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## **An Introduction — Fashion and Multiple Perspectives** Uma Introdução — Moda e Múltiplos Olhares

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# An Introduction — Fashion and Multiple Perspectives

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There is a pervasive tendency to simplify social phenomena by adopting perspectives that highlight certain dimensions while neglecting others that may, in fact, be significant. This inclination towards simplification appears to stem from the desire to condense analysis and reach conclusions or solutions to complex problems more rapidly.

In the preface to his seminal work *Introdução ao Pensamento Complexo* (Introduction to Complex Thought), Edgar Morin (1990/2005) appeals to thought itself — conceived as a supreme entity — to "dispel the mists and darkness" (p. 5) so that the rules governing us may be revealed and the light of knowledge may shine. Yet, the concept of "complexity", which defines our existence in all its dimensions, brings us not clarity but "discomfort", "confusion", and an inability to comprehend the world in simplistic terms. Morin (1990/2005) asserts a core premise of his philosophical reflections: that "simplistic modes of knowledge mutilate" (p. 5). This mutilation occurs because we are not permitted to explore the multiple layers that constitute reality and its phenomena, resulting in a form of cognitive blindness that prevents deeper understanding. One contributing factor to this narrowing of vision is the increasing scarcity of time available to us.

Morin (1990/2005) initially defines complexity as that which cannot be expressed in a single word and provocatively suggests that, in a time of profound uncertainty, complete knowledge is, in fact, impossible. Philosophers have long borne witness to this reality — summarised succinctly by Adorno (1964/2005), who argued that "totality is non-truth". Norman (2011) also reminds us of this essential condition by asking why things are not simple and answering plainly: "because life is complex". Complexity, he stresses, is not incidental but structural — it defines societies and is integral to their very formation.

From this standpoint, it follows that any meaningful understanding of the world — and any attempt to address its problems with greater clarity and precision — requires openness to a plurality of perspectives. These perspectives allow us to illuminate the interwoven structures of life. No single viewpoint can encompass the totality of interconnected systems and relationships, which are dynamic, interdependent and often unpredictable. Different types of knowledge and experience must, therefore, engage in dialogue, offering interpretations that may diverge or even contradict one another but which are nonetheless mutually enriching. Valuing such plurality means recognising that reality is composed of nuance, contradiction and interdependence — features that only emerge fully when observed from multiple vantage points. Only through such multiplicity can we approach truth, whatever form it may take.

This approach can be extended to all fields of human knowledge and activity. However, our focus here is on one of the most complex and fascinating phenomena in human history: fashion. Fashion has traversed and shaped human societies across time. Its reach — spanning social, economic, technological, environmental and cultural domains — confers upon it a distinct aura. This wide-ranging influence extends from the production of raw materials and manufacturing processes to communication, distribution, aesthetics, and environmental concerns, among others. These varied elements interlace individuals in a network of effects, both material and symbolic. As a mirror of who we were, are and may become — across past, present, and future — fashion has consistently demonstrated its capacity to leave a tangible mark on daily life, capturing the *Zeitgeist* of each era, shaped by the multitude of circumstances that define our lived experiences.

As Berlin (2012) suggests, garments and accessories function not merely as utilitarian items but as cultural artefacts interwoven with magic, identity and communication. Owing to this individual and collective significance, fashion is a multifaceted concept that reflects our circumstances as well as the aspirations that inspire us. It is a mirror of our shared human personality and purpose. One such purpose — increasingly urgent — concerns the environmental impact associated with the fashion industry. It is estimated that the industry produces over 100 million tonnes annually. It is worth noting that, alongside the significant increase in clothing production, garment usage has declined considerably since at least 2000 (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, as cited in Muller & Mesquita, 2018).

The title of this issue, "Fashion and Multiple Perspectives", opens a window to diverse analytical approaches to the many challenges that shape fashion and,

more broadly, the clothing industry. As a visible expression of the social actor that is the "self", clothing embodies a declaration: "this is who I am" — a visual representation of identity. Humans are the only species to change their "skin" daily, a practice laden with social, cultural and environmental implications. Fashion projects the future; it reflects the present and enables experimentation with materials, aesthetics and attitudes.

It extends across intersecting and complementary domains, characterised by diversity and transformation. This issue aims to transcend standard disciplinary boundaries, encouraging the intersection of fields from multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary perspectives that give rise to new forms and relational constellations. The "multiple perspectives" invoked in this call for contributions reflect the need to explore a wide array of methodological and conceptual approaches, thereby assembling a corpus of knowledge that offers a truly pluralistic understanding of fashion.

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