

Summary

Dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of fashion from an academic perspective, the quarterly journal *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* views fashion as a cultural phenomenon, offering the reader a wide range of articles by leading Western and Russian specialists, as well as classical texts on fashion theory. From the history of dress and design to body practices; from the work of well-known designers to issues around consumption in fashion; from beauty and the fashionable figure through the ages to fashion journalism, fashion and PR, fashion and city life, art and fashion, fashion and photography — *Fashion Theory* covers it all.

Our latest issue turns to escapist dress strategies in diverse cultural contexts, throughout the ages.

The Victorian Fancy Dress Ball, 1870–1900 by **Rebecca N. Mitchell**. While most scholars agree that the Victorian fancy dress ball differs fundamentally from its eighteenth-century predecessor — the masquerade — few studies detail the nature of those differences. This article suggests that

central to this shift was the Victorian embrace of self-revelation in fancy dress, as opposed to disguise or antithesis. Late Victorian fancy dress allowed participants to negotiate rather than to escape their self-presentation and their milieu: revealing aspects of their character (including, for men, the novelty of sartorial pleasure) by choosing costumes from a prescribed set of identifiable roles and tropes, and by choosing costumes that directly engaged with issues of their day. Considering mass-market guidebooks and a range of contemporary popular works, this article explores the representational strategies of late nineteenth-century fancy dress, including abstract and overtly gendered costumes.

We Need to Talk About Fancy Dress: Connections (and Complications) Between the Catwalk and Fancy Dress Costume by **Benjamin Linley Wild**.

Many fashion designers repudiate the influence of fancy dress within their work. This marginalization likely reflects a socialized attitude that fancy dress is a short-lived, skill-less and superficial spectacle that lacks credibility. Many scholars and fashion commentators concur. They argue that this sartorial form and the circumstances in which it is worn are not affective, that it does not influence how wearers perceive themselves and others, and thereby lacks a fundamental characteristic of most clothing. Arguing that fancy dress is affective, this article reappraises the connections between dressing up and fashion design. It summarizes, first, the long-standing interplay between fancy dress and contemporary vogues. Second, the article considers the presence of non-normative fashions on the modern catwalk. Two suggestions are made to further academic discussion. First, recent discussions about 'critical' and 'experimental' fashions can become more globally and culturally relevant if they are expanded to include fancy dress costume. Second, fancy dress costume can be more usefully understood, and readily incorporated within academic studies, if it is acknowledged that this term is not unidimensional and encompasses a variety of garments, reflecting the diverse motivations of people who choose to dress up. The article uses recent clothing collections as case studies.

Queen Victoria's Banarasi Brocade: A Transcultural Approach to Royal Fashion by **Sarah J. Hodge**.

The fancy-dress costume worn by Queen Victoria (1819–1901) to her Stuart Ball in 1851 is an outlier amongst her surviving wardrobe. As an object of fancy dress, it combines the fashions of the mid-nineteenth century with those of the 1660 to produce a garment that is both fashionable and highly symbolic. While previous scholars and exhibition curators have been most interested in the dress as a window into Queen Victoria's fashionable style and entertainments at Buckingham Palace, the materiality of

the dress tells a deeper story. Made in the same year as the Great Exhibition, from the products of British colonial networks and structures, this dress is reflective of far more than a young woman's fanciful tastes. The materials used firmly tied it to the mid-nineteenth century, particular with the inclusion of an Indian Banaras Brocade silk underskirt. It was the costume of a queen, worn to a highly publicized event. Reconsidering the costume as a transcultural garment broadens its significance and symbolism, reframing analysis of this costume to consider the recontextualization of Indian fabric and within this British royal fashion object.

Tatiana Bakina contributes *Fashionable Technicolor Dreams: Fashion and Escapism in Early 1940s Hollywood Colour Musicals*. In the early 1940s, Hollywood movie musicals made in glorious Technicolor provided a welcome distraction for war-weary audiences. Their bright song and dance scenes were in striking contrast to the black and white world of film noir which previously dominated American cinema, and injected a shot of vital colour into the lives of viewers. Anxiously waiting for World War Two to end, Americans naturally yearned for pastimes to help them forget their troubles and cares. The movie musicals carefully constructed an atmosphere of escapism using a variety of methods: musical showstoppers, dream and fantasy scenes transporting viewers to faraway places, action set in past, calmer days, ample details arousing nostalgia for the "good old times". The characters' costumes also had an important part to play in this process. In what ways was dress used to build up the logic of escapism? And how did contemporary fashion trends and the fashion industry help Hollywood costume designers create memorable looks for their characters? These are some of the questions forming the focus of Bakina's paper.

Yuchen Guo's *The Esthetics of Cosplay* aims to investigate cosplay — an activity in which participants wear costumes to portray a fictional character. Firstly, I conceptually distinguish cosplay from onstage acting, child pretend play, and similar cases. I argue that cosplay is based on self-oriented perspective-taking and is more committed to the character than pretend play but less committed than onstage acting. Subsequently, I argue that cosplay is a type of hybrid art or a hybrid of art forms — a combination of photography, dramatic acting, and fashion performance.

Rosemary Thurman offers *The Impulse of "-Core" Aesthetics: A Step Away from the Fashion System*. In this paper, Thurman turns to "-core" aesthetics — ultra-fast trends which have been a topic of constant discussion in the industry over the last few years. The author defines "-cores" as constructors of style, drawing inspiration from nostalgia for particular eras, thematic communities, cultural events or figures. The paper is based on the findings of a group study which enabled Thurman to gain a deeper

understanding of these processes and their heterogeneous nature in real time, and to analyse shifts in the fashionable discourse which they produced. Closer examination of the “-cores” suggests that they are not merely means of self-expression and a form of escapism, but signs of more complex processes involving fragmentation of the field of fashion and changes in its entire system. A convenient means of distancing oneself from accepted fashion institutions, “-core” aesthetics show a lack of trust in traditional opinion leaders and the inefficiency of existing trend generation processes.

The **Body** section is devoted to the body in the digital space.

In *Fluid Bodies and Matter in Digital Fashion*, Oksana Pertel dives into how visual features in digital images such as flowing, amorphous matter, frequent use of water and other liquids, melting and running substances and morphing shapes can be used to describe social, economic and cultural processes in digital fashion. Thus, in this paper, Pertel uses analysis of content through form as a methodological tool. For her theoretical framework, the author combines the concepts of “flow” and “immediacy”, developed by critical theory scholar Anna Kornbluh (Kornbluh, 2024) and new media experts Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (Bolter, Grusin 1999). The author’s hypothesis is that the fluid nature of digital images supports the concepts of “flow” and “immediacy”. “Immediacy” is a feature both of the cultural logic of late capitalism, and of the technological foundation of the media environment in which this logic unfolds. The idea of “flow” enabled the emergence of general concepts such as “bodyflow” and “fluid matter” which help understand processes of further transformation of the body and matter by digital fashion tools.

Restructuring Situated Bodily Practices: Understanding the Relationship of Dress, Body, and Identity in Virtual Dressing Practice by **Jin Joo Ma**.

As the fashion industry increasingly explores virtual worlds to expand product ranges, understanding users’ perceptions and behaviors in relation to their avatars, selves, and the overall virtual fashion culture is becoming even more important. This study investigates virtual dressing practices by applying the triad of dress, body, and identity explored in conventional dressing practices. Utilizing the key components of practice theories — material, competence, and meaning — this research employs autoethnography to delve into the author’s personal experiences and reflections on virtual dressing practices. It examines how avatars, as the dressed body, function as both a private embodiment and a public representation within virtual worlds, comparing these aspects to those in the offline world. The findings suggest that while virtual dressing practices uphold the triad’s dynamics, the materiality, competences, and cultural

meanings differ markedly. Furthermore, a user's situatedness can profoundly affect their dressing practices and perceptions in virtual life. Grounded in practice theories and an autoethnographic approach, this study's methodological framework provides a nuanced and relatable understanding of virtual fashion, transitioning from the broader concept of situated bodily practices to a more defined, embodied practice that is shaping a new facet of fashion practices.

Culture section is focused on the territories of fashion and opens with *Locational Fashion Cultures* by **Katrina Sark**.

This article employs a methodology of locational fashion cultures, which is still underdefined and underutilized in Fashion Studies, from the interdisciplinary intersections of cultural analysis, cultural history, cultural and media representations of fashion in urban contexts, to help us understand fashion beyond its economic value and systems. As case studies and examples of this methodology, this article outlines four books from my Urban Chic book series (published by Intellect) that examine Berlin, Vienna, Montreal, and Copenhagen cultures through the lens of fashion. The cities in these books are not often considered canonical fashion capitals like Paris, London, and New York, but each has unique and vibrant fashion cultures. By examining their respective fashion cultures, we can investigate the ways in which fashion can be re-inscribed with cultural values independent from its material or trend-driven obsolescence. The article also provides a summary of the various ways in which fashion cultures and fashion cities have been defined and described by fashion scholars to date. It concludes with some suggestions and questions that may be posed in order to analyze and highlight locational fashion cultures.

Fashioning Change: Fashion Activism and Its Outcomes on Local Communities by **Francesco Mazzarella & Sandy Black** reports on a research project aimed at investigating ways in which fashion activism and making can be used to catalyze positive socio-economic change and activate legacies within a local community. The project focused on a neighborhood in London with a previously strong industrial profile in fashion and textiles, and now challenged by concerns regarding deprived youth, skills shortage, decline in local manufacturing, and high unemployment rates. To tackle such challenges, this participatory action research project comprised a range of fashion activism interventions. The project was developed through a partnership between a Higher Education Institution and local government and contributed to activating change from within the system. The approach adopted is defined as "middle-up-down" as it bridges bottom-up initiatives activated by grassroots communities with top-down services delivered by

support organizations. The outcomes of the project are discussed in relation to the key themes emerging from the project evaluation: sustainability awareness, empowerment and skills development, career pathways, and community engagement. In demonstrating how a “quiet” form of activism can be used as an embedded and situated approach to co-designing meaningful social innovations within the local community, the paper also outlines the limitations of the project and recommendations for future work.

Noemí Pereira-Ares contributes *Clothescapes of Refugeehood: Emma Lee’s The Significance of a Dress* (2020). Clothing the body is a human activity par excellence and clothes, insofar as they are an embodied everyday practice experienced by all cultures, tend to migrate with their owners. Clothes offer protection, operate between the self and others, and might also function as mementoes connecting past, present, and future. Attentive to the ways in which clothes affect and are affected by the body, authors writing about contemporary refugeeism have concocted powerful images of the (un)clothed body to render the depersonalization to which refugees are often subjected, the uncertainties surrounding their condition, and how material culture objects might help them preserve a sense of self-continuity. Engaging intertextually and ekphrastically with a wide range of media and art forms, Emma Lee’s *The Significance of a Dress* (2020) reimagines the narratives embedded in those tex(tile)s moving across borders. Focusing on those poems centered on refugeehood, this article seeks to examine how Lee uses clothing as a catalyst for exploring issues of identity loss, vulnerability and resilience, whilst illuminating the human dimension so often erased in mass media reports on refugeeism. The analysis will be prefaced by a discussion on the nexus between clothing, mobility and dispossession, where the concept of “clothescapes” is introduced as an analytical tool to theorize how individuals, clothes and different environments interact.

Marion Real, Iban Lizarralde & Benjamin Tyl offer *Exploring Local Business Model Development for Regional Circular Textile Transition in France*. From a cosmopolitan localism perspective, the circular economy could be described as a web of smaller circular economies where the core development is situated in local areas, like cities, or regions, with the active participation of territorial stakeholders. The objective of this research is to explore the development of local business model niches within the scope of circular textiles and fashion, including social enterprises. The research is based on the analysis of a specific territory, the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region in France, where participative observations at different scales (local, regional and interregional) have permitted an in-depth comparison of four local social enterprise business models. The study defends the active role of social entrepreneurs in supporting circular transitions into regions and highlights

the strong diversity of challenges they faced during the design of local business models, both at a technological, social and policy level.

Elaine Webster contributes *Symbolic Consumption: Dressing for Real and Imagined Space*. The boudoir cap had a lifespan of about fifty years, arising as a distinct dress expression in the last decades of the nineteenth century, encompassing an era of radical change in the social roles and expectations of women in New Zealand. During this time evolving styles reflected these variations, and can be understood both as expressions of the culture that created them and also as tools in the negotiation of new realities. The boudoir cap was worn by women in the boudoir, a lady's private space within the home, to which only intimates were admitted. The actual boudoir was a luxury enjoyed by only a minority of Dunedin women, but boudoir caps were worn by many women, so that through the boudoir cap the concept of the boudoir was available to all as symbolic consumption. Originating in the tradition of covering the hair, the caps were strongly associated with the conventions of modesty and control of sexuality. The boudoir cap was instrumental in the construction of the feminine ideal, and reflects changes in this ideal over time. This paper studies the material culture of the boudoir caps in the Otago Museum collection.

Zemfira Salamova's *The Vogue App as Digital Space: A "Fashionable" Social Network?* takes a look at the Vogue application, which the fashion magazine unveiled in September 2024. The app's development was part of a broader process of digitization in fashion media, widely seen since the late 1990s, and may also be examined in the context of relationships between long-standing publications and social media platforms. At first glance, the app's digital space is not unlike the interface of a social network. The affordances it offers the user, however, are relatively limited, and horizontal communication, virtually absent. Salamova's paper presents an in-depth study of the position offered to the user by the Vogue app. Analysing the digital space's structure and language, the author reconstructs the particular user experience shaped by the app's designers.

Juha Park & Jaehoon Chun's *Evolution of Fashion as Play in the Digital Space* focuses on the phenomenon in which fashion functions as play in digital media. It delves deeper than fashion's functional purposes of decoration or physical protection and examines its emergence as an independent tool for creating play culture. This article discusses the four characteristics of play in the context of the digital space — free activity, departure from space-time, pretending, and order — then applies each characteristic based on the marketing strategies of fashion brands and social media culture. These representative topics include the pretending multi-persona, a fashion meme based on social media, voluntary play in a brand platform,

and sensory expansion and departure from space–time through brand experience. This article highlights contemporary fashion as a tool for play that also functions to satisfy one’s high-order desires, such as self-expression, with digitalized clothing, having fun and getting extended sensation with a brand in any time or space, and adding a layer of emotion through social interaction in digital space. This suggests that fashion, in itself an aesthetic object in everyday life, can enhance the characteristics and values of play, when applied in the digital space.

Rosa Crepax & Morchen Liu offer *Affective Fashion Trends: Aesthetic and Digital Affects from Nostalgia to AR*. Responding the digitalization of the fashion industry, technological innovation, the acceleration of trends, the article identifies a tendency toward affect and discusses the potential of affective fashion trends. Selected cases are examined: from the pandemic-born nostalgia aesthetic on TikTok, and ASMR videos, to digital fashion and the use of augmented reality to push the boundaries between human body and adornment. Through an analysis grounded in a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework, we identify a shift in the cultural Zeitgeist toward emotions, feelings, sensations, and bodily experience. We stress the need for an affective, rather than purely visual perspective on aesthetics and argue for the potential of technology as a vehicle for affect in fashion and popular culture more broadly.

Olga Gurova presents *Teaching Sustainable Dress Consumption in Finland*. The author looks at the role of schools and teachers in introducing children and young people to sustainable dress consumption practices. Gurova treats teaching sustainable consumption as a form of activism. In this paper, she analyses the teaching of sustainable consumption, using Finland as a case study. A leading country in terms of sustainable development, Finland is nonetheless facing overconsumption. The study is based on interviews with teachers of a range of subjects, primarily domestic science and home economics. The author shows that although curricula are ostensibly oriented towards sustainable development, practical skills related to dress such as sewing, darning and mending are disappearing from the education process and losing their importance, which creates problems for sustainability. In **Focus** column we turn to the project *Who is fashionable here?* which was held by HSE Design School and Samokat company in autumn-winter 2024.

In this issue’s **Events** section, **Michal Vaníček** contributes his review of ‘Viktor&Rolf: Fashion Statements’ at Kunsthalle Munchen, Germany (February 23rd–October 6th, 2024).

Laura Beltrán-Rubio offer her thoughts on ‘Sargent and Fashion’ at Tate Britain, London (February 22–July 7, 2024).



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