

What will probably surprise some of us is the fact that “the Iranian modernity and its link with the Islamic political organization are revealed not as a contradictory relationship but as an intertwined existence, in which one does not exclude the other.” Even more: “it seems that fashion designers have understood ahead of others that fashion – and thus modernity – does not belong exclusively to the Western hemisphere. Although the idea that real fashion is produced in Western locations is still present, there is a sense of the “equality of individuals” facing fashion. To be more specific, this equality is understood in terms of being modern, and does not apply to other categories/sources of inequality like gender or class. In other words, there exists a series of systemic processes that renders a clothing item “fashionable”, that are found in Paris, New York, London, or Milan, and to a lesser extent Tokyo. In parallel, there is the level of daily social practices lived as “fashion”, present extensively around the world.”

One of the benefits of reading this book will thus be the fact that the (Iranian) Muslim world and the European one will not seem any longer to us as opposite – if not conflicting – worlds, but rather as distinct modernities of the same intertwined common world.

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But is this book, after all, about fashion or not? – one may wonder after reading these lines. What is it, in fact, all about? What is its *object* of concern?

Good question! Yes, indeed, it is about fashion, but not only, not alone. It could not be. It is about what one could name, in the steps of Marcel Mauss, a *total social object*, dressing being in this view a “technique du corps”, as suggested by the French ethnolo-

gist almost one century ago. But “body” may be misleading in this respect, supposing a distinction between the body and something else that would be the subject – a distinction the visionary Mauss already tried to overcome. Or, as reminded by Jean-Pierre Warnier, “a subject does not ‘possess’ a body. *It is a body*”. This “total object” Bălăşescu is concerned with starts with the body, is concerned by fashion as biotechnology and the ways this is shaping bodies, and ends with the subject – or rather with subjectivation, i.e. an *object in motion*. In Bălăşescu’s view, fashion is thus “part of the matrix of subjectivation that encompasses both body and subject as an entity”. It is not just this body “out there”, dressed in the “visible” way of fashion, but rather a long chain of mutual implications the anthropologist has to follow and go through: “Fashion practices constitute a map of the social body, expressed by different styles. (...) styles become markers of identity. At the same time they are signifying practices that ultimately refer back to the subject. The social space always already has a multitude of styles from which a person could choose, but the choice of a style is translated in the social imaginary as the expression of the interior self, and *it becomes* the self. Marketing activities codify the multitude of styles, and the appearance of rebel or contestatory styles is more and more rapidly integrated in the “normality” of fashion, sometimes with a simple word game: “shock is chic”. Initially, a counter-style contests the existing identity-models by repositioning and recontextualizing the commodities, and subverting their conventional uses. They claim an identity position that is not (or not yet) normalized. But, in the process of integration, the new models of rebellious subjects are appropriated and objectified by the system of power.”

Norbert Elias has convincingly described the ways and extent to which the “process of civilization” was also a European means of domesticating and finally mastering the “natural” body, this un-

worthy partner of the spiritual, and “true” subject. From this *longue durée* perspective, the “subjectivation” (in fact, a recent and reactive re-building of the subject) Bălășescu is speaking about goes beyond – and even against – this long lasting process of civilization. In this respect, it can be considered as a *post-civilization* phenomena. Its critical approach has to be welcomed. In return, its excesses, risking to throw out the baby with the bathing water, have to be fought against and prevented as much as possible.

Fashion-making in Paris and Tehran, dressing (and un-dressing) the social body on two continents (and worlds), are the means Bălășescu has chosen to find a way through this labyrinth of self-critical, late modernity. For most of the Romanian readers it may be a surprising way, but it will become obvious while reading the book that it is also a fertile and fascinating one.

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All these links and processes do happen, indeed, in Paris and Teheran, where they are described and questioned by the author. But, like it or dislike it, Tehran – not to speak about Paris – is just next door, so that it should be no surprise that most of these things happen elsewhere too. No surprise either that everything in this book also concerns all of us. Don't you feel concerned, for instance, by the following general outcome of this particular anthropological journey between Paris and Tehran: “we are facing a form of social organization based on ‘*ready-to-wear*’ citizenship”? If yes, then look also for the other genuine findings of this rich book!