



Study of Fashion Inspired by Architecture and How fashion and dress shape women's identities.

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Introduction : Coco Chanel famously said that “fashion is architecture: it is a matter of proportions.” As with most things the iconic designer said or did, it wasn't long before the world followed her lead. Classic designers like Versace, Balmain and Cardin all studied architecture before switching to fashion, while legendary architects like Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry have taken time off from designing buildings to work on jewelry, shoes and bags.



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Architecture can be an inspiration for a fashion design. It may seem a little surprising to use an architectural building as an inspiration for fashion design, but all examples of architecture, whether traditional or contemporary, can cause a creative spark to the designer. Whether it is in the overall theme of a building or just a detail, useful ideas in the architecture can be found as inspiration to create a garment. Architecture and fashion may seem far from each other; in architecture, designing monumental buildings are meant for a long visual life, whereas fashion in clothes changes every season. However, both forms are three dimensional and contain space; both are structured; both are related to fine arts and visual.

Three dimensional form and space is the basis of architecture and so are the most designed objects in art. In evaluating a designed object different perspectives should be considered. Three dimensional designs as in architecture, sculpture, and fashion occupy a space which affects the overall form of the design. Fashion designers, who have to have a spatial way of thinking like architects, translate a two dimensional material (cloth) into a three dimensional form (body-shaped garment). Fabric is a two dimensional shape but when it is constructed as a garment surrounding the human body, it becomes a three dimensional form which has its own space as well. Fashion designer needs to experiment with form and shape, while designing and constructing a garment that is appropriate to human body.

Fashion as point of view : Fashion is viewed by some as traditional, wasteful, shallow, even anti-feminist, while others have a deep passion for fashion and describe themselves as ‘fashion addicts’ or ‘fashion junkies’. Fashion – being a largely female dominated area – generally affects



women's lives more than it does men's. Our identities are not only ours to form and to anchor our existence on; they guide other people's interaction and behavior towards us. A countless of opportunities exist to present or express ourselves to the people around us, to guide them about how they should act towards us, to have their actions towards us reinforce our identities or to disregard them when they fail to. We have bio lines or 'about me' pages on online social platforms, signatures at the end of our emails, passports and identification cards, body language, opinions, behavior and mannerisms, and tools with which we communicate our identities.

And visual communication of our identities through dress and/ or fashion is ubiquitous and a fundamental tool that proclaims who we are, both to ourselves and to people around us. Getting dressed every day is a compulsory, non-negotiable activity for most people; we can hardly ever exercise our preferences on the matter. Instead, we decide how to execute the dressing process. What we choose to wear can determine rejection or acceptance into different social groups, whether or not we get a job, a promotion, respect, admiration and attention. Our dressing and fashion choices have psychological, social, political and economic meanings and consequences.

Women's social identities – these are their identities in relation to various social groups they belong to or aspire to belong to – are arguably the aspect of their identities that fashion influences the most. Women get a sense of social identity from social groups, which could be based on race, class or politics; they enhance their status and self-image by enhancing the groups to which they belong. Note that interaction is not a prerequisite of social group membership. Since fashion already divides women into those who can afford it and those who cannot, women who can afford to interact with fashion are already considered de facto members of the middle class and the upper class.

Fashion among middle class Kenyan women in urban areas and women living in other urban areas in Africa, for instance, can be described as 'Afro-contemporary', 'Afro-centric', or 'Afro-chic', especially during this period of the rise of African prints and fabrics, such as the shuka, kanga, batik, and the famous Ankara fabrics, among others. There are African print shoes, African print runway designs, African print accessories, African print umbrellas and African print car seat covers.

African print is basically 'in' right now. There are those women who want to belong to this group and they want to be seen as fashion-forward without 'succumbing to western culture'.



These are poets and artistic personalities, who attend Afro-fusion concerts and art exhibitions: they are Afro-centric Afropolitans.

The women who consider fashion itself a fad tend to be women who are non-conformist or simply women who are not at all concerned with fashion per se – they merely wear clothes because of social pressures.

Whatever the case and whatever the current fashionable trend, there are always women who buy into the trend, those who rebel against it and those who are unaware of it. Fashion in this particular case separates social identities into fashion-forward, non-conformist and those oblivious to it. For instance, a woman who categorises herself as belonging to the ‘Afro-centric’ subculture will begin to dress in a certain way – by paying close attention to or emphasising or incorporating fabrics and accessories that are considered to be African – and she will adopt the value system of this group with exceptions to things that are in conflict with her other identities. For example, she might not be willing to cut off all her chemically-treated hair and start growing her natural hair because she prefers wearing her hair straight. Or she might cut off all her chemically- treated hair and keep her natural hair but she will not be willing to wear kitenge fabric trousers or any ‘Afro-centric’ outfit for that matter. An urban African woman will express and proclaim her social identity by adhering to the fashion trends or parts of the trends associated with women who belong to this fashionable middleclass group, while another urban African woman will rebel against the trend to indicate that she belongs to a different non-conformist middleclass group.

Feminists verdict relating to fashion : feminists say about fashion trends and the fashion industry. Feminism’s overarching credo is that women must be allowed the right to be who or what they want to be and to do whatever they want to do, as long as they are not breaking any laws or infringing anybody else’s rights. As such, it is not surprising that some women hold the belief that fashion is anti-feminist. Some feminists argue that the fashion industry has for decades favored one female body ideal over all others and peddled the notion that a woman is not much if she isn’t adorned in the latest fashion. Indeed, it is easy to understand how and why most people think of feminists as being anti- fashion and of fashion as being anti-feminist. This is mainly because of how fashion models tend to be objectified – and how they represent only certain body types. This objectification can be blamed on what drives and motivates most



designers: sex appeal. Models will often present designs worn without bras, extremely short shorts, transparent clothing, backless dresses, pelvis-high slits and ‘barely-there’ blouses, which wouldn’t be a problem in a ‘perfect society’. However, it is important to note that these body revealing designs are solely for the pleasure and gaze of men. Thus the sexist nature of the fashion industry aggravates feminists, who struggle to curb the objectification of women. Women are forced to believe that unless they resemble as much as possible the ideals advertised in magazines, advertisements and runway shows, they are simply not attractive or appealing to men. Not everything born out of patriarchy and not everything born out of fashion is oppressive to women.

However, not all fashion is clearly objectifying. Feminists can enjoy fashion without being vilified for it. After all, women should be able to do what they want and be whomever they choose to be. The idea of women formulating rules to control other women’s freedom by dictating what they are allowed and not allowed to be interested in, even if these preferences are negative products of patriarchy, is itself an anti- feminist idea. Not everything born out of patriarchy and not everything born out of fashion is oppressive to women. Fashion may be considered by some women as superficial, sexist and oppressive, but if feminists refuse to participate in it, we are signing away our power to influence it. And differences over fashion should not be a divisive issue among feminists. Instead, our differences should be addressed comprehensively to unify feminists and bolster feminists’ efforts to achieve their goals.

Based on the above theories , it can be accomplished that fashion is and also isn’t anti-feminist. As far as the feminist movement is concerned, differences of opinion on the matter should not separate feminists into various camps because unity within the movement is vital to the cause. We simply cannot – and must not – allow the cliché that ‘women are their own worst enemies’ to be perpetuated In the past, women were oppressed by corsets, which restricted their movement, and were not allowed to wear trousers, which were much more comfortable and appropriate for sporting and other activities, and in both cases fashion contributed significantly to the liberation of women. Chanel made – and popularized – non-corseted dresses to allow women to move freely, while Amelia Earhart wore trousers because it was ridiculous to fly a plane in a dress, which helped to popularized not only trousers among women but also the notion that women could do anything. African women can learn to enjoy fashion, harness and exploit its power, and



change the patriarchal aspects of it, which they may find problematic. Fashion as machinery for feminist activism

Fashion used as campaign ambassadors in past : Fashion has been used by feminists in the past to make political statements and break free from oppression. Black American women in the 1960s and 1970s wore denim overalls instead of dresses as they fought to dress on their own terms. Women all over the world have embraced the color pink as the universal color for cancer awareness campaigns breast cancer awareness month. Red color is used for awareness for HIV/Aids, Blue ribbons are used for mental health awareness etc. Fashion typography is growing in popularity and being used everywhere to declare different personal or political messages.

It has been observed that black women wearing t-shirts and other clothing with tags such as ‘I love my black’, ‘I’m a natural’, and ‘I love my kinky hair’, among others. Chimamanda Adichie said in a recent interview that her hairstyle is a political statement against the idea that “beauty has become this homogenous thing.” Marc Jacobs designed ‘Free Tibet’ tote bags, which were purchased by many women who shared his sentiments. International pop stars Beyoncé and Katy Perry wore ‘Obama’ dresses and accessories in support of his re-election, while Vivienne Westwood wore an ‘I am Julian Assange’ t-shirt in support of the Wikileaks founder. Lady Gaga wore a satirical meat dress at an awards show, which ridiculed the notion of women’s bodies as meat, while the popular fashion blog ‘Man Repeller’ creates an anti-sexist and anti-‘male approval’ outlook on fashion. And various women in Arab countries have posed in pictures wearing their burqas but slightly revealing the lingerie they wear underneath them.

Fashion has thus been used in feminist and other such campaigns and succeeded tremendously – and could be again. And two key questions that need to be addressed by feminists in societies and organisations – as well as by feminist intellectuals – are how can feminists further exploit the power that fashion wields to their advantage? And how can feminists use fashion as a tool for activism instead of dismissing it as anti-feminist?

As an industry whose consumers are mostly women, fashion could be a powerful tool for feminists. However, just like any other machinery, efficiency depends on knowledge of the machine’s parts and functions. Fashion should be explored further because the possibilities of using it for good are as endless as there are questions surrounding its relationship with feminism.



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