

Polyphony and Fashion



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Abstract

This essay is trying to look at Fashion through an anthropological methodology based on an ethnographic constellation. So, the concepts of Syncretism's, Fetishisms, Ubiquities, Polyphony are designing a transitive imagination with an astonishing perspective.

Keywords: Polyphony; Fashion; Clothes; Syncretism's; Fetishisms; Ubiquities; Diversified voices; Epistemological design; Soundscape; Ethno-poetics; Visual communication

In this case, it was not the clothes that were made to fit her body but rather her body had to be trimmed and, in some cases, cut off to make sure the clothing fit [1].

Constellation

Perhaps in this moment Fashion must be observed and transformed through an anthropological paradigm, beyond the positivistic one. I can present my methodology based on an ethnographic constellation. Syncretism's, Fetishisms, Ubiquities, Polyphony are my keywords which design is a transitive constellation, to look at fashion with some different glances or, better, with an astonishing perspective. Syncretism is connecting fragments of incompatible cultures in a montage of familiar and stranger beyond any dialectical synthesis. Fetishism re-enacts the metamorphic desire of mixing organic and inorganic, subject and object, screen, and skin beyond any dichotomic logics. Ubiquity is expanding the possibility to experience differentiated spaces for the same subject through digital communication. Polyphony is an exchange between music, social sciences, and literature to affirms the dissonant coexistence of diversified voices. The constellation realized thanks to these keywords will project an epistemological design, through which it will possible to discover a ubiquitous utopia: in-between no-space and any-space is emerging the unexplored fashion desire.

Here, I have already presented the first three concepts, so now it will be the moment to listen polyphony.

Astonishment

According to one of Adorno's liminal expressions referred to Schumann, astonishment is the moment before: the one in which

this musician (an anthropologist or a fashion designer) perceives a crisis in his conscious creativity and, before surrendering to it, composes one of his most beautiful pieces of art.

Astonishment is the condition when a researcher starts to do ethnography in a deep solitude. At this moment, astonishment opens all its sensitivity to something or someone still unknown but that he/she wishes to encounter. The unknown - as a person, a ritual or a symbol - opens all the corporal porosity with the aim to be ready to meet the stranger, to listen the sound never heard before. Any researcher should be trained to develop her/his mindful body, to be positioned on the desiring necessity to meet the unknown as an incomprehensible code or story. The body's disposition to accept and to favour the astonishing narrative is a pre-condition to invent the not-yet existence. I have to be ready to meet the dissonance, that's why I want to accept the limit of my familiar-acoustic or designed - knowledge.

Polyphony

If dialogic is the key word that establishes a different relationship between two subjectivities, polyphony relates to the method of making research and the way of multiplying the narrative styles, experimenting a new kind of essay-form, ethno-poetics, visual communication, sound-scape. The exchange between social sciences and literature, particularly comparative literature, presents one of the most interesting terrains for fashion research [1].

An innovative interpretation of polyphony was realized by Michail Bachtin who was applying the concept of polyphony from musical pattern to classical novel [2]. He was a marginal Soviet

essayist. He wrote the essay *The Author and the Hero* (1988) where he influenced a current of radical anthropologists since the 80s of the last century. According to him, the polyphonic narrative is affirmed with Dostojewski as his novels develop a different compositional model: against the hegemonic monologism, the hero is no longer projection of the author, nor any secondary characters are an extension of the same centralized model of language. On the contrary, a multiple style is affirmed, a decentralized psychology is experimented, and each character has his/her own way of being represented through the Dostojewski's writing. Every person is a cosmological way of thinking and speaking. In this way, polyphony affirms a composition of diversified voices (as in the symphonies) in which everyone has his/her own subjective sonority. A very revolution in the writing and perhaps also in the designing.

So, according to Michail Bachtin, he tries to solve the problem of representing other subjectivities (for ex. a "native informant") in her or his identity, by decentralizing the author and his hero's style of writing. I was used (or I tried) to experiment this approach towards multiple voices in my ethnographic representation [3,4]. When a given research, context expresses a multiplicity of messages and sources, one must develop an appropriate method. There is a dialogical exchange between the context and the method. So, in this polyphonic wandering, methods have to multiply the points of view, observation, listening and the final transcription.

If the fieldwork of ethnographic representation is multi-vocal, for example a big city or a fashion week, its composition can only be multi-vocal favouring different points of view. Multiplying research methods and styles of representation is the astonishing assumption to entry and to listen some vague polyphony. It's fundamental to the extent the points of observation and explanation even if they are divergent: the spatial and acoustic perspectives might be in tension, contradiction or indifferent for the observer. The method of anthropological research is polyphonic because it multiplies sensorial styles of observations and representations. A single empirical phenomenon may be narrated not only through the classic essay-form, but also assembling photography or videos, deploying a poetic sensibility, or experiencing body performance. This method is polyphonic because, during processual fieldwork and composition, it discovers that the alleged object is actually also a living subject. Multiplying the researcher's subjectivity means that emotion and reason, poetry and science, organic and inorganic may be an experiment beyond any dualistic paradigm. The method that expands polyphony is making visible and audible other subjectivities: that is the point for fashion and anthropology. These subjectivities may also be non-human, like animals, plants, building, advertising or even things, objects, commodities [5].

Fieldwork

When I began an ethnographic research on the mega-city of São Paulo, Brazil, I perceived the deep sensation that from such a kind of no-ending urbanist conglomeration was emerging a dissonant coexistence of different voices, sounds, noises, images, people, styles, symbols, architecture, advertising. The challenge was clear: I could try to represent the visual communication of the paulista metropolis only using a polyphonic perspective. Polyphony means looking for a decentralized pattern of behaviour, body language, street style, mutant identities, the co-presence of fashion global standard and how a young homeless is performing a mix of dress-code. It's all in the mix in the tumultuous urban panorama. Fashion may be a strident, jarring, uncanny, astonishing pulse. Syncretism, ubiquity, meta-fetishism, polyphony is pulsing along "my" paulista scenarios... At the same time, but following different kind of composition, also during my anthropological research in an aldeia Bororo (Meruri in Mato Grosso) I discover that specially young "native" people are using to mix traditional dress-code with the urban ones they are used to look through Iphone. So, polyphony is a transitive constellation floating between a big city and a small aldeia (village). Anyway, this temporary polyphonic composition will be impossible or homologated without the co-presence of a syncretic mix of codes, ubiquitous identities, and a meta-fetishism transition beyond dichotomous experiences [6,7].

Conclusion

My temporary conclusion on a polyphonic fashion perspective is the following: in-between Sao Paulo and Meruri is emerging my dramatic ubiquitous utopia.

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