

ABSTRACT

Fashion is a social phenomena showing its power among the individual identity and collective conscience. It is capable to influence the masses and the individual without them noticing it. That is why it could be instrumental to politics and ideologies that it brings forth.

like Carl Menger said, "Fashion is an institution because, just as religion and money, the most important social institutions, have arose spontaneously."

In this manner, institutions bear so much information accrued throughout their evolution to make them a unique mechanism that no man could have possibly invented nor could they be the product of a social agreement. Therefore Fashion is an institution.

It is a spontaneous concurrence that no one could have invented nor organized.

It is a game considered useless or futile by many, but it also affects people who think or try not to be part of it. People who go counter fashion, create themselves fashion. André Suarès teaches us that "fashion is the best farce, which nobody laughs at because everybody takes part in it".

In this essay, I will try to show how the phenomena of fashion affects anybody's life without them really being aware. This is indeed the power of fashion, being able to affect, permeate, "own" the individual without him being aware of it.

That is because fashion is power, and this power imposes itself to society while at the same time it is the society's expression and dictates the rules to be followed.

Fashion is simultaneously time and place and space, individual and collective expression, belonging and differentiating, it is communication. Fashion is a phenomena no one can get away from.

It is time because it walks step by step with history. It is an expression of the spirit of the time, and the present. It reflects society in its real present time, without denying the past nor looking at the future. En fact fashion "fishes out" from the past, expresses the present and anticipates the future. It never stops, always in continuous evolution. It is conscious of its continuous death and rebirth. Coco Chanel has said the "the reason for fashion to exist is to be out of fashion".

It is place because although dictates the "general guideline " in particular historical moments, it is the expression of particular cultures. We will see therefore the play of details, fabrics and styles that mark the various fashions expressing various cultures. Silks, tunics and turbans will never lack on an Indian runway. Nor will burka and veils on Arabic ones. So, we can say that fashion expresses the place and its traditions.

It is space because it is an universal phenomena. It doesn't know limits. It moves through space to bring its dictation everywhere, carrying the various cultures it represents and affects them with one another. This way, jeans have become an universal wear and the first turbans have appeared on the Italian runways. In this sense, fashion could be considered an element of democracy.

It is simultaneously individual and a collective expression and belonging and differentiating.

It is as Simmel defines: "the fashion, displays a special way of life, where one tries to find a compromise between the tendency of social equality and individual different stimulants".

Fashion enables everyone to follow the general guidelines that coherent with the social identity. Everybody follows these guidelines to avoid "social sanctions". At the same time, within these guidelines, fashion lets anyone use it in order to distinguish themselves from one another. That is why it is an individual expression: expression

of the Ego. We don't know if this is a real ego or a false one. In fact anyone can take advantage of this game of seduction, being the creator of endless images of self.

Through fashion we can express all we are as well as all we are not. We have to be careful to maintain the mask we have created for ourselves though. By our clothing and our fashion following or not we present our business card to the world.

As matter of fact we say: "First impression counts".

Clothing lets us sort the person in front of us, after his/her personality (if he/ she is neat, groomed, more or less self conscious, a worker or not, sad or happy etc...) as well as the belonging to a certain social class or political ideology. Fashion is an individual and social identity simultaneously. It express who we are or who we want to be in society, granting access in particular social rings.

It produces then feelings of social belonging and emancipation.

It is communication because it expresses not only the Ego, but it also represents ideologies. It has evolved hand in hand with technological communication, to the point that it is now in our pocket with the touch of an App. It is not just communication in the appearance or good taste of a clothing or fabric. Every fashion brings along an ideology: it expresses a trend. That is why our brain can place the other person among the different social groups based upon their clothing style.

If we come across a man very attentive to his look, a look particularly tight, with a certain type of hair-do and carrying, let's say, the *speedy bag* of Louis Vuitton, we have the tendency to involuntarily identify him as homosexual; if we see a girl wearing a long and likely colored strand of hair covering part of her face, with striped details (such as leg/arm warmer, etc..) and black as the dominant color of her clothing, we will again involuntarily classify her as emo.

Fashion is a phenomena that with time, has penetrated increasingly in the business word and it is more and more conquering of a larger segments of the market.

Behind the fashion world and the creation of a couture dress there are numerous studies, combining the artist's creativity to the capability for the dress to be real, nevertheless maintaining the ability for the wearer to be and feel as he or she wishes. Studies about consumers' taste and fashion-dictated "must" merge to obtain what society expresses is the best.

The institution of fashion is backed by numerous sociological theories. The most authoritative comes from Herbert G. Blumer, George Simmel and Thorstein Veblen. Respectively one with his vision of fashion as a three level social controller; the other with his elaboration of the "trickle down" thesis; and last with a vision that combines the previous two, fashion as social controller through which the upper class controls the spread of life style throughout the social stratifications.

Illustrious sociologists, distinguished names have continued to write, theorize, analyze this phenomena under the most various aspects. This theme has been considered from many point of view such as economical, sociological, psychological, communication, esthetic, moral, cultural, functional and the list keeps going. The reason is because fashion is something that has always existed, dies and renews itself. It is never the same and combine many factors in its renewing process.

This essay aims to underline that an aspect maybe less considered in the fashion phenomena and its social power is the link between fashion and politic.

Fashion and politic are closer than one can think of. Due to its strong appeal, fashion can be easily exploited for political goals.

In the past, fashion designers would take side with the political party. This attitude has faded away as fashion has become an economic phenomena. Nowadays although fashion designer might favor a politician, they take their distance.

Gone is the time when Gianni Versace, Nicola Trussardi e Krizia were open ambassadors for "craxismo".

Throughout history only two phenomenas understood the power fashion holds and what strong sense of belonging it builds. One of these phenomenas is religion, any religion, which has proper codes for its garments; the other is dictatorship. The dictatorial regimes understood fashion intrinsic power and used it to their advantage creating a social identity and bringing the masses closer to the regime. To this goal, Mussolini, for example, hired the artist Giacomo Balla.

Nowadays maybe the “power dressing” is undervalued by the political class.

The expression “power dressing” has been coined by the author John T. Molloy in his 1975 book “Dress for Success”. The writer gives this formula the assignment to explain how certain types of clothing affect people’s career or personal life. It is an idea that the politician has to consider necessarily. The clothing is expression of the Ego and it works to build his credibility; the success or failure of a political campaign is based on credibility.

No matter how noble or admirable are the issues on his agenda, alone they will not be enough to secure him the success if he is not credible.

It is necessary therefore a relationship between the values brought forth and oneself look and attitude, especially for whom who plays publicly like politicians do.

If, for example, the former Minister of Tourism, Brambilla, would carry out one of his fierce pro animal campaign wearing a leather purse or a fur collar, surely he would not be credible to the eyes of the same people he is trying to proselyte.

Political communication could use fashion to implement its aims.

The best example of union between fashion and politics used in an electoral campaign has been shown in the United States of America. Here, Anna Wintour, the fashion’s voice, was the open and involved supporter to the democratic candidate Barack Obama!

We will see later a different approach on how fashion can bring together masses also to ideologies and values that governments try to promote: it is the Benetton Marketing campaign case.

Instead, on the hand of a kind of fashion that can draw up the crowds not only to the politician per se, but rather to real and actual ideologies and values which the governments propose to reach, we pick the reference of Benetton case and his advertisings. The union between fashion and politics, that has been created during the American presidential contest with the Wintour case, is exponentially boosting the pocket of Obama's election campaign and the list of famous supporters. Anna Wintour is placed fifty-first in "The World's 100 Most Powerful Women" list, ranked by bi-weekly magazine Forbes.

Who is she? She is the fashion guru (and since 1998 editor-in-chief) of a magazine considered to be the most prominent American and global fashion one, i.e. Vogue. Her commitment to support the campaign pro-Obama has been composed by a series of fund raising through invitations to dinner at celebrities', cocktails parties, glam parties and events. The peculiarity has been to involve many stylists in the "Runaway to win" project, which has seen the creation of a new line of several gadgets, articles of clothing and accessories which proposed presidential quips and slogans in support of the democratic nominee. And what could be the influence on people, especially the young people, but that one to embrace Obama's figure? They noticed that brilliant fashion designers launched products in favor of the candidate and world celebrities and everyday TV shows idols were wearing them. The result is these products became in fashion and made fashionable the "Obama's product" too. We might dare defining the Italian situation as outrageous, considering who are the fashion icons who gather approvals. In Italy, identified as "cradle of fashion" from the whole world, where the "Made in Italy" becomes markup, it can be seen, at most,

the ex-minister Minetti walking like a catwalk model or linking the color green to the members of the Lega Nord. It would be too hard to find a situation similar to the Wintour case. There are no personalities either, fashion icons like Carla Bruni in France, Queen Rania in Jordan or Kate Middleton in England. The fashion affects us more than what we notice. The purpose of fashion is to leave an impression, it has to astonish, make indignant, make to think. This is why it can be functional to political strategies. If a government intends to promote a certain political campaign, fashion could be one of its tools. The Benetton case proves the worthiness of such statement. The Benetton group institutional advertising campaigns entered in our houses and minds and they let us reflect. But the most important thing is that they stuck in our minds with ideological messages they were supporting. Their peculiarity is to not publicize the product per se; sometimes it is even absent in the pictures. They foster and bring a message, an idea which attempts to be and delve into the expression of reality. If we would ask someone "Do you remember the social marketing promoted by the Ministry of the Environment last year?", I do not know how many of them would be able to answer. But, who does not remember indeed, during that time of racial issues and of researches against AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), the advertisement launched by Benetton where a black woman breastfeeds a white child? And above all, which mother does not feel near to this cause? This way the image of all colorful sweaters joint together has become the expression of harmony between young people of different nationalities who bought the sweaters. Hence, the consumption doesn't targets anymore likely buyers grouped by nationality, age or income but grouped by shared social values. Politics then could address its aims and naturally bend the crowds towards the goals that it is trying to reach even through the tool of fashion. It is approximately how it has happened in 2006 with the Kefiah trend. People was crazy for this scarf repre-

senting the Palestinian cause and, even without knowing the exact history, they embraced that ideal because the scarf was in fashion. In such atmosphere, a government would have found less prejudices in crowds when pleading for the Palestinian cause. All this happens because what is fashionable is also socially shared, therefore it is right to follow. Fashion molds us. It is expression of our society and its rules. It is a fine mechanism to which man, who is by definition social animal, cannot escape. As a matter of fact, if man does not follow social conventions, he would be a social out-cast and publicly punished; this is why everybody respects fashion even if subconsciously. It is in this way that the power of fashion manifests itself: it offers a safe place in society to the individual and the opportunity to be always conform to every situation, according to common rules.