

Patrizia Calefato. *Fashion as Cultural Translation. Signs, Images, Narratives.* Anthem Press, 2021

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Meeting Patrizia Calefato in her writings is always an inspiring pleasure. Her ability to fathom the culture and society we live in through the lenses of fashion theory never fails to fascinate old and new readers. Hence, if one wants to learn more about the systems of signification we are immersed in in the contemporary age, which fashion as a social discourse contributes to shape and mould by means of its multifaceted nature, this book by Patrizia Calefato — for the excellent translation by Alessandro Bucci — is definitely a must-read.

The premise on which Calefato grounds her compelling theoretical intervention in the academic and cultural debate at large is the definition of fashion as a system working from the margins of what is commonly reckoned as ephemeral and frivolous (clothes, accessories, body decorations and make up), wisely acting to influence and possibly change “the great discourses of history,” as Calefato puts it. This agency of fashion lies in a theory of fashion itself as cultural translation where the clothed bodies are meant as signs, or better, as crossing spaces for the complexity of signs, able not only to communicate and express social meanings, but especially to produce and model the society’s imagery, representing and sharing tastes and fashions, expressing desires and values, and — last but not the least — displaying and exercising power.

In the ten chapters forming the volume, which include analyses of fashion’s relationship with time (both in its historical sense and the “synesthetic” one, able to affect our senses and memories), space (from the early- 21st century urban landscapes to the contemporary fluid fashion scapes of contemporary “cities” and imagined communities like fashion blogs and social media profiles), cultural tradition and heritage, converging media and wearable technology, writing as a broadly-meant semiotic practice and, finally, visual narratives, Patrizia Calefato actually questions our epoch, shaken to the core, in many ways, by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wherever we look at the new state of things, it seems that the future we should all desire has no reason to exist if it does not disrupt much of what we are leaving behind, that is to say if we are not able to

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envision and practice an “ethics of possibility,” as Calefato maintains, founded on the values of ethics, sustainability, commitment and the defense of the dignity of work and workers. In this sense, fashion can do its part, as it has already proved since the very early phases of the Covid-19 pandemic when even luxury brands the likes of Valentino, Prada and Gucci, to name a few, converted their businesses to produce personal protective equipment and give their contribution to social solidarity safeguarding collective health.

Therefore, today’s fashion scapes that our clothed bodies draw and by which, at the same time, they are traced, cannot neglect the sense of fashion for ethics, being it the concern towards the sustainability of production, communication and consumption, or the concern towards the deconstruction of Eurocentrism and the decolonization of fashion. Only if fashion is able to follow this trajectory already drawn, will its future be long-lasting and good for humankind.