GLOBAL FASHION 2016
20-21 OKT INTERNATIONELL MODEKONFERENS INTERNATIONAL FASHION CONFERENCE

"Substantial" and "Real": Representation of Long-Lasting Fashion in Contemporary Biannual Magazines

Daria Mikerina

Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Humanities

d.mikerina@gmail.com

Abstract

Purpose

The paper introduces research in progress that investigates an emerging version of fashion culture by studying the mediation of "actual", "personal" and long-lasting fashion in increasingly successful biannual magazines (*The Gentlewoman, Fantastic Man, Lula*).

Methodology

Roland Barthes' methodology has been applied to analyse the material. His landmark *The Fashion System* (1967) laid out the structural analysis of written clothing as described in magazines and remains the only large-scale study of the representation of fashion. Barthes defined fashion as something opposite to "natural", constructed by a narrow instance of a fashion group and reproduced every year anew. A developing paradigm, termed here *post-prêt-à-porter*, is instead characterised by a rejection of trends, a focus on the "relevant" sides of garments and a deceleration of cycles. The paper analyses verbal structures of clothes as presented in magazines that promote "real fashion" and discusses the changes in vocabulary and references compared to the *prêt-à-porter* era in which Barthes wrote.

Findings

The paper argues that signs in contemporary fashion are not fully arbitrary and that they are motivated to a higher degree than in Barthes' system. In the representation of *post-prêt-à-porter* fashion the shift from the symbolic function of fashion to its aesthetic function is distinctive. In deprioritising the demand for newness, biannual magazines restore the real signs of utility.

Value

The article begins a discussion about shifts in representation of fashion in the context of the emerging cultural trend of celebrating "slow lifestyles".

Keywords

Biannual fashion magazines, long-lasting fashion, Roland Barthes, fashion discourse, *post-prêt-à-porter*

Article Classification

Research paper

ISBN: 978-989-20-7053-7

Background of the study: emerging “slow culture” in fashion and publishing

“The broken fashion system” appears to be the most discussed issue by fashion experts in 2016. We need only look to the special print edition of *Business of Fashion* entitled *The New World Order*, or the latest issue of *Vestoj* (a magazine produced under the patronage of the London College of Fashion) entitled *On Failure*, consisting of a long interview with industry experts revolving around the question: *What’s Wrong with the Fashion Industry?* (Cronberg, 2016). What is “wrong” is that the urge for constant progress and growth has led to overproduction and that the fashion industry has become “too big, and too fast”. To quote Imran Amed, founder and editor-in-chief of *Business of Fashion*: “We try to respond to the customer’s need for newness, but in doing so, we have created an over-proliferation of products that don’t have enough time to sell before the next collection drops, leading to waste. In doing so, we are constraining the creativity of our designers, exhausting the buyers and press, and overwhelming the consumer” (Amed, 2016).

The “endless fashion circle” of attraction, consumption and rejection has become too accelerated. Fast fashion brands sell their “interpretations” of designer collections even before the actual collections appear in-store. In 2016 industry experts opened up a discussion about the immediate need for catwalk items to satisfy “buy now, wear now” consumer behaviour (which is a rather radical reconstruction of the whole fashion system).

Prêt-à-porter is on the verge of crisis and, as a natural reaction to this unsustainable pace, the concept of “slow” lifestyles (which first emerged in the food industry) has became more and more relevant in the industry of fashion. There is a growing tendency to discuss, produce and wear slow fashion, long-lasting fashion and sustainable fashion. As Mimma Viglezio, a creative consultant and editor-in-chief of biannual fashion magazine *Lula* observes: “The pursuit of unending growth is killing creativity, common sense, and, on top of everything, pleasure […] People are tired of buying *stuff*: they want to buy *experience*, they want to buy *pleasures*, so the system needs to change” (my emphasis) (Viglezio, 2016).

The dominant anthropological and semiotic approaches to exploring fashion are based on the perception of fashion as something constantly changing, and opposite to “natural” (recalling Walter Benjamin’s famous quote: “Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world” (Benjamin 2002: 8). For the purpose of analysing this emerging paradigm – which is characterised by an alternative perception of fashion, a different experience of time and an alteration of the fast fashion cycle – this article investigates the representation of the new fashion culture in increasingly successful biannual magazines [1]. Although biannual fashion magazines operate in accordance with fashion seasons and consequently produce fall/winter and spring/summer issues covering current collections, they do not promote trends; rather, they prioritise the qualities of garments and nurture a wardrobe-based attitude to dressing.

The emerging cultural trend of celebrating the “slow lifestyle” has found its manifestation particularly in “slow print” in the form of biannual or quarterly magazines devoted to travel, literature, food, fashion, architecture and interior design. As Ruth Jamieson, the author of a survey on independent magazines *Print is Dead, Long*

Live Print notes: "In delivering ever faster, ever cheaper, ever more disposable content, digital has created a demand for something slower and of higher value, something that stands the test of time" (Jamieson 2015: 8). The end of print in the digital era only threatens the traditional monthly magazines. "Since the early 1990s, we've said goodbye to many of the magazines that once defined the newsstands […] Will there always be a *Vogue*? The very fact that we think to ask that question shows how much things have changed" (Jamieson 2015: 7).

Contemporary biannual fashion magazines that promote long-lasting fashion should be seen in the context of a general trend in magazine publishing of celebrating quality of life and everyday aesthetic and personal relationships with things. The concept of long-lasting fashion, as discussed in this paper, applies to an approach in fashion that is devoted to quality, value and authenticity. From that perspective, successful biannual fashion magazines like *The Gentlewoman* fall into the same camp as the phenomenally popular lifestyle magazine *Kinfolk,* the travel magazine *Cereal*, the literature magazine *The Happy Reader* and the food magazine *The Gourmand* – all of which are published in English. Notable for their book-like quality, they promote "valuable" material culture and boast a global readership: "They revel in the physicality of the magazine. […] They publish long, luxurious articles and photo-essays that take months to research and hours to read and absorb" (Jamieson 2015: 8). Paradoxically, in the digital era we now talk about the growth of magazine culture. There is a solid community of independent publishers (conferences like *Indiecon* in Hamburg or *Modern Magazine* in London) and readers (specialist stores like *magCulture* in London or *Do you read me?!* in Berlin). Tellingly, biannual fashion magazines are not only sold at magazines stores and newsstands but also in concept clothing stores. This indicates a certain union of different spheres within everyday aesthetics.

Methodology: "written clothing" in biannual magazines

With the aim of studying the mediation of so-called "substantial" and "real" fashion, this article analyses the spring/summer 2016 issues of three biannual fashion magazines: *Fantastic Man*, *The Gentlewoman*, and *Lula*.

The decision to select *Fantastic Man* and *The Gentlewoman* for analysis was a clear one. These magazines are widely acknowledged and well-respected by fashion experts. *The Business of Fashion* defines *Fantastic Man* as "one of the most significant new fashion publications of the last decade" [2] and *The Gentlewoman* as "one of the industry's most intellectual and informed women's magazines" [3].

Fantastic Man was launched in 2005 by Dutch publishers Gert Jonkers and Jop van Bennekom as "the original gentleman's journal, obsessed with personal style, intelligent writing and eloquent photography" [4]. As of 2016, the Amsterdam-based publication had a worldwide circulation of 87,628 copies. In the context of the publication of biannual fashion magazines, it may be seen as a pioneering effort in that it foregrounds personal tastes in lieu of seasonal trends.

The Gentlewoman is a "sister publication" of *Fantastic Man,* launched by the same publishers in 2010. The

magazine is produced in London and managed by Penny Martin, a respected editor and academic (who ranks in the BoF500 index of the most influential people in the fashion industry). As the magazine's media kit advertises: "Above all, *The Gentlewoman* provides a unique and timely perspective on the way intelligent women think and dress" [5]. As of 2016 it boasted a circulation of 98,969 copies.

These publications are not literally "fashion magazines" but rather men's and women's magazines. So although, as noted above, these biannual magazines are among "the most significant new fashion publications", curiously neither *Fantastic Man* nor *The Gentlewoman* contain any articles on fashion. Presenting themselves as "people-centred magazines", they primarily publish interviews and personality profiles. Here follow extracts from the magazines' media kits: "*Fantastic Man* features the stories of incredible men from a range of fascinating backgrounds: chefs, designers, athletes, broadcasters, actors, musicians and many more" [4]; "*The Gentlewoman* showcases the most accomplished, powerful and glamorous women of today through long-form profiles, chatty Q&As and candid portrait photography" [5]. All photographs of the magazines' personalities are accompanied by detailed captions describing the clothing they wear.

The first place in biannual magazines where fashion is mediated is "people profiles". The second place is "stories on clothing". Instead of engaging with trends, biannual magazines present artistic, photographic projects about garments, e.g. analysing the construction of jeans (the story "Crotch" in *Gentlewoman* (pp. 122–126)) or celebrating the tracksuit by means of photography (the story "Track" in *Fantastic Man* (pp. 206–213)).

The London-published magazine *Lula* is the third to be selected for analysis. In it, fashion is also to a great extent textually mediated through image captions. Notably, since 2015 *Lula* has been edited by acknowledged fashion expert Mimma Viglezio, a creative consultant who has served in a number of senior positions for luxury brands (including Bulgari, Louis Vuitton and the Gucci Group). She is also a writer and regular guest on projects run by the highly regarded fashion website SHOWstudio. Under her management, the publication has been restructured to create more mature content. Viglezio explicitly promotes "substantial" long-lasting fashion (in the issue analysed here, the fast pace of fashion is the main topic of her editorial (p. 29)).

In all three of the above publications, fashion is textually mediated through – to use Roland Barthes' term – "written clothing". Taking Barthes' observation as a cue, this article borrows the same methodology (the structural analysis of written clothing as described in magazines) he used for *prêt-à-porter* fashion and applies it to contemporary biannual magazines.

"Objective" descriptions of garments

Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1967), which remains the only large-scale study of the representation of fashion, was written during the emergence of *prêt-à-porter*. In contrast to the approach proposed by the editors of the biannuals analysed here, Barthes believed that real clothes are inert and retain no meanings in and of

themselves. As he underlines, in order to make possible the constant yearly changes of fashion, "a simulacrum of the real garment" must be created (Barthes 1983: xi).

Therefore, Barthes' understanding of "the real garment" should be addressed. "The real garment" has a technological structure which we never have access to. As Barthes has it, fashion is disseminated throughout society because of the activity of interpretation ("translation" in his terminology) from a technological structure to iconic and verbal structures (Barthes 2013: x). We could say that this "translation" always creatively enriches the first item, given that we always have to deal with the mediated (represented, interpreted and "enriched") garment. In magazines, as Barthes distinguishes, there are two different garments: *image-clothing* and *written clothing* (Barthes 1983: 3).

What immediately strikes the eye is that the captions in the surveyed magazines are highly detailed and concrete in contrast with its photographs, which almost always artistically display only a part of the garment, and often in black-and-white. We are shown only certain parts of the garment and given an "objective description" of the whole garment. We see only ten centimetres of the sleeve but we read that *"here, the cream ribbed cashmere jumper is by WILLIAM & SON"* (The Gentlewoman, 219). Although the description is of a *"golden geometric rose ring, and ring o3 with two half-round rocket shapes"* (Lula, 125), the rings are hardly visible at all because of the distance of the model in the photo.

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes emphasises that the described garment is a fragmentary one, since we are given only part of the garment, "a circumstantial use" (Barthes 1983: 15). In the magazines under scrutiny here, the description always seems to operate as "a whole garment", while the photograph is unequivocally "circumstantial".

Here we need to acknowledge that the extent to which the garments are explicitly demonstrated is an issue of the publishers' relationships with their advertisers. In the 1960s Barthes claimed that fashion was constructed by editorial staff. But nowadays the borders between editorials and advertisements are blurred. As Penny Martin remarks (in an interview conducted in 2008 before the launch of *The Gentlewoman*): "Your advertisers will count up how many shots they got per season. There's a sort of sliding scale of how well you showed their garments. […] There are some brands that are known to count up how explicitly you've shown their garments" (Martin 2008: 115).

In terms of explicitness, garments are often "not shown that well" but "described very well" in all three magazines. At the same time, as Martin observes in *Business of Fashion*, the majority of *The Gentlewoman* revenue comes from its strong relationships with advertisers (brands like Céline, Miu Miu, Balenciaga, Saint Laurent, Gucci and Prada) (Matthews, 2015). Here a sign of this shift in fashion culture becomes evident. With the spread of fast fashion, high-end brands are faced with a pressing necessity to differentiate themselves by choosing to be less explicit, thus favouring a more elitist mode of representation.

In biannuals, "image-clothing" often delivers unsatisfactory technical information about "real clothing". As highly-acclaimed fashion photographer Nick Knight notes: "What really matters is the desire that the image creates within you" (Knight, 2016). But "written clothing" above all reveals the technical characteristics of "real clothing": colour, fabric, pattern, cut. Colours are often sophisticated, complex and specific. The images may be black-and-white but the garments are described as *eggshell*, *deep indigo, ecru, baby pink, acid-yellow, cement-grey, heather-grey, sky-blue, powder-pink, burgundy-and-cream, baby-blue-and-white, mint-green, powder pink,* etc. The language is very specific and precise. For example, in describing striped patterns words such as *striped, pinstriped, candy-striped, awning-striped* and *micro-pinstriped* are used.

The following is a representative example of a caption from *Fantastic Man*: *"SVEN is wearing a beige cotton T-shirt with knitted rib collar detail by CALVIN KLEIN COLLECTION, a beige-and-white gingham-cheek cotton short-sleeved shirt by PAUL SMITH and beige cotton twill cargo trousers with Velcro patch pockets by CALVIN KLEIN COLLECTION"* (p. 92). On the face of it, speech takes as its main function the function of knowledge.

When looking at these magazines it becomes very clear that the clothing described is a "translation" of the actual outfit, and not of the clothing in the photo. At the same time, the written clothing often informs the context in which the photograph was taken. "Written clothing" is a confusion of references both to the "reality" of the actual outfit and the "reality" of a particular actualisation of that outfit: *"Photographed at MIT's Media Lab with Jibo, Dr Cynthia Breazel is wearing a black jumper by PROENZA SCHOULER, black wool trousers by 3.1 PHILLIP LIM and her own jewellery and shoes"* (The Gentlewoman, p. 231).

The tendency "to describe"

Barthes stresses that in magazines words refer not to collections of real garments, but to *vestimentary features* already constituted into a system of signification. These vestimentary features can have concrete attributes (referring to the technological structure of the "real garment") or abstract attributes (interpreted as "the real"). In this respect, Barthes differentiates two types of utterances in fashion magazines: (1) If the utterance merely objectively describes "the real garment" (features like forms, fabrics, colours) the *signified is implicit* (a notion of fashion); (2) if the utterance is interpretative and attitude-based, the *signified is explicit* (Barthes calls it the "worldly signified"). In Barthes' definition it provides the equivalence between clothing and "the world". By naming its signifieds, fashion becomes didactic ("*For summer, one smart coat will suffice",* The Gentlewoman, p. 242).

As far as this article explores the mediation of "substantial" and "real" fashion, utterances of the first type (which describe "substances") are our primary interest. It is reasonable to conclude that in the surveyed magazines it is precisely these vestimentary features of concrete attributes which are prevalent. (The main exception is the artistic photo-projects about garments in *The Gentlewoman,* in which many utterances with character features appear: *curious, sporty, elegant, ladylike, subversive;* circumstantial features, e.g.

situations: *"guaranteed to withstand the rigours of daily wear", "suitable for sunnier climes";* or moods: *"if one's feeling particularly languorous").* Utterances in the majority of these cases are nominative sentences (while for "interpretative" and didactic fashion the use of verbs is characteristic), consisting of compound adjectives that designate textile terminology as well as names of colours, silhouettes and fabrics. There is a very moderate and cautious use of metaphors, because first of all editors tend to give a sartorial description and present the garment in all its technical detail: *"A pile of possibilities from PRADA: white chiffon dress with red piping and embroidery, multicolored cashmere intarsia vest, white tulle top, white organdie culottes, yellow-and-black patent leather sandals, white metal earring, and white-and-orange-striped calfskin bag with black leather handle"* (The Gentlewoman, p. 145). Fashion-specific vocabulary and adjectival hyphenation is used in abundance.

The vestimentary code: multiplication of features and extension of matrices

Barthes treats any utterance that a magazine dedicates to garments as a signifier of the vestimentary code. He observes that "the garment is unveiled according to a certain order, and this order inevitably implies certain goals" (Barthes 1983: 16). In Barthes' analysis, he coins the term *signifying matrix,* consisting of *object (O)*, *support (S)* and *variant (V)*. Taking the utterance *"shoes with a mirrored heel"* as an example, "shoes" is the object aimed at signification, "heel" is the support of the signification and the "mirroredness" of the heel is the variant. According to Barthes, the signification emerges from the variant, which is not material, but modifies a material element. As Barthes notes, each term of the utterance must find its place in a matrix, but at the same time a confusion of elements is very common (Barthes 1983: 74). For instance, the confusion of support and variant applies to all utterances that include mention of a species of fabric, colour or pattern. Let us take "*Beige linen short-sleeved blouse with blue and pink stripes by SANDRO"*: As undifferentiated materials (colour, fabrics, cut, pattern) "*beige", "linen", "short-sleeved"* and *"with stripes"* are supports, but as affirmation (choice) they are variants. Simultaneously, "*mirrored heel"* indicates a confusion of object and support. In Barthes' logic, *"the heel"* (the intended object) is actualised by the *"mirrored heel"* (*"heel"* thus becomes a support).

Utterances in the examined magazines are usually highly compounded and very long. In Barthes' terms, we uncover here an extension of matrices: firstly, a multiplication of an element within a single matrix; secondly, the linking of several matrices with one another (Barthes 1983: 71). In the magazines "written clothing" usually consists of three or more matrices, which are linked together by development. In every matrix it is common to have three or more different variants: *"TOMMASO is wearing a black (S1V1) knitted (S1V1) wool (S1V1) roll-neck (S1V1) jumper by SUNSPEL (O1) with a grey (S2V2) wool-and-cotton (S2V2) polo shirt (O2) with white (V2) grosgrain (V2) button placket (S2), a white (S3V3) cable-knitted (S3V3) wool (V3) bomber jacket (O3) with nylon (V3) sleeve inserts (S3) and ecru (V3) cotton (V3) sleeves (S3), and white (S4V4) cotton (S4V4) trousers (O4) with nylon (V4) cuff (V4) detail (S4), all by SACAI"* (Fantastic Man, p. 86). According to Barthes, the meaning of the utterance issues not from one matrix or the other but from their association.

Looking at the written clothing in the surveyed magazines, it can clearly be seen that some substances fill certain forms more frequently than others. As far as most of the utterances “objectively describe the real garment” rather then “refer it to the world” (i.e. interpreting it), the composition of the utterances is typical. The strongest patterns are: the matrices <SV>O whose object consists of an article of clothing and whose feature <SV> consists of the colour, fabric, pattern or cut. Barthes calls patterns that take the place of a single bloc within the utterance *routines*: “These routines contribute to the ordering of the production of meaning: their frequency alone tends to banalise the message they transmit” (Barthes 1983: 85). Following his argument, it is logical to assume that the meaning of “a wool jacket”, “grey short” or “white trousers” is weak. But the association of these elements with each other and the relations of the matrices “elevate it to the singularity of the never-before-seen or the never-before-read” (Barthes 1983: 86). In the magazines analysed here this “singularity” is strengthened by emphatically detailed, complex and terminological fashion language.

This leads to the following interesting question: If we attempt to apply Barthes’ scheme to contemporary magazines, what place in the matrix should the name of the brand take? The brand name appears in capital letters in every single matrix. This is an element that Barthes did not have to deal with in the 1960s. But in contemporary magazines we are often told little else about the garment’s characteristics except its brand. As emphasised earlier, utterances in biannual fashion magazines are usually compounded and long. However, a few examples of “short” utterances that more clearly illustrate this principle are to be found. The following utterances are from *Lula* magazine: *“GUCCI green lace dress”* – we are given certain parts (colour, fabric, brand) and spared others (cut, length, detail, etc.); *“TOMMY HILFIGER knitted dress”* or *“LOEWE tassel top”* – we are only informed of the material and brand of the article of clothing. Finally, all information about the article can be narrowed down to its brand: *“VIVIENNE WESTWOOD mule shoes”* or *“PAUL AND JOE glasses”*.

On the one hand, the brand is immaterial and can be taken as a variant, as a differential category from which signification emerges. We may even assume that meaning emerges precisely from the brand name insofar as branding is constitutive of fashion discourse today. On the other hand, the brand gains and confirms its significance/relevance due to characteristics assigned to its garments. Brands buy advertisements in magazines, because they need their products to be represented in a certain manner (in our case as one-off pieces, which are “substantial” and “real”). According to the emerging fashion paradigm, in a situation where there is too much “stuff” the reason customers invest in a garment is because of the exceptional quality of its construction, whereby the name of the brand becomes less relevant.

The rhetoric system of the signifier: the poetics of clothing

As “written garments”, fashion can be mediated in two major ways: through the objective technical description of garments (presumably on a denotative level) and through the relation of garments to the world (on a connotative level). We have concluded that for fashion biannuals the first way is markedly dominant. According to Barthes, the rhetoric of fashion in this case is defined “by the coming together of matter and

language" (Barthes 1983: 235).

As seen from the above examples, utterances in fashion biannuals primarily consist of names for clothing (ensembles, garments, parts of garments, details and accessories), or *species* in Barthes' terminology. What is important for Barthes is that the name of the species does not correspond to a real system, but to a terminological system (with the assertion of species, the shift from nature to culture occurs). As he points out, in language the species belongs to the level of denotation since "it is not at this level that we risk finding rhetorical elaborations" (Barthes 1983: 87). But in the case of the material analysed here, the names of species are particularly specific, complex and sophisticated. The language tends to be merely descriptive and objective (mediating "substantial" and "real" fashion), but at the same time it is inventive, innovative and interesting. The nomenclature is emphatically anything but simple: *A-line, dirndl-skirt, bandeau, rickrack, ruffles, cutout top, romper, box bag, clog shoes, bum bag, cat eye sunglasses, sun-bleached jeans, bucket hat, raw selvedge denim jeans, bib top, babouche slippers, double skirt,* etc. Among the fabric names we have *georgette, merino, intarsia, gauze,* etc. French-origin terms like *basque, appliqué, crêpe de Chine, plissé, bouclé* and *cloqué* are commonplace. We come across such specific fashion terms in every utterance, one after the other, and they are used on a regular basis.

As we have seen earlier, in fashion biannuals utterances are full of compound adjectives and specific lexis (in Barthes' terms they consist of a complex chain of matrices with multiple supports and multiple variants). And we also know that most of these utterances merely describe technical characteristics of real garments. But according to Barthes, when we add a variant to a species we already "interpret" the real, thereby initiating a process of connotation (Barthes 1983: 97). He terms this situation the *poetics of clothing*: "This rhetoric derives its particularity from the material nature of the object being described" (Barthes 1983: 235). According to Barthes, denotation is pure as long as the description is functional: "But if technical description is only the spectacle of itself [...] there is connotation and the beginnings of a "poetics"" (ibid.). The technical descriptions of the real qualities of garments in the surveyed magazines are so profound as to imply a departure from their first meanings.

Here we should return to a question of the functions of speech and address: Why is terminological profusion so indicative of fashion biannuals? It should be noted that in contrast with the biannuals analysed here, traditional monthlies like *Vogue* put emphasis not on the garments' construction but on their look. Anna König, in her analysis of fashion writing in British *Vogue*, explains why fashion-specific and textile terminology decreased markedly from the 1980s to the 1990s. She contends that the reader has lost familiarity with fashion vocabulary, impacting on the understanding of what a garment might look like: "Whereas in the past many readers would have had a working knowledge of the language of garment construction – most likely based on personal experience of home sewing – it is meaningless to the average reader of today. This reflects a decline in the skills associated with the production of clothing, whether in a domestic or a commercial setting" (König 2006: 217).

Whereas the surveyed biannuals use French-origin words and other technical fashion vocabulary to indicate specific fabrics or details, most contemporary fashion magazines use them merely for ironic effect. As König argues, the use of irony helps an editorial team to distance itself from fashion (König 2006: 216). It is noteworthy that this ironic attitude to clothing is expressed in most contemporary magazines (not only mainstream ones like *Vogue*, but also glossy niche magazines). König maintains that the use of irony indicates that magazine editorial teams are aware that fashion trends are not really "important": "The growing dependency on irony may also be a reflection of writers' awareness that they are presenting a simulacrum of the fashion world: they don't believe in it, so why should the readers?" (ibid.) As Ane Lynge-Jorlén observes, glossy niche magazines (like *Another Magazine, Love, Tank, POP* and *Surface*) also shy away from taking fashion seriously, preferring the use of irony to mimic criticism. They address a young progressive audience in employing an informal style to mediate fashion as fun, trendy, lightweight and ironic: "Criticism is pretended via irony and spitefulness – as a form of mock criticism – with which writers can engage without jeopardizing their jobs or the magazine's revenue" (Lynge-Jorlén 2012: 19).

In contrast, there are no ironic or mocking comments in the biannuals investigated here. Rather, the tone is serious, the target audience is mature and descriptions tend to be essential. Such written garments mediate a belief in their "relevant" qualities. The editors of biannual fashion magazines neither treat fashion as a simulacrum, nor do they distance themselves from it. The intensive use of fashion-specific language helps to mediate the magazine's serious and respectful attitude to garments. It is telling that it was a men's magazine, *Fantastic Man,* that first initiated the mediation of "substantial" and "real" fashion. The serious attitude to garments came directly from men's fashion culture, with its sartorial understanding of the "substance" of clothes and an appreciation of well-made garments, style and the wearer's personality. Here, fashion is not mediated as trend-led, but filtered through a focus on quality and style: not as a simulacrum, therefore, but as something "authentic", something we can believe in.

Garments that people actually wear

On top of that, "authenticity" of clothing is mediated by placing "written garments" in "personality profiles". The magazines under analysis pre-eminently represent clothing that "somebody wears", whether it is an interview character or a model (who always has a name). The following is a typical utterance: *"Brogan wears ROBERTO CAVALLI white glove leather one shoulder top, high-waisted camouflage embroidered denim jeans and khaki leather belt, and ALEXANDER McQUEEN chandelier earrings"* (Lula, p. 101).

As argued earlier, most of the utterances in these magazines merely describe "the real garment", but omit "worldly signifieds". However, "written clothing" not only refers to the "reality" of garments but also to the concrete actualisation of the outfit as well, and therefore a connection with the world is projected onto the dimension of the wearer. And here we find another level of connotation.

"Written clothing" is often inserted into the narrative. A caption to the subject's photo consists of different interesting facts about the person, and the last utterance is always "written clothing". The following is an example from *Fantastic Man's* story on Pedro Almodovar: *"PEDRO's 1987 film 'The Law of Desire' features a miracle-granting Holy Virgin to whom the characters pray for miracles. Here, the director wears a white cotton crew-neck T-shirt and a blue printed cotton shirt, both by LOUIS VUITTON"* (p. 216). This rhetorical device underlines the relevance of clothing in the daily life of the distinguished "everyman" (who may not necessarily be a celebrity or model). By combining a "story" with a description of clothing, *Fantastic Man* represents the idea of a "man of great style and substance" [4]. Such a man can be a world-famous film director, a member of an art collective (*"ALESSANDRO thinks that the next big step in smart technology will be a cross between Airbnb and Grindr. He is wearing a lilac angora wool roll-neck jumper by VERSACE"* (p. 276)) or even a strongman (*"VIDAS was once a contestant on Lithuania's hit television show 'Šok Su Manimi' ('Dance With Me'). Here, he is draped in an orange, white and black cotton leopard-print beach towel by HERMES and black polyester shorts by REHNAND"* (p. 239)).

A wardrobe-based approach to clothing and the idea of long-lasting fashion is expressed in the tendency for subjects to wear not only clothes from the latest collections but "their own clothes" (branded or not) too: *"Photographed in Bruton, Somerset, Manuela is wearing her own checked coat by VIVIENNE WESTWOOD GOLD LABEL and a knitted red wool top and matching skirt by MALENE BIRGER"* (The Gentlewoman, p. 187); *"MARC JACOBS at NET-A-PORTER.COM wool and cashmere blend sweater, MIU MIU cropped striped metallic knitted top, and Lou's own jewellery"* (Lula, p. 78); *"DAVID works in LA, with his business partner NELSON TYLER, an early pioneer of rocket belt technology. The flight suit DAVID has charmingly fashioned into trousers is his own"* (Fantastic Man, p. 198).

"Relationship with garments" as the signified

According to Barthes, in utterances of this type (where the signified does not refer to the world, but is implicit) the signified is both always the same and a notion of "this year's fashion". In the case of our magazines, however, the signified is fashion understood as a notion of style and "good taste". It represents an invitation to pause and slowly contemplate garments from the latest fashion collections, not because they are "new" but because they have quality. In other words, the publications invite their readers to "back-translate" from "fashion clothing" (a construction that is traditionally understood as "opposed to natural") to the aesthetic utility of "real clothing".

In order to represent clothing from the latest collections as relevant, biannuals focus on their construction but also their wearers. By describing garments in a serious tone and using professional language, they mediate the idea that fashion garments are carefully and skilfully produced. In contrast, fast fashion may be able to copy a "look" but cannot replicate quality. By presenting garments that "somebody wears", biannuals mediate the idea that fashion garments shape our everyday experience.

Biannuals do not create a dichotomy between a “chosen species” and all other unnamed species (“in” fashion and “out of” fashion). In fact this is how the idea of long-lasting fashion is mediated. And here it needs to be reiterated that the magazines do not talk about the sustainability or durability of clothes (issues of ecology, overproduction and responsible consumption have yet to find a place in fashion publications), but rather talk about clothes from the latest fashion collections in terms of “substances”. The concept of “slow fashion” is much broader than the concept of “sustainable fashion”, which is defined by sustainable recyclable materials, transparent supply chains and minimal emissions. In the magazines analysed here, garments from the latest ready-to-wear collections are represented as garments not merely to be discarded the following year as “last season”, but as garments that will take their special place in a person’s wardrobe. A detailed and precise description of product ingredients is just as important for the slow food movement as a detailed and precise description of garments is for slow fashion. It is a rhetorical device used to encourage the reader to pay closer attention to the material qualities of the garments and to shift, for a moment, back from “culture” to “nature”, thereby ascribing higher value to fashion collections.

The dominant function of speech here is emphatic, where knowledge assumes a supportive function. The goal is to emphasise the beauty and taste of garments by means of precise but poetic language. This is how the “aestheticisation” of the fashion object is achieved. In this regard, the intersemiotic translation of “real garment” to “written garment” in the magazines investigated here is closed to what the rhetoric tradition calls *ekphrasis,* a vivid verbal description of visual works of art (Eco 2000: 97). But here we advisedly stay in the dimension of applied art. Although the surveyed biannuals do take fashion seriously, at the same time they do not mediate a belief in fashion as high art but rather claim it as the art of everyday experience. By creating imagery through detailed technical descriptions, they emphasise “beauty” in terms of style, function and attitude: as it were, borrowing the codes of crafts and design. The idea is to strengthen the link between fashion and “reality” (to emphasise the aesthetic utility of garments) and weaken fashion’s dependence on imagery (to diminish the perception of fashion as “fantasy” and simulacrum). In order to represent *post-prêt-à-porter* fashion, this shift from the symbolic function of fashion to its aesthetic function is distinctive. The surveyed magazines, far from doubting the importance of concepts, references, narratives and fantasies in fashion clothing, refer directly to the garments because the concepts and narratives are already imbedded in them.

As Benjamin avers, novelty is the highest value for an art doubtful of its task as it “ceases to be inseparable from <...> utility” (Benjamin 2002: 11). In the semiotic construction of the idea of *post-prêt-à-porter* fashion the magazines analysed in this text restore the real signs of utility. In order to mediate fashion in the context of everyday aesthetics, the claim for novelty should be pushed into the background. Biannuals give their readers time to contemplate the collections (six months to slowly read and re-read the issue) and to see the garments not as products, but as items of beauty, attraction, joy and emotion.

Whereas Barthes described fashion as a tyrannical machine that converts its unmotivated signs into a natural fact, signs in the contemporary fashion system are motivated to a higher degree. “Substantial” and “real”

fashion is represented not only via arbitrary symbols (the conventional names of “species” and named “worldly” signifieds) but via analogical icons and indexes (substances) as well, making the difference between types of signs seem relative.

Conclusion

This article instigates a discussion about shifts in the representation of fashion. The biannuals investigated mediate a rather radical understanding of fashion as something that is analogous to “natural”. By deprioritising the demand for newness, the magazines ground fashion’s aesthetics in the utility of the garments and the experience of the wearers.

The “written garments” in these magazines tend to closely and terminologically describe pieces of clothing that designers create and “somebody wears”, but resist overloading the description with subjective interpretations (in order not to negate “the reality” of the garment). In fact although biannuals are seasonal and do represent the latest collections, they shift emphasis onto the qualities of the garment and the taste of the wearer. They place fashion in the dimension of everyday aesthetics, a position from which they are allowed to mediate fashion as relevant and long-lasting (no one doubts the relevance of design or architecture). To create a personal wardrobe (whether from the newest fashion collections or not) means to shift from consuming to experiencing. And in this context, editors play the role of curators as opposed to trend-setters. As this paper argues, this serious and personal attitude to garments originated in men’s sartorial fashion culture.

Will fashion be able to legitimise itself in the domain of refined everyday aesthetics? To produce trends without being defined by them? The fact that the biannual magazines analysed here are among “the most significant contemporary fashion publications” suggests important changes in the fashion industry are underway.

Notes

[1] Biannual fashion magazines emerged in the 1990s and fall in the category of “niche fashion magazines”. Ane Lynge-Jorlén in her research on niche fashion magazines differentiates two principle subgenres: “glossy magazines”, and “art journal magazines” (Lynge-Jorlén 2012). Biannual “glossy magazines” (like *Another Magazine*) represent the idea of fashion defined by novelty and provocative youth culture, and therefore are not in the field of interest of this article.
[2] https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/jop-van-bennekom-gert-jonkers
[3] https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/penny-martin
[4] http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/Fantastic_Man_Mediakit_2015.pdf
[5] http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/The_Gentlewoman_Mediakit_2015

References

Amed, A. (2016), “Welcome to the New World Order” available at: https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/editors-letter/welcome-to-the-new-world-order-3 (accessed 1 September 2016).

Barthes, R. (1983), The Fashion System, Hill and Wang, New York.

Barthes, R. (2013), The Language of Fashion, Bloomsbury Academic; Reprint edition, London.

Benjamin, W. (2002), The Arcades Project, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
Business of Fashion. Issue 6: The New World Order. 2016.
Cronberg, A. (2016). What's Wrong with the Fashion Industry? available at: http://vestoj.com/whats-wrong-with-the-fashion-industry/
Eco, U. (2000), Experiences in Translation, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Toronto.
Fantastic Man. Issue 23. Spring/Summer 2016, Die Keure, Bruges.
Fantastic Man. (2015), Fantastic Man media kit [Brochure], available at http://press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/Fantastic_Man_Mediakit_2015.pdf (accessed 1 September 2016).
Jamieson, R. (2015), Print is Dead, Long Live Print, Prestel, London.
Knight, N. (2016), "Interview Nick Knight: Architect of Fashion Film, by Mimma Viglezio", Lula, Vol. 22, pp. 56–59.
König, A. (2006), "Glossy Words: An Analysis of Fashion Writing in British Vogue", Fashion Theory, Vol. 10 No. 1–2, pp. 205–224.
Lula. Issue 22. Spring/Summer 2016. Youth. Lula Publishing, Ltd., London.
Lynge-Jorlén, A. (2012), "Between Frivolity and Art: Contemporary Niche Fashion Magazines", Fashion Theory, Vol. 16, No 1, pp. 7–28.
Martin, P. (2008), "Interview with Penny Martin", in Shinkle, E. Fashion as Photograph: Viewing and Reviewing Images of Fashion, I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd., London, pp. 113–127.
Matthews, L. (2015), "How Do Independent Magazines Make Money?" available at: http://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/how-independent-magazines-make-money?utm_source=Subscribers&utm_campaign=d0533511c7-&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d2191372b3-d0533511c7-417417225?utm_source=Subscribers&utm_campaign=d0533511c7-&utm_med
(accessed 1 September 2016).
The Gentlewoman, Issue 13, Spring/Summer 2016. Fantastic Woman, Ltd., London.
The Gentlewoman (2015), The Gentlewoman media kit [Brochure], available at press.rockmedia.it/mediakits/The_Gentlewoman_Mediakit_2015.
Vestoj: The Journal of Sartorial Matters, Issue 5: On Failure. 2016. London. Viglezio, M. (2016), "Editor's Letter", Lula, Vol. 22, p. 29.