

'EXPLORING FASHION SEMIOTICS: COMMUNICATING MEANINGS IN FASHION IN DRESS LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: *Dress fashion may be treated as being in some way analogous to spoken or written language. When Eco claimed to speak through clothes, he presumably meant that he was using clothes as spoken words. Dress transmits a variety of cultural meanings. Furthermore, dresses are not simply functional; they 'signify' something as Eco would have said. Some appearances due to their complexity, aesthetic appeal, novelty with the social context or the person or, unfamiliar nature, become very salient to perceivers. Those appearances may attract the perceiver's attention, appeal to his or her sensibilities, excite or fascinate, interest or even tantalize, perplex or even confuse. Whether the perceiver finds the appearance visually appealing, he or she is aroused to interpret and to understand. The underlying objective of this literature review was to investigate what kinds of semiotics theories have been employed in use of evaluating meanings of fashion of dress. This paper discusses in detail theories available to interpret data in order to discover communicating meanings through fashion in dress. Some of the main theories in communication are identified as semiotics (sign theory), cultural theories of social codes, social cognition, consumer theory, and Marxist theory. Finally, the available method for interpreting data is identified as semiotics which along with its sub-theories are discussed.*

Key Words: Fashion, Semiotics, Royal Fashion, Pragmatics, Sign language

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion in dress is a cultural phenomenon and it makes statements. Before it makes statements, it should have been recorded as a symbol or a sign in the particular culture. Signs are human constructions and they make communication possible (Keiser 1998). Wearing certain clothes and engaging in various activities are part of this vital process which gives meaning to objects. recent years there has been researching on fashion and dress as a principal site of social communication by Semiologists and scholars in the field of cultural studies. In their work, the dress is considered to be a high commodity enmeshed in multiple webs of meaning and value. They raised ideas with the relationship between dress and society, theories of semiotics and dress and consumer culture. Based on the scholarly attempts of Roland Barthes, Malcolm Bernard, Susan B. Kaiser, Alison Lurie, Elizabeth Rouse, and others, It is intended to bring to the discussion cultural insights of dress/headaddress/jewelry from the interlinked fields of culture and history.

1.1 Why people make certain choices of dress?

Clothes permit the wearer to play with his or her identity. They are often used to define, to present, to deceive, to reveal and conceal. The dressing is very much a creative act. A Swiss linguist and father of semiology Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) studied human language from two directions, that of langue and parole (Gottdiener 1995.). Langue is the social institution, independent of the individual; it is a normative reserve from which the individual draws their parole, a virtual system that is actualized only in an actualized manifestation of the function of langue. Roland Barthes a French semiotician proposes to langue as the dress. Further, he proposes parole, is getting dressed or dressing means the personal mode which the wearer adopts in the dress that is proposed to them by their social group (Barthes, 2006). Dresses are often considered extensions of

the people who wear them. It is understood to have semiotic value in the expression of both the fragility and the potency of social statuses and socio-political relations. It is critical in the representation and reproduction of society and forms a crucial link between social groups across space and time. Svendsen Lars (2009) raised points on dress communication. According to him, 'Symbols are central to all shaping of identity, whether it be a crucifix, a safety pin that pierces the skin or a national costume. These symbols have to mean something about the person wearing the symbol.'

1.2 Theories and concepts available to address the topic: the concept of communicating meanings: sign

The Swiss Linguist and father of semiology Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) identified that signs are used for communication. He thought so because signs are intentional. As semiologist, Umberto Eco remarks, according to Saussure, signs "express" ideas. Ideas must be the mental event that concerns a human mind. Thus the sign is simply regarded as a communicative device taking place between the two human beings intentionally aiming to communicate or to express something. (Gottdiener 1995) The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce developed an approach to the study of signs which he called Semiotics. Unlike Saussure, however, Peirce conceived of the sign as a three-part relation, a vehicle that conveys an idea to the mind, which he called the *representamen*; another idea that interprets the sign, while he called the *interpretant*, and an object for which the sign stands. He (Gottdiener 1995) described sign as his own words

'A sign stands for something to the idea which it produces or modifies: or it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its object; that for which it conveys its meaning and the idea to which it gives rise, its *interpretant*.'

The sign is a unity of what is represented (the object) how it represented (the *representamen*) and how it is interpreted (the *interpretant*). For a unity as a sign, all three elements are essential. The interaction between the *representamen* object and the *interpretant* are referred to by Peirce as *semiosis*, alternatively (*semiosis*) is a good explanation of how the model works. The three elements make up a sign, function as a label on an opaque box that contains an object. At first, the mere fact that there is a box with a label on it suggests that it contains something, and then when we read the label discover what that something is. The process of *semiosis* or decoding the sign is as follows: the first thing that is noticed (the *representamen*) is the box and label; this prompts the realization as well as the knowledge of what the box contains which is provided by the *interpretant*. Reading the label is actually just a metaphor for the process of decoding the sign. The important point to be aware of here is that the object of a sign is always hidden. We cannot actually open the box and inspect it directly. The reason for this is simple.

It is important to understand the aspect of the distinction manifested by Peirce and Saussure in their respective classification of signs. For Saussure there is only one sign, the unity of the signifier and the signified. Saussure's sign is part of a system of communication and is motivated (intentional) even if it is arbitrarily fixed by social convention. Peirce, in contrast, considered nine aspects of the sign. Of those, he formed three forms of the signs which have become most important. The three forms are a symbol, an icon, and an index. A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders

it a sign if there was no interpreting. Peirce also considered that the symbol is conventional and regulated by culture, it is a sign by virtue of some law or rule.

French semiologist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) shows the sign can itself become a signifier of another sign, a connotation or second order sign which signifies a cultural value, such as status. In this case, the sign becomes a sign "vehicle" for connotative aspects of the culture, such as the status structure of the society. He shows as an example the word "axe" denoted for chopping wood. The possession of an "axe" in some cultures, however, connotes a high social status. Hence the meaning of objects involves higher order levels of connotation that are linked in more substantive ways to cultural processes rather than merely through a mechanism of denotation implied by Saussure. (Gottdiener 1995) Barthes further pointed out that any social object can become the sign of its own function. And all social objects and actions have a communication aspect too. (Shukla 1994) According to Barthes sign is a system. The systems of signs articulate with cultural values or ideology as connotative codes. These produce wider structures of meaning than was assumed by Saussure. Signs circulate in advanced societies between the levels of lived experience. The creation of signs through everyday life uses values. Also, signs are expropriated by the hierarchal systems of power, including their use for exchange value in the marketing of commodities.

1.2 The language of clothes: clothes as signs

Roland Barthes has made what is perhaps the most theoretical ambitions attempt to consider clothes as a kind of language. His book on the fashion system defines it as the totality of the social relations and activities that are necessary for fashion to exist. He distinguishes initially between three aspects of clothing; the real garment, the represented garment, and the used garment. These are three forms of existence applied to the garment on its path through the fashion system. The real garment is the actual physical garment that is produced, the represented garment is that which is displayed in fashion magazines and advertising, and the used garment is what is bought and worn. With this category, Barthes is interested in the represented garment, because that is what we are presented with as consumers. He said that to be fashionable, has nothing to do with the material characteristics of clothes, but is a product of the fashion language. To understand fashion it is, therefore, necessary to understand the language that constitutes it as fashion. Barthes states his wish to study 'written garments' clothes, without any practical function, as described in fashion magazines because only the 'meaning' is left when the function is removed. (Barthes 1983)

1.3 Cultural theories that interpret fashion of dress as the sign

1.3.1 Social codes

Culture provides the distinguishing concepts of clarity to dress and details of its associated rules. The code is the concept known as rules of association or underlying patterns provided by culture. Codes help to form an understanding of the message. Furthermore, it can be considered as a set of rules or an interpretative device known to both the transmitter and receiver, which assigns a certain meaning or content to a certain sign. (Shukla 1994) Every culture has its own tools or norms which guide people on how to be groomed or get dressed in a particular way. It is also like a protocol or etiquette for dressing. Codes were derived as protocols from non-material cultural elements. Besides, codes also provide certain principles to dress according to social convention. Codes are social conventions and each community shares the same meaning. (Rouse 1993)

1.3.2 Social cognition

Culture influences people in their thinking pattern and identification by their appearance. These patterns could be identified as patterns of the structures of social cognition. (Keiser 1998) According to Keiser's opinion, these cognitive structures also allow receivers to organize their thoughts and to simplify their perceptions, so they do not have to consciously struggle for interpretation each time a person is observed. Cognitive structures provide an easy sense of order and predictability for the purpose of clarifies of expectations and also explaining behaviors related to senders. (Keiser 1998) He also stated that 'moreover fashion and social change, as well as the sender's creativity in appearance management, lead to a variety of appearances for which perceivers may not have already formulated a cognitive structure'.

1.3.4 Consumer theory

Clothes or dresses can be considered not only forms of communication at the discretion of senders but also as commodities or consumer products that are produced within a specific territory. Consumer objects have no inherited meanings at all; rather their meanings are formed in their production and the way they are used. (Keiser 1998) Societies use the power of the dress code to make distinctions between men and women, class or caste differences. These distinctions are formalized as sumptuary laws (Gottdiener 1995).

1.3.3 Marxist theory

Fashion in dress signifies the difference between classes in society. According to Marx's theory, it is unlikely that there has ever been a society that has not, at least potentially, been a society which had fashion. This is because, for Marx, 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' (Marx & Engles 1992). According to this statement, all societies have always consisted of different classes. All must, therefore, have been potentially fashionable societies, societies which used these changes in clothing or dresses to constitute and communicated class identities. Marxists claim that fashion and dress are simply the ways in which class identity is expressed or reflected; that a person is first a member of a social class and then communicated that membership through fashion and dress.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study follows a systematic literature review process that consists of three key phases which introduced by Nazru (2013): planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the review. The study started with the selected 15 scholarly work especially books using an inclusion and exclusion criteria. Qualitative data were extracted from the selected literature following a data extraction strategy. The extracted data were synthesized to formulate the stated research questions to obtain the review goals.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Available methods and sub-theories for analyzing data: semiotics

Semiotics is a powerful tool that can be used to understand meanings in communication. It is a philosophy, a body of theory and an assortment of methods that deals with the study of signs and how they work. (Sebeok 1986) The fundamental semiotic concept is the sign anything that stands or can be taken to stand, for something else. All aspects of dress and modes of self-presentation are

potential signs. Semiotic analysis is a significant process which belongs to sender and receiver of signs as well as the message, the channel used and the style of its communication. It is important to stress that the meaning of the sign is not intrinsically linked to the signs themselves, but rather that signs acquire their meaning through a process of interpretation. The meanings associated with signs are in general and appearances in particular, tend to be tentative or subject to change. In the social context, a sign begins to hold some associations to make sense to the people.

3.2 Signifier and Signified

Peirce stated that an individual sign is a system composed of multiple parts: an expression, concept or object, which is commonly called the signifier. (Peirce 1958) According to Saussure, a sign consists of two separate components: a signifier and a signified. Signifier means the physical form as perceived by the senses and the signified means the mental concept of what it refers to. The sign, for Saussure, is a bifacial unity of signifier and signified. Unity is affected by culture. That is the assignment of some signifier, such as the word 'chair', to some signified, what a particular community of users understands to mean a chair, occurs by cultural prescription (Gottdiener 1995). The signifier is the vehicle through which a sign conveys its message. Clothes, accessories, hairstyles and other grooming styles can be conceptualized as vehicles that have the potential for carrying a message. Once the message becomes time-worn, irrelevant, or unexciting, then the vehicles may cease to convey the message in question. This point raises some critical questions if we desire to compare appearance messages to words. It is important to think thoroughly why some ordinary words such as a dog, cat continue to hold their meanings after hundreds of years of usage, whereas other words seem to be more time-bound. In this argument, it is understood that the signifiers are extremely complex because of the potential for mixing and matching, fashion change, and other characteristics related to the visual realm. Whereas the signifier is the medium that carries the message and the signified is the actual content of the message. A signifier may be the complete appearance as well as a particular unit or an element of that appearance. In fact, people normally see the person's appearance entirely, so it is important to recognize that signifiers may be complete appearance or images. The signifier is a tangible, concrete, visual and physical artifact or image through which meaning is conveyed. The signified, on the other hand, is more abstract and intangible; it is the concept or idea to which a signifier refers. It is important to think how these two concepts connect and conceive the appearance message by using signs. The appearance sign is the union of the signifier and the signified: it is similar to a composite of a tangible artifact (part) or an image (whole) and intangible idea or message. Therefore the appearance sign becomes at once concrete (tangible) and abstract (intangible) (Keiser 1998). The relationship that connects signifier to signified is critical, for it provides a bridge between the object and whatever meanings assigned to it.

3.3 Paradigm of Signs: Syntagmatic Relation and Paradigmatic Relation

According to semiotics, meaning can be created by the relation of all kinds of objects to each other and are not restricted to social interaction within a speech community. There are two ways in which a sign may differ from another sign. Both of these are based on the operation of differences between cultural units. (Gottdiener,1995) Furthermore, this definition can be identified in another way as elements in a language. Syntagmatic relations or differences are the permissible ways in which elements succeed each other or combine together in a chain of discourse. This can be considered as the difference between things that may come before and after one another. The syntagmatic difference is to do with the signifying sequences or wholes that can be constructed using signs. This syntagmatic relation is regulated by the laws of culture involving appropriate modes of appearance.

The relation between the elements in a *syntagm* is 'this and this and this'. These contiguous items are also regulated by the society's dress code and constitute the syntagmatic axis. This relation can be identified as in the dressing system which is the *syntagm* consisting of the juxtaposition in the same type of dress of different elements. As an example, a skirt can be worn with a blouse or a jacket. People can violate the dictates of fashion by inappropriately mixing different combinations of clothing or adornments. However, it is visible that the historical dress paradigm was built upon on the paradigmatic relation rather than the syntagmatic relations. According to the paradigmatic relation functionally, similar objects can be classified theoretically. For instance, crown, headdress hair band etc. Paradigmatic structures facilitate the associative and connotative use of terms: they assume a code or coding. A crown is understood by virtue of its relation and opposition to turbans, headdresses, hair band. The difference can be understood by the different styles of it, from which one must be chosen to make the outfit. It is also the difference between the different styles of headdresses, either peaked or notched. The relationship between elements in a paradigm is 'this or this or this' also it runs horizontally. Paradigmatic relations are those which belong to the same associative set by virtue of the function they share. Shukla says, "The paradigmatic order is a set of pieces; parts or details which cannot be worn at the same time on the same part of the body, and where the variation corresponds to a change in the meaning of the clothing: toque- hood-bonnet, etc' (Shukla1994).Semiology may be thought of as a theory of contexts, a theory which describes how the contexts in which items of clothing exist actually work. *Syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* relations, then, are the contexts in which things exist and from which their meanings derive. It is argued here that *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* relations can explain all contexts that a garment, an ensemble or an entire King's dress collection may inhabit. This involves the claim that, no matter what the larger context that was suggested as the real source of meaning, that context would have to be describable in terms either of syntagmatic or paradigmatic difference. That is whatever larger context would have to be either *syntagmatically* or *paradigmatically* related to the element that was being discussed.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on a systematic literature review, the paper not only depicts the status of semiotics in dress and fashion research. In this paper theoretical findings in relation to the communicating meanings in fashion in dress were discussed. Meaning of culture and tradition communicating meanings in dress and concept of semiotics were discussed. Finally, methods which are available for analyzing study data were discussed in detail.

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