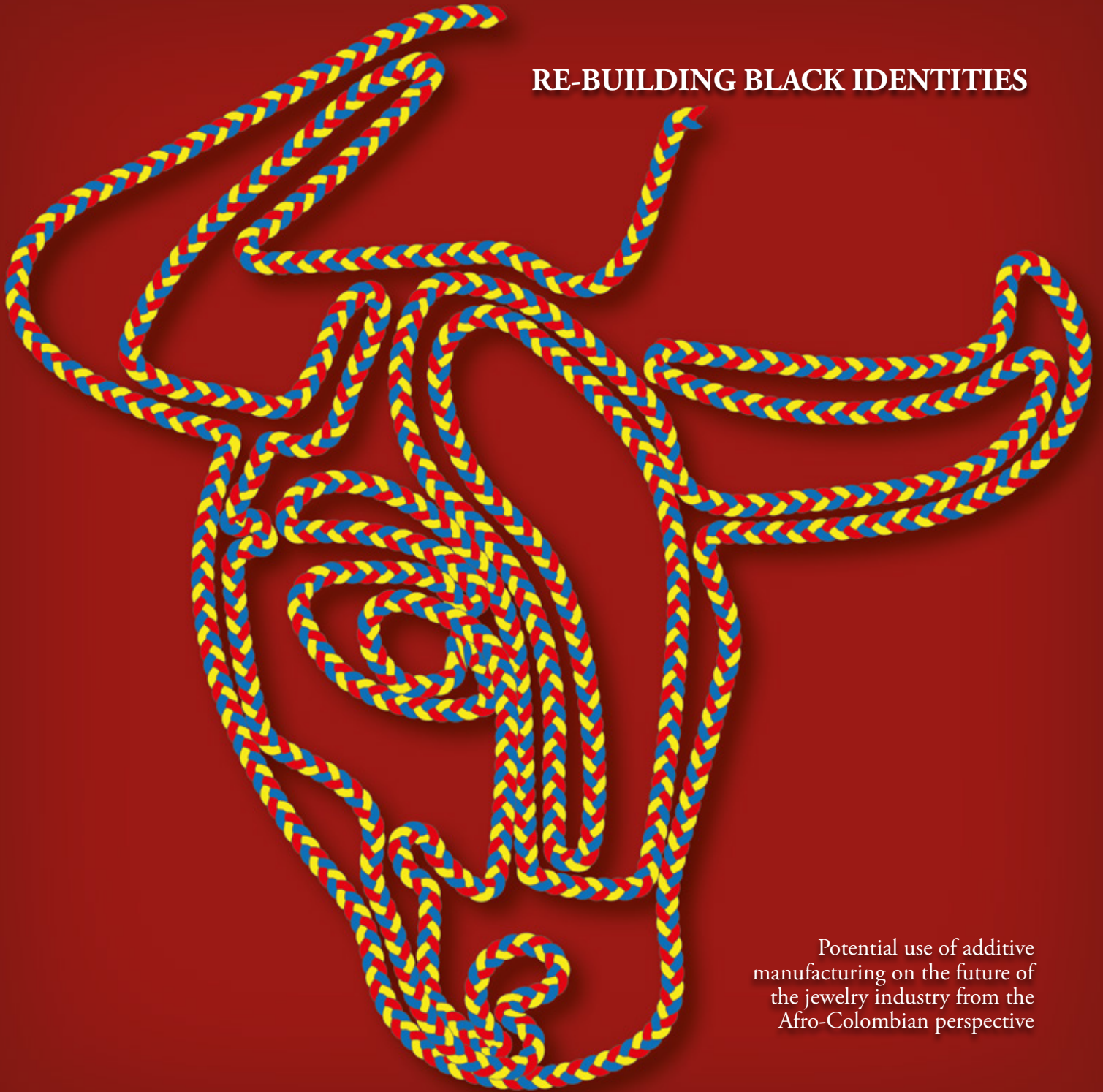


RE-BUILDING BLACK IDENTITIES



Potential use of additive manufacturing on the future of the jewelry industry from the Afro-Colombian perspective



POLITECNICO
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RE-BUILDING BLACK IDENTITIES: POTENTIAL USE OF
ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING (3D PRINTING) ON THE FUTURE
OF THE JEWELRY INDUSTRY FROM THE AFRO-COLOMBIAN
PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Culture, independently of its origins, has always been a great source of inspiration for designers, but in some cases, some minority cultures, despite their contribution, have not received the deserved acknowledgement in the society. This is the case of the Afro-Colombian culture. The underrecognition may be due to the underrepresentation and misconception that many people hold about those belonging to a minority community. The following project has the overall objective of honouring the Afro-Colombian community, in such a way that some of its main cultural characteristics can be exalted in a 3d printed product. To accomplish this, it was necessary to conduct a research on the cultural subject, the relevance of this culture within the society, and the value of additive manufacturing in the fashion industry. This research is supported by literature consultation, and based on the author experience during his internship at Vojd Studios in Berlin, Germany, where he explored the problematic of cultural underrepresentation and cultural apathy within the fashion industry.

After the compilation of information and its eventual analysis, it was possible to design and produce, throughout additive manufacturing technology, two jewellery object collections. The design of the collections is based on two important elements of the Afro-Colombian culture, which are the Carnival of Barranquilla and the Afro-Colombian hairstyle. The Carnival of Barranquilla was chosen as a source of inspiration because it is one of the most important folkloric celebrations in Colombia, based in part on the rituals of the African descendants back in the time of the Spanish colonization of America. Whereas, on the other hand, the Afro-Colombian hairstyle was taken into account because of its importance as a mean of expression and communication, as it was at the time of the colony, helping African slaves escape from slavery and, as it is nowadays, as a gathering element used by the Afro-Colombian communities across the country. Finally, it is expected that this work can be used by readers to understand the value of diverse minority cultures, as a mean to mitigate social inequality and racism, as well as supporting people belonging to minority groups on getting the opportunities that they deserve in society.

ABSTRACT IN ITALIAN

La cultura, indipendentemente dalle sue origini, è stata sempre una grande fonte di ispirazione per i designer, ma in certi casi, alcune culture minoritarie, nonostante il loro contributo, non hanno ricevuto il riconoscimento che meritano nella società. È questo il caso della cultura afro-colombiana. Il non riconoscimento potrebbe essere dovuto alla sottorappresentazione e al pregiudizio che molta gente nutre nei confronti di coloro che appartengono ad una comunità di minoranza. Il seguente progetto ha l'obiettivo generale di onorare la comunità afro-colombiana, in modo che alcune delle sue principali caratteristiche culturali possano essere esaltate in un prodotto stampato in 3D. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo, è stato necessario condurre una ricerca sulla specifica tematica culturale, la rilevanza di tale cultura all'interno della società e il valore della manifattura additiva nel settore della moda. Questa ricerca è supportata dalla consultazione della letteratura e basata sull'esperienza dell'autore durante il suo tirocinio presso Vojd Studios di Berlino, in Germania, dove ha esplorato la problematica della sottorappresentazione e dell'apatia culturale nell'industria della moda.

Dopo la raccolta di informazioni e la loro successiva analisi, è stato possibile progettare e creare, attraverso l'uso della tecnologia di manifattura additiva, due collezioni di oggetti di gioielleria. Il design delle collezioni si basa su due importanti elementi della cultura afro-colombiana, che sono il Carnevale di Barranquilla e l'acconciatura afro-colombiana. Il Carnevale di Barranquilla è stato scelto come fonte di ispirazione perché è una delle celebrazioni folcloristiche più importanti in Colombia, basato in parte sui rituali della popolazione di discendenza africana ai tempi della colonizzazione spagnola dell'America. Mentre, dall'altro lato, l'acconciatura afro-colombiana è stata presa in considerazione per la sua importanza come mezzo di espressione e di comunicazione, com'era all'epoca della colonia, al fine di aiutare gli schiavi africani a fuggire dalla schiavitù e, com'è tutt'oggi, un elemento di incontro utilizzato dalle comunità afro-colombiane in tutto il Paese. Infine, si auspica che questo lavoro possa essere utilizzato dai lettori per comprendere il valore della diversità delle culture minoritarie, come mezzo per mitigare la disuguaglianza sociale e il razzismo, oltre che a supportare le persone appartenenti a minoranze nell'accedere alle opportunità che meritano nella società.



INTRODUCTION

Nowadays 3d printing technology is becoming an emergency technology being applying to a vast variety of manufacturing industries. On one hand, not only fashion companies are choosing the 3d printing technology for its terrific advantages in the cost reduction, but also because 3d scanner can be used for designers as a tool for finding new inspiration. On the other hand, culture assigns to the current prospective, the symbolic dimension present in all society practices, and for decades the African and Afro-Descendant¹ ones have lacked real and meaningful representing figures for boosting the fashion industry. As a representative figure the idea of this project is to show through the fashion industry a conceptual design work spirited on stories and facts of the African people and people of African descent.

For understanding the importance of additive manufacturing as an emergence technology applied to the Fashion industry, it is necessary to clarify how creative designers and entrepreneurs are taken advantage of the technology for the creation of new products. Moreover, there are different examples of 3D printed objects in metal and polymeric materials that clearly display a successful implementation of the technology. Therefore, readers need to be aware that throughout the application of 3d printing, these visionary people are planting seeds for the building of a new and promising path for the fashion industry.

Culturally speaking, for decades the fashion industry is being a mean throughout society express. As a result, people feel identify, represented, or simply have sympathy for what they are wearing and want to definitively show their feelings to the world. For some individuals, it occurs more often that every single piece of clothes or accessory that is worn has its own meaning and is the resulting manifestation of a particular culture. Then, it is relevant to emphasize the importance of the concept of “Afro-Colombian culture” and African culture in general as a design source of inspiration for the development of this project.

In terms of inclusivity, what is not above mentioned is that, even if there are different design organizations around the world such as the CFDA (Council of Fashion Designers of America) or the BFC (British Fashion Council), there are only a few Afro-Descendant designers as active members. Consequently, the lack of cultural variety often results in the creation of objects in which the primary inspiration sources are concepts of superiority of one race over another, as well as in products that, instead of celebrating cultural features, are racist and offensive expressions to many people. Therefore, the idea of the project, being myself part of a minority community, is to reclaim and embrace my own Afro-Colombian cultural roots, and to share them with the world, with the aim of highlighting and honouring their most representative attributes.

¹ For the purposes of this project, the terms “African and Afro-Descendant” referred to a community or a culture encompass respectively all the people recently born in Africa and those of the African diaspora as well (currently residing in the countries of the American continent or others, thus, not only in the United States), while the terms “Black communities” or “people of colour” embrace both the aforementioned meanings.

1.1. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The development of the project focuses attention on the design of a collection of luxury accessories inspired to key features belonging to the Afro-Colombian tradition, the masks of the Barranquilla Carnival, using a 3d printing technology. As an Afro-Colombian designer with professional experience in 3d printing and product design for fashion, I have decided to use this knowledge to develop the design of the project because of the important advantages that 3d printing provides, comparing to other technologies such as injection moulding. In fact, it represents the most cost-effective way to facilitate the production of pieces with complex shapes, it is innovative, and allows to apply new materials and to experiment.

Starting from a detailed examination of the past and current situation in terms of diversity and inclusion in the fashion industry trends - and not only, specifically with regard to the process of creating fashion products which are meant to refer to the African or Afro-Descendant tradition, I have reflected that there is a lack of representation or misinterpretation of the African or Afro-Descendant cultural and fashion world in society. It is legitimate to depict a different culture and to show it to people. However, in doing so, what is fundamental to avoid superficiality, creation or reinforcement of damaging stereotypes, is to conduct a deep investigation of that culture or, even better, rely on the support and approval of people belonging to the same culture, as well as on the potential users' perspective. This is even more important when it comes to represent the culture of a minority.

Hence, the main goal of the project is to give my contribution to celebrating the culture of which I am a representant, including its relatable symbols and icons, through the authentic interpretation of an Afro-Colombian angle, and to restoring the dignity that has been denied for centuries. However, as it will be further explained in a subsequent chapter, the concept design is not exclusively meant to target African or Afro-Descendant populations for a specific functionality of the products presented, but everyone willing to deepen the African cultural roots and values under the magnifying glass of an Afro-Colombian perspective. This means that, even though the concept design is strongly inspired to peculiar elements of the Afro-Colombian heritage, the products are designed to meet various needs and to prove to be functional for multiple groups of users belonging to the same culture or not. Of course, it must be understood that the specific deliverables of this project are not meant to be necessarily representative of the entire African or African descent heritage, but to be identifiable and acknowledged as luxury products inspired to the Afro-Colombian culture.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

General Objectives

Development a collection of fashion accessories to celebrate the Afro-Colombian culture as part of the Afro-Descendant heritage, starting from the extraction and re-elaboration of authentic elements of the tradition using a 3d printing technology.

Specific Objectives

To articulate the main goal, the specific objectives of the project are the followings:

- Investigate the problematic of diversity and exclusion, as well as the representation and underrepresentation of the Afro-Descendant cultures, in the fashion industry trends over the last decades, by also analysing the concepts of cultural appropriation, blackface and tokenism.
- Identify and present the pillars of the Afro-Descendant cultural heritage from different perspectives (history, art, music, cinema, fashion, and so on).
- De-construct negative stereotypes and re-construct identity from specific elements of interest to the Afro-Colombian community.
- Apply personal knowledge and skills on 3d printing technology based on professional experience to design a collection of accessories using authentic elements of the culture, and conferring, in this way, new meaning to the jewellery.
- Provide practical recommendations to inform fashion leaders in regards to ways to improve the lack of diversity in the high-end industry, as well as embracing Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs)² from other cultures or subcultures into their creative products, with a focus on the importance of the participatory method in the design process.

² Concept developed by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to indicate "expressions of folklore" and all the forms that constitute integral part of the identity and heritage of a traditional or indigenous community, transmitted from one generation to another, in which traditional culture is expressed (URL: <https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/folklore/>; last consulted on 26/01/2020).

STATE OF THE ART AND
PROJECT RESEARCH

1. THE ISSUE

The information gathered through the literature research is intended to support the framing of the “issue”, with regard to which the Gucci ‘blackface’ scandal is emblematic, towards the understanding of the concept which underlies the design of the project. Starting with the polo neck jumper that has been to hell and back for being accused of rooting in racism, the following chapters are therefore focused, from an historical point of view, on the analysis of how the fashion industry has treated the Afro-Descendant communities such as the Afro-American one in terms of representation and inclusion over the last centuries, also providing concrete examples from the popular culture.

1.1. IDENTITY AND CULTURE UNDER THREAT

In 2018 Gucci’s Fall Winter Show was released launching, among the other outfits and accessories of the collection, a turtleneck of the cost of 890\$ that was not only being sold for almost a year but was also the fuse of a tumultuous debate. Gucci was indeed accused of racism and, more specifically, of making profit from blackface³, spreading an unfair and harmful representation of African and Afro-Descendant communities.

But what is it meant by ‘blackface’ and why does it exacerbate racism?

Blackface can be defined as a form of theatrical make-up used predominantly by white actors or actresses to represent a caricature of a Black person, instead of having recourse to Black performers directly on stage⁴, which was very rare at the time it spread. Similarly, ‘actor-character race-mismatching’ is a common practice in the history of cinema, theatre and television - from the origins of cinema to the contemporary Hollywood era - that has been adopted in film fictions when

“the race of an actor or actress does not match the race of the character he or she portrays - blackface, yellowface, redface, brownface” (Mag Uidhir 2013)⁵.

According to some sources, it probably started in New York in the 1800s or so in order to entertain white people with

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/business/gucci-blackface-adidas-apologize.html> (last consulted on 23/01/2020).

⁴ Cockrell, D. (1997). *Demos of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World*. Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama.

⁵ Mag Uidhir, C. (2013). ‘What’s so Bad about Blackface?’, *Race, Film & Philosophy*, pp. 51-68, New York: Routledge.

minstrel shows based on negative stereotypes about African or African-Descendant people, teasing about their expressions, accents and appearance, as well as representing them as scary demonic figures, with the result of exacerbating the feelings of fear and repulsion against them. Therefore, it was very far from being a form of flattery.

In spite of the fact that blackface is a 200 years old practice by now and that many historians, human rights' activists and politicians have often defined it as a racist insult, it still continues to be carried out, on several occasions, as an acceptable form of entertainment in too many countries, including some in Latin America, either because of social convention, as an act of ignorance, or because of adherence to a pure ideology of white supremacy.



Figure 3. Billy B. Van's transformation with blackface in "The Monologue Comedian" (1990). Source: Strobridge & Co. Lith/Wikimedia Commons, via BBC World

According to many critics such as the Spanish Pan-African historian of Colombian origin Autumi Toasijé, not understanding the historical dimension of pain and shame linked to blackface has "no excuses", especially considering the still open wounds of the terrible centuries of slavery⁶.



Digging deeper into the issue, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*⁷, a children's book which was published in England in 1899 and in the United States the following years, is particularly significant in this regard. While there was nothing particularly disturbing about the plot of its writer, Helen Bannerman, the illustrations accompanying the narrative, initially realized by the same author as well, drew the attention of American civil rights' activists in the 1930s and 1940s for having exacerbated the denigrating caricature of children of colour⁸. Although the book was clearly set in India and the protagonist was an Indian child, the drawings perfectly matched the humiliating reference to the "pickaninny" used to identify African-Americans at that time, reason why the appellation "Sambo" was very common to be used to describe or even call dark-skinned people during slavery. In various editions of the book, Sambo is depicted with very dark skin, in stark contrast to his white eyes and teeth, a big nose, as well as excessive red lips. Hence, considering the resemblance to some of high fashion's most popular items is undeniable, the reinforcement of the negative stereotype of Black people as inferior and unintellectual people did not end with those drawings.

Figure 4. Book Cover of "The Story of Little Black Sambo". Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/8b/e3/a9/8be3a908ef72c8766a0d7e3ae8123fe8.png>

⁶ <https://elcomercio.pe/mundo/actualidad/blackface-justin-trudeau-considera-racista-pintarse-cara-negro-bbc-noticia-678076-noticia/?ref=ecr> (last consulted on 24/01/2020).

⁷ Bannerman, H. (1899). *The Story of Little Black Sambo*. London: Grant Richards.

⁸ Jeyathurai, D. (2012). *The complicated racial politics of Little Black Sambo*. South Asian American Digital Archive. URL: <https://www.saada.org/tides/article/little-black-sambo> (last consulted on 23/01/2020).

⁹ Robin Bernstein (2011) writes that "the pickaninny was an imagined, subhuman Black juvenile who was typically depicted outdoors, merrily accepting (or even inviting) violence" (34) (*Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: New York University Press).

Luckily, the blackface minstrel shows gradually disappeared over the years, but its major influence over vaudeville, radio, television, motion picture, and world music industries of the last two centuries is undeniable, to date, being extremely harmful to the Black community, which is still struggling to erase the lasting effects of those derogatory images, not only in a cultural perspective, but at several other levels, including socio-economic and justice.

Flashing forward, similarly to what happened to Gucci, other big fashion brands were being accused of the same offence by consumers and having their items removed from the global market. There are indeed countless examples of that and not exclusively belonging to the fashion world: a Moncler's line reminding the before-mentioned little Black Sambo stereotype, Katy Perry's shoes that resemble blackface, Prada's black monkey with exaggerated red lips¹⁰, and even Canada's President Justin Trudeau who appeared, in some photos and videos of his twenties, dressed up as Aladdin with skin-darkening make-up on his face and hands at the West Point Grey Academy¹¹. And within the fashion industry itself, it is not just high fashion brands that have hit the wrong tone when it comes to respecting different cultures, but also mainstream retailers: to provide an example, in 2018 H&M had to apologise after an advertising campaign showed a Black child in a "coolest monkey in the jungle" hoodie¹².

10 <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-gucci-clothes-racist-blackface-sambo-2019-2?IR=T> (last consulted on 25/01/2020).

11 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49758613> (last consulted on 24/01/2020).

12 <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-51177738> (last consulted on 25/01/2020).



Figure 5. Gucci's collection Fall 2018 Ready-To-Wear (Model: Mathieu Perrais). Source: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2018-ready-to-wear/gucci/slideshow/collection#36>



Figure 6. Gucci's collection Fall 2018 Ready-To-Wear (Model: Jeppe Julius). Source: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2018-ready-to-wear/gucci/slideshow/collection#4>

Another related issue that is fundamental to be mentioned here is ‘cultural appropriation’. Such phenomenon, as a by-product of imperialism, capitalism, oppression, invasion, is defined¹³ as the adoption and consequent assimilation of icons, symbols, rituals, aesthetic standards, and behaviour from one culture or subculture – like for instance, African-American and Native American cultures - by a member(s) of a dominant one, without explicit authorization, attribution or compensation, with the main purpose of making profit from these elements and convert them into a trend, because they are seen as “*exotic, edgy, and desirable*”. This harmful process is generally and more easily to be applied when the culture suffering from the appropriation is “*a minority or somehow subordinate in social, political, economic, or military status to the appropriating culture*”, such as Black community, indigenous or rural populations, and so on.

“This ‘appropriation’ often occurs without any real understanding of why the original culture took part in these activities or the meanings behind these activities, often converting culturally significant artefacts, practices, and beliefs into meaningless pop-culture or giving them a significance that is completely different/ less nuanced than they would originally have”¹⁴.

The risk is, once again, to perpetuate a bunch of inappropriate stereotypes on a specific Traditional Cultural Expression (TCE), even if admittedly unintentional. It is anything but genuine appreciation and celebration from which everyone can benefit, totally devoid of good intentions. Just to give an example, as reported by Brigitte Vézina, in 2015, French fashion designer Isabel Marant launched on the market, as part of her Spring/Summer Collection, a dress with a design very closely resembling the elements at the heart of the traditional costume of the Mixe, an indigenous community from Santa María Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. The outfit, known as a *huipil*, from a history of at least 600 years, has the original cost of around 300 Mexican pesos in the traditional town where it was created, while its unauthorized reproduction retailed for \$365, the equivalent of 4,500 pesos. Later, the Mixe community manifested their malcontent in relation to the inestimable value of the costume as a key expression of their culture.

13 Vézina, B. (2019). *Curbing Cultural Appropriation in the Fashion Industry*. Waterloo, Canada: Centre for International Governance Innovation.

14 <https://www.aihfs.org/pdf/8-1-16%20Cultural%20Appropriation.pdf> (last consulted on 26/01/2020).



Figure 7. The Mixe’s traditional costume vs the Marant’s plagio. Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CFX8fvUgAA-7rb.jpg>;



Figure 8. The Marant’s plagio Source: https://media.vogue.co.uk/photos/5d548636fe40ba0008d8370b/master/w_1280,c_limit/_arc0762.jpg

Yet another example is the Spring/Summer 2017 season during the New York Fashion Week, on which occasion Marc Jacobs launched his collection with a clear majority of White models on the runway wearing multi-coloured faux dreadlocks, a hairstyle typically attributed to Black culture, without acknowledging it.



Figure 9. Models wearing rainbow dreadlocks in the Marc Jacobs Spring 2017 fashion show. Source: <https://dazedimg-dazedgroup.netdna-ssl.com/2000/azure/dazed-prod/1180/7/1187411.JPG>

As reported by Pahull Bains (2019), New York designer Kerby Jean-Raymond who owns the brand Pyer Moss, as part of the coveted Business of Fashion's annual BoF500 list - created to celebrate the most influential people in the global fashion community - last year, participated to the gala that was held in Paris on September 30. Commenting on the 'tokenistic'¹⁵ climate of the event and on the choice of putting on a Black gospel choir performing "to a room full of white people", he wrote on his Instagram story the following words, wishing to no longer be associated with the BoF500 list:

*"That level of entitlement is the core issue. People feeling like they can buy or own whatever they want [...] if that thing pertains to blackness. We are always up for sale [...] Homage without empathy and representation is appropriation. Instead, explore your own culture, religion and origins. By replicating ours and excluding us- you prove to us that you see us as a trend. Like, we gonna die black, are you? [...] BOF499, I'm off the list"*¹⁶

To avoid misinterpretations, the act of borrowing from other cultures is not dangerous at all if carefully done in the proper way - creatively open and culturally sensitive - and it does not have to be necessarily followed by unfounded accusations of cultural appropriation. Being inspiring from other cultures and recognizing it, indeed, is almost inevitably nowadays and can potentially bring benefits to both the cultures involved. As reported by Jenni Avins (2015) in *The Atlantic*¹⁷, the major "precepts" for a mindful cultural celebration, when it comes to borrow one or more elements from a given culture or subculture, should be the following:

- "Blackface Is Never Okay": as already explained above, blackface was/is never appropriate, always painful and offensive in as much as it perpetuated/s negative stereotypes and derogatory ideas on Black culture or some elements of it.
- "It is important to pay homage to artistry and ideas, as well as acknowledging their origins": this is a fundamental principle in order to express gratitude to the culture source of inspiration and consequently not running the risk of being accused of cultural appropriation.
- "Do not adopt sacred artefacts as accessories": one central aspect of borrowing from other cultures in the right manner is the respect for the elements of that culture, especially in the case of their close connection with religious, spiritual and ceremonial meanings. Sometimes only specific members of a community or tribe have earned the right to wear

¹⁵ For further explanations on 'tokenism', please refer to the following chapter.

¹⁶ Bains, P. (2019, 02 October). *Designer Kerby Jean-Raymond Calls out Business of Fashion's Inclusivity Problem*, Fashion Magazine, <https://fashionmagazine.com/style/kerby-jean-raymond-bof-500/> (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

¹⁷ Avins, J. and Quartz (2015, 20 October). *The Dos and Don'ts of Cultural Appropriation*, The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/10/the-dos-and-donts-of-cultural-appropriation/411292/> (last consulted on 11/02/2020).

such sacred items or accessories through honour-worthy achievements and acts of bravery. An example is the feather headdresses that are being now banned from some music festival organizers, precisely for their high significance.

- “*Remember that culture is fluid*”: culture is dynamic and changes over time. This aspect should be recognized in cultural inspiration and celebration, together with the fact that under certain circumstances, the act of re-proposing and re-enacting specific elements, products or tools of a culture that seemed bound for a certain oblivion, can be extremely appreciated and can save them from that forgotten place.
- “*Do not forget that appropriation is no substitute for diversity*”: as aforementioned, striking examples in this sense are all those runways where a bunch of White models wear garments and/or accessories borrowed from a given culture - even if acknowledged - in a visible non-diverse environment. Diversity must be ensured effectively, since it entails several aspects and levels of the structure of the fashion industry. Well-intentioned appropriation is not synonym of that.
- “*Engage with other cultures on more than an aesthetic level*”: engaging with the same people belonging to the culture or subculture by which a fashion designer is inspired, not only prevents the potential for misappropriation, but it also creates an opportunity for the fashion industry to perpetuate real, world-changing progress. From cultural appropriation, the inspiring cultures should/can benefit as well, but we have to give people more chances and instruments to do that.
- “*Treat a cultural exchange like any other creative collaboration - give credit and consider royalties*”: this is closely linked with the previous principle and even reaches a next stage. Engaging with the all culture may also imply possibilities for co-branded collaborations and common business from which both sides can receive their share of merits. As Avins and Quartz report in the same article (2015), this is what happened in the case of Oskar Metsavaht, the founder and creative director of the popular Brazilian sportswear brand Osklen, who collaborates with the Asháninka tribe for his Spring 2016 collection. The tribe got royalties and the launch of the collection also served as an public awareness means to speak up about their continued struggle to protect lands against illegal occupants and environmental degradation, in return for motifs and concepts for the collection. This is how Metsavaht describes the experience to Quartz:

“Sharing values, sharing visions, sharing the economics, I think it’s the easiest way to work. [...] This is the magic of style. It’s the magic of art. It’s the magic of the design”.

So, the central question here is:

What is fashion industry concretely doing to prevent or address cultural appropriation?

Within the fashion industry, claims of misinterpretation of culture or cultural appropriation have been nothing but rare over the last decades; in fact, the boundary between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation is sometimes blurring and the act of being inspired by another culture or subculture can turn out to be tricky, especially when the designers in question are not totally aware of the elements characterizing that culture, as well as of what is commonly agreed to be acceptable and what can cause misunderstanding and profound - cultural, social and economic - pain to the holders of that tradition. The spread of social media has increased the opportunity to reflect on and talk about the degree of acceptance of a specific item proposed by a certain couture house and, in some cases, even speak up. Undoubtedly, there is today, more than ever, a more sincere commitment to recruiting for diversity, but is that enough taking into consideration the important responsibility of the fashion houses in shaping the image of individuals and communities all over the world? According to the fashion critic of *The Washington Post* Robin Givhan,

“This conversation is important because people need to be reminded that fashion plays an enormous role in shaping how we view and value people. If we don’t consider how the fashion industry is embracing, showing or including various people, then we risk allowing whole groups to be, if not devalued, then ignored” (Peoples Wagner 2018)¹⁸.

Cultural appropriation cannot be eliminated as long as people continue to buy the products and ignore the issues behind omitting the original culture or even erasing an entire one. Apologizing is not enough anymore. If anything, a step in the right direction would be giving the credit that culture or subculture deserves, as well as including individuals from the same culture into a joint design participatory process.

¹⁸ Peoples Wagner, L. (2018, 03 August). *Everywhere and Nowhere. What it’s really like to be black and work in fashion*, The Cut, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/08/what-its-really-like-to-be-black-and-work-in-fashion.html> (last consulted on 12/02/2020).



GUCCI

Gucci deeply apologizes for the offense caused by the wool balaclava jumper. We can confirm that the item has been immediately removed from our online store and all physical stores.

We consider diversity to be a fundamental value to be fully upheld, respected, and at the forefront of every decision we make. We are fully committed to increasing diversity throughout our organization and turning this incident into a powerful learning moment for the Gucci team and beyond.

Figure 10. The Gucci balaclava jumper, which has been withdrawn from sale. Source: <https://cbsnews3.cbsistatic.com/hub/i/r/2019/02/07/f00736c6-1b67-4336-898a-5267b69a1881/thumbnaill620x388/b4d40c41c01ad5b511aa5d0ce72c50dd/untitled-collage.jpg>

In apologizing for the offensive turtleneck, Gucci declared to intend to undertake another step to tackle culture appropriation: launching a full program of scholarships to promote the involvement of different communities in the creation process. Likely, Prada has announced a diversity council that aims to ensure that people of colour's right to be heard is respected within the company and fashion industry at large. Nevertheless, considering the fact that only 3% of the members of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) - one of the main not-for-profit trade association in the fashion sector - are people of colour, or that, for instance, during the Fall Winter 2019 New York Fashion Week, only 10% of the designers were Africans or Afro-Descendants¹⁹, are those efforts being enough to combat racism and other forms of intolerance in the fashion industry or is it just another bid to make of the Black communities' heritage a trend?

¹⁹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-gucci-clothes-racist-blackface-sambo-2019-2?IR=T> (last consulted on 25/01/2020).

What are the most appropriate actions to concretely promote diversity and inclusion in the fashion industry?

1.2. PROBLEMATIC OF DIVERSITY AND RACISM OF AESTHETICS: UNDERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK WORKFORCE IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Diversity is a controversial issue in the fashion industry, especially over the last decades. Underrepresentation and lack of recognition of Black designers are, now like in the past - or even more according to some columnists²⁰, burning issues within the luxury fashion industry but are not solely confined to it. Even though fashion is one of the few industries that touches all lives in some way, the fashion industry has so far struggled to reflect countries' diversity in its workforce across all levels (CFDA 2019)²¹. While it is true that during the Spring 2015 Fashion Week 25 Black designers presented their collections, which turned out to be a total surprise, if compared to the Fall 2012 New York Fashion Week where only two Black designers showcased collections among 127 participants, that event should be read as a more or less direct consequence of the worldwide struggles of activists, designers, editors, bloggers and social media reporters against the lack of diversity, unacceptable protagonist of the runways. Underrepresentation of African or Afro-American²² designers in the high-end fashion market - at times implicit, at others even explicit and obvious - could be a proof of the fact that models of colour are continually being passed up by many Western designers both in the catwalks and in the mass media, as is evident by leafing through mainstream high-fashion magazines - e.g. *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*²³, whose texts and images usually

²⁰ For example, Bethann Hardison stated that "there were more high-profile black designers in the 1970s than there are today" (Friedman, V. (2015, 11 February). *Fashion's Racial Divide*, New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/12/fashion/fashions-racial-divide.html>, last consulted on 31/01/2020). In the 1970s, there were actually greater opportunities for Black models, it was a golden era for them. However, the demand for Black models decreased significantly in the 1980s and especially the 1990s. At that time, top designers opted for an aesthetic that ultimately excluded models of colour to make way for the grunge era and "heroin" chic which fostered that group of models that included Kate Moss, Stella Tennant, and Kristen McMenamy. Since then, the debate over racism in fashion surfaces every season's runways, as the numbers of black models remains stagnant (Newman, S. L. (2017). *Black Models Matter: Challenging the Racism of Aesthetics and the Facade of Inclusion in the Fashion Industry*, CUNY Academic Works).

²¹ *Insider/Outsider: Inclusion and Diversity in the American Fashion Industry*, January 2019, CFDA, PVH Corp. and The Dagoba Group, https://cfda.imgix.net/2019/01/CFDA-PVH_Insider-Outsider_Final_01-2019.pdf (last consulted on 06/02/2020).

²² For the purposes of this project, as previously introduced, the term "Afro-American" related to a designer, culture or community, stands for all the people of the African diaspora coming from the American continent, thus, not exclusively from the United States (e.g. Haiti, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, etc.).

²³ Ellington, Tameka N. (2017). 'Underrepresented: The Lack of Black Designers Featured in Harper's Bazaar and Vogue', *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal*, vol. 2, art. 7, pp. 93-116.

reflect the values and interest of the advertisers, mostly belonging to the White population (Hazell and Clark 2007)²⁴. The literature review demonstrates that the specific beauty ideal which usually ‘sells’ in the sector, is the mirror of the dominant White culture and has been considered a trademark of beauty for centuries. Considering that models are the means through which the designers choose to represent their brands and new collections to the target audience, the traditional beauty ideal seems to have no place for body type diversity and Black female or male models. In fact, if we take a look at the fashion designers’ shows, representation of White, skinny, middle to upper class model has been the norm for many years, especially during the mid-1990s and 2000s²⁵. There were no Black editors at the head of major fashion publications at the time. No significant efforts have been made so far to promote a real diversification of these restricted patterns and standards. On the contrary, exploitation of non-White models and cultures is rather than a simple assumption, as it will be discussed more in detail below. Thus, studying diversity and analysing its multiple modes of representation in a specific sector like the fashion industry is crucial to seeing how such an influential branch can affect and be affected by the cultural standards of what is supposed to look like physically desirable, attractive, and worthy, according to the mainstream views. The *Colour of Beauty*²⁶ is a short documentary that puts a magnifying lens on the racism played out in the fashion industry. Focusing on Renee Thompson, an aspiring Black model in New York, who clearly has the looks, the walk, and the drive, but since she is a Black woman in a world where White women represent the standard of beauty, her success remains stagnant. In fact, fashion agencies rarely hire Black models, unless they are “*the right Black models*” looking “*like white girls dipped in chocolate*”, coherently to the mainstream perspective.

Before entering the heart of this chapter, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’, which are frequently and unwittingly used interchangeably without a proper understanding of the differences. To remain within the fashion world, the CFDA (2019) provides the readers with the following focused definitions of the two key terms: for ‘diversity’, “*the mix, simply a measure of difference*”; for ‘inclusion’, “*a climate in which diverse individuals come together to form a collective whole, enabling and empowering individuals to make contributions consistent with their beliefs and backgrounds*” (*Ibid.*). In other words, embedding inclusion is the key for ensuring a good portion of diversity in a certain setting or sector. In the fashion industry as much as in other sectors, diversity itself is not enough. Yet, without inclusion, diversity is ineffective. These two concepts work together in a way that one does not necessarily exclude the other, in fact they are mutually reinforcing in a constant and powerful dialectic between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ groups of individuals.

24 Hazell, V., & Clarke, J. (2007). ‘Race and Gender in the Media: A Content Analysis of Advertisements in Two Mainstream Black Magazine’, *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 5-21.

25 Givhan, R. (2017, 06 September). *Fashion is finally figuring out diversity - in ways that actually matter*, Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/fashion-is-finally-figuring-out-diversity--in-ways-that-actually-matter/2017/09/06/a16333a6-88f0-11e7-a94f-3139abc39f5_story.html (last consulted on 06/02/2020).

26 St. Philip, E. (2010). *The Colour of Beauty*, NFB, https://www.nfb.ca/film/colour_of_beauty/ (last consulted on 07/02/2020). The documentary is part of the Work For All series, produced by the National Film Board of Canada, with the participation of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Their appropriate integration into one setting or sector result in a more equitable environment for the people operating in it at multiple levels and categories of the same setting/sector. The most evident indicator of the current state of inclusion and diversity in each fashion brand or magazine is visibility: we can see diversity and inclusion on the runways, magazines, and in overall brand coverage. However, visibility is not reliable enough as a factor to determine the amount of diversity and inclusion in the fashion firms. Great efforts in this respect should be made to apply also to the mission statement and core values, as well as to overall business structure, covering from the entry-level staff to the executive leadership of the fashion firms and magazines, including the financiers and business leaders (*Ibid.*).

“*Eyes are on an industry that season after season watches design houses consistently use one or no models of colour. No matter the intention, the result is racism*” (Harrison, 2013)²⁷. This is what Bethann Hardison, a US former fashion model and leading activist for the diversity within the fashion industry²⁸, commented on the New York Fashion Week 2013, in an open letter to the CFDA in which she highly critiqued designers and brands reporting the fact that there was not even a single model of colour parading in the runway shows. As a matter of fact, racial equality as much as diversity are not yet priorities for White high-end fashion houses and editorial market producers considering also that Afro-American professionals working in the sector are still not being treated as such: an example, as aforementioned in the previous chapter, is that of the CFDA itself, where only 12 Black designers out of the 470 total participants have a membership (Adams 2015)²⁹. As commented by the designer Carly Cushnie,

“*It wasn’t until I was nominated for a CFDA Fashion Award in 2013 that I realized I was the first black woman to be nominated in that category. When you think about how many years the CFDA has been around, it just seems insane to look back and realize there are very few people of colour around you in the same industry*” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

But on the other hand,

how can we talk of inclusion if African and Afro-Descendant fashion designers, as much as models, editors, writers, photographers etc., are not receiving the support, credit and coverage they deserve?

27 <http://balancediversity.com/> (last consulted on 04/02/2020).

28 In 1989 she co-founded - together with Iman, and Naomi Campbell - the Black Girls Coalition to celebrate the success of Black women in fashion and calling out designers who had executed acts of racism on the runway.

29 Adams, E. (2015, 12 February). *Examining Fashion’s Absence of African American Designers*, Racked, <http://www.racked.com/2015/2/12/8025297/fashion-diversity> (last consulted on 31/01/2020).

Institutions of higher learning such as the Fashion Institute of Technology, Parsons the New School for Design or even the Pratt Institute have an alarmingly low percentage of student population from the Afro-American community - respectively, 8%, 3.31% and 1.9% (Ellington 2017)? On one side, those schools have not been clearly designed to be accessed and afforded by young aspiring designers from the underrepresented backgrounds in society. Socio-economic conditions of the people coming from minority groups are not being taken into account, then, there is a lack of opportunity for them. On the other side, young Afro-Americans are not choosing the fashion or design path of study because they are not retaining it as an accessible career for them (Friedman 2015), as a result of the lack of representation of their minority group in the sector and the 'racism of aesthetics' dominating in the fashion magazines.

Is perhaps not it a vicious circle?

Without a doubt racism is an ever-present plague in society, but fashion industry also stands out for a “*toxic culture of exclusivity and elitism that intersects with racism*” within its homogenous and inaccessible hierarchy (Segran 2018)³⁰. It is not a well-equipped environment to confront its own racism and that does not definitely facilitate the restoration of a climate of diversity and inclusion. To help the understanding of the problematic of underrepresentation of Black designers in the fashion industry, Ellington (2017) proposes a theoretical framework based on the Critical Race Theory (CRT), a scholarly methodology that has its origins in the United States' legal studies of the early 1970s with the work of Derrick Bell, an African American civil rights lawyer, first person of colour teaching at the Harvard Law School. Grounded in social justice, CRT was widespread to globally become one of the most important perspectives on racism in education, as well as a new approach to cope with the less sympathetic public and the more nuanced forms of racism that were developing at that time (Delgado and Stefancic 1998)³¹. According to the magnifying lens of this interdisciplinary approach, 'race', instead of being biologically grounded as commonly assumed, is a concept coined by the society, and more precisely by Western society, specifically as a means for serving the interests of the same White population that constructed it at several levels and sectors, with the result of generating oppressive situations and setting societal barriers to the progress of many individuals belonging to minority communities, from economic system to labour market, spreading across politics through education, health and research. Recognizing and acknowledging the concept of 'race' as a social construct is the starting point for understanding structural inequalities and discrimination's effects of our time. Moreover, a crucial aspect that CRT brought to light was that race has the dangerous power to 'intersect' with other identities such as gender or class³², inevitably creating divisions

30 Segran, E. (2018, 25 August). *Why racism is so entrenched in the fashion industry*, Fast Company, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90226152/why-racism-is-so-entrenched-in-the-fashion-industry> (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

31 Delgado, R. & Stefancic J. (1998). 'Critical Race Theory: Past, Present, and Future', *Current Legal Problems*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 467–491.

32 This clarification recalls the “intersectionality” theory, which aids in the understanding of how the combination between social and political identities of an individual may cause unique modes of discrimination. It was African American lawyer, civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to develop the theoretical framework of intersectionality as an analytical strategy to examine the discriminatory

as well as laying the foundations for poverty and small-scale to organised criminality in non-dominant groups, whose access to opportunity and power is deprived by that sort of 'institutionalised' racism. This last connection would explain, for instance, the few cases of designers being fully integrated into the fashion world with the fact that they might come from the wealthiest and most powerful social classes or have achieved the celebrity status. Hence, the central idea here is that the key to achieve a healthy equality is to re-establish a new paradigm capable of overturning the current dominating one and promptly responding to the contemporary structural racism.

The framework illustrated in Fig. 8 that Ellington (2017) developed on inspiration of the physics converging lens ray diagram, has the objective of representing the process of deconstruction of the phenomenon, defined as a status of 'normalized oppression', through the lens of the CRT. The starting point is the social constructs, namely race categorizations, which result in oppressive conditions for non-dominant communities hidden behind the excuse of “*liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege*” (97). Thus, social constructs are reflected into an axis point - deconstruction of normalized oppression - through the double convex CRT converging lens. From that axis point, various rays are being radiated indicating 'humanization', 'understanding', 'empathy', 'emancipation' and finally 'equality' as culmination of the entire process.

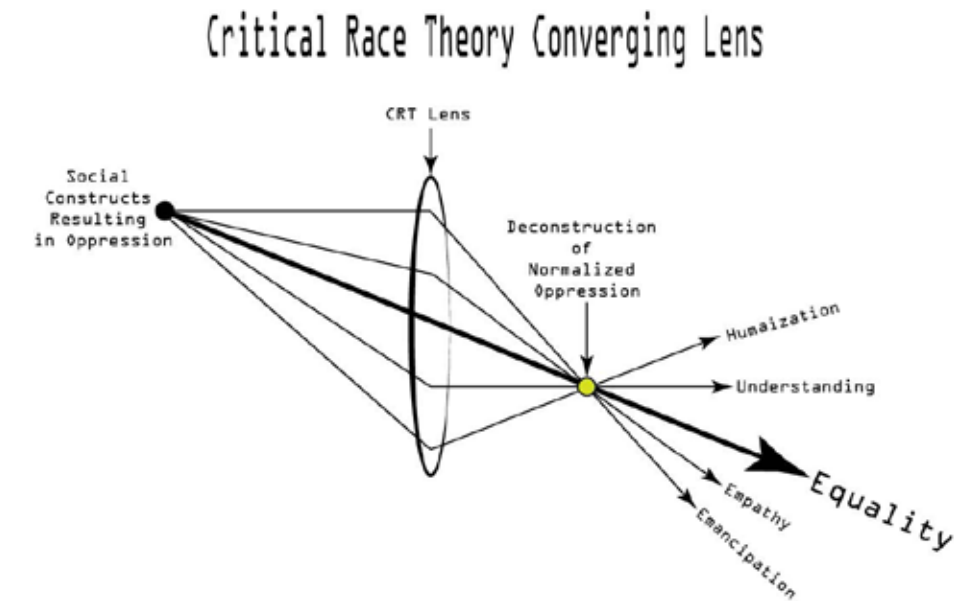


Figure 11. The Critical Race Theory Converging Lens Toward Equality. Source: Ellington (2017, 97).

crossovers in social inequality.

Another crucial question we should ask ourselves at this stage is when the intentions of many fashion firms of including Black designers or models can be deemed good and sincere, and when it is just another attempt to convert it into a profitable business.

And besides, is inclusivity trendy today?

Concerning this aspect, the concept of ‘being the token’ is another example of ‘normalized oppression’ resulting from the CRT framework - “*interest convergence*” - as an insincere attempt to align the oppressed groups with the dominant ones (*ibid.*) as well as displaying a touch of diversity in the sectors or institutions in which they are operating.

But what does it mean to be a ‘token’?

As often happens in television shows and movies, especially in the ones produced in Hollywood, the token is a member of an underrepresented group, in our case an African or Afro-Descendant person, who is operating on behalf of the dominant culture as a means to drive ‘illusive’ messages towards the public by giving him/her the typical roles traditionally taken by Black actors or actresses in cinema - or in general in the media - in order to ‘pretend’ to make great efforts for inclusivity whenever there is a urgency to demonstrate the sharing of privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with an otherwise excluded group (Laws 1975)³³. In cases in which designers get away with barely casting one or two Black models in their fashion shows as a symbolic effort towards inclusivity, therefore, this is tokenism. Another similar way is the tokenization of biracial models as almost an attempt to ‘lump’ a diverse audience into one category, with the assumption of the brand that Black girls could identify themselves with these models in the same way that biracial girls could, which is implausible. On the contrary, there is a high risk that they could feel invisible and unrepresented.

Thus, tokenism can be defined as a new form of racism that affects the media of the contemporary age, and not only that. In fact, industry producers do not want to appear racists nor being accused of discrimination. Although the status of token allows the person or small group of people to advance in their career, being acknowledged, in other words, getting the unique opportunity that many others from the same minority group will not probably have, it also leads to the dominant population to believe that they have ‘filled their diversity quota’ (*ibid.*). Tokenism’s actions may result in social consequences for the other people of the same minority group as the token; in this way, tokens are inevitably relegated to a perpetual

33 Laws, J. L. (1975). ‘The Psychology of Tokenism: An Analysis’, *Sex Roles*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 51–67.

status of “*symbols rather than individuals*” (Kanter 1977, 966)³⁴. Likewise, Ellington (2017) shows, through a qualitative content analysis, how in the 2000 issues of *Vogue*, e.g., the role of being the token was assumed by Black designer Lawrence Steele “*being featured with the same legitimacy as all other designers*” (105), with a full page write-up and an editorial shoot with his garments. Greater credit compared to that received by his female counterpart jewellery designer Monique Péon, who was *Harper’s Bazaar’s* 2012 token Black designer. Undoubtedly, an entire page photograph of her work shown was dedicated to her in the magazine. However, Péon’s features were usually small, 1/8 or 1/4 page in size (*ibid.*), as evidence of the intersectionality’s dynamics prevailing in this case of tokenism: in fact, being a Black woman designer resulted in greater discrimination.



Figure 12. Campbell’s “Africa Inspired” in Harper’s Bazaar (2009). Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/c8/ba/65/c8ba65989767572a683d7abc8382bc15.jpg>

34 Kanter, R. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York, United States of America: Basic Books.

“Orientalism” or “exoticism” is another veiled racist discourse³⁵ by which Western society historically constructs the identity of the ‘Other’ from the far East as a cultural contrast to establish and maintain its own superiority and ‘hegemony’ over non-White populations, as usually happens with stereotype and its most dangerous consequence, prejudice. These representations, even if apparently celebrative of the ‘Other’ culture and not-negative, however, upon further investigation, result to be latently racist (Said 1979)³⁶. High-end fashion industry producers make use of this practice to ‘sell’ the image that they want to society in a misleading way for most people. In fact, through this social process many Black models who are not an integral part of the industry because of their distance from the White beauty standard, suddenly become a fundamental means to spread the message hidden behind a seemingly admiration for their identity and culture to the extent that they are exploited by the industry for it. Thus, they are “posed and styled in exotic juxtapositions to the normative white body”, presented as creatures more so than women to serve the “White gaze” or the “West’s cultural fascination with non-Western women’s bodies” (Mears 2011, 174-175)³⁷, with the result of giving effect to stereotypical depictions of the other cultures, as specifically in our case, of the African or African-American cultures. Those images do nothing but solidifying existing “racial attitudes linking black people with ‘savages’ from the ‘bush’” (Wissinger 2015, 229)³⁸ and contributing to maintaining the Western hegemonic power over many discourses that govern our social lives, relationships and understandings. Yet another example of ‘normalized oppression’ achieved by maintaining complete control over the image of the Black female as a deviant, hypersexual, and otherworldly creature to be observed and flattered, as well as by providing ideological justification for racist, sexist, and classist attitudes. The ‘Other’ is fantastical and exotic, but dangerous at the same time, which creates division and distance between the two cultures as well as increasing negative feelings such as fear. A good example in this respect from the editorial luxury fashion sector is a set of photos - “Wild things” - published by Harper’s Bazaar in September 2009 that illustrate Black supermodel Naomi Campbell, photographed by Jean-Paul Goude, while donning leopard and zebra print in four cliché African contexts: in one picture, she runs alongside a cheetah, while in the other ones she sits over a crocodile, plays jump rope with two monkeys and rides an elephant. Both tokenism and orientalism, as well as stereotypical representations and cultural appropriation, seriously affect identities and other aspects of individuals in the society.

35 A way of analyzing how individuals understand themselves in their culture and shape perceptions about a particular group, culture or society (Hall, S. (2013). *Representation - Cultural representation and signifying practices*, London: Sage Publications Ltd).

36 Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York, United States of America: Vintage.

37 Mears, A. (2011). *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Berkeley, United States of America: University of California Press.

38 Wissinger, E. A. (2015). *This Year’s Model: Fashion, Media, and the Making of Glamour*. New York, United States of America: New York University Press.



Figure 13. Campbell’s “Africa Inspired” in Harper’s Bazaar (2009). Source: <https://www.fashiongonerogue.com/wp-content/uploads/igr/photos/2009/aug/naomi2.jpg>

Figure 14. Campbell’s “Africa Inspired” in Harper’s Bazaar (2009). Source: <https://pleasurephoto.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/naomi-campbell-by-jean-paul-goude-2009.jpg>

Figure 15. Campbell’s “Africa Inspired” in Harper’s Bazaar (2009). Source: <https://michaelsxavier Sanchez.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/bazaarsept2009naomisecretista-com1.jpg?w=629>

Stereotypical representations, as generalized perceptions and other similar discourses are dangerous, to the extent that once they go beyond the mediatic and virtual borders, they affect reality and real people's lives. Luckily, in recent years, the number of people of colour appears to be increasing in the model line-ups of New York, Paris, London or Milan Fashion Week shows. In this regard, 2017 seems to show the first timid signs of a turnaround for fashion brands and media industry's long road to go in terms of inclusivity. Among the enduring criticism received for not being inclusive enough, repeatedly and often retracing negative outdated stereotypical depictions, indeed, the fashion industry was praised for a wave of consciously embracing diversity on the runways, being more open and inclusive than ever happened before, according to what has been declared in one of *The Fashion Spot's* diversity reports following Fashion Month (2018) and in the *Washington Post* (2017): "Last season, for the first time ever, every New York Fashion Week presentation on our roster featured at least one model of colour, giving us reason to hope. Close examination of this season's ad campaigns has left us feeling even more optimistic"³⁹. According to other sources, in the same year the number of non-White models at New York Fashion Week doubled as against the previous season, with the overall percentage of non-White models even landing at 36.9 percent (Eckardt 2017)⁴⁰. It is important to emphasize here that the definition of diversity has also changed over the last few years, from simply referring to race/ethnicity, to now including several other areas, such as age, body size, abilities, gender and sexual orientations, making way for distinctiveness on the runways. In particular, the 2017 New York Fashion Week was recorded as the most diverse of any show during the Spring/Summer season, with "the best castings - most diverse, most beautiful, and most relevant - of any city, period" (Singer 2017)⁴¹.

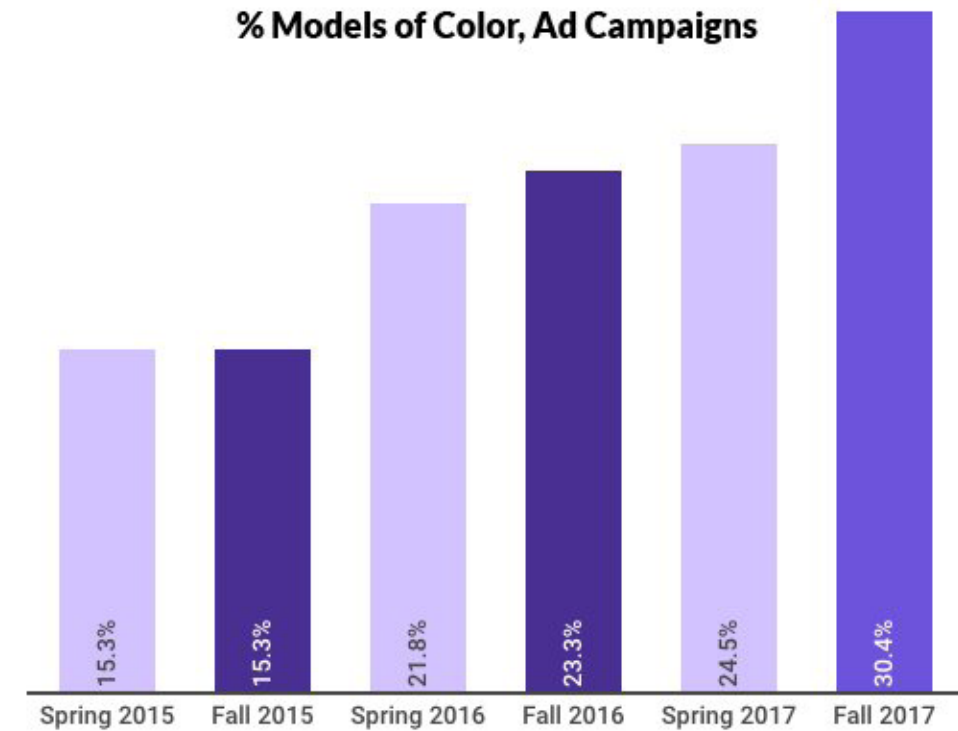


Figure 16. For the first time ever, the number of non-White models cast exceeded 30 percent. Source: <https://cdn2-www.thefashionspot.com/assets/uploads/2017/08/MOC-ad-campaigns-fall-2017.jpg>

³⁹ <https://www.thefashionspot.com/runway-news/762095-diversity-report-fall-2017-ad-campaigns/> (last consulted on 04/02/2020).

⁴⁰ Eckardt, S. (2017, 22 September). *This New York Fashion Week was likely the most diverse ever*, W Magazine, <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/new-york-fashion-week-spring-2018-models-diversity> (last consulted on 06/02/2020).

⁴¹ Singer, S. (2017, 14 September). *Runway diversity (at last!) and the rise of the new guard were the big stories at New York Fashion Week*, Vogue, <https://www.vogue.com/article/new-york-fashion-week-spring-2018-runway-diversity-rising-guard> (last consulted on 06/02/2020).

But what is this sudden change in diversity due to?

In the Autumn/Winter 2016 season, as a tribute to Ugandan princess, Elizabeth of Toro, the mainstream fashion designer Zac Posen, wearing the “*BLACK MODELS MATTER*” stamped in stylized white letters on a large leather bag, featured 40 Black models and two Asian models on the runway of 47 looks, meaning his show was 89% non-White. “*It’s crucial that the new generations see diversity not as an issue, but as an asset - said Posen at the Black in Retail Action Group Gala in October 2015 - “I will continue to battle this on the runway and the red carpet, and for the rest of my life”*⁴². It is possible that, as claimed by Posen, people - so not exclusively fashion leaders - are gradually believing in diversity not as the end goal or something to pursue in order to receive a mere approval from the public, but an added value to distinguish themselves and strive for excellence while being more inclusive and just, and as a final result, more effective to better face the competitiveness of the globalized world. In other words, a diverse team means a better company and better solutions to the problems. In fact, diversity does not exclusively refer to race, ethnicity, gender and class. Diversity means, above all, diverse abilities, cultural backgrounds, experiences, as well as increased productivity and innovation.

⁴² <https://splinternews.com/this-awesome-fashion-week-show-featured-over-40-models-1793854772> (last consulted on 07/02/2020).



Figure 17. The newer brand Yeezy’s runway show during New York Fashion Week in 2017. Source: https://fashionista.com/image/limit%2Ccs_srgb%2Cq_auto:good%2Cw_1240/MTQ0NzQyNjc0MjA3ODc2MTQy/gettyimages-600963654.webp

Although racial diversity in runway models has increased in the last few years, many designers still choose to display a majority White model casting in their fashion shows and campaigns. In any case, there is a good chance that all this may be related to the dearth of a substantial number of Black designers in the same sector. In fact, while there has been a major push to put more Black models on the runway lately or at least it has been discussed at length, the inclusion of African and Afro-American designers in the arena of high fashion has been overlooked. Brown (2000)⁴³ states,

“Racism [...] keeps Black designers from making the cut. When you pick up Vogue, Elle, or Bazaar, they’re always citing the designers to watch but they’re never Black [...] The high-end market does not embrace talent from African Americans because people associate a certain lifestyle with the garments they purchase, and Black designers aren’t considered status symbols by the population at large” (83).

Black design entrepreneurs or aspiring find difficult to make a name for themselves in this sector because of several factors. Especially Black female designers, for which the combination of racial and gender barriers - such as the ‘glass-ceiling’⁴⁴ phenomenon affecting women in general and minorities around the world - makes things a lot more complicated. No matter

“[Black women] are some of the most stylish women on the planet [...] when it comes to creating the clothes that make the look, only a handful of [Black] designers ever rise to international stardom” (Givhan, 2011, 196)⁴⁵.

Additionally, their contribution in the fashion industry has been scarcely researched and reported, at least so far. In his dissertation work Kennedy Benson (2017)⁴⁶ conducts a qualitative study to explore the challenges faced by Black female design entrepreneurs in the field of luxury fashion and more specifically to understand their experiences by examining how they launched, financed and successfully maintained their businesses. As described in his work, the low numbers of successful Black designers can be attributed to the scarceness of arts and design education in public schools, an absence of support from family in so far as fashion design is often not regarded as a practical career within the Black community, as well as a consequent lack of socio-economic capital (Friedman 2015). Those factors, together with the fact that, as aforementioned, there is no real social and financial support - such as educational scholarships, financial incentives, easy access to funding, interest-free-loans, support networks and mentorship, and other subsidies made to measure for that

43 Brown, M. R. (2000, July). *Employed by design*, Black Enterprise’s Special Report.

44 ‘Glass-ceiling’ means an intangible barrier to the career advancement of especially women or people from minorities within a hierarchy, in terms of obtaining both upper-level positions and a higher salary than a man, on equal terms.

45 Givhan, R. (September 2011). ‘Where is our Valentino?’, *Essence*, Vol. 42, Issue 5, p. 196.

46 Kennedy Benson, S. L., (2017). *Black fashion designers matter: A qualitative study exploring the experiences of Black female fashion design entrepreneurs*, Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 16154, <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/16154> (last consulted on 10/02/2020)

specific minority, without forgetting that most do not live in conditions of wealth - from the responsible authorities to ease the situation, do nothing but diminishing the real chance for Black aspiring designers to pursue careers in the fashion sector. Realizing the samples for a small collection can cost upward of \$50,000, excluding the expenses associated with mounting a runway show at the New York Fashion Week, related funding production, promotion brand and operating fees, which can reach an amount of \$70 to 100,000 for newcomers⁴⁷ (Brown 2000; Holson 2010⁴⁸). Most young Black designers do not even have the option of going to an expensive fashion design school. The popular and financially successful Tracy Reese, board member of the CFDA, together with the Afro-Caribbean designer Carly Cushnie and her business partner Michelle Ochs - Canadian and half Filipino - are the only Black female high-end designers owning and co-owning successful fashion brands that took part to the New York Fashion Week Spring 2015 (Friedman 2015). Outside of the context of New York Fashion Week, there are other promising names including Azède Jean-Pierre and Madison Mazey, both of which were acknowledged on *Forbes’* renowned *30 under 30* list and Project Runway alums Kara Saun, Korto Momolu, Samantha Black, Kimberly Goldson and Kahindo Mateene (Wilson 2016)⁴⁹.

After noticing the lack of representation of Black designers in the fashion industry, Brandice Henderson-Daniel created Harlem’s Fashion Row (HFR), which has been recognized as “*the most prestigious platform for multicultural fashion designers*”, being a cornerstone of the New York Fashion Week in so far as essential in providing an outlet for emerging designers of colour to showcase their collections and promote their brand (Johnson 2015; Tate 2017)⁵⁰. Today fashion industry counts a few noteworthy names that have brought some improvements towards the goal of diversity: Virgil Abloh, a US fashion designer, entrepreneur, artist, and DJ, has been the first artistic director of Louis Vuitton’s men’s wear collection since March 2018; Elaine Welteroth, a US journalist, editor and *New York Times* best-selling author, in April 2016, was named editor-in-chief of *Teen Vogue*, making her the second person of African-American heritage in Condé Nast’s 107-year history to hold such a title; Dapper Dan, who has been a fashion icon in Harlem for years, is finally being recognized in luxury fashion as a result of his joint venture with Gucci (Wiley 2018)⁵¹; the Ghanaian Edward Enniful became the first black editor-in-chief of British *Vogue*; Tyler Mitchell, a US photographer and filmmaker, became the first black photographer to shoot the cover of *Vogue* (Segran 2018).

47 This sum of money would include space rental, set design, models and stylists’ salaries, and other logistics expenses.

48 Holson, L. M. (2010, 08 September). *A fashion week debut, seven weeks in the making*, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/09/fashion/09pean.html?r=1> (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

49 Wilson, J. (2016, 05 January). *Why it’s important that two black fashion designers made Forbes’ 30 under 30 list*, *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-fashion-designers-forbes-30-under-30_us_568bdb21e4b014efe0db9e9c (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

50 Johnson, N. (2015, 16 September). *Harlem’s fashion row honors emerging designers of color*, *NBC News*, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/harlems-fashion-row-kicks-new-york-fashion-week-n426171> (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

Tate, C. (2017, 07 September). *Harlem’s fashion row shines light on black designers at New York fashion week*, *Essence*, <https://www.essence.com/fashion/harlems-fashion-row-10-year-anniversary-show> (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

51 Wiley, K. N. (2018, 15 June). *Think Tank: Diversity and Inclusion in Fashion - It’s Time to Pick up the Pace*, *WWD*, <https://wwd.com/business-news/business-features/kenya-wiley-think-tank-1202711050/> (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

So, in light of this, is it possible to think of a long-term meaningful change in this sense in the immediate future? What more can be done to speed up the process of inclusion of Black workforce in the fashion industry?

1.3. 'BLACK DESIGNERS MATTER': HOW TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY FOR AN ETHICAL FASHION INDUSTRY

Despite the good examples of inclusivity previously made, as a matter of fact, African and Afro-American people are still facing many challenges in order to access to the fashion industry. Recently the *New York Magazine* published voices and stories of more than a hundred Black people working in the sector, from stylists to models to designers to editors, that declared their discontent towards the marginalization and “accidental” racism with which they have been daily rewarded in return for their contributions to the industry (*Ibid.*). To this end, Kenya Hunt, Deputy Director at Elle UK, declared as follows:

“I’ve experienced the fashion industry on both sides of the Atlantic. I’ve had to create my own community. It’s painfully obvious when you go to shows and events and see how few people of colour are in prominent spaces. So, while the industry here has made great progress on the runway with models, behind the scenes is still incredibly homogeneous. When at dinners, or while having idle chitchat before a show, it can feel quite isolating depending on the conversation, cultural reference points, and unconscious biases” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

If the fashion industry intends to make progress in terms of inclusion and diversity, additional and multi-faceted actions will be required compared to those already in place. The very first action-step to be put into practice towards the goal of inclusivity, even if it has been often taken for granted, is to select racially diverse models, designers and brand executives that can create a more accepting, open and inspiring environment for women and men of colour that work or hope to work in the sector. It might sound obvious, but it is often the hardest part to concretise. However, the selection should not be limited to affluent Black young aspiring designers. Clearly, this would not be fair either. And yet, that is what usually happens, considering that most of the successful people of African and Afro-American origins in the sector are those who had the

chance to dedicate most of their time and energy to highlighting their profiles and pursuing their dreams, also thanks to a proper power network support and financial backup. Another reality, for example, is the fact that, until very recently and even now in some cases, most interns and *stagiaires* or entry-level employees at fashion houses, companies and magazines, respectively, did not get remunerated or get paid too little, as a consequence of their managers’ assumption that they do not really need an income to survive (*Ibid.*). Therefore, it follows that the only people who can afford to take these internships or jobs, especially in expensive cities like New York, London or Los Angeles, come from a wealthy background.

To move closer to the goal of inclusivity, thus, it should be created a system through which start-ups, enterprise fashion firms and brands can connect with Black talented aspiring designers belonging to a variety of different social, financial and cultural backgrounds. As aforementioned above, this necessarily requires a strong mechanism to provide these people with more concrete opportunities to support them from the very beginning of their career or even before and after entering the fashion industry. According to stylist Law Roach’s personal experience,

“The manager goes to the publicist to ask for suggestions. And the publicist hires the same people, over and over. The studios call the same publicists, and they call the same stylists, and that’s why there aren’t any opportunities for other people. New talent is just passed up. I think that the work should speak for itself, right? It just perpetuates this idea that only certain people can help your career, and it’s not inclusive” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

This also applies with regard to the new designers that wish to establish their own business. For them, there is no clear path to starting and maintaining a brand. Once again, success in fashion is often “*synonymous with access and money, or access to money, so designing is closed off to those that do not have the capital*” (Yacob 2018)⁵². And of course, there is no success without proper access to business networking opportunities.

Although awareness around diversity and inclusion in the fashion industry have increased in the last few years, when it comes to appoint more people of colour in decision-making roles and high positions of power, there is still a long way to go. For fashion, retail and luxury brands, that means the position of artistic director, creative director or chief digital or innovation officer. In this sense, it would be more effective to place and mentor talents of colour in solid internship programmes as well as entry-level positions in order to let them grow professionally, and eventually have enough chances to shine as directors, vice-presidents or CEOs. In this case, delivering specific leadership skillset trainings as well as peer-to-peer mentorship is fundamental. Internships in particular should be planned and organized with special focus on assigning

⁵² Yacob, P. (2018, 01 December). *Black Fashion Designers Weave Identity and Diversity into Their Pieces. For these designers, representation in fashion isn’t a trend, but rather a best practice*, Vice, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/pa5zmg/black-fashion-designers-weave-identity-and-diversity-into-their-pieces (last consulted on 08/02/2020).

interns challenging work assignments and extending invitations to exclusive company or industry gatherings (Wiley 2018).

Interventions to ensure diversity should not be confined to the mere selection and feature of more Black professionals, including designers, photographers, editors and models in fashion shows and magazine covers though. First and foremost, it is important to work on the racist dynamics rooted in the fashion system, not always explicit and visible, as well as addressing the structural factors that caused the devaluation, omission and appropriation of Black culture and style over the years. According to the fashion designer Aurora James:

“Fashion has a bad habit of making very surface-level changes. It’s not just about adding more black models. People don’t think about the factory workers who are, honestly, almost always people of colour. How meaningful would it be to make something beautiful that is also empowering?” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

Segran (2018) brings up as exemplary the aforementioned case of Gucci’s partnership with Dapper Dan, which demonstrates how the brand has recently opened its door to more Black voices, taking its responsibilities for “*the deep-seated history of racism under the surface*”. In the 1990s, during which luxury brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton were at the height of fashion more than ever, people from Harlem did not feel very represented by their clothes and accessories, very far from their aesthetics and style, despite the positive appreciation for the labels. Dapper Dan, a New Yorker Afro-American tailor had the idea to create hip streetwear-like bomber jackets and track suits-plastered with bootleg logos from these brands. His creations started to be worn by Black celebrities of that time, including boxers and hip-hop artists. Gucci and other high-end companies were furious and worried not primarily for the possibility of losing revenue, but mostly for the simple fact that they did not want to be associated with the Black community in general. Gucci eventually sued Dapper Dan for copyright violation, forcing him to lose his business activity. However, a few years later, the clothes launched by Dapper Dan became mainstream and many luxury fashion houses winded up with replicating similar garments recalling Black style. Thus, Gucci’s creative director Alessandro Michele did the same by recently launching a close reproduction of Dapper Dan’s clothing line, to everyone’s general surprise, and announcing a brand-new partnership with him in order to help him re-establish his *atelier* in Harlem and featuring him in marketing campaigns.



Figure 18. Dapper Dan, 1982. Source: <https://pixel.nymag.com/imgs/fashion/daily/2018/08/17/magazine/black-in-fashion/dapper-dan/dapper-dan.nocrop.w710.h2147483647.jpg>

Although ambitious, another step towards a real inclusivity is the course in fashion and race led by Kimberly Jenkins for the next generation of designers at Parsons School of Design in order to give way to a cultural awakening and awareness process in the brands that these students go on to launch or work for. Hence, the right attitude to create more concrete opportunities of inclusivity and diversity in the fashion industry or, at least, fostering the possibility of talking about it is described by Celeste Scott as follows:

“It is also important that instead of becoming defensive when called out about lack of inclusivity in a certain area, that brands remain open and attentive to what their audiences have to say. Humility is perhaps the most important virtue when it comes to conversations surrounding inclusivity and representation in the fashion industry”⁵³.

Of course, an aspect that should not be overlooked is a concrete adaptation of the fashion industry’s personnel towards an upgrade of their skills and abilities specifically related to Black culture and aesthetics, as a result of an effective participation and integration of more and more Black people into the sector’s workforce. Just to provide an example, the model Anok Yai admitted that:

“My biggest frustration in the industry is the lack of hairstylists that know how to care for black hair. Within seven months I’ve lost ten inches of my hair. And if I could change one thing instantly, it would be that hairstylists would be required to know how to do black hair. I’m tired of seeing my hair on the floor after each job” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

However, it is not exclusively about hairstyle and aesthetics’ awareness, but what is crucial in this respect is the knowledge of the cultural meanings and functions related to African or Afro-American traditions, practices, and objects. As the designer Recho Omondi stated:

“It’s not about blackness, it’s about context and storytelling, and understanding who we are, where we come from and how broad the diaspora is. Ad campaigns featuring black people sometimes miss the mark because they truly do not understand the foundation. If you don’t know that putting a black child in a sweatshirt that says, ‘Coolest Monkey in the Jungle’ is triggering, then you are still losing, no matter how inclusive you’re trying to be” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

⁵³ Scott, C. *What real inclusivity should look like in the ethical fashion industry*, The Good Trade, <https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/diversity-inclusion-in-the-fashion-industry> (last consulted on 11/02/2020).

Hence, if fashion firms have diversity and awareness in their staff, they will probably have it also in their products’ design. It would be like having a “jury” to approve a new product every time, whether a dress or an accessory, before launching it in the runways or directly in the market. Regular reflections on what fashion industry is designing and producing, why and for who, in the same way as measuring the impact of the products on diverse populations and users through human-centred design methodologies, result in “lessons learned” for the present and the future, and can help make sure to cover different categories of people and needs, and primarily to not offend anyone. Each member of the staff of big and small fashion houses should benefit from individual-level programs such as inclusion training, as well as from organizational-level efforts focused on an organization’s policies, practices and values.

According to the CFDA (2019), another crucial step towards a full experience of diversity in the fashion sector is to identify issues and challenges, as well as addressing needs “*to convert awareness into action*” (*Ibid.*) at multiple levels of the fashion industry’s structure (from visibility to business, etc. as aforementioned). In general, one of the main obstacles to a full inclusion of African or African-Descendant people into the fashion industry’s workforce is the absence of their influence’s power in the same sector. In fact, people who are at the top of fashion’s elite, namely influencers, have the power to globally condition the way people consume fashion aesthetically and commercially. Unless Black women and men are in the position of accessing that fashion’s elite, there will not be equality. Hence, there is a structural problem in our society and CRT is again the key approach to draw on. It is in fact true that “*exclusion does not just manifest on the runways. It sits at our fingertips as we flip through fashion bibles, publications meant to validate fashion as a respected means of expression*” (Newman 2017, 3)⁵⁴. Active participation is a core value and strategy in this respect, from the stage of identification of the needs of the users to the co-design of outcomes. This aspect and others interconnected will be further addressed in the next chapters.

⁵⁴ Newman, S. L. (2017). *Black Models Matter: Challenging the Racism of Aesthetics and the Facade of Inclusion in the Fashion Industry*, CUNY Academic Works.

2. ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND AESTHETICS

The origins of Afro-American⁵⁵ cultural, aesthetical and artistic dimensions are to be found in their inheritance from the entire African culture and style, and more precisely by going through the history of the enslavement of Africans and the African diasporas in the Americas. Besides being essential for the understanding of the identity of the Black communities residing in the American continent, this aspect - sadly often overlooked - is also the most effective and convenient starting point to go deep into the main reasons underlying the evolution process of the same cultural and artistic heritage in the Americas over the centuries. However, tracing the diverse historical and cultural backgrounds of African diasporas may not be exhaustive of all the emotions, experiences and narratives - of abuses and resistance - that gave rise to that unique style, but at least it allows us to get close to a more empathic approach of analysis. Before moving forward, what is valuable to bear in mind is the use of the plural in words such as “communities”, “dimensions”, “backgrounds”, “diasporas”, “cultures”, “styles”, “stories” etc. referring to the Black cultural and artistic heritage in what follows, which is anything but casual. It is symbolic of the presence of multiple Black experiences, narratives and memories, intercepted not only by geographical area or country, but also gender, generation, class, capital and other factors, and correspondingly extensive aesthetics underpinning varied cultural expressions.

2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND POPULAR CULTURE

The term African diasporas may sound new to most, given that it has not been explored that much over the years. It refers to the worldwide multitude of communities, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality, descended from native sub-Saharan Africans - mostly from Western and Central Africans - who were enslaved and deported to the American continent in the context of the Transatlantic slave trade occurred between the 16th and 19th centuries, and predominantly living outside the African continent, namely in the Americas, across the Caribbean - especially Haiti and Cuba - as well as South and North America - in Brazil more than in any other country, but also in Colombia, in the United States, and so

⁵⁵ The term ‘Afro-American’ does not have to be misunderstood here. It refers not exclusively to Black communities coming from the United States, but to all African descendant people that inhabit the whole American continent from North to South, as it should be also intended in everyday language.



on⁵⁶. On the other hand, by 'Afro-American diasporas' are popularly - and perhaps incorrectly⁵⁸ - meant communities of Black people present only in the United States, whose ancestors were enslaved and shipped to the United States or the prior British colonies, along the east coast of North America. Moreover, considering Britain's participation in the transatlantic slave trade, populations of African origin have also existed in the country since at least the 16th century or even before, as slaves or workers employed in a variety of occupations. A significant number also had a key part in the abolition movement of the 18th century. Additionally, many free African men served the armed forces as military musicians as well as soldiers and sailors, playing an important - but often unacknowledged - role during the First and Second World War, even giving their lives or enduring long periods of incarceration as prisoners of war. Indeed, especially African American troops also had to face discriminatory treatments and deep-seated racist abuses and attacks that were prevalent not only in the US army, but also in the country of United States itself once back home from the war, as attested in the 2017 historical drama film *Mudbound*⁵⁹ based on the novel of the same name by Hillary Jordan. Thus, the African diasporas have contributed in a significant manner to the economic development of most of the countries of destination, as well as to social, cultural and political innovations of global significance⁶⁰.



Figure 20. Captives being brought on board a slave ship on the West Coast of Africa, c1880.

Source: [https://www.thoughtco.com/thumb/9EbrJD-KsbpAxNmJxoWDgoN2Cvw=/1333x1000/smart/filters:no_upscale\(\)/SlaveTrade-58d199915f9b581d72a541e9.jpg](https://www.thoughtco.com/thumb/9EbrJD-KsbpAxNmJxoWDgoN2Cvw=/1333x1000/smart/filters:no_upscale()/SlaveTrade-58d199915f9b581d72a541e9.jpg)

56 Ade Ajayi, J. F (1998). *General History of Africa. IV Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*, UNESCO International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Abridged Edition, Paris.

57 The focus has lately shifted to Africa's multifaceted presence and influence on other regions and countries of the world apart from the American continent, comprising the Middle East and Asia, as well as Britain and its former colonies such as India, subsequently at people's mass deportations, trafficking, displacements, postcolonial migrations etc. (*Ibid.*).

58 Considering that America is officially not a single country, but the whole continent.

59 Rees (2017). *Mudbound*. United States: Elevated Films, Joule Films.

60 http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=314_diaspora&catid=125_themes&Itemid=226.html (last consulted on 22/02/2020).

Communities residing in Africa and its diasporas have been generally considered as distinct groups, separated by oceans and distant from each other light-years, under the assumption that they have had only sporadic contact during brief historical moments. However, there is the need of breaking this binary and being detached from the reductive vision of Africa and African diasporic communities as two divided entities, in order to explain the dimensions of the second cultures in the light of the first one. For instance, the legacy of the transatlantic slavery, especially racism and colonialism, which have caused so much pain, problems and disadvantages to African and African-Descendant communities, represent one of the many shared factors that contributed to the emergence of Pan-Africanism, "a movement and body of ideas that sought to unite the same people, link them to Africa and attempt to organise and protest against racism and colonial rule" (*Ibid.*). In recent years, the African Union (AU) - the African intergovernmental organisation - has officially recognised the African diasporas as an integral component of the African continent and has invited all those of African descent to contribute to Africa's development (*Ibid.*).

But what was/is the role of Africa and the idea of original homelands in general in influencing the creation of interconnected and interacting identities and resulting cultural production of the diasporic communities scattered around the world?

Understanding and reinterpreting the real connections between Africa and African diasporas on many levels, including language, knowledge, know-how and - of course - cultural/artistic production - and the related materials - is extremely important at this stage. This kind of awareness becomes crucial when it comes to design a manufacture that we wish to recall - explicitly or implicitly - the Afro-American styles through an authentic, innovative and, above all, not colonialist perspective. In this respect, Afro-American cultures and styles can be read as an evolution of the African cultural and aesthetical heritage, as well as anthropology and philosophy, which adapted itself to - and intersected with - the peculiarities of the different contexts of arrival, according to a mechanism of mutual exchange and learning. In his documentary, *Dream to Change the World - A Tribute to John La Rose* (2003)⁶¹, Horace Ové chronicles the life of the political and cultural activist, publisher, poet, and writer John La Rose, by drawing inspiration from the multicultural history of his country⁶² of origin, Trinidad and Tobago, and its diaspora. Through music and the arts of carnival, steelpan and calypso La Rose leads the viewer through the intrinsic connections and dialogues between art, culture and social transformation. The true heart of the motion picture is the fact that when African-Caribbean people travel back and forth across the continents they become "cultural bearers, bringing the creolized vernacular cultures of the Caribbean" with themselves (Chęcinska 2018,

61 Ové (2003). *Dream to Change the World - A Tribute to John La Rose*. United Kingdom: African and Asian Visual Artists' Archive.

62 Trinidad and Tobago is the native country for both, Ové and La Rose.

119)⁶³. In the same way as anticipated before, in her article *Aesthetics of Blackness? Cloth, Culture, and the African Diasporas*, Christine Checinska asserts that the textile objects, images, and texts of African diasporic communities might be seen as “making visible Paul Gilroy’s black Atlantic concept [...] which seeks to transcend cultural nationalism, foregrounding instead connection and exchange without forfeiting the acknowledgement of nuanced differences” (*Ibid.*). Hence, African diasporas share many similarities or reflections, as descendants of the same ‘family branch’, so to say, although deep differences emerging from differing coordinates and experiences are undeniable. In this sense, the Caribbean itself⁶⁴, as the other regions or countries in which the percentages of African-descendant people are significant, might be deemed to represent connecting elements between African diasporas and the old homeland - Africa, through the exhibition of historical narratives and self-representations in the form of everyday clothing, accessories, and objects on the body, in the house or in other spaces like galleries. In this way, the story of an object, a house or a cloth is also “the story of relationship, of intimacy, of remembering and re-memorying” (120).

Likewise, the central idea here is that all those creative forms of expression from everyday life that have given rise to new varied types of music, songs, dances, as well as theatrical and poetical traditions, are also the result of an interweaving of disparate historical experiences in different geographical coordinates of the world. Thus, African and African diasporas have endured regular massive, cataclysmic events that have led to transformative changes over the past four centuries, which have shaped in turn diverse identities and traditions, expressed through spontaneous modes of self-representation as ways of reaction and resistance. This means that all these popular cultural forms of expression have not been generated only by those socio-historical transformative changes, but have also actively participated in their unfolding, embodied and commented upon it. They have changed in turn depending on the different times, events and perspectives. Popular culture thus becomes a means to give voice to the unrecorded views of the people excluded from power and privilege, while re-evoking historical memories and a consciousness of continuity with the past:

“We see seventeenth-century commoners in Gold Coast city-states satirising their exploitative overlords, whose power had been fuelled by the Atlantic slave trade; [...] Sotho migrant labourers on the journey to the South African mines creating a new poetic genre to describe their experiences of travelling and arriving at the fearsome mine compounds; Congolese artists after independence painting ‘reminders’ of Belgian colonial rule and images of fortune-bearing mermaids for the sitting rooms of aspiring urbanites; Tanzanian rappers seeking to reach new continental and diasporic Internet audiences for their Swahili compositions in the era

⁶³ Checinska, C. (2018). *Aesthetics of Blackness? Cloth, Culture, and the African Diasporas*. TEXTILE, vol. 16, issue n. 2, pp. 118-125, DOI: 10.1080/14759756.2017.1408938

⁶⁴ In this case, the Afro-Caribbean cultural and artistic heritage might be extended to all the African-Descendant populations residing along the Caribbean coast and, more generally, to all the African diasporas arrived in South America via Caribbean Sea. In this connection, it is plausible to assume that also part of the Afro-Colombian communities living in Cartagena, Barranquilla and other Caribbean cities of Colombia might be included in this consideration.

after structural adjustment; and, everywhere in Africa, people using mobile phones to document events on the ground, share music, promote activist agendas, make money transfers and imagine alternative worlds” (Barber 2018)⁶⁵.

However, the challenges in identifying all those popular cultural elements and studying their evolution with the purpose of drawing the pillars of the African diasporas’ cultural relationships, are mostly dictated by the scarcity of official well-documented material, which did not come to light until very recently. Moreover, the immense variations in historical happenings from one continent or region to another have made the retrieval even more difficult (*Ibid.*).

So, are the past and the present of African diasporas an indivisible continuum?

2.2. IDENTITIES, VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS AND CREATIVITY OVER YEARS

The formation or development of Black identities and behaviours all over the world, as well as its evolution and negotiation over the years, have been unfortunately influenced by the construction and dissemination of an indefinite number of harmful prejudices, mostly dictated by ethnic-racial considerations and categorization. African diasporas have been often catalogued through those stereotypical representations that have resulted not only in great disparities in wealth, income, employment, education, and health care, but also in insurmountable obstacles to the full development and spread of their real sociocultural identities. An example is the use of photography’s indicial value for the identification and classification of the races in Cuba. The images of “judicial photography”, obtained from the review of some works belonging to the Cuban anthropology, were used and evaluated as evidences of the theory of ‘atavism’ and the African presence in the island, starting from Western stereotypes applied to the aesthetics of the so called *negros brujos*. Thus, anthropologists, physicians and lawyers appropriated of those photographs to claim their pseudo-scientific beliefs on the “Negro” race by searching, in the portraits of Afro-Cubans, for the recurrence of a series of physical characters that were believed to identify cultural and social practices associated with these traits. The objective was to transform some aesthetical values of the subjects portrayed into visual stereotypes of criminals in order to control the mimetic effects generated by the photographic image. In this way,

⁶⁵ Barber, K. (2018). *A History of African Popular Culture*, Cambridge University Press.

recourse to captions for the pictures was crucial to guide the observer towards a predefined *punctum* as the decisive clue that makes a specific visual trait of a typical race or class's face, producing in such a way a stereotype (Pavez Ojeda 2009)⁶⁶. In this sense, 'Blackness' has often recalled the ascription to particular bodily features, history and cultural styles, that have been matched, perhaps wrongly, with the concept of race.

Surprisingly, all this has not prevented African and Afro-Descendant people from shaping a unique cultural and artistic heritage, which has defined their stories and narratives over the centuries and has influenced many other cultures that met the same path in diverse time and space coordinates. According to Checinska (2018), for instance, everyday artistic expression and cultural production - from visual arts, songs and dance to the textile crafts - of West African people were a relief capable to create a secure connection to their real and imagined former dwellings in their ancient homeland, Africa. At the same time, "*engaging in these creative practices became a tangible way of remembering and of writing themselves into the history of their new homelands*" (120-121). Appiah argues that

"Contemporary African American⁶⁷ social identity - for instance - given its reliance on the problematic concept of race, is indeed incoherent. Because the persistence of this incoherence creates an unnecessary obstacle to the success of the ethical aims of African Americans, the government may need to intervene to reshape the souls of black folk. [...] The best or most appropriate way for the state to help African Americans successfully pursue their ethical aims is [...] to combat racial discrimination more aggressively and to affirm publicly a commitment to racial equality" (McPherson et. Shelby 2004, 172, 173, 192)⁶⁸.

As previously introduced, the use of the plural for words such as "identities", "representations", "practices" and "traditions" is strategic to reflect, as much as possible, the multitude of Black experiences and voices, realities and nuances so as to avoid a mono-dimensional definition/interpretation of 'Blackness' and/or diaspora. McPherson and Shelby claim that "*African American identity is complex and intensely contested*" and that there are "*at least five interrelated [...] modes of Blackness*", whose parameters are "*both vague and greatly contested*" (Ibid., 176-177). The first is the "*racial*" dimension or mode which is commonly referred to certain somatic or genetic characteristics (e.g., skin color, hair type, physique) and continental origins (e.g. Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia) of specific human groups descended from inhabitants of Africa. The second is the "*ethnic*" dimension or mode related to the fact of sharing the same distinctive culture's features and biological origins - or genotype - preserved by Black endogamy. The third is a "*national*" mode which emphasizes, besides the aforementioned

⁶⁶ Pavez Ojeda, J. (2009). 'El retrato de los «negros brujos». Los archivos visuales de la antropología afrocubana (1900-1920)', *Aisthesis* (46), Instituto de Estética - Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, pp. 83-110.

⁶⁷ By "African-American", the authors refer to the identity of African-Descendant individuals or groups living in the United States, so the term does not cover the entire American continent.

⁶⁸ McPherson, L. et. Shelby, T. (2004). 'Blackness and Blood: Interpreting African American Identity', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 171-192, Blackwell Publishing.

racial and ethnic criteria, the relevance of the "*ancestral homeland*", that are the territorial origins of the group, whether some part of sub-Saharan Africa or other territories of the Black diasporas, including Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, and so on. The fourth is the "*cultural*" mode which goes beyond the shared physical and biological traits, or geographical descent, and concerns - for example - linguistic patterns, aesthetic sensibility, or religious beliefs and values. The fifth and last dimension is linked to the commitment to specific "*political*" aspects such as "*equal civil rights*" or "*group political empowerment*" as strategies to address "*resistance against oppression*". Of course, not all African American individuals can identify themselves with all the five modes of Blackness, but rather embodying the racial mode - for instance - with the exclusion of the cultural or political dimensions.

"A person of African descent might have very dark skin and strongly advocate for equal civil rights yet have only moderate fondness for Africa and no interest at all in jazz" (Ibid., 177).

So, the process of identity's formation and evolution was not always the same among Black communities around the world; that is why it is also important to contextualize it. For instance, in an environment like London, second generation of Afro-Caribbean diasporas usually intermingle with White people more easily and frequently comparing to what the same groups do in New York where, outside of work, they generally do not mix with non-Black groups of individuals (Foner 2011)⁶⁹. Moreover, it seems clear that

"if the country were largely free of racism, racial inequalities, and Black ghetto poverty, most African Americans probably would have very little attachment to their specifically racial identity, at least no greater attachment than other ethno-racial groups have to theirs" (McPherson et. Shelby 2004, 184-185).

But, how - and to what extent - participation and connection in transnational networks operate to enhance a sense of 'Blackness' among African diasporas spread all over the world? What kind of interactions occurs between those groups?

The answer to these questions, of course, cannot be univocal and certain as every individual has a story of his/her own, depending on his/her socio-cultural background as well as experience of integration into the societies;

⁶⁹ Foner, N. (April 2011). 'Black Identities and the Second Generation', *The Next Generation*, City University of New York, Hunter College.

and this last aspect inevitably changes from one national context to another. However, it is difficult to deny that Blackness is deeply steeped in certain historical, political, and cultural traditions in different parts of the African continent to easily function as a binding force in the forging of a shared African identity (De Witte, 2014)⁷⁰. What is also certain is that Africa has had different meanings for many people who had something to do with it:

“to some it is the land of the noble savage; to others it is a vast reservoir of cheap labor and raw materials for exploitation; to yet others it is a vast continent of jungles and cannibals, remote and exotic, a persistent enigma” (Onyeocha 1996, 35)⁷¹.

Considering all the age-old issues that have affected African and African diasporas over the centuries, from slavery to poverty - just to mention a few ones, it is inevitable that even their cultural, political, ideological and religious identity has undergone the judgement of the most cynical of the critics for granting credits on their own heritage and processes (e.g. from the set decisions on the emergence of the African nations from various policy makers of the Western world, to the prohibition of speaking native languages, practicing folkways as well as wearing typical Afro hairstyles). Even African art has been often subjected to the exigent approval of colonialists who studied African artistic production in a way to make it appear inferior to Western art (Essel *et. Acquah* 2016)⁷². Besides the fact that their identity has been always related somehow to a burdensome and painful memory, of course. And this might suggest the reasons why many African Americans of the United States, for example, have experienced the desire of changing the colour of their complexion and becoming White, just to liberate themselves from the racial stigma represented by a more highly pigmented skin - which has always been considered as “source of all evil” by Western “science” - and finally being a full-fledged human being.

Dreadlocks have also been contentious in this respect. As reported by Abdullah (2014)⁷³, typical hairstyles belonging to the Black culture, including dreadlocks, but also cornrows, braids and twists, have been described as “unkempt” and “matted” by United States’ policies of the last few years, and consequently, banned by the US Army for women personnel. These policies constitute, of course, a serious offense for the African American community in the United States, especially considering the nature itself of the Africans and Afro-Descendants’ hair. Regarding this aspect, critics of policy have argued that *“the rules are not the problem; the problem is with such perceptions of natural Black hair, which are of course racially biased”*

⁷⁰ De Witte, M. (2014). ‘Heritage, Blackness and Afro-Cool - Styling Africanness in Amsterdam’, *African Diaspora* (7), University of Amsterdam: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, pp. 260-289.

⁷¹ Onyeocha, I. M. (1996). ‘Africa: The Question of Identity’, *Identity and Change, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, Series II - Africa, Nigerian Philosophical Studies, United States of America: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Vol. 3, Chapter 3, pp. 35-47.

⁷² Essel, O. Q. *et. Acquah*, E. K. (2016). ‘Conceptual Art: The Untold Story of African Art’, *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 10, pp. 1203-1220.

⁷³ Abdullah, H. (2014). *Army’s Ban on Dreadlocks, Other Styles seen as Offensive to some African Americans*, CNN, <http://www.edition.cnn.com/2014/04/08/politics/army-hairstyle-ban-debate> (last consulted on 06/03/2020).

(Mutukwa 2016)⁷⁴. This kind of policies are counterproductive for the Black communities themselves, since *“what is deemed right, proper or correct to the coloniser often becomes right, proper, and correct to the colonised”* (Fanon 1964)⁷⁵. From here, for instance, Black women and girls’ trend to straight their hair with, most of the time, dangerous products for their health. In this regard, Mutukwa declares:

“[...] my choice to fashion myself through dreadlocks was a way of using my body to establish and signify my identity as a young, Black African woman. But, for many, this process of emphasising my blackness signified rebellion. There is much struggle between my parents and me concerning my hairstyle. I ask the mirror: ‘What’s so wrong with the way I look? I love the way I look. I love my hair’. [...] With my hands in my hair, I break into song and dance and continue to celebrate my dreadlocks, my joy and energy rising as I resolve the issue - I keep the dreadlocks” (2016).

Similar practices of ‘self-styling’ are crucial for the understanding of the past, and especially the contemporary development of Black identities or ‘Blackness’, which is a tangled issue in the interpretation of ‘Africanness’. The two terms have often been used as interchangeable and their relationship has consequently been overlooked. Identifying themselves as being Black, indeed, does not necessarily imply feeling African as well. But in recognising themselves as African, Blackness is not an uncontested trope (De Witte 2014). It seems that today the most inclined to embrace an “Afro-cool” lifestyle trend are young people of different African and/or Black backgrounds, influenced by contemporary urban African fashion and music’s trends (*Ibid.*).

But, what does the “Afro-cool” aesthetics mean?

“Afro-cool is about feeling the spirit of a vibrant continent and indulging in its creativity and ‘fresh aesthetics’. It may flirt with the ancient and the tribal, but always with a playful and cosmopolitan twist” (Ibid., 285).

In other words, it is about pursuing ‘self-realization’ by participating actively in the process of creating something new and dynamic at the same time, with a look at the past, history and traditions, to finally shape the future with new vibrant positive vibes. A symbolic example here are the T-shirts with the catchphrases *“Africa is the future”*, *“I am African”* etc., a step towards *“rebranding Africa”*, *“refreshing the world’s view of Africa”*, and eventually freeing the continent and its people from

⁷⁴ Mutukwa, T. (2016). ‘Dreadlocks as a Symbol of Resistance: Performance and Reflexivity’, *Feminist Africa: The Politics of Fashion and Beauty in Africa* (21), University of Cape Town, South Africa: African Gender Institute, pp. 70-74.

⁷⁵ Fanon, F. (1964). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York, United States: Grove Press.

the old counterproductive “*clichés of safaris, traditional drums, corruption, poverty, war and disease*” (*Ibid.*, 286).

It can be suggested that “being Black” is more than simply “being”. It is a “*discursive accomplishment, a practice rather than a reflection,*” a continuous process of “*self-production*” and cultural consumption aligned to the quest, or even struggle for “*belongingness*” (Hall 1996)⁷⁶. This implies that African diasporas’ cultural identity, in particular, is more than a matter of “*being*”, a transformative state of “*becoming*”. In sum, Blackness, coherently with the concept of identity, is something that “*happens*” rather than something that “*is*”, something that has been developed by “*specific intersections of specific moments for specific individuals*” (Wright 2006)⁷⁷.

2.3. EVOLUTION OF A STYLE: PERFORMANCES AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ART, MUSIC AND CINEMA

The most considerable contributions of Africans and African diasporas to creative arts, music, cinema, publishing and the entertainment sector in general, are particularly dated to the twentieth century and involved those Black communities that lived in the United States of America, but not only. In that period, African American music genres such as *jazz, gospel, blues, soul* and *rap/hip hop* marked one of the most radical and important transformations in the field of music of all time. In general, the ‘diaspora’ phenomenon has had a significant impact on worldwide popular culture, from dance to fashion, giving rise to cultural and musical movements celebrated today all over the world, including *reggae* and *salsa* - respectively from Jamaica and Cuba, as well as *samba*. During the 1970s, an important cultural influence - related to *reggae* - has been Rastafarianism, whose name derives from the pre-regnal title of Haile Selassie I, “Ras Tafari Makonnen”, emperor of Ethiopia. This religious movement that initially emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s, was strongly affected by some of the ideas of Marcus Garvey, whom many Rastafarians regard as a prophet. It became widespread thanks to its strong influence on *reggae* and one of its greatest exponents, Bob Marley⁷⁸.

76 Hall, S. (1996). *Foreword to the Art of Being Black*. Claire Alexander. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

77 Wright, M. M. (2006). ‘What is Black Identity?’. *Cahiers Charles V*. Special Issue: L’Objet Identité: Épistémologie et Transversalité, No. 40, pp. 135–51.

78 http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=314_diaspora&catid=125_themes&Itemid=226.html (last consulted on 22/02/2020).

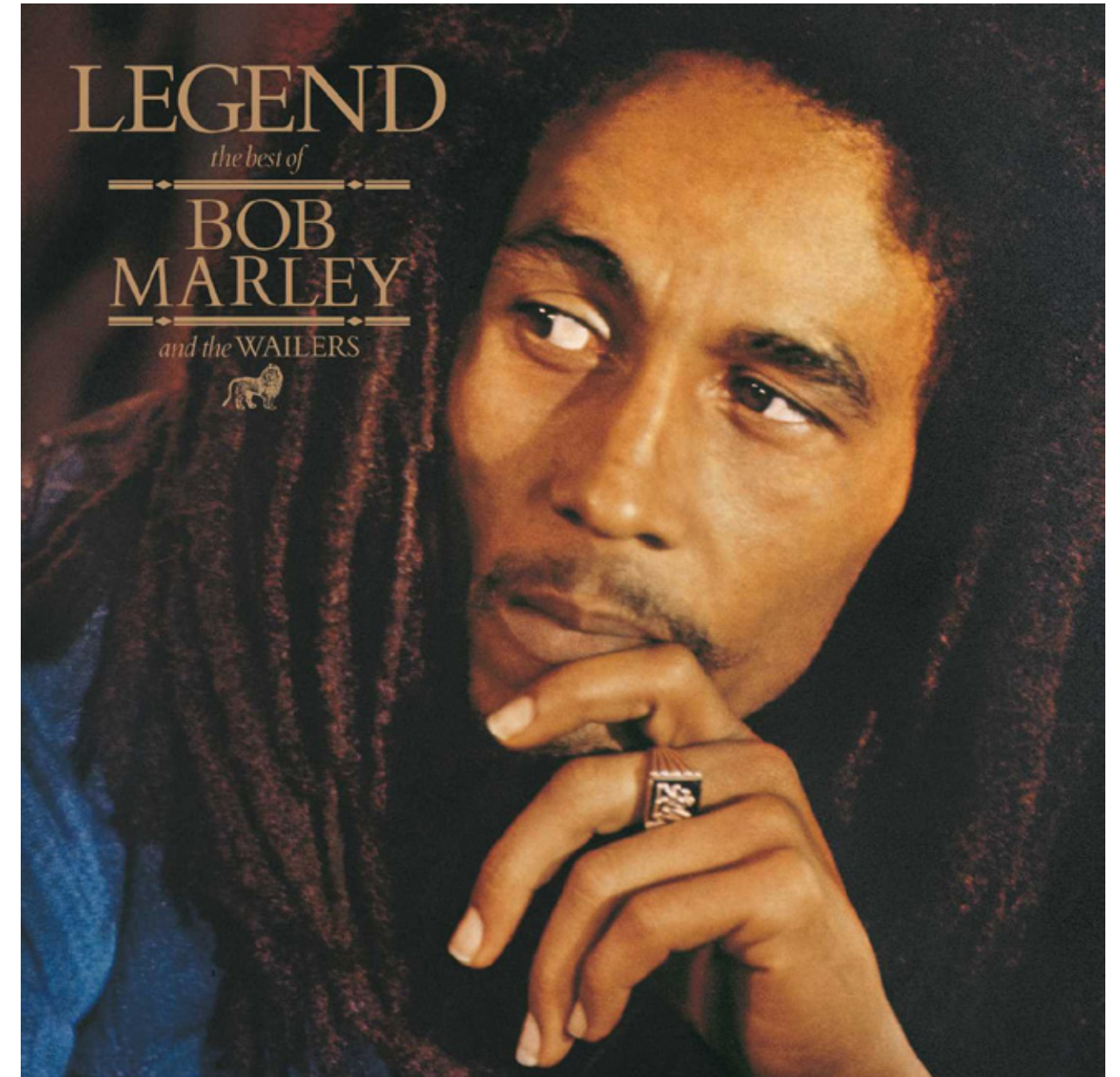


Figure 21. Cover of *Legend*, compilation album by Bob Marley and The Wailers. Source: https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/71EFb-BEAeL._SL1400_.jpg

Salsa, with its Afro-Caribbean origins, has been recognised as one of the most important musical styles and dance forms that define and underpin Latin American cultural identity worldwide. And yet, transcultural predecessors of *salsa* such as the *danzón* that evolved into the *mambo* and the *cha-cha-chá*, has Afro-Cuban origins. Other ancestors of *salsa* like *rumba* and *bomba* have respectively Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican provenances. In particular, “*salsa dance inherits this legacy of resistance against colonial subjugation from its Afro-Caribbean ancestors*” (Renta 2007)⁷⁹.



Figure 22. Images taken from the Cali World Salsa Dance Festival. Source: <https://blog.bestday.com.mx/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Festival-Mundial-de-Baile-de-Salsa-de-Cali-1280x720.jpg>

79 Renta, P. (2007). Salsa Dance Performance: Latina/o History in Motion. In N. R. Mirabal et. A. Laó-Montes (Ed.). *Technofuturos: Critical Interventions in Latina/o Studies* (pp. 269-294). Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books.

In Robert Farris Thompson’s 2011 book, *Aesthetic of the Cool: Afro-Atlantic Art and Music*⁸⁰, it is described how African social and visual philosophies are represented and transmitted around the world through a vast heritage made of visual art forms, music, as well as daily life customs and traditions. In the ambition of analysing the unifying traits of Afro-Atlantic art and culture, Thompson defines the “*aesthetic of the cool*” as “*deeply and complexly motivated, consciously artistic, interweaving of elements serious and pleasurable, of responsibility and play*” (16). Similarly, in *Grupo Antillano: the art of Afro-Cuba* Alejandro de la Fuente (2013) pays homage to Afro-Cuban art of the height of the Revolution and the particular contribution of Grupo Antillano, a collective of plastic artists who, together with intellectuals, researchers, writers, and performing artists, explored the history of race and image in Cuba, with the objective of reiterating the importance of the African roots in Antillean culture and in Cuban national culture.

It has been widely acknowledged⁸¹ that the aforementioned *blues* music has its deepest origins in the work songs chanted by the enslaved Blacks during the days of slavery in the Mississippi Delta region of the United States, influenced primarily by West African rich musical and oral traditions, and later spread among the White population as well. Also, *jazz* emerged from *blues* and other African American and European musical traditions around the beginning of the last century. Likewise, *rapping* as well as the closely related *hip-hop* music are both rooted in the African culture. It has been reported (Pollard 2004)⁸² that the origins of these popular musical genres, by now widespread across the whole world, can be dated back to when, centuries ago, tales and anecdotes were delivered, in the West African region, in rhythmic form, over drums and sparse instrumentation, anticipating exactly what is today known as *rap*. *Jazz* music, and especially poetry and lyrics, is also considered to be one of the most important precursors of *hip-hop* music (Sobol 2002)⁸³. Although *rap* is a male-dominated genre, it is also renowned as a music style through which African American women have had the chance to achieve great strides, (re)defining their cultural roots and identity from a Black feminist perspective. Just to cite a few of the many Black female artists that have forged this music genre, the Grammy awardees Left Eye of TLC and Lauryn Hill (Keyes 2000)⁸⁴.

In the Afro-rooted musical scene, definitely worth mentioning the celebre genre *Afro-beat* born in Ghana in the early 1920s, as well as the Nigerian entertainment industry contribution to the development of the African popular music, also known as *Afro-pop*. This latter fuses different elements from traditional African rhythm and sound, as well as various recurring themes, such as rebellion, romance, nostalgia, fashion/style, artistry, celebrity, hedonism, and tribalism⁸⁵. Music of Nigeria

80 Thompson, R. F. (2011). *Aesthetic of the Cool: Afro-Atlantic Art and Music*. Pittsburgh, United States: Periscope.

81 URL: <https://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/deftradition.html> (last consulted on 07/03/2020).

82 Pollard, L. (2004, 2 September). *Rap returns home to Africa*, BBC News. URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3622406.stm> (last consulted on 07/03/2020).

83 Sobol, J. (2002). *Digitopia Blues*. Banff, Canada: Banff Centre Press.

84 Keyes, C. L. (2000). ‘Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 113, No. 449, pp. 255-269.

85 Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London, United Kingdom: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

has indeed experienced phenomenal growth over the years with the contribution of by now globally acclaimed artists. In particular, Nigerian *Afro-pop* music videos - with their capacity of visual communication of national and local cultural everyday practices and narratives, have helped in exporting, once again, part of the African cultural heritage, resulting in increasing a sense of credibility on an international level.



Figure 23. A picture that portrays the celebre American jazz trumpeter Miles Davis. *Source: https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/cncGHJJZXL3f4zeVXTTXOOoXLs4XcOYCCCFvHw0_Y14w1UIpiwNBiCFqlKYxPjGdpjW6Od8Zt6RV1HCAqb0tYWZItKvz2Kn-qbdOwOA7upQ0YGJFmblR0Z-6lomf1g*



Figure 24. Nina Simone, one of the maximum international exponents of Rhythm and Blues (R&B). *Source: https://media.npr.org/assets/img/2012/06/26/gettyimages_32049661_custom-df84c0bcb09d9fdcdfc155b6e87390ccd2120b9.jpg?s=6*

In the artistic panorama, the African and African diasporas' contribution is equally immense, thanks to the modern and historical paintings, sculptures, installations, textile production and other visual expressions - among which the famous highly stylized masks - from the African continent in general, including native and indigenous populations, as well as the North American, Caribbean or South American regions influenced by original African traditions⁸⁶. However, African art has not been always perceived as such in the past and, sometimes, even in the present. It turned out that even conceptual art is a product of Africa in so far as it was actively practiced there long before the advent of the twentieth century as “*a lived experience [...] manifested in [...] everyday art*” (Essel *et. Acquah* 2016, 1218). Those exquisite traditional objects and artefacts realized by many African sub-cultures several centuries ago, which inspired several Western modernists to explore diverse forms of representation in art, were potentially associable to the conceptual art. Indeed, the aesthetic real of African traditional art are sometimes projected through nonvisual codes and performances (*Ibid.*), and favour visual abstraction over naturalistic representation. Artists of the calibre of Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, André Derain, Henri Matisse, Joseph Csaky, and Amedeo Modigliani, declared expressly to have been inspired by, African art, amongst other art forms (Murrel 2008)⁸⁷.

86 Indeed, the African artistic production often has similar recurring themes as it is for African diasporas' art.

87 Murrel, D. (2008, April). *African Influences in Modern Art*, The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aima/hd_aima.htm (last consulted on 07/03/2020).



Figure 25. Queen Mother Pendant Mask: Iyoba (16th century).

Source: <https://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/aol/original/DP231460.jpg>



Figure 26. Typical silk fabric with *kente* pattern designs originally from Ghana.

Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/de/5e/1d/de5e1de87303f59291f0197431f59c30.jpg>

Likewise, cinematographic production from Africa and African diasporas has not always been recognised the way it deserves. As aforementioned, the notorious spread of the ‘blackface’ at the beginning of the last century and colonialism in general kept away Black people from the opportunity of participation in the film industry all over the world or in any mainstream cinema product made in Hollywood. Therefore, especially during the colonial era, Africa was depicted on films exclusively by Western film directors, mostly as a stereotyped exotic land, a huge jungle totally lacking in history, culture, art and literature. Typical examples, in this respect, are *The New Adventures of Tarzan* (1935)⁸⁸, *The African Queen* (1951)⁸⁹ or *Out of Africa* (1985)⁹⁰. James Edward Ford III (2015) describes the most common attitude in normally representing both Blackness and Africanness in movies as:

“[...] the very mainstream orientation to film that frequently deploys, sometimes apologizes for, but rarely relinquishes stereotypes of black people supported by familiar narratives, characters, and filming techniques” (200)⁹¹.

Although some critics argue that “realism offered a welcome alternative to early twentieth-century caricatures of Black people in mass media and art” (*Ibid.* 199), a motion picture like Tarantino’s *Django Unchained*⁹² that, even if considered not totally faithful to the historical facts, allows to identify a new kind of contribution to the tradition of legendry in Black expressive culture, with a more positive representation of a genuine “Black hero”. Something different from the more realistic McQueen’s period-drama film, *12 Years a Slave* (2013)⁹³. The protagonist Django is, indeed, the “legend” who escapes objectification and, in doing so, confronts the racialized state of emergency commonly called U.S. civil society. Moving to our time, Jordan Peele’s directorial debut *Get Out* (2017)⁹⁴ provides another interesting perspective in this respect, since it openly pursues to represent the delusional contemporary U.S. society that believes in the existence of its post-racial nature while ignoring the underlying presence of race, as well as associated subjugation and marginalization of African-Americans.

According to a 2009 report released by UNESCO, the Nigerian film industry grew quickly in the 1990s and 2000s and became the second largest film producer in the entire world, surpassing Hollywood and closing the gap on India, the global leader in the number of movies produced each year⁹⁵. The Afro-Cuban filmic heritage is quite rich, but it has received

88 Kull, E. et. McGaugh W. F. (1935). *The New Adventures of Tarzan*. United States: Burroughs-Tarzan Enterprises Inc.

89 Huston, J. (1951). *The African Queen*. United Kingdom: Horizon Pictures, Romulus Films.

90 Pollack, S. (1985). *Out of Africa*. United States: Mirage Enterprises.

91 Ford III, J. E. (2015). ‘Close-Up: Fugitivity and the Filmic Imagination. Blackness and Legend’, *Black Camera*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 199-217, Bloomington, Indiana, United States: Indiana University Press.

92 Tarantino, Q. (2012). *Django Unchained*. United States: A Band Apart, Columbia Pictures.

93 McQueen, S. (2013). *12 Years a Slave*. United States: Regency Enterprises, River Road Entertainment, Plan B Entertainment, New Regency Productions. United Kingdom: Film4 Productions.

94 Peele, J. (2017). *Get Out*. United States: Blumhouse Productions, QC Entertainment, Monkeypaw Productions.

95 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2009/05/299102-nigeria-surpasses-hollywood-worlds-second-largest-film-producer-un> (last consulted on

increasing scholarly appreciation only in recent years. As documented by Haseenah Ebrahim (2007), Afro-Cuban filmmaker Sara Gómez’s works are crucial to deepen the understanding of matters of racial inequalities and marginalization, but also interconnected gender equality’s issues, within the Revolutionary Cuba of the 1960s and 70s⁹⁶. Indeed, her works display a recurring concern with the issue of race, and with the fundamental importance of African culture contributions to the popular culture of the Caribbean country. For example, in her directorial debut, the short documentary *Iré a Santiago* (1964), she was able to capture various aspects of life in Santiago de Cuba, including the beat of carnival, which has culturally coloured the city highlighting its African origins and influence (*Ibid.*).



Figure 27. Sara Gómez behind the camera. Source: https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/aoF9oK37Is6Ei1Bgm-20z9TEFBLNjzaZu1btCoQp7IKWkWxQHvoROYzUFxCCQin_DSI5DQ1qq_ttuA7I7VxlQggDt3qgjnSslfDyuevdB1La3nMaCti9u-ntw08/03/2020.

96 Ebrahim, H. (2007). ‘Exploraciones/Explorations: Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema’, *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* (82), pp. 107-118, Amsterdam, Netherlands: CEDLA - Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation.

More recent celebrations of African cultures and styles are provided instead by the Hollywoodian movies production. An example is *Black Panther* (2018)⁹⁷. In understanding the fundamental role played by fashion and culture in shaping the world of cinema, *Black Panther's* costume designer Ruth Carter referred back to traditional African fashion and revisited it in a modern way for the creation of a literally new world as setting of the film. Carter admitted that she had to do a deep dive into the diverse history of traditional dress of the entire African continent, perusing the textile production, hand-dyeing, and beading techniques of the Tuareg, Zulu, Maasai, Himba, and Dinka communities. This extensive research eventually resulted in “a dramatic look that makes clear that Wakandans use clothing as an important form of self- and community expression, to honour their ancestors, and to maintain a progressive social order” (Ford 2018)⁹⁸. Considering the cosmopolitan character of African fashion scene, Carter was particularly careful not to represent it as frozen in the past in order not to fall back into the usual clichés. More in detail, Carter and her team created the costumes and accessories from scratch using design software and 3d printing. Just to give an example, when it came to develop the dress worn by Nakia - a Wakandan spy, they drew inspiration from the *kente* pattern popularly realized by the Akan people of Ghana. They emphasized the resulting design's intricate geometric shapes by opting to use a simplified colour palette. Then, they used 3d printing whose technology was crucial to make the graphic lines raised and textured once they transferred it onto black fabric (*Ibid.*). Carter declared that the only way to get accessories - such as the crown worn by Ramonda, Queen of Wakanda - “perfectly shaped” was to have them 3d printed with flexible material⁹⁹.

97 Coogler, R. (2018). *Black Panther*. United States: Marvel Studios.

98 Ford, T. C. (2018, 15 February). *Why Fashion Is Key to Understanding the World of Black Panther*, The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/02/why-fashion-is-key-to-understanding-the-world-of-black-panther/553157/> (last consulted on 08/03/2020).

99 Carter explains in more detail how her and her costume design team realized the outfit of *Black Panther* using a 3d printing technology, in the following video from *Vanity Fair*: ‘Black Panther’s Costume Designer Breaks Down T’Challa’s Entrance Scene’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmP1aHJJ-U> - last consulted on 08/03/2020).



Figure 28. Ramonda, Queen of Wakanda, and her daughter, Shuri, wearing 3d printing design jewellerys and accessories in *Black Panther*. Source: https://static.dezeen.com/uploads/2019/02/black-panther-angela-bassett-3d-printed-costume-julia-koener-ruth-carter-oscars_dezeen_hero1.jpg



Figure 29. Nakia and T'challa in *Black Panther*. Source: https://www.thenortherner.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MV5BNDczMTk4ODE5NV5BMl5BanBnXkFtZTgwMDYyNTQ5MjI@_V1_SY1000_CR0015011000_AL_.jpg

2.3.1. FOCUS ON AFRO-COLOMBIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Afro-Colombians or *Afrocolombianos* is the ethnic group of Colombians of Sub-Saharan African descent to which I belong. As aforementioned, in the context of the Atlantic Slave Trade, people from West Africa were enslaved, deported and distributed throughout the whole American continent. In the case of Afro-Colombians' ancestors, they were imported as slaves to Colombia by the beginning of the sixteenth century to replace the rapidly declining Native American labour force. African slaves' work was essential in all the regions of Colombia, until very recently. They were mostly used to extract gold from mines or to work in the sugarcane plantations¹⁰⁰ present in the areas that today correspond to the current departments located in the Western part of the country, from Chocó, the African heart of Colombia, to Antioquia, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Nariño¹⁰¹.

In Latin America there is a huge variety of different identities and cultures, and Afro-Colombian is one of them. Colombia in particular is a plural-ethnic and multicultural country. However, Afro-Colombians have not always been appreciated and have had to face many challenges to survive in their country, despite the countless sacrifices done for its people. After colonization, the image of the country was constructed by omitting its ethnic differences and excluding Afro-Colombians and indigenous people from the process of constitution of the nation. Afro-Colombians and their culture were barely recognised, hidden behind the process of *mestizaje* or "whitening" of the Black population with the intention of erasing the signs of Blackness from the country (Gontovnik 2016)¹⁰². As reported by UNDP (2015), although Afro-Colombians households constitute around the 10.5 per cent of the entire Colombian population, they have a per-capita income 20 per cent lower than that of the non-Afro-Colombian households¹⁰³. Furthermore, their political, civil and social rights have rarely taken into account as it is clearly visible from the frequent episodes of overt racism carried out by different sections of the national population, as well as by those who are supposed to safeguard those rights.

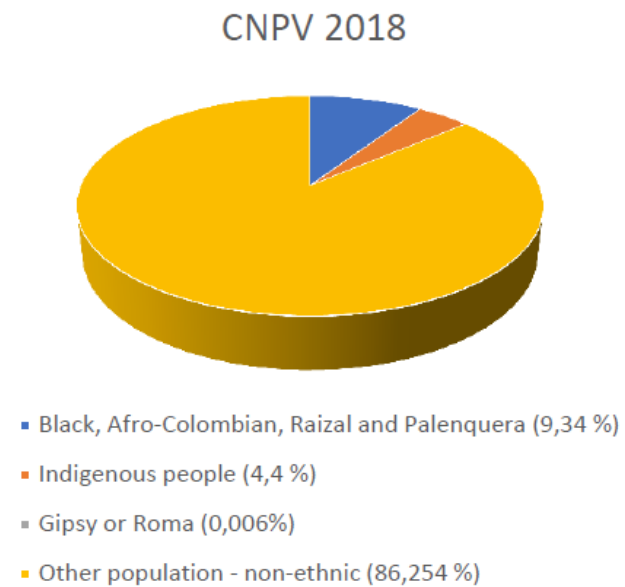
100 Landers, J. *et. al.* (2015). Researching the history of slavery in Colombia and Brazil through ecclesiastical and notarial archives. In M. Kominko (Ed.), *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (pp. 259-292). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Open Book Publishers.

101 <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/afro-colombians/> (last consulted on 10/03/2020).

102 Gontovnik, M. (2016). *Choc Quib Town and the performance of Afro-Colombian identity*, Artelogic, <https://journals.openedition.org/artelogie/358> (last consulted on 16/03/2020).

103 *Country Programme Document for Colombia* (2015-2019). Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/docs/Country%20Programme%20Documents/COL_CPD%202015%202019_ENG.pdf (last consulted on 10/03/2020).

Figure 30. A graph that depicts the distribution (%) of total population per ethnic group in Colombia based on estimated data of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE). Source: DANE, *Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda (CNPV 2018)*.



Even Afro-Colombian culture and identities have been victim of a sort of “satanization” (Sampson 2014)¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵, starting from the period of slavery to the modern times. Only with the National Constitution of 1991, the state recognized the Colombian society to be composed by different ethnicities, including Afro-Descendants and indigenous, besides European descendants and *mestizos*, declaring eventually the nation as multicultural and plural-ethnic. And even after all this, Colombian minorities’ rights have been often denied or ignored at different levels by most people. Although the constitutional changes of 1991-93 granted new territorial and cultural rights for Afro-Descendants on the Pacific Coast, generating related public policies, the Colombian state’s structure was not up to address the social issues as appropriate (Mosquera 2004)¹⁰⁶.

Meanwhile, several elements of the Afro-Colombian culture have been, deliberately or not, subjected to cultural appropriation, from music/dances to folklore symbols/practices and gastronomy. Typical Colombian dishes and ingredients originally belong to the Afro-Colombian and, consequently, African diaspora’s tradition. These are *bandeja paisa*, Caribbean and Pacific *sancocho*, *ceviche de camarón*, *arroz con coco*, and many others.

104 Sampson, E. A. (2014). ‘Los afrocolombianos: ¿los portadores de cultura o los marginados?’. *Repertorio Americano*. Segunda nueva época, No. 24, pp. 357-370.

105 An example is the traditional musical practice *bambuco*, initially “satanized” by Europeans and non-Afro-Colombians for being thought as a dance and music proper to the African slaves, and eventually become a genre of Colombian popular music (Sampson 2014).

106 Mosquera, D. (2004). ‘Re-constituting Chocó: the feast of San Pacho and the Afro question in Colombia’. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesía*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 171-194.



Figure 31. Traditional Afro-Colombian colours and hairstyles. Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/5b/a3/c3/5ba3c33e74c40902a75b6f2c5bf6d95b.jpg>

An event that testifies how the African roots persist to this day in the Afro-Colombian community is the Barranquilla’s Carnival. This popular festival seems to have been around for centuries¹⁰⁷, and Miranda Freitas (2010) attests many similarities between the masks and African figures protagonists of the Carnival (e.g. the bull, the tiger, the caiman, the zebra, and so on) and the African collection of Dakar Museum. For example, the ox, which symbolizes wealth in the African culture, appears in sculptures both in Colombia and at Dakar Museum (*Ibid.*). According to the same author, therefore, there is a good chance that Barranquilla’s Carnival can be a practice to be traced back to the African diasporic tradition.

107 Joseania Miranda Freitas (2007) dates it back to the year 1778 (Miranda Freitas, J. (2010). ‘Las raíces africanas del Carnaval de Barranquilla’. *Revista Brasileira do Caribe*, Vol. 10, No. 20, pp. 423-445).



Figure 32. The masks of Barranquilla's Carnival: the blue dog on the left. Sources: <http://www.carnavaldebarranquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/>



Figure 33. The masks of Barranquilla's Carnival : the zebra on the right. Sources: <http://www.carnavaldebarranquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/>

Daniel Mosquera (2004) recognises 'La Fiesta Patronal de San Pacho' - the feast honouring St Francis of Assisi that takes place in Quibdó, capital city of the Colombian department of Chocó, every year between mid-September and the beginning of October - as a symbolic festival "for the maintenance of a cultural memory" (172). According to the author, San Pacho constitutes "an Africanized and familiarized version of St Francis of Assisi" (177), which "has helped to reinvent an Africanity that challenges metropolitan conceptions of the 'African' in the national imaginary by privileging and advancing a cultural production that includes popular religion, music and visual media" (172). Furthermore, the feast has had a second, but not secondary, function, which is "to reorient political memory through testimonies of historical displacement" (178).



Figure 34. Images of the feast of San Pacho in Quibdó, Colombia. Source: https://blog.redbus.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/403947_11370_1-1280x720.jpg

In general, Afro-Colombians can be considered as anything but a homogeneous community. Indeed, they constitute a diverse ethnic group with more than one identity and multiple customs and traditions of African roots and more. This as a

consequence of the fact that people taken from Africa to America as slaves were not a homogeneous group. People speaking the same language and sharing the same culture were separated and mixed up with other people from different backgrounds, as a form of control to prevent possible revolts or escapes. Sometimes the only connection was their status of slave. Thus, original African cultures did not preserve their authenticity in the move to the new context. African languages fell into disuse and other African lexical elements turned into part of the native languages of some specific groups or communities, such as 'pidgin' or 'creole'. Over time, through the succession of complex social processes, diverse groups characterized by a series of common cultural patterns merged as communities (Mintz *et. Price* 1976)¹⁰⁸. In this way, traditions, cultures and identities met and mingled creating new forms of expression, in line with all the aforementioned factors, as well as the social, cultural and political dynamics of the time. It is known that in the United States, the practice of employing slaves as bugle players or trumpeters was quite frequent during the slavery period. However, playing *tambores* was often forbidden, together with the possibility of carrying out musical manifestations with ritual meanings (Bermudez 1992)¹⁰⁹. That is why in general, urban slaves or those working in the mines or plantations could only incorporate part of the African elements into their cultures (*Ibid.*). So, in general, resistance - against the acculturation's imposition from the colonial authorities and other abuses - has been a central aspect in the African diasporas' creativity and self-identification processes, which has significantly influenced their cultural and musical production.

Afro-Colombian case represents a good paradigm to reflect on the complex and unbreakable bond between creativity, musical culture, construction and consolidation of identities on national and regional level. Music is a major aspect in the Afro-Colombian culture. Moreover, it has been a key element in the aforementioned process of forging identities over the years. Important popular music genres and dance forms with African cultural foundations, recognised all over the country and beyond, are *cumbia*, *porro*, *vallenato*, *merengue*, *puya*, *currulao*, *abosao*, *bullerengue*, *mapale* and even the Caribbean *champeta* (*Ibid.*). As already seen in the previous chapter, from the music perspective, African diasporas around the continent have been able to make of traditional music or dance manifestations, internationally recognized music genres that have shaped the identifying elements *par excellence* of "Africanness", "Afro-Americaness" and *latinidad* (*Ibid.*). *Cumbia* in particular has been institutionalised as an integral part of the Colombian and Latin American identity. However, according to the hypothesis of Wade (1991)¹¹⁰, many Afro-Colombian musical styles and practices, appreciated on a national level and beyond, have suffered the aforementioned "whitening/*blanqueamiento*", a process of 'domestication' that has made them more acceptable by the whole Colombian society as a fundamental component of the national identity. Once again, this is the result of the affirmation of the dominant position of a class/group over another: the descendants of the European

108 Mintz, S. W. *et. Prince*, R. (1976). *An anthropological approach to Afro-American past: A Caribbean Perspective*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

109 Bermudez, E. (1992). 'Música, identidad y creatividad en las culturas afro-americanas: El caso de Colombia'. *América Negra: Expedición Humana* (3), pp. 57-68.

110 Wade, P. (1991). 'The language of race, place and nation in Colombia'. *América Negra* (2), pp. 41-68.

colonizers - Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch and British - that have held the power in the Latin-American region over the last centuries. A phenomenon that musicians could not be able to counter, considering their belonging to a lower social class. Either way, those dances, music manifestations and songs, still performed and acclaimed today, have originated inevitably from the ones that the slaves developed while in contact with both White and indigenous cultures surrounding them.

ChocQuibTown or Choc Quib Town is a Colombian *hip-hop* group recognized nationally and internationally for their distinctive way of making music. In accordance with *hip-hop* history, their name itself represents a way of territorializing their identity as Afro-Colombian group from the department of Chocó, situated along the Pacific Coast of Colombia, with its capital city in Quibdó. Chocó was one of the main areas in Colombia where African slaves were sent to be exploited during the Atlantic slave trade, for the large presence of gold mines. Today it is identified as the region where the highest percentages of the Black population live in the country. For ChocQuibTown, locality is fundamental. Pride for their racial heritage and self-determination are also important ingredients of their success. Therefore, they identify themselves, in their songs, as '*prietos*' (dark skinned), coming from "*the Africa that is inside Colombia*". ChocQuibTown have been able to mix traditional music from the Pacific Coast, like *Bunde*, *Currulao*, *Bambazu*, *Levantapolvo*, with elements of *hip hop*, *dancehall* and *funky*, besides the strong element of *salsa*, which highlights their Latin American origins (Gontovnik 2016). Furthermore, the aforementioned contact with the indigenous population of Colombia that resulted in some cases in actual alliances is also quoted in ChocQuibTown's songs such as *De Donde Vengo Yo* and *Oro*. Indigenous people such as the Embera communities of the Darien region have indeed endured similar grievances on socioeconomic, civil and political levels over the years, including the pain of invisibility and the trauma of displacement whenever a powerful entity took possession of their land for exploitation in the name of "progress" for the whole nation (*Ibid.*). The look shown in their videos is an important evidence of the colourful clothing heritage of the Pacific region of Colombia. In general, dress is a fundamental component of their identity performance and, at the same time, a form of expression of resistance in line to the *hip-hop's* ultimate scope.

"Choc Quib Town intends to subvert the order of things, as they should for a young group of Afro-Colombians in the twenty first century, and at the same time, they are also honouring their two lineages: one that talks about the distant past, tracing back to the development of folk music and dance, and the other related to the immediate past, that of their attachment to hip-hop as a global youth movement" (*Ibid.*).

Visual communication is also key to gain visibility and bring urgent political issues to the table, such as the protection of natural resources from foreign exploitation. For this purpose, we see them dress according to the different *mise-en-scène* (*Ibid.*). Once again, costumes and dances are closely related to the carnival festivities that take place in many Colombian cities and town as it is visible in the video of the song *Somos Pacifico*:

“Appearing inside the visual structure of a video perceived as a very contemporary hip hop performance, these images are definitely a wink to the group’s racial heritage, to their place in the mixed nationality and to the function of the carnivalesque [...] Carnival clothes, carnival dances that come from a folk heritage, dancing in the streets, hand gestures and words that belong to the global hip hop movement all corroborate this idea. These hand gestures, although alien to local inhabitants of Chocó, akin to the global movement, are also part of the carnivalesque function, the resistance function of global hip hop” (Ibid.).



Figure 35. Members of ChocQuibTown in the single cover of *Dinero No Hay*. Source: ChocQuibTown’s Official Facebook Page.

Regarding cinema, differently from the Afro-Brazilian heritage, the history of Colombian film production teaches us that it has not properly considered to raise awareness on African diaspora. In general, the majority of film makers in Colombia continue to be White or *mestizos*, “coherently” with the widespread indifference towards the Afro-Colombian population. However, there are some examples of movies that highlight specific traits of the identity of the Afro-Colombian communities and share a clear political stance in claiming respect and acknowledgement for them (Adorno 2013)¹¹¹. Among those films, *El vuelco del cangrejo* (2009)¹¹², *La sociedad del semáforo* (2010)¹¹³, *Chocó* (2012)¹¹⁴ and *La playa DC* (2012)¹¹⁵ are worth quoting. One of the most important among the several peculiarities of Afro-Colombian identity, *el ritmo africano*, the strong bond with music, which represents a fundamental part of everyday life of Afro-Colombian people or better to say, a key element of their identity, whether in moments of sadness or joy, or even in times of profound spirituality.

111 Adorno, N. (2013). ‘La identidad afrodescendiente dentro del cine colombiano’. *Cinemas d’Amerique Latine*, pp. 110-121.

112 Ruiz Navia, O. (2009). *El vuelco del cangrejo* (Crab Trap). Colombia, France: Contravia Films.

113 Mendoza, R. (2010). *La sociedad del semáforo*. Colombia: Día Fragma.

114 Hinestroza, J. H. (2012). *Chocó*. Colombia: Antorcha Films, HD Cinema.

115 Arango, J. A. (2012). *La playa DC*. Colombia, France, Brazil: Cineplex.

3. THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORAS' CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

The example of Dapper Dan's successful fashion line, just like many others, suggests why introducing as well as fully integrating the African and African diasporas' cultural heritage should be today a strategic priority for the fashion sector, but also for the medias, music industry, performing arts, and so on. Now more than ever, African culture and style represent an increasing "source of pride, pleasure and empowerment" (De Witte 2014), especially for young Black people in the process of defining their identities - or better to say - "self-styling" their Africanness, whether inside or outside Africa:

"African culture, ever reinvented, ever reimagined, is booming as a reservoir of materials with which young people shape their lifestyles and identities, both in cities on the continent and in the diaspora" (Ibid., 264).

An example in this respect is the success that the film *Black Panther* brought in terms of "growth of Afro-futurism and a new appreciation for the African aesthetic" among the members of African diaspora all over the world and in the United States in particular, where, for example, Black college graduates started to wear stoles made from woven *kente* material at their graduation ceremonies (Campbell 2018)¹¹⁶.

That is why the way people clothe themselves or wear a particular item reveals its fundamental importance here. Considering the potential positive impact as well as power of fashion in celebrating the belonging to an African cultural group and leaving a distinctive mark for a positive ripple effect on the future of African inspired fashion and cultural landscape in general, seeking and emphasizing African aesthetic and cultural roots are indeed at the heart of the concept of "reinventing" and creating a new understanding of African beauty as "a source of Afropolitan pleasure and (individualized) self-expression, and as a source of (collective) Black empowerment in a context marked by racism, inequality, and exclusion" (De Witte 2014, 284).

¹¹⁶ Campbell, C. C. (2018). 'Forging A New Future: Africa and her Diaspora'. *Journal of Futures Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 95-100.

3.1. CONTRIBUTION, TRENDS AND INFLUENCES IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

The first step towards the understanding of the great importance of including African and African diasporas' cultural heritage in the fashion industry is to be aware of its contribution and influences on a global level over the last decades. African fashion tells us a story, an identity, or even more than one. For their wide range of print designs, fabrics and colours, in fact, African textiles have always had a significant influence on the fashion industry, from traditional clothing to the most modern African-inspired garments and dresses worn by models on the runway (Tate 2017)¹¹⁷.

If we go back to the years leading up to the American Civil war, United States became the subject of an immense economic development, especially thanks to the great contributions of enslaved Blacks to the textile, clothing and fashion industries. As documented by Kennedy Benson (2017), right after the initial spread of slavery in the country, many of them were already engaged in various handicrafts, adapting the knowledge and techniques acquired in their homeland (e.g. weaving) to their new trades as cobblers, hatters, tailors, seamstresses, carpenters, smiths, among the others (*Ibid.*). A few years later, African textiles would influence many other fields such as, Western art and painting. An example, among others previously mentioned, is provided by Post-Renaissance Europe that admired African clothing and placed it among its European treasures, or famous French artist Matisse, who was inspired by Raffia designs from Africa in his paintings¹¹⁸.



Figure 37. The workers that built United States of America. Source: https://www.thenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Jones-factory_1919_alamy_fir_img.jpg;

117 Tate, C. (2017, 26 May). *How African Textiles Have Influenced the Fashion Industry*, Hello Beautiful, <https://hellobeautiful.com/2939174/african-fashion-and-textiles-trend/> (last consulted on 30/04/2020).

118 'Stitched with History: African Textile and Fashion'. *New African*, No. 477 (2008), pp. 32-34.



Figure 38. An old textile industry. Sources: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/a4/47/bela447be928e6c79943d798de8c10af473.jpg>

On the other hand, what has made African fashion so fascinating and unique over time is that, not only it had a major impact on other cultures and styles, but also the fact that it, in turn, let itself be “naturally”, spontaneously, influenced by them. That would explain why the evolution of African design today represents a mixture of African, Diaspora and Western cultures, whilst incorporating elements borrowed from indigenous traditions around the world. This - not always acknowledged - merit is well described by the Nigerian-born, London-based Duro Olowu hereafter:

“What is interesting is the level of sophistication, which reflects the way African people have always combined European fabrics with indigenous culture. For a long time, there was a sense that this was limited to Africa but now it has become global. Combined with an awareness of social responsibility, it makes for a powerful statement. [...] I think the African influence is more than a trend. Now it is part of the melting pot” (Hume 2010)¹¹⁹.

As declared by historian Tanisha C. Ford, another credit of African style is the attitude of its people:

“even when faced with intense social violence, Black people continue to find ways to [express themselves with] style [...] Black people have long been having their own conversation around beauty and style, and have influenced the most popular fashion and beauty trends around the world” (Laneri 2018)^{120,121}.

119 Hume, M. (2010, 12 June). *Africa's influence in the fashion industry*, Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/bd700276-74e0-11df-aed7-00144feabdc0> (last consulted on 30/04/2020).

120 Laneri, R. (2018, 5 February). *How a Harlem fashion show started the 'Black is Beautiful' movement*, New York Post, <https://nypost.com/2018/02/05/how-a-harlem-fashion-show-started-the-black-is-beautiful-movement/> (last consulted on 30/04/2020).

121 Reference to the fashion show events that took place in the basement of the Harlem Purple Manor, a popular nightclub on East 125th Street, which was called “Naturally '62” and intended to promote African culture and fashion (Laneri 2018).

Nowadays, the appointment of Virgil Abloh as artistic director of Louis Vuitton can be seen as a change in trend in the fashion world towards a broader recognition of African beauty and excellence. All that, combined with the efforts of some Western independent brands in choosing to highlight their African roots. One of these, Daily Paper, an Amsterdam-based menswear and womenswear fashion brand, established in 2012 by three childhood friends, Hussein Suleiman, Jefferson Osei and Abderrahmane Trabsini. Their collections aim at mixing the colourful African heritage and materials of the countries of origin of the creators - Somalia, Ghana and Morocco - with modern streetwear designs, creating an interesting bridge with the international diaspora's tastes and roots, whilst encouraging Africa's potential rise¹²².

A further demonstration of the importance, at more than one level, of including African and African diaspora's cultural heritage in the fashion industry, in the greatest effort to restore the important place of Africa in the international system of production and manufacturing.

3.2. DESIGN ACTIVISM: FASHION INDUSTRY AND ITS POWER TO DECONSTRUCT RACIAL STEREOTYPES

In the process of seeking to restore the original identity of a given culture or community from the a bottom-up approach, the design world or a fashion product - if we want to consider a more concrete level of analysis - can be considered as a multi-purpose visual tool with a socio-cultural force. As already seen, fashion performs a major role in the social construction of identity in modern times, providing “*an excellent field for studying how people interpret a specific form of culture for their own purposes*” (Dugal, Mittar, 2015, 421)¹²³. Fashion is often used by people as a visual statement of a well determined social status (Simmel 1957)¹²⁴ or to express their ‘membership’ to a specific group or culture and their ‘auto-exclusion’ from others.

Hence, while the fashion industry might have the potential to encourage *de facto* a full participation of Afro-descendent designers in the global fashion market with the concrete possibility to de-construct racial stereotypes and, at a later stage, “reconstructing the truth” and re-establishing an appropriate representation of the Black cultural heritage, there might be a chance of meeting further objectives in line with an action-oriented thinking, from awareness-raising on issues of racism and xenophobia, just to mention a few, to users’ behavioural change towards a comprehensive understanding of the product

122 <https://futur404.com/future-fashion-africa/> (last consulted on 30/04/2020).

123 Dugal, A. B. & Mittar, S. (2015). ‘Fashion as Identity Architect: Sikhs in Perspective’. *International Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp. 420-422.

124 Simmel, G. (1957). ‘Fashion’. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 62, No. 6, pp. 541-558.

and a sustainable consumption from multiple perspectives. Likewise, fashion can have both a potential negative and an equally positive impact on development in Africa, depending on the use made of it; however, the negative outcomes can be corrected to move toward a positive impact. Alastair Fuad-Luke defines design activism as:

“Design thinking, imagination and practice applied knowingly or unknowingly to create a counter-narrative aimed at generating and balancing positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change” (2009, 27)¹²⁵.

In other words, designers can propose alternative stories to default paradigms¹²⁶ and concretely create the most varied tools - not only referred to the fashion world, but also the visual and digital field in general - to help shape and mobilize a cause. It is common knowledge that the fashion community has shown, on numerous occasions, its influential power over fighting for social justice and progressive causes, when there was the willing to do it. As attested by Segrán (2018), a good example of using design in these terms is when Diane von Furstenberg, Tory Burch, and Marc Jacobs, among many other designers, supported Hillary Clinton's campaign by creating t-shirts emblazoned with phrases like “*women's rights are human rights*”; or when, in Ireland, the country was set to vote on a bill to decriminalize abortion and local designers created luxurious hats and sweaters with the word “*repeal*” embroidered on them; and again, when designers took a stand against Trump's threat to ban people coming from Muslim countries from entering the United States, by sending models down the runway during New York Fashion Week in outfits covered with words like “*immigrant*” and “*human*”.

Thus, it is worth asking, why do we not do the same to tackle racial injustices all over the world and see how effective it can be?

In this regard, Black women have used their clothing and hair, for generations, as a form of cultural and political expression, beyond the scope of creating a fashion statement that genuinely reflected their history, culture and style. As already introduced, cornrows, braids and twists have been worn as a key tool in this respect. For instance, Black female activists of the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements, which share the same concerns and visions, have used dreadlocks and cornrows to promote the “*Black is Beautiful*” slogan.

125 Fuad-Luke, A. (2009). *Design Activism - Beautiful strangeness for a sustainable world*, London, United Kingdom: Earthscan.

126 URL: <http://juhahuuskonen.fi/2012/04/creating-counter-narratives-alastair-fuad-luke-on-design-activism/> (last consulted on 03/11/2019).

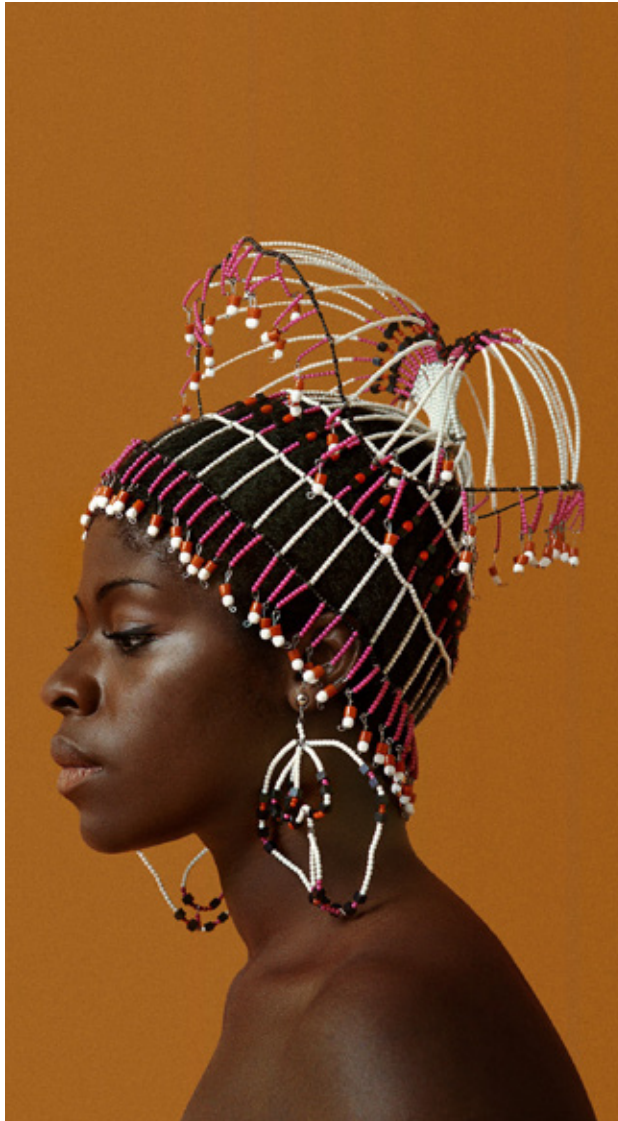


Figure 39. Some of the photos that lifted the Black is Beautiful Movement: Sikolo Brathwaite with Headpiece designed by Carolee Prince (1968); Source: <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2018/11/27/lens/27Brathwaite9/27Brathwaite9-superJumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp>;
 Figure 40. Paton Stage at Apollo Theater (1968). Source: <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2018/11/27/lens/27Brathwaite12/27Brathwaite12-superJumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp>.

Another movement, the Black Girl Magic, easily recognised through the popular hashtag #BlackGirlMagic among others, focuses on encouraging self-empowerment by “celebrating the beauty, power and resilience of Black women” (Wilson 2016)¹²⁷. Likewise, this concept has unintentionally provided an endless well of creative inspiration for the fashion industry: what Black women wear and how has been continuously imitated and reproduced over the years, not only by White women, but also by fashion’s most influential designers (Kennedy Benson 2017).

As commented by Ethan Miller, agent at IMG Models NY:

“Anti-blackness is built into the ethos of this country. there’s something wrong with that and we need to deconstruct it. I think, specifically, in America, there’s such a deep history that is not often acknowledged, but instead swept under the rug because it makes White people uncomfortable” (Peoples Wagner 2018).

“Deconstructing” anti-blackness stereotypes means accepting everyone’s natural differences and, thus, resisting alterations of one’s image. As reported by Hauser (2017)¹²⁸, Kenyan-Mexican Oscar winning actress Lupita Nyong’o openly criticized the UK magazine Grazia with the hashtag “don’t touch my hair” (#dtmh), for editing out and smoothing her mass of curly black hair, in order to make it fit within the standards of Eurocentric notion of beauty. The actress’s protest, originated her awareness about the danger of omitting her own roots, resulted significant, on the one hand, to confer, in other Black women, a sense of pride and confidence of their natural beauty, and on the other hand, to advocate for pushing the dominant culture to reconsider and appreciate beauty from different natural perspectives. Other magazines such as, Ebony and Essence, in contrast with Grazia, have helped to disseminate the same concept by promoting Black beauty ideals thereby encouraging Black people to feel comfortable with their native skin, hair and culture (Dasi 2019)¹²⁹.

127 Wilson, J. (2016, 12 January). *The Meaning Of #BlackGirlMagic, And How You Can Get Some of It*, HuffPost, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-black-girl-magic-video_n_5694dad4e4b086bc1cd517f4 (last consulted on 08/04/2020).

128 Hauser, C. (2017, 10 November). *Lupita Nyong’o Criticizes Magazine’s Altered Image of her Hair*, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/style/lupita-hair-grazia.html> (last consulted on 22/04/2020).

129 Dasi, E. A. (2019). ‘The Intersection of Race, Beauty and Identity: The Migrant Experience in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah’. *Studies in Linguistics and Literature*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 140-154.



Figure 41. Grazia magazine's cover (November 2017). Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DOPQ6mvVoAASJXJ?format=jpg&name=900x900>.

Fashion industry, as much as cinema, social media and other influential sectors, has the strongest visual communication, social distinction/assimilation (Simmel 1957)¹³⁰ as well as representational capacity, which can make a real difference in putting an end to racial stereotype and stigmatization threat and its effects, only if there is a genuine will to drive their products towards the right direction. This means that fashion has the actual power of promoting the acknowledgement, acceptance and celebration of people's natural differences and peculiarities. This objective can be only reached by acknowledging the structural limits and obstacles to such a role and overcoming them constructively in order to achieve the ultimate goal of connecting people across countries, orchestrating action, as well as galvanizing positive policy changes to ensure the African story is told.

3.3. “RECONSTRUCTING THE TRUTH”: CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY AND PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

In line with what has been discussed in the previous chapter, it can be asserted that cultural sustainability is another key element to achieve the noble goal of authentic transmission of traditional knowledge to future generations, and it is also a guarantee for the originality of a product. Along these lines, more than concerning our relationship with the environment, it is about respecting communities' identities and cultures at all levels and phases of the design process and genuinely contributing to “re-constructing the truth” about them. Pop *et al.* argue that

“Surely any fashion product, clothing or object, such as clothing accessories and the whole range of life-style objects, including even houses, cars and the urban environment, becomes a sustainable cultural product only to the extent to which it is developed on the education-research axis in every industrial field, a proper research, both technical and humanistic, oriented towards sustainable development and invariably inducing ethical production” (2017, 4)¹³¹.

As shown in the following figure, extracted from the same essay, the principle of cultural sustainability as well as the practice of participative and collaborative design in fashion through the integration of the educational-empathic and thematic level, along with humanistic values, into the design thinking - in particular in the stage of research and outlining the idea of a product - increase also the chance of concretely realizing an original sustainable cultural product.

¹³⁰ In this respect, fashion can serve as a mean to define social affinities and, simultaneously, a way of placing ourselves as distinct among our peers.

¹³¹ Pop, M. & Avram I. S. (2017). *Humanistic Episteme in Researching Cultural Sustainability of the Fashion Product*, Bucharest, Romania: National Research and Development Institute for Textile and Leather, National University of Arts Bucharest.

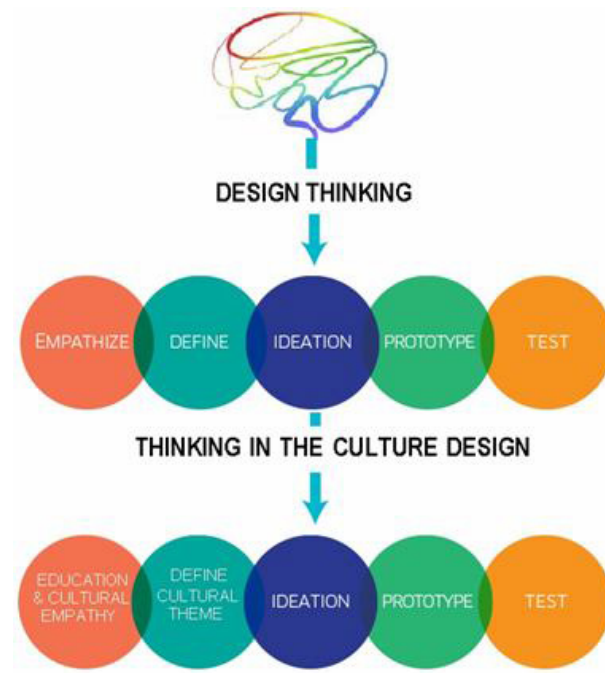


Figure 42. Figure 8. Design Thinking. Source: Pop & Avram, 2017, p. 4.

What is crucial here is the active involvement of the user in the design process, including the making, through user-designer knowledge sharing and participating understanding of the product, which can be translated into an honest and respectful representation of the culture, aesthetics or style of inspiration. Considering the fact that fashion is a one of the most powerful and direct tool for self-expression, individuality and belonging, Fletcher and Grose (2012) state that the design, creation and production of outfits or accessories does not exclusively concern satisfying material or physical needs, but also has a symbolic role which aims to propose to society an image or a message with which users want to be identified¹³². This is even more true when those users are also the ones whose culture has inspired and/or is intended to be represented by the product concerned; or better said, when there is a high probability of creating potential emotional relationships between product and user, which is a key factor - and a challenge at the same time - to be taken into account in the entire design process. However, what is relevant to emphasize here is how this bond is forged throughout the design process, more than the mere fact of generating it. Creating a “culturally” sustainable design is not exclusively a matter of recalling feelings and memories, but that these are recognised as valuable and meaningful by the product owner and carry a positive meaning beyond pure functionality. The type of thrills aroused certainly play a key role in this discussion, because they are able to build the

132 Fletcher, K. & Grose, L. (2012). *Fashion & Sustainability - Design for Change*, London, United Kingdom: Laurence King Publishing.

foundation for a successful and longer-lasting person-product relationship based on emotional or cultural appreciation. In this respect, cultural sustainability is likewise a matter of art, ethnographic heritage, high-tech scientific innovations as well as socio-psychological disciplines. In 2010 Wendy Moody and others¹³³ conducted an exploratory study on emotions and mood, claiming that clothing attributes can both influence positive and negative emotions, especially during the trying on and wearing phase (Moody *et al.* 2010). In this sense, value created through emotions, especially positive experiences in general, has the potential to enrich a person’s life and well-being (Mugge *et al.* 2009)¹³⁴.

Hence, how to develop ‘cultural appreciation’ and avoid the risk of ‘cultural appropriation’? How to “reconstruct truth” on a certain culture through fashion?

In general, realizing a “culturally” legitimated product is a challenge for both designers and researchers involved in the planning process, especially for the difficult undertaking of focusing on the symbolic meaning of a product related to the past, which implies embedding memories, while capturing present or future experiences and emotions is undeniably easier. In referring to the African-inspired collections from western couture houses such as Christian Dior and Jean Paul Gaultier¹³⁵, Ikechukwu Onyewuenyi (2009) argues that, despite the efforts of the stylists who certainly own credits for having broken away from the

“Historical black sheep notion affixed to African dress”, “there were moments throughout the collection where sensationalism crept in and the line between cultural sensitivity and indifference was blurred. To the conscious eye, it seemed as though qualities of African culture were forced upon templates of Western fashion in what was a concerted effort to deftly fuse the two. [...] Are these Western designers truly iconoclasts of African fashion? And does Africa entrust them to fittingly communicate the dynamism that defines Africa’s fashion-forward culture?”¹³⁶.

133 Moody, W., Kinderman, P. & Sinha P. (2010). ‘An exploratory study: Relationships between trying on clothing, mood, emotion, personality and clothing preference’, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 161 – 179.

134 Mugge, R., Schoormans, J.P.L. & Schifferstein H.N.J. (2009). ‘Emotional bonding with personalised products’, *Journal of Engineering Design*, vol. 20, no. 5, pp. 467-476.

135 In particular, the author mentions Jean Paul Gaultier’s showing at Paris Fashion Week’s Spring 2005 and Roberto Cavalli’s Just Cavalli Spring 2008 collection entitled ‘La Ma Africa’: “only a few choice outfits represented quintessential African couture while much of Gaultier’s efforts to evoke a tribal flavor were rather outlandish [...]”. An exception is made for Junya Watanabe’s Spring 2009 line: “[...] an Eastern interpretation of African fashion that was unsurprisingly very honest and executed with the necessary touch of ingenuity and cultural regard that would charm Africans far and wide”.

136 Onyewuenyi, I. (2009). ‘Fashion Africa: Forging a distinct identity’, *Pop’ Africana (Fashion)*, p. 52.

From a personal point of view, it is difficult to criticize a designer who wants to base his/her pieces on a specific culture. What is important here is the respect for the culture, which also depends on the level of cultural awareness reached by the designer at the time of selecting, interpreting and embedding a given theme into the design of the product. Stated otherwise, respect for the culture means valuing what is beautiful and avoiding excessive interpretations that may cause offense and threaten cultural identification and values. To understand this last difference, it is essential to run a detailed research on the culture or the basic concept on which a designer wants to base his/her work. Additionally, to avoid the risk of creating stereotyped depictions of identity, whenever a designer builds upon a different culture, the result of the design should be presented through the eyes of a designer belonging to that culture. On the contrary, whether a designer extracts some elements of a culture with the intention of representing it through his/her perspective and values, which is usually common and preferred by the users, this needs to be made very clear to the public. A successful approach towards this purpose may be to consider, for example, conducting advertising campaigns, with the consent of the communities that inspired the realization of the product, to show their history and the sources of inspiration in the local context; then describing the creative reinterpretation of the design by starting with the introduction of the original design and its genesis. It may be also considered to devolve a part of the profit to or reinvest it in that community.

What happens more often is that designers do not clarify this process and the original meaning of a culture gets lost because it is filtered through the eyes of the same authors, who may not go deep into details, through a process of selection, modification and, finally, appropriation of a culture. Cultural products end up reflecting, in this sense, the cultural values of their producers, as well as the social conditions under which they are produced. This is undoubtedly true, especially in the case of movies, where the ideological impact can be so effective to alienate any attempt of a powerful resistance towards a massive flow of wrong assumptions. A good explanation of this concept is provided by Belkhyr Souad (2012) regarding the phenomenon of the “US-Americanisation” of non-United States cultures and stories in Disney products:

“[...] A viewer who watches a movie is not just engaging in the simple process of consuming an innocent product. Rather, such a viewer can be said to be involved in a complex process of decoding cultural meanings and appropriating them. Consequently, analysing the impact of Disney products [...] on consumers worldwide is necessary for a better understanding of how US cultural and consumer values transcend the borders of the US to reach different regions [...] children are not the only ones likely to be affected [...] some Arab producers have also embraced those representations and started reproducing them in the form of local products”¹³⁷.

137 Souad, B., (2012). *Disney Animation: Global Diffusion and Local Appropriation of Culture*. In Études caribéennes [Online]. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudescaribeennes/5863> (last consulted on 06/11/2019).

Initial signs of a turnaround can be seen in Disney and Pixar’s latest offering *Coco*¹³⁸, an ambitious story, set in a fictional town in Mexico, that touches sensitive cultural-related themes (e.g. family, death and loss, legacy, music and tradition) by embracing cultural celebration and, for this reason, widespread acclaimed. To ensure its credibility in terms of authenticity and respect for Mexican cultural heritage, the creative team had to search outside the studio walls and consult the people who knew best about music and emotions, namely the audience (Bart-Stewart 2018)¹³⁹. On this example it can be asserted that collaboration with people from local communities, whether at consultation level or as a full participatory approach, is therefore of a great importance for a conscious design process with the additional element of cultural education for both the fashion company and the consumer, even if it may require a longer planning time.

Coming back to the main issue, one point raised by Onyewuenyi is fundamentally important, which concerns the monopoly of fashion opportunities almost completely held by a group of mainstream designers with a frequently Eurocentric vision of society and, consequently, of the fashion world. This is often a cause of exclusion, from the fashion industry, of those designers belonging to minorities (e.g. African and afro-descendent designers), and therefore, of the possibility to introduce a more authentic representation of their culture to the public. Onyewuenyi claims indeed that

“The bastion of African fashion lies not in hands of the West, but in the hands of Africa’s own budding designers who are pushing the fabric of fashion as it is today within the Continent and throughout diasporic regions. Reaching a ten-year milestone in its existence, South Africa Fashion Week has provided a platform for numerous African designers to cast African fashion in a culturally perceptive yet progressive light. But now, we must support them”.

Based on an experimental participatory fashion workshop, which was held in Helsinki during the summer of 2012, a case study¹⁴⁰ was conducted to explore opportunities for activism in the field of fashion and clothing design and evaluated as a qualitative study through the collection and analysis of interviews, questionnaires and observations, for a target group composed mainly by female participants in the age of 25 to 35. The overall objective was, in the first place, to question whether the personal engagement and identification with the product results in a closer emotional person-product attachment supporting the sustainability at multiple levels - not only economic, but also social, cultural and environmental - as well as a longer lifespan of the same product; in other words, investigating the possibilities to behavioural change through participatory design strategies, otherwise known as ‘do it yourself’ (‘DIY’) approach, which let the user become an

138 Unkrick, L. (2017). *Coco*. United States: Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios.

139 Bart-Stewart, D. (2018, 17 January). *How Pixar’s ‘Coco’ achieved authenticity through collaboration*, Medium, <https://medium.com/@DBartStewart/how-pixars-coco-achieved-authenticity-through-collaboration-5805a6393d27> (last consulted on 06/11/2019).

140 Hirscher, A-L., & Fuad-Luke, A. (2013). Open participatory designing for an alternative fashion economy. In K. Niinimäki (Ed.), *Sustainable Fashion: New approaches*, Helsinki, Finland: Aalto ARTS Books.

active influential factor in the products story and not just a recipient of the designers given meaning. Then, the participants were asked questions on how to express and fulfil their expectations for personal representation and identification, with the purpose of raising awareness, motivating and enabling a change in consumer behaviour towards a skilful making and understanding of the products. Despite the small number of participants and the likelihood that a close person-product attachment evolves over a longer period of time, which suggests interesting opportunities for future research, the results showed that there are possibilities for designers to help the consumer create an emotional and valuable bond with their clothing.

To encourage meaningful person-product attachment designers need to understand what users expect and need from fashion and clothing, but especially who they are and how to reflect their identities in a specific product. This means that users' cultural values and attitudes need to be carefully analysed, along with the limits between inspiration, appreciation and appropriation:

“On these grounds, fashion in its role as a cultural and social medium, can be a good agent to transform consumer behaviour. [...] For a sustainable behavioural change, the importance lies in understanding and awareness. Both designers and consumers are addressed. Whether we can plan and design for value is still debatable, as it depends on many personal and psychological factors. [...] Growing product value should become main criteria for design success. It should be a goal and in the designer's responsibility to evaluate the product's meaning to their owners” (Hirscher, 2013, 7, 14, 15)¹⁴¹.

To increase the product's value and create an emotional connection with the costumer it has been suggested¹⁴² that embroideries and complex woven or knitted elements of traditional design could be realized by the artisans. In this sense, consultations with cultural mediators could be needed to overcome barriers of language, cultural differences and working routines, between the fashion company or the designer and the specific community or artisan involved in the design process. In a few words, slower cycles and a more local production should be promoted.

Responsibility for product credibility starts, thus, in the design department, where the role of designers needs to be redefined in accordance with the lessons learned from previous exercises, along with the overall relationship with the product and the consumer. Priorities in the design system should shift towards empowering the end-user with knowledge, skills, ideas and awareness. However, for a more sustainable production patterns it is crucial to support also virtuous interdepartmental

¹⁴¹ Niinimäki, K. (2013). Fashion Activism through Participatory Design. In *Crafting the future: 10th European Academy of Design Conferences 17-19 April 2013*. University of the Gothenburg, Sweden.

¹⁴² *Cultural Sustainability in Fashion (on: Luxury Craftsmanship, Ethical and Legal Fashion, Cultural Appropriation)*. Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative: The Swedish School of Textiles, University of Borås.

synergies to ensure full alignment between multiple processes, strategies and visions entailing design, production, marketing and communication, as well as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

DESIGN CONCEPT AND
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

4. LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY: MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF 3D PRINTING

4.1. INTERSHIP AT VOJD STUDIOS

During my study course of M.Sc. Product Design for Innovation at the Politecnico di Milano, I had the opportunity to focus on different subjects for the growth of my professional knowledge. Courses such as Materials Technology, Nanotechnology and Functional Material for the Design, and Parametric Representation Methods, were those that particularly captured my interest throughout my studies. My interest in the application of the acquired knowledge of the technologies drew me to the research of a company related to the field of additive manufacturing (3d printing technologies) where to carry out my internship. Thus, after the research I had the opportunity to perform my internship from 1st March to 30th August 2018 at VOJD Studios, located in Berlin, Germany.

4.1.1. INTRODUCING VOJD

VOJD Studios is a Design Studio focusing on the luxury fashion industry using additive manufacturing technologies. Some important international media companies' reviews about VOJD have quoted:

“The idea behind the business [...] was to show that traditional craftsmanship and future technologies are able to work together: After the initial printing process, products are completed manually at a factory in southwestern Germany, much like any luxury-goods workshop” (Paton 2017)¹⁴³.

¹⁴³ Paton, E. (2017, 13 November). *In Berlin, a Design Studio Puts Luxury Into 3-D*, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/13/fashion/3d-printing-vojd-berlin.html> (last consulted on 17/02/2020).



Figure 44. Christian Hartung and Hristiyana Vucheva, co-founders of VOJD Studios in Berlin. At right is a small 3-D printer for models.
Source: <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2017/11/13/style/13PRINT-INYT1/13PRINT-INYT1-jumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp>

“VOJD - the only high-end 3D printing company for the luxury fashion industry [...] The rise of 3D printing has influenced all realms of manufacturing, but probably less so in the fashion industry. That isn’t to say that it isn’t there, in fact, Berlin-based VOJD Studios is a company that specializes in just that — 3D-printed accessories for high fashion houses” (Yeung 2017)¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴⁴ Yeung, H. (2017, 1 March). *In the Advent of 3D-Printed Accessories, It’s a Struggle Balancing the Past and Future*, Hypebeast, <https://hypebeast.com/2017/3/vojd-3d-printed-accessories-interview> (last consulted on 17/02/2020).



Figure 45. Model Wearing VOJD creations. Source: <https://image-cdn.hypb.st/https%3A%2F%2Fhypebeast.com%2Fimage%2F2017%2F02%2Fvojd-3d-printed-jewellery-interview-1111.jpg?q=90&w=1400&cbr=1&fit=max>

4.1.2. HOW IS 3D PRINTING RELEVANT TO LUXURY CONSUMER GOODS?

Manufacturing process can be defined as the phases for which raw material is submitted to be transformed in a final product. In the industry of fashion different processes are applied for the creation of accessories depending on the type of material in demand, at the same time within the sector there are also some factors that enable a manufacturing technology to be relevant for a company. In this chapter the main focus will be to discuss the importance of additive manufacturing and factors such as, the product features and cost efficiency, as well as their relevance for the luxury consumer goods.

A product feature is an attribute or characteristic of a product that confers value to the 'personas' or end-consumer and helps also to be differentiated in the market. So, for the luxury fashion industry, one that is in constant search of differentiation maintaining high quality standards, product feature has an important role, and needs to fulfil established conditions. On the other hand, the exponential development of technology forces companies to always update their manufacturing processes to be aligned to the market demand. With the appearance of the additive manufacturing technology, companies are being subjected to include it, not only as a way to reinforce their manufacturing processes but also as a way to cover an increasing part of the market searching for innovative and ingenious ways of application for this technology. Therefore, as the concept of democratisation of the technology started to spread throughout the world, and additive manufacturing started to be seen as a new easy technological tool that concedes opportunity to different users, at first, it is important to highlight the repercussion of the 3d printing technology in the product features for the fashion industry. For example, one of the advantages of the 3d printing technology is the concept of interlocked flexible pieces and mechanisms that, if made with this technology do not require assembly, thus allowing an optimization advance in the manufacturing process. Another example is the concept of made-to-measure custom product, which enables to personalize a product for a specific client by means of parametrical methods and software. And finally, the technology offers the possibility to generate complex and intricate designs and shapes, which will be very difficult to obtain by other means.

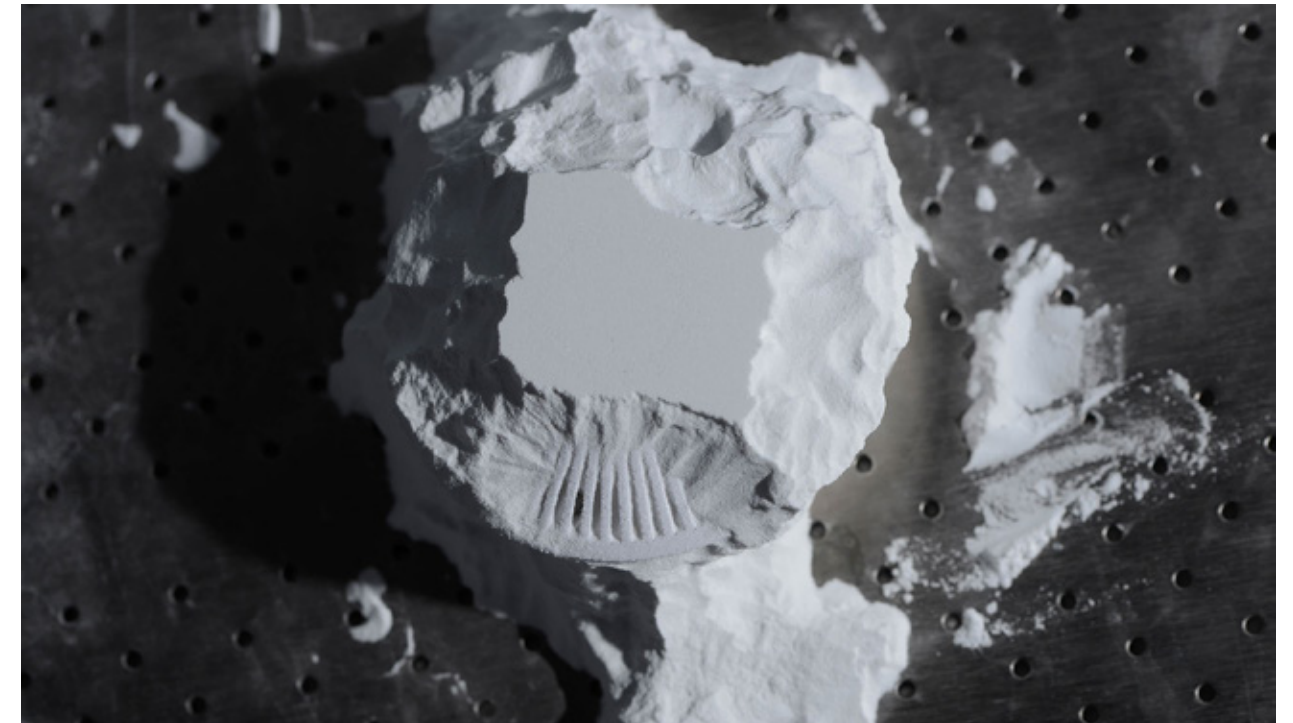


Figure 46. In the Advent of 3D-Printed Accessories. Source: <https://image-cdn.hypb.st/https%3A%2F%2Fhypebeast.com%2Fimage%2F2017%2F02%2Fvojd-3d-printed-accessories-interview-333.jpg?w=1600&cbr=1&q=90&fit=max>

The cost efficiency, on the other hand, is a concept related to saving or spending less money. Therefore, for the fashion industry is important to create a product or a production process in a way that the cost will be the lowest for acquiring more revenues. As an emerging technology additive manufacturing can play an important role on this aspect. For instance, due to elimination of fixed costs for mould making a company can save a great percentage of money, due to the fact that mould production cost is relatively high and can only be compensated with a great volume of pieces sold. Considering that the injection moulding process depends on the production of a mould, the generation of personalized article will also depend on the creation of a personalized mould, that eventually will be a big investment for a product that is aimed to be created for the use of just one customer. Another example in which additive manufacturing can be used for cost efficiency is when a small series production is required. In the fashion industry the concept of small production is not unfamiliar, this can be seen in fashion shows or in the launch of limited series collection. Additionally, customization and personalization can be optimized by means of additive manufacturing. For luxury fashion companies, the presence of exclusive clients cannot

be denied, consequently taking into consideration that additive manufacturing as a way of reducing the cost of production of an element can be a key for raising the revenues. Finally, a further example is the factor of speed or rapid prototyping and manufacturing, which for additive manufacturing technology is an advantage comparing to other manufacturing processes, not only for a presentation prototype but also because, with the exponential development of the technology, a 3d printing prototype could become a final one.

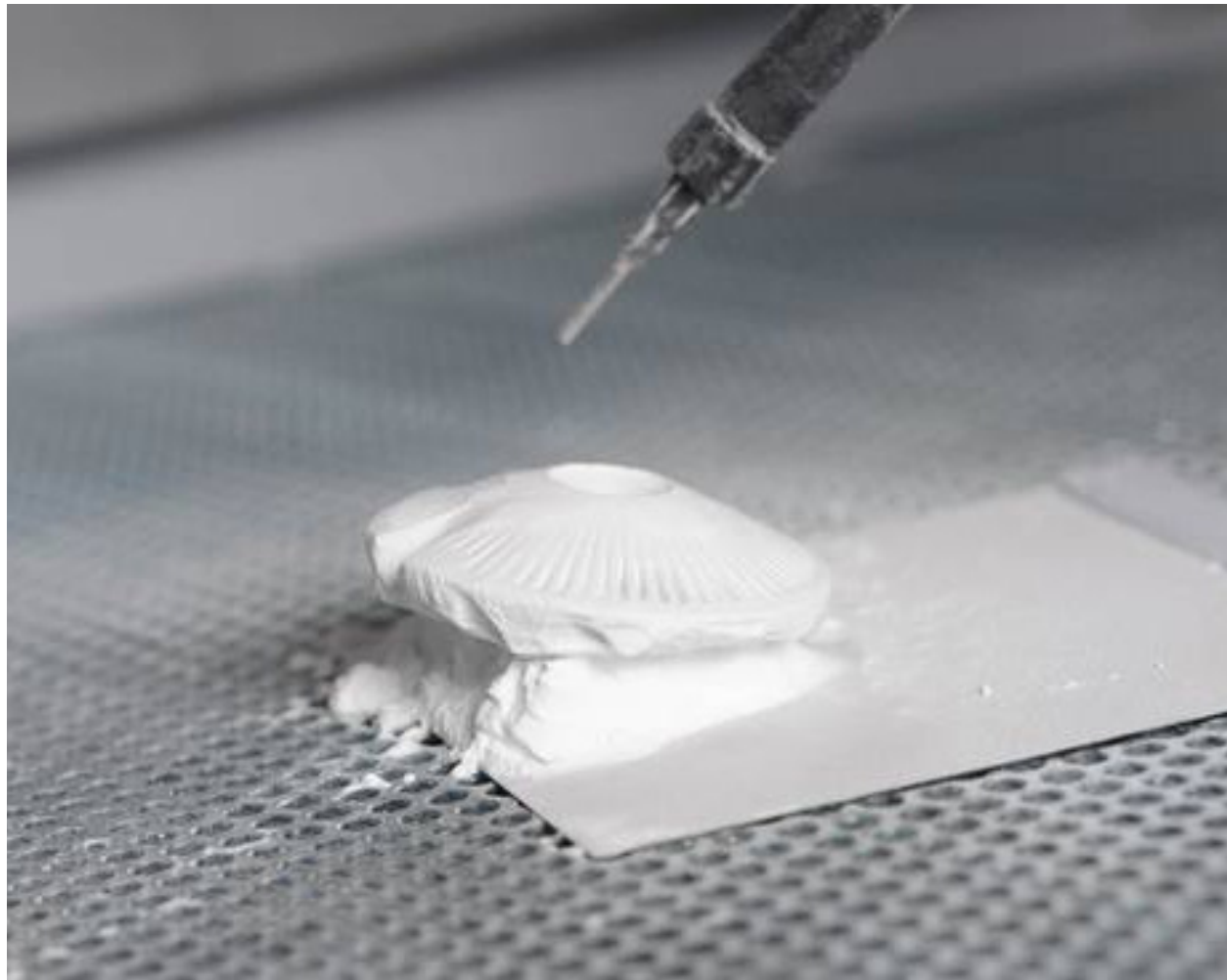


Figure 47. In the Advent of 3D-Printed Accessories. Source: <https://image-cdn.hypb.st/https%3A%2F%2Fhypebeast.com%2Fimage%2F2017%2F02%2Fvojd-3d-printed-accessories-interview-444.jpg?q=70&w=550&cbr=1&fit=max>

4.1.3. HOW DOES VOJD ENABLE LUXURY GOODS TO LEVERAGE THE POTENTIAL OF 3D PRINTING?

In the process of delivering good quality product, it is important to highlight the strategy that allows a product to be presented to the final customer in the most efficient way. For the aforementioned reasons, VOJD Studios has two principal factors as elements of success.

The first principle is to co-design and develop products using new innovative materials, finishing, shapes and structures. Usually, in the design process there are a series of steps or stages that facilitate the delivery or presentation of a final concept parting from an initial idea. Moreover, within this process a series of iterations are presented and sometimes this directly involve a client that in some cases could be the final user or customer, and in other cases a company partner which manifests a common interest for the product. Basically, there are typically two types of iterations, one for the material and the other one in the shape of the object. So, depending on the needs and requirements of the customer, changes in the materials, such as type, quality, and finishing are presented. As for the shape of the object, the changes are related to scale dimensions, thickness and structural distribution of the volume of the object.

The second principle is to manufacture market-ready 3D printed pieces for ready-to-wear and accessory collections in a quick and cost-effective way. Typically, the process of 3d printing technology is correlated with the concept of generating initial and final prototypes instead of a final product. At VOJD, with the exponential growth of additive manufacturing, the product generated is a final product with all the characteristic of a product of good quality.

4.1.4. MAIN ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED AT VOJD STUDIOS

During my stay at VOJD Studio I was involved in all the phases of the design process. Generally, the design methodology at VOJD required different design competences such as, searching, research, design and trend research, googling, organization, design strategy, luxury experience, concept development, emailing, sketching, scanning and printing, drawing, photo editing, graphics, amusement, layouting, 3d modelling, manufacturing technology evaluation, presentation. After the above activities related to the first phase of design, there were activities related to the phase of iteration that involved a process of model optimization for selected manufacturing technology and post-processing configuration as well as further definition of user requirements (e.g. weight, stability, surface smoothness).



Figure 48. In the Advent of 3D-Printed Accessories. Source: <https://image-cdn.hypb.st/https%3A%2F%2Fhypebeast.com%2Fimage%2F2017%2F02%2Fvojd-3d-printed-accessories-interview-555.jpg?q=70&w=550&cbr=1&fit=max>

4.1.5. MAIN COMPETENCES ACQUIRED AT VOJD

It is necessary, in order to understand the continuous professional growth of a person in the design field or any other field, to underline the importance of the definition of acquired knowledge when doing a professional experience. To do so, it is crucial to define and organize the acquired competences from both theoretical and practical points of view.

From the theoretical range, while working with 3d printing technology, I learned that it is extremely necessary to put a lot

of attention to the gaps and tolerance specifically when designing an element, the above is just to avoid that two different pieces get blend during the 3d printing manufacturing production processes. I had the opportunity to put in practice previous abilities such as, modelling and rendering, to get the closest approximation to the final result for favouring the efficiency of the process at first, and secondly to get an excellent impression of the result at the moment of presenting the product to the client belonging to the luxury fashion industry.



Figure 49. In the Advent of 3D-Printed Accessories. Source: <https://image-cdn.hypb.st/https%3A%2F%2Fhypebeast.com%2Fimage%2F2017%2F02%2Fvojd-3d-printed-accessories-interview-111.jpg?q=70&w=550&cbr=1&fit=max>

And from a practical range, I was introduced to the process of differentiation between elements created completely with polymeric materials and the ones created with alloys such as those between plastic and ceramic. The idea of using different materials and alloys in the 3d printing process is a concept intrinsically linked to the requirement of the client. For instance, an element object built in completely polymeric material has lower weight as compared with those of ceramic alloys; this characteristic would be or would not be required for the client. Another example is referred to the mechanical characteristic of a material that in some cases is linked to the function of the object, which in turn, as the last example, might or not might be primordial for a client. On the other hand, as a practical range, I had the possibility to work on different techniques, processes and technologies for colouring materials; the aforementioned would have similarities or differences depending on the material and superficial finishing.



Figure 50. In the Advent of 3D-Printed Accessories. Source: <https://image-cdn.hypb.st/https%3A%2F%2Fhypebeast.com%2Fimage%2F2017%2F02%2Fvojd-3d-printed-accessories-interview-222.jpg?q=70&w=550&cbr=1&fit=max>

4.1.6. MAIN ESTABLISHED RESULTS

A developed project can be used as a reference to show the application of previous competences and the acquisition of new abilities. It is important also to underline what was the contribution of every member of a group within the phases of developing a project to clarify the diverse competencies applied. As part of my activities at VOJD STUDIOS it was always satisfying to participate in the generation of different product for a variety of distinguished luxury fashion companies. Additionally, at this point I want to highlight being part of the development of a project for Louis Vuitton in which the main goal was the generation of a series of accessories to be manufactured through 3d printing technology. It is important to imply that for the project the logotype of the company was always present inside the design process, from the idea to the final stages, mainly because for the company its logo is recognized in the market as a symbol of prestige. Hence, as a designer, the main challenge of the project was to interpret the necessities of the company into tangible objects. After an

excellent delivery of a project, it is inevitable that the studio was able to catch the interest of other organizations. So, for this project, I was involved from the ideation to the conclusion. At the end of an assessment, I was able to define and organize the sources of acquired competencies in two different groups; one is from the professional role and the other one from the development process.



Figure 51. VOJD Studios collaboration for the Kenzo's men leather goods in AW19. Source: https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/5ca5ef9af4e531180d008709/1557324032693-ELFR0K326CLJN0OHA86/ke17ZwdGBToddI8pDm48kPp8KDuBCWc3lb1zwpGOUl7gQa3H78H3Y0txjaiiv_ofDoOvxcdMmMKkDsyUqMSsMWxHk725yiiHCCLfrh8O1z5QHyNOqBUUEtDDsRWrrJLTmB54K-fV_fjAN1yJ8HvLEaKM6inCy_8Tj12E2UsU9M85-6z2MakvbRjKSoC_-ety0/MFW19_Paris_Kenzo+2.jpg?format=300w

Figure 52. VOJD Studios collaboration for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring/Summer 2019 show. Source: <https://inm-baobab-prod-eu-west-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/inm/medial/image/2018/10/25/12740823Screen-Shot-2018-06-22-at-1.21.30-PM.jpg>

Professional roles:

In some cases, I was able to work with more professionals in the field who guided me through the process of learning the most effective tools used in software to come out with projects in a half of the required time. This knowledge exchange and relation with other experienced designers was fundamental for my professional growth.

Development process:

For some projects, I was asked to carry out a research of the different functions and shapes used at the studio to come out with a shape that truly represented the values of the company. After the phase of research, I worked on the brainstorming of ideas and first sketches. Finally, I was able to work most of the time with software such as Rhino and SolidWorks, essential tools for creating the .stl and .step files required for the manufacturing process carried out by the 3d printing machine.

To complement the concept of established results for my internship at VOJD Studios, I want to point out my participation on the project Louis Vuitton Men's Spring-Summer 2019 Fashion Show, which was presented on June 2018 in Paris, France. At that occasion I had the chance to be part of the co-design process of some accessories presented on the show.

4.1.7. PERSONAL REFLECTION

Capabilities:

- I observed that, thanks to my previous experiences in the M.sc Program of the Politecnico, I was able to manage the time accordingly to the deadlines set by the Studio. My previous working experiences helped me to manage the time accordingly to the company and client requests. Therefore, assignments of the company and the different projects I worked on helped me to improve my professional capabilities.

- The international environment of the office in which I was in contact with - product/industrial, and fashion designers, from a different part of the world - helped me to enhance my social abilities to work as a member of a team.



Figure 53. VOJD Studios design team in Berlin. Source: Author

- I feel that personally the challenge of being in a different city like Berlin, with a different language and culture, helped me to improve my social intelligence and to adapt myself to a new and different situation. Despite the difficulties of the beginning, for me it was an amazing experience that I totally recommend to other people as a way of getting out of the comfort zone.

- Although I have already gained previous professional experiences, in my opinion, the possibility of working in a different continent, with people from different parts of the world, and different methodologies, were crucial together with the fact of adapting to a new design process within an organization. The luxury fashion industry keeps pushing you to continue to be creative and innovative.

- After this opportunity in this studio, the company was/is interested in continuing to collaborate with me, and that is why it was possible to develop my thesis work at VOJD Studios. For an Afro-Colombian citizen, these personal and professional achievements are very difficult to accomplish in my native country Colombia.



5. CONCEPT DESIGN

5.1. MARKET RESEARCH

For a development of a design project it is always necessary and important to make a market research, not only to find inspiration but also to collect information regarding costumers and target markets. Today there are some samples of work inspired by the Afro-Colombian culture in the global market. The inventive force behind those samples can usually be found within the creative mind of Afro-Colombian artisans that put ancestral knowledge into use to come out with master pieces that represent their cultural heritage. But although Colombia is a nation deeply influenced by the African culture, it is also a country that “*has historically overlooked and/or excluded its Black population at various levels; not only are they underrepresented in business and politics, they are also sidelined in arts and culture*” (Muhammad 2019)¹⁴⁵. The underrepresentation and lack of Afro-Colombian figures in society draw people to the misconception that some of the most characteristic elements of cultural intangible heritage and identities of the country do not have an African touch. For example, some people in the country ignore the fact that *cumbia*, *joropo* and *vallenato*, some of the most diffused folkloric genres of music and dance from Colombia in the world, have African origins. Moreover, the phenomenon of cultural appropriation by some not African-root authors has always been present throughout the history of the country. The phenomenon is counterproductive to the African descent culture due to the fact that some elements are taken from the culture and incorporated into another culture without giving acknowledgment or recognition of any kind. Therefore, in this chapter some major examples of real Afro-Colombian contribution to the Colombian jewellery industry will be provided.

The bases and characteristics of the Afro-Colombian jewellery date back to the time in which Spanish colonizers took African slaves and brought them to America. The African slave trade was originated from the continuous decrease of Native American enslaved people, used at that time as fundamental workforce for the colonists. Therefore, the idea of the Spanish colonizers was to replace a debilitated labour force for a more strong and summited one. In various places in America, most of the African slaves were coming from different countries such as, Angola, Congo, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Nigeria, etc., and during their transportation to the new land, every individual was separated from other individuals coming from his/her own country, family, and ethnic group. As a result, at their arrival there was a mix between different African cultures. Although there were cultural similarities within the African slaves, the new integration favoured

¹⁴⁵ Muhammad, S. (2019). *This team of Afro-Colombian actresses is bringing diverse stories to the stage*, Remezcla, <https://remezcla.com/features/culture/team-afro-colombian-actresses-bringing-diverse-stories-stage/> (last consulted on 21/02/2020).

the generation of a new cultural conformation that was, of course, based upon the African most distinguishing aesthetic characteristics. These aesthetic characteristics can be reflected in different artistic manifestations such as, manufactured textiles, artisanry, music, dances, jewellery, and so on.

5.2. INSPIRATION SOURCES

The inspiration source is a fundamental part of the development of a project. When it is explained, it helps readers to have an initial clue of what the bases and principles of an author's idea are in the creative process. So, after the recollection of information regarding the Afro-Colombian society and its relentless efforts to contribute to the generation of a worldwide recognized Colombian culture, it is important to point out the two elements selected as inspiration source for this project. For this project the main idea is to develop a collection of fashion accessories to celebrate the Afro-Colombian culture as part of the Afro-Descendant heritage, starting from the extraction and re-elaboration of authentic elements of the tradition using a 3d printing technology, inspired by the Barranquilla Carnival (a celebration born from African Rituals), and the Afro-Colombian hairstyle (a practice used as a form of resistance against oppression and discrimination).



Figure 55. Carnival dancer. Source: <https://hablemosdeculturas.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Mascaras-del-carnaval-de-Barranquilla-1-768x512.jpg> Figure 56. Afro-Colombian hairstyle. Source: https://www.elespectador.com/sites/default/files/000_q72yy.jpg

5.2.1. ANCESTRAL AFRO-COLOMBIAN RITUALS

One of the most important and popular Colombian folkloric celebrations is known as the Barranquilla Carnival. From the festivity it is important to highlight its prominent influences from the European, Native American and African culture. Throughout the years, different theories about the origin of the celebration have been proposed. But the clearest and most spread one is that it could be originated from the holiday week for the slaves, and then it grew until it became a regional celebration. Despite of the forced separation from their motherland and brutal abuses from the European colonists, most of the African slaves continued to cherish their native traditions. Thus, after decades of demanding a better treatment from their owners, a given holiday week was earned by the slaves. This week was used for the slaves to celebrate their culture. During this week different rituals were hold to honour their deity figures, and among those, we can mention animals that include the bull, tiger, zebra, donkey, goat, monkey, alligator, and so on. The rituals also include songs, dances, chants and other cultural manifestations. Manufactured elements were created to be used during the rituals and each of those had symbolic connotations. At this point it is essential to highlight the importance of the mask as one of the most outstanding element used during the rituals. The masks portrayed respected symbolic figures of the African slaves, and they were also used as a distinctive element for people who were wearing them during the rituals. Nowadays the masks used during the Barranquilla Carnival do not differ that much from those used during African slave rituals, and represent one of the most distinctive symbols of the folkloric Colombian celebration. As well described by Bakhtin:

“[...] [T]he carnival-grotesque form exercises the same function: to consecrate inventive freedom .to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from convention and established truths, from clichés carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (1968, 34)¹⁴⁶.

Some of the most important masks worn during the Barranquilla Carnival and a little explanation about its significance and origin are shown below.

“Máscara de Torito” (Little bull Mask)



Figure 57. ToritoFontalvo01. Source: <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/Madera/ToritoFontalvo01.jpg>

It is the most representative mask from the *Congos* dance, in which the main bull (*Toro mayor*) leads the animal quadrille. The design displayed in the picture dates back from 1878, and is traditionally from Rebolo, a recognized neighbourhood of Barranquilla. It was elaborated by the celebre carver *Rocha*, and the design was accredited in 1996 by the Colombian handcraft organization (Artesanías de Colombia). The original mask is preserved in the house museum of dance “*El Torito*” (Little bull) in the Rebolo neighbourhood. The mask was carved in wood, varnished and decorated with mirrors, bull horns, brass bells, coloured scarves and satin ribbons¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/> (last consulted on 02/03/2020).

“Máscara de Tigre” (Tiger Mask)



Figure 58. TigreManchando. Source: <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/Madera/TigreManchando.jpg>

It is a member of the quadrille of animals in the *Congos* dance. It is also traditionally from the Rebolo neighbourhood of Barranquilla city. The design has an articulated jaw and it was elaborated by the recognised carver “*Mañé*” *Herrera* in the period of 1950-1980. The design mask was also accredited in 1996 by the Colombian handcraft organization (Artesanías de Colombia). The mask was manufactured in wood, painted with enamels and adorned with horse hair for its mustache.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/> (last consulted on 02/03/2020).

“Máscara de Chivo” (Goat Mask)



Figure 59. Chivo. Source: <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/Madera/Chivo.jpg>

It is a member of the animals' quadrille in the *Congos* dance. It is also traditionally from the Rebolo neighbourhood of Barraquilla city and it was elaborated by the recognised carver “Mañé” Herrera in the period of 1950-1980. The design mask was also accredited in 1996 by the Colombian handcraft organization (Artesanías de Colombia). The mask was manufactured in wood, painted with enamels, varnished and decorated with *fique* on its beard (*Ibid.*).

“Máscara de Burro Blanco y Negro” (Black and White Donkey Mask)



Figure 60. BurroBlanco, BurroNegro. Sources: <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/Madera/BurroBlanco.jpg>, <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/Madera/BurroNegro.jpg>

It is a member of the quadrille of animals in the *Congos* dance. It is also traditionally from the Rebolo neighbourhood of Barraquilla city. The design has an articulated jaw and it was elaborated by the renowned carver “Mañé” Herrera in the period of 1950-1980. The design mask was also accredited in 1996 by the Colombian handcraft organization (Artesanías de Colombia). The mask was manufactured in wood, painted with enamels and varnished¹⁴⁹.

149 <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/> (last consulted on 02/03/2020).

“Mascara de Toro Miura” (Bull Miura Mask)



Figure 61. ToritoMiura. Sources: <http://artesaniasdecolombia.com.co/PortalAC/images/especial-mascaras-carnaval-artesania-colombia-2017-2.jpg>

It is a recognised and famous carnival decorative mask. It was created by Manuel Pertuz in 1993. Its rounded and volumetric shape reproduces with more accuracy the animal head. Some stylized coloured lines in yellow, blue, red, black and white demarcate the face of the mask, and as a distinctive element it has a white star and coloured points in its forehead. It was awarded with the craft master’s medal in 2001. The mask was carved in wood, painted with enamels and varnished.

The Satin Ribbons



Figure 62. Torito Tradicional Naranja. Source: <http://www.carnavaldebarranquilla.org/miniweb/mascaras/Madera/Torito Tradicional Naranja.jpg>

It is one of the most employed elements in the Barranquilla Carnival. The coloured fabrics are applied in a great variety of objects and accessories that can be observed in events throughout different locations during this important Colombian celebration.

5.2.2. THE HIDDEN SIDE OF THE AFRO-COLOMBIAN HAIR STYLE

In the last part of this chapter it was explained how the Afro-Colombian slaves at the time of the colony used to manufacture different items and accessories for rituals, daily life activities, or distinctive differentiation elements. But slaves were not always allowed by their householders to have and create that kind of objects. Most of the time, owners tried to limit slave interaction among themselves or with their surroundings for fear to escapes or rebellions. Consequently, they started to use their bodies as a means of expression. Hairstyle became one of the most important instruments for cultural expression at that time. Different kinds of hairstyle were worn by women and children, who in a specific threatening situation used to hide them from their owners with turbans of African heritage design. But over time, an unthinkable hidden message began to be born behind Afro-Colombian hairstyles. Thus, slaves started to use the particular design displayed through their hair as maps indicating their escape route from slavery. At this stage, it is important to explain how they were able to find such a clever and original solution with a hairstyle.



Figure 63. “Tejiendo Esperanza 2019». Source: https://www.kienyke.com/sites/default/files/styles/interna_relacionado_seccion_s/public/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WhatsApp-Image-2019-05-31-at-5.45.52-PM.jpg?itok=tAZvGEI

“Las Gusanillas” or “cornrows”

“Las Gusanillas” (in the Colombian pacific coast region) also called “cornrows” (in the USA), or *canerows* (in the Caribbean region), is a kind of hairstyle that was first seen in Stone Age paintings that date back to 3000 B.C. and that were found in the Tassili Plateau within the Sahara region. It is a kind of African braiding hairstyle where the hair is braided really closed to the scalp in an underhand, upward movement in order to create a single line of raised row. While mainly the cornrows are created in neat linear rows, they can also be formed in a myriad of geometric and curving designs (Sharma 2018)¹⁵⁰.

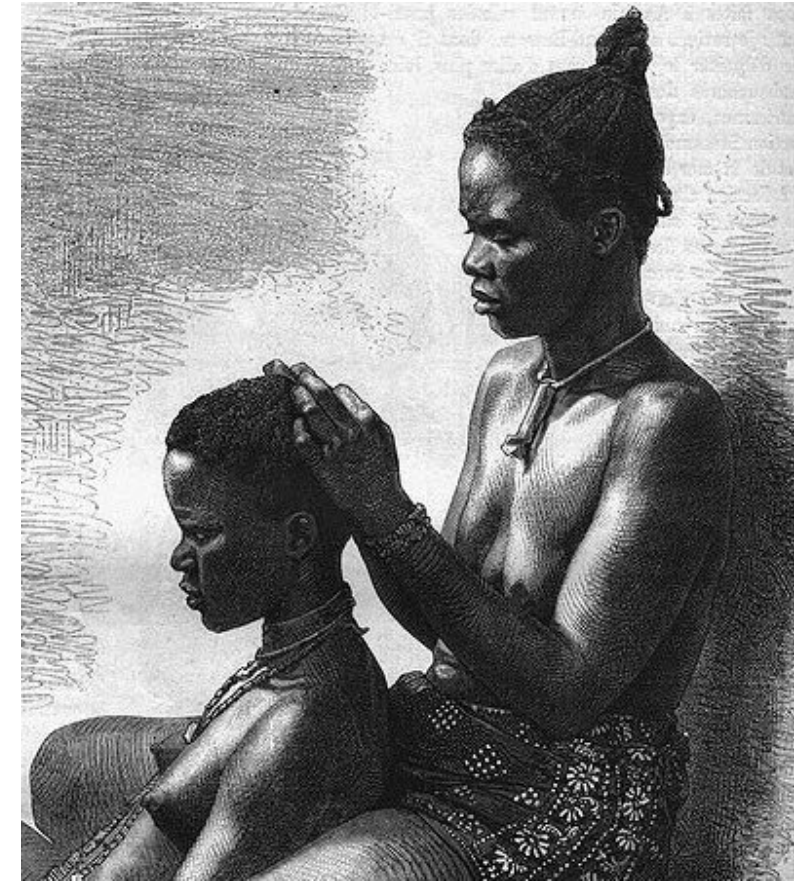


Figure 64. Braiding hair. Source: <https://www.edtimes.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/DLj1H4sXkAlbM2A.jpg>

150 Sharma, C. (2018, 29 January). Africans used to hide escape maps from slavery in their hairstyles, Edtimes, <https://www.edtimes.in/africans-used-to-hide-escape-maps-from-slavery-in-their-hairstyles/> (last consulted on 03/03/2020).

The cornrows hairstyle started to be spread through Egypt and in the rest of Africa and instantly started to generate connection between individuals and distinctive groups, acting as a sort of communication language. On the other hand, cornrows are also an indicator of different social notions such as age, relationship, ethnicity, status, religion and more concepts related to identity. During the time of the Slave Trade, when millions of Africans were brutally forced to leave their land and head towards the Atlantic sea, European colonizers used to shave the head of the prisoners as a sanitary measurement, but also as a way to rip off their cultural attachment heritage. For the settlers, the African hair was considered as disorganized, heavy, and “unruly”; consequently, Africans pleased their captors and started to wear their hair in tight braids or cornrows, as a way to look more neat and tidy to the eyes of their European colonizers.



Figure 65. Harper and banaker. Source: <https://www.edtimes.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/harperandbanaker.jpg>

At this point, it is important to highlight the importance of Benkos Bioho, an African heroic figure that, at the time of the slavery, used to guide their people to liberty and fight for their right. Benkos Bioho was born inside a royal family in the

Island of Bioho, one belonging to the archipelago of Bissagos, off the coast of what is today Guinea-Bissau. He was capture by Portuguese people and sold to Spaniard ones in Cartagena, a major port city located on the Colombian Atlantic coast. During his early life, around the 17th century, he tried to escape numerous times, until finally succeeded and built the San Basilio de Palenque village in the company of some other fugitive slaves. The village was a walled well-protected city, aimed to help runaways and slaves to find their way to freedom. Under Bioho’s command people from the village built an army, as well as their own cultural language and even an intelligence network to organize and support slaves that wanted to obtain their freedom and get into the safe areas. Moreover, under Bioho’s guidance women were able to create route maps and even messages throughout the cornrows’ hairstyle. Consequently, cornrows became an excellent communication instrument, due to the fact that slaves were rarely able to possess writing materials, and even when they had such a privilege, a message or a map in the wrong hands could cause problems to the people involved.



Figure 66. Different cornrows hairstyles. Source: <https://www.edtimes.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/918e18004ebad720eb498ca3761adb7b-640x640.jpg>

No one would have thought that a message or a map could be embodied on the slaves' head, so it was slightly easy to circulate information in this particular way. But not only messages were worn in the form of African cornrows, they were also used to carry on decorative seeds that lately were used by the liberated slaves to grow their own crops. This last practice was inherited from their African ancestors, who used to hide elements in their hair so as to protect them from robbery or loss.



Figure 67. Afro-Colombian hairstyles with accessories. Source: [https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-zBVOJf7nNFw/VAYk6dWvFII/AAAAAAAAAD0/lkw-uNvcnF8s1600/tejiendo-esperanzas-7%2B\(1\).jpg](https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-zBVOJf7nNFw/VAYk6dWvFII/AAAAAAAAAD0/lkw-uNvcnF8s1600/tejiendo-esperanzas-7%2B(1).jpg)

5.3. THE CONCEPTS

5.3.1. DEFINITION OF COLLECTION OBJECTS

A basic feature of African jewellery that can be mentioned is its strong use of symbolism that can be observed in different pieces such as, necklaces, rings, bracelets, earrings, hair accessories, and other elements that at the time of the colony were used as amulets in rituals, or simply, as valuable self-adornments. Every manufactured element had a meaning or was created to represent a specific idea. Usually, upon a variety of accessories, animal's shapes were engraved, like for example the jackal, conventionally pictured as a figure for keeping away bad spirits, the snake, considered as life defender, or the salamander, regarded as a fire defender image.



Figure 68. African-Jewelry and materials. Source: <http://bridgenewsgh.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/A-chief-on-golden-regalia.jpg>

But not only animals were source of inspiration, other shapes were taken from nature too, like for example fruits such as the almond that represented the immortality or the pomegranate, traditionally thought as a fertility symbol. Throughout history, and for their jewellery creation, Africans have tended to use organic materials, because of their readily availability within their settlement region. Wood, amber, glass, bone, sea shells, animal hair, egg shells, carved stone, and seeds are some of the most common materials used by African craftsmen.



Figure 69. African-Jewelry and materials. Source: <https://africa-facts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/ts994.jpg>

At their arrival in America, Africans slave had to adapt themselves to the new environment, thus to the use of some new and different materials. But still, some other materials such as silver and gold were well known among slaves, due to the pioneered knowledge in the manipulation of the precious metals from some African workers.



Figure 70. African Jewelry. Source: <https://africa-facts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/African-Jewelry-1-1024x477.jpg>

Another basic feature of African jewellery is its strong cultural meaning, for instance, some accessories can display an individual's power, wealth, and position within the society. For example, a peculiar necklace may indicate the provenance of the wearer and the family which she/he belongs to. During important celebrations, the particular accessories were carried by distinguishing nobles and priests with the purpose of purifying the chief soul. Necklaces, bracelets, rings and hair ornaments were worn in major ceremonies. At this point it is important to review the most common accessories used by the African people, specifically necklaces, rings, bracelets, and earrings.



Figure 71. African Jewellery. Source: <https://www.atinkaonline.com/fm/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ASANTEHEN-880x440.jpg>

In necklaces representations of the buffalo were engraved. Buffalo skulls were used as a decoration element in bronze necklaces. For Africans the buffalo was an important figure and it was respected for its cunning and strength. Consequently, a Buffalo necklace's wearer was an important and respected individual within the society and only highest dignitaries were able to sit in assemblies on the buffalo skull.



Figure 72. African necklace from Bushman people. Source: <http://www.botswana.co.za/images/botswana-bushman-beads-ian-michler.jpg>

At the time of the African slavery trade, large bracelets were used within sanctuaries by some African tribes as a means of communication with ancestral spirits.

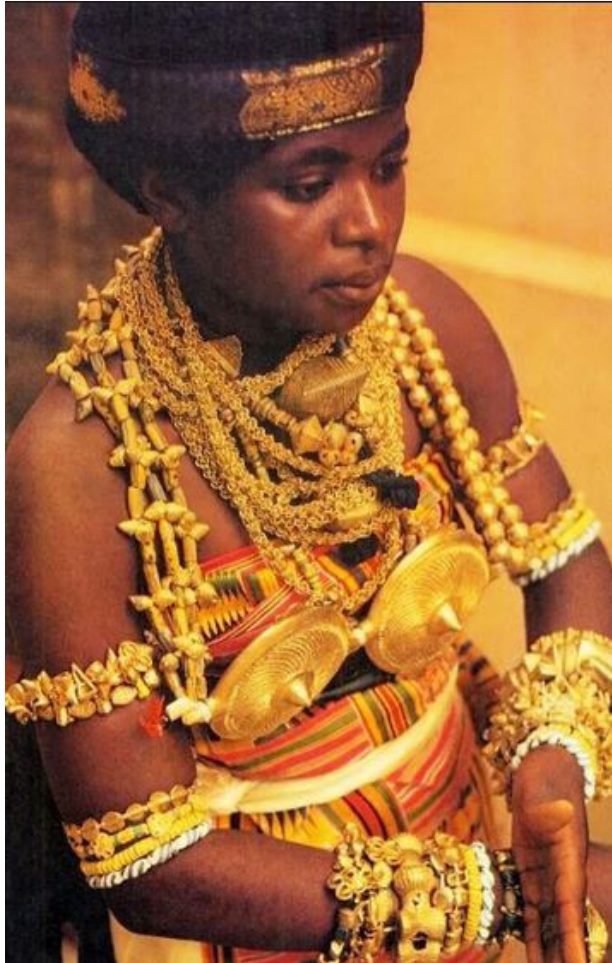


Figure 73. African bracelets. Source: <https://zoede.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Ashanti-Funeral-dancer-Phot-Angela-Fisher.jpg>

Elongated silver rings employed as tobacco holders were used by chiefs and high-ranking guests of the nomadic population of Berbers and Turks. Military heads, knights, and warriors used to wear rings that represented some fighters on horseback during ceremonial rituals and prayers.



Figure 74. African bracelets. Source: <https://www.cfhi.org/sites/default/files/styles/gallery-image/public/images/gallery/ghana13.jpg?itok=1OQHdsv1>

Fulani earrings are one of the most famous pieces of African jewellery. These earrings are created in Mali by Fulani craftsmen. They are hand-crafted twisted bronze pieces that, with their glimmering appearance, make an instant impression. For their manufacture, the bronze is hammered nearly to a piece of paper's thickness and then it is twisted to create the intricate look of the earrings. For centuries the design has maintained its characteristic shape, and women would normally receive them as a gift on their wedding day, or on other important occasions.



Figure 75. Fulani gold earrings. Source: <https://africa-facts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Fulani-gold-earrings.jpg>



Figure 76. Fulani gold earrings. Source: https://www.fulaba.com/b/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Fulaba-shoot-with-Edil-gold-dipped-Fulani-earrings-large_83-edited-2-1151x1280.jpg

6. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

6.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARAMETRIC DESIGN FOR PERSONALIZED OBJECTS

Parametric design can be defined as the design process based on algorithmic thinking that allows the formulation of parameters and procedures that in cooperation, determine, codify and specify the connection between design intent and design response (Jabi 2013; Woodbury 2010)¹⁵¹¹⁵².



Figure 78. The Shenzhen Airport, by Massimiliano Fuksas, has a wave-like skin that was parametrically designed by a single person, using scripts that took into account necessary structural and daylighting requirements. Source: <https://d1xchyou513y0i.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017442111-Shenzhen-Airport-768x511.jpg>

151 Jabi, W. (2013). *Parametric Design for Architecture*. London, United Kingdom: Laurence King.
152 Woodbury, R. (2010). *Elements of Parametric Design*. United Kingdom: Routledge.

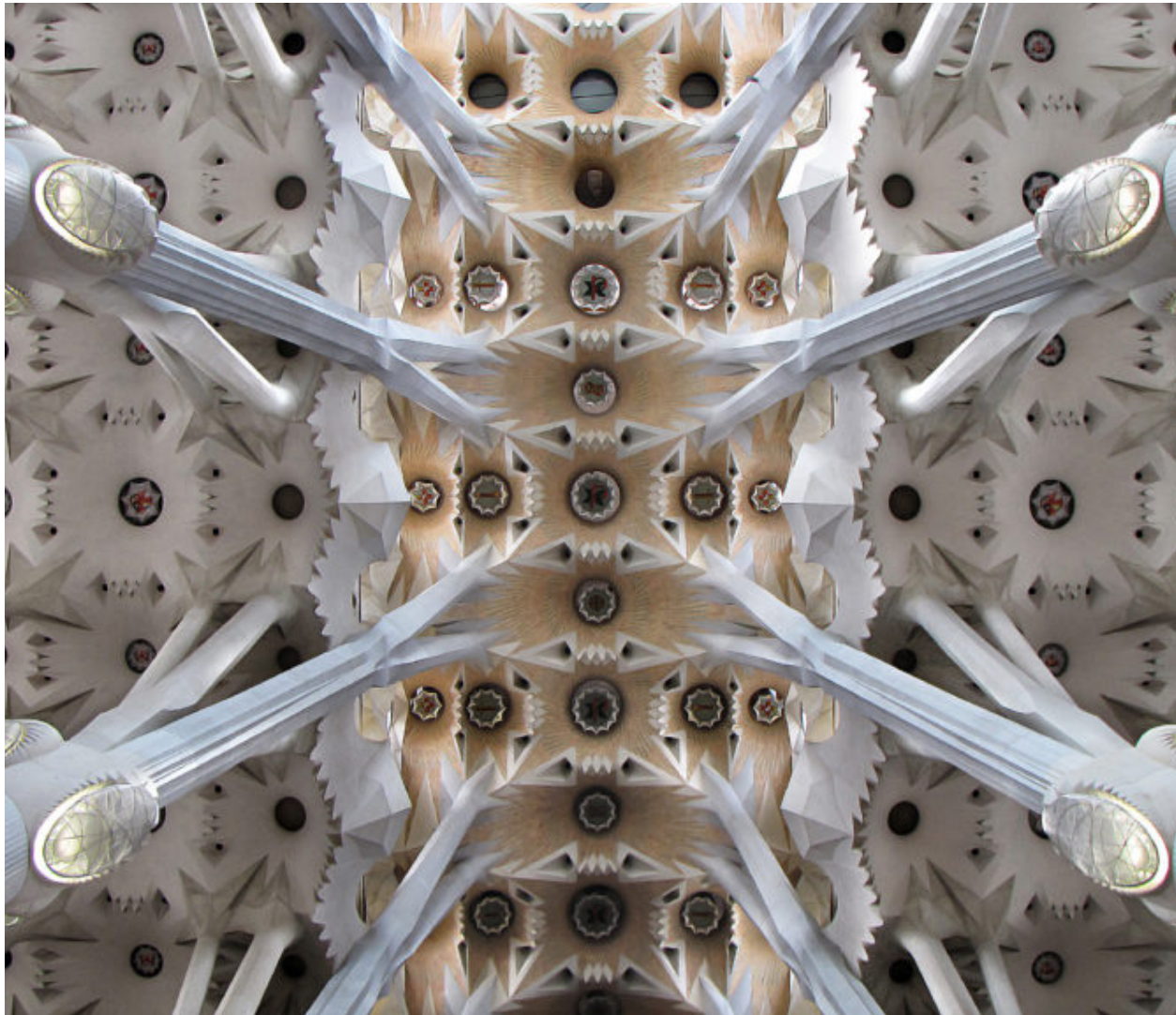


Figure 79. One of the earliest examples of parametric design, Gaudí designed the soaring arches of Sagrada Família by using chains plied down with weights to create inverted models that simulated the optimal curvature for bearing the weight of the building. Source: <https://d1xchyou513y0i.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/20174353/3-Gaudi-Sagrada-Familia-768x576.jpg>

In parametric design, a geometry and structure in which their elements are in a correlative relationship can be manipulated throughout parameters to generate more complex geometries and structures. The term parametric originates from the mathematical term ‘parametric equations’ and indicates the use of definite parameters and variables that can be modified to manipulate or change the final result of an equation or system. Nowadays the term is more associated to computational design systems, but a previous illustration of these modern systems can be found in Antoni Gaudí’s architectural works (Frazer, John 2016)¹⁵³.

For this project the importance of the parametric design resides in the concept of customization of designed elements. The designed accessories are addressed to a variety of different customers. Having a parametric design will at least facilitate the design process and help to decrease time of modelling production. Among the advantages of applying parametric design in this project, it can be listed:

- Further design control and capacity to obtain conceptual integrity in all surfaces of the model.
- Easy modification due to the used of parameters.
- Less material waste and cost reduction.

The main software tools implemented in this project were Power surfacing for SolidWorks and Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 3d.

153 Frazer, J. (2016). Parametric Computation: History and Future. In P. Schumacher (Ed.) *Architectural Design: Parametricism 2.0: Rethinking Architectural Agenda for the 21st Century* (Vol. 86, pp. 18-23). Chichester, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons.

The SolidWorks' plug-in, Power Surfacing is an application for industrial Designers that allows the easy generation of organic 3d objects, through the freeform manipulation of surfaces and solids. The application is well integrated and allows the use of all SolidWorks commands.

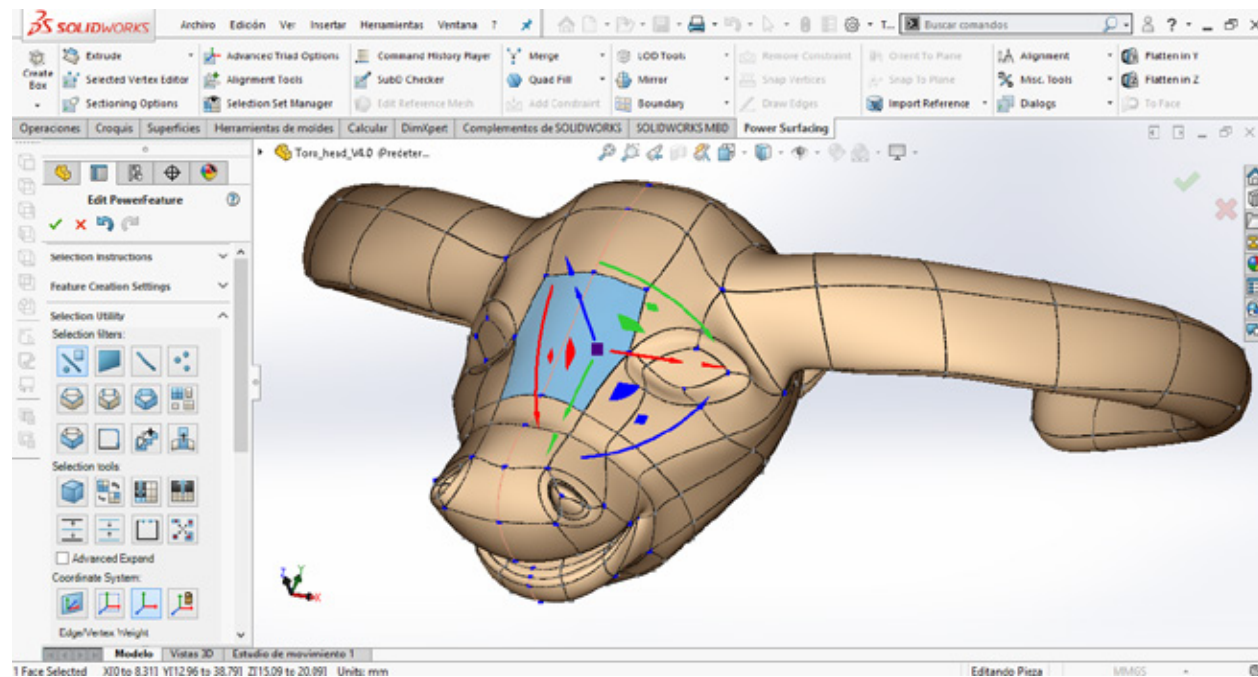


Figure 80. Toro ring being modified with SolidWorks' Power Surfacing tool. Source: Author

On the other hand, Grasshopper for Rhinoceros was another modelling tool implemented in the developing of the project. Being a plug-in for Rhinoceros 3d it allows the creation and edition of geometries and it is displayed to users with a visual programming language interface. Components or nodes are dragged onto a canvas in order to build a grasshopper "definition" (Davis, Daniel 2014)¹⁵⁴. The utility of the software for the personalization of objects in the project can be observed when, by the variation of a determined parameter of a "definition", changes are spread throughout the whole system and observed as a modification on the geometry.

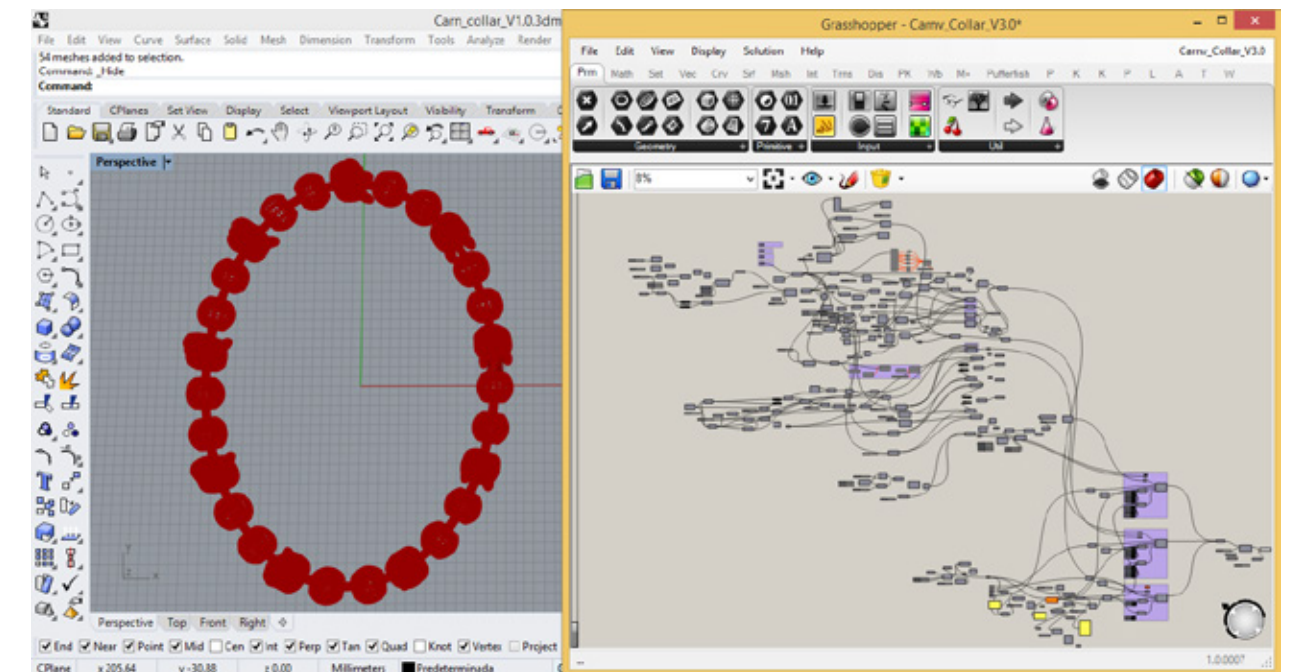


Figure 81. Carnival necklace being modified with Grasshopper. Source: Author

As a conclusion it can be stated that the use of parametric design in the design process increases the variety of solution when the correct parameter is implemented aiming to enable the correct control of elements belonging to a complex structure.

154 Davis, Daniel (2013, 6 August). *A History of Parametric*, <https://www.danieldavis.com/a-history-of-parametric/> (last consulted 07/03/2020).

6.2. THE TWO COLLECTIONS



As aforementioned, this project has as a fundamental aim, the celebration of the Afro-Colombian culture as part of the Afro-Descendant heritage, starting from the extraction and re-elaboration of authentic elements of the tradition by using the 3d printing technology as a display medium. The two families of objects are presented in this chapter, one from the Afro-Colombian rituals and the other from the Afro-Colombian hairstyle practice. Each collection are conformed by the following elements:



Figure 82. Sketches and renders of the two family collection objects. Source: Author

6.2.1. THE RINGS

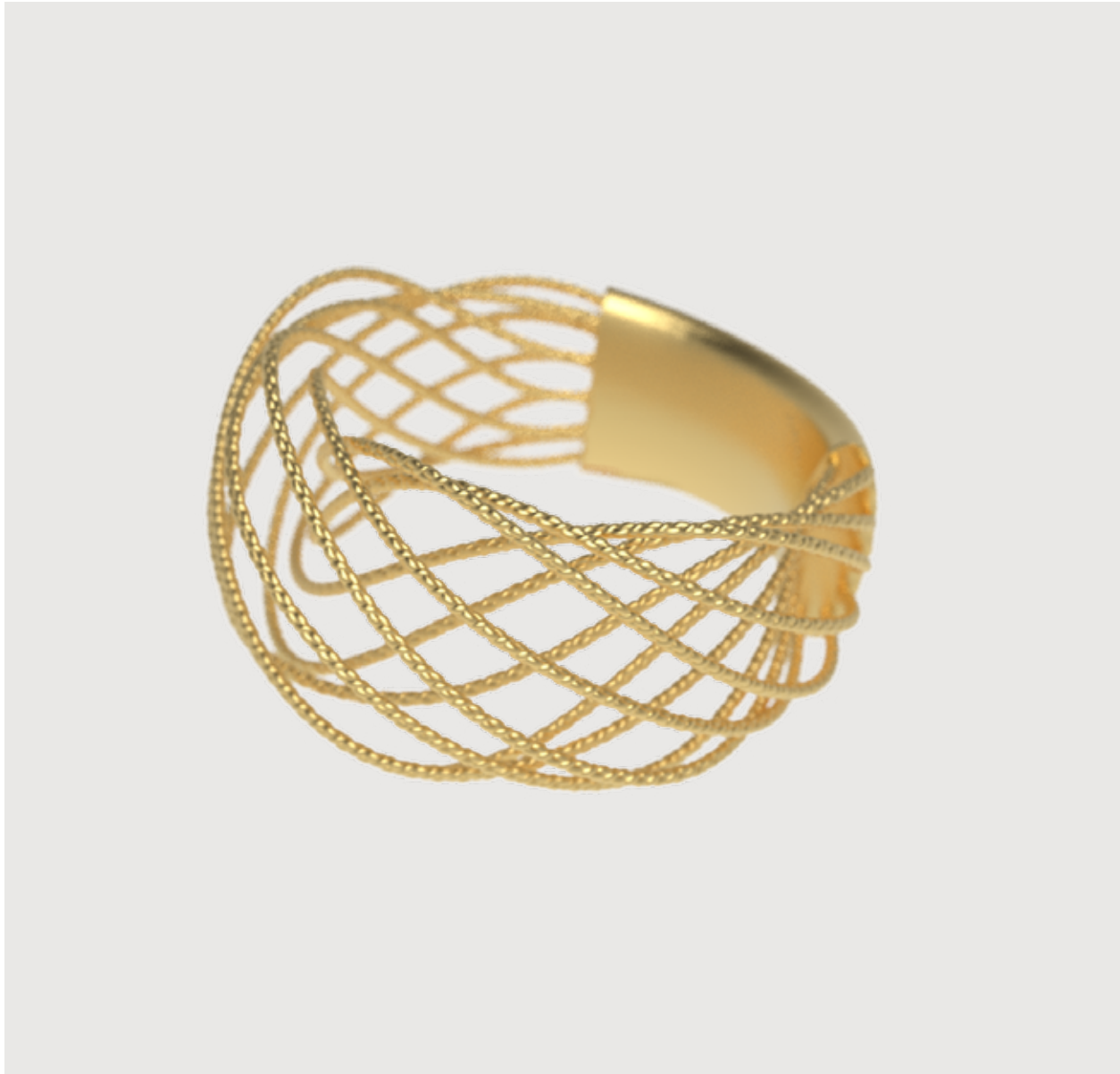


Figure 83. Hairstyle ring. Source: Author



Figure 84. Carnival ring. Source: Author

Hairstyle ring

Cornrows were fundamental in time of the colony, but are also important nowadays for Afro-descendent communities in Colombia as a cultural way of expression. Different events and contest are hold within the communities, with the principal objective of celebrating and honouring the ancestral practice of cornrow's hairstyle. Creativity is the main ingredient in contests held in the Colombian cities whit great affluence of Afro-Descendent people. The above drove me to the determination of opting for that as inspirational element for the creation of the ring.



Figure 85. Afro-hairstyle contest Cali 2014. Source: https://www.elespectador.com/sites/default/files/e771c8cc9d8f0d62ef2df3535e5442fb_0.

.jpg

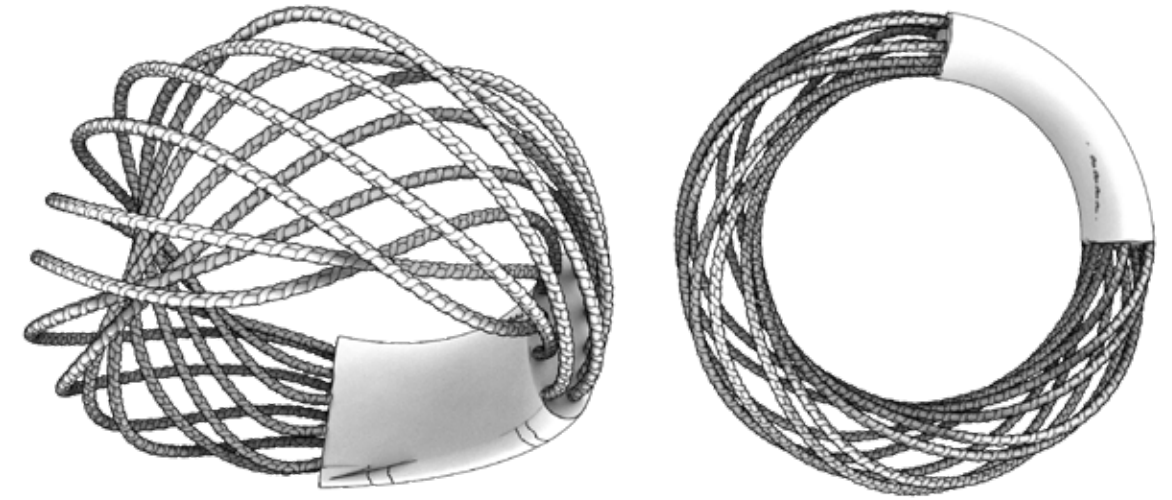


Figure 86. Sketches of the hairstyle ring. Source: Author

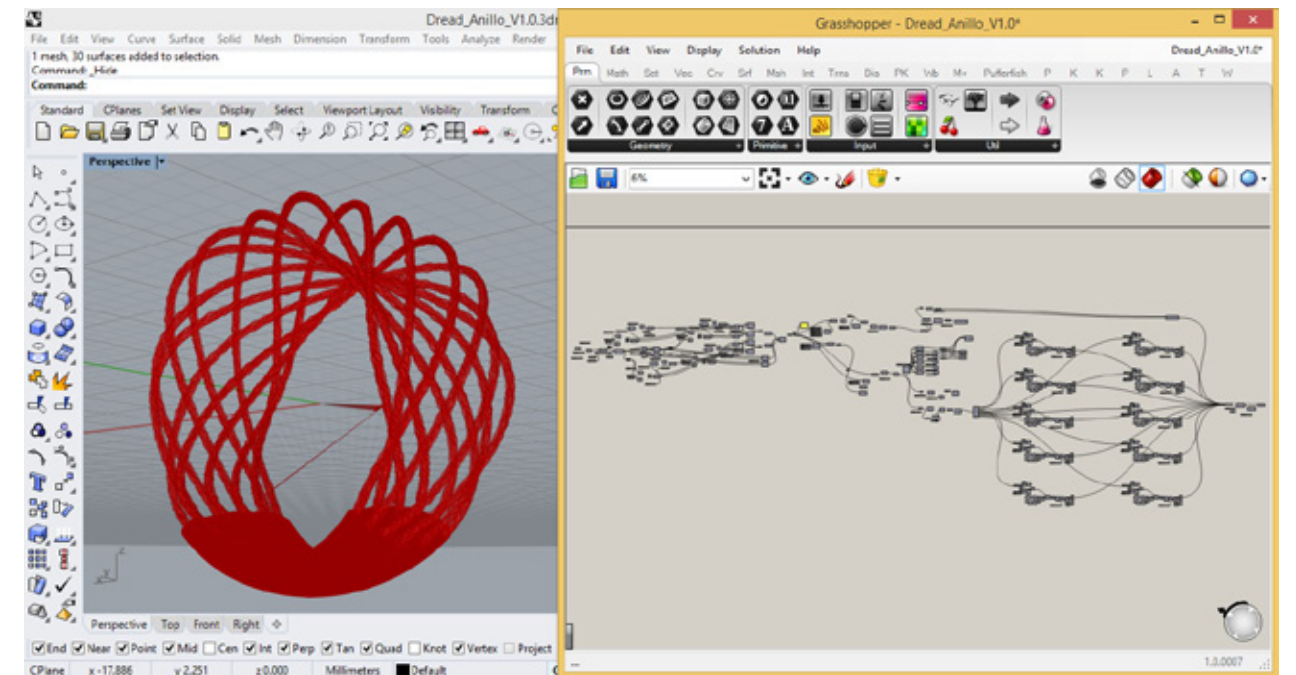


Figure 87. Hairstyle ring modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author



Figure 88. Hairstyle ring. Source: Author



Figure 89. Hairstyle ring. Source: Author

Carnival ring

In the main parade of the Barranquilla carnival, the major bull is the first emerging figure and the one who leads the subsequent animal quadrille figures.



Figure 90. Advertising image from the Barranquilla carnival 2017. Sources: <https://www.korrajea.co/2015/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Carnaval2017-768x589.jpg>

In most recent times, as for this important festival, the bull has achieved an important recognition, particularly in the figure of “Toro Miura” manufactured by artisan master Manuel Pertuz.



Figure 91. Toro Miura of artisan Manuel Pertuz. Sources: http://artesaniasdecolombia.com.co/Documentos/Contenido/26318_especial-mascaras-carnaval-artesantias-colombia-2017-g.jpg

The roundness and accuracy of Toro Miura's shape has captured the attention of the public, which in some occasions have transformed its image into the carnival symbol.



Figure 92. Sound of Colombia's cover. Sources: <https://static.soundsandcolours.com/2017/02/sccolombia.jpg>

The beauty of Toro Miura's shape inspired me for the elaboration of the ring belonging to the carnival collection.

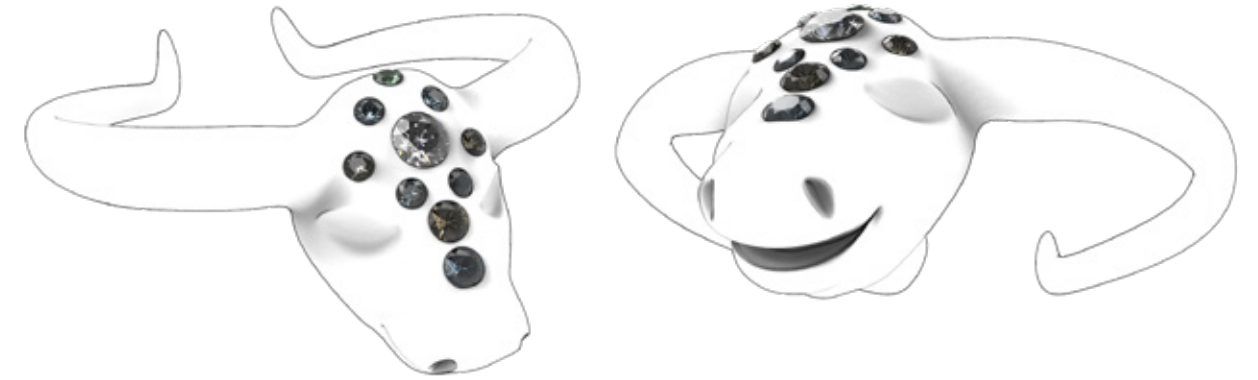


Figure 93. Sketches of the carnival ring. Source: Author

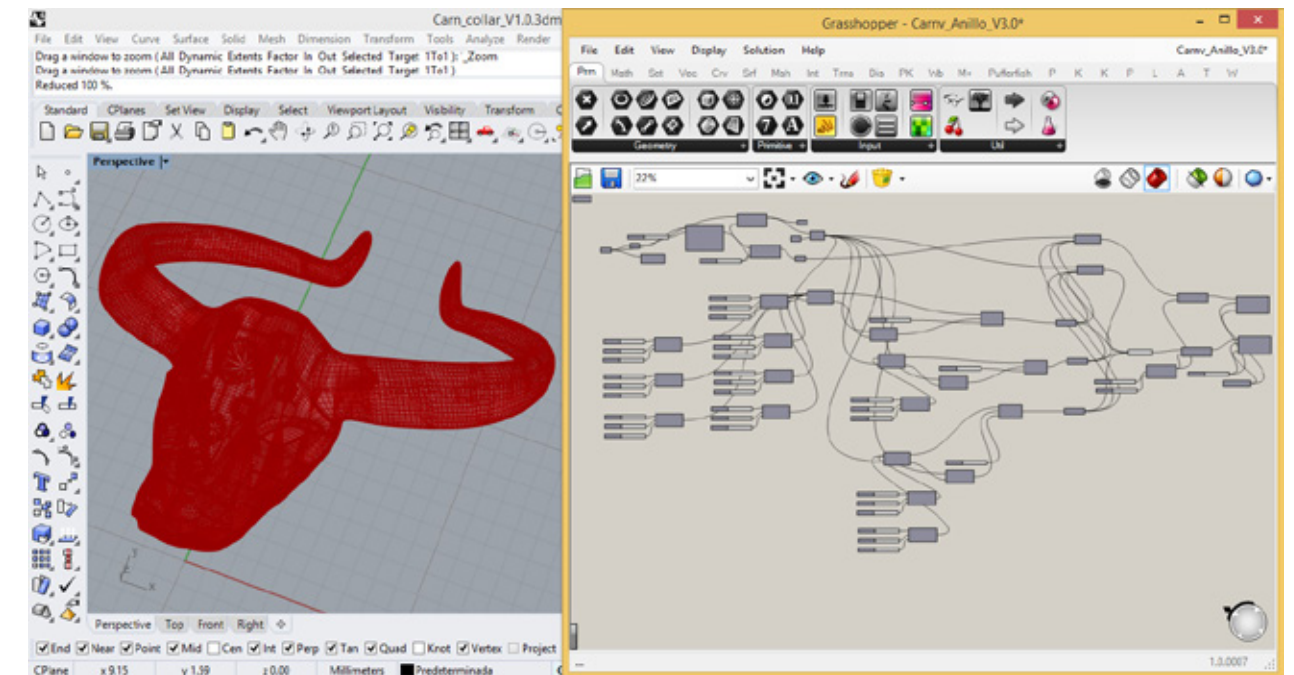


Figure 94. Carnival ring 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author

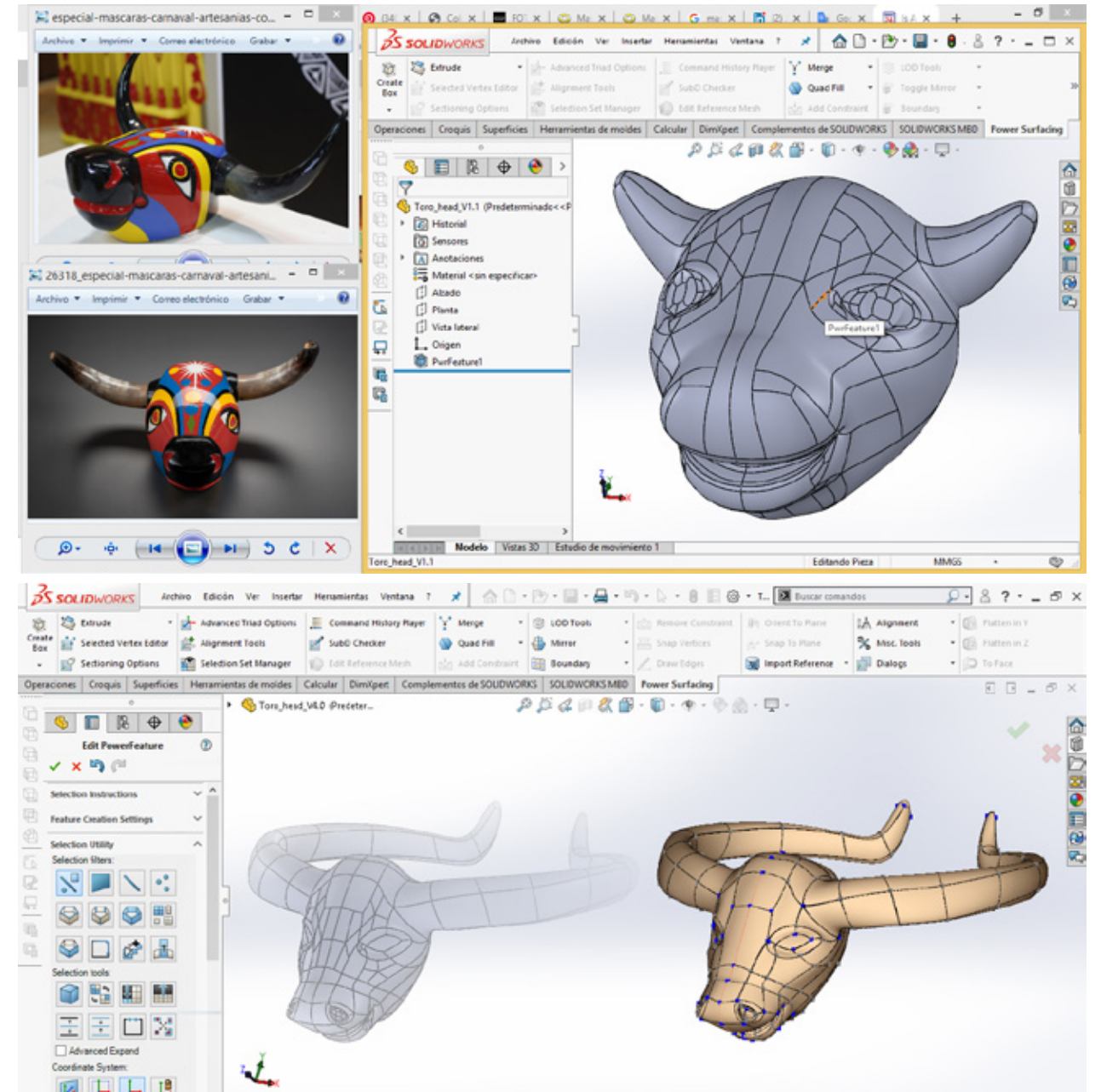
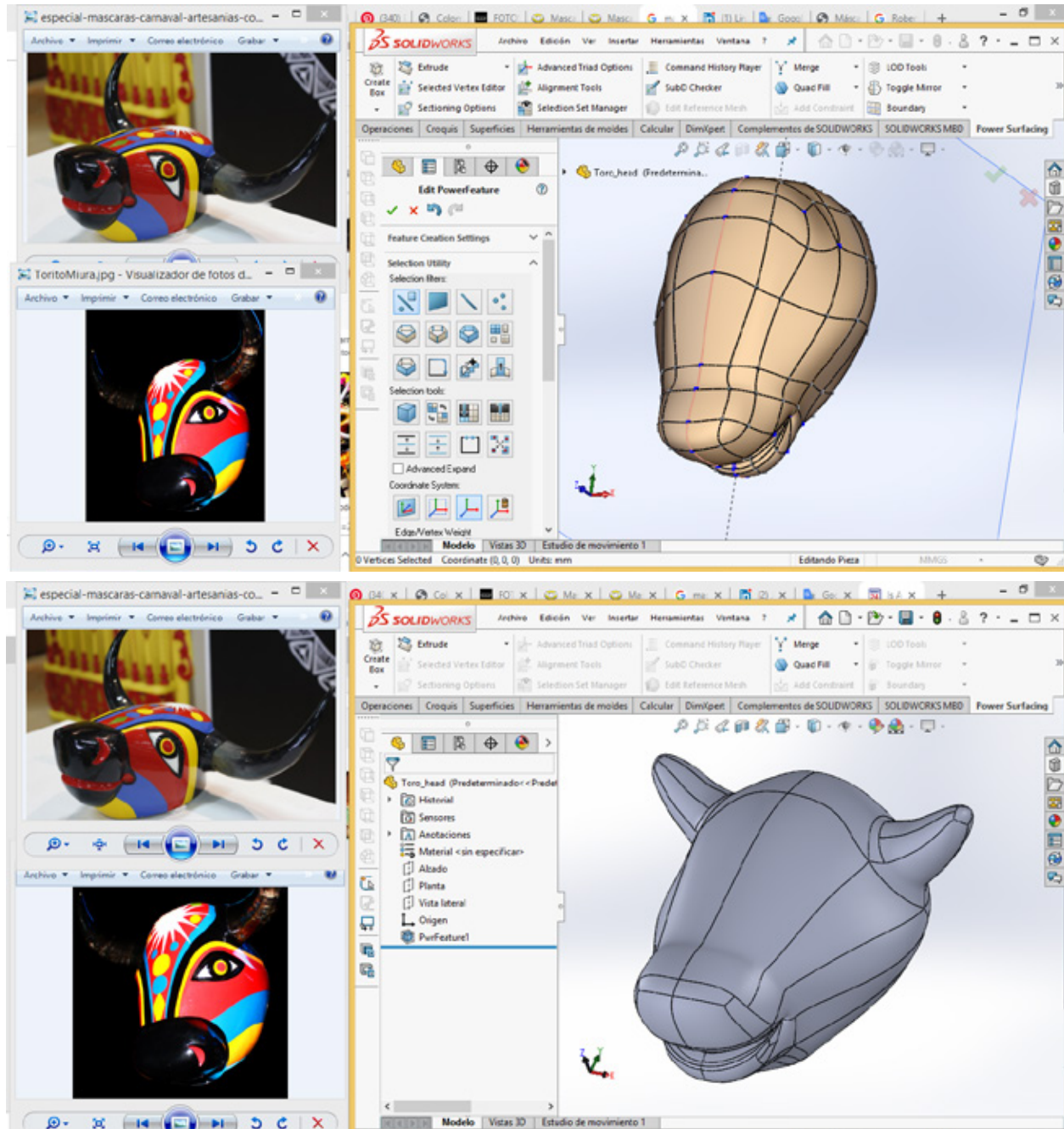


Figure 95. Carnival ring 3d modelling in SolidWorks Power Surfacing. Source: Author



Figure 96. Carnival ring. Source: Author



Figure 97. Carnival ring. Source: Author

6.2.2. THE BRACELETS



Figure 98. Hairstyle bracelet. Source: Author



Figure 99. Carnival bracelet. Source: Author

Hairstyle bracelet

Due to the fact that cornrows are a fundamental element of the Afro-Colombian hairstyle, I decided to use them as main inspirational elements in the development of the bracelet, together with the concept of geometrical conformation of a bunch of African hair.



Figure 100. A Group of African hair. Source: Author

Due to parametrization of the designed elements, it is possible to create different shapes that can fit the design taste of the client demanding for customization.

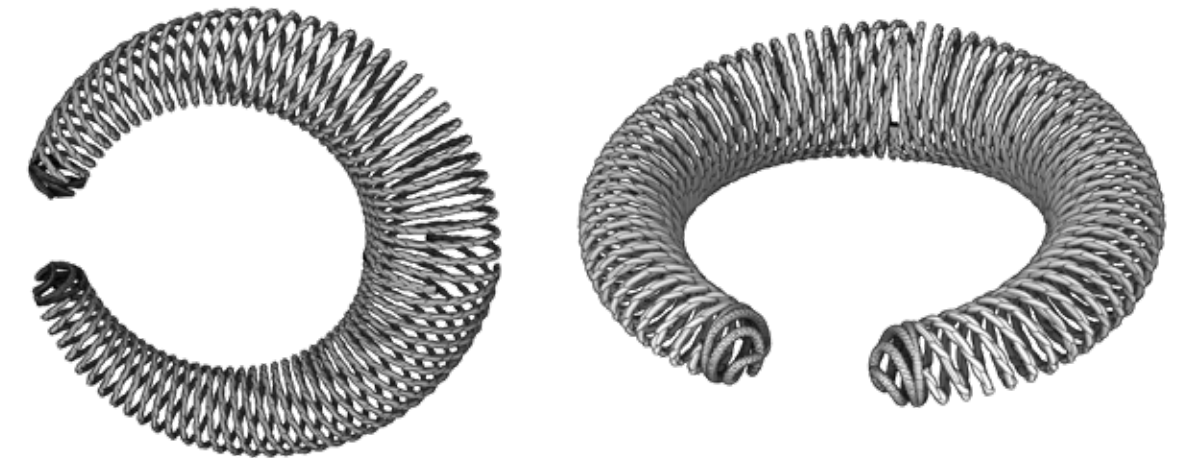


Figure 101. Sketches of the hairstyle bracelet. Source: Author

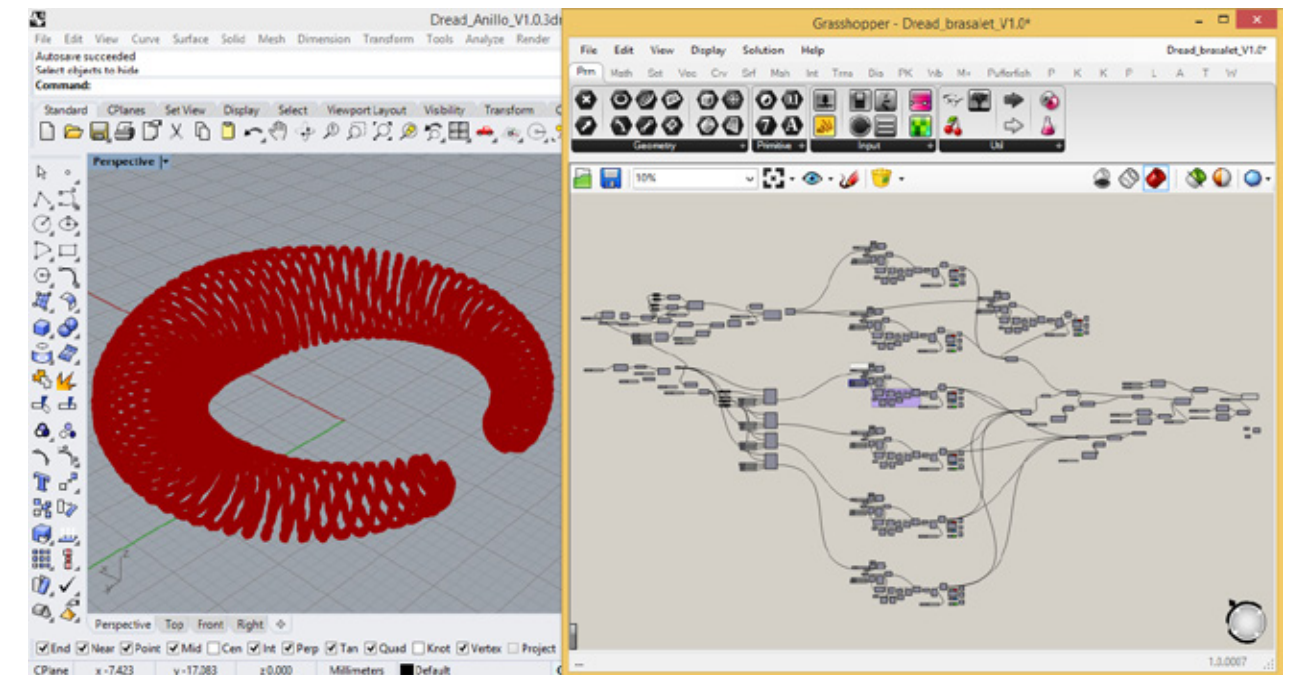


Figure 102. Hairstyle bracelet 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author



Figure 103. Hairstyle bracelet. Source: Author



Figure 104. Hairstyle bracelet. Source: Author

Carnival bracelet

Animal figures as in the ancestral African rituals of the colony time were one of the principal components for the developing of this project. But not only animal's images were important in the rituals. The fabric ribbons were another element, one that is still used in a great variety of object within the Barranquilla carnival.



Figure 105. Logotype of Carnival de Barranquilla S.A.S. Sources: <https://www.carnavaldebaranquilla.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Logo-CarnavalSAS-big.jpg> <https://files.rcnradio.com/public/migration/Logo25a%C3%B1os.png>



Figure 106. Folkloric traditional dress. Sources: http://cr00.epimg.net/emisoralimagenes/2016/08/26/barranquilla/1472226340_709139_1472249096_noticia_normal.jpg

The texture chosen to be applied to the element is one of the most iconic from the Barranquilla carnival and the Colombian folklore.



Figure 107. Advertisement by the Carnaval de Barranquilla S.A.S. Sources: <http://www.carnavaldebarraquilla.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/slider-02.jpg>

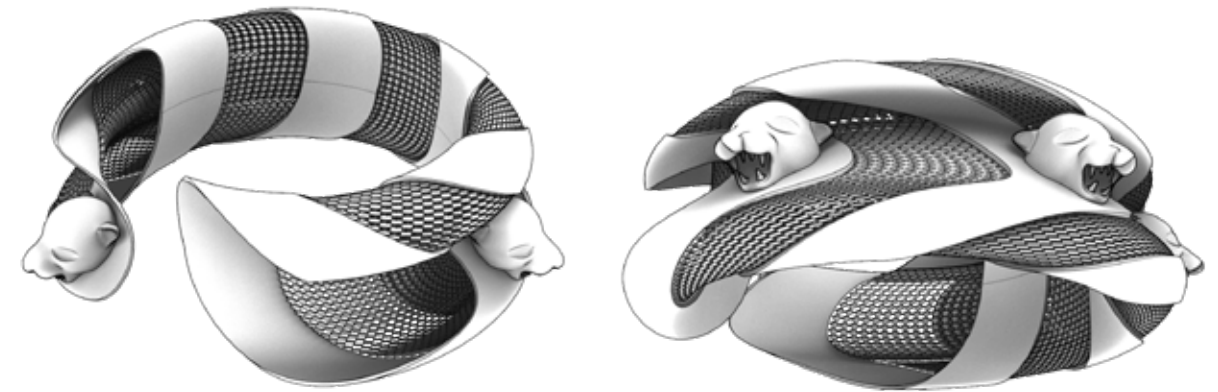


Figure 108. Sketches of the carnival bracelet. Source: Author

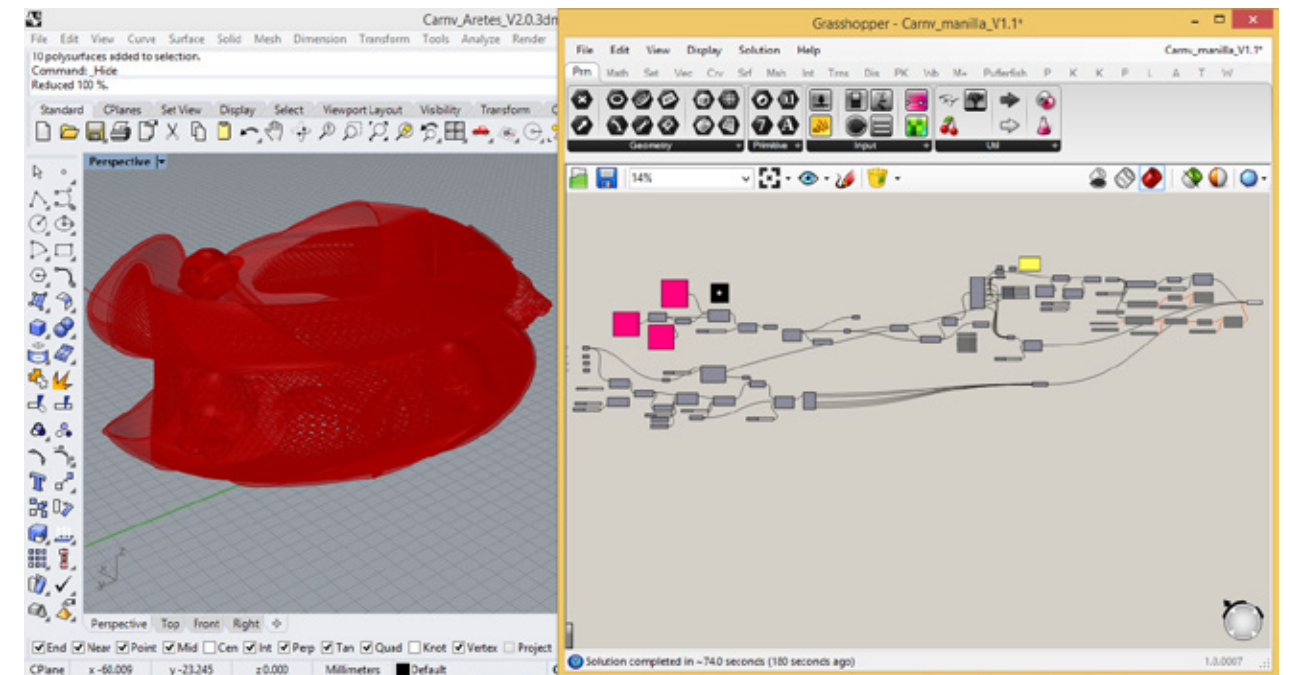


Figure 109. Carnival bracelet 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author

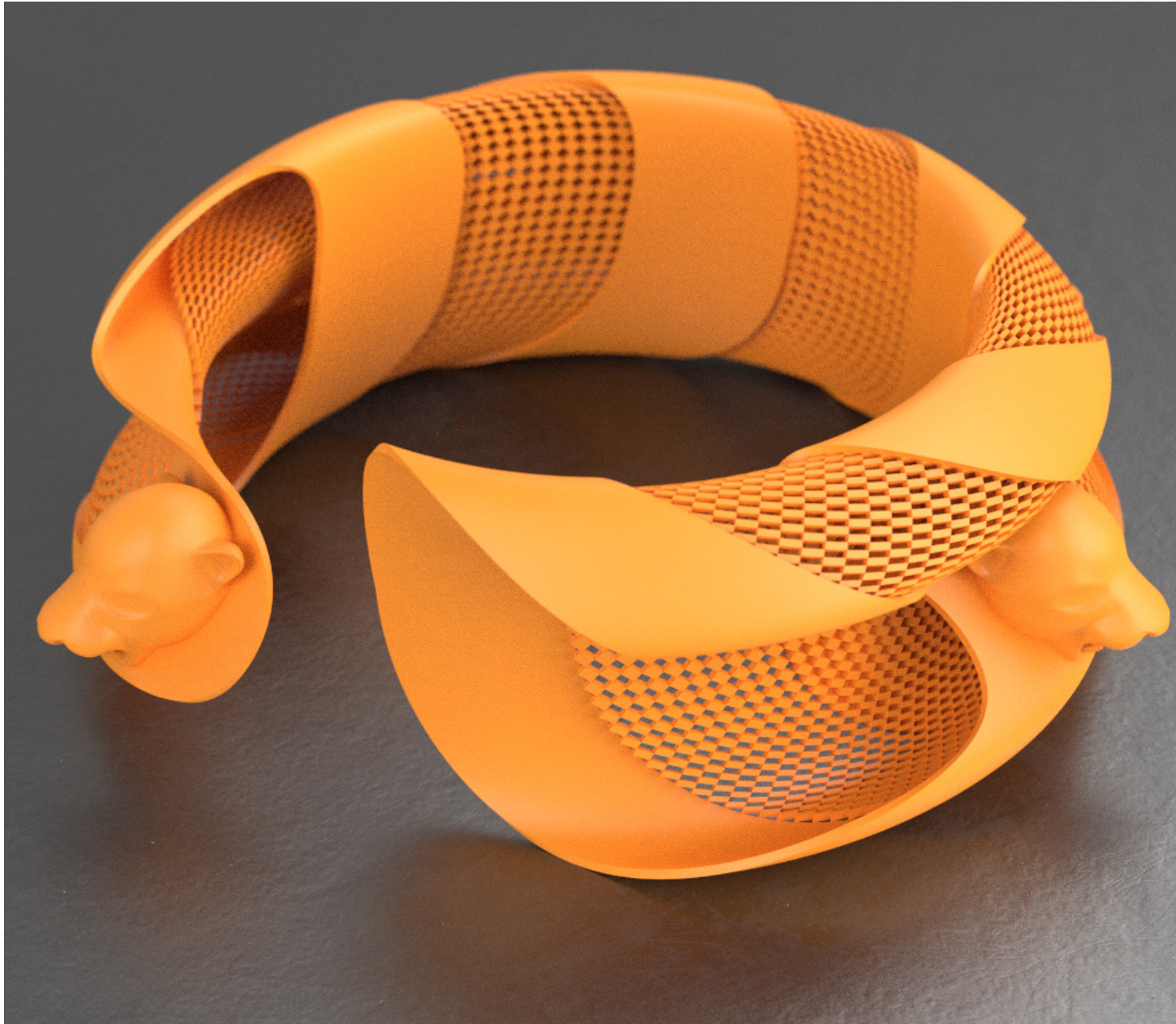


Figure 110. Carnival bracelet. Source: Author



Figure 111. Carnival bracelet. Source: Author

6.2.3. THE EARRINGS



Figure 112. Hairstyle earrings. Source: Author



Figure 113. Carnival earrings. Source: Author

Hairstyle earrings

As mentioned previously, cornrows were a fundamental instrument used by Colombian Afro-Descendants for escaping slavery. The configuration of the cornrows and, consequently, the variety and differences between the various hairstyles for the purpose of escaping, depended on the locations of an African community, and the nature of the message they wanted to express. Consequently, for the development of the earring, I decided to base the design on the fascinating, diverse, and creative cultural expression of the cornrow maps.

The idea is that people could wear and embrace a piece of the Afro-Colombian history. Different maps are displayed in these folkloric accessories that have also incorporated the concept of seed manufactured accessories created by Afro communities in Colombia.



Figure 114. *Figure . Different cornrows hairstyles. Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/564x/7e/ec/2f/7eec2fcc538082babedee8bc9e02bf8.jpg>*

At the end, due to the vast variety of hairstyles it is possible to generate and provide multiplicity of options for a selective customer.

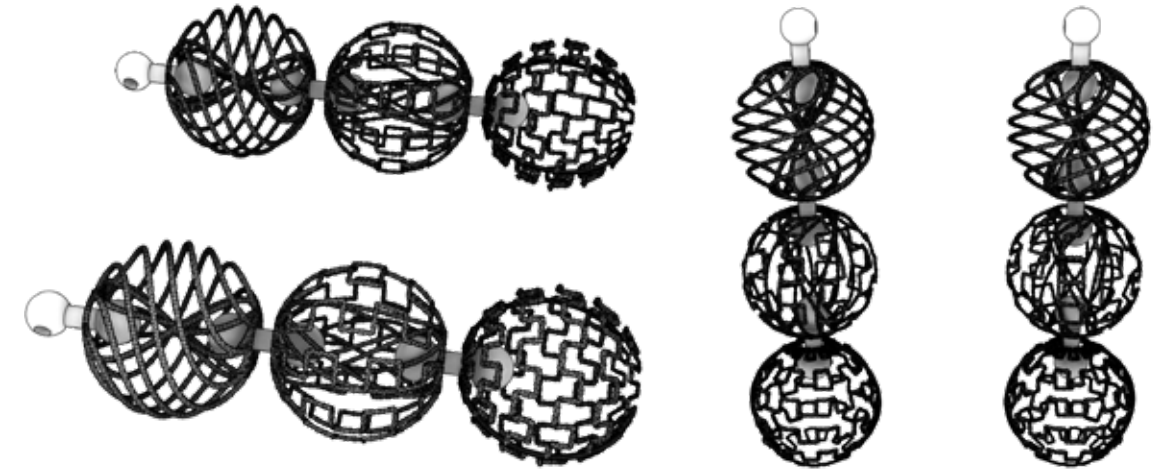


Figure 115. *Sketches of the hairstyle earrings. Source: Author*

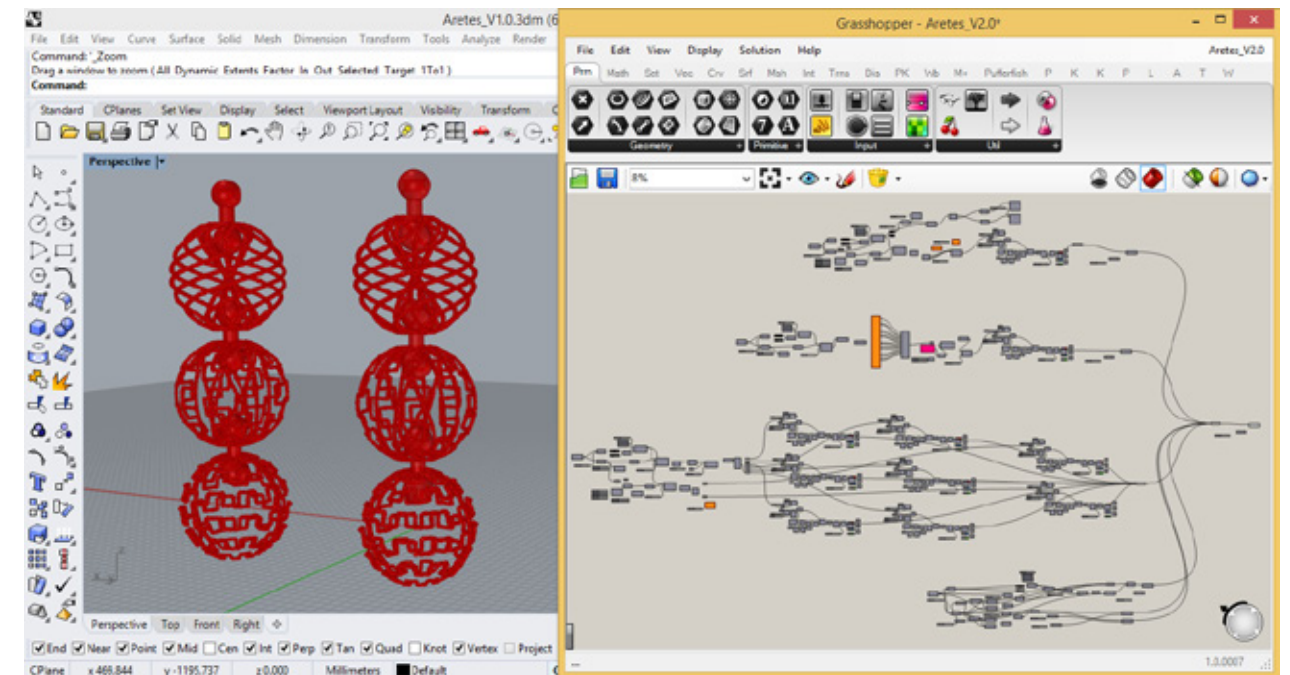


Figure 116. *Hairstyle earrings 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author*

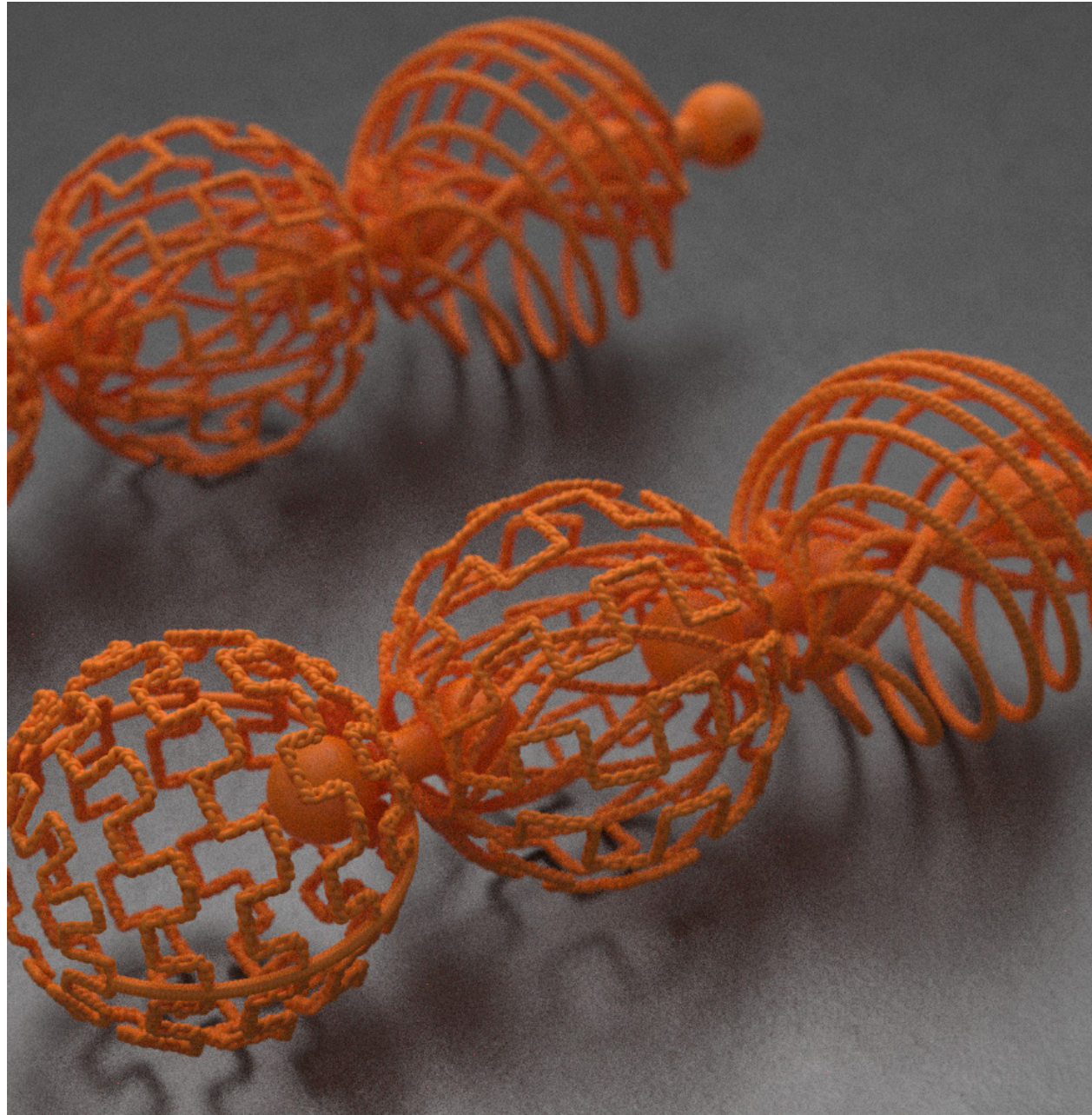


Figure 117. Hairstyle earrings. Source: Author



Figure 118. Hairstyle earrings. Source: Author

Carnival earrings

As already indicated, animals were venerated in Afro-Colombian rituals. Therefore, in this project I wanted to pay tribute to the most important animal figures of my ancestors that are also portrayed in the Barranquilla Carnival.



Figure 119. Picture of carnival masks from the article *Sin máscaras, no hay Carnaval/Without masks, there is not carnival* (Sistema de información para la artesanía - SIART). Source: http://artesaniasdecolombia.com.co/Documentos/Contenido/8360_carnaval-especial.jpg

The idea to allow an easy identification by the public is to make accurate images of the most representative animal figures of the carnival as well as some other geometrical elements. This is how the idea of having a texturized animal figure was developed since the very beginning.



Figure 120. Sketches of the carnival earrings. Source: Author

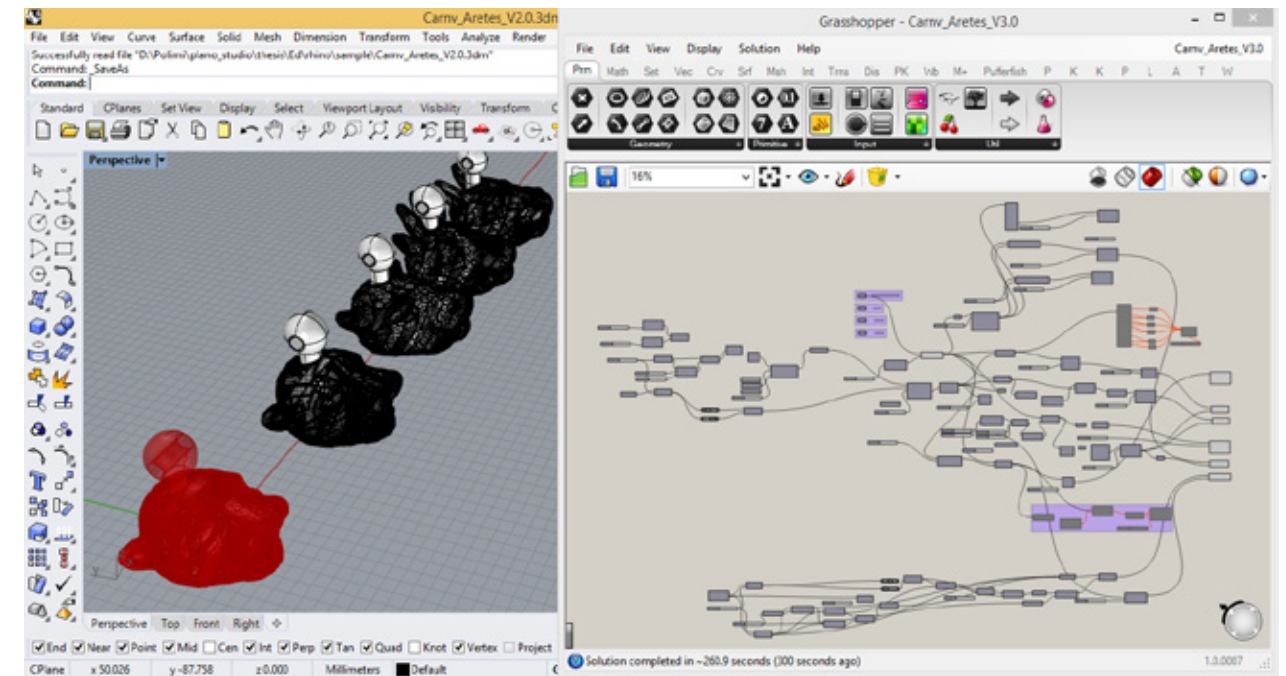


Figure 121. Carnival earrings 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author

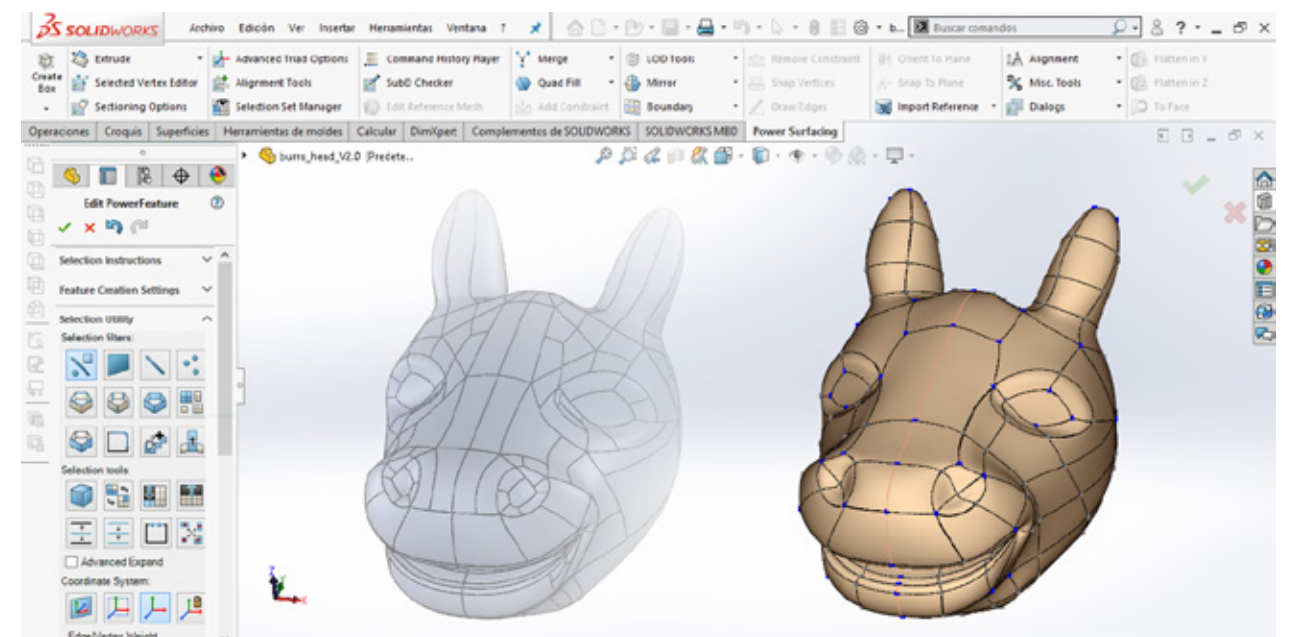
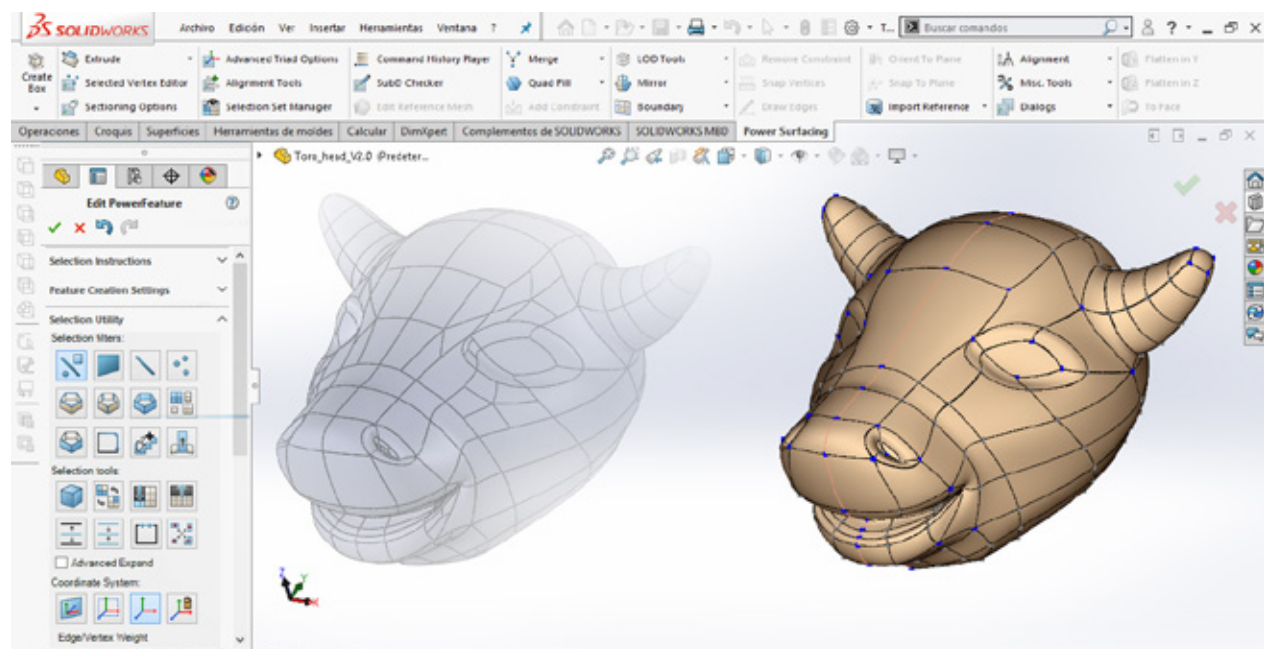
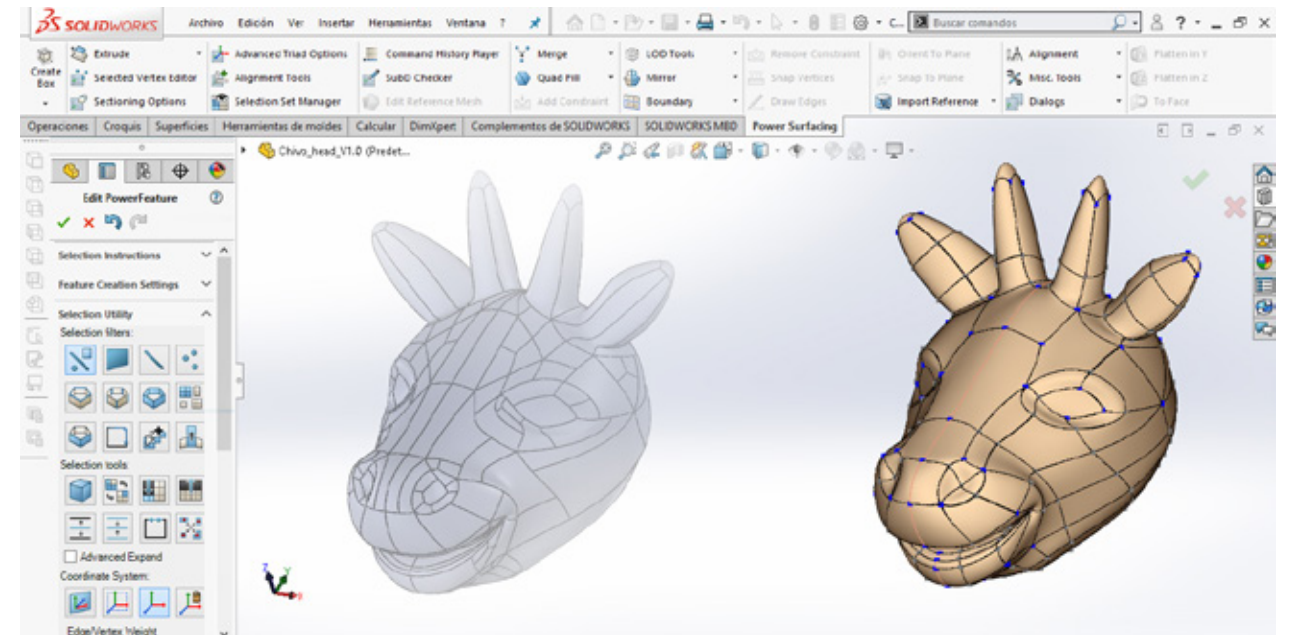
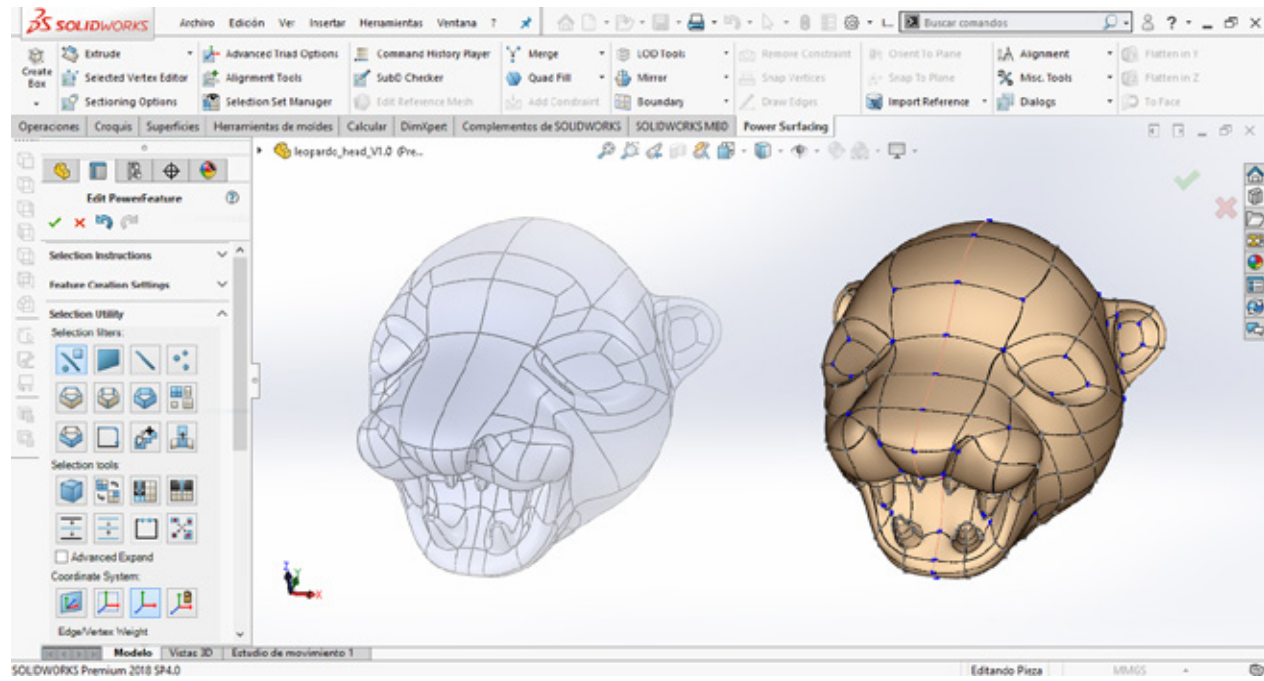


Figure 122. Carnival earring 3d modelling in SolidWorks Power Surfacing. Source: Author



Figure 123. Carnival earrings. Source: Author



Figure 124. Carnival earrings. Source: Author

6.2.4. THE NECKLACES

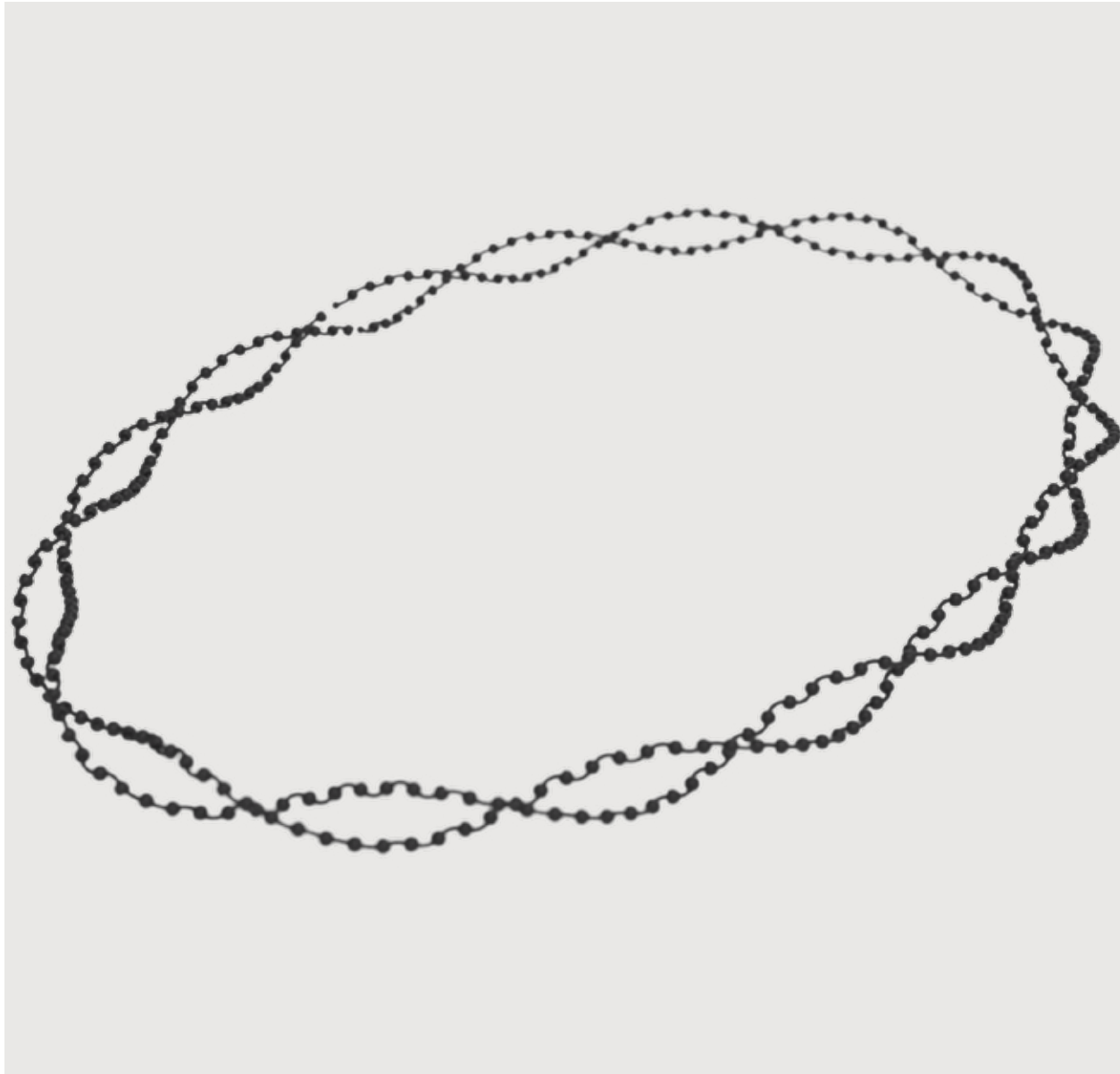


Figure 125. *Hairstyle necklace. Source: Author*



Figure 126. *Carnival necklace. Source: Author*

Hairstyle necklace

As an Afro-Colombian member who understands the “struggle” of having got African hair, which most of the time, out of the African culture, is seen as inappropriate or “*inadequate*” (Dabiri 2020)¹⁵⁵, I decided to take the geometrical conformation of an single African hair as inspirational element.

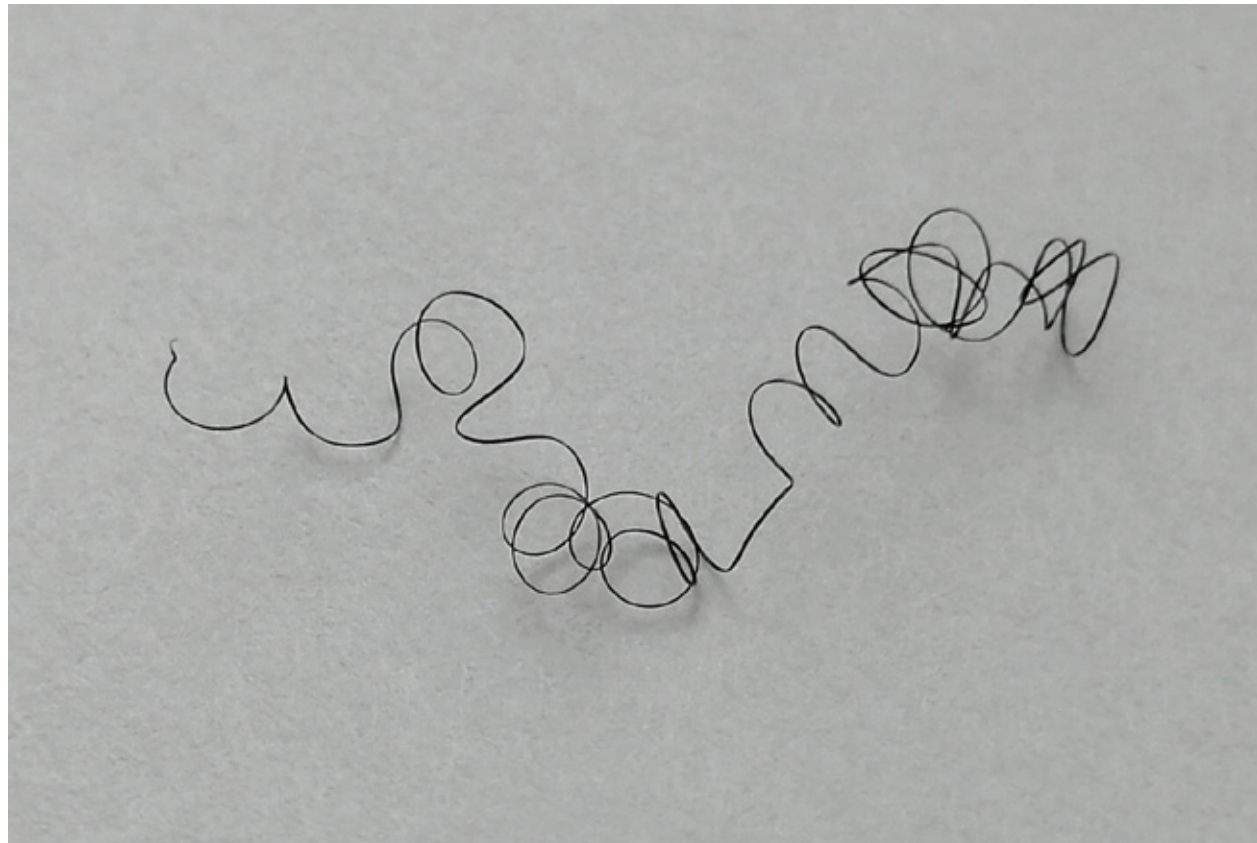


Figure 127. Single African hair. Source: Author

155 Dabiri, E. (2020, 25 February). *Black pupils are being wrongly excluded over their hair. I'm trying to end this discrimination*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/25/black-pupils-excluded-hair-discrimination-equality-act> (last consulted on 07/03/2020).

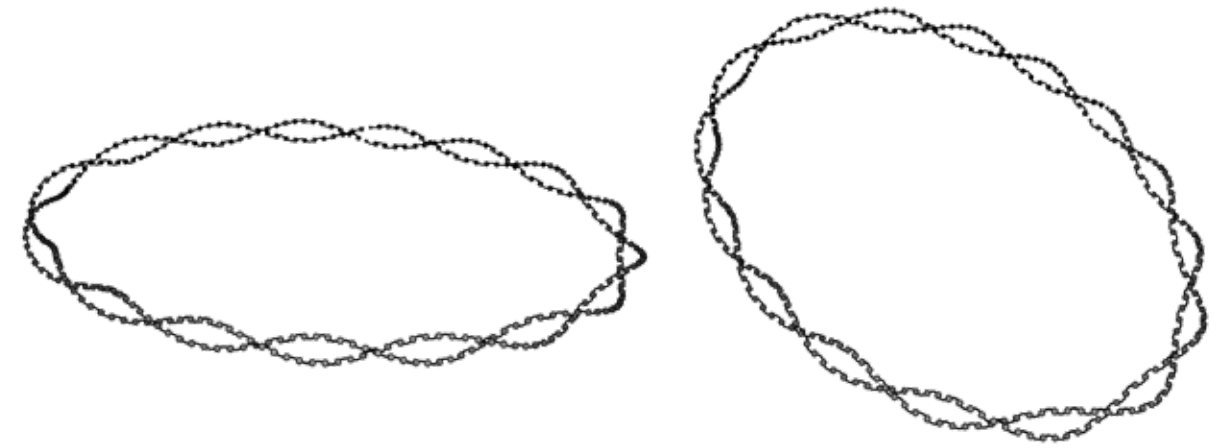


Figure 128. Sketches of the hairstyle necklace. Source: Author

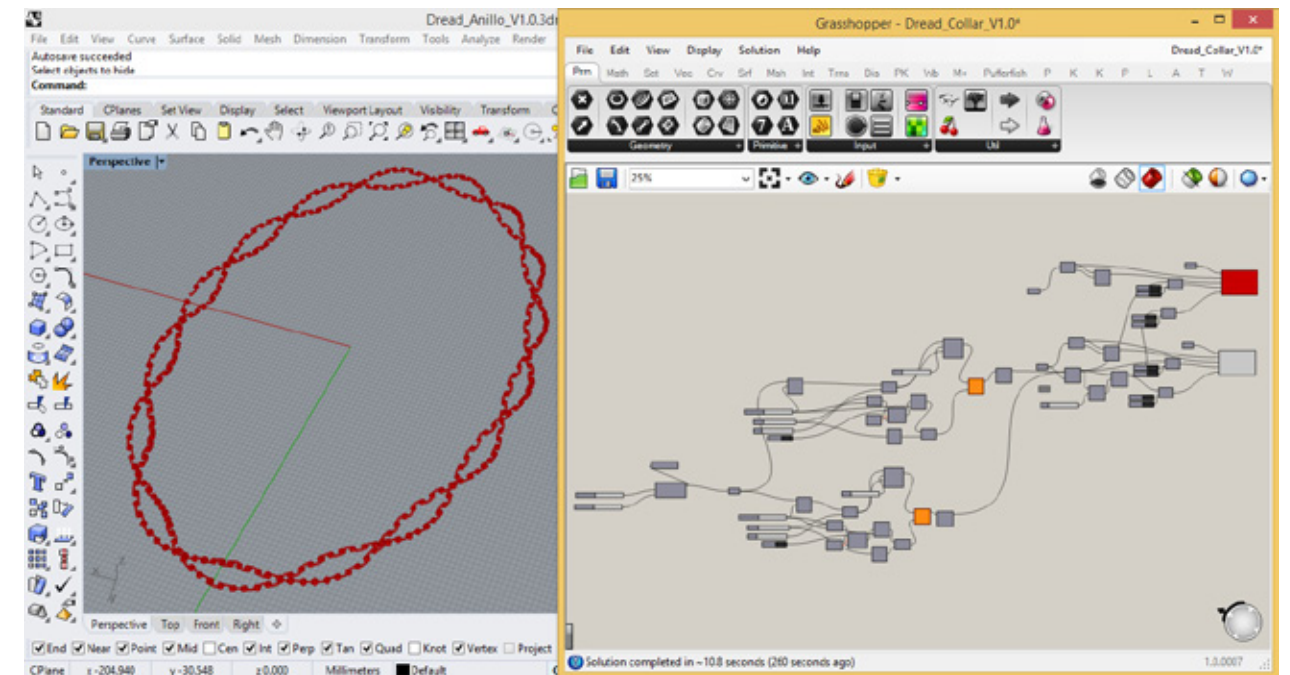


Figure 129. Carnival earrings 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author

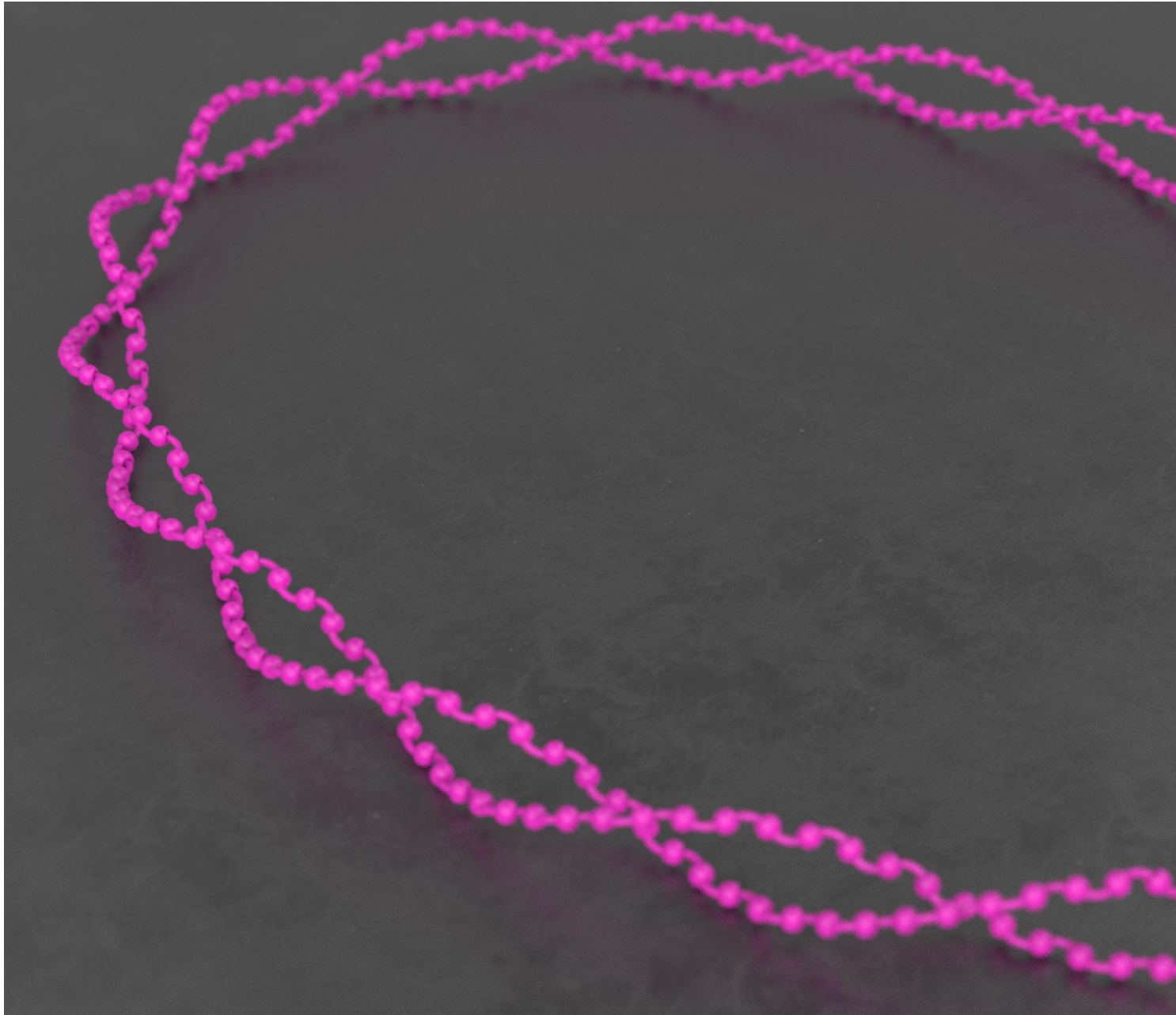


Figure 130. Hairstyle necklace. Source: Author



Figure 131. Hairstyle necklace. Source: Author

Carnival necklace

The combinations of design between the most traditional seed necklace together with that of the animal figures, inspired the development of this carnival necklace. Every element of this object makes reference to the concept of a manufactured seed, adding to the design the idea of further elaboration, as if every single element was carved by an artisan.



Figure 132. African necklace. Source: <https://africa-facts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/African-Jewelry-8.jpg>



Figure 133. Sketches of the carnival necklace. Source: Author

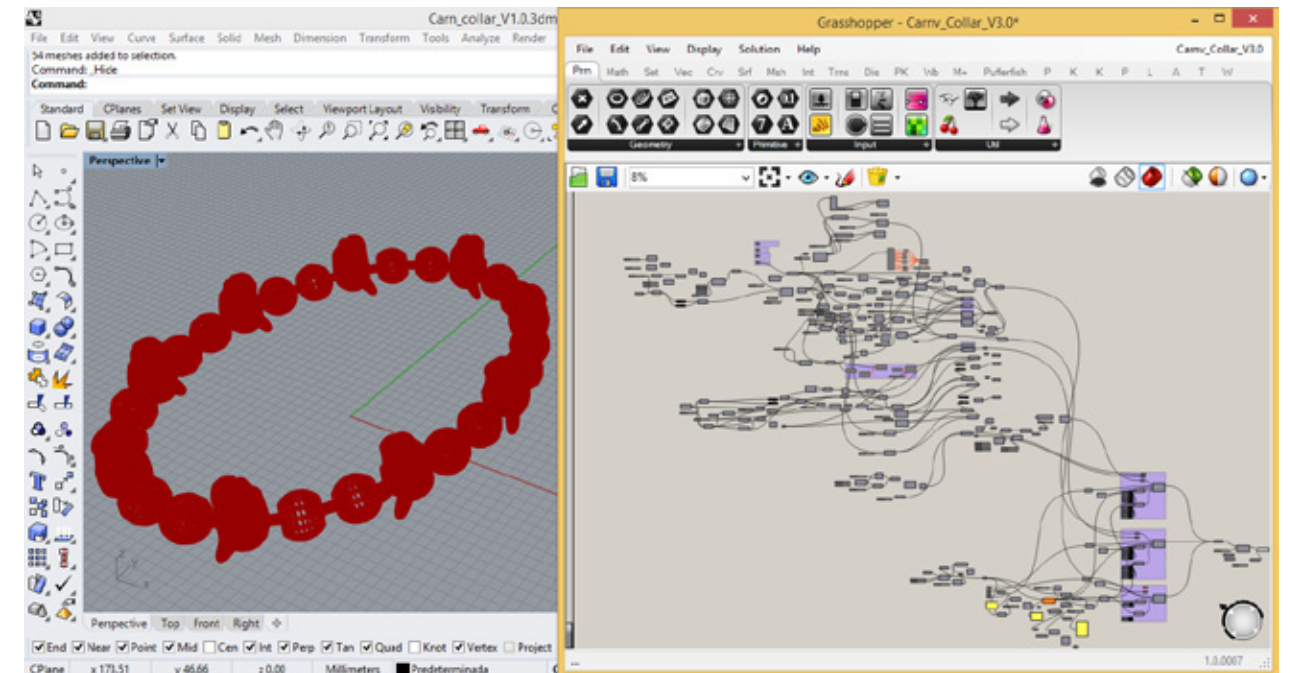


Figure 134. Carnival earrings 3d modelling in Grasshopper for Rhinoceros 6. Source: Author

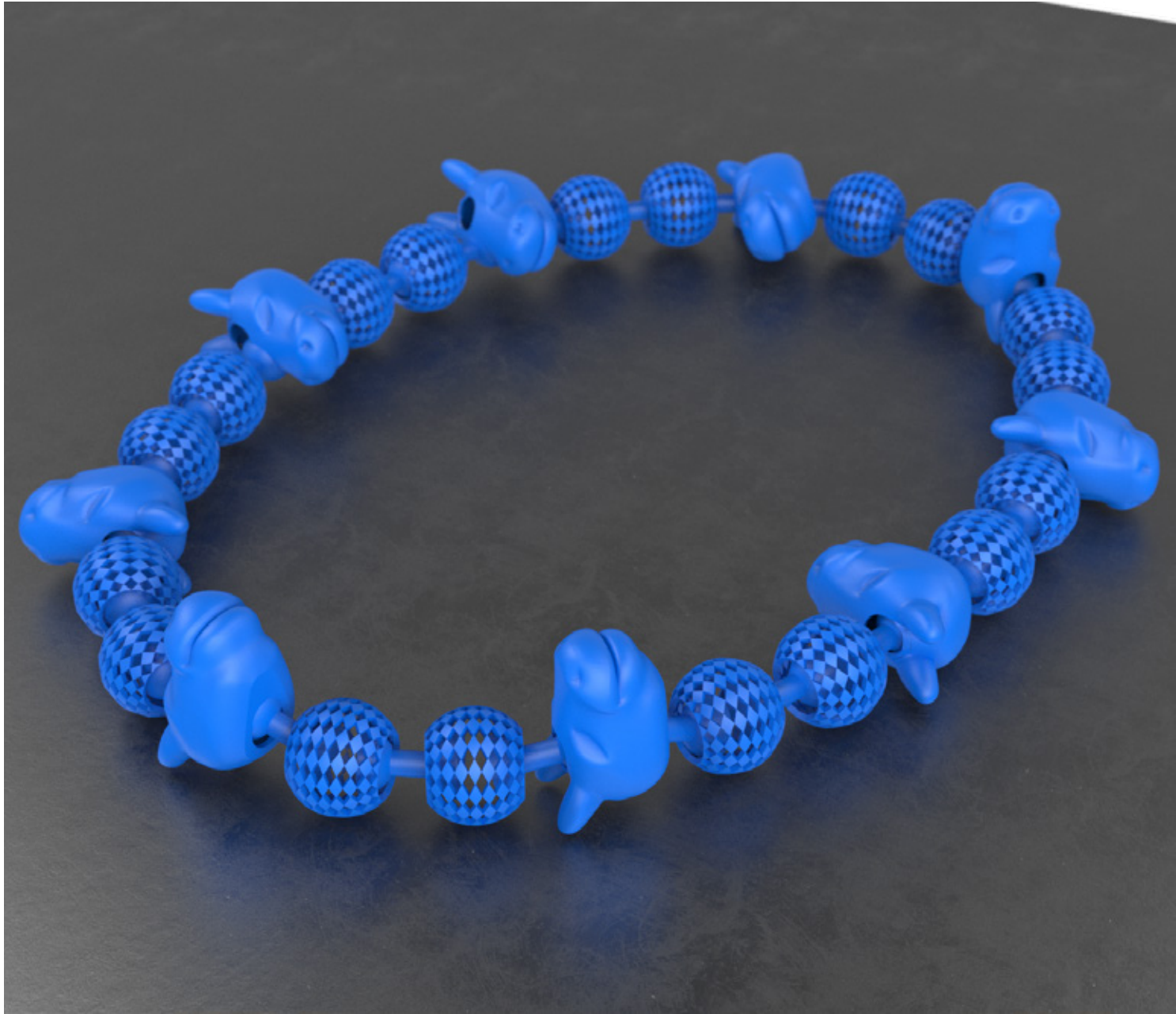


Figure 135. Carnival necklace. Source: Author



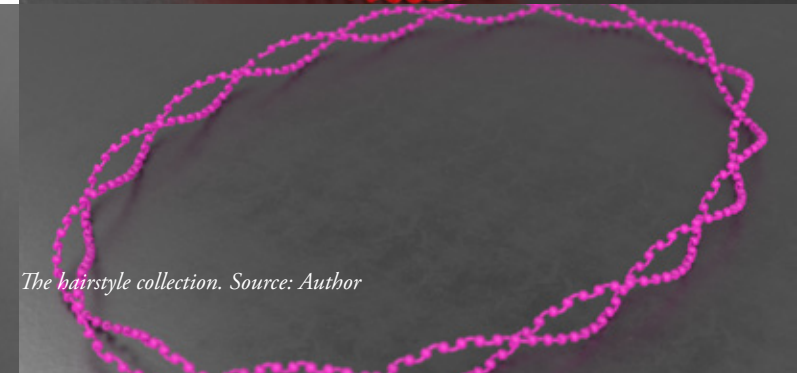
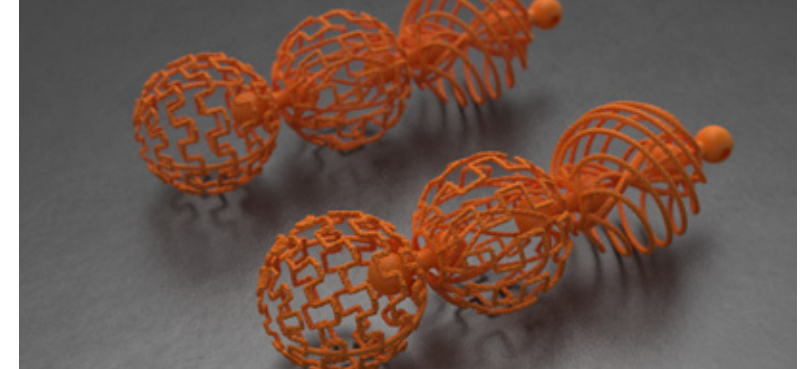
Figure 136. Carnival necklace. Source: Author



Figure 137. Hairstyle contest. Source: https://www.elspectador.com/sites/default/files/000_q72xz.jpg



Figure 138.



The hairstyle collection. Source: Author



Figure 139. Artesanías El Congo Real. Source: <https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/>

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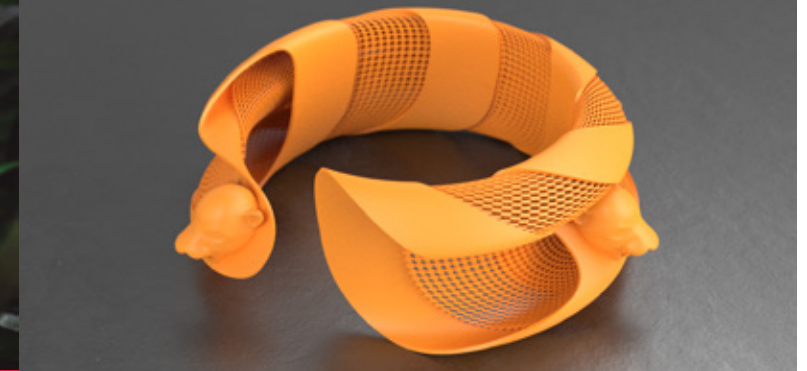
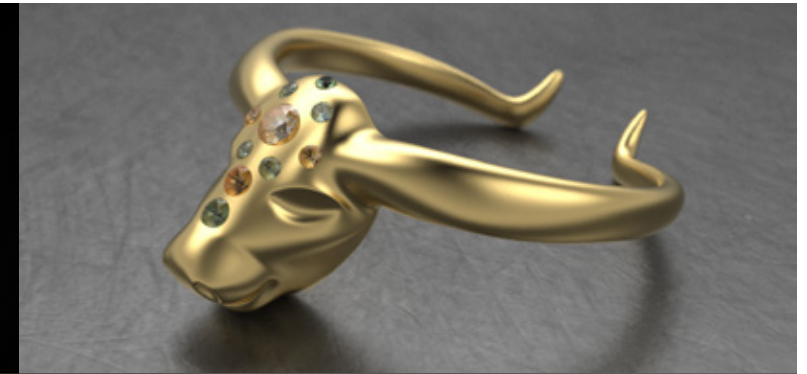
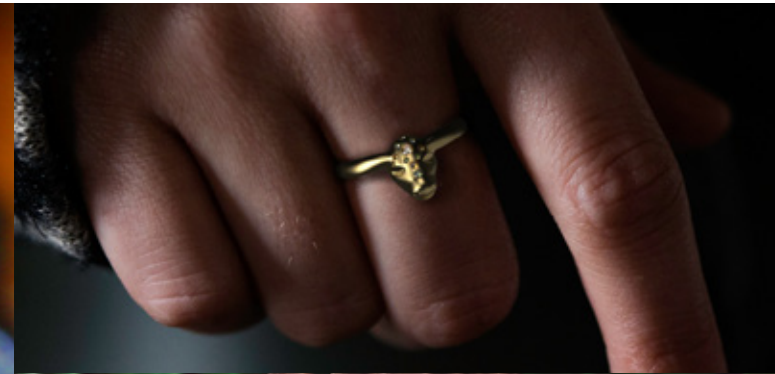


Figure 140.



The carnival collection. Source: Author

7. INNOVATION TOPICS ON THE PROJECT

Innovation is fundamental in the development of a project, as it allows companies to survive in a constant changing world. This work is based on the innovation principles underlined in the book *Overcrowded: Designing Meaningful Products in a World Awash with Ideas*¹⁵⁶ that states that whether it is a product, service, business model or processes, there are two levels of innovation, which are innovation of solution and innovation of meaning.

Innovation of solution refers to the generation of better ideas to solve a determined problem.

“Innovation of solutions. This concerns better ideas to solve established problems. It’s a new how, a novel way to address the challenges that are considered to be relevant in a marketplace. A novel solution may introduce incremental or even radical improvements, but always in the same direction: they are “more of the same” innovations” (Verganti 2016, 20).

Innovation of solution states that it is necessary to start a project from the outside-in, which means that, it is necessary to individualize the problems of users to find a respective solution. Moreover, it is necessary to start a project from what users want and it is better to get ideas from outsiders and from creative communities. *“Tacit assumption is that there are problems in the world; people, customers, have needs and problems. We wake up in the morning to help solve those problems better”*. Consequently, it is to believe that *“innovation comes from the outside in; you need to start from users and outsiders.”* (Verganti 2016, 17). The above principle are followed by different perspectives of innovation such as, user driven innovation, crowd-sourcing, and open innovation, that have been the innovation mantras of recent years. (*Ibid.*).

On the other hand, innovation of meaning issues the generation of meaningful products that creates new value to a person that acquires them.

“Innovation of meaning. This concerns a novel vision that redefines the problems worth addressing. It takes innovation one level higher - not only a new how but especially a new why: it proposes a new reason why people use something. A new value proposition, i.e., a novel interpretation of what is relevant and meaningful in a market. A new direction” (*Ibid.*).

¹⁵⁶ Verganti, R. (2016). *Overcrowded: Designing Meaningful Products in a World Awash with Ideas*. Cambridge, United States of America: The MIT Press.



The innovation of meaning focuses on the inside-out, which makes reference to start a project taking inspiration from personal experiences, consequently, to built a vision starting from ourselves. Besides that, it states that, creating a meaning or a new meaning requires a deeper understanding; *“it demands that you start from your values, from what you believe in, from your vision of the world. It’s like a gift. A person will never fall in love for a gift she simply asks for. The gift needs to come from you, from your own search for meaning. If you do not love it, how could she love it?”* (Ibid., 12).

The following scheme provided in the aforementioned book is reported hereby to help understand more clearly the differences between the two kind of innovations.

Innovation of Solutions	Innovation of Meaning
How (act)	Why (meaning)
Answer (need)	Discovery (proposal)
Negativities (problem)	Positivities (gift)
User (using)	Person (living)
Compete on performance (better)	Compete on value (meaningful) (Ibid., 56).

7.1. INNOVATION OF MEANING

Innovation of meaning is about finding meaning, therefore, understanding that people have a purpose in life and they are willing to find opportunities in the world. People wake up in the morning with the purpose of creating things that have more sense, that are more meaningful. This work is about finding a better meaning for jewellery. For many people, wearing jewellery is an habit, putting on bracelets, rings, necklaces or earrings has become something that they usually do. As the habit makes part of people’s routine, they rarely stop to ask themselves “why” they wear it. Most people have a simple explanation, they like how it looks. In fact, wearing jewellery can be seen as a way through which they express themselves, complete an outfit, and even make an statement. In any case, they see jewellery as a mean to adorn their bodies and bring extra beauty to life. Researching and studying their reasons was fundamental to understand and have a more clear overview of the direction of the project, and thus, for the generation of a correspondent meaningful solution by adopting an inside-out approach. Exploring the use of jewellery from the inside-out rather than from the outside-in was important because *“if you want to create things that people love, that are meaningful, you will hardly get there just by solving problems”* (Verganti 2016,

12). This work does not aim to find a solution to a determined problem, but instead, to define a more meaningful purpose for wearing jewellery.

“The search for meaning gives you the chance not only to solve problems, not only to innovate, but to innovate in a direction that you believe is more meaningful to people and to this world. “Meaning” is what connects you and the recipients of your creations” (Ibid.).

As the focus was on the Afro-Colombian culture and the way of expressing some of its most valuable characteristics through the creation of two collections of objects, the main goal was to show that conferring a meaningful purpose and a more significant value to the use of jewellery is possible. Honouring a culture presenting it in a way that people can understand its real value in the society, its real history, in a way free of stereotypes and misconceptions. Recent history proves that, the most renowned fashion companies usually do not care about showing respect and appreciation to minority cultures¹⁵⁷, either because of the lack of understanding of a culture, the poor interest of their staff in making an appropriated research on culture avoiding to fall down in biased ideas and stereotypes¹⁵⁸, or the lack of inclusion and opportunities of expression for people belonging to a minority group capable to show a culture in an authentic way within their staff.

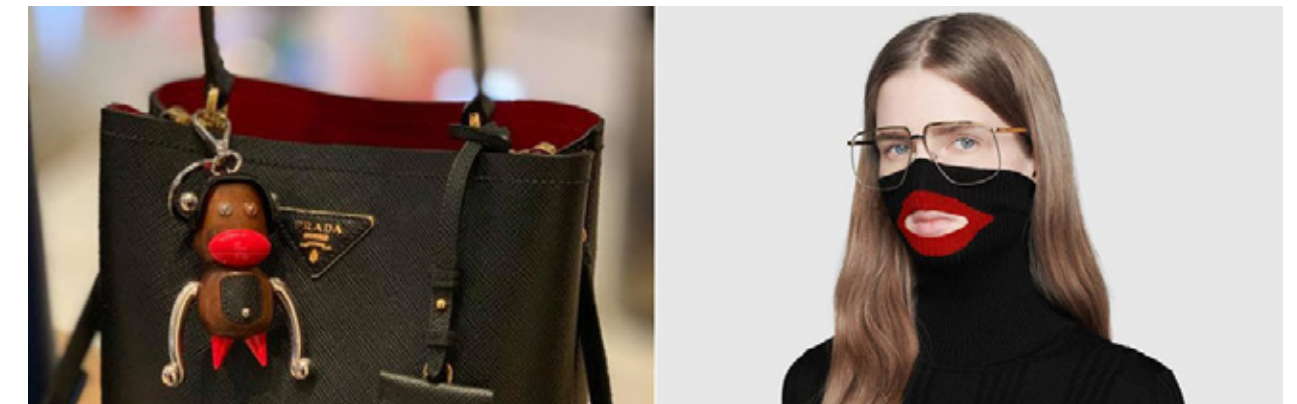


Figure 142. Images from the article *“It’s time for fashion brands to get serious about improving their cultural IQ”*. Source: <https://images.businessoffashion.com/site/uploads/2019/02/4chantal.jpg?auto=format%2Ccompress&crop=faces%2Centropy&fit=crop&max-h=512&w=1024>

¹⁵⁷ <https://edmontonsun.com/life/fashion-beauty/fashion-industrys-struggle-with-racial-insensitivity-why-does-it-keep-happening/wcm/d2096105-28fc-4fea-a65a-19895bc50d08> (last consulted on 08/05/2020).

¹⁵⁸ D’Innocenzio, A. (2019, 17 February). *Racism and fashion: Why top brands keep producing products that prompt backlash*, Global news, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4970809/racism-fashion-products-backlash/> (last consulted on 11/05/2020).

An important fact to highlight about this project is that there is a story hidden in each object. An interesting story that makes reference to the Afro-Colombian culture and that explains more about its origins. People can appropriate and love more an element that are wearing if it tells a story, and if it is an authentic representation of a culture, because it is what the author of this project expects to find in a product. The above gives a new value to an object, because:

“Value comes from envisioning which direction makes more sense. It does not require more ideas, but one meaningful vision. Not to improve how things are, but to change why we need them. The winners are those who make existing problems old and redefine the scenario: those who make customers fall in love by offering not something better, but something more meaningful” (Verganti 2016, 19).

The author of this work is aware that there is already an existing meaning in jewellery that people usually wear, but this project is about finding new meanings. In fact, *“in our current world, [...] the main driver of value is not just meaning, but new meaning”* (Ibid., 22). Therefore, *“the only way to build a connection of endless love is to keep innovating the meaning of what we offer”* (Ibid.). Nowadays people, as never before, are searching for meaning. *“They savor making sense of a life that is increasingly rich of opportunities, intricate and unfathomable. And since life keeps changing, they are in constant search of new meaning”* (Ibid., 44).



Figure 143. The two collections of objects. Source: Author

7.2. TECHNOLOGY: A SOURCE OF INNOVATION OF MEANING

It is important to underline that the innovation of solution was not the principle followed to generate the two collections of objects developed in this work. Although solving technical issues was important for developing this project, it was not the main focus, it was instead, the embodiment and honouring of the Afro-Colombian culture and the creation of a symbiosis state between this culture and the state-of-the-art technology. A blending of tradition and modernity through 3d printing, similarly to what Ruth Carter did with her custom design vision for the *Black Panther* film¹⁵⁹. The project's cornerstone was to find a new value proposition to jewellery throughout the Afro-Colombian culture, one that has been barely taken as a point of reference or inspiration over the years. In other words, 3d printing was the perfect piece to complete the puzzle, bridging the gap between culture and technology. On the other hand, the application of this technology played an important role in the manufacturing process, since it allowed to solve many technical issues. After a research, and thanks to the previous experiences with the additive manufacturing technology, the author was able to identify this technology as the best option for the production of this project. But why it is the best option?

*“3D printing is revolutionary, but not because it can replace conventional manufacturing, render traditional factories obsolete and localize all production (the economics will not support this currently and in the foreseeable future). It is revolutionary due to its ability to complement traditional manufacturing processes, revolutionize product design and create new value”*¹⁶⁰.

Another advantage derived from the use of additive manufacturing technology is that it can be used with different materials. The use of polymers material is the most popular and widespread. Moreover, 3d printing allows to use different metals such as brass, bronze, or silver with different plating options. However, the technology does not limit its application to only polymers and metals, there can be also applied other innovative materials, such as alloys between ceramic and polymeric materials. On the other hand, from a sole innovation of solution's perspective, where the main concern is to try to generate better ideas to solve manufacturing needs such as, generation of complex and intricate shapes, interlock flexibility, customization, manufacturing cost reduction, one will find out that 3d printing technology is probably still the best option.

159 Suntiger, H. (2019, 25 January). *An Oscar nomination for Best Costume Design – a conversation with designer of the 3D printed costume Julia Körner*, Innovation Origins, <https://innovationorigins.com/an-oscar-nomination-for-a-3d-printed-costume-a-conversation-with-designer-julia-korner/> (last consulted on 07/05/2020).

160 World Economic Forum (2017). *Technology and Innovation for the Future of Production: Accelerating Value Creation*, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_White_Paper_Technology_Innovation_Future_of_Production_2017.pdf. (last consulted on 08/05/2020).

In this work, one of the points that favours the use of the 3d printing technology is the fact that it brings the possibility to create complex structures that are very difficult to be generated by the conventional manufacturing processes. Consequently, given that this work contains a variety of complex surfaces, the use of additive manufacturing becomes essential.

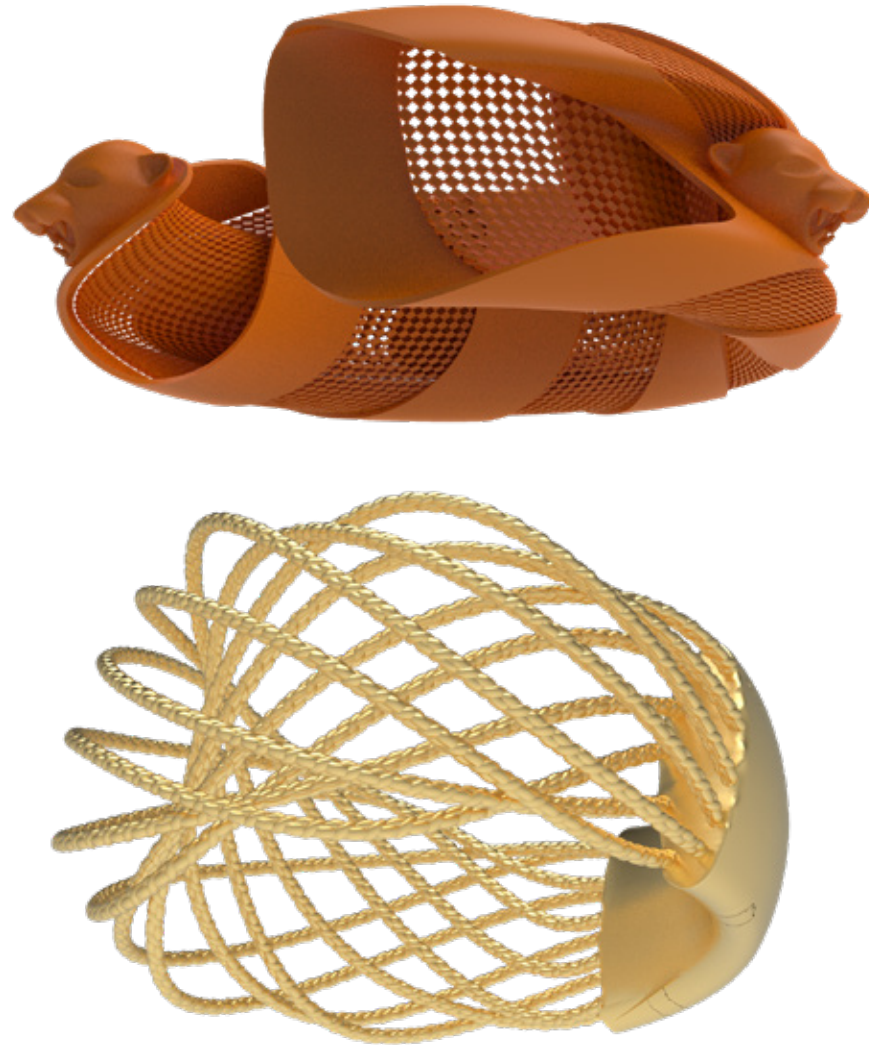


Figure 144. Examples of the application of 3d printing for solving the issue of manufacturing complex geometries. Source: Author

Additionally, 3d printing technologies enable new production of objects' attributes such as, the interlock flexibility. Considering that the objects reach a high level of complexity, additive manufacturing can offer an amazing design freedom, thanks in part to its great level of accuracy. Indeed, it is possible to combine various interlocking parts much faster compared to that of the traditional manufacturing techniques. *“Additive manufacturing can shorten the production process from weeks to days and not only that, but your 3D printed parts will also be cheaper”¹⁶¹.*

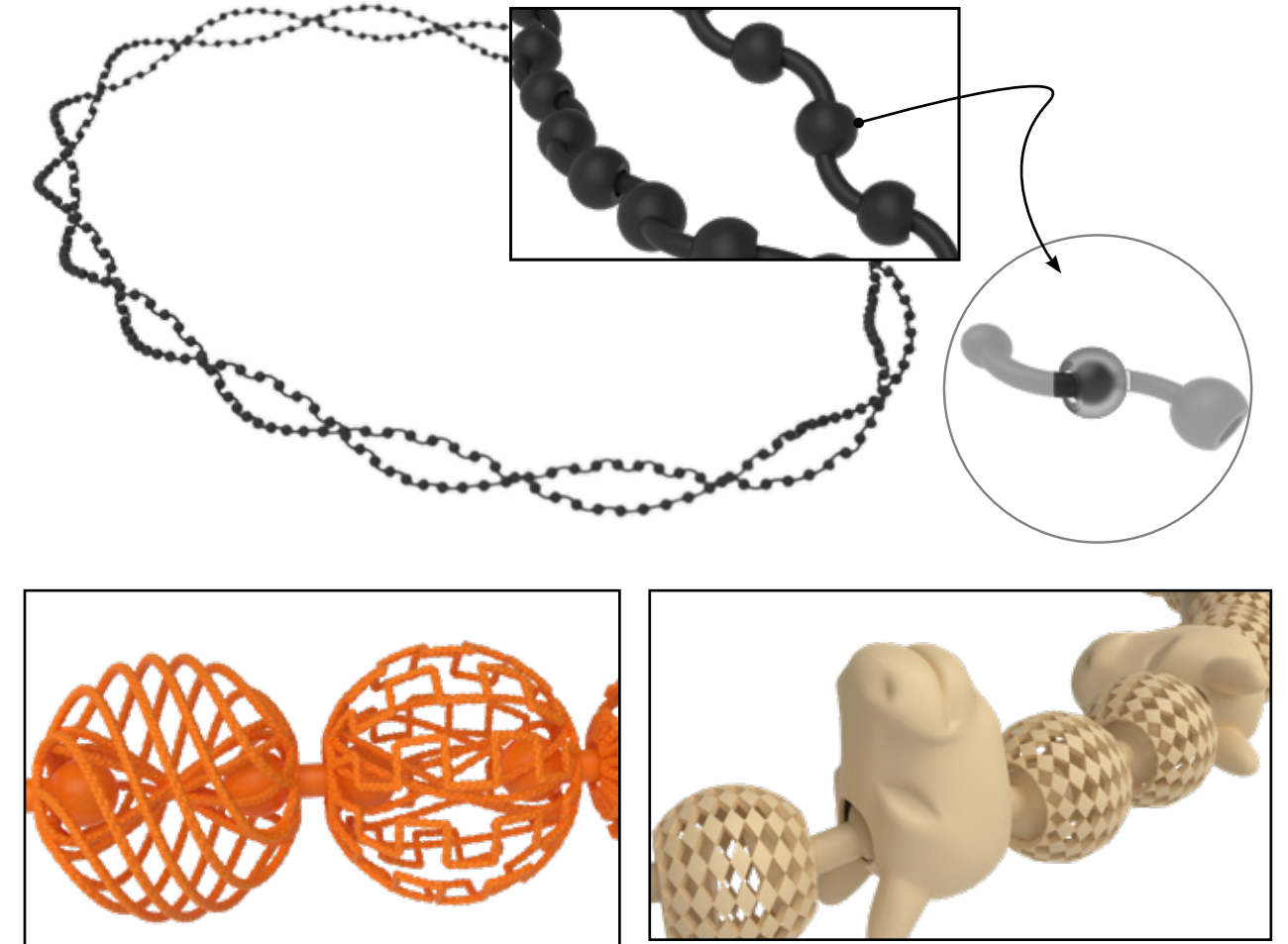


Figure 145. Examples of the application of 3d printing for solving the issue of manufacturing interlock flexibility. Source: Author

161 <https://www.sculpteo.com/blog/2018/10/10/the-ultimate-guide-to-designing-3d-printed-interlocking-parts/> (last consulted on 09/05/2020).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a designer, one of the main objectives in the development of this thesis is to display throughout products, some of the most important and outstanding characteristics of the Afro-Colombian culture in the most authentic way. As a person belonging to the Afro-Descendent community, I was already familiar with some of the most important features of the culture, but still, to show the culture in the appropriate way it was necessary to conduct an in-depth research, so that the final products can be appreciated by the recipient customers as viewed through the eyes of the creator. On the other hand, an expected purpose/impact of this project is to enhance the sense of inclusivity and encourage a sound participation of cultural minorities in the fashion industry with the exhibition of their products. Furthermore, thanks to the knowledge achieved in the course of the Master's degree and the experience acquired in additive manufacturing during the internship, I was able to obtain the required tools for the elaboration of this work.

Throughout the development of this project it was possible to identify general and fundamental aspects of the Afro-Colombian culture, which were extracted, translated and used for the design and elaboration of authentic elements manufactured with 3d printing technology. The above was crucial for the achievement of the objectives established for the project.

Firstly, the problematic of diversity and exclusion as well as the underrepresentation of the Afro-Descendant cultures in the fashion industry was investigated and analysed taking into consideration factors such as, cultural appropriation, blackface and tokenism. Undoubtedly, as it was discovered, cultural appropriation has had a negative impact in our society, in the extent that, the cultural manifestations of people belonging to a minority group have not achieved in most of the cases a deserved recognition, therefore generating inequality, in the wider sense, within the social structure throughout the world. Only by realising transcendent aspects such as, the importance of paying homage to artists and ideas, the exclusion of sacred artefacts in making mass consumption accessories, the engagement in other cultures on more than a mere aesthetic level, and the fair treatment of a cultural exchange like any other creative collaboration, it will be possible to achieve much more inclusivity within the fashion industry. Additionally, the phenomenon of blackface is used by a predominant cultural group as an offensive way to diminish the cultural importance of a minority group, perpetuating negative stereotypes and derogative ideas. Therefore, it is important for designers to make a profound investigation regarding when developing a project related or based in a specific culture. Furthermore, the tokenism is another negative aspect in term of inclusivity because it camouflages the problem creating an illusion of making great efforts for inclusivity whenever there is a urgency to demonstrate the sharing of privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with an otherwise excluded group.



Secondly, the pillars of the Afro-Descendent cultural heritage, which involve history, art, fashion, cinema, music, among others, were identified and presented, because of their essential importance for a comprehensive understanding of the specific community. Although it was not exhaustive of all the emotions, experiences and narratives, the above was also the most effective and convenient starting point to deepen the cultural and artistic evolutionary process that took place in the American continent over the centuries. It should be noted that the term diaspora(-s) - that makes reference to the worldwide multitude descendent communities of sub-Saharan Africa that were taken as slaves in the context of the Transatlantic slave trade during the 16th and 19th centuries - was explored to have a background of the historical events that helped shape the cultural identity(-ies) of the African descendent communities in America. As a result, it was inevitable to explore the subject of visual representation and to point out how African diasporas have suffered a great discrimination due to the underrepresentation and misconception of the community, exacerbated by the construction and dissemination of harmful prejudices mostly dictated by ethnic-racial considerations and categorizations. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable contribution of African diasporas in culture, art, music, cinema, starting from the colony time. Without a doubt, African American music genres such as, jazz, gospel, blues, soul, rap/hip hop, from the USA, as well as reggae, salsa, merengue, cumbia, and reggaeton, from other American countries, all belong to a diaspora cultural manifestation phenomenon that has had a significant impact on popular culture worldwide. But not only music, other artistic manifestation such as, painting, sculpture, installations, textile production and other visual expressions from African diasporas have constituted an equally immense contribution, as it was found out for example with the African conceptual art and the African cinematographic production that, once again, have not always received the recognition deserved. Only with the most recent African culture's celebration provided by Hollywood such as, the case of Tarantino's work *Django Unchained* (2012), or *Black Panther* (2018), a more general appreciation of the African culture has been finally obtained.

Thirdly, the study of the Afro-Colombian community was important to identify a more suitable way for the process of deconstruction of negative and harmful stereotypes and the reconstruction of a new identity based on the identification and reinterpretation of specific and authentic elements of the Afro-Descendent culture. It was necessary to completely immerse into the Afro-Colombian culture to identify some of the most fundamental columns in which the culture itself stands, from the beginning of its conformation until nowadays. Consequently, some interesting facts about the culture were discovered such as, the problematic of cultural appropriation, underrepresentation, discrimination, undervaluation, and the stereotyping phenomenon, among others, which have contributed to the growth of the inequality issue in Colombia over the decades. In the course of the research, it was possible to realize that despite the difficulties, Afro-Colombian communities have been able to overcome those problems and to make some of the most important cultural contribution that nowadays are distinctive cultural traits of the whole country. Hence, some of the most typical cultural manifestation such as, cumbia, vallenato, joropo, and bullerengue, in music and folklore, or mapalé and champeta, in dance, are known as African heritage contributions. But not only music and dance, some events such as, the Barranquilla's Carnival, the black

and white carnival of Pasto city and the San Pacho festivities of Quibdó city, exhibit the Afro-Colombian investment in art and culture. Additionally, the heritage practice of the African hairstyle has played an important role through the Afro-Colombian history. It was used during the time of the Spanish colony to help slaves escape from slavery and has been used as a linking cultural tool for all the Afro-Colombian communities throughout the country.

The experience sustained during the internship was fundamental for the development of the project. Working at Vojd Studios in Berlin allowed me to acquire the basic knowledge in additive manufacturing (3d printing) for the completion of the project. While working in this studio elaborating 3d printing accessories for the luxury fashion media, I was able to understand the problematic of underrepresentation of the Afro-descendent community within the field, and consequently work to find a solution that could raise a sense of inclusion and appreciation of cultural minorities.

As for the contribution of the project, it is important to highlight that the valuable data acquired through a deep research process all along the development of this work, has allowed to reveal a great market opportunity for the conception and generation of new and authentic products belonging to an undervalued source, this being the case of cultural minorities in general. At this point, it is important to underline the main contributions of this project that can be defined from a cultural and technical perspective.

From a cultural perspective, the two fashion collections of objects developed in this project translate and exhibit two of the most authentic characteristics belonging to the Afro-Colombian culture. The Afro-Colombian rituals performed during the Spanish colony and their evolution until their adoption as more general cultural traits of the country, have been studied to be translated and displayed taking the most essential and distinctive elements as inspirational source for developing the first collection of objects. The exploration of the Afro-Colombian hairstyle's practice was another important inspirational source to develop the second collection of the project. It was exciting to find out a great variety of hairstyles with a well determined meaning, and gratifying to be able to make an exploration of the form using authentic elements of the Afro-Colombian culture. Finally, it could be said that the relevance of an in-depth exploration of the cultural subject, was fundamental and brought out peculiar unexplored elements that were used as fundamental stimulating sources.

As for a technical perspective, the introduction and use of the additive manufacturing technology was supremely important for the culmination of the two collections of objects. Indeed, additive manufacturing as compared with some other manufacturing technologies has a positive impact in the production process of certain objects. Among the positive characteristics of the technology, it can be mentioned, its capacity to allow an easy relatable customization or personalization of elements, its ability to generate complex and intricate designs and shapes, its capacity to enable the production of interlocked flexible pieces, its effect in costs reduction when it comes to projects with a limited number of produced pieces,

and its factor of speed or rapid prototyping. All the above listed facts needed to be considered and actually confronted during the development of this project; thus, the application of this technology became extremely relevant for its culmination. The suggestive use of additive manufacturing and subsequently, the use of an unusual material on the manufacturing process for this kind of elements, open a new door full of opportunities for further future developments on the luxury jewelry field of the country.

Finally, with regard to future developments of the project, it is important for designers to remember that when it comes to culture, it is indispensable to conduct a deep research on the matter and to keep native communities integrally involved in the design and development process. The co-participation reduces the risks of misinterpretation and cultural appropriation, and makes the project much more genuine allowing designers to give the deserved credits to the community to which the original idea belongs.

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