

FASHIONING PHILOSOPHY

THE TRANSLATION OF PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS INTO FASHION CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This paper examines the translation of philosophical thought into contemporary fashion imagery, focusing on how philosophical texts are transformed into semiotic resources within luxury fashion campaigns. Drawing on Roland Barthes' theory of fashion semiotics and Stuart Hall's notion of trans-coding, the study conceptualizes this process not as faithful interpretation but as transformation, whereby philosophy is converted into visual, affective, and mythological forms. The analysis is situated within recent debates in fashion philosophy and cultural theory. Through two comparative case studies—Saint Laurent's *As Time Goes By* campaign (2024) inspired by Marcel Proust, and Gucci's *Aria* campaign (2021) referencing Sigmund Freud, Judith Butler, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Baudrillard—the paper demonstrates how fashion mobilizes philosophy as symbolic capital. Saint Laurent translates Proustian temporality into a regime of restraint, slowness, and interiority, constructing philosophy as an atmosphere of intellectual elegance. Gucci, by contrast, stages philosophy as excess, citation, and desire, transforming theoretical texts into fetishized signs within a hyperreal visual economy. By integrating Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the paper argues that contemporary fashion does not merely borrow from philosophy but reshapes it into wearable mythologies. In doing so, fashion reveals both the power and the limits of philosophy's circulation in image-driven consumer culture.

Keywords: *Philosophy; Myth; Semiotics; Fashion; Cultural Capital.*

INTRODUCTION

Fashion has long occupied an ambivalent position in 'western' intellectual thought.

While philosophy has traditionally concerned itself with truth, permanence, rationality, and ethics, Fashion has been associated with ephemerality, surface, imitation, and excess.

As a result, fashion has historically been excluded from the core concerns of philosophical inquiry, relegated instead to the domains of sociology, anthropology, or cultural studies (Svendsen, 2006; Simmel, 1957). Yet in recent decades, fashion has increasingly asserted itself as a site of theoretical reflection, engaging explicitly with philosophical texts, concepts, and figures.

This paper examines the relationship between

philosophy and contemporary fashion campaigns by exploring how philosophical discourse is transformed into visual and semiotic forms within luxury branding.

Specifically, it explores the translation of philosophical texts into fashion garments through contemporary luxury fashion campaigns. Rather than treating philosophy as an abstract intellectual source that merely inspires designers, the paper examines how philosophical references are semiotically transformed into visual, material, and narrative forms that structure fashion imagery and branding. Focusing on two case studies—Saint Laurent's *As Time Goes By* (2024) campaign under Anthony Vaccarello, and Gucci's *Gucci Aria* (2021) campaign under Alessandro Michele—the

paper also explores the kind of meaning produced when philosophical thought is translated into fashion. The central question of this study is how contemporary luxury fashion campaigns transform philosophical discourse into visual and semiotic capital, and what kinds of ideological meanings emerge through this process.

Through this lens, fashion campaigns are treated as texts that do not merely reference philosophy but actively re-code it into wearable, visual, and consumable forms.

To address this question, the paper employs Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, particularly his analysis of fashion as a system of signs, and his theory of myth as second-order signification.

FASHION, PHILOSOPHY & LITERATURE: A HISTORICALLY UNEVEN RELATIONSHIP

Traditionally, Philosophy has maintained a skeptical, often dismissive stance toward fashion. Within this study, the term 'philosophy' refers not only to formal philosophical discourse, but more broadly to theoretical and intellectual traditions mobilized within contemporary fashion imagery. From Plato onward, appearance and imitation have been viewed as threats to truth and knowledge (Plato, 2002). Fashion, understood as a system governed by change, novelty, and social imitation, appeared incompatible with philosophy's pursuit of stable, universal principles.

The reason for fashion's unreliability was usually related to the emphasis on the body, the visibility and the material. Clothing, adornment, and style foreground the surface of the body, a realm traditionally associated with deception and contingency rather than rational insight.

As a result, fashion was rarely considered a legitimate philosophical object, except as an example of moral decay, social conformity, or cultural frivolity.

Fashion's historical proximity to literature rather than philosophy is not merely a matter of disciplinary neglect but reflects a deeper affinity between dress, narrative, and symbolic expression. Literary figures have often treated clothing as a vehicle for aesthetic, ethical, and even philosophical reflection, long before philosophy itself acknowledged fashion as a legitimate object of inquiry. A paradigmatic example of this literary engagement with dress is found in Oscar Wilde, whose essay *The Philosophy of Dress* (1885)

articulates one of the earliest systematic attempts to theorize clothing as an intellectual and aesthetic practice. In *The Philosophy of Dress* (1885), Wilde rejects the prevailing view of clothing as a superficial or purely functional matter.

Instead, he presents dress as a mode of self-articulation and a form of aesthetic intelligence. For Wilde, clothing is not an external ornament added to an already-formed subject, but a constitutive element of personal identity and cultural expression. Dress, he argues, should be guided by principles of harmony, proportion, and beauty rather than by blind adherence to fashion trends or utilitarian demands (Wilde, 1885).

Wilde anticipates later philosophical discussions of embodiment by insisting that the way one dresses is inseparable from the way one exists in the world. Dress becomes a form of lived aesthetics, mediating between the self and society.

In modern culture, this alliance has re-emerged through contemporary aesthetic trends such as *dark academia* or *poetcore*, which draw on literary figures and textual atmospheres rather than philosophical systems (López Millán, 2023).

Emerging primarily through digital platforms and social media, these trends are characterized by their visual citation of literary culture.

While they are inspired by intellectualism, *dark academia* and *poetcore* draw upon a romanticized vision of the intellectual life shaped by novels, poetry, and biographical myths of writers and artists. Both trends exemplify how fashion continues to seek intellectual legitimacy through literary affect and narrative imagery, rather than through explicit philosophical engagement.

They reaffirm the cultural logic identified by Wilde, in which dress operates as a form of aesthetic self-construction and cultivated sensibility.

In parallel with the rise of literary aesthetics such as *dark academia* and *poetcore*, contemporary fashion has developed a pronounced fascination with books themselves as material and symbolic objects. Beyond atmosphere or narrative suggestion, books increasingly appear as explicit visual motifs within fashion collections and accessories, functioning as condensed signs of intellectual depth, cultural authority, and cultivated taste.

This phenomenon marks a shift from fashion's engagement with literary *mood* toward the direct citation of literature as object.

A paradigmatic example is the work of JW

Anderson for Dior, particularly its series of book-inspired bags and garments that reproduce the covers of canonical and contemporary literary texts, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal*.

These accessories do not merely reference literature in a thematic sense but materialize the book as fashion object, transforming reading into a wearable sign. The bag ceases to be a neutral functional item and becomes a symbolic surface upon which cultural capital is displayed.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO FASHION

Although fashion was long excluded from philosophical inquiry, the last two decades have seen a major expansion of scholarship treating fashion as a legitimate object of philosophical, aesthetic, and theoretical analysis.

Rather than forming a unified field, these approaches collectively challenge the assumption that fashion is superficial or conceptually insignificant.

A key precursor to contemporary fashion theory is Georg Simmel, whose essay *Fashion* (1905) remains one of the earliest attempts to theorize fashion as a meaningful social and philosophical phenomenon. Although writing from sociology, Simmel explored themes of modernity, individuality, temporality, and social form.

He conceptualized fashion through the dialectic of imitation and differentiation: fashion allows individuals both to belong to a group and distinguish themselves from others.

This tension makes fashion unstable and temporally bound, linking it directly to modernity's accelerated sense of time and perpetual change.

Lars Svendsen's *Fashion: A Philosophy* (2004) occupies a foundational place in contemporary philosophical approaches to fashion.

Svendsen argues that fashion cannot be reduced to clothing or explained solely through sociology or economics; rather, it is a system of meaning structured around change, novelty, and collective recognition. What distinguishes fashion from dress is its temporality: fashion exists only insofar as it becomes obsolete. While Svendsen establishes the philosophical groundwork for understanding fashion as intellectually significant, he does not examine how meaning is produced through images, branding, or visual references.

Thinking through Fashion (2015), edited by

Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, marks a methodological shift by positioning fashion not merely as an object of theory but as a site through which theory itself can be tested and transformed. Drawing on frameworks such as psychoanalysis, phenomenology, feminism, and post-structuralism, the volume argues that fashion reshapes concepts like ideology, performativity, and subjectivity through embodiment and visibility.

In doing so, it destabilizes the hierarchy between philosophy and fashion. Nicholas Pappas's *The Philosopher's New Clothes* (2015) examines how philosophy historically defined itself against fashion and appearance. Focusing on Plato's *Theaetetus* and the early Academy, Pappas argues that philosophy actively constructed fashion as its conceptual opposite, associating it with imitation, instability, and superficiality in contrast to truth and stable knowledge. Fashion thus became central to philosophy's own self-definition.

Similarly, *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion* (2016), edited by Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marino, establishes fashion as a legitimate field of philosophical inquiry.

Rejecting the marginalization of fashion as merely commercial or sociological, the collection presents it as a complex cultural practice raising questions about temporality, imitation, normativity, and aesthetic value. Rather than defining fashion as a stable object, the contributors approach it as a constellation of tensions between individuality and conformity, innovation and repetition.

Finally, Gwenda-lin Grewal's *Fashion | Sense* (2022) offers one of the most ambitious challenges to the traditional opposition between philosophy and fashion. Rather than asking how philosophy can interpret fashion, Grewal asks how fashion itself constitutes a mode of thinking. She argues that philosophy's privileging of depth and truth has historically devalued surface, appearance, and change, even though philosophical thought itself depends on style and embodiment.

Central to her argument is the concept of "fashion-thinking," a form of reflection grounded in temporality, transformation, and repetition, positioning fashion as a space where abstract philosophical ideas are materially lived and performed.

APPLYING BARTHES' SEMIOTICS

This study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as its primary methodological framework in order to analyze how philosophical texts and concepts are translated into contemporary fashion campaigns. Barthes' work is particularly suited to this task because it conceptualizes fashion not as a neutral object or aesthetic phenomenon, but as a structured system of signs through which cultural meanings are produced, circulated, and naturalized. By treating fashion campaigns as semiotic texts, Barthes' framework allows for a rigorous analysis of how philosophy is re-coded into visual, material, and discursive forms.

In *The Fashion System* (1983), Barthes proposes a tripartite model for understanding how fashion generates meaning.

He distinguishes between the real garment, the image garment, and the written garment.

The real garment refers to the material object itself—the clothing as worn or produced.

The image garment consists of visual representations of clothing, such as photographs, illustrations, and campaign imagery.

The written garment encompasses the textual descriptions that accompany fashion, including captions, press releases, reviews, and brand narratives (Barthes, 1983, pp. 3–26).

Crucially, Barthes argues that meaning does not originate from the real garment alone. Instead, fashion meaning is produced through the interaction of these three levels, with the image and written garments playing a decisive role in shaping interpretation ((Barthes, 1983, pp. 5–10).

This insight is particularly relevant to contemporary fashion campaigns, which function primarily through controlled visual and textual narratives rather than through direct engagement with the material garment.

In the context of this study, fashion campaigns are treated as privileged semiotic sites in which philosophical ideas are articulated not through argumentation but through image composition, styling, pacing, and textual framing.

The campaign becomes a space where meaning is actively constructed, allowing philosophy to be translated into fashion without requiring conceptual explanation or theoretical precision.

In *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes introduces the concept of myth as a second-order semiological system. In myth, a sign from the first semiological system (for example, a garment with certain

connotations) becomes a signifier for a broader cultural ideology. Myth functions by naturalizing historically and culturally constructed meanings, presenting them as self-evident or “common sense.”

Fashion campaigns that reference philosophy operate at precisely this mythological level.

Philosophical traditions, texts, and figures are transformed into signs that signify intellectual authority, depth, or radicality, which are then attached to brand identity (Barthes, 1972).

In this process, philosophy is stripped of its argumentative complexity and reconstituted as a visual and affective resource.

Through myth, fashion campaigns convert philosophy into a form of symbolic capital that appears natural and inevitable.

The association between a brand and intellectual seriousness, for example, comes to seem intrinsic rather than constructed. This mythological operation is central to understanding how philosophy functions within contemporary fashion culture—not as critique, but as legitimizing aura.

Although Barthes developed his semiotic framework primarily in relation to print fashion media, his approach remains productive for analysing contemporary digital campaigns because these campaigns continue to operate through systems of visual signification, textual framing, and myth production.

At the same time, contemporary luxury campaigns circulate within digital environments shaped by accelerated image consumption, algorithmic visibility, and participatory spectatorship.

This study therefore adapts Barthes' framework not as a closed structuralist system, but as a flexible analytical tool for examining contemporary image culture. At the denotative level, the analysis identifies the visible elements of each campaign, including garments, bodies, gestures, interiors, books, colours, lighting, and staging. At the connotative level, the study examines how these visual signs generate cultural and philosophical associations related to temporality, desire, memory, intellectualism, gender, or historical citation. Finally, at the level of myth, the analysis explores how these associations become naturalized into broader ideological narratives that connect philosophical authority to brand identity and symbolic prestige.

The campaigns are therefore approached not as illustrations of philosophy, but as semiotic systems that reorganize philosophical discourse

into visual and affective forms compatible with luxury branding. In this sense, the article adopts Stuart Hall's notion of trans-coding to describe the transformation of meaning across different representational systems (Hall, 1997).

The term "translation" is therefore used metaphorically rather than literally, referring not to faithful conceptual transmission but to processes of semiotic transformation and aesthetic re-functioning. Philosophical texts are not translated faithfully; rather, they are re-coded into atmospheres, gestures, objects, and aesthetic signs. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is employed at the comparative stage of the analysis in order to examine how philosophical references function as mechanisms of symbolic distinction within the contemporary fashion field.

CASE STUDIES

YSL & MARCEL PROUST'S "IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME"

Anthony Vaccarello's *As Time Goes By* campaign (2023) for Saint Laurent consists of a series of short visual clips explicitly framed as meditations on *Love, Time, Desire, Togetherness, Dreaming, and Memory*. The clips, directed by Nadia lee Cohen, are based on Marcel Proust's book *In Search of Lost Time*. The novel explores memory, time, desire, and social life in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France, most famously through the narrator's involuntary recollections triggered by everyday sensations.

Rather than functioning as narrative episodes, these clips operate as semiotic vignettes, each isolating an affective-philosophical concept closely aligned with Proust's exploration of subjective time and involuntary memory.

The campaign does not attempt to adapt Proust's literary content; instead, it fragments his philosophical concerns into discrete affective states, translating them into visual, temporal, and corporeal signs. The book, frequently appearing in the hands of the models, could be considered as a character itself.

From Barthes' perspective, each clip can be understood as a micro-text within the larger fashion system, articulating meaning through the interaction of image, rhythm, body, and garment. Philosophy enters these clips not through explicit citation but through the orchestration of connotative structures that render Proustian temporality perceptible.

The clip titled *Love* does not depict overt romantic interaction; rather, it foregrounds proximity without resolution.

Bodies are positioned close to one another, glances linger without culminating in action, and gestures remain suspended at the threshold of touch.

The narration reflects on the fleeting moment of falling in love and the retrospective fabrication of memory, establishing from the outset a tension between emotional experience and its later reconstruction. At the denotative level, the garments remain consistent with the campaign's broader aesthetic vocabulary—black-and-white tailoring, restrained silhouettes, and clean structural lines—while the *mise-en-scène* privileges enclosed interiors and spatial closeness.

In the bar scene, a customer sketches the waitress, yet never manages to hand her the drawing; the possibility of romantic connection disappears as abruptly as it emerges.

This unresolved encounter becomes central to the clip's semiotic logic. Connotatively, love is translated not as emotional excess or dramatic confession, but as temporal suspension.

The campaign therefore aligns closely with Marcel Proust's understanding of love as a condition structured through anticipation, delay, projection, and absence rather than fulfillment (Elkins, 2017). The refusal of consummation becomes semiotically productive because meaning is generated precisely through incompleteness.

Love exists within the interval separating desire from realization, and this distance acquires aesthetic value. Fashion, within this framework, functions less as a vehicle of seduction than as a mediator of separation: garments maintain boundaries even as bodies gravitate toward one another. Consequently, the clip reframes romantic desire through restraint and duration, suggesting that emotional intensity emerges not through spectacle but through the persistence of what remains unattainable.

The clip titled *Time* is perhaps the most overtly philosophical in its semiotic construction. Denotatively, the sequence is characterized by minimal movement, prolonged stillness, and carefully controlled pacing.

The camera refuses rapid cuts or dramatic shifts in perspective, instead lingering insistently on gestures, gazes, and pauses.

The narrator reflects on the elasticity of time and its capacity to expand or contract according

to emotion, habit, inspiration, and subjective experience. Within this framework, the characters interact only minimally, yet their exchanged glances produce an atmosphere of latent emotional significance. An elderly gentleman dressed in black enters a cab while three elegantly dressed women pass by; for a brief moment, their eyes meet before the encounter disappears almost immediately. At the connotative level, slowness functions as the primary signifier of Proustian *durée* (Elkins, 2017). Time is not represented as linear chronology or measurable progression, but as experiential density shaped by memory and perception. Importantly, the garments remain visually consistent throughout the sequence, emphasizing continuity rather than transformation. In doing so, the campaign directly challenges fashion's conventional association with speed, novelty, and obsolescence. Rather than presenting clothing as transient commodities tied to seasonal change, Saint Laurent positions fashion as a medium capable of articulating subjective temporality and philosophical reflection. The visual repetition of silhouettes and textures reinforces the notion that identity and memory are cumulative rather than disposable. Through slowness and repetition, the campaign distances itself from trend-driven immediacy and instead situates fashion within a reflective, almost meditative temporal framework. In the *Desire* clip, the body becomes a site of contained tension and controlled emotional negotiation. Denotatively, the characters' movements remain rigid and measured, while the garments emphasize structure, discipline, and concealment rather than exposure. A young maid enters a hotel room carrying several boxes while the hotel guest reads what appears to be *In Search of Lost Time*. Irritated by the maid's flamboyant cleaning, the guest retreats to the bathtub, creating a subtle dynamic of observation and displacement. Simultaneously, the maid opens the wardrobe, selects a long black dress with a deep cut, changes her outfit, and releases her hair. The narrator explains that desire possesses a protean nature: rather than obtaining what we want, the object of desire itself continuously shifts. The sequence avoids explicit erotic display and instead constructs desire through posture, antithesis, spatial arrangement, and the

tension between concealment and revelation. Connotatively, desire is represented as interior pressure rather than outward expression. This reflects Proust's treatment of desire as something fundamentally mediated through memory, fantasy, and imagination rather than immediate gratification (Elkins, 2017). The tailored garments function semiotically as mechanisms of containment, simultaneously suppressing and revealing desire through their rigidity and precision. In this context, restraint becomes more expressive than exposure. The campaign therefore reframes desire not as fulfillment or excess, but as a perpetual state of instability sustained through anticipation, repression, and transformation. The *Togetherness* clip presents two bodies occupying the same space without dissolving into emotional or physical unity. Denotatively, the figures remain side by side and aligned in posture, yet continue to preserve individual separation. A woman dressed in soft cr me lingerie and a man wearing a silk shirt and trousers lie together in bed while both read *In Search of Lost Time*. Silence dominates the scene, replacing overt intimacy with quiet coexistence. Connotatively, togetherness is represented not through fusion or romantic idealization, but through parallel presence and mutual contemplation. The absence of dramatic interaction destabilizes conventional representations of intimacy that depend upon physical affection or emotional transparency. Instead, the campaign proposes a more complex understanding of relationality, one grounded in coexistence, distance, and shared temporality. Reading becomes a symbolic act that unites the figures intellectually and emotionally while simultaneously preserving their autonomy. This dynamic resonates with Proustian notions of interpersonal connection, where intimacy is never fully accessible because individuals remain partially unknowable to one another. Fashion reinforces this condition through the tactile contrast between fabrics—silk, lingerie, soft textures—which signify vulnerability while also functioning as protective surfaces. Consequently, togetherness emerges not as the erasure of individuality but as the negotiation between closeness and separateness, intimacy and solitude. Taken together, the six clips form a semiotic

constellation rather than a linear narrative. Each isolates a philosophical affect, yet all are unified by a shared visual grammar of restraint, slowness, and interiority. At the level of myth, Saint Laurent constructs itself as a brand aligned with philosophical time rather than fashionable time. Proust's thought is not quoted or explained; it is naturalized as atmosphere. In Barthesian terms, the campaign performs a second-order semiological operation in which Proustian philosophy is emptied of discursive complexity and reconstituted as style. Love, desire, and memory cease to be conceptual problems and become aesthetic states. This myth does not invite critical engagement with philosophy; it transforms philosophy into a form of symbolic capital that stabilizes the brand's identity as intellectually serious, melancholic, and timeless. Through these six clips, *As Time Goes By* demonstrates how fashion can translate philosophical texts not by representing them, but by restructuring perception itself. Philosophy becomes visible not in content but in rhythm, gesture, and duration. In doing so, Saint Laurent offers a model of philosophical translation grounded in condensation, restraint, and mythic naturalization—one that stands in sharp contrast to Gucci's strategy of excess and citation.

GUCCI & THE PHILOSOPHY OF DESIRE

The *Aria* campaign by Gucci (2021), conceived under the creative direction of Alessandro Michele, represents one of the most explicit and self-reflexive engagements with philosophy in contemporary fashion imagery.

While Barthes and Bourdieu constitute the primary methodological frameworks of this study, the philosophical figures appearing within Gucci's *Aria* campaign are treated as semiotic references mobilized by the campaign itself rather than as independent analytical frameworks.

Unlike campaigns that draw on philosophy indirectly through atmosphere or literary allusion, *Aria* foregrounds philosophical texts as visible objects within the image itself.

The models provocatively hold the books or lay besides them, as if the objects are not accessories or props but models too.

This strategy transforms philosophy from a background reference into an active semiotic component of the campaign, allowing theory

to circulate as image, desire, and brand mythology. According to Gucci's own framing, *Aria* is structured around Eros, described as an ancient and generative force that seeks to overcome separation through relation to the Other.

The campaign text explicitly states that "knowledge itself becomes an object of desire," and that philosophical texts "become objects of attraction themselves," with words transforming into an "amorous lexicon" (Gucci, 2021).

This declaration is crucial: it reveals that the campaign does not aim to represent philosophy, but to eroticize and aestheticize it, positioning theory as a libidinal rather than epistemic resource. From a Barthesian perspective, *Aria* functions as a complex semiotic system in which garments, bodies, books, and interiors operate across multiple levels of signification.

Meaning is not produced by clothing alone, but through the interaction of the image garment (photography, staging, body), the written garment (campaign text, book titles), and the mythological level, where philosophy is naturalized as style and desire.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides the foundational logic for *Aria*'s treatment of desire. His work *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905) appears more than once in the campaign, combined with fetishistic references and strong sexual connotations.

However, Freud is not translated into fashion through narrative or symbolism; instead, his concepts are trans-coded into material and visual strategies. "Transcoding" describes the transfer of meaning across different discourses and signifying systems, through which existing representations are rearticulated and resignified (Hall, 1997). Freud's understanding of desire as displacement (Freud, 1905/2000)—where libidinal energy attaches itself to substitute objects—is mirrored in the campaign's fetishistic aesthetics. Materials such as latex, leather, gloves, and sheer fabrics function as fetish-surfaces, drawing attention to texture, touch, and partial revelation. Through the campaign, accessories such as lashes and whips, which are considered both as horse riding essentials and sex toys, are used as props. In addition, the intense contrasts of colours and the use of dramatic postures play a major role in the fabrication of sensual tension. Desire does not culminate in fulfillment; it circulates endlessly between body, garment,

and object. Within this Freudian framework, the philosophical book itself becomes a fetish-object. When Gucci states that “knowledge itself becomes an object of desire” (Gucci Official Website, n.d.), it enacts a precisely Freudian operation: intellectual authority is stripped of its epistemic function and re-invested with seduction.

The book is no longer a vehicle for understanding but a site of attraction, proximity, and pleasure. Desire is thus displaced onto theory as surface. Garments in *Aria* operate as mediators of desire rather than expressions of identity.

They do not reveal an inner self; they organize eroticism. In this sense, Freud is translated into fashion not as psychology, but as a logic of attachment—where meaning adheres to objects through desire rather than truth.

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity is translated in *Aria* through the stylization and repetition of gender codes.

Gender ambiguity in the campaign is not presented as stable or essential identity. Instead, it is overtly theatrical, exaggerated, and hyper-visible.

From a semiotic standpoint, this corresponds closely to Butler’s claim that gender is not an inner essence but a repeated performance governed by norms (Butler, 1997).

In *Aria*, garments intentionally do not express gender; they produce it through citation.

Tailoring, lingerie, makeup, and posture function as signs that are reassembled across bodies, demonstrating the constructedness of identity. Importantly, Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* (1997), which appears in the campaign on the hand of a model, dressed in a red, velvet tuxedo, that lays besides a white peacock (symbol of transformation) emphasizes that materiality itself is regulated by discourse. Gucci translates this insight into fashion by showing how bodies become legible only through clothing, styling, and pose.

The body in *Aria* is never naked in a neutral sense; it is always already formatted by fashion’s semiotic system. Butler’s theory is thus translated into garments as performative surfaces—clothes that do not signify who someone “is,” but how identity is continuously enacted, repeated, and destabilized. Walter Benjamin’s influence emerges most clearly in the campaign’s treatment of history and the archive. *Aria* was conceived as part of Gucci’s centenary moment, and yet it does not present history as continuity or heritage.

Instead, the past appears as fragmented citation.

Archival silhouettes, historical references, and brand motifs are reintroduced without claims to authenticity. They appear alongside contemporary elements, producing temporal disjunction rather than lineage.

This aligns closely with Benjamin’s conception of history as montage rather than progress (Benjamin, 2008). In *Aria*, garments operate as citational fragments. They do not recover the aura of an original moment; they replay it as surface.

The campaign’s self-awareness about reproduction—explicitly referencing Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* (1935)—renders this operation reflexive. Gucci acknowledges that it is producing aura through mass reproduction, staging Benjamin’s critique as aesthetic strategy.

Benjamin’s theory is thus translated into fashion as archival simultaneity: garments become sites where multiple temporalities coexist, stripped of origin and reassembled as image.

Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) provides the meta-theoretical frame that ultimately unifies *Aria*’s semiotic logic.

Baudrillard theorizes a condition in which signs no longer refer to an underlying reality but circulate autonomously, producing meaning through repetition and recognition rather than reference.

In *Aria*, philosophy itself enters this regime of simulation (Baudrillard, 1981).

The presence of Freud, Butler, Benjamin, and Baudrillard does not anchor the campaign to theoretical discourse. On the contrary, it demonstrates how theory functions as sign-value. Recognition replaces understanding.

The book signifies “theory” without requiring engagement with content. This is most evident in the way philosophical texts are visually integrated into scenes of desire. The book does not interrupt the erotic atmosphere; it enhances it.

Theory becomes part of the spectacle, indistinguishable from garments, bodies, and interiors. Philosophy is no longer a critical distance from fashion; it is absorbed into fashion’s hyperreality. In Baudrillardian terms, *Aria* does not represent philosophy—it simulates it.

Theory becomes an aesthetic effect, consumed as depth rather than deployed as critique.

At the mythological level, *Aria* produces a powerful ideological statement: Gucci is the space where desire, theory, and fashion converge. Philosophy is naturalized as sensual, playful, and

excessive. Intellectual depth is no longer associated with austerity or distance, but with intimacy, performance, and pleasure. Following Roland Barthes, this myth empties philosophy of its argumentative force while preserving its symbolic authority. Freud, Butler, Benjamin, and Baudrillard are transformed into cultural credentials—recognizable names that confer distinction without demanding comprehension. Through this semiotic operation, *Aria* exemplifies translation as trans-coding. Philosophical theories are not explained or illustrated; they are re-functionalized as garments, poses, textures, and props. Philosophy survives not as thought, but as form, desire, and brand identity.

COMPARATIVE IMPLICATIONS

When read through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and distinction, the contrast between Saint Laurent's *As Time Goes By* and Gucci's *Aria* campaign can be understood not only as a difference in semiotic strategy, but as a difference in how philosophical knowledge is mobilized to produce, distribute, and legitimize symbolic power within the field of fashion. Philosophy, in both cases, functions as a form of institutionalized cultural capital, yet it is activated through distinct regimes of visibility, accessibility, and authority. Saint Laurent's campaign exemplifies what Bourdieu would describe as a legitimate mode of cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). The philosophical reference to Proust operates implicitly rather than explicitly, requiring a cultivated viewer capable of recognizing intellectual cues without overt explanation. This restraint is not accidental; it is constitutive of elite cultural capital, which derives its power precisely from its ability to remain understated and unmarked (Bourdieu, 1984). Intellectual depth is suggested, not declared. The campaign assumes a viewer who already possesses the symbolic competence to decode slowness, black tailoring, and interiority as signs of seriousness and refinement. In Bourdieu's terms, Saint Laurent's regime of translation reinforces symbolic hierarchy. Philosophy is converted into a form of embodied distinction that appears natural, effortless, and self-evident. The brand does not democratize philosophical knowledge; it aestheticizes it in a way

that presupposes prior cultural education. The effectiveness of this symbolic regime does not depend on the consumer possessing actual philosophical or literary expertise. The would-be customer is not necessarily required to fully understand the intellectual references embedded within the campaign in order to participate in their symbolic value. Instead, what is consumed is the aesthetic aura of intellectualism itself. The myth of intellectual elegance thus functions as a mechanism of exclusion as much as inclusion, aligning Saint Laurent with established forms of high culture and reinforcing its position within the upper strata of the fashion field. Gucci's campaign, by contrast, engages philosophy through a regime that appears—at least superficially—more open, plural, and inclusive. The proliferation of references to Freud, Butler, Benjamin and Baudrillard does not demand quiet recognition but invites interpretive play. Philosophy is rendered visible, even flamboyant, staged through excess, irony, and theatricality. From Bourdieu's perspective, this strategy corresponds to a reconfiguration rather than a rejection of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Gucci does not abandon distinction; it re-codes it. Intellectual legitimacy is no longer tied to restraint and invisibility but to demonstrated critical awareness, familiarity with theory, and alignment with progressive discourses such as queerness, psychoanalysis, and archival critique. Cultural capital here is not inherited but performed. The campaign rewards viewers who can recognize citation, irony, and theoretical reference, transforming philosophy into a repertoire of signs that signal contemporary intellectual sophistication. However, Bourdieu's framework also allows us to see the limits of this apparent democratization. While Gucci's regime makes philosophy more visible, it does not make it less instrumental. The proliferation of references does not destabilize the logic of distinction; it merely updates it. The ability to recognize Butler's performativity or Benjamin's citation remains unevenly distributed, relying on educational and cultural resources that are themselves structured by social inequality. What changes is not the function of philosophy as capital, but its stylistic register. Viewed together, the two campaigns reveal how fashion operates as a site where philosophical

capital is converted into symbolic capital, and symbolic capital into economic value. Saint Laurent naturalizes philosophy as timeless authority; Gucci aestheticizes philosophy as critical play. One strategy masks the mechanisms of distinction; the other foregrounds them. Yet both ultimately reinforce fashion's role as a field in which intellectual legitimacy is not produced through argument or debate, but through *recognizable signs* of cultural competence. In both campaigns, philosophical books undergo a transformation from first-order signification (texts with arguments, historical contexts, and internal contradictions) to second-order mythological signs (Barthes, 1972). Following Barthes, this process involves emptying the sign of its original content while preserving its form. "Proust," "Freud," "Butler," "Benjamin" and "Baudrillard" cease to function as authors and instead operate as floating signifiers of depth, critique, or radicality. This mythological transformation is not accidental but structural. Fashion campaigns require signs that are immediately legible, affective, and visually compatible. Philosophical books are therefore stripped of difficulty and reconstituted as aesthetic resources. The book becomes not something to be read, but something to be *recognized*. Importantly, this does not mean that philosophy is misused or misunderstood. Rather, it reveals how philosophy circulates in contemporary visual culture. The authority of the book is preserved even as its discursive complexity is suspended. The campaigns rely on the social prestige of philosophy, not on its argumentative force. From this perspective, the translation of philosophy into fashion does not simply involve semiotic trans-coding; it involves social stratification. Fashion campaigns do not merely communicate philosophical ideas; they organize access to them, determining who is positioned as capable of recognition and who is excluded. Barthes' concept of myth explains how philosophy becomes style, while Bourdieu's theory of distinction explains why this style matters—because it functions as a marker of taste, education, and social position. Ultimately, the comparison between Saint Laurent and Gucci demonstrates that fashion's engagement with philosophy is inseparable from questions of power. Whether through the austerity of condensation or the spectacle of excess, philosophy is mobilized

to produce legitimacy, authority, and value within the fashion field. The difference between the two regimes lies not in their use of philosophy, but in how openly they display the mechanisms through which cultural capital is produced and circulated.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how contemporary luxury fashion campaigns transform philosophical discourse into visual, affective, and mythological forms. Through a comparative semiotic analysis of Saint Laurent's *As Time Goes By* campaign and Gucci's *Aria* campaign, the study has argued that fashion does not simply reference philosophy as an intellectual source of inspiration.

Rather, philosophy is trans-coded into aesthetic signs that circulate within systems of branding, desire, and symbolic distinction.

Drawing on Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, alongside Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Stuart Hall's notion of trans-coding, the analysis has demonstrated how philosophical texts are reorganized into consumable visual forms that function less as arguments than as cultural signifiers.

The comparison between Saint Laurent and Gucci reveals two distinct regimes through which philosophy is mobilized within contemporary fashion culture. Saint Laurent constructs philosophy through restraint, slowness, and interiority. By drawing on Marcel Proust's reflections on memory, temporality, and desire, the campaign produces an atmosphere of contemplative elegance in which philosophy becomes inseparable from rhythm, silence, and duration. Proust is not adapted narratively or explained conceptually; rather, his thought is condensed into visual stillness, suspended gestures, and controlled emotional distance.

In this context, fashion operates through mythic naturalization: intellectual seriousness appears timeless, refined, and effortless.

Gucci's *Aria* campaign, by contrast, stages philosophy through citation, theatricality, and excess. Freud, Butler, Benjamin, and Baudrillard appear not as coherent theoretical frameworks but as recognizable cultural signs embedded within a hyperreal visual economy.

Philosophy becomes fetishized, eroticized, and spectacularized. Books circulate as objects of desire rather than vehicles of knowledge, while

garments function as performative surfaces through which identity, sexuality, and historical citation are continuously reassembled. Unlike Saint Laurent's strategy of condensation, Gucci foregrounds the mechanisms of cultural production themselves, transforming theory into a visible and playful repertoire of signs. Yet despite these differences, both campaigns ultimately perform a similar ideological operation: they convert philosophy into symbolic capital capable of reinforcing brand legitimacy and cultural prestige. The analysis therefore suggests that fashion campaigns should be understood not merely as promotional images but as complex semiotic systems that participate actively in the circulation of intellectual discourse within contemporary visual culture. Philosophy, once positioned historically as fashion's conceptual opposite, is increasingly absorbed into the logic of image production, branding, and aesthetic consumption. In this process, philosophical texts lose part of their argumentative specificity while gaining new forms of visibility, mobility, and affective power. What emerges is not the disappearance of philosophy, but its transformation into style, atmosphere, and recognizable cultural authority. Ultimately, the relationship between philosophy and fashion reveals broader tensions within contemporary consumer culture concerning knowledge, visibility, and distinction. Fashion's engagement with philosophy demonstrates how intellectual legitimacy can be aestheticized and commodified without necessarily losing its symbolic force. Future research could extend this discussion by examining how audiences interpret and circulate philosophical references across digital platforms and social media environments, where the boundaries between theory, image, and consumption continue to become increasingly unstable.

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