

To be able to draw parallels between fashion and architecture one must at the onset ask why fashion exists. Especially since fashion is often seen as a frivolous industry.

The word 'fashion' comes from the Latin word 'facio' meaning 'to make' or 'a particular make or shape.' (Benninkmeyer, 1963:2).

For centuries people have suited their wardrobes to indicate their occupation, class, gender, locality and group affiliation. These differentiated social groups on their part influence fashion and that is why fashion is often called a "mirror of society" (Evans, 1939:55).

Lanver (1958:44) states that "when we look at the past, clothes are in tune with the spirit of the age. Loose and provocative under Charles II, stiff and formal in the later years of Louis XIV. Frivolous in the middle of the Eighteenth Century, simple and emancipated after the French Revolution. Demure and voluminous in the early Victorian period, elaborate and mature under Edward VI, skimpy and boyish after the First World War".

Fashion is important to us because it is a means of self-expression and according to Sproles and Burns, culture is the primary influence on the type of clothing people wear. (Sproles & Burns 1994).

An article on sociology and semiotics on the fashion-era website speaks of an innate characteristic desire that human beings have to strive for differentiation.

This is true for groups, but also for individuals and in her book "Fashion Forecasting", Evelyn Brannon captures the essence of why fashion keeps existing when she says that since the desire to fit in and stand out at the same time can never be fulfilled, people are in constant pursuit of this goal.

Most theorists agree that there are three theories that could be distinguished on why fashion exists. They are decoration, protection and modesty.

In the first instance we will discuss the decoration theory in terms of identity, because identity is the ultimate core of architecture and fashion.



Psychologists such as Bruner, Goodnow and Austen believe that we survive as humans by placing things into categories based on experience. If we did not do that, we would be confronted with new situations at every corner and we would not know how to react. By categorizing things we know how to address a certain person based on the attire he is wearing, we know that we must sit down in a chair, even if it looks a bit different from the chairs we have seen before and we know that we need to enter a building at an opening.
(Broadbent, 1980:210)

SA sociologist Burgess believes that “identity” does not only serve an ontological function, but also a utilitarian function, because it forces an individual to ask himself the personal question of what he values and believes in ever changing circumstances and situations. Depending on the situations, people have different identities and by dressing accordingly we give observers a clue as to who we are and what we want from life. (Burgess, 2002:1,10,14)

The clothes we wear are in essence not a mere decoration, but a visual language of our personalities. A visual language that is not arbitrary but helpful when it comes to research in human behaviour, since architecture is ultimately created for people.

Looking at architecture and identity we refer to Jenks, who describes architecture primarily as a language and not only an instrument. (Jencks, 1980:80)

Norberg-Schulz writes that, although the importance of orientation in an environment cannot be misjudged, identification with the environment is cardinal for a person to dwell in the place. He explains further that this ties in with Heidegger who believed that identity is to a large degree dependent on places and things.
(Norberg-Schulz, 1980:20-21)

Contemporary architects cannot ignore the fact that they work within an architectural language that has been established over all the years that building has existed. Umberto Eco speaks of the existing processes of codification and argues that all the ingenuity in the world cannot make a new form functional if it is not supported by the existing codes. (Eco, 1980:22)

Although effort is made by innovative designers to free their profession from pre-existing views from the public, people want to identify new shapes with ones that they have already seen.

According to Bonta the features of a form that refer to identity could be listed as its shape, its colour, its material and the specific detail of its finish (Bonta, J.1973:286)

We conclude that in order for us to feel at home in an environment, we have to understand it. And in order for us to understand our environment, we must identify with it. We do this through our senses and through our individual and collective memory that is part of our own identity.

5.1 identity

The theory of protection is relevant to both fashion and architecture. We do not only need protection from the elements on a daily basis, but also protection from social ridicule.

In order for us to feel at home in an environment, we certainly want to be comfortable in the physical context, but we also want to experience a sense of belonging in the social context.

Bonta raises the point that people often use indicators of a specific identity as a mask to fit into a certain context. "For instance, there are certain ways of talking, dressing, or behaving that are associated with certain social classes, professional groups, ages or ideologies. Essentially, they are indicators that naturally reflect the individual's belonging to the group concerned." (Bonta, 1973:279)

In a country where emphasis is placed on equality, people feel protected in areas that are not biased, but inviting.

A building has the main function of providing enclosure in order that human activities can take place in a well tempered environment.

As with clothing, there are certain elements in the built environment that signify protection. The identity of these elements will change from one culture to the next, and that is the reason why it is important to include the local tradition in the built environment.

It might be difficult to convince everyone that fashion is indeed modest, especially since the industry is largely characterised by prima donnas who pride themselves on their exclusivity, but if one can look past this stereotypical view of fashion, it is clear that fashion is something that anyone can participate in.

Evans advocates fashion when she writes that "Fashion is democratic; she desires appropriate interpretation regardless of rank, birth or heredity." (Evans, 1939:61)

König is able to focus our attention on the human side of fashion when she writes eloquently that "Fashion today has become one of the most essential media for the self-assertion of the large masses. Therein lies its greatest achievement." (König, 1958:13)

Since we live in a democratic country, self expression should be one of these basic meanings of existence. Clothing plays an important role in how people view themselves and how they value themselves and in a modern world. We should be able to elevate our quality of life by valuing the way in which we present ourselves to the world.

Because the S.T.A.R.T. precinct was designed with the aim of creating a dynamic interface for social expression, through the projects involved, the result is a democratic space, earnest in its intentions of involving all.