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Dressed for leisure: the fashion descriptions in the mondaine chronicles of João do Rio

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ABSTRACT

In recent historiography, there is a consensus that the modernizing reforms promoted in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 20th century have changed the capital's architecture and the relationship between its population and the urban experience, introducing new practices into daily lives of cariocas. Among them was the introduction of sports, with the press being the main vehicle for its dissemination. This article explores the presence of fashion dedicated to sports in chronicles and examines its contribution to the validation of a collective imagination about leisure. The literary representation of sportswear gains complexity in the "civilisation du journal", in which social relations are regulated by the production and reading of magazines. Therefore, the aim is to map out the access to fashion paradigms by readers of periodicals. As a case study, two chronicles of João do Rio on the sports theme are analyzed. Published in the column "A Semana Elegante" in 1916, they focus on the female presence and their clothing in the practice of tennis and sea bathing. We conclude that the importation and representation of sports practices and their fashion acted in the construction of an imaginary of elegance in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Keywords: Literature. Chronicle. João do Rio. Fashion.

Vestida para o lazer: a descrições da moda nas crônicas mundanas de João do Rio

RESUMO

Na historiografia recente, é consensual a visão de que as reformas modernizadoras promovidas no Rio de Janeiro no início do século XX alteraram a arquitetura da capital federal e a relação da população com a experiência urbana, introduzindo novas práticas no cotidiano dos cariocas. Dentre as novidades incorporadas, encontram-se as práticas de esporte. A imprensa periódica constituiu o principal veículo de representação de tais práticas esportivas. O presente trabalho tem por objetivo analisar a presença da moda esportiva nas crônicas mundanas e examinar sua contribuição para a validação de um imaginário coletivo acerca do lazer. O enquadramento do figurino esportivo ganha complexidade na "civilização do jornal", na qual as relações sociais passam a ser reguladas pela produção e pela leitura dos impressos. Busca-se, portanto, mapear o acesso aos paradigmas fashion por parte das leitoras (mulheres) de periódicos. Como estudo de caso, são analisadas duas crônicas mundanas de João do Rio sobre a temática esportiva. Publicadas na coluna A Semana Elegante em 1916, estas abordam a presença feminina e sua indumentária na prática do tênis e dos banhos de mar. Assim, pretende-se mostrar como a importação e a representação das práticas esportivas e sua moda atuaram na construção de um imaginário de elegância na cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

Palavras-chave: Crônica mundana. João do Rio. Moda.

Vestida para el ocio: descripciones de moda en las crónicas mundanas de João do Rio

RESUMEN

En la historia reciente, es consensual una visión de que como reformas modernizadoras promovidas en Río de Janeiro, no inicio del século XX, alterar una arquitectura de capital federal y una relación de población con una experiencia urbana, introducción de novas prácticas no cotidianas dos cariocas. Dentre as novidades incorporadas, encontram-se as práticas de esporte. A imprensa periódica constituiu o principal veículo de representación de tais práticas esportivas. O presente trabalho tem por objetivo analisar a presença da fashion esportiva nas crônicas mundanas y examinar sua contribuição for a validação de um imaginário coletivo acerca do lazer. O enquadramento do figurino esportivo ganha complexidade na "civilização do jornal", na qual as relações sociais passam a ser reguladas pela produção e pela leitura dos impressos. Busca-se, portanto, mapear o acesso aos paradigmas fashion por parte das leitoras (mulheres) de periódicos. Como estudo de caso, são analisadas duas crônicas mundanas de João do Rio sobre a temática esportiva. Publicadas na coluna A Semana Elegante em 1916, estas abordam a presença feminina e sua indumentária na prática do Tênis e dos banhos de mar. Assim, pretende-se mostrar como una importación y una representación de las prácticas deportivas y su moda en la construcción de un imaginario de elegibilidad en la ciudad de Río de Janeiro.

Palabras clave: crónica mundana. João do Rio. Moda.

1. INTRODUCTION

Illustrated journals have proven to be a radiating source of historical knowledge. From their pages, the traces of references that have shaped the culture of the press in modernity are emanated. The wealth of textual and visual resources they offer allows us to grasp, in an almost unique way, the dynamics of the basic phenomena of culture that scholars have called media (PINSON, 2008; KALIFA et al., 2011). The popularity of periodicals made way for new literary genres, such as chronicles, through which it is possible to better understand the process of collective constitution of the notion of modern life (BENJAMIN, 1989, 1995). The transnational circulation of printed matter is, in turn, responsible for the insertion of Rio de Janeiro's readers in the reading circuit of cultural periodicals.

The fast expansion of the press during the 19th century introduced structural changes that went far beyond simply creating a new framework for the circulation of printed texts. Newspaper innovations induced a real transformation in the writing system, affecting reading and writing regimes at once (THÉRENTY, 2003). With the new pattern of daily publications, a regularity previously non-existent, a routine was established, which impacted on society as a whole. Reading daily editions imposed rhythm to the daily activities, guiding this new routine. From the 19th century on, the press shaped the urban experience, determined by the rhythm of writing and reading periodicals. From politics to social events, from philosophy to science, all themes were jolted by the emergence of the professional press that covered daily life in the cities.

According to Thérenty, the literary categories served as a pattern for the invention of journalistic poetic. Considering

the writing of periodicals as a literary object, the researcher took a look at the poetic, rhetorical and linguistic methods used in the construction of a way of narrating specific to periodicals. Composed from literary resources, journalistic texts comprise, in her view, four characteristics: the fragmentation, the collectivity and the periodization in which they manifest or modify themselves in relation to current events, as detailed below.

First, it is necessary to consider, according to Thérenty, that journalistic writing is part of a strict framework in which the layout works as a poetic rule. The texts must follow an organizational structure to fit into the *mise-en-page* of the newspaper. This structural strictness promoted the fragmentary layout of textual genres, such as *roman-feuilleton*, poems written in prose, and chronicles. Secondly, one must take into account the collective nature of journalistic writing. Each article is built within a system of structural, thematic and ideological echoes in dialogue with the rest of the newspaper. The plurality of themes and the communication between the parts of the newspaper represent the reality in the form of a text. This plurality mimics the division and organization of life in society. Thirdly, one should pay attention to its periodicity. The reading of the newspaper is repeated non-stop, at regular intervals, within a homogeneous temporality. That assumes the constancy of the reader, suitable for keeping up with the unfolding of the narratives developed in the press. And, finally, Thérenty notes that journalistic writing is a kind of referential writing. It relates to current events, of which it is an integral and constitutive part. Moreover, it depends on the technical progress of the media and transport facilities, as well as on political rules, i.e., it depends on censorship or

the free circulation of information, among other contextual factors.

The combination of the four characteristics that make up journalistic writing as defined by Thérenty explains the new form of production and circulation of literature thus connecting newspapers to poetic, rhetoric and literary language. Based on the concepts proposed in this study, we can place periodicals as tools to establish modern temporality. This temporality is organized around the production and reader-response of printed matter in big cities.

It is also worth noting that urban civilization is directly linked to the flourishing of the "media age". The press has modified the ways in which societies have come to record and transmit their stories. For this reason, periodicals have established themselves as one of the collective instruments of organization of sociability. In its pages, we find a set of shared representations characteristic of societies and a set of social practices necessary for their production, dissemination and reader-response.

Newspapers aim to describe everyday life. The problem of organizing its content, multiple by nature, imposes itself on the newspaper's director: how should information be prioritized? what criteria should be used to organise it? How should information be framed /formatted considering what should be said? How should it be said? Newspapers do not give a chronological or thematic treatment to information, but rather favor a blended choice of data. The sections are permanent spaces assigned to a certain genre or subject within the periodicals. They manifest the temporality of the printed matter, since they establish a cohesion, from edition to edition, whose effect is the creation of a picture in which daily life becomes readable. The fragments succeed each

other, and a trace separates the textual units. The rubrics are entitled in order to install a stable order and to conduct the reading. "Politics", "Foreigner", "Varieties", "Spectacles", "Folhetim" and "Chronicle" exemplify the common titles that filled Brazilian periodicals.

Although there were distinctions in the form and content, there was a porous boundary between the sections, which allowed newspapers and magazines to be seen as inventories. These complex systems, composed of interesting pieces of information, attracted increasing attention of the literate segment of the population.

In this article, we will focus on the section chronicle in the period of the Belle Époque. Unlike the theatrical and political sections, which preserved the same structure and thematic approach of the 19th century, the chronicle reveals itself as an inconstant and varied genre. It is not limited to a generally stable or easily describable form. Narrator's autonomy is a feature of the chronicle. In order to recreate the urban atmosphere, they tell tales of daily life. Accident or sensational crime, death or birth, divorce or marriage, dance or duel, concert or scandalous scene, dramatic success or literary success, hall of fine arts or racetracks, experiments or scientific discoveries, everything might be a subject for a chronicle. The genre is considered a kind of "encyclopedia of modern times".

On the basis of the considerations made so far, we have put forward three questions which this article will try to answer. How does the chronicle participate in the media creation of a collective imaginary of modernity in Rio de Janeiro's Belle Époque? How does the genre represent the place occupied by the female figure in the Rio de Janeiro society of that time? And, finally, how does sports fit into this dynamic?

2. CHRONICLE MONDAINE

Mondaine chronicles can be considered deposits of literature. They are random, a space for causerie, for the profusion of details, for actualities and for the display of the futile. The confidential tone employed by the *écrivain-journaliste*¹ plunges mondain discourse into an ideology of community identification, as readers recognize a famous name in the press. The chronicler, an opinion maker, takes them for a stroll through the public sphere or the interior of exclusive and soiree halls, creating an atmosphere of familiarity and identification. The portrait of events, however, is not committed to the totality, nor to the veracity of the facts. It is up to the chronicler to select the information and fictionalize it as he sees fit. Often, the content of the chronicles relates to other sections of the newspaper, such as the editorial, the announcement page or even the daily news, as long as such information is considered relevant to the chronicler's readers.

The chronicler guides the reader through the experiences lived in the metropolis. The term *mondain* is defined by the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* as "Ami des vanités du monde, des chose terrestriel et périssable. Qui est futile [...]". Fashion, sports, shows and literature are considered concerns of mondaine life. According to Guillaume Pinson (2008), "mundanity" is a social fact that interweaves practices and representations, concrete gestures and discourses. Its origin came from the regulations of French aristocratic society in the 18th century. The salons of Tout Paris, marked by luxury and fun, staged the hospitality and distinction at court, portrayed by Anne-Marie Fugier in *La vie élégante*. Or la formation du Tout-

Paris, 1815-1848 and sociologically organized by Norbert Elias in *A Sociedade da Corte*. The elegant life of the aristocrats marks the beginning of the new codes of sociability. The adoption of this new posture is mediated by the chronicler in literature published in the press.

From the point of view of the “civilisation du journal” (KALIFA et al, 2011), “mondaine” society is both the source of the chroniclers and its target audience. We can define it as a set of interconnected networks: family, professional, political and artistic interests, inserted in a single system. The genres of the “mondaine” press are responsible for the *mise-en-scène* of the multiple individualities belonging to a social mosaic. Referring to Marcel Proust and Jean Lorrain as examples in French literature, Pinson states that a “mondain” chronicler talks about the world of leisure, from a detail captured in his appearance at social events. Aware of the futility of his articles, the chronicler seeks to entertain the leisure class² through the organization of avant-garde discourses and the literary reconstitution of the real and the modern city.

We must emphasize that the position of the chronicler is dual. On the one hand, he enjoys prestige among the elite. The invitations for the restricted occasions corroborate, in a way, the chronicler's alignment with the elite's standards of sophistication. However, his integration is not absolute, as working as a reporter on the leisure scene prevents him from sharing the assumptions of the leisure class, as defined by Veblen (1899). Veblen states that this part of society remains at the top of the social structure due to the maintenance of the capacity to dedicate oneself to leisure at the expense of work. For the members of this class, work is considered despicable and debased in the struggle for prestige and social status. The view of journalism as work

detached the chronicler from the indispensable requirements for maintaining complicity with the elite.

The chronicle is a space of representation of model social identities, such as those created by the standards of “mondaine” elegance. However, the author's insertion creates a bond with both the leisure and the working classes. The latter desires to achieve social ascension together with the chronicler, by means of emulation (VEBLEN, 1899). In addition, considering that the press develops within an economical market, the dynamics of commercial production encourages consumption, at the same time, of both actual and imaginary mondain chronicles. Thus, in his texts, the chronicler conciliates the reality of the wealthy classes and the reality imagined by those who, for various reasons, cannot experience it in the first person but try to forge it by reading the “mondaine” chronicle.

Based on the notion of cultural transfer proposed by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (2009), we can state that the “mondain” chronicler assumes a role of mediating agent of interactions between different cultures. The nationalities of cultural objects, both those of origin and those of reader-response, are hybrid. According to Espagne and Werner, there is no semantic loss in the import, export and reception, of cultural objects, once the exchanges allow active accommodation. The action of the chronicler assumes an active reinterpretation of sociability patterns. He facilitates the displacement between the conditions existing in the place of origin and the conditions of the receiving context. In this sense, his mediation is not taken here as a loss, but as an agent of appropriation that generates a new and productive literary construction.

In Rio de Janeiro's Belle Époque, mondain chroniclers disseminate symbols of elegance. On the pages of the press,

they seek to validate modern practices, such as the footing on Avenida Central, the flirt, the five o'clock tea at Art Nouveau adorned cafeterias on Rua do Ouvidor and the consumption of toilettes recently arrived from Paris. Journalists / writers create, through writing, an aura of refinement, which involved an elegant presence in these environments sparking the very notion of an emergent progress and civilization in Brazil. The incentive given to the circulation of people in the streets is a concrete phenomenon of this new sociability in the city, which was recently reconfigured by the renovations of the mayor Pereira Passos and the president Rodrigues Alves.

Unlike the European aristocracies from the nobility that gravitated around the monarchic courts, the carioca elite of the first Republic, deprived of titles, imagined an ideal of modernity and sophistication, based on objects of desire and actions treated as sophisticated. They constantly sought symbols to corroborate their superiority in comparison to the working classes. For this, they imported an idea of modern civility coming, above all, from England and France. The habits and the French appearance are examples of the attempt to build a collective imaginary of the Brazilian Grand-Monde. The mondain chronicle asserts itself as a technical and poetic means to represent this imagined community as discussed by Benedict Anderson (2008) and propagate an ethos of elegance. The section is established in the context of media culture in Brazil as the main written expression of the tensions and aspirations of a section of society that was looking for ways to maintain itself a closed, restricted and privileged community, such as the old French aristocracy.

The writer João do Rio was the one who best represented the "mondain" practices and desires of this elite. He is

usually recognized by literary historiography and anthropology because of his work as a reporter in the great newspapers of that time, such as *O Paiz* and *Gazeta de Notícias* (GOMES, 2006; O'DONNELL, 2008). His successful work in the introduction of street reportage culminated in the publication of works that left us a true mapping of the city and its types, gathered in the books *The Religions of Rio* (1904) and *The Enchanting Soul of the Streets* (1908). However, in the mature phase of his career as a writer-journalist, he moved away from the suburban streets and cultivated an aspect of the chronicle that is more affectionate to luxury and salons. Then, he dedicated the last years of his career to the coverage of the entertainment of the Brazilian elite. This endeavour is collected in the two series: “Pall-Mall Rio” (1916) and “A Semana Elegante” (1916), both signed under the pseudonym José Antônio José. In these “mondaine” chronicles, he proposed a new organization of elegant leisure. He called up journalistic and literary resources through which he constructed an imaginary of modernity and elegance shared by the leisure class of Rio de Janeiro.

3. THE FEMALE FIGURE

3.1 Fashion and elegance in the mondaine chronicle

The female image is recurrent in the works of João do Rio. In the collection of short stories entitled *A Mulher e os Espelhos*, the leading roles are almost always women. In “mondaine” chronicles, they are the main interlocutors, to which the writer frequently refers by the expression “my dear readers”³. In “A Semana Elegante”, the interlocution is

personified in the constant presence of high society ladies, such as D. Renata Gomes and D. Nicola de Teffé. In view of the evidence presented, we feel the urge to point out the gap that still persists in academic studies about João do Rio. It is inexplicable that investigations do not focus on the female presence in his texts.

To lead a first incursion into this overlooked literary territory, we have elected the representation of women's fashion as the entry point to an analyses of João do Rio's work. This is not unintentional. In 1911, the author published a book bringing together some of his popular literary conferences. From this volume, entitled "Psicologia Urbana", we highlight the conference called "O figurino". In this conference, he presents his position towards appearances, imitation and superfluous, a position clearly shaped by the ideals of dandism. Greatly delighted by Europe, he praised Paris as a beacon of elegance: "Oh! É preciso ter estado na Cidade Luz para compreender a Moda e a criação de um Figurino. Há Londres, há Milão, há Viena, há mesmo a Alemanha inteira. Para essa obra delicada e formidável, porém, só Paris." (RIO, 2015, p. 114). João do Rio's perception of Paris as the radiating center of fashion is clear in the assertion. His voice in defense of French elegance stands as an emblem of the Brazilian Belle Époque's own civilizing project.

Among his extensive journalistic and literary work, we highlight the column "A Semana Elegante", published under the pseudonym José Antônio José in the Revista da Semana in 1916. Discussing mondain themes, these chronicles compose a portrait of elegant practices that helped to forge an imaginary. Their content differs from the pedagogical character of the texts generally present in women's magazines and periodicals. Publications such as A

Mensageira (1897) and Jornal das Famílias (1863) turned to the reader “in school, attentive to the fashions and costumes of her time” (MARTINS, 2001, P. 377). In them, the columnists considered subjects related to fashion, hygiene, maternity and housekeeping. These magazines teach the reader to sew her own clothes. This fashion discourse shows the steps and the tools for clothing’s manufacturing. As a consequence, publishers neglected the symbolic dimension of clothing, which becomes evident by the structure of the texts and the lexical choices. The description of a sewing pattern published in the Journal of Families in 1864 is one example of that:

Este vestido, cujo desenho nos foi pedido, e que poderá agradar a mais de uma de nossas assinantes, por ser muito de moda neste momento, é destinado a ser feito de tafetá preto e em bordado real com seda preta; as pétalas das flores fazem-se quer com contas de vidrilhos, quer com nozinhos. O corpinho é bordado nas frentes, e atrás ao redor do pescoço; as mangas são bordadas nos canhões. Toda a frente da saia é bordada em forma de avental, o bordado forma canto de cada lado e segue toda a roda. (O JORNAL DAS FAMÍLIAS, 1864, p. 22).

The gown’s description is objective and practical. In this fragment whose authorship is not known, the dress is at the center of the description. In order to meet the reader's wishes, the materials and techniques necessary for the reproduction of the piece are explained. Despite the wealth of details, there is no mention of the meanings attached the act of dressing and its impact on identity and social conformity. Readers are lead to see fashion as a material object, merely utilitarian, devoid of significance.

If, on the one hand, as part of an industrial society perspective, the only purpose of buying clothes was for the basic protection of our body, their consumption would be

done at a very slow pace and only as replacement for old ones. On the other hand, the urge and eagerness for new products mimic the real object, adding images, reasons and meaning which appeal to the buyer's moral sense. As reported by Barthes (2009), "what makes you want, is not the object, is the name; what makes you sell is not the dream, is the meaning". Fashion consumption is not only material. It is also figurative and may represents values of civility and progress. Thus, the relationship of clothing with the character who wears it, the context of its use and the effects provoked in the observer indicate meanings, which constitute a collective imaginary.

Such a reflection raises a question about the role of clothing as a language, according to Barthes' concept. While the physical garment has practical functions, such as protection, decency and adornment, these functions do not apply to "written clothing", which has no tangible applicability. In this regard, "Fashion description has the function not only of proposing a model to the real copy, but also, and above all, of widely spreading Fashion as a meaning". (BARTHES, 2009, p. 29.). In the Belle Époque carioca, João do Rio took advantage of clothing as a language to create characters and assign distinctive qualities to them. The "mondain" chronicler acts in the circulation of fashion as a symbol of the novelty and good taste, assuming the role of mediating agent of cultural transfers.

3.2. The body on stage

How was the female body represented in the periodicals? One cannot think of it only as biological materiality, composed of organs, skin and senses. It is necessary to understand the body in its interaction with culture and

language, considering the presence of social factors. The perception of the female body is not universal, since time, space, economic conjuncture and social groups can modify it. In the context of the Belle Époque carioca, the ideal of modernity and the new manners adopted by the so called leisure class had an influence on body image.

At that time, Positivism and Darwinism inspired transformations. The advances of science in medicine and the rise of sanitary concerns affected the conception of the body in society. Due to its centrality in urban life, political authorities intervened in the experience of the corporeal. Mandatory vaccination and the promotion of personal hygiene habits are examples of some of the changes that happened in the turn of the century. In the press, we found campaigns in defense of collective immunization, streets' sanitizing, such as the prohibition of the creation of animals within the urban perimeter and the paving of public sidewalk, and the frequent advertising of beauty products aimed at body care, such as soaps and perfumes.

The periodicals also reveal a positivist representation of female bodies, inspired by ideas of health and cleanliness. Positivist convictions encourage a certain body image of thinness and elegance.

3.3. The sports activities at Belle Époque

The modern periodicals help to build an idea of a healthy society, aligned with scientific vogues. The chroniclers focus on a new theme: sports. At the beginning of the 19th century, sports expanded among the the higher classes, who copied the habits of the aristocrats. Physical exercises gained intense repercussion in the press. As said by Ana Luíza Martins, a wealth of thematic magazines emerged in

direct response to the growing interest in sports. Those magazines were aimed at the most diverse audiences. Magazines such as *A Bicicleta* - an almost faithful replica of the French *Bicyclette* - and *O Sport* composed the varied spectrum of sports publications in Brazil.

The appreciation of sports practices arises from the expansion of the press, which has promoted the transatlantic circulation of information on such practices. The first bicycle races and tennis matches took place in England in the 19th century and were quickly mimicked in France. The 1900 Universal Exhibition, held in Paris, was the first world-scale event to give visibility to sporting practices: "Included in the programme of the exhibition were *Concours internationaux d'exercices physiques et de sports*, reflecting the serious status of sport and health in the minds of the French elite". After the event, the number of practitioners and the market for products tailored to sports experienced a sharp growth.

In Brazil, texts and photos from the Universal Exhibitions were portrayed by the press mostly due to their experimental nature as representative of the technical improvements shown. The information disseminated the ideal of progress and modernity among readers in Rio de Janeiro, the showcase of the country. The flow of information rose to a scale previously unthinkable, from a global systemic perspective, after the installation of continental and intercontinental telegraph networks. The result was an extraordinary modification in the way information was disseminated, both in terms of space and temporality. It is common sense to consider the arrival of physical exercise programs and sports practices in Brazil as simultaneous to their explosion in Europe, by means of the press.

In the illustrated magazine *Fon-Fon*, an advertisement from a department store proclaims: "Sport is the secret of

long youth!”. Horse racing at the Jockey Club, tennis matches in Icaraí, rowing contests at Regatta Club, cycling competitions and sea bathing exemplify the adoption of sports practices in Rio de Janeiro at the Belle Époque. They became themes explored in “mondain” chronicles.

In England and France, sports’ popularity has given rise to the installation of manufacturing units to meet demands generated by an unprecedented market. Sports magazines such as *Agence générale des Sports* and *GeoG Bussey et C°* of London were launched. In the Parisian shops, sports items for cycling, fencing, gymnastics and tennis were sold. Waterproof fabrics were innovations sold as hygienic and suitable for staying outdoors. Wearing the novelties showed affinity with the ideals of progress valued in the capital, which established new possibilities of social distinction (BOURDIEU, 2007):

No cotidiano de lazer, as modas esportivas sucediam-se passageiras, novidades fugazes, festejadas, rendendo matérias de agrado da elite, que comparecia aos selecionados eventos para ver e ser vista (...). (MARTINS, 2001, p. 341)

We know that sports fashion seeks to reconcile two aspects. On the one hand, it expresses the practical circumstance required by movement. The insertion of sports in daily life shows, therefore, that women needed mobility to play sports. The previous outfits still repressed a great part of the movements due to great lengths of fabric and constrictive cuts. Tighter cuts and stretch fabric facilitated the activities. Adaptation to water and protection from the sun were concerns as well. This set of requirements led to the consumption of the new products offered by an up-to-date market.

On the other hand, sportswear began to embody insertion into the leisure class. The consumption and use of these specific outfits indicated that their wearers could dedicate their free time to the improvement of their body and health. The characteristic appearance of this garment symbolized modernity and progress. Therefore, literary description of sportswear in the section of “mondaine” chronicles builds and validates the inauguration of a new instance of sociability associated to sports.

4. THE FICTIONALIZATION OF SPORTSWEAR IN THE CHRONICLES OF JOÃO DO RIO

4.1. Tennis

The practice of sports is featured in João do Rio's writings, as seen on a chronicle called “Tennis” published on edition 31 of “Revista da Semana”, dated September 9, 1916. With a shorter text than most of the “mondaine” chronicles in his column, it is accompanied by photographs of women playing tennis. We decided to divide the analysis into two points, which are in constant dialogue: dress-writing and dress-image. The proposal follows the Barthesian plan of composition of the “fashion system”. The visual content is a relevant addition to the proposal to analyze the female figure in Belle Époque.

João do Rio starts by noting the practice of sports among women from the leisure class. The expression “finally” shows a delay in adopting sports as part of daily life: “Enfim as encantadoras convenceram-se de que era necessário adotar um sport. E esse sport insensivelmente vai sendo o lawn-tennis” (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 31). The need for physical exercise originates from women's wish to follow

European parameters. In the textual construction, an appreciation of what was foreigner (as opposed to local) is reinforced by the use of English words such as sport and tennis. This is part of an attempt to validate foreign habits considered modern, as resources to achieve a better social position. This permeated throughout all of "Semana Elegante". As João do Rio states, "O sport serve além disso ao moral. Dá afirmação, desembaraço, enche de galhardia, aclara as ideias." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 31). Tennis would be a chance for improving the spirit and reinforce shared morals, due to the possibility of social integration.

The chronicler suggests a new beauty standard. Using the dialogue with one of the characters, he discloses suggestions of body admiration. The new beauty standard is supported by a discourse that associates it with good health. "(...) os grounds de Paysandú prepararam campos bem marcados e pela manhã são muitas já as verdadeiras encantadoras, senhoras e senhorinhas que reforçam os músculos e vitalizam o corpo nessa elegância inglesa." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 31). Segundo ele, engordar seria o futuro mal da brasileira, por isso, os exercícios se mostram como o único modo para evitar o sobrepeso. In his view Brazilian ladies were destined to gain weight and physical exercises were the only way to avoid that. The chronicler corroborates the understanding of sports not only as a space of sociability and demonstration of elegance but also as a framework and a solution for a new modern definition of beauty associated with the female body.

Concerns with body shapes refer to the relationship that was established, at the time, between body standards and standards of good health, widely promoted through the city architectural, political e cultural reforms. The hygienist discourse combined with a medical perspective, formed the

basis of successive new housing policies for the city center while associating itself to new forms of sociability and, in particular, sports activities. The female body acquired a new significance in the city, a significance which could be felt concretely by the mere presence of women on public spaces as well as symbolically, as part of literary and media representations of the modern city.

It is possible to find in João do Rio's discourse an endorsement of the cosmopolitan ethos of Rio de Janeiro, through the dissemination of new social and cultural dynamics. The downfall of body and spirit when a sedentary life is sought shows his agreement with a political project that aimed to establish "a civilized modern city".

Another relevant aspect is the characterization of the tennis match as a symbol of "English elegance". There is a dialogue between modernity proposed by João do Rio and the habits of European leisure classes of 18th and 19th century. The author demonstrates an assimilation of cultural practices considered elegant by a wealthy layer of society. The mimicking of modernity starts from the "[...] ideia de criar aqui mesmo no Rio do divino prazer." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 31). It is therefore an attempt to represent alignment with European models of civilization and modernity combined with touches of local characteristics.

The flâneur starts with a casual encounter with a female character to describe her outfit. "A sra. Renata Gomes, fui encontrá-la de sapatos baixos, vestida de brim, com uma sweater de lã leve e rubra e uma raquete na mão." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 31). The description is brief and succinct. The attention lies in the accessory: the racket in her hands, which enables the reader to identify her with the sport she plays. Being seen with a racket testifies to her

purposes and her agreement with the health standards and contemporary life mentioned above.

Low heels shoes are in direct opposition to high heels typically worn in receptions, balls and theatres. The claim for mobility and comfort during play changed the notion that only high heels symbolized elegance, while low heels were intended for countryside attire. Fitting in became the new fashion ambition. More important than the symbolic value of elegance attributed to the heel, adaptation to new practices and new spaces is seen as signs of modernity.

João do Rio also discusses the choices of fabric. "Dressed in denim" indicates an opposition to the conventional toilette of elegant leisure. Denim is a fabric made of cotton. Resistant, it was used in workers uniforms in the 18th and 19th centuries. The white garments, easily dirty, become symbols of wealthiness. So did sneakers, because they called for delicate and expensive care with cleaning and maintenance that many people couldn't afford. The attire is composed of a dress and a sweater, again written in English, to reinforce the adoption of foreign standards. However, it is possible to notice its adaptation to Brazilian hot weather, when the chronicler mentions the adjective "light" to describe it. Instead of giving up on a piece of clothing that would change the overall look, that clothing is transformed. Due to the tropical climate, the heavy wool, used in the Northern Hemisphere countries, is replaced by a lighter fabric. This proved a good alternative in order to maintain the same appearance and attributed values.

The photographs alongside the text illustrate the dress code of Mrs. Renata Gomes. Ten women are shown holding tennis rackets. Most of them were photographed while moving, in an explicit reference to visibility and the health of the female body. They all wear light colours, which

corroborates what was said about tennis' imaginary. This imaginary was reinforced by the mandatory white attire in Wimbledon matches, to this day the most important tennis tournament in the world. Skirts worn are still long, but neither too round nor too straight so as to ease their movements. Despite this, a well-defined waist indicates femininity, exposing the lines of the woman's body. Finally, some toilettes are accompanied by hats for skin protection against sun exposure, in keeping with the ideal of pale skin conveyed in elegant European society.

By approximating clothing literary descriptions and photos, we can identify a shared imaginary mediated by sports. The symbols, such as the racket and white clothes crystallize an ideal of modern civility, legitimizing tennis as an elegant leisure practice in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 20th century.

4.2 Bathing at sea

In 1892, the first tramway lines marked Rio de Janeiro's expansion towards "Zona Sul", the south part of town. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, circulation of people intensified due to the new transport facilities throughout the city. As Julia O'Donnell points out, "[...] os bondes sintetizavam boa parte dos signos da urbanização e, na mesma medida, de determinado ideal de modernidade." (O'DONNELL, 2013, p. 22). A process of imagining Rio de Janeiro as a seaside destination thus begins, introducing architecture and habits of coastal cities such as Cannes, Nice and Biarritz.

In the chronicle "A paixão pelo mar", published on March 11, 1916 (ed. 05), the author discusses the attire for sea bathing, recommended by medical authorities based on

scientific advancements and hygiene, important goals in modern life. João do Rio's opening statement is: "Enfim, parece certo que a paixão pelo mar entrou na moda! Com estes dias de intenso calor e de céu ardente, o interesse mundano não é a vilegiatura na montanha, mas principalmente as praias de banho, as nossas maravilhosas praias, as mais belas do mundo!" (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 05). We pointed to the repetition of "finally" [enfim], which express a sense of underdevelopment that was being overcome by the city's civilizational project. The development of the South Zone initiated an attempt to create a bathing paradise inspired by European's modern beach life.

"Nós somos melhores quando contemplamos o mar. Olhá-lo é tonificar o espírito como respirá-lo é adquirir a saúde do corpo." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 05). In this fragment, the chronicler related the sea to a healthy lifestyle, as he did with tennis. There was consensus around the benefits of practicing sports and enjoying fresh air, which contributed to the symbolic purpose of joining together those who identified with the hygienic discourse.

Perhaps the ambition for distinction gave rise to that conviction. Having free time to enjoy activities by the sea characterised those who could take advantage of the middle of the day, as opposed to the workers who took a quick bath in the sea before work and arranged themselves in the tight cubicles of the toilets. As João do Rio states, "O prazer agora é correr às praias, tomar banho de mar, comunicar com o ócio, pela manhã e tarde." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 05). The bathing experience is based on a good health discourse and on the dissemination of elegant leisure practices.

Brazilian beaches' natural beauty is presented in parallel with European seaside resorts. "[...] dilúvio azul de Icaraí, sonho de pérolas do Flamengo, a madrépora verde clara de Copacabana." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 05). As compared by João do Rio, "A linha de Copacabana reproduz um trecho de Biarritz." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 05). The ideal manifested itself in the import of Portuguese stones for the iconic paving of the Copacabana beachfront, encrusted by workers brought from Lisbon exclusively for the task and by the subsequent construction of the Copacabana Palace Hotel, built to accommodate foreign visitors at the 1922 World Expo.

A myriad of meanings accompanies tennis outfit and swimsuits. Although central to this, the body is not mentioned. The exhibition of female body was considered inappropriate due to existing paradigms of morality. In 1916 there was still no campaign in favor of swimsuits, which were only popularized in early 1920s. João do Rio does not describe in detail the toilettes worn on the beach. Two images accompany the chronicle and help readers imagine the modern beach lifestyle suggested by the author.

The toilette was composed of a dress and espadrilles. The sleeveless dress showed cleavage. In both photos, the waist was well defined and the skirt's length reached the knee. Espadrilles tie strips adorn the ankles. In the second image, the woman wears a kind of cap, probably to prevent her hair from getting wet. As with the tennis attire, here we identified a concern with suitability to practice. Although there is no review of the fabric used, we deduce the choice of one that would dry quickly, for hygienic reasons and thermal comfort. The shoes, without heels, were suitable for footing in the sand. The lack of accessories is justified by its incompatibility with swimming. The uniformity of bathing

suits shows a sense of belonging and identification among members of leisure class. In order to express individuality, women could customize stripes of the dresses and the ribbons and drawings in the upper part of the shoes.

"Este verão, meu amigo, trouxe definitivamente para o Rio mundano a paixão pelo mar! é de todas as modas do Rio a mais deliciosa." (A REVISTA DA SEMANA, 1916, n. 05). Faced with the articulation between the attire and its description in literature, we see the importance of "mondaine" chronicle for the representation of the bathing experience as a step towards a civilized progress.

5. CONCLUSION

In the course of the 19th century, periodicals were the main agent of time organization and regulation for social practices and representations. The press became an inventory of habits and collective interests. They gathered individualities in a heterogeneous and fragmented collectivity, composed of people who shared an imagined reality.

The intensification of cultural transfers acts on the import of standards and values that underpin the imagination of this society. Appropriation and adaptation of sports practices in Rio de Janeiro's Belle Époque stage a new range of activities to fill the free time and new spaces of sociability, which generate new body and fashion representations. Bodies dressed and in movement, as well as the narrative composition of clothing, tennis and sea bathing strengthen the consonance with European ideals of progress and civilization.

As a result, we might observe the establishment of an imaginary related to modernity and elegance through

literature. Circulation of sports fashion in the “mondaine” chronicle founded a plurality of senses that Brazilian leisure class wanted to manifest. Concerns about health and the desire for social distinction crystallize a standard of sports practices and representations, inventing a new imaginary of modern elegant leisure.

Notes

¹ See Melmoux-Montaubin, Marie-Françoise, *L'écrivain-journaliste au XIXe siècle, un mutant des lettres*, Saint-Étienne, Éditions des Cahiers intempestifs, coll. « Lieux littéraires », 2003.

² The Theory of the Leisure Class Online by Thorstein Veblen.

³ In Portuguese, the word used for “readers” change by genre. “Leitores” was used for men and “Leitoras” for women. João do Rio used “leitoras” in this texts.

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Revista da semana



Semana Elegante







«TENNIS»

«SIM, as encantadoras con-
 enceram-se de que era
 necessario adotar um sport.
 E esse sport insensivelmen-
 te vai sendo o law-tennis. Não
 temos ainda as partidas en-
 thusiasticas da Bagatelle em
 Paris ou do Tigre em Bue-
 nos-Ayres. Mas os grounds
 de Paysandú prepararam
 campos bem marcados, e pela
 manhã são muitas já as
 verdadeiras encantadoras,
 senhoras e senhorinhas que
 reçoem os musculos e vi-
 talizam o corpo nessa ele-
 gancia inglesa. Entre as
 senhorinhas são de desta-
 car Sylvia de Ntoac,
 Monteiro de Barros, Euge-
 nio de Barros.

A illustre e distincta ami-
 ga Jacuelina Pedreira, es-
 creve-me:

«Por que não vem assis-
 tir a uma das nossas parti-
 das de tennis? Por estas ma-
 nhas que ainda não são quen-
 tes, o espectáculo é delicioso.
 Não encontrará novidade;
 todas as inglesas que dão
 hy é apenas um pouco longe. E d'ahi essa idéa de crear aqui
 a Icarahy um ar tão estrangeiro fazem o tennis. Ir a Icara-
 me mesmo no Rio o divino prazer.
 A sra. Renata Gomes, fui encontr-a de sapatos baixos,
 vestida de brim, com uma sweater de lá leve e rubra e uma
 raquette na mão.
 — Meu Deus! V. Ex. põe-me doido!

— Porque?

— Agora o tennis?

— Estou na moda. De resto, meu caro, de todas as modas, a que se devia fa-zer cultivar perennemente a mulher brasileira é o sport. A salvação da belleza fe-minina em Lisboa foi ex-clusivamente devida á ac-ção dos sports. As senhoras em Lisboa tinham habitos sedentarios, as meninas eram chloroticas. Ha uns quinze annos veio la rage des sports; mesmo nos collegios o exercicio era obrigatorio. E hoje Lisboa conta como exemplo da belleza moderna.

Qual o mal futuro e ine-vitavel da brasileira? En-gordar!

Qual o meio de evital-o? Fazer exercicio!

Devemos lutar para não ficar nem como as nossas avós nem como as nossas mamás. Depois...

— Mais alguma coisa?

— Se os rapazes fazem-s uma geração physicamente solida; as mulheres devem juntar á sua graciosa fra-gilidade o dom precioso da saude. E esse só se consegue permanente com o excitante dos sports, o verdadeiro dy-namogenol... Mais!

— Ainda?

— O sport serve além disso ao moral. Dá affirmção, de-sembaraço, enche de galhardia, aclara as idéas.

E rindo:



A REVISTA DA SEMANA. Rio de Janeiro. n. 31, 09 set. 1916.

[illegible]

A REVISTA DA SEMANA. Rio de Janeiro. n. 05, 11 mar. 1916.



ECHOS

Paris, rive d'Or. As praias esbeltas de Paris. O centro é a moda. Porque os olhos? Não. Já estão a saltar para os olhos. Pelos olhos:

Leal e culto, lembra a Sancha de S. Naves Binsens ou dos Hóspedes. E, claro como os olhos, premedita a gente que vem de Madrid.

Recorre em festas de uma temporada. Lembra o coração dos Pervertidos. E, como minúsculos lagos e hatulos, para gente que vem para a Madrid.

O Carnaval em Petropolis:

A semana seguinte do carnaval de Petropolis, toda em Petropolis. O Rio teve o seu carnaval dançante. E a noite com de Dingo. No seu exílio de verão, a classe de gente, ressaltando tradições que se aguçaram, improvisou um carnaval de petropolis distinguindo. Foi a o exemplo deste ano, porque para que o carnaval do ano se pagasse os rampantes pela sua indústria, que se encerra de carnaval da rua.

Nada menos de quatro noites se realizaram em Petropolis com a assistência da mais alta sociedade carioca: o baile da Embaixada Americana, a que fomos mais longe inferioria na outra página da diretoria; o baile da Magestic Hotel, do qual publicamos na nossa página passada vários aspectos; o baile do Palace Hotel, e finalmente o do Palace de Crystal.

...

Alguns fantasmas mais que se apresentaram os convidados do sr. Embaixador Americano: Príncipe de Badenburgo, de Matcovitz de Kapurhain, Ministro da Holanda, van Zeppala Oberkeller, de Prussien, Napuliano, Encarregado de Negocios de Portugal, sr. Jactino de Montalvo, de Japão; Bayramunda de Goetz Maya, de Nagualy; Carlos José Filho, de Charles Chaplin; Oscar Lopes, de Piaré; Honório Machado, de Solier E. de Barros Filho e Joaquim de Sousa Lolo Filho, de Patrícia Botelho; Nina Ribeiro Filho, de Piaré; Joaze Lago, de Mindogrina; Paulo de Castro Maya, de Damasc; G. Lundberg, de Piaré; Henrique Liberti, de Espinosa; Roberto Remillo, a Luis XVI; Alameda Santos, de Compuser Milado.

...

Os quatro primeiros os seus recordações, que o sr. Morgan destinara as fantasmas que mais se distinguiram no seu baile, tiveram a seguinte distribuição, depois de uma carreira elétrica:

1. — Mlle. Carlos de Figueiredo, vestida de Misses perem.

2. — Mlle. Vera Barboza, a 1880.

3. — Mlle. Ayarragney e Carlos Lobo, a Luis XV.

4. — Dr. Carlos José Filho, de Charles Chaplin, a cabides mimosas negras, conhecido por Carlos nos ditos cinematographos.

...

Liberet também teve o seu carnaval seguinte em Petropolis. No baile infantil de Domingo, no Palace de Crystal, uma animada infantaria da Direção da Acção mundial, a seguinte lista de assistentes:

Carlos Amadio de Figueiredo, um lindo pequeno Namidiano; Vasco Machado, um Anjo em luto novo, fuma e racha de pasta; Henrique Schiller, Piaré; Maria Eliza Sancha, mais despretensiosa de grupo; Lucas Schiller, Amor; Maria José Figueiredo, Tasso, em velas brancas bordadas a prisa; Hilda de Figueiredo, Hildegarde; João José Figueiredo, Abil Loui XIV; Gilda Hilda de Maria Maria, uma linda florada que não parecia uma flor entre flores; Mlle. Rosa, dançarina, e o baile mais o bail; Jope Salazar, Compuser; Virginia O'Brien Vieira, Pularge; Paulo Eugênio Figueiredo de Mello, Boudier; Luis Adolpho Figueiredo de Mello, Piaré; Eugénio Dias Viana, Giquelito; Luis Soares, Cow-boy; Sylvia Brandão, Sanchette; Hildegarde Louisa de Cunha, Capam; Eugénio Piaré, dragão; Luciano Franklin Sampaio, Dançarino; Mlle. Schow, Gm Vermelho; José Manoel da Costa Pereira, Cabaret; José Maria Tasso d'Argem, um encantador petit lapin; Maria Aurélia Sousa Lolo, Sanchette; Yvonne Falcão, Alaciano.

...

PARTE no dia 6 o aniversário do Derby-Club. Foi de facto, no dia 6 de Março de 1885 — ha trinta e um annos, — que varios estudantes reunidos na rua de Houppeo n.º 91, sob a presidência do sr. Dr. Paulo de Freitas, estabeleceram a fundação da nova associação esportiva. Com o sr. Dr. Freitas os cinco fundadores deram-se. No dia 7, os socios fundadores reuniram-se no Theatro Rio para discutir os estatutos; no dia 8, no salão do Club das Demonstrações, era eleita a Direcção e no dia 12 votavam a authorisação para a compra da chata de Houppey onde, a 2 de Agosto do mesmo anno, se edificou o hippodromo. Trinta e um annos passaram. Na segunda-feira ultima, commemorando a data anniversaria, a Direcção do Derby-Club procedeu a fundação da nova officina social da Avenida Rio Bonito, já quasi minúscula. Os convidados a cerimonia puderam visitar o palacio do Derby, em todas as suas dependências, administração e a arte das decorações, referendo no andar sobm, onde está localizada a grande sala de baile, cuja inauguração terá lugar no próximo inverno com uma festa que certamente ficará memoravel nos annos da elegancia carioca.

...

PELA offendação regressou a Buenos Ayres, a reanunciar as funções de Ministro da Guerra, o despedido sr. Dr. Luis de Souza Bragança, que se demittiu offe de vinte dias no Rio em caso de li-sonça.



Alguns aspectos (sem-se contar os Caballeros) do Rio, em tempo de festa. Dentro de cada festa (Londrão).

vestido, encara; — torna-se infinita sua vasta solidão fúnebre, ou a Paixão humana se limita.

Uma tu tens a fúnebre de um vultuoso a tua vastidão humana de dentro do Gai.

Uma vida, mas antes, dentro do infomante para a. Rio mundano (Mlle. José José) E de baixo as costas de Rio e mais delirante. Que é de mais para mais e mais no seu infomante expiante!

E o pinto velho se abraça para a morte d'onde a morte a grupo encante de um bando de creaturas d'onde de mais e de jasmim.

José Antonio José.



A REVISTA DA SEMANA. Rio de Janeiro. n. 05, 11 mar. 1916.