

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's **Dress** section, we take a fresh look at the happy interplay of fashion and literature. In *Fashion and Modernism: The Vestimentary Contexts of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein*, **Olga Vainshtein** focuses on two case studies. The first involves the portrayal of dress in the writings of Virginia Woolf. Vainshtein examines the connections between fashion and modernism in Woolf's essays and literary works, discussing Woolf's

views on the verbal recreation of the material world, based on the essays *Modern Literature* and *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. Vainshtein pays particular attention to vestimentary detail in *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Orlando*. Looking at the emotional connotations associated with fashionable dress in Woolf's stream of consciousness poetics, Vainshtein concludes that sewing scenes in these novels play a special symbolic role as "safe spaces". Turning to clothes changing scenes in *Orlando*, Vainshtein goes on to examine the performative function of gender. The second case study in Vainshtein's paper looks at the everyday style of Gertrude Stein, her acquaintance with Pierre Balmain, and publications in *Vogue*.

Natalia Povalyayeva contributes *Inside Selma Lagerlöf's Wardrobe: Dress and Fashion in the Life and Work of the Queen of Swedish Literature*. At first glance, Selma Lagerlöf may not seem an obvious choice for a study into the interaction of fashion and literature. For years, the Swedish writer was widely regarded as possessing little or no interest in dress and fashion. Ample sources, however, show that both in her private life, and in her writing Lagerlöf always paid attention to the impact of dress, how it reflects and shapes the personality of the wearer, the meanings it conveys, and its potential within a given literary work. Lagerlöf's sartorial tastes are examined using her memoirs and lengthy correspondence with her mother, sister Gerda, friends, acquaintances, publishers and fellow writers. Of the most interest are Lagerlöf's letters to her close friends Sophie Elkan and Valborg Olander. The author describes the contexts and functions of dress which particularly interested Lagerlöf: everyday clothing, outfits for travel, public events and special occasions. Particular attention is paid to two key functions: the Nobel Prize award ceremony, and Lagerlöf's admission to the Swedish Academy. Lagerlöf, Povalyayeva notes, was particularly interested in the ritual and social significance of dress. These aspects are highlighted in *The Emperor of Portugallia*, one of Lagerlöf's best-known novels. Looking closely at the world created by the writer in this work, Povalyayeva analyses the religious, ritual and social symbolism of clothing and accessories in the novel. In the final part of the paper, the author looks at the ways in which Lagerlöf's writing and sartorial practices have been reflected in the work of contemporary fashion designers. A case in point is the Max Mara collection Resort 2024, which draws inspiration from Lagerlöf's life and oeuvre, as well as her huge success and status of Swedish national treasure. Povalyayeva also refers to work by students at Beckmans College of Design, including a red dress inspired by *The Emperor of Portugallia*. The author's study leads her to conclude that Selma Lagerlöf's interest in dress and fashion was both driven by her successful writing career, with frequent public events

demanding a certain level of dress, and high earnings allowing her to purchase top quality clothes and accessories from leading designers, and, in turn, enriched her oeuvre — as we saw with *The Emperor of Portugallia*.

Nadezhda Pereverzeva presents *The Dressing Gown as a Key Element of Leo Tolstoy's Domestic Life*. Leo Tolstoy's clothes can be seen as a marker, indicating his view of the world. Among his followers, wearing the type of shirt favoured by the writer (and sometimes known in the West as a Tolstoy shirt) became a sign of adherence to his views. Tolstoy's shirt and dressing gown played an important part in his everyday life and creative process. In this article, the author discusses the original dressing gowns from the museum of Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's estate, and their significance in the writer's everyday life: from dealing with life change to inspiring creativity.

Natalia Lebina contributes *The Late 1920s — Early 1930s Male Vestimentary Canon in the USSR as Seen by a Historian of Soviet Everyday Life, Based on Censored Satirical Novels* — the fourth in her series of publications on fashion and *belles-lettres*. In this paper, the author turns to Ilf and Petrov's famed Soviet satirical duology *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*. Both novels had to pass through censorship. The books share the same main character, Ostap Bender, and can be seen as a source of information on Soviet male dress codes towards the end of NEP. Around that time, the first signs of the new Stalinist "Big Style" were beginning to be seen. Both *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf* offer valuable insights into the traits associated with masculinity in Soviet society, the corporeal markers used to distinguish "us" from "them" in everyday socialist reality, and ordinary life in the late 1920s and early 1930s, just before and during the Great Turn.

Maria Markova's "*With a Torch in Her Skirt Pocket*": *Vestimentary Code in the Nancy Drew Book Series* traces the transformations of the legendary American heroine's wardrobe. The first series of children's mystery stories recounting the adventures of the teenage sleuth appeared in 1930. Nancy's dress had always to be practical, and to reflect both her way of life, and her open nature and love of travel. Thus, she required a diverse and elegant wardrobe, whilst at the same time needing practical options for her active detective work. Throughout the series, the authors pay particular attention to Nancy's and her friends' clothing, describing in detail the vestimentary habits of girls with different body types and hair colour. This didactic approach was surely intended to show that the heroine not only did good by solving crimes, but also taught her young readers how to dress. Markova offers a sartorial portrait of Nancy Drew

with descriptions of the functional nature of its features, based on five novels from the first series (1930-1931, revised edition 1959-1965).

Natalia Povalyayeva offers *A Schiaparelli Gown for Girls of Slender Means*. Although items of clothing can, in literary works, assume the status of characters in their own right, critics often fail to give them due attention. Muriel Spark's novel *The Girls of Slender Means* provides a perfect case in point. A Schiaparelli dress belonging to one of the heroines is key on all levels of the novel's conceptual structure, serving to bring out the author's philosophical and religious discourse. Despite this, critics discussing the novel tend to focus on Spark's satirical technique, her religious and moral views, issues of gender, post-war trauma, and identity — anything, in short, but the question of why, out of all haute couture options, Spark chose a Schiaparelli dress. Some studies even omit the designer's name altogether, mentioning only the gown itself. In this paper, Povalyayeva sets out to correct this omission, to determine why the dress had to be from Schiaparelli, and in what ways this item is essential in putting across the writer's vision. Povalyayeva looks closely at Muriel Spark's attitudes towards clothing and fashion, and shows that throughout her entire life, the writer paid special attention to dress and sartorial practices — both her own, and those of others. This interest, Povalyayeva continues, was duly reflected in Spark's writing. Always aware of the latest trends, the writer kept a close eye on fashion, and was an avid reader of *Vogue*. Turning to Spark's choice of a Schiaparelli gown, the author argues that this was anything but random. Elsa Schiaparelli's personality, radically innovative clothes, vision of female dress, target audience and specific features of her designs were all ideally suited to Spark's aims. Through just two words — “Schiaparelli gown” — Spark is able to conjure up a multilayered metaphor, a multifunctional tool speaking volumes not merely of post-war English society, but of human nature itself.

Dorothy Jones offers *The Eloquent Sari*. As part of India's aesthetically rich and politically complex textile tradition, saris are abundantly endowed with “the social life of things”, as well as participating in the language of clothes. This article considers the sari's representation in some Indian literary works as a focus for exploring acts of political and personal resistance against hegemonic authority. The sari can serve simultaneously as a sign both of the nation, and of Indian womanhood. Its rich array of associations has made it a valuable focal point for a number of Indian writers, both when representing major political events, and when portraying the complexities of personal relationships and family life.

Dita Svelte offers “Do You Call This Thing a Coat?": *Wit, Epigram and Detail in the Figure of the Ultimate Dandy, Beau Brummell*. Identified

as the ultimate “man of fashion”, the dandy possesses a unique longevity amongst men’s style icons. The author argues that the dandy and fashion itself persist because they share the appealing quality of wit — the expression of unexpected insight in a moment of surprise. Svelte focuses on George “Beau” Brummell (1778—1840) to study this wit as manifested in the verbal epigram and sartorial detail. The dandy’s epigrams are rarely discussed within fashion studies, and are often regarded as separate from his material contributions. In *The Fashion System*, Roland Barthes characterizes the fashion writing of magazines, largely composed of utterances which may be regarded as epigrams, as “rare and poor rhetoric.” Svelte argues that Brummell’s famous epigrams intend to astonish through their pithy insights. The sartorial detail is often read as operating through the logic of distinction; this is the basis of Barthes’ claim that the fashion system “kills” the dandy by replicating his constant innovations. Svelte contends that the details of the dandy’s dress contain a spark of surprising insight. The verbal epigram and sartorial detail can thus be seen as expressions of the same impulse to surprise, which characterizes both wit and fashion.

The **Body** section this time around opens with **Samuel Egea-Castañeda’s** *Fashioning the Posthuman Body in the Anthropocene: Alexander McQueen’s The Horn of Plenty*. Often eclipsed by what is considered Alexander McQueen’s magnum opus, Plato’s Atlantis (S/S 2010), *The Horn of Plenty* (A/W 2009) has received less critical attention. Conceived as a satirical response to the excessiveness of the fashion industry, the collection reveals McQueen’s ecological consciousness and his artistic exploration of post-humanist thought. Drawing on the epistemology of posthumanism and recent works on the posthuman turn in fashion, this article examines how McQueen’s *The Horn of Plenty* challenged anthropocentric worldviews through both sartorial design and staging techniques to expose consumerism’s environmental impact. Through a series of bird-woman hybrids, McQueen rendered how humans and non-humans are altered by the Anthropocene, and, resorting to a Gothic presentation of clones, he engaged with a post-anthropocentric discourse that critiqued the relentless cycles of mass production. The show’s mise-en-scene — a heap of black-sprayed trash — alongside the debris-like headgear worn by the models turned the runway into an artistically crafted commentary on environmental pollution. Through grotesquely altered bodies and an overall unsettling stage evoking landfills and oil spills, McQueen’s *The Horn of Plenty* illuminated the fraught entanglements of the human, the non-human and the more-than-human in a time of ecological crisis.

Maureen Lehton Brewster contributes *Becoming the ‘Sorority Girl’: Following Southern Fashion and Sorority Culture on #Rushtok*. This inquiry explores the development of the (uniform) sorority girl on RushTok, a digital sociality focused on sorority culture. The author conducts two rounds of intraviews with 13 RushTok users to explore their intraaction with these formations in 2022 RushTok content. The author follows the “sorority girl” within the intraview data to explore her (re) production in this content, and how she comes to matter in the process of becoming-sorority-girl. Brewster uses feminist posthuman theory to explore how (non)-human agents such as screens and clothing come to matter in the becoming-sorority-girl assemblage. The author argues that the style-fashion-dress practices seen on RushTok — particularly the brands, styles of clothing, and types of bodily maintenance used by RushTok content creators — (re)produce the Southern sorority girl uniform, which (re)produces PNMs as becoming-sorority-girl along uniformly gendered, racialized, and classed lines. Brewster also considers how RushTok users’ intraaction with TikTok’s algorithmic logics makes hegemonic ideals of gender, race, and class in women- and girl-led organisations (WGLOs) more visible and widespread.

This issue’s **Culture** section looks at fashion and time and opens with **Aurélie Van de Peer**’s article *So Last Season: The Production of the Fashion Present in the Politics of Time*. Fashion is a powerful cultural phenomenon in its ability to impose on fashion items, its wearers, and producers a quality of forwardness or backwardness. As a temporal designation, both scholars and industry professionals tend to regard fashion as rooted in the present. Yet hitherto academic debate has not sufficiently scrutinized the fashion present and its boundaries. The idea of being up to date necessitates a relational temporal order in which the present or the modern is constituted vis-à-vis the outmoded. Through a concise historicization of the temporal anchorage of fashion, this article argues that we primarily read the present of fashion in a chronological way. Today we take as given the sequential transience of fashion, characterized by the ultimate absence of fashion history. Moreover, the variety of chronometric operations that allow for control over fashion changes enable the field of high fashion production to engage in a politics of time in which it displays its own forwardness by picturing (the sartorial choices of) others as “so last season,” or, to put it in other words, as lagging behind the industry’s referential time.

Anabela Becho’s article *Suspending Time: Matter and Memory in Madame Grès’ Pleating Technique* aims to reflect on the relationship

between fashion and the notion of time, specifically the idea of suspending time in fashion. The investigation focuses on Madame Grès' body of work that materialized the hypothesis of temporal adjournment. Madame Grès (1903–1993) pursued a ceaseless quest for an absolute esthetic in her designs, honing her archetypes rather than repeating successful designs for each season. She worked for six decades, initially going by the name of Alix. Although a woman of her time, bound by an artistic and cultural context specific to her epoch, the author argues that there is a deliberate quest for timelessness at the heart of Madame Grès' oeuvre, which can be perceived in her innovative technique. Based on direct observation of a corpus of dresses, the article discusses the long, draped dresses crafted with technical mastery as a profound reflection on fashion, time and memory within the process of making (the infinite gesture). The obsessive draping, fold after fold, done by hand, was sequential, repetitive and meditative as Madame Grès grasped the minutes and hours in a dimension of suspended time.

Else Skjold offers *Biographical Wardrobes — A Temporal View on Dress Practice*. Much “fashion thinking” is concerned with *the new*, the trend-leading, and the spectacular. Hence, much debate and theorization within this area of research focuses on fashion as a generic, institutionalized and ritualized system that continuously produces and disseminates new trends and ideals. A large body of knowledge has been developed that aims to comprehend how fashion trends emerge and connect to society and subsequently get promoted by a system of trend agencies, fashion designers, or fashion editors. In contrast to this line of thinking, other areas of research have been looking the opposite way for the last few decades, namely at the down-to-earth everyday routines of people — what is often referred to as *the ordinary*. In line with the development of practice theory, the area of design research has produced increasing inquiries with regard to the way people's daily practices are intertwined with time, space and objects. This paper represents a vision of dress practice building on this view, with a particular focus on the issue of temporality. Based on her concept of the biographical wardrobe, the author points to alternative understandings of dress practice that highlight how *continuity* rather than *newness* plays a vital role in the self-understanding of individual users.

Tatiana Bakina presents *Vampires, Avengers and Catwomen: Catsuits in Cinema as a Symbol of Timelessness*. Today's audiences may tend to associate the black catsuit with superheroes and action movies, yet this iconic item has a far longer history, going back to the early twentieth century. The tight one-piece was first used in cinema to create an

atmosphere of mystery, ambiguity and sexuality. It gradually became part of the screen image of the vamp: a confident, attractive and dangerous woman. Much later, the catsuit evolved into “fighting camouflage” for female characters in action and superhero movies. The materials, style, tailoring and function of the suit changed over time, yet its association with power and danger remained the same for many decades. In this paper, Bakina follows the evolution of the female catsuit’s functions throughout the history of cinema. The author looks not only at the changes in design and other aspects which have allowed the catsuit to remain a powerful image, popular with audiences for over a century. Bakina also highlights the curious fact that as an item of clothing, the catsuit always succeeded in retaining its status beyond fashion trends due to its particular features and functions.

In this issue’s **Events** section, **Carolina Francesca Maria Davalli** contributes her review of “Ephemeral Matters. Into the Fashion Archive” at Nasjonalmuseet, the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo (19 October 2024 — 23 March 2025).

In the **Books** section, **Maria Terekhova** offers *Clothing Cinema* — her thoughts on Nadia Vasilieva’s *Think Me Up a Life (Pridumay mne sudbu)* (St. Petersburg: Seans, 2025).