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Fusion Fashion

Culture beyond Orientalism
and Occidentalism



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Oriental goods and alterity

Fashion as a dynamic consists predominantly of change and the emergence of novelties. The Cabinet des Modes declares this in form of a motto on each title page: „L'ennui nacquit un jour de l'uniformité“. In 1789, they compare English fashion to French fashion. English fashions never change – the French magazine declares! – because the English look for perfection: „pour varier, il faudroit mille essais, les essais ne peuvent pas avoir la perfection, et ils y renoncent“. The French, in contrast, would be extremely bored by perfection, so their fashions change all the time ...¹ Fashion's purpose, besides the apparent economic one, is to offer new perceptions and to engender fantasies (an aesthetic and a psychological argument).

Within this conceptual frame, oriental elements served, since the crusades, as a driving force behind what was to become Western fashion. Oriental luxury goods could easily fill the need for alterity and social distinction. They were, from the very beginning, seen as luxurious because they were hard to obtain, expensive and rare. They were endowed with qualities like sensuality, fairytale fantasy, passion and civilization, as well as with the opposite: wildness, perversion and excess. The exotic was feared and desired at the same time and soon incarnated the fantastic otherness *par excellence*, the object of desire very distant from contemporary familiar life. And yet, quickly incorporated, it could rapidly become part of the familiar and thus be devoid of its menacing aspects.² However, the oriental textiles as carrier of new knowledge about technologies of production and fibres also meant a challenge to Western Europe. In the 16th century Europeans started to imitate and to copy the quality of the imported textiles and rapidly became serious competitors for their Eastern partners in the trade of luxury goods.³ The ambivalence between admiration and competition, and even fear, is deeply engrained in the Western adoption of the exotic. Against all probability, exotic objects have – more or less – kept these attributions until today, although the knowledge about them has increased: the knowledge about their material features, about the regions from which they

1 Cabinet 1789, 1. mars, p. 76.

2 In a political context, it could be used for specific purposes, as Ina McCabe (2008) has demonstrated.

3 Walter B. Denny: Oriental carpets and Textiles in Venice. In: Venice and the Islamic World 828-1797. The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York and London 2007, p. 174-191, p. 183.

come, about how they are produced (and later imitated), as well as about the ways the ideas they embody are constructed as images and clichés in order to serve different power politics. Nevertheless, their ‘fantastic’ image remains. From an individual psychological perspective one could call that process repression. We know (intellectually) how things work, but we don’t want to realize it. And this is exactly why things can retain their power and become the agent of individual behaviour as well as of cultural processes. Sigmund Freud’s linkage of psychoanalysis with culture as well as Carl Gustav Jung’s theory of the archetypes laid some of the foundations for modern ethnopsychology discussing what Mario Erdheim calls the “social production of the unconscious”⁴. It has, however, as far as we know, not yet been applied to the analysis of Orientalism/exoticism with regard to dress and fashion.

Oriental sartorial practices and the West

We claim that the specific sartorial practices of Orientalism differ from other forms of Orientalism, therefore their analysis must be different. In our understanding, textile artefacts and fashion items count among the most essential objects of material culture. These artefacts reveal and visualize a specific cultural knowledge, including technologies. They serve not only as display for prestige and luxury, but their sheer materiality and contact with the body invite a specific sensual confrontation with otherness. In this book, we want to follow what Serge Gruzinski has once called “the track of sartorial artefacts”⁵. We argue that sartorial practices submerge fundamental premises of traditional conceptions of Orientalism equating - for example - the representation and the appropriation of oriental objects with hegemony, or conflating “distance” with otherness, proximity with the self. Further, we put forward the argument that the contact of “East and West” via fashion requires one to redefine boundaries between the other and the self, between strangeness and familiarity. And, coming back to the argument that the desire for alterity as well as for difference and distinction drives fashion, we also have to ask whether alterity is inevitably linked to hegemony and power.

This perspective may invite reconsideration of Edward Said’s argument of “Orientalism” as a pure social construction because it does not refer to the empirical material conditions of Orientalism. If new postcolonial studies rightly require that the other be allowed to speak ⁶ we have to ask who are in fact the

4 Mario Erdheim: *Die gesellschaftliche Produktion von Unbewußtheit*. Eine Einführung in den ethnopsychologischen Prozeß, Frankfurt 1982.

5 Serge Gruzinski: *La pensée métisse*. Paris 1999.\$

6 Sebastian Conrad / Shalini Randeria: *Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt*. In: Conrad/Randeria (Hg.): *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt/Main 2001, p. 9-49, p. 12-13.

others in fashion, who the „Orientals“ and who their European counterparts? Spivak's term “representation” aids us in mastering the ambivalence in fashion practices and discourses: on one hand representation means performance, on the other it inherently claims to replace the other.⁷ In fashion, both dualistic practices are perfectly linked because with the body they involve all senses of the actors. Thus, it is another way to live and to experience difference and the other, with different meanings and goals depending on each particular historical constellation. This connection could help to explain why in times when, during the 18th century, the Turks of the Ottoman empire were attacking Western European powers, Europeans were so fond of Turkish dress and fabrics.

At least, we should identify and create a clear distinction between the different historical actors and their practices. In other words, what does oriental fashion mean to the European bourgeois lady wearing a Turkish style head scarf or coat? What effects did Poiret's presentation of oriental haute couture have during his visit to the United States in the beginning of the 20th century for Orientalism as discourse and practice? Does the incorporation of oriental design into European fashion help to forge European identity via dress?

The Book

Older studies deal mostly with the contrast between Orientalism and Western fashion cultures (e.g. Richard Martin and Harold Koda 1994; Steele/ Major 1999). More recent studies on Orientalism focus either on special cultures or societies (Tarlo 2010), on particular historical periods (McCabe 2008) or on theoretical questions (race and Orientalism, e.g. Kondo 1997). Fashion is often not the main topic, but only a means to illustrate processes of orientalization (Berg 2005; Berg 2008, Riello 2009 a, Riello 2009 b).

In contrast, the focus of this book is only in part the history of Orientalism. Its main objective is to present tendencies which can be labeled “entangled fashion” in analogy to the concept of “entangled fashion”, or “fusion fashion”. Fashion can no longer be regarded as a modern phenomenon only to be found in the West. Fashion theory has to reconsider the distribution of signs and values within the globalized consumer culture and the politics of their exchange. We have to avoid substituting one paradigm for another as, for example, turning the Euro-centric perspective into the paradigm of an Asian-Euro-centric view.

7 For Gayatri Spivak: Can the subaltern speak. in: Cary Nelson/Lawrence Grossberg (ed.) *Marxisme and the interpretation of culture*. London 1988, p.271- 313, p.275 quote after Conrad/Randieria (ed.), op.cit., p. 23. Spivak's definition of representation: “Two senses of representation are run together: representation as “speaking for”, as in politics, and representation as “re-presentation, as in art or philosophy.

The history of fashion has begun to be re-written in a global perspective.⁸ We hope to contribute to that new concept of fashion beyond the traditional Western concept.

Orientalism as an important part of Euro-centric perspectives on culture and history implicitly suggests that global history is organized around *Western* history. On the other hand it presupposes the Western modernization process to be a generalized or generalizable schema.⁹

With the selected examples of orientalizing sartorial practices, we hope to contribute to the re-writing of the history of *material* culture in another than the “orientalised and Euro-centered” perspectives and to discover the different voices of a multiple other: we suggest thinking of it in terms of “entangled history”.¹⁰ How does fashion as a *concept* work, and how does it relate to “Orientalism”? For this reason we think it necessary to widen and deepen the history of fashion by including the role of fashion magazines, fashion photography, movies and so on. It is also necessary to systematically analyze the signification of subcultures for the fashion system and to reconsider the essential part of global trade in a historical perspective.

The focus of “Fusion Fashion” is therefore on Orientalism as a sartorial practice, which has to be differentiated from the common concepts of Orientalism in terms of organization, constitution and reception. The book offers historic as well as systematic perspectives. On the one hand, it compares the beginnings of orientalizing practices in fashion since the Renaissance and discusses the contribution of early fashion magazines to the discourse of Orientalism. On the other hand, it highlights current tendencies of so called “Orientalism”, “self-Orientalism”, “Occidentalism” in a globalized world. The book covers two time periods: Orientalized fashion practices from the 16th to the beginning of the 20th century, with an emphasis on European „oriental“ practices, and the period beginning in the 1990s up to the present day, with an emphasis on non-Western sartorial practices.

8 See, among others: Marie Leshkovich, Sandra Niessen, Carla Jones: *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*. Oxford: Berg 2003, Giorgio Riello, Peter McNeill (eds.): *The Fashion History Reader. Global Perspectives*, London, New York 2010; Kristin Knox: *Culture to Catwalk. How World Cultures influence Fashion*, London 2011; Jan Brand, José Teunissen (eds.): *Global Fashion - Local Tradition. On the Globalization of Fashion*, Arnhem: Terra 2005; Gertrud Lehnert: *Karneval der Stile / Über "Global Fashion - Local Tradition. On the Globalization of Fashion"* in: *Texte zur Kunst* 78, Juni 2010, 162-165.

9 For a global history see Jürgen Osterhammel: *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, München 2010 (including a critical epilogue on Eurocentric Orientalism); Jürgen Osterhammel: *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, München 2011.

10 For a good definition of entangled history see Conrad, Sebastian/Randeria, Shalini (ed.): *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt/Main, 2001, p.17

Theoretical premises

The following assumptions outline the objectives of this book:

Fashion is used as a means for cultural inclusion and exclusion. Western fashion has long claimed an aesthetic, technical as well as moral/ethical superiority over the non-western sartorial otherness.

European fashion, however, has always adopted 'oriental' practices yet in different ways and with different goals. Moreover, the development of European fashion is substantially due to the cultural transfer of techniques, materials, tastes and aesthetics.

Thus, fashion contributes to specific constructions of Orientalism through the sensual and ambivalent character of its materiality and the ambiguity of consumption practices.

A characteristic feature of Orientalism as a sartorial practice is to be found in the close link between fashion, politics and economy. These spheres have to be understood as programmatic spaces of representation and thus facilitate strategies of cultural identity formation.

On the other hand, Western fashion has become very influential in non-Western societies in the course of colonialism and globalization. The process of appropriation of Western fashion can be described with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of „mimicry“ or, as Michael Taussig proclaims, as „a mimetic exchange with the world“¹¹ and hence as an active and sensual incorporation of the Other.

Yet, current processes of 'Re-Orientalizing the Orient' and the 'Return of the Local' cannot be reduced to a mere response to the hegemony of Western fashion. Beyond „re-ethnicization“ or „folklorization“, they are new cultural strategies within the post-colonial space, which point to the complex positioning of the cultural and social self within the global fashion system. But can Bhabha's concept of "third space" be usefully employed in the analysis of fashion as a global phenomenon?

Terminology

"Fusion Culture", in our understanding, designates multiple ways of transnational contacts and exchange, narrations, of making selections from foreign cultures, of fragmenting, of incorporating - or rejecting - the "other", of

11 Homi Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, London, New York 1993 ; Michael Taussig: *Mimesis and Alterity: A particular history of the senses*, New York, London: Routledge 1993.

merging and thus changing certain aspects of different cultures – an open process without ever coming to an end. Fusion Culture is comparable to Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space", but "fusion culture" seemed more appropriate with regard to fashion. We do, however, continue to use the term "oriental" as a working term in a double sense as:

1. related to the artefacts originating in the region the Enlightenment defined as "Orient": Asian and Arabian cultures and Persia: more or less everything "east of Europe", as says the *Encyclopédie*. Oriental material culture was exported to the West and integrated into and incorporated in European consumption practices.
2. Orientalism is employed as a discursive element as introduced by Edward Said, meaning the construction of oriental otherness by colonial practices and knowledge. However, our aim is to question Said's concepts as well as the theoretical amendments and corrections which were added later by post-colonial studies and the new consumption studies.

The various chapters discuss traditional concepts of Orientalism in different historical periods and explore their impact on the European societies as well as on fashion in general within a global framework. They provide examples of the reinforcement of European identity by the means of moral exclusion of the other's body and taste and by the means of distance between centre and periphery in Renaissance costume books (Mentges), present fashion magazines as a place to imagine and to represent the variety of European selves and European differences (Lehnert). Contemporary phenomena are discussed: the global trend and national model of Japanese Lolita (Kawamura) and the revival of old dress traditions like the kimonos in Japan (Tovar). Other articles show the impact of consumer culture on Islamic fashion in Egypt (Abaza) or the role and influence of Bollywood movies on the creation of fusion fashion in India and at the same time reinforcement of an Indian identity (Devoucoux). Finally, Buyun Shen argues that fashion is no modern Western phenomenon, but that even in ancient cultures (like in Chinese Tang Dynasty – 7th to 10th century a. C.) one can find phenomena very closely related to the modern concept of fashion as self-fashioning. Thus she refutes the traditional conviction that Chinese traditional dress was mainly composed of ritual garments. For modern times, the contribution of Shukla conveys how traditional sartorial dress practices in India are based on the narrow exchange between producer, trade and consumer respecting changes of taste and new influences as well.

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