

Fashion as a means of communication:
The extinction of textual information in clothes

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Abstract

This paper starts by explaining the basic concepts of fashion communication. It analyses the evolution of fashion communication through the change of the periods from the Baroque era, 19th century period, and the Modern era. Furthermore, the paper concentrates on the textual importance of the look and the ideology that they have expressed in the Baroque era, specifically during the reign of French King Louis the XIV and 19th-century fashion symbols such as shoulder pads and jeans. The overall statement about the textual power change of the clothes is shown through a comparison analysis between the three eras. The thesis is concluded with examples of Armenian brands that try to bring back the textual importance of the clothing ensembles. It discusses the methods of the goal implementation and some examples of the brands. Finally, the capstone ends with a conclusion, based on the comparison and analysis of the three periods, and several questions for the future research.

Introduction

The first question that appears in my mind as soon as I wake up is: “*What to wear today?*”. At first sight, the question is not complex and requires a simple answer, however, many think about it from the end of the day till the beginning of the next day. No wonder many see the ideal look for the day as one of the best scenarios of the desired dream. My ideal look is the combination of comfort with a pinch of fanciness and a small emphasis on my favorite accessory like a ring that I got from my family, which reminds me of their love and support wherever I am. The combination of the letter mentioned ingredients: the comfort, fanciness and the symbolic object create the textual value of the daily look.

As a result, fashion becomes an ensemble of visualized ideologies expressing, either individualized or collectivized, religious, historical, cultural background of the wearer which can have an obvious or nonobvious ideological meaning powerful enough to create communication.

The power of communication was granted to fashion since the eons. First, it helped to express the basic information about the status and the profession of the wearer. Then it became textually reach and helped to express ideologies connected with politics, sociology, nationalism, psychology, and traditionalism. Nevertheless, the change in the styling of the clothes was inevitable. Through the change of the visual image of the clothes, the textual information also started to change becoming visible only to a small number of people instead of large audiences as in Baroque era and the 19th century period. Nevertheless, the textual importance of clothes started to become a trend in Armenia. The examples of textual renovation in Armenian fashion are either an evidence for the comeback of the meaningful fashion or just another trend without any ideological meaning.

The thesis shows the process of textual extinction of clothes by comparing the period of Baroque France during the reign of Louis XIV, symbolic objects of social expression as shoulder pads and jeans in the 19th century and the modern already transformed fashion communication texts.

Literature Review

The critical analysis of fashion starts with the identification of the etymological meaning of the word. Malcolm Barnard starts his second edition of *“Fashion as Communication”* with the analysis of the word *“fashion”* both as a verb and a noun. (Barnard,1996) The book is a guideline for those who want to understand fashion as a means of communication. One of the topics discussed in the book is included in one of his next books called *“Fashion Theory: A Reader”*.

The broad area of fashion study in *“Fashion Theory: A Reader”* is concentrated around the well-known cliché *“you are what you wear”*(Barnard,2007) that, consequently, reveals the multiple ways in which fashion is a part of the deep processes of the shaping of modern, as well as postmodern selves(individuals), bodies and social relations. Barnard’s representation of fashion is more than a materialized ideology but a way of social and international communication language. Due to the multiple ideas and topic discussions included in the book the author does not come up with an answer to the question *“What is fashion?”* (Barnard,2007) but rather clarifies how it affects and contributes to the development of the individual, society and the communication between the communities. The author views fashion as a part of social processes of distinction, that is, of the reproduction of hierarchies of status and prestige within a profoundly unequal social world as well as alienated consumerism or as a creative activity linked to processes of identity construction and sub cultural resistance.

The author also views the possibility of fashion attendance in the construction of politics, gender stereotyping and sexism. The main topic of the discussion is the connection between fashion and *“Sex and gender”*, *“Social Class”*, as well as *“Ethnicity and Race.”*(Barnard,2007) The author discusses the analytical path of fashion that in its turn leads to *“a restricted way of*

understanding how material culture shapes and reflects social forms and processes.” (Barnard, 2007)

Overall, Barnard views fashion as a phenomenon by discussing both the material, moral value of fashion as well of its effect on the development of ideologies such as nationalism, modernism, sexism, liberalism, conservatism, and collectivism both in the past and in the present.

Marybelle Bigelow in her *“Fashion History- western dress prehistoric to present”* discusses the connection between the past and the present of the fashion industry, claiming that without studying the past the research of the present is useless. She states that the history of costumes has a significant contribution to modern costume design image and value.

The book includes three factors such as the history of costume, costume design, and fashion illustration. Nevertheless, it also provides expanded information on the lifestyle of different periods. The book aims to help the reader to see how today’s fashion reflect the styles of other times and cultures and why. The latter mentioned idea is discussed by the author with the help of careful research of the past dress, jewelry, coiffures, and footwear by documenting the psychological, sociological and political trends that influenced the course of fashion.

(Barnard, 2007)

First of all, the book concentrates on the change of garments because of social, political, or technological trends and links the ideology of fashion to art.

Fashion and its history are irrefutably related to the art of the period during which specific garments were worn. Major artists of every age reflected through their creative manipulation of fabrics and trims, the contemporary aesthetics of their times. And within the change of the period and the new wave of artists the trends tended to change.

The ideology of fashion is portrayed as a form of art -the materialized artistic sculptures are presented with the help of clothes that according to Bigalow are the combination of personal selection and creativity, where the modes and manners of individual lifestyle and period styles can be traced. (*Barnard, 2007*)

Furthermore, the book discusses fashion as a political tool used by the “*Superior countries*” to influence the “*Secondary countries*”. The influence was made due to the political, cultural, technological and economic power. But as the authority (*the “Superior countries”*) used to disappear or give up their positions to other countries the change of politics, economy, culture and therefore fashion was inevitable. (*Bigalow, 1990*)

Finally, the main thesis of Bigalow is that art is as much a part of fashion as the political and sociological aspects of a period. She compares the latter mentioned statement with the case of “*the chicken or the egg*” by replacing the two with the social structure or the aesthetic concepts of a period. (*Bigalow, 1990*)

In other words, fashion brings art and color to life. The examples of the latter mentioned statement are presented in the book “*Women in clothes*” that is a combination of the conversations, surveys, projects and challenges on the subject of clothing and fashion, done among hundreds of women of all nationalities who are famous, anonymous, religious, secular married, single, young, old.

The book draws connections between the emotions that people experience while wearing particular look showing that “*Even basic clothing choices can give people confidence, show them the connection between one's appearance and habits of mind, express one's values and politics, bond people with each other*”. (*Heti, Julavits, Shapton, 2014*)The appearance becomes a

tool that can function both as armor or disguise. Moreover, clothing is considered the tool that helps the individual to change.

The book includes a set of questions that were asked and answered by the participants of the surveys. Main themes of the questions include the different perceptions of fashion, style identity, and beauty. Some of the questions also touched the theme of putting meaning into the clothes and the discussion around the statement, “*We are what we wear.*” (Heti, Julavits, Shapton, 2014).

Why are we what we wear?

Paul Fussell tries to give an answer to the latter mentioned question in his book “*Uniforms*” by giving both the metaphorical and the physical meaning of the uniforms and their effect on the process of shaping the self and the cultural individual.

The author claims that generally, all the clothes chosen by their wearers are astonishing in the sense of their effect on the shaping of people’s character, while the uniforms are more fascinating as they are obligatory and regulated with implications of mass value. “*While a uniform is something that everyone must wear although many deny wearing one*”. (Fussell, 2002) The denial of wearing a uniform will be negatively reacted by the society and will be given the labels of not having a style and being far from fashion. In addition, the author also implies to the traditions behind the creation of a particular uniform.

But what is considered to be a uniform? Uniforms can be presented as Boy Scout suits or army suits but they can also be black and white suits, a wedding dress or even a traditional costume. As long as the costume is applied by both the authorities and the society and has a cultural value in it, it can be considered as a uniform.

Every country has its national costumes that can be considered the uniform of the country that belongs to a specific period. The context of the costume is noticed through the analysis of the ensembles as a whole and the items that it consists of individually. Armenian traditional costume and accessory analysis are presented in the book “*Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity*”. It is a combination of all Armenian symbols that are worth to be mentioned while talking about the topic of fashion and the textual importance of clothes.

The book “*Costume History and Style*” includes all the traditional costumes up from early Paleolithic ages to the ages of the Contemporary. (Russell, 1983) The book gives all the possible forms of cultural costumes developed in the world by defining the idea of their representation of traditional costumes as the uniforms of a particular period. It gives a detailed overview of the Baroque era costumes and the texts associated with the ensembles. The book also discusses the political and cultural atmosphere of the period and linking them to the ideological meaning of clothes.

While the Book “*Costume History and Style*” includes all the possible costumes belonging to a particular period, the background of its creation the book “*Survey of Historic costume*” concentrates mainly on the western customs and tradition in the development of the historical costume and its influence as a “Superior country” on the development of world fashion. (Russell, 1983),(Eubank, Tortuna, 2000)

The book “*Survey of Historic costume*” presents the vast topic of the historic costume in the Western world. (Eubank, Tortuna, 2000) The book provides a great amount of western historical costumes with a full background of its creation and the influence it had on the development of the historical costumes of other countries. The authors try to make the book as clear as possible by presenting all the ideologies referenced with their definitions. For instance

there are clear definitions of the terms such as clothes and clothing that stand for the apparel, dress stands for the aspects of personal appearance that are more likely to include the characteristic of the wearer that can be changed with the help of grooming, style is the predominant form of dress of any given period or culture, that can last for a very long or short time. The authors view fashion as a synonym to a style that has a relatively short duration and is the keystone to the development of the costume that is a style of dress peculiar to a nation, a class or a period. (*Eubank, Tortuna, 2000*)

The authors explain the Fashion phenomenon in the western world connecting it with the development of politics, arts, economics, and technology. In addition, the authors imply the topic of western influence on the development of the historical costume and overall the ideology of fashion itself. (*Eubank, Tortuna, 2000*)

The etymology of the word fashion

Word analysis and exploration can lead to the discovery of such phenomenal ideologies as fashion. The etymology of the word is important as it helps to understand what the used words mean and how they came out to have those meanings. There are a lot of words used when talking about the topic of fashion; adornment, garment, decoration, style, fashion. Are these words synonyms? No, they are not. Overall, they can be used in the same context but cannot replace each other. You may ask “*But wait don't they all mean clothes or accessories?*”. Each of the words stands for different meanings and different generation of things; they have different backgrounds and various historical and individual explanations. Etymology becomes the key to identify both the individual definition, identification of the word and the historical background

that helps to explain the correlation between the word and the meaning behind it on historical bases.

The etymology of the word fashion according to the Oxford dictionary comes from the Latin word "*factio*" that stands for making or doing something, (to "*facere*"- to make or to do something). Going back to the creation of clothes it could be learnt, that they were mainly linked to the activities or professions that the human beings were associated with. Clothes were considered body coverings used to protect the body (based on profession and the climate conditions of the habitat) that date back to the aeons. The original meaning of fashion referred to something being done unlike now when it stands for something to wear. The latter mentioned statement can be considered a vivid example of the obvious (clothes that identified the profession of the wearer) and non obvious (clothes that are body coverings created for the purpose of beauty) texts. (*Bernard, 1996*)

The word fashion is also connected to the word "*facere*" also being the root of the word "*fetish*". This makes a great sense as clothes and fashion were the most fetishized commodities, particularly in the capitalist societies. (*Bernard, 1996*) Moreover, in Armenian culture, the traditional clothing items are often fetishized in the historical and cultural context. Most of the clothing items have meanings connected to religion, customs and traditions of the culture. For instance, in Armenian culture women's head, hairstyles and accessories symbolized their mature or immature sexuality. Young girls made their hair into more than fifty braids that were connected to each other with a ribbon or metal accessories with a blue bead in the middle. The girl's head was always covered with a short cotton, or silk kerchief, or a special cap that is pictured in the photo (*Appendix 1*). The convention changed when young women got married as they started to wear their hair in two braids covering them with a small cap or a kerchief which

she now covered with a long shawl. Women from higher Armenian regions wore a more ornate cap with silver netting or embroidered adornments, which they covered with a gauze scarf, assuring that no one could see her fine decor. In Eastern Armenia women wore a stiff velvet or cloth covered headband instead of a cap. A woman wore her headdress at all times as a sign of her upright and chaste behavior, adding the covering of a cap or kerchief when she left her home, and the expression “*to have no kerchief*” meant “*to have no shame*”. (Kontzias,2001) It was considered acceptable for a woman to let her kerchief touch the ground only when she deliberately threw it under the feet of fighting men in order to stop the quarrel. Moreover, the kerchief was so important and valued in Armenian culture that women in Aghdznik swore by their wedding kerchief just as they would by the bible (Kontzias, 2001).

As commodities fashion items and clothing appear to be a vivid example of the way in which “*a define social relation between men Assumes...the fantastic form of relation between things*” (Marx 1954:77)(Bernard,1996). In this case, Marx’ term “*social hieroglyphics*” is how we treat other people's clothes and make a judgment based on the ensemble, which identifies the social position of the wearer. Clothes become the tool to understanding and analyzing human relations giving shape and color and at the same time legitimizing and naturalizing inequalities and social distinctions. (Bernard,1996)

The Oxford English Dictionary lists nine different senses connected with the word fashion some of which are “*the action or process of making*”, “*conventional use in a dress*”, “*manner or demeanor*”. As a noun fashion can be synonymous to sort or kind as well as make or shape. In the case of “*manner and demeanor*,” the word fashion finds its place in the French phrase “*facon de parler*” that can be opened up as “*manner of speaking*”.(Bernard,1996) In other words, fashion was linked not only to visual but also to the verbal communication.

Nevertheless, in some of the cases the phrase meant not to talk in the particular ensemble of clothes. For example, the phrase used in Shakespeare's "*King Lear*" when the king tells Edgar not to talk to him in that fashion, his conflict is considered the ensemble of clothes that remind Parisian style, that is why the king tells Edgar to go and change them. The example states that although fashion can be used as a metaphor for manner or style in some cases in the same combination of words it still refers to the style of clothes. However, another highlight of the example can be the emotional reaction caused by the clothes that connect the word to "*manner*". (Bernard, 1996)

This complex puzzle of words can be concluded in my own definition of the word fashion - an ensemble of visualized ideologies that express either individualized or collectivized religious, historical, cultural background of the wearer which can have an obvious or non obvious ideological meaning powerful enough to create communication.

Fashion communication: tools and audience

When one thinks about communication the first things that come to his/her mind are the sentences created through the combination of words that people use in order to express ideas. Through the centuries people started to pay attention to the ideas expressed by music, architecture, dancing and other representations of artistic expressions. In other words, people started to notice not only the verbal and non-verbal communication but also the visual communication that is created either by the whole body or the whole object. Visual communication is synonymous to fashion communication as they both refer to the overall outer image of the body.

While verbal communication consists of words and sentences that express a particular idea, nonverbal communication consists of gestures and signs that also aim to express some ideology. As a means of communication fashion also has its tools, which are clothes.

The history of clothing starts from the simple need to cover the body. Most authorities suggest that the need for protection was the foremost reason for the invention of rudimentary garment forms. Others state that it dates back to the basic needs for food and shelter. Furthermore, there are also several thoughts that categorize fashion as a form of art or sociological influence. However, fashion includes all of the characteristics listed above. It is a mean of protection and an artistic tool to express and influence the psychological state of a person's mind, by developing both an individual and a collective identity.

The combination of protection, artistic expression, and the cultural association is combined in one of the Armenian national costume accessories which is called "*gognoc*" (*Appendix 2*). The item appears in Western Armenian woman's costume as an apron served to conceal and protect the lower sexual areas of woman's body. While having a protective function the piece is considered a representation of the artistic generation of the period through its ornamentation emphasizing the generative essence. The definition of the word "*gognoc*" is "*abode of the womb*" which once again emphasized the protective aspect of the item. The cultural and traditional meaning behind the apron claims that it was not worn for the ordinary work in the house but was an obligatory part of a woman's dress when she was already mature, moreover, in many regions of the country it indicated that the woman is married (*Kontzias, 2001*).

In other words, fashion items whether clothes or accessories are the materialized forms of ideological expression. Here one can notice several ideological meanings conducted in one piece

of clothing they are nationalism (the ornamentation and the meaning behind the subject as a representation of cultural values of Armenian women), conservatism (the item was worn as a representation of respect towards the family influenced by the opinion of the society) and traditionalization (the item gained tradition label when accepted by the society as a cultural object).

Most of the information got about the clothing of the prehistoric times reached us through carvings, which included mainly hunting, fishing, herding, warfare, and primitive religious rituals. In Armenian history, the visual information connected to garments of the earliest times was portrayed on the walls of churches (*Kontzias, 2001*). At the times clothes were considered not as beauty objects but as a practical tool to cover the body from climate change and making it comfortable to perform physical actions. The most interesting part here is that whichever function the clothes and accessories would have they have always contained the power to include texts about the wearer, starting from the most primitive one to the text that included the whole characteristics of the person wearing it. The objects used to cover the body were full of meaning. The portrayed accessories and clothes were associated with the profession of the wearer whether it was a hunter or a ruler of the tribe. However, the main function of the clothes was still the protection both from the animals and the climate.

Clothes became a representation of fashion when the accessories and the clothes started to include the function of bringing happiness and beauty to the life of the wearer, as well as, bore a particular cultural importance for a nation or a community. For instance, when the need for warmth did not exist people collected shells or colorful stones and stung them together on rawhide thongs or lengths of a thread made from vegetable fiber to wear for personal adornment and beauty. (*Bigalow, 1990*) In Armenian culture, the traditional clothing is also connected to the

foremost function of body protection, for instance, the later mentioned piece of clothing the “*gognoc*” was not only considered a representation of beauty and a particular ideology but a protection for the lower sexual organs of the wearer both for men and women (*Kontzias, 2001*).

Clothes are fashion’s body coverings considered as wearable, sculptural art forms used by the individuals to identify themselves as creators of a specific period and representatives of a particular ideology. (*Bigalow, 1990*) In addition, individual selection of styles makes the wearer in part a creator. By his or her very selection a person retains individuality and personality. By the same selectiveness, an individual maintains group and time identity. By combining personal selection and creativity the modes and manners of individual lifestyles and period styles can be traced. The process can also be represented as a psychological reaction. In psychology, an individual’s personality is formed through several characteristics one of which is the creativeness the individual may express by the choice of the combination of clothing that would also be in part a representation of his/her personally.

Clothes can be considered the materialized forms of the ideas and immaterial things that form the fashion ideology. As Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux claim the world’s earliest uses of ideology were derogatory or pejorative: “*To be an “ideologist” was to be someone with his or her head in the clouds, trying to delude or persuade people with mere ideas rather than hard realities*”. (*Nealon, Seals, 2012*) In other words, people who explore fashion ideology (the ideologists) are often viewed as dreamers who connect their creations with imaginative content. This is the main reason why fashion ideology did not receive the deserved attention by the representatives of the field of studies such as sociology, politics, psychology and even economy. But when one analyses the concept of fashion it's deeply connected to all of the latterly mentioned fields. Moreover, all of the fields are based on ideologies themselves and

clothes can also be considered the materialized representation forms for the latterly mentioned ideologies.

Nevertheless, the inseparable part of the word fashion - phenomenon, is explained by the fact that its definition is portrayed in each of the latterly mentioned fields. However, because of different approaches to the topic of fashion, there have been a lot of contradictions. For instance, sociologist Herbert Blumer in his book "*Fashion: from class differentiation to collective selection*" claims the importance of fashion in not only class differentiation, that used to be the main topic of fashion study as a sociological tool, but its importance in the collective selection that makes fashion one of the most important tools in the sociological system. Although some of the studies contradict each other they are still viewed as an explanation to the fashion phenomenon. (Blumer, 1969) In other words, fashion belongs to not only one field of study but to all of them that when combined create the key to the national and individual identity development. However, the way of expressing a particular idea through fashion has radically changed through the centuries. The change from obvious to non obvious texts had a big contribution to the development of simplified methodologies that helped to express the ideas conducted in the combination of clothes simpler.

Each of the ways of communications has their audience. In case of verbal communication, the audience can be both individual and social starting from a single person to several thousand people. The same can be told about both the nonverbal communication through gestures and visual communication through fashion ensembles. However, the audience of fashion communication can change through the periods of time while the change of audience for other communication methods can be a matter of several seconds. The following comparison of the period of Louis the XIV's reign and the modern fashion communication can be considered a

vivid example of the change of the audience and textual importance of fashion through time in different parts of the world.

The change of fashion communication based on context and audience through Louis

XIV reign to modern fashion

The period in France labeled as the Baroque era was very prosperous in 1643 when Louis XIV also called the Sun King came to the throne. At that time country that had power over fashion and art, in general, had the largest power of influence. Before French power expression through fashion, the ones powerful in Europe were the Spanish. As taste tends to follow power, Spain was passing through its golden age by creating a global empire that impacted on the flourishing of the economy. It's important to pay attention to the audience that was used in order to communicate the fashion ideology of the mentioned time period. First of all, the text and the goal of the communication were to gain power over other countries and the best sociological tool to implement the ideology was through fashion communication. The audiences in this situation were the European countries that the Spanish aimed to have an influence on. The Spanish fashion reached its peak of development when it was adopted in courts through Europe. Spain shows a vivid example of the start of using fashion communication as a tool to express a political and economic ideology, moreover the creation of the concept of fashion as a tool for gaining power as we will see further in the example of Luis XIV. (*Russell, 1983*)(*Louis XIV's Use of Fashion to Control and Express Power, 2011*)

The clothes and the texts that they express became simpler through the ages after the Baroque era in France, although the financial factor has not changed. The texts that the clothes express became non obvious (clothes with a hidden meaning) in comparison with the obvious

(clothes with numerous elements that were considered to have particular meanings) texts that were used during the Baroque era. As well as, the audience of the communication became larger in comparison with the Baroque era and the direction of the communication has also changed giving the possibility for the citizens to express their opinion to the authorities.

Due to the period of Sun King's reign, one can identify all the ideologies that used fashion communication as a tool for the implementation, moreover, the importance of fashion communication and the change of its audience as a result of the period change will be identified by comparing it to modern fashion.

As fashion was a competitive sphere of content creation in the context of political power, France declared a fashion war to Spain. Jean-Baptiste Colbert (finance minister) claimed that fashions were to France what the mines of Peru to Spain. (*Louis XIV's Use of Fashion to Control and Express Power, 2011*) In comparison with dangerous weapons that create power, fashion was equivalent to the power of a word. It could hurt someone or be a delightful compliment. When the Sun King came to power he ensured that only positive and intelligent texts would be around him. That is why all the nobility had to fight for their space in the court beside the king. So the king starts the implementation of fashion communication on the smaller audience than Spain in order to gain political power firstly in the country, to strengthen the significance of the monarchy, then to spread the fashion word through the whole Europe.

Spain shows a vivid example of the start of using fashion communication as a tool to express a political and economic ideology, moreover creation of the concept of fashion as a tool for gaining power. In the latter mentioned example one can notice that the only authority of the country who also ruled the world of fashion was the king who used fashion for his political tactic implementation unlike today, when the aim of fashion is to express imaginative approach to

beauty aiming to leave a valuable artistic heritage to the world of fashion and is ruled by the most luxurious brands in the world.

To be in the court of the king was very challenging both in physical and financial manner. The concept of fashion that was connected to luxurious ideology was worth being a part of the king's court. In other words, the text needed to say "*I am worth it*". The aristocrats who wanted to be around the king should have the mere physical proximity to the king, which meant that they would spend a numerous amount of money on clothes and if not enough take loans from the king. The balls in the courtroom took place every day and the authorities or the people who wanted to be considered as an authority, were obliged to look different during each of the balls. This meant spending a fantastic amount of money and coming up with a different design every day. The latter mentioned statement was both a challenge for the wallet of the nobles and the designers who created the texts. (*Louis XIV's Use of Fashion to Control and Express Power, 2011*)

Through fashion, Louis developed an influential political and also sociological power that kept the citizens of the country busy with their clothes as a result of which they were too poor and too preoccupied to revolt against the monarch. It is very important to mention that nowadays the concept of having the proximity to the most famous and fashionable people have stayed the same.

Today many people still need role models in order to develop their sense of style. There is not one authority to borrow loans from but there are a lot of banks that provide credit cards for shopping lovers. Nothing has really changed in the financial matter compared to the Baroque era. The brands that have a high rank in the fashion world, cost a fantastic amount of money and are

labeled as “*nobility*”. There are numerous “*courtrooms*” that only the noble people can enter in the forms of private parties and events for the famous people.

The king’s fashion communication has developed a strong content through the usage of ideologies such as political, sociological and even psychological and creating a political tool that was ready for another ideological expression. Louis developed a nationalistic ideology in his fashion communication. He claimed that nothing that could be made in France was allowed to be imported. He even once ordered his son to burn his coat as it was made of foreign cloth. Here fashion expresses the ideology of both connected to economic stimulus plan and to a nationalistic ideology not allowing any kind of material or accessory of foreign origin in the country. So through the nationalistic ideological expression, one can notice the extension of the audience to the whole country and also a noticeable part of the partner countries that were influenced in the context of economic ideology through fashion communication. After accomplishing his first goal of strengthening the monarchy the king started to broaden the communication in order to occupy the first aimed goal of influencing the whole of Europe.

The tactic was brought into the reality through the coloring of the clothes. As the Spanish black color dominated through the whole Europe, French came to change that. The luxury and colorful clothing of that then became popular was connected to the multiple entertainments that the king held in his palace. It visualized the active life of the nobles. But nevertheless, the colors could also stand for the higher monarchy, for instance, the famous red hills that the king would wear indicated his status of the king higher from the others. The French became the most powerful both economically and politically in Europe from Italy to the Netherlands with the help of political and economic ideological expression through of fashion communication. Here one can notice the final change from Italy to the Netherlands after which through the whole Europe.

It is important to mention that the king spread fashion propaganda. Historian Maxime Preaud claimed that from the very beginning of the king's reign, he recognized that images had the power to shape perception. So this means that Louis already knew about the textual power of fashion and used it as a tool to express the ideologies that he needed. Fashion plates containing images and captions were spread out to the world. The images were combined with sarcastic and sexual innuendo. Many give the figures elaborate back stories while the clothes speak for themselves. This means that the context of the clothes was already textually analyzed by other countries. Moreover, the example of the plates presents a vivid proof of the conscious usage of fashion communication in the accomplishment of the political goals such as becoming the most powerful country in the whole Europe.

Even if fashion has changed and became more modernized nowadays the ideology that it expressed has partially stayed the same. But the usage of fashion for political tactic implementation became more hidden than back in the Baroque era. For example, the meeting between Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron in France (*Appendix 3*). Multiple sources had analyzed the gestures and the speeches of the presidents and their behavior with their wives, but besides the verbal and nonverbal communication, in the form of gestures, there is also a strong fashion communication that refers to the dresses of the first ladies. In order to show either real or an imaginative respect and mutual warm relationship with the countries, the first lady of USA wore a dress by Chanel. It is important to highlight the fact that she has never worn the brand before this was her first time wearing it. Nevertheless, Melania Trump's dress grabbed the whole attention of the meeting as it was overloaded with silver shiny elements shading the simpler dress of Brigitte Macron, showing the not textually mentioned power of US over France.

Nevertheless, the political context of the clothing is hardly mentioned in any of the media analysis of the meeting.

Another important change that occurs in fashion communication of the modern era is also the change of the audience. Of course, this statement can be applied differently in different countries as there are some that are still exposed to fashion communication enforcement by the country's authoritative powers, such as the political and the religious powers. The texts that are in part individualized can be seen at the red carpet ceremonies throughout the world. During those ceremonies, one can witness the most effective obvious texts in fashion communication that are expressed not through the political power but are a combination of the ideological expression both for the wearer and the creator of the text.

The content restricted in the clothes is very similar to the ones used during the Sun King's era. It represents the status and the artistic expression of the wearer when combined creates the image in part the identity of the wearer. Although the elements of the ideological expression (elements of the clothes, jewelry wigs) have come to the minimum and the texts became non obvious containing in many cases minimum elements of ideological expression. Nevertheless, the most important change is noticeable in the audience of the text, which becomes the whole world with several concentrations and exceptions in comparison with the Sun King's era that included maximum the European countries.

Another major change that occurs in the modern era is the change of the direction for the communication. In the Baroque era, the communication was spread by the king to the citizens. Nowadays there is a possibility for the citizens to express their opinion through fashion communication to the authorities. For instance, during the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, the brand called Light Affect produced T-shirts (*Appendix 5*) and accessories such as caps with

encouraging texts that had a political context, providing a voice for the fashion communication from the citizens to the authorities. The latter mentioned example states, how individualized fashion has become nowadays, transforming from the sociological tool used by the political authorities for collectivization, to a voice given to the citizens to express their point of view.

The Sun King's era was full of obvious texts. The clothes carried the labels such as French, rich, poor and many other labels that people used to take into account when communicating with each other. In one of the balls after the obvious texts in fashion had turned into non obvious texts, the generation that used to know everything about each other by just looking at the clothes and the ensembles were in shock and confusion as they were no longer able to learn the information they were capable of learning during the Sun King's reign era.

The tangled web of "*why*" of clothing becomes increasingly complex. As each successive political power became more sophisticated, the manner of personal adornment adjusted. These adjustments took place because technology advanced, philosophical attitudes altered, and psychological needs adapted to the overall cultural changes. (*Bigalow, 1990*) Nevertheless, many of the clothing stayed in the context of modern fashion. In the highly regimented and specialized haute couture industry, artificial flowers, buttons high heels and many more fashion ornaments from the Baroque era in France stayed in fashion as a part of modern fashion carrying the back stories of their original ideology or losing the ideology and staying as meaningless objects of dress that create the effect of empty fashion.

Through the latter mentioned period of time, the ideologies of nationalism, socialism, conservatism, and collectivism are being noticed. In other words, the text of the past was full of context and meaningful ideologies that were powerful enough to make an influence on the political level and grant power to the authority. Nowadays the concept of meaning in clothes has

changed. If you see a girl in a shirt and jeans you can make several generalized ideological outcomes from reading the text she presents. The texts have become non-obvious.

Decoding fashion communication texts of the past that reached the present

The amount of information contained in clothes is limitless. The main issue is connected to the quality of the text, the audience that it is meant to be presented to and the visibility of the content. The Baroque era presented in the previous chapter is a period full of high-quality texts that are used as a sociological tool for the collective selection (theory by Blumer) (*Blumer, 1969*), that use three different types of audiences from the small one including the nobles to the large one including the whole Europe. In addition, the texts had a high visibility as the content could be easily decoded. Through the changes of time in different parts of the world, a variety of texts were created. The texts contained unique ideology implied to the particular culture and period. In this chapter, we will discuss and decode some of the most interesting texts that have changed their textual importance becoming artistic objects with no or hidden texts. The examples will help to understand the simplification of fashion communication in the modern era because of the absence of textual content.

One of the most famous looks of the 80s was the look of the “*confident lady*”. In a world that was dominated by men, the look was a claim of strength and power for women. The look can be listed in the texts that put emphasis on one major element, which afterward becomes a trend that makes the content partially visible. The most important detail in the look was considered the shoulder pads. In the case of this kind of texts in order to understand the content properly one needs to know the story behind its creation. In his book “*Uniforms*” Paul Fussell presents the stories connected to the creation of shoulder pads starting from the compliments that men were

most often gifted. Yes! The text has been created taking into account the most often heard compliments about men, which was: “*You are so strong! Look at your broad shoulders!*”(Fussell, 2002) Fussell claims that male shoulders, together with chest hair, constitute precious secondary sexual characteristics. It follows that broad and well-developed shoulders are important for self-respect and pride. First, the shoulder pads were an accessory for the military uniform then they became a part of women’s closet representing the strength and pride of women and creating a unique text relevant to the particular period. The text chose as a target the audience of men who considered women as fragile characters for household activities, proving through imaginary of fashion communication that women can have as wide shoulders as men. (Fussell, 2002)

Do we carry the same text now? Although the context of the text can be used nowadays as a representation of gender equality, it found its place beside the artistic objects created by the luxurious brands as valuable artistic heritage without any textual importance. There is no particular ideology besides the visual extravagance and interesting shaping of the pads that create an impression of an artistic object.

“Freedom from convention. That was originally the message to be conveyed by the institution of blue jeans, which like jazz, Hollywood, and Coca-Cola is one of America’s most impressive inventions. But when everyone has at least one pair, what do you have? A uniform as the dark suit.” states Fussell(Fussell, 2002). The process of change that makes a unique clothing object to an ordinary one that most of the people have labeled as uniform already indicates the loss of the original text that was implied to the object as it was created.

The back story of jeans starts from the “*Levi Strauss*” that was originally not a brand name but an actual boy in Bavaria who came out with the invention of jeans taking as a target the Gold

miners, that successful or not required heavy-duty trousers. So firstly, the idea of jeans was to create a comfortable and strong wear to use while digging. (Fussell, 2002)

However, when the Gold Rush had run its course, cowboys became popular and the jeans passed to them and their impersonators on their way to America's youth, as a sign of protest against their parents. Jeans expressed both the ideology connected to individuality and collectivism. Until around 1963, part of the routine for Levi's wearers was shrinking the trousers to fit, and the best way to do that was to put them on wet and let them dry on your body. This gave the wearer the impression that he or she was actually creating the garment or at least emphasizing the individuality among American youth with different body types. Alison Lure in her study "*The language of clothes*" gives a vivid description of the start of the collective ideology implication of jeans saying that the 90% of middle-class and college students of both sexes were identical below the waist, though above they might wear anything from a lumberjack shirt to a lace blouse.(Lure,1981)(Fussell, 2002)

From an item expressing rebellion jeans are now a part of daily looks for many people that are aimed to bring comfort and do not express the same ideology. An interesting factor connected to jeans is that now it does not have any audience in comparison with the old form of rebellion jeans used in 1963. In other words, jeans lost their power of textual expression.

Before the 20th-century texts carried a hidden but a powerful meaning, for instance, in the form of feminist shoulder pads and rebellion jeans. The texts were visible as they were a topic of discussion in the society and were a result of promotional activities. After the 20th century, the texts became rather invisible as the main text that they address is connected to comfort and status, although the factor of promotional texts is still a part of everyday fashion. However, the importance of details as carriers of the hidden meaning is still present in the modern fashion but in the shape

of individualized objects such as a necklace from mother that one has a touching back story connected with, which has an irreplaceable part in one's everyday fashion.



“My outfits are always two things: comfortable and organized. These are reflective of my personality as well. If I have too many colors or risqué choices then I begin feeling anxious. I don't prefer overly casual clothes in public though (sportswear) since I always put my best foot forward, even when I feel terrible. And I do this for myself, not others. As for accessories, I use them sparingly. Usually pieces which have personal value to me.”

“For example the pendant that I am wearing today is

my birthstone which my mother gave me over 10 years ago. Despite what clothing I wear, I want to carry something symbolic with me which reminds me of what really matters”

-Tatevik Kyurkchyan-



Tatevik's fashion is a vivid proof of the statements discussed above. It is simple and comfortable. The texts that her look carries can be visible only to her close friends who know about her well enough in order to make statements through analysis of her looks. Nevertheless, she carries a text that is very meaningful to her in the form of which she creates the value of her

look and gives it the power to communicate. Her necklace becomes the emphasized item of her look like the shoulder pads and the jeans. But in comparison with them, the audience of the text that she communicates can be viable only to a small audience of her relatives and friends

The signs of textual restoration of fashion in modern Armenia

Despite the fact that the comparison of the three periods led to the statement that there is a vivid process of extinction in the significant textual expression of clothes, as result of individualization, there are signs of textual restoration of fashion in modern Armenia in the forms of modernization of the traditional “*Taraz*” and carpet ornaments, as well as, the usage of Armenian calligraphy and symbolism in everyday fashion items. For example, the later mentioned brand called “*The Light Style Affect*” (*Appendix 5*). The brand played a great role during the Velvet Revolution by creating a symbol that is still a part of the Armenian everyday fashion weeks after the revolution. The fashion items such as T-shirts and caps with the photos of the revolution and the slogans. Moreover, the brand also has collections dedicated to Armenian alphabet and symbolism that express the ideology of nationalism but with a pinch of modern interpretation.

Another brand that tries to bring back the ideological meaning in Armenian fashion is the “*Terian Cultural Centre*” that was first popular with their photography centers where people could dress in Armenian national “*Taraz*” from different regions that later became a trend (*Appendix 6*). After the idea of bringing back the traditional costume was accepted by the Armenian society they started to produce wedding dresses that became a part of Armenian weddings. It is important to mention that the wedding dresses also brought with themselves the

restoration of old Armenian wedding traditions. Today the center tries to produce collections mixed with modern fashion although keeping its goal of bringing the Armenian cultural value back. In other words, “*Terian Cultural Center*” as well as the “*Light Style Affect*” try to bring back the textual value in fashion with the help of nationalistic and cultural ideologies.

Nevertheless, the aim of the restoration is not always clear. In case of the “*Teryan Cultural Center*” the letter mentioned goal of the traditional value restoration is clear as it is mentioned in the official website of the brand, moreover it is shown through multiple events implemented by the brand. On the other hand, the brand “*Light Style Affect*” does not formulate the clear goal of the brand making the viewer think that the brand restores cultural values but it instead replaces the old traditions with the new ones.

Conclusion/Questions for future research

The discussion and comparison of the Baroque, 19th century and the Modern eras present the vivid proof that fashion is indeed one of the greatest means of communication that has changed and is changing now as a result of modernization of the clothes and the attitude of the society towards fashion.

Fashion is one of the broadest and most interesting topics that has innumerable branches to write about. I chose fashion as a mean of communication as I consider it to be the most powerful characteristic of fashion that is, unfortunately, becoming too oversimplified and drown into frames of predictability. However, Armenian fashion representatives try to restore one of the most powerful tools in communication which is including textual meaning in the clothes helping them to express important ideologies such as political, cultural, nationalistic, and traditionalistic.

Armenia cannot be the only country who attempts to bring back the textual power of clothes there can be other countries too. Unfortunately, the time provided for the capstone was one of the greatest limitations that I had in order to explore the restoration of fashion texts in other countries. Nevertheless, it can be a great topic of exploration for a new capstone.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

(Kontzias,2001)

(Kontzias,2001)



Appendix 3



Appendix 4

[Light affect brand](#)





Appendix 5

[Teryan Cultural Centre](#)



