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# Against abstract universalisms in fashion theory: For a dialogical process of interpretation and translation

## ABSTRACT

*Criticism on the Eurocentric character of the concept of fashion has been raised already for almost four decades within fashion studies. Yet, the growing entanglement with globalization studies and postcolonial and decolonial theories has accelerated an epistemological turn within fashion studies. The epistemological turn not only fostered new research on the empirical level, it also challenged the theoretical framework of the discipline. Even the concept of fashion itself, entrenched as it is in modernization theories, has gradually come under attack. The concept of fashion has been held accountable for defining only 'modern' western fashion as its research object, while side-lining, even erasing, other 'traditional' sartorial systems. In order to redress the Eurocentric character of fashion theory and the exclusionary effects it engenders, fashion has been redefined as a 'universalism'. Although this view became quite mainstream, in its turn it also became gradually criticized. It has been rightly argued that redefining fashion as a universalism is only another way of re-inscribing fashion scholarship in the hegemonic western 'modern/colonial' way of knowledge production. Studying sartorial practices*

## KEYWORDS

intra- and intercultural dialogue
intra- and intercultural hermeneutics
Eurocentrism
universalism
methodology
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*positioned outside the western capitalist fashion system through the lens of fashion obscures an understanding of their own specific characteristics. In this article, I will turn more specifically towards the question of which methodologies we can mobilize if we, scholars versed in western modern knowledges and modern knowledge production, are committed to a multiplicity of sartorial worlds in as well as outside 'the West'. The article proposes a hermeneutic–dialogical method of interpretation and translation as an epistemological as well as an ethical tool towards a more adequate understanding of 'other' ways of wearing, making, feeling, thinking of and living through clothes. Finally, this article offers a tentative analysis that shows what this dialogical approach might entail.*

## INTRODUCTION: EUROCENTRISM IN FASHION STUDIES

Fashion studies is still a relatively young scholarly domain that from its very beginning was characterized by a broad interdisciplinary approach. Yet, the growing entanglement of this domain with globalization studies and postcolonial and decolonial theories has induced a radical critique of the standard parameters of its scholarly practice. Fashion has become to be seen no longer as produced within geographically bounded centres in the West but within interconnected networks stretched across time and space. On the empirical level, this new lens has fostered fresh inquiries. A whole range of research has been published that shows the exchange, imitation and appropriation not only of textiles, design and techniques but also of dresses and ways of dressing across and within continents. This research has made clear that western fashion has been thriving thanks to the import of materials, techniques and know-how from various continents that were previously not available to European textile manufacturers. It has also been shown that colonial and imperial relationships have been constitutive to the development of the European fashion industry, either by imitating and appropriating materials and techniques from the colonies or by using the colonies as market. Needless to say, the conditions within which these interactions took place have often been unequal in terms of access to various resources. Many of these dynamics are still occurring today. The communities are a legion whose designs and patterns have been imitated, borrowed or stolen by big fashion companies. Hence the many heated discussions on cultural appropriation in the media in recent years. Global luxurious brands such as Louis Vuitton and Valentino incorporated Maasai cultural expressions in their collections of 2012 and 2016, respectively, making huge gains without recognizing nor compensating the Maasai people. In 2017, Dior was accused of copying a Romanian embroidered folk coat as part of their *Pre-Fall 2017* collection. These are only a few examples in an ongoing chain of accusations against multinational brands appropriating cultural expressions of communities without doing them justice. Attention has also been devoted to the way the quite aggressive global proliferation of the western fashion system has destroyed local fashion and clothing practices. The great efforts that upcoming fashion hubs across the globe are making to turn themselves into world fashion cities and the strategic actions of young designers from the Global South trying to position themselves within the contemporary formal and informal global fashion market has been the focus of a substantial body of research. And last but not least, increasing attention has been devoted to the detrimental effects the global fashion industry has on the environment as well as on the labour conditions of its exploited workers.

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Yet, as the lens of globalization has come to challenge the idea of 'the West' as the autonomous and in itself bounded originator of fashion, the very concept of fashion itself has come to be challenged as a consequence. The Eurocentric concept of 'fashion', grounded as it is in modernization theories, has been blamed for defining only western fashion as a suitable academic research object, while side-lining all other 'traditional' sartorial practices. In order to counter this exclusionary character, fashion has been redefined as a universalism. In its capacity of an all-inclusive term, the concept was meant to encompass all sartorial practices stretched in time and space. Although this view became quite mainstream, it also gradually began to be criticized. It has been argued that redefining fashion as a universalism is only another way of re-inscribing fashion scholarship in the hegemonic western 'modern/colonial' way of knowledge production. Studying sartorial practices positioned outside the western capitalist fashion system through the lens of the very concept of fashion obscures an understanding of the specific nature of the practices under scrutiny. Despite the aggressive expansion of the capitalist fashion system, it has not been able to destroy all sartorial diversity, even not in some liminal spaces in the West where capitalism originated. So, if we are committed to a multiplicity of sartorial worlds in as well as outside the West, we need to critically interrogate our cognitive categories and methods used in our processes of knowledge production. Therefore, in this article, I will more specifically turn towards the question, how we, scholars versed in western modern theories and ways of knowledge production, can proceed in doing research if we, indeed, acknowledge the need to do justice to various ways of being and knowing. Which methodologies can we mobilize if we want to actually implement this intellectual endeavour into the practice of our knowledge production? The article proposes a hermeneutic–dialogical method of interpretation and translation as an epistemological as well as an ethical tool towards a more adequate and just understanding of 'other' ways of wearing, making, feeling, thinking of and living through clothes. Finally this article will offer a small tentative exercise in hermeneutic understanding that hopefully offers a glimpse of what this dialogical approach might entail.

## FASHION: FROM A EUROCENTRIC CONCEPT TOWARDS A UNIVERSALISM[1]

Criticism of the view that fashion was an exclusive phenomenon of western capitalism has been voiced from the 1980s onwards. Fashion scholars argued that a broader and more encompassing perspective on dress history was needed as a result of global social changes (Lillethun et al. 2012: 76–77). In their article 'Eurocentrism in the study of ethnic dress' originally published in 1993, Baizerman et al. blame museums and academics for having focused on Euro-American fashion in the formation of museum collections as well as in academic curricula while overlooking ethnic dress (2008: 123). The hierarchy between Euro-American fashion and ethnic dress is the result of the nineteenth-century evolutionary ideology that positioned western dress at the top of civilization. This taxonomy has had a long lasting detrimental effect on a genuine understanding of the pluriform dress practices in the world (2008: 126).

At an early stage, Jennifer Craik, too, has been an important spokesperson in the discussion of Eurocentrism in fashion theory. In the introductory chapter of her book *The Face of Fashion* (1993) the author makes clear that she rejects

1. For a more detailed outline of this process of universalizing within fashion theory: see Jansen and Craik (2016) and Jansen (2020).

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the assumption that fashion is bound up with concepts such as capitalism, individualization, class, civilization and consumerism. These key concepts are the legacy of classical theorists such as Veblen and Simmel on which western fashion theory has been built. In order to redress this Eurocentric view, Craik proposed the concept of fashion systems to explicitly acknowledge the existence of a variety of different forms of 'fashions' of which the western designer fashion system is just one among others (1993: 6). In her subsequent book *Fashion: The Key Concepts* (2009) and in the edited volume *Modern Fashion Traditions* (2016) she edited with Angela Jansen, Craik kept underlying the importance of redefining the concept of fashion as encompassing all sartorial articulations and practices in a broad geographical as well as historical remit. In other words, Craik and Jansen made a strong case for the understanding of fashion as universal (2016: 8).

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, the acknowledgement of the western Eurocentric legacy, and the need for a more inclusive definition of fashion and thus for a more inclusive fashion history and theory, gained wider currency. Various aspects of the hegemonic Eurocentric frame have been denounced as responsible for the exclusionary effects of mainstream scholarly practice: the ethnocentric view that only higher technologically developed cultures are qualified for accommodating change (Eicher 2001); the tradition vs. modernity opposition (Rabine 2002); the West/Rest dichotomy and the ensuing analytical division of labour between anthropologists and fashion studies scholars (Niessen 2003) to mention only a few of them. Aware of the need to dismantle this western-centric frame, in recent decades a large amount of work has been done researching fashion practices on a global scale and in an extended time frame. Despite a few 'terminological' concerns (e.g. Almila and Inglis 2017; Niessen 2003, 2016; Riello and McNeil 2010) it is quite striking how the scholars involved in this endeavour almost univocally shared the view that reframing fashion into a term with universal validity claims would be an adequate way to open up fashion theory to sartorial practices that were excluded so far. This universalizing move has been motivated by the fact that the common denominator of all the sartorial practices is that they are all subject to change. This view has aptly been articulated by Eicher in the introduction to the book *National Geographic Fashion*: 'Fashion is, after all about change, and change happens in every culture' (Eicher 2001: 17).

This pursuit of fashion studies to become inclusive through the use of universalisms can be read as a continuation of the intellectual shift that has taken place in anthropology since the 1970s. Whereas 'traditional' societies have long been seen as culturally isolated, backwards and unchanged ('others'), from the 1970s onwards they became characterized as porous, dynamic and the temporary result of connections and exchanges. The outcome of this was, according to Blaser, that all these societies have been seen in one way or another as 'modern' (Blaser 2013: 549). Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities is an exponent of this view (Eisenstadt 2000). So, many scholars who tried to avoid 'othering' quite easily jumped into 'saming' by assuming the universal appropriateness of the concepts and categories which are part of the Eurocentric canon (Blaser 2014: 52).

## UNIVERSALISMS: TRANSLATION AS ERASURE

Precisely this act of 'saming' of all sartorial practices in time and space by capturing them under the term fashion has been contested. In her book

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*The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory* (2000), Entwistle explicitly addresses the need for clarifying the definition of fashion. Drawing on a larger tradition of academic literature on fashion, Entwistle argues for fashion as a phenomenon that is historically and geographically specific to western modernity. As a peculiar system of production and consumption, fashion is 'characterized by an internal logic of regular and systematic change' (2000: 45). Denouncing such a definition as ethnocentric is, according to Entwistle, itself ethnocentric as it is 'universalizing fashion as a system of dress found in all cultures' (2000: 47). In the introduction to the second edition of this book ([2000] 2015), Entwistle stands by her opinion that fashion, although it has become a global phenomenon, must be historically situated within western modernity. Suggesting that fashion can be found everywhere and at all historical times is itself Eurocentric because such a view 'imposes particular western characteristics onto non-Western places, flattening out regional variations and differences and alternative systems of dress production, distribution and consumption' ([2000] 2015: 14).

In the introduction to the Special Issue 'Decoloniality and Fashion' of the journal *Fashion Theory* (2020), Angela Jansen and Toby Slade also attack the universalization of the concept of fashion as a way to counter Eurocentricity. Drawing on decolonial theory they make an urgent appeal to delink fashion theory from the modern/colonial framework. For too long, scholars have addressed the problem of Eurocentrism within this very same framework that has erased sartorial practices and knowledge 'outside the geographical and epistemological boundaries of Europe and North America' (2020: 811). Universalizing the concept of fashion only means the perpetuation of these very processes of erasure and denial. In her article 'Fashion and phantasmagoria of modernity' in the same issue, Jansen elaborates on the need to construct a framework that can truly dismantle Eurocentrism (2020: 817). While Jansen, in the edited volume *Modern Fashion Traditions* (2016) was still making a plea for a re-articulation of fashion as a universalism in order to make fashion theory more inclusive, she now rightly critiques the false universality claims which are inherent to the modernity/coloniality power structure. Mainly drawing on the work of the decolonial scholar Vázquez, she suggests a decolonial fashion framework that recognizes modernity's epistemological limits and acknowledges the multitude of ways of fashioning the body, as well as the epistemic plurality outside modernity. Both have long been erased by the modern-colonial order (2020: 815–16).

The use of fashion as a universal has not only neglected the pluriform way of making, wearing and experiencing clothes outside the West, it has also come to occlude sartorial diversity within western societies that survived within the liminal spaces of modern capitalism. Sanjay Seth, one of the leading scholars in the debate about Eurocentrism in the social sciences, too has argued quite persuasively that the use of universals causes overlooking multiple ways of understanding and organizing lives (Seth 2009, 2013, 2014; see also Bhambra 2010). Like all forms of knowledge, contemporary social sciences have a historically and geographically specific genealogy. The 'modern' social sciences originated in Europe, as part of and as an attempt to account for the social, cultural and economic processes defined by these domains of knowledge as 'modernity' (Seth 2013: 138). In Seth's view this does not necessarily mean that some of the concepts are 'merely' European and therefore parochial (Seth 2014: 316). As the production of this 'modern

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knowledge' has been at once product and constitutive of the modernity/coloniality project, this knowledge has been disseminated globally by the oppressive imperialist powers (Maranhão 2003: 64; Seth 2013: 149; Vázquez 2011: 27). As a consequence, its central concepts came to inform institutions and practices in societies outside the West and function as categories through which communities outside the West have learned to know and organize their lives and where they have transformed, reconfigured, replaced, erased or expelled other ways of understanding and being in the world (Seth 2013: 147; Vázquez 2011: 33–34). In many places around the globe, these western categories have been imposed and co-opted but only alongside other ways of understanding reality that have survived and that often had little resemblance to western modern categories (Seth 2013; see also Blaser 2013: 548–50). But even in the West itself, where the developments defined as 'modern' and modern knowledge originated, they have dominated yet not fully eradicated the other ways of apprehending and living life:

> […] while modern knowledge has constituted our global modernity, it is never homologous with the entire world or, to put it another way, the world that modern knowledge creates continues to sit alongside other worlds. This, I have sought to show, is glaringly apparent – for those who care to see – in many parts of the non-west where the analytical categories of the human sciences do not neatly and fully map onto the entire space. […] But it is *also* true in the heartlands of modernity. Even here, where modernity and its knowledges are autochthonous products, and have been doing their work of transformations over many centuries, they have to coexist with other ways of understanding and being in the world.
>
> (Seth 2013: 148, original emphasis)

The above arguments clearly underline the urgency for fashion scholars, wherever they are working, to be sensitive to the various ways of living and knowing through clothes that do not self-evidently fit within the 'modern' experiencing, thinking and researching of fashion. Even in the West where the modern capitalist fashion system has been rampant, in the liminal spaces of this system peoples have lived their sartorial lives otherwise. When fashion scholars instead unilaterally decide to redefine the concept of fashion (and related ones, see Rovine 2015) as universalisms, and thereby designate change as the decisive characteristic of all 'fashion' systems, they make use of a process of translation that is inherently tied to 'modernity's epistemic territory' (Vázquez 2011: 27). What is understandable within this episteme is selectively made visible, what does not fit becomes erased. As a consequence, the pluriform other ways of making, wearing and living with clothes are ignored.

## INTRA- AND INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS

There is, however, according to Vázquez, another procedure of translation possible which he defines as 'translation as plurality' (Vázquez 2011: 27). This is a movement that is not based on the reproduction or even further expansion of the modern epistemic territory. Translation as 'a practice of plurality' comes about through a horizontal dialogue between epistemes and different worlds that connect with one another as equals (2011: 41).

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In a subsequent article, 'Towards a decolonial critique of modernity' (2012), Vázquez argues for the act of listening as an alternative to modernity's monopoly of speaking. Listening to the voices that have been silenced, then, presents itself as a critique to modernity's monopoly of speaking, defining, classifying. As an epistemological tool as well as an ethical principle, the act of listening recognizes the right of communities to represent themselves and to be heard (2012: 243–48).

The act of listening and engaging in a true dialogue are both key aspects of the hermeneutic 'theory' and methodology as they have been more systematically articulated by Hans Georg Gadamer. It may come as no surprise that many scholars have increasingly taken recourse to (Gadamerian) hermeneutics, as a useful point of departure for exploring dialogical intercultural understandings (Dallmayr 2009; Marotta 2009; Pillay 2002; Taylor 2002). Yet, given the fact that traditional western hermeneutic theory has been primarily concerned with intracultural constructions of meaning, some scholars stress the point that hermeneutic theory should be readjusted to an intercultural global context (Gómez-Rincón 2023; Spariosu 2014; Xie 2014). Even in the case of intracultural understanding, a basic assumption of traditional hermeneutics has also been challenged (Riechertz 2021).

Hermeneutics as a theory and methodology is concerned with the act of interpreting and understanding (historical) texts and events; a process that is all the more difficult the more the texts or events are distant in time from the interpreter. Hermeneutics has a long history of interpreting texts within the domain of theology, classical philology and jurisprudence (Dallmayr 2009: 25). Mainly thanks to the writings of Gadamer, hermeneutics have been expanded in order to deal with understanding more generally (Allwood 1989: 305). In Gadamer's project, hermeneutics is not only a theory and practice of interpretation. It is also an ethics in that it urges the interpreter to be open and sensitive to what the text, the event, the interlocutor has to tell.

Gadamer has articulated his take on the act of interpreting in his canonical work *Truth and Method* (1960). According to Gadamer, a reader who tries to interpret a text, an event or an utterance – no matter whether she/he/they is/are engaged in scientific or other forms of understanding – cannot but read the text against the backdrop of her/his/their own framework which is necessarily formed by one's/their own tradition. Throughout this process, the interpreter should be aware of the fact that history governs her/his/their values and assumptions and should make this mechanism transparent. A reflexive stance towards one's own act of interpretation fosters an open attitude to the meaning brought to the fore by the text (Dallmayr 2009: 26; Pillay 2002: 336). The interpreter trains her/himself/themselves to be sensible to the fact that the text does not always allow insertion into the fore-meaning the interpreter projected onto it. Confronted with this resistance, the interpreter needs to revise his/her/their initial assumptions or presumptions. This process of going back and forth in order to improve understanding is the well-known hermeneutical circle. As a result of this ongoing process of experimental testing (*Erproben*), the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon brought to the fore by the object of interpretation merge together (Dallmayr 2009: 26). In Gadamer's view, this 'fusion of horizons' is possible because the researcher and author of the text or interlocuter are linked to one another through a historical line of subsequent interpretations (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). The researcher enters

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into a tradition that has been handed down from generation to generation (Gadamer in: Gómez-Rincón 2023: 528). But in a contemporary global context, we need to go beyond Gadamer. The key question underlying an adjustment of traditional hermeneutics to an intercultural context is how 'to enable the understanding of the beliefs, practices, works and forms of life of people with whom the researcher does not share the continuity of a common history or tradition' (Gómez-Rincón 2023: 528; see also Xie 2014: 4). Intercultural understanding and translation is possible but only through a dialogue in which the parties are committed to an exploration of the presuppositions and categories of understanding of one's own culture as of those of a foreign culture. Intercultural understanding 'involves a watchful listening and empathic, interactive participation in an ongoing dialogue' (Spariosu 2014: 199) in which the unconscious and hidden assumptions of one's own worldview are revealed, and those of the other (Gómez-Rincón 2023: 534; Xie 2014: 5). As one gains a new perspective on one's own culture by looking from the viewpoint of another culture, intercultural dialogue ultimately leads towards an enlargement and transformation of the horizon of the partners engaged in the dialogue (Gómez-Rincón 2023: 534; Xie 2014: 6). An interculturally oriented dialogue does not establish a fusion of horizons in the sense of a harmonious synthesis of horizons. Instead, it offers an enlargement of the different perspectives of each partner, which despite the differences, enables the partners to connect 'to face common issues' (Santos in Gómes-Rincón 2023: 534). Inextricably linked to the question of interpretation is the question of translation. Translation in intercultural context is first and foremost about assessing and evaluating one's own concepts and cognitive categories with the help of the categories of the other (Xie 2014: 7). But what is, according to Spariosu, of the utmost importance in establishing a genuine inter- and intracultural dialogue is the fact that 'all partners involved [need] to give up, entirely and unconditionally, their mentality of power and reorient themselves towards a mentality of peace' (Spariosu 2024: 193).

As has been argued, the limits to the usability of traditional hermeneutics in a global intercultural context lay in the presumption of a common cultural tradition between the researcher and those researched. Although the two dimensions (inter- and intracultural) are not always separable, this presumption has also come to be challenged in the context of intracultural hermeneutics. Intracultural hermeneutics in essence presupposes that cultures are in themselves bounded entities that are internally homogenous. If such an illusion was ever feasible, in times of accelerated global cultural connectivity and exchange, such a view on intracultural unity is no longer tenable (Reichertz 2021: 64). This is not to deny that in cases of intercultural dialogue the difference between the horizons of the various partners engaged in the dialogue can be far more radical. This is only to acknowledge that in cases of intracultural dialogue, where possibly more cultural exchange may have taken place, it is by no means to be taken for granted that the partners in the dialogue share the same cultural tradition (Reichertz 2021). In intracultural dialogue too, understanding may need a critical examination of hidden or unconscious assumptions of both traditions and cultures. And it is precisely here that the strength of the hermeneutical dialogue lies: not in engendering a harmony of beliefs, but in the invocation of an unconditional openness to new horizons that ultimately can involve a possible process of transformation (Dallmayr 2009: 32; Xie 2014: 6).

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## DUTCH *KLEDERDRACHT* ('TRADITIONAL COSTUMES') AS FASHION? A TENTATIVE EXERCISE IN HERMENEUTIC INTERPRETATION

Coming to a close, I would like to engage in a dialogical reading of some sartorial practices peculiar to a few rural areas in the Netherlands. Although these practices have almost disappeared by now, they have long been part of Dutch culture. One can even say that they have been seen and experienced as fashion's 'other'. These sartorial practices have been studied from an ethnological approach; the 'costumes' and the crafts have been analysed from a costume historical perspective. Within fashion theory these sartorial practices and objects have, indeed, gathered scant attention.

My dialogical understanding of these practices is based on a conversation I had with Neeltje van Altena Boneveld who lives in Marken, a former fisherman's island. Neeltje's mother used to wear the local costumes and she herself is very much engaged in the conservation of the costumes and the knowledge that goes with it. In September 2023 I attended a festive event[2] in Marken in order to feel and experience what the local *dracht* still means for the inhabitants. This event, called *Ijsbruiloft* ('wedding on the ice'), where young and old wore the traditional festive costumes used to be a recurring event since the 1940s, but was organized for the first time again after the lifting of the coronavirus restrictions. I also visited the local museum that showcases the history of the community. The traditional costumes and the practices they are embedded in are an important aspect of the narrative of the museum. I analysed some documentaries on this subject that were made some years ago by a young film maker/researcher. As these sartorial practices are almost disappearing, the film maker/researcher made five documentaries in which they documented and analysed the sartorial practices of five communities in which local costumes are still worn by a mere handful elderly women (Adriaans 2017–19). Finally, I read some secondary literature in order to learn more about the world within which these sartorial practices were enacted. In this tentative analysis I will try to understand the sartorial practices and the worlds shaped by the costume wearers by listening carefully to and learning from them. Subsequently, I will critically question whether the mainstream concepts of fashion theory are adequate tools to translate the voice of the costume wearers with. And when translating, I will carefully assess, what – speaking along the lines of Seth – we would lose, overlook or get lost in the act of translation (Seth 2014: 317).

In the nineteenth century, men and woman in various Dutch rural and fishing villages used to wear local costumes, *klederdracht* or *streekdracht* as it is called in Dutch. Although these communities lived in rather self-sustaining and enclosed worlds, they were also partially connected with the larger outside 'modern' world mainly thanks to their economic activities (Roodenburg 2007: 254). Nonetheless, the costumes were perceived in the first place as an articulation of the wearer's local identity (de Leeuw 1998: 13). At the same time, by wearing the local costumes, the wearer actively contributed to the process of place-making (Kettle 2019: 4). Wearing the costumes was indeed inherently constitutive of the connection to the villages and the communities the wearers lived in. This local embeddedness has been confirmed time and again by the stories told. The *Ijsbruiloft* ('wedding on the ice') I attended functions even nowadays as a rite which provides a strong sense of belonging.

What is quite remarkable in this context is that the characteristic fabric used in several of these local costumes is Chintz. Chintz is a fabric produced in India and was imported in the seventeenth century to the Netherlands by

2. This event, called *Ijsbruiloft* ('wedding on the ice') is a fake collective wedding party that used to be organized in winter on ice. The participants in the fake wedding (bride, groom and partygoers) are expected to dress as the rules used to prescribe how to be dressed for a wedding. Since there has been no ice in recent years, the 'wedding on the ice' has lately been taking place in September. http://www.ijsbruiloft-marken.com/. Accessed 5 February 2024.

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the VOC (The Dutch East Indies trading company). In the course of the eighteenth century, this fabric was incorporated into the regular fashion. Having become out of date within the regular fashion system, this textile was, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, incorporated in several local costumes where it became experienced as inherently local (Arnolli 2016).

Besides being a sign of locatedness, costumes were also an expression of the status and social position of the wearers such as standing, wealth, religion, marital status and age. Costumes also differed according to the rhythm and the rituals of life. People had costumes for weekdays or for going to church on Sunday; for religious festivities or for family celebrations. Mourning especially was a long process composed of various stages which all were expressed by different mourning costumes (de Leeuw 1998: 5–18; Roodenburg 2007: 252). So, wearing the appropriate costume was embedded in a whole web of unwritten rules and codes which were specific to the local community and which the local inhabitants had to have a certain practical knowledge of. Being dressed *goed* ('well'), *gepast* ('appropriate') or *keurig* ('respectable') are some of the important qualifications with which community members valued each other's clothing practices. Yet, within the confines of these rules and codes, women could adapt their costumes to their personal taste. Through the choice of lace, ribbon, embroideries and accessories they were able to express their own taste and preferences (de Leeuw 1998: 20). Within the communities, some women stood out and were credited for their exceptional feeling for combining colour and patterns (van Altena Boneveld 2021).

The various parts of the costumes were all made by the women in the community with fabrics they could purchase in the local shops. The skills of sewing, knitting, embroidering and mending were taught by the mothers to their daughters. In many cases this learning process started already at a very young age in an almost organic way. Monday was washing day, Tuesday drying day, Wednesday folding day and on Thursday and Friday women were making new pieces. Mothers, daughters and grandmothers sat together in the living room sewing, embroidering or mending. But since not everyone was equally good at all aspects of the creation of the costumes, women sometimes exchanged certain parts with each other. 'If you were good at embroidery, you did the embroidery for the neighbour who used to sew well and who sewed your clothes in return. This is what people did for each other' (van Altena Boneveld 2021). So, the process of making and maintaining was part and parcel of, even constitutive to, the social fabric of the family and the community (van Altena Boneveld 2021; Roodenburg 2007: 249).

In several communities, younger generations were eager to make some innovations to the costumes (de Leeuw 1998: 14; Roodenburg 2007: 250). Young women discussed among each other whether they would omit the ribbons on the headdress which they considered unnecessary, or change the back of the skirt which they did not like; or whether they would add some new accents (van Altena Boneveld 2021). Yet, in most communities costumes gained more value as they got older. In some communities it was even so that the more old clothes you had, the higher regards you were given (de Leeuw 1998: 21). Many of the garments, as they were handed down from mother to daughter, were cherished as precious family pieces and heirlooms. In some communities, e.g. as in Marken, it was an unwritten law that the eldest daughter inherited the most *antieke* and the most cherished pieces (Roodenburg 2007: 250). *Antiek* thus meant not only the oldest costume one had (worn by the most generations) but also the most beautiful one. It was

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also customary to put on your *antieke* clothes on church holidays (van Altena Boneveld 2021).

Likewise, in this community, it was common practice for women to embroider their initials or some kind of family sign onto the garments they made themselves. Wearing garments that were marked with the initials of your mother, grandmother, even of deceased family members or with an old family sign was something to be proud of, as it was an expression of respect for the family traditions as well as an act of strengthening family ties (van Altena Boneveld 2021; Roodenburg 2007: 250).

Transferring clothes from generation to generation also required some quite specific knowledge, Neeltje told me. One needed to know how to properly wash textiles in order to keep them colourful, how to fold them properly and store them well so that they are not attacked by moths. The transmission of this knowledge, too, was constitutive to the social fabric of the family and the community (van Altena Boneveld 2021).

From the late 1950s onwards, the various *streekdrachten* became abandoned. As employment opportunities decreased in the field of agriculture or fishery men had to go to work in the nearby towns. Later on, more and more children attended secondary schools in town, and families could even afford to go on holidays. As a consequence of the larger 'modern' world gradually intruding the relatively enclosed world of the local community, traditional costumes became increasingly changed for urban fashion or *burgerdracht* ('civilian dress'). In Marken they call wearing fashion *in 't vreemd gaan* ('dressing in a foreign way') because urban fashion or *burgerdracht* was worn by 'foreign' people who came to live in the village (van Altena Boneveld 2021). Indeed, for the community members 'discarding their costumes', felt like 'discarding a way of life' (Roodenburg 2007: 257). As community members gradually left behind their way of life also the knowledge that guided this life became useless. Consequently people had to start learning from scratch how to dress and behave in this other world. Many women in the documentaries I analysed said that they feel safe in their costumes. At every occasion they are dressed appropriately. Their costumes are part of what still constitutes the world they were born and raised in and they collectively shaped. When dressed in *burger* or in *'t vreemd*, they feel insecure because they do not know which rules to rely on. Some go shopping with their daughters, others receive extensive advice from the shop lady (Adriaans 2019). Neeltje confirmed that even now, after so many years that most locals no longer wear traditional costumes, some people still do not know how to dress for the occasion in *'t vreemd* (van Altena Boneveld 2021).

In one of the documentaries I analysed, the documentary maker interviewed a well-known Dutch ethnographer, Gerard Rooijakker, who was asked whether according to him *klederdracht* could be seen as fashion. The ethnographer firmly agreed (Adriaans 2017b). His view perfectly aligns with the broadened inclusive definition of contemporary fashion theory. Yet, if one looks carefully at how the sartorial practices are lived and experienced in the local communities, one cannot but critically question whether the concept of fashion is an adequate one to capture these specific sartorial traditions. If, using the words of Gadamer, we really open ourselves up to the lesson taught by the 'texts' uttered by the community members themselves, we have to admit that the texts do resist this interpretation. First of all, the wearers' self-definition of their sartorial practices, summarized by the expression *in dracht* is used to differentiate them from urban fashion, called *in burger* ('as

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a civilian') or *vreemd* ('foreign'). Wearing urban fashion stands for everything they are not. By focusing on the adjective 'urban', the wearers of local costume explicitly self-identify as people of the locality who have different rules and customs than those who live in the city. The locals were not wearing their costumes to be fashionable, but to express their social position 'as richly and respectably as possible' within the local community. The *dracht* presents the wearers as *keurig* ('respectable') members of the community (Roodenburg 2007: 249). In their second documentary, the documentary maker, unreflexively mobilizes the conceptual repertoire with which they themselves give meaning to fashion, by asking a woman dressed in her local costume whether she feels 'attractive' in these clothes. She does not seem to know how to interpret this word attractive and replies that she finds it beautiful. Without asking further explanation, the interviewer proceeded by asking when she felt the most 'trendy'. Her reaction again revealed that she did not understand the question as she was not used to thinking and speaking about her dress practices with the help of this category. By an interrogative intonation, she asked for clarification: (do you mean) 'beautiful?'. Of course she likes being beautiful, she riposted and she is happy when the older people of the community say that she is beautiful, that she is *bas*. She told the interviewer the word *bas* is a typical designation used in the community. The interviewer laughed, because they found *bas* a nice word. But once again, no further explanation was asked (Adriaans 2017a). As I was intrigued by this unnoticed resistance to the interviewer's interpretation, later on I asked Neeltje what being *bas* meant. According to Neeltje: 'bas means that you are appropriately dressed for the occasion but also that the costume has been composed with a good feeling for colour and patterns' (van Altena Boneveld 2021). It may be clear that some categories used by the documentary maker and the meaning systems they referred to did not meet the meaning systems of the woman in Marken with the help of which she lived and understood her dress practices.

Second, saying that local costume is not static is not the same as saying that local costume is fashion. Most local costumes do change slightly indeed; the pace wherein differs according to the region. Living customs and practices always change. Yet, since regional costumes expressed social positions (local, religious, status position, gender, etc.) in the first place, they could not change too quickly. Continuous change would damage recognizability. To do the trick, stability and respect for the tradition were required (de Leeuw 1998: 21). Moreover, there is no institution that is in charge of organizing the system of planned obsolescence and newness, as is the case in the western fashion system. As has been explained earlier, newness – the primary value within this modern western fashion system – is not specifically valued here, rather the fact that an object has been part of and has been constitutive to the family history. Furthermore, if we translate these specific sartorial practices by the concept of fashion, we reduce the many logics involved in these local dress practices, such as the religious, the social, the educational, the economic and the aesthetic into one dimension: the semiotic logic. The semiotic logic is no longer connected to the larger society wherein it is embedded but only operates within the fashion system itself where brands and styles refer to one another (Baudrillard 1972).

Lastly and relatedly, the fashion system is a system in which production and consumption are separated social practices. The garment that consumers buy is a commodity, a fetish in the Marxian sense of the term. The consumer

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has no idea of the labour invested in the object and the social relations that lay behind it. The object that circulates in the fashion system obtains its 'magic' value by the signature of the designer or the brand (Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975). This does not mean that consumers cannot imbue a particular garment with meaning themselves and cherish it dearly. Yet, within capitalist consumer culture, the individual meaning is always overdetermined by the logic prevailing in the system of production and dissemination. In the case of the Dutch traditional costumes, making and consuming/wearing were not separated actions but were intertwined moments of deep investment that were at once an expression of but also constitutive to the individual, family and community history.

Sum total, I hope that my tentative analysis has shown that hermeneutical guidelines foster an open attitude to the story told by the partners involved in the dialogue. In order to understand these stories, we should engage in 'a watchful listening' (Spariosu 2014: 198) and ongoing conversation that enable us to make explicit our own presuppositions and categories, as well as those of the other participants. Defining these Dutch traditional costumes as fashion would, according to me, be an act of interpretation/translation that negates the voices of the wearers and makers and consequently reduces these local and historical sartorial specificities into a kind of presumed sameness. In the Netherlands, fashion as an integral part of the 'modern' capitalist world existed along sartorial practices that were deeply ingrained in some local social fabrics which were not entirely constituted according to the logics defined as 'modern', although they were connected.

Moreover, by unreflexively using the western concept of fashion and related ones, fashion research would not only ignore alternative worlds of making and dressing but also be complicit in further proliferating the western consumer discourse and rendering it normative. Using the concept of fashion as a universalism is not only a denotative gesture, it also performatively brings into being that what it narrates (Blaser 2014: 54). The ultimate outcome of this is that this proliferation enables the modern/capitalist fashion world – with its detrimental impact – to further occupy and further destroy other territories wherein communities live and inhabit worlds otherwise (De La Cadena and Blaser 2018: 3; Vázquez 2017).

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