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The art-fashion of Fernanda Yamamoto: tensioning and reinventing creative processes

A arte-moda de Fernanda Yamamoto: tensionando e reinventando processos de criação

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Abstract

Based on the experience of immersion in the studio of Fernanda Yamamoto an artist-creator, nationally and internationally recognized in the fashion world, this article discusses the way in which the creative processes, in that context and conditions, were intertwined with the research process. Information was collected via observations, informal conversations and interviews, which were recorded in a field diary. The analyses were based on Bakhtinian architecture and, characterizing the contemporary fashion system as a complex system that responds to the demands of innovation in a volatile and voracious market, built by the tense interaction of different social voices, the research made it possible to understand and move senses that weave the dialogue between Fernanda Yamamoto's production and the fields of art, fashion and life. The results contribute to the tension of prevailing narrative about artists and the creation processes and make other stories visible in the field of fashion, research and life.

Keywords: Art; Clothing; Creativity; Research; Semantics.

Resumo

A partir da experiência de imersão no ateliê de uma artista-criadora, reconhecida nacional e internacionalmente no mundo da moda, Fernanda Yamamoto, o artigo discute o modo como se entrelaçaram os processos de criação, naquele contexto e condições, com o processo de pesquisar. As informações foram coletadas via observações, conversas informais e entrevistas, as quais foram registradas em diário de campo. As análises fundamentaram-se na arquitetura bakhtiniana e, caracterizando-se o sistema de moda contemporâneo como um sistema complexo que responde às exigências de inovação em um mercado volátil e voraz, edificado pela tensa interação de variadas vozes sociais, a pesquisa possibilitou compreender e movimentar sentidos que entretecem o diálogo da produção de Fernanda Yamamoto com os campos da arte, da moda e da vida. Os resultados contribuem para tensionar a narrativa predominante sobre artistas e processos de criação e visibilizar histórias outras no campo da moda, da pesquisa e da vida.

Palavras-chave: Arte; Roupas; Criatividade; Pesquisa; Semântica.

The act of dressing and the body-clothing ensemble produce plural meanings in the polyphonic symphony of life. Meanings, however, are coined and marked by the tensions between different social voices (Bakhtin, 2018, 2020; Stella & Brait; 2021), which build what we know as fashion: a complex system that responds to the demands of innovation in a volatile and voracious market. Why sew one more piece? Are we not sick and tired of producing so many clothing artifacts that end up building the mountains of discarded clothes in the Atacama (<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-60144656>) area or in the seaside dumps in Ghana (<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/media-58911546>)?

If fashion conceptions circulate through the mint of the daily life of each dressed person's notions and actions, within the framework of people's environmentally catastrophic practices or hegemonically operative discourses and appearances, we are faced with the potential of a movement seeking to research and negotiate the importance of a transient field-theme across knowledge that contributes to the understanding of fashion as an element intertwined with the contemporary social experience.

Even though this "text-piece" insists on focusing on fashion, its trend is not towards the waste accumulation in the landfills; on the contrary, it addresses and aggregates remains, fragments that, in the production lines, would be discarded as waste. I could even, in a movement of criticism-refusal-insurgency, renounce the word fashion and deal with clothes, purposefully appropriating their divergent meanings, since fashion and clothes are not equivalent: Lipovetsky (2009) and Lipovetsky and Serroy (2015) describes fashion as a logic coupled to the functioning of hyper-financialized capitalism, that is, the term has expanded from the sphere of clothing to offer understandings about mechanisms of objectification and subjectification that condition our current modes of existence; as to clothes, when Agamben (2011) discusses nudity, at the same time he tells us about the need to cover the body, wrapping it in clothes. The philosopher goes back to the Christian theological genesis to articulate the way in which the perception of nudity is ingrained in our culture through the construction of the doctrine of original sin: Adam and Eve's transgression of the divine order strips them of the garment of grace that covered them; thus, they go from a state of shameless nudity to a nudity that must be shielded. If being God means dispensing with clothing, since God lives in supreme plenitude, the imperative to cover the body describes our human condition – a theological strategy that imputes to nudity the perception of human nature that has lost the state of grace, i.e. a corrupt naked human nature.

Still, I prefer to insist on the term Fashion because I prefer to rally other senses loosening a programmed knot and stare at its loose threads with no particular weave. Otherwise, I run the risk of talking about clothes and the idea of fashion remaining stagnant. This is the terrain on which this text was developed.

Based on the experience of an immersion in the studio of Fernanda Yamamoto a renowned artist-creator in the fashion world, specifically during the process of preparing a fashion show/exhibition, the processes of creating and researching intertwined and help steer the discussions hereafter. Fragments gathered from our experience with the artist's studio team, reviewed in dialogues with authors such as Adichie (2019), Bakhtin (2018, 2020), Lipovetsky (2005, 2009) and Vygotsky (2018, 2019), among others, allow us to understand how the creative processes in that context and conditions create tension in meanings while also pointing to the plural horizons that the term fashion can evoke.

Support Mold: Fashion System and Creation Processes

In times of accelerated spectacularization, “Celebrity is the ‘authority’ of the temporary”, stated Costa (2004, p. 169), and fashion designers share the list of global fame with names from different fields. It is not even necessary to demonstrate excellence in a certain domain (such as soccer, cinema and music); all you need to do is tune in to fashion or technology and dance to the rhythm of entertainment to achieve a star status in just one click and then disappear in another click. Ours is the time in which the media selects, consecrates, spectacularizes and terminates the notoriety of the day, as ephemeral as any other commodity. Names magically coated with originality multiply to cover up the “impoverished reality” that sustains them, points out Bourriaud (2009).

Fashion, however, appropriated the phenomenon in its own way, using stylistic signatures – that is, transforming the names of designers into brands – and launching them as one of the pillars of its operating system on a global scale, benefiting from them capitalistically². Charles Frédéric Worth (1825-1895, founder of the first Haute Couture house in Paris in 1857) appears at the forefront of those who refuted the role of the couturier-artisan, subordinate to the desires of his clients, occupied for centuries on end, in order to approach artistic brilliance with the mission of innovating, “freely” creating original models and validating his stylistic signature.

In a profession that was historically and symbolically discriminated against, seamstresses were restricted to an anonymous and depreciated work belonging to the sphere of mechanical arts – unlike the social value given to the liberal arts. The reorganization of Western fashion in the 19th century, according to emerging modern values – individualization, the new, seduction – socially promoted the meeting of the role of the seamstress with the status that the great artist of fine arts had already enjoyed, more markedly, since the 16th century (Cunha, 2000; Lipovetsky, 2009).

It is in this context that Lipovetsky observes a new era for fashion, that of the so-called Haute Couture, in which great creators emerge: true modern artists endowed with the quality of unique artistic talent, innate genius, supported by romantic ideology. Nochlin states (2016, p. 14) that “genius (...) is thought of as a timeless and mysterious power, somehow incorporated into the person of the Great Artist”, an assumption historically consecrated in shared narratives and conceptions about artistic creation. In the field of fashion, Gabrielle Chanel, Elsa Schiaparelli, Christian Dior and Alexander McQueen – just a few examples to illustrate – will surely be remembered and will help compose a list of creators consecrated for their genius expressed in clothing creations.

It was mainly in line with the belief in the creative individual originality of their celebrity designers that the Haute Couture houses consolidated the exclusivity of their labels and the prices written on them. Combined with this precept, they legitimized themselves through the aura of tradition associated with the mastery of a craft, a kind of artisanal tradition, while they adapted to the speed of globalized competition, renewing themselves incessantly but within the boundaries of the unifying imaginary of the brand image (Roux, 2005). It is the long time tradition orchestrated by the very short time of fashion and unified under a single name:

Cult of the founder and the creators who are inspired by him, glorification of the “brand spirit” and loyalty to a style or a code of recognition, celebration of significant events, the construction of a luxury brand is inseparable from the symbolic management of its roots, from the work of building a myth. (Lipovetsky, 2005, p. 83)

² Félix Guatarri proposes the concept of capitalistic culture to designate not only societies classified as capitalist, but also sectors of the “Third World” or “peripheral” capitalism, as well as the so-called socialist economies of Eastern countries that live in a kind of dependence and counter-dependence on capitalism (Guatarri & Rolnik, 1986, p.15).

For nearly a century, Parisian Haute Couture institutionalized the rules of Western fashion, centralized its renewal and internationalized its style. This phase is now gone, but not without leaving its mark on its current organization: the artistic status of the genius designer, the rhythm of seasonal creation and collections presented biennially by live models in advertising shows – today, held in the format of international fashion weeks, the “Fashion Weeks”, with the so-called “fashion capitals”: Paris, Milan, London and New York at the center of command and media attention (Lipovetsky, 2009; Volonté, 2012).

In our hyper era, made possible by new conditions of computerized creation, communication and manufacturing, such general principles of modern fashion regulation have been remodeled to the extreme. The understanding of creativity from an individualistic perspective, referring it to innate characteristics, has become intertwined with the globalized dynamics of the contemporary fashion system: the creative aura attached to the figure of the creator is operated in favor of economic and symbolic advantages of fashion brands and conglomerates (Ayres, 2017; Brydges, 2018; Hoppe, 2019; Tokatli, 2011).

Alexander Hoppe (2019), when investigating two Indian companies that manufacture clothing for North American and European brands, highlights the existence of an artistic license to perform creativity. Even though the designers of these companies are responsible for an average of sixty percent of the creations of the pieces exported, it is the Western brands, often personified by stylistic signatures that receive the credit for the authorship of the creations. In the hierarchical chain of the fashion industry, creativity and authorship are (in)visible according to the moral authorization endorsed by the power relations of the international political game.

The illusion of an innate vocation attributed to fashion designers and so many other characters from different fields can be criticized based on Vygotsky’s legacy (2019): the “innate vocation” is an illusion because it ignores the conditions that allow artistic productions and the dialogue that they inexorably weave with the existing environment; it implies stripping ourselves of a mystical view of the creation’s nature and understanding it as an activity present in everything that humanity has developed to date, from the most modest tools to extraordinary inventions.

Vygotsky (2019) helps us to perceive the creator-creation-creature entanglement because it allows us to grasp creation in a complexity characteristic of something that is forged based on our experiences, from the reality in which we live and from the way we respond to it: it is the experience accumulated throughout life that supports our imagination’s creative activities as they provide the material with which we will work. Mixed, dissociated, (re)combined, reworked, the marks of the remaining impressions of our real experiences are materials for building something new, a product of the imagination that, when incarnated, becomes part of the world and thus intervenes into and modifies it (Souza et al., 2018; Zanatta & Silva, 2017).

In line with this perspective, we can glimpse the fashion creative process through the intertwining of the actual conditions of existence of the people who create clothes with the socially and historically constituted possibilities that are bequeathed to them based on their conditions of class, race, gender, among others. Social, cultural, economic and professional characteristics that mark the occupation as well as those who occupy it, and the broad spectrum in which this activity can be inserted in the contemporary fashion system, are intertwined in their creative processes (Volonté, 2012).

The Methodological Paths of Sewing

When I talk about my role as a seamstress-investigator, more than an analogical impetus contiguous to fashion research, whose theme easily leads us to establish a correlation between

fashion-clothing-sewing, I find the possibility of revealing another way of researching, invented by the openings that critical social psychology favors us and grounded in the theoretical-methodological reflections developed by Bakhtin and his Circle (Jobim e Souza, 2017; Machado & Zanella, 2019). The image insinuated by the act of sewing can very well connect us to the subtle actions of our daily lives, to the inventive activity, to the smallness of the needle and thread, to that insignificant thing that goes unnoticed by the positivist formats of the traditional scientific paradigm. I therefore establish myself as a seamstress of life in the practice of researching and producing knowledge (Fonseca et al., 2012).

The paths that favored the collection of materials were framed by the country's health conditions. Due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, virtual means of interaction and communication have transformed the performance of many of our daily activities into remote versions. For the performance of our investigation, it would be no different: the possibility of following Fernanda Yamamoto's ongoing creations cooled off right at the beginning of the investigation and I began to investigate ways of studying her creative processes based on materials available on the internet, counting on the possibility (with luck) that she would accept an invitation for an online interview.

It turns out that I was surprised by her openness. When I contacted her via email, explaining my research objective and asking her for an interview (remote or in person – with the necessary precautions and already vaccinated), Fernanda Yamamoto replied that they were preparing a fashion show for the São Paulo Fashion Week (SPFW), the first in-person edition in two years, and invited me to go to the studio, located in São Paulo, to attend the event.

This was indeed an irresistible proposal. I eventually spent 11 days in her studio, immersed for 10 to 12 hours, until the date of the performance/exhibition (November 19, 2021). The project in progress produced articles that came from far away: they were kimonos sewed in the Yuba Community³ around the 1960s, using feed bags. Three original kimonos were rearranged and another seven were made in the studio, totaling ten pieces. I worked side by side with her team, where I met 12 people: two seamstresses, a style and pattern coordinator, two pattern makers, a cutter, two salespeople, a person who organizes the general spaces of the studio and the physical store, a stylist, a coordinator and a production assistant.

However, during the preparation period for a fashion show, the studio hires more people and there is more traffic. Thus, the discussions in this study took advantage of the conversations and casual encounters that a “studio in full swing” can provide: in addition to the team members, I spoke with freelancers, female embroiderers, models, friends, among others. In addition to this space's activity, the research process also consisted of other informal, casual encounters, including a previous visit to the exhibition site, but only authorized materials are exhibited throughout this work⁴. Written records of the conversations, impressions and scenes experienced were jotted down in a field diary and complemented with photos and videos.

At this point, I would like to call attention to a convergence, from the outset, between the dynamics of the studio and the ethical-political stance adopted in our investigation, as if we shared an ethical commitment to the weaving of life: the conversations that took place with each person on the team were organically linked to the ways of perceiving, doing, creating and living together that were established there. When the studio staff welcomed me, there was no “room” for

³ Self-managed rural community located in Mirandópolis, in the interior of São Paulo, founded by Japanese immigrant Isami Yuba. For 100 years, they have cultivated and preserved Japanese traditions and customs.

⁴ The research project, from which the text was produced, was approved by the Ethics Committee under opinion no. 5.478.883.

formal interviews; there was, instead, room for me to use my manual sewing skills (learned during my undergraduate degree in fashion) in whatever was necessary and, in the process, let myself be carried away by conversations with whoever was around me.

Thus, it was a case of an investigation that was entangled with the artistic case to which that staff was dedicated, a research-event intertwined with a wearing art-event: amalgamated, they were produced by the openness available between one process and another, by the reciprocal responsiveness that they inexorably and dialogically wove, by the coincidences of the conciliations and differences of our abilities and by the surprise that creating research and creating kimonos, because they were carried out by eventfulness, implied in our ways of being together. If we started from distant fields, one from psychology and the other from fashion, our investigations forged by inventive desires became companions and made our encounters spaces locations where to “join affections, percepts and concepts” (Fonseca et al., 2012, p. 10).

With the Bakhtinian perspective, I drifted with the orality of the conversations I was able to weave with the people in the studio, with the subsequent approach to the collected materials, with the emerging, insurgent, unpredictable voices that rose up, encountered, confronted and negotiated the constitution of the second time of the research: this one in which I encounter the text-words, in which I try to make of them and with them means of discerning their own powers to revive the constitutive polyphony of this research process and that process of creating wearable art, to proliferate meanings in the fabric of our lives and our world.

Tearing the Silk Fabric

Silk is a noble, ancient fabric. Originally, a cocoon that the *Bombyx mori* caterpillar weaves around its body with a single thread and remains inside that cocoon until it metamorphoses into a moth. Once the cocoon is undone, this single thread is joined to others in the spinning machine to make the skein and wind it onto spools (<http://www.usp.br/aunantigo/exibir?id=7780>). Weaving, unraveling, spinning, winding, reweaving: “She is here literally to tear the silk fabric,” joked Netto – a freelance pattern maker who was helping to prepare the show – on the day I arrived at the studio. That was the first task they gave me: to break the single thread into several, unravel it with my hands, and make threads in the larger weave that kept them connected.

Unraveling the single thread of silk into multiple threads; unraveling a supposed single fashion story into multiple fashion stories. As Adichie (2019, p. 33) states, “When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain some sort of paradise”.

Some sort of paradise. In the writer’s expression, I find encouragement, even if temporary, for my desire to translate in words the intensity experienced in the field. Far from notions similar to salvation or human fulfillment (Rolnik, 2018), a species asks for passage to the plurality of meanings that can connote the idea of paradise. Deterritorialization, displacement, trembling: it is in this type of paradise that I throw myself. In it, I rejoice in the torture of the path that leads from idea to word.

There is no rush; we need to be in the moment of stuttering. We need to inhabit the vacillating state we find ourselves in when the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the unrecognizable makes us dizzy. To stutter is to shuffle the fixed order of meanings, to probe language and invent ways of saying the unspeakable (Barros & Zamboni, 2012). While the practices through which fashion is realized, objectively and subjectively, intimately and globally, forge fashion narratives and constitute it in a specific way, I stutter because I was swept away by the events experienced

in those days and challenged by possibilities of, with them, putting tension on dominant fashion narratives. Not because these are lies (their catastrophic consequences are accumulating frenetically, even within us) but because their imperatives also create stereotypes and these are essentially incomplete (Adichie, 2019). I stutter because the power of life “can never be fully expressed” (Barros & Zamboni, 2012, p. 121).

It is distressing, without a doubt, yet paradisiacal. This is because there is in it (in this type of paradise) a poetics sensitive to the creative movement that we en-gage in when we escape conventional ways of knowledge, doing and existing. De-territorializing oneself implies distrusting certain and firm ground, rejecting “fictional narratives” (Rolnik, 2018, p. 86), opening oneself to the possibility of moving in between and invading unknown territories or daring to invent them, therefore, open to the possibility of deciphering the world through other signs, thus telling other stories and, in turn, engendering other forms of subjectivation, producing other modes of coexistence and existence.

Tracing Patterns, Tensioning the System

- It’s different here, you know, right? (Netto)
- Oh, really? (Investigator)
- Yes! If you don’t know, find out! (Netto)

And he smiled at me.

These were some of the first words I heard as soon as I “settled in” at the studio. No, I didn’t know that “it was different” there. And even less that this idea would continue to circulate in the coming days.

- No, we are not normal! (Marina, model maker)
- Here, I had to do things I never imagined. (Silvia, pilot)
- Impossible things? (investigator)
- Not impossible, actually incredible!

Fernanda Yamamoto’s invitation and my immersion in the process of preparing a fashion show for her brand led me to a state of strangeness. While research focusing on the work of fashion designers discussed the individual perspective of creativity and its relations with the fashion system, revealing logics and practices that (re)produce a stylistic system that makes it viable (Ayres, 2017; Hoppe, 2019; Tokatli, 2011), my investigative path presented an opening that, if not adverse, was at least unusual for those who live within the hierarchical structure of the fashion industry: the management and creative positions in brands and labels that circulate through the main international fashion weeks.

Different, unique, averse, unusual As soon as I arrived, I started collecting some words that evoked a certain distance, a departure, by definition, from the common, from the standard, from the known. From fashion? With which fashion(s) did they – and I – dialogue to affirm so much difference? Over the course of those days, meanings were being created and connected to those words that reinforced the different. There, the creation of meanings produced sensitively in the “experience of the irretrievable”, to use the expression of the artist Mira Schendel remembered by Valle and Gondar (2014, p. 652); here, on the sheet of paper, we sway between the word, the concepts and our relationship with the sensitive, in an attempt to evoke what verbal language cannot express because only the breadth of intuition is capable of communicating them.

Already immersed in this limbo, I venture with Bakhtin (2020, p. 399) to scrutinize the “deepening of meaning with the help of other meanings”, to plot the potential meanings of those expressions alluding to the “unusual” in the link in the infinite chain of possibilities. This is because we can only seek the interpretation of meanings in the encounter between them, correlating one meaning to another meaning(s), because what gives it life is precisely the existence of this other.

Tzvetan Todorov writes in the preface to the French edition of *Aesthetics of Verbal Creation* (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 32) that “meaning is freedom and interpretation is its exercise”. If it is in the encounter between me and the other that the possibilities of meaning emerge and if it is the correlation between them that allows us to comment on them, I make my encounter with those words passing through the studio a birthplace of meanings. Interpreting them, in turn, involves the appropriation of the other’s word: it impels me to transform Netto’s “here it is different” – and expressions, looks, gestures, tones that challenged me – into “my-other words” (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 381). It is not, however, a matter of taking possession of them, but rather of recognizing them as others and, with them, overcoming them, producing meanings aiming at the creative understanding that Bakhtin (2020) teaches us. If we perceive the responsive nature of meaning, that is, its inexorable condition of responding to a question, and generating other questions, then we intend to produce answers-questions and move meanings by completing, denying, awakening, and polemicizing this arrangement made of ours and of others’ words.

In Bakhtinian theory, dialogism is the foundation of life: “to live means to participate in dialogue,” stated Bakhtin himself (2018, p. 329), which means understanding the manifestation of life as a plot of multiple social voices, a tense interaction between thoughts, ideas, and words that echo worldviews, composing an infinite and never-ending dialogue in which the senses are eternally updated. And this is how I dialogue with a fashion to which those expressions that connote difference sound like a response to me. By seeing them as participants in the dialogical process of life, we can understand them as enunciators of a set position, by relating them to other statements. “It is impossible for someone to define their position without correlating it with other positions”, Bakhtin (2020, p. 297) argues. Responsive positions like the ones I found in the studio distanced themselves from the spectacle fashion and simultaneously linked themselves to it.

Perhaps the persistence of such meanings circulating around the studio was relevant because the statements they responded to required a certain insistence: they responded to the discourses of/in fashion that obstinately claimed to be monologic, which move with enough force to drown out other present voices, making them absent. Perhaps they rehearsed a synchronous and discordant chorus of a forged dogmatic fashion that, with its uproar, gets spread to every corner of the planet where capitalist culture has been able to stir up and, walking hand in hand, they set a conspiracy of the same kind.

In this plot, the figure of the celebrity designer can be twice as interesting: both because it inserts us into the great dialogical context to which Fernanda Yamamoto and her team belong, since their work is recognized nationally and internationally in this field, and because it offers a gateway for us to glimpse this preponderant fashion as well as the way in which they respond to it; it brings them into a reciprocal relationship with each other in the arena of dialogue.

The remaining aura and glamour of the designers’ creative work fuel a circuit so reserved, coveted and competitive within the fashion system that Ayres (2017) reports, for example, the extreme difficulty encountered by designers and interns working for New York brands and labels to grant interviews in collaboration with her in the research on inspiration and appropriation in the fashion industry. Only under the condition of total anonymity did two people agree to cooperate,

due to the fear of retaliation and exclusion from a network that is recognized as closed, exclusive and highly competitive. In an ethnographic phase of the investigation, the investigator also noted the confidential nature that accompanied the work of creative teams of companies in meetings in which the investigator participated as an assistant for a select archive of vintage products. Her expectation that she would be able to see and hear how these teams made aesthetic choices was frustrated: discussions were held in private rooms and choices were made directly and bluntly, without verbal expression, as if, by remaining silent, they could protect the magical secrets of the artistic creation of the brand they represented.

On the other hand, when I entered Fernanda Yamamoto's store⁵ for the first time, in response to the invitation that was made to me in an exchange of messages, the tone was accentuated by the welcoming expressed through words such as: come, stay, help, participate, watch the fashion show. It is the intonation that ensures the axiological-emotional context of what we hear, read, see, says Bakhtin (2020). It was the tone of openness expressed through different inviting words that enlivened that context that welcomed me.

She promptly welcomed me, took me to the studio and introduced me to everyone. I stopped for a moment to observe the space, the various tables, the bookshelf with books by renowned designers, the countless models hanging with their pilot pieces, the seamstresses' corner, where they operated the sewing machines, shelves with threads and supplies, the mirror taking up part of the wall, the rolls of fabric fitted under the large tables. Then, Fernanda asked:

- Do you sew?
- Yes, I do. (Investigator)
- Oh, so it would be nice if you did something, right? Jeon, can Milena help with anything? (Fernanda)

Fernando Jeon is a fashion designer and pattern maker who has worked in the creative department of the studio for nine years. He was the one who was directing the production of that show, as Fernanda told me a few days later. Before Jeon was able to say a word, Netto suggested that I help him unravel the blue kimono. All the other tasks suggestions were made by Jeon. They should be done during the days I was in the studio. Without knowing it, Jeon was directing not only the production of the show but also a path for my investigation to take place. With each task I took on, an exchange, a conversation would take place with the people who were next to me, often working on the same outfit.

And, intentional or not, Fernanda's suggestion implied an axiological positioning, her perception of creation and a sensitivity indicating that I should join the group. As if she knew, in Benjaminian terms, that manual work carves a space for the emergence of narratives, or that activity cannot stop and that crafts allow conversations to go along them. In any case, while my hands sewed, unraveled, pleated, embroidered, I forgot about myself, I swayed to the rhythm of the work and my listening was prepared to unite the line of the hand with the path of the word, to activate the space that lives between the gesture and the material of speech, between the unspeakable embodied in the act and the symbolic realm in which the language lives, and which now is seamed in this piece-text (Benjamin, 2016; Valle & Gondar, 2014).

It was the first time Netto had participated in the preparation of a Fernanda Yamamoto fashion show; he was hired on a daily basis to help, mainly with the modeling, but he "did everything",

⁵ The designer has a store in São Paulo, where her creations for commercial collections are sold. The atelier is located on the mezzanine floor, a room where people in different roles share the space and create the pilot pieces for commercial collections and, when preparing for a fashion show, the artistic pieces to be presented publicly.

as he himself told. However, it was not his first time participating in SPFW or in a studio like Fernanda Yamamoto's; he had accumulated diverse experience working as a stylist and modeler in the fashion industry. And we were there in the task of unraveling the silk, it was he who helped me and not the other way around. According to my investigating eyes, he played a role both inside and outside, a threshold that narrated the predominant fashion circuit to me so that I would not forget it, and, at the same time, a warm embrace from someone who recognized the uniqueness of the place he was in. One day, walking together to the subway, he told me a little bit of his experience:

– On my first day at the studio, Jeon gave me a silk fabric and his *Pinterest* boards and told me to do some tests. I was like, “Wow!” I designed this seam around the stains and Jeon liked it. These are the bubbles we are fraying on the blue kimono. No studio does this. Fashion is too much ego, too much me, no one allows shared creation. Fernanda has no ego; she goes on the catwalk side by side with her team. I think only she and Isaac Silva do this.

Netto was well aware of the contrast; he was experiencing it right there. It was no coincidence those first words he addressed to me: in the narrative of the star-creator sustained by the myth of the great artist, a tear opened up like those we made in the silk fabric. With their threads, they wove a way of doing things that di-verged from the model of authorship that suffocates the inexorable polyphony of human creative constructions; borrowing Bourriaud's expression (2009, p. 131) they expressed another in which it was possible to observe each participant closer to the role of the “artist-operator”. Instead of automatic reproduction meaning alienated, standardized production, they experimented among creations that interpenetrated and amalgamated in the pieces of the kimonos, they were becoming artists-operators of meanings.

We challenged the fabric with the same dedication with which that collective artistic project challenged the stylistic system operating in fashion (and in the artistic field in general). Overpriced, signature and style work in favor of capital; together, they burden subjective exchange relations with the weight of the commodity and function as a “homogenizing factor” (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 132) of subjectivities, of operations in the artistic and cultural fields, of relationships between us, of our relationships with the thing of life. In line with this logic, the production of Fernanda and her team puts pressure on this: while the signature endows the creator with the authority of genius and the style highlights a unity of form personified under the artist's originality, the creator-designer turns her name into a brand through which she sells clothes and makes visible wearable art constructed from shared creative processes, but not a myth.

Fernanda Yamamoto, we can say, approaches her fellow designers when she walks on the catwalk following her collection, sustaining her signature, sharing the red carpet, communing with all the rules, demands, and minutiae of a spectacular event, and distances herself from them when her walk does not pursue commercial products like those promoted by her peers i.e. such clothes that cross the catwalk with their celebrity designers and then appear in the shop window. Fernanda contrasts them with artistic pieces that are not for sale. And she is not alone in her walk. After the closing of the show at SPFW, the entire studio team entered the catwalk: pattern makers, seamstresses, freelancers, cutters, assistants, salespeople. If fashion demands a stylistic signature as an entrance pass, Fernanda uses hers en bloc, collectively, almost like a petition.

Some Seams

Fernanda Yamamoto's brand is not a century-old brand like the brands that have been around since the Haute Couture period; but it takes risks with tradition, preserving its ancestry in its

artisanal work, as a means of artistic elaboration of its fashion shows, and in the pieces themselves, specified in that project by traditional Japanese kimonos, which intersect with the Japanese ancestry itself and that of those who performed it.

It is in this circumstance, in which “the authentic preserves all its authority”, as Benjamin (2016, p. 182) tells us, that Fernanda Yamamoto’s artistic production assumes the place of a “different” authority: not that of the provisional, but an authority acquired procedurally and collectively with her authentic ways of doing things, because she pursues, with singular dedication, the “traditional value of cultural heritage” (Benjamin, 2016, p. 183). The traditional value of her activity lies therein, something that is constructed from specific perspectives of creation, practical exercise, art and fashion.

With this diligence, life is intertwined into their creative processes. One of the kimonos designed by Valeria (the team’s modeler), for example, combined two techniques already developed in the studio, the “square” technique⁶ and origami⁷. From these two elements, combined with the persistence in creating the pieces through handicrafts, the choice of shared artistic process as a premise for the creation of the fashion show, the technical expertise accumulated and circulating in the studio, the willingness to value traditional Japanese culture, among other aspects that condition her possibilities of (re)inventing, Valeria created something completely new. The ways of perceiving, creating and doing instituted in the studio contextualize the possibilities, both for her and for the other people who work there, transforming the materials they collect from life and the fashion they make every day into new and unique arrangements, which will be integrated into their next routine and artistic activities, into individual experiences and into reality (Vygotsky, 2018, 2019).

By telling us stories other than those hegemonically seen, reviewed and re-produced through wearable forms and clothed bodies, we can, in Bakhtinian terms, call them stylists. In Bakhtin (2020, p. 189), we find the concept of style as “a single and finished picture of the external image of man: the combination of the external man, his clothes, his manners with the environment”. In this sense, exteriority is sustained by the ability to look from the outside, to look at this unified image of the world with the eyes of someone who knows that it is one of the possibilities for the occurrence of existence. Because it is a world, a possibility of it, with its values and forms, the exteriority can make this comprehensible. If style is a worldview that can become a means of elaborating a material, we understand the competence of Fernanda Yamamoto and her team in printing elaborate worldviews on clothes because they are “capable of materializing issues that are important to us in our daily lives, proposing different approaches to them, spreading other values among us” (Preciosa, 2007, p. 80). Clothes, and their modes of creation and production, also propose modes of existence.

By gathering threads, practices and positions that characterize Fernanda Yamamoto’s ways of creating, making and displaying wearable art, we can perceive the agreements, confrontations and tensions that weave her dialogue with the fields of art, fashion and life, foundations of the creative process that can be observed in her studio. Among the resonant voices, Fernanda’s ethical-political-artistic commitment engenders a narrative of disruptive fashion. By leading her team on the street and on the catwalk, she highlights modes of production and relationships that are intertwined in her creative processes and in the processes of producing fashion. By displacing the norm, she makes it visible, allowing us to encounter previously unexplored issues surrounding fashion, the stylistic

⁶ This is a technique in which squares of fabric are fitted together and superimposed on a base fabric, resulting in a texture. In 2014, Fernanda Yamamoto won first place in the 28th *Museu da Casa Brasileira* Design Award, in the textile category, with a dress produced using this technique. (<https://ffw.uol.com.br/noticias/moda/fernanda-yamamoto-vence-28o-premio-design-museu-da-casa-brasileira-na-categoria-textil-698/>).

⁷ Origami is a Japanese technique for creating shapes by folding paper, without using glue, scissors or tape. In Fernanda Yamamoto’s studio, the technique is performed using fabrics that are creased with an iron or press to create various shapes.

system and the media events that sustain, move and convey it, and that are infiltrated in everyday life, intertwined with the multiple social voices with which we objectively and subjectively dialogue with our existences. By participating and subverting the fashion world, Fernanda touches us with possible sensibilities that only the specificity of art is capable of reaching (Bourriaud, 2009).

For my part, my previous proximity to fashion, which had already led me to complete a degree in the area, to become familiar with the basic techniques of clothing construction, cutting, modeling, among others, was essential to my investigative event. At the same time that we experimented with crafts and clothing forms, we experimented with the creation of fashion, research and ourselves. This is the creative activity that Vygotsky (2018, 2019) teaches us: while we sewed, unraveled and re-sewed wefts, threads and fabrics, we stitched together conversations, experiences and our bonds; mutual production of new and unique material and subjective arrangements.

And the encounter of these skills of ours could only happen because they embraced me with their collective ways of doing things. And I'm not just referring to the making of the dress pieces, but to the embrace in the dimension of conviviality: the welcome, the feeling of, in such a short time, allowing me to belong to a group; perhaps this was so easy because this dynamic had already spread roots there, but in times in which individualizing processes drain our sense of community and humanitarianism, these small acts become immense.

Without knowing much about anyone else but a "fashionable name", I went looking for someone, attracted by the productions that had previously crossed my path. What I found, however, was a group of people displaying nicknames: Fê, Val, Jê, Zé, Sil, Má, Rô, Su... Hence, I was also Mi, Mile. A set of syllables that promoted meanings to communicate to us about the relationships they wove between them-selves, between them and the work, between them and the studio space, between them and the possibilities of fashion and art.

Observing nicknames and shared creative processes, visible when fashion is stamping stylistic signatures with its gears, is one of the answers that our investigation yielded to the convergence of our ways of creating and making wearable art and research and the depth of venturing the entirety of the body in the process and being able to link its traces to the dialogues that were woven into this writing.

In the Process of Finishing

To conclude this text-piece, I take advantage of its inexorable condition of unfinishedness to ask, in the wake of Adichie (2019), the following questions: what if we admitted that there is more to the word fashion than the currently renewed generic? What if we knew that fashion finds the power of vital creation when it is realized in collective processes connected to life? It seems that the narratives produced by Fernanda Yamamoto's art challenge the existence of fashions that result from sterile processes or offer ready-made answers to our ways of existence and rather express answers that explode into life the multiplicity of meanings that connect us to the persevering and mobilizing polyphony of human creation. We do not shy away from the globalized fashion system, but its history is not unique; threads escape from which others are woven, and, with them, we broaden our perceptions of ways of weaving fashion and research, life and the world.

Brief reconquest of a transitory paradise. This experience that wanders here through narrative attempts is not objectified by means of what is ready; it impels me to recompose myself and the world, so that it can be embodied and, who knows, involve someone else in this taking back effort. I wander through/between this time of processing, meaning, elaboration of what has been

experienced, and I continue in disorder. And that is why I call it paradise: a sensitive, privileged and spontaneous time that may breed possible matters.

When surrounded by this paradise made of rearrangements, it is better to lose oneself. To lose myself in the conversations that brought me closer to each person in the studio while our hands worked; to lose myself in the collection of fragments of our unique stories; to lose myself in the different events that inexorably weave the making of research, the creation of a field, the functioning of the studio, the preparation of a fashion show; to lose myself in the whole of the research (and of life) that is not yet nothing but could become. Who knows, maybe this way I can continue carrying the possibility of sewing together a collective history and other fashions as well.

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