

Anthropology & Fashion



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Opinion

Museum and Performing Fashion

A basic experience of mine was at the MoMA in New York about ten years ago. I was admiring the many works of art from all over the world, when I noticed a queue in the center of the museum. A very long line of people with a polyphonic style, very different from each other. Not understanding what they could be waiting for, I inquired and realized that they were queuing to enter a museum within the museum, dedicated to Alexander McQueen, the great fashion designer who committed suicide. The next day I returned to the museum, got in line and, when I finally entered, I found myself experiencing an innovative event. The dark and sacred music surrounded and perhaps dressed the mannequins on whose bodies they were delivered to the irregular yet fascinating arts of the stylist. For me it was an anthropological experience: one of the most important museums in the world dedicated an exhibition to a fashion designer. It was clear to me that fashion intersected with the arts and with a performative exhibition, in which the visitor was an active part of the event: not only a spectator but also a performative subject.

Ms Morte e Madame Moda

The sacral and funereal aspect of the exhibition reminds me of an anticipatory dialogue between Fashion and Death of the poet Giacomo Leopardi, quoted by Walter Benjamin.

Ms Moda meets Madame Morte and says to her: Oh, dear lady, you are my sister.

And Death replies: what are you saying! I have no sisters.

And Fashion: We are sisters because we are both daughters of *caducity*.

At this statement Madame Morte stops and remains perplexed, listening carefully to their dialogue:

Death: Get away with the devil. I'll come when you don't want me to.

Fashion: As if I weren't immortal.

Death: Immortal?

The dialogue is continuing:

Fashion: Don't you remember that we were both born from *Caducity*?

Death: What do I have to remember, I am the capital enemy of memory.

Fashion: But I remember it well; and I know that both of us are equally drawn to constantly undoing and changing things down here, even though you go one way and I go another for this purpose.

The sisterhood between fashion and death is connected with constantly, relentlessly and in the most diverse ways seeking the establishment of a common existential choice: challenging human caducity by always renewing the future by killing or suppressing the past, in life and in clothes or museums. Fashion faces human caducity and challenges it by inventing surprising beauties. The co-evolutionary dimensions of our human species are determined by the desire for change, addressed by different but similar modalities from Fashion and Death.

And that's why Giacomo Leopardi and Ms Moda conclude: "I say that our common nature and custom is to continually renew the world, but from the beginning you threw yourself into people and

blood; I am mostly content with beards, hair, clothes, of household goods, buildings and such things”.

This statement has great anthropological value for me; it attests that the so-called invention of fashion is simultaneous and co-evolutionary with the affirmation of *Homo Sapiens*. That is, since the first human experiences, forms have been experimented and invented with which to transform the “natural” being into a “cultural” being. First the skull, then the body were invested with infinite forms, very different from culture to culture to affirm the transitive and mutant beauty of the human body, divergent from the animal and vegetal one while inserting these two kingdoms, together with the mineral and divine one, in the production of symbols and signs that constitute a real fashion.

Digital Bottega

A radical turning point in the practical invention of the arts of every art: painting, sculpture, architecture, engineering and finally fashion occurred from the beginning of the Renaissance in Florence. In the *bottega* like atelier the master lived and received his students to be introduced to the most varied arts. Many brilliant artists began in Verrocchio’s *bottega* workshop, including Leonardo da Vinci.

The current phase sees an inventive and conflictual relationship between analogical digital cultures and communication. It is possible to see and experience this apparent dichotomy in an inventive relationship to be practiced in a new *bottega*, where the most varied visual arts have as their aim the experimentation of a style and a vision of beauty incomparable with the past, which must be killed, so to speak and from whose death a different analogue-digital fashion can be born. A workshop that acquires technologies and transfigures them into works, as fashion is always the sister of technique, not only of death.

Constellation

The transitive concept of constellation has been given by several authors in the past and currently also by other scholars, including myself. When I returned to live in Roma, a after 15 years in Brazil, I discovered that tramway no. 5, from my adolescence, has become something completely different in the itinerary and especially for the people who use it. A spontaneous, jagged fashion with profoundly different cultural origins is shown and

experienced in its journey, which sparked my anthropological gaze based on differences. In recent years I have decided to develop and specify my operational concepts for field research in the form of a *constellation*. Therefore, mobile and plural concepts, which do not find synthesis but travel in their syncretic and conflictual relationships. In my opinion they are concepts that are ready to be applied to the fashion universe, Madame Death permitting. Their development is complex and long, in this article I present them in this short way. They are: *Astonishing* - *Indiscipline* - *Ubiquity* - *Polyphony* - *Syncretism* - *Diaspora* - *Heteronomy* - *Gender* - *Fetishism*.

In few words: *Astonishing* opens the body and mind to the strangers, to the different and is determined by existential and aesthetic porosity. *Indiscipline* seeks a different method from multi-discipline, based on context that challenges the social division of knowledge. *Ubiquity* is the experience of almost every person acting in different spaces at the same time, changing the concept of sedentary identity. *Polyphony* practices the multiplicity of voices and writings to interpret any human phenomenon. *Syncretisms* mix cultures, symbols, identities, stories, fashions without arriving at any synthesis. *Diaspora* is separated from collective and dramatic conditions to affirm a new urban subject: the diasporic subject. *Heteronomy* takes up Fernando Pessoa’s literary visions to affirm the possible multiplication of one’s names and identities. Gender is obviously connected with changes regarding sex, eros, family. Fetishism, especially in the version of meta-fetishism, is the heart of my research on objects, subjects, clothes, goods that question the colonial matrix and dichotomous thinking [1-3].

In this constellar perspective, Ms Fashion (Moda) challenges Madame Death (Morte) and seeks a new creative space, the digital *bottega*, where new creators of visions will be able to have their works opened and consumed.

References

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2. Leopardi G (1824) Dialogue of fashion and death, in *Moral Operettes*. various editions.
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