

Opponent's Review of the Master's Thesis by Mgr. Daria Mikerina

Semiotics and Fashion Studies: Limits and possibilities of a systemic approach to contemporary fashion

In her work, Daria Mikerina occupies with fashion studies in relation to semiotics, which is very relevant to studies being followed in the Department. She sets out to scrutinize possibilities of systemic approach in Fashion. Quite naturally from the semiotic perspective, she starts from „The Fashion System“ by Roland Barthes, in which he applies previous enquiries from his most structuralist period. She mentions how Deleuze insisted on the role of materiality in meanings of signs that can cause breaks in representation, but she does not satisfactorily follow this line of inquiry. She seems to be satisfied with doubts raised by the question how could we escape from representation when we assign this disrupting role to modern art, in alleged accord with Deleuze. But lines of escape from representation can also be followed in other areas. Fashion is above else a part of material culture and should also be analysed in this respect.

It seems a bit precarious to analyse the concept of system in relation to fashion. I can see some problems using various definitions of system from Handbook of Semiotics by W. Noth. Following him, the author brings over naming of fashion as an open and dynamic system, but these attributes come from other fields of science. Systemic studies provide far more composite terrain for inquiry in communication. I would suggest looking into constructivist studies of communication influenced by theory of systems and cybernetics. The author should provide minimal requirements for useful definition of system and, specifically, the system of fashion. As she passes by over this problem, she then feels the need to mention existence of systems in culture. In relation to what she could see as minimal requirements for a definition of system, it might also come to consideration whether fashion is or is not suitable for analysis as an autonomous system.

Daria Mikerina concludes that the system of fashion is open and dynamic, but it seems to me that with these attributes, she would be better off without the notion of system, since she does not define openness and dynamics of the system. Her efforts to overcome not-well-defined notion of system become clearer in the third chapter, especially with topics about embodiment and performance art, second of which is considered in relation to haute couture display events. There would be discussion in place whether we can speak of it as of art or an event with different than aesthetical function prevailing.

From this perspective, the questioning is not so much about what we can say about fashion, but what can we do or perform with apparel and what we can say about it.

I would also recommend reading Gilles Lipovetsky's work on fashion which could be put against Barthes's ideas or be used to rethink it by opening perspectives on communities and fashion production. As the author stresses the commercial aspect of fashion, she could make use of the concept of sign consumption in relation to branding, which she mentions.

Daria Mikerina opens a discussion on what is systemic that allows for interpretation of fashion. I would suggest questions such as what compels the interpretation of fashion and when does it begin. Where can we find autonomy of a system – in fashion and discourse on it itself or in a larger system and what would be its delimitations? To the end of the thesis, the author proceeds to concepts that cannot be easily aligned with the concept of system and offer other perspectives of research. As

most fruitful I can see those concepts that bring apparel closer to the body where it naturally fits. Performance does not need to be related to art.

The thesis reveals good knowledge of basic semiotic problems related to fashion. It shows good command of English. I recommend its acceptance for the defence. Preliminary, I suggest grade 2.

26th of January 2016 in Prague

Tomáš Kladný