

Fashion and gender: the sexualized clothing or Look New Look de Christian Dior (1950s) in the New

Fashion and gender: the sexualized clothing in New Look of Christian Dior (1950)

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ABSTRACT: The text reflects on the relationship between fashion and gender, considering the contribution of fashion to the construction of gender identities. Thus, it seeks to understand this connection at a specific moment in History of Fashion, the time when the so-called New Look by Christian Dior was in vogue, created in 1947 and lasting throughout the 1950s, with repercussions in the following decade. The silhouette sought by the balance between bust, waist and hips was in line with an ideal of woman sought after the Second World War: that of mother and wife. Supported by a typology of sources including photographs, printed material, oral testimonies and a period dress, the research looked for traces of the imitation of French fashion in the municipality of São João do Sabugi, located in the Seridó region, State of Rio Grande do Norte.

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KEYWORDS: Fashion. Genre. Christian Dior. New Look. Sexualized clothing.

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AS JACKETS

I faced hurricanes in my light dresses
 Anyone who sees me out there wearing these printed
 dresses can't imagine the bars, the
 walls and the cement floor that they made light.
 You can't imagine the darkness
 that these dresses cover
 and within the darkness the fires that return every
 time I undress, every
 time nudity frees me from its bonds.

(Iracema Macedo, Dart Throw, 2001)

The feeling of putting on a piece of clothing can be like rediscovering a dream, like forgetting a sadness for the happy cape that one wears, that of being deceived by the caress of the fabric or its fluidity. The clothing can hide the ailments and problems – help in dealing with hurricanes, in crossing the bars, jumping over the walls – and their artifices bring them closer to the ideals of beauty and happiness that surround individuals or that spring from within each one. If being dressed guarantees some protection in relation to modesty, if it provides power or denounces social position, undressing distances one from the obligations that culture and society may have suggest.

In the 20th century, the Social Sciences, including History, have undergone notable changes, both in terms of the problems listed and the methods used in your research. Attempts to renew and revise historiographical production ended in find new approaches, new directions and new problems, which is to say new research spaces.

Thus, fashion, a cultural practice that was previously little studied, became the target of attacks of historians, who certainly do not fail to relate it to a social and economic. Studies on fashion began to appear in the 19th century, carried out mainly by sociologists, in which such investigations tended to seek the emergence of fashion in the rise of the bourgeoisie, from the 14th century onward when this social segment needed to assert their status through appearance. Some of the earliest thinkers who dedicated to the subject, Spencer and Simmel, for example, already identified the two movements

that would be at the basis of how fashion works: “imitation” and “differentiation”. Opinion equal to belong to the group or wanting to be different to launch new things and challenge the common is in the game of antagonistic and complementary poles that define fashion (CALDAS, 1999).

Fashion is understood as a set of periodic adjustments and adaptations in clothing styles. clothing, as well as accessories and other types of personal ornamentation, placed in circulation at a regional or universal level, “frivolous mobility erected into a system permanent” (LIPOVETSKY, 1997, p. 10). The concept can also be used for occasional variations that occur in different sectors, in society, in politics, in science, among others. The interest of this work, however, is to talk about fashion as a process transitional between styles of dressing and showing off.

An articulation between the concepts of fashion and gender was of great importance in theoretical discussion that needed to be generated for our master's research², when we studied the imitation of French fashion – especially Christian Dior's New Look – in a municipality of Seridó potiguar, during the 1950s. In that study, the typology of sources gathered from photographs to a period dress, including printed periodicals and the orality, attempting a “horizontal reading” as a methodological bias (LIMA; CARVALHO, 2011, p. 50), as we sought to find recurrences in the analyses iconographic, crossed by reading women's and current affairs magazines, by using collection of oral testimonies and, finally, a piece of clothing recognized as object of material culture and historical document.

A little about the understanding we seek to have about the concepts of fashion and gender appears in this article, starting from the point of considering relevant the understanding that the The fashion system contributes greatly to the construction of gender identities.

Fashion and the construction of gender identities

Since ancient times, human beings have been focused on designing forms and models of decorate the body, sometimes to seduce, sometimes to keep warm, sometimes to demonstrate status, or to do all three things at once. The invention of new and varied aesthetic codes for

production of clothes and accessories has, even if unconsciously, always been related to political-economic situations, class struggles, circumstances of time and place. By say Carl Kohler (1996, p. 57-58):

For humanity, dressing is full of profound meaning, for the human spirit not only builds its own body but also creates the clothes that clothe it, although in most cases the creation and making of the clothes is the responsibility of others. Men and women dress according to the precepts of this great unknown, the Spirit of the Age.

Throughout the History of Fashion, which began in the 14th century, we see society Westerners struggle to forge an ideal body for men and women, emphasizing qualities, covering up imperfections, defining points of erotic appeal, always in accordance with each historical context. Especially from the 19th century onwards, when the figure of the fashion creator – the stylist – and fashion is defined as a system, the creations are signed, the new developments follow one another incessantly, by seasons, and new releases are eagerly awaited with expectation.

Following this operating model, in 1947, the French designer Christian Dior presented in Paris his collection entitled Ligne Corolle (Corolla Line), as a proposal for renewal of fashion shortly after the disastrous times of the Second World War (1939-1945), when merciless restrictions were in force regarding the excess of materials used in clothing production. Dior's idea was to recapture a dream image, lost in over the last few years, making women wrap themselves in meters and meters of fabric, spent in the making of wide skirts imitating the corolla of flowers.

The style idealized by Dior fulfilled fashion's destiny of returning to the past, as a system characterized by cyclical changes in the modes of image construction external aspect of the individual, and it took up the silhouette used in the mid-19th century, in which, seeing if from the bottom up, the architecture of the female figure began with a raised skirt converging towards the minimum waist, supporting ogival breasts. The novelty, or the renewal of an old style, faced controversy, such as campaigns against its use, but it enchanted – and

dressed! – women around the world over the next ten years after its re(invention), being more lasting than Christian Dior himself could have imagined. Right at the moment of its announcement, the Corolla Line was renamed by fashion editor Carmen Snow, becoming appear in specialized magazines and, later, appear in Fashion History books with the American name New Look.

The New Look is considered to be the first clothing fashion to reach populations two five continents³ . contributing to the emergence of international clothing, which had begun to insinuate itself since the invention of the sewing machine, in the 19th century. Your adoption by women from the four corners of the planet collaborated in emphasizing the separation between the sexes, provided by the erotic appeal of the curves created in the folds and gathers of the cloths, filled and armed with the intention of creating volumes for the construction of a feminine form similar to the hourglass, or, as it is called in Brazil, the guitar-body. The style that made the women walking flowers permeated the 1950s, contributing to the construction of a gender identity that associated the female sex with motherhood, an image that is recurring in advertisements published in periodicals of the time, presenting women as mother and wife, crowned as Queen of the Home.

Between the 1940s and 1950s, and well before that period, French fashion was disseminated worldwide through a press that specialized in the female audience, or that made room for fashion in current affairs magazines. Published from one country to another, the forms of ideal dress emanated from centers of power, such as Paris, arriving first in large Brazilian cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, from which they were scattered across the printed pages, in illustrations, photographs and writings, image-based exhortations textual to convince users from the most remote places to dress according to the latest fashion, in our case, Christian Dior's New Look.

In this way, through imitation, French Haute Couture⁴ was imitated by small-sewing the most hidden places, giving room for women of the most varied regions conform to an ideal model advocated for them. Although the production of copies of New Look line outfits have sometimes escaped pure and simple imitation,

concessions made to local taste and possessions did not fail to corroborate that fashion is strongly related to the construction of gender identities.

Since fashion was invented as a systematic practice of covering and adorning the body, One of its tasks has been to oppose men and women through their appearance.

When the doublet was created in the 14th century, European clothing became sexualized, becoming distinguish one from the other by the use of trousers or dresses. For Gilles Lipovetsky, what marks the birth of fashion is the “appearance of a radically new type of clothing, clearly differentiated according to the sexes: short and tight for men, long and tight for the woman. Clothing revolution that laid the foundations of modern dress” (1997, p. 29).

Since then, we have experienced two major phases in the History of Fashion: from the 14th century to the XIX; from then until the 1950s. The first period corresponds to the era of a fashion aristocratic, strongly marked by greater changes in men's clothing, while the second has its apotheosis in the New Look, which marked the last great novelty in women's clothing, clearly created to distinguish women from men.

From the 1960s onwards, a trend that had already been evident since the 1920s, with the predominance of a unisex style of dress, in which jeans and t-shirts dress children and teenagers of both sexes, boys and girls, men and women adults. This movement of the fashion system towards less sexually marked clothing had a setback between 1947 and the 1950s, when Christian Dior's New Look vogue contributed to a clear distinction between men and women through the ways in which they they made them present themselves in their costumes.

Apparently, sexualized clothing has changed over the centuries, but it still was seen as predominant in the 1950s, when the New Look worked to its advantage . If, in that decade, the ways of organizing appearance were much easier disseminated throughout the world, thanks to the reach of magazines, cinema and television, a strong difference between men's and women's clothing made men look like rods and women women resemble flowers in their skirts to imitate corollas, making it possible to make a analogy of these images with the male and female genital organs, respectively.

Beyond this sexualist reading of fashion, we find suggestions that lead to construction of a gender identity in children's clothing, whose colors and adornments already would point out ideal models for boys and girls. These aesthetic teachings would be extremely loaded with intentions aiming, ultimately, at forging the genders as a fatal characteristic of personality, from which one cannot escape.

Thinking about this, we find that the concept of gender, which emerged among feminists English and American, began to be used by scholars worldwide, from the 1980s, when it was introduced into Brazilian academic circles. Since then, began to compete for space and prestige with the so-called “studies on women” (CISNE, 2012, p. 78), arising from the needs for theoretical foundation felt by activists of second wave of feminism, which occurred in the heat of the social movements of the 1960s and 70s.

The emergence of the concept of gender contributed to an understanding of inequalities between men and women as something socially constructed, also serving for the relational analysis of the subordination of women to men, when the feminine is defined in relation to the masculine, in a kind of socio-symbolic contract between the sexes, according to explains Mirla Cisne. Quoting Piscitelli, this author recognizes the importance of the essay “The Trafficking in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,” by Gayle Rubin, published in 1975, as responsible for the dissemination of the definition of gender, to the point of becoming mandatory reference in feminist writings (CISNE, 2012, p. 77-79).

Would Gayle Rubin be the one who established the dichotomy in the relationship between sex and gender, first biologically determined and the second socially constructed, but the term “gender identity” was introduced by psychoanalyst Robert Stoller in Congress Stockholm Psychoanalytic Center in 1963. For Rubin (cited by CISNE, 2012, p. 79-80), “the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by social intervention human”, therefore there is a transition between nature and culture⁶

Criticism of the theory developed by Rubin, which emerged since the 1990s, was suspicious the insistence on natural bases in gender studies, reinforcing dual systems established (sex-gender, nature-culture) as universal and fully

accepted. One of the main thinkers to question this analysis has been precisely Judith Butler, who delved into the sex/gender dichotomy, also historicizing the sex category, for it idealized and materialized in different contexts, according to the course of history.

Unstable, because it is not fixed, and in permanent self-criticism, the concept of gender has been appropriated by researchers from the most diverse theoretical orientations, awakening turbulent and stimulating debate around it. The Anglo-Saxon expressions sex and gender, which are difficult to translate for the Neo-Latin languages, they created distinctions that slowly gained meaning. In this aspect, Guacira Lopes Louro (1996, p. 3) states that while sex refers to identity biological of a person, gender is linked to their social construction as a subject component of a varied typology.

When understanding the concept of gender as a historical-social construction, one must consider its plural character, given the existence of different ideas of feminine and masculine socially and historically. Different societies have different conceptions of man and woman, as these societies internally nurture diverse conceptions, dependent on class, religion, race, age and other elements characterizing this or of that group. It is also worth mentioning that the notions of masculine and feminine are transformed if in time. Thus, the processes of gender construction are determined historically, linguistically and socially, being constituted and instituted by multiple instances and relations social, by institutions, symbols, forms of social organization, discourses and doctrines (LAUREL, 1996, p. 4).

Society creates ideas about men and women, based on observation and knowledge of sexual differences, from which it establishes models of relationship between them others, and within each of the two poles. The so-called gender relations present the feminine and masculine as opposites and complementary. According to Gouveia and Camurça,

Most of the time, what is masculine has more value. Thus, gender relations produce an unequal distribution of power, authority and prestige among people, according to their sex. This is why it is said that gender relations are power relations (1999, p. 12).

Thinking that one is not born as one is, but rather learns to be so, they are fulfilled from an early age social norms that determine the behavior of men and women. The norms of gender suggest how one should be, by adopting different values for being masculine and for being the feminine being. For example: in patriarchal societies, marriage and motherhood together make up the possible option for happiness for women. Still in these societies, even enjoying greater freedom of choice, man comes up against a single path of behavior: the obligation to be strong, fearless, masculine (GOUVEIA; CAMURÇA, 1999, p. 17-20).

Constantly constructed throughout history and in everyday life, gender relations are maintained and organized by institutions – such as family, work, politics, church, school, justice – and legitimized by written norms and tacit values, dependent on education, tradition and customs. Gender relations are also strengthened by use of recurring symbols, which represent a tradition of behavior, changing according to historical circumstances. While making people appear equal as men or women, gender relations make them unlike anyone else, helping to create desires, fears, dreams and hopes very particular, subjectivizing them. Gouveia and Camurça think that

Gender relations are one of the main components in the formation of our personal identity. They affect many things in our lives, from the name we have – because being called Maria is different from being called João – to our affections and feelings and even our sexuality (1999, p. 31).

Therefore, within the complex process of socio-historical construction of gender and their consequent relationships, also gives rise to the formation of individual identity as psychic or linguistic reality. The forging of identity occurs to achieve goals practical, enabling attitudes of personal responsibility towards the community. Jurandir Freire Costa calls the mechanisms of constitution of subjectivity “artifacts of fixation of identity”, seen in this way: “Some of these artifacts are the personal pronoun in the nominative case, the

'I' which indicates the position of the sender of the message in the act of interlocution; the proper name; the predicates indicative of personal characteristics; descriptions of characteristics" (1995, p. 5).

Judith Butler has been, in recent times, one of the leading theorists on issues related to the concept of gender, and in the work entitled "Gender Issues" (2012) part of feminist understanding to deconstruct the notion on which this thought is based. The author discusses the duality of sex/gender – the natural one, the constructed one – one of the points foundations of feminist politics, which presents women as a subject that represents, a subject one with a fixed identity.

For Butler, sex is also a discursive and cultural construct, that is, its stability is achieved through discursive paths: "being a good mother, being an object heterosexually desirable, to be a competent worker". From this perspective, "understanding identity as a practice, and a significant practice, is to understand intelligible cultural subjects as effects resulting from a discourse bound by rules, and that is inserted in the widespread and routine acts of linguistic life", in which matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality operate through repetition, constituting the subject from a process of signification, "which both hides itself and imposes its rules" (2012, p. 208-209).

These studies speak of "naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of its central protagonists: 'men' and 'women', in which gender is an act and sex appears as a foundation. Judith Butler thinks that reconceptualizing identity as an effect, as something produced or generated, is to affirm that "it is neither inevitably determined nor completely artificial and arbitrary". The possibilities for action then opened up clash with the images of identity as founding and fixed, since in feminist discourse the construction cultural becomes entangled in the binary idea of free will and determinism. At this point, Butler (2012, p. 211) exclaims: "Construction is not opposed to action; construction is the setting necessary for the action, the very terms in which the action is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible".

Constituted by practices of repetition, identity collaborates with the politics of compulsory heterosexuality, which constructs sex as a hierarchical binary. The normative injunctions qualify intelligible sex and consolidate reproductive sexuality, through which “sexualized and gender-marked bodies acquire intelligibility cultural”, an ontology (BUTLER, 2012, p. 13).

As early as 1993, Butler had taken issue with Gayle Rubin's analysis that sex was natural and cultural gender, discarding the understanding of sex as a “static condition of the body” to see it as a “process”, understanding it “as a cultural norm that governs the materialization of bodies” (quoted by Cisne, 2012, p.81), while gender would designate “the production apparatus, the discursive/cultural means through which nature sexualized or 'natural' sex are produced and established as pre-discursive” (PISCITELLI cited by CISNE, 2012, p. 81). Therefore, sex is not only related to based on biological explanations, but is socially determined, like gender.

Criticism of gender studies is more specifically directed at its character dual, tending towards a global identity and obscuring categories other than sex and gender (class, race/ethnicity, nationality, among others). Such objections claim that these approaches do not propose an alternative to the feminist movement (removing the centrality of women in their analyses), as they move away from political practice (isolating the gender category of economic-social determinations).

Those who look for the weak point of deconstructivist/post-structuralist/postmodern – where gender studies are situated – say they find it in limitation to subjectivism, focusing on symbols and representations, “without the slightest mediation with the objective determinations of society” (CISNE, 2012, p. 90). According to Araújo, an opacity of social practices and relations is opposed to the centrality of the dimension symbolic, since “gender begins to describe everything and explain very little, because, as concept, tended to be self-referential” (cited by CISNE, 2012, p. 90-91)⁷.

If in ethnic, professional, racial, religious and political terms it is admitted that Identities are historically constructed, and so will sexual identities be.

It is believed that sex and sexuality are universal things, because this is “the game of possible language”, as stated by Jurandir Freire Costa (1995, p. 6).

Until the 18th century, medicine recognized the existence of only one sex, the male, with woman being its inferior representative, an inverted man. At the end of the 18th century, This belief was weakened, as the bourgeois-democratic revolution established equality of legal-political rights, inventing so-called rational justifications for inequalities survivors, those of women, blacks and colonized peoples. In the case of women, their originality, which made them unequal, came to be sex, and pleasure sexual, the nervous constitution and the bone constitution expressed the female sexual difference. According to Costa's analysis, for women, “bone inferiority was determined by their sex: the skull is smaller and the pelvis is larger and wider than that of men. This proved that she was intellectually inferior and anatomically destined for motherhood” (1999, p. 9).

Biological explanations have given the go-ahead for moral and political inequalities between men and women were fixed by sex. What is thought about sexuality and what appeared as universal, fatal and natural notions, was skillfully produced by Europeans over the last three hundred years, through a set of discursive and non-discursive practices that established the difference between the sexes.

Among these practices, appearance has been – over the centuries – one of the ways of framing of beings in the social sphere. The individual is subject to accepting determinations originating from various institutions, complying with a series of social norms that presuppose roles often seen as fair and natural. Confusing these social roles with identity, the person is made by others, that is, parents, friends, teachers, religious and political leaders, among many others, and the ideological interest embedded in these repetitive suggestions are that “there should be no transformation of the human being so that there is no transformation of society” (EMBACHER, 1999, p. 22).

As a strategy of conformity or symbol of agreement with values collectives, clothing works effectively to reproduce the habits and customs that corroborate gender relations. As individual identity is being

generated, depending on the person's age and power of reflection, there is a variation in importance given to attire. Airton Embacher says that “clothing participates in the construction of identity and is also determined by it. Clothing has a paradoxical function, because, at the same time that it provides an individual mark to the subject, it makes it disappear in the group” (1999, p. 96).

The biblical passage that portrays Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden refers to the first known costumes, in the form of fig leaf codpieces, a suggestion that the clothing would have been created to satisfy modesty⁸. Nowadays, to awaken sexual desire, rather than discouraging it, it seems to be the purpose for the act of selective hiding, certain parts of the body. Clothing provokes and attracts, especially if certain parts of the human anatomy are in an exaggeratedly insinuating casing, functioning as a secret to be revealed or a package to be undone. On this, Alison's words Lurie are providential:

Whether or not it is the primary cause, from the beginning of time an important function of clothing has been to promote erotic activity: to attract men and women to each other, thus ensuring the survival of the species. If fertility is the goal, we should choose members of the opposite sex, rather than our own, for lovemaking. A basic purpose of clothing is therefore to distinguish men from women. (1997, p. 226)

Even in infancy, babies of different sexes can be identified by the colors of their clothes: usually pink for girls and blue for boys. As they go growing up, other distinctive details gain prominence in the clothing of young people of the male or female, with the man's clothing closing on the right, and the woman's on the left. Furthermore, the boy's attire is more serious, with little variety in shapes, colors and decoration, while the girl's clothing has gathers, bows, ribbons, lace and embroidery. In adulthood, men's attire is limited to very few variations, as the most important thing is to show economic and social status, not physical qualifications. In contrast, for much of the modern European history, women's clothing suggested motherhood, emphasizing rounded contours (LURIE, p. 227-228).

As Alison Lurie explains, one of the main purposes of clothing is establish a distinction between men and women, so that clothing is “recognized as masculine or feminine”, and in times when such intention was manifests itself satisfactorily, “the birth rate is generally high” (1997, p. 226). It says Lurie:

The distinction in clothing according to sex begins with the baby's layette, toys, crib and furniture in pink for girls and blue for boys. Pink, in our culture, is associated with feeling; blue, with service. The implication is that the girl's future concern will be the life of affection and the boy's, earning a living. As they grow older, light blue becomes a popular color in girls' clothing – after all, women have to work as well as shed tears – but pink is rare in boys: the emotional life is never virile (1997, p. 227).

Women's clothing differs from men's clothing in its shapes, colors, fabrics and elements of decoration, as it is noted that there are

a tendency for boys' clothes to be wider at the shoulders and girls' clothes to be wider at the hips, anticipating their adult bodies. Boys' and men's clothes, moreover, emphasize the shoulders with horizontal stripes, epaulets, and yokes in contrasting colors. Girls' and women's clothes emphasize the hips and bottom through the strategic placement of gathers and embellishments (LURIE, 1997, p. 227).

The author's thought is that a man's clothing “diverts attention from his physical qualifications and focuses on their economic and social status”, while the women's attire “was designed to suggest motherhood,” drawing attention to the generosity of forms (LURIE, 1997, p. 228). Gilles Lipovetsky argues that an “aesthetic precious seduction” has as a symptom “changes in the structure of clothing male and female”, which took place in the mid-14th century⁹ who were committed to “displaying the charms of the body accentuating the difference between the sexes” (1997, p. 65-66). For him,

the fashionable outfit became a seductive outfit, highlighting the body's attractions, revealing and hiding the attractions of sex, enlivening erotic charms: (...) an instrument of seduction, a power of mystery and secrecy, a means

to please and to be noticed in luxury, fantasy, and mannered grace. Seduction moved away from the immemorial order of ritual and tradition; it began its long modern career by individualizing, albeit partially, the signs of clothing, idealizing and exacerbating the sensuality of appearances (LIPOVETSKY, 1997, p. 66).

It is possible to visually identify these differences constructed by culture in images stored in the memory collections of families and individuals. The identities of gender forged from norms have their images repeatedly disseminated as natural and fixed, which can be found by exploring iconographic memory and orality, in addition from sources such as printed matter and objects produced by fashion.

The New Look: from audacity to conformity

It is possible to discuss the ambiguity of visions constructed regarding the New Look, for some a revolutionary way of dressing, for others a conformist style. If the New Look radically broke with prevailing fashion, advocating the abandonment of a feminine silhouette without affectations and the adoption of completely opposite aesthetic forms, we can think that it was revolutionary.

However, the novelty it brought revived old patterns from a hundred years ago, and contributed to the forging of a place for women in a society that did not emancipate them of the obligations traditionally attributed to her, being a wife and mother. The recurrence of lines of women's clothing in the mid-19th century alluded to a certain romanticism of the times of return of soldiers from the battlefields of World War II (1939-1945), when family seemed to be a good refuge, capable of healing wounds and erasing memories negative.

Christian Dior's (re)creation helped to create the scenario of reconstruction of world after the great conflict, covering the woman with an expensive garment and flashy, marked by the excessive use of fabric and the financial expense involved. The women's costume in the post-war context could make them forget the time of scarcity of food and raw materials, making her jump from textile frills like a ballerina, but the composition

the general form of presentation gave notes of the past tense, with a short hair heir when it was neither possible to care for it nor display it with impunity. Let's get to the facts...

It was a scandal. Twenty meters in circumference made the skirt swirl in the ballroom crowded with people, on Avenue Montaigne, in Paris, on that February 12, 1947. The audience was in shock, as it was a time of austerity and clothes had to be made with fabric containment.

It was a success. In a short time, women went from being amazed to ravenous. consumers of the new way of dressing, which revived the trend of the mid-19th century, marked by a minimal waist and an oversized skirt.

It was a bold move. That day, the audacious designer who, in the name of a dream, surpassed the limits of common sense, went from being an unknown to an instant celebrity. According to Marie-France Pochna (2000, p. 8), the editor of Elle magazine, Françoise Giroud

Like everyone else – women and men – watching the show, she couldn't believe her eyes. How could anyone have the audacity to launch such a fashion? The first model appeared, and the whirlwind of her skirt sent ashtrays flying. One, two, three models followed at the same pace. Long skirts, slim waists and developed busts – it was amazing!... Stunned, the spectators, wearing short skirts under straight dresses, unconsciously pull down the hem of their skirts.

The creator of such boldness was Christian Dior, born in 1905, in the bourgeoisie of Granville, in Normandy, a French region bathed by the English Channel. Still in its infancy age, he demonstrated a certain talent for drawing, designing masks and costumes for the local carnival. After high school, he tried to study Fine Arts, but was convinced by his parents to study Political Science. In Paris, the young student joined a group of painters, musicians and writers, “genially gifted provocative boys, future glories” as Christian Bérard, Henri Sauguet, and Maurice Sachs. Failure at the School of Science Politics is followed by his father's bankruptcy and, to survive in Paris, Dior designs and sells fashion sketches for newspapers for two years, until becoming a model maker at Robert Piguet's studio. In 1942, he began working for Lucien Lelong, another well-known couturier, until

Marcel Boussac, textile magnate and the “most powerful man in France”, financed the setting up their own Haute Couture “maison” (POCHNA, 2000, p. 5-8).

Dior's entry into the restricted circle of fashion designers in the French capital took place with the shock of the invention of a flashy style, contrary to the restrictive tendencies that were in force since the Second World War. If, as Dior (2011, p. 45) stated, a new fashion reacts to the prevailing style, shifting and renewing the focus, when “the charm goes to different points”, what he does now is build a new feminine silhouette. The New Look predominated largely until the mid-1950s, but still echoed in the decade following, with slight variations, but without losing focus of being a style centered on balance between breasts, waist and hips, which guaranteed a feminine silhouette full of curves.

At the time Dior made his debut as a fashion designer, there seemed to be a thirst for renewal in all areas, including clothing, which was so penalized during the belligerence phase international. In the post-World War II period and during the 1950s, “the spread of a spirit of optimism and the appreciation of a way of life provided by mass production of industrialized goods, favored by the economic prosperity of one of the powers world, the North American one”, even motivated some sectors of peripheral countries in context of the world economy, such as the middle segments of large cities (SANTOS, 2011, p. 43). This optimism affected the economy and politics, having as a starting point the prosperity of developed countries, spreading as a “world phenomenon”, “although general wealth never came within sight of the majority of the world's population” (HOBBSAWN, 2002, p. 253-255): such awareness could make one want a life better in every way, including better clothes¹⁰.

Dior surprised the world in 1947 by launching his first fashion collection, initially called Linha Corola, later nicknamed New Look. The big trend that presented was that of an exaggerated feminine form, in which the silhouette was constructed artificially through extravagant expenditure of fabric. In short, the New Look style, bodices were reinforced with boning and, from very tight waists, wide openings opened skirts, resembling the corollas of flowers. The skirts could be pleated, gathered, draped

or skewed, always lined with tulle to give the frame effect, resulting in the shape of a corolla of a dome. Georgina O'Hara (1999, p. 195) takes charge of confirming:

Although other designers – BALENCIAGA, BALMAIN and FATH – had already been moving towards this style in 1939, their work was interrupted by the Second World War. Two years after the war, Dior's show caused an international sensation. The New Look was the polar opposite of the restrictive and economical clothing imposed by rationing. A dress could require up to 25 metres of fabric, and the style accentuated and exaggerated the female form thanks to undergarments with ribs and starched fabrics. The New Look provoked controversy throughout the West.

Many women embraced the style, but others reacted against it, bemoaning what they saw as its extravagance and artificiality. Women outraged by the stylistic excesses of the new fashions organized pickets at the House of Dior, and the resulting publicity made the Dior name famous overnight. The New Look prevailed in various forms until the mid-1950s.

Given the socioeconomic situation experienced by post-war France, a country in a phase of reconstruction, paralyzed by strikes, with short-lived governments and a lack of almost everything – from coal to gasoline, the fashion launched by Dior seemed like a provocation. After the initial shock, the new form of appearance was embraced by women, as if it meant a happiness rediscovered. If the politics of the time does not have symbols to counter the prevailing slowness, “the New Look serves as a catalyst for the desire to lift one's head, to rediscover health, love, life” (POCHNA, 2000, p. 9).

If the war had restricted the creativity of designers due to the limited materials available, the post-war period gave space to other possibilities, some of which had certainly already been tested, but now found the ideal climate to proliferate. James Laver states that after the times of crisis, “fashion often presents a tendency towards luxury and nostalgia for a was 'safe' (1996, p. 256) and this was seen from 1947 onwards, when what had already been shown to be timid tendency, before the war, broke out with full force, gaining followers and, also, detractors. The female desire to differentiate herself from men by assuming a sinuous silhouette and danceable to the detriment of the rigid cut of the previous era, gained expression with the New Look, inspired by “the 1860s style with tight waists, very wide skirts and

meticulously lined, structured blouses [...], high heels [...] and large hats”

(POCHNA, 2000, p. 257).

As they gradually revived in the post-war period, fashion houses wanted to satisfy the demand for elegant attire, when the repressed desires for elegance and fun exploded. The New Look fashion had international repercussions, even though it went in the opposite direction to of rationality – the dream built with waste – because for “an average dress, generally 6 to 9 meters of fabric were used. The hems of the skirts were usually about 8 meters of wheel!”. The acceptance was not unanimous, since, for example, the Chamber of Commerce of London considered this fashion the height of frivolity, since in England the fabrics remained rationed until 1949 (MOUTINHO; VALENÇA, 2001, p.146-147).

After the pain of the invasion, the deaths and the privations, the French found themselves again with one of the hallmarks of its culture, the taste for sophistication. Right now, as the years go by 1940 to 50, when technology seems to want to free women from domestic work, and when she works outside the home, votes and drives a car, the system that determines the image feminine opts for nostalgic elements of fashion from a hundred years ago. The New Look came mocking logic by disseminating, through the mass media, such magazines, a way of dressing whose essential characteristics are opulent materials, tightness of the waist and the “full skirt hitting the middle of the calf”, whose distance from floor should be forty centimeters, as Dior dogmatized (BAUDOT, 2000, p. 142-144). These skirts, longer than those typical of the previous decade, are adopted in a reaffirmation that the times of scarcity had come to an end.

Dior's fashion has a paradoxical quality – conformist and audacious. Celebrate a returns to the most traditional values of women, but it smells revolutionary, while proponent of a break with the reality of the time. At the same time, he makes use of resources, the most modern, to spread its proposal on a universal scale, as it aims,

thanks to the new means of communication, to address the world, not only the privileged, but the entire planet. Elitist and purposefully excluded from practical realities, Christian Dior's fashion does not propose to

masses its consumption, but to an entire society its spectacle”
(BAUDOT, 2000, p. 144).

One of the popes of the fashion press, Carmel Snow, editor of Vogue magazine American, is the one who definitively baptizes the style suggested by Dior. In February 1947, arranged in the audience of the French couturier's first show, and astonished by the boldness stylistic materialized by a wasp waist, majestic breasts and corolla skirt, she does not have doubt and exclaims, as if proclaiming: “This is a new look!”¹². From then on, the expression began to be repeated by fashion journalists, spreading the new trend around the world outside, mainly in the United States, where the style was filtered, predominating a line more casual.

Look final

In our study, we went through the photographic collections of families from São João do Sabugi¹³, a municipality in the Seridó¹⁴ region, in Rio Grande do Norte, to find traces of the feminine silhouette promised by Christian Dior's New Look in the 1950s. At the same time, the predominance of the style (re)created by Dior was sought in the pages of the main magazine Brazilian women's newspaper of the time, *Jornal das Moças*, and in the fashion reports of fashion magazines. *current affairs* *Cruzeiro* and *Manchete*.

Knowing the New Look's debt to underwear, since its architecture only succeeded thanks to the help of bras and panties engineered into its “structure backstitching or its fillings” (MEDEIROS FILHO, 2014, p. 179), in addition to the petticoats of setup, we went to gather information from the witnesses' statements about the secrets to get the image of the guitar raised above the female body. Anywhere in the world, The woman who wanted to wear this fashion needed to strictly follow the suggestions and care for construction of a body architecture, or invent new artifices for this, since “The hourglass silhouette required the use of accessories under clothing to shape the body” (BLACKMAN, 2011, p. 196).

Completing the picture, we had access to a wedding dress from 1955, which expanded our typology of sources. As objects of material culture, clothes are traces of the fashion system, evocative pieces of memory and privileged historical sources, due to “their material qualities which are very distinct from other types of documents (textual, iconographic, audiovisual) and also because they are materials that coexist, shape and are molded by the body” (ANDRADE, 2008, p. 16)¹⁵.

Referring to Lou Taylor's work, researcher Rita Andrade presents the defense of the “study of clothing and fabrics as sources/documents capable of elucidating aspects historical, cultural and social when viewed in context” (ANDRADE, 2008, p. 16).

The Corolla Line – or the New Look – was the last contemporary episode in clothing sexualized, characterizing fashion as a system of constructing ideal bodies by recurrence of persuasion strategies. Over the last few centuries, clothing sexualized walked in the direction of choosing artifices for the transformation of the body seen and Christian Dior, in his choice of a flower-like appearance for the post-war woman, sought references to the past and projected the comforting image of a woman, mother and wife.

The New Look fashion valued “globe-shaped, well-raised breasts”, in accordance with with the “pin-up aesthetic”, whose abundance of forms could suggest a “consoling power of maternal breast that every man misses more or less”, making us imagine that in world recently emerged from a time of deprivation “the hypertrophied female bust works as a kind of nourishing and comforting pillow” (FONTANEL, 1998, p. 117). The hourglass silhouette, fixed at the waist, sought support in points of the body feminine that allude to motherhood: the hips and breasts. From the waist, the skirts came out boldly, supported by an architecture of layered tulle frames, distancing themselves from the legs and forming an immense wheel, abundant and generous shapes suggesting motherhood, protection and protection.

Women were allowed to insinuate with the help of devices: padding in bras and in skirts, compression of the waist and stomach. Intimate care with the construction of

an ideal figure, expressed in clothes, screams about how they should behave, meeting standards and expectations.

Accessing the silhouette that was popular in the world during the 1950s, suggested by designer Christian Dior, women from Sabugi, whether they are the users themselves or their seamstresses, used all possible devices to achieve the shape of the dressed body with which one dreamed. In our study, we concluded that the strategies attempted by fashion system to become hegemonic were circumvented in São João do Sabugi, through adaptations or adjustments to the regulations of local society or by replacing expensive or hard to find materials. However, it does not fit within the limits of this article detailing the tactics employed locally to evade strategies spectacular fashion¹⁶.

As a dimension of culture, fashion makes its vocabulary of pieces available, shapes and colors for the construction of gender identities. The period from 1947, entering the 1950s and leaving it, lived the last dramatic act of the sexualization of clothing, a text that had been written since the 14th century, when the system of fashion was inaugurated.

Whether using other resources, the women of São João do Sabugi remained faithful to the form intended by the New Look and adopted an aesthetic ideal designed to build the feminine image considered appropriate to that temporality. They therefore starred in the moment in the History of Fashion that said goodbye to a tradition – sexualized clothing – before welcoming the unisex way of dressing.

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Notes

¹ Gilles Lipovetsky considers the mid-14th century as a milestone in the emergence of fashion, as only “from the end of the Middle Ages onwards is it possible to recognize the order of fashion as a system, with its incessant metamorphoses, its sudden movements, its extravagances” (1997, p. 23).

² MEDEIROS FILHO, João Quintino de. Imitating Dior: the New Look fashion in São João do Sabugi – RN (1950s). 242 p. Dissertation (Master’s in History) – Federal University of Campina Grande, Campina Grande, 2014.

³ According to Dario Caldas, the New Look was the first globalized style of clothing (1999, p. 670).

⁴ The concept of Haute Couture was created from the regulation of the couturier profession (couturier) in 1943, including the designers listed in the fashion show calendar organized by the Parisian Couture Trade Union Chamber. Meanwhile, the work of traditional neighborhood seamstresses, who produced made-to-measure items, came to be called petite couture (small sewing) (GRUMBACH cited by ANDRADE, 2008, p. 62, our translation).

⁵ Speaking about the masculine/feminine distinction in the ways of dressing in the “patriarchal eras”, Alison Lurie argues that “The silhouettes of the Woman in the New Look and the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit were almost as distinct as those of their grandfathers” (1997, p. 239).

⁶ According to Stoller, the idea of gender would be understood as follows: “sex was related to biology (hormones, genes, nervous system, morphology) and gender to culture (psychology, sociology). The product of the work of culture on biology was the ‘finished’ gendered person, man or woman. Haraway, Donna: Gender for a Marxist Dictionary, in: Symians Cyborgs and Women, 191” (PISCITELLI cited by CISNE, p. 79).

⁷ For scholars with a Marxist tendency, in postmodern theory “there is a shift in the central focus from the ‘social question’ – the contradiction between capital and labor – to cultural issues”. Regarding gender studies, it would be necessary to realize that “the relational and historical character of social constructions about the sexes implies considering that the meanings attributed to the masculine and the feminine are developed in interfaces of broader social relations, which refers to a mediation with other dimensions, such as class, ethnicity and generation”. Therefore, the ideal is that the gender issue be understood as class mediation, one of the expressions of the “old social question” (CISNE, 2012, p. 100-108).

⁸ “Then their eyes were opened, and when they saw that they were naked, they took fig leaves and tied them together and made loincloths for themselves” (HOLY BIBLE, 1998, p. 51). Further on: “The Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and clothed them” (Ibid., p. 51). If there seems to be nothing new in the interest devoted to clothing, Linda Grant reinforces this thought in these terms: “The Old Testament begins its narrative with the origin of clothing, inevitably attributing the blame for its necessity to the dissimulation of women and later defining countless rules and regulations about what God wants us to wear and how we are constantly offending him with our transgressions in terms of dress” (2009, p. 21).

⁹ Gilles Lipovetsky states that, from 1350 onwards, there was a profound dissimilarity between men and women in the field of clothing, expressed in a sexualization of appearance. While men's clothing “defined the waist in a short doublet and emphasized the legs, which were fitted with long breeches”, women's clothing “shaped the body and emphasized the hips, and showed off the shoulders and cleavage in the necklines”; while initially “the padded doublet emphasized the male chest, and the crotch sometimes had phallic shapes”, later “the corset, with its frame, allowed women to slim the waist and raise the cleavage for four centuries” (1997, p. 65-66). According to Marques, the development of the textile industry and trade were important for the changes in clothing that occurred between the 14th and 15th centuries, but he credits the “evolution of the art of war” for this radical transformation in men's clothing, as the appearance of cuirass (a type of armor), characterized by its “fit to the body”, made it very different from women's clothing, “which would remain linked to traditional forms” (1981, p. 24-25).

¹⁰ According to Eric Hobsbawm, during the 1950s, developed countries became increasingly prosperous, where “many people knew that times had indeed improved” and “the economic boom seemed almost worldwide and independent of economic regimes”. Populations grew, life expectancy increased, total food production increased, and the technological revolution began to transform “everyday life in the rich world and even, to a lesser extent, in the poor world”. There was an industrial expansion, resulting in a period of economic growth and well-being, while politically there seemed to be “a kind of marriage between economic liberalism and social democracy”, resulting in a “reformed capitalism”.

Developing around the United States, the world capitalist economy became internationalized, with countries trading “with each other to an ever-increasing extent” (2002, p. 253, 255, 260, 265, 267, 271).

¹¹ Regarding the coincidences between the creations of different designers, Christian Dior asks us how to explain “the fact that couturiers, all creating in absolute secrecy, have so many points in common”. For him, it is as if there were “a fashion message in the air”, which will tend to appear from one moment to the next (2011, p. 21).

¹² Carmel Snow's entire statement would have been: “It's quite a revolution, dear Christian [...] your dresses have a new look.” (PRADO; BRAGA, 2011, p. 193).

¹³ São João do Sabugi had its political emancipation decreed on December 23, 1948, separating itself from the municipality of Serra Negra do Norte, through Decree-Law No. 146, sanctioned by José Augusto Varela, Governor of the State of Rio Grande do Norte (FREITAS, 1959, p. 17). At the time under study, São João do Sabugi also included the territory that today makes up Ipueira, a municipality emancipated in 1963 (CASCUDO, 1968, p. 190).

¹⁴ Located in the middle of the semi-arid northeast, the Seridó region of Rio Grande do Norte is divided, according to the Institute Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in two geographic microregions, namely Western Seridó (municipalities of Caicó, São João do Sabugi, Ipueira, São Fernando, Timbaúba dos Batistas, Jardim de Piranhas and Northern Black Mountain Range) and Eastern Seridó (municipalities of Currais Novos, Acari, Carnaúba dos Dantas, Cruzeta,

(MORAIS, 2005, p. 27).

15 Referring to Lou Taylor's work, researcher Rita Andrade presents the defense of "the study of clothing and fabrics as sources/documents capable of elucidating historical, cultural and social aspects when seen in context" (ANDRADE, 2008, p. 16).

¹⁶ Following what Michel de Certeau (1999) suggested for cultural studies, we use the concepts of strategies and tactics to refer, respectively, to the spectacle of fashion and the opacity of escapes from its hegemony in spaces distant from the centers of power.