

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.

In this issue we look at the touch and the tactile and open it with **Roger Smith's** *An Essay on Touch*.

Touch and sensed movement are part of the history and culture of clothing. Regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic have drawn attention to experience of physical distance in conditions where, previously, closeness and touching was the norm. This greatly accelerates changes

digital technology is bringing in human subjectivity. In response, the paper is an exploratory essay on the nature and changing culture of the sense of touch. Touch is in fact a multiple sense, with a long history bound up with the very variable social processes by which people regulate their relations with each other. The touch sense(s) is also bound up in deep-lying ways with people's feel for reality: touching, perhaps because it is present before birth, appears fundamental to our notion of being a self in the world. This is reflected in language, in which there are many figures of speech about touching and moving (e.g., I grasp the problem; she gave a touching speech; a political movement). If so, this raises questions about the consequences of establishing relations — even of buying clothes online — without touching.

Anna Furse's paper *Staying in Touch* — that draws from and elaborates on a 2011 chapter 'Being Touched'¹ — explores the touch sense today in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, from its cultural, physical, social, psychological affects and meanings as well as the semantics of the term itself in the English language and what this reveals. If as Classen proposes, touch might be the "hungriest sense of post modernity" (Classen, 2005, p.2) in normal society, during the pandemic this reached levels of global famine. Introducing Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on 'haptic' space and how they comprehend space as 'smooth' or 'striated'², I use their metaphors to compare and contrast two diametrically differing dance forms; classical ballet and Contact Improvisation (CI). The latter opens to discussion of Asian martial art forms that influenced the development of CI. I conclude with my central purpose in this piece: to suggest that touch, when read from an interdisciplinary perspective, might register as a sense with far-reaching significance beyond either its physiological or psychological connotations; and when practised professionally offers an alternative social model to hierarchical power relationships on the one hand, and might counter the undermining affect of a technological capitalist society on individual experience.

Hans Rindisbacher offers his paper *The Mediation of Perception: Futures of Touch: Sex, Tenderness, Law*.

The sense of touch is a bit of a mess. It does not circumscribe a clearly delimited sensory space or range of objects but provides a grasp of their surface characteristics, shapes, as well as non-permanent features like wetness or dryness, temperature, or internal movement (vibration). Touch creates a "sense of space" and orientation in the environment via gravity; movement and localization are further dimensions often addressed

through the tactile and so is pain, another crucial dimension of touch as embodiment — and its opposite, pleasure.

Theorized largely via E. Canetti, touch appears in this article as the materialization of vision at the point of impact. It is where the gaze hits and power, in its unmediated form, lands on the body. After an introductory overview of some history of the senses and the recent sensory turn, the article examines the tactile in three films through, and as, forms of embodiment. They are the sci-fi romantic comedy *Her* (dir. Spike Jonze, 2013 USA), the romance-drama *Phantom Thread* (dir. Paul Thomas Anderson, 2017 USA), and the drama *The Man who Sold His Skin* (dir. Kaouther Ben Hania, USA 2021). In the context of our touch-averse Covid-19 present, these films speak to the fear of a loss of the tactile, above all, but also of a deep curiosity of what's to come in the multidimensional cross-modal world of a future where physical human interaction is ever more digitized and mediated.

Sara Chong Kwan's paper *The Ambient Gaze: Sensory Atmosphere and the Dressed Body* re-considers, or rather complicates the notion of 'the gaze' in relation to the dressed body from a phenomenological and sensory perspective. It challenges conventional approaches to 'male gaze' theory that tend to overstate the power of the gaze and the importance of appearance in forming dressed experience for the wearer. It argues that all sensory dimensions contribute to an overall 'atmosphere' or multi-sensory surround for the body. This notion of 'atmosphere' attends more holistically to the way clothing and the body mingle, in movement, through everyday life. In this context, atmosphere is constituted through appearance, movement, texture and touch, aromas and sounds, deportment, gestures and more intangible sensory aspects such as the wearer's attitude, emotional mood, memories and imagination.

This research draws upon wearers' own accounts of the embodied and haptic sensory experience of everyday dress. These accounts were collected as part of my doctoral study into sensory everyday dress in a contemporary UK context. When dressed the wearer is seen and aware of being seen, but simultaneously feels the touch and movement of dress upon the body and is similarly sensitive to their scent and sound.

Feminist continental philosophy also provides an framework to understanding dressed experience that challenges the western hierarchy of the senses in which the ocular is designated as the 'higher' sense. It provides a means to re-address and prioritise the role of touch in dressed experience and to give voice to the wearer's embodied and sensory experience, which has traditionally been marginalised within fashion and dress

studies. Touch is positioned, along with other non-visual senses as central to the wearer's embodied experience and the way in which they make meaning from their dress practices. The importance of haptic aspects of clothing in both restricting and liberating the social body and the role of sensuous please in enabling the wearer to know — and then — potentially to transform — the way in which they position themselves in, and negotiate through, social life is demonstrated through the empirical examples.

This research addresses the complexities of the role of dress in everyday life, moves away from the notion of the dressed body as primarily an object to be gazed upon and towards an appreciation of the embodied and dressed self as a meaningful and active subject.

Ellen Sampson's paper *The body beyond the body: clothing archives, touch, and the body schema* explores sensory and material experiences of clothing archives; examining the multiple modes and displacements of touch which mediate our relationships with and experience of archival garments. Drawing on practice-based research undertaken at the costume institute of the Metropolitan Museum of art, it asks how these differing material and sensory engagements shape our understandings of these spaces and the objects the contain.

Drawing on the work of Schilder and Merleau-Ponty it positions garments in archives as distributed parts of the body schema, objects which remain part of wearer even when the body is gone from them. In applying ideas of the body schema to objects away from the body, it ask what role touching, looking and imagination play in our encounters with garments that cannot and will not be worn: garments with which we are prevented from engaging with through our usual sensory means.

Else Skjold contributes her paper *Can we start talking about touch, please? — Reflections on aspects of tactility and sensory experience in the light of the corona pandemic*.

Why is touch important? For long, the fashion industry has been driving on seasonal- and trendbased looks, in an increasingly online universe. And no less so during the corona lockdowns where it was simply not possible to purchase garments in physical shops. It is well-documented from e.g. wardrobe research how important our senses are when we dress, and how problematic it is to reduce the wearing of garments to a mere visual phenomenon rather than a full-body, sensoric experience.

Having studied fur in a five-year period from 2014-2019, the author here reflects on the paradox that fur is an area where touch is a core trait that has got somewhat lost at many levels in the general fashion industry

of today. Placing this within the sustainability debate, this paper will address how fur is at the same time emblematic of industrialised agriculture and thereby the anthropocene world-view that needs to change, but also carries elements that is worth reflecting upon in the green transition that is starting to happen. The paper takes its departure in situated field work of a full research team led by the author (Skjold et al, 2018/Skjold 2019).

Barbara Brownie contributes *Clothing in the Void: Spacewear and the separation of dress from body in microgravity*.

The experience of weightlessness can be characterised as ungroundedness. The weightless body is suspended in a void, out of touch with any stabilizing ground or object. This sensation extends to clothing, which is separated from the body in microgravity. While on Earth, the weight of clothing on skin is a constant reminder of gravitational forces, equally, in space, the absence of the sensation of cloth against skin is a reminder that the body is located in an extra-terrestrial environment in which the behaviours and sensations of everyday objects are defamiliarized. This article considers the clothed body in the different gravitational conditions of normogravity and microgravity, and the role that is played by the touch of cloth on skin, or the absence of that touch, in differentiating the experiences of gravitational environments. While on Earth we may take for granted the touch of cloth against our skin, during spaceflight, touch is a novelty, and must be actively sought out.

Maud Lannen and **Roger Smith** offer their experimental piece (*Re*) *thinking dance reflections on touch, sharing and meeting during the pandemic or a conversation that otherwise wouldn't have been*.

On 3rd March 2021, artist and researcher Maud Lannen presented her PhD project 'Per-forming the haptic maternal' to international interdisciplinary research laboratory PeARL (Performance and Research Lab). During Q&A, she was met with silence. This event opened-up questions about Zoom technology, English as the all-encompassing, blanket medium for communicating across borders, about the specific language of disciplines and about other possible barriers within and outside our control which might have hindered engagement and/or understanding that evening. The event also unexpectedly prompted Roger Smith, a historian of psychology and participant in PeARL, to write to Maud and Maud to respond. The reciprocated gesture turned into electronic correspondence which continues to this day — a conversation on Zoom, remoteness, absence and aesthetics. The conversation lets our minds wonder and wander on the digital page. It attempts questions and new ways of thinking about what it means to

be present, to meet and to share in the context of PeARL, of dance and beyond, ultimately conversing on what touch is and can be in a way that would have been mostly *ungraspable* prior to Covid-19.

This is a conversation and interaction between a scholar (Roger is also amateur dancer and novelist) and an artist/choreographer-researcher. Both have written on touch, albeit their knowledge belongs to different traditions. The PeARL conference (June 2021) brought the opportunity for an art experiment: to (re)compose, extend, improvise and choreograph our email notes into reflexive sound work as dance and performance; to experiment with sharing and meeting differently. This special edition on ‘Touch’ for the *Russian Fashion Theory* journal, opens-up a new opportunity: to translate our video performance piece for the conference into performance or choreography writing; to experiment, once again, with sharing and meeting differently.

Yeseung Lee contributes *The Textilesphere: The Threshold of Everyday Contacts*.

A sense of displacement pervades contemporary life, with the global crisis of forced migration, increasingly modular and distributed families, and remote social interactions replacing familiar ways of being in a space with others. This sentiment, together with the widening application of highly advanced textiles in many areas of the built environment, calls for an appraisal of textiles in relation to notions of home and belonging. Drawing on a range of academic and practitioner literature, brought together under “relational approaches,” this essay puts forward the “textile-sphere” as a new ontological category and a critical device for textiles thinking within this context of societal and technological changes. The textile-sphere is an affective spatiality generated by physical wear as indexical traces of everyday life, emphasizing sustained physical contact as an essential of home. It suggests a new way of thinking about textiles which transcends 2D–3D, human–nonhuman, and material–immaterial dichotomies, focusing, instead, on the flexible relations between surfaces. The textile-sphere is a useful tool for exploring the complexity of contemporary spatiality in relation to various physical and virtual surfaces, and the role textiles can play in interrogating this complexity, letting us contemplate what it means to be “in touch,” to be home.

Marilyn Delong, Juanjuan Wu and Juyeon Park offer *Tactile Response and Shifting Touch Preference*.

Tactile response is explored through recall of subjects for fabric preferences. Shifts in touch preference may occur in one’s experience and

require bringing the touch experience to one's awareness. To investigate such shifts in preference, subjects who were studying to be designers taking an introductory design course were asked in an open-ended format to describe fabrics they liked to touch. Responses from 123 subjects were analyzed and the three most frequently listed properties they liked to touch were soft, smooth, and warm. Wool was listed by 41 percent as a fabric they disliked touching. Fabrics associated with shifting touch preferences from dislike to like included wool and cotton. Reasons subjects initially disliked a fabric were specific and included attributes of scratchy, rough, and itchy. Fabric combinations that often pleased included soft with warm and smooth with warm. When subjects reported initially liking or disliking a fabric the shift in preference often occurred because of a change in repeated exposure, focus on some features, discovery of new features or new associated experiences. Touch preference shifts were affected by how the fabric would feel on the body, contextual surroundings, and experiences with family. Such an investigation of tactile response and touch preference helps a designer to think about how to optimize user satisfaction with textile products.

Steve Swindells and **Kevin Almond** contribute *Reflections on Sculptural Thinking in Fashion*.

What does it mean to think sculpturally in fashion practice? This paper explores some of the philosophical and practical aspects of three-dimensional thinking in fashion design; it does this by engaging with theories, concepts and philosophies related to thought and the experience of creating three-dimensional artifacts, which are common to both sculpture and fashion. Central to this relationship is the employment of the senses with respect to perception and cognition. Of particular interest is the sense of touch, and how sensory experience encounters notions of empathy and mimicry in a phenomenological encounter with others: whether animate or inanimate. The research emerged through conversations between a fashion designer, Kevin Almond, and a contemporary artist, Stephen Swindells. The sensibility of the paper, and much of the analysis and debates, thus explore these issues from a creative practitioner's perspective. A conceptual current running through the conversation, and subsequently the paper, touched upon whether following a line of thought becomes analogous to visually and mentally tracing a human form in a psychological space—and what is the significance for fashion of the interrelationships between sculptural thinking and phenomenological encounters with others within urban environments.

Louana Aladjem and **Elizabeth Fischer** contribute their paper *The haptics of fashion and inclusivity in Louana Aladjem's BA degree collection*3.

The aim of Louana Aladjem's fashion practice is to provide a sensory experience of dress in a world flooded by images of clothing. Wearing clothes is an embodied experience. Two issues lie at the core of Aladjem's degree collection: How can we share and communicate fashion with other means than visual media? How can fashion and fashion platforms reach out to different audiences with physical abilities considered outside the norm?

Online sales platforms and social media have given increasing importance to fashion as image. This dematerialisation of dress flattens all surfaces and materials, the screens impart a uniform sheen to fashion. The tactile experience of clothing is greatly reduced — as is our haptic memory of materials. Laura U. Marks has coined the notion of «haptic visibility»⁴ i.e. the fact that visual experience is intimately linked with the tactile or haptic experience resulting from the mix of personal learning and cultural background: our “sensory education” enables an image to evoke tactile sensations. Blind persons develop a specific “sensory education” through a heightened sense of touch, smell and hearing. Their distinctive way of experiencing and interacting with the surrounding world can help us reconsider our visually driven way of consuming and appreciating objects. In Aladjem's research process, blindness and sight impairment aren't considered a disability. Instead, they become a means of experiencing things differently, following E. Manning's theory, which celebrates the diversity of bodies highlighting what they are able to do rather than assuming that they are deficient, and the how they are subtly attuned to their surroundings⁵.

Before designing the BA degree fashion collection, interviews were conducted with several blind persons about their experience of shopping and wearing clothes. The videos of the Canadian Molly Burke, a 27-year old visually impaired woman who calls herself a “blind fashion lover” and discusses her relationship to fashion⁶ were analysed as well. The main difficulties encountered by the visually impaired in purchasing and wearing of clothes are:

- Labels cannot be read and aren't easily accessible, resulting in lack of information about the material, it's origin and care, as well as size;
- Impossibility of recognising patterns, colours and flat embellishments without an audio description;
- Fastenings are impractical, uncomfortable and difficult to use, wrongly placed on the items of clothing, awkward to reach and fasten without help;

- Shops are not geared to answer the needs of visually or physically impaired persons, the clothing racks aren't easily accessible;
- The lack of detailed description on e-commerce platforms leads to many disappointments on receiving the merchandise.

These findings provided the key points in designing a fashion collection encompassing the needs of a more diverse audience. The goal was to create a collection that would also appeal to consumers that were not visually impaired. This meant reconsidering not only the clothing in itself, but also the communication around the collection. Aladjem had to resolve both issues to create a *tangible* dialogue between sight and touch, achieving a form of “haptic visuality” that would speak to all audiences, to overlap sensations and senses and find the crossroads between the pleasure of seeing and the seductiveness of touching. It was also essential for Aladjem to stay true to her identity and design language in the fore, so as to establish a bridge between consumer needs and her stylistic choices and signature as a fashion designer. The collection is not supposed to visibly highlight the fact that it is made with a particular population — considered as disabled — in mind. On the contrary, it purposely integrates the needs of a more diverse population in a positive and aesthetic way.

In Focus column reflects upon the format of PhD by Practice and Practice as Research methodology and presents **Claire A. Baker's** paper *Babushka as Icon — Practice as Research and the Importance of the Sketchbook*.

As a textile practitioner and researcher, through a co-design methodology which draws on auto-ethnography, Claire investigates the embroidery practices of an obsolescent community — the Babushkas of Chernobyl. By contemporising their artefactual textile heritage their voices can be heard and their stitched legacy preserved. New audiences are encouraged to respond to and engage with the resulting artworks and new narratives.

This extended photo essay is a personal reflection on the links between theory, fieldwork and practice, how each informs the other and is of equal importance. Its focus is a body of work that has developed through the process of making and thinking through craft. Artworks reflect the depth of the artist's relationships with the Babushkas and how she reconnected with them emotionally through making, during the long period of separation enforced by a global pandemic.

A reflective approach is evidenced by extracts from a sketchbook, an illustrated rationale of Claire's thought process showing how her making links to both primary and secondary research. Reflective practice

incorporating tacit knowledge has its own rigour and validity and the sketchbook acts as a record of this.

‘The manner in which practice-led researchers typically ‘code’ their research practice is via documentation and evidentiary trails that chart the trajectory from research question to finished practice-led research artwork output’ (Stapleton cited in Green 2007, p. 10)

Through the act of making, feeling and manipulating the materials, seeing what happens and what you can do, the creating of an artefact becomes magical. You are awarded intense thinking time, so enjoyable not to be noticed until, you are suddenly aware of a million different things to try.

Baker makes work with the Babushkas, about them, of them and for them. Craft is a way of doing things, a process of improvisation, about working with materials and valuing that experience, craft includes emotion and making generates new ideas (Adamson, 2018).

In *Events* Nadezhda Pantyulina talks about the importance of the bodily experience and introspection in her travelling exhibition project Remember the Dried Flower, and Asya Aladjalova reviews Material. Women’s Memory of the Gulag at the International Memorial (October 6, 2021 — March 15, 2023).

Endnotes

1. Furse, A. (2011). ‘Being Touched’ in Marshall, J. and Torovell, D. Eds. *A Life of Ethics and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
2. Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2008) ‘The Smooth and the Striated’ in *A Thousand Plateaus*. London, New York: Continuum.
3. This essay is based on L. Aladjem’s BA degree theoretical essay *Entre tactilité et virtualité, les enjeux de la mode de demain*, Geneva 2020, written under the supervision of Aude Fellay.
4. “Seeing touch and touching sight: a reflection on the tactility of vision”, *The Senses and Society*, quoted by Jenni Lauwrens, “More than Meets the Eye: Embodied Engagement with After the Last Supper”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 77, Issue 2, 2018.
5. Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 15.
6. www.youtube.com/user/MollyBurkeOfficial.