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9 Style, Sense and Senses: The Iconic and Transcultural Language of Italian Fashion

A dress tells more than a thousand words.

9.1 Centre versus Periphery

If we start—as the title of this book *Diversity and Otherness: Transcultural Insights into Norms, Practices, Negotiations* suggests—from the axiom that *Diversity* and *Otherness* have become more and more visible in our life-worlds around the globe nowadays and that—in reaction to this—societies tend to control (by *Norms*), regulate (by *Practices*) and find their cultural identity (by *Negotiations*) within this multitude of otherness in order to express their rootedness as well as their transculturality, then the iconic language of Italian fashion seems to combine exactly these parameters. Converting it into an object of research, the topic of the Italian fashion system and history has, indeed, the potential to essentially show that the (philosophical and spiritual) sense and the (physical and body-related) senses of fashion (in the plural) mark a most appropriate, suitable and practical approach for looking at socio-political and artistic ways of negotiating between individuals and their society as well as of promoting emancipatory social discourses worldwide.

In this first section "Centre versus Periphery" (9.1), I will try to introduce to this topic, by taking a look at the borders that contour the world of fashion in the broader sense. In the section "Transcultural Theory and the Italian Habitus" (9.2), we will examine more closely the Italian blueprint of the history of fashion, before giving proof of our thesis with the help of a concrete case-study in section 9.3 "Karl Lagerfeld: 90 Years of Fendi—90 Years of Fairy Tales (2016)". To conclude, the section "Transmedia Content and Our Nomadic Lifestyle in Postmodern Times" (9.4) will fine-tune the transmedia and nomadic factors that generate transculturality in the fashion system, before the section "Fashion as an Aesthetic and Didactic Tool" (9.5) wraps up our reflections, focusing on the practical use of why fashion matters both, in the arts and in culture, as well as in the classroom.

Now, as far as methodological approaches are concerned, in the following I will mainly contextualize my source material with theoretical reflections connected to the *Iconic Turn* (Maar & Burda, 2004) and the notion of *transculturality,* as coined by Wolfgang Welsch (cf. Welsch, 1999). As far as the research within the field of Fashion Studies itself is concerned, I am interested in further developing the application of transcultural parameters to discourses of clothing and apparel that are visible in our daily life practices, after having noticed during the making of a book about Italian fashion released in 2016 (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016) that the—for me,

most obvious—relation between fashion and transculturality had yet to be analysed systematically. With increasing industrial relevance since the turn of the century, the power of fashion has, however, not gone completely unnoticed on the level of research. Innovative fashion theorists range from the German cultural philosopher Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and his classic title *Philosophie der Mode* (Simmel, 1905), which was originally written in German and which defines fashion as a form of social relationship, to the French sociologist Frédéric Godart, who first published his study *Sociologie de la mode* (Godart, 2012) in French and in 2012 also in English, analysing fashion as an ever-changing but principally structured entity throughout history, focusing mainly on its European, i.e. French and Italian, roots although within a global context. Yet, among many others, it was Roland Barthes's *Système de la mode* that in 1967 influenced fashion theory most widely by pinpointing the semiotic power of clothing, the cultural importance of Coco Chanel, and the Hippy style in Morocco, while enhancing also the figure of the dandy or the language of colours and jewellery, among others. Immediately, already in the very year of its first publication (in 1967), Barthes's key work was translated into English under the title *The Fashion System* (Barthes, 1967). His main socio-aesthetic ideas are highlighted further by the American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906–1998) who, only one year later, in the revolutionary year of 1968, published a volume entitled *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, which was followed in 1978 by his *Ways of World Making*. Through Goodman's theoretical lens, we understand that what Barthes identified as a *Fashion System* was not only a "language" but also a way of creating new realities, or, as Goodman puts it, a—transcultural, transmediatic and so, nomadic—*World Making* of its own. It was only in 2019, though, that two university scholars working in Austria edited an anthology in German dealing expressively with fashion as a transcultural phenomenon between globalization and regionalism, offering case studies taken from Austrian, Romanian, Turkish, Iranian and African fashion, among other approaches (Schrödl & Allerstorfer, 2019). This edition certainly helps to fill the aforementioned research gap and to balance the pair of opposites "centre" versus "periphery" within the debates of Border Region Studies or Transcultural and Global Studies.

In this essay, I myself intend to investigate the modes of cultural transfer within the world of contemporary fashion by focusing on the presumably minority case study of Italy (whilst also paying close regard to France). Often, Italian fashion, in fact, appears to be second-ranked in regard to France even after WW II—a standard categorization that Carlo Maria Belfanti openly criticizes and rebuts in his cultural outline of the image historically associated with the label Made in Italy (Belfanti, 2019, pp. 198–199). By using the term *fashion*, I intend to include all aspects of how we dress, cover and expose nudity, and/or use cloth to protect it, in order to express ourselves physically, to reflect our inner attitudes and mind-sets, and, finally, to create our surroundings, in real life as well as in the fictitious sphere of literature and the arts. As I have tried to stress in my book *Moda Made in Italy* about Italian fashion (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016), which focusses on the transcultural significance of

fashion's semiotic language and its connection to social habits in Italophone areas, following Roland Barthes's crucial analysis in his *Système de la mode*, this definition applies to all individuals and citizens of contemporary societies beyond all distinctions of race, class and gender. Fashion per se, thus, constitutes a category which has been transculturally coded throughout history (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, pp. 20, 29–30). "Fashion", in this sense, is far from being applicable only to a presumable élite or upper class, but embraces both *haute couture* (i.e. handcraft and true art parameters), as presented by stylized models during a fashion show (and which is fabricated for a very restricted group of buyers and customers), and *prêt-à-porter,* as is offered by fashion chain stores or as is designed for special needs (e.g. sportswear, kids and baby-clothing, business looks, etc.). Fashion actually concerns, in a transversal way, everyone, even if this might be quite invisible, unconscious, perceived as remote controlled or not be obvious on first sight. As Italy's most prominent and acknowledged contemporary female writer, Dacia Maraini (b. 1936), metaphorically states in an interview: "Fashion is the foam of the wave" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, pp. 209–211),[151] meaning that fashion shows unconscious or subcultural currents of humankind as well as paradigmatic underground flows within specific sectors of any society. Fashion includes not only "superficial and ephemeral" flows and trends, but also more "profound" mainstreams that build up connections either with particular areas (thus being more "local"), or with general socio-cultural tendencies (thus being more "universal and globalized"), to quote Maraini (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 210–211). It is exactly between the poles of a "universal and globalized" fashion, on the one hand, and a more "locally rooted" tradition of how to dress, on the other hand (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 211),[152] that spatial concepts and expressive meanings are generated in fashion norms, practices and negotiations. In its continuously swinging back and forth between central and peripheral profoundness, Maraini finally concludes that—in the long run—"it's the universal fashion that wins and prevails" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 211).[153]

Within this framework, the aim of my discussion is to give evidence of the *glocal* (according to the sociologist Roland Robertson (1992), as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 45) and transcultural lifestyle that fashion implies. In this context, it is suitable to pinpoint at first the history of how body language has been translated into postmodern and global public life (cf. section 9.2 "Transcultural Theory and the Italian Habitus")—i.e. from street-wear to high fashion, and from past to

151 "La moda è la schiuma dell'onda" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, pp. 209–210; the translation in English is mine). N.B.: All English translations of the quotations that were taken from this source are mine.

152 Maraini uses, in Italian, the terms of "una moda … universale e globalizzata" versus "una moda legata al territorio" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 211).

153 "… la moda universale è quella che vince e prevale" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 211).

present—throughout Italian, European, and "western" history worldwide, thus creating significant communication tools, a multitude of styles, and empirically evident, nonverbal languages (in the plural) from today's perspective. I will mainly argue that fashion is—and potentially, always has been—heterogenous, i.e. fashion has always been based on openness, on a multitude of looks and a variety of styles, even if it is only in the third millennium that this might have become completely clear and undeniable. In fact, fashion has always been able to deconstruct and make uniform individuals and societies at the same time. Just think of the self-mocking, subversive, transgressive and polyphonic, and yet coherent, implications of the Sicilian brand Dolce & Gabbana, which even if pinpointing the most banal Italian stereotypes, paradoxically aims at a *Transcultural Turn* (cf. Bond & Rapson, 2014). Seen from the side of a critical perceiver, this target, for instance, clearly appears in the trailer for the Dolce & Gabbana collection, which carries the hybrid and bilingual title *Italia is Love* (Meet the style Hello, 2018), and which was designed for the 2016 summer season, introducing, among other motifs, seductive young women, well-dressed gentlemen and stylish ladies of all skin colours, tough Latin lovers, policemen, a priest, normal people and two nuns on the set. It uses shrill colours, cliché-ridden symbols and requisites, launching tourist souvenirs, pizza and coffee, all with the intention of creating a supposed "typical" Italian ambience, architecture, and location on the level of marketing—only to be stripped down, in the end, by its own hyperbolic manner. Many capabilities and examples of this overloaded, pseudo-aggressive marketing strategy may be found, not only in the case of this exemplary clip by Dolce & Gabbana, but also on many advertisements in print media, on huge posters (e.g. at the airport of Linate in Milan) or on photographs combined with the trailers of a brand-new fashion collection, posted on YouTube, social media or the company's website. In the case of Dolce & Gabbana, single icons and symbols of these campaigns—be it a kiss-mouth, a handbag, a red rose or just a coffee maker—are directly woven into the tissue or printed on the cloth, thus dominating also the fashion looks themselves.

So, through the veil of irony, a complex and interdisciplinary field of collective memory of the past (here, taken from the traditional Sicilian realm of the imagination) connects itself with representations of a present located between and beyond borders, that deal with global connections in a late capitalist, postmodern and neoliberal world order (and a world order which challenges and questions, indirectly, consumerism, sheer entertainment, or dystopian attitudes). Therefore, often the advertising techniques of Dolce & Gabbana try to generate a decentralized meta-level of a desirable, dynamic, carefree Mediterranean lifestyle in a real-life, cross-media 3D-format. They serialize and set in parallel promotion trailers of specific collections with the help of live fashion shows in Europe and overseas, they perform in television, print media and social media, all at the same time, while—as it happened in the case of *Italia is Love*—even the models are told to take selfies on the runway or behind the scenes, sending Tweets to themselves from the catwalk or from backstage to the audience, their communities and friends, releasing interviews to journalists,

bloggers and influencers, etc. At the same time, though, this playful, kaleidoscopic and picaresque surface-experience is put into question, as if the viewer of this variegated, supercharged multichannel show is forced to look for deeper and more profound meanings himself, after having experienced the designer's joyful creativity or having attended a live fashion performance.

Thus, the Dolce & Gabbana trailer, semi-seriously entitled *Italia is Love*, perfectly demonstrates how to bombard the audience with rapid sound effects, quickly changing and vivid colours, and amusing short comedy sketches all shuffled together, while at the same time the presentation of dresses, clothes and accessories are, again, excessively associated with stereotypes and local symbols, in order to deconstruct the geopolitical and ethnic order of cultural areas through irony, hyperboles and transcultural twists. While the latter are presented in such an exaggerated way that the patience and perception of the watching audience are put to the test, the individual observer will ask himself why the video has been cut in such rapidity and why it is showing such an abundance of apparently stylistic perfection in this relatively short clip. In the end, there remain only two options: simply to reject the video, by classifying it as ethno-kitsch or similar, or, for the more self-reflective viewer, to question the essence of its making by deconstructing its strong but superficial visual impact, by spotting the Sicilian roots of the designer-duo in the negation of silence and isolation (which might be regarded as characteristic for certain Sicilian traits), and by identifying the viewer's own clichés and stereotypes that appear through the colourful vividness in his mind. The critical spectator, thus, unmasks the supposed "Mediterranean" style of the trailer as a provocative projection of his (or her) own prejudices and is at least amused—or, in the best case, constructively encouraged—by his own sweeping judgements, compounds and/or ways of thinking. Using this technique, this clip succeeds in completely puzzling the self and, at the same time, recomposing the brand's storytelling with the goal of landing an effect on every spectator, wherever on this planet a potential customer might be, and independently of any specific cultural sphere with which one might identify.

On the other hand, instead of deconstructing, reconciling might also represent a technique by which to act out otherness or, respectively, hybridity. By bridging fashion and literature, the Italo-American writer of Bengali origin, Jhumpa Lahiri—Pulitzer Prize Winner 2000 (*Interpreter of Maladies*, 1999) and holder of the 2014 National Humanities Medal received from President Barack Obama in 2015—starts her critical, though heartfelt, reflections about the art of designing book jackets by recalling "The Charm of the Uniform" (Lahiri 2016a, pp. 3–11). She writes that her Indian cousins were allowed to wear impressive uniforms when going to school in Kolkata (Calcutta), while the female first-person narrator (i.e. Jhumpa Lahiri's *alter ego*) was educated to freely wear what she liked when she went to school in the US as a child herself. Quite differently from Italy's most famous feminist voice, Dacia Maraini, who takes her distances from this kind of standardization by stating that "I am not in favour of impositions of any kind. I like everyone dressing how they feel. I wouldn't venture to impose

a fashion on anybody. Only dictatorships love uniforms" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 215),[154] Lahiri frankly admits that "I would have liked a uniform myself" (Lahiri, 2016a, p. 5). In *The Clothing of Books*—a multi-layered postcolonial essay about the editing of her books, which Lahiri programmatically first wrote in 2015, not in what was (for her) the hegemonic language of American English but in the secondary and European, if not third-rated, language, Italian, with which she had just fallen "in love" (Lahiri, 2016a, p. 17)—she further explains her inner reasons:

> I learned the hard way that how we dress, like the language we speak and the food we eat, expresses our identity, our culture, our sense of belonging. From childhood, I understood that the clothes I wore, wherever I was, rendered me an "other". … When my books were first published, when I was thirty-two years old, I discovered that another part of me had to be dressed and presented to the world. … I am forced, at times, to accept book jackets that I dislike, … I sometimes think, as a writer too, that a uniform would be the answer. (Lahiri, 2016a, pp. 9–11)

Both these examples—the fashion duo Dolce & Gabbana, on one side, and the author Lahiri, on the other—represent different responses of how to cope with the transcultural challenge of combining different cultural spaces by letting "cultures … interpenetrate or emerge from one another", thus articulating "the concept of transculturality" as an "altered cultural constitution" (Welsch, 1999, p. 197). This concept, actually, tries to propose an alternative to the dogma of letting cultures merely coexist "as closed spheres or autonomous islands" (p. 195), as in Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744–1803) 18th century concept of "cultural racism"—as Wolfgang Welsch puts it critically (p. 195). Examined with the help of Welsch's concept of transculturality, Dolce & Gabbana as well as Lahiri both revert to fashion (or cloth) in order to accept the challenges and trends that are constantly moving and changing in postmodern and postcolonial times (cf. Schrödl & Allerstorfer, 2019, pp. 7–13) in a playful, unconventional and outcome-oriented, imaginative way. Both parties start from a subaltern position: Dolce & Gabbana originating from the extremely poor Italian south, and Lahiri from the minority position of a presumed-to-be-inferior hyphenated Indo-American female identity in the US (at least in terms of race and gender). Both try to invert the power relations that exist between periphery and centre by referring either to a fashion collection (Dolce & Gabbana) that recodes *italianità* (i.e. a typical, easily recognizable "Italian style" or "Italianness"), or to a school uniform that inspires the writer to invent the metaphor of how to *clothe* books (Lahiri) in order to trigger or, respectively, reflect transculturality. Floating between processes of interconnectedness and dichotomized concepts like "the feminine" vs. "the masculine", proceedings like these might fuse into one style or even just in a single outfit within the fashion

154 Maraini's original words in Italian read: "Non sono per le imposizioni di nessun genere. Mi piace che ciascuno si vesta come si sente. Non mi azzarderei a imporre una moda. Solo le dittature amano le divise" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 215; the translation in English is mine).

system: just think of Yves Saint Laurent's (1936–2008) revolutionary women's suits, which are inspired by men's tuxedos but which are transformed into a completely feminine line, or of Giorgio Armani's spectacular triangle silhouette for his women collections in the 1980s.

After spotlighting the theory, history and mechanisms of the Italian fashion system in the next section 9.2 ("Transcultural Theory and the Italian Habitus"), in the subsequent section 9.3 ("Karl Lagerfeld: 90 Years of Fendi—90 Years of Fairy Tales (2016)") of this essay, I will come back to the postmodern nature of further fashion concepts by analysing extensively a specific fashion show that Karl Lagerfeld designed for the Italian fashion label Fendi and that he presented in 2016 in the picturesque old town of Rome. But already at this point, we may observe that in today's world, the tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity in the context of fashion discourses is manifestly inclined to dissolve the first (homogeneity) into the second (heterogeneity), thus enhancing diversification. In our introductory examples, this act of heterogenization operates by either exaggerating the *italianità*, in order to de-nationalize, de-territorialize and universalize the promoted fashion style (Dolce & Gabbana), or by turning the conventional association of a uniform either into a desirable and iconic outfit, or, on the contrary, into a consumer-friendly but shallow straightjacket—which might be, metaphorically speaking, advantageous or disadvantageous when also functioning as a book cover (Lahiri).

9.2 Transcultural Theory and the Italian Habitus

The mediatic and aesthetic circumstances that characterize the economic and cultural aspects of these first two cases—whether regarding Lahiri's books or Dolce & Gabbana's summer collection of 2016—merge into a transcultural wrapping, which is not only a sign of their postmodernity or diversification, but also turns our attention to the very origins of Transcultural Studies. In fact, it is due to the work of German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (b. 1946) that we realize the modalities in which the centre and the periphery today overlap more and more, transgressing their (fictitious) former borders. In his view, our (post-) modern life-worlds are primarily the result of a horizontal, liquid hybridity, promoted and reinforced by new media and by virtual, i.e. digital, forms of communication:

> ... cultures today are in general characterized by *hybridization*. For *every* culture, all *other* cultures have tendentially come to be inner-content or satellites. This applies on the levels of population, merchandise and information. Worldwide, in most countries, live members of all other countries of this planet; and more and more, the same articles—as exotic as they may once have been—are becoming available the world over; finally the global networking of communications technology makes all kinds of information identically available from every point in space. (Welsch, 1999, p. 198)

The importance and influence of socio-economic parameters is even more pronounced by the Cuban sociologist, influential public intellectual, and prolific author, Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969), who coined the Spanish term *transculturación* as a neologism in his essay *Contrapunteo Cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940), and which was translated into English by Harriet de Onís in 1947 as *transculturation* in the English translation of the book entitled *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*:

> With the reader's permission, especially if he happens to be interested in ethnographic and sociological questions, I am going to take the liberty of employing for the first time the term *transculturation*, fully aware of the fact that it is a neologism. And I venture to suggest that it might be adopted in sociological terminology, to a great extent at least, as a substitute for the term *acculturation*, whose use is now spreading. (Ortiz, 1995, p. 97)

Keeping in mind that Welsch—writing in the 1990s—manifestly connects his essay with Ortiz—dating back to the 1940s—and that, in my paper, I am interested in applying both of these approaches, which have merged to form specific aspects of today's Transcultural Theory, in the Italian case, as an instrumental value, we might add to our methodology the concept of *habitus*. This notion was first introduced by French sociologist Marcel Mauss (*Les techniques du corps*, 1934) and picked up shortly after by the German sociologist Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (1939), before it was further used also in the work of Max Weber, Gilles Deleuze and Edmund Husserl. However, it is the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) who is responsible for revitalizing and rendering the analytic utility of this notion by remarking that *habitus* is a system of durable dispositions or principles which organize practices and representations functioning as "structuring structures" (cf. Bourdieu, 1980a, p. 88; the translation in English is mine). More than Mauss's "body techniques", Bourdieu discovers *habitus* to be an agency within social *fields* which generates an infinity of possible practices, and which therefore stands at the beginning of what Bourdieu calls a "practical sense": in French, *Le sens pratique* (1980).

While Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) had already used the expression *habitus* as a synonym for "inner attitude", Bourdieu defines it as a describable social impact and a personal attitude, thus implicating the history of the body as well as the individual appearance, the language that somebody speaks or in which the person writes, together with his or her taste, style and way of dressing (cf. Bourdieu, 1980b). *Habitus* may therefore implicate a concept that is more precise and appropriate for academic reflections about fashion-related issues than the common term "style" (from the Latin *stilus*, meaning "stylus", "slate pencil", "spelling style" or "way of writing"), and derivative terms like "styling" or a "stylish" appearance. By connecting Bourdieu's sociological concept of *habitus* with Welsch's idea of a transcultural "way of life" (Reichardt, 2017, p. 49)—or even with transcultural "ways of thinking" (p. 51) in the plural—and, in a third step, with the methodological approach of Transcultural Studies that we are referring to here, following Welsch's crucial essay about *Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today* (1999), we notice that transculturality

may in fact be applied to almost all academic subjects and domains. Seen against this backdrop, it seems obvious that this method is certainly also—and particularly—fruitful and illuminative when applied to the fashion system, since, for practical reasons, all people, ethnic groups and human beings around the globe have to cover their nakedness, to dress themselves, and therefore to choose a style, thus automatically producing their own habits, expressions and traditions as to their apparel throughout the centuries.

The Italian *habitus*—a term that I use as a homophonic pun in connection with the ambivalent Italian term *abito* (meaning "garment", as well as "habit"), in my introduction to *Moda Made in Italy* (2016)—might be considered as the result of a long and heterogenous history of foreign rule in Italy, of single city states, provinces and regions which became fragmented for centuries all over the country after the Roman Empire had collapsed. The Italophone culture, therefore, formed a prismatic patchwork of dialects, local customs, and politics from the Middle Ages until the 19th century, when the state of Italy was officially founded in 1860/1861. If we now ask ourselves what kind of model a transcultural Italy implies or represents today, we might either answer with Lüderssen and Sanna that the Italian lifestyle equals a decentralized country—an *Italia de-centrata* (1995), i.e. a nation state (as well as a cultural sphere) that is not centralized like France, which historically has concentrated all political, creative and innovative powers in the capital city, Paris—or, alternatively, we might think about a "syncretic" *Italofonia* grown on a Foucauldian heterotopic basis. Without disesteeming the very helpful idea of Italy's decentralized structure, but, on the contrary, in order to emphasize even more the Italian case, I have extensively highlighted the latter, i.e. the option of a transcultural vision of an "Italophony" (or: "Italophonie"), in my book about *Italia transculturale* (2018), focusing on Italophone syncretism as a heterotopic model (cf. Reichardt & Moll, 2018, pp. 16–17). It is important to recognize this Italian *habitus* for its sociological and didactical potential, seen that it holds—particularly in relation to Italian fashion—a remarkable relevance also in relation to didactical purposes, as well as for Cultural and/or Literary Studies. Thus, with a view to make up the leeway that exists in Italian Studies so far, the third of five main theses, which I formulated in the introduction to the book *Moda Made in Italy* and which may be formulated in the context of the current state of research, states that "*The question of Italian fashion* has not even been opened yet" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 20; the translation in English is mine; italics in the original).[155]

So, what is so remarkable about this Italian *habitus*? The remaining four theses illustrate its transcultural characteristics by enhancing the specific connection that the Italian fashion history generally holds with:

1. art ("Fashion is art"),
2. European (i.e. "occidental") culture,

155 "*La questione della moda italiana* non è stata ancora aperta" (Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 20).

3. Italian history and literature, both of which are liberally influenced by fashion as a "language" *sui generis;* and, finally,
4. language teaching methodologies and sociolinguistics (cf. Reichardt and D'Angelo, 2016, pp. 13, 15, 27, 30).

All in all, it must be said that, even if Italy's fashion history features at some crucial turning points in western cultural history, it often risks disappearing in the shadow of the French fashion system. Therefore, it would seem useful to recall a few milestones that affected Italy's role in cultural fashion history worldwide, before evaluating the case study of Karl Lagerfeld's fashion design for the Italian label Fendi in a more thoroughgoing way in the following section 9.3 ("Karl Lagerfeld: 90 Years of Fendi—90 Years of Fairy Tales (2016)") and drawing further conclusions from it in the sections 9.4 ("Transmedia Content and Our Nomadic Lifestyle in Postmodern Times") and 9.5 ("Fashion as an Aesthetic and Didactic Tool").

Indeed, since the beginnings of the so-called "occident", Italian fashion has played a crucial role in the European history of culture and made a significant impact in international politics and economy, in continental literature, design, architecture, figurative arts, film, music and theatre. One of its main characteristics consists in the fact that we may talk about "Italian fashion" still today, because almost all successful fashion brands in Italy are managed and owned by Italian designers and Italian family dynasties, as the late director of *Vogue Italia*, Franca Sozzani (1950–2016), noted in 2010 (p. 117; cf. also Grünwald, 2009, pp. 75–76). Moreover, in the third millennium, Italian fashion boutiques are to be found all over the world in quite a high density, thus representing a clear economic USP and proving, at the same time, that today's Italy has adapted itself from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era by opening up to global transculturality (if we agree to follow Welsch's theoretical approach), on the levels of both marketing and lifestyle-trends beyond geographical borders (cf. Grünwald, 2009, p. 45). Therefore, Italian fashion might be understood, with Roland Barthes, as a semiotic, *ergo* a systemic, aesthetic language that constantly transfers and directly propagates an Italian way of life around the world. This corresponds with Welsch's thesis that "transculturality is in no way completely new historically", but "breaks through the fiction of homogeneity", since "styles [have] developed across the countries and nations" (Welsch, 1999, pp. 199–200). In fact, cultural trends have long shaped a network linking together states, people and spaces for extended periods on the European continent, thus transforming Europe into an exemplary showcase or, respectively, a "transcultural laboratory" par excellence (cf. Reichardt, 2006, p. 93; the translation in English is mine).

As is well known, the clothing in classical Greek and Roman antiquity imitated the Egyptian dress-code and formed the foundations of classical aesthetics, when it was rediscovered by the Italian designer Valentino Garavani (called Valentino, b. 1932) in its timeless elegance to become his evening robes in the 1960s. This itself also followed Anne Hollander's theory of apparel as expressed in her book *Seeing*

Through Clothes (1978), in which she states, in a nutshell, that a contemporary robe may be read just as a historical revelation, since it reveals its historical roots only if the wearer knows how to "see through clothes", i.e. how to explain their composition against a historical backdrop. Valentino deconstructed the somewhat hieratic, inflexible and static connotations of this historical background by recoding it symbolically with the help of his own shade of dynamic, lively, and bright red: the iconic *Rosso Valentino*. As the major book on the ideal of an early modern *Corteggiano* (1528), by Baldassare Castiglione, shows, in the aftermath of the classical era, the Italian noble court culture and its way of *Composing Ourselves in Style* (cf. Graham, 1990) again do make a remarkable appearance in Renaissance times (cf. Burke, 1995). The etiquette promulgated by *The Book of the Courtier* (as its English title reads) explains precisely the dress-code for courtiers and court ladies, and also demonstrates the relaxed principle of an omnipresent sense of style, nonchalance or casualness—or *sprezzatura*, as it was called at that time (cf. D'Epiro & Desmond Pinkowish, 2001; cf. also Paulicelli, 2014a). Although, at the end of the 16th century, in around 1600, it was the Italian-born Maria de' Medici who introduced the habit of wearing underpants at the French court (previously this was not very common in France), but already during the baroque, in Italy, we find a sumptuary law that follows the French example, befitting the image of aristocrats, monarchs and the bourgeoisie, and not anymore the other way round (i.e. the Frenchmen picking up fashion habits from the Italians).

Indeed, Italian culture starts to disengage from Paris only in the mid-19th century, slowly showing again a more and more autonomous and independent fashion style, until coining the fashion sector by means of the label *Made in Italy* after World War II (cf. Belfanti, 2019, pp. 198–240). This progression culminates in the *italianità* of the Fascist regime, that tried to promote Italian fashion and textiles by inaugurating (in 1933) the first national fashion exhibition in Turin, which had been the first Italian capital in 1861 and was then declared as the first fashion capital (*capitale della moda*) of Italy by Queen Elena of Italy (also: Elena of Montenegro, 1873–1952). After the Second World War (1939–1945), a new era began which marks the 1950s and 1960s as the *Golden Years* of Italian fashion. The fashion hotspot shifts from Turin to Florence, where in 1951 the wealthy Florentine aristocrat and businessman Giovanni Battista Giorgini (1898–1971) initiates in his Villa Torrigiani the first Italian fashion show ever in the context of a newly arising, international fashion system. Due to its immense economic and media success, in Italy as well as overseas and since 1954 until today, the Palazzo Pitti (the palace in which Maria de' Medici was actually born, back in 1575) now hosts transcultural fashion events, even if they all follow their own economic interests—a fact that raises the question to what extent it is reasonable or impossible to link together cultural and economic interests.

Back in those days, at the time of the Italian economic miracle (ca. 1950–1973), the land "where lemon trees do bloom" benefited highly from its historical past. As the single case studies collected in the anthology about *Moda Made in Italy* (cf. Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016) illustrate in detail, since the Middle Ages, the Italophone area had

been traditionally famous for its slowly expanding companies specialized in handcraft, run by families, and for producing or elaborating leather, wool and fabrics like silk, linen, cotton and—from the 1970s onwards—also synthetically blended fibres. On top of that, since Renaissance times Italy enjoyed the highest prestige from the best trade connections via the former Sea Republics of Venice and Genoa, thus clearly mapping the advantages offered by the entangled history of the autonomous Italian city states, the international circulation of wares, and the cultural transfer that also shaped political power relations in the Far East (and the Silk Road) and Africa or India (with their cotton fields). During the *Golden Years* of fashion, i.e. during the late 1950s and 1960s, Florence and Rome were struggling for the title of the Italian capital for film and fashion, even if, in the end, Milan would win the race. The reason of this outcome was the promotion of the *Pronto Moda* (or *Alta Moda Pronta*), i.e. the Italian adaptation of Ready-to-wear-fashion, or, respectively, *Prêt-à-porter* that emerged in the 1970s.

Even if Milan would benefit enormously from its industrial and infrastructural location, back in the 1950s many Hollywood celebrities and world-famous stars came for their movies and shooting programmes to Italy's capital, Rome. Attracted by the booming business in the Roman film studios at Cinecittà and their low production costs, many international and US films were produced in Italy, and these productions were followed by the press, journalists, and media. In this field, the idea was born to use the red carpet that was habitually placed on the streets upon the arrival of well-known Hollywood stars, serving as a catwalk or runway (a so-called *passerella*), in order to present themselves as well as the newest fashion highlights. It was in the film *La dolce vita* (1960), directed by Federico Fellini (1920–1993), in which the script-writer Ennio Flaiano (1910–1972), historically inspired by the most famous Italian *paparazzo*, journalist and photographer at the time, Tazio Secchiaroli (1925–1998; cf. Mormorio, 1999, p. 30), created the figure of an intrusive photographer with the surname Paparazzo. This denomination quickly advanced to become the equivalent of a scandal or boulevard-photographer who tries to sell to people—backed by the stars' and starlets' glamour as well as by the red-carpet-effect invented in Italy—as many newspaper copies and, as a social outcome and unintentional collateral effect, also as many new dressess as possible, advertised by means of articles and circulating pictures, which addressed not only the local jet-set but also a global clientele.

9.3 Karl Lagerfeld: 90 Years of Fendi—90 Years of Fairy Tales (2016)

It is surely the spectacular architectural and historical background of the Fontana di Trevi—a world-renowned white marble and travertine fountain designed by Nicola Salvi, completed in 1762 and located in the heart of Rome—, but also exactly that stylish *habitus* of an internationally intermingled high society, together with the glamour of a media publicity, from which not only Federico Fellini drew inspiration. In early

spring 1959, it is on this location, that he decided to film the famous fountain scene with young Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni (1924–1996) and the Swedish shooting star and "queen of the Roman night scene in 1958" (Gundle, 2011, p. XI), Anita Ekberg (1931–2015), for *La dolce vita*, released in 1960. Fifty-six years later, rather, in 2016, the German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019), born and raised in Hamburg, comes back to this legendary setting, that was coined, cinematographically speaking, by Fellini and immortalized precisely by this film director and screenwriter originally from Rimini as *the* place of seduction. The plot of the film went down in movie history, and its Fontana di Trevi-scene offers unforgettable impressions, stimulating for sure also Lagerfeld's phantasy. One of the most powerful images is the moment when, in the early morning hours, and after a long and adventurous night in the Eternal City of Rome, Ekberg—cast as Sylvia—steps into the water of the fountain in a black, floating, full-length strapless gown to lure the epitome of a Latin lover—embodied by Mastroianni—to join her under the waterfall with the soft words: "Marcello! Come here!" (Pazyluz, 2016, 00:01:20).

On July 7th 2016, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of Fendi, Lagerfeld realized—in a congenially subversive and, yet, crystal clear and transparent mode, working almost imperceptibly against the cliché-related *dolce-vita* myth—his grand and truly transcultural (by combining a multitude of various ways of life, as per Welsch) Fendi-show *Fendi Legends and Fairy Tales: 90 Years of Fendi*.[156] It opposed to any Fellini reminiscence an alternative world of myths—not a complex, interwoven Mediterranean stratification (as Chambers & Cariello illustrate; cf. Chambers & Cariello, 2019, p. 50), but a presumably unobtrusive, precise and "pure" Scandinavian line. Lagerfeld had been officiating, already then, as the Artistic Director of the Roman brand for over 50 years: when he passed away in 2019, this almost lifelong collaboration had reached a total time span of 53 years. In retrospect, transferring the human body (represented by the actors Ekberg and Mastroianni in Fellini's film) from the water of the fountain, above the water's surface in Lagerfeld's project, the light and bright colours of this fall/winter-collection 2016/2017, and the soft, meditative soundtrack and the light-flooded, yet nocturnal ambience, that underlines the show, evoke almost heavenly, otherworldly, yet secular, associations, while the models seem to hover above the fluid element like angels or, precisely, "fairies". This was rendered possible by constructing a special catwalk over the water, made out of a transparent plexiglass floor, running on the fountain across the large, fully illuminated, water basin, with the waterfall in full action behind it. By choosing this location, Lagerfeld added—in the imagination of the spectator—to his fashion show not only a flair of Hollywood, Cinecittà and the world of movie stars and visual arts, but

156 The official video showing the preview of the Fendi fall/winter fashion collection 2016/2017 in full length has been published by the Fendi company on YouTube (FF Channel, 2016).

also a northerly understatement, a tender fragility of contrasting images, and some literature, by referring explicitly in the show's title to the literary genre of *fairy tales*.

Despite the show's message that, according to Welsch's transcultural credo, nowadays "[t]ransculturality is gaining ground … not only on the macro-cultural level, but also on the individual's micro-level" and that, because of our "multiple cultural connexions", we all might be defined as "cultural hybrids" (Welsch, 1999, p. 198), Lagerfeld's strong and deep connection to the Fendi label is generally not really out in the open. As a matter of fact, it is common knowledge that Hamburg-born Lagerfeld acted as chief designer for the French fashion house Chanel, whose history started with the first Chanel boutique opened in Paris in 1913 by Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel (1883–1971) herself, for some 30 years. Of course, his activities in France are quite evident not only because Lagerfeld spent his whole adult life in the French capital Paris, where he succeeded in saving the label Chanel from business failure, restructuring it continuously from 1982 onwards for success, before he passed away in Paris in 2019. But before, originally, Lagerfeld had started to work for the Italian trademark Fendi—whose logo with the two complementary, variegated "F"s were sketched by him as a young man—already at a much earlier stage of his career, precisely in 1964/1965. Historically speaking, at the same time when Karl Lagerfeld left Hamburg with his mother and came to Paris at the age of twenty in 1953 (cf. Kmieciak, 2019, p. 21), in Italy there were various single fashion designers, who were effectively busy in the Italian fashion world, namely Germana Marucelli (1905–1983), Emilio Pucci (1914–1992), the sisters Fontana, Valentino and also the Fendi family. They were all producing their outlines, models and items in a restricted number of pieces in small Italian factories, before selling them in their boutiques. Notably, in this very first post-war period of the 1950s, the master saddler Guccio Gucci (1881–1953) played a key role in Italo-American relationships and generally in the global fashion business, his successful economic rise being as exemplary for the victory of the *Alta Moda* in 20th century Italy as the brand's history of Fendi (cf. Paulicelli, 2001, p. 288).

Indeed, Lagerfeld himself was significantly involved in building up the most discussed *Alta Moda* fur-fashion that pushed Fendi to the top of a highly exclusive and solvent costumer base world-wide. When he began to work for the five Fendi sisters (Paola, Anna, Franca, Carla and Alda) in 1964/1965, their parents, Adele (née Casagrande) and Edoardo Fendi, had been running a small boutique in Rome's via del Plebiscito (Palazzo Fendi) since 1926, bringing all five of them within the company in the 1950s. While Lagerfeld very successfully launched both—the French (Chanel) and the Italian (Fendi) fashion house—over the years, guiding them to an exceptional economic height, later he actually began to strive towards reaching other classes too, including those with a lower income. Thus, in 1984, a year after his start at Chanel, he opened a competitive store for his brand *Karl*, targeting "everybody", before he created a reasonably prized *prêt-à-porter* collection to be sold in all European and US chainstores of the Swedish multinational clothing-retail company Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) in 2004. Finally, in 2012, he launched his label *Karl* (or: *Karl Lagerfeld*) online, serving

not highly exclusive fashion but also offering "accessible price points" (LeWeb, 2013, 0:27:00) for women's fashion, accessories and products, available within an average price range.

Finally, after having organized for the first time in the history of fashion a show on the Great Wall of China in Beijing on 19th October 2007, presenting the Fendi spring/summer-collection 2008 not only outside of Europe, but also in a most spectacular open-air location,[157] in 2016, for the very first time a high fashion event-show took place at Rome's Fontana di Trevi. Since Fellini's film crew came here to shoot *La dolce vita* in 1960, no other red-carpet event had ever taken place on this site before, as the piazza in front of the fountain, built by the Italian architect Salvi in the 18th century in a late baroque, almost neoclassic style, has a minimal surface. The small-sized square is composed only of a few stone-steps in front of the water basin, a narrow passage-way arranged in a semicircle around it, and the pedestrian alley behind it, offering a very restricted space to the (limited, and therefore selected) international audience, that was able to assist the spectacular show and that mainly consisted of media and only several dozens of the most important fashion representatives, buyers and customers. Almost simultaneously, the video-taped show itself was published on the internet—featuring an almost analog-to-digital congruity—and presented live on the runway installed above the water-level of the fountain.

After having renovated the Fontana di Trevi for 2,13 million Euros as a part of the project *Fendi for Fountains* in 2015, the luxury fashion house, multinational brand, and, since 2001, member of the LVMH Group Fendi, invested apparently not only in the protection of Italy's historical heritage, but also in cultural industries, in order to promote its ninetieth anniversary on July 7th, 2016. Initially, the brand presented this show of *1001 nights* using the programmatically bilingual and "fabulous" motto *Fendi: 90 Years of Fairy Tale—Fendi: 90 anni da fiaba* (the online sources were not available any longer when this book went to press) for the purpose of a prestige advertising strategy. Consequentially, the event was recorded on video and firstly spread on YouTube under the title *Haute Fourrure 2016-17 Fashion Show: Legends and Fairy Tales*, featuring "romantic colors and ethereal materials such as organza, silk, and tulle", according to the advertising text of a former YouTube-video (under the entry "show more") which was removed from the internet later on, though. In a mode of production that took place in a "typical Italian atmosphere of family", in fact, Lagerfeld worked for Fendi in the last "several years" before he passed away in 2019 primary with Silvia Venturini Fendi—née Fendi, daughter of Anna Fendi—(Fendi, 2008, 0:00:18–0:00:30), always trying to illuminate Fendi's craftsmanship with printed and hand painted fabrics, embroidered lace or rich velvet jacquards. In light of this event, the multi-media embedding was particularly sophisticated on the occasion of the *90 Years*-show (that today circulates mainly under the short show title

157 Cf. the full show on YouTube (FTV HOT, 2016).

Legends and Fairy Tales) in July 2016 at Fontana di Trevi, for which the most expensive and requested international female top-models were engaged and a video specially dedicated to the making of the collection and the collection's concept was produced (cf. Fendi, 2016). The whole choreography was enhanced by a background music mix that also performed the original soundtrack of *La dolce vita* at the end of the show, as it was originally composed by Nino Rota (1911–1979) for Fellini's movie, giving a slightly ironic touch to the fashion parade. Also, at the end of the show, Karl Lagerfeld walked over the transparent plexiglass runway "over water", together with Silvia Venturini Fendi, thanking the audience for their attention as if they were not in an open-air space but on an ordinary catwalk during a regular indoors fashion show. Standing side by side with her in the middle of the catwalk, face to face with his audience he threw, according to tradition, a coin into the fountain's water, thus transmitting a sign of eternity or symbolical farewell to the viewers (or later online users).

The chief attraction of this fall/winter collection 2016/2017 presented by Lagerfeld was, however, that he included the history and architecture of Fontana di Trevi into his concept, with which he was familiar having spent quite an amount of time living in Rome himself (as well as in various apartments, houses and villas that he temporarily owned in Paris, New York, Vermont, Monte Carlo, Hamburg, the Provence, and Biarritz). He also added a brilliant transcultural nuance of ostentatious, yet gentle and unexpectedly "quiet" hybridization to the setting. Accordingly, the garments of this special fashion collection are not inspired by typical Mediterranean traditions and costumes—in contrast to the "loud" and colourful example of the Dolce & Gabbana video-display that I quoted at the beginning of this essay, and, as memory of the scenery of *La dolce vita* could perhaps have suggested—but surprisingly by Nordic fairy-tales. Thanks to this artifice, the German designer, who spent his life abroad, thus feeling at home in the most variable places, succeeds in recoding the whole Roman ambience by means of patterns, cloths, webbing, applications, cuts, textiles, veils, decorations, combinations of accessories, hairstyles, lady's bags, shoes, furs and embroideries not by a typically southern esprit—as, again, the intense, vivacious and sanguine Dolce & Gabbana collection does—but by a Scandinavian, i.e. a much cooler, low-key, discreet and delicate flair. The latter does not create a clash, though, with the expectations of the viewer, but exceeds them, topping all stereotypes by smoothly fitting the illustrations, symbols and motives that Lagerfeld choose for the cloths and dresses in a harmonic but completely new and congenial, complementary relation between fashion style, live performance and the architectural masterpiece of the Trevi Fountain.

The filigree flowers, delicate fairies, sophisticated silhouettes of castles, enchanted skylines and landscapes, pastel shades and colours, and the long, drawn-out characters and animals that the garments were adorned with, have all been taken from drawings that Lagerfeld discovered by chance when he came across the work of Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen (1886–1957). Parallel to the Fendi show, not only was an exhibition with some of Nielsen's works shown in Palazzo Fendi, entitling

the 2016 event in Rome also with the Italian motto *90 anni da fiaba* (in English literally: *90 Years of Fairy Tales*), but the German art-book publishing house Taschen Verlag, whose headquarters are in Cologne, also edited a special edition of Nielsen's illustrations in a beautiful coffee table book, poetically titled *East of the Sun and West of the Moon* (cf. Nielsen, 2015). So, Lagerfeld's transcultural synthesis produced this creative, intercultural German-Italian encounter at Fontana di Trevi, enriching it with a *tertium quid*, i.e. a third, intersecting cultural sphere, in which the German designer combined elements that are commonly associated with Italian, German, French or Danish culture. With his *Gesamtkunstwerk* on the Roman fountain, the stylist generated a unique, customized, new formula that was in perfect harmony with the architectural peculiarity of piazza di Trevi, the specific style of his collection, and the historic significance of the company anniversary.

Following Nielsen's exceptional, yet neither generally popular nor particularly Italy-oriented Nordic Art Nouveau aesthetics, first published in a book-format in 1914 and lavishly reissued by Taschen in three languages (English, Italian and German), Lagerfeld escapes the banality of historically idealizing "the 'Sweet Life'" (Gundle, 2011, p. 379) of the Rome of the 1950s. Instead, Lagerfeld avoids falling under Fellini's spell by neither seeing it as "one of the most powerful marketing tools of Italian products abroad" (p. 352) at the one extreme, nor by regarding past and present Rome exclusively through a socio-critical lens, at the opposite extreme. With the distance of half a century, in 2016, one could have been also tempted, actually, to rebel against the quite negatively connotated, never-ending story of Rome as a decadent, corrupt "bustling, class-divided city of the post-war years" (p. 344), when "the drugs traffic boomed in Italy" (p. 337) and social injustice oscillated between the "ecstasy of fame" represented by Anita Ekberg as "film goddess from the land of dreams" and "the tragedy of broken dreams" of ordinary people (p. 352). It is rather from a balanced, mediatorial point of view in-between these two perspectives that Lagerfeld's Fendi show exhibits itself as an aesthetic fashion highlight that transmits also didactically a multi-ethnic, collaborative and pacifistic message, which might be seen—if not, quite simply, as a total work of art—then surely as a transcultural language at its best.

The semiotic language and transcultural dynamics that support and sustain Lagerfeld's representation of *Fendi Legends and Fairy Tales*, though, do not address only a social elite but indeed manifest themselves everywhere, such as on the street and in street fashion, as is true to the definition of fashion that Lagerfeld gave himself in 2011 on the occasion of a podium event in Paris, that aimed to discuss the digital culture: "Fashion is what people wear, it's not only what you see on the runway" (LeWeb, 2013, 0:34:02). To this he adds, in fact, that "fashion is a nice way to escape banality" (LeWeb, 2013, 0:37:07), and finally concludes—picking up an idea that Anne Hollander expressed already in *Sex and Suits* (cf. Hollander, 1994, p. 11)—that fashion is unavoidable and is therefore a basic cultural need of humankind: "Everybody is interested in fashion. … And when people say that they don't like fashion and that they don't care for it, they [still] cannot escape it … because they have to dress"

(LeWeb, 2013, 0:39:25–0:39:31). In this Lagerfeld, who was renowned for his speedy answers and witticisms, shows himself to be fully aware of the civilizing power of fashion, remarking that, slightly smirking, "I know there are more important things in life than fashion, but as we don't run around naked, maybe we need fashion" (LeWeb, 2013, 0:43:08–0:43:14).

By combining and reuniting harmoniously his Nordic roots as well as his passion for the Mediterranean lifestyle, Lagerfeld's final, widely publicized performance for Fendi clearly demonstrates how his fashion thematizes the self-reflection of fashion shows in Italy on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how—through its local focus on the ground in Rome—his work opens up by drawing on other cultures: among others, on the German popular tradition (with its faeries collected by the Brothers Grimm in the early 19th century, its storybooks and closeness to the protection of nature, but also the somewhat supposed "Prussian" appearance of Lagerfeld himself), the Scandinavian fairy-tale world (with its legends, trolls, nordic spirits and elves but also strong Art Nouveau tradition and minimalistic design history), and on French *chic*, subtlety or savoir-vivre, which for centuries was so close to the Italian history of style, and in fashion. On the basis of these—both global and local, *ergo glocal*—considerations, Lagerfeld finds a transcultural synthesis beyond geopolitical spheres and social restrictions, which relate, most notably, to the categories of *Race, Class and Gender* (as Patricia Hill Collins and Margaret Andersen conceptualized in their homonymous anthology in 1992). This approach suits him not only because in the fashion business he encounters neither racism nor homophobia, and he is free to live his progressive and liberal convictions, but because it represents a cultural habitat that matches exactly his needs. Being an unconventional thinker, Lagerfeld found in the fashion world the freedom to act as one of the first true freelancers on the European market, working—in the beginning of his career—for some ten to twenty different brands, as a young German man living and working in Italy and France, at the same time, thus embodying a prototypical European citizen.

His *90 Years of Fairy Tales*-show of 2016 reflects to the spectator not only that fashion is a communication tool, but also that it may lead, by bridging one's own cultural identity and personal self-positioning, to even more transculturality and—hopefully—new representations of gender in future times, to still more individuality, to even more freedom of personal expression, styles of travelling, circulation or residency, and to greater age diversity and tolerance of corporality, physical shape and bodily *habitus*. The accuracy and entertainment that inhere in the 2016 Fendi show, hence, point in a promising direction and mark a seminal moment in transcultural history, without hiding its postmodern dislocation, gender issues or social gaps, but by acclaiming artistic visions, that invite the audience to critically decode complex cultural synergies and facets of nonverbal communication.

9.4 Transmedia Content and Our Nomadic Lifestyle in Postmodern Times

Before we may come to our conclusions (leading in section 9.5 to the synthetical idea of "Fashion as an Aesthetic and Didactic Tool"), reconsidering the application spectrum of fashion discourses in general, and of Italian fashion, in particular, we must first fill the missing link between transculturality, on one side, and transmediality and the idea of nomadism, on the other. As the case study of Lagerfeld shows, in postmodern times, the circulation and exchange of (luxury) goods, ideas and manners among cultures, individuals and places could, of course, be seen critically in various aspects. But so far I have intended to point out in this essay that, in terms of transculturality, transmediality and "nomadology"—the sociological notion introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in order to explore the sphere of interest *in-between* of consumerism and anthropology (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1986)—they may also have innovative, surprising, entertaining, enriching and liberating effects. From this point of view, we can say that the past seventy years, in a period spanning from 1950 until 2020, have revolutionized world fashion, that, since then, circulates literally *in-between* of countries, borders and cultures as an individual and social means of expression.

If we consider, furthermore, the increasing power that the media play in our globalized communities, we could think of fashion as a 3D-compound or simply as a "world language" *sui generis* that operates on various parallel levels in series, just like interconnected trends which appear in Italian food, music, architecture, design, visual arts or sports. Within the fashion business world, this transnational, yet uniquely human and ever-changing language enhances the visibility of all sorts of fashion collections, series or trends by transmitting a fashion hype—simultaneously to its material exposure in the analogue world (e.g. during a fashion week in New York)—also via social media on the Internet, via trailers on YouTube, print media, TV-spots, advertisements in journals and/or cinema, reports and articles on paper or online, thus truly manifesting the impact of the *iconic turn* in postmodern times (cf. Maar & Burda, 2004, p. 15–17). On a historical level, however, fashion has always acted as a bonding force between individuals and society, between social groups, multitudes and distinctive cultures creating continuously a plurality of human *in-between* or *third spaces* (cf. Bhabha, 1994, pp. 36–37), thus being originally more detached from technical media. Fashion melds and combines not only humanism with technology, but also various different aspects such as economic parameters, values of nation-branding and personal identity, the representations of race, class and gender, power discourses or a metaphorically decodable zeitgeist. Its complex polyphony and subversive transmedia structure show the transgressive, as well as the didactic potential of fashion discourses.

For centuries the centres of Europe, such as the courts in London or Paris, dictated the most treasured habits of dressing by means of the role-models represented

by their kings and aristocrats. But, in the hidden shadow of power, also folk-tradition, subversive social discourses and popular customs were acted out by the people on the streets, in the suburbs, and in the peripheries of Europe, demonstrating themselves to be present, inventive and influential. Still today, they very often give proof of extremely original interpretations, opinion forming critique and even carnivalesque versions of higher standard looks, thus capturing their proud, even supercilious essences, making them theirs, recoding or reverting them, sometimes turning them into their opposite, sometimes adapting them by just making them their own or trend-setting new apparels among their peers. Furthermore, this phenomenon is reflected in the fanciful and creative crossover-looks exposed in popular surroundings, for instance, in Africa, if we think for instance of the so-called *sapeurs* in the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinshasa. Their characterization originates from the French word *sape*—meaning "stuff" or "gear", "duds"—and today defines itself through the acronym ***S**ociété* des ***A**mbianceurs et des **P**ersonnes **É**légantes* (English: "Society of Entertainer and Elegant People"), whose distinguishing mark consists of a lifestyle targeted at fashionable and individualistic elegance, and orientated at the features of classic dandies and gentlemen. At the same time, due to their skin colour, their body language and their environment, the sapeurs transmit also a rebellious fun-factor and slight ironic appeal to the viewer.

In fact, the sapeurs developed from a subculture into a social movement, which has its roots in the 1920s (while in Europe we experienced the Art Nouveau, first, and, then, Art Deco period as the case of Kay Nielsen shows), having been originally founded by the Congolese freedom fighter André Matsoua (1899–1942), who had lived for several years in Europe before introducing into his home country an elegant "western" dress style when he came back. The members of this social group called sapeurs reached international visibility in the middle of the 1960s, when they protested against the politics of the military dictator and President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1965–1997) Mobutu in Brazzaville, Congo. These sapeurs—who phonetically almost match with the lexeme "saveurs" in French (i.e. in English: "savours", "tastes", or "flavours")—seem to live out, freely and peacefully, their postcolonial resistance against suppression and economic exploitation by means of clothes and personal performance in the public space. Since their historical beginnings, these people have been mostly neglected and discriminated against, and have never been taken seriously by the French high-brow fashion scene. Only recently, in 2012, two photographers Francesco Giusti and Mathilde Lloret finally curated an art exhibition with the title *Dressing Up*, which showed pictures of various sapeurs, their life-worlds and their mode of "dressing up" in Mulhouse, France (Atelier Photographique Hors Champs). In this sense, sapeurs not only give their fellow citizens a good example of how to stand up for one's own rights, but this exhibition is also an example of how to influence main-stream and public opinion in an illuminating way, taking over a visible, even prominent, social role, thus gaining visibility.

The outfit and overall social concepts of the sapeurs can both be "read" as a potpourri of characteristic traits, the most crucial and paradigmatic skill being the one to combine fashion with an ethical code, thus pioneering in real life Roland Barthes's semiotic theorem of transformation activities or so-called "Shifters" (cf. Barthes, 1967, pp. 5–6). According to Barthes, every dress or outfit that is being worn can be decoded and explained either as if it was a poem—i.e. by words—or as if it would mirror a social reality in its pure, direct and physical form, as an iconic language, that means, by images. Coming back from the political sapeurs-movement to the transmediality of Italian fashion, this is, actually, exactly how we could further analyse some dresses of the Dolce & Gabbana collection *Italia is Love* of 2016, which showed the title of the collection printed, stitched or reproduced on the textile itself by featuring the literal words *Italia is Love* sometimes in an overt and playful, and sometimes in a veiled or hidden way. There can be no doubt that the designer's approach to the wearer (first demonstrated by the model on the catwalk), as well as to a potential spectator (i.e. the ideal consumer), is a powerful technique in order to start a communication among the two of them, representing a clear attempt to come into contact together, or, indeed, a way of manifesting a semiotic language, whether on a provocative or on an entertaining or unifying level.

A similar unique, iconic example of the transcultural language of fashion, that combines words with images in order to launch also a political appeal, materializes in the famous women's *Pace*-dress—the so-called *vestito Pace*, in Italian—designed by Valentino Garavani in 1993. The pattern showed in various lengths, from a mini to a full-length dress, the word "peace" (Italian: "pace") on the dress, translated in up to fourteen different languages and/or alphabets, and stitched with a decorative silver thread on a white underground, the white colour obviously symbolizing peace or a plea for the absence of war activity. The writing of the Italian word *pace* in foreign languages echoed a multicultural, united "one-world-mentality" beyond ethnic and geographical borders, as it strikingly transmits, still today, not only a symbolic but also a political message. This dress programmatically relates to the time when it was designed in 1993, representing a clear reaction to the First Gulf-War (1980–1988) and the Second Gulf War (1990/1991) by literally "speaking up" for peace and for an end to the warfare. The many variations of this lettering were publicised, back in 1993, not only on the fashion items themselves but also in the show windows of Valentino's boutiques, where the polyglot word-series were used for decoration on their doors and windows, and as a strapline for the whole collection. Because of its historical textile story-telling, the *vestito Pace* was presented solemnly again in the Ara Pacis in Rome, on the occasion of Valentino's retrospective exhibition, with the bilingual (Italo-American) title *Valentino a Roma: 45 Years of Style* in 2009. The Lombard designer chose the congenial, strategic and symbolic frame of a museum after that the Ara Pacis Augustae (short: "Ara Pacis", from Latin: "Altar of Augustan Peace"—Valentino plays also in this architectural context on the word "peace" applying a transcultural tonality) had been restructured by the American architect Richard Meier from 1995 to

2006, in order to bundle his demands within the realms of arts, transmediality, publicity and classiness. Created in 1993, the message of the iconic Valentino *Pace*-dress also anticipated the popular *Pace da tutti i balconi*-movement in Italy against the war in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002.[158]

Spanning from the dress-code of the African sapeurs, to the Dolce & Gabbana collections and to Valentino's *Peace*-dress, we might ask ourselves what these outfits "tell" us. Which stereotypes do they play with? What kind of motifs are used? Which stylistic devices dominate the seasons and campaigns, and why? What is global and what is local in these show-cases? Searching for answers to these questions that respect both the aesthetic-mediatic and the didactic-political parameters of fashion, we could certainly pinpoint its cross-media effect in a useful way by referring to Marshall McLuhan (*Understanding Media;* 1964), or by establishing a connection on the meta-level of communication by combining fashion with migration issues. Through migration and mobility, cultures meet, change and move, both physically and mentally, thus producing *Nomadic Subjects* (1994) as Rosi Braidotti puts it. These modern "nomads" follow Wolfgang Welsch's *ubi bene, ibi patria* principle (cf. Welsch, 2003, p. 40): your home is not necessarily where you come from or where you are meant to stay, but where you may freely choose to live—just as Lahiri did when moving from New York to Rome, or as Lagerfeld did when moving from Hamburg to Paris and Rome.

Through "migration processes" and "worldwide … communications systems", on the basis of interweaving cultures, fashion also becomes hybrid, not only because, as Welsch states, "We are cultural hybrids" (Welsch, 1999, p. 198), but because fashion is hybridization *per se* (cf. Grünwald, 2009, p. 7), and has always been. It combines different styles, mixes materials, cuts and colours, overwrites gender roles, and is always intended to make transculturality visible. This technique could be illustrated by acting as a mosaic, a puzzle, a patchwork, a salad bowl, rainbow or melting pot, which are all different metaphors that may didactically be used to better describe what transculturality stands for, in order to bridge cultures, focus border-regions and create a *third space* (cf. Bhabha, 1994, pp. 36–37). Within these intersectional spaces, fashion also transcends media by addressing itself equally to literature, as well as to architecture, the figurative and performative arts, to film, music or to show business.

We could easily find plenty of evidence for the basic transmedia principle of transculturality, if we define transmediality as a term applicable to non-media specific phenomena, that various media produce together using their specific means,

158 The *Pace da tutti i balconi*-movement was a social campaign in Italy, that started in 2002 as a demonstration against Italian participation in the Iraq war (2003–2011). During the protest, over one million rainbow-coloured textile banners showing the Italian word "pace" (for "peace") in white were put up on balconies, doors and windows all over the country, thus drawing a high degree of media attention. The *pace*-flag worked for almost a decade as a postmodern cult object and communicative tool "beyond horizons".

and that in the end are not clearly connected to one original source medium anymore (cf. Rajewsky, 2002, p. 13). For literature—to begin with—it is, indeed, obvious that no character and almost no interior space can be realistically described without mentioning dress-codes, textiles or any material made of cloth or cloth-like structures on the level of narration. In this sense, "fashion" is as unavoidable as Hollander and Lagerfeld put it. Just think, for instance, of the final key-moment in *The Leopard*—both, in the novel[159] and in the movie by Luchino Visconti from 1963—which deals with the "Death of a Prince" (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 2007, pp. 239–254) under the entry "July, 1888" (p. 241). In this scene, a sophisticated way of dressing and a pronounced and "exquisite sensation of one or two fine silk cravats" (p. 252) play a crucial role in the memories of the Prince (called Don Fabrizio) who, regarding "himself in the wardrobe mirror", recognizes himself merely with the help of "his own suit" (p. 246). At the moment of his passing away, death appears to him in the silhouette of a young woman, wearing an elegant brown travelling dress, who comes to pick him up for a (last) train-ride, as it seems, at the main train station of Catania, and who unveils her face in the very last moment before he dies:

> Suddenly amid the group appeared a young woman, slim, in brown traveling dress and wide bustle, with a straw hat trimmed by a speckled veil which could not hide the sly charm of her face. She slid a little suède-gloved hand between one elbow and another of the weeping kneelers, apologized, drew closer. It was she, the creature forever yearned for, coming to fetch him; strange that one so young should yield to him; the time for the train's departure must be very close. When she was face to face with him she raised her veil, and there, modest, but ready to be possessed, she looked lovelier than she ever had when glimpsed in stellar space. (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 2007, pp. 253–254)

In canonical Italian literature, the association between fashion and death is frequently to be found—for instance, in Giacomo Leopardi's (1798–1837) dialogue between the allegories of Death and Fashion in *Operette morali* (1827; cf. Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 39) or in Gabriele D'Annunzio's (1863–1938) concise statement "Modernize or perish" ("O rinnovarsi, o morire", cf. Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 11; the translation in English is mine). The film adaptation of Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *Il Gattopardo* by Visconti who, back in 1963, employed the already then renowned costume-designer Piero Tosi (1927–2019) for the costumes (cf. Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, pp. 61–73) and used the music of Nino Rota, brings us not only back to Lagerfeld's reminiscence of Rota in his Fendi-show in 2016, but also reminds us of the transmedia content and the hybrid character of fashion. The latter becomes manifest in different forms of narration when combining fashion, dress-codes and textiles not only with literature but also with arts and film.

159 *Il Gattopardo* by Tomasi di Lampedusa (2007) was first published in 1958 in Italian, while the first English translation,by Archibald Colquhoun, was published under the title *The Leopard* in 1960.

As for the figurative (and performative) arts, the connection to fashion, again, appears evident, since an oil painting starts with a canvas and many artists also use textiles for sculptures or installations, as shown by the work of the German conceptual, installation and process artist Franz Erhard Walther (b. 1939) or the US-artist-duo Christo (b. 1935) and Jeanne-Claude (1935–2009) when wrapping several monuments and landmarks in France, the US, Germany, Italy, Great Britain or Japan with cloth. For example, when building the *Floating Piers* on Lago d'Iseo in Northern Italy from June 18th to July 3rd 2016 as a work of art in a public space, installing over 100,000 square meters (cf. Christo & Jeanne-Claude, 2016, p. 46) of dahlia-yellow fabric over the piers in the water and the streets of Sulzano, Christo's textile art was used by the visitors of the exhibition *Walking on Water*—as the film of the making of the *Floating Piers* project was entitled, which Christo launched in 2019.[160] Thus, Christo transformed the piers into what locals called a catwalk—i.e. a true "passerella" (Christo & Jeanne-Claude, 2016, p. 4)—on water and turning the visitors of the exhibition into unusual "models" against the natural backdrop of the gentle highlands, that surrounded the open-air event. The spectators of this art performance—who came from all over the world to meet on Christo's piers of the Lago d'Iseo—within the art project, figured as active participants, temporarily filling it with life, different languages, voices, behaviour, manners and guise, forming a random, ephemeral melting-pot on this especially constructed "runway". The erratic composition of international culture travellers formed, thus, an intrinsic part of the *Floating Piers*-experiment, giving it (as all works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude do) a nomadic shade while being creatively enhanced, on an aesthetical level of art, as an unparalleled community of *Nomadic Subjects*, even if only for a restricted, actually short time (in this case, only for the duration of 15 days). Christo's land-art event was almost alike to how Lagerfeld staged his Fendi show at Fontana di Trevi that took place almost simultaneously on July 7th 2016: was this coincidence, inspiration, mimicry or just due to the spirit of the time in that very period? Probably both artists began to plan their events around 2014 and it is to be assumed that it was a zeitgeist-driven amalgam of the above, or a trendy way of thinking for both artists, who developed their projects independently, but in correspondence with the artistic *status quo*. Regardless, the analogy shows, again, how a cultural discourse might spontaneously emerge and disseminate (combining an art event with the element of water by mastering the latter), and how quick fashion picks up artistic, social and style-related movements or developments (gathering people "on" the water with a socializing and aesthetic transmedia effect).

160 The cinematic release *Walking on Water* (2019) was directed by the Bulgarian writer-director Andrey M. Paounov (b. 1974) (cf. MIFF, 2019, 0:02:28), while the official catalogue for *The Floating Piers* printed in 2016 still names only Antonio Ferrera as "the project's filmmaker" (Christo & Jeanne-Claude, 2016, p. 62). The trailer of Paounov's film *Walking on Water* can be found online (MIFF, 2019).

Finally, the transmedia fusion of fashion with film is certainly not restricted to modern art, but also happens in literature, as in Tomasi di Lampedusa's case and as many films that are based on books, like Brian De Palma's satire of the fashion world in his *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), based on the book by Tom Wolfe from 1987. Other Hollywood productions may come to our minds: e.g. Baz Luhrman's *The Great Gatsby*, in which Leonardo Di Caprio features as the main character in 2013, after Jack Clayton directed this film in 1974 with Robert Redford and with costumes designed by Ralph Lauren, both of which are based on the novel with the same title, written by Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1925) that visualizes trendsetting discourses of fashion in cinema. Another US-American film production connected to fashion brands, that we could mention, is David Frankel's *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) with Anne Hathaway and Meryl Streep based on the book by Lauren Weisberger (2003). In Italian cinema, though, the historical and handcrafts aspects of costuming often seem to prevail. This is, for example, the case in Roberto Faenza's film version of Dacia Maraini's novel *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (1990). It was released in 1997 under the short title *Marianna Ucrìa* and presented costumes (created by Danilo Donati [1926–2001]) and a soundtrack composed by Ennio Morricone (1928–2020). On the other hand, on the level of social discourse, we can certainly define a distinguished *Italian Style* (Paulicelli, 2016)—and *Made in Italy* itself (cf. Belfanti, 2019)—in the transmedia representation of suits, dresses, costumes and outfits throughout the full history of Italian (and also international) cinema and visual media when revisiting it systematically and selectively from the angle of (Italian) fashion (cf. also Reichardt & D'Angelo, 2016, pp. 14–15).

As a matter of fact, it is Hollywood that dictates fashion rules in postmodern cinema, often with a blatant economic effect. This is shown by the case of *American Gigolo* (1980), written and directed by Paul Schrader, and which stars Lauren Hutton and Richard Gere, who wore only Armani-suites in the film. It was revealed as a big unpaid advertising campaign, causing an Armani hype and big run for Armani-outfits in the US of the 1980s. After a first documentary exhibition of Yves Saint-Laurent's work as a fashion designer in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1983, the programmatic exhibition *Art in Fashion* by Giorgio Armani followed in the Guggenheim Museum of New York in 2000. This was the first of various museum shows worldwide (e.g. Capucci, Schiaparelli, Prada) that focused on the role of Italian fashion in the international art system. This trend was flanked by openings of fashion museums, which were located mainly in Italy and which showed the work of Italian designers, culminating—abroad—in the London exhibition *The Glamour of Italian Fashion 1945-2014* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in in 2014. These Italy-related sociocultural activities and innovative initiatives are, again, all based on a public sensitisation, strongly promoted by a series of intermeshed—specific Italo-American—cinematic discourses. As a matter of fact, in postmodern times, the fashion affinity in cinema and movies primarily shows luxury as a global lust for life—the *dolce vita* or *savoir vivre*—which is historically rooted in the time of the *telefoni-bianchi* films

("white telephones" that were shown in Italian movies as a US-coined, iconic code for luxury and the privileges of the upper class). These films were produced in the post-war period in the studios of Cinecittà, when Alfred Hitchcock, Liz Taylor, Audrey Hepburn or Ava Gardner worked in Rome, the city which was then often dubbed *Hollywood sul Tevere* (Engl.: "Hollywood on the Tiber").

The step from *Marriage Italian Style* (*Matrimonio all'italiana*, 1964), directed by Vittorio De Sica with Sophia Loren, in which close-up views accentuate the female bosom, to postmodernity with *American Gigolo* in 1980, that zoomed in on men's wear, highlight the ongoing transformations of the predominant values in "western" societies. Furthermore, public behaviour of this time disclosed the affinities that connect the fashion system with a neoliberal spirit and popular culture. This mix exploded in Italy, on a political level, during the Berlusconi-era in the 1990s, revealing all its weaknesses and decadence but also demonstrating incontestably the new power of both, the *iconic turn* and media or transmedia effects. The same can be said of architecture, as the setting of the Fontana di Trevi illustrates, both in Fellini's film *La dolce vita* and in Lagerfeld's fashion show for Fendi. It is not just by chance that the term *supermodel* became prominent in the show-business of the 1980s and 1990s, combining pop culture with a postmodern taste, launching different ethnic groups, nationalities and *habiti*, spanning from neo-baroque and rather exhibitionist brands (such as Versace in the 1980s) to sober and minimalist labels (such as Jil Sander in the 1990s). In the TV documentary *Made in Italy 1951–2015* by Jean Lauritano (broadcast in 2015 on the German-French tv-channel *Arte*), it is said that Donatella Versace, the sister of Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace (1946–1997), was first Gianni Versace's scout who had the job to find out in clubs, discotheques and pubs what women liked to wear, and later on was the one to propose some models to him, who were not only handsome, tall and slim, but had also particular pretty faces. Finally, they all walked for him, including Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford, Claudia Schiffer, and Nadja Auermann. In the 1980s, these supermodels worked all over the world on a transmedia level. They were portrayed on the most popular fashion magazine covers, preferably all at once, branded themselves as household names in order to have a worldwide presence, reputation, remuneration and high value to the market. They embraced old-style glamour, showed a professional working attitude, and availed themselves of the latest fashion in public and jewellery on the red carpet and at jet-set-events, thus slowly replacing film stars or at least extending the definition of their role and status in society, and, finally, becoming style-icons of luxury and wealth themselves. The circle that paradigmatically connects fashion with other ethnicities and life-practices (like the *sapeurs* in Africa, the attitudes in Italian culture towards the Gulf-War in the Mideast, various music genres, etc.), with literature (e.g. *The Leopard*), arts (e.g. Christo and Jeanne-Claude), film (from *La Dolce Vita* to *The Devil Wears Prada*, etc.), museum shows, the model business, etc., can't be closed without at least mentioning a last parameter that is crucial for any professional fashion concept: architecture.

In fact, apart from all the links that connect fashion to the industrial sectors and sociocultural *fields* (or *champs*, as Bourdieu originally calls them in *Les règles de l'art*, 1992) of entertainment, film, media, music, arts, photography, theatre, dance, food, design, sports, subculture or pop-culture, the closeness of fashion to architecture—at the end—becomes most evident when architecture is used as a catwalk or scenery for fashion shows. An architecturally sophisticated surrounding, a stunning, expressive landscape or a theatrical, even dramatic, building all enhance the impact and the message of any fashion performance, both on the analogue and the digital levels. When located in Italy, they often take place in open-air spaces, as in Rome on the Spanish Steps, in the Ara Pacis (Valentino, 2009) or at Fontana di Trevi (Fendi by Karl Lagerfeld, 2016), or even—for the first time in fashion history—abroad, on the Chinese Wall (Fendi by Karl Lagerfeld, 2007). Anyway, if in Italy or around the world, picturesque monuments, romantic ruins or iconic places function as settings for a suggestive photo-session or fashion event they do so not only in order to generate new transmedia synergies. They rather emphasize the essential nomadic baseline of fashion itself and serve as orientation devices or landmarks for the nomadic lifestyle that globetrotters, migrants, tourists, self-proclaimed world-citizens, jetsetters or frequent travellers perceive as most attractive and compatible with the plurality of their multi-faceted life-worlds in postmodern times.

9.5 Fashion as an Aesthetic and Didactic Tool

To complete this study about *The Iconic and Transcultural Language of Italian Fashion*, let's see, now, in this last chapter, how we can make use of it on a practical level. We have seen that in Italian fashion, local parameters merge with the "universal" language of fashion—to come back to Dacia Maraini's words that I quoted at the beginning of this essay—, if we agree that fashion implies not only the expression of a certain spirit of the time, but also mobility, individuality and style as the expression of one's personality (instead of blindly following mainstream trends). On the economic level, fashion represents "an aesthetic and symbolic choice that ... builds upon a technical dimension, ... a symbolic dimension and [finally] ... a trade-off between distinction and belongingness" (Grünwald, 2009, p. 6). In this dynamic sense, permanent change becomes a constant figure, just as D'Annunzio intended ("O rinnovarsi, o morire"), he himself also being an *arbiter elegantiae*—i.e. an arbiter of good taste, behaviour and refinement—who designed fashion for his female lovers using the label *Gabriel-Nuntius Vestiarius-Fecit* (cf. Sorge, 2015). Besides fashion studies that deal with Roman Antiquity (cf. Hollander, 1978) and the Renaissance (cf. Birbari, 1975), and generally semiotic interpretations as a crucial research approach to fashion, as proposed by Roland Barthes (cf. Barthes, 1967), theoretical theses concerning the paradox (cf. Esposito, 2004) and the unavoidability of fashion (cf. Hollander, 1994) have also tried to explain its extrovert charm and underground potential. The vital, historic,

symbolic, subversive, sociopolitical and artistic-aesthetical impacts of fashion have always reflected, in praxis, the differences between north and south, orient and occident, and were, at the same time, merged in the way people dressed or in the way that textile elements were either combined in daily life or used and mentioned in Italian literature, cinema, arts, theatre and language.

Although designers like "Lagerfeld, Miuccia Prada and Rei Kawakubo say that fashion is not art, [and] it is difficult to disagree" (Barnard, 2014, p. 27), we may agree, on the contrary, also with their colleague Roberto Cavalli (b. 1940) who, as an artist, writes, on the contrary, that his "creations are meant to be worn and not attached to the wall" (cf. Reichardt & D'Angelo 2016, p. 17; the translation in English is mine). In other words, in the third millennium, the semiotic language of fashion openly illustrates: *First*, its synergetic aspects, not only in artistic but—according to the French poststructuralist Michel Foucault (1926–1984)—also, and even primarily, in its social *discourses* (cf. Foucault, 1971). They particularly focus on solidarity, subalternity and minority aspects that follow the advice of taking care of oneself by reverting to "techniques of self" (cf. Foucault, 1984). *Second*, the semiotic aspects of the fashion system reveal its iconic parameters, fully unfolding the *iconic turn* and most clearly appearing on the Internet, visual and digital media, and, finally, *third*, the semiotic power of fashion consists of its transcultural facets. In fact, the transculturality of fashion expresses itself through its ubiquity, mobility and social hybridity, stressing, according to Welsch, the fact that cultures are incommensurable and that they melt, meet and communicate everywhere by inspiring themselves and by being aesthetically interwoven and compared with one another. These circumstances are based not just on present-day globalization and on a way-of-life that approximates nomadism or the nomad as a theoretical figure—a key concept already envisioned by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their 1986 essay about *Nomadology* (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1986). Moreover, they also refer to communication, synthesizing aesthetics, and functional optimization (cf. Grünwald, 2009, p. 8). In the light of their social role, garments express and represent emotions, cultural membership and uniqueness—in short: "fashion translates that sense of self into style" (Barnard, 2014, p. 26). In the end, outfits "are tools and ultimately prosthetic devices that make possible the representation or translation of an idea or an experience of the self and of ourselves, and thereby communicate it to other people" (p. 27), irrespective of whether their transcultural outlook is related, for example, with Italian fashion, and whether it is launched in Europe, Japan, the US, or in emerging markets such as China, India (cf. Grünwald, 2009, p. 45), or elsewhere.

Even if the phenomenology of fashion, sociological fashion studies and the aesthetic issues of fashion might all seem hybrid, superficial or hard to categorize, we may deduce from Zangemeister's and Stark's neurological study about *The Artistic Brain Beyond The Eye* (2007) that any image must be developed first in the brain of a designer before he sketches it as an empirical, two-dimensioned image. Later on, such a drawing will then be transformed into a look that is worn and presented on a

catwalk by a model. Finally, his creation may be received through the eyes of a spectator in a real life, three-dimensional version. It is this inner image itself, again, that will be remembered by the receiver organically, with the help of the human brain, as if it came from an abstract sphere, before vanishing back into it, and, in the end, being tentatively adopted by cultural tradition—just as those immaterial units, with which we pass on our cultural heritage from generation to generation, called *memes*, as Richard Dawkins teaches (*The Selfish Gene*, 1976).[161]

On a didactical level, we can deduce that connecting fashion discourses to several theoretical approaches (Bourdieu, Welsch, Barthes) helps to illustrate the complexity of *style, sense and senses* and why fashion actually matters—both in our real lives and in academic discussion. Focusing on the specific (peripheral) case of Italy according to the current state of research in Cultural Studies, we have been able to recognize not only how fashion discourses (in a Foucauldian sense) clearly mark, constitute and visualize cultural identities throughout history, but also how closely Italian fashion discourses have influenced, among others, French culture. In fact, the typically "French" *Haute Couture* and the characteristic "Italian" *Alta Moda* were originally intertwined through iconic figures such as Maria de' Medici, who emblematically introduced Italian habits at the French court at Renaissance times. In (post-) modern times, this role is played for example by "the architect of fashion", Gianfranco Ferré (1944–2007), an Italian designer working as Stylistic Director for the French fashion brand Christian Dior and commuting between Milan and Paris, or Emanuel Ungaro (1933–2019), who was a French designer descending from an Apulian family that had emigrated to France with various economic and administrative ties to Italy. Karl Lagerfeld, added a transcultural stylistic element to the international fashion scene, working as a German for the Italian label Fendi and the French signature Chanel for decades, whilst at the same time spending most of his lifetime in France.

As a consequence, because fashion mirrors history and society so clearly, the Italian case might be used didactically to approach young students in order to make them familiar with the complexity of globally entangled history, focusing on the past centenary, and introducing fashion to gender studies, minority issues and transcultural approaches. How could then such a teaching unit be structured?—Well, starting with Coco Chanel's revolutionary capture of leg wear, "translating" trousers and

161 "Meme" is a neologism coined by Dawkins in 1976 in order to contrast the notion of a "gene" with a "meme", that he defines as an envisioned entity, idea, behaviour or style that humans inherit socio-culturally (in analogy to the biophysical heredity transmitted by a gene) on an individual as well as on a generational level from one mind to another. On this base, new collective (e.g. European) as well as national (e.g. Italian, British, etc.) identities and transcultural parameters arise (e.g. in the fashion system). Dawkins's fundamental concept of a meme in *The Selfish Gene* (1976) was picked up shortly by the English neuropsychologist Nicholas Keynes Humphrey, who defined memes as living structures, and later developed further by other European cultural scholars like Jan Assmann (*Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 1992) or Susan Blackmore (*The Meme Machine*, 1999).

pants from the man's world to the everyday life of women during the 1920s and 1930s, and ladies smoking proposed by Yves Saint Laurent in the 1960s, after World War II, the dynamic of "western" world fashion gives way to the Golden Era of Italian fashion. As we know, this lasted from the 1950s to date, in the third millennium, launching the Italian designers Valentino Garavani, Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani particularly in the US. If we agree that the aesthetic highlights of these fashion trends have introduced transcultural parameters to global culture throughout the decades, we may consider that they pinpoint two peaks of modern culture in Europe: the first lasting from 1920 to 1935, distinguished by Italy's emancipation from the French fashion model, and the second from 1950 up to the present, which is characteristic in Italy's solidarity with the USA and its interest in transatlantic cultural impact. Indeed, on the political level we may realize that the Italian rise in contemporary fashion history is strongly linked to the increasing power of US-culture in the 20th century. The cachet of *Made in Italy*, actually, goes back to post-war Italy, when, after the end of the Second World War, people in Italy—as all over Europe—were faced with poverty, devastation and lack of resources. Like France, also in Italy many cities had been destroyed. While there was the necessity to start up the economy again everywhere on the so-called Old Continent, within the fashion business sector, Italy was well known to have always had a good quality of textiles and a prolific commercial experience, and it quickly showed itself able to modernize by new means of technology.

This historical overview could serve as a good starting point to delve into Italo-American relationships as a passport to fame for fashion products originating from Italy. In fact, as the USA had been Italy's principal economic and political ally at the end of World War II, America's political interest was directed on preventing Italy from falling into the clutches of communist Russia, once the war was over. Simultaneously, the Italian inventions in fashion in this very period were a perfect match with the Americans, who really liked the extroverted glamour that the Italians spread with their love for life on the red carpet on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the easy-going pace of the Italian *dolce vita*. They appreciated the Italian designs as being full of fantasy and peachiness, the vivid and bold colours of their textiles, the way they wore them stylishly in public, and, later on, the accessible, wearable Italian fashion of the *Pronto Moda*, while Italian aristocrats continued to invite the Americans in their *palazzi* to "society events [that] greatly contributed to making Italian fashion known internationally" (Paulicelli, 2001, p. 288; cf. also Belfanti, 2019, pp. 233–234). Historically, this American enthusiasm also openly reflects in the above-mentioned first fashion show organized by Giorgini in 1951 at his home, where he presented some young Italian fashion designers and their products initially to only four or five American critics and buyers, whom he had persuaded to come over to Florence to meet him

during their stay in Paris in that year. As history shows,[162] they were so taken with the presentation that Giorgini repeated the event a year later in 1952, which paid off materially when all of a sudden three hundred US-Americans experts and clients showed up in Florence (cf. Belfanti, 2019, pp. 225–226). There were so many more than he had expected that he had to hire Palazzo Pitti in order to receive them all—and this was only the beginning of a long and stable transatlantic fashion friendship.

In this perspective, fashion offers a perfect entry to Italian culture, mentality, modern history and to the contemporary way of life, in general, both on the aesthetic and the didactic level. Throughout the centuries, the Italian casualness started blurring *From Sprezzatura to Satire* (Paulicelli, 2014a), until nowadays, in the late capitalist phase, it seems to converge in a transnational nomadic lifestyle as propagated by Wolfgang Welsch (cf. Welsch, 2017), especially when analysed from a cross-cultural perspective within a global framework, focusing the interdisciplinary fields of fashion, identity and globalization (cf. Paulicelli, 2008). Summarizing the key role of fashion *Made in Italy* today, if it is seen as a historical result of foreign and self-related interactions as well as a significant didactic vehicle, we may conclude that—speaking with Pierre Bourdieu—the *habitus* (i.e. the individual appearance and performance in public and private) in the cultural sphere of Italian fashion, opens out into a "nomadic" way of life in postmodern and globalized times. Thus, Italian fashion embodies in various empirical manifestations the phenomenon of *Nomadology* that Deleuze and Guattari spotted within the conflicting domains of capitalism, globalization and postmodernity (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), on the threshold of a transcultural anthropology that was about to be critically introduced by Wolfgang Welsch only a few years later.

To summarize, it seems that the success of modern Italian fashion is based on three historical promoting factors. Firstly, there was the role played by the landing of the US-American allies in Italy in 1943: due to their presence in the country until the end of World War II, a "reciprocal attraction" (Paulicelli, 2001, p. 288) built up between Italy and the US. Based on the two big historic emigration waves of the Italians to North America in the 19th (between the 1870s and 1930s) and 20th century (since the 1950s) and the newly formed Italophone diasporas in the USA, the Italo-American ties were socially reinforced and, at the same time, essentially renewed. Secondly, the rise of Cinecittà amidst the international film-industry, which was explicitly promoted by Mussolini, represents—not least also due to the active cooperation of Hollywood in the post-World-War-II period—the historic starting point of the success of Italian fashion trends in the 1950s, which still manifests its iconographic and media power until the present day. Thirdly, the advantages that the Italians gained, in terms of experience, in running handcraft-manufactures and traditional family-businesses

162 Cf. the website of the fashion center in Florence CFMI (Il Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana), "La storia", online (CFMI, 2015).

in the textile sector since Medieval times, deeply rooted in the European collective cultural memory, highly qualified them in modern times.

From the long-term-relation between Italian and French fashion throughout European history to the modernization and the final awakening of a genuine Italian style oriented towards the New World and the US-market in the post-war period, we can still identify various references to the exchange between the French and the Italian fashion systems from the beginning of the 20th century until today. But when they actually are assessed at the same time, one observes that they have become more and more hybrid and transcultural according to the progressive process of globalization. The interlaced, complex origins and European roots of these performative manifestations highlight, indeed, how the semiotic language (Barthes) and *habitus* (Bourdieu) of fashion have strongly co-influenced social and cultural attitudes, the economy, history, visual arts, literature, music and dance, industrial design, architecture, the film sector, transcultural ways of life and tastes, gastronomy, tourism, migration, sports, and even politics in the "western" world. It thus results that fashion is a historical non-verbal language, that has always reflected civilization and is multilaterally connected to the evolution of mankind on a cultural as well as a transcultural level. It depicts an endless field of experience between the poles of diversity and otherness, or—as Bhabha puts it—of identity and difference, opening a hybrid *third space*, in which entities of cultural difference meet without claiming any "assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5).

In conclusion, in tracing transitions, contact zones, rivalries and creative competition as well as cultural shifts and cross-overs between styles, the controversies and mutual impact of French and Italian fashion designers, in an international context show that fashion discourses can be regarded as a form of symbolic capital—if not as an artistic subgenre or cultural activity *per se*—as well as a theoretical discourse (cf. Barthes, Foucault, Bourdieu). Nonetheless, in view of the fact that, even if theoretical approaches do exist, fashion still needs to be fully integrated into Cultural Studies, we have to reassess the binomial formula of *Diversity and Otherness*, as well as the formal and normative codes of fashion design throughout the centuries. Within this scope, the transcultural approach offers not only a multitude of case studies *in-between* of cultural spheres, academic disciplines and international market fields—or between *Style, Sense and Senses*—but also explains methodologically *The Iconic and Transcultural Language of Italian Fashion* as a 3D kaleidoscope or prism through which we can observe its diverse local (i.e. standard) bonds to a Mediterranean lifestyle, as well as its global attachment to the rest of other life-worlds. Therefore, as one of the most active international experts on Italian fashion studies, Eugenia Paulicelli, professor of Italian Studies at Queens College and the City University of New York, rightly considers that the label *"Made in Italy"* from the standpoint of its transnational underpinnings that are dialectically in conversation with ideas and ideals of national identity and character" opens up "the notion of *Made in Italy* to a larger transnational context", and thus continues to reinforce still today "the high levels

of Italian craftsmanship, attention to detail, beauty and cultural heritage". These all count as values that Paulicelli stresses, given that they define "the Italian character and style at its best" (Paulicelli, 2014b, p. 169; italics by Paulicelli).

Precisely because fashion has always mirrored society, it seems difficult to understand why—since the academic boom of Cultural Studies, which slowly started in the 1980s—we have implemented and generally acknowledged in study programmes and syllabi film studies, gender studies or postcolonial studies, but academia has unaccountably neglected (Italian) Fashion Studies so far. While, up to now, the scientific *Otherness* of this domain might have restrained scholars of Italian and Transcultural Studies from including fashion discourses into canonical research fields, positive evidence is given, though—by political and artistic environments, as well as by daily life-experience—about how close societies across the world feel to the polymorphic languages of Italian fashion, which, *de facto*, stands as a paradigmatic case. Often overseen as positioned in the shadow of French *Haute Couture*, the presumably "simpler", more practical and, yet, variegated Italian way of life, *life-worlds* and skilful effortlessness (called *sprezzatura*) actually embrace a wide range of diverse cultures and layers of meaning.

In my contribution, I have tried to bridge this research gap and to illustrate the transcultural dynamics of Italian fashion by first pinpointing fashion as a semiotic language, indicating relations between fashion and traditional—even stereotyped—"Italian" habits, and second by discussing the transculturality of fashion *Made in Italy* as well as its subversive power, applying a range of theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches (Welsch, Deleuze, Barthes, Bhabha, Foucault, Goodman). For centuries experienced in handling foreign rules, the Italian mentality developed not only smart forms of entrepreneurship in order to survive and raise the economic status of their states, but also an inventive mind-set across the grain, which was distinct from their foreign rulers. Furthermore,—in spite of its Eurocentrism that can't be denied—the peculiarity of the topic concerning "Fashion made in Italy" consists in the circumstance that fashion from Italy is not as imperialistically self-centred as French or American fashion might appear. Instead of that, Italy-related fashion products and trends disperse themselves throughout the world in a subtle, almost imperceptible, heterotopic manner (cf. Reichardt & Moll, 2018, pp. 16–17). These two factors—Italian rebelliousness and heterotopic syncretism—catapulted the Italians in the second half of the 20th century to becoming the most requested and successful fashion designers in history. Like the US-Indian-Italian writer Lahiri or the postcolonial Franco-Congolese *sapeurs* in Africa, Italians keep on searching for their "decentralized", independent and deliberating own way, while constantly enriching and optimizing the transcultural spheres of fashion.

Always oscillating *between* centre and periphery, and in showing an open-minded *habitus* in the face of a US-writer originating from India who moved to Rome (like Jhumpa Lahiri) or a German designer living in France and also working in Italy (like Karl Lagerfeld), by focusing on iconic aspects of a language which is keen on using

the media beyond borders in order to reach out to people all over the world, Italian fashion has developed its own aesthetics to reflect nomadic lifestyles in postmodern times. Symbolically, particularly in academic sciences, it takes on an assumed "peripheric" role within the global fashion system (mostly standing in the shadow of France, in the public perception) just like the European market does in the international context. In truth, though, Italian fashion is—at least historically speaking—of central standing and great importance because it represents a freely flowing font of traditional proposals, original inspiration and a permanent pool of creative and fresh ideas since WWII. Italian fashion, thus, offers—just like the transcultural practices that developed in Europe over the centuries—a lens of opportunity and an extremely broad choice of subjects which are still to be questioned and studied. For centuries, despite all Eurocentrism from which *world fashion* (in analogy to World Literature) suffers, Italian fashion has succeeded in showing how to express individualistic and ideological attitudes regarding style, gender and society with such a solid professionalism and—in the eye of an interested audience—unique *sprezzatura*, that make it worth including the Italian *habitus*—also as a didactic key-concept—in a much more visible way, if not in the curriculum of Cultural Studies in general, then at least in the standard reach, concern and research spectrum of Modern Italian Studies, today, both in Italy and abroad.

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