



A SCAR OF BELONGING

fragments of fashion by Gillis Görll

edited by Otto von Busch

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(1901-1975)

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To Pascale

To write, or not write.
Only for the ember of God within.
It is a silent cry into the abyss,
the dark night of my craft.
Letters of love,
for Garments and God,
and for the care of another.

(opening lines to Görll's notebooks)

FOREWORD

by Otto von Busch

In the spring of 2014 a dossier was uncovered in the archive of the university of Gothenburg. Mixed in with the collection of magician Iwan Ljunggren (1884-1975), the dossier had been found as a librarian sorted through the magician's donation for a small exhibit at the entrance of the main reading room. I was contacted to review the contents of the dossier, which contained the notebooks of Gillis Görll (1901-1975), a tailor with an inclination towards Christian mysticism and a visionary engagement with God in clothing. From my perspective, Görll's short reflections have opened a whole new chapter in our understanding of dress and fashion.

The content of the dossier provides a very limited scope of Görll's life. The box contains some books with extensive notes in the margins where short reflections are mixed with comments, biblical references and alchemic symbols. A collection of prints and postcards reveals a mind obsessed with deciphering spiritual and allegorical meanings in dress in the Arts, and mending as a craft. The box also contained a set of vaguely obscure sewing utensils, probably for his trade of invisible mending, or re-weaving.

Görll's collection of short reflections, aphorisms, poems, and sometime prayers, records thoughts on his

craft, mixed with mystical prose, but most crucially, they mark a dedicated venture to find new depths in the world of fashion. It is his unconventional approach to dress and fashion that makes Görll's reflections worthwhile reading as an orifice for what clothes *could do for God*.

The language is most often timid. It mixes aphorisms with mystical observations and prayer, sometimes also theoretical speculations. His notes are theological in nature, often joined by references to the scripture, but cannot be seen as an attempt to capture neither God nor fashion through analytical concepts. The reflections may have some resemblance to poetry, but they are likewise no biographical "confessions" in the style of St. Augustine or Rousseau.

Görll was no writer, no man of the letters, and his writings may be of modest merit. Similarly, his spiritual meditations, even if they echo of mystics like Meister Eckhart, St John of the Cross, or Theresa of Avila, seems more connected to the folklore and craftsman mystics, such as Jakob Böhme and Hjalmar Ekström. Görll's line of writers saw God's work come to life through the hands of the commoner and worker, and as reflected in his trade; through the works of repair. As Görll noted at the opening line, the words were written only for himself, yet were still sentences coming through his work like a stream from God.

Perhaps a more relevant reference to Görll's reflections could be *Markings*, the collection of short notes and aphorisms by Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. Not only do they have similarities in style and approach, but the two men equally share an unbound affirmation to both spirit and profes-

sion. Their parallels can be observed, not least, in one of Hammarskjöld's notes, from Whitsunday 1961, which also could have been one of Görll's,

Once I answered Yes to Someone—or Something. And from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, has a goal.

As a reader will discover, self-surrender was a critical component to Görll's work, which he, in his modest trade of invisible mending, came to share in close association with Hammarskjöld. As an unlikely convergence of mind and matter, Görll mended some of Hammarskjöld's suits in the late 1950s when he worked at a tailor's studio on Park Avenue, just around the corner from the Secretary-General's apartment on 73rd street.

When a reader approaches Görll's writings, it is important to remember that it was written by a man who worked in the tacit trades deep within the realm of dress and appearances. If we do not see his daily toil in the repair of snagged fabric in suits and dresses, we fail to recognise the deep concern of his craft as well as the sadness of many of the entries. Not only was Görll part of the caring class, in drudgery serving the top strata of society, but one can also sense his lamentations over the spiritual dissonance and despise of labour inherent in the world of appearances.

Görll's reflections bear witness of a seeker of spiritual depths in his trade, perhaps a rare trait within the realm of appearances, yet still a perspective at arms-length distance from the high velocity fashion industry. It seems, in a very honest way, that Görll endeavoured to unite in one practice the *Vita Activa* with the *Vita Contemplativa*. His

reflections were indeed maps of his trade, where he outlined a new approach to clothing and fashion that he wanted to implement into the very fabric of his living, a life in resonance with Ignatius of Loyola's ideal of being "active while in contemplation" (*in contemplatione activus*).

To an attentive reader, Görll's writings seem to address Hannah Arendt's poignant question "To what extent do we remain obligated to the world even when we have been expelled from it or have withdrawn from it?" Fashion, at least in its mythical display, seems proudly withdrawn from the daily toils of man, and seeks to be a safe haven from obligation and responsibility towards the social or spiritual conditions of man. But Görll's writing seeks deeper layers of commitment and solidarity with stricken humanity, and in the end a moral rehabilitation of fashion through repair, faith and human togetherness. This perspective he frames in the concept of *façon*, which may be his greatest contribution to the study of dress and fashion.

To Görll, to engage in dress is a practice, or perhaps more specifically what Arendt would specifically call *praxis*. It is not something neutral or withdrawn, but requires us to evaluate which actions that yield the most humane and practical results for the most virtuous and desirable world. By these means Görll reexamines the etymology of fashion to frame an approaches where bonds of responsibility and love tie human beings to each other through the realm of dress. Görll identifies this special quality of clothing as *façon*, a "weak fashion" within the realm of God, where souls meet in a mystical unity of spiritual togetherness. Yet, a reader must also be conscious that Görll was

perhaps fighting his own demons, as in the trade of appearances humbleness and demonic pride share the same clothes.

One can think of Görll's reflections as individual ecclesiastical routines for his endeavours to find and examine the spiritual elements of fashion. Yet, frivolous and insufficient as they are, his texts open a rare glimpse into another side of a trade mainly known for its secular shallowness, its temples of Mammon with shimmering surface and hedonistic extravagance. We can only speculate on the characteristics of Görll himself, but in his short notes we come in contact with a man we may call a minor prophet of love: a timid writer who seeks and shares new depths in the world of appearances.

I don't think a reader should approach Görll's reflection as lines of poetry, even if there are as many kinds of poets as there are tailors. His writing combines a religious concrete imagery with a directness that lays a specific claim upon a reader interested in the world of fashion. Writing with a wounded sincerity, with a weakness for mystical references, we can follow Görll's texts towards becoming almost a fashion theologian, or what we should perhaps more accurately call a *fashion mystic*.

A SCAR OF BELONGING

*Only the hand that unpicks
a seam on God's mantle
can mend the world.*

To mend
the robes of God,
- nothing more.

~

Fashion, an armour:
a sheeting for the soul.
Façon, a wound:
a cut that heals,
leaving a scar of belonging.

~

A son of God said;
“Follow me!”
a carpenter, barn raising
in community; asylum.
And Fashion, said;
“Follow me!”
yet always threads on heels.

Façon's only reward is
a window of vulnerability
to God Himself.
With façon I stand before thou.

~

The son: the dirty robes of God.
Façon: the frayed lining.

~

In God's warp, you leave your weft:
Give little; receive little.
Give everything; receive everything.

~

Fashion is burning,
with hopes and expectations,
attraction, fuming passion,
ripples topped with consuming desire.
Alone,
I left fashion,
singing.

Patterns, unpaved paths
ascending, across dunes
before the tide,
bends the pins.

~

I sought love,
appreciation.
Comfort.
But in fashion
I found only conformity.

~

In an orgiastic state,
the puncture that binds,
an escape from separation.
You,
I saw you.

~

Can fashion mean anything else
than “sameness”?

Loneliness.
How could I ever have thought
fashion could be the union
I sought?

~

Gods weakness is neither a dull blade
Nor an edge that frays.
It is the sharp pin
That holds me
to his mantle's hem.

~

Giving through fashion
is deprivation, sacrifice, it
leads to impoverishment.
The gift of love
is limitless enrichment.

~

Fashion is a hunger for appreciation,
Façon is a shared overflow of joy.

Façon must be the attentive care
we give another
through dress;
an active concern
for the life and growth of another.

~

Enfolded, new sprung
not unlike a safety pin,
a dark night leads
Back to its well
When you see me,
I know I am loved
because I am.
Your gift,
is my capacity to love.

~

Fashion is the amalgamation
of selfishness and blindness
which makes man ignorant
as he comes to neglect
the possessions he already has.

Icon, star,
stranger, enemy,
subject, slave,
- permanented red.
The contempt is epic.
This is fashion - a tragedy
never fully absolved.
Like a jacket, fit perfect,
God needs not answer
any questions.

~

The strands of God,
A Eucharist, stitched
Into the weft of my Being

~

Possessed by fashion, I,
like a slave,
is yet another thing, powerless,
and starving for your eyes.
No depth,
answers my double cry,
that rings of a song cried out.

In that dress,
you are no longer it.
In that dress,
you have seized the power
of spiritual shears.

~

Fashion, with geometrical vigour,
kills, steadily the hindmost,
yet still flees the moment.

~

Most of us dress
for a loud world, broken,
without affection.
Only in a silent workshop,
can God's breath be heard,
in the fullest attention to action.

~

If it comes to you with great ease,
perhaps it is not façon you just found.

Fashion, glorious,
worrisome; poky fears.
With scarcity of spirit,
I seek another success,
To drape a refuge, courage,
in you.
I make a dress that calls,
rather than cries.

~

Cobbler, tailor, seamstress,
the low dressmakers,
carpenter, plumber.
Beggars, along unpaved paths,
despised, spiritually famished.
It is in the labour,
the gift is God's, to God.
With head bowed
I thread the lower path.

The darkness, you earlier fled,
now calls you.
The path, you earlier sought,
now seeks you.
The bodies, you earlier beautified,
now bury you.

~

Fashion,
the high path,
the external path.
It yells on the streets,
beaming, with its own light.
Façon,
the lower path,
is the hushed “yes”.
A silent whimper,
in the dark night.

~

Façon is a look of compassion
that sees through the blindness of greed.

I, and You; one look,
veridical confessions,
the present,
threadbare.

~

Façon is peace, self-surrender,
it threads through,
a wound of love, of charity,
lined by recognition.
No tacking,
its stitches are backed with sincerity.

~

Such is the nature of fashion;
grief, exhaustion, fear,
- a ravaging fire which tears the soul,
as the intoxication of fashion
drowns, once peaceful men.

Fashion,
idolatry without love,
what could be more monstrous,
more sad?

~

Life without fashion is as impossible,
as living beyond time itself.
But he who lives a life in fashion alone,
is not a man.

~

But as for me, may I be dead,
before I hear the moan
at the end of the season,
stripped of prestige and armour,
a blossoming passion comes to an end.

~

It seems to me,
despite fashion,
life can be full of beauty and meaning.

Waiting,
resting my shears,
I see presence in the elements:
the bitterness of spectacle,
fashion, a mirror
undiluted,
offering my soul, darkly.

~

Façon can only be our noble reality
a love, for someone,
that does not transform
into a copy of my expectations.
But in fashion, always,
I do not love another,
only a potential likeness
to my own aspirations.
My work must be like teeth on a zip:
truthful response of a fellow soul,
yet not a reflection of myself.

Bound in hypocrisy,
you fall asleep in your cell,
after fashioning up
your fellow inmates.
A real dress, however,
utters words;
“I have life for you. Life abundant.”

~

To live in façon is to pray
without thinking.
Action responds
to the reality between us.
Like a shuttle
and thread of life
through the warp of the moment,
always growing, always experiencing
new in the old and old in the new.
Every moment,
the soul reborn,
and façon emerges anew.

Façon is the hound
that barks at the horizon,
the draft that passes
through the tomb.

~

Like waves, true façon enabled us
to find ourselves and loose ourselves
at the same time,
a miracle rare,
of brief duration.

~

Fashion, on the body of others,
exercise tyranny,
starvation in perpetuo;
my soul, not killed,
just not yet,
at the mercy of its rule.
Warp, weft,
all lies betrayed.

No dress is an island.
In a world of bridges,
nothing can be known in isolation.

~

The spirituality of *façon* is first of all
a life.

It is not merely something
to be known and studied,
it must be lived.

A luminous wantonness.

To be known,
it must be shared.

~

Like a Roman conqueror,
imprisoned by passion, excited,
fashion gives an order to its subject.
To find *façon*,
one must be a blind pilot, with a string
gauge the depths of agony,
and listen
down the abyss of
the soul.

Two ways to dress the Zeitgeist;
Fashion, solitary magic in separation.
Façon, the spiritual magic in relations.

~

Fashion tears the quilt of community,
the weft of faith.
Façon mends with the smallest stitches
a soul can beget.
Both faith and façon,
are more real than realpolitik.

~

The power of fashion
resides in the attachment
to our gilded aspirations.
Like a kite,
soaring high in the wind,
façon can be attained only
by detachment.

To dress up, to elevate oneself:
it is best done by those
who have never seen God.

~

Fashion,
pitiless and possessed,
no commoner, does not
cowardly,
bow his neck to its force.

~

Coming from myth,
returning to myth;
fashion is strung, between
an image of God
and an willingness to obedience.
Façon too abides, but only,
the grace of your undesire.

~

Be sure my friend,
the end of life will be fashionable.

Like a surge, fashion is a force
that pulls man towards death.
Pitiless to the man who possesses it,
pitiless to its victims;
the first it entrances,
the second it annihilates.
Like a ravaging fire,
fashion burns the hand
that holds its torch.

~

To know the Cross is not merely a path.
For the Cross is a double blade,
that cuts apart life's patterns:
the enigma of being and unbeing,
mind and matter, flesh and spirit,
bridge and fence,
pleasure and suffering,
leaving no man saved.
To be at the cross, is to inhabit
God's tool.
To once again,
mend the world.

Fashion always promises,
but never gives.
Yet you know the offering of God,
the grace that is at the soul of being.
At its clear source,
a salubrious curiosity:
the devotion to another,
a root called façon.

~

In a moment of the zeitgeist,
God asks a question.
And in the flow of time,
in an attire that drinks your dreams,
you glimpse another soul
face to face;
God answered already.

~

Craft can be a flicker of miracle,
it may show you,
the greater wonder:
unimpaired forgiveness.

As you live in the moment,
you have the choice of two selfhoods;
your proud persona, so real,
or the hidden, the inner,
so low it is nothing.
But only nothing can give eternally
to the truth in whom it subsists.

~

There is no greatness in me,
but, at times,
a little spark of God,
a glint of light, at the heart
of our shared moment.

~

The tender gesture,
nameless.
That garment,
life's innermost substructure,
speaking;
"Dearest."

The zeitgeist
never leaves you untouched
there is no need of comment.
It is a wind of death
that blows away its halo,
yet if you care, deeply,
it will let you drown
in the unknown sea
of another person's
unspoiled attention.

~

Façon is God shrouded in the honesty
of flesh and blood,
enveloped in evocations
admiration, fibres of love,
woven with the immediacy of saying,
"I see thou."

~

The depth of a dress
can only be measured
by the weight of surrender.

To live with façon is
to bring peace to the realm of enemies.
Like Jesus Christ,
unshielded in the midst of his enemies,
mocked, ridiculed.
Deserted by his own disciples.
This must be the cause of façon:
to bind souls to each other,
to bring peace to enemies.

~

Façon is always the question;
“whose silence are you?”

~

Now it just happened.
A submission, unconditional,
to the veiled mission:
Mending a dress that still held
the fragrance of our encounter.
I knew, it was a surrender before thou.
To arrive,
as an instrument for love.

Façon must be Equality,
the public recognition of another,
effectively expressed in my manners;
the principle of equal degrees
of attention
due, to the needs
of another.

~

A limitless loving devotion
elevated heart, ascending prayer.
Here I merge with your soul,
together in the moment.
Façon, the weft and warp of the
Eucharist,
communion at the heart of a true
Church.

~

My shears, the cross,
Gethsemane, a dress,
for the Majesty of your glory.

Fashion leads towards exclusivity,
magic,
telluric egotism.

But if anyone comes to me,
seeking my hand's service,
I will to lead them to thou.

~

Dedication to façon
means dedication
to another.
The real you, responding
to the real me.

~

Fashion tries to avoid suffering.
Its magic
is in proportion to your fear.
Façon cannot avoid suffering,
in the end,
façon means suffering.

Let go of your plans,
your strategies of attraction.
The first look always belongs to God.

~

The cross, the mirror, the shears,
the double edge that cuts through
flesh and soul.
Such wound,
only silence can heal.

~

God has no dress
for his own engrandment,
or for dominion.
Our souls are instruments
of his wonder.

~

Fashion can be powerful,
to kneel, before force.
But façon alone is freedom,
to kneel, before thou.

Façon acts only
in resigned humility.
Unlike fashion, it neither
seeks nor desires itself;
it only pursues your sensibility.

~

Façon;
to let you soak in,
to let thou slowly inside, until your
glow, has become a part of mine.
That, is not a process of origination,
expansion, or growth,
not a fire lit by lightning.
It is a process of reconciliation
and retreat.

~

The pride of Fashion
makes some deific;
the humility of togetherness
makes us real.

Loyal,
façon must mean to be truly loyal,
loyal to the treasures, which reside
in the wound,
and the courage, to be neglected
is the prize one pays
for the sake of a loyalty,
a loyalty we must call love.

~

Façon demands heroic labour,
and difficult sacrifice.
It demands the greatest heroism:
truthfulness, fidelity,
purity of conscience.
It demands my fullest attention,
not to myself,
but to thou.

~

To seek fashion is to defile.
To judge another is to defile.
With fashion, it try to possess you.
To possess is to defile.

Façon means nothing special.
It is only a will, to be true
to that depth in you
which seeks, relentlessly,
to fulfil its own promise to God.

~

Metaxy:
Two prisoners whose cells adjoin
communicate with each other
by knocking on the wall.
Separating them, the wall is also their
means of communication.
God - façon - man;
separated, detached,
dress and prayer adjoin our cells.
My prison uniform,
my suit, my severance,
is a link to another.

~

Unlike fashion,
façon has a mark of eternity.

Today,
my highest ecstasy.
My attention caught you
at your fullest.

~

A fashionable man,
proud of his latest suit,
is like the convict,
proud of his short prison sentence.

~

You may know façon,
as it is the rarest, purest
form of generosity.
To live for façon,
is not consolation.
It is the light
that leads me to you.

Façon is to kneel down.
Kneel down, not before another,
but to our shared soul.

~

Façon is to listen
to the voice within,
in order to hear
what is resounding outside.

~

Dress:
the most important,
least recognised,
communion,
between human souls.

~

I am the shroud.
The body is God's.
But in the mirror
there is no reflection.

Dress has but one moral duty:
to reclaim affection in others,
build trust from God's weakness,
and peace in ourselves,
and to offer God's peace
to others.

~

Façon;
humility and attentive patience.
Façon;
the wonder and attention,
daily renewed,
of a loving look.

~

When façon completely dwells
in a soul,
it is in heaven
and this seam, in itself,
is God's filament, in which
He dwells.
He who has found façon in another
cannot feel God's absence.

Life yields only
to the one who surrenders.
Yet, nothing is ever gained
by giving in.
Fashion is always stolen goods.
Never accept such gift.

~

I have seen a path
beyond fashion. More noble
than the adoration by the famous;
To give yourself completely
to one individual, in one look,
careful stitches,
a labour more diligent
than the world's salvation.

~

A heart, trapped,
in the dark nights of my craft.
Always at the mercy of alms.
I seek no gifts,
only the giver.

Fashion is not completely violent
until it ceases to disturb us.

~

I found God in the silence within.
Come,
please remain quiet,
let us open to the darkness of our study.
Do not seek.
Like God, façon will find you.
Let your hands touch
each strand of the thread
which makes every day
a new fulfilment.

GÖRLL'S DOSSIER





Public Information
PENTAGON





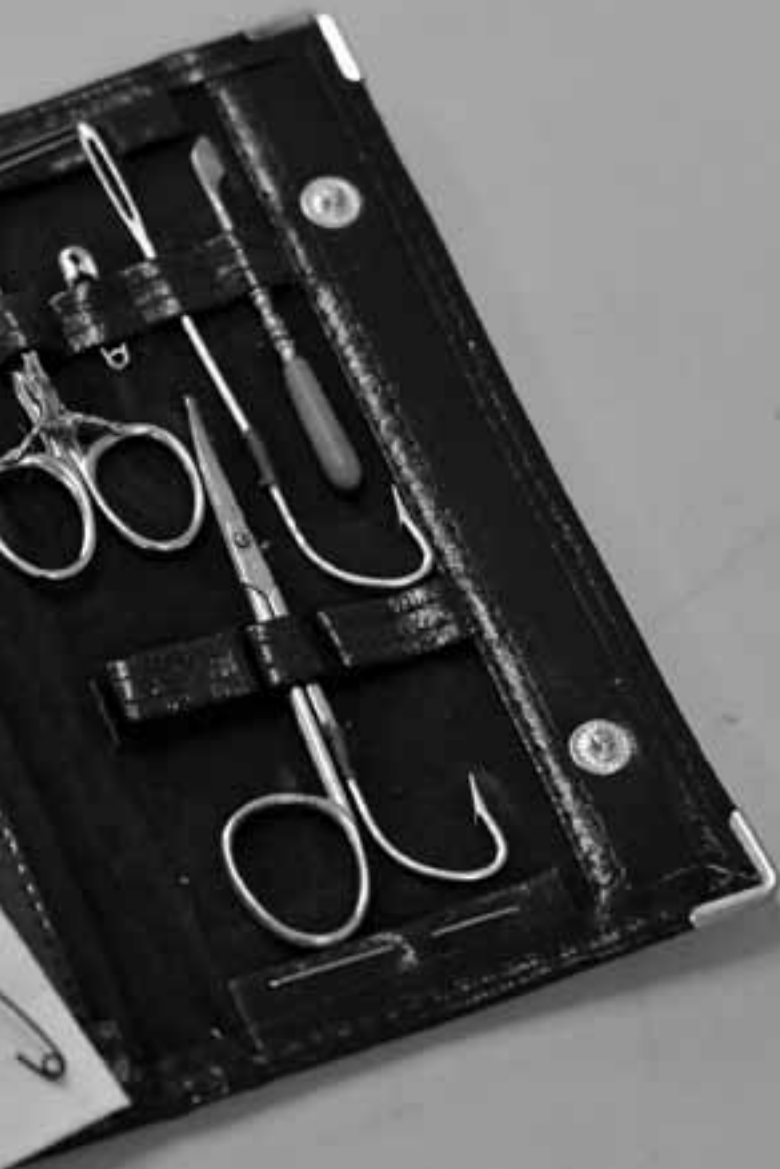






















Handwritten notes at the top of the page, partially obscured by the top edge of the notebook.

Dear Dad
I hope you
are well
I hope you
are well



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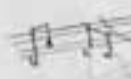
Handwritten notes below the flower diagram, including the phrase "I thought for your life" and other illegible text.

Love
E. T.

Tafelberg + ...
(...)

"Was, wenn ich sterbe, doch noch dem die
Engel loben?"

Beste Form,
Musik of the present
Zeitgeist



Musik 4



Engel loben
die besten
Figuren

C. F. Meißel: Der Tod führt den Körper des Lebens an. Hat gelten keine
Jacke ... auf die ...
kannst Hand in Hand ...
den wie in ...
Ein Nachteil dieser ...
Rachenergen (Abb. 58). Doch ...
denkbar ...
was ein ...
deshalb ...
und der ...

(Handwritten notes in a circle)

Fliegen
Papier
Fad

...
...

Zeitgeist of ...
...

1840

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BÜRGERLICHE LIEBE

Die bürgerliche Liebe ist die unmetaphysische Liebe, die Liebe als bürgerliche Einsicht, deren Kenntnis nicht von dem guten Essen und Trinken und sonstiger Verführung abhängt. Die Liebe, die alles andere vor sich bringt als Verführung des Geschlechts, die sich ruhigen Halbes erhebt und nicht geliebt sein will. Auch sie kann ihre Ergebnisse in ihren Armen haben. Denn in der Liebe wird selbst der Bürger ein wenig begonnen und er ist immer in heiterer Stimmung. Wie es die bürgerliche Liebe in erster Linie mit unverwundbaren Tacten zu tun hat, so ist auch die Kunst, die in Ausfall, Konstanz von Tacten.

Das Bürgerthum in dem Sinne, den das Wort heute noch hat, im Sinne aller der Bürgerthum auf praktische vernünftige bestimmte wurde bei dem alten Römer schon vor alle unverwundbar ausgebildet. Die Kunst für die Bürgerthum des Tactischen machte sie unter



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POST-SCRIPT

by Otto von Busch

Görrl's writings offer a rare profile of a craftsman who merges the realms of dress and mystical thought. In the following post-script I have the intention to help the reader position Görrl's writing within a religious and theoretical context, which may help expose his vital contribution to our understanding of fashion and dress.

This reflection on Görrl's work is ordered as follows: the first section will trace what is known about Görrl's history, his trade and engagement with religious thought. Görrl's theological thinking will be discussed next, and especially his conception of a weak and inner God, breaking with the dominant image of a strong, almighty and external deity. This perspective of a frail God opens a remarkable avenue of thought for Görrl, especially his unique framing of *façon*, the spiritual practice of dress which brings us closer to God and the souls of our fellow man. The subsequent section frames Görrl's conception of *façon* by using the Greek term of *metaxy*, an in-between that both separates and merges, like a prison wall that both divides the convicts, but is also used for tapping messages between cells. This discussion is followed by noting the importance of love in Görrl's understanding of clothing, a theme also concurrent in many mystical traditions. The final sections

highlight Görll's use of the Cross as a metaphor that opens many of the conflicting and contradictory positions between body and soul, matter and mind, fashion and *façon*. The post-script finishes with a short note on how to understand creation from Görll's perspective, as it offers a point of departure for those who want to follow his path, put heart and soul into the realm of dress, making and mending in the service of God.

The life of Gillis Görll

Except for the contents of the dossier in the archive of the university library in Gothenburg, Görll have only left sheer traces in the records. According to the birth certificate, Görll was born 1901 in Fickel, or Vigala, in Estonia, in a pietist Baltic-German and Swedish family. He is noted to have joined his father's rural tailor workshop serving the agrestic aristocracy where he learned the trade and early came to focus on invisible mending, or reweaving.

Invisible mending specifically signifies the repair of a snag in a garment by reconstructing, or reweaving, both the warp and weft, using a long needle. The material for the repair is picked from the extra fabric on the seams or inside of the garment. The practical nature of this work left traces throughout his later writings.

Görll did his apprenticeship in Reval and Stockholm where it seems highly likely he came in contact with the mystic Flodberg-group, a loose congregation of ecumenical seekers interested in the desert fathers, who met regularly at a tailors shop at Köpmangatan 10 in Stockholm for mass and contemplation on the scripture. The imprint of

these mystic teachings left heavy traces in Görll's writing. It was most likely here he found a fellow seeker in the cobbler and mystic Hjalmar Ekström.

Ekström, born and raised in the southern Scania province in Sweden, was one of the core members of the Flodberg-group, based in Helsingborg, where Görll also moved in the 1930s after his journeyman years. The group members were inspired by the mystical traditions of Johan Arndt, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, Thomas a Kempis, Jean de Bernieres-Louvigny, and specifically, the labourer's knowledge of God. Ekström wrote his religious letters from the silent back room of his cobbler's workshop, and most likely sometimes shared his wordless work and tranquillity with Görll, whose mending studio was in a basement only a block away. They both saw the workshop as the inner sanctum of the soul, where only "the breath of God could be heard".

Inspired by Ekström, Görll's writings expose how he perceived the usage, tear and mending of clothes as an image of the continuous death in the image of Christ, the shedding of cloth with the undoing of spiritual and human flesh. This was the *kenosis*, or "self-emptying", in the quest for the mercy of the higher love of self-surrender. To Görll, the *kenosis* of mending and repair was a continuation of the world-repair God instigated through the act of incarnation, and Görll gives hints to how he sees the craftsmanship of re-weaving in correspondence with the Judaic concept of *tikkun olam*, "repairing" or "healing the world". In cabbalist Isak Luria's vision of the world, God's light was contracted but later shattered into small shards. Man can help repair God's creation, assist in the mending the world,

even in the smallest action, as it rescues a spark of creation and allows it to reunite with God's essence.

After the Second World War, Görll spent a decade in New York, working from a tailor's shop on Park Avenue on the Upper East Side, which was run by a distant relative. With a twist in the threads of life, here the Fates made Görll come to rescue some sparks of God's creation at the intersection where cold war politics met the realm of mystic thought: In his workshop, close to the intersection between East 73rd Street and Park Avenue, Görll came to mend the suits of New York's upper echelons, and perhaps with astral influence, that of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. It is not unlikely Görll and Hammarskjöld also came to share some discourse on mysticism, *tikkun olam* and the silent crafts of the statesman. Perhaps as another coincidence, at his death in Ndola in 1961, Hammarskjöld carried two books which also left deep marks in Görll's work; Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, and Christian mystic Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*.

The time in New York also reflects on Görll's religious reflections, as it is most probably here he gets introduced to the writings of Simone Weil, Etty Hillesum, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas and Erich Fromm, whose influences can be easily traced throughout his texts. Most probably Görll followed some occasional lectures at the New School and the Union Theological Seminar where these authors were much discussed at the time. However, in the late-60's Görll moved back to Sweden and settled with his sister in Gothenburg, where he seems to have enjoyed reading the mysticism of Swedenborg, and he joined the local Swedenborgian association in the fall of 1969.

Görll died in Gothenburg on October 10th 1975 and his sister donated his notes to the library archive at University of Gothenburg. The donation was apparently mixed with that of magician Iwan Ljunggren (1884-1975) and some of Görll's work seems to have been lost together with Ljunggren's extensive collection of magical machines. More of Görll's life and deed remains to be discovered, yet even in their fragmented state, Görll's writings is an invaluable contribution to the study of the deeper mysticism of dress.

Görll and God

Görll's upbringing and engagement with the Christian faith is apparent in his writings. Yet, his approach to exegesis bears special marks from his encounter with the Flodberg-group (cf. Ekström 1963; 1988; Geels 1980; Halldorf 1997), and later, he is deeply influenced by the thoughts of Simone Weil and Ety Hillesum.

Within the Abrahamic religions the concept of God defines one supreme and holistic powerful force acting out a plan from above and beyond, distinct from the realm of man and sin. God is here an omnipotent external force, an eternal and almighty deity, deciding everything and to which one may pray for miracles.

However, there is also a historical undercurrent in Christian thought that emphasises the incarnation, the particular event where God took the form of a weak human body. Such interpretation emphasises a deity that sides with the wounded and weak. Perhaps most importantly, it leads to a God that is tortured by man and executed on a cross: the only God with wounds.

This line of thought reappeared with urgency at the envelopment of World War II, extending the weakness to apply not only to the incarnation of God, but to the full being of God as divinity. The writings of Etty Hillesum, Simone Weil and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trace a God that is not an almighty external force, but a vulnerable and small sparkle of light dwelling in each one of us. God is weak and in need of our protection and care. An ember of God is in all of us, at the depths of the soul, yet pushed down by all human wickedness, social burdens and the proliferation of evil. Whereas God can only love, created beings can also hate, and are thus able to mobilize more power of oppression. Yet this corruptive and foul force is challenged by the infinitesimal power of God in each human soul, if we only care for it.

As is also argued by philosopher Hans Jonas, the benevolent, affirming God is a weak God, suffering yet tending to his creation, propagating life. For Jonas, this God resides in the original affirmation, in the “yes” to life that is vested in the reproduction of life itself (Jonas 1984). The fragile affirmation of life resides at the foundational struggle of organic being, within metabolism itself, which is by its very nature interdependent on the rest of nature, always in need of another.

By clinging to itself, life says “Yes” to itself (Jonas 1984: 81) This gives us, as living beings with vested power over nature, an “imperative of responsibility” towards our shared Being, and Jonas traces a biological ethics, a morality that emerges from the very nature of life and death, from existence and mortality itself (Jonas 1996). Our human responsibility stretches beyond the individual and the

current moment, towards conviviality, common survival and all organic life on the planet. From Jonas position emerges the impossibility of a benevolent, omnipotent, almighty and personal God: a caring God who can help us could not have let Auschwitz happen. Instead it is us who must help God, preserve and care for his divine creation: this is our responsibility as ethical beings. Such endeavour must be done through human labour, creative actions of attentive stewardship, suppressing isolation, negation and death.

French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil also share the concept of a God in need of protection. Weil argues that “to picture God as almighty to oneself, that is to imagine oneself in the state of false divinity,” and to put trust in God must mean, “to love a powerless God.” (Weil 1997: 394f) Weil’s God is powerless because he must depend on man to do his will. God is helpless since he cannot be an agent in the world, but only have a will to life. Man has to be the hands of God.

Like Weil, also German feminist theologian Dorothee Sölle finds it problematic that God is thought of a separated from the world, standing elevated from his beloved creation. Primal ideals of men, with the imagery of heroes, warriors and kings, who represent the ideals of strength, independence and unrelatedness, may seem as divine signs. Simultaneously, their opposite, relatedness and weakness, count as traits of frailty, and could according to this historic view, not be emblems of an almighty God.

The all-powerful God sets a model of sovereignty that is contagious, argues religious scholar John Caputo,

“it spreads from rouges theology to blood in the streets. The sovereignty of God is readily extended to the sovereignty of men over other men, over women and animals, over all creation. It is a fantasy of divine omnipotence” (Caputo 2006: 79). Such fantasies often lead to unjust death and innocent suffering, which must rather be the signs of a God absent from his creation.

Görll shared this critique of the sovereign relationship between God and man, and applied it to the realm of dress and fashion. Görll shows that, by reproducing this ideal of living into our social relations, fashion was propagating domination and tyranny.

One can perceive the presence of God in fellow man in many ways, but one way brought up by Görll is our ability to spot the inner beauty in another: a beauty of reciprocity and interdependence. To Görll, this entails a trace of God in appearances, a beauty which one cannot want to change, thus a beauty beyond any scope of fashion. In this modesty lies the ember of God.

A frail fashion

Weakness and frailty are stigmas of a lack of power, but love cannot be forced upon man, not even by an almighty God. As Sölle (1984) highlights, human beings crave for being needed, longed-for and desired, they need love to build a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Only with liberation and grace, love and wholeness, can God’s creation flourish, by a salvation of the small spark of God in each one of us: “Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant?” (2 Cor 11: 29)

It may be such weakness St. Paul points towards in his claim of the “weakness of God” (1 Cor. 1:25), suggesting another meaning to the almighty and governing nature of God. Such reading advocates a concept of God that is not a claim for a unified external entity, but instead the word *harbours* a transfer of Being, towards the in-between of human existence. This transfer carries (*ferre*) Being towards (*trans*) the existence of mutuality, of spiritual exchange, and thus requires a soul open to the world, a soul at risk, in a position of vulnerability.

It is only through vulnerability that the soul can be open to the interstices of Being. The exposure of frailness disrupts Being from within, points it away from independence and autonomy towards interdependence. This is not the weakness of defeat or submission, but a delicacy that opens its door, whispers a calling, and shelters the other. It protects an exposed passage between souls. Without sovereignty, it is a powerlessness that lacks conditions: it does not push its rules onto the world. Similar to Derrida’s concept of “weak force,” or Gianni Vattimo’s “weak thought”, it is not something that “is” but instead it “calls.” (Derrida 2005: xiv) In such approach, as proposed by Caputo (2006), the name of God opens a passage for actualization, not a trade of force-for-force, but an existence similar to that of forgiveness which subdues the need for retaliation. It musters courage, marks the event or eruption of gift-like togetherness, tears open the social towards a sharing of honest appreciation and hope. It unlocks our isolated world towards love. As Hillesum poignantly reveals, love is a way of *doing* God’s deeds, not pointing to God.

It is this conception of God that Görll brings from

mysticism to the realm of dress. The connection between God and fashion may to some seem like a form of blasphemy, but in Görll's writings it opens passages between two isolated regions of thought. Such move allows a sharpening of analytical concepts that cuts through the totality and omnipotence that the concept of Fashion shares with the concept of God. Similar to the Christian thinkers mentioned above, Görll imagined another type of fashion, a fashion that is not a big and external entity or force, but instead small, frail and powerless. Görll saw a true fashion, a wound or vulnerability, a window to the soul, or to the little spark of God that resides in all of us. This must be a fashion of love, and as to echo Weil, Görll mentions in one of his musings about fashion, "an idolatry without love, what could be more monstrous or more sad?" To Görll, it takes courage as well as creativity to open this window to the soul and let God and our fellow Being in. What Görll points to is a process of spiritual exposure, a counterpoint, or *punctus contra punctum*, to the perceived autonomy of fashion. It is the hidden, yet exposed, soul of fashion, the soul of dress, a "weak fashion" that Görll called *façon*.

The concept of *façon*

To Görll, it seemed of uttermost importance to find a word for the spiritual side of fashion, the human nature to seek a fellow soul through the practice of dress. In order to pinpoint this, perhaps marginal, aspect of fashion, he turned to the historic term *façon*. Even if we cannot know his original intentions behind the term, an etymology of the word helps us unveil some of its richness.

The English word *fashion*, which stems from the Middle English *facioun*, is a variant of Old French *faceon*, *fazon*, and *façon*, meaning “to form, make, or do,” and also, “outward appearance.” The French word comes from Latin *factiō*, “a making,” from *facere* or *faciō*, “do, make.” In its similarity to the word *fact*, the word also connotes the fabrication of our living world and its conditions. With the word *façon*, which in French would mean a way or manner, as in “a manner of speaking”, Görll emphasises not only the imitative aspects of ephemeral dress, but clothing as a practice, or *praxis*, a social making that concerns the human condition, or the “soul of man.” For Görll, this individuating dialogue means opening a passage between people, the possibility of using clothes as a signal by actually saying nothing. As a weak force, or “weak fashion”, *façon* is a calling between souls, through the realm of God, that spells out the poetic exactness of our inter-Being beyond words.

The Latin root of *factiō*, “a making,” apparent in *fashion*, is also related to the word “faction”, meaning the differentiation between groups and separation of individuals. These political implications, of fractions and opposition, is also highlighted in the dictionary entry on the word “faction” which implies “selfish or mischievous ends or scrupulous methods”, whereas “fashion had taken on a connotation of contrivance or management” (Oxford English Dictionary 2010). Görll was seeking the opposite of this selfish spirit of fashion that he saw seeping into every social relationship, and he sought a counterbalance, perhaps in a similar way to how Weil argues that “in all that is social, there is force. Balance alone nullifies force.” As a

The Etymology of Fashion / Façon

Origin:

Latin: *facere*

“do, make”



Latin: *factiō*

“a making or doing, a preparing,”
but also “group of people acting together”



Old French: *façon* (also *fachon*, *fazon*)

“face, appearance; construction, pattern,
design; make, do, thing done; beauty;
manner, characteristic feature”



English: *fashion*

“make, shape, appearance”

kindred action to that of Weil, Görll sought the term that could balance the force of selfishness in fashion, and these connotations were perhaps the main reason Görll was seeking another term than fashion for this rooting of dress into spiritual mutuality. *Façon* is the inner, deeper facing of the extravagant Fashion.

As an interesting note, *fascion*, the old spelling of fashion which is now obsolete, explicitly highlights how fashion shares the root of fascism, and this may be more than a historic play of words. As Görll notes on several occasions, fashion, in its rudest form, is an unquestioned obedience, an almighty force of steadfast marching boots. It is exactly this connotation Görll opposes, as he tries to go back to another root of fashion to find a mode of sensitive and respectful togetherness, a human gravitation towards the social, of love and affective admiration. In *façon*, justice and charity are not separated, as they are both media of spiritual compassion, in an obligation to acknowledge and help another: unlike fashion, *façon* can neither be sold nor bought.

The fragments left by Görll would perhaps not made much sense if published in his lifetime. Yet, today, after the Deleuzoguattarian “turn” in social theory, Görll’s notes connects to many contemporary debates. Without the mainstreaming of Spinozan concepts, such as *conatus* and *affect*, Görll’s writings may have been contained as a mere curiosity for the local archives.

To Spinoza, *affect* is an ability to affect and be affected, an agency that produces change, a capacity or passage between bodies, an embodiment of cognitive movement. In Görll’s application of the term, it opens a capacity

to be “touched“ or “moved” spiritually, but also in a physical sense, through a passage between souls. However, like Spinoza, Görll makes a distinction between affective “actions” and “passions”, where the first means to master the affect, to create, while the second is to be driven by affect, unaware of its motivation. Fashion is a passionate affect, a following. Façon, on the other hand, is an act of creation, of actively *responding* to the other, to *respect* the other, as the word comes from the Latin *respicere*, “to look at”, meaning the ability to see the other as he or she is; to recognize his or her unique Being.

Görll also touches upon the Spinozan concept of *conatus*, an impulse or striving, as an inclination towards a “will to live”. This is a natural affirmation towards the emergence and reproduction of life. As Spinoza states in his *Ethics*, *conatus* means how “each thing, as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being.” (*Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6) Our *conatus* is intertwined with our well-being, specifically happiness which, “consists in the human capacity to preserve itself”. Conversely, a person is saddened by negative affects, that which limits or opposes his *conatus*. For Spinoza, our human *conatus* is the foundation of virtue, as it is the inclination towards life and conviviality, the affirmation of togetherness. It is a realm where the one who *gives* is rich, not the one who *has*. God is this original *conatus*, the primordial *Yes*, whose origin is embedded into life itself, to which Hammarskjöld noted: “Once I answered Yes to Someone—or Something.”

Even with its connotation to Nietzsche’s “will to power”, Spinoza’s *conatus* is not explicitly a basis for violence, but instead *a will to live and let live*. In this manner,

Görll's concept of *façon* also differs invariably from or fashion theorist Ralf Wronsov's aesthetic violence and the "will to fashion". This violent *Modegelust*, is perhaps more similar to Weil's conception of "force" which she identifies as the "contagious impulse, indeed, and intoxication, impossible to resist without an exceptional strength of soul." (*Lettre à Georges Bernanos*) This will to fashion is, as Wronsov suggests, a cruel force of violent elitism and hierarchization, where everyone trapped in its net becomes its servants; possessed and hypnotized by its power. This force of fashion echoes Weil, who notes that, "except for an effort of generosity as rare as that of genius, one is always barbaric towards the weak." (*Notebooks*) Yet, again in correspondence to Weil, Görll suggests in one of his notes that "faith and *façon* are more real than *realpolitik*", thus suggesting that *façon* can be the spiritual calling that opens a passage of hope through the violence and armour of fashion.

With the rise in interest in affect, Görll's writings on *façon* open new vistas for fashion theorists wanting to escape the limitations of the continually growing concept of fashion, which by day seems drained of meaning. Where "fashion" could mean anything from immaterial trends and styles to commodities, consumerism or capitalism itself, the concept seems to lack any relationship to the emotional state of wearer of clothes. Görll's writings fills a lacunae in our conceptual apparatus that can help capture the emotional and spiritual longing for the twining of souls. In *façon*, Görll suggests a deep care for the other, a concern for a fellow being that can only happen through the exposure to risk and the acknowledgement of our spiritual vulnerability.

With Görll's writings another layer of fashion surfaces: the loving and affective relationship between peers who seek truth and justice through dress practices, who seek a deeper epistemology of the self in search of Beauty and, of course, God. Façon is a transmission of love, reason and justice, and it sends a signal between two souls; that we are utterly alone except if we help each other. Görll seeks an honest love through dress, not the pseudo-love of fashion. It is a love for God based on compassion and justice, not religion.

As with God, façon is a counterweight to the necessity of violent force, or the brute cruelty of life. Fashion is a social machine without real friction, as Gilles Lipovetsky (1994) argues, consisting of consumers willing to be commanded, guided without force, led without leaders, prompted to march without orders, a glamorous escape from freedom. Façon is the facing of fashion, and like God, a window of vulnerability of the world, a silent cry of mercy between the depths of our souls. And similar to how it takes courage to pray to a vulnerable God, it takes courage to meet another, in an honest way, through dress.

A few lines from William Blake's poem "The Divine Image" was attached to Görll's sewing kit, and it beautifully captures his undertaking;

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

The metaxy of dress

At several occasions, Görll orbits in narrative circles around the concept of metaxy (μεταξύ), the Greek concept of “in-between” or “middle ground”, used several times in the works of Plato. Metaxy is the character of the daimon Eros, but also the other spiritual and transcendental vectors that connects souls on a deeper level. As Plato notices in *Symposium*, Love (Ἔρως) is the mediator between Poverty (Πενία) and Possession (Πόρος), an in-between that resonates also with dress .

Weil uses a specific metaphor to elucidate metaxy, a scenario of two prisoners whose cells adjoin, and who communicates with each other by knocking on their shared wall, each from his own side. Thus the wall, a material obstacle and a thing which separates them, is also their shared sounding board and means of communication. Metaxy thus connotes a Janus-faced materiality, both the barrier and the intermediary to the spiritual world, both a wall and a bridge.

Weil’s take on metaxy also resound of Buber’s notion of “betweenness”, but to Görll it draws a clear connection to the major work on fashion theory available in his time, the essays on fashion by the German sociologist Georg Simmel. To Simmel, fashion acts as a border between social groups, it connects likeminded and identifies enemies. The striped prison uniform may be a typical example, clearly defining the convict’s social stigma, shared by his fellow inmates, while simultaneously separating him from civilians and guards.

Yet, for Görll, both the prison walls and dress—precisely as material boundaries of demarcation and seg-

regation—also create special lines of communication. The prison is also a place for redemption, self-surrender and contemplation: it captures the body but liberates the soul, pointing it towards the mercy of God. Thus both prison walls and dress, in their very limited scope of action, may act as silent sounding boards for the subtle knocking between pilgrims.

This perspective on a metaxy of dress connects well to some crucial aspects in the writings of Sölle, to whom the central event in biblical faith is not creation, but Exodus (Sölle 1984). Exodus is the radical event of the Old Testament, in both literal and figurative sense: presupposing the New Testament, it is the project of liberation. To Sölle, liberation is an ontological project, as Exodus is the narrative of a God creator who sets out to liberate the oppressed. The narrative of Exodus is a quest for the human place in the world, a liberation of body as well as soul from the domination of oppression, but also from desire, disposition, possession, and dependence on property, as even an owner of property is also seen by others as a property.

To Görll, the metaphor of the prison cell also carries other fruitful connotations, as it is the solitary confinement of the individual that makes the longing of spiritual companionship resound through the whole complex of fashion, or what some theorists of today would call the “fashion system.” Built from an assembly of lonely actors, all seeking the gravity of togetherness, yet agonizing about their social status, Görll insists the fashion industry is a massive prison of forsaken creatures. Thus a substantial part of his oeuvre reflects his engagements with how *façon* could account as a concept of what he called a “fashion justice.”

Also here Görll's reading of Weil is divulged in his concern for a justice of compassion, similar to Weil's argument that,

The essential contradiction in the human condition is that man is subject to force, and craves for justice. He is subject to necessity, and craves for the good. (Weil 2001: 150)

In contrast to fashion, Görll expounds on how *façon* is a form of dress that ensures that no harm is done to others, which does not outshine or blind its surrounding, like fashion tries to do. Instead, like a wound, it invites unshielded, open to the mercy of the other. As Görll claims in one of his notes, "*façon* has no ethical shadow."

Beyond the agonizing cries of the everyday injustice of appearances, *façon* is the response of an inner voice, a channel between sufferers by which no disruption may prevail. It is a spiritual relatedness that circumvents violent aesthetic judgments to instead seek the inner life of co-prisoners. This is once again the metaxy of dress: a togetherness in the flow of the moment, inherent in the current *zeitgeist*, the moment of God, but beyond the predator's murderous volubility.

Weil has a compelling query on the nature of justice, in many ways compatible to Görll's stance;

Justice consists in ensuring that no harm be done to others. Harm is done to a human being when he cries within, "Why as I being hurt?" He will often be deceived once he tries to understand what evil it is he is experiencing, who is inflicting it upon him, why it is being inflicted upon him. But the cry is infallible. (*Ecrits de Londres*)

Façon and love

Görll draws many parallels between *façon* and love, and it is obvious that he distinguished clearly between an ego-centric and voyeuristic sense of love within the concept of fashion, and the spiritual commitment and loving-kindness of *façon*. However, as Görll points out, whereas fashion is an ephemeral passion, a short-lived burst of attraction at the mercy of desire, *façon* is instead the lasting attentiveness, labour, knowledge and effort of nurturing a loving and lasting relationship.

Fashion is the effort to cultivate one's personal expression into an attractive and aesthetic "package" in order to be successful on the arena of social competition. Fashion induces the spectator, and oneself, with the impression of sex appeal and popularity, in order to build an elevated exterior which shines of success, greatness and social, or subcultural, standing. In this way, fashion is a competition, its aim is to outshine the other contestants, to beat them in the tournament of taste. Görll point to the social function of fashion: to produce the subject as a desirable object on the social market and eclipsing challengers. Like a hero's sword, it is simple to wield fashion successfully, but as a social commodity, fashion offers no way to sustain a loving relationship with one's admirers.

These evocative thoughts resonate with Erich Fromm's notion of the modern assumptions on love: "People think that to *love* is simple, but that to find the right object to love—or to be loved by—is difficult. [...] One reason is the great change which occurred in the twentieth century with respect to the choice of a 'love object.'" (Fromm 1957: 2) Görll was most probably well accus-

tomed to Fromm's book *The Art of Loving* as several of his articulations draw comparisons to love as a commodity versus love as a labour. As a prime commodity, fashion is sold as the attractor that enhances the wearers potential on the love market, the social market-place of recognition and appreciation. It reproduces oneself as a "love object". Being attractive, Fromm continues,

usually means a nice package of qualities which are popular and sought after on the personality market.[...] Two persons thus fall in love when they feel they have found the best object available on the market, considering the limitations of their own exchange values. (Fromm 1957: 3)

The comparisons between fashion and this form of market love does not end there, as the two "packages" soon find hard to keep up with the illusions they were attracted to in the first place,

The two persons become well acquainted, their intimacy loses more and more its miraculous character, until their antagonism, their disappointments, their mutual boredom kill whatever is left of the initial excitement. Yet, in the beginning they do not know all this: in fact, they take the intensity of the infatuation, this being "crazy" about each other, for proof of the intensity of love, while it may only prove the degree of their previous loneliness. [...] There is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started with such tremendous hope and expectations, and yet, which fails to regularly, as love. (Fromm 1957: 4)

Not only does love fail on the premises of hope and expectations, but the intensities of passion and infatuation are also the very mechanisms which feed and burn the desire of fashion. Fashion is a love that is meant to fail, it is socially programmed to betray.

The idea of fashion is exactly to be “crazy” about the latest trend, or the new love, the new “me” that promises social salvation. These are the craving forces that pulls fashion into the life of the everyday consumer.

We flee from our loneliness into dictatorial consumer systems which use suggestion and propaganda to induce us the safety of conformity. Yet to most of us, fashion seems the opposite of conformity: I can be “myself”, or “unique”, buying the same things my idols or objects of love do. Fashion promises the antithesis to my loneliness, the entry to a world of success, prestige, greatness, power, money, affluence: it is a social door opener, a ticket not only upwards, but also to myself, my possible self made real: a me better than before. Fashion makes me *want to conform*, to embrace sameness as a temporary escape from our separatedness.

Façon, on the other hand, is a hard struggle of mutual recognition as imperfect beings, breaking through the honesty of human separation, shame and anxiety. It is a creative activity of forging community, stitching the bonds between souls. It is a sincere look, an appreciating comment and an exchange of bespoke trust.

Façon corresponds well to the relationship of love between man and God in the mystical traditions of Christianity. It is a higher unity, often referred to as a “death of the ego”, where the soul of man merges with the Spirit as

an ascending consciousness. Thus, to fully grasp the references Görll draws between *façon* and love, one must look to the mystical traditions.

Reading the mysticism of Görll

Görll's use of the language of Christianity not only reflects his upbringing and spiritual search for transcendence, in some instances parallel to those of Ekström and Hammar-skjöld, but is also the language of the culture around him. Even if Görll's texts in some ways reflect passages from Buddhism and Taoism his choice of concepts, literary images and metaphors suggests that he took deep influence of the writings of the Christian mystics, not least Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Madame Guyon, Gerhard Tersteegen and perhaps most visibly Richard Rolle's treatise *The Mending of Life*. Even if his interest may not have been exegetic in its nature, Görll sought answers to the deeper meanings, following the long traditions of mystical interpretations of the Holy Scripture, not least in the Song of Songs.

The language of Görll is not mere an aestheticist's vain poetry. It gives reference to the mystical traditions he was well acquainted to, where language is seen as but a crude tool for depicting and channelling the world of spirit. Within this heritage, words give the reader a sovereign inner freedom of interpretation beyond dogma and decrees of exegesis.

Similar to a language in search of God, Görll sees dress as a vernacular for connecting souls on a deeper

level, but as he notes in a reflection, it is “not worse than words”, as it is held together by stitches instead of syntax. To a craftsman in the trade of invisible mending, he uses words to re-weave the thread of life, or the *Moirai* (Μοῖραι), spun and cut by the Fates. To mend the world on a level of the soul is to engage with creation on a deeper level than the mere surface of words.

Thus, to Görll, mysticism of the scripture has a deeper or supreme parallel in dress, manifesting unity with God and Fate. Both the Scripture and the Stitches of Fate are threads that bind the subject to an intensive and *numinous* consciousness with God, or what German theologian Rudolf Otto would call “das ganz Andere” (Otto 1950). Façon fuses the soul to God.

So what is mysticism in the writings of Görll? Mysticism may give a secular reader connotations of uncanny, strange, or even bizarre gibberish about inner transformation, ecstasy and unity with God. Yet within the traditions, the texts of the mystics present ideals of deeper aspirations in the experience of religious faith and devotion. The mystic, coming into a unified consciousness with God, experiences a direct and transformative presence of God and a higher self, often through a departure from the life of the ego, or a symbolic death. In Görll’s sense, this transformative experience emerges from a unity with the Thou of the other, through the medium of dress. An example can be found in a note from Görll, where the Eckehartian poem of German origin “The Granum Sinapis” (“mustard seed”, Mt 13: 31) is quoted;

It is light, it is bright; It is completely dark;
It is unnamed; It is unknown,

Without beginning and also free of ending.
It goes forth out of silence, Empty, unclothed.
Who knows its dwelling? Let him come forth
And tell us what its form may be.

In a similar sense, Görll's writing echoes deeply of the mystical traditions where clothes comes to play a primary role, as a metaphor for skin shedding, shape shifting, transgressions between life and death, the stripping of egocentricity.

Although the term "mysticism" is a reasonably new categorization, the adjective *mystical* (Greek for "hidden") has a long history throughout Christianity, as it reveals a very profound truth about the objects of faith: the perceived inaccessibility to God, to the inner meanings of life and the answers to human separatedness. Like Görll's emphasis on the deeper processes of belonging and community in *façon*, religious mysticism is a journey or itinerary, not a brief experience or moment of union. Mysticism, like *façon*, is a commitment, a consciousness and a labour of faith: a way of knowing and loving which is directly transformative to the centre of one's life. *Façon* is based on charity, affection, unconditional love, or *agápē* (ἀγάπη), rather than passion or desire, or *eros* (Ἔρως). It is closer to Teresa of Avila's "transverberations" of the heart, the wounds of love, invoked in the Song of Songs 2:5 which famously reads, "because I have been wounded by charity." To Görll, Avila's notion is a direct passage to the vulnerability of God through the frailty of *façon*.

Like many aspects of the mystic traditions, Görll's writing is full of metaphors, of "ascent", "interiority", "oneness" and various shades of light and darkness. His endeavour to dig deeper into *the soul of fashion*, and his

continuous references to God and a mysterious “other” or “lover” leaves a reader with the impression that he seeks small embers in the massive darkness of a void, a darkness of God in a cloud of unknowing. The mystical consciousness is an experience of togetherness beyond all knowing and beyond all experiencing – yet still Görll seeks words for this sting of hope between the soul and a divine abyss. The image of God hidden in darkness comes from two episodes in Exodus, where Moses sees God “in a dark cloud” (19:9). And later, as Moses has spoken to people of Israel, “Moses withdrew to the thick darkness where God was” (20:21). Amid the deepest shadows, in the unseen and unsensed, the promise of unity with God is a treasure beyond all beauty, as proposed in the *Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius.

Mystical dress for a journey within

Using several layers of negative or apophatic metaphors, Görll always seeks to expose the spiritual twin to fashion, the seeking nature of the soul that tries to bridge the separatedness of human existence. Such usage of metaphors is common in the Neoplatonic traditions of Christian mysticism, from Augustine to John of the Cross, where their style proposes forms of Christian love based on an inner journey towards God, a supreme experience of deep or inner mutuality; the *itinerarium mentis*. Yet, like in much mysticism, Görll’s journey towards the within or “interiority” is in itself a paradox; the more he traces God inwards he seeks, the more the interiority opens out to that which is inaccessibly beyond itself. Like a facing,

façon is an inner realm which only exposes itself in love for the other.

The soul of dress is everted, folded unto itself. Inside out, the soul exuviates the layers of ego to unravel the threads of life towards its source. Only through the careful mending of the soul, of “threading the inner life with the strands of Scripture,” can the fabric of life be artfully re-woven. With such contemplation in action, Görll sees a deeper meaning in his trade, very much in the tradition of Böhme and Ekström.

Yet, even though one will have to think the notebooks of Görll were for himself, a reader must approach his writing as he, quite like Weil, was positioned “in the fray”, that is, in the tattered and threadbare margins of society (cf. Bell 1998: 8ff). As a reader, one must surely ask if Görll wrote what he *really* aimed to convey, or veiled his writing under layers of obfuscation and drape, as was the practice of his textile trade. Perhaps his texts are meant to be readable only to his fellow mystics, such as Ekström. Not only are his notebooks full of occult and alchemic symbols, but one must also approach his reflections as if they are to wear through the fabric of thought itself. Not only are his texts veiled, but perhaps even “folded” onto themselves in a Deleuzian manner (Deleuze 1993).

When reading, it is important to remember that Görll’s trade was invisible mending, and his craft was at the centre of his attention as a craftsman of exegesis. Not only can invisible mending be concerned with “world repair” in a Lurianic sense, but the process of re-weaving also captures its material, the threads used for the darning, from the back side, fringe or underbelly of the fabric. It

is thus moulding together old and new, front and reverse, inverting patterns, fusing kindred threads into torn fabric. Taking his craft with deep seriousness, Görll's writing is only the very surface of a deeper motion of world repair.

Considering Görll's focus on craftsmanship, it could be appropriate for a reader to approach his reflections in a Straussian manner, seek glimpses and combined threads of meaning in words only draped as amateur poetry. Indeed, Leo Strauss devotes great effort to the study of esoteric and Gnostic attitudes among the Greek philosophers, and exposes hidden undertones in their work, perhaps most famously in the works of Xenophon (Strauss 1975). To Strauss, philosophy is rampant with deception, myth and purposeful enigmas, perhaps even invisible mendings, thus bordering the mystic traditions. In a Straussian manner, such writings ultimately asks the crucial question of philosophy and religion: Must philosophers, or gods, or indeed tailors, always mean what they say?

The mysticism of façon

Similar to the thoughts of Weil and many mystics before her, not least Thomas a Kempis, Jean de Bernieres Louvigni, Madame Guyon and also Sören Kirkegaard, Görll puts attention to our responsibility for God by being his "tools." As emphasised by Weil, not only is God weak, but he has no agency, no hands in this world. God is a vulnerable child, a curbed and disabled deity, torn from his creation, who can only be experienced by us turning inwards and to the vulnerability of each others. To "have faith" is to be deeply engaged with our fellow man in the

appreciation and care of God's creation. This is how Görll introduced a series of concepts alien to the everyday understanding of dress, such as empathic justice, love, friendship, consent, care and compassion. As Görll notes in one passage, *façon* is the ceaseless attention to love and justice, instances of mutual and honest togetherness or unity. Such stance breaks western traditions of rights-based moral philosophies based on the framing of the autonomous individual. It also breaks down some of the boundaries taken for granted for common western frameworks of sovereign personal identity.

Denying the individual soul an unconquered nature of independence, such lines of interdependence opens man to processes of becoming, change and influence, and connects being intimately to that of others. Not too unlike Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship (Buber 1994), or Jean-Luc Nancy's *Being-with* (Nancy 2000), Being for Görll means a spiritual connection to others.

As also noted by Sölle, it is the division of the world into *I* and *not-I* that is the root of violence; since I am not the fly, I can kill the fly. Furthermore, such position makes it possible to believe one can be a neutral spectator, autonomous and separated from God's creation, and ultimately undisturbed by the suffering of the world outside. Autonomy, greed and indifference are signs of a broken relationship to God, a bond in need of repair.

For Görll, a perspective of deep mystical relatedness also breaks with the image of God as all-mighty, a defusion of God's *Allmacht* or *Omnipotenz*. Instead, God is vulnerable, small and in need of care and compassion: God emerges only in his need of having his creation stitched to-

gether. Görll infuses this shift of perspectives with his view on fashion, transforming fashion from being a supreme and almost divine force, an almighty and omnipotent symbolic regime that demands obedience and followers, into the vulnerable honesty and care, a relationship harboured in the concept of *façon*.

Vulnerability, which is given such prominence in Görll's reflections, also reverberates in Weil's thoughts on beauty,

Beauty is the supreme mystery in this world. It is a brilliance that attracts attention but gives it no motive to stay. Beauty is always promising and never gives anything; it creates a hunger but has in it no food for the part of the soul that tries here below to be satisfied; it has food only for the part of the soul that contemplates. It creates desire, and it makes it clearly felt that there is nothing in it to be desired, because one insists above all that nothing about it change. If one does not seek out measures by which to escape from the delicious torment inflicted by it, desire is little by little transformed into love, and a seed of the faculty if disinterested and pure attention is created. (*Ecrits de Londres*)

This hunger for an intermediary between spirit and soul, between the outer and inner world, is what makes the quest for beauty such central part of Fashion, but also such a misled endeavour, always imprisoned with false imitations. In its search for togetherness, beauty can only mirror social or cultural ideals of status, and as Görll notes, echoing Weil, "Beauty has its tongue cut; it has no language; it does not speak; it says: nothing. *Façon* is the dog that barks by his master lying lifeless in the snow."

Façon can only be the burning bridge, the embers lifted by the wind to light traces through the darkness between the beauty of divinity and of the soul. Yet the fragile connection opened by façon is never analogous to the blind man and his stick, it is as much a mirror and a window, or as the Scripture would have it; *a mirror darkly* (1 Cor 13:12). Being the courage to kneel before the dark well that resides in the profound abyss of the human soul, façon braces the lines between peers, blessed by God. Façon is the grace of recognition within the soul of another through the medium of dress. It is a true greatness, which reveals the realm of two connected spirits—with its love, heroism, truth and holiness—which is indistinguishable from beauty, justice, harmony and the sovereignty of good.

As if echoing Sölle, Görll at several occasions returns to the spiritual breath that comes through a “window of vulnerability.” Using the metaphor of the skin, which needs its open pores in order to live, Görll also pinpoints how the unguarded soul and a daring leap into risk, is needed to encounter the other, to let the other into lived spiritual experience, to come together with God. In the words of Sölle, “every window makes us vulnerable and is a sign of relationship, receptivity, communication” (Sölle 1990: x) Surely, Görll would agree with Sölle on the point that “Christ is God’s wound in the world. Therefore we need a window of vulnerability if we want to live in inward relationship with Christ.” (Sölle 1990: xi) For Görll however, this wound is the dressed body, the spiritual well of façon, sprung from the original vulnerability that makes us drape the body, like Adam and Eve covered and hid themselves.

The wound in our soul opens the special character of dress: *the compassion of façon*. This puncture of sympathy, or loving-kindness, corresponds to the “silent cry”, or *Du stilles Geschrei* of Sölle. Like Sölle, Görll expounds on the question of how spiritual, moral and ethical positions are interconnected, seeking inwards to delve into the depths of the soul to challenge fashion as a force of power and oppression to instead seek spiritual community through practices of dress.

The traits of commodity fetishism in fashion have also been obstacles to a deeper investigation to the emotional and ethereal reality of dressed practices. The connection between fashion and glamour, fame, money and beauty has obfuscated the spiritual reality of clothing and Görll further hints that togetherness cannot grow in a group where everyone is in search of fame, security, autonomy or immunity.

Façon can only blossom in the realm of unshielded honesty, in open search of the spirit of togetherness. This is why fashion is doomed to exclude, to only be a matter of surface. It cannot touch the soul of man if it is an amour aimed to fully protect. To Görll, the greatness of a human being depends solely on his or her relationship to his fellow, to this relationship to God. Here we can find Görll’s proposal for new practices in the professions of dress: we must become façon in order to become love itself. Such vulnerability may produce a sense of anxiety, which is by most of us avoided by becoming spiritless and unfree. But we must turn this response around, evert the armour of the ego. In the loyalty to our fellow beings, and through the channels of façon, we can become one with God and one with another.

The shears and the Cross

Görll's analysis of fashion is continuously returning to the mystery of the Cross. With the predominance of mirrors in the culture of fashion, Görll connects this "nature" of dress to the image and reality of the Cross. Another common reference to the cross that Görll uses is the tailor's shears, often drawn as either the symbol of PX, the *Chi Rho*, or as the abstract symbol of the fish, the *Ishthys*.

As in the writings of John of the Cross, the soul seen in Görll's texts is a soul suffering the loss of God, inhabiting a painful dark night. But at the Cross, there is light, an ascending pathway at the intersection between man and spirit, unifying the opposites that catches man in its net. As with the Gnostics of the Saviour who takes the form of flesh in order to undergo death, God becomes matter, which becomes God again: the Cross is a path of transformation and shape-shifting.

Görll highlights how the Cross is a meeting of God and Man, mind and matter, soul and body, life and death, but also between individuality and community, being and un-being, war and peace, fashion and *façon*. Like in the shears, the two opposing blades form the instrument that cuts across the grain, the device that divides, yet also cuts clean the frayed edges that man has to mend. The Cross is the cross-hair of paradoxes, as in the Book of Lamentations, in the agony of Job, or God's enigmatic voice saying "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (Exod. 33: 19)

This doubleness or contradictory nature of the Cross makes it an epicentre of conflict and ambivalence where the lines of revelations intersect, and thus presents a

direct passage to God. At the intersection of the Cross, or the crossed blades of the scissor, man must take the right path. Its mystery seems contradictory, as the most rigorous and logical exercise of intelligence fails to reach its depths and leads only to inevitable gainsay. To accept this inevitable contradiction amounts to an acceptance of the silence and void that fills the human soul, the lack of power to find our fellow soul. It is a perspective that echoes of Aristophanes speech in Plato's *Symposium* where man in primal times where man was a double bodied, cross-shaped, spherical creature who wheeled around through the world in perfect harmony and happiness—but now torn apart.

Görlle expounds on how the shears, the mirror and the double logotypes of fashion, such as the crossed C's in the Chanel logotype, refer to the mystery of the Cross. At the heart of high fashion is a seed of spiritual longing, a calling to follow the mark, of not only God, but his mocked, tortured, abandoned and executed son. It is an urge for honest recognition, or truth, justice and compassion, yet it is almost always mistaken for a search for fame, glamour or attention.

In this way, the Cross is also a marking, a sign of guidance, a figurehead; like fashion it cuts through the now into the future as a becoming. It guides man, who is separated from God, towards the participation, not passive observation, into the divinity of creation. It is a force of spirituality, of deep interconnection, that guides man towards love, not power; to being, not nonbeing. Through the guidance of harmony between opposites, and the sign of the crucifixion, the soul has the power to repair the harmony of force and love, to learn to imitate God, and get the

will to do attend to his creation. Because of the Cross, human beings can know what perfect compassion, care and goodness is: the abandonment of force in order to save the weak and frail, to open a vulnerability for the mending of the world.

The creation of *façon*

For Görll, fashion is created through the processes of material and mythical summoning, a force of assembly through the force of energy and will. Not unlike the genius persona of the star designer, mythical fashion is produced from “nothing”: it is true gesture of genesis. But *façon* is created differently. It is not an act by extensive means, but instead a process of renouncement and retreat. *Façon* happens through acceptance, acknowledgement and an unveiling of another, tearing down illusions and expectations we put on each other. Creation in *façon* is done from submission and self-surrender, not pride and self-aggrandisement.

Whereas fashion builds theatre sets for the performance of life, *façon* gives room for another to step forward in his or her existential nakedness. *Façon* does not gleam like a lighthouse in order to outshine others, or attract others like flies to a torch. Instead, it is a “beacon of hope”, giving guidance to peers to find their way towards a life of interdependence.

Taking on the heritage of Böhme, Görll understands God as a verb, a divine movement; a process of flowing and striving. Creation happens in the opening towards this process of change, to evolve with this metamorphosis in a commutual manner. The new is not new, not “other,” it is

a clearance for a meeting, destined to happen if we let the guard down.

As the act of creation differs between fashion and *façon*, so does their status of being. As Görll is questioning the theological concept of *aseitas*, God's supreme independence, he criticises the same relationship in dress. If God is supposed to be an independent master, and believers are dependent servants, then the relation between the parts is one of power and submission, not a relationship based on love. Like Sölle, Görll finds it uncanny that the highest glory of God is that he does not need human beings; God does not need human existence, faith or love. Correspondingly, fashion is an independent power that seeks the submission of slaves, rather than reciprocity, and only a rethinking of the *aseitas of fashion* can challenge this destructive force. This challenge must come through the deeds of a God whose name, in the words of Sölle, is that of a "silent cry" (Sölle 2001).

In conjunction with the thoughts of both Levinas and Sölle, Görll insists on the indivisibility between knowledge and action; to know God, or to know *façon*, means to know what one must do. Ethics is thus not leading towards right action or a result of God's vision, but God is the vision itself, the action itself. To know God is to do the right thing, and in the realm of dress this means to seek God through the path of *façon*. In accordance to Weil's thoughts of a handless God, God is the will of our hands, but the pivot of the action itself, the hands, must be ours. And where such hands are missing, God cannot manifest. Guided by God, man can do good to others.

The creation of *façon* is thus a political event, it is

always in conjunction with the hands of others; it is a communal event. As it does not seek domination, but instead conviviality through its vulnerability and withdrawal, it argues for another understanding of creation than one of forceful genesis.

It is very likely Görll engaged with Hannah Arendt's thoughts emerging from her book *The Human Condition* (1958) in the framing of his idea of *façon*. Arendt's concept of *natality* touches on a compassionate form of solidarity that cannot be fully understood in the notion of discipline, order, and continuity, but is instead an on-going process of rebirth and recreation. It consists of a multiplicity of actual and potential encounters and forms of togetherness, between people that builds a community. Natality, like birth, is not a revolutionary event or a sudden eruption which forces itself onto the world, but a continuous process and an ontological condition that multiplies forms of human plurality, yet still allows for a compassionate unity between mortals. We can never choose the place, time or circumstance of this birth, yet we must make decisions to affirm it, based on the conditions of our time, or *Zeitgeist*, and build on natality's movement, interruption, rebirth and continuous care of the world and its inhabitants.

Natality is thus a political concept more than a metaphysical one; it prompts us to take action, to care for the vulnerable newborn, rather than stop to contemplate on abstract categories or moral ideals. As Arendt posits,

This child, this in-between to which the lovers are now related and which they hold in common, is representative of the world in that it also separates them; it is an indica-

tion that they will insert a new world into the existing world. (Arendt 1958: 242)

Nativity is passage in-between, it opens a rupture that calls for world-protection and world-repair, of cultivating the properties of human togetherness into full bloom, and offers the invitation to feel at home in our shared world. This condition cannot be achieved by inaction, only by human action and stewardship, by nativity and a mending of our shared world.

The heritage of Gillis Görll

Görll's inquiries into *façon* breathe an air of peace and reconciliation. Yet it is important to remember that *façon* is still within the realm of the *zeitgeist*, a part of the flow of the moment. Also *façon* needs the current opportunity, the *kairos*, and it is also a relatedness that is communal, shared, and seeks its strength in a conformity with the other, to form a group, community or church.

The community made real by *façon* is also a becoming, a unity in part defined by its time, thus connected to the *Zeitgeist*. *Façon* is not clothing beyond time, yet it is still not governed by the seasons or the fashion industry. Instead, *façon* is the clothing of intersubjective time itself. *Façon* takes place in "our time", the time we receive and share which in turn shapes our actions of conviviality, where a cloud of togetherness condenses into one stitch in our common quilt. It is a mark in time that helps grasp some concrete yet ephemeral reality, in correspondence with the rest of the world. *Façon* is the silhouette of this

shared time, not the silhouette of an industrially defined season.

Façon manifests the widest notion of the *kairos*, the moment, and the most inclusive one – a time of meeting, of revelation, of relational rapture through the veils of appearances. In this way it also overlaps to Walter Benjamin's interest in fashion,

Each season brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of things to come. Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions. (Benjamin 2004: 63f)

As Benjamin notes, the realm of dress is a mirror, perhaps even a *mirror darkly*, of the world and its time, its struggles, conflicts and convulsions. Yet, Görll wanted to draw our attention to the deeper meanings and united consciousness that opens through the vulnerability of the veiled body; the reconciliation and world-repair of *façon*. In their modesty, Görll's reflections can make us see new facets of the cultural and spiritual domain of clothing. His short notes put a finger on how dress is much more than a channel of communication in the realm of social competitiveness.

Görll posits to us a *contemplative couture*, a realm of spiritual longing and a tool to mend the world. I think we must see this servile man, unnoticed by destiny, as happy in his humbleness, and most probably in total agreement with one of Hammarskjöld's markings:

How humble the tool when praised for what the Hand has done.

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Seeking the Soul of Fashion

Gillis Görll (1901-1975), left a collection of short reflections and aphorisms at his death. A tailor, seeking God in clothing, had found the soul of fashion.

Writing with a wounded sincerity, his texts bear witness of the religious depths of attire. With his concept of *façon*, or weak fashion, a whole new chapter has opened in our understanding of the spirituality in dress and fashion.

Finally emerging from the shadows of time, Gillis Görll was nothing less than a fashion mystic.

