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**Prehistoric Figurine Styles as Fashion:
A Case from Formative Central Mexico**

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Abstract: Small, ceramic figurines used in household settings in Central Mexico during the first millennium BC were emphatically stylistic. Attributes cooperated to direct the viewer's attention to the style of the figurine, to how the figurine was made, and to the choices of makers and users from a range of alternative ways of making. This paper draws on studies of modern fashion to develop a social interpretation of these patterns based on two collections of figurines, one from the Basin of Mexico and the other from Tlaxcala. The history of Formative figurine fashions is considered at multiple scales.

The anthropomorphic figurines of Mesoamerica promise insight into ancient systems of social differentiation as seen from within; they are tantalizing glimpses into how Mesoamerican peoples represented their own social worlds. For the last 20 years or so, analysts have been particularly interested in evidence of variation in the original systems of differentiation – for instance, in gender divisions that differ from expectations, in situational variability in social categories, and in counter-hegemonic alternatives to dominant systems. These new interpretive interests have stimulated increased methodological attention to variability in the archaeological record. Analysts have scrutinized contextual variation in the occurrence of figurines (Lopiparo and Hendon 2009; Marcus 1996, 2009). They have also considered variation in subject matter with increasing care. Figurines of the Formative era (1800 BC-A.D. 200) encode differences in age and gender (Blomster 2009; Cyphers 1993; Follensbee 2009; Joyce 2003; Marcus 1998:38). They reference distinct roles or categories of social actors such as elders, ballplayers, or persons of authority (Cheetham 2009:158; Clark and Pye 2000:232; Lesure 1997:242; Marcus 1998:50, Niederberger 2000:179-181; Oliveros 2004:55-61). In recent work, such variation in subject matter or context – for example, depictions of girls and women of different ages (Cyphers 1993; Joyce 2003) or differences in the choice of subject matter by site (Brumfiel 1996) – has become a central focus of interpretation.

In this effort to base interpretation on careful attention to variation, there has been, in general, less attention to *stylistic variation* – to eyes or legs formed in different ways, and so forth – than to variation in subject matter or context. Most exceptions focus on a single style, Olmec. Otherwise, particularly for the Formative case of interest here, investigators tend to treat stylistic variation as passively ethnic or chronological, without much

importance in the experiences of the original makers and users and therefore without a significant role in social interpretation.

The general inattention to style (with the exception of Olmec) is a surprise given larger archaeological interest in the topic. In the last few decades, archaeologists have moved from debate over what theory might better grasp the social basis of style to recognition that stylistic phenomena are multidimensional and fluid (Bowser 2000; Hegmon 1992; Wobst 1999). Style has been re-envisioned in terms of materiality, dispositions, and practice (e.g., Conkey 1990, Dietler and Herbich 1998; Hegmon and Kulow 2005) in ways very compatible with recent themes in the social interpretation of figurines (Lesure 2005).

This paper is an experiment in the social interpretation of stylistic variation in figurines. The case under analysis – actually two collections from the first millennium BC in Central Mexico – is particularly apt because patterns among stylistic attributes are rich and emphatic, while patterns among iconographic attributes are frustratingly weak. If we take the strength of inter-correlations among attributes as a gauge of makers' and users' concern to convey an intended message to viewers, then people in these cases seem to have cared more about the style of figurines than about the subject matter of the images. There was, of course, a differentiated subject matter that is interesting and worthy of investigation, but my focus in this paper is on style – specifically, on deliberate juxtapositions of styles and how those might be interpreted.

These juxtapositions of distinctive styles within a single community present a dilemma for social interpretation. One's first thought is that the styles might have referenced different groups, different classes, or competing discourses on social

differentiation – or simply that they enhanced distinctions in subject matter. There is precedent for such suggestions in the literature on Mesoamerican figurines from various epochs (Brumfiel 1996; Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009; Guernsey 2012), including the Olmec case (Blomster 2002; Cheetham 2009; Clark 1990; Lesure 1999). However, close attention to attributes and their variation suggests that these precedents are not appropriate models for the case under study. Despite original makers' and users' lively interest in style, figurine styles mainly referenced themselves and other styles. That result of the attribute analysis creates a dilemma: how do we bring people and society back into the picture?

To do that, I turn to the sociology of fashion. I suggest that a fashion system was operating on figurines in Formative Central Mexico. That postulate provides a basis for developing a social interpretation of self-referential styles.

The organization of the paper is as follows. After an introduction to the case study and a brief methodological discussion, I review in greater detail the dilemma that this case poses for interpretation. I then turn to fashion and consider whether it is appropriate to postulate a fashion system operating in certain domains of material culture (specifically, ceramic figurines) in Formative-era Central Mexico. Answering cautiously in the affirmative, I draw on insights from the sociology of fashion to interpret juxtaposed figurine styles at multiple temporal scales.

The Case Study

Analyses for this paper were conducted on two collections of figurines, one from the Basin of Mexico and the other from the state of Tlaxcala, about 90 km away. The Basin

of Mexico sample was excavated in the 1920s by George Vaillant and is curated at the American Museum of Natural History. I analyzed figurines from two sites, Zacatenco and Ticomán, located near each other on the Cerro de Guadalupe, a peninsula along the western edge of the system of lakes that dominated the basin in ancient times (Figure 1). Zacatenco was occupied from about 1000 to 500 BC, during a time of rapid population growth following decline of Tlapacoya and Tlatilco, the area's first regional centers (Niederberger 2000). By the era of Ticomán (600-200 BC), the Basin of Mexico and the neighboring Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley were full of small hierarchical polities of considerable sociopolitical complexity. Neither Zacatenco nor Ticomán was a significant political center at the regional level. The sample I analyzed comprises more-or-less the entire collections of anthropomorphic heads and bodies from Zacatenco (321) and Ticomán (260) housed at the American Museum of Natural History.

The collection from Tlaxcala (900-400 BC) derives from recent excavations at four sites, Amomoloc, Tetel, Las Mesitas, and La Laguna (Figure 1). Material culture of this region was closely tied to that of the adjacent Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley and the Basin of Mexico, but the region was peripheral in terms of sociopolitical development. Occupation by village-dwelling agriculturalists was late, dating from approximately 900 B.C. Population expansion and the proliferation of hierarchical polities followed rapidly. Of the sites excavated, La Laguna was a regional center and the others were villages. The figurine collection consists of 1681 fragments, of which 928 were anthropomorphic head and body fragments.

The predominant context of figurines at all the sites considered here was broken up in domestic debris. They were dispersed throughout each site, and distinctive figurine styles

appear together in secondary refuse deposits such as the fill of bell-shaped pits. More subtle information on context is generally lacking. For Zacatenco and Ticomán, relatively crude early-twentieth-century excavation techniques reduce the usefulness of contextual information provided by Vaillant. The Tlaxcalan sites are damaged by modern agricultural activities and erosion. In most cases the Formative occupation surface was gone, and intact deposits were in the form of subsurface pits.

The original uses of Formative-era figurines are not known with any certainty. Contexts and disposal practices indicate that the small, solid figurines considered here were not votive offerings or sacred cult paraphernalia. One common idea is that they were objects of household ritual (e.g., Guernsey 2012:102-103). Marcus (1998) is more specific for Oaxaca, suggesting that figurines were depictions of ancestors propitiated by women in household contexts. Other suggestions are that they were used in lifecycle rituals (Cyphers 1993) or as toys. Taube and Taube (2009) suggest that Classic-period figurines in the Maya area were items of popular culture with purposes more social than ritual. I have argued along similar lines for the shared component of Formative-era figurine traditions, suggesting that ritual uses were localized innovations that may have differed significantly from one area to another (Lesure 2011:152-155). An alternative to ongoing debate over function would be a more abstract characterization (Faust and Halperin 2009:8-9). For instance, figurines were exemplary bodies (Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:298), material points of reference in the negotiation and reproduction of social relationships (Lesure 1997:228) that would have played a role in the constitution of people as subjects (Joyce 2000:38).

Methodological Notes

The general archaeological literature on style provides no ready-made framework for the analysis of stylistic variation among figurines. One reason is that work on the social implications of style has expanded rather than narrowed the interpretive possibilities. Stylistic differentiation can have diverse, even opposite, functions, either promoting affiliation (through complementarity) or discouraging interaction (Wiessner 1984:227). Wobst (1999:125-126) now emphasizes the fluidity of stylistic phenomena: passive stylistic variation can easily become active and vice versa. The identification of “groups” is no longer the sole outcome of a social interpretation of style (Conkey 1990:13). Another reason is that while "style" in material culture generally may be conceived as what people "read" into artifacts (Wobst 1999:120), images constitute a special case. What people read in images cannot be reduced to style, since images also are read as referencing subject matter.

Style refers to how a figurine is made. Whereas the leg itself references subject matter, how the leg is formed is a stylistic attribute. I have found helpful Gell's (1998) distinction between iconography and style. *Iconographic elements* in a work reference the subject matter of the image, whereas *stylistic elements* reference other works. Stylistic qualities of a work prompt it to be perceived as part of a larger whole constituted by all works in the same style (Gell 1998:162-163). Thus, the stylistic qualities of a figurine leg reference other figurine legs by appearing similar or different. Those similarities or differences, in turn, reference the ways in which a figurine was made, given the range of possibilities available to the maker.

Analyses for this paper included a systematic effort to distinguish stylistic from iconographic attributes. Of course, that distinction is always an interpretive judgment since there is no hard and fast boundary between the two (Lesure 2005). I began with a pre-iconographical assessment (Panofsky 1955:28-30), to identify iconographic elements such as torsos, legs, faces, jewelry, and so forth. Following Gell, stylistic elements were conceived as referencing other images. “Style” was thus inferred from the works themselves, through a process that involved identifying similarities and differences among works (Ackerman 1963:165, 182). These practices resonate with traditional typological procedures in archaeology.

Figurines of Formative Central Mexico are the subject of the longest-lived, most widely employed figurine typology for ancient Mesoamerica. Archaeologists working across an area of as much as 50,000 km² (Plunket and Uruñuela 2012:1-2) draw on a two-level taxonomy created in the early decades of the twentieth century by Clarence Hay and George Vaillant (Vaillant 1930, 1931, 1935). With certain modifications to the system (Reyna Robles 1971, Niederberger 1976) and revisions to the sequence (Tolstoy 1978), the typology continues to be useful in the classification of figurine collections from the central highlands.

The types of the Hay-Vaillant classification are overwhelmingly stylistic rather than iconographic or functional in orientation. This does not mean that the typology itself should be naïvely accepted. Some types are well defined and have widespread distributions, while others are dubious entities. Classification of individual collections should be conducted with greater attention to the complex relations between local and

regional patterns, a point that has prompted me to define local types for central Tlaxcala (Lesure 2014).

Still, classification under the Hay-Vaillant system is a reasonable starting point for the study of figurine style. Further, unlike the Postclassic types contrasted by Brumfiel and Overholtzer (2009), those under consideration here appear to have been functional equivalents. They are ceramic, handmade rather than mold made, and overwhelmingly solid rather than hollow. Original heights generally ranged from 5 to 15 cm. A tiny percentage of each assemblage consists of whistles, which are identical in imagery to non-whistle figurines and not confined to any particular type or types. There are no other likely functional attributes. Masks, attachments to incense burners, and pieces broken off effigy vessels are rare at the sites under consideration. Where they are present, their imagery differs from that of the figurines. No significant stone sculpture is known from the sites considered. At Central Mexican sites at which sculpture appears in the time range under consideration, the imagery is unrelated to that of small, ceramic figurines – with the possible exception of figurine type C8 at Chalcatzingo (Grove and Gillespie 1984), a case exceptional in other ways as well (see below).

In sum, the variability under consideration in this paper is of a particular sort: stylistic variation among small, solid, ceramic figurines that were apparently functional equivalents of each other and which were plentiful in domestic settings. Other kinds of variation also provide interesting material for study; I hope to address differentiated subject matter in a future paper. The reasons for my particular focus here are that the ancient makers and users appear to have been particularly interested in the styles of their figurines and yet that variation at first resists social interpretation.

Initial Results: An Interpretive Dilemma

In this section, I explain why recurring juxtapositions of the figurine styles in the case under examination present a dilemma for interpretation. First, I argue on the basis of the attribute analysis that original makers and users took a lively interest in style. Second, I consider several models for the social interpretation of stylistic variation. I argue that none of those makes sense of observed variability, and I introduce an alternative suggestion to be developed in the consideration of fashion.

The Salience of Style

My inference that style was experientially important draws on the idea that artists craft images in anticipation of reactions from viewers. They choose attributes so as to prompt recognition of a referent or to elicit a chain of associations. A particularly effective way to do this is to build redundancies among attributes into the image. The attributes then cooperate visually to elicit recognition on the part of the viewer. Observed in prehistoric figurines, visual cooperation among attributes is evidence of an effort by the maker to direct viewers' attention. For example, at Early Formative Paso de la Amada, the form of breasts, stomachs, hips, and thighs cooperate to elicit recognition of many Ocós-phase figurines as images of young women (Lesure 1997). That pattern of correlations among attributes supports the interpretation that references to age and gender were important in the original intentions of the makers of the figurines.

I began analysis of the collections considered here by looking for something similar: associations of attributes that might hint at how the original makers and users categorized

their social world. I first looked for differentiation by age and gender and then sought associations of those attributes with posture, gesture, apparel, jewelry, headdress, and painted decoration. This analysis was conducted for each collection considered as a whole but also within each of the primary constituent types. There are few hints of age differentiation. Prominent instead are what I interpret as schematized gender attributes: female breasts (40-50 percent of each collection) and a pubic appliqué that probably depicts a stereotyped item of clothing, the male loincloth (6-10 percent). A single figure in each collection appears to have both male and female attributes (0.2-0.4 percent). A larger number have neither (15-25 percent) or have either chest or pubic area obscured in some way (5-10 percent). In the later part of each occupation, there is some proliferation of pubic markings that likely depict female genitals (5 percent of the Tlaxcala collection, 14 percent of the Zacatenco-Ticomán collection). The cross-correlation of those with breasts and with other attributes provides an interesting topic that defies brief summary. Suffice to say that the patterning is not readily interpretable as, for instance, referencing female age differentiation.

The above initially appeared to provide material for exploring associations with other attributes, but analyses yielded depressingly few results. There is a strong association in both collections between loincloth (or lack of any sexual characteristic) and the holding of a ball. Sexless figures differ more from those with either breasts or loincloths than the latter do from each other, but sexless figures do not themselves form a coherent grouping. There are likely sexless for a variety of reasons. In Tlaxcala, only figures with breasts have bracelets, but bracelets are actually confined to a single type. Although sample sizes are small, other forms of bodily adornment occur with both breasts and loincloths. There

does not appear to have been any systematic effort to signal differentiation of female and male subjects in terms of ornament: women and men were depicted with similar necklaces, similar earspools, similar headdresses, and similar designs of body painting.

My suspicion is that women and men at these sites did not have identical hair styles, jewelry, and body paint, but we have no other direct evidence on this point. One possibility is that the figurines might have expressed a discourse of gender fluidity or inclusion. That is what I initially thought (Lesure 2005), and I will consider the issue further in another paper. A source of unease with that interpretation is that it seems to reflect a contemporary, social-science interest in gender as a starting point for social analysis. Considering the full spectrum of iconographic attributes, it appears that the makers of the figurines treated them all in similar ways. Thus, with a few exceptions – loincloth/holding-ball being the most prominent – iconographic attributes seem to have been selected independently for inclusion on any particular figurine. They do not cooperate with each other to promote recognition of social categories or to link certain sorts of persons with particular modes of self-presentation or comportment.

There are further disquieting points about the strength of references to subject matter among the figurines. The most serious is that, in the Tlaxcalan case from 800 BC, the majority of figurines at the village sites are depicted with earspools, but we recovered no actual earspools at these sites and do not definitively have them in our excavated samples until after 500 BC. Figurine makers fashioned human images with earspools even though they themselves did not wear such ornaments. Were figurines intended to be depictions of high-status people who lived elsewhere? There is no supporting evidence for such a claim. I now suspect that figurines with earspools are not depictions of people elsewhere

(who wore earspools) but, rather, *copies of the figurines* made by such people. In a sense, figurines were not so much representations of people as they were representations of other figurines.

This point is reinforced when attention is turned to stylistic attributes. The frustrations encountered in the effort to identify correlations among attributes of subject matter disappear. Among stylistic attributes, intercorrelations are deep, rich, and emphatic.

A striking example in the Tlaxcalan collection is the pair of types Cuatlapanga and Coaxomulco, which appear together in refuse pits of the Late Tlatempa subphase of the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC (Figure 2). Cuatlapanga was the predominant type, and it had been in use locally since the ninth century. Coaxomulco was a minority type in Late Tlatempa. There are no evident differences in subject matter between the two.

Both types are derived from the larger C1 tradition, and, at first glance, they are not all that different. However, formal variation within the types is based on radically different generative rules. The monothetic Cuatlapanga type is characterized by rigidly redundant features: eyes, noses, and mouths are virtually identical from one figurine to another. Coaxomulco is polythetic in that any two figurines match one another in some traits but not in others. Coaxomulco also borrows traits freely from other contemporaneous types. Cuatlapanga was rigid and inward-looking, while Coaxomulco was fluid and extroverted, freely borrowing and rearranging attributes.

This juxtaposition looks deliberate and experientially significant. Every piece of these figurines, down to the curving conical tips of Cuatlapanga legs versus the turned-up, squared ends of Coaxomulco legs, constituted a statement of allegiance to one of two

distinct generative schemes. Here is strong cooperation between attributes, but it directs the viewer's attention not to differently conceived subject matter but rather to differences of style.

Models for Understanding Juxtaposed Styles

The richness of patterning of stylistic attributes suggests that people were actively interested in this aspect of variation and that juxtapositions of styles were deliberate and meaningful. So what did they mean? What implications did contrasts in style have for the original users of figurines? I consider three plausible models.

First, people might have actively used figurine styles to signal affiliations to social groups at the scale of the community or above. During the first millennium BC, there is one likely case. Within Central Mexico, type C8 figurines are highly clustered at Chalcatzingo and its surrounding villages, even though the style also appears at the distant site of La Venta, on the Gulf Coast (Cyphers 1988; Grove and Gillespie 1984). The use of C8 figurines looks like a group-level expression by members of the Chalcatzingo polity. However, that pattern of distribution is unique in this era.

Locally important types were usually manifestations of widely dispersed styles that extended not only across the boundaries of polities but almost certainly across ethnic and linguistic boundaries as well. Vaillant's types D1-2, C1, E2, and B4 are good examples. Even minority types were sometimes widely distributed. In my Tlaxcala collection, there are two type F figurines and a single type A figure, both more common in the Western Basin of Mexico but never predominant there. The pastes of the A and F figures in Tlaxcala appear local. Some other rare stylistic variants seem instead to be in non-local

paste. It appears that individual figurines might move considerable distances and that styles with foreign origins could readily be adopted in new locales. Distribution of both common and rare types alike was so extensive that in most cases they could not have referenced affiliation to community or polity.

Second, figurine styles might have referenced group affiliation *within* communities. Conceivably, types might have become widely dispersed because in each case they were used, locally, to reference social divisions typical of villages. This model fails to make sense of within-site distributions of types in the case is under consideration. At any one time, in any particular community, one type often predominated, but other styles were present in smaller numbers. Some of those alternatives are mere flickers in the local record, while others would eventually replace the dominant type. The problem for the model is that, on the one hand, stylistic juxtapositions occur in individual trash pits, suggesting that multiple types were used by members of individual households, as observed by Marcus (1998:117) in Early Formative San José Mogote (Oaxaca). On the other hand, types are homogeneously distributed throughout each site. It seems difficult to reconcile such patterns with a model in which figurines signaled household membership in intra-community social units. Membership would have to have been at the level of the individual, crosscutting virtually every household, a scheme that seems to me implausible.

Let me consider as a third model the broad suggestion that stylistic juxtapositions might have enhanced references to subject matter. For example, the 17th century Dutch artist Frans Halls rendered the wealthy subject of a portrait in subtle strokes to yield a naturalistic glow, whereas he used coarse, vigorous brushstrokes in depicting a generic

working-class type. The contrasting styles were simultaneously an expression and a perpetuation of class divisions (Jongh 2000:13-14). "Style," suggests Wobst (1999:121-122), "is what reifies hegemony."

Any such implications of stylistic juxtapositions among Formative figurines would be of great interest. Stylistic distinctions might have referenced relations of power and authority, as has been suggested for deliberate juxtapositions of the pan-Mesoamerican Olmec style with more localized expressions (Blomster 2009; Clark 1990; Lesure 1999). Another possibility is that distinctive styles might have expressed alternative discourses. Figurines are highly selective in their portrayal of social actors. If a dominant style portrayed actors in one way, an alternative style would have provided opportunities to renegotiate or even contest that portrayal (Lesure 2005).

In this third model, stylistic distinctions deepen the visual impact of differences in subject matter or else differentially reference expressions in some other medium (such as sculpture). No such patterns are present in the sites under consideration here. Figurine types juxtaposed at any particular time portray similar subjects in similar ways. Minority types do not seem to have contested the discourse expressed in dominant types; they depicted similar social categories. Further, contrasting styles are always confined to the domain of ceramic figurines. There are no cases like Olmec, in which one type referenced other media (such as sculpture) while another did not.

This is the dilemma for social interpretation in the cases under study: the styles were richly coded, but I can find no evidence that they referenced anything besides themselves. People seem to have been interested in style in and of itself. How do we move from that observation to social interpretation?

One possibility would be to consider further the idea that contrasts in style called attention to the ways in which figurines were made. Use of figurines in a particular style referenced a user's choice among a set of possibilities that were available also to other users. Style did not typically reference group affiliation or (at least in any direct way) discourses of power. It referenced the tastes of the user.

That idea prompted me to explore the sociology of fashion. Fashionable clothes are richly coded functional equivalents of each other that call attention to themselves and their distinctions from each other. They reference the choice of the wearer from a set of possible choices accessible also to other wearers. Could a fashion system have been operating among figurines in first millennium BC Central Mexico?

Fashion as Western, Modern, and Associated with Clothing

Before considering what studies of fashion might tell us about figurine styles, it is necessary to address two potential objections: that fashion is a phenomenon unique to Western modernity and that fashion occurs only in the realm of clothing or other bodily ornament.

First, although some features of the contemporary Western fashion system, such as its institutional mechanisms, are unprecedented, the system is built on general social and psychological processes. There appears no reason to insist that the phenomenon is impossible in other cultural contexts. Although specialists in contemporary fashion object to most of the non-Western cases proffered by anthropologists (Davis 1992:28; Entwistle 2000:43-48), Cannon (1998) convincingly documents the internal emergence of fashion

systems within Native American communities in the context of the nineteenth-century North American fur trade.

The second objection is that fashion is properly identified only in the realm of clothing. Certainly, sociological studies of fashion have focused almost exclusively on clothing. However, Blumer (1995:378-379) finds fashion operating in “diverse areas of human group life” including the arts, entertainment, architecture, household decoration, mortuary practices, medicine, academic disciplines, and business management. There may be still poorly understood differences among these manifestations -- Davis (1992:120) notes the more frantic pace of fashion in contemporary clothing than, for instance, in cookware -- but there is no convincing basis for restricting fashion to clothing as a matter of principle. I draw here on studies of clothing because that is the domain of the most theoretically rich work on fashion.

Characteristics and Causes of Fashion

Fashion is a social phenomenon in which people choose among alternative versions, models, or ways of doing/making -- in short, among different styles. The choosers participate in a network of interaction and are generally aware of other people's choices. At the level of individual decision-making, a crucial factor is the desire to be current, up-to-date, in fashion. The cumulative result of individual decisions made under the imperative to be in fashion is convergence on a limited range of styles that are popular briefly before they are replaced by others. Both the expectation and the fact of continuous change are key elements of a fashion system (see Blumer 1995; Cannon 1998; Davis 1992:12-15; Entwistle 2000:43-48).

Three additional themes are speed of change, appropriate social-organizational contexts, and tensions between the individual and the collectivity. Fashion change these days is extraordinarily rapid, but the pace in the nineteenth century was more languid (Davis 1992:104-108). It is not clear how fast change needs to be for a phenomenon to qualify as “fashion,” but change should be *perceptible* to participants. Gradual alterations in traditional folk dress, for instance, do not constitute fashion (Entwistle 2000:48). Fashion systems are not compatible with rigid social hierarchies. Most analysts, following Simmel (1957, originally published 1904), identify a class-differentiated society open to upward mobility as a necessary condition for the emergence of fashion. We tend to think of fashion as individual expression, but its power of social control is more striking: fashion “sets sanctions on what is to be done, it is conspicuously indifferent to criticism, it demands adherence, and it by-passes as oddities and misfits those who fail to abide by it” (Blumer 1995:379). At least in the sphere of clothing, fashion answers simultaneous psychological propensities to be different and to conform. It is fueled by the identity-ambiguity of the self in a complex, heterogeneous society (Davis 1992:21-29; Simmel 1957:541-543, 547-551) or societies undergoing rapid change (Blumer 1995:389-391; Cannon 1998:25-29).

Many theories have been proposed to account for the fashion system in Western clothing during the last few centuries (Entwistle 2000:57-71; Lowe 1993; Sproles 1985). Only a limited number of these are plausibly applicable to fashion as a general phenomenon. Davis (1992) narrows the field to two: the class-differentiation (or trickle-down) theory of Simmel (1957) and the collective choice theory of Herbert Blumer (1995, originally published 1969).

The class-differentiation theory has been widely influential, and it was taken up by Wilk (2004) in a previous application of ideas from the study of fashion to Formative Mesoamerica. In this theory, the middle classes emulate the fashions of the elite, prompting the elite to abandon those modes in favor of new ones. The process of continual change that is fashion is driven by imitation (on the part of a subordinate class) and differentiation (on the part of the elite). Critiques of this theory are now routine, but many center on changes in the fashion system (or Western society more generally) in the century since Simmel wrote (Davis 1992:110-115; Entwistle 2000:58-63). More telling for our purposes here is Blumer's (1995:380-384) ethnographic observation (Paris, 1960s) that elites were not operating outside of the fashion system as trickle-down theory would suggest; instead, they were enmeshed within it and were often the most anxious to be perceived as "in fashion." Identification of the current, the relevant, and the modern was an elusive collective sense that elites -- influential as they might be -- did not control.

In Davis's (1992:118) assessment, Blumer's collective choice theory (originally collective selection¹) is "a more balanced, comprehensive, and felicitous analysis of the fashion process than that offered by trickle-down theory or, for that matter, most extant theories." Blumer (1995:388-389) identifies six conditions necessary for the emergence of fashion. Within the specific arena in which fashion emerges, there must be (1) an orientation towards revision of old forms and adoption of new ones. There must further be (2) competition generated by a recurrent presentation of new models, (3) relative freedom of choice between models, and (4) no utilitarian difference between models such that their relative merits could be subjected to a decisive test. There should be (5) prestigious persons whose choices among models carry weight. Finally, the arena should

be (6) open to effects from a changing social world -- from, for instance, historical events, the introduction of new participants, or the changing content of social relations. In such circumstances, people's choices will converge on certain models but the chosen models will continuously shift over time. Choices by high-status individuals will be influential, but only to the extent that they are perceived to have made the right choices given ongoing developments.

Blumer's (1995:390-391) functional analysis of the larger social role of fashion incorporates both the general structure of fashion change and the experiential imperative to be up-to-date. Fashion can play an important role in societies undergoing rapid change. Its continual movement helps detach people from the restraints of the past. Instead of ties to tradition, fashion inculcates dispositions oriented to the immediate future and to continual change. Yet fashion sets strict limits on variability. It therefore holds off the threat of anarchy and provides a source of order and stability in a present that is always in motion.

I adopt Blumer's framework as a working understanding of the basic mechanisms behind fashion systems. Fashion, as I use the concept, may appear in many or few arenas in any given society, and it may wax and wane or disappear altogether in response to larger social circumstances (Cannon 1998:25-29). Plus, it is theoretically possible that, in Formative Central Mexico, fashion operated among figurines but not in other domains of material culture.

Fashions in Formative Figurines?

Were social conditions of Formative Central Mexico appropriate for the emergence of fashion? I argue a cautious "yes." Let me emphasize that I am making the case specifically for Formative-era Central Mexico. There is reason to be wary about the applicability of the model to other regions and time periods in Mesoamerica.

Although the social system underwent radical transformation in the Formative, "differentiated but not rigidly class-divided," seems an acceptable characterization. One precondition for fashion was thus plausibly present.

A key issue is the pace of change and specifically whether change was perceptible. Figurine types in the first millennium BC seem to have followed a temporal rhythm at or just below what can be resolved by radiocarbon dating – approximately a century, sometimes less, sometimes more. Figure 3 documents temporal patterns in the two cases, though it should be made clear that this hardly constitutes raw data. The sequence itself and the dating of the types are heavily interpreted. Suffice to say that they constitute my best effort based on primary data and previous interpretations (especially Tolstoy 1978, 1989a, 1989b; Niederberger 1976, 2000; Reyna Robles 1971; Vaillant 1930, 1931, 1935). My assessment of the two sequences is that while individual types typically lasted longer than a human lifespan, changes in the mix of juxtaposed styles were within the domain of experience.

Patterns in the distribution of figurine styles in Central Mexico (reviewed above in discussion of the interpretive dilemma) are amenable to interpretation in terms of the second and third of Blumer's (1995:388) conditions, (2) that there was an openness to the recurrent presentation of new forms and (3) that people had freedom of choice, including access to alternative models and the practical ability to switch from one to another. Those

conditions together are expected to lead to a competition among models. Figurine makers and users in Formative Central Mexico appear to have taken a lively interest in differences of style. Even in smaller villages, where at any one time a single type predominated, there was a constant percolation of alternative forms, often on inspiration from adjacent regions. Although figurines were not significant objects of trade, some individual pieces ended up far from their place of origin, rather as if travelers would bring home a couple of interesting pieces. The result was extensive distributions even of some quite minor types, with the preponderance of individual pieces locally manufactured at their site of deposition.

Thus, two of Blumer's (1995) conditions for the emergence of fashion seem to be met. What about the rest? His first condition is that (1) there must be an orientation towards revision, an outlook towards the future, a shared desire to be up-to-date. This would be a surprise for villages of Formative Mesoamerica – but mainly because we assume that they will match our image of a tradition-bound society. We actually do not know the criteria according to which Formative villagers chose among figurines. This first criterion of Blumer's will have to be a conclusion, a dividend of the analysis, rather than something that can be established with the archaeological evidence.

Blumer's remaining criteria are plausibly present. Certainly, there was (4) no utilitarian differences between types of figurines. It seems likely that (5) the choices of prestigious people were influential, but that elites did not control the trajectory of stylistic change. At Chalcatzingo, figurines were not more common at high-status than at low-status households (Gillespie 1987:265), but among the Tlatilco graves, in the late second millennium BC, they formed a more important part of the total offerings of wealthy

female graves than of poor graves (Lesure 2011:128-129). Finally, it seems likely that (6) choice of figurine styles was an arena open to effects of a changing world. People appear to have regularly adopted figurine styles from an emerging center of power but then moved on rapidly to new ones. The ephemeral impact of the Olmec style among the objects of interest here, remarked on by Tolstoy (1989:98), is an example. Among small, solid, ceramic figurines in Central Mexico, Olmec-style heads came and went like any other style, despite the longevity of Olmec style in esoteric, elite, or ritual objects such as greenstone figurines and monumental sculpture (Lesure 2012:380, 388-389). There are other possible cases. The dispersion of type C10 figurines may be related to the rise of Cholula as a regional power and the subsequent popularity of E2 to developments in the Basin of Mexico, perhaps the growing prominence of Cuicuilco. In these examples, political developments affected figurine styles far beyond the zones of control of the centers. However, the effects were brief, far shorter than the lasting clout of the centers. It is as if some process internal to the domain of figurines prompted makers to move on to new styles: a process such as fashion.

In Blumer's functional model (1995:390-391), fashion is to be expected in societies undergoing rapid change. The pace of change in Formative Central Mexico was rapid by preindustrial standards, with no more than two millennia between initial settled villages and fully urban centers. The emergence of fashion as a mechanism that oriented dispositions towards a future of constant change while simultaneously providing a source of stability seems plausible.

Let me conclude this assessment on a note of caution. An important aspect of fashion in clothing was absent in Formative figurines: fashion as individual expression, along

with identity construction, ambiguity of the self, and all the micro-variation both synchronic and diachronic that go with those (Entwistle 2000:55; Simmel 1957:546; Sproles 1985:59). The level of variability that distinguishes individual outfits is not evident in figurines. Arguably, this point could exclude stylistic change in figurines from being legitimately considered fashion. I would propose instead that these elements of clothing fashion may be specific to that domain. In the remainder of this paper I will assume that the case has been made and consider what studies of fashion might tell us about figurine styles.

Towards Social Interpretation

Blumer's model of the workings of fashion systems helps move the social interpretation of figurine style beyond the interpretive dilemma noted at the outset of this paper. The dilemma was that although people were intensely interested in figurine style, the styles seemed merely to reference each other. To move beyond that impasse, I began by observing that style also referenced how a figurine was made and thus choices by makers and users from a range of shared models. Identification of a fashion system helps to explain the intensity of interest in style and suggests the beginnings of a social interpretation: figurine style was an ever-moving source of stability in a social world in transformation. In this section, I explore a few general aspects and implications of such an interpretation; then, in the following section, I bring discussion back to the case study.

The analysis of style as fashion casts an interesting light on issues of signification. Joyce (2007), drawing on Preucel and Bauer (2001; see also Preucel 2006), suggests that Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs helps illuminate different dimensions of the

signification of figurines, prompting analysts to consider not simply *what* figurines signified but *how* they signified. Briefly, *iconic signs* resemble their referent. *Symbolic signs* have an arbitrary relation to their referent, as the word "dog" has to an actual living dog. Finally, *indexical signs* are caused by or affected by the referent: the footprint references the foot that made it.

The models that I originally tried to apply to stylistic variability – without much success – were iconic and perhaps symbolic. In contrast, the understanding developed over the course of this paper suggests that style signified indexically. Figurine style referenced the social through a chain of references that began with perception of the richly coded formal qualities of the objects. Styles did not signify groups or communities directly; after all, any particular style would be abandoned even as the communities persisted. The styles of figurines instead signified the social indirectly, beginning with richly coded references to the forms of other figurines. Those relations of similarity and difference provided concrete, *indexical* proof that neighbors free to choose usually decided to make figurines in the same way – but in a way that looked to the future and that was continually subject to revision in response to events in the larger social world.

Figurine styles were therefore not typically signals of ethnicity or other group affiliation. (The case of C8 figurines at Chalcatzingo proves the rule: such a distribution was completely atypical.) Styles referenced not who the makers or users *were*, but instead what *choices* they had made among a range of available options. People of different communities might (at any particular time) make different choices, but there was significant overlap in their available options, and people would readily adopt the choices of ethnic others who were perceived as trend-setting.

If these kinds of factors lay behind stylistic variability in figurines, then we need to think somewhat differently about the ethos of Formative-period villagers of Central Mexico. These were not wholly tradition-bound people. They could be forward-looking, preoccupied with appearance, and concerned to be up-to-date. They took a lively interest in figurine styles and in other people's choices among styles. In communities large and small, and even when villagers mainly made and used the same style, people considered alternatives. They were free to choose and always open to outside input because the desire to be up-to-date transcended allegiance to any particular style.

The idea of style as a reference to acts of making and choosing invites attention to the agency of Formative villagers. In relation to the full agenda of a theory of fashion attentive to agency, Blumer's analysis is relatively narrow. He emphasizes conformity and the structures that emerge from collective choice, ignoring acts of deviance or defiance along with the rich topic of the psychological implications of individual choices (Davis 1991). Although Blumer's analysis is not, from that standpoint, comprehensive, it is nonetheless of considerable interest. For example, one persistent problem with treatments of agency in Formative Mesoamerica is that they tend to effectively accord powers to elites and constraints to commoners. It proves difficult to envision ways in which actions of ordinary people would have constrained those of the privileged and powerful. This is especially the case in accounts of the second millennium BC, given the rapid and thus seemingly inexorable course of increasing complexity in that era. As a result, when we see villagers adopting the figurine style of a newly powerful center, we tend to assign agency to the center and ignore the fact that villagers abandoned the style long before the power of the center faded. In Blumer's model, the villagers become

agents. They adopted the styles of powerful centers on their own accord, in order to be up-to-date. Those styles were absorbed into a fashion system with internal processes that propelled the abandonment of each successive style for a newer latest-thing.

Blumer's analysis therefore has a larger theoretical interest for the study of Formative Mesoamerica because it helps us break out of a tendency to reduce everything to one basic process, that of increasing social inequality. Still, Blumer's model provides only a general orientation towards the analysis of figurine fashions. In theoretical terms, it does not go very far towards an understanding of the dynamics of choice; methodologically, it does not solve the problem of how to address variability.

What about Variability? Agency, History, and Figurine Fashions

My point of departure in this paper was the goal of taking variability seriously. I noted that progress in the social interpretation of stylistic variability had been less than that for iconographic or contextual variability. The case under consideration is particularly apt because style is so salient. I have established a basis for interpretation by proposing that a fashion system operated among figurines. It will be noticed that the suggestions based on Blumer's model make sense of the general patterns of stylistic variability in the case study but fall short of the original goal of making specifics count. To move towards such an interpretation, it is important to consider the particular nature of the chains of signification elicited by figurine styles.

Signification began with perceptions of the details of form of one figurine in comparison to another. To interpret stylistic variability, we need to set aside our interests, as social scientists, in quick references to gender, age, or inequality – the sort of

references that iconic variability may more readily provide. We need to start instead at the beginning of the indexical chain, with that in which original users and makers were themselves concretely interested: the specific stylistic contrasts of different eras. A consideration of synchronic stylistic juxtapositions is a necessary route towards a richer understanding of the agency of Formative villagers within their fashion systems. The analysis also suggests that these fashion systems exhibited certain emergent properties at multiple temporal scales.

To introduce considerations of scale, I adopt Barthes's (2005, originally published 1966) assessment of fashion as structured in the three temporal scales of the *Annales* historians. Barthes's brief analysis provides a useful bridge between the fashion literature and archaeology. On the fashion side, it moves us beyond an overemphasis on the short term. It also resonates with archaeologists' interest in multiple temporal scales and in the *Annales* school of history (see Knapp 2009, originally published 1992). At the smallest of the three scales, that of the event, there is fashion as experienced by participants. There are both year-to-year variations and somewhat longer, decadal trends. The excesses of the 1970s, for instance, remain an object of perception even though year-to-year variation in that era is forgotten; in other words, 70's fashions remain on the horizon of the event. At an intermediate scale are the cyclical rhythms of fashion that extend beyond directly perceptible change. The work of Richardson and Kroeber (1940) established this as an important domain of fashion research (Lowe 1993). They found oscillations in skirt width, length of skirt, and so on lasting approximately a century. At the largest of scales, the *longue durée*, are basic clothing forms that persist across centuries, such as the kimono or the dress. I consider each of these scales, concentrating on the first two.

The Scale of the Event: "Product Lifecycles" of Figurine Styles and the Dynamics of Choice

The level of the event is the smallest of the scales – the experiential scale of people's engagement with multiple, contemporaneous styles. This will be an important area for work if we are to move towards an analysis of figurine fashions that is richly attentive to agency.

Most research on modern fashion, particularly that concerning "product lifecycles," operates at this scale. Two points from that literature are helpful here. First, individual styles (approximated in our case by figurine types) undergo a characteristic trajectory of invention, dissemination, acceptance, saturation, decline, and obsolescence (Sproles 1985:64-67). Second, the meaning of an individual style is continuously changing (Davis 1992:123-158; Simon-Miller 1985; Sproles 1985). Those changes are related to, among other things, characteristic moments of the product lifecycle (e.g., initial dissemination versus market saturation). Although the specific, changing meanings of prehistoric figurine styles are difficult to discern, we can get some sense of alterations of meaning by examining the nature of stylistic contrasts and considering whether the source of inspiration for new types was local or external.

The Cuatlapanga figurine type, introduced already in Figure 2, provides a good example of the stylistic cycle in which gradual alterations of meaning can be inferred even though the specific content is largely lost. From the standpoint of the villages of central Tlaxcala, the source of this type was external in that its specific elements, generative rules, and so forth were put together elsewhere (probably in the Puebla-

Tlaxcala Valley). It was first used in central Tlaxcala during the Tzompantepec phase (900-800 BC). At that time, Cuatlapanga was a minor type distinguishable for its extreme internal coherence in contrast to the more common figurines, which were crude, loosely rule-bound, and stylistically rather haphazard (Figure 4, bottom). I have not been able to link the latter to any particular supra-regional types, whereas the linkages of Cuatlapanga (to C1 and B) are clear (see Lesure in press). In its introduction/dissemination phase, Cuatlapanga was a local novelty both for its traits (eyes made in a particular way, etc.) and for generative rules that demanded rigid internal coherence.

In Early Tlatempa (800-ca. 725 BC), Cuatlapanga achieved widespread adoption and acceptance. The most frequent alternatives were still crude figurines lacking internal coherence as a type. There were also a few low frequency alternatives – termed “typeable deviates” in Lesure (in press) – that may have differed more in substance than in constitutive rules. Although a loosely structured local tradition of crude figurines continued at a reduced level, collective choice in this era centered on the stylistic rigidity of Cuatlapanga. The typeable deviates indicate that, although people consistently chose Cuatlapanga, they were interested in potential alternatives.

In Late Tlatempa (ca. 725-650 BC), Cuatlapanga was in the somewhat stale, saturation phase of the fashion cycle. The type was still the most popular, but there was a more numerous range of internally coherent minority alternatives with clear linkages to supra-regional traditions. The most common alternative was Coaxomulco. Its juxtaposition with Cuatlapanga in central Tlaxcala suggests an intense local dialogue about figurine stylistics. The upstart Coaxomulco presented a radical inversion of the rigid rules of the majority type (Figure 2). In this altered mix of styles, the local meaning

of Cuatlapanga would have changed – and not for the better, if being up-to-date was a concern.

Interestingly, it was not Coaxomulco that became the dominant type of the initial Texoloc phase (650-500 BC). Instead, both Cuatlapanga and Coaxomulco were discarded in favor of a new type, Ehco, with strong ties to E2 in the Basin of Mexico (Figure 4, top). It appears that for a relatively brief period there was a renewed era of high coherence based on this diminutive new type made in a striking, cream-coloured paste. Soon, however, and still within the Texoloc phase, stylistic variation took on a character not previously seen in the local sequence. The initially highly coherent Ehco splintered into numerous varieties that can be assembled in a plausible stylistic series consisting of gradually accruing divergence from the prototypical Ehco – itself not a local invention but a suite of traits appropriated by local figurine makers from the Basin of Mexico (Figure 5). Figurines of the later Texoloc and early Tezoquipan phases (through 400 BC, when a gap in our sequence begins) exhibit what looks like ebullient minor innovations on a single basic style. The result is stylistic juxtapositions that differ from those we have previously seen. Rather than lack of coherence (Tzompantepec), rigid hyper-coherence (Early Tlatempa and initial Texoloc), or a dialogue between opposing generative schemes (Late Tlatempa), we have partial coherences on multiple levels, a pattern that can best be represented typologically by identifying types with numerous constituent varieties.

The model of the "product lifecycle" can help give a general sense of the shifting meanings of individual styles and of the dynamics of choice in different eras. It suggests that the implications of acceptance, rejection, conformity, and deviance were circumstantially variable.

There were also scales of emergent patterning beyond that of the event. When considered in isolation, the 500-year sequence of stylistic juxtapositions in central Tlaxcala looks like a linear trajectory from crude and pre-stylistic, to emulation of trend-setting areas, to mature local innovation. However, when it is placed beside the case of the Western basin of Mexico, a cyclicity in stylistic juxtapositions is perceptible.

The Intermediate Scale: Cycles in Figurine Fashions

Fashion research since Richardson and Kroeber (1940) confirms the presence of cyclical change in components of dress over decades and centuries (Lowe 1993:293-300). Constraints inherent in clothing play a factor in these oscillations: skirts can get only so long before they impede movement. Still, Robinson (1975) found cyclical change in men's facial hair (shaved or bearded) with a periodicity similar to changes in women's dress.

Was there analogous patterning in figurine fashions at a timescale at the edge of or beyond that of individual experience? There are certainly no metric patterns at the level of individual features such as those observed in modern women's dress. Figurine eyes do not get wider and then smaller, they simply change from one form to another form. There are, however, cyclical changes of a more abstract sort.

The cyclicity in stylistic juxtapositions is suggested in Figure 6. I have already noted two episodes of rigid stylistic coherence in Tlaxcala, first in Early Tlatempa and then again at the beginning of the Texoloc phase. In those instances, not only did one type predominate, but its stylistic rules demanded conformity at the level of individual attributes. At the sites in the Basin of Mexico, there were no such episodes of hyper-

coherence but instead always some degree of stylistic variability – probably because these communities were less isolated than the Tlaxcalan villages.

The episode of local innovation in the Texoloc and Early Tezoquipan phases of central Tlaxcala (yielding diverse types with multiple subvarieties) is echoed in the Western Basin of Mexico during Ticomán 1 and 2. Consistent with the claim of localized innovation is that figurines in the two regions are less similar in details than they had been in the preceding era. A shift from smoothed surfaces (Ticomán 1) to burnished surfaces (Ticomán 2) occurs also between Texoloc and Early Tezoquipan in Tlaxcala. However, the Tlaxcalan types Huehuetitla and Huiloac are only generically similar to the suite G-I-L in the Basin; their details are explicable with reference to a sequence of local innovation, as shown in Figure 5.

In the Basin of Mexico, there is also a second, *earlier* episode of stylistic innovation in the first part of the Zacatenco phase. This was the creative ferment from which type C1 emerged to achieve widespread supra-regional popularity. This was a period of local innovation in which figurine makers experimented with form at multiple levels, from particular attributes to generative rules.

There are also, in the Basin of Mexico case, periods of stylistic juxtapositions that seem understandable as dialogues between explicitly contrasting generative schemes. Towards the end of its period of use, C1 (and its cloud of variants) was juxtaposed with type B. The latter type tends towards the redundancy and rigidity of Cuatlapanga, though the patterns are not as extreme as observed in the Tlaxcalan case (Lesure 2011:148). A second episode occurred some 250 years later, when the striking white-slipped types

H2/H5 exhibit high internal coherence and redundancy, in contrast to the micro-variation that characterizes the G-I-L series and its burnished-brown successors in H3.

When these two sequences are examined side-by-side (Figure 6), a cyclicity is perceptible in stylistic juxtapositions. Localized micro-innovations on a single basic pattern alternate with periods of local conformity. Periods of greater conformity may take the form of dialogue between deliberately contrastive generative rules, or hyper-coherence within a single dominant type.

The cycles varied from about 100 to 300 years; they would have been beyond the horizon of perception of individuals. Makers and users were probably aware of the lifecycles of types. They would also have experienced stylistic innovation, hyper-coherence, or deliberate contrasts in generative rules, and some would have witnessed a shift from one to another of those. However, people would not have perceived the longer-term oscillation between those states. What, then, would have been the causes of patterning at this scale?

If figurine style was caught up in a fashion system, then cyclicity would be expected as an emergent phenomenon of the system itself (Richardson and Kroeber 1940). The exact causes may have been multiple, and they may prove difficult to reconstruct. Kroeber imagined deterministic causes behind long-term fashion cycles, but more recent work favors stochastic models (Lowe 1993:297-300). For instance, Lowe and Lowe (1982) identify structural factors in women's fashions, including inertia, cultural continuity, and a system of rules of aesthetic proportions, but also unpredictable impacts from the social world outside fashion. If a similarly complex nest of causes lie behind the

cycles of stylistic juxtapositions in Formative figurines, then teasing out cause will be a difficult task.

The Scale of Long-Term Structure

At the scale of long-term structure, analogous to studies of “the kimono,” “the doublet,” or “the dress” in the history of clothing, we are led to consider the history of the figurine itself. Such a history would deal with the beginnings and ends of figurine traditions but also basic, long-lasting reconfigurations of their elements. This is a large topic. I consider just one aspect, briefly. Fashion may come and go in any particular material domain, and we expect it to be perpetuated only in differentiated but not rigidly hierarchical societies. What happened to the figurine traditions of Central Mexico with the development of urban life, state ideologies, and more rigid class structures? As fashion theory would lead us to suspect, we do indeed see a significant reconfiguration within figurine traditions in the Terminal Formative (100 BC – AD 200) and Classic (AD 200-650) periods, potentially involving the breakdown of the Formative-era fashion system. However, the patterns are complex.

At the time of abandonment of our site of La Laguna in Tlaxcala, figurine use in that area seems to have been in steep decline. However, a lively tradition of household figurines continued at the city of Teotihuacan in the Terminal Formative and Classic (Barbour 1976; Goldsmith 2000; Scott 2001). At Teotihuacan, figurines of different types no longer appear to be functional equivalents of each other, and there is a reorientation of attributes of subject matter and style (in comparison to the cases considered here) such that subject matter becomes more salient. The periodicity of stylistic change also

lengthens during the Classic, but that is associated with the introduction of molds for making figurines, thus complicating any effort to sort out causes. Finally, it is important to note that, although there are reasons to be wary about the applicability of the model of fashion to other parts of Mesoamerica, we do see reconfigurations in traditions of domestic figurines in these other areas as well during the later Formative, including cessation of figurine-making in some regions (Guernsey 2012:109-110; Love 1999:148; Marcus 1998:313). So while the Terminal Formative changes to household figurine traditions of Central Mexico appear consistent with the proposals on fashion developed here, those also need to be considered in a larger spatial context beyond anything possible in this paper.

Conclusions

I have argued that small, solid, ceramic figurines used in household settings in Central Mexico during the first millennium BC were emphatically stylistic. Attributes cooperated to direct the viewer's attention to the style of the figurine, to how the figurine was made, and to the choices of makers and users from a range of alternative ways of making. I drew particularly on Blumer's (1995) model of fashion as a general phenomenon to develop a social interpretation of those patterns. Fashion among anthropomorphic figurines provided a sense of cohesion and stability in a social system in rapid, potentially disorienting transformation. It also inculcated dispositions oriented to the future and to continuous change.

As a basis for social interpretation, these suggestions make sense of patterns of stylistic variability in Formative figurines of Central Mexico, but they do not depend on

observations of specific stylistic juxtapositions. I went on to suggest that observed juxtapositions provide evidence of changes in meanings of individual styles as well as something of the changing fashion scene – the way people engaged with styles – in different eras. Also, comparison of two stylistic sequences revealed emergent cyclical properties in the Formative fashion system, including oscillation between local stylistic conformity and proliferating innovations on a single basic form. Stylistic conformity is manifested in different ways, either as hyper-coherence or as a dialogue between contrasting generative rules.

The analyses presented here suggest a variety of questions for future work. Several lines of inquiry are relevant to the particular cases I have considered. How much should we make of the appearance of fashion specifically in *figurines* – that is, among miniature images of people? That question must be pursued conjointly with a consideration of whether fashion was present in other domains of material culture. For the Tlaxcala case, two initial observations seem to point in different directions. On the one hand, it is intriguing that animal figurines (mostly dogs) exhibit less stylistic elaboration than human figurines (Lesure 2014). On the other hand, it appears that some elements of pottery styles changed at a pace similar to figurines; a detailed comparative analysis of these two domains of material culture, pottery and figurines, is currently in progress. Another line of inquiry is how generalizable the analyses of this paper might be to Formative-era figurines in other parts of Mesoamerica. An important consideration for those cases will be *how* style signified (indexically, as argued here for Central Mexico?) and the relative balance between stylistic and iconographic attributes (are interpretive dilemmas akin to that described here found in other cases as well?). I suspect that Central

Mexico constitutes something of an extreme case. The fact that the Hay-Vaillant system is unique for Formative Mesoamerica in its areal coverage and success as a classification suggests that stylistic processes may have been different in other places. Finally, what implications would the case considered here have for the study of fashion systems in general? Any pre-modern case has value, but of particular interest here is that while fashion operated in the material sphere of figurines, Formative-era clothing – to the extent that we can tell given obviously imperfect knowledge – was fairly tradition-bound. Thus, as a case of fashion, the Mesoamerican Formative would be distinct from the modern West, where clothing is the central locus of fashion. From the standpoint of developing a general theory of fashion as a social process, the Formative case is consequently of considerable interest.

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Figure captions

Figure 1. Map of Central Mexico with a selection of Formative-period sites. Map courtesy of David M. Carballo.

Figure 2. Comparison of two types juxtaposed within the same communities in central Tlaxcala during the Late Tlatempa subphase. Arbitrary code numbers for eye forms are provided to facilitate assessment of internal variability within types. Drawings by Jeremy Bloom.

Figure 3. Contemporaneous juxtapositions of figurine types in central Tlaxcala and the western Basin of Mexico during the first millennium BC.

Figure 4. The history of the Cuatlapanga type in juxtaposition with other styles (central Tlaxcala). Drawings by Laura Baker, Jeremy Bloom, Amy Carroll, and Jennifer Salazar.

Figure 5. Varieties of Ehco, Huehuetitla, and Huiloac types under the hypothesis of gradual local innovations on the prototypical Ehco style (central Tlaxcala). Drawings by Laura Baker, Jeremy Bloom, Amy Carroll, and Jennifer Salazar.

Figure 6. Cyclicity in stylistic juxtapositions in Central Mexico during the first millennium BC. Note the repetition of high coherence in the Tlaxcala sequence and of localized innovation versus contests between distinctive generative rules in the Western Basin of Mexico.

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Lopiparo, Jeanne, and Julia A. Hendon

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¹ Blumer and Davis use the term “collective selection.” I have substituted “collective choice” out of concern that an archaeological audience might confuse the original expression with the Darwinian concept of group selection..