

Brazilian Jeans

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Here in Rio a very popular genre of party are the funk balls, that happens on weekend nights, most of the time in sport courts in clubs that are kind of decadent. Each of these parties gather thousands of youngsters, coming from their homes up on the hill, where the favela slums are localized. The girls and boys who take part care a great deal about their personal appearance, specially when they go out to dance. I have been studying these parties since 2002 with my principle focus being on their clothes.

What has become known as “ brazilian jeans” is a representative garment of the wardrobe of the girls who come to the funk balls, and in fact it was really a style that was created by them, because it was their appropriation of these jeans, and their wearing them to funk balls, that really gave them life. These jeans are largely known as the “trousers of Gang”, in reference to the leading retailer and producer of this style of jeans, although in the funk context the trousers are called by the native category “moletom stretch trousers”, a reference to the materiality of the garment.

The point to be stressed, and which is noted by the dancers, is that more than the brand, the importance of this special garment relies in its materiality. The style of those feminine trousers, a confluence of local and global tastes, is defined by a fabric that can look like denim, but is actually a stretched jersey material that simulates its appearance, after being dyed and washed. The raw material is the same as denim being around 95% cotton plus elastane, but the effect of the weave is to emphasis the stretching quality of the elastane. This trait of materiality adds to the trousers

utilitarian and aesthetics characteristics which, in interaction to the body and the dance, allows us to grasp their meaning.

The “moletom stretch” is a fabric that stretches equally in both horizontal and vertical dimensions, unlike traditional denim with elastane that only stretches in one direction. . The elasticity and the softness of the jersey give a lot of comfort to the dancer, for whom a funk ball requires quite extreme movements of the legs, including flexing her knees and swinging her hips almost to the the dance floor. At the same time, the jersey is thick enough to receive all kinds of embellishment, that goes from cuts that form figurative and abstract motives, which allow one to see the skin of the dancer, through baroque adornments, such as embroideries and crystals. On the other hand, the “moletom stretch”, due to its low density, adheres to the body like a body stocking, revealing curves of a body that becomes even curvier with the movement of the dance. Finally, as the jersey fabric still has the appearance of denim, it acquires a fashion appeal and a connection with global taste. All of these qualities makes such jeans central to the funk balls. At present I am carrying on my PhD research, and one of my concerns is these jeans. I would be interested to hear from other researches who have found links between the materiality of textiles and their precise relationship to the body and to bodily movement such as in dance.

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