



NARRATIVES OF FASHION. What becomes heritage? What turns into history?

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Summary: *This paper forms part of a larger project which researches and analyses several museums, focusing on the exhibition of fashion design objects. We adopted ethnography as a qualitative research methodology, alongside theoretical references, the contents of the exhibition narratives and, for this reflection, the criteria adopted for annual design awards, sponsored by the Design Museum. We question the dichotomy between art and science in relation to the museum; between the history of fashion heritage and the world of fashion today, with their agents, users, and ethical challenges. We verify the construction of the history of fashion, sometimes distant from its role as an object of broad market appeal and the result of material culture. Beyond this problem, we also verify the cognitive relations between the narratives and relations between the visitors and the fashion objects, through their instinctive understanding of these objects. In order to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the work being done through exhibitions of costumes/fashion, we highlight standards and specificities. This research also presents gaps and opportunities in the narratives that may be conducive to the history of fashion with a broader or more diverse perception of this universe.*

Keywords: *museum exhibition, fashion narratives, cognition, interactivity, mediation.*

1. Introduction and methodology

This paper presents analyses of the data collected and questions related to the process of researching patrimonial narratives of fashion in exhibitions devoted to this topic. Accordingly and in conjunction with theories regarding costume history, the history of fashion is verified, although sometimes distant from its role as an object of broad market appeal and as the result of material culture. Furthermore, we also prove cognitive relations in the narratives and relations between visitors and their instinctive understanding of fashion objects.

Case study ethnography was selected as a research methodology, analysing field notes alongside theories of discourse, space and verification of communication tools. Based on bibliographical references and other sources, correlations were drawn in order to enrich the material. Thus, this article presents the specific case of the Design Museum in its exhibition activities for the annual design awards. With regarding to this event, we focused on the criteria presented for objects of fashion that were nominated -including some which won awards - between the years 2008-2014.

2. Fashion exhibitions

2.1 Global analyse

Before exploring the findings from researching exhibitions in situ, it is relevant to present a macro perspective of fashion exhibitions throughout the world. Based on the work of Horsley (2014) which

presents a list of exhibitions from 1971 to 2013 related to the topic of fashion/costume, exhibits of costumes, hair, tattoos (body focus), illustrations and fashion photographs were excluded. According to Norogrando (2014a), examples were taken from 2008 onwards, due to the (1) expansion of the geographic and institutional scope - including 13 museums and a focus on Latin production; (2) updating of data for the year 2013 – resulting in a fivefold increase of the number presented by Horsley; (3) inclusion of the year 2014. It should be noted that these factors – and in particular the first - are relevant in order to expand the perception of what is understood as information of reference, which receives greater visibility through its excellent facilities with which information of Anglo-Saxon origin is distributed. This increased visibility, creates distortions in the general public's perception if not in the community of experts from this field of knowledge, because the global information is restricted to one cultural and linguistic vision, which can also be described as post-colonialist. Therefore, it was deemed important to include significant institutions/performances from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Chile, Argentina and Brazil.

Taking the past 43 years into account, it was in 2010 that a peak of more than 70 fashion exhibitions was recorded. Over the following two years (2011 and 2012), the number dropped – to approximately 60 exhibitions – and in the last two years (2013 and 2014), this number has further decreased. However, the presence of fashion in the museum context is already more widespread and it is understood that this fall in numbers is due to its normalization and inclusion in existing spaces. It should be noted that this achievement is not widespread, and in certain contexts - such as in Brazil - exhibitions of this patrimony are still very infrequent.

This inventory applied categorising analysis in order to quantitatively identify some common characteristics displayed at fashion exhibitions, and it was observed that the narrative is a very popular choice, comprising over 31% of total the exhibitions in the past seven years (this is also representative of the last 43 years). Thus, the vast majority of exhibitions focus on a fashion designer. Yves Saint Laurent is the most common. Of course, this visibility (11 exhibitions) is largely due to the fact that there is a foundation that supports and encourages these activities– Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent. Valentino is next, with 3 exhibitions and Madame Grès, Chanel, Elio Berhanyer, Hussein Chalayan, Bill Gibb, Dior, Yohji Yamamoto, Cristobal Balenciaga, Dries Van Noten each had two exhibitions. In Portugal, José António Tenete is the most prominent designer in museum exhibition activities.

The second most common theme adopted for these exhibitions is based on chronological periods, the choice of specific dates, such as "Les Années 50 La Mode en France, 1947-1957" (Palais Galliera, FR, 2014), "Volver a los 80 "(Museo de la Moda, CL, 2010 and 2011), and " the 80s are Black "(Powerhouse Museum, AU, 2010) the latter combined with a third approach: colour. Although not as significant in quantitative terms, colour in fashion is a topic discussed almost every year by at least one institution.

The narrative of historic periods by chronology is not a key topic for temporary exhibitions, but is more common in permanent exhibitions. However, this amplitude can appear in narratives centred on a type of object, such as exhibitions that explore the wedding dress as a narrative focus. Also, many exhibitions could be categorised as Regional, i.e., those that have focused on a particular region or culture, such as "Made in India" (Kent State University Museum, USA, 2010), "Fashioning Kimono: Art Deco and Modernism in Japan "(Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA, 2008).

Another approach is through fashion materials, textures and techniques, such as knitting (in 4 exhibitions) or embroidery (3 exhibitions) and others – which have been less explored - such as crochet, cotton, felt, jeans, silk, feathers, furs, ties, pleats, drapes, patterns (floral, stripes and digital print). The pattern process is underexplored, but one exhibition that had the *moulagem* technique as a curating guideline: "Prototype" (Musée Suisse de la Mode, CHE, 2009). The relationship between fashion and technology was shown in two exhibitions, one in 2012 by the Museum at FIT (USA) and another in 2013 by Kent State University Museum (USA). Another issue is fashion and the body, treated in exhibitions and textile museums, such as in 2011 at the Museo del Tessuto (Italy): "Futurotextiles. Surprising textiles, design & art. "

Male fashion is a central theme in but a few exhibitions, totalling only 6 in over 410 exhibitions throughout the last 7 years. Children's or baby fashion is less explored, and only by the Museo del Traje - Centro de

Investigación del Patrimonio Ethnological (ES, 2013) and the permanent exhibition at the Museo Nacional de la Historia del Traje (AR), as it is perceived that the public enjoy the child-centred setting (Norogrande 2011np2).

Since 2011 there was a further opening of the museum space for the exhibition of works by fashion design students or by emerging designers. As an example, in 2014 we identify actions in MUDE (PT), the National Museum of Costume (PT), the Powerhouse Museum (AU) and the Museo del Costume-CIPE (ES).

Some exhibitions relate fashion to themes or performances, through Sports, Dance, Music and Arts. These exhibitions can be fanciful, such as the exhibitions "Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy" (MET, USA, 2008) and "ARRRGH! Monsters in Fashion" which in another narrative showed distortions, deformations or changes made by fashion to the human body and psycho-socially. These relationships are also shown in other exhibitions and institutions, but in more direct ways, usually by a chosen object, such as skirt shapes.

Actions which have addressed the issue of sustainability or reflections related to production have been relatively infrequent in recent years: "Fashion Fair" (Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 2009), "Eco Fashion: Going Green" (M-FIT, USA, 2010), "Sustainable Fashion: Exploring the Paradox" (Kent State University Museum, USA, 2011), "WAS tHE IST" with the collection of recycled design Katell Gélébart, awarded the Premio Kairos (MK & G, DE, 2012) and "Fashion Victims: The Pleasures and Perils of Dress in the 19th Century" (Bata Shoe Museum, 2014). In reality, and according to Horsley, approaching an issue rather than an object is a very recent phenomenon, which Valerie Steele (1997) - director and chief curator at the Museum FIT - defined as the cultural and social issues raised by fashion. Not coincidentally, the MFIT exhibitions have most developed this concept of the "thought show" (Horsley 2014, 171). In her interview, Steele reinforces that the mission of the museum is to advance knowledge of fashion, so that people will "take fashion seriously, recognising that it can also be fun, but fundamentally we envisage fashion seriously as a cultural form that is significant". Furthermore, "the objective is to challenge the trivialization of myths about fashion to try to show people that fashion is more complicated than they think" (Black 2014).

2.2 Comparative analysis of case studies

In order to verify the actions of fashion/costume exhibitions, 12 institutions were visited including: the Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK), the Fashion and Textile Museum (London, UK), the Fashion Museum (Bath, UK), MoMu (Antwerp, Belgium), the Galeria del Costume – Palazzo Pitti (Florence, Italy), the Museu do Traje – Centro de Investigación del Patrimonio Etnológico (Madrid, Spain), the Museu Tèxtil i d'Indumentària (Barcelona, Spain), MUDE - Museu do Design e da Moda (Lisbon, Portugal), the Museu Nacional do Traje (Lisbon, Portugal), the Museu do Traje (Viana do Castelo, Portugal), the Museo de la Moda (Santiago, Chile), the Museo Nacional de la Historia del Traje (Buenos Aires, Argentina). In these museums, 10 permanent and 17 temporary exhibitions were studied. This distinction – between permanent and temporary – is necessary because the first implies a long exhibition period and is thus closely related to institutional discourse, whereas the second has a short period of exposure (on average 3-6 months) and therefore allows more freedom for the existence of other narratives, structures, displays, etc. In order to consolidate relevant information regarding the issues, we have included a correlated analysis of these actions.

The relationship between the visited exhibitions and an aesthetic conception is almost unanimous. Thus, based on the concepts of community by Sherman and Rogoff (1994), in the process of finding meaning in the museological context, the term "art lovers" can be used, as the collection - through artistic and aesthetic appeal - is transformed into a broader historical context.

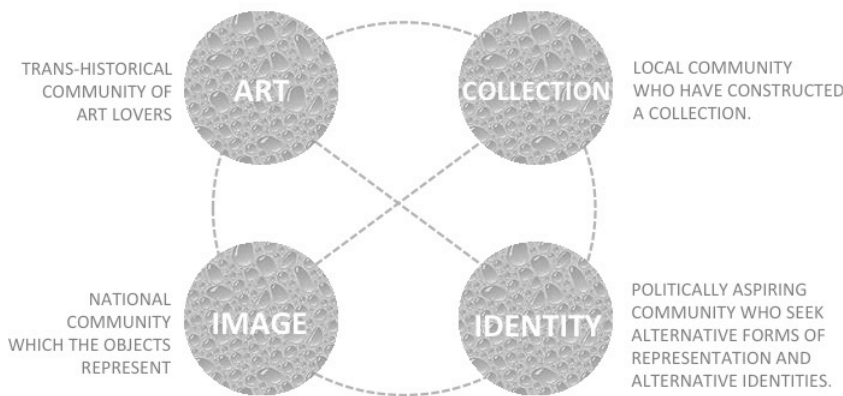


Figure 1: Communities and the formation of heritage meaning. Source: Based on concepts defined by Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff (1994) "Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles".

Some museums could also be denominated "collection" and "image", in which the first is relates to a local community that has formed that collection and the second represents a nation. In this case, the national museums are seeking to fulfil this attribute, even if it sometimes a utopian aim. Of the institutions visited, those which exhibit this local character in their formation and representation, include the Museu do Traje de Viana do Castelo (Portugal) and the Museo Nacional de la Hist3ria del Traje (Argentina). The second museum, gives prominence to the location Rio del Plata at the opening of its exhibition space and the museum's relationship with the local forms part of the nature of the institution and of its collections (Norogrande 2011np2). The first museum has ethnographic appeal, including the inclusion in the exhibition space of the tools and the explanation of the production processes.

In relation to the concept of the formation of meaning through "identity", the authors guide the issue of politically aspiring communities, which have not the slightest relationship with the museums which were studied, starting with the very theme that they address and their respective institutional names. However, from further investigating the origin of some institutions we can cite MoMu, as an educational institution of fashion that enshrines the aspirations of the community in the international market, strengthening the image of Belgian fashion based on its inventory policy (Norogrande 2012np1). Spanish museums can also be cited here, as unlike the others, they highlight their national producers in their permanent (and temporary) exhibitions. In analysing the international and marketing fashion context, this comprises nationalist positioning and is thus also an aesthetic policy, in avoiding fully imported or mass-produced, globally hegemonous exhibitions.

Based on Lord and Lord's (2002) concepts of exhibition, almost all museums were designed using a model of "contemplative perception", although some could also be classified as 'comprehensive perception', due to a less aesthetic and more contextual or thematic model type than the first.

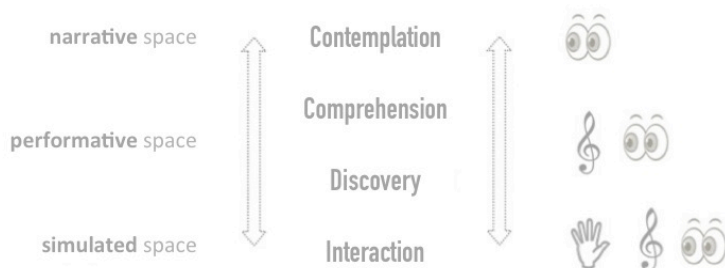


Figure 2: Relationship between the concepts of space (Dernie, 2006), speech (Lord and Lord 2002) and ways of learning (Hughes 2010).

Finding the "simulated space" (Dernie 2006 - where the model of the visitor's perception is focused on interaction (Lord and Lord 2002) for a more diverse learning experience that involves not only the visual

experience but also hearing and tactile experiences (Hughes 2010)) is very rare. In this situation, the museum which most explores the performative experience of space is the Museo del Traje-CIPE - through their "Pedagogical Area", their tours or their latest exhibition, featuring sensory action, where replicas were produced to be played (Fashion 2013). The freedom given to visitors at the exhibition "Yohji Yamamoto" (V & A, 2011), where visitors were allowed to touch the exhibits is also notable. Thus, the interaction was not restricted to a multimedia channel with picture and sound, but included the handling of delicate textile pieces. This is an everyday experience of "high-street" trade but is unusual in the museum context. This exhibition was also innovative, as the objects were not merely arranged in the showroom, but spread out, integrating them into other narratives, communing with other museum objects. The visitors received a printed guide, almost a "treasure map" to transform their perception of the space for a more explorative type of exposure (Lord and Lord 2002). This form of visitation was also previously presented by museum with the exhibition "The concise dictionary of dress" (2010), curated by Judith Clark with Adam Phillips.

Continuing to consider a cognitive extension of the performative space, simple proposals - such as the contextualization of the exhibition space for a sound image or music through a temporal relationship with the objects - are poorly explored, although they are important in the perception of information and narrative space (Lorec, Skolnick, and Berger 2007). The only permanent exhibitions visited were at the Museo Nacional de la Historia del Traje and a room at the National Museum of Costume. In temporary exhibitions this idea of performance space is more common. In the case of the exhibitions: "Volver a los 80" (Museo de la Moda, CL, 2011) and "I wear my voice on my sleeves, Fado and Fashion" (MUDE, PT, 2013) the absence of the "object" exposed to narratives would be almost inconceivable - firstly because much of the narrative is linked to the history of music as well as objects of famous singers (such as Michael Jackson's glove or Madonna's objects), and secondly because the title of the exhibition invites the consideration of the voices of the singers together with their clothes. However, in all situations where there was exploitation of audio, we sought references on this subject, and there were few exhibitions presenting the data sheet or a list of recordings that contextualized the space.

3. Designs of the Year

Every year, the Design Museum presents an exhibition of the best designs of the year, currently organised in the following categories: architecture, digital, fashion, furniture, graphics, products, transport. The designs indicated are selected from all over the world, but we can perceive a predisposition towards some countries and especially for what is developed in England. However, without questioning and confronting the comprehensiveness of the categories, we consider the initiative to award design to be valid in order to give visibility to the activity and successful actions, and as a reference for reflections on the history of fashion, and even Design as a whole. We also consider this initiative to be valid as it arises in a context where design is a historically recognized and active activity.

Focusing on the fashion and product categories, we note that the aesthetic appeal is relevant, but there are other features that cause the work to be selected. In the category of fashion, it is not only objects that receive indications. For example, in 2010 the award was given to the Alexander McQueen spring/summer collection fashion show. In 2012, the designer was again on the list of nominees, but for another aspect - a museum exhibition dedicated to his work. The exhibition was developed by Andrew Bolton with the support of Harold Koda from the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum (NY, USA): "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty." In 2013, the documentary "Diana Vreeland: The Eye Has To Travel", directed by Lisa Immordino Vreeland received fashion category award. Thus, it is clear that for fashion, a broad spectrum of the fashion world is taken into account. In the 2012 exhibition, objects were presented with other elements that would enable the comprehension of the nominees. These included a video showing the process of designing and producing the wedding dress for the Duchess of Cambridge (UK Sarah Burton for Alexander McQueen). Perhaps in this case, as this dress is an iconic object for "British" popular culture and, relatively little surprising within the general and historical context of the fashion universe, the detail of the work in the exhibition became even more relevant - this, and also the Olympic torch of 2012, are therefore examples which will not be discussed in this paper.

In any case, a recurring theme in the award nominations of 2012 was the issue of innovative and accessible design (Museum 2011) and the award for fashion went to the Issey Miyake Collection 132 5 (Issey Miyake Design Studio Tokyo, Japan, 2012). In this collection the accent is on the concept, the process that led to the final effect of the product.



Figure 3: Objects of the Collection 132 5. Issey Miyake. Source: Publicity Images

Thus, the aesthetic earns importance, but its originality is in its development, in the concept. This can sometimes be lost when the object is presented without consideration of the action of the designer, or craftsman in some cases.

On the other hand, there are some nominations only exist due the relation of the object with the user, such as the Oratory Jacket (designer Will Carleysmith for Brompton Bicycle Ltd, London, UK) launched in 2011 or the Melissa + Gaetano Pesce Collection (boots and slippers) – designed by Gaetano Pesce (USA) and produced by Melissa (Brazil). The nomination of these products makes sense when we verify the possibility of interaction and customization that the second provides, or in the case of the first example, which has to be seen against the costume culture and everyday life in London, as the product combines a masculine style of dressing with the needs of cyclists in a big city.



Figure 4: Brompton Coat. Source: <http://www.wired.com>

Figure 5: Melissa + Gaetano Pesce boot. Source: <http://www.gaetanopesce.com>

4. Considerations

According to previous studies regarding the inventory process in museums (Norogrando 2011a) much of what is considered valuable in the market system keeps this attribute when it is included in a patrimonial collection. In the development of an exhibition the museum makes use of this collection, sometimes through loans, and thus much of what is to be communicated, inevitably passes through this filter of value.

This can be easily understood by the fact that over almost half a century the primary theme of fashion exhibitions has been about creative authorship. This is because the symbolic value of the author's signature or a designer brand is heavily marketed in order to extol the object beyond its cost and its materiality, because fashion is also a means of communication.

"The pedagogic function of museums can be analysed by reviewing both what is said, and how it is said. Museum pedagogy is structured firstly through the narratives constructed by museum displays and secondly through the methods used to communicate these narratives" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 3).

Fashion can be studied as an object, an image, a text, a practice, theory or concept, due to its abstract or material, specific or interdisciplinary characteristics. Through emotional and personal meanings (XXXX; VVV), uses and habits, gender differences and range of ages, there exists a vision of the "material culture of fashion" (Riello 2011). Thus, the possibilities of narratives for exhibitions are endless. Only with different views and different thematic topics can the perception of this universe can be expanded. However, it can be observed that other approaches to fashion, or even about costume are gradually being introduced to the public. The concept of dressing like culture is still linked to standard references, thus the history of clothing ends up being eclipsed, whether with regard to its aesthetic surface due to a Eurocentric vision or authorial capitalism. Therefore it is argued that curated projects in museums expand the perception of the visitor to other spheres of costume/fashion material culture.

The exhibition process of costumes in museums, and even the history of fashion, follows a related art history tradition, as verified by researching various exhibitions. This means that attention is given to some attributes and not others, that aesthetic has more relevance than process, that there is a distance between the already established dichotomy between art and science (Galison and Jones 1998) and that fashion exhibitions are presentations of works of art. Without defending or defining fashion as an art, a science or anything else, we know that after the conception of a fashion object, its inherent course being worn on a human body. And so, we arrive at one of the difficulties of exhibiting, whereby a model of contemplative presentation may not be enough to provide the cognitive dimension intrinsic to the object. This led to MT-CIPE providing displays which can be touched, to educational institutions collecting fashion objects for educational purposes (Kent State University, Fashion Institute of Technology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, among others), and to the reproduction of dresses to be worn (Rodrigues and Canabrava 2012). Taylor (2004) states that in the history of fashion, the aspect relating to wear is often overlooked. As a result, the relationship of the object with the physical and psychosocial body does not receive a great deal of space in the narratives. Thus, is argued that we lack wearing the clothes, because only by wearing them can one have the dimension of the costume, the limit and the expansion of this text structure. This point is also defended by the historian Jacoba de Jonge (Godtsenhoven 2012) and understood by MT-CIPE in their actions to extend the cognitive perception of touch.

Fashion is part of visual culture, of material cultural heritage and also of intangible cultural heritage. Thus fashion is in itself more than appreciation, but consists of its visual aspect and although understood through vision, it is also understood through the skin, by the movement of the body and by involvement with a context, from the beginning "to the ends" of the object's life¹.

When a designer develops a product, apart from concerns about the production process, he must also directly understand how the object will be inserted in the context for which it is being developed and how it will be handled by users. For a very simplistic example, when a shoe is developed for a baby, it is

¹ Reference is made to the 'life cycle of the product', but it is used in the plural in order to contemplate the action in which the end of the life of the product can be incarnated in more than one concept, not only when it is launched on the market for its primary purpose. It is considered – for a more sustainable concept – that the end of the product is not automatically at the end of its planned cycle but rather has a 'second chance' to gain value and be included in consumer culture either by society or through recycling, whereby the material is reused for other products.

necessary to understand that while the measures are for a small foot, the shoe should also allow handling by large hands, often with poor dexterity, such for when grandparents are dressing their grandchildren². Thus, for a vision much closer to the position of a designer than a historian, it is understood that people perceive a story better when it is brought closer to their "interpretive strategies and repertoires" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 3). Thus, nothing more suited to the production of narratives where the interaction with certain situations is considered. Where art and science are simultaneously explored, part of the narrative practices and technologies involved with objects are included, without the loss of contemplative appreciation, which assigns value from the beginning of its conception. In this way, the history of fashion is added to, and the patrimonial narratives provide a closer view of the object's life in various phases, as to enlarge the narrative requires the consideration of the sentiment. This implies wearing the clothes, including in the narratives the understanding and the repertoire of who wears them, because fashion without people is another thing.

5. Conclusion

This paper presented the analysis of a large inventory of fashion exhibitions, and also the specific analysis of a group of case studies. As a result, patterns and characteristics that help understand the work being done in the area can be traced. Moreover, this research presented gaps and opportunities of narratives that may contribute to the history of fashion with a broader or more diversified perception of this universe.

We believe that it is important to explore the heritage of costume/fashion from several interpretive and expository angles in order to provide a greater understanding of the universe in which these objects are inserted. Thus, the notion of societies/time can be better observed with a direct relationship to the clothes, or a greater notion of responsibility can be gained when we understand the cycles of production, or even an understanding of the amount of specialist activities and professionals are involved in the development of an object.

Thus, although fashion as a field of academic research has been undervalued over the past decades, patrimonial exhibitions contribute to a deeper sense of fashion/body and what is so close to humanity: the skin and culture.

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² This example is based on the first author's professional experience: 9 years in the footwear industry specializing in the children's market.

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