

Representational functions of fashion images in culture

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SUMMARY

The author examines the representation of fashion images as visualization of communication in contemporary culture. Verbal and non-verbal communication in the culture develops genres of entertainment industry and the very system of cultural codes of fashion. The author studies functioning of fashion processes that affects the value system of modern society, while analyzing fashion broadcasting's specific features.

Ключевые слова: Модные образы, репрезентация, модные показы, функции, коммуникация, зрелище, коды, культура

Keywords: fashion image, representation, fashion shows, function, communication, sight, codes, culture

Nowadays the diversity of fashion images gives an opportunity for searching a cultural code for any member of the society. This code as a communication system represented in sets of signs and fashion meanings helps to accumulate information in some kind of fashion-meanings stock, which is later on transformed into personal identity and image. It is possible to classify various ways of the emergence and development of signs and means of their interpretation. Sign system of haute couture started to form in the XX century with a frequent appearance of fashion houses which declared their own style and distinctive items that later became symbols. Gradually, routine symbols started to lose their initial meaning or became obsolete unable to exist and function in contemporary society. There is no need in proving that any symbol requires new meanings. For instance, by the 2000's the creative primacy of haute couture was devalued: prominent symbols failed to live up to new century's realities and were substituted by mass culture concepts. During the century representation of fashion images acquired new symbols and features combining in itself business and art, consumption and aesthetics, utility and beauty.

Target audience of fashion will hardly be attracted by standard fashion shows. A new type of creative consumer comes into the spotlight. This consumer demands high-quality,

intellectual and artistic content, which leads to changes in policies of creating newbreakers in fashion world. By arranging exhibitions, fashion shows and various events, fashion houses actively interact with the arts community. Art as a channel of influence on target audience is the universal code, since competitive ability as artistic value is the essence of the new sign. Thus, today we are facing the urgent problem of discovering and determining secondary connotative out of initial signs, in which art is the trigger of mechanism of metaphoric substitution. As a result, symbols and signs appearing as refractions of the art prism are gradually filled with values and beliefs of modern society and assigned to new meanings.[6] Consolidation of various genres of visual art and fashion results in significant increase in renovation of cutting-edge images. Nowadays the turnover of visual images created in fashion industry increases tempo of altering sign and codes in culture. Term “visual representation of fashion images” in this context implies all types and forms of modern fashion show. Representation of fashion image on the runway allows to address directly to emotions and feelings of public. Not only can it visualize personal style preferences but also create new signs and cultural meanings and concomitant connotations.

French semiologist Roland Barthes in his works regarded fashion as a sign system. He considers fashion as a symbolic aspect of culture - myth (which runs through media industry when it comes to means of communication rather than its content). The myth doesn't disappear in modern cultures, on the contrary, functioning more effectively. Barthes in his studies pointed out the rhetorical «significatum», which itself is a system of sociocultural attitudes, ideas, motives, and values included in sign system of fashion. «Each person has several internal dictionaries, several mental storages of the books read, depending on how many types of knowledge and levels of culture the person is capable of perceiving. When it comes to an item or a set of items various grades of knowledge and culture are possible. The deeper we analyze individual reaction the more elementary coded meanings we can find»[1, C.84]. Barthes's fashion semiotics operating by myth principle resonates with concept of simulation proposed by Jean Baudrillard. His concept addresses connectivity of things and their transition «from one system to another, more integrated, becoming more structured after each alteration. With every synthesis of various functions a new meaning is generated.» What is more, these meanings can be independent from individuals or on the contrary subordinate to the needs of one particular person.[2]

Being the integral element of culture and the essential part of lifestyle, fashion can sufficiently and adequately represent reality. At the same time, system of fashion images in culture appears. Today fashion activates often passive consciousness of an individual sometimes unable to capture anything but routine events, stimulates it with innovations, and

intends to bring its own identity to sociocultural experience of a person. Many professionals are involved in creating and spreading fashion ideas. Analysis of renowned works of Russian designers such as V.Zaitsev, T.Parfenov, D.Razumihina, Yu. Dalakyan, V. Andrianov, A.Ahmadulina, A.Terekhov, A. Bartenev and others allows to speak about active demonstration and representation of particular visual entertaining image for particular target audience. «Mass» spectator, on the one hand, enrolls in functioning of artistic fashion world, while on the other hand, satisfies his living needs. Escalation of entertaining function of art culture leads to hypertrophy of forms of show culture with involvement of folklore, mythological and archetypal components. Autonomous independent forms of fashion shows define their functions; for what, for whom and why will any visual event will take place[8]

As a result, we are able to speak about the importance of functions of entertaining fashion shows in contemporary society. A.Hoffman distinguishes and observes the most important functions of fashion such as functions of creating and maintaining uniformity and variety in cultural prototypes; innovative function; communication function; function of social differentiation and leveling; function of socialization; prestige function; function of physical and mental relaxation; interaction function; compensatory function[4]

Let us consider the basic functions of fashion shows which in some situations have specific features in comparison to functions of fashion

1. Interpretation of fashion as aesthetic phenomena causes the concept of its main function as satisfying aesthetic need of an individual. Aesthetic function in fashion show has an important stabilizing role: finding a common ground and uniting artistic values of a costume with fashion standards in modern clothes. Art's influence on fashion is impossible to deny in general. Fashion images created by top models on the runway during the conceptual shows establishes new artistic and aesthetic meanings of contemporary art, which were inherited from painting, graphic art, cinema, theater, and other visual genres. Integrity of fashion image is build upon diversity of associative connections. Man's desire to state and develop himself as a unique individuality, while the borders of stable meaning and rating are blurring, implies searching evident artistic values in fashion. During conceptual fashion shows an individual forms his or her personal semantic field of style with the degree of freedom and subjectivism intended by the designer. A person becomes an interpreter during perceiving of fashion show. However, if visual art in the first place inspires a person through elevating him above his or her needs and problems of biophysical basis, fashion industry, in its turn, often addresses to the level of perception where primary needs are in focus. Reproduction of fashion images by stereotyped mind contradicts aesthetic meanings. Representation of new images depends on the individual level of cultural evaluative attitudes.

2. Interpretation of fashion as sociocultural phenomena leads to regarding communication as its main function. Various psychological interpretations point out fashion's role in satisfying diverse mental needs of individuals: in originality, self-expression, expression of unintentional impulses (psychoanalytic concepts), etc. Firstly, it is worth noticing that communication function of fashion culture reveals diverse means of constructing one's personal image, uncovers social borders between individuals or social groups, expresses sets of social attribution features. Runway show is an infinite stream of communication which reflects concrete forms of fashion. In this case aesthetic aspect of fashion show is examined through the «messages» during the event. Runway as a form of conversation is tied to ethic (defines individual from the given point of view) and aesthetic categories. Runway as a cultural dialogue is opposed real world while being closely related to it.[7, C. 64–67]
3. Informative and manipulative function of fashion is linked to mass understanding of current trends and updates of materials, technologies and aesthetics in fashion world. Its selection is defined by significant changes in various fields of culture, politics, sports, tourism, everyday life. The function is linked to men's will to drift away from practical down-to-earth attitude towards fashion standards and to draw public attention to polysemanticism, combinatorial potential of runway images. In this case fashion shows lead to accumulation of techniques of manipulation of social opinion and activities. Many sociocultural problems such as ideological gap between generations, loss of interest to social life, obsession with personal ambitions result in alienation of individuals from the society. Fashion shows give individuals an opportunity to try the role of a critic of new reality, at the same time they allow to see one's appearance as a field for experiment.
4. Recreation function is partly supported by creative and sensory mechanisms (of generating and maintaining uniformity and diversity in cultural prototypes) to some extent compensating simultaneous sameness. Severe stress people experience in urbanized industrial world in some cases is neutralized by variety of fashion inherits disabling tediousness and emotional barrenness of average citizen. Some researchers name this function “function of psychophysical discharge” [1]. We can witness many examples when contemporary designers in their fashion shows use playful, amusing, and exaggerated comical attitude towards the event to evoke positive emotions of the spectators.
5. Today socialization function is one of the most important in modern society because it appeals to various social groups from unsophisticated consumers, art and fashion devotees, and media professionals to high-profile investors and fashion industry giants. For the last century fashion designers have created vast assortment of costume forms, as well as phenomenon of diverse

cultural images. That is the reason why clothes designers regard runway not only as advertising of their products but also as a chance to promote a certain lifestyle.

Socialization function creates and expands information space from where all members of the society can draw news about sociocultural changes in term of fashion shows. Information that comes from the shows is spread widely via fashion media such as magazines, tv-shows and video-broadcasts, professional and profane fashion sites and blogs.

6. Image-making function becomes apparent in creating and maintaining cultural standards and also gives ground to developing aesthetic categories in fashion and exploring such concepts as beauty, harmony, balance, and ugliness for general public. Designers play the lead role in this process, they embody fashion trends and create cultural standards. It is the fashion shows and demonstrations that make the spectator in reality or in one's imagination try on any look which helps to enrich and form one's individual image.
7. It is worth noting that happening and performance in fashion reveal the provocative function of fashion. Entertaining alternative fashion shows are paradoxical, controversial, and ambiguous in general, they imply improvisation. However, provocation as more active form of sensory perception enhances personalities and images of models participating in the show. Individualism and non-standard approach are presented in many ways. Images created by models during the performance or happening transform events of this kind into synthesized system of complementary web of meanings, contexts, and subtexts often caused mixed reaction from the public.
8. Fashion serves adaptation function, e.g. gives an opportunity to break with recent past and prepare for approximate future, while regulating the process of transition. By presenting new cultural models and selecting it collectively, fashion becomes a way of adapting to the changing dynamic world. Fashion show nurtures and forms unity of perception and taste. The current fashion in contrast to old one's strangeness and irrelevance is comprehensive and natural. Visual representation adapts fashion images for the spectator in different forms of fashion shows, and anyone can choose any part of the given image based on personal preferences to build one's individual image
9. Cultural identification function emphasizes the diversity of identity forms in modern society. Cultural identity evolves while searching one place in the world, it depends on the social standards, ethnic background, traditions and family values. Lotman Yu.M. claims that «regular change of fashion– is a sign of dynamic social structure: «Fashion with its permanent epithets : “whimsical”, “changeable”, and “weird”, which point out its motiveless nature, seeming involuntariness of its changes, becomes some kind of metronome of cultural development» [5, C. 38]. Visual representation directly connected to ethno-styles that reflect the specifics of our

ethno-cultural genes which reveal themselves on the subconscious level and often stay the same during one's lifetime.

Within these functions we can form the following groups: 1) connecting functions (*functions of socialization, communication, adaptation and cultural identification; integrative, and regulative functions*) 2) recreative functions (*psychophysical discharge, image making, compensatory, informative and manipulative*); 3) significative (*aesthetic, symbolic and communicative, provocative* functions, function of social regulation). In our opinion functions of visual representation of fashion images have several features depending on attachment to certain form of fashion show. Functions of visual demonstration are deeply connected with social categories, public's interests and cultural needs. Each function of visual representation contributes to maintaining and broadcasting fashion code in social culture. Everyday public spaces around the world represent and state wide variety of fashion images, new fashion signs and codes. Modern fashion world using visibility phenomena allows us to create and demonstrate our own integrated image of the reality. It is important to state that nowadays fashion show is not just a source of communication, visual information and aesthetic delight, but also a functional element of industrial production, a field of representation of fashion images for the consumer

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