

# The Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies



Edited by Eugenia Paulicelli, Veronica Manlow, and Elizabeth Wissinger

# THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO FASHION STUDIES

This collection of original essays interrogates disciplinary boundaries in fashion, gathering fashion studies research across disciplines and from around the globe.

Fashion and clothing are part of material and visual culture, cultural memory, and heritage; they contribute to shaping the way people see themselves, interact, and consume. For each of the volume's eight parts, scholars from across the world and a variety of disciplines offer analytical tools for further research. Never neglecting the interconnectedness of disciplines and domains, these original contributions survey specific topics and critically discuss the leading views in their areas. They include discursive and reflective pieces, as well as discussions of original empirical work, and contributors include established leaders in the field, rising stars, and new voices, including practitioner and industry voices.

This is an in-depth overview of the field, ideal not only for undergraduate and postgraduate fashion studies students, but also for researchers and students in communication studies, the humanities, gender and critical race studies, social sciences, and fashion design and business.

**Eugenia Paulicelli** (Queens College and The Graduate Center, The City University of New York) is Professor of Italian, Comparative Literature and Women's Studies, and Founder and Director of the Concentration in Fashion Studies at the Graduate Center. Among her books are *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt* (2004); *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, Globalization* (co-editor, 2009); *Writing Fashion in Early Modern Italy* (2014); and *Italian Style: Fashion & Film from Early Cinema to the Digital Age* (2016).

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*Eugenia Paulicelli, Veronica Manlow, and  
Elizabeth Wissinger*

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**To our daughters, Anna, Cassielle and Laurel**



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# INTRODUCTION

*Eugenia Paulicelli, Veronica Manlow, and Elizabeth Wissinger*

From fig leaf to formalwear, clothing has a long history of performing both utilitarian and symbolic functions. It has meaning and practical use, a physical reality, and emotional and economic significance.

Explaining why fashion needs to be studied, as it certainly does, quickly leads to uncertainty over how to study it. Fashion is multi-dimensional; it is clothing, accessories, body manipulation and modification, makeup, ornaments, life styles, and behavior. Fashion is made of aesthetic objects with political uses. It speaks to identities of gender/s, race, and class. Clothing is at home on everyone's body, but in no one discipline. If ever a subject both called for inquiry and resisted classification in a single field or method of inquiry, fashion would be it.

It is the editors' belief that in its material and immaterial dimensions fashion is culture in all its plural and diverse manifestations. Fashion does not only manifest culture, it shapes and produces it. Subjects, bodies and objects interact and "belong to the same ecosystem."<sup>1</sup> As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has argued: "even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context."<sup>2</sup> Fashion is located on the body, but at the same time it is movement; it travels from locations and spaces that has an impact on the meanings of fashion. The Internet of Things is a tangible manifestation of fashion's flowing and fleeting, its continuous motion.

Fashion is at once an art with aesthetic dimensions and a global industry that occupies a significant part of the world economy. These poles are not as mutually exclusive as they might appear. In fact, one quickly finds aspects of one in the other: art, whether in cinema, galleries, or museums, always involves business; the business of manufacturing, retail, and marketing always relies on aesthetics. In today's digital, media, and consumerist society, fashion occupies a growing importance that shows no signs of abating.

Fashion demands to be studied in all its multiple dimensions as a social, cultural, economic, and aesthetic force. Fashion and clothing are part of material and visual culture, cultural memory, and heritage; they contribute to shaping the way people see themselves, interact, and consume. Fashion is a privileged lens through which to gain a new understanding of cultures, and individual lives, as well as the mechanisms regulating production both in the past and the present. The textile industry, for example, was at the core of social, political, and economic transformations in the Europe of the Renaissance, in the eighteenth-century industrial

revolution, during colonialism, and in the struggle for independence from colonial empire. The study of fashion cannot be confined or limited to the purview of a few specialists. Rather, the study of fashion needs to be inclusive and to enrich itself with the sharing of collective knowledge and expertise.

Dress, costume, and textiles have been studied for a long time, but it was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that a new phase opened up. More in-depth research in feminist theories, the impact of cultural studies, changes in historiography, semiotics, and theory all contributed to interrogate the traditional disciplines as well as the disciplinary boundaries surrounding the study of clothing and fashion as a manufacturing industry and a powerful political and economic force. With this kind of gradual revolution, the study of fashion has expanded its reach and confines. The study of fashion is no longer solely located in art and design schools. Design schools have created new programs offering in-depth and scholarly approaches to the study of fashion in its historical and theoretical contexts. Parallel to this, changes have occurred in universities with the establishment of new courses and programs focused on fashion, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The City University of New York (CUNY), where the editors teach, is but one example. In the last few years we have also witnessed important changes among the younger generations of students. With their expertise and sensibility, they have contributed to blurring the lines between theory and practice. They have also contributed to debunking outdated ideas about fashion practitioners not interested in engaging in intellectual projects. We are now entering a new phase in which the study of fashion can help to build bridges between different cultures, languages, and domains.

While clothing, adornment, and later, fashion, are phenomena treated by scholars dating back to antiquity, the treatises and commentaries produced tended to consider fashion's intersection with questions of morality, politics, nation building, gender, and identity, as if they were an isolated force in social life. By contrast, what drives the newly intensified scholarly interest in fashion is the growing recognition that fashion can no longer be considered a separate phenomenon, or merely a text or a performance. Rather, scholars have developed an awareness of fashion's multidimensionality and the impact it has on the economy and on those who work to produce fashion goods and have focused more on geopolitical issues such as pollution, waste, and climate change. Rising to the challenge of analyzing these processes, new works on methodology, theory, and continuing forms of practice have proliferated alongside new academic journals devoted solely to the topic, ranging from graduate student journals to highly specialized volumes devoted to specific aspects of the fashion field, such as luxury.

The field of fashion studies has seen a particular uptake in popular and academic interest during the last two decades. Fashion, dress, and material culture have become prominent and crucial areas/fields and objects of academic research. The existence of important academic journals, and the publication of several fashion studies readers and handbooks, all testify to the boom in research interest in a fast developing field of academic inquiry.<sup>3</sup> The growing scholarship spans many areas and geographical locations that have been crucial in developing the field of fashion studies. They have opened new domains for the critical study of fashion and have challenged the widespread belief that fashion is solely a Western/European phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

Although there has been a growing interest in the consolidation and institutionalization of fashion studies, that interest has come up against established disciplinary divisions. Research has been conducted in traditional disciplines: literature, art, history, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, education, chemistry, fashion design, film, theater, business, journalism, law as well as in a variety of sub-disciplines, new disciplines, and interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies. In particular, the traditional divide between the

textiles/dress/practice approach versus cultural studies, sociopolitical, and theoretical angles on the topic has been quite pronounced.<sup>5</sup>

The disciplinary distance that results from distinct treatments thus far has frustrated some of the attempts to establish the field's overall contours. As a result, "comprehensive" overviews have been published in different forums, for separate audiences who are sometimes unaware of developments in each other's fields. It is for these reasons that the study of fashion has contributed to set up a paradigm that is against the idea of disciplines considered as territorial academic silos.

*The Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies* fills an important gap in existing fashion studies scholarship. The volume aims at contributing to an open dialog that interrogates disciplinary boundaries. For each section of the volume, scholars from across the world, from a variety of disciplines and at different stages of their careers, offer analytical tools for further research.

Never neglecting the interconnectedness of disciplines and domains, the volume aims at providing a state-of-the-art review of fashion studies research from across the field. These original contributions survey specific topics and critically discuss the leading views in their areas. They include discursive and reflective pieces, as well as discussions of original empirical work (case studies). We have organized the volume in eight sections and for each one of them the authors included present different approaches and focus. In the first section, dedicated to fashion histories and theories, we have included an essay by Riello who contributes to questioning the Western paradigm according to which fashion was a European invention. Similarly, fashion is re-examined in light of aesthetic and continental philosophy by Matteucci and Pappas, in art by Lau, economic theories by Katagiri, and posthuman theories by Smelik. Approaches and methodologies are organized thematically around umbrella topics such as "fashion practices: from the museum to the workplace and beyond" in which the chapters range from fashion curation and new methodology by Van Godtsenhoven to reflection on fashion and design in higher education by James and Bertola, and Colombi, respectively. Practices and their politics expand to include fashion and the design studio by Iszoro Zak and Roberts, to children's fashion in history and designing by Le Guennec, but also in the context of education and care by Byam, and sensibility towards individual care of wardrobes that results in a "quiet" form of activism by Hackney, Hill, Saunders and Willett, and finally to the role of technology in fabrics and design and its interaction with the concept of the "hand-made" by Faedda. Section 3 revolves around fashion, body, and identity from bullying and the psychological underpinning of clothing for youth by von Busch; the role of scent as prosthetic aura by Parr, to the deconstruction of Western masculinity in suits by Smerene, college student activism during Trumpism by Thompson, to the influence of the military in fashion throughout history by Roveri, and the impact of violence on interwar femininity by Moyses Ferreira, to regulatory settings by Kapartziani, Koulocheris and Pichou. The role of place and location in fashion is examined in a wide range of essays in Section 4, the made in Italy and associated questions of labor by Barna and Dobos-Nagy, and the important role of the textile industry and fairs in a global market by Dematteo, and the formation of the "Italian look" in the historical context of the post-war democratization of fashion by Scarpellini, to the role of Brazilian fashion by Özüdogru. The chapter by Tanjeem on the analysis of Bangladeshi labor issues during the COVID-19 pandemic offers a new perspective on sustainable practices and human rights, while the essay by Yangzom presents a reflection on the exponential global growth of second-hand clothing in the light of the ongoing pandemic.

Clothes, ornaments, accessories, and the multiple technologies of the body become fashion through different kind of media, from printed magazines, literature, and language in social media, film, television, and new media. Section 5, "Fashion and Print Media: Literature and



Magazines”; Section 6, “Fashion and Film”; and Section 7, “Branding, Media, and Television” are dedicated to studies that cover different cultures, historical contexts and politics of style. From post-unified Italy etiquette books by Paternoster, to English and French/American literature by, respectively, Mahwatte and Kudish, to the role of sartorial choices in public figures such as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, by Alexander to early modern Persian narrative poetry inscribed in silks by Hedayat Munroe and concluding with Berger and Blake's essay on fashion consumption is shaped in mechanisms of sales obstruction. In addition, the section dedicated to film offers reflections on the status and evolution of this field since the early 1990s, with essays by Uhlirva and Church Gibson, who investigate the interconnection of fashion, screen media, film and celebrity culture, while Rees-Roberts focuses on the representation of the fashion designer between fame and failure. Additional analysis and applications on specific film genres is offered in the chapters by Marion and Scanlan around the figure of the superhero and the intersection with comic books. Chatterjee, who is also a costume designer for theater and dance productions, reflects on the female leaders in Indian cinema and Bollywood design. The following section focuses on television, branding, and media convergence culture with an essay by Mascio, and on the digital touch points and the new consumer experience by Andò, on the theory of mediatization of digital media consumption by Puig, Serrano-Puche and Sánchez-Blanco on fashion and art through the work of trend forecasters by Pedroni; on the “it bag” by Reynolds and the role of influencers as cultural mediators by Arriagada.

Concluding the volume, Section 8 on “The Future of Fashion and its Challenges” is composed of three essays by the editors of the volume. Each one aims at offering further reflections on specific areas of the fashion industry and its cultures. Manlow presents her findings on the luxury market and e-commerce through interviews with industry practitioners and analysts and poses some questions about the future of the industry. Wissinger considers how new technologies of biodesign may affect the fashion system, and she suggests possible avenues for future research. Race, its cultural discourses, and practices are the topics of Paulicelli's essay on Harlem-based designer Dapper Dan and Gucci in the framework of fashion and translation studies, seen as a productive methodology.

## Notes

- 1 See Elizabeth Ezra and Catherine Wheatley, eds., *Shoe Reels. The History and Philosophy of Footwear in Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 5.
- 2 Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3–63.
- 3 Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, eds., *The Fashion Reader. Second edition* (Oxford: Berg, 2011); P. McNeil and V. Karaminas, eds., *The Men's Fashion Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2009); Sandy Black, Amy De La Haye, Joanne Entwistle, Agnès Rocamora, Regina A. Root, Helen Thomas, eds., *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, Black et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). Anneke Smelik and Agnès Rocamora, eds., *Thinking Through Fashion* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015).  
The predecessors of this volume are books published by Berg on several theories of fashion such as Michael Carter's and others published by Berg and also of note is *The Rise of Fashion. A Reader*, ed. Daniel Leonhard Purdy (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Malcolm Barnard, ed., *Fashion History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).  
Heike Jenss, ed., *Fashion Studies: Research Methods, Sites, and Practices*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).  
Other titles are *The Berg Companion to Fashion* (2010) edited by Valerie Steele. Additional publications more historically oriented are the *Fashion History Reader Global Perspectives*, edited by Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeill, London: Routledge, 2010; *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, 10 volumes edited by different authors, and editor in Chief, Joanne B. Eicher, 2010; or organized thematically,

## Introduction

such as Kaiser, *Fashion and Cultural Studies* (Bloomsbury Academics); the monograph by Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism. Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); and Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) and by the same author, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

- 4 There is a vast bibliography on the topic. We could mention the work of historians such as Giorgio Riello and Beverly Lemire, eds., *Dressing Global Bodies: The Political Power of Dress in World History* (London: Routledge 2020); G. Riello and Peter McNeill, eds., *The Fashion History Reader Global Perspectives*, *ibid.*; see in this volume the essay by Negley Harte, “The study of Fashion and Dress” pp. 15–17; *The Cambridge Global Fashion History*, edited by Christopher Breward, Giorgio Riello, and Beverly Lemire, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming; Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, *Fashion History. A Global View*, Bloomsbury: 2018; and the numerous monographic studies such as Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University 2008); E. Paulicelli and H. Clark, eds., *The Fabric of Cultures. Fashion, Identity, Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2009).
- 5 See John Styles, “Dress in History: Reflections on a Contested Terrain”, *Fashion Theory* 2, no. 4 (1998): 383–90 and the whole issue of the journal dedicated to methodology; and Giorgio Riello, “The Object of Fashion: Methodological Approaches to the History of Fashion.” *The Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 3, no. 1 (2011): 8865; Giuseppina Muzzarelli, Giorgio Riello, and Elisa Tosi Brandi, eds. *Moda. Storia e storie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010).



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## PART I

# Fashion theories and histories

This section on *Fashion Theories and Histories* addresses a wide range of subjects and delves into a variety of disciplines: to begin with history, art, literature, philosophy, economics. The disciplinary domains of these fields of study are explored in depth. They are defined and they are challenged. As we move forward to explore fashion as a visual and material force manifested at various points in time and in various places and contexts, we discover common points in questions that recur throughout the book. We also find unique phenomena specific to a given author's research which we might not find discussed anywhere else.

Giorgio Riello writes about fashion as a diffusionist force, starting in Europe and expanding (especially in the twentieth century) to other parts of the world influenced by European/Western imperial precepts. The idea that fashion existed only in Europe emerged in the so-called "first global age" (c. 1500–1800) at a time in which different parts of the world became increasingly connected through trade, diplomacy but also exploitation and war. It was in this period that fashion was used as a tool of power to affirm Europe's dominance, well before its nations emerged as empires and that discriminatory racial categories came to legitimize Europe's conquest of other parts of the world.

Fashion as a topic worthy of philosophical investigation has long met with skepticism. Giovanni Matteucci asks what aesthetics means in the context of fashion. Can we look to art or are the categories that constitute fashion closer to style and taste? How does fashion as a lived experience with links to global business and technology change how we see its relationship to aesthetics? Matteucci begins his investigation by addressing the meaning of an "aesthetics of fashion" and the reasons for its struggle to emerge as a legitimate topic. Fashion certainly deals with aesthetic elements, yet these are not easily attributable to the canonical categories at the center of the traditional understanding regarding the fine art experience. Given that fashion's formulation of beauty generates consumption, thus demanding incessant product innovation and reinvention, value in this domain hinges on embodied practice rather than detached contemplation, hence, the devising of an aesthetics of fashion is mainly grounded in praxis as opposed to theory. The concept of an aesthetics of fashion was first broached and developed by novelists and artists in the nineteenth century. Today, as a result of having acquired so much importance, the agenda of these particular aesthetics has inevitably triggered its overall conceptual reassessment. It is precisely this aesthetic efficacy that accounts for fashion's increasingly pervasive impact on our current reality, allowing for the crucial role of

aesthetic praxis both in the articulation of identities, and in the dialectics between social groups, unfolding in much the same way as it does in the art world.

Nickolas Pappas notes the silence in philosophy with respect to fashion and its essential purpose. Although philosophy has said little about fashion, its orientation on the subject can be seen in the ways philosophy has used fashion to say what philosophy is—to discuss its own existence and to illustrate its importance. The author considers Nietzsche, Rousseau, and Thoreau.

*Beyond Good and Evil* imagines value systems as costumes, Europe as the frequent change of dress. In Nietzsche's hands the metaphor subverts the cliché of wardrobe as false, and specially strikes against the Platonic fantasy of philosophy as *nudity of the soul*. It works against Rousseau who seeks authenticity in the philosopher. "The good man is an athlete who delights in fighting naked." (Thoreau, also speaking Platonically, appeals to *the shirt* as generic garb that evades the problem of costume.) Against this received wisdom, Nietzsche's allegory suggests that the fashion system has understood something Platonic anti-fashion missed. Insight comes not from denying innovations in presentation but in embracing the creativity of wearing *something else*. The philosophical ideal of reason, as a power escaping human particularities, repeats the position within the world of costume that some dress escapes the social origins of dress. Nietzsche's costume change of values reawakens a dulled metaphor, urging philosophy to learn from what fashion knows.

Charlene K. Lau evaluates the meaning of avant-garde in fashion discourse as well as looking at its representation in art history, literary, and cultural studies. Her chapter "Contemporary Avant-Garde Fashion" presents an evaluative overview of vanguard fashion in contemporaneity and engages with scholarly studies of fashion practices that are described as "experimental," "critical," or "radical." Lau presents a theory of the vanguard and critically examines groundbreaking practices, situating them within a narrative of the proto and "original" artistic avant-gardes and cultural producers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This examination of contemporary fashion vanguard practices—that question fashion as an institution and challenge other disciplinary boundaries—restores conceptual frameworks and methodologies from the fields of art history, and critical, cultural, and literary theory in order to illuminate the ontology of avant-garde fashion at present.

The fashion industry is a vast complex of markets, enterprises, and practices spanning the globe. Yoko Katagiri maps the organization of the fashion industry allowing us to see the economics of fashion in relation to firms, markets, and commercial behavior. Fashion economics is a new sub-field of economics that analyzes fashion behavior with the tools of economics. Katagiri's chapter explains what fashion economics is and introduces the reader to economic theories that can help predict rational and irrational behaviors within the fashion market. The chapter describes the fashion industry as an organization and shows how smaller segments comprised of economic agents function and interact with other segments of the industry. It introduces economic concepts that analyze fashion consumers', producers', and market behavior: Such theories are monopolistic competition, social interaction theories, econometrics, traditional utility, and game theory. To show how economics help one understand market behaviors, Katagiri includes some examples: trickle-down theory of fashion, limited edition by a brand, emergence of fashion, and fashion cycles.

Anneke Smelik defines post-human fashion within a human and non-human network. She proposes a new materialist framework and seeks to integrate post-human fashion in the larger discourse of fashion studies, inscribing it within the critical discourses of posthumanism and new materialism. Post-human fashion blurs the categories between human and machine, humans and animals, virtual and material, and organic and artificial. The chapter explores several

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dimensions of posthumanism: the relation to technology; the shifting boundaries between femininity and masculinity; and the turn toward sustainable fashion. A posthuman aesthetic decenters the human by hybridization: blending human–animal and human–machine while queering gender and sexuality. A posthuman perspective permits an understanding of fashion as materially co-produced in a complex network of interconnected human and non-human actors.



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# 1

## WORLDS WITH NO FASHION? THE BIRTH OF EUROCENTRISM<sup>1</sup>

*Giorgio Riello*

Today it is natural for us to conceptualize fashion as a global phenomenon. However, this simple statement hides a series of important issues that include the world-wide reach of high-street, haute-couture, and luxury brands, the apparent homogenization of taste toward Western aesthetic and sartorial models, and the omnipresent use of garments and accessories to signify identity and convey changing social and cultural models. The present-day global dimension of fashion is at odds with the fact that its history has been narrated as quintessentially European. This statement also needs unpacking. The histories of dress and fashion—and to an extent also more recent theoretical discussions in the field of fashion theory—build on a century-long scholarship interested in mapping the major sartorial shifts and turns in specific nations among which are France, Italy, and Spain for the middle ages and the early modern period (1300–1800) and then France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consequently, fashion is embedded within traditional European narratives that includes the Renaissance, the age of revolutions, industrialization, modernity and modernization, and twentieth-century booms and busts. For a long time, areas of the world outside the West were deemed to have experienced fashion only through Europe as yet another form of Western imperialism, perhaps kinder than colonialism, war, exploitation, and plunder.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of fashion as a diffusionist force, starting in Europe and expanding (especially in the twentieth century) to other parts of the world rested on European/Western imperial precepts. It allowed for narratives that followed closely the chronological, interpretative, and conceptual categories of European history. The consequence was that other areas of the world were either latecomers in “adopting” fashion, or did not quite fulfill the criteria to match the European model. Secondly it encouraged generations of historians to deny that fashion might have existed at all before the nineteenth century outside Europe and the Western world.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most famous among historians to present this argument was the doyen of the French historical profession, Fernand Braudel (1902–1985). Even a historian such as Braudel, open to the use of anthropological and material culture methodologies, found it difficult to shake off long-standing tropes that wanted to position European “fashion” in opposition to the “costume” worn in other areas of the world.<sup>4</sup> The German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1858–1918) in the early years of the twentieth century conceived fashion to be the attribute of advanced civilizations such as the West. Theirs—Simmel suggested—was a world characterized by rapid change, economic dynamism, new and more efficient communication, and fashions that were



widespread often at an international scale. In contrast, other societies apparently enjoyed more stable forms of dress that scarcely changed over time and that were materialized in the “costume” of local communities. One might say that it was an attribute of (Western) fashion to be dynamic and expansive, while costume was passive and destined to be superseded.<sup>5</sup>

This brief excursus serves us in pointing out two issues. First the fact that since the new millennium a number of scholars working on the histories of different parts of the world have shown that Braudel’s historical explanation and Simmel’s theoretical modeling are not simply Eurocentric and chauvinistic but are plainly wrong. There is now sufficient research to show a flourishing of fashion in areas as different as Tang to Qing China, Mughal India, Safavid Iran, Colonial Latin and North America as well as Japan, the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia.<sup>6</sup> One might conclude that there is hardly any area of the pre-modern world that did not experience rapid and sometimes extravagant changes in clothing; yet each area presented characteristics of its own, leading to a reinterpretation of the very concept of fashion away from European categories alone. Second—and the topic of the remainder of this chapter—is the acknowledgment that the primacy of Europe was not invented in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the idea that fashion existed only in Europe emerged instead in the so-called “first global age” most especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at a time in which different parts of the world became increasingly connected through trade, diplomacy but also exploitation and war. It was in these centuries that fashion was used as a tool of power to affirm Europe’s dominance, well before its nations emerged as empires and discriminatory racial categories came to legitimize Europe’s conquest of other parts of the world.<sup>7</sup>

### Worlds with no fashion

Fashion did not begin in Europe as a tool of dominance. Quite the opposite. One of the difficulties that early modern Europeans encountered in articulating a view of fashion was conceptual. Up until the second half of the seventeenth century the expression “fashion” defined what the sixteenth-century English traveler and writer Andrew Boorde called the “fashion of al maner of countreys.”<sup>8</sup> Fashion was the manner of life, and defined people’s behavior or, in material terms, the make and shape of an artifact. It was only slowly over the course of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries that the word ‘fashion’—intended as an indication of as change over time of shapes, colors, materials, and decorations—came into use in several European languages. But this was no simple linguistic innovation or a phenomenon endogenous to Europe. The emergence of the concept of fashion had a great deal to do with the ways in which Europeans thought of themselves and their “fashions” (ways of living) compared with other parts of the world. They reflected on their changing dress and they opposed their costume and customs with those of other populations—far and near—across the world. This is evident in the second half of the sixteenth century in the visual representations to be found in European costume books.<sup>9</sup> A series of publications presented the costumes of the people of the world through individual plates. In perhaps the most famous of these books, Cesare Vecellio’s *Habiti Antichi et Moderni* published in Venice in two editions in 1590 and 1598, the author complains about the difficulty of representing the dress of individual cities and states as “what pertains to dress has no stability, nor fixity, and it is ever changing according to people’s choice and whim.”<sup>10</sup> Here Vecellio refers specifically to European dress while he warns the reader that for other parts of the world little is known of their costume.<sup>11</sup>

Vecellio was not the only one to insist on a presumed dichotomy between Europe (whose contours as a continent were taking shape in a series of publications and atlases of the time) and other parts of the world, often not well known to Europeans. A couple of generations after

Vecellio the English traveler and author Henry Blaunt wrote about the Ottoman Empire that “to this day [the Ottomans] vary but little from that long, and loose manner of garment reported to have been ever used in the East.”<sup>12</sup> He further explained that “they would have no *novelties*, and therefore would disgrace all new *examples*; then I perceived it to be a peece rather of *Institution*, then *Incivilitie*; for they desiring perpetuall *hostility* with the *Christians*, must estrange the People from their *Customes*.”<sup>13</sup> Blaunt saw the refusal of fashion not as a form of “barbarism” or “incivility” but as a result of an opposition, in this case to the novelty and change of European dress. A similar strategy of analysis was also used by the Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis who traveled in Japan in 1563 where he spent the rest of his life. His Treatise of 1585—one of the first to present the Far East to a European public—was composed of a series of statements that compared and opposed Europe and Japan. He dedicated an entire part of his work to clothing and the manners of wearing garments and accessories. He pointed to differences such as that, unlike Europeans, the Japanese always took off their shoes at home, or the fact that Japanese clothes were not as tight-fitting as European ones. Among his first observations was the fact that “Among us a new look in clothing is created nearly every year; in Japan styles are always the same, without ever changing.”<sup>14</sup> These examples would continue with more quotes from early modern European travelers, traders, and adventurers pointing to an opposition between European fashion and the lack of it in other parts of the world. In many cases they were not even certain that fashion was a positive attribute for Europe and the most conservative among them praised the political and social stability brought about by the “unchanging costume” in use outside Europe.

One of the contributions of recent scholarship on pre-modern dress (and indeed fashion) outside the borders of Europe has been a more critical engagement with European travelogues, diaries, reports, and disquisitions on Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Rather than accept them at face value, the limitations of many reports on China, Japan, or the Ottoman Empire, for instance, are now acknowledged. They include views expressed by observers (nearly all of whom were men) whose exposure and direct contact with the societies that they described and analyzed was at best limited.<sup>15</sup> Their experience was often second hand and even more commonly mediated, with resulting problems created by linguistic and cultural translation. They also looked at the reality around themselves not as modern-day anthropologists or ethnographers, but with the baggage of a humanist education and Renaissance categories and concepts. Their observations were shaped—in the words of anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot—by the belief that “Man (with a capital M) was primarily European and male.”<sup>16</sup> They believed that such a model could hardly be matched by other world populations. Moreover, at a practical level, their views were tainted by the purposes of their travels and negotiations with local people and the degree to which their aims were realized or frustrated.

Perhaps more troublingly for us is not the fact that these sources should not be taken at face value, but that for decades they have been used by historians to reinforce their view that Europe—and Europe alone—had fashion in the pre-modern period. The result has been a distortion of our models and interpretations that—as previously observed—is only now in the process of being rectified. Yet in reading European sources “against the grain” and triangulating them with Chinese, Indian, Ottoman, and other sources, one must ask why sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans were so fixated in pointing to an absence of fashion outside Europe. Even acknowledging their limitations, I would like to argue that their views were the result of a broader understanding of the world that was taking shape at the time. Dress was part of a material interpretation of the world that over time became hierarchical and placed Europe both as the most advanced instance and the most coveted example of an evolutionary understanding of civilizations. An easy opposition between sartorial models (as we have seen for



Figure 1.1 The Naked. “Famille d’Indiens du Brésil” from Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*. Woodcut. 1580 edition. Granger Historical Picture Archive / © Alamy Stock Photo FG18JE

Europe vs. the Ottoman Empire or Europe vs. Japan) gave way to a more articulated understanding of different parts of the world as characterized by different models of dress.<sup>17</sup>

### Multiple worlds

In the first half of the sixteenth century Europeans had significantly broadened their geographical knowledge of the world. Today Christopher Columbus’ arrival in the Americas or Vasco da Gama’s direct trade with the Indian ocean are no longer seen as triumphant

achievements that heralded a renaissance for Europe, let alone start what used to be called a phase of early modern “European expansion.” Yet the impact that the Americas had on European culture and the transformations brought about by Asian trade cannot be denied. These events stimulated the rise of new Atlantic empires, changes in commodities and food-stuffs available in Europe, and perhaps most importantly a reinterpretation of the “mental boundaries” of Europeans. It is within this process of “re-locating Europe” that one can see the emergence of a new interpretation of a world (that was in the process of being surveyed and known by Europeans) through the medium of dress and bodily embellishment. Simply put, Europeans saw the world as divided into four parts: the naked, the furred, the draped and the sewn. These were not precise geographical formations and did not distinguish neatly different continents. The “naked world” included the Americas and to a certain extent Africa and parts of Asia; the “furred world” extended instead to include the northern polar parts; the “draped world” included many parts of Asia ranging from Japan to the Middle East and extended into North Africa. And finally, the “sewn world” was that of Europe where fashion manifested itself.

The new lands of the Americas were described by Columbus (though they were not yet conceived as a new continent nor named as such) soon after his return to Spain in 1493. Much translated around Europe, Columbus’ work circulated widely in the late 1490s and introduced one specific feature of the inhabitants of these new lands (new for Europeans). Columbus said that they “went around naked without shame” and that they were “children of nature” lacking not just the social structures of Europe—and indeed the rest of the known world—but also the cloth and clothing that for centuries had acted as a form of protection, of moral conduct and of respect of social hierarchy. Peter Martyr d’Anghiera (1457–1526), who was tasked by the Spanish crown to collect first-hand reports about the Americas, reported in his *Decades de Orbe Novo* (1505) that “the inhabitants of the island of Hispaniola are in my opinion happier than the ancients. They are all naked, and they do not know either units of measures or money. They live in the golden age, without prevarications, without laws, content with their destiny and not at all worried about the future.”<sup>18</sup> Nakedness was here part and parcel of a “state of nature” of what Europeans perceived as the golden ages of mankind, an atavist state.

One can say that the nakedness of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas was a controversial subject especially about the varied nature of these people. Positions differed: the French Jean de Léry (1536–1613) who traveled to Brazil in the 1550s commented that the Tupinamba people went around “not only without hiding any parts of their bodies, but also without feeling any sort of shame or embarrassment, they live and go around naked as they come out of their mothers’ wombs” (Figure 1.1).<sup>19</sup> He said that lustfulness was created not by the sight of nakedness but by the elaborate clothing and jewels worn by Parisian ladies, a trope that was used a century later by Montaigne. By contrast, Léry’s archenemy, André Thevet (1516–1590), author himself of a similarly successful travel book, put the peoples of the Americas just above wild beasts and took their nudity, to cite historian Brian Cummings as “a clear indication of monstrosity or of bestiality.”<sup>20</sup> He was voicing a popular position that connected their nakedness to repulsive behavior such as cannibalism.

While the association with bestiality came to be questioned over the sixteenth century, Europeans thought of nakedness as a lack, a deprivation that was as much material as it was cultural. The problem was not confined to the Americas: the Venetian Ambrosio Bembo (1652–1705), writing of his travels in the mid-seventeenth century, opposed the dress (or lack of) of the inhabitants of India with that of Europeans. He was writing at a time in which the European dress of the elites was particularly stiff and covered entirely the body with the exception of the face and hands. According to Bembo in India “All the men and women wear a white cloth under their clothing and over their private parts, which, as we have said, is the only



Figure 1.2 The Furred: “Painting of Greenlanders”, Denmark, 1654. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Granger Historical Picture Archive / © Alamy Stock Photo FFC40T.

clothing of the poor people.” He added that “In many parts even civilized persons do not wear any other clothing, and they anoint their skin with oil to make themselves shine and also to protect themselves from the sun.”<sup>21</sup> He was repeating points already reported by several travelers before him that by the seventeenth century had become an environmental explanation.<sup>22</sup> The mercenary Captain Ripon who traveled to the East Indies in the first decades of the seventeenth century similarly observed that “Most people go there naked, except that they have underpants and the women a shirt,” though he added that this was “because of the heat it is there.”<sup>23</sup>

The northern parts of the world seemed instead to present the opposite problem. Elite, literate, early modern Europeans who lived in the warmer and temperate parts of the continent were amazed that these inhospitable lands could support any human life. The European search for an eastern as well as a western passage to China via the northern pole had several times resulted in failure and loss of lives. This might explain why the limited encounters with populations as well as whales and fur-bearing creatures living in the extreme Northern Hemisphere were keenly described and reported. John White (1539–1593)—well known for

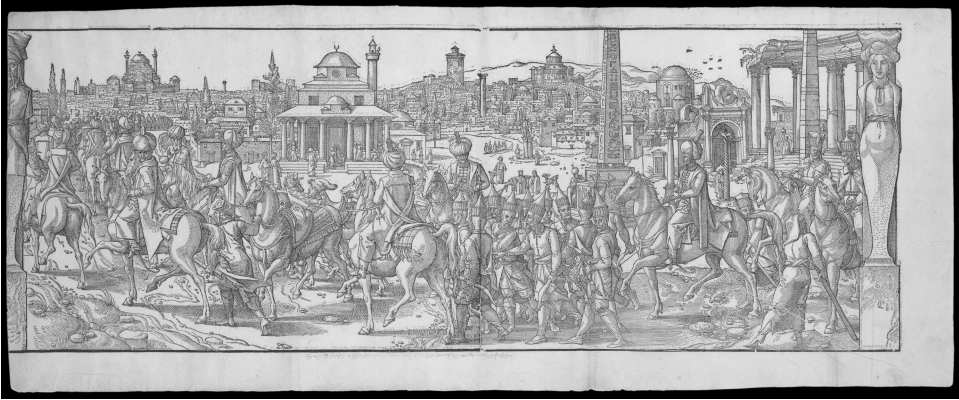


Figure 1.3 The Draped: “Detail of *Ces Moeurs et fachons de faire de Turcz*” (Customs and Fashions of the Turks). Print by Pieter Coecke van Aelst, c. 1520–1550. Part of Woodcuts in a frieze of 10 blocks printed on 10 sheets, 35.5 × 455.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.85.1–.7a, b

his drawings of Roanoke people on the American East Coast—including also drawings of the Inuk inhabitants of Frobisher Bay in the Qikiqtaaluk Region of Nunavut of today’s Canada, depicted as wearing sealskin parka.<sup>24</sup> Such was the fascination with northern people such as the Inuit of Western Greenland, that the Danes decided to transport four of them (one man and three women) to Denmark in 1654. They are represented in a beautiful painting now at the Ethnographic Museum in Copenhagen (Figure 1.2). Having converted to Christianity, they remained in Denmark for five years, though none of them survived long enough to go back to Greenland. This painting attributed to Solomon von Hager shows the group of four dressed in their attire. The banner held by the man says: “With small leather boats on the sea / the Greenlanders go hither and thither / from animals and birds they get their garb / In the cold land of midnight.”<sup>25</sup>

Animals and birds provided therefore a form of dress that in the case of northern lands was considered protective. While the representation here is positive, the zoomorphism of their dress may create in European minds an uneasy parallelism between human and animal. This is particularly striking as artifacts and material culture methodologies have shown that northern clothing was largely sewn through the use of bone needles and fiber thread. Here the schism between reality and representation (literal and visual) is as apparent as Europeans’ need to differentiate and hierarchize the world. While Europeans might imitate nature in their textile motifs, reproduce it through slashed and pinked clothes, or adorn themselves in rare fur, the animal and natural worlds were seen as “domesticated” through fashion. This was not the case for the use of pelts, hides, and animal skins to be found in many parts of the world well beyond the northern parts. Pastor Johann Christian Hoffmann (1651–1682) traveled to Batavia and complained of the local inhabitants that they “they let a sheepskin or other body that barely reach the calves hang like a cloak around you. Let a skin be too small, in which case they take one more and sew it up by means of a small sharp bone and strong thread, which they know how to obtain from the tendons of some bird with long legs, and the join them as artistically as possible and let them hang around their disgusting body, having first smeared them entirely with disgusting grease.”<sup>26</sup> Here the zoomorphic transformation of humans was aided by other products derived from animals such as tendons and grease.



Figure 1.4 The Sewn: “The Tailor” (Il Tagliapanni) by Giovanni Battista Moroni. Oil on canvas, 1565–1570. Oil on canvas 99.5 × 77.0 cm. The National Gallery, London NG697. Peter Horree / © Alamy Stock Photo J47CNX

The “naked” and the “furred” contrasted not just with the dress of European elites but also with what was worn in various parts of the “Orient.” Although great variations existed, early-modern European visitors, missionaries, traders, and armchair travelers saw a communality in Asian and North African dress that was set in opposition to what was worn in Europe. The Italian traveler Pietro della Valle (1586–1652) wrote of the dress worn in India that “The Garments which they wear next to the skin serves both for coat and shirt, from the girdle upwards being adorn’d upon the breast, and hanging down in many folds to the middle of the leg. Under this Cassack, from the girdle downwards, they wear a pair of long Drawers of the same Cloth, which cover not only their Thighs, but legs also to the Feet; and ‘tis a piece of gallantry to have it wrinkled in many folds upon the Legs.”<sup>27</sup> Della Valle saw three main features, the most important of which was the fact that outside Europe garments were draped (“wrinkled in many folds”) rather than tailored. It is not the case that garments in Asia were not sewn; it was the visual effect of loose-fitting garments that surprised Europeans. Second, there was no layering of garments: whilst Europeans were used to linen shirts and woolen (and for the richest silk) overgarments, in Asia they observed instead garments used “both for coat and

shirt.” And finally, the distinction between bust, upper leg, and lower leg that composed pre-modern European dress was not present in Asia.

There were other distinctive differences as well. Since the fourteenth century, European dress had seen a progressive differentiation between the genders that is still with us today. This was not visible to Europeans in Asia. The Venetian Bembo observed that “The Moslem women do not dress very differently from the men, and some wear the same binding around the heard, but with brighter colors.”<sup>28</sup> This was a point much repeated also for Ottoman dress. Ottaviano Bon, the Venetian Bailo (representative) to Istanbul between 1604 and 1607, was puzzled not just by the fact that “The habit of his [the sultan’s] is much like that of the men” but also that women “sleep as men do, in their linen breeches, and quilted waistcoats.”<sup>29</sup>

Yet there was no general agreement. Whether the limits of the draped extended beyond the Middle East was unclear. For instance, Giovanni da Empoli (1483–1517), who traveled in Asia on behalf of some of the major Florentine merchants, wrote of the Chinese that “they dress as Germans, of all sorts of garments, as for instance lined berets and ruffs” and that fine white silk was abundant there.<sup>30</sup> Such a sense of familiarity was due to the fact that the dress of Ottoman, North African, and Middle Eastern men was in no way unknown in cosmopolitan European cities such as Venice. While such attire was often described, as for instance in costume books, as “strange,”<sup>31</sup> it was also represented in several works of art by artists such as Melchior Lorck Dürer and Pieter Coecke van Aelst (Figure 1.3).<sup>32</sup>

The draped figures of “Oriental” dress was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries set in opposition against the increasingly tailored clothes that can be seen in women’s—and even more so in men’s fashion—in Europe. In this period a number of tailor’s manuals appeared in Italy, Spain, and Central Europe detailing patterns for the production of clothing and the skills needed by tailors especially in cutting.<sup>33</sup> The use of scissors was a point of differentiation between Europe and Japan according to Luís Fróis: “In Europe, all our clothing is cut with scissors,” he said, “in Japan everything is cut with a knife.” While in Japan a so-called *monotachi-gatana* (meaning “thing-cut-off-sword”) was adopted, in Europe scissors had become by the sixteenth century the object that identified the profession of the tailor as can be seen in the beautiful portrait of a tailor by the Italian painter Giovanni Battista Moroni, dated c. 1565–1570 (Figure 1.4).<sup>34</sup> It has been argued that tailoring was an art that relied not just on skills but also on disciplines such a geometry and mathematics.<sup>35</sup> Through tailoring, in Europe the body was re-composed and remodeled as can be seen in the increasingly elaborate sartorial constructions of verdugals, ruffs, and cuffs that characterized European dress in the renaissance.<sup>36</sup> Scissors and tailoring provided also endless variety and the capacity to continuously invent new shapes. This is captured in Hans Weigel’s *Trachtenbuch* of 1572 whose frontispiece shows Africa, the Americas, and Asia dressed in their imagined dress. Perhaps surprisingly, Europe is represented not fully clothed but naked, holding a bolt of cloth in one arm and a pair of scissors in another. Rather than donning one dress, the continent in Weigel embraces the everlasting change of fashion.<sup>37</sup>

From the sixteenth century and even more so in the following centuries, the clothes worn by the European elites and increasingly the upward merchant classes came to embody civilization and fashion; yet their appropriation and use by people in other parts of the world was seen as suspicious if not plainly erroneous. There is an apparent incongruence between the claim for a stadial view of world dress that is hierarchical and privileges the sartorial choices of Europeans and the actual opposition against anyone else but Europeans to enjoy fashion. The Dominican missionary Domingo Fernández Navarrete (c. 1610–1689), for instance, mocked the choices of the rulers of Makassar in the Sulawesi Island as “their Garb was the most ridiculous that can be express’d; they were both in their gay dress, had European cloth coats over



their bare Skins, their Arms naked, the Sleeves hanging down, and their Bellies uncover'd after their fashion."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the adoption of Asian dress by Europeans was actively discouraged if not opposed. In Islamic lands it was a clear sign of the giving up of Christianity. Ambassadors to Asian empires and kingdoms were warned not to readily accept robes of honor that were commonly given by rulers to visiting diplomatic missions. Their acceptance and wearing was both an act of submission and a challenge to their European identity.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has considered the enduring view that Europe—and Europe alone—experienced fashion when colonialism and Western power was imposed across the world. Experts in Chinese, Ottoman, American, and Indian history—among the many—have shown that this is not the case. Fashion existed in different areas of the world already in the early modern period. I have tried here to show that the idea of “worlds with no fashion” was not the invention of twentieth-century philosophers or historians. This trope goes back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when a number of Europeans dismissed any argument for fashion to have existed beyond Europe. Their views cannot be taken at face value but need to be interpreted historically. The early-sixteenth-century dress became a potent tool through which Europeans “understood” (and often misunderstood) the world around them. They conceived a hierarchical world composed of different sartorial traditions that were ordered in terms of civilization. The ever-changing attire of Europeans was perhaps the most difficult to describe materially and visually; yet its complex forms and the fact that it had—at least according to Vecellio—“no stability, nor fixity” became attributes for a European exceptionalism that dominated historical interpretations of dress and fashion over the following five centuries.

## Notes

- 1 I thank BuYun Chen, Beverly Lemire, Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, and Eugenia Paulicelli for their comments.
- 2 Giorgio Riello, “Fashion in the Four Parts of the World: Time, Space and Early Modern Global Change,” in *Dressing Global Bodies: The Political Power of Dress in Global History*, eds. Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2020), 41–64. See also Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, eds., *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2010).
- 3 See BuYun Chen’s analysis in her forthcoming “Towards a History of Fashion without Origins” in *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion*, eds. Christopher Breward, Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2022), vol. 1.
- 4 Of the dress in non-European societies, Braudel said that “As a General Rule no Changes Took Place in These Societies Except as a Result of Political Upheavals.” in *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, ed. Fernand Braudel (London: Fontana, 1973), 227.
- 5 Giorgio Riello, *Back in Fashion: A History of Western Fashion Since the Middle Ages* (London: Yale University Press, 2020), 25–26.
- 6 The literature is large and includes Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1991); Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph K. Neumann, eds., *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity* (Istanbul: IREN, 2004); Regina A. Root, ed., *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Robert Ross, *Clothing: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Beverly Lemire, *Global Trade and the Transformation of Consumer Cultures: The Material World Remade, c. 1500–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

- 7 See also Carlo Marco Belfanti, "Was Fashion a European Invention?," *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 3 (2008): 419–43.
- 8 Andrew Boorde, *The Booke of the Introduction of knowledge* (London: Copland, 1550).
- 9 Giulia Calvi, "Cultures of Space: Costume Books, Maps and Clothing between Europe and Japan (Sixteenth through Nineteenth Centuries)," *I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance* 20/2 (2017), 331–63; Giorgio Riello, "The World in a Book: The Creation of the Global in Sixteenth-century Costume Books," *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019), 281–316.
- 10 "Che la cosa de gli habiti non conosce stato, ne' fermezza, & si vanno sempre variando a' voglia, & capriccio altrui." Cesare Vecellio ai lettori'. Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et Moderni di Tutt oil Mondo* (Venice: Bernardo Sessa, 1598). See also the book's first edition published as Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni delle diverse parti del mondo* (Venice: Damian Zenaro, 1590).
- 11 On Vecellio see: Eugenia Paulicelli, "Mapping the World: The Political Geography of Dress in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books," *The Italianist* 28, no. 1 (2008): 24–53.
- 12 Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant. A Brief Relation of a Journey Lately Performed by Mr Henry Blunt, Gentleman...* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1650), 181–82. See also Sabine Schülting, "Strategic Improvisation: Henry Blout in the Ottoman Empire," in *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East: Performing Cultures*, eds. Sabine Schülting, Sabine Lucia Müller and Ralf Hertel (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 67–82.
- 13 Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant*, 182.
- 14 Richard K. Danford, Robin D. Gill and Daniel T. Reff, eds., *The First European Description of Japan, 1585: A Critical English-Language Edition of Striking Contrasts in the Customs of Europe and Japan by Luís Fróis, S.J.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 38. See also Luis Fróis, *Européen & Japonais: Traité sur les contradictions & differences de moeurs*, ed. Claud Lévi-Strauss (Paris: Chandeigne, 1998).
- 15 See for the case of China, Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 20.
- 16 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 76.
- 17 Key to this rethinking are: Terence S. Turner, "The Social Skin," in *Not Work Alone: A Cross-cultural View of Activities Superfluous to Survival*, eds. Jeremy Cherfas and Roger Lewin (London: Temple Smith, 1980), 112–40; and Valerie Traub, "Mapping the Global Body," in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, eds. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 44–97.
- 18 Daniel Defert, "Vetir ceux qui sont nus, ou costumes et coutumes au XVI e siècle," *Droit et Cultures*, 4 (1982): 27.
- 19 Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre de Brésil* (La Rochelle: Chuppin, 1578), 110.
- 20 Brian Cummings, "Animal Passions and Human Sciences: Shame, Blushing and Nakedness in Early Modern Europe and the New World," in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman (London: Longman, 1999), 35.
- 21 Ambrosio Bembo, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, eds. Clara Bargellini, and Anthony Welch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 174.
- 22 For instance, in the early sixteenth century the traveller Balthasar Springer wrote of Africans that they went naked and that it was "the burning heat of the sun which makes the moors as black as coal." Cit. in Jean Michel Massing, "Hans Burkmair's Depiction of Native Africans," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 27 (1995): 41 and fig. 11 p. 50.
- 23 Les gens y vont la plupart tout nus, sinon qu'ils ont des caleçons et les femmes une chemise, à cause de la grande chaleur qu'il y fait'. *Voyages et aventures du Capitaine Ripon aux Grandes Indes: Journal Inédit d'un mercenaire (1617–1627)*, ed. Yves Giraud (Thonon-les-Bains: L'Albatron, 1990), 141.
- 24 [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1906-0509-1-30](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1906-0509-1-30)
- 25 P. J. P. Whitehead, "Earliest Extant Paintings of Greenlanders," in *Indians in Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 148.
- 26 "est également aussi mauvais et dégoûtant que s'ils allaient nus, si ce n'est qu'ils laissent pendre comme un manteau autour de soi une peau de brebis ou une autre dépouille qui descend a peine jusqu'aux mollets. Qu'une peau soit trop petite, dans se cas ils en prennent encore une et la cousent au moyen d'un petit os pointu et de fil fort, qu'ils savent obtenir à partir des tendons de quelque oiseau à grandes jambes, et les joignent aussi artistement que possible entre elles et les laissent pendre autour de leur corps répugnant, après les avoir au préalable entièrement barbouillées des graisse dégoûtante."

- Hoffmann, Johann Christian, *Voyage aux Indes orientales* (Besançon: Éditions la Lanterne magique, 2007), 76.
- 27 Pietro Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India from the old English translation of 1664*, ed. Edward Grey (London: Hakluyt Society, 1892), 43.
- 28 Bembo, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 174–75.
- 29 Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court from the Seventeenth-Century*, ed. John Withers (London: Saqi Books, 1996), 107.
- 30 “vestono come Almani de tute lor sorte d'abiti, così berete di fodere et coleti.” Cit in Marco Spallanzani, Giovanni da Empoli, 203–4.
- 31 Bronwen Wilson, “Turchi allo specchio: i libri dei ritratti veneziani,” in *Mediterra-noesis: voci dal medioevo e rinascimento mediterraneo*, eds. Roberta Morosini and Cristina Perissinotto (Turin: Salerno Editrice, 2007), 94.
- 32 Julian Raby, “The European Vision of the Muslim Orient in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Arte veneziana e arte islamica: atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica*, ed. Earnst J. Grube (Venice: Edizioni d'Altra Riva, 1989), 41–46.
- 33 <http://research.fibergeek.com/2018/05/31/tailoring-manuals/>. On tailors see Elisa Tosi Brandi, *L'arte del sarto nel Medioevo: Quando la moda diventa un mestiere* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018).
- 34 Richard K. Danford, Robin D. Gill, and Daniel T. Reff, eds., *The First European Description of Japan, 1585*, 51.
- 35 George Vigarello, *La Robe. Une histoire culturelle - Du Moyen Âge à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2017).
- 36 Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, “Distinguishing Oneself: The European Medieval Wardrobe,” in *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion*, eds. Breward, Lemire and Riello, vol. 1 (forthcoming 2022).
- 37 Hans Weigel, *Habitus Praecipuorum Populorum, tam Virorum quam Foeminarum Singulari Arte Depicti. Trachtenbuch* (Nurnberg, 1577). See also Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 146–61.
- 38 Cit. in Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume III: A Century of Advance. Book 1. Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 1446.
- 39 Stewart Gordon, *Robes of Honour: Khilât In Pre-colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

## 2

# AESTHETICS OF FASHION

*Giovanni Matteucci*

### **Fashion's challenge to philosophy**

It would be misleading to maintain that up to the end of the eighteenth-century fashion had been completely neglected by philosophy. In his helpful survey on the topic,<sup>1</sup> Stefano Marino discusses philosophers like James, Lotze, Spencer, Alain, Simmel, Benjamin, and Fink who were among the most well-known thinkers to draw crucial ideas from fashion analysis, testifying to the significance of the phenomenon and the import of this relative concept apropos of certain social and cultural issues. Nonetheless, despite the prominence of such thinkers, their reflections on this specific subject remained on the margins of mainstream debates for a long time. Most deemed it a frivolity, an intellectual divertissement rather than a legitimate problem worthy of proper philosophical consideration.

Philosophy's tenacious distrust of fashion has obvious historical roots. In an essay of 1990, Karen Hanson<sup>2</sup> questioned the reasons behind the "philosophical fear of fashion," clearly noting that negligence stemmed from the issue of embodiment inherent to this phenomenon, conventionally subjected to marginalization—if not downright dismissal—by Western thought. Philosophy has always sought to capture the stable and lasting (not the ephemeral and perpetually flowing), the deep and essential (not the superficial and accidental), the ideal and spiritual (not the corporeal and material), the active and reflective (not the passive and instinctual), the immortal and eternal (not the fleeting and temporary) components of human reality and experience. Since this long-standing tradition is based on values diametrically opposed to those constitutive of the concept of fashion, philosophy has inevitably argued against recognizing fashion as a serious object of study as it epitomizes the aforesaid canonically defective aspects fittingly relinquished by humankind in its pursuit of "perfection," in keeping with a strongly idealizing anthropological vision underpinning much of Western culture.

Even though our cultural tradition has not changed since the publication of Hanson's essay, the circumstances of our existence, more specifically our lifestyle, have been altered. In the last decades, fashion *per se* has gained considerable traction as a serious object of philosophical analyses. To a certain extent, if current traditional obstacles seem surmountable it is because we now understand that the predicaments arising from treating fashion as a serious topic of study are not related to its characteristics, but rather reside in an anthropological stance resoundingly refuted by contemporary reality, while being inconsistent with the human condition in general.

Indeed, this scheme has led to the neglect of elements worthy of attention and consideration. In short, the problem concerned theory (the philosophical tradition) more so than reality (the phenomenon of fashion). Consequently, the admittedly few, yet in instances authoritative philosophers who in the last two centuries have pioneered attempts underscoring the importance of fashion from a theoretical point of view, can now be read in a new light.<sup>3</sup> Initially viewed as marginal contemplative episodes aimed at embarking on theretofore unexamined subjects, these musings were instead early signs of necessary transformations in philosophical thought. In contrast, the growing and deep-seated relevance of fashion in the present life-context stresses the urgency of attaining a firm cognizance of these methodologies.

### **Fashion's challenge to aesthetics**

The breaking down of the philosophical taboo regarding fashion is ongoing, though it has yet to be completed. Surprisingly, still totally missing is the contribution provided by a part of philosophy that we logically expected to have taken place before that of other disciplines, namely aesthetics. Although not particularly numerous, the various studies of fashion by philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sometimes deep and evocative, focused on facets unrelated to aesthetics. In fact, most cultural and social arguments—notwithstanding a small number that examined experiential and conceptual structures underlying the phenomena of fashion—managed, for the most part, to carefully avoid a line of reasoning based essentially on aesthetics. To this day, it is still unusual for actual aesthetics scholars addressing this phenomenon not to do so in an exclusively fragmentary manner.<sup>4</sup> For several decades now, essays on philosophical aesthetics usually either make little mention of fashion, or simply disparage it by reducing it to a moment of general aestheticization, or that of the dissemination of a particular aesthetic.

This is probably the result of an original sin. In fact, aesthetics was born as a philosophical discipline from a very radical gesture, i.e., the exclusion of the dimension of practicality from the determination of pleasure considered to be strictly aesthetic. He who effectively and finally anointed aesthetics as being part of philosophical knowledge, organizing the speculative framework wherein aesthetic reflection has mainly dwelled hitherto, i.e., Immanuel Kant, affirms that aesthetic pleasure is, in fact, a pleasure “without interest” in what is judged through taste.<sup>5</sup> But if we look at the field of fashion, the interest in something that is offered to our experience appears nothing short of dominant, both in production, with all its economic and commercial motives, and in its use, with all its consumerist and hyper-consumerist connotations. And since interest is the foundation for the aesthetic pleasure generated by the experience of fashion, a philosophical knowledge faithful to the axiom of disinterested pleasure inevitably tends to remove such an experience from the scope considered as its purview.<sup>6</sup>

The eighteenth-century reduction of aesthetic pleasure to disinterested pleasure was justified by many arguments. It was in that period that the sphere of “fine arts” was being distinguished from that of “mechanical arts” consisting of production techniques geared to making useful objects. Therefore, this meant seeking to isolate a pure, free, independent beauty from other forms of beauty conflating practical and commercial purposes. This distinction was effected even if it meant sacrificing or ignoring how useful and practical components were actually involved in poetry, painting, music, architecture, etc. Aimed at defining aesthetics by abstracting any connection with worldliness, this strategy certainly enabled the powerful development of philosophical reflection with respect to the arts, but precluded an adequate overall consideration of aesthetics in its many ways of being concretely manifested and realized in human experience. Barbara Carnevali<sup>7</sup> illustrates to what extent the divorce between the

economic and the aesthetic domains has influenced the culture of the last two centuries, making it difficult to understand both pre-modern reality (pre-bourgeois) in which they were strongly intertwined, and contemporary reality in which they are properly merged.<sup>8</sup>

One effect of this fundamental configuration is the fact that the first aesthetic reflections on fashion of some conceptual depth arose in the nineteenth century not so much in the field of philosophy, but more so in that of literature. Balzac, Wilde, Baudelaire, d'Annunzio, Carlyle, and Mallarmé manifested their interest in the phenomenon of fashion and often in its aesthetic implications, not only in their literary works, but also in writings surely requiring speculative engagement. Examples include almost purely theoretical essays, like Baudelaire's famous *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (*The Painter of Modern Life*) and Oscar Wilde's *Philosophy of Dress*, not to mention the *Dialogo della moda e della morte* (*Dialogue between Fashion and Death*) in Leopardi's *Operette morali*.

On the one hand, these authors could count on a robust tradition: that of a practical knowledge of customs already expressed in early modern literary writings.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, they intercepted the qualitative shift stemming from a new historical-cultural context they were witnessing, which makes one think of fashion in its current sense as a phenomenon mainly pertaining to the last three centuries (a notoriously controversial thesis, however precisely for this reason, a significant one). Anyhow, they testify how as early as the nineteenth century a concrete, urgent need was felt to grasp something that, although apparently eluding the knowledge system, clearly revealed a specific and powerful ability to impact the aesthetic reality these writers belonged to. The concrete aesthetic culture of the last two centuries has found a powerful catalyst in fashion, which "officially" removed from aesthetic theory understood as mere philosophy of the fine arts—inevitably and exceedingly captivated those compelled to operate in the aesthetic field. A growing phenomenon in Western context, fashion is ironically considered less and less relevant by institutionally backed scholars appositely equipped to theorize on this subject.

We can define what is expressed in the writings dedicated to fashion by aforesaid extraordinary authors as a kind of *operative* aesthetics. Basically, it represents the reflexive-pragmatic equivalent of the phantasmagorical reality that dominated the urban and metropolitan scenarios persistently evoked by great nineteenth-century literature, described and narrated in every national variation. It could therefore be said that the *aesthetics of fashion* were not absent for long, but were kept strictly outside the sphere of relevance attributed officially to *philosophical* aesthetics. The only exception was the limited, but long-lasting,<sup>10</sup> debate on whether or not to include fashion in the fine arts system, along with poetry, painting, music, architecture, etc., taking as a starting point the same ideological system that existed at the origin of philosophical aesthetics, thereby corroborating suspicions of fashion as an impure phenomenon from a theoretical point of view, and thus reckoning it as unworthy of real speculative consideration *per se*.

The very fact that from a theoretical point of view it has only been considered in a limited manner—and then mostly in extra-aesthetic arguments—reveals that fashion is a real problem not just for philosophy in general, but above all for aesthetics. Rather than reinforcing its taboo, its removal if anything heightens its urgency. If we look at the current cultural and social reality, it becomes impossible not to attribute to fashion such a problematic significance precisely from an aesthetic point of view. Fashion is one of the most important factors in promoting and shaping taste in the age of widespread aestheticity. The orientation of preferences is determined in a radical manner by mechanisms related to fashions in any sector of modern life much more than ever before, at least in Western culture documented by history. There is therefore a further contradiction that deserves to be considered: in order to understand the present condition of

human reality it seems not only impossible but also ruinous to avoid examining fashion in its intense aesthetic capacity, in its being a vector of aestheticization that connotes the global context of the twenty-first century. But in order to do this we need to question traditional categories of aesthetics modeled on other phenomena, which unlike fashion were supposed to be able to be isolated in their purity, just like the fine arts. Fashion seems to need not just a new aesthetic consideration but likewise a new consideration of aesthetics.

### **Aesthetics of fashion and fashion's aesthetics**

The label "Aesthetics of Fashion" sounds like an attempt to programmatically determine a specific area of study. First it indicates the analysis of concepts and their implications, not only at a conceptual level, yet equally relating to fashion favoring the plane of aestheticity (i.e., in a broad sense, questions concerning contents of experience and cultural products that variously intersect with sensitivity, imagination, pleasure and displeasure, and thus taste, the idea of beauty and its natural and artificial manifestations...). This can be pursued on a pragmatic level starting with stimuli offered by current circumstances, and developing "operative" aesthetics provided by authors such as Balzac, Baudelaire, Wilde, d'Annunzio, and so on. Nonetheless, this endeavor can, and perhaps should, explicitly address at a purely philosophical level the difficulties such an area of study must confront in order to even surface in the current debates. To this purpose, it should preliminarily free itself from a series of prejudices deriving from its tradition, as previously stated.

Subsequently, it becomes important to consider a second manner of interpreting the label "Aesthetics of Fashion," noting how it could raise a set of questions that fashion itself poses from a specifically aesthetic point of view and in the perspective of a requalification of aesthetics in general. In this sense we can speak of "Fashion's Aesthetics." Here the first question to be raised is how fashion implies aesthetics, i.e., which type of reflective-conceptual reconnaissance relative to aesthetics does it entail, or even more radically, what conception of aesthetics does it demand. With its many manifestations, fashion certainly has to do with elements like style, shape, taste, and beauty. But is it true that these elements, because of the way they act in this environment, are easily attributable to canonical categories that stand at the center of the experience of the arts as traditionally understood, and that are widely and unreflectively embraced by common sense? If these differences exist, do they render compatible or, to the contrary, incompatible the aesthetics implied by the first and the aesthetics implied by the second? In short, which aesthetics do not simply "refer" to fashion, but are rather *fashion's own*? And if it were true that fashion compels aesthetic reflection to question some of its tenets, is it not throwing a new and different light on various traditional topics as well, mostly those related to the sphere of the so-called fine arts during at least the last two and a half centuries? And finally, what relationship can there be between fashion's aesthetics and the aesthetics dictated by other contemporary phenomena equally inextricably entangled with both extraordinary technological advances of the latest generations and the new social regime of the so-called "aesthetic," "artistic," and/or "artist" capitalism in the age of globalization?<sup>11</sup>

The reciprocity between aesthetics of fashion and fashion's aesthetics is obvious. In fact, in building a theoretical reflection on strictly aesthetic elements of fashion we cannot ignore its specific aesthetic content if we want to avoid applying an incorrect criterion to the phenomenon being investigated. And the measure of this potential error is effectively summarized by the gap between the two manners of questioning the experience of beauty: on the one hand, using traditional aesthetics as a philosophy of the fine arts, and on the other hand, resorting to the aesthetics of fashion. As pertains to philosophy of art, beauty qualifies the outcome of

expressive techniques geared toward the creation of objects or events that are to be experienced so as to guarantee the sustainability of their intangible absoluteness over time. Conversely, in the case of the aesthetics of fashion, beauty qualifies experiences triggered by the consumption, acquisition, adoption, desire, and display of a product whose symbolic value is activated chiefly through individual behaviors that are nonetheless always exhibited to others. The beauty of a painting is contemplated (beautiful is the object or the configuration we contemplatively enjoy), and art is the creation of it, whereas the beauty of a fashionable dress is actually worn or imagined, in consumption or in desire (beautiful therefore becomes the experience of enjoying it, the effective experiential articulation in and of itself), and fashion is the practice of it. Preserving a painting in a museum certainly does not mean taking it away from art nor preventing the experience *of it*, while preserving a fashionable dress in a museum means taking it away from fashion, and thus preventing one from having an experience *with it*. And, herein lies the problem: both the experience of a painting and the experience with a fashionable dress are actually modalities of aesthetic practice.

### **A new aesthetic agenda**

We touch here on an essential point. If fashion is the manner in which beauty generates the consumption of commodified goods thus always requiring a new production, if therefore it entails a notion of aesthetics based on its use rather than its contemplation, it requires a conception of it founded on practices rather than on ideas or idealities. This remark would be sufficient to understand the difficulty of philosophy in general, and of philosophical aesthetics in particular, in dealing with this matter. While philosophy has usually privileged thematic and conceptual categories over practical structures of experience, only a system of aesthetics able to juggle notions that do not lose their operational and pragmatic component seems equipped to understand phenomena like fashion. Fashion can thus become a relevant transformation factor for aesthetics in general.

Using an example can be helpful to prove this point. As previously discussed, often the primary task of an aesthetics of fashion consists in locating fashion in relation to the art world. This strategy presumes a stable definition of art that can be equally applied to fashion. Yet today we are witnessing the complete reverse of this situation. In the current art world, individual subjectivities (celebrated from the end of the eighteenth century to the half of the twentieth century, as the creative genius) the critic and the spectator refer to fewer and fewer material works. As Yves Michaud nicely put it,<sup>12</sup> art itself today has been sublimated in an atmosphere that connotes experiences and experiential devices more than objects in the cognitive sense of the word. It requires the participative collaboration of diverse individuals in every moment of its life cycle: from production, to evaluation and appreciation. Hence, this general reflection on art should serve as a launching pad for the formulation of useful structures aimed at developing a methodology addressing the phenomenon of fashion. In fact, if back in the days of the couturier Paul Poiret fashion regarded art as its own cultural legitimation, currently it is art that finds in fashion a model for its development and full achievement. And it does so not by getting contaminated but by being properly innervated by a “logic of fashion” that has become the salient feature of dominant production, which is simultaneously economic and cultural, and inscribed within a hyper-modern society situated in the age of globalization.<sup>13</sup>

Fashion carries into effect a logic that can work also when categorial and substantial determination is lacking. It manages the articulation of appearance as the emergence of trends that act as orienting points of relevance without impeding the continuous flow of a reality which is increasingly intertwined with virtuality, thus emphasizing its own processual character. This



intrinsically practical know-how is precisely the competence that today's aesthetics strives to make sense of, while also calling into question its own categories.

Fashion is a crucial testbed for this purpose. It is in an aesthetic manner that it solves the important question of extracting sense also in the absence of contents that could be defined cognitively. It does so by insisting on "tacit," "embodied," "non-representational" elements that are significant from the perceptual, expressive, and emotional point of view,<sup>14</sup> thereby offsetting the obsolescence cycle and compensating for the lack of definite and stable structures. In the spiral of fashion, consumption takes place due to the compulsion to repeat the experience of consumption itself as it is emotional and socially aggregating, hence according to intrinsically aesthetic coordinates. Its aim, although still linked to practical concerns, is not the satisfaction of a specifically determinable need to which the purchased good merely responds. For this reason, the experience of fashion, in its characterization radically differing from the canonical view of aesthetics as a philosophy of art, paradoxically becomes paradigmatic of the current forms of art experience. And, in fact, today artworks are purchased, just like fashion items, as the pledge of a direct and emotional encounter with those who have produced them rather than on the basis of a formal or content-oriented appreciation, and so "not for conformist or speculative reasons, but for emotional, relational ones" according to Gilles Lipovetsky. Furthermore, Lipovetsky states that "[in] such cases the purchase expresses a personal link, a choice, an emotional way of positioning oneself in a milieu. It reflects an expressive, user-friendly individualism."<sup>15</sup>

This practice becomes aesthetic as an experience of repeated emotional and contingently sensorial gratification, which is not quenched by a cognitive acquisition. It not only makes the peculiarly aesthetic dimension of appearance hypertrophic, but it also emancipates it from metaphysical, ethical, or even merely cognitive constraints belonging to a different order. Thanks to fashion, aesthetics reveals an intrinsic anthropological primitiveness (or "primitivism") in this process by means of an essential link to the body. Potentially perceived as being precisely a form of knowledge touching on appearance *per se*, in no way subordinated to a content ideally located beyond appearing, and thereby effecting its own radical accomplishment in practices which are always of an inter-subjective nature. By getting expressively and emotionally charged, as is the case with fashion, appearance becomes the threshold through which the biological and the cultural element penetrate each other. Resulting from the fact that functionality no longer concerns the organism as such, instead it now pertains to a whole inter-subjective interaction, and hence to an environment which is not only a biosphere, but also a bio-cultural ecological niche. Thus, it is at the aesthetic level that this peculiar intransitive and experiential significance of fashion emerges. This is specifically the kind of significance that risks being overlooked by other disciplines (from semiotics to sociology, from cultural studies to psychology), when they only focus on its transitive and epistemic meaning (by retrieving and furthering the distinction introduced by Zangwill):<sup>16</sup> from "sprezzatura" to "coolness,"<sup>17</sup> the characteristics of "fashionable" seem to be attributed precisely to what remains by its nature indeterminable as far as it relates to the overall way phenomena manifest themselves rather than to a few specific contents. Consequently, when attempting a disciplinary, and therefore epistemic determination of these characteristics, although the accuracy of the description increases, the expressive force—that which renders elements of fashion captivating and fascinating by communicating an intrinsically (and productively) ephemeral aura—fatally decreases. Not by chance the captions of fashion magazines indulge in the evocative.

Consequently, it is precisely by virtue and not despite its working in the unavoidable horizon of contingency, that fashion as an "Adonic" experience<sup>18</sup> affirms itself at least potentially as the actualization of the emancipatory power of aesthetics. In this way fashion reveals the ability of aesthetics to validate what was once usually perceived as being primary and

primitive as compared to this branch of philosophy focusing on the nature of beauty, from the individual project of personal identities to the definition of social roles, and even to the determination of economical values. It is not coincidental that contemporary individuals have found in fashions the forms of articulation of their social identities. We only need to think of generations who have found in their way of appearing not only the sign, but also the very law of their identity, from hippies to punks. Moreover, think of the struggles waged by social minorities in which single battles often consisted in the “simple” claim to the right to manifest (and manifest oneself with) one’s own accentuated appearance, at times modest, at other times blatant. This explains the increasing social usages of appearance throughout the twentieth century all the way up to sub- and counter-cultural experiences that took place over the last 50 to 60 years.<sup>19</sup>

These factors can also help determine an aspect of fashion that is equally essential. Fashion is inescapably related to the processes of commodification and is therefore an economic phenomenon; it certainly conveys public prestige and is therefore a social phenomenon; it intrinsically displays personal identity and is therefore a psychological phenomenon; it fatally has to do with systems of communication and cultural expression and is therefore a phenomenon that is semiotic, anthropological, etc. But it effectively accomplishes all these functions in and through a gratifying experience that tends to be distinguished by categories like beauty, style, glamour, and the like, namely by the enhancement of positive aesthetic pleasure based on the potential (one might say: required) shared appreciation that marks the sphere of taste. Hence, we can maintain that it is as a chiefly aesthetic phenomenon that fashion is *also* an economic, social, psychological, semiotic, and anthropological phenomenon and even more. Consequently, it truly seems that an aesthetics of fashion that diverges from the traditional agenda of an aesthetics as a philosophy of fine arts is an urgent task in order to fully understand a powerful motive that practically monopolizes the current human condition.

## Notes

- 1 Stefano Marino, “Philosophical Accounts of Fashion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: A Historical Reconstruction,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*, eds. Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marino (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 11–45.
- 2 Karen Hanson, “Dressing Down Dressing Up: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion,” *Hypatia* 5, no. 2 (1990): 107–21.
- 3 For some of them, and above all Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, see Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung. Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).
- 4 Among the rare exceptions: César Moreno-Márquez, “Fashion,” in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, eds. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 107–11; Adam Gecky and Vicki Karaminas, eds., *Fashion and Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); Ian King, *The Aesthetics of Dress* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017); Giovanni Matteucci, “Fashion: A Conceptual Constellation,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*, eds. Matteucci and Marino (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 47–72; Gioia Laura Iannilli, “How Can Everyday Aesthetics Meet Fashion?,” *Studi di estetica* 7, (2017): 229–46. doi: 10.7413/18258646014.
- 5 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. P. Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150.
- 6 See Llewellyn Negrin, “Fashion and Aesthetics: A Fraught Relationship,” in *Fashion and Art*, eds. Gecky and Karaminas (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 43–54.
- 7 Barbara Carnevali, *Le apparenze sociali. Una filosofia del prestigio* (Bologna: Mulino, 2012), 127–60.
- 8 See Gioia Laura Iannilli, “Towards a Reconciliation of the Polarity between Aesthetics and Economics,” *Studi di estetica* 15, (2019): 1–19. doi: 10.7413/18258646095.
- 9 Eugenia Paulicelli, *Writing Fashion in Early Modern Italy. From Sprezzatura to Satire* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).
- 10 Sandra Miller, “Fashion as Art: Is Fashion Art?,” *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 1 (2007): 25–40.

- 11 See Gernot Böhme, *Zur Kritik des ästhetischen Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016); Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).
- 12 Yves Michaud, *L'art à l'état gazeux. Essai sur le triomphe de l'esthétique* (Paris: Stock, 2003).
- 13 Gilles Lipovetsky, "Art and Aesthetics in the Fashion Society," in *The Power of Fashion*, eds. Jan Brand and José Teunissen (Amsterdam: Terra/ArtEZ, 2006), 70–90.
- 14 See Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 129–39; Andrea Eckersley, "A Non-Representational Approach to Fashion," in *Proceedings of IFFTI 2008* (Melbourne: RMIT University, 2008), <http://iffiti.com.bh-in-10.webhostbox.net/downloads/papers-presented/x-RMIT,%202008/papers/p198.pdf>.
- 15 Lipovetsky, "Art and Aesthetics in the Fashion Society," 87.
- 16 Nick Zangwill, "Fashion, Illusion, and Alienation," in *Fashion. Philosophy for Everyone: Thinking with Style*, eds. Jessica Wolfendale and Jeanette Kennett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2011), 31–36.
- 17 See Luke Russell, "Tryhards, Fashion Victims, and Effortless Cool," in *Fashion. Philosophy for Everyone*, eds. Wolfendale and Kennett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 37–49; Paulicelli, *Writing Fashion in Early Modern Italy*.
- 18 See Winfrid Menninghaus, *Das Versprechen der Schönheit* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2003); Matteucci, "Fashion: A Conceptual Constellation," 66–70.
- 19 Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus. Concepts, Practices and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 103–19.

### 3

# IF PHILOSOPHY WERE A FASHION SHOW: WHAT THEN?

*Nickolas Pappas*

If the philosophy of fashion belongs somehow before fashion theory, as the philosophy of language comes before linguistic theory, or the philosophy of education before educational theory, the difference may lie not in their relative importance but in philosophy's ambition to be preliminary even undirected: its effort to start a new discussion. This often means the drive to find or invent the terms of inquiry. Philosophy would then see its adjacent theory as carrying out the inquiry with the aid of accepted terms. (Aristotle calls this the difference between arguments leading to first principles and those going from first principles.<sup>1</sup>)

Naturally the difference between philosophy and theory comes in degrees. Every new beginning inherits some old vocabulary, and every theory invents new terms to use, or finds new uses for old language. But the ambition to be at a loss for words may be the most eccentric arrogance in philosophy.

It does not follow from my calling philosophy preliminary that theories actually follow philosophy's lead. When it comes to fashion, philosophers have until recently<sup>2</sup> said nearly nothing about dress and its changeability. They concentrated the remarks that they did make on fashion or dress as metaphors for something else, sometimes indeed as a metaphor for philosophy or for the practices to which philosophy opposed itself. Such metaphorical references might be preliminary to philosophy's penchant for preliminaries. Dress, and better still changes in dress, and better yet (to put it in the tradition's language) dress as that which necessarily changes – as for instance in a masquerade – maybe just because it lies so far away from philosophy, can offer an image of what philosophy tries not to be, fears becoming, or occasionally prepares itself to become.

On my reckoning Nietzsche enters fashion theory in these pre-preliminary ways. Nietzsche is not the only philosopher to have urged a new identity for philosophy, although he offers a dramatic example of that act, and evokes the future as the domain of new philosophizing. And one passage especially among his images of the future finds hope of a kind in what Nietzsche can only conceptualize as the parade of philosophical styles: philosophy as fashion show.

#### **Value systems as costumes**

Value systems appear as costumes in *Beyond Good and Evil* §223, where modern Europe becomes the place for frequent changes of dress. The passage is imagining the future. Section 223 seems to pull the future by the ears out of the worn-down magician's hat of the present, not as if

a Nietzschean transformation were coming but so that you could almost swear it had already arrived. The type that Nietzsche calls the “hybrid European” here “needs a costume... requires history as a storage room for costumes.” In the modern world such a need incites a crisis.

The European soon notices that not one fits him very well; so he keeps changing. Let anyone look at the nineteenth century with an eye for these quick preferences and changes of the style masquerade [*stil-Maskeraden*]; also for the moments of despair over the fact that “nothing is becoming.” It is no use to parade as romantic or classical, Christian or Florentine, baroque or “national,” *in moribus et artibus*: it “does not look good.” But the “spirit,” especially the “historical spirit,” finds its advantage even in this despair: again and again a new piece of prehistory or a foreign country is tried on, put on, taken off, packed away, and above all *studied*: we are the first age that has truly studied “costumes” – I mean those of moralities, articles of faith, tastes in the arts, and religions – prepared like no previous age for a carnival in the grand style... Perhaps this is where we shall still discover the realm of our *invention*, that realm in which we, too, can still be original, say, as parodists of world history and God’s buffoons [*Hanswürste Gottes*] – perhaps, even if nothing else today has any future, our *laughter* may yet have a future.<sup>3</sup>

Not a bad place to begin, if you want to visualize that “philosophy of the future” promised in the subtitle to *Beyond Good and Evil*. Section 223 presents a scene and mode of future philosophy. It also offers an image of something that you need to believe in before the idea of a future philosophy can bring comfort, which is the possibility of a transition from depressing news of the day to hope for what Nietzsche calls the “day after tomorrow.”<sup>4</sup>

But my subject is not Nietzsche’s vision of tomorrow, it is fashion; fashion and how philosophy might see itself among (and sometimes horrified by) the appearances of dress and costume. And my question given that subject is how the language of masquerade gives Nietzsche something to say about where philosophy is going.

### Interpretive puzzles

As a promise of what philosophy might become, the passage poses difficulties. One interpretive challenge arises in connection with what I called the very appeal of §223, that it shows a way from the present toward the future. After all the section begins with “moments of despair,” *Verzweiflung*. *Nichts steht*, nothing looks good. “*Es kleidet nicht*” or in the nearest-to-literal English *Nothing suits*, nothing is appropriate. You can be romantic tonight and baroque in the morning, but there’s nothing that someone can look at and react by saying “Man that suit is *you*.”

The moment of despair turns into a fresh hope. Is this *supposed* to sound like sorcery? The historical spirit finds “its advantage [*Vorteil*] even in this despair.” More sympathetically we could interpret Nietzsche as saying that the desperate search for some right culture from the past has inspired an agitation of historical inquiry. Each discarded *Weltanschauung* becomes part of the inquirer’s repertoire. Without knowing it, and without intending to, the drive to study oneself as historical phenomenon – the “historical spirit” – has been rehearsing for a grand spoof of every creed and principle, one unwearable get-up after another. The ironic presentation of past values paves the way for the future revaluation of values.

The earnest search for moralities from the past that one might follow today *as morality* failed at its intended purpose, but all this activity of trying moralities on lends itself to a new *telos* of amorality, as a paw in some animals was abruptly taken over to serve as a hand.<sup>5</sup> More of the same, that’s the solution. When nothing suits you, just continue putting the suits of morality on

and taking them off again. Nietzsche proposes two things about this burlesque of taking the past for a model: it may be *original*; and, he says, it may be *funny*.

But lost at this carnival is the condition that Nietzsche had just called despair. If nothing looks right on you, what is the style-masquerade going to be about? One show of clothes after another, and yet they all look bad? Is this the victory that you hope to snatch from the jaws of defeat? To take comfort in Nietzsche's proposal for future philosophy, you would have to believe not only that dressing in wrong clothes is somehow reassuring, but also that the *reason* why dressing in those clothes is desirable is that everyone else will laugh. This is what justifies the practice. The future is worth hoping for (on this reading) because your carnival act with its changes from one unflattering costume to another will amuse people to the point of laughing at you.

Well, that would be original, to invite the humiliation of mockery. But Nietzsche speaks in the first person, naming a "we" who become buffoons and parodists and the same "we" that laugh. If his carnival masquerade spoke of masochistic buffoonery it would only yield a future for someone *else's* laughter.

The despair makes sense if morality or religion is a costume and you haven't got a thing to wear, but the advantage doesn't, nor the promise of merriment.

### **Received wisdom about clothing**

The second impediment to reading the costume changes of §223 is that the metaphor of clothing as falsehood or imposition, a naked body beneath being the true human essence, is too old and familiar to warrant looking at in Nietzsche's case. Why mention Nietzsche's return to a well so many others have drunk from? And having mentioned it, why look at it closely?

This second interpretive difficulty links up with the first one, in that the familiarity of the clothing metaphor controls one's reception of the passage in Nietzsche. If you assume that clothing must represent what is false and moreover what is false *to* something else – if philosophers never force themselves to be at a loss for words and rethink what their words say – then Nietzsche's promise of a masquerade ahead will sound like a vision of successive outfits that don't fit. Morals and values fail at suiting the human natural reality that tries them on. Nietzsche has rehashed the complaint that one's dressed appearance misrepresents one's reality, in order to imagine a future free from morality.

But clothing does *not* have to be just one thing, and is not a single thing for Nietzsche. It is true that clothing in the West has signified falseness for about as long as people have found clothing worth writing about. A figurative fig leaf is a concealment or hypocrisy because the literal fig-leaf loincloths in Eden were meant to cover and deny.<sup>6</sup> Though the leaves came from a tree, they were not natural clothes, and certainly weren't natural to humans, not when considered as adornments to human genitals, hence their failure to fix the newfound problem of nakedness.

On top of making flimsy clothing material, fig leaves are so irritating to the skin that they *feel* like an imposition, thus like something not right for the body. In fact, by the time of Saint Irenaeus if not earlier, the pruritic effect of the fig leaf is read as the reason Adam and Eve dressed themselves with it. Irenaeus pictures Adam telling himself: "I deserve such a garment, which provides no pleasure but bites and stings the body."<sup>7</sup>

And yet clothing can represent something other than enmity to the body. Even Adam and Eve have a more complex relationship to their clothes than that. When they leave Eden to enter their occupations God gives them garments made of animal skins, presumably a better fit than the fig leaves, though never fitting as well as they had on the animals they were taken from; and

implying, with this first appearance of bloodshed in the world, that clothing requires violence to nature.<sup>8</sup>

The falseness of clothing to the body does not have to be seen as a count against it. Depending on whether one takes comfort in the thought that clothing misrepresents the body or else feels the falseness of clothing as an objection to it, one may find either cheerful or threatening uses for the metaphor. The naked state, correspondingly equivocal, will read as either release or exposure. It can be both at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

Often enough however the tension resolves into either the promise or the threat of nakedness. Philosophy for its part (philosophy before Nietzsche) has seemed reliably antagonistic to what clothing means. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* distinguishes "external appearance" from "the inclination of the heart," the mere "title of philosopher" from "the true philosopher." These contrasts between interior reality and showy untruth line up parallel to the distinction between the body and the dress it wears. Fine dress is "foreign to virtue." "The good man is an athlete who likes to fight naked [*nu*]," as evidently the philosopher also is.<sup>10</sup>

Rousseau's use of clothing as philosophical metaphor has a digestible sound to it. This is what we expect clothing to mean, and this take on the meaning of dress inclines Nietzsche's reader to understand him in similar unproblematized terms.

### The received wisdom in Thoreau

For all his singularity as a philosopher, Rousseau belongs in the intellectual mainstream when he speaks of dress. Clothing is artifice, both unreal and untrue. That mainstream extends into the middle of the nineteenth century; for Thoreau was writing close enough in time to *Beyond Good and Evil* that he and Nietzsche could have carried on a conversation, Thoreau's side of the conversation coming in his remarks about dress in the long first chapter of *Walden*.

The chapter's 39th paragraph especially reads as a foil to the passage from Nietzsche:

At present men make shift to wear what they can get. Like shipwrecked sailors, they put on what they can find on the beach, and at a little distance... laugh at each other's masquerade. Every generation laughs at the old fashions, but follows religiously the new... All costume off a man is pitiful or grotesque. It is only the serious eye peering from and the sincere life passed within it which restrain laughter and consecrate the costume of any people. Let Harlequin be taken with a fit of the colic and his trappings will have to serve that mood too.

Fancy clothes – any clothes, really – start Thoreau speaking of laughter, as Nietzsche will. Thoreau says "we are amused," uses the words "costume" and "masquerade" as Nietzsche also will. He invokes the Harlequin in motley; for Nietzsche the European of motley ancestry is dressing for a carnival all ready to become a *Hanswurst*, which is not generically a *buffoon* as the word is translated but an eighteenth-century clown or jester figure, a Punch or a Harlequin.

Both Thoreau and Nietzsche detect something morbid in the costume that has been taken off. "Pitiful or grotesque" is what Thoreau says. Nietzsche describes moral costumes' being "put on, taken off, packed away, and above all *studied*," that poignant but dubious stage of knowledge possible only after the clothing has lost its use.

Then too there is the fact that the laughter is directed at fashions that other generations followed "*religiously*," for Thoreau, and that for him the alternative to a ridiculous outfit is one that has been "consecrated." Only where Thoreau sees religious attachment to fashions, Nietzsche imagines a fashion show of religions.

Despite these similarities the two passages part ways in their responses to laughter.<sup>11</sup> Thoreau hears no future in the sound and takes no delight in imagining people laughing. For him laughter means that something has gone wrong – as opposed to sincerity, the curb on laughter. Sincerity belongs inside the clothes and you can glimpse it through clothes now and then. It is a hard-won sincerity that belongs to the suffering body, which stands opposite to clothing.

But Thoreau also pictures a different kind of opposition, when like Rousseau he pits elaborate dress against the body of the philosopher. *Walden* has already spoken of philosophers as people you could not expect to find dressing up: “The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward... The philosopher... is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries.”<sup>12</sup>

In another passage, still in the same first chapter, Thoreau tells how the philosopher is clothed. “Our shirts are our *liber*, or true bark,” meaning that which – unlike fancy dress – comes off only with trouble and dangerously.

I believe that all races at some seasons wear something equivalent to the shirt. It is desirable that a man be clad so simply that he can lay his hands on himself in the dark, and that he live in all respects so compactly and preparedly that, if an enemy take the town, he can, like the old philosopher, walk out the gate empty-handed without anxiety.<sup>13</sup>

Mind you, failing to be clothed “like his contemporaries” does not mean that the philosopher wears some other costume. It is impossible to put something on that makes you a philosopher.

This is a barely negotiable position: *to dress differently without wearing any particular different thing*. The shirt, as Thoreau would have it, stands apart by virtue of being an article of clothing everyone wears, or *generic* clothing.<sup>14</sup> That makes it the kind of thing most people wear with a sense of being undressed. It is clothing as default, as philosophical skepticism often interrogates our knowledge of default objects, generic things, not a goldfinch but a bird; “a table, yes; a Louis XV escritoire, no.”<sup>15</sup>

The old philosopher that Thoreau alludes to sounds like the ancient Cynic Diogenes, who could walk out the gates of any town and had achieved *ataraxia*, freed himself from anxiety. The Cynics reduced their personal gear to pouch, walking stick, and cloak. Like the shirt, the woolen cloak folded over once is clothing only from the philosopher’s perspective. For people who really dress up, it is the element of the wardrobe that goes without saying.<sup>16</sup>

But if the mark of the philosopher’s wardrobe is the unremarkable or commonplace and what everyone has on already, the Cynic’s cloak and the Thoreauvian shirt belong to the same order of things as the naked body. Wearing nothing special is a lot like wearing nothing, so the philosopher, too, like Rousseau’s good man, might well prefer to be naked. The ridiculous sight of costume change that Thoreau wants his readers to contemplate can be repaired by wearing that costume that must not change, and that its wearer need not change.

### **The Platonic legacy**

*Walden*’s philosopher above all resembles Plato’s, because it is specifically Plato who associates the unclothed (unfashionable) body with philosophy.

The Platonic tradition regarding nudity could not have begun except for the practice of nudity in athletics, a practice 300 years old when Plato was born, and the consequent Greek obsession with art that portrayed young male nudes. These practices were unknown elsewhere



in the Mediterranean. But although Greek authors acknowledge the uniqueness of their custom, even seizing upon that uniqueness as a sign of their ethnic distinctiveness, they also provide rationalizing explanations for nudity that would seem to deny its status as custom or folkway,<sup>17</sup> as if Greeks stripped to exercise because anyone would do the same and everyone should.

On one hand you find both Herodotus and Thucydides observing that non-Greeks don't exercise naked. Plato's character Pausanias in the *Symposium* says the same thing making clear that the Greek practice scandalizes foreigners.<sup>18</sup> Being a mark to separate Hellenic from foreign, nudity felt like an artifice. That might be why *gymnastikê* "naked exercise" was sometimes said to have begun lately, i.e. during the classical era – a mistake in chronology that reflected the perpetual aura of innovation clinging to athletic nudity.<sup>19</sup>

The same ancient authors who recognized nudity as an invention could rationalize it as a discovery reflecting natural truths. Thucydides suggests that as men wore less around each other they also attached less value to social distinctions, presumably those false distinctions that depended on dress.<sup>20</sup> Later in antiquity Lucian will argue that naked bodies become healthfully accustomed to the open air.<sup>21</sup> And numerous sources recycle the story of an Olympic athlete, usually a Spartan, who discarded his loincloth to run faster with an unconstrained body.<sup>22</sup>

If not to liberate the body, the hypothesized purpose of the nudity was to let the body be seen as easily as possible. Thus the Spartans were said to inspect their boys naked, to ensure that they had not been shirking their exercise.<sup>23</sup>

It was this culturally specific practice, not the mere absence of clothing but the *return* to its absence by young men and for the purposes of competition, that Plato made into a metaphor for philosophy. Still he justifies the metaphor by reference to the nature of nudity, again the open truthful inspection that it makes possible. He seems to want to preserve the idea that nudity is everyone's true costume, as a shirt or a folded blanket is.

Early in Plato's *Charmides*, Socrates has just come into a wrestling room when the young man Charmides walks in. Socrates' friend, Chaerephon, is there. Here is Socrates narrating:

Chaerephon addressed me: "How does the young man look to you, Socrates? Isn't his face beautiful?" "Supernaturally so," I said.

"But if he chose to strip," Chaerephon said, "his face would be nothing. That's how absolutely beautiful his form is..."

And I said, "I'll agree that the man is unsurpassed – *if* he should happen to have only one more little quality."

"What?" asked Critias.

"If his soul happen to be naturally good," I said... "Shouldn't we undress him in this respect and look at him before we see his shape? For he has matured to a point where he would want to discourse."

"Oh yes indeed," Critias said, "because he is a philosopher."<sup>24</sup>

The philosopher is someone who refuses disguise. Plato's *Theaetetus* elaborating on the image of wrestling – that dialogue too is set in a wrestling room – will speak of stripping to argue, with

the clear sense that engaging in philosophy without clothing represents the participant's vulnerability.<sup>25</sup>

Philosophy knows everything there is to know about clothing. It isn't innocent. It knows that it is naked and still it's not ashamed. As philosophy has inherited the metaphor of clothing, that figure evokes more than nostalgia for a lost time of truth. There are still opportunities for shedding moral, religious, and aesthetic conventions and living *au naturel*.

### ***The Gay Science on dress***

The preface to *Beyond Good & Evil*, which declares its war against dogmatic philosophers (and against Plato as their representative), opens with a line that can read as a retort to Plato's metaphor: "Suppose truth were a woman – what then?" Nietzsche says dogmatic philosophers, embarrassing seducers that they are, have failed at winning her heart. He does not give examples, but one that comes to mind is philosophers' repeated loud announcement that they want to see truth naked, and to display her naked form to everyone else.

But it is really in two passages from *The Gay Science* Book V, written very close in time to *Beyond Good & Evil*, that Nietzsche addresses the metaphor head-on. As the *Beyond Good & Evil* passage does, *Gay Science* 352 explicitly asserts its analogy between clothing and morality. Nietzsche establishes a literal claim, the unnatural and anti-aphrodisiac condition of the naked human body, before elaborating a parallel for the moral domain. Imagine a cheerful dinner party, he says, whose participants are suddenly struck naked.

I believe that not only their cheerfulness would vanish and that the strongest appetite would be discouraged – it seems that we Europeans simply cannot dispense with that masquerade [*Maskerade*] which one calls clothes. Now consider the way "moral man" is dressed up, how he is veiled behind moral formulas and concepts of decency... I am not suggesting that all this is meant to mask human malice and villainy – the wild animal in us; my idea is, on the contrary, that it is precisely as *tame animals* that we are a shameful sight and in need of the moral disguises... The European disguises himself with *morality* because he has become a sick, sickly, crippled animal that has good reasons for being "tame."<sup>26</sup>

As it had been for Rousseau, clothing is a covering or disguise. But it's not a cover for hiding the nature within. Given the sad state of the body today, the disguise serves to suggest that there will be more waiting underneath than one actually ever finds there. Clothing covers not the shame of sexual power and natural strength but the shame of their loss. (Here, Nietzsche anticipates the psychoanalytic observation that genitals are covered not to deny their presence but to draw attention to them.<sup>27</sup>)

The state of the modern spirit is worse. In fact the metaphor will collapse from the strain of describing the analog to the naked lunch that awaits a moral voyeur. For when you take away the moral formulas that have cloaked modern human actions and characters, what you'll find is a creature that already behaves in agreement with every moral stricture, not out of respect for the moral law but because it lacks the strength or imagination to misbehave. For instance the fancy dress that is the virtue of social cooperation is not a binding that holds back one's inner beast but a decorous re-presentation of people's need for one another. Rather than hide one's nature, sociability displays it with a decorous label.

Clothes are just right for an animal like this one. How ridiculous to expect that it could ever have been naked. But in a world where there is no more need for confinement, the old

metaphor of clothing as that which constrains will no longer apply. To call the modern human animal *tame* as Nietzsche does is to say that it is already virtually clothed. Domestication is a process through which the effects of civilization enter into a living thing's nature. Domestication binds the animal in trusses and stays that don't come off.

In that case the tame animal that Nietzsche claims to see underneath morality's strictures is not exactly like the naked body. Being tame it has already taken on the shape of its garments. At this point, the metaphor of clothing as artifice loses the contrast that had given it that old purpose.<sup>28</sup> There is no naked body inside that's being lied about. Plato's fantasy that some default exists, a philosophizing true human beneath and needing to be freed from the garb of corrupt society, betrays his failure to grasp the extent of the corruption.

Or you could say that the lie told by morality has become metaphysical. It is a lie about that for which there is no truth, misrepresentation as such and no human nature to be represented. For philosophy to resemble a fashion show now means not that values confine and adorn some wiser real humanity, but that philosophy's vision finally comes to settle on what had seemed unsubstantial.

### The actor's clothes

Elsewhere in the same neighborhood of *The Gay Science* (§361) Nietzsche is contemplating "the problem of the actor." He has reason to speak of costumes and disguises as he begins a genealogy of the histrionic. He imagines socially marginal families who adapted to keep themselves alive. They changed with the wind, he says; they tailored their beliefs to suit their times. More accurately: Nietzsche uses a hard-to-translate idiom, "*den Mantel nach dem Winde hängen*," to hang your coat on the wind. It is a proverbial expression for conformism. Kaufmann's translation says they turn their coats with the wind, which very nicely makes them turncoats – as close to a literal rendering as you could want, and it prepares for the twist that Nietzsche now gives to the phrase: "*und dadurch fast zum Mantel werdend*," thereby almost becoming a coat.

These Ur-actors are no longer deceiving anyone, if by "deceiving" you mean presenting themselves as something that in fact, deep down, they are not. Deep down you find only the shallows. The metaphor of the garment now casts doubt on the idea that any alternative to a garment exists. When being a habitual turncoat can turn you into a coat, there is no such thing as taking all your clothes off in order to live in the open air. Clothing defines your personhood.

### Philosophy's costume

The point of picking out a trail like this one, from *Beyond Good & Evil* 223 back to itself, has been to imagine that passage as a forcible transformation of a longstanding symbol for which philosophy had found a specific and stable use. Nietzsche's costume change of values reawakens a metaphor that had become unthinking, urging philosophy to see and learn from and even emulate what fashion already knows.

What about the other interpretive challenge in §223? How could the carnival of costume changes have ever been taken as a hopeful sign? Isn't the image unseemly and desperate? At best it promised a self-abusing display of one's own bad taste.

Now the fashion show has a different look. Philosophy will not put on one costume after another that inhibits the true human spirit, displaying the bad fit in the way it jerks its limbs all bound up and pinched. In true historical spirit philosophy will put on the morality of another time and place with flawless accuracy, so that it looks like a second skin or second nature. Here is Roman etiquette: perfectly right. Now look at Renaissance tastes and opinions. They are

irreproachable too and exactly what the Renaissance needed. The inventiveness begins after philosophy releases itself from any fantasy of authenticity that would have only spoiled the audacity of its mimicry.

Looking right in every dress might be thought of as the essential skill for perspectival thinking. If it was Plato who denied perspective, the image of a series of costume changes is perfect anti-Platonism.

In this sense, if §223 is depicting a future philosophy, it is opening another way to worry at Plato in the spirit of the preface to *Beyond Good & Evil*. For if Plato had depicted philosophy as nudity of the soul, and if nudity is a costume, then it's fair to take Nietzsche as an inspiration for the thought that *nudity is the costume that philosophy wears*. Philosophy has sought to be a discourse free from perspective, which is to say free from costume. But like the stylized nudity of classical Greek athletic competition that mode of dress – there are reasons for calling it *anti-fashion* – is more deeply implicated in the fashion system than it might believe, certainly more than it wants. Even at home and relaxing with nothing on, you (or “one”) (or philosophy) have put on a special outfit for the purpose. Nietzsche looking at Plato the emperor of philosophy here resembles the boy in the famous story, but this time shouting “Look!” (to the emperor's great embarrassment), “He's wearing something!”

## Notes

- 1 Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics I.4 1095a30-32.
- 2 Philosophical attention to fashion in recent years includes Karen Hanson, “Dressing Down Dressing Up,” *Hypatia* 5 (1990): 107–122; and “Fashion: Fashion and Philosophy,” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), II, 157–161; Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Ronald Scapp and Brian Seitz, eds., *Fashion Statements* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Lars Svendsen, *Fashion: A Philosophy*, translated by John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); Jessica Wolfendale and Jeanette Kennett, eds., *Fashion – Philosophy for Everyone: Thinking with Style* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). Gwenda-lin Grewal's, *Good Looks: Philosophy and Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming) will add significantly to this literature. My own book, *The Philosopher's New Clothes: The Theaetetus, the Academy, and Philosophy's Turn against Fashion* (London: Routledge, 2016), which is separate from the present piece but connected and continuous with it, examines as this piece does the degree to which philosophy has thought of itself in the language of fashion.
- 3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966).
- 4 On this phrase in Nietzsche see *The Antichrist*, Preface. “The day after tomorrow” translates *Übermorgen*, which as Stanley Cavell has pointed out can also be taken as “an after-, or over-, or super-morning.” *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 118.
- 5 The reference is to Nietzsche's proposal for revising evolutionary theory, toward one element of “punctuated equilibrium”: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II.12. The wisdom in this revision of evolutionary theory was appreciated by Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1214–18.
- 6 Genesis 3.7.
- 7 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* III. 23.5.
- 8 Genesis 3.21.
- 9 See Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 106–10, on the dialectical understanding of the naked human in *King Lear* and in *The Communist Manifesto*.
- 10 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts [Discourse on the Arts and Sciences]*, part 1, paragraph 5. Translations my own.
- 11 On laughter and the joking impulse in Nietzsche see Nickolas Pappas, “Morality Gags,” *The Monist* 88 (2005): 52–71.
- 12 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chapter 1, paragraph 19.

- 13 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chapter 1, paragraph 37.
- 14 On generic clothing, which may also be called “anti-fashion,” see Nickolas Pappas, “Anti-Fashion: If Not Fashion, Then What?” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*, eds. Giovanni Matteucci and Stefano Marino (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 73–89.
- 15 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 144.
- 16 On the Cynics’ peregrinations see Silvia Montiglio, “Wandering Philosophers in Classical Greece,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000): 86–105. On their wardrobe see the portrayal of Cynicism in Lucian Sale of Lives §8. On Thoreau and the Cynics see already the early review of *Walden* by Charles Frederick Briggs, who put Diogenes in his review’s title and invoked him several times: “A Yankee Diogenes,” *Putnam’s Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* (1854): 443–8.
- 17 The essential first reading on the subject continues to be Larissa Bonfante, “Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 93 (1989): 543–70.
- 18 Non-Greeks find nudity shameful, Herodotus *Histories* 1.10.3, Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.6.5; Greek gym practice as seen by foreigners, Plato *Symposium* 182b–c.
- 19 Claims of a recent beginning for nudity: Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.6.5; Plato *Republic* 5.452c. On the issue and evidence from Athenian vases see Myles McDonnell, “The Introduction of Athletic Nudity: Thucydides, Plato, and the Vases,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 111 (1991): 182–193.
- 20 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.6.3–4.
- 21 Lucian *Anacharsis* 24.
- 22 The Spartan Orsippus first to run naked, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.44.1; the Spartan Acanthus, Dionysios of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 7.72.2–3.
- 23 Aelian *Varia Historia* 14.7.
- 24 Plato *Charmides* 154d–e. My translation.
- 25 Plato *Theaetetus* 162b, together with 169a–b in which the naked wrestling is described as involving a proverbial bandit (Antaeus, Skiron).
- 26 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974).
- 27 See for instance John Carl Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1930).
- 28 Anne Hollander makes this observation from a different angle, proposing that the bodies of nudes have reflected the shape that clothing of a time had imposed upon the body; hence that nude paintings continue to present the images of clothing. *Seeing through Clothes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

# 4

## CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE FASHION

*Charlene K. Lau*

Despite frequent usage of “avant-garde” in the lexicon of contemporary fashion, academic discourse on specifically named avant-garde fashion is sparse. The term has become a catachresis in its contemporary deployment, a catchall term for “edgy” or unconventional fashion. Anthologies such as Dietrich Scheunemann’s edited volume *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde* (2005) and David Hopkins’s compilation *Neo-Avant-Garde* (2006) address the vanguard in relation to areas such as art, architecture, film, literature, and performance, but make no reference to fashion. “Avant-garde” also does not receive an entry in the *Berg Companion to Fashion* (Steele 2010), an encyclopedic resource for fashion studies. This is a curious gap given the field’s partial origins in dress history and art historical discourse. Often, synonymous terms such as “radical,” “revolutionary,” “experimental,” “critical,” or “conceptual” are employed in order to elucidate a vanguard fashion at present. However, the exclusion of sartorial fashion in avant-garde studies and its converse may in part be due to the paradox of the vanguard and the market as they collide in fashion; unlike art, fashion makes explicit its relation to commerce.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the historical avant-garde has made use of mass culture intertwined with fashion: from Italian Futurist Thayah’s pattern for his *tuta* coverall design published in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, to surrealist illustrations for fashion magazines including *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue* among others. Art historian Thomas Crow has acknowledged that the vanguard has historically made a practice of incorporating forms outside of the arts: “From its beginnings, the artistic avant-garde has discovered, renewed, or re-invented itself by identifying with marginal, “non-artistic” forms of expressivity and display—forms improvised by other social groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture.”<sup>2</sup> As such, the avant-garde has invariably been polyvalent, making collaborations between disciplines and other cultural producers all the while mixing up so-called high art forms with low or mass culture. Thus, the market and vanguard need not be in an entirely paradoxical relationship; rather, avant-garde fashion as we know it today utilizes the structure of the market to advance its project of opposition, and social, political, and cultural critique.

### Defining “what is ‘avant-garde’?”

Clarification on “avant-garde” is necessary in order to understand its evolution throughout history in relation to its contemporary articulation in fashion. However, the very act of defining

the term seems oxymoronic. Critic and poet Bob Perelman contends that the vanguard must shy away from orthodoxy, as it “attacks inherited forms and established aesthetic protocols—decorum in general.”<sup>3</sup> As such, any study of the avant-garde requires openness, regeneration, and fluidity rather than be bound to dogma. Keeping this in mind, what lies ahead can be viewed as a dialectical exercise of definition, in many ways mirroring the struggle with tradition enacted by avant-gardes themselves.

Contemporary usage of “avant-garde” has roots in revolutionary France; *Avant-garde* is a French medieval military term that literally translates to “vanguard,” or “advanced guard” and refers to the front line of the army. As a leader in the field of battle, this foremost section of troops surveys and secures terrain, clearing obstacles in reconnaissance to allow for the unimpeded advance of the main military force. Despite some disagreement on the avant-garde’s points of origin in military, artistic, and leftist political discourse, there is a general consensus in avant-garde studies that the artistic inflection emerged from the mid- to late-nineteenth century in Europe. Art historian David Cottington locates the first instance of non-military usage of the avant-garde concept in 1825, when French Socialist Count Henri de Saint-Simon articulated a technocratic framework introducing three professions as leaders of society: the artist, the scientist, and the industrialist, with the artist as “avant-garde.”<sup>4</sup> It was not, however, until the mid-nineteenth century that the label became synonymous with art alone when it was applied to writers with negative connotations. Cottington notes that the key to understanding use of “avant-garde” as it is known today is the shift from the idea of “art (in its widest sense) *as such* as avant-garde” to there being “an avant-garde *within* art.”<sup>5</sup>

Literary critic Renato Poggioli identifies the first application of “avant-garde” to art in the work of Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant, a disciple of French utopian socialist philosopher, Charles Fourier. In *De la mission de l’art et du rôle des artistes* (1845), Laverdant wrote of the importance of art in society as a whole, and that the true avant-garde artist “must know where Humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is.”<sup>6</sup> Poggioli adds that the avant-garde was seen as a leftist political term first and foremost – in reference to the 1848 revolution and Paris Commune – and that it was seldom employed outside of a political context.<sup>7</sup> While both artistic and socio-political understandings of the term were conjoined for some years, he contends that the political meaning fell into disuse during the 1880s, making way for a primarily artistic definition.<sup>8</sup> However, while its history refers to the avant-garde as a leftist enterprise, it has also been embedded in fascist discourse, with Italian Futurism being one such movement. Keeping this political history in mind, “avant-garde” in the context of contemporary fashion is seen more generally as a radical, progressive cultural force.

### Theories of the avant-garde

The widespread usage of the term “avant-garde” in contemporary fashion further necessitates a theoretical framework in order to more clearly define its aims. As no such theory of vanguard fashion exists as of yet, a brief genealogy of avant-garde theory as rooted in literary criticism serves as a necessary point of departure. Poggioli’s *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1962/1968) was the first attempt to delineate such a theory, with its focus on the vanguard as a sociological phenomenon. According to Poggioli, the avant-garde is “a historical concept, a center of tendencies and ideas,”<sup>9</sup> a defined period of radicalism and revolution that is specifically situated in the early-twentieth century. He further contends that the avant-garde was a strictly European social phenomenon, and as a movement, was more successful in France and Italy than in countries such as Germany due to the “Latinity of the phrase.”<sup>10</sup> However, this (and later,

German literary critic, Peter Bürger's) rigid definition is not entirely useful for its contemporary usage. Instead, it is helpful to imagine an avant-garde that, although originally rooted in a specific European historical tradition, now temporally and geographically shifts in a process of decentering global contemporary cultural production. Yet, of particular use is Poggioli's delineation of four "moments" of the avant-garde: activism, antagonism, nihilism, and agonism, the latter two of which are derived from antagonism. These elements remain pertinent to a contemporary study of the vanguard, representing commonly held characteristics or tendencies, and grounding such cultural production as socially and politically engaged artistic practice.

Following Poggioli, Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) is perhaps the most referred-to and disputed example in scholarship today. Bürger identifies two concepts of the avant-garde that are closely associated: "self-criticism" or opposition to the institution of art, and the integration of art into the praxis of life. However, he argues that while the historical avant-garde attempted artistic autonomy and to unify art and life, they were unsuccessful and ultimately failed in their mission. As with Poggioli, Bürger concludes that the avant-garde is a historical paradigm, in that any neo-avant-gardist attempts are doomed to fail because the original avant-garde experiment did not meet its lofty aims. To further those historical efforts is farcical, inauthentic, and "negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions."<sup>11</sup> Here, Bürger takes a page from Marx's dictum that history repeats itself, occurring "first as tragedy, then as farce."

### The neo- and contemporary avant-garde

Conceptualizing a fashion vanguard in the contemporary moment directly opposes the idea of a singular or authentic avant-garde that can only be located at its historical point of origin. Art historian Benjamin Buchloh has leveled criticism at Bürger's theory, and contends that his claim of a singular origin and theory of the avant-garde is "limited, if not naive."<sup>12</sup> In his strident review of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, he argues that had Bürger not held such prejudices against contemporary art, he would have discovered that the aims of neo-avant-garde art—and specifically the practices of those artists working in the late 1960s—were in fact aligned with the historical vanguard. In place of a singular theory of the "original" avant-garde, Buchloh considers the vanguard project as a "continually renewed struggle over the definition of cultural meaning" and "the development of new strategies to counteract and develop resistance against the tendency of the ideological apparatuses of the culture industry."<sup>13</sup> This interpretation of the avant-garde allows for a more open-ended approach restricted neither by the finality of a historical periodization nor a rigid definition of inclusion and exclusion. In *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (2000), Buchloh further rebukes Bürger, this time taking issue with his claim of the neo-avant-garde as an inauthentic repetition of its prewar forebears. He asserts that artists of the late 1960s such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers, and Hans Haacke "detach themselves more than any other postwar activity from the legacy of the historical avant-garde,"<sup>14</sup> and that their concerns—as institutional critique—were vastly different from Bürger's previous conceptions.

Similar to Buchloh, Hal Foster also finds fault with Bürger's assertion that only one theory of the avant-garde exists. He argues for the continued relevance of the vanguard and the need for new narratives that "*complicate its past and pluralize its present.*"<sup>15</sup> In his essay "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?" (1994), Foster identifies Dadaist readymades and Russian constructivism as precursors to pop art and minimalism of the late 1950s and early 1960s respectively. Marc James Léger is more pointed in his approach on the contemporary avant-garde in *Brave New Avant Garde* (2012) and defines the new vanguard beyond Foster's analysis. He rallies the troops and reinstates the revolutionary concept of struggle, declaring that the new avant-garde "represents not so much the transnational class of civilized petty bourgeois culturati, but a counter-power



that rejects the inevitability of capitalist integration.”<sup>16</sup> As such, Buchloh, Foster, and Léger posit an avant-garde project open to changes in the contemporary moment, one that stands in opposition to mass and mainstream culture, and by extension, capital.

Such lack of clarity in what is or is not qualifiable as avant-garde has moved into fashion discourse where attempts have been made to discount the term’s use in art history after the mid-twentieth century and repurpose it for fashion’s sake. Following Bürger, Geczy and Karaminas assert that to recognize a vanguard in art after 1950 is “inappropriate or unrigorous,”<sup>17</sup> despite its continued presence in art historical discourse and contemporary art. However, they see that the term is appropriate for use in contemporary fashion, as fashion “followed a different path, and its association to wealth and status made the traditional concept of the avant-garde a *non sequitur* [sic],”<sup>18</sup> therefore highlighting the deep contradictions that lie in defining and naming the vanguard. Yet, their discomfort in using “avant-garde” more broadly is evident in part due to the fact that their study, entitled *Critical Fashion Practice*, takes the idea of self-criticism from Bürger, however without explicitly citing his theory. As Geczy and Karaminas understand it, the fashion vanguard is a largely occupied with aesthetic experimentation, asserting that “the avant-garde designer is one who breaks away from the traditions or constraints of design and questions the garment and its relationship to the body.”<sup>18</sup> Using this statement as a prompt, a more rigorous definition is necessary in order to unite such fashion to the socially and politically engaged practices of the artistic avant-gardes, both historically and in contemporaneity.

### **Toward an avant-garde in contemporary fashion: modernity and post-modernity**

To speak of a contemporary fashion avant-garde is to identify its kinship with art and inter-disciplinarity more broadly, and situate it within the context of its progenitors in art history. With their oppositional views, the historical avant-gardes instigated dress reform with the aim of abolishing fashion’s “mercantile logic” by “striving to replace it by a utopian ‘antifashion.’”<sup>19</sup> During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, artists including William Morris, Henry van de Velde, Futurist Giacomo Balla, and the Russian Constructivists envisioned destroying fashion in its contemporary incarnation – and therefore its capitalist impulses and market-driven politics – enforcing a limited form of dress more aptly described as uniform. Yet, despite the restrictions they imposed on what the clothes should or should not look like and how they would function, there was still a remarkable amount of aesthetic play in terms of style in their dress designs. Less focused on uniformity, but contra to then fashionable tastes for corsetry, couturier Emilie Flöge favored looser silhouettes, a preference echoed by sometimes collaborator and companion and Vienna Secessionist founder Gustav Klimt, who donned smocks while painting or resorting at Lake Atter. Unlike some of the avant-garde’s predilection for minimal decoration, Flöge’s designs did not shy away from ornamentation, but embraced intricate embroideries or ruffles. In these diverse ways, the historical avant-gardes attempted to “overstep the limits of ‘pure’ art and act directly on daily life”<sup>20</sup> in order to abolish commercial fashion with their clothing designs. Stern’s overview of historical (or “radical”) avant-garde fashion such as constructivist and futurist dress serves as a foundation for drawing parallels between avant-garde fashion and clothing designed by vanguard artists. Missing from the discussion, however, is a mention of Surrealism along with its star designer Elsa Schiaparelli and her collaborator Salvador Dalí. While Schiaparelli’s designs might be described as anti-fashion, they were very much so a part of the fashion system, yet challenging norms from within.

Beyond the art historical avant-garde, oppositional dress also took shape in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in tandem with early feminisms. Elizabeth Wilson’s

seminal *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) explores utopian concepts of dress and dress reform from a cultural studies discussion of counter- and subculture. Her analysis of nascent Victorian feminism focuses on resistance to fashionable women's dress and increasingly contorted silhouettes, from rational dress and the Bloomer movement to ideas of the New Woman at the turn of the twentieth century. In her later essay, "These New Components of the Spectacle: Fashion and Postmodernism" (1990), she posits the possibility of punk subcultural dress as a post-modernist avant-garde, identifying counter-culture as one such site for the subversion of good taste, gender, and beauty.<sup>21</sup> Such concepts of opposition in the post-modern fashion avant-garde are also tested further in Diana Crane's study "Postmodernism and the Avant-Garde: Stylistic Change in Fashion Design" (1997). Her analysis largely centers on four aesthetic binaries in postmodern avant-gardism: "futurity-tradition, masculinity-femininity, luxury-pauperism, and bodily concealment or nudity."<sup>22</sup> Here, Crane's themes echo the antagonism to which Poggioli speaks, grappling with the tension between categories of style and their broader reverberations in culture and society at large.

Caroline Evan's formative *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (2003) examines fashion of a conceptual and experimental nature, including designers such as Rei Kawakubo of Commes des Garçons, Hussein Chalayan, and Walter Van Beirendonck. Evans states that a majority of the fashion she considers in the text is "economically negligible,"<sup>23</sup> usually a characteristic of vanguardist work – yet acknowledges that Martin Margiela's "aesthetic of dereliction is avant-garde, his experimentation does not take him outside a capitalist paradigm."<sup>24</sup> One can then pose the questions: must the vanguard exist solely outside the confines of capitalism, and if so, how possible might this be? Later in a side note, she acknowledges Lisa Tickner's argument in *Modern Life & Modern Subjects* (2000): "Partly *faute de mieux*, and partly as a consequence of its own desire to remake its audience, the avant-garde was never free of fashion or commerce or economically independent of the bourgeois society whose tastes and values it disdained."<sup>25</sup> Evans's position here demonstrates the trifling dialectic that continues to exist for the avant-garde—in fashion, art or otherwise—oscillating between autonomous cultural production and contemporary market conditions. In this sense, while the sympathies of contemporary avant-garde fashion may seem anti-market or counter the logic of commodification, it must still function within the fashion system in order to survive. As is the case with luxury designers such as Commes des Garçons, this oppositional stance can in fact prove quite profitable, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars per year in revenue.

### Contemporary avant-garde fashion as art

The contemporary avant-garde object of fashion challenges the institutional politics of the fashion system and questions what fashion is beyond a commodity, as art or an art. This is perhaps most evident in the exhibition and collection of vanguard fashion in museums and galleries. For designers, such an arrangement in the institutional display and acquisition of their garments as artifacts benefits from cultural capital as their *oeuvre* is taken out of the fast-paced fashion system, secured in the history of material culture, and conferred status as art. In *The Culture of Fashion* (1995), Christopher Breward writes that the work of avant-garde Antwerp school designers such as Martin Margiela or Ann Demeulemeester are "manifestation[s] of those late twentieth-century debates centering around the distinctions between fine art and craft, suitable for presentation in the spaces of a gallery, rather than ephemeral commodities designed for retail and wear."<sup>26</sup> Where Paris has been deemed the historical center of avant-garde production, Antwerp has served as an incubator for vanguardist fashion practice since the 1980s, as influenced by the Japanese fashion avant-garde. The "Antwerp Six," as they came to be

known—Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs, and Marina Yee, all graduates from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp—traveled to London in 1986 to show their fashions on the international circuit. Since, they have been seen as progenitors to successive generations of designers schooled in this new tradition of the contemporary avant-garde where fashion meets art. Exhibitions of such designers' work are especially apt, given that vanguard fashion often expressly resists mass manufacture and commercial viability, therefore bringing its cultural value closer to that perceived of art. This is often articulated in the avant-garde fashion object itself, one that might be a handmade, one-of-a-kind creation. Alison Bancroft aligns the fashion avant-garde with haute couture and designers such as John Galiano and the late Alexander McQueen, invoking what she calls the vanguard's "artistic model" to discuss the role of Lacanian desire in haute couture and the interjection of the real in the symbolic order.<sup>27</sup> As such, one-off designs are covetable as original and singular objects, mirroring the cultural value placed on artworks. However, such status can also be bestowed upon conceptual fashions in ready-to-wear collections when shown in a museum. Hussein Chalayan's experiments with technology, ideas of gender, migration and home, function as artworks in exhibition spaces. Designs such as his fiberglass "Remote Control" dress (edition of one, Spring/Summer 2000) or convertible furniture dresses (Autumn/Winter 2000), were developed and produced as unique objects, never meant for even limited manufacture. Rather, they were created for the runway presentation as concepts and to exist as standalone works, likely never to be worn by a human body again. While desirable as fashion – they fulfill the intellectual idea of what fashion can be pushed to be and do – their display in the museum creates symbolic value for the designs as cultural entities rather than as commodities. In this sense, designs such as these critique and resist mass manufacture and crass commercialism in the fashion system, generating other systems of value.

If today's vanguard abdicates certain notions of fashion as wearable commodity, it occupies an intermediate space between fashion as a short-lived commercial product and the perceived eternal time of art. By archiving their creations in the museum, avant-garde fashion designers are liberated from the constraints of capital, instead circumventing mass appeal and consumerism; in the words of designer Bernhard Willhelm: "fashion is not a product that has to please everyone."<sup>28</sup> Yet, this may in part be due to the fact that contemporary avant-garde fashion also speaks to another market, that of the museum. In 2006, Willhelm and his business partner Jutta Kraus donated the entire Bernhard Willhelm clothing archive to the ModeMuseum in Antwerp, and the museum continues to accession objects as the label produces more collections. As a result of the expeditious institutionalization of their designs, Willhelm and Kraus's designs are quickly enshrined with cultural capital and accrue additional meaning once preserved as museum artifacts. Thus, the objecthood of avant-garde fashion in contemporaneity—as a conceptual object firstly rather than a wearable item in everyday life—produces conditions which necessitates its afterlife in the contemplative space of the museum, against the grain of fashion's fast pace.

However, contrary to perceived notions of eternity in the object of avant-garde fashion, a close relationship also exists between contemporary avant-garde fashion and performance art. As a time-based medium, live performance plays directly into fashion as an "embodied practice, a *situated bodily practice*,"<sup>29</sup> activating dress through the display of movement. Curator Ginger Gregg Duggan (2001) connects the hybridity between fashion-as-performance-art, grouping avant-garde fashion shows into five categories based on the following characteristics: spectacle, substance, science, structure, and statement. She asserts that fashion shows identified as "spectacle" share traits with theater, opera, film and music videos—employing theater and stage design, props, music and lighting effects—as demonstrated in presentations staged by Alexander

McQueen and John Galliano at Christian Dior. On the other hand, Viktor & Rolf and Hussein Chalayan work through more conceptual concerns in their designs and runway presentations, placing them in the group of “substance designers” where their focus is on “emphasizing process over product.”<sup>30</sup> In the category “science,” Duggan argues that the material innovations by Japanese designers including Issey Miyake and Junya Watanabe can be viewed as similar to the experimentation of early video-performance artists such as Bruce Nauman and Nam June Paik, while Rei Kawakubo and Martin Margiela fall under the banner of “structure,” as their attention to construction and form aligns with the physicality of the performance work of Jana Sterbak and Rebecca Horn.<sup>31</sup> Lastly, she asserts that “statement” designers Susan Cianciolo and Miguel Adrover use fashion as a medium for political messaging, following 1970s happenings. While not exhaustive—no amount of categories could possibly contain avant-garde production in its entirety and groupings are not mutually exclusive—Duggan’s categories function as guides in producing criteria for contemporary avant-garde fashion beyond their articulation of performance.

Although fashion performed may speak to an avant-garde embedded in the garments themselves, it also alludes to a politics of the bodies that lie beneath. Concepts of ideal beauty, which continue to change throughout history as sartorial fashion has, are challenged in the fashion vanguard with the unconventionally attractive. In drawing connections between experimental fashion and performance art, fashion scholar Francesca Granata explicates a grotesque body at the turn of the twenty-first century, where unruly bodies “upset gender and bodily norms and rules of propriety and beauty.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, politics is performed through the intersections of marginalization including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, disability, age, and class. Granata’s discussion of Bakhtinian bodies-out-of-bounds in the works of Georgina Godley, Leigh Bowery, Kawakubo, Margiela, and Wilhelm illuminates the multiple transgressions, disciplinarily speaking between fashion, art and performance, but also in notions of taste and propriety in concepts such as camp and debasement. As such, borderlessness—various cultural fields and disciplines mixing and merging—serves as a metaphor for an acceptance for difference, alternative ways of being, and inclusive politics in the contemporary moment. In this way, the contemporary fashion avant-garde advocates for inclusivity, equality and justice in its messaging, whether in the garment designs themselves, their presentation or in the very bodies that wear such fashions.

## **Conclusion**

This overview of key ideas, works and moments in the avant-garde elucidates the instability of the revolutionary project with its varying histories and theories. Contemporary avant-garde fashion cannot be divorced from this history, however difficult. Rather, it is amongst this theoretical strife that the fashion vanguard opens itself: to adaptation and the ebb and flow of history. In aligning the contemporary fashion vanguard with its (art) historical forebears, it becomes clear that avant-garde theory and its discourse must be expanded to include fashion. Accordingly, the avant-garde’s genealogy can be extended, recontextualized for fashion as one narrative of the vanguard, and as an entity unto itself. Such an interdisciplinary undertaking however, is not so different from the field of fashion studies, a site in which disciplines cross-pollinate freely, transgressing borders.

Yet, this chapter also issues a call to action—for fashion scholarship to commit to the use of “avant-garde,” fully engage with its critical potential, and in so doing, commit to connecting the vanguard to a politics of fashion and fashion as social transformation. In challenging disciplinary boundaries, contemporary avant-garde fashion defies the very idea of fashion itself, a political undertaking that seeks to disrupt the institution of fashion. As history is still being

written in the present, today's fashion avant-garde responds to and reflects upon key and critical socio-political issues of the moving window of time known as contemporaneity. In this way, contemporary vanguard fashion—as cultural production—can enact real and radical change, simultaneously operating within but resisting the system that constrains it.

## Notes

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- 7 Poggioli, 9.
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- 11 Peter Burger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-Garde," *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 58.
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- 13 *Ibid.*, 21.
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# 5

## ECONOMIC THEORIES OF FASHION

*Yoko Katagiri*

### **Introduction**

Fashion economics is a specialized field in the discipline which analyzes the fashion industry, firms' and consumers' behavior concerning fashion products and services. Economics itself is a study of social and behavioral sciences, which often involve in documenting generalizing, and understanding behavior in the economy. Economic agents are governments, industries, firms, household units, and individuals. The agents make economic decisions knowing resources are limited, such as land, natural resources, money, labor, capital, and technology. Economics examine and comprehend the interactions of these agents with limited resources, test hypotheses, and apply implications by changing regulations or navigating the economy to increase or maximize the wealth of these agents. The primary two fields in economics are macroeconomics, which studies the economy as a whole, and agents' units are large such as trade between countries and governments and how money works in the economy. The other one is microeconomics, which studies an individual scale like a single market, firm, and consumer. There are subsets of specialized fields such as financial economics, international economics, labor economics, and industrial organization.

Fashion economics is a relatively new but growing field in economics, so new that even economists might ask what it is. Using economic analysis has been limited until recently by the widespread assumption in conventional economic theory that firms and consumers behave rationally in a narrow sense: a firm maximizes profits, and a consumer maximizes self-satisfaction of consumption or *utility*. Utility maximization represents maximizing self-satisfaction from the consumption of various goods and services. Food consumption is a good example: Eating an apple satisfies the person who eats it. In economics, this self-satisfaction from consumption is the traditional "utility," and this maximization is considered a rational behavior. Fashion-related behavior may be irrational. Some consumers are willing to pay \$50,000 for a Hermès Birkin bag on a waiting list, which, if evaluated from the traditional utility theory point of view, might be worth only \$100.

The phenomenon of Hermès is an example of "conspicuous consumption." The first ones to write about this idea were the economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen<sup>1</sup> and the sociologist and philosopher George Simmel.<sup>2</sup> They described how fashion trends trickle down, in one direction, from a small group of wealthy people to a larger majority of the population.

Recent developments in economic theory, such as game theory, behavioral economics, and computational improvements in simulation tools provide economists more flexibility in the analysis of irrational (or seemingly irrational) behaviors in fashion. These variants of the traditional tools allow us to analyze economic situations where interactions among firms or consumers, or interactions of both parties are essential features that form the industry.

For other disciplines of fashion studies, understanding economic theories, methodology, and mechanisms help researchers make logical hypotheses and predictions. When human interactions occur, economic activities develop, and eventually fashion emerges in society. Fashion is a form of consumption within society and economic agents independently and inter-dependently make decisions in their actions.

For example, in the COVID-19 pandemic, society quickly fell short of personal protective equipment (PPE) at the most urgent level in hospitals. Free and sharable mask patterns and instructions became available, and many home crafters sewed and donated them in no time. As soon as the hospital supply chain started receiving proper PPE, the economy shifted into making masks for profit, as mask-wearing became a new social protocol. Soon enough, variations emerged in the market with unique features, designs, and accessories such as big ribbons and printed logos. From an economic perspective, these agents' behaviors are predictable. Researchers from other disciplines will undertake research on pandemic masks from their specialized points of view: sociology, psychology, politics, fashion technology, history, material culture, and literature. By understanding the economics underlying environmental developments around the mask, rather than see "irrationality," other fields of research can also establish logical hypotheses and explanations.

This type of analysis is accessible not only for economists – economic researchers often use data which are publicly available. The American Economic Association, a prominent economic organization, lists data sources for projects, including GDP, labor-related indicators, and the World Bank database. At the same time, narrowing down to focus on data for each company or product category for fashion products may be difficult for an outside researcher. Many fashion firms run privately and have no obligations to share private information with the public. Some level of financial information is available for public firms that are listed in the stock exchange. There is also a limitation on how far back the data go and how consistent they are.

The following sections propose a program for using economics to study fashion. The first is a discussion of how the fashion industry functions as an organization. It shows how each part of the industry is related to the others. The next focuses on consumer behavior that relates to fashion, then the entire industry, where supply and demand behaviors interact. A concluding section suggests topics for future areas of study.

### **Fashion industry as an organization**

Historically, with limited resources, many fashion firms have started their business in a single stage, i.e., one firm operates a textile mill, and another firm runs a retail store. Today, the fashion industry is more complicated with a variety of coexisting firms, with some integrating their segments to have more control of a business or reduce the cost. Types of firms are diverse today, and researchers need to understand in which parts of the fashion industry a particular firm does business.

Figure 5.1 offers a visualization of the fashion industry and how agents take part as an organization. Stages 1 to 4 are a supply chain. The supply chain consists of Stages 1 (preparing materials or textiles); 2 (manufacturing); 3 (business-to-business distribution or wholesale); and 4 (business-to-consumer distribution or retail). The only difference between the apparel industry and the apparel-related industry is the primary materials are used in production. The

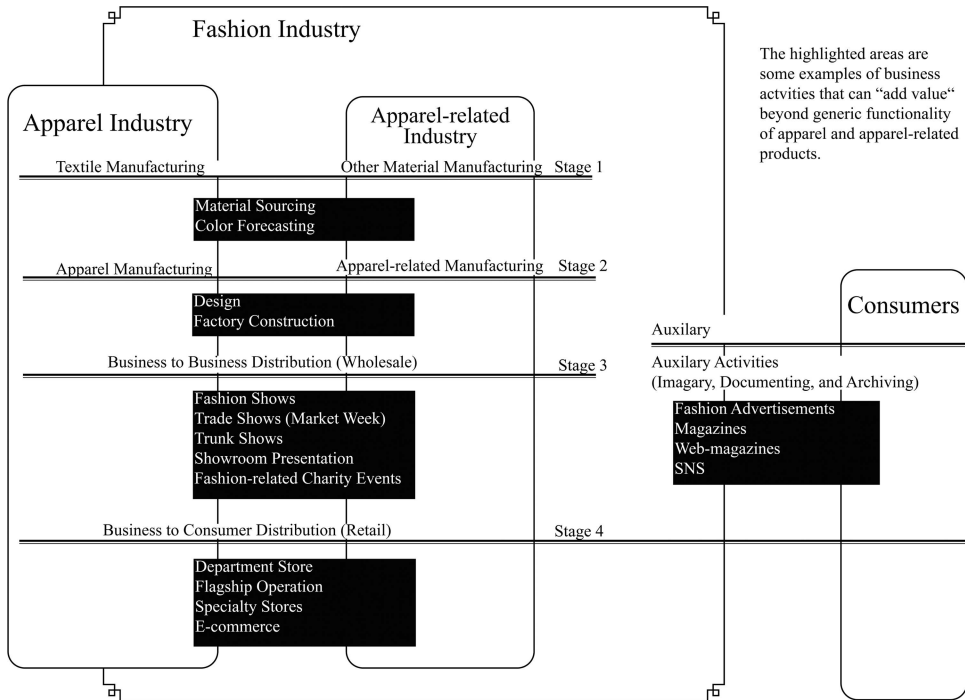


Figure 5.1 Organization of fashion industry, apparel, and apparel related industry

apparel industry uses textiles, while the apparel-related industry (handbags, shoes, cosmetics) uses other materials. The Auxiliary Stage handles an intangible stage—control of imagery, such as advertising, museum display, and Instagram, not a part of the supply chain and not necessarily occurring after Stages 1 through 4.

Some textbooks employ the terms *apparel industry* and *fashion industry* interchangeably, but that is incorrect. The significant difference in these terms is that the apparel industry delivers generic tangible products such as basic T-shirts and jeans; the fashion industry involves activities that add extra value to otherwise simple apparel garments. For example, at Stage 1, textile mills can produce material that will be of a trendy color, using a color-forecasting company, such as Pantone. Stage 2 adds twists in design or adds a brand logo to an otherwise simple T-shirt.

Understanding the organizational structure of this industry is essential to any researcher who aims to analyze the incentives, obstacles, or role of any firm which participates in the industry. For instance, a firm that may start as a fashion blogger firm (Auxiliary Stage), and has gained popularity, may expand into garment designing (Stage 2,) while outsourcing the sewing of garments, and also sell as a wholesaler to department stores (Stage 3).

Economic topics that relate to the supply chain are vertical integration, inventory level analysis, and differentiation, as follows.

### **Vertical integration**

A firm operates at multi-stages in the supply chain. In the fashion industry, the GAP is among the prominent firms that, in the 1970s, began the trend toward vertical integration in the United States. It operated as a jeans-specialty retail store (Stage 4) where it sold other brands.



Today, GAP carries only its own-label products while operating in Stages 2, 4, and Auxiliary, which is vertical integration.

The incentive to integrate vertically is to reduce costs and uncertainties from dependence on other firms in the supply chain.<sup>3</sup> With vertical integration, the firm has control over production; it can be more effective in matching the supply of products with consumers' demand, and the firm can control the timing of the delivery.

An early study concluded that vertical integration would not be successful, suggesting it would be too costly to manage given shortages of the technical skills necessary.<sup>4</sup> That may have been true at the time. In subsequent years, however, advances in technology have made forecasting more reliable and lead times shorter, together making vertical integration much more attractive. Together with changes in international trade regulations, some fashion firms have decided to operate internationally with vertical integration in the model over time.

The free-trade and vertically integrated operation made changes in clothing prices in the United States; from 1982 until about 1994, the changes in clothing prices are the same as the price index. Then significant shifts happened in the early 2000s, where fast fashion, such as Zara, and H&M became the game-changers in the industry. The relative price of the clothing became cheaper for the first time while the price index was increasing. The core structure of fast-fashion is vertical integration, and clothing became available faster and cheaper for consumers. These changes produced a field much different from the one analyzed by Rosenblum. In an empirical comparison of financial outcomes between vertical integration or outsourcing some parts of a supply chain business models, Khudadad et al. found that vertical integration did not appear to cause significant differences in profit margins.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Inventory level***

Efficient inventory management is essential in order to maximize profits. It is a significantly important issue for retailers in Stage 4 who order from the wholesalers in Stage 3, months in advance. Retailers face uncertainty about consumer demand in the future. Forecast errors in consumer demand can result in either excess inventory or inventory shortage. Both of these can reduce the profits by reducing the price or loss of sales opportunity, respectively. Eppen and Iyer analyzed this issue using Bayesian estimation, an econometrics tool.<sup>6</sup> This technique involves updating the forecast in response to errors as they are experienced. During a selling season, retailers thus update their demand information to decide how many garments to keep and how many to put away for outlet stores. Eppen and Iyer assert that holding on to inventory is too costly so that once retailers know that a specific volume will be unsold, they argue it would be optimal to send all the excess inventory to outlet stores.

### ***Product differentiation***

The fashion industry thrives by differentiating products and brands. Product differentiation is a known characteristic in a monopolistic competitive structure in economics. Stages 1 to 4 and Auxiliary Stage in Figure 5.1 involve different ways that firms create perceived or real differences between their products and competing ones through the adding value activities (highlighted in the figure). In industrial organization, the major subfield of the economics of which fashion economics is a part, product variety analysis is a relatively new area. For example, Woo establishes economic models in which status-seeking consumer behaviors encourage more product variety in high-status products in the market. It provides an incentive for firms to create products differentiated from other competitors.<sup>7</sup>

Product variety extends to quality variation, known as *vertical differentiation* of products. It is quality differentiation for the same style. For fashion products, we often observe it. De Fraja applies a game theory approach to set up a market where two firms offer multi-product lines to the market under a one-shot game to maximize profit. This research shows that quality becomes identical, which we observe for instance in the oligopoly market in sneakers. De Fraja expands the analysis into an increasing number of firms and finds that it offers more variety in the market, but the average quality may decrease with entry.<sup>8</sup>

### **Consumer behavior, and their relations to the industry**

Consumer behavior regarding fashion products is fascinating because of significant departures from what conventional economics would predict; intentionally created shortage by brands; another is where some consumers prefer to wear clothing as uniforms. Additionally, a group of so-called social interaction theories involves more radical departures from traditional economic thinking, as detailed below.

#### ***Created shortages by brands***

This strategy involves “limited edition” restrictions on quantity sold while maintaining prices below those that would clear the market. This widely contrived shortage and a release date of the product generates interest and enthusiasm for the product, which is in turn expected to lead to growing demand and revenue today and the future. Fast-fashion firms and designer collaborations, Supreme brand sales, and special-edition sneakers from Nike and Adidas are some examples. Shortly after being sold out at stores, other shops such as eBay sell them at a much higher price. Game theory can be used to model this particular fashion consumption behavior, but that has not yet appeared in the academic literature.

#### ***Traditional utility***

Economists assume that consumers maximize their satisfaction or “utility” from consumption of the goods they buy. This utility is “intrinsic” utility in that it derives only from the consumption of products – self-satisfaction from consumption. Economists usually assume that the marginal or extra utility for each additional unit of the same item declines (holding constant other items), so once they acquire one item, they will tend to choose another item for their next purchase. As applied to fashion products, this implies that most people will wind up with a variety of apparel and related products.

However, some consumers do have peculiar preferences or “utility functions,” which lead them to value and purchase only one type (color, style) of each garment category (pants, shirt, and shoes). These consumers treat garments as uniforms. For instance, Steve Jobs, a co-founder of Apple Inc., only wore Issey Miyake’s black turtleneck, Levi’s 501 jeans, and New Balance sneakers. These clothing choices, although relatively rare, are compatible with conventional economic theory and its emphasis on the functionality of clothing.

#### ***Social interaction theory, including conspicuous consumption and Leibenstain’s theory***

Aside from the traditional utility from goods, utility may increase or decrease with what others perceive about consumer’s taste, social status, and wealth. Firms take on such perceptions to produce

what will meet the needs of customers' desires to send the appropriate signals.<sup>9</sup> These three types of consumer behavior have been described by Leibenstein as *bandwagon*, *snob*, and *Veblen* effects.<sup>10</sup>

The *bandwagon effect* reflects a desire to project one's fashion taste in the mainstream to others: if a style is on trend, these consumers follow. The more a particular piece of apparel becomes trendy and cheaper in the market, the more these consumers will increase their demand for this product.

The *snob effect* involves a fashion-forward group of consumers who signal their wealth or taste through their fashion consumption. Traditionally, fashion shows in major cities such as Paris and New York present a new style at a high price. If a larger population imitates their style at a lower price, snob consumers move onto the next style. Academic thinking about the snob effect has shifted in recent years. Whereas in the traditional view, consumers focus on price as the signal of exclusivity, many fashion firms have begun limiting the supplies of products (see "created shortages by brands" above) that are non-luxury and not easily imitable. The manipulation of scarcity can lead to snob effects on demand.<sup>11</sup>

The *Veblen effect* applies to particular products or brands. When the price of one of these products or brands increases, demand increases for this product as its value in showcasing wealth increases. If the Veblen effect is strong enough, the demand curve can be upward sloping: the higher the price, the quantity demanded increases. Bagwell and Bernheim use a game-theoretical approach to suggest that brands commit to a high price to maintain the Veblen goods status.<sup>12</sup> Louis Vuitton sells products only through its own managed retail spaces where they can charge upward of \$2,000 for a brown canvas logo monogrammed bag that is not even leather. There is no discount. Bernheim and Brook and Durlauf establish a utility function, which is a combination of intrinsic and social interaction utility.<sup>13,14</sup> If consumers observe few purchases of the product, this keeps their estimate of the total number of purchases low and maintains the perceived high status associated of the item.

## Interactions between Consumers and Firms

The industry research area involves suppliers' and consumers' interactions, which can explain the behavior of the fashion cycle and welfare analysis. While game theory has been a primary tool for explaining the fashion cycle, welfare analysis considers whether firms or societies, in general, use the limited resources in the most effective ways and, if not, what are the costs of inefficiencies. Some economists analyzed the welfare of the use of fashion in society. The result of such an analysis can have important policy implications.

### *Fashion Cycle*

Karni and Schmeidler applied game theory to describe the fashion cycle from the consumers' perspective.<sup>15</sup> Pesendorfer used both consumers' and firms' perspectives.<sup>16</sup> Karni and Schmeidler analyzed two types of consumers – snob and bandwagon – using three colors as "trend representation." In a game setting where consumers choose which colors to buy, these consumers maximize expected utility based on the character type (snob or bandwagon), and observe the outcomes sequentially and for all players in nine consecutive dynamic games. The results find the "winning" color (fashion) will change over time – thus, a fashion cycle takes place.

Pesendorfer sets up a game model that involves a designer's style innovation and the resulting diffusion of the associated garments, which leads to falling prices of the garments over time. Two different games exist: in one case, a monopoly brand such as Armani offers to consumers its sub-brand versions such as Emporio Armani and Armani Exchange. In the other case, the new

design innovation diffuses over time in a monopolistic competitive market. In both cases, few consumers can afford the new product, which induces a snob effect increasing demand. However, as prices of the product decline and more consumers purchase the same style, a bandwagon effect set in, and the snob effect dissipates. The resulting decline in profitability creates another fashion cycle.

### **Welfare**

Whether the fashion industry offers the most effective way of running a business or is good for society is an open question. Textbooks point out that having varieties under monopolistic competition comes at the cost of “excess capacity.” Under monopolistic competition, the firms do not produce quantity at the maximum capacity at the lower cost.

Cooper and Arrow and Dasgupta use consumers’ relative consumption or the consumption level as compared with that of observable social groups.<sup>17,18</sup> Cooper finds that welfare decreases with a high cost on the environment in production: negative externalities. Arrow and Dasgupta analyze that consumers tend to spend more on conspicuous rather than necessity goods, which decreases overall welfare for consumers. On the other hand, Woo argues that social status seeking could increase consumer welfare, as long as consumers’ status seeking is weak.<sup>19</sup> Different cultures have different degrees of status-seeking behavior. It would be an attractive topic to explore what social factors explain the differences.

### **Conclusion and further areas of study**

The most noticeable changes in the fashion industry recently arise from attention to social causes such as sustainability, social responsibility, and inclusivity. Where traditional concern had to do with inefficiencies from the monopolistic competition, having a variety of choices in the economy does not use the existing resources at full extent. Today’s concern is over *externalities*, which is an action of one agent directly affecting the environment of another agent, such examples like polluting water by dyeing garments or reducing pollution from the use of recycled plastic in garment production. Toms, a shoe company, donates a pair of shoes to needy populations for each pair sold in developed countries. The economics profession has so far made little formal progress in analyzing this type of externality in the fashion industry.

Also missing in the economic study is consumer behavior toward counterfeit, knockoff, and bootleg purchasing behavior, all of which involve copying the original. Counterfeit is a copied version with an intention to confuse consumers. It will not happen when all consumers have complete information about the original product. In practice, some consumers are poorly informed and purchase the product, not knowing it is counterfeit. Others purchase the product knowing it is counterfeit but expect others not to recognize it is counterfeit. Counterfeit products are either purchased by the gullible or by those who believe others will not recognize the deception. Counterfeiting is a trademark infringement and illegal.

The knockoff, on the other hand, is an “inspired-design” taken from well-recognized products. The products look similar but are not identical. In the article by Pesendofer, the original design needs to be imitated for fashion to cycle and eventually to provoke the original seller to innovate with another design. Patents may help the original firm collect profits from its design. In practice, however, it always takes more time for fashion designers to obtain patents than the time required to imitate their design, a situation that has come to be known as the piracy paradox.

The most recent form of fashion imitation is called bootleg fashion. These are deliberate, obviously fake items sold with no intention of deceit, i.e., a parody Gucci T-shirt. Consumers knowingly purchase a transparently fake T-shirts, which begins a peer-group trend (use of

Gucci colors, for another example).<sup>20</sup> This phenomenon is called “trickle across” fashion diffusion. Each of these last three forms of imitation in fashion (counterfeit, knockoff, and bootleg) have not been the subject of much economic research, but such research should be encouraged.

In sum, this chapter has reviewed core economic theories relating to the fashion industry, analyzing firms’ and consumers’ behavior, and the joint effects of these on welfare. Since the first recognized economics paper about fashion, neoclassical intrinsic utility analysis started to explain consumer behavior around fashion, later adding the social interaction based utility.<sup>21</sup> The relatively recent introduction of game theory has given economists additional tools to understand interactive behavior in the market further. It has provided theoretical explanations of observed phenomena such as fashion cycles. Those papers introduced here have made the most significant contributions to the study of fashion economics and represent the latest research topics in the field. As discussed here in the conclusion, however, there are more areas of research that should be pursued, as they will make a valuable contribution to this growing body of literature.

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## 6

# A POSTHUMAN TURN IN FASHION

*Anneke Smelik*

### **Severed heads, androids, and aliens**

Now that face masks have entered the reality of social life since COVID-19, they also made their debut on the catwalk. In Rick Owen's grunge and glamour collection for Spring 2021, for example, the face masks occasionally turn into threatening face coverings. In Craig Green's Spring 2021 menswear collection, the masks become part of some kind of armored exoskeletons creating a funny but distinct posthuman look. The impossibility of featuring live fashion shows inspired Balenciaga to present the collection in a video like a first-person computer game *Afterworld*, showing how digital technology has entered the field of fashion.<sup>1</sup>

But the posthuman look was already there before the COVID crisis. Gucci's 2018 (S/S) show featured "posthuman" severed heads in its "wonkiest show yet."<sup>2</sup> Inspired by Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Gucci designer Alessandro Michele questioned the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. This is by no means the only example of "posthuman fashion." Iris van Herpen created a fragile headgear of circular transparent folds moving in sync with the model's steps ("Syntopia" S/S 2018). The folds diffract the face of the model, and presumably, her vision on the world. It produces a dreamscape where the human face morphs into something in-between human, angel, and alien. For one of Alexander McQueen's shows (A/W 2012), models were wearing reflective silver Plexiglas visors, making them look like androids.

As the human face is one of the most over-connoted parts of the body, severed heads, exoskeletons, alien faces and android visors challenge the question of what a human is. This is a first definition of posthuman fashion: it pushes the boundary between the human and non-human. Posthuman fashion blurs the borders between human and machine, humans and animals, and organic and artificial. Many conceptual designers can be said to create posthuman designs; Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons) famously transformed the shape of the human body for the collection "Body Meets Dress – Dress Meets Body" also called the 'lumps and bumps' collection (S/S 1997)—grotesque forms that have continued appearing in today's collections. Through make-up and hairdo, Alexander McQueen created a reptilian look for models in "Plato's Atlantis" (S/S 2010). He was generally known to create all kinds of bizarre masks distorting the human face, ranging from religious icons, African masks, a chainmail warrior mask, to even face clamps. Likewise, Issey Miyake, Junya Watanabe, Martin Margiela,

Hussein Chalayan, Viktor & Rolf, and Gareth Pugh have transgressed the boundaries of the human body and face. These are all rather spectacular examples of posthuman fashion, producing strong affects—from fear or disgust to wonder and fascination. This chapter explores several dimensions of posthumanism that in each case will be related to examples taken from fashion, respectively cyborg aesthetics, queerness, and sustainability. But first, posthuman fashion will be defined by inscribing it within the critical discourse of posthumanism.

### A posthuman perspective

The Latin prefix “*post*” suggests that the posthuman comes after the human, but this linear framework does not hold for posthumanism. Rather, the term *posthuman* interrogates what it means to be human. This age-old question gathers urgency in the age of the “Anthropocene,” a term invented by Nobel Prize winner Paul Crutzen to indicate that the era in which we are living is dominated by the human species. *Anthrōpos*, the Greek word for “human,” has a lasting and negative effect upon the planet.<sup>3</sup> In the Anthropocene, the human can no longer be considered in terms of superiority to its “other,” the non-human world. Consequently, a posthuman perspective involves an act of decentering the human.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of the term *posthuman* are not entirely clear,<sup>5</sup> but generally a performative piece by the literary scholar Ihab Hassan is taken as the starting point of a posthumanist culture in the humanities.<sup>6</sup> He suggests reevaluating the relationship between humans and non-humans, especially with respect to technology and the environment. The first art exhibition entitled *Post Human* already took place in 1992, starting in Lausanne and touring to Turin, Athens, and Hamburg.<sup>7</sup> The notion of the posthuman gained wider currency with N. Katherine Hayles’ book *How We Became Posthuman*, in which she processed the accelerated change invoked by information technologies and critically assessed the techno-optimist rhetoric of the last decades of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

The posthuman is basically a hybrid figure; it is about thinking what the human is or rather becomes “before, beyond, or after the human.”<sup>9</sup> Cary Wolfe emphasizes that the term *post-human* pertains to the human being who lives in both a biological and technological world, while “posthumanism” refers to the historical time in which the human is decentered by “technical, medical, informatic and economic networks.”<sup>10</sup> Rosi Braidotti argues that “The posthuman is a work in progress. It is a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we are becoming,” in a time of unprecedented technological development, the crisis of climate change and all-pervading capitalism.<sup>11</sup> In the context of fashion, my provisional definition of the posthuman is a hybrid figure who decenters human subjectivity, celebrating in-between-ness, by making alliances with all kinds of non-humans.

A posthuman perspective acknowledges a nature-culture continuum that defies binary thinking, such as between the human and its many others—the non-human. The non-human can be organic or inorganic. Traditionally, the non-human pertains to nature or the organic: to trees, animals or monsters, as well as to bacteria, fungi, or spiders. Today, the non-human equally refers to the technological or inorganic world of robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), or synthetic polyester. In the case of fashion, the non-human can be made of organic materials like wool and cotton or of technological materials like polymer fibers, solar cells, or 3D printed polyamide.

In sum, a posthuman perspective proposes a non-anthropocentric view by taking the human subject away from the center of attention. It permits an understanding of fashion as materially co-produced in a complex network of interconnected human and non-human actors. As such,

the term *posthuman* refers to the insight recognizing the human as being always already interconnected with the wider material world.<sup>12</sup>

### **A posthuman aesthetic**

What does a decentering of the human mean for the field of fashion that is conventionally focused on the human body? A first and perhaps obvious answer lies in a posthuman *aesthetic* or *imaginary*, like the severed heads of Gucci, the android faces of McQueen, Iris van Herpen's fractal folds, or Comme des Garçons' grotesque lumps and bumps. Or perhaps even the face masks we now wear on a daily basis.

Posthuman fashion can be seen as an immediate successor of postmodern fashion, with its flair for spectacle, extravagance, and pastiche.<sup>13</sup> A posthuman aesthetic may share an inclination for the dramatic and the bizarre, but it engages more ethically with the contemporary world than in the ironical times of postmodernism. Such a critical engagement happens in many ways, but I will only touch upon three instances in this chapter: the relation to technology, the shifting boundaries between femininity and masculinity, and the turn towards slow or sustainable fashion.

As we have seen hybridity is key to the figure of the posthuman. The cyborg, as a hybrid of human/machine, has become one of the most prevalent images of the posthuman in contemporary culture. The term *cyborg*, a *cybernetic organism*, originates in space studies, indicating a feedback system between human and machine as an updated version of the mechanical robot.<sup>14</sup> The notion was introduced in feminist scholarship by Donna Haraway (1985) as a posthumanist concept for "fractured" identity in her agenda-setting "Cyborg Manifesto" (the essay that inspired Gucci's designer Michele in 2018). The entanglement of the biological and the technological, of "man and machine," is in itself not new, but the sheer expansion and all-pervasiveness of that entanglement and the ever-accelerating speed at which the two have been merging in the past decades is quite staggering.<sup>15</sup>

The cyborg has been hailed as a posthumanist configuration in its hybridity between human flesh and metal or digital material, and in its wavering between mind and matter.<sup>16</sup> In popular culture, the cyborg has become a friendly figure, after the more evil robots or disturbing androids of earlier science fiction stories. This is in tune with our times where we have come to love the technology that surrounds us: from the hot shower and strong espresso in the morning, to the metallic sheen of our car, or the smooth surface of our mobile phones. We stroke our technological gadgets—in fact, we need to stroke them in order to make them work. Technology is no longer the scary "other," but our friend, and in some sci-fi stories even our lover.<sup>17</sup> Contemporary fashion reflects this friendly relationship, for example in the metallic fashion that became *en vogue* in 2017. Metallic is both cool and sexy while not necessarily smooth because Comme des Garçons still created its lumps and bumps, but now in shimmering silver (A/W 2017). Metallic fashion is hardly a new trend, harking back to the cool "space race" of the 1960s, as can be seen in Paco Rabanne's collection of A/W 2018 in which designer Julien Dossena revisited the brand's iconic chainmail dresses of the 60's.

Technology not only inspires a certain aesthetic, but is also intricately bound up in the designing and making of fashion. Old and new technologies play a pivotal role: from age-old techniques like spinning and weaving; to factories on an industrial scale for cut, make, trim (CMT); to the role of computers today, for computer-aided design (CAD), 3D printers, and wearables; to virtual fitting and shopping in the near future.

As one of the pioneers of 3D printing, the Dutch designer Iris van Herpen is an example of the indispensable role that technology plays in contemporary fashion.<sup>18</sup> Her technologically



informed fashion designs feature fractal folds and striking shapes, 3D printed in parametric patterns on extremely thin acrylic tulle or organza that is computationally distorted, foam-lifted, laser-cut, and heat-bonded. Yet, she always combines the latest technologies with manual craftsmanship. Her designs often find inspiration in a natural phenomenon, using cutting-edge technologies to catch immaterial processes like dreams, sound waves or magnetic fields, or organic forms like waves of water, wisps of smoke, a spider web, or butterfly wing, in the smart materials of 3D-printed dresses. Morphing art, fashion, and technology Iris van Herpen has developed a posthuman style of in-between-ness, creating encounters between craftsmanship and technology, between the organic and inorganic, and between materiality and immateriality.

### A posthuman critique

One of the dangers of a posthuman, or cyborg, imaginary has been the privileging of the digital over the material. The techno-optimism of cyberculture and of certain roboticists and futurologists embraced the AI promise of downloading the human mind into a computer (e.g. Hans Moravec, Marvin Minsky, or Raymond Kurzweil).<sup>19</sup> This fantasy led to a celebration of disembodiment and immateriality that resulted in a veritable “flight from the flesh.”<sup>20</sup> Such fabricated claims point to disdain and denial of the human body and subjectivity, which is problematic in itself but also quite unproductive for the field of fashion. Moreover, as Hayles reminds us, the glib analogy between the structure of the brain and the computer is fundamentally metaphorical, sustaining a false binary opposition between mind and body.<sup>21</sup> Clarke and Rossini argue that such “vestiges of heroic aspirations ... preserve rather than challenge the Cartesian mind-body split.”<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, a critical posthumanism undoes and complexifies the mind-body relationship.

This is why I propose to firmly place posthumanism within the theoretical framework of new materialism. New materialism abides by the notion that things, objects, art, fashion, and people are made of matter, that is to say they are all mixtures of mineral, vegetable, and synthetic materials.<sup>23</sup> The posthuman subject cannot be deprived of her flesh, but needs to be grounded in materiality: s/he is an “embodied and embedded posthuman subject in process.”<sup>24</sup> “Embodied” because humans have bodies—and any fashion scholar would add, a “dressed body”;<sup>25</sup> “embedded” because we live located in space and time; “in process” because the posthuman subject is in the process of becoming, always within an entanglement of things both human and non-human.

What posthumanism and new materialism share is their endeavor to rethink and undo dualisms.<sup>26</sup> A dualistic or binary mode of thinking is a way of dealing with difference by creating an opposition or dualism out of it, for instance between the human and the non-human, nature and culture, the material and the immaterial, or men and women. Poststructuralist critique showed that such binary oppositions are not neutral but hierarchical: one pole of the binary (e.g. man) is considered superior to the other (e.g. woman). Reversing the order won’t change anything, because the underlying binary structure remains intact. Deconstruction meant instead to “destruct, destabilize, displace an opposition” and construct a new meaning while relocating power.<sup>27</sup>

The deconstruction of binary oppositions gets “intensified” in new materialism.<sup>28</sup> Posthuman thought takes it further by arguing that the two terms, such as nature and culture, are always and already mutually involved and messily entangled.<sup>29</sup> In other words, nature-culture is a continuum rather than an absolute opposition, which means that the human–non-human can also be positioned on a continuum. Because the term *nature-culture* is heavily

sexualized, genderized, and racialized, displacement entails the undoing of a number of established binary oppositions.

Gender is particularly meaningful for fashion, as styles of clothing and dressing are historically, perhaps even universally, different for men and women. It is, therefore, no coincidence that with the advent of the second women's movement and the gay liberation movement in the 1960s, the differences between men's and women's clothing started to minimize, undoing the traditional gender binary. The hippie movement endorsed "unisex" clothing in the 1960s; career women adopted a masculine look in the 1980s; and "gender benders" abounded in pop culture in the 1980s and 1990s: from Grace Jones, Annie Lennox, or Madonna to David Bowie, Boy George, Prince, or Michael Jackson. The play with androgyny was on. Gender bending was a product of the fundamentally ambiguous culture of postmodernism that played with the fixed meanings of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler's seminal work on gender performativity (1990) laid the conceptual groundwork to question the very categories of gender and denaturalize the discourse of the human body.<sup>30</sup>

While gender ambiguity is then not a new phenomenon in itself, gender fluidity has become much more normalized in fashion today. Take for example Saskia de Brauw modeling for Yves Saint Laurent's men's campaign in 2012. Or look at Gigi Hadid and Zayn Malik dressed in the same brown suit for the cover photo of *Vogue* (August 2017). While women have adopted elements of male clothing in their daily wear, most notably pants, still very few men have incorporated skirts or dresses in their wardrobes despite the exceptional designs by Jean-Paul Gaultier, Marc Jacobs, or J.W. Anderson. Gender fluidity has also become more visible with the breakthrough of transgender models like Andreja Pejić, Valentina Sampaio, or Anjali Lama to name just a few.

Posthuman fashion can be said to push the boundaries further in blurring not only gender categories, but also transversally mixing them up with categories of the non-human like the animal or the machine. The eccentric designs by Belgian designer Walter van Beirendonck or German designer Bernhard Willhelm (together with Jutta Kraus), for example, have transformed bodily shapes and transgressed codes of decency. Van Beirendonck is known for his explicit sexuality, donning his male models with dangling penises on clothes or with a penis hat. His fascination for non-humans, from animals to extra-terrestrials, led to outrageous designs with masks, plastic prosthetics, or inflatable clothing.<sup>31</sup> Bernhard Willhelm's designs are equally crazy, colorful, and hilarious. This is posthuman fashion because both designers not only challenge gender roles, but also queer the human form, sometimes beyond recognition. In their radical take on body politics, and their fatigue with the "body beautiful" of the fashion world, their anti-fashion questions the power differences based on gender, sexuality, race, and abledness.<sup>32</sup>

Van Beirendonck's and Willhelm's designs point to the transformative process of becoming enabled by posthuman fashion. By reshaping the human body beyond its finite contours, these designs offer an encounter with otherness, opening up to the alien world of insects, birds, or cyborgs, and multiple sexes and genders. Such encounters suggest "that all bodies possess an inherent capacity for transformation," as Stephen Seely puts it.<sup>33</sup> As such, fashion designs provoke a dynamic process of posthuman becomings.

### **A posthuman take on sustainability**

So far I have shown how a posthuman aesthetic decenters the human by hybridization: blending human-animal and human-machine while queering gender and sexuality. Such a respect for diversity is in effect a political process, as Annamari Vänskä argues: "Posthumanist

critique of fashion is therefore essentially an ethical and a political project: it aims to do justice to the complexity of humanity by decentering the human".<sup>34</sup>

Where posthuman critique and new materialism converge, is in their critical engagement with the contemporary world. There is a strong ethical concern for real-life conditions and the need for creative responses to the current challenges.<sup>35</sup> This ethical passion and political critique makes sense because posthumanism claims that we are entangled with the world. That also makes us, humans, "completely responsible to and for the world and all our relations of becoming with it. We cannot ignore matter (e.g., our planet) as if it is inert, passive, and dead. It is completely alive, becoming with us, whether we destroy or protect it".<sup>36</sup> Donna Haraway, too, pleads in *Staying with the Trouble* for "cultivating response-ability" for a damaged earth.<sup>37</sup> She convincingly argues that deep interconnectedness is the only way to defy human exceptionalism, calling for a "practice of becoming-with others for a habitable, flourishing world".<sup>38</sup> For Haraway, the other always includes non-humans, or what she refers to as "companion species" like dogs or monkeys, but we can also think of bacteria, viruses, spiders, synthetic hormones or polymer fibers.

This kind of posthumanist critique is highly welcome and most necessary considering the urgent issue of sustainability. It is by now well documented that the fashion industry excels in textile waste, pollution, and exploitation of human labor and natural resources, due to over-production and over-consumption.<sup>39</sup> The fashion system is caught in a spin of acceleration, characterized by rapid changes in style, ever-faster cycles of global production and consumption, and ever cheaper products.<sup>40</sup> Scholars in fashion studies have highlighted the urgent need to engage systematically with the social and environmental consequences of the globalized fast-fashion system.<sup>41</sup>

The problems are huge and many solutions are being developed in many different countries in the direction of a circular economy. Solutions range widely in a fast-growing field: from developing alternative yarns and fabrics, for example out of hemp, orange peel, or pineapple skin; to different ways of recycling textiles and clothes; to technological innovations like smart fabrics or solar dresses; to creating new business models towards circularity. Yet, compared to other fields (such as the slow food movement), the development of sustainable fashion has been lagging behind or remains stuck in local, isolated, fragmented, or partial solutions for fashion design and production.

A posthuman perspective may help advance the field of fashion because it takes critically the entanglement of the human and non-human. Sustainable fashion not only pertains to the material production of sustainable fibers, textiles and clothes and the disposal of waste, but also to a capitalist industry grounded in social-economic realities in a global context. As consumerism is at the heart of the fast-fashion system, matters of identity play an important part. The desire for constant change and renewal<sup>42</sup> keeps production and consumption of fashion in an iron grip. Posthumanism brings into focus those several levels within the field of fashion, as a material, but also as a social and cultural practice. The field of fashion thus does not only involve complicated chains of material production and consumption, but also pertains to immaterial issues of body images, subjective identity, social interaction, and cultural values.<sup>43</sup>

Neither the practice of, nor the scholarship on, sustainable fashion has seriously considered the interaction between the human and non-human factors of the fashion system. The close connection between fashion and identity is responsible for over-consumption, which in turn is crucial to the wasteful economy. Recognizing the embedded and embodied dimension of fashion may help acknowledge the agency of consumers, doing justice to their active role of engagement. A posthumanist perspective can bring these practices – materials, objects, bodies and identities, and labor – together, because it departs from a dynamic notion of life in which

human bodies, fibers, fabrics, garments, and technologies are inextricably entangled. Such a perspective helps understand fashion as materially co-produced in an intricate network of interconnected human and non-human actors.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how posthuman fashion highlights new processes of human becoming by stressing the dynamic interaction between human and non-human actors. By proposing a non-anthropocentric view to the field, posthuman theory will help to understand fashion as made up of complex and intensive assemblages where humans, animals and cyborgs interrelate. It is a grounded theory that takes the embodiment and embeddedness of dressed bodies into account. Posthumanism is in a strong position to bridge practice and theory, because it takes personal issues of identity together with wider matters of social relations and ecological sustainability. By revealing the deep interconnectedness of those aspects, a posthumanist perspective may give direction to the desired change and transformation towards sustainable fashion.

## Notes

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## PART II

# Fashion practices: from the museum to the workplace and beyond

Fashion practices take on a material form within the context of organizations. This materiality may take on predictable forms or it may move in unforeseen directions. A balanced form in relation to the body can emerge from the vision of a designer who wishes to empower the wearer with more creative choices in fashion, or it may break away from predictable models.

In order to reflect on the present and future avenues of fashion curating as a discipline, Karen Van Godtsenhoven, who is herself a practitioner, looks at the kaleidoscopic range of theoretical disciplinary lenses at play in twenty-first-century fashion exhibitions, based on three use cases of exhibitions pairs, in which the author was either closely involved, or which were organized by the institutions she worked for, The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Antwerp Fashion Museum. Comparing six fashion exhibitions of different scales at different locations, her chapter aims to look at these exhibitions using three analytical lenses. She begins by looking at the curatorial mode of the practice of fashion exhibition-making in the twenty-first century, authorial or collaborative, and the range of academic disciplines used next to the traditional field of fashion history: sociology, literary and semiotic studies, cultural studies, architecture and design studies, new materialism, gender and queer studies, film studies, art history, psychology, biography, decolonization studies. Apart from this “cultural turn” in fashion curation, broader trends in new museology, such as the concept of the design-as-medium, the museum space as a heterotopia and affect theory are used as analytical lenses. Finally, the concept of the traveling exhibition and its self-referentiality or meta-curatorial practices are discussed where applicable.

Sustainability in fashion has often been approached with caution, leading many to question the practical application of a responsible system within the second most polluting industry in the world. Alana M. James explores how the emergence of a human-centric approach to design education can help adapt the current fashion curricula to focus on sustainability. A series of complex challenges currently face the integration of these responsible ideals within the value chain, with practitioners, educators, and students needing to work collectively to ensure the fashion industry is “future proof.”

Paola Bertola and Chiara Colombi consider the prevalent pedagogy in fashion design education arguing for the inclusion of new subjects such as high tech, big data, and the circular economy. This chapter offers a theoretical and reflective contribution to the debate on fashion education presenting the sectoral references for a renewed fashion design education but also

discussing the changed and changing educational context that today pushes fashion design education in overcoming its craft-centered and self-referential focus and becoming less peripheral within the design scientific debate. They argue that factors such as the complexity of contemporary globalized markets, accelerated technological innovation, and the multifaceted nature of networked social communities require a quicker speed in renewing educational content, as well as the acknowledgment that lifelong learning is now essential for sustainable competitiveness, social inclusion, and active citizenship. The authors analyze a series of challenges that pressure fashion in re-evaluating its own ontology and as a consequence, the ways of informing the fashion education system.

Eva Iszoro Zak and Julian Roberts consider the creative role of pattern cutting accidents in the fashion design process. They contrast the open-ended process and the direct physical connection and how that departs from the design experience which is reliant on technology. Garment construction methods which use abstraction and abstract, random or accidental tools within the design process, enable the generation of speculative end results, focused on expanding, rather than merely reaching, known outcomes. Iszoro Zak and Roberts offer two examples of experimental design and pattern cutting methodologies which apply modes of abstraction. Therefore, the analysis of differences and similarities between both methods is carried out, taking into account the different approaches, definitions, and meanings of the concepts presented, which play a fundamental role in both methodological approaches.

Fiona Hackney, Katie Hill, Clare Saunders, and Joanie Willett address fashion, imagination, and the practice of sustainability and ethics in an interdisciplinary investigation of how reactive activities might shape a “sensibility for sustainability” in relation to clothing to bring about pro-environmental behavioral change. The study draws on the everyday lives of individuals and communities suggesting that, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we might employ quiet activism as a mode of active care in relation to our clothing choices and the world beyond our wardrobes. The project works with communities to co-produce knowledge through “hands on” making, a creative intervention in the fashion system that recognizes that fashion industries, cultures, and imaginaries are multi-faceted and complex with significant personal (i.e. emotional) social and environmental implications. This chapter focuses on one of the S4S research methods, The Wardrobe Audit, to argue that being conscious of our relationship with clothing, alongside such participatory practices as upcycling, repurposing, and creative repair, is an important tool for generating a sensibility of sustainable clothing, and therefore for informing policy on behavioral change.

Since prehistory, human cognitive skills have developed to enable them to produce clothing, ornaments, and accessories. Barbara Faedda writes about the development of a rich set of tools, processes, and technologies for weaving, embroidery, pleating, bleaching, dyeing, cutting, sewing, and spinning. Currently, high-end fashion is typically characterized by handmade garments and advanced manufacturing practices along with complex technologies, and today’s designers are eager to explore further and find new solutions in their creative process, and to introduce more interaction with scientific innovation. In May 2016, at the Met Gala, a model wore a “Cognitive Dress” developed by IBM Watson in collaboration with the fashion house Marchesa. Each rose stitched on the dress contained an LED light which changed colors based on the emotions communicated by the public, in real time, via Twitter. Interactive surfaces, conductive yarns, and connected clothes are the outcome of another recent initiative by Google, Project Jacquard. In partnership with the iconic jeans brand Levi’s, Jacquard technology was used to produce the Levi’s Commuter Trucker Jacket, a “smart-jacket” that connects wirelessly with an iOS or Android phone in order to perform several functions while biking, driving, or simply walking. Today, Iris van Herpen is one of the leading names in the

world of fashion-applicable technology. Her “New Couture” line is the outcome of experimenting with new materials, shapes and tailoring methods. Van Herpen’s aesthetic philosophy combines traditional manufacturing with the most advanced technologies. She began producing her first 3D-printed dresses in 2009. New high technological tools applied to fashion – combined with those developed since prehistory – affect its creative and artistic process, as well as the personal and collective experience with clothing. Smart fabrics, wearable tech, or 3D clothes all change human perception and emotions, and modify the interaction between the “dressed body” and the world.

Both Melinda Byam and Aude Le Guennec consider the often-neglected area of children’s fashion within childhood and fashion studies. They discuss ways in which the voices of children can be incorporated into the design process through education and industry initiatives which take into consideration sustainability and ethical concerns. Byam looks at how the intersection between children’s fashion, early childhood education practices, and discourses on sustainability and ethical labor practices help contribute a new perspective that calls for a comprehensive change within the industry and insight into the norms associated with consumer behavior. Through an analysis of the “caring-about” relationship, and a discussion on the notion of craft, the author centers the child within the discourse as a potential change-maker. The author argues that the focus of change should be on the child as they develop their sense of self through early-childhood education practices such as those of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Malaguzzi, which are imbedded with themes common to this discourse. These education practices can be used to shift the culture of consumption around fashion to be one that includes the concept of caring about people and things as these children develop into adulthood. Le Guennec focuses on the importance of reshaping children’s position in society and valuing their voice by bringing attention to the importance of the daily interactions between children and their clothing. This area of research remains marginal in childhood studies, fashion history, and fashion design, despite the importance of this market in contemporary society. Based on an original anthropological methodology aimed at interpreting the material culture to inform the society, this investigation in the past and present of children’s fashion highlights the role of clothing in the socialization of children. Opportunities, methods, and potential limitation for the fashion industry to undertake a renewed approach of a more inclusive and responsible childrenswear, influencing children’s socialization, and emphasizing the specificities of the creative process are suggested. Moving away from the conception of children’s fashion as a miniaturization of adult’s dress code, and tying the changes in scholarship with the needed evolution of the apparel, this research establishes how childrenswear can reinvent itself thanks to a new model where children are included as users as well as co-creators of the story that they tell. Le Guennec explores the socialization process whereby children develop an awareness of fashion and use it to achieve various ends.





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# AFFECT, HAPTICS, AND HETEROTOPIA IN FASHION CURATION

*Karen Van Godtsenhoven*

## Introduction

This chapter sets out to survey the status of fashion curation at the close of the second decade of the twenty-first century, in the context of recent transformations the field of fashion studies and fashion curation, through three analytical lenses.

Firstly, by looking at the various academic disciplines at the heart of fashion exhibitions and secondly, by examining the curatorial modes used. Thirdly, by analyzing the notion of the exhibition design as a medium in its own right as it emerged from the museum studies field since the late 1960s.<sup>1</sup> In order to illustrate these concepts, this chapter presents three case studies, each exploring a pair of two exhibitions at institutions for which I have worked: three shows presented at The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (*Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, *Camp: Notes on Fashion*, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*) and three shows presented at the Antwerp Fashion Museum MoMu (*Mme Grès: Sculptural Fashion*, *Rik Wouters & the Private Utopia*, and *Olivier Theyskens: She Walks in Beauty*).

As a curator involved in four of these six exhibitions,<sup>2</sup> I worked on theoretical research, object selection, editorial content, and conceptual design development, together with my respective colleagues. Whereas MoMu is a dedicated fashion museum which hosts only fashion exhibitions, The Costume Institute is a dedicated fashion department within the larger context of an encyclopedic museum with seventeen art departments. Both institutions organize fashion exhibitions which can be compared conceptually, even though the scale and local context varies greatly. Ingrid Mida writes in her analysis of exhibitions staged at both institutions that “these exhibitions are conceptually based and share characteristics of art installations that privilege affect and emotive response rather than pedagogy.”<sup>3</sup> The chosen exhibitions will be surveyed using the three analytical lenses described previously, in order to detect new patterns and forge new horizons for the field of fashion curation.

Over 20 years after the conference which marked the “deep disjuncture” between fashion curators coming out of the field of costume scholars (“object-based curators”) and those from the field of cultural studies,<sup>4</sup> the field of fashion curation has integrated several disciplines which act as added critical and interpretative layers to the field of costume studies: sociology, art history, literary studies, philosophy, cultural studies, architecture and design studies, new materialism, queer studies, film studies, psychoanalysis, biographical, and decolonization studies.

This “cultural turn” in fashion curating strategies indicates, according to Loscialpo, “the emergence of approaches emphasizing the cultural relevance of dress on display, exploring fashion within the museum not only in its materiality or historicity but as a complex cultural phenomenon.”<sup>5</sup> Advocating for a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, Maria Luisa Frisa suggested that fashion curating is the “exercise of a critical gaze, which recognizes the multiple traces, symptoms and fragments that are around us.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Frisa argues that the way in which an exhibition develops “borrows techniques from art and film, like montage and assemblage.”<sup>7</sup> Combined with the rise in attendance and popularity of fashion exhibitions, these developments have also led to the “emergence of a ‘new fashion curator’ or exhibition maker, which mirrors similar and earlier changes within art curating, such as the advent of the ‘curator-as-auteur.’”<sup>8</sup> While the authorial attitude refers to the act of curating as a mode of authorship, the collaborative approach “expresses a dialogical understanding of exhibition making and of the exhibition as an ongoing process.”<sup>9</sup> This article will look at the curatorial modes of each exhibition, authorial and collaborative, as well as the combination of the two.

As a third point of analysis, this article will look at exhibition design as a medium in and of itself, and which has gained importance in fashion exhibitions as a hermeneutical device, a sort of midwife, even, which connects the visitor to the narrative, the objects and relates the objects between themselves. The exhibition design offers a way for the visitor to experience affect, in a so-called “immersive environment.” The analyses of the exhibition designs will be led by Loscialpo’s argument about Foucault’s concept of heterotopia,<sup>10</sup> in which the “exhibition can be a space of difference (...) in which objects are presented in their difference from the conceptual orders in which they would normally be understood.”<sup>11</sup>

This approach to the exhibition design is concomitant with the cultural turn of fashion curation strategies, since it leads us away from “objects and collections [as well as chronological preoccupations] and towards difference.”<sup>12</sup> The museum is a “space of representation,”<sup>13</sup> it displays the difference existing between ‘things’ and the cultural, conceptual systems for understanding and interpreting them.”<sup>14</sup> In the heterotopic space of the museum, we start to see a “network of relationships”<sup>15</sup> between visitors and exhibits, which acquire new meanings by acting upon each other.

The affective quality of the exhibition design is its potential to cause affective responses in the visitor: pre-conscious, embodied reactions which come before any intellectual “grasping” of meaning or interpretation of objects in the exhibition. Fashion objects are usually prohibited from being touched in the context of an exhibition; hence, it is particularly hard to convey sensorial or haptic qualities to the visitor. Laura Marks has introduced a helpful method for an affective analysis based on “haptic visuality,” which prioritizes the researcher’s physical reactions to the object over the use of interpretative, mental faculties.<sup>16</sup>

In fashion exhibitions, through the possibility of identification with the mannequin’s body, the visitor can become an active participant, like an actor in a performance. The use of affect, performance, and cinematic qualities in exhibition design demonstrate the curatorial “awareness of the competition between the museum and the entertainment industry,”<sup>17</sup> according to Peter Vergo’s definition of new museology, most pertinently so in *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*.

### ***Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination (2018) and Mme Grès: Sculptural Fashion (2012)***

The Costume Institute’s 2018 Spring exhibition, *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* (Figure 7.1), curated by Andrew Bolton, assisted by Mellissa Huber, in collaboration



Figure 7.1 Installation view of *Heavenly Bodies* at the Met Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018

with four curators<sup>18</sup> from the Met's Medieval Art Department, was conceived of as a catholic pilgrimage spread over two locations: The Met Fifth Avenue and The Met Cloisters, a composite of reconstructed French and Spanish medieval cloisters brought to Northern Manhattan in the 1930s. The exhibition's central concept, "the Catholic imagination," was based on the idea that Catholic paraphernalia are "mere hints of a deeper religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation."<sup>19</sup> Hence, material splendor works on a metaphorical level as an entry point for the human imagination in order to access the great mystery. This concept engendered a dialogue between religious architecture, religious medieval artworks, and garments, both worldly and from the Vatican's treasury. The medieval art of storytelling was mirrored in the sequential order of the spaces, which acted as dramatic backdrops for the objects. Curator Andrew Bolton stated: "Imbued with profound religious meanings, these works in wood, stone, gold, ivory, and enamel resonate with their fashionable counterparts in silk, lace, satin, organza, and brocade through their metaphorical underpinnings, establishing an elemental principle of consonance."<sup>20</sup>

In a reverse Dantesque motion, the visitor's "pilgrim's journey" started downstairs at the Anna Wintour Costume Center, with pontifical vestments from the sacristy of the Sistine Chapel. From there, it went upstairs to the galleries of Byzantine Art, where the glittering tesserae of Byzantine mosaics were reflected in golden-hued garments by Dolce and Gabbana, based on the mosaics of the Cathedral of Monreale in Sicily, and by Gianni Versace, inspired by the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.

In the main space, the Medieval Sculpture Hall, a cinematic moment introduced the display. The iconic, satirical scene from Fellini's *Roma* (1972) featuring an ecclesiastical fashion show, underscored the structural similarity between fashion shows and liturgical processions: "Both generally follow an orderly, predetermined arrangement; involve participants both active (models/the clergy) and passive (guests/the laity); and are accompanied by music."<sup>21</sup>

The hall's layout resembled a church interior, with a central nave, and two single aisles. The silhouettes shown followed the hierarchical and gendered distinctions present in the Roman Catholic Church, ranging from terrestrial to celestial and included a black Alexander McQueen for Givenchy ensemble inspired by priests' attire, a scarlet Valentino dress, referring to the cardinal's garb, and a white papal silhouette by John Galliano for Dior.

From these halls full of splendor, the pilgrimage led to the more remote Met Cloisters, which sit atop a hill reached by foot. Here, one saw garments relating to the reflective worlds of religious orders, in an architecture evocative of monastic life. The Saint-Guilhem Cloister, with an arcade of rounded arches with Romanesque carvings, featured an ensemble by the Roman brand Valentino for AW 2015-16, which paid homage to the arches of the Colosseum with a motif of silk velvet pieced into double-faced cashmere. The mirroring of the stone arches in the fabric of the cape was an example of the principle of consonance for the visitor to detect.

The Fuentidueña chapel focused on the altar, where mass is celebrated, including those for the sacrament of matrimony. A striking masterpiece, the three-seam wedding dress by Balenciaga, recalled the cone-shaped gowns worn by statues of the Virgin. In this space, the affective qualities of the exhibition design were possibly at their highest: a dramatic Gothic skylight cast a large window outline on the silhouette, which in turn cast a beautiful, precise shadow on the floor. This chiaroscuro effect was underscored by a moving rendition of Schubert's *Ave Maria* (1825) by Barbara Bonney. Without any knowledge of Catholic rites or Balenciaga's technical mastery, the visitor could physically sense, upon entering, a hint of the Sublime, through the interaction of sound, light, and the placement of the objects in the space.

The final room, the Late Gothic Hall, featured silhouettes designed by Alexander McQueen, whose romantic sensibility saw him using Gothic and religious elements in color schemes echoing the Early Netherlandish painters that surrounded the silhouettes.

The disciplinary lenses used for this exhibition were art historical, architectural, theological and literary sciences, creating a metaphorical dialogue between artworks, which stood for the divine presence on earth. In terms of the curatorial mode, *Heavenly Bodies* can be considered as an 'authorial' exhibition, whereby the strong voice of the curator creates a unified curatorial narrative. However, the process was also collaborative: *Heavenly Bodies* was an 'invasion' of the Medieval Department's gallery spaces by The Costume Institute, and a collaboration with curators from the Medieval Department, as well as some of the Vatican's highest officials. The guiding structure of the exhibition design, created by the interdisciplinary architecture firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R), also added to the collaborative nature of this large-scale project. One could consider *Heavenly Bodies* as an example of a heterotopia to the second degree: firstly, by its nature of being set in the heterotopic space of the museum, and secondly, because this museological space is in itself a reconstruction of French cloisters/ a medieval church, hence the two degrees of difference. The physical journey across galleries and different

locations, evoked affective responses in the visitor: after the climb up the hill to the Met Cloisters, one was welcomed by auditive harmonies, dramatic lighting effects, and an olfactory feast of herbs and flowers in the garden which all worked towards a holistic sensorial experience.

The exhibition *Mme Grès: La Couture à l'œuvre* was curated by Olivier Saillard, in collaboration with Alexandre Samson and Laurent Cotta, and first shown as an extra muros project of the Musée de la Mode – Palais Galliera at the Musée Antoine Bourdelle in Paris in 2011. The show was reiterated at MoMu as *Mme Grès: Sculptural Fashion* (Figure 7.2), with the same curators and co-curated by me, in 2012. The main difference between the two shows were the addition, in the second iteration, of contemporary designers like Yohji Yamamoto, Jean Paul Gaultier, AF Vandevorst, Helmut Lang, and Haider Ackermann, showing the long shadow of influence cast by Mme Grès' oeuvre. In Antwerp, Mme Grès' timeless minimalism and exacting modernity were accentuated by a focus on her daywear, in addition to the classical evening gowns. Both exhibitions unfolded around a conceptual dialogue between the garments and the surrounding architecture and sculptures: focusing on elements of either classical antiquity or modernity, on craftsmanship and material, the visitor was invited to view, by means of a "haptic visuality," how the folds in the fabric and the drapes in the plaster casts, flowed into one another in a process of mutual becoming.

The Musée Antoine Bourdelle, which opened in 1949, is a conglomerate building built around the original nineteenth-century studio of sculptor Antoine Bourdelle (1861–1929). In 1961, the imposing neo-Classical Great Hall was added for the centenary of the artist's birth, housing mostly large plaster models. The architecture of the Great Hall fitted "the artist who conceives everything as a monument. There is nothing more beautiful than the energy of the builder."<sup>22</sup> In the same way, Mme Grès' couture salon engendered awe in the visitor: "There



Figure 7.2 Installation view of *Mme Grès: Sculptural Fashion*, MoMu Antwerp, 2012

was only a large salon with white and ivory decoration bathed in silence and in a muffled light, which simultaneously evoked the Olympus and a monastery.”<sup>23</sup> In the Great Hall, a few of Grès’ classical gowns stood for the Sublime, through their link with the towering works referring to Antiquity. This introduction evoked the notion of Mme Grès who saw herself as a sculptor with fabric: “I would have liked to be a sculptor, working with stone or textile is the same to me.”<sup>24</sup>

The Bourdelle Museum’s Great Hall is connected by a corridor to the artist’s studios, where singular Grès gowns acted as colorful, fluid *Fremdkörper* accompanying the central plaster study, the Dying Centaur (1911-14). Zenithal northern light created a striking cinematic effect, adding bold light accents and contrasting shadows. A vivid presence of two masters could be felt, imbuing the space with a sense of the Sublime. The studio then opened onto the sculpture gardens, containing Bourdelle’s most famous bronze statues. From there, the visitor descended into the contemporary, minimalist wing of the museum, added in 1992, where more Grès silhouettes dotted the permanent collection.

For the iteration of the Mme Grès exhibition at MoMu, a nineteenth-century warehouse building turned into a contemporary museum by architect Marie-Josée Van Hee in 2001, the concept of the Musée Bourdelle could not be repeated, since its architecture, gardens, and sculpture installations are all site-specific. Instead, the curators chose to invite a Belgian sculptor, Renato Nicolodi, to create, in collaboration with set designer Bob Verhelst, monumental elements that would channel Mme Grès’ aura and the Musée Bourdelle’s architecture and atmosphere. Nicolodi, originally trained as a painter, created black plinths, staircases, pillars, and arcades which echoed monumental architecture, the type of archetypical architecture ingrained in our collective memory, dating to Antiquity, the Pyramids, the Renaissance, and the neo-Classicism typical of 1930s Nazi architecture. His concrete sculptures were featured in the middle of the exhibition, elucidating and unifying the presence of the separate monumental elements in between the silhouettes of Mme Grès, scattered like remains of a bygone civilization.<sup>25</sup>

Like *Heavenly Bodies*, the iteration of the *Mme Grès* exhibition at MoMu is an example of a heterotopic space to the second degree. The MoMu exhibition referred to and differed from the original Mme Grès exhibition at the Bourdelle museum, which was in itself a heterotopic space, a mix of the original artist’s studio and newly built additions. In the MoMu version, the exhibition included a second level of metaphor, as the museum space acted as a proxy for the Bourdelle museum space: the exhibition had become self-referential.

In terms of curatorial mode, *Mme Grès: La Couture à l’Oeuvre* can be considered as authorial, using the theoretical lenses of fashion history, art history, and architectural studies.

Compared to the authorial mode of the Paris exhibition, the Antwerp iteration was created more collaboratively, through a collaboration between curators of two institutions, and the introduction of new commissioned work by a contemporary artist/sculptor guiding the exhibition design.

### ***Camp: Notes on Fashion (2019) and Rik Wouters & the Private Utopia (2016)***

The Costume Institute’s Spring 2019 show, *Camp: Notes on Fashion*, (Figure 7.3) was co-curated by Andrew Bolton and myself, assisted by Amanda Garfinkel. The exhibition traced fashion’s camp sensibility through an art historical and literary lens, combined with voices from cultural studies and queer studies, centering on Susan Sontag’s 1964 essay “Notes on Camp.”

*Rik Wouters & the Private Utopia* (Figure 7.4) at MoMu was curated by myself in collaboration with Herwig Todts of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp (KMSKA). It was a



Figure 7.3 Installation view of *Camp: Notes On Fashion*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019



Figure 7.4 Installation view of "Dirk Van Saene" in *Rik Wouters & The Private Utopia*, MoMu Antwerp, 2016



thematic exhibition about slow fashion through the lens of philosophy (Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, 1854) and art (the works of neo-Impressionist and fauvist Rik Wouters).

*Camp: Notes on Fashion* exhibition was organized in two parts, the first part was conceived as a hermeneutical and literary journey through Western art history, tracing the origins of the word "camp" through different manuscripts, displayed in "peephole" vitrines in the wall, giving the visitor a feeling of complicity as she tiptoed through these narrow galleries. These manuscripts illustrated the different etymological origins of the word "camp," in order to lay out a grammar of the camp sensibility, culminating into a room dedicated to Susan Sontag's seminal essay "Notes on Camp" of 1964. The second part of the exhibition, "the camp eye," celebrated the expressions of the camp sensibility in silhouettes, demonstrating that fashion "is one of the most enduring conduits of the camp sensibility."<sup>26</sup> Since camp lies in the eye of the beholder, the visitor was invited in this part to discover the camp qualities of the very different types of silhouettes in the room.

In the first part, the choice of objects, in consonance with the exhibition design, let the visitor participate in a conspiratorial performance. Upon entering, the visitor saw Tacca's Antinous statue, embodying perfect male beauty (the "Beau Ideal") in a contrapposto stance, also known as the "teapot" pose. In a direct eyeline to the next gallery, Antinous' contrapposto was linked to the regal pose of Louis XIV in the portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud. This way, the exhibition design linked two "camp Edens," Greek Antiquity, and Versailles through a performative gesture, the "camp pose."

The adjacent Versailles gallery was titled "Camp, (v.)," for the verb "se camper," to flaunt or to posture, illustrated by Molière's 1671 play *The Impostures of Scapin*, which contains the first usage of "se camper." The crooked pose connects Scapin with the regal pose of Louis XIV as well as with the effeminate stance of his brother Monsieur and the transgender "pose" of the Chevalier d' Eon, all in one gallery. Silhouettes by Karl Lagerfeld and Jean Paul Gaultier dedicated to the camp heroes of Versailles accentuated the space.

Next, the Victorian cross-dressing "sisters," Fanny and Stella, illustrated the gallery for Camp, (adj.). A letter in which they describe their "campish undertakings" served as the central manuscript, accompanied by an installation with androgynous mannequins re-enacting the Victorian photographs of the pair. This installation was a very popular spot for taking selfies, where visitors imitated the camp poses of the queer heroines.

The next gallery, titled "Camp (n.)," was dedicated to Oscar Wilde, the personification of the "camp as type" which appeared in Victorian England.<sup>27</sup> A large painted portrait of Wilde in contrapposto stance, wearing a frock coat, was accompanied by a dandiacal Gucci silhouette by Alessandro Michele, an Yves Saint Laurent silhouette with velvet breeches and slippers, and a sweeping caped silhouette by Alexander McQueen featuring peacock feathers in gold bullion embroidery. Several of Wilde's manuscripts were on display, from *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* to *De Profundis*. From there, one meandered into the central "Sontagian room," which featured Sontag's own typewritten essay, "Notes on Camp," animated as a rolling block of LED-text at the top, accompanied by the sound of typewriting, giving the impression one was listening in on her study. Here, quotes from her essay were paired with art objects from across the Met's collection, exemplifying camp as a democratic aesthetic that promoted "the equivalence of all objects."<sup>28</sup>

Transitioning into the open space of the second part, one moved through a circular room focused on the phenomenon of voguing, a dance form characterized by the striking of iconic "Vogue" model poses which evolved out of Harlem's queer ballroom scene since the 1960s.

While the first section of the exhibition functioned as a series of whispering galleries, the second "out" part presented a discursive echo chamber with a "cacophony" of voices speaking

about camp. The quotes about camp, spoken by fashion designers, came from cultural theorists and were repeated in writing with the silhouettes. They also served as section headings, for example, the historical pastiches of John Galiano and Vivienne Westwood were grouped under the section “Camp is historicism viewed histrionically.” Other sections included “camp is a second childhood” and “camp is gender with / without genitals.” The auditive cacophony was interrupted every couple of minutes by Judy Garland’s heart-wrenching, final version of “Over the Rainbow,” giving the joyful atmosphere a melodramatic, camp twist.

Whereas on the semiotic level, the exhibition was structured around literary texts and art historical signs, the experiential exhibition design itself played a significant performative role in conveying the camp sensibility to the visitor: its use of different media, visual, and auditive cues (the repeated contrapposto stance) underscored the performative aspect of the verb “camping.” This way, both the mental and physical faculties of the audience were stimulated in an immersive, heterotopic environment.

The curatorial mode of the exhibition was collaborative, as the curators worked very closely together with exhibition designer Jan Versweyveld, and scholar Fabio Cleto, in order to shape the complex sensibility into an accessible exhibition format, with enough liberty for the visitor to create their own reading or performance.

*Rik Wouters & the Private Utopia* took the text *Walden* (1854) by transcendentalist philosopher Henry David Thoreau about self-reliance and life amidst nature as a guiding essay for the themes in the show which illustrated different aspects of slow, artisanal fashion. At the heart of the exhibition’s design concept lay a Heideggerian worldview which does not distinguish between the mental and the physical. The exhibition brought together paintings, garments, drawings, sculpture, and installation work in a serendipitous, holistic dialogue.

The exhibition was organized at MoMu in order to celebrate the centennial of the passing of Belgian painter and sculptor Rik Wouters (1882–1916), whilst the Fine Arts Museum’s premises were closed for renovation. Wouters’ colorful work, situated in the Brabant Fauvist movement, celebrated the modest, domestic life and intimacy he had with his wife Nel, their “private utopia,” characterized by a bohemian mentality. The exhibition’s temporal narrative was organized according to the hours of the day: the journey started with an installation by Atelier E.B. (artists Lucy McKenzie and Beca Lipscombe), who created a teenage bedroom dotted with posters of Rik Wouters exhibitions. It progressed to intimate tableaus of bathing and hair combing into the kitchen with still lifes of food by Rik Wouters and James Ensor, accompanied by Dirk Van Saene silhouettes made of kitchen cloth and his earthenware porcelain. From the kitchen it went to the study, with Walter Van Beirendonck’s childrenswear accompanying Wouters’ *The Education*, and then outwards to fields of flowers, accompanied by Bernhard Willhelm’s landscape sweaters and skirts. The show ended with scenes from the painter’s studio and silhouettes made of duvets and blankets. A color palette of green and blue hues on the wall expressed the progression from inside to outside and back inside. Through large openings and interruptions of the glass cases, the visitor felt like a fly on the wall in the different rooms. In the circular central room, a large installation by fashion designer Dirk Van Saene created the impression of a lush private flower garden in the form of a large, tufted carpet based on his painting of his neighbor’s garden with cats and flowers. Sitting on the carpet, one could view an array of rotating silhouettes which gave an overview of Van Saene’s career from 1982–1916. Van Saene often paints on dresses like on a canvas and uses bold, bright color planes much like Van Dongen or indeed, Rik Wouters. Van Saene designs fashion, paints, and is also a ceramicist: all these works were juxtaposed in the exhibition with the sculptural work of Rik Wouters. Other Belgian designers who created installations included Christian Wynants, Bruno Pieters, Veronique Branquinho, Jan-Jan Van Essche, Walter Van Beirendonck, and Marina

Yee. Participating contemporary artists included Atelier E.B., BLESS, Berlinde de Bruyckere, and Ben Sledsens. The work of Maison Martin Margiela and Dries Van Noten was featured in the exhibition as examples of pivotal Belgian designers who reject the ever-new imperative of (fast) fashion. German-Austrian duo Ines Kaag and Desiree Heiss, known as BLESS, chose to inject the exhibition with “infraordinary” objects, as counterpoints to the idea of extraordinary design. Their useless hair comb, for example, a comb from which long hair flows, was an uncanny and surreal object that unsettled the domestic atmosphere of the bathroom in the exhibition. Their exploding chair, installed at the end of the exhibition, looked like a floral “granny sofa,” yet exploded when the visitor would try to sit on it: a pun on today’s home fitness craze. The playfully subversive BLESS objects in the exhibition functioned as actors, *inter-acting* with visitors, as the only objects which were allowed to be touched.

The exhibition was collaborative in different ways: firstly, it was curated by two curators of different institutions (the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp and MoMu), and secondly, most of the fashion designers and artists present in the exhibition were invited to create their own installation. The set design by Bob Verhelst brought together all these different voices in a coherent visual narrative of utopian domesticity, playing with notions of inside and outside by using different color schemes, natural light, and doors and windows.

These two thematic exhibitions could be viewed as immersive experiences in a heterotopic environment, in which the visitor is transported to another time and place. Likewise, the two following designer exhibitions are examples of heterotopic, immersive experiences.

### ***Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty (2011) and Olivier Theyskens: She Walks in Beauty (2017)***

*Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (Figure 7.5) was organized by The Costume Institute in 2011, curated by Andrew Bolton, assisted by Amanda Garfinkel, in collaboration with the deceased designer’s London-based team. The exhibition attracted 661,509 visitors and can be considered a game-changing phenomenon, responsible for the rise of the profile of fashion exhibitions throughout the world, the “artification” of fashion in museums and for the rise of the fashion curator-as-auteur.

The *Olivier Theyskens: She Walks in Beauty* (Figure 7.6) exhibition was co-curated by Lydia Kamitsis and myself, in a collaborative curatorial effort with the designer. The exhibition surveyed the first two decades of the designer’s career and was the last one before MoMu closed for renovations in 2018.

Both of these exhibitions focused on the work of one designer, using different structures: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* had a thematic approach, with several collections per theme, and *Olivier Theyskens: She Walks in Beauty* followed a biographical, chronological structure, with collections grouped per fashion house the designer worked for. Theoretically, the concepts of Romanticism, Beauty, Horror/the Abject, and the Sublime contextualized both designers’ work, characterized by a striving for exalted beauty which does not eschew the darker sides of humanity.

In *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, the immersive set design by Gainsbury and Whiting resembled the spectacle of McQueen’s catwalk shows, creating an unprecedented visitor experience which was like being transported through time and space into the designer’s mind. In the dark, dreamlike exhibition space, McQueen’s collections were grouped in themes referring to Romanticism, e.g. the Romantic Mind, Romantic Gothicism, Romantic Nationalism, Romantic Exoticism, Romantic Primitivism, and Romantic Naturalism. Two collections were presented as a single entity with an immersive set design which reproduced their original



Figure 7.5 Installation view of *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011

catwalk show: *VOSS* (SS 2001) and *Plato's Atlantis* (SS 2010). A special installation, a moving hologram of Kate Moss from the *Widows of Culloden* show (AW 2006), animated the center of the exhibition accompanied by an emotive piece from Schindler's List soundtrack. The exhibition space's heterotopic qualities provoked different affective responses ranging from terror to joy, following the characteristics of the Sublime, in Bolton's words, "the strongest of passions, as it contains the potential for exaltation and transcendence beyond the commonplace."<sup>29</sup> The exalted nature of the creations in their enchanted surroundings ensured the exhibition of a high entertainment value, however, this did not overshadow the material qualities of the workmanship, skill, and artistic creativity on display, as in the illustrious "Cabinet of Curiosities," which was spectacular yet allowed for close inspection of the objects.

*Olivier Theyskens: She Walks in Beauty* surveyed the journey of the designer across different rooms, evolving "from darkness into the light." Starting with the dark romanticism of Theyskens' early years and his own brand, the show progressed into his tenure at couture houses Rochas and Nina Ricci, and onto his creative directorship at Theory NY and his namesake brand again. The chronological evolution through the space was marked by a progression from dark walls and gothic elements, to sleeker grays for the couture houses, and to bright white for the contemporary labels. As a curatorial contextualization of his work, the choice was made to accompany the silhouettes with the Romantic poetry of Lord Byron (*She Walks in Beauty*) and other poets and writers including John Keats and Charles Baudelaire, whose writings evoke the atmosphere of Theyskens' world. Another contextualization of the work was to show the design drawings of each silhouette, as the Platonic ideal, mirroring each silhouette on an enamel ribbon, allowing the visitor to compare idea with reality.



Figure 7.6 Installation view of *Olivier Theyskens: She Walks in Beauty*, MoMu Antwerp, 2017

The exhibition design included some meta-curatorial gestures: cracks and openings in the ceiling peeled away different layers of previous exhibition designs and sanded paint circles on the floor acted as a palimpsest showing the different layers of painted colors from over 16 previous exhibitions. This way, the show contained markers of the museum's own history, aligned with the "looking back" mode of the designer retrospective.

Both exhibitions aimed to make the mannequins as life-like and animated as possible, a challenge for every fashion exhibition but particularly when one is dealing with work as performative as Alexander McQueen's. In *Savage Beauty*, the mannequins were fully accessorized from head to toe, such as the *Plato's Atlantis* silhouettes with the iconic "Armadillo" hoof-like ballerinas and conic headdress. A billowing black cape from AW 2002–03 was inflated around the mannequin's body. In the exhibition catalog, this life-like principle was pushed even further: the silhouettes were photographed on a real model's body, and later photoshopped to look like a mannequin with archival smudges and blemishes, to spectacular, uncanny effect. Instead of the mannequin imitating the real body, here the living model became the dummy. The Theyskens show used natural-looking mannequins with relaxed poses and nuanced, realistic hand gestures. The mannequins wore full ensembles with shoes and wigs made of natural hair, which sometimes made for striking, surrealist combinations with the hair

used in the costumes. The poses were slouched, as if the mannequins were models waiting backstage, giving a behind-the-scenes, participatory feeling to the visitor.

## Conclusion

This micro-survey reveals a few shared curating strategies, adding literary, socio-cultural, art historical, architectural, theological, philosophical, queer studies perspectives, and the interdisciplinary approach of new materialism to the traditional field of fashion history.<sup>30</sup>

Both curatorial modes, the authorial and collaborative mode are prevalent, sometimes they are mixed, and both are applicable for thematic as well as retrospective exhibitions.

The heterotopic qualities of the museum space, combined with immersive sets for fashion exhibitions, create a performative space in which the objects, design elements, and visitors are actors in an entangled network of relationships, creating meaning, and events in the exhibition space. The holistic interaction of object, exhibition design, and visitor do not just create an exhibition narrative but, through their references to other spaces and exhibitions, also a meta-narrative about fashion exhibitions as such. With regards to the reception concept of new museology, each of the six exhibitions show a poignant awareness of the competition between the museum and the entertainment industry: cinematic set designs and the use of multimedia work together toward a phantasmagoric, immersive experience which induces affective reactions, giving the visitor not just the intellectual *jouissance* but also a sense of physical wonder, terror, and joy. In order to overcome the impossibility of touching objects on display, an effort is made to create a sense of “haptic visuality,” a visual imagination of haptic qualities. All these developments create a rich substrate from which to reimagine the concept of the fashion exhibition, its curatorial narratives and modes, its design, and its ways of interacting with the visitor during the next decades.

## Notes

- 1 “This concept, which illustrates important changes in the curatorship of art, emerged between the late 1960s and early 1970s with independent exhibition makers such as Lucy Lippard, Harald Szeemann, and Seth Siegelaub, who reflected on the exhibition form, treating it as a ‘medium in and of itself’” writes Paul O’Neill: Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2012), 16.
- 2 I was not involved in *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* and *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*.
- 3 Ingrid Mida, “The Enchanted Spectacle of Fashion in the Museum,” *Catwalk: The Journal of Fashion, Beauty and Style* 4, no. 2 (2015): 51.
- 4 Christopher Breward, “Between the Museum and the Academy: Fashion Research and its Constituencies,” *Fashion Theory* 12, no. 1 (2008): 84. Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 64.
- 5 Flavia Loscialpo, “From the Physical to the Digital and Back: Fashion Exhibitions in the Digital Age,” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 227, doi: 10.1386/inf3.3.2.225\_1.
- 6 Frisa in Mida, *The Enchanted Spectacle of Fashion in the Museum*, 49.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Loscialpo, “From the Physical to the Digital and Back: Fashion Exhibitions in the Digital Age,” 227.
- 9 Hans-Ulrich Obrist, “Panel Statement,” in *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility*, ed. P. Marincola (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001), 23–24.
- 10 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. J. Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1, (1986 [1967]): 22–27; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1992 [1966]), [original edition: *Les mots et les choses*, Paris: Gallimard].

- 11 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, 130.  
In the same vein of the exhibition space as a form of difference, Ingrid Mida quotes Alison Griffiths, who defined the concept of an immersive exhibition as “the sensation of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the world giving the sensation or feeling of otherness in which dimensions of time and space are absent.” Mida, *The Enchanted Spectacle of Fashion in the Museum*, 5.
- 12 Beth Lord, “Foucault’s Museum: Difference, Representation and Genealogy,” *Museum and Society* 4, no. 1 (2006): 1–14.
- 13 Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, 130.
- 14 Loscialpo, “From the Physical to the Digital and Back: Fashion Exhibitions in the Digital Age,” 231.
- 15 Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 11.
- 16 However, she acknowledges that “perception is already informed by culture” Laura U. Marks, “Affective Analysis,” in *Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Research Methods*, eds. Celia Lury, Una Chung, et al. (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 145.
- 17 Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 46.
- 18 Curators Griffith Mann, Barbara Drake Boehm, Helen Evans, and Melanie Holcomb.
- 19 Father Greeley in Bolton, Andrew. *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 95.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 22 André Suarès. Cited on the museum’s website: <https://www.bourdelle.paris.fr/fr/musee/le-musee-des-espaces-dexposition-singuliers/le-grand-hall>.
- 23 Laurent Cotta in Olivier Saillard, ed., *Mme Grès: La Couture à l’Oeuvre* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2011), 147.
- 24 Olivier Saillard, ed., *Mme Grès: Sculptural Fashion* (Veurne: Hannibal, 2012), 13.
- 25 Nicolodi explains: “When I first used stairs in my work, they had the form of incrementally advancing entrances. (...) Figuratively, the gradual factor in my sculptures symbolically stands for the mental journey that I hope the viewer will take as he experiences my work. Steps take us from level to level, climbing them stands for the different stages or steps that you go through when experiencing a mental journey. It is the same in Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, which is based on a fictional journey through the hereafter. (...)” in Olivier Saillard, ed., *Mme Grès: Sculptural Fashion* (Veurne: Hannibal, 2012).
- 26 Gallery text in “Camp: Notes on Fashion.”
- 27 As demonstrated in the 1909 J. Redding Ware’s *Passing English of the Victorian Era: A Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang, and Phrase*. The entry read: “Actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis. Probably from the French. Used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character.”
- 28 Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964), 515–30.
- 29 Andrew Bolton, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 12.
- 30 In the scope of this article, only six exhibitions could be discussed, but just a few more exhibitions could add more perspectives: the *Manus X Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology* (2016) exhibition at The Costume Institute included insights from new materialism and posthumanism, the *Margiela: The Hermès Years* (2017) exhibition at MoMu took an embodied approach with videos featuring gestures to convey the haptic sensation of wearing the garments. The upcoming Costume Institute exhibition, *Once Upon a Time in America: Untold Stories* (2021) will weave together stories about colonialism, nationalism and socio-cultural themes in a cinematographic environment designed by film directors.

## 8

# THE FUTURE GENERATION OF FASHION: HOW HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXTUALIZES SUSTAINABILITY AS A KEY DESIGN TOOL

*Alana M. James*

### **Background and context**

The term *sustainable fashion* has often been described as an oxymoron – two conflicting forces fighting against each other, pulling in opposite directions. Fashion, in its very nature is all about the new and contemporary, a constant evolution of change, season after season presenting the latest, fresh and different ideas. This wheel of constant change has been intensified further with the development of the fast-fashion business model, which aims to bring catwalk-inspired fashion to the mass market, as quickly and as cheaply as possible. This model is based on speed of delivery to market and has increased the amount of clothing available to consumers, moving away from the traditional two seasons per year to a constant drip feed of up to 16 collections per year. The provision of new fashion products at affordable prices has changed the consumer's relationship with garments, with large quantities of cheaper clothing often being preferred to lower quantities, purchased to last. Fast fashion, known for its tendency to be easily discarded and replaced is the antithesis of sustainable fashion with Stahel<sup>1</sup> describing this premature product replacement to be hostile to ecological values.

In contrast, the principles of sustainability are built on values of longevity, alongside the reduction of impact and effective resource use, prioritizing preservation of the environment for future generations. Opposing the speed of production, sustainable fashion favors the slow and considered design and make process, with a consequential increased value relationship between the owner and the product. Principles of circularity are increasingly being discussed as alternative practical applications in fashion. A circular model relies on values of material and resource efficiency and more importantly sufficiency, moving away from the traditional *take, make, dispose*, linear model of consumption.<sup>2</sup> It is the reuse of value within an existing system which enables circularity, curtailing value loss embedded in products by keeping them in a circular model.<sup>3</sup>

The stark contrast between the definitions of *fashion* and *sustainability* highlights the need for change, with a shift away from this unsustainable model slowly being recognized in the



industry. Increasingly, fashion brands are waking up to the negative environmental and social effects caused by the production of fashion. In some cases, steps towards change are being implemented with alternative methods being used to reduce this impact. From a materials perspective, high street brands such as Zara are consciously making a shift towards the use of organic and recycled resources and online retailers such as ASOS are no longer selling products made from mohair, cashmere, and silk. Other brands have focused on second-hand market opportunities with H&M and Harrods engaging in the resale of pre-owned products. However, innovation in the design and production of garments tends to remain with smaller business operations where further risk and control can be contained. Brands such as Allbirds are making flip flops from Brazilian sugarcane and Mimycri create bags from discarded rubber boats used by refugees. Maldini and Balkenende<sup>4</sup> support this, stating that issues lie where established companies are beginning to take the lead, but are not innovating, with disruptive innovation more likely to occur in start-up companies responding to societal change.

Sustainability is a broad and often unfamiliar territory to fashion students which often results in a lack of engagement within their design and production processes. However, this is not isolated only to students, with many industry professionals and educators often feeling overwhelmed and confused as to how to contextualize sustainability within their practice.

The immediate challenge in this scenario is the education of professionals who currently work within the industry, with knowledge and skill parameters shifting as a reflection of this integration. This is also having a backwards knock-on effect on the skills and knowledge needed from fashion graduates and thus, the curricula being taught in the education system. The addition of sustainable principles requires educators to resolve the discipline's inseparable relationship with the concept of constant change and newness seen in fashion.<sup>5</sup> The need for change within the fashion industry needs to also occur in higher education to ensure that a whole system reform can aid in the integration of sustainability in the fashion business model. This is emphasized by Williams;<sup>6</sup> "The tensions of employability in the current paradigm versus graduate literacy in sustainability for roles that are needed but not yet recognized is challenging, especially for a discipline so closely related to current industry practice."

### Implementing sustainable principles

*Sustainable education*, a term coined by Sterling<sup>7</sup> believes that if a difference is to be made that the focus should be on students and the values taught, teaching them to *care* and *conserve* rather than *compete* and *consume*. There also exists opposing forces in the teaching of sustainability in a fashion context at a higher education level. The traditional methods of teaching implemented support the *take, make, dispose* linear model of fashion, with students encouraged to keep up with the latest trends and reflect a constant change of aesthetic in their designs. Sterling (ibid) continued to explore the contrasts between traditional education and the teaching of sustainability; "most mainstream education *sustains unsustainability*." This is said to be done through uncritically reproducing norms, fragmenting understanding, an inability to explore alternatives and rewarding dependency and conformity. The approach to teaching fashion has changed very little in the past few decades and is rooted in corporate globalization and the traditional production-to-consumption model.<sup>8</sup> However, it is the adaptation of curricula and its pedagogy that presents the greatest means to change, starting to educate the next generation of industry professionals to push forward an agenda of sustainability in fashion.

The need for a change in the design and delivery of the fashion curricula is widely acknowledged, however there remains a disparity between this acknowledgment and the practical implementation of sustainable pedagogy. Methods of teaching sustainability have in the past

been scrutinized, however it has become apparent that traditional methods of teaching do not effectively embed values of sustainability within the creative practice of design. Tasci<sup>9</sup> states that “words” are not enough to fully understand the complexities of sustainability in the correct context, but that learning by seeing real-life examples is a much more effective method of student engagement. Experiential learning can often lead to more meaningful learning and often appeals more to creative students who appreciate a tacit sense of learning through their hands-on craft. Design students however need to have an appreciation for the principle of sustainability from a number of different perspectives to ensure a deep-rooted knowledge of the subject area. This cannot only be from the point of view of the creative design process, but rather the positioning of this practice within a global context. The understanding of the value and potential of sustainability from a social, environmental and economic perspective is key. This again however presents further challenges, but yet has the potential to see graduates leave university with a diverse foundation of knowledge, influencing employability opportunities. However, a reluctance to engage in content outside of the boundaries of their own discipline has in the past been evidenced by students.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to academics, students and industry professionals have also acknowledged the need for a greater level of knowledge about sustainability and encourage the integration of this into fashion education.<sup>11</sup> The knowledge needed however is not confined to the parameters of creative practice, in addition to traditional fashion skills and knowledge future industry professionals are said to need knowledge of; environmental regulations, chemical use, recyclability of materials, supply chain complexities, designing for waste reduction, and ethical responsibilities.<sup>12</sup>

### **Is sustainability changing creative education?**

When considering methods of sustainable integration into creative practice, the design process is often remodeled to position human characteristics such as *empathy* as a leading driver towards change. This was first modeled by The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford,<sup>13</sup> which positions *empathize* as the first stage of the design process, reflecting a human-centric approach from the very beginning. The positioning of this reflects the need for the designer to respond to human needs, ensuring that outputs are meaningful and useful to people. The need to position responsible design within a human-centric model is also reflected by Manzini;<sup>14</sup> “the search for a better life is human.”

Within a higher education context, this model has been implemented by leading higher education institutions such as the Center for Sustainable Fashion at The University of the Arts London, where *empathy* is positioned at the beginning of their design methodology through the engagement of citizen participation. This stage is described as; “a journey can be taken through the principles of activation of citizen action to both engage wider audiences in the identification of needs and hopes, and to create a platform authorship of our futures.”<sup>15</sup> Their philosophy in education concentrates on a transition to sustainability through a focus on process, action, and creative participation in contrast to output and economic sustainability,<sup>16</sup> which is the focus of many more traditional fashion programs. It is this shift in thinking away from traditional fashion education that is needed to ensure complex problem solving and systemic change can happen.

When considering *how* sustainable principles can be practically implemented in to fashion education, many examples of best practice can be discussed. During a study conducted by the author, fashion and textile educators from three different geographical locations disclosed how they personally implemented these principles in to their teaching practice. Contributions were very discipline specific, with materiality and applied garment construction methods such as

zero-waste pattern cutting, heavily considered. In addition to pedagogical content, participants also detailed their day-to-day studio culture, where more considered and preserved methods of working were debated. The reuse of fabrics, recycling disposal of waste and their level of engagement with sustainability far exceeded just their teaching, but stretched into their daily operations and philosophy as a considerate academic. Furthermore, after-school clubs, parent classes, and competitions were also discussed as tools utilized in embedding sustainable principles in creative education.

In contrast however, the study also highlighted areas where there remained a resistance to incorporating sustainability into the fashion curriculum. A lack of support, time, and resources were widely discussed as a prominent issue, with academics who are currently integrating sustainability into their practice feeling that it was only possible if they went above and beyond their responsibilities. A further challenge discussed was getting colleagues to see the value in teaching sustainability, with a potential change in teaching materials requiring more time and effort. The use of sustainable champions to help lead the way in departments was also discussed, however this approach created additional pressure for isolated individuals opposed to the adoption of a collaborative team effort. Other discussion suggested that sustainability could potentially limit student creativity and that students did not dedicate their time to a fashion program to receive *bad news* about their creative practice.

### **The role of the educator**

The changing needs of the knowledge and skills of design practitioners in the fashion industry has a significant consequential effect on the knowledge and skills base needed of the modern-day fashion academic. With future generations of creative industry professionals relying on the knowledge of their tutors and lecturers, the root change needs to begin with the academic, with their dissemination of knowledge being key in the integration of sustainable values. The recent acknowledgment for the need of such knowledge however results in a generation of academics who may not possess such knowledge meaning there is a gap within the knowledge cycle. The origin of this knowledge however is debateable, with many academics relying on an invested interest through their research areas to enable this knowledge to be passed on to their students, utilizing research informed teaching methods. Just as with industry professionals and students however, a reluctance to engage from academics has been evidenced, with staff being uncomfortable to deliver materials out with their specialist knowledge. This resilience to change has been said to be due to a number of factors, including the compatibility with the individuals values, beliefs, and personal motivations, the support provided from colleagues, managers, and institutions and the extent to which the educator is comfortable with the change resulting in their lack of control during delivery.<sup>17</sup> Top-down pressures from institutions can also result in a push-back in terms of engagement with sustainable pedagogy, with a lack of ownership in this scenario being said to be responsible.

Described as twenty-first-century competencies, the societal challenges reflective of the contemporary fashion industry mean that equity between tutors and students as learners alike needs to be acknowledged (*ibid*). The importance for educators to firstly be educated themselves is emphasized by Armstrong and LeHew,<sup>18</sup> who state that the integration of sustainability in higher education is not possible without a confident educator and that a need to enhance the knowledge of the relationship between fashion and sustainability is prominent. This further emphasizes the need for educator training, with the development of this knowledge being paramount and the role of CPD and internal sharing of good practice needing to be explored. This shift however requires academics to go beyond industry-specific knowledge and training

(ibid), evidencing the ability to think in a non-linear way and solve complex problems. When applying this to a design context, problem solving is an inherent skill practiced by a designer, facilitating this change based on previous experience.

### **Current challenges and barriers**

There are many barriers currently preventing further change within the educational implementation of sustainable principles. Whilst the positioning of sustainability in the fashion industry is changing, the integration of these principles remains non-mandatory and furthermore, often seen as an inconvenient additional factor which needs to be considered during the design process, adding to a long list of considerations and further complicating the job of the designer. The segregation of sustainability in terms of fashion product in the marketplace, also has the potential for creating further barriers towards change. Highlighting sustainable values through selected product ranges, or as is often seen, through more basic product lines can provide positive connotations in terms of their primary role of raising the consumer awareness of sustainability. However, the more switched-on consumer would begin to question why all products currently being offered do not follow the same *sustainable* principles, with these being the exception to the rule rather than the norm. As with the fashion market, there has been a similar approach identified in the teaching of sustainability, with additional modules or courses often being an add-on rather than an embedded value. Sterling<sup>19</sup> believes this approach to negate the theoretical grounding of sustainability, with these responsible values being auxiliary rather than foundational.

Terminology also presents further potential barriers with *sustainability* now encompassing so many factors, it has almost lost meaning all together. Often used by many, without a depth of meaning or understanding, sustainability has become an overused buzz word that consequently lacks definition parameters. Often presented as an umbrella term and broken down further into sub-categories (e.g. environmental and social sustainability), the complexities of what this concept encompasses needs to be carefully deciphered. Due to this lack of real understanding and meaning, an interchangeability of terminology often occurs with terms such as green, eco, ethical, and responsible also being used to often mean the same thing. This lack of clarity only poses further complications and mystifies sustainability, with many simply *switching off* from engaging with these values on any level. The parameters of sustainability also remain ill-defined within an industry context, with no standards or requirements being implemented, meaning that the level of engagement remains very subjective. With consumer awareness growing, companies generally now engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) to some degree; however, *how* and *through what means* often remains out with public knowledge due to a lack of publicizing and communicating these activities.

Definition and discipline specific vocabulary is also an issue for students studying fashion programs, with appropriate terminology failing to be integrated at a higher education level. Consequently, students do not possess the means to express their values and thoughts surrounding sustainability, let alone the skills to practically implement these principles in their practice. The sustainable lexicon remains a significant barrier to further integration in fashion, with a top-down approach needing to be embedded in fashion education. This approach however once again relies on educators to act as a catalyst to change, utilizing their mixed levels of knowledge and skills in the area. It could indeed be questioned if fashion educators currently possess the required level of language skills to express connections between sustainability and fashion in a coherent manner. This again poses a further barrier which needs to be quickly

overcome, with language inherently learned through education, making integration of sustainability essential but very challenging.

### Towards a sustainable future

It has been evidenced that the fashion industry is beginning to make small, incremental steps towards sustainability in the design and production of their products. Recognition of the negative environmental and social impact has long been acknowledged; however, it is implementing the solutions to these issues that remains the real challenge. When analyzing the key stakeholders within the problem space, a clear gap in knowledge has been evidenced in currently industry professionals, educators, and students. Potential methods of obtaining knowledge, specifically for industry practitioners and educators, remains ambiguous and needs further exploration, with current examples focusing on continuing professional development (CPD) programs and self-motivated research interests. This top-down reliance of knowledge means that educators first need to be informed, prior to them imparting knowledge to their students.

The perception of sustainability within a fashion context needs to be approached differently, with knowledge and skills within these parameters becoming part of the designer's toolkit, embedding responsible values throughout their creative practice. In higher education, curricula should give credence to this area of knowledge just as focus would be paid to discipline specific skills such as illustration, pattern cutting and garment construction. This integrated approach would avoid issues of segregation and ensure that fashion students acknowledge principles of responsibility at every stage of their creative process.

The industry needs to begin to lead by example and demystify the parameters of sustainability within a fashion context. Not only would this allow comparability amongst companies, but could also direct the skills, knowledge and experience required of individuals leaving university. This would ensure that the graduate qualities required by industry are fulfilled and that students are *work ready*, following the completion of their education. Many institutions, both from a theoretical and creative perspective, are looking to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as a substitute to guide the development of curricula and direct student projects. The SDGs, developed by United Nations provide a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice.<sup>20</sup> While very relevant to fashion, these goals are not discipline specific and could be related to a number of different sectors; this does however allow for creative interpretation and innovation from a student perspective.

The success of integrating sustainable principles within fashion education requires commitment and buy-in from multiple stakeholders, each with their distinctive role to play in the transition to future responsibility. Collectively, these parties have the ability to shape and future proof the fashion industry, ensuring that sustainability is embedded as a key skill in creative design disciplines.

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# REFLECTING ON THE FUTURE OF FASHION DESIGN EDUCATION: NEW EDUCATION MODELS AND EMERGING TOPICS IN FASHION DESIGN

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## **Contemporary challenges for post-modern industries and education models**

For decades the fashion system, in its current structure, has been at the center of public debate, firstly as one of the main economic and cultural drivers of our contemporary and global society and, more recently, as one of the first sectors calling to reorganize itself towards more sustainable paradigms.

The complexity of current globalized markets has changed the context wherein the fashion system is immersed and operates. The international scale of competition, where the positioning of brands and products often overlaps, leads to businesses expanding and growing their economic gains while equally facing, on one hand, supposedly improved trade conditions and, on the other, increasing difficulties in managing design processes relating to different product categories and components.

Moreover, progressively worsening conditions have hampered the tasks of understanding and identifying ideal communities of users and consumers, thereby making the concept of market segmentation less relevant when developing strategies. During the '80s, when the fashion system started to grow and be configured in its main structural pillars, consumers' profiling was mainly based on socio-demographic logics; in contrast, the current interdependence of cultures and the cross-border spread of consumption habits have made it impossible to distinctively recognize a specific array of consumers serving as reference groups.

The accessibility to information of any kind and origin – thanks to mass communication – the advent of the World Wide Web and the reigning power of social media, have led to an interconnected society where people from all over the world are no longer aliens despite their different social backgrounds and histories; characterized by blurred cultural contexts, these multifaceted networked communities share ideals, values, and desires.

In light of these conditions, most industries have already recognized the dimension of innovation as social construction<sup>1</sup> and have embraced the paradigm of open innovation<sup>2</sup> directing their design processes toward a user-centric, multidisciplinary, and systemic approach. Users,

whose expertise derives not only from the direct experience of product and services but also from their accessibility to experiences and knowledge, promote innovations by participating in the creative processes as they direct the evolution of symbolic, visual, and experiential contents within their communities, or even by creating new communities; they do so through their actions or simply by expressing their identity through opinions, ideas, sentiments, and feeds.

The switch from technology-driven to design-driven innovation,<sup>3</sup> which is human-centric and meaning-based,<sup>4</sup> has been facilitated by the technological acceleration promoted by electronics and the digital paradigm. In particular, the miniaturization of technology has put design practice at the very heart of the creative discourse, facilitating multiple product functions, and simpler interactions with the product itself. Digital technologies, as such increasingly accessible, have made these changes even more extreme.

Design-driven innovation therefore not only addresses the quality of products/services, as well as the attendant experiences derived from their use, but more specifically the process of owning the values underpinning these same products/services. Hence, design practice has moved from the concept of “know how” and the need for high technical competences enabling problem-solving activities and the concept of “know what” supporting a problem-setting focus, to a metadesign approach producing new knowledge as it requires to “know why.”

The pursuit of processual metacognitive knowledge – one capable of supporting an understanding of fast-changing contexts such as the one we are currently immersed in – is streamlined by a design thinking approach. Since design thinking allows the balancing of critical and creative instances, it is particularly helpful in cases of complex contexts where decisions are based on contextual data and multidisciplinary cross-references, and where a “generative concept is not simply ‘found’ in the problem as given, but largely created by the designer; it is not a matter of re-cognizing a pre-existing pattern in the data, but of creating a pattern that re-formulates the problem and suggests directions towards a solution.”<sup>5</sup>

Opening knowledge in an era of open innovation requires the acknowledgment that lifelong learning is now fundamental in promoting sustainable competitiveness. In this perspective, design innovation as innovation of meanings seeks “to be consistent and relevant with the context where the product’s values are generated from and where the very product will be released to, yet being able to offer a new evolutionary perspective of that cultural context and its meanings.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, lifelong learning refers to the cognitivists’ idea of learning as making sense of old and new elements, while alternately adopting the constructivist idea that “knowledge is not passively received from the world or from authoritative sources but constructed by individuals or groups making sense of their experiential worlds.”<sup>7</sup>

Within this framework, an acceleration of the process of renewing educational contents proves rather urgent.

## **Universities in transformation and the rise of design education**

Universities are enduring institutions dating to the Middle Ages, and their organization throughout history closely reflects the models of organizing and transferring knowledge which have been characterized by different periods of time. Although we are living in decades of radical transformations, the form these models have today is still very close to that conceived during the eighteenth century in Europe. While up to the Renaissance, a unified conception of knowledge still prevailed embracing a pluralist vision integrating scientific and humanistic disciplines, the Enlightenment reformulated this long-held postulation. At the time universities were expected to serve the paradigm of production and consumption inaugurated by the first Industrial Revolution, led by concepts such as hierarchy, standardization, and quantitatively



measurable productivity. Pursuing this purpose, knowledge domains started to be clustered into closed silos, and between the end of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century, universities were restructured to respond to high-specialization demands typical of the socio-economical organization of advanced industrialized societies.

Furthermore, design developed as a formal discipline during the transition from artisanal to industrial production,<sup>8</sup> intent on serving much more complex and standardized processes. During this phase, design was often interpreted as a technical-engineering practice, driven by the rigid constraints of the early industrial paradigm, and frequently based on a merely functional vision. This particular approach immediately highlighted the tension between the universe of “new industrial products,” strongly homologated and simplified, and the ability of traditional craftsmanship to create artifacts that could also embed symbolic and aesthetic values.

Born as a reaction to a technocratic vision of design, the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century aimed at developing languages free from the constraints imposed by the industrial production paradigm of the period. Within this seminal experience, an Arts and Crafts education model was equally developed, while similar educational approaches informed the flourishing of applied arts schools all over Europe.<sup>9</sup>

The tension between art and industry, technology, and culture came to characterize a very long phase in the evolution of design, landing at the very center of the debate from which sprang the Bauhaus movement. In fact, the initial program of the Weimar School was the reunification of all disciplines, such as architecture, painting, photography, theater and music, in a single “art of building,” able to bend the industry towards a new language potentially imbued with the typical expressive qualities of arts and craftsmanship.<sup>10</sup>

Albeit, the original purpose of reconciling industry with the arts was progressively abandoned as the Bauhaus program evolved. Some of its premises, such as the focus on usability, later developed into more radical principles, such as “functionalism” and “rationalism,” inspiring the so-called Modern Movement.<sup>11</sup> In the course of the Modernism experience several schools of design and architecture were established or reformed, with the goal of formalizing practice-based educational approaches of applied arts schools into a codified theoretical corpus. Ultimately, this process prompted design’s designation as a scientific discipline. Despite its radicalism, this venture enabled design education to be incorporated into university curricula, thus gaining new legitimacy, as well as giving birth to a rich theoretical and methodological corpus of contributions.<sup>12</sup>

The current vision that embraces the multifaceted nature of design in its dual nature bridging the gap between the disciplines of “arts and humanities” and “science and engineering,” only just emerged thanks to Herbert Simon’s theory of “limited rationality,” followed by Donald Schön’s concept of an “epistemology of praxis.”<sup>13</sup>

This multidisciplinary vision of design, also blending theories and practices, is particularly relevant within current transformations, where the “silos-centered” vision of knowledge, characteristic of the twentieth century, is no longer able to respond to the needs of our contemporary world. In light of this scenario, there are three factors opening up possibilities for design as a practice, while positively reassessing design education and validating its opportunities for growth. They relate to (1) the nature of today’s technological innovation, (2) the peculiar structure of contemporary productive organizations and companies, and finally (3) emerging issues characterizing our twenty-first-century social and cultural environment.

First of all, the nature of technology within the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution is dramatically different from the past, and its evolution is following accelerated and unpredictable paths. From formerly being a “black box” conceived by experts within the closed boundaries of R&D departments, technology is increasingly becoming an open asset. First of all, due to

broadly accessible knowledge within our networked world, innovation is no longer confined within specific functions of companies and organizations but instead sourced from a larger ecosystem. In addition, it is open equally in terms of potential applications, where the digital revolution and miniaturization have transformed it into a multipurpose flexible asset.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, design – driven by its user and culture-centered approach – is able to envision new domains of applications, emerging as a powerful lever to guide technological innovation.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, as a consequence of the shift from industrial economy to knowledge economy, the need for new job hierarchies and management styles has been growing within organizations.<sup>16</sup> These organizations are increasingly characterized by parallel, transversal and open processes, mostly requiring multidisciplinary competences. In particular, company operations are no longer run as routine undertakings; rather they are often project-based, and involve professionals who hold technical and design skills together with highly demanded managerial expertise.<sup>17</sup> This has been leading to an increasing focus on design skills and professionals, often promoting them to new and strategic roles.<sup>18</sup> This is also highlighted by a growing interest in “design thinking” as a major requirement in innovation management and leadership positions, intended as a creative attitude filtering, transferring, and connecting different bodies of knowledge with a view to envisioning innovation’s trajectories.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the complexity of contemporary societal organizations, resulting from phenomena such as mass urbanization and consumption dynamics, large and global migrations, frictions and conflicts among religious and political systems, is raising new and complicated issues, which can be addressed only through systemic and collaborative approaches. Therefore, design is seeing a progressive broadening of its traditional practice domains, evolving into a powerful driver of innovation at a social level, within new and emerging fields such as services, healthcare, urban and territorial systems, and public policies.

Only this ongoing recognition of the potential of design as an innovation driver, impacting on new fields and sectors and feeding new strategic skills and leadership styles, can explain the booming demand for design education at a university level. In addition, design education – less bridled by rigid ontologies than other more mature disciplines – is demonstrating an innovative capacity to read ongoing transformations, quickly responding to them with new programs and educational experiences.<sup>20</sup>

### **Breaking the *Silo* of fashion design education**

While the transition described previously was happening, and design was becoming a prominent topic in academia, fashion education followed its own path, pushed by a rapidly growing industry and an enduring demand among prospective students, usually fascinated by fashion for its cultural, social, and mediatic exposure.

From a humanities’ perspective, fashion has been developing into a formalized field of theoretical studies and research, giving birth to “fashion studies,” which have led to a rich body of contributions and dedicated academic specializations. Conversely, from a design perspective, it has remained on the margins with respect to the evolution and articulation of design education, long time anchored to the model of “arts and craft *ateliers*” and, in many cases, still so today. This can be explained by the strong artistic, symbolic and cultural contents indubitably characterizing fashion; whereas concurrently, this “art-artifact-centered” vision constrained the development of fashion design education, which has not fully explored many of its inherently fundamental disciplinary domains.

As a matter of fact, this partial vision fails to properly account for the myriad of repercussions resulting from the multifaceted nature of fashion in particular, and design in general. Beyond its

cultural value, fashion and design should be seen as part of a larger socio-technical system.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly true for fashion, where textile is one of the oldest “technologies” conceived by humans. Fabric and garment industries were at the core of transformations inaugurating a completely new age for humanity as represented by the first industrial revolutions. Moreover, the fashion industry is today a key component of our globalized system of production and consumption, being not only one of the richest cultural expressions of modernity, but also an instrumental agent in triggering a series of adverse effects on social communities and the environment.

In spite of this systemic and multidisciplinary vision, several fashion schools are still focused on product-centered education, very much intent on promoting students’ stylistic and crafting abilities. They still focus on nurturing individual talent, training students in designing and crafting fashion artifacts, replicating the Arts and Craft model (1880–1920). In doing so, fashion education disregards the mission increasingly espoused by more and more university level programs. Generally speaking, universities have mainly focused on transferring knowledge and skills, as a way of replicating our current socio-technical systems, which in turn have been failing in many ways, thereupon remaining behind and becoming progressively isolated. Instead, those higher education programs honing their research capacity are attracting a wider global population of talented students and investigators, while fostering social, cultural, and economic development within their own communities.<sup>22</sup> In fact, only those universities creating space for research will be able to inform and innovate educational contents in a radically and constantly changing world, where the nature of tomorrow’s jobs is largely unpredictable, and the challenges facing us are unprecedented.<sup>23</sup>

In response to these pressures, a reformed and shared agenda for fashion design education is essential, preferably focusing on three main areas calling for change: (1) contents, (2) organization, and (3) societal outreach.

Content-wise (1), not only is fashion’s DNA steeped in multidisciplinary, consisting in a layering of cultural, technological, and economic values, it is also exposed to the same dramatic transformations investing all other disciplines. In fact, many of the radical recent advancements in science and technology can have high impacts on fashion and need to be integrated in educational paths. First of all, digital manufacturing and Industry 4.0 concepts are transforming tools for designing and prototyping, but more radically, they are reshaping the role of design within emerging new modes of production and consumption. Secondly, life sciences and biotech research are bringing in completely new opportunities for fashion, from bio-based materials to smart fabrics and components. Finally, the convergence of cultural and social studies with digital technology, such as data analytics and AI, within the field of digital humanities, can become a new source for informing design processes more closely connected to customers’ behaviors and needs.

Looking at the form and organization of current fashion design schools (2), several transformations are happening, already exhibiting their potential for enhancing learning and teaching experiences. Indeed, as knowledge becomes increasingly distributed and accessible, and the phenomenon of global citizens proliferates, schools should relax their boundaries leading to their integration in a larger network where students can access complementary and qualified resources in a new cooperative space for higher education. Conjointly, infrastructures should be updated to fully explore the potential of cyber-physical environments, where the Internet of Things and the Internet of People are enabling expanded learning experiences within flexible and transformable spaces. Additionally, traditional labs and workshops need to blur their perimeter and build a dialogue between advanced tools and craft and tailoring approaches,

where constant exposure to different technologies and techniques can heighten students' cognitive capability for continuous learning.

Finally, the entire mission of universities has been changing (3) since becoming a mass education system in the last decades of the twentieth century. They have been producing a growing impact on society, while developing research practices connecting education and the external world. Universities have been able to build a virtuous/virtual? relationship with local eco-systems. The so-called model of the “Triple Helix” model of innovation – that refers to a set of interactions between academia, industry, and government – clearly represents this transition towards a system where academia is able to function as a development engine linked to industry and government.<sup>24</sup> Within this context, the third mission of universities – that refers to the social, entrepreneurial, and innovative activities performed by universities in addition to teaching and research tasks – has fueled local economies, as well as social and cultural growth, through the establishment of “bridge entities” such as incubators and accelerators facilitating cross fertilization and innovation transfer towards the external world. As part of the mission of universities, this particular approach is currently becoming essential to dealing with the challenges of contemporary societies, while making societal outreach as important as education and research. All things considered, a new perspective is needed in rethinking fashion design education and research, where ethical and entrepreneurial dimensions are relevant drivers for transformation.

These three areas in need of change could provide the ideal contexts in which to carry out experiments relevant to the future of fashion design teaching and learning. Likewise, efforts geared towards improving and innovating our models will result in better integrating fashion studies – once wedged in a peripheral position – into the most advanced experiences of design education.

### **Fashion design education perspectives**

Fashion is facing a series of dichotomic challenges forcing it to reevaluate its own ontology and, as a consequence, the ways of informing the fashion education system. Current fashion business models, more or less successful, oscillate between a designer-centric foundation and a processes-centric vision, highlighting the need for a systemic and strategic approach considering fashion's cultural, social, and economic impact.

Early on, the theoretical debate opposing ready-to-wear to fast fashion evolved into a clever dialog; nonetheless, it has yet to meaningfully engage in the re-engineering of design management and product development processes in order to promote an identity for fashion products and brands transcending the hackneyed rhetoric touting purportedly new merchandise, marketing it as being “different from”: paradoxically, this “novelty,” claiming to be the opposite of existing styles, is actually so comparable to the latter as to repeatedly blur boundaries almost to the point of making them overlap each other.

Although globalization has functioned as an essential perspective within a hyper-connected society, the idealized virtues of delocalization have already been strongly disavowed, therein revealing detrimental effects such as the loss of traditional materials and industrial cultures, and the impoverishment of both Western and Eastern communities, national and regional economies. The reshoring and reacquisition of know-how is crucial to progressively, as well as effectively, reshoring fashion manufacturing.

Finally, low-cost manufacturing has led to high environmental and social costs, fueling a need for higher transparency regarding processes and product authenticity. This effort has underscored the differences and distances separating brand mythopoeia—imprinted into the

consumer imaginary—from *de facto* products, while demanding the system recognize the need for sensing social interactions and sentiments in a more effective and integrated manner, advocating for the implementation of Consumer Social Responsibility (CSR) in the task of re-designing value chains.

Within this framework, fashion design education also needs to be redesigned: first and foremost, it must be informed by the fashion industry and, in consideration of the aforementioned challenges, it must equally address new subjects and contents such as heritage recovery, high-craft vs. high-tech, Big Data Supported Decisions, digital fabrication and Industry 4.0, circular economy, Product Lifecycle Management informed by Web 2.0., omnichannel retailing and digital ubiquity, social media engagement and social sensing, sustainability and social innovation.

In an era of knowledge accessibility, where tools and skills can be acquired on the Internet and from open-access resources, fashion design education is in need of making knowledge available to communities. Within a continuous stream of information, fashion design education must move its focus from teaching methods to learning styles, reorganizing bottom-up contents, and promoting a methodology conducive to originally and individually contextualizing contents. While design is reforming organizations through design thinking, strategic design, design policies, and creative innovation leadership, fashion design education must re-establish fashion's political and cultural role.

Fashion should not be intended as a production field or a market but rather as a design matrix capable of shaping socio-cultural contents. Fashion should embrace a collaborative approach instead of a designer-centric approach, a project-based approach instead of a collection/garment approach, an entrepreneurial attitude instead of corporative monopolistic strategies, a sustainable core instead of a fast pace one, in order to respond to all the critical issues it has created, thus possibly coming up with feasible solutions.

The “fashion space” is usually defined by other disciplines. Fashion needs a disciplinary recognition moving its focus from a desired but limited-in-scope re-appropriation of traditional know-how to the assumption of the aforementioned political role as a way of combating the refusal of fashion. The fashion industry needs to reshore not only its manufacturing activities but also the very system of fashion, recognizing the space of universities and fashion education institutions not solely as places where qualitative techniques are taught and transferred, but also as political entities concurring in raising awareness, and enabling students to become better citizens through fashion (i.e. “Who made my cloth” initiative). Reshoring fashion as a system requires educating “process designers” instead of “product designers,” avoiding a fast-fashion logic centered on clothing overproduction in the interest of “learning with fashion,” which in turn leads to “hybrid ontologies” and the birth of the so-called “folksonomy”<sup>25</sup> based on social life stream and emerging phenomena inspiring the whole design process.

### Authors' statement

This article is the result of common research and findings; nevertheless, Paola Bertola edited sections 2 and 3; Chiara Colombi edited sections 1 and 4.

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# ABSTRACT PATTERN CUTTING AS A DESIGN TOOL: ACCIDENTAL CUTTING AND SUBTRACTION CUTTING METHODOLOGIES

*Eva Iszoro Zak and Julian Roberts*

In general, and before proceeding with a deeper analysis, it is convenient to keep in mind the different assertions of the terms *abstraction* (noun) and *abstract* (adjective).

According to the RAE (Royal Academy of Spanish Language), abstraction is the ability to abstract, which in turn comes from the Latin *abstrahere*—which means “to draw away,” “separate,” “set aside.” It is about separating, through an intellectual operation, traits or qualities of something and to analyze them in isolation, looking to them in their pure essence or notion. This essentially agrees with the Oxford English Dictionary, where the term applies to the process of considering something independently of its associations or attributes, and the freedom from representational qualities in art. Another meaning applies to art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather seeks to achieve its effect by using shapes, colors, and textures. Abstraction can also be understood as the quality of dealing with ideas rather than events. Something abstract exists in thought as an idea but does not have a physical or concrete existence, i.e. it denotes a concept, quality, or state, rather than a concrete object.

Abstract pattern cutting and the application of abstraction in general can be understood in different ways from the perspective of the experimental design and pattern cutting methods: Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting.

## **Liberation — freedom**

The two aforementioned methods diverge or proceed away from traditional design and construction, breaking with conventional rules and tools, and sustaining methodological approaches in which graphic ideation prior to the execution of the object is not necessary, opening up to new and formal languages.

Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting are methodologies of experimental garment construction useful to students as a pedagogical tool, and for designers in general. These



methodologies are complimentary of traditional methods, and their utilization opens up new variations.

The traditional methods shouldn't be replaced because they are focused on the construction of garments designed in advance, imagined with the mind beforehand, whilst Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting are focused on the unknown, in the discovery of the non-existent. Of course in one garment it is possible to mix both conventional parts with volumetric experiments.

In general, the conventional methods of garment construction generate the project outcome and determine it, and the result is predictable.<sup>1</sup> However, both Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting experimental pattern cutting methodologies give rise to new – and often surprising – outcomes which are far less expected and knowable at the outset.

As taught subjects both approaches challenge the student to put away their standardized rules and fine drawing implements, and to paint and draw using liquid mediums and fast expressive actions, to loosen their limbs, and better develop a sense of physical connection and intent within their design work. By going wrong, and being “ugly” and monstrous in their mark-making, rhythms of line become practiced, scales approaching and beyond human size become explored, and a less anxious open-ended design development process becomes possible. From our approaches to design, the tools that we use makes design thinking less predetermined, more intuitive, creative, and potentially disruptive. This way of design using intuitive processes, devices, and implements agree with the consideration that: “Tools that make hard things easy can make us less likely to tolerate things that are hard.”<sup>2</sup>

Abstract pattern cutting is a design tool that elevates technical drawings of any shape to a creative process, so the designer and the pattern cutter become necessarily the same person. The methods are not exclusive of designers or pattern cutters. It is no longer the case that designers and pattern cutters are separate job roles or sequential, and there is no hierarchical separation of the creative and technical processes in Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting. Experimental pattern cutting is a means of designing.

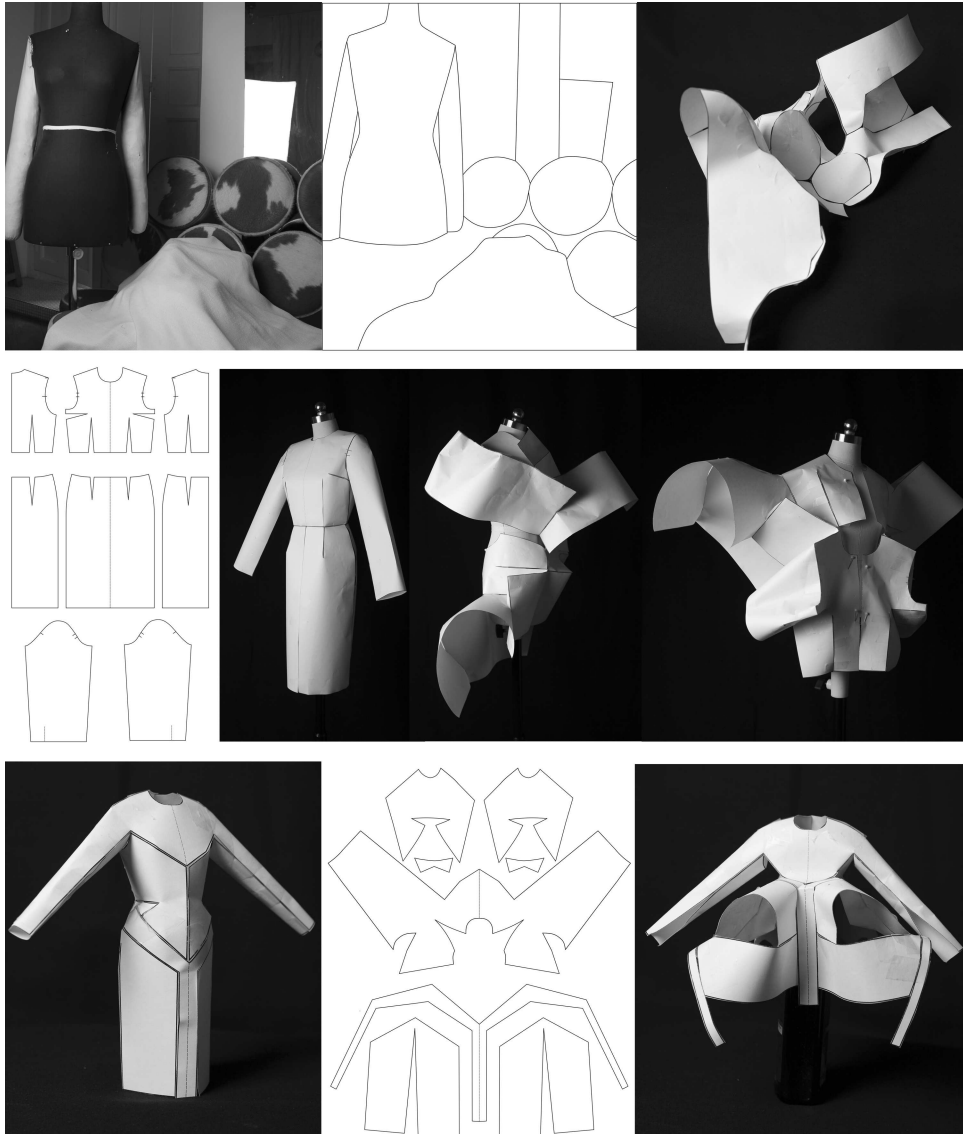
### **Formal abstraction, relativity, and randomness**

Mental abstraction is the process of considering something independently of its associations or attributes. It also relates to art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, colors, and textures. Even simple forms can be understood as abstract simplifications of the existing reality. Others that were not originally abstract could be “abstracted” and become a powerful design tool. In this way, actually any form can be used as a template pattern that can potentially shape complex volumes.

Any existing or imagined reality can be translated into abstracted patterns of itself, as exemplified by the photographer John Akehurst in the 1997 report “The Edge” for *The Face* magazine. In this work he decided to resort to abstraction by photographing partially dressed models with beige underwear and a background of the same color. He wanted to flee from the model's face and expression. This resource to abstraction enabled the decontextualization and loss of meaning of objects, and at the same time the cultivation of new realities. Akehurst agreed to focus purely on the form, and looked through the objective from the point of view of the form – often an abstract one.<sup>3</sup> The idea is to start from one reality and transform it into another, keeping just certain essential aspects and neglecting others.

In this way any image of the external reality can be reduced to abstract patterns and decompose in flat surfaces, since the contour of practically any object could give rise to completely unknown volumes, non-existent until date, after a process of joining them in different ways.

For example in Figure 10.1 on top, on the left, we have a photograph of existing reality, in the middle a technical drawing of the contours of the objects of this image. These flat surfaces can become patterns and be joined in completely different way, conforming a new volume (on the



*Figure 10.1* In the first row, an image of the existing reality is shown, extracting then the contours of this image and converting them into abstract patterns, that may be used to model a new reality. In the second row, there are block patterns of a dress; then the model corresponding to this dress – respecting the conventional union marks – and finally two models of a totally new and original garment joining the pieces in another, unconventional way. In the third row, the model of a volume of a basic dress deconstructed in abstract patterns, that correspond to the same volume, and a totally original garment, joining these patterns in another way, in this order. *Author of the photographs, drawings and models: Eva Iszoro*

right) that has nothing to do with the initial volume of the photography. It means that any flat form with surface can become a flat pattern, that later can be joined with itself or other patterns in order to conform a volume. This initial abstract pattern can be accidental, invented, extracted from the reality or even can already exist.

For example, there is the possibility of abstracting forms that are normally used in this context as, for example, block patterns, questioning what they represent (Figure 10.1, in the middle). In this way, the patterns of a basic dress, joined in another way, can give rise to new and original garments that have nothing to do with the original garment. The key is, sometimes, to treat all patterns in an abstract way, including anatomical blocks. The point is that the pattern of a sleeve can correspond to the volume of a sleeve or maybe not, or you can even join several sleeves together, to make up a new volume, unknown until now. Any flat pattern treated in an abstract way opens up to new possibilities.

Intellectual operations can be even more complex. For example the volume of the human body can be decomposed into abstract patterns, through strategic cuts, as can be seen in Figure 10.1 (first image below). In this image, the volume of a simple base dress has been decomposed into abstract patterns, shapes without any clear volumetric reading. Even for an expert in the field of pattern cutting it would be impossible to decipher that these patterns correspond precisely to the volume of a base dress. Most of the time, the usual block patterns do have a volumetric reading when an expert in pattern design and cutting looks at them, knowing that they make up a certain volume that corresponds to the human body. The decomposition of the same garment in abstract patterns, without increasing or reducing the volume, become indecipherable, even under expert observation.

We can go even further, such as re-joining the abstract patterns corresponding to the volume of the dress, to conform to a new unconventional reality, which has nothing to do with the initial volume of the original base dress (Figure 10.1, last photograph). In this way, and making use of the same patterns, we realize that it is possible to conform quite different models. One corresponds to a known and identifiable volume – as that of the human body – others make us encounter the unknown, going through ludic and creative processes where anything can happen.

The formal abstraction therefore works in different ways: It is possible to generate volumes through abstract, decontextualized patterns (obtaining original volumes). Alternatively, known volumes can be decomposed in abstract forms.

Accordingly, it is important to understand each pattern as the combination of a determined flat surface and a net of union marks that indicate how this flat element is going to be joined with itself or with other elements. This will conform a certain design model, not necessarily “fashionable.”

A pattern without construction marks is incomplete. Indeed, different allocations of the construction marks will induce different volumes. Let us repeat the obvious: The pattern is composed of a form plus a collection of union marks. However, this fact is rarely exploited to the fullest. The same pattern shape, but with different construction marks, implies a drastic change of the resulting volume. The geometric versatility of a flat pattern implies different possibilities of union with itself, and/or with other equal or different patterns, to produce a panoply of volumes completely different from each other.

This is one of the basic concepts of both Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting. It has a close relationship with the transformability or genesis of a series of garments – a collection – with differentiated volumes, starting from just one or a small number of patterns, and optimizing the time that the designer dedicates to the genesis of such a collection. It goes without saying that this fact brings one of the biggest worries of Accidental Cutting, and that implies

sustainable approaches too, because it is possible to construct different garments using the same patterns with permanent joints or trims.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the previous description, in many cases the patterns are not only shapes with marks, but can be far more complex, including points or lines within their surfaces, or even other surface patterns inside them, establishing a hierarchy or subordination between one and the other patterns. The patterns inscribed in others can be conserved or discarded, maybe set aside for a certain time and recovered later. Both methods, Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting, feed on these facts in different ways.

In the Accidental Cutting method, the patterns resulting from surface removal are called “negative” and the ones removed as “positive”<sup>5</sup>; alternatively, they are denoted “interior” and “exterior”, respectively. The relationships between the positive patterns and the format space in which they are cut is very important. This feature is also fundamental in Subtraction Cutting.

It should be said that the patterns can not only be divided into “interiors” and “exteriors,” since some are not always contained in the others but simply complementary to each other.

The exploration of the topology is important in both methods: The pattern does not exist by itself but related to the format space, which contains it. This, in some cases, induces a reduction in fabric waste, following the Zero Waste philosophy. However, this is not the fundamental objective of the methods, but finding original volumes through abstract patterns, with no volumetric reading, without having any clear picture of the final result, garment, or object. From the topological point of view there could exist different relations between the patterns and the surface where they are cut: hierarchies, groups, densities, accumulations, unions and intersections, clusters, specific borders, open and closed patterns, relative interior and exterior, complementary, etc. The introduction of new terminology and the processes of both methods are described in detail in these earlier publications: PhD Thesis of Eva Iszoro<sup>6</sup> and *Free Cutting* of Julian Roberts.<sup>7</sup>

As we point out, the main purpose of both methods it is to seek unknown volumes, but this fact does not prevent the outcomes being applied at various market levels, neither are exclusive or rarefied. There are degrees and scales to which experimental methods of construction can be applied, so it is possible to apply them in a subtle and gentle manner, or in a colossal and absurd manner, depending on the requirements that motivate the task. In fact, for the more commercial versions other factors must be taken into account like ease of ironing, textile savings, ease of execution; therefore, not every experiment is valid.

## **Thinking and making**

Both methods, Subtraction Cutting and Accidental Cutting, are design opportunities in which the constructed form is developed through flat, abstract patterns. It is about discovering new realities, previously nonexistent, through patterns, and not creating patterns for new realities previously imagined. When the mind excessively participates in the design process, the tendency of copying is inevitable: The mind tends to copy existing realities without realizing it.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes innovation is over-complicated when the mind is overly focused. The total or partial deactivation of thought in some phases of the process can be beneficial for discovering the nonexistent.

Rei Kawakubo once said that her job is to “find accidents.” She acknowledged that accidents within technical processes of construction of garments are an important aspect of fashion design practice.<sup>9</sup> Accidents often occur in experimental creative processes, and are not based on rational knowledge. Both methods combine conscious and unconscious decisions – more

intuitive – during the design and construction process of garments. So, the phase of realization becomes active in the creative process.

### **Abstract and conceptual thinking**

We mentioned that abstraction can also be understood as the quality of dealing with ideas rather than events. In this sense, the conceptual developments become important in both methods.

Although in the early stages of the Accidental Cutting you barely have to think, this does not mean that there couldn't exist initial conceptual approaches. The method allows conceptual developments where each practicing person can establish their own rules and treat certain aspects, facing the unknown in a personal way.

Eva Iszoro is currently developing several conceptual series, associated to the initial abstract patterns approaches, those series are: Signs, Geometric Perturbations, Lines, Human-Inhuman, Without Pattern, Geometric Landscapes, Absences, Intertwined, etc. Each series implies a potential series of volumes and garments, which do not have a limited final number of elements. As an example Intertwined series is exposed in Figure 10.2 and described below:

Intertwined consists of a linear geometric expression in which different forms are linked. In this case we work with curved or angled continuous lines, and each displacement of union of the cut shapes leading to very different volumes. If the original displacement is very insignificant, the volume usually has a smaller relief than if the displacement is very large (Figure 10.2).

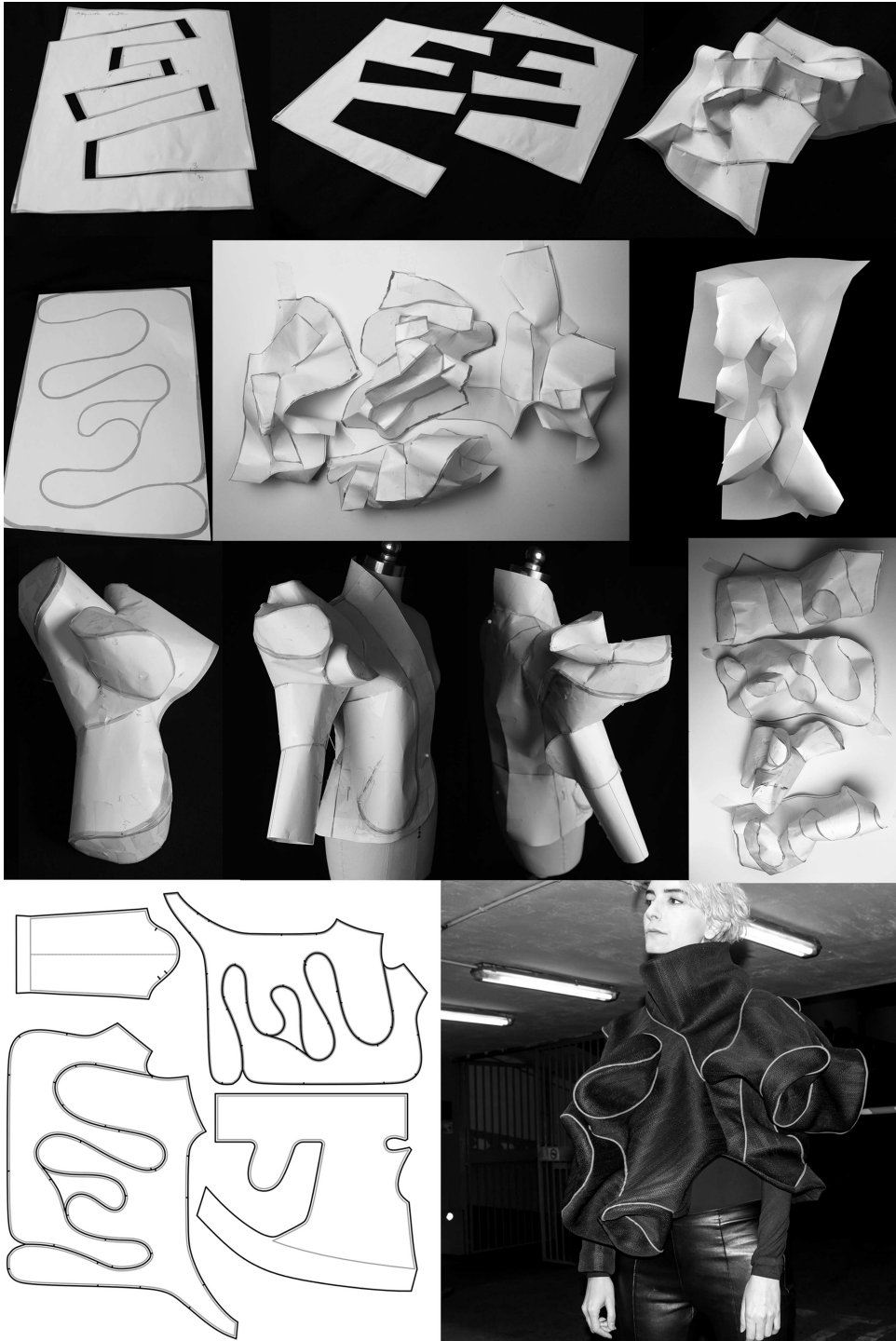
The creative process in all Accidental Cutting series is the same. It starts from elementary units of randomly generated patterns, which have at the beginning no recognizable associated pattern identity or volumes, and adds some kind of conceptual strategy. Subsequently, the greatest number of possible unions are explored, usually tending to infinite, since the possibility of introducing new rules and variables are endless.

The next phase consists in the adaptation to the human body or to another sort of object. The initial models can only suppose an original constructive detail of the final object, an entire concrete element such as a sleeve or a leg, or the results may even become the whole garment.

The adaptation phase is done with the modeling techniques. In this phase of the creative process, observation is very important, as well as a conscious thinking for the selection of elements. The methodology encourages unlimited investigation by its intrinsic characteristics, and can be furthermore increased and multiplied by the different possibilities of application of the generated experiment, introducing scaled and quantitative variations of localization and distribution, as well as variations in textile support. Modeling techniques are as precise as can be tailoring techniques developed in flat. The volumetric construction of the garment in Figure 10.2 requires precision, because the volumetric experiment is applied to a volume of a human body of a specific size during the modeling process after the construction of the initial element. All the usual considerations of proportion, fit, finish, and wearability can be applied to these experimental methodologies. Attention is given where appropriate. The garments can be loose or tight, but the pattern itself and the volume have the same precision as any other more conventional method. These considerations may be applied more usefully after the garment starts to take shape, or during the experimental prototyping process, rather than being limitations or risk avoidance applied at the outset.

The initial phase of the process starts when the designer selects an abstract pattern that is decisive and fundamental in terms of obtaining the final result – always surprising – which

*Abstract pattern cutting as a design tool*



*(caption on next page)*

*Figure 10.2* Patterns, volumetric models, and prototypes corresponding to the series “Intertwined,” applying the Accidental Cutting design methodology. The starting points of the volumetric research are intertwined patterns characterized by continuous angled or curved line, that manifests itself in angular or rounded volumes respectively. All the models, manual, and virtual (second row on the right) start with the same initial “Intertwined” patterns but the joints, scales, and placements into garments are different. *Author of the photographs, drawings and models: Eva Iszoro. Model: architect Claudia Lena*

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however may be greatly modified or even cease to exist in later phases, especially modeling.

For example, in Figure 10.2, we can observe an application of an “Intertwined” series pattern and its associated volume, into a jacket as a sleeve. However, in the scale 1/1 this approach did not work as expected, and two sleeve patterns in this series, one smaller and the other bigger, were applied into a completely different garment, not as sleeves any more but as a part of the bodice. So it is important to mention the potential instability of the method.

The introduction of personal rules and concepts, which can vary from one designer practicing the method to another, makes it a way for volumetric exploration to obtain many new results, unexplored to date. Both methodologies have the potential to be practiced in analog and digital form.

In Subtraction Cutting there are particular conceptual approaches, as for example, the different techniques intrinsic to the method: Tunnel, Displacement, and Plug techniques.<sup>10</sup>

In general, Julian Roberts does not use paper or cardboard patterns in his practice, but it is possible to, and others prefer to during the practice of the Subtraction Cutting method. He draws the patterns directly onto the fabric, during the construction creative process, often without template patterns to follow, so the pattern is more of a performance or action residing in the cloth. This means that the pattern is the garment, and also that the pattern also incorporates himself – his own gestural movements and limbs.

However, the intuitive manual processes of both methods are not against the incorporation of technology such as 3D modeling, avatar visualization, 2D/3D printing and scanning, it depends on how one wishes to practice and interpret the methods. In Accidental Cutting AutoCad software is used in the initial stages, but not in all instances and since the COVID-19 lockdown, CLO 3D software has become very useful as a visualization/simulation tool due to more limited access to workspace, materials, and machines.

### **Relative matter and scale**

In both methods, Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting, not only patterns or processes are important: The material itself is an abstract design tool, since the use of different textile materials can completely change the final result, as other authors such as Winifred Aldrich have warned as well.<sup>11</sup> Above, we have seen that the change of joints of the same pattern originates different volumes. With changes of scale the same pattern and the same connections can behave very differently when using different kinds of textile.

All textiles collapse with gravity, stretch, warp, bend, twist, drape. Geometric certainty is therefore denied by the reality of the construction material. You must touch it, learn through your hands, be rid of any rigid geometric principles or suppositions, and through risk and trial and error, learn how the material responds to material experimentation. It’s important to

understand the behavior of the matter, the flow of the textile around the human body, and explore abstractions of it.

In Accidental Cutting it is particularly useful, in particular, to construct first paper models, knowing in advance that the result in textile will be different. It is quite interesting to observe the different results when applying different materials. It does not mean that little fabric models are excluded from the first phases of research; it only means that both materials are welcomed, and they are normally tested before the confrontation with the scale 1/1.

This phase of constructing reduced scale models is also important in the sense that they can be used in subsequent moments, or sorted in a kind of “library of shapes and associated volumes.” This is a similar approach that Rissanen has in his own methodology.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the pattern cutting becomes a real abstract and decontextualized design tool, that could be used in different moments and garments.

### **Relation with the human body**

The importance and relation with the human body differs in both methods.

For the author of the Subtraction Cutting, the human body is important from the beginning. He sometimes likes to make patterns without the actual presence of the body – that is incorporated at the final stage – however, the body is still in his mind (he can’t ever pretend it’s not there because he has a body, he uses a body, and his limbs are involved in the making process). Therefore, he sees his own self as physically connected to the pattern: As he makes it, his body makes it, too. There is always a relationship between his body and that of the wearer, even if they never meet. In some ways the body participates as part of the patterns/tools. The real body must be involved in one way or another, and cannot, certainly, be avoided. A mannequin dummy is not enough: Real people move, breath, change shape, have material sensitivities, have arms, legs, heads, and opinions. The body must be authentic, and included in the design construction process.

Sometimes there is a vital relationship between the garment maker – and their own physical movements – and those of the designed garment structure: Its shape, form, and the range of movements it inspires the body to make. But on other occasions, to distance oneself from the human body is necessary for escaping from its physical limitations and conditioning in the early phases of the three-dimensional construction.

The human body and personality of the wearer teaches us a lot about how abstract cutting might adapt and change when worn. We learn and co-design through watching and observing the body in relation with the garment geometry. Sometimes the two collide or fight; sometimes they fit.

In Accidental Cutting it is important to abstract from the human figure and to get away from it, especially in the first phases of the creative process. It's not the same to construct for the human body or apart from it, without its presence and influence, and after to adapt the experiment to it. In some occasions, a distancing from the human body is necessary, working at 1/1 scale or lower before deciding the size of the experiment that arises from the abstract form.

In Accidental Cutting, it is important in all cases to obtain as many models as possible, both on paper and using textiles, introducing variable joining rules. In the first phase there is a total distancing of the human body, in fact the suppression of it. The elimination of this conditioner



in the early design phases allows a certain autonomy, and opens up new possibilities. It is a different approach to fashion design, especially characteristic in Western culture, which focuses on the genesis of models for the human body, and revolves around it. It is a free and playful phase. Later on it is possible to choose the experimental elements that can be adapted to the human body.

As fashion designers we look, in the practice of both methods, for new relations between the human body and the volumes that wrap it. Measuring by eye, relative to our own limbs and those of the potential wearer, and developing and exploring more subversive tools which are more humanized or disruptive from which the garment emanates.

In Figure 10.3, a new approach to the human body is shown from the perspective of Subtraction Cutting. The images correspond to a recent project of a “Dress for a Musician” by Julian Roberts (2018).

During the process of developing the garment a series of measures and tools were developed by drawing around the physical body of the person for which the garment was being made—a musician. These outline drawings of the body, limbs, hand-spans, not only delineated the body in its conventional form but also incorporate the “musical reach” and posture of the subject: Their stretched hand reaching an octave chord on a piano keyboard, their comfortable outstretched arms reaching for piano key notes at opposite ends of the piano, and the flow of their long hair as they tilt their head in rhythm with the music, and in rest postures when the music ceases. These outline portrait drawings were then cut directly into cloth to create a human-shaped hole which then became mended closed, stitched shut like a scar creating distortions, tensions, and unknowable volumes in the resulting experimental garment form. The relation between the finished garment shape and the pattern template tools from which it derives become abstracted by the complex behavior of the textile material, as it reacts unpredictably to geometric challenges, the moving body and gravity. All of these elements conspire to make an end result that challenges the intention of conventional pattern cutting practice.

## **Conclusions**

The abstract pattern cutting attending to concepts, processes, and design tools is manifested in the methodological approaches of design methods and experimental pattern cutting: Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting. They make design thinking far less obvious, and more creative and intuitive.

Abstraction and the abstract imply a liberation from the conventional garment design and construction and, at the same time, relativity of forms and processes. The concepts and thoughts occasionally can be more conceptual, and at other times more intuitive or even non-existent, placing action over thought. This converges to the definitive materialization of the final design object and establishes new relationships with the human body.

Both Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting involve open and not closed design and research methodologies, new approaches, terms, and concepts that are continually added. They involve highly unstable creative processes that can vary from one moment to another, and from one designer to another. There is the possibility of a drastic and unexpected change. The final result supposes a delimitation of the investigation, but it is only one of the infinite possible results.



Figure 10.3 “Dress for a Musician” 2018. Author of the photographs, drawings, and models: Julian Roberts. Model: musician Andrew Poppy

Ultimately, the experimental design and pattern cutting methods of the Accidental Cutting and Subtraction Cutting continuously nourish themselves on abstraction and different types of abstract tools. They encourage and enable the process, facing the unknown and the discovery of the non-existent. Without the introduction of these elements this would not be possible.

## Notes

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# CHANGING THE WORLD, NOT JUST OUR WARDROBES: A SENSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING, CARE, AND QUIET ACTIVISM

*Fiona Hackney, Katie Hill, Clare Saunders, and Joanie Willett*

## **Clothing as quiet activism in the time of COVID-19**

In a recent webinar about sustainable, ethical fashion and activism the journalist and author Tansy Hoskins urged her audience to work collectively for social change and to always keep the wider consequences of their everyday actions in mind.<sup>1</sup> Developing the concept of “women’s wisdom,” Hazel Clark also pointed to the importance of everyday agencies in challenging the fashion status quo.<sup>2</sup> She argues that models already exist in “theories and practices which have been devised and applied by women.” This chapter examines the quietly activist potential in women’s everyday skills, knowledge, and capacities to address our dangerous fashion system.<sup>3</sup> It draws on material and findings from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded project “S4S: Designing a Sensibility for Sustainable Clothing” (2019–20). S4S combines arts and social science methods to investigate how, by “making together”, stitch groups might shape, uncover, or draw out incipient sensibilities (mind-sets, imaginaries) that promote pro-environmental values, qualities, aspirations, aesthetics, and self-identities through everyday behaviors.<sup>4</sup> We argue that participatory fashion and textiles practices are potentially an important tool for generating a sensibility for sustainability and therefore for informing policy on behavior change.

The research team includes arts researchers at the University of Wolverhampton, politics academics at University of Exeter, partners: campaign group Fashion Revolution, sustainable clothing brand Antiform, and community organizations in Cornwall and the West Midlands. The project launch – which included an address from Fashion Revolution’s Orsola de Castro delivered from inside her wardrobe – recruited 40 participants who went on to attend making, upcycling, and repurposing workshops, kept clothing diaries, contributed to films, wardrobe audits, discussion, events, and to the S4S pop-up exhibition.

The politics of fashion and fashion activism is a topic of vital current interest.<sup>5</sup> Underpinned by work on amateur creativity and community activism,<sup>6</sup> S4S employs the concept of “quiet activism,” a quietly affective activism that is embedded in everyday life.<sup>7</sup> This involves

employing crafts processes – often those conventionally associated with women’s domestic skills, denigrated as amateur, and overlooked – to co-produce “making interventions” that build community agencies, assets, and affects.<sup>8</sup> When, as now in a time of pandemic, the structures of capitalism are under severe strain, alternative and countercultural values and practices move into the mainstream.<sup>9</sup> Arts, crafts, and DIY activities that take place in the shed, on the allotment, or at the kitchen table have renewed potential to shape new quietly revolutionary and ethically sustainable versions of how we might live, work, relate to one another and our environment, and put them into action.

As COVID-19 highlights social inequalities new ideas about universal care or a commons of care provide a model for inventive forms of rethinking society.<sup>10</sup> As most of us spend more time being at and working from home, we are also spending more time with our wardrobes and ideally getting more creative with garments. Rediscovering care for our existing clothes, moreover, might align with increased attention to care for others and self-care for ourselves. This chapter examines a selection of material from the S4S wardrobe audits, locating them within the context of fashion changes in the wake of COVID-19. Using the lens of quiet activism, we reflect on what we might expect from our participants during COVID-19. Would they follow the large uptick in online clothing purchases or, on the basis of what they told us, would they be likely employ time making, mending, or modifying clothing?

### **The quietly activist wardrobe: method and methodology**

S4S research methods were designed to mimic and rework phases of the lifecycle of clothing by inserting material, sensory, and emotional practices generated within communities to encourage participants to rethink their relationship with the fashion system.<sup>11</sup> A conceptual framework: “think, feel, act” was embedded in questionnaires and wardrobe interviews to prompt a reflective, reflexive response. Our method, combining quantitative social science with qualitative practice-based arts research, is underpinned by a shared interest in the principles of “embodied research” that invites participants to use their bodies in order to explore and generate knowledges.<sup>12</sup> The principle combines the emphasis on activity and learning found in action-oriented research, with a focus on the physical and emotional use of the body, feeling, and affect.

Workshops, stitching groups and participants’ wardrobes were conceptualized as spaces “in between” the flow of fast fashion. Research interventions (activities, wardrobe audits, diaries, films, etc.) short-circuited the flow by emphasizing, for instance, the quality, skill, labor, and environmental impacts conventionally hidden in mainstream discourse. These spaces and interventions provided participants with opportunities to connect and reflect on the topic in depth through engaged social material practices as they make and talk together.<sup>13</sup> The research is thus both informative and transformative.<sup>14</sup>

Initially associated with material culture studies, ethnography, and social anthropology,<sup>15</sup> there is growing interest in wardrobe practices in sustainable fashion studies. Fletcher and Klepp argue for Wardrobe Studies as a discipline with methods including laundry probes, clothes mapping, caring through clothing, in addition to the clothes counting and interviews conducted in S4S.<sup>16</sup> The value of wardrobe methods, they contend, is their attention to both the specificities and the pluralism of the “lifeworld of garments” – the “social, relational, material, practical questions” played out in and around wardrobes.<sup>17</sup> Wardrobe methods can better help us understand the capacity of individuals to challenge the status quo and create sustainable futures for clothes, an ambition that itself is quietly activist.

The role of wardrobes in identity construction has been tackled from several perspectives such as life-history, clothes collections, and circulation.<sup>18</sup> Sophie Woodward's seminal ethnography of the wardrobe, however, is perhaps the most helpful for interpreting the S4S audit material.<sup>19</sup> Addressing the largely neglected topic of why women wear what they wear, Woodward studied the acts of clothes selection, combination, and wardrobe management involved in 27 women's wardrobes: what is retained (worn and unworn) or divested, items gifted, passed down, or swapped. She examines how women use clothing to negotiate relationships and self-identities. Clothing functions as "sartorial biography",<sup>20</sup> an extension of the self, or "personhood in aesthetic form" (Gell, 1998: 157),<sup>21</sup> which can help us understand the multiplicity and complexity of identity and embody our potential selves. We consume, retain, or gift items as a means of maintaining continuity with others, experimenting with new imaginaries, or managing "rupture" – major life changes such as losing a job, having a child, marrying, moving to live in a new country/culture.<sup>22</sup> All these elements feature to some extent in the S4S wardrobe audit interviews. Significantly, many who engaged most fully with the project were undergoing a form of rupture in their professional and/or personal lives. Drawn initially to the project by an interest in textile crafts and/or sustainability they discovered that it came "at the right time" to impact their lives more generally. The project methods, including the wardrobe audits, helped them to negotiate and reimagine self-identities and new futures for themselves, as well as the planet, under the rubric of a sustainable clothing sensibility.

The S4S wardrobe audit involved participants: (1) estimating the number of clothes they owned, excluding underwear, then counting them, and (2) being interviewed in front of their wardrobes. We interviewed 15 participants and have completed count forms for nine. Some participants stopped part way through counting, horrified by the number of clothes items they owned. Notable is the significant difference between the number of items estimated and those counted in wardrobes. Figure 11.1 shows the box plot distributions for participants' guesses of the number of items in their wardrobe against the number counted. The mean value for guesses was 111 items (minimum 30 maximum of 230) and for counted items 146 (minimum 33 maximum 340). This masks a significant standard deviation, shown by the tails on the box plot for "total." Even the participant with few items underestimated the number of garments in her wardrobe by 10%. Others were drastically different. At the upper end of the scale, Abigail estimated 150 items, but counted 340. A second notable feature is the larger number of clothes owned in comparison to Woodward's study,<sup>23</sup> where totals ranged between 35 and 182, evidence perhaps of increasing clothing consumption.<sup>24</sup> This could relate to access to cheap fast fashion from online retailers, but issues of clothing retention also play a part.

While the "before" and "after" data-interviews captured participants' affective learning journeys through the project and any self-reported behavior change, the in-project interviews invited reflections on their clothing choices, practices, and feelings. We report on three of each. Although the wardrobe audit might have been perceived as an invasion of privacy, the women who participated engaged with it strongly, thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to talk about their wardrobes.

### **Through the wardrobe: affective journeys**

This section takes an affective journey with three participants, who expressed different attitudes to clothing, examining their responses to the wardrobe audit and how it impacted them. Christine, originally from Italy, places a lot of store on looking good. However, in the pre-workshops interview she admitted to losing control over her wardrobe:

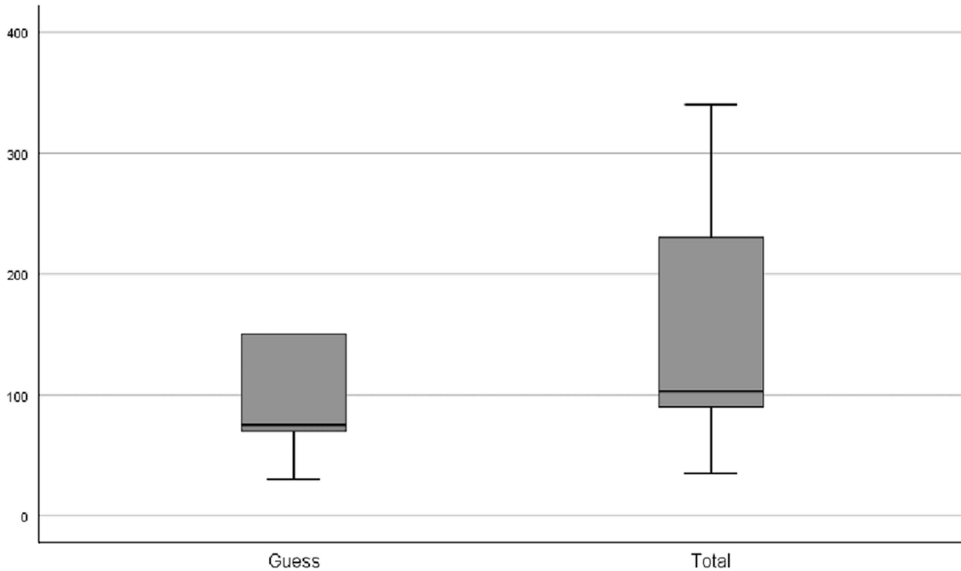


Figure 11.1 The difference between estimates and actual numbers of items in participants' wardrobes. © S45 project

I have to say that this is the worst time in my life in terms of owning so much stuff ... I think that recently I've let myself go a little bit too much ... When I buy things on Amazon ... I still have things wrapped, or things that are absolutely brand new, part of this big lot of stuff that I buy.

She was shocked at the volume of items that she had, many of which were unworn. By the post-workshops wardrobe audit she was relieved to pass on garments that she had kept for years, but still thought she had too many. She was possibly more ashamed of her wardrobe than beforehand. Christine learnt how to alter and repurpose a garment and subsequently came to love the fluidity of clothing. Occasionally she was tempted to buy cheap clothes from Amazon but restrained herself, perhaps due to the affective impact of feeling she had too many clothes. She continued to shop online because of the limited range of shops in the small town where she lived. The change in Christine with regards to prioritizing quality over quantity can be attributed to the workshops. She appreciated the difficulty of being sustainable and why reducing clothing is challenging but important. Having achieved the skills to do basic mending she wants to continue learning and has bought a sewing machine. She prefers structured learning, confirming how important workshops and purposeful projects are in challenging social norms and encouraging pro-environmental behavior change,<sup>25</sup> The change she has undergone seems to have been an amplification of her clothing thinking and practice rather than a radical transformation.

Tiffany, already experienced in clothes-making and sustainable thinking, deepened her knowledge and skills through project participation. She told us how she had started to make changes:

She had already started to make changes as stated in the initial wardrobe audit:

I think the evidence is the lack of things that I've bought ... it's like the only thing I've bought recently is ... those trousers and like I say, they had them in the window and every time I walked past I was like I really like those ... so I know I'm gonna get wear out of them .... before starting the workshops I used to finish work and stroll around Truro and spend like a t-shirt here and a t-shirt there, but I don't now because I think I've got loads of things.

By the final wardrobe audit her ethical thinking had deepened and she had pretty much stopped shopping for clothes. She has a checklist now before buying: have I got anything like it already? Is the fiber natural? Can I make it myself? Is it the most sustainable option on my budget? Her purchases became more considered and she plans to re-make items she does not wear. The workshops amplified her latent interest in sustainability and her aim to repurpose garments reflects a new awareness of their fluidity and malleability. She feels less pressure to dress in a "cookie-cutter" style and is happy to be more unique. Tiffany really enjoyed the workshops and the community of friendships built there.

Susan's love of fashion brands and looking good was reflected in her clothing count. She said, "It took me ages, about 90 minutes in the end ... when I counted them all ... I couldn't believe how many clothes I've got, especially summer tops, I was really surprised." Unlike Tiffany and Christine, she had an additional 20 to 30 items in the final wardrobe audit count. Expecting always to be brand-oriented, she feels that she makes good clothing choices, and has a style that she is comfortable with. For ethical reasons she now chooses locally based brands and doesn't shop online. One change is that she cares less now about what she wears and how she looks, putting comfort first, something that she associates with the area she lives where there is less cultural peer pressure. She no longer buys cheap clothes choosing better quality items that last. Another change is that she washes clothes less often and spends less money because she knows that she has enough clothes to wear, and consequently shops less. Susan really enjoyed the social aspects of the workshops and considered the up-skilling strategies she learned useful. Rather than asking her mum, she now fixes more of her clothes herself – and her boyfriend's too.

While the pre-workshop clothing counts revealed to participants that they had more clothes than they need, post-workshop audits revealed that the project had amplified thoughts around sustainability and clothing that participants already experienced rather than engendering radical transformational change. Both Susan and Tiffany reflected more deeply on the life course of a garment, causing them to re-value clothing as precious rather than disposable. They developed different strategies to address this in their everyday lives dependent on their personal preferences, identities, and lifestyles, all prime examples of quiet activism. Tiffany restricted consumption by posing a rigorous set of questions before she bought a garment. Susan, for whom clothes shopping was deeply ingrained in her self-identity and self-presentation, reduced her shopping and mended garments to prolong longevity. Both evidenced a new awareness of the fluidity and malleability of clothing as they embraced upcycling.<sup>26</sup>

### **In and out of the wardrobe: spaces of quiet activism**

The longer, in-project interviews revealed connections between women's subjective engagement with their wardrobes and quietly activist sensibilities for clothing behavior change. The three individuals featured in this section were deeply involved in the project, observing that it had come at the right time for them. Each was experiencing some form of major life change (Woodward's concept of "rupture"): career change, family moving on, for example. A brief



outline of each woman's background will be followed by consideration of (1) their affective response to the wardrobe audit, (2) clothing stories, and (3) emergent clothing sensibilities through the lens of quiet activism.

Abigail, a skilled dressmaker, trained in fashion, was employed in the textiles industry local to where she lived until it moved offshore. Married and a mother to three young girls, family is a major concern alongside her ambition to set up a sustainable textiles-related business. Admitting that the prospect of the clothing count left her "mildly terrified" – and that she was horrified by the number of items she owned – these feelings swiftly turned to pleasure as Abigail became engrossed in the garments, "reminding myself of what's there and the stories behind it." Clothes function for her as a mode of storytelling, a material photo-album, memento or autobiography that recalls and momentarily fixes personal temporalities, events, connections with family, all integral to her own multiple identities as daughter, sibling, working professional, mother, and wife.<sup>27</sup> She speaks of her clothes with love as if in an emotional relationship with them and treats them with great care. A red skirt suit, her mother's going-away outfit when she first married aged twenty-three in the 1960s, is a favorite. Abigail loves the fabric, texture, color, design, and original label, but it is what she terms the "sentimental values" that are most important. She wears it often (Figure 11.2) – usually the jacket with jeans or skirts, for events, even a job interview – and hopes that her daughters will do the same, the garment connecting three generations of women. Woodward considers the mother–daughter relationship central to the expression of self-identity through clothing, the act of wearing items being a "shared bond".<sup>28</sup> Wearing this treasured item of her mother's wardrobe, Abigail forges an embodied connection with her as a young woman, in part situating herself in the position of her mother but also, by teaming the jacket with other items, using it to negotiate her own present identity.

Abigail has a rich and lively system for acquiring clothes and passing them on, from regular swaps with sisters – a means of maintaining family connections and continuities as well as saving money – to charity shop finds, and gifted family items. She is motivated by the thrill of the second-hand bargain, something that requires cultural capital (knowledge and skill) to recognize value. While she brought expertise to the project, she valued the process of "working on and bouncing ideas and sharing" with others in "very much a reciprocal situation." The clothing sensibility emerging from Abigail's audit interview centers on a "heightened sensitivity" to the wider ethical and sustainable responsibilities that inform her clothing choices. Acknowledging love for and pride in her wardrobe, she links this to a growing sense of self-confidence, irrespective of fashion, "If I love it and it's me and that's what I want to say on that given day, wear it!"

She argues for more purposeful dialogue about our lives with clothes – a form of everyday activism in itself – admitting to getting a "warm fuzzy feeling" when hers are noticed. Wearability, nevertheless, is most prized. Abigail makes, alters, purchases, embellishes, and selects clothes with the express purpose of extending longevity. This involves a flow of making interactions between her wardrobe, sewing room and "Reclaiming Fashion," her business concept (running classes in environmental stitch activism for young people, which the project helped her take to the House of Lords).<sup>29</sup> As her daughter observed, "Mummy you're a great engineer, a fashion engineer."

Sarah, who works in museums and heritage, was experiencing a major challenge in her professional life, which was affecting her self-esteem when she joined the project. Initially leading a set of workshops, she joined as a participant when she realized that "exchanging ideas ... sharing ideas, and developing ideas with other people" renewed her self-confidence, and "reminded me I am good at stuff." Sarah has experienced periods of



Figure 11.2 Abigail wearing her mother's suit jacket from the 1960s combined with contemporary items from her wardrobe. © S45 project

unemployment, is good at strategizing to economize, can make, repair, and alter clothes, and habitually buys from charity shops.

She was, nevertheless, shocked at the size of her wardrobe. Her estimation of 20 or 30 pairs of shoes, for instance, fell short of the 52 pairs she owns; “a pair for every week of the year,” she joked. For the interview Sarah enjoyed arranging all her clothes in her dining room, reflecting on her pleasure in ownership as she created a colorful display (Figure 11.3). Management, staging, and display is central to her relationship with clothes for, although she claims never to have considered herself fashionable, she consciously assembles items to construct personas: “cycling Sarah”; “outdoor Sarah”; “grown working in an art gallery Sarah”; “tomboyish Sarah”; “girly Sarah”; “history Sarah – my Lucy Worsley dress.” “I’m a lot of different Sarahs,” she concludes, and she has garments and stories for each.

The wardrobe audit prompted Sarah to develop a strategy to limit consumption. A habitual organizer who has been known even to document her purchases (date, price, shop), she is adept at planning and extended these wardrobe management skills to develop a tool to help her live a more sustainable life. Drawing on her knowledge of dress history, Sarah adopted the British Board of Trade's 1940s wartime ration scheme challenging herself to use only 66 coupons over a period of seven months, something she achieved with coupons to spare, partly through stopping daily purchases of tights or stockings.<sup>30</sup> An act of quiet activism, this couponing strategy helped Sarah “make do without,” as she put it, a contemporary response to wartime make-do-and-mend, a personalized version of the citizen activism that women's groups and many female MPs encouraged women to participate in during the war years.<sup>31</sup>

The project determined Sarah to “buy less and wear longer” and develop strategies to assist her in this. Influencing others, moreover, to find their own sustainable clothing sensibilities, she



Figure 11.3 Sarah's display of her colorful shoe collection, created for the wardrobe audit. © S45 project

provides an informal personalized dress service for colleagues, and runs workshops on upcycling for Girl Guides, as well as repurposing and adapting unworn garments for her family. Guilt felt after the wardrobe audit prompted her to think up strategies such as her coupon system and act on them to limit clothing consumption. Sarah shaped her own affective journey through the project, continuing to take pleasure in her wardrobe by feeling “virtuous” rather than “guilty.”

Suzanne trained in furniture design, working as a designer before taking up a post in higher education. As a mother of four boys, she has a busy family life, which shapes a primarily functional relationship with clothing and makes shopping a chore. There is also a gendered dimension to this, as illustrated in the following quote:

[b]ecause my family are all men I've never really done the going shopping thing as an activity ... I'm not a fashion person; I don't particularly think I'm fashionable either, so clothes are a bit of a funny thing for me.

She has a strong community network of neighbors, friends, and family sharing hand-me-downs, and encourages family clothes swaps. The interview revealed how clothing embodies a complex set of temporal and emotional relationships – memories of relatives who had gifted things and occasions when pieces were worn.<sup>32</sup> Many items are decades old with rich histories. Engaging with project workshops reignited an interest in design and making, and Suzanne describes using a sewing machine at home for the first time in years. This coincided with one of her sons leaving home to start university, freeing up space for a sewing room, and re-connecting with colleagues she studied with in the 1990s. She felt a fashion sensibility begin to evolve, “Not fashion as in designer or the latest fashion, but just in terms of style. Sort of garments, quality, style, finish.”

For the clothing count, Suzanne devised an elaborate system for estimating then counting her clothes. This involved descriptions of individual pieces and notes about the fit and feel of the garments resulting in an 11-page document, rather than the single page of the original pro-forma. It revealed that there are around four times as many clothes in her wardrobe than she had estimated. Even though she doesn't buy new clothes, she was shocked and mortified at the amount of clothing and began to plan a managed reduction in a socially and environmentally sensitive way. First thing was to organize clothes into sizes, give away those that did not fit, and rotate seasonal clothing in and out of storage in the loft. Suzanne has good making skills and easily picked up skills at workshops. This enabled a sense of being able to choose exactly what to wear by making/altering/re-making it rather than "accept something that was less than what you wanted."

Suzanne's clothing sensibility emerged from her re-evaluating her clothes shopping behavior as well as the extent of clothes she retains, using her sewing and design skills to make sure that what owns fits her and her family's needs. Being part of a group was important to her and during lockdown she has posted on social media about making clothes and accessories, and borrowing patterns from project participants, suggesting that the social connections remain and support an evolving sensibility for behavior change.

## **Conclusion**

The processual nature of making (building, crafting, shaping, constructing) a wardrobe involves an ongoing process of moving, exchanging, recalibrating, replacing, and divesting as well as acquiring garments.<sup>33</sup> The complexity of this wardrobe work and the extent to which it is integral to the labor of making the self needs to be recognized if we are to rethink the fashion system. The S4S interviews evidence a diverse range of strategies that participants devised to reduce the environmental impact of their wardrobes: repairing and repurposing garments, constructing a checklist or coupon system to limit purchases, "being mindful" (Sarah) of what is bought and where, buying locally and not online, buying nothing new for a year, swapping or passing-on clothing, buying second-hand, organizing the wardrobe to ensure, where possible, that clothes are worn. Such strategies evidence a particular set of priorities – to care for clothes, respect and value them, pay attention to "quality, style, finish" (Suzanne), fabric and fit, how garments connect us to others, and other versions of ourselves. They signal an alternative sensibility of fashionability, whereby fashion consciousness is reimagined as sustainability consciousness. The personal becomes political and the wardrobe a quietly activist space for social, economic, and political agency.

While, for many, the project amplified existing ethical concerns about clothing rather than instigated radical behavior change, for participants facing some form of "rupture" in their lives it was especially significant. Seeking to forge new self-identities, they were particularly open to change. The social and cultural capital involved in being part of a community or group, additionally, clearly reinforces adherence to new norms of behavior. If such sensibilities are to be maintained beyond the project, however, in the face of COVID-19 for instance, it is likely to be because they are rooted in a participant's own circumstances, interests, needs, proclivities, networks, and ultimately self-identity. During the lockdown Suzanne has posted on social media about making clothes, accessories, and borrowing patterns from fellow S4S participants. Sarah, meanwhile, is itching to buy more clothes, albeit from charity shops as browsing these and fabric markets has been impossible. Clothes consciousness: the desire to use clothing to look and feel good, and communicate with others, is central to our social, emotional, and psychological identities. If a sensibility for sustainable clothing is integral to that sense of self and

embedded in the structures and imaginaries of everyday life, we can anticipate real affectual pro-environmental change, inside and outside the wardrobe.

## Acknowledgment

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# FASHION AND TECHNOLOGY: HAND AND MACHINE IN (HIGH- END) FASHION DESIGN

*Barbara Faedda*

The term “encloded cognition” was introduced a few years ago by Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky, with an article published on the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, basically describing the psychological effects that clothes have on the person who wears them. The two scientists’ theory that wearing a medical doctor’s coat – while also attributing a meaning to it – would increase performance on attention-related tasks was confirmed after several experiments. They stated that clothes not only affect our thoughts, but also the abilities and feelings associated to them.<sup>1</sup> To put it simply, the motto “dress to impress” does not therefore only refer to others, but above all to ourselves, as numerous studies and experiments – including Hannover and Kuhnen’s on the hypothesis that clothing styles might influence self-descriptions – had previously demonstrated.<sup>2</sup>

The study of Adam and Galinsky provoked many reactions. Right after it was released, the *New York Times* underlined the effects of clothing on cognitive processes stressing Galinsky’s statement that “we think not just with our brains but with our bodies.”<sup>3</sup>

Adam and Galinsky’s new theory laid the groundwork for further scientific investigation. In 2014, Charles Van Stockum and Marci DeCaro published the results of their research, where they described some limitations of the “encloded cognition theory,” explaining that, “interventions designed to enhance controlled attention may restrict the ability to notice useful information that is important for some tasks, especially those that rely on creative or associative processes.” What is important here to note is the part referring to the creative process. Van Stockum and DeCaro explain that, while it can be true that the doctor’s coat wearer will probably perform better than the painter’s coat wearer in specific tasks, some other elements have to be taken into consideration, like “individual differences and task demands.” They noticed that, even if most studies on embodied cognition show that “embodiment activates existing knowledge,” the opposite can also happen, which is that “embodiment can inhibit the creation of new knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

The lively scientific debate went on. In 2015, a research by Slepian, Ferber, Gold and Rutchick, titled “The Cognitive Consequences of Formal Clothing,” explained that not only is formal clothing generally associated to social distance and less intimacy, but also – and more interestingly – to more abstract cognitive processing.<sup>5</sup> In 2016, Lopez-Perez, Ambrona, Wilson, and Khalil tested the empathic response of persons wearing a tunic that they identified as a nurse’s scrub, and published their findings in a research report titled, “The Effect of Encloded

Cognition on Empathic Responses and Helping Behavior.” In those who were wearing – and not just seeing – the nurse’s scrub, they noticed higher levels of empathy and helping behavior. The research team therefore stated that the results of their study supported Adam and Galinsky’s “enclothed cognition framework.”<sup>6</sup>

The same year, Galak, Gray, Elbert, and Strohminger examined the levels of conformity and consistency in the choice of clothing of women who moved or relocated to another neighborhood with higher or lower status. The team’s results were quite clear: women tended to conform to new local norms after moving to a higher status location, while they generally ignored them in a lower-status neighborhood.<sup>7</sup> In 2017, a research group studied the effects of clothing on competency judgments, coming to the conclusion that “posture manipulations affect judgements of individuals differently according to the clothing they were pictured in.”<sup>8</sup>

Since prehistory, the cognitive skills developed by human beings in producing their clothing, ornaments, and accessories have been incredibly sophisticated. Exploration and experimentation have developed a rich set of tools, processes, and technologies for weaving, embroidery, pleating, bleaching, dyeing, cutting, sewing, and spinning.<sup>9</sup>

The most refined skills, expert craftsmanship, and complex practices have been applied to high-end fashion since its birth. What we call haute couture, Alta Moda, or high-end fashion, is most traditionally characterized by handmade garments and superior manufacturing practices. High fashion is defined by high quality, great professionalism and expertise, and extreme attention to details and finishes, that are often – but not exclusively – performed by hand.

Until today, it seemed that a balance between the hand and the machine had been reached and that high-end fashion designers were able to manage a fair combination of the two. However, the digital revolution is upsetting this balance and fashion designers now see new technologies as one of their biggest challenges, forcing them to take a position, and eventually to declare if they are interested in adopting them and, if so, to what extent.

Within this tension – and in a variety of positions spanning from rejection, to silent resistance, to moderate acceptance, to enthusiastic endorsement – fashion designers feel the urge to develop a new narrative based on recurrent words and themes: past, future, memory, dichotomy, integration, exploration, or creativity, just to mention a few. But above all there is the hand. The hand’s prominent role is always seen, whether the designer fully embraces the new technology or s/he opposes it.

In May 2016, the Met Gala’s theme was “fashion and technology,” linked to the successful exhibition *Manus x Machina*. At the fancy event, a model wore a “Cognitive Dress,” developed by IBM Watson in collaboration with the fashion house Marchesa. Each rose stitched on the dress contained an LED light that changed colors based on the emotions communicated by the public, in real time, via Twitter. The feelings were linked to colors thanks to an algorithm and a program able to identify emotions in the tweets’ text and translate them into a color palette. IBM was involved because of its interest in cognitive-enabled experiences and embodied cognition. This was also an experiment around the power of customers’ emotions and feedback.<sup>10</sup>

Another high-tech gown – although less interactive – was presented that night by the young American fashion designer Zac Posen. The dress was hand-sewn and crafted from organza and fiber optics – connected to a switch on the inside – so that the dress lit up in the dark. In a series of interviews, the designer highlighted the fact that the dress was created using custom-made Gossamer fabric, sourced in France, and that it took six people around 600 hours to make the gown. Zac Posen explained: “I’m interested in that place, where the past and the future meet because that’s universal and that hits a chord around the world ... just recognizing beauty and a magic moment between fantasy and technology [...] I’m really an old school designer.”<sup>11</sup>



The “Cognitive Dress” designed by Marchesa with IBM technology and presented at the Met Gala followed another “Intelligent Dress” presented about one year before: the “Butterfly Dress,” designed by the avant-gardist Turkish designers Ezra and Tuba Cetin and powered by Intel’s Edison Compute Module. The dress, made from a luxury jacquard interwoven with metallic Lurex fibers, has forty butterflies which can detect the presence of a person – thanks to a proximity sensor that makes the butterflies react to external stimuli. The closer a person is approaching, the faster the butterflies flap, until they all leave the gown. Tuba Cetin said in an interview: “We love to play with fabrics, designs, colors, movement and aesthetics, but the future of clothing as we know it is about to change. To be part of this change we need technology.”<sup>12</sup>

Interactive surfaces, conductive yarns, and connected clothes are the outcome of “Project Jacquard,” an initiative launched by Google in 2015 and developed in partnership with clothing company Levi’s.<sup>13</sup> Paul Dillinger, Levi’s head of global product innovation, highlighted the idea that “in a hyper-digital world, people constantly struggle to be physically present in their environment while maintaining a digital connection.”<sup>14</sup> The new Jacquard yarns combine thin, metallic alloys with natural and synthetic yarns like cotton, polyester, or silk, making the yarn strong enough to be woven on any industrial loom. One of the aims of Project Jacquard is to create yarns that are not just similar but truly identical to traditional ones.

A few years prior, in 2013, fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg used Google smart glasses during her fashion show, introducing a new phase of wearable technology into high-end fashion design. The glasses, worn by the models and the company’s staff, were able to capture not just the creative and performance process from new perspectives and angles but also the emotions and immediate response of public, critics, journalists, and professionals during the show.<sup>15</sup>

There are other recent interesting cases of fashion companies dealing with the combination of traditional handcraft and cultural heritage with technological development (and more often with attention to the environment as well).

The Italian brand Jehsel Lau, based in Milan and led by Mexican fashion designer Jehsel Lau, started by producing clothes for dancers and performing artists and in 2010 expanded their offerings with an “Eco-luxury” clothing brand that combines high-fashion handmade techniques with high-tech materials (Ecorepel, a new finishing technology that ensures a high level of water and dirt repellence on textiles), while adopting a sustainable and environmentally friendly and biodegradable method of production free from fluorocarbons. Lau considers her brand part of the Slow Fashion movement, a term first coined by London College of Fashion’s professor Kate Fletcher when she compared fashion to the Slow Food movement, founded in Italy in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, and defined by three interconnected principles: good, clean, and fair.<sup>16</sup> The Slow Fashion movement proposes a new idea of pleasure linked to fashion, in which fashion is no longer time based but quality based. Fletcher tries to reject the idea of a dichotomy – that goes beyond that of hand versus machine – stating that “slow is not the opposite of fast – there is no dualism – but a different approach in which designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers are more aware of the impact of products on workers, communities, and ecosystems.”<sup>17</sup>

In the spring of 2016, Jehsel Lau presented their collection, called – in my opinion not coincidentally – “*Aequilibrium*,” at Altaroma, Rome’s bi-annual high-end fashion week and also incubator for young designers. Lau underlined that her creations – all presented as individual and unique pieces – were all handmade and characterized by the coexistence of innovation, avant-garde, and traditional craft techniques. Jehsel Lau’s use of technology spoke to durability and ergonomics, while the handmade spoke to aesthetic beauty. This is an example of a brand that, combining skilled manufacturing practice with new technology and slow fashion values and practices, decided – very ambitiously – to place itself in the high-end fashion world.<sup>18</sup>

Speaking of pure textile research, Grado Zero, an Italian company working on specialized innovative fabrics, uses specific geometric textile modeling software in combination with software for the analysis of thermal, mechanical, and engineering properties. They merge textile and engineering expertise. New materials include thermo-active alloys or polymers and high-performance fibers, but also eco-friendly fabrics that use natural fibers such as cypress, peat, kapok, nettle, and spiderweb. Many applications and technologies that Grado Zero applies to the textile and clothing industry are covered by confidentiality agreements with the companies for which they have been developed. These companies include major international fashion brands like Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and others that the interviewed were not allowed to mention. They told me that their technology mainly relates to the search for optimal performance in the fabrics (waterproof protection and breathability), to the application of materials until now not even taken into consideration by the fashion and textile industry (in-memory materials shape, or materials and treatments used in the space industry), and finally to the introduction of alternative materials with high ecological value (for example, the use of alternatives to cotton such as nettle and cypress; alternatives to animal skin as Muskin, a fungus treated like a skin; and vegetable alternatives to goose feathers). Some of these technologies and materials are still being tested and evaluated by the companies, while others are already available mainly to small fashion brands who wish to offer innovative products not available in big quantities to large fashion industries (as in the case of the tanned fungus). Nettles and cypress are already gaining a prominent position in the clothing industry. From cypress, Grado Zero developed a hybrid fabric with anti-bacterial and antiseptic properties.<sup>19</sup>

The most advanced technology is also applied to less expensive productions. One of the most recent creations in this field is the “Data Dress,” an idea presented in 2017 by Google and digital fashion house Ivyrevel.<sup>20</sup> Google is creating an app that will collect users’ information and data, tastes, preferences, lifestyle, and social life. On the basis of personal data and specific needs, Ivyrevel then creates a unique “data dress,” tailored to the customer’s selection of materials, shape, cut, and color. Ivyrevel’s co-founder Dejan Subosic recently stated: “We are proud to be digital-only, breaking boundaries to create a new fashion heritage by merging fashion creativity with technological innovation.”<sup>21</sup>

Not everyone in the fashion world considers the alleged dichotomy between hand and machine successfully resolved. Some discomfort is noticeable among high-end fashion designers who are inevitably called to take a position and to justify their choice, either in favor or against the use of more advanced technology in high-end fashion. There is resistance, especially to 3D technology.

For many high-end fashion designers, 3D technology – whose birth is usually dated in 1984 – is without a doubt the most controversial new technology.<sup>22</sup> In 2015, Italian fashion designer Renato Balestra said that clothes in 3D cannot be an alternative to high fashion, that 3D is better suited to ready to wear, while high fashion is not only made of small details that are constantly being changed but also created directly on the model, assembling different pieces of fabric and constantly adjusting them to a real person. He stated: “Technology is not a tyrant to fashion because creativity has no limits and the creation must be free. It, of course, influences our collections because fashion is always conditioned by the historical moment and now we live in a world of technology. Sometimes it can be useful in creating new materials and new production techniques – it might certainly help – but we do not want to become slaves to technology.” Another Italian fashion designer, Raffaella Curiel, said: “I do not think that 3D printers will replace hand-made and the high fashion unless you want to permanently kill our handicraft and manufacturing tradition. A machine cannot substitute handmade work and creativity. It is great to have a new technology that might allow shortening the production time

of the clothes, but it is a good thing only for ready to wear, not for high-end fashion. High fashion is experimentation, research, study, a minor form of art and culture that a machine cannot replace. High fashion clothes are a unique result of a large research project.” Guillermo Mariotto, creative director of Gattinoni, underlined: “Technology has always influenced fashion, and without it, ready to wear would have never grown. I would buy a 3D printer, I love these ‘toys’, but it is limited to the production of ready to wear. At best, you might use 3D printers for online orders, because it would speed up the process, but not for high fashion. It is difficult for a 3D printer to replace the handmade.”<sup>23</sup>

What is evident to the observers of this phenomenon in the fashion realm is not just the persisting idea of a hand/machine dichotomy, but also the perceived need for defining the boundaries between the different areas of applicability. Designers feel that they have to find a way of combining the two paradigms, and eventually to understand how, to what extent, and in which sector they are interested in adopting new technologies.

There are many experts now who think, “The possibilities of 3D Printing for product development and manufacturing are endless.” Moreover, if we delve into the technical detail, we discover that 3D printing is made up of different types: a) photo polymer/liquid resins and gels; b) thermoplastics in filament form; c) polymers, elastomers, metal alloys, and ceramic powders.<sup>24</sup> This endless series of possibilities is probably the basis of Iris van Herpen’s enthusiasm for this technique. Van Herpen – who in 2011 presented a 3D-printed dress at the Paris Haute Couture Fashion Week – is unanimously considered the real pioneer of the 3D printing in high fashion. In 2015, she was even named the initiator of a “high-tech movement.”<sup>25</sup>

However, the idea of adding new high-tech tools as fashion products seems to appeal to an increasing number of fashion designers, but, the more technology intervenes in the high-fashion creative process, the more numerous are the references to tradition, heritage, manufacturing, the handmade, and hours spent in producing a garment. This is when the dress becomes a *haute couture sculpture* or a *work of art*. It is a process of beautification of technology which follows the dialog and brainstorming between engineers and fashion designers, and that some observers describe – predictably – as a conversation that is not always smooth. Beautification occurs through a recurrent and passionate clinging to the handcrafts’ tradition, the manufacturing culture, and expertise of the savvy tailor, skillful embroiderer, and virtuoso lace-maker. Sartorial tradition is the anchor of high-end fashion, and traditional craftsmanship – an intangible cultural heritage – is the inspiration.

All of these examples share the fact that new high technological tools applied to fashion affect the creative process, as well as the psychological experience – both at a personal and a collective level – with clothes, accessories, and ornaments. They also change human perception and modify the interaction between the “dressed/adorned body” and the world.

One of the main goals of technology applied to fashion is to improve and amplify human capabilities. Two clear examples are sportswear and wearables (especially for people with neurological diseases): both fields have benefited from striking improvements and evident results. It may be interesting to remember that the concept of “wearable technology” itself – that many find to be very innovative – is nothing new and actually lies far behind in human history. As Guler et alii explain “The history of the common wristwatch began in the 1500s [...] German inventor Peter Henlein began developing small watches that hung from a chain around the neck [...] In 1904, aviator Alberto Santos-Dumont commissioned the famous jeweler Cartier to create a timepiece that could be worn around his wrist.”<sup>26</sup> It is a striking example of high-end fashion combined with technology.

There is a lot of material that can be further explored, and research is advancing very fast. This chapter intends to give an idea of the many, interdisciplinary interests that characterize the multifaceted and challenging interaction between fashion, science, and technology.

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# CRAFTING CARE THROUGH CHILDHOOD: EDUCATION, PLAY, AND SUSTAINABLE ETHICAL FASHION

*Melinda Byam*

## Introduction

Fashion as an industry is an interconnected labyrinth of commerce, art, craft, labor, and technology that reaches a global scale with a social, economic, environmental impact unlike most other industries. While the focus on fashion largely centers on women's fashion, with men's fashion close behind, children's fashion and its ecological, economic, and social impacts is often ignored. I hypothesize that this is due, in part, to the fleeting nature of the developmental stages and bodily sizes of children. Shifting the focus to children's fashion and the child consumer we must recognize them not only as their own segment of the industry but also as future adult consumers. In connecting this method of thought to early childhood education practices and discourses on sustainability practices, a new perspective emerges on a way to create change within the industry.

Discussions around sustainability and ethical labor are motivated by the necessity to transform an industry that is constantly depleting natural resources while polluting others, and one that is often accused of unethical labor practices. Ideas on how to create a more sustainable industry often entail changing consumer behavior – and the way manufacturers and designers work within the industry,<sup>1</sup> all presumably changes at the adult consumer/worker level.

This chapter examines the intersection between early-childhood educational practices and sustainability practices within the fashion industry. At the same time, my aim is to call attention to the role of education in forming new more conscious consumer behaviors and citizens. This project, I argue, should start from childhood. Early-childhood practices must be a focus on the agency of the child who is viewed as an active participant not only in their learning process but in guiding this process. In this same mode of thinking, the child must be seen as a consumer, recognizing that although their consumption is not autonomous from that of their parent or guardian, the modern child is a driving factor within their family's consumption habits<sup>2</sup> as they live “*in relation*” to commerce with their adult figure as the sentimental link between themselves and consumption.<sup>3</sup> In the case of children's goods, they are the recipient of such consumption, while maintaining their novice status as an apprentice in consumption practices. Using the Loris Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia approach, which was created with the intent of “raising better

citizens of the world...characterized by activism, community participation and belief in education as a foundation for civil society” we see how the language and pedagogy of early-childhood education can contribute to the larger discussion on sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

### Connecting consumption and caring-about relationships

Featherstone's *Theories of Consumer Culture* examines three main perspectives of consumer culture. First, that rates of consumption are surmised from the ever-growing capitalist culture of commodity production, leading to an abundance of retailers and goods. The second perspective is that consumer culture is based on a derivation of a social structure that relies on the satisfaction from the obtaining and displaying of goods. The third is that consumption is connected to an emotional pleasure.<sup>5</sup> Whereas all three perspectives have been accepted as routes to consumption, and even over-consumption, Featherstone argues that it is the *culture of consumption* that must take prominence within the theoretical discussions of consumer culture.<sup>6</sup> This culture, which is embedded through embodied practices and social conditioning, is a part of the pivotal question as the exploration of the culture of children's consumption continues. Specifically, I ask how can this culture of consumption be one that includes the concept of caring-about – people, things, fashion – and expanded upon as these children develop into adulthood?

Before exploring the different components of the caring relationship within fashion consumption, we must first come to a basic understanding of the study of caring, beyond the commonly characterized analysis of caring as a domestic theory. Nel Noddings expands upon caring as relating solely to close interpersonal relationships. It is categorized as the care-for relationship which “consists of face-to-face occasions in which one person, as carer, cares directly for another, the cared-for,”<sup>7</sup> and the caring-about relationship, to a larger societal level which includes the “caring about people who are at a distance from us in terms of social status, culture, physical distance or time.”<sup>8</sup> In this matter, caring is based on consciousness when we engage in these caring encounters. This consciousness contains the potential to connect the fashion consumer to the plight of the garment worker, the farmer, and the health and sustainability of the planet.

Caring encounters account for the rise in exposés revealing the exploitation often involved in fashion production, which calls for direct action against the blameworthy retailer or brand to create a change for the “victimized” workers. However, these “call to actions” hardly have a lasting impact as consumers mostly continue to purchase items regardless of their semi awareness of the issues<sup>9</sup> and lack of willingness to compromise on style or price.<sup>10</sup> Noddings attributes this level of caring as potentially being one of the inherent flaws of caring-about—“abstraction,” in which the group determined to be the cared-for become mere symbols for the ideology of the “carer.”<sup>11</sup> The cared-for is neither consulted in the call for action nor are they the recipient of any beneficial behavior, as is the case of the boycotting of retailers for their treatment of factory workers without consulting with those workers.<sup>12</sup> The consumer who continues to shop despite the exploitation that is occurring can be described as acting upon an “indisposability” characteristic. In this instance, we must not judge them as not-caring or lacking the sense of responsibility and concern but as potentially lacking the connection between consumer-fashion-worker/producer. As discordant as it may sound, these consumers are unable to recognize that the self is part of that relation and that there is an intrinsic connection between self-interest and other interest.<sup>13</sup> The benefits to the cared-for and cared-about are, in turn, beneficial to the self. The differing approaches to caring relationships highly depends on how the act of caring has been taught and developed from an early age. In continuation, how one

perceives their actions as impacting those outside their own personal associations is a combination of the strength of the caring-about relationship and the value placed on one's own immediate needs and wants. It is in how these caring relationships are taught to children and embedded within their behavioral system that has the potential to be fundamental to the larger sustainability discussion.

Interpersonal relationships are pivotal factors within this subject matter, the clothing we wear is subjugated to and inspired by the social structure of our space. In addition, with the scaling of the caring-about relationship, interpersonal relationships have an effect on how we perceive and consider those outside of our space. The clothes children wear is another venue in which they explore and create social rules. Like adults, the choices children make in deciding to dress alike or different is an exhibition of their social connections. For example, children dressing alike can be an outward display of their friendship, or they wear a certain character license to show that they belong to a social construct related to that character. The ceremony of getting dressed illustrates Clifford Geertz's "'scenography' of deep play and are everyday rituals that bind people together socially";<sup>14</sup> it is a part of the choreography of social interactions. Children's fashion, at even the early age of child development, relates to the matter in which a child presents themselves to their peers, while still adhering to the "rules of play" which they then apply to their own set of interactions. Clothing, however, unlike toys or the tools of the classroom, are embodied by the child – the phenomenology of the dressed body as the vehicle in which the self is situated in a place and space<sup>15</sup> – and are inherently connected to the child's sense of identity.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, children are perceived as representative of their parents and are also dressed with the intent to display the "moral good" of the child and family.<sup>17</sup> For example, the choice, notably by the parent, to present their child with sustainable clothing, enables the child to partake in the same system of "social signaling" that is used to highlight social association.<sup>18</sup> A child wearing sustainable clothing signifies the participation in a care relationship, while also becoming another factor within the child's tacit knowledge of caring.

Allison Pugh defines the "economy of dignity" as the system in which "children claim, contest, and exchange among themselves the terms of their social belonging"<sup>19</sup> through the commodities in which they possess, illustrating the early onset of the use of commodities as social capital to establish belonging within a social sphere.<sup>20</sup> Sustainability, and the challenging of current consumer behavior, relies on a universal ability to redirect the child's "economy of dignity" to not be defined, or to not be so heavily defined, by the possessing of certain goods, especially those that are disposable. If at an early age we can shift this learned behavior, this competition over "things," then perhaps as these children grow older, they will have a different relationship to their commodities.

Acknowledging that children are dressed bodies, that actively exist within their environments, such as schools and the playgrounds, leads us to an understanding that their clothing must be a part of the conversation in creating an environment that is the most conducive to their development. Just as the child's learning environment, and their processes of development that they are geared towards, must be a part of the discourse surrounding children's fashion.

### **Drawing on early-childhood practices**

Early-childhood practices, including that of Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, and Loris Malaguzzi, center the child as an active participant in their education. Their concepts are sensitive to the significant role that personal relationships, the environment, both physical space and/or nature, and the materials used impact the child's development.



In the early twentieth century, there was a decisive shift in educational theories and methods leading to what is now considered the modern education system. This shift was inspired by Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi as well as by Jean Piaget's "constructivist" theory which centered the child's experience in learning over teacher-led instruction.<sup>21</sup> "Pestalozzi believed in developing the power of the head, heart, and hands as the path to creating individuals with the knowledge to decipher between right and wrong, and the capacity to act upon this knowledge."<sup>22</sup> He believed that this empowerment and ennobling would lead to more responsible citizens and a better society. He believed that young children learned best through touch and when they were allowed to follow their innate curiosity and interest.<sup>23</sup> Pestalozzi's focus on tactile learning and curiosity, when combined with Froebel's constructive-deconstructive play (explained below), creates the framework in which the educational process can be utilized to restructure fashion into a more sustainable industry. Imagine what happens when Pestalozzi's "touch" is re-framed to encompass the sensation of cloth upon the body as in the case of clothing and fashion, or what it would mean to deconstruct and then reconstruct not only a garment but a whole industry for longevity.

In identifying a connection between education and children's material goods, emphasizing the need for quality and practicality, one can look at Froebel's early-education pedagogy, specifically his use of "gifts" and "occupations" in implementing his belief that children have a natural tendency to take things apart, to push until breakage, to mend and then through repetition learn. His gifts (sturdy toys that could withstand the rigors of child curiosity, which, through either teacher-led or child-led prompts, could allow children to explore this ebb and flow of creation) and his 10 "craft" occupations (objects that were to be modified through piercings, cutting, weaving, or folding) were to enable the child to, as Froebel wrote, "collect their own experiences from things themselves, to look with their own eyes and to learn to know by their own experiments, things and the relations of things to each other, and also the real life of the world of humanity."<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on doing and playing rather than that of passive rote learning<sup>25</sup> is where children gain the ability for critical novel thinking and the ability to work through problems – to create beyond what they already know exists.

Children's exercises with the craft occupations mirror the craft of fashion – cutting, sewing, weaving – linking the development of children's critical thinking skills to the appreciation of craft embedded within the fashion industry. In the craft of fashion, designers and sewers both act as craftsman, often needing to deconstruct an idea, or a physical garment/textile in order to create something novel. This parallelism exposes the similarities between the early education modules examined above and fashion. Moreover, the notion of play as a function of craft transcends beyond academic education and the creation of fashion into the social realms that children must navigate. Richard Sennett states that "play teaches children how to be sociable and channels cognitive development; play instills obedience to rules but counters this discipline by allowing children to create and experiment with the rules they obey."<sup>26</sup> There are many venues in which this play may occur when giving children the time and space needed, in creating for children their optimum environment. To Montessori, the environment is critical to the ethical and moral development of the child. Montessori's educational philosophy, which was derived from both Froebel and Pestalozzi, recognized "the domestic vacuum in the lives of children whose mothers were required to work each day outside their own home...the classroom created a method of education that conceptualized the school as home,"<sup>27</sup> a double-faceted connection to the fashion industry as the work that pulled the mothers away from their homes was most often related to the fashion industry. The purpose of Montessori's classroom was to be a place where a child's individuality could flourish, while still nourishing a connection between the child and their classmates. Students fostered a concern for each other's welfare.

Much like Sennett's insight on the role of the workshop in the formulation of a craftsman,<sup>28</sup> Montessori believed in the necessity of creating the right environment for healthy development, the risk in putting a child in the wrong environment. She argued and predicted in regard to the development of the child, that they "will be abnormal; they will become the deviated adults we now know."<sup>29</sup>

In similar regard to Montessori, the Reggio Emilia approach, in accordance with its intention of "raising better citizens,"<sup>30</sup> emphasizes the child's relationship with the teacher, the learning environment (windows for air and light as well as plants) to create a closer relationship to nature, and the child at the center of their own educational development. The significance of the fostering of the child's relationship to nature is consistent with environmental education practices and studies which see environmental education "as playing a key role in attaining sustainable development and in creating an environmentally literate society able and motivated to influence decision making."<sup>31</sup> The environment, the teacher, and the child's experiences with the objects and other children in the classroom are all tools as Loris Malaguzzi stated "to give a human, dignified, and civil meaning to existence, to be able to make choices with clarity of mind and purpose, and to yearn for the future of mankind,"<sup>32</sup> while creating "a place of research, learning, revisiting, reconsideration, and reflection."<sup>33</sup>

To further the discussion on the future of the viability of the fashion industry, there may be an argument for interjecting the care of others and our environment into the adherence of these social norms. In focusing on play and the rulemaking of play, we see how children develop not only a sense of responsibility to themselves but also to others, and therefore a sense of care. This sense of care can be reconnected to fashion in which the mindwork associated with play and inert learning associated with touch can provide an intersection to engage with ideas of sustainability in children.

Often regarded based on their object-owner use span, children's objects are considered to be of lesser value than their adult owner counterparts and as such less attention has been placed on the longevity of their life cycle. What effect does the perceived relative disposability of children's material goods have on the child's conceptualization of the consumption-sustainability relationship? As David Harvey asserts, the risks of a society based on goods not made for longevity means "more than just throwing away produced goods... but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people...this creates a temporariness in the structure of both public and personal value systems."<sup>34</sup> Narrowing this argument to children's material goods, Victor Papanek, in bridging educational theories with that of design, argued that the disposability and lack of attention put forth on children's toys taught children "dangerous lessons"—"[they are] made of cheap plastic, and stain, break, or wear out quickly...playing with them the child cannot help but to assimilate certain values; things are badly made, quality is unimportant, garish colors and cutesy decorations are the norm, and when thing wears out they are pitched and replacements arrive miraculously."<sup>35</sup> This was not a criticism of objects such as Froebel's gifts or the manipulative teaching materials of Montessori, which were designed to aid in developmental processes and withstand the vibrant energy of children, but as a critique of over-abundance, especially poor design in regards to function and aesthetics, that have no purpose or potential of longevity. Froebel's gifts and Montessori's materials are made to last. They are durable objects that were created with the intention of lasting through rough play, and for longevity – notably with Montessori's manipulatives – with the same object being able to be used throughout many stages of the child's development.

Even though Papanek used children's goods as an area to illustrate his design critique, children's fashion is often overlooked and ignored within larger discussions regarding the

fashion industry. The body, and growth thereof, is notably missing within fashion discourse especially when we consider the role that the body plays in the wearing of fashion.<sup>36</sup> Combining this with children's fashion, which has been minimally researched, there becomes a grave disparity in discourse. This ephemeral nature of childhood is compounded by fast fashion and a desire for an excess of belongings, forcing the focus onto the use span of the object as opposed to their quality or material agency. The consequence is a complete disregard for the effect of fashion on the child's development.

To resolve what he saw as some of the disparities within the design community, Papanek suggested that instead of designing an over-abundance of the same products for the same group of people, that designers spend 10% percent of their time designing for, the marginalized groups that designers often overlook.<sup>37</sup> He recognized that this may be hard or impossible for designers working for "the corporate greed of many design offices," but that by encouraging students to take on these "alternate patterns of thinking [w]e may help them to develop the kind of social and moral responsibility that is needed in design."<sup>38</sup> This process of creating an "alternate pattern of thinking" can be applied to new areas beyond design and used to help children develop their critical thinking skills and, in turn, employ those skills to the areas of societal function that need improving. There is a recognition that change is fostered through the education of the next generation and the emergence of the outsider entering an industry with a novel perspective. The workshop is where this next generation learns to think, to develop their craft, and capacity to effect change.

For a child, the sociable workshop where their collective learning takes place is their home, the playroom, the classroom, and the playground. Within these workshop spheres, children explore concepts of rhythm, repetition and time, as Alexandra Lange explains that "children [are to have the] space where they never have to put things away so that a question may be pursued over time."<sup>39</sup> The workshop is a place where children can enter into a process of review and repetition as they formulate a deeper understanding of what they are working on. This is also the space in which children interact with each other, creating their own social rules and rules of play. The use of play in early childhood education gives the command of action to the child. This "play teaches children how to be sociable while channeling cognitive development... instills obedience to rules but counters this discipline by allowing children to create and experiment with the rules they obey. These capacities serve people lifelong once they go to work."<sup>40</sup>

The care and craft that are developed through education can become intrinsically linked to how fashion and garment workers are regarded. Similarly, the sense of care for self and others and the consideration for another's work is developed while working with others in a classroom. In extending this consideration outside of the classroom to the objects we consume, specifically to fashion, there needs to be recognition that the clothes we wear have been made and sewn by skilled workers and therefore deserve the care of a valued craft as oppose to a disposable object. Applying the concept of teaching children to embody the sentimentality of a caring-about relationship as a means of supporting the discourse on sustainable fashion, can risk the implication that there is an accepted methodology to effectively teaching care. Regardless, this does not negate the connection between this caring-about relationship and sustainability, or the need for the act of caring-about to be embedded within as a natural way of being. Returning to Sennett's concept of craft (the development of skill) we can infer that the development of Nodding's caring-about relationship is a skill that needs to be learned and honed through repetition, cultural literacy and finally pervasive socialization with the hope that the child embeds within themselves a code of being that includes the awareness and disposition to be concerned for those outside of their physical spheres in life.<sup>41</sup>

Linking education to consumption is not a novel concept. It is thought that the growth of capitalist production at the turn of the century – enabled by the development of scientific management procedures and Fordism – encouraged the emergence of new markets and buying tendencies which were brought to the masses through the “educational” utilization of advertisements and the media.<sup>42</sup> “Education” has been used as the means of affecting the rates and methods in which consumers consume from general advertising to the educational paraphernalia used to spread the best practices and goods needed for the health of your baby and child.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

Early childhood pedagogies, theoretical applications of care, and fashion studies explorations linking craftsmanship to the ethical labor practices and sustainability are all fields that have been developed independently of each other. Children are seen as the future of society and industry, the ones that will be affected by the modes of today, as well as the decision makers of tomorrow. However, they are noticeably absent from discourses and studies concerning sustainability and the effects of an industry that relies on non-ethical labor.<sup>44</sup> Whereas Montessori believed that “the child who has never learned to act alone, to direct his own actions, to govern his own will, grows into an adult who is easily lead and must always lean upon others,”<sup>45</sup> further study is needed to understand if this pedagogy can be applied to the redefining of consumer culture. At an early age, children must have independence, albeit with some adult guidance, to be allowed to explore and flounder within a safe and encouraging environment, so that when they are older, they are able to navigate the world based on their own cognitive thinking. Caring about an interest in the betterment of the environment, and a concern for others must all become embodied practices, starting with the young child as they explore what these complex ideas mean within the safe confines of their social workshop. The value applied to the personal consumption of consumer goods over that of any greater global impact must be evaluated. Questions such as “how has this value system been inherited and learned on a personal and industrial level?” and “what are the consumer behaviors of children that effect their consumer behaviors as adults?” need to be addressed. A direct methodology of listening to the testimonies of children as they discuss not only their consumption but their present and future ideas about consumption needs to be developed. As in education, allowing the child to take a primary position within the sustainable fashion discussion may lead to insights previously not focused on. In all, to incite the change needed, there needs to be more research on what it takes to craft a caring-about child, and a caring-about society, at which point the embodiment of fashion can be truly reflective of the person and the industry it is situated in.

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# FROM IDEATION TO INCLUSION: INVESTIGATION IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDRENSWEAR IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

*Aude Le Guennec*

## **Introduction**

“To have a child is to be thrown suddenly [...] into the world of stuff.”<sup>1</sup> The material culture purchased from birth particularly in contemporary societies in the Global North, is conceived to care, educate and socialize the future adult brought into life. In this environment, clothes have a major part to play: from the first contact of the vest wrapping up the newborn, to the daily dressing routine, clothes are the companion of children, supporting their needs and fashioning their roles. However, clothing is largely ignored in childhood studies, in the discussions on children’s culture and in the research on children’s education. Nevertheless, dressing the child consists also in socializing a future adult, and shaping an ever-changing social being through the times. In that respect, are children’s clothes solely the anecdotal miniaturization of adult’s versions? Can we not approach childrenswear as a specific domain of the production of childhood material culture as for toys, furniture, or books and explore the impact of the socialization of the child on the production of these clothes?

The perspective adopted in this chapter is based on my experiences as the keeper of the Textile and Fashion Museum in Cholet – an original collection dedicated to children’s fashion in France – and the curator of a series of exhibitions where I have explored the past and present of children’s fashion from the analysis of their material culture and the research into children’s clothing behavior. This investigation is completed by the invaluable information that my activity as an educator of reflective practitioners and consultant for the childrenswear industry has provided. This has helped me to analyze in more depth and influence in some respects the design ideation for the creation of children’s clothes. This chapter is underpinned by an original, trans-disciplinary perspective, fusing an object-based research on children’s clothing history with the methodologies of childhood sociology<sup>2</sup> and fashion anthropology.<sup>3</sup> Starting with the historical analysis of the constraints of the childrenswear apparel shaped by a traditional approach, stuck in a centennial organization of the production and influenced by the representation of childhood by the adults, this chapter will explore alternative ways to convey

children's voice in the design process aiming to reflect the expectations of individuals defined as beings as well as becoming adults.<sup>4</sup> Finally, moving away from the conception of children's fashion as a miniaturization of adult's dress code, and tying the changes in scholarship with the needed evolution of the apparel itself, this research will establish how childrenswear can reinvent itself thanks to a new model where children are included as users as well as co-creators of the story that they have to tell.

### **Dressing up a specific user: the constraints of the children's fashion apparel**

Mirroring the history of children's fashion and the articulation between home making, bespoke tailoring and standardized production,<sup>5</sup> the current organization of the apparel industry reveals the position of the child as a specific user. It echoes the constraints of the production and commercialization since the middle of the nineteenth century as evidenced in the sale catalogs of the department stores.<sup>6</sup> As part of my ongoing research, an investigation into the organization of leading European brands (*Jacadi*, *Catimini*, *Okaidi*, *CWF*) demonstrates how these particularities have shaped what is considered as a distinct sector of the fashion industry. Firstly, contemporary childrenswear designers specialize in a specific age range reflecting the physiological and social development of the users: designers for infants, babies, toddlers, and kids work in departments in charge of each segment. Imbuing Piaget's theory on children's development,<sup>7</sup> they take into account the constraints related to each phase of childhood in terms of motor skills, and ability to independently interact with their material and social environments. Similarly, echoing the segmentation of the adult's ready-to-wear, contemporary children's fashion reveals an appetite for the uniformization by genre, which links the generations and reinforces the construction of a dual society. After centuries of uniformed styles in early childhood, the democratization and standardization of the fashion industry in the 1930s led to the distinction of boys and girls through clothing.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, even the evolution towards mixed-gender schools in post-WW2 Europe didn't contribute to the alleviation of gendered uniformization in 1960s childrenswear.<sup>9</sup> However, and certainly in reaction to the oversexualization of children's fashion over the last decades,<sup>10</sup> the current trend for a gender-neutral education slowly impacts the childrenswear market. The promotion of these collections initiated by pioneer Scandinavian brands such as *Marimekko* in the 1960s, and more recently *Småfolk* or *Aarrekid*, implies a revolution in production, from the design process to communication and retail. Therefore, resulting from a clear intention to innovate in childrenswear, it evidences the impact of the changes towards a gender-neutral education on the dress codes and subsequently the apparel.

Childrenswear designers, currently mostly female, are influenced by their own parental experience and lack any specialized education in this sector of fashion. Therefore, despite an effort to listen to children's voices during the fitting of their prototypes,<sup>11</sup> most of the time from the domestic make of the layette to the industrial creation of standardized collections, children's fashion relies on the perpetuation of what the adults traditionally consider as appropriate and adapted: an adult-centered design aiming to educate a becoming adult just as they have been.

### **Ideation in childrenswear: nostalgia**

"There's a child in each adult": through these words, the pedopsychologist Jean-Claude Quentel<sup>12</sup> summarizes the mechanisms involved in the education of the child. When the child is born, they don't appear as a white page but carry in themselves the history of the family and the

past of the society. Focused on the transformation of the child into a responsible adult, the parents and educators look at their childhood as an example to follow, and at the past as an ideal to recreate. In this process, the material culture magnifies this intergenerational connection. An emotional and nostalgic design is therefore at the heart of this process, to support the growth of a confident future adult.<sup>13</sup> Based on a definition of nostalgia as a social factor, the Japanese concept of *Kansei design* models the interactions involved in the process of making an object.<sup>14</sup> The creation of a family uniform worn by both adults and children, as explored by the brand *Le Vestiaire de Jeanne*, shows the importance of the dress code to strengthen the relations between family members and enhance the sense of belonging to a common history. Furthermore, the influence of the dress code of emblematic figures such as the iconic sailors, the workers of the past, the exotic Eastern moujiks, the characters of children's literature, creates a style based on the exploration of otherness to support the construction of the self.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the storytelling generated by this nostalgia is at the heart of the design process and is an engaging way to teach children about past society to inform their awareness of the world.

To explore this heritage, museums are the ideal forums. Cradled in an area specializing in childrenswear since the 1960s, the Textile and Fashion Museum of Cholet (France) was conceived in 2002 as the thesaurus where the designers could get inspired by the past thanks to the study of the archives. As the statement of the ability for the museum to support the design process of heritage brands, the series of children's fashion exhibitions *Small Couture*<sup>16</sup> curated since 2004 in partnership with the industry, renewed the perception of past fashion by removing the filter of the black-and-white archives to reveal the true colors of the past.

Fascinated by the resource of this heritage, the Parisian brand *Jacadi* has explored this collection to create the narrative of a company born in 1976, whose style is influenced by the Haussmannian era of the French Capital. The analysis of the features of children's fashion over the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as the particularities of childhood culture of the time inspired an original branding framing the design, communication and retail style and imbuing the entire corporate culture of the company. In 2009, the creation of the collection *Les emblématiques* as a re-interpretation of disregarded, despite iconic, children's outfits, has contributed to the reinterpretation of a nostalgic past. Based on a methodology fusing storytelling techniques with visual analysis, the study of the contextualized heritage has re-established *Jacadi's* reputation, and created a heritage brand positioned as a major actor of the high street market. This experience has also demonstrated that childrenswear can provide the opportunity for the development of a bespoke creative process, highlighting the potential of a lengthy underestimated style.

However, the inclusion in the lineage via the appropriation of nostalgic design doesn't provide the designer with an access to the child himself, but to the representation that adults have of past childhood. These images and objects, most of the time decontextualized or over-interpreted,<sup>17</sup> shape the preconception of the fashion industry without addressing the needs of children as users and social beings. Similarly, if museums display a picture of the society, they hardly invite children's views in this interpretation prioritizing adult expectations. Are there other ways to access children's perception of their environment and include this as a core element of the fashion design process, to reinforce their appropriation of a material culture conceived for them?

### **Children's perception of fashion: an inspiration**

As identified by Donald Winicott,<sup>18</sup> it is through manipulation that children appropriate the world. The connection between children and their material environment and their ability to



learn from and bond with the objects is therefore facilitated by their inclusion in the handling and use of artefacts. This is even more important for clothing. Looking at the history of childrenswear, it is through the democratization of the print industry that children have been able to gain easier access to attractive storytelling garments.<sup>19</sup> Following from earlier experimentations in luxury fashion and in collaboration with talented graphic illustrators, pioneer childrenswear brands like the British *Ladybird* in the 1930s have prioritized the creation of patterns inspired by the illustrated literature to attract their young customers.<sup>20</sup> Contemporary fashion keeps fostering this passion for inspiring patterns thanks to the resource of advanced printing techniques: amongst others, for *Palava* and *Catimini*, imaginative stories compose the signature of inspiring collections.<sup>21</sup>

However, the conception of clothes for children doesn't always take into consideration the functionality of these garments and their ability to support children's growth and acquisition of fine motor skills. Two decades ago, the French mail order company *Vert Baudet* decided to focus on children's physiological development in the creation of educative outfits: the range "I can dress myself" stimulates children's autonomy thanks to the design of smooth fastenings, smart reversible T-shirts, and educational printed patterns and encourages children's social and sensori-motor development in a friendly and playful manner. Confronted by the ever-growing child, childrenswear brands have also looked into the creation of functional expandable garments meeting the financial constraints faced by the household: amongst others, the *Babygrow*, made from a special knitted fabric by W. Artz in the 1950s, as well as the concept of the contemporary brand *Petit Pli*, reveal this attention to the fit of baby's clothes and a sustainable approach of a durable fashion.

The success of popular sequined T-shirts with versatile patterns, of super-hero hoodies which are the "must have" items of brands such as the Spanish *Yporque*, or the textured tops of the Scottish *We love shapes*, can be seen as part of this effort to include children. They are not only actors in the manipulation of their garments but also inspired designers thanks to their ability to project themselves into a world of sensations and dreams. These outfits are not toys or fancy dresses: these are examples of what an inclusive design process looks like! These attempts show not only a willingness to please and attract children, but also to stimulate the creation of a strong bond with their clothes. However, children are still considered only as end-users and their contributions are conveyed solely in the evaluation of an adult-centered design.

### **What do children think about clothing?**

Lengthy underestimated and ignored, children's voices have just recently been considered as a valued contribution to the world. Since 1989, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child has acknowledged the importance of the opinions and rights of children across the globe.<sup>22</sup> It is only since this period and alongside major changes in the approach of education, that the importance to access children's perceptions has developed in childhood studies.<sup>23</sup> However, due to the complexity of the relationships between adults as makers, purchasers, and educators and children as users, gathering and imbuing their perceptions in design is difficult and even more complex when the research focuses on early childhood and is confronted to the absence of oral expression of the child's opinion. This makes it difficult to take into account their approach of the material culture at all stages of their lives. Furthermore, this opinion is not always sought, as clothes, toys, and childcare material are mostly designed to support the socialization of the child and to encourage the embedment of the adult's rules.

When designers usually include users as the main critiques of their prototypes, the global fashion industry has generally been reluctant in allowing children to review and influence their collections. This is of course impossible when babies and toddlers don't have the cognitive development to express their preferences, to communicate verbally and to reflect on their decision making. Therefore, capturing children's views on fashion mostly relies on the observation of their daily clothing behavior. This happens for example during the daily dressing routine. The decision making regarding the composition of an outfit, the selection of what the child considers as matching and appropriate garments, is an act of creation in itself. However, this fashion statement is most of the time limited by the accessibility to a selection of clothes, mostly purchased by parents.<sup>24</sup> Constantly adjusted by the adult as the censor of any fashion faux-pas, this styling game reveals the direct contact between the child and the material environment.

The exceptional nature of the global lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessary home schooling of millions of children in the Global North, has provided a window to observe children who are socializing in different and unexpected ways. Recording their clothing choices when dress codes are lifted has provided a different picture on how they behave in a context where their appearance is less a matter of identification to their peers or a necessity to adapt to specific activities.<sup>25</sup> Launched in both Great Britain and France between April and June 2020, a survey of children from six to twelve years old has provided a snapshot of the impact of the lockdown on the clothing behavior of more than 100 individuals, from a variety of social and geographical backgrounds (*Dressed for Homeschooling*, Heriot-Watt University and IDKids Community). Alternating the favorite football strips as a daily uniform and the fancy dress costumes, allowing the youngest children to identify with their preferred characters, the results of the survey reveal the importance that children place in the narrative of their outfits and their interest for their look, which is far from being solely anecdotal or purely functional.

The lockdown has also allowed to envisage the unusual inclusion of clothing into the learning program of homeschooled children. Looking at engaging the youngest pupils and their parents in daily activities, and exploring ways of working with domestic material accessible from home, teachers from the Maternelle School of Pantin (a state nursery school in the suburb of Paris, France) worked with *Studio Abi* to propose a series of workshops around the notion of playing dress-up.<sup>26</sup> Each brief invited children to propose solutions to a specific problem, that they could solve with the help of the adults as facilitators: to create a camouflage outfit invisible in the background; to build a den with old clothes and linen; to dress-up as works of arts or as their favorite fiction character in an unexpected manner and without using the usual stereotypes and fancy dresses available in shops. The outcome of this participative and intergenerational experience highlighted the bonding power of clothing and the transmission of skills and narratives between the generations simply happening thanks to the manipulation of a piece of cloth. Once again, it seems as if the absence of peer interactions during the activity encouraged the exploration of the playful aspects of fashion without pre-conceived ideas. This fostered children's creativity and their ability to co-design an inspiring material environment (Figure 14.1).

### **The child as a partner: co-creation in contemporary fashion industry**

Although marginal and fairly recent, some experimentations of children's brands have perceived the potential of engaging children's creativity through clothing and encouraged children's



Figure 14.1 Anne-Charlotte Hartmann – Studio Abi, workshop with nursery children: “Dressing up in order not to be recognized,” tribute to the artist Charles Fréger, Paris, 24th March 2020. Courtesy of Studio Abi, Anne-Charlotte Hartmann

interactions with the design process of their clothes by allowing their artistic expression whether in the make or in the customization of their outfits. For example, since the 1960s the British *Clothkits* offers pre-made kits of customizable garments and accessories to a mixed audience of adults and children; in 1998, the brand *Charabia* has pioneered the commercialization of a color-in dress accessorized with felt markers. This technique used by children to decorate their fancy dresses is transferred to their wardrobe. Similarly, *Catimini* invites girls to participate in the conception and customization of their “dream dresses.”<sup>27</sup> The ideas of the young customers expressed in their sketches are transferred in the design of the models by the creative team. Going one step further in the inclusion of children in the design process, the American brand *Mini and Maximus*, uses children’s illustrations for the patterns of their T-shirts. In this case, the child is a valuable partner of the production process.

However, these examples reveal the limited freedom of the child in a process initiated and led by the adult in charge of the conception. Each year, *Vert Baudet* launches a design competition where children are invited to draw their ideal wardrobe and prints. The drawings

submitted to the panel present playful, creative and unexpected representations of the ideal garment by the child, but the prototyping evidences the intervention of an adult aware of the constraints of the production. Thus, in these contemporary attempts for a more inclusive design process, children are mostly partners of adults who keep the control of the creation. The apparel makes the final decision and adjusts the products to the needs of the market and the requirements of a socially adapted dress code. The outcomes of these sparse examples of the invitation made to the child to enter the design process, are therefore a pale reflection of their creative potential. However, they are mirroring the complexity of the “educator-maker-user” trio involved in the creation of their material culture. Marginal in an adult’s industry unknown to them, children are not in the position of fully interacting with the production of an equipment aiming, after all, at their socialization.

Diverting from the standardized fashion apparel and allowing more freedom in the design process to address children’s needs and views is necessary to create the products adapted to the child. Fostering the social responsibility of young children as part of their education is explored by the award-winning designer Maija Nygren. In her inclusive design project, *The convertibles*, Maija invites children to participate in the making of modular outfits.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, inspired by Montessori’s and Froebelian’s theories, Maija offers an opportunity for children and their parents to bond creatively in the conception of an “emotional” garment appealing to their senses. Besides fostering the necessary nostalgia as a core ingredient of childrenswear, the memories in the clothes and the pleasure that comes from this shared moment of conception, helps the appropriation process. It is also a way to learn about the habits shaping our society, to nurture the relationships between the generations, and to inspire a more sustainable future. Including children in the making of their “second skin,” in the conception of garments helping define their emerging identity, is a way to enhance their awareness of the world that they will have to create. Therefore, locating the fashion industry closer to the users may ingrain the habit of listening to the feedback of customers in educative processes, and in constant interaction with the adult. Then, looking at alternative ways to produce and consume children’s fashion, and exploring challenging models of circular economy, is a necessity (Figure 14.2).



Figure 14.2 Maija Nygren, “The Convertibles,” March 2020. © Almborealis Ltd 2020, Courtesy of Maija Nygren and Julien Borghino

## Conclusion

In June 2020, at the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Italian edition of *Vogue* magazine focused their issue on childrenswear as an insight into the future of our fashion culture.<sup>29</sup> Launching a call for cover-page illustrations, they have selected eight kids' drawings, each of them representing a fashion silhouette carefully colored in and highlighted by this statement: "our future." In the history of *Vogue* and more broadly in fashion communication, giving the front cover for children to express themselves, publishing their vision of fashion without over editing or mimicking their style, constitutes a milestone in the invitation to take part in the fashion industry. The global lockdown allowing the chance to dedicate more time to listening, playing and educating children, has reinforced parents' considerations for a world designed for them, not only as mini-consumers, but as inclusive partners. In this exceptional context, and echoing the niche exploration of co-creation, the society seems to have taken on board the creative ability of young users who are "as strong and competent actors in their own lives, capable of holding and sharing their own views and opinions."<sup>30</sup> This revolution in the households has highlighted the capacity for children to actively co-design their material culture not only by playing with the objects made and purchased for them, but by imagining and making these themselves. It has shown that, more than a miniature version of adult's fashion, childrenswear had its own influences, inspirations, and features in relation to the socializing child. Above the sole consideration for a more inclusive fashion where children, as much as any users, should be listened to, *Vogue Italia* has acknowledged this change by highlighting the representation children have of adult's world, by shifting the usual adult-centered focus on children and by exhibiting this vision outside the walls of the classroom. Endorsing the need for a radical change in children's fashion apparel, this major breakout in fashion welcomes the birth of a childhood material culture anchored in the world and appropriated by the "creative creators"<sup>31</sup> of today and tomorrow.

## Notes

- 1 Alexandra Lange, *The Design of Childhood* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 5.
- 2 Jean-Claude Quentel, *L'enfant, problème de genèse et d'histoire* (Paris-Bruxelles: De Boeck Université, 1997).
- 3 Pierre-Yves Balut, *Théorie du vêtement* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).
- 4 Alan Prout, *The Future of Childhood: Towards the Interdisciplinary Study of Children* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2004).
- 5 Clare Rose, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boy's Clothes in Late Victorian England* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2010).
- 6 Aude Le Guennec, "Du musée à la thèse: vers un modèle d'étude du vêtement de l'enfant". *Tétralogiques* 23 (2018): 115–42. <http://www.tetralogiques.fr/spip.php?article90>.
- 7 Jean Piaget, *La formation du symbole chez l'enfant: imitation, jeu et rêve, image et représentation* (Neuchâtel-Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1945).
- 8 Jo Barraclough Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).
- 9 Dominique Veillon, *Nous les enfants: 1950–1970* (Paris: Hachette Littérature, 2003).
- 10 Mariette Julien, *La mode hypersexualisée* (Montréal: Sisyphes, 2010).
- 11 Aude Le Guennec, Sylvie Marot, *Small couture (3): Marithé et François Girbaud, mixAges* (Cholet: Musées de Cholet, 2008).
- 12 Quentel, *L'enfant*, 1997, 275: "L'adulte est dans l'enfant."
- 13 Donald Norman, *Emotional Design* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
- 14 Pierre Lévy, "Beyond Kansei Engineering: The Emancipation of Kansei Design," *International Journal of Design* 7, no. 2 (2013): 83–94.
- 15 Le Guennec, "Du musée à la thèse," 2018.
- 16 See the series of exhibitions: *Small Couture* (1) to (6), 2004 to 2013, Cholet: Musées de Cholet.
- 17 Le Guennec, 2018.

- 18 Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971).
- 19 Aude Le Guennec, Brigitte Riboreau, *Motifs d'enfance* (Lyon: E.M.C.C, 2013).
- 20 E. W. Pasold, *The Legend of Scarlet Ladybird: The Story of Pasolds* (London: Langley, 1960).
- 21 Le Guennec, Riboreau, *Motifs d'enfance*, 2013.
- 22 United Nations Convention of the Right of the Child, 1989. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>
- 23 Johanna Einarsdottir, "Children's Perspectives on Play," in *The Sage Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*, eds. Liz Brooker, Mindy Blaise and Susan Edwards (London: Sage, 2014), 319.
- 24 Daniel Thomas Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 25 Virginie Vinel, "Se coiffer et se maquiller à la préadolescence. Enquête en Alsace-Lorraine," in *Être fille ou garçon. Regards croisés sur l'enfance et le genre*, eds. Mélanie Jacquemin et al. (Paris: INED, 2016), 245–57.
- 26 Aude Le Guennec, "Children's Fashion," in *Encyclopaedia of Childhood Studies*, eds. Daniel Thomas Cook and Erica Burmann (London: Sage, 2020), 753–6, <https://www.studioabi.fr>.
- 27 Dominique Zarini, *Small Couture (6): Le style Catimini depuis 1972* (Cholet: Musées de Cholet, 2013).
- 28 Maija Nygren, *The Convertibles, A Study of Knitted Circular Knitwear Fashion Through Consumer Engagement* (MA thesis, Heriot-Watt University, 2018); <https://www.almaborealis.com/convertibles>.
- 29 *Vogue Italia*, no. 838, June, 2020.
- 30 Einarsdottir, "Children's Perspectives on Play," 2014, 320.
- 31 Lego Foundation, ed., *Creating Creators* (Billund: Lego Foundation, 2019). <https://www.legofoundation.com/en/learn-how/knowledge-base/creating-creators>.

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### Further reading

- Balut, Pierre-Yves. *Théorie du vêtement*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013: to understand the mechanisms of fashion as a socializing medium.
- Qvortrup, Jens. *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005: to explore the child's agency and ability to interact with their environment.

## PART III

# Fashion, body, and identity

Fashion has a strong connection to emotions. It closely tied to identity and finds expression in all sectors of social life, within the arts and the media and in the political sector. The authors in this section look at the body and consider constructions of fashion in a variety of contexts from everyday life to situations of conflict and war.

Otto von Busch speaks of the sense of excitement created by fashion, anchored in the body yet connected to a variety of symbolic markers. He uses Wilhem Reich's idea of bioelectricity to explore fashion at the intersection of desire and anxiety, and freedom and fear. Fashion and the body have an intimate connection and span the spectrum from emotion, self, and identity to cultural engagement. To appear before others means to be judged by them, as no appearance is unmediated. What denotes "fashion" is what everyone wears, or especially what some wear *before* everyone else does the same. This chapter suggests a perspective placing fashion in the affective interactions between peers and where fashion plays out in the *emotions* of users; to feel accepted. With the dissemination of "fast fashion," cheap, accessible, and on-trend looks have become available to wider populations, yet this does not necessarily translate as mass emancipation or that daring expressions of aesthetic individuality become more common. Rather, psychopolitical and social mechanisms of aesthetic competition and fear of exclusion pushes users towards a "barren" fashion of sameness. Anxieties around shame and humiliation shape normative behaviors, as exemplified in how clothes are used as excuses for bullying. These mechanisms pull consumers to just stay acceptable, discouraging a vital and affective relationship to dress. Instead the potential for personal expression is reduced to simply keep up with what is only just the look of one's peers, or everyone else, what could be called "bare fashion."

Scent is an important product in the fashion industry, both economically and for the effect that it creates. Debra Riley Parr discusses the abstract properties of scent, as an art, but also places it within the fashion system as a component of fashioned and staged identity. The fashion system over the past century has instrumentalized scent in order to increase profits, to expand the concept of the fashionable, to produce an effect/affect in the flow of standardization and mass consumption. As Chanel understood early in the twentieth century, perfume creates an invisible, sometimes enigmatic aura, a kind of extension that is not quite one's own bodily smell: a prosthetic shimmer. And, with the help of an expert perfumer like Ernest Beaux, perfume can be standardized and mass-produced, highly profitable. Scent becomes abstract and as perfume, a prosthetic aura, a familiar kind of equipment that performs a service within the



fashion system. Scent participates in the dialectical logic of fashion, and explains the contemporary proliferation of perfumes like *Serpentine* or *Girl*, fragrance collaborations between Comme des Garçons and artist Tracey Emin and musician Pharrell Williams, respectively. Scent creates hard economic value in a sprawling, highly competitive industry focused on the tiniest of distinctions, even as it contributes to affect, to the staging of the ephemeral, evaporative identities of the contemporary consumer, critical to the reproduction of the fashion system.

Gender is upheld and continuously renegotiated in its encounter with fashion. Diego Semerene writes on masculinity and its encounter with digital culture exploring how men have disavowed fragility through the armor of the tailored suit and more recently through the exposed muscular body. Masculinity has historically been associated with agency over objecthood. Through a history of sartorial, muscular, and pharmacological manipulation we see the presumably cis-gender white male body “recut” and “recast” as a necessary departure from organic reality and a never-ending denial of its materiality, and penetrability. Reaching back into the history of the male suit allows us to see how men’s *modus operandi* for disavowing the fragility of all human bodies, and naturalizing sexual difference, has stayed consistent for centuries. How does the presumably cis-gender white male body, then, manage to inhabit digital networks and survive yet again when such networks require male bodies to make themselves seen? This chapter argues that social media platforms, particularly Instagram, give rise to a new mode of phallic engineering that helps men not just maintain their claims of white cisgender heterosexual masculinity but also thrive in an environment that requires the repeated courting of the other’s gaze. Social media thus become a network for the re-inscription and circulation of dominant forms of masculinity where hegemonic male bodies reach for kinship and phallic legitimacy through muscle.

Chrysoula Kapartziani, Spyros Koulocheris, and Myrsini Pichou analyze the relationship between dress and the law in the context of refugees in Greece. This essay examines through field study and interviews, the redefinition of legal values via the relationship of dress with the law. It raises a variety of questions: What unifies and what differentiates the refugees as far as their dress is concerned with the other inhabitants of Athens? What is the legal European landscape on such dress regulations? The adoption of a common “cosmopolitan model” for the status of the citizen should be the epicenter of contemporary legal thought. The Greek legislator has so far adopted an open approach in relation to the sartorial expression being practised by the refugees, while the legal debate in other European countries has so far led to another regulatory approach. These regulations have caused a plethora of opposition. In Greece, where no legislative position has been taken so far, history uncovers the pivotal role of headscarves in traditional Greek costume.

Charles Thompson explores fashion as a political tool through an exploration of the multiple examples of fashion activism discussed in the popular press as a reaction to the presidency of Donald Trump, both in opposition to him (e.g. through the pink pussy hat) and in support of him (e.g. wearing of the “Make America Great Again” baseball cap). We see the role that fashion plays in college students’ activism within the sociopolitical climate following the 2016 presidential election. In particular, this chapter explores historical concepts of college student fashion as well as legislation and students who paved the way for using fashion as activism on contemporary college campuses. The chapter ends by exploring the two movements associated with the 2016 presidential election – the “Make America Great Again” hat and the knitted, pink pussy hat – and the ways they’ve bridged campus and community activism.

Mattia Roveri looks at the history of appropriation of military designs from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present considers the introduction of military patterns into fashion design by major brands and emerging designers who are also veterans. Appearance and

### *Fashion, body, and identity*

impressions are key components of the military. Despite all its symbolism, military gear and its relationship with the fashion industry has only recently gained attention in public outlets and scholarly work. This chapter explores the relevant work that has been done on this topic and focuses on three important moments that have shaped the relationship between the military and the fashion industry.

Lucy Moyses Ferreira explores violence in fashion imagery during the interwar period. The female body becomes a site where the turbulence of war is reflected. Concentrating on fashion imagery in French, British, and American publications, this chapter brings to light and examines a marked change in the representation of femininity during the interwar period, which was characterized by violent tropes of fragmentation. Drawing on contemporaneous psychoanalytical theory, a field which rapidly advanced as a result of the war itself, as well as the art movement it influenced, Surrealism, this chapter investigates the factors behind the shift, including the aftermath of the First World War and the continually turbulent experience of modernity. As national policies, as well as certain psychoanalytical theories, strove towards restoration and wholeness, this chapter proposes that residual trauma, in the form of fragmentation, ruptured the smooth surface of fashion imagery, where it could be processed. Through doing so, fashion's critical role in both reflecting, and contributing to, wider worldly developments is irrefutably emphasized.



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# BULLYING AND BARREN FASHION: AN AFFECTIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE PSYCHOPOLITICS OF DRESS

*Otto von Busch*

## **Feeling a fashion**

Whereas most methods of fashion studies emphasize systems, hierarchies, and the messages that dress can convey in the construction of identity, the purpose of this text is to highlight the emotional grounding of fashion in body and being. That is, we don't *know* fashion as much as we *feel* fashion. This is thus a perspective that puts emotion as the basis for the understanding of fashion puts its focus on the intimate interactions between your brain, body, and environment, in resonance with other affective perspectives bridging nature and culture.<sup>1</sup> To put it differently, fashion is an emotion played out *through the senses* intimately connected to biological processes in the body, our cognition, and is in resonance with embodied social dynamics and interactions. It is a desire entangled with, on the one hand, very foundational experiences such as acceptance and inclusion, and on the other hand, more elevating emotions of aliveness, such as seduction, adoration, and social power. At its best, the experience of fashion is part of the thrills that contribute to the unconscious construction of our daily life experiences.<sup>2</sup>

An affective perspective of fashion highlights that we *are in our senses*, in our milieu of dynamic cognitive mechanisms that are also contagious and part of the mobilization of embodied connections.<sup>3</sup> Anchored in a more physical level, this perspective on embodiment resonates with philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's<sup>4</sup> argument how the alloplastic extensions of our flesh, through tools and technologies, expands our senses into the surrounding environment. That is, the body comes to expand beyond the skin to sense our social environment as we become simultaneously subject and object to ourselves; feeling ourselves through technologies and tools, in the optics of the mirror and glasses, in the stick of the blind person, or through the posture promoted through the heels. Yet, whereas Merleau-Ponty primarily focuses on the subject's cognitive relationship to the surrounding environment, my exploration here follows an interactionist perspective on emotion, where subjects read and respond to the slightest gestures of others, often non-verbal, such as facial expressions and gestures, and through these discrete interactions individuals see themselves, we well as others, as objects.<sup>5</sup> In interactions, subjects assess the dispositions of others and adjust behaviors so as maintain status, esteem, and self-worth.

An emotional perspective on fashion places the *locus of fashion* into everyday experience of fashion, that is, fashion may surely be supported and amplified through a system of production and consumption, in media and stores, but it is the phenomenological anchor in the body that is put at the forefront. Most consumers can relate to this perspective. With the right appearance, we feel animated and the pleasure of being on top of ourselves, we feel seen and acknowledged. But with a “wardrobe malfunction” we feel wounded, and agonized as we sense repulsion or even disgust from peers. We fear shame and humiliation and the everyday judgments, exclusion, and gossip that come with everyday appearance in social interactions.

The emotional entanglement with fashion leads us to the tension between *vital* versus *bare* fashion, what could also be connected to the distinction between *natality* and *seriality*. The tension between these two poles on a continuum translates to emotive energies of the vital dynamics of the new look, how it makes us feel fresh or cool, whereas the old looks are drained of energy, fail to excite us and instead make us feel bored. In-between these two poles exist a low-energy safe and dull landscape of sameness, what we could call “barren” fashion as it barely makes anyone excited. As fashion faces an environmental crisis, one must ask if it is this barrenness of fashion we spend so much energy sustaining, rather than developing more vital modes of being with clothes.

### Appearing: the allure of barren fashion

As fashion scholar Susan Kaiser<sup>6</sup> argues, we are all “forced to appear” and thus being judged by the peers we appear before. There is no unmediated way of appearing, Kaiser highlights, and we have little say in the reception of our appearance, even if we put in an effort to affect our looks. Still, we are not passive, but utilize the cognitive codes offered to us, modulating our looks to fit with the position and context we engage in. We make our looks appear “legible” to our peers according to the context, both through symbols and emotional priming. But as we appear, we are also forced to take part in being judged. Fashion designer Charles Frederick Worth remarked already in 1895 that the pleasure of judging others is at the heart of fashion and appearance, stating that: “Women dress, of course, for two reasons: for the pleasure of making themselves smart, and for the still greater joy of snuffing out the others.”<sup>7</sup> So, make no mistake; the emotional risk of humiliation is always present as snuffing out rivals is the *greater joy* of fashion. It can be the quest for what fashion theorist Rebecca Arnold<sup>8</sup> calls the “thrill of exclusion.”

Worth’s comment leads us to examine the tension between freedom and conformity; or the paradox that we use the same word for fashion both when it breaks free from the convention of the time, while it also denotes that very same convention. As highlighted in Susanne Pagold’s<sup>9</sup> definition of fashion as “to dress like everyone else, but before everyone else,” the difference between conformity and difference is minimal, yet still the crucial element at the heart of fashion. As I appear, I put myself out to *be judged by others*, as Kaiser point out, and it is this social and emotional gamble that activates fashion as an energy experienced in the body – a “passion.” As Giorgio Agamben<sup>10</sup> notes, “Fashion can be defined as the introduction into time of a peculiar discontinuity that divides it according to its relevance or irrelevance,” and it is worth expanding the perspective to also include the bodies on which fashion is draped. Here, fashion plays with emotions of belonging versus exclusion, the division between relevant and irrelevant people: winners and losers, conquerors and casualties.<sup>11</sup>

This aspect of fashion, that dressing means setting oneself up to judgment, exposes that the gamble can be played in many ways, from the lowest risks of absolute conformity, to the high

intensity of playing daringly. Desires and affects may emerge from blending in and being part of the group, but also from breaking rules and conventions, that is, the risk that comes with challenging an audience or disrupting the game. However, most consumers are playing along a continuum between two poles of fashion; on the one end the *vital* gamble of looks, daring and dynamic, versus the *bare*, at the other end, the plain conformity. It is at this latter end of the continuum most of what is everyday fashion appears, in the conformity of what is offered in the stores or shown in the ads; little challenge needed, as it is a look already chosen by editors and influencers. This large expanse is the *barren* fashion of in-between, it is the emotional desert where most consumer fashion is offered to us. This means something like feeling enough vital to expose some form of personal difference, while serial enough to not stand out but be accepted in the current context. This is the safety that is the bread and butter the “fast-fashion” industry keeps churning out, what fashion editor Michele Lee<sup>12</sup> calls “McFashion;” a type of fashion consumption just as *unsatisfying*, *commonplace*, and *utterly forgettable* as the fast-food equivalent. The basic premise of this barren fashion is to be almost emotionally disconnected; a quick fix in calories or appearance – no risk taken and with minimal reward of only just being accepted.

At the vital end, a wearer seeks aesthetic judgment, and tries to present his or her appearance in the most rewarding way: sexually, culturally, sub-culturally, economically, or whichever currency or arena the gamble is enacted on.<sup>13</sup> Peers affirm the look, positive comments are exchanged, the outfit offers a sense of flirting with the attention of others, and especially peers whose opinion counts. Thus, for something to be working “fashionably” (more than just blending in and to be accepted) it needs to put some social currency at risk, and this gamble may also raise our social status or undermine it: we are either rewarded or punished, and if we sought attention, being ignored may be experienced as a failure.

But the humiliation that may come from losing can be traumatic, and we may withdraw from the game to stay safe in conformity, in the plain uniforms which offer neither risk nor reward.<sup>14</sup> Not only being ignored, but being shamed or humiliated is a disaster, as rejection and exclusion causes pain experienced as strongly as that of physical violence.<sup>15</sup> And as we will see further on, using clothes as an excuse for judgment and harassment is a common trait in the dynamics of exclusion and bullying where one moment of humiliation can result in a lifetime of submission and fear, becoming trapped in the barren.

It is thus no coincidence in the widespread use of low-risk apparel, where every culture and scene have their own barren landscapes of appearance. There is no-hazard couture, just like there is low-risk streetwear for skaters and habitual punk rebellion for every mall goth. Every subculture has its barren expression, as far away from the edge as possible. To not be judged, to simply pass, is a low risk gamble and with more emphasis on the uniform elements of dress. But at its most extreme, one could imagine it something like the “heat death” of fashion, the baseline aspects of barren dress. In its most ubiquitous form, it means just passing and blending in with the crowd, and in most cases in the West, that is something like plain jeans and a T-shirt, where, even if it changes in style, still is the staple food of the wardrobe.

This is where barren fashion overlaps and becomes the equivalent to Agamben’s<sup>16</sup> minimal sense of living in “bare life,” as the minimal sameness of fashion. Agamben’s distinction emerges from the Greek demarcation between “bare life” (the biological fact of life, Gk. ζωή “zoê”) versus “qualified life” (the form or manner in which life is lived, Gk. βίος “bios”). Bios (citizen life of the included) is distinguished from that of the ostracized person, the excluded non-citizen; the prisoner or slave who is kept barely alive – unrecognized sameness of inferiority is their destiny (the state treats them as bare numbers, stripping them of citizen rights and humanity). Bare fashion is barely interesting as fashion. It is the parallel to zoe or “bare life,” the

minimal life devoid of meaning, control or rights.<sup>17</sup> It is the bare minimum of individual pleasure, devoid of meaning, control or difference. And perhaps more importantly: it is a risk-free fashion of quantifiable sameness – a fashion devoid of vitality, without the sense of hazard that comes with passion.

The dynamics between positive valence, or the pleasure and reward of being affirmed and included, and the negative valence, the pain and punishment of exclusion, also points towards one of the paradoxes in fashion; how the freedom of accessible dress, that anyone can basically dress however they feel like, makes consumers simultaneously *desire to be led*.<sup>18</sup> Freedom increases the desire for guidance where people are drawn to the voice of a leader or a prophet to lead them: the pain of failure makes the risk too high. I can dress any way I desire, but I prefer an influencer or designer to tell me how.

### **Toward the barrenness of fashion: the social stigma of rejection**

Dressing unconventionally is both accessible and acceptable to large populations today, and one may ask why so few of us do. If we are all individuals and unique, as most of us are at least made to think, why is that not expressed more blatantly? The answer is obvious, and most of us have experienced it; to be forced to appear and be judged can be hurtful and almost always causes some emotional friction.

To unpack the negative valence in dressing “wrong” and the risk of humiliation and stigma that entails, one could examine the processes that continuously reconstruct and guide emotional and social interactions.<sup>19</sup> Norms and differences are made and remade, and people are interactive and dynamic beings who go in and out of relationships, associate in fluid and changing ways, and where relations are experienced in relation to social embodiment.<sup>20</sup> In his work on the social dynamics of stigma processes in bullying, social psychologist Robert Thornberg<sup>21</sup> examines the processes that keep reproducing victimhood, and it can be worth to put focus on Thornberg’s argument to see how the “shallowness” of fashions acts as an interface and legitimization for rejection of bullying victims, processes deeply entangled in exploiting exclusion for the purpose of humiliation.

The subject is caught in a psychological struggle between others, ingroup and outgroup, popular and unpopular peers, being an inter-dividual more than an individual, and dress plays a central part in these psychopolitical processes.<sup>22</sup> Thornberg<sup>23</sup> emphasizes how “children co-construct and participate in their own peer cultures by creatively appropriating and reconstructing information and norms from the adult world to address their own concerns.” That is, identity is a social and interactive process, continuously renegotiated and readjusted, and is not a fixed essence. Relating to the processes that justify rejection and bullying to Goffman’s ideas of the production of “stigma,”<sup>24</sup> Thornberg uses this core concept to unpack the consequences of such labeling of targets as “contagious.” It is the stigma that makes bystanders also turn against the victim, as “a negative reputation of the victim is constructed and spread further within the community.”<sup>25</sup> The stigma process also mobilizes those who do not actively participate in bullying to become passive supporters of the process, as they do not want to socialize with the victim because of social pressure.<sup>26</sup> Victimhood is contagious, and a bystander may be socially “stained” by supporting or standing up for a victim.

As the stigma process of rejection and bullying is a social event, it is not dependent merely on bullies and victims, but on more collective dynamics within the in-groups. It is thus important to notice that bullying cannot be reduced to individual characteristics of the bully or the victim. As a group process that creates, manifests and maintains normative orders,<sup>27</sup> the social dynamic establishing what is considered “normal” remains unquestioned. Thus the stigma of the victim

is socially co-constructed also by the passive bystanders, and then used to explain and justify bullying as a “natural” consequence of the victim’s choices. As Thornberg<sup>28</sup> notices,

For example, Anna in Grade 4 was socially represented by her classmates as a fat girl with odd clothes, and bullying was seen by many peers as a ‘natural’ consequence of her fat body and odd clothes or, as Frida in her class put it, ‘I know it sounds a bit cruel, but she actually has herself to blame. She wouldn’t be bullied if she just lost some weight and started to wear normal clothes.’

In the process of creating the social norm of the group, the in-group members “socially compared themselves with the targeting child in a way that confirmed their ‘normality’ as well as their socially included position in the peer group, at the expense of the victim.”<sup>29</sup> To come back to Worth’s notion of how the pleasure of fashion plays out in the snuffing out of rivals, one of the in-group members claimed how much better she and her friends were than their victim, using clothing as a marker of this distinction:

‘Frida, Johanna and me—we’re popular in the class. We’re kind of good-looking, and we wear brand clothes. Anna is kind of the opposite, and everyone think she’s strange’, a girl in Grade 4.<sup>30</sup>

The victim in turn internalizes the humiliation to the degree they enact it even in new settings, thus producing social expectations that traps the victims in a self-fulfilling prophecy. “They became nothing more than their bullying-induced labels for the classmates.”<sup>31</sup>

Not only do the peers withdraw from the victim due to their stigma and the scare of being “contaminated” by their exclusion and loser status, but the internalization also limits the victims’ opportunities to socialize with peers, develop social relations and have friends as they have been discredited as deviants. As a peer mentions; “Almost no one in the class would like to be with her... they don’t want others to think that they are like her ... She’s a jerk with ugly clothes and that’s why people avoid her (a girl in Grade 5).”<sup>32</sup> The contagious affects of rejection streamline the peer-group to turn off any emotional connection with the victim.

The victim comes to doubt or question the normal (like-anyone-self) self-image to instead assume her bullies’ image of her. Liberation from rejection and humiliation becomes almost impossible, as in the example Thornberg lifts, where Anna changed her clothing to fit in. But this is to no avail. “The problem was that the victims already played an involuntary role in an ongoing pattern of collective action”<sup>33</sup> and the peers were already moving the boundaries of the norm away from the victim. “If victims tried to change something about themselves, it was never good enough (e.g. ‘It doesn’t matter if he wears his new Converse shoes, he’s still a nerd’, a boy in Grade 5).”<sup>34</sup> Not only does clothes and fashion play a role in this dynamic (as the whole group plays along in the definition of what is considered acceptable or not), but as noted above, clothes act as a perfect canvas on which to project the difference and norm deviance and a perfect excuse for shaming and humiliation.

### **Barren fashion and the inferno of the same**

If fashion is a convenient excuse for rejection and humiliation, it may be no surprise many are drawn to the safety of what the defining social groups in one’s social environment considers “normal.” The minimal experience of McFashion at the largest retailers limits risk and



legitimizes the “choices” of the wearer (the in-group makes known what brands count and the store has already chosen what it thinks is on trend, making the risk of making the wrong choices minimal).

The safety of the barren, habitual, and safe consumerism that is merely one click away, exposes how Lee’s notion of McFashion is a parallel to Jean Baudrillard’s<sup>35</sup> notion of the “desert of the real.” Or rather, we could call it the barrenness experienced with minimal-risk fashion under the threat of humiliation as the “desert of the same,” a phenomenon that could be observed in the nervous conformity in almost any school corridor. With the new landscape of cheap and accessible online shopping, every new and accessible look is just a click away – risk free sameness is almost guaranteed.

Cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han<sup>36</sup> draws parallels between how the ubiquitous accessibility and transparency of contemporary consumer society keeps reproducing a feverish hunger for sameness. As a complement to consumer goods, also the market of lovers suffers, in the endless freedom of choice, the overabundance of options, and the compulsion for perfection.<sup>37</sup> The desire for predicable and transparent sameness leaves no room for the unknown and mysterious, where every aspect of life, especially as communicated through social media, is being flattened out into an object of affirmative maximization, circulation, and consumption. When a consumer engages with “other” or “exotic” fashions, the emphasis will most certainly be on the sensual signification of this new difference (what it does to me). Otherness must be legitimized and never be at risk of becoming contaminated by the otherness of the loser.

With the transformation of the individual subject into a “project” in the achievement society, the self becomes an auto-compulsive drive with no way to resist itself.

Today, we do not deem ourselves subjugated *subjects*, but rather *projects*: always refashioning and reinventing ourselves. A sense of freedom attends passing from the state of subject to that of project. All the same, the projection amounts to a form of compulsion and constraint – indeed, to a *more efficient kind of subjectivation and subjugation*.<sup>38</sup>

One becomes a slave to oneself’s entrepreneurial drives to always become anew. And “whoever fails is at fault and personally bears the guilt.”<sup>39</sup> This is the power of the barrenness of McFashion, and unquestionably subscribed by the in-groups; by continuously affirming sameness one does not really need to firmly establish what counts, yet every participant knows to adjust to the social interaction that sets the norm. “Instead of making people *compliant*,” Han argues the social dynamic of social achievement “seeks to make them *dependent*.”<sup>40</sup>

In applying Han’s ideas to fashion, all that matter is to achieve, perform and keep up, at least with the barren minimum, to not be a loser, and in the realm of dress this means to continuously update new looks, amongst peers or on social media. Han<sup>41</sup> posits how this explosion of sameness is driven by an *excess of positivity*. The slogans of our time are endless improvement and the ceaseless embrace of possibility. It is not the father’s “no” that is the voice of society, but instead slogans of limitless self-improvement, such as “nothing is impossible,” “be what you can be,” or “just do it!” It is a free competition that keeps reproducing the “right” entrepreneurial difference, thus eliminating any real contrasting Otherness or aliveness.

As Han posits, even transgressions and mystic pleasures, such as BDSM is turned into barren sameness, as in E.L. James’ popular *50 Shades of Grey*. Here, even sadomasochistic torture lacks the “negativity of overstepping.”<sup>42</sup> Transgression, torture, and pain becomes yet another product range and easily accessible sameness. Trapped within our own enjoyment, consumers become fearful of any negativity or asymmetry that can break the relationship between our

desire and what we can acquire. Over-affirmation of hyper-transparent consumption, with endless “haul” videos or media updates, reproduces sameness everywhere: everything gets modeled on the ubiquitous accessibility of the search engine. “Society, as a search engine, a machine for consumption, is abolishing the desire for what is absent-what cannot be found, seized, and consumed.”<sup>43</sup>

If fashion today is available everywhere, if only as images dug down into viral marketing campaigns for the new limited edition “drop” it is the epitome of sameness (a “drop” is in this sense a limited test of market potential, in itself a risk-minimized event). Barren fashion is the search for the no-thrill acceptable sameness, safe from potential rejection or humiliation. Acceptable, quantified, and thus legitimized deviance is the name of the game, as people line up for the latest cool street wear from this or that street wear brand that “everyone” is talking about (“everyone” that counts in the feed of fellow consumer rivals we habitually call “friends”). It is the process turning every new fashion into a new menu at McFashion: no risk of unknown pleasures, but instead endless sameness.

Barren fashion is devoid of emotional charge beyond that of every other search-engine-commodity, and we must ask if this is a model of fashion utopian enough sustaining. It is a fashion with minimal affect, minimal emotional investment, and easily ready to be discarded if not proven to work “right” in the process of achieving inclusion. This is fashion stripped from any unique quality, any aspiration towards autonomy; as unsatisfying, commonplace, and utterly forgettable as the habitual fast-food calories. It is the price we pay for too few “likes” and our fear of humiliation, making most of our wardrobes full to the brink of desert-like sameness. We must see it for what it is: barely of interest after leaving the store or recording the haul, it is bare fashion.

Vital fashion, on the other hand, comes with practice and the fostering of courage. It is not necessarily what the celebrities and influencers wear (with their staff of stylists and brand collaborations). A look not secured by any editor, it can be the challenge anyone takes to push the boundaries of their comfort zones; a daring tie, oddly colored socks, a new silhouette, a stoop sale find. The vitality is in the gamble, the reward of daring to pull it off, however modest. The vitality lies in the passion of risk, having the nerve to take a step into an emotional unknown; to try something out, *beyond* or *before* the safety of following one’s peers. If fashion should be worth sustaining, it must offer us more than conformity, anxiety, and sad affects. It must be a fashion that is a daring play with the passions.

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# PROSTHETIC AURA: THINKING ABOUT SCENT IN FASHION

*Debra Riley Parr*

As a field of inquiry, fashion needs to understand its object of study to be dialectical, imbricated in the reality of relations. Fashion is an interdependent capitalist industry as well as a design field, as avant-garde as it is appropriative, and elegant as it is extractive. As theorist Annika Marie has pointed out, “it is nearly impossible to have a serious engagement with fashion without thinking market, industry, business and the mode of production known as global late capitalism.”<sup>1</sup>

This essay begins to theorize how scent, particularly perfume, operates within the global fashion system as a structural support, while seemingly a mere accessory. It proceeds from the position that, in the dialectical relation between fashion and scent, fashion is dominant and scent, perceived to be weaker in the set of relations, is in actuality a structural buttress, a prosthetic support. This dialectic, however, like all such structures of power, opens up under scrutiny to a complex set of relations. At a very primal level, textiles and scent wrap the body in ways that create borders and identities, protection and support. Fashion poses as an independent cultural field, an autonomous zone that is self-determining both creatively and economically. However, fashion is not as independent as it seems. In fact, it relies on a perfumed aura to create distinct brand identities and provide design houses with massive revenue streams, while also articulating what it is to be fully and fashionably dressed.

Thinking about scent in (and out of) fashion is not a matter of starting *tabula rasa*, but rather, as French curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud suggests, entails “finding a means of insertion into the innumerable flows of production.”<sup>2</sup> Bourriaud is speaking of contemporary art practice, but in the complexity of the fashion system, his method helps to unfold perfume’s place, its part in the productive flow of design, marketing, consumption, and the performance of the social. Considered an adjunct to fashion, perfume also operates in a dialectical set of relations, although its modes of production differ from those of the fashion industry. Perfume-in-fashion is an example of a relational, post-productive object, of the sort described by Bourriaud in *Postproduction*. It is a matter of designers and others in the fashion system (re) programming the already available form of perfume; it is, to apply Bourriaud’s language, a tool to be used. But how so?

Perfume’s long history, beginning in alchemy and herbology, includes recipes for scented concoctions in medieval manuscripts promising all sorts of physical and psychological transformations. Such promises are understandable to us with our twenty-first-century knowledge of

the direct link smell makes to the brain's limbic system—the system governing emotion and memory. By the mid-twentieth century, Andy Warhol imagined perfume as a way to take up more space. In his exhibition *The Art of Scent: 1889–2011*, curator and scent critic Chandler Burr proposed elevating perfumery to the status of art; perfumers like Daniela Andrier resist this move insisting on distinctions between art and design, differences with affinities to fashion. As perfume, scent becomes abstract, performing a service within fashion that is easy to understand in terms of “the whole range of metaphors of getting dressed, of putting some sort of self together, as a basic requirement of going out into the world, becoming real in being public and seen,” to quote Annika Marie again. Perfume works in the everyday project of fashioning a self that is fit to be seen (or smelled).

Like other fashion accessories, perfume may fall into the category of the fetish – as fashion historian Cristina Giorcelli points out in her introduction to *Accessorizing the Body*.<sup>3</sup> I assume Giorcelli is referring to Marx's theory of the commodity fetish, in which an accessory like perfume would appear as a most obvious and trivial thing, with the real modes of perfume production – perhaps even more so than other accessories because of the traditional secrecy around formulas – remaining largely invisible. A Marxist critique reveals that the perfume commodity is perceived not in terms of social relationships between people involved in its production, but rather in the economic relations of the market. That is, the relations of farmers of roses and lavender in Grasse, France, the chemists of Givauden, and the designers and manufacturers of perfume bottles (to mention only a few of the players in the supply chain), remain obscured and rendered less important in comparison to the jostling of Byredo's fragrance *Slow Dance* with Miu Miu's *Fleur D'argent* or D.S. & Durga's *Debaser* for the attention and desire of consumers, for a profitable market position.

Giorcelli does not reference Sigmund Freud's reading of the fetish, in which a terrifying thing in an act of repression is supplanted by an object that becomes over-determined, burdened with carrying psychic disturbance(s) sublimated into a form that is an object of obsession. Perfume – in its often contradictory relation to bodily smells – is a perfect convergence of the Freudian sexual fetish and the commodity fetish. Like our natural stinks and pheromones, perfume is designed to excite sexual drives, whether it supplants the body's anxiety producing odors, or heightens these by incorporating animalics (ambergris, civet, musk) as base notes. As presented in the market, perfume as commodity depends upon the belief and experience that scent evokes material sumptuousness as well as desire, longings for sexual desire, sexual desirability. Perfume markets itself as a place for this convergence: a desire for both luxury and sexuality.

In her discussion of accessories, Giorcelli also refers to Immanuel Kant's discussion of “picture frames, the columns of buildings, the clothes of Greek statues: all *parerga*, whose primary meaning pertains to decoration, ornament, embellishment, and supplement.”<sup>4</sup> Kant writes:

Even what is called ornamentation (*parerga*), i.e., what is only an adjunct and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object, in augmenting the delight of taste does so only by means of its form. Thus it is with the frames of pictures or the drapery on statues, or the colonnades of palaces. But if the ornamentation does not itself enter into the composition of the beautiful form—if it is introduced like a gold frame merely to win approval for the picture by means of its charm—it is then called *finery* and takes away from the genuine beauty.<sup>5</sup>

These unnecessary or frivolous forms – or alternatively the literally supportive ones that may be (mis)read as insignificant or can pass as fungible parts of a designed “whole” can, also according

to Kant, function to excite interest in the object itself. Perfume can be, like Kant's *parergon*, dismissed or an invitation that excites interest in the whole design. Giorcelli then quotes Jacques Derrida's musings on Kant's *parergon*:

A *parergon* comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done (*fait*), the fact (*le fait*), the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board (*au bord*, *a bord*) it is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er)...The *parergon* inscribes something, exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that it is lacking *from itself*.<sup>6</sup>

For Derrida, the important thing is to deconstruct the binary opposition suggested by the pairings of *ergon* and *parergon*/inside and outside. As in all binaries – here, fashion/perfume – there is a hierarchy at work: the first term asserts its primacy, but can be shown in fact to depend on the secondary term, either through some lack or through interactions in which the second term manipulates or otherwise influences the first. Derrida intimates the power of the *parergon*: “One must avoid letting the *parergon* get the upper hand over the essentials.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the past century, the fashion system has instrumentalized scent (as perfume) in order to expand the concept of the fashionable, to increase profits, to produce an aura-effect/affect in the flow of standardization and mass consumption. This instrumentalization has made scent into a kind of prosthetic – an appendage attached, or introduced into a broken system, or at least a system that as early as the beginning of the twentieth century begins to acknowledge transformative shifts in how fashion is designed, manufactured, and distributed. Of course prosthetics in fashion may encompass a whole range of items – accessories like hats and gloves – and clothing itself may qualify as a prosthetic device, supplemental to skin and hair. Perfume, then, an accessory, a supplement, a *parergon* – can be inserted into the flows of the fashion system.

The term “prosthetic” is not without its own history. Vivian Sobchack's essay “A Leg to Stand On” argues against the metaphoric use of the term.<sup>8</sup> Sarah Jain's essay, “The Prosthetic Imagination” traces the use of the term:

As a trope that has flourished in a recent and varied literature concerned with interrogating human technology interfaces, ‘technology as prosthesis’ attempts to describe the joining of materials, naturalizations, excorporations, and semiotic transfer that also go far beyond the medical definition of ‘replacement of a missing part.’<sup>9</sup>

Perfume as prosthetic functions to replace a missing part in a material way, especially in terms of the way perfume functions to support the fashion system and participates in the modern insistence on scrupulous hygiene and grooming to remove odors of the body. Perfume is a material artifact and at the same time creates an invisible, sometimes enigmatic aura, an extension not quite one's own bodily smell: a prosthetic shimmer. If perfume can be said to function as *parergon*, as prosthetic, what exactly is it doing? If it is not merely trivial, how does it press against the limit of an ensemble, a shirt, a skirt, a dress? How does it “cooperate” within the operation, as Derrida describes?

My second term, “aura,” also may prove problematic, raising questions about how precisely does perfume create such a thing? Is it an olfactory counterpart to the emanation of colored light around a subject as in Russian spiritualism, or the aura Walter Benjamin refers to in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” the experience of which produces a

sense of uniqueness and location in time and space for singular, history-rich objects? Benjamin's point is that those days are over: the mass production of objects and the transformation of objects into commodities destroys the aura we experience, or used to experience, in the presence of images like the *Mona Lisa*, or objects like a handmade, inherited heirloom with a complicated history.<sup>10</sup> Or, of haute couture garments. I'm thinking of perfume as a prosthetic device, material in its auratic effect/affect – one that is closer to the body than clothes, interacts with body heat and skin, and yet also projects out into the atmosphere around the body, creating in some instances an olfactive wake – known in perfumery as *sillage* – as the body moves through space. Could this trailing be the aura-effect? And in terms of affect – is perfume, with its stimulus to the limbic system, a way of interjecting emotional resonances to mass-produced fashion?

As a cultural object, perfume is only beginning to be understood. Much work remains to account for its meanings as an emotional stimulant, as an aesthetic, material composition, as a prosthetic with olfactive auratic potentials, as well as its production and distribution under late capitalism. For fashion, in very simple terms, perfume works as a cash generator, a guarantor of profits on low margins, a cheap entry into affordable luxury. Chanel, Dior, Givenchy, and Gaultier increasingly use couture as a marketing device for far more profitable ready-to-wear, fragrance, and accessory lines. It isn't hard to see how this works. "Haute couture is what gives our business its essential essence of luxury," says Bernard Arnault, the head of Moët Hennessy – Louis Vuitton (LVMH), which owns both Dior and Givenchy.<sup>11</sup> "The cash it soaks up is largely irrelevant. Set against the money we lose has to be the value of the image couture gives us. Look at the attention the collections attract. It is where you get noticed. You have to be there. It's where we set our ideas in motion."<sup>12</sup>

Perfume then, like other accessories, supplements couture, the loss leader in the relationship. It extends the aura of haute couture, which, following Benjamin's logic, is sacrificed in mass production. Perfume also creates an aura around the figure of the designer, maintaining and expanding the concept of the fashionable, by marking out a creative, proprietary space. The designer's skills in defining the cut, fabric, silhouette of a garment also include the concept of a signature "look" that is immediately recognizable – the frothy clouds of Charles Worth, the tweed and masculine line of Chanel, the distressed black fabric layerings of Yamamoto. By the early twentieth century and the withering of couture under conditions of mass production, scent as prosthetic aura, inserted into industry's flow, works as a kind of accelerant creating desire for, and access to, the latest fashion. Even as the cult of the designer reaches its apex in the 1980s as fashion historian Rebecca Arnold points out, perfume figures in most designers' plans for their collections, as an aside perhaps, but also resonant of the drive to create a total ensemble.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the insertion of scent into the current of fashion design may be a holdover from the emphasis on *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the total work of art, in the emergent design culture of the industrial revolution, which would come to threaten the culture of couture. As Chanel understood, perfume can extend "the look" to the olfactory, increasing the sensorial experience of wearing certain fabrics. Chanel famously wanted a scent that didn't smell like a flower, that was instead a composition – a constructed thing like a dress. It had to fit her sense of fashion: it had to be modern, abstract, not like the popular singular florals.

When fashion designers turn to scent, the accords that signify their design aesthetic might prove elusive and difficult to pin down. However, with the help of an expert perfumer like Chanel's Ernest Beaux, it can be articulated in a design brief. But – unlike couture – perfume can be standardized and mass produced and is highly profitable. By subjecting scent to the rigor of fashion thinking, Chanel put perfume under the regime of the fashion system, where it affords a kind of sensory pleasure – even more important now in fashion's global and digital

context. Perfume design and production continue to flourish by extending, glamorizing, making affordable the fashion designer's formal syntax.

Comme des Garçons is a good contemporary case in point, with its ever-increasing number of perfume series that at once reiterate what the company refers to as its *kachikan* – Japanese, meaning “sense of values” – and expand its fashion aesthetic. As of 2013, Comme des Garçons, the global multi-brand with \$220 million in revenue per year, generated about \$10 million from perfume sales. Rei Kawakubo's husband and president of the company, Adrian Joffe, with Kawakubo filling the role of editor, manages the company's scent wing. Comme des Garçons' scent collection includes collaborations with a number of perfumers and other designers like Jun Takahashi of Undercover, magazines like *Monocle Magazine*, museums like The Serpentine Galleries, and musicians like Pharell. Joffe describes Comme des Garçons' role in these creative partnerships as akin to that of a film producer – with interest in the plot and the text, but also allowing for sympathetic affinities to emerge.<sup>14</sup>

The brand's fragrances can be highly conceptual and often come with bold manifestos. In 1998, with the release of its first “anti-perfume,” *Odeur 53*, a blend of notes including “oxygen, flash of metal, nail polish and burnt rubber” the company began to understand the marketing benefits of these scents, produced with low margins, that could at the same time cooperate, as in Derrida's description of the *parergon*, within the operation. By 2002, the company entered into what Joffe calls a “partial licensing” agreement with Barcelona-based Puig, designed to maintain the creative freedom so important to Kawakubo. Joffe explains the *modus operandi*: “We do the perfumes, we do the boxes and Rei does all the graphics, and they produce it and sell it only to fragrance stores.”<sup>15</sup> The twist in the arrangement with Puig affords a way to keep producing conceptual scents, thereby sustaining the *kachikan*, even in fragrance. Joffe outlines the strategy: “We divided the logo. We gave [Puig] Comme des Garçons Parfums, but we made a new label, Comme des Garçons Parfums Parfums, for all the weird things. No one knows this, but you will see Parfums Parfums [on some bottles] and on the other ones, you'll see Parfums. It's kind of a revolutionary license really.”<sup>16</sup>

Like the company Rei Kawakubo established in 1969, her clothes, boutiques, business decisions, and perfumes are of a piece with her design aesthetic, which has been described as destroyed, deconstructed, in love with asymmetry and deliberate imperfection. Kawakubo admits to never being into fragrances, so her growing number of niche perfumes is a team effort of many guest “noses” under the creative direction of designer Christian Astuguevielle, known in the industry for his work with Molinard and Rochas, as well as for his enigmatic rope wrappings of objects.<sup>17</sup> He has directed well over 75 scents and some of the most interesting available on the market, including *Copper*, composed by perfumer Alienor Massenet.

Astuguevielle's methods of research, thinking, and formulating a perfume brief align perfectly with Comme des Garçons' design practice. All their perfumes involve a process that moves from concept to experiment to decision-making guided by the company's key values – experimentation and creative freedom. Astuguevielle explains that the company does not subject their perfumes to market testing and this practice supports the freedom to produce anti-perfumes like *Odeur 53*, “which really stood out from what perfumery had to offer at that time, and since then it has inspired many others. For this one, all I said was that I wanted to make an anti-perfume. She just told me ‘go.’”<sup>18</sup>

This practice of not subjecting the perfumes to market testing situates Comme des Garçons apart from other design houses, bringing forth their specific design process to pursue “unpretty” smells and to develop a perfume collection, for example, around the collective experience of incense, rather than work to target a particular customer profile:



We launched five incenses and people were mesmerized. But all we did was use the history of mankind! In every religion, we all have a memory associated with incense. After that, we went from beautiful orthodox church to the smell of drycleaners, and it was not a problem. When we create, we don't think about someone. We think about a fragrance.<sup>19</sup>

None of the *Comme des Garçons* perfumes is designed to illustrate a specific collection, but remains an autonomous part of the whole – a *paregon*? Astugueville notes the grounds on which fashion and perfumes meet at *Comme des Garçons* include similarities in rhythm and the kind of research done in preparation for production, but he insists there is no attempt to draw inspiration directly from specific garments or themes. He makes this distinction about perfume:

Perfume is about its time; it's about a moment, a desire, so I suggest wishes. A few years ago, I said I wanted to work around the idea of synthetic, everyone agreed and we launched a series shortly after. Competition never influences the decisions we make. The time we live in does.<sup>20</sup>

*Comme des Garçons'* perfumes are independent of specific collections. They do not attempt to evoke specific smell-scapes or notes: these perfumes reprogram the expectations of perfume and serve to buttress *Comme des Garçons'* identity and revenue.

*Odeur 53* and the rest build on the success of *Comme des Garçons'* first perfume, *Eau de Parfum*, launched in 1994. Described as a “sultry accord of Moroccan souk,” the discernible notes are labdanum, cedar, styrax, galbanum, sandal wood, carnation, hay, black pepper, frankincense, cinnamon, geranium, cardamom, nutmeg, Turkish rose, French honey, and coriander.<sup>21</sup> Mark Buxton, the renowned British nose, concocted the formula that from the list of notes appears to be quite lovely and not at all a challenge to the norms of perfumery. However, to align with the experimental *Comme des Garçons'* aesthetic, Buxton deliberately eschewed the temporal structure of most perfumes: there are no top, middle, or base notes that unfold over time; rather the many notes work more like a complicated melody designed to interact uniquely on different skin. Often described as *avant garde*, *Comme des Garçons'* original scent poses a challenge to conventional perfumery: it is not easily classified as a *chypre*, a fragrance that is warm and dry, with mossy or woody characteristics. It is not gender specific, but not unisex either. Perhaps in this defiance of “feminine” and “masculine” categories, one can detect a nod to the Françoise Hardy song, “Tous les garçons et filles,” that inspired the company's name. This also fits with how Kawakubo's clothes challenge received notions of the gendered silhouette.

The design process for creating *Comme des Garçons'* perfumes also grows out of the company's *kachikan*, the value of creative freedom that fosters experimentation which understands the market but is not interested in designing to the market's current demands. Rather, *Comme des Garçons* wants to create demand for something that the market may want, but has yet to experience. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Astugueville says, “I love to mystify.” But in design briefs he develops for the anti-perfumes the reverse may actually occur as one becomes aware of the very conventions governing perfumery being overturned. Most are not “pretty” and some are downright “difficult,” challenging the common sense expectations that a perfume smell “good.”<sup>22</sup>

Perfume as prosthetic, an accessory to fashion, as seen in the case of *Comme des Garçons*, becomes central to the economic future of fashion. Perhaps for this reason, scent is becoming as autonomous as design, that is, seen as independent and self-reflexive. This autonomy might

suggest we flip our understanding of perfume: is its position as ancillary to fashion as it seems? Returning to the idea of the *parergon*, the prosthetic, the supplement: perfume taken on board intervenes and fills a lack, but then becomes something more. According to *Euromonitor* analytical reports over the past few years, fragrance industry profits amounted to billions of dollars and this sector, while underperforming in 2020 due to the global pandemic, remains poised for future growth. The flow of fragrance production reaches all markets, from impoverished countries to the most wealthy. In certain areas, the black market in knock-off scents flourishes given the enormous desire for the latest celebrity endorsed scent and sluggish economies. The projected profits for the fragrance sector in 2018, for example, relied heavily on an ever-increasing number of perfumes that boast a celebrity connection. Indeed, the role of celebrity culture was key to growth, and layers another aura surrounding the name of the fashion designer. Artisanal and niche perfumes, as well as fragrances claiming to be natural and even vegan, as in the case with Coty's Calvin Klein cK Everyone, now seem to be the arena for anticipated growth.<sup>23</sup>

For the consumer, this prosthetic aura structures a feeling that one can enter a public sphere built around the idea that the self, and the fashionable self in particular, is constructed and a matter of control. At the same time, perfume – like fashion – confers identity, for both corporations and individuals, marking a creative and proprietary space, infused with an aura-effect/affect in the flow of standardization and mass consumption. When consumers visit a boutique to see high-end fashion like Dior and Givenchy, or Comme des Garçons, and purchase a bottle of perfume, they leave with a bit of the brand's aura, which in turn activates the potential auratic experience specific to the individual wearing the perfume. While the textile may function as a wrap against the cold world, perfume evaporates, a volatile border that diffuses and sets up an olfactive scenario in which the subject, enveloped in a vaporous material, dissolves. In this way, scent participates in the dialectical logic of fashion, and explains the contemporary proliferation of perfumes like Comme des Garçon's *Serpentine* a fragrance collaboration with British artist Tracey Emin for the Serpentine Galleries in London. The *Serpentine* describes the scent as being light and fresh, fresh, light, yet deceivingly complex, unisex scent composed of grass, leaves, pollen (galbanum, iris leaf), oxygene (aldehyde, ozone), asphalt (black musks, nutmeg), labdanum, and smoked cedar with a little bit of pollution (benzoin, juniper wood, gaïac wood).<sup>24</sup> Or, consider *Girl*, Comme des Garçons collaboration with the American musician Pharrell Williams, a scent with notes of neroli, white pepper, and cedar, named after his 2014 album. Perfume creates hard economic value in a sprawling, highly competitive industry focused on the tiniest of distinctions, even as it contributes to affect, to the staging of the ephemeral, evaporative identities of the contemporary consumer, critical to the reproduction of the fashion system.

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# TAILORING THE IMPENETRABLE BODY ALL OVER AGAIN: DIGITALITY, MUSCLE, AND THE MEN'S SUIT

*Diego Semerene*

## **From omniscience to omnipresence: can the phallus survive visual inspection?**

White masculinity has been consistently associated with agency over objecthood. The man's suit has played a central role in producing the supposedly cisgender white heterosexual male body, from which masculinity is supposed to emanate. The suit has often worked as an armor, safeguarding certain men's bodies from the position of vulnerability and penetrability that has, in turn, been stigmatized as the domain of feminine and racialized bodies. If white men have enjoyed the safety of omniscience, largely as authors and not targets of visual inspection, tailoring kinship amongst themselves through sartorial semblance, what strategies do they forge when their bodies become objects-to-be-updated within digital networks?<sup>1</sup> What happens to man's strategies of survival when he is faced with digital culture's injunction that his body be visually represented ad nauseam?

In this chapter, I argue that social media platforms, particularly Instagram, give rise to a new mode of phallic engineering, which recalls the symbolic effects of the man's suit, but that is achieved through muscle. Phallic engineering can be understood as the crafting of a carapace that covers up an absence – of inviolability or invincibility – through a claim of inherent power, which is esthetically articulated. Phallic work is a mirage. It functions fundamentally through decoys, presenting a narrative of unquestionable might through façades, forever deferring rigorous scrutiny. That is precisely what Jacques Lacan refers to as the privilege of the phallus. You can summon it as much as you like, it will always say nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Bodies that aren't available for examination are more likely to have claims about themselves stick than those that are constantly inspected, surveilled, ranked, managed, and picked apart. In this manner, my argument is that the white man's muscle of social media has come to do the phallic work that the men's suit did for centuries.

The muscular is an aesthetic that makes a claim, a phallic claim. In heterosexist and white supremacist societies such as ours the phallus could only stand in for heterosexual whiteness. This doesn't mean queer men writ large, or heterosexual men of color, cannot utilize muscle to make phallic claims about themselves or to queer such claims for their own benefit, as has happened throughout the history of the suit in its various variations: from the dissident excess of

the zoot suit and the anti-imperialist sartorial modesty of political leaders to experimental dandyism.<sup>3</sup>

Reaching back into the history of men's suit allows us to see how white men's *modus operandi* for disavowing the fragility of their bodies, embodying and naturalizing sexual difference, have stayed consistent as a patriarchal stratagem all over the world. The fact that the basic structure of the suit has often been re-appropriated by marginalized populations and artists only confirms its function as a fundamental organizer of hegemonic masculinity.

The male body has always been a pliable, and unstable, assemblage aimed at inscribing ideology and effacing queerness, from the vestimentary manufacturing that gave us a pear-shaped male entity in the eighteenth century to the sartorial architecture of the nineteenth century men's suit intended to resemble the muscular sculptures of Greek antiquity. The muscular male body of social media becomes the go-to ready-made veil, or stopgap, for men's lack, and an instrument for withstanding digital media's scrutiny that re-iterates sexual difference (man versus woman) as an essential inevitability rooted in biological anatomy.

A critical reading of Instagram posts, stories, hashtags, captions, and tags within photos exposes misogyny and the reiteration of homosocial links as strategies of re-inscription and circulation of the fantasy of a sexual difference built on the always already white phallus *collectively* and through muscle. That is, although all bodies are ultimately penetrable, unstable and vulnerable in the face of disease, violence, death, time, language, etc., the idea of a sexual difference reproduces a culture built on the fantasy that this isn't true, as if certain bodies were inherently, and not just culturally, immune to violence as well as naturally gifted to enact it together.

In such a culture, different values are accorded to different bodies based on subjective realities sold as objective truths: men being fundamentally different from, and superior to, women at the physiological level. We count on the sartorial to make assumptions about the genital. Gender, national, and racial stereotypes are evident examples of this tendency which slots women in the position of weakness (some more so than others) and white men as particularly immune. Male hysteria around the usage of masks to hinder the circulation of the novel coronavirus is a clear example of this fantasy. The phallus, as understood by psychoanalysis, is precisely this idea of an indestructible and intrinsic power associated with, or claimed by, bodies deemed male.

In a move akin to the masculine defense mechanism against the penetrability of all bodies, Claire Pajackowska suggests the trend of ripped jeans, shredded like the most popular bodies of Instagram, to be the outsourcing of a subjective severance into a sartorial one: creases, gashes, slits on the clothes (denim and leather as two materials that signify usage and experience) to mask internal chaos and fragmentation.<sup>4</sup>

The reliance on incessantly updated photographic confirmation of homosocial collectivity and muscle in hegemonic modes of masculinity is made evident through workout imagery online, which includes memes and ways of posing, in which muscular male bodies co-exist and communicate with other muscular male bodies like a band of brothers. A certain brand of heterosexual masculinity, perhaps its most prominently represented in digital networks, is performed through narratives of corporeal labor, relentless repetition, and a fantasmatic immunity to physical pain. Central to this dynamic is the concept of *gains*, the literal growth of bodily size, number of followers, tagged claims of kinship with other men and fitness brands, as well as a rhetoric of animality guaranteed through a masculinity rooted in multiplicity. Such men are often posing together in the frame, or tagging one another as a way of articulating affiliation.

This chapter lays out the strategies men have developed in the face of a potentially threatening digital detection that the phallus in reality is a signifier without signified (it does not “exist”) in order to enjoy digitality without coming undone by the invasive gaze of others. I harken back to the history of man’s clothing to suggest an ancient logic of phallic *trompe l’oeil* that is at play digitally. Hovering over the text is the ontological impossibility of a cisgender self at the level of the body, whose material assemblage is always at odds with the account of seamless harmony that it makes about itself. Here the term masquerade, historically tethered to femininity, finds a coherent home in bodies deemed male.

### **Digital labor, the dreamwork, and the device**

Social media enter there where most don’t. They are often the last thing we experience before going to bed and the first before getting out of it. Not to mention their accompanying our most scatological activities. This network of intimacy and penetration could thus be described as a soporific and an aphrodisiac, which exposes its kinship with precisely that which it, the *network*, stokes (waking dreams), and brackets (sleeping dreams).

From psychoanalysis we know that the *dreamwork*, the way dreams are formed, is triggered by a certain relaxation of the superego, that all-powerful psychic agency responsible for censorship, allowing desire to articulate itself so vibrantly even if, or especially because, it does so in coded ways. In dreams, too, shredded feelings can take the shape of shredded clothes. Dreams work through decoys, the manifest content inevitably cloaking what would be the intolerable truth that the latent content bears.

Much as the necessarily partial content of the digital screen never coincides with the backend language that codes what we see, the latent content of dreams is a dish never served without the alterations of its manifested counterpart. Condensation and distortion are pre-condition for repressed material to emerge during sleep precisely because even when the superego is relaxed we can only experience oneiric freedoms through concealment and disguise.

If the repressed must veil its erotic status even when the body is asleep, or physically alone, in order to surface, it may come as no surprise that whatever experiences social media might be selling – “I’m selling the dream really aren’t I?” is what at least one gym-obsessed social media user wonders<sup>5</sup> – these experiences form an essentially pornographic public network. The pornographic embodies the very flatness that an ever-expanding, and ever naturalized, panoply of social media filters works to enact, closing up the pores of our skin, as if to limit meaning and clog up the possibilities of interpretation – of profundity – at the same time that they mask the body, and mostly the face, with a protective gloss.

The idea of social media as pornography might begin with the notion of the selfie, the flattest of all portraits, “heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it).”<sup>6</sup> The selfie as an oneiric sales pitch of a self-portrait, pornographic in its flattening artifice, is perhaps where the impossible attempt at making image coincide with self, the very definition of a *dis* identity, through posing is at its most futile. This is because such an attempt is at its most conscious and thus, most counter to what the dreamwork could ever produce if it is to reveal something about desire at all. As Nishant Shah reminds us, selfies aren’t actual photographs so much as they work like dog food for the hungry beasts of social media, content as meaningless fuel.<sup>7</sup>

In the age of social media, Lacan’s adage that there is no sexual relationship is dramatized in literal fashion.<sup>8</sup> Lacan distinguishes the *sexual relationship* from *sexual relations*, which do exist. In fact, sexual relations are all that exists, even if they are always botched – “even and mostly when it’s an act.”<sup>9</sup> The status of the other as an inevitable, buzz-killing nuisance – if they are to take space in any material vicinity at all – has perhaps never been so evident. As lovers sit across the

dinner table or lie in bed with devices in hand, during sex or in order to keep the sexual act at bay, the figure of the lover is rendered, or revealed once again to always having been superfluous.

The lover is mere surplus because the gadget-subject relationship *does* exist. And it's in fact all there is. Pornographic in that it closes up, like the clogging of pores to keep the environment away from the skin, the possibility for another subject (the Other, the stranger, the foreign, an actual lover – agent, not object) to emerge.

### Coming apart at the seams

The excitement of social media's muscular bodies may be located beyond the stand-alone phallic chiseling of each body. We may locate it in the building of a sewn-in muscular corset of sorts that, like the suit, functions as a shielding costume rife with hawkish connotations and homogenizing symbolism that help delineate (digital) space.<sup>10</sup> What renders these bodies particularly pornographic, or more than merely pornographic, is the fact that muscle in social media is always a game of call and response between men, with women caught in the middle as an object to be reviled, through sexist rhetoric (i.e. the barrage of memes deriding slutty female behavior) and neglect (i.e. the ever-present hashtag, or caption to many an image of men having fun together: *Saturdays are for the boys*).

The gym space of social media is a platform for the phallus to emerge as having already won, without bodies of women occupying the frame as agents that could expose the flimsiness of phallic claims – which work like territorial claims about who gets to occupy digital space unscathed. By the time such claims appear on screen (in men's boasting of their size and of their "savage" kinship), muscle forms a diegetic smokescreen or a tagged multiplicity, humiliating those who fall short and warning those who question the might of the phallus, keeping others from taking up (digital) space, from "loitering."<sup>11</sup>

A recent Instagram post illustrates the re-erecting of exclusionary man-man bonds through the effacing and shaming of woman. It is a pre-workout selfie in the gym-goer's car with the following caption, "Girls like guys with big shoulders to pick them up over there [sic] head. I like big shoulders to remind people I'll chuck your ass off a balcony if I have to." The caption included the hashtags #stay, #rugged, #staymachine.<sup>12</sup> Despite the thousands of followers who would have access to the post, the imaginary addressee is clearly gendered. Heterosexual masculinity seals its deal: one man re-entering in relation with another, re-enacting the semblance between them and the difference with everyone else. Woman is kicked out of the field of vision, keeping them from occupying digital space, from "loitering," along with the possibilities to "erode boundaries and create new spaces" that could come from that.<sup>13</sup>

The phallus can only appear as a claim, through materially mediated illusions. As such, phallic engineering has been the de facto survival strategy for the male body for a long time before social media came along. The male body alone, naked and by itself, could never sustain the myths that render it male.

The history of male dress, particularly after the mid-fourteenth century with "the appearance of a radically new type of dress that was sharply differentiated according to gender," is a history of veiling. Gilles Lipovetsky marks this moment as the start of fashion "in the strict sense."<sup>14</sup> That moment marks a history of buttressing the male body from its own strangeness.

The male body, as the one that represents the phallus from virtue of bearing a penis, is always about to come undone given that the phallus doesn't quite exist, a non-existence with grave material consequences. Phallic claims risk, then, collapsing in the face of visual, or viral, exposure. Hence, the strategies that man has concocted, from sartorial engineering and the theatrics of social media screens to hysteric refusals to wearing masks against the novel

coronavirus, in order to respond to a constitutional panic stemming from the fictitiousness of the phallus as direct consequence of bearing a penis: A flimsy claim that requires a lot of engineering and maintenance.

The need to re-enact sexual difference sartorially is inextinguishable, and symptomatically so for a culture that would like to think of sexual difference, what Lacan referred to as “the small difference!,” as a natural scientific fact.<sup>15</sup> The history of clothes is a history of bodies ceaselessly re-gendered to match their supposedly natural predisposition and purpose. Bodies that are always inevitably *passing*. The suit, from conception to material production, shares the function of muscle in navigating social media's injunctions as buffering zones that disavow the fragility of the human body and the disturbing similarity, if not sameness, between bodies deemed male and those deemed female.

The origin of the suit harkens back to the later seventeenth century, when male coats began to appear in discrete dark colors, dull fabrics and military motifs like rows of braid became popular. But long before this, all sorts of structures made of metal, wood, and whalebone already helped give men's and women's bodies their shape, as they were sewn directly into dresses, doublets, skirts, and coats. We can thus never neatly divorce the textile from the fleshly nor can we easily sort out where the prosthesis begins and the real ends. As such, the human body ceases to be *cis* the moment sexual difference must be rendered visible. The materiality, or architecture, of gender presentation (skin, cloth, cut, muscle, filter, pixel, ad infinitum) belies physiological fantasies at the core of gender (difference) as a concept.

By the mid-1700s, masculine fashion had become less spectacular, a phenomenon that many scholars have called The Great Masculine Renunciation, when lavish dress was supposedly outsourced to women and men had to come up with new strategies to articulate phallic power and class privilege, for instance, through scopophilia and fetishistic identification.<sup>16</sup>

Men's shoulders looked narrow until the very end of the eighteenth century, the stomach swelled out, and the chests were somewhat sunken. The male body formed a dome-like shape with the mid-section emphasized by the center row of buttons of the waistcoat. Women's dress was progressively the opposite, with a focus on the chest and suppression of the mid-section, so that “[n]o one could confuse them.” Man and woman must be distinguished since “it is not *they* that will distinguish themselves.”<sup>17</sup>

The fact that what supposedly arbitrates sexual difference is precisely the site that must remain obstructed from view – sexual anatomy – discloses the smallness of that difference. The rest of the clothed or semi-clothed body, and as Patricia Gherovici remarks, especially the face, is left to express a truth that the sexual anatomy would supposedly offer effortlessly.<sup>18</sup> Although a larger discussion around masks and masculinity is beyond the scope of this text it is worth noting the apparent predilection for black masks during the pandemic amongst men who did don them. Monochromatic black and its association with soberness, respectability and pragmatism helped establish the longevity and ubiquity of “the suit's dark and restricted color palette,” standing in stark contrast with the connotation of risk and disease of surgical masks.<sup>19</sup>

Since sexual difference is never settled, it's always threatened by lived bodily and desiring praxes, we must stitch that small difference on the body over and over again. “When that doesn't stick we say, *It's a tomboy*,” says Lacan, or *It's a sissy*.<sup>20</sup> Following this intrinsic non-coincidence between the cisgender male body in theory (phallic and whole) and the cisgender male body in practice (in pieces), when it *does* stick, it's a cis-gender subject, or, *It's a cis-sy!*

Lacan argues that what the transsexual really doesn't want is at the level of the signifier, not the physiological.<sup>21</sup> Which is why, for Lacan, the transexual's mistake is forcing a sexual discourse onto the body through surgery, whereas that discourse belongs to the “real,” a less anatomical register. The real for Lacan is not the biological, which is a scientific concoction that



helps determine sex but only partially, and unstably.<sup>22</sup> The real is related to the coding of signification, not to materiality per se, which can only be grasped through the distortions of fantasy and signification in any case.<sup>23</sup>

We can trace a similar logic in relationship to the supposedly cisgender social media white male in his forcing a sexual discourse onto the body through muscle, not always through surgery, like many trans people, but through the effect of a just-as-manmade set of repetitive bodily practices. Lacan claims that when it comes to animals we can't tell males from females unless they are in heat. Which isn't the case of humans, precisely because it is "as signifiers that [we] are sexuuated."<sup>24</sup> We can't establish animal sexual difference so easily. Animals themselves can't tell the specificity of objects so effortlessly either. "There's nothing easier than fooling an animal about the qualities that turn an object, of whatever appearance, into the thing towards which he'll advance as if towards its partner."<sup>25</sup> This inability to tell objects apart, or blindness toward the singularity of the object, is where easily fooled animals, code-abiding machines, and cis-sy men might coincide.

### Patching up, plastering over

In an interview with writer Gonçalo M. Tavares, Alexandre Lacroix defines our era as that of "triumphant rationality and that of the liberation of drives," in which we behave as much as machines as animals. Tavares summarizes the thought by suggesting the creatures of our time to be no longer human, but "animal machines."<sup>26</sup> Remaining human in a context where machines are so efficient and rational, and just as discriminatory as the subjects who create them, would only cause a sense of failure, falling short, or coming apart.

The creative solution involving presumable opposites, the bestial and the technological, is when we detect in the muscular bodies of social media, underpinned by the military rhetoric of machine readiness, or a "triumphant rationality" we could ally with the material history of the suit, programming code, and bestial hunger, or a "liberation of drives."<sup>27</sup> A liberation so optimal that, as a U.S. soldier recently put it in one gym-set Instagram story, it leaves one, "Empty...just like my soul."

When we consider the history of clothes as a history of clothing difference, or clothing sameness with *difference drag*, the shift in masculine dress with neo-classic artists and designers in the late-eighteenth century becomes significant, as those artisans go back to Greek statues to convey modern ideas and visual tropes after the discovery and excavation of Pompeii, that most priapistic of all cities. Forever erect penises, phallus-like, at last.

The renewed interest in antiquity led to a re-"discovery" of the fundamental structure of the body for the purposes of man's garb. The harkening back to antiquity was also due to the economic need for a proportion paradigm, as clothes were becoming ready- or semi-ready-made, forcing tailors to "draw conclusions about general male proportions."<sup>28</sup>

Georges Vigarello recognizes a lack of reservation in discourses around the artificiality of the body already in the sixteenth century, when machinic analogies regarding corporal composition and "adjustment" become notable, even if the fascination with natural beauty persists.<sup>29</sup> As the organism is surveilled and sculpted, the body is articulated and systematized as raw material in the quest of ideality through a language of cranes, gears, hoists, and pulleys. "Being beautiful presupposes a highly oriented labor at the level of morphology."<sup>30</sup> The idea of beauty differed for men and women, as masculine beauty is associated not with seduction, but a capacity to elicit terror. We can thus push the notion of the body as not just a collection of joints, but as a wobbly and brittle product of them. Lacan locates the manifestation of desire precisely "at the joint of speech, (...) just as it becomes embodied in speech (...)."<sup>31</sup>

The fact that sculptures, in their rock solid stability served as model for the fabrication of the average proportion of male bodies is quite telling. The suit presents a vertical stiffness very different from the billowing of loose fabric associated with women's dress, or the mostly flaccid reality of the penis. Hollander argues that tailors set out to rebuild the nude Greek sculptural rock-like male body, not through nudity but through cloth, hoping to convey "the image of the unadorned masculine perfection" that was perfect by default. This was achieved by getting rid of cuffs, pocket-flaps, and wigs; shrinking coat lengths; and puffing the top of sleeves to give the illusion of developed deltoids. References to ancient sculpture were built into the clothes: curved seams, steam pressing, lack of wrinkles, and flat-lying lapels, which remain the structure of contemporary iterations of the suit.

The construction of "natural" man involved quite intricate artifice. With these sartorial changes, men came to look very similar and to desire to look similar to one another. Hollander suggests the Great Masculine Renunciation to be a kind of trading up to a naked togetherness through cloth that excised women further away from man's semblance, from his vicinity, from his body – highlighting the porno-homoerotics of an arrangement that gives rise to men staging sameness through being sartorially nude together.<sup>32</sup> A naked togetherness through cloth that displays masculine (re-)semblance which is uncannily reflected on the collective workout rituals so many men stage for social media in order to survive that network's demands in an obsessive exposure of a body that is always other than itself, that is always elsewhere. And, most of all, a body that is always one amongst many.

On the subject of naked decoys, Manuel Charpy highlights the emergence of adjustable mannequins in the 1830s, which enabled the trying out of clothes to take place through a system of measurement, conversion and representation, without requiring the physical presence of the bodies that were to actually wear them. This virtual molding system that developed despite or along with the necessary "contradictions between ideal bodies and real ones," was known as *semi-tailoring*.<sup>33</sup> Lost in translation, and purposefully so, was the lacunae between ideality and materiality. The sartorial results of this engineering involved the *patching up* of the "miserable details of a nature full of flaw,"<sup>34</sup> or the *plastering over* the inconvenient materiality of the body – its tacit queerness – by "a series of coded rules that overhang the real."<sup>35</sup> The birth of the average sartorial man is, thus, the birth of a mathematically established avatar in pornographic relation with its doppelgängers. Something about this male body must remain untouched, unknown, disavowed, and experienced through doubles. With their naked bodies finding nudity collectively, we can think of this masculine fashioning of bodies, through the suit and through digitally mediated muscle alike, as a visual duping vis-à-vis sexual difference with pornographic consequences – or purposes.

In conclusion, acknowledging the ways in which men have come to perform, or pass for, phallic bodies in digital networks, takes us through the sartorial interventions that have made and re-made the male body as a sleight of hand. While digital technology has given a new arsenal, this male body has always been a pliable assemblage aimed at indexing ideology, dressing gender difference, and effacing queerness only to reveal it.

## Notes

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- 7 Nishant Shah, “The Selfie & The Slut: Bodies, Technology, and Public Shame,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 1, no. 17 (2015): 86–93.
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- 9 *Ibid.*, 27. My translation.
- 10 Breward argues the man’s suit to also have functioned as a buffer zone between the male body and “the confusing sensations of modernity.” Breward, *The Suit: Form Function & Style*, 179.
- 11 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 159.
- 12 @rugged\_ray30 (deactivated since). Breward, *The Suit: Form Function & Style*, 43.
- 13 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 159.
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- 18 Patricia Gherovici, *Transgender Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective on Sexual Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 19 Breward, *The Suit: Form Function & Style*, 46.
- 20 Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XIX: ... ou pire*, 2011, 16–17.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 25 Jacques Lacan, “Desire, Life and Death,” in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, eds. Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Sylvana Tomaselli (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 227.
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- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*, 106.
- 29 Georges Vigarello, *Histoire de La Beauté: Le Corps et L’Art d’Embellir de la Renaissance à Nos Jours* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004), 82.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 31 Lacan, “Desire, Life and Death,” 234.
- 32 Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*.
- 33 Manuel Charpy, “Ajustements: corps, vêtements à tailles fixes et standards industriels au XIX siècle,” *Modes Pratiques: revue d’histoire du vêtement et de la mode* 1: *Normes et Transgressions* (2015), 108–9.
- 34 Gérard Audran, “Les Proportions du Corps Humain Mesurées sur Les Plus Belles Figures de l’Antiquité” (Paris, Joubert, 1801). Cited in Manuel Charpy, “Ajustements: corps, vêtements à tailles fixes et standards industriels au XIX siècle,” *Modes Pratiques: revue d’histoire du vêtement et de la mode* 1: *Normes et Transgressions* (2015): 110. My translation.
- 35 Charpy, “Ajustements: corps, vêtements à tailles fixes et standards industriels au XIX siècle,” 112.

# THE GARMENT THAT UNIFIES AND DIFFERENTIATES: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND REGULATORY SETTINGS<sup>1</sup>

*Chrysoula Kapartziani, Spyros Koulocheris, and Myrsini Pichou*

Law is a great reservoir of emotionally important social symbols as well as a powerful instrument of social stability. Among other things principles of law are supposed to control society. To a considerable extent law exerts an indirect influence on fashion by shaping the possibilities of change. For example, the public wearing of veils encourages new fashion trends for Muslim women which in turn may bring about basic general change in the dress habits of the broader community. The absence of freedom to disseminate new fashion ideas and the absence of Muslim women in public spaces, can prevent or delay the adjustment of immigrants, the development of relations between locals and immigrants as well as the spread of new fashion trends. Thus, it can exert a very important basic influence even on the processes of social change in society.<sup>2</sup>

## **Research methodology**

This study combined field research, qualitative doctrinal,<sup>3</sup> and socio-legal research<sup>4</sup> using a synthesis of secondary and primary qualitative data regarding the right to wear Islamic dress. Ten (eight women and two men) professionals who work daily with refugees were interviewed, using a semi-structured questionnaire, about the veil as an article of women's clothing and fashion, the interaction between the dress of the "other" and the clothing habits of the interviewees.<sup>5</sup> Through the interviews, the views of people who support refugee rights and interact with refugees daily were documented.

The focus of the doctrinal research was the law itself and the research was carried out "through reading court judgements and statutes with little or no reference to the world outside the law."<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this study, we applied a doctrinal approach to identify the relevant legislation and legal principles governing the covering of the face and head in the European Union and Greece, and any legal issues that may arise from this practice.

The interviewees were carefully selected on the basis of their experience with immigrants and refugees, or on their capacity as professionals, so as to represent what in literature is referred to as a “panel of knowledgeable informants.”<sup>7</sup> Their opinions and thoughts shed light on the topic under investigation, as we will see further on.

### **The veiled body: legislative corpus**

As they relate to law, religion and identity, Islamic dress<sup>8</sup> practices in Europe have great significance in human rights discourse. Muslim women in Europe have been prohibited from wearing the aforementioned full-face veil (niqab) mainly due to the argument that “Islamic dress” infringes constitutional principles such as secularism. In most European countries, there are laws that prohibit wearing Islamic dress in public spaces<sup>9</sup> and schools<sup>10</sup> based on the aforementioned argument. Many cases reached the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on the grounds that national laws and court decisions have infringed women’s right to manifest their religion according to Article 9<sup>11</sup> of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Additionally, claims have been brought on national stages under other legal provisions such as discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

The ECtHR held that institutional policies that prohibit the wearing of hijabs in schools and universities are compliant with democratic principles<sup>13</sup> and meet requirements of proportionality and necessity.<sup>14</sup> In the light of our argument and the results of our study, it is worth referencing the dissenting opinion of Judge Tulken in the case of *Sahin v. Turkey*<sup>15</sup> (ECtHR), who crucially stressed that the actual voices of women who wear these religious dresses were not given serious consideration. It seems as if neither European governments nor courts are taking into account the complexity of the reasons women may choose to cover their faces or bodies, nor the beliefs and attitudes of Muslim women themselves.

As aforementioned, many ECtHR cases in recent years (for example the case of *Leyla Sahin v. Turkey*, *Dahlab v. Switzerland*<sup>16</sup> and *S.A.S v. France*) regarded gender equality as well as social interaction and safeguarding public order as objectives that justify limiting freedom of religion.

In accordance with all the above restrictions that have been applied in Europe, many Spanish municipalities imposed local bans on Muslim women wearing burqas or niqabs in municipal buildings and public spaces. They did so without previously investigating whether women wore burqas of their own free will or if they were obliged to do so. In February 2103, the Spanish Supreme Court<sup>17</sup> decided that it is not legitimate for a municipality to ban a fundamental right such as freedom of religion.

After this, in another ECtHR case<sup>18</sup> which referred to the ruling of the Spanish court we find the argument that “...a State Party cannot invoke gender equality in order to ban a practice that is defended by women,”<sup>19</sup> regarding the full-face veil as an “expression of a cultural identity which contributes to the pluralism that is inherent in democracy.”<sup>20</sup> In this case the court also stated that public order and safety “...could be attained by a mere obligation [of women] to show their face and to identify themselves where a risk for the safety of persons and property has been established....”<sup>21</sup> Judges Nussberg and Jäderblomm stated in their dissenting opinion on *S.A.S. v. France* that “...while communication is admittedly essential for life in society, the right to respect for private life also comprises the right not to communicate [...] the right to be an outsider.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, the judges considered that it is the duty of the court to protect “small minorities against disproportionate interferences.”<sup>23</sup>

The sociological studies conducted during the period when the full-face veil was banned in public spaces in France and other European countries are worth mentioning.<sup>24</sup> Findings

revealed that women did not feel forced to wear the full-face veil. Many Muslim women even answered that they freely decided to wear full-face veils on many occasions against the wishes of their family. After the prohibition of veils, the findings of another study conducted in France<sup>25</sup> demonstrated that only a small minority of the women habitually wearing veils stopped wearing them. Most of the women also thought that the law caused negative effects for them such as social isolation.

### **The legislative context in Greece**

According to the official 2011 government census, Greece has a population of 10.8 million, while the religious demography of Greece is 98% Greek Orthodox, 1.3% Muslim, and 0.7% other religions.<sup>26</sup> However, the refugee crisis has led to an influx of over 150,000 additional people since the beginning of 2015, and that number continues to increase.<sup>27</sup>

In Greek legislative history, there are laws which regulate certain clothing habits or fashions, such as the regulation concerning the length of women's skirts during General Th. Pangalos' Dictatorship in 1925–1926, and the more recent example of wearing a hood that covers facial characteristics.<sup>28</sup> Both these though are associated either with public indecency or act as measures against terrorism and to maintain social control.

Although, according to Article 3.1 of the Greek Constitution, “the prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ,” there are neither laws nor circulars prohibiting any kind of “Islamic dress” anywhere in public or private places. Moreover, Article 5 of the Greek Constitution states that “all persons... shall enjoy full protection of their life, honour, and liberty irrespective of... religious... beliefs”. Additionally, there are multiple reports<sup>29</sup> proving that individuals' religious identity is often intertwined with cultural and ethnic identity in Greece.<sup>30</sup>

### **To a colorful *Agora*: the field study**

During our field study,<sup>31</sup> we visited a small area in the historical center of Athens and more specifically, the Anaxagora, Menandrou, Sophocleous, and Socratous street districts. A long way away from the bazaars of Asia and less than a kilometer from the ruins of the Greek and Roman agoras of Athens, this new market is still able to recall them both, in a intertwining plexus of modern and contemporary Greek, Greco-Roman, and Asian markets. We encountered mostly people from Bangladesh, Pakistan, or the Kurdish area of Iraq.

The main feature that both aforementioned places share is that women can hardly be seen there (Figure 18.1). The main purpose of our visit was to see where in their stores merchants kept the hijabs, burqas and the other articles of Islamic clothing, and in general to foster discourse regarding the presence of women, veiled or unveiled, in their “agora.” All of these items of clothing were almost “hidden” in the basements of their stores and none of them were on display in shop windows (Figure 18.2).

Regarding men's attire, Western fashion is the prevailing style throughout these shops. All the retailers working at the stores were men – the lack of women being not only noticeable but prevalent. During our visits, we came across very few women whose faces were totally covered. Also, it became apparent that this market is not addressed to any native clientele, since we didn't come across any other Greek citizens of Athens. Furthermore, they are places without any organized project or formal policy by the state for the integration of migrants. On the contrary, migrants propose with this dynamic market new ways to frame our “embodied” selves, inviting natives and locals alike to become part of and enjoy it.



Figure 18.1 A shop's sign. © Tania Pashali



Figure 18.2 On sale in the basement of the stores. © Tania Pashali

### **The dress of the “other”: a garment that unites or differentiates? The interview results**

It is interesting that although the interviewees are familiar with the head covering<sup>32</sup> as an article of clothing because of its use by old women until recently in rural Greece, they still evaluate it according to Western stereotypes.<sup>33</sup> This can also be linked to Benhabib's observation, which argues that the bans and limitations placed on wearing veils can be regarded as an attempt to

inscribe on Muslim women the receiving society's moral system<sup>34</sup> female lawyer (aged 35–40) says that "...sometimes, my first emotional reaction towards the view of a woman in a veil is that it is unfair, the same with an elderly lady...although there is something familiar with the image of the elderly because we have been used to old women wearing headdresses in Greek rural areas." Her colleague (aged 35–40), meanwhile, explains that she "...can never tell whether she [a refugee woman] chose [the veil] due to her religion or if wearing it was imposed on her. That is why I always feel sad." At the same time, their male colleague (aged 50–55) perceives veils as "... more normal [for older women], possibly due to the fact that I am familiar with old women wearing headdresses in Greek villages."

The same veil, can be perceived as simply a piece of cloth, according to the majority of the interviewees. As a female lawyer (aged 35–40) explains "...when I recently met a stateless woman from Kuwait, who had her entire body covered apart from the eyes, I felt the need to take her aside, just the two of us and ask her how she felt being covered in black fabric in all this heat." For this lawyer, the veil as a piece of fabric, and, alongside all other garments, does not necessarily violate rights.<sup>35</sup> However, the majority of interviewees identify a difference, especially in older women, who, as part of their already shaped identity, still wear the veil. Ayelet Shachar,<sup>36</sup> proved the significant interconnection of the veil with collective identity. In this context, most of the interviewees believe that religion is part of culture, and this is reflected in the dress habits of the refugees. For example, a female lawyer (aged 35–40) says that "... they try to maintain bonds with the cultural and religious legacy," and her colleague asserts that "... religion is combined with sartorial culture."

The aforementioned remarks can be identified in Jackson<sup>37</sup> and Monk-Turner's<sup>38</sup> study on the interpretation of wearing the veil by women in Egypt and Yemen. More specifically, they wrote that, "when asked what the hijab means, Egyptian women focus on religious reasons and Yemeni women emphasize a cultural (or modesty) understanding." Furthermore, Volgelsang-Eastwood and Volgelsang<sup>39</sup> proved that veiling is more related to habits and tradition than religion.

Compared to the elderly women refugees, younger ones seem to be wearing more colorful veiling and to be fashioning a new style. A female social worker (aged 35–40) observed that "... younger women wear usually more spectacular veiling and pay attention to matching the colours or patterns with the rest of their clothes..." Another social worker said that "younger refugees wear clothes which are closer to Western fashions..." and their colleague noted that "...some young women create their own style" or as Emma Tarlo has argued<sup>40</sup> "By adopting hijab and inventing it with so many meanings, young women not only seek to make their faith visible, but they also attempt to manage the way others perceive and interact with them."

Equally interesting are excerpts of the interviews that refer to the interaction between the dress habits of the refugees and the interviewees' everyday clothes. On one hand, it is interesting that the professionals of the host country, Greece, modify their dress habits to emulate the habits of the "other." On the other hand, the colorful dress habits of some cultures have had an impact on the interviewees' everyday wardrobe choices. A female social worker (aged 45–50) acknowledges this influence and says that "[my style] is sometimes less professional and sometimes more ethnic... I am referring to a more general sartorial change over the years."

Finally, the answers referring to the changes and alterations in the dress habits of refugees during their stay in the host country are also worth analyzing. The majority of interviewees assert that in many cases the full-face veil was gradually abandoned. A female social worker (aged 35–40) says that "a 40-year-old woman came to the first meeting fully veiled, with a backpack and gym pants. A month later, she came with a bag and dressed in a more urban style while maintaining the veil. Six months later, she came with her face spruced up, with makeup."



The same female lawyer (aged 35–40) remembers that “we had a single parent family, with the family leader a highly educated Syrian lady who worked as an interpreter, and while when we met her at the border (Idomeni) she was veiled, subsequently, she decided on her own that she doesn’t want it anymore and she took it off. I have another highly educated lady in mind, from Afghanistan, financially independent (job as interpreter), who continues to wear the veil all the years that I have known her [since 2013].”

### **Conclusion**

The restrictions concerning the veil have failed to change the dress habits of migrant groups in European countries through a legal norm. Furthermore, these attempts have created tensions and contradictions. By contrast, the absence of any regulation in Greece seems – up to the present day – to have had contributed to a gradual change of refugee dress habits. This absence coexists with the tolerance of a society which is familiar with traditional images of elderly women wearing head coverings in the Greek countryside (Figure 18.3).



*Figure 18.3* An elderly lady wearing a kerchief in the region of Thessalia, 1980s. Courtesy of Chrysoula Kapartziani

This study argues that the veiling of Muslim women is more a manifestation of culture, than an expression of religion, which is distinct from what authors like Rena Lewis assert, who associate it with “religious identity”<sup>41</sup> or “faith communities,”<sup>42</sup> and this understanding accords with the descending opinions of Courts and part of the relevant bibliography. Therefore, instead of restricting such a cultural element, efforts should shift toward a more inclusive approach in order to strengthen dialog in Europe. In Greece, it seems that there is freedom of expression for different dress habits, which has already led to interaction and interchange in dress styles between refugee groups and locals. This realization recalls Georg Simmel’s argument<sup>43</sup> about fashion acting as an expression of individualization, while at the same time it “demands” demands mutual imitation” and serves as a manifestation of conformity. We can all relate to fashion, and according to Ulrich Beck,<sup>44</sup> our era of “reflexive modernity” demands by its very nature a structural transformation in our living practices, customs and behavior, policy-making, etc. It demands that all the world and European citizens adopt a new standpoint, or in other words the cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>45</sup>

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### Notes

- 1 This research was initiated and realized in the context of the research project “Dress and the Law” ([www.dressandthelaw.gr](http://www.dressandthelaw.gr)). Parts of this research have been presented to the public on the following occasions: (a) in November 16, 2017, in Athens at the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation’s “Kanari 4” Cultural Space as part of the “Dress and the Law” lectures, (b) in December 2017 in the context of the Sociology of Law MA class at the School of Law of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, (c) on January 22, 2019, following an invitation by the “Fabric of my Life” European Program partners at the Danish Institute at Athens, (d) on February 2, 2019, at the 8th Symposium of the Hellenic Costume Society at the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation’s “Kanari 4” Cultural Space in Athens, and, (e) in the form of a panel discussion themed “Unveiling the Law: Regulating the Dress of the Other” at the Hellenic Centre in London on February 17, 2019. On February 6, 2019, the daily newspaper *Kathimerini* dedicated the article entitled “Dress as ‘another’ identity” to the research (in Greek): <http://www.kathimerini.gr/1008581/article/epikairothta/ellada/to-endyma-ws-allh-taytothta/>
- 2 See: Arnold M. Rose, “The Use of Law to Induce Social Change” in *Transactions of the Third World Congress of Sociology*, vol. 6 (London: International Sociological Association, 1956), 52–63.
- 3 See: Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), 22, 41.
- 4 Mike McConville and Wing Hong Chui, eds., *Research Methods for Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). They argue that doctrinal research is qualitative “on the basis that such research is a process of selecting and weighting materials taking into account hierarchy and authority as well as understanding social context and interpretation.”
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., 4.
- 7 Robert Stuart Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
- 8 The term “veil” or “Islamic dress” is used in this essay as a comprehensive concept, including all traditional Muslim clothing, such as the headscarf (hijab), the jibab (which is a garment like a coat covering the body except the hands), the burqa (which is the garment worn over daily clothes with a hijab or niqab) and the niqab (full face veil).
- 9 Wearing the burqa in public was prohibited in France on July 13, 2010.
- 10 In France, Article L141-5-1(v) of Educational Code regulates under the principle of Laïcité the wearing of symbols and clothing denoting religious affiliations in universities, schools and colleges.

- 11 See: Case of Lucia Dahlab v. Switzerland, Sahin v. Turkey, Sefika Kose and 93 others v. Turkey, Dogru v. France.
- 12 F.e Regulation 3 (S2003/1660) of the Equality Act 2010 of UK. See the employment tribunal cases of Azmi v. Kirkless Metropolitan Borough Council, Appeal No UKEAT/009/07/MAA(2007). The tribunal decided that the refusal of the Governor to allow a teaching assistant to wear a niqab was not a form of direct discrimination on the grounds of her religious beliefs. In the case of Bushra Noah v. Sara Desroriers (Trading as Wedge), ET 2201867/2007 it was decided that a hairdresser's refusal to employ a woman who wore a hijab was not a form of direct discrimination but of an indirect discrimination (the requirement for the hair to be displayed was a disadvantage for the claimant).
- 13 See the case on Dahlab v. Switzerland, Sahin v. Turkey, Sefika Kose and 93 others v. Turkey, Dogru v. France, about the relationship between wearing a hijab and other principles of European democracy, such as gender equality.
- 14 See: Amy R. Jackson and Dorota Anna Gozdecka, "Caught Between Different Legal Pluralisms: Women Who Wear Islamic Dress as the Religious 'Other' in European Rights Discourses," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 43, no. 64 (2011): 91–120, doi:10.1080/07329113.2011.10756671.
- 15 Sahin v. Turkey (App. No. 44774/98), ECHR, June 24, 2004 (Chamber), November 10, 2005 (Grand Chamber).
- 16 Dahlab v. Switzerland (App. No. 42393/98), ECHR, February 15, 2001.
- 17 SSC February 14, 2013. Apart from the procedural arguments (like the limited power of the municipalities in comparison with the Spanish State and Congress), Spanish Supreme Court stated that public order could not be seen as a "preventive clause," and that any danger must be certain. The court also recognised the right of each person to show or hide his face. Lastly, it commemorated a recommendation of the Council of Europe on Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia, which encourages avoiding a general ban on the full-face veil, stating that it may hinder the integration of women in host societies.
- 18 S.A.S. v. France (App. No. 43835/11), ECHR, July 1, 2014.
- 19 Ibid., §119.
- 20 Ibid., §120.
- 21 Ibid., §139.
- 22 Ibid., dissenting opinion of Judges Nussberger and Jäderblomm §8.
- 23 Ibid., dissenting opinion of Judges Nussberger and Jäderblomm §20.
- 24 Open Society Foundations, "Unveiling the Truth: Why 32 Muslim Women Wear the Full Face Veil in France," April 2011, 1–77.
- 25 Open Society Foundations, "After the Ban: The Experiences of 35 Women on the Full Face Veil in France," September 2013, 1–18.
- 26 Ibid. [http://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics?p\\_p\\_id=documents\\_WAR\\_publicationsportlet\\_INSTANCE\\_qDQ8fBKKo4lN&](http://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics?p_p_id=documents_WAR_publicationsportlet_INSTANCE_qDQ8fBKKo4lN&)
- 27 UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response–Mediterranean, THE UNREFUGEE AGENCY (June 1, 2016), <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>.
- 28 Law 3772/2009 (FEK112/A'10-7-2009). By this Law in the case of some criminal offences like disturbing the public peace during a demonstration (Art. 189 of Greek Penal Code), or in case of robbery (Art. 380 of Greek Penal Code) or in a case of unprovoked bodily injury (Art. 308A of Greek Penal Code) or in case of severe injury (Art. 308 of Greek Penal Code) or in case of exclusive damages to foreign ownership (Art. 382 of Greek Penal Code) there was a substantial additional penalty of imprisonment (up to 3 years) where the perpetrator had his facial characteristics covered. This additional penalty was abolished by par. 2 Art. 20 Law. 4322/2015 (A' 42/27.04.2015) in all the aforementioned criminal offences except of robbery. The reason was their contradiction to fundamental constitutional rights.
- 29 Casey Jo Cooper, "Comment: From the Watch Tower to the Acropolis: The Search for a Consistent Religious Freedom Standard in an Inconsistent World," *Emory International Law Review* 28 (2014): 509–56.
- 30 Ibid., 518–19. Cooper asserts that "In other countries... the distaste [for other religions] roots itself in issues of culture and national identity that are quite separate from matters of religious doctrine. Examples include... Greece, where Orthodox Christianity is integral to the national identity."

- 31 On three different Saturdays during 2017, on September 30, on October 7 and on October 21. Each session lasted about 5 hours. All photographs by Tania Pashali were shot in the context of the field study and on these Saturdays.
- 32 Head coverings either as kerchiefs or scarves are characteristic elements of Greek traditional costume and survived as everyday articles of clothing worn by elderly ladies in rural areas until very recently. Headaddresses in Greek traditional costumes can be divided into two main categories: those characterized by the “mandili” (kerchief) and those characterized by the “bolia” (scarf). The “bolia” or “obolia” is an integral piece of material of various lengths and widths, examples of which vary in style and bear different names. The “mandili” is a separate square, or approximately square, piece of cloth. The transition from the scarf to the kerchief seems to have taken place gradually from the 1930s until the early 1990s, as it is visible in some costumes. The kerchief is an accessory, imported in most cases from abroad to replace the older headcovering of homespun material made by joining two oblong, rectangular pieces of fabric lengthwise. See: Ioanna Papantoniou, “A First Attempt at an Introduction to Greek Traditional Costume (Womens),” *Ethnographika* 1 (Nafplion: Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, 1978): 5–92 (in Greek) and I. Papantoniou, X. Politou and V. Zidianakis, “Kerchiefs & Scarves,” *Lykeion ton Ellinidon Calendar 1995* (Athens: Lykeion ton Hellinidon, 1995): 3–12 (in Greek and English).
- 33 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1993).
- 34 Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 35 Annelies Moors, “‘Islamic Fashion’ in Europe: Religious Conviction, Aesthetic Style, and Creative Consumption,” *Encounters* 1, no. 1 (2009): 175–201.
- 36 Ayelet Shachar, *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women’s Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 37 Jackson and Gozdecka, “Caught Between Different Legal Pluralisms: Women Who Wear Islamic Dress as the Religious ‘Other’ in European Rights Discourses,” 91–120.
- 38 Kenneth Jackson and Elizabeth Monk-Turner, “The Meaning of Hijab: Voices of Muslim women in Egypt and Yemen,” *Journal of International Woman Studies* 16 (2015): 29–48.
- 39 Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood and Willem Vogelslang, *Covering the Moon: An Introduction to Middle Eastern Face Veils* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).
- 40 Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford & New York: Berg Publishers, 2010), 68.
- 41 Reina Lewis, *Muslim Fashion. Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 163.
- 42 *Ibid.*, §197.
- 43 Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” in *The Rise of Fashion, a Reader*, ed. Daniel Leonhard Purdy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014 [1901]), 289–300.
- 44 Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity, 2006), ISBN 978-0-745-63398-5.
- 45 *Ibid.*

# COLLEGE STUDENTS' FASHION ACTIVISM IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

*Charles J. Thompson*

In September 2016, Eneale Pickett, then a black sophomore at the University of Wisconsin (UW), received a comment on his Etsy shop that read, “Thank your mammy for pickin my butterbeans through you ugly knuckle dragging HIV+ jobless crack smoking fa\*\*ot.... All white people are racist and that’s a good thing”<sup>1</sup> and another comment via Facebook that read, “If you don’t like white people, go back to Africa you piec eof shit [sic]. Piss on you and your slave ancestors.”<sup>2</sup> The comments were reactions to Pickett’s “All White People Are Racist” hoodie, released as a part of his fashion line, Insert Apparel.<sup>3</sup> Pickett founded Insert Apparel in response to a number of racist incidents that occurred on UW’s campus – including one in which a fellow student was spit on and insulted with racist and sexist slurs.<sup>4</sup> Pickett’s clothing – which includes other thought-provoking phrases – was intentionally created to cause discomfort and spark conversations around race because, as Pickett said, “growth don’t happen in comfort.”<sup>5</sup> These seemingly simple garments – one-color hoodies with plain, white text – make bold statements.

Pickett is not alone; throughout history, from the mini skirt to the t-shirt, fashion has been used as a catalyst for activism. Today, fashion and dress are key tools in the activist cache of not only international designers and fashion houses but also homegrown activists. Furthermore, activism occurs at venues from the runways to the university hallways, with examples occurring more frequently following in the wake of the sociopolitical climate that arose from the 2016 presidential election. In this chapter, I will briefly examine college student dress and fashion activism outside of academia, culminating with examinations of contemporary fashion activism on the college campus. By making sense of the various intersections of college student dress and activism, we can better understand both college student activism and fashion as a tool for activism.

## **Defining fashion and fashion activism**

Before discussing how fashion has been used for activism, it is important to define and understand the differences between fashion, in a general sense, and fashion activism. Simmel<sup>6</sup> argued, fashion and dress are not solely focused upon clothing style, but rather processes that help shape and express the psycho-social development of an individual; furthermore, that fashion is poised at a point between both collective, social customs, and individualistic interests.

Furthermore, Entwistle<sup>7</sup> added that fashion is a system through which people adorn and encode their bodies, performing and displaying, though often subtly, messages about who they are as individuals. Designer Céline Semaan coined the term “fashion activism” in 2012 to mean fashion whose purpose is to evoke social and/or political change. Perhaps the most popular and accessible form of fashion activism is the slogan T-shirt (like Pickett’s hoodie designs mentioned in this introduction), which has its roots in 1960s subversive fashion. Fashion, in this sense, cannot escape its inherent semiotic nature, as how one adorns themselves has intentional and unintentional signifiers. However, it is what a certain fashion signifies that can push it to be labeled as fashion activism.

### **College student fashion**

Authors have noted the importance and influence of college student dress. When attending college was a new venture in the United States, it was usually barred to all except wealthy, white men.<sup>8</sup> Historically, college men – and later college women – wore what today would be considered formal attire to class.<sup>9</sup> This is not especially surprising considering the fact that clothing itself served as a signifier of one’s status because, just as only the wealthy could afford to send their children to college, only the wealthy could afford clothing that was both high quality and fashionable.<sup>10</sup> Though we’d be hard-pressed to consider it activism, college women at the Seven Sisters colleges actively fought their administrators to wear items that were previously not seen as feminine or acceptable on the college campus: sportswear, jeans, shorter skirts, baggy clothing, etc.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, dress at primarily white institutions (PWIs) began to move towards more casual style, much to the chagrin of Deans of Women and Deans of Men.<sup>12</sup> As Tuite<sup>13</sup> wrote:

[B]y the turn of the century, despite the very best efforts of college administrations, students were breaking away from stringent dress codes and realizing that the rules for appropriate college clothing were not to be found in the expertly penned regulation handbooks or the earnest circulars issued to parents, but could be taken from the students themselves.

Despite administrators’ attempts to curb students’ desires for new fashion, students continued on their quest for casual wear.

Simultaneously, the American public began to look towards students at PWIs as examples and trendsetters in fashion, and casual style took hold outside of the walls of the college campus.<sup>14</sup> Walking around a college campus today, one would see that campus fashion is incredibly diverse – while some students follow trends, others focus on comfort. One thread that connects campus fashion from the past to today, is that it serves a purpose; sometimes, that purpose is for activism.

### **Using fashion as a tool for change**

When thinking of student fashion activism, it is imperative to consider *Tinker v. Des Moines*. In 1965, a group of students at Des Moines public schools staged silent protests against the Vietnam War by donning black arm bands and organizing hunger strikes. The school principal announced that any student caught wearing the arm bands would be suspended. Despite the warning, Mary Beth Tinker, a 13-year-old student, persisted. Tinker, along with her brother and three other students, was suspended and not allowed to return to school until she agreed to

no longer wear the arm bands to school. The students returned, deciding instead to wear black clothing for the rest of the school year.

Represented by ACLU lawyers, the students began their legal battle, which took four years. Ultimately, their case made it to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1969, the Supreme Court decided in favor of Tinker and her classmates in a landmark First Amendment decision. Justice Abe Fortas wrote the decision on the case stating the now famous phrase, “Students don’t shed their constitutional rights at the school house gates.”<sup>15</sup> This decision set the legal stage for fashion activism at public colleges and universities, as their policies and practices may not inhibit college students’ First Amendment rights.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of fashion counterculture took hold in America.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, movements across the nation saw activists using fashion to make statements both on and off college campuses; however, none may be as unique as the experiences of black women on college campuses who used their style to define their identities and experiences.

In her book, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*, Ford examined the ways in which black women have used their fashion choices as tools for resistance throughout history. In defining soul style, Ford<sup>17</sup> wrote:

Soul style comprises African American and African-inspired hairstyles and modes of dress such as Afros, cornrows, denim overalls, platform shoes, beaded jewelry, and dashikis and other garments with African prints that became massively popular in the 1970s when “Black is Beautiful” was a rallying cry across the African diaspora.

The Black Panther Party donned soul style, and as the movement gained steam, chapters of the Black Panther Party chartered on college campuses across the nation bringing soul style even more to the forefront of campus fashion. While students protested against restrictive dress codes on all types of campuses, on the campuses of PWIs, soul style held a different kind of importance.<sup>18</sup> As Ford<sup>19</sup> argued, “soul style was even more significant to black women students who were simultaneously invisible and hypervisible on their predominantly white campuses than it was to their HBCU peers.” Black women used their soul style as a way to mark their presence, while simultaneously reclaiming their identity through “race-conscious fashions.”<sup>20</sup> It is this similar motivation of reclaiming and protecting identity that we see with contemporary college students’ use of fashion for activism.

### **Contemporary college student fashion activism**

Most contemporary examples of student fashion activism are seen somewhat simplistically. The number one tool in the arsenal of student activists is the slogan T-shirt. However, we see various causes and purposes for using fashion as activism. More often than not, fashion is ignored in the reporting other than to quote the words or phrases on the shirts, but the messages this collective activist fashion plays cannot be ignored. This is highlighted by Lynch and Strauss,<sup>21</sup> who wrote “How we construct ourselves expresses a world view and a value system that are key to understanding meaning within a distinct milieu and time period.”

One contemporary example of college student fashion activism comes in the form of the SlutWalk. Though versions of this have existed for many decades, the formal event began in 2011 in Toronto, Canada. Comments from a police officer addressed to a group of college women sparked the first formal SlutWalk in April 2011. The officer, when addressing the women on sexual assault, told the students that in order to avoid assault, they needed to not dress like sluts.<sup>22</sup> His victim-blaming sparked outrage transnationally, and versions of the

SlutWalk popped up in cities across the United States. Activists who take part in the walk will carry signs and sport T-shirts with their messages; however, a unique aspect of the slut walk is the clothing choice. Typically, participants will wear outfits that have been previously shamed as *too slutty* or *revealing* in order to take back their agency and raise awareness about misogyny and inequality. In the United States, the large, formal SlutWalk is now spearheaded by celebrity personality Amber Rose. The mission of the event is to educate people on “injustice, domestic violence and gender inequality” and it has expanded to offer services such as breast cancer exams, HIV testing, and more.<sup>23</sup>

Just as the event crossed national borders from Canada into the United States, it has also crossed from the public stage to the college campus, with college women nationwide leading the charge. In the first half of 2018 alone, multiple campuses played host to organized SlutWalk marches. In April 2018, the American Association of University Women Student Organization (AAUWSO) at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma hosted a SlutWalk, and, as student organizers phrased it, wore “whatever they damn-well pleased.”<sup>24</sup> The AAUWSO wasn’t alone. That same month, SlutWalk marches occurred at Central Michigan University,<sup>25</sup> the University of Maine,<sup>26</sup> Grand Valley State University,<sup>27</sup> Eastern Washington University,<sup>28</sup> Indiana University,<sup>29</sup> and others. Each march was organized by student groups on the various campuses, and clothing played an important role in each. Though these events were prior to the 2016 presidential election, they served as a precursor to the activism we would see before, during, and after the presidential inauguration.

### **To the 2016 presidential election and beyond**

College campuses have never been strangers to activism; the history of higher education is spotted with various movements including curricular reform,<sup>30</sup> sexual orientation discrimination,<sup>31</sup> racial and ethnic discrimination,<sup>32</sup> anti-war sentiment,<sup>33</sup> and more. Recent history has seen an uptick in campus activism. As the Higher Education Research Institute<sup>34</sup> reported, students today are increasingly more civically engaged in activism than their peers over the last 50 years. Though we’ve seen continuations of activism from decades past regarding feminism, LGBT rights, racial inequality, and more, much of today’s activism coincides with the politically contentious 2016 presidential election and effectively intersects many of these previous movements. For a picture of contemporary college student fashion activism, though admittedly an incomplete picture, I will examine two articles of clothing that were sparked by movements: the “Make America Great Again” red trucker hat and the pink pussyhat knitted cap. It is important to note that these movements are not unique to college campuses and bridge the divide between campus and community while having profound ripples within both.

### **Make America Great Again**

Around the time of a presidential election, especially one as contentious as the 2016 election, it is not uncommon to see civically engaged Americans sporting the fashions of their parties or candidates. From buttons to T-shirts and scarves to socks, we’ve seen every article of clothing turned into a walking billboard for candidates – think Joy Villa’s Trump-supporting ball gown from the 2017 Grammy red carpet.<sup>35</sup> However, none of these articles of clothing have made quite the statement or held the lasting memory quite the same as the “Make America Great Again” or “MAGA” red cap.

Donald Trump claims to have coined his campaign slogan following Republican Mitt Romney’s unsuccessful presidential bid in 2012. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Trump



asserts that he thought of the phrase, wrote it down, and immediately instructed his lawyers to register and trademark the phrase.<sup>36</sup> In fact, on November 19, 2012, Trump's lawyers did just that and filed to trademark the phrase with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Before long, when Trump entered the political arena leading up to the 2016 election, the red trucker hat embroidered with "Make America Great Again" in white thread appeared everywhere – on the heads of celebrities, professional athletes, campaign officials, and Republican voters from every demographic and geographic region. In fact, Trump's campaign drew jeers when it was discovered that they had spent more on producing the cap than on other traditional political campaign tools like polling, consulting, staff, and promotions.<sup>37</sup> The phrase and the red hat have now become unequivocally synonymous with Donald Trump's campaign and presidency, but that does not mean that they, much like his presidency, have been free from controversy.

Perhaps the loudest and most concerning critique of "Make America Great Again" comes in the form of answering the questions *When exactly was America Great? And for whom was it great?* Many have claimed the slogan holds sexist and racist connotations, as a quick glance through American history will show inequitable and intolerant treatment towards women and people of color. This contention was cemented in an event that took place on the campus of the University of Virginia in August 2017.

The Unite the Right march occurred on August 11, 2017, and brought groups of white nationalists and politically right-leaning organizations to the Charlottesville campus, where they sported their red MAGA hats, chanted white nationalist sayings, and carried Tiki Brand tiki torches.<sup>38</sup> The imagery was reminiscent of times past, as Murphy<sup>39</sup> wrote, "historically in the United States, torch-carrying mobs lit the scene of countless Ku Klux Klan rallies and mob lynchings." In fact, part of the reason for organization the march was to protest the removal of confederate landmarks from Charlottesville. Unfortunately, the march sparked violence and ended with the tragic death of a woman from Charlottesville.<sup>40</sup> Even though the march started on the campus of the University of Virginia, it is important to note that the event was not sponsored by the university. Despite this, the event marked an intriguing tie between campus and community and the MAGA hat.

In the wake of the election, college conservatives have reported needing their own "safe spaces" on college campuses, as they feel they cannot freely express their conservative beliefs or support for republican candidates.<sup>41</sup> Others argue that conservative students are often silenced and feel unsafe on college campuses.<sup>42</sup> In a 2017 survey of 3,014 college students conducted by Gallup, the Knight Foundation, and the American Council on Education, partnering with the Charles Koch Institute and the Stanton Foundation, 69% of respondents believed that conservative students are able to "freely and openly express their views." While 69% is not a small number, it is shadowed in comparison to the 92% who believe politically liberal students can do the same.<sup>43</sup> So, though we have examples of large-scale activism by right-winged thinkers, the example of college students wearing the "Make America Great Again" trucker hat around campus can be seen as a subversive act of conservative fashion activism in its own right. Though, much like any other form of activism, it has not gone without consequences.

In December 2017, a group of students from Fordham University, a private, Jesuit university in New York, entered into a student-run café called Rodrigue's Coffee House. The students, in what they dubbed to be a "free-speech exercise,"<sup>44</sup> went into the coffee shop wearing the MAGA hat, which they knew was against the coffeehouse's Safer Space Policy that states all MAGA wear is "propaganda for movements that stand in opposition to our safer space policy because it is used as a threatening display against minority communities" (Smith 2018: para. 4). The president of the coffee shop asked the men to remove their hats or leave. The students initially refused to do so, setting off a heated yelling match, which was filmed and later widely

shared among conservative media outlets. Students on both sides of the issue were asked to apologize and faced various sanctions by the university. In a similar story now dubbed “Hatgate,” the president of the UCR College Republicans (UCRCR) at the University of California, Riverside had his MAGA hat removed off of his head by another student during a Student Organization Leadership Retreat.<sup>45</sup> The student who removed the UCRCR President’s hat went to the Student Life office and had a contentious argument with the president. This altercation was also filmed and widely shared among conservative news outlets. Though the university’s response varied from Fordham’s due to UC Riverside’s status as a public university, the student who took the hat later pled guilty to petty theft and sentenced to taking part in a deferred entry of judgment program.<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, wearing politically charged attire on campus is a form of fashion activism. What the MAGA hat has shown specifically is that the small article of clothing can hold vast power, for those who support it and those who oppose it. Those who wear it, who also tend to be those who have historically not faced extra scrutiny due to their outward appearance on campuses, are facing backlash for the first time.

### **Pussyhats and protests**

In a parallel response that became as anti-Trump as the “Make America Great Again” trucker hat was pro-Trump, the pink Pussyhat, a cat-eared, knitted cap, was born. In 2016, Jayna Zweiman and Krista Suh, while prepping for the Women’s March on Washington in Washington DC, envisioned attendees creating a blanket of pink as a “powerful visual statement of solidarity.”<sup>47</sup> Together, they enlisted knitter Kay Coyle who would create the now iconic Pussyhat pattern. The stark, ear-catching name was chosen for a number of reasons. It was cleverly chosen to illustrate the appearance of cat ears, to reclaim and de-stigmatize the word “pussy,” and to protest against Donald Trump’s own words.<sup>48</sup> The words in question came from a 2005 exchange between Trump and Billy Bush of “Access Hollywood.” Donald Trump was recorded talking about women in a derogatory manner; his exact quote, “Grab ‘em by the pussy” sent shockwaves throughout the nation.<sup>49</sup> It was this phrase and other misogynistic treatment of women by Trump and his campaign that led to the first Women’s March on Washington.

On January 21, 2017, approximately 470,000 people (three times more than attended the president’s inauguration) descended upon Washington DC,<sup>50</sup> and an estimated 4.1 million people joined in local demonstration across the United States.<sup>51</sup> Immediately recognizable was the sea of pink Pussyhats that a large percentage of the activists wore. The idea conceived of by a small group of women had a profound effect. Soon, the Pussyhat found its way outside of the streets and onto other venues. At Angela Missoni’s Milan Fashion Week showing in February 2017, pink Pussyhats were waiting on the seats as guests filed in, and the models walking the runway in Missoni’s fall looks all wore Pussyhats of their own.<sup>52</sup> The Pussyhat had such a cultural impact that it can now be found in museums from Michigan<sup>53</sup> to London.<sup>54</sup> While some consider the Pussyhat to be the ultimate symbol of femininity and empowerment, in another parallel to the MAGA hat, the Pussyhat is not free from controversy.

In a now-viral photo tweeted by photographer and digital strategist Kevin Banatte in 2017, his girlfriend and director of an LGBTQ advocacy organization GetEqual Angela Peoples stands in front of a group of blonde white women wearing pink Pussyhats, all either taking selfies or looking at their phones. Meanwhile, Peoples holds a sign that reads “Don’t forget: White women voted for Trump.”<sup>55</sup> This image spoke volumes, especially to those who argued that the hat was exclusionary of people of color, or those who have genitals that are not pink.<sup>56</sup> Further criticism came when it was argued that the Pussyhat was not inclusive of trans\* and

non-binary individuals.<sup>57</sup> The criticisms have been addressed by the movement's original founders via the Pussyhat Project website and in interviews, but the controversy surrounding the knitted caps still lingers. Mariel Ferreira, a Latina woman who helped organize the Women's March in Topeka, KS, addressed the controversy and the need for reorganization in an interview with *City Lab* saying that the Women's March has "the reputation now that we're not as intersectional as we thought we were, so it's important to really be addressing that, really being strong, and supporting those communities and offering our services to them."<sup>58</sup>

Though examples of college students wearing the Pussyhat are not quite as stark or violent as the examples presented with the MAGA trucker hat, we cannot ignore the influence and power that college students had on the rise and spread of the Pussyhat. First, a number of sponsors of the National Women's March organization are student-run organization such as the Georgetown University College Democrats and the NAACP College & Youth Division; included in the partner list are also a number of organizations that have college charters on campuses across the nation, such as the National Organization for Women, the Secular Student Alliance, and more. Furthermore, many marches occurred on university campuses including Florida A&M University, Georgia Southern University, University of Hawaii, Johns Hopkins University, Wayne State University, University of Michigan, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Clemson University, Texas A&M University, and more. The sheer number of marches, including those on university campuses and in university towns illustrates the importance of college students in the mobilization of the march and the Pussyhat.

## Conclusion

Fashion can be successfully used as a tool for activism and protest, whether it occurs on the runway, at city hall, or on the college campus. College students have historically and contemporarily been catalysts for activism through fashion. By examining college students' fashion activism, we can begin to paint a modern picture of not only college student activism, but also the salient messages that fashion can send. This chapter serves as synthesis of multiple movements but can help lay the groundwork for future studies in fashion activism and its intersections with college student life.

## Notes

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# FASHION IN THE TRENCHES: HOW THE MILITARY SHAPES THE FASHION INDUSTRY

*Mattia Roveri*

The military, much like most large-scale group organizations with a guiding ideology and purpose, invests heavily in appearance and (first) impressions. Compared to other organizations the stakes in appearance in the military are significantly higher. The right clothing and accessories will enable us to make quick judgments about the environment, to distinguish between friends and enemies, prey and predators. From the manufacturing side, military clothing is a closely studied and meticulously executed branch of industry, which requires specific skillsets. Historically, military gear was a place to work through and exhibit innovative fashion ideas. And yet, despite all its symbolism, military gear and its relationship with the fashion industry has only recently gained attention in public outlets and scholarly work. This chapter will explore some of the relevant work that has been done on the relationship between the military and fashion industry, and will then discuss at greater length three particularly important moments that have made important impact on the way the military and fashion industry have impacted each other.

Clothing is the primary protection of our bodies against external elements and enemies,<sup>1</sup> but it is also a mode of self-expression and throughout history there are probably few competitors to the everyday relevance of the question: “what should I wear?” What we will wear reflects how we see ourselves, where we belong in our society, our gender and social/civic duties and what is the message we might want to convey by our appearance. All these factors are relevant also in the context of the military. Much conversation about the military and clothing has focused, and rightfully so, on uniforms. Indeed, it has been widely recognized that clothing modifies our body and wearing a uniform increases the army’s control over the soldier’s body. In other words, clothing is closely tied up with the sense of the self and control over bodies. Military clothing demonstrates the way power structures relate to, and involve, members of the society. And it is widely acknowledged that military clothing exercises a profound impact not only on the wearer but also on others, both in terms of politics and intimate emotions. The deep impact of military clothing can be seen through a variety of different media and it is sometimes the case that the best records of the grandeur of military chic are conveyed by artists who had themselves been long excluded from the military – female writers and fashion designers. In the novels of Jane Austen, for example, we witness an explicit fascination for the military uniform in a way that is probably appropriate for someone who can never wear such garment.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, military clothing is also profoundly ambivalent: it is about ceremonies (e.g. parades, but also private events like weddings and funerals) as much as it is about solitary training and invisibility through camouflage, and the wide spectrum of military gear available showcases its suitability for a variety of occasions. Politically, military clothing is ambiguous and embodies both resistance and power,<sup>3</sup> so that wearing military style becomes tantamount to sending a message. What exactly that message is has differed in various moments in history. It might have been particularly straightforward in the 1970s and 1980s when hippies adopted military gear and demonstrated their resistance to Vietnam War. However, there is a unifying aspect also in today's overload of military style in fashion, and it is neatly summarized in a magazine site intended for style-conscious men:

What camouflage clothing, and military-influenced fashion in general, says about a wearer's politics is secondary to what it says about the wearer, which is pretty consistently this: I am an individual. I do what I like. I don't much care what you think.<sup>4</sup>

As are most things related to the military, so too is military clothing business a large operation that depends on many different industries. The military has in fact been one of the main driving forces of innovation in modern societies, especially during wartime.<sup>5</sup> With regard to fashion industry, however, there are two areas in particular which exclusively depend on military innovations: first, the ready-made clothing industry. The idea of manufacturing ready-made clothes goes back all the way to the earliest clothing factory, the United States Army Clothing Establishment, which was officially set up in Philadelphia at the beginning of the war in 1812.<sup>6</sup> The second major innovation driving clothing and fashion industry is the introduction of standardized measures.<sup>7</sup> All across the world, the militaries made use of the human material that they were in charge of, often through conscription, and obtained anthropometrical information about soldiers that was then used in a variety of fields from physiological studies to statistics and clothing industry. In the United States, over one million conscripts were measured during the American Civil War and the results were categorized into three sizes: small, medium, and large.<sup>8</sup> This idea was to have profound impact on the further development of designs and textiles. Constant search for better ways for clothes to fit (and avoid the ultimate insult of not having clothes that fit), a pursuit that started in the military, has since continued to drive the fashion industry. It should also be noted that the close association between the military and ready-made clothing industry had a profound gendering influence on fashion industry – “men's ready-to-wear line developed long before women's, [...] because military uniforms drove the manufacture of men's clothing on a large scale.”<sup>9</sup> By WWI, women were buying more ready-made clothes than men and had thus quickly caught up with the industry, but it remains a fact that the ready-made industry was first tailored to fit the needs of young male conscripts and that has fixed some of the basics in the way the clothing industry works today.

This chapter will look at three significant moments of military/fashion relationship in modern and contemporary history. First, the establishment of modern military institutions that takes place largely in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and coincides with the emergence of the first fashion designers and their salons. This is also a period when ready-made clothing is first conceived as a possibility and then widely employed in, and popularized through, the army. Secondly, the context of the two world wars in Europe was particularly rich in experimentation with military style and here the designer Elsa Schiaparelli looms large. Finally, we will briefly look at the way in which the military and fashion industry have been impacted by 9/11, the recent political trends in post-2016 U.S. presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **The birth of modern military institutions and the fashion industry**

After the French revolution and the complex re-evaluations of European imperialism, many countries across the world opted for conscription. The military was known to be a rite of passage for soldiers, why not also for countries? Many European countries like France and Italy tied conscription very closely with the fabric of their nation states. The figure of the soldier now became one of the most formidable examples of national belonging and civil participation. As a result, millions and millions of young men were catapulted into this unique but also disruptive, and at times destructive, military experience. Whatever the outcome, military experience was an eye-opening and life-changing experience that turned many young men away from their previous plans and exposed for them a new future. As we learn from Sophia Loren's memoir, Giorgio Armani discovered his passion for fashion during his military service.<sup>10</sup> There are many others – Yves Saint Laurent, Stefano Gabbana, Domenico Dolce, Elie Tahari – whose designs are often playing with the military and possibly with their own previous experience in it.

Even though the idea of uniformed military gear starts to emerge around the Thirty Year War in Europe among the leading powers (the French, Germans, and Prussians), it is the post-French revolution Europe and the emerging nation states that become particularly invested in the representation of their armies and its symbolism. On the other side of the spectrum, the fashion industry went through a particularly rapid change at that very precise moment. The increasing industrialization in Europe simplified the fast production of materials and consequently fashion articles could be made at a relatively inexpensive cost. As Kawamura has noted, with the soaring population and productivity that resulted in increased living standards and social mobility, fashion became more democratized and accessible to a wider circle of people.<sup>11</sup> And this all comes at the time when national governments start thinking about their military gear and pay more attention to the kind of message and symbolism that military uniforms convey about the country.

In his groundbreaking work on the culture of clothing, Daniel Roche highlights the wide range of effects that the implementation of the uniform in the military has had on the army.<sup>12</sup> Uniforms enforce social discipline, strengthen a sense of belonging and amplify national sentiments. They also provide a “costume” where to hide and adopt a socially acceptable appearance, which emphasizes the utility of bodies (over the value of individuals). The “docile body,” a concept coined and discussed by Michel Foucault is relevant,<sup>13</sup> though not directly addressed by Roche. He helpfully reminds us that military uniform ought not to be understood strictly “in terms of docility and repression, or ideological instrumentality. It creates through education, realizes a personage and affirms a political project by demonstrating omnipotence.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the uniform also gives agency to its wearer, creates a sense of belonging and purpose. In post-unification Italy, for example, King Victor Emmanuel II wore a blue uniform with little stars on the collar, symbols of the Italian military across all military ranks. It was very similar to all soldiers so that wearing a uniform with the same features as that of the king boosted an otherwise illiterate soldier's ability to associate himself with the king as soldier.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the military uniform played an essential role in fostering both a sense of belonging to the army and the nation across different social classes and geographical areas of late-nineteenth-century Italy.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, it is interesting that wearing a uniform is not simply a matter of participating in external demonstration of national symbolism or facilitating combat training, but that wearing a uniform was regarded from early on as having a psychological effect on soldiers and thus a profound impact on their behavior. On the one hand, this was an expected (and broadly cultivated) result emerging from the regulations that emphasize the importance of taking proper



care of one's clothing and uniform: the daily routine of keeping the uniform clean and polishing shoes and equipment was going to result in an improved physical (and mental) hygiene and thus bring about a change in one's habits and behavior. It was noticed, however, that the impact of the uniform went much further than that. In discussing the efforts of the pre-revolution French military, Roche notes that the "[u]niform, by influencing character, created men perhaps more susceptible to change, with the aspiration to uniformity and capacity to adapt which mark the cultural intermediary."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, wearing a uniform could be to some extent compared to wearing a costume, which enables its wearer to adopt a different identity and thus to rise above the socio-economic or political circumstances of one's origin.

Alongside the internal (psychological) changes in soldiers that seem to have resulted from the widespread incorporation of military uniforms in national armies, there was also an outward emotional appeal of the uniform that was successfully mobilized/employed for recruitment. The sexual attraction of uniforms is a widely debated (though also generally acknowledged) topic and popular media sites are full of musings on the topic of what makes a man in uniform "universally attractive."<sup>18</sup> A good-looking uniform could indeed be an efficient recruitment tool, and this is backed up by sources from various armies, from different time periods. The realization that uniforms could help the military boost its enlistment numbers had an effect also beyond military settings. As one author puts it, Europe was taken by uniform mania and unifying clothing was contemplated for a variety of professions and even for leisure or specific groups in society (e.g. women).<sup>19</sup>

But what does that have to do with fashion? Leading up to the French Revolution, fashion was a concern equally for both sexes and the military outfits often offered men the perfect venue where to show off their latest fashion items and innovation. In other words, the military context provided up until then a unique environment, with plenty of publicity and exposure, for the aristocrats to show off their appearance. Soldiers were dressed rather randomly, often combining clothes from their civilian wardrobe. After the French Revolution, male fashion in Europe went under the influence of England and the restrained fashion styles of the bourgeoisie.<sup>20</sup> This was also the case in military clothing: battlefield had changed and with the new colonial enterprises and wars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was less need to identify one's allies than there was to hide from the enemy. The fashion industry became increasingly associated with women, and hence the previous contrast in fashion consumption between upper and lower classes was now translated into a contrast between genders.

Perhaps partly as a response to the ever-changing and unpredictable fashion industry that was increasingly associated with women, military uniform served as a symbolic reference to restraint, equality, uniformity, and collective expression. The colorful and extravagant military costumes of the eighteenth century were left behind and this switch determined the direction of male fashion for the following centuries. Female fashion was allowed to follow suit in adopting specific elements of military fashion and national symbolism in clothes, if not the military outfits and their overall style.<sup>21</sup> These characteristics not only started to dominate menswear as opposed to womenswear, but they also came to be associated with the fundamental characteristics of men and women. Women's frivolous and low-quality clothing also reflected their position in society and the generally low opinion of their ability to hold power.<sup>22</sup> Military clothing consequently became the "legitimate" object of, and point of reference for, the male gaze, and next to gathering intense following among amateur military enthusiasts,<sup>23</sup> military gear has also come to determine the "normalized" boundaries of heterosexual male fascination for sartorial habits. Go beyond the dominant culture, which closely follows the strictures of military style, and you risk being regarded an outsider of the male norm.

### **Gendered fashion and the military: Elsa Schiaparelli**

Over 100 years later, as Anne Hollander records in her article in the *Times* magazine in 1983, women's fashion appears to openly appropriate military style thus starting another chapter in the history of the relationship between fashion and the military.<sup>24</sup> The military and its tailoring industry is the flagship of male fashion and boasts best quality, attention to detail and technique. It speaks of the qualities that are valued and expected in society from male behavior and position. Men's fashion is geared towards the collective, restraint, and power. Women's clothing had always expressed their sense of individualism, difference, excess. This fascinating development and influence of the military on feminine fashion culture had brought about a change in the representation of women and their power. This was attractive and seductive, but at the same time transgressive in its challenge to expected gender roles. As Hollander notes, a woman wearing military inspired dress or uniform gave rise to fascinating paradoxes in self-presentation as it brings together "audacity and self-discipline, nostalgic reference and brisk modernism."<sup>25</sup> The world was ready for that and women looked good in uniforms that were closely adapted to flatter their bodies.<sup>26</sup>

Hollander further argues that this "mock-military" style is never in perfect replica of the original, thus always providing an almost satirical commentary on the seriousness of the male military outfit. While this might well be true, it is also true that the 1970s were particularly significant for women's long-coveted desire to gain access to the military.<sup>27</sup> In 1973 compulsory military draft for men in the United States is ended and an all-volunteer military is born, giving new opportunities for women to participate in the institution. The years 1976 and 1978 are crucial for allowing women have access to military academies and allowing them to serve in non-combat troops.<sup>28</sup> In that context, it might come as less surprising that the female fashion industry is starting to experiment with the military; after all, women serving in the military has become a new possibility and encountering a woman in military uniform is something that the rest of society should better get used to.

But this trend of incorporating military style into women's fashion had an important predecessor in Elsa Schiaparelli, a famous and daring Italian-French fashion designer whose style was deeply influenced (among other things) by the military and who consciously sought to render women more powerful, active and dominant. At the time when Europe and the rest of the world was devastated after the end of WWI, Schiaparelli's refreshing approach won much following and she was one of the most serious rivals to Coco Chanel. Furthermore, her bold designs have recently attracted more interest in contemporary fashion industry precisely due to the empowerment of women through clothing that she advocated in her work.<sup>29</sup> Schiaparelli's most famous work remains in the 1930s when she designed clothes a la "hard chic" style, which boasted a rather masculine fitted look with padded shoulders, nipped-in waste, and narrow hips. Her styles were closely tailored to follow the wearer's body contours and these were widely adopted by some high profile customers like Katherine Hepburn, Greta Garbo, and Joan Crawford.

This new style borrowed from the military and service uniforms and aimed to express the new aestheticism of the "New Women," who would be encouraged, and expected, to compete in the masculine public domain. Women wearing Schiaparelli were projected to be active, daring, and innovative; her main work in the 1920s and 1930s was women's sportswear and practical clothing, such as swimsuits, trouser-skirts, and travel clothes.<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, despite her playfulness and unconventionality, some of her greatest fans were "the ultra-smart and conservatives, wives of diplomats and bankers, millionaires and artists, who liked severe plain dresses."<sup>31</sup> The appeal of her couture on powerful female figures is perhaps less surprising than

what she might have thought. Her wealthy fans appropriated male fashion standards which, as we saw in the previous section, were largely dictated by the military style that favored restraint over pleasure and excess, masculine strong lines over feminine softness. This is exactly what some of Schiaparelli's most famous and influential work from the 1930s offered, and it was for this reason that her signature style was often referred to as the "Wooden Soldier silhouette."<sup>32</sup> Schiaparelli's daring challenge to dominant culture and her attempt to creatively borrow from the military in order to impact women fashion and – by implication – women's lives, has surely quite a lot to do with her recent revival in fashion industry and beyond.

It should be noted that Schiaparelli was particularly interested in the ceremonial military gear, the pompous and extravagant clothing that had been the standard way to portray and visualize military clothing until the mid-twentieth century. When it became less practical to wear a scarlet uniform in battle, military gear became much less pronounced and its combat gear developed color and pattern combinations (e.g. camouflage) that enabled soldiers to remain in hiding and unnoticed. As indicated above, this combat clothing has today become widespread well beyond the military. And interestingly, the same connotations have been prominent in the civilian use of military styles: the ceremonial clothing is extravagant and appropriate for special events, combat style remains increasingly popular in everyday clothing. In our modern context, the parading military style has had a ubiquitous effect on both women's and men's fashion industry.<sup>33</sup> The ceremonial and combat gears have both become a constant presence in both street and high-street fashion.

### **Military and fashion post 9/11 and 11/9**

After 9/11, while the world is witnessing a growing trend in nationalism, clothing industry has relatedly observed a steady increase in military-themed clothing dominating the consumers' wardrobes, from high-end fashion articles to street fashion and vintage stores.<sup>34</sup> Not only is camouflage in fashion, it is worn by everyone, from the rich to the poor, from the immigrants and underground artists to politicians in leisure time, from kids to grandparents (e.g., Rihanna), from terrorists themselves (the ironic capture of Osama bin Laden in U.S. military camouflage) to the U.S. military officials. As Martin and Steuter argue, camouflage is worn by a variety of social groups because it has the potential to represent different viewpoints.<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, wearing camouflage might manifest one's support for the national military and thus makes a strong appearance in clothing choices of patriots and military supporters. On the other, however, camouflage also manifests struggle and hardships and is thus worn by counterculture artists, hip-hop musicians, hustlers and skaters, and so on. Through its nature-imitating visuals camo symbolizes (natural) strength, action, and dynamism. While camouflage and military gear is becoming increasingly mainstream and visible on the street after 9/11, it seems to have become "too" popular to be used by extreme militant groups (e.g. the Alt-right and white supremacist groups) who are also on the rise since 9/11 and who have received a particular boost through the 11/9/2016 U.S. presidential election. These groups that have by now started to resemble para-military organizations in many other respects are the only ones who will overtly shy away from using military-inspired clothing.

Why is that? The military has been increasingly visible across the world in the past few decades, but in the context of the global pandemic and worldwide emergency caused by COVID-19, the military is simply everywhere. This time, however, its presence in civilian environment is generally interpreted as one of assurance rather than threat or war. In current circumstances, the military is employed to organize life in its most basic elements: to ensure safety and implementation of emergency regulations on the streets, shops, borders and life

events (e.g. funerals). It is probably no coincidence that Donald Trump made his first public appearance wearing a mask, something that he had vigorously refused to do anywhere else previously, at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington on July 11, 2020. Not even the POTUS can stand above the code of practice and garment in the military.

## Conclusion

This trend of looking towards the military for inspiration for fashion seems to show no signs of exhaustion, quite the opposite. Given the wide variety of military fashion wearers, it is unlikely that this fact by itself has a broader significance in terms of people's willingness to engage in violent conflicts and wars. It does seem to suggest, however, that the military is caught in-between (in a way that is certainly not negative for the military) multiple different strands and pushes in our society and, if anything, it might appear that as a consequence we are all ready to see the military institution in a more humane and complex colors than we were prepared a few decades ago.

## Notes

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- 3 Joseph H. Hancock II, "Cargo Pants: The Transnational Rise of the Garment That Started a Fashion War," in *Transglobal Fashion Narratives*, ed. Anne Peirson-Smith and Joseph H. Hancock II (Bristol–Chicago: Intellect, 2018) 334–7.
- 4 Julia Layton, "War and Fashion: An Aesthetic," *Lifestyle*, accessed July 20, 2020. <https://lifestyle.howstuffworks.com/style/tips-advice/evolution-of-military-style2.htm>.
- 5 See Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
- 6 Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 1997), 45.
- 7 See Giorgio Riello, *La Moda. Una Storia dal Medioevo a Oggi* (Bari–Rome: Laterza, 2012).
- 8 Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 30.
- 9 Linda Przybyszewski, *The Lost Art of Dress: The Women Who Once Made America Stylish* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 25.
- 10 Sofia Loren, *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: My Life*, trans. Sylvia Adrian Notini (New York: Atria, 2015), 274.
- 11 Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 7.
- 12 Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Régime,"* trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 13 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).
- 14 Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 229.
- 15 Ciro Paoletti, *A Military History of Italy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 120.
- 16 For an interdisciplinary study of the cultural impact of the military in modern and contemporary Italy see now Mattia Roveri, ed., *Italy and the Military: Cultural Perspectives from Unification to Contemporary Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
- 17 Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 229–30.
- 18 Jennifer Craik, "The Cultural Politics of the Uniform," *Fashion Theory* 7, no. 2 (2003): 127–47. <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270403778052140>.
- 19 Alexander Maxwell, *Patriots Against Fashion: Clothing and Nationalism in Europe's Age of Revolutions* (Basingstoke–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 20 Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (New York–London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 32.

- 21 Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st century* (London–New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 102.
- 22 See Rachel Fuchs and Victoria Thompson, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke–New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).
- 23 Anne Hollander, “Men in Tights: Why Guys in Uniform Get Girls,” *The New Republic*, February 10, 2003. <https://newrepublic.com/article/66725/men-tights>.
- 24 Anne Hollander, “The Appeal of Military Detailing,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 27, 1983. <http://www.anne-hollander.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Appeal-of-Military-Detailing-Times-Mag-1983.pdf>.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1993), 313–4.
- 27 Lorry M. Fenner, “Either You Need These Women or You Do Not: Informing the Debate on Military Service and Citizenship,” *Gender Issues* 16, no. 3 (1988): 5–32. (pp. 13–4).
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- 29 See Annita Boyd, “In the Service of Clothes: Elsa Schiaparelli and the War Experience,” in *Fashion and War in Popular Culture*, ed. Denise N. Rall (Bristol–Chicago: Intellect, 2014), 76–89.
- 30 Ilya Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli Fashion, Femininity and Modernity* (London–New York: Berg, 2012).
- 31 Andrew Bolton and Harold Koda, *Schiaparelli & Prada: Impossible Conversations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 32.
- 32 Adrian Bailey, *The Passion for Fashion* (Limpsfield: Dragon’s World, 1988), 163; see also Judith Thurman, *Cleopatra’s Nose: 39 Varieties of Desire* (New York: Picador, 2007), 193.
- 33 See for example Timothy Godbold, *Military Style Invades Fashion* (London–New York: Phaidon Press, 2016).
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- 35 Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter, *Pop Culture Goes to War: Enlisting and Resisting Militarism in the War on Terror* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

# VIOLENCE AND FRAGMENTATION WITHIN INTERWAR FASHION AND FEMININITY

*Lucy Moyse Ferreira*

In January 1928, French *Vogue* featured an illustration by the British photographer and cultural polymath, Cecil Beaton Figure 21.1. It portrayed a woman languishing on a chaise-longue, luxuriously dressed in an evening gown and abundant jewelery, with carefully applied makeup. Her left arm extended outwards, as if to check her makeup in a mirror. Yet in her hand was not a mirror, but instead, a severed head. Such a disturbing trope was not unique to this issue of *Vogue*, or to the publication itself. As this chapter will demonstrate, Beaton's illustration was representative of a broader shift in the representation of women within fashion media during the interwar period in France, Britain, and America. From dismembered heads to limbless torsos, fragmentation of the female form appeared in fashion magazines from mainstream to niche, as well as in wider culture. Why did such disturbing imagery- appear in a form of publication that is typically perceived as being based on fantasy and escape? What is the larger contextual meaning of a woman being viscerally fragmented in this way? In order to address these questions, this chapter will consider the spectrum of "violence" that women were subjected to in fashion during the interwar period. Drawing on contemporaneously advancing psychoanalytical theory, as well as examples from the Surrealist movement it influenced, it will explore what prompted this rupture in the representation of femininity. This will involve a consideration of societal anxieties and attitudes towards, for example, the impact of the First World War, and the fragmented experience of interwar modernity.

The First World War caused death and destruction on unprecedented scales, as well as the "realisation of the instability of this world," as stated by Benjamin Crémieux in 1931.<sup>1</sup> He specifically linked this disconcerting change with the "power of violence" that the war had inflicted.<sup>2</sup> This affected not just the whole population of each country involved, but also their culture. The beginnings of mass media painted a graphic and gruesome picture of this situation, through newspaper articles, photographs, and newsreels. Fashion media was not immune to this, and 1919 American *Vogue*, for example, published a poem lamenting the war's "crime and violence," almost one year after it ended.

As a result of the violence of the war, the phenomenon of physical fragmentation in particular became increasingly interwoven into everyday lived experience. Approximately 1.5 million French, British, and American men lost a part of their body during the conflict. They

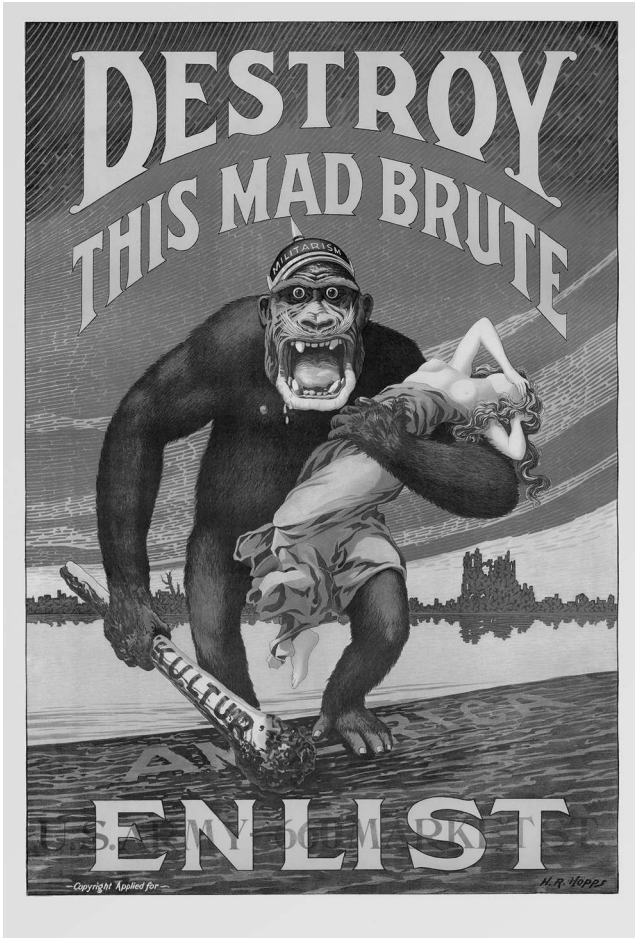


Figure 21.1 H. R. Hopps, Poster: 'Destroy This Mad Brute – Enlist U.S. Army', 1917

were tainted with a permanent reminder of horrors undergone, and a lifelong loss that could never be restored. While this physical trauma occurred directly upon the male body, the general public was also affected, and came into contact with this suffering on an individual, private, and family basis, as well as through contact with the public on the street. Caroline Playne described the returning soldiers that she saw in Brighton, England: “hundreds of men on crutches going about in groups, many having lost one leg, many others both legs, caused sickness and horror”.<sup>3</sup> This presence was inescapable within public, and for many, private life: a constant reminder of the carnage experienced both at home and in the trenches. Coupled with the detailed media coverage, this meant that the violence of the war, and its lasting consequences, reached civilians, creating a newfound presence of limblessness within everyday life. The reverberations were strongly felt within society, and reactions to them were expressed in a range of artworks and literature. What effect did this have upon women? How did the prevalence of amputation, which was present to the greatest extent ever seen upon the male body,<sup>4</sup> connect to the newfound appearance of fragmentation within fashion magazines? How did this affect perceptions of the female body, beauty, and fashion at large?

While women could not fight on the front line, as Canby highlighted, “millions of women... flung themselves into the conflict without incurring the passionate reactions of bloodshed, and [were] transformed,”<sup>5</sup> acknowledging the war’s wide-ranging impact upon women, even when they had not taken part in active combat. The war also affected notions of femininity on a conceptual, image-based level. Propaganda produced in each country frequently addressed women; and furthermore, as Pearl James has argued, it “represent[ed] the violence of war through the visual metaphor of a raped, mutilated, or murdered woman”.<sup>6</sup> Figure 21.2, a 1917 U.S. Army poster by H. R. Hopps, is one such example, and portrays a woman in the clutches of an ape-like representation of the enemy. It uses the representation of a captive, defenseless, and beautiful woman about to be assaulted in order to portray this message.

Violence continued to be inflicted upon depictions of femininity, often in the form of fragmentation, including within fashion magazines. In 1921, for example, the *Gazette du Bon Ton* published an article on a current trend for narrow ribbons. The accompanying image (Figure 21.2) was designed to showcase new designs and demonstrate potential ways to wear them. It featured a surrealist composition, with oversized ribbons cascading from the top left corner, overlapped by floating faces, and phantom poles bearing wearer-less hats. In only one case does a face appear entirely intact. The others retain various states and combinations of completion: the eyes are missing in all, while one retains a solitary pair of eyebrows, and in another, lips appear alone. Together, an unsettling sense of blankness is invoked, an imaginary dystopia where facial features are unnecessary and interchangeable. This trope occurred regularly within the magazine across the interwar period, sometimes appearing multiple times within the same issue. In the same 1921 issue, for example, an article on Scotland was punctured by illustrations of uniform doll-like face and neck entities.

Similar explorations into fragmentation, often directly prompted by the conflict, were being carried out concurrently within psychoanalysis. The war had instigated a newfound increase in receptiveness towards, and major development of, the discipline. Many seminal texts were produced or first translated into English and French following the war, sometimes as a result of direct involvement with it. This was the case, for instance, with Paul Ferdinand Schilder and his work with amputated soldiers after the war, which would eventually lead to the publication of his *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* in 1935. Here, he wrote that “when a leg has been amputated, a phantom appears; the individual still feels his leg and has a vivid impression that it is still there. He may also forget about his loss and fall down. This phantom, this animated image of the leg, is the expression of bodily schema”.<sup>7</sup> From this, Schilder developed the definition of “body image”: a term that has become heavily associated with fashion, which was in fact born out of the war. He defined it as “... the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves...”.<sup>8</sup> He proffered that whilst sensations are given to us in multiple ways and from multiple places, such as “from the muscles”,<sup>9</sup> body image entails a combination of both the lived, physical experience of the body, as well as its mental perception. While mind and body, and even limb and torso, may be separated, the concept of body image allows the self to remain mentally intact.

According to Schilder’s theorization, even when limbs were missing, the mind could still “feel” them, and the body remained intact and whole in this way, from a mental perspective due to body image. Schilder therefore developed the concept of a united body existing within the mind, even when it was not physically “whole.” The fragmentation within the *Gazette Du Bon Ton* during the early 1920s, which focused on the face and the head, therefore carried out the very opposite function: they decisively severed the head from its body, thus enacting a separation between body and mind. Similarly, instead of making strides towards wholeness, *Vogue* explicitly praised the fragment itself.<sup>10</sup> Theoretically, the pages of a fashion magazine



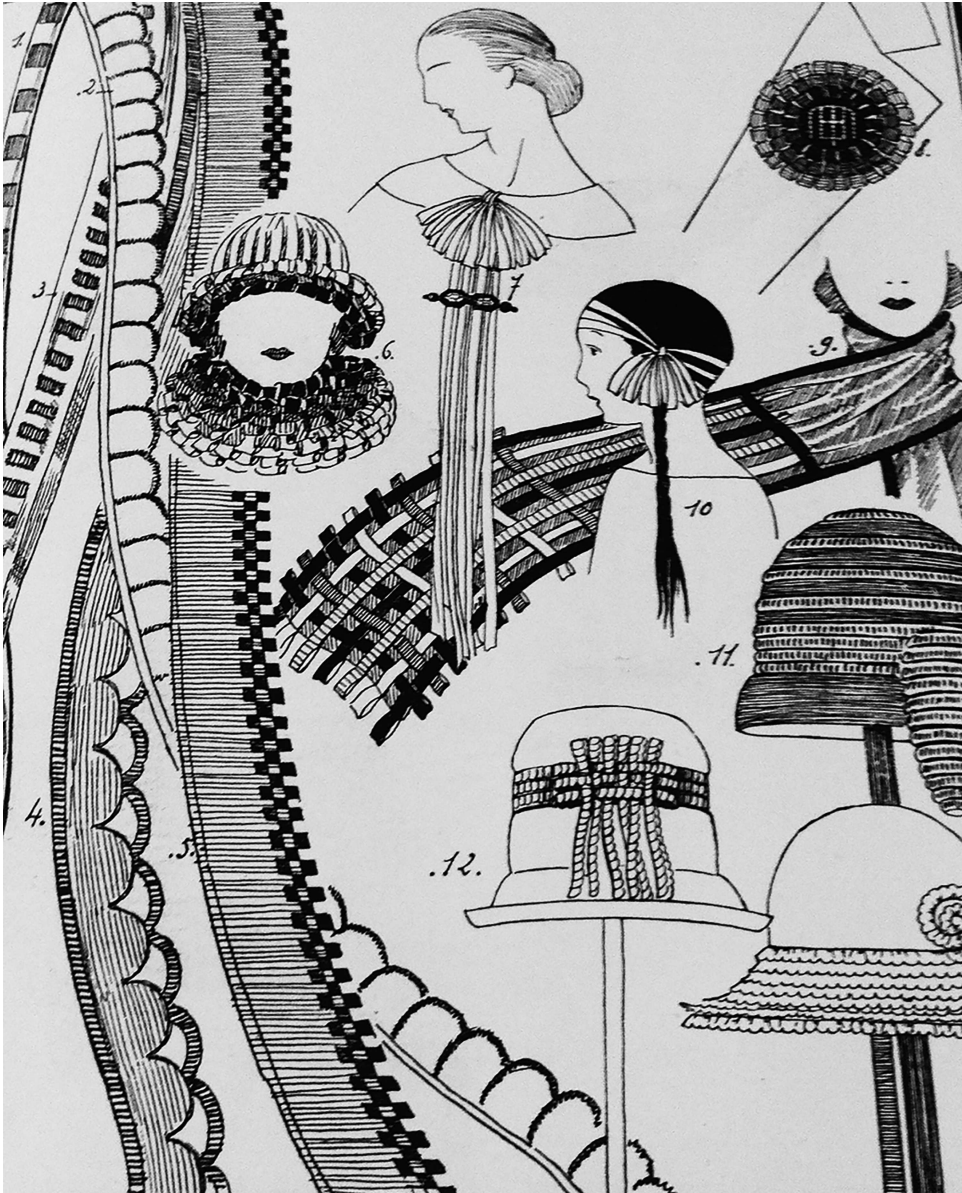


Figure 21.2 La Mode des Rubans Étroits', *Gazette du Bon Ton*, no. 10, 1921

promote an image-based ideal of a whole body, with polished images, and carefully considered text. They are a platform upon which aspirational values can be elegantly laid out, working towards the creation of an ideal, if only in the realm of images. Yet trauma and anxiety surfaced upon the pages of the fashion spread, and broke down its traditionally smooth, whole images.

This corresponded with Jacques Lacan's notion of the fundamentally fragmented human body as part of his concept of the mirror stage, which was first presented in 1936, and appeared in its initial written form the following year (1937). According to Lacan, from birth, humans



Figure 21.3 G. Seignac, Poster, Crédit Français, c. 1920

experience their bodies and existence in a state of fragmentation, an experience which he compared to the mangled, abject bodies painted by Hieronymus Bosch. The mirror stage proposed that it is only when an infant first identifies its own reflection in a mirror that it recognizes itself as “I” and becomes whole.<sup>11</sup> For Lacan, the recognized mirror reflection represents “the visual Gestalt of the human form, coherent, erect, and masterful, promises stability, unity, and wholeness...”.<sup>12</sup> Hence, this suggests that when a body part is missing, it becomes incoherent, weak and unstable. However, building on Schilder’s definition of body image, Lacan claimed that “the identification with this visual Gestalt allows the body image to serve as a defensive mask, concealing the aboriginal state of fragmentation and the experience of bodily fragmentation that may re-emerge under stress”.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, within everyday life, the perception of oneself is held together by a sense of “wholeness” based upon the level of images, having been formed in the mirror. Nonetheless, the memory of the fundamental fragmentation of humanity, as sustained by Lacan, continues to haunt the ego (which itself had been formed within the mirror), and is manifested in “images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring,

bursting open of the body” that “torment mankind”.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, at times of particular stress, the original “experience of bodily fragmentation” re-emerges.<sup>15</sup> Not only did Lacan suggest, then, that the state of fragmentation never truly disappears, but he also linked this with violence: when “the subject experiences [this primitive] anxiety associated with bodily fragmentation,” he added, the “integrity of the body image is attacked or threatened,” leading to “an impulse to aggression”.<sup>16</sup>

The war itself was a profound example of a period of stress, and consequently, according to Lacan’s hypothesis, had the potential to instil (British English) such anxiety and aggression as to ultimately precipitate the breakdown of body image from whole to fragmented. That the war in fact caused this eruption of violence, and literal mutilation and fragmentation of the body, only served to intensify the fragmentary effects that Lacan theorized. It is notable, then, that after the war, the attitude towards the face, body, and sense of wholeness changed upon the pages of the fashion magazines.

Before the war, in 1913 for instance, American *Vogue* declared that “the very essence” of the “well-gowned woman of to-day” depended upon “the utter obviousness of the whole”.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, accompanying images featured “whole” women, and there was a tendency to avoid fragmenting the body, even when articles focused only upon accessories. The postwar trend towards fragmenting the body therefore represented a shift in attitude towards the body. This was in line with Lacan’s notion of the fragmented body: a significant, horrific event caused the image-based whole body, as preferred before the war, to viscerally rupture. Rather than creating perfected unity, as is the possible scope of a fashion publication, the postwar fashion features instead were testament to the after-effects of violence, which was evident through fragmentation. This was a form of transposed violence, now made visible at a level of representation.

At the same time as this explicit fragmentation and attempts to create unity within psychoanalysis unfolded, other efforts were made towards restoring wholeness. Certainly, the state of fragmentation not only happened on an individual level to those directly and physically affected during the war, but also collectively within society, which led to acts of social, political, cultural, and economic reparation. The French government instigated its *rappel à l’ordre*, a “political and cultural agenda... largely aimed at repressing the trauma of war”,<sup>18</sup> and similar restorative measures were put into place by Britain (with its Ministry of Reconstruction, for example), and to a lesser extent, by the United States.<sup>19</sup> For example, the United States’ well-known postwar period of isolation also involved an element of self-protection, of turning inwards as one collective, cohesive body. Correspondingly, images of wholeness pervaded national, governmental imagery in each country. The whole body, “whose restored wholeness functioned on an explicit level as an antidote to the traumatic memory”,<sup>20</sup> was especially called upon in this light. In particular, this was played out through the image of women, such as Figure 21.3, a poster for the *Crédit Français*. Here, a strong and healthy woman, wearing modest traditional garb, and carrying a wholesome, rustic and plentiful bundle of wheat, promotes values of health, stability, fertility, and long-lasting wholeness. The *Gazette du Bon Ton*, then, presented women in the opposite light, and *Vogue* explicitly promoted opposing values. In addition to demonstrating Lacan’s psychoanalytic phenomenon, the breakdown of the female body within fashion magazines also served, accordingly, to challenge this nationalistic appropriation of the whole female body.

The fragmentation of the female body in fashion, particularly of the head, became more and more intense as the 1920s developed, such as within Beaton’s aforementioned 1928 illustration. Here, the depicted woman coolly contemplated the severed head in her hand, in the same way one might ponder over an accessory, or critique an aspect of one’s appearance, as if it were a

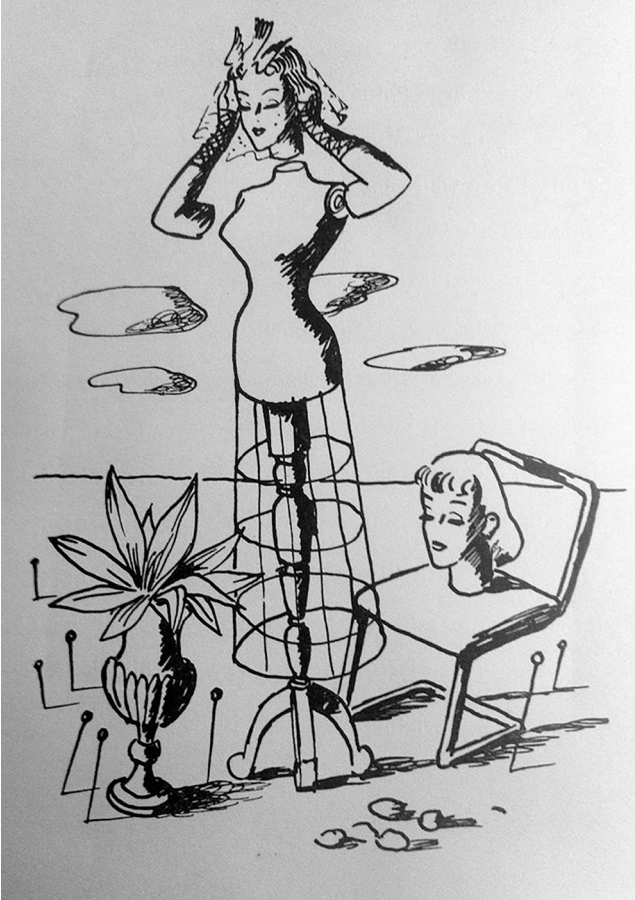


Figure 21.4 Illustration, *Pinpoints*, issue 1, 1939

reflection. This suggests a knowing exposition of the process behind the Lacanian Mirror Stage. Furthermore, by juxtaposing a whole, intact body with a duplicated fragment of the same head, Beaton's image simultaneously incorporated national and governmental strides towards wholeness, and also the new, radical, ruptured form of femininity that served to contest it.

This dichotomy was also reflective of Freudian postwar psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud defined his fundamental structure of the psyche itself in "The Ego and the Id," published in 1923, as requiring a splitting or fragmentation of the self. He defined the id as being "the dark, inaccessible part of our personality," of which "what little we know of it we have learned from our study of... dream-work".<sup>21</sup> It is the instinctive, subconscious side of humanity. The ego develops out of the id, he claimed, and "attempts to mediate between id and reality," dealing in reason.<sup>22</sup> The notion of the very essence of the (same) self being split or divided in this way is echoed in Beaton's illustration. Could the woman in her entirety be the sensible, mediating ego, trying to control the more subversive id? The expression of each "face" in Beaton's illustration was calm, nonetheless the eyes of the right-hand face were slightly more closed. This suggests that the right-hand face is more in touch with the unconscious, and could represent the id. The left-hand face remained attached to the rest of the body, holding the second face out for

examination, suggesting a degree of calculation, and that it deals in reason, meaning that it may relate to the ego. Indeed, it is the ego that evaluates the id, keeping it in check and in accordance with society rather than its base drives. The image's parallels with the Freudian ego and id evoke a division within one's own mind, suggesting an instability of and fragmentation within the individual self.

This sense of fragmentation also played out within society at large. It was representative of a widely echoed sentiment of the experience of modern life itself as disembodied and fragmentary. As early as 1903, Georg Simmel had remarked upon the fragmentation that modern life is marked by, particularly in the increasingly popular city, bombarding the occupant with a "rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli".<sup>23</sup> By the early 1920s, these effects were only grossly amplified. The violence of the war and its prolonged effects were met with a rapidly increasing influx of people and images, and new innovations and the rising prominence of technology, experienced at greater speed than ever before. In 1920, Barbara Low described this as "the pressure of what is called Civilization" which was "too extreme, too rapid in its action".<sup>24</sup> Ergo, the fast pace of city life, in addition to the war's aftermath, was a further stressor and contributor to collective modern anxiety. The root of this anxiety was in fragmentation: when urban life is experienced as a vast influx of images and experiences, each one could only be experienced fleetingly, as a fragment. Contemporary literature widely emphasized the "helpless woe" and "brutality" that this could create, to use Virginia Woolf's phrasing.<sup>25</sup>

This sense of fragmentation continued to influence creative considerations within fashion magazine editorials into the 1930s. In October 1934, British *Harper's Bazaar*, for example, published a piece on Nathalie Paley, a Russian aristocrat and celebrity. Instead of showcasing traditional portraiture, the article explained that it "noticed separately her eyes, mouth, hands, ears, hair..." and using "these scattered observations... formed [an] impression of her".<sup>26</sup> The piece presents several photographs, all tightly cropped to focus on one particular, fragmented aspect of her appearance. The opening image is, indeed, her eye, staring determinedly ahead, set off by a thin, drawn in eyebrow, and lashings of mascara. Over the following pages, her appearance continued to be presented in fragmented shots, conducting what the magazine viscerally termed – in the piece's title – an "Anatomy." This conveyed a clinical designation of the body and its potential dissection. The female body was deconstructed with scientific precision upon the fashion page. This creative editorial decision signified fragmentation in fashion's continued momentum, which would only go on to increase.

In March 1938, for example, *Harper's Bazaar* even used the repeated shape of a fragmented female torso as a bold cover design. Not only was each torso itself de-limbed, but an abstract black and white pattern across each one made the very torsos appear to be fragmented and in pieces. One single cropped eye appears in the middle of this configuration, representing the female reader's position, in the midst of, and observing, a fragmented sense of modernity. Around the same time, contemporary artists, particularly the Surrealists, were exploring similar notions of fragmentation and modernity. Indeed, by the high 1930s, commercial fashion and Surrealism were strongly intertwined. Like *Harper Bazaar's* cover, the Surrealists also powerfully explored the fragmented torso, and this physical fragmentation of the female form pervaded their art, such as Roland Penrose's *Real Woman*, and Hans Bellmer's multiple *Dolls*. Bellmer himself stated that "if the origin of my work is scandalous, it is because for me, the world is a scandal," directly acknowledging the impact of wider contextual changes.<sup>27</sup> During the previous year, 1937, these considerations had also appeared within couturière (and Surrealist collaborator) Elsa Schiaparelli's perfume, *Shocking*, which also represented a de-construction of the female form. Its bottle was shaped as a woman's torso, supposedly modelled after Mae West.<sup>28</sup> The fleshy voluptuous nature

of the shape was juxtaposed by the cold, hard glass material, evoking a sense of the uncanny. *Harper's Bazaar*, the Surrealists and Schiaparelli alike were exploring, responding to, and contributing to the same contemporary concerns.

As the 1930s progressed, these values seeped into, and influenced, commercial fashion and the ideology it disseminated. Violent manipulation of the body became more and more explicit within mainstream media as the decade drew to a close, and the threat of a Second World War became clear. In July 1938, for example, *American Vogue* published an illustration by Eduardo García Benito, depicting evening gown designs by Chanel and Schiaparelli. The setting was indicated, by a tower in the background, as being the prestigious and fashionable Place Vendôme, though it had been isolated from the city, and instead transformed into a barren, oneiric background. One model faced the viewer, wearing Chanel, while Schiaparelli's model faced into the distance, allowing a front and back view, similar to traditional fashion plates. In any event, neither of the models had heads attached to their body: instead, their necks ended in amputated stumps, and they raised a floating, severed head up in the air with their arms, as if heads were removable accessories. This pose recalled the classical imagery of the 1936 Olympics, as if they were victors holding their prize. But instead, García Benito subverted this association, and presented a sinister version, where heads become detachable body parts. Indeed, within the illustration, an additional head lay alone on the ground, cast in shadow, as if redundant and tossed aside.

Similar tropes prevailed in 1939, in the first issue of the niche British fashion journal, *Pinpoints*. It declared its founding intention of seeking "a better understanding of Beauty," accompanied by a large, vivid image (Figure 21.4). It depicted a woman, with her eyes closed, as if in a state of deep meditation, or even a subconscious one, linking to psychoanalysis's concurrent excavations of the mind. The illustration, produced in black ink on a stark yellow background, contained elements of traditional beauty: the timeless, hourglass proportions of a mannequin, and the classic vase sprouting elegant leaves. Yet these aspects did not add up to a harmonious whole. Contrarily, the woman was not depicted intact; rather, her head and arms are conveyed as floating fragments. Together with the mannequin, she becomes a part living, part inanimate doll, seemingly in the process of removing her own head.

In this way, the image echoed the aforementioned Surrealist torsos, such as Schiaparelli's *Shocking*, with the limbless dressmaker's dummy. Notwithstanding, here the "severed" limbs are present, intensifying the onlooker's sense of horror by confirming that they had indeed been "removed." Despite being markedly unattached to the body, the fragmented arms are raised above the neck, as though they were still attached. In addition, the doll also seems to have a head, held between the floating arms, which appear to be in the process of coolly and detachedly interchanging it, recalling Beaton's 1928 illustration. Indeed, a further head rests placidly on the chair. With eyes peacefully closed upon each of the faces, they are similarly presented as interchangeable accessories of the body.

The evocation of this sleepy or subconscious sentiment – even in the face of physical fragmentation – is enhanced by the setting. Indicated only by a line depicting the horizon, and stylized rocks, a drifting, ominous and oneiric atmosphere – where anything can happen – is exuded. The Surrealist group, inspired by developments in psychoanalysis, prized the subconscious, as well as dreams, as a way of accessing and unlocking the former. Doing so upheld the revolutionary promise of escaping the bourgeois actions that they believed had led to the First World War. And violence – which still infused the shaken, de-centered life of interwar modernity – could be similarly progressive, as advocated by both André Breton and Georges Bataille, two Surrealist main players who otherwise tended towards conflict. For Breton, "the simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly...

into the crowd,”<sup>29</sup> and such violent tropes were at their strongest within the group’s visual output during the late 1930s, when this illustration was published.

The war was over, but anxiety persisted, if only behind the eyes, beneath consciousness. From the violent capabilities of the sharp pins, to the cool horror implicated by the presentation of human body parts as inanimate accessories, violence permeates the stylish surface of fashion imagery. If only for a snapshot within the turning of a page, as fleeting and fragmented as the postwar quotidien, fashion was rendered a vehicle of violence with transcendent possibilities, lurking beneath a smooth, superficial veneer.

Whilst society, on an (inter)national basis, made attempts to recover as quickly as possible, striving towards wholeness both in policy and representation, fueled also by Schilder and Lacan’s theorization of the whole, trauma could not be erased. Without being comprehensively addressed or worked through, it lingered beneath the surface of consciousness. Violent impulses broke through in fashion, with its position in the realm of fantasy and escape, which rendered it an apt place for exploration, removed from reality. Here, any rug-swept trauma could be expressed upon an image-based level, offering the possibility of processing it. Editorials and imagery, which before the war had explicitly prized wholeness, were suddenly marked by repeated tropes such as the severed head and dismembered torso. Fashion, along with art, radically altered perceptions and experiences of the body, due to the violence of war and the fast, fragmented pace of peacetime. Fashion magazines fully participated in and contributed to this phenomenon, reflecting, projecting, and exploring the traumas of contemporary society. This demonstrates fashion’s unrelenting relationship with the context in which it occurs, and shows that, while it could reflect contemporary anxieties, fantasies, and fears, it was also a place where, like in psychoanalysis, they could be explored and resolved. As Elizabeth Wilson<sup>30</sup> has argued, fashion operates “as a cultural phenomenon, as an aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society,” and in this way, it “may then be understood as ideological, its function to resolve formally, at the imaginary level, social contradictions that cannot be resolved.” The interwar period was marked throughout its duration by a range of collective and personal traumas, many of which were based upon, or experienced and perceived with, violence. They manifested as representations of violence in fashion, placing them into a realm where they could be safely processed.

## Notes

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## PART IV

# Fashion and place

Fashion as a social phenomenon has an influence on all forms of social structure shaping ethics, politics, and national identity.

Floriana Bernardi and Enrica Picarelli examine writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's promotion of black fashion and a Nigerian and broader African identity in her writing, feminist activism, and in a collaboration with Christian Dior. This chapter discusses the political nature of fashion with special reference to the way this Nigerian writer and public intellectual has exploited the power of dress style as an agent of cultural and marketing recoding of national identity with her "Project Wear Nigerian," as well as a means to promote feminism and self-branding. Taking special advantage of digital media and social networks, Adichie's usages of fashion demand a larger theoretical discussion that takes into account the consolidation of "Africa" as an aggressive actor on the global fashion market, celebrity culture, post-feminism in the neoliberal age, and other *g-local* issues of cultural translation and theory.

The "Made in" label is a of great symbolic importance and functions as a guarantee of quality and craftsmanship, as well as a source of trust regarding the conditions of production. Emilia Barna and Emese Dobos-Nagy outline this role in respect to Made in Italy and France and reveal how it obscures production processes through a variety of adaptations by the luxury industry. The "Made in" label may hide deeply exploitative conditions of production. This chapter explores this transformation of the "Made in" label and the relations of global production that it obscures through the cases of Italy and Eastern Europe.

Emanuela Scarpellini traces the evolution of the Italian ready-to-wear industry and the development of an Italian look beginning in the 1970s. Designers' and brands' engagement with the national images of their countries of origins allows them to position themselves in a variety of ways. This chapter takes into consideration the beginnings of post-World War II fashion production and design dissemination in Italy, within an international framework that saw Paris as the recognized capital of fashion. It highlights the specificities of the Italian experience, examining some historical strengths, starting with the production of fabrics, especially silk, and then analyzing the progression and peculiarities of industrial textiles, as well as that of clothing and accessories districts. Afterwards, there is an examination of the role and the innovations introduced by the fashion designer, testifying to this professional's ability to organize the entire fashion supply chain. The result is a new model of high-quality ready-to-wear clothing suitable for a wide range of consumers.

Şakir Özüdoğru focuses on the Brazilian fashion industry and on the social representations of Brazilianness that it puts forward. Özüdoğru questions how Brazilian fashion brands employ and adopt Brazilianness as a policy in the process of design and promotion. By giving examples from contemporary brands and collections, the elements and associations of Brazilianness are analyzed. The carioca lifestyle is addressed as the symbol of Brazilian lifestyle emphasizing the human body and sexuality. Brazil is presented as a tropical heaven. Özüdoğru extends the discussion of Brazilianness to local/global power relations in a highly globalized fashion scene.

Globalized identities are highlighted at trade shows. Lynda Dematteo considers the marketing transmutation of identities in the case study of the Made in Italy Fabrics Fair and the relationship between Italy and China. The regular occurrence of the main international textile fairs plays a leading role in the development of global fashion. The ethnographic description of this complex process makes it possible to grasp the major commercial issues of an industrial sector now dominated by China and to understand the transmutation in the marketing of national identities in the global scene on the basis of the case study of the Made in Italy Fabrics Fair. Milano Unica produces the value of the 100% Made in Italy fabrics by enhancing Italian heritage and know how so as to attract Chinese designers with a concern for environmental issues and product quality. The prestige of these intermediate products enables Chinese buyers to assert the high level of their nascent fashion houses. These business practices highlight the values hierarchy between established companies and newcomers.

Nafisa Tanjeem situates the experience of Bangladeshi garment workers producing clothes for global fashion brands against the backdrop of historical transnational solidarity building initiatives. She explores how COVID-19 has impacted these workers and transnational solidarity. Transnational labor organizing has historically taken a “spotlight” approach strategically or inadvertently – targeting one actor at a time and ignoring the broader political economy of the supply chain capitalism. This spotlight approach failed to address how global brands, governments, and local suppliers all played their unique roles in exploiting racialized and feminized labor of garment workers. The global COVID-19 pandemic revealed one additional example of the limited reach of this spotlight approach. To address pandemic-induced job losses and livelihood threats, transnational labor rights advocates extensively targeted global brands (and the global brands rightfully deserved these backlashes and critiques), ignoring how the Bangladesh government or the Bangladeshi garment factory owners played their part in worsening living and working conditions of garment workers. Hence, we see the continuation of a historical gap between priorities of “global” and “local” forms of labor organizing and a problematic tendency of coopting the narrative of survival of Bangladeshi garment workers by various local as well as global actors.

The importance of the secondhand clothing trade from preindustrial to contemporary times with a focus on New York is explored by Dicky Yangzom. The chapter is a brief survey of research on the cultural economy of secondhand clothing from the premodern period to more contemporary scholarships which focus on the United States, Europe, and the global market. Examining how the value of secondhand clothes have changed throughout history, the paper argues that economic value itself is embedded in cultural narratives that are shaped by nonlinear experiences of time and space. It concludes with potential directions for future research.

# CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE AS FASHION ICON: ADDRESSING NATIONALISM AND FEMINISM WITH STYLE

*Floriana Bernardi and Enrica Picarelli*

## Introduction

Intellectuals can make the difference and novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie must know this. The recipient of many awards and academic distinctions, Adichie has authored acclaimed fiction and non-fiction works, famously advocating for race and gender equality in TED talks that have become manifestos of inclusive politics. These public presentations contribute to Adichie's status of transmedia celebrity who navigates literary, intellectual, and popular arenas pushing a message of empowerment to a following that includes many celebrities.<sup>1</sup>

More relevant to our chapter is Adichie's love of fashion and commitment to promoting designers from Nigeria, her home country. She describes herself as someone who "likes shoes, and likes dresses, and likes makeup, and likes books, and likes to write"<sup>2</sup> and has a long history of collaborating with lifestyle brands, including *Boots No7*, *Glamour*, and *Vogue*. A postcolonial writer with a deep awareness of the implications of black embodiment in the dynamics of cultural production and marketing,<sup>3</sup> Adichie puts self-fashioning at the forefront of her public performance. Her enactment of a body politics centered on taking pride in the physical features that mark her as female and African – skin color, curves, coiled hair – ascribes agency to looks. She performs style to claim positionality and enact presence, offering a compelling case study of the ways the relationship of fashion with celebrity culture can be productive in cultural and political terms.

This chapter explores the role fashion plays in the making of Adichie as a persona of contemporary media culture, operating as the language that articulates a specific way of relating the social with the author's positioned self.<sup>4</sup> Particularly, we look at the "Wear Nigeria Project" Adichie promotes on Instagram to argue that this initiative sends a message of personal empowerment and a desirable re-narration of Nigeria and the whole African continent on global mainstream media.

### Adichie's love affair with fashion

Adichie's enthusiasm for fashion dates back to her childhood when she loved watching her mother get dressed for Mass and she adored the way her mother dressed her in pretty little-girl clothes, caring for every detail, from hairstyle to accessories.<sup>5</sup>

Those moments marked the initiation into a life-long ritual of expressing one's sense of self through fashion and, meanwhile, they illustrate its importance in the Nigerian context. As elsewhere in West Africa, in Nigeria self-styling conveys respectability and prestige.<sup>6</sup> Adichie explains that, throughout her childhood and teenage years, she was always dressed in the clothes she truly wanted to wear, something that helped her establish her place in the world. However, when she moved to the United States to attend college, she found that attention to one's appearance was discouraged.

I had learned a lesson about Western culture: women who wanted to be taken seriously were supposed to substantiate their seriousness with a studied indifference to appearance. [...]The only circumstances under which caring about clothes was acceptable was when making a statement, creating an image of some sort to be edgy, eclectic, counterculture. It could not merely be about taking pleasures in clothes.<sup>7</sup>

It took success and maturity to overcome this cultural shock and regain confidence in displaying her love of clothes. When she did, Adichie took a serious commitment to expose the complicity of fashion with a global system of inequality. Fashion is not neutral, write Lynch and Medvedev, and demands attention as the most immediate means a woman has of performing agency.<sup>8</sup> Adichie's style choices stake new claims on Nigeria's place in the world, claims that play into her marketing of herself as an engaged Afropolitan intellectual.<sup>9</sup> Afropolitans are mobile Africans who proclaim their belonging to multiple locales and cultures. Their sartorial choices express this liquid identification, which rejects Western views of the continent as "an object apart from the world"<sup>10</sup> and essentialist notions that see it as impervious to the passage of time. Adichie, who has crafted her public persona on her status of global citizen living between Nigeria and the United States, references Afropolitanism in her acclaimed novel *Americanah* (2013), where she examines the politics of black appearance in the West via the foils of fashion and hair-styling.

More and more in the past five years, her concerns have crossed from fiction into reality, prompting the writer to speak up on fashion's complicity in reproducing inequalities.

I began to resist some standard ideas and language of global — which is to say narrowly western — fashion. The depiction of bright colors as bold or daring, black as the unimpeachable hallmark of sophistication, and beige as neutral, for example, were based on a specific pale-skinned standard. For a dark-skinned person, blue might be a better black, brighter colors more ordinary than daring, and neutral negotiable.<sup>11</sup>

Adichie acknowledges that, far from expressing frivolous concerns, these accepted rules of appearance affect the marketing and reception of her work, as they inform the expectations of what a global intellectual is expected to look like and, by extension, communicate. As a reaction, she grounds her public life in her body, and more specifically, in its defining features and surface, which she enhances with styles expressing an idea of beauty crafting a glamorous aesthetic of African stylishness.

As with many other celebrities, her sartorial choices are the object of frequent scrutiny, more so since she expressed the desire to exclusively wear Nigerian designers. This choice gives material manifestation to many of the themes informing her writing – female empowerment, African self-assertion, decolonization – while aligning it to other notable figures who call attention to the normative limitations affecting black persons on the international scene. Celebrities like Nigerian writer and photographer Teju Cole, Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong'o, and African-American performers Beyoncé and Solange Knowles, mobilize fashion to incite discussions on inclusivity, diversity, and black identity. Their iconic status confers designers from the global South a certain discursive power, channeling their voices into the media systems as being legitimately significant,<sup>12</sup> thus adding further value to their creations. Adichie shows that the choice of wearing styles by African designers may reinforce a celebrity's appeal by linking her/him to the cause of minority empowerment. The following section describes the status of the Nigerian fashion industry in the second half of the 2010s and the context that spurred Adichie to promote it.

### **Fashion in Nigeria**

In 2017, Adichie created the “Wear Nigeria Project” Instagram account, devoted to documenting her support of Nigerian designers and showcasing diversity in fashion.

It was 2016 and Nigeria's economy was in chaos [...] suddenly everyone was talking about “buy Nigerian products to grow the naira”. The political rhetoric gave me an idea: what if I wore only Nigerian designers to public events? I would be supporting the different layers of the industry [...] and I hoped to bring other buyers to Nigerian brands.<sup>13</sup>

At that time, Nigerian designers were facing a difficult and contradictory situation. On the one hand, oil trade had spurred a positive micro-economic performance that sustained a strong appetite in the country for luxury goods, making the creative sector top the gross value of 2.5 billion naira.<sup>14</sup> On the other, the lack of sustained public support and chronic infrastructural deficiencies had brought the fall of the textile manufacture, begun in the 1990s, to 75%, thus hampering production capabilities. All the while, Nigerian fashion had been enjoying increased global visibility, with a handful of designers garnering global acclaim. Dubbed the “African fashion Renaissance,”<sup>15</sup> this contingency marks the controversial idea of African fashion's graduation, in the global eye, from “tribal” to innovative, and from being the recipient of, to producing modern styles. As Jennings argues, this shift in perspective can be linked to an inability on the part of the old fashion capitals to provide global consumers with goods evoking ideas of authenticity and uniqueness.<sup>16</sup> While this is certainly true, the phenomenon was equally spearheaded by local creatives, who have been making the most of Africa's fast digital growth<sup>17</sup> by deploying mobile technologies to increase their outreach and visibility and establish international collaborations.

Adichie launched her project at this time, donning Nigerian designs to showcase the sector's rich offer of quality craftsmanship and materials. The “Lagos” section of *Fashion Cities Africa*<sup>18</sup> offers an overview of this scene with its sociocultural meanings. Brands like Dakova, Deola Sagoe, Jewel by Lisa, Ikiré Jones, Maki Oh, Lanre da Silva Ajaye, I.Am.Isigo, Orange Culture, and Kenneth Ize, promote cultural sustainability and diversity, while catering to global demands for luxury and innovation. They preserve heritage using hand-made techniques and textiles (*adire*, *aso-oke*, *akwa ocha*, and *oja*), while channeling messages of empowerment and equality.

Essentially, the focus is on promoting pride in being African by creating narratives around the clothes and the people who make and wear them. For these brands, color, silhouette, and patterns express the Afropolitan value of individuality, while affirming the local heritage.

As Africans the world over are faced with a racist emergency accelerating the ongoing global conversation on black self-assertion, fashion offers a democratic platform to explore ways to claim the right to equality. Adichie puts her visibility in the service of the argument for a southern perspective on global fashion,<sup>19</sup> acting also as role model for generations of sartorially savvy individuals from the continent eager to assert the international relevance of Afrocentric fashionability. This audience is the backbone of Adichie's project. Nigerians are style-savvy and very active on social media. Yet, whereas in the past they mostly bought their garments abroad, now they favor local production,<sup>20</sup> sustaining a luxury economy that is as much physical, as it is visual. This means that the acclaim of Nigerian fashion is also a function of a representational economy revolving around the ability to attach aesthetic and cultural value to "things, experiences, places, embodied selves, brands,"<sup>21</sup> deploying fashion's power to craft atmospheres to designate Lagos, Nigeria's principal fashion hub, as a global destination. The augmented status of the "mediatized"<sup>22</sup> experience enacted on social media by Adichie enhances Nigeria's participation in the creation of a global network of meanings, goods, trends, and relations that has its core in the positive reclamation of African culture. So to speak about African fashion at this historical juncture is to speak about globalization and the networks of power affecting our tastes and performances of self.

The next section explores how Adichie's fashion statements address these issues. They embrace the goal of safeguarding her cultural heritage by showcasing its value for Nigeria's economy and ambition of becoming a superpower. More importantly, they question the assumptions and politics of representation underlying the cultural industry, making the case for more diversity and a new idea of desirability on mainstream media.

### **#Project Wear Nigeria: fashion, politics, (post)feminism**

Adichie's page, counting about 600,000 followers as of July 2020, presents her as a distinguished fashionista, who puts her celebrity status in the service of the Nigerian creative industry.

The account documents the writer's articulation of the self through her choice of outfits, functioning like a "personal fashion blog."<sup>23</sup> Adichie uses hashtags referencing fashion/beauty, like #madeinNigeria, #naturalhair, and #OOTD (the acronym for "outfit of the day"). She is mainly portrayed standing or in frontal stylish poses giving a full view of her outfits, often smiling or in laid-back poses with a flawless hairstyle and makeup. Adichie's posts rarely capture moments of her private life, focusing instead on her appearances at prize ceremonies, literary festivals, social dinners, etc. Accordingly, the settings include stages, the halls, and courtyards of public institutions all over the world, the venues where she gives lectures, but also their backstage, and elegantly furnished private rooms. The goal of the pictures is to show her interpretation of dress as a mode of personal expression. The captions list the name of the designer and photographer and the location of the picture. The comment section is sometimes disabled.

Adichie emerges from Instagram's array of posed shots as an elegant woman who enjoys sporting the occasional edgy piece and stand-out detail, always careful to deliver a feminine look that exalts her body shape and skin color. Her outfits are mostly sourced from luxury brands like Style Temple, Moofa, and Maki Oh, although she is sometimes portrayed in more affordable garments, including Grey, or MsBeeFab. Sometimes she explains her choice of style, like in a post from April 24, 2018, where she is portrayed wearing trousers by Emmy Kasbit at

The Igbo Conference organized by London's SOAS Centre for African Studies, where she was the keynote speaker. As a proud Igbo woman, Adichie's choice of wearing garments by Emmy Kasbit,<sup>24</sup> with its aesthetic of clean architectural cuts featuring indigenous textiles like *akwete* (traditional Igbo woven cloth) although reinvented in an unconventional way, reflects her personal history and situated status within Nigeria's multicultural ecosystem. Like the aforementioned brands, Emmy Kasbit practices "cultural" fashion.<sup>25</sup> It explores and re-discovers local traditions and techniques, educating customers on sometimes forgotten histories to incite love and respect for them. The strong narrative elements of the designs inspire a storytelling aesthetic and a subgenre of visual representation marked by the organic fusion of design and place, foregrounding situatedness and temporality.

Adichie's Instagram feed adds to the inter-cultural dialogue spurred by African fashion production, offering a constantly updated lookbook of trends that play into her goal of upending unilateral views of elegance. Her deliberate snub of Western designs induces a reckoning with the power structures that inform our daily choices of self-expression and perceptions of empowerment. Her goal, as stated in an interview with *I-D*, is to denounce the "commercial reasoning for excluding people" whose looks do not conform with normative standards of beauty.<sup>26</sup> "Project Wear Nigeria" is, therefore, politically motivated, as it exposes fashion's complex system of material and symbolic signification and its implications for identity politics.<sup>27</sup>

This deployment of the clothed body exposes the entanglements of normativity and global influence, investing style with the critical power to question accepted norms of self-presentation and the white Western ideal they promote. This is particularly true if we look into the meanings behind the hashtag #naturalhair, often deployed on Instagram by Adichie. As a recent exhibition at the Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum has displayed, the topic of Afro-hair is inseparable from fashion: first it is part of an individual's stylistic look and, most importantly, it is a site of colonial regimes, in terms of their practices of regimentation.<sup>28</sup> The policing of black hair goes back to the slave trade, when women of African descent were often prohibited from showing their hair in public. To this day, wearing black natural hair in one's own style (Afros, cornrows, dreadlocks, twists, braids, and Bantu knots) can lead to harassment and public censure in countries like the United States or South Africa.<sup>29</sup> This is the reason why, as Thompson points out, "talks about black hair are not just about hair, they are about identity and the juxtaposition of hegemonic norms and black subjectivity."<sup>30</sup> Following Thompson, who identifies two waves of hair movements, Cruz Gutierrez believes we are now living a "third wave of hair movements," started in the late 2000s, and strictly connected with the popularization of social networks. Like the first two waves, unanimously understood as "socio-political demonstrations that originated in the US and directed towards the importance of Black natural hair in processes of identity formation,"<sup>31</sup> also this third wave has to do with the "efforts to elaborate counter-discursive formations that undermine the pervasive impact of the Western beauty canon, which has permeated in the everyday praxis of Black women's socialization since the slavery period."<sup>32</sup> What is more, the current hair movement can count on the online platforms and communities (blogs, vlogs, social networks) as spaces of diffusion and creativity, where the free expression of the self is encouraged and beauty canons can be more easily challenged.

Blogging and online communities are the spaces new women's struggles in today's fourth wave of feminism (or post-feminism) travel through.<sup>33</sup> Multiple artists also maintain that wherever Black hair is safe, Black people are too. A representative example is Laetitia Ky, a feminist visual and fashion designer from the Ivory Coast, whose hair sculptures made with her locks promote a vision of African beauty grounded in pre-colonial aesthetic traditions, which also works as a commitment to body-positivity and a precise feminist politics. Her works, and those of others like the Kenyan-German artist Mwangi Hutter, indicate that the act of dealing



with black natural hair and African g/local fashion from the pages of a celebrity Instagram profile like Adichie's is a kind of activist strategy incorporating dress and hairstyle. Put more simply, it is a way to inspire a politics of appearance and visibility marking the transitioning<sup>34</sup> towards self-understanding, self-determination, agency. Basically, it can be read as a strategy to mark the passage "from a position of controlled submissive subjects to that of empowered social agents."<sup>35</sup>

And so, what is the power of Adichie's Instagram images in this process? Digital communication has played a big part in the racial assertion of Africans, as images are the first and easiest commodities creatives can circulate and an instant means of expressing "the social value placed on innovation."<sup>36</sup> More importantly, digital images are tools to claim agency and inscribe users into global systems of signification, where their style choices produce not only identities, but social capital and actual monetary value.<sup>37</sup> If listened together, scrolling down Adichie's Instagram grid, her photos seem to interpellate black bodies and their agency. Her profile looks like a self-fashioning catalogue of Nigerian fashion, championing a celebrity writer and activist as a model whose message has some of the traits of the "black feminist futurity" theorized by Camp: "a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future now – as imperative rather than subjunctive – as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present."<sup>38</sup> By portraying an image of success as a woman and a writer and by showing off proudly the creations of Nigerian fashion designers, Adichie expresses the desire—for black women, for people from Nigeria and Africa at large, as well as for herself—"to be seen, to be photographed, to be visible and to matter" as "unbounded black subjects," to again quote Camp.<sup>39</sup> Her fashion performance articulates and negotiates a notion of identity that brings together two elements – that of fashionable woman and acclaimed writer – which are generally regarded as mutually exclusive. She reclaims fashion from an African stance to express this complexity, making it instrumental to trouble normative codes of representation and presentation of beauty. Finally, she adds a further layer of complexity to the performance by underscoring the diversity and richness of the fashions produced in Africa by carefully showcasing exclusively Nigerian designers.

## Conclusions

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Instagram profile advertises Nigerian designers with the aim of breaking down limited markers of identity, pushing forward a message of emancipation and self-ownership for African women. Her support of the national fashion industry participates in the debate on cultural fashion by placing Nigeria at the forefront of a movement of reclamation mobilizing bodily practices of presentation and self-styling to re-route the flows of signification and production that sustain the global fashion industry. By doing so, Adichie links her celebrity status to that of her home country. Further research will highlight if and how Adichie's deployment of her body as a strategy of self-branding and nation/continent branding can actually serve and reinforce a de-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and inherently feminist practice of construction of a new body of the *Nation*.

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# TRANSFORMATION OF THE “MADE IN ...” LABEL: COUNTRIES AS BRANDS AND THE HIDDEN GLOBAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

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## **Introduction: “Made in ...” as a guarantee of quality?**

The “Made in” label plays an important role in the consumption of fashion, especially luxury consumption: the country of origin (COO) often functions as a guarantee of quality and craftsmanship to customers, as well as a source of trust regarding the conditions of production. The latter is becoming increasingly important with the growth of the “conscious” or “ethical consumption” movement.<sup>1</sup> While consumers in countries of the global core tend to associate the label “Made in China” to either cheap, mass-produced products, or imitation or counterfeit items, luxury labels of Italy and France symbolize the local fashion industry heritage and the associated professional experience, and thus carry high prestige. Regardless, due to global economic relations as well as regulations, this relationship between the label and the country brand may serve to obscure the actual geography of the global commodity chain, as well as the conditions of production, which are often deeply exploitative. In the neoliberal capitalist world system, in order to cut costs, production has often been outsourced not only to countries of the global periphery, as the better-known examples of Asian (e.g. Bangladeshi) sweatshops suggest, but also within countries of the core (e.g. Italy) or from the core to the semi-periphery (e.g. Eastern Europe), although these have been less visible. Moreover, the meanings of labels change along with global economic changes. For instance, the mentioned association of the “Made in China” tag with cheapness and poor quality, arising from China’s particular position in the global commodity chain from the 1970s, has weakened with the rise of luxury production within China and the emergence of a domestic elite characterized by a conspicuous consumption of these products. Based on secondary literature as well as our own qualitative interviews with fashion industry workers and experts, in the following we explore this transformation of the “Made in” label, the relations of global production that remain obscured by it, and reflect on the particularities of the legal system that makes this possible. We have selected the examples of Italy and Eastern Europe – which are themselves connected in the global commodity chain of fashion.

## The global commodity chain of fashion and the neoliberal order

The fashion, and, more broadly, garment industry, is a global industry – in fact, “the most globalized industry of all.”<sup>2</sup> Rooted in world-systems analysis, the *global commodity chain* (GCC), and more recently, *global value chain* (GVC) perspectives have contributed “theoretically to our understanding of how the global economy works, and in particular how power is exercised in global industries,”<sup>3</sup> and to analyzing “the international division of labor characteristic of capitalist production.”<sup>4</sup> The “global apparel value chain” can be described as consisting of *raw material networks*, *component networks* (textile companies producing fabric, synthetic fibers, etc.), *production networks* (apparel manufacturers), including US garment factories and Latin-American and Asian (sub)contractors, *export networks* (brand-name apparel companies, overseas buying offices, trading companies), and *marketing networks* (department stores, etc.).<sup>5</sup>

The GCC literature distinguishes between *producer-driven* and *buyer-driven* commodity chains,<sup>6</sup> where the former refers to “more capital-intensive industries (e.g. motor vehicles) in which powerful manufacturers control and often own several tiers of vertically-organized suppliers,” while the latter is characterized by “far-flung subcontracting networks [which] are managed with varying degrees of closeness by designers, retailers and other brand-name firms that market, but do not necessarily make, the products that are sold under their label.”<sup>7</sup> The garment and fashion industry has clearly been shifting towards the latter type. Profit here comes “from combinations of high-value research, design, sales, marketing, and financial services that allow the retailers, designers and marketers to act as strategic brokers in linking overseas factories and traders with product niches in their main consumer markets,”<sup>8</sup> and a small number of brand companies are in control of manufacturing. These are mostly based in the EU and the United States, after the industry having undergone a strong process of concentration through mergers and acquisitions in the 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

The geography of the global commodity chain of fashion has been shaped by companies searching for lower labor costs in an environment of increasing competition. Subcontracting, together with processes of delocalization, have been an ever-present, but recently intensifying feature of the industry, and it has in a large part relied on a mass incorporation of unorganized – mostly female and migrant – labor into the workforce,<sup>10</sup> typically through homeworking or small inner-city workshops.<sup>11</sup> Instead of focusing on developing technology, the industry has largely relied on the strategy of exploiting labor, which has been assisted by the so-called sweating system,<sup>12</sup> characterized by extremely poor, near-slave labor conditions. Delocalization in the garment industry already began in the 1950s, with Japanese, European, and American companies offshoring production to Southeast Asia (and West Germany to Eastern Europe), but it intensified with post-Fordist production and the “increased financialization of the world economy,”<sup>13</sup> in other words, the era of neoliberal capitalism. With regard to labor, this shift has signified a “move away from regular employment towards increasing reliance upon part-time, temporary and subcontracted work arrangements.”<sup>14</sup> The collective response of manufacturing companies to the shift was a decreasing of industrial production in the core countries of the capitalist world system, which appeared as “de-industrialization” from the perspective of core economies.

Due to the media coverage of sweatshop exploitation through widely publicized stories – industry “scandals,” often accompanying such tragedies as the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh – public opinion continues to associate sweatshops mostly with East and Southeast Asia. However, poor, even sweatshop labor conditions with below-subsistence wages and a lack of unionization are also prevalent in core countries of Europe (e.g. in Italy, one of the case studies of Montero), as well as the United States (e.g. Los Angeles<sup>15</sup>). In fact, this tendency has

been driven by the ever-growing importance of the speed of production in the fashion industry, the fast-paced changes in fashion trends and the “high elasticity of demand”<sup>16</sup> within an extremely high-risk and competitive economic environment. This has also resulted in an increase of domestic production, which helps drive down costs of transport. A recent report refers to this process as *nearshoring*.<sup>17</sup> The report places an emphasis on the desirability of technological development for the industry, which is supposed to contribute to sustainability – yet it fails to offer any discussion of the consequences with regard to labor.

### Made in Italy: regulation and labor

In the fashion industry – and here we focus on the luxury end of the fashion industry in particular – the values associated with the *country of origin* (COO) are manifest in a country image and origin effect.<sup>18</sup> This is especially strong in the luxury sector, and few countries possess the reputation of the Italian fashion industry – a centuries-old tradition ensuring that the “Made in Italy” label remains a strong marketing statement, particularly in the case of leather goods such as shoes and bags (Figure 23.1). However, displaying the COO, although permitted, is not compulsory in the case of products manufactured and distributed within the EU, on the basis that this would contradict the principle of the free movement of goods;<sup>19</sup> and, indeed, that displaying the COO favors countries with traditional prestige in the fashion industry. On EU level, there are no harmonized measures or unified practice in terms of origin marking (with the exception of a number of special cases in the agricultural sector), yet many companies choose to use origin markings on a voluntary basis, and there are also national-level regulations.

Labelling became an issue on EU level following the Italian 55/2010 regulation (“Provisions concerning the commercialization of textiles, leather goods and footwear”), also known as the “Made in Italy” bill, through which Italy introduced a compulsory labeling system in the textile, garment, interior design, footwear, and leather goods sectors for ready and semi-finished products.<sup>20</sup> Santo Versace, one of the former owners of the Versace fashion house and a former member of the Italian Parliament, is known to have lobbied for the law.<sup>21</sup> Donatella Versace, the creative director and “face” of Versace, has declared that the company would not



Figure 23.1 “Made in Italy.” Photograph by Dóra Békefi

manufacture any product outside of Italy, which is part of the brand strategy and a source of pride for them.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the regulation pointed to the conflicting interests of companies producing small batches and those producing large batches and making use of the offshoring of manufacturing.<sup>23</sup> According to the bill, the label has to orientate the consumer with regard to workplace health and safety regulations, as well as environmental aspects, and that no underage labor was involved in the manufacturing of the product. This regulation enables the use of “Made in Italy” for any finished product that had gone through at least two – traceable – processing phases domestically. According to fashion law expert Katalin Daszkalovics,

This is taken so seriously in Italy that if someone uses a label unlawfully, misleading the consumer by suggesting that the product (...) or even just the design or the packaging was done in Italy in its entirety, they face sanctions specified in Article 517 of the Criminal Code – imprisonment of up to one year and four months and a very high – to my latest knowledge, maximum 26,000-euro – fine.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, domestic production in Italy takes place within a complex and historically shaped structure. Thanks to a loose immigration policy, favorable social benefits and healthcare services during the 1970s, Italy became a primary destination for migrating Chinese.<sup>25</sup> This increase in population provided an opportunity for the northern Italian town of Prato to gain independence from the city of Florence.<sup>26</sup> During the 2000s, and in line with a transition from the welfare state to an increasingly neoliberalized economy, immigrant Chinese in Prato became entrepreneurs from subcontractors to Italian firms,<sup>27</sup> and eventually managed to turn the former textile industry center into a manufacturing center supplying cheaper-priced goods.<sup>28</sup> Today, there are several thousand SMEs here producing “Pronto Moda” (fast fashion) items of clothing, footwear and accessories, while navigating a complex bureaucracy and engaging in tax evasion and informal labor practices.<sup>29</sup>

According to an interviewed female worker with decades of experience in Italian leather industry manufacturing, the fact that Italy had begun offshoring manufacturing to Asia about 20 years previously (in the 1990s) in hope of better profit had harmed the Italian fashion industry:

Since the fabrics were also developed [in Asia] and manufacturing had also been outsourced, companies indeed made significant profit, while at the same time many small and medium-sized family enterprises became bankrupt and many people with expertise were forced to find work in other fields in order to make ends meet.<sup>30</sup>

She also talks about Italian-Chinese companies in Tuscany, who

work with half the hourly rate [of Italian companies], but in addition to Italian manufacturers, they are also competing with Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian ones. This is only possible by not declaring every [worker] or having them do an enormous amount of unpaid overtime.<sup>31</sup>

In South Italy, thousands of workers work from their home or in small workshops, underpaid, without contract or any kind of security, on products of luxury brands. This is a good indication that global capitalism and competition penetrating all market segments have also affected luxury brand companies. In Italy there is no minimum wage regulation;<sup>32</sup> according to trade unions and consultancy groups, an hourly rate of 5 to 7 euros would be adequate.<sup>33</sup> However, women working from home in the Puglia region receive remuneration on a piece-rate basis, as opposed

to an hourly rate, earning less than the mentioned amount. According to Deborah Lucchetti from Abiti Puliti, the Italian “leg” of the anti-sweatshop advocacy group Clean Clothes Campaign, the fact that a majority of Italian luxury brands have outsourced their manufacturing instead of using their own factories have contributed to the creation of a status quo that permits exploitation, in particular of people working outside the range of unions or even brands<sup>34</sup> – and much of this kind of exploitation takes place domestically or – as we will show in the next section – in the semi-peripheral countries of Europe. Many brands work with local suppliers from the region that contract with manufacturers on the brands’ behalf. A decreasing lead time (the total time required to produce a garment or accessories before shipment of the order) has facilitated the breaking down of manufacturing and distribution among a number of different subcontractors, while depressed prices have fostered informal labor conditions.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the commodity chain, we find not only fast-fashion pieces, but also luxury products with a high handicraft need that are being made for low wages – unbeknown to the consumer on the basis of the final retail price and the brand image.

### **Eastern Europe: an invisible tailor shop**

During the era of the command economy, garment was a relatively neglected, yet not insignificant industry in Eastern Europe: the Council for Mutual Assistance provided a reliable market for products manufactured in the socialist countries. This network, however, was discontinued after the 1989–1990 regime change, with the trade of countries in the region redirected towards the EU. Eastern European companies benefited from already existing contracting connections, which meant a lifebuoy for them. Their dependence on contract work had escalated already before the regime change, and especially during the 1990s, and local textile manufacturing was subsequently reduced. Without locally available materials and tools, Eastern-European garment manufacturers had little opportunity to export locally developed and designed products.<sup>36</sup>

From the 1990s, an outward processing trade (OPT) has been in place between the European Union and Eastern European countries (now also within the EU) such as Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.<sup>37</sup> Within this scheme, contractors transport semi-processed products (fabric, cuttings or semi-finished products) to low-wage subcontractors in Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries for assembly and intermediary work processes, then import them back duty-free, and the product is “made in labelled” as the original – Western European – country. Thanks to the OPT, these Eastern European countries have come to serve as the “sewing workshops” of western world brands – mostly German, Italian, and French companies.<sup>38</sup> Although the textile industry comprises a small proportion of industrial production in these countries, it employs a large number of workers – particularly in Poland, Romania, and Czechia.<sup>39</sup> With the growing globalization of the garment industry, mass production has mainly taken place in Asia from the 1990s, but in a new global division of labor, Eastern European manufacturers remained the producers of higher quality, premium, smaller-scale collections.

Garment manufacturers of the Federal Republic of Germany already shifted production to Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries starting from the early 1970s. These companies established a strong political lobby power and managed to secure conditions favorable to them.<sup>40</sup> In the 1990s, Italy, Switzerland, and the Netherlands also began to outsource their garment production. The Yugoslav Wars led to production being moved from there to Romania, Bulgaria, and other Eastern European countries. The attractiveness of the region for Western companies lies in its geographical as well as cultural proximity, existing manufacturing



capacities, a qualified workforce, and low-level adherence to national labor laws.<sup>41</sup> The majority of Eastern European textile and garment companies have remained trapped as subcontractors: most of them profit from the reorganizing of manufacturing to Europe, the reduction of working capital and lead time, and indirectly from the growing export of buyers.<sup>42</sup> After 1989, the vocational training system also collapsed in the region; consequently, most of the workers are sewing operatives, often low-skilled and trained on the job.<sup>43</sup>

The Clean Clothes Campaign report *Labour on a Shoestring*<sup>44</sup> revealed that well-known shoes labelled and perceived as Italian and German are in reality manufactured in Eastern European under poor, sweatshop-like labor conditions, with workers receiving very low wages. For the mentioned report, shoe factory workers were interviewed in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. In all six countries, the workers' wages were insufficient for their own, let alone their families' subsistence, and the factories failed to maintain adequate working conditions.

According to a leather manufacturer from the region, which had performed manufacturing for foreign world brands,

[t]hose companies that have [product] development in Italy, for instance, like going to Eastern Europe. They have smaller quantities, such as a few hundred items, produced here, since it is faster than taking it to China, and Eastern Europe produces good quality, Romania and Bulgaria are in a good position in this respect.<sup>45</sup>

The Italian-Chinese companies discussed previously are also affecting the situation of Eastern European manufacturers, since many of the buyers work with Italian and Eastern European suppliers parallel. So their depressed prices also impact Eastern European orders. From time to time, scandals erupt around certain Western brands (e.g. Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Prada or Hugo Boss) regarding the poor and informal working conditions under which their products are manufactured. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that certain subcontractors restructure production assigned to them according to their own profit interests, the interviewed leather manufacturer argues that

[t]here is regulation and there are economic opportunities. The subcontractor has me do one half of the order, the other half with a Chinese-Italian company, but they're stressing me at the same time, saying how effectively they work. Even if there was a scandal and it turns out that a company had made use of undeclared Chinese labor through a company registered to a stooge, they throw up their hands saying they don't know anything about this, since they had only outsourced it to a subcontractor. But at the same time, they communicate the expectation regarding the hourly rate towards the subcontractor, so they push [production] in this direction themselves. Everything has a price, they know what costs how much where, the price is dictated by the buyer.<sup>46</sup>

The quote also points to the competition among subcontractors and how companies are using it to place pressure on them, affecting labor conditions in a negative way. Even though the world brands they work for could in theory serve as a source of prestige for Eastern European manufacturers, many of them have no website and they keep their client a secret:

I do not have a website, I couldn't even indicate my references. It is discretion – no one says who they work for. I wouldn't call it an unwritten rule. But I have the feeling that brands wouldn't be happy if it was found out.<sup>47</sup>

According to the manufacturers, the past five years – which roughly coincides with the “Made in Italy” bill entering into force, along with the associated sanctions – had brought changes for the previously entirely hidden commodity chain. Previously, however, brands and sub-contractors used various creative ways to circumvent regulation.

Since now in such cases it is the company whose brand is found in the factory that is charged with a fine, it has been a clear tendency for luxury brands to create their own factories, especially leather factories around Florence. Now they put “Made in Hungary” in. Five or ten years ago companies sometimes asked us to leave a small, not easily accessible opening where they could place the Italy label. A direct [sub-contractor] contact of mine told me that there was also a practice of a shipment leaving [Eastern Europe], which was scrapped and destroyed on paper, then “re-manufactured” on paper in their own Italian factory.<sup>48</sup>

While for Western-European consumers, “Made in Europe” signals a kind of guarantee for reasonable working conditions and wages, the above shows that this often proves to be an illusion.

## **Conclusions**

COO markings in many cases communicate a false idea towards the consumer with regard to the conditions of manufacturing. As a consequence of the organization of the global commodity chain of the fashion and garment industries, the stark competition between brands and the pressure of the market, it is workers at the lower end of the chain – subcontractors of the subcontractors – whose exploitation remains hidden this way. Whether it is a more broadly affordable fast fashion or high end or luxury product, marking the COO is no guarantee of adequate labor conditions or fair wages.

In the Italian case, the “Made in Italy” label can be lawfully used if the product is entirely produced in Italy – design, origin of the raw material, as well as manufacturing. This means that the national COO law – labor and tax laws are an entirely different matter – is broken neither if, within the national borders, it is Chinese companies that manufacture the product, nor if it is produced within the informal economy, under uncontrolled circumstances, without contracts and union protection, for low hourly rates by workers working from home. The Italian example also illustrates the ways in which regulation obscures various social and economic conflicts of interest. On an EU level, the legal circumstances secured by the OPT scheme have contributed towards the establishing of a hierarchical division of labor, where Eastern European subcontractors in competition with one another as well as their Asian counterparts serve brands in the core countries of the EU. These Eastern European manufacturing companies are also characterized by poor labor conditions and low wages, in contrast with what the “Made in Europe” label is generally assumed to signify.

An important question is whether the increasingly conscious group of fashion consumers, understood to assign significance to transparency and ethical labor practices, is powerful enough to place pressure on fashion brands to attempt meaningful change in these practices – deeply embedded in the logic of the global capitalist world system. There is a tension between the economic interests of brands, the transparent informing of consumers, between legislation and legal practice. What effective changes the moving of fashion industry production back to the core countries are going to bring to workers remains yet another question, yet industry reports discussing “nearshoring” appear not to pay any attention to questions of labor.

## Notes

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*Transformation of the “Made in ...” label*

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# THE ITALIAN LOOK, OR THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF FASHION

*Emanuela Scarpellini*

## **The birth of Italian fashion**

When, in Paris, in 1947, Christian Dior presented his new collection to the public and to the press, it was immediately dubbed the “New Look,” seemingly confirming that the long-proclaimed world capital of fashion had fully reprised its international role. The creators of the main clothing market, guided by the detailed regulations stipulated by the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* in 1868, thus resumed once again their work after the long parenthesis of World War II. Glamorous fashion shows, great tailors and dressmakers, prestigious ateliers, an exclusive clientele: everything contributed to the allure of Parisian *haute couture*.<sup>1</sup>

The domination of Paris could not be called into question by any other city in the fashion world. Neither London – although it had established itself in men's clothing by virtue of the iconic tailors of Savile Row, and its emerging sports productions – nor New York – efficiently producing a different style of apparel in Seventh Avenue, clothing more suited to everyday life connoting greater informality<sup>2</sup> – could follow suit. Moreover, everything led to thinking this situation would remain unchanged in the ensuing years.

Instead, the second half of the twentieth century held many surprises in store, with the advance of the mass society and the youth revolution, the establishment of Swinging London and an American casual style, the many internal transformations in French fashion itself, and finally the emergence of a new protagonist, Italy, in an initial phase with Florence and Rome as fashion centers, and then more definitively with the advent of Milan in the 1970s. What were the characteristics prompting the emergence of this new fashion capital? Can we discern certain particularities characterizing the Italian response as compared to that of its competitors on the international market? Finally, given the current state of affairs, does it still make sense to talk about “national fashions” in the context of increasing globalization?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to retrace the history of Italian fashion's success within an international framework.

In the first place, it is essential to remember that attempts to create a distinct Italian fashion had already begun at the onset of the twentieth century, thanks to the work of some visionary pioneers. For example, Rosa Genoni, an extraordinary organizer of cultural events and fashion schools, paid particular attention to the dissemination of practical knowledge among women, motivated by the idea of a rebirth of Italian fashion that would draw inspiration from

Renaissance models.<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Futurist movement drew up various manifestos (this plural form has become more common) on fashion, because they considered male and female clothing a fundamental element of the revolution, both artistic and in terms of lifestyle, and sought to launch and inculcate these ideals in Italy.<sup>4</sup> It was above all the fascist regime that strove to expedite a turning point by promoting Italian sartorial productions in the name of self-sufficiency, and as part of a broader nationalistic project. Fashion shows, conferences, major propaganda demonstrations, fairs, public bodies: everything had to contribute to creating a new “Italian style” necessarily countering the highly applauded French model. However, having failed to elicit responses from the productive sphere, the top-bottom project proved ineffectual.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, starting in the 1950s, the production of clothing increased. Often referenced as a pivotal date in the rediscovery and renewal of Italian fashion, February 12, 1951, marked the staging of the famous fashion show organized in Florence by Giovanni Battista Giorgini, attended by many American buyers and important representatives of the international press.<sup>6</sup> It was the beginning of a commercial success based on a new image, identifying Italian fashion as a high-quality product, albeit less formal in style than that of French high fashion, and available at much lower prices: an ideal product for large American department stores. In fact, these were garments produced in small series, often defined as “boutique fashion,” mainly made and supplied by small-scale producers.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this initial favorable outcome – mainly involving the metropolitan areas of Florence and Rome – the foundations for a lasting international success had yet to be built. This goal would be achieved in the 1970s via a new approach, characterizing Italian productions in an original way, thanks to a new breed of fashion designers and the growth of Milan as the new fashion capital. A different approach was adopted: ready-to-wear clothes designed by the designers. Hence, another fashion show is deemed historically significant: the first ever held by a fashion designer in Milan. On April 27, 1971, Walter Albini’s models wore clothes he himself had designed, and which were produced by specialized clothing companies, thus introducing for the very first time the new *prêt-à porter* model to the public.<sup>8</sup>

To understand the bases on which this success was built, it is essential to analyze the distinctive actors, structures, practices and watershed events intervening in the formulation of an Italian system of fashion production.

## **Textile production**

The ongoing vitality and longevity of textile tradition and production is one of the historical distinctions of Italy as pertains to the fashion industry. Since the country was relatively lacking in raw materials, it always resorted to importing raw cotton and the bulk of wool fiber, especially that of high quality. Its specialty became the subsequent transformation of these unprocessed resources into semi-finished or finished products, namely into yarns and fabrics.

By the early nineteenth century, areas of specialization for wool processing had emerged in the northern regions of Piedmont and Veneto, as well as in Tuscany (where they worked above all with the regeneration of rags). These regions witnessed the consolidation of some large companies, such as that of Alessandro Rossi in Schio and Gaetano Marzotto in Valdagno, as well as various factories in the areas of Biella, more precisely those of Zegna, Loro Piana, and Rivetti. All these cases involved setting up modern structures, equipped with state-of-the-art mechanical equipment representing a capital-intensive industry.<sup>9</sup>

Lombardy, on the other hand, was the leading region for the production of cotton yarns and fabrics, likewise widespread in other regions.<sup>10</sup> In this sector, the names of families that were

often the protagonists of the political and civil life of the country stood out, specially the Cantoni in Legnano, the Ponti in Solbiate Olona, and the Crespi in Capriate. Cotton and woolen textiles developed into a stable and important component of Italian manufacturing production and exports, in tandem with two important additions.

Firstly, silk production came to play a leading role, thus supplying the most expensive and prized yarns and fabrics used for centuries to produce the most sophisticated fashions. At the end of the nineteenth century, the most markedly industrial production phases began to migrate from the small workshops near the silkworm farms, to real industries outfitted with new textile machines. The most profitable area was located in the north of Lombardy, with Como as a reference center,<sup>11</sup> where most of the silk production was concentrated. It achieved impressive numbers: during the 1901–1910 decade, Italy produced about 5,500 tons of raw silk, maintaining a high production up to the 1931–1940 decade (3,000 tons).<sup>12</sup> All this created specific professional specializations, handed down over time, which covered the entire production chain: from the early stages of the quasi-agricultural processing of the rearing of the silkworms to the coloring and printing of fabric, with long-term consequences for the development in successive epochs.

The second fundamental element to be taken into consideration in explaining the characteristics of Italian fashion is to be found in the “product strategy,” that is the positioning of Italian silk on the international market. In fact, since the mid-nineteenth century, Italian silk, followed by its French equivalent, was considered the most prized by foreign buyers, being more expensive than Asian silks. This was largely due to the quality and care in processing materials, especially in the early stages of production (particularly during the reeling stage).<sup>13</sup> In a sense, Italian silk already possessed a “quality label,” which went beyond the individual producer. All this had an important effect on the creation of a “culture of quality,” on account of which producers aimed at offering products potentially targeting the highest segments of the market, thus allowing them to establish themselves in a highly internationally competitive sector. Privileging quality as a brand name, proved to be a valuable lesson, namely for those seeking to leave a strong mark.

In the interwar years, however, the production of natural silk experienced a continuous decline, due to both the economic difficulties of the period, first as a result of the crisis of the 1930s and the ensuing Second World War, and finally, as a result of the development of new resources stemming from technology: chemical fibers. The scarcity of raw textile materials, apart from silk, had induced some Italian industrialists to invest early on in new man-made fibers. The Piedmontese entrepreneur Riccardo Gualino, for example, transformed his company Snia into a major producer of the first cellulose-based artificial fiber, rayon. In 1925, Italy, thanks to Snia and other companies, became the second-largest producer of rayon, after the United States.<sup>14</sup> The fascist regime openly supported this new industrial venture, which indirectly favored the policy of autarchy; in fact, it was above all the needs of the market and the success of exports that permitted the rapid development of the new artificial, functional, and low-cost fiber industry. This success repeated itself in the 1960s, as industrial production again focused on new synthetic fibers, starting with nylon. Accordingly, the Italian chemical industry – especially in the cases of companies such as Snia and Montedison – rose as one of the world’s leading producers of textile fibers in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, a specific phenomenon has strongly defined the fashion industry in Italy from its outset: the importance of the textile industry, both in its oldest and artisanal manifestations, as is the case of silk production, as well as in its the more advanced and capital-intensive ones, as exemplified by textile and chemical companies. The widespread presence of the aforementioned skills, allied with a commitment to higher quality production, constituted keystones of Italian fashion-design success.

## **The industrial districts**

Italian productive ingenuity therefore resided in uniting – precisely in areas having specialized in specific processes for many decades, and in some cases even centuries – large and modern enterprises with a complex structure made up of small and medium-sized enterprises, artisanal workshops, and family-type micro-factories. Various economic theories of the twentieth century had long considered the great Ford-type factory as the ideal model for maximizing and rationalizing production, thereby believing that different configurations were a legacy of the past. In particular, social capital was considered entirely superfluous as concerned modern production, based instead on investments, capital, a well-trained labor force, and advanced organizational models. The latter worked very well for mass production, and suitably for standardized fabrics and articles of clothing, produced serially and sold on the market at reasonable prices.<sup>16</sup>

After the great economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s, Western societies entered a different phase. Basic products were now readily acquired goods taken for granted by families and a new generation; ergo, the latter – having tried out new styles and new consumption modes in the context of youth struggles infused with a spirit of dissent – was looking for different products. The great mass productions no longer seemed to respond to the needs of the affluent society that had been taking shape since the 1970s. Consumers were looking for higher-quality, more sophisticated, and differentiated products, which could visibly characterize the identity of young people and women at work and play.<sup>17</sup>

This situation had important effects on the fashion world. A generation of young fashion designers, the expression of a new aesthetic culture, started looking for different solutions to offer the new consumer public. The problem in many cases did not lie so much in the creative skills of the fashion designers but in the difficulties of practical realization. The large clothing industry was not suitable for small-scale productions, which changed rapidly from one season to the next, and had to be made quickly; on the other hand, the made-to-measure artisanal production had times and costs ill-suited to the enlargement of the market and the requirements of middle-class consumers. The solution for many fashion designers came from the small district businesses. These were able to produce fabrics and clothing even in limited series at competitive prices, combining almost artisanal work skills with modern industrial machines. Flexibility and adaptability had always been their strong point; their specialized technical skills had matured over decades, at times over centuries. The result was a type of high-quality ready-to-wear clothing at low prices. Obviously, there had previously been several experiments in the direction of the industrial production of design models, in various countries, including France (for example with Pierre Cardin). But in Italy this form of production became the norm, a system that typified Italian fashion.<sup>18</sup>

But what were the specificities of Italian industrial districts compared to other productive conglomerates? As early as the end of the nineteenth century, the pioneering studies of Alfred Marshall had challenged the absolute superiority of the hierarchical model of the modern factory; similar results could be equally obtained with a different type of organization, that of a system (today we would refer to it as “a network”). In this second case, the various production operations, instead of taking place inside a factory, were distributed among various small companies in a given area, which collaborated closely.<sup>19</sup> In the 1970s, various scholars pointed out how this logic was fully operative in Italian industrial districts, beginning with those specialized in textiles, clothing, and leather goods.<sup>20</sup> In practice, here we distinguish three types of relationships between operational subjects: the hierarchical ones, on account of which several companies perform different operations to arrive at the final product; the horizontal ones, in



which various companies carry out the same processes, in competition and cooperation among themselves; finally, the diagonal ones, in which some companies are producers of services, for example in the field of transport or finance, useful for all the others.<sup>21</sup> Thus, for example, in a district specialized in knitwear such as Carpi, near Modena, there are currently 2,600 companies, of which 1,200 specialize in textiles and knitwear, 1,400 in clothing, while many others provide support services.<sup>22</sup>

An aspect often stressed is that the success of the districts does not depend exclusively on industrial and commercial elements. The starting point is the presence of strong social capital, namely the existence of close relations based on mutual acquaintance, such as friendship, and also often kinship, between the various subjects. This allows the establishment of a climate of trust and respect based on reputation that permits one to combine individual interest with that of the entire community. A strong sense of belonging to the district and a well-established work ethic, correspondingly allow for effective collaboration among geographically contiguous firms forming a functional productive cluster.<sup>23</sup>

The golden age of the districts covers roughly the period from 1975 to 1995, after which there was a certain slowdown. The main cause was outsourcing practices espoused by many companies, moving production to low-cost countries, especially in Asia.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, there was a slower growth of many Western economies, especially after the 2008 crisis. Nevertheless, even today, these districts remain very solid regarding the domain of high-quality products (for the most part, low-quality production has been transferred abroad), and constitute the heart of Italian fashion. Indeed, understanding the manifold nature of Italian fashion requires bearing in mind and examining these characteristics.

### **The fashion designer**

The opportunities offered by the unique structure of the textile and clothing companies in Italy would not have inherently sufficed to create a successful fashion system without a central figure: the fashion designer (*stilista*, stylist, in Italian). The famous tailors or dressmakers of haute couture of the past were creative geniuses, who owned an atelier where at times tens of people worked under their direction, and they were concerned with catering to wealthy clients and organizing fashion shows presenting their latest models. In a way, everything happened before their eyes; the production was strictly controlled and limited to a few luxury items of clothing, attended to in every detail and sold at high prices.

We have seen how the transformations of the 1970s and the drive towards the creation of a wider luxury market spurred some young creative people to look for a closer relationship with industries, starting with those of the districts. These young people had not necessarily been trained as tailors or dressmakers, but they managed to interpret better the needs of the new public, creating a “style” that would express the identity and values of a new generation. They designed the models of a collection, and then they came to an agreement with a company, working with industrial designers and patternmakers to choose the fabrics (perhaps from another company in the district) and create a prototype that could be produced in series. Later the garments would be passed to other more artisanal enterprises (always in the same district) for personalized finishing: special stitching, buttons, application of accessories, final packaging. In this way it was possible to combine the creativity of the designers with a production capacity historically mastered by textile and clothing companies, combined with typically artisanal workmanship, thus resulting in an ideal synthesis of different know-hows. Furthermore, the possibility of producing even small collections, which could change rapidly following the

indications of consumers, also enabled young designers to enter the production market, even if they were not backed by considerable financial capital.<sup>25</sup>

Thanks to this original system names like Giorgio Armani, Gianni Versace, Gianfranco Ferré, Valentino Garavani, and then Missoni, Prada, Gucci, Ferragamo, Dolce & Gabbana, and many others<sup>26</sup> were successful. Unlike many prestigious tailors and dressmakers of the past, they did not confine themselves to the creative part, but were equally directors of the entire aesthetic and material process, overseeing every phase: the choice of fabric, the design, the creation of the industrial prototype, finishing, packaging, and sale.

It is also worthwhile noting that fashion designers went beyond fulfilling creative and productive duties, becoming directly involved in the sales and promotion of the brand. Consequently, their growing personal visibility emerged as an integral part of the construction of an internationally recognized brand. For this reason, singular attention was paid to the media world: the press, cinema, fashion shows, and the Internet. At a time when fashion design became a luxury for many, its media promotion was fundamental. This is demonstrated, for example, by the attention paid to the world of cinema: the 1980 film *American Gigolo*, starring Richard Gere, immediately propelled the sales of Armani designs worn by the protagonist. For the same reason, Milan, the heart of the production world, but also the historical capital of publishing and printing in Italy, became the reference center for a new wave of ready-to-wear fashion.<sup>27</sup> In fact, it is in this exact same city that the most prestigious fashion magazines are published, starting with “Vogue Italia,” one of the most popular editions of the magazine issued by Condé Nast.<sup>28</sup>

It stands to reason that ready-to-wear fashions submitted by Milan hinge on many factors: production specificity, the persona of the fashion designer, and media promotion of the brand. Owing to the convergence these crucial elements, Milan has successfully entered the international market as an incontrovertible fashion hub, contributing its own recognizable aesthetic language.<sup>29</sup> Within the global fashion world, it represents a new voice enriching that of existing models, favoring a democratic access to luxury, and fostering individual image construction among a wider range of consumers throughout the world.

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# HYBRID FASHION PATTERNS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN FASHION IMAGE

*Şakir Özüdoğru*

## Introduction

Since the 1980s, new fashion centers have been established and new players have entered the global fashion scene,<sup>1</sup> thus the competition in the international fashion market has become more complex and compelling. In developing countries, the governmental bodies and private sector have made significant investments in the fashion industry, principally in the fields of leveraging the design excellence, expanding marketing networks, forming powerful brands, and reinforcing fashion education. Yet, these countries and their brands aiming to be international actors need to differentiate themselves from the emerging rivals. Therefore, several strategies should be invented and operated. We can specify one of these strategies as the strategy of referring to the country's positively perceived image.<sup>2</sup> Since the triumph of Japanese designers in Paris, it has become common to see designers and brands from various countries in the global fashion scene. Most of these designers make an emphasis on their ethnicity and national culture by referring to their countries' images.

The Brazilian fashion industry is not an exception. To gain recognition for Brazilian products on a global scale, the Brazilian governmental institutions and Brazilian brands have adopted the positively perceived image of Brazil as a differentiation strategy.<sup>3</sup> As the Brazilian scholar, Rezende suggests,<sup>4</sup> since the 1990s, the representation of Brazil in the international market has been shaped by the combination of modern design and unique local production; and in the 2000s, fashion designers and brands such as Osklen, Ronaldo Fraga, M. Officer, Lino Villaventura, Gilson Martins, and Isabela Capetto have offered a more delicate and sophisticated Brazilian image.

The Brazilian way of employing the strategy of referring to the country's positively perceived image can be called as the use of "Brazilianness" in fashion. Through this strategy, a contemporary Brazilian image is being constructed. And focusing on this process has become a valid research subject since the 2000s. For example, Brazilian researcher Debora Krischke Leitao questions how French consumers perceive fashion products made in Brazil. She asserts that export-oriented Brazilian firms use certain themes of "Brazilianness."<sup>5</sup> She entitles these themes under a generic name, "tropical-exoticism." Likewise, Szilvia Simai claims that the

fashion products made in Brazil are adorned by certain myths which are presented to the international market. In her visual-ethnography based analysis, she explores themes of “Brazilianness” under the following topics: “tropical fantasy,” “body of post-colonial woman and fantasies that surround this body” and “fantasies related to samba and carnival.”<sup>6</sup> Mariana Bassi Sutter and her colleagues entitle the strategy of the use of “Brazilianness” in fashion as “Brazilianism.”<sup>7</sup> For them, Brazilianism is shaped around certain themes including behaviours of Brazilian people, national symbols and representation of Brazil, colors, natural materials, artisan applications and techniques, fabrics, prints, and forms.

In this chapter, to present a contemporary view and expand the existing literature, I examine elements of Brazilianness and its associations. I use data drawn from my thesis conducted in Brazil between September 2016 and June 2017, mostly in Sao Paulo. By following the constructionist grounded theory’s principles and procedures,<sup>8</sup> I have interviewed 35 professionals from the fashion sector including fashion designers, fashion journalists, consultants, export managers, and academicians. All the interviews are transcribed and analyzed. While the names of respondents are removed, to provide clarity, the professions are emphasized. This chapter is a part of a broader project dedicated to developing a model on possibilities of intercultural communication of fashion for developing countries.

### **The construction of Brazilianness in Brazilian fashion: elements and associations**

The images of countries function as barriers or facilitators in the internationalization process of brands and countries. Thus, the brands need to form positive and consistent images of their countries through the products they produce.<sup>9</sup> The image of Brazil, as a tourist destination, is shaped around coastal settings, rainforests, beaches, forest parks, the natural beauty of Brazilian scenery, the carnival, and the warmth of Brazilian people. Even negative images of Brazil such as poverty, violence, and drug traffic present an exotic image encouraging dark tourism activities.<sup>10</sup> Since the internationally known actress and samba singer, Carmen Miranda became popular and the national symbol of Brazil in the 1940s, Brazil’s reputation as a tropical country has strengthened. In fashion, tropicalism is one of the well-known themes of Brazilianness employed by mostly beachwear brands from Rio de Janeiro. But it is worth inquiring whether there is more than this. For this reason, I investigate how Brazilian fashion designers and brands transform the positively perceived image of their country into fashion products.

When interviewed, the participants frequently associated a few themes with Brazilianness, such as “carioca style,” “colors,” “prints,” “flora and fauna,” “handcrafts,” “lifestyle,” “fabrics and forms,” and “sensuality.” I classify these themes under three topics: “Brazilian Lifestyle,” “Aesthetical Applications” and “Artisanal Applications.” Also, although I did not ask any question related to sustainability, during the interviews, participants often mentioned practices related to ethical fashion such as fair-trade, upcycling and reuse. So, I introduce one further, “Ethical Fashion Applications,” which was not in the scope of the research at the beginning.

### **Brazilian lifestyle**

Brazilian lifestyle is constantly associated with joy in living, irony, the warmth and hospitality of Brazilian people and being sexy.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to being the tourist attraction center of Brazil and the reputation of the carnival, Rio de Janeiro is marked as the place where all the features of the Brazilian lifestyle can be observed. The city and citizens of it created their unique fashion and the way of life called “carioca style.” The residents of Rio de Janeiro refer to themselves as

“carioca.” To describe what the carioca style is, a sales manager of an internationally known Brazilian swimwear brand describes the daily routines of a typical carioca girl as below by mentioning the popular song, *The Girl from Ipanema*:

The girl from Ipanema! The girl wakes up as 6 or 7 in the morning. She goes running at the beach or goes surfing. She does outside sports. One will say, you are going to the beach, maybe you are not going to lie down under the sun. It is more than that; it is an experience. It is a lifestyle. You gonna do outside sports; you gonna play beach volleyball. You gonna just sit and drink coconut water. That is part of our essence. Going to the beach for us, it is not like that you program that. It is part of our routine.

It sounds like a life intertwined with the beach and the sea, not merely in the sense of clothing or personal image but with all activities and daily routines of human beings. The South American bureau chief for the *New York Times* from 1999 to 2007, Larry Rohter claims that because of the tropical climate of Brazil, the human body is generally on display and “people dress to be comfortable” that makes carioca style in fashion “casual”, “light,” and “body-oriented.”<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of the 2000s, the Brazilian fashion industry has invented symbolic categories referring to carioca style such as sensuality and exoticism. A socio-semiotic study on advertisements of Brazilian luxury brands published in fashion magazines reveals a kind of tropical beauty image. This image arises from a mulatto woman silhouette which is short in height with black, long, wiry hair and has a slim waistline, large buttocks, and small breasts.<sup>13</sup> Bikini and beachwear brands from Rio de Janeiro frequently use this image in their ads by “celebrating Rio’s lifestyle.”<sup>14</sup> For instance, a beachwear brand from Rio de Janeiro, Salinas constantly presents this mulatto appearance in its look-books.

Besides sexuality, the body-oriented and hot nature of the Brazilian lifestyle directly recalls happiness in life. Thanks to pictures of nudes taken during the carnival and samba dancing, Brazil is usually seen as a country of cheerful people, as a fashion journalist says: “the people who celebrate all the time.” Although it is difficult to describe an abstract feeling such as happiness on tangible objects such as fashion products, a lead designer of a luxury brand describes her designs as below:

[...] when you wear something, something from my brand, you immediately feel happier, you know, you feel like I am gonna have some fun now and you get compliments, people smile, laugh to see, looking at you. I think, this whole thing, it is really abstract, there is nothing that really you can the way you can like say that this is it. It is an abstract feeling.

Styles and patterns of fashion items complete this “abstract” feeling of happiness and make it more perceivable. Since the perceived image of Brazil is associated with leisure time and celebrations, most of the Brazilian luxury fashion brands, especially brands from Rio de Janeiro, produce casual items. Even the occasional dresses might be so colorful, loose, and light. The internationally known Brazilian brand, Osklen is an example of this. In the introductory text, fashion journalist Camila Yahn lists some words relating to the fashion show of Osklen presented during the 42nd edition of Sao Paulo Fashion Week. These words can be read as an outline of Osklen’s philosophy, and Brazilian lifestyle in fashion as well: “Relax, Large Silhouettes, Vacation, True luxury, Nature, Harmony, Beautiful place, Beautiful light, Sunset, Sunrise, Dancing, Friends, Calm, Comfort, Brazil, Rustic, Hawaiian Slippers, Good styling, Unisex, Rustic silk is everything, Travel.”<sup>15</sup>

## Aesthetical applications

Brazilian fashion presents an “esthetic nationalist ideal” formed by a certain visual grammar of fashion realized through “use of colors, shapes and volumes,” and the materials as well.<sup>16</sup> The sharpest signifiers of this visual grammar are colors and textile prints. A representative of a fashion association thinks that people from foreign countries see Brazil as a colorful nation, and he continues: “I think we combine colors very well in Brazil.” During the research, I persistently asked their color preferences and selected colors’ associations with Brazilianness to fashion designers. Yet, there was no consistent answer. A fashion designer responds: “Brazilian colors, I would say it is green and yellow. Whenever we do a something green, yellow, it is like a huge success.” Green and yellow are the colors of the Brazilian flag, which is the prominent national symbol. And also, these colors are primary components of a tropical palette. The main issue about the colors in Brazilian fashion does not directly depend on the colors themselves but the attitude towards them. Throughout the interviews, the common attitude towards colors is described as combining many colors and creating colorful articles. An experienced fashion designer believes that when fashion items become more colorful, they sound more Brazilian. The brands having a strong emphasis on colorfulness mostly combine colors associated with the tropical image of the country formed by the natural beauties, beaches, palm trees, tropical fruits, and so on. The use and combination of colors by Brazilian fashion brands meet with the elements of the Brazilian lifestyle in fashion, especially “joy in life” and “fun” in a fresh, tropical summer.

Textile prints are always combined with colors and reinforce the effect of the fresh summer. A fashion designer, who uses prints of tropical fruits in every collection, points out the inspiration of her collections by recalling her childhood memories:

I went back to childhood memories, and that’s where I grow up like lots of mango trees, my house had four mango trees, the neighborhood had so many mango trees and bougainvillea, bougainvillea all around the walls of each house and in Bahia we have a lot of African cultures so we were inspired by that as well.

As put by Brazilian fashion researcher Raquel Carvalho Maia, since the beginning of the 2000s, among beachwear brands, it has been remarkably popular to use textile prints of “foliage, colorful flowers, palm trees, bananas, tropical animals”; and from 2013 on, this trend has become more recurrent.<sup>17</sup> Thus, it can be said that these collections construct a (self)-orientalist view of Brazil, which can be interpreted as a strategy of gaining recognition in the international fashion scene.

Last but not the least, African influences in Brazilian fashion should be mentioned. One of the typical characteristics of African aesthetics is an ornamental usage of abstract, geometric forms.<sup>18</sup> Famous Brazilian fashion designer Walter Rodrigues presented an African-inspired collection entitled “The Continent/Continent” during Fashion Rio in 2011. The collection came alive through a project committed to empowering local communities by teaching seamstresses the basic techniques of garment production. For his collection, the inspiration derived from body paintings of African tribes and merged with modern silhouettes. The strategy of empowering local, disadvantaged communities brings to mind the last two elements, respectively, artisanal applications and ethical fashion applications.

## Artisanal applications

Traditional artisanal applications employed by fashion designers and brands in their collections is another component forming Brazilianness in Brazilian fashion. Mostly derived from the Northern

regions of the country, these applications and techniques include lace-making, embroidery, basketry, quilts, using natural materials, and so forth rooted from Portuguese and Dutch colonizers, and African and Indigenous cultures.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to their distinctive features and exporting potentials, it has become a trend to combine traditional applications and techniques in exclusive authorial designs among luxury Brazilian fashion brands since the beginning of the 2000s. Fashion journalist and consultant, Gloria Kalil points the Brazilian craftsmanship as one of the main features in creative sectors for differentiating Brazilian fashion products in the foreign markets.<sup>20</sup> Also, as it is stated, fashion is a way of moving traditional handicrafts to an area surrounded by symbolic meanings. Thus, it helps to warm up the economy by launching a new aesthetics and contemporary values.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, a participant of this study, who is a fashion consultant, strongly stressed that empowering Brazilian craftsmanship is the only way of creating a unique Brazilian identity in fashion: “I believe that to the extent that our creators value our craftsmanship found in various places of the country, we can finally have an identity, more unvarnished from the international fashion.”

The very first fashion designers who have used these artisanal applications in their innovative designs by combining traditional woven and knitted textile techniques with current styles and gained international importance are Martha Medeiros and Marcia Ganem. The key characteristic of Medeiros’s designs is Renaissance lace dresses, whose lace is produced by a cooperative of over 450 women living in the Northeast of Brazil. Marcia Ganem, in her turn, combines traditional lace-making techniques with semi-precious Brazilian stones and polyamide fibers. She works in close collaboration with lace-maker communities of the region where she comes from. She teaches those communities how they can transform traditional techniques into high added-value products.<sup>22</sup>

These experiences also show the other side of the coin that Brazil is a vast country with huge regional inequalities. The South and the Southeast regions of the country are more developed and industrialized regions. Thus, this region plays the hegemonic roles in economy, society, culture, and politics. The North and the Northeast of the country are the poorest regions suffering from low-income, top crime rates, and low education. This inequality creates a knowledge gap between the regions. Since the South is considered as a symbol of progress and novelty, craftsmanship, which is mostly associated with the North and the Northeast, remains a sign of the past and folklore. In this regard, empowering and encouraging artisan communities to keep their traditional techniques by reinventing and revitalizing them becomes crucial. Hence, I mark ethical fashion applications as a vital element of Brazilian fashion.

### **Ethical fashion applications**

Since the 1990s, sustainability issues have been at the top of the global fashion industry’s agenda. To define this trend, various terms have been suggested including green fashion, sustainable fashion, eco-fashion and so on. I prefer using the term “ethical fashion” as an umbrella term to include all applications of sustainable fashion from fair trade to reuse. Ethical fashion can be defined as below:

[...] fashionable clothes that incorporate fair-trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton.<sup>23</sup>

In Brazilian fashion, various ethical fashion applications can be observed. From these applications fair-trade applications, upcycling, empowering local communities, and using innovative fabrics are primarily ones employed by the industry.



Fair-trade applications, or more precisely applications inspired by fair trade, is one of the common ethical fashion applications used among small-size businesses in Brazilian fashion. In the global fashion industry, the notion of fair trade is “regulating the trade between the North and the South to protect the producers of the disadvantaged regions of the world.”<sup>24</sup> One brand that employ the principles of fair trade is Nannacay founded by Marcia Kemp in Rio de Janeiro with the motto of “creative hands transforming life.” Nannacay works with remote artisan communities living in Peru, Colombia and Brazil and produces unique fashionable accessories such as fans, hats, and pompoms rooting from traditional crafts. Although the brand does not have a direct emphasis on Brazilianness, Kemp underlines that Nannacay is Brazilian and belongs to the Brazilian fashion. By collaborating with the large Brazilian luxury brands, Nannacay’s socially responsible production strategy becomes a sign of the Brazilian ethical fashion.

Another ethical fashion application that has been gaining popularity in Brazilian fashion is upcycling, which can be defined as “a viable recycling method for re-using what would otherwise be a textile waste.”<sup>25</sup> A fashion designer, Fernanda Yamamoto, and a textile designer, Agustina Comas, developed a project on use of wasted fabrics in luxury clothing. Comas produces textiles from wasted men’s shirts and Yamamoto transform these textiles into fashion clothing. Eventually, the project concludes in Yamamoto’s 2017 Winter collection presented in Sao Paulo Fashion Week N42. After the success of the collection, Yamamoto decides to re-organize her atelier with a zero-waste operation.

In another project, Yamamoto works in collaboration with a lace-makers’ community living in a poor region of northeast Brazil, Cariri. After an extensive investigation, the designer presents an innovative lace-making technique over traditional ones. In her project, she trains members of the feminist artisan community, Cunha. After the training, the community produces lace pieces with a unique style and the project concludes in Yamamoto’s 2016 Winter collection, entitled History of Lace, presented in Sao Paulo Fashion Week.

The last aspect that should be mentioned here is developing innovative and sustainable textile surfaces. On this subject, with its sustainability institute, Instituto-e aiming to promote Brazil as a country of sustainable development, Osklen is the leader in the sector. The major project of Instituto-e is the e-fabrics project dedicated to developing an eco-friendly textile production by using sustainable raw materials to protect biodiversity and the cultural richness of the country.

## **Conclusion**

For fashion designers and brands coming from developing countries, referring to the country’s positively perceived image is a strategy to gain recognition in the international fashion scene. This image comprises the country’s historical background, cultural heritage, daily routines, natural beauties, and so on. Here, I try to elaborate on the elements and their associations that are employed by Brazilian fashion designers and brands. I should note that all designers and brands do not necessarily employ this strategy. There is a considerable number of brands presenting minimal, fresh or classical looks by following international trends. Yet, the use of Brazilianness in fashion should be taken as one strategy of various differentiation strategies.

Here, I presented four themes of Brazilianness employed by Brazilian fashion designers and brands. The carioca lifestyle, closely related to beach culture, is a symbol of the Brazilian lifestyle because it offers leisure and vacation time activities including beach and water sports, having fun with friends, relaxation and sunbathing. Also, the Brazilian lifestyle emphasizes the human body and sensuality, which are the key factors of carioca style. Aesthetical applications include the

combination of colors, prints, shapes and materials that form abstract ideas and make them visible. I can associate colorfulness with “happiness” and “joy in life” and point it as the core tactic of emphasizing Brazilianness. Plus, prints such as foliage, palm trees, pineapples, tropical landscapes create a tropical image suggesting exoticism. Presenting the country as tropical heaven is the most active tactic that can be considered as a way of self-orientalism. Artisanal applications are commonly used by fashion designer brands coming from the northern regions of Brazil, and these designers are frequently working with artisan communities to empower these communities, contribute to the development of the region, and keep the traditional techniques alive by giving them a unique look. Another essential element of Brazilian fashion is the emphasis on sustainability. Associations related to the fashion industry give importance to ethical fashion and they have a special agenda for it. Thus, ethical fashion applications should be considered as one of the significant themes of Brazilian fashion.

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# GLOBALIZED IDENTITIES IN THE FASHION TRADE

*Lynda Dematteo*

Major international textile fairs play a leading role in the development of global fashion. These huge gatherings set in motion the production chains of goods and services in connection with this multi-billion-dollar industry. For three days each season, trade shows bring together the various actors of the global textile market, allowing manufacturers to assert their own distinctive features, showcase their innovations, and negotiate their positions in the sector. In 2005, with the help of their government, Italian textile industrialists managed to create a new international trade show, Milano Unica, which quickly became an important venue for shaping global trends, especially in male fashion. This ambitious initiative was launched at an important turning point: in January of that same year, global trade in textile products was liberalized. For the sector's European producers, it was the beginning of a difficult period: the European industries, long protected by quotas that limited the exports of emerging countries, now faced competition from Chinese exporters. Garment industries had long since been relocated to Asia. Outsourcing led to a transfer of technology that enabled Chinese industrialists to bridge the gaps generated by the English industrial revolution and recover their past prominence.<sup>1</sup> China is now the world's largest producer of textile products.

This evolution has compelled European fashion business executives to adopt new strategies: establish joint ventures with Chinese companies<sup>2</sup> and shift their focus to high-quality yarns and luxury fabrics. The men's luxury group Ermenegildo Zegna, which had supported the abolition of European quotas, then urged its Italian counterparts to start their own trade show to promote the Italy brand on the global scale.<sup>3</sup> The Piedmontese woolen weavers of Biella brought together all those who were able to obtain the famous "100% Made in Italy" label to promote Italian luxury fabrics among the great garment manufacturers all over the world.<sup>4</sup> The Piedmontese are internationally recognized for the finesse of their fabrics made from the rarest wools. Although the raw materials come from different parts of the world, they are processed in mills in the Italian Alps. The territorial origin of the products is constantly highlighted, even if only the local industrial history serves to enhance their value.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, industrialists territorialize the weaving process to better globalize the Italy brand. Such a solution seems as paradoxical as the delicate situation they face: on the one hand, they make clothes produced through complex global value chains, while on the other hand, they must market the specifically Italian industrial and craft heritage that has made them famous throughout the world. Unlike Asian industrialists who seek to hide the realities of production,<sup>6</sup> Italians today tend to

stage their industrial know-how in the fashion fairs to enhance the value of their products made locally.

According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, capitalism has a double polarity: it oscillates between deterritorialization (relocation of production) and reterritorialization (defense of national labels). The more the capitalist machine is subject to deterritorialization by the decoding and maximizing of the flows in order to extract the surplus value, the more its ancillary apparatuses are reterritorialized by absorbing a growing share of this surplus value.<sup>7</sup> The more contradictory, the better it works. Milano Unica meets this challenge by showcasing the roots of the Italian textile industry on a global scale.<sup>8</sup> It is smaller than other fairs, and its board intends to distinguish the Italian textile industry by the refined and constantly innovative character of its products; technical specificities and environmental concerns are enhanced to better capture the attention of designers who attend it.

Fairs have already been studied by sociologists,<sup>9</sup> geographers,<sup>10</sup> and anthropologists of business.<sup>11</sup> More recently, two Swedish anthropologists have explored what the ethnography of professional congresses and trade fairs could contribute to the understanding the professional faire.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of their first observations, I will explain how Milano Unica contributes to shaping the global Italy brand<sup>13</sup> by promoting Italian textile heritage and know-how.

### **Fashion trade shows in the global textile production cycle**

Until now, anthropologists of globalization have not been very interested in trade shows, although Fernand Braudel studied the fairs of Troyes and Lyons.<sup>14</sup> The great fairs differ from markets in that they are distinct from everyday trade: a market is a local event held regularly in the same place; a fair, on the contrary, is a periodic form of exchange on a global scale. These temporary platforms produce globalization by connecting professionals from all over the world. Merchants have always been nomads: the major fairs are scheduled well in advance, with little or no flexibility in the timeline. It would be extremely difficult to modify this without generating tensions throughout the industry, as participants need to produce their collections and travel around the globe to present them. Geographers refer to this kind of system as a “cyclical cluster.”<sup>15</sup> It is through these professional meetings that the productive process is activated. In order to fully understand what is at stake, it is necessary to visit the different fairs that punctuate the production cycle: the production first the production of threads (Filo), then the production of fabrics (Milano Unica), and finally, the production of clothing (Pitti Uomo). The items that compose a collection are very diverse, and the stylists discuss upstream with their suppliers, who will orient their own production according to the wishes they have expressed. Each year, the fabric manufacturers also go to the Pitti Uomo trade show – a highlight of men’s ready-to-wear – to get an idea of the current and upcoming trends in order to direct their own production according to the evolution of men’s fashion.

I started to examine the political issues related to the trade of luxury fabrics, especially with China, in 2015. As part of the joint project with POLITICO.<sup>16</sup> Our goal was to examine the relationship between the globalization process and governance by developing an anthropology of unprecedented transformations in the links between economic and political issues. According to Arjun Appadurai, the link created when a product is exchanged is intrinsically political in that it produces the value embodied in such commodities. Luxury goods, and their deployment as signs, are political because their “principal use is rhetorical and social.”<sup>17</sup> Appadurai thus defends “methodological fetishism” to grasp how human actors encode things with various meanings according to the cultural context. In this light, we can say that commodities, like people, have social lives.<sup>18</sup>

Since 2005, the seasonal shows set up by Milano Unica have become commercial, high-profile society events. The goal was to assert the commercial importance of Italy in the high-end fabric sector. Milano Unica was faced with the global centrality acquired long ago by the Paris International Fair – *Première Vision* – which Italian industrialists went to every season to show their collections to French fashion designers and professionals from all around the world attracted by the Parisian scene of fashion.<sup>19</sup> The fourth Milano Unica chairman – the great cotton weaver from Bergamo, Silvio Albini – then created a Chinese edition in March 2012 and an American edition in July 2015. I was able to do this new fieldwork thanks to him, as he introduced me to the general manager of the fair, Massimo Mosiello. Milano Unica (the choice of the name is significant) has enabled the Italian textile industry to bond and to create a sense of national belonging by bringing together all the world-renowned regional trade fairs that showcased Italian luxury fabrics and accessories (IdeaBiella, IdeaComo, Moda In, Shirt Avenue, Prato Expo). The first time I met Massimo Mosiello, he explained that given the inner tensions, such a grouping was in itself a “miracle.” Thanks to him, I was able to attend four trade shows in Milan and two Shanghai editions in autumn 2015 and spring 2016.<sup>20</sup>

The Italian pavilion of Milano Unica in Shanghai (Figure 26.1) is part of the Chinese Intertextile fair, the biggest of the sector worldwide. It was set up thanks to the support of the Italian government, eager to develop trade with China. Milano Unica New York has encountered more difficulties. After only two seasons, the Italian industrialists realized that they could not afford to set up such a platform in Manhattan, and they finally returned to the American *Première Vision* show. However, this Italian business initiative has made the board of *Première Vision* anxious. The Italians are also trying to present their collections before the French do, which inevitably leads to tensions.<sup>21</sup> These defensive identity reactions are not necessarily a good thing for the future of European textiles. Competition among Europeans is fierce in Shanghai, because the Chinese megacity is now destined to become the global textile hub. The board of *Première Vision* has already lost the game: they wanted to create a Chinese edition, but they did not succeed because the German group Messe Frankfurt, which oversees the entire business of fairs in China, collaborated with the Chinese to create Intertextile; it seems that German and French industrialists (ever entangled in their old continental grievances) were unable to imagine a common strategy in relation to the Chinese market. For lack of political support, the French textile industry is underrepresented in the Chinese fair today. Only about a dozen (among the strongest) entrepreneurs go there regularly. The management of these fairs is in itself an important business that allows countries to establish their commercial fame and to influence fashion on a global scale. At this level, private and national interests tend to overlap. Italy is certainly the European nation that has been most successful in national investment in trade issues, specifically in relation to Asia. Italian entrepreneurs (with trade diplomacy support) have succeeded in establishing Italy as a luxury country in the Chinese imaginary.<sup>22</sup> In conjunction with the Milan Expo 2015, there were more than 100 Italian industrialists, thanks to government subsidies. In 2016, there were approximately 40. It is not easy – even for the more prestigious European suppliers – to enter the Chinese market. Many of them are afraid of seeing their products counterfeited; they have given up going to Shanghai.

Intertextile is a gigantic trade show that brings together industrialists from all over the world and sanctions the hegemony of China in this industry. The measure of the recurring event is impressive: in the spring of 2015, the fair received 2,636 exhibitors (compared to 1,469 the previous year) from 24 countries, and saw 62,649 buyers from 88 countries (more than a 56% increase when compared to the previous year, when 40,214 visitors traveled to the show). The stands covered a total of 100,600 square meters (more than double the previous year). When I visited the fair for the very first time, I did not anticipate it would take almost two hours to get



Figure 26.1 Milano Unica Shanghai. Courtesy of Dematteo

out because of the queues that had formed just before closing. Dozens of agents are habitually mobilized to channel the flow of people leaving the huge Chinese structure.

In 2015, the Chairwoman of Chinese trade show, Ms Wendy Wen, was very proud of having received so many Italian exhibitors.<sup>23</sup> Europeans occupy the most prestigious space in the Chinese fair. The Italian pavilion of Milano Unica (neatly aestheticized, as it is in Milan) claimed a special position on the global textile scene, based on three keywords: “Quality, authenticity, exclusivity.” Access to it remains strictly controlled: only Chinese professionals who have been invited by Italian industrialists can enter the area. This policy, aimed at countering industrial espionage, also has the effect of stirring the desire of designers.<sup>24</sup> Big Italian textile suppliers are currently trying to capture the profits of China’s economic emergence by positioning their exports in the market for high-end fashion products in China. The Chinese fashion industry is developing and moving upmarket.<sup>25</sup> For Milano Unica, participating in this development is important for the future of Italian textiles (Figure 26.2).

### Textile fairs as “tournaments of values”

The trade shows have developed in response to globalization and they play a very direct role in the process of fashion creation.<sup>26</sup> They are the places where the collective creative process can be seen in all its complexity because industrialists reveal the content of their production by deploying their new collections. Flagship products are displayed in the synthesis areas conceived by the fair’s artistic director and his team of designers. The fabrics are selected by an impartial style committee. The exhibitors send a sample on the basis of guidelines provided by the committee; then the fabrics selected are displayed in the same neutral way, without Milano Unica expressing any preference. Some exhibitors prefer not to send a number of their luxury



Figure 26.2 Milano Unica Portello. Courtesy of Dematteo

products to ensure they remain exclusive; they therefore remain outside the selection process. On the basis of the samples selected, the artistic director of Milano Unica will define the trends for the following year's season.

Studying trade shows offers many methodological advantages and enables one to collect a great deal of ethnographic data.<sup>27</sup> Brian Moeran and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen (2011) were the first anthropologists to undertake a systematic study of this kind of commercial event when they tried to identify the different functions of interest for the businessmen who invest in them. According to the anthropologists, fairs serve three main purposes: (re)configuring a professional field, ritualizing industrial practices, and functioning as a “tournament of values” (in the sense of Appadurai), where participants negotiate between different values to better cope with the commercial challenges of the moment.<sup>28</sup>

The participants carry values that they strive to defend to better assert themselves in their professional fields.<sup>29</sup> These values are never fixed attributes: they are the result of arbitration that is often unintelligible for the uninitiated.<sup>30</sup> The value is not intrinsic to the object: the preciousness of the fabrics is the result of a social construction during which various processes (selection of the raw materials, sophistication of weaving processes, respect for animals and for the environment, design, and marketing) are enhanced to arouse consumer desire. Most of the work undertaken by the luxury houses concerns the desirability of objects. How are values produced, negotiated, and traded at international fairs? What distinguishes the value of cultural products? These are the questions raised by Brian Moeran.<sup>31</sup>

The values of cultural goods are defined by complex combinations of cultural variables. Fairs are the places where these values are created. On this occasion, we can observe the creation of a



symbolic exchange value in which several cultural values are considered: technical values (know-how), social values (prestige), situational values (rarity and authenticity), and the values of appreciation (aesthetics). Fabrics are not only products, they are also a language; industrialists do not only produce material goods, they construct sense.<sup>32</sup> In menswear, fabrics are usually associated with male virtues and leadership skills.<sup>33</sup> At the fair, they show their products and stage their values through sophisticated installations that one can admire in their stands. They don't just make deals, they assert their positions and brand identities through creativity and artistic sensitivity.<sup>34</sup> Observing what happens in the stands enables one to understand how commodities are culturally designed by trade agents.<sup>35</sup>

Moeran refers to Pierre Bourdieu to analyze the fairs in terms of field. Entrepreneurs make use of different forms of capital to construct their commodities and set their transaction prices. The diverse resources at stake could be material, social, ideological, or symbolic, and they are unevenly distributed within the Italian textile system. Some industrialists control more resources than others, and their prices are higher.<sup>36</sup> In that way, Milano Unica makes evident the hierarchy that prevails in the Italian textile sector. The location of the stands is not indifferent. Industrial clusters that have come together to form Milano Unica are always visible. Fairs structure social spaces: among the textile manufacturers there are the nobles and the less noble;<sup>37</sup> this is especially true in Northern Italy, since the aristocracy and the industrial bourgeoisie merged at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

The "genetic code" of the company is an important part of the Italian entrepreneurial culture. Textile industries are generally family-run businesses (siblings usually share the leadership tasks) and filial respect toward the founder is continually reaffirmed.<sup>39</sup> These families' stories can eventually be the subject of monographs, which also enhance the prestige of their fashion brands.<sup>40</sup> The aristocratic ideology contributes to producing the market value of the fabrics, as well as the ceremonies surrounding the presentation of the collections.

The size of the stands, the interior design (more or less sought after, always in connection with the aesthetic DNA of the fashion houses), the number of people mobilized to welcome visitors, and the fame of the buyers who visit them: all these elements nourish the prestige of the great industrialists present. For weaving professionals, the Loro Piana House is at the top of the scale of values and a model to imitate for all operators. The famous Piedmontese brand selects the best wools; it has created a competition for breeders to continually improve the quality of the wool, and it has succeeded in manufacturing the most valuable of fabrics. Control over the entire production chain is the hallmark of excellence in textiles. Loro Piana refuses to advertise and also produces clothes for elite customers only. They are weaving purists and their production is a matter of luxury. In 2013, Loro Piana was bought by the LVMH group for 2 billion euros. The Piedmontese company is now directly managed by the son of Bernard Arnaud, who boasts about having bought the Chateau d'Yquem of Italian textile.<sup>41</sup>

Trade shows foster competitive and collaborative interactions throughout the whole sector. This temporary bringing together of people contributes to a sense of community: for a few days, participants have the opportunity to establish business relations with new trading partners, to acquire knowledge, and to establish continuity in a number of commercial relationships that are keys to their productive activity. During the fairs, the competitors exhibit their products together in the same space. In the areas of synthesis created by the fair's artistic director to exhibit the flagship fabrics for buyers, each competitor can see what the others have contributed or elaborated. They may thus choose to reorient their future production according to strong ideas they have identified among the other competitors. These professional meetings are not exempt from tensions. Gatekeepers filter the curious at the stands' entrances, and the most prestigious stands accept visitors on invitation only. Manufacturers nevertheless agree on the

need to go beyond traditional commercial rivalries to “*fare sistema*” and promote the Italy Brand globally.<sup>42</sup> There are also very strong forms of solidarity between some companies. The weavers of Biella work in close cooperation and they dominate the Italian textile industry; the presidents of the fair generally come from this province. Thanks to this event, small producers benefit from the copresence of the leading luxury brands to boost their own image on a global scale. The whole cultural environment of the fair contributes to producing the value of “Made in Italy”: this commercial platform creates the identity of the “100% Made in Italy” product through a sophisticated staging where every detail counts: the site, the architecture of the stands, the uniforms of the hostesses, the Milanese coffee, the staging of fashion trends, and even the prestige of the chef who delights the guests.

### **Value and international hierarchy**

Participating in all these shows represents a significant financial investment for the Italian companies that are trying to assert themselves on a global scale: they must finance the shipping of the products, the rental of the stand, the travel of staff members, hotel nights, restaurant meals, and entertainment for guests. Therefore, the economic benefits of these periodic encounters should at least be equal to the sums invested. However, they can benefit from government subsidies, aimed at developing exports in sectors that politicians consider to be strategic for the nation.<sup>43</sup> The national trade promotion agencies are also in attendance at these major international fairs – namely, Business France for French entrepreneurs, and the Italian Trade Agency for Italian entrepreneurs.<sup>44</sup>

Among the big textile industries, no one can escape these lavish exhibitions and receptions without disappearing from the scene: it is essential to stage activity during these fair days. Everyone seems very busy, and the appointments with foreign designers follow at a rapid pace, even though most of the sales have already been made upstream. Buyers get to know the major trends that emerge during the fair, then go to their suppliers to make last-minute orders to update their own collections. Participants try to get an idea of the changes in the market: they discuss with their regular customers, their partners, and even their competitors, and everybody readily makes comments on international news because political ups and downs influence business.

A collective story of the textile industry emerges during these meetings. Important political figures are also invited to express themselves on the economic trends in Italy, and especially in Lombardy. Storytelling tends to play an increasingly key role in these events.<sup>45</sup> Generally, the president of Milano Unica gives an overview of the global challenges awaiting the textile sector in the months ahead. The synthesis of his remarks is provided in several languages to the many journalists present. The digitization of trade is at the heart of the concerns of all the industrialists. In this arena, China is already well ahead of the Americans and the Europeans. However, in July 2017, digital catalogs were already available in the exhibition areas of the Milano Unica trade show. Since February 2019, the *e-milanounica.it* digital platform – created in collaboration with Pitti Uomo – has given a new virtual dimension to the fair.<sup>46</sup> This development enabled Milano Unica staff to deal easily with the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 while staying connected with Asian and American participants.

China and Hong Kong now represent a crucial market for Italian luxury fabrics manufacturers, but competition from Chinese weavers is of great concern for the board of Milano Unica, which denies them access to the show because they are direct competitors: Italian industrialists must constantly innovate to maintain their leadership. They are anxious that their Chinese counterparts can learn about Western design, branding, and marketing. Among

potential Asian countries that hope to participate, only Japan and Korea – because they produce specific, high-quality fabrics – are welcomed by Milano Unica. To face the Chinese competition, Italian professionals have bet on industrial heritage and sustainable fashion.

They are now striving to reterritorialize their production by promoting the family-run fabric mills. Today the Biella industrialists even compare their fabric production with high-quality viticulture. The purity of the Alpine water is presented as a determining factor in the quality of the fabrics. Sustainability has become the key argument both to define the specificity of their products and to attract foreign customers mindful of organic agriculture, the quality of processes, and the purity of products.<sup>47</sup> Wool processing is a specific Piedmontese and European feature, but manufacturers surely must re-elaborate and enhance this natural product if they wish to survive: while the Chinese industrialists dominate the textile market in terms of quantity, the Italians want to continue to subjugate in terms of quality and innovation. Since 2017, the fifth president of Milano Unica, Ettore Botto Poala, has been developing innovative technical textiles made of wool: “follow the leadersheep.”<sup>48</sup> In this changing context, the Italians are trying to seduce a growing number of designers with environmental concerns, and they have made a real effort in the treatment of the water they use in the weaving process.<sup>49</sup>

This investment also makes marketing sense because clothing has always had the function of spiritually elevating human beings and making hierarchies of values visible.<sup>50</sup> In 2019, Biella presented its candidacy to UNESCO in order to become a creative city and the European reference district for the sustainability of the textile supply chain.<sup>51</sup> The Pistoletto Cittadellarte Fashion Foundation is a Biellese platform dedicated to artistic creation that strives to rethink textile products in response to environmental emergencies.<sup>52</sup> Michelangelo Pistoletto, one of the 100 most highly regarded artists in the world, collaborates with Piedmontese industrialists to reorient their creative work. He designed the symbol of the infinite durability of the “re-woolution” logo. Piedmontese industrialists are returning to materials that, in the past, were typically European: leather and fine wool. If they want to meet the desires of rich Chinese customers, they must go “back to their roots.” At the beginning of 2017, the Zegna group displayed these new values in a promotional video, which also echoes the new political trend.<sup>53</sup> Such discourse about roots – with images of the Piedmont mills – breaks with the focus of previous years on cosmopolitanism.

While international luxury brands have increased their efforts to enter the Chinese market in order to capture the rise in purchasing power, several Chinese companies are, in turn, investing in the luxury segment in order to offer clothing or accessories as worthy as the major Western brands. They are trying to position themselves at the top end of the range by purchasing luxury fabrics woven in Italy, so they can label them “Made in Italy” and raise their prices. The valuation of Italian know-how differs according to the buyers: the “Made in Italy” luxury fabrics take on various meanings when they enter the production of clothes for historic French haute couture houses, such as Balmain and Hermès, or for emerging Chinese luxury brands like Nisiss, founded in 2006. The owner, Susan Chen, is building her own valuation strategy in collaboration with artists and scholars, enhancing visibility of her famous Italian suppliers (notably Loro Piana). Nisiss claims both its Chinese identity and a poetic approach to creation. Its Guangzhou-based designers refuse to refer to Western labels, preferring to highlight their own interiority: “Catching the ‘rhythm’ of nature, rather than reproducing replicas, has long been a key component, running through the development of Chinese art.”<sup>54</sup>

Although Chinese producers are now predominant in the textile sector, the prestige of the old European brands remains intact. Chinese companies still need to refer to Europe in order to sell their products on their own market. However, since January 2019, the Biella industrialists have had to deal with the opening of the first Chinese wool spinning mill in the area: Xinao

Textiles Europe, a subsidiary of the same name registered in Shanghai.<sup>55</sup> It is probably too simplistic and unfair to accuse the Chinese garment manufacturers of copying – Italian manufacturers sell their fabrics to them, and so they can subsequently use the Italian label. The Chinese designers want to show that their creations were manufactured with fine Italian fabrics, and use the “Made in Italy” label as a sign of value on their own market. In that way, they produce Italo-Chinese clothes and try in some cases to appear as Italian brands in order to sell them at higher prices. This is typically the strategy of the Chinese brand Giada, which strives to pass as Italian in the eyes of Chinese consumers to the great displeasure of Italian businessmen.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Giada's owners do the opposite of what was done by the famous Italian brands when they relocated garment manufacturing to China. It is actually quite ironic: Italian entrepreneurs go to China in order to produce clothes at a lower cost while the Chinese rely on Italian suppliers to create their own luxury brands. French designers do not need to display the brand “Made in Italy” on their creations; instead, they tend to hide it. For their part, the Chinese need to do so to assert the high level of their nascent fashion houses. Such kinds of business practices highlight the value hierarchy among companies that have made the history of global fashion and newcomers.

In the global fashion sphere, boundaries are totally blurred and artificially recreated for business purposes. The borders can thus be reaffirmed in different ways depending on the hierarchy of values and trading partners. Many Italian and Chinese observers are shocked by these trade realities, but it is quite normal for fashion professionals who evolve in a global world and create hybrid fashion styles.<sup>57</sup> Actually, Italian and Chinese industrialists are increasing their profit margins by working together: one by relocating garment manufacturing, the others by re-creating Italian brands in their own markets. This unprecedented situation of interdependence leads them to produce and reproduce a national brand in an increasingly fabricated way, regardless of the affiliations of the designers and workers. Creators are circulating from one brand to another, reinterpreting the different heritages of the fashion houses; meanwhile, industrialists are increasingly mobilizing national symbols on the global scene to assert the value of the flagship products they merchandise. However, the completely off-ground nature of these globalized identities worries their own producers. In order to strengthen the prestige of their products, manufacturers must anchor the process of fabrication in an area with a rich industrial history. As nothing ties the looms to the ground, the Alps’ water quality is recognized as an essential part of the weaving process. Environmental quality and sustainability then become key elements of value-creation. In that way, Milano Unica also exemplifies how a global platform can also contribute to the deglobalization of the textile industry in a context of environmental crisis.

## Notes

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- Italy can display the label “Made in Italy,” “100% Made in Italy,” or “100% Italia.” Any infringement is now punishable by law. The definition of “Made in Italy” has since become the most restrictive in the world.
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  - 8 Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers, *Blowing Up the Brand: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
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  - 14 Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce* (London: William Collins, 1982).
  - 15 Power and Jansson, *Economic Geography*.
  - 16 The international consortium POLITICO, “The Political Life of Commodities,” was carried out by the Norbert Elias Centre in Marseille (<https://anr.fr/Projet-ANR-14-CE29-0006>).
  - 17 Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63, 38.
  - 18 *Ibid.*, 3.
  - 19 In 1973, 15 weavers from Lyon decided to present their collections together at the *Centre International du Textile* in Paris. Three years later, they were able to consult each other to offer buyers a synthesis of trends; this enabled them to structure the market and limit uncertainty. They were soon joined by other professionals and *Première Vision* rapidly became international, attracting textile manufacturers and designers from all over the world to Paris (cf. Patrik Aspers and Asaf Darrf, “Trade Shows and the Creation of Market and Industry,” *Sociological Review* 59, no.4 (2011): 758–78).
  - 20 <https://www.milanounica.it/mosaic/it/milano-unica-shanghai>.
  - 21 In an interview by *La Spola*, the president of Milano Unica reported on the commercial frictions between Italian and French industrialists on the conjunction of the fair dates of July 2016. Since then, many Italian suppliers have decided to give up *Première Vision* to participate only in Milano Unica (Matteo Grazzini, “Ercole Botto Poala: ‘Non diro’ mai o noi o loro’.” *La Spola*, February 18, 2016. <https://www.laspola.com/ettore-botto-poala-non-diro-mai-o-noi-o-loro/>).
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# THE LABOR OF FASHION, TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZING, AND THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Nafisa Tanjeem*

## Introduction

Fashion has been historically shaped by various gendered, racialized, and classed forms of precarious labor. The question of the precarity of labor in fashion is often not a visible, widely pronounced one.<sup>1</sup> Fashion Studies in a world struck by a global pandemic needs to carefully consider the question of precarious labor that is involved in the production, circulation, and consumption of fashion goods. The complexity of the global fashion supply chain and the intricate relationships between various actors and institutions embedded within the supply chain make it challenging to unravel labor precarity and the way workers and their transnational allies address (or do not address) this precariousness at the labor-intensive production end.

The global COVID-19 crisis posed some unique challenges to the \$2.5 trillion global fashion industry. Demand for fast fashion decreased due to unemployment and changes in consumer priorities.<sup>2</sup> Instead of performing catwalk, models started participating in virtual shows. The Paris fashion week allowed viewing collections by appointment only.<sup>3</sup> Twenty to thirty percent of brands were expected to change hands or close down.<sup>4</sup> The impact was more pronounced in the Global South, where millions of garment factory jobs were lost, and the livelihoods of factory workers were threatened as the global brands suspended or canceled orders on an unprecedented scale.<sup>5</sup>

This essay situates the COVID-19 experience of Bangladeshi garment workers producing clothes for global fashion brands against the backdrop of historical transnational solidarity building initiatives. It argues that transnational labor organizing has historically taken a “spotlight” approach<sup>6</sup> – strategically or inadvertently – targeting one actor at a time and ignoring the broader political economy of the supply chain capitalism. This spotlight approach failed to address how global brands, governments, and local suppliers – all played their unique roles in exploiting racialized and feminized labor of garment workers. The global COVID-19 pandemic revealed one additional example of the limited reach of this spotlight approach. To address pandemic-induced job losses and livelihood threats, transnational labor rights advocates extensively targeted global brands (and the global brands rightfully deserved these backlashes and critiques), ignoring how the Bangladesh government or the Bangladeshi garment factory



owners played their part in worsening living and working conditions of garment workers. Hence, we see the continuation of a historical gap between priorities of “global” and “local” forms of labor organizing and a problematic tendency of coopting the narrative of survival of Bangladeshi garment workers by various local as well as global actors.

### **The spotlight approach of transnational labor organizing: a brief historical overview**

This section sheds light on how various historical transnational labor organizing initiatives, for example, the 1990s anti-child-labor campaign, corporate codes of conduct, the social clause, and the Accord and the Alliance, adopted a spotlight approach without addressing the complex political economy of the supply chain capitalism.

#### ***The 1990s anti-child-labor campaign***

Transnational labor organizing in the Bangladeshi garment industry can be traced back as early as in the 1990s. The anti-child-labor campaign in 1992 called for the U.S. and European consumer boycott of clothing produced in Bangladeshi garment factories to end the employment of children under 14 years old. The campaign was partially motivated by the fear of corporate downsizing in the USA and the export of U.S.-based manufacturing jobs to countries that provide non-unionized, feminized, and cheap labor. Although U.S. labor unions and labor NGOs broadly used the human rights language of protecting Bangladeshi children in their campaigns, they collaborated with various U.S. conservative and protectionist actors that were more worried about massive layoffs and corporate downsizing in the USA than rescuing Bangladeshi children from exploitative labor conditions. The campaign resulted in the introduction of “The Child Labor Deterrence Act,” which was commonly known as “Harkin’s Bill,” in 1993. Harkin’s bill prohibited importation to the USA of products produced by child labor.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the 1990s anti-child-labor campaign shed a spotlight on Bangladesh, identified child labor as “Bangladesh’s problem,” and depicted Bangladesh “as a site of eternal failure and of Bangladeshis as forever victims, children, or (gendered) others”.<sup>8</sup> It ignored consequences arising from the “race to the bottom” in the global fashion industry, the massive drive to push wages down as far as possible by the U.S. and European brands, and the way intersecting systems of oppression left no other way for Bangladeshi child garment workers but taking jobs at exploitative factories.

In response to Harkin’s bill, thousands of child garment workers were fired from the factories and forced to take jobs as domestic workers, brick breakers, and even sex workers. Bangladeshi NGOs, unions, and activist groups started protesting the situation. The language of protest was quickly picked up by the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturer and Exporter Association (BGMEA) as well. Later a “Memorandum of Understanding on the Use of Child Labor in the Export-Oriented Garment Industry in Bangladesh” was signed with the support of ILO, UNICEF, BGMEA, and the government of Bangladesh on July 4, 1995, to place underage garment workers in non-formal schools. Ethel Brooks points out how these non-formal schools were not regulated by the Education Board of Bangladesh, making it impossible for child garment workers to continue higher education. Many of these children eventually joined garment factories when they turned 14. Moreover, transnational activist initiatives focused only on child workers who worked in the ready-made garment sector and constituted only 4% of all child workers in Bangladesh. The initiatives undertaken by consumer rights groups and international labor rights NGOs never inquired why these children were forced to engage in paid

work in the first place and did not propose long-term solutions. UNICEF, ILO, the Bangladesh government, and the U.S. Department of State did not acknowledge the spotlight approach's limitations and continued to present Bangladesh as a successful case study of eradicating child labor.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The corporate codes of conduct***

Since the late 1990s, corporate codes of conduct from international buyers started proliferating the Bangladeshi garment industry in the absence of robust labor legislation and its implementation. Less than 3% of the workforce in Bangladesh was protected by the existing labor laws during that time.<sup>10</sup> Garment factory owners did not necessarily consider corporate codes of conduct as an institutional mechanism to maintain labor standards. They viewed compliance to codes of conduct only as a means to survive in the competitive global market since “compliance” in the garment industry context did not refer to allegiance to state labor laws that were obligatory in nature and applied to all citizens even when these laws were not obeyed or implemented. While corporate codes of conduct brought some limited improvements in factories that were mostly located in export processing zones, these codes did not impact working conditions in subcontracting factories that constituted at least 28% of all BGMEA enlisted garment factories.<sup>11</sup> They mostly focused on benefits, such as paid leave, maternity leave, overtime payment, and medical treatment, and ignored creating collective bargaining platforms. Mahmud and Kabeer argue that corporate codes of conduct prioritized workers' welfare over ensuring their rights. They report that garment factory owners often viewed corporate codes as public relations stances that protected brand images and kept consumers guilt-free while transferring the cost of compliance to the suppliers.<sup>12</sup>

Corporate codes of conduct are not necessarily laws and not drafted in collaboration with workers and activists. They are often crafted in a language that workers do not speak or understand. In many cases, public relations consultants from the Global North are recruited to compose these codes. Instead of bringing long-term structural changes in workers' lives, these codes are primarily aimed at avoiding “troubles” created by corporate watchdogs and labor rights activists.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the extensive and prolonged phase of implementing corporate codes of conduct in the Bangladeshi garment industry, which is still persistent today, failed to move beyond the spotlight approach and challenge what Kabeer et al. call supply chain capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The “social clause”***

The provision of enforcing a social clause on labor standards through international trade agreements and possible World Trade Organization sanctions started gaining widespread support in the labor rights circles of the Global North since the mid-1990s. Proponents of the social clause were motivated by the possibility of building transnational solidarity with workers and improving working conditions. However, labor representatives in the Global South were skeptical about the protectionist implications of the social clause as global labor standards tend to favor producers in the Global North.<sup>15</sup> Although many of the Southern organizers morally supported the social clause, they were worried that the clause would likely be dominated by powerful unions in the Global North, thereby creating a North-South divide in the global labor politics.<sup>16</sup> Naila Kabeer argues that social clause proponents often compare wage and working conditions in Bangladesh with those in other parts of the world. However, Bangladeshi garment workers' decision to participate in the labor market is not influenced by labor standards in other

countries. It is instead determined by comparison with available alternative employment opportunities, specifically in the informal economy. As long as the export sector offers better options than what the informal economy provides, a continuing cheap pool of feminized and racialized workers with limited capacity to collectively bargain will remain available. Kabeer suggests broadening the scope of labor standards beyond one industry at a time, thereby going beyond the spotlight approach. She argues for a universal “social floor” that expands selective enforcement of labor standards in a specific sector in a specific country and globally promotes all workers’ rights.<sup>17</sup>

### ***The Accord and the Alliance***

After the collapse of Rana Plaza, an eight-storied commercial building housing five garment factories, which killed more than 1134 workers and injured more than 2,500 others in 2013, transnational solidarity building initiatives mostly revolved around the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (popularly known as “the Accord”) and the Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety (popularly known as “the Alliance”). The Accord was a legally binding five-year agreement, which was later extended for three more years, among more than 200 global brands and retailers, and Bangladeshi and global trade unions. It played a significant role in improving working conditions in more than 1,600 factories by providing independent inspection programs supported by brands and involving workers and trade unions.<sup>18</sup> It also required public disclosure of inspection reports and corrective action plans. Many called the Accord “a historical agreement” because of its legally binding nature that required signatory companies to assist in securing finance for safety-related renovations and its collaboration with unions and workers to review and implement safety protocols.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the Accord, to some extent, transferred the spotlight on Bangladeshi garment factories as the site of the problem to the responsibility of global brands. The Alliance, on the other hand, was another five-year commitment – and not a legally binding “agreement”<sup>20</sup> – which was unilaterally proposed, designed, and governed by 29 mostly U.S.-based corporations without involving independent worker representatives. It allowed brands to retain complete control of the inspection process. The approach of Alliance mostly resembled a corporate social responsibility (CSR) model, which has a proven history of failure in the context of Bangladesh. Many corporations, including GAP and Wal-Mart, preferred the Alliance over the Accord because the Alliance provided them immunity from lawsuits that were possible to file by third parties under the Accord.

Many progressive labor rights circles in North America and Europe widely lauded the Accord for being a “major breakthrough”<sup>21</sup> and “game changer”<sup>22</sup> and sharply criticized the Alliance for merely adopting a CSR model. Nevertheless, both the Accord and the Alliance created much confusion and complications for garment factory owners, garment workers, and local labor organizers. They relied on a private governance mechanism to exclusively shine the spotlight on a technocratic definition of workplace safety (i.e., building and fire safety), ignoring other forms of safety such as living wage or job security or safety from sexual harassment.<sup>23</sup> They did not create new legal rights or benefits or labor organizing capabilities for workers.<sup>24</sup> Although the Accord and the Alliance jointly covered about 2,300 garment factories employing 2 million workers, they left out about 3,000 subcontracting factories employing another 2 million workers who produce for the domestic market as well as pick up subcontracting orders for direct exporters.<sup>25</sup> Bangladeshi NGOs and labor rights organizations affiliated with the global Accord campaign were usually the ones who spoke English, were well-connected with transnational activist networks, or received transnational funds for local labor organizing

initiatives. Bangladeshi grassroots non-English speaking, not-well-connected, not-so-celebrity labor organizers who operated outside the NGOized donor-driven model of labor organizing rarely found a voice in the global Accord campaign.

### ***Brands vs. suppliers: the conflict between transnational and local priorities***

Many small, grassroots, non-cosmopolitan Bangladeshi labor activist groups often focus their organizing energy on addressing exploitative practices of the garment factory owners and the Bangladesh government, only to find that this is not necessarily the spotlight of transnational labor organizing. Transnational solidarity building initiatives must start from somewhere, and the place they historically began with is brand-based activism. The global retailers have long tried to avoid their responsibilities by claiming that the local suppliers and the local government should play the primary role in implementing local labor standards. It is crucial to counter this narrative and pressure on the global brands making billion-dollar profits to ensure fair labor standards in their supply chains. Nevertheless, international labor rights groups' continuous tendency to give benefits of the doubt to the local suppliers and the Bangladesh government falls at odds with the approach many local labor organizers take. The inclination of ignoring priorities of local grassroots labor organizers, the practice of working with selective, cosmopolitan, English-speaking labor organizers from well-funded Bangladeshi labor NGOs, and representing these organizers as the voice of all Bangladeshi garment workers obstruct the possibility of building meaningful transnational solidarity.

The Tuba protest in 2014 and the wage movement in 2018 and 2019 are glaring examples of this tendency. In August 2014, hundreds of garment workers occupied a garment factory building in Dhaka, Bangladesh. They organized a hunger strike in response to the non-payment of three months' salaries and allowances owed to 1,600 workers by the Tuba Group. The state's violent suppression of the workers' protest and the arrest of prominent local grassroots labor organizers did not garner widespread coverage by the global media and international labor rights groups who were enthusiastically covering the Accord campaign during the same period.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, garment workers' mass protests for increasing the minimum wage and the violent repression of these protests by the factory owners and the state in 2018 and 2019 did not receive attention from the international labor rights community in the same way as received by the Accord campaign.

### **Organizing during the COVID-19 pandemic: spotlight on global brands and an appropriation of survival of garment workers**

As of May 3, 2020, 1143 Bangladeshi garment factories reported \$3.17 billion worth of suspension or cancellation of orders by the global retailers, which affected 2.27 million garment workers (BGMEA 2020). The U.S. apparel imports from Bangladesh were projected to drop by -6.57% to -17.06%, and EU apparel imports from Bangladesh were expected to drop by -3.67% to -12.38%. The economic impact on the garment industry was forecasted to be similar or worse than what Bangladesh experienced during the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>27</sup>

In a YouTube video clip published by BGMEA on March 23, 2020, Rubana Huq – the President of BGMEA and managing director of the Mohammadi Group – appealed to the “good senses” of global retailers. She urged them to put aside the differences, work together, and step up for Bangladeshi garment workers.<sup>28</sup> The international media, such as the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *NPR*, *Reuters*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Washington Post*, widely covered this plight of Bangladeshi garment factory owners. Clean Clothes Campaign, International

Labor Rights Forum, Maquila Solidarity Network, and Workers Rights Consortium issued a joint statement urging brands to take responsibility for workers in their supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>29</sup>

The international media and international labor rights organizations rightfully questioned the retailers' decision to cancel or suspend their orders. What is striking in the whole discourse is the presumed innocence of BGMEA and the Bangladesh government. A *New York Times* article quoted Rubana Huq, who clustered the garment workers, BGMEA, and the government of Bangladesh – all under the same “we” – as she said, “For them (Western brands and retailers), it’s a question of the survival of the businesses....For us, it’s the survival of our 4.1 million workers”.<sup>30</sup> This specific statement is problematic, at least on two fronts. First, Bangladeshi workers and Bangladeshi factory owners cannot be collapsed into the same category. Despite the brutal impact of the series of suspensions and cancellations of orders on the Bangladeshi garment industry, BGMEA and the garment factory owners continued to exercise a tremendous amount of power and control over the garment workers. Second, it is not necessarily a binary, mutually exclusive question of the survival of businesses in the West and the survival of workers in Bangladesh. European and American retailers also did not or could not pay their frontline store workers at a mass scale during the COVID-19 crisis. Many of these workers were laid off. Those who were eligible got limited forms of benefits from their respective governments that were not enough in most cases in the face of the upcoming global recession. In Europe and North America, workers organized with their unions and allies and staged strikes demanding fair treatment from the giant retailers.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, in her *New York Times* interview, I would argue that Huq carefully wrapped the question of “business” by an appropriation of the narrative of “survival” of workers.

In a globalizing world shaped by neoliberalism and capitalism, running a garment factory in the Global South is not easy. The competition for offering the cheapest product within the fastest possible time with other countries worldwide and other factories within the country is extreme. Unrealistic pressure from the global retailers, political unrest, not-so-efficient infrastructure and transportation, recent rise in global trade protectionism, increasing automation, and threat of re-shoring manufacturing to the Global North or other cheaper destinations are challenges that are beyond the control of Bangladeshi garment factory owners. The only factor the factory owners can control and exploit is labor – which is cheap, feminized, flexible, disposable, and plenty in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is essential to critically analyze the appropriation of the narrative of workers' survival that BGMEA and the owning class carefully deployed to protect their capitalist interests in the midst of a global pandemic.

The series of events in the 2020 pandemic-struck Bangladeshi garment industry is an epitome of “economization of life” – a phrase borrowed from Michelle Murphy<sup>32</sup> – which can be explained as a governance mechanism that determines who is “worth living” and “worth saving” relying on neoliberal market rationales. Therefore, protecting the national economy and the owning class often gets priority over preserving the lives of racialized and feminized workers. Economization of life is a mechanism of using economic metrics to determine who gets to stay home and safe from the contagion and who gets to work and remains exposed.<sup>33</sup> The Bangladeshi garment workers faced a complex existential threat during the global COVID-19 crisis. On the one hand, their livelihoods were threatened as they were left without work and income. On the other hand, their cramped homes and workplaces offered little to no protection from the contraction of the coronavirus. BGMEA overwhelmingly focused on workers' economic well-being – at least rhetorically – ignoring the health risks the workers and the greater community would face if factories remained open.

In the video message appealing to international buyers, Rubana Huq says, “We will have 4.1 million workers literally going hungry if we don’t all step up to a commitment to the welfare of the workers”.<sup>34</sup> This hyper-focus on workers’ economic welfare and the humanitarian “survival” narrative as circulated by BGMEA perfectly aligned with their business interests as their business-as-usual got threatened by the global pandemic. The historical track records of BGMEA protecting Bangladeshi garment workers’ safety, security, and well-being are highly questionable. For example, just one and a half years before the pandemic started, when garment workers were organizing demanding a living wage, BGMEA initially proposed a salary raise from BDT. 5300 (approximately \$62) to BDT. 6063 (approximately \$71) only. It vehemently resisted providing garment workers a living wage and raising the minimum monthly salary to BDT. 16000 (approximately \$188) as demanded by garment workers and labor activist groups, and eventually settled down with BDT. 8000 (approximately \$94).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, a spotlight approach of transnational labor organizing exclusively targeting the global brands during the pandemic ignores how the simplistic and opportunistic framing of “welfare” or “survival” of workers during the pandemic is based on the logic of economization of life and served the purpose of the supply chain capitalism. It failed to initiate more critical, complicated, and structural dialogues about the failure of the just-in-time and lean production in the supply chain and the roles of retailers as well as BGMEA, garment factory owners, and the Bangladesh government.

International media, such as *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *NPR*, and *Al Jazeera* widely covered how the suspension and cancellation of orders and irresponsible behaviors of the retailers threatened the Bangladeshi garment industry and the job prospects of more than 2 million workers. The coverage was crucial, especially when the international pressure had the capacity of pushing retailers to reconsider how their decisions might have impacted their brand images even if they did not care about workers. Nevertheless, very few international media reached out to Bangladeshi garment workers first-hand and inquired about their COVID-19 experiences. Very few of them covered stories on how the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s 31 directives, which laid out how lives would be governed during the pandemic, did not include a word about 4.1 million garment workers of the country.<sup>36</sup> They didn’t write much about how both BGMEA and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) asked owners only to “consider” closing the factories amid the global pandemic<sup>37</sup> or how these organizations were deficient in coordination within themselves. Due to the severe lack of coordination, hundreds of garment workers who went home after the government announced a public holiday due to the pandemic<sup>38</sup> walked more than 100 km to Dhaka for fear of losing jobs.<sup>39</sup> Rubana Huq expressed doubts about whether all the people returning to Dhaka were even garment workers. She claimed, “Most of the workers live near the factories”,<sup>40</sup> which totally ignored the fact that a vast majority of these workers were migrants coming from outside of Dhaka, and they visited their families during holidays. Few international media highlighted the fact that the government of Bangladesh ordered the shut down of most of the workplaces, educational institutions, and public gatherings starting from March 26, 2020, but the garment factories were not included in this order. The factories were allowed to remain open as long as the owners were able to ensure the protection of workers from the virus (Ibid). Middle- and upper-class people were afforded the opportunity to stay home, but the working-class, feminized garment workers were left exposed to the threat of contagion. Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity, one of the prominent labor NGOs in Bangladesh, reported that most of the garment factories were not capable of maintaining adequate social distancing on the factory floor, proper use of face masks, hand-washing, access to sanitizers, continuous sanitization of the machines, safe use of public restrooms, and other

hygiene protocols.<sup>41</sup> A study conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation found that 99.8% of 430 garment workers who were interviewed for the survey claimed they were not infected by COVID-19. Nevertheless, 95.8% of them reported they didn't have information on whether their coworkers were infected. 85.7% of them suffered from fever and cold during the pandemic, but none of them visited doctors or got tested for COVID-19,<sup>42</sup> which most likely indicates an alarming level of under-reporting of COVID-19 cases among Bangladeshi garment workers.

## Conclusion

The spotlight approach of transnational labor organizing during the COVID-19 crisis failed to address critical questions, such as why the global garment industry is so extraordinarily fragile that a few weeks of disruption created devastating impacts or what kind of risk management system for brands, factory owners, and workers the global fashion industry should institute in place. The historical as well as contemporary trends, as analyzed in this chapter, demonstrate the need for adopting a "floodlight" approach<sup>43</sup> that can holistically address the socio-economic context of the precarious garment labor and support meaningful transnational coalition-building practices bridging the gap between the "local" and the "global." A floodlight approach is also crucial for going beyond crafting garment industry-specific solutions that are not enough for bringing transformative changes since the problem lies in the larger capitalist-neoliberal structure of the global fashion supply chain and the way it naturalizes free-market economy, widespread privatization, shrinking state, non-existent social security, over-reliance on corporate philanthropy, goodwill of NGOs, and individual charity for addressing deep-rooted structural challenges.<sup>44</sup>

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# FROM RAG TRADE TO THRIFTING: THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF SECONDHAND CLOTHING

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## **Introduction**

Currently in the United States, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, unemployment rates reached 16%, exceeding The Great Recession of 2008, and nearing over half of what it was in The Great Depression.<sup>1</sup> As numerous fashion brands closed shop, early predictions saw a 40% decline between January and March 24, 2020.<sup>2</sup> However, in the midst of an economic decline, the secondhand fashion market continues to hold over 40 billion in global market share and is expected to annually grow at a rate of 15–20% – with higher rates predicted for developed markets.<sup>3</sup> Amongst this trend, e-commerce brands like ThreadUP, Poshmark, DePop, The RealReal, and Rent the Runway continue to grow in value.<sup>4</sup>

Thrifting – no longer a penny-pinching practice driven by economic necessity, is now a full-on cultural phenomenon whose patronage is no longer captured by a world of class ambitions and distinction. Instead, for Gen Zs and Millennials, thrifting has become a popular lifestyle choice shared via thrift hauls on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. On a recent fieldwork for example, despite the pandemic, lines were coiled outside secondhand shops in Brooklyn, New York. Today in fashion, one can argue, old is the new. However, as scholarship on secondhand cultures have shown, even this proposition is itself, old.

## **Secondhand clothing in the premodern era**

In Premodern Europe, as scholars have shown,<sup>5</sup> clothing, used, pre-owned, worn, and repaired often traveled through many hands and bodies in creating what Jones and Stallybrass calls, “a banking system in clothes.”<sup>6</sup> Looking at records of Philip Henslowe, an English theater owner in the late 1500s, Jones and Stallybrass describe how he not only loaned money to other professional theater companies, but also pawned and sold clothing.<sup>7</sup> The presence for a market in secondhand clothing they assert, is exhibited both by Henslowe’s business network of 59 women and 35 men, and his willingness to pay high sums to acquire these used clothes.<sup>8</sup> At a time when visits to the theater was beyond the means of most people, the pawn value of a pair of silk stockings they calculate was enough to pay for 72 visits!<sup>9</sup>

Prior to industrialization, without machine labor, the production of clothing remained an arduous enterprise. Scarce to come by, unlike today's use and throw norms, clothes were investments procured with longevity in mind and safekept with care through repair and recycle.<sup>10</sup> Serving not only a utilitarian purpose of the body's protection, clothing was instrumental in financing one's family savings and security from bankruptcy debt as people pledged their used clothes with local pawnbrokers.<sup>11</sup> In what Fontaine calls, the *ancien régime* economy, the circulation and recirculation of used clothing created a network of actors from pawnbrokers, frippers, tailors, craftsmen, shopkeepers, pledge women, and patrons that created a "non-money" currency of alternative exchanges in forms of pawning, pledges, gift, livery, and barter alongside the official coin.<sup>12</sup>

While secondhand clothing culture is not a new phenomenon, like fashion itself, scientific inquiry of it didn't draw much interest. For the latter as a form of alternative currency, according to Fontaine, the reason remains two-fold. First, notions of economy deriving from Enlightenment *Philosophes* in its separation from politics placed monetary circulation at its center, and thus alternative forms of "non-money" exchange such as used clothing were dismissed as archaic.<sup>13</sup> Second, in imagining a new society, Enlightenment philosophers privileged collective will over personal-ties, resulting in the disappearance of the role of ordinary clothes from social life as it wore out and was replaced by new styles.<sup>14</sup> For the former, fashion as others like Gilles Lipovetsky have argued, was also seen as frivolous, superficial, and ephemeral. In its fleeting mode of exchange, it too was a recipient of being seen as "unscientific," and not "fashionable among intellectuals."<sup>15</sup> In the "occultation of the material" to use Fontaine's expression, secondhand clothing suffered further neglect, both under the consecration of material – in the focus on high-fashion and class-prestige<sup>16</sup> and in the suspicion of the material – in the "false consciousness" of the manipulated masses.<sup>17</sup> Taken either way, under the dereliction of mass-fashion, secondhand clothing as both ordinary and as an "archaic" form of currency, ill-fitting of Enlightenment notions of reason and progress, continued to remain under studied.

### Research on contemporary secondhand clothing

Only at the cusp of the twentieth century do we begin to see a growing interest in the world of secondhand cultures. As scholars explore this shifting cultural marvel "no longer a question of the *jeunesse dorée* rubbing shoulders with the poor and the down-and-outs," as Angela McRobbie writes in 1989,<sup>18</sup> contemporary popular culture has also picked up its anthem in songs like "Thrift Shop" by the hip-hop duo Macklemore and Ryan Lewis.<sup>19</sup> Gospelizing the cantor of an emerging milieu, the duo in the buoyancy of a music video full of Grandpa sweaters and vintage mink coats lampoon high-fashion price-tags as they rap, "They be like, Oh, that Gucci. That's hella tight/ I'm like, Yo that's fifty dollars for a T-shirt/ Limited edition, let's do some simple addition/ Fifty dollars for a T-shirt, that's just some ignorant bitch (Shit)/ I call that getting swindled and pimped (Shit)/ I call that getting ticked by a business."<sup>20</sup> In what the literary critic Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht pronounces as "presence effects,"<sup>21</sup> the song's melody, seizing the definition of "thrifting" howls: "I'm gonna pop some tags/ Only got twenty dollars in my pocket/ I, I, I'm hunting, looking for a come-up/ This is fucking awesome."<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most sweeping work on contemporary secondhand cultures is Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe's "mission" as they describe in the introduction of their book. Gregson and Crewe, embarking further on the notion of alternative currency, in great richness complicate and contextualize contemporary practices of secondhand goods exchange. While the empirics

of their study expands beyond secondhand clothing, including practices such as used-car sales; the breath of their study accomplishes two very important tasks: (1) demonstrating how goods, while alienable can be reworked or reappropriated in the creation of new value systems, and (2) how these practices, situated within spaces of exchange produce geographies whether imagined as “central or marginal,” and “local or global.”<sup>23</sup> More so, in the depth of their study with sellers and buyers, they explain through observational fieldwork and in-depth interviews, how the biographical traversing of things become objectified and sublated in rituals of collecting, gifting, and bargaining, which through processes of distinction and taste, create consumer identities and subjectivities.<sup>24</sup>

In this schema of alternative value systems and consumer identities, an area of secondhand culture that has gained more attention above all else, is vintage fashion. Nancy Fisher for example in historicizing vintage fashion delineates how discarded used clothing as charity wore out its stigma of poverty.<sup>25</sup> Tracing the original use of the term “vintage fashion” to 1957 in the United States, Fisher states, in those times, vintage was seen “on the same cultural level to a ‘beer bottle.’”<sup>26</sup> Characterizing the changing mood then, she quotes a vintage clothing shop owner in New York who in 1982 writes of the scene:

When I began this business in 1965, the only thing that could be said about vintage clothing was that it was old and used and that you had to be a little weird or theatrical to buy it, let alone wear it on days other than Halloween. Today every fashion-conscious woman and man has probably bought at least one old piece and worn it as evening or everyday clothing.<sup>27</sup>

According to Fisher, the rise of vintage is parallel to the rise of mass production as an alternative form of consumption where individuals seek novelty and high quality in garment construction (the opposite being seen as a defining feature of mass production).<sup>28</sup> This makes vintage consumers, like wine collectors, unique in their identity for it requires specific cultural capital in deciphering the value of a garment beyond its original year of make, including knowledge of the spaces in which, as they would say, “find such treasure.” While the initial use of the term *vintage* borrows from the concept of “wine age,” (i.e., as in *1965 Bordeaux Wine Vintage*) referring to future investment purchases (i.e., such as *Vintage 501 Levi Jeans* in fashion), the term today as Fisher states, “has morphed into an abstract category” of clothing “that is 20 years older or more, with a recognizable decades-old look.”<sup>29</sup>

While the overlapping features between these value systems and consumer identities are obscure, Heike Jense’s work on vintage fashion broadens our understanding of secondhand fashion. Holding history as mnemonic undertaking, she follows how youth cultures in Germany appropriate memory in the twenty-first century. For the boy and girls of the 1960s stylers, Jense shows how vintage and retro come into creative play in both resisting and revalorizing the past, and in providing them with an identity apart from their parent’s generation.<sup>30</sup> Such facsimiles of bygone eras aren’t solely cemented in retro garments, but also in the disassembly of old clothes by designer like Lamine Kouyaté of XULY.Bët who as Victoria Rovine writes, “celebrates edges, literally as well as figuratively.”<sup>31</sup> Cradled in Rovine’s multifarious metaphor is the Malian and Senegalese designer Kouyaté’s own experiences of center and margin: “It’s an African—and any Third World nation’s—philosophy to use things up. You don’t waste anything, but create new from old.”<sup>32</sup> Celebrating the edge, Kouyaté’s design team rummage flea markets by salvaging old clothes, reclassifying finished products as raw material, transforming T-shirts into dresses, sweaters into scarves,<sup>33</sup> and by spectacularizing trash on the runway. For designers like Kouyaté, memory is not only a historic trope, but in his

refusal of “the fashion industry’s perpetual rush into the future, in which the past is rejected and discarded,” the biographical imaginings of the trope itself is deconstructed and re sewn into a new subjectivity: “Afro-Modernity.”<sup>34</sup>

### Secondhand in the global market

In the larger scale of global exchanges of used clothing, production of spaces is an ongoing dialogue fraught with economic debates around free trade and protectionism. The East African Community (EAC), an intergovernmental organization for example, has been pushing to ban the trade of secondhand clothing in countries like Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda since 2016,<sup>35</sup> while lobby groups in the United States such as Secondary Material and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) have urged countries like Kenya against their recent ban as of April 2020.<sup>36</sup> The EAC argues that used clothing stifles local textile and apparel economy. This measure to boost local economy is also joined by others countries such as Haiti, Nigeria, and India.<sup>37</sup>

As the largest importer of used clothing in East Africa, Kenya’s recent ban holds significant attention as other East African countries with the exception of Rwanda in 2018, retreated from the ban due to the US Trade Representative (USTR) threats to suspend preferential trade agreements (PTAs) such as the 2000 African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which offers duty-free and quota-free access to US markets.<sup>38</sup> This is further complicated by the current global state of the world as Kenya has cited COVID-19 as the reason for the ban as preventative measure against the spread of the virus.<sup>39</sup>

In the United States and the United Kingdom, two of the largest exporters of secondhand clothing; the early onset of the pandemic’s lock down measures has bottle-necked the flow of textile and apparel movement in the global commodity chain and added to cash-flow problems.<sup>40</sup> Exporters such as Antonio De Carvalho of *Green World Recycling* for example state, “we are reaching the point where our warehouses are completely full” and “we are losing... a huge amount of money, making a big loss for the operation.”<sup>41</sup> Prior to COVID-19, De Carvalho used to sell a ton of used clothing for 570 pounds (\$768.93 US dollars) where within a month of the pandemic, prices had dropped to 400 pounds (\$539.55 US dollars).<sup>42</sup> In response to Kenya’s ban due to COVID-19, SMART states that it “is a disingenuous attempt to stop secondhand clothing trade” by “masquerading as a measure to protect its citizens.”<sup>43</sup> As export values dropped by 45%, Jackie King, director of SMART in an interview said, “I would anticipate there will be companies going out of business.”<sup>44</sup>

The ban of mitumba (Swahili for bundles) in Kenya on the other side of the globe also has traders domestically feeling the loss. While Kenya imported 176,000 tons of secondhand clothing in 2018, now traders who use to sell 50 pairs of trousers a day can barely sell 1.<sup>45</sup> As of August 2020, Kenya under pressure from Europe and the United States removed the ban, but the domestic market which depends on low-cost import continues to struggle from the hemorrhaging effects of the ban.<sup>46</sup> For others in Kenya, this represents an opportunity in the market as Phyllis Wakiaga of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers states, “I think corona has shown not just for Kenya but for many countries to look inward a lot and try and fill some of the market gaps.”<sup>47</sup> Likewise, designers in Kenya, although aware that reworking the value chain will take a number of years, remain optimistic that with local sourcing and production, they can capture the domestic Kenyan market.<sup>48</sup>

Although the aforementioned global state of secondhand clothing trade contextualizes challenges in the current market, this tug of war as Karen Tranberg Hansen in great breadth has demonstrated in the case of *Salaula* in Zambia, is also not new. Economic debates around

free-trade and protectionism as Hansen shows is deeply rooted in histories of colonialism where countries like Zambia, known as Northern Rhodesia in early colonial days remained underdeveloped as British labor outposts.<sup>49</sup> While changes in the colonial economic policy in the 1950s brought upward mobility, and a cash-only wage replaced cash and food rations, in spite of their purchasing power, many Africans had little opportunity to spend their hard-earned cash.<sup>50</sup> African urban workers were not only restricted from land and home ownership which drew their consumption towards food and clothing,<sup>51</sup> in addition, comparable to sumptuary laws in European early modern period, distinctions were created by colonial authorities around basic clothing needs and clothing desires (considered unnecessary by them).<sup>52</sup> Despite a growing African market, writes Hansen, the colonial government was reluctant to recognize and promote new production and marketing practices which ultimately restrained Africans from full economic participation.<sup>53</sup>

On the outside, post-World War II economic changes in Europe and the United States left a surplus of used clothing resulting from competition with ready-to-wear.<sup>54</sup> These used clothes then through charitable organizations such as Salvation Army found an outlet in sub-Saharan Africa, making them the world's largest secondhand importer.<sup>55</sup> With a growing consumer demand and a lack of domestic manufacturing industry in Zambia, even though import restrictions were in place during WWII, through the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), secondhand clothing found a market.<sup>56</sup>

And here lies the current challenge of many African countries, as Zambia after independence in 1964 banned the importation of secondhand clothing.<sup>57</sup> In addressing how to clothe the new nation, independence also meant freeing the country from outside imports and refocusing efforts to strengthening domestic industries. While the following decade did see increasing domestic economic productivity, including in textile and garment manufacturing, this was short lived due to weak political foundations.<sup>58</sup> Zambia, like Kenya and many other sub-Saharan African countries, remains tensely caught in the contradictory challenge of liberalizing local economies with pressures from Europe and United States (in the form of donor-driven policies like AGOA), and of protecting local economies from external competition such as used clothing imports. Nonetheless, without competitive supply to meet local consumer demands, the secondhand market continues to be a relevant sector in both labor and consumption.

However, the presence of secondhand clothing in the Global South is not without criticism. In *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast-Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*, Andrew Brooks argues that this trade has billions of people locked in a dependency without much choice but to wear the discards of the Global North.<sup>59</sup> In the West, writes Brooks, fashion trends continue to accelerate with social media as Gen-Z and young millennials haul new clothes from fast-fashion retailers like Boohoo and Fashion Nova, leading to a narrowing effect in manufacturing and shipping lead times, and placing greater pressure on factories – resulting in the exploitation of factory workers in places in Bangladesh and China, and environmental degradation due to micro-fiber pollutants posing threats to the ecological system and the food-chain.<sup>60</sup> And while it wouldn't be inaccurate to say that parallels of economic dependency and reproduction of inequality between the Global South and North hark on histories of colonialism and Western imperialism, it still leaves to reckoning the question of how African countries can modernize their economies?

Scholars postulate no simple answers. This dependency on secondhand import as Brooks has expounded, doesn't necessarily explain the decline of local garment and textile manufacturing.<sup>61</sup> In fact, without official data, a number of factors remain at play, including the impacts of industry privatization following economic liberalization policies in which domestic actors do not have capital to compete, not to mention new disruptions in the market from

China and India.<sup>62</sup> Others, such as Pietra Rivoli in *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Markets, Power, and Politics of World Trade*, remain more optimistic. In this David and Goliath battle over the market she writes, secondhand clothing is not the problem but rather a creative resolve in people from not wearing rags.<sup>63</sup> As a professor at Georgetown University in 1999, she reflects over anti-globalization protests on her campus, “the poor suffer more from exclusion from politics than from the perils of the market and that... [activists]... should be focused on including people in politics rather than shielding them from markets.”<sup>64</sup> In spite of their diverging outlooks, both Books and Rivoli can agree that neither romanticism over anti-globalization, nor the utopianism of laissez-faire will resolve millions of sub-Africans out of secondhand clothing. Brooks suggests that trade agreements and policies need to provide greater flexibility in their terms,<sup>65</sup> while Rivoli in Karl Polanyi’s expression of “the double movement” states that the market needs skeptics, and the skeptics need the market – and most of all, those on the ground need both.<sup>66</sup> This contention over secondhand clothing in the global market nonetheless leaves us with the question: how can African countries grow out of secondhand when competing against more powerful actors like the United States and Europe who historically have been writing the rules of the game?

### Old clothes, new directions

Although it is beyond the means of this chapter to exhaustively demonstrate the scope of all the scholarship on secondhand clothing, what I have tried to convey here, albeit briefly, is both the subject’s breadth and depth. While secondhand clothing economies have historically been around, the current practice both “locally” and “globally” continues to undergo rapid changes. In light of this, a number of new questions arise: how can we explain the current ascend of the secondhand market share? And, how do these changes compare on the global scale of the trade? That in part has been the goal of this chapter, to maintain that thrifting, in comparison to the alternative currency of the *ancien régime*, and the post-war rag-trade, remains a novel cultural phenomenon.

To try to answer these questions, I’ve identified a number of themes that run through secondhand’s history to discern how these subject matters point to new directions for future research. But firstly, it should be noted that to understand secondhand fashion, we need to examine its cultural economy. That is to give analytical autonomy to culture, as Jeffery Alexander states, where culture isn’t something to be explained, but does the explaining.<sup>67</sup> This perspective maintains that rather than purely calculative transactions between rational actors, economies are cultural events grounded in beliefs and social norms, and economic actors and actions embedded in a system of meaning that is performative, narrativized, and symbolically coded.<sup>68</sup> How else can we explain the significance of the desire for something as mundane and stigmatized as trash? This is very much the brilliance of secondhand, for it thwarts the linearity rooted in Enlightenment philosophies and instead, creates an interrogative opening, questioning our modern beliefs around what is “new” and “old” by challenging ideations of Western rationalism, instrumentalism, and utilitarianism. And thus, it brings to seriousness, the centrality of not materialism but materiality.

In the case of Zambia for example, as Hansen shows it would be an erroneous over simplification to say that secondhand consumption is about Africans imitating Western fashion.<sup>69</sup> Rather, she states, “clothing competence,” their preoccupation with dress and aesthetic sensibility has more to do with well-being and has long preexisted colonial civilizing projects.<sup>70</sup> Context matters greatly since meaning takes place in interaction,<sup>71</sup> especially in cases of *Salaula* where local norms inform the interpretation of these “outside” goods in creating their own “look.”<sup>72</sup> The arrival of import

bales for example, are heavily scrutinized. The plastic wrap and the holding straps are all closely examined for tampering to verify that the bale is “fresh” and “new.”<sup>73</sup> As these used clothes enter a new cycle of consumption in the marketplace, traders open the bales publicly to show they have not been meddled with, whereas a pre-opened bale is suspected to be “third-hand” (worn by Zambians and resold), and therefore, depreciative in value.<sup>74</sup>

Citing Miller’s “birth of value” where “people create the conditions for value to emerge in the context of transactions,” Gregson and Crewe also emphasize importance of context.<sup>75</sup> Unlike the dualism of “the market” and “the gift,” or production and consumption, their thesis shows how context, in manners of reworking goods and spaces of exchange through biographical narratives are crucial in appropriating alienable goods and constructing geographies.<sup>76</sup> The range of this theory is applicable beyond their original study based on the United Kingdom, and can also contribute to studies on cultural ecologies and secondhand cultures. This is an observation in my own research on the secondhand market in New York City where secondhand retail spaces such as vintage shops, consignment shops, and thrift shops, and their overall density interplay with the cultural hierarchies of the city’s geography.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, a productive avenue of research in the global market would also be to compare local contexts, either within Africa or internationally where countries like India and China have selectively liberalized their economies. This tension between free trade and local economies is also a cultural narrative seeped in histories of colonialism and Western imperialism. Therefore, for operations of secondhand trade policies, it is imperative to understand how preexisting biographies of goods, nation, and people will be interpreted against “new” clothes from the “outside.” Polanyi’s double-movement heeds to this dialectic, that markets cannot sustainably govern themselves and are in fact embedded in society.

In the West, the historical milieu of used things considerably determines its interpretation. These histories are as Igor Kopytoff has put forward, the cultural biography of things.<sup>78</sup> For instance, that secondhand clothes were an alternative form currency in the premodern era is because clothing was laborious to make and therefore scarce. However, this instrumental view reduces used clothing an exchange value (to use Marx’s term), and neglects how charity, livery, and gift are as Emile Durkheim has shown, actions motivated by sacrifice and renouncement in a greater process of moral socialization.<sup>79</sup> In today’s scene, this view on alternative currency is most comparable to the vintage secondhand market. The RealReal’s advertisements for example, reverberate with “authenticated luxury consignment” by their “experts.”<sup>80</sup> What is authenticity if not a form of cultural capital with narratives and characterization around taste? The market’s attempt to capture authenticity, especially in the case of vintage fashion is not only a matter of economic optimization, but branding, positioning, and marketing which are themselves cultural processes of generating value. In the case of vintage fashion, as Gregson and Crewe state, value is mediated by the first cycle of consumption.<sup>81</sup>

In the period following World War Two, with the rise of mass fashion, in places like London and New York, through black markets, a surplus of used clothing found its way to flea markets.<sup>82</sup> While secondhand for those having lived through the war was “a terrifying reminder of the stigma of poverty, the shame of ill-fitting clothing, and the fear of disease through infestation,” it was the subcultures of the 1950s and 1960s that reframed secondhand.<sup>83</sup> To rummage for old fur coats, crêpe dresses, army coats, and silk blouses was for the hippies and the beats youth culture, a way to perform their subcultural identities in the rejection of mass-produced fashion (which was seen as “selling out”).<sup>84</sup> As McRobbie states on the post-war rag trade, “secondhand style continually emphasizes its distance from secondhand clothing.”<sup>85</sup>



This idea of distance carries great import to understanding secondhand fashion for it contours experience and supply's it with meaning, and takes place both in contact with space and time. In matters of space or in the production of geography, it is our contextualization of what is "local" or "global," and "center" or "margin" that shapes cultural practices and value. How these meanings play out in a homologous fashion is well documented by Jennifer Le Zotte in *From Goodwill to Grunge: A History of Secondhand Style and Alternative Economies* in showing how used clothing's marginality becomes part of various marginal groups in resisting dominant culture.<sup>86</sup> A potential area of research here is to examine how this notion of marginality is changing today as mass-fashion retailers collaborate with secondhand companies (i.e., Walmart and ThreadUP),<sup>87</sup> or sell secondhand clothes (i.e., Urban Outfitters).

The other factor that regulates secondhand economies is time. Time, not in the mechanical sense of the word, but in the perceptive, sensory, and experiential mode that orients action. The significance of this is clear in the way in which goods themselves are categorized (i.e., vintage, retro, or more generally secondhand). Fisher's metaphor of vintage wine is apt for vintage fashion as age becomes a way to seize value. Memory is another dimension of this as Jens describes in the case of retro and the sixties stylers. In the form of biography, memory, both in its presence and absence molds how consumers experience secondhand fashion. This distance of time also explains why the newness of mass-fashion is seen as less desirable and in large part enables singularization giving old, used, and worn clothing its novelty as the "new." Thus, materiality becomes consequential to grasping how consumers appropriate secondhand clothing, and how the secondhand market captures this in the form of capital and value.

These elements however, as scholars of secondhand have underlined, do not work in a linear fashion but rather in the interaction between space, time, center, margin, local, and global move idiosyncratically in forming a post-modern narrative. To answer the question raised earlier, today's secondhand culture, in contrast to the sumptuary laws of the pre-modern era, or the class-based distinctions of the nineteenth and twentieth century, are both stylistically anachronistic and without an overarching ideology. (This is not to deem class irrelevant, for it continues to remain so, for example, in the case of luxury secondhand fashion; nor is it to say that beliefs are now trivial.) Therefore, these identities today can be explained less as sub-cultures, and more as a cultural process of individualization. Lipovetsky for instance, on the democratization of fashion describes this as a means of emancipating of the individual from tradition in the process of greater personalization.<sup>88</sup>

It is no surprise then that for most consumers of secondhand fashion, their primary reason for shopping used clothing is that "it's different," "one-of-a-kind," and enables them to express their individuality. In the current context then, consumption of secondhand clothing is not only driven by mass-fashion's surplus, but the ubiquity of styles "in fashion." Surplus however in this circumstance is narrativized as mass-fashion's waste and thus the consumption of secondhand is seen as a practice in sustainability. Lisa McNeil and Rebecca Moore in their research for example, explore why consumers don't shop sustainably.<sup>89</sup> This is a developing area of research in secondhand fashion, and can greatly contribute to general studies on sustainability and fashion. What all of these changes represent, to say the least, is that meaning is historically determined by the conditions it comes in interaction with.

In addition, "experience economy"<sup>90</sup> also conspicuously separates secondhand fashion today from its more antecedent practices. This involves rituals of hunting, rummaging, and scavenging through the mish-mosh of de-contextualized goods that in the anachronism of individual styles become part of de-commodifying what is alienable. The experience of time and space creates meaningful distinctions here (i.e., vintage shops vs. thrift shops). Popular practices of Do-It-Yourself culture and upcycling in secondhand also create greater moments for such

personalization. Kouyaté's designs for XULY.Bêt, and the prominence of brands like Bode who remake American quilts into contemporary silhouettes are an example of the demand for singularized goods. Moreover, consumer landscape today remains deeply altered by e-commerce and social media. The meeting of secondhand market with this virtual landscape leaves a lot of room for new research on how this refashions the experience economy into new networks of laboring consumption.

In conclusion, the circularity of used clothing illuminates the post-modern condition of secondhand fashion. In its own self-referentiality, thrifting today is less an action and more a state of identification. Like the allegory of Plato's cave, fashion's ephemerality draws us into the allure of surfaces whose dialectics allow us to explore the undercurrents of this age of personalization. Confronting fashion's critics, neither consecrating it as class ambition, nor denouncing it as false consciousness; in the embrace of mass-fashion's waste, secondhand fashion illustrates materiality's centrality to life. Things remain lifeless because they are not fetishized, writes Stallybrass<sup>91</sup> in a world that is increasingly described as "disenchanted." To this, secondhand offers a restorative humanism, in loving and caring for old worn-out clothes, in its reappropriation, in transcending a subject object dualism, in its fetishism, it turns trash into magic.

## Notes

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- 6 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Lemire, "The Secondhand Clothing Trade in Europe and Beyond," 147.
- 11 Fontaine, *Alternative Exchanges*, 1–12.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 1–12.

- 16 Fontaine in her introduction for example states that in giving material importance, ordinary clothes were forgotten. This tradition has a long persistence in fashion studies as well where mass-fashion until recently was not explored.
- 17 Part of the reason why mass-culture was not studied by intellectuals was because it was not seen as “culture.” Lipovetsky (1994) raises this point in his introduction on the views of The Frankfurt School scholars like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer who saw mass-culture as dupes of culture industries like advertising.
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## PART V

# Fashion and print media: literature and magazines

Fashion has always held a central role in literature even if this centrality has often been an overlooked subject in literary studies. The authors in this section consider epic poetry, novels, and photography at different points in history and locations.

Annick Paternoster discusses the interconnectedness between social indexing and moral evaluations of fashion in Italian turn-of-the-century etiquette books. In conduct books of the 1860s and 1870s fashion rules aim at achieving self-improvement for the lower middle class. In etiquette books (1880–1920) fashion is mainly communicating social distinction, that is, membership of the ruling class, through conformity and normality, values that are conservative in nature. The paper argues that fashion etiquette is highly normative, very detailed and all pervasive: for every stage of life, for every moment of the day, dress is precisely regulated. Women's fashion is a status symbol advertising their husbands' power and wealth. Fashion etiquette also allows to define outsiders: social climbers, dandies, and working women. Later etiquette books encourage women to pursue self-direction and don the more functional attire that goes with a professional career.

Royce Mahawatte explores fashion in English novels from the 1700s to the consideration of nineteenth-century authors such as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. This chapter will give the reader an introduction and a critical resource that will chart the major connections between fashion and the English novel, whose rise in the late 1700s is linked to the expansion of fashion cultures and bourgeois consumption. The essay outlines the work of Anne Hollander, Bill Brown, and Roland Barthes who each raise some literary, fashion, critical, and methodological questions that are essential to understanding the relationship between fiction and fashion such as whether dress expresses character, psychology, or morality and if fashionability exists in the language of editorials and fiction that describe clothing. These debates will look back to the nineteenth century, which this chapter will argue is the century of fashion textuality.

Adele Kudish explores the economics of beauty and its exploitation within a capitalist system in Zola's *Ladies Paradise*, Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic* series (2001–2019), and Darren Star's TV program *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). Kudish connects the novels to depictions of fashion consumption that are found later in contemporary television series such as *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girls*. This chapter compares how sexual commodification is embedded in representations of conspicuous consumption and considers how the pop culture texts operate in a postfeminist/neoliberal framework that transforms the

earlier-written novels' negative appraisals of conspicuous consumption into relatively uncritical celebrations of wealth, appearance, and consumerism.

Katarzyna Kociolek explores the photographic depictions in two female political autobiographies using detailed descriptions written by Margaret Thatcher and Betty Boothroyd to discuss how they used clothing to establish their identities. Magazines have played an important role in the history and development of fashion and indeed in shaping its trajectory. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory (1980), the chapter argues that the descriptions of clothes as well as photographs play an important function in consolidating Thatcher's identity constructed in *The Autobiography* (1995). Also, challenging the concept of "power dressing," the chapter proposes a thesis that it was the adoption of elements of ultra-feminine styles, which helped Thatcher to establish her public personae of an empowered female political figure.

Nazanin Hedayat Munroe considers the depiction of twelfth century Persian epic poetry on silk for an educated elite. The figural silks have been circulated in the Persian-speaking world and fragments have been preserved in Western museums. Between 1550 and 1650, a small group of silk textiles with figural designs were produced in the Persianate world, attributed to Safavid Iran. Depicting legendary lovers codified in the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of medieval poet Nizami Ganjavi, the silks illustrate the tumultuous royal love story of Khusrau and Shirin, and the separation of youths Layla and Majnun. The protagonists were absorbed into popular culture, becoming role models for kings and Sufi dervishes alike. Created for the elite, these textiles celebrate the meetings of these lovers in pivotal scenes, evoking worldly and mystical desire. Donning these silks communicated erudition, wealth, and mystic belief.

Rachael Alexander looks at the way fashion was represented in two important Americans and Canadian magazines in the 1920s, identifying how values of femininity, acceptability, and desirability were defined in relation to fashion. In addition to written content, these magazines presented increasingly sophisticated images; iconography which served to construct aesthetically-based ideals to which their readers were encouraged to aspire, granting increased importance to appearance and positioning of consumption as a form of identity creation. When combined with an increase of middle-class wealth and leisure, fashion was more accessible to readers of national mass-market women's magazines. Drawing on fashion theory, literary ways of reading, and consumer culture theory, this chapter will interrogate the representation of fashion in two often overlooked popular magazines: *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Canadian Home Journal*. Through a transnational comparative analysis, this chapter interrogates how middlebrow magazines negotiated complex contradictions to position fashion as an acceptable, desirable, and – at times – essential feminine interest, and argue that this positioning was crucially framed by morality and interlinked with constructions of national identity.

Fashion is under scrutiny. Natalia Berger and Skylla Blake conduct interviews and engage in discourse analysis of anti-fashion activism by animal protection adherents. They consider two campaigns, one successful and one not so successful: the anti-angora campaign of PETA and the anti-merino wool campaign. Social activists raise the debate around animal welfare in the apparel industry. With shocking and disturbing images, they are campaigning to attract worldwide media attention in order to highlight serious animal abuse in production of fashion, and influence consumption. Their study addresses how this movement influences "meaning" that is given to related fashion products, and how seemingly similar campaigns sort different effects on consumer practices. Via a cross-case discourse analysis of Dutch fashion texts, their essay sheds light on why this might be the case. It concludes with the notion that it is discourses which change first before shaping social reality.

# FASHION ETIQUETTE AND FASHION ETHICS: RULES AND VALUES IN ITALIAN TURN-OF- THE-CENTURY ETIQUETTE BOOKS

*Annick Paternoster*

## **Fashion ethics in conduct books**

While fashion historians insist on the past interwovenness of dress and morality,<sup>1</sup> this certainly remains true for the nineteenth century, with fashion's moral dimension firmly anchored in a rigid behavioral code communicating membership of the middle classes. This contribution discusses the intricate interconnectedness between social indexing and moral evaluations of fashion in the context of Italian turn-of-the-century etiquette books. Whereas twentieth-century fashion became increasingly disentangled from morality, the recent debate on ethical fashion has reignited research into moral values, such as compassion and altruism (Geiger and Keller 2017, amongst others).<sup>2</sup> To understand the specific nature of fashion etiquette, it is important to discuss the fashion discourse of historical conduct books first. There are, in fact, significant differences between conduct and etiquette books and these differences are reflected in the way that the respective genres treat fashion. While advice literature is typically investigated from the point of view of social history, women's studies, the history of education, literary history, and so on, an interesting contribution to this multidisciplinary panorama has been offered by politeness studies and historical pragmatics.<sup>3</sup> Scholars of historical politeness, in fact, have studied conduct and etiquette books as reflexive discourses on politeness, in as far as they contain prescriptive rules perpetuating actual usages:<sup>4</sup> a conduct author systemizes and rationalizes existing usages, but by the very fact that these usages appear as rules in authoritative, prescriptive works, they will help reinforce the existing usages. I am specifically interested in the relationship between politeness, conduct and etiquette, in both their verbal and non-verbal manifestations (which include fashion). My research mainly interrogates etiquette from the point of view of conventions, morality, and social class;<sup>5</sup> here I use those concepts to investigate prescriptive discourses on fashion. This paragraph considers fashion ethics in conduct books. After introducing the genre of etiquette books, I discuss the mandatory nature and complexity of fashion etiquette. The last paragraph concentrates on fashion errors and discusses ridicule as a social sanction in the context of social climbers, dandies, and working women.



In Italy, etiquette books emerge in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, but they enter a market dominated by conduct books, the so-called *galatei*. In the young Italian state, conduct books were particularly successful in the two decades that followed the unification of the country (1860–1880). After decennia of deep socio-political divisions, the ruling class needed to create a national identity and conduct books were seen as reliable instruments in this nation-building effort insofar as they contained a discourse of social stability, where inferiors were asked to respect their superiors. Conduct books promoted two sets of values: social values for polite interaction (fraternal love, solidarity, ...) and personal values deemed necessary for the economic development of the country (diligence, orderliness, thrift, ...). Fashion belongs to the latter set, where the emphasis is on study and work, believed to bring about change and self-improvement. Bodily hygiene and respectable attire, in fact, are seen as prime conditions to obtain suitable employment, better housing, or credit. In particular, fashion values center around diligence and thrift while excesses (avarice and laziness on one end and vanity and frivolity on the other) lead to poverty. Fashion rules are simple: for dress and accessories (cosmetics, fragrance, hairstyles) a golden mean must be followed, which is deemed to communicate modesty, seriousness, common sense, and propriety. Similarly, following fashion needs careful timing: adopt it too early and you will be judged frivolous, too late and you will be judged old-fashioned.<sup>6</sup> Fashion had, indeed, been the object of a democratization process. Perrot describes how advances in the textile industry enabled mass production and faster distribution.<sup>7</sup> Because of prêt-à-porter ranges newly available in department stores, the bourgeois outfit became more accessible, increasing uniformity in the second half of the century.

### **Etiquette books**

Post-unification conduct books promoted social change in the sense that they encouraged their readers to stay above the stigmatizing demarcation line separating the petty bourgeoisie (including artisans and skilled laborers in a supervisory role) from the remaining population deemed unrefined and “inferior.” Because conduct books were written either for school children or for (male) adult members of the lower middle class, they only included inexpensive activities, such as visits, walks in the park, theatre, table manners, conversation.<sup>8</sup> However, in etiquette books (1880–1920) the relationship with social class changes noticeably: etiquette is mainly communicating social distinction, that is, membership of the ruling class, through values that are conservative in nature and resist change from below. The relationship between etiquette and social distinction is, however, ambiguous and complex. While etiquette is a “defensive weeder”—as Morgan poignantly puts for Victorian England<sup>9</sup>—used by the upper class to protect an exclusive sociability, i.e., to keep out undesirable newcomers, etiquette *books* are geared towards the aspiring middle classes wishing to put their increasing wealth to good use and improve their social status. In other words, while etiquette books contributed to democratization, etiquette was about social distinction. Mara Antelling is an Italian fashion journalist. Writing a history of nineteenth-century fashion as early as 1902, she sees elite fashion as a quest for distinction. In fact, she questions if the recent “equality of clothes” can truly “breach the social dikes that are still erect between the social classes” given that “the upper classes have locked themselves in a tight-knit club, barricaded in a fortress, and look with diffidence at the tide that mounts and threatens to invade.”<sup>10</sup> While the Italian middle classes were not particularly well off in the nineteenth century,<sup>11</sup> the onset of the industrial revolution in the 1890s creates a wealthy upper middle class, which frequently interacts with the aristocracy. This ruling class is keen to copy an aristocratic lifestyle to enhance its social prestige, and this explains the editorial success of etiquette books, which exploit improving levels of female literacy and the

birth of print culture as a new mass market. Villani investigates the important links between Italian etiquette books and newspapers or women's magazines, to which their authors were regular contributors.<sup>12</sup>

The term *etichetta* "etiquette" derives from Spanish and enters Italian in the seventeenth century with the meaning of court protocol. At the end of the eighteenth century Italian *etichetta*, as well as French and English "etiquette," loses the reference to court and indicates the most formalized part of polite behavior in a private setting.<sup>13</sup> Etiquette books are a widespread phenomenon in the United States and in many European countries, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, to name but a few. In Western Europe and in the United States, etiquette books emerged already in the 1830s.<sup>14</sup> This is far earlier than in Italy, where the Industrial Revolution and the birth of an upper middle class only took place towards the 1890s. However, in terms of the topics they treat and the rules they propose, Anglo-American and continental European etiquette books are remarkably similar: after all, they cater to an international peripatetic elite.<sup>15</sup> In all these countries the genre enjoys great editorial success, in terms of different titles, reprints and new editions. This is no different in Italy, where the 10 most popular etiquette titles generate 71 editions before 1920. Also, on both sides of the Atlantic, they are increasingly written by women for a female public that has benefitted from improved literacy levels. In Italy, famous etiquette writers were the novelists La Marchesa Colombi (pseudonym of Maria Antonietta Torriani), Matilde Serao (writing as Gibus del *Mattino*, the newspaper she founded in Naples with her then-husband Edoardo Scarfoglio), and Jolanda (marchioness Maria Majocchi Plattis). Others were prolific journalists, like Anna Vertua Gentile, Emilia Nevers (Emilia Luzzatto, who translates Émile Zola), and Mantea (Maria Luigia Carolina Sobrero). Either widowed or separated, they wrote to support themselves financially. Caterina Pigorini Beri – the only married writer – was well published on the folklore of Calabria and the Marche. Villani provides a detailed account of how Matilde Serao used her social successes in the influential drawing rooms of Rome and Naples to craft a powerful network that advanced her professional writing career.<sup>16</sup> These female writers were tangible examples of gender mobility: some of them lived lives that were rather unlike the conventional model prescribed in their etiquette books, which were still advocating marriage and motherhood as the only suitable life choices for a woman. Because most authors were professional writers, the Italian etiquette books stand out by an engaging style, which is often entertaining and tongue-in-cheek.

The advent of women as writers on etiquette impacted hugely on the subject matter. *La signora*, "the lady," became the center of the social codification and the reader followed her from childhood, through marriage, motherhood, middle age, and eventually into old age. Whereas conduct literature considered women only as the angel-wife, etiquette books encouraged them to partake in a rich array of social activities, at theatre, concerts, exhibitions, public conferences, even outside town. The social norms regulated contexts typical of the upper middle class – the "at home" day, lunches, gala dinners, balls, trips to spa towns, mountain or beach resorts, with the women's lifestyle becoming a status symbol advertising their husbands' superior power and wealth. While social constrictions formed undoubtedly a heavy burden on daily life, these women were not just victims of the social system. Being a good hostess and having an influential drawing-room could advance one's husband's career and one's children's position on the marriage market. In this endeavor, fashion plays a key role.

### **Fashion etiquette: rules and values**

Philippe Perrot makes an important methodological statement on the use of etiquette books as sources for fashion:

The etiquette handbooks that proliferated in the nineteenth century provide an irreplaceable body of documentation on dress because they often devoted substantial chapters to the topic. The conformism of their prescriptions and the pains they took to preach the most acceptable and legitimate norms provide much better evidence of actual behavior than the fashion magazines.<sup>17</sup>

Like the court protocol it descends from, etiquette is highly normative. For every social context it delivers complete scripts, which are structured as a fixed sequence of minute steps. In contrast to conduct books, which contain only generic fashion rules, fashion etiquette covers a myriad of very detailed rules. Paternoster shows how within Italian turn-of-the-century etiquette books the values most frequently invoked to justify the rules are normality and conformity.<sup>18</sup> Normality comprises a semantic set of evaluative adjectives related to what is considered normal, i.e. conventional, upper-class behavior such as “refined,” “luxurious,” “chic,” “high-ranking,”<sup>19</sup> while conformity relates to “outward compliance with formalities” and includes terms such as “allowed,” “necessary,” “impeccable.”<sup>20</sup> The two values are intimately linked: whatever is compulsory for a given social group is automatically considered normal in that group. These same values apply rigorously to fashion: every aspect of one’s outfit is strictly regulated. Vestimentary rules depend on time and place: women are expected to change four to five times a day into negligée wear, a day dress to receive visitors, a simple walking dress or town wear, evening wear, and, finally, nightwear. Dress also depends on a woman’s age: there are different rules for children, adolescents, young women, newly married women, mothers, mature and elderly women. Marking important transitions, rites of passage all have their precise dress code: christening, first communion, confirmation, engagement, civil and church wedding, pregnancy, and the different stages of mourning, while there is also specific advice for women who do not marry. Finally, fashion etiquette includes rules for staff: servants, wet nurses, and governesses.

Examples abound and three brief extracts will suffice. The first regards the “at home” day:

Depending on her grade and condition, the lady will wear, when she receives, a very elaborate tea-gown, or a simple graceful dress. ... A beautiful piece of jewelry, only one, or a big brooch in an antique shape, or a big chain, from which hang elegant trinkets, go along with the tea-gown: not to mention rings, from twenty to thirty, this being self-explanatory. Likewise, a lady of a more modest condition will wear a little gem on her simple day dress.<sup>21</sup>

Note that Serao (here writing under her pseudonym Gibus) includes women of a less wealthy background. At a ball, the lady pulls out her most elaborate attire, but there are restrictions for young, unmarried girls and older women:

For balls, ladies need a light-colored dress with a train, men a tailcoat, top hat, cravat and gloves. ... Unmarried girls and elderly women must not wear a décolleté; the mother who accompanies her daughters must choose an elaborate dress, but not light-colored, nor of light-weight fabric; black satin, however beautiful, is not admitted by us at grand balls, although it is in France. Black velvet, on the other hand, is.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, rules for accessories are very precise and cover handkerchief, umbrella, veils, hats, gloves, fans, bags, jewels, cosmetics, and fragrance. Gloves follow a “meticulous code”:<sup>23</sup>

When it comes to gloves, one must follow fashion, respecting the rule that the summer calls for suede and the winter kid leather; outdoors, always a dark tint, or at

least a warm color, but never, ever, peach, pearl gray, straw yellow, pink, mauve, that is, light colors: in general straw yellow and white are for gala occasions, pink, clear blue, mauve, only when wearing a dress in the same shade.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to the complexity of fashion rules, American etiquette books are no different. Tables of content reveal the level of detail with which dress advice is delivered. *American Etiquette and Rules of Politeness*, a popular manual first published in Chicago in 1882, lists the following subtitles for women's attire: evening dress for ladies, ball dress, the full dinner dress, dress of a hostess at a dinner party, showy dress, dress for receiving calls, carriage dress, and no fewer than 22 subsequent entries.<sup>25</sup> In sum, fashion etiquette is highly normative, very detailed and all pervasive: for every stage of life, for every moment of the day, dress is precisely regulated.

### **Fashion errors**

Since fashion rules are so elaborate, etiquette books display an interesting tension field with simplicity. Simplicity of attire is frequently insisted upon. The spinster "must avoid all fashion eccentricities";<sup>26</sup> the elderly woman "must not follow fashion";<sup>27</sup> the pregnant woman must "renounce the extravagant caprices of fashion";<sup>28</sup> mothers accompanying their daughters to a public event must not "parade the latest fashion caprices."<sup>29</sup> Similar bans include young girls and widows in mourning. Yet, these restrictions do not apply to the lady herself (that is, before she has daughters of marriageable age), since her clothes and jewels are meant to advertise her husband's status and wealth, especially so as men were wearing sober, dark outfits.<sup>30</sup> For Nevers, the "eccentric inventions of fashion" are indicated "for carriage rides, and for concerts and theater";<sup>31</sup> for Mantea, the little umbrella "follows the caprices of fashion,"<sup>32</sup> an indulgence stretching to tableware: "... if one wants to follow the latest fashion, tablecloths and napkins have no fringe."<sup>33</sup> Unlike conduct books, etiquette books contain no critical, moralizing discourse on the "caprices" of fashion. At times a specific trend can be criticized, but overall it is assumed that the lady follows fashion.

However, fashion errors can lead to social sanctions. In fact, it is the very existence of sanctions that upholds the compulsory nature of etiquette. Rouvillois explains the parallelisms between law and etiquette: etiquette errors lead to "reproaches, blames, silent mockery," while serious transgressions will attract public ridicule and ostracization.<sup>34</sup> Spa towns are places where the social conventions are somewhat less strict, and this leaves room for error: "As soon as they reach the spa resort, the most respectable little women engage in a noble race to see whoever trips up first. Extravagant outfits; impossible hats; gross hairstyles."<sup>35</sup> Pigorini Beri discusses the stigma of transgressions and the general importance of learning "how to be a cog, albeit really small, of the social mechanism" in order to "avoid ridicule."<sup>36</sup> Wearing unsuitable clothes will cause embarrassment: "If someone who is underdressed in respect of the general uniform is out of tune, the person who overdresses is even more out of tune: and in any case it will be good to be make enquiries in order to avoid incurring ridicule."<sup>37</sup> Social climbers are especially exposed to ridicule because, having grown up outside the upper class, they might not have internalized the complicated rules of fashion etiquette. Lack of confidence causes them to overload their outfits:<sup>38</sup> the parvenu "always overabounds in the expression of etiquette rules and social costumes."<sup>39</sup> However, ostentatiousness is more a problem with men who are required to have sober outfits. The arriviste "flaunts gold and jewels, showy costumes."<sup>40</sup> In an etiquette book for men, Alfonso Bergando dedicates an entire chapter to "anti-gentlemanlike" manners, where he criticizes the rich who pay more attention to "appearance" and to "gaudy pomposity."<sup>41</sup>

Dandies incur in the same criticism. Unlike the parvenu, the dandy deliberately cultivates anti-conformism. The true gentleman, however, “does not prove the desire to detach himself from traditional customs,” on the contrary, he is “often dismayed” at the phrase “*fin de siècle*,” which the “selfish” interpret as “disregard for every respect, the trampling on every barrier that is put between the sordid greed for money, the desire to take pleasure.”<sup>42</sup> The problem here is the perception of selfishness and individualism, the dandy’s obvious disregard for conformity and tradition, “the end of a social organization.”<sup>43</sup>

Whereas gaudy outfits are condemned at the top of so-called good society, Nevers also warns against wearing worn-out dresses to go outdoors in the morning, which attract “the mark of bad taste, a mark that often induces to judge badly the person itself.”<sup>44</sup> An aesthetic mistake attracts a moral judgment of lacking seriousness. This is true for the lady, even more so for her maid. Nevers tells an anecdote: one day she is out on the street with a little girl and they meet two women. One is dressed in worn-out evening wear (a light-colored silk dress that does not fit, white but “yellowed” hat, straw yellow gloves, white satin shoes). The other woman dons appropriate walking attire: a grey, cotton dress, with a black hat and leather boots. When the little girl indicates the first one as the “most elegant,” Nevers comments: “... naturally. — Well, the first one was the maid, the second one her mistress.”<sup>45</sup> Nevers warns that elegant, but “crumpled” cloths “inevitably” look as if they are second hand or hand-me-downs.<sup>46</sup> If a woman of lower standing wants to be seen as serious, she will need serious outfits, as the American activist Jane Addams puts in 1905:<sup>47</sup>

... the working girl ... knows full well how much habit and style of dress has to do with her position. Her income goes into her clothing, out of all proportion to the amount which she spends upon other things. But, if social advancement is her aim, it is the most sensible thing she can do. She is judged largely by her cloths.<sup>48</sup>

Later etiquette books advise women on issues related to emancipation.<sup>49</sup> Although World War I acts as a strong catalyst, some changes emerge earlier. Young girls are allowed to leave the house without a chaperon, and increasingly etiquette writers stress the importance of a solid education. Change also pertains to dress. Writing in 1906, Jolanda strongly criticizes the use of the corset for medical reasons. Alpine walking and cycling demand shorter skirts, and low, comfortable shoes, while tennis or swimming demand practical clothes. Jolanda also discusses female clerks and shop assistants, working in offices, post offices, telephone exchanges, and department stores. They, too, wear slightly more practical outfits, probably suits and blouses, which became popular with the turn of the century: these women, “forced to arrive on time at their office in the morning, do not waste time to adorn themselves, but neither do they neglect a bit of elegance and sometimes coquetry.”<sup>50</sup> For women, there is a cautious, but unmistakable transformation from ornamental use of clothes as a status symbol to more functional outfits that leave them freer to pursue professional activities outside the home. Women’s emancipation reintroduces individual values into the fashion discourse.

## **Conclusion**

While the link between fashion and morality remains strong in the nineteenth century, after a slow dissociation in the twentieth century, it is now back on the agenda because of the demand for sustainable, or ethical, fashion. In Italian conduct books until the 1870s, fashion is part of a discourse based on ego-centered, individual values: appropriate dress is a tool to achieve social change for a readership belonging to the lower middle class. Roughly around 1880 the arrival of

Italian etiquette books is linked to the emergence of a rich elite. Central fashion values are conformity and normality, which are group-centered, social values of a conservative nature. Conforming to the elite's numerous, intricate norms is a way to achieve class distinction. The relationship with class, however, is ambiguous: both writers and readers of etiquette books use them to improve their chances at social mobility, but at the same time etiquette books stigmatize newcomers. Dress mistakes easily allow to define outsiders: social climbers, who mistake ostentatiousness for conformity, and dandies, who do not care about conforming. Young working women need to pay particular attention to their clothes if they want to avoid falling victim, not only to aesthetic, but also to moral condemnation. A later etiquette book by Jolanda embraces a moderate feminism and women become a vector for social change. Women are now, albeit cautiously, encouraged to pursue self-direction and to don the more functional attire that goes with a professional career.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See, e.g. Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). First published 1986.
- 2 See, e.g. Sonja Maria Geiger and Johannes Keller, "Shopping for Clothes and Sensitivity to the Suffering of Others: The Role of Compassion and Values in Sustainable Fashion Consumption," *Environment and Behavior* 50, no. 10 (2017): 1119–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916517732109>.
- 3 For a recent manual in the field of politeness studies see Jonathan Culpeper, Michael Haugh, and Dániel Kádár, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7>; see also Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, eds., *Historical Pragmatics* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110214284>.
- 4 See Marina Terkourafi, "From Politeness1 to Politeness2: Tracking Norms of Im/politeness Across Time and Space," *Journal of Politeness Research* 7, no. 2 (2011): 159–85, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2011.009>; Jonathan Culpeper, "The Influence of Italian Manners on Politeness in England 1550-1620," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 18, no. 2 (2017): 195–213, <https://doi.org/10.1075/jhp.00002.cul>.
- 5 Annick Paternoster, "The Codification of Nineteenth-Century Etiquette: On Politeness, Morality, Rituals and Discernment," in "Politeness in Historical Europe," eds. Annick Paternoster, Gudrun Held, and Dániel Kádár, special issue, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 24, no. 2 (forthcoming).
- 6 Annick Paternoster and Francesca Saltamacchia, "Il vestito forma la persona 'Clothes Make the Man': Fashion Morality in Italian Nineteenth-Century Conduct Books," in "Fashion Communication," ed. Nadzeya Kalbaska, Teresa Sábada, and Lorenzo Cantoni, special thematic section, *Studies in Communication Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2019): 287–306, <https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2018.02.006>.
- 7 Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie. A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 8 On Italian conduct books see Inge Botteri, *Galateo e galatei. La creazione e l'istituzione della società nella trattatistica tra antico regime e stato liberale* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999); Luisa Tasca, *Galatei. Buone maniere e cultura borghese nell'Italia dell'Ottocento* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2004); Laura Vanni, *Verso un nuovo galateo. Le buone maniere in Italia tra 'antico' e 'nuovo' regime* (Milan: Unicopli, 2006); Gabriella Turnaturi, *Signore e signori d'Italia. Una storia delle buone maniere* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011).
- 9 Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774-1858* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1994), 28.
- 10 Mara Antelling [Anna Piccoli Menegazzi], "La moda," in *Vita intima, la moda e lo sport, vita sociale*, eds. Anna Vertua Gentile, Mara Antelling, Silvio Zambaldi, and Scipio Sighele (Milan: Vallardi, ca. 1902), 85–120: 88. On Antelling, see Ombretta Frau and Cristina Gragnani, *Sottoboschi letterari. Sei case studioscose studiate tra Otto e Novecento. Mara Antelling, Emma Boghen Conigliani, Evelyn, Anna Franchi, Jolanda, Flavia Steno* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2011). All translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.
- 11 Alberto Maria Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana. L'età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996).
- 12 Paola Villani, *Ritratti di signore. I galatei femminili nell'Italia belle époque/belle époque e il caso Serao* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2018).
- 13 Tasca, *Galatei*, 134.

- 14 For France, see Frédéric Rouvillois, *Histoire de la politesse de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006); for Britain see Michael Curtin, *Propriety and Position* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987) and Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class*; for the United States see John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990) and C. Dallet Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 15 Richard J. Evans, *The Pursuit of Power. Europe 1815–1914* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016), 289.
- 16 Villani, *Ritratti*, 137–48.
- 17 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 87.
- 18 Annick Paternoster, “Politeness and Evaluative Adjectives in Italian Turn-of-the-Century Etiquette Books (1877–1914),” in *Politeness in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Annick Paternoster and Susan Fitzmaurice (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2019), 107–44, <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.299.04pat>.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 129–30.
- 21 Gibus del Mattino [Matilde Serao], *Saper vivere. Norme di buona creanza* (Napels: Aurelio Tocco, 1900), 60.
- 22 Emilia Nevers [Emilia Luzzatto], *Galateo della Borghesia. Norme per trattar bene* (Turin: Giornale delle donne, 1883), 77.
- 23 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 120.
- 24 Nevers, *Galateo*, 163.
- 25 Walter R. Houghton et al., *American Etiquette and Rules of Politeness*, 7th ed. (New York: Standard Publishing House, 1883), 9–10.
- 26 La Marchesa Colombi [Maria Antonietta Torriani Torelli Viollier], *La gente per bene. Leggi di convenienza sociale* (Turin: Giornale delle donne, 1877), 64.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 28 Mantea [Maria Luigia Carolina Sobrero], *Le buone usanze* (Turin: Libreria Roux di Renzo Streglio, 1897), 112.
- 29 Jolanda [Maria Majocchi Plattis], *Eva Regina. Il libro delle signore. Consigli e norme di vita femminile contemporanea* (Como: Casa Editrice Italiana, 1909), 446. First published 1906.
- 30 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 35.
- 31 Nevers, *Galateo*, 39.
- 32 Mantea, *Le buone usanze*, 163.
- 33 Anna Vertua Gentile, *Come devo comportarmi? Libro per tutti* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1897), 289.
- 34 Rouvillois, *Histoire de la politesse*, 260–1.
- 35 La Marchesa Colombi, *La gente per bene*, 115.
- 36 Caterina Pigorini Beri, *Le buone maniere. Libro per tutti. Approvato dal Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione per le Scuole femminili e Normali superiori e inferiori* (Turin: F. Casanova e C, 1908), 126. First published 1893.
- 37 Pigorini Beri, *Le buone maniere*, 72.
- 38 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 133.
- 39 Pigorini Beri, *Le buone maniere*, 126.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 41 Alfonso Bergando, *Sulle convenienze sociali e sugli usi dell’alta società*. Milan: Fratelli Dumolard, 1882), 179. First published 1881.
- 42 Vertua Gentile, *Come devo comportarmi?*, 172.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 44 Nevers, *Galateo*, 38.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 38–9.
- 47 Frau and Gragnani, *Sottoboschi letterari*, 13.
- 48 Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 34–5.
- 49 Annick Paternoster, “Istruzione, lavoro, voto. L’emancipazione femminile nella trattatistica comportamentale dall’unificazione al primo dopoguerra,” in “Da madri a cittadine. Le donne italiane dall’Unità alla Repubblica,” eds. Sara Delmedico, Manuela Di Franco, and Helena Sanson, special issue, *The Italianist* 38, no. 3 (2018): 334–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614340.2018.1515869>; Annick Paternoster, “Women on Books for Women: Reading Lists in Turn-of-the-Century Etiquette

Books,” in *Lettrici italiane tra arte e letteratura. Dall’Ottocento al modernism*, eds. Giovanna Capitelli and Olivia Santovetti (Rome: Campisano, forthcoming).

50 Jolanda, *Eva Regina*, 404.

51 For further reading into US historical etiquette, see Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen’s Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston: G. W. Cottrell, 1860). For its female counterpart, see Florence Hartley, *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston: G. W. Cottrell, 1860). Both incorporate a chapter on dress. They are still in print (London: Hesperus, 2014) in an abridged version; unabridged versions can be retrieved from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). A typical English example is the Anonymous, *The Hand-Book of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (London, Paris, and New York: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, ca. 1860) retrievable from Google Books. A French example which enjoyed huge editorial success – still in print – is Baronne Staffé [Blanche Soyer], *Les usages du monde: Règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne* (Paris: Tallandier, 2007), first published 1891. Of the Italian examples, only two titles are still in print: La Marchesa Colombi, *La gente per bene: galateo*, eds. Silvia Benatti, Inge Botteri, and Emmanuelle Genevois (Novara: Interlinea, 2000); Matilde Serao, *Saper vivere: norme di buona creanza*, ed. Beppe Benvenuto (Milan: Mursia, 2012).



# 30

## FASHION AND THE ENGLISH NOVEL

*Royce Mahawatte*

“It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon.”  
*Charles Dickens, Bleak House (1986: 55)*

After revealing the bleakness and torpidity of the London courts of law in the first chapter of *Bleak House* (1853), “In Chancery,” Dickens suggestively titled the second chapter “In Fashion.” The narrator mimics the fatigued voice of a society page editorial in recounting the movements of Lady Deadlock, who “has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence and at the top of the fashionable tree.”<sup>1</sup> The fashionable world is described in language eliciting confinement. It “cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun.” The language becomes morbid and gothicized “It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air.”<sup>2</sup> By the end of the chapter, when Lady Deadlock takes to her bed after seeing the papers brought to the house by Tulkinghorn, the lawyer, we begin to realize that the phrase “in fashion” is probably a euphemism for many other things, and that the “fashion intelligence,” that frantically follows Lady Deadlock around, might have eyes that are actually all-seeing.

The presence of fashion in literature is often overlooked in traditional literary studies. The representations, however, of dress, fashioned bodies, material culture, and even the state of being fashionable itself, hold an important place in the development of fiction, and of the novel in particular. Despite the range of opinions on the origins of the novel in Great Britain, this literary innovation, suited to an industrializing Great Britain and Western Europe, was associated with newness. To quote Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), a standard text for many literary scholars: “The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture, which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it was therefore well named.”<sup>3</sup> For better or worse, the word “novel” had an association with, or was a particular gloss on, the word “fashionable.” Therefore, it is no surprise that right up to the present day, fiction and fashion have had a complex and often antagonistic relationship with one another.

This chapter serves as an introduction and a critical resource charting out the major connections between fashion and the English novel, whose rise in the late 1700s will be linked to the expansion of fashion cultures, imperialism and bourgeois consumption. I will explore some literary, fashion critical and methodological questions that are essential to understanding the

relationship between fiction and fashion, and I will steer these debates towards the nineteenth century, which I will present as the century of fashion textuality. Taking a traditional approach to the literary canon, I will look at some key strands of the novel's development in relation to fashion: dress in the Gothic novel, and the phenomenon of the much-overlooked "fashionable novel" or, "the silver-fork school of fiction," as William Hazlitt condescendingly termed it.<sup>4</sup> This brings us to literary realism where authors like Charles Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, and George Eliot represented a critical and advisory approach to the material experience of fashion. Their works could not help but draw on the linguistic registers of contemporary fashion writing as they responded to a thriving system of fashion communication and consumption.

### **Critical debates: fashion as imagery and fictions of consumption**

How are we to define fashion when discussing fiction? After all, fashion is concerned with the material life of dress and the aesthetic of "rapidly changing styles."<sup>5</sup> Fashion studies developed by focalizing on this field of study as one of "the organizing principles of modern collective life."<sup>6</sup> Fashion though, is also embodied as a "situated bodily practice" – it alters the temporal meaning of the body.<sup>7</sup> All of these interpretations have symbolic and literary implications. Lipovetsky's idea can be applied to the English novel that served a culture benefitting from slavery, industrialization, and colonial expansion, all of which were the foundations of Western modernity. These exploitative models equally provided the raw materials for the fashion industry. The sociolinguistic work of Roland Barthes presented fashion as a function of language, which has the task of communicating and, arguably, creating fashion. Without language, fashion is just objects, lacking the temporality, the instruction as to how it can be worn, and the urgency only provided by and through language. Accordingly, fashion is often communicated via the imagery of storytelling and drama. There are archetypal narratives, fairy tales, and myths (many of which were consolidated in the nineteenth century by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in a first volume popularly known as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, originally published in German between 1812 and 1814, and later in English in 1823) where characters' destinies were negotiated through tropes of fashioned embodiment: ball gowns, donkey skins, extremely long hair, and of course, glass slippers. Currently, these objects are not indicators of fashion in and of themselves, but they do suggest a form of praxis for the way dress is communicated. Dress and fashioned bodies have symbolic value in fiction. In medieval poetry, items such as the girdle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have crucial representational meaning. Geoffrey Chaucer in his medieval collection of 24 stories, *The Canterbury Tales*, takes a great deal of care in describing the pilgrims' garments enabling readers to understand and visualize these items, as opposed to the spiritual world in which these characters operate. The scarves of Bath's wife are described as "kerchiefs of fine texture... I swear they weighed ten pounds."<sup>8</sup> Her scarves probably did not weigh as much, therefore signaling an important aspect at this juncture. The writing of clothes in the English tradition, even before the rise of the novel, often satirized the need to dress up. Whether representational or realist, fashion in fiction was often comic, sometimes hyperbolic and critical, particularly underscoring the frivolity of people, women in the main, and their tastes.

The purpose of writing fashion into fiction has been varied according to the novel. Should fiction depict character or place? Should the clothes described be so identifiable that readers can purchase them? In the growing study of fashion in fiction, a number of approaches have developed. Anne Hollander writes that in nineteenth-century novels, clothes "always correctly express character," and Clair Hughes and John Harvey discuss different forms of "reality effect," where fashion lends tangibility and vividness to fiction.<sup>9</sup>

Fashion and the English novel did not connect within a vacuum: instead, this process transpired in a cultural context hosting a fluctuating interaction between writing and the way people started thinking about their identities and their bodies. After the Napoleonic Wars, and the run up to reform movements rising in the 1830s, social mobility began to change. Concepts of lineage and modes of social movement became unstable. The overall picture reflects a culture where fashion functioned as a material language of distinction. People wanted to communicate their status, at least in part, through their dress, and fashion culture produced a linguistic medium of its own. Fashion registers began to evolve and consolidate. There were neologisms—often French loanwords and approximations—for “new” colors (American English), dress cuts and styles. Pithy phrases, collocations and aphorisms appeared, all of which communicated the urgent temporality of fashionable dress, how to wear it and how to name it. Of course, the clothes themselves represented a material language in action—one equally ready for interpretation. Novels engaged with this popular culture and traversed these modes of interpretation. It has been argued that Jane Austen’s fiction marks out white dresses as being indicative of an overly emotional character disposition while at the same time engaging with its contemporary fashion media.<sup>10</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter, we might sort English novels in keeping with two traditions. First, novels that engaged with the symbolic and apparently axiomatic meaning of dress where *dress is a representation*. Second, those that were wholly aware of the contemporary *language of consumption*, scarcity and value, and the ambivalent role of fashion in society. These are in no way discrete categories, they often overlap, but they allow for systematic discussion of the subject. The first viewed fashion and dress as a sometimes simple or bafflingly complex surface to be interpreted, and the second envisioned fashion as a social process (possibly drawing on emerging journalistic registers) that shaped character and plot, and expressed the volatility of social structures themselves. One of the earliest subgenres of the novel, Gothic fiction, is perhaps the best place to explore these approaches.

### Fashioned surfaces: the Gothic inheritance

In 1764, Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*. It begins with Prince Manfred of Otranto seeing his son killed by nothing less than a giant helmet that falls from the sky. This is not fashion, but a component of military uniform, albeit a rather fanciful one. It is a sign of feudal power, of masculinity, themes that lie at the center of Otranto’s work. Catherine Spooner, whose pioneering *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (2004) brought together the strands that connected fashion to the Gothic elements in fiction, points out that the form “is historically linked to fashion through the emergence of modern consumerism in the eighteenth century.”<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, much of Spooner’s work explores the conflicts around the way gothicized dress is read and understood. Here clothes are used in an excessive, contrived, and cleverly unobtrusive way. Do they indicate a depth that has to be accessed through analysis, or do they represent surfaces that carry meaning that readers recognize axiomatically?

The Classic Gothic period used medieval and Catholic dress as a way of criticizing heavy-handed or corrupt regimes. Habits, religious dress, hid and revealed identities and sexualities. Matthew Lewis’s 1796 novel, *The Monk: A Romance*, tells the story of Ambrosio, a corrupt priest drawn to a particular nun:

Her features were hidden by a thick veil; But struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus... Her bosom was carefully veiled. Her dress was

white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot...<sup>12</sup>

It seems that Gothic genres are obsessed with surfaces and what might lie beneath them, but this is not as it seems. In fact, it is the surface, the material or visual experience of dress that led Eve Sedgwick to write: “characters in Gothic novels fall in love as much with women’s veils as with women.” Before her work on sexuality, homosociality, and homophobia (now a part of the body of work called queer theory), Sedgwick’s interpretation of fashioned Gothic surfaces marked a turning point in the appreciation of fashion in the novel. It allowed surface to be read as if it were indicative in and of itself. Sedgwick explains: “the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified.”<sup>13</sup> The way we appreciate fashion in the Gothic novel bears a similarity with how we understand fashion more broadly. With its interest in startling visuals, uncanny visions and a lure to the fantastic, Gothic fictional forms adapted to the new modernities of the Victorian era.

By the 1860s, the form had evolved into the “novel of sensation” with its explorations and investigations into the horrors of the everyday, the drawing-room scandal, and the secrets of middle-class domesticity. In fact, by the early 1850s we had already seen this in the depiction of Lady Deadlock in Charles Dickens’ novel, *Bleak House*, fully published by 1853. Her mysterious past is concealed by her fashioned exterior. She is a woman who manages to fool the “fashion intelligence,” partly through her fashionable clothes. It is up to Tulkinghorn, Inspector Bucket, and the reader to unpick the layers of Lady Deadlock’s self-fashioning. When she is revealed as Esther Summerson’s mother (and the trope of the fallen woman), it is telling that she is found outside, with her clothes wet and bedraggled.

The sexual politics of the literary female body were often communicated via the visual interrogation of her clothes. Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859) is arguably the most influential sensation novel deploying one of the most enduring Gothic tropes: the white-raced young woman in a white dress. The first published part concluded with the scene of the drawing teacher, Walter Hartwright, meeting a mysterious woman dressed in white, walking alone on Hampstead Road just before midnight. He tries to interpret her clothes, as a way of understanding her social position, as a woman without a chaperone, therefore possibly a fallen woman.

... and her dress—bonnet, shawl, and gown all of white—was, so far as I could guess, certainly *not composed of very delicate or very expensive materials*. Her figure was slight, and rather above the average height—her gait and actions *free from the slightest approach to extravagance*. ... What *sort of a woman* she was, and how she came to be out alone in the high-road, an hour after midnight, I altogether failed to guess.<sup>14</sup> [emphasis added]

He attempted to read the materiality of her garments – how fine were they? Not at all, it appears. He also noticed that her manners were free from “extravagance” – a kind of fashionable sensibility – the woman is not worldly. She had “not exactly the manner of a lady, and, at the same time, not the manner of a woman in the humblest rank of life.” He tries to understand her uncanniness through the interpretation of her clothes. White dresses were associated with sensibility, excessive emotion. Was she a ghost or, more perhaps worryingly, is she a sex worker? As the plot develops, we find that this woman, Anne Catherick, has recently escaped from a mental asylum and, that she resembles an heiress (who also happens to prefer

white dresses) with whom Walter falls in love. The sensation novel deployed dress as an instrument of meaning, as a source of modern confusion and finally as forensic analysis.

### Writing of consumption: the fashionable novel

The representational reading of fashion and dress validates the literary world, as it were. This view has been inverted and scholars such as Elaine Freedgood, whose work has used Bill Brown's ideas and which focuses on objects in narrative. In an age of nineteenth-century economic expansion, consumer goods have their own life in storytelling. Both Brown and Freedgood recalibrate their critical focus to read the nature of material culture, rather than character, in fiction.<sup>15</sup> These theoretical turns offer opportunities for literary scholars, but interestingly literary history itself already tells us that fashioned objects played an important part in English literary fiction in the early nineteenth century. There is ample evidence showing the close relationship between fiction and fashion culture as they evolved alongside each other.

Fashionable novels were a genre that depicted the high life and fashionable people, particularly in the metropolis. The "silver-fork" school, or the fashionable novel, to use a less pejorative term, "detailed the customs of the European moneyed, social preferment, and the love of materialistic lifestyles."<sup>16</sup> Although the genre proper spanned from 1825 to 1850, it actually transcended this period as exemplified by the works of Catherine Gore, Benjamin Disraeli, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton and many others. The label came from an essay in the *Examiner* by Hazlitt, titled "Dandy School," in which he mocked Theodore Hook's obsession for writing about silver forks.

From form to content, novels were metaphors for consumption – an experience of modernity, transience, and frantic momentary value – and as such, they informed the publishing and promotional strategies implemented to disseminate them. Disraeli's novels included disguised portraits of living people, and Gore's *Pin Money* (1831) and *Women as They Are* (1830) included the names of real shops and suppliers such as Harding, the fashionable textile supplier; Rendell and Bridge, jewelers of Ludgate Hill; and the furnishing firm of Gillow. Fashionable novels were advertising, conduct manuals, fashion information, and, after all that, salacious reading too.

Edward Bulwer Lytton's novel, *Pelham, or the Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828), is an example of a "dandy novel," a subgenre of fashionable novels, which narrated the exploits of fashionable men. The titular character becomes a part of a fashionable set of men about town, and learns how to make his way through Parisian and London society. All the while, he is disengaged, an observer, an onlooker, not experiencing any emotional change or development. The engaging parts of the novel are the discussions about clothes. Ellen Moers and John Harvey point out that the novel altered the way men dressed.<sup>17</sup> *Pelham* marked the end of the styles worn by Beau Brummel, the first dandy to capture the public imagination, and heralded more understated menswear that followed the natural line and, in particularly, enforced the wearing of black as the only "color" that a man could wear if he were to be accepted in society. In Chapter 48, Pelham returns from Paris to London, decides to have a new suit made, and ends up coming into conflict with the tailor whose methods he finds dated. Pelham rejects stuffing and under measuring, and when the tailor leaves Pelham after a morning of measuring and arguing, he is left to ruminate on men's fashions. Pelham starts giving the reader fashion advice, and the novel stops in favor of presenting 22 "maxims." Here are a couple:

V. Remember that none but those whose courage is unquestionable can venture to be effeminate. It was only in the field that the Spartans were accustomed to use perfumes and curl their hair.

VI. Never let the finery of chains and rings seem your own choice; that which naturally belongs to women should appear only worn for their sake. We dignify foppery when we invest it with a sentiment.<sup>18</sup>

The novel becomes fashion editorial, advising the reader on how to dress. The fashion system that we find in *Pelham* indicates an experience of modernity – an experience that the Victorians would find very uncomfortable. Hazlitt compared the prose style of the fashionable novel to “a collection of quack or fashionable advertisements.”<sup>19</sup> Such an emphasis on the material was morally problematic for readers as it presented the individual viewing society as a type of commodity. Fashionable novels played an active part in a fashion system and they represented a contemporaneity that was deeply offensive to the Victorians committed to social reform, altruism, empire, and even to the moral role of fiction in a changing society.

### Fashioning realism

Fashionable novels are rarely read or studied these days, but we know the genre from the parodies and reworkings that have lasted as major works of Victorian realism. The realist novel was the literary innovation of the Victorian era. Its awareness of social issues, its interest in truth telling and detailed description lent itself well to the depiction of fashion, both by resorting to imagistic dress representation, as well as by writing about consumption. In Chapter 28 of Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39), Kate has to read “The Lady Flabella,” the author’s parody of a fashionable novel, to Mrs. Witterly. When she reads the overwrought prose, the narrator scathingly comments: “there was not a line in it, from beginning to end, which could, by the most remote contingency, awaken the smallest excitement in any person breathing.”<sup>20</sup> The criticism of fashionable novels served to uplift the verisimilitude of Dickens’ prose, which was by nature highly stylized. The parodic treatment of fashion served a purpose in the construction of the author’s discourse of truth.

It is impossible to discuss the relationship between realism and fashion satire without referring to the works of W. M. Thackeray, which are concerned with the writing of not just clothes and material objects but also with the very essence of what it means to be fashionable in society. His novels present a world transitioning from the Regency era to an unstable modernity. *Vanity Fair* (1847–48) is understood as a historical satire about a society changing during the Napoleonic wars and, of course, as a social satire of Becky Sharp’s ambition. The novel is also a complex, historicized reimagining of the fashionable novel and its antecedents. Although much more twisted, its plots (a woman without connections making her way in the world) align with those of Austen’s *Emma* and Catherine Gore’s fashionable novels (Gore was a literary acquaintance of Thackeray’s). In Chapter 36 “How to Live Well on Nothing a Year,” and 37 “The Subject Continued,” the plots and trappings of fashionable life were rendered by Thackeray so that the emotional, geopolitical and the socio-economic structures around them become apparent.

She came like a vivified figure out of the Magasin des Modes—blandly smiling in the most beautiful new clothes and little gloves and boots. Wonderful scarfs, laces, and jewels glittered about her. She had always a new bonnet on, and flowers bloomed perpetually in it, or else magnificent curling ostrich feathers, soft and snowy as camellias.<sup>21</sup>

The fashionable clothes worn by Becky Crawley (née Sharp) are lavishly described: she herself is a fashion illustration. This is Becky as viewed by her own young son who shares very little intimacy with his mother. We soon discover that Becky's dresses, and the Crawley's fashionable life, for that matter, is maintained by the non-payment of bills, and by abusing the trust of vendors and servants. "Nobody in fact was paid."

...who pities a poor barber who can't get his money for powdering the footmen's heads; or a poor carpenter who has ruined himself by fixing up ornaments and pavilions for my lady's *déjeuné*; or the poor devil of a tailor whom the steward patronizes, and who has pledged all he is worth, and more, to get the liveries ready, which my lord has done him the honour to bespeak?<sup>22</sup>

Becky's lace and diamonds, we find in Chapter 48, are stolen goods, that not even her husband knows about. The novel is a metaworld, where the narrator admits the characters are not real and where the world of fashion is not only an illusion, but an expensive one at that. The author's satire was actually not that far from the tone of fashionable novels and even contemporary fashion editorials. The instability of tone, of moral position, is central to fashion's presence in fiction and perhaps to the writing of fashion itself.

This ambivalence is apparent even in a novelist like George Eliot, the sage of English realist who repeatedly explored fashion and the tropes of fashionable novels in her presentation of womanhood. The narrative of Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) is a psychological and race conscious critique of fashionable novels. It is hardly a coincidence that Eliot places a narrative of English high life, "coat-tails and flounces," as she put it in 1876, against a range of European Jewish experiences.<sup>23</sup> Her first fiction *The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton* (1855) was a work of clerical realism and the story is preoccupied with fashionable life, with the appreciation of clothes, social aspiration; gossip and, most tragically, the fear of downward mobility. The financially struggling Reverend Barton finds himself and his wife, Milly, flattered, and patronized by the glamorous Countess Czerlaski who comes to stay with them. They are enamoured by her and by:

the details of the tasteful dress, the rich silk of the pinkish lilac hue (the Countess always wore delicate colours in an evening), the black lace pelerine, and the black lace veil falling at the back of the small closely-braided head. For Milly had one weakness—don't love her any the less for it, it was a pretty women's weakness—she was fond of dress.<sup>24</sup>

Eliot deploys fashion language: "rich silk," "pinkish lilac hue," "black lace pelerine." She even gives out fashion instruction, "closely-braided head," like a fashionable novel. She was a Puritan writer and saw fashion, the love of "balloon sleeves," as vanity, egotism and profligacy. At the same time, she sought to extend sympathy for those "fond" of fashion, as if it were a delusion. Balloon sleeves were highly conspicuous and wasteful, much like the countess herself. They reveal character, but become more poignant when seen through the eyes of Milly, who could not afford this kind of dress. The language here has the ability to make the trivial seem extremely important, which does not bode well for the Bartons who are fatally engulfed in the Countess, chillingly described, "fashionable vortex."<sup>25</sup> When thinking about these kinds of sequences in fiction, it is possible to cross reference them against the fashion media and cultures in which they were set. There is now a growing scholarly literature seeking to place the fiction of consumption directly within fashion culture.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

“Certain susceptibilities were asserting themselves, and others were diminishing. The change of clothes, had, some philosophers will say, much to do with it.”

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*<sup>27</sup>

The late-nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century novel developed further ways of presenting and exploring fashion that largely exceed what can be discussed in this chapter. In Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* (1887), Grace Melbury's hair is covered by the appearance-driven Mrs. Charmond, thus symbolizing the natural world being consumed by an increasingly monetizing, urban, and modern value system. Furthermore, it clearly evokes the rising fashion for wearing hairpieces and wigs, invariably harvested from the heads of working-class women. If we were to draw broad strokes over the tradition of fashion in the English novel, one would say that the level of critical awareness, of not just the fashion system and industry itself, but also of the underlying dynamics of fashion's social role, becomes more strident. After changing into a man, Orlando, in Virginia Woolf's eponymously titled novel of 1928, is struck by what is fundamentally the embodied gender politics of dress. She experiments with Turkish coats that allow a degree of gender fluidity. When she experiences “the coil of skirts about her legs,” she begins to understand the “penalties and privileges” of her female embodiment and becomes “a little more modest, as women are, of her brains, and a little more vain, as women are, of her person.”<sup>28</sup> So a form founded on novelty is certainly work reappraising, not only as one which presented dress as poetry or image, but also as a narrative exploration of consumption and the social role of fashion itself.

## Notes

- 1 Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 57.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 3 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Reading: Cox and Wyman, 1995), 13.
- 4 William Hazlitt, “The Dandy School,” *Complete Works* (London and Toronto: Dent, 1934), vol. 20, 144–6 (144).
- 5 Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* (London: Bloomsbury, 1985), 45.
- 6 Giles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 6.
- 7 Joanne Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” in *Body Dressing*, eds. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 33–59 (34).
- 8 Geoffrey Chaucer, “Prologue to the Canterbury Tales,” *Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), l. 453–4.
- 9 Anne Hollander, *Feeding the Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 12; Clair Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Peter McNeil et al., *Fashion, Fiction: Text, Clothing in Literature, Film and Television* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 5–6; John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 28–31.
- 10 Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*, 115; Jane Taylor, “‘Important Trifles’: Jane Austen, the Fashion Magazine, and Inter-textual Consumer Experience,” *History of Retailing and Consumption* 2, no. 2 (2016): 113–28.
- 11 Catherine Spooner, “Curtain'd in Mysteries: An Introduction to Gothic Fashion” in *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1.
- 12 Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 16.
- 13 Eve Sedgwick, “Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel,” *PMLA* 96, no. 2 (March 1981): 255–70 (256).
- 14 Wilke Collins, *The Woman in White* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 48.
- 15 Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas of Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 14.



- 16 Matthew Whittings Rosa, *The Silver Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 3, 10; Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983), 1.
- 17 Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 69; Harvey, *Men in Black*.
- 18 Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Pelham; Or the Adventures of a Gentleman*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), vol. 2, 63, 64.
- 19 Hazlitt, "The Dandy School," 144.
- 20 Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), 345.
- 21 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 440.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 431.
- 23 George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press), vol. 6, 301–3.
- 24 George Eliot, "The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton" in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 26 Royce Mahawatte, "The Sad Fortunes of 'Stylish Things': George Eliot and the Languages of Fashion" in *Communicating Transcultural Fashion Narratives*, eds. Anne Peirson-Smith and Joseph H. Hancock II (Bristol: Intellect, 2018); Patricia Zakreski, "Fashioning the Domestic Novel: Rewriting Narrative Patterns in Margaret Oliphant's *Phoebe, Junior and Dress*," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21, no. 1 (2016): 56–73.
- 27 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 172.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 141, 179.

# “SELLING THEMSELVES PIECEMEAL”: THE ECONOMICS OF BEAUTY AND POWER IN FOUR REPRESENTATIVE TEXTS

*Adele Kudish*

This chapter compares how sexual commodification is embedded in representations of conspicuous consumption – Thorstein Veblen’s term in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899] for the public display of luxury purchases – in two canonical novels about shopping: Émile Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*The Ladies’ Paradise*) (1883) and Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), and then contrasts these representations with the way sex and shopping are conflated in two early twenty-first-century popular culture texts: Sophie Kinsella’s *Shopaholic* (2001–2019) and Darren Star’s television program *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). To analyze these four texts, I employ feminist-Marxist criticism as well as the tools of comparative literature as interpretive frameworks. While *The House of Mirth* and *The Ladies’ Paradise* are not necessarily emblematic of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century representations of consumerism (scores of popular novels less critical of capitalism were published during this time), Zola’s depictions of the sexualized spectacle of shopping and Wharton’s iconic portrait of the spending habits of a woman on the margins of the upper class very likely provided templates for Kinsella’s *Shopaholic* and *Sex and the City* (*SATC* explicitly references Wharton, for example).

In each of these texts, as we will see, sexual desire is sublimated into shopping, if not entirely supplanted by it. For example, the literary critic Lori Merish identifies in Zola “the female consumer as a new cultural type whose commodity desires often outstripped, and certainly re-defined, her sexuality.”<sup>1</sup> At the same time, women’s value in the texts examined in this chapter hinges entirely on either their physical labor or the “invisible labor”<sup>2</sup> they put into their appearance. This is true whether the text is situated in the nineteenth century or in “a neoliberal fantasy of women’s sexual liberation”<sup>3</sup> (neoliberalism assuming “the marketization of all human spheres”<sup>4</sup>) of the twenty-first century, creating a similar paradigm in which shopping is characterized as “better than sex.” However, while *The Ladies’ Paradise* and *The House of Mirth* depict modern capitalism as a machine that consumes, uses, and then disposes of women, the pop culture texts transform the negative portrayals of conspicuous consumption in Zola and Wharton’s novels into, on the one hand, largely uncritical celebrations of wealth, appearance, and consumerism, and on the other, outlets for marketing and the manufacturing of consumer desire.

### Representing the ruthless machine of late-nineteenth-century capitalism

While Zola's novel takes place in a Parisian department store and Wharton's in the private homes of New York's elite class, both novels trace the social mobility of their heroines whose worth and identity depend on their beauty and the acquisition of clothing. In *The House of Mirth*, impoverished, 29-year-old socialite Lily Bart descends through the strata of society until she is dismissed from a milliner's shop for her poor work, and she dies of a chloral overdose in her boarding house. As Lily sinks further into poverty from her overspending and over-borrowing, the more frugal Denise Baudu in *The Ladies' Paradise* rises in the new commercial order as a wealthy businesswoman. A poor provincial teenager from Valonges, Denise arrives in Paris looking for work in her uncle's drapery shop when she discovers that the small businesses around him are being supplanted by large department stores ("bazaars,"<sup>5</sup> as her uncle Baudu describes them). The novel dramatizes the Baron Haussmann's restructuring of medieval Paris from 1853 to 1870 during the Second Empire. It was then that France saw how "Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist."<sup>6</sup> Denise sympathizes with the victims of Haussmann's reforms, and she herself describes the ever-expanding store across from her uncle's small, dark shop as a "monster [...] for crushing people,"<sup>7</sup> yet she is also strangely drawn to it.

Both Denise and Lily are portrayed performing various kinds of labor, whether physical or aesthetic, in each novel. Denise suffers bleeding feet, a broken ankle, a painful back; Lily's fingers become needle-pricked from the milliner's shop, and they both do piecework at home to survive. The explicit references to painful body parts underscore how each woman becomes "an appendage of the machine,"<sup>8</sup> in which she "must sell [herself] piecemeal [...] like every other article of commerce."<sup>9</sup> Although some critics have viewed *The Ladies' Paradise* as a positive story, or one that operates on a fairy-tale structure,<sup>10</sup> both novels are palpably critical of rags-to-riches success stories of consumer capitalism. For example, the specter of prostitution haunts both novels, as it does in *Sex and the City* (see below) (although Marx viewed sex work as "only a *specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the laborer"<sup>11</sup>). Observing her little brother who has nothing to eat, Denise thinks, "[h]er poverty would be over, she would have money, dresses and a fine room. It was easy: They said that all women came to that eventually, because in Paris a woman could not live from her work alone."<sup>12</sup> And for Lily, "[t]here were [...] moments when she was conscious of having to pay her way"<sup>13</sup> in "taxes [...] for [...] prolonged hospitality, and for the dresses and trinkets which occasionally replenished her insufficient wardrobe"<sup>14</sup> (and of course the banker Gus Trenor, who lends her money, insinuates that Lily is willing to sell her body in a terrifying scene that threatens the possibility of rape).<sup>15</sup>

Besides the shopwork and other physical labor that each performs, there is also the "invisible labor" that goes into the two women's artfully cultivated appearance, which augments or diminishes each woman's social value and identity. For example, Lily says to Lawrence Selden, "If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it."<sup>16</sup> Although "the reader is never actually privileged to witness one of Lily's shopping trips,"<sup>17</sup> we "see her emerging from the shops" and know that "Lily *must* spend time shopping, as her piles of bills from the dressmaker [...] testify."<sup>18</sup> As a saleswoman herself, Denise does not have much time for her own shopping. Instead, she is defined outwardly by "the silk dress that did not belong to her"<sup>19</sup> while underneath she experiences "a deterioration in her whole body."<sup>20</sup> The impoverished Parisian shop girls, the *midinettes* – many of whom could afford to eat one meal a day, that offered by their employers – wear silk gowns and must present

themselves attractively on very little money. But as the novel progresses, Denise's work ethic and her "willingness to endure pain"<sup>21</sup> bring her success in Octave Mouret's department store.

Nevertheless, Denise still mediates her desire for recognition and power through material goods, and is herself seduced by the prospect of wielding power over the consumers in Mouret's store. This is because in *The Ladies' Paradise*, love and fetish ("a worship of the commodity which is sexually-charged"<sup>22</sup> and, later, in Freud, "castration anxiety"<sup>23</sup>) become conflated in Mouret's (and ultimately Denise's) eyes:

Mouret's sole passion was the conquest of woman. He wanted to make her queen in his house and he had built this temple [the department store] so that he could have her at his mercy. His whole tactic was to intoxicate her with attentive gallantry, to trade on her needs and to exploit her feverish desires.<sup>24</sup>

Even though Denise recognizes Mouret's strategy for what it is, she is willing to collaborate in the exploitation of feminized material desire. Like her employer, she delights in the "fine dust [that] rose from the [department store] floors, heavy with the smell of woman, the smell of her linen and the nape of her neck, her skirts and her hair [...] like the incense of this temple dedicated to the cult of women's bodies."<sup>25</sup> This description of shopping (one of many in the novel), at the same time highly sexualized and religious in tone, points both to the fetishizing of the activity of shopping itself (the mingling of face powder, linen, and women's necks) and the magnitude and power of the capitalist machine that Mouret and Denise construct in *The Ladies' Paradise*. This fetishizing process mirrors itself in *The House of Mirth* when Lily feels "[h]er whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury"<sup>26</sup> in her room at Bellomont, where she is a house guest, or when she is "giving a dexterous touch to her furs,"<sup>27</sup> as if they are a talisman when she is destitute and blacklisted in society towards the end of the novel.

Denise's floor-length golden hair is her only material and sexual asset outside of her labor, but she never considers selling it. Throughout the novel, this hair comes to function as a symbol of Denise's untamed resistance to Mouret, and also her power: she is Samson and Midas in one. Denise can rise in a way that Lily cannot because she manages to re-appropriate the narrative of her bodily exploitation and recast it onto others. Although Denise empathizes with the new hires in Mouret's store, she chooses to view them through the lens of capitalism: "[w]as it human, was it right, this appalling consumption of flesh [...]? She pleaded the case of the cogs in the machine, not for sentimental reasons, but *with arguments that rested on the interest of the owners*."<sup>28</sup> In this way, Denise rewrites the role of overseer, with "an urge [...] to improve the mechanism."<sup>29</sup> In letting go of any ambivalence about capitalism, she triumphs, not as Mouret's lover, not as a disposable woman, but as Mouret's equal, and as the last two words of the novel tell us, "all-powerful."<sup>30</sup> There is a certain element of the sexual dominatrix in Denise.

Lily is aware in a different sense than Denise of the vastness and mercilessness of the machine in upper-class life, but uses the same vocabulary to describe her predicament: "I can hardly be said to have an independent existence. I was just a screw or a cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it, I found I was of no use anywhere else."<sup>31</sup> Much earlier, Selden too had observed that Lily "was so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her, that the links of her [sapphire] bracelet seemed like manacles chaining her to her fate."<sup>32</sup> As Claire Hughes puts it, "[t]o survive, Lily needs to marry, to maintain the calculated strategy [...] in which neither love nor respect had played a part. Seduction is work, marriage a business deal, dress crucial to fiscal confidence. Part of Lily knows this, part rejects it."<sup>33</sup> Hughes determines that Lily cannot "recover her lost outline, create a new moral aspect for her beauty and fashion for herself an authentic identity that—and here is the real problem—will also find

out true love and a husband”<sup>34</sup> in the way that, as I demonstrate, Denise can if she embraces the “new moral aspect” of capitalism.

By the end of the novel, Lily’s value in *The House of Mirth* diminishes to just a few dollars in her bank account,<sup>35</sup> reinforcing the sense that Lily was truly “of no use,” that is, valueless, in life. But even Denise, who is depicted at the end of *The Ladies’ Paradise* as having conquered Mouret, is herself consumed as a victim of capitalism. She loses her soul; the action of the final pages, in which Mouret declares his love and claims that he will ask Denise to marry him, take place in the presence of literally more than a million francs – the day’s take in cash – on Mouret’s desk. The fact of Denise’s exchange value merely swells in proportion to the way in which Mouret’s business grows with her help. Although Denise does not feel her loss as Lily does, perhaps a symptom of her automation, Zola, like Wharton, makes it plain through his ironic descriptions of the department store that the spectacle of consumerism is actually a cannibalizing force.

### Shopping-as-sex in *Shopaholic* and *Sex and the City*

Considering the thematic similarities between Zola, Wharton, Kinsella, and *Sex and the City*, one might expect the same cannibalizing spectacle to provide the backdrop against which the early twenty-first century popular representations of consumer culture are displayed, but not so. Carrie Bradshaw and Becky Bloomwood’s experiences of debt and relative poverty in *Sex and the City* and *Shopaholic*, respectively, episodically mirror those of Lily and Denise, but in the hands of their creators, these postfeminist characters metamorphose into women for whom privation is always temporary and debt magically disappears. Rather than centralizing arguments against consumerism, Kinsella and Star’s texts succumb to the clichés of a sensibility, according to Gill, that encompasses “a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment, [and] the dominance of a makeover paradigm.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, “possession of a ‘sexy body’ is presented as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, that Carrie and Becky do not take responsibility for their overspending is not surprising. As pseudo-depoliticized postfeminist texts, *Shopaholic* and *SATC* “often [resort] to parody to diminish the historical importance of Second Wave feminism,”<sup>38</sup> and end in reinforcing many conservative norms (the wealth system, the gender wage gap, and traditional gender roles more broadly). As cultural theorist Angela McRobbie puts it, postfeminism is the “active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s come to be undermined [...] while [the texts] simultaneously [appear] to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to ‘feminism’.”<sup>39</sup>

In these texts, sexual fantasy, sexual exploitation, and shopping fantasy fuse, linking sexual liberation and self-image to conspicuous consumption. As Jane Arthurs explains, *SATC* “exploits fully the glossy women’s magazines’ consumerist approach to sexuality, in which women’s sexual pleasure and agency is frankly encouraged as part of a consumer lifestyle and attitude.”<sup>40</sup> This appraisal can be traced to Wolfgang Fritz Haug’s *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society* (1971), which argues that “commodities borrow their aesthetic language from human courtship; but then the relationship is reversed and people borrow their aesthetic expression from the world of the commodity,”<sup>41</sup> which is a “world of attractive and seductive illusion”<sup>42</sup> that creates irresistible images for consumption. On the other hand, Roland Barthes explains that it is the fashion magazine’s writing (rather than the images) that “is essentially *intelligible*: it is not the object but the name that creates desire; it is not the dream but the meaning that it sells.”<sup>43</sup> Both *Sex and the City* and *Shopaholic* mix the representation of modern women’s sexual independence with depictions of buying articles of mostly real-brand, seasonally timely luxury goods in recognizable – if

whitewashed – versions of New York and London. Combining the fictionalized representations of sex and relationships with real luxury items, hotels, and restaurants is significant not only in that they create verisimilitude; as product placements, they also manufacture desire to consume in the reader or viewer.

Becky Bloomwood's relationship with Luke Brandon in the *Shopaholic* books betrays its transactional nature as a frivolous, self-deceived woman-child wins a serious, handsome, rich man for a husband (the first time Becky meets Luke, he gives her £20). Becky is, at first, a low-level financial journalist with no money sense (she merely copies banks' press releases for her magazine) and multiple maxed-out credit cards, while in sequels, she lands better-paying jobs as a TV personality, and then a job as a personal shopper at the now defunct luxury department store Barneys in New York. Becky describes her own opinions, in the second book in the series, as "just gossip, or ... mindless tittle-tattle"<sup>44</sup> to Luke's stereotypical straight-man truth. Kinsella's ironic, but mostly sympathetic, portrayal of Becky never gives way to either full satire or condemnation; at worst, the author's tone is smugly self-satisfied at being more savvy than the heroine. In these novels, Becky describes shopping as a far more sensual activity than actual sex with Luke:

[t]hat instant when your fingers curl round the handles of a shiny, uncreased bag—and all the gorgeous new things inside it become yours. [...] It's like going hungry for days, then cramming your mouth full of warm buttered toast. [...] It's like the better moments of sex. [...] It's pure, selfish pleasure.<sup>45</sup>

The phrase "the better moments of sex" inadvertently reveals a central truth about "chick lit"; despite the characters' supposed liberation, the genre nevertheless trades in women's latent discomfort about sex. This is a generic difficulty. To represent women as truly embracing themselves as sexual beings threatens to flip the novel from comedy to bodice-ripper. But describing the act of shopping as sensual, on the other hand, in long, protracted scenes, performs a generically and socially acceptable sexuality. For example, at an obstetrician's appointment, Becky is cut off mid-sentence by the male doctor who assures her that "it" is perfectly safe: "I didn't mean sex!" I say in surprise. "I meant shopping."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Becky is so "liberated" that physical intimacy with her partner is fully replaced by this more sensual outlet for gratification.

On the other hand, *Sex and the City* presents frank discussions about sexuality and sex acts that are not typically present in "chick lit," but it cannot do so without indulging in a wide range of "slut shaming" plotlines. With the exception of the "ones" with whom the four main characters, all wealthy white women living in Manhattan, find long-lasting relationships and, in three out of four cases, marriage, men in *SATC* are not particularly memorable other than for their sexual predilections and commitment issues ("modelizers," "toxic bachelors," even "the marrying guy"). In the worst of cases, however, the men are depicted as slut-shamers, and the show's running "joke" is that all women are prostitutes.<sup>47</sup> In the episodes called "The Power of Female Sex," this is not even subtle. After Carrie's friend, Amelita, witnesses Carrie's credit card being cut up at Dolce & Gabbana, Amelita introduces Carrie to a whole new world that crosses the line from "professional girlfriend [to] just plain professional."<sup>48</sup> When she wakes up in a hotel room with her new boyfriend gone and \$1,000 on the table, Carrie decides to write it off. But her friend Samantha's pronouncement earlier in the episode, that she believes "men and women are equal-opportunity exploiters," reveals how deeply the show was committed to postfeminist "choice" ideology and thus reproducing the patriarchy's insistence on individual maximization of power as value.

Moreover, *SATC* presents dating as shopping, thus diminishing the role of sex in “Sex and the City.” Carrie and her friends have the freedom to “try on” men (“[h]e’s not my boyfriend, just somebody I’m trying on”<sup>49</sup> says Carrie, comparing the marriage-minded man she’s dating to “a DKNY dress [that is] not your style, but it’s right there so you try it on anyway”), and discard them when either their sexual proclivities prove too bizarre, or when the women are merely bored. In *SATC*, shopping becomes metonymy for a dating fantasy (“Hello, lover!” Carrie calls to a pair of pink Christian Louboutin sandals in a store window<sup>50</sup>). Despite its openness to sex, *SATC* still privileges the shopping-is-as-good-as-sex (or better) scenario. At the end of season two, Carrie pronounces “[w]e keep dresses we’ll never wear again, but we throw away our ex-boyfriends.”<sup>51</sup> This is particularly evident in season 6, episode 5 (“Lights, Camera, Relationship”), in which the tension hinges on the earnings disparity between Carrie and Berger (in a reversal from season 1’s financial straits, Carrie has just received a five-figure advance check for her book on the same day that Berger learns he is being dropped by his publisher). The awkward tension between them is thrown into a new light at the high-concept Prada store (for which the TV show furnished what must have been indispensable advertising) where the employees greet Carrie with hugs and kisses, and the whole setting provides far more aesthetic pleasure and excitement for the viewer than the chemistry-less Berger and Carrie couple.

## Conclusion

Thematic – if not ideological – similarities are almost obvious between these pop culture texts and the canonical ones (“[w]elcome to the age of uninnocence,” Carrie proclaims in the novel,<sup>52</sup> as well as in the TV pilot). As Hadley Freeman, writing about Candace Bushnell’s fictionalized essay collection *Sex and the City* (1996) (on which the show is based) in *The Guardian* puts it, “[l]ike Wharton, Bushnell depicts a socially claustrophobic world in which marriage is the fancy dressing for financial security for women and in which sex, except on rare occasions, is less a meeting of souls than a simple transaction in exchange for, say, fashion [or] a summer home in the Hamptons.”<sup>53</sup> *Sex and the City* the TV show, however, more often than not supports postfeminist and pro-consumerist values by shrugging off critique about issues such as labor and prostitution. Similarly, Becky does not acknowledge her shopping addiction until the sixth *Shopaholic* book. Unlike their predecessors from the previous centuries, Becky and Carrie’s experiences are almost entirely removed from the production of goods. The exception is Becky’s roommate Suze, an aristocratic non-consumer who successfully takes over Becky’s Fine Frames crafting side gig after Becky abandons it.

Both series end with no financial consequences for either woman’s pathological shopping; comfortable relationships with extremely wealthy men who can afford charmingly spendthrift girlfriends excuse and even normalize Carrie and Becky’s hyper-consumerism. In this way, while Denise in *The Ladies’ Paradise* loses part of her soul to the capitalist machine and Lily loses her money and herself in *The House of Mirth*, Kinsella and Star’s heroines do not grow or change. In these twenty-first-century texts, “[a] consumer lifestyle is presented not as a series of commodities to be bought but as an integrated lifestyle to be emulated.”<sup>54</sup> While Carrie and her friends especially take pride in displaying their knowledge about fashion as a form of intelligence within the show, the way the fashion industry works is romanticized and flattened. Like looking at a fashion magazine or scrolling through Instagram, reading *Shopaholic* or watching *Sex and the City* arouse desire – not for sex, but for the spectacle of shopping. Here, the capitalist machine has seamlessly consumed the postfeminist narratives.

*Shopaholic* and *SATC* are emblematic of late 1990s and early 2000s postfeminist media that include shows like *Ally McBeal*<sup>55</sup> and *Desperate Housewives*<sup>56</sup> and film franchises like *Bridget Jones's Diary*.<sup>57</sup> As Nash and Grant point out, even programs that are more specifically aware of traditional feminism, like Lena Dunham's *Girls*,<sup>58</sup> keep *SATC*'s postfeminism "[lurking] on the periphery."<sup>59</sup> Perhaps a glimmer of hope resides outside of traditional film and TV writers, in individual female comedians whose iconoclastic personas are driving what is perhaps a new wave: Amy Schumer,<sup>60</sup> Phoebe Waller-Bridge,<sup>61</sup> Sarah Silverman,<sup>62</sup> Mindy Kaling,<sup>63</sup> and Issa Rae<sup>64</sup> are all young women whose voices defy easy categorization in the feminist/postfeminist split. But it is perhaps Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, not-young actresses and true feminists, who are leading this more diverse lineup with their Netflix series *Grace and Frankie*.<sup>65</sup> In today's turbulent political and environmental landscape, navel-gazing postfeminist media comes across as tone-deaf and even just plain "boring."<sup>66</sup> No one expects television programs to be a driver of any real political change, of course, but a shifting discourse away from the repetitive depiction of mindless consumerism can only be seen as a step in the right direction.

## Notes

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# FASHION IN LITERATURE BASED ON MARGARET THATCHER'S *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1995)

*Katarzyna Kociołek*

Laura Ugolini (2009) points to the importance of autobiographies as primary sources for fashion historians who intend to trace both changes in sartorial practices as well as transitions in meanings attached to dress. According to Ugolini, the detailed study of male autobiographies from the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century demonstrates greater pre-occupation with “exceptional purchases” than “day-to-day provisioning.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the autobiographies of famous female politicians such as Margaret Thatcher offer detailed descriptions of the clothes bought or ordered for specific occasions rather than for the daily wear. While there exists voluminous scholarship on autobiography, most scholars focus on textual analysis of self-writing. Although in contemporary autobiographies the visual element in the form of photographs seems to occupy a prominent position, so far, little critical attention has been given to how the subject of an autobiography is constructed visually and no interest has been invested in the role dress and clothing play in the process of autobiographer’s self-representation. The aim of the current study is to redress the imbalance and to examine the importance of fashion in autobiographical writing and in photographic depictions of a leading British female politician in her autobiography. Based on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s metaphor theory (1980), the paper argues that the photographs play an important function in consolidating the woman’s identity constructed in her autobiography. Also, challenging the concept of “power dressing” as popularized by John T. Molloy’s *Dress for Success* (1975), this chapter proposes a thesis that it was the adoption of elements of ultra-feminine styles which helped Thatcher to establish her public personae of an empowered female political figure.

Many of the leading publications on autobiographical writing seem to fail to acknowledge the importance of photographs that accompany contemporary autobiographies. This omission seems all the more intriguing as according to Barthes photography and autobiography appear to be tightly linked. In *Camera Lucida* (1981) Barthes notices that while “a specific photograph [...] is never distinguished from its referent,”<sup>2</sup> the photograph is also “a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it seems that a comprehensive analysis of any autobiographical work ought to take into account both its textual and visual content, investigating the complexities of the relationship between the two. Echoing Barthes’s claim that photography objectifies the subject and presents the self as the other, Linda Haverty Rugg (1997) in her book entitled *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* comments on the dual role that

photographs perform in autobiographical texts. While on the one hand the inclusion of photographic material helps to accentuate the bodily presence of the author, on the other hand, according to Rugg, the photographs stand for the “disassociation (the self’s observation of the self as other),” which is at the core of any “autobiographical act.”<sup>4</sup> As remarked by Rugg “the presence of photographs in autobiography cuts two ways: it offers a visualization of the de-centred, culturally constructed self; and it asserts the presence of a living body through the power of photographic referentiality.”<sup>5</sup> The photographs also add credulity to an autobiographical text, fulfilling the reader’s desire for and the autobiographer’s implied promise of the truth, argues Rugg. Although Rugg examines a handful of autobiographies’ photographic content, she does not comment on sartorial practices of the represented participants, focusing instead on the analysis of the postures and surroundings. Based on Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s seminal work on autobiography *Reading Autobiography* (2001), in which the authors comment on the importance of “performative view of life narrative,”<sup>6</sup> one can argue that photography and descriptions of clothing assist performativity of gender in autobiographical texts, centralizing the connection between “identity and material bodies.”<sup>7</sup> The present study brings attention to how the photographic depictions of the autobiographer’s dressed body facilitates the textual construction of the self, for as noticed by Wilson in the Foreword to her book *Adorned in Dreams* (2013), “Fashion resembles photography [...] both are poised ambiguously between present and past: the photograph congeals the essence of the now, while fashion freezes the moment in an eternal gesture of the-only-way-to-be.”<sup>8</sup>

In the realm of politics appearances often matter more than in other spheres of life and a sartorial blunder may have serious repercussions. Therefore dress choices of leading political figures not infrequently seem to be “gestures of the-only-way-to-be.” British political scene abounds in sartorial practices that trace their origins to the times when status was literally worn on one’s sleeves and sumptuary laws strictly defined the dress codes of elite groups and individuals. During most of the British imperial history, the clothes of those in the position of power seemed to have reflected the metaphorical concept MORE IS BETTER,<sup>9</sup> where “more” related to both the amount of fabric used for the making of the garment and abundance of decorations. Important political figures were flaunting their privileged position by wearing richly decorated attires fashioned from the finest textiles. The unprecedented political importance of costume for Britain and its imperial identity is thoroughly discussed by David Cannadine in his seminal work *Ornamentalism. How the British Saw Their Empire*. When at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century the system of honors was expanded to the degree “far surpassing that which had taken place one hundred years before,”<sup>10</sup> the hierarchical system of titles consolidated the elites across continents, but also became firmly tied with the notion of political influence and power.

The opening up of the British political scene to other social groups, i.e. working-class men, and middle-class women in the twentieth century, provoked a violent clash between connotative meanings of sartorial practices in the public realm of politics and the proclaimed identities and self-definitions of those entering it, who happened to be neither affluent, upper class nor male. According to Janet Radcliffe Richards, female politicians who already by entering politics transgressed the previously fixed gender boundaries, through their conventional sartorial choices seemed to have expressed their adherence to traditionally held ideas about gender differences (even though through their very presence in politics they also appeared to erode many of the gender stereotypes concerning women). In other words, their choice of visibly feminine hairstyles and clothes might be interpreted as a form of a PR stunt desired to deflect the attention of the more conservatively-minded general public from the male attribute

of power that they actually enjoyed. The female political figures wearing floral-patterned dresses for public functions and avoiding trousers at all costs (as Thatcher did) also seemed to have subscribed to the belief expressed by Richards that even from the feminist perspective “there is nothing inherently degrading about conventional differences of (...) dress, hairstyles.”<sup>11</sup>

The political importance of Thatcher's attire is often downplayed in major publications about the Iron Lady. Despite her public image that clearly corresponded to that well-deserved nickname, the topic of Thatcher's style is only occasionally raised. Fashion historians and theorists refer to her sartorial practices when discussing the appearance and appeal of power suits in the 1980s; for example, Joanne Entwistle having described the power-dressing uniform as “tailored skirt in navy blue with smart blouse and something ‘feminine’ around the neck, such as scarf or ruff” concludes that “the style was embodied by Mrs Thatcher.”<sup>12</sup> Biographer Charles Moore also depicts Thatcher as deeply concerned about her looks. In his three-volume biography of Thatcher, largely based on Thatcher's diaries, Moore frequently drops descriptions of her outfits as well as comments on her attitude to clothes. Represented as acutely aware of the power of the visual in politics, Thatcher seemed to have expressed a belief in the close connection between professionalism, immaculate appearance, and high moral credentials. As shown by the specific examples discussed later in the chapter, Thatcher's skillful handling and blending of feminine and masculine elements of dress resulted in a visual projection of unquestionable authority and commitment of a professional who is never off-duty.

Being a prime minister for three consecutive terms and the first woman assigned to this prominent political role, Thatcher became to epitomize a style of dressing that connoted authority, offering “a key template for women rising to political and professional ranks”<sup>13</sup> (Young 2011: 34). Robb Young describes her outfits as “immaculately tailored skirt suits” in “commanding shades of blue and steely grey,”<sup>14</sup> noting that her selection of more feminine attires, such as “wispy printed dresses” and “diaphanous eveningwear” often helped her to soften political opponents.<sup>15</sup> She seemed to have treated fashion with utmost seriousness, implies Young, who comments that she was “always willing to talk fashion.”<sup>16</sup> Also when buying her clothes in “bulk shopping trips,”<sup>17</sup> mindful of sending appropriate message through her attires she tended to choose British labels, and promoted homegrown fashion design.<sup>18</sup>

While numerous photographs of Thatcher exude confidence mixed with unquestionable authority, the skirt suits she is wearing seem to be a sartorial metaphor of her accuracy, precision, and love of expertise. It was largely through clothes, that she was able to non-verbally communicate (both nationally and internationally) her commitment to being a professional politician through and through. She appeared to be always in control of her image, even in the aftermath of such a dramatic event as the Brighton night-time bombing in 1984. Not only was she dressed when escorted out of the rubble but also reportedly returned to “get a change of clothes for the next day.”<sup>19</sup>

In the accounts of her early childhood, Margaret Thatcher acknowledges the impact of her Methodist religious upbringing not only on her character formation but also on her sense of dress. As a daughter of a dressmaker,<sup>20</sup> she seemed to be a keen and accurate observer of differences in clothing styles, which is well-evident in the fragment on Catholic girls, who, unlike the plainly dressed Methodist girls, would wear “white, ribboned party dresses”<sup>21</sup> for their first communion. Similarly, in Thatcher's description of her first visit to London, she recalls being impressed by a rich diversity of attires worn by people in the streets, “for the first time in my life I saw people from foreign countries, some in the traditional native dress of India and Africa.”<sup>22</sup> In this memory of London, ethnic dress becomes a metaphor of what Thatcher calls “the dazzle of a commercial and imperial capital.”<sup>23</sup> The Roberts' family ethos of hard

work and efficiency, thanks to which “everything worked like clockwork”<sup>24</sup> seemed connected with the person of Thatcher’s mother, Beatrice Ethel Stephenson. It was largely thanks to her thrift that the family “always lived within [their] means,”<sup>25</sup> but at the same time Margaret and her sister Muriel could find themselves “by Grantham standards, rather fashionable.”<sup>26</sup> “Clothes were never a problem for us,” recounts Thatcher, adding that as a professional seamstress her mother would make top quality clothing with the use of “very good pattern services, Vogue and Butterick’s”<sup>27</sup> after acquiring supreme fabrics at reduced prices. Thatcher’s father’s election to be a major of Grantham was sartorially celebrated in the family by the making of new dresses, “for my father’s mayoral year, my mother made both her daughters new dresses – a blue velvet for my sister and a dark green velvet for me – and herself a black *moiré* silk gown.”<sup>28</sup>

Brief but informative descriptions of clothing are scattered throughout Thatcher’s autobiography, testifying to her interest in fashion. Often a description of clothing accompanies a memory of a person or an account of an important event. For example, when Thatcher recalls her maternal grandmother, she comments on her dress, “dressed in the grandmotherly style of those days – long black sateen-beaded dress – she would come up to our bedrooms on warm summer evenings and tell us stories of her life as a young girl.”<sup>29</sup> Also, Thatcher’s recollection of her headmistress includes a rather vivid account of her dress style, for as the late prime minister admits she “greatly admired the special outfits Miss Williams used to wear at the annual school fête or prize-giving, when she appeared in beautiful silk, softly tailored, looking supremely elegant.”<sup>30</sup> It was Miss Williams’s advice to never buy “a low-quality silk when the same amount of money would purchase a good quality cotton”<sup>31</sup> that seemed to have laid the foundation for one of Thatcher’s own fashion rules that she formulated as “always to go for quality within your own income.”<sup>32</sup> The memorable 1950 election campaign was also marked by a special sartorial practice. Taking very seriously the tip of Croydon MP’s wife, Lady Williams who suggested that all conservative candidates should be dressed in distinctive clothing, “[she] told candidates that we should make a special effort to identify ourselves by the particular way we dressed when we were campaigning,”<sup>33</sup> Thatcher recalls, “I spent my days in a tailored black suit and a hat which I bought in Bourne and Hollingsworth in Oxford Street specially for the occasion.”<sup>34</sup> She also put some extra care into making that uniform communicate conservative party allegiance by adorning the hat with a “black and white ribbon (...) with some blue inside the bow.”<sup>35</sup> It was much later when Thatcher made the full use of the blue color to visually and metaphorically communicate conservative party values.

The ubiquitous Thatcher’s pearls made their entry into politics shortly after the 1950 campaign. Following a chance meeting with a fortune teller, who holding the string of pearls foretold Thatcher that she would be “great as Churchill,”<sup>36</sup> Thatcher would consider them lucky. Her numerous outfits were accessorized with the pearl necklace, which Cochrane lists among key elements of her power style alongside “the hair,” “the blue suit,” “the pussy-bow blouse,” and “the handbag and gloves.”<sup>37</sup> According to Cochrane, the pearls metaphorically communicated “no-nonsense conservatism” since they were “the epitome of traditionalism (...) Expensive but not frivolous or decadent like diamonds (far too Elizabeth Taylor), they spoke of reliability.”<sup>38</sup> Although Thatcher’s necklace was not quite what Germain Greer dubbed “power pearls” which are “large, anything from 11 mm in diameter to 16 mm, in a single strand” by wearing it, the British prime minister joined the international milieu of other pearl-wearing female politicians such as American Condoleezza Rice or Margaret Spellings, Ukrainian Yulia Tymoshenko, or Israeli Dalia Itzik. Through their physical qualities such as a round shape and pure white color, strings of pearls seem to be ideally suited to serve as visual and sartorial metaphors of perfection, purity, clarity, and unity, all the qualities with which most of the political figures want to be associated. While being a piece of jewelery and performing an

ornamental function, a pearl necklace does not connote excess usually associated with ornamentation, but natural (literally crafted by nature) simplicity.

Another moment in Thatcher's life when style gained political importance to the extent that the aspiring Tory candidate followed professional advice on the matter, came in February 1958. Following a break from political activism after giving birth to Mark and Carol, since 1956 Thatcher was keen to make a re-entry into politics as an MP candidate. As a young mother of twins, however, she had to confront opposition of the Selection Committees, whose members expressed doubts about her ability to reconcile the busy role of an MP with her commitments as a wife and a mother. Recalling the meetings with the Selection Committees, Thatcher does not hide her resentment about the way she was received, "What I resented (...) was that beneath some of the criticism I detected a feeling that the House of Commons was not really the right place for a woman anyway (...) I was hurt and disappointed by these experiences."<sup>39</sup> She discovered that in order to appear convincing to the Committees it did not suffice to give a good speech and explain that her supreme organization skills coupled with the assistance of "a first-class nanny"<sup>40</sup> would allow her to succeed as an MP. Having the support of the conservative party vice-chairman, Donald Kaberry, she sought his expertise on how to deal with the prejudiced committees. Even though, as Thatcher notes, gender discrimination was hardly a topic on which a man could "give very useful counsel,"<sup>41</sup> surprisingly she did receive a piece of advice and still more unusually the advice concerned fashion. "Donald Kaberry did give me advice on what to wear on these sensitive occasions – something smart but not showy. In fact, looking me up and down he said he thought the black coat dress with brown trim which I was wearing would be just fine."<sup>42</sup>

Kaberry's sartorial expertise was tested shortly and proved to be more than helpful. Competing for the Conservative seat of Finchley, a constituency in North London, Thatcher recalls her meticulous preparation of the speech but also taking good care of her appearance. Not only was she wearing the recommended black coat dress and the lucky pearls, "but also a lucky brooch."<sup>43</sup> So attired she went through the usual routine of a speech followed by questions, finally to learn that she had one-vote lead over her rival candidate and turned out to be "selected for the safe seat of Finchley."<sup>44</sup> Capitalizing on her sartorial success, she also decided to wear black when addressing Finchley Association during the Adoption Meeting a month later, "this time I again appeared in a plain black outfit with a small black hat."<sup>45</sup> The simple black dress seemed to work because it metaphorically connoted seriousness by alluding to dark-colored male business suits. Being a conceptual blend of a female elegant evening attire (in the past also the symbol of widowhood, i.e. a signifier of a mature and single woman) and professional menswear that since the nineteenth century was predominantly black, such a dress communicated non-verbally the message that Thatcher could not convincingly put across while challenged with questions about the burden of motherhood on her political career prospects. Donning a black attire sartorially united her with the vestimentary code of politics, visually separating her from the pastel-colored garments of infants and their mothers. In fact, one of the famous power-dressing manuals, *Women: Dress for Success* (1980), advised professional women to abstain from wearing "'feminine' colours such as salmon pink" for these were viewed as "undermining to a woman's 'authority'."<sup>46</sup>

This early experience of being discriminated as a mother seemed to have considerable impact on Thatcher's style and her apparent insistence on avoiding casual clothes even when photographed with her children. While in *The Autobiography* she admits that "having brought Mark and Carol into the world made [her] uneasy,"<sup>47</sup> she also states that any allegations that she despised a career of full-time motherhood made her angry. "To be a mother and a housewife is a vocation of a very high kind. But I simply felt that it was not the whole of my vocation,"<sup>48</sup> she

observes. Such claim seems to have reverberated with feminist rhetoric of the time, according to which as noted by Janet Radcliffe Richards “there is something radically wrong with a system which forces so many women to choose between caring properly for their children and using their abilities fully.”<sup>49</sup> Just like in the early days of competing for an MP mandate, also later in her career she seemed adamant to project an image of herself as first and foremost a professional woman and only secondly a mother. Not surprisingly perhaps, *The Autobiography* features only one photograph of Thatcher with her children, and still it is the one in which Carol and Mark are already grown-ups. Even in this family portrait entitled “With Denis, Carol and Mark” Margaret Thatcher is separated from her children by a vertical beam of a window frame. Both the window frame and the arrangement of the represented participants seem to suggest psychological separation, as the family members do not make any eye contact, looking straight into the camera instead. The fact that Denis and Mark are standing behind Margaret and Carol, who are seated and hence depicted as much smaller figures, metaphorically conveys the idea of a patriarchal family, in which the male family members visually dominate over the female ones (in the photograph it is in fact the father who is the tallest of them all and therefore appears to be a dominant figure, as the title of the photo also suggests by placing him first in the list). Thatcher’s position of a woman in power is expressed in a more subdued and subtle way, i.e. sartorially. Unlike her daughter, she is depicted wearing a tie-neck blouse, which visually corresponds to the neckties worn by both Denis and Mark. The way Thatcher’s tie is styled resembles a type of a male cravat called ascot which is pinned rather than tied and worn for formal occasions or in the military. Although it is pinned with a brooch, Thatcher’s tie appears to be a conceptual blend that connotes power and privilege as well as masculinity.

In *The Autobiography*, Thatcher does not hide the fact that she found the House of Commons to be a male-dominated space, “the House itself was – and still is – a very masculine place,” an observation that also might have had a direct impact on her sartorial choices. Proudly accentuating her privileged position on becoming one of the few female MPs, she recalls “I was very glad, however, that both my parents had seen their daughter enter the Palace of Westminster as a Member of Parliament – quite literally ‘seen’, because the press contained flattering photographs of me in my new hat on the way to the House.”<sup>50</sup> The quote seems to soundly illustrate Thatcher’s willingness to assert her feminine identity in the men-dominated sphere of politics, not only by using the word “daughter” instead of “child,” but also through a commentary on the new hat which linked pleasing appearance and new garment with femininity. Even though, as an MP she would feel equal to her male colleagues “in the House of Commons we were all equals,”<sup>51</sup> and “immediately felt at home,” when invited for her first official meeting with prime minister Harold Macmillan, she did not eschew a chance to present herself in an overtly feminine attire. More than succinct in her description of what she chose to wear, by including the commentary “I sorted out my best outfit, this time sapphire blue, to go and see the Prime Minister,”<sup>52</sup> she emphasizes the metaphorical role of clothing as connoting gender and political identity. The sapphire blue was her favorite color as reported by her long-time wardrobe diary keeper and personal assistant Cynthia Crawford “Her favourite colour was obviously blue, always a good colour for her,”<sup>53</sup> for it also easily conveyed her Tory party allegiance. Reported as having a rather strict attitude to colors, Thatcher used them to emphasize bonding and affiliation, for example when visiting foreign countries: “Wherever we went she always tried to wear the colour of the country. When we went to Israel, for instance, Mrs. Thatcher wore a pale blue suit with a cream trim — the colour of the Israeli flag. When we went to Poland she wore green, because green is the colour of hope in Poland, and so on. We always tried to incorporate something of the host country in what she wore.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly,

although when in Britain she avoided wearing red clothes because they connoted Labour Party, she opted for red outfits when visiting Russia or the United States.

According to Crawford, what defined Thatcher's style was the simplicity of her well-tailored skirt-suits combined with feminine accessories "what we wanted for her as Prime Minister was to look business-like but with a hint of the feminine. She always wore pearls, a brooch, and earrings and, although nobody could see it, perfume."<sup>55</sup> The decisively colored skirt suits, which dominated in her wardrobe, reverberated with Utility Clothing Scheme stylistics of the acclaimed if austere creations by signature British designers such as Norman Hartnell, Victor Stiebel, Digby Morton, Edward Molyneux, or Hardy Amies.<sup>56</sup> Characterized by non-ornamental tailoring that is deprived of such extravagant elements as frills or pleats, the knee-length skirt, and close-fitted jackets, in wartime Britain became a civil uniform of active women who contributed to the war effort by taking on clerical professions. Adhering to strict rules governing Utility Clothing, the famous British designers created fashions that embraced top aesthetic quality without being unduly wasteful. In fact, while Thatcher's power suits appear to be conceptual blends of female wartime austerity clothing and masculine formal attire, they perfectly encapsulated Thatcher's belief in values of frugality, practicality, and no-nonsense politics. Such outfits also metaphorically connoted patriotic femininity of women in the service of the nation. Interestingly, Thatcher's passion for buttons, which as reported on by Crawford, according to the late prime minister "made an outfit"<sup>57</sup> also links her style with Utility Clothing Scheme. With little other ornamentation available, buttons and their arrangement seemed to have played major decorative function in Utility womenswear.<sup>58</sup>

While her biographer Charles Moore stresses the fact that she used dress as a political tool, one of the fashion designers who designed clothes for her, Tomasz Starzewski, comments that her public and private image was the same, equally formal and very professional (*Christies*, video). This is well-evidenced in the selection of photographs in her autobiography, in which she is depicted wearing formal clothing. Even in the few ones that picture Thatcher in a casual context, she is in fact wearing outfits which do not differ much from the ones she would sport for her professional assignments. One example of a more casual photograph is a shot in the kitchen for which she is wearing a dark-colored dress accessorized with pearls, a scarf, and an gingham apron, which is her only tribute to informality. In the other one, placed on the same page, Thatcher is portrayed with her husband Denis on holidays in Cornwall in 1987. Her outfit, which comprises a floral calf-long dress and pumps, bears resemblance to the attire in which she was photographed when attending the Special Commonwealth Conference in London a year before, in 1986 (shown on a previous page). Immaculate hairstyle, combined with a neatly tied pussy-bow of the dress, bishop sleeves, and a belt connote primness and control rather than relaxed holiday making.

Since the early 1980s, British women were encouraged to adopt a can-do-all style of being a woman. This became a dominant femininity pattern that was visibly modeled on Thatcher's ability to juggle demanding roles of a mother, a housewife, and a successful career woman. That Thatcher was keen on upholding such an image of herself is evident in her autobiography, in which she presents herself as an extremely busy and yet self-sufficient woman: "Denis and I decided that we would not have any living-in domestic help. No housekeeper could possibly have coped with the irregular hours. (...) it was 10 or 11 o'clock at night when I would go into the kitchen and prepare something."<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, this new demanding and competitive femininity generated a need for guidance on how to achieve a perfect equilibrium and harmony in managing such a busy life. New approach to femininity was swiftly reflected in fashion, where suits modeled on menswear became *de rigueur* for professional women. Thatcher, the nation's iconic working mother, commented on the importance of selecting appropriate clothes



in one of the sections of her autobiography, “preparation for the election involved more than politics. I also had to be dressed for the occasion.”<sup>60</sup> Although she regards her interest in clothes as a typically female pastime, the vocabulary that she uses to discuss her wardrobe belongs in the realm of men’s fashion. She proceeds to describe “suits” and “outfits” that she would select for various purposes, noting that “everything had to do duty on many occasions so tailored suits seemed right.”<sup>61</sup> The emphasis she puts on political significance of her outfits and the systematic approach she took to cataloguing her suits to avoid political blunder give an impression that, for Thatcher, fashion was more than just a womanly leisure pursuit.

To conclude, numerous descriptions of various items of clothing or accessories in Thatcher’s autobiography assist the construction of the autobiographer’s self as professional, orderly, and attentive to details, but also, and perhaps most importantly, as feminine. Similar message is imparted through a careful selection of photographs included in *The Autobiography*, none of which challenges the image of the Iron Lady as the one who is always in control. Based on the analysis of Thatcher’s sartorial practices as represented textually and visually in her autobiography, one may venture a statement that she succeeded in developing a style which signified political empowerment without sacrificing femininity, or that perhaps she even managed to alleviate the feminine elements of attire to vestimentary symbols of power.

## Notes

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- 3 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 4 Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 14.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 6 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 143.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 143.
- 8 Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), ix.
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- 12 Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 187.
- 13 Robb Young, *Power Dressing. First Ladies, Women Politicians and Fashion* (London, New York: Merrell, 2011), 34.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 20 Margaret Thatcher, *The Autobiography* (London: Harper Press, 1995), 2.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 9.

- 26 Ibid., 10.
- 27 Ibid., 10.
- 28 Ibid., 10.
- 29 Ibid., 12.
- 30 Ibid., 14.
- 31 Ibid., 14.
- 32 Ibid., 14.
- 33 Ibid., 50–1.
- 34 Ibid., 51.
- 35 Ibid., 51.
- 36 Ibid., 52.
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- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, 63.
- 40 Ibid., 63.
- 41 Ibid., 63.
- 42 Ibid., 63–4.
- 43 Ibid., 64.
- 44 Ibid., 65.
- 45 Ibid., 65.
- 46 Entwistle, *Adorned*, 189.
- 47 Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, 56.
- 48 Ibid., 57.
- 49 Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*, 219.
- 50 Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, 71.
- 51 Ibid., 73.
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- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Geraldine Howell, *Wartime Fashion. From Haute Couture to Homemade* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 176.
- 57 “Politics as theatre...” *Christies*.
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- 59 Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, 21.
- 60 Ibid., 575.
- 61 Ibid., 575.

# LOVERS, LEGENDS, AND LOOMS: PERSIAN NARRATIVE POETRY DEPICTED ON FIGURAL SILKS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

*Nazanin Hedayat Munroe*

## **Introduction: Persianate silk textiles in the early modern world**

Between 1550 and 1650, a group of approximately 11 silk textiles attributed to Safavid Iran (1501–1722) were produced depicting human figures in narrative scenes. These figural narrative silks include variations of key interactions between two sets of lovers from a set of 5 twelfth-century epic poems, namely, the *Khamsa* (Quintet) by Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209). The *Khamsa* of Nizami covers a range of subjects: from a mystical treatise to a historiography of Alexander the Great, and a cosmological parable based on Sasanian king Bahram Gur. However, it is the two eponymous love stories in his quintet—“Khusrau and Shirin” and “Layla and Majnun”—that were reproduced in silk and thread, presumably as apparel or furnishing fabrics for the elite during the Safavid period.

Globally recognized for their opulence, silk textiles produced in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran and the Persianate realm represent the zenith of luxury fabrics. These lavish silks incorporate more than figural motifs; popular designs incorporate flora and fauna, including the *gol-o-bolbol* (bird-and-flower) motif, another popular metaphor from Persian poetry. Many silks in this category include “cloth of gold”: textiles featuring a layer of gold- or silver-wrapped threads or flat strips (foils) that float on the face of the cloth, producing an iridescent surface. The range of motifs in luxury textile offerings further emphasizes the importance of this particular group: the *Khamsa* silks were reflective of a shared ideology between the designers and consumers, both of whom possess the erudition required to access the significance of these narrative scenes. Although there are a limited number of extant fragments of these textiles, the number of variations in the use of designs and materials—and the fact that any loom-woven material was created with the intention of producing yardage—all point to the popularity of a trend that resonated with a wealthy and educated consumer demographic.

## **Poetry, painting, and textiles**

Iran has a lengthy history in both silk production and textile trade, dating to the pre-Islamic period. The geographic location of Greater Iran on the “Silk Route,” the historic trade routes

from East to West, made this region a significant entrepôt in the trade of this precious commodity. By the sixth century AD Iran had developed an indigenous sericulture industry that thrived in the northern regions of Mazandaran and Gilan, perfectly suited to farming *Bombyx mori*, the silkworms cultivated to produce the delicate filament. Weaving centers were established throughout the region—the largest ones in Yazd, Kashan, and Tabriz—in the centuries that followed, each with its own silk-weaving subspecialty. These textiles were prized not only within Iran, but throughout the Islamic world, and admired across Europe as examples of expert craftsmanship. Luxury fabrics include velvet and *lampas*, complex patterned cloths that could display detailed imagery including designs with human subjects.

Figural silks were not developed independently of other media. In Iran, Persian poetry had developed as the highest art form dating back to the eleventh century, when Abul Qasem Ferdowsi codified the oral history of the Iranian people in his *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), ca. 1010, comprised of 60,000 rhyming couplets called *masnavi*. Ferdowsi's work established Persian as the language of literature, a convention that would remain for a thousand years among royalty and the upper classes throughout the Islamic world, contributing to the pre-eminence of Iranian culture and artistic forms.

In the twelfth century, the poet Nizami Ganjavi (1140–1209) would adapt Ferdowsi's meter and style to produce his quintet of epic poems, known as the *Khamsa* or “Five Treasures.” Two of Nizami's works in the collection are romances based on legendary figures whose tales were grounded in historical events: the love story of Sasanian King Khusrau Parviz and Armenian Princess Shirin, and that of Bedouin beauty Layla and her admirer Qays, aka Majnun. In the centuries following Nizami's rendition of these characters, several illustrated manuscripts of his *Khamsa* were produced by workshops for the ruling classes throughout Greater Iran. By the turn of the sixteenth century, scenes representing a few pivotal events in the respective narratives had become part of the cycle of illustration, and were well known among the educated elite.

However, it was not until the mid-sixteenth century that silk luxury textiles depicting these scenes were produced possibly by royal, as well as independent, textile manufacturing workshops. The *Khamsa* group includes eleven different signed and unsigned textile designs in multiple extant fragments, celebrating the lovers meeting in crucial scenes.<sup>1</sup> Khusrau, a powerful sixth-century Sasanian king, is awestruck as he catches the first glimpse of his fated beloved, Shirin, as she bathes nude in a stream (Figure 33.1a and b); while the Bedouin lovers Layla and Majnun unite in the deserts of Arabia, unchaperoned and surrounded by wild animals who are tamed by their love (Figure 33.2). Seemingly, only the aforesaid provocative scenes were depicted despite their inclusion of partial nudity, which went against Islamic world conventions requiring bodies be covered. Although these scenes brazenly express the characters' sexual desires, they were nevertheless popular among the elite in the opulent courts of Safavid Iran and the Persianate world.

These silks have been lauded by curators and scholars as the pinnacle of Persian silk weaving, but my careful examination of this group of objects has led to several new discoveries previously unremarked upon by earlier scholars.<sup>2</sup> One important oversight is revealed by the poetry itself: Persian-language poets responding to Nizami's exemplar authored their own versions of the *Khamsa*, altering the narratives and prompting new images in the cycle of illustration for manuscripts. This practice is known as *javab-gui*, a literary response to a classic theme in literature. The original work was thereafter referenced as the *Khamsa* of Nizami, while alternate versions incorporated the poet's name in a similar fashion. These subsequent works were often written in Persian, and reproduced as illustrated volumes.

In the absence of mechanically reproduced copies, handmade copies of the *Khamsa* and other popular literature were created in *kitab-khana* (book-making workshops), a collaboration

(a)



(b)



Figure 33.1 (a) “Velvet fragment with design from Nizami’s *Khusrau and Shirin*.” Fragment from the same design as 33.1b. Silk; cut velvet. Mid-sixteenth century, Safavid Iran. Textile Dimensions: L. 15 3/8 in. (39 cm) W. 6 1/2 in. (16.5 cm) Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1978.60 Purchase, The Seley Foundation Inc., Schimmel Foundation Inc., Ruth Blumka and Charles D. Kelekian Gifts and Rogers Fund, 1978 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452846>. (b) “*Khusrau Sees Shirin Bathing*.” Fragment from the same design as 33.1a. Silk; velvet, cut; pile warp substitution. 1524–1576. Safavid Iran. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art. 1944.499.b Textile Dimensions: 8 1/2 × 6 1/8 in. (21.7 × 15.7 cm). Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund. <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1944.499.b>

between calligraphers and painters funded by the court or a wealthy patron. Manuscripts were a significant means by which to propagate the popularity of the text, but the ultimate enjoyment of poetry was achieved via an aural experience. Long passages were memorized by storytellers and performed as entertainment at court, and later in tea- and coffeehouses for middle-class patrons.

*Kitab-khana* workshops were established not only in Iran, but throughout the Persianate world, including Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India. Rising in the ranks of a manuscript workshop required years of training; beginning as apprentices, young protégés prepared paper for calligraphers and master painters, who executed the highly detailed compositions by area of expertise, from abstract designs to figural subjects. Although the convention for signing artwork



Figure 33.2 Textile, sixteenth century. Silk fragment depicting Layla and Majnun, inscribed in cartouche on side of howdah: (trans.) “the work of Ghiyath” Silk, gilded parchment wrapped around silk core Courtesy of the Cooper Hewitt Textile Dimensions: 25 3/16 in. × 11 in. (H × W: 64 × 28 cm). Previously owned by Francisco Miquel y Badía (Spanish, 1840–1899); Gift of John Pierpont Morgan; 1902–1–780 <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18132971/>

was not commonplace, master painters began to incorporate subtle signatures within their compositions from the fifteenth century onward.

Textile making followed a different process, and was executed independently from paintings. The design for a loom-woven textile was created by a specialist called a *naqshband* (literally translated from Persian as “thread picture-maker”; pl. *naqshbandan*), who worked directly with an image plotted on a grid as a repeat, and then executed as a scale model with thread.<sup>3</sup> The *naqsh* or image itself may have been created by a painter in conjunction with the *naqshband*.<sup>4</sup> The thread model was then followed to specification by a master weaver and his assistants, who produced continuous lengths of silk textiles. Primary sources do not specify if the practice of *naqshbandi* was a separate practice from weaving, but it is a reasonable assumption that designing cloth required a thorough understanding of the mechanics and limitations of the loom. Textiles were not always designed for a specific end use; in some instances, the same type of textile could be used for either apparel or furnishings.

Royal workshops in both book-making and silk weaving were maintained by the state to serve the court, but textiles also could be produced by independent workshops for sale on the open market. The establishment of a silk-weaving workshop required a significant amount of capital to procure the necessary equipment and materials ensuring continuous yardage to create each design, the most efficient way to produce patterned silk. In most cases, the identity of the workshop and *naqshband* is unknown; nevertheless, as with paintings produced in this period, three of the works in the *Khamsa* group incorporate a subtle signature: “Work of Ghiyath” (Figure 33.2).

Though this signature posed a mystery for Western collectors and curators when they started collecting *Khamsa* silks in the late nineteenth century, several publications have shed light on the identity of this *naqshband*. He was Ghiyath al-Din (ca. 1530–1593–5), a significant Iranian textile designer from Yazd noted in biographical compilations called *tazkira*, which stated that his woven silks were in demand by the rulers of Turkey and India. Ghiyath al-Din also penned his own poetry, demonstrating his skill and status as the leading designer of his day; some of his poetry recorded in *tazkira* indicates that he was employed at the court of Shah ‘Abbas I for some period of time.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, his musings also reflect that later in life he became somewhat disillusioned with the court’s opulence, and turned to religion and prayer, a turn of events connecting him to the scenes from the *Khamsa* depicting Nizami’s characters.

### Silk, sufism, and self-image

One of the fundamental beliefs governing Iranian ideology took root during the early modern period, when the Safavids declared Shi’i Islam as the state religion. This is significant because for centuries Iranians had been ruled by non-indigenous Sunni Muslims. The major sects of Islam, Shi’i and Sunni, were established in the seventh century following disagreements about the succession of spiritual and temporal rule within the newly established empire of Islam. This bifurcation manifested itself in different religious practices and spiritual interpretations throughout the Islamic world, impacting iconography in the visual arts. In an attempt to categorize Sunni and Shi’i viewpoints, Western scholars often cite artistic decoration depicting human figures as forbidden in Sunni belief, but permissive in the Shi’i world. Although at times this appears to be the case, it is an oversimplification of a complex issue. The interpretation of *hadith* (the canonical traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) varies widely from literal to metaphorical—often attributed as Sunni and Shi’i, respectively—hence drawing attention to the root of the division between these two sects with regard to the representation of figural subjects in the visual arts.

Further adding to the *mélange* of viewpoints is the growing popularity of Sufism among artists and craftsmen throughout the late medieval and early modern periods. The mystic practice of Islamic Sufism developed in the eighth century as a counterpoint to orthodox hegemony, attracting poets and artists as its main following—often practicing in secret, and imbuing their works with symbolic significance. In addition to instating Twelver Shi'ism, the Safavid dynasty emphasized their temporal right to power based on a genealogical connection to a religious Sufi leader, Safi of Ardabil, giving legitimacy to Sufi practices. Although different Sufi orders evolved from both Sunni and Shi'i religious leaders, they share common ground concerning the role of the arts: poetry was seen as a conduit to the celestial world, and visual art forms had the potential to provide like-minded viewers with a vicarious experience—a reminder of the ultimate desire of the Sufi to transcend the earthly realm and unite with the Divine. Given the role of apparel in self-expression, this union of mystic belief and artistic expression presents itself in the *Khamsa* silks as the ultimate identifier of Sufi ideology: a significant point overlooked by previous scholars.

Of the four protagonists depicted, the lovelorn Majnun became a role model throughout the Islamic world for Sufi mendicants, whose ascetic practices mimic those of the character. Nizami describes Majnun, who is the son of a wealthy tribal chieftain, as having foregone the material comforts of the physical world as a way of expressing his devotion to Layla, the girl with whom he has become obsessed. Denied union with her, this becomes a metaphor of the Sufi longing for union with the Divine. The young man wanders the desert wilderness naked, composing eloquent impromptu poetry for his beloved, acquiring the nickname *Majnun* (Ar., “crazy one”; literally, “the one possessed by djinn”). The Sufis relate to Majnun's wanderings and his rejection of society, particularly the more ascetic *Qalandars*, wandering beggars who consider prayer and remembrance of the Divine as their daily occupation. In Nizami's version of the tale, Majnun is alone in the desert, occasionally visited by his parents or sympathizers who have come to help him. After his prolonged separation from society he becomes a beast master, befriending the wild animals who surround him protectively, calmed by his gentle spirit. Majnun is often depicted in illustrated manuscripts of Nizami's epic in the desert alone with his animals, but never with his beloved.

However, not all subsequent versions of the *Khamsa* follow this narrative thread. The earliest *Khamsa* response was written by Amir Khusrau Dihlavi (completed 1298–1302), a Turco-Hindu court poet working for the Sultans of Delhi in the thirteenth century. Having complied with the convention of resorting to Persian as the language of literature, Amir Khusrau, known as *Tooty-i Hind* (the Parrot of India), was much beloved in his day. Establishing the precedent for *javab-gui* in the *Khamsa* tradition, the thirteenth-century poet changed the events of Nizami's romances in subtle but significant ways, even switching the order of the title characters.

In Amir Khusrau's “Majnun and Layla,” the young woman has a lucid dream about her lover that prompts her to mount her camel and venture to the wilderness to visit him (Figure 33.2), which results in a physical union; this never takes place in Nizami's narrative. We see this meeting depicted on four of the five silks featuring the couple, whereas only one silk velvet within this group depicts Majnun alone in the desert with his animals. Despite the assumption by earlier scholars that these silks all evoke Nizami's narrative, I believe most of the silks featuring Layla and Majnun are based on Amir Khusrau's later version of the *Khamsa*.

Due to the iconographic similarities between paintings and woven images of the poetry's central scenes during this period, the relationship between poetry, paintings, and textile design may help determine provenance. One of the best-known illustrated manuscripts of the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusrau created in the royal workshop in Lahore for the Mughal Shah Akbar



(r. 1556–1605), depicts a very similar scene of the lovers (Cleveland Museum of Art, 2013.301). This is based on precedents established by the fifteenth-century workshops in Iran which also produced illustrated manuscripts of Amir Khusrau's *Khamsa*; master painter Bihzad (active 1480–1535) is credited with having supervised the composition of Layla visiting Majnun in the desert (Bahari 1996: 67; Chester Beatty Library, MS. 163, f. 120v.).

Amir Khusrau also altered the story of the royal couple in his “Shirin and Khusrau,” omitting the section of Nizami's narrative in which the king happens upon the naked Shirin bathing in the stream. Manuscript paintings of the famous bathing scene depict the equestrian Khusrau at the top of a hill, looking down at Shirin—demurely covered with a waistcloth, though in Nizami's poem she is quite nude—who faces the viewer, unaware of her voyeur. This scene is accordingly not depicted in Amir Khusrau's *Khamsa*, but regularly included in illustrated manuscripts of Nizami's *Khamsa* produced in Iran. Curiously, the Mughal *Khamsa* of Nizami (produced around the same time as the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusrau, 1595–1598) also omits the bathing scene from the established cycle of illustration, indicating that this was not a preferred scene for the ruling class in India.

A final fragment depicting Khusrau and Shirin in the bathing scene resides at the Topkapi Museum (13/1697). This velvet includes several details from Safavid paintings of the couple in this scene, and is among the costliest of the *Khamsa* silks: voided velvet embellished heavily with metal-wrapped threads, creating a golden surface. The fragment shape resembles the unstitched sleeve of a *balapush*, a loose-fitting overgarment. The museum identifies the fragment as being a sixteenth-century Safavid Iranian textile; one can hypothesize that the silk made its way to Ottoman Istanbul in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century through diplomatic exchange, but there is some speculation among scholars that it was produced in a Turkish workshop.

Here, the relationship between poetry, painting, and silk production points to a hypothesis relevant to both authorship and provenance. The silks depicting the bathing scene of Khusrau and Shirin are based on Nizami's *Khamsa* and were probably produced in Safavid Iran, where paintings and textiles depict the same elements of design based on details in the narrative. The silks depicting Layla and Majnun seem to be based on Amir Khusrau's *Khamsa*, celebrated across the Persianate realm. Until now, these silks were attributed to Safavid Iran and primarily to Nizami's *Khamsa*; however, the use of two different epics signed by the same *naqshband* brings about several questions. Why would Ghiyath al-Din prefer one poet's version of the story over the other? Were they produced in different workshops, or even different countries? The stylization and iconography incorporated into the various designs suggest that perhaps some of these silks may have been produced for Mughal court patrons by Safavid weavers.<sup>6</sup>

### Patrons, designers, and consumers

The production of paintings and textiles in South Asia in the Safavid manner was based as much on politics as patronage. The second quarter of the sixteenth century was tenuous for the newly established Mughal dynasty, which had lost control of India from 1540 to 1555 during the reign of Hodayun, son of the dynasty's founder, Babur. Married to an Iranian princess, Hodayun and his family sought asylum at the Safavid court, where they were promised military assistance by Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576) in exchange for Hodayun's conversion from Sunni to Shi'i Islam. Upon returning to India to regain his territory with the assistance of Safavid forces, Hodayun requested permission to take two painters and two calligraphers from the Safavid *kitab-khana*, who led the newly established royal workshops for the Mughals.

Textile specialists were among those who migrated to India from Iran in the final quarter of the sixteenth century, as the end of Tahmasp's reign resulted in political chaos and a loss of patronage and wealth throughout Iran from 1576 to 1587. The newly established Mughal court, now under the peaceful and prosperous reign of Akbar (r. 1556–1605), offered artists and court administrators a viable and secure alternative.<sup>7</sup> The Safavid weavers who joined the Mughal court atelier brought their knowledge of materials and techniques with them. A careful analysis of the weaving techniques used for the *lampas* fabrics in the *Khamsa* group demonstrates that Iranian weave structures were used to create figural designs and cloth of gold. Broadly referenced by Europeans as “brocade” or “brocaded” cloth, *lampas* woven textiles were the second most expensive silk available on the international market, preceded only by silk velvet.

In addition, scholars have attributed this group of silks to Safavid workshops due the presence of figural imagery. The basis of this argument reprises the categorization put forth by previous scholars hinging on the claim that figural images were frowned upon in Sunni Islam based on *hadith*, yet permissible in the Shi'a context due to the less literal approach developed by this sect towards Islamic teachings.<sup>8</sup> Although the discussion of figural imagery in Shi'i and Sunni visual culture is beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that this outdated and dichotomous approach has been one of the underlying arguments for the attribution of these silks to Safavid Iran in accordance with scholarship of the past 100 years. Furthermore, although the Mughal dynasty is identified in later years with Sunni practice, the familial and political connection with the Shi'i Safavids brings into question its viewpoint on these issues.

Contemplation of these two major points raises an even larger question relating to patronage attribution practices, which are determined either by the ruling dynasty of a royal patron, the geographic location of the workshop, or the national origin of the artists. Considering Hodayun's reported conversion to Shi'ism, Akbar's Iranian mother, and the presence of many Safavid painters and weavers at the Mughal court, basing attribution on either a technical or ideological analysis proves inapplicable.

Regardless of the location of manufacture, the expensive materials and labor-intensive techniques used for the five Layla and Majnun silks bespeak either royal or high-end workshop production. In addition to complex designs attesting to highly skilled *naqshbandan*, the expense of multiple silk warps and precious metals used for embellishment also indicates that these textiles were produced for an elite consumer. Although primary sources listing the value of silk textiles rarely include iconographic details (silk fabrics were generally categorized according to the amount of gold woven into the cloth), these delicately illustrative designs may also have added to the worth of the fabrics. Lastly, the “designer signature” of Ghiyath al-Din incorporated into two of these designs potentially enhanced the inherent value of these textiles. Conversely, after examining each design layout, it seems unlikely that these are the product of the same designer; Ghiyath al-Din has been linked to eight “signed” textile designs, three in the *Khamsa* group. Yet why create two different versions of the same scene of Layla and Majnun, and why did the Iranian designer choose Amir Khusrau's poetic narrative over that of Nizami?

An article published by Phyllis Ackerman in the 1930s places Ghiyath al-Din at the court of Shah 'Abbas, offering the sovereign his figured brocade depicting Layla and Majnun. Ackerman based her connection between the *naqshband* and a satin *lampas* from The Textile Museum (TM 3.312) on an anecdotal note by Heinrich Blochmann in the English translation of the Mughal state manual *A'in-i Akbari*, referring to a seventeenth-century Iranian *tazkira* (biographical compilations of the leading artists and poets of the age).<sup>9</sup> If Blochmann's anecdote is accurate, perhaps Ghiyath al-Din designed the silk to impress his sovereign, or as a royal commission. But in examining the figures closely, one realizes that across Majnun's bare chest runs a continuous curvilinear line, meant to represent his rib cage—a drawing convention that one finds in Indian

representations of ascetics, but less often in Iranian ones, where Majnun is depicted with hatch marks outlining his ribs on the side of his body (for an example of this, see “Majnun in the Wilderness,” The Metropolitan Museum, 45.174.6). If these were produced by Safavid weavers, there is every possibility that the signature “Work of Ghiyath” was employed either by another weaver with the same name, or as a “designer knock-off” based on an original. Some versions of this design theme may have even been developed and manufactured at the Mughal court, where Iranian literary and artistic traditions had already been integrated into the syncretic forms that flourished in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Finally, the issues of patronage and consumerism must be considered. Royal workshops produced textiles for use within the court, which included the gifting of *khila't*, robes of honor distributed at special occasions by the ruler to courtiers, high-ranking military, and diplomats visiting the court. These signaled approval from the king: the more gold embedded in the garment, the higher the honor.

As with any loom-woven textile, these luxury silks cannot be examined without consideration of both patronage and consumerism, also an argument ignored in previous discussions. The surviving *Khamsa* silk fragments, which are dispersed among museums in Europe and North America, represent what I believe to be only a very small portion of the silks that were produced in this subgenre. This brings the larger genre of figural silks into the argument, insofar as there were additional designs based on Persian narrative and poetic themes that were well known among the educated elite. If these scenes and characters were recognizable by the middle and upper classes as well as royalty, then their meaning went far beyond the ostentatious affirmation of wealth and status typically exemplified by silk and gold.

### King and dervish: garments as piety and power

Although most extant examples of these designs are fragmentary, the fineness of the silks—and in some cases, the shape of the fragment—connotes that these were probably used as garments. The only surviving *Khamsa* silk known to have been fashioned into a garment resides in The Hermitage State Museum collection (IR-2327), a metal-thread velvet depicting Majnun alone in the wilderness with the animals. Fashioned into a chasuble—most likely following a diplomatic exchange—this opulent silk has been attributed by the museum to Safavid Iran, and dated to the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, the iconographic details that the velvet’s design evince may have been produced in the seventeenth century at the Mughal court by Safavid weavers.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of wearing *Khamsa* garments, these narrative figural scenes rendered as luxury silks present an opportunity for the wearer to project personal ideology. There are very few depictions of women wearing figural garments, which leads to the hypothesis that the male elite were the primary consumers of these garments. Khusrau represents a legendary and powerful king, preoccupied by his passion for Shirin: an apt metaphor for a ruler or courtier who wants to project wealth and power, while also relaying sensitivity and passion. Majnun represents a wandering dervish whose pure intention and devotion to his beloved one led him to transcend the physical world, achieving communion with the divine: the premise for Sufi belief. Representing any of the *Khamsa* characters—and in a seventeenth-century example, we have all the lovers contained within the same design (British Museum, OA 1985.5-6.1)—may have led the viewer to acknowledge the erudition of the wearer – since learning the literary classics was part of the education of the elite. Alternately, by the sixteenth century, the *Khamsa* lovers had been immortalized in verses that were sung from urban coffeehouses to remote villages, so perhaps the less educated classes were also able to recognize these characters. In either case,

these outer garments were meant to communicate the inner character of the wearer to his/her community—a fact that impressed even the Europeans who came in contact with these garments through trade and diplomacy.

## Conclusion

Though the *Khamsa* silks have been attributed as a whole to Safavid Iran, there are several factors backing the argument that these were produced by Safavid weavers in Mughal India. The range of techniques used, from silk velvet to double cloth, indicates that some textiles in the group were probably produced at royal workshops and some at independent workshops. The silk textiles with Ghiyath al-Din's signature are the only ones that provide some potential for determining exact provenance, but even this attribution is contestable, as his name may have been used by a lesser-known workshop, producing what we consider in fashion a “designer knock-off.” If the first *Khamsa* silk was designed by this famous *naqshband*, either independently in his own workshop or for Shah Abbas, then it is certainly possible that others created variations based on his thematic design.

Although the bathing scene of Khusrau and Shirin is consistent with the narrative and manuscript paintings from the original story in the *Khamsa* of Nizami Ganjavi, the textiles depicting Layla and Majnun are most likely based on the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi, who penned his narrative a century later. There is much room for speculation on the reason for this departure from the original text; in part because in Nizami's version of the romance the lovers never unite, while in Amir Khusrau's narrative they engage in intimacy in the space of a day.

The messages communicated through garments fashioned from these textiles were somewhat contradictory: passion contrasted with piety, and luxury with asceticism. Most importantly, the message projected by the wearer of these silks was one that seemed to resonate well with viewers in the Persian-speaking world: it consisted in praising mystical love, while simultaneously projecting opulence and power.

## Notes

- 1 Nazanin Hedayat Munroe, “Interwoven Lovers: Narrative Silks Depicting Characters from the *Khamsa*” (PhD Diss., University of Bern, 2018), 148–49.
- 2 Munroe, “Interwoven Lovers,” 64–70.
- 3 Jon Thompson, “Safavid Carpets and Textiles” in *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501–1576*, ed. Jon Thompson and Sheila Canby (Milan: Skira, 2003): 281.
- 4 Galina Lassikova, “Hushang the Dragon-Slayer: Fire and Firearms in Safavid Art and Diplomacy,” *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 31–32.
- 5 Robert Skelton, “Ghiyath al-Din ‘Ali-yi Naqshband and an Episode in the Life of Sadiqi Beg,” in *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (London: I.B. Taurus, 2001), 252.
- 6 Munroe, “Interwoven Lovers,” 67–70.
- 7 Abolala Soudavar, “Between the Safavids and the Mughals: Art and Artists in Transition,” *Iran* 37 (1999): 49. Soudavar identifies three waves of Persian painters migrating from the Safavid to Mughal court; textile specialists are believed to have migrated earlier.
- 8 Soudavar, “Between the Safavids,” 51.
- 9 Phyllis Ackerman, “Ghiyath, Persian Master Weaver,” *Apollo* 18 (1933): 255.
- 10 For a discussion of iconographic details, see Munroe, “Interwoven Lovers,” 2018: 122–25.

# THE MORALITY OF THE MIDDLEBROW: FASHION IN AMERICAN AND CANADIAN MASS-MARKET WOMEN'S MAGAZINES OF THE 1920S

*Rachael Alexander*

In the 1920s, the United States and Canada were cultures becoming increasingly focused on the visual and it was around this time that recognizable media stereotypes of women first emerged.<sup>1</sup> The rapidly improving technologies of film and photography were instrumental in this shift, as were women's mass-market magazines. These magazines – aimed at an intended audience of white, middle-class, upwardly mobile women – achieved record circulations in the early decades of the twentieth century and irrevocably altered the publishing landscape. Among the most popular, in their respective countries, were the American *Ladies' Home Journal* (1883–2014) and the *Canadian Home Journal* (1905–1958). In addition to written content, these magazines presented increasingly sophisticated images to their readership. This iconography occupied a central position in the magazines' commercial functions but, just as importantly, constructed aesthetic ideals to which readers were encouraged to aspire.

This use of imagery on a mass-market scale placed an increasing level of importance on appearance in the period. The significantly altered cultural context in which women were visible, “invited a practice of the self which was centered on one's visual status and effects.”<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, an amplified attention to fashion – among both the magazines and their readers – was no small part of this shift. The rapidly changing culture of modernity saw a renegotiation of the relationship between appearance and identity, encouraged by the positioning of consumption as a form of identity creation. Widespread increase of middle-class wealth and leisure allowed for the intended readership of national mass-market women's magazines to share more fully in a preoccupation which had traditionally belonged – at least in its more elaborate manifestations – to the upper class.

Yet the privileging of appearance – as a marker of the successful performance of modern femininity – presented readers of these magazines with complex contradictions to be negotiated and resolved; not least the seeming incongruity of the selflessness demanded by domesticity and the perceived self-interest of vanity. Tensions such as these permeated the mass-market magazines, which often promoted the values of middle-class restraint and frugality on one page,

and aspiration and leisured consumption on the next. Drawing on fashion theory, literary ways of reading, and consumer culture theory, this chapter will explore how middlebrow magazines provided a space in which these contradictions could exist simultaneously. Using the frequently overlooked *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Canadian Home Journal* as case studies, it will interrogate how middlebrow magazines positioned fashion and style as acceptable, desirable, and – at times – essential feminine interests and argue that, for both magazines, this was crucially interlinked with constructions of national identity.

### **Middlebrow magazines and fashion**

In his discussion of a cultural approach to fashion, Christopher Breward comments: “the relationship between production, consumption and the designed artifact, which has always been central to any definition of the discipline, demands an investigation of cultural context.”<sup>3</sup> This statement is as true for early-twentieth-century mass-market magazines themselves as for the fashions presented in their pages. The assertion seems particularly pertinent for the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Canadian Home Journal*, given that they presented the majority of their fashions in the form of practical patterns to be followed and styles to be emulated. Patterns therefore exemplify a localized and active relationship between production, consumption, and the designed artifact. This relationship allows for the reconciliation of frugal domesticity with middlebrow fashionable aspirations: “The paper pattern was a brilliant device for bridging the gap, or rather the gape, between the reader as ‘household manager’ on one hand and as fashionable lady on the other.”<sup>4</sup> Alongside patterns, these magazines incorporated advertisements for readymade goods: specific garments and accessories including hosiery, corsets, workwear, and footwear. Through this combination of material, the magazines address a reader who is both dressmaker and shopper; raising questions about the relationship between types of production, modes of consumption and the fashions presented.

Yet readers' relationships with the fashioned artifacts themselves – the dresses, corsets, footwear – are rather complex. As Elizabeth Wilson comments,

Since the late nineteenth century, word and image have increasingly propagated style. Images of desire are constantly in circulation; increasingly it has been the image as well as the artefact that the individual has purchased.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of magazines, the fashions or fashionable goods presented are not tangible, insofar as they are conceptions and images of products. In other words, it is not the dress or the corset which circulates; rather, their representation and associated benefits or attributes, the means to make or the invitation to purchase. This intangibility is of particular interest when interrogating the function of fashions within the middlebrow magazine.

### **“Fashions,” the *Ladies' Home Journal* and the American context**

In the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the majority of representations of fashions were contained in a clearly signposted “Fashions” department. Established in 1920, it was to be headed by Harry Collins, “a recognized authority” to whom “Parisian designers are always ready to give heed to any ideas and suggestions that he may advance, and American fashion leaders look upon his views on all new styles.”<sup>6</sup> This introduction asserts Collins as an “authority” on fashion, simultaneously connecting him with unnamed designers in Paris and the less specific “fashion leaders” of the United States. This statement is indicative of the somewhat fraught relationship

the middlebrow magazines had with international fashion cultures, keen to establish themselves as fashionable yet lacking the gravitas of more established fashionable centers.

The small introduction was followed by a larger, and far less subtle, "Editorial Announcement" in the same issue:

Beginning with the February issue, The Home Journal will make a radical departure in the presentation of fashion to the women of America. In that number Harry Collins, an accepted authority on women's clothes, will present his spring gowns designed by him exclusively for the readers of this magazine. ... He has held aloof from magazines. ... But, appreciating his genius and what it could be made to mean to the women of America, The Home Journal has prevailed upon him to present his art through its pages.<sup>7</sup>

Exclusivity is mentioned often throughout, referring to the designs and accompanying articles. In the endless quest to grow circulations, this is not an unusual claim. Yet, the solicitation and provision of original designs, unavailable elsewhere, indicates that the magazine was trying to distinguish itself from competitors and position itself at the higher end of the market. In the short article that directly follows, Collins takes great pains to emphasize the uniqueness of the arrangement; stating, "I shall give the first serious treatment of the principles of correct dress in relation to the special needs of American women."<sup>8</sup> Of course, the "American women" referred to are the implied readers; predominantly conservative, white, and middle class. His series is presented as fundamental reading for the upwardly mobile fashion-conscious reader; not only a "post-graduate course in dressmaking but an assertion of modesty and propriety."<sup>9</sup>

From the outset Collins adopts a moralizing tone, not unlike the wider editorial voice of the magazine, communicating his concerns about artifice, lack of taste, and "false originality":

The good taste of the American woman is sorely tried by such antics. Let *her* not be misled. *The principles of sound taste survive the vagaries of passing fashions*, and the purpose of this series of articles is to redefine and clarify the laws of good taste and their application to modern dress.<sup>10</sup>

Taste, situated as "natural," is placed in opposition to "passing fashions," defined as "false originality," and what other authors describe as "eccentricity." Miranda Gill examines the use of this term, arguing "Eccentricity was one of a range of interlinked adjectives which dominated descriptions of fashion."<sup>11</sup> But the term was ambivalent and unstable since, "Fashion advocated eccentricity as a key component of modernity, whilst custom prohibited it in the name of tradition."<sup>12</sup> A reluctance to engage with such a mode emphasizes the distinction between the fashion offering in the *Ladies' Home Journal* and that of the more high-end, slick magazines of the period such as *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*. Collins continues his opposition, noting, "In dress, as in life, good taste is the possession of a sense of the natural fitness of things, the feeling of right proportion and of the harmony between details. Good taste is synonymous with sincerity."<sup>13</sup> This definition of taste, the repetition of notions of naturalness and authenticity, and the generally traditional views espoused throughout the articles, frame fashion firmly within discourses of morality, something Collins claims to avoid.

In the later "Dress and Character" he states, "It is not my intention to moralize; I am imbued with the love of the beautiful in dress and I perceive that women are beautiful in proportion as they dress in character."<sup>14</sup> In spite of his protestations, his arguments are underpinned by a clear, if reductive, moral scheme, confirmed in his assertion that, "A noble character in ignoble dress

arouses pity; a base character in beautiful dress arouses moral indignation.”<sup>15</sup> His instruction and advice, then, is unavoidably moralizing. This attitude appears to align Collins more closely with nineteenth-century perspectives on fashion. As Elizabeth Wilson comments:

In the nineteenth century fashion had come to be associated almost entirely with women’s clothing, while men’s clothes have since been perceived (inaccurately) as unchanging. Fashion as a mania for change could therefore more easily be interpreted either as evidence of women’s inherent frivolity and flightiness.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Collins does rail against the “mania for something new,” which is “deeply rooted in the growing restlessness of our time” and appears, at times, to distinguish between troubling and ostentatious “fashion,” and correct, appropriate and beautiful “modern dress.”<sup>17</sup> At other times, however, he uses the terms interchangeably, presenting a position which is neither clear nor consistent. Yet, this confusion is not his alone.

The tensions rendered explicit by Collins are reiterated throughout the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Elizabeth Sears’ article, “Habits of Fashion,” comments of women, “They like to be as well dressed as possible. But while they desire to be well dressed, they are apt to resent being slaves not only to style, but to the whim of the men who create style and who manufacture it for them in concrete form.”<sup>18</sup> That this article appeared in the same issue as the excited announcement of Collins’ new fashion department demonstrates the complex and often contradictory nature of the magazine form. Like Collins’, though, Sears extolls the natural feminine interest in modern dress, but disparages slavish adherence to “style”; makes a clear and explicit distinction between “style” and “good taste”; and situates fashion in a national framework, calling for alternatives to Parisian styles:

Woman can make her own power of choice felt in the world of dress once she sets her mind to it. She has refused, again and again, to be submerged in hoops, tight corsets, high choking collars or trailing skirts. Yet she receives with a trusting faith the statement that we must accept these absurd Parisian models because “we have no American styles.”<sup>19</sup>

Internationally, Paris was crucial in middlebrow conceptions of fashion and, “even in America, Paris was looked to as the natural home of real fashion.”<sup>20</sup> Yet for Sears and Collins, Paris represents the detestable aspects of fashion; its transience and absurdity, excessive demands and wasteful expense. This manifests itself in the nationalist rhetoric of both authors’ contributions:

Character in dress implies truth to our surroundings. As a nation we have a most individualistic character. We expand and develop at a rate beyond the imagination of the Old World. In such a creative atmosphere it is surely a discord to affect “foreignisms,” either in dress, habits or home furnishings.<sup>21</sup>

Dominant nineteenth-century notions here regarding authenticity are deployed in a national context, demonstrating American exceptionalism and applying it to fashion. Both discussions center on this logic, but also reject utilitarian dressing, dress reform, and unattractiveness, associating them with explicitly feminist attitudes. Thus, both call for the creation of a specifically middle class, relatively conservative mode of dress, with its own styles, characterized as “American.”



Although David Reed asserts that the “employment of a designer to provide exclusive fashions for the readership” was an “eccentric idea,”<sup>22</sup> the arguments presented in the *Ladies' Home Journal* follow the logic of former editor Edward Bok's fashion nationalism project between 1909 and 1912.<sup>23</sup> In “American Fashions for American Women,” Bok attempted to reject Parisian influence through a sustained campaign which involved advertising, articles, and a prominent letter to the *New York Times*, “justifying the need for an American response to recent ‘freakish fashions; from Paris.’”<sup>24</sup> While Bok's crusade garnered much support, it was undermined by the reluctance of department stores and magazines to insult or sever ties with Paris designers, and the relatively underdeveloped American production infrastructure. Primarily though, the crucial blow to the project was consumer reluctance to abandon Paris and, as Schweitzer states:

Bok baldly admitted that American Fashions for American Women had failed. He told Curtis admen, “We cannot change things that are fixed in a woman's mind. A magazine cannot reform. It can awaken interests, but it is up to the public to decide. Women must decide the style.”<sup>25</sup>

The final statement in Collins' “Democracy and Aristocracy in Dress” – the sixth, and last, of his series – is remarkably similar to Bok's: “The future of dress is in the hands of American women.”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the invocation of political terms, such as Bok's detailing of “republican virtue” and Collins' “democracy,” position a distinctive fashion as an important component of American national identity. Collins' articles can be read as a second attempt to encourage the readership to favor a specifically American fashion. While Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith comment on the increasingly complex trajectories of fashion in the early twentieth century, including the developing New York fashion industry, they note “The assumption that new styles came exclusively from Paris, or at least from Europe, and traveled westwards across the Atlantic, undergoing some adaptation on the way, became deeply ingrained during the nineteenth century, and was still dominant in the 1920s and 1930s.”<sup>27</sup> As in 1912, Parisian influence was not to be banished so easily.

Collins' articles – particularly in relation to Bok's efforts – offer an example of the increasing complexity of transatlantic fashion exchange, in spite of the apparent abandonment of the series. Most of the d topics and titles, outlined in the January 1920 issue, never appeared. After the July article, Collins did provide three additional articles. Yet these were more conventional, dealing with practical rather than theoretical aspects of fashion. His final contribution came in October 1920, when Mary Brush Williams was quietly, without announcement, introduced to the fashion department. From then, she wrote monthly articles titled, “Paris Says....” In spite of protestations from Bok, Collins and Sears, it was clear that fashion nationalism was not, at this point, commercially viable. Yet these efforts do represent challenges to what was perceived to be an outdated privileging of European style, reflecting a desire to break from ideals imposed by the “Old World” and an effort to renegotiate fashion as acceptable for an American middle-class audience. The fashion pages, surprisingly, are the only area of the *Ladies' Home Journal* where uncertainty or concern are explicitly displayed regarding national identity, whereas the *Canadian Home Journal* is significantly different in that fashion is one of the very few areas where the magazine does not vigorously promote Canadian national identity.

### **“Dress,” the *Canadian Home Journal*, and the Canadian context**

If the United States was ill equipped to challenge European influence, it stands to reason that Canada was even less so and the *Canadian Home Journal* reflects this. Articles which address fashion or clothing – beyond the expected fashion pages – are few and far between. When they do appear, they consistently serve to reinforce restrained attitudes which champion practicality over style. One notable example of this is Canadian author Nellie McClung’s brief article, “The Morality of Clothes,” which begins by describing an “unfortunate remark” regarding velvet made by the author in a shop.<sup>28</sup> This results in the saleslady providing an “unmistakable re-proof,” stating black velvet “is not good this year” and continuing:

From that I fell to thinking of the Morality of Clothes. Clothes are thoughts made manifest. The history of womankind has always been written in their clothes. ... Women will never be free until they are free from the bondage of dress. Fine raiment, silk linings, ornamentation, seed pearls, embroideries, have cause more women to sin than poverty or passion. This will never be eradicated, any more than the thirsty man’s predilection for cold water. But it can be changed.<sup>29</sup>

“Dress,” in its more luxurious manifestations, is positioned as a constraining and nefarious force, explicitly linked to immorality and “sin.” As with Collins, it is not dismissed; rather, it is unavoidable and essential, a communicator of character and identity. While McClung employs the rhetoric of women’s liberation and freedom, the reliance on nineteenth-century notions of moral dress is confirmed with overt references to artifice and deception:

How can we expect men to respect women when the women show by their dress that they do not respect themselves; for the women who dress indecently confess their poor opinion of themselves, in the honest ways of life, and admit by their costume that they have to descend to the grosser plane in order to be attractive. Unable to charm the beholder by legitimate means, they lower the standards to the level of the animals.<sup>30</sup>

“Indecent” dress and artificial “costume” are contrasted with honesty and implied naturalness, against the background of thoroughly traditional gender roles. Oddly, the women who wear these unacceptable styles are portrayed as both manipulative and animalistic, two traits which would appear to be mutually exclusive. The alternative offered is of “wholesome,” “working clothes,” affiliating morality with practicality and stating, “It is no longer considered a fine, ladylike thing to be idle, but, rather, a disgraceful condition.”<sup>31</sup> This renegotiates the ideal of femininity, disparaging idleness and elaborate display, and encouraging practicality and hard work. Appropriate clothes are therefore asserted as an important method of displaying these venerated traits and although Canadian identity is not openly discussed, it is implied through these traits. Whilst contributions such as these were not common throughout the title, the attitudes presented here correspond with the practical and concise nature of the fashion pages.

When compared to the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the fashion pages of the *Canadian Home Journal* contained more practical advice on styles and patterns than discussion of a national fashion. Throughout the period, the fashion advice altered in format from longer articles in the early 1920s, to an unsigned regular column titled “Dress” in the middle of the decade, culminating in a variety of articles after 1928. The earlier articles were consistently written by Charlotte M.

Storey and dispensed a range of advice to the Canadian readership. At times they referred to wider concerns or discussions regarding fashion, as in this example:

What is there about that subtle thing called *Fashion*, that commands the interest of every normal woman, whether she live in the Metropolis or the remotest prairie home? Why is it that every woman, no matter how little attention she may pay to her attire, resents being called *old-fashioned*? Why should the imputation carry reproach with it?<sup>32</sup>

Initially, this article appears fairly philosophical in its questioning; raising fashion as a mysterious force for both urban and rural women and probing the reasons for its influence. Yet in the next line it abruptly returns to the subject presented in its title, stating,

This is a formidable trio of questions that would take pages to answer, so we shall leave them with you to think about, and urge our pen to hasten on and write of other things such as fur and cloth wraps and millinery, of which there is much to tell.<sup>33</sup>

The questions demonstrate an awareness of the contentious nature of fashion but the following paragraphs assert it as an important interest, the attention to which is more pressing than the questioning of it. The article continues to present advice on appropriate styles and trends, relying on frequent references to Paris to legitimate its claims, and stating “Individuality in dress is becoming a fixed objective with women who study the art of dressing well ... but the velvet hat is supreme, Paris says so.”<sup>34</sup> The references to individuality are common throughout both titles, but this individuality is ambiguous; presented at times as a desirable trait, and at others as one which should be avoided. Here the term is constrained by adherence to the fashion dictates of Paris. Individuality is desirable, but only insofar as it does not oppose Parisian trends.

Hammill and Smith comment, “In Canadian magazines, discourses of cosmopolitanism and exoticism were strongly inscribed in the reporting and marketing of fashion.”<sup>35</sup> This is evident throughout the fashion advice, in spite of its changing format. The November 1926 “Dress” column provides somewhat of a shopping tour, firmly centered on Paris: “With the advent of nipping winter winds the tidings that Paris favours muffs will be welcome news... in one of the shops is a Cossack inspired turban of gray baby lamb, smartly set off by a red feather gardenia.”<sup>36</sup> The implication that these are Parisian shops lends a sense of authenticity to the advice, which continues to mention numerous other “fashionable shops” and the clothing being sold.<sup>37</sup> For the readers of the *Canadian Home Journal*, who would have predominantly made rather than bought their clothes, this article presents a form of what Lorna Stevens and Pauline Maclaren call the “shopping imaginary,” “the imaginary shopping spaces which women’s magazines create.”<sup>38</sup> Creation of such “dreamworlds” allows for the promotion of the patterns presented on the fashion pages, which were often explicitly positioned as European.<sup>39</sup> For example, the pattern pages which appear alongside the “Dress” article in this issue are titled, “French News on Dolman Sleeves and the Horizontal Line.”<sup>40</sup> Through a Paris-centric “dreamworld,” the inaccessible garments in the fashionable shops of Paris, described in the advice, are linked to the obtainable styles presented as patterns. This connection is furthered with the patterns representing trends discussed in the fashion articles, and the depiction of women shopping in images. The pattern pages therefore fall into the liminal category of advertorial, between advertising and editorial content, particularly through these links with other content. Yet they were still advertising a product, produced by a company. The company interestingly was not European, but rather American.

Throughout the decade, patterns were provided by American companies which cited Toronto offices; Pictorial Review until August 1923, Standard Designer until October 1926, and finally Butterick Pattern Company. The presentation of American fashions in a Canadian publication is perhaps not unexpected. The fashions were certainly not produced in Canada, so inevitably had to be imported from somewhere. The implications of this arrangement are interesting though, particularly in the case of the Butterick Pattern Company. Established in 1863 by Ebenezer Butterick, the company produced magazines with the express mission of advertising its patterns. These early magazines included *The Ladies' Quarterly Review of Broadway Fashion* and *Metropolitan Monthly*, which were merged in 1873 to create *The Delineator*, "a magazine of 'American Fashion' for the world and one of the 'Big Six' women's magazines in the fin de siècle period."<sup>41</sup>

*The Delineator* was one of the *Ladies' Home Journal's* direct competitors and one of its major influences: "Butterick Company influenced Curtis Company in terms of product content (forcing inclusion of the patterns female customers desired), expansion of product line, and in showing Curtis the advantages of a widely developed system of agents selling the magazines."<sup>42</sup> In this way, *The Delineator* can be seen to be influencing both the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Canadian Home Journal*, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the transnational publishing landscape and emergent mass-fashion industry. "A World Wide Pattern Service" announced the monthly inclusion of Butterick Patterns, but the nationality of the company was obscured.<sup>43</sup> No mention is made of the United States. Instead, the advert states that shops are in Paris, where sales "are greater than the sales of any pattern in any other store in the world" and London.<sup>44</sup> The Butterick Pattern Company did have international offices, and certainly none of the information being presented is untrue, but the decision to position these patterns as originating from Europe implies that this would matter to readers. Alternatively, it could have been the case that the magazine was unwilling to include explicit links to American industry, given the nationalist aims of the publication. Regardless, this example renders explicit the extent of cross-border and transatlantic fashion exchange.

## Conclusion

The aesthetic ideal the readers of the *Canadian Home Journal* were being encouraged to emulate was not Canadian in origin, nor did it claim to be. But it was presented as a specifically Canadian interpretation of the fashionable standards set elsewhere, increasingly the case in later decades.<sup>45</sup> Compared to the *Ladies' Home Journal*, however, this was not explicit or vigorous fashion nationalism. Yet, to some extent, the provision of nationally-specific ideals of dress was one way in which fashion was cemented as an appropriate, and encouraged, interest. As seen in Collins' and Sears' articles in the *Ladies' Home Journal* and McClung's in the *Canadian Home Journal*, these titles negotiated between nineteenth-century concerns regarding morality and authenticity and encroaching twentieth-century modernity. Appropriate fashion, as presented by these magazines, can thus be understood as a series of compromises or middle grounds; between frugality and excess, between North America and Europe, and between nineteenth- and twentieth-century values.

Both titles presented negotiation, albeit through aggressive fashion nationalism on the part of the *Ladies' Home Journal* and subtle national interpretation for the *Canadian Home Journal*. The framing of fashion within discourses of morality was central in affording this negotiation. While the process and results were not without tensions, mediation of these binaries allowed a middlebrow fashion to be positioned as a worthwhile, if not essential, middle-class feminine interest in both of these titles. While appropriate modes and levels of engagement remained consistently circumscribed by domesticity and nationalism, these titles demonstrate how interest in fashion was promoted to an ever-expanding audience of women.

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*Morality of the middlebrow*

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# FASHION CONSUMPTION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE: MECHANISMS OF SALES OBSTRUCTION

*Natalia Berger and Skylla Blake*

By introducing the term “written clothes” in 1967, Barthes showed the natural relations between fashion and its consumers through a text, or, broader, a public discourse. According to the philosopher, through language, fashion becomes a *narrative*. The emphasis of his study was on the deconstruction of the meaning-producing system, which makes people consume fashion. “It is not the dream but the meaning that sells,” the philosopher said. “Fashion appears essentially – and this is the final definition of its economy – as a system of signifiers.”<sup>1</sup>

Although these fundamentals of Barthes’ fashion system seem to be little affected by time, the “meaning” itself has undergone multiple changes. Together with the rapid growth of mass production and consumption, fast and cheap fashion, the industry has become a target of social activism. Besides *Vogue*’s natural habitat, the glossy magazines, fashion as a subject migrated to a wider space of mass media and turned into the center of public debates. Nowadays, it is rather “in fashion” to criticize the fashion industry. In the last decade, more and more scholars from varied disciplines such as marketing, management and fashion have focussed on the problematic relationship of the (fast) fashion industry and the complexion of ethics and sustainability, recognizing the main drivers and actors involved in the complicated supply chain structure on the one side and consumer behavior and consumption on the other.<sup>2</sup>

One of the topical issues of public debate is animal welfare. Today, practically all branches of the clothing industry using animal products, be it fur, leather, wool or feathers, are under pressure of animal welfare activists. While the “humane movement” is not something new and dates back to the nineteenth century, never have there been so many people determined to stop the exploitation of animals.<sup>3</sup> The question is: how does this movement affect the meaning attached to a given sartorial product and its consuming practices?

Our multidisciplinary cross-case study compared two, seemingly similar, “anti-fashion” media campaigns conducted by animal welfare activists in the period 2007–2015 with apparently very different effects. The anti-angora campaign of People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) resulted in a large-scale ban of products made from angora wool by more than 300 high street brands worldwide and caused significant damage to the angora wool industry in China, the world’s main producer. However, another PETA-campaign, which started over a decade earlier, targeting Australian merino wool production, resulted in more modest apparent effects.

### **Discourse- and media-effects studies**

Our approach combined some theoretical foundations of critical discourse analysis (CDA) with framing and media-effects theory.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the term “fashion” is used in the same sense as “clothing industry.” From a social constructivist’s point of view, through discourse, language plays an essential role in shaping social reality. As Fairclough noted, “social transformations in contemporary social life are extensively ‘discourse-led’, in the sense that it is discourses which change first.”<sup>5</sup> A primary target of CDA is the power relations within the social process.<sup>6</sup> The nature of the method leads to an interdisciplinary form of analysis, meaning that a CDA study should use specific knowledge of disciplines, which studies the social practice of interest.<sup>7</sup>

The research program in the CDA tradition includes analysis of three dimensions of discourse: social practice, discursive practice (text production, distribution and consumption) and text.<sup>8</sup> Hence, attention should be paid to different kinds of linguistic actions, which are “undertaken by social actors in a specific setting determined by social rules, norms and conventions.”<sup>9</sup> The meaning of a text is formed by underlying cognitive structures such as sociocultural knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies.<sup>10</sup>

Mass-mediated communication is one of the natural fields where discourse practices occur institutionally. Print media, especially of the high-circulation and “glossy” kind, “very much reflect the social mainstream.”<sup>11</sup> The value of these media to social research lies in their impact. In the context of fashion studies, mass media plays one of the key roles in the construction of cultural meaning attached to apparel and its consumption.<sup>12</sup>

According to Fairclough, even aspects of the “style” of a text may be ideologically significant.<sup>13</sup> Choice of words and *frames* affect the meaning constructed by particular social actors, therefore, making framing analysis a logical descriptive instrument for discursive practices and text. A frame describes the object and defines a dominant perspective on it.<sup>14</sup>

The modern understanding of framing effects is bound to behavioral or attitudinal outcomes of mass-media communication. These effects are “not due to differences in what is being communicated, but rather to variations in how a given piece of information is being presented (or framed) in public discourse.”<sup>15</sup>

Entman defined four framing functions – problems definition; diagnosis of causes; making moral judgments; and suggesting remedies.<sup>16</sup> Together with the CDA-driven categories such as “genre,” “author,” “general topic,” “social actor(s) presented,” and “rhetorical tropes,” these framing functions formed the basis for the coding book of our content-analysis.

### **Research design and corpus-building**

Although the PETA-campaigns ran worldwide, due to the reasons of accountability and locality, only Dutch historical data was taken for analysis. One of the practical tasks of our research was to build a representative and valid corpus of texts that were published within the given time frame. Daily and weekly local and national newspapers as well as women’s magazines and the most popular Dutch fashion blogs were chosen for a more comprehensive overview of different media involved in given discursive practices. First, the content-analysis of mass media texts (the sample consists of 291 relevant articles collected through LexisNexis) was conducted. In addition to the print and online media, some other important and demonstrative discourse events were included in the analysis (the TV releases, its viewers’ comments, and social media monitoring data).

In the final stage of the research project, a textual discourse analysis was performed. The ambition was to weave interpretation of the particular texts into a broader picture of the



specified discursive and social practices combined with current theoretical knowledge in the regarded disciplines. In the following paragraphs, we have presented a limited but representative excerpt from our findings.

## **Anti-fashion campaigns**

### ***Mulesing of merino lambs***

Australia is one of the world's largest wool producing countries, with 90% of the globe's apparel wool coming from Australian sheep, mainly merinos.<sup>17</sup> Due to the climate, merinos are susceptible to the so-called fly-strike. To combat this serious pest, farmers have been using the controversial "mulesing" technique for over 80 years. The procedure involves cutting flaps of wool-bearing skin from around the tail and breech area of lambs, which is often carried out without the use of pain relief medication.<sup>18</sup>

PETA's fight against this practice started many years ago and seemed to sort effect. Several U.S. and European retailers pledged to seek wool from non-mulesed sheep. However, in response, the Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI), in which a large part of the Australian wool industry is united, filed a case against PETA, and it was in 2007 that a mediated out-of-court settlement was reached. PETA agreed to halt its activities against Australian wool farmers and, in return, AWI vowed to phase out mulesing by 2010. The promise was broken and over 80% of Australian lambs are still being mulesed each year.<sup>19</sup> Over the years, PETA has continued exposing different kinds of mistreatment of sheep in Australia for wool, not only addressing fashion houses but also asking consumers to refuse buying wool of any kind.

### ***Plucking of angora rabbits***

With sheep wool accounting for approximately 95% of all wool, the other 5% made up by angora rabbit and other fur animals is comparatively small.<sup>20</sup> In December 2013, PETA revealed a shocking video with undercover footage taken on ten Chinese farms, showing how restrained angora rabbits screamed, while workers hand-plucked hair from their bodies. According to PETA, these are standard production practices in China with its angora-market share of 90%.<sup>21</sup>

In response, high street retailers such as Marks and Spencer, Top Shop, H&M, Primark, and Next rushed to distance themselves from angora wool and sickened consumers called for a boycott of the stores still selling items made with angora fur.

In March 2015, the Netherlands addressed the European Council and called for concerted actions to prevent products involving such mistreatment from entering the EU. Dutch companies C&A and Hema decided to ban the controversial angora in February 2014, and a couple of months later, Scotch & Soda, WE Fashion, Gaastra, and Supertrash did the same.

This campaign almost wiped out the market for angora; the export value of Chinese angora rabbit wool plummeted from \$23 million in 2010 to just \$4.3 million.<sup>22</sup>

## **Discursive practices and texts**

In this chapter, we will reflect on a broader picture of discursive events, which, according to our analysis, most likely led to the now-known effects on consuming practices. Therefore, the content-analytical data, i.e. the completed codebook, will be evaluated as a kind of large single macro text, which reflects mass media discursive practices around two anti-fashion campaigns.

For more in-depth explanations and practical evidence, we will dive into the micro-layers of a context (such as single texts, phrases, and words).

### ***Triggering events***

The reason why people suddenly didn't want to buy sweaters from angora could be collective shock caused by the video that was spread by PETA via the Internet in September 2013. In terms of Anderson, triggering events "much as an earthquake ... are catalysts for dramatic shifts in public policy."<sup>23</sup> Such an event during the anti-angora movement in the Netherlands was, beyond any doubts, the video with the screaming rabbit that seemingly caused a *moral shock*: "The vertiginous feeling that results when an event or information shows that the world is not what one had expected."<sup>24</sup>

As evident from the data provided by the Dutch social media monitoring service *Coosto*, general interest for angora wool during 2013–2015 was consistently low; the rather monotony diagram of social media activity shows only four moderate splashes of public interest for the topic and one exceptional peak of activity in November 2013. The first Twitter posts, referring to the PETA petition, were made by different private persons and animal welfare organizations and had no clear effect on the major interest. Only a couple of days later, when the popular consumer program *Radar* (AVROTROS) covered the topic on national television and showed the video document, the bomb burst. The public reaction came from different facets of discursive practices – via social media (460 related tweets in one day), via the website of *Radar* (509 comments), and via other online media and forums. On the very same day, five leading national newspapers published articles about the angora-ban by a number of fashion retailers; the glossies *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* did the same on their online pages. The message in all media accounts was similar and could be summarized by the headline from *Trouw* (29 November 2013) – "Fashion retailers ban angora wool after gruesome video."

As content-analysis showed, there were various social actors with different practical goals who were active in the media campaign:

- Animal protection movement, represented by NGOs (such as PETA, Bont voor dieren/ Fur for animals, Dier en Recht/Animal and Rights) and political parties (Partij voor de Dieren/Party for Animals).
- The fashion industry, represented by retailers (such as H&M, C&A, Zara, WE, Supertrash), the Dutch trade association for fashion and textile industry Modint and one wool manufacturer.
- The government represented by the responsible minister.
- Journalists and bloggers.
- Independent experts (biologists and rabbit breeders).
- The general public – readers, viewers, consumers.

The role of activists was threefold: first, they actively generated the content – via social media and press releases; second, the leader of political party initiated discussion in the Parliament and the EU Council; third, as interviewees, activists offered journalists certain interpretations and judgments. For example, the spokesperson of *Bont voor dieren* used the term "Angoragate" (confirming to the Cambridge Dictionary, this suffix "used to create a name for a situation that causes public shock or disapproval") and emphasized on a public indignation and unawareness of how angora wool is produced: "People have been shocked" (*Trouw*, 30 November 2013).

The video-document was used by animal activists as a driver to move towards a new ethical frame – “*conditions in angora industry are immoral.*” In its essence, this new ethical frame was built on the existed shared value in the public debate on farm animal welfare – “*animals should not suffer.*”<sup>25</sup>

The spokesmen of the clothing industry, while supplying media channels with official statements, did not talk to journalists directly (none of the ten invitees from the retailers appeared on the life *Radar* show). A formal reaction of H&M and other big sellers composed of a commonplace of the regarded media discourse. The clothes giants promised to stop selling products containing angora until the moment the whole production process would be transparent and cruelty-free; heretofore, consumers could bring earlier purchased angora items back to a shop. A month later, some retailers stated the inability to trace the wools’ supply chain back to farms and announced a full ban of angora production.

It is safe to say that mass media (intentionally or not) played a crucial role in the distribution of the particular frame in the way angora was talked about, which was created by other key actors of related social practices. It seems that the majority of journalists did not look further than documents offered by PR agents of two main players – activists and fashion retailers (from 38 regarded articles only four provided experts’ points of view on the specifics of breeding and shearing angoras). It was the same with the governments’ reaction to the video; the definition “unacceptable practices,” pronounced by the responsible minister, together with her intention to discuss the question in European Parliament, was repeated in news compilations of national and local papers.

Still, one cannot conclude whether the industrial ban on angora products was caused by one video and the publicity around it. It is more likely that such a radical action was motivated by economic reasons. To begin with, in the time of the campaign, the yearly production of angora wool was about 10,000 tons.<sup>26</sup> The fiber was seemingly more vulnerable for ban than Australian sheep wool with its nearly half million tons of per year production.<sup>27</sup> Besides, due to the video and the following public discussion, the luxury image of “fluffy and warm” angora was seriously damaged; hence, the product got a “negative prestige.” According to the clothes psychologist, a fashion may be killed by being brought into association with an event of a painful character.<sup>28</sup>

Pursuant to our analysis of the 509 comments posted on the online TV shows’ forum, *Radar*’s audience, besides expressing anger and disapproval, discussed possible solutions for the situation. The most common idea was “punishment” together with the requirement to “stop industry practices,” which was followed by the call and promise to “stop buying” and “be more conscious and responsible as a consumer”; the appeal to “spread the video” and “sign the petition” were also popular.

According to our data, within the anti-merino campaign in the Netherlands, there were no noticeable trigger events. Although *Radar* made an item about cruelty in the sheep’s wool industry on 25 October 2014 that included PETA’s documentary footage, it did not provoke a comparable public reaction like with the angora video. There were no comments on the webpage on *Radar*, Twitter activity was less than half and the majority of posts were produced by *Radar* itself or by animal welfare activists.

The curve of social media activity with regard to “merino wool” remained stable in the years up to 2015 and indicates a generally higher daily public interest for the fiber than seen for the rabbits’ wool. However, only a little part of the accounts published in all types of mass communications was dedicated to mulesing or other cruel practices in the wool industry; on average, texts were related to wool as a garment and its characteristics.

### ***Stereotyping***

It is very likely that the Dutch public took the animal activists' version of the way of angora wool farming in China for granted. This is how stereotypes – normative beliefs and perceptions of groups – work. They help the perceiver make sense of a situation, aid explanation by saving time and effort, and fit the shared group beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

Based on our analysis, there were very few attempts to present a more balanced interpretation of what everybody saw on the angora-video. The journalist's offered frame fitted with the existing stereotype of China' lacking animal protection policies and of China as an unfriendly place for animals.<sup>30</sup> There was the factual indication that "the incident was filmed in China" and that "China is the worlds' biggest manufacturer of angora fiber." However, explicitly or not, a transition from the single cases to a more general assertion was made practically in all the texts in our corpus. A typical example: *Metro* (29 November 2013) referred to the "video, where one could see how in China wool is torn off of screaming rabbits." Additionally, *De Volkskrant* (30 November 2013) enquired, "Why do people in China cope with the rabbits so harshly?" This generalizing question indicates the widespread believe in the Western world that "China [is] culturally inclined to animal cruelty."<sup>31</sup>

We found evidence of such stereotyping not only in the releases of official media but also in many public reactions, such as these comments on *Radar's* online forum: "In every country, animals suffer unnecessarily, but what the Chinese perform is simply not to describe"; "in such countries" people "enjoy" animal abuse; as a consumer, "you have to be suspicious" once you learn that the woolen item is made in China. These examples demonstrate how "schemata of interpretation" performs its interpretative function to organize experience and guide collective action.<sup>32</sup> As Benford and Snow noted, this function works through simplifying and condensing the aspects of the "world out there."<sup>33</sup>

PETA, the leading actor of the discursive practices under discussion, repeatedly pointed out in its public utterances that "there is no form of supervision on animal welfare in China" (*Radar*, 2013; *Cosmopolitan*, 2013). Other animal welfare activists spread the same information. Although there were not many attempts to expand on the reasons of the given situation in China, some newspapers assigned the lack of animal welfare policies in this country to the "cultural differences between East and West" as did national newspaper *NRC* on 10 January 2014. We found only one, untypically extended, article in our sample, where the journalist tried to look at the problem from different points of view; this was the only case when Chinese "super capitalism" was mentioned as a core cause of bad animal treatment (*Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 3 December 2013).

Within the anti-mulesing campaign, we did not find evidence of negative country stereotyping. Instead, we detected active exertion to create a positive stereotype of wool as natural and sustainable fiber by the parties concerned.

### ***Monophony versus polyphony in discursive practices***

The slow and more modest apparent effects of the anti-merino campaign could be explained by the absence of homogeneity in the discursive practices around it. As Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy argued, more structured and coherent discourses lead to institutional change because "the more reified and taken for granted the social construction, the more difficult or costly it is to enact behaviors not consistent with it."<sup>34</sup> Our analysis of the anti-angora movement supports this argument: because of existing stereotype and shared values, the public easily accepted a frame that "angora fiber is immorally obtained and should be boycotted"; the industry could not afford to ignore the public pressure and took action.

“When texts contradict each other, or when the relationships among them are less clear, their implications for action are necessarily more negotiable regarding definitions of unacceptable actions and their costs.”<sup>35</sup> This theoretical statement explained why discursive practices regarding mulesing did not lead to a massive public response and did not seem to affect consuming practices directly.

First of all, it was hard to trace a distinction between *wool* and *merino wool* in the studied discourses; it looks like both terms are often used as synonyms by journalists. Additionally, it could also mean that the majority of the general consumers cannot differentiate between merino and other types of sheep’s wool.

Although activists and mass media informed the public about cruel practices in the Australian wool industry, the message of the campaign was not as consistent and simple as it was in the angora-case. While the Dutch press wrote about mulesing earlier (*Trouw*, 23 July 2005), in the following years, the topic was hardly discussed (we found only ten articles where mulesing was mentioned). Social media monitoring showed only one splash of the public interest between 2009 (earliest data) and 2015 for the phenomenon. Namely, on 22 March 2010, the civic journalism platform *Newslog.nl* published an item about the mulesing and related this practice with the manufacturing of the popular UGG’s shoes; attached to this was a link to the short video with bleeding sheep and hard-handed breeders made by PETA. The news was 90 times repeated in Twitter but caused no further resonance in conventional media. On 23 October 2014, *Radar* made an item about merino wool. During the TV-show, its host and experts did not only discuss “disrespectful animal treatment” and “rush” with which merino wool was obtained in the video document shown, but also noted that such “shocking” cruelty is *not always the case*. “Of course, there are also farms where sheep are well-treated,” emphasized the host; the problem is that for a consumer, it is impossible to find out where the woollen item was made; hence, it cannot be traced whether the animals were handled humanely. The expert explained what mulesing entails and why it is done. While the economic arguments for the procedure were articulated, the audience was also provided with an idea that there are primary *medical reasons* behind the painful treatment. As well as the TV show, a few related accounts in other traditional media spoke about the medical necessity of mulesing, as did *Elle* (31 October 2013), mentioning a “deadly disease” miasis. An argument provided by *Trouw* (23 July 2015) reflected the standpoint that presumably had a disturbing effect on the effectiveness of the anti-mulesing campaign: “Without this mulesing, many sheep would die.”

In addition to multiple viewpoints in the protest campaign, we registered a strong motion *for wool*, which unfolded parallel with PETA’s activities. Public discursive practices around merino wool during 2007–2015 comprised of more texts about wool as a garment and less about how it is produced. Newspapers and glossies wrote about the Campaign for Wool and fashion events such as No Finer Feeling Campaign, Wool Week Amsterdam and Woolmark Award (which attracted most of the attention in women magazines and national prints – 13 texts between 2013 and 2015). Wool as a garment was the only angle in how this fiber was discussed in the fashionistas’ blogs.

Unlike the message of the anti-mulesing campaign, the pro-wool messages were rather simple and straightforward. According to our content-analysis, the image of wool was built over many years using the keywords qualities of the product and it corresponds to the different types of consumer’s interests and demands. For those who care about:

- Environment: “natural,” “sustainable” (“you can wear a woollen coat for 10 years”), “good for the environment,” and “recycled.”

- Quality of apparel: “lightweight,” “warm,” “luxury,” “fashionable,” “easy,” “comfortable” (one of the most repeated adjectives), “enjoyable,” “genuine,” and “craft.”
- Style and trends: “chic and elegant,” “sign of the times,” “classic,” and “feminine.”

Additionally, addressing the collections of well-known fashion designers in the same context as wool made the garment more attractive to the mode-conscious audience.

One can state that all these attributes of wool repeatedly articulated in Dutch public discourse, together with other actions performed by the pro-wool campaigners (the most famous ambassador of which was Prince Charles), formed grounds for a “feel-good” frame for the perception of the garment by consumers and made the voices of animal welfare activists less clearly perceptible.

## Conclusion

In the course of our research, we observed how the mechanism of the creation of meaning attached to sartorial products can work. The dramatic effect that PETA’s anti-angora campaign had on press coverage and consumer behavior was probably caused by the presence and the nature of a triggering event – the shocking video with undercover footage of screaming rabbits. It is likely that the credibility of the footage was achieved due to existing negative views of China with a track record of incidents of animal abuse. The construction of the further frame “angora wool should be banned” was highly likely because of the shared value that “animals should not suffer.” Additionally, the success of this campaign could also be explained by the economic factors (the tiny share of angora in global wool production) and by the simplicity and homogeneity of the given discursive practices. In contrast to the angora case, discourses around merino lambs and mulesing were rather polyphonic, and the pro-wool voices appeared to be much more consistent, clear and multitudinous than the voices against. The latter was too ambiguous to create a firm base for consumers’ negative attitude towards wool.

Nevertheless, in 2019, online and physical shops available in the Netherlands offer enough products made from angora; ostensibly, the ban effect on the fashion industry was temporary. On the other hand, there are very slow but positive changes regarding the phasing out of mulesing. In this, we see that Barthes was right again: “Fashion is structured at the level of its history: it is destructed at the only level at which it is perceived: actuality.”<sup>36</sup>

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## PART VI

# Fashion and film

While the interest in fashion in cinema is now thriving, it had traditionally been overlooked within the wider fields of both film and fashion studies, considered a niche (and gendered) subject.

Marketa Uhlířová argues for a broadening of fashion in cinema studies and aims to reframe the field. In her own research, Uhlířová considers film broadly to include experimental film, newsreels, fashion films, and early cinema. She traces the fragmented and uneven development of fashion in cinema into a field of its own, and considers the major forms of inquiry that have emerged in specific disciplinary contexts. But it also turns to forms of practice outside of the academy that have recently co-shaped the field: popular writing on film and film costume, fashion and film curation, film festivals, and fashion image-making. In bringing all these disparate strands together, Uhlířová argues for a reframing of fashion in cinema as a multifaceted and dynamic field whereby distinct – though variously interlocking – forms of knowledge and experience have been produced in distinct contexts.

The literature on stardom often does not give fashion the prominence it deserves. In fact, Church Gibson says that there has been a reluctance to explore the links between celebrities and fashion. She examines the importance of the star image by focusing on the impact that three actresses, Keira Knightley, Kristen Stewart, and Julianne Moore have had on the fashion industry. The relationship between film and fashion is almost as old as cinema itself, but for a long time it was virtually ignored by scholarship – and there was little critical interest in cinematic costume. This essay looks first at the different ways in which screen style influenced the fashions of the twentieth century. It suggests that, in a new millennium and a transformed mediascape, the production and the consumption of cinema may have changed, but the links between screen and style are still as strong as ever. Cinema has found new ways to gratify the ever-increasing public interest in fashion itself, and a burgeoning body of literature covers the subject of its costuming.

In his chapter Rees-Roberts focuses on a handful of fiction and non-fiction films that center on the figure of the fashion designer. He offers a critical reflection on one of fashion's foundational myth, that of creative authorship, by focusing on the interlocking questions of fame and failure.

Jonathan S. Marion and James Scanlan focus on the gendered fashion in superhero comic books. This chapter explores how superhero costumes are translated from the printed page to

the screen in three ways. First, to provide sociocultural and historical context, the early history of comic book costuming is considered, including the role of broader cultural influences, material technologies, and live action media adaptations. Second, extensive interview excerpts are used to highlight the issues and challenges of translating between in-print and on-screen costuming, including more recent barrier-breaking superhero movies such as *Captain Marvel* and *Black Panther*. Third and finally, the relationship between print and screen superhero costumes as opposite sides of the coin are explored using two contrasting case studies, with the long-term continuity in Superman's costuming on one side, compared to the ongoing changes and variability in Catwoman's costuming on the other.

Deepshikha Chatterjee reflects on the adoption of handloom textiles in India by Indira Gandhi, an act that eventually influenced the sartorial vocabulary of subsequent female politicians. The curated and updated use of these artisanal fabrics by the first and only female Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and other women politicians in South Asia, entailed strategically juxtaposing these ancestral and cultural-affirming artifacts with modern accessories or styles in order to signal strength and tradition, rootedness alongside change. This chapter explores how this archetype was depicted on Bollywood screens specifically by Katrina Kaif's character in the film *Raajneeti*. What currency does the "simple" handloom textile hold in asserting power on the street and on the screen within the Indian/South Asian context? How did the assemblage of persona, fabric, hairstyle, accessories, and draping style serve to deify female public figures?

The chapter is animated by these questions.

## FASHION IN CINEMA: REFRAMING THE FIELD

*Marketa Uhlirova*

In March 1985 the film scholar Charlotte Herzog sent a brief letter to the German film theorist Heide Schlüpmann, who was at this point preparing a special issue of *Frauen und Filme* (Women and Film) – the journal she edited – on costume in cinema. In the letter, Herzog expressed her desire to contribute to this, and, fearing she may be too late, resolved at least to share a preliminary outline for her own collection of essays on the subject, which she was planning with her colleague Jane Gaines. This volume, provisionally titled *Fabrications: Body and Costume in Our Screen History*, would eventually become something of a manifesto for a field yet to emerge, undoubtedly in part thanks to the forceful introductory text written by Gaines.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, Herzog concluded her letter by writing: “It is reassuring to know there are other feminists interested in the same subject, and who recognize it is an important aspect of filmmaking and women audiences, etc.”<sup>2</sup> Herzog’s almost-conspiratorial note speaks volumes of how rare an alliance of kindred spirits this would have felt like. Equally eloquent is her qualifying the mutually shared interest as a feminist one, which suggests at least two things: one, feminist academics interested in problems of fashion, costume and the body were rather an anomaly in 1985; and two, Herzog believed that the subject needed a feminist approach in particular, presumably in order to break the silence on it in mainstream, largely male-dominated film theory.

This anecdotal piece of evidence speaks to the uneasy development of fashion in cinema as a field. Indeed, problems of how cinema interacts with fashion and dress were routinely marginalized in the histories and theories of film – as well as fashion.<sup>3</sup> When the subject was pursued, it was often done so by individuals working alone or in discrete, isolated hubs. Largely considered an “interdisciplinary niche” within film studies,<sup>4</sup> the field evolved unevenly and unprogrammatically, from different disciplinary roots that were sometimes at odds with one another. Dress historian Lou Taylor, for example, observed that the study of fashion in film is “deeply divided” between theoretical and object-based approaches, pointing to a gap – and a sense of antagonism – between humanities scholars (such as Gaines and Herzog, presumably) who pursue nuanced intellectual arguments and museum curators who rely on object-based expertise in collecting and exhibiting costume.<sup>5</sup> Another major hurdle to the development of a *bona fide* field with a cohesive identity has been an underlying dilemma about what exactly constitutes its object of study: is it costume, or is it, rather fashion? – a dilemma that brings with

it question marks about disciplinary positioning (film studies or fashion studies?) and consequently, shared theoretical foundations, aims, and methods.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all this, much has changed since 1985. The neglect Herzog alluded to has now been addressed from across numerous humanities disciplines, and even reversed. Recent years in particular have witnessed a surge of interest in examining the intersections between fashion and cinema, evident in numerous publications, conferences, and, in 2012, the foundation of a dedicated academic journal, *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, edited by Pamela Church Gibson. The subject has now been explored in different ways, by scholars who span cinema and fashion studies, visual culture, art history, media studies, literary theory, theater, dance studies, and beyond. And, as I hope to show in this chapter, the inquiry has not been the sole domain of the academy but has also been pursued from within the cultural sphere, with distinctive modes and motivations. It is this broader contemporary perspective – much of it already recognized and covered by *Film, Fashion & Consumption's* wide-ranging remit – that I draw on here in proposing that we reframe the specialist “niche” as, instead, a field in its own right, and establish it not within the confines of one discipline or another but, rather, at the interface of several diverse disciplines and practices.

In sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's definition, a field is postulated as “a structured space of positions,” constituted by struggles among these positions over power and (all kinds of) capital;<sup>7</sup> struggles “which often take the form of a battle between established producers, institutions and styles, and heretical newcomers.”<sup>8</sup> Crucially, as Bourdieu notes, “a fight [within a field] presupposes agreement between the antagonists about what it is that is worth fighting about” – thus, a field establishes a common ground, a space of encounters, both conceptual and physical.<sup>9</sup> Its relational dynamic catalyzes interaction, allowing for cross-fertilizations. With this in mind, I want to put forward a delineation of the field of fashion in cinema, in which diverse elements co-exist and ferment together – often productively, sometimes not. I suggest a constellation in which academic scholarship sits alongside different forms of knowledge production, including museum exhibitions, online platforms, film seasons and fashion film festivals (including the one I co-founded in 2006, to declare my own “vested interests”), but also popular writing, journalism, and creative practice. In what follows, I briefly survey these disparate strands of the field. While their separation into sub-chapters reflects the plural positions and approaches taken historically, they are also, crucially, knitted together here into a single fabric. For, it is becoming increasingly problematic to maintain that theoretical reflection and practice exist in isolation: in fact, in many cases, categorizing projects under one category or another seems fraught, since growing numbers of scholars and curators frequently collaborate or otherwise sustain a meaningful dialogue.<sup>10</sup>

### **Popular publications and film criticism**

Current theoretical reflection on fashion and costume in cinema has its roots in popular journalism going back as far as the 1910s. The emergence of this type of writing broadly coincided with the consolidation of two cinematic forms – the narrative feature film and fashion actuality, which was from 1909 presented in regular newsreels. Together, the two forms stimulated a sustained interest in what was worn on the big screen, which was reinforced by an absence of a clear separation between costume and fashion that continued throughout the silent era. Early discourses on cinematic dress typically celebrated its aesthetic value, but also commented on its effects on audiences. Dress enjoyed frequent – sometimes extended – mentions in film reviews, and had special features devoted to it in popular and trade press, including regular

columns, interviews with fashion and costume designers, and opinion surveys.<sup>11</sup> Yet, anything that can be thought of as a critical paradigm did not develop until much later.

In 1949, the short-lived yet prestigious French journal *La Revue du cinéma* published a double issue dedicated to “the art of costume in film,” with theoretical articles by costume designers Jacques Manuel and Claude Autant-Lara (both collaborators of the film director Marcel L’Herbier) and film critics Lotte Eisner, Jean George Auriol and Mario Verdone.<sup>12</sup> A year later, these were reprinted in Verdone’s Italian volume *La moda e il costume nel film*, together with new additions (largely compiled from earlier film periodicals) by acclaimed figures such as Adrian, Adolphe Menjou, and Irene Brin, plus an extended homage to the costume designer Gino Carlo Sensani.<sup>13</sup> These two titles seem to be among the first publications expressing an appreciation for costume and fashion as overlooked yet significant aspects of the cinematic image. At the same time, they are important attempts at a theoretical separation of costume from fashion, arguing for a need to understand costume as a distinct form of film craft that must respond to its industry’s particular requirements.

Putting aside individual costume designers’ biographies and autobiographies (beginning with Edith Head’s *The Dress Doctor* published in 1959),<sup>14</sup> a more serious interest in the subject arose again in the mid-1970s, with Diana Vreeland’s blockbuster exhibition *Romantic and Glamorous Hollywood Design* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute (1974–75). While hardly a serious historical project – Vreeland reportedly presented authentic costumes alongside numerous copies made to replace lost historical originals<sup>15</sup> – the exhibition proved very popular and likely had the effect of sparking further study, especially on Hollywood costume design. It was closely followed by several overviews as well as monographic books dedicated to leading designers. Most notably, these have included publications by Elizabeth Leese, David Chierichetti, Dale McConathy and Diana Vreeland, and Edward Maeder.<sup>16</sup>

More recently, there has been a new proliferation of lavish, photography-led publications on costume design by authors including Regine and Peter W. Engelmeier, Deborah Landis, Christopher Laverty, and Jay Jorgensen and Donald L. Scoggins.<sup>17</sup> And in the past decade, the subject has found a passionate champion in Christopher Laverty, the founder and principal contributor to the website *Clothes on Film*.<sup>18</sup> Though not explicitly reflexive of the theoretical positions within which they are grounded, all these works are valuable attempts at studying costume design as a singular film art and craft. More recently, research into costume design has also begun to receive more scholarly treatment, as, for example, in publications by Annette Vogler, Drake Stutesman, or Adrienne L. McLean.<sup>19</sup>

### Film and visual studies

As in these popular accounts, Hollywood cinema also became central to examinations by film studies scholars publishing between the early 1980s and 2000s, although they pursued markedly different agendas. Here, perhaps the most enduring concern was the connection between cinema spectatorship, dress and consumerism.<sup>20</sup> This line of interrogation can be traced to Charles Eckert’s seminal text “Carole Lombard in Macy’s Window” (1978), which made a case for an “almost incestuous” relation between fashion, cinema and the American economy.<sup>21</sup> In what became a much-repeated trope,<sup>22</sup> Eckert made an analogy between the cinema screen and a “shop window,” considering it as an ideal space to display and mediate a broad spectrum of merchandise among which fashion and cosmetics were singled out as especially prone to commodity fetishism. Coupled with the giant luminous screen, fashion produced glamorous and seductive images that stimulated (almost invariably) female desire to possess and consume.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Eckert’s account of women as largely passive and submissive consumers,<sup>24</sup> the

alliance between screen fashions and consumerism has also been interpreted as potentially a liberating force for articulating modern female identities,<sup>25</sup> and in the context of a participatory milieu of today's "transmedia universe."<sup>26</sup>

Related to this inquiry, but distinct in its motivations, has been a body of work on costume and fashion embedded within cultural studies and (third-wave) feminist film theory and their ideological critique of the cinema. First emerging in the mid-1980s, much of this scholarship responded to an earlier feminist debate, which had rejected "artificial" female adornment as a tool of male oppression and passive female spectacle. It was now felt that as a consequence of this, fashion had fallen into an impasse and remained ignored within the academy. Exemplified by Gaines and Herzog's 1990 collection *Fabrications*, this critical shift echoed Carol Ascher's and especially Elizabeth Wilson's earlier texts, which made a point of reclaiming fashion as a subject vital to women's history (as well as men's, in Wilson's case) – as one that is both necessary and intellectually exhilarating.<sup>27</sup> Fashion and film costume, *Fabrications* argued, constituted a rich area of study in dire need of critical re-evaluation, with a new emphasis placed on the positive aspects of fashioning (fabrication), and its potential for female pleasure, subversion, and resistance.

The studies that followed have largely revolved around two major areas of interest that were often interlinked: firstly, the interactions between fashion, costume and cinema in the construction of stardom, celebrity, female types and female spectatorship;<sup>28</sup> and secondly, the role of costume in the politics of representation, in affirming as well as subverting various aspects of identity – gender, national, sexual, social, class, or racial.<sup>29</sup> Among them, the vast majority were focused on Hollywood, and women (characters, actresses) within it.<sup>30</sup> As the dominant cinema and the epitome of commercial entertainment propped up by the star system, the classical Hollywood idiom offered itself as "a key source of idealized images of femininity."<sup>31</sup> Its visual-narrative style combining realism and escapist fantasy has created a particular economy of desire and identification, deemed especially fit for a critical undressing.

But even those who looked to other cinemas – British costume drama,<sup>32</sup> post-war European cinema<sup>33</sup> or French cinema<sup>34</sup> – largely limited their scope to narrative fiction film. Among the rare exceptions have been Elizabeth Leese's 1976 book *Costume Design in the Movies*, which for the first time outlined a brief history of costume and fashion in fiction as well as short non-fiction film and Jenny Hammerton's 2001 book *For Ladies Only?*, which focused on fashion as one of the major themes in the British Pathé cinemagazine *Eve's Film Review*. This research has expanded in the last decade, with Eirik Frisvold Hanssen's and Michelle Tolini Finamore's studies of fashion newsreels and color during the silent era, Eugenia Paulicelli's 2016 analysis of Italian newsreels during the late 1920s and 1930s, Natalie Snoyman's doctoral thesis on three-strip Technicolor and fashion, and my own attempt at a typology of historical fashion films.<sup>35</sup> For the most part, however, pre-classical, non-classical, and non-narrative cinemas were left out, presumably because they do not readily invite the kind of ideological analysis applied to fashion in narrative film.

The Fashion in Film Festival, which I co-founded in 2005, sought to respond to these limitations by introducing an array of film forms that had hitherto been sidelined in the debate: early, avant-garde, experimental and underground film, artist film and video, newsreel, documentary, industry/process film, and advertising shorts. The point was not only to show that the wealth of material relevant to the study of fashion in cinema was much greater than had previously been considered, but also, importantly, to capture the new lines of inquiry that this material opened up (and that were by no means exclusive to it): the conceptualization of fashion display in film as a type of "cinema of attractions,"<sup>36</sup> treating dress less as a functional and symbolic device (of characterization and plot), and more as a visual, sensuous, affective, and

performative phenomenon;<sup>37</sup> a need for developing a critical language to address such problems, particularly because these film forms allow costume to become a significant, sometimes even dominant, element of the *mise-en-scène*; and a clearer distinction between the concepts of cinematic *representation* and *presentation*.<sup>38</sup>

### **Fashion studies**

In contrast to film studies, histories of fashion continued to refer to cinema only sparingly, if at all. Again, classical Hollywood cinema was almost invariably privileged, treated either as a means of dissemination with great mass appeal for audiences,<sup>39</sup> or, conversely, as a source of imagery mined by fashion designers and photographers.<sup>40</sup> Though few and far between, these accounts have nevertheless recognized cinema's enormous impact on fashion, acknowledging its capacity to reinforce, if not originate, new trends in dress, styles, cosmetics, and mannerisms. In her widely read 1975 book *Seeing through Clothes*, the art historian Anne Hollander argued that the movies and movie stars created a "common cinematic experience" used by audiences as a reference point for their own sartorial and gestural self-expressions.<sup>41</sup> Referring to the spread of cinema in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Hollander also suggested something more radical: film's influence on fashion, according to her, went beyond individual styles, causing a decisive shift in the perception of the female body. In providing a vocabulary of movements for imitation, from walking to dancing to moving hands, cinema created a new feminine beauty ideal in a dynamic body.<sup>42</sup>

The longstanding neglect of cinema in the histories of fashion and dress can be attributed to at least two factors: Firstly, until the digital age, the world of fashion had always considered cinema at one remove from its daily business – it simply hadn't played as integral a role in its communications, marketing and promotion as the static media of photography and printed magazines. This is certainly reflected by the relative indifference the fashion press historically showed toward "cinema fashions," which were, meanwhile, robustly covered by the film press. Secondly, fashion historians have been skeptical towards film as a reliable form of historical evidence. Film fashions have been deemed notoriously inaccurate due to the liberties with the truth costume designers tend to take:<sup>43</sup> unable to resist the all-consuming influence of contemporaneous fashions, costume designers distort history in representing it.<sup>44</sup> And, much as this discourse around historical (in)accuracy may be a red herring, it follows that film has been systematically displaced from fashion history's remit in a broad dismissal. This has, however, overlooked the fact that besides costume, film also shows *fashion*, not to mention the complex interrelations between fashion and costume in narrative film, as explored by film scholars such as Sumiko Higashi, Sarah Berry, and Stella Bruzzi, and later also by fashion and cultural studies scholars including Mila Ganeva, Karen De Perthuis, Michelle Tolini Finamore, and Eugenia Paulicelli.<sup>45</sup>

It is only in the last decade or so that fashion scholars have begun to turn more sustained attention to non-fiction films that record, document and promote fashion, including newsreels, commercials, and amateur films.<sup>46</sup> Keen as they have been to embed film analysis within historical narratives of fashion (as opposed to the other way round), fashion scholars have sought to connect cinema to other modern public presentations of fashion, such as the department store, theater's fashion play, the fashion show, and advertising.<sup>47</sup> An important factor in this development has been the opening up of the film archive in the digital age. If film archives previously tended to "work behind closed doors and only grant access to...holdings on strict conditions,"<sup>48</sup> the large-scale digitization project of the past two decades has instituted a new



regime of greater access to moving image works, including those previously deemed of little value.<sup>49</sup>

### Fashion industry and fashion film

Advancing digital technologies have also profoundly reshaped the fashion industry in the early twenty-first century, with fashion film emerging as a newly prominent form of display and communication. At first explored primarily by independent designers, stylists and photographers, fashion film began to be adopted more widely around 2010 by brands and fashion magazines who were waking up to an ever-growing appetite for time-based creative content online and, consequently, the possibilities of creative expression and promotion in this sphere. Typically produced without the involvement of advertising agencies, and thus having the essence of authorial productions, fashion film was embraced for its capacity to communicate in a less “processed,” less “commercial” tone, with an apparent capacity for seamlessly blending branding, creative, and entertainment elements.

*SHOWstudio*, a website founded in 2000 by Nick Knight and Peter Saville, played a pioneering role in establishing fashion film as a viable means of showing fashion to a global audience. Since mid-2000s, it was joined by other platforms, from DVD-based magazines (such as *FLY*), to online iterations of established fashion magazines (*Dazed Digital*, *tank.tv*, *Purple Television*), to major video channels, both curated (*Nowness*, *M2M Studios*) and sharing (*YouTube*, *Vimeo*). There has also been a veritable explosion of festivals focused expressly on fashion film, with the aim to foster creative exchange among image-makers, producers, and agencies working in the industry (including Diane Pernet’s Paris-based *You Wear it Well* and its newer iteration *A Shaded View on Fashion Film*; Ditte Marie Lund’s *Copenhagen Fashion Film*; Niccolò Montanari’s *Berlin Fashion Film Festival*, and Constanza Cavalli Etro’s *Fashion Film Festival Milano*). This formula has now become ubiquitous, spreading to other large cities globally, including Bucharest, Istanbul, Los Angeles, Madrid, Mexico City, Miami, San Diego, and Santiago.

Besides the creative fashion films, the fashion industry has adopted the moving image in a broader sense, in an even greater variety of contexts. From various behind-the-scenes formats to fashion and beauty demonstrations (think, e.g., *Vogue*’s “Inside the Wardrobe” series) these types of content offer entertaining sneak peeks into aspects of fashion previously more or less hidden from view. With a hybridization of various formats shown online, the fashion moving image is less confined to the handful of clear-cut formats previously accessed in cinemas and on television. It is now a more plural and hybrid form than ever, spanning multiple media and platforms, also including social media, fashion shows, retail and the public space, and often variously overlapping and converging with more traditional print media forms. It is highly likely that the recent rise of the fashion documentary feature (*The September Issue*, 2009; *Dior and I*, 2014; *McQueen*, 2018) and fashion reality television (Channel 4’s *The Model Agency*, 2009; Hulu’s *The Fashion Fund*, from 2011) owes much to the Internet’s consolidation of an audience for backstage fashion’s dramas. Importantly, this new pre-eminence of fashion moving image within (and without) the fashion industry has prompted a push beyond the horizons of existing thinking about the interactions of fashion and cinema. As a result, fashion moving imagery has demanded a serious investigation by scholars who are both fashion and film-literate, and indeed, there is now a growing body of literature on the subject.<sup>50</sup>

## Exhibitions

Film has also enjoyed a growing presence in the fashion and design museum. There, it has often been deployed in a bid to enliven, animate and spectacularise exhibitions, drawing on the new accessibility of archival footage while also answering to recurrent objections against the static and graveyard-like feel of museum displays, especially of dress.<sup>51</sup> Yet, it has generally been cast in a functional way, seen as supporting material that contextualizes or illustrates the primary object – dress. This is as true for fashion exhibitions as those focusing on film costume, such as Deutsche Kinemathek's exhibition *Filmkostüme! Das Unternehmen Theaterkunst* (29 March–2 September 2007), or the V&A's major exhibition *Hollywood Costume* (20 October 2012–27 January 2013). In other words, film in the fashion exhibition has rarely been given the status of an artifact, let alone one with its own materiality. There is no doubt that the entrenched cultural investment in the “original” (dress) versus the “copy” (film), is played out here, but there have certainly also been technical hurdles in displaying archival film in museums.

Such a curatorial hierarchy between dress on the one hand and fashion communications media on the other has recently undergone a shift. Film display, for one, has now become an increasingly prominent aspect of exhibition scenography. Major touring exhibitions such as *McQueen: Savage Beauty* (originating at the MET, 4 May–7 August 2011), *David Bowie Is* (originating at the V&A, 23 March–11 August 2013), and particularly MET's *China: Through the Looking Glass* (7 May–7 September 2015), have done much to shake up the traditional imbalance, with giant screens blatantly dominating some of the exhibition spaces. In the case of *China*, film became central in the curator Andrew Bolton's rationale for the show, with its status further reinforced by the appointment of the celebrated film director Wong Kar-wai as the exhibition's “artistic director.” The installation featured some daring confrontations between fashion, art and objects of popular culture, among which cinema enjoyed prominent exposure. Still, it is interesting to note that the curator's justification for film here was as a “filter” through which Western fashion designers have absorbed ideas of Chineseness,<sup>52</sup> something that once again affirmed the fashion exhibition's habitual hierarchical order of the object and its “context.”

There has also been a handful of curatorial projects to have focused specifically on the theme of fashion and cinema's crossover. Perhaps the most ambitious among those was the 1998 edition of the *Florence Biennale*, titled *fashion/cinema* (21 September–1 November 1998), which comprised seven thematic exhibitions across the city of Florence.<sup>53</sup> As the first major project of its kind, the biennale brought fashion and cinema together in broad terms, exploring a diverse range of subjects, from costume design (*Costumes from the Oscars*) and shoes (*Cinderella*), to then-contemporary films selected for their strong visual style (*Cine-Moda*), to a retrospective exhibition of fashion and cinema (*The Last Word*). It also featured Terry Jones's prescient exhibition *2001 Minus 3*, featuring newly commissioned films and videos by 22 pairs of avant-garde fashion designers and image-makers, including Raf Simons, Hussein Chalayan, Donald Christie and Solve Sundsbø (many were established contributors to *i-D* magazine, of which Jones was then editor). These films were showcased in the cavernous space of Florence's disused train station Stazione Leopolda, on monitors or screens, many of which were incorporated in inventive spatial installations.

Elsewhere, in São Paulo, the journalist Alexandra Farah staged several seasons of her fashion film festival *Filme/Fashion* between 2003 and 2007 – making hers the first festival of its kind, despite claims by others. With a repertory scope and a thematic approach, the festival highlighted “film fashion” as a major expressive feature in cinema, and in some of its seasons introduced a substantial proportion of Brazilian film. Elsewhere, in France, a retrospective season

*Le cinéma français des années 20: corps et décors*, hosted by Musée d'Orsay (8–24 February 2008), brought to light visually striking examples of set and costume design in French popular cinema of the 1920s. The season explored the intermingling features of exoticism, modernism and fantasy in this period, and, much like the Fashion in Film Festival, threw the spotlight on a body of film that had typically been marginalized in accounts of cinema history and applied art alike. Finally, two major exhibition projects have also focused on fashion film as a rapidly expanding area of creative practice: *SHOWstudio: Fashion Revolution* at Somerset House (17 September–23 December 2009) and British Council–sponsored *Dressing the Screen* at UCCA Gallery in Beijing, China (26 October–11 November 2012).

## Conclusion

Taking stock of all these parallel developments – and placing them side by side – urges us to expand earlier conceptualizations of the field of fashion in cinema, and re-frame it as a composite one. This is a field whose strength issues not from one single disciplinary grounding but, rather, from its being located in the overlaps and interstices of a number of different disciplines and fields. Thus, its horizons extend beyond those of cinema studies and fashion studies, to also embrace fashion and film curation, cultural, media and visual studies, and debates around current fashion image-making practice. It is my belief that such a broad definition enables us to better trace relations between these different activities, which already inform and enrich one another by provoking new ideas, revealing new problems, and suggesting new avenues for further research. To be sure, fields are far from static, homogenous entities with universally shared stakes. Indeed, both cinema and fashion studies have recently been faced with their own “identity crises,” brought about by a growing diversification in interdisciplinary approaches that went hand in hand with an increasing tendency to specialize in distinct subfields. This has led some to conclude that these fields are in themselves best thought of in terms of their multiple identities.<sup>54</sup> Like them, the study of fashion in cinema is fragmented in nature, with plural and frequently shifting trajectories. As such, it is continuously being redefined from within the academy as well as from without.

## Notes

- 1 Jane Gaines, “Introduction,” In *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, eds. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (London: Routledge, 1990), 1–27. The special issue of *Frauen und Filme* came out in May 1985, under the title “Maskerade.” *Fabrications* was eventually published five years later, and with a changed subtitle: Gaines and Herzog (eds.) *Fabrications: as above*.
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- 3 Paul Jobling, “Border Crossings: Fashion and Film/Fashion in Film,” in *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, eds. Sandy Black et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 164–80.
- 4 Rachel Moseley, ed. *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity* (London: BFI, 2005), 2. See also Helen Warner, *Fashion on Television: Identity and Celebrity Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
- 5 Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 177.
- 6 Marketa Uhlirova, “On Fire: When Fashion Meets Cinema,” in *The Handbook of Film Theory*, ed. Kyle Stevens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage, 1993), 72.
- 8 David Hesmondhalgh, “Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production,” *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 2 (2005), 215–16.
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- 16 Elizabeth Leese, *Costume Design in the Movies* (New York: Benbridge, 1976); David Chierichetti, *Hollywood Costume Design* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1976) and *Edith Head: The Life and Times of Hollywood's Celebrated Costume Designer* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); Dale McConathy and Diana Vreeland, *Hollywood Costume: Glamour, Glitter, Romance* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1976); Edward Maeder, *Hollywood and History: Costume Design in Film* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987).
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- 18 <http://clothesonfilm.com>
- 19 Annette Vogler, *Filmkostüme! Das Unternehmen Theaterkunst* (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 2007); Drake Stutesman, "Costume Design, or, What is Fashion in Film?" in *Fashion in Film: Essays in Honor of E. Ann Kaplan*, ed. Adrienne Munich (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 17–39; Adrienne L. McLean (ed.), *Costume, Makeup, and Hair* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016).
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- 24 For a critique of this line of enquiry, see Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume & Identity in British Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996), 46–47.
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  - 32 Harper, *Picturing the Past*; Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*.
  - 33 Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*; Street, *Costume and Cinema*; Eugenia Paulicelli, Drake Stutesman and Louise Wallenberg, eds. *Film, Fashion, and the 1960s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).
  - 34 Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).
  - 35 See Leese, *Costume Design in the Movies*, 9–17; Jenny Hammerton, *For Ladies Only? Eve’s Film Review: Pathé Cinemagazine, 1921–33* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2001); Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, “Symptoms of Desire: Colour, Costume, and Commodities in Fashion Newsreels of the 1910s and 1920s,” *Film History: An International Journal* 21, no. 2 (2009), Tolini Finamore, *Hollywood before Glamour* and “Color before Technicolor: Colorized Fashion Films of the Silent Era,” in *Colors in Fashion*, eds. Faiers, Jonathan and Bulgarella, Mary Westerman (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Paulicelli, *Italian Style*, see esp. chapter 4; Natalie Snoyman, *“In to Stay”: Selling Three-Strip Technicolor and Fashion in the 1930s and 1940s* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2017) and Marketa Uhlirova, “Excavating Fashion Film: A Media Archaeological Perspective,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 19, no. 3 (2020).
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- 41 Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 344.
- 42 Ibid., 154
- 43 Ibid., 295, 342. See also Gaines, “Costume and Narrative.”
- 44 See for example James Laver, “Dates and Dresses,” *Sight and Sound* 8, no. 30 (Summer 1939), 50; and Maeder, *Hollywood and History*. As Sue Harper and Pam Cook show, historical inaccuracies and distortions in dress and décor were also seen negatively among film critics as well as historians, and were generally perceived as expressions of poor taste. For more see Harper, *Picturing the Past*; Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*.
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- 49 Ian Christie, “Who Needs Film Archives? Notes Towards a User-Centred Future,” *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities* 1 (2015), 36–44.
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# FROM STARDOM TO CELEBRITY CULTURE AND BEYOND: FASHION, COSTUME, CINEMA, AND CHANGE

*Pamela Church Gibson*

In 1998, I published an essay on “Film Costume” in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* in which I questioned the lack of academic interest in the subject.<sup>1</sup> I argued that costume – an undeniable source of pleasure for audiences – was just as worthy of critical attention as other aspects of *mise-en-scène*, and that, with fashion itself now established as a subject deserving of academic debate, costume too should be given similar treatment. Twenty years ago, of course, the two were quite obviously linked in the public eye; I was writing at the end of a century in which, for so long, fashions and styles had been popularized, not through journalism, but through their appearance on the cinema screen (2). There have been significant changes and shifts within that same relationship, which this essay will explore.

At that time there were only a handful of academic publications on film costume to set alongside the popular descriptive and lavishly illustrated coffee-table books, and these authors mostly drew on the psychoanalytic theory which dominated film scholarship at that time (3). I argued for a widening of scope, for attention to the craft of costume-making, and for a plurality of critical approaches. All these hopes were realized in the intervening years, and critical interest is now strong enough to support an academic journal, *Film, Fashion and Consumption*, which appears twice a year. But as this article will show, the relationship between the three concepts of its title, though still strong, has altered its shape over the years. Cinema has undergone a sea-change, and fashion – commanding a new level of public interest – is now consumed in new and different ways.

## **Cinema and its past**

Perhaps, before we consider the possibly diminished potency of cinema itself – and indeed start to examine the new ways in which fashion has hijacked cinema for its own ends – we might recall its former powers. In the twentieth century, films created and dictated patterns of consumer spending. Hollywood cinema was the most powerful force here, since from 1917 onwards its films were ensured worldwide distribution, something denied to other national cinemas. Indeed, Charles Eckert argued that “Hollywood gave consumerism a distinctive bent ... It did as much or more than any other force in capitalist culture to smooth the operation of

the production–consumption cycle” (4). Hollywood films could – and did – popularize everything from makes of cigarette and car to fitted kitchens and bedroom furniture, but it was the response of women audiences to the leading actresses and their dress, hair, and makeup which was most notable.

The widespread use of makeup was, in fact, a by-product of the screen, which took away its stigma; before the advent of cinema, it was eschewed by most respectable women and still associated by many with prostitution. One of the books that has appeared since 1998 is Sarah Berry’s *Screen Style: Hollywood Film and Fashion* (5). It describes, among other things, the way in which makeup became socially acceptable through its use by the stars. It was more than merely decorative – Berry argues that, when the Depression of the 1930s sabotaged traditional patterns of employment, makeup gave enormous confidence to the working-class women who entered the workplace for the first time as family breadwinners. In the last century, hairstyles too were increasingly dictated by the screen rather than by women’s magazines. In the 1920s, the film star Clara Bow popularized the new “bobbed” hair in a way that Coco Chanel could not, while considerable numbers of women, entranced by the look of “platinum blondes” such as Jean Harlow and – much later – Marilyn Monroe, sought for the first time to change the color of their own hair. And, most notably, the screen could dictate demands for new body shapes, with the big-breasted stars of the 1950s offering a desirable silhouette quite unlike that of high fashion.

If we are to consider fashion history here, we should remember that throughout the last century, new images created in Paris or London could be popularized at mass market level if they were showcased in Hollywood films. For instance, the bias-cut dresses of the ’20s and ’30s, originally created by couturier Madeleine Vionnet, and soon adapted by Hollywood designers, were re-created in rayon at mass market level, and reinterpreted by home dressmakers at a time when most women were taught to sew capably. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the long skirts of Dior’s “New Look” translated perfectly into on-screen style; they looked appealing and feminine in a way that they possibly did not on the printed page. Affordable accessories of all kinds were inspired by film, from cheap versions of boudoir-style marabou-trimmed slippers in the 1930s to the berets worn by Faye Dunaway in *Bonnie and Clyde* (US, Arthur Penn) in 1967.

The clothes created by costume designer Thea von Runkle for this same film ensured the public acceptance of the “midi-skirt” and “maxi-skirts” that designers and retailers had been attempting to introduce in a decade dominated by increasingly abbreviated mini-skirts. And film’s own designers had already shown their ability to create new fashions of their own that the high street would follow. The padded shoulders created by MGM studio designer Adrian for actress Joan Crawford were copied everywhere, Paramount designer Edith Head’s sarongs for Dorothy Lamour were instantly adopted for beachwear, and the Cossack hats and sweeping greatcoats that Julie Christie wore in *Dr. Zhivago* (UK, David Lean, 1965) were subsequently seen at every market level. Men too were influenced by star images; for instance, that perennial wardrobe staple, the white T-shirt, made its very first appearance on screen, Formerly an undervest for American servicemen to wear under their uniforms, it became a desirable outer garment when worn as such by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (US, Nicholas Ray, 1957). Elegant screen menswear, too, has had its influence across the years, from Cary Grant’s Savile Row tailoring to Jude Law’s wardrobe for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (UK, Anthony Minghella, 1999) – and, since 1960, various actors have showcased James Bond’s suits and resort wear. There is now a website, [jamesbondlifestyle](http://jamesbondlifestyle.com), displaying garments as well as gadgets.

Of course, other national cinemas had their own influence and their own stars who created fashions, often reaching beyond the confines of their native country. In the 1950s, for example, Brigitte Bardot created a new way of dressing and making up which was youthful and



rebellious, quite unlike the contemporary Hollywood ideal, and which instantly appealed to young women (6). Italian films of the decade showcased national style in all its various aspects (7). *La Dolce Vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960) was a perfect showcase for every aspect of Italian design, from Marcello Mastroianni's stylish suits, ubiquitous dark glasses and snazzy cufflinks to the scooters that sped up and down the Via Veneto. European actress Audrey Hepburn took her youth-inflected style to the West Coast and Oscar triumph; she too became an enduring fashion icon (8). Non-western cinemas of course set fashions too, particularly Hindi cinema with its vast audiences (9); academic debates have become more international in their focus.

Couturiers, aware of the potency of cinema, were delighted to dress stars for their on-screen appearances. Across the years Hollywood attracted – among others – Chanel, employed briefly by Sam Goldwyn of MGM, and her rival, Schiaparelli, who designed several dresses for Mae West. Director Alfred Hitchcock attracted the services of Dior himself, who created the wardrobe for Marlene Dietrich in *Stage Fright* (1950) and in 1975 Ralph Lauren's androgynous designs for Diane Keaton in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* were instantly reconfigured for the high street. From the 1980s onwards, Armani and Cerruti designed on-screen outfits for leading men as well as women; they also provided innumerable tuxedos for the annual Oscars. European designers often preferred, though, to provide clothes for the films made by less commercial, more "art-house directors." Chanel later worked with Jean Renoir and Alain Resnais while St. Laurent, Alaïa, Gaultier and Raf Simons, among others, designed wardrobes for the films of directors they admired (10).

### Change and reconfiguration

We now need to consider how cinema and its stars are faring today – in a drastically re-configured media landscape. For with the twenty-first-century dominance of the Internet, it has been transformed into a "mediascape" where new digital platforms flourish alongside film, television and print journalism, and arguably dwarf the influence of these predecessors. In this new century, when social media has acquired unforeseen and extraordinary powers – to shape views, to create and foster "celebrities," to assist in changes of government – it has also assumed a leading position in the popularization of fashion. There is of course enthusiastic amateur fashion activity online, but there is a continual increase in commercial sponsorship of various sorts. The most popular fashion bloggers of a few years ago were swiftly recruited for retail purposes, and so, subsequently, were "vloggers" and "Instagram influencers"; 43 In the United Kingdom, a survey conducted in 2019 by GlobalData showed that social media influenced the clothing choices of 63.8 of clothing shoppers aged 16–34, choices dictated in the main by stars of reality television (11).

Film itself is now consumed – and increasingly produced – in a radically different way since the advent of "streaming." While large-scale productions – the planned "blockbusters" – are still watched in cinemas and studios increasingly rely on special effects to ensure the need for a big screen, many films are now viewed online and at home. Companies like Netflix, Sky, and Mubi pay for, and show, films originally intended for conventional cinematic distribution and – in another new development – films are even specifically created for online distribution and viewing. The Oscar-nominated film, *The Irishman* (US 2019, Martin Scorsese) was in fact made for Netflix, not for a studio, and was directed by the award-winning Hollywood director, Martin Scorsese. It had a short release in the cinema, followed by a long life on the small screen. Unsurprisingly, in an effort to preserve the historic medium of cinema, the prestigious Cannes Film Festival has announced that it will neither recognize nor reward films made for online distribution.

In these changed circumstances, we might ask whether cinema, its stars and its costumes can still influence mainstream style. Certainly, the twentieth-century phenomena of “spin-offs,” the fashions generated by those seen on screen, and of “tie-ins,” where retail activities are planned to directly coincide with a film’s release, seem obsolete. With the popularity of “streaming,” shared cultural experiences are disappearing, just as with the contemporary music industry, where a uniform public awareness of new songs and new stars is similarly diminished. In the past, most people made very regular visits to the cinema, and were aware of each new film on its release; this is no longer the case.

### **Stardom and the new “celebrity”**

Today, of course, couturiers still dress the stars of cinema, but it is their gala appearances that provide maximum publicity. The Oscars award ceremony remains a key red-carpet occasion, watched by a massive global audience (12). In fact, the whole notion of “stardom” has shifted with time; as early as 1985, film scholars Allen and Gomery noted that it encompassed rock stars, athletes, and soap opera actors and indeed argued that the term had become so over-used as to be almost meaningless (13). Christine Geraghty later charted further changes in “stardom,” detailing the way in which contemporary film actresses had to compete with an array of “stars” across a range of “old” and new media (14).

In Chris Rojek’s typology of celebrities, film actors are classed as “celebrities by achievement” those who are famous because of their talent. His second category is that of “celebrity by ascription” – those famous because of their parentage, who currently range from Prince Harry to Willow Smith and Brooklyn Beckham. Rojek’s third category is “celebrity by attribution,” those who become famous because they attract media attention (15). The most relevant examples here are the Kardashian family, in 2020 still the best-known stars of “reality television.”

The fashions inspired by these “celebrities by attribution” invariably involve the tropes of “glamour modeling,” which do not change with the seasons or even the years. As I have argued elsewhere, there is now a separate “fashion system” running parallel to and independent of the traditional system that translates changing silhouettes, colors and fabrics from the fashion capitals and their collections into high-street merchandise (16). The look within this new system is unchanging. Hair is long and invariably colored, the eye make-up is heavy and stylized, the lips glossy, the cheeks accentuated, the breasts and buttocks emphasized, white skin is “perma-tanned” (17). Clothes, of course, are tightly fitted and invariably revealing; this new “celebrity” image bears little resemblance to the traditional images circulated by “high fashion.” This “look” first took hold in the early years of the millennium and was reinforced by the growing popularity of the Kardashians, who personify the style. Ironically, the Kardashians themselves now court high-fashion designers, but they do demand that the clothes they select will somehow meet the specifications outlined above (18). Interestingly, their stepsister Kendall Jenner has a figure that does not fit her family type, nor the “celebrity” ideal; she is very slim, comparatively flat-chested, and has become a successful high-fashion model, working for top international couturiers. Her sister, Kylie, by contrast, has become a billionaire through selling makeup that is calculated to create the “celebrity look”; she, and her half-sister, Kim Kardashian, are currently listed in the top 10 Instagram accounts.

But film and its stars are still of value to traditional fashion. Actresses have traditionally endorsed fashion-related products; some are now “brand ambassadors” in a more recent publicity move. British actress Kiera Knightley was among the first to be recruited, by Chanel, to star in “fashion films” and feature in press campaigns. And designers still gain publicity by costuming films and their stars. Tom Ford dressed actor Daniel Craig for all his appearances as

James Bond; perhaps experiencing the commercial potency of feature film gave him the idea of directing his own. And costume designer Jacqueline Durran's Oscar-winning outfits for *Anna Karenina* (2012) were replicated at every market level. Every designer catwalk that autumn seemed to show a "Russian" look, with fur trims, sweeping skirts, boots, Cossack hats and coats, while Durran herself was employed to develop an "Anna Karenina" line for the high street chain, Banana Republic. The film also showed off Chanel jewelry, worn by Kiera Knightley, then a brand ambassador, in the title role. Period film, interestingly, can still influence contemporary fashion – Kirsten Dunst, who played the title role in *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006), was featured on the cover of U.S. *Vogue* and the costumes inspired window displays in Barney's prestigious store, whilst Manolo Blahnik provided the shoes for the film. And the art – house links continue; Karl Lagerfeld provided Chanel clothes for the lead actress in *Personal Shopper* (Olivier Assayas, 2016), starring Kristen Stewart, at the time another brand ambassador for Chanel and here playing a stylist whose job is to dress an obnoxious celebrity. But film also has been harnessed in new ways to serve fashion's growing needs, as I shall suggest.

Although radically altered in the age of "streaming," the medium of television, in new ways, is flourishing. Its big-budget serials have seduced directors from traditional cinema, while its period dramas invariably command a faithful following. And it seems to possess a reinvigorated fashion presence, possibly a legacy of *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004) with its popularizing of Manolo Blahnik stilettos and its ever-increasing display of designer dresses (19). Notable televisual moments have included the couture dresses worn by the protagonist of *Killing Eve* (BBC America, 2018–), the drastic haircuts and flat caps popularized by *Peaky Blinders* (BBC/Netflix, 2013–) and perhaps surprisingly, the lavishly embroidered and quasi-medieval but ahistorical gowns of *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2013–2019). This last series inspired both catwalk looks and high street styles, while Adidas produced a range of "Game of Thrones" sneakers and Urban Decay launched a limited-edition makeup line based on the different characters in the series.

Television has also launched an increasing number of "reality" series devoted to fashion and to modeling; lastly, of course, it creates and showcases the new "celebrities by attribution" in its "reality" shows. In 2018 and 2019, the popular UK series *Love Island* showed a new way forward with the involvement of "etailing"; those who were watching and who had downloaded the Love Island app were able to click on any of the onscreen garments distributed by the online retailers who sponsored the show and ensure their delivery the following day. The 2019 GlobalUK survey quoted earlier also revealed that half of the shoppers aged 16–34 announced that "celebrities" – including the stars of reality television – inspired their fashion choices (20).

### Cinema appropriated

As I implied earlier, cinema has been harnessed, in novel ways, to serve fashion's needs. These changes have included the appropriation of fashion imagery by the feature film, the hijacking of the traditional documentary format and the choice of directors from cinema proper to create the new online "fashion films." Leading designer Tom Ford has even moved into the making of full-length feature films – in which he arguably created new narrative strands devoted to dress, décor, and lifestyle.

The most significant online fashion development in the new millennium was the emergence of the digital "fashion film" (21). Initially perceived by some as a "green" initiative, a way of showcasing couture collections and so circumventing the need for the extravagant

cross-continental cycle of catwalk shows, these films became increasingly popular in the fashion industry, not to present collections but to function as a superior form of brand commercial. The luxury brands speedily hijacked the talents of cinema; both mainstream and “arthouse” directors were scouted and deployed in their making, from Baz Luhrman and Roman Polanski to David Lynch and Lucrezia Martel. These films now have their very own international festivals, three of which are currently held in traditional “fashion capitals” – Paris, London, and Milan. Designer Miuccia Prada, with her sequence of films, “Women’s Tales,” all created by female directors, has even contrived to make these “advertorials” into an avowedly feminist film cycle. When she employed the veteran French director, Agnès Varda, stalwart of the French “New Wave” of the 1950s and 1960s, she arranged for the first screening of her film to be held at the Venice Film Festival, so important within conventional cinema.

The new millennium also saw an extraordinary proliferation of documentary films about different aspects of fashion – and not only those which offered a look into the lives of designers and a glimpse of their *ateliers*. The new documentaries – revitalizing the genre, perhaps – flourished within different national spaces and featured different aspects of the industry – its journalists, photographers, and personalities. There was a growing market for documentaries which revealed to viewers previously hidden areas of the fashion industry, most notably *The September Issue* (US, R.J. Cutler, 2009) chronicling the preparation of an issue of U.S. *Vogue*. *Bill Cunningham New York* (US, Richard Press, 2010) profiled the well-known street photographer, while *The Gospel According to André* (Kate Novack, 2017) examined the long career of leading fashion journalist André Leon Talley.

Simultaneously, there was a burgeoning of feature-length films with a leading designer as their subject – *Coco Avant Chanel* (France, Anne Fontaine, 2009) and *Chanel and Stravinsky* (France, Jan Kounon, 2009) were later followed by two full-length French films both spun around the life of Yves St. Laurent – one directed by Jalil Lespert in 2014, the other by Richard Rousseau in 2015.

Finally, there was the new-millennial choice of a “fashion” setting for feature films, something which had faltered in the preceding century when there was less public interest in the fashion system. Robert Altman’s *Prêt à Porter* (US, 1994), set during a Paris Fashion Week and featuring both well-known designers and their most recent collections, was a commercial failure. But *The Devil Wears Prada* (US, David Frankel, 2006), with its behind-the-scenes drama set in the offices of a high-fashion magazine, showed a new desire for narrative films set within a fashionable milieu. It was the correctly gauged appetite for another glimpse inside a couture house that ensured the success of the film *Phantom Thread* (UK, Paul Thomas Anderson, 2017) starring Daniel Day-Lewis as fictional designer Reynolds Woodcock. And Tom Ford, in his two films to date, created his own “fashion setting” for his central protagonists by adapting two novels, and then reworking them completely. In his first feature, *A Single Man*, in 2009, he transformed the life, home, and friendships of “George,” the university lecturer at its center; “Susan,” the heroine of *Nocturnal Animals* (2016), originally a mother of three and part-time teacher, was reconfigured as a glamorous art-gallery owner, now married to a billionaire. Both films showed off clothes that – whilst not designed by Ford himself – perfectly reflected his aesthetic, while the settings and décor mirrored Ford’s own tastes, as he told various interviewers at the time. Today, the public appetite for fashion might seem insatiable, but films in some form help to satisfy it; the relationship that began over 100 years ago seems set to continue.

The last 20 years, of course, have seen an ever-widening body of critical literature dedicated to the complex relationship between dress, fashion and film, as the endnote below suggests. Perhaps the most striking change has been the development of online media, which has given a voice to those within the industry and a platform for them to discuss their own work in relation

to contemporary theoretical discussions – for example, designer Jacqueline Durran discussing the film industry, costuming and sustainability on YouTube (22). This is something completely new – and those involved in the design and the making of screen costume certainly need chances to explain their work themselves. A future cross-fertilization of scholarship and industry would advance the – already prolific – debates around costume still further, just as I hoped when I wrote my own first essay on the topic (23).

### Endnote: academic literature and further reading

In 2001, Sarah Street was the first to describe “everyday” dress, rather than simply looking at costume which is spectacular, fashionable, or both (24). In 2010, Tamar Jeffers examined the narratives of transformation through dress which have dominated cinema (25). Meanwhile, scholarship has continued to develop established areas of address; Patrizia Calefato theorized the discourse of film costume, Gundle and Castelli the concept of “glamour” (26). Harrington (27), Nadoolman Landis (28) and more recently Baughan & Rosser, introduced and discussed the work of individual designers in a more informal way (29). There have also been attempts to explore and outline the specifics of the roles available within the industry, for example La Motte, Musgrove, and Maclean (30).

Interdisciplinary work has evolved, using areas such as film studies – for example, Desser & Epstein’s exploration of how the critical relationship between the audience and the clothing they see on screen has developed (31). Others have explored costume in relation to gender studies, such as Harper, Chapple, and Williams (32). There remains a desire to focus on the work of specific designers or specific objects of design – for example “Withnail’s” coat (33) or “Padme Amidala’s” robes (34) and costuming within specific genres, for example historical dramas (35) or animation (36). But in other new developments, Brownie has explored the performance of “ordinariness” (37), Sodergren has examined the notion of authenticity (38) and Hannah has discussed costume as a performative body-object-event (39).

Despite this developing body of literature, in 2012 Helen Warner commented that the subject was still marginalized within academia and that further interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary progress was required. Warner herself has published a book on an underexplored topic, *Fashion on Television: Identity and Celebrity Culture*, which was published in 2014 (40).

Lastly, there are now in print a number of very interesting anthologies now. Elizabeth Ezra and Catherine Wheatley’s edited collection, *Shoe Reels: The History and Philosophy of Footwear in Film*, is the most recent, published by Edinburgh University Press in 2021; it is a significant addition to work on costuming and covers cinema across the globe, past and present (41). Another important anthology is that edited by Adrienne Munich, *Fashion in Film*, and published in 2011 by Indiana University Press (42). Rachel Moseley edited another very useful collection of essays *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*, published in 2005 by the British Film Institute in London (43). Finally, for all those interested in the seminal fashions and significant films of an important decade, the anthology *Film, Fashion and the 1960s*, edited by Eugenia Paulicelli, Louise Wallenberg, and Drake Stutesman was published in 2017 by Indiana University Press (44).

### References

- 1 Pamela Church Gibson “*Film Costume*.” In *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- 2 Gibson, P. Church, *Ibid.*
- 3 I am referring to two seminal texts from the 1990s: Gaines, J. and Herzog, C. *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Bruzzi, S. *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- 4 See the essay by C. Eckert (1987/1990) *The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window*, in Gaines and Herzog op.cit.
- 5 Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- 6 Ginette Vincendeau, *Brigitte Bardot*. London: BFI, 2013.
- 7 Eugenia Paulicelli, *Italian Style – Fashion and Film from Early Cinema to the Digital Age*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- 8 Rachel Moseley, *Growing up with Audrey Hepburn*. London: BFI, 2004.
- 9 Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber, *Fashioning Bollywood: The Making and Meaning of Hindi Film Costume*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- 10 Arguably Yves St. Laurent's most famous film wardrobe was that of Catherine Deneuve in Luis Bunuel's film *Belle de Jour*, made in 1967. She became both his close friend and his muse, and famously sang onstage at the end of his very last catwalk show in 2002. He designed her outfits for all her films before that date – and later, she wore a St. Laurent tracksuit in *Potiche* (François Ozon, 2011). Among others, he dressed Sophia Loren, Jean Seberg, Romy Schneider and Isabelle Adjani for the screen; the directors he worked with included Alain Resnais and Luc Besson. French designers have traditionally favored art-house directors; Karl Lagerfeld has also worked with Ozon, and Gaultier has on several occasions designed costumes for Besson; Raf Simons dressed Tilda Swinton for the Luca Guadagnino film *A Bigger Splash* (Italy/France, 2015). However, for the James Bond film *A View to a Kill* (UK, John Glen, 1985) Azzedine Alaïa dressed Grace Jones as the villainess Xenia Onatopp.
- 11 GlobalUK Data – Annual Report, 2019.
- 12 See Elizabeth Castaldo Lunden, *Fashion on the Red Carpet: A History of the Oscars, Fashion and Globalization*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.
- 13 Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*. New York: McGraw Hill Educational, 1985.
- 14 See Christine “Geraghty’s Essay Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Texts Bodies and Performance.” In *Reinventing Film Studies*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. London: Arnold.
- 15 Throughout his book, *Celebrity* (2000, London: Reaktion) sociologist Chris Rojek expands on the three types of celebrity and their manifestations.
- 16 For a full discussion of what I argue is a completely new ‘fashion system’ with quite different rules, see my monograph *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (2012) London: Berg. This idea is developed further in my 2018 essay *Celebrity*, published in “The End of Fashion: Clothing and Dress in the Age of Globalization,” Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, eds., London: Routledge.
- 17 I first described and analyzed what I defined as the “celebrity style” or “look” in the monograph referenced in the footnote above.
- 18 See, once again, the essay referenced in footnote 16.
- 19 For an analysis of the costuming and fashion in this series, please see the essay *Fashion is the Fifth Character; Costuming ‘Sex and the City,’* by S. Bruzzi and P. Church Gibson, in ‘Reading Sex and the City’ (2003) edited by K. Akass and J. McCabe. London: I.B. Tauris.
- 20 See the GlobalData annual report referenced in footnote 11.
- 21 Nick Rees Roberts has written a truly excellent analysis of the phenomenon; his book, *Fashion Film: Art and Advertising in the Digital Age*, was published by Bloomsbury (London) in 2018.
- 22 Here is the link to the YouTube discussion with costume designer Jacqueline Durran. <https://youtu.be/tTO3j2O0ZFg>.
- 23 See Church Gibson, 1998, op.cit.
- 24 Sarah Street’s 2001 book, *Costume and Cinema: Dress Codes in Popular Film* London: Wallflower Books. Is a really useful entry point for studying the subject.
- 25 Tamar Jeffers MacDonald, Explores the central cinematic theme of transformation through dress in her 2010 book *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- 26 See Calefato Patrizia, *The Clothed Body* Oxford: Berg, 2004. See also Steven Gundle and Clino Castelli, eds., *The Glamour System*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Stephen Gundle’s earlier book,

- Glamour: A History*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 contains a comprehensive chapter on the heyday of Hollywood.
- 27 Elizabeth Harrington, *50 Designers – 50 Costumes: Concept to Character*. Beverley Hills: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2004.
  - 28 Deborah Nadoolman Landis is a costume designer who has worked in Hollywood since 1977. She has twice served as President of the Costume Designers' Guild and has written several books, including *Screencraft: Costume Design*, published in 2003 by Focal Press (Burlington, MA).
  - 29 See Nikki Baughan and Michael Rosser, *Five Costume Design Teams Discuss Their Bafta and Oscar-nominated Work*. London: Screen International, (29/1/2020).
  - 30 Richard La Motte is another respected practitioner. with forty years' experience in the industry. His book, *Costume Design 101: The Art and Business of Costume Design for Film and TV* (Michael Wise Productions: London) is partly intended for aspiring designers. Writing from this same perspective is Jan Musgrove, examining wider terrain in 'Make-up, hair and costume for film and television, published by Focal Press (Oxford) in 2003. Lastly, *Costume, Make-up and Hair*, edited by Adrienne Maclean, a professor at the University of Texas, is a collection of essays examining these three crafts from an academic and historical perspective, published in 2016 by Rutgers University Press, New Jersey.
  - 31 See *Hollywood Goes Shopping*, a collection of essays edited by David Desser and Garth Jowett, published in 2000 by the University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
  - 32 Sue Harper's excellent historical survey, *Women in British Cinema; Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*, was published by Continuum Press, London in 2000. The second half of her book examines women's various contributions to the film industry, including their work as directors, producers, and designers. In her 2011 article, *In Threads and Tatters: Costume, Identification and Female Subjectivity in Mullholland Drive*, published in *Cultural Studies Review* 17, no. 1, academic Linda Chapple examines questions of dress and gender. Film scholar Melanie Williams looks at the career of a noted British costume designer from an overtly feminist perspective in her article, 'The Girl You Don't See: Julie Harris and the Costume Designer In British Cinema' – in *Feminist Media Histories* 2, no. 2 (2016).
  - 33 See the article on a very interesting designer, 'Withnail's Coat: Andrea Galer's Cult Costumes', edited by Justin Smith, published in *Fashion Theory* 19, no. 3 (2005).
  - 34 Another perspective on screen costuming can be found in the 2019 article by Mary. C. King and Jessica L. Ridgeway, "Costume Evolution During the Development of Romantic Relationships and Its Impact on the Positions of Power in the Star Wars Prequels and Original Trilogies," *Fashion and Textiles* 6, no. 1 (2019), 1–15.
  - 35 Julianne Pidduck looks specifically at the costuming of period drama in *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past*, published by the British Film Institute in 2004.
  - 36 Lauren Boumaroun examines novel territory in *Costume designer/everything: Hybridised identities in animation production*, published in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 59, no. 1 (2018).
  - 37 Helen Warner is one of the few scholars to focus on the costuming of television; she questions the seeming lack of academic interest in her article Tracing Patterns: Critical Approaches to On Screen Fashion. *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 1, no. 1, 121–32. Her monograph, *Fashion on Television: Identity and Celebrity Culture*, was published in 2014 by Bloomsbury (London).
  - 38 Barbara Brownie examines the important topic of 'everyday' costuming in her article "Dressing Down: Costume, Disguise and the Performance of Ordinarity," *Clothing Cultures* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2018).
  - 39 Jonatan Sodergen has chosen another important aspect of costuming, the question of "authenticity". His article "From Aura to Jargon: The Social Life of Authentication," was published in 2019 in *Arts and the Market* 19, no. 2.
  - 40 Dorita Hannah considers costume from a completely different perspective, within performance studies, in her journal article *Alarming the Heart: Costume as a Performative body-object-event*, in *Scene*, vol. 2, nos. 1 and 2.
  - 41 *Shoe Reels: The History and Philosophy of Footwear in Film*, is edited by Elizabeth Ezra and Catherine Wheatley, and was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2020.
  - 42 Adrienne Munich's anthology, *Fashion in Film: New Directions in National Cinemas* was published by Indiana University Press in 2011.
  - 43 *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity*, edited by Rachel Moseley, was published in London by the British Film Institute in 2005.
  - 44 *Film, Fashion and the 1960s*, edited by Eugenia Paulicelli, Drake Stutesman and Louise Wallenberg, was published by Indiana University Press in 2017.

# THE MASTER NARRATIVE: AUTHORSHIP, FAME, AND FAILURE IN THE DESIGNER FASHION FILM

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The narratives of the glamorous lives of famous (and, at times, infamous) fashion designers that are spun by the media industries, which often trade in codependent clichés of creativity and notoriety, have been given a new lease of life through the scrutinizing lens of social media. In *Hijacking the Runway: How Celebrities Are Stealing the Spotlight from Fashion Designers* (2014), journalist Teri Agins shows how pop stars such as Victoria Beckham and Kanye West have penetrated the world of luxury fashion by using their fame and influence to re-position themselves as designers with cultural capital. This cult of personality is the required “edge” to get ahead in fashion in the age of social media.<sup>1</sup> Digital impact is now taken as a given for the younger generation of “creative directors” or designer-marketers like Olivier Rousteing at Balmain, whose personal feed on Instagram is shoppable with a click-through feature to the brand for his millions of followers, or Simon Porte at Jacquemus who stages his private life by “curating” his own feed to enhance the overall brand image. On his account @jacquemus, he strategically posts intimate shots of himself alongside branded campaign imagery and runway footage. Indeed, today, Pamela Church Gibson argues in her comprehensive coverage of fashion’s preeminent position within the culture of celebrity, “designers themselves are in fact expected to feature in the public domain. The new fashion-literate public wants to know about the *person*, here as in every other sphere.”<sup>2</sup> Previously, the prestigious couturiers of Paris fashion such as Charles Worth or Cristóbal Balenciaga maintained their mystique through public discretion – an historical precedent challenged by the mediated fame of figures such as Gabrielle Chanel and Christian Dior and subsequently displaced by the advent of 1960s pop culture embodied by Yves Saint Laurent, who was in many ways the first celebrity designer to self-consciously fabricate a mass-media persona – that of the tortured artistic genius – relayed through his public image.

In *Fashion Film: Art and Advertising in the Digital Age*,<sup>3</sup> I examine the reactivation of such myths through contemporary cinema’s biographical turn in both fiction and nonfiction film, which focuses on the personal and professional lives of many illustrious designers – part of a tendency that the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed “the biographical illusion,”<sup>4</sup> meant to indicate the ways in which forms of biography (such as biopics and documentaries) artificially construct a life as an a posteriori expression of social existence, as an intentional authorial



project, given retrospective significance by the formal organization of the biographer. Here, I extend my previous coverage by focusing more specifically on the interlocking questions of fame and failure in a handful of contemporary fiction and nonfiction films as a way of probing one of fashion's foundational myths of creative authorship.<sup>5</sup>

Heralded by Dior as “the master of us all,”<sup>6</sup> the midcentury couturier Balenciaga looms large as a spectral figure over fashion's mythology of authorship. Indeed, for one of the recent films I discuss, *Phantom Thread* (Anderson, 2017), Mary Blume's historical inquiry into the backstage workings of his atelier was required background reading for the cast and crew.<sup>7</sup> Balenciaga cultivated his mystique despite despising self-promotion,<sup>8</sup> choosing rather to redefine the couturier “as a builder, not a decorator,”<sup>9</sup> known for sculpting rather than encasing the body. In her fawning profile of Balenciaga, written for French *Vogue* in 1965, the novelist Violette Leduc described him as the supreme designer of his age, describing how he “sculpts, paints, writes in the act of making dresses. That is why he is above the others,”<sup>10</sup> she concluded. Blume's own more measured assessment paints a nuanced portrait of a volatile professional with an explosive temperament, including details of rages in the workroom and obsessive behavior.<sup>11</sup> The adulatory tone of much of the commentary on Balenciaga that tends to consolidate his mandarin pose as an “absolutist,”<sup>12</sup> a “perfectionist,”<sup>13</sup> or a “designer's designer”<sup>14</sup> began during his lifetime despite the tardy recognition of his talents by journalists and critics. As Cecil Beaton observed in 1954, reverentially calling Balenciaga the “Spanish genius,”<sup>15</sup> a “Titan among couturiers,”<sup>16</sup> a reluctance to optimize his talents more commercially through media exposure only consolidated his artistic standing as the “master architect.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the mythologizing tendency of such a discourse, it does however suggest the productive links between fashion and fiction, between forms of (creative) design and (narrative) storytelling, a leading thread lucratively exploited by the commercial strategies of contemporary brands, which include, notably, the preeminent house of Balenciaga.<sup>18</sup> As Beaton presciently remarked long before the advent of designer branding, “[i]f one could say that fashion is a serial story that never ends, then the good designers [sic] must invent new plot developments to continue the tale, and all good dressmaking must confirm to the fictional pattern of fashion's evolution and continuation.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Fictionalizing fashion: desire and deception**

In his wide-ranging account of the literature, politics, and culture of postwar Britain, Alan Sinfield reminds us that the media narratives of individuals' professional and personal lives are, in themselves, ideological representations, stories that are embodied and lived; “Stories” he argued, “transmit power: they are structured into the social order and the criteria of plausibility define, or seem to define, the scope of feasible political change.”<sup>20</sup> As we now consider Paul Thomas Anderson's historical drama, *Phantom Thread*, a fictionalized version of the milieu of high fashion in 1950s London, let's also bear in mind Sinfield's observation that “all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to suppress.”<sup>21</sup>

In *Phantom Thread*, Daniel Day Lewis plays the distinguished English couturier Reynolds Woodcock – the pointedly phallic name is intentional – who dresses society ladies and foreign princesses while obsessively micro-managing his fashion house assisted by his curt sister Cyril (Lesley Manville). After having her dismiss one unpromising lover for her sloppy eating habits, Woodcock falls for a much younger waitress Alma (Vicky Krieps), a post-war immigrant, who becomes his muse and lover. Beguiled by Alma, he measures her slim body for a couture gown to transform her into his ideal model, informing her dogmatically she will have breasts only if he allows her to. The dramatic premise is that Woodcock is a domineering force embodying an earlier form of “toxic” masculinity. His power, however, is eroded by Alma's perverse attempt

– through Munchausen-by-proxy – to master him by poisoning his food to slow down his professional activity through periods of illness; she thus retaliates by controlling him through physical decline and personal failure. The closing scenes indicate Woodcock’s willing submission to Alma’s conceit, which combines two parallel strands of failure: the sense of decline, breakdown or an abrupt cessation of normal functioning (as in a power failure); but also the more obscure sense that originated etymologically in middle English borrowed from the old French word *faillir* and derived from the Latin *fallere* meaning to trick or deceive.

Anderson’s current status as a prestigious auteur within contemporary U.S. cinema is largely down to a back-catalogue of films that examine the territories of disconnected, straight American masculinity.<sup>22</sup> One of his earlier films, aptly titled *The Master* (2012), has been situated within an authorial inquiry into solitary estrangement “as though Anderson has become transfixed by the specter of damaged male souls in arrested development, living at remote distances from their buried needs [...] outwardly grown men in uncomprehending struggle against some impasse: the residue of stunted childhoods.”<sup>23</sup> This familiar discourse of a fragile, Oedipal, heterosexual masculinity is further compounded by the reception of *Phantom Thread*, a film critics perceived as haunted by the specter of earlier generations of (male) auteurs, the “masters” of cinema such as Alfred Hitchcock – particularly for the psychological template of his romantic thriller *Rebecca* (1940).<sup>24</sup>

On its release in 2017, *Phantom Thread* also tapped into contemporary sexual politics by igniting popular debate online as to the measure of its critique of “toxic” behavior.<sup>25</sup> One critic for *Gay City News* even lambasted Anderson for straightening (or potentially re-closeting) the figure of the midcentury couturier, whereas another for *Feminist Frequency* pleaded the case for the film’s pertinent interrogation of hetero-patriarchal structures – the clinical narrative is, after all, framed as Alma’s story (her fantasy) told as a confession to her doctor.<sup>26</sup> In academic circles, the film has been viewed – somewhat predictably – through the lens of a post-Lacanian psychoanalysis with due diligence to the discipline’s own theoretical masters.<sup>27</sup> Such interpretation suits the film’s Neo-Freudian staging of neurosis generated by the repression of perverse desire through its narrative deployment of the designer as an obsessional type – Jacques Lacan described the obsessional neurotic as an actor playing his role as if he were already dead.<sup>28</sup> Anderson’s representation of creativity would also more broadly appear to embody Lacan’s general axiom, according to which, as Alison Bancroft glosses in the context of fashion, “desire has no object. Instead, desire is a constant search for something more. To desire something is to be in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction. Desire is self-perpetuating, with the only object of desire being desire itself.”<sup>29</sup> Psychoanalytically, then, desire would therefore seem invariably to lead to failure.

With such apparent attention to the film’s manifest psychosexual dynamics, is it properly a “fashion film”? Is it interested in exploring fashion per se? Why set the story in the specific professional milieu of high fashion and the historical context of postwar London? In interview, the director in fact admits to his own ignorance of fashion history.<sup>30</sup> *Phantom Thread* does, however, contain within it a subordinate focus on the labor involved in design by insistently showing the couturier at work and emphasizing the collaborative endeavor back-stage as much as the front of house “salons of seduction,”<sup>31</sup> thereby gesturing to the material as much as the symbolic production of fashion. Day Lewis, credited as co-creator of the film’s script, transposed his routine method of diving deep into characterization by learning to sew and contributed to the elaboration of Woodcock’s appearance. Yet, while the film is indeed invested in the central “metaphor of couture” with its insistent preoccupation with “measuring and cutting and sewing, stitching, and unstitching,”<sup>32</sup> it sidesteps a fuller historical interrogation of the mythology of the designer within the society of his time, unlike Bertrand Bonello’s more

critical dissection of the workings of fame and personality in the biopic *Saint Laurent* (2014).<sup>33</sup> Mark Bridges, the costume designer on *Phantom Thread*, imagined Woodcock as an impeccably groomed esthete, one whose work is paradoxically becoming unfashionable; he is stuck as a successful (but nonetheless second-tier) couturier failing to chime with the changing times.<sup>34</sup> Beyond the shadow of Balenciaga, other more local designers of the period – some celebrated internationally in their time like Norman Hartnell, others less revered like John Cavanagh – would seem more obviously to fit the bill in terms of professional models. Like Woodcock, Hartnell designed for royalty (he was appointed designer for Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation in 1953) but acknowledged in his memoirs the subordination of London fashion to the monopoly of Paris couture.<sup>35</sup> French houses were then perceived as the “originators of trends”<sup>36</sup> and Paris was more commercially competitive than the impoverished London of the postwar era.<sup>37</sup> Hartnell’s template of an upper-class, high-society glamour intended to rival the more prestigious Parisian couture was beginning to show signs of age by the mid-1950s and would later appear increasingly anachronistic opposite the younger, more popular, boutique trends that emerged through the 1960s.<sup>38</sup>

In his essays “Couture as queer auto/biography” and “Self-loathing, ennui and melancholy: on tragic queers and the failures of fashion,” cultural historian Christopher Breward unmasks the ambiguous identity of the midcentury couturier in relation to prevailing discourses of visibility and the policing of non-normative sexuality.<sup>39</sup> Reading the autobiographies of Dior and Hartnell, alongside those of Hardy Amies and Pierre Balmain, Breward not only reveals the tropes of gossip and revelation as bound up in anxieties around identity, privacy, and publicity – through the negotiation of the closet – but also the sartorial codes of homosexuality represented in the tailored, neo-Edwardian look of such 50’s couturiers. By further tracing the lineage of “tragic queers” revived in the late twentieth century by Alexander McQueen’s morbid brand of aesthetic decadence, Breward speculates that fashion, “in its entropic nihilism, its innate queerness, seeks failure as a conditional price for success. In the cultural, political, social and economic construction of modern homosexuality it has found a cruel and fatal currency for the playing out of its tragic systems.”<sup>40</sup>

Cited as a further influence on *Phantom Thread* and noted for his autocratic manner and volatile personality is the Anglo-American designer Charles James, an important exemplar of fashion’s (queer) history of failure.<sup>41</sup> Bridges’ costumes for the film are in many ways pastiche imitations of James’ singular sculptural designs. Described by his biographer as “supremely individualistic and self-promoting”<sup>42</sup> – he even penned an autobiographical article in 1974 called “A Portrait of a genius by a genius”<sup>43</sup> – James’ renown was tarnished by a checkered history of bankruptcies and failures in ready-to-wear, culminating in a belated botched collaboration (pre-cobranding) with mass retail.<sup>44</sup> As a coda to *Phantom Thread* and as the ghost of a suppressed alternative story of queerness is this surprising anecdote: in 1954, approaching middle age, nearly bankrupt and facing decline, James, the epitome of the urbane homosexual couturier, divided popular opinion by marrying a wealthy, young divorcee some 20 years his junior.

### Documenting fashion: fame and failure

On the cover to Gerber Klein’s biography of James, the contemporary New York designer Zac Posen is quoted as describing the subject as “a great master of fashion and a pioneer of glamour,” going on to suggest how the beauty and drama of his creations were matched by a dark reality – the drama of the designs extending to the drama of his life. Clearly, there is an historical lineage of commercial and individual failure to be traced from James through to

contemporary designers like Posen or Isaac Mizrahi – an “American” fashion story in contrast to the dominant European narratives of glamour and success of the emblematic figures of the late twentieth century, which include Saint Laurent, Karl Lagerfeld, Valentino Garavani, and Gianni Versace, biographical representations of whom I examine in detail in *Fashion Film*.<sup>45</sup> As cultural historian of glamour Stephen Gundle observes in the case of Versace and others: the fame, and in some cases notoriety, of designers of the late twentieth century was most often dependent on the public staging of their lifestyles and the narrative elaboration of their private lives. “They manufactured not just clothing but the contexts in which clothes were to be worn.” Emerging as key “masters of style,”<sup>46</sup> designers came to embody contemporary definitions of glamour. Through the “personalization of fashion,”<sup>47</sup> a host of creative myths had emerged historically to bolster the symbolic capital of the industry by designating couture as a minor art form and the fashion designer as a type of artist or auteur. The gendering of this history of authorship is evident from the names of the late-twentieth-century designers listed previously – the focus on predominantly male designers as media celebrities in their own right (bar one or two exceptions such as Diane Von Furstenberg or Donatella Versace) illustrates the overall gendered bias of cultural discourses of success and failure.

In an image-obsessed industry such as fashion, driven by the promotional imperatives of marketing and branding, in which as Anja Aronowsky Cronberg observes, “[n]o venture is ever a failure,” in which designers rarely “speak candidly about their work in a market where they are not only artists, but also peddlers of a product,”<sup>48</sup> the story of the male designer’s success, conveyed through the public image of its subject, is a particularly potent one. In her editorial to a special issue of *Vestoj* on failure, Aronowsky Cronberg comments that in fashion “a downfall is transformed into a temporary glitch in the machinery, and a breakdown is nothing but an occasion to rise again, like a phoenix from the ashes.”<sup>49</sup>

Evidently, not all designer stories recount personal and professional success or even associate fame automatically with its commercial or creative iterations, for good reason. Contemporary fashion also contains (and tends to suppress) the ghosts of alterative careers that came and went in spectacular fashion: take the instance of the promising Spanish-born New York designer Miguel Adrover, who had proudly claimed the American way of life as his inspiration for a collection in 2001, but who “went mercurially from rags to riches and back to rags again in only two years.”<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the *New York Times* heralded the arrival on the scene that year of the 20-year-old Posen under the banner “A Star is Born.”<sup>51</sup> Sandy Chronopoulos’s later documentary of his trajectory, *House of Z* (2017), tells the story of a designer, who was over-hyped by the press while still a student at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, and whose pink brushed-silk dress became a sensation after it was worn at a party by the socialite Paz de la Huerta. The film uses conventional testimonials to chart the designer’s history – the “rise and fall” narrative arc of biography – from early recognition by the luxury industry to subsequent commercial implosion under the weight of family discord: by the end of the decade, Posen’s extravagance and theatricality no longer suited the consumer dominance of sportswear in U.S. fashion and his attempt to integrate Paris couture was deemed a failure. Following Posen’s re-invention as a media personality with appearances as a judge on the reality TV show *Project Runway* for six seasons until 2018, the documentary’s release in 2017 was conceived as part of the designer’s comeback strategy – hubris in hindsight given that three years later, he shuttered his house. The *New York Times*’ coverage this time asked what had gone wrong, leading with an article titled “Even ‘Project Runway’ Couldn’t Save Zac Posen.”<sup>52</sup>

The earlier documentary about Mizrahi, Douglas Keeve’s *Unzipped* (1995) is, like *House of Z*, a revealing counter-example of the homophobic cliché of the self-loathing queer designer.<sup>53</sup> Keeve’s sympathetic portrait captures the excitement involved in producing a collection. A

rising star at the time, Mizrahi, whose label subsequently folded, gives a charismatic and hyperbolic performance of the designer at work. The film begins with the failure of his previous collection and ends with the triumph of the memorable show that deconstructed the catwalk by simultaneously unveiling the backstage preparations in real-time through a transparent curtain. *Unzipped* eschews the idealist myth of the creative genius in favor of the subject's grounded nature and ironically camp delivery, which are enhanced by the attention to the centrality of gossip to his professional milieu.

The example of Mizrahi is relevant to a consideration of failure because, in his memoir *IM*, he further queers this story by mobilizing his identity as a gay, Jewish New Yorker to shine a light on his trajectory as a designer.<sup>54</sup> There, he details personal insecurities about weight and sexuality alongside his strong work ethic and innate sense of boredom. His insightful memoir explores personal doubts about making a business work, being engulfed by work, and feeling undeserving of acclaim. "Failure," queer theorist Jack Halberstam notes, "of course goes hand in hand with capitalism."<sup>55</sup> And in *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, historian Scott Sandage talks of failure as hard-wired into the American psyche – the dream of success is about a deep collective fear of failure, in short. "Failure is not the dark side of the American dream; it is the foundation of it."<sup>56</sup> From the mid-1990s, Mizrahi was backed by the house of Chanel, a surprising move in which the brand experimented by financing a U.S. designer through a ground-up business strategy with no licensing, advertising, or retail stores. The publicity generated by Mizrahi's personality was intended to compensate for poor sales figures: Chanel was, in effect, underwriting a failing enterprise and Mizrahi finally shuttered his house in 1998. Despite the blunt front-page headline in the *New York Times* – "Designer Most Likely to Succeed, Doesn't"<sup>57</sup> – he later claimed to have felt relief. He subsequently reinvented himself as an entertainer by diversifying his media celebrity, appearing as himself in a cameo in the TV series *Sex and the City* and as a judge on the reality show *Project Runway Allstars*, eventually redefining himself as a "performer, a writer, trapped in the body of a fashion designer."<sup>58</sup>

### Documenting fashion: celebrity and invisibility

The question of the visibility of designers (now rebranded as creative or artistic directors) as all-round media entertainers within the multi-platform screen culture of the twenty-first century is further elucidated by two contrasting documentary portraits of Olivier Rousteing and Martin Margiela, which suggest very different communicational strategies – from Rousteing's current mobilization of personality through the staging of authenticity on social media to Margiela's earlier adoption of authorial invisibility, which culminated in his withdrawal from the industry in 2008. Loïc Prigent's earlier exposé of Rousteing, *The Balmain Line* (2014) testified to his promotion of Instagram models like Gigi Hadid and Kendall Jenner and pop stars like Rihanna, positioning him (and the brand) within postmillennial pop culture's sphere of digital influence.<sup>59</sup> *Wonder Boy, Olivier Rousteing, né sous X* (Bonfont 2019) offsets his attempt to track down his birth mother (the film's title juxtaposes the rare professional success of a black designer in a predominantly white industry and the practice of anonymous birth and adoption – *né sous X* – under French law) against his public performance as a fashion-celebrity. As defined by the cultural theorist Jacqueline Rose, "celebrities are the people required by us to embody or to carry the weight of the question: who are we meant to be performing to, or what are we doing when performing to an invisible audience?"<sup>60</sup> The testimonial nature of the film is established through its mode of confessional intimacy that avoids the clichés of the genre such as talking heads used to evaluate a subject's worth. The gap between Rousteing's high-profile star status and his low-key provincial background is captured by the back and forth between shots of him

performing in public and others of him alone in his comfortable abode or in the company of his loving family – thereby consolidating a contrived opposition between the artificial nature of the fashion spectacle and the affective authenticity of “ordinary” home life. Rousteing’s confessional exchanges with his trusted driver also indicate the film’s investment in the construction of its subject’s persona through interaction, through the staging of his lived reality – illustrative of sociologist Erving Goffman’s thesis on how ritual social interactions (gestures, exchanges, facial and verbal expressions, and so forth) structure the theatrical dimension to everyday life.<sup>61</sup>

The coordinates of class and race are drawn up through the stark opposition between the emotional sincerity of family dynamics and the perceived insincerity of the fashion industry (“you’re a genius” gushes one guest after a show). After Oswald Boateng, Rousteing is one of the very few black creative directors to work for a leading French heritage brand (followed subsequently by the arrival of Virgil Abloh and Rihanna at LVMH) and the film’s attempt to trace his origins by showing his background also reiterates a French Universalist understanding of identity in which race makes no apparent difference; an ideological maneuver that in turn naturalizes the designer’s national identity. The film focuses more precisely on Rousteing’s self-performance (through the insistent close-ups of his body in private and public – shaving, working out, or modeling for a photo shoot) and his vulnerability – he allows the director to acknowledge his loneliness despite the dominant image of success promoted by his social media presence, beyond the feed of self-curated imagery. The persistent focus on the body, in particular, in such portraits raises the general question of embodied performance – how to be yourself when you are constantly filmed, when your subjectivity is perpetually projected to the world through the lens of media. In that respect, the most revealing sequence of Rousteing is the discovery of his adoption file. The medium distance shot accompanies the interview without intruding visibly on the private moment; we witness the social worker explain the process for tracing his birth mother who, at the age of fifteen, gave him up to the state for adoption. He spontaneously bursts into tears: the interaction is both unscripted and performed, a sincere release of pent-up emotion belied by an awareness of the camera’s presence. In the age of branded communication, the more commercial value of this type of representation for Balmain lies in its staging of the designer’s authenticity – by sharing his insecurities, Rousteing is shown to be a likeable and relatable figure – alongside a more subordinate representation of both the showbiz glitz and material production of fashion.<sup>62</sup> The editing crosscuts between the intimate story and the professional scenes of Rousteing attending fittings for J-Lo and Juliette Binoche in New York, which are juxtaposed with shots of the seamstresses laboring through the night. The film concludes with images of the star designer – reminiscent of those of Versace in formation with his supermodels in the 1990s – confidently leading his cohort down the catwalk, staking authorship for the designs through his visible presence.

Conversely, in *Margiela: In His Own Words* (Holzemer 2019), another of fashion’s prominent entertainers, Jean-Paul Gaultier (whose own “iconicity” was enshrined in the 1980s by his signature look of peroxide blond hair and *marinière* striped tops) remarks on the extreme discretion and radical anonymity of his former assistant, Martin Margiela, who dodged the public self-performance expected of the designer through an “invisible” 20-year tenure of his eponymous house from 1988 to 2008. Margiela’s elevation to “greatness” was apparent in the retrospective exhibition of his work at the Palais Galliera in Paris in 2018, in the catalog for which the museum’s director Miren Arzalluz compares him favorably with Balenciaga: both designers possessed, in her view, the same iconoclastic vision, “both profoundly changed the sartorial codes of their respective eras [...] neither succumbed to the frenetic pace of the industry or to media pressure, preferring to take refuge in an almost heroic discretion... to devote themselves to perfecting their trade.”<sup>63</sup> The fashion historian Caroline Evans is more skeptical

of Margiela's legacy, commenting that while his shows clearly problematized the idea of the fashion spectacle, "it could equally be argued that Margiela simply traded on a particularly exclusive kind of cultural capital which required insider knowledge of new fashion signs."<sup>64</sup> Evans locates a leading paradox running through his career: known to be critical of the corporate structures of consumer fashion through an "aesthetic of ruination," Margiela's position as a designer, "however oppositional or experimental it might be" remained "locked ... into the very capitalist system whose cycles of production and consumption it might be seen to be criticizing."<sup>65</sup>

According to Holzemer's film, Margiela's power lay precisely in his anonymity. Unlike the media visibility and public exposure of other designers of the period, most notably John Galliano and Alexander McQueen, "Margiela was conspicuous by his absence."<sup>66</sup> For some 41 collections spread over 20 years, he never once appeared on stage or gave press interviews to gloss his collections. As evident from the film's nominal focus on testimonial authorship, Margiela remains invisible providing a voice-over narration of his career, showing only his hands as they unpack his personal archive of ephemera. His anonymity also erased intentional authorial discourse from the promotion of the label: "I don't like the idea of being a celebrity," he comments in voice-over. "Anonymity is very important to me. And it balances me that I can be like everybody else. I always wanted to have my name linked to the product I created not the face I have." He acknowledges invisibility as more than simply a PR strategy; rather, it allowed him a layer of protection as both a professional and individual. All public relations were denied, part of a personal choice to protect himself from the industry. *The Business of Fashion* talked of the designer's "cult of invisibility,"<sup>67</sup> the press of Margiela as a mystery man, one whose strategy actually fueled more interest in his label from the challenge of an identity (or rather, a personality) withheld. Margiela's deconstruction of authorial origination (which included a "greatest hits" ten-year retrospective of his existing collections in 1999) meant designing collections that would be impactful without the imprint of his own face or body – the inverse of some contemporary designers like Rousteing, Jacquemus, or Abloh, whose self-publicity, it might be argued cynically, is a strategic way for a brand to conceal a relative lack of creative ambition or innovation.

*Margiela: In His Own Words* toys with discourses of authorship by denying the designer's visible presence but simultaneously reiterating the undeniable "greatness" and perennial influence of his designs (for example, on the oversized aesthetic of Demna Gvasalia's rejuvenation of Balenciaga), therefore falling back on an idealist discourse that mobilizes authorship – however invisible – as a commodity and equates success to renown: after all, Margiela's intention was always for his name to be known. In the final analysis, he assured his heritage through a timely retreat from the industry in the late 2000s, at the very moment of its full transformation into a form of digital entertainment, thereby resisting the rise of Internet marketing by retiring following the transition from a design house into a lifestyle brand. Ironically, as it turns out, in mid-2020, amid the economic fallout from COVID-19, *Vogue* magazine reported that as part of an attempt to deploy fashion film to save retail, *Margiela: In His Own Words* would be released in the United States through retail stores rather than in movie theaters via an affiliate link that would direct viewers to a platform to stream the film. *Vogue* explains how in the past, department stores were merely the setting for screening after-parties; now retailers can list a fashion film as a retail product in its own right: "These partnerships are the first of their kind, merging the worlds of fashion and film in an ingenious new way."<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, they indicate not only new ways of thinking about fashion and film in the post-cinema age, but also the ways in which digital entertainment is reinvigorating the existing discursive framework of fashion authorship for new audiences.

## Notes

- 1 Teri Agins, *Hijacking the Runway: How Celebrities Are Stealing the Spotlight from Fashion Designers* (New York: Gotham Books/Penguin, 2014).
- 2 Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London: Berg, 2012), 186.
- 3 Nick Rees-Roberts, *Fashion Film: Art and Advertising in the Digital Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
- 4 Pierre Bourdieu, "L'Illusion biographique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 62–63 (1986): 69–72.
- 5 For more extensive analysis of designer fashion films see Rees-Roberts, *Fashion Film*, 131–82.
- 6 Mary Blume, *The Master of Us All: Balenciaga, His Workrooms, His World* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013), 19.
- 7 See Sheila O'Malley, "Love, After a Fashion," *Film Comment*, January–February (2018), 24–29.
- 8 Judith Thurman, *Cleopatra's Nose: 39 Varieties of Desire* (New York: Picador, 2007), 204.
- 9 Blume, *The Master of Us All*, 5.
- 10 Violette Leduc quoted in Miren Arzalluz, "Iconoclastic Visions of the Silhouette: Cristóbal Balenciaga," in *Fashion Game Changers: Reinventing the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Silhouette*, eds. Karen Van Godtsenhoven, Miren Arzalluz and Kaat Debo (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 33.
- 11 Blume, *The Master of Us All*, 147.
- 12 Thurman, *Cleopatra's Nose*, 204.
- 13 Bettina Ballard, *In My Fashion* (Paris: Éditions Séguier, 2016), 171.
- 14 Brenda Polan and Roger Tredre, *The Great Fashion Designers: From Chanel to McQueen, the Names That Made Fashion History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 97.
- 15 Cecil Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion: A Personal History of Fifty Years of Changing Tastes and the People Who Have Inspired Them* (New York: Rizzoli Ex Libris, 2014), 312.
- 16 Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion*, 315.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 On branded imaginaries see Christian Salmon, *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind* (London: Verso, 2017) and Bruno Remy, *Brands and Narratives: Brands and the Cultural Collective Unconscious* (Paris: IFM/Les Éditions du Regard, 2008).
- 19 Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion*, 319.
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# FASHION AND GENDER IN SUPERHERO COMICS AND FILMS

*Jonathan S. Marion and James Scanlan*

## **History of early comic book costuming and media**

Comic books developed as an art form in the 1930s, bursting into mainstream consciousness with Superman's 1938 debut and the popularity of superheroes during World War II. This popularity reflected social shifts in art, politics, sartorial technology, and social mores concerning decorum and appropriate dress. The industry's early years, known as comics' "Golden Age," were marked by a glut of competitive publishers, each patching together new aesthetics, drawing on a diverse array of influences including sports and leisurewear, military uniforms, and theatrical costumes (e.g. the leotard). Early male superhero costuming was based on circus performers, soldiers, and earlier pulp heroes from Westerns, adventure, and sci-fi stories, while female superhero costuming was derived from pin-up art, swimwear/activewear, chorus girls, models, and actresses. All early costuming was influenced by the expanding production of semi-synthetic fabrics in the 1920s and 1930s, starting with Rayon (artificial silk) being marketed as form-fitting material for swimsuits and stockings. Nylon was developed concurrently, and the corresponding shift in the tightness of commercially available clothing significantly influenced comic-book costume designs – especially visible in the tight, revealing designs of female characters' costuming.

## ***Early gendered costuming***

At his debut, Superman was heavily influenced by sci-fi predecessors Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. Superman's costume design – broadly setting the standard for male superhero costumes thereafter – was particularly influenced by Flash Gordon's uniform: a long-sleeved red and blue leotard that left Gordon's legs uncovered, with red boots and a yellow chest insignia depicting an exploding star. Superman's creators changed the chest insignia, adding blue tights, red briefs, and a red cape. Batman (inspired by Westerns and detective stories rather than sci-fi) still had a costume closely following Superman's, primarily differing in color (emphasizing black, grey, and yellow), introducing a facial covering/cowl, and a bat-themed chest insignia instead of an S-Shield.

Inspired by literary "Jungle Queens," Sheena, Queen of the Jungle (a pulp-comic character pre-dating Superman), was meant to be isolated from Western civilization, yet her animal-skin

costume design closely followed pin-up art of the time, a trait shared by other early heroines. When Sheena debuted in Britain, she wore a mid-thigh length dress with one strap over her right shoulder. Migrating to America, and into color, she was presented in an animal print dress, split into a very short skirt and a single-strap top resembling the modern bikini (which would not officially be introduced until 1946). This costume was experimented with frequently, but its sexualized nature, resembling risqué fashions of the day, remained constant.

Widely considered the most iconic female superhero of all time, Wonder Woman was a character of contrasts, concomitantly challenging and reinforcing contemporary depictions of femininity. Her patriotic color scheme, feminist and militaristic narrative themes, and Greco-Roman iconography evoke strength and power, specifically alluding to Suffragette iconography of breaking chains and other bonds. However, Wonder Woman's costume design still mirrored the pin-up styles of earlier female characters, with bare shoulders, décolletage, and a short skirt or less.<sup>1</sup> Established at the outset of the genre, these costuming standards have served as the iconic norms for in-print superheroes ever since, including: tight materials in bright colors; identity-obscuring elements, such as a mask; flamboyant accessories (commonly capes or hats); identifying insignias, usually on the chest. And, perhaps most notably, costume design differences based on sex, with the female characters overwhelmingly sporting risqué designs.

### ***Later costuming trends***

Though the Golden Age template has endured in many regards, superhero costuming has also evolved to reflect social and technological changes. In the years following the genre's birth, polyester, acrylic, and then spandex were introduced and reset the sartorial scene for modern superhero costumes and, following the war, many superheroes' costumes were updated accordingly. At the same time, fiery societal interest in space exploration and aeronautics ushered in a changing aesthetic for mainstream comics, a "Silver Age." The Flash's redesign emphasized lightning iconography to highlight his speed, rather than employing the Greco-Roman symbol of Hermes' wings. Unlike the first Flash – whose uniform was a miscellaneous patchwork, from blue jeans to an old military helmet – Flash II was uniformed in a red synthetic bodysuit, with yellow boots, belt, wristbands, and a lightning-bolt accented mask covering most of his face. Green Lantern was similarly revised, receiving a black-and-green bodysuit with a lantern insignia, employed as a test pilot instead of a railroad worker, and with powers derived from alien technology rather than magic. As the popularity of the Flash/Batman-style full-coverage male costuming took hold, color scheme, insignia, and accessories became even more important for differentiating between characters.

Two other major trends developed during this era, increasing the importance of costumes for visual identification. First, debuting superhero teams (e.g. Fantastic Four, X-Men) visually displayed their partnerships via matching/complementary outfits. The Fantastic Four's character-specific costumes share a dark blue and white color-scheme, with a blue "4" in a white circle as their identifying insignia. Similarly, the original X-Men wore blue bodysuits under yellow overclothes, each uniform also including a mask and an X-insignia on their belt. Second, solo male characters such as Spider-Man and Iron Man brought the male-costuming trend to its logical conclusion: complete-coverage/full-armor costumes. Spider-Man crafted a head-to-toe red and blue body suit, with web accents, to protect his secret identity. Iron Man's costume went even further, providing mechanical armor in addition to full coverage. Although initially experimenting with bulky, grey or gold armor, the character quickly shifted to a relatively form-fitting red-and-gold design. And, shifting from the Golden Age's focus on magic to mirror social interest in technology, space, and science, Iron Man was one of the first fully

technology-based superheroes. Rising cultural angst following the 1950s/1960s ushered in a darker turn in superhero costuming, with black replacing longstanding character color-schemes even for characters as iconic as Captain America, Spider-Man, and Superman.<sup>2</sup>

Protective synthetic fibers such as Kevlar added to the dark, militaristic aesthetic and ethos, exemplified by the highly-armored and virtually all-black costuming of modern Batman. Popular new anti-heroes offered their own spin on the classic superhero template, such as Frank Castle as the Punisher, who emblazoned a crude skull on his DIY militaristic/mercenary armored costume to modify the standard superhero insignia and broadcast his lethal intentions. The Punisher's black and white morality, which allows him to deal death guiltlessly, was reflected in the simple black-and-white color scheme of his costume.

### ***Increasing representation in comics***

Growing calls for increased diversity in comics were met by a few faltering first steps. When a new X-men team debuted, many were persons of color or anti-heroes. This team had no unifying color or costume scheme, although black, yellow, blue, and red were dominant (see Figure 39.1). At most, every member had some costume elements suggesting an "X," whether across their torso or on a small clasp. One major female character showcasing the continued sexualization of female costume designs was Storm, the team's first non-white character. Wearing thigh-high black boots, black bikini bottoms, a black top revealing most of her torso but covering her bust and shoulders, and a billowing black cape with yellow trim (clasped above the bust with an "X" symbol), Storm's uniform leaves her legs, head, arms, and abdomen uncovered. Storm's uniform was soon redesigned, albeit initially with something only slightly less revealing, but this sort of sexualized costuming remained the standard for many female characters.

### **The challenges of translating between in-print and on-screen costuming**

It was during the Golden Age that the first superhero movie, *Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941), was released, immediately establishing a relationship between comics and live-action. *Batman* (1943), *Captain America* (1944), and *Superman* (1948) quickly followed. For most of their existence, comic book adaptations were low-budget, without substantial resources or careful attention to casting and costuming. Visible in all initial adaptations was that translating the aesthetics of in-print comics into three-dimensions – especially costuming – was challenging. Rather than skin-tight and sleek, costumes were baggy and bulky; rather than colorful and engaging, they were monochromatic and drab; and huge capes and masks appearing dramatic in print looked awkward in action. These challenges continued to plague the television adaptations of the 1950s–1970s and persist to the present.

The last 20 years represent an unprecedented surge of investment in and popularity of comics' properties. Starting with Sony's successful adaptation of *Spider-Man* and Fox's *X-Men*, a new *Batman* trilogy and Marvel's self-produced MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) began, generating billions. Formerly peripheral properties, comics' adaptations now serve as primary tentpole pictures for entire studios. Superhero films in 2018 accounted for 25% of all domestic ticket sales in the USA, amounting to nearly \$3 billion, and three of the five top-grossing films of the year were superhero vehicles: *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Endgame*, and *Deadpool 2*.<sup>3</sup> The shared MCU ethos set the standard other studios are attempting to imitate, with billions of dollars currently funding dozens of comic book film projects.

Regardless of budget, superhero movies require nuanced negotiations between the expected and the possible. Responsible for design and fabrication, including practicality of movement under a variety of conditions, costume designers must translate two-dimensional designs into three dimensions. While the default for costuming is fabric, superhero aesthetics demand a broad variety of uncommon materials. A recurring frustration mentioned in interviews is the challenge of creating practical costuming for looks that may be easily drawn but are physically impossible. As James Acheson, costume designer for Sony's *Spider-Man* and for *Man of Steel* notes, "It's a very different genre...the iconography is there, the image of these people is there. So the job is then to make it work three dimensionally."<sup>4</sup> Discussing her work on the dramatic, extremely high-collared cloak for *Doctor Strange*, Alexandra Byrne relates:

Obviously, we have practical limitations. The collar in the comic is enormous... you'd never see your actors' faces. It's about getting the spirit... It really is about working with the fabric and the processes. Every time you add something else to the cloak, it changes the weight, the balance, and the behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Several costume designers expressed surprise at the sheer quantity of specialized fabrics and non-fabric materials needed, providing challenges found in few other genres. For example, for *Superman Returns*, Louise Mingenbach employed an extremely thin and stretchy Spandex derivative called Milliskin to approximate the painted-on nature of most comic book costumes. She contrasts this with using leather to design the X-Men costumes (see Figure 39.1) when she was the primary costume designer of FOX's *X-Men* franchise, whose characters needed more protection than the nearly invulnerable Superman.<sup>6</sup> Concerning her work on *Wonder Woman*, Lindy Hemming similarly noted, "I worked with leather armor, metal, plus the more conventional silks and cottons...it's hard to think of a material we didn't use!"<sup>7</sup> Echoing this sentiment in another interview, she emphasized the unusual experience of working with materials molded directly for actors' bodies.<sup>8</sup> The result for *Wonder Woman* was a mixture of pragmatic and iconic – red, blue, and gold armor that looked practical for battle, with the famous silver bracelets and golden lasso, yet retaining core design elements rooted in pin-ups and chorus girls.

Costume designers universally emphasized how costumes needed to simultaneously look good on screen *and* fit with the broader-world design being depicted. Not just as matters of physical feasibility but also visual viability: some things look good in print but not on screen. As Judianna Makovsky relates, "I think doing superhero movies are the hardest thing. To make them believable and not make them look silly, it's very hard to do that."<sup>9</sup> Compounding this challenge, another design aspect universally emphasized was the need for the finished designs to be practicable both in terms of sufficient (a) freedom of movement and comfort for actors, and (b) durability for repeated takes and use.<sup>10</sup> Commenting, "[t]hey conceptualize everything and then people like me have to make the costumes come alive... The most difficult part is getting it so the actors can raise their arms,"<sup>11</sup> concerning the heavily armored characters on *Ant Man & the Wasp*, Frogley found solutions for actors' mobility problems in medieval armor.

Another practical challenge for costume designers is having to create numerous context-specific versions of costumes – e.g. for stunts, to accommodate different times of shooting during the day<sup>12</sup>– necessitating numerous additional tests of the materials required. As Makovsky specifies, the versions seen in the finished product are usually "the hero versions, which are the beauty costumes."<sup>13</sup> Other versions get created, however, to accommodate specific shot requirements such as "harder, less malleable versions for extreme close-ups, as well as softer, more flexible, and padded versions for battle scenes and action sequences."<sup>14</sup> Even



Figure 39.1 The leather costumes worn by the X-Men in *X2* (2003), the second film of FOX's X-Men films. These costumes are quite different from the blue and yellow costumes of the comic books, which were more closely realized in *X-Men: First Class* (2011). Copyright Alamy

when separate versions are not needed, various workarounds may be required for functionality, such as the addition of “spandex gussets under the arms and between the legs” which get painted and customized to match the rest of the costume’s material.<sup>15</sup>

Notably, several key costume designers admit to having negligible comics exposure before working on an adaptation. For example, Bob Ringwood “had never even read a Batman comic”<sup>16</sup> and Stephanie Maslansky admits that “[a]s far as the comics are concerned, I was not that familiar with superheroes.”<sup>17</sup> Yet costume designers must balance their own vision against both studio constraints and respect for the source material. Maslansky, who guided Netflix’s Marvel universe, including *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, and *The Defenders*, notes, “[m]y job is to take what I learn from the comic books and illustrations and create a live-action believable grounded character from them.”<sup>18</sup> And, as Ringwald notes regarding working on Tim Burton’s 1989 *Batman*:

I went out and bought about 200... then I closed the comics and decided that to make it work, I had to come up with a bat that was dark and mysterious and sexy... I had decided from the beginning that this ‘Batman’ was not going to be in blue knickers... we can’t put him in tights, it’ll look ridiculous.’ So I had to find a way to make him into a superhero. I gave him a completely armoured body... I went into the rubber world and sculpting.<sup>19</sup>

Costume designs have to avoid over-the-top characteristics from the source material without sacrificing key character traits conveyed through costuming. When discussing the *Dark Knight Rises* version of Bane, for instance, Lindy Hemming mentions wanting to avoid the look and

origin of the comics version, who was visually influenced by circus strongmen and science horror, and revealed “the mask is based on a jet engine... This mask is like a fuel injection system, pouring oxygen into his lungs, and keeping him functioning.”<sup>20</sup> A different consideration, discussed by Makovsky, concerns working with female costuming often imagined by men:

...on certain costumes like let’s say Black Widow, we work with Visual Development from Marvel and they’re usually boys who draw these things and I go I can’t get all that on a little girl’s body... I wanted to really make Natasha much more sleek and make it a simpler costume so you really could see her.<sup>21</sup>

For consumption on screen, in-print costumes that are often sexualized into impossibility need to be translated into something simultaneously practical and eye-catching when worn by a real human.

Also relating to gender, *Captain Marvel* costume designer Sanja Milkovic Hays insists: “[w]e want to see women on screen, especially women that are so strong and so powerful.”<sup>22</sup> As such, the lead character’s costume was intended to feature her femininity without leading to objectification. The final result was a blue-and-red body suit – with a gold star insignia and piping accents – which left only her face and head uncovered while still highlighting the actor’s body and fitting in a visually appealing manner. As Hays describes: “Her suit is strong and superheroic, but still very feminine...her costume [is] part of her attitude. She’s a girl with an attitude and rightfully so, she has nothing to prove. It’s a very modern concept for a female superhero. Hopefully a lot of young women can relate to that.”<sup>23</sup>

Nominated for an Academy Award for her work on *Black Panther*, Ruth Carter drew inspiration for the fictitious kingdom of Wakanda from numerous African tribes. Regarding initial design inspirations, she recalls:

I looked at the Surma stick fighters and how the men draped cloth around their bodies, and I was inspired by that. I looked at the Tuareg people and how they used these beautiful purples and gold and silver. And I looked at the Maasai warriors and infused that red color into the costumes of the Dora Milaje, Black Panther’s elite female bodyguards.<sup>24</sup>

One result was a matched squad of armored woman warriors in bright red with brown leather boots, with gold and silver gauntlets, wrist guards, and neck rings. Speaking more generally Carter noted, “If you look at the Jabari tribe, they were influenced by the Dogon of Mali, if it was the Merchant tribe, they were influenced by the Turkana. It’s a collaboration...I wanted to look at this and say, those neck rings that the Ndebele women wear in South Africa would be great in our piece,” adding that “in the past, people have defined African art as simply primitive, without celebrating it for its innovation.”<sup>25</sup> In short, fantastical screen “worlds” remain relatable, at least in large part, due to deliberate grounding in real-world clothing, customs, and considerations.

### **Contrasting case studies: Superman and Catwoman**

Various iterations of Superman reflect reverence for the original, iconic costume. Indeed, while each artist/costume designer depicting Superman has put their own spin on the outfit, few have strayed far from the costume’s defining attributes. Almost every version has prioritized continuity<sup>26</sup> with



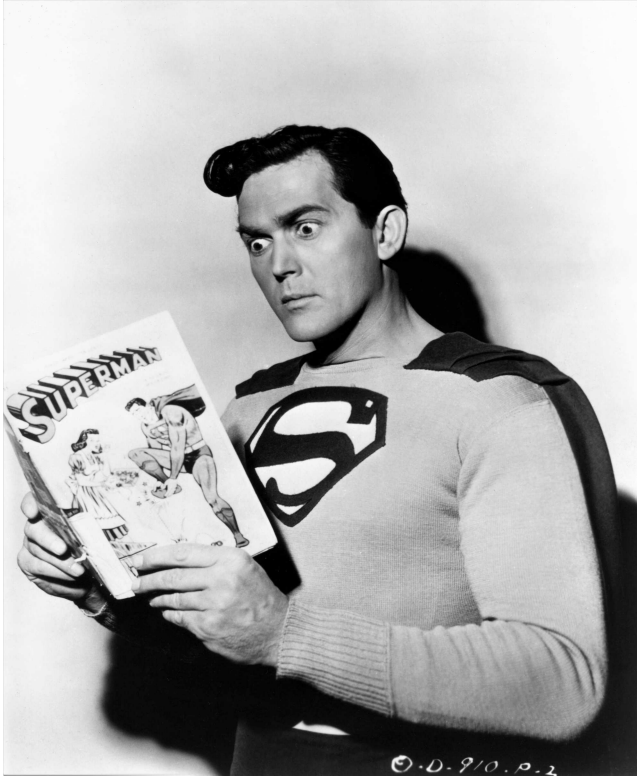


Figure 39.2 Kirk Alyn in costume during filming of 1948's *Superman*, which ran as a 15-chapter serial. This image illustrates how overall costume design remained closely based on the comic book illustration, but also the limits of the materials at the time. Copyright Alamy

innovations relegated to supporting accents, such as the tone of blue, fabric texture, cape volume, boot height and style, or even the amount of negative space in the S-shield. As several artists and designers have discovered, even the slightest misstep can anger fans.

Kirk Alyn, in the low-budget film serial *Superman* (1948), provided the first live-action adaptation, including a costume with a crooked S-shield (see Figure 39.2). *Adventures of Superman* (1951–58) with George Reeves had a famously cheap and padded costume, yet served as the standard until Christopher Reeve in the bigger budget movie *Superman* (1978). For many, Reeve's portrayal and the film's costume design remains the most iconic with no subsequent attempts improving upon this design, bolstering the costumes enduring iconography. Brandon Routh in *Superman Returns* (2005) proved highly divisive, with many fans abhorring the significantly decreased size of the S-shield and changed costume coloring. Similarly, the muted color scheme worn by Henry Cavill in *Man of Steel* (2013) had little support through his entire run portraying the character.

Contrasting the general stability of Superman's cross-media costuming, Catwoman's garb reflects an ebb and flow of trends resulting in numerous, even drastic, changes. When she debuted in 1940 as "The Cat," the character – a typical cat burglar – wore loose dresses (featuring green and purple) to blend in and case high-society events. By the end of her first run, a furry cat mask, cat ears, and a whip were incorporated. In the mid-1950s, Catwoman

disappeared in print due to violating industry standards for portraying women. She only re-appeared in comics (in 1966) due to the character's popularity on the *Batman* television series. On TV, Julie Newmar, Lee Merriweather, and then Eartha Kitt popularized Catwoman as a black-catsuit-wearing seductress. For many years afterward, Catwoman's in-print costume blended the purple from her early costume with tight catsuit of the live-action costume.

When Catwoman was adapted in *Batman Returns* (1992), portrayed by Michelle Pfeiffer, she was given a black leather-look bodysuit accented with white stitches. The broad popularity of the film's costume led to another redesign of Catwoman's in-print costume, introducing a zip-up protective black leather suit with large goggles. When a live-action depiction proves popular, it can have an enduring impact. Indeed, the leather-and-goggle redesign proved exceedingly popular, continuing to inspire both print and live-action designs (e.g. Anne Hathaway in *The Dark Knight Rises*, Camren Bicondova's teenage version in *Gotham*). Conversely, the nearly universally panned leather bikini of Halle Berry's *Catwoman* (2004) only reinforced fans' preferences and what future designers should avoid.

## Conclusion

Because it is real people who imagine superheroes, extant models for heroes, gender norms, materials, and clothing all influence comic books depictions. Within such contexts, however, in-print versions are only beholden to imagination whereas live action adaptations must contend with the limits of real bodies and physical properties. Interviews with costume designers reveal the challenges associated with fabricating superhero costuming that balances comic book aesthetics against film production demands. The very different histories of Superman and Catwoman adaptations – the former defined by continuity and adherences to one iconic tradition and the latter defined by radical change and multiple celebrated reconfigurations – illustrate how differences in print and screen versions cannot be reduced to translations between media alone, and the broader complexities of fashion and gender in superhero comics.

## Notes

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# SARTORIAL POLITICS FROM STREET TO SCREEN: FEMALE LEADERS IN INDIA AND BOLLYWOOD DESIGN

*Deepsikha Chatterjee*

In fourth grade, I remember visiting the former official residence of India's sole female prime minister, Indira Gandhi, in New Delhi, currently the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum. I was struck by a particular object on display: a faded saffron-colored sari with a narrow, black contrasting border, still exhibiting blood spatters from when Gandhi was assassinated, many years after the fact. In 1983, she was killed by her own guards while in office. In an attempt to quell a Sikh terrorist rebellion in Punjab, she authorized the army to enter the sacred Golden Temple (also known as Harmandir Sahib). Code-named "Operation Blue Star," this military action led to the deaths of civilians and pilgrims. Her guards retaliated against her, and her death unleashed a bloody riot against Sikhs in India. The separatist agenda, Gandhi's handling of it, and her assassination shook the country. The legacy of Indira Gandhi – a highly influential political figure, daughter of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru—has been called into question. At the same time, the medium of television has transformed this controversial figure into a popular-culture icon in India, memorialized and perpetuated through images/photographs.

While much has been written about the Gandhi family's political legacy, this study is interested in her sartorial legacy. Evinced in the everyday look created by Indira Gandhi, and later appropriated by women vying for political and civic power in India, this style has also translated into films eliciting a similar affect. As a woman who carved a place for herself on the traditional political stage – having benefitted from powerful familial connections and being closely associated with a continued legacy shaping Indian politics to this day through her daughters-in-law, Sonia Gandhi and Maneka Gandhi, and her grandchildren Priyanka, Rahul, and Varun, the Nehru-Gandhis – she succeeded in popularizing a political sartorial style that remains strongly paradigmatic and deeply impactful. I will discuss this style in director-producer Prakash Jha's scathing socio-political film *Raajneeti*, specifically focusing on the metamorphosis of the female protagonist, Indu, transformed from a rich, entitled young daughter to a young widowed heiress of a political empire.<sup>1</sup> Shadows of a Gandhian storyline and style emerge in this film, concretizing the character's political position (Figure 40.1).

Indira Gandhi's signature look consisted of handloom saris with simple coordinated blouses, short hair – including a carefully coiffed asymmetrical shock of grey hair – evoking a perfect



*Figure 40.1* Portrait of Indira Gandhi (1917–1984) who served as prime minister of India from 1966 to 1974 and 1980 until her assassination in 1984, New York, 1963. (Photo by Bachrach/Getty Images). In this image from 1963 taken in New York, Gandhi sits poised in a subtle brown printed sari, modest blouse, neatly done hair with the iconic grey streak, simple stud earrings, subtle matching lipstick and a bracelet/watch, all clothing elements pointing to Indian femininity rooted in tradition yet speaking to global modernity

mix of ethnic heritage and Western modernity in a post-colonial India. India was still trying to carve out a niche in the world's political arena of the 1970s and 1980s when she served as prime minister. Gandhi scholar Katherine Frank reminds us how her political and visual identity was in contradistinction to her personal life, “a rootless, chaotic existence, in which she never had a stable family life or owned a house of her own”.<sup>2</sup> Gandhi's life is mirrored in that of the character of Indu. Gandhi's adoption of khadi early in her life – a traditionally spun and woven textile popularized by Mahatma Gandhi – lent visual stability to her image.<sup>3</sup> Here, I engage with a broad and eclectic array of khadi fabrics: the original hand-spun, hand-woven cloth in natural colors; then the machine-spun hand-woven version; and finally, the completely machine-made product in vibrant hues used in films, mimicking the original artisanal textile. As material culture researcher Mukulika Banerjee has shown, saris – regardless of their type – hold

deeply personal and social meanings in India.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the strategy deployed here is to achieve an understanding of the feelings tied to khadi cloth, by discussing a variety of traditional clothes.

The image Gandhi projected was informed by her own background, as well as her commitment to the independence movement. Frank writes how in the Nehru family, “all British and foreign goods were shunned in favor of Indian products, especially home spun khadi cloth”.<sup>5</sup> When, during the Satyagraha movement, her father Jawaharlal and grandfather Motilal were imprisoned, the khadis of the Nehru women became emblematic of national dress.<sup>6</sup> Even though she went to school at St. Cecilia’s run by British women in India, she had to wear khadi outfits, making her feel as though she stood apart from the rest.<sup>7</sup> When the family moved to Geneva for a short spell, Jawaharlal Nehru enrolled Indira in L’École Internationale. Here she wore “starched Swiss dresses, knee socks and strapped patent leather shoes” but this style was promptly reversed when they returned back to India.<sup>8</sup> Frank narrates how in India, as a young teenager Indira led the youth segment of the Indian National Congress, and donned a Gandhi cap, a simple long-sleeved khadi jacket with a skirt, akin to the garb of her *swaraj*-minded (supporting self-government) comrades.<sup>9</sup> Clothing played an important role in her life, at times allowing her to fit in, while at other times, to dissent.

For Jawaharlal Nehru, clothing was crucial to portraying an image. In the study of khadi production and consumption, Lisa Trivedi writes how khadi cloth was used “to construct a common visual vocabulary” through “political dissent and [native leaders’] visions of community”.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, she delineates the heterogeneity among these sartorial approaches. “Western dress” introduced by the British symbolized “the Crown and promise of Western progress”.<sup>11</sup> Ruby Sircar builds on this by analyzing the roots of contemporary political clothing:

Gandhi tried to avoid the caste system by dictating the way he dressed, other politicians such as class-conservative Jawaharlal Nehru [...connected their clothing to] courtly India and bourgeois urban classes.<sup>12</sup>

Trivedi, through Emma Tarlo, reveals that the Nehrus initially dressed in a manner contrary to that advocated by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, both Motilal and Jawaharlal adopted khadi fabrics fashioned into garments approximating Western sartorial cuts, thereby creating a syncretic Indian style. This style is what Indira Gandhi took on, while introducing some feminine negotiations. When Indira was older, just having returned from a tour of South Africa in 1941, she was instructed to meet Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi had already been a major influence on the Nehrus by then. In his *ashram* Mahatma instructed her to “put on khadi and wash her face” after he saw her in her expensive silk and wearing lipstick.<sup>14</sup> Soon followed her marriage to Feroze Gandhi, and even at this wedding ceremony, the couple opted for khadi – Indira wore a pink-tinted khadi sari, woven with yards of yarn spun by Jawaharlal Nehru during his imprisonment prior to this celebratory event.<sup>15</sup> When Nehru passed away in 1964, she wore a white khadi sari for the funeral. In 1966, during her swearing-in ceremony as the first female prime minister of India and all of South Asia, she wore a white khadi sari with a Kashmiri shawl and a talisman necklace of brown beads.<sup>16</sup> The khadi aesthetic passed down to the next generation when Indira gave her future daughter-in-law, Maneka, a khadi sari worn by the latter on the day she wed Sanjay Gandhi.<sup>17</sup> The style of combining khadi fabrics with other modernizing elements pertaining to the cut of clothes, or the choice of accessories, cemented the fusion look in India, embraced by those seeking to appear rooted in tradition, while simultaneously being open to Western modernity (see Figures 40.1 and 40.2).

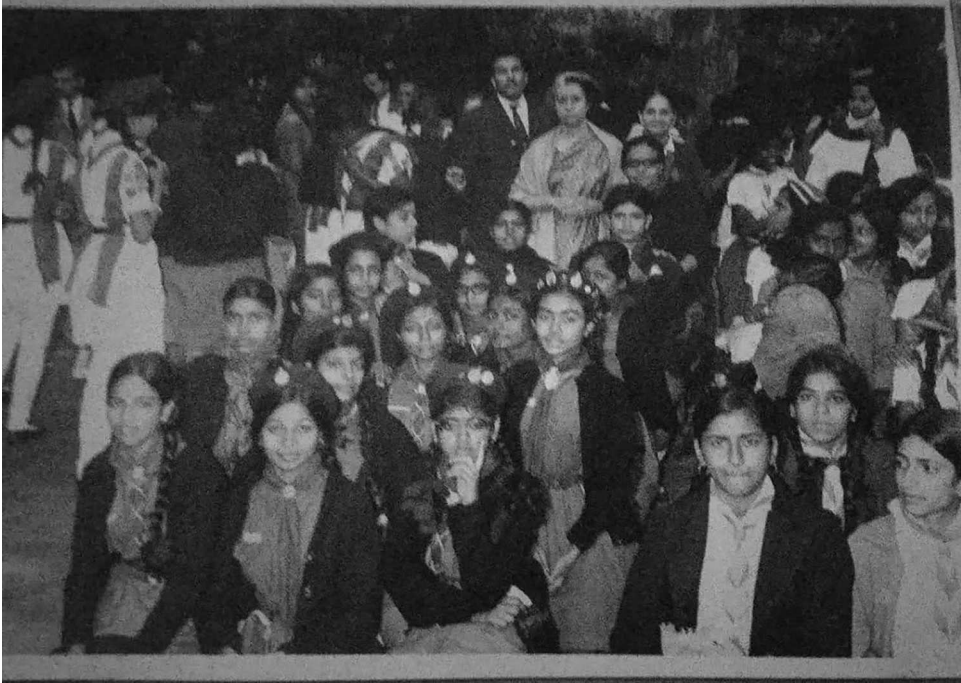


Figure 40.2 Toward the middle of the background, standing beside a man in a suit and tie, Indira Gandhi, wearing a sari and shawl, joins a group of Indian Girl Guides – recognizable by their international uniform – upon their return from an international camp in 1971. This group included the author’s mother. Photo from the author’s family collection

Many female politicians have used this style to project a nationally, regionally, and locally relevant vocabulary of tradition coupled with confidence, resilience, and a nurturing capacity.<sup>18</sup> Sushma Swaraj on the national stage for the BJP party, Sheila Dixit in New Delhi, Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, Jayalalithaa in South India, Vasundhara Raje Scindia in Rajasthan, Ambika Soni on the national stage, and others have maintained this style of saris – preferably subtle and traditional, with the right mix of modern elements such as glasses, wristwatches, modest matching blouses, restrained hair, and simple jewelry. Anupama Kapse writes about how such combinations played out in Indian film costumes from the 1960s, a time when India was socially and bureaucratically shaping its identity, and also when Indian films were shaping and molding the identities of Indian audiences.<sup>19</sup> Kapse suggests a “sari, often accompanied by props like a watch, umbrella, purse, or pen signified the new modern face of Indian femininity”.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, skillfully curated elements like hair, makeup, jewelry, and accessories, play a significant role in on-screen and off-screen character delineation. Kapse’s focus on white saris can be expanded to the simple khadi style handloom sari, often cream, tan, or beige with contrasting woven borders that can interchangeably stand for simplicity, power, economy, determination and/or subtlety. Gandhi wore these colors as a widow. As Kapse posits, unlike the plain white sari which, when perceived as a chiffon, can stand for sexuality, the khadi sari does not connote this state or quality. Tellingly, the coarse and crude attributes of khadi fabrics do not intersect with sexuality or sensuality. This effect is powerfully suggested by the saris worn by the Gandhi women – specifically, Indira, Sonia, and Maneka – read as widow attire, thus desexualized in the eyes of the public. As I shall determine through the case study of Indu

in *Raajneeti*, iconic styles established in everyday life are adaptable and repeatable on screen, in such a manner as to articulate a similar language. As Kapse reminds us, “clothes have served as a visual shorthand for class or moral stature of popular characters in Bombay cinema”.<sup>21</sup> The visual and material amalgam of a subtle sari and Western accessories proves crucial for Indian women navigating space within the context of a male-dominated, national, and popular culture.

Furthermore the influence of this style can be seen all over South Asia where many female leaders have reached the national political stage. In recent history, one could spot this influence in the case of Benazir Bhutto – prime minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990, and again from 1993 to 1996 – in her well-tailored salwar kameezes, well-groomed chignon hairstyles under her translucent but well-poised hijab headscarves. Similarly, Sheikh Hasina in her richly woven saris carefully draped over her head, and Khaleda Zia in saris, head coverings, and pearl earrings in Bangladesh, signal this mix of textile heritage and conservative values, evocative of a dual ability: keeping pace with men, as well as their global ambitions. Sri Lanka’s Chandrika Kumaratunga, in her woven silk and cotton saris, maroon lipstick, neat hairdo and prim earrings, has also held the reins of power in her country. Irrespective of the fate they faced politically – Bhutto was brutally assassinated during an election campaign in 2007 – they have projected, and continue projecting, a sartorial image of confidence, power, education, and strength blended with conventional feminine and maternal values.<sup>22</sup> Owing to its presence in the public memory, this particular brand of iconic imagery is easily adoptable in social and on-screen performances.

Katrina Kaif, a Bollywood star and glamour girl, was transformed for *Raajneeti*. Beyond merely supporting the leading man, the role of Indu attracted the spotlight. Unlike other films highlighting the female character’s sexuality, in *Raajneeti* Indu is slowly stripped away of hers, thus conveying a political position detached from her original femininity. By the time Kaif played the role of Indu in this film, she had starred in a slew of comedies and dramas. Her roles in these earlier films were rather limited in range, however; failing to provide the opportunity to portray a steely woman, manipulated by a political game, while simultaneously finding her footing.<sup>23</sup> In this particular film, costume changes turned out to be a useful narrative tool for achieving this goal.

When I watched this film in 2010, I was impressed by the similarity in sartorial styles between this character and Sonia Gandhi, the current President of the Indian National Congress Party. Even as Indu ends up leading a major political party, she is compelled to make many personal sacrifices to attain this position. These sacrifices and her ultimate rise to power are subtly signified via her costumes, as much as they are manifested through the storyline, dialogues, mise en scène, and the profusion of characters.

The costume designs for the film were created by Priyanka Mundada. In the past, I have documented how costume design in Bollywood represents a collective process wherein the designer plays an important role, while equally being supported by the main actors, dressmen, onset wardrobe managers, assistant directors, producers, directors, and so on.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, collective public memory has immense potential to shape character designs, as evidenced by the transformation of Indu. Interestingly, the film places a lot of narrative emphasis on the last remaining political figure, in this instance, a woman. This allows for a clear sartorial trajectory to be established through her character development.



### Political clothing in *Raajneeti*

*Raajneeti* (Politics) is a gritty drama, inspired by on-the-ground dirty political games in India, a theme often seen in Prakash Jha films. Indu is the daughter of a rich businessman who can fund political campaigns for any compliant political party. Through flashbacks, we learn Bharti, the matron of the central Pratap family, had had a relationship with the leftist leader Bhaskar Sanyal some decades back. As a result, she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby. A family friend, Brij Gopal, helped her get rid of the baby. Afterwards, it is revealed that this baby was rescued and grew up to be Sooraj, a rival grassroots politician. Bharti later marries Chandra Pratap. Chandra and his elder brother Bhanu lead their Rashtrawadi party together. Then Bhanu becomes ill, and on his deathbed grants Chandra control of this political organization. Chandra, in turn, allows his son, Prithviraj, to have a significant voice in the party. This upsets Bhanu's son Veerendra. Sooraj, now a popular local leader vies for attention and nomination on the party ticket but is spurned by Prithviraj. In a romantic subplot, Chandra's younger son, Samar, just back from the United States, cavorts with Indu. Indu misinterprets his flirtatious attentions as love. Meanwhile, the two spurned leaders Veerendra and Sooraj get close and try to destroy Chandra by establishing their own party. Sooraj kills Chandra in a fit of anger complicating relationships further. In another subplot, Prithviraj is falsely accused of raping a young party worker, a situation orchestrated by the miffed Veerendra. This accusation leads to growing tension between the cousins. The two brothers Samar and Prithviraj promise Veerendra that if the charges are dropped against Prithviraj, they will both step away from the political limelight. Instead, they set up their own party and try to garner public support. An interwoven subplot has Indu begrudgingly paired with Prithviraj by her father. Privately, he behaves as a respectful man, belying his public and political persona; eventually they get married. It is brought to light that Samar has an American girlfriend, Sarah. Upon visiting him in India, Sarah is astonished to discover that the man she believed to have been a thoughtful individual, has now become devious schemer. There are plenty of enemies at this point. Prithviraj, on his way to drop Sarah back at the airport, gets killed, along with Sarah. Indu is left to lead the party, with her brother-in-law, Samar, supporting her from the outside. After these many losses, Samar decides to finally renounce the blood-stained political world and return to the United States.

Katrina Kaif as Indu holds a crucial position in this film. At the beginning of the film, she is seen as a young woman interacting socially with the Prataps, especially Samar. She is costumed in dresses, her hair cascading down her back; in general, she is attired as to express a carefree attitude. In these early scenes, important male characters are seen competing for power. Their costumes signify their political roles: the leftist leader in khadi kurtas and unkempt hair, Samar – again having lived in the United States – sporting urban business looks contrasting with the people's leader Sooraj in kurtas with grassroots appeal. The film offers an ideal canvas on which political prototypes are depicted through dress.

Although the storyline alternates between flashbacks and contemporary scenes, there is little sartorial periodization. This typical Bollywood technique incorporates stereotypical clothes, in order to further emphasize rural-urban class divisions. Here the on-screen stereotyping parallels political street style, only allowing for minor temporal shifts through clothing. This is in fact a tactic employed by politicians who want to attract commoners. In India, older rural folks represent a large constituency, which unlike the younger urban classes, have neither the means nor the mentality to follow the trends. They wear durable clothes, often khadi saris or kurtas and pajamas. By espousing these rural sartorial styles, political leaders try to signal their unchanged constancy in order to win over this more traditional electorate. For example, in Figure 40.3, the older brother Prithviraj on far left wears a kurta and a scarf wrapped around his

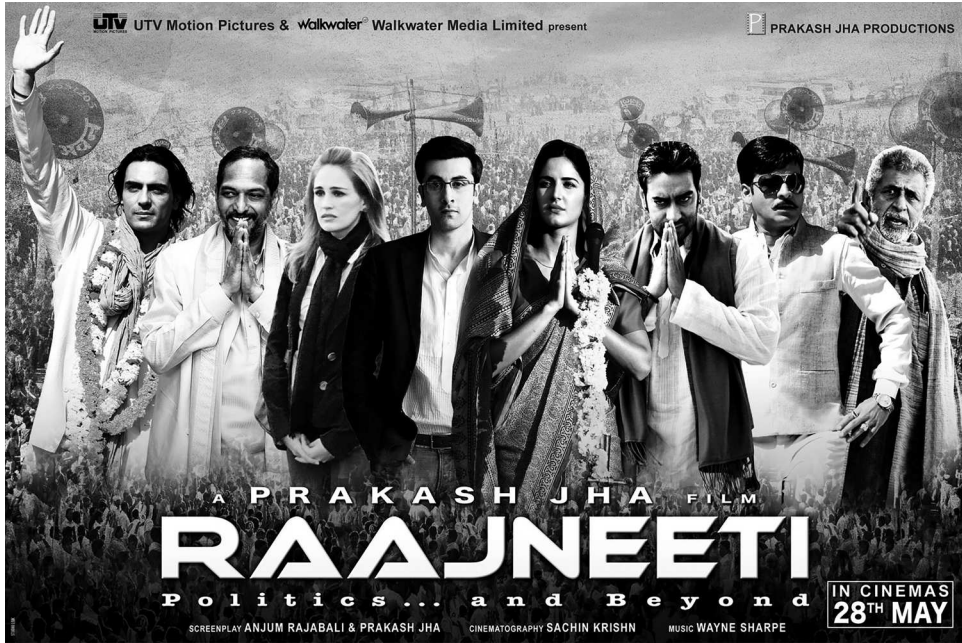


Figure 40.3 *Rajneeti* movie poster with characters (left to right) elder brother Prithviraj, family friend Brij Gopal, American girlfriend Sarah, younger brother Samar, Indu as a political leader, abandoned brother Sooraj, cousin Veerendra, and leftist leader Bhaskar Sanyal. Photo Courtesy: Prakash Jha films

neck. This style is as relevant in 2020, as it was when the film was released in 2010, while still having been common in the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, aforementioned real-life leaders such as Sonia and Maneka Gandhi, Sheila Dixit, and Mamata Banerjee rarely embraced trends. This practice suggests that, politically, it is wise to reject fickleness. This attitude toward dress is true of the style established by the Nehru–Gandhis, remaining valid even after many decades.

### Indu, Kaif, and other women

Indu’s role changes as the film progresses and her costumes chart this transformation. In an early scene, she is seen accompanying Samar; who feels a connection and tries to propose to her. They both go to a club to celebrate and let their hair down. Indu is seen wearing makeup, an accessorized short black dress, her hair is loose, she consumes alcohol, and enjoys herself at the club. This scene paints Indu as a possible partner for Samar, a U.S. resident. Indu’s look and demeanor in these scenes stand in stark contrast to her daytime appearance and demeanor, featuring her as being respectful to the elders of her adopted family, while wearing simple cotton clothing in tune with the image of a good Indian woman. Following a carefree phase in which she favored dresses and Western-style clothes, she moves on to kurtas, functioning as a midpoint compromise between the nonchalant woman and the soon-to-be-responsible one as she bids farewell to Samar, her first love. The transformation from youth to mature adult, from insouciant to judicious attitude, is later finalized when she is seen in a kurta, a long black scarf, a wristwatch, and a black *bindi* on her forehead. Prior to this, she was not seen with a *bindi*, a

convincing marker of “Indianness” and Hindu religion. In lieu of a red *bindi* – a marker for marital status – Indu chooses a black one symbolizing caution, determination, and compromise. Interestingly, Indira Gandhi was rarely seen in a *bindi*, having been widowed in 1960. Indu’s metamorphosis is solidified when she is seen in an orange and green embroidered salwar kameez as a young bride, and later in handloom saris as a political figure (Figure 40.4).

While space does not allow for a thorough analysis of the costumes of other female characters in the film, it is necessary to point out that other characters are dressed in political styles aligning with the storyline wherein conservative appearances indicate proximity to politics.

### Concluding thoughts

The few concluding scenes in *Raajneeti* feature Indu campaigning and getting elected; it is at this point that the Gandhian style and storyline intersect. After her widowhood, and her



Figure 40.4 Indu, as the successfully elected leader, wears a modest printed handloom style sari. Photo Courtesy: Prakash Jha Films

ensuing engagement with politics, Indu campaigns in a black and orange sari made of khadi cottonesque. In discussing white saris of the 1960s, Kapse asserts that this color

allows masculine desire to be staged upon it while emphasizing the virginal innocence and purity of a woman who is trapped within a tense and deeply contradictory relationship with her own desires and motivations.<sup>25</sup>

This affect plays out on Indu's body and clothes. Indu, in her slowly transforming wardrobe, has stood for steadfastness – as a daughter, a girlfriend, a daughter-in-law, a wife, and now as a leader. The bright contrasting colors worn by Indu in the middle of the movie, which represented this character's marital status, are later replaced by ample black attire repositioning her as a capable leader. In the film's closing scene, Kaif dons a *bagri*-print maroon sari with an understated greyish-red border and paisley motifs, the end piece demurely draped over her head, as she clutches a felicitous garland gifted to her by devoted supporters. It is very similar to an image of Indira Gandhi.<sup>26</sup> Indu here convincingly steps into her role as a political matron. Shorn of the *bindi* and *sindoor* – marks of feminine youthfulness and marital status – she appears desexualized and dedicated to her fellow citizens rather than to her personal needs. Elevated on a pedestal, Indu epitomizes a real politician; this *mise en scène* showcases the lofty culmination of a hard-fought battle. Her face is emotionless. It is precisely in these final images that she most closely resembles the Nehru-Gandhi icons of feminine power – relatable and engaged, nurturing yet firm, converted into the traditional role model capable of ensuring a supportive following, despite past controversies. Although this film is ostensibly meant to showcase the complex inner workings of political parties in India, it also succeeds in consolidating a popular sartorial paradigm constructed and cultivated by South Asian female leaders and politicians.

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## PART VII

# Branding, media, and television

In the contemporary communications ecosystem, television and new forms of media are important vehicles for the communication and mass dissemination of fashion images and discourses. Trend forecasters, influencers, bloggers, vloggers, and many others inhabit the social media landscape changing the way fashion reaches a variety of consumer segments and the public at large. Fashion makes new connections to audiences through commercials, TV series, and through a variety of digital media.

Marta Torregrosa Puig, Javier Serrano-Puche, and Cristina Sánchez-Blanco discuss mediatization as the integration of media into society and its role as an influential force. They consider mediatization's potential for explaining transformations in the fashion industry. They explore the influence of the acceleration of time, as well as the study of digital logic for production, distribution and use of media content, and show its effect on individual and institutional practices relating to fashion.

Jana Melkumova-Reynolds looks at how the British accessories label Sophia Hulme achieved "consecration" through unusual means. Selfridge's accessories buying team rejected Hulme when her line was formally presented to them but it captivated the attention of the accessories buyer when spotted on a stylish woman walking along the Via Montenapoleone in Milan. Melkumova-Reynolds traces this journey to "it bag" while exploring notions of spatialized aesthetic knowledge, mediation, and consecration.

Marco Pedroni considers the role of professional trend forecasters who can be considered tastemakers. He investigates the controversial relationship between fashion and art in the light of research practices of fashion creators. It is shown how the practice of "trend research," born as fashion forecasting in the 1960/1970s and evolving in the 1990s into the generally applied practice of coolhunting, "industrializes" inspiration, systematizing contexts and detection methods, moving it away from the idea of a supernatural intervention fertilizing human ingenuity. Trend research is analyzed as a relevant issue for fashion studies not only as a professional practice and methodology for the production of innovation, but above all from a cultural point of view, as a meeting ground between fashion and art.

Romana Andò points to how the new media ecosystem has revolutionized the experience of fashion consumption. On the one hand, fashion brands are gaining an increasing visibility in media content, becoming more and more prominent in media storytelling and digitally spreadable thanks to audience engagement; on the other hand, fashion consumers turn

themselves into media audiences (and vice versa) who take advantage of a permanently accessible media system where they can appropriate brands and fashion related items, both symbolically and materially. She explores the overlap between *audienicing* and fashion consumption: Consumers experience media content as multiple touchpoints with the brand, being instantly gratified by accessing a wide range of information, made available by official brands, media coverage, and social media. Fashion consumption takes place predominantly within the media sphere, progressively combining with audienicing practices.

Fashion has long enjoyed a close relationship with mass media. The current media situation concerns mainly a change of boundaries in textual matters which is above all evident when narratives are related to the contemporary moment.

Antonella Mascio considers fashion discourse as it appears in TV series, considering its narrative structure and its ability to reach new consumers introduced to high fashion and underground brands that they would otherwise not be exposed to. She also considers how television influences other forms of media and its influence on influencers. In a contemporary communication environment, fashion style shows new possibilities in digital media both for the connections with audiences (from typical mass media relationships—i.e. one to many—to social networks relationships), and for the use of media formats (from commercials and fashion films, to websites, memes, and gifs). In this new context, Mascio suggests that dressing issues are no longer only related to clothing: fashion is increasingly included inside stories, sometimes as the main subject of narration.

Arturo Arriagada places fashion bloggers, Instagrammers, YouTubers, and beauty vloggers under the term “influencers” – micro-celebrities who accumulate followers on social media and promote themselves and the brands and products that hire them. Influencers qua micro-celebrities manage and commodify their images, personas, and content in order to construct affective relationships with their audiences. They do this in the form of “glamour labor” i.e., constant online self-promotion and self-fashioning mediated through affect and the body. In spite of their growing presence, little attention has been paid to the cultural and technical knowledge influencers develop to create meaningful content around brands and products. Drawing on 35 interviews with Chilean social media influencers in the field of fashion, and visual and textual analysis of a sample of 90 Instagram stories, this chapter analyzes how influencers’ calculations – economic and cultural – commodify their knowledge to support brands and themselves. This analysis reflects on how influencers experience the commercialization of their knowledge through digital platforms in the social media economy.

# MEDIATIZATION OF FASHION: AN APPROACH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIGITAL MEDIA LOGIC

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Cristina Sánchez-Blanco*

## **Introduction**

The study of mediatization has become one of the most productive fields of academic research in communication, especially in the last decade.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, authors such as Hepp, Hjarvard, and Lundby state that “the emergence of the concept of mediatization is part of a paradigmatic shift within media and communication research.”<sup>2</sup>

As a new paradigm in construction, the meaning of the term “mediatization” is still the subject of debate<sup>3</sup> and has given rise to two traditions in particular: the institutionalist tradition and the social-constructivist tradition.<sup>4</sup> According to the institutionalist tradition, the media constitute a social institution with its own set of rules. Mediatization alludes to the fact that different social fields must adapt to those rules. The social-constructivist tradition highlights the growing role of the media as part of the process of the construction of social and cultural reality through communication. Although both traditions have different trajectories, they are not mutually exclusive, and constitute the identity of research on mediatization.<sup>5</sup>

In general, the concept of mediatization refers to the interdependence between changes in the media and social change. Mediatization deals with how “media have become integrated into the fabric of culture and society and thereby condition and influence social practices, at the same time as media are influenced by the particularities of the contexts within which they are embedded.”<sup>6</sup> In this process of mutual influences, the role of the media has transformed to the point where social institutions are subject to media logic.<sup>7</sup> The dependence of institutions and spheres of social life on media logic means that the rules and resources of the media become operational characteristics of institutional and everyday practices. As a result of this convergence, mediatization has considerable potential for exploring changes in specific industries and institutions of contemporary culture.<sup>8</sup>

Fashion studies include many contributions that focus on explaining the role of the mass media in disseminating fashion content. As noted by Skjulstad as a consequence of the increasing importance of media to fashion as part of the digital turn, fashion studies is “increasingly paying attention to new forms, formats and platforms for mediation of fashion,”<sup>9</sup> such as



online fashion films,<sup>10</sup> to fashion mediation in new media,<sup>11</sup> in digital platforms such as Instagram,<sup>12</sup> and to fashion blogs.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the mediatization paradigm is still a framework in fashion that is relatively unexplored by the academic community. Research that expressly uses this framework has mainly focused on the changes wrought by digital media.<sup>14</sup>

Taking the three levels of mediatization summarized by D'aloia, Baronian, and Pedroni as our starting point, we set out a scenario of the potential of the concept of mediatization for researching transformations in fashion.<sup>15</sup> The first level of mediatization affects social agents in their role as fashion consumers. On this level, research examines the impact of fashion on personal identity. Although this is a classic topic of sociological fashion research, the question now is to what extent the digital ecosystem has altered this influence, taking into account the fact that, in terms of technology, users have access to multiple content in an uninterrupted time flow, at an increasing pace and in a scenario marked by hyperconnectivity between people.

The second level of mediatization affects where the display of fashion takes place (magazines, fashion runways, events, stores, etc.). On this level, mediatization answers three interdependent questions. Firstly, those relating to the technological evolution of media for producing and distributing content. Secondly, those relating to the new genres, formats and languages that these media create. And finally, this second level is where we find research linked to the role of fashion communication as a strategic element (not just a tool for dissemination) in the definition of brand identity in relation to the consumer. Mediatization on this level articulates both the focus on new options for producing and distributing content (the efficacy of the communications processes) and the cultural and structural significance that these options acquire (communication's ability to create a community).

The third level of mediatization refers to transformations of the fashion industry as a social institution. Digitalization has changed the way we experience time and space by influencing users' perception and changing the way that brands act. The industry's ability to control, create, use, and work with media logic has consequences for business models and industry ground rules. On this third level, each process in the value chain can be studied to observe the relationships of dependency between the omnipresence of digital media, the ways in which institutions are organized and managed, the speed of the market, and consumers' pace of life. While the three levels of impact can be researched independently, it is their interdependence that makes the mediatization paradigm so fertile.

### **Digital media logic and fashion**

As mentioned, talking about mediatization is, in some ways, talking about the necessary adaptation of different forms of institutional logic to "media logic." Logic is understood here to mean the specific rules that govern a domain or institutional context. In the case of "media logic," this extends to the phases of production, distribution and use of media content; and is conditioned by (1) ideals, (2) commercial imperatives, and (3) technology.<sup>16</sup> These three aspects, which manifest in each of the phases of production, distribution and use, do not occur to the same extent in each medium. It is necessary to understand the differences between "mass media logic" and "digital media logic," which is linked to the social and personal network elements of online environments.<sup>17</sup>

"Mass media logic" is based on professional routines that set the guidelines for drafting and publishing content and for how this content is received by the audience. "Digital media logic," on the other hand, is based on phenomena such as user-generated content, virality, social connectivity, and "datafication." Both of these forms of logic currently coexist, which has given

rise to a “hybrid media system” in which the dynamics of social media have forced traditional media to adapt to the new communication scenario.<sup>18</sup>

In this new media ecosystem, it is helpful to examine how media logic (and, specifically, digital media logic) affects fashion, as a reflection of the process of mediatization in which the industry is immersed. To this end, we present some of the types of logic that govern the production, distribution and use of media content by describing their specific impact on fashion. First, we will study the influence of temporal acceleration on individual and institutional practices linked to fashion, as a distinctive factor of our times that strengthens these forms of logic.

### **Living in a high-speed society**

In the words of Scheuerman: “any attempt to make sense of the human condition at the start of the new century must begin with the analysis of the social experience of speed.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, temporal acceleration or the speeding up of time is a process that largely explains how economics, politics, social relations, and our perception of our environment work today.<sup>20</sup> As stated by Harmut Rosa, it manifests on several levels. The first and most readily quantifiable level is technological acceleration, which involves reducing transport and communication times (a process of which digital media are the greatest exponent). Another level is the acceleration of social change, which is reflected in the culture and instability of social institutions, to which fashion is not immune. The third process is the acceleration of the pace of life, as, paradoxically, technological acceleration has not led to an improvement in the quality of the pace of life or increased free time (hence initiatives that call for slowing down and aspiring to live a slow life).<sup>21</sup>

With this acceleration, fast fashion is becoming more prominent and the fashion cycle has been shortened. A model based on speed to incorporate consumer preferences, combined with a culture of acceleration, has consequences for consumer and brand practices. The feedback between the speed of changes in taste and the speed with which novelties appear in stores creates a climate of opportunity that consists of making customers understand that if they like a certain model, they should purchase it immediately.<sup>22</sup> In fact, retailers strategically limit the supply of products with a very short renewal cycle and limited distribution, also known as the “scarcity effect.”<sup>23</sup> This situation also explains compulsive purchases, a dynamic that also favors the ease with which products can be returned, and hoarding, either in physical stores due to the fear of losing items to other customers, or through Internet browsing.<sup>24</sup>

The speed with which products are produced and sold gives rise to what are known as living collections: new products that continuously appear and blur the borders between spring-summer and autumn-winter collections. This context explains the “last week” section of online stores, which show new products. The acceleration of time also affects the consumption rhythms previously set by sales. Mid-season sales and special discount days, such as Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Single’s Day, are increasingly common and accelerate the pace of purchase and opportunity.

*The Business of Fashion* has highlighted the “now or never” trend as one of the 10 drivers of the fashion industry in 2019 in its report *The State of Fashion 2019*.<sup>25</sup> This trend explains the emergence of immediate fashion that has resulted in the “see now, buy now” process, the sell-in process and delivery of products purchased online to the customer’s home within a few hours. Although the industry is still analyzing whether this system is worth the high production costs due to the demand caused by changes in the calendar and to doubts about the impact on brand creativity, it is clear that B2C fashion shows, social media photo-sharing apps and

e-commerce have already moved consumer preferences toward immediate gratification and growing expectation of novelties. Hence, as mentioned in *The State of Fashion 2019*, the fashion industry is increasingly working to exploit intensive mobile device use to “integrate commerce functionality into social media, enabling direct-to-product journeys, improving mobile conversion rates, optimizing the user experience and streamlining the check-out process.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Digital production logic: attention economy**

Together with temporal acceleration, another distinctive element of our times is the excess of available information, boosted by the ability of technology to send more information in less time. Digital media logic, in which each user can now be both a producer and consumer of content, leads to the multiplication of agents emitting to potential receivers. However, given that people’s attention is a scarce resource, the time we are able to spend on each piece of information we receive is also getting shorter.

All of this means that the production logic in digital media is governed by what is called the “attention economy,”<sup>27</sup> in which content producers (and, in general, anyone who wants to communicate something) compete to grab people’s attention in an attempt to occupy their available time. This has led to the emergence of a “marketplace of attention,” marked by the question, “*How do media find an audience when there is an endless supply of content but a limited supply of public attention?*”<sup>28</sup> It is therefore a phenomenon with economic implications and implications for business models,<sup>29</sup> both for companies in different industries and the platforms that operate in the digital space and whose design, as we shall see when we discuss distribution logic, is also designed to compete in this battle for attention.<sup>30</sup>

In this context of information overload and shorter attention spans, most of the content consumed by users reaches us via emotional appeals.<sup>31</sup> Memes (contagious images, videos, and ideas that circulate virally over the Internet, as studied by Skjulstad in *Vetements*) are acquiring increasing importance in the media diet, and brands have also incorporated “central ingredients of contemporary Internet culture into the core of their design practice, and applied these strategically. Their design and communication practices are pervaded by Internet meme logic, heavily bringing on participation culture.”<sup>32</sup>

Fashion in the digital environment requires adapting to a language and grammar that are in line with the technological options and the characteristics of its media consumption. Consumption via screens has made the spectacular a must for brands, conditioning decisions regarding design and production of content, the products shown and the spaces in which they are shown. This is the case of fashion films<sup>33</sup> and fashion shows.<sup>34</sup> In fashion shows, media-tization emphasizes the very nature of the event. The progressive dramatization of fashion shows is part of the strategy for generating memorable and stand-out content in the digital environment, where attention is a scarce resource. The aim is to achieve a total sensory experience in which staging is characterized by music and lighting and is filmed by strategically placed cameras that capture different angles (from close-ups to panoramic shots), thereby obtaining an overall view of what is happening and an experience of immersion in the brand universe. All this turns the online broadcast of the fashion show into a popular cultural expression that gives meaning to the collection and feeds the brand’s aesthetic universe.

### **Digital distribution logic: affordances and digital architecture of platforms**

The structural design of a space conditions the options for interaction and behavior within that space. For this reason, it is important to examine the mechanisms that underlie the functioning

of each environment and condition the relationship between structures and agencies by either constraining or permitting activity in the space. This is what the concept of “affordances” refers to, understood in the general sense as “possibilities for action.”<sup>35</sup> With regard to digital media, the concept of affordances refers to “what platforms are *actually capable of doing* and *perceptions of what they enable*, along with the *actual practices that emerge as people interact with them*.”<sup>36</sup>

More specifically, the affordances of social media are shaped by their digital architecture, i.e., “the technical protocols that enable, constrain, and shape user behavior in a virtual space.”<sup>37</sup> The digital architecture of each social media platform is formed around four aspects: network structure, functionality, algorithmic filtering, and datafication. The interrelationship between these factors shapes the communicative potential of each social media platform. Thus, broadly speaking, Twitter is more suitable for disseminating news content, whereas Facebook is more oriented toward the creation of user communities. YouTube and Instagram are associated with the dissemination of photographic and audiovisual content, either for entertainment (especially in the case of the video-sharing website) and as content on users’ day-to-day lives or brand advertising. These last two platforms have become essential for communicating fashion brands. Indeed, by prioritizing aesthetic aspects, the audiovisual language of fashion content has made Instagram the biggest social network in the industry.<sup>38</sup>

In connection with this notion of digital architecture, Voorveld et al. studied user engagement on eight different social media platforms and concluded that “engagement is highly context specific; it comprises various types of experiences on each social media platform such that each is experienced in a unique way (...) which in turn affect advertising evaluations.”<sup>39</sup> Specifically, for fashion brands, Instagram is understood within the business model as “an opportunity to improve customer relationships and to ultimately capture a larger audience.”<sup>40</sup>

Within this experience, Instagram Live stands out as a characteristic of live video streaming linked to the functionality of the platform and, once again, to the idea of speed. It also provides a further functionality as a purchasing platform, a clear example of social commerce. As Bianchi et al. explain, “s-commerce reflects both the social nature of social media and the integration of e-commerce opportunities.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Digital use logic: social connectivity**

According to Casero-Ripollés, three filter modalities coexist in this hybrid media system that condition content dissemination. First, in line with traditional media logic, there is the editorial gatekeeping function carried out by journalists and media professionals. Second, as mentioned when discussing the digital architecture of platforms, there is also a technical filter, linked to the algorithms that determine the information made visible to users. Finally, there is also a social filter associated with the connectivity provided by digital media. As a result, the network of contacts and friends partially determines the information we receive through digital platforms.<sup>42</sup>

Socialization of media consumption is thus reflected in the appearance of new intermediaries in the digital environment who act as advisors for other users they have influence over, both in the processes of acquiring information and in their purchasing and lifestyle decisions.<sup>43</sup> The importance of influencers is particularly clear in the fashion industry,<sup>44</sup> as they provide a source of advice, guarantee, and support. Individuals need to know that they are succeeding when they use (and share) fashion content because the aim, especially in this field, is to achieve social acceptance. They try to keep up to date with all changing trends through their trusted sources of information.<sup>45</sup>

Digital use logic and the emotional culture of fashion (aspirational desire, desire for approval, and the surprise of novelty) feed each other to create a daily environment for users that

influences the definition of identity and lifestyle. The aesthetic keys of representation become naturally integrated into users' day-to-day practices, affecting their taste, expectations and understanding of themselves. Thus, fashion affects identity not only by wearing it but also by seeing it and dreaming of it. Added to the influence of the pleasure of the material possession of fashion is the pleasure of the virtual possession of content, which, when visited, shared and saved, also generates an imagined identity that ends up affecting the real identity. Examples of this are the emotion of adding pins to Pinterest boards and the website's wish-list and favorites options.<sup>46</sup>

This digital use logic has made social media a valuable window into worlds that inspire. Discovering, exploring and sharing them is an emotionally gratifying experience. In an analogy with the classic *flâneur*,<sup>47</sup> users stroll through the digital universe, letting their imagination integrate with each of the worlds and stories the audiovisual content provides. This virtual stroll, in which each user is the protagonist, does not end with private desire; this desire is made public. It is shared with the rest of the social audience in an exercise of self-expression, of strong emotional content and tone. The brands of the luxury industry understand this very well when they provide universes through their websites and social platforms that invite us to dream while awake, often not involving purchases, but obtaining a response from users that gives them notoriety and presence in an environment with an overabundance of content.

### Fashion in (speedy) times of mediatization: a conclusion

This transformation of the fashion industry is being driven by the adaptation of digital logic to processes of production, distribution and use of content, and by the context of temporal acceleration that, beyond the merely technological level, is also evident in the personal experience of users and the institutional experience of brands. Mediatization has become a framework for the effective interpretation of this transformation for several reasons. First, because it not only explains the new possibilities the digital media has for disseminating fashion content, but essentially because it explores how fashion is being redefined by the presence and action of these media. And second, because research on the redefinition of this institution (made of everything from the users to the brand and its business) is being carried out while taking into account the growing role of the digital ecosystem in the construction of the social sphere; a sphere in which fashion has a relevant role in the creation of lifestyles.

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# FROM BAG TO “IT BAG”: A CASE STUDY OF CONSECRATION IN THE FIELD OF FASHION

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## Introduction

“Selfridges’ new accessory star Sophie Hulme was snapped up after a chance meeting during Milan Fashion Week. [...] ‘I first found the brand after chasing [someone] who was wearing one of Sophie’s bags down Via Montenapoleone in Milan,’ the store’s accessories buyer, Lydia King, told us.”<sup>1</sup> This is how British *Vogue* describes the acquisition by the renowned department store of the up-and-coming British accessories label in 2011, painting a romantic image of a discovery and an ensuing chase. While highlighting the importance of place (Milan’s fashionable street) and foregrounding the work of two cultural intermediaries – the perceptive buyer and the savvy consumer – in the transmission of fashion knowledge, this portrayal does not mention another mediator: the brand’s commercial agent; I was that agent.

In 2011, I was working for the Paris-based agency N°10\_Showroom that represented a dozen up-and-coming apparel labels. By the time of the aforementioned Milan encounter, Hulme had been our client for three seasons, and I had been in conversation with Selfridges about her collection for just as long. I had shown her designs to the store’s buying team during their visits to our showroom, sent them multiple emails with images from her lookbooks and press clippings, and had several phone conversations with assistant buyers. However, my efforts proved futile; it took a customer in Milan to convince the buyer that Hulme’s collections were worthy of her attention and budget. What followed Selfridges’ acquisition was a steady growth of interest in Sophie Hulme from other stores; a change in the label’s pricing policy that resulted in a heftier price tag on her items; Hulme’s rise to the status of an iconic British designer and a symbol of the nation’s creativity – in 2015, Samantha Cameron, then the spouse of Britain’s prime minister, presented one of Hulme’s bags to China’s First Lady Peng Liyuan during the latter’s official visit to Britain with her husband;<sup>2</sup> and a rise of my own professional profile as an agent. Remarkably, the design and materiality of Hulme’s bags remained the same; their “transubstantiation”<sup>3</sup> occurred on other, symbolic levels.

This chapter considers the success story of the Sophie Hulme brand invoking Bourdieu’s<sup>4</sup> concept of cultural intermediaries. Furthermore, it discusses the ideas of geographic spaces as actants in fashion mediation, using the conceptual framework of actor-network theory (ANT).<sup>5</sup> It draws on my ongoing ethnographic and auto-ethnographic research into the work of fashion agents that includes observation, self-observation, and interviews with fashion professionals in

London and Paris. My approach is indebted to Entwistle’s<sup>6</sup> work that paved the way for analyzing fashion by combining the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu<sup>7</sup> and Latour,<sup>8</sup> and informed by my years of employment as an agent in the fashion industry before moving into academia.

### Intermediaries and mediations: between Bourdieu and Latour

Pierre Bourdieu’s work on taste and cultural production,<sup>9</sup> unpicked the mechanisms of taste-making, arguing that taste was socially constructed and shaped by “cultural intermediaries,” a professional circle that endows certain cultural goods and practices – from food to fashion objects – with symbolic value, “legitimizing” and “consecrating” them. Such intermediaries, as per Bourdieu, include “all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth).”<sup>10</sup> Intermediaries operate within what he calls a “field”: a “structured space of positions,”<sup>11</sup> that is, a social structure where meanings and values emerge as a result of relations between multiple agents occupying various standpoints. In their work, intermediaries deploy and grow their cultural capital,<sup>12</sup> which includes “a mastery of the signs and emblems of distinction,”<sup>13</sup> as well as social capital, “the aggregate of ... resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of relationships ... which provides each of its members with ... a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit.”<sup>14</sup> Their accumulated cultural and social capital, which they put forward as “security”<sup>15</sup> to guarantee the legitimacy of the cultural products and practices they seek to “consecrate,” provides a context that allows them to endow these products with particular symbolic meanings.

Over the last two decades, Bourdieu’s concepts of the field and intermediaries have been increasingly applied to the study of fashion.<sup>16</sup> Research on fashion intermediaries has included studies of retail buyers,<sup>17</sup> fashion models,<sup>18</sup> coolhunters,<sup>19</sup> bloggers,<sup>20</sup> influencers,<sup>21</sup> and other agents. More recent investigations, however, call for a reconceptualization of the intermediary. Thus, Sommerlund<sup>22</sup> stresses the importance of considering aesthetic objects and spaces, such as trade shows, showrooms and lookbooks, as mediators within fashion. Similarly, Entwistle<sup>23</sup> suggests that “there is more to be gained from considering *all* the objects assembled in a fashion actor-network than would be in conventional research focused only on the distinctly ‘social’ or ‘cultural’ actors,” inviting researchers to employ actor-network theory when considering meaning-making and the production of value within the fashion system.

ANT posits that any social phenomenon emerges as a result of “associations,” entanglements, and relations between both human and non-human actors. Within this framework, the idea of action is not limited only to what “‘intentional,’ ‘meaningful’ humans do”—instead, “any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, agency does not reside solely with the human being; non-humans may exert it, too. Latour notes: “In addition to ‘determining’ and serving as a ‘backdrop for human action,’ *things* might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on.”<sup>25</sup> In the case of fashion, this critical lens encourages one to consider a variety of participants in mediations, radically extending the idea of the “intermediary” to include non-human actants.

Latour, unlike Bourdieu, distinguishes between the terms “intermediaries” and “mediators”: the former, to him, are “what transports meaning or force without transformation” and have a somewhat lesser influence, whereas the latter “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry,”<sup>26</sup> thus exerting greater force. If this essay was following a strictly ANT framework, it would be more accurate to utilize the term

“mediator” in relation to the fashion actors such as agent, buyer, store space, and so on (as does Sommerlund in her 2008 article), as the mediations they carry out inevitably modify the meanings of the brands, styles, and trends they deal with. Nonetheless, since this chapter also follows in the traditions of scholarship on cultural intermediaries,<sup>27</sup> it is appropriate to use the language of that scholarship, including its key term. Therefore, in the following sections, “mediator” and “intermediary” have been used interchangeably to signify the same thing: a human or non-human actor involved in investing fashion products with symbolic value. As more scholarship on cultural industries emerges that combines Latourian and Bourdieusian lenses, these terms will likely need to be reconsidered, and possibly replaced with a new common denominator.

### **The figure of the fashion agent and the curious case of Sophie Hulme**

However pivotal to the running of fashion businesses, fashion agents have hitherto remained largely unnoticed by dress scholars: according to Entwistle,<sup>28</sup> their work “tends to remain... invisible.” This chapter is a step towards closing this gap in fashion studies. The role of the fashion agent is akin to that of a literary agent: mediating between the creative talent (in fashion’s case, the brand) and the market player (the store). Some agents work independently as freelance consultants, others are employed by, or run their own agencies, often dubbed “showrooms.” The agent presents the designer’s latest collection to retail buyers in trade shows or showrooms during seasonal fashion weeks, or by appointment in buyers’ offices; brokers the deal with the buyer, negotiating the conditions of sale, the brand’s position on the shop floor or in the online store; and oversees the dealings between the brand and the retailer. Moreover, the agent coaches the designer, advising how to tweak the offer and price point in order to make their collections more sellable. The agent, then, is an interface between fashion’s facets as “art” and “commerce.”<sup>29</sup> The above summarizes my responsibilities as Hulme’s agent; I will now move on to discussing my – remarkably limited – role in her rise to fame.

Sophie Hulme had been making the same tote bag design every season since her very first collection in 2008. When my agency took her on in 2009, many retailers were already aware of her work, but only a handful of independent boutiques had committed to buying it. By late 2012, the same design was selling in some of the world’s most high-end stores, including Net-a-Porter, Lane Crawford, and Harvey Nichols, alongside established luxury labels, at a price point that was 20% higher than the original 2009 tag. Consequently, although the materiality of the bag remained the same over time, its value had changed dramatically. Bourdieu<sup>30</sup> coins such shifts as “symbolic transubstantiation” involving “imposition of value” through “ontological promotion,” rather than material transformation.<sup>31</sup>

A few relevant changes occurred between 2009 and 2012. Firstly, Hulme got noticed by a Paris-based agency (that I worked for) and started presenting her collections at Paris Fashion Week, in the fashionable Marais district, thus establishing her credentials as a “hot” international brand. During her first two seasons with us, buyers from several major stores (including Selfridges, but excluding the retailer’s accessories team) visited the showroom and examined the collection, but none of them placed an order on her merchandise. Notwithstanding, the brand’s presence in smaller stores was slowly growing, so the agency remained positive about its potential.

The first major breakthrough happened in the third season, in early 2011, when a buyer from Selfridges – who must have seen the lookbooks we sent her, but still decided not to visit the showroom with the rest of the team – allegedly<sup>32</sup> spotted a glamorous woman with an interesting bag walking down Via Montenapoleone, a hub for luxury fashion stores, during

Milan Fashion Week. She chased the woman down the street and asked her where her bag was from; the woman turned out to be British, the bag by Sophie Hulme, and the buyer immediately got in touch with the designer who then pointed her towards our showroom. She then made an appointment with us in Paris and placed a significant order.

Months of negotiations between my agency and Selfridges ensued whereby the showroom was trying to secure a prominent position for the collection in the retail space. We succeeded: Hulme’s collection ended up in a highly visible location on the store’s ground floor, next to the bags by the high-end French label Céline, which at that point was seen as the “hottest” accessory label with fashion connoisseurs. The collection was unveiled just before the start of London Fashion Week. That season was the turning point in the label’s success: dozens of key international and domestic buyers alike visited Selfridges during their trip to London for this fashion week event, and spotted Hulme’s designs there next to Céline bags, which sparked their interest; they then stopped by Hulme’s stand at London Fashion Week and examined her latest collection; after London Fashion Week, they traveled to Paris and finally placed purchase orders in our showroom. Thereupon, the number of stockists for Sophie Hulme worldwide grew from 22 to 49, and the sales figures almost tripled. Nowadays, Hulme’s Tote is sold in over 400 stores worldwide,<sup>33</sup> including the most prestigious department stores, concept boutiques and e-tailers.

### The disavowal of the economy in the field of fashion

As an agent, I was clearly unable to “consecrate” Hulme’s designs without help from other – unknowing – mediators. My efforts did the job to a certain extent – the buyers learned the new name, and many put it into their “labels to watch” lists – yet it took a “consecration” from a woman in the streets of Milan to persuade them to place an order.

Why was this woman’s endorsement more valid than everything I had done? Bourdieu’s concept of “disinterestedness”<sup>34</sup> and its importance in the field of cultural production that “demands the repression of direct manifestations of personal interest, at least in its overtly ‘economic’ form”<sup>35</sup> comes to mind. The shopper in Via Montenapoleone had no personal, economic, or professional interest in promoting the bag and therefore appeared a more trustworthy agent of consecration. The buyer also assessed her as possessing significant “fashion capital,”<sup>36</sup> due to her habitus, her job (according to the *Vogue* article,<sup>37</sup> the woman herself was a fashion editor) and the very fact that she was in Via Montenapoleone during Milan Fashion Week.

Another factor that probably contributed to the buyer’s decision to invest in the bag after the Milan incident was to do with *reaffirming* her own position as a cultural intermediary. The situation whereby, having spotted the woman in Milan, the buyer ran after her to obtain the name of the designer, reiterates the romantic discourse of “discovery” that is crucial for fashion mediation. The buyer was exercising her own cultural authority – that of “discovering,” quite literally, a designer object in the middle of a foreign space, with a view to subsequently “consecrating” it by putting it on the market. Bourdieu observes how cultural intermediaries can be haunted by “fear of compromising their prestige as discoverers by overlooking some discovery.”<sup>38</sup> A “discovery,” followed by a chase, is more gratifying than the prosaic and unabashedly economy-driven act of receiving a catalogue from the sales agent, visiting the agent’s office, and placing an order. It brings to our attention that, in Bourdieu’s words, “the disavowal of ‘the economy’ is placed at the very heart of the field [of culture], as the principle governing its functioning and transformation.”<sup>39</sup>

### The store as an institution of legitimation and consecration

If Selfridges' buyer made up her mind about buying Hulme's bag after seeing it carried by a fashionable person in Milan, other stores did so after seeing the bag in Selfridges. Some of them openly admitted to it when phoning my agency to secure appointments days after the merchandise had been displayed in the department store. Studying the selections of established retailers in search of new brands is common practice for buyers: as an owner of an independent London boutique put it in a conversation, "I have to spend a lot of time in the shop, I don't have the time to go to many tradeshows to search for new designers—it's much easier just to pop down to Selfridges and draw up a list of labels to watch."<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the fact that a big retailer like Selfridges has bought into a brand instantly increases the latter's symbolic capital: when presenting a relatively unknown collection to a buyer, a sales agent usually gets asked where it retails, and naming a first echelon stockist significantly increases the buyer's interest in the label.

Selfridges and other important stores, then, act as "institutions of diffusion, legitimation and consecration" for young labels, like museums and well-respected galleries do for artists.<sup>41</sup> There is also another analogy from Bourdieu's work that comes to mind: when discussing the importance of the couturier's signature, or label, in fashion, Bourdieu posits that such a signature "is a mark that changes not the material ... but the social nature of the object"<sup>42</sup> rendering it more valuable. Like the couturier, the high-end department store "performs an operation of transubstantiation" (ibid.) on an object: Hulme's Tote became symbolically more valuable as soon as it appeared in Selfridges; like a designer piece bearing a designer's signature, it also physically had a Selfridges tag attached to it. In fact, it became more valuable economically too: after the first season of sales in Selfridges the bag's price went up by 20%, although its material qualities and costs remained exactly the same.

The "consecration" of new cultural products is, to Bourdieu, inevitably related to the reproduction and conservation of existing norms within the cultural field. The system that can fulfill a consecration function is also designed to "prohibit the constitution of cultural counter-legitimacies"<sup>43</sup> and to forever reproduce "producers of a determinate type of cultural goods, and the consumer capable of consuming them."<sup>44</sup> In fashion's case, the majority of retailers reproduce the dominant norms of the field by selecting the same labels that are sold in respected "dominant" stores like Selfridges, rather than taking on new "pretender"<sup>45</sup> brands, such as Sophie Hulme in its early days. Unlike Selfridges, independent boutiques that stocked Hulme's collections from the beginning did not appear to have enough "consecrating authority" to legitimize her work in the eyes of more established retailers: while buyers from stores like Barneys, Harvey Nichols, and Net-a-Porter had been aware of Hulme's work for a few seasons from seeing it in independent shops, they only committed to buying the collection once it had appeared in the department store next to another established brand, Céline.

As an agent I, too, have participated in this practice of conserving and reproducing dominant positions. As soon as Sophie Hulme started selling in several signature stores my agency and the designer took the decision to stop selling it to some of the less important – non-dominant – independent retailers. Although this decision entailed financial losses, we felt that it reaffirmed the brand's position as a serious label, rather than as a "pretender" whose work was showcased by institutions with lesser cultural authority. Hence, as soon as Sophie Hulme gained "distinction" as a brand, my agency denied access to it to players with a "lesser" symbolic capital, leaving them behind while reaffirming the legitimacy of established players – defending and conserving the positions of dominant agents perfectly in line with Bourdieu's ideas.

Crucially, having had Sophie Hulme among my collections "consecrated" me as an agent – I subsequently managed to persuade a few labels to join N<sup>2</sup>10\_Showroom simply by mentioning we had worked with Hulme. This system of mutual validation by multiple players in the field matches Bourdieu's description where a "cycle of consecration is one in which A consecrates B, who consecrates C, who consecrates D ... who consecrates A."<sup>46</sup> The complexity of this cycle, in Bourdieu's words, only adds to its efficiency: "the more complicated the cycle is, the more invisible it is, the more its structure can be misrecognized, and the greater the effect of belief."<sup>47</sup>

### **Spatial actants and knowledge spillovers in fashion mediation**

The previous discussion demonstrates how the valorization of fashion objects occurs not only as a result of the premeditated actions of cultural intermediaries (such as fashion agents) but rather emerges from a more complex and messy system of mediations involving both calculating and unsuspecting participants. One of these participants, in Sophie Hulme's case, is geographical and interior space.

It is significant that the encounter happened in Milan despite both women – and the brand – being British. The impression the bag made on Selfridges' buyer may not have been the same had the encounter occurred in Britain. The appearance of the tote in Milan elevated the label to the status of an international brand, making it part of a global network of fashion knowledge.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the collection was then shown to buyers in the most fashionable location in Paris (most showrooms that are based in the Marais tout this site as one of their unique selling points, and ours was no exception) further added to the brand's global credentials. Speaking of the role of spatial mediations, I would also speculate that the collection would not have had the resonance it had with buyers if it had been displayed in a different part of Selfridges: the prime position on the ground floor, close to the entrance and to the coveted Céline bags, endowed it with symbolic meanings that an equally elaborate display in the up-and-coming designers section on the fourth floor would not have achieved.

Geographer Andy Pike notes that "the object of the brand and the process of branding are geographical because they are entangled in inescapable spatial associations."<sup>49</sup> Drawing on Amin and Thrift's<sup>50</sup> concept of "valorization of milieu," he proposes that "brands ... acquire, reproduce and sustain value and meaning from their spatial connections."<sup>51</sup> During the 2011 events, such "valorization of milieu" occurred several times: during the Milan encounter between Selfridges' buyer and the woman carrying a Sophie Hulme bag; during the encounters that fashion buyers had with her collection during London Fashion Week and in our Paris showroom; and, significantly, during the encounters buyers had with her bags on Selfridges' shop floor.

Evidently, non-human actors shape brand value as much as human ones. So, what does this tell us about the role of human fashion intermediaries like myself? I propose that this role increasingly consists in facilitating encounters that have the potential to "valorize" the milieu and enable knowledge exchange that is not planned or premediated.

When discussing knowledge flows in trade shows, Bathelt et al.<sup>52</sup> distinguish between "vertical traded interactions" whereby "knowledge reified in products, services, solutions, or other commercial offerings is sold by one party and purchased by another," and "horizontal traded relationships" which involve knowledge exchange between actors who operate within the same field or industry but do not have a "client-supplier" relationship. A phenomenon that occurs within their relationships is what Bathelt et al.<sup>53</sup> term "knowledge spillovers": an intentional or unintentional (in the case of industrial spying or eavesdropping) exchange of

information. The encounter between Selfridges' buyer and the Sophie Hulme wearer in Montenapoleone is an example of such a spillover.

The role of the fashion agent was once focused on "vertical traded interactions" (i.e. direct sales). And yet, the case discussed here demonstrates how such interactions may be less effective than "horizontal traded relationships": my "vertical" attempts to sell Sophie Hulme to Selfridges brought less impressive results for the brand than a chance "horizontal" encounter between the buyer and the woman in Milan. Since then, the awareness of the importance of such horizontal interactions has been growing among fashion professionals. As my latest (2017–2019) interviews with fashion agents suggest,<sup>54</sup> they are increasingly turning away from the classical model of mediation where their main role is to demonstrate designers' collections to retail buyers and persuade them to sign a check. Instead, they are seeking to facilitate connections between talent and the market in less direct ways: by negotiating creative collaborations or pop-up events that would involve displays of designers' work in new, not necessarily commercially inscribed locations, and by organizing presentations that do not have a clear-cut trade component to them. Accordingly, in early 2019 the owner of N<sup>o</sup>10\_Showroom informed me that he was rethinking the way he presents his brands' collections and considering organizing events that would only showcase one to three looks from every brand, incorporate a performance, be shown in a variety of spaces including locales outside the usual fashion week circuit (including a town in the South of France) and be open to professionals and the general public alike, in contrast with usual showroom format where complete collections are presented on clothes racks exclusively to buyers and press.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, owners of London-based agency It's Limin/ALL explained, somewhat poetically, that they currently see their job as "creat[ing] the possibility for a conversation to happen," rather than orchestrating direct sales.<sup>56</sup>

This scenario suggests that the role of the fashion agent, and possibly of the fashion intermediary in general, is moving from the domain of "vertical" interactions, where the agent is directly implicated in the sale, to that of "horizontal" relationships, where the agent is a mere facilitator of new connections, aided by other entities, such as space. Sophie Hulme's rise to fame is a case in point: in fashion, spatial actants and knowledge spillovers are, at times, more important than traditional, unidirectional forms of mediation by human actors.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has identified the actors implicated in the "consecration" of a fashion object and traced the multiple mediations that propelled it to success. It has argued that this process involved both intentional (such as the agent) and unsuspecting (such as the woman in Via Montenapoleone) fashion intermediaries and discussed the importance of the "disinterestedness" of the intermediary and the disavowal of the economy within fashion mediation. Furthermore, it has examined the role of non-human actors, such as the spaces of fashion stores and cities, in the valorization of Sophie Hulme's collection, and proposed new ways of thinking about the work of fashion intermediaries, focusing on their facilitation of "horizontal traded relationships," rather than "vertical traded interactions."

The scope of this chapter has allowed for an analysis of only a small number of mediators involved in Hulme's case over a short period. Many other actors and mediations have been left out: the stand at London Fashion Week, where Hulme's collection was presented; the sales assistants selling her items to end consumers in Selfridges; the less established London-based boutiques that picked up her collections early on (and endowed them with "London cool" credentials); the appearances of her bags on social media, and so on. And if we extended the time frame to the present day, we could consider the roles of Samantha Cameron and Peng

Liyuan in the emergence of new meanings around the brand. On the other hand, this limited inquiry has offered an insight into how fashion mediation and resulting branding processes can be studied by building upon Bourdieu’s and Latour’s frameworks.

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# INDUSTRIALIZED INSPIRATION: REASSESSING THE OSMOSIS BETWEEN FASHION AND ART THROUGH THE WORK OF TREND FORECASTERS

*Marco Pedroni*

## **Four ways of interpreting the fashion/art nexus**

The controversial relationship between fashion and art<sup>1</sup> is rooted, among other elements, in the rhetoric of inspiration and creativity, the foundation myths of both the artist and the fashion designer. However, the production time tables dictated by short fashion collection life spans, already typical of ready-to-wear lines and currently exacerbated by fast-fashion releases, have to a certain degree codified and structured the inspiration research practices of fashion creators, and sanctioned their close dependence on consumer tastes and changing lifestyles.

In this chapter, I will show how the practice of “trend research”—born as fashion forecasting in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, and evolving in the 1990s into the generally applied practice of coolhunting—“industrializes” inspiration, systematizing contexts and detection methods, moving it away from the idea of a supernatural intervention fertilizing human ingenuity. My goal is to show that trend research is relevant for fashion studies not only as a professional practice and methodology for the production of innovation, but above all from a cultural point of view, as a meeting ground between fashion and art. The encroachment of fashion into the realm of art is rooted in contemporary *couture*. Charles F. Worth is remembered as a dressmaker who promoted himself as an artist,<sup>2</sup> an approach consolidated among high-fashion designers in the twentieth century. Artists have also made frequent incursions into the sartorial world. The Pre-Raphaelites, Gustav Klimt, and the Futurists are prime examples.

The debate regarding the possible incorporation of fashion within the art world entered a particularly acute phase in the 1980s<sup>3</sup> with the 1983 celebration of the career of Yves Saint-Laurent by an exhibition at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. The entrance of a dressmaker, especially a living one, into this hallowed temple of art was hitherto unheard of. It marked a fundamental redefinition of the relationship between fashion and art, with art welcoming a newcomer into its halls, institutionalizing the status of the creators of clothes as artists, true “superstars”<sup>4</sup> on the contemporary scene. More recently, in 2015, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* became the London Victoria and Albert Museum’s most visited exhibition with

almost 500,000 visitors, confirming the trend of elevating the creations of fashion designers to museum status.

During this global multiplication of exhibitions dedicated to fashion designers, art critics, and fashion theorists have continued to discuss the possibility of assimilating fashion into the world of art. From the many positions taken, I find it useful to isolate four theses on the relationship between fashion and art.

1. First thesis: fashion and art are irreconcilable and separated. In the words of art critic Michael Boodro, “art is art and fashion is an industry.”<sup>5</sup> His comment underlines the commercial nature of fashion, a sign of its frivolity and its inability to pursue the ideal of *l’art pour l’art*. According to this view, art is an individual creation and fashion is a collective process only partly involving the designer. Enjoyment in art is an experience involving contemplation and requiring time and cultural capital, as opposed to the instantaneous and voracious consumption that characterizes fashion.
2. Second thesis: in fashion, there are both functional and artistic elements. The attention that art history has reserved for fashion has long kept alive the distinction between high art and popular art, identifying the first with *haute couture* and the second with the fashion industry, and thereby reinforcing the myth of *couturier*-artist and the stereotype of consumers as a gray mass.<sup>6</sup> Fashion, nonetheless, has a split nature. It is both a tool servicing functional needs (ranging from the regulation of body temperature to the desire of appearing attractive), as well as, in and of itself, the object of aesthetic contemplation.<sup>7</sup>
3. Third thesis: fashion has a high cultural and symbolic value (similar to art). Equating fashion with a form of cultural industry<sup>8</sup> or defining it as a part of the late twentieth-century consumer culture<sup>9</sup> means intuitively revealing the dual nature of its economic and productive fields on the one hand, while acknowledging its cultural nature on the other. Considerably more so than other artistic expressions, fashion is produced for the market. Despite this, its creators claim to be true artists and underline the capacity of fashion to transcend its material substance and become a harbor for the social imaginary.<sup>10</sup>
4. Fourth thesis: fashion is an art subject to constraints, repeatable, and ambivalent. Accordingly, if fashion is art, then it entails an indissoluble relationship with the consumer, as noted by Martin when defining fashion as design art “consumed by the consumer.”<sup>11</sup> It is an art subject to stringent and characteristic constraints: ergonomic based on body forms, material as governed by the finite variety of usable materials, and societal in conformance to social dictates of sartorial appropriateness. A “mercenary” art which aims to produce marketable clothing on a large scale, an art that is paradoxical because both auratic (*haute couture* creations) and anti-auratic (serial production), elitist and popular; an art which begets art, thanks to its close association with photography, music, cinema, etc.,<sup>12</sup> yet concurrently draws inspiration and “consumes” other art forms. The continuous re-proposal of past style elements, reinterpreted and reassembled into new forms, makes fashion a repeatable and re-combinable creative phenomenon. Fashion is in fact an art intimately connected to the practice of imitation, transpiring in production aspects such as the search for models, styles, subjects in the planning stage, and in the emulative efforts enacted by consumers. It is this art *sui generis* which makes the paradox of “industrialized inspiration” possible.

### Inspiration versus trends

Inspiration and trends are two words that co-exist in the language of fashion, identifying two dimensions opposing each other on many levels: the artistic creativity of the designers versus the

commercial and manufacturing exigencies of the industry. Inspiration as a concept implies the intervention of a divine or supernatural entity illuminating the human mind, transporting it to a state of excitement or enthusiasm conducive to the creation of a work of genius. This has been a subject of contemplation from ancient to modern times, linked to artistic activity since the Greco-Roman period. Classical imagery is permeated by the presence of the Muse, invoked by the poets as a source of inspiration. This alluring literary and cultural *topos* even carried over to the Renaissance when a “genius” was considered to be an exceptionally talented individual whose creativity could be neither taught nor explained due to its superhuman origins, a gift enabling its possessor to envisage a future imperceptible to others. Victor Hugo in *The Function of the Poet* describes his subject as having “[h]is feet on earth, his eyes on the distant haze,” and Charles Baudelaire compared a genius to an albatross, a bird whose giant wings prevent it from walking gracefully when landbound, yet simultaneously empowering it as the “prince of the clouds” thanks to its vast wingspan. This concept pertaining to artistic inspiration is closely tied to the notion of creativity as *poiesis*, and not *mimesis*, a producer of innovation rather than imitation, repetition, or reproduction.<sup>13</sup>

Currently, the social representation of creativity is divided between a tendency to think of it as a mysterious and innate faculty of particularly talented individuals capable of producing innovative and original ideas and solutions, and an opposing understanding of creativity as an *ethos* of contemporary society,<sup>14</sup> possessed – albeit not equally – by actors of the social world. Fashion, in adopting (in theory) the first model through the figure of the designer-creator, applies (in practice) the second option within a supply chain that may be described as a “diffused creativity system.”<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, this vision is extended to the whole spectrum of professionals working in fashion production.

The creativity of designers in the fashion industry requires continuous stimulation in order to manifest itself not according to the episodic benevolence of the Muses, but at precise periods prescribed by the fashion system calendar and production schedules. Therefore, requisite inspiration must be systematized in order to conform to processes deeply rooted in fashion forecasting.

Forecasting trends, indicators of emerging consumer tastes and of design stimuli, have been a central issue for the fashion industry since the 1960s when

“in the clothing industry, [...] ‘economic luxury’ began to be accessible to ever larger segments of the population, leading to an acceleration of the pace of innovation which in turn causes a rapid and frenetic fueling and amplification of the increasing pressures of market requirements.”<sup>16</sup>

High fashion was unable to match this pace in meeting requests for new lines; whereas alternatively, industrial production lines have not proven flexible enough to keep up with consumer demands. The gap separating these two fashion production poles as regards satisfying consumer expectations is filled by ready-to-wear collections, an intermediate production segment lying between high fashion and industrial packaging, which has been able to respond to rapidly changing consumer demands since the second half of the last decade.

The impossibility of producing sufficiently comprehensive collections embracing the complete range of fashion variants has led to the creation of national fashion councils. Their collective planning programs aim to coordinate the clothing industry in order to provide manufacturers with information on consumer tastes and the resulting chances of success of new clothing lines. In effect, rationalizing the fashion system with a view to supporting production planning and guaranteeing an adequate level of style variety would prevent producers from flooding the market with an excess of proposals.

In the 1960s, national fashion councils agreed on the first international coordination of fashion colors.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, during this same decade the existing pyramid model—traditionally featuring *haute couture* at the peak from which fashion trends trickled down as industrial fashion producers assiduously copied them—buckled under the pressure of new external influences exerted by movies, music, youth, subcultures, etc. The ready-to-wear lines were better equipped to absorb these new ideas and respond in a timely manner.

The management strategies of fashion councils intent on governing trends were doomed to fail because these same councils could not prevail upon a field receiving input from such multifarious sources. Ready-to-wear embodied a new model for the propagation of trends: dispersion through a receptive logic based on external stimuli, a path widely differing from the completely self-referential system of *haute couture* dressmakers. This was the birth of fashion forecasting as an activity based on the prediction of trends.

Fashion forecasting may be defined within at least three model categories.

1. In the French sartorial model, *bureaux de style*, or styling and design bureaus, external to fashion companies have proved effective. Under the supervision of an artistic director, a team of researchers with design, artistic and humanities skills gathers information and materials related to changes in the collective imagination. These materials are then organized under macro-themes and presented in the form of mood boards, codified to demonstrate concepts in the form of colors and materials. The research follows the same biannual rhythm as the fashion collections, beginning 24 months before the scheduled proposal of the final product. Research results are presented six months later to textile manufacturers and industry design offices, providing design and innovation stimuli 18 months before the final presentation to the market.
2. The Italian industrial model<sup>18</sup> has led instead to the creation of professional trend studios focusing on a semi-finished products industry strongly linked to the local context. Both French and Italian specialists produce trend books; the Italian version of these trend books reveals a less “intellectual” approach placing greater emphasis on the operative and technical aspects, and are often ad-hoc creations tailored for specific clients.
3. Trend agencies founded in the second half of the 1980s developed a consultancy model consisting of a marketing approach integrating trend research with analysis of international markets and sales figures corresponding to fashion products. The trend books produced seemed to satisfy the needs of the ready-to-wear sector rather than those relevant to research for inspiration within the domain of *haute couture*. Historic French agencies such as Carlin International, Promostyl, Peclers Paris, and Nelly Rodi have over time built an international research network tending towards fostering a trend agency organizational model resorting to trend books as a form of business card, opening the door to the presentation of a more in-depth consultation offered to commercial companies.

The transition from the sartorial model of *haute couture* to the industrial ready-to-wear lines presents style offices and designers with an unprecedented challenge. They must accelerate and multiply the inspiration and design processes, ensure a research flow, and integrate the results with production and consumption trends.

Several other factors are relevant in fashion forecasting. The demographic explosion of the baby-boom generation along with the affirmation of the young as protagonists of style and media favorites in the dissemination of trends have led fashion designers to copy ideas from urban subcultures, thus fulfilling a need to produce clothing evocative of styles emerging from

the media and popular culture. The growing competition heightens the feeling that production lines lag behind market tendencies, sparking frantic trend forecasting.<sup>19</sup>

## **Coolhunting**

Trend forecasting activities take two paths. The first, within the fashion system, seeks to identify lines and colors for the next collections through a constant dialogue with the production chains and an examination of the competition. The second and external path spots what is happening “on the street” in favored urban areas in an attempt to reflect these changes in consumer styles.

Since the 1990s, these observers of urban trends have been known as *coolhunters*.<sup>20</sup> Coolhunters work as professional tastemakers in the cultural economy of fashion, as well as in that of consumer goods in general, acting as “symbolic experts”<sup>21</sup> and “cultural intermediaries”<sup>22</sup> engaged in the research of emerging mentality trends and in the study of the oscillation of consumer behavior.<sup>23</sup>

Coolhunting calls into question the quantitative marketing approach of the 1980s, offering a more careful reading of the consumer world through an immersion in the everyday contexts of particular segments of the population, especially youth, with techniques inspired by anthropology and qualitative sociology. The aim of coolhunting, in common with that of fashion forecasting, is to aid client companies in building successful market sector strategies based on new insights. Notwithstanding, this goal transcends fashion forecasting when it extends the research field from trends endogenous to fashion—i.e. style, color, materials, etc.—to socio-cultural trends, those referred to as “mindstyles” by the Milanese agency Future Concept Lab.

Coolhunting activities have been interpreted as merely a sign of the inversion of the trickle-down model of fashion diffusion,<sup>24</sup> where the social elite lead the mass of consumers in taste decisions. In the trickle-up model, stylistic innovation arrives from young consumers, subcultures, and trendy neighborhoods, spreading upward to “higher” social levels. Agencies do not in fact employ uniform research models. At least three epistemologies of coolhunting exist.<sup>25</sup> Northern Europe (Germany, Netherlands, Belgium) relies heavily on consumer mentality information, as demonstrated by agencies such as Science of the Time and Trend Observer. The approach of anglophone agencies, as exemplified by TrendWatching and Brain Reserve, is characterized by customized reports based on client requests. Italian and Spanish agency reports are instead typically of ethnographic inspiration and oriented to the construction of behavioral clusters based on an observation of consumer habits. Common to the three approaches is a view of consumption as not only a commercial process, but as a cultural, identitarian, and even political act.<sup>26</sup>

The reaction to the use of coolhunting in fashion ranges from a flat refusal to an acceptance in the form of external consultations or outsourced activities.<sup>27</sup> In general, *haute couture*, premier brands and elite labels, distance themselves from coolhunting. It is seen as competing with the creative activities of the designer, and is deemed unnecessary to the company’s objective of creating styles. Their research, searching for innovation rather than trends, is managed directly by in-house “creatives.” This refusal of coolhunting favors, in part, a representation of high-fashion designers as artists and heirs of the Parisian couturier ethos, and is consistent with an image of a brand as a point of reference in the market. It is a stance grounded in the fashion designers’ perception of coolhunting as merely observation and imitation activities antagonistic to the creative function of the designer.

The other levels of fashion production are more open to the use of coolhunting. In-house coolhunting departments are generally limited to companies proposing fast fashion ranges. These internal market research facilities are outnumbered by companies using external

consultants, particularly smaller entities whose budget does not allow for the specific allocation of resources and funds for research purposes and attendant travel expenses.

The two possible trend research approaches open to fashion companies, geared towards creating styles or following trends, should not be understood as rigid alternatives but rather as poles of a continuum. The center includes companies working to market in-house styles without ignoring trends—endogenous and exogenous—in a constantly renegotiated equilibrium between brand identity and renewal, style and research, observation, and reprocessing. Even in the absence of a dedicated coolhunting department, and despite the unique role of the fashion designer, coolhunting is not an activity completely devoid of design skills. These include the consultation of printed sources of inspiration (traditional trend books) and digital sources (online databases such as WGSN and fashion blogs). These options resulting from trend watching undertaken by specialized agencies and actors, connect coolhunting to the work of designers, yet they also tend to underscore its subordination to the creative process.

### The Industrialization of Inspiration

The variety of approaches to trend research shows that, in the professional practices of the fashion field, trends, and inspiration (conceptual opposites) are actually two overlapping territories, intersecting in much the same manner as the production and artistic needs of fashion. In giving priority to speed, a problem of content providing ensues. The need for artistic inspiration devours novelty and demands a continual supply of previously unseen work material and project input. Research is a vital source of ideas for a fashion house. The origin of ideas, usually entrusted directly to the style office or resources in close contact with it, is heterogeneous. Participating in textile trade fairs and industry events for fabric research and studying yarn and color trends, consulting trend books and magazines, scrutinizing fashion shows displaying collections by designers, and checking out the products of competitors, going on research trips to keep up with street styles, purchasing garments in flea markets, surfing image archives, as well as other activities more in line with the artistic sensibility of the designer such as visiting exhibitions or attending cultural events, represent but a partial list of the stimuli required for the company when designing its collections. These are essential industry activities where the search for trends is fused with the search for design inspiration, and where the designer is projected as a creative cog in the well-oiled machine of fashion production, though only one of many cogs.

The industrialization of inspiration reveals itself in two strategic areas: firstly, in viewing research as a systematic and continuous activity, as in the fashion season jaunts made by style departments or visits to fabric trade fairs; secondly, in instituting and codifying a set of methodological rules to enact the “hunt” for inspiration. This second aspect is more visible when market research agencies work not solely on fashion trends, but also on a broader analysis of social and cultural trends. These agencies and professionals have in recent years begun the publication of methodological essays on coolhunting.<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between fashion and art, interpreted through the lens of the professional practices of a coolhunter, is compatible with the last of the positions discussed in the first paragraph: fashion as art *sui generis*, on the one hand lacking in the detachment, individuality and eternity that “pure” art claims as its own, yet on the other, tenacious in defending the rhetoric of inspiration typical of artistic creation. Both this unique blend of creativity, and the market it caters to, are linked by an emblematic word: “trend.” A term variously used to indicate an emerging sensibility that fashion professionals know how to grasp and develop, and to refer to the direction taken by the consumer taste. In the same way, “coolhunting” is a word preferred to “trendwatching” or “trendspotting” for its ability to enhance the image of the

sensitivity of those described, researchers who “hunt.” At the same time, it identifies the search itself not as a simple fact or behavior, but as something elusive, something “cool.”

Within this lexical frame, and on the basis of the practices that I have attempted to reconstruct here, the professionals directing the reading of trends perpetuate the peculiarities that make fashion an art by its very nature. Their aim is the generation of a spark to start the creative process of a collection, promoting the conditions for the transformation of “coolness” into products that are industrial, serial, and ephemeral.

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# AUDIENCE FOR FASHION: DIGITAL TOUCH POINTS, BRAND CIRCULATION, AND THE NEW CONSUMER EXPERIENCE

*Romana Andò*

## **The audience for fashion: an introduction**

Hardly any distinction exists between the domains of fashion and the media in the contemporary consumer experience. Fashion consumption takes place predominantly within the media sphere, progressively combining with audiencing practices. This consideration has emerged as the result of at least three theoretical turning points in fashion studies and audience studies. The first is the definitive overlap between fashion and the media, which has been widely analyzed in fashion studies.<sup>1</sup> The growing presence of fashion in the media, where it is very often a protagonist or a co-protagonist in the storytelling, is evidence that the mass media and digital media are not only tools of communication that are exploited by the main players in the fashion system (the designers and creative industries), but also part of a complex mediation process.<sup>2</sup> Fashion practices are crucially dependent on the media for their articulation, as new languages and newcomers – for example, bloggers and influencers<sup>3</sup> and vloggers and haulers<sup>4</sup> – emerge from different fields, and fashion expands beyond its traditional boundaries.

The second element is the distinct shift in consumer culture representation: within the frames of both fashion and the media, the consumer is conceptualized, analyzed, and constantly evoked as a creative participant, a fan engaged in an ever-widening experience. We have gone beyond the original distinction between producer and consumer proposed by Bourdieu;<sup>5</sup> we are now faced with a consumer who embodies the attitudes, motivations, and sometimes the competencies of the producer, and who, in the logic of fandom, expects to cooperate in product creation and usage. In other words, being a consumer means being a *prosumer*, as recognized by Toffler in his book *The Third Wave*,<sup>6</sup> except that he or she now has access to the additional resources bestowed by modern technology and culture.

This leads us to the final turning point, namely, the potentialities that the new media ecosystem provide for the fashion system (and the consumer) in its blurring of traditional forms of communication in favor of an enhanced branding and consumption experience. This paradigm shift is the product of the digital revolution that has generated a new model of content circulation and *spreadability*,<sup>7</sup> which is supported by total connectivity and the diffusion of mobile devices. The top-down flow model has been supplanted. Within this scenario,

representations of fashion stretch beyond traditional media such as magazines, cinema, and even television, and now colonize different media content according to a transmedia logic<sup>8</sup> that offers customers an immersive and coordinated consumption experience. At the same time, consumers are co-creators engaged in something more than just purchasing items; they are actively involved in spreading and producing fashion content throughout the media eco-system and sharing pleasures and meanings with brands and other consumers.

### **Fashion and/in the media**

The relationship between fashion and the media is a rich one. It is fundamentally a matter of interdependence and cross-pollination.<sup>9</sup> Fashion is one of the most powerful imaginative resources that the media provide for individuals, and it plays an important role in social and cultural life,<sup>10</sup> for example, in helping individuals to construct their identities.<sup>11</sup> Fashion, then, is both symbolic and communicative.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand it is used by the media to create a sense of spectacle and to stimulate the audience's imagination, and on the other it is used by its members to give meaning to their everyday lives and to make them intelligible to others. In addition, it supports media storytelling and projects images of social and cultural value.

As has been mentioned, the media have long been considered by the fashion industry as strategic and efficient, but not as protagonists, while fashion has long been considered an essential part of the media narrative. For instance, fashion items are exploited technically and symbolically in cinema media narration, where they are employed for purposes of realism and to engage the audience (though not necessarily the fashion consumer). In the past few years, increasing media interest in fashion brands and the industry's cognisance of the evolution of the media system have grown, and this has resulted in increasingly complex strategies to valorize fashion brands and audience engagement. An example of the brand as protagonist is *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). Hugo Boss is a meaningful element of the narrative in *The Terminal* (2004), while style is a central feature of *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001). Famous designer biographies include *Coco Avant Chanel* (2009) and *Yves Saint Laurent* (2014). Fashion and cinema coalesce in designer and director Tom Ford's *A Single Man* (2009) and *Nocturnal Animals* (2016). Additionally, a number of TV series feature fashion items as the protagonists of the story (e.g., *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*). In other cases, fashion players are protagonists in the narrative; for example, *The Assassination of Gianni Versace* (2018), and *Girlboss* (2017), which was based on the life story of Nasty Gal founder Sophia Amoruso. Italian fashion entrepreneurs are featured in *Luisa Spagnoli* (2016), *Atelier Fontana* (2011), and the more recent *Made in Italy* (2019), which was distributed globally by Prime Video. Increasing attention has also been paid to telling the story of fashion stores, such as in *Velvet* (2014) and *Il Paradiso Delle Signore* (2015). The increasing visibility of fashion in the media is the result of a transformational process in the relationship between fashion and its audience; the growth of so-called celebrity culture<sup>13</sup> and the interest in cinema stars (and what they wear) exhibited by adoring fans has generated an intense dialogue on the subject of fashion between the media and the audience. The effects of this process can be observed in the now normalised fandom practices relating to cinema, high-quality television, and digital media. Huge quantities of Web 2.0 content are produced by brands to engage consumers. Narrative-based brand fashion shorts are released on a regular basis on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. Influencers' social media campaigns, where a sense of intimacy and accessibility makes fashion immediately appropriable (at least on a symbolic level), have become increasingly prominent.

The trend is that of constant growth and diversification beyond the confines of a single medium. The logic of transmedia branding<sup>14</sup> has led to ever-more immersive brand

experiences. In fact, while digital communication provides multiple touch points between fashion brands and the consumer/audience – the result of a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up process – the creative potential of the consumer is activated, and, with the support of all the imaginative resources that come from diverse media content, the moments that precede and follow the purchasing process have affected and enhanced the previously straightforward act of buying a good. Customers now actively seek out experiences that are memorable, meaningful, and pleasurable, consuming fashion as buyers and consuming media content as the audience. In this scenario, we can observe a confluence of audiencing practices and fashion consumption.

### **Making sense of (media and fashion) consumption**

Fashion consumption has always been defined by the industry's boundaries and by a rigid internal organization<sup>15</sup> that result in a physical definition of consumption practices themselves. This organization is nowadays challenged by the social, cultural, and technological transformations we are describing: first, the growing online and offline nomadism of the consumer goes hand in hand with his or her inclination to be creative and participative. This condition has come to override Bourdieu's idea that consumers have no opportunity to become creative agents; as Rocamora points out, in that system of homologies "there is no room for the consumer-author."<sup>16</sup>

Second, fashion consumption, in its broadest sense, occurs most often through and within the media ecosystem, where it intersects with media consumption as audiencing. Learning from the audience experience, we may say that thanks to the interoperability of connected devices the consumer experience is actually fluid; it is no longer constrained by the characteristics of the medium (or the physical space of consumption). Each consumer can select and assemble a plethora of content as a single step in an expanded experience that the market cannot predict—albeit it is consistent in terms of audience sense making.

We are arguing that this idea of consumption partially resonates with the definition of the experience economy<sup>17</sup> and experience marketing. Consumption (as has been noted) is conceived of as a more prolonged process that takes into account all the elements – context, usage scenarios, cognitive and emotional elements, and participative practices<sup>18</sup> – that precede, follow, and surround the purchasing activity. Consumption, then, becomes a memorable experience made of meaningful moments linked to the whole life of the individual.

The fashion system is increasingly focusing on the construction of significant experiences (i.e. in store, in museums, and online) that expand the so-called "customer journey" beyond the moment of purchases and promote the spreadability of fashion items and their meanings within the new media ecosystem. If the marketing approach is to build strategically this kind of experience without examining the sense making related to the overall experience of consumption, the audience for fashion<sup>19</sup> may be fruitfully investigated through the lens of audience studies. In particular, to understand how the audience produce meanings and pleasures,<sup>20</sup> we may refer to the decoding moment of consumption<sup>21</sup> as well as to the wide range of creative practices that have been detailed in ethnographies of consumption.<sup>22</sup>

To analyze the phenomenon of fashion audiences, we have to consider the kind of fashion consumption that overcomes the need to consume meaningful objects (as in the "object turn" in the sociology of consumption<sup>23</sup>) and results in consuming the "experience with"<sup>24</sup> the object and fashion brand in its broader sense. Examples include corporate fashion museums, restaurants, *hôtelleries*, or cultural experiences such as those proposed by Fondazione Prada, where fashion is evoked but not represented at all, and certainly not sold and purchased. This is also

what happens when individuals consume multiple representations of fashion *within* media content. The shift in the media ecosystem towards a transmedia storytelling (and a transmedia branding) approach clearly supports this form of consumption. To paraphrase a definition of transmedia storytelling, we may say that a fashion brand can be considered to be a unified and coordinated experience, built through different media channels where significant chunks of brand meanings and values are disseminated. Consumers are called upon to rebuild their own paths through all available brand touch points. In this sense, each experience is different and accords to the way the complex narratives of the brand intersect and are rebuilt and rearranged by the consumers themselves.

### **The fashion consumer as media content producer (and vice versa)**

As we have pointed out, the concept of consumption helps us to understand the conjunction between the fields of media and fashion, particularly with regard to consumer creativity, which makes the boundaries of each field more permeable and allows for a definitive fusion of the two domains. As a matter of fact, within contemporary consumer society we are able to observe a growing number of consumer goods that can be used productively as a function of their mediatization; moreover, the lower barriers that regulate consumer productivity lead to a framework in which the meaning of consumption is transformed. Productive consumer practices have become an ordinary pursuit for ordinary people, in the process of taking on tasks engaging with fashion as a lifestyle by doing “glamour labor.”<sup>25</sup> As media studies have highlighted, audiences are not limited to consuming content; the complexity of engagement with the objects of material culture often results in the production of user-generated content (UGC) that expands the possibility of traditional media to reach out to other audiences without apparent limits. Concepts such as spreadability<sup>26</sup> help us to visualize this phenomenon: if content has features such as the ability to generate interest, affectivity, and engagement, it will probably be an object of re-elaboration and be shared by the audience in a way that increases the visibility of the original content through the creation of infinite digital touch points.

Consumers/producers, then, act as “accidental influencers.”<sup>27</sup> Even if they are not connected to each other by strong ties—as in the first fandom communities—they represent an extraordinary opportunity for endless content circulation and the extension of their own and others’ consumer experiences. Fashion items and brand representation within media content are most certainly spreadable, in the sense that the more symbolic and visible prominence they have the more they are appropriated by audiences and consumers and shared online. Sharing practices are a clear example of consumer productivity: within this frame, consumers, engaged in a relationship with brands and with other consumers on the basis of the so-called linking value of products and services,<sup>28</sup> participate in brand value creation by disseminating content, supporting its circulation, and enriching it through interactions, comments, and reviews.

This particular version of the co-creation frame is borrowed from fandom studies. Studying fans with respect to their relationship with the cult object and with other fans allows us to see that reducing their emotions and affective attachment to the object of interest – textual productivity<sup>29</sup> (fanfiction, fanart, fanzines, and so on) and the social dimension of experience (i.e. social media interactions) – and to a precise conclusive moment is impossible. Fandom logic, although strongly related to media content, has nowadays been appropriated by all fields of production. Producers today seek fans, and not just buyers, for their products, and fandom practices become *tout court* synonymous with consumption. At the same time, the consumer is asked to engage with the desired good, overcoming the specious correspondence between

supply and demand and giving rise to a logic based on production and consumption in which the last step represents the trigger point for further experiences.

### **The audience for fashion: new perspectives in media and fashion consumption**

Observing the way people consume fashion tells us how many resources are available to them. In the new media ecosystem, fashion consumers can count on a series of new aesthetic competencies (or cultural capital) that derive directly from their enhanced experience as media audiences. Presently, a multiplicity of both official and grassroots sources are available to the consumer, to the point where consumption no longer leads to a clear homology in the definition of taste, consumption practices, or the production of shared meanings. In the context of a generational perspective, this change is extremely significant. Until a few years ago, the aesthetic skills of fashion were improved by reading specialized magazines, participating in fashion shows, following the endorsement of celebrities<sup>30</sup> who were considered exclusive, and referring to iconic film imagery. Younger generations have grown up in a digital world where they build their competencies through images derived from TV series, online micro-celebrities and interactions, and visual social media.

It may be useful to explore these new sources of cultural capital in fashion consumption. The first is the “as worn on TV” concept, a phrase that refers directly to television imagery: in the last 20 years, the emergence of high-quality television<sup>31</sup> and cult series has represented a turning point for both television viewers and fashion fans. Fashion has become a major avenue for storytelling in many programs (e.g., *Sex and the City*, *Gossip Girl*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Mad Men*, *Suits*, *Scandal*, *House of Cards*, and *Peaky Blinders*), and brands are more interested in investing in media content that is perceived as being of a similar quality to cinema. Evidence of the centrality of fashion in television can be found in the proliferation of websites and online platforms (in particular Pinterest) on which the outfits of the protagonists of favorite shows are reconstructed with all the details (information, images, and tutorials) necessary for its symbolic (imitation) and material (online shopping) appropriation.<sup>32</sup> As a result, fans can expand their experience of being members of an audience while simultaneously enjoying the experience of consuming fashion.

Thus, outfits worn by prominent television characters and personalities perform a double function. They become strategic in that they provide the audience with an immersive experience in which, where the “social imaginary” gathers the public together within a shared and recognizable environment;<sup>33</sup> at the same time, they constitute a touch point between consumers and the fashion brands that have invested in the product placement. The desire for more information, which is inspired by seeing fashion items on television, may be instantly gratified by the extremely wide and composite range of information that is made available by official brands, the traditional media, and social media. The audience’s desire to interact with media content is satisfied by being able to search for recognized brands online and by using technologies that let it engage in fandom-like activities such as detection and poaching.<sup>34</sup>

Another interesting phenomenon that reveals the crossover between media and fashion – namely *being the audience for fashion* – is that of online reviews. Consumer-generated advertising, “which can be seen as a form of user-generated content, refers to specific instances where consumers create brand-focused messages with the intention of informing, persuading, or reminding others.”<sup>35</sup> This content, which is often presented not only in the form of online reviews but also of unboxing videos or tutorials, turns the individual experience of consumption into a public consumer-oriented space where people share valuable content. Digital consumers actively use electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) through social network sites

(SNS) to aid their own and others' purchasing journeys, and leverage their online interpersonal networks for brand recommendations. As consumers share their experiences online, they add value to consumer goods, creating common resources that feed the creativity of others.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, we refer to the recent phenomenon of the micro-celebrity. Senft defines this concept as "a new style of online performance in which people employ webcams, video, audio, blogs, and social network sites to 'amp up' their popularity among readers, viewers, and those to whom they are linked online."<sup>37</sup> Compared with traditional celebrities – whose endorsements influence advertising effectiveness, brand recognition, and behavior as a complex bundle of cultural meanings<sup>38</sup> – micro-celebrities are becoming increasingly effective because the audience perceives them to be "people like me." This sense of intimacy is strongly maintained and reinforced through carefully assembled self-presentation and ongoing fan management.<sup>39</sup> The micro-celebrity encourages the audience to be part of the performance, which consists of recommendations regarding outfits, makeup, and lifestyle, as in the case of "haul videos" wherein micro-celebrities discuss the prices, sizes, and features of recently purchased items.<sup>40</sup> The persistent stream of content that flows through social media, competing for the largest audience,<sup>41</sup> is part of the fashion consumption experience, particularly amongst the younger generation.

### Conclusion: a journey called fashion

The enriched consumer experience that we have envisaged is actually a dynamic process made up of different acts of audiencing: a journey made up of discrete and interrelated moments in which individuals act as audience members and consumers of fashion while actively producing meanings and shareable content. The pre- and post-purchase stages of consumption are arguably more important than the single act of purchasing itself.<sup>42</sup> Customers incorporate past experiences, including previous purchases and audiencing acts, and these become part of new consumption experiences. Theoretically speaking, this broader conceptualization of fashion and media consumption requires a new interpretive sensitivity: tools (such as the customer journey map) have to be adapted to represent consumption as a process, allowing scholars to study different steps on the journey, and to extract new meanings from them. The challenge, then, is to understand the increasing affinity between fashion and media consumption.

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# MEDIA CONVERGENCE, FASHION, AND TV SERIES

*Antonella Mascio*

## **Media convergence and fashion**

Our lives' media scenario has grown increasingly complex. Mobile technologies and digitization have changed our experience in a significant way. We live in media surroundings in which we actively participate, either as consumers of tools and products, or as creators and disseminators of contents. Media are part of the baggage each of us carry around, similar to the shoes and clothes we put on to go out. They can be compared to the objects we always have with us, and we cannot do without. Fashion communication falls within this framework, and as such, is characterized by new rationales and new practices.

This article will primarily focus on a specific kind of media product, the television series, as a textual form capable of connecting with multiple discursive lines, through its links to several media platforms. From the television set to the tablet and smartphone, devices for viewing television series are constantly growing in number and win over different categories of users. Technology thus enables a completely customized consumption and use of these products, within the typical framework of convergence culture.<sup>1</sup> The idea of convergence refers to a radical cultural change, more than a technological one, concerning production and fruition of media products, as well as the social relations they engender, in diverse situational contexts. This means, for example, that while television series like *House of Cards*<sup>2</sup> or *Jane the Virgin*<sup>3</sup> are still followed by a majority of audiences through the classic approach, one episode after the other, and season after season, many groups now follow them through other channels, like social networks. These new avenues attract viewers seeking to further explore some of the narrative and aesthetic lines in the shows and talk about the topics referring to them.

In fact, the importance of television series in terms of fashion has an already established – although quite recently – history. Ralph Lauren used the mansion of *Downton Abbey*<sup>4</sup> – linked to the imagery created by the television series – to present its Fall 2012 collection, as a testimony to the taste conveyed in it, linking its name to a cultural product already provided with strong connotations of style. Brooks Brothers and Banana Republic have already devoted a capsule collection to *Mad Men*.<sup>5</sup> Many tributes have been paid to *Game of Thrones*<sup>6</sup> by several designers: Gucci, Helmut Lang, Manish Arora.

Analyzing the concept of transmedia storytelling is central.<sup>7</sup> This approach contends stories which are articulated through the creation of a complex narrative universe, capable of

exploiting the different options provided by media platforms in order to offer a consistent and articulated narrative structure. In Facebook pages, or in Instagram profiles, the fandom linked to television series takes many shapes, especially regarding the most beloved series. Following the modalities that develop online through the exchanges about outfits, brands, and styles, helps us to understand how fashion is important today in audiovisual productions and how its presence has become fundamental in storytelling.

In television series, references about garments and brands have steadily grown in recent years, thus providing audiences of various ages and interests with the option of linking with contents concerning fashion in addition to narrative. In television shows set in the past, as well as in those set in the present, an increasing number of elements linked to specific styles and known designers can be found. The relationship between television series and fashion appears to be growing in importance: dresses and costumes provide television productions with added value, at not only an aesthetic level, but also to the narrative contents, thanks to the use of meanings referring to specific styles and garments. In some instances, a piece of jewelry, or a jacket, or a pair of shoes, are immediately linked to specific social groups, easily recognizable milieus or subcultures, thus offering viewers a map to navigate through the text and its pathways. The effects of these links impact with the market as well. In many cases, clothing lines linked to successful series have been created, and are sold in several chain stores (for example a *Stranger Things*<sup>8</sup> line and other lines produced by Pull&Bear or Primark). The use that audiences make of some outfits worn onscreen, or of the characters whose style shows affinity to their taste, is likewise relevant. These images and characters become models to imitate, take up and post in their social network profiles. Audiences devote time and energy to them.

For these reasons, the first part of this article focuses on the relationship between television series and fashion. After having defined and explained the context, the second part of the article considers five television series (*Gossip Girl*,<sup>9</sup> *House of Cards*,<sup>10</sup> *The Carrie Diaries*,<sup>11</sup> *Stranger Things*, and *Riverdale*<sup>12</sup>), together with a group of Instagram posts linked and/or devoted to them. These posts have been analyzed in order to understand the ways in which audiences – and mostly fans – seize on television contents linked to fashion, inside the chosen stories.<sup>13</sup>

### **Fashion discourse: a part of the storytelling**

Although it seems a recent phenomenon, it was in fact during the first half of the twentieth century that with cinema, the media industry's expansion started to create “viral” forms of consumption.<sup>14</sup> Many television series today are considered *cinematic* – a high-quality product in terms of script, direction, casting, immersive storytelling, and of course the great attention paid to clothes/costumes. As Mittell wrote, “in the digital era a television program is the origin of an inter-textual network extending its perimeter and blurring the boundary between the viewing of a series and the consumption of para-texts derived from it.”<sup>15</sup> In this conceptualization, considering the different para-texts and ancillary moments as an important component of the enjoyment of the television series by audiences, is likewise important.<sup>16</sup>

Let's take for example *Sex and the City*, *Downton Abbey*, *Gossip Girl*, and *Riverdale*. Each of these series presents a specific macro topic, where clothes play a fundamental role. *Sex and the City* instantly became a significant example of the relationship between storytelling and fashion: we can say, without any doubt, that the Manolo Blahnik brand has become known worldwide thanks to Carrie Bradshaw. Even today Carrie's style is still considered something to follow, although the last episode of the television series was aired 15 years ago.<sup>17</sup> A similar phenomenon is at work in a period drama like *Downton Abbey* was much discussed, with great attention paid to the wardrobe of its characters. An exhibition has been devoted to the series, based mostly on

the costumes, which is still running.<sup>18</sup> Considering specific teen dramas also allows in-depth exploration of the features linking the audience to the shows' wardrobes in many Internet social networks: Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram.

In other words, the narrative complexity of the television series also includes clothing, which not only plays the role of building and defining the individual features of each character, it also becomes a modular element of the serial product. The link between the outfits and the audience develops therefore far beyond the boundaries of the story being told; it runs through the para-textual worlds linked to the television series. Clothing works both as an additional promotional asset, in particular for activities following the first broadcasting of the television series, as well as a socialization tool, for audiences particularly sensitive to the topic.<sup>19</sup>

These television fashion spaces join the recently expanded number and quality of discursive spaces devoted to fashion in the media more generally. For example, *Vogue*, *Marie Claire*, or *Harper's Bazaar* devote a lot of space talking about television series and their outfits. This proliferation of images, articles, audio-videos, and text leads to a new discursive power of fashion: the meanings attributed to fashion refer to increasingly diversified contexts, at times quite distant from the concreteness of dressing and accessories. Fashion is no longer solely an object, but rather the subject of discourse capable of showing itself through the multiple ways in which it appears and for its ability to – metaphorically – speak out. This arguably a phenomenon particularly evident in television series, as these examples seek to illustrate.

Viewed from this angle, it is possible to identify many avenues ways of fashion storytelling in television shows: sometimes fashion is evident, other times it is implicit and more subtle. In television series like *Sex and the City*, *Gossip Girl*, *Lipstick Jungle*,<sup>20</sup> *Atelier Fontana*,<sup>21</sup> or *The Assassination of Gianni Versace*,<sup>22</sup> the fashion discourse is obvious and participates in the narrative construction of the text. In some instances, it is part of the main plot, while in others the characters constantly move in and out of fashion worlds: from famous display windows, to easily recognizable garments or accessories, to shoppers, through a series of clues emerging in most scenes portrayed. In other instances, fashion works as a parallel between the fictional world and the real one. Brands and fashion houses are present in the episodes and are part of the wealth of knowledge of audiences who are capable of identifying them, and thereby recognize their symbolic and value-laden meaning.

There are also television series where the attention to clothes does not go unnoticed; however, the styles are not in line with contemporary taste. This phenomenon mostly applies to narratives set in a different historical period than the present, either in the past, like *Downton Abbey*, *Mad Men*, and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*,<sup>23</sup> or a fantasy world, like *Game of Thrones*. Here, clothing works not only as a tool to better understand the characters' roles, but also as an implicit guide to taste.

In these cases, however, audiences are the ones making and sharing much of the content, by describing or at times analyzing the outfits coming from this kind of television series, thereby linking them to the present. In the television series *Reign*,<sup>24</sup> for example, some outfits come from the most recent designer creation, despite the fact that the series is set in the late sixteenth century. In season 1, episode 16, Kenna wears a Rena Wedding Dress by Kite and Butterfly, and in season 3, episode 18, Queen Mary wears a black and brown embroidered wool felt vest by Etro. This contamination between the use of historical costumes and garments from the latest fashion shows has been recognized by viewers as well. The posts in social media often present contrasting views: some viewers do not appreciate the adopted strategy, finding it shallow and careless. Others have instead interpreted the choice as a search for innovation and care in the juxtaposition of styles. In a 2013 interview for *Fashionista*, the costume designer, Meredith Markworth-Pollack, said that the choice of placing some contemporary elements in

the costumes had been made by production, in order to project a sort of “revisited authenticity.”<sup>25</sup>

The observation of the outfits fits perfectly with what Joseph Mittell<sup>26</sup> calls “investigative” fandom and refers to the way audiences watch television series today. This process transforms viewers into amateur narratologists, capable of following the many paths put forward by the ecosystem linked to the television series, as well as creating new thematic itineraries, fashion and styles among them. From the late 1990s, within the new wave of quality television series, in the confluence of interest in new manners of story representation and high-level acting, clothing thus became a focus of debate and sharing among audiences. Clear evidence of this process can be found in the online universe: sections entirely devoted to clothes are present in websites, blogs, forums, and wiki settings, making clothing a much talked about topic, and followed in social networks.

### **Television series, social network, and fashion**

The next pages focus on the television shows discussed in the sample of the Instagram posts examined. These were analyzed according to the ratings of the best television series.<sup>27</sup> Starting from this ranking, we chose *Gossip Girl*, *House of Cards*, *The Carrie Diaries*, *Stranger Things*, and *Riverdale*. They are much loved and followed by audiences, with wardrobes highlighted by institutional figures of the fashion world. For instance, Motivi, an Italian brand, dedicated two capsule collections to *Gossip Girl*, “City Glam” and “Party Chic.”<sup>28</sup> Anna Sui designed a collection for the series as well.<sup>29</sup>

Today the activity of the television series fans is quite visible in social media pages. Institutional profiles devoted to specific television series, pages managed by the fans and devoted to individual characters, or to actors, stylists and costume designers are common. The use of social networks has become a habit for many, a way to stay linked to a specific product, even after the closing credits and the theme song. Fans use social media to explore and understand the fashion discourse which is presented there through the style of characters, the brands being shown and the references to that world. Instagram is now the favorite social network for Millennials and Generation Z, as many studies confirm.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Instagram is an appropriate place to turn, in order to better understand how much the topic of fashion in television series is becoming part of the discourse circulating in social networks, and which kind of viewers were more interested in it. Instagram, in effect, is not only a space for sharing, but also an information, or even learning, venue. On Instagram mechanisms may be activated which refer not only the social, but also the cultural capital, linked to the flow of knowledge circulating among viewers, the main feature of convergent culture.<sup>31</sup> The concept of convergent culture is in fact closely linked to participatory culture: it describes a dialectics between top/down forces originated in the cultural industry (namely the production and distribution of TV series) and the bottom/up forces which instead spring from active audiences contributing to expand the notoriety of medial products through a process of content production. But not solely that. A large part of the viewers are quite active in posting comments linked to the clothes present in the TV series, together with images and remarks. And this is precisely the context where we have developed the design of the research.

### ***Instagram as a research tool***

In order to understand the ways through which fashion is present in television series, and then used in the diverse contexts of Instagram, we analyzed a specific group of images, part of the

research corpus of the larger study from which this essay's analysis is drawn. The goal of the research – still in progress – consists in observing and understanding the ways through which audiences express their appreciation for the outfits present in the TV series, through social platforms such as Instagram. As written previously, Instagram was chosen because at the moment is one of the most used social media, with an increasing number of users.<sup>32</sup> Fashion is also one of the most widely discussed topics, so much so that all the most famous brands as well as emerging ones, are present with constantly updated profiles.

The chosen methodology is qualitative and based on the visual analysis of posts.

The first step of the research has consisted of the definition of the sample of the TV series on which to work, from a relevant number.<sup>33</sup> For each of one, we picked the images using a series of hashtags that included the title of the individual television series; the name of the most interesting characters under the outfit profile; and some words deemed to be search keys common to all cases (“fashion,” “wardrobe,” “style”). For every television series, 100 images and related posts were selected. We did not take into consideration the profiles of the users as starting points to analyze; rather we opted to follow the trajectories identified through the hashtags. This path led us to observe the identity of users in a later phase, which we shall discuss.

The emerging corpus of images is thus made of five hundred images published on Instagram with their related remarks. Each of these images has been analyzed according to the tools of the visual methodology.<sup>34</sup> In particular, we focused on the meaning of each image, with reference to the profile where it was posted. Therefore, in its being linked to a specific television series, each image turns out to belong to a social identity defined specifically by the television narrative. An additional effort consisted of understanding the interpretation which users have given to the images and the way they were put into focus. For example, in some instances the images are presented in connection with the audiences' real world, and not with the location and setting of the television series. In this regard, the remarks have turned out to be quite useful. These images, in effect, as Pinney<sup>35</sup> writes, represent “compressed performances” in some cases, because they refer to dynamic moments of the television series, quite well known among fans, where clothing and costumes are part of the plot and its meaning.

We also took into account the fact that in Instagram pages, users adopt several communication strategies, according to the type of audience they want to reach, and the role they want to play. Following the study by Lev Manovich<sup>36</sup> linked to the different modes of expression provided by Instagram, we have used three strategies defined by the author: “home mode,” “imagery mode,” and “self-expression mode.” The “home mode” is used for all the images intended mostly for a “private” audience, made of friends or relatives. These are photos comprising selfies and shots from everyday life, small events like dining with friends and relatives, birthday celebrations, holidays, where the person managing the profile is often present. The visual quality is not the best; these are usually amateur photos.

In contrast, the “imagery” strategy is used for images which are published in order to attract a wider mass audience. These are quality photographs often depict the author of the page, posing according to traditional codes. This “imagery” strategy consists in “images intended to persuade, promote, or otherwise perform strategic intentions.”<sup>37</sup> In these instances, the aesthetic feature is particularly relevant and detailed. These shots refer to a specific symbolic universe, where both figures and backdrops are highlighted, as they are linked to recognizable cultural images.

The last strategy, that of “self-expression,” takes place when “people use particular visual aesthetics and styles to define their membership in subcultures, to signal their “identities,” and to identify with particular lifestyles.”<sup>38</sup> In this instance the published images aim at narrating the user through his/her aesthetic and cultural choices. These categories are useful for arranging the

images of the corpus according to the characteristics described by Manovich, in order to analyze them starting from a preliminary value-based framework.

### ***The analysis of the television series and their use on Instagram***

The work on the analysis of the images has entailed a few steps. For each image a series of elements have been taken into consideration in order to proceed with the cataloging with respect to the previously mentioned categories (“home mode,” “imagery,” and “self-expression”). First of all, the quality of the shot has been considered. For example, an image taken from a photoshoot made on the set would look quite differently from a selfie. Then the setting and the subject of the image have been analyzed. The qualitative study has also included an interpretation of the way the images talk about fashion and the type of connection with the style of the TV series they refer to.

A summary sheet was then prepared for every TV series, comprising all the collected data. In this way, several trends have emerged more clearly.

We then subdivided the TV series of the corpus into two macro-groups: the first group of television series taken into consideration is the one linked to the use of fashion in the course of the show’s storytelling (*Gossip Girl*, *House of Cards*, and *The Carrie Diaries*). The second, instead, comprises the series where the outfits of the characters seem to have the same importance as the other elements in the plot (*Stranger Things* and *Riverdale*).

We found a series of occurrences that were shared by all the cases considered: *Gossip Girl*, *House of Cards*, and *The Carrie Diaries*. First, the chosen images are quality photos and do not only show clothes, but also trendy locations and design objects. This use of the “imagery mode” is particularly present whenever an aestheticizing choice of the photos to publish on the profile is made. Second, these posts are usually linked to imageries known by the audience, connected to well-represented settings in the media, inhabited by social groups shown to belong to the upper middle class (*Gossip Girl*) or political elites (*House of Cards*). There are some exceptions, however. *The Carrie Diaries*, for instance, appears to be different, as it expresses its attachment to fashion starting from the search for a style based more on passion and recognition of elegance by characters, than on their social status.

On Instagram, the titles of these television series work as taste-defining indicators, thus falling in tune with what is stated in television products. As such, they work as a sort of meta-brands, capable of adding value to the user’s discourse according to the recognition attributed by the audience to the television product. For this reason, the images pertaining to these series are mostly published by users calling themselves “fashion bloggers,” “influencers,” and “shop assistants.” They are professional (or aspiring) figures who want to openly express their love for the fashion world.

These are not the only categories of viewers using these specific television series in their profiles, however. We also found the fans of the series, or of some of their characters. Some are expressly devoted to the outfits shown on screen and the images refer to screenshots taken from the episodes. Others are photos taken from magazines or other media, portraying actors outside the set, on special occasions (photo shoots for magazines, attendance in social events, or awards ceremonies). There are other instances which are compositions of several images made into one: stage photos placed alongside a sort of scrambling of the outfit; photos of the characters and selfies of the users dressed in the same way; photos of the outfit and photos of model/s on the runway with the same garments.

In contrast, in television series where fashion seems to be less relevant in the overall economy of the story, the profiles found through the chosen hashtags belong mostly to people

using social media as expressive tools of their fandom. In many instances a “home mode” strategy emerges: the images and the posts seem addressed mostly to users’ groups with whom there is already a connection, therefore not a wide and anonymous audience. We refer here to the other two teen dramas of the corpus: *Stranger Things* and *Riverdale*. They are quite different texts, both in terms of the stories being told, and the chosen settings. In both of them, specific brands cannot be recognized, except in *Stranger Things*, where it is possible to see the sneakers used by the characters, as they are recognizable and useful to establish a link with the 1980s, the historical period where the series takes place. For the rest, there aren’t any explicit references to the fashion world and its brands. Instead, style markers are used to define the role of the characters and their identities. For many of the protagonists of these two shows, the wardrobe makes reference to specific stereotyped styles (like preppy, casual, or underground), adjusted to be functional to the narrative. For example, the outfits making reference to youth groups and specific subcultures are well outlined. The “Serpents” of *Riverdale*, use an aggressive aesthetic quite close to that of metal fans, with a corresponding following in Instagram posts. Interestingly, this manner of staying connected with the story even beyond the viewing of the individual episodes, as a sort of tribute made through the use of a “uniform,” is capable of going beyond the boundary of gender: there are many girls, for example, showing selfies wearing the clothes of male characters (in particular Jughead Jones).

Even if *Riverdale* is set in the present time, the clothes, as well as the design, recall a retro atmosphere highlighted in some characters. Instagram users are aware of, and underline this choice of style, and their discourse especially and clearly distinguishes between Betty, Veronica, and Cheryl, the most popular female characters. If the first character embodies the simple and linear style, perfectly describing the personality of the good girl, Veronica represents the only character showing an evident “flair for fashion.” Cheryl is clearly different from the other two because, although provided with a well-designed wardrobe, she seems much closer to a fabled imagery than reality.

Many pictures in line with the “imagery mode” are devoted to Veronica and Cheryl, where graphic quality and aesthetics are very polished. For both of them, spaces belonging to dream-like imagery are often evoked, following a trajectory linked to the highlighting of outfits. If in one case, there is a highlighted link between the personality of the Instagrammer and that of the “possible” wardrobe, in the other case the personal taste towards a utopian vision of the garment is staged, as is often the case in high-fashion runway shows.

In general, both for television series where fashion discourse seems explicit, and for those where fashion does not seem relevant, fans on Instagram show many examples linked to the “self-expression” mode often appearing through practices which might be labeled as “get the look”: these are posts at times presenting double images (the television character on the one hand, and the user on the other hand) to highlight the similarity of the outfit, as a first step in the relationship between the fan and the character. While the recognition of the style and the aesthetic appreciation linked to this type of representation of the outfit appear clearly, even when the clothes are copied to be worn and shown to other users, the effect of closeness with the character can be better understood by also analyzing the remarks accompanying the images. The outfit and in many cases the hairstyle or the makeup become signs of the wish to take hold of the character’s traits. We found in several instances that users – more women than men – say they have dressed in a certain way (as in the photos) to feel like a given character because they were facing difficult personal circumstances: the chosen outfit makes them feel stronger. These provocative instances will provide grounds for further research as our project progresses.



## Conclusion

Television series are steadily growing in importance, not only in the scenario of media fiction, but also in the much wider fashion discourse. The examples we have reported here show the extent to which the outfits shown on screen have become desirable and valuable in socialization spaces. They play not only an aspirational role but also move people towards creative research and activity involving style, personality, and relations. We interpret Instagram participation as a reflection of the social and cultural environment linked to the fashion world, where television series work as an additional driver to specifically expand and influence that fashion environment. In the current phase of evolution, linked to the mediatization of culture and society, this research reveals a transformation of new habits of fashion fans,<sup>39</sup> who are in many instances fans of television series as well.

Even for the instances where fashion follows an implicit line, as in *Stranger Things*, we find clear statements of appreciation for fashion that adds to fashion discourse more broadly. The 2017 Louis Vuitton presented on the runway a T-shirt dedicated to the series, as a testimony of the passion its creative director, Nicolas Ghesquière, has for the show is but one example.

Our findings indicate that there is now a short circuit between fiction and fashion, where it is no longer clear which influences which. We found audiences play a role in this mechanism, whether they belong to a group of experts, like designers or fashion bloggers, or are simply fans, with their own taste and knowledge. What they are showing on Instagram is in fact something more than a mere aesthetic choice, it is part of the making a fashion world.

## Notes

- 1 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York University Press, 2008.
- 2 *House of Cards* (2013–2018, USA: Netflix/Sky Atlantic).
- 3 *Jane the Virgin* (2014–, USA: The CW).
- 4 *Downton Abbey* (2010–2015, UK: Carnival Film, Masterpiece/ITV).
- 5 *Mad Men* (2007–2015, USA: AMC).
- 6 *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019, USA: HBO).
- 7 Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
- 8 *Stranger Things* (2016–, USA: Netflix).
- 9 *Gossip Girl* (2007–2012, USA: The CW).
- 10 *House of Cards* (2013–2018, USA: Netflix/Sky Atlantic).
- 11 *The Carrie Diaries* (2013–2014, USA: The CW).
- 12 *Riverdale* (2017–, USA: The CW).
- 13 The analysis in this article is drawn from a larger research project carried out with the participation of students following the degree course in Fashion, Communication and Management of Bologna University.
- 14 Fashion has always played a central role in media productions. Wilson (*Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity*, London: Virago Press, 1985) writes that the 1930s were already considered the gilded era of Hollywood dressing. The dresses linked to cinema productions started then to be sold in several chain stores in the USA, including Macy's in New York. Being readily available in this way cost them some of the mystique they previously had but contributed to making the audiences' desire for appropriation come true: placed in easily accessible stores, made with mass market fabrics, "cinematographic" garments became a sort of *trait-d'union* between the imagery of cinema and the concreteness of reality. In this way, the symbolic, aesthetic, and functional value of the clothes on screen progressively took hold, and eventually expanded to television productions.
- 15 Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 20.

- 16 Cfr John Caldwell, “Second-Shift Media Aesthetics,” in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, eds., A. Everett and J. Caldwell. USA – UK: Routledge, 2003.
- 17 Vogue Italia: <https://www.vogue.it/moda/tendenze/2018/09/06/carrie-bradshaw-look-da-copiare-sarah-jessica-parker-sex-and-the-city>. Accessed November 2020.
- 18 <https://www.downtonexhibition.com>. Accessed November 2020.
- 19 Antonella Mascio, “Television Series and Fashion. A Look to the Audiences’ Activities,” *Comunicazioni Sociali* 2017, no. 1, Milano: Vita & Pensiero, 2017, 79–90.
- 20 *Lipstick Jungle* (2008–2009, USA: NBC).
- 21 *Atelier Fontana* (2011, Italy: Rai Fiction/Rai1).
- 22 *The Assassination of Gianni Versace – American Crime Story* (2018, USA: Fox 21 Television Studios/FX).
- 23 *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017–, USA: Amazon Prime Video).
- 24 *Reign* (2013–2017, USA: The CW).
- 25 Online: <https://fashionista.com/2013/10/reign-costume-designer-interview>. Accessed November 2020.
- 26 Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
- 27 We used a group of specific web sites, including the Internet Movie Database and Ranker: <https://www.imdb.com/chart/toptv>/<https://www.metacritic.com/> and <https://www.ranker.com/>. Accessed November 2020.
- 28 <http://www.trendstoday.it/trendstoday/gossip-girl-una-capsule-collection-per-manhattan-girls/>. Accessed November 2020.
- 29 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/anna-sui-gossip-girlinspired-t>. Accessed November 2020.
- 30 <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/#Instagram>. Accessed November 2020.
- 31 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
- 32 See <https://www.statista.com/>. Accessed November 2020.
- 33 At first students were asked to pick and work on the TV series they were familiar with and liked. This is why the initial sample is larger (35 titles) than the one presented here.
- 34 Gillian Rose, eds., *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (London-Thousand Oaks-New Delhi-Singapore: Sage, 2016).
- 35 Christopher Pinney, *‘Photos of the Gods’: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).
- 36 Lev Manovich, *Instagram and Contemporary Image*, Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Creative Commons license, 2017 ([http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/154-instagram-and-contemporary-image/instagram\\_book\\_manovich\\_2017.pdf](http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/154-instagram-and-contemporary-image/instagram_book_manovich_2017.pdf)). Accessed November 2020.
- 37 J. Schroeder, “Snapshot Aesthetics and the Strategic Imagination,” *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* (IVC), 18 (2013) (<http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/snapshot-aesthetics-and-the-strategic-imagination/>). Accessed November 2020.
- 38 Lev Manovich, *Instagram and Contemporary Image*, Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Creative Commons license, 2017: 40.
- 39 Agnes Rocamora, “Mediatization and Digital Media in the Field of Fashion,” *Fashion Theory* 21, no. 5 (2017): 505–22.

# BRANDING DAILY LIFE: FASHION INFLUENCERS AS MARKET ACTORS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ECONOMY

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## Introduction

The activities of fashion bloggers, Instagrammers, YouTubers, and beauty vloggers has been described under the term “influencers” – micro-celebrities who accumulate followers on social media promoting themselves and the brands and products that hire them. Influencers’ activities blur the lines between hobby and work, passion and profit, as well as blurring the distinction between brands’ publicity, the authenticity of the content, and their own branded personas. Their activities have been described as “aesthetic,” “immaterial,” “visible,” and “aspirational” forms of labor,<sup>1</sup> and have been examined in relation to self-branding,<sup>2</sup> reputation,<sup>3</sup> identities,<sup>4</sup> and self-enterprise and gender inequalities.<sup>5</sup> Influencers are said to legitimate certain forms of communication and taste by staging and promoting a “glamorous life”;<sup>6</sup> they perform “calibrated amateurism,” a type of contrived authenticity<sup>7</sup> (Abidin 2016), which Duffy<sup>8</sup> acknowledges as an aspirational form of labor, noting that they are “not getting paid to do what they love.”

However, less attention has been paid to the cultural and technical knowledge influencers develop to create meaningful content around brands and products, to circulate value across digital platforms, and their roles as market actors. In this latter role, it has been suggested that influencers perform qualifications that singularize attributes and attach them to specific brands and products via economic and cultural calculations, thus mobilizing them in different markets.

It has been previously discussed how fashion mavens use their technical and embodied knowledge to marketize goods and services,<sup>9</sup> more recently termed “glamour labor”<sup>10</sup> to refer to constant bodily self-promotion online. Here, drawing on interviews with Chilean social media influencers in the field of fashion (N: 35) in 2017, and visual and textual analysis of a sample of 90 Instagram stories, this chapter analyzes how influencers do the same, though across their digital networks. I analyze fashion influencers’ economic activity in the framework of economic calculation, value formation, and market performativity developed by Callon, Méadel, and Muniesa<sup>11</sup> to offer an analysis of how influencers’ calculations – economic and cultural – commodify their knowledge for brands and themselves.

The chapter begins by situating the work of influencers as part of an economy – the social media economy – that creates value based on affect, on communities of followers, and on reputations of self-branding and content. I then explore how influencers use “calculation” and “qualification” to singularize (or differentiate) goods and themselves from one another in the markets, and how influencers are themselves subjects of calculations by other actors within a market (e.g. branding agencies) aimed at stabilizing the value of their work. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how influencers experience the commercialization of their knowledge through digital platforms in the social media economy.

### **Influencers and value creation in the social media economy**

Some scholars have written that the main determinant of economic value in the social media economy is that of engagement – the frequency and manner in which users engage with content;<sup>12</sup> for others,<sup>13</sup> the value users produce and accumulate on social media is instead framed in terms of reputation. Regardless of label, social media influencers use affect as currency. Affect involves the exchange of feelings and emotions with potential audiences in order to construct a community of followers.<sup>14</sup> Influencers become micro-celebrities who manipulate and commodify their images, personas, and content<sup>15</sup> in order to construct affective relations with their audiences. They do this in the form of what Wissinger<sup>16</sup> describes as “glamour labor,” a “constant self-promotion and fashioning” online through managing affect and manipulating the body. Influencers then convert these intense affective online social relationships into “comparable metrics,” which objectify and valorize their affective connections.

Drawing on the work of Deleuze, the objectification and commodification of affect was examined by Arvidsson and Colleoni.<sup>17</sup> These authors frame the value produced on social media as objectifications of “non-representational thoughts,” including emotions and affect. Historically, say Arvidsson and Colleoni, affect was private, expressed only with friends, family, lovers, and community, and the ideal public self was affectively neutral. Nonetheless, with the advent of social media, affect has become increasingly public and measurable. As people use “social buttons” to connect themselves with brands, people, celebrities, or public issues on social media, they convert affect into public and objectified forms, where it can be quantified along three dimensions: numbers, intensity, and influence. Numbers means the volume of “likes,” “retweets,” or “views” associated with a particular piece of content. Intensity is measured in terms of how many positive or negative comments or interactions a piece of content receives (known as “sentiment analysis”). Influence measures the reach of particular users – people invested in a brand or a public issue and who, from the center of online networks, reach out to and influence their connections. Using this framework, value – defined as the ability to mobilize affective attention and engagement – is produced through online social relations, or relations of “affective proximity.”<sup>18</sup>

Although an ostensible ethos of authenticity guides users’ social media communication, the platforms require users to craft the self and make it visible; they connect private and public performances<sup>19</sup> (Banet-Weiser 2012). They also blur the boundaries between personal and commercial communication, and it is this blurring that allows cultural producers like YouTubers, Instagrammers, and other social media influencers to create value.<sup>20</sup> Influencers are seen as “authentic” consumers of brands and goods—consumers that can also communicate and represent brands in terms of authentic personal experience, as well as produce and circulate personal meanings for brands or products. Online interaction connects branding and content creation practices to the sociality of social media platforms, using the platforms’ inherently public social connectivity, or affect.<sup>21</sup> Social media influencers thus accumulate audiences by

presenting themselves as authentic and affective consumers,<sup>22</sup> and they construct their own reputations – their own brands – by promoting their authentic lifestyles and their acts of consumption.<sup>23</sup> The efficiency of their self-promotion processes – their “glamour labor”<sup>24</sup> – are quantifiable through metrics such as likes, shares, and reproductions, thus enabling marketing agencies to put a price on the online affective work done by influencers<sup>25</sup> (Gandini 2016; Hearn 2010). As Hearn and Banet-Weiser suggest,<sup>26</sup> the communication of glamour and affect on social media is functional to the political economy of platforms, exemplifying the “platformization”<sup>27</sup> of cultural production.

### **Influencers as market actors displaying cultural and economic calculations**

I here use the definition of markets as socio-technical networks made up of actors (e.g., producers, consumers, intermediaries) and objects (e.g., digital technologies) where goods and services are exchanged, and agency is distributed across human and non-human actors.<sup>28</sup> Thus, value is produced through relational activity in which both human and non-human agents participate in processes of production and consumption.<sup>29</sup> Unlike French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>30</sup> who views value as dependent on cultural meanings resulting from individuals’ accumulation and display of capital in a particular field, Callon and his colleagues<sup>31</sup> focus on market actors that generate value by engaging in processes of qualification, which define and singularize the “qualities,” or attributes of products, that will be traded in markets.

Goods are qualified within markets by “imagining and estimating courses of action associated with particular things or states”<sup>32</sup> in a process known as calculation. Economic agents – producers, intermediaries, and final consumers – therefore make calculations when deciding which good or commodity will be produced, promoted, or bought within a particular market. Actors make commodity calculations in markets, which stabilize over time and can then be traded.<sup>33</sup> When calculations and qualifications circulate through networked markets, or “circuits of value,” relational and non-fixed value is produced through such market activity.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, market activities reflect the series of calculations made by producers, consumers, and intermediaries that produce and circulate value. For example, in processes of qualification, Nixon<sup>35</sup> positions advertising practitioners as market actors “disentangling goods from the world of producers and attempting to entangle them in the world of consumers.” These market actors depend upon market devices<sup>36</sup> and research (e.g., surveys, focus groups, and big data) to generate knowledge and “insight” into consumer behavior in different contexts, connecting goods’ qualities with consumer habits and enabling advertisers to make accurate calculations.<sup>37</sup>

Although some have argued that the account of value creation ignores culture as a constitutive element and an analytical category,<sup>38</sup> or that their pragmatic approach to economic behavior neglects the way that moral values legitimize the transaction of goods,<sup>39</sup> their work on the economy of qualities has influenced many subsequent scholars of knowledge commodification and trading. For example, scholar Don Slater describes the work of advertisers and marketing executives as activities where “cultural calculations,” displayed as a form of knowledge, interpret and qualify goods and consumers.<sup>40</sup> These advertising professionals not only generate value through strategic (economic) calculations but also through their identities: to create value, advertisers and marketing executives,<sup>41</sup> or fashion buyers<sup>42</sup> must display their cultural categories, their forms of knowledge, and their interpretations of the social world. Economic actors’ identities are thus bundled with their cultural and economic calculations within the network and with the other members of the network; their decisions, their forms of self-presentation, and their resolutions about suppliers of goods and services all reflect who they

are and whom they know. Where digital platforms objectify and measure users' public affective investment, such associations, calculations, and identities are used in particular ways to create value on social media.<sup>43</sup>

## **Methods**

Data for this chapter comes from two different sources. First, from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 35 social media influencers based in Santiago, Chile in 2017; and second, a random sample of 15 "Instagram Stories" created by six social media influencers (N = 90). Interviews included participants' backgrounds and expertise; processes of content creation, distribution, and promotion through social media platforms; self-presentation strategies; and their relationship with brands and branding agencies. Next, these social media content samples were included in a larger collection of 540 Instagram stories, which was used to explore the different mediations enacted by influencers. The six participants were selected based on discussions during the interviews. Visual and textual elements of each "story," as well as interview transcripts, were coded and analyzed using a grounded theory approach.<sup>44</sup> Data from interviews and stories were analyzed for their cultural and economic calculations to explore how fashion influencers use their technical and embodied knowledge to promote brands and products, and specifically, how they qualify brands, products, and themselves as promoters of brands.

### **Fashion influencers displaying cultural and economic calculations**

Fashion influencers' ability to promote brands and products relies on embodied knowledge—their ability to naturally present products and brands, as if they were authentically using or consuming the products. Platforms like Instagram facilitate this style of affective communication, offering options from traditional blog posts to live streams to the ephemeral Instagram Stories that were being rolled out during our interviews. Instagram Stories, which have playful tools like emojis and filters, enable direct, conversational communication. The importance of such direct affective connection, of the message being less important than how it is transmitted, is explained by a female influencer who uses Instagram Stories to present herself doing mundane activities like applying a lotion while inviting her audience to respond:

"You've got two ways to communicate: Stories that last 24 hours, and the photos that stay there. I get the most responses from Stories, because it's your day-to-day, you can show your everyday life, like 'I'm going home,' 'I'm cold.' Who cares?" (Cecilia, 26, fashion influencer since 2012).

On Instagram, fashion influencers promote brands or products with content of themselves engaged in everyday activities, like going to the gym or cooking, hence contextualizing the brand by using the product in authentic-seeming situations. This authenticity differentiates their work from that of professional advertisers, branding experts, and promotional roles played by actors or TV celebrities. Influencers consider the promotional work of other media professionals as "non-organic"—not honest enough to translate the real value and properties of the products and experiences they promote.

These discourses of naturalness and of organic content validate influencers' activities as a form of labor. They see themselves as experts who know what to expect from a product, and as "ideal consumer[s]" who understand how products are distinctive and how they might be meaningful or useful to their followers. According to interviewees, the main quality of a

“good” social media influencer is honest communication with their audiences, which builds their credibility as reliable recommenders. As one female influencer explains:

“The appeal of influencers is that they do what they like. That’s what distinguishes [an influencer] from a television celebrity. A celebrity might promote a product she doesn’t use, and it won’t matter, because she doesn’t need to have that kind of credibility. But influencers are much more associated with the brands they promote, so if you start promoting stuff that isn’t what you would normally like, people start to distrust [you]. This is about your work being what you would do anyways, without obligation.” (Ignacia, 17, fashion influencer since 2011).

In order to engage audiences and commercialize their knowledge as brand promoters, fashion influencers display a set of cultural and economic calculations serving as parameters to qualify and marketize brands, goods, and themselves. They define themselves as being able to “translate” the values of a brand and to bestow their own status (as trendsetters or fashion experts) upon said brand. One female influencer with 148,000 followers describes this translation process: she presents a brand or a product as an example of a wider fashion trend, which she then validates with a picture of herself wearing the product on the street. Natalia’s description is an example of how fashion influencers display cultural calculations – in the form of specific knowledge about fashion trends – so she can appeal to her audiences in a more “authentic” way, while being strategic with regard to the brand paying her for its promotion.

“One of the keys to success [as an influencer] is using the brand as raw material to make a different point. I mean, this t-shirt I’m wearing has stripes, right? It’s part of a trend, ‘navy style.’ A brand may give me a t-shirt with their logo, but the final point of what I wrote on Instagram was to talk about the ‘navy’ trend, not to literally say, ‘buy this t-shirt.’” (Natalia, 29, fashion influencer since 2014)

Fashion influencers, especially experienced ones with large audiences and established commercial relationships with branding agencies, engage in economic calculations in the form of editorial decisions. One influencer uses two intertwined strategies of positivity to promote content: she avoids sharing her political positions or any value judgments about public issues, and she publishes only positive product reviews (even when she must invite several people who work with her to try the product in order to get positive comments about it).

“We don’t talk about negative stuff in general, we don’t say, for instance, ‘this product was awful.’” (Romina, 34, influencer since 2011)

Many influencers struggle to distinguish goods from their competitors—attributorial labor that is a key element of influencers’ production of value. When facing the aforesaid predicament, some interviewees said that they had to limit the number of similar products and brands they promoted, instead aligning their image and values with those of the brands they promote. A lack of consistency between self and brand was thought to diminish influencers’ value as brand promoters:

“When I see a girl taking pictures with anything they send her, it’s not credible, who is she writing for? She’s all over the place, and you can see that they’re desperate for brands to find them and give them money... agencies are unlikely to pay for this kind

of work, they will think it's cheap. That kills the industry.” (Carlos, 34, fashion influencer since 2011)

Yet despite the calculation that underlies these decision-making processes, there is often real concern about authentic alignment, and decisions about what to promote often reflect influencers' ethical values. Because influencers promote brands and products as part of their everyday activities, many feel that they must have a real connection with a product or a brand that they promote. For example, one influencer began to feel guilty about promoting products that she herself did not use to her followers. She shifted her model and began promoting vegan food and fair-trade products through online videos—products that were more in line with her authentic beliefs. Another influencer promotes only makeup products that are not tested on animals.

### **Fashion influencers targeting content to reach audiences**

Influencers' reviews or recommendations to buy or use a product should read like advice from a personal friend rather than having the tone of traditional advertising. Although influencers require some technical knowledge, their success depends on their ability to affectively connect with their followers via a coherent personal narrative. A fashion influencer that has built her personal brand around sharing discounts and sales explains what happened when she changed her approach:

“I bought a marble background, tried a post on reviewing some of the... beauty products, TV and food [that I liked]. I took an ‘instagram famous’ photo, I dunno, where the lipstick looked pretty, and it only got a few likes in comparison to other photos I upload. People don't expect that from me, they don't expect the picture to be so pretty and so professional—they just want the raw discounts.” (Josefina, 31, fashion influencer since 2015)

Social media influencers' lifestyle and personal experiences are the binding threads for their content, so their self-presentation must affectively engage their audiences while remaining consistent in tone and narrative. Sharing mundane daily activities enables them to present themselves casually and carelessly: in bed, no makeup, making funny faces, showing off their pets, eating lunch or breakfast, etc.—the same kind of light content that their followers share. Even influencers associated with glamorous lifestyles or special technical expertise post this kind of content from time to time. They must perform being casual and laid back—another type of calculation they must make as they produce and present their content and create their online personas. As one female influencer says, “they want to see your lifestyle, what you do in your day-to-day, even if it's fake.” But even then, it is important that the labor that goes into these calculations remains invisible, that their personas read as natural. Another female fashion influencer says,

“I know some people, right before taking their ‘good morning’ photos, go to the bathroom to wash the crust off their eyelids, and that's like, we all know that we wake up with sleepy face. It's not wrong; don't try to show that you're perfect when no one is.” (Cecilia, 26, influencer since 2012)



There is no defined formula for successful content. Emerging social media influencers often model their themes and strategies on those of established, successful influencers or draw inspiration from their own interests and mundane events. Sometimes they try to anticipate what might be successful based on how previous posts have performed, using metrics and direct feedback to determine success. But they try to keep these calculations invisible, lest they lose their unique personal voice or appear too contrived. As one female influencer said, “I think it might become dangerous if you exclusively start focusing on [metrics], because I think that ultimately, whenever we do something natural, that brings you likes, not backwards. Not looking for likes and then making it seem natural.” Influencers aim to keep their content “organic,” which implies a calculated display of spontaneity. As another female influencer describes, they often try to intuit what their followers will respond to using empathy:

“That post got a lot of clicks, because I based it on, you know, what is the user looking for. Like, what is the user looking for? It’s surreal, I’m thinking about what they are looking for. No one tells me they want panties, there are times where they ask for content, but it’s not like 30 people ask you at the same time—you just think about their needs as a human being, or like guessing a bit.” (Valentina, 23, influencer since 2014)

### Concluding remarks

In this article, I explored how a group of influencers in the field of fashion experience their economic activities based on cultural and economic calculations. Particularly, I described how fashion influencers work in the framework of market actors performing qualifications to singularize attributes and attach them to specific brands and products via economic and cultural calculations, mobilizing them in different markets.<sup>45</sup>

Based on the data presented, I argue that value on social media is not the result of commodity exchange or the possession of physical means of production. On the contrary, it seems to be the modern–most iteration of the production of signs and meanings as intangible assets related to brands,<sup>46</sup> as well as the “self,” that work as forms of capital (e.g. cultural, economic, social).<sup>47</sup> The work of branding consists of designing a memorable and consistent brand image across sites and media.<sup>48</sup> As social media influencers have emerged as market actors, branding has evolved into a dynamic force through which value is socially produced based on affect.<sup>49</sup> Fashion influencers create content and display “glamour labor”<sup>50</sup> to promote brands and products through affective connections with their audiences. Goods are shown in everyday situations that highlight the qualities of the goods – an economic as well as affective activity, which requires cultural and economic calculations to perform well.

And so social media influencers shape consumer opinions as a function of affect;<sup>51</sup> the value they produce comes from themselves and is transferred only to brands, products, and branding agencies. Thus, glamour and affect work on social media allow influencers to “enhance the affordances, data extraction practices, and profit of the major platforms.”<sup>52</sup>

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## PART VIII

# The future of fashion and its challenges

Fashion as a multifaceted phenomenon is always forward moving. It takes on new identities and forms alliances with forces giving shape to the cultural, social, and interpersonal worlds that people inhabit. Some of the forces that will continue to shape fashion in the future are explored here: the role of the industry itself, the tools it adopts to create, manufacture and disseminate information, as well as new materials, and finally its constant modes of translation between cultures and worlds.

The luxury fashion sector is a significant force not only in the fashion industry but in the global economy. Industry experts in Veronica Manlow's chapter provide their analysis on issues impacting the future of the luxury sector. In the future of fashion more generally, fashion looks toward more ecological types of materials and production practices, and some are adopting new technologies to introduce them to the fashion world. Biodesign, the use of living organisms to engineer new materials and products, is one such practice. Elizabeth Wissinger explores the possibilities of this technology, discussing the nature of biodesign, some recent explorations of the technology by prominent designers, and some future avenues for research in this emerging area.

Race and its cultural discourses and practices and the link between Fashion Studies and Translation Studies are the topics of Eugenia Paulicelli's essay. Focusing on the relationship between Gucci and the Harlem based designer Dapper Dan, Paulicelli revisits the discourses around race and cultural translation as they pertain to actual producers of alternative languages and styles and highlights the notion of difference in the process of translation as it is practiced by minoritarian groups, which as a result become socially visible. One of the questions posed in the essay is how can cultural translation actually be practiced in order to change existing power relations regulating class, gender and race, rather than consolidate them.



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# THE FUTURE OF LUXURY FASHION: INSIGHTS FROM INDUSTRY EXPERTS

*Veronica Manlow*

The luxury fashion sector finds itself at a crossroads with a future less clear than just a few years ago. The pandemic ushered in the worst year ever. Brands already under stress folded while the biggest players—conglomerates LVMH, Kering, and Richemont solidified their positions and no doubt will continue to pursue strategic brand acquisitions. Many bought the companies they relied on in their supply chains, putting them in a strong position when COVID-19 hit.<sup>1</sup> Luxury fashion brands face new obstacles with prominent voices from within the industry such as Giorgio Armani<sup>2</sup> calling for significant changes to the business model and customers demanding more transparency in the supply chain.

While those who work in the luxury sector have more protections than the Bangladeshi garment workers that Nafisa Tanjeem (Ch. 27) introduced us to, Emilia Barnes and Emise Dobos-Nagy (Ch. 23) explain that luxury commodity chains also extend to lower-wage countries in Europe and Asia. Even within Italy and the USA, sweatshop conditions can be found.<sup>3</sup> Those far from corporate offices: in retail stores, ateliers, and factories, in the offices of vendors and suppliers and those who are more tenuously connected to the complex and often invisible links comprising supply chains, may have found themselves in harm's way.

COVID-19 grounded travel to a halt. Customers who had traveled internationally to shop found themselves in quarantine. One-third of global luxury goods were purchased by Chinese and some predicted that this would increase to 50% by 2025. Younger Chinese were purchasing up to 70% of their luxury goods overseas.<sup>4</sup> The absence of these and other consumers shocked the fashion ecosystem. Merchandise accumulated and digital become the only channel available for brands to market and sell product.

Questions abound about the future of luxury. Has consumer consciousness changed in response to economic and job insecurity and an abrupt change in lifestyle which included a shift to remote work? For some, luxury seemed morally questionable while for others luxury purchasing intensified. In order to answer these and other questions the author interviewed two luxury fashion experts in September of 2020. Bijou Abiola was designer women's wear buyer at Lord & Taylor and director of digital strategy at Hudson's Bay. Now she is Director of Customer Insights and Strategy at L'Oreal Luxe. Luca Solca, an expert on the luxury sector, is Senior Analyst at Bernstein and Senior Advisor at Boston Consulting Group.

Solca<sup>5</sup> reflected on the evolution of the modern luxury industry in an article he wrote:

[N]othing in the modern luxury industry is really exclusive. If it were exclusive, it wouldn't be an industry. We are talking about businesses that have to grow fast, and growth is the exact opposite of exclusivity.

While Solca believes that luxury goods must display excellence in order to command a high price, he referred to the role “marketing levers” play, allowing us to see how the definition of luxury may broaden:

Price discipline and direct control of distribution are probably two of the most important features. Avoiding overwhelming the market with a lot of iconic products is another one. And as we have seen recently can be applied to new product families as well. We saw most recently sneakers developing into the higher end. We saw tee shirts costing a thousand dollars or more. We saw that brands benefited from this development in streetwear which was not necessarily considered to be a part of luxury in the past. As far as product families are concerned there is always an opportunity to trade up.

Abiola and Solca see the digital realm and e-commerce as the new frontier, the engine which will move luxury forward. They stressed that while the pandemic has been devastating, a full recovery is expected. They provided insight on how brands can successfully navigate a rapidly changing landscape. Abiola described the current state of retail:

It's been a crazy time. March happened and the world has sort of stopped. Retail had been in this place of limbo even before the virus hit. Tons of articles discuss the death of the department store as we witness many companies filing for bankruptcy.

She explained that we can trace some changes in consumer behavior to the past five years and to “the rise of e-commerce and people's ability to shop via social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook”:

The millennial demographic especially is shopping not just for need but also for fun. Shopping is based more on what influencers are wearing and less on brand affinity. That leads to a lack of loyalty to a brand or to a specific store. We saw that happening before Covid and when Covid happened, a lot of stores shuttered. Once lockdown restrictions were lifted, some stores never got the traffic back and as a result, we're seeing a lot of brick and mortar stores fold. This is sad but this is the reinvention of retail as we know it. In apparel at least.

Solca referred to COVID-19 in a report and in an interview with Imran Amed<sup>6</sup> as “terra incognita.” He expanded on this:

People are not travelling anymore. At least not as much anymore. Especially when we look at international travel and overseas travel to Europe from Asia and China in particular. It has reshaped and structurally changed the way people buy luxury goods. They buy more online.

Solca spoke of the rate of sales:

We had a huge amount of decline but the current trading commentary was particularly encouraging with June and July monthly rates almost flat year on year. This seems to be a crisis that finds a solution sooner rather than later. It is early to say because clearly there are many risks in the background, a resurgent infection for example as well as the effects from the recession but on the other hand you can also find that the announcement of an effective vaccine or a therapy could come to balance those risks so all in all I would say that the current trading updates make me more confident on the trajectory of luxury goods companies and the market.

When asked to speak of the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, he pointed out:

Well this has prompted the most important decline in GDP since the Second World War so I think that the way economies resurrect from this decline is going to be most important. For sure this has prompted another major injection of liquidity by central banks, the Fed and the European central banks and other central banks worldwide. This is possibly something different from what we saw in 2008 and 2009 when there was first and foremost a risk of moral hazard or a perceived risk of moral hazard and when central banks only decided to move in later in the game so this time we didn't have the same dislocation in equity markets. Equity markets have been recovering quite quickly, although one would have to add that the recovery is being very spiky with sectors like tech for example that have been very, very strong indeed and other sectors that have continued to trail. And it is obviously a fact that a lot of industries connected to people being on the move including airlines, hotels, travel retail, oil and so on are still under a huge amount of pressure. And this can potentially accelerate some of the trends that were already in motion beforehand. I think that this is certainly the case in luxury goods with a faster acceleration of digital distribution and a faster demise of wholesale and also faster repatriation of Chinese spend to China.

Abiola addressed manufacturing disruptions and a shift in demand:

Retailers are having a hard time paying their partners/brands right now. Everyone has been trying to figure out cash flow: how much cash do we pay out and how much do we store. In terms of manufacturing disruptions there have been shipping delays.

Both Solca and Abiola felt that working from home will continue even after COVID-19 has ended. Said Abiola:

In terms of production we saw an uptick in at leisure wear. Luxury sweatsuits that cost \$200 or \$300—worn by influencers—drove demand for luxury sweats during lockdown. I think you are going to see companies like Lululemon grow even bigger because people are working from home and the people who are working from home have more disposable income. They're not going to need Givenchy high shoulder jackets for Zoom calls. Maybe they'll need it by Fall 2021 but definitely not anytime soon. Our WFH lifestyle is lending itself to a more casual aesthetic. In Phil Knight's memoir *Shoe Dog*<sup>7</sup> he talked about a Japanese businessman saying "I envision a day where everyone is going to be wearing running shoes, pretty much no more heels, no more anything, only running shoes." I think we are there now. Which means that



brands are going to have to pivot. Make less stuff. Make better stuff. Less but better. More edited and more tailored to the now.

Abiola and Solca reflected on new patterns of consumption that have been brought about by travel restrictions. Abiola pointed out:

Tourists are not coming in to major cities. There have been lockdowns and this may happen again. Many smaller retailers have lost their leases. It has been really tough to see the numbers around small businesses folding. There is a human aspect to this but there's also the reality behind it. I look at my group of friends and a lot of them are starting to shop on Etsy. There is this growing mindset of "we are not going to put money in the pockets of the big guys. Let's go find smaller retailers." Smaller retailers having a hard time maintaining physical locations should close up shop and find other avenues to drive business. There's this whole wave of showing support for Black owned businesses. People are finding ways of taking whatever disposable income they have and putting it to use towards some sort of good. I think market places like Etsy have a lot of opportunity going forward.

Solca spoke about how the pandemic changed the way that people consume:

Well I think if we look at different product categories I believe that for sure people have been going out much less. On the one hand supermarkets have been rising and restaurants have been declining especially in Europe but I think to some extent in the US people have been reassessing the appeal of houses with gardens and holiday homes. Holiday homes are allowing us to self-isolate and at the same time get some open air time which is seen to be safe. I know a lot of people that have been spending money refreshing and refurbishing their holiday homes and haven't been spending money on going to the Maldives, and I guess that spending money on your home has really benefitted from this situation. Having said that when I look at personal luxury goods I don't necessarily see a huge amount of differences between one product category and the other. They all seem to be fairly equally impacted. Where I see a very big difference is between brands that are really top of mind and at the top of consumer desirability and those brands are clearly doing better than other brands that were just nice to have or were possibly not really there. Lockdowns reduced some of that divergence because when stores are closed everyone's sales go down to zero. But I expect that this divergence will continue to increase.

Regarding e-commerce Solca said the following:

What we've seen for sure is a very substantial increase in e-commerce worldwide. China was already leading in e-commerce so my expectation is that the increase in China is possibly a bit more moderate. But I would also think that on the back of the lockdowns, digital distribution has also benefitted, and this has also been sort of a step change for distribution globally.

Solca explained that consumers are more careful about how they are spending and expect more innovation from brands. He singled out Dior, Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Chanel, and Hermes:

These brands I expect will continue to be at the top of consumers' minds and at the top of consumers' preferences more so than midcaps or brands that were sort of falling by the wayside. I think that in watches this is particularly visible because the top brands are private. If you look at Rolex or Philippe Patek they are really doing very well while most of the brands in publicly traded groups, I think are struggling. When I think of Vacheron Constantin they are not really where they should be.

Solca<sup>8</sup> has spoken of the “megabrand bathtub.” New consumers come in and richer ones eventually leave. He was asked if there will be enough new consumers to keep the bathtub full:

It seems so because we have a huge amount of middle class development in China that seems to provide hundreds of millions of consumers so they should be taken care of. Down the road we have South East Asia and we have maybe one day India. There is a huge amount of middle class potential there and I also think that megabrands are being developed in some cases to upgrade at least a portion of their assortment to regain a sophisticated consumer. We talk for example of moving into higher end handbags successfully. LV has done this in the most recent 8 years or so and maintaining strong appeal to very fortunate consumers. Clearly rich consumers want to have something unique and they may find something unique in the megabrand assortment but they may also find something unique in niche high end brands which has been fortunate and an opportunity for smaller players moving into the market. I think of Moynat for example. It is one of the brands that have been able to make the most of this opportunity. Sort of a brand that was resurrected recently and has been bought back to occupy the very top end of the market.

Abiola believed that retailers “need to be able to quickly shift gears”:

You should try to do almost everything at once. This is the whole idea of a test and learn. You might think your customers are on Facebook but really they are shifting to Instagram. Or you may think they are on Instagram but they are on TikTok. The influencer marketing economy is a bit saturated but when I think of categories like Beauty, influencers still matter because there's endless use cases of product and application types. Apparel is a little different. So trying everything and not necessarily limiting yourself to where you think your customer is going to be important. And that is a risk. Especially when there is limited capital to go around and there's no ROI certainty. You really have to test and learn. One of the things that is going to kill any line of business right now is thinking that they know how their customer behaves because we are experiencing – in real time – quick shifts in consumer.

When asked about challenges faced by the luxury sector before the pandemic and if they have been exacerbated, Solca said the following:

The most important challenges for brands in the industry was the continuing escalation of fixed costs because they needed to have better and better stores. You needed to have more and more developed communication across many different channels. They needed to have CRM. You needed to have product innovation. Megabrands have the benefit of scale and they can leverage a higher revenue base. I don't think that Covid-19 changes that. I think that it increases this power. So in terms of underlying forces I

think that we are still there with big brands having an interest in escalating as much as they possibly can. And investing fixed costs in more and more areas so that the smaller brands have more of a problem keeping the same pace. And that is going to be conducive eventually to industry consolidation. And I think that this is really the shape of things to come. The luxury goods industry is relatively young and as a consequence it has been more fragmented than more established industries like food. But I think that in due course this industry will also consolidate. We have seen it already with LVMH taking a bigger and bigger relative size in comparison to its peers. And I think that this will only continue with the acquisition of Tiffany. I think that the stronger players will be able to cherry pick and acquire the best of the smaller players. And that in the end will produce a consolidated industry like we have in other areas.

Solca was asked what he thought about the way luxury firms have responded to the crisis:

I think that brands by and large have been very much aware of this challenge. Some of the brands took it upon themselves to start high profile initiatives to try to help their local communities. I'm thinking of Moncler for example, I'm thinking of Vuitton, Gucci and a few others. I think that brands did what they were supposed to do. I think the area which has yet to be developed is how you can present collections in a different way if you are not to use physical catwalk shows. But that was a problem that preexisted Covid-19 because you had to get the format of the new collection presentation appropriate for social media which is something that was a bit of a work in progress. I think some of the brands were particularly inventive in coming up with new formats. I think there is going to be more work dedicated to how you can actually move into a presentation format that is most effective and interesting to consumers and at the same time safe from contagion and I think this is certainly going to be the matter and the focus of the upcoming fashion shows.

Solca was asked if he sees behavioral and attitudinal changes in customers as long lasting or temporary:

I don't know that I would necessarily agree with this. I think that every time we have a recession there is clearly an expectation that things will change for good. I think consumers and people in general tend to oscillate between optimism and pessimism. I think it is easy to be pessimistic when things go wrong. And things have gone wrong big time in 2020. But I also think that people want to live. I don't necessarily expect that Covid-19 is going to bring about any structural sobering up of consumption. I think it is going to be an unfortunate parenthesis and at one point consumers will go back to their lives. My sense is in the background that consumers are becoming more aware of certain values like the environment for example, like social equality.

Both Abiola and Solca reimagine retail and the luxury sector according a key role to the digital. They envision a stronger digital presence for luxury brands and advances in technology which will impact every facet of the supply chain:

I think that in various ways my sense is that brands have been using social media to get closer and closer to consumers. Social media is very fragmented and very diverse country by country and being on top of social media in China is very important

indeed. There's 10 different platforms at least that are worth mentioning in China which you need to be on or you would benefit from being on. First and foremost WeChat, The Little Red Book and many others. I think that brands that can afford the resources to develop these activities will rise more and more also because these platforms are very important to recruit younger consumers and to update your consumer base. Those brands that cannot and have no resources to do that are condemned to fall by the wayside. And I think that this has been important.

Solca said that there is "clearly a national backlash in the making." He pointed to "a confrontation between China and the US" and said:

At the moment this is not a problem for luxury brands but one should keep this risk in the back of one's mind because there is clearly a number of brands from a Chinese background that are moving at least in the accessible luxury space and I expect that Chinese entrepreneurs will continue to try and break into that space that is potentially very important as a stronger and stronger middle class develops in China.

Abiola spoke about the role of analytics and artificial intelligence:

As a retailer it is a joy to have people transacting online because there are a lot more data points that you can collect and you can use AI to predict how likely a customer is to return an item based on their clicking patterns on the website. If I can get more people shopping online then I have more data to collect. There are so many things I don't know about you when you walk into a physical location. Online however, between cookies and IP address tracking, it's a data dump wonderland! In a digital world, it's so much easier to have more of your customers interacting with you whether it's through websites, Instagram, Facebook etc. Whatever the digital channel, increased engagement means increased information assets.

She shared her thoughts on direct selling to the consumer:

Department stores have to think about why customers are coming to their sites rather than going to the brand sites. That is why the department stores came into being to begin with. Being able to buy multiple things from the same place and having one shipping total versus going to multiple places and paying multiple shipping prices. I think the real game changer is going to be when everyone starts offering free shipping. This sounds very small but when you have better reward programs and you offer incentives like spend more plus get more, then people tend to feel some sort of brand affinity. It's really about finding the real value proposition on what they mean to the customer and why those customers should keep coming to them rather than going directly to the brand.

Solca and Abiola spoke of a convergence between luxury and technology. Solca said the following:

I think it will have to be possible to buy what they don't have in store and to have it delivered wherever you like, and so it is going to be a seamless opportunity to buy either in the physical stores or from your mobile when you are in store. I think to buy

online and pickup in store or to buy online and to return in store should all be basic features that all of the brands will have to integrate sooner rather than later. It is not as easy to do as it is to say because of logistics and IT challenges but I think that for sure will have to be a target for all brands to reach. I think consumers will anticipate and will want that so that brands that cannot provide this kind of feature will be penalized.

Abiola does not believe companies can go back to doing “business as usual”:

They may be fine now but in the next two to three years consumer behavior will look very little like it does today. Think about the customer who starts online, goes in the store then comes back online to place the order, how do we ensure that when he comes into the store to try it on, we place that order online right away so he skips a step. What we don’t want is for him to go home and find that same item on a different site and buy there instead. It’s ultimately about the ease of transacting—the easier the experience, the better the results.

Abiola spoke of the appeal of shopping in physical stores but said that during the pandemic many people got used to shopping online. Safety was one important reason “but they also realized that shopping online is quite convenient.”

Abiola spoke of the importance of investing in research:

You have more and more people interacting with you via increased digital engagement. You are collecting more information than you were four or five months ago. But the next question to ask is do we have a solid data warehouse plus flow plus analytics strategy? Wherever it is that you are storing the data, how quickly you analyze it, iterate it and turn it into actual insights that drive action is key. When we think of research we think of six month lead times, seasonal lead times, yearly lead times. Right now it is week to week lead times. How do I test and learn weekly? You have to plan out your digital marketing strategy—where your ads are going to go, etc. I had a professor in business school that used the term “explore and exploit.” How much of your budget are you allocating to exploiting your current business and how much of it are you using to explore new opportunities? Businesses that are not putting a little more of it in the explore bucket will struggle.

Solca expressed his view on digital strategy:

I think that for sure how brands integrate digital and CRM in their approach and data in general is going to be a very important force. I think there is a huge amount of potential upside to be gained by integrating data and using data more cleverly. In the business the days when you took decisions exclusively on the back of intuition and gutfeel are gone. And if you continue to do so then your ability to be on target is clearly going to be reduced. I think that there is a data revolution that is going on within luxury that will have a huge amount of impact in most of the processes including the creative process. You can analyze the current Zeitgeist, you can analyze the spirit of the times through data today with what photographs people post on Instagram. I believe that is going to create a bigger front for brands to invest in. And another opportunity for big brands to gain further advantages over small brands.

When asked if digital luxury goods such as virtual fashion is likely to grow in significance, Solca said that this was possible. “These are clearly the most advanced areas in the market. It is really an unknown. As a function of how habits will change this could possibly also be a rather interesting area.”

Abiola and Solca addressed the role of discounted luxury. Abiola believed the following:

There will definitely be a win in offprice. We saw this in 2007 and 2008 with the recession when people just didn't have as much disposable income. And in order to buy designer brands they were going to hunt in places like TJ Maxx and Marshalls. I think we will see that happening again.

Solca felt that this is a very interesting area of the business:

In the past we have seen different approaches to offprice. Some of the brands have become really offprice brands and are making more than 100% of their profit in the offprice network. But I would not necessarily recommend a luxury brand to follow that path because then all of the time their brand equity is annihilated, I think that the opportunity is to execute your offprice as best as you possibly can. Make it less convenient and basically ask consumers to make an effort to discover it. I wouldn't necessarily have it online. I would still have it primarily in physical locations. Those physical locations should be of very high quality and should be possibly a recruiting ground for consumers to the full price market.

He cited Value Retail. They offer “real product” and not product “made on purpose for the offprice channel.” They've created “a very good environment for brands to trade and meet consumers that could potentially be recruited for the full price channel.” Solca also expected the second-hand and luxury goods rental businesses to increase in importance and to reach a broader audience.

Solca believed physical stores would continue to be relevant but that less of them will be needed. He spoke of the importance of creation as a “more memorable flagship store experience where you have something that is specific to the brand and where you can learn about the brand.” He said that “I think there is going to be an effort to make those stores both closer in terms of what you find in those stores and in translating core brand values. I am thinking for example about Apple as one of the best in class examples of how their stores relate to the core brand DNA.”

I wish we had more examples like that in luxury with features in the stores that were directly rooted in the core value of the brand rather than just an escalation of who has the most expensive marble on the floor which has no bearing in building the brand DNA. And if I go to a Louis Vuitton store in Shanghai or in Paris or in New York I need to find something different and I need to have a reason that I want to spend time in those stores because if they are the same exactly then I couldn't care less.

Abiola and Solca addressed ethical issues and speak of questions of racial and social equity in the wake of movements such as Black Lives Matter which have had a global impact.

Abiola said the following:

It's been a crazy few months. First there was Covid then there was George Floyd. And then the world just kept changing. After the George Floyd tape surfaced, we saw a lot

of statements come out from brands in the retail and fashion industry, it was a trickle but as they came out, we got to see brands react in real time. The only challenge was as those statements came out, we got a first-hand look into the disconnect between words and action/culture. Between personal accounts and Diet Prada<sup>9</sup> exposés, we started to really get a sense of the pain Black people faced within the four walls of corporate America, especially in fashion. Authenticity and empathy have emerged as the winners in this fight for diversity and inclusion. Between forming councils and hiring heads of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), there seem to be good intentions to make things right. What I'm a bit thrown off by is seeing companies bringing in minority talent at the senior level but primarily to fill head of diversity roles. There is more for people of color to do in retail than just leading diversity and inclusion. What will be very telling in the next year or so is to see how many other roles, business driving roles—not to say that diversity and inclusion roles are not business driving—business facing roles: head of digital, head of marketing etc.—end up being filled by people of color. One very wrong school of thought as to why these roles aren't being filled by minority groups is there aren't enough of them to fill the roles. It is just not true. I really would love to see action behind the words. I want to see more diversity in senior leadership. The more diverse your senior leadership is, the more robust your thinking and your strategic approach to driving the business will be. We have to find the right people to fill these roles. We have to find junior talent to come into the pipeline so that we train them to be our future leaders. We won't see any real changes for the next 5–7 years as it will take some time before new hires attain a powerful voice within companies. Diversity in talent breeds diversity of thought. Different ways of thinking lead to different outcomes.

In retail specifically, we're starting to see more minority and disabled models in ads. We are seeing a lot of diversity represented in consumer facing marketing. But I care more about the back of house. Who is running the team? How diverse is the group? How are you treating your employees of color when they show up to work? Are we giving them equal access? Only time will tell. Everyone wants to be an "ally"—it's trending right now but when the spotlight goes off this issue, what will be left?

When asked about an exemplary company, Abiola said the following:

Every time I think a company is doing it right, some contradictory exposé is released. Where I've seen it done right is in companies who have gotten backlash for unfair practices that turn that backlash into engaging with the customer. For example, companies who have turned it into bringing those same people in and saying "hey come help us figure this out"—I find that to be very reconciliatory. There is a lot coming out and it is all coming out at once. Watchdog groups or groups like the Black in Fashion Council will play an important role in holding the industry accountable. But everyone has to be accountable to themselves. It would really be sad to have all these leaders come out and say all these wonderful things and not act on them. This is not a trend. These are people's livelihoods and people's lives and people of color should be given the same exact opportunities. What we have seen over the past few months is that unfortunately we are a long way off.

Solca saw a change in consumers “in respect of racial differences.” He said: “I think those values will become more important. I think a secular shift towards that will happen gradually and step by step.”

Solca addressed ethics in the luxury sector:

I think that in general when I look at this industry this is really a rich industry so I think that by and large workers in this industry have been benefitting from very favorable tailwinds supporting this industry. I think it is much better to work for a big luxury brand than to work for a grocery discounter. So I think that this is clearly something that has helped. I believe that if brands want to be real in their claims about craftsmanship and social values and so on they will probably have to integrate more into upstream manufacturing and deal with their suppliers and their workers with respect. I think that there was a shortcut there that some of the players used to basically strong-arm small suppliers into working for them at relatively low margins. So I believe that in the end more transparent opportunity coming from digital and consumers that are more aware of social and environmental challenges will make it so that the industry is going to be even more disciplined. Today we are at the beginning of ESG. There is no established framework for investors to assess ESG credentials differently from what they can do for example in terms of financials where they have IFRS criteria. I think that down the road there is going to be more and more an established framework to assess the ESG compliance and as a consequence of that they should in general improve the opportunity for workers in various parts of these companies to benefit from that. I don't think these workers are in a bad position to start with and they are probably better off than most workers if we compare them to workers in industries with smaller margins and more fragile business models.

Solca spoke of the changes he would like to see:

I think possibly as a consumer a bit more of a transparent view on how things are made and who is actually making them. I would like to know where my product is coming from, who created it and under what kind of conditions. I think some of the brands are thinking about having a personal note from the worker that created the product associated with the product you buy. I think this would be a clever development and I think it would substantiate this idea of craftsmanship and the display of craftsmanship.

Abiola provided advice to retailers:

Invest in technology. Step outside the box of what you have been doing. It is time to let technology take over. We know that retail—especially apparel—is a very high touch business meaning it's all about people's tastes. But I would definitely say let technology do what technology can do. There is no limit to what it can do. Traditionally retailers have shied away from technology because it's a consumer facing business but so much advancement is happening on the tech side of things that we need to explore that more. Keep an eye on Google. Going back to this notion of ease of transaction, they're launching a program where consumers get to close the loop all on Google. For example, instead of starting their search on Google or Instagram, going to You Tube



to find out how to use the item and then coming back to the retailer's website to buy it, Google is giving them the ability to do it all in one place before transacting. The touchpoints we were used to getting from our consumers, sort of going from our Instagram to You Tube to here and there might then be consolidated into one place making Google more powerful in terms of understanding consumer behavior. Google will be doing more of the analysis for us—they're expanding their suite of businesses and we need to be paying as much attention to them as we are to Amazon.

There have been financial crises and pandemics in the past and while they may have a short term adverse impact the luxury industry is resilient. Fashion is sure to march onward taking on new meanings and forming new alliances. The forces that animate fashion that Simmel<sup>10</sup> spoke of which cause it to be discarded by some as it is adopted by others—prompting the emergence of new styles—happens now at an accelerated pace. Surprising new players such as Amazon Luxury Stores and Alibaba's Luxury Pavilion may take center stage but the fundamental tension between conformity and differentiation remains a part of the human condition and ensures that fashion will remain relevant.

## Notes

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- 6 BoF, *The BoF Podcast: Luca Solca on 'The Worst Year in the History of Modern Luxury'*. March 19, 2020. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/podcasts/global-markets/the-bof-podcast-luca-solca-on-the-worst-year-in-the-history-of-modern-luxury>
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- 8 Solca, 2017. *Ibid.*
- 9 Diet Prada is an Instagram account with about two million followers. Founders Tony Liu and Lindsey Schuyler gained followers by showing images of brands copying one another. Diet Prada has started to call out racism and discrimination within fashion. See for example Rachel Tashjian, 2020. <https://www.gq.com/story/diet-prada-kanye>
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# FASHION'S FUTURE IN BIODESIGN

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Fashion and technology are ineluctably intertwined. Technological innovations from the sewing machine to artificial textiles have provoked seismic shifts in the fashion system. This essay offers a brief discussion of one such innovation, *biodesign*, which is poised to shake up fashion, potentially affecting traditional production practices, materials, and styles, to offer new avenues for a less damaging and polluting way to do fashion in the future.

Biodesign is design with living organisms. As biodesign pioneer and curator Will Myers has explained,

Unlike biomimicry, cradle-to-cradle, and the popular but frustratingly vague “green design,” biodesign refers specifically to the incorporation of living organisms or ecosystems as essential components, ...of function of the finished work.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, biomimicry takes nature as a blueprint for design, using artificial processes that “mimic” natural ones. Biodesign, on the other hand, designs natural processes themselves, co-creating with biological functions rather than merely imitating them. Similarly, the term “cradle to cradle,” refers to design which imitates natural processes by means of copying them, whereas biodesign actually designs with living systems. While it is, in a sense, “green,” biodesign refers to a set of innovations that will potentially have a far more revolutionary effect on how fashion gets “done,” than recycling, organic sourcing, or reduced waste processes combined.

Biodesign holds much promise for righting many of the wrongs fashion with a capital “F” has stumbled into. Recent years have seen a growing chorus of critics linking the fashion system’s excesses with damaging pollution and climate change.<sup>2</sup> Redesigning how fashion gets done is especially important now, as the industry’s by-products have destroyed delicate ecosystems whose diversity and interdependence historically had kept deadly pathogens at bay. As one pundit pointed out, “Our environmental practices make pandemics like the coronavirus (COVID-19) more likely: The story we tell about pandemics casts us as victims of nature. It’s the other way around.”<sup>3</sup> Biodesign’s focus on solving design problems that will lead to better ecological results from fashion practices such as fabric dyeing and clothing waste going into landfills could rehabilitate the fashion industry from some its worst polluting ways.

Creative solutions to these environmental problems are being explored by professional practitioners and novices alike. Fashion dyes, for instance, are notoriously polluting, creating

water waste. Biodesigner Natsai Audrey Chieza hit on the idea of putting a wild strain of soil-dwelling organism's naturally secreted pigment to use for dyeing textiles. The results, which have been on display at the New York City's Cooper Hewitt Museum, are many hued colorfast silk garments created in collaboration with a synthetic biology lab at University College London's Department of Biochemical Engineering. The method improves on industrial dyeing methods, by using significantly less water, and does not depend on poisonous chemicals.<sup>4</sup> Landfill and waste are another issue biodesigners are addressing. To combat waste exacerbated by the onset of fast fashion and throwaway style culture, companies like Bolt Threads have developed fully biodegradable fabrics made (or more accurately grown) from sugar, yeast, and water. Stella McCartney partnered with the company to produce a tennis dress made from their trademark Microsilks, which combines the above ingredients with cellulose blended yarn that, when discarded, will fully decompose rather than end up as landfill. Adidas explored these possibilities as well, developing a sneaker in 2016 derived from something called *biofabric*, designed to fully biodegrade with the application of a special enzyme. These shoes have not gone into production, but the company has vowed to employ biodesign techniques to shift toward using 100% recycled ocean plastic in all of their products by 2024.

Biodesigned mushroom grown leathers also show a great deal of promise to address both animal cruelty and synthetic fiber pollution with a one-two punch. These leathers are grown from mycelium, the web like fine strands that branch into the networks that form the basis of all fungi. The mycelium sheets are tanned into a leather-like material in a process that uses less water, less noxious methods, and employs no animal products, a far cry from the ecologically damaging effects of traditional processes for leather production. Bolt Threads<sup>5</sup> founder Dan Widmaier claims this is a material whose time has come in the fashion industry. A recent *New York Times* article quoted him saying, "the truth is, this industry remains an environmental ticking time bomb and is full of outdated technologies." His company joins companies Modern Meadow, Mycelium Made, and MycoWorks, who are betting that mushrooms could be the answer to many of fashion's problems.<sup>6</sup>

Interest in biodesign for fashion is also bubbling up from the experimental midst of self-fashioned DIY biologists, bioartists, biofabricators, and biohackers.<sup>7</sup> At the most recent in-person (pre-pandemic) Global Community BioSummit at the MIT Media Lab, tabletop displays of mushroom grown leather<sup>8</sup> and algae derived jewelry,<sup>9</sup> jostled cheek by jowl with Arduino powered e-textiles embedded in bacterial cellulose,<sup>10</sup> alongside a display of incredibly soft yeast-derived yarn fibers. The mood at the MIT BioSummit was one of excitement, tempered by a healthy dose of caution about biodesign's future. One important theme to emerge was the need for inclusiveness in reaping the rewards of these innovations.

Some attendees advocated for taking the tech world as a model for success. A panelist in a breakout room argued that, just as digital hacking went from an egregious offense to a coveted status, so too could the biohacking/piracy/DIY community bio movement follow the same path to enter the mainstream. On the mainstage, however, panelists took a different view. One issued a call to arms, saying "Biotech is poised to become the technology defining the 21st century...but we can't repeat the same mistakes made while developing the digital and computerized world where only an elite group determined its development. We can't hand it over to a 'small cast of characters' again—everyone has to be involved and stay involved."<sup>11</sup> In the ensuing conversation, participants pointed out that corporate driven branches of the field, such as the internationally renowned awards competition iGem,<sup>12</sup> present an "identity that doesn't quite fit with our value systems." Finally, as one panelist succinctly put it: "We know science is biased, so how do we prevent this bias moving forward?"

Without sustained critique and careful scholarly analysis, gender and racial bias inherited from technological culture from whence biodesign's innovations derive, may color their path forward. Public education will play a crucial role in avoiding these issues, and fashion arguably has a large part to play in the process. These debates center around several topics that I will explore briefly here, and then conclude by pointing the way for future avenues of research.

Biodesign's potential for future good is tinged with a heavy dose of controversy, because its processes depend in large part on synthetic biology, a practice involving splicing genes and other methods for manipulating life that brings with it all of the baggage of public fights about GMOs (genetically manipulated organisms), designer babies, and biotech more generally. These controversies may date back to the 1970s, but they are currently alive and well at both amateur gatherings such as the BioSummit discussed above, as well as more professionally established venues. At a talk I attended by William Myers, for instance, these issues bubbled up from the audience. Myers is one of the early proponents of biodesign; he was discussing his book, *Biodesign* at New York City's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). After sharing a wealth of information about biodesign's potential for improving ecological impacts in the fields of architecture, design, and fashion, he was peppered with questions about designer babies, and the dangers of what he himself has called the process of "manipulating life."<sup>13</sup> When I asked him about it afterwards, he said this was a common problem he faced in his work, where public fears of the messiness and unpredictability of biological processes often clouded people's ability to understand biodesign's possibilities.

While the audience questions may have implied a simplistic understanding of biodesign's possible social and cultural effects, at the same time, the history of the technological culture in which biodesign is emerging must not be ignored. Scholars can help practitioners make informed design choices by providing critical and historically informed accounts of other technological innovations in fashion, to provide a basis for careful analysis of potential social and cultural impacts of such changes. "Smart" clothing, for instance, with interwoven biosensors or electronic circuitry, was touted as the fashion industry's next big thing in breathless accounts of how designers and scientists were collaborating to bring clothing into the twenty-first century. Just as biodesigned materials incorporate living processes into their function, "smart" clothing harnesses biological processes such as movement, sweat, heat generation, and heartbeat to generate reams of data that supposedly benefit the wearer, and most certainly benefit the companies that produce these items. While wearable tech was being touted as the way to fashion's future, researchers diligently uncovered deeply problematic issues woven into the very fabric of smart design, and found that smart clothing, and wearable biosensors more generally, were built on a business model that seeks to exploit these biological processes for corporate profit.

The fact that much of wearables' potential to change fashion for the good of the wearer was limited by a business model based on data exploitation was cleverly hidden by the "cool" stuff that smart clothing, for instance, lease omit the semi colon and insert the word "when" to read: could do when biosensors were incorporated into clothing design. Biosensors are a two-edged sword which promises to give the wearer increased access to their body's function and productivity. The fact that these sensors give corporations access to the data that the body produces is often forgotten in the rush to update clothing to be responsive to the wearer. As I have argued elsewhere, smart clothing lies at the interface of wearable systems and biological interfaces, by engaging direct interactions with bodily energies and fluids, such as those fueled by human biological sources (muscle motors, biofuel cells, kinetic energy collectors) or that read and analyze biofluids such as blood, sweat, and tears.<sup>14</sup>

The problems arising from bio-influenced design affect humans directly, so it makes sense that critical research and scholarly analysis was able to raise the alarm about wearable

technology's potentially damaging effects on human beings. My own studies of wearables found gendered attitudes stemming from the masculine-oriented Silicon Valley culture in which they originated built into products, for example. Body alarms, and smart jewelry that dials 911 at the first sign of distress, were typical of early iterations of wearables for women, in products that arguably reflected underlying assumptions that women are all potential victims and need to be protected when they are out in public. I argued that these types of devices smuggled detrimental and limiting cultural attitudes about people gendered female into their design and function.<sup>15</sup> My research joined other studies that have linked fitness trackers,<sup>16</sup> responsive clothing,<sup>17</sup> and computerized biosensors<sup>18</sup> to problems with human data protection,<sup>19</sup> a lack of diversity in design settings leading to biased or discriminatory design,<sup>20</sup> and issues with commercial power dynamics that normalize technologies that do not serve consumers' best interests.<sup>21</sup> Critical studies of bias in AI,<sup>22</sup> software development,<sup>23</sup> and wearables<sup>24</sup> have also revealed deep-seated problems of racism and sexism that permeated the design culture from which these innovations have evolved. There is no study, however, of how these biases and consumer vulnerabilities within the ecosystem of wearable tech are affecting the development of embodied biotech, created by biodesign.

Thus, it is vitally important to keep in mind that biodesign is not a magic bullet that will solve all of fashion's problems. The development of unprecedented innovations in materials and body/clothing interfaces constantly demands actively informed and public facing scholarly analysis in order to help guide it toward equitable and socially just ends. There is a particular dearth of research on the sociological factors that can drive and sustain this new wave of innovation. Motives for wearing technology are complex and ineluctably entwined with commercial and structural power interests that complicate the means by which the technology becomes available and the uses to which it is put, worn, or otherwise. Coming innovations in technology infused fashion will enter the market amidst these existing contradictions and ambivalences. The desire to move from engaging with collecting and processing human data, to engaging the life drive of biology more generally, is complicating matters further (for a sample of the wide-ranging and interesting discussion of posthumanist and transhumanist takes on these debates, in which humans are seen as information systems ripe for enhancement, biological life itself can be seen as code to be patented, and biology is seen as the next phase of information (see Lilley, 2013; Parthasarathy, 2016; and Thacker, 2004). Human data are important, of course, but thinking outside of the human box with regard to powers of biological interaction is a crucial move for researchers seeking to understand the next iteration of fashion/technology interface, as it moves toward merging with biotech.

In other words, studying biodesign and how fashion as an artistic practice can shape its possible futures meets the pressing need for historically and critically informed scholarship that will pinpoint how and when new technological developments in bio-based embodied technologies are veering close to past missteps and offer feedback to help right their course. Fashion studies needs to offer models for avoiding the social inequities of access suffered by both the fashion and technological communities. Despite their potentially immense impact, research into these innovations' socio-technical effects is in its infancy and must catch up to existing critical studies of less invasive and limited forms of electronic, yet still biologically oriented, wearable tech.

Combining the art of fashion with science by means of biodesign can help scientists envision new innovations, while the power of science can be creatively wielded to innovate new fashions that foster better ways of living. Once this global pandemic's rage abates, we will emerge from this global standstill, but cannot go back to business as usual. Researchers and scholars need to work to produce crucial knowledge for understanding how science,

technology, and fashion can work together, through biodesign practices and implementation, to create tools for revolutionizing our past ways of life and pave the way toward a more sustainably healthy and equitable future.

## Notes

- 1 William Myers, *Biodesign* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 8.
- 2 Sara B. Marcketti and Elena Karpova, *The Dangers of Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Elizabeth L. Cline, *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* (London: Penguin, 2012).
- 3 Sigal Samuel, "Our Environmental Practices Make Pandemics Like the Coronavirus More Likely," *Vox*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/3/31/21199917/coronavirus-covid-19-animals-pandemic-environment-climate-biodiversity>.
- 4 <https://faberfutures.com/projects/project-coelicolor/>
- 5 "Bolt Threads | Sustainable Fashion Biomaterials and Fabrics," Bolt Threads, n.d., <https://boltthreads.com/>.
- 6 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/02/fashion/mylo-mushroom-leather-adidas-stella-mccartney.html>
- 7 Global Community Bio Summit, 2019, <https://www.biosummit.org/>.
- 8 Many companies have sprung up (pun intended), alongside DIY artist projects, which employ mushroom derived mycelium to grow materials that strongly resemble leather. The best known company is <https://www.mycoworks.com/>. A typical lab devoted to the practice that had a display at the Global Community BioSummit is called Mycocrea: Mycelium and Biomaterials Lab: <https://www.mycocrea.com/>; all links accessed 12/14/19.
- 9 This jewelry is grown and fashioned by an artist currently working in the lab of the NYU/ITP Program: <http://www.rwrita.com/>
- 10 An organic compound produced by bacteria.
- 11 Global Community Bio Summit, 2019, <https://www.biosummit.org/>.
- 12 From the iGem website: "The International Genetically Engineered Machine competition is a worldwide synthetic biology competition that was initially aimed at undergraduate university students, but has since expanded to include divisions for high school students, entrepreneurs, and community laboratories, as well as 'overgraduates'."
- 13 [http://www.designdebates.nl/\\_pdf/whatIsBioDesign\\_10-5-12.pdf](http://www.designdebates.nl/_pdf/whatIsBioDesign_10-5-12.pdf) posted on a website called "designdebates."
- 14 Elizabeth Wissinger, Wearable Tech, Bodies, and Gender, *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 11 (2017): 1–14.
- 15 Elizabeth Wissinger, "From 'Geek' to 'Chic': Wearable Technology and the Woman Question," in *Digital Sociologies*, 369–86, eds., Jessie Daniels, Karen Gregory and Tressie McMillan Cottom. (London: Policy Press), 2017.
- 16 The literature on fitness tracking is vast and spans several disciplines; these are a few relevant examples: Btihaj Ajana, "Digital Health and the Biopolitics of the Quantified Self," *Digital Health* 3 (2017): 1–18; Aristeia Fotopoulou and Kate O'Riordan, "Training to Self-Care: Fitness Tracking, Biopedagogy and the Healthy Consumer," *Health Sociology Review* 26, no. 1 (2016): 54–68; Marjolein Lanzing, "The Transparent Self," *Ethics and Information Technology* 18, no. 1 (2016): 9–16; Kate Crawford, Jessa Lingel and Tero Karppi, "Our Metrics, Ourselves: A Hundred Years of Self-Tracking from the Weight Scale to the Wrist Wearable Device," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4–5 (2015): 481; Natascha Dow Schüll, "Our Metrics, Ourselves," *Public Books*, January 26, 2017, [www.publicbooks.org/our-metrics-ourselves/](http://www.publicbooks.org/our-metrics-ourselves/).
- 17 Susan Elizabeth Ryan, *Garments of Paradise: Wearable Discourse in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014); this analysis wonders, are you smarter than your jeans? R. N. Juchems, *Axel Blog*, 2018: <https://www.axel.org/blog/are-you-smarter-than-your-jeans-these-smart-clothes-have-something-to-say-about-your-data-privacy/> accessed 12/5/19; see also, Stefan Schneegass and Oliver Amft, *Smart Textiles* (New York: Springer, 2016).
- 18 Dawn Nafus, *Quantified: Biosensing Technologies in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).
- 19 Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2003): 605–22; Patricia Clough, Benjamin Haber, Joshua Scannell and Karen Gregory, "The Datalogical Turn," in *Non-representational Methodologies: Re-envisioning Research*, ed. Philip Vannini (New York: Routledge, 2015), 146–64. A recent study went so far as to argue that wearable data should be protected as by current HIPAA regulations: R. Arrison, "'You're Wearing

- That?’ Why Data Generated from Wearable Tech Should be Protected Under Privacy Law” *Sports Law Journal* 26(2019): 605–622.
- 20 Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019).
- 21 Deborah Lupton, *The Quantified Self* (London: Polity Press, 2015); Lanzing, “The Transparent Self,” 9–16; Karen Levy, “Intimate Surveillance,” *Idaho Law Review* 51, (2015): 679; Brett Nicholls, “Everyday Modulation: Dataism, Health Apps, and the Production of Self-knowledge,” in *Security, Race, Biopower*, eds. Holly Randell-Moon and Ryan Tippet (Macmillan UK: Palgrave, 2016): 101–20; Rachel Sanders, “Self-Tracking in the Digital Era,” *Body & Society* 23, no. 1 (July 19, 2016): 36–63.
- 22 Meredith Broussard, *Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018); Gina Neff, “Does AI Have Gender?,” *Gina Neff*, August 20, 2018, [ginaneff.com/4](http://ginaneff.com/4).
- 23 Charlton D. McIlwain, *Black Software* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- 24 Gina Neff and Dawn Nafus, *Self-tracking* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016); Josh Berson, *Computable Bodies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

# FASHION AND RACE: TRANSLATING CULTURES IN DAPPER DAN AND GUCCI<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Translation derives from the Latin *translatūs*, the past participle of *transfere*, which means “carrying across.” In its etymology, translation evokes and engenders movement, mobility, and migration. In this way, translation is a process that crosses borders and enables the act of negotiating cultural differences. This process is especially important for racialized bodies and identities, which have either been excluded from or rendered invisible by the master narrative of history.

This chapter sets out, first, to examine cultural translation as it pertains to fashion in both its history and as system and practice; and second, to examine contemporary cultural translation in action in the relationship between Gucci, one of the iconic brands most closely associated with the made in Italy and Italian cultural heritage and the African American designer Daniel R. Day, better known as Dapper Dan. In this section of the article, I develop an interpretive framework to analyze the process of translating cultures that is at the core of fashion and examine what happens when an “Italian” brand like Gucci meets an African American sensibility, giving birth to a hybrid and successful commercial and cultural encounter.

“Cultural translation,” according to Kyle Conway, “is a concept with competing definitions coming from two broad fields, anthropology/ethnography and cultural/postcolonial studies,” both of which have used the term in different practices and applications.<sup>2</sup> Postmodernist and postcolonial author Homi Bhaba refashioned the term in the early 1990s in his *The Location of Culture*. In Bhaba’s definition, “cultural translation” is identified as a form of resistance for migrant and non-elitist groups. In Bhaba’s perspective, “cultural translation” always defines a political act that gives voice to hybrid identities and minoritarian groups. I would like to revisit and interrogate this term and unpack the discourses around cultural translation by identifying its politics and by focusing on the actual producers of alternative languages of style. Thus, my aim is to highlight the notion of difference in the process of cultural translation as it is practiced by minoritarian groups who, as a result, become socially visible in shaping a new politics of style. But the crossing over of cultural translation does not always work to the advantage of minoritarian groups. Indeed, in the hands of those colonial nations that since at least the fifteenth century and during the period of the Silk Road have traded minoritarian cultures, those cultures have been subjugated and certainly not liberated, nor has it engendered acts of resistance.<sup>3</sup> The



question, then, is how can cultural translation actually be practiced in order to change existing power relations regulating class, gender, and race, rather than consolidating them.

The cross-pollination between the fields of translation and fashion studies could be in my view a contribution to the ongoing scholarly debate on “decolonizing fashion,” the debunking of the notion of “exceptionalism” long attributed to Europe and the West in general, and the correcting of the view that fashion is solely a “Western” phenomenon, even (or especially) in periods that are not immediately associated with fashion such as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> For example, Harish Trivedi, a scholar who has written on English literature in India, post-colonial studies and translations, has posed a number of questions that have a direct bearing on my argument.<sup>5</sup> As Trivedi states, in history there has always been translation, but starting in the 1980s thanks to a boom in publications, readers, and handbooks, huge advances have been made in the field of translation studies. A similar boom also took place in studies on dress and textile in the 1980s, giving rise to a new field called fashion studies. It might be worthwhile to identify the points on which these two fields of scholarly inquiry can find a common fruitful terrain. Of interest to me in our context is, on the one hand, the cultural turn taken by both fashion and translation studies and, on the other, the role of language both fields endorse and on which they rely as a vehicle of culture. The role of language in fashion studies, with all its complexities, specificities, and hybridities from words to objects and different processes of embodiment, such as the page, the screen, and the body, cannot be underestimated. In order to understand, maintain and respect diversity, awareness of the “intractable” or “culture-specific” aspects of the languages of fashion and cultures needs to be heightened. Trivedi mentions Indian items of clothing that cannot be translated into Western vocabulary: “Kurta, dhoti ... peculiarly Indian and not really like the Western shirt, trousers...”<sup>6</sup> This simple example shows that words and objects are not only language specific, they are also culture specific.<sup>7</sup> The translation of any text, literary or otherwise, is always a negotiation between two cultures. This has been identified as the “cultural turn” made by translation studies in the 1990s. Fashion is by definition a system and a practice that crosses boundaries, whether of bodies and genders or nations, places and time. Fashion, then, is an ideal platform for a fertile study of the complex phenomenon of translation of languages and cultures and how this bears on questions of race and identity.

In previous studies that have focused on different historical epochs, especially from the Renaissance onwards, I have examined the role that translation has in the construction of intangible and tangible discourses and practices in fashion and the “made in Italy” label and brand.<sup>8</sup> To understand fashion and its impact on affective regimes and both individual and collective power, we would do well to contextualize the ways cultures and languages of fashion, style, and beauty have always traveled. Today the traveling of fashion items happens at an unprecedented speed and breadth thanks to the internet. The process of translating cultures in fashion is both embedded (grounded in social context) and embodied in the individual choices of wearing a specific item. Fashion, then, is the expression and manifestation of different cultures, shaped by languages and narratives more than “a field where cultures meet and [where] language [is] in constant translation.”<sup>9</sup> I am interested in examining the racial identity of those who own and produce a translation of fashion and style and how this interaction is mediated and engenders a new culture and politics of style. That said, I wish to pose some questions regarding the process of cultural translation that could lead instead to the exclusion of migrants, or minoritarian groups from the narrative of corporate and capitalist institutions.

In the last few years, a growing body of scholarship has identified how race and diversity explain and interrogate the power of fashion as a multibillion-dollar manufacturing industry and as a strong symbolic force. The entire question of the politics of fashion has never been so

openly discussed in the fashion industry and in the media as it is today. Never before has the fashion industry come under such attack—from exploitation of the labor force, to waste, etc. And rightly so. Consumers today are attentive to the story behind a product, their growing awareness has disrupted the traditional narratives of fashion communication and has questioned the ethics of imagery disseminated on the Internet that degrades race, gender, and religious belief. Consumers can and do exercise their power to protest and make their voices heard; they demand inclusiveness, diversity and respect not only for the people working in the fashion industry in different capacities but also for themselves as they become ever more protagonists of their race, gender, and cultural identity. If “the creation of a fashion product means creating culture,” to interpret and translate culture in different geographical contexts and locations is not a task to be taken lightly.<sup>10</sup> Globalization creates a climate of constant tension as local territories whose cultures and producers of fashion demand to be acknowledged and recognized as the hands of people who actually make our clothes. This has been the slogan of a movement and a non-profit organization called “Fashion Revolution,” which came to the fore after the disaster of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, where more than 1,040 workers in a run-down building died.

A greater awareness of cultural sensitivity has also been evident in the world of high fashion. Fashion can now no longer rely on the aura of its glory, seductive power, and selling techniques to a faceless consumer. Affected by these and other changes, the luxury market has been re-branding itself and its narratives, language, and culture. Gucci has been particularly active in dealing with race and diversity. In an interview granted to fashion critic Robin Givhan that dealt with the question of inclusion and systemic racism in the industry, Marco Bizzarri, Gucci’s CEO states that they are ahead of the game in terms of initiatives and awareness.<sup>11</sup> In fact, in the climate of greater cultural sensitivity, the brand has thrived.

Let us go back for a moment to the concept of “cultural translation” that Bhaba developed in a chapter of his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*.<sup>12</sup> He approaches translation as a process, a discursive practice that informs the tactics and behavior of migrant communities as a political strategy and a form of activism. In the chapter entitled “How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, post-colonial time and the trials of cultural translation,” Bhabha refers to the possibility for migrants to transform receiving cultures and produce a third space; or an alternative culture. But how exactly does a minoritarian group or culture active in the domains of fashion and style resist assimilation into white hegemonic culture and produce an alternative hybrid language? Of use here is what bell hooks, among others, has identified as a commodification of otherness that is often masked by a recurrent discourse on cultural diversity.<sup>13</sup> In the domain of legal studies, Nancy Leong has identified “Racial Capitalism” as a process of “deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person”; or more precisely a system “in which white individuals and predominantly white institutions use non-white people to acquire social and economic value.”<sup>14</sup> Acting merely as the “spice and flavor” that enliven bland white food and style, ethnicity, and blackness are used by the hegemonic culture and capital to maintain the status quo and reinforce the white supremacist culture and political economy. Luxury brands are far from being exempt from the industry’s more dubious ideological practices.

### **Gucci and Dapper Dan: the catwalk and the street in translation**

Let me make my argument in the form of a story, or better, a series of stories. The first I would like to tell is about Gucci and the latest developments of the brand and the work of its creative director, Alessandro Michele, who took charge in 2015. Lately, the brand has experienced a new Renaissance.

But first a historical note on Gucci. It was in 1904 that Guccio Gucci set up a workshop to produce high-quality leather goods in Florence and in 1921, his first shop was inaugurated, just a few minutes' walk from the Piazza della Signoria where the Gucci Museum, renamed "Gucci Garden," is currently located.<sup>15</sup> Based on its earlier success, the first Gucci store outside Florence opened in Rome in 1938. The brand is now owned by François-Henry Pinault (CEO of the Luxury Fashion group Kering), who is married to the actress Salma Hayek and is headed by CEO Marco Bizzari. Like many other brands, Gucci chooses multiple geographical locations for its fashion shows: for example, the Gucci pre-fall 2019 show was held at the Selinunte Archeological Park in Sicily and the last Cruise 2020 show at the Musei Capitolini in Rome, one of the world's first museums. Rome is also the city where Michele was born.

For the sake of my argument, I am going to concentrate on the Gucci Cruise 2018 show, which took place in Florence, the heart of the Italian Renaissance. It is also the city with which the Gucci brand is identified especially by foreign consumers.

The fashion show in question took place in the Palatine Gallery of Palazzo Pitti, which had been first opened to the public in 1833.<sup>16</sup> On exhibit in the gallery are over 500 paintings, mostly from the Italian Renaissance. The location itself not only speaks volumes about Italian cultural heritage, it is also a space for global cultural intersections. Gucci contributed 2 million euros toward the restoration and enhancement of the Boboli Garden, the iconic park behind Palazzo Pitti, a treasure trove in Renaissance art. The choice of location becomes crucial for contextualizing the narrative of the collection and its spectacle. In this narrative and in the collective imaginary, high fashion and luxury brands create an aristocratic elite aura, a courtly society almost, brought back to life in a Florentine location that brings with it its baggage of embedded meanings of cultural heritage and Italian/European identity.<sup>17</sup>

The Gucci Resort 2018 collection presented eclectic combinations of colors, textures, fur, ruffles, leather, exquisite evening and street wear, bold colors, Gucci prints, and monograms. Interestingly, the collection included several t-shirts and casual jackets featuring the word "Guccy" (deliberately spelled wrongly); and other words such as "Guccification" or even the intimation to "Guccify yourself," as it appeared on Michele's shirt at the end of the show. With these linguistic interventions, Gucci gestures toward various discourses. One was certainly the translatability of Gucci as a brand and as a lifestyle that embraced its aesthetic: "Guccification." In addition, the misspelling of the brand name—"y" name—"y" instead of "i"—and its transformations hints, on the one hand, at "counterfeiting" practices, while on the other at the freedom to intervene in the transformation of the brand, especially in its latest guise under Michele's direction and his interpretation of both cultural heritage (the heritage of the Gucci brand) and Italian heritage in general (Figure 49.1).

There is one garment in particular I would like to comment on. In the "Look 104/116" item in the collection, we see a dress featuring the wrongly spelled word "Guccy."<sup>18</sup>

This does not appear on a T-shirt, but on a dress that presents itself to us in all its hybridity. In so doing, it materializes and illustrates the process of translation insofar as it brings together forms and motives from the past and the present. In this outfit, not only are different epochs and styles combined, so are the intersecting discourses. The distant past of the Italian Renaissance is evoked thanks to the slashed sleeves, which were popular at that time. But here they co-habit with a modern silhouette, a minidress, and the misspelled name of the brand. This kind of example of translation might recall Roman Jakobson's definition according to which "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign" (1959, 2012, 127). In addition, in the theory of semiosis, meaning is constantly created in an ongoing



*Figure 49.1* Gucci Cruise 2018 Runway. Florence, Italy, May 29: A model walks the runway at the Gucci Cruise 2018 show at Palazzo Pitti on May 29, 2017 in Florence, Italy. (Photo by Pietro D’Aprano/Getty Images)

process of interpretation and translation. So, rather than being a truthful representation or copy of a previous meaning, translation is, rather, an active production of meaning, an ongoing process of signification—infinite semiosis. Umberto Eco has also spoken about processes of translation related to different semiotic systems, but also relating to “translation proper” as a finite textual product of inter-lingual movements. These processes are at work not only in fashion in general but also in the specifics of a heritage brand such as Gucci. Michele’s interventions and re-interpretations are tangible examples of re-semanticization of details and aesthetics of the past. The Gucci Resort 2018 collection does not limit itself to what might be called micro-translation. Let me turn my attention to a macro example of cultural translation and of the practices of translating cultures more in line with that conceived by Bhabha. One of the items included in the Antianatomy collection was a fur mink jacket with a GG monogram on its puff sleeves (Look 33/Model Alana Henry) (Figure 49.2).<sup>19</sup>



Figure 49.2 Gucci Cruise 2018 Runway Florence Italy, May 29th: A model walks the runway at the Gucci Cruise 2018 show at Palazzo Pitti, May 29, 2017. (Photo by Pietro D'Aprano/Getty images)

It is in the sleeves of the jacket that the “adapting” and “copying” of the translation process manifests itself. Once again, the jacket is steeped in the Renaissance, but not the Italian one; this time it references African American culture and the Harlem Renaissance. In fact, the jacket featured in the 2018 Gucci show was an almost identical rendition of a jacket originally designed by the Harlem-based Dapper Dan, who reached notoriety in the 1980s.

Let us pause our Gucci story for a moment and tell another one, the Dapper Dan Story (Figure 49.3).

What about clothes? Fashion for me wasn't about expression. Fashion was about power. I would navigate the streets with a certain look until I could own the look. Being fly was a vehicle to getting around my situation in life. (Dapper Dan, 160)



Figure 49.3 “North of 40 Podcast Launch” New York, New York November 14: (exclusive coverage) Ambiance at the celebration for “North of 40” Podcast launch at Dapper Dan Atelier on November 14, 2019, in New York City. (Photo by Bruce Glikas/Wire Image). Courtesy Getty Images

I had to be there to translate the vision for the tailors and make sure they understood what needed to be done. (Dapper Dan)<sup>20</sup>

Dapper Dan has established a successful business relationship with Gucci. More than stating that fashion is part and parcel of the process of translating cultures, and in some cases of wrongly “appropriating” minoritarian, non-Western or unfamiliar cultures out of either ignorance or political insensitivity, I draw on Dapper Dan as an illustration of how white Western and dominant power structures in fashion in the age of neoliberal capitalism can be undermined through the voice and bodies of racially diverse culture. In the 1980s, in the midst of the triumph of logos and brands, Dapper Dan, a gifted Harlem-based designer created a counter-language of fashion and style that subverted the logos—the ostriches, crocodiles, and fur, opulent fabrics—of luxury brands. On the third floor of his boutique, Dapper Dan made printed textile and leather clothes that featured luxury monograms in his designs. Dapper Dan’s creations are just that, creations. They are not knock-offs of high fashion. In fact, he re-imagined the luxury brands by re-inscribing their logos in his own athletic and sportswear hand-sewn creations. So, Dapper Dan’s creations were what some called with a neologism, “knock-ups” since his creations were even more luxurious than the “originals.” Whereas knock-offs refer to a cheaper version of luxury items, Dapper Dan’s designs were original creations that incorporated logos of Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Gucci, etc. In his memoir, Dapper Dan describes his early fascination with the logos of the luxury brands that were gradually entering the mainstream U.S. market, but were not yet accessible to the African American communities. He wanted to create a jacket for one of his friends called “Little man” (179) and took a trip from Harlem to Fifth Ave to the Louis Vuitton and Gucci stores to have a closer look at their designs. But he noted that the stores carried mostly bags and luggage, while he was interested in exploring the possibility of making leather jackets and clothes using the brands’ logos. In his memoir he recounts:

Like Louis Vuitton, the Gucci store specialized in leather bags, luggage, wallets and loafers. The store had a small section on clothing, but one look at what they had and I

knew that my tamest customers wouldn't wear it, let alone someone as flashy as Little Man. The sizing and the cuts were all wrong. Most of all, none of the clothes had the beautiful Gucci logo... Crests and logos stayed inside of clothes those days, tucked away like a secret. [...] Gucci sold garment bags. Unlike the other pieces in the store, the garment bags were made from long lengths of fabric, enough uninterrupted cloth to play with and possibly use on a jacket. [...] I could definitely work with this.[...] Little Man's jacket with the Gucci trim was my first effort at incorporating logos on a piece of clothing. (Dapper Dan, 180–81)

In his design practice, sourcing, and tailoring, and after becoming fluent in its language, Dapper Dan reinvented luxury and refashioned it with an original style informed by his culture, taste, and sensibility. In fact, he goes into details in his memoir on how he researched and studied in depth the history of the heritage brands, their symbolism and how to reproduce in his own way the craftsmanship required for printing on leather and fabrics. He created a sophisticated workshop with very expensive machines in his townhouse in Harlem.

I went down to the main branch of the New York Public Library in midtown, where there was this huge room dedicated to the history of European family crests, and tried to find all the fashion houses crests: Gucci, Burberry, Fendi [...] I wanted my own line to look rich with history—not just European and Judeo-Christian history, but also African, Muslim, Eastern, and others.

While I sat in that library reading room, delving into this history of symbols, I was beginning to see the light about the timeless, mythic power of logos, like the symbol of the tree, which shows up in the Old Testament and in Buddhist scripture, or the symbol of the star, or the symbol of the circle.[...] There are visual and narrative symbols which often seem to be in conversation with each other: snakes, eyes, wheels, stars. Symbols are doorways to myth and information (Dapper Dan, 188).

In the late 1980s, Dapper Dan created a jacket for the American Olympic sprinter Diane Dixon, a successful track athlete who had won a gold medal for the United States in the 4x400 hundred meters relay at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. When that same jacket was featured 30 plus years later in the 2018 Cruise collection, she posted on Instagram a photo of herself wearing Dan's jacket alongside a photo of Gucci's new rendition of it. On her jacket, the puff sleeve bore the LV (Louis Vuitton) monogram, which was the only difference from the jacket featured in the Gucci show. In the age of Instagram, images and words run as fast as Diane did when she was an athlete, and it was thanks to the jacket's presence on social media that it was discovered that it was a copy of a Gucci item. This, in fact, was Dapper Dan's signature.

Dapper Dan's operation had always been controversial. In the course of his career, he faced multiple lawsuits from luxury brands claiming he had violated their copyright. In the 1990s, today's associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Sonia Sotomayor was an attorney for the law firm Pavia & Harcourt LLP, that, representing Fendi, sued Dapper Dan. As historian Elena Romero tells it, "Dapper Dan's case never made it to court and Sotomayor won on default."<sup>21</sup> By 1992, and after a raid again led by Fendi, his shop was closed, forcing Dapper Dan to go underground, where nevertheless his exclusive clients were able to find him "through the code of the streets."<sup>22</sup> Over the years, despite his brushes with the law, Dapper Dan became something of a personality. So much so that the Museum of the City of New York fashion exhibition, held from September 2006 to February 2007, entitled "Black style now" recognized

the value of his creative work and put on display samples of his craftsmanship including a LV logo calfskin topcoat and a velour Nike team jacket; and in its 2017/18 exhibition “Items. Is fashion modern?”, The Museum of Modern Art included examples of Dapper Dan’s work.<sup>23</sup> A photograph of the jacket he designed and copied from Gucci was included in order to highlight his work and the use he made of monograms in luxury brand items. But with a difference: while fashion houses in the post-war era have used monograms to affirm the status quo and the prestigious role they play in it, Dapper Dan used them to subvert existing norms and rules.

Dapper Dan enjoyed great economic success. His boutique was open night and day to respond to the high demand for his designs from African American celebrities. By translating, adapting, and copying the luxury brands’ logos and monograms, Dapper Dan helped to shape and fashion a new, bold and proud black culture. This was at the time of hip-hop music and culture, graffiti, etc. which all started from very humble origins on the street to later become a huge industry. Dapper Dan was one of the heroes of this culture. As Romero has stated: before Dapper Dan, there was “no authentic” luxury brand available to hip-hop entertainers. Dapper Dan created new designs and an aesthetic that rendered visible a new generation of artists, entertainers, even hustlers and drug dealers giving them a distinct style, a new language of fashion that gave voice to minoritarian groups. In one of his most recent Instagram posts, Dapper Dan defines himself as a translator. He suggests that this kind of re-imagining and fashioning of not only his own body (Dapper Dan) but also those of his customers is an active space in which he affirms himself as a cultural producer who uses fashion and style as powerful forms of expression for and creation of subjectivities that were invisible.

As we have seen, for Bhabha a cultural translation is a discursive practice, a strategy and an active mode of re-writing Western discourse. For our purposes, that discourse takes the form of the luxury logos and monograms that were identified with white culture or elite. “Copying” and “adapting,” Dapper Dan performed acts of creative interpretation that transformed a given item in the course of the translation process. This new transformation cannot be identified as a cultural appropriation; rather, it is a step in the formation of a new counterculture, a form of re-negotiation, a minoritarian group reworking the language of the dominant culture. It is not “copying.” Rather, it is using the vocabulary and the material of the dominant culture to create a new language and style, Bhabha’s third space, that in remaking and exposing “Western” culture contributes to a process of “cultural resistance.”

Dapper Dan’s clothes are “Made in Harlem” and the location of Harlem and its history have an important role not only in the production of a distinct culture that goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century and the first Harlem Renaissance but also to what style, dress, and fashion has meant and still means for minoritarian and/or diasporic communities. Fashion and dress scholar Carol Tulloch has analyzed the importance of style narratives for African diasporic communities. She notes how black culture and style have greatly influenced fashion in general, but has also helped to construct social visibility and to assign dignity to black culture.<sup>24</sup> Historian Tanisha Ford’s work on the history of the civil rights movement has contributed to the understanding of the interconnected nature of black diasporic communities (USA, England and Continental Africa) through the creation of a “soul style.”<sup>25</sup> The fil rouge of the practices of translating cultures shows moments of continuity through different transformations of the manifestation of a black aesthetic. As historians have shown, through the practice of translating cultures, African American and African diasporic communities have used the language of fashion, fabric, and style to weaponize their social, cultural, and political visibility. Dapper Dan represents an important and contemporary chapter in a history that shapes and fashions a new aesthetic that, unconsciously or not, signals what I would like to call the multiple Harlem Renaissances. Harlem is now undergoing a new Renaissance, this time in the form of a process



of gentrification that runs parallels with the exponential growth of tourism, boutiques, restaurants, and cafés. Harlem now has a “Fashion Week” that has seen the participation of women activists and has been held on one or two occasions at the Museum of the City of New York.

### **The Gucci story and the Dapper Dan story merge: politics of style**

At the Antianatomy show, as we saw before, a black model carrying a gold laurel crown in her hand is wearing a jacket originally designed by Dapper Dan. Or more accurately: in the Gucci show the model is wearing a jacket that had been designed and adapted by Dapper Dan using LV monograms and luxury material: leather and fur. After the Instagram post, the fur jacket with puff sleeves and the Gucci monogram came to be a social media phenomenon generating such a buzz that Dapper Dan was able to reclaim authorship. Gucci and Michele responded on social media by saying that theirs was an “homage” to Dapper Dan’s creative work as he looked at masterpieces of the past. This story illustrates cultural translation in terms of the way Bhabha discusses it, but this time from the point of view of Dapper Dan and not from Gucci’s. Once a victim accused of counterfeiting luxury brand designs, Dapper Dan has turned the tables. He has acquired the power to assert his claim to authenticity, intellectual property and authorship of his design. As a consequence, he was invited to collaborate with Gucci. The collaboration has taken various forms: first, he has been hired by the company to produce a line of fashion, under his own name, “Gucci – Dapper Dan.” Gucci’s jacket is exhibited at the Gucci Garden Gallery in Florence with a caption that reads “Mink and GG Crystal jacket, homage to Dapper Dan of Harlem, Alessandro Michele for Gucci Cruise 2018.” And since January 2018, Dapper Dan has reopened his boutique, which is by appointment only, in the heart of Harlem on Lenox and 129th Street. A billboard on the top of the building reads: “Gucci Dapper Dan. Made in Harlem.” Following the Gucci incident with the balaclava style sweater evoking black face (February 2019) and the many protests it evinced from black communities and activists, Marco Bizzarri flew to NYC to meet Dapper Dan. Dan played a crucial role in helping Bizzarri meet Harlem-based community leaders and receive their insights and perspectives. As a result, Gucci has established a global diversity program and a long-term plan of action designed to further develop cultural diversity and awareness in the company. In addition, the brand has initiated a “Changemaker North America Scholarship Program,” part of their “Equilibrium” projects, that give scholarships and grants to individuals, small companies, and women’s co-operatives and where Dapper Dan sits as one of the board members (Figure 49.4).<sup>26</sup>

Dapper Dan is a story about the creation of an alternative space within the structure of dominant culture. The Harlem designer not only reclaimed his name and authorship but has also been able to negotiate new programs to promote diversity in the fashion industry and respect for other cultures.

### **Conclusion**

“Translating Culture leads to Success”

The most important thing that I understood and did in fashion was to translate culture.

(Dapper Dan, Instagram post, 20 August 2020)

We at @MadeAtDaps don’t dictate culture; we translate culture.

(Dapper Dan, Instagram post, 26 March, 2020)

Nevertheless, the practices of translating cultures remain a terrain that demands further exploration and the development of new paradigms to expose the seams stitched into the very



Figure 49.4 Dapper Dan (L) and Marco Bizzarri (R) attend the “Heavenly Bodies: Fashion & Catholic Imagination” Costume Institute Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 7th, 2018 in New York City. (Photo by Sean Zanni/Patrick McMullan via Getty Images)

structure of the global capitalism within which fashion is located and the ongoing commodification of culture, identity and racialized bodies. Cultural practices of all kinds must pay attention to those who elaborate new cultural translations and give them a voice. Dapper Dan seems happy that life has given him an opportunity to continue his creative work on a different level without erasing his past. A similar trajectory seems to underscore the dynamics around the Made in Italy brand and its multiple translations. In fact, Dapper Dan is on record as saying that when he first went to Italy to meet the head of the Gucci factory, he was amazed to see how men dressed in Italy. It was, he said, a style that reminded him of the African American style of dress and led him to think about the Italian influence in Harlem at the beginning of the twentieth century: Italians were, he has said, “A big influence on us (in Harlem) [...] because they were right here with us.”<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

- 1 This article is based on a paper that was first presented at the conference on “Fashion and Costume Designers as Cultural Translators: Adapting Dress Across Media,” July 18–19, 2019, University of Cork, Ireland and later at Columbia University, October 2019. A more extended version of the chapter titled “Made in Italy and Translating Cultures: From Gucci to Dapper Dan and Back” will appear in *Textile: Cloth and Culture*, special issue on “Fashion as Cultural Translation” (ed. Armida de La Garza: 2021).
- 2 Kyle Conway, “Cultural Translation,” in *Handbook of Translation Studies*, eds. Luc van Doorslaer and Yves Gambier, vol. 3., 21–25. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012).
- 3 See Toby Osborn and Joan-Pau Rubies, eds., “Diplomacy and Cultural Translation in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 4, 2016; Federico Federici and Dino

- Tessicini, eds., *Translators, Interpreters and Cultural Negotiators: Mediating and Communicating Power from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2014).
- 4 Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Dressing Global Bodies. The Political Power of Dress in World History* (London: Routledge, 2019); Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up. Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Zoltan Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Global Gifts. The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Eugenia Paulicelli, "Intercultural Translations: Early Modern Fashion Cities in Italy and Europe in a Global Context," in *The Cambridge Global Fashion History*, eds., Christopher Breward, Beverly Lemire, and Giorgio Riello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, forthcoming).
  - 5 Harish Trivedi, "Translating Cultures Vs Cultural Translation," <https://iwp.uiowa.edu/91st/vol4-num1/translating-culture-vs-cultural-translation>, last accessed January 5, 2021. Of the same author, *Postcolonial Translations: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); *Interrogating Post-colonialism. Theory, Text and Context*, Indian Institute for Advanced Studies, 2006; see also Boris Buden, Stefan Nowotny, Sherry Siman, Ashok Berry, and Michael Cronin, "Cultural Translation: An Introduction to the Problem, and Responses," *Translation Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 196–219.
  - 6 Harish Trivedi, "Translating Cultures VS Cultural Translation," *ibid.*, 3.
  - 7 See Deepshikha Chatterjee, "Cultural Appropriation: Yours, Mine, Theirs or a New Intercultural?," *Studies in Costume & Performance* 5, no. 1 (2020): 53–71. In this article, the author cites a very fascinating example about the different cultural contexts in India and their various draping of the Sari practices.
  - 8 There is an extensive bibliography on the Made in Italy in relation to fashion. Among the many publications on the topic, see, Marco Bettiol, *Raccontare il Made in Italy. Un nuovo legame tra cultura e manifattura* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2015); Paola Colaiacomo, ed., *Fatto in Italia. La cultura del Made in Italy (1960–2000)* (Roma: Meltemi, 2006); Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, eds., *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Eugenia Paulicelli, "Fashion: The Cultural Economy of Made in Italy in Fashion Practice. The Journal of Design, Creative Process & Fashion Industry," the special issue on "Fashion Made in Italy," eds., Paola Bertola and Chiara Colombi 6, no. 2, November 2014 (155–74); Carlo Marco Belfanti, *Storia culturale del Made in Italy* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019); references to fashion and translation are contained in E. Paulicelli, *Writing Fashion in Early Modern Italy. From Sprezzatura to Satire*, Ashgate, 2014 and *Italian Style. Fashion & Film from Early Cinema to the Digital Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
  - 9 In her 2010 article on "Fashion as a Cultural Translation," Patrizia Calefato applies the critic Rey Chow's paradigm developed in her book *Primitive Passion* (1995) to fashion. In Chow's view "to look at" corresponds to the western gaze, while non-Western cultures are in the position of being looked at. According to Calefato, this view allows Chow to develop the relation between the "original" or the source and the "translation" among cultures. This supposed "original" is a construction and its "to-be-looked-at-ness" acts, in turn, as an optical unconscious. Calefato, *Social Semiotics*, 20, no. 4 (September 2010): 343–55.
  - 10 See Paola Bertola, *La moda progettata. Le (sette meno una) vie del design* (Bologna: Pitagora Editrice, 2008).
  - 11 Robin Givhan, "Fashion's Racial Reckoning," *The Washington Post*, August 31st, 2020 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2020/08/31/fashion-industry-diversity-initiatives/?arc404=true>; see also the fashion and Race database created by Kimberly Jenkins in 2017, <https://fashionandrace.org/>
  - 12 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), see also by the same author, "In between Cultures," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 107–9, 2013.
  - 13 bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London and New York: South End Press, 1992).
  - 14 Nancy Leong, "Racial Capitalism," *Harvard Law Review* 126, no. 8, (June 2013): 2151–226; see also Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, "Luxury Capitalism: The Magic World of the Luxury Brands" in *Luxury. A Rich History*, 252–88 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
  - 15 *Gucci by Gucci. 85 Years of Gucci*, Mondadori Electa, 2006; Gucci. *The Making of* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2006).
  - 16 The presentation of the Gucci 2018 Cruise Collection can be seen on the Vogue website: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/resort-2018/gucci>, last accessed, January 16, 2021.
  - 17 Interestingly, this kind of aura is in Michele's terms brought to the eclectic mixture of streetstyle, reuse of the logos in the form of a postmodern pastiche that in an assemblage and collage is close to a camp sensibility. Gucci was one of the sponsors of the Metropolitan Museum exhibition on "Camp: Notes

- on Fashion.” The exhibition was curated by Andrew Bolton with Karen Van Godtsenhoven and Amanda Garfinkel. The catalogue of the same title had an introduction by Fabio Cleto and it was published by Yale University Press, 2019.
- 18 See: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/resort-2018/gucci/slideshow/collection#104>, last accessed January 16, 2021.
- 19 See: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/resort-2018/gucci> (last accessed on January 16, 2021).
- 20 Daniel R. Day, *Dapper Dan Made in Harlem. A Memoir*, 176 with Mikael Awake (New York: Random House, 2019).
- 21 Elena Romero, *Free Stylin’: How Hip Hop Changed the Fashion Industry*, Praeger (2012, 87).
- 22 Romero, *Ibid.*, 87.
- 23 See Paola Antonelli and Michelle Millar Fisher, *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* 172 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2017).
- 24 Carol Tulloch, *The Birth of Cool. Style Narratives of the African Diaspora* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).
- 25 Tanisha C. Ford, *Liberated Threads. Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*, 5 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015). See also, Susan Kaiser, *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, 77 (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012); Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*; Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit. The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Elke Gaugele and Monica Tilton, eds., *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique*, 2019; L. Welters and A. Lillethun, *Fashion History. A Global View* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academics, 2018).
- 26 See: <https://equilibrium.gucci.com/gucci-changemakers-north-america-scholarship-programs/> (last accessed on January 16, 2021).
- 27 Author’s conversation with Dapper Dan, Match 30th, 2019.

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