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## Articles



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## Book Reviews

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# Letter from the Editor

A theme inevitably develops as we put each issue of *Catwalk* together, and what emerged as an organising principle for issue 4.1 is the symbolic and emotional meanings of the clothes we admire and the garments we actually wear.

'The "New Look" Woman in the City and on the Street as Represented in Fashion Photography,' the first article of the issue, considers a paradigm-shifting design of the twentieth century, Christian Dior's 'New Look,' which emerged on the fashion scene in 1947. While post-war fashions of the 1940s and 1950s inspired by the wasp-waisted New Look are frequently described as overtly feminine, signifying a return to traditional gender roles, Jess Berry, PhD, of Griffith University, Australia argues that the actuality is far more complex. Although the New Look's structural design gave the wearer a nineteenth-century hour glass figure and was understandably interpreted as symbolising the so-called feminine virtues of constraint and compliance, representations of the style show a new, as well as traditional, path for women. While late 1940s fashion photography of the look and its imitators by Cecil Beaton and Richard Avedon reinforced the mythology of the return to traditional gender roles, another narrative about the "New Look" emerged during the 1950s in photographs by Norman Parkinson, Willy Maywald, and Georges Dambier. These images asserted women's mobility in the public arena of streetscapes, shopfronts, and urban architecture, at a time when socio-political forces sought women's return to the home. By analysing such imagery, Berry discovered a visual rhetoric of mobility, dynamism, and modernity associated with the 'New Woman' and the 'Modern Woman,' foreshadowing the re-emergence of feminism in the coming decades.

In Italy, just as in other countries, fashion has been an important feature of women's magazines, and in the 1970s was the principle object of criticism for many Italian feminists. 'Feminism in Italy in the 1970s: Fashion, Identity, and Creativity,' by Dr. Anna Balzarro, of the American University of Rome, sheds light upon the nature of the feminist movement in Italy during the 1970s, by examining the relationship between the Women's Movement and women's fashion. Balzarro analyses the imagery and articles of *Effe* and *Noi Donne,* two Italian feminist magazines, as sources of data to illustrate what distinguishes a 1970s Italian feminist magazine approach to fashion from that of a traditional women's general interest one. Another goal of her study is to assess the 1970s feminist aesthetic. To achieve that goal, Balzarro, examined films and photographs of women's demonstrations, gendered images in contemporary magazines, and the design work being carried out in Roman feminist fashion workshops and learned that Italian feminists dressed in a wide variety of styles, with the major criterion being the expression of freedom. Paradoxically, while many of the feminists of the period claimed they rejected fashion, adornment, and makeup as toadying to the male gaze, they created new trends, which had a positive effect on women's fashion and beauty culture.

Who among us has not stood in or before or closet and pondered – sometimes agonised – over what to wear? 'Wardrobe Affect: Addressing Decisions about What to Wear," by Emma Thompson of York University in Toronto, Canada, gave me much to think about, and I am certain that *Catwalk* readers will have a similar response. How do we decide what to wear? To understand the actual process of getting dressed, Thompson uses affect theory, the coordination of the body's power to act and the mind's power to think simultaneously, and affective labour theory, the work we do to create a particular emotional impact on others, to understand the kinds of decisions we make about what to wear or not wear. It ends up that the nuances of getting dressed lack a specific language, which exposes the lack of value placed on the activity in a capitalist economy where the most valued work is monetarily rewarded. The article closes

with a thought-provoking discussion of the ways in which the disabled are hindered by what they would like to wear by what they can actually wear, as they negotiate their identity through their daily clothing choices and the emotional relationships they have with them.

'Contemporary Fashion Tastemakers: Starting Conversations that Matter,' by Rachel Matthews, of Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, is a study of the activities of contemporary fashion tastemakers and their role in the complex mechanisms of fashion diffusion in the twenty-first century. Matthew's article focuses on the activities of selected fashion journalists and high profile fashion bloggers who catalyse a range of actions that assist with decisions about what is a worthy new fashion object and what should be dismissed. Transforming fashion propositions into digital textual forms that are searchable on the Internet is a key activity of today's fashion tastemaker, who is a fashion facilitator rather than a fashion arbiter of the old model such as a magazine editor. Using a Foucauldian approach, Matthew's study examines the relationship of the commentators' language to other social processes that circulate fashion ideas.

Our Reviews section is devoted to recent exhibitions and books. Cassandra Schrøder Holm visited London's Victoria and Albert Museum to view *Wedding Gowns 1775-2014*. *Catwalk*'s Reviews Editor Leonard R. Koos visited The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire*, an exhibition, which offered some surprises beyond dresses in the expected colour black. Michael A. Langkjær, a regular reviewer for this journal, visited Hamburg German's Hamburger Kunsthalle to ponder a show organised around Karl Lagerfeld's models, *Feuerbach's Muses: Lagerfeld's Models*. Following the exhibitions section are four book reviews. Jessica C. Locke and Antonio Alcalá consider Maria Mellins' *Vampire Culture.* Jess Berry's double review of sexuality subcultures' influence on fashion, assesses Adam Geczy's and Vicki Karaminas' *Queer Style* and Frenchy Lunning's *Fetish Style*. The coming together of dress and museums is discussed in Craig C. Douglas' review of *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, edited by Maria Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson. Our Reviews sections highlight Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions and Briefly Noted Books.

A deepest 'thank you' to Elizabeth Kaino Hopper for helping us put this issue of *Catwalk* together. I would also like to thank Laura Petican, Michael A. Langkjær, and Lisa Howard.

Enjoy!

Jacque Lynn Foltyn, PhD
Chief Editor, *Catwalk: The Journal of Fashion, Beauty and Style*

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# The 'New Look' Woman in the City and on the Street as Represented in Fashion Photography

*Jess Berry*

## Abstract

Post-war fashions of the 1940s and 1950s are frequently regarded as overtly feminine, signifying a return to traditional gender roles. In particular, Christian Dior's 'New Look' of 1947 and its subsequent imitators symbolically represented feminine virtues of constraint and compliance due to the structural design of garments that stylised the female body in an hour-glass silhouette redolent of the nineteenth century. In part, fashion photographers, including Cecil Beaton and Richard Avedon in the late 1940s, contributed to the prevailing mythology of the New Look, whose studio-based images of the style aimed to inspire luxurious and aristocratic fantasies of feminine glamour. However, representations of this style are often contradictory. Specifically, the article argues that an alternate image of the New Look and associated fashions was also present during this era, where the backdrop of the city that featured in the photographs of Norman Parkinson, Willy Maywald, and Georges Dambier during the 1950s asserted women's mobility in the public arena at a time when socio-political forces sought women's return to the home. Drawing on Margaret Maynard's framework for interpreting fashion photography outlined in 'The Fashion Photograph: an Ecology,' in which she establishes how meaning is produced through resemblance to other images, this analysis considers previous representations of fashion and the city in relation to the so-called 'New Woman' or 'Modern Woman,' a figure who has appeared cyclically in the socio-cultural imagination as a symbol of change, female emancipation, and mobility. Through analysis of photographs taken by Parkinson, Dambier, and Maywald the study investigates how the rhetoric of mobility, dynamism, and modernity associated with the 'New Woman' and the 'Modern Woman' was adopted in relation to the 'New Look' woman in order to affirm her presence outside the domestic sphere. In doing so, it demonstrates that the streetscapes, shopfronts, and urban architecture that formed the backdrop of 1940s and 1950s fashions marked women's visibility in the city as a self-affirming action. In revisiting the possibility of the New Look as having qualities that can be aligned with female agency through dress, this analysis contributes to current discourses regarding the complex relationship between fashion and feminism, where tensions between pleasure in self-adornment and feminine narcissism, and considerations of consumer culture and economic mobility, continue to characterise women's relationship to fashion.

## Key Words

Fashion, photography, 'New Look,' New Woman, Modern Woman, Christian Dior, Norman Parkinson, Willy Maywald, Georges Dambier, Cecil Beaton, Richard Avedon, the city.

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## 1. Introduction

In the years following World War II women were encouraged to return to traditional body ideals and social roles.[1] Fashion of the era functioned to mark out femininity with two

main silhouettes that reshaped the female body with confining foundation garments: Christian Dior’s ‘New Look’ (Image 1) and its many imitations characterised by full skirts, wasp-waists and padded hips, and Jacques Fath’s fitted bodice, slim-line straight-skirts and cinched waists. While the term ‘New Look’ was coined by Carmel Snow, editor in chief of *Harper’s Bazaar*, in relation to Dior’s Corolla line of 1947, it became broadly applicable to all of Dior’s creations of the late 1940s and early 1950s as well as those by his imitators (both famous and anonymous designers).[2] With this in mind, I adopt the term ‘New Look’ to describe fashion of the 1940s and 1950s that displayed the stylistic return to the constrained female body, with bodily discipline and an idealised hour-glass silhouette achieved through controlling undergarments and the structural design of clothes.

***Image 1***: House of Dior: Bar Suit, 1947. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958, gift of Christian Dior, 1969.

Numerous fashion historians have examined the New Look with regards to its contradictions and controversies. For example, the dress historian Margaret Maynard examines how the New Look was marketed to Australian women as a pleasurable and sensuous style of dress, coinciding with post-war ideologies that women should return to the home after engaging in war-time work opportunities.[3] The historian and fashion theorist Peter McNeil pays similar attention to the role the New Look played in attempts at symbolically refocusing attention towards women's sexual and reproductive capacities along with considerations of class, austerity, waste, glamour, and excess that the fashions embodied due to their extravagant use of fabric and labour.[4] Elsewhere, the style has been described in relation to particular adaptations of the look and women's reception of it; for example, the cultural studies scholar Angela Partington's study of the way that working-class women re-configured the style in Britain to make it appropriate for active pursuits, and the film and television scholar Stella Bruzzi's examination of the ways in which Hollywood cinema modified the New Look as a persistent means to portray romantic femininity as well as sexual pleasure and empowerment.[5]

The prevailing mythology of the New Look, with its excesses and impracticality, continues to be of hyper-femininity and a return to the domestic sphere, yet representation of this silhouette and its associated symbolic virtues of constraint and compliance may not necessarily be a straightforward equation. The article explores the contradictory representation of the post-war woman in fashion photography of the 1940s and 1950s, who, while dressed in garments conceived as overtly and traditionally feminine, is depicted as an active agent of modern urban life. In particular, it claims that the backdrop of the city that featured in the era's fashion photography asserted women's mobility in the public arena.

The visual culture of couture that the New Look promoted is generally conceived to be epitomised by glamorous studio shots, featuring aristocratic women poised in exaggerated poses amid ornate salon décor. As the fashion historian Christopher Breward argues of Cecil Beaton's and Richard Avedon's New Look images, 'their glossy perfection disguised the part they played in ensuring that elite visions translated into wider commercial worth.'[6] However, the article contends that the alternate frame of the city was just as significant to the representation of the New Look. Select photographs taken by Norman Parkinson, Georges Dambier, and Willy Maywald are considered here as representative of fashion advertising and magazine editorials that linked women to a narrative that affirmed their presence outside the domestic sphere, where streetscapes, shop fronts and urban architecture form the backdrop of 1940s and 1950s fashions.

In making this argument, I examine previous representations of fashion and the city in relation to the so-called 'New Woman' and 'Modern Woman,' a figure who has appeared cyclically in the socio-cultural imagination as a symbol of change, female emancipation, and mobility. While the fin-de-siècle New Woman has often been labelled a largely textual configuration and fantasy figure, and the Modern Woman a construction of 1920s and 1930s fashion publicity, these figures have become cultural icons of modernity, representing an active woman of increased independence and opportunity.[7] As such, I am not so much concerned with the lived experience of the New Woman or the Modern Woman but rather with how her cultural iconicity has been translated in visual construction. Adopting Maynard's framework that positions fashion photography as an ecology of images, that is, 'a rhetorical practice, informed by provisional, external engagements and framing procedures that play with relational contrasts,' the article finds that fashion photographers of the 1940s and 1950s drew on the visual rhetoric of the 'New Woman' and the 'Modern Woman' to position what will be termed the 'New Look' woman as socially and physically mobile despite her dressed appearance of traditional feminine restraint.[8] Through visual analysis of these photographs, this investigation

seeks to understand how the New Look was represented to women in modes beyond the retrograde ideals of nineteenth century fashion with which the style is commonly aligned.

Further, in reconsidering the New Look woman within the context of the city, I examine how these images emphasise what the cultural historian Liz Conor terms ‘feminine visibility,’ highlighting women’s configuration as spectacle and self-apprehended image, evidencing how the fashion image serves as a mechanism to explore evolving notions of female identity. [9] As such, this study contributes to on-going discourses, as identified by the visual culture scholars Hilary Radner and Nathalie Smith regarding the complex and contradictory relationship between fashion and feminism, where women’s agency through dress can be interpreted as highlighting aspirations of independence and mobility, as well as expressing concerns regarding the importance of sexual attractiveness and women’s role as consumer to be counter-productive to women’s emancipation.[10]

## 2. New Women and Modern Women in the City

In ‘Fashion’ (1904), the sociologist Georg Simmel was one of the first scholars to identify the relationship between fashion and the city. [11] Simmel noticed that the rapidly growing cities of the nineteenth century created a maelstrom environment that provoked the individual to assert personality through both uniformity and distinction in dress. His observations regarding the relationship between fashion, modernity, and the metropolis remained intrinsic to the performance of urban life throughout the twentieth century. [12] Strangely, while fashion and the metropolis appear to be inextricably linked, women’s presence in the city has often been considered problematic. For example, in the nineteenth century the *flâneur* or dandy often undertook the project of understanding modernity. These prominent figures of literature and popular culture gendered the city as the social and professional domain for masculinity, where women were largely written out of participating in this public arena.[13] While contemporary scholarship by the cultural historians Deborah Parsons and Janet Wolff has identified the existence of the *flâneuse* in the city as the middle-class fin-de-siècle shopper, the cultural studies theorist Elizabeth Wilson’s *The Sphinx in the City* (1996) underlines that much discourse concerning women’s presence in the metropolis at this time envisages her ‘as temptress, as whore, a fallen woman, as lesbian, but also as virtuous woman in danger.[14] Such representations echo concerns that women’s presence in the city was a moral and political threat to the patriarchal construction of the metropolis, where industrial capitalism contributed to the separation of the public and private spheres and women were confined to the domestic realm.[15]

Despite this anxiety, the city has often appeared in popular-culture images and texts that depict the ‘New Woman, a social phenomenon and literary type of the late nineteenth century. The art historian Ruth Iskin’s analysis of the fin-de-siècle *flâneuse* in early advertising demonstrates that ‘posters which depicted urban women with agency participated in reshaping women’s identities in the 1890s and early 1900s,’ as these images reflected the New Woman’s desire to enter the public sphere but also portrayed women participating in urban life.[16] As Iskin contends:

> Though these changes were much contested, portraying active modern women in the city was less threatening in a commercial poster…than in a political context. Posters could thus visualise attractive icons of modern women in the city and through them such images were assimilated into mainstream culture.[17]

Iskin’s analysis centres around a number of images that depict women strikingly attired in hats, gloves, and corseted gowns as they promenaded the city streets. Posters for biscuits, bicycles,

and soap are remarkably similar in their portrayal of the fashionable femme shopping in the urban environment.


***Image 2:*** Frederic Hugo d'Alési's, *Exposition du Centenaire de la Lithographie,* 1895. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

For example, the woman depicted in the French-Romanian artist Frederic Hugo d'Alési's 1895 illustrated poster for a lithographic exhibition (Image 2) is described by Iskin as

'defined by her cultivated gaze and fashionability, she performs both with the expert touch of the actress who is observed by an audience.'[18] While Iskin is concerned with how the woman is represented as an example of the *flâneuse*, it is worth emphasising that the New Woman portrayed in this advertisement, and others like it, such as those by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec of *La Goulue* (1892) and Jules Cheret's Dubonnet posters (1895), couple fashion, the city, and feminine visibility and spectatorship as symbolic of female independence at a time when 'respectable' women rarely walked unchaperoned.[19]

Representations of New Women in the city allowed women to venture beyond the boundaries of private space into the public sphere and symbolically represented female agency. A similar argument can be made for the 1920s and 1930s 'Modern Woman' who appeared in the post-World War I popular consciousness as the flapper or *la garçonne*. Epitomised by her slim, streamlined silhouette and cloche hat or bobbed-haircut, the 'Modern Woman' of literature, advertising, and magazine publicity was economically, socially, and physically mobile. As the historian Mary Lynn Stewart contends 'the modern woman became a resonant symbol of emancipation.'[20] As with the 'New Woman,' the 'Modern Woman' was a contested figure; in particular, her perceived androgyny sparked critical discourse concerning women's social roles in post-war society. Her short skirts afforded physical mobility and her short hair symbolised the erasure of gender boundaries.

Historians have often dismissed the modern woman as an apolitical figure who was preoccupied with fashion and consumerism. However, the historian Mary Louise Robert's analysis of French style in the 1920s demonstrates that post-war fashions symbolically functioned 'as a visual analogue of female liberation…fashion constituted a semi-autonomous political language that served as a maker as well as a marker of the modern woman.'[21] A similar analogy can be drawn to the imagery of the Modern Woman as represented on the covers of the fashion magazines *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* during the 1920s and 30s. Illustrations by George Lepape, Pierre Mourgue, and Erté for these magazines depicted the 'flapper' fashions alongside automobiles and framed by cityscapes, thus visually aligning the Modern Woman with the concept of modernity and personal freedom. As Roberts argues, 'to buy and wear the new styles…was to participate in a social fantasy of liberation.'[22] Whether this image represented real political effect is debatable, while the Modern Woman's fashion had political significance for women's emancipation in the cultural imagination, the desired effect of the streamlined silhouette still required restrictive foundation garments despite the abolition of the corset, and these new fashions have also been understood in terms of the emergence of modern consumerism that exploited women for profit. Nevertheless images of female visibility in the public sphere of the city presented women with an iconography that equated fashion and the metropolis with progressive modernity. As Roberts asserts, 'the visual alignment of *la femme moderne* with an ethos of mobility,' produced 'a cultural landscape in which a vivid new kind of woman – powerful, active, and adventuresome - could be represented.'[23]

George Lepape's illustration of the model and photographer Lee Miller in front of a Manhattan skyline for the March 1927 issue of *Vogue* (Image 3) is an example of how the modern woman image was aligned with the city to represent a larger discourse concerning identity and power in relation to fashion and female visibility. Here Miller is depicted as spectator engaged and active in the city that surrounds her. Directing her gaze outward towards the viewer she appears confident of her place in this public sphere. That the city does not dwarf her with its towers but rather echoes her form and dress in terms of the similarity of their elongated lines and further suggests that the modern woman was at home in this world rather than in the domestic environment. Similarly, Erté's November 1933 cover for *Harper's Bazaar*, suggests a modern woman comfortable in her city surrounds.[24] The cover features a well-heeled woman with bobbed hair, her bright orange attire standing out amid the geometric lines of

skyscrapers and tuxedo clad men. While she is self-aware of her position as the object of her many suitors' gaze, she is unfazed by this attention and appears wholly confident. Her fur-trimmed coat and sparkling jewellery convey wealth and power suggesting economic independence. That both Lepape's and Erté's covers portray the modern woman walking the city at night glamorises her perceived sexual emancipation and suggests that the modern woman challenged the moral rectitude associated with women's presence in the city. As Conor contends the modern woman:

> was often depicted as seeing herself as an object of desire and as capable of evoking strong sexual responses: she saw herself as sexual….The entry of women in metropolitan space was shaped by representations of feminine types who were not at home in the home…this was her way of partaking in the adventure of the city, the excitement of sexual attraction, anonymous display and urban style.[25]

Both the fin-de-siècle 'New Woman' and the 1920s 'Modern Woman' were often represented in the context of the urban environment, where the city and its symbolic associations of freedom and change were connected to fashion. This dynamic can be interpreted as part of the rhetoric of advertising and consumer culture, where Martin Pumphrey, the literary and cultural studies scholar, asserts, fashion encouraged women to become involved in modernity in terms of image and lifestyle enjoying new freedom 'not in terms of career or political action but in terms of a carefree leisure.'[26] While the 'New Woman' and 'Modern Woman' images may not have reflected women's true political and economic positions, they provided an iconography of fashion as a liberating force of social and sexual freedom by connecting cultural icons of women to the city. In other words, while the images of the 'New Woman' and the 'Modern Woman' presented by advertisers and fashion magazines may have only presented women with a fantasy of liberation that was inherently tied to consumptive practices, nevertheless this imagery fuelled the cultural imagination in representing women's mobility and agency in the public sphere.

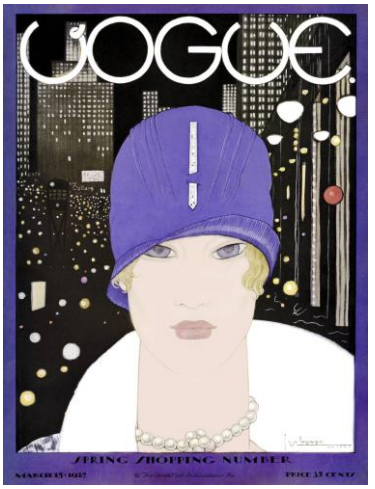


***Image 3*:** George Lepape, *Vogue,*
15 March 1927 © Condé Nast

## 3. The New Look Woman’s Representation in Fashion Photography

Dior’s ‘New Look’ of 1947 has been much discussed in fashion history with regards to its representation of luxury and glamour after years of wartime austerity, as well as how it visually indicated a return to decorative feminine ideals after a period that necessitated more utilitarian styles of dress. Epitomised by a tight bodice and a flared, flowing skirt that dropped to below calf length, the style was often described by Dior in terms of extreme femininity:

> We were emerging from a period of war, of uniforms, of women-soldiers built like boxers. I drew women-flowers, soft shoulders, flowering busts, fine waists like liana and wide skirts like corolla.[27]

Dior’s floral language suggested the fragility of women and, according to the historian Diana de Marley, ‘expressed the type of woman most governments in the West were looking for…from being all-capable, women were now told to become decorative stereotypes.’[28] The style could be seen to resemble a modernised version of a nineteenth-century silhouette that required corsetry and crinolines to achieve the desired effect of an hourglass figure. The fashion historian Valerie Steele concurs, noting of ‘from stiletto heels and waspie girdles to white gloves and aprons, women’s fashion promoted restrictive images of femininity.’[29]

The 1947 New Look was not the only fashion of the post-war period to convey constrained femininity. Dior’s long-line and Y line, and Jacques Fath’s slim-line suits and dresses all required women to restructure their bodies with corsets and girdles to achieve the wasp-waist. The hats, gloves, and stiletto heels that accessorised the New Look also portrayed an image of female bodily discipline and control. The idea of constrained femininity that these fashions represented was promoted in numerous popular sources, including the American fashion designer Anne Fogarty’s *The Art of Being a Well Dressed Wife* (1959). Fogarty’s book conveys the importance of disciplining the mind, body, and emotions as well as the need to master an at-home style to perform wifely duties. Her ultra-feminine ideology has been recognised by Steele, where statements such as, ‘take advantage of the opportunity your kitchen offers for expressing your wifely qualities in what you wear’ illustrate the rhetoric of how the New Look fashions were adopted to convey traditional female roles.[30]

Similarly, the fashion historian Ann Hollander identifies the connection between the New Look and the constructed feminine ideal of housewife and mother, where ‘the style itself created a trivial quality for fashion and implied the shallowness of women, still being automatically viewed as The Second Sex.’[31] The allusion here is to Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal publication *The Second Sex* (1949), which was significant to the development of second wave feminism. This has particular resonance, as numerous fashion historians have suggested that the New Look was an antithesis to de Beauvoir’s ideas that women’s dress and concern for appearance was ultimately tied to her position as ornament; for de Beauvoir, fashion was a site to display a woman’s sexual worth as well as her husband’s wealth and status.[32] Despite Hollander’s assertion that the New Look epitomised a restrictive image for women, she recognises a place for fashion photography to recast the symbolic meanings attached to particular modes of dress. In particular she argues that Richard Avedon’s photographs recognised women’s desire to assert agency regarding how they were perceived, whereby they:

> Acknowledge how hard it is for a woman to become self-aware and self-possessed…and perform well in her own eyes. He demonstrates that…a photographer can hold his canny mirror to show that clothes and mirrors are

> always her allies, but mainly Avedon shows that the quality of the performance depends on her and springs from within.[33]

I argue that the idea of women's self-apprehension and awareness of femininity as a construction, that Hollander describes in relation to Avedon's work, is emphasised in images from the same era that employ the city as backdrop. Furthermore, this directly contrasts with the dominant perceptions of the New Look and haute couture fashions of the 1940s and 1950s that were often portrayed in such a way as to highlight associations of luxury and glamour.

Breward's analysis of haute couture as captured by the iconic photographers Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, and Cecil Beaton reveals that the representation of these garments was directed by a cinéma vérité approach. For example, Penn used the stark background of the blank studio wall in his photograph *Fath Detail*, Paris (1950) to highlight form, texture, and precision, while Beaton constructed elaborately theatrical and glamorous tableaux set in salons, parlours, and museums, for example his photograph of *Charles James Ball Gowns* (1948).[34] Avedon's approach differed in that he often set his scenes outdoors in order to highlight carnivalesque and fetishistic elements of dress.[35] The images Breward describes convey an unrealistic fantasy construction of ideal femininity, presenting women as ornate decorative objects not unlike their surrounds, or as bodies to be observed for their fetishistic sculptural forms.[36] However, I contend that the city and street as backdrop to 1940s and 1950s couture offered a conflicting vision of these fashions where the dynamism of the city conveys an immediacy and realism that is contrasted with the fantasies and dreams of many studio-based images. That is not to say that fashion photography of the street does not present a desirable image of glamour, only that this image is a more readily available experience of fashion in everyday contexts. While Olivier Zahm, the founder/owner of the French fashion and culture magazine *Purple*, proposes that fashion photography is considered 'instinctively suspect of superficiality, inauthenticity and gratuitousness,' it would seem that fashion photography that engages with the realism of the street is less likely to be characterised in this way.[37] In engaging with this realist style, Elliott Smedley, the stylist and fashion editor, argues that fashion photography has 'stripped bare the fantasies and the superficial ideals that the fashion industry had formerly felt compelled to portray and disseminate.'[38]

This assessment is particularly true of contemporary street fashion photography; however, it also has some bearing on the way Norman Parkinson's photographs of models clad in couture walking the streets of New York can be interpreted. Parkinson's *Traffic* featuring then model Ivy Nicholson (1957) uses the backdrop of architecture and automobiles to suggest the modernity of the woman portrayed.[39] The image has a snapshot quality suggesting the realism of the scene as well as its immediacy. Parkinson's framing of the image conveys a reciprocity between the woman's dress and the speed of city life by blurring the sweep of her coat. This technique draws attention to the relationship between fashion and the city, where both can be seen to represent change, freedom and activity. Wilson similarly alludes to the contradiction of the city as a background to 1940s and 1950s women's fashion in her evocative description:

> Although the New Look was supposed to be so feminine, there was a weird masculinity about it all. The models were as tall as guardsmen in mufti, or City men leaning against furled umbrellas. They wore the highest high heels, and hobble skirts with sharply jutting hips and flying panels which bore faint memories of Gothic architecture, but the hard hats looked like city bowlers.[40]

The general perception of the New Look is that it symbolised women’s return to the home after the Second World War. As Wilson argues, there was much consternation surrounding the new fashion, where ‘women MPs from the Labour Party spoke out against its attack on the freedom of women, its “caged bird attitude” and its emphasis on “over sexiness.”’[41] Yet, the backdrop of the city or the street contrasts with this perception, for the rhetoric of the urban environment has been consistently connected to an emancipated woman, as demonstrated by the illustrated images of the nineteenth century New Woman and Modern Woman of the 1920s and 1930s. I contend that iconography of the city is adopted by photographers of the 1940s and 1950s to convey themes of liberation in relation to the New Look.

***Image 4:*** Willy Maywald Dior and Buick, 1953. © Association Willy Maywald/ADAGP. Licenced by Viscopy 2015.

In particular, Willy Maywald’s photographs of Dior’s garments appear to draw on the rhetoric of the New Woman and the Modern Woman. For example, the Dior model standing in front of a black Buick automobile wearing a Tulip line ensemble defined by a wasp-waist and stem-straight skirt (Image 4), recalls the plethora of advertising imagery from the 1920s that used the backdrop of the car in the city to suggest female mobility and modernity. For example, Georges Lepape’s January 1925 illustration for *Vogue* portrays a lavishly dressed Modern Woman framed by the art deco streamlines of automobile and architecture.[42] As Robert’s argues of such imagery, ‘advertisers, novelists, and social observers pictured women (much more than men it seems) behind the wheel of the car, creating a visual image of female mobility and power.’[43] Thus despite the model’s seemingly confining Dior garment and its symbolic association with feminine constraint, the ‘New Look’ woman is visually equated with the Modern Woman through her visual approximation to the sleek and sophisticated machine.

It would seem that the New Woman was also a source of visual rhetoric for representing the ‘New Look’ woman. In particular, Maywald’s image of a woman in a Dior suit holding an umbrella while looking at kiosk magazines on the streets of Paris (Image 5) recalls Hugo d’Alési’s 1895 illustrated poster and his representation of the New Woman (Image 1). As Iskin argues, representations of the New Woman’s unchallenged presence in the city revised social constraints. While Maywald’s photographs refer to a different time where a women’s

unchaperoned presence in the city was not an issue, that the New Look woman is represented comfortably inhabiting these urban spaces arguably conveys that these garments were not necessarily as symbolically restricting as popular commentary insists.

***Image 5:*** Willy Maywald Dior 1949. © Association Willy Maywald/ADAGP. Licenced by Viscopy 2015

In her study of 1960s fashion photography, Radner argues that the 'Single Girl' 'on the move' consolidated a new feminine ideal: 'young, single, economically self-sufficient, the ideal incarnated the notion of movement, of a culture in transition.'[44] In her analysis of fashion photographs by Martin Munkacsi, David Bailey, and William Klein, she emphasises that the 'Single Girl' image is reliant on the photographic modes of 'outside fashion' where 'the model is shot outside, often walking or running; she is active.'[45] For Radner, this activity suggests a liberating engagement with urban life 'outside traditional patriarchal construction,' yet must still contend with the constraints of consumer culture. The political and cultural writer Virginia Postrel similarly contends that the active model of outside fashion imagery is an icon of modernity and liberation, where she identifies the cyclic appearance of 'the striding woman' in fashion advertising from the 1920s and 1930s as well as the 1970s.[46] Although Radner and Postrel do not discuss fashion photography from the 1940s and 1950s as engaging with outdoor activity a corresponding argument can be made in relation to the New Look woman in the city and on the street. For example, Willy Maywald's photograph of Bettina racing down the steps wearing a floating ballerina skirt by Givenchy (1953) or Georges Dambier's September 1952 image for *Elle* of Sophie Litvak wearing a softly draped winter suit at the bus stop both convey the New Look woman as purposeful and engaged in her city surrounds.[47] As with her 1960s 'Single-Girl' counterpart, her action is carefully staged to offer a model self for the woman reader. As Martin Harrison, the art curator and writer, explains of fashion photography that occurs in the public sphere:

> Women's fashion magazines were the first medium to present images of women for the consumption of women, rather than men, and the women depicted in these photographs—who after all represented their readers—

> began to be cast in active as opposed to the passive roles traditionally assigned to them in art.[48]

In analysing images of the New Look in the city it should also be noted that they provide a framework to consider women’s visibility in public life, where the woman is represented as either an anonymous figure going about her daily business or as fantasy spectacle. Alistair O’Neil argues that there is a tension between women’s visibility and invisibility in the city that was powered by fashion, where 1940s fashion spreads of the single-girl office worker simultaneously convey individual anonymity and spectatorship.[49]

***Image 6***: George Dambier ‘Suzy Parker Vitrine Lanvin,’
Paris 1952 © George Dambier

I contend that women’s visibility in the city as a self-affirming action can be further observed in relation to examples of New Look fashions, in particular through images such as George Dambier’s photograph of the model Suzy Parker that cast shop windows as mirrors (Image 6). In these instances, the New Look woman is self-aware of her own image as feminine spectacle. However, Maywald’s and Dambier’s use of the mirror might also be seen to affirm women’s presence in the city. By making the window a mirror capable of holding the woman’s image and presenting herself looking at this image, we imagine that she is also observing herself in the city surrounds. Thus, the New Look woman is not only self-reflexively aware of her visibility in the city but also recognises her social freedom to belong in the street and observe the city around her. Just as the New Woman and Modern Woman became equated with the city as an adventurous and powerful image of mobility, the New Look woman in the city contributes to a continuous construction of fashion imagery as a liberating space for women to explore a space for resistance against the confining structures of ideal domesticated femininity that the New Look was conceived to represent.

## 4. Conclusion

The conflicting image of the New Look woman in the city is that of a constructed feminine identity achieved through garments symbolically associated with discipline and restraint, positioned alongside ideas of modernity, dynamism, and progress, conveyed by the

image of the metropolis. This contradictory representation may well have a number of purposes within the wider visual culture that the woman is invited to simulate as part of her identity. Given that the New Look's silhouette was based on an old look from the nineteenth-century, the backdrop of the metropolis gave the style a modern façade so that the female consumer might associate the New Look with change. Alternately, just as the iconic image of the Modern Woman was adopted by advertisers to appeal to and create an audience of female consumers by subtly transforming perceptions of women's position in the city, the New Look woman may have been visually aligned with the consumer sphere of shopping. However, in saying this, the streetscapes, architecture, and bus stops that appear in Maywald's, Parkinson's, and Dambier's images provide a less convincing visual rhetoric of female consumptive practice than the many photographs by Beaton and Penn that used luxurious and glamorous backdrops to accessorise the New Look.

Partington's analysis of the way working-class women adapted the style to be comfortable and serviceable at work further signals the complexity of the New Look. Her study 'contradicts the assumption made by fashion historians that the New Look was inappropriate for work or active pursuits' and provides evidence that women felt the style 'comfortable rather than restrictive or ornamental.'[50] That the women represented by magazine photography were imagined as wearing the New Look in the city and partaking in active life may have been a catalyst in part for working-class women to take up the style in every-day life.

I surmise that images by Parker, Maywald, and Dambier suggest that the New Look woman inhabits the city and is dominant within it. In each instance identified in this investigation, the New Look woman is not dwarfed by the buildings that surround her but rather is represented as central to the city's bustle and dynamism. Parkinson's and Maywald's photographs, in particular, reinforce the link between the New Look woman, activity, and modernity. Arguably, these images represent what the historian William H. Chafe terms the 'paradox of change,' where women are depicted as both active in public life and associated with the domestic realm. The New Look woman in the city is thus reflective of the post-war period when 'reliance on traditional images said a great deal about the difficulty of changing fundamental perceptions about sex roles.' [51] Just like her nineteenth-century and 1920s counterparts, post-war women of the 1940s and 1950s faced criticism based on their presence in the public domain and engagement with city life. While the New Look silhouette may have symbolically referred to women's return to traditional female roles, in juxtaposing this image with the metropolis, women were offered a narrative of female agency that drew on the rhetoric of mobility, dynamism, and modernity associated with previous representations of emancipated figures, the New Woman and the Modern Woman. Undoubtedly, fashion photography holds a contentious position when examining relationships between fashion and feminism. Whether the commercial imperatives of the genre necessitate modes of hegemonic social control that are inherently designed to confirm women's place within patriarchy and capitalist society is a question beyond the scope of this article, and one that is perhaps limited in understanding that fashion photography also operates within the framework of fashion as a social practice, whereby women assert a set of meanings to dress beyond those circumscribed by the fashion system.

## Notes

[1] Margaret Maynard, 'The Wishful Feeling about Curves: Fashion, Femininity and the New Look in Australia,' *Journal of Design History* 8, no.1 (1995): 43-59.
[2] Eric Pujalet-Plaa, 'New Look,' in *A-Z of Fashion Berg Fashion Library,* accessed 29 February 2012,

http:/www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bazf/bazf00421.xml?q=new%20look&isfuzzy=no&print.

[3] Maynard, ‘The Wishful Feeling About Curves: Fashion, Femininity and the New Look in Australia,’ 43-59.

[4] Peter McNeil, ‘Put your Best Face Forward: The Impact of the Second World War on British Dress,’ *The Journal of Design History* 6, no.4, (1993): 283-299.

[5] Angela Partington, ‘Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence,’ in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader,* eds. Juliette Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (London: Pandora, 1992), 145-161; Stella Bruzzi, ‘It will be a Magnificent Obsession: Femininity, Desire and the New Look in 1950s Hollywood Melodrama,’ in *Fashion in Film*, ed. Adrienne Munich, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 160-180.

[6] Christopher Breward, ‘Intoxicated on Images: the Visual Culture of Couture,’ in *The Golden Age of Couture. Paris and London 1947-57,* ed. Claire Wilcox (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 176.

[7] For discussion of the role of the New Woman in literature see Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de siècle,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[8] Margaret Maynard, ‘The Fashion Photograph: An Ecology,’ in *Fashion as Photograph,* ed. Eugenie Shinkle (London: I.B Tauris, 2010), 55.

[9] Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 7.

[10] Hilary Radner and Nathalie Smith, ‘Fashion, Feminism and the Neo-Feminist Ideal: From Coco Chanel to Jennifer Lopez,’ in *Fashion Cultures Revisited: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, eds. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2013), 275-286.

[11] Georg Simmel, ‘Fashion,’ *International Quarterly* 10 (1904): 130-155.

[12] Elizabeth Wilson, ‘Urbane Fashion,’ in *Fashion’s World Cities*, eds. Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 33.

[13] Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[14] Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Janet Wolff, ‘The Invisible Flaneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,’ *Theory Culture and Society* 2, no. 3 (1985): 37- 46; Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996), 6.

[15] Wolff, ‘The Invisible Flaneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,’ 37- 46.

[16] Ruth Iskin, ‘The Pan-European Flâneuse in Fin-de-Siècle Posters: Advertising Modern Women in the City,’ *Nineteenth Century Contexts: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 25, no. 4 (2003): 337.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 339.

[19] For image examples see: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, ‘La Goulue, 1892,’ *Toulouse-Lautrec: Paris& the Moulin Rouge*, accessed 11 February 2015, http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/TOULOUSE/Default.cfm?IRN=209906&MnuID=3&ViewID=2; Jules Cheret, ‘Quinquina Dubonnet, 1895,’ poster, accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.jules-cheret.org/Poster-advertising-'Quinquina-Dubonnet'-aperitif,-1895.html.

[20] Mary Lynn Stewart, *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen: Marketing Haute Couture 1919-1939* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 159.

[21] Mary Louise Roberts, ‘Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women’s fashion in 1920s France,’ *The American Historical Review* 98, no. 3 (1993): 665.

[22] Ibid., 683.

[23] Ibid., 684.
[24] For image example, see Erté, '*Harper's Bazaar* November 1933,' *Design Observer,* accessed 11 February 2015, http://designobserver.com/feature/bad-taste-true-confessions-erte/37579/.
[25] Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, 47-49.
[26] Martin Pumphrey, 'The Flapper, the Housewife and the Making of Modernity,' *Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (1987): 186.
[27] Remy Saisselin, 'Baudelaire to Christian Dior: Poetics of Fashion,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 18, no.1 (1959): 113.
[28] Diana de Marly, *Christian Dior* (London: B.T Batsford, 1990), 23.
[29] Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997), 29.
[30] Anne Fogarty, *Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), 32.
[31] Anne Hollander, 'Woman in the Mirror,' in *Woman in the Mirror Richard Avedon* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 2005), 239.
[32] For discussion regarding the relationship between Simone de Beauvoir's views on fashion and the New Look see Radner and Smith, 'Fashion, Feminism and the Neo-Feminist Ideal: From Coco Chanel to Jennifer Lopez,' 277; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985)*,* 100; and Pamela Church Gibson, 'To Care for Her Beauty, to Dress Up, is a Kind of Work: Simone de Beauvoir, Fashion and Feminism,' *Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1&2 (2013): 197-201.
[33] Hollander, 'Woman in the Mirror, 239.
[34] For image examples, see: Irving Penn, 'Fath Detail, Paris, 1950,' *The Art Institute of Chicago: Irving Penn Archives*, accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/IrvingPennArchives/artwork/144832; Cecil Beaton 'Charles James Ball Gowns, 1948,' *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2014/charles-james-beyond-fashion/images.
[35] For image examples see: 'Richard Avedon: Fashion,' *Richard Avedon Foundation*, accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.avedonfoundation.org/fashion/.
[36] Breward, 'Intoxicated on Images: The Visual Culture of Couture,' 176-198.
[37] Olivier Zahm, 'On the Marked Change in Fashion Photography,' in *Chic Clicks,* eds. Ulrich Lehmann and Jessica Morgan (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz and The Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, 2002): n.p.
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[39] Norman Parkinson, 'Traffic 1957,' *Norman Parkinson Archive,* accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.normanparkinson.com/archive/traffic-vogue-1957/.
[40] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity,* 46.
[41] Ibid., 225.
[42] For image example see: George Lepape, '*Vogue*, January 1925,' *Condé Nast Collection,* accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.condenaststore.com/-sp/Vogue-Cover-January-1925-prints_i8483139_.htm.
[43] Roberts, 'Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's Fashion in 1920s France,' 674.
[44] Hilary Radner, 'On the Move: Fashion Photography and the Single Girl in the 1960s,' in *Fashion Cultures, Theories, Explorations and Analysis,* ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 128.

[45] Ibid., 129.
[46] Virginia Postrel, *The Power of Glamour: Longing and the Art of Visual Persuasion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 203-207.
[47] For image example see: George Dambier 'Sophie Litvak at the Bus Stop,' *George Dambier Photographe,* accessed 11 February 2015, http://www.georges.dambier.fr/wp/fashion/.
[48] Martin Harrison cited in Hilary Radner, 'Proper Women in Improper Places' in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation World,* eds. Scott Lash and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1999), 89
[49] Alistair O'Neil, 'A Young Woman, N.Y.C,' *Photography & Culture* 1, no.1 (2008): 17-18.
[50] Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence,' 159.
[51] William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124.

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**Jess Berry,** PhD, earned her doctorate in visual arts from Griffith University, Australia where she is currently a Lecturer. Her research is concerned with the fashion city, fashion new media, and Australian fashion history. She is editor of the book *Fashion Capital: Style Economies, Sites and Cultures*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press (2012).

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# Feminism in Italy in the 1970s: Fashion, Identity, and Creativity

*Anna Balzarro*

## Abstract

The article aims to shed light upon the nature of the Neo-Feminist Movement in Italy during the 1970s through an analysis of the relationship between the Women's Movement and women's fashion, which was the principle object of criticism for many Italian feminists of the period. Fashion has always held an important role in women magazines and in Italian culture, and I chose *Effe* and *Noi Donne,* two feminist magazines, as sources of data to illustrate what distinguishes an Italian feminist magazine from a traditional women's general interest one. *Effe* and *Noi Donne* differ in their origins in that the former was more strongly linked to the Neo-Feminist Movement, while the latter was founded in the 1940s and was more aligned with the traditional Italian left wing parties than with the Women's Movement. An understanding of how these magazines approached fashion of the time leads to a better grasp of the differences within the world of feminism. A second issue for consideration is the role clothes played in neo-feminist identity. To assess these objectives, the article examines films and photographs of women's demonstrations, as well as gendered images in contemporary magazines. The findings reveal that Italian feminists were dressed in a wide variety of styles, indicating that the criterion they used for their choice of clothes was one of absolute freedom. Paradoxically, while many of the feminists of the 1970s purported to reject fashion, they actually created new fashion trends, which had a positive effect on fashion itself, launching a fertile period of creativity in women's dress. An analysis of this resurgence of fashion was carried out through a case study of one of the feminist fashion workshops that opened in Rome during the period, owned by Paola Agostara, whom the author interviewed, extensively. A broader knowledge of the connection between the Italian neo-feminism and Italian fashion in the 1970s furthers understanding of both.

## Key Words

Italy, 1970s, fashion, fashion magazines, women, identity, magazines, feminism, neo-feminism, political movements, social movements, Paola Agostara, *Noi Donne*, *Effe*.

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## 1. Introduction

The literature regarding the Italian Neo-Feminist Movement of the 1970s deals with topics ranging from the Movement's relationship with politics and with the student/worker protest movement of 1968, to the formation of local feminist groups. Fashion, however, had a mixed reception by feminists of the period. For some, fashion was antithetical to women's rights; they objected to imagery and cultural values that glorified the pursuit of beauty as the most important objective of a woman's life. However, the complex phenomenon of Italian feminism, with its tremendously varied groups and facets, also exhibited various other attitudes about the connection of women and fashion.

*Noi Donne*, the magazine of the Women's Union of Italy (UDI), was historically left wing and the criticism it levelled against the world of fashion was mainly political-economic in nature. The magazine was in favour of cheap, practical fashion but was against fashion destined only for the élite. It also condemned against the exploitation of women garment labourers who were working from home. The main objective of *Noi Donne* was to raise awareness regarding the problems of the world at the time, not to rail against women's dress, and *Noi Donne* included advertisements for clothing in its pages as well as articles that provided advice about what women should wear. In contrast, *Effe*, which was founded in 1973, had a stronger link with Italian neo-feminism, published radical attacks against fashion, which it considered to be harmful to women's dignity. After some years, the differences between the two magazines diminished, and by the end of the 1970s, *Noi Donne* published a long, positive article about new feminist fashion trends.

***Image 1:*** The length of skirts, 1980. © Anna Balzarro

Those who lived through the period will recall that one could distinguish at first glance a feminist from a woman who appeared to be uninterested in politics or from a woman who favoured right wing politics. The five images used to illustrate this article are of young Italian women, who described themselves feminists, followed politics and feminists groups in their schools, and dressed in ways that reflected gender politics of the 1970s in Italy. Like other feminists, they would often buy used clothes from flea markets and combine garments according to their own personal tastes. One might wear a flowery dress over a man's jacket, combining traditionally gendered fashions. As the 1970s ended and moved into 1980, baggy jumpers and very long skirts were often worn as seen in Image 1, a style of dress which lent itself to various interpretations such as the desire to hide one's body in reaction to the prevalent tendency of the time to display the female body and draw attention to its shape. A fusion of styles (Images 2 & 3) visibly accentuated the women's spirit of freedom and liberty, and their fight against social conventions.

During the 1970s many alternative fashion workshops sprang up in Italy, such as Paola Agostara's workshop, which she opened in Rome in 1972. There was a strong link between the explosion of creativity originating from those unusual clothes workshops and the Italian Women's Movement. Neo-feminism broadened the range of possibilities and ideas for Italian women as well as influencing their way of thinking about clothes and fashion.

## 2. Women, Men and the Socio-Political Economics of Italy, 1945-1970s

Italy at the end of the 1940s and during the early 1950s was still a predominantly agricultural country with a high rate of illiteracy, reaching its highest peak among the female population. The historian Paul Ginsborg, who extensively studied Italian contemporary politics and society, defined Italy in the mid-1950s as still being an underdeveloped country.[1] During the Second World War and the post-war years, women often made due with the clothes they could find, recycling what they could, including male clothes, and using low-cost fabrics to spend as little as possible. The few women that militated in the large mass political parties such as the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano), PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano), and DC (Democrazia Cristiana), made sobriety and simplicity in clothing a matter of dignity and personal respect, creating a trend that lasted for decades.

A profound economic transformation occurred during the mid-1950s that resulted in an economic boom. Certain socio-economic characteristics existed that differentiated the Italian situation from other Western development models. One of these was the rapid growth of Italy's industrial production, which more than doubled in five years. Italian fashion had become a reference for other Western countries since the 1950s. That was official on 12 February 1951; on that day Giovanni Battista Giorgini, a noble man from Florence, organized an important fashion show in his house, Villa Torrigiani. The most important Italian brands took part in the event. Anyway Italian fashion had received an important input two years before when Fontana sisters had sewed Linda Christian's wedding dress. Between the 1950s and 1960s Italian fashion had great development. In 1950 Roberto Capucci opened his tailor's in Rome. In the 1950s Gucci's production of light scarfs, bags and shoes had a boom, followed in 1960s by Gucci's garments. In 1958 the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (the Association that promotes Italian fashion events) was founded and in 1965 the industrial group of Benetton brothers started its activity. Another important element was Italy's efforts to comply with the requests of the European Economic Market. European countries that had a much higher per-capita income than that of Italy had a strong demand for electrical household appliances, automobiles, and televisions, which fostered the 'extraordinary growth of the Italian electrical household appliance industry that represented one of the most significant expressions of the economic miracle.'[2]

Italy's Northern industries were the economic, mechanical, metallurgical, and chemical driver of this 'miracle.' The *Lambretta* motor scooter, automobiles, and household electrical appliances became the symbols of a new life, of an affluence that made it easier to forget about the sacrifices endured during the war years. In particular, during the mid-1960s, Italy dominated Europe's washing-machine manufacturing. These were certainly important developments but must be analysed by different angles. For example, an essential appliance such as the washing machine revolutionised the lives of women and was considered an object of freedom that gave women more time to themselves.[3] However, while washing machines gave women more time for themselves, the question became what were they to do with that time? Was this additional time really for them, or did the new consumerist society push them in a direction that made them modernised 'slaves,' for example, wanting to appear more beautiful and more focused on fashion, beauty, and their seductive strategy?[4]

Progress had a cost that would lead to the movement of large masses of workers leaving the countryside for large urban centres, and from southern Italy to cities like Milan, Rome, Turin, and Genoa.[5] Men were initially the first ones to migrate, but were soon followed by women. Married women were mostly housewives, but the younger ones found jobs in factories working in very difficult conditions, with no insurance and with salaries that were half those of men. Nonetheless, as Ginsborg observed:

> despite these conditions, many young southern girls experienced their factory jobs as a form of emancipation having succeeded in escaping from the male hierarchy and dominance present in their families and finally earning their own money.[6]

Urbanization became an ongoing phenomenon that created new lifestyles. In an essay on consumerism, the historian Luca Gorgolini wrote that at the end of the 1950s, the youth category was established in Italy and young women had become potential fashion consumers, just as much as adult women.[7] Following British and American youth and counterculture trends, young people in Italy also were creating their own music and fashions, with clothes becoming more colourful and more affordable. The miniskirt was popular among young Italian women of the sixties, who were often frequenting the same places that young men were.

Young Italian women were also present in recreational and work areas and increasingly began attending secondary school. Between 1960 and 1980, the percentages of female attendance in different types of high schools grew exponentially, together with the overall growth in the level of education among Italians.[8] In 1960 there were 280,000 girls out of a total of 762,000 students attending middle and high school (36.7 percent); by 1980, that number had risen to 1,175.000 female students out of a total of 2,423,000 students (48.4 percent).[9] The education reforms of 1962 that established mandatory education up to the age of fourteen 'opened new horizons for thousands of middle class and working class youngsters' and many belonging to the middle classes went on to attend university.[10] Unfortunately, these important changes were not accompanied by improved scholastic institutions, or by innovative academic curricula. The education system remained strongly hierarchical and did not encourage a critical spirit, or help students from lower socio-economic classes. *Lettera a una professoressa,* (*Letter to a Teacher*), published in 1967 by Lorenzo Don Milani, an education reformer Catholic priest, became a cult favourite of the Italian 1968 student movement, when youth spoke up against 'the class prejudice of the educational system.'[11]Meanwhile, economic development had halted.[12]

Italian workers paid the highest price for the economic recovery and at the end of the 1960s began to speak up, participating in an extraordinary period of strikes that reached its peak in the fall of 1969. The strikers were mainly metalworkers, particularly those working at FIAT, the main Italian automotive industry. Their battles paralleled protests of high school and university students and continued into the following decade. In Italy, workers and students experienced a closeness that was much greater than in other countries. According to the historian Guido Crainz, Marxism in Italy 'was an interpretational key capable of giving a voice and future to the anomaly of youth rebellion.'[13] Italy was considered 'the most politicized country in Europe during the late sixties and early seventies, based on the political weight of its 'movements.'[14] The Neo-Feminist Movement developed within this highly politicized context that rejected all hierarchical and authoritarian systems.

## 3. Images of Italian Women in the 1970s

Before analysing the characteristics of Italian neo-feminism and its connection with fashion, we must consider the images of women and of female fashion models of the time on

television and in advertising to understand the styles and stereotypes from which feminism aimed to break away.

***Image 2***: Fifteen year-old feminist wearing a long skirt and an Indian shirt, 1978. © Courtesy of Paola Balzarro

By analysing such imagery from the 1970s, we can see provocative representations of the female body. For example, various motorcycle brands were offered to the public featuring women dressed in short shorts and low-cut T-shirts; beer was advertised by using a beautiful blonde woman covering her breasts with her bare arms. In 1971, the famous showgirl Raffaella Carrà appeared on television wearing bell-bottom pants and a cropped top that showed her bare

stomach. During those years, an increased commercialisation of the sexualised female body occurred alongside the more reassuring images of woman as protector of the hearth and perfect companion. Did exposing one's body indicate that one was a liberated woman who owned her sexuality, or did such representations of women that shocked respectable society members of the time conceal a new form of oppression? Did representations of the smiling, perfect housewife and glamorous sexy showgirls intersect with the reality of actual women of the 1970s?

Letters sent to the editorial columns of Italian magazines revealed great unhappiness and discontent among women of the period. Brunella Gasperini, the writer and journalist, known to her detriment as the author of 'women's' novels, responded to such letters in a column in the popular weekly magazine *Annabella*. Those who wrote Gasperini were mostly middle class women. An excerpt from a letter written in 1977 reads:

> I am 37 years old, have been married for 14 years with an 11 year old daughter and unfortunately I am a very unhappy, tired, dissatisfied, bored and frustrated housewife.[15]

When considering this letter it is important to note that the political conquests of the 1970s were marked by significant steps taken in women's rights.

## 4. Women's Civil Rights and Fashion Issues

While a major objective had been reached in the post-war years with women's suffrage, Italian society had not yet made important progress in women's civil rights and family issues. For example, divorce became legal in Italy only in 1970 and was opposed by the DC, the main political party linked to the Catholic Church, as well as by other centre-right parties that organised a popular referendum in 1974 to abolish the legalisation of divorce, but were defeated. Images of women appeared on the posters inviting citizens to vote 'Yes' or 'No' in favor of cancelling the law. 'Our No' was the slogan of an UDI, the Italian Women's Union that was linked to the historical Italian left wing parties. On the left of their poster there was a 'new' woman wearing jeans, a sporty blouse, and short, permed hair. She conveyed the image of being at ease and comfortable wearing such clothes, while the other side of the poster showed a drawing of a nineteenth-century woman wearing a long flowing skirt and a bonnet, the symbol of a past that was being left behind.[16] Those in favor of 'Yes' also used contemporary images of women, but a different message was conveyed by their sense of fashion and style. 'Yes, like our wedding day' was the slogan used next to a couple getting married, the bride in a white dress with a fashionable broad-brimmed hat. 'Yes to family and life,' read a poster by the Movimento Sociale Italiano, the extreme-right wing party.[17] The image portrayed a father dressed in a casual-elegant style while holding a young girl with her legs uncovered, while her smiling mother looks on in a smart-looking sporty outfit with skirt above her knees and dark moccasins.[18]

Changes in the law reflected the changing status of women. In 1975, the Civil Code introduced new family legislation that approved equality between spouses. 'A century has gone by and the code always remains the same,' claimed the UDI in a 1974 poster designed for a national demonstration for the new family law.[19] In 1978, Parliament approved Law 194 that regulated abortion. The DC was strongly supported by the Catholic Church and tried to unsuccessfully abolish the law through a referendum held in 1981.

What connection existed between the Italian neo-feminist movement that reached its highest visibility during those years and the conquests of the 1970s? There was a link, of

course, but not as visible as one might think, because Italian feminism was a complex and multi-faceted reality.

***Image 3***: Long skirts, loose tops, and tennis socks worn, 1979.

## 5. Italian Feminism: The Personal is Political

Italian neo-feminism emerged as a cultural phenomenon in the second half of the 1960s, and its cultural pathway was closely intertwined with the anti-authoritarian movements with 'an opposition against psychiatry and to the theory of the neutrality of knowledge.'[20] By the end of the 1960s, the discussion surrounding gender roles had become part of a general criticism about the authoritarian and patriarchal family. In its initial phase, many women and even men joined the Women's Movement. The historian Elda Guerra observes that by the 1970s Italian feminism had become a separate social movement with a political stance. According to Guerra, women felt the need to get together among themselves, and:

> groups and associations were born and spread across Italy from Turin to Bologna, from Rome to Naples to Sicily, creating a fragmented movement where private homes, or organization centres that just had an address, constituted points of reference for a virtual mapping that still partly needed to be rebuilt through recovering archives and collecting memories.[21]

In the above, Guerra highlights two aspects closely related to each other: First, Italian feminism in the 1970s was formed by a myriad of different groups that met primarily in private homes or in collective associations that took the name of the area where they were located. For example, 'the San Lorenzo association' in Rome was named after 'the neighbourhood where the Roman Feminist Movement began contacting women door-to-door in September 1972 informing them on contraceptives and housewifery.'[22] Second, many different and disparate experiences have made historical reconstruction of the period very difficult also because the work carried out often did not produce any written texts. [23]

Self-consciousness, women speaking up among other women telling their stories and experiences, and expressing their needs was a widespread practice that Italian women learned from American women, thanks to the travels of the first Italian feminists to the United States. This consciousness raising led to reflections on one's own body, dress, and sexuality that became identifying factors of the feminist experience. Another important issue was that not all women resolved their connection with politics in the same way. The question was how to have one's personal consciousness coexist with the public consciousness that many of the women those years had experienced when they had participated in the student movement. Where were the contradictions?

First of all, not all the groups shared the need for both a personal and political experience. Carla Lonzi, one of the leading Italian feminist theoreticians who founded the group Rivolta Femminile (Feminine Revolt), stated in 1978 that politics had ended. This was during the peak of neo-feminism's highest expansion, and Lonzi's statement intended to cut the connection between Marxist ideology and women's politics that she believed should have led to a global rethinking and to a rebuilding of society, culture and history.[24] On the other hand, Anna Rossi-Doria, the historian, identified the specific characteristic of Italian feminism as 'having not only been a social and cultural phenomenon, but above all a political one' and this was because women were forging new relationships and 'the discoveries these led to were in no way intended as a utopia, but as leverage for a general change within society.'[25] The focus on oneself, on one's own consciousness and awareness, was not the final objective, but rather a revolutionary tool that could mark a new way of understanding politics. Another characteristic of Italian feminism was the rejection of the idea of equality that had marked the 1968 worker/student movement and the previous women's liberation movements. The concept of equality between women and men was considered inadequate for understanding the complexity of the female world. Women from past generations had fought for their right to vote, for their

civil rights based on equality. Women in the 1970s took these equal rights victories for granted and asked themselves what they actually meant for women and how they influenced their interpretation of the world around them.[26]

They were not impressed by previous victories, specifically the divorce law and the new family law even if 'their political presence led to an intensive and important unparalleled reformist legislation in only a few years that had never occurred prior to that in Italy's history.'[27] Even the stances taken for legalizing abortion were not initially shared by all the various feminist groups. In 1971, the MLD (Women's Liberation Movement close to the Radical Party) promoted a petition for legalising abortion, but the women belonging to the Rivolta Femminile group and other more intolerant groups dissociated themselves from this initiative 'considering this as a traditionally political objective that was a betrayal of the real values of neo-feminism.'[28] In the years that followed, legalizing abortion became a shared platform of the entire feminist movement, with women belonging to all the feminist groups deciding to massively take to the streets to defend the abortion law. Another consequence of the abortion issue was to emancipate the UDI women from the PCI's political line that was initially more cautious, bringing them closer to the new feminist groups.

The different positions expressed by the Women's Movement and the UDI during those years is represented in two feminist Italian magazines: *Effe* (1973-1982) and *Noi Donne* (1944-present). *Effe* has been defined by the feminist historian Elda Guerra as 'the monthly magazine that was to accompany the history of the movement'[29] while *Noi Donne* was the UDI's official journal and was closely affiliated with the Communist Party. The content, advertising, and representations of each periodical highlight the different positions about fashion held by neo-feminists and women of historical left.

## 6. *Effe* and *Noi Donne*: Feminism, Fashion, and Beauty

'Who is he? Absolutely no one. He is the equivalent of semi-naked women on the covers of magazines.'[30] This comment is in response to the image of a semi-naked man wearing a fur-coat that appeared on the cover of the first issue of *Effe*, published in 1973. Named for the 'F' of the word feminism, *Effe*'s intent was clear: to convey a strong and resolute criticism of representations of women as passive objects of sexual desire as depicted in traditional magazines. Three years later, in 1976, Agnese De Donato, the *Effe* photographer, commented on the meaning and history of the magazine:

> It was 1973 and feminism was still in a spontaneous phase with groups that were created here and there. We realized a communication tool was missing, not only among ourselves, but among other women: we said many nice things to each other, but there was no way of making them public; the press spoke of us, but only as angry feminists who ripped their bras, something that never happened here. This story of the bras still comes out in all the interviews: serious works such as the relationship between Marxism and feminism don't even mention anything about this in any newspaper.[31]

The magazine was founded not only as a new political tool, but to establish a medium dedicated to restoring real images of women, disrupting stereotypes that portrayed women as empty vessels or angry bra-burning feminists.

When *Effe* spoke of fashion, beauty, and sex, as and it did with the photograph of the semi-naked man on its inaugural cover, it was to make a strong statement. One of the magazine's recurring themes was the battle against cosmetics. A series of articles published in 1973 through 1975, by Alice Luzzatto Fegiz, led the charge, harshly criticising beauty products,

accusing them of being health hazards and too expensive.[32] Their success and distribution as consumer products, it was claimed, was connected with images of the ideal female body that were built around harmful and predominant clichés. So it was that the back cover of *Effe*'s first issue contained a mirror image of the naked man wearing the fur coat with the only difference being that it was a drawing of a woman's body that was a ruthless portrayal of advertising stereotypes: 'wrinkles decrease love,' 'high breasts bring a husband.'

At the time, the entire fashion world, which was male dominated, was accused of not only exploiting women's labour,[33] but of creating shoes and clothes that symbolised male dominance and efforts to control women by rendering them ridiculous. The industry was criticised for encouraging women to wear fashions that restricted their movements by wearing tight-fitting dresses and high-heeled shoes that made them totter. Fashions of this sort were also condemned for packaging women as objects of sexual prey, exposing them to the possibility of sexual violence. 'Fashion Encouraging Rape' was the meaningful title of an article published in 1975 that underlined these concepts.[34]

In contrast, *Noi Donne*, a magazine created for the working class woman that represented the Italian Women's Union, the women's organization of the historical political parties of the Italian left wing. The version of this magazine that was published in 1969 and the beginning of the 1970s was not obviously different from mainstream women's magazines such *Grazia* and *Annabella*. For example, in 1970 a *Noi Donne* feature on 'maternity elegance' displayed pregnant women wearing mini dresses, maxi dresses, and bell-bottom pants, and lacked any noticeable criticism about widespread fashion trends. While not focused on high fashion, fashion was presented throughout the entire magazine, mainly on everyday ready-to-wear made for 'real' women and for their families.[35] *Noi Donne* focused on fashion's affordability. The 1970s were a period of economic crisis and a magazine created for working class women had to consider this aspect, as well as create features such as camping holidays, fashion in large department stores, and ecologic furs. Critiques of the fashion world focused on the exploitation of fashion labourers who worked at home, were underpaid, and received no benefits. Until the mid-1970s, *Noi Donne* had a classist imprint and protested against working conditions rather than taking on strictly feminist positions.

When it came to fashion, beauty, and body image, the contrast between the two magazines was striking. While *Noi Donne* featured clothing that was aesthetically pleasing, practical, and affordable, *Effe* did not provide fashion advice and refused to feature advertisements they considered harmful to women's dignity. *Effe* supported the new feminism, protested against the global exploitation of the female body and female beauty standards, and distorted representations of the female nude. It promoted the self-definition of women, and condemned body-baring garments, so-called 'modern' fashions as new forms of oppression that confined women to inferior roles and objects of the male gaze.

## 7. Italian Feminist Fashion

Irrespective of the images of women featured in *Effe* and *Noi Donne*, how did actual feminists of the 1970s dress? A lengthy survey published in 1978 by *Noi Donne* entitled 'Moda o malamoda?'(Fashion or Bad Fashion) dealt with many interesting topics but above all stressed that contemporary fashion that liberated women was based on street reality.[36] The habit of rummaging through markets to find used clothes, including valuable ones at affordable prices, rendered 'rags' highly coveted fashion objects. Flea markets such as Porta Portese in Rome and Resìna in Naples, and specialty shops such as Old America in Rome, and Isola del Tesoro and Surplus in Milan were places where one could find clothing and recreate the look of the feminist woman that made them stand out from other women. While right-wing women wore designer clothes, gold jewellery, and bought costly toiletries such as Chanel perfumes and

expensive luxury accessories like Vuitton bags, the 'new' woman wore 'long torn skirts, shawls, and scarves and, no makeup.[37]


***Image 4*:** International Women's Day, *8 March 1979*, 1979, Rome, Italy.
© Anna Balzarro

Above all, clothing for the neo-feminist woman was about freedom: the right to dress as one wished, to upend conventions such as a 'dress for every occasion' and other fashion clichés. A sixty-year old woman could wear a white dress from an Indian bazar; a teenager could wear a man's style button-down shirt. This rejection of prescribed fashion rules is reflected in photographs of the first national feminist demonstrations in Italy,[38] the imagery in various videos of which were in line with the aesthetic seemingly promoted by *Effe*. In the colder seasons, feminist women wore dark coats, long scarves, wool berets, turtleneck sweaters, and unfussy, natural hair as shown in Image 4, during a demonstration on 8 May 1979 to commemorate International Women's Day. In the warmer months, they were depicted with no specific or overly-refined style; they wore long skirts, blouses with rolled up sleeves or no sleeves, eco-sandals like Dr Scholl's, no make-up, and had natural-looking straight or curly hair (Image 5).

By the end of the 1970s, neo-feminists were wearing an eclectic mixture of styles that ranged from flowered and plaid skirts, workmen's overalls and frayed shawls; these were all freely mixed and matched, thus highlighting the modern woman's contradictions while making statements about personal identity. *Noi Donne* posed a rhetorical question: Are we really liberated from fashion or is fashion the one benefiting from this 'wind of change?' Has the creativity of the street paradoxically been co-opted by the fashion-industrial complex, and ultimately influenced the world of high fashion, which had been the target of feminist protest?[39]

## 8. Feminist Fashion Design Workshops: Paola Agostara

During the 1970s in Rome there were many fashion-oriented workshops that created innovative styles for the neo-feminist woman. By studying one of these feminist design workshops, the intertwining of feminism, fashion, women's practical lives, and political battles is revealed. I interviewed one of the key players of those years, Paola Agostara, who began working in fashion in the mid-1970s. [40] During those years she collaborated with the magazine *ABC,* which focused on sex education, and before designing her own fashions, she created ragdolls that were used for birth control education ('had I taken the pill') and lobbying for abortion rights. *ABC* published images of semi-naked women and presented itself quite differently from other feminist publications of the era, but it dealt with issues that concerned feminists. In mid-1970s Agostara sewed a dress for herself similar to the one worn by the ragdolls she made for *ABC*: a type of patchwork dress made with floral print fabrics, combined with polka-dots, and other patterns, all of which came from bathrobe fabric she had bought at the Piperno shop on Via del Monte della Farina, in Rome. Agostara's friend Stella Macallè owned a women's clothing shop and had noticed her wearing the patchwork dress and liked it very much. In my interview with Agostara, she talked about an article published in the fashion magazine *Annabella* that showed a photograph of her with her ragdoll, both wearing the patchwork dress.

***Image 5***: Long skirt and sandals, 1978. © Courtesy of Paola Balzarro

Thus began Agostara's role as feminist fashion designer. One interesting factor was the way in which the work in the workshop was organized. Agostara would arrive at work every day, 'like an employee going to the office' and then decide what to create. There were two workers to help her especially with dying the cloth. Once the design had been established, the fabric pieces were cut out and then sent to external seamstresses. After having agreed on a price with Agostara, the seamstresses would sew the pieces together to make the final product. Each garment was unique. Although there was no mass production, the output rate was very high, reaching levels of up to 100-120 items a day. Nevertheless, each article of clothing was different from the next, even if this difference might only be a different shade of colour. Paola Agostara received many commissions from Italy and abroad, from boutiques and from exclusive departments which were starting to open up inside department stores. For example, she sold her first rag jackets, made of pieces of dyed sheets, to a department of La Rinascente, a leading Italian department store.

The patchwork dress was followed by a jumpsuit, and in 1976 on her wedding day, Agostara began to dye cloth in her Piazza Cairoli workshop near the Jewish Ghetto, to prepare the fabric for an order of jumpsuits to be shipped to Jasmine's, the clothing boutique located in Paris' Latin Quarter. Agostara immersed three to four jumpsuits at a time in a large copper pot, starting with a light colour and kept adding other colours until she found the hue she liked. Agostara's initial inspiration for the jumpsuit was a book of ancient costumes; she had been inspired by Turkish pants and re-visited them by adding details. Another early design was oversized smocks that were trending during those years; even the designer Kenzo had created one. Agostara says she was inspired by street fashion, by seeing things, and imagining how to create them. Her designs made use of recycled materials. For example, she made sweaters by using yarn left over from making the hair of her ragdolls. One of these sweaters was sold by Bang in Via dell'Oca and was worn by Catherine Spaak, the French actress and singer, on the cover of *Grazia,* another important Italian women's magazine. According to Agostara, her final designs were almost always reached by chance. Although originating from one idea, changes might occur while the clothes were being made, especially during the dying process, producing a final product which was different from the way it was originally intended.

During the 1970s, many women designers created styles based on their imagination and creativity that were aimed at breaking away from the official fashion dictates. Three or four women might walk into a store and try on clothes in the fitting room together, as if playing a game. It was not about getting dressed but about transforming oneself. The connection with feminism was freedom and liberation, the desire to be different and the construction of an 'identity' that was different from that of the bourgeois lady.

As a sign of solidarity with other women, it was also common in the 1970s for a group of Italian women, for example ten friends, to visit a woman's clothing shop and buy the same dress in different colours, or purchase similar looking dresses.

## 9. Conclusion

In Italy during the 1970s, the neo-feminist focus on the exploitation of women's bodies led to an overall condemnation of the fashion world and to a refusal of any artificial embellishment that confined women to being objects of the male gaze. Their rejection of scanty clothing and representations of the female nude that transformed the female body into a commercial product created an opposite trend, covering the female body with ankle-length skirts, coats, scarves, and oversized sweaters. Nonetheless, the liberating winds of change during those years were open to international influxes and encouraged travel, preferably low-cost, among the younger generations. These changes succeeded in leaving visible traces on clothing that took on a distinctive look. Street life created new styles that opened fashion to

greater creativity. As occurred in Paola Agostara's workshop, this creativity was also combined with feminism and political issues such as contraception.

High fashion, however, did not miss its opportunity to co-opt the trend. Paola Agostara's designs were featured in leading national fashion magazines such as *Annabella* and *Grazia*. The freedom expressed by women's avant-garde fashion was thus co-opted by the official fashion forums and in time reached a broader public and was decontextualized from its original meanings.

## Notes

[1] Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi. Società e politica 1943-1948* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), 283.
[2] Ibid., 290.
[3] Mario Calabresi, 'La macchina per lavare,' *Cosa tiene accese le stelle. Storie di Italiani che non hanno mai smesso di credere nel futuro* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 5-15.
[4] Betty Friedan, *La mistica della femminilità* (Milan:Edizioni di Comunità, 1964); Enrica Asquer, *La rivoluzione candida. Storia sociale della lavatrice in Italia 1945-1970* (Rome: Carocci, 2007).
[5] Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture identità trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), 109.
[6] Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia*, 303.
[7] Luca Gorgolini, 'I consumi,' *Il secolo dei giovani. Le nuove generazioni e la storia del Novecento*, eds Paolo Sorcinelli and Angelo Varni (Rome: Donzelli, 2004), 213-254.
[8] Anna Balzarro, 'Una storia degli anni Settanta: donne a scuola tra vecchie e nuove culture,' vol. 1 of *Nuove frontiere per la storia di genere*, eds. Laura Guidi and Maria Rosaria Pelizzari (Salerno: Collana scientifica dell'Università di Salerno, 2014), 351-356.
[9] Istat (Istituto Superiore di statistica), *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1926-1985* (Rome, 1985), 85.
[10] Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia*,404.
[11] Ibid., 406-407. At its root, the 1968 movement refused the authoritarian management of the schools and universities and criticised a scholastic system that did nothing to bridge the cultural gaps based on differences among social classes. University students who were forced to work to support their studies had fewer chances of succeeding than students who belonged to more affluent families that supported them. Even if universities in theory were open to everyone, 'there were very few chances that poorer students succeeded in graduating.'
[12] By 1963. Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), 13. The crisis highlighted how the class disparity was kept hidden as well and how one of the essential factors of the Italian economic boom was paying workers coming from the very poor countryside with very low wages.
[13] Ibid., 242.
[14] Guido Crainz, 'La stagione dei movimenti: quando i conti non tornano,' *Meridiana. Rivista di storia e scienze sociali* 38-39 (2000):127-149, 127.
[15] Brunella Gasperini, 'L'amore come valvola di sicurezza,' *Più botte che risposte* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 2014) 186-187.
[16] Adriana Sartogo, *Le donne al muro, l'immagine femminile nel manifesto politico italiano 1945/1977* (Rome: Savelli, 1978).
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

[20] Elda Guerra, 'Una nuova soggettività,' *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta,* eds. Teresa Bertilotti and Anna Scattigno (Rome: Viella, 2005), 25-67, 43.
[21] Ibid., 36.
[22] Luciana Percovich, *La coscienza nel corpo:donne, salute e medicina negli anni Settanta* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005), 66.
[23] Lea Melandri, 'La protesta estrema' del femminismo, *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta,* eds. Bertilotti and Scattigno, 81. An initial analysis can still be made on topics that the associations discussed thanks to the testimonial of a key figure of Italian feminism, Lea Melandri: 'In the need I still feel today to protect the most profound and radical intuition of practicing self-consciousness – the problems related to sexuality, one's love life, personal history, etc. I find myself failing to mention the inherent conflict that these topics opened both with respect to the revolutionary movements of those years, and more generally, regarding politics, its institutions, its logic and its words. Consequently, a large part of my commitment and passion at that time has never been expressed.'
[24] Fiamma Lussana, 'Le donne e la modernizzazione: Il neo-femminismo degli anni Settanta,' eds. Francesco Barbagallo, Giuseppe Barone, Giovanni Bruno et al., *Storia dell' Italia repubblicana. L'Italia nella crisi mondiale. L'ultimo ventennio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 473-565, 487.
[25] Anna Rossi-Doria, 'Ipotesi per una storia che verrà,' *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta,* eds. Bertilotti and Scattigno, 5.
[26] *Il femminismo negli anni Settanta. Storia del femminismo in Italia*. *La Storia siamo noi.* Accessed 18 October 2013. http://www.lastoriasiamonoi.rai.it/video/il-femminismo-negli-anni-settanta/1532/default.aspx.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Elena Petricola, 'Parole da cercare,' *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta,* eds. Bertilotti and Scattigno, 205.
[29] Elda Guerra, 'Una nuova soggettività,' 65.
[30] *Effe*, 0, no. 0 (1973). An image of this cover can be found through *Centro delle Donne città di Bologna*, Biblioteca digitale delle Donne at, http://www.bibliotecadigitaledelledonne.it/227/.
[31] Serena Caramitti, 'Donne e stampa femminista,' *Fermenti,* January-February 1976, Accessed 15 October 2013,
http://www.fermenti-ditrice.it/archivio/Articolo_Stampa_Femminista_Caramitti_Fermenti.htm.
[32] Alice Luzzatto Fegiz,'Ribelliamoci al mercato dei cosmetici,'*Effe*, April 1975, 28-29; Ead. 'Cosmetici costosi e dannosi,' *Effe*, April 1975, 14; Ead. 'Cosmetici un subdolo ormone,' *Effe*, Juin 1975, 41.
[33] *Effe*, April 1979.
[34] 'Moda per violentarti meglio,' *Effe*, November 1975, 45.
[35] 'Il maxi ai grandi magazzini,' *Noi Donne*, 10 January 1970, 30-31
[36] Francesca Colli and Marisa Fumagalli, 'Moda o malamoda,' *Noi Donne*, 2 April 1978, 33-45.
[37] Gorgolini, 'I consumi,'240.
[38] *Femminismo in Italia,* accessed 18 October 2013*,* http://daf82.wordpress.com.
[39] Colli and Fumagalli, 'Moda o malamoda.'
[40] Paola Agostara, interview by author, Rome, 18 July 2013.

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**Anna Balzarro** is adjunct Professor at The American University of Rome and received her (two) doctoral degrees from the École des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales of Paris and from the University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy. Her research focus is contemporary history, in particular the Fascist Era in Italy, the Second World War, and the history of women.

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# Wardrobe Affect: Addressing Decisions about What to Wear

*Emma Thompson*

## Abstract

Can affect theory, the potential of the body's power to act and the mind's power to think simultaneously,[1] be used to describe the series of preconscious decisions made daily in the wardrobe? The social theorist Brian Massumi argues that discussions of the body have largely focused on the beginning and endpoints of the body's movements, not on movement itself. Through a critical analysis of the existing literature and cultural forms, including the practice of getting dressed, and the concepts of affect and affective labour, this article will describe the role of affect in the wardrobe. The literary theorist Michael Hardt's concept of affective labour[2] will be applied to the average individual's process of getting dressed to create a particular emotional impact on others or oneself. The kind of dressing I am referring to here tends not to be directly rewarded with monetary payment as it is in professions such as modelling. The nuances of getting dressed and how that practice lacks a highly specific language with semantics descriptive of it, exposes the lack of value placed on the activity in a capitalist economy. While the process of putting an outfit together may not always represent the ideal self that one wishes to convey, it is usually designed to evoke specific reactions in others, what the sociologist Erving Goffman refers to as 'impression management.'[3] Consideration also will be given to situations in which individuals cannot wear what they would like to wear and to the more limited garment choices of people with disabilities. Affect in all its transitioning forms will be examined to explore the wardrobe moment, not only in the clothes individuals wear, but the ones they hang in their wardrobes.

## Key Words

Affect, clothes, wardrobe moment, appearance, body, disabilities, dress, fashion, visceral response, affective labour, preconscious, interaction, language, value, social, individual, appearance, impression management.

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## 1. Introduction

There is no specific language for the process of getting dressed that denotes the selection of clothes and the styling done to complete the process. Aside from words like 'donning,' 'doffing,' and 'slimming' we are limited to using words that typically describe a variety of activities. Consider the 'getting' of 'getting dressed,' which is also used to explain such as activities as 'getting milk' and 'getting an appointment.' This limited vocabulary poses a certain amount of difficulty for the discussion that will take place in this article, the purpose of which is to examine the daily practice of dressing and the role of affect in it. The fashion historian Susan J. Vincent notes that while on a personal level individuals are likely to feel uncomfortable when wearing the wrong thing, 'on a societal level, judgments about what might constitute the right stuff and the wrong stuff, and why, are manifested only very rarely.'[4] While popular culture venues such as reality television shows and tabloids that critique the dress of celebrities are common, detailed scholarly research about the choices people make about what to wear while

considering the garments in their closets are fewer than one would expect and are focused on activities such as impression management.[5]

When one is 'getting dressed,' questions about how the particular garments one is considering arrived in one's closet, what an individual likes about them, and why they are 'right' for the occasion one chooses to wear them, are not usually considered.[6] While it is obvious that there are rules about appropriate dress for work, depending upon one's occupation, or for such activities as dropping one's children off at school, i.e., not being caught wearing pyjamas by staying in the car, consideration about the specific activity of getting dressed is rare. We know there is an unspoken process that can be stressful, especially when a person is already ten minutes late for an activity and still not certain about what to wear. While the process of getting dressed is valued, for most of us it is not rewarded in modern capitalist societies, although getting dressed is a consumption practice that contributes to identity construction and our packaging of self for various markets, whether work, dating, or other social activities. People do judge the appearance of others, and part of that judgement is based on what people wear.

The psychologist Ali Guy, the sociologist Eileen Green, and the social scientist researcher Maura Banim coined the term 'wardrobe moment' to conceptualise the series of questions we ask ourselves everyday, however briefly, when regarding the appropriateness of our garment, shoe, and accessory choices for where we are going, what we are doing, and how we feel. Guy, Green, and Banim note that our moods may alter the choices we make but that those choices may be preconscious and not become apparent until the wardrobe moment occurs.[7] My focus here is not on the questions individuals ask themselves as they stand before or within their closets, facing their clothes, but rather on what is occurring physiologically and emotionally as they do so, before the decision about what to wear becomes conscious: affect. I use 'affect,' as defined by the affect theorists Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, to explain '*other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension.'[8] This preconscious knowing may direct one to a particular garment, judging it superior or more suitable than others.

## 2. Methodology

This article undertakes a critical reading of the practice of getting dressed in the wardrobe moment. Affect theory and affective labour theory are utilised to critique the reproduction of so-called universal knowledge of the activity of clothing oneself. In postmodern societies, we are generally not required to follow a particular fashion trend or theme and the choices we make about what to wear may be fragmented.[9] Since identities are constructed through clothing choices and appearance, and there are fewer 'rules,' straight forward meanings or interpretations of clothing and appearance, the notion that there is one standard and accepted meaning for clothing is problematic. Except for those required to wear a uniform, there is no one answer to the meaning of dress, why one gets dressed, or the processing of dressing. The article also considers internal contradictions involved in dressing and impression management in capitalist society and the inadequate vocabulary we have for describing the process.

While there may not be a specific communication system that controls what individuals wear, it is important to consider what we gain by critically thinking about the way in which we get dressed and what influences the series of decisions we make while doing so.[10] The examples used in this article come from several sources: personal observations of the practice of getting dressed, as seen in personal experience and as a result of interactions with others, recent popular culture discussions about the appropriateness of dress in public places,[11] and studies examining the relationship of clothing and body image and of appearance management.

Throughout this article the space where clothes are stored as well as where they are chosen from will be referred to as 'the wardrobe.' A wardrobe may be a series of drawers or closets, but it is ultimately the place where one is surrounded by one's potential clothing options and where the decision about what to wear may be made. The article is organised in three sections. The first section explores the role of affect and the 'bodily horizon' in the decision-making process of what to wear.[12] The role of affect in getting dressed will be contrasted with the habitual practice of doing so, to emphasise the difference.

In the second section, getting dressed will be considered as a form of affective labour that similarly to other forms of affective labour is not recognised in the capitalist system as it is not directly monetarily rewarded except in certain instances. This lack of recognition may explain why there is a dearth of language in English to describe practices of getting dressed. This discussion will be realised primarily through the frameworks of the literary theorist and political philosopher Michael Hardt and the Marxist theorist and political philosopher Antonio Negri.

In the third and final section, the role of affect and affective labour in the wardrobe moment will be applied to different bodies. When one struggles to find clothes that fit and that one also wants to wear, dissidence may occur between clothes serving a functional purpose and reflecting one's identity and aesthetic self-image. This contention is relevant not only because it plays a role in the visceral response one has to one's clothes, but also to the view that getting dressed is a form of labour as important as the initial consumption of goods and shopping. The labour that occurs after the purchase is important for it may be emblematic of the self and is critical for understanding the relationship between clothing and affect. Furthermore, while the act of the purchase may be a part of constructing an identity, the future of how the garment will be worn by the individual needs to be considered with respect to its capacity to create a particular identity.

## 3. Affect and Inbetween-ness

I use affect theory to explain the preconscious, physiological arising within the self that incorporates both the mind and body.[13] According to Hardt, affect draws upon reasons and emotions, using both body and mind before an action is made.[14] Seigworth and Gregg describe affect as arising 'in the midst of *inbetween-ness*: the capacities to act and be acted upon.'[15] For the sociologist Deborah Gambs and the social theorist Brian Massumi this 'inbetween' is a third state 'between activities and passivity.'[16] Massumi compares this third state to an arrow in flight, which implies movement or transition not a beginning or endpoint.[17] Transition is critical for understanding the wardrobe moment and the in-between states of undress and dress.

Desiring to dress a certain way as a form of self-preservation through self-actualisation can be linked to what the philosopher Baruch Spinoza describes as preservation of the self.[18] By using affect theory, we can see that dressing in a particular way can be a viewed as following one's nature and conscious appetite, as an expression of self. The feminist theorist Sarah Ahmed's use of affect reflects Spinoza's theory by speaking to the relationship between individuals and their objects.[19] Getting dressed is a personal and intimate process. With clothing one can conceal or reveal certain aspects of the body in relation to one's body image, and have an ongoing affective relationship with garments in our wardrobe as a tool to do so.[20]

## 4. Affect and the Wardrobe Moment

Selecting clothes from one's wardrobe can be a preconscious form of creating the self through one's garments and accessories. The clothes in one's closet become a part of one's garment repertoire. While for a special social event, one might give much thought to what one

will be wearing, considering degrees of formality, appropriateness, the impression one wants to make, colour scheme, and what is suitable from among the clothing one already owns; this practice differs from the everyday routine of getting dressed. For example, depending upon one's job or career and one's attitudes about fashion, dressing for work may be a predictable process, with nothing more than a last look in the mirror

The different levels of awareness or consciousness involved when getting dressed, for example, why on certain occasions the selection of clothing may be more methodical than others, is situational, a social role, a performance.[21] While the choice of what to wear may be based on habit, other factors may be involved such as an unarticulated appreciation for the way the clothes look or feel on one's body, as well as their symbolic value for self and others. It is the 'not that, not that, not that, maybe, okay this will work' that comprises the wardrobe moment, as one goes through a mental checklist or a literal donning and offing of clothes. In the moment one decides what to wear affect operates on a visceral level. One suddenly knows that it 'works.'

## 5. Getting Dressed as a Habit versus Encountering the New

Much of the selection process of getting dressed, whether part of a rushed morning routine or simply picking something quickly to wear, is completed through habitual motions. However, while the selection may be based in habit, this does not mean it is unintentional.[22] The decision that this top goes with these bottoms is done naturally and frequently, is a preconscious movement towards an object, and is a different encounter than when one is shopping and responding to a never-seen-before garment. A pre-conscious, physiological, affective response to a new dress, shirt, pair of shoes, or a belt can be viewed in terms of Spinoza's claims that desire is a conscious appetite, related to a yearning to possess the object that moves from pre-conscious knowing to conscious desire to own. A connection, in the words of Hardt, has been made 'between the mind's power to think and the body's power to act, and the power to act and the power to be affected.'[23] This is somewhat similar to the thought processes involved in the wardrobe moment, when one's conscious and pre-conscious mind consider the functionality and appropriateness of the garment, and self- image as one's eyes move along the clothes in the closet and viscerally respond to each item of clothing's suitability.

## 6. Clothing as Objects: The Promise of Happiness

A movement toward and away from objects as a result of affect is a concept Ahmed discusses in her 2010 essay 'Happy Objects.' Happy objects are desired for the pleasure they promise and thus function as social goods.[24] Objects can affect one's happiness, and individuals form intentions and opinions about them.[25] While the emotion created by the garments is a tangential concern in this article, the relationship we have with our clothes and the way our clothes impact us by creating preconscious physiological responses is a central matter, for when clothes make us happy or unhappy we may be directed toward or away from them. According to Jennifer Craik, the fashion and textiles researcher, 'clothing the body is a technique of every social body through which the physical body is actualised in its habituses.'[26] The literary critic John Harvey observes that 'clothes 'can give you away: they can give away your income, a vulgarity, a failure of cool.'[27] Clothes are the costumes we wear in our various social acts or performances of self, and how well that performance is received by the audience can certainly disturb our happiness.[28] Not only can clothes provide indicators of one's character and status, they also reflect on the culture in which one lives. Political and socioeconomic realities are apparent in the way individuals dress and groom themselves,[29] and affect the decision- making process of what to wear. According to Ahmed, 'affect is what sticks, or what sustains, preserves

the connection between ideas, and objects.'[30] When we connect to our clothes as objects, they speak to our values and the image we have of self and object; there is an exchange between an individual and an image.[31]

***Image 1***: *Painting the Body Clothed*, 2015.
© Courtesy of Coleen Schindler-Lynch

Clothing plays a critical role in managing the impression of the multiple selves and social masks that comprise who we are.[32] The pop culture researcher Claudia Mitchell explains,

'how we dress can be read as an expression or even an extension of multiple aspects of our identities, or as a way to narrate aspects of the self.'[33] Clothes arrive in our closets because we have put them there, because we purchased them as functional or desirable objects, or perhaps because they were a gift. However they arrived, our collection of clothing reveals something about our various identities, roles, relationships, and tastes. The art critic Nicolas Bourriaud furthers the idea of the object as extension of the self by explaining how drawing upon 'relations between people and the world' creates an artist's work.[34] It is possible that some of one's clothing is valued for its artistic merit. Dressing can be a form of adornment, an aspect of the quests for beauty and artistic expression, and may be guided by preconscious affect, which may play a role in our likes and dislikes as part of our 'bodily horizon.'[35] If the process of creating an outfit were considered comparable to that of creating a work of art, Bourriaud's view of how the artist works is useful for exploring the affective relationship one has with one's clothes.

> Their works involve methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him/her, and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimensions as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together.[36]

One's body becomes a canvas on which we 'paint' our 'art,' and our likes and dislikes are displayed or indicated by their absence (Image 1). The unclothed body is a 'clean slate' until it is dressed, made-up, tattooed, pierced, or surgically altered to create identity.[37]

Besides their merit as art objects (or not), clothing has kinaesthetic, sensual appeal. The wardrobe moment is shaped by how our body moves in the clothes we wear and by the attraction to them as they move with us. Ahmed writes of 'the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency how we are touched by what we are near.'[38] Nearness, when considered in relation to the wardrobe moment, articulates being close physically to our clothing, but also to the visceral response and attraction one has to a garment as one approaches it. The way a dress or pair of jeans fits our body and how we feel when we move in them demands our awareness and establishes a relationship with them.[39] We move around our clothes as we approach them in our closets, whether we decide to wear them or not.

In the wardrobe moment, we go through different motions, choices, and the like, and affect exists in our habitual choices and styling. Returning to Spinoza, if objects affect us differently at any given time, this allows us to understand why a shirt is 'just right' one day and 'does not work' on another. This also explains styling practices; for example rolling the cuffs of pants up one time and taking them down another.

## 7. Social Capital, Immaterial Labour and Constructing a Look

The donning of clothes is a requirement when appearing in public and involves preparatory work from which conclusions about our public persona are made. It involves affective labour that will evoke emotional experiences, sentiments, and behaviours not only in ourselves but in others as they attempt to discern clues about our character, values, and manner. Hence, the wearing of clothes is not 'merely about the production of a consumable good.'[40] Since the assumptions others make about the garments we wear may have larger ramifications for our social and personal life, we need to use impression management and affective labour in all its forms, with the mind and body 'simultaneously engaged,' blending our intelligence and emotions.[41]

Immaterial work, affective labour, makes statements about our social networks and the communities to which we belong.[42] The sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato explains that the immaterial labour 'involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion,' is not usually defined as labour.[43] Clothing can denote a community based on appearance and sense of belonging, and be a form of social capital. By following trends or dressing in a particular required way, such as wearing a uniform, wearing clothes can be seen as an extension of the body, a form of biopower. While dressing a certain way may play a role in getting one a job, or provide a sense of belonging to a group, the labour put into one's appearance is hidden. Only those who have an intimate relationship with an individual may be aware of the lengths an individual has gone to put a look together. Appearances based in clothing choices are often taken for granted, may or may not be remarked upon by others, let alone directly rewarded.

To label the practice of getting dressed a form of affective labour, it must be established that the individual derives value from the appearance one creates directly or by those with whom one interacts. While the labour involved does not result in a consumable product, it does have emotional or behaviour consequences. Spinoza's concepts of *affectus* and *affectio* are useful for exploring the value generated in the wardrobe moment.

Spinoza defines *affectus* as emotion, and emotion for Spinoza is 'an increase or diminution of the power either of the body or of the mind.'[44] By using Spinoza, we can see that individuals select their clothes for any number of reasons, including those based on emotion, but what is critical here is that the clothes are selected in a way that creates meaning or value for the individual, including the aesthetic pleasure they supply. According to Nigel Thrift who is researching affective politics at the University of Warwick, aesthetic pleasure is 'an *affective* force that is active, intelligible, and has genuine efficacy; it is both moved and moving.'[45] Thrift's articulation explains not only the affective response one has to one's own clothes, but also articulates how the seemingly practical activity of getting dressed is largely influenced by sentiments of taste and attractiveness. Aesthetic pleasure goes beyond putting a look together and is also derived from the way one feels in one's clothes. For example, value can be located in having a pair of pants that not only provide a flattering silhouette but also fit 'just right.'

An affective response is also influenced by the actions of others' bodies.[46] Our appearance plays a role in our social interactions, though it may not be as actively involved as a communication mode as speech or non-verbal gestures. Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* describes this type of communication as a personal performance; through the appearance one chooses to costume and perform, impressions and meanings are created and social statuses can be determined through non-verbal communication.[47] Consider the professional dress of a physician: Not only is the white coat traditionally worn a symbol of medicine, it functions non-verbally as a status cue and evokes a positive emotional response in patients, increasing their confidence and trust in their physician.[48] Consider too the labour lawyer who dresses in earth tones to make clients feel more comfortable,[49] or the celebrity who hires a stylist to craft a look for an event where the celebrity will vie for the attention of the media. Appearing on 'best' or 'worst' dressed lists is a way of manipulating affects in viewers and commentators that is key to immaterial labour belonging to culture industries.[50]

If value is found in appearances, consideration should be given to its implications for the wardrobe moment. Physical appearance, including dress, speaks to the social discipline and manner of the individual.[51] Although judgments are made based on how we look, the prevalent view promoted by popular culture is that our appearance should be effortless.[52] If we recognise getting dressed as an important action, something that speaks to our relationship with our physical bodies and our social interactions, it is obvious that more consideration should be devoted to understanding this activity. However, the kinds of activities involved in getting

dressed, being fashionable, and developing a personal style shapes what one buys and consumes, and also involves the maintenance of garments, including washing, ironing, mending, and trips to the dry cleaner. These upkeep practices are also represented on the body and can imply one's socioeconomic status. Affective labour is also involved in the caring of a child's wardrobe, and that work can be difficult to measure within the current capitalist system and not valued.[53] It is the personal satisfaction, social relationship, and attention that are valued in the parent/child relationship.

Collective subjectivities are produced through affective labour and 'ultimately produce society itself.'[54] Can collective subjectivities be found in the labour of getting dressed? Are there instances where knowledge that is not verified individually is used in the practice of getting dressed, such as adopting general rules of dressing, as for example, wearing only black socks with black pants? There are many such instances where 'dress' knowledge is transgressed and a new trend is started, for example, wearing one's shirt outside one's pants rather than tucked inside of them. The nuances of getting dressed, and how the practice itself lacks a highly specific language with semantics descriptive of it, exposes the lack of value placed on the activity for it cannot be quantified objectively in a capitalist economy and also exposes a several millennia prejudice that is the result of the mind/body dualism which views appearance as frivolous. This is certainly an area of research that requires further exploration.

## 8. Dressing Different Bodies

If there is value derived from the way in which one appears, what happens when one cannot wear what one would like to wear? The choice of what to wear inevitably comes down to what is in the closet, and for some people what is in the closet is more a reflection of functionality, availability, and cost and not of their personal aesthetic. The role of affect in the wardrobe moment is tangled in the realities of our bodies and our clothes. The anthropologist Mary Douglas observes that our social and physical bodies enable and constrain one another, and 'there is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.'[55] Reflecting on Douglas, the sociologist Joanne Entwistle explains that the two bodies 'constitute the totality of our individual experience of embodiment – the physical body (the biological, individual body) and the social body (the body demanded by our culture).' Unless we alter our bodies through surgery, weight gains and losses, and exercise, they may or may not align with the current cultural construction of the ideal body.[56]

From this negotiation of finding clothes that fit and are functional, we enter into the discussion of how clothes as identifiers can be misleading, particularly for those with different bodies including those with physical disabilities. Here clothes, while desired for their comfort and functional qualities, for example, a person with a mobility disability finding sweatpants the most comfortable bottom to wear, can indicate an identity or stereotype that is misleading. What role does affect play here? Is there both a movement towards and away from the sweatpants in the wardrobe moment? One might be concerned that dressing in sweatpants might work against the effect one wants to create and give the impression that one is a slob. Typically, the practicality of the garment will trump aesthetics in the wardrobe moment; the reality is there is a lack of options, and comfort and function must supersede aesthetics. Consider another example: Affect may play a role in one's visceral response to a skirt that may be attractive, but one must avoid because one 'knows' that sitting in it for more than a few hours will be painful. Similarly, one may consider a pair of trousers that slide low in the back and are therefore difficult to wear in a wheelchair, or a button-down shirt whose small buttons present difficulty for arthritic hands to fasten. While the scope of some of these questions goes beyond the purpose of this article, it is important to note that affective labour in the dress

process can be obstructed. Additionally, the lack of language to describe the daily practice of getting dressed may also influence the lack of attention given to those with different bodies and their relationship with their clothes.

## 9. Conclusion

Affect exists in the wardrobe moment as a preconscious visceral response that draws one to or away from an article of clothing. Affect swirls with the conscious questions of appropriateness, what is on the to-do list for the day, one's mood, and assists in the decision of what to wear. Even when the choice is not being consciously considered, affect plays a role in the habitual selection of garments, guiding the choice in a preconscious way. The garments in our closets say something about us, and how we put ourselves together is a matter of impression management and performance. Whether the impression we craft is successful is a different matter. As noted throughout this article, there is a lack of adequate language not only for describing the process of getting dressed, but also the different practices, series of decisions, and criteria that are worked through in the wardrobe moment. There is a need for terms and phrases that more accurately describe not only the role of affect in the wardrobe moment, but the feelings, thoughts, questions, and moods that influence what one wears, rather than merely describing the beginning and endpoints of getting dressed.

## Notes

[1] Michael Hardt, Foreword, in *The Affective Turn*, ed. Patricia T. Clough (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), x.
[2] Michael Hardt, 'Affective Labour.' *boundary* 2, no. 26 (1999): 80-100.
[3] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).
[4] Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body From Renaissance to Today* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2009), 160.
[5] An early consideration was by Goffman in 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which consider such choices as costuming for a performance.
[6] Maura Banim, Eileen Green and Ali Guy, *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes*, eds. Ali Guy, Eileen Green, and Maura Banim (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001), 1-20, looks at the personal relationships women have with their clothes and the interactions they have with them.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'Introduction,' in *The Affect Theory Reader,* eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.
[9] Susan B. Kaiser, Richard H. Nagasawa, and Sandra S. Hutton, 'Fashion, Postmodernity and Personal Appearance: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach Formulation,' *Symbolic Interaction* 14, no. 2 (1991): 180.
[10] Discursive reflection communication is political and moral and allows for a new understanding of systems that work to control these practices in order to disrupt and subvert them. For more on this line of thought, see Thomas R. Lindolf and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 3rd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage, 2011), 58.

[11] For example, a Florida school board has proposed a dress code for parents of children who attend the schools within the board. 'Florida School Board Member Wants Dress Code for Parents,' NBC News, accessed 6 February 2015, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/florida-school-board-member-wants-dress-code-parents-n84211.
[12] Sarah Ahmed, 'Happy Objects,' in *The Affect Theory Reader,* eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 32-33.
[13] A side note on uses and theories of affect: Sylvan Tomkins's theorizing on affect as well as his followers are avoided in this instance as Tomkins divides affects into categories similar to emotions (Shame and Its Sister's, 1995), which is contrary to the way affect is being used in this paper. This is not to say that affect cannot become conscious as an emotion as the two are certainly linked, but for this understanding and use of affect, an affect is not directly linked to emotion.
[14] Hardt, *The Affective Turn*, x.
[15] Seigworth and Gregg, *The Affect Theory Reader,* 1.
[16] Deborah Gambs, 'Myocellular Transduction,' in *The Affective Turn*, ed. Patricia T. Clough (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 111.
[17] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.
[18] For Spinoza, preservation of the self comes from his definition of desire: 'desire is appetite together with a consciousness of the appetite, and that desire is the very essence of man in so far as it is determined to do those things that contribute to his preservation.' Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. G. H. R Parkinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 213.
[19] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 202.
[20] Hanna Frith and Kate Gleeson, 'Dressing the Body: The Role of Clothing in Sustaining Body Pride and Managing Body Distress,' *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 5, no. 4 (2008): 249-264.
[21] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self,* 252.
[22] Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique.' *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 455.
[23] Hardt, *The Affective Turn*, xi.
[24] Ahmed, 'Happy Objects.'
[25] Ibid.
[26] Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 223.
[27] John Harvey, *Clothes* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 43.
[28] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self.*
[29] Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body* (Oxford, and New York: Berg, 1998), 15.
[30] Ahmed, 'Happy Objects,' 29.
[31] Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon, France: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 23.
[32] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*.
[33] Claudia Mitchell, 'Fashion for the Soul,' in *Not Just Any Dress*, eds. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 261.
[34] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 42.
[35] Ahmed, 'Happy Objects,' 32.
[36] Ibid., 43.

[37] Lars Svendsen, *Fashion a Philosophy*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books: 2006), 76-77.
[38] Ahmed, 'Happy Objects,' 30.
[39] Mitchell, *Not Just Any Dress,* 262.
[40] Melissa Ditmore, 'In Calcutta, Sex Workers Organize,' in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, eds. Patricia. T. Clough and Jean. O. Halley (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 171.
[41] Hardt, *The Affective Turn*, xi.
[42] Hardt, 'Affective Labour,' 94, 96.
[43] Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour,' in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics,* eds. Paul Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), 142.
[44] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 60.
[45] Nigel Thrift, 'Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour,' In *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 292.
[46] Megan Watkins, 'Desiring, Recognition, Accumulating Affect,' In *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 269.
[47] Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 24.
[48] Amir Kazory, 'Physicians, Their Appearance, and the White Coat,' *The American Journal of Medicine* 121, no. 9 (2008): 825-828; Stefano Palazzo and David B. Hocken, 'Patients' Perspectives on How Doctors Dress,' *Journal of Hospital Infection* 74, no. 1 (2010): 30-34; Shakaib U. Rehman, Paul J. Nietert, Dennis W. Cope, and Anne O. Kilpatrick, 'What to Wear Today? Effect of Doctor's Attire on the Trust and Confidence of Patients,' *The American Journal of Medicine* 118, no. 11 (2005): 1279-1286.
[49] Peter W. Cardon and Ephraim A. Okoro, 'Professional Characteristics Communicated by Formal versus Casual Workplace Attire,' *Business Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2009): 355-360.
[50] Hardt, 'Affective Labour,' 95.
[51] Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 57-58.
[52] For examples of hastening the morning routine see: Timothy Gower, 'Steal His Routine,' *Prevention*, September 2005, accessed 6 February 2015, http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/212751538?pq-origsite=summon; Danielle Pergaent, 'How to Speed Up Your Morning Routine,' *Allure*, June 2013, accessed 6 February 2015, http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/1411849688?pqorigsite=summon; Rebecca Davis, 'Saving Time on Your Morning Routine,' *Redbook,* September 2005, accessed 6 February 2015, http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/222204653?pq-origsite=summon.
[53] Hardt, 'Affective Labour,' 96.
[54] Ibid., 89.
[55] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology,* 2nd ed. (New York, New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 72.
[56] Entwistle, Joanne. 'The Dressed Body,' In *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, eds. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 138.

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**Emma Thompson** is completing her Master's degree in spring 2015 in Critical Dress and Disability Studies, in the Graduate Program in Communication and Culture, at York University, in Toronto, Canada. Her research interests include embodiment, private and public life, disability, the day-to-day practice of getting dressed, and the ideal body. *Left Out: A Revealing Look into the Everyday Fashion Choices of Individuals with Mobility Disabilities,* her thesis, seeks to understand how persons with mobility disabilities negotiate their identity through their daily clothing choices and the emotional or affective relationships they have with their clothes.

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# Contemporary Fashion Tastemakers: Starting Conversations that Matter

*Rachel Matthews*

## Abstract

This article examines contemporary fashion tastemakers and their role in the complex and evolving mechanisms of fashion diffusion in the twenty-first century. It focuses on two groups of fashion tastemakers: selected fashion journalists and high profile fashion bloggers. By undertaking discourse analysis of their tastemaking activities, this study explores actions by these fashion commentators that function as a catalyst for a range of activities that assist with the fashion diffusion process. The contemporary fashion tastemakers studied here utilise language to write about and verbalise their tastes as a key aspect of their tastemaking operations. Textual analysis undertaken as part of this study focuses on the way their statements identify and name new fashion ideas and items while dismissing a vast number of other possibilities. Their activities filter and classify their selections as fashion and place nominated fashion objects within popular fashion discourse. Informed by the social theorist Michel Foucault's perspectives on discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), this article examines the relationship of the commentators' language to other social processes. Their written expressions transform fashion propositions into digital textual forms, which are searchable on the Internet. Their actions initiate conversations and social interaction around specific fashion objects, and these enable new fashion ideas to become socially mobile, readily shared through a variety of networks. Through greater circulation, the potential for these objects to be accepted and adopted as a new element of the fashionable aesthetic is increased.

## Key Words

Fashion, style, taste, tastemaking, fashion tastemaker, fashion commentator, fashion communication, discourse, networks, blogs, social process, cultural diffusion.

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, notions of taste first developed from the passive sense of taste in the mouth and subsequently became connected with intellectual thoughts and actions.[1] In *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (1991), the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers numerous definitions of taste such as 'Taste is an acquired disposition to "differentiate" and "appreciate"' and 'Taste is a match-maker; it marries colours and also people.'[2] The specific focus of Bourdieu's research was how class and social boundaries are reproduced and legitimated through notions of taste, and expressed and enacted through consumption. Class and social position form an important cornerstone for many discussions on what constitutes taste, often using it as a way to define specific social groups. In an empirical study of American society in the 1970s, the sociologist Herbert J. Gans identified five 'taste cultures,' or taste publics, based predominantly on education and economic circumstances.[3] Both Bourdieu and Gans describe the display of one's taste in the social space as the use of novelty, as a marker of social difference or distinction in order to reinforce social divisions. The sociologist Colin

Campbell offers a different perspective on taste as framed by Western consumer society at the end of the twentieth century. He links it with individual psychological motivations of consumers who seek pleasure through forms of consumption.[4] His view of taste is 'psycho-historical' and focuses on hedonistic novelty-seeking, rather than on class or social group. Despite their differences, both perspectives underscore an understanding of taste as an ability to judge and discriminate on aesthetic and cultural matters, a definition used in this article.

Taste is fundamentally tied to consumption, as one's ability to make discerning aesthetic judgements is revealed through what one consumes. The mechanisms of taste require an environment of materialism, consumerism, and commodity fetishism, as does fashion, yet discussions on taste have a moral tone that suggests taste allows these aspects to be negotiated and viewed with control and discretion.[5] Utilising notions of taste and tastemaking when addressing fashion is an attempt to dignify indulgent aspects of consumption and reveal one's ability to 'immediately and intuitively judge aesthetic values' of new fashion propositions.[6] The design and cultural critic Stephen Bayley suggests that taste operates 'as an important social mechanism for validating one's personal preferences and demonstrating social and cultural superiority.'[7] It is the individual's display of understanding and connection with social and cultural status markers that assists in changing what may seem like one's personal preference into an expression of taste. The greater the display of one's knowledge and social connections, the more readily one's personal opinions are transformed into a judgement of taste for one's social group.

Central to both fashion and taste are the seemingly opposing forces of personal self-expression and group action that create tensions within individuals as they negotiate their place in society. Fashion and taste are concerned with reconciling intimate subjective feelings with public acts that reveal these states and connect with broader standards operating in the social space. In the *The Sociology of Taste* (1997), the sociologist Jukka Gronow explains that individuals seek to express certain forms of aesthetic judgement through taste and fashion as a solution to the fragmentation of modern society, demonstrating 'how a person can be a homogenous part of a mass without losing his individuality.'[8] In consuming certain goods, individuals express their aesthetic preferences and share collective taste with others, building a social space or 'community of taste' for affirmation and the shared production of meaning and knowledge around the goods.

Due to the transitory nature of both fashion and taste, aesthetic preferences and collective tastes are continually in flux, always in production. The focus for the 'community of taste' is constantly changing, as its members seek the next new item upon which to focus. This article argues that there are those with certain social credentials within the 'community of taste' who work to direct the gaze of community members, ensuring a smooth passage of change from one taste to the next. These tastemakers are powerful, high-profile opinion leaders for their communities of taste and use their positions to assist in the co-creation of meaning and knowledge production. By framing their views as taste, they stabilise patterns of consumption. Through a variety of methods, the tastemakers explicitly demonstrate their faculty for immediately and intuitively judging the aesthetic values of new fashion propositions, while ensuring their social and cultural superiority in the expressions. Their special combination of knowledge, expertise, visibility, and abundant connections to socially significant people, events, and information provide the perfect recipe for transforming their personal preferences into expressions of taste for their community.

## 2. Methodology

This article explores the activities of contemporary fashion tastemakers, operating within a fashion system that continues to evolve alongside digital developments. These developments

have transformed the communication processes of fashion; communication channels in fashion media have multiplied, new influencers have emerged and the boundaries between producers and consumers have blurred. Technological developments have also raised questions about the democratisation of culture, recognising the value of user-generated content, and the challenges the latter poses for professional cultural intermediaries or tastemakers.[9] This renewed context has compelled fashion tastemakers to evolve in ways that allow them to remain credible within their communities. The fashion commentators discussed in this article have developed their communication skills in flexible and diverse ways as they negotiate new channels and practices emerging from the digitally enhanced fashion media environment within the twenty-first century fashion system. I have focussed on a small number of influential individuals who affect popular fashion discourse through their writing platforms. The fashion journalists tracked for this study are: Lisa Armstrong (*The Telegraph*, UK and *British Vogue*),Suzy Menkes (*Vogue,* formerly *International Herald Tribune*), Vanessa Friedman (*The New York Times*, formerly *Financial Times*, UK), and Cathy Horyn (formerly *The New York Times*, *T Magazine*). The fashion Bloggers tracked are: Susie Lau (Stylebubble), Bryan Grey-Yambao (*Bryanboy*), Leandra Medine (*Manrepeller*), and Rumi Neely (*Fashion Toast*).

To clarify examples of new forms of tastemaking, I begin with a brief overview of fashion tastemaking activities, and propose a way of categorizing these activities in the twenty-first century. The typology included moves away from using fashion industry job titles and instead offers flexible definitions of shifting and multiple methods of influence, such as performing, commentating or image-making. The categories I use reflect Foucault's perspective on discourse as a broad 'set of statements' that acknowledge interactions, relations, context, and discursive practices, and are the methodological approach used in this research.[10] Most of the article focuses on the fashion tastemakers whom I selected for their ability to exert influence through language and discourse, image-making, and performative actions. The article accesses their ability as fashion commentators to focus attention on specific items, filtering out that which they deem as unimportant.

The 'rhetorical code' the semiologist Roland Barthes explored in *The Fashion System* (1967) is one of the approaches I use to understand the value of fashion writing.[11] However, I do not attempt a semiotic examination of fashion, language, and communication. Instead, the study attempts to unpack some of the social processes triggered by the tastemakers' written expressions as a way of understanding how they manage information in a noisy, fast moving, multi-channelled fashion media environment where consumer attention is not assured. The contemporary fashion media environment is crowded with a variety of voices that compete for attention and where information comes packaged as entertainment, 'infotainment.' The article explores how fashion discourse evolves in the space between symbolic constructions of fashion in the media and how this translates into a message for the individual, using a mix of different fragments to build one story.

The findings resulting from this study come from a specific source of data: textual analysis of the selected fashion commentators' published expressions in articles where their writing specifically identifies, names, and classifies certain ideas about fashion, giving them textual form and a place in contemporary fashion discourse. I am interested in how these ideas evolve, circulate and become a *social topic,* transmitted in various social contexts; a *searchable keyword,* readily typed and searched in digital domains; and used as a *signal,* as a form of feedback to the tastemaker's network.

I discuss some of the processes through which their ideas become familiar or known in textual and visual forms that initiate conversations among those interested in fashion. Once social and mobile, these ideas circulate through various types of networks, initiate interactions, create meaning, and offer various perspectives about the fashion object. The broad exposure,

growing recognition, and subsequent inclusion in contemporary fashion discourse of these items increases their potential to be accepted and adopted as new elements of the 'fashionable aesthetic.' By enabling this process, the words of fashion commentators create productive value that is applied to the fashion system. With their language and images, fashion tastemakers filter fashion information, influence aspects of fashion discourse, and bring the focus of attention to a specific set of new fashion items, 'making [them] manifest, nameable and describable.'[12]

## 3. Fashion Tastemakers Old and New: Typologies

A number of fashion tastemakers have been identified as pivotal within theories of fashion diffusion, [13] and been defined as intermediaries who interpret fashion for the public and influence the future direction of fashion. In the sociologist Herbert Blumer's study of fashion diffusion in the 1960s, the tastemakers discussed were established figures in formal occupational roles such as magazine and newspaper fashion editors, department store buyers, and celebrities lauded for their sense of style. Bourdieu discusses such cultural intermediaries as 'need merchants, sellers of symbolic goods,' individuals who generate meaning and symbolic value around objects; and cites journalists, advertising and marketing strategists.[14] At the end of the twentieth century, the sociologist Diana Crane, amongst other scholars, suggested that the new fashion tastemakers are specific fashion designers, fashion forecasters, fashion editors, buyers, high-profile consumers such as movie stars and musicians, and certain protagonists from youth subcultures.[15] Crane's list signalled a shift to greater diversity in tastemaking agents and a broadening of the channels through which taste is diffused.[16]

Much writing about the twentieth-century fashion system describes a system made up of two halves, production and consumption, that required mediation from experts in the field or from those with superior levels of taste, in order to function. This construction of the system is one that tightly controlled channels of influence, with limited opinions filtered down through institutions of mass media such as fashion magazines and newspapers, or through shop windows of leading department stores. Later, the fashion system expanded to include subcultural influences from the street. Previous descriptions of the fashion diffusion process therefore position the tastemaker as a mediator between the clearly defined practices of production and consumption. This has created the perception of the powerful fashion tastemaker centrally controlling both domains.[17] Past and present high profile fashion 'bible' magazine editors for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* such as Diana Vreeland, Carmen Snow, Anna Wintour, and Glenda Bailey come to mind, as do buyers for influential fashion stores like Joan Burstein for Browns in London.

In contrast, the fashion system of the twenty-first century is increasingly decentralised, a change enabled in part through digital developments in media and communications.[18] The new fashion system is more diverse and open, and supports collaboration amongst a broad range of people.[19] Contemporary fashion tastemakers interact with participants across their networks and exploit personal interconnected communication systems such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to extend their sphere of influence. While they are arbiters of fashion, they no longer dictate what their audience should wear, but rather find ways to use their status and communication skills to make suggestions and advise the sophisticated and non-passive consumer. The cultural studies scholar Angela Partington describes the twenty-first century fashion system as 'participatory and inclusive.' Moreover, it is social/collaborative and incremental/cumulative.[20] The nature of digital communications allows today's tastemakers to collaborate with their audience, tapping consumer sentiment, because their followers offer instant feedback through social media 'likes,' re-posts, and Instagram. This not only engages the consumer in the tastemaking process, it also provides spontaneous and unfiltered insight for fashion producers about products, brands, and trends. Defined or perceived boundaries

between production and consumption have diminished, allowing the fashion system to better connect cultural and economic issues that spur renewal and evolution.[21] The actions of fashion tastemakers are catalysts for growth, assisting with the construction of meaning around new objects for their communities of taste.

The status of the contemporary fashion tastemakers in today's fashion system is directly linked to her or his ability to influence, acquire celebrity status, or 'attention rights.'[22] In today's fashion media environment, many players compete for attention as a fashion tastemaker's visibility must be earned and fiercely defended through an on-going demonstration of one's ability to aesthetically discern trends and new styles. Aesthetic discernment, or *one's ability to confidently select the 'one' new proposition from many other possibilities before a clear direction can be perceived by others*, can be expressed in a number of ways in the world of fashion tastemaking. For the fashion tastemaker, there is also an imperative to be first, or at least be very early, to identify the next direction in taste. The nature of the current fashion system, a crowded international fashion calendar with increasing numbers of fashion sub-seasons or weeks (pre-fall, resort, and so on), and the demands of the well-informed consumer, compounds the issue of being a first mover. Given the speed of modern communication channels, the fashion tastemaker must have stamina, be agile, and act with confidence when faced with a multitude of new fashion propositions.

As previously noted, fashion tastemakers of the past were primarily defined in terms of their job titles. Today, that has changed. While there are still many fashion designers, buyers, journalists, and bloggers, only a few truly operate as fashion tastemakers. It is the tastemaker's ability to make a difference, to move fashion forward, to create an appetite for renewal and evolution in the fashion system that confers fashion tastemaker status. The brief typology of contemporary fashion tastemaking proposed below classifies potential approaches or modes of aesthetic discernment that feed into discourses about contemporary fashion. Constructed as a methodological tool, the typology is informed by theories of discourse and discourse analysis proposed by Foucault and built on by Stuart Hall (1987), Jonathan Potter (2004) and Linda Graham (2005), among others. The proposed concept of discourse does not close down or define its limits or restrict those who are able to contribute to it, but rather promotes an open-endedness that allows for the unexpected. Foucault's theory of discourse focuses not only on language but on language and practice, and makes clear that discourse is concerned not only with what one says but what one does.[23] By adopting this approach, I have been able to construct a framework for studying contemporary fashion tastemaking that is flexible enough to assimilate unexpected changes to practices and players of the field.

One of the changes identified in this study is a growing tendency in the twenty-first century for individuals of influence to demonstrate their status and tastemaking abilities through a breadth of cultural competencies. The fashion journalist Cathy Horyn describes an elite coterie of tastemakers as 'today's generation of multi-hyphenate creative types' with 'multi-layered careers.'[24] This shift is evident among celebrities who describe themselves as 'Model-Stylist-Fashion Designer.' For example, Alexa Chung describes herself as a Model-TV Presenter-Journalist-Designer-Ambassador, while Nicole Ritchie designates herself as an Actress-Writer-Model-Designer-Musician.

The typology shown in Table 1 accommodates a polymorphic or hybrid approach to tastemaking. For example, my study takes as its specific focus certain selected fashion journalists and fashion bloggers who can be generally categorized as commentators, but through analysis of their tastemaking activities could be more accurately described as commentator-selector or commentator-performer. These hyphenated descriptors can also be re-formed and re-ordered to track changes in the actions of fashion tastemakers at different times and in different contexts.

***Table 1*: Typology of Tastemaking**

| Type of tastemaking activity | Characteristics | Example of tastemaker and contribution |
|---|---|---|
| Innovator / Originator: | One who:<br>Introduces a new thing or an alteration to something established<br>Proposes a change, a new product, new process or method<br>Causes, provokes or sets change in-motion | Tastemaker: Phoebe Philo<br>Contribution: Pool Sliders / 'Furkenstocks'<br>Tastemaker: Miuccia Prada<br>Contribution: Ugly Chic<br>Tastemaker: Scott Schuman<br>Contribution: Street-style photography |
| Performer: | One who:<br>Plays a role or takes part in public entertainment<br>Carries out or executes an action in a specified manner | Tastemaker: Kate Moss<br>Contribution: Heroin Chic<br>Tastemaker: Bryanboy<br>Contribution: Fur collar & sunglasses |
| Commentator: | One who:<br>Explains the significance or meaning<br>Explains that which is difficult or obscure<br>Comments or interprets or translates in a particular way | Tastemaker: Lisa Armstrong<br>Contribution: Notion of "Investment" fashion purchase<br>Tastemaker: Man Repeller<br>Contribution: Wearing masculine / difficult trends |
| Image-maker: | One who:<br>Creates possible images of the future<br>Describes something visually, graphically or vividly | Tastemaker: Katy England<br>Contribution: Real people as models<br>Tastemaker: Nick Knight<br>Contribution: Fashion film – moving fashion images |
| Selector: | One who:<br>Has ability to make or constitute a difference in or between,<br>Perceives or recognizes the difference, is able to distinguish difference (*through expert knowledge*) | Tastemaker: Anna Wintour<br>Contribution: Promotion of Marc Jacobs<br>Contribution: Celebrity magazine covers<br>Tastemaker: Sarah Lerfel (The Colette Store)<br>Contribution: Repetto sunglasses |

## 4. Fashion Commentators: Talking the Talk

The remainder of this article focuses on the fashion commentators who are part of fashion's language community and of the larger community of fashionable taste. A language community is a group of people who share a common language or dialect and expectations about language use that assures mutual understanding.[25] Through its accessibility, the language of fashion appeals to many for it can be enjoyed without the investment or risk associated with adopting new fashion garments.[26] In part, this language is learned and understood through

writing in the fashion media and its use creates a sense of shared knowledge, acting as a social tool for constructing collective meaning and cohesion within networks. Name-dropping and confidently identifying the latest 'It' bag by its moniker can impress and lead to acceptance in certain social circles. For example, Carmen Snow, past editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, provided the fashion world with the term the 'New Look' to encapsulate Christian Dior's influential collection in 1947, a phrase now etched into the language of fashion history (as discussed in Jess Berry's article that opens this issue of *Catwalk*.[27] Becoming an integral part of fashion discourse requires more than just saying the right words at the right time. With contemporary fashion's rapid and continual pace of change, there is a need for descriptive terms to be constantly re-defined in relation to new clothing and changing themes.[28] The fashion commentators' articulation of tastes through language assists in ensuring that fashion's vocabulary develops in step with new ideas and products.

Textual, discursive, and linguistic constructions of the fashion world are an important element of fashion's representation and the production of many of fashion's 'special' ways of describing itself.[29] 'Fashion-speak' or 'fashionese' are terms that have been used to parody the affected, obtuse language used by some fashion commentators.[30] Often, newly invented fashion terms will provoke questions and curiosity as readers seek to comprehend the meaning of a new term. For example, 'normcore' is a fashion term that has been circulated in popular fashion discourse. 'Normcore' is a perplexing recent trend that proposes dressing in an utterly conventional, nondescript way, normalisation as a point of difference or bland anti-style. This has generated debate about how it translates into a fashionable aesthetic or a specific garment form; this is an example of how the language of fashion can prompt social activity in some circles.

Bourdieu claims that language rarely functions purely as communication; instead, it contains signs that must be understood, wealth that must be evaluated, and authority that must be believed and obeyed.[31] Those involved in a 'linguistic exchange' need to understand the structure of the cultural field, which is a legitimate voice within a given field, and how to decode the messages being sent. My examination of the language used by selected fashion commentators acknowledges that these individuals have power within the fashion media context and that fashion is implicit in the objects and ideas they describe because they have brought them to our attention. Their status as tastemakers has been gained through a complex series of activities and negotiations, through which they have accumulated a combination of knowledge, expertise and in some cases rare competencies, and become an integral part of a significant social network. Their recognition as authorities by other key fashion industry players is made evident through their presence in the front row at international fashion week events. Their high visibility within such contexts provides them with the status to influence the discourses and language of fashion media.

In *The Fashion System,* Barthes examined the content of fashion magazines during the 1960s and observed that fashion images are accompanied by a certain type of writing. He defined this content as 'image clothing' accompanied by 'written clothing,' and argued that they offer an understanding of fashion that is distinct from actual garments or 'real clothing.'[32] As part of his semiotics of fashion, Barthes developed a rhetorical code of clothing and explored the meta-language and connotative system at work between 'written clothing' and fashion. He formed a view of how a described garment can move from appearing to have no productive value to being fashionable, and his insights provide a useful perspective about how a written idea is activated in the fashion system. 'It is not the object but the name that creates desire; it is not the dream but the meaning that sells, he argued.[33] Barthes was writing at a time when written fashion had a more instructive role, giving clear directions to readers about what to wear; by contrast, written fashion in the twenty-first century offers a variety of opinions more

suited to the diverse aesthetics of contemporary fashion and a multiplicity of fashion sub-groups and subcultures.

With the inclusion of multiple inter-active communication channels as part of contemporary fashion media operations, the notion of liberating fashion writing from its previous journalistic conventions has been discussed at length by scholars.[34] The addition of the voices of readers, as well as writers, and the ability to hypertext have turned fashion writing into a multi-layered source of information, that is more receptive to broader interpretations than in the past. These changes have cut across the entire fashion media environment, its institutions and audiences, as cross-media referencing and remediation of old and new media have become common practice.[35]

***Image 1***: Céline Fur Lined Sandals or 'Furkenstocks' as first seen at Céline Ready-to-Wear Collection Spring/Summer 2013, Paris Fashion Week, September 2012, © Photographer Chris Moore/Catwalking/Getty Images

The writing of fashion commentators contains various elements intended to persuade their target community of the creative, cultural, and symbolic relationships between real clothing and notions of fashion. These expressions form statements that feed into the prevailing discourse about 'what's new and where next' in fashion. Statements within a discourse contain a focus of attention (or constitutive object), and the statement functions to set up an antithesis. Consider the example of 'furkenstocks,' a fashion object combining fur and Birkenstock style shoes, featured on a Spring/Summer 2013 Céline catwalk (Image 1), that fashion tastemakers sought to define as new (newly revived, coming up next), and set in opposition to the old (an undesirable feature for contemporary fashion).

> Lisa Armstrong: "There were new silhouettes, new bags, and some outrageous new shoes; mink high heels and mink-lined pool sandals that were near-instantly christened furkenstocks."[36]
>
> Susie Lau: "the Birkenstock underwent an unlikely revival as a trickle-on effect from being re-appropriated, most prominently as "furkenstocks" at Celine's S/S 13 show."[37]
>
> Leandra Medine: "Fashion Week forecasted a different fate for my feet come spring….I couldn't have seen the low-heel's violently odd awkward cousin, the Birkenstock, slip through the fashion week cracks if Celine hit me over the head with one."[38]

Statements like these articulate the fashion commentator's aesthetic discernment or ability to differentiate the *one* from the many before it becomes apparent to others, giving the new fashion object visibility.[39] The public action of singling out, naming, and locating an item such as furkenstocks, acts as a vital trigger for other discursive practices or 'practices that derive from them.'[40] The item has been deemed worthy of note, given a textual form, and been given a place within the realm of contemporary fashion. That said, a particular discourse about a fashion object is not established merely with a couple of statements; instead, it must appear across a range of texts. The discourse emerges through a family of statements, from a range of texts, and channels, and voices that share a support strategy for the object in language and in practice, creating a 'discursive formation.'[41]

## 5. The Social Topic

Once an object has been identified, named and classified by an influential individual, it is released, becomes socially mobile, and gathers momentum. The fashion commentator's discourse has bestowed the 'status of an object,' to use the words of Foucault, 'making it manifest, nameable and describable.'[42] The discourse about the fashion object is absorbed into and transformed by a variety of discursive practices and across a variety of orders of discourse. These emerge as expert fashion knowledge, gossip, and/or personal opinion, from creator and user-orientated perspectives. Exchanging views and information within one's social group informs how the new idea will evolve from a symbolic notion of fashion into a social reality. Within their reference groups, individuals are able to test their positions about the new fashion object and garner feedback from others about its possible broader acceptance and adoption. 'Orality implies community. Not only do we dress up; we talk about it,' observes Laird Borelli, *Vogue*'s archive editor.[43]

As it circulates as a social topic, the fashion object can initiate micro-social action. Numerous micro actions come together to form macro-social issues or 'discursive formations,'

that are created through a will to share and a desire for meaning making within communities. Through these micro-social actions, the discourse grows and diversifies, is acted out on the body, and is manifested in imagery, performance, and interactions.[44] Consider the social media discussion about the Céline furkenstocks discussed and pictured above.

> The Urban Silhouette: "Celine furkenstocks - Stylish or too far? What do you think? #celine #fur #furkenstocks #birkenstocks #fashion #love #hate #trend #style"[45]
>
> Olive Benson: "If I wear Celine Birkenstocks am I chic hippy wood nymph? #furkenstocks"[46]
>
> Lauren Seeley: "So Ugly They're Chic – as Jack Berger would say, what have you got there, a pet? #fuglychic #furkenstocks"[47]

Such promotion by a fashion commentator initiates and enables a range of discursive practices around the object, which generate fragments of meaning that are produced, shared, transferred, and communicated through objects, images, and texts. From these fragments, individuals form their personal and collective positions. In *The Fashioned Body* (2000), the sociologist Joanne Entwistle describes this process in terms of the individual's physical body and the social body, each informing, influencing, and restricting the other, mediated through social and cultural discourses. The influential fashion discourses offered by tastemakers and the practices that derive from them provide us with insights about how people 'fashion' themselves and the power of discourse over the body.[48]

## 6. The Searchable Keyword

Despite the predominance of images in fashion, the act of using words to identify, name, and classify has great importance in the twenty-first century. The power of the fashion commentator lies in her or his ability to transform the object into a searchable form. Seeking information online about a new fashion trend becomes a relatively straightforward activity when the object is described in textual form, in contrast to using an image as a starting point. Moreover, through the use of a key word, search engine technology is able to track and locate all references to the term. Fashion followers can track down a fashion object in a variety of digital forms. A history of the emergence of new terms and their uptake or rejection is a by-product of the digitalisation of keywords. The object can also be assigned a hash tag, #, and a marker for data analytics. As seen in Table 2, the accumulation of statements belonging to the discourse can be viewed as technical, trackable data, creating a history of different fashions.

Digital technology holds the potential for global exposure of the object, offering increased circulation through various orders of discourse readily diffused through multiple networks and channels.[49] Through the capabilities of the Internet and its various search mechanisms, it is also possible to identify associated statements that connect with and build related discourses. For example, the furkenstocks discourse is readily connected with 'ugly chic,' 'wearing socks with sandals,' and 'pool sliders' discussions that form a broader discourse, as well as search terms, about 'fashionable footwear.' The more challenging the trend, the greater the need for information, clarification, and affirmation. Followers of fashion will want to know how a seemingly unfeasible new design like furkenstocks fits within the bigger picture of the next fashionable aesthetic.

However, within the contemporary digital communication system there is the risk that the object will be lost, subsumed in the Internet 'noise' and competing discourses. This makes

the fashion object's association with high profile fashion tastemakers essential, because being able to trace the object back to a statement by a legitimate fashion tastemaker not only is an endorsement, it amplifies the message.

***Table 2*:** The Frequency of Furkenstocks as an Internet Search Term

| 'Furkenstocks' as internet search term on August 22, 2014 | |
|---|---|
| Number of #furkenstocks on Twitter | 43 |
| Results for furkenstocks on Google (web) search | 3,760 (in 0.13 seconds) |
| Results for furkenstocks on Google (video) search | 58 (in 0.20 seconds) |
| Number of #furkenstocks posts on Instagram | 96 |
| Number of comments Stylebubble blog post on furkenstocks | 26 |
| Number of comments Manrepeller blog post on furkenstocks | 85 |

## 7. The Tastemaker's Signal

By identifying and naming the fashion object, fashion commentators signal other influential individuals who form part of the tastemaking network. Demonstrating one's ability to aesthetically discern is a critical act for a fashion tastemaker and international fashion week events in New York, London, Milan, and Paris provide the perfect arena for this type of signalling as fashion tastemakers of all types gather and engage in tastemaking activities.[50] As the typology of fashion tastemaking proposes in Table 1, there are various people who make up this network. All seek to shape the dominant discourse of contemporary fashion by developing a distinctive mode of address and fashion focus as their 'trademark.'

Fashion commentators' selection and objectification of new fashion ideas can be viewed as acts of strategic collaboration amongst various fashion tastemakers, as they make visible to each other their tastemaking abilities and position themselves with their opinions. There is a signalling or 'optioning' process as part of taste formation in cultural fields where uncertainty is high and product difference is elusive. All production markets are characterised by uncertainty, and producers look to each other, 'defining their market positioning based on observed signals from one another.'[51]

At international fashion weeks, fashion tastemakers have the weight of expectation that they will be able to identify the next direction, drawing attention to what is significant and filtering out the rest. They cannot wait for others to lead the way, so they align themselves strategically with other tastemakers to compare their visions. These comparisons take place through careful monitoring of public expressions such as writing and posting comments, dressing up in certain looks or fashions by particular designers, and being photographed or simply present at key events; alternatively fashion tastemakers may take advantage of the personal contacts and connections within the industry to get useful feedback. This process of signalling or sharing information brings together the similar choices made by key tastemaking players, while maintaining the appearance of autonomy. Through this activity a discourse emerges that informs ways of talking, writing, and acting about the identified object. This

activity conserves the operations of the fashion system by allowing consensus to emerge, while legitimising the tastemakers' positions in fashion media through mutual recognition. This has resonance with Blumer's explanation of 'incipient tastes' and Entwistle's discussion of 'collective action,' where shared experiences provide opportunities for casual discussion and the exchange of views or 'statements,' assisting in a convergence of tastes.[52] Taste is essentially concerned with 'relational orientations and strategies' within a context of much uncertainty, and fashion commentators' use of a signal is a strategy to deal with ambiguity.[53] The fact is that consensual legitimation of trends is imperative in the formation of taste, even for expert fashion tastemakers.

## 8. The Networks

The study of social topic, searchable keyword, and the tastemaker's signal identifies three distinct diffusion networks within which contemporary fashion commentators position themselves. Through careful packaging or encoding, their statements inform and contribute to the discourses as they progress through a range of different networks, each circulating ideas and generating information, interactions, and associations that will shape and refine the meaning of the new fashion object.

Being part of a network has always been crucial to the operations of a fashion tastemaker, with an emphasis on *who* one knows. However, this examination of fashion commentators embraces a wider understanding of the term 'network' to recognise the diversity of the physical and virtual nature of networking required in the twenty-first century. The significance of the new network is highlighted through the intertextual nature of today's fashion media. Intertextuality is concerned with the flow of meaning and ideas between statements, and the relationship of these statements to the discourses that produce them.[54] The contemporary fashion media system contains statements from designers, brands, celebrities, and other commentators as well as consumers, creating webs of influence. Fashion commentators operate in this intertextual frame.

In this study, the *social* network formed around the object as a social topic bridges institutional and interpersonal sources and connections together, and provides an organic, accessible system whereby the nominated fashion object spreads amongst formal and informal networks, within private and public sources, and evolves as its exposure and recognition grows. The presence and prominence of the statement generates information and opinions about the object – from where to purchase it, which celebrities have it, to tips about how to wear it, price comparisons, and even how to make one's own version. For example, the blogger and costume buyer Liz McKinnon, aka Coocoo4coco, posts her own take on how to personalise a fashionable aesthetic through vintage purchases or customising garments and accessories. In Image 2, she presents some very practical advice for those looking to make 'furkenstocks' on a budget, with suggested materials and equipment needed to construct fur-lined Birkenstock sandals, with decorative spikes.

The *searchable* network is a data network. For example, furkenstocks fashion object was distributed through a technical system of nodes connected by hyperlinks that generate, route, and terminate ideas. For the fashion commentator, using language that becomes a search term provides a way of connecting with other information that contributes to the discourse about it. The digital network also makes it possible to locate these statements in time and space, two important measures of credibility for contemporary fashion tastemakers. That kind of information can provide evidence that the commentator's expressions were some of the first to emerge and were written in close proximity to the source. Details like these generate kudos and reinforce the authenticity of the expressions of the fashion commentators.


***Image 2:*** DIY Fur Spiked Birkenstocks blog post on Coocoo4cocoblogspot.com.au, on 10 December 2013 © Elizabeth McKinnon

The network concerned with the *signal* has two tiers. At its centre, it has an exclusive, tightly controlled arena directed towards a competitive group bound by one purpose, fashion tastemaking. This creates a focus or spectacle for the second or peripheral tier that keenly observes, documents, and diffuses tastemaking activities through a range of other networks. By issuing statements from the core of this network, fashion commentators ensure that their contributions to the discourse remain highly visible and closely connected with significant people, events, and information for their community of taste; these types of messages ensure attention despite the volume of other noise in the fashion communication system.

The networks described in this article help to illustrate the evolution of the contemporary fashion tastemaker, responding to a fashion media environment that has been re-invigorated by the emergence of new players and the evolution of communication channels and practices. The fashion commentator must be a team player in order to function more collaboratively within networked systems, modifying practices that once were presented as remote directives that were removed from the perspectives of their audiences. The expert opinion of commentators is now carefully couched in accessible and personalised expressions that also reveal details about their lives in ways that connect with the minutiae of the lives of their readers whose reactions and responses are actively sought. In other words, the messages of commentators are porous, absorbing and adapting broader interpretations of meaning.

Concomitantly, in today's fashion system there is increased emphasis on the performative abilities of fashion commentators. Previously, fashion tastemakers were primarily journalists, positioned at a distance from much of the public focus on fashion. Through the expansion of media channels and appetites for fashion content, anyone involved with fashion is

potentially exposed and made visible. The high profile of fashion bloggers and instant visual documentation of activities in and around International Fashion Weeks has created a premium on being 'visible' to document their presence. Some have become celebrities, appearing as judges on television programs like *Project Runway* and in news programming as fashion experts. As part of a change seen more broadly in the media, all types of knowledge come packaged as 'infotainment,' a blend of information and entertainment. Even established fashion journalists now open their lives for public scrutiny, just as celebrities do. Suzy Menkes auctioned her unwanted wardrobe items in a well-documented sale at Christie's auction house in July 2013. Fashion commentators are stepping in front of the lens, leveraging a combination of celebrity status, sound-bite, photo opportunity, and performance as part of their tastemaking practices.

Fashion tastemakers now embrace the power of the digital code, understanding that their expressions need to register for search engines and data algorithms to increase their reach, connections, and visibility. Journalists and bloggers understand that their value to brands, advertisers, and media institutions is quantified and assessed by their ability to exploit these digital media capabilities and starting conversations that matter.

## 9. Conclusion

Fashion commentators are no longer in a position to dictate to their audience what the new fashionable aesthetic will be, so in order to remain valuable and continue to exert influence on popular fashion discourse, they apply their communication skills with a lighter touch, operating as key players in the co-creation of meaning and knowledge for their communities of taste. In the twenty-first century fashion media environment, one of the approaches they employ to make their voices heard is to use their commentary to instigate conversations with those who read or listen to them. These conversations generate further interactions, relations, alternative perspectives, and a range of shared discursive practices that produce meaning around the fashion objects they present as important.

Applying discourse analysis to their taste judgments, this article has focused on statements from fashion commentators that name or objectify new fashion objects, and describes how these types of statements act as triggers for multi-layered social processes and activities. Three productive activities that build or feed popular fashion discourse have been discussed - the nominated object is shared as a social topic, used as a searchable keyword, and used as a tastemaker's signal; all three of these begin with micro social actions. These starting points position the fashion object in a variety of communicative practices and begin the object's circulation in a range of networks. It is through these practices and within these networks that the object accumulates meanings and associations and grows in significance for the community of fashionable taste.

This study of the activities of fashion commentators provides insights about the importance of networks and the connections they exploit to remain influential. The three networks described above map three different perspectives as to how new fashion ideas are diffused in an increasingly complex fashion communication system, locating the commentators within each. These networks reveal that language is a primary thread or pillar that helps to construct popular fashion discourse. A dominant discourse is still crucial for the fashion system to process a multitude of new fashion propositions, filtering and focusing attention on certain objects to enable change to proceed. Fashion commentators assist the fashion system by managing the constant process of change through identifying, ranking, and explaining new trends, while ensuring that their personal taste judgements continue to influence and infiltrate our conversations and shape the future and fortunes of fashions and the rapidity with which they come and go.

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**Rachel Matthews** is an academic and researcher, whose work explores fashion communication through object, image, and text. She has a BA from Central St Martins College of Art, London, and is currently undertaking a PhD at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, exploring the activities of contemporary fashion tastemakers. Her career has combined senior posts in fashion education, the fashion industry and international consultancy projects. Her experience in academia includes program management, course development and lecturing in fashion design, fashion communication, and fashion theory in the UK and Australia.

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# Exhibition Reviews

## *Wedding Dresses 1775-2014*

Victoria and Albert Museum, London
3 May 2014-15 March 2015
Curated by Edwina Ehrman
**Catalogue:** ***The Wedding Dress: 300 Years of Bridal Fashion***
Edwina Ehrman
London: V&A Publishing
2014, 208 pages, £30
Illustrated with an index
978-1-89177-813-3

You know something has become a cultural success when you no longer question its presence in everyday life, when the origin of your need for it seems irrelevant. But just there, between our most obvious habits and most unconscious choices, exist those social structures that say the most about us. This brings me to the white wedding dress.

Featuring more than eighty wedding outfits, the *Wedding Dresses 1775-2014*, an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, tells the fascinating story of the cultural development of the white wedding dress, a tale of how history turned into fashion and fashion into tradition. Today, choosing the right wedding dress can constitute one of the most critical decisions in a woman's life. With such thoughts on my mind, I entered the majestic museum to take a look at the evolution of the iconic gown. Having passed the South East Asia and The Arts of Temple and Court in Thailand galleries, the contrast to the exhibited objects in the Materials and Techniques gallery, where *Wedding Dresses* is located, was immediate, a clash of cultures. An enormous round room with two levels in the middle, the gallery that houses the gowns resembles a floating, layered wedding cake under a gigantic white and solemn arch.

One foot inside the gallery, through a barely noticeable doorway, a display case and a wall text marked the beginning of the exhibition. Because of the flow of visitors through the entrance, I could not stop in front of it but rather caught a glimpse of a lovely cream-coloured silk gown with matching hat and shoes. Spring flowers covered the youthful figure of the mannequin and a polonaise petticoat was displayed, but it was difficult to see. The dress form had its back against the wall, and the text roughly elucidated the wedding dress history of the eighteenth century. I read it from a crooked angle, trying to get a better idea of the big picture of the exhibition, before following the stream of patrons into the show. The space itself was quite simple: a round room with two large display cases in the middle, a low ceiling, and dim, warm lighting. On the right, display cases followed the circular gallery shape, tracing a chronological journey through the history of wedding dresses. Every now and then, a wall text kept track of the periods and the changing fashion tendencies. The exhibition's time-span, beginning in 1775 and continuing to the present, had felt a little arbitrary before I entered, and it did not feel less so after reading the first texts which described a lack of uniformity in early wedding dress fashion.

During the eighteenth century, as today, a wedding was a joyous event, a formal one. A marriage was a family decision, and though parents naturally hoped for mutual affection for their offspring, romance was not always an expected aspect of the undertaking. As far as how to dress for the occasion, fashion followed the general 'formal wear' styles of the day. White did occur at weddings, having long been regarded as appropriate formal wear, but it was more

likely to be employed by the upper classes due to its limited usefulness. White was difficult to keep clean and within Christianity has the symbolic value of representing innocence and chastity. As a result, white had both a moral and economic value. On top of that, the lace (Image 1), silver, and gold thread often used to decorate the garments was expensive. This, of course, gave garments that featured them a higher status and made them more desirable.

***Image 1:*** Honiton lace veil detail, British, c.1850.


Among the middle and working classes, a woman simply wore her best dress, or, if she could afford it, had one made that could still be used after the wedding. Light colours or floral patterns were preferred, and a bride might wear a straw hat as well as a pair of fine shoes (Image 2). Most weddings took place in churches.

The first display cases featured dresses from the museum's own collection. Each silhouette differed from the next and delicate accessories, exhibited between them, created an appropriate and softly romantic atmosphere. A bonnet partially disappeared behind an elaborate flower decoration and a petite soft shoe was lined up next to different undergarments. Unfortunately, this exhibition room was also crowded, and I walked at a controlled pace, so I never had the chance to stop and play out the imaginary scenarios that the dresses evoked. Since the dresses had either their backs or fronts against the wall in the display cases, it was difficult to obtain a complete impression of these fanciful creations.

With the title '1840-1914,' the exhibition reached an historical peak and more fully articulated a welcome insight into the show's purpose. In 1840 Queen Victoria married her first cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and wore a white wedding dress with a lace veil and an orange blossom wreath. During her long reign, Queen Victoria repeatedly

influenced the history of fashion. She may not have always looked it, but one would be making a mistake to equate her mournful appearance after the death of her husband with a lack of fashion. The invention of photography made it possible to produce copies for personal, political, and commercial purposes, and the wealthy upper classes quickly adopted their strict queen's wedding look. In this section of the exhibition, fashion plates, newspaper articles with wedding announcements, and diary passages were added to the story – a lovely choice.

***Image 2:*** Silk brocade gown and petticoat, silk-covered straw hat and silk satin shoes, 1780. Worn by Jane Bailey for her marriage to James Wickham. Image reproduced by kind permission of the Olive Matthews Collection, Chertsey Museum.

I stopped in front of a wall where fashion plates were projected and changed every ten seconds, but soon turned to the less crowded middle of the room. There, an elaborate, three-sided case held a marvellous eighteen-foot embroidered wedding gown train and, at the other end, a wonderful white silk satin gown (Image 3). This was a Norman Hartnell design, created for Mary Whigham, when she married Charles Sweeney in London in 1933. They were the talk of the town and gossip column darlings, and nearly two thousand onlookers watched the wedding couple. Their many curious admirers could not have been disappointed by the appearance of the gown, with its pearl-embroidered, transparent, stars covered train. Layers of satin appliqué and tulle with metal wire created an impressive border around the edge of the train and met on the front of the skirt. Hem-length hanging sleeves in layers of fine see-through silk matching the border added a perfect fairy-tale look to the dress. On the wall behind the gown, a short film clip from the wedding was projected. In it, the couple walked through the church doors and down the steps to their waiting car. A sea of people watched them as they walked and saw the wind catch the bride's long veil. The happy couple smiled and waved to the crowds. The addition of this video was the perfect supplement to viewing the immobile dress behind the glass. By seeing the dress move in the film clip and a glimpse of the occasion for which it was created, the dress suddenly looked alive.

***Image 3:*** Embroidered silk satin wedding dress designed by Norman Hartnell, 1933. Worn by Margaret Whigham for her marriage to Charles Sweeny. Given and worn by Margaret, Duchess of Argyll. © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

I continued through the exhibition, following the history of the wedding gown. As an example of late nineteenth-century century fashion, a magnificent Charles Frederick Worth creation was displayed. Worth and his well-branded House of Worth made costly and confident designs, and attracted an international clientele, particularly wealthy Americans. His fashion flair was celebrated and made Worth Paris' leading dressmaker at a time when the French capital was the home of haute couture. In 1880, Clara Mathews married Colonel Hugh Stafford. For the wedding, Mathews ordered a gown designed by Worth. By the mid-1870s the train had

become popular, usually made of richer fabric than the dress itself, and the Mathews gown consisted of ivory silk satin, had a tailored bodice-jacket with a Basque edge, and a fringe of pearl beads. The skirt was decorated with opaque and pearlised beads worked into fringes and tassels. A panel of net embroidered with feathery leaves whose stems were accentuated with beads completed the ensemble. It was a spectacle to behold.

More labels, personal objects, and quotes covered the walls of the display cases. Unfortunately, the space was far too compressed to do them justice. It was difficult to look at the objects and read the texts. Nearly back at the entrance, I reached the present era. Here the weddings of Lady Diana and Prince Charles and Prince William and Kate Middleton were highlighted. While Diana's and Kate's dresses were not physically there, a small cinema area projected video recordings of the ceremonies. It was emotionally moving for me to see their weddings again; both were major international televised events, and in this setting, beautifully underscored the white wedding dress tradition.

Upstairs, the exhibition's atmosphere changed. Whereas the ground floor had felt closed and crowded, the first floor was open, and the white ceiling cleverly resembled that of a church. Here was another side of history, the contemporary wedding dress as a personal statement, led by examples from the rich and famous. More than thirty dresses stood on white platforms in full glass cases or with no glass at all, allowing me to move around them and take a closer look. There were no guided directions, so I followed my feet and eyes. Small labels in front of the dresses described the exquisite materials used and gave the dresses names. The landscape was silent and almost colourless. A few exceptions lit up the room. One in particular was the colourful cream wool Bellville Sassoon coat worn by Sara Donaldson-Hudson in 1971, which was decorated with hand-painted, vibrant Indian-style floral designs, and lined with orange silk. Donaldson-Hudson wore orange satin boots to the ceremony to complete the outfit. I moved on to the other end of the gallery and stood before the serene wedding gown of Kate Moss for her marriage to musician Jamie Hince in 2011. Designed by John Galliano, and inspired by Zelda Fitzgerald and the streamlined styles of the Jazz Age, the slim beaded silhouette and almost see-through body was a true supermodel dream. Another noteworthy example of a wedding gown as a personal statement was a 2011 Gareth Pugh pale grey 'slashed' chiffon wedding gown designed by Gareth Pugh (Image 4).

Projected on the high walls were wedding pictures, private as well as professional, and some of the labels also had pictures of the happy wedding couples. This gave a touch of personality to the dresses, but not enough. For me, the 'unknown' and objectified dresses were hard to relate to as the outfits seemed more like ghostly empty shells, left behind and useless. While some of them were extremely beautiful, their personal dimension did not translate to the viewer. The dress was there, but the bride was missing. The diary comments, newspaper announcements, and particularly the film clips from downstairs would have spread magic in this solemn hall.

I left the exhibition mumbling about its unfulfilled potential. Turning the ground floor into a history lesson and the first floor into a runway show diverted the attention from the real story. Not many garments have been fashionable for nearly two centuries, which makes the white wedding dress both rare and intriguing. And that is the story the exhibition started to tell but never really finished. The look of the wedding dress has evolved with the world and our changing views on personal status. We have gone from buying expensive lace and silk garments, aspiring to look like the nobility or even royalty, to trying to look like we are wearing something no one has seen before. The white wedding dress has transcended fashion to become a major symbol in our social structure. It has survived because of our committed faith to the institution of marriage. Love is always in vogue, even as its expression changes with the seasons.

***Image 4:*** Pale grey slashed chiffon wedding dress designed by Gareth Pugh and veil by Stephen Jones, 2011. Worn by Katie Shillingford for her marriage to Alex Dromgoole. Photo © Amy Gwatkin. Courtesy of Katie Shillingford.

**Cassandra Schrøder Holm** holds a degree in history and is affiliated with the fashion and textile department at Design Museum Denmark, where she works with textile and women's history.

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## *Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire*

The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
21 October 2014-1 February 2015
Curated by Harold Koda and Jessica Regan

In a famous scene from Margaret Mitchell's 1938 bestselling novel *Gone with the Wind*, adapted for the screen memorably in Victor Fleming's 1939 blockbuster film, Scarlett O'Hara, in full mourning following the recent death of her unloved husband Charles Hamilton, raises high society eyebrows by attending a charity bazaar in Atlanta. In order to collect funds for the Confederate Army, the men are invited to bid to dance with the woman of their choice, and Rhett Butler offers the enormous sum of $150 for a dance with Scarlett. Scarlett accepts, much to the shock of the other attendees as this was not considered proper behaviour for a woman in mourning. While this famous scene serves in the plot to characterise Scarlett as a headstrong woman as well as to develop the budding relationship between her and Rhett, it also subtly conveys the potential conflict an upper-class nineteenth-century woman would likely feel, given

the tension between the dictates of traditional social values and an individual's freedom of choice. The nineteenth-century woman was hard-pressed to negotiate her own desire to dress and do as she pleased with the complicated and rigid prescriptions for apparel and behaviour for a widow in mourning.

***Image 1:*** Henriette Favre (French) Evening Dress, 1902. Mauve silk tulle, sequins. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Irene Lewisohn, 1937 (C.I.37.44.1). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The recent exhibition *Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire* (21 October 2014-1 February 2015) at the Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art examined this dilemma in terms of the seemingly competing values of mourning and fashion. *Death Becomes Her* featured thirty ensembles as well as accessories and other ancillary objects associated with mourning practices from the early nineteenth century to the end of the First World War. The ensembles, primarily American and British but with several French examples, were arranged in chronological order in the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Gallery of the Met's Costume Institute. The outfits were displayed on white mannequins, all of which featured ghostly white wigs, specifically created for the exhibition by Paul Huntley. Each ensemble was captioned with details on its origin, period and the materials used, and was accompanied with a short narrative that clarified details on the cultural history of nineteenth-century mourning practices. On the perimeter of the room, quotations from period sources were projected onto the walls, although it was difficult for viewers to appreciate fully these citations given their positioning. In the far left corner of the space, two spectacular mauve and grey half-mourning evening dresses made by the French designer Henriette Favre in 1902 and worn by Queen Alexandra following the death of Queen Victoria (Image 1), spatially stood apart from the other ensembles, but also aesthetically conveyed in their use of colour and style a loosening of mourning practices at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the final corner of the exhibition a commercial stand had been set up, annoyingly obstructing one's movement past the final displays. In the adjoining Carl and Iris Barrel Apfel Gallery, fashion plates, jewellery and other accessories were exhibited. In an original and clever touch, Gabriel Fauré's 1893 *Requiem, Opus 48* played over loudspeakers in the main gallery, creating an appropriately solemn tone but also practically minimising the sounds of conversations between exhibitions viewers as they reacted to the fascinating displays.

For the twenty-first century exhibition viewer, the world of nineteenth-century mourning practices is like a visit to a distant place, its rules and codes seemingly foreign and strange in the contemporary consciousness. The Met exhibition effectively used the displays to instruct the viewer on the subtle details of this system of signs and meanings. Although *Death Becomes Her* included several examples of men's and children's mourning attire, the exhibition made it clear that the act of public mourning was a primarily female activity, an occasion for middle- and upper-class women to embody the collective grief of a family along with its social status and respectability. Periods of mourning could vary based on the relationship to the deceased (spouse, child, sibling, or parent). The first phase of full or deep mourning, which typically involved substantial amounts of seclusion, was followed by secondary mourning and then by half mourning. During full mourning, jet black crape (the spelling of crepe with the letter 'a' signified in the period that the fabric was destined for mourning clothes) and other fabrics like bombazine, parramatta, merino wool and cashmere were used because of their dull and flat finish. The choice among these fabrics was often made according to a woman's socio-economic class and the disposable income of her household. As one moved to a period of secondary morning, glossier fabrics like statin were permitted as well as more elaborate trimmings in velvet, silk cording, and so forth. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, colours like grey, mauve and violet also became a possibility as a woman reached the final phase of half-mourning. Separate accessories of all sorts such as parasols (Image 2), hats and jewellery corresponded to each of these periods. To meet the burgeoning need of the niche market associated with mourning practices in the nineteenth century, speciality stores and mourning 'warehouses,' from the high to the low end, appeared with ever greater frequency in the major cities of Europe and America. As the text accompanying a magnificent 1861 jet black moiré silk and lace-trimmed evening dress (Image 3) noted, the high-end mourning warehouse Jay's of London frequently contended in its advertisements that mourning attire and fashionable dress

were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

***Image 2:*** Mourning Parasol, 1895-1900. Black silk, wood, metal, tortoiseshell. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Rachel Trowbridge, 1960 (2009.300.2478). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

*Death Becomes Her* foregrounded a number of themes that persuasively supported its central argument that fashion was increasingly integrated into mourning codes and practices in the nineteenth century. The extraordinary expansion and amplification of mourning dress during this period was contemporaneous to the rise of the middle class in Western societies and the transformative economic changes behind it. On one level, the mechanisation of the textile industry in the first decades of the century provided the material availability of affordable fabrics to a broader consumer public. This, in turn, permitted middle-class consumers to purchase clothing that represented more precisely the sartorial variations of the different periods of mourning. On another level, just as one saw in other areas of middle-class dressing habits

during this period, the newfound prosperity of the bourgeoisie and the conspicuous consumption that accompanied it allowed middle-class consumers to imitate more extensively and effectively the sartorial codes and customs that previously had been reserved for the aristocracy and royalty, a practice in which they frequently engaged in an attempt at self-valorisation. Moreover, changing gender roles for the middle-class woman permitted her to more autonomously participate in the emerging world of conspicuous consumption. For the middle-class wife, wearing fashionable and costly mourning apparel was a way to convey publically the wealth of her household in a world wherein a new aesthetics of social display had taken hold by mid-century.

***Image 3:*** Evening Dress, ca. 1861. Black moiré silk, black jet, black lace. Lent by Roy Langford (C.I.L.37.1a). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, by Karin Willis

***Image 4:*** Mourning Ensemble, 1870-1872. Black silk crape, black mousseline, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009, Gift of Martha Woodward Weber, 1930 (2009.300.633a, b). Veil, ca. 1875. Black silk crape, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Roi White, 1984 (1984.285.1). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, by Karin Willis

Interestingly, as far as mourning practices were concerned, this seemed to present a contradiction. In principle, mourning attire in both its colour and choice of fabric was meant to deflect or discourage attention, setting her apart from other women and creating a visual, if not social exclusion, when the woman was in public. However, as many of the ensembles of the exhibition illustrated, the quality of the materials used as well as elements like cut and silhouette counteracted this premise and could potentially attract the male gaze. As the text accompanying an impressive 1870-72 black lace ensemble with veil (Image 4) explained, the expensive fabrics and fashionable lines of a widow's mourning outfit often prompted a lascivious and predatory response from men as her clothes indicated not only a certain social and economic standing but also her marital availability and sexual experience. As well, if a widow were veiled, she became more mysterious, erotic, and desirable.

On the consumerist side of the matter, by the 1860s, the marketing of mourning clothes to a female public increasingly appealed to a woman's sense of fashion. As the exhibition's display of accessories like hats and parasols (Image 2) as well as illustrations from French and British journals emphasised, the burgeoning fashion press frequently depicted mourning attire alongside images of the latest fashions, showing that the same style was often used for the outfit, the only differences being the colour and the fabrics used. In this respect, death and mourning no longer had to interrupt the sartorial existence of the nineteenth-century woman as fashion minimised the aesthetically and socially onerous effects of traditional 'widow weeds.'

Upon leaving the exhibition and wandering back through the Met's magnificent Egyptology collections, with their own cult of the dead in full evidence, one could not help but be struck by the how much cultural production in any time or place is devoted to the idea of death. The unlikely yet strangely congruous juxtaposition of nineteenth-century European mourning attire and ancient Egyptian funerary art also brought to mind the historiography of influential scholars like Philippe Ariès and Pierre Chaunu. In seminal works like Ariès' *Essais sur la mort en Occident du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Essays on Death in the West from the Middle Ages to Our Times, 1975) and *L'Homme devant la mort* (Man Faced with Death, 1977) or Chaunu's *La Mort à Paris; 16e, 17, 18e siècles* (Death in Paris; the 16th, 17th, and 18th Centuries; 1978), these historians posited that death, beyond its biological reality for all living beings, was a fundamentally social construct whose ultimate meaning and signifiers shifted according to the values and preoccupations of any given period or culture. As *Death Becomes Her* compellingly illustrated, the emerging fashion system of nineteenth-century capitalist Europe was able to unhinge sartorial forms from their basis in a traditional value system and modify them according to the new patterns of consumption and aesthetic display that the middle and upper classes began to favour. In the end, this conjunction of fashion and its conspicuous consumption with death and mourning practices in the nineteenth century conveys how the systematic commodification of every aspect of human existence offered the consumer the illusory possibility of distancing the mourner from the finality of death by the very act of consumption.

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**Leonard R. Koos**, PhD, is an Associate Professor of French at the University of Mary

Washington, USA. He is a specialist in nineteenth-century French culture and has published extensively on modern French literature and history. He is Reviews Editor of *Catwalk*.

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## *Feuerbach's Muses – Lagerfeld's Models*

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg
21 February-15 June 2014
Curated by Hubertus Gaßner and Luisa Pauline Fink
**Catalogues:**
***Nanna – Anselm Feuerbachs Elixier einer Leidenschaft***
Edited by Peter Forster
Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag/Museum Wiesbaden and Hamburger Kunsthalle
2013, 288 pages, 29.80 €
Illustrated and annotated
ISBN: 978-3-86568-959-7
***Moderne Mythologie***
By Karl Lagerfeld
Göttingen: Steidl/Hamburger Kunsthalle
2014, 96 pages, 48 €
ISBN: 978-3-86930-770-1

An LED-lit stream of quotes connected the Hamburger Kunsthalle's 'Altbau' (Old Building) with *Feuerbach's Muses – Lagerfeld's Models*, an exhibition in the lowest level of 'Galerie der Gegenwart' (Gallery of the Present). As I entered the gallery one quote in particular caught my attention: 'Decadence can be an end in itself,'[1] a one-liner that resembled a 'Karlism' in Lagerfeld's little black book, *The World According to Karl* (2013).[2] While I assumed the 47½ meter long LED running track of red diodes was part of the special exhibition, it was in fact a permanent Kunsthalle installation by the American conceptual artist Jenny Holzer called *Ceiling Snake* (1996). No matter, the 'Snake' raised my expectations for this double exhibition, by turns ironical and clever, trivial and banal, featuring recent black-and-white photography by the fashion designer/photographer Karl Lagerfeld (b. 1933) and the romantic-realist paintings by Anselm Feuerbach (1829-80). On entry from the Altbau, the shows were arranged in a parallel series of spaces – Lagerfeld's to the right, Feuerbach's to the left – in the same gallery. Two attractive catalogues, *Nanna* and *Moderne Mythologie*, accompanied the exhibition (Image 1).

The intrinsic interest of the Feuerbach-Lagerfeld exhibition for *Catwalk*'s readers is its approach to beauty and style. Lagerfeld's half of the exhibition consisted mainly of the *Moderne Mythologie* series of photos inspired by *Daphnis and Chloe*, the romance novel by the ancient Greek writer Longus. The photos, taken in 2013, feature the French model Baptiste Giabiconi as the goatherd Daphnis and the Italian model Bianca Balti as the shepherdess Chloe. The paradoxically titled *Moderne Mythologie* plays on love, youth, desire, and beauty as perennially connected with the archetypal rites of passage to adulthood. *Daphnis and Chloe* is also a tale of psychological development, with an episodic character that makes it easily translate to images.

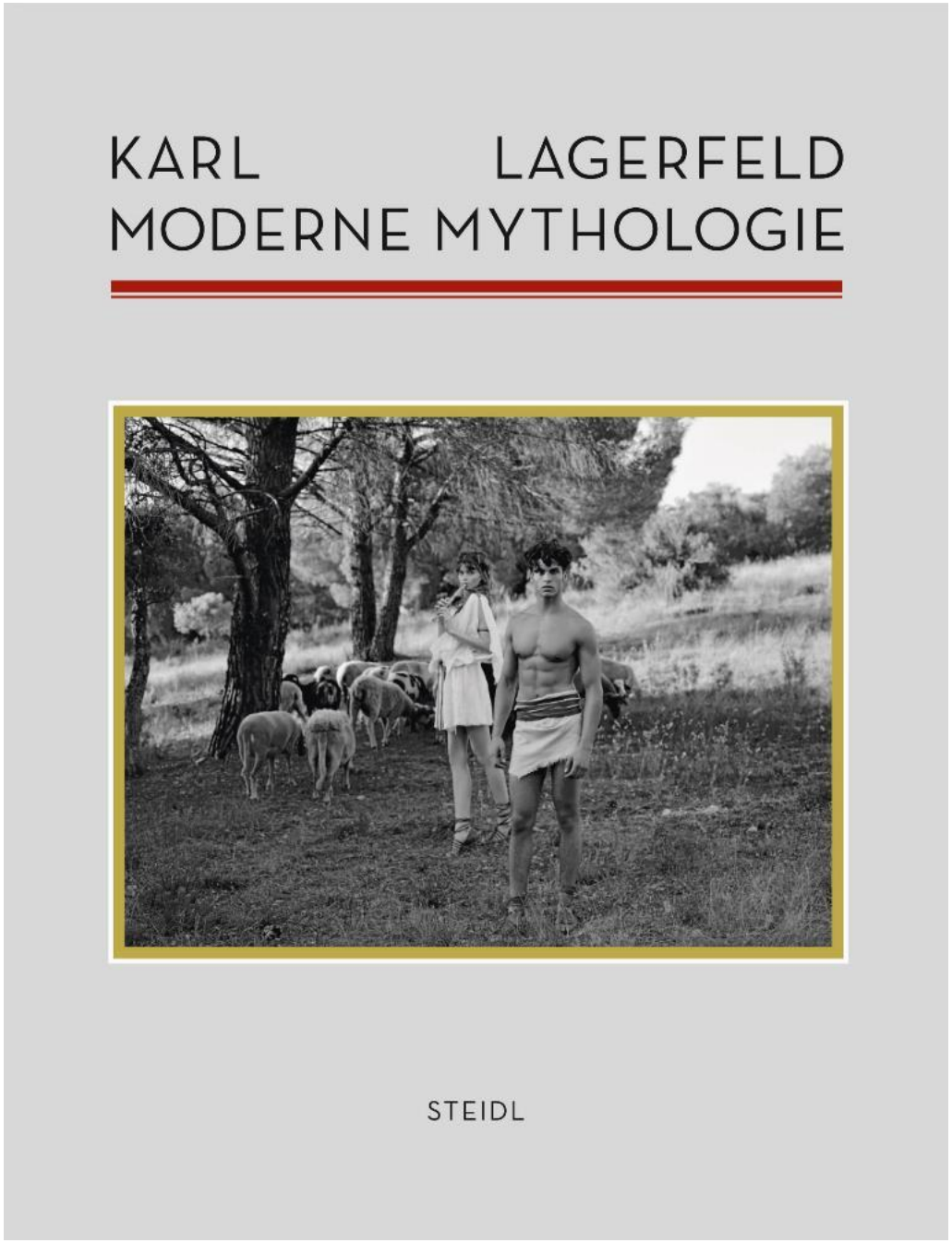


***Image 1:*** Karl Lagerfeld, *Moderne Mythologie*, 2013. © 2013 Karl Lagerfeld

Little is known of Longus, who wrote *Daphnis and Chloe* sometime between 175 and 225 CE, and Lagerfeld has retold the love affair between the goatherd and the shepherdess through the medium of art photography. Born to prominent families but exposed as infants in the countryside, each is a foundling. Daphnis is raised by a goatherd, and Chloe by a shepherd. At the love god Eros' command, they are brought together when each is sent out to tend a flock. They meet and fall in love but are too naïve to understand their emotions or to satisfy their passions. Peerless in their beauty, the couple attract trouble – attempted rapes, armed conflict, and pirate raids – and are eventually restored to their noble positions by the parents who abandoned them. They marry. As objects of others' desire, the message of the myth is clear: beauty is a curse as well as a blessing. With a small cast of six and minimal props, Lagerfeld has highlighted aspects of the tale while conveying the youthful innocence of the young couple, including their combination of gawky and graceful movements (Image 2).

***Image 2:*** Karl Lagerfeld, *Moderne Mythologie*, 2013. © 2013 Karl Lagerfeld

*Moderne Mythologie* has no labels and did not follow the narrative sequence written in Longus' novel. A small bibliophile Steidl reprint of C. F. W. Jacobs' German translation of the *Hirtengeschichten von Daphnis und Chloe* (Pastoral Tale of Daphnis and Chloe) from 1832, with Lagerfeld's photos as vignettes made it easier to understand the motifs that are on display and reproduced in the large-format catalogue.[3] Excerpts from Longus were on display as single pages, along with a voice reading passages from the novel. Sounds of birdsong, insects, and the wind suffused the gallery spaces, referencing descriptions by Longus such as:

> Now there was buzzing of bees, music of songbirds, gambolling of new-born sheep; lambs gambolled on the hills, bees buzzed in the meadows, birds enchanted the thickets…. Hearing the birds sing, [Daphnis and Chloe] sang.[4]

Lagerfeld is well-known for his images of beautiful young men and women of the fashion world, and *Moderne Mythologie* uses some of his favourite models to represent scenes from Greek antiquity where youth, as now, was much admired. This point was emphasised by a quote by Hippolyte Taine (1828-93), written on the gallery wall: 'Die Antike ist die Jugend der Welt' (The ancient world is the youth of mankind).

Youth, beauty, and antiquity were also highlighted in a smaller side-gallery photo series by Lagerfeld called *Body Freedom* (2008). Like *Moderne Mythologie*, it featured Giabiconi, of whom Lagerfeld once observed as being good for clothes and great with no clothes. The series was photographed in the ruins of the Villa Adriana outside Rome. Twenty-seven shots of Giabiconi, including one which was taken in shadow so as to 'remove' his head, made Giabiconi's well-muscled torso a tribute to the kouroi, archaic youths in ancient marble. These images were paired with a quote etched on the gallery space wall, 'Der perfekte Körper ist die Seele selbst' (The perfect body is itself the soul), taken from the sonnet, 'Before a Statue of Achilles,' by the American poet and philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952).[5]

While the black-and-white *Body Freedom* series has the look of white marble, the matte silver and bronze tones of the *Moderne Mythologie* canvases give them an antique, muted quality. Their colours contrasted with the shining black, grey purple, pink, mauve, and muted green oils of the Anselm Feuerbach paintings in their gilt frames, also on display in the gallery. Feuerbach's paintings are rich in classical themes and complemented Lagerfeld's styling of his Daphnis and Chloe photos. But while Lagerfeld's images express youth, innocence, and beauty, Feuerbach's convey mature self-assurance, strength, and, of course, beauty. Feuerbach used live models, just as Lagerfeld did, and his literary subjects were from Greek tragedy and legend. One of his series of portraits begun in 1860 features his model and muse Anna Risi, known as Nanna, in a variety of *Rollenspiele* (roles), among which she figured twice as Iphigenia, of the ancient Greek playwright Euripides. Lagerfeld's corresponding treatment of his model Balti, and more specifically, Giabiconi, reveals a similarly idealistic approach to the model as muse, a physical manifestation of beauty that inspires art. Feuerbach replaced Nanna from 1867 to 1875 with the model Lucia Brunacci in his large-format paintings of mythological scenes from works such as Medea (e.g., *Abschied der Medea* (Medea's Farewell (1870)). As a 'Fischermädchen in Antium' (Fishergirl in Antium) in *Am Strand* (At the Beach (1870)), Lucia balances an amphora on her left shoulder while her classically featured profile looks down at her little son Remo.

Noteworthy in Feuerbach's canvases featuring Nanna and Lucia are their melancholy visages and introverted gazes. Lagerfeld's models in both sets of photographs at the Kunsthalle are also unsmiling. Feuerbach's historical paintings depict moments of hesitation, of suspended or merely contemplated action. Such is also the case with Lagerfeld's images of Daphnis and Chloe, an explanation for their lack of smiles, perhaps. With their frozen *contrapposto* (asymmetrical balancing) poses, akin to that of classical statuary and reliefs, Lagerfeld's models seem to peer beyond or past each other into an unknown future. This kind of affect is characteristic of figures portrayed on Greek vases, and causes the viewer to become attuned to what is going on 'within' rather than 'between' the participants. According to Longus, Daphnis and Chloe 'wanted something,' but 'did not know what they wanted.'[6] In the great canvas of Feuerbach's *Iphigenie* (1862), Nanna looks out to sea with a longing which may hark back to the *sehnen*, a yearning for the ideal, of Romantic German artists of Feuerbach's time.[7]

Feuerbach dressed Nanna, a cobbler's wife, in mauve and black taffeta, respectively, in two portraits from 1861, and posed her with a fan, endowing her with the aristocratic social status that her physical appearance suggested (Image 3). In spite of Longus' insistence that Daphnis and Chloe were 'too beautiful to be shepherds'[8] and that to be nobly born is to be beautiful, it is through adornment that Chloe's beauty is communicated:

> Then could be seen what beauty is like when enhanced by adornment, for when Chloe had dressed, braided her hair, and washed her face, she looked so much comelier to everyone that even Daphnis hardly recognized her.[9]

This idea is also shown in Lagerfeld's photos – notably that of Balti/Chloe on the poster for the exhibition – depicting the final denouement of the tale. In contrast, the beauty of Daphnis, as imaged by Lagerfeld, speaks for itself with the splendid physique of Giabiconi.

***Image 3:*** Anselm Feuerbach, *Nanna*, 1861, oil on canvas, 137.8 x 99.3 cm.

As I contemplated these images, I wondered whether Lagerfeld might be ironically suggesting that the present-day supermodels and fashion model photography are merely reprises of an age-old cultivation of beauty, fashion, and adornment. Certainly Feuerbach's Nanna and Lucia were modelling gowns and clothes as well as their faces and figures. Both women had thick dark tresses and strong profiles similar to those on a Roman coin, a fashion of beauty highly thought of in the nineteenth century. Feuerbach wished to demonstrate that people such as his model muses were not, in the words of Oscar Wilde, 'simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art,'[10] but tangibly 'real' with a timeless beauty, hence something to which one still could aspire.

***Image 4:*** Karl Lagerfeld, *Moderne Mythologie*, 2013. © 2013 Karl Lagerfeld

Longus began his novel with an ekphrasis, a re-presentation of a work of art.[11] In the preamble of *Daphnis and Chloe* Longus notes that he took for his inspiration a series of paintings in the Grove of the Nymphs on Lesbos: 'A longing seized me to rival the depiction in words.'[12] In the 'Vorwort des Longus,' found in the *Moderne Mythologie* catalogue, Lagerfeld cites this preamble. Surely he was aware of the ekphrastic character of *Daphnis and Chloe*, and perhaps he used it to mount an ekphrasis in reverse. By mirroring the visual impression that inspired Longus, Lagerfeld closes the ekphrastic circle.

Whether consciously or not, by re-doing the ekphrasis, Lagerfeld has revived the theatrical landscape of the pastoral genre of eighteenth-century painting and decorative art, of which he is an acknowledged connoisseur. In the Wallace Collection, London, there is a painting by the French artist François Boucher (1703-70) entitled *Daphnis and Chloé* (aka *Shepherd Watching a Sleeping Shepherdess* (1743)).[13] Here Boucher has chosen the symbolic moment when Daphnis is surprised by the love and desire he feels upon seeing the semi-naked body of the sleeping Chloe. A similar Rococo 'feel' characterises the setting and positioning of several of Lagerfeld's images in *Moderne Mythologie*. This applies particularly to those of Daphnis reclining side-by-side with Chloe, nude, on a couch or on a fur, beneath an allegorical statue of Aphrodite, or between classically inspired vases, all with a sylvan scenic backdrop (Image 4). In the cover image for the *Moderne Mythologie* catalogue, Lagerfeld has Chloe playing a recorder instead of the panpipe recounted by Longus. It may be a slight detail, but this choice evokes seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painted pastorals whose shepherdesses play recorders rather than panpipes. Whereas both Feuerbach and Lagerfeld use classically inspired motifs, their spirit is different. Where Feuerbach concentrates his art on the antiquity theme, Lagerfeld's photos evoke a 'pantomime pastoral' of the very sort that the eighteenth century excelled in.

Lagerfeld has given us an idealistic, highly artificial, and idiosyncratic vision of Beauty, one for which he is increasingly known not only in his fashion photography for advertisements such as those for Chanel but also in his Paris Fashion Week catwalk extravaganzas. The 'Body Freedom' and 'Moderne Mythologie' series represent his 'in your face' challenge to current presumptions of art as having to be conceptual or topical: Art can (still) show us Beauty – period. The pairing of Lagerfeld with Feuerbach was as inspired and challenging as it was ironic and celebrates a timeless aesthetic.

## Notes

[1] The streaming quotes are in Dörte Zbikowski, *Jenny Holzer: Installation for The Hamburger Kunsthalle (Ceiling Snake). 1996*. Hefte der Hamburger Kunsthalle (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1998).

[2] Karl Lagerfeld, *The World According to Karl: The Wit and Wisdom of Karl Lagerfeld*, ed. Jean-Christophe Napias and Sandrine Gulbenkian (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013).

[3] Longus, *Hirtengeschichten von Daphnis und Chloe. Mit Fotografien von Karl Lagerfeld*. In deutscher Übersetzung von Christian Friedrich Wilhelm Jacobs (Göttingen: Lagerfeld, Steidl, Druckerei Verlag, 2014 [1832]), 11, 13, 16, 20, 21, 23, 24, 28, 31, 32, 34, 43, 54, 61, 62, 65, 79, 91, 97, 110, 140, 144, 147.

[4] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*/Xenophon of Ephesus, *Anthia and Habrocomes*, ed. and trans. J. Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/Loeb Classical Library, 2009), 25 (1.9.1).

[5] George Santayana, 'Before a Statue of Achilles,' in *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2 of *American Poetry*, ed. J. Hollander (New York: Penguin/The Library of America, 1993), 550 (stanza III).

[6] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 43 (1.22.4).

[7] Gert Schiff, 'An Epoch of Longing: An Introduction to German Painting of the Nineteenth Century,' *German Masters of the Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Drawings from the Federal Republic of Germany*, ed. E. Walter (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1981), 10.
[8] Silvia Montiglio, *Love and Providence: Recognition in the Ancient Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 86; in the same work, see Montiglio's in-depth discussion of this aesthetic/social aspect of Daphnis' and Chloe's physical beauty, 86-105.
[9] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 189 (4.32.1).
[10] Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying,' *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. J. B. Foreman, (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1973), 988.
[11] See Joseph Kestner, 'Ekphrasis as Frame in Longus' "Daphnis and Chloe,"' *The Classical World* 67, no. 3 (December 1973-January 1974): 166-171.
[12] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 13 (1.3.1).
[13] Jo Hedley, *François Boucher. Seductive Visions* (Verona: The Wallace Collection, 2004), 87, fig. 69.

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**Michael A. Langkjær**, PhD, of the Saxo Institute, History Section, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, writes about Anglo-American popular material culture and the fashions and costumes of rock music performers. A member of the editorial board of *Catwalk*, he is co-editor of *Images in Time: Flashing Forward, Backward, in Front and Behind Photography in Fashion, Advertising and the Press* (2011). He is currently doing research on the Rococo and German cultural foundations of Karl Lagerfeld's personal and fashion-style aesthetics.

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# Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions

## *The Age of Liberty*

(Ulster Museum, Belfast, 13 June 2014-19 April 2015)

The first two decades of the twentieth century in Europe constituted a transitional period for women's lives as well as for the clothes they wore. This exhibition at the Ulster Museum explores the wardrobe of the Edwardian woman as the constrictive corset disappeared and more modern, relaxed silhouettes (such as those created by Paul Poiret) dominated the fashions of the period. *The Age of Liberty* juxtaposes this newfound sartorial freedom with contemporary social trends like the campaign for woman's right to vote and the increased visibility of middle-class and upper-class women in the public sphere.

## *Fashioned in America*

(Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona, 11 October 2014-15 March 2015)

Featuring more than forty ensembles and accessories, *Fashioned in America* explores the current revival of fashion designs made in the United States in response to the new global economic climate, the issue of sustainability and other environmental concerns, and labour ethics. Highlighting creations by contemporary designers like Anna Sui, Ralph Rucci, and Nanette Lepore, among others, this exhibition shows how talent and vision have been uniquely combined in the United States with technology, quality, and hands-on control from concept to manufacture, the result being an increased competitive edge for the American apparel industry on the global market.

## *The Great War: Women and Fashion in a World at War*

(Kent State University Museum, Kent, Ohio, 24 July 2014-5 July 2015)

The First World War, as countless historians and cultural critics have noted, was a seminal political event that definitively changed Western society. This exhibition, organised to coincide with the centenary anniversary of the First World War, examines the changes that wartime culture had on women and their clothing habits. Divided into sections that examine women at work, at leisure, and at home, *The Great War* demonstrates not only that fashion was an expression of their reactions to the wartime effort, but shows how many of these forms and practices endured following the war's end.


**Image courtesy of the Kent State University Museum, © photograph by Joanne Arnett**

## *Romantic Fashions: Mr. Darcy Meets Eline Vere*

(Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 11 October 2014-22 March 2015)

This major fashion exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag looks at various facets of what we now consider to be romantic clothing for women and men in the nineteenth century. Featuring creations from the time of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Louis Couperus's *Eline Vere* (1889), as well as modern interpretations of such styles by contemporary designers like Vivienne Westwood, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Edwin Oudshoorn, this exhibition confirms the popularity and persistence of these elegantly evocative romantic fashions over the past two centuries.

## *Women Fashion Power*

(Design Museum, London, 29 October 2014-26 April 2015)

Designed by the architect Zaha Hadid, this exhibition explores how famous and powerful women have used fashion as a tool for self-expression, empowerment, and influence. Including exclusive interviews with celebrities and unique articles of clothing, *Women Fashion Power* shows how diverse figures like Princess Diana, Naomi Campbell, Natalie Massenet, and Anne Hidalgo, among many others, have employed fashionable dress to attract attention, build a media reputation, and assert their authority in politics, business, and culture.

## *Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance*

(Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, 15 November 2014-3 May 2015)

In this innovative exhibition, two different yet ultimately related museological approaches are used for understanding Renaissance art and culture. In one portion of the exhibition, art historians explore, through the imagery of Renaissance painting, the period's use of cosmetics and its conceptions of beauty. In another section of the show, UK-based fashion designers have been enlisted to create new designs using the materials visible in select Old Master paintings. The result of these two types of research activity is a highly suggestive analysis of representations and conceptions of body image and beauty during the Renaissance.

## *Brilliant: Cartier in the 20th Century*

(Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado, 16 November 2014-15 March 2015)

Featuring jewellery and other precious objects designed by the French luxury goods company from 1900 to 1975, this exhibition traces the spirit and evolution of Cartier through the twentieth century and demonstrates how these sumptuous and intricate creations reflected the greater social tendencies of the period. *Brilliant: Cartier in the 20th Century* additionally details the design and manufacturing process that preceded the final form of these objects. By revealing the entire process involved in the creation of this brand's internationally famous jewellery and luxury goods, this exhibition ultimately shows how Cartier was able to break down the distinctions between the various disciplines of the fine and decorative arts.

## *The Red that Colored the World*

(Bowers Museum, Santa Ana, California, 21 November 2014-21 March 2015)

In this fascinating traveling exhibition that originates at the Bowers Museum, the curators have sought to trace the history of a certain hue of the colour red that comes from the American Cochineal, a tiny scaled insect that secretes carminic acid. Discovered by the Spanish in Mexico during the sixteenth century, cochineal became a highly sought-after colorant for pigments used in painting, sculpture, furniture, and textile design from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century. The exhibition includes artefacts from pre-Columbian and Spanish Colonial Mexico as well as painting, furniture, and clothing from around the world. In the end, this exhibition illustrates the importance of colour in art, fashion, and history along with its role as a feature of daily life.

## *Guy Bourdin: Image Maker*

(Somerset House, London, 27 November 2014-15 March 2015)

Guy Bourdin, whose editorial and advertising imagery has been recognised as among the most striking and innovative in the second half of the twentieth century, is the subject of this retrospective of his distinctive fashion photography. Curated by Alistair O'Neill and Shelly Verthime, this exhibition features over one hundred coloured prints of Bourdin's most significant works from the 1950s onwards. Also included are Polaroid test shots, double-page

spread layouts, contact sheets, and transparencies marked for composition, all of which provide a glimpse of the creative process and craftsmanship that went into Bourdin's unique images. In addition to confirming Bourdin's status as a revolutionary figure in fashion photography, this exhibition also underscores his role as a pioneer in the realm of fashion film by including some of his early Super-8 films, many of which were made at the time of his on-location photo shoots.

## *Faking It: Originals, Copies, and Counterfeits*

(The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 2 December 2014-25 April 2015)

Featuring more than one hundred objects from the museum's permanent collection, *Faking It: Originals, Copies, and Counterfeits* analyses the role of the concept of authenticity in modern fashion. While imitation is often a part of the process of inspiration, couture copies, diffusion lines, and licensing agreements have blurred the distinction between what is regarded as genuine and what is deemed inauthentic. Moreover, the rise of the counterfeit industry has further complicated the matter, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between an original and a copy. This exhibition explores the various details and dimensions of these topics in the context of fashion and confirms the complex and sometimes problematic distinction between the real and the fake.

## *Fashion Mix – Mode d'ici, créateurs d'ailleurs*

(Fashion Mix – French Fashion, Foreign Designers, Palais de la Porte Dorée, Musée de l'Immigration, Paris, 9 December 2014-31 May 2015)

From design creation to manufacturing and consumption, the fashion industry in France from the outset has been an international proposition. This exhibition, co-curated by Paris's Palais de la Porte Dorée, Musée de l'Immigration and the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode, examines the history of the creative presence of non-French designers, artisans, artistic directors, and stylists in the French fashion industry from the nineteenth century to the present. Featuring garments and accessories as well as archival documents that trace the migratory journeys of these important contributors to French fashion, *Fashion Mix* demonstrates how the French fashion industry has been able to regularly maintain its vitality and prominence on the international scene by including participants from various cultural origins.

## *Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair*

(Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 5 February 2015-3 May 2015)

This traveling exhibition, which originated at the Chicago History Museum, is a retrospective look at the history of the Ebony Fashion Fair, a Chicago-based charity runway event founded in 1958 and directed by Eunice W. Johnson from 1963 onwards. The Ebony Fashion Fair, as this exhibition shows, redefined in the course of its fifty-year history, concepts of beauty, style, and empowerment for the African-American woman. With nearly one hundred ensembles and accessories on fully stylised mannequins that are meant to imitate the fashion show experience, this exhibition details the importance of the role of fashion in the mid-twentieth century's vision of new black America.

## *China: Through the Looking Glass*

(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New City, 7 May 2015-16 August 2015)

With the major exhibition *China: Through the Looking Glass*, which is presented in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Chinese Galleries and the Anna Wintour Costume Center, the influence of China on Western culture will be examined in the context of fashion, art, and cinema. Featuring over one hundred examples of couture and ready-to-wear garments juxtaposed with examples of Chinese art from which the former drew their inspiration, this exhibition explores how Western visions and conceptions of China are just as much informed upon by romance, nostalgia, and the imagination as they are by reality.

**Evening dress, Roberto Cavalli (Italian, born 1940), fall/winter 2005–6; Courtesy of Roberto Cavalli. Photo: Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Photography © Platon**

## *Classical Allure: Richmond Style*

(The Valentine, Richmond, Virginia, 3 May 2015-31 January 2016)

To inaugurate the new Nathalie L. Klaus and Reynolds Family Galleries, The Valentine will introduce classically inspired treasures from its remarkable collection of costume and textiles. The exhibition will explore themes personified by the four goddesses that adorn the Virginia State Seal: Libertas, Ceres, Virtus, and Aeternitas. Through these archetypes *Classical Allure: Richmond Style* will examine local and regional clothing the classical forms that persist as part of the aesthetic, political, and philosophical identity of Virginia's capital city.

## *Royal Hawaiian Featherwork: Nā Hulu Ali'i*

(The DeYoung Museum, San Francisco, California, 29 August 2015-28 February 2016)

This exhibition of Hawaiian featherwork, the first on the US mainland, will present approximately seventy examples of feathered capes and cloaks as well as other feathered objects (royal staffs, leis, helmets, and religious artefacts). The royal garments and accessories exhibited in this show demonstrate the artistry, the intricacy, and the highly symbolic nature of

the different types and configurations of feathers taken from birds indigenous to the Pacific island group. Developed in partnership with Honolulu's Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, *Royal Hawaiian Featherwork: Nā Hulu Ali'i* explores the history of the Hawaiian Islands through its distinctive sartorial culture.

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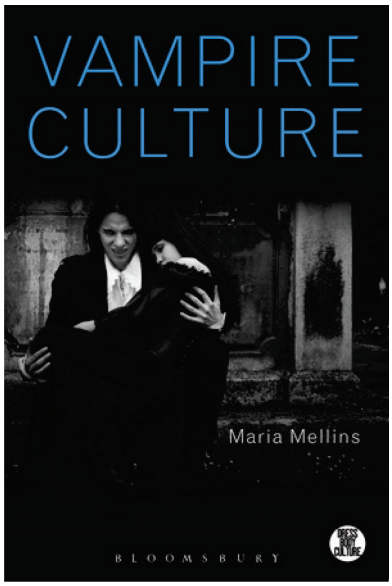
# Book Reviews

## *Vampire Culture*

Maria Mellins
London: Bloomsbury Academic
2013, 149 pages, £19.99
Illustrated, with index
ISBN: 978-0-85785-075-1




**Courtesy © Bloomsbury Publishing**

The film scholar Maria Mellins' *Vampire Culture* provides unique and rich insight into the London-based vampire-oriented subculture and subcultural dynamics in general. Using the term *community* throughout her text to refer to this subculture, Mellins presents a study based significantly on empirical research. The author asserts that she attained partial insider status into this community because of her persistent and active engagement with its members through social events and networking. In this regard, *Vampire Culture* also affords a glimpse into the steps taken and challenges faced when approaching a subcultural community with the double objective of being both participant and observer.

Chapter 1, 'Twenty-First-Century Vamp,' gives an overview of contemporary vampire culture and of the commodification of the figure and lifestyle of the vampire in Western media. In addition to providing a brief case study of the popular American television series *True Blood*, informed by Mellins' previously published research on this program, the author clarifies aspects that are key to her analysis throughout the book, such as geographical scope and gender specific focus.

Chapter 2, 'Interviewing Vampires,' provides the framework for Mellins' research into the London vampire community and details her first connections and contact with members of the community. Here, she briefly previews the discussion that will be elaborated later in the study (particularly in Chapter 5, 'Feminine Discourses') regarding the relationship between the vampire subculture and other subcultural communities, specifically goth and steampunk, with consideration of their respective lifestyle and clothing choices. These are styles from which vampire followers often appropriate apparel and accessories in order to create their own composite styles. Furthermore, Mellins outlines the scope and methodology of her study and introduces the reader to the eight representative case studies upon which a large part of her analysis of female participation in vampire subcultural expression is based.

Chapter 3, 'Vampire Femininity and Status,' addresses the theme of identity performance and the role that dress plays in enacting and performing female identity within the vampire community. According to Mellins, her study focuses on female members because they are the majority within the community and because they have personalised the style more pervasively than its male members. This gendered appropriation is later discussed in depth in Chapter 5. Mellins explains in detail the theory of subcultural capital as proposed by the sociologist Sarah Thornton. This theory is crucial to Mellins' analysis of female participation in the vampire subculture and, in particular, to her case study in Chapter 6 of MorbidFrog, a subcultural celebrity within London's vampire community. Having subcultural capital relates to

being 'in the know' about what is in vogue within a particular subculture as well as to possessing and displaying evidence of this knowledge (for example, in the form of dress and/or accessories). Mellins also addresses in Chapter 3 the need for updated research into female pursuits of subcultural capital within particular communities, arguing that contemporary social and technological developments have facilitated such pursuits in new and diverse ways.

Chapter 4, 'Vampire Community Profile,' outlines the demographics of the participants in Mellins' study, highlighting age, background, profession, and social situation. The author makes an important distinction between vampire 'fans,' on the one hand, and participants in the vampire subcultural community, on the other. She shows that, while they can and do overlap, these two categories are not synonymous, and that the vampire community appears to be more significantly interested in pursuing subcultural interests rather than simply enacting vampire fandom. In this chapter, a section is also devoted to a consideration of vampire dress and how, when, and with what frequency it is incorporated into the community participants' performance of vampire identity. Associated with this is the examination of specific apparel and accessory choices of women involved in the vampire subculture as well as the practices related to their involvement in that subculture, such as wearing make-up and making jewellery and accessories. Mellins first notes here the originality and authenticity with which female participants combine diverse elements related to vampire dress in order to fashion their own identifiable vampire style. This chapter additionally includes ten photographs illustrating subcultural bricolage, vampire media inspiration, and creative productivity. It closes with a brief overview of the consumption of vampire media by the female participants of the vampire community.

Chapter 5, 'Feminine Discourses,' takes an in-depth look at the predominant discourses within the female enactment of vampire identity. Here, Mellins puts forth many of her most concrete and specific findings regarding the discursive categories into which female participation in the vampire community may be organised. The first category, 'Romanticization of the Past,' alludes to the evocation of the historical via forms of sartorial expression. Within these manifestations of historical romanticisation, there is a preference for the Victorian aesthetic. This preference is reinforced in many cases by vampire community members' childhood and/or adolescent fascination with this period and with the gothic. The next category, 'Steampunk,' relates to the vampire community's recent fascination with steamfashion. This sartorial mode relates to Victorian-era-reminiscent styles that are modified with anachronistic, science, and technology-evoking elements. Members of the vampire community have used social media and websites for insight regarding steampunk fashion, and can reciprocally share their own steamfashion creations.

'Excessive Femininity,' a discursive category first alluded to in Chapter 3, is expounded upon in Chapter 5. Hyper-feminine styles, including open necklines, long skirts, and corsets, are linked to the historical romance component of traditional vampire media. After detailing this category, Mellins devotes a section specifically to the use of the corset and, by extension, to foundation garments in general. She highlights the use of shapewear to evoke an historical image of feminine beauty and to privilege an ideal of femininity in which female curves are accentuated. In drawing from comments by one of the eight case-study participants and by an historical costume maker and corsetière, the author addresses the potential of the corset to create a sense of empowerment in its wearers. Furthermore, Mellins considers corset-wear as a potential form for the exploration of subversive conceptions of femininity.

'Androgyny and Variation,' the next feminine discursive category, can be considered in opposition to excessive or hyper-femininity. Mellins relates androgynous discourse within the vampire community to its presence in the goth subculture, referencing the goth specialist Dunja Brill by noting that this discourse in some cases may undermine women's subcultural capital. However, Mellins finds that, within the vampire subculture, gender play and gender-bending in

dress practices may be more acceptable than in the goth scene, and she attributes this largely to the infusion of steamfashion into sartorial modes within the vampire community. The final discursive category highlighted in Chapter 5 of Mellins' study is 'Identification and Outsiderdom.' Here, the author relates women's identification with the vampire (that is, with the monster) to childhood feelings of isolation and alienation. She finds that, in this sense, the association with the figure of the vampire may represent a cathartic experience for women who desire to imagine alternative-to-mainstream realities in which anxieties about not belonging are dispelled.

Chapter 6, 'Alternative Celebrity,' studies the existence of celebrities within the vampire community. The author begins by emphasising the variety of aesthetics within the subculture that accentuate and confirm its plurality, a phenomenon which is enhanced by the participation of both insiders and outsiders alike. The community is thus a rather complex amalgam presenting a multiplicity of ways of involvement and acceptance within it. Furthermore, Mellins points out the fact that technology and media have lately transformed the meaning and implications of the terms *celebrity* and *fame*. She performs her analysis of the existence of luminaries in the community based on the hierarchies that the cultural critic Andrea Macdonald considers as characteristic of subcultural celebrities. Mellins explains why such hierarchies can help us understand not only the mechanisms behind belonging to the community, but also its fragmentation. The latter is associated in her study with generational gaps and the role played by physical and virtual spaces of interaction.

A central focus of Chapter 6 is the author's analysis of the relationship among the five hierarchical categories proposed by Macdonald – *knowledge*, *access*, *fandom level*, *leaders*, and *venue* – and the main case study of this chapter is MorbidFrog, a thirty-four year-old, prominent member of the community. MorbidFrog exemplifies the concept that social status is essentially related to a person's involvement in the community. This reveals the importance of time and income available to be spent on the community by its members. Social status also relates to *performance*, a sixth hierarchy that Mellins adds to round out her study of vampire celebrities. This hierarchy, mainly in relation to dress and accessories, is crucial to the vampire community due to the aesthetics inherent in this subculture.

In the final section, 'Conclusions,' the author emphasises that the activities and research behind the production of *Vampire Culture* dispelled some misconceptions she had held about the vampire community. She states her hope that this book may guide outsiders of the community to the same objective appreciation of it, as a fandom that expresses its interest in the figure of the vampire in a myriad of ways. This objective alludes, as well, to another advantage of her study, which resides in the documentation of the social codes and dress preferences of this community in recent years. In this sense, the study serves as a testimonial of ultra-current trends within the subculture, trends that will inevitably continue to morph and evolve over time.

The notable insights provided by *Vampire Culture* in terms of empirical research highlight its value as a resource for graduate students and researchers of alternative lifestyle communities. This aspect of the study is further enhanced by its sociological perspective on the formation and evolution of such communities. In this regard, Mellins' research has a broader potential to serve as a general model for the study of subcultural communities, of current and recent sartorial styles within particular communities, and of the influence of media and technology on subcultural trends and practices.

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**Jessica C. Locke**, PhD, is a Professor of Literature and Composition at the Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico City Campus. Her most recent publications are in the areas of colonial and contemporary Mexican literature. She has also participated regularly in the *International Gothic Literature Congress* in Mexico City with keynote addresses and panel presentations.

**Antonio Alcalá**, ABD, is the founder of the *International Gothic Literature Congress*. He is the language coordinator and a full-time professor at Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico City Campus, and a lecturer on literary criticism at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). He has published in journals of Mexican universities (UNAM and Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM)), and recently contributed to the volume *A Companion to American Gothic* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

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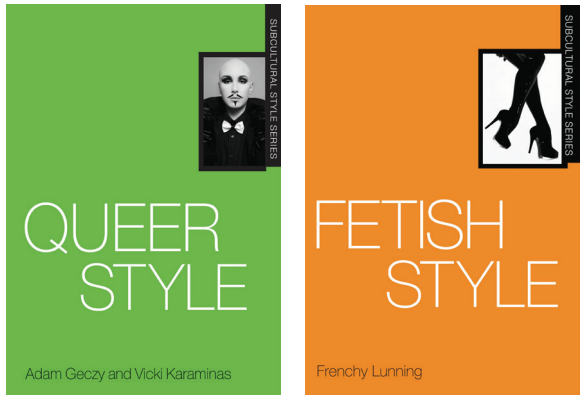
## *Queer Style*

Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas
London and New York: Bloomsbury
2013, 192 pages, £17.99
Illustrated, with index
ISBN: 978-1-84788-196-0

## *Fetish Style*

Frenchy Lunning
London and New York: Bloomsbury
2013, 159 pages, £18.99
Illustrated, with index
ISBN: 978-1-84788-570-8




**Queer Style and Fetish Style both Courtesy and © Bloomsbury Publishing**

Fetish and queer styles are no longer considered purely the domain of the demimonde, deviants, perverts, and prostitutes, and have become fashionable to the mainstream through iterations in popular culture and haute couture. The 2013 exhibitions, *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk* at FIT, New York, and *Fetishism in Fashion* as part of the Mode Biennale, Arnhem, attest that diverse sexual practices are increasingly visible in the cultural zeitgeist, where fashion offers an accessible mode of representation to examine complex expressions and experiences of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and

queer) and BDSM (bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism) cultures. The timeliness of this exploration is further apparent with two recent books published by Bloomsbury as part of the *Subcultural Style* series. *Queer Style* co-authored by Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, and *Fetish Style* by Frenchy Lunning provide much needed scholarly accounts of fashions associated with transgressive sexual identities in both historical and contemporary contexts.

*Queer Style* is perhaps the first comprehensive study devoted entirely to the significant contributions, influences, and expressions of lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer identities in matters of style and dress from the eighteenth century to the present. This ambitious project is not only accessible in its illuminating account of recognisable queer fashionable characters and style icons but also provides rigorous detailing of the theoretical discourses of Queer Theory, Gender Studies, and Fashion Studies that contextualise the aesthetic, social, and cultural concerns that frame these identities. As such, Geczy and Karaminas draw on a broad array of examples from art and popular culture including Beau Brummell, Romain Brooks, David Bowie, Leigh Bowery, and k.d. lang to provide the reader with an understanding of the depth and diversity of queer style and culture. From the outset, the authors are careful to specify an inclusive and wide-reaching definition of queer that is not necessarily predicated in homosexual desire. Geczy and Karaminas present queer style as concerned with social and bodily types that diverge from mostly heterosexual and middle-class normative constructs. By and large, these forms of appearance embrace and perform affectation, false creation, exaggeration, and pretence. Through this characterisation, the authors are able to effectively highlight the constructed nature of identity in all forms and reiterate the ways in which style and dress, mannerism, and performance contribute to individual and subcultural styling.

In the first chapter, 'The Meaning of Style between Classic and Queer,' the authors provide a complex conceptual framework, which draws upon the art historical tenets of aesthetics, as identified by the art historian Johann Winckelmann in the eighteenth century. Winckelmann's conception of classical beauty, as evoked by ancient Grecian sculpture of the heroic masculine form, is the cornerstone of much subsequent Western art historical scholarship regarding style. Geczy and Karaminas argue that the classic has become the conventional mode for describing matters of style, whether related to art, beauty, or dress. Moreover, they assert, the construction of 'queerness' has been shaped as the classic theoretical other. However, this assessment becomes complicated in recognising that Winckelmann's perspective provides a curious proposition whereby the reference for classic beauty has an underlying homoerotic sensibility. In developing this analysis, the authors use Winckelmann's aesthetic musings as an analogy to consider how broader notions of style and its aesthetic form are social formations and states of being, necessarily set up in opposition to each other. Further art historical references from the baroque to modernism are adopted to pursue the argument that elements of art and culture that are excessive, flamboyant, or exaggerated have been depreciated for their opposition to 'classic style,' are deviations from the norm, and thus 'queer.' There are obvious parallels throughout history where art and dress have shared conceptions of beauty, and the argument that queer style makes apparent these existing codes through exaggeration and resistance is well taken. The art historical focus of this chapter provides an important set of aesthetic conventions that underline understandings of style; however, it would have been interesting if some of the parallels between queer style and its penchant for difference, and the fashion system's simultaneous desires for distinction and conformity, as identified by Georg Simmel, were drawn out to elucidate these ideas further in a fashion studies context.

Various formations of lesbian style are presented in Chapter 2 where a chronology that traces the mannish look of the early twentieth century through to Butch/Femme role-plays of the 1950s and the emergence of androgynous styles in the 1980s is examined. Lesbian dandy figures of artistic and literary circles including Romain Brooks, Radclyffe Hall, and Una

Troubridge are explored as icons epitomising the mannish style of monocle, cropped haircut, and suit that was fashionable during the 1920s. *La Garçonne*, the flapper, and *lionne* identities are incorporated into the discussion along with details of the vibrant lesbian communities in Paris, London, and Berlin as well as Greenwich Village and Harlem. The lesbian bar culture of the 1940s and 1950s and the increased visibility of Butch/Femme role-plays provide the backdrop to an important discussion regarding the anti-gay rhetoric and violence of the period. The subsequent rejection of these identities by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s due to their seemingly repressive male-female patriarchal constructs of behaviour gives significant context to the emergence of anti-style and androgynous looks. The period from the 1980s to the present affords the authors with a rich array of popular culture examples to explore, with performers including Madonna, Annie Lennox, and k.d. lang, offering interesting case studies on their gender ambiguous images that challenged stereotypes of bisexual and lesbian identity. Some mention is also made of the influence of lesbian identity on mainstream fashion through examples such as Gap and Calvin Klein. Unfortunately, with this and the subsequent discussion regarding queer-identifying fashion designers, the approach is somewhat cursory and does not make apparent the widespread impact these styles had on mainstream fashion culture.

Chapter 3 treats gay men's style in a similar manner. The figures presented span eighteenth-century Macaronis and Fops as well as the later Dandies and Aesthetes. These styles and their significance to fashion history are well known to scholars of the field but provide important context for the underlying argument that queer style and identity is very much concerned with artifice and construction. Of particular interest to this reader was the significance of the artistic avant-garde in the performance of ambiguous sexual identity. The instance of Marcel Duchamp's drag performance of Rrose Sélavy, which aimed to destabilise the constructs of artistic male authorship provides a well-considered case study to further the argument that queer style plays out uncertainties, discontinuities, and resistances to the social order that are impossible to neatly define. Pierre Molinier, Jean Genet, and Andy Warhol are further pertinent examples explored within this chapter to demonstrate the ways that queer identity melds dress, temperament, and performance. This chapter also covers the impact of the gay pride movement on sartorial signifiers and the increased visibility of gay male 'types' – such as the 'bear' and the 'leather man' – that would become ingrained in the popular culture imagination through performers such as The Village People. The impact of popular cultural representations of gay men on television and film from the 1990s onwards offers a further set of examples to consider the assimilation of gay identities towards the normative and the emergence of a new man that has challenged conventional categories of male subjectivity.

The highly codified clothing associated with BDSM is the subject of Chapter 4. The authors note this tendency also has its place within heterosexual practice – as explored in the book *Fetish Style* – and as such provide a comprehensive set of examples that focus on the highly codified clothing and accessories that are affiliated with perverse sexual practices. The performative and exaggerated affects associated with BDSM roles are explored here with reference to the apparatuses of the Sadist (boots, uniforms, ropes, and whips) and those of the Masochist (harnesses, collars, and corsets). The authors' take on the subject is engaging in that it focuses on wider political discourses of sexuality through the theoretical framework of Gilles Deleuze, who positions sadomasochism as the opposition between individual and institution. Military uniforms, the Gestapo, leather accessories, and their associated subcultural and popular culture manifestations and representations are explored to provide an overview of the theatricality of BDSM style and its relationship to transgressing and destabilising normative sexual practices.

The discussion of Drag Kings and Queens further elucidates the theatrical performance of identity associated with queer culture and is outlined in Chapter 5. The authors are careful to

distinguish between transvestism the – concern to construct the illusion of the opposing gender through dress and mannerism, and dragging – a pantomime or exaggeration of stereotypical attributes associated with masculinity and femininity. Numerous popular culture references are made, from Freddie Mercury to Cabaret and Ru Paul, in order to elucidate the ways such practices challenge gender stereotypes and redefine notions of masculinity and femininity.

The final chapter of *Queer Style,* which concerns itself with non-Western understandings of gender and sex roles, is a significant contribution to the authors' investigation. As Geczy and Karaminas contend, by considering examples such as the transvestite ladyboys of Thailand, the transgendered *fa'afafine* of Samoa, and the Albanian sworn virgins, a wider understanding of queerness and the fluidity and tenuous nature of gender and sexual identity distinctions is made further apparent. As Jennifer Craik has argued, the remit of fashion has expanded in the twenty-first century to recognise the non-Western, and as such it is more and more pertinent for fashion scholars to consider style practices outside of the Euro/American-centric system, providing global accounts that move beyond ethnographical understandings of dress.

Given the approach *Queer Style* takes in providing an overview of the subject from past to present, Geczy and Karaminas should be commended for their efforts in providing a comprehensive synthesis of significant queer style icons, modes of dress, lifestyles, and identities all within the context of significant theoretical discourses and chronologically bounded socio-cultural and political developments. Given the breadth of their research, it does beg the question as to why a more substantial portion of the book did not analyse the impact of the numerous and significant queer identifying fashion designers who have bought their individual lifestyles to bear on high fashion and, in turn, mainstream culture. Fleeting references are made to Jean-Paul Gaultier, John Galliano, and Yves Saint Laurent, among others, but it is surprising that more is not made, for example, of Walter Van Beirendonck's continuing engagement with his 'bear' identity through his collections, or indeed Jean-Paul Gaultier's consistent appropriation of BDSM signifiers. Perhaps Karaminas' contribution to the *A Queer History of Fashion* FIT exhibition catalogue precluded the inclusion of these types of analysis. Fortunately for the fashion scholar, some extended case studies of BDSM-inspired clothing by high-fashion designers are covered in Frenchy Lunning's *Fetish Style.*

Fetishism in fashion has been studied with more regularity than queer styles, with Valerie Steele's *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* (1996) and David Kunzle's *Fashion and Fetishism* (1982) being the seminal texts to have explored particular garments and styles that are symbolically associated with non-normative sexual practices. *Fetish Style* extends the work of these previous volumes by providing a number of case studies that examine the way that particular items of clothing produce sexual and psychological reactions by wearers who are affiliated with twenty-first century subcultures including Japanese style tribes, hip hop fashions, and BDSM club cultures. Lunning identifies two distinctive periods for significant fetish fashions that form the structural basis of the book. Firstly, the 1870s to 1900 which produced a plethora of writings by medical and psychiatric authorities on the 'perversities' of corsets and high-heels, and secondly, the 1970s to the present where postmodern discourses focus on these styles from a cultural studies perspective. In the introductory chapter, Lunning frames nineteenth-century fashion fetishism in relation to African religious objects endowed with magical powers that became a fascination for Europeans at this time. She argues that the presence of these sensual objects in France through colonial channels also coincided with the emergence of commodity culture and industrialisation where objects were seen as able to fulfil desire. In addition to this, Freudian ideas regarding sexual development transformed fashion as fetish. The postmodern turn is identified as the second iteration of fashion fetishism, whereby non-normative gender and sexual identities adopted fetish fashions as an outward sign of transgression.

'Fetish Style History' is the subject of Chapter 2, in which the author traces the development of fetish fashions in fin-de-siècle France, paying attention to a range of socio-cultural circumstances, medical developments regarding the psychology of sexual practices, and the establishment of consumer culture. Jules Cheret's posters are presented as evidence of how desire is built around the image of women, but also around particular consumer objects through advertising. In this period, fashion becomes one of the key signifiers of social position and conspicuous consumption, and Lunning guides the reader through examples from fashion history – including the emergence of haute couture and the great male renunciation – to explain the sartorial excesses of the feminine. The heavily ornamental styles of the Victorian era, that aimed at concealment and constraint, particularly through the wearing of elaborate undergarments, are also explored in relation to what Lunning argues is the first iteration of fetishism. In the second part of the chapter the author identifies the critiques of gender theory and queer theory, which allowed for more inclusive and diverse sexualities and identities as a catalyst for the second iteration of fetishism where the performance of fetish identities were played out in popular culture by Madonna and David Bowie, along with the visibility of subcultural groups such as the Mods, Rockers, Punks, New Romantics, Lolita, and fan costume movements.

Chapter 3 focuses on the subject of 'Fetish Identity' and attempts to tackle the question of how women's underwear of the late-nineteenth century came to be associated with fetishism. Drawing particularly on Ulrich Lehmann's theorisation of fashion and modernity, the author outlines a set of circumstances in which patriarchal culture was called into question through the suffragettes and argues that clothing became an important signifier of gender and sexual identity. The chapter covers the appearance of cross-dressing in nineteenth century society, the role of the boudoir as a stage for fantasy and private sexual intrigue, and the emergence of sadomasochism at the end of the eighteenth century. Lunning draws these elements together to describe how women's underwear was able to act as a transformative costume in the secret world of the boudoir, where corsets, stockings, and boots were able to position women as dominatrix – a performance outside her usual role of closed and bounded domesticity. The inference here is that women's underclothes were a costume within the theatre of the boudoir that made it possible for women to perform the role of 'Mistress' and for men to succumb to their submissive desires. While the author presents an interesting and informed narrative of the symbolic and psychological resonances of these garments in relation to S/M identities, it only explores the possibilities of these garments in relation to a heterosexual female dominant/male submissive role play, a criticism that continues to be played out in other sections of the book. In a mode somewhat disjointed from the preceding section, Lunning turns to postmodern fetish theory through the lens of Laura Mulvey. Here she introduces important theoretical contexts linking Marx and Freud where the commodity market is supported by psychoanalytic disavowal and lack. This creates a situation in which woman, in her historical role as consumer, also becomes the subject of her own commodification and ultimately the fetishized object. The performative aspect of fetish is further elucidated with regards to the spectacle, so providing context for the case study examples set out in Chapter 4.

Constriction, character, and effectuation are identified in Chapter 4 as a set of organising principals through which to explore the effect of fetish fashions on the body and identity. Much of this research is based on the author's interviews with the fetish community in Minnesota and provides a compelling discourse surrounding the physical and psychological appeal of the fetish garment. Corsets, stockings, gloves, boots, and skin suits are explored as to their sensual and erotic effects on the body through enhancement, pressure, and haptic allure. The character section of the chapter focuses on the roles undertaken by the dominatrix Mistress Jean Bardot and the various fictional identities that she adopts from nurse to avenger. Costume figures

prominently in this discussion. The infantalist 'Baby Dani' is another of Lunning's subjects and provides insight into a different set of costumes based in childhood clothing worn by the fetishist. While these case studies are interesting, they are far from comprehensive in their approach to BDSM/fetishist role-play and, for the most part, focus on heterosexual relationships. This omission is an oversight that is highlighted sharply to this reader by the more comprehensive approach to this aspect of the subject as presented in *Queer Style*. Objects of effectuation are identified to be costumes and accessories that are used directly on the body for purposes of sexual gratification. These include gloves, high-heel shoes, boots, and masks, and are discussed in relation to particular sexual practices. It is interesting here to compare the differing accounts of these objects and roles in the two books reviewed. *Fetish Style* draws attention to practices that are seen as subversive and degrading by 'vanilla' non-fetishists, whereas the discussion which occurs in Geczy's and Karaminas' *Queer Style* positions these practices as a mediation on roles of power and oppression in society.

Chapter 5, 'Fashion as Fetish,' covers the mainstream adaptation of fetish fashions through popular culture and high fashion. The corset is considered in relation to its appearance in the collections of Vivienne Westwood, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Viktor & Rolf, and Dolce & Gabbana, where it is noted that for the most part designers use these constrictive forms of dress not only to make reference to fashion history but also to S/M fantasies of tight-lacing and domination. The presence of masks in the contemporary performance of fashion on the catwalk is also explored, where the obfuscation of identity and power plays between submission and domination are conceptual concerns for a number of designers. Lunning traces the mask through the collections of Gareth Pugh, Junya Watanabe, Jun Takahashi, and Thierry Mugler, and while the references to fetishism, the perceived eroticism of the veil, and S/M fantasies are relevant to this analysis, the lack of discussion regarding the clear critique of beauty that these designers engage with makes this argument less convincing. Bondage as represented in the collections of Alexander McQueen and Jean-Paul Gaultier's appropriation of skinsuits are also explored. Contemporary fashion is rich with references to fetish practices and, to this reader, the possibility of extending this section to include a more diverse range of designers, materials, and forms was a missed opportunity. An interesting addition to this discussion is Lunning's research into the role of fetish fashion in Cosplay and Japanese subcultural tribes such as Lolitas, thus demonstrating how fetish wear has been appropriated for symbolic purposes beyond sexual practices.

The final chapter of *Fetish Style* concludes with speculation as to the future of fetish fashions, arguing that the appearance of these forms in mainstream culture has released non-normative sexual behaviours from the closet with popular culture increasingly embracing a multitude of desires and identities as a result of the postmodern turn. Given this premise, it is striking to this reader that so many identities and styles associated with fetish fashion are not explored in more depth, with the large majority of the book concerned with heterosexual practice that positions the dominatrix at the forefront of role play and over-emphasises S/M relationships within fetish culture. Despite this criticism, *Fetish Style* is by and large a rigorous and complex account of the myriad of forms and performances associated with fetish fashions contextually framed by significant theorists – Marx, Freud, William Pietz, Ulrich Lehmann, Judith Butler, and Laura Mulvey – which also commendably takes into account a range of case studies and examples from high fashion to street style and club culture. Lunning's interviews with members of the fetish community provide further original discourse to the subject.

Both *Fetish Style* and *Queer Style* are important scholarly additions to the growing literature on subcultural styles that have become a prevalent force within contemporary culture. In both accounts the reader is provided with important socio-cultural and theoretical context to the multiplicity of sexual and gender identities that are performed in popular culture, high

fashion, and street style. As the authors of both books note in their conclusions, the transgressive intent of many subcultural styles has become less and less potent as mainstream culture comes to absorb alternate identities, whether they are derived from queer or fetish subcultures. This transformation, of course, mirrors the very system of fashion within which these identities and styles operate, for if the fashion scholar has learned anything from this history, particularly of the late-eighteenth century onwards, it is that fashion thrives on the innovation of oppositional dress and its dissent from the conformist majority and thus constantly seeks change through the appropriation of deviant styles.

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**Jess Berry,** PhD, earned her doctorate in visual arts from Griffith University, Australia where she is currently a lecturer. Her research is concerned with the fashion city, fashion news media, and Australian fashion history. She is editor of the book *Fashion Capital: Style Economies, Sites and Cultures*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press (2012).

## *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*

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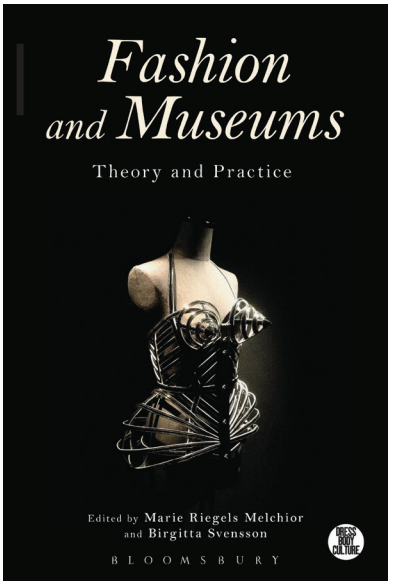


**Courtesy © Bloomsbury Publishing**

Michaela Boland, writing in *The Australian* newspaper on 17 February 2015, observed that those who oppose including fashion exhibitions in public art museums would be unhappy to learn that two major state galleries have recently reported record-setting figures for these sorts of shows. Boland's article reported the number of fashion exhibitions held in Australia since 2009 and the visitor numbers they attracted. Fifteen years into the twenty-first century, it is clear that large-scale social, political, and cultural changes are in progress, including in art museums, and these paradigmatic changes are affecting social structures, and relationship and value systems. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, writing in 2004, noted that museums are in charge of acquiring, caring for, and exhibiting those objects that symbolise a culture's deepest feelings and hopes. Moreover, in a time of radical change, such as the present, art museums are among the most vulnerable. As an 'expository' space, the museum has an ongoing engagement with authenticity and is an ideal location to store and display not only unique garments, but to show them as evidence of the social structures and value systems that shape our societies.

The modern museum as we know it originated in the Age of Enlightenment as an expression of reason and rational thought. It insinuated itself into position through grand narratives and what Jean-François Lyotard called 'meta-narratives,' which were understood outside the site (the museum) from which they were articulated. The museum, in developing a reliable picture of the world, has always employed observations, shaped through the process of classification and presentation to either construct or enhance new knowledge. Compared to its antecedents, the twenty-first century public museum has adopted a more democratic stance towards its visitors, which has allowed fashion into the museum, as opposed to merely textiles and historic dress displays of earlier eras.

Even today, many assumptions persist about the nature of fashion and the role and function of the public museum. While both engage in the commerce of the sign, their significations have similarities and differences. In both fields of contemporary cultural practice, audiences have come to appreciate the finished product, be it the fashioned garment or the exhibition. Readers of fashion magazines, those who attend fashion parades and catwalk spectacles, and those who visit fashion exhibitions in a public gallery or museum are often unaware of the complex stories, developments, and negotiations that lie behind these events.

The idea of the muse is a daunting proposition for both the fashion designer and the museum curator. Both creators are tethered to the related themes of influence, historical connections, and the genealogies of their respective creative and institutional endeavours. However, while they may be read as separate zones of inquiry, fashion and the museum exhibition, as opposed to fashion as museum – allow for fertile conversations to occur both aesthetically and intellectually.

The publication *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice,* edited by Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson, is an anthology of sociological essays that provide fertile conversations on these matters. The table of contents clearly arranges the twelve contributing essays into three interconnected sections: The Power of Fashion: When Museums Enter New Territory, Fashion Controversies: When Bodies Become Public, and In Practice. Like most anthologies the introduction, conclusion, and in this case, the conclusions to most of the essays, provide an accumulative contemporary and precise statement about the topic. Like many scholarly books about fashion, the failing of the publication is in the quality of its reproductions. While the black and white images are clear and for the most part well-sized, the addition of some colour plates would have enhanced the publication significantly. I realise colour reproductions are expensive, but when you consider the subject matter, a few coloured plates would be a welcome inclusion, especially as this publication is part of Bloomsbury Academic's *Dress Body Culture* series.

The majority of contributors to the book hold academic positions or were educated in the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Riegels Melchior and Svensson's editorial choices are well considered and balanced. Each essay reads as a case study engaging with various aspects of dress in fashion museology, and every essay problematises the notion, once stated by Claire Wilcox, that clothes are a type of shorthand for being human. Riegels Melchior's introduction posits the question of why has fashion become popular in museums. While there are both economic and marketing (that is, visibility) advantages, a more considered answer to the question could lie in the observation of Akiko Fukai, the director and chief curator of the Kyoto Costume Institute, that fashion in museums can only be understood when one considers the broader perception of what constitutes art, as well as a growing academic interest in fashion studies. Another legitimate consideration is the museum's potential to produce 'presence' within the context of interpreting meaning. The 'presence' of the garment or fashioned object located in its museum setting can be read is a similar way to Walter Benjamin's concept of 'auration,' the oneness of the object, its uniqueness. Privileging the object through the mechanism of exhibition display is what sets the museum experience for the visitor apart from other cultural institutions. The museum's liminality also provides a safe place for contemplation and examination.

Complimenting, and serving as a counter balance to the anthology's northern European emphasis, are contributions by Harold Koda and Jessica Glasscock, of The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rosemary Harden, a curator at the Fashion Museum, Bath; Jeffrey Horsley, an independent curator; and Julia Petrov, of the Alberta College of Art and Design in Canada. While the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has been exemplary in situating fashion's voice in the public museum, it is refreshing to gain insights into Scandinavian museums and their relation to fashion both historically and at the present time.

For example, we learn about the Swedish System, the mannequins developed by Nordiska Museet in 1933, which provided a new way to display fashion during the modern era. This simple yet effective display system reinforced the 'form following functionality' of modernism and has been widely employed in a variety of museums since its inception. Another example, folk dress and the interactive engagement of actualising Denmark's Amagermuseet's folk dress collection, made sense for a young audience engaged in this museum's public education programming for fashion museology, and transforms museum educational practices. In the Norwegian Museum of Science, Technology, and Medicine, fashion has been employed to offer visitors ways for understanding the history of industrialisation.

The chapters in this publication problematise, analyse, champion, and offer new ways to consider dress and fashion museology, their histories, and relevance. Today, exhibiting fashion

is part of a broad sociological narrative shaped by the democratisation of clothes culture and is understood by contextualising gender as well as global and local identities. *Fashion and the Museum: Theory and Practice* is a collection of sociological studies that will have appeal to students and researchers interested in dress history, fashion studies, museum studies, and curatorship.

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**Craig C. Douglas,** PhD, is an adjunct Senior Lecturer in Art History and Theory,' Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.

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# Briefly Noted Books

## *Art/Fashion in the 21st Century*

Mitchell Oakley Smith, Alison Kubler, eds. London: Thames & Hudson, 2013, 320 pages, illustrated with index, £32, ISBN: 978-0-50023-909-4.

Many observers and commentators have noted the growing interrelationships between the realms of contemporary fashion and art. This book, co-edited by the fashion journalist Mitchell Oakley Smith and the museum curator Alison Kubler, seeks to provide a comprehensive survey of the productive and fascinating encounters between fashion and art in the twenty-first century. Including many short interviews with artists, photographers, fashion designers, and art directors, *Art/Fashion in the 21st Century* confirms the increasingly blurred distinctions between these important types of creative expression and cultural representation in the contemporary world.

## *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century*

Adam Geczy. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 256 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £19.99, ISBN: 978-0-85785-426-1.

In his latest study, the artist and writer Adam Geczy argues that Orientalism has been a central influence in the development of modern fashion. From his consideration of the growth and importance of the cotton and textile industries, to the popularity in European culture of styles like chinoiserie, japonisme, masquerade, and bohemianism, Geczy traces the dynamic history of the exchange and transformation of forms and ideas from East to West over the past five centuries.

## *Glam Rock: Dandies in the Underworld*

Alwyn W. Turner. London: V&A Publishing, 2013, 160 pages, illustrated, £25, ISBN: 978-1-85177-764-8.

In the wake of the stylised mod and countercultural-oriented bohemian styles of the 1960s, the flamboyancy and theatricality of glam rock fashion had a significant influence on British popular culture in the early 1970s. This volume, drawing from examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection, surveys the Glam Rock movement, analysing its impact on fashion, film, and theatre during the period.

## *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*

Eric Silverman. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 288 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £21.99, ISBN: 978-1-84788-286-8.

In his book *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, the anthropologist Eric Silverman examines the semiotics of Jewish dress from the ancient period to the present. In his analysis of sartorial styles in the biblical, rabbinic, Hassidic, and diasporic contexts, Silverman shows how Jews and non-Jews alike have debated and legislated Jewish apparel in different places and periods in order to address issues like religious devotion, identity, and gender roles.

## *Kawaii! Japan's Culture of Cute*

Manami Okazaki and Geoff Johnson. Munich: Prestel Verlag/Random House, 2013, 224 pages, illustrated, 24.95€, ISBN: 978-3-79134-727-1.

Kawaii, the Japanese word for cute, refers to a youth subcultural aesthetic that has grown in popularity in Japan and throughout Asia. From the use of kawaii in manga and animé illustration, to its manifestation in Hello Kitty imagery and decoration, this book reviews the many forms of kawaii in Japanese popular culture. It also includes interviews with artists, illustrators, and fashion designers who have participated in the creation and development of this playful and increasingly influential style.

## *Fashion and Age: Dress, the Body, and Later Life*

Julia Twigg. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 184 pages, illustrated with index, £19.99, ISBN: 978-1-87488-695-8.

In modern fashion, age has often been a subtle yet powerful determinant of what styles are considered socially appropriate for a woman to wear. In her recent book *Age and Fashion: Dress, the Body and Later Life*, the sociologist Julia Twigg systematically examines links between dress and age, focusing in particular on recent changes in marketing and retailing for the 'grey market,' in which the traditional values for appropriate dress in later life have been blurred. Drawing on fashion theory, the sociology of age, and conceptions of material culture, Twigg effectively demonstrates how clothing has been used to transform culturally constituted notions of age in modern society.


**Courtesy © Bloomsbury Publishing**

## *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America*

Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moore, eds. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 320 pages, illustrated with index, £19.99, ISBN: 978-0-85785-335-6.

This collection brings together essays by noted international scholars who analyse contemporary Muslim dress practices in a variety of contexts and perspectives. In particular, the contributors in this volume discuss how these sartorial forms and practices are changing in an increasingly globalised and transnational world, underscoring the anxiety and innovation that has emerged as traditional forms and contemporary values migrate and interface in the world marketplace.

## *Great War Fashion: Tales from the History Wardrobe*

Lucy Aldington. Brimscombe Port: The History Press, 2014, 248 pages, illustrated with bibliography, £25, ISBN: 978-0-75249-348-0.

In her recent book, the costume historian Lucy Aldington examines the various articles of clothing and accessories that constituted the wardrobe of the everyday Edwardian woman before and during the First World War. With a commentary that includes original accounts from women from the period, discussing the importance of their clothing choices, Aldington explores the evolution of fashion and work wear during a period when the role of women in society was dramatically changing.

## *Fashioning the Nineteenth Century: Habits of Being 3*

Cristina Giorcelli and Paula Rabinowitz, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, 289 pages, illustrated, $25, ISBN: 978-0-81668-747-3.

In the third instalment of the four-volume *Habits of Being* series, the essays consider the development of the modern fashion system in nineteenth-century European and American culture. During this period, fashion and the consumption of fashionable goods began to move across class boundaries, from established elites to the emerging middle and working classes. The contributors of *Fashioning the Nineteenth Century* trace this movement during this transitional period by discussing themes like modernity and changing conceptions of beauty, gender, and power in the context of the production and consumption of fashion during this period.

## *Fashionable Encounters: Perspectives and Trends in Textile and Dress in the Early Modern Nordic World*

Tove Engelhardt Mathiassen, Marie-Louise Nosch, Maj Ringgaard, Kirsten Toftegaard, and Mikkel Venborg Pedersen. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014, illustrated with bibliography, £38, ISBN: 978-1-78297-382-9.

In this anthology of sixteen essays by a group of internationally known scholars, fashion and fashionability in the Nordic region (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, The Faroe Islands, and Greenland) is examined from 1500 to 1850. The contributors address topics like elite luxury consumption, the development of international trade, changes in christening and bridal wear, religious influences on perceptions of luxury, and the transformation of the garment industry and trade during this period.

## *Vintage Fashion and Couture: From Poiret to McQueen*

Kerry Taylor. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Press, 2013, 224 pages, illustrated with index, 39.95 CND, ISBN: 978-1-77085-262-4.

In her book, the former Sotheby's vintage fashion specialist Kerry Taylor surveys the major designers, styles, and fashion icons associated with twentieth- and twenty-first century haute couture. In addition to narrating an overview of fashion history during this period, Taylor provides valuable information about evaluating, collecting, and preserving vintage clothing and accessories.

## *Moroccan Fashion: Design, Tradition and Modernity*

M. Angela Jansen. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 160 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £64.99, ISBN: 978-1-47258-919-4.

In her recent book, the fashion researcher M. Angela Jansen explores the changing nature of the fashion industry and market in contemporary Morocco. Featuring interviews with three generations of Moroccan fashion designers, Jansen provides an analysis of the transformation of the country's fashion business, from its origins as a craft enterprise to a contemporary industry that has witnessed the creation of local designer labels, attempting to retain their aesthetic autonomy, given the influence of Western fashion.

## *The Tie: A Global History*

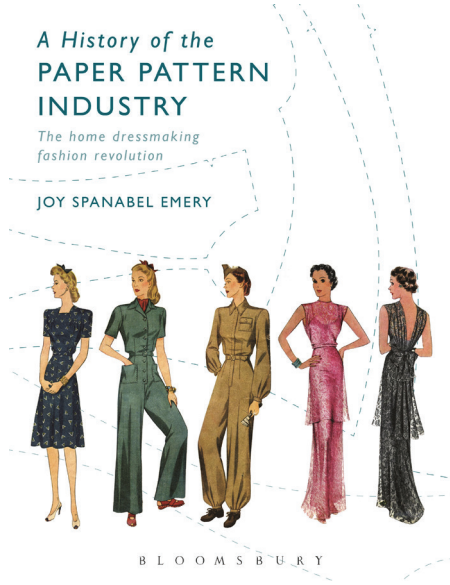
Anna Lisa Gulizia, ed. Zurich: Swiss National Museum/Scheidegger & Spiess, 2014, 280 pages, illustrated with bibliography, 58€, ISBN: 978-3-85881-758-7.

In this sumptuously illustrated and creatively designed volume, essays from international scholars as well as archival and contemporary images delineate the fascinating history of the necktie from historiographical, political, social, and aesthetic perspectives. Edited by the art historian Anna Lisa Gulizia, who recently curated an exhibition on the same subject at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich, this volume is also available in a German language version. In the end, *The Tie: A Global History* explores how larger cultural issues like gender, class structure, and identity can find expression in the smallest and subtlest of sartorial details.

## *A History of the Paper Pattern Industry: The Home Dressmaking Fashion Revolution*

Joy Spanabel Emery. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 272 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £55, ISBN: 978-0-85785-831-3.

In this fascinating and extensively illustrated study, the theatre specialist and curator Joy Spanabel Emery examines the history of sewing patterns from sixteenth-century tailoring manuals and eighteenth-century pattern pamphlets to the full-size packet patterns of the contemporary period. In addition to providing interesting insights into how homemade fashions were affected by social changes like technology, modern retailing, and marketing strategies with the rise of advertising, the author also provides nine complete patterns of vintage styles that provides readers with a visual guide for producing these garments.




**Courtesy © Bloomsbury Publishing**

## *The Beauty Trade: Youth, Gender, and Fashion Globalization*

Angela B. McCracken. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 224 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £41.99, ISBN: 978-0-19990-806-6.

In a globalised world, the business of beauty generates substantial revenue for corporations while it affects the daily practices of millions of consumers. Angela B. McCracken's latest book analyses, from a feminist perspective, the beauty economy and its influence on changing gender norms, particularly among young people. From both an entrepreneurial and a consumerist perspective, McCracken concludes that diversity and the desire for uniqueness counteract the homogenising tendencies of globalising economies in the areas of beauty products and practices.

## *Fashion on Television: Identity and Celebrity Culture*

Helen Warner. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 200 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £19.99, ISBN: 978-0-85785-441-4.

In her recent book, the media and cultural studies specialist Helen Warner examines the links between celebrity culture and fashion in the context of television programming. In particular, her study focuses on the ways by which television production and fashion marketing have worked in tandem to establish and modify consumer behaviour in terms of the politics of gender and identity in contemporary society.

## *Advertising Menswear: Masculinity and Fashion in British Media since 1945*

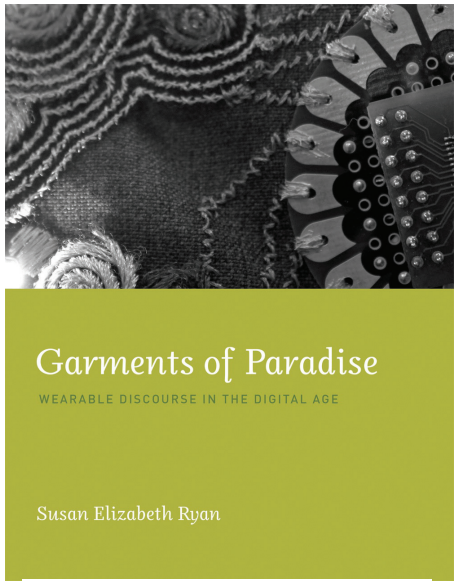
Paul Jobling. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 272 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, £65, ISBN: 978-1-47255-744-1.

In this book, the art and architecture researcher Paul Jobling examines the theme of the 'peacock male' in the golden age of British print advertising in the post-World War II period. His study focuses on advertising images of menswear and male fashion trends, with specific attention given to design practices as they relate to marketing strategies and an understanding of consumer behaviour during this period. Jobling's readings of these frequently stereotypical yet ultimately ambiguous images reveal fascinating insights into the ways by which these visual constructs negotiate between fashion and masculinity.

## *Garments of Paradise: Wearable Discourse in the Digital Age*

Susan Elizabeth Ryan. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014, 336 pages, illustrated with bibliography and index, $35, ISBN: 978-0-26202-744-1.

In *Garments of Paradise: Wearable Discourse in the Digital Age*, Susan Elizabeth Ryan, the art historian and new media specialist, considers the social and theoretical implications of wearable technology, an increasingly prevalent phenomenon. Proposing the concept of 'dress acts' as a hybrid type of social activity in which the behaviour of the wearer is intrinsically bound to the materiality of the garment, Ryan ultimately shows how wearable technology affords the possibility for new sorts of interpersonal communication in the digital age.

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## *Global Textile Encounters*

Marie-Louise Nosch, Zhao Feng, and Lotika Varadarajan, eds. Oxford: Oxbow Press, 2014, 256 pages, illustrated, £12, ISBN: 978-1-78297-735-3.

In this anthology of essays, the latest volume published in Oxbow's Ancient Textile series, the authors take the textile cultures of China, India, and Europe as a point of departure for the analysis of the various and diverse encounters and exchanges between these important centres of textile production, from antiquity to the present. The editors have organised thirty-three original and incisive contributions from eminent international scholars in order to explore issues like cultural hybridity, globalisation, and the appropriation of otherness in the fashion system.