skirts, from the skimpy shade of a flaring collar, in hidden, slippery floral negligee, beneath unimpeachably brushed felt hat-brim, brushed counterclockwise against inclement weather, flung errantly, upward-gathered protectively, tightly, caressingly, accompanied by the scent of wet wool, with brittle flaking trail of ancient taffeta, and sprung and blurry knife-pleats, dangling sullied cuffs, puckered redundancies, bursting elbow darts and clumsily altered waist-seam, proportionate ancientness, profligate thinness, hastily re-pinned hem, and newest possible recombination of superlative lost gestures, with tactile eagerness and tacit illustrious hope we wonder about form. Maybe it shivers. Or outwardly it glitters and gleams. So say the etymologists.

From fold to seam (where the fold is the opposite of the seam), from whole cloth to the cut, from weave to knot, the history of the structure of garments has moulded all the human gaits and ways of moving across cities and rooms. Our slightest gesture is inflected by the forms of the clothing we wear. Personally, we prefer the older garments to the tyranny of the new. We prefer to be caught unawares by the flicker of our ancestors' gestures inhabiting our own. In this way, the garment frees us from tiresome autonomy.

Our bed with its sheets and blankets is also dressed, and the daintiest dish of the luncheon board or the merest sandwich wears its diminutive invitation. Trimming is an ancient sport. To dress and trim has been our entertainment. How do we know how to do it? Someone learned from someone—a desire, then a gesture transcended a life, reached toward another's, and then it happened again. The invitation flits, impalpable, from hand to hand, from will to will, pausing now and then among the materials to temporarily alter the forms of appearing. Its ghost is a texture. We say of a textile that it has a hand. When the garment falls to the floor, how does the hand later know how to fold it? How do you fold a garment you love, a garment you have made love in, a garment mended by a stranger, a garment inherited with difficult emotional complicity, and what sort of garment do you leave on the floor?

On the frieze adorning the front of the Athenian Acropolis, two female figures—one divine, one human—together fold a large cloth. What is that textile suspended from their four hands? A sail, a robe, a blanket, a curtain, a dance floor, a city. A house or a city is just a library of cloth. We need protective closets for our outfits, and for the ones we've inherited, and also for the ones we retrieve from the city's refuse heaps and the stores and warehouses of the

refusées, lead purely by our instinct for cloth, which radiates from our recollecting hands.

Let's think about the hermetical adornments of the housewife of any gender, the laundress of any gender, the hoarder, the private collector of unfamous things that will never overtly appear. Because not every garment is always for appearance. The folded garments, resting in their little caches, will rise from and fall into secrecy and in this way notate seasons and time. She, the citizen of this library, will arrange these tremulous fragments. She will fold them, smooth them, wrap them and store them. Her gestures are protective and sometimes inquisitive. Sometimes she will retrieve her assemblages just for the pleasure of the rustling of the special papers and to admire or meditate a little on their plentiful solitude. She'll take the inventory of humbleness. This ceremony could take place at the change of seasons, or when somebody dies, or in the morning after certain unsettling dreams, or sometimes while a little drunk. Her fingers will tingle. This tingling will originate a syntax. Secrecy is social. Hers is a material anthropology of secrets.

Ratty, tawdry, cheap, elusive, worn: what we clandestinely love we assemble according to a formal grammar that operates on reversals and the strong

pleasure of the implicit. We use the garment sometimes to hide desire, and then we veil the garment itself with the purloined wrappings of a lapsed economy. We keep them for later, for Nothing, these moth-filigreed blankets of melancholic provenance, these coin-like tags and buttons sacrificially clipped from jettisoned cardigans, these stained luncheon gloves that have lost their mates, these embarrassing blouses with lurid applique corsages, these moot words applied to cloth. Objects and wrappings found in anonymous thrift-store pockets now become elements in a language game.

The referentiality of these private caches is indirect. They don't function like signs; they are images. Any image is thick with latent time, with others' times, as is the structure of anyone's consciousness. An image makes a proposition about the complexity of human relationship—historically, sensually and psychically. As a battery stores energy, converting then releasing it in measured increments, the image stores time. A composed stack or pile of discrete units in enclosed contact produces an energetic charge. The relationship of memory to the polyvalence of surfaces, their textures, the productive and affective traces of bodies, is enjambed or paused in the image. Any image is a network of correspondences that energetically converts its receiver.

The relationship of form to image is this: not every form is an image, yet each image selects from, enacts and reconfigures a history of form. Form is labile, always becoming other, slipping away, as in the ancient Ovidian accounts of changing. The image frames this lability, gathers and arranges its traces in order to transmit immaterial experience to the future, to the lover, to whatever must be transformed. The transmission will not be smooth or constant. Long fallow times in the image-life may arise. We think that any image, any outfit, is an autobiography of form.

Arena, ceremony, form, family, market, military, person, satellite: these are words of Etruscan origin.

We
just
love
etymology,

in
a
decorative
way.

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