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# How did intellectuals conquer fashion? Nineteenth-century discourses

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## How did intellectuals conquer fashion? Nineteenth-century discourses

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, we hold that the idea of fashion and its rhetoric got a conceptual form similar to intellectual: both concepts swing among good and evil, the banal or not banal, among ideologization or politicization and the deideologization or the disappearance of its social, historical, political or cultural sense. Thus, we work about a dualism (intellectual-fashion) – that are linked with a question that will allow us to understand which role intellectuals have and which arguments they have when they observe the fashion. Moreover, we want to demonstrate that “the difference between the sexes” is linked permanently with the issue in question. Therefore, we want to explain how the concept “fashion” has been politicized during the “progress period”, modernization or modernity (19th Century and the beginnings of 20th Century) in Europe as much as in the Río de la Plata (current Republic of Argentina).

**Palavras-chave:** fashion; *intelligentsia*; 19th century.



## Como os intelectuais conquistaram a moda? Discursos do século XIX

### RESUMO

Neste artigo argumentamos que a noção de “moda” e sua retórica adquiriram uma forma conceitual semelhante à “intelectual”: ambos os conceitos oscilam entre o bem e o mal, o banal ou não banal, entre a ideologização ou politização e a desideologização ou o desaparecimento de seu sentido sócio-histórico, político ou cultural. Assim, trabalhamos sobre um dualismo (intelectuais - moda) – que, ligado a uma questão, nos permitirá compreender qual o papel desempenhado pelos intelectuais e quais argumentos possuem quando observam a moda.

Além disso, pretendemos demonstrar que “as diferenças entre os sexos” estão permanentemente vinculadas ao assunto em questão. Portanto, queremos expor como o conceito de “moda” foi politizado durante o período em que o “progresso”, modernização ou modernidade (século XIX e início do século XX) são pensados, tanto na Europa quanto no Rio da Prata (atual República da Argentina).

**Keywords:** Moda; *intelligentsia*; século XIX.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As we know, our fashion is a modification of the European ones. But, it is an artistic modification carried out by intelligent men. According to this, we are going to present the most general and newest among the elegant.

"Modas porteñas", en La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, poesía, de literatura, de costumbres. (Nº 1 – Buenos Aires November 18, 1837).

In this paper, we hold that the idea of fashion and its rhetoric got a conceptual form similar to intellectual: both concepts swing among good and evil, the banal or not banal among ideologization or politicization and the desideologization or the disappearance of its social, historical, political or cultural sense.

Thus, we work about a dualism (intellectual - fashion) that is linked with a question that will allow us to understand which role intellectuals have and which arguments they have when they observe the fashion, in a general sense that we are going to analyze later.

How useful were the literary registers about clothing, ornament, customs, usages and habits? Finally, rethinking that period of time, questioning us about the function (or demise) of fashion in our identification processes.

We extract this idea of "dualism" from the chapter "La vida como dualismo" from Filosofía de la moda [Philosophie der Mode] (1905) where Simmel warns us that every activity -even the most productive or the one that has exhausted all of its possibilities- has something that could not be revealed. The antagonistic elements are prevailed due to the mutual limitation. Therefore, appearances would allow us to suspect deeper forces, more contained tensions. (SIMMEL, 2014 [1905], pp. 31-32). From this perspective that we allow us to make the following thoughts.

On one side, the challenge of assemble the concept of "intellectual" or intelligentsia with the concepts of "fashion"

and on the other side, we want to demonstrate that “the difference between sexes” is linked permanently with the issue in question. Therefore, we want to explain how the concept “fashion” has been politicized during the “progress period”, modernization or modernity (19th Century and the beginnings of 20th Century) in Europe as much as in one colony of South America, the Río de la Plata (current Republic of Argentina). This proposal tries to confirm that in Hispanic America, the 19th century intellectual’s inquisitiveness for separating from colonialism was in a dilemma: they had to copy the tradition, fashion and usages from the rest of Europe (they did not want to be like Spain) and consequently they would lose the native characteristics or they had to accept the creole and mestizo world. In the worst case, they had to accept the native and savage one. This contradiction and tension were set up by some men from the “Argentine romantic youth” or “generation of the ’37”. This allows us to think in the other way around of some positions that only consider that Hispanic America was conquered by the innovation, the new or the European fashion.

According to Alberdi in “Carácter histórico del Derecho Constitucional Suramericano: su división esencial en dos períodos diferentes”.<sup>1</sup>

All the constitutional law of America before Spain is incomplete and vicious, in terms of the means that must take it to its great destinies. (...) None of the constitutions of South America deserves to be taken as a model of imitation, for the reasons that I am now occupying myself. (...) All the constitutions of the last period are reminiscence, tradition, often textual reform of the constitutions given in the previous period. (ALBERDI, 1981 [1852], p. 69-70).

We can confirm that the subjects who are socially inserted in a lifestyle such as romanticism conquered their own personality in search of free expression. They wanted to

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<sup>1</sup> Second chapter of *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina, derivados de la ley que preside al desarrollo de la civilización en la América del Sur*, which first version is in Valparaíso, may 1852. From now on, *Bases*.

be different from the general. "Only if we take into account the exaggerations in the romantic fashion and the necessity of emphasize the Hispanic again, it is possible to understand the fashion (...)" that rules the 1830's period. (SAULQUIN, 1990, p. 38-39).

A second example of the nineteenth century corpus, Esteban Echeverría, founding father of the intellectual elite of '37, thinker and poet, whose name is associated with the beginning of intellectual and literary Americanism in the Rio de la Plata formulates that: "We will ask for lights to European intelligence, but with certain conditions. (...) we will always have an eye fixed on the progress of nations, and another in the bowels of our society<sup>2</sup>" (ECHEVERRÍA, 1991 [1838]: 253-254).

## 2. THE ART OF COMPARING CONCEPTS INTELLIGENTSIA OR THE INTELLECTUAL?

The names of Fortoul, de Leroux, Bernager, Quinet, Massini, mean modern art and the progress of the world (Fashion and Justice).

"Literatura", en La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, poesía, de literatura, de costumbres. (Nº 2 - Buenos Aires November 25, 1837).

The term intelligentsia was used for the first time in Russia in the nineteenth century: those who had gone through universities and received a culture, essentially of Western origin, were a small group outside the traditional agents. They were recruited among the "second sons of the aristocratic families", the children of the petite bourgeoisie, or even of well-to-do peasants. Separated from the old society, they felt united by the knowledge acquired and by the attitude they adopted regarding the established order. The scientific spirit and the liberal ideas also contributed to

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<sup>2</sup> Extracted text from "Palabras Simbólicas. XII Fusión de todas las doctrinas progresivas en un centro unitario", en *Obras escogidas*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1991.

lean towards the revolution. The intelligentsia felt isolated, hostile to the national heritage and cornered in violence. (ARON, 1967 [1955], p. 205)<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, we understand that -in the beginning- the use of the nickname [mote] "intelligentsia" was pejorative.

In the *Diccionario Enciclopédico Ilustrado de la Lengua Española*, published under the direction of José ALEMANY y BOLUFER in 1945, the word intelligentsia does not appear, but we can find "intellectual": "adj. Pertaining to understanding // Spiritual or without body // Dedicated to the cultivation of science and letters". The same definition appears on the website of the Real Academia Española in 2018, and it clarifies that it derives from the Latin *intellectuālis*<sup>4</sup>. Nothing is said about its origin or political role.

On the contrary, in the *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* [Treasury of the French Computerized Language], appears the entry "Intelligentsia, intelligentsia", as a feminine noun. There, it is also historically associated with the 19th century of Czarist Russia. It was conceived as the intellectual vanguard that militated for political-social reforms. In brief, this term of Russian origin has in its history -and in its definition- greater politicization than the Hispanic term "intellectuals". That is why we will use indistinctly one and the other, precisely to give the political aspect to the role of the intellectual.

We add about intelligentsia, that it can include poets, essayists, academics, writers, politicians, artists, scientists, professors, self-taught or journalists. We prefer to link this figure to the analysis and realization of a diagnosis. The intellectual translates, he is a bridge (or should be) between civil society, citizenship, the State and acquired knowledge, scientific or not. ROMANO SUED (2016) points out that the

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. also with BAÑA, 2014, "Apogeo y declive de la intelligentsia rusa. Entre el trabajo intelectual y el deber moral", en <http://nuso.org>, September – October. Free access [viewed in april 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. <http://dle.rae.es/?id=Lqb2TD7> [viewed in April 2018].



intellectual's arduous task consists of writing and rethinking meanings, events and objects within larger movements and systems, since there is a link of multiple relationships between "worlds texts" and languages that reveal one and again in a tense and contradictory way.

The intellectual preaches because he understands and explains, always under his subjectivity, his political and ideological positioning, his beliefs and his perspectives. However, it is not frequent today to link the intelligentsia with issues of fashion or political fashions. Except for few exceptions, we can't find associations neither in public life nor in contemporary private life.

But in the nineteenth century, there were several personalities -who considered themselves as intellectuals- explicitly linked to fashion topics, not only in Europe but also in South America, particularly in the Río de la Plata.

Finally, we are aware of the divergences in the processes and historical contexts of each territory where the intellectuals write. (Europe and Hispanic America).

We support, for the first case, what Gisèle SAPIRO (2017) summarizes in "El espacio intelectual en Europa entre los siglos XIX y XX": The process of formation of nation-states contributed to the disintegration of the European literate community, which only spoke one language, Latin. With the vernacular languages, the birth of the book market and the expansion of the reading public to social groups, not necessarily trained in the classical humanities -women, urban middle classes, and then the working class-, fragmentation was a fact. If the French was -until the eighteenth century- the language of culture of the European courts; the German Kultur imposed itself with its austere rigor against the superficial charm of French civilization, initiating the process of nationalization of literate culture. The translation became the main mode of transnational circulation of texts.

All this led to the development and differentiation of the intellectual professions that took variable forms according to the political and administrative structures of the different countries and the competitive relationships among themselves.

Because of the central role given to culture, the construction of national identities depended on the producers of collective representations that were the intellectuals. Literate men, publicists and thinkers of the social world, proclaimers of a radiant future or nostalgic for a lost past, assumed the role of prophets of the modern world. This national construction was developed within the framework of an increasingly intense international competition that had Europe as its center, and it became a model that circulated from one country to another through a mimetic process. (SAPIRO, 2017, p 26, our italics).

For the Hispanic American case, we understand that in front of "the dissolution of the colonial order and the construction of the first independent order" there were various factors that go from the insurrection to the permanence of loyalties. We isolate certain scenes that occurred in the past, however we are interested in the one where collapses the legitimacy of the viceroyalty. When this happens, the competition for the status of creole insurgent elites -for not having access to public functions-, becomes a competition for holding public power, specifically in the case of the Río de la Plata.

Latin America is seen as the historical "family" and it is seen as a synonym of the adversities from which it seeks to escape to enter the path of civilization.

The general observance of Claudio Lomnitz applies entirely to Argentina: 'In Latin America, the identity problem arises as part of the national obsession to explain and remedy the backwardness, given by the failure of the independence and national sovereignty as a civilizing mechanism'. (ALTAMIRANO, 2005, p. 106-107).

For Altamirano, the option adopted by "the minority" was to transform the national physiognomy. In addition to this,

they tried to redefine relations with the rest of South America. This situation implies that being geographically in Latin America would not always mean for Argentines to identify themselves as Latin Americans.

To complete this "scenic silhouette" where the "sons of the Independence Revolution" wrote their texts, we should point out that:

The community notion of nation is problematic in the Río de la Plata and throughout America because the actors of the uprising were Creole, and the basis of their identity consisted precisely in their belonging to the metropolitan culture (...). The problem in the Río de la Plata lies precisely in the fact that the founding pact of the political community fails to take shape, before the drafting of the Constitution of the Argentine Confederation in 1853 which proclaims the national union. (BERNARLDO de QUIROS, 2008 p. 31).

However, it does not stop "pretexting the nation". It was invoked during meetings of intellectuals in literary societies. It was a nation that not only evoked a denunciation of a "horde" that came to replace people; but also one that should civilize barbarism.

## 2.1 From Fashion

Sometimes fashion resembles these flirtatious young girls who, after having exhausted the novelties of taste, start to imitate the old ladies, for a refinement of coquetry. The middle age is the old age that undermines the fashion of the day.

"Últimas modas francesas", in La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, poesía, de literatura, de costumbres. (Nº 1 – Buenos Aires Noviembre 18 de 1837).

To define "fashion" we must consider that, as an inherent notion of material culture and associated categories such as clothing, ornaments, customs, traditions and habits (the latter three are the alter ego of "fashion"), fashion has aroused a growing interest in different disciplinary fields. It

is due, in part, to the fact that fashion imposes conditions not only of universalization, but also of particularization (BENJAMIN, 2016, p. 93 et seq.) Its tyranny includes the imperative that the fashion should not be adopted automatically, that is, not to be copied. It is worth highlighting, within the unfinished and enigmatic work of Walter BENJAMIN, *Libro de los Pasajes* [Passagen-Werk], in "Apuntes y Materiales. B [Moda] ", written between 1927 and the year of his death (1940)<sup>5</sup>, some definitions, like these, which will be useful for us to understand the material history of the 19th European century.

By fashion we will understand not only the effects of clothing, but also a practice linked to the incorporation of the novelty, new trends in politics, legal/legislative, literary, economic, social, artistic and cultural.

Customs are linked to a routine repetition of an eternal conservative imitation. Fashion is also an imitation, but it is unexpected. It is linked with the past, with the present and with the future. This imitation is fundamental -wrote SIMMEL (2014 [1905], p.34 and 35)- not only for the individual and for the scientist but also for fashion. In the individual, it engenders in the practical order the same peculiar tranquility enjoyed by scientists when we have subsumed a phenomenon under a generic concept; fashion, as a constant phenomenon in the history of our species, its vital conditions are circumscribed to an imitation of a given model, and thus satisfies the need to rely on society, leads to the individual. But, unlike customs and habits, fashion has two radical functions: uniting and differentiating, and this implies leaving out a circle that cannot follow it. It is the

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<sup>5</sup> I acknowledge the contribution of Dr. Francisco Naishtat for this extract: "it belongs to the composition of *Passagen-Werk*. However, this book was not published posthumously until 1982, as volume V of the complete works (*Gesammelte Schriften*), edited by Tiedemann and Schweppenhäuser, under the supervision of Adorno and Scholem". About the writing accuracy of this fragment is precisely uncertain or almost impossible to know. "What we can say is that Benjamin worked on the manuscript and on the research of *Libro de los Pasajes* between 1927 and 1940, that is, for thirteen years. That fashion fragment was written during that period. I could not tell you much more, if not for the topics, figures, names would give the impression that it corresponds to the second phase of the research of the *Pasajes*, which began when Benjamin was definitively exiled in Paris, from the northern spring of 1933, immediately after Hitler's rise in Germany" (email received in May 2018).

"hermetic occlusion" of fashion. (SIMMEL, 2014 [1905], p.37 and p.52).

The role of fashion, then, occurs in a combination between what is left and taken from the past, the demands of the present and its unfailing future transformation: In a diachronic way, the modernus concept, whose étimo modus, is related to fashion because of its derivation from the temporary adverb 'mode' that carries the implicit idea of novelty. There is a right of recognition of every age, generation or culture, to affirm certain degree of progress linked to the antiquus. (GODOY DOMÍNGUEZ, 2008). For Baudelaire, as we will see, it was the transitory, the fleeting, and the contingent. (BAUDELAIRE, 2013 [1863]).

In its synchronic appearance, it also reveals the conditions of the sexes in their different spheres because the attributes of dressing, elegance and good taste are related to the social and political process that installed the idea of civilization in the modern West<sup>6</sup>.

To give an example of the diachronic and synchronic simultaneously, the idea of the nation -a modern form of collective identity that assumes limits and determinations- is not self-explanatory, but it must look for its conditions of emergence and durability. We consider that the configurations of the relations between the sexes would explain an aspect of that history. These can be seen through the historical documents of intellectuals that allude to fashion.

That is the reason we question ourselves: how have sexual differences been seen, as an indeterminate phenomenon, and what role did fashion fulfill in those configurations? Why and what motivated the intellectual and political elite to mention fashion and the sexes in their union or in their differentiation between men and women?

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<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Goldgel, 2013, p. 111 et seq.; Zambrini, 2009; Simmel, 2014 [1905], p. 32.

Here [It refers to the second half of the 19th century] fashion has inaugurated the place of dialectical exchange between women and merchandise -between pleasure and the corpse- (...) Thus fashion was always the parody of the multiform corpse, provocation of death through women, bitter dialogue in whispers, between strident and learned laughter, with decomposition. That is fashion. That is why it changes so quickly (...) and it is another one again when death tries to hit it. (BENJAMIN, 2016, p.92 [B 1, 4])

The world of the 19th century began to modernize, there was a disenchantment or "demagification" of the images of the world (sic Max WEBER, 1917-1919) and each sphere of value had its position with the fashion:

a) Legal sphere, for example, through the sumptuary laws formally prevented that people, who did not belong to the aristocracy, could emulate a better social belonging through clothing. The most significant period of normativity was in the late Middle Ages and early Modern Times. (ZAMBRINI, 2009).

b) Religious sphere because it condemned the use of certain types of garments for women and men. They feared the confusion between the sexes. One of the greatest fears was transvestism, a figure opposed to the family.

c) Erotic sphere because fashion was, for example, a means by which a woman could highlight her figure and show a man her most seductive image, the most intimate promise of her figure (BENJAMIN, 2016, p. 92 [B 1, 8 ]).

d) Economic sphere. It was associated with the flourishing of fashion and fashion press (through the production and sale of certain clothing and ornaments that, according to the customs of each era, could be different or equal).

e) And with this also would appear, in the politics sphere, the materialization of the notion of "freedom" in clothing, as a philosophical and political emerging, for example, of republicanism and liberalism (the Phrygian cap, to put an example of clothing) (BARD, 2012).

Then, in order to construct a more exhaustive history of material culture, research should be based on archives if it is to make a more complete reconstruction of the history of culture, politics and identity. In that sense, the concept of fashion is a catalyst that would anticipate political, social and cultural reactions. "The most keenest interest of fashion lies with the philosopher [the intellectual] in his extraordinary anticipations" (BENJAMIN, 2016, p.93).

It was attempted to trivialize and remove the content or reduce an aspect: one of the applied sciences (particularly textile design and clothing). But fashion offers unsuspected twists, because it is a tool that enhances differences, exacerbates contrasts increasing both biological and natural and ideological divergences, and it offers a way of behaving according to the existing order (BARD, 2012, p.14).

In other cases, it was a mean to make proclamations in pursuit of equality, freedom or to denounce violence and chaos.

### 3. ARTICULATIONS I: EUROPEAN INTELLECTUALS AND THE MENTION OF FASHION

Among us, fashion participates in the indecision that affects all our social things. We do not have dominant fashions, as we do not have ideas, or dominant customs. Meanwhile, it is necessary to walk towards homogeneity.

"Modas de Señoras", in La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, poesía, de literatura, de costumbres. (Nº 3 Buenos Aires - December 2nd, 1837).

Since the sixteenth century, both in Italy and in France, new ways of dressing have been discovered through the character "Pantaleon" in the commedia dell'arte. This character represents a rich and miserly old man who wears a specific suit - long underpants that later becomes the pant garment [in latin pantalón] (BARD, 2012, p.11).

In England, on their side, will appear the work Utopia from Thomas More in 1516. It was a parable or allegory in

which life and English customs were criticized<sup>7</sup>. For this, he will use the clothing and ornament to reproach that society:

With more arrogance than prudence they determined to present themselves [the English Ambassadors to the island of Utopia] and to wound the eyes of the miserable Utopians with the splendor of their clothing (...) they all dressed the most diverse colors, mostly silk (MORO, 2008 [1516], p.40).

In turn, it is time to make a proclamation for a new society based on equality. This can be found in the Utopia Island principle. Moro writes, "Everyone has to wear the dress in a same color, a color of his/her own." (MORO, 2008 [1516], p.40).

However, in this section we will work on a small cut of European authors who have already witnessed the revolutionary transformations of the continent. Therefore, they are participants in a new public space in which the modernization process takes place. We can mention Honoré de Balzac (who in 1830 published the *Tratado de la vida elegante* [*Traité de la vie élégante*]). It was for the first time published in the weekly magazine *La Mode* that was created in 1829 and directed by Émile de Girardin, one of the pioneers of modern French journalism); Charles Baudelaire's in *El pintor de la vida moderna. I. Lo bello, la moda y la felicidad* [*Le peintre de la vie modern. I. Beauté, mode et bonheur*], published in 1863 in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. Then, as we anticipated an author of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, George Simmel with his texts originally in German, 1905's *Filosofía de la moda* [*Philosophie der Mode*] and "Digresión sobre el adorno" (1908).

According to Balzac, an intellectual exponent who knew how to recover in his writings and aphorisms, in an ironic and sarcastic way, the role of fashion, throws a definition entirely related to the idea of nation. There he revealed a

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<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Goldwaser Yankelevich, 2008.



typical "social life pathology" in European modernity. He interrogated about habits and customs that make the distinction between persons who become rich in detriment of the citizenship [pueblo]. Fashion was described as what degrades or dies by becoming common but that exists and stipulates new fashions thanks to opinion's strength. The man who dresses fashionable is not only a modern man, he depends on another one that cannot bear it, the worker. He writes openly: fashion only emerges in a poor citizenship [pueblo de pobres] and in a nation of people who produce and people who consume. (BALZAC, 2013 [1830], p.11). Benjamin will bring his own to say that: "Balzac's slogan is extremely appropriate to explain (...) that this era does not want to know anything about death, that fashion also makes fun of it" (BENJAMIN, 2016: 95).

Charles Baudelaire is based on Balzac when he writes *El pintor de la vida moderna...* will unfold the elements that allow figuring out the customs, the moral and the aesthetics of a period which implies the eternal and the relative. While the eternal is discarded for not allowing a clear and determined identification of a historical time; the relative, which implies fashion, morals and passion, allows us to understand that context.

In section IV "Modernity" ["La modernidad"], he affirms that:

Undoubtedly, as I have portrayed it, this man [he refers to the dandy or the soul of the author or the artist, although the latter is the one whom least shapes him as a denomination], this solitary men with an active imagination, always on the march for the great desert of men, has a higher goal (...) different from the fleeting pleasure of the circumstance. He seeks what I will be allowed to call modernity (...). In its case, it is a question of rescuing from history what fashion contains of poetry, of extracting from the eternal from the transitory. (sic, BAUDELAIRE, 2014 [1863], p. 21; italics in the original).

It will refer to modern art, in particular to the paintings that dress their characters with old costumes, which appeal

to fashions and ornaments of the Renaissance, and discredit them because the painters of his own actuality (19th century) insist on covering topics with "daubs of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance or the East", instead of being able "to choose topics that are general and adaptable to all periods of time". It is a proclaim in favor of modernization and of the incorporation of the novelty into the ancient.

Finishing this condensed journey around certain European intellectuals who have referred about fashion, we will revisit George Simmel who will write a philosophy of fashion just at the beginning of the 20th century. From the components of fashion, he observed the unstable (modifiable) forms of power and money relationships between individuals and institutions. It is not the "society object", but the "effects exchange". These can be lasting as those crystallized in constitutions, churches and nations; or temporary, such as fashions, uses and customs. In *Digresión sobre el adorno*, he explains that as the superfluous increases, the freedom and independence of our being increase too. The superfluous does not impose any limitation law, any structure. (SIMMEL, 1939, [1908], p.360).

This is articulated with some aphorisms of Honoré de Balzac: "The man accustomed to work cannot understand the elegant life". (BALZAC, 2013 [1830], p.11). This is because the exceptional is the one who has idleness for work. So he is "elegant and carelessly at the same time. He decides for his free will whether to wear the lab coat or the tailcoat worn by the fashionable man, he is not subjugated to laws, he imposes them". (BALZAC, 2013 [1830], p.11). This is a *sine qua non* condition of being modern.

As Simmel says in 1905 (in *Filosofía de la moda*): fashion implies a social, specific, regular and non-accumulative change (It is different from Sciences) that unfolds in multiple spheres of social life. In the West, fashion will be a phenomenon capable of altering traditional patterns. It is the communication of identity signals through attire; therefore,

at the origin of fashion, we can find the dynamics of distinction and imitation.

At the same time, it enables the individual to reconcile him with the collective by allowing him to settle his personal tastes in a specific collective framework. It is a copy or imitation, which "it is nothing more than what seems to be at the moment" to give identity signs versus originality and differentiation, as is the case with dress or adornment that are somewhat above contingency and the person (SIMMEL, 1939, [1908], p.362).

As a corollary to his attempt to interrelate fashion-intellectuals, Simmel acclaims: the empire of fashion is more intolerable in those orders where they should only be worth substantial criteria. Religiosities, scientific interests, even socialism and individualism, have been a matter of fashion. "But the unique reasons that should influence the adoption of these vital positions are in absolute contradiction with the perfect insubstantiality that governs the process of fashion" (SIMMEL, 2014 [1905], p. 39-40).

#### **4. ARTICULATIONS II: RÍO DE LA PLATA INTELLECTUALS AND THEIR FASHIONS**

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I only deal with frivolities, things that nobody takes into account, such as fashions, styles, uses, once again ideas, letters, customs (...).

"Figarillo" (Alberdi), in "Mi nombre y mi plan", La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, poesía, de literatura, de costumbres. (Nº 4 - Buenos Aires December 9th 1837)

For a matter of space economy, we will make a special emphasis on the Rio de la Plata, especially in La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, de poesía, de literatura, de costumbres (it contains twenty-three published issues from 1837 to 1838. Hereafter we mention it as La Moda). It was founded in the porteña city of Buenos Aires, mainly by Juan Bautista Alberdi.

It is assumed that this publication could have its source of inspiration in the eponymous weekly magazine, mentioned above in the case of Balzac. Although there is no empirical material evidence that affirm that *La Moda* could be possible copy or imitation of the French *La Mode*, we believe that it was Esteban Echeverría -who was in France between 1826 and 1830<sup>8</sup> -, who incited and introduced Alberdi in the reading of that publications. The majority of the articles of the *La Moda* are written by pseudonymous or they are anonymous<sup>9</sup>. With the closure of this Argentina gazette due to the censorship of Rosas's regime, many of them exile in Montevideo, and they continued writing about similar issues and topics -and even repeating notes- but in a newspaper called *El Iniciador*<sup>10</sup>, published in the Oriental Band between 1838 and 1839.

In both publications, the editors sought to influence and act in the public sphere, offering a material that modified the social dynamics and the reading routine of the small public of the "good porteña society" ["buena sociedad porteña"]. (IGLESIA, ZUCCOTTI, 1997, p.64).

In times of the *Salón Literario* and, mainly in the year 1837, there was a relative political stability that allowed Alberdi to think, for example, on the possibility of designing a state as a liberal and democratic republic. From that perspective, the "generation of the '37" believed that the political emancipation, waged during the independence wars, had not been accompanied by a cultural and also emancipatory movement (IGLESIA, ZUCCOTTI, 1997, p.65).

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Goldwaser Yankelevich, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Among its editors included Juan María Gutiérrez, Jacinto and Demetrio Peña, Vicente López and Carlos Tejedor, but the main writer was Alberdi. He signed as "Figarillo", a pseudonym that is due to his admiration for one of the most important critics of Spain, Mariano José de Larra, whose pseudonym was "Fígaro". (Lojo, 2009: 13). According to the research of José A. Oria (1938), and thanks to his comparative analysis, we can assume with great precision to whom each one belongs. It is known that, in addition to "Figarillo" (Alberdi himself reveals it in *La Moda*); the initial "E" refers to Demetrio Peña; "X" and "El regañón" to Vicente F. López; the three asterisks (\*\*\*) to Jacinto Peña; "Uno del Pueblo" and "Un abogado" to José Barros.

<sup>10</sup> According to María Inés de Torres (1995), on the neighboring shore of actual Uruguay, "the generation of *El Iniciador*", constituted a group involved in the struggle against the despotism in the old continent but projected in the Río de la Plata.

The Spanish monarchical sign of the colonial customs continued it and seemed to remain in the different Rosas's governments. So La Moda came to fill a space to reform or break with ancient customs and habits, in a city occupied by commercial and political innovations.

However, this Generation unfolded, during the rosista's regime, in a state of "proscription". Since it was a regime based on confrontation, censorship of thought, persecution and the imposition of customs (BOTANA, 1997), many of the discourses of the "disappointed generation of '37" were cryptic when they try to escape from the rules of censorship. This is because the dispute in the Rio de la Plata lasted for dozens of years around a key issue: the opposition between the federal currents (with serious nuances between them, but they were unified by an ornament called "divisa punzó" that claimed "Die to Unitarians Savages", "live the Holy Federation") and the unitarians.

We observe that, in the Hispanic American literary and intellectual field, this topic about fashion appears in classic works of consecrated authors: Sarmiento, in his diary of *Viajes por Europa, África y América* of 1845; Bilbao with its "*Sociabilidad chilena*" and Bello in the poem "*La Moda*" (both published in the mid-nineteenth century in Santiago de Chile); Nieto Gil, in his novels *Rosina* (1842) or *Ingermina* (1844), author of the current Colombia, among others. In some cases, they had a marked influence of European thought. In others talking distance from it.

"With the liberal experiments of the early 19th century, the Hispano-American elites were forced to redefine their links with the Spanish tradition. They had to act on the basis of new political realities" (GOLDGEL, 2013, p. 16, our italics). In this way, customs and tradition did not go together. Customs became an arena of struggle and

transformation<sup>11</sup>. The new as an imitation of something already existing in another place, but with no previous experience, had its material space in fashion getting confused with the concept of "progress". And in this scene, the newspaper as the ideal platform to reflect cultural transformations.

We interrogate ourselves how to read "the history in flesh and blood" from different novelties introduced in Hispanic America through literary as legal-political writings. What developments and effects did they produce in our political societies? Finally, how the intellectuals of the Rio de la Plata would have thought about the "modern being" in times of national identity construction, particularly those who have dedicated themselves to write in *La Moda*, such is the case of the "father" of the future national Constitution, Juan Bautista Alberdi?

In the Constitution of the Argentine Confederation that is promulgated in 1853, of course, it is "explicit" the exclusion of women as a subject of political rights. However, in the writings of the men of the mid-nineteenth century who were considered to be developers of the Argentine nation, traces of the transition from the object woman (of the other) to subject of rights appear.

The woman was not always written 'negatively', but she has been included in a "field of forces" [campo de fuerzas] where the senses were disputed with each other. This is why we say that, in the writings about fashion, contradictory figurations of women appear, written by nineteenth-century men worried about getting out of Spanish domination, without thereby entering into an autochthonous savagery.

According to Goldgel, the process of political emancipation of the Río de la Plata is associated with the emergence of a new media (the newspaper), the

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<sup>11</sup> "During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, novelty played a central role in the efforts to justify the political legitimacy of Hispanic American nations as well as the reformulation of the link that subjects established with time and history". (GOLDGEL, 2013, p. 24).

consolidation of a social device that operates a constant renewal of objects and practices (fashion) and the continuity between two discursive formations of the period (the Enlightenment and Romanticism). He affirms that these three elements were legitimized on the support of the novelty, being "the new" the object of permanent thoughts at the time of the rising republican era.

In the literary-journalistic production of nineteenth-century Argentina, the allusion to foreign fashions (mainly European) as part of the national project can be seen as an alternative form of nationalist propaganda (HALLSTEAD, 2004, p.54). Something similar holds Regina ROOT (2014) to affirm that fashion occupied a battlefield of signifiers. Particularly it allowed young patriots to distance themselves from the relics of Spanish colonialism.

One of the hypotheses that we have investigated<sup>12</sup> holds that when attention is placed on political romanticism, the role of the written woman is forgotten, and when the function of the woman is remembered, the political context of that speech is disregarded.

If they insisted in women's clothing that was because woman had to play a cardinal role as a reproducer of democratic customs within the family, but "the equality of rights did not refer to her but also to the adult male sector" (MOLINA, 2005, p. 160). We believe that this invocation problematizes the notion of (politic) equality and that this conflict is seen precisely through the role played by fashion in these discourses.

That insistence can be corroborated in the two most prominent publications: *La Moda* and the biweekly newspaper *El Iniciador*, which talk about these topics.

If fashion and woman figure, were so relevant for some of the members of '37, why some historiographical studies - classical or contemporary- have suppressed their analysis.

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<sup>12</sup> Widely developed in GOLDWASER YANKELEVICH, 2012.

Why are they neglected, while the figure of the foreigner, the immigrant, the gaucho, the indian, the frontier, the desert, the barbarism, the hero, the caudillo are analytical tools to understand a political proposal of the time and circumscribe the concept of nation? What is behind this omission? Is there a methodological decision to put them aside or is it a division of fields between "feminist theories", "sociology of fashion" and "political history"?

It is believed that this suppression is due to the fact that in the imaginary division of study fields, everything relates to the subject "woman" (both as a subject or as an object of discourse) must -indeed- be addressed by the feminist theory and the commonly currents of thoughts entrusted to the "gender" (feminine) or of everyday life. The explicit fact of the exclusion of women in the field of politics does not allow us to see that, in any case, their figure contributed anyway to the construction of the concepts in question. Many times, historians downplay this figure, not always explicitly or intentionally.

Therefore, a careful look at the texts has allowed us to isolate four central positions, which are types of women appearance in the writings of the men who founded the nation.

These positions or figures will contribute to a reading of nineteenth-century sources, that will allow us to interpret them and even systematize the contemporary studies that have been dedicated to that century. In addition, they reduce the ways of her appearance in the writing of men who thought about the idea of fashion, the nation and its political constitution. These are:

1) The figure of the woman as an object of (the) Illustration. That is to say, those parentheses indicate that, either this figure appears as a favorite recipient, ideal of an audience that must be enlightened and attend to romantic men's discursive productions, or as an "object woman" that would exemplify an ideal. This ideal corresponds to a



receiver who listens, reads but does not decide or criticizes, a "mannequin". She is the primordial component of the social order, useful for complying with the doctrinal policy of the time. After all, she opens a discursive passage to the legitimacy of a State which must control the chaos of civil society where barbarism still exists.

For example: in *La Moda*, when its editors wonder about who should deal with the mission and the social status of women, the answer is that it depends on the new "intelligent and avid knowledge" generation since that is dealing with the becoming of a nation. (*La Moda* N° 19, 3/24/1838, p. 6).

2) The one that refers to her as a pretext (or excuse), discursive tool (weapon) to appeal to issues of another tenor, especially in times of censorship of freedom of expression. Many times, both the woman and the concept of fashion worked as a pretext, but also as a potency, within the discourse, to advocate or encourage a change, not only in culture, but also in politics. Following the previous example, in the same magazine-gazette, to criticize the people -currently sovereign-, they refer to "the women", as "anonymous entities", without individuality, therefore, without a real responsibility: Women "everything they can and they know, because they are many: in the crowd we can find omnipotence and infallibility. The crowd is the ignorance: ignorance is their title of sovereignty." (sic, *La Moda*, N° 18, 3/17/1838, p. 5).

3) The intruder [*La intrusa*]<sup>13</sup>, an obstacle to progress. A figure would break with fraternity and harmony between the equals, for example, men. The intruder is embodied by the woman figure. This often happens to manifest the strangeness generated by the 'old', which does not fit into the doctrine or plan that is projected. Such is the case of the limeña figure of "la tapada" in Sarmiento's travel stories. He notes due to a suit that the Spaniards adopted from the

<sup>13</sup> Third position inspired by the homonymous story by Jorge Luis Borges (1974), included in *El informe de Brodie*.

Arabs for religious spirit, when women do not dress in an European way, single or married -clarifies the author-, they wear a veil, cover their head and face with the mantle. When they wear this they "leave barely a naughty and mocking eye uncovered, and from that moment all social ties are loosened for them, if they are not unleashed at all" by "being free as the birds of the sky". (SARMIENTO, 1848, p.9)

4) Finally, the nineteenth-century text analysis women as "active subject", what emerges is a figure of a frontier, hinge that would illuminate the passage of an ancient era (the colony) to a modern one (the nation-state or the foundation of the Republic). A figure that forces to project a mediate future, different from the current one. No longer as a pretext, no longer as an object, but as a moment of awareness that perceives political and cultural change. It is a clarification about the contemporary situation. This figure (in relation to the other three) implies comparison, just as it happens with fashion: it appeals to a before and an after, and it can only be mentioned by those who possess a progressive thought of the history of a people, of a country or of the nation. In short, a figure that refers to the subjectivity of the transition.

The Editors of *La Moda* had clear three characterizations (without hierarchies in his mention) about the feminine condition:

1º) The woman who was dependent of frivolity, coquetry, ornament and marriage.

2º) The one who was absolutely free and out of control, "the woman" (from the street) as opposed to "The Lady and the lady";

3º) The victim of a society (or half of it).

According to Alberdi, the resolution would be a family that contains her as long as it does not take away her freedom of action in the public world. At the same time, the pressure of society should lead her to understand that it

depends on her to protect her autonomy, taking in account, all at once, the needs of her nation.

Who is responsible? Whose fault it is? The editors do not hesitate to affirm: "the man puts the last stamp to the defects of her education, making her vain, flirtatious, and false". Women is prepared "for the happiness of the father, the husband, the son", and that only offers illusions that disappear like dreams or fashion. Here, the woman is a victim, but since it's a condition, she is of course, temporary, transient. They write, "Her main condition is to please, luxury dazzles her, a boudoir absorbs her precious hours, (...) quickly browses an insignificant novel". (sic, *La Moda*, N° 19, 3/24/1838, p. 6).

So, as recorded here, the change in customs -which must begin by supplanting one type of Argentinean family for another, as Alberdi and The Editors write- depends on women. On what did her condition depend? We can find some answers in two articles in *La Moda*, although they should be read as one. Both were written under the subtitle "Al Bello Sexo". One appeared in N° 5 and the other (which is supposed to be a clarification of this one), four numbers later. We allow ourselves to quote the first one almost in all its extension for the revealing message and the advanced state of its thinking:

When all humanity progresses, when the early and ardent Argentine youth receives with an electric celerity, the ideas, the progress of the century, will women remain stationary? The sweet companion of man, that soul with which his is to be united in an eternal bond of happiness, will she always continue to be so distant, so inferior to him? The answer is no: women is destined to arrive in this century of leveling to her true social condition. The task is great and noble, and what is more, her best success depends on the woman herself. Hurry then, the beautiful Argentine sex to unleash of frivolity, to break out with the worries of an old and vicious education, abandon mental idleness (...).

(...) Stop considering the knowledge something unrelated to her-instruction is the true path of virtue,

(...) Otherwise she will never stop being more than a luxury item, a domestic administrator, a momentary companion of entertainment and of pleasure to the senses; degrading role (...) (La Moda, Nº 5, 16/12/1837, p. 3, ours italics).

In this first long paragraph, the author presents the figure of women as a subject capable of liberating herself. She is a figure of transformation; she must modify her condition that makes her occupy a superficial place. In addition, there is a possible answer: there was an old and vicious education. Therefore, we locate here the frontier-figure in which the author sees the need for a change, a progress understood in terms of modernization, compared to the old-fashioned - which in this case is the education received in that time.

This figure is a case - example. At the same time that it challenges the figure of women, it appeals to all society.

The self-awareness of the Editors about the women's situation is significant. It's Alberdi himself who is behind all this:

The work *Bases...* (see footnote 1) is subsequent to *La Moda*. From the reading of *Bases...* it could be affirmed that, for Alberdi, *women* should be excluded from politics. However, the articulation of the reading of *Bases* - *La Moda* illuminates an *interstitial posture* between the "true and possible" *woman*<sup>14</sup>. He sees as utopian the possibility that the constitutions of Hispanic America can make the representative republic. This is so because they intend to copy "the philosophical essays that the France of 1789 could not perform" (ALBERDI, 1981 [1852], 1981, p. 233). Let us remember that, when a political fashion is copied it ceases to be a novelty and it becomes a difficult graft to carry on. For Alberdi, although one can begin to write a constitution, what is really *necessary* is,

(...) to replace our current Argentine family for another equally Argentine, but more capable of freedom, wealth and progress (...) South America has an army for this purpose, and it is the charm that their beautiful and kind women received in their origin which is improved by the splendid sky of the New World. Removing the

<sup>14</sup> Paraphrasing Chapter XII of *Bases...*: "False position of the Hispanic American republics. The monarchy is not the means to get out of it, but the possible republic before the true republic".

immoral impediments that make sterile the power of the beautiful American sex and you will have made the track of our race, without the loss of the language or the primitive national type. (ALBERDI, 1981 [1852], 1981, 233-234, our italics).

The woman, described by Alberdi, is the hinge between the Creole type and the new 'American' type who is a product of the fusion of the 'beautiful and kind women' of the New World; and the elimination of the colonial heritage that "sterilized the power of the beautiful American sex." According to Alberdi, the new Argentine family will have the potency of the European man with the protection of the idiomatic tradition and the physical type (deposited in the women). But while the conditions are not in place for "the ideal", then we must think about what is possible. And the possible about the figure of the woman, is found by the jurist, in the following paragraph:

As for the woman, modest and powerful architect, whom from her corner makes private and public customs, organizes the family, prepares the citizen, lays the foundations of the State, her instruction should not be brilliant. It should not consist of ornate and exterior luxury talents, such as music, dance, painting. We need ladies and not artists. The woman must shine with the shine of honor, of dignity, of the modesty of her life. Her destinations are serious. She has not come to the world to ornament the room but to beautify the fruitful solitude of home. Give her attachment to her home is to save her; and if we want that home attracts her, it must be an Eden. (...) a hardworking woman has no time to get lost or the pleasure to get distracted by vain meetings. As long as the woman lives in the street and in the midst of provocations, applause, as an actress, in the living room rubbing like a congressman among that kind of public called society, she will educate her children in her image, she will serve the Republic as Lola Montes, and she will be useful for herself and her husband as a more or less decent Messalina. (ALBERDI, 1981 [1852], 1981, p. 79 -80, our italics).

We have to analyze it carefully. In general, when this passage is mentioned, it is usually cut out. For example, Batticuore states that "Alberdi expresses as a sort of drastic formula the fate of female instruction", and he quotes "We

want ladies and not artists" (BATTICUORE, 2005: 49). The same happens in the prologue of María Rosa LOJO (2009: 16). For Lojo, this phrase would show a sexist thought of Alberdi.

It is important to take up the whole paragraph ("do justice") and contextualize it according to the author's ideas. We should take note that, according to Alberdi, is in this moment where appears the political role that would be assigned to the figure of women and fashion in the foundational scenario of the nation to come.

When he refers to the type of women education, he adds that she "should not be brilliant." (BATTICUORE, 2005, p.36). It is necessary to warn and clarify that "bright" connotes a negative feature (like the brightness of the moon whose light is not its own) because it refers to the world of ornament and "superficial" life. In other words, he observes the public space of his period, belonging to a society that he disapproves.

So "giving attachment to home" means "protect her" from the corruption she may suffer because of the colonial society in which she lives. Women have a unique power that must be preserved: to make private and public customs, to lay the foundations of the State, no more and no less. According to the tucuman Alberdi, it is a serious task. For that reason, he contrasts two figures of "deviant women" or "intrusive women": Lola Montes and Messalina. The underlying motive or the cause seems to be the way in which society corrupts and places women in a superficial place.

Is it today imaginable that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a man or a group of intellectual men, located in a space of visibility -as the media was-, denounced this type of "detours", corruption of the body and the feminine doing? Contemporary studies have not accounted until now for the exercise of self-responsibility

that this generation has made regarding the situation of women.

Therefore, the written woman adopted different imaginary anatomies (MATHIEU, 1991). At this point, the question arises: these figures traced in the writings on fashion, would allow us to understand, through singular expressions, the epochal conceptions?

The identity of the Hispano-American intellectual can be expressed in an Alberdian question: How can we write with a language that is not ours? How can we build a culture with elements inherited from colonization or from the European world? The great subject of 'dependence' or of the different 'mirrors' in which we can contemplate ourselves as constitutive of the Latin American problem, becomes an obsessive topic, and that it is why the concept of "fashion" collaborates so much with his intellectual ideas. In other words, it is the anomaly of a modernization without modern subjects.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

I am a Spanish's son, and it is already known that every Spanish's son should do all his life what his father did: he should not be more than an imitation, a copy, a tradition of his father, that is, he will be always imitation, always copy, always routine, as for example, our homeland, of its mother country (...)

"Figarillo" (Alberdi), "Mi nombre y mi plan" (continuación), en La Moda. Gacetín semanal de música, poesía, de literatura, de costumbres. (Nº 5 - Buenos Aires December 23, 1837)

What we wanted to show up to now is, on the one hand, the ambivalent position that certain intellectuals adopted regarding the concept of fashion. Secondly, we wanted to state that when the intellectuals referring to fashion, they inevitably refer to the difference between the sexes, the man and/or the woman.

Third, and despite the influences of non-Spanish Europe, some Spanish-speaking intellectuals have diagnosed a destiny for their homeland or nation based on new ways of understanding fashion.

In any case, we note the politicization of the concept and its intrinsic relationship with the history of thought and literature in certain intellectual men of the nineteenth century.

According to George Simmel in 1905 (one of the authors that we address in the second section), the question of fashion is not "to be or not to be", but rather it is simultaneously "to be and not to be", it is always situated in that part between the past and future, providing, during its apogee, a feeling of present as intense as its own death.

The dualism that we tried to demonstrate became "flesh and blood": Honoré de Balzac, Baudelaire, Simmel, Benjamin; Sarmiento, Alberdi and the Generation of the '37 of the Río de la Plata have demonstrated how they have conquered the concept of fashion and its clear reminiscence with the socio-political construction of their time. Their works, by the way, build what we can call "material culture" in moments of reflecting about modernity.

Paraphrasing the alberdian diagnosis about modernity without modern subjects it can be settled with a re-think of the concept of fashion in our latitudes. Think again "to be Latin American" [ser latinoamericano] at a time when "not to be globalizing" [no ser globalizante] is imposed. It is a challenge that deserves further study.

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