



Fashion As A Constellation

Massimo Canevacci*

Professor of Cultural Anthropology, University of Rome La Sapienza, Italy

*Corresponding author: Massimo Canevacci, Professor of Cultural Anthropology, University of Rome La Sapienza, Italy

Received: 📅 May 05, 2023

Published: 📅 May 08, 2023

Mini Review

The nexus between fetishes, polyphonies, syncretism and fashion involves a multi-sited ethnographic approach, through which the conceptual contours of a moving constellation between different spaces/cultures begin to be outlined. In the following, I will present the design that has become clear to me over time and that still leaves me suspended. I emphasize that each concept of constellation has been developed in specific texts and then may be applied on fashion. Fetishism is immediately imposed by the amazing theories of Marx and then with Benjamin, Adorno, Kracauer; the transversal looks of Bateson, Taussig, Fanon. The turning point, for me, was lit in the last ten years when I was faced with an empirical research on objects, goods, things, bodies, films, advertising, to understand the mutations produced by the visual-digital expansion. I therefore had to articulate an anthropological genealogy about the spell in order to de-reify its concept, to tear it from its supposed objective use, and to break through the still hegemonic colonial matrices. It is the subjectivity of dominant history that produces, at times, objective meanings applied to and often subordinated by the dominated.

Polyphony is the more sentimental concept, since it emerged from my first empirical investigation, an ethnography of urban communication in Sao Paulo. I had Bachtin's readings applied to literature. The observation of a large metropolis (its "narratives") led to a change of perspective, implying an unbalance of my Benjaminian background on Paris, Berlin, and Naples, thanks to a neglected and isolated Bachtin in the Soviets. The urban fragments became polyphonic and dialogical "being", no longer dialectical or synthetic. The metropolitan dissonance had to find multiple forms of composition; hence my choice was to perform three solo voices: essayistic, ethno-poetic, visual. Syncretism is all a Brazilian conceptual dance. Since my early experiences, this concept immediately emerged in the traditional Afro-Brazilian religious version applied to Candomblé, but even more on the cultural side

constituted by music, fashion, food, cinema, architecture. In short, I believe to have absorbed the "anthropophagic" revolution of the Paulista avant-garde of the 1920s, to insert it into a different vision that I tried to define as cultural and stylistic syncretism.

Heteronomy is manifested in my path thanks to the discovery of Fernando Pessoa and his disquiet of selves, that is, the restlessness of the self that is pluralized in the pronoun while keeping the preposition in the singular and defying grammars. The Portuguese word (*desassossego*) then has a baroque sonorous beauty punctuated by five "s" that make the rhythm sibilant beyond a plural. A fashion designer has to be and to invent his/her own heteronomies. Diaspora came later as a result of post-colonial readings: Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai enlightened me with their texts and I rethought to the brilliant anticipations of Franz Fanon, whose thoughts still active and growing over time. With my passion for Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim, I tried to develop diaspora in an individual and no longer collective sense, a spatial uprooting that preserves some identity traits from the past to transfigure them into present-future life projects. Scenarios of cosmopolitan changing values is a mutant panorama about body-scape and fashion diasporic imagination.

Astonishment originates in the passionate epistolary discussion between Benjamin, surrounded by the Paris library, and Adorno already in exile in the United States. Adorno's critique of his more adult friend, defined with the use of "Mr./Ms." is based on a brilliant concept: the impressive activity, a magical circle within which Walter Benjamin would be locked. The latter's response is still brilliant, even now. Definitely, the dialog between the two releases the possible relations between reification and petrification, between history and myth, whereby the mere political or intellectual struggle against commodity alienation is insufficient. Philosophical and anthropological astonishment is deeply intertwined with fashion astonishment, which by other ways accompanied the research

on body and visual communication. Ubiquitously is my benjamin, as the last to arrive. A concept that emerged on its own, almost by parthenogenesis, during my diasporic conditions in Sao Paulo (Brazil) and especially in Nanjing (China), where for six months I taught with the privilege of using the Internet, while students of communication were denied it in their free time at night. Thus, being able to communicate – even simultaneously – with friends, relatives, acquaintances increased my habitability as an absolute foreigner.

Gender has its foundations laid in my last lessons, when I began to explain the translation of anthropo-logy (discourses about human beings beyond anthropocentrism) and culture (popular, mass, avant-garde, analog/digital, values, beliefs, behaviors, fashion etc.). And successively I developed the concept of gender: arguing that if the sexes are two, genders are infinite, based on the relationship between biology and culture, evolution of species, and the Anthropocene that includes, since always, techno-cultural mutations. Indiscipline arrived alone when it became clear that the declarations in favor of multidisciplinary led to little or nothing, and that the problem was the nexus between the social division of labor and the disciplinary division of knowledge. Faculties and Curricula Departments were (are) strongly tied to a disciplinary system to encourage the expansion of research. Indiscipline is not a degraded do-as-you-ask, but rather favoring the choices of researchers or students who – based on precise projects – should have the right to insert knowledge-in-mutations.

Constellation χ design my fashion perspective: it stirs these concepts, challenges them, puts them in transit and assembly, even “informs” them; sometimes it uses these same concepts beyond

or against themselves, often intersects them with asymmetrical aesthetics that pursue the unknown. Syncretic ubiquity, polyphonic heteronomy, generative astonishment, diasporic fetishism: this is my fashion constellation. . The wandering between philosophy and anthropology of the various concepts inscribed in constellation establishes a reciprocal and somewhat uncoordinated influence of the “constellation”; the eye of the researcher observes it from afar after having been very close, indeed, within each small fragment collected with ethnography. The constellation becomes mutant in the assembling of the various concepts in transit, as its design the reflective process donating anxiety and happiness. Constellation χ is the challenge of matching Anthropology and Philosophy in their known territories and, unavoidably, in the unexplored ones of Ethnography. Constellation χ seems to want to re-update a Latin saying that fascinated during the Florentine Renaissance: *festina lente*. The symbolic turtle that sails “slowly fast” on the seas and in the skies, seems to be appropriate to the current fashion trends changing between analogic slowness and digital speed. Constellation χ is illuminated by dissatisfaction with the state of things, because things, each thing, have no state but movement. Trying to detect some of these movements – crossed and unexpected – is the purpose of this constellation. Because if the origin is shifting and mutating, the goal is vague and wandering: in that blurry other place it is possible to train the body-eye to fix, interrogate, and interpret blurry, mutating wandering drawings in the form of enigmatic rebus attractors that have the power to dissolve certainties glance to fix, interrogate, and interpret blurry, mutating wandering drawings in the form of enigmatic rebus attractors that have the power to dissolve certainties acquired as soon as one tries to fix them on fashion.

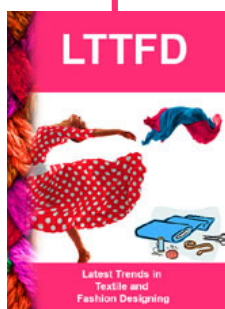


This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

To Submit Your Article Click Here:

[Submit Article](#)

DOI: [10.32474/LTTFD.2023.05.000220](https://doi.org/10.32474/LTTFD.2023.05.000220)



Latest Trends in Textile and Fashion Designing

Assets of Publishing with us

- Global archiving of articles
- Immediate, unrestricted online access
- Rigorous Peer Review Process
- Authors Retain Copyrights
- Unique DOI for all articles