FASHION DESIGN AND ORIENTALISM
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Stereotyping and Gendertyping... Both concepts contain the root "type", and I think it is useful to start with a short etymology. The word 'type' has a 'noble' aspect (Yee 2000), because it sends us to its philosophical origins and scientific usages. Barthes (Barthes and Lavers 1973) poses it at the bases of bourgeois mythology, calling it "the virus of essences"; Barthes argues that the bourgeois ethics is based on the identification of timeless essences expressed in the exterior form. Yee goes beyond this, making "type" the essence of any myths of alterity. The encounter with otherness is managed through the construction of taxonomies. Their function is to order the chaotic reality, and to make it manageable. "Type" is the result of an empiric generalization, but also an ideal – often times aesthetic – of the observer. The Platonic world of Ideas, and the famous sociological concept of ideal type (Weber) are well known examples of this particular usage. Taxonomy – procedure of categorization based on types – was and continues to be at the basis of biology.
The poor cousin of "type" is the "stereotype", a type that is no longer scientific, a type that entered the popular use and lost its explanatory value. In this way, stereotype is closer to 'cliché', and it is less useful to recognize and even to desire difference (as type does, cf. Yee), but it is more used in order to summary dismiss that difference through the process of simplifying and framing it. Gendertype is consequently a particular case of stereotyping, and it directly refers to the fixation of culturally ascribed gender features. Thus, stereotype immediately bring our thoughts toward a certain photographic fixity, -- even the cinematographic stereotypes are not cinematic – and it does not let too much space for the analysis of its dynamic production; it encourages more a critique of the form of the society that produces, recognizes, and uses it. More so, there is an undeniable link between the colonial advent, and the creation and proliferation of stereotypes emerged out of the encounter with the Other.

Most usually stereotypes are held responsible for constructing grids of perception, or are blamed for relying on those grids. Indeed, this is most often the case, and the political consequences of such situation are far from being minor.

Nevertheless, without neglecting the politics of stereotyping, this paper will rather posit itself into a flow of meanings generated between the image associated with the stereotype of the veiled Muslim woman, and the various uses of this image in the production and advertising of fashion. Although the general theme is the clothing creation, the paper will particularly focus on the veil and its transitory, nomadic if you will, meanings. The goal is not to offer a critique of the society using stereotypes (after all, there is no place without stereotypes), but to look into the actual process of creation of images and meanings through fashion design and advertising.

Traveling Meanings

There is continuous movement of uses and meanings of clothing mirrored by a series of temporal and spatial movements of the garment itself:
1. a meta-spatial movement from designer's paper to the actual fabric choice, cut, and garment creation;
2. several spatial movements: from the retailing place to the user's wardrobe or body;
from the geographical area of production to the places of wearing;

3. a temporal movement: from a 'fashionable cut' to 'out of fashion' – a garment passing through time loses its fashionability. This movement can be only symbolic: a piece of garment can be intentionally created with a retro touch.

An important tension at play in most of these movements is the tension between being modern and being out of modernity. Modernity is both an analytic concept and a term daily used by people in different locations. The two are not completely separated. The argument of this paper is that fashion design is at the core of the creation of the image of modern individual, and that there are zones of fashion in which the tension between modern and non-modern individual resurges, pointing to a stereotypical, aesthetic, and racialized image of modern individual; it also designates the (always) exotic non-modern. But simultaneously this tension may play with these categories in a way that shows their intimate interrelation, the mode in which they dialectically constitute one another, and it may denaturalize the link between geographic location and 'culture'.

Fashionable Veils

In the last decade in the fashion world there is a proliferation of images and symbols, the most spectacular is maybe Lagersfeld's dress designed for Claudia Schiffer in the mid 1990S under the designer label Chanel. Mr. Lagersfeld incorporated in the dress texts in Arabic extracted from Quran. Chanel house was compelled to eliminate the dress from the collection, as a result of contestations and even threats received from Islamic fundamentalist groups.

Nevertheless, images of veiled women appear in a series of advertisings, creating the tension necessary in any publicity campaign. The juxtaposition of symbols of modern and non-modern, and their display upon the same body generate the shocking effect. For example, a Reebok advertising appeared in spring 2001 shows a woman completely veiled, wearing Reebok sport shoes. The caption reads: "A Hidden Classic".

The veil, and particularly women's veil is commonly perceived as a symbol of the oppression of women under a totalitarian religious regime. Fashion is a modern category, and when the two of them come together, the question of blurring borders between modern and non-modern comes to mind (Moors 2000). Whereas in the analysis of postcards in Palestina, Moors argues that this tension is constituted between a traditional clothing piece and a modern body, which is marked by make-up or social origin of the models, my paper concentrates in the tension embodied by and in the clothing piece itself. .

The veil is said to symbolize and even to prove the lack of liberty of Muslim women. Although liberal, multicultural societies accept and sometimes praise the display of cultural particularities, in the Western world the Muslim women's veil is usually taken as symbol of their subjection to oppressive customs. This contradicts the ideal of the free and rational citizen of any secular state. In more general terms, individual freedom is the quality that characterizes and "distinguishes the modern subject from its Others" (Veer 1995): 3). In the case of the "veil incident", the object of dispute is discursively constructed not as cultural freedom (multiculturalism), but as symbol of the other's un-freedom.

Fashion as modern phenomena gives the clothes the gift of volatile expression. The meanings embodied in them are shifting with the seasons. The surface of clothes, their form, and their

functionality (in the classic sense) is given up to the fact that they become signs of something else, of anything else but most of all signs of identities. Their materiality is secondary, submitted to the production of bodies, of identities, of gender, and of status (Baudrillard 1993)

Underneath this idea lays a whole layer of philosophy of human being as entity endowed with such a thing, that is, with identity. Fashion and the individual are parallel creations, and the fact that 'identity' exists and that it is necessarily attached to an individual are linked with the shift in the conceptualization of what human being means. The 'self' becomes the natural carrier of identity. Moreover, the conviction that the inner qualities are expressed by outside characteristics has to do with a very specific understanding of the idea of self. (Finkelstein 1991) shows how the emergence of this conception and the idea of bettering oneself through fashion are intimately linked.

The development of Western arts and philosophy had at its center the idea of "men", individual, human being, and there is no better art of expressing this particular mode of care of the self than fashion.

There is a dimension of the relation fashion/veiling relation that seems to me interesting to approach. As shown before, there is a constant reticence toward viewing veiling as a voluntary action, outcome of the wearer's agency (unless male veiling is in focus). Also, there is a peculiar understanding of the veil as always signifying – seclusion or resistance, struggle or submission, religion or interdiction – but almost never beautifying. There is a constant undeniable tendency of beautification of dress, regardless of the time or space in which the dress is used. But not too many words are said about the aesthetic effort put into the creation and arrangement of the (Islamic) headscarf.

In the context of increased interest in the women's choice of wearing the veil, in a time in which the word globalization is used to devaluation, and almost always doubled by the illocutionary "free market", in a world of generalized consumption and globalized modernities, to talk about any dress article without implying fashion is an anachronism. The main reason for this is that fashion is a phenomena intimately linked with the idea of modernity, a mirror of social relation, and an expression of historic transformations. As (Eicher 1995) observes "ethnic dress in the late twentieth century cannot be analyzed without acknowledging the phenomenon of world fashion, for ethnic dress and world fashion are interrelated." (296).

The complicated relation between dress and subjectivity is best expressed in the eagerness of assigning some clothes to the all-encompassing "tradition". This problematic term is readily used in the case of non-European inspired dress, in order to emphasize a lack of mobility in costumes – a static quality that is extrapolated on the whole society, and thus denying the possibility of social change, progress if you will, with implications that are well beyond the surface of the clothes. Such is the previously discussed case of the veil, for which there is an obstinately refuse to see it as an outcome of individual decision. Why the veil cannot be fashion for some people? Because, as argued before, fashion caries in it the entire philosophy of the modern subject, identity endowed self that expresses its inner qualities through consumption (Campbell 1987), and that signifies at the surface of the body. There is a message of progress and linear time, of bettering of the self that fashion seems to transmit, and if somebody dresses 'traditional' than s/he opposes every term of this

equation. “People without fashion” allegedly have no individuality, progress, and they are “exiled” from modernity.

The basic qualities of the “modern self” are directly reflected by fashion. As stated before, the idea that the self can be constantly improved and that clothes display the signs of its improvement became to be pervasive. Self acquired the paradoxical qualities of fashions: always the same but constantly changing, improving; volatile but constant, that is. The existence of fashion guarantees in the collective imaginary a specific mode of conceiving and caring for the self, and that is a ‘modern’ conception.
(Ferguson 1999) offers an elegant critique of this view that affects and effects theoretical positions in various social analysis. The anthropologist propose the extension of term style to the wide range of cultural practices shared by a group (including dress) that are usually targeted to *signify differences* rather than to express “often merely imputed or asserted ‘depths’ [...] – alienation, traditional values, or what have you.” (97). This is a position very close to Finkelstein’s argument of the self as product of a process of signifying, rather than a pre-existent reality. Ferguson proposes a relational understanding of cultural identity expressed in, and defined by, style. Identity thus is not an expression of *apriori* qualities or shared characteristics of a group, but the creation of a long-term process of signifying difference[1]. This perspective may prove very useful in treating phenomena like veiling, and arranging it in a larger social context. As mentioned before, veiling is not only or always an expression of a fundamental Islamic belief, but it also may signify an opposition with the practices and constriction of fashion[2]. Many analyses that emphasize the contextualization of veiling are implicitly using this more complex understanding of the relation between what is usually called identity – essentialized category – and the dynamic of the social fabric.

The difficulty of analyzing the practices of dress comes from this continuous opposition between identity – assumed essential – and the social processes of identity creation, which render identity a posteriori to the adoption of a certain form of expression. Nevertheless the essentialized image of veiled woman is used in many adds as backgroud and argument for a modernity lived through consumption of fashion products. A photo in a Brazilian fashion magazine shows a Muslim woman's face veiled in black with only her eyes visible. It's an advertisement for lipstick, and the slogan says: "You who can show it, take advantage of it."

As if to contradict this perception, in January 2001 in Tehran took place the first fashion show after the Islamic Revolution. The catwalk was filled with young Iranian models displaying clothes that combine traditional characteristics of Islamic dress with fashionable cuts, and chic allures, as if to “substract tradition” from traditional clothing.

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[1] This position sends one to (Lévi-Strauss 1963)’ theory of totemism (1963) and binary oppositions, from which the tradition of post-structuralism heavily draws.
[2] In her book on scarf styling, (Barron 1998) (1998) offers a view that combines the opposition to fashion with a fashionable head-dress in itself: “Islamic dress, of which the headgear forms an integral part, liberates women from the stranglehold of the fashion world [...]. A disturbing trend, so prevalent among our sisters, is to discard the wearing of a scarf [...] out of fear of being labelled out of fashion or simply out of ignorance of scarf-styling.” (vi)

Orientalism, few words

At the end of the 1970es Edward (Said 1978)) defined Orientalism as a set of specific social practices located in the West, oriented towards the production of knowledge about, and the circumscription of, a geographical space, and that construed a hegemonic discourse of domination of the Western space over the East. The book provoked a well too known conversation, and Said himself returned upon his writing ((Said 1993)) adding nuances and affirming that "gone are the days of simple binaries". Is fashion design a Orientalist practice?

In the realm of fashion design I think that working with simple binary readings is somehow counterproductive. Fashion design is an activity that takes places in the larger social complex, and reflects a body of knowledge of the human body. The main referent of the fashion design is the individual and his/her (imagined) characteristics. Fashion sketches constitute signs that precede the referent (the body), and they shape it apriori, in its absence. In fact the shaping takes place, like in the case of imagining architectural spaces, in the presence of already existing assumptions about the human body. The preconceptions of fashion design impose to the body a set of habits directly linked with the shape of the clothes. But, like buildings, dress is inhabited in various ways, and there is a dialectical, dynamic relation established between vestimentary practices and the apriori of clothing design.

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It is not necessarily that fashion designers have in mind categories of race, culture, or class (for sure they think gender, even in self-consciously gender-subversive designs), but the use of the product in the social context may assign (and subvert for that matter) racial, cultural or class characteristics to certain garments or apparel, like the segregated inhabiting of certain neighborhoods – as result of long term social processes – racializes these neighborhoods. Popular knowledge of fashion design may be reappropriated by designers, recuperated, and reconstructed as typified style, recognizable in terms of race/class/gender (e.g. the ghetto style) or geographic location. The designer of the Parisian house "Impression" told me in an interview: "I was preparing something 'Afghanian', but since September 11th, I had to cancel the collection." Fashion designers develop a whole language that links geographic areas with aesthetic characteristics.

They also construct and work with "types" or "stereotypes" of target clientele. The Middle Eastern buyer has a very particular image: she is all the time veiled, which makes her look un-stylish, but at the second glance one can notice the accessories: Prada, Gucci bags, fashionable matching shoes, etc. She buys the most flamboyant evening dresses, orders without caring for money, does not spend too much time watching, and wears her dresses only once or twice. (account of a accessories designer).

I would argue that, during this processes, two apparent contradictory tendencies are developing: first is the aesthetic cartography of the world and the bodies that populates it. This may be seen as a way of naturalizing cultural characteristics, or creating cultural/racial traits through aesthetics.

The second tendency has to do with the nomadic quality of the fashion itself. It seems that fashion designers have understood before others that fashion – and thus modernity – does not belong exclusively to the Western hemisphere. Although the idea that real fashion is produced in Western locations (except Tokyo) is still present, there is a sense of the "equality of individual" facing fashion.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to present the importance of a project that would study the meta-spatial, spatial and temporal movements of designer clothing and the imagery associated with them, particularly focusing on the flow between Middle East (Iran in my case) and Paris.

As argued in the beginning, the modern individual has a symbiotic relation with fashion. Through fashion, an aesthetic model of modernity is put into place. Muslim women's clothing constitutes an ideal background against which this image is projected, as in the advertising for lipstick discussed before. But, not only that this clothing itself may and does constitute fashionable dress as the Tehran fashion show proves it, but also Western fashionable accessories can be successfully integrated in Muslim garments: in Tehran a powerful mark of distinction is the designer signature on the hijabs. The use of designer label headscarves as hijabs is very popular among the middle and upper class women in Iran.

Ethnographically studying the production of dress, the flow of images, clothes, and their uses is a modality of problematizing both the stereotypical assumptions of modernity, and to follow the uses of modernity as political argument in various situations. Often time human rights are used to justify neo-colonial types of impositions in different parts of the world, and the arguments used are of a stereotypical nature. Often time the human rights are equated with the right of being a consumer. In the case of the generic Muslim Women, the consumption is absent (or hidden for that matter), pointing to the darkness of "lack of rights". But it may not be necessarily so...

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