

# From the King to the *Couturier*: Rui Spohr and the Role of the Fashion Designer in Brazil

Renata Fratton Noronha

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## Abstract

Until the French Revolution, power was manifested through clothing, being strongly subjected to sumptuary laws, in an attempt to protect the appearance/social status of the monarchy. In contrast, the nineteenth century promotes the rise of the *couturier*, the artist once called artisan. Despite the apparent democratization of taste promoted by consumption, haute couture, which is the domain of the *couturier*, tags fashion as a virtuous and distinctive creation. This study investigates how the *couturier* became a sort of arbiter, who determines taste and fashion. If the king uses ceremonial and the *etiquette* to enhance his sovereign image, the *couturier* also invents himself. From this questioning, a possible dialogue based on a local action referring to a global dynamics is proposed: a look at the construction-or invention-of Rui Spohr, a Brazilian fashion designer-who studied and lived in Paris. Besides being a fashion designer, Spohr also worked as a *journaliste-déssinateur*, where he gave fashion tips following international trends and sketched some illustrative models. Shortly after his return to Brazil, his articles were first published only to promote his work. In the early 1990s, he returned to his position at the newspaper company, this time as a great name in his working area, delimiting his acting space.

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**Renata Fratton Noronha:** Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul – PUCRS (Brazil)

✉ [ffratton@gmail.com](mailto:ffratton@gmail.com)

She is a PhD student in History. She earned a master's degree in Cultural Expressions at Feevale University, and a Master 2 degree in Mode & Création at the Université de la Mode/Université Lumière Lyon 2. During her studies there, she was an intern at Palais Galliera. Renata has developed a distinguishing career, with more than ten years' experience teaching at Fashion Design courses.

## Introduction

- “After the bloggers, stylists are over!”, somebody stated in the room.
- “Brands pay a fortune for them to post photos! They are the masters of fashion!”, the same person said.

I heard the conversation at random during a brief visit in one afternoon. On the table, I could see a Spanish magazine with the latest haute-couture fashion shows. Karl Lagerfeld laid beside a girl on a pink dress, similar to Joan Crawford’s in the movie *Letty Linton*.

- “Who is the new *égerie*?”, Rui asked.
- “She is the daughter of Vanessa Paradis, a French singer, and Johnny Depp, an American actor.”
- “Uhn...”, he answered, showing no interest at all. “But she is so skinny... How come she is wearing a Chanel dress?”<sup>1</sup>

Karl Lagerfeld had just finished Chanel’s latest fashion show together with Lily-Rose Depp, whose teen style brings lightness and freshness to the traditional brand codes. Lily-Rose is now on the position where her mother had once been. At the age of 19, Vanessa Paradis was the face of Chanel N° 5. Such youth perpetuation seems to reach the octogenarian fashion designer who guides Lily-Rose on the catwalk.

Rui Spohr, a Brazilian fashion designer always says that he might have met young Karl or Yves Saint-Laurent (before he became Dior’s successor) in *Chambre Syndicale* hallway where he studied. One year after he got into school, Lagerfeld and Yves won the *Concours de la Laine*, which was a great opportunity, since the winners were given the chance to design their projects and present them in a fashion show, with media coverage.<sup>2</sup>

Saint-Laurent succeeded as Dior’s substitute, having his own brand signature, and Lagerfeld successfully associated his talent with outstanding brands. Being in the company of younger people is a largely used strategy: Chanel mythicized Gabrielle, or Coco its founder. The brand’s strength and tradition associated with Lily-Rose’s youth seem to pose Karl Lagerfeld precisely in the present.

But, in the age of selfies, in which social media becomes a powerful tool for visibility, what is the role of the fashion designer after all?

Lagerfeld has long been called the *kaiser*, the emperor of fashion, expressing not only his status but also his sovereignty, that is, a genius with a sharp look, precise lines transformed into drawings, someone who was given the gift of transforming the essence of his time into clothes, especially for women bodies.

If the king uses ceremonial and etiquette to strengthen his sovereignty, the fashion designer also reinvents himself. Fashion is an image-made phenomenon that ends up becoming an image as well. Thus, the fashion designer can be seen as a collector of superposed, rearranged images capable of changing habits and customs, according to the culture they are in.

Here, I propose a possible dialogue based on a local action that refers to the global dynamics. This study is focused on fashion chronicles and columns of Rui Spohr, a Brazilian fashion designer, who graduated from the *École de la Chambre Syndicale* in Paris in the early 1950s, and now works in Porto Alegre, the second largest city in southern Brazil. Rui’s biography remarks that, besides being a global center of fashion after the war, Paris earned its reputation back and became a mythical place for those who want to take part in the fashion world. Dior’s new look has revived not only Worth’s aesthetic sense, but also the city’s rebirth.

1. This talk took place in March, 2017, when an event was being prepared to celebrate Dóris Spohr’s 79<sup>th</sup> birthday and the International Women’s Day, as Dóris was born on March, 8.

2. This contest is the starting point for Alicia Drake to draw a kind of cross-portrait of the two important names of the twentieth century fashion. Regarding Yves Saint-Laurent, she comments her drug-abuse and her relationship with Pierre Berger. On Lagerfeld, the search for the image of youth that is reinforced by the company of equally young people. Alicia Drake, *Beautiful People. Saint Laurent, Lagerfeld: splendeurs et misères de la mode* (Paris: Folio, 2010).

Besides being a fashion designer, Rui worked as a *journaliste-déssinateur*<sup>3</sup> in a local newspaper, giving useful fashion tips based on international trends, with illustrative sketches. He started writing shortly after he returned to Brazil in order to promote his work. This way, Rui built a relational identity, which is expressed through his sketches in newspapers or through his signature design for a select group of people, legitimating his role as the spokesman of foreign influences.

## The king of appearing

Clothing is not only an up-to-date tangible brand enclosing the body, but also a kind of anticipation,<sup>4</sup> of a thought yet to be expressed, in which beauty is related to the social, symbolic and imaginary aspects of fashion. As Charles Baudelaire<sup>5</sup> suggests, fashion is modern, transforming ephemeral into eternal.

Although fashion does not affect times and civilizations as a whole, it poses a new rhythm to different societies. It emerged in the late Middle Ages, when commerce was flourishing and cities were in expansion. After the Renaissance, clothing standards and etiquette were introduced, especially in the European court society. The role of Louis XIV, the Sun King, is essential in this process, making Versailles his territory of acting and staging.

Norbert Elias<sup>6</sup> analyzed the court society and its role in organizing the system of social relations during the *Ancien Régime* and concluded that the court's compliance is the main mechanism for legitimating and perpetuating the sovereign's power. This form of submission derives from military fiscal control and elaborate etiquette guidelines. Moreover, the manipulation of certain codes represents power control, with the king also being submitted to these rules in order to maintain his absolute figurativeness. The sovereign establishes an interdependence relation with his court, i.e., the king is on the top of this hierarchy. Therefore, if nobles ruin, the king is faded to ruin as well.

Therefore, the etiquette and its rituals make it clear the nobles need to establish an elite as well as the king needs his supremacy, as an instrument of both detachment and action.

The ceremonial is also associated to the garment of kings and nobles. According to Philippe Perrot,<sup>7</sup> in the *Ancien Régime*, clothing was classified according to a strict order, in which the use of certain colors and shapes were restricted, being subject to sumptuary laws (named *ordonnances vestimentaires*) that worked as an instrument of political, social, and economic regulation, with the nobles ensured the exclusive right to wear luxurious clothing that would distinguish them from other social groups. Perrot also observed that, during Louis XIV's reign, social status, season and occasion could even determine the width and type of ornaments and the shape and material used for buttons, for example. Competitions and rivalries emerged, and became evident in the court society's garments, since what you dress represents who you are, setting a challenge for all its members, that eventually worked as an affirmative force to the absolute power of the king.

In defining the French court as a "factory" of etiquette guidelines of modern times, Isabelle Paresys notes the dynamics of "conspicuous consumption" implemented by Louis XIV, which eventually became the

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3. *Journaliste-déssinateur* is the title given to Sphor by the *Chambre Syndicale*, after his return to Brazil, when he was invited to cover the fashion shows in Paris.

4. The idea of anticipation by Frédéric Monneyron. In his words, "Je voudrais en effet m'employer à esquisser que, non seulement le vêtement ne suit pas l'histoire, mais, position quelque peu iconoclaste, qu'il la précède; qui bien de nos comportements? la démarche, le tempo, le rythme des gestes sans nul doute déterminés par lui." Frédéric Monneyron, *La frivolité essentielle* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

5. Charles Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2009).

6. Norbert Elias, *A Sociedade de corte* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2001).

7. Philippe Perrot, *Le dessus et le dessous de la bourgeoisie: une histoire du vêtement au XIX siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1981).

nobles' *ethos*, regulating their expenses with clothing to affirm their position and how they would appear in the court.<sup>8</sup>

Luxury, precious materials, shapes and matching accessories should be adequate to the space, occasion and hierarchy they are in. They suit the bodies whose anatomy, modeled by clothing, symbolize special eloquence. In courts, more than any other space, the dressed body is a spectacular representation of its own silhouette: dressing in a certain way is a rule, perfectly incorporated by the sovereign and his courtiers, the same way that etiquette dictates life within the court, as the ceremonial, the dress code represent the court's hierarchy.

A thoroughly constructed figure of Louis XIV, in Peter Burke's<sup>9</sup> viewpoint, holds the rituals as a symbolic manipulation of power; thus, etiquette and its rituals become the key to construct his public image. The propagation of the king's images — propagated in the imaginary through literature and oral means — widened his visibility, working as propaganda, in a certain way, and even serving as a model to other sovereigns.

The construction of the king's image is made from his daily life drama, where everything is skillfully controlled, staged. The king is submitted to the court's eye; every action, every gesture works as a strategy for preserving his prestige and survival, since his physical body is ephemeral, but not his figure.

Norbert Elias supports that, in terms of etiquette and good manners, the mechanisms of distinction, body and emotion control, when properly employed, ensure the civilizing process and, consequently, maintains the status and power established.

Freud considers the word 'civilization' as the sum of achievements and institutions that separate our life from our prehistoric ancestors, and they serve for two purposes: the protection of humans against nature and the regulation of their bonds to each other.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, civilized humans care for what is apparently unimportant or useless, but of great importance in the cultural field, such as beauty, cleanliness, and order. Thus, they become requirements that coincide with the sublimation of instinct.

We may think that etiquette compliance, ceremony and the imposition of a way of life, in which the "visual aspect conditions the being," helps the civilized body, that is, the clothed body. More than shaping or deforming its fragile form, hiding or revealing it, clothes builds it out of impositions, demands that are represented by sumptuary laws in the court society.

After the French Revolution, what once was a standard becomes the right to wear anything, since individuals are free to adopt the clothing that suits them — according to their gender.<sup>11</sup>

Manuals of civility and etiquette started to determine the *savoir-vivre* pedagogy, witnessing the demands of the rising bourgeoisie for a feeling of belonging that reinforce their financial success and legitimize their new social status in society.

In the industrial society, clothing gradually became more accessible as the manufacturing processes and circulation of goods evolved. In this consumption system, which reaches its modern meaning, the distinction between what is only "to have" (determined by the purchasing power) and "what to have" or knowing how to buy it in order to affirm an image built from the appearance management is essential. Therefore,

8. For the author, "Louis XIV fut accusé par Saint Simon, au début du XVIIème siècle, en avoir tourné n 'maxim politique' le goût de 'la splendeur, la magnificence, la profusion', épuisant par la des courtisans en mettant le luxe en [...] nécessité réduisant ainsi peu à peu tout le monde à dependre entièrement des ses bienfaits pour subsister. La bienveillance du roi est en effet ne chance essentielle dont dispose la noblesse d'épée pour échapper à l'appauvrissement provoqué par ses dépenses pour paraître à la cour." Isabelle Paresys, "La cour de France, fabrique de normes vestimentaires à l'époque moderne" in *La Fabrique de la norme*. Veronique Beaulande-Barraud, Julie Claustre and Elza Marmursztejn (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

9. Peter Burke, *A fabricação do rei. A construção da imagem pública de Luís XIV* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1994).

10. Sigmund Freud, *Obras Completas volume 18 O mal-estar na civilização, novas conferências introdutórias e outros textos. (1930-1936)* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010).

11. According to the decree of October 29, 1793, "No person, regardless his/her sex, may force any citizen to dress in a certain way, otherwise he/she will be considered and treated as suspect, disrupting the public order; each individual is free to wear whatever he or she finds more suitable to him/her" (free translation). Perrot, *Le dessus*, 38.

it is important to be comfortable with the etiquette rules as well as the adequate use of clothes, that is, to master the fashion codes.

## The birth of the fashion designer

After observing the dynamics established in the 19th century, the historian Philippe Perrot remarks that the adequate dress behavior is associated to values such as cleanliness, simplicity and accuracy, raising a new discourse on new behaviors that evidence its cultural specificity.<sup>12</sup> The carefulness and cleanliness of clothes — not just the body — reinforce the control over the appearance.

John Carl Flügel, an English psychoanalyst, was the pioneer in developing an analysis that took Freudian theories into account, building a relationship with fashion and clothing. In a study published in 1930, Flügel analyzes the three main functions of dressing: adornment or ornament, protection and modesty.<sup>13</sup>

When he analyzing the psychological nature of ornament and modesty functions, the psychoanalyst draws his attention to phylogenesis and ontogenesis: in phylogenesis, from an anthropological viewpoint, the ornaments would be the first motivation for dressing, and modesty would be the consequence of the acquired habits, whereas embellishing and protection would be unimportant in the early stages of clothing development. Yet, in phylogenesis, that would be the opposite: habits would be imposed to children, that is, hygiene, moral and aesthetic ideals, rather than their own needs and desires.

The child's satisfaction regarding his/her naked aspect would be a self-erotic and narcissistic source of pleasure. One way of suppressing this pleasure would be replacing his/her primitive interest in the naked body with an interest for clothing, in which the means to combat and suppress primitive satisfactions become the means to satisfy the same instincts. Or, revisiting the images of modern life described by Charles Baudelaire,<sup>14</sup> fashion must be considered an indication of the taste for perfection, as a permanent and continuous attempt to transform nature.

Therefore, the carefulness and cleanliness of clothes — not just the body — reinforce the control over the appearance, the dressing as a way to sublime the instinct, escape from the animal nature of the being and establish bonds, as Flügel<sup>15</sup> suggests based on Freud's ideas. If there is no longer order but the right to choose what to wear, the social staging demands not only to master the body in terms of control its manners and gestures, but a kind of pedagogy concerning decency and etiquette. What to wear and how to dress are visible traces of the place each one occupies in the post-Revolution emerging society.

According to Diana Crane,<sup>16</sup> in the nineteenth-century societies, the social class you belong is one of the most important aspects of your social identity, and different uses of clothing indicate the nature of the relations among classes. For the working class, for example, clothes represented an important part of the family's assets. Thus, a men's suit should serve for many different uses for a long time, just as young women should prepare their trousseaus with underwear and clothing that should last for decades.

Many different approaches are taken from the consumption viewpoint or even a visual struggle between classes, where taste and distinction prevail, tending to undergo a process of imitation and, therefore, constant change. The economist Thorstein Veblen<sup>17</sup> analyzes the economic structure of his time emphasizing

12. The original text is: "Issues, comme la distinction, des stratégies sociales nouvelles, la propreté, la simplicité et la correction suscitent des discours nouveaux, des conduites nouvelles qui attestent de leur spécificité historique et culturelle. La propreté vestimentaire ( et non pas corporelle, encore rudimentaire) pend, avec et comme l'essor de l'hygiène, une extension formidable au XIXème siècle, où le blanchissage du linge, en particulier, joue dans ses raisons prophylactiques et somptuaires un rôle sans précédent". Perrot, *Le dessus*, 227–228.

13. John Carl Flügel, "Sobre o valor afetivo das roupas," *Revista Psyché*, vol. 13 (2008): 13–26.

14. Baudelaire, *Le peintre*.

15. Flügel, "Sobre o valor afetivo das roupas."

16. Diana Crane. *A moda e seu papel social, classe gênero e identidade das roupas*. (São Paulo: Senac, 2009).

17. Thorstein Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class*. (Oxford: Oxford world's classics, 2009).

the uses and customs as explanatory elements for the economic activities, especially, for the privileged ones. For the German sociologist Georg Simmel,<sup>18</sup> fashion expresses the dual nature of human beings, since they are immersed in the society but try to differentiate themselves from it, to free themselves, to isolate themselves, but never abandon it. His theory matches the changes in fashion to the process of imitation among classes, in which the lower social groups try to imitate the elites. In this model, it is assumed that fashion is adopted by upper classes and, therefore, lower groups, triggering a process of social contagion.

In this new lifestyle embedded in consumption, products are an enlargement of one's personality. Clothes are, thus, consumer goods, following the same logic and defining not just gender and social class but "creating" behaviors from their ability to impose social identities and allow people to affirm latent social identities.

Throughout the 19th century, fashion was consolidated in its modern sense and became the key element of the stylish life with the renovation of Paris, an ideal setting for the rise of haute-couture: in *Rue de la Paix*, during the fall of 1857, an Englishman settled there revolutionized the clothing-related production and commercialization, providing new prestige to the figure of the *couturier*.

Worth's gesture corresponds to the emancipation of the fashion designer as simply an artisan to become the artist who is no longer subordinate to his clientele, and now "creates" models based on his/her own subjectivity, which will carry his/her signature. In the eighteenth century, couture is inserted into the craft category; the emergence of haute-couture enabled fashion to be recognized as art, at least in terms of the creative process for elaborating new products.

It must be remembered that when Charles Worth arrived in Paris, he worked for Gagelin, a prestigious French *maison de nouveautés*, *Chez Gagelin*. Worth acquired experience on the universe of fabrics and fashion trade. As he was trained in tailoring in 1850, he became the head of the dressmaking department. His privileged position was played an important role as he had quick access to information, contact with suppliers and he was also close to French dressmakers, extremely well-skilled for sewing.<sup>19</sup>

Françoise Têtard-Vittu<sup>20</sup> defines Worth as a sales specialist who, when associated to Gustave Bobergh started his own business in Paris, offering dresses that could quite possibly resemble the so-called "*à disposition*," made by factories. For Têtard-Vittu, the secret of Worth's success is due to the fact that he focused on a foreign clientele. Moreover, the models made for exportation, carried his label, as a way of authenticating them as "real Paris dresses." Worth presented another innovation process: the reproduction of sewing patterns. Since 1866, Worth's patterns could be copied from *Le Printemps* newspaper or in 1867 from Harper's *Bazaar*.<sup>21</sup>

For Nancy Troy (2003), the ability to develop a clothing from sketch — from the definition of the model to the material and ornament used — allowed him to control all the stages of the manufacturing process, so he could dedicate himself to each step and also be able to commercialize his creations in France and abroad. Having the control of the design, production, and distribution of his creations, Worth could dictate what fashion was during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He also successfully charged for it this, since for his wealthy clientele it was not enough to wear Worth, but to be luxurious — and expensive!<sup>22</sup>

King of his time, the *couturier* determines the rules of clothing production: it is not merely one's body but his ability to arrange colors and forms that can establish an interdependence relationship with the wealthy clientele. The fashion designer signature brings closeness and legitimates the good taste, wealth and, consequently, the privileged social status.

If Louis XIV continued to inspire, with his strategies of building an image given by the ceremonial, etiquette and code dispute, so did Charles Worth as well: the French fashion started to have wide international

18. Georg Simmel, *Filosofia da moda e outros escritos* (Lisboa: Texto, 2008).

19. Lourdes Cerilo Rubio, *La moda moderna. Génesis de um arte nuevo* (Madrid: Siruela, 2010).

20. Françoise Têtard-Vittu, "La naissance du couturier et du modeliste" in *Au paradis des dames* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1992).

21. Têtard-Vittu, "La naissance du couturier et du modeliste."

22. Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture. A Study in modern art and fashion* (Cambridge: MIT press, 2003), 19–21.

influence, and Paris was its center. As Diana Crane points out, this prestige consolidates the *savoir-faire*, or shared rules and values, with techniques handed down as heritage. Paul Poiret worked in *maison* Worth, Pierre Cardin worked with Dior, and Yves Saint-Laurent was his successor. Unlike kings, fashion leaves no heirs, just like in Arts with its masters.

## Rui Spohr's invention

Flavio Spohr was born in 1929 in *Novo Hamburgo*, southern Brazil, a city located in *Vale dos Sinos* and notable for the German immigration, not far from Porto Alegre, the state's capital. He is the second son of a traditional catholic family, while many of the community members are Protestants. As a teenager, he was not interested in the repetitive work of his father's shoe factory. He rather read the pages of the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, with photographs of Evita Peron wearing Christian Dior.

He studied Accountancy, as his father's request so he could study Fine Arts. Inspired by the magazines, he fell in love with fashion and decided to make that his job: first writing for a local newspaper and then organizing a fashion show -without ever having seen one!-, and finally went to Paris, while Europe was still recovering from the Second World War. His often repeated story was no longer just his, it incorporated other memories, new agents and different views.

The change of his name — or why Flavio became Rui — is the theme of his autobiographical text *Memórias Alinhavadas*, released in 1997.<sup>23</sup> The first-person narrative is presented in a non-linear way that initially leads to his experience as a student in Paris, then his arrival in Porto Alegre, and the conception of his atelier, and then bringing back his childhood memories in Novo Hamburgo — his hometown. The book also features important and unusual episodes — such as Rhodia's fashion shows in the 1960s or the bride story that said “my veil is falling!” — and presents Rui's definitions to fashion, which he calls “my truth.”

From Stuart Hall's concept of identity, formed through always incomplete and unconscious processes, when analyzing Rui's biography it is clear how memory represents his sense of identity and mobility.<sup>24</sup> This way, Michel Pollak's ideas fit the concept that a person's self-image, acquired throughout his/her life, the image that is constructed and presented to others and him/herself, is believed as his/her own representation, and how others perceive it.<sup>25</sup> So, the identity construction is a negotiation, in which real or invented references not only can carry the notion of past, tradition and memory in constructing or updating codes and values shared by a collective, but also establish their differences, their limits to one another.

The chapter of *Memórias*, dedicated to Paris, narrates the transformation *Novo Hamburgo* went through, when he debuted as a journalist in a local newspaper, and signed the text as Rui because he was concerned about his family's reaction towards his interest in fashion. In 1949, he organized his first fashion show, inspired by what he had seen in Hollywood movies; and, in 1951, with the money of his father's inheritance, he sailed to France at the age of 22.

He studied in the *École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* and in the *École Guerre-Lavigne*, with the same training of great international fashion figures of the twentieth century. He worked as Jean Barthe's assistant — an important hatter of the time. Living in the city, which was, at the time, “a myth, a distant dream that no one could get,”<sup>26</sup> the memories he brought from the French capital became important factors to the construction of his self-identity, “a process that gradually build a new image as well.”

23. Rui Spohr and Beatriz Viégas-Farias, *Memórias Alinhavadas* (Porto Alegre: Artes e Ofícios, 1997).

24. Stuart Hall, *Identidade cultural na pós modernidade* (São Paulo: DP&A, 2009).

25. Michael Pollak, “Memória e identidade social” in *Estudos Históricos*, vol. 5 (1992).

26. Rui Spohr defined Paris and what his staying there represented in the early 1950s, in an interview in December 2012.

When Rui settled in Porto Alegre, he took over women's fashion, ruled only by women at that time. Mary Steigleder, a hatter and influential dressmaker, who followed the French patterns, led by Menna Fiala's *Casa Canadá*, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In order to "shake up Mary's structure" — to whom he refers as "Madame Cuja Dita" — Rui also began to publish fashion chronicles in a local newspaper "A Última Hora." His texts are always followed by sketches, often his versions for the trends of the time. In other words, his image of a newcomer from Paris is also incorporates the idea of a "civilizer," who masters the fashion codes and processes and proposes copyrighted models.

Early in his career, he meets Doris, his first assistant who became his wife, life and work partner, and also his best model.

The national recognition came in the 1960s, when Rui joined Rhodia team.<sup>27</sup> At that moment, he incorporated regional culture aspects as a way to establishing his status, which became a relational identity,<sup>28</sup> besides bringing elements of fashion in Paris he projected regional values as well.

Rui Spohr's creations, especially during that period, illustrate a non-tropical Brazil, symbolized by the cold and well-defined seasons, characteristics of southern Brazil, which, within a tropical panorama, became an exotic element.

The French experience, the cold and his international influences reinforce his "Europeanized" style, precisely at a time when big efforts were made in order to fabricate a Brazilian fashion style.

If Rui locally acts as an important interpreter of international trends, nationally, his creations embody an "aesthetic of the cold."

In a concept brought by a singer and composer from Southern Brazil, Vitor Ramil, in the 1990s, the "aesthetic of the cold" would be distinctive, reaffirming differences in the search for a definition and an affirmation of "Brazilianness." Far from the tropical heat, this 'cold and mestizo nationality' helped composing another perspective of Brazil.

In his trajectory, it is possible to affirm that Rui opened space for a professional fashion, inserted in his historical and social context, becoming also of his testimony. He became a reference not only in terms of style but also as a mentor: he received countless apprentices in his atelier, extending his pedagogical vocation beyond the newspaper's advices, as well as developing a partnership with artisans, weavers and other entrepreneurs, helping to give visibility to local initiatives.<sup>29</sup> With no doubt, his greater recognition was due to tailor-made clothes, dressing generations of women in socially important events, from debutante balls to marriages. Through these events, according to the social dynamics, he imposes a style, yet he is constantly reoriented by changing values within the society he acts.<sup>30</sup>

## Teachings of a fashion designer

When he definitively settled in Porto Alegre, it was in the newspaper that Rui found space not only to promote his fashion, but to act as mediator and an advisor, reinforcing notions of sophistication and good taste that would be in accordance with international fashion.

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27. The French chemical industry promoted its synthetic threads in Brazil through fashion shows and fashion collections and editorials, in a strategy developed by Lívio Rangan (1933–1984), a visionary advertising manager. The fashion shows performed between 1960 and 1970 were outstanding, with theater, dance, music and visual arts together. Rodhia's fashion shows are the study case of the historian Maria Claudia Bonadio.

28. According to Pierre Bourdieu's "relational thinking," the artist (or his/her artistic work) only exists within a network of visible or invisible relations that define a specific social position, i.e., their position regarding others.

29. In exposing the pieces stored in Spohr's collection, Dora Spohr comments the partnerships with local artisans: wool, loom, silk painting, lace dyeing and personalized buttons are some of the techniques regularly used in Rui's patterns.

30. An example of this reorganization of values is the wedding dress. Rui believes that wedding parties nowadays are over-exaggerated, "and everything is organized around the bride," and that the party, the celebration have become more important than the wedding ceremony itself. He thinks that many brides stopped looking for his dresses because he does not usually make tube dress patterns, and he continues to wear brides taking into consideration the religious aspect of marriage.

When we take a brief look at his texts, it is possible to notice that they follow a pattern, with little changes, where the text is followed by a graphic representation (sketch) of his own. An important tool for the *couturier*, the sketch can be understood as the first materialization of the proposed style to be followed, and, once his signature is in, it reaches the universe of art.

The text, as presented, besides presenting a standard style, becomes a description of a well-known and distinctive visualization and, therefore, worthy of imitation. In this context, he clearly assumed an avant-garde discourse, exalting the novelty.

It is also clear, from these newspaper articles, Rui's performance as a 'judge of good taste.'

In one text published in May 1957 in the newspaper "A Hora," for example, he points out the city's sophisticated ladies and their "correct" garments, according to the season and the occasion in which they were seen. The outfit appears next to Rui's sketch:

Mrs. Borthomé was seen in a grayish *tailleur* with a nice windbreaker effect on her back. Modern and elegant lines....

Mrs. Fichter was seen wearing a red cashmere late in the afternoon with this beautiful dress. Mrs. Fichtner who has appeared several times in this column, besides having good taste, she makes all her dresses herself....

One a summer morning this May, we saw Mrs. Vasconcelos in a white pleated skirt, a pink silk blouse with white details. The elegant touch was given by the purse in the same fabric of the blouse. Synonym of fashion and good taste....<sup>31</sup>

In the summer of 1958, he did not hesitate in using a severe tone to prevent women from wearing exaggerated jewelry during hot months. In the period of the year dedicated to vacations and leisure, clothes should also represent simplicity, and gemstone jewelry should be replaced by *faux bijoux*:

Did you know that in the summer it is absolutely ridiculous to wear overshiny jewels on the beach or in the mountains? Wear them as costumes. It is at this time of year that you can satisfy the intimate desire of every woman to dress in showy details and great effect. For a sports dress there is nothing prettier than exaggerated earrings, exotic bracelets and large necklaces.<sup>32</sup>

In the role of a "civilizer," Rui presents another dimension to local fashion, acting as the mediator of international trends, and also the 'arbitrator of good taste', guiding what he believes is appropriate and, therefore, subject to recognition.

As Rui has a say on the fashion world, after the death of *Maison Dior's* founder, when the young Yves Saint Laurent, was appointed as his natural successor, he said:

In Paris the preparations for the launch of European Spring and Summer. Yves Saint-Laurent, a 21-year-old boy appointed to replace the great Dior, is the main subject in the world's specialized magazines. Will he have the skills to replace the old and experienced Dior? Will he continue to give prestige to the house that depends on it? Is he the King of Fashion? All will be resolved by January 31. He may prove once again that in the fashion world, age and experience has little importance, what matters is taste and originality, creating new clothes not just copying them. The value of a fashion designer, male or female, is to present something of his own, following the trends; copying is only to be a dressmaker, no matter how sophisticated is the dress is.<sup>33</sup>

When justifying that in fashion, age and experience have little importance, Rui understands Yves Saint Laurent struggle to place himself in the fashion world as they were both young seeking to prove their talent and competence. Even in different positions, Saint Laurent sought to ensure the prestige of the

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31. *A Hora*, May 23, 1957.

32. *A Hora*, January 9, 1958.

33. *A Hora*, January 27, 1958.

great *Maison* Dior, updating the well-known formula, while Rui sought recognition in a place dominated by women dressmakers, the weapon was the same: the creation of new clothing.

When he stated that “copying is just being a dressmaker,” Rui valued his own ability to “present his signature,” reinforced by years of study in Paris, where he attended the same school as Yves Saint Laurent.

He also mentioned the future of *Maison* Dior, because he experienced the French fashion culture. Rui is able to exert some power, whose label goes beyond his signature in the garment: he declared his intentions and taste. By the recognition of his sketches and opinions as well as hats and dresses patterns, a system of values is reinforced.

In a rather different tone, when he worked as a *journaliste-dessinateur* in the 1990s, his text were more informative and less rigid, with a glossary of fashion terms, art and etiquette tips. Despite that, he continued writing about his opinion on places and lifestyles, and the elegant ladies continued being honored with the description and the sketch of the models chosen for important social situations.

In the column of September 1, 1996, besides explaining the terms *twin-set*, *prêt-a-porter* and *chemisier*, he draws and describes the most interesting patterns at a recent gala and explains the best way of using lipstick:

When using your lipstick, a greater effect to enhance your lips is reached when using a contour pencil in the same color as the lipstick. This can accentuate, diminish, increase, or give it a new format. Ask a make-up professional if you have never worn this type of makeup. Success guaranteed.<sup>34</sup>

He eventually comments on international catwalks trends, always providing readers with a sketch of his own, a way of demonstrating that he continues to act as a mediator of trends, taking into account the dynamics of the local society.

## Conclusion

Fashion, as a phenomenon that is made from images and reinvented from them, in a constant movement, walks on multiple times, reinventing itself in each new sketch, each new collection, or each new image constructed from itself.

In this process, it seems to have a surviving strategy similar to the king's, consisting in looking through the other's eyes, developing an interdependence relation. In the consumption established here, this would be equivalent to Worth's strategy of turning to an international clientele, not without first allowing his patterns to be literally copied from newspapers and magazines. A similar strategy was developed by Christian Dior, who associates his patterns with the imaginary Paris, with his mostly iconic pattern named as *new look* in North American, establishing a series of licenses in order to diversify his products. Before Dior, and in a rather distinctive style, Gabrielle Chanel's *chemise* black dress had also been acclaimed by the American press. Vogue called it “Chanel's Ford,” since, like the model T, this dress was simple and accessible for women of all social classes.

The fashion designer can also be associated to survival: even when the creator is not present, his memories compose the *maison's* and the brand's imagery, the files are endlessly updated, and can have a different and new look, for example, Karl Lagerfeld who merged his vision with Chanel's, and dressed Lily-Rose's body in a promise of youthfully continuity.

If, at first, my interest was to pay closer attention to the *journaliste-dessinateur* Rui Sphor, immersing in his collections eventually gave rise to a new direction. It is because of the first text he wrote in 1949 that made him to adopt the name Rui as a way of protecting his identity, which was eventually exposed. After settling in Porto Alegre, Rui began to gain space in newspapers' social columns, where he presented

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34. *Correio do Povo*, September 1, 1996.

the latest trends and sketches of his own. The newspaper is then replaced by the television. In 1996, he reassumes his position in newspapers, writing in the column “Fashion, style and behavior” every Sunday.

In the 1990s, Rui has worked for 40 years and lived his professional apogee: changed address, launched a *prêt-à-porter* collection, organized great fashion shows and wrote his autobiography.

Why did he return to the newspaper? Was it a way of reaffirming his space in times of economic stability where the country was taken over by imported products and international brands? Was it sort of intuition about the changes that the Internet would bring, radically transforming the fashion, once consumer action would prevail? I would risk to say that, according to Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>35</sup> this was the moment in which Rui settled definitively *à droite*, Rui turned his style into tradition, providing security in the face of all the changes that were about to come – such as fast-fashion and globalization.

Over the years, his view on elegance is no longer imposing, but informative, following cultural values. Such values, materialized as texts and sketches, and eventually as clothes, function as an extension of the bodies they wear, are part of the construction and/or an affirmation of identity.

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35. Here, the reference is the haute-couture presented in *Le couturier et sa griffe: contribution à une théorie de la magie*. Pierre Bourdieu and Yvette Delsault. “Le couturier et sa griffe: contribution a une théorie de la magie,” *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, vol. 1 (January 1975).

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