

ARTS AND DESIGN UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA

Thesis in Fine Arts and Decorative Arts

**CONTEMPORARY
FASHION,
MEANS OF DEFINING
IDENTITY**

Abstract

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Introduction

We are now living under the influence of contemporary mythology, we have accumulated baggages of signs, symbols, tools and typologies that unconscious it affects the manner that we are presenting ourselves to the world.

The main focus of the paper is to penetrate the layers of personal and group identity in the attempt of understanding the mechanisms underlying the construction of identity in general and visual identity, clothing in particular. Questions that are looking for answers in this study relate to the identification means and which relation can be attributed mainly to the domain of art.

The paper notes that there are no prototypes identity wrong, but there are gaps in the promotion and understanding their share of mistakes in the processes by which some become more viral or more visible than others. Each identity typology addresses to a specific audience and each public consists of individuals more or less informed about esthetic norms issued and secured over specific processes and human social evolution.

Chapter 1. Identity and alterity

1.1. About identity

The concept of identity has become more and more used in the modern language. Often we find papers, articles or just various studies targeted to this topic.

Sociology and political science deals with social identity as an individual's personal characterization, as membership to particular groups with respect to nationality, social class, subculture, ethnicity, gender, etc., all analyzed through historical changes and cultural circumstances. Philosophy explains identity as a concept that defines an entity, making it recognizable, with reference to a number of features that make it different from other distinct entities. Logic sciences define identity as a relationship between an entity and itself.

Contemporary individuals are perhaps abusing of these approaches to identity theory, but the hard need for affirmation and integration, plus the need to range a half-step ahead, make the study of identity a complex process essential to society's current development.

1.2. Personal identity

Personal identity is a dynamic concept, continuously connected and related to social realities. This section summarizes how the construction of personal identity is a basic condition of social relations. Personal identity creates equivalences and differences based on similarities and differences that occur from one individual to another, or from one group to another.

While we are not necessarily required, however, it seems natural to join and to relate to certain social groups by nature of entities greedy for communication and interaction. Just understanding the need for affiliation and group identity assertion is the subject of this paper. Society is forming us, supports and promotes, and we will always respond to society. Continuous reporting to each other and others actually put social creativity bases.

1.3. Psychosocial and group identity

Theories of social identity refers to both the psychological and sociological behavior in the group. Mihai Dinu summarizes social identity theory as consisting of three elements: categorization, identification and comparison.

Categorization process facilitates knowledge and self-knowledge. We use frequently social categories to identify a person of a certain environment, whether social, political, cultural or professional. The categorization accounts for information about people and allows us to find out more information about them. Identification also defines the concept of social identity. We willingly or without resistance identify with certain groups that our instinct tells us that we belong to, and most of our attributes and characteristics are due undoubtful to the simple act of belonging to certain groups.

These concepts also put foundation to discrimination between a social group and between single individuals. Certainly, however, the main idea is implied by identity theory of social comparison. It makes possible the operation of all social mechanisms that plays a very important role in the evolutionary processes of the human individual.

1.4. Alterity and reporting to others

All that is happening around us, everything that interacts with our personal realities settings, has the role to transform us and put us in contact with new worlds and compilations and leaves a stong mark on our way of seeing and understand things in terms of new aesthetic

values that appear on our ability to understand.

Each person has their own universe of signs, a collection of features that are easily becoming clear indications of its typology. Reference *to the other*, a basic component of the concept of identity involves categorical notion of *otherness*.

Reporting *on the other* is essential and any reference invoke the identity makes automatic otherness, the existence *of the other*.

1.5. Alienation

There are countless cases in which personal identity is poorly structured, in these circumstances, we are witnessing the individual social reports with other individuals considered from one reason or another identity marks. When an individual is reported and adopted a number of attributes that belong to another individual or group identity that wants to join, and these attributes do not coincide with its value system, are different of his contrasting personality typology, he starts to feel alienated. Alienation is a psychological and sociological concept involving the separation of the subject from the community, society and world. It automatically implies depersonalization and has repercussions on every individual, both at social and individual level of perception and reporting, and also at the understanding and self-knowledge level. There are few situations where the individual is more concerned and interested in what they want to become or appear than what is true.

Chapter 2. Fashion morphology

2.1. Fashion and vizual identity

In most cases, the elementary and most direct comment on a specific person is based on findings resulting from simple visual analysis. The eye is the first one that scans and the first perceptions are those that appear visually and only later we discover the other identity compounds of the human being.

Usually we are attracted to people like us and reluctant to those who are different from us. Thus, we can say that the first eye contact can have a big impact on the way we make our opinion about somebody. Clothing has become a very important part of personal image and it is heavily translatable to social meanings. Periodic lines, known as trends, are sketching a rich number of visual information, that we often associate to fashion.

2.2. Fashion and perception

Clothes can identify the wearer, the social group that he belongs to and the role it plays inside of one group. A character can be defined by what it is, the environment he lives in or regarding to the images used to promote himself. The combination of different proportions: behavior, environment, communication, way of being is the base issue composing any identity profile. However the relationship between these factors is rarely equal, an early priority in any identity program being to determine which is the dominant factor.

We wear what we wear to identify ourselves in certain social groups or just because we impose some kind of label, very often we act on the impulse of emotion so, we choose our clothes according to what we feel and what we want to communicate about us, to seduce, to surprise or even to shock. We sometimes wear clothes to show that we don't really care about what we are wearing.

The fact that there are people who have not ever had even the slightest problem with the fashion style is an absolutely false statement. Just because we are "required" not to go outside naked is an adhesion to the most primitive style tasks. Charged with symbolic meanings, the primary concept to transform abstract ideas into products of rational and then back to abstraction, contemporary fashion is beyond the allegations, a phenomenon.

2.3 Fashion system

2.3.1. The fashion system explained by Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes points out the curious paradox: the fashion industry can not survive without the help of the media and there is a semiotic and rhetorical fashion, which in addition to its natural propagation in the visual, using language and terminology targeted to various social groups make fashion phenomenon more contagious than it seems at first glance. Purchase the latest in fashion is ephemeral nature idea, utopian and unrealizable, as long as in the new area of trends are thrown forward, always other and other news. In this essential changing process, the magazines have an important role to the foundations of teaching part of fashion, as a part of initiation. The work of Roland Barthes, generically called "The fashion system" demonstrates the role that the author had in addressing clothing as signified object and its influence on contemporary fashion theory. It is clear that what fashion needs now is a semiotic substantiated by a number of well-educated translators that are spreading it so the masses will understand the concepts without the slightest bit of effort.

2.3.4. Barthes and the general state of garments

To simplify the path of the reader, the author starts by defining work as simple as the three forms attributed to the garment: the real one, the written one and the image garment, with particular attention to the last two forms. Both the writing and the image garment refers to the same kind of reality, namely the real garment. If the garment picture reveals a clear spatial relation, for the writing one, we need a logic, even syntactically report, the first structure is a plastic one, while the second is verbal one. The author argues that for the same object we can draw three different structures: technological, iconic and verbal, assemblies that do not have the same spreading mode.

Because magazines and literature field, in fashion there is a continuous migration from the iconic to verbal technological structure. The author points out that fashion does not have the simple function of proposing a model of the real object, but also spreading it as a concept.

The description function, language specified may be a fixing, an exploration or an emphasis one, each time illustrating a certain state of the garment. The manifested function in case of the image garment is the look. The written mantle became known by reading.

2.3.3 Fashion rethoric

Roland Barthes identifies four significant and explicit systems of fashion: real, written dress code, or terminology system, connotation fashion and rhetorical system.

Fashion rhetoric emerges as a relatively independent concept, while fashion connotation has no autonomy, being a parasite of the written dress code. Thus, according to Barthes, we can not submit fashion to an independent review connotation. Thereby, fashion can be explained as a series of "transcription", having a technical base and also being normalized by a code.

The world fashion industry is using images and language to create a code of goods abstract, always new, to encourage consumption, but always the same, to encourage consumption. Semioticians analyze signs and how they are transmitted and perceived.

The relationship between the image and the symbolic description of them is that of an equivalence, the relationship that can be easily defined by a single word, significance. But this relationship is usually expressed rhetorically, so it became an arbitrary of equivalence, as a mark of style, as a transitive, final, even random relationship.

Chapter 3. Communication and message

3.1. The general principles of communication

I think we all have a vague idea about how any type of communication works. In short, the communication process involves the existence of a source and a receiver. But things are not like that, what happens along the way with the message is more than interesting.

Communication is one of the most important concepts that acts at an individual and social level. It mediates the relationship between individuals and social groups, and through communication we are always connected to new and newness.

Among specific telecommunications and propagation processes and the exposure of trends and identity models there is a close and profound resemblance, with the amendment that the human individual is not just a static intermediary in the transmission of information, but more than a dynamic one, informations being deteriorated and transformed or distorted by the simple act of subjectivity. Thus, each character involved in the communication process algorithm adds new forms and meanings to the original message, making it always personal according to its own standards.

Magazines, editorials, articles and pictorials, blogs and social networking, advertising, here are some of the means of spreading information. Accessing them, we do nothing other than to report to decrypted and processed information, exposed just to become socially viral.

3.2. Metalanguage

We use language to communicate and we are always adapting it according to each area operation and communication. Fashion to, uses a certain specific language that enables it to easily communicate. When we become familiar to the fashion language we manage to transform the represented element into a described one. Through language, fashion becomes understandable, affordable, easily to infiltrate to any individual or social level.

After Barthes, the systems belonging to language object and metalanguage involves points of articulation that link directly to connotation and denotation.

Metalanguages are the operations that form the most part of scientific languages, whose role is to provide a system that gives real meaning to any ensemble of original nature descriptive.

3.3 . Fashion and communication

In the construction of identity, the media has the most important and significant role. Prototypes clothing considered "correct" in the present social context is very often unconsciously assimilated by the most "identity hunters" from the the field characters promoted by any means of media communication.

And, how often, all we need confirmation of our tastes or choices, and the best model is the one that was promoted or exposed by the media already.

Fashion is using language to promote itself beyond its particular area, and also popularize any product or selling it. It makes us aware of what it is and is trying to be, as an entity, through means of communication rather than by itself: the promoted products.

3.4. The feedback

Yes, the street gives us the most complex reformulations of the topics presented in any fashion editorial. The principle of action and reaction witness to the cyclical development of a single theme, in a single season. It requires a response as quickly as possible addressed to individual requirements based on proposed themes given just involuntary by the consumers. So, launching a trend implies a consumer and after a quick glance thrown to street fashion we see that consumers do not act as designers and stylists want, but as they perceive and transform any trend. More or less appropriate, these acquisition and processing of fashion are a big part of the extensive process of transmission and propagation or infiltration and organizing fashion. From any kind of statements we can establish a new mechanism for

Chapter 4. From Prince Charming to Superman

4.1. Principles of modern mythology

Almost all mythological stories have a strong and real background, built on beliefs, ideologies or the aspirations of the primitive man, and the striking similarities seen from one culture to another, make the origins and their significance the proof of universality.

In the contemporary iconographic collection we meet symbol characters, marks and objects, moods and attitudes, all accumulated and intensely expressed in the social groups. All the contemporary indications and events are strongly expressed at a purely commercial and social level.

By making *valid truths* relying on modern legends, we address to human individuals using

our other individuals and their outstanding qualities and we all engage in the act of formulating contemporary mythology. Culture does not necessarily mean civilization and social attributes of any culture are purely based on the behaviors and interactions, especially on a series of myths, stories and heroes, their attributes and enhances features or defining virtues in comparison to other cultures.

4.2. Myths generator

4.2.1 The importance of media communication

The specific fashion literature journals are clearly subjective, the editor or the journalist are the ones that have total control over the language and the details. The text often precedes the image, being the one that attributes importance or not to an object or a clothing ensemble. The power of speech and expression and then the power of language and metalanguage are undeniable forces that decide whether or not a garment is fashionable, trendy or a must of the season in progress.

In fashion we can not speak of constancy and loyalty, it is a dynamic phenomenon, which launches stereotypes. The totality, the nature and content of specific literature affects how audiences perceive different types of communication processes. The message has launched a cycle, from producer to consumer and to the producer again.

The mass media succeeds, by specific means of information and broadcasting, to create and influence the training of any character or individual and to make strong impression on the formation and spreading ideologies, by constructing individual and group identities.

4.2.2. Advertising and compulsive spending

In the globalization era, the construction and implementation of a brand or a mark becomes an absolutely vital tool in the difficult process of economic survival.

We are no longer buying just for the pleasure of buying, we are buying to show off, losing ourselves to fashion. As any of the creative fields of consumer goods used to expand their advertising and specifically to gain increasingly more consumers fashion too extends broadly through advertising. It relies heavily on the use of mental functions of the consumer and on the promotion of individual concepts, transformed into real social models.

Beyond the launch of new models, the ads aim to spread moods, offering the world an inspirational show, challenging and energizing, with a greater cachet than any other form of

performance art.

4.2.3. Fashion – from art to consumption

We are becoming increasingly more demanding and our requirements underlying marketing studies that precede the appearance of new products. As carriers of the garments we are both *producers and consumers*, producing and consuming messages that are promoting the new, the novelty and *the trend* as something indispensable for almost vital importance.

Beyond all, fashion is a huge business, and we, as consumers, are caught in a continuous revolution encouraged endlessly by speeches and rhetorics of fashion that elevates the status of art consumption.

4.2.4. Super networks and the fervid consumption

With positive and negative impact on the individual, the media is what creates and destroys myths, heroes are born and thrown into crowds, then retreated and underrated just to start all over again and create other and other contemporary heroes. Modern iconosfera is created and presented in newspapers, magazines, catalogs, programs and TV shows, commercials or music videos, billboards, shop windows etc and mass dissemination of any information radically alters our perception of the surrounding reality. The existence of large communication networks expanding coverage characterized by extreme pandemic contamination and speed makes the present society to be informed, perhaps too aware, from the time an act begins. The viralization of the messages, actions, ideologies or trends is an undeniable fact of present social life.

4.3. About conformity and uniformity

Advertising campaigns, posters, publications and fashion magazines suggest or dictate what we should wear, and all this information is taken more or less directly, more or less consciously, by a variety of consumers declared or not fashionistas.

Although the area of fashion is becoming wider, more permissive and more tempting, modern societies are facing increasingly the uniformization. The desire to be in fashion goes beyond fashion leading, most often to a specific type of conformist manifestation. Social norms do nothing to co-work together.

4.4. Social groups

4.4.1. Culture, subculture, counterculture

The study of subcultures often consists in the study of symbolism attached to clothing, music and other attributes that belong to the subculture members. Members of any subculture are distinguished by their clothing, a type of social behavior and specific slang. Subcultures make their presence felt at any social structures, and their relation to culture is not always based on positive feedback.

We're talking about urban groups, cultures and subcultures and countercultures, all been considered valid on the panoply of contemporary mythology.

4.4.2. Urban tribes

We operate in a social environment dedicated to consumer's goods . We are open to any kind of event or social action. We easily align to the new direction of fashion. We identify to certain social groups and operate in their directions, we categorize ideologies, products, objects, relying our own value judgments or on those made by the initiators and engineers of the contemporary mythology. We are assaulted, once again through the media, styles and references, trends and approaches that make us want to transform ourselves from individuals to social characters. The need for self-definition, and the desire to align validated trends lead to a number of labeling the individual as belonging to certain groups of individuals. Clothes can identify the carrier, the social group that we belong to and the role we play in a group. Specific fashion iconography takes different meanings and can be also differently expressed.

4.5. The contemporary hero

Modern society is increasingly hungry for symbol characters that were to easily called heroes.

Modern myths are based on the same principles as the primitive societies myths : creating invincible human beings, caught in the struggle of good versus evil or simply exposed as models. Does people really need symbol celebrities? The answer is yes.

4.5.1. The icon

Modern mythology gives us a rich gallery of icons that close to the development of media

become absolutely viral, causing real social contagion. The icon can be represented by a character, an object, a logo, an idea or ideology, a gesture or a facial expression, any readily recognizable manifestation, overall infiltrated. Any type of representation reaching the stage of an icon has gone through a filtration process with specific fashion means of propaganda. The fact that it survived, recorded a feedback and the fact that its infiltrated in the social irreversible assigns, makes it recognized and designated as icon.

4.5.2. Social representations

We are continually exposed to the same information media, the same social networks, we are all offered the same values as generally valid, and yet we manage to individually develop within the same social context. Universalization of social concepts and globalization have failed to reduce the human individual to the state of sociocultural recipe from current reality and the road to uniformity and conformity, is still very and full of obstacles related to individual and individuality. It is true that each individual defines the identity of a particular social group that he belongs to, as true as the fact that membership in a social group leaves its mark on every person, whether we are referring to ideology, behavior, culture or specific signs of any social background they belong to.

4.5.3. The identification and the addiction

The need for self-definition, and the desire to align validated trends lead to a number of labeling the individual as members to a certain group. Any social group and culture that may not be labeled as more advanced than others or inferior to others because for any human interaction, any micro-society tends to operate regardless of the circumstances. To ensure that endorsed place in a society we need certainty that we fit into those well set patterns dictated by the creators of contemporary mythology. Not only mass media uses his weapons effectively in the current iconography, the society also has a strong creative role in these truly visionary processes. Leaving aside the influence of media, society became what it is, by imposing its own highlights and the obligation to respect them.

In any society affected by media symptoms some cases of interdependence occur , the social media subjects are contaminated with *the slang* of any kind that exists in any identity group.

Chapter 5. The fascination of the heroes and Alice versus Wonderland

Personal projects

Childhood fascination with heroes and stories can be found and easily observed in most of my work and projects.

I have worked as a designer, illustrator, editor, stylist, visual merchandiser, blogger and consultant. I have worked as an assistant at the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, the academic year 2006-2007, and from 2012 I am teaching an Applied Design course at the Faculty of Sociology in Bucharest.

5.1. Fashion Design Projects

Projects carried out in this direction, fashion design, simple representations have always been linked to a well-established concept in advance, with clear intervention in the form and pattern, without too many references and related touches of fabric textures and prints. My main interest was playing with shape and accurate reproduction of preliminary sketches.

Alice vs. Wonderland

It is my first personal collection and a collaboration with Tina R. The concept summarizes an upside down world, where everyone loses its property in order to force the boundaries of imaginary delirium, an exaggerated world where nothing makes sense and, however, everything finds its own balance.

Other collections, Relevant Disorder, Aristocats, My Sketchbook, Urban Blues aim garment illustration dynamics as an object composed of simple lines with great attention to detail and overview fashion composition.

5.2. Projects of visual merchandising

The shopwindow is a pictorial exposed directly under the eye of the buyer, a mix of elements from several areas of consumption, with direct addressing, with targeted messages that acts both visually and emotionally. Direct impact, leaving no reflections or implying no delays, is certainly the most effective marketing tool.

Wallpaper, Christmas Carrol, Work în progress, are showcases projects that capture a space created from the combination of graphical representations of objects with real elements. Room decor mixes objects, supplemented by graphic signs, fast or elaborate drawings of

certain objects.

Think Green, Think Green And Reuse, Outback, Urban Story are the urban character attempts to fit through shopindow in totally different places, with clear references to the holiday and relaxation.

5.3. Exhibition, space planning Concept Store Anaid Art Gallery

Bad Timing is a group project developed with designers Smaranda Almășan, Lucian Broscățean, Dana Iuga, at Anaid Art Gallery, Bucharest. The exhibition correspond with Anaid Art Concept Space project, which aims fusion between fashion design and contemporary art through art installations belonging to romanian designers.

The *UV 35* project was finnalsed with a group exposition by designers Smaranda Almășan, Lucian Broscățean, Dana Iuga and Codruța Luca. It is a fashion design project that advocates for our environment and the way we approach any contemporary aberration.

5.4. Editorial activity

Since 2008 I have conducted a series of editorials for Sanoma Hearst press trust. I worked with Villa Design since the first issue, and I saw a bold attempt to combine art, design, fashion and architecture under the patronage of the same title. I published a series of essays based on fashion and contemporary heroes, we presented news and trends illustrated headings, I've made fashion pictorials in crossroad with interior design. For *House and Garden* magazine I have published over a hundred illustrations, news, documentaries, presentations of design projects, trends and news.

5.5. Several illustration projects

I have done a series of works to illustrate the editorial content of the magazine *House and Garden* and *Villa Design*.

From the pile of dreams - is a children's book project that presents a simple world, easy for everyone. I have created the text and the illustrations also. Other illustration projects: illustrated volume of poems, Amor Cortese, rhythms and rhymes of the troubadour poet Adrian Părvu, Latest Hairstailes, Glasses on etc.

5.6. Fashion styling

Mix-and-Match, here is the basic principle of any fashion exercise. To combine pieces in order to obtain a consistent and coherent look , these are the first steps to make true fashion. From the establishment of the proposed clothing line for the shopwindow, to select and combine the products for the online store, up to choosing clothes ensembles for the brand image campaigns of Tina R, this is how I could resume my work as a stylist .

5.7. Fashionstuff- street style collection

www.fashionstuff.wordpress.com

I started fashionstuff in 2009 because I used to look in any urban space for specific signs displayed through the individuals that inhabit it. Elements of street art, urban fashion, festivals and events for consumers define contemporary mythology iconography urban area.

5.8. Teaching activities

From 2012 I have worked as an associate professor at the Faculty of Sociology in Bucharest. Working with a group of students focused on the sociology of consumption, I launched a simple task: transforming a story character in contemporary one, exposed to social pressures and temptations under consumer society. The chosen hero thus become an excuse to use another type of expression, avoiding the traditional means used in presentations like Power Point.

Conclusion

The socio-political context is one of the determinants for the dynamics of contemporary mass culture. In a society deeply affected by the political and economical recession, it seems that the culture landmarks begin to gradually simplify, and the individual became more and more connected to the reality, increasingly oriented more towards restoration of traditional values.

Like any trend gradually changes into another, due to the global economical crisis, we manage to surprise ourselves by renovating and relearning ourselves. It's now time for ideals, of returning to material , cultural and spiritual values that have characterized the humanity since forever.