



Ruptures of Dress: an analysis of *Vestido Nuevo* and the formation of gender identity in childhood

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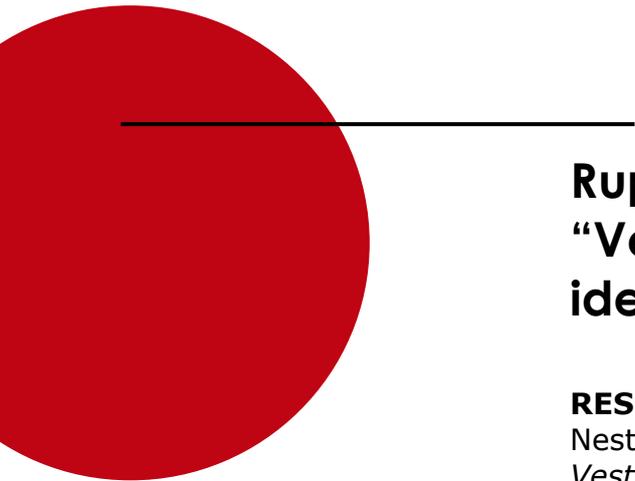
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ABSTRACT

In this article we will analyze the Spanish short film *Vestido Nuevo* (2007), which deals with gender issues in the school context. From the perspective of fashion and cinema as cultural manifestations and their possible relations with gender studies, it is sought to problematize the issues that surround the ruptures of the modes of dress in relation to the culturally established genres in contemporary Western society. Our gaze turns to childhood, a period in which the subject's gender identity, his apprehension of the world and his place in this space of socialization is constituted. With such a focus, clothing is analyzed as language and how its use can be tied in the search for affirmation and recognition of gender identity. Similarly, cinema represents social practices that express, dialogue or challenge discourses through the screens. We conclude that the dressing choices of the protagonist of the film break with the dress code established culturally throughout the history of the clothing in relation to masculine and feminine, generating social conflicts for him, for the family and for the school.

Keywords: Gender; Fashion; *Vestido Nuevo*.



Rupturas do vestir: uma análise de “Vestido Nuevo” e a formação da identidade de gênero na infância

RESUMO

Neste artigo analisaremos o curta-metragem espanhol *Vestido Nuevo* (2007), que trata as questões de gênero no contexto escolar. A partir da perspectiva da moda e do cinema como manifestações culturais e suas relações possíveis com os estudos de gênero, busca-se problematizar as questões que circundam as rupturas dos modos de vestir em relação aos gêneros estabelecidos culturalmente na sociedade ocidental contemporânea. Nosso olhar se volta para a infância, período no qual se constitui a identidade de gênero do sujeito, sua apreensão de mundo e o seu lugar nesse espaço de socialização. Com tal enfoque, analisa-se a roupa enquanto linguagem e como sua utilização pode estar atrelada na busca por afirmação e reconhecimento da identidade de gênero. De igual forma, o cinema representa práticas sociais que expressam, dialogam ou contestam discursos por meio das telas. Concluímos que as escolhas vestimentares do protagonista do filme rompem com o código do vestir estabelecido culturalmente ao longo da história do vestuário em relação a masculinos e femininos, gerando conflitos sociais para ele, para a família e para a escola.

Palavras-chave: Gênero; Moda; *Vestido Nuevo*.

1. INTRODUCTION

When dressing the body, the daily choices of clothing transmit through shapes, colors, styles, adornments and even aesthetic interventions - such as hair cuts and paintings, make-up, tattoos, use of earrings or piercings, etc. - messages to those who observe us. The re-creations that we make of our bodies through these artifacts and interventions also begin to transmit gender representations, through the choices regarding the modes of dressing it is possible to pass the message of a femininity or masculinity, or of none of these attributions cultural activities.

In this sense, the focus of the present work is to show, not what is expected culturally in our contemporary Western society in relation to the genders and their clothing choices, but on the contrary, the ruptures present in dress codes and how they cause shocks and estrangements, especially when the transgressor is a child.

For this purpose, the cultural aspects of fashion, the construction of identity, the senses constructed by bodily or dress re-creations as well as the gender terminologies that help to understand and demystify their meanings are addressed in this study. Having said this, it is possible to carry out the analysis of the cinematographic work *Vestido Nuevo* (2007), dialoguing with the ideas of the authors and allowing to think about the gender identity constructed in childhood by fashion and cinema that present themselves as significant means of expression and cultural production.

2. SOCIOLOGY OF FASHION

It is known today that fashion is a phenomenon that goes beyond the simple act of dressing the body for reasons of protection or modesty, being, on the contrary, a phenomenon

that manifests itself as a significant form of expression. According to the sociologist Kathia Castilho (2009, 37), human beings use different techniques of construction and elaboration of discursive character, which leads us to understand fashion as a universal occurrence, founded on all human societies that are expressed through a set of costumes and ornamental accessories.

Through the corporeal decorations individuals construct their identity, that is, the way they identify themselves and how they would like to be seen and recognized by the members of the society in which they live. For Calanca (2008, pp. 16-17), it is through the garments that the signification of the body, of the person, is made, making it significant and establishing its relations with society.

From this perspective, Castilho (2009: 82) says that the body is not disassociated with the subject, manifesting itself as a semiotic structure that establishes meanings and explores the most diverse possibilities of expression. The author believes that the body itself is a discourse and that when dressed in fashion speech, it has another meaning, reiterating or confronting the basic discourse that is the body.

In agreement with Castilho, the sociologist Malcolm Barnard (2003) defends the idea that the body is loaded with meanings that change with time. It is difficult for him to support the argument that the body would be absent from meaning until it is worn by clothing, or that it would have a natural meaning and would always be the same everywhere.

Coming to meet Barnard, the sociologist David Le Breton (2011) conceives the body as a symbolic construction and not as a reality in itself in which the representations give it a meaning and these representations are dependent "of a social state, of a world view and a definition of the person" (BRETON, 2011, p.18), which shows the changing character of meanings corporeal. According to the same author, the body can be

compared with a screen, a projection surface in which the subject acts symbolically on the world around him, putting in his place the fragments of the feeling of personal identity disintegrated by the social rhythms. From the ordering and the sense of self, the individual seeks his unit of subject "by assembling signs in which he seeks to produce his identity and to make himself recognized socially" (BRETON, 2011, p.274).

Although the construction of identity is a personal action, most of the time it can be conditioned to social standards. According to Miranda (2008), individuals interpret the actions of others and choose, according to their structure of values, the most adequate forms of exposure in society. In this way, for the author, when the individual is in accordance with the group, tends to feel more comfortable. This highlights the "function of the socialization process of educating the individual to behave appropriately in each new situation" (MIRANDA, 2008, 26-27). This integration (or not) to society can happen through behaviors or objects that emit messages and integrate or marginalize individuals in the social environment.

At this point, we approach our purpose: to present the ruptures of dress that defy traditional representations regarding gender in the context of present Western society. In this way, all the deviant aesthetic composition of a culturally conceived masculinity or femininity causes shocks and estrangements, especially when the divergent action starts from a child. Thus, in order that the analysis of the short film *Vestido Nuevo* can be performed, it is considered fundamental to deal with some concepts referring to the diversified terminology of gender studies. Thus, we will try to explain the concepts in order that the reader understands the effective meanings of each terminology, avoiding the common misunderstandings that pervade gender nomenclature.

3. DEMYSTIFYING GENDER TERMINOLOGIES

In recent times, gender studies have become popular in the academy and in society, mainly from feminist contestations about the traditional social and political arrangements, segregation and silencing in which women have historically been led. But, although women were responsible for starting these studies, questioning the positions in which they were represented in society, they refer both to women and men, seeking to contextualize what is assumed about gender, avoiding generalizations on the man or the woman (LOURO, 2003).

Thus, gender deals with the way biological characteristics are represented in the historical process (LOURO, 2003), but the concept is related to socially constructed values and not to an idea of biological determinism (SABAT, 2001). Constructs from the perception of the sexual difference, trying to understand the social relations between women and men, between masculine and feminine. Although biological characteristics can not be denied and gender is built on sexed bodies, it is not properly about the organic constitution to which it refers, but rather about the social characteristics that are constructed from the perception of biological differences.

Grossi (1998) explains that in the West it is very common for the term gender to be related to sexuality, which causes difficulties in common sense in understanding, for example, the meaning and the difference between gender identity and sexual identity. For the author, gender identity is marked by the individual feeling of identity, while the sexual identity is related to affective attraction and desire, that is, the sexual orientations of individuals, which can be heterosexual (desire for gender homosexuals (desire for the same gender), bisexual (desire for both genders), or asexual (absence of

desire). Thus, although gender identity and sexual identity are related, these terminologies have different meanings.

The author also believes that gender identity, while comprising individual feelings, tends to be constructed as a consequence of social labeling. As an example, there are the exams to which the pregnant women are submitted and that detect the biological sex of the baby passing, from that moment, to construct an imaginary of what will be the life of that child: if a boy behaves according to a boy are expected, such as playing ball, playing cart or dressing in blue. Being a girl, she is expected to be calm, behaved, docile, play house and dolls and like pink. These social behaviors are called gender roles, that is, the patterns established in a given culture and given historical moment, and the expectations that society has for a certain order to be maintained and bodies, desires and attitudes can be controlled.

The term heteronormativity, according to Petry and Meyer (2011), to be understood must have a nomenclature analyzed separating the hetero and normative terms. Straight means the other, the different, is the antonym of homo, which means equal. In relation to sexuality, straight is the attraction by someone of the opposite sex / gender. Already the term norm refers to something that regulates, seeks to make equal, associated with normal, that is, follows a norm. According to the authors, the term heteronormativity can be understood as a parameter of normality in relation to sexuality, "to designate as normal and normal the attraction and / or sexual behavior between individuals of different sexes" (PETRY, MEYER, 2011, p.196).

Thus, heteronormativity has become the standard of sexuality that regulates the ways in which Western societies must follow, naturalizing in culture the idea that the norm is the relations existing between people of different sexes. About this norm, it is known that the forms of sexuality are plural

and not necessarily the individuals have affective attraction by the opposite gender, but also by the same gender, or by both genders, as already mentioned.

Finally, we would like to elucidate the term transgender, which is close to our focus on the analysis of cinematographic work. For the psychologist Jaqueline Gomes de Jesus (2012, pp. 8-14), the term transgender is an umbrella concept and embraces the diverse range of people who do not identify with the gender they have been assigned. Non-identification can occur to varying degrees and a transgendered individual can recognize himself as a transsexual from a child, or late, for different reasons but, according to the psychologist, much is due to social repression.

In fact, the term transsexual refers to the identity of the individual who recognizes himself as a trans person, that is, who identifies with the opposite gender who he was designated at the time of birth. In view of this, the term is not necessarily related to transgenital / genital reassignment surgery, as common sense usually thinks. Although many have the desire to undergo surgery to tailor their sex to their identity, this is not a rule and does not exclude the individual who does not perform the surgery from their transsexual condition, for that is exactly what transsexuality is: a condition. Therefore, any individual seeking recognition whether as trans woman or trans man are transgender and also transgender individuals.

In the light of the explanations of the genre terminologies carried out here, it is believed that the analysis of the short film that follows can be more intelligible and, thus, provide a more sensitive reflection on a theme that we know to be complex, mainly when it involves childhood, but at the same time relevant to be worked for a more just and welcoming society with who dared to leave the normal.

4. GENDER IDENTITY IN FASHION AND CINEMA

For Rossini (2008, p. 123), cinema has been an important communicator and mediator of social, cultural and artistic transformations for more than half a century. In this sense, it has also been a significant source of historical research, acquiring more and more space and being considered as a testimonial objective of history, of high illustrative power, since the cinema causes a "reality effect" in the spectator, mainly by the technical or sound artifices that are immediate, leading the viewer / listener to an instant adhesion of the referent to the "reality" that is being recorded. (NAPOLITANO, 2011, 236).

However, despite the objective view that cinema provokes, it also operates a cutback on the real made by producers when they decide what to show or omit, according to Rossini (2008). For the author, the filmmakers take positions when making a cut to produce the narrative, since a selection is never free of intentionality. In this way, cinema can be considered as a social product, composed of a multiplicity of visions, which makes it a rich source for history, where it is possible to study the imaginary of a society with its different positions.

But when we take cinema as a source of research, some details must be observed, because, according to the author, there are many elements to be decoded by virtue of the diversity of genres and visual formats. Such elements are of a technical, artistic, cinematographic and extracinematographic nature, such as interlacing of images, movements, camera angles, lights, sounds, music, words and clothing.

Thus, when making an analysis of a film work the ideal is to consider these elements and their interactions, because to consider only the verbal aspect of cinema is to fail to

understand it in its totality. As we look at the short film *Vestido Nuevo* (2007), we return not only to the protagonist's costume, but also to the speeches of the characters and their gestures / movements, as these elements help to decode the work.

The short film analyzed approaches the theme of gender and its relationship with childhood, provoking reflections on the gender identity of the protagonist Mario, played by Ramon Novell.

In the production, the boy Mario is eight years old and on the day of Carnival at school appears in the classroom wearing a pink dress, which creates a strangeness in the class and in other spheres of the school, such as the direction. The beginning of the work is especially interesting because it is possible to observe the speech of the boy and his perception about this party when reading the essay that wrote about that day that, for him, seems so pleasurable: "I really like Carnival Day . It's a lot of fun because we disguise ourselves and they let us come without a uniform, we dress as we want. I really like Carnival Day. " Examining Mario's words it is possible to see that the Carnival period represents a moment of freedom, where the subject can exercise his / her expressions of gender, since in the day-to-day of the school the students must be uniformed.

It is noted at this point that the scene in which Mario reads his essay seems to pass on another day than Carnival day and his outfit seems to be the men's school uniform, in which it is possible to observe a chess jacket in tone of blue - color culturally associated with boys - dressed in a white social shirt with colored details on the collar (see figure number 1).

Figure 1: Mario breaks the gender representations and dress code.



Source: Prepared by the authors from *Vestido Nuevo* (2007).

Following the movie, when students are arriving in the classroom on Carnival day, it is possible to hear some curses between them, suggesting that both the school environment and the age range of the children in question are conducive to the exchange of offenses, where the curses are usually related to corporeal issues in which it is possible to identify that everything that can evade a standardized model can also generate conflicts and estrangement. This is what happens in the next scene, when the teacher notices a sudden silence of the group and realizes that the silence had been caused by Mario to be wearing a pink dress, which surprised everyone.

However, Mario, despite noticing the strangeness of his colleagues, does not seem to mind, and quietly walks up to his chair to sit down. The teacher asks him what he is doing and he says he is "dressed like a girl", which causes an uproar and Mario is called a "little girl" and "doll" by his colleagues, especially a boy named Santos - a significant character in the work, which represents the homophobic figure of heteronormative discourse.

Coming to the purpose of this article, we analyze the dress in which Mario breaks the social patterns of gender representations, as shown in figure 2. The clothing in question is a dress without sleeves, modeling in line A, pink and with application of a flower.

Figure 2: Mario breaks the gender representations and dress code.



Source: Prepared by the authors from *Vestido Nuevo* (2007).

Such clothing, in addition to breaking the combination made in school - in which everyone should wear Dalmatian dog costume - also breaks with a culturally established gender stereotype in which the use of dresses reigns as being a custom restricted to the female universe. On this point, two questions can be established for analysis. The first is that, even on a school day, children do not have the right to dress up as they wish, but on the contrary, they are instructed to wear the same clothes, all Dalmatians, with no sense of creativity and fantasy that the school could encourage in children. There is even a very suggestive scene in which the teacher says she will distribute the collars of the Dalmatians to the students, which again suggests the social conditioning in which we live: the collar is well represented there so that the rules are obeyed and tell us that there is someone holding this leash.

The second observation is that customs change with the passing of time, since according to the history of fashion and clothing they show us that until the 19th century it was common for both genders to wear dresses because they were more practical, diaper change and the children's going to the bathroom, since the closures of trousers, for example, did not have zippers (BLAZESKI, 2018).

Just as in film Mario suffers the consequences of breaking the code of dress in relation to the genre that was attributed to him socially, outside of fiction this situation also happens, as was the case of boy Romeo, who in 2015 was banned from his school in the United Kingdom until it was "dressed according to its gender" in the words of the institution (SOARES, 2015). Like Mario, Romeo also went to school wearing a dress (see figure 3) and became news in the media because of his taste for this piece, now considered an exclusively feminine dress, but commonplace in the past for girls and boys. Proves that the habits of dress also change over time.

Figure 3: When fiction and "real life" intersect.



Source: Prepared by the authors from *Vestido Nuevo* (2007) and *Nova Escola* (2015).

Another scene that catches our attention is when Mario is waiting in the office for his father to come and pick him up. In fact, he is invited by the teacher to leave the room while she takes the case to the knowledge of the director who, in turn, wants clarification, questioning the father of the boy if it accompanies Mario and what reason the boy would come

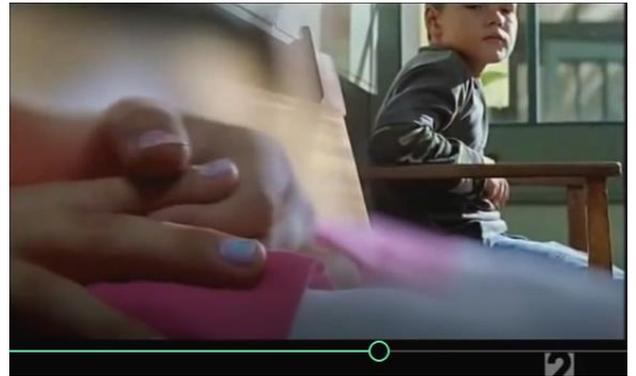
dressed like that for school - "a curious misunderstanding" - according to the director.

Another scene that catches our attention is when colleague and friend Elenita appears to see Mario. Elenita is a girl who wears a vest for the spine, and when she arrives at the office, Santos, the boy who provoked the gang to mock Mario and who is also there, speaks, as soon as the girl arrives, that "it was just the which was missing, "referring to it and indicating that there is also an aversion towards the girl, which implies that the" different "cause some people to repulse, while among them, - the excluded - there is unity and friendship.

As for this aspect, Elenita advises his friend Mario not to dress as he is, as it is "illegal", just as he should not paint his nails, a habit that the boy loves, warning him to "see how everyone dress". The naturalness of Mario, however, makes him question the reason, since in the house of Elenita he usually dresses as a girl. The friend then explains: "Yes, but outside you can not, boys do not dress like girls", suggesting that these experiences be carried out in secret, in a private environment, in which few people know about this practice, far from the social world where they may pass offenses.

In this same scene Mario shows Elenita his painted nails and puts herself at the disposal to teach her to paint faces, animals and colorful flowers. The girl says that her mother will buy more colors of glazes for her, but she had told Elenita that it was too "exaggerated", which causes Mario to question what the exaggeration her friend is talking about. Elenita supposes that it is what shines, to which Mario sensibly responds: "because I like the things that shine the most ... it's more beautiful!". In figure number 4 you can see the painted nails of Mario, in the scene in which the narrated dialogue takes place.

Figure 4: Colors on the nails of Mario.



Source: Prepared by the authors from *Vestido Nuevo* (2007).

In relation to the figure of the father in the short film, it plays a role of protecting the child, welcoming him and protecting him from embarrassing situations. This perception comes at times, such as his response to the director, stating that the child "likes to dress like that," or in the attitude of not recriminating Mario, but only ask why he dressed in his sister's clothes. Also in the scene that closes the short, when the father takes his own jacket to cover the son in the return home and it picks him up in the lap, hugging and welcoming the boy, as shown in figure number 5.

Figure 5: Embrace that embraces diversity.



Source: Prepared by the authors from *Vestido Nuevo* (2007).

The father's attitude was understood by us as a protective action, although one may question the father's motive to hide the dress, putting his coat on top. It is understood, analyzing the context of the work, that the attitude of the father is

protective, since the boy had already been offended by colleagues and removed from the classroom by the teacher. In addition, at every moment in which the father figure appears in the short, the same is placed next to the son, which is possible to perceive by the look that directs to Mario, by the answer that he gives the director in defense of the boy and , finally, by the comforting embrace that closes the cinematographic work.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this article it was possible to relate gender studies to childhood, focusing on the gender identity manifested by the dressing choices of the protagonist Mario, from the Spanish short film *Vestido Nuevo* (2007), and how its gender expression breaks with the dress code established culturally throughout the history of the garment in relation to masculine and feminine, generating social conflicts for him, for the family and for the school.

As seen in the studies of different authors cited in this work, the body and clothes emit messages for others in the search for recognition of an identity, which is not always socially attributed at birth and is based exclusively on biological connotation. Thus, in the search for social recognition for the identity in which there is identification, different forms of gender expression arise through clothing, accessories, corporal and aesthetic interventions, showing that fashion is a non-verbal language, with significant communication and strength Social.

What is clear from the message of the short is that those who dare to leave the established normality are marginalized in society, not finding shelter even in institutions that could be welcoming, as is the case of schools, and that children can also act in to "marginalize" the "different", since they have been taught to follow gender patterns since childhood and are

not instructed to take a diversified look at identity manifestations that are plural.

On the other hand, the work also gives us the message that there is the possibility of acceptance, in the short represented by the figure of the father, who is always in favor of his son in the way that he is. By the way, it is understood that Mario's choice of dressing in women's clothing is a taste and a habit, not appearing to have been a costume chosen only for Carnival, but instead Mario had the habit of dressing himself thus, in the house of the friend Elenita, besides painting the nails, indicating that the identity of genre in which Mario recognizes, is the one of girl. And it's okay to feel like this.

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