

CLOTHING – A CHOICE AND IMAGE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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This article is concerned with questions about clothing and fashion as one of the most important components of the culture of the individual, affecting all aspects of life. This leads us to look at them as a symbol of social prestige, medium for individuality, type of communication, choice and image in society and so on, including the fact that they are an important economic and cultural sector. We pointed out various examples of the belonging and identification of man through attire, and examined the opinions of various authors and designers. The current dynamic development of processes makes social phenomena in fashion extremely mobile. Looking at clothing today, we saw it as the winner of symbols filled with new content.

Key words: *clothing, fashion, identity, symbol, culture*

The attitude to clothing is very personal. Each person expresses their Self and inner peace thanks to it. According to Arthur M. Kroll "The Self itself is the man's assessment of their own." Each individual makes their own decision what individuality means, what brings them benefit and prosperity. (Bolz, 2004: 100-102) In monolingual dictionaries the term "clothing" is everything that could be dressed up. It may be underclothes, top, overgarments, ready-sewn ones, order, etc. The terms "Adam / Eva's clothing" means naked without clothes.

The history of dress is not as "pretentious" as it seems at first glance. It raises questions that are known to the history of the human civilization: about raw materials and climate, about fashion trends and social hierarchy, about cultural identity and others. Clothing varies depending on lifestyle and it is a kind of demonstration of social inequality. Changes would be much less significant in case there is absence of social stratification, of progress in public attitudes. Fashion trends are a priority of the upper layers of the social hierarchy – where there is not wealth, there is no freedom of movement and progress, then changes will be taboo. The fate of poverty around the world is to

survive, and fashion is a chimera, it is unattainable luxury. (Braudel, 2000: 250-251) Since time immemorial wealth and poverty have been very common with any society. Anyway, people of different cultures have the same attitude towards them. While the perception of poverty is uniform, the attitude towards wealth is very different in different countries and social groups. If in the world history religion condemns striving for profit (Sotirova, 1988), the reality dictates something else: money is constructive and creating nature. Especially when it comes to *haute couture*¹. There cannot exist one and the same fashion in a society with unequal financial resources.

The way we dress is a form of communication that best suits the Self. This is their social identity formed by the cultural values that everyone possesses. That is why many stylistic trends in fashion cause different associations in the different social groups. Each person's fashion and style are individual, they are his/her own choice and image in society.

Clothes are able to discover our strengths, quests, our liberalism or conservatism. It's been passed through a long way of improvement to satisfy simpler or more complex emotional needs. They can send - consciously or not, various sexual messages. Clothing adds nuances to our daily life, expresses our feelings and as a whole - our aura. Moreover, fashion affects all aspects of life: it is a way of dressing, communication, food, gait, care for our body, face, hair, etc.

Fashion (Latin: *modus* - manner, norms, rules, time, rate) means a way of expression according to taste, a manner of dressing and behaviour that are typical of an era. Fashion is an expression of aspiring and ideal for beauty. It is mostly a social psychological phenomenon and can serve as a tool for setting social boundaries. Everything fashionable attracts public attention, but low-status people cannot always afford it. Public opinion can be manipulated and directed to different trends in fashion and tastes. The most famous global fashion centers are Paris, London, Milan, Los Angeles and New York, and cities such as Tokyo and Sydney are also gaining popularity. For a long time fashion has been aristocracy privilege. The first time the term appeared was in the phrase "new fashion" (*la nouvelle mode*) in 1482 to introduce changes in the clothing of the society elite. In 1549 the term turned its meaning into "being in fashion" (*être à la mode*). During the XVI century the first fashion magazines and newspapers were issued but only in the XIX century they were offered at lower prices. Gradually fashion has developed in a way that it has become an image of the whole society. Around the middle of the XX century the names of Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Nina Ricci, Pierre Cardin appeared on the stage who have revolutionized fashion. In the XXI century fashion attracts

mostly younger generation that tends to seek and find their own style, guided mainly by motives for being convenient.

Taste - this is man's knowledge, education and inner culture considered together. (Zaytsev, 1983: 62) It is a determining factor of the image of each individual and subsequently a demonstration of person's choice and preferences. Taste is different for everyone and to a great extent it plays an important role leading the formation of personality.

The skill in dressing, taking care of oneself is one of the most important feature of the individual's culture. The culture of clothing is a serious and important life issue that should be dealt at an early age. Personality formation is largely dependent on the ability to organize and direct the mind of the young man in the right direction, forming aesthetic criteria. The acquisition of these criteria is of great importance. We consider that attending cultural events and institutions, such as exhibitions, museums, shows, performances, theatre, cinema and many others have constructive character for developing aesthetic qualities.

Fashion can help us understand the past. From the way people are dressed, we can see how they have lived and worked, what they have believed in and what has been valuable for them. Even today clothing symbolizes man's place in society. One thing is certain, though times and fashions change, the suit remains a symbol of social prestige. It can help us to "set the clock" with modern times to serve us as a barometer of the social status of the person, group or society. On the other hand we are witnessing today the so called blurring of boundaries. What it reveals is that in the past when people have to spend extra money for clothes, today many of them give the latest available to look good and to keep up with fashion trends. But we have to be aware of the fact that to follow the dress code, you have to possess a number of qualities to enclosing a high standard of living and to spend a substantial amount of clothing. It means that there are limits and boundaries, even though the more privileged ones could be a small circle of people. The majority belongs to a market of mass- produced clothing at affordable prices with a poor quality. **However, fashion and design are important economic and cultural sectors for each country. We have to realize the importance and economic significance of the production and marketing of garments. Society relies on the factory owners, which need new ideas, perceptions, suggesting that they cannot go without designers and vice versa.**

What is concluding is that fashion is a great non-verbal way of communication. The conclusion is that fashion is a powerful nonverbal communication tool. Our choice of how

we dress up sends messages to the outside world. Each piece of clothing and decoration is our character that others read. Despite the changeable nature of the aesthetic ideal, tireless pursuit of fashion is actually tireless pursuit of our identity.

According to Georg Simmel two social trends are required in order fashion to come into being: the first is the necessity of uniting and entity, and the second - from isolation and separation. The human individual has a primordial need to be part of the society and belong to something greater on the one hand, and on the other hand, he/she wants to be seen as part of a whole. According to him, both for fashion and about the society in general, what is essential is the conflict between two forces, the clash between two propensities - "adaptation to society" and "individual deviations from its requirements." (Stoykov, 2006: 35-36)

Consciously or not we use fashion as a means of identification - to ourselves and others. Whether you want to be outstanding in the society or isolate ourselves in both cases, consciously or not we *distinguish ourselves*. Here are a few examples of how the clothes start to speak in different social definitions as Jana Dvoretzka (2009) thinks:

Social status and economic status: in the history of clothing there are two inevitable events: the rich are trying to visually separate from the masses - to be recognized as the rich and the second - those from lower social classes imitate the fashion of the rich to be recognized as part of their class group;

National, ethnic and genetic affiliations: National costume as a sign of national pride;

Gender identity: in almost each epoch man and woman's clothes of men and women have emphasized biological differences between the sexes;

Sexual identity: clothing is an important sign in identity formation and the struggle for discrimination;

Religion: it expresses mainly group identity, the appearance is one of the most powerful tools of one religion to promote its values;

Cultural identity - interest groups: the term "culture" in fashion is seen as a communicator of subcultures;

Membership in a group (uniform): as a noun "uniform" refers to the distinctive clothing that identifies wearer as a member of an organization while participating in its activities and serve to create a visual identity in it.

Even unconsciously man participates in a particular group identifying their image and characterizing their nature. Every day a person faces the choice of how to look, what to wear. A man uses their body as a primary means of expression. Alitsia Kuchinska (1988)

in "Fashion models in everyday life" says that one except for our true given by the nature body can make use of specific replacing forms of expression, which he called a "second body". These forms include: clothing, architecture and art environment, the internal living environment, everyday objects used, objects of luxury, a combination of gestures and behaviours, manners and viewpoints. According to it fashion is the product of actions designed to show with the help of a sign (subject, etc.) something more than what this character really is. For example, fashion coat is more than just a means of protection from the cold. In other words one can use different expressions to simulate certain situations, pretending to be another person more different than his/her own nature, can demonstrate skills as they do not have to hide those which they wish to hide and to expose those which they care about. (Kuczynski, 1988: 9.10) The French semiotician, culturologist and structuralist Roland Barthes (2005) has made a major contribution to this issue. In his famous work "The fashion system" he has discussed fashion as a sign, while the fashion object as an owner of three different structures - **technological, iconic and verbal**. According to him to understand the meaning of fashion, you must understand how it is described.

Today creating top fashion is a priority of the best and proven over time *companies*. At the beginning of the XXI century the number of customers purchasing custom unique models at extremely high prices has decreased more than seven times. Terry Edzhins (1999) in his book "The End of Fashion" says that haute couture is dead. It is a statement that suggests a dark and uncertain future for the fashion industry. What is known, however, is that the best and most unique creation (which we can treat as art), have been created namely in the collections of "couture" class. For a company that designs such collections this implies a high brand image. In such a competitive and dynamic business environment what is essential for the success of any company is the public approval and *branding*. This is a prerequisite for a user to obtain a *social position* and to distinguish themselves from goods flooding the market. Today the brands are highly promoted as the name means everything to them while values are just totemic. In the modern world advertising has a socio-biological function with its graphic emblems, logos and constant presence it enters customers' minds and with their help builds up its world.

Logically people will never refuse to wear clothes, but in terms of fashion, it will continue to revolve in the cycle of past and present, offering people comfort, convenience and brilliance. In our opinion the mankind faces a choice, unfamiliar up to now and it is logical explained by the fact that the society has been dynamically developing. The high growth rate of the *apparel sewing industry* is a process that goes through the production

and leads to social changes and reassessment of the traditional norms and values. The process of development, which every society lives through, leads to social changes and reassessment of the traditional norms and values. For the present conditions we live in what is characteristic is an extreme mobility of the social processes, consisting of new environment and new forms of regulating the human behaviour. All these processes establish new trends in the way people dress.

That is how the designer Lloyd Klein describes the portrait of a modern woman - "a modern image of a woman that I dress: she possesses lots of individual personality, she should have much culture and - of course, be very feminine and active." ²Olivier Lapidus said: "The individual has a desire to find and reveal their true self and not to show through their clothes a brand or style ... Young people no longer want to accept that fashion can carry it too far. They no longer want to say – look at my jacket, do not look at me – today it is said – look at and watch me, not my jacket! We are looking for an exact match between a costume and a man. This is exactly my philosophy according to which out of the garment and out of the suit one should seek the individual."³ In this connection it is interesting what Paco Rabanne has said: "Fashion is a perfect symbol, a sign of a kind of civilization. In a bourgeois civilization, people dress in a bourgeois style. In a proletarian civilization – as it was with you – in a proletariat style. For example, at the time of Mao Tse Dwi when he wanted agriculture to take advantage of the culture and industry – then gender differences in clothing were eliminated as well as the social disparities in clothes were liquidated. He dressed everyone in the same blue worker clothing. He did it to avoid a struggle between classes and between the sexes. And he managed to do it, that is to enhance the development of agriculture, which at that time was very low. "I have given exactly this example to show how important clothing for this or that civilization is"⁴- Rabanne explained. The "Trajectorie", he said: "The garment is indeed extremely revealing. To be and to appear are not two contradictory concepts: there are direct links between them that are reflected constantly in a game of mirrors. How to realize our personal contribution if we do not know what has been done before? "(Rabanne, 1993: 126)

Fashion is ahead of its time. Designers work at the beginning of the year to present their collections at the end of or even the next year. Haute couture is designed three months before the season, and prêt-à-porter is six months. We want to say that designers get ahead of time and they are obliged and required to detect trends that are unique both for particular individuals as well as for different countries. If you want to have success in several continents, they are obliged to respect and adhere to the cultural identity of the dominant mass of people.

In today's fashion it is not merely enough that clothing satisfies human needs – but it should protect them from the environmental conditions. The sign function of clothing increases a lot and today it is filled with new contents - social, group, sexual, cultural background, etc.

A different trend has started to make its way in the late 50s and early 60s: TV-type imagery. *Kitsch*⁵ phenomenon is unprecedented today. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the role of aesthetic education as an extreme and urgent task of the contemporary society. Aesthetic education of individuals is a complex set of impacts. It involves the development of a true aesthetic criterion, which is a prerequisite for escaping the captivity of bad taste and kitsch.

"You are welcomed according to your clothing and you are shown to the door according to your brains" is an old true saying that today we can interpret this way: the most important thing is the first impression, a criterion both for aesthetic education of the personality as well as a symbol of the social and individual human place in society. Every day a person makes his choice – good or bad, right or wrong, conscious or not, and builds his world- individual, distinctive and unique. We need to know that the choice we make is a sign, and according to us, the embodiment of our cultural identity.

NOTES

¹ "**Haute Couture**" (translated from French means "high sewing", known as "haute couture") - the best designers' creations for the elite of society. The term "fashion" is often associated with the term "Haute Couture" which comes from the French haute couture. The creations from "couture" class are exclusive and unique, custom-fitted single model and there are almost no machine seams, as high quality fabric is used for them. A designer mostly works at client's request. The father of "Haute Couture" - Charles Frederick Worth established a union chamber of haute couture in France in 1868, where the members were only those designers and fashion houses that achieved high quality of apparel, professionally hand-executed and basically having individual orders. The market of this class clothing today is extremely limited. If in the middle of the twentieth century the number of customers purchasing unique patterns for ultra-high pay, for example, amounted to 15,000 for the whole world, in the early twenty-first century they have been around 2000. But collections of "couture" class have not been created for sales but mainly for brand image. The demonstration of couture goods of fashion houses ("Chanel", "Christian

Dior", "Valentino", etc.) takes place twice a year (spring and summer models are presented in January and the autumn and winter in June).

² Taken from the interview with Prof.L.Stoykov in October, 1995 in Paris. V: Stoykov, L.World fashion. Part one-England and France [II ed.] – „Alma communication”, „Ot igla do konets (From beginning to end)”, 2010, p. 139.

³ Again there, p.152,159.

⁴ Again there, p.163-164.

⁵ **Kitsch** – art of bad taste, a semi culture for mass consumption, a spicy tickle of the undeveloped artistic sense even with popular art design methods, but applied in a trivial, awful distasteful way.

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