



FASHION AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON – SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF IMPACT

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ABSTRACT: Fashion fills all „cells” of society only there, and where there is a possibility that some social groups or classes may imitate others by imparting separate cultural patterns. If we try on the basis of a past experience of comparing fashion as something substantive, we can say that in the twenty-first century it is striving for gradual institutionalization and this is joined by the field of sociology on one hand, and on the other of art objects. Fashion has the function of a social regulator, demonstrating social inequality but also smoothing the differences between social groups. It is not only a means of demonstrating social status, but also a means of impact. It successfully performs its role both in intergroup and intragroup communication. This connects it with the main socio-psychological mechanisms of communication - suggestion, conviction, imitation. Based on the socio-psychological mechanisms of fashion influence, images and situations can be created that generate certain ideas, some of which are in the field of fashion and the circle becomes a self-sustaining eternal reality, as the society to which they serve.

Keywords: Fashion, Society, Socio-Psychological Mechanisms of Impact

MODA KAO SOCIJALNI FENOMEN – SOCIO-PSIHOLOŠKI MEHANIZMI UTICAJA

APSTRAKT: Moda ispunjava sve „ćelije” društva samo tamo, i gde postoji mogućnost da određene socijalne grupe ili klase mogu imitirati druge reprodukujući odvojene kulturne obrasce. Ako pokušamo na osnovu prošlog iskustva da uporedimo modu kao nešto suštinsko, možemo reći da u dvadeset prvom veku ona je pokazala težnju ka postepenoj institucionalizaciji i tome se, s jedne strane, pridružuje polje sociologije, a s druge umetničkih predmeta. Modu ima funkciju socijalnog regulatora, demonstrirajući društvenu nejednakost, ali i izgladjujući razlike između društvenih grupa. Ona nije samo sredstvo za demonstriranje društvenog statusa, već i sredstvo uticaja. Uspešno obavlja svoju ulogu i u međugrupnoj i unutargrupnoj komunikaciji. To je povezuje sa glavnim socio-psihološkim mehanizmima komunikacije - sugestijom, uvjerenjem, imitacijom. Na osnovu socio-psiholoških mehanizama modnog uticaja, mogu se stvoriti slike i situacije koje generišu određene ideje, od kojih su neke u oblasti mode i krug postaje samoodrživa večna stvarnost, kao što je društvo kome služe.

Ključne reči: moda, društvo, socio-psihološki mehanizmi uticaja



1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES

We shall begin with the fact that fashion in this text, in the broad sense of that term, will be understood as a process of a social construction of the boundaries between the fashionable and non-fashionable part of the social space and, respectively, between the fashionable and non-fashionable representatives of different social straits. In that part of the social space that we call fashion, we develop fast-paced processes of changing consumer patterns that give visibility to the symbolism of modernity and prestige. In their casual part, consumption processes are running at a reduced rate and there is no race for prestige. There is another logic of choice in this part. Thus, fashion realizes the boundary between „we” and „they”. From the perspective of sociology of art, obedience to fashion requirements and self-identification „I am a modern person” leads also to the corresponding social behavior related to the dynamics of the practice of use first and visible in fashionable clothes: monitoring fashion processes – such as reading fashion magazines, watching TV shows for fashion, attending fashion shows. The other part of the social practice is to adapt the novelties in the field of fashion to their own physical, intellectual and cultural practices as well as financial capabilities and budgeting for the purchase of fashionable clothes. The opposite self-identification – „I am one of those who do not obey fashion” – leads the practice of both individual and group ignorance of fashion processes and orientation on another value scale – to the useful, functional and comfortable clothing, which may not be the last „scream” of fashion. Neither from the point of view of art nor from the point of view of sociology, we can find universal meaningful signs to which we can recognize fashion objects, including clothing. If we attempt on the basis of a past experience of comparing fashion as something substantive, we can say that in the twenty-first century it aspires to gradual institutionalization and this brings it on the one hand to the field of sociology and on the other it treats it as an art object. Fashion is a platform for manifestation of various professionals – fashion tailors, journalists and fashion reporters, mannequins, photo-models, and so on. In the field of fashion, today there are two values – prestige and modernity.

2. FASHION AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Fashion fills all „cells” of society only there and where there is a possibility that some social groups or classes can emulate others reproducing separate cultural patterns. In traditional professional societies, customs and law much more clearly and rigorously than fashion affirm certain cultural patterns for certain social groups. For example, in Middle Ages, lower-class representatives of Europe were forbidden to wear brightly colored clothing, because the bright clothes were of great significance for the higher classes. In addition, the use of certain materials (for example, silver, gold and precious stones), fabrics (for example silk and velvet) as well as the clothing pattern were regulated by royal decrees. Notable in this respect is the edict of the French King Charles VIII who, in 1480 prohibits all but the Supreme Court from wearing golden and silver embroidery on them and decorating their garments with precious stones. He further regulates the length of the shoe noses by specifying them with the social status and titles of their footwear. On the other hand, modern fashion is mass fashion. For the first time,



the peculiar features of societies in which mass fashion appears and operates are mentioned by the German sociologist G. Simmel at the end of the 19th century. He determines the following signs:

1. In society there must be differences of prestige among the different social strata;
2. Representatives of the lower social strata strive to occupy a higher position in society and allow the realization of such aspirations – that is, there are no rigid and impenetrable boundaries between different classes.

This is one of the features characteristic of capitalist society as opposed to feudalism. Fashion operating in such a social system is characterized by:

- (a) dynamism;
- (b) social differentiation and mobility;
- (c) openness and development of communicative channels;
- (d) overcapacity over the system of production of material goods and the existence of multiple competing fashion models.

In the narrow sense, the fashion of clothing represents a process of gradual development and improvement of the urban culture development started in the 13th-14th centuries with the separation of crafts from trade. New forms of communication are also developing, and the process is particularly enhanced with the discovery of prints when images of clothing can be distributed. However, the French bourgeois revolution must come, so that bourgeois fashion can not only create and acquire citizenship, but also gain social prestige. The scientific and technological revolution has led to the formation of a society with „equal opportunities”, where business boundaries and formal prohibitions have been abolished, it develops a mass production machine, allowing for meeting the needs of varied and inexpensive goods, including garments for the mass consumer. These facts are summarized by Georg Simmel, who creates the concept of „elitist fashion” which attempts to explain the causes and mechanisms of functioning of fashion, guided by the peculiarities of the psychology and behavior of different social strata – this concept is called „Concept of percolation effect”. According to it, the lower strata tend to emulate the elites, to demonstrate their kind of illusory community with the upper classes by copying their fashion models. Thus, these fashion patterns gradually permeate from top to bottom, reach the lower strata, and finally spread throughout society – thus explaining the emergence of mass fashion. Social elites, however adopt new models as fashionable to distinguish themselves. The masses again strive to master the new standards and this process can be repeated indefinitely.

In the twentieth century Simmel's theory has been criticized by the American sociologist Herbert George Blumer, who believes that the role of the elite of society (and its participation in the process of formation) of fashion is exaggerated. He connects mass choices with mass behavior. In today's society, the middle class plays a leading role, which he believes is also a fashion legislator, which is a consequence of its midline and sustainable position in society. Another phenomenon related to the twenty-first-century fashion changes is that many new „fads” also arise in the lower strata of society. As an example can be cited jazz music and fashion denim clothes. The famous fashion designer



Karl Lagerfeld in the 1980s pronounced his notorious phrase: „Whoever neglects the street is a fool. It is the street that sets fashion for the last 20 years“.

Fashion also has the functions of a social regulator, on the one hand demonstrating social inequality, and on the other hand smoothing the differences between social groups. It is not only a means of demonstrating social status, but also a means of communication. It successfully performs its role both in intergroup and intragroup communication. This connects it with the main socio-psychological mechanisms of communication – suggestion, conviction, imitation. Already in the nineteenth century Spencer traced fashion as an imitation: "Fashion is by its nature imitation". In the bourgeois society, public figures become the object of imitation. Objects of imitation become actors such as Talma and Talion, actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt, poets – Lord Byron, politicians – Simon Bolivar and Giuseppe Garibaldi. In the twentieth century, role models become Hollywood cinema stars, popular pop and rock musicians, politicians and top models. In the second half of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of youth fashion (the term street fashion) was also observed. After the Second World War, the rebellion of the younger generations acquired the most diverse forms that formed the youth counter-culture. In the 1940s, they were „Zoot“ in the United States and „Zazou“ in France, in the 1950s the „Breeders and Bikers“ and „Teddy Boys“ in the United Kingdom, the styles in the USSR; In the 60's, „Rockers“ and „Hippies“ appeared in the West, through the 70's „Shaving heads (Skinheads)“ and „Punks“; in the 80's – „Punks“, „New Romantics“, „Rappers“, „Greens“ and so to the early 1990s, when the „Grunge“ fashion appears.

Anti-fashion often becomes a mass fashion that influences fashion of all walks of life. As an example may be mentioned the fashion of denim clothes, which in the 1950s and 1960s are mostly clothes of youth, to protest against official norms – beggars, hippies, „left“ students. Today, the fashion of jeans is widespread and has lost the halo of rebellious fashion. This indicates that alternative culture has enormous innovative potential, which is absorbed and processed by modern officially launched fashion. For example, from hippies is taken the tendency to individualize the appearance of the particular person as opposed to the depersonalized formal fashion, especially that of corporate culture. Hence the interest in using elements taken from other peoples (for example, the different nations of India) as well as antique jewelry, conferring elements of eclecticism in clothing. From the counter-culture of the punks are borrowed the bright colors, as well as the aggressive accessories, make-ups and hairstyles. All these chaotic and uncritical borrowings in fashion led its researchers to pay attention to such a phenomenon, such as exaggerated fashion or kitsch.

3. FASHION AND ITS EXAGGERATIONS AS A PROBLEM OF SOCIOLOGY OF ART

Philip Crick, in his article „Kitsch“ [1], likens the relationship between Art and Kitsch analogous to the relationship between the parasite and its successor. He says „They are interrelated, but in an irreversible way. Remove, for example, all traces of Kitsch in a society, and the art can still thrive. It can even grow and prosper. But if you pull the art out of the structure of a culture – if you break its nervous system – it will eventually



disappear from Kitsch. Maybe in this case and culture will also disappear” [2]. From this quote, it is clear that in the kitsch „deliberateness and surplus go hand in hand” [3]. In the text of this article the author makes a detailed analysis of the kitsch by finding the features and the vital juices that kitsch extracts from art. For our reasoning, this is useful in methodological terms because its conclusions with a high degree of credibility can be extrapolated to the art of fashion. By analogy, it can be said that the kitsch fashion maker does not put at risk its own contradiction, no ideas, except in the most superficial sense. It can be said that in the field of fashion, the kitsch of the lower layers is an „emotional ointment or stimulus” (again according to Crick) about its social mimicry. This is largely covered by the views of Simmel. Further on [4], Crick sees negation of kitsch as a double denial. His opinion is that „The Kitsch, on the other hand, bears the stamp of his own ignorance. Whenever the kitsch-product falsely portrays itself as a work of art, its analysis does not provide evidence that the work, at any moment has an image of itself as a work of art”.

In fashion, this can also be postulated as a nonproductive eclectic. Mixing in the most unimaginable fashion trends from different styles and epochs will inevitably create a garment, costume or collection that they will all try to make for fashion. But it is not because of its inner essence. To avoid such a danger, the renowned fashion designers aspire to have some idea in their collections, such as the gender idea. In the light of such fundamental ideas there may be borrowings but they are „strung”, figuratively speaking, on an ideological axis and work in the same direction to solve the specific artistic task in the fashion collection. In the works of world fashion designers can be felt „the creation of the new”, and not the „production of novelty”. The result in their fashionable clothes appears in the searching process, not in the path of imitation.

The third major difference that Crick points out is the difference between art and kitsch in the decorative sphere. He points out that: „Art is not decorative in itself. In the kitsch – the author draws attention – there is no internal formal conditionality between the ornament element and the main theme. Decorations are simply used as a cosmetic for all that is in the center” [5]. In fashion, this is particularly noticeable when comparing the embroidery in the folk costume, which has an apotropaic function, and therefore its appearance, place and material on the garment is strictly defined, while the embroidery in the contemporary costume has only an ornamental-decorative function. This is often not realized by modern modelers. Especially blatant is this disharmony in the modern military uniforms, which with their embroidery, seams and applications are the pinnacle of the kitsch in the special clothing of today's man, because they really are an illustration of „cosmetology in the center”. Here, it is worth recalling that, in support of his reasoning, Crick cites even Hermann Broh: „Modern artists have a clear understanding of those who imitate their works, and many of them respond to plagiarisms in an inventive way. The difference in the situation in the nineteenth century seems to be partly due to the final formation of the mass society and the subsequent expansion and development of kitsch as a human activity and industry over the last 150 years” [6]. It is precisely this fact that is remarkable in fashion during the Brooch period. The time of great artists and fashion houses with their collections of crowned people lasted relatively short. Dressing up great clothes for fashion clothing cannot feed a huge army of fashion designers.



The crisis is particularly acute after the military conflicts reaching its peaks after the first and the second world wars. In fact, they are even bold, we may even call them revolutionary transformations in the ladies' costume. Almost everything changes – materials, lengths, patterns, silhouettes. Not just certain types of clothing disappear – whole layers of life disappear. What's coming to theirs. They are replaced by the mass industry, the imitation and the plagiarism that is close to the theft of industrial and intellectual property. Nothing, however, is able to stop this kind of kitsch. The clothes become more and more simple, the length of the skirts shortens more and more to get to the point of saying that it has become an „indecently wide belt“.

American art critic Clement Greenberg, in his article „Avant-garde and Kitsch“ [7], also draws attention to the kitsch, but in a very peculiar form. He examines and justifies the emergence of the western avant-garde as a counterbalance to kitsch, claiming that: „In the quest for absolute, the avant-garde reaches the „abstract“ or „objectless“ art and poetry. (...) The content is intended to dissolve in such a form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced wholly or in part to something that it is not“ [8]. The kitsch in fashion, however, successfully overcomes this barrier by not only replacing, but also by imitating. It imposes almost everything from clothes, but in a simplified and „hasty“ option. The aim is until people understand the deception they have already bought things. Wearing imitations seized even the middle class. Clothes, shoes, accessories previously bought it from strictly certain places and with a guarantee of quality are no longer valid. It may be that designer clothes are sewn in a clandestine workshop in Hong Kong and only labels in them are original. And all this despite the numerous and powerful trade or governmental organizations struggling against such crises. If we say to sum up again with Griegenberg's words, we will quote his thought that „Academism and commercialism appear in extremely strange places. This may only mean one thing, namely, that the avant-garde is becoming increasingly insecure for the audience on which it depends – *the rich and educated*“ [9]. Yes, the rich and educated are aware both of the creativity of the legislators of today's fashion and of the ability of kitsch for social and economic mimicry. They are trying to break away, though not always successfully from the clutches of a prank by turning to practical clothing. Maybe here comes the triumphal procession of denim costumes among the middle class representatives, but only in out-of-work time. These people, in their role as consumers of fashionable apparel, understand, again, according to Greenberg, that „Where there is an avant-garde, we also find an rearguard. It is quite clear that, along with the entry of the avant-garde, a new, second cultural phenomenon emerges in the industrial West – this thing, which the Germans give the wonderful name Kitsch – a popular, commercialized art and literature with their homeotypes, magazine covers, commercials, boulevard stories and gorgeous magazines, comic books, „Tin Pan Alley“- style music, steppe, Hollywood movies, etc.“ [10]. In this case, Greenberg with „adolescent maximalism“ is trying to expand the boundaries of kitsch to suggest to readers that kitsch is almost a pandemic. For this article, which he published in 1939, later gives a very interesting explanation, which partly explains the reasons for its writing: „I was dealing with kitsch, while the real enemy was not the kitsch, but the middle-class table. Trying to like them is probably not the heaviest sin of an artist, but their taste was a real danger, main threat oppressing high culture. My understanding of kitsch was somewhat *rudimentary*: I had not gone far in my analysis. I then started out with a new model“ [11]. Maybe, without



asking, C. Greenberg recognizes an important detail - if the understanding of such an erudite such as himself is rudimentary, what about ordinary people who have neither knowledge, nor are their senses so exaggerated that they detect, recognize, and reject the kitsch. That can not happen. This is the social base on which the kitsch thrives. Its mechanics and action based on elemental formulas that offer the routine of consumer experience are best displayed in second-hand fashion - buying and wearing clothes that, although physically preserved, bear the traces of foreign experiences and relationships by cultivating indifference - to be cheaper when old clothes or shoes are bought per kilogram. The buyer who bought old Salamander two-dollar pair of shoes will equalize in this respect with a bandit or politics who have the opportunity to buy new shoes for this brand for \$ 1,000. The difference in the funds is huge - the brand - the same. How the ordinary man would not be happy here. „Kitch” - continues Greenberg - is not confined to the cities in which it is born, and spread to the countryside, where destroys people's culture”. An example of this is that today the rural folk costume can be seen only in specialized museums. Machine production and kitsch on its base kill the homemade primitive fabrication of fabrics and from there on the sewn on their base clothes. Machine-made kitsch can be sold and is sold more cheaply than the native handmade item. And in this sense, the whole fashion industry is a huge, all-consuming kitsch. Massive clothes, jewelry, plastic trinkets, the identical in material and construction shoes-sneakers are in fact the walls of a giant prison, called kitsch, in which opposite counter clocks show different and unusual clothes such as cuts and colors with the sole purpose of not being one and the same, even if they seem to us to be different, bright and unordinary.

Since the era of postmodernism there is no single and final criterion for reality, the education of taste and combos possibilities of man in the selection and use of readymade garments remain one of the few ways to fight against kitch. This, in turn, fits into Gilo Dorffles' strategy of kitsch as a phenomenon of bad taste [12]. In his article, the author stops at the analysis of the vicious circle born from the symbiosis between bad taste and kitsch. Bad taste is looking for and consuming kitsch, and kitsch generates, nourishes and strengthens the bad taste. In fashion, this is noticed when people are not dressed according to the season or setting. The clothes in this case are not only signs but also substitutes for the event. Let's imagine for a second that our deputies are naked (ie without clothing) and thus discover the Grand National Assembly. This would rather be an adjective gathering than an act of higher state activity. With this extreme example I want to emphasize how great importance is attached to clothing in such cases. In fact, fashionable clothes in this case manage to conceal the ordinary human actions - insipid and sentimental - by presenting them as absolute. Here, it is appropriate to recall the example Dorffles gives with the old girls - „to give generously with love the doves and street cats but ready to punish every kid for stealing apples” [13]. The current cultural panorama - shared with the readers Dorffles - which is divided into elitist art and art for the masses (a phenomenon that has been analyzed many times by authors such as Riesmann, Morin, Anders and Adomo) has allowed the production of objects of a bad taste to reach too high level” [14]. This high level has long gone beyond the sanitary minimum, and today society is lost in it.



Based on what has been said so far, the following summary can be made. Kitch accompanies the fashion of the time of large-scale machine production. Today it is a generator of bad taste. A lot of people have neither the senses to find kitch nor the financial means to order individual sewn by a tailor clothes. Such actions are only practiced for sewing the costumes for the prom, but here the bad taste also tells the word, and despite the immense means, time and labor invested, the result is fashion models of banality and boredom. Kitsch so deeply penetrated into our lives today that we do not even notice it. This mostly applies to everyday fashion clothes we wear.

4. CONCLUSION

The garment is one of the first and major markers that give information to other people about the individual's national, professional and class affiliation, his property status, age and over time the amount of messages that should be addressed to others using colors, fabrics, ornamentation of the costume, the presence (or absence) of details and adornments – all which are complex as much as the structure of society itself is.

Every nation has developed its system of fashion for men's, women's and children's clothing, which has evolved over the centuries under the influence of various cultural factors, improving the technology of production and expanding trade links throughout every historical age of its development. Compared to other types of arts, fashion has a unique quality – the ability to respond immediately and ubiquitously to various important events in the life of the people, as well as to the change of ideological and aesthetic trends in its spiritual life. Thus the art of fashion, the contemporary mythological complexes of society and the general course of the history of a society emphasize that fashion can create images and situations that generate certain ideas, and the circle becomes a self-sustaining eternal reality, as is eternal the society to which they serve.

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