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# **Geographies of Fashion and Style: Setting the Scene**

## **Abstract**

The papers assembled in this forum examine the Geographies of Fashion and Style through texts, visual images, material objects and processes of growing and making, as lived experiences and performative practices and, crucially, as concepts and practices that travel and mutate over time and place. In this introduction, we chart the Eurocentric cultural episteme of the fashion industry and fashion studies and dismantle it by drawing on, and out, globally-orientated and decentered approaches to the study of fashion and style. Our contribution to debates on fashion and style is to draw out five impulses arising at the intersections of geography and fashion studies and which our collection of papers brings to the fore: Theorizing, Queering, Decolonizing, Ecologizing, and Curating. In doing so, our introduction foregrounds the significance of fashion and style as sites of (micro) political problems and potentials, and is a call and a framework through which to extend and take seriously the diverse processes of fashion and style as sentient to the broader themes and scholarship of concern in the geohumanities.

## **Keywords**

Fashion theory, globalization, decoloniality, ecology, curation

## Introduction

“Fashion is both a verb, as in ‘to fashion something,’ and a noun, as in ‘to wear the latest fashion.’ In the OED, fashion carries no fewer than fourteen different meanings. ... By the late Middle Ages, fashion came to mean a “style, fashion, manner (of make, dress, embellishment)” as well as a “way or mode (of behaviour)”” (Welters and Lillethun 2018, 14-15 citing Kurath 1952, 358).

As practices that inscribe certain cultural, bodily, historic, speculative, global, or singular patterns in the world through dress, fashion and style are inherently geographical practices. They span scales, from world to body; times, from “pre-history” to “postfashion”; speeds, from fast to slow; and terrains, from cotton field to catwalk. Research on fashion within geography has traditionally, and importantly, taken critical aim at cultures of consumption, cheap labor markets, and environmental destruction of the contemporary garment industry. As Louise Crewe argues in her seminal book *The Geographies of Fashion*, the fashion industry has “actively used geographical strategies of association and dissociation to create and reproduce hierarchies of value: bringing certain spaces, places and people into high relief whilst masking the global inequalities, abuses of labor standards and environmental catastrophes that underpin the industry” (2017a, np). At the same time, historically fashion studies have been prone to overlook and distance non-European fashion systems: European or North American fashion and its capitals have been centered while other fashions are made peripheral or put in aspic. This special forum introduction aims to chart the Eurocentric cultural episteme of the fashion industry and fashion studies and dismantle it by drawing on, and out, globally-orientated and decentered approaches to the study of fashion and style.

The forum emerged out of two events that took place in 2017: a panel discussion, ‘Opening geography out to Fashion Worlds’ at the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference in London, and a subsequent workshop, ‘Geographies of Fashion and Style’ at the University of Bristol. Both events were motivated by an attempt to pluralize thinking about fashion and style within geography, by bringing fashion scholars and designers, who have insider knowledge of the industry and its practices, into geography’s engagement with fashion. There were two key goals of these interdisciplinary dialogues. The first was to contribute to recent attempts within geography to attend to the complex cultural and creative significance of the fashion industry, as a domain traditionally examined within the discipline through macro-political and economic discourses. The second was to follow Louise Crewe (2010) in disrupting the dismissal of fashion as a minor (feminine) art, or the marginalization of dress as of superficial concern, by examining the potential of fashion and dress as minor modes of resistance to racialized, gendered and social inequalities and injustices. The various papers and conversations spanned histories of exploitation and exclusion revealed in archives and exhibitions, the politics of appropriation and practices of style, digital commodity activism, and the future of textiles design in a lab. A shared theme across these conversations was an interest in articulating the microsocial problematics and potentials of fashion practices - as involving beliefs, tacit knowledge, materiality and affects - as a way of advancing broader critical questions about global corporations, transnational networks, or labor geographies.

Formulating something of the rich dialogues making up those events in this introduction, we will introduce and critically evaluate the work of key fashion scholars and practitioners from across the geohumanities, including our special forum contributors, who are thinking and practicing - and making us think and practice - fashion and style anew. First, we examine how questions of geography and globalization are paramount in the fashion industry and fashion studies. Second, we examine how geography as a discipline has examined the fashion industry and its practices. Finally, we probe further the resonances between geography and fashion to draw out five impulses that orient the collection and direct emergent work: Theorizing, Queering, Decolonizing, Ecologizing, and Curating. In doing so, our introduction aims to foreground the significance of

studying fashion and style as sites of contesting or enacting (micro) political problems and potentials. Key to this aim, we believe, and something foregrounded in our five impulses, is developing a relational and ecological view of fashion and style – traversing the micro and molecular level of folds, framings, and fabrications of dress – which is capable of breaking down distinctions between here and there, ideal and atypical, fast and slow, grown and made.

### **Global (re)turn in fashion studies**

Fashion studies is said to be in the wake of a ‘global turn’ (Ling, Lorusso and Reinach 2019). As early commentators attest, this is a turn closely associated with the globalization of the fashion industry (see Niessen, Leshkovich and Jones 2003; Maynard 2004; Brands and Teunissen 2005). Yet the academic study of fashion has always had a global, albeit Eurocentric, perspective. For example, Auguste Racinet’s nineteenth-century survey, *Le Costume Historique* (1888), has long been respected as the first authoritative survey of global dress and is still considered a key point of reference for costume and dress historians today (Foster 2004). The book’s original divisions - “The Ancient World,” “The Nineteenth Century-Beyond the Borders of Europe,” “Europe 400-1800,” “Traditional Costume Till the Late Nineteenth Century” - alert the contemporary reader to the fact that this historical survey of world costume was underwritten by European colonial conquest and imperial imaginaries. Indeed, Tetart-Vittu warns the contemporary reader:

“Racinet now and then turns aside from description of clothing and ornament to conduct assessments of the characteristics of specific ethnic groups. ... The ideology implicit in these remarks is not easy to stomach.” (2003, 14).

This racist ideology was pervasive at the time and in part emerged out of the colonial collecting and display practices of the world exhibitions and fairs that had inspired and underwrite the book, practices which included putting ‘ethnic groups’ in traditional costume on live display. Although Racinet consulted a wide range of authors and sources beyond these displays when compiling his polychrome panorama of world costumes, including South American authors, his sources were in the main European or problematically Eurocentric in perspective, thus his images and text must be contextualized in “the colonial topos to which they belong” (Brekenridge 1989, 197).

This colonial topos or “ecumene” (Brekenridge 1989, 197) continued to inform the teaching of costume and dress history into the twentieth century. According to fashion scholars Welters and Lillethun (2018, 5) in the early twentieth century the typical narrative in classrooms and museums “began with the dress of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome and progressed through European historical period to the French Republic”. The structure of these classes and exhibitions therefore reproduced Racinet’s divisions and perpetuated his centering of Europe (Fales 1911). However, this Eurocentric teleology taught within historical fashion studies also critically differed from his more inclusive world-historical survey, as the dress belonging to those “beyond the borders Europe” was now excluded. The dress of non-western cultures was thereby placed outside the path of modern history and its narrative of progress and located instead in the ethnographic museum – then home to so-called “primitive” art and material culture and under the purview of anthropologists and folklorists (Fromm 2016). This separation was cemented by the textbooks that began to be produced for use in colleges and universities, all of which “traced the history of dress as it reflects Western Civilizations” (Welters and Lillethun 2018, 5). The effect of associating dress history with Western progress and civilization also led to the separation of “costume” and “fashion” histories in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1967 Fernand Braudel published his three-volume opus *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century* and although he only devoted twenty-three pages to “costume and fashion” his pronouncements on them had a lasting impact on the then nascent field of fashion studies.

At the time *Civilization and Capitalism* was published, Braudel’s emphasis on the economic condition of everyday life, as well as the process of capitalism and its geographical spread, represented a radical departure away from the study of political and economic elites and towards a focus on the everyday lives of ordinary people. Braudel’s emphasis on the importance of clothing, as a necessity, and fashion, as a reflection of power and privilege, in the first volume of *Civilisation and Capitalism* was ground-breaking in its ‘geohistoriographical’ (Mayhew 2011) approach to economic and social history. It is Braudel’s thesis that fashion began in 1350 - when male elites began wearing shorter tunics to distinguish their rank (Braudel (1981[1967], 317) – as a way for the European upper class to distinguish themselves from the lower social classes.

However, while Braudel presents a global view of clothing and fashion, he makes a distinction between those who wear “fashion”, namely the European elite, and those that wear “costume”, namely the poor of Europe and everyone beyond its borders. Braudel goes on to contrast the rapidly changing dress of the European fashionable elite with the “changelessness” of the “costumes” of other regions of the world, including “the courtly costumes of India, Japan, China, and the Islamic countries as well as the poor in Europe” (Welters and Lillethun 2018, 5). According to Braudel’s argument then, fashion is a European invention linked to the rise of capitalism, and by association modernization and globalization, in the west.

As with Racinet’s survey, Braudel’s Eurocentric narrative was reproduced by the growing number of fashion historians and scholars that emerged from the 1980s onwards. Therefore, although Braudel's work had a positive impact on the field of fashion studies by legitimizing clothing and fashion as worthy subjects of scholarly study, according to Welters and Lillethun (2018, 4-6) his separation of “costume” and “fashion” histories had two major negative consequences for the field (and this separation is still reflected in journals like *Fashion Theory* and *Costume*). The first was that his “claim that fashion did not exist before 1350” (Welters and Lillethun 2018, 5) had the unfortunate effect of giving fashion a definitive periodization: 1350-present. Accordingly, fashion did not exist before the medieval period and this understanding was given credence by the fact it is only from this period onwards that dress tends to survive in museum collections. Furthermore, because this periodization rested on Braudel’s claim that fashion emerged as a way for European elites to differentiate themselves from the common classes, it meant that fashion historians, and by extension collections and museums, focused on the dress of political and economic elites to the neglect of folk and everyday dress (an ironically *anti*-Braudelian focus on elites). The second problem associated with Braudel’s thesis is his claim “that fashion did not exist outside the Euro-American zone” (5). This not only initiated the narrative that fashion only belonged to the European elite and its diaspora, but it put the “costumes” and dress traditions of non-Europeans in aspic. Fashion historians following Braudel’s, and similar (e.g. Simmel (2012 [1905])), pronouncements focused on charting changes in dress as they related to European trends in tailoring. Changes in body modification, hairstyling and textiles, which are “the hallmarks of fashion change in [African and] Eastern cultures” (Welters and Lillethun 2018, 5), were therefore

placed outside of fashion, and by association modernity and the West. As a result of the popularization of Braudel's limiting definition, periodization and placement, fashion thereby became synonymous with modernity, progress and Western capitalism, whereas costume and dress became synonymous with tradition, stability and 'the Rest'.

For Ling, Lorusso and Reinach (2019, VII) the association of fashion with Western capitalism and modernity "revealed a profound Orientalist bias" in fashion studies, as it "expressed the alleged cultural superiority of the West vis-à-vis the rest of the world". By the 1990s fashion scholars, informed by the work of Edward Said and other post-colonial theorists, began to recognize and critically reflect on that bias (see Niessen 2003). Two different approaches to tackling the dual problem of Eurocentrism/Orientalism in fashion studies emerged in response. The first relates to those who have critically charted the birth of fashion and its association with capitalism, colonization and globalization. Maynard's (2004) and Ross's (2008) examinations of the effects of colonization on the dress of the colonized are key works in this regard and have prompted further problematisation of the globalization and the Westernization of dress (e.g. Rovine 2009). Although these studies critique this violent colonial imposition, they still only associate fashion with the "arrival of modernity – and thus capitalism itself" (Bartlett 2019, 21). Thus, whilst such narratives do point out the colonial violence and geographical unevenness of 'modernization', they trace the rise of fashion to modernity and Western progress and as such inadvertently reproduce Braudel's Eurocentric view of fashion, reliant as it is on the reductive dualisms of West vs Rest, fashion vs costume, modernity vs tradition and industry vs craft.

Challenging the pervasiveness of such dualistic thought in fashion studies, Riello and McNeil, amongst others, called for a radical reconceptualization of fashion, stating (2010, 4):

"If we wish to understand fashion beyond Europe, we must refrain from thinking that this has suddenly emerged in the last few decades as the results of globalization and the growth of the new middle classes".

Their plea to develop a more expansive conceptualization of fashion so that more inclusive and plural histories of fashion could be written distinguishes a second approach to tackling fashion



studies' problem with Eurocentrism/Orientalism. A seminal contribution in this regard was Craik's (1993, 2009) concept the 'fashion impulse'. According to Craik's (2009, 19–20) thesis, where fashion is reemphasized as a doing rather than just a thing to wear, the human desire to fashion the body and our 'selves' exists in societies the world over and from prehistory to the present day. Hansen (2004, 372) had already highlighted that for anthropologists like herself so-called "traditional dress ... was always a changing practice, remaking itself in interaction with other dress styles" and that globalization was "creating a new 'world in dress,' breaking down conventional fashion boundaries" and extending "the West's established fashion canon". Hansen's call to focus on fashion as practice and not just as a grammar, system or industry signalled a broader move to poststructuralism in cultural studies, whereby culture and globalisation are viewed processually, "as created through agency, practice, and performance" (370) and composed of multidirectional shifts. Hansen's detailed review of anthropological literatures charting changing styles of dress in "Latin America", Africa, South Asia, East and South East Asia and "The Pacific", as well as Europe and North America, highlighted that this new "world in dress", and therefore globalization itself, is a process which is practiced, negotiated and resisted locally and that drives complex cross-cultural exchange, including cultural appreciation and appropriation in the contemporary era.

Fashion historians have argued that fashion must be understood as a global and plural phenomenon in the past too. They have made their case by highlighting fashion's 'other' modernities and 'earlier' globalizations. For example, Slade used the case-study of Japan to argue that:

"there are other modernities, and different fashion histories beyond the canon of European and American dress narratives, which dominate nearly all interpretations of the practices, styles, institutions and hermeneutic structures of clothing in the modern age" (Slade 2009, 1).

Further challenging the narrative that fashion was a European invention, Franks (2015, 331) uses the changing styles of the kimono to illustrate how fashion can and has come in "distinctively non-European forms" (see also recent V&A exhibition). Furthermore, fashion and textile historians highlight the silk (Schäfer, Riello and Molà 2018) and cotton (Riello and Roy 2009) trades as 'early' globalizations that happened in the 'pre-modern' and 'early-modern' eras respectively, and that enabled not only the diffusion of these textiles from East-West but the cross-cultural exchange

of technologies, skills and techniques as well as fashions and styles. Indeed, Riello (2009) shows how the birth of the European fashion industry, and Europe's industrial revolution, was indebted to its "Indian apprenticeship" in cotton production techniques, including spinning, weaving and printing (see also Lemire and Riello 2008; Ashmore 2009; Clifford 2018; Riello 2019). Taken together, these global fashion histories demonstrate that fashion and its industries never have been "the exclusive property of the West" (Hansen 2004, 370). Moreover, publications including the *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (2010), *Fashion History: a Global View* (2018), and *Critical Studies in Global Fashion* (2019), have variously cemented the view that fashion is practiced and contested globally in the past and present. Taken overall, this "new wave in global fashion studies" can be understood as a return to Racinet's global perspective yet one that now "encapsulates glocal, historical, linguistic, sociocultural, anthropological, and postcolonial and de-colonizing discourses in the increasingly multifaceted agendas of fashion studies" (Ling, Lorusso and Reinach 2019, XV).

Out of the many disciplines Ling, Lorusso and Reinach (2019, VI) list as concerned with setting the agendas of contemporary fashion studies, however, "including history, sociology, anthropology, and linguistics", geography is conspicuous by its absence. Given fashion studies' global (re)turn it is surprising there has been so little dialogue between fashion studies and geography (for an exception see Breward and Gilbert 2006). Not least because geographers themselves are increasingly, if not historically, examining how fashion industries and their practices matter geographically across a diversity of scales and contexts. The next section presents a review of this geographic work, before providing five impulses through which fashion studies and geography might stage further interdisciplinary conversation and collaboration.

### **Geographies à la mode**

It is curious geographers have, until recently, taken so little interest in fashion given that as Ling, Lorusso and Reinach (2019, VI) point out: "No other form of commerce, arguably, can claim to be more pervasive throughout the globe than the textile and apparel business, and no other visual

culture is more pervasive than fashion.” Perhaps, it is not so curious if we take a closer look at the discipline’s “icon of shabby non-style” (Crewe 2008, 25). Although the geography teacher has recently been adopted as a sartorial icon by “normcore” devotees, who adopt “a deliberate inelegant sense of style, and a paradoxically fashionable unfashionableness” (Baum 2016, np), his bland practicableness also speaks to the privilege, power, and white, heteronormative masculinity of those who have historically set geography’s academic agendas. Within these agendas, and even the early agendas of “retail geography” (Blomley, 1996), there has been a “trivializing of consumers’, especially Western women’s, interest in clothes” as well as “an antifashion tendency that devalues the significance of dress as a cultural[,] economic [and global] phenomenon” (Hansen 2004, 373). However, the cultural turn in geography in the 1990s enabled “the spaces, places and practices of consumption, circulation and exchange [to] lie at the heart of a reconstructed economic geography” (Crewe 2000, 275) which in turn opened a space for geographers to take fashion seriously. Louise Crewe’s trailblazing work on *The Geographies of Fashion* (2017b) has challenged and corrected the discipline’s dismissing of fashion as a frivolous and minor feminine concern. From her early work on fashion quarters (1996) and shopping and retail spaces (2000, 2001; Gregson, Crewe and Brooks 2002) to her development and application of theories of scale and relationality to map and connect the fashion industries’ diverse global sites and architectures (2008, 2010, 2016, 2017), she has shown why fashion matters geographically and why geographers should be interested in it. Furthermore, key works, spanning more than three decades of writings on fashion (often in the context of the global fashion industry), allow us to trace geography’s shifting interests in and engagement with fashion: from the geographies of fashion production to its spaces and practices of consumption, to examining the complex geographical connections between sites of production and consumption.

Crewe’s (1996, 257) first key work on fashion centred on examining “the evolution and dynamics of the fashion quarter in the Nottingham Lace Market” and highlights an enduring interest for geographers in geographies of fashion production. Drawing on notions of the “embedded firm” and “operational networks”, Crewe outlined how the dense clustering of fashion-related firms in the Nottingham Lace Market conferred “significant competitive advantages in addition to being powerful instruments of job creation and growth” (257). Crewe’s paper highlighted that fashion

firms and industries could therefore be major forces in the economic development of a city and that fashion quarters were being recognized and encouraged as potential ‘urban boosters’ by regional and national urban planners. Expanding this work, Breward and Gilbert’s edited book *Fashion's World Cities* (2006) showed how the status of the “Fashion capital” was being mythologized and harnessed by urban planners to promote and enhance the “cultural economy” of major cities at the same time as the industry's garment production system was being restructured and globalized thanks to the wider cultural shift from ready-to-wear to fast fashion. Indeed, Weller (2007, 39) highlighted that fashion capitals were “‘territories’ of aesthetic influence” and “vicious knowledge” that exerted a massive influence on the global restructuring of the fashion industry, which from the 1970’s saw the relocation of fashion production away from garment districts in core and semi-peripheral industrialized cities with their expensive rents, to the cheap rents and labor found in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh and China (see Smith 1996). Several geographers have since critically examined the outcomes of this restructuring, including highlighting repeated labor and environmental tragedies and injustices (Crewe 2008; Enigbokan and Patchett 2012; Brooks 2015; Cook et al. 2017; Crang et al. 2020). Others have explored emerging industry responses to the problems associated with fast fashion production, including Leslie et al’s (2014) study of Toronto’s independent fashion sector’s move to the principles and practices of “slow fashion”.

Geographers have also challenged the expectation that the production of high-quality fashion garments, and its associated skilled competencies (Pacault and Patchett 2018), would remain in industrialized fashion centers. For example, Tokatli (2008, 2015) highlighted the case of fast fashion retailer Zara, which switched its sourcing of higher-quality tailoring from Spain and Portugal to Morocco, India and Turkey, to argue that the geography of skilled competencies and jobs associated with fashion was also changing to include partially industrialized countries. In comparison, Tu and Shengjun (2014) highlighted that fast fashion production could be sited in the industrialised core by exemplifying Italy’s *pronto moda* industry in Prato. However, they also underlined *pronto moda's* competitiveness rested on the transnational entrepreneurship and value chains associated with its immigrant Chinese workforce (see also Tokatli 2014). Weller (2014, 734) also questioned that such regional competitiveness could be attributed to “local places and

their policies” and demonstrated that the success of New Zealand’s fashion industry in the first years of the new millennium was just as much the outcome of “higher order processes and structures” such as “regulatory conditions that delivered export-promoting factor prices” (734, see also Molloy and Larner 2013). Whilst Reimer (2009, 65) warned that the “design-intensive” jobs associated with such creative industry successes could often be just as “labour-intensive, low-paid and ... insecure” as fashion manufacturing ones. Taken overall, geographers have not only revealed but have critically mapped and theorized the complex geographies of fashion production in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Geographers have also researched and theorized the contemporary geographies of fashion consumption. In this context, Crewe’s early key works on retail geographies (2000, 2001) and shopping spaces (Gregson, Crewe and Brooks 2002) were again path-defining. Crewe (2000, 275) recognized fashion consumption was “woefully undertheorized”, and demonstrated how feminist theories of embodiment and subjectivity and non-representational theories of practice and relationality could be applied to fashion (and its geographies) to overcome this. For example, in a collaborative paper, Gregson, Crewe and Brooks (2002) emphasized “shopping as practiced” such that the meanings typically attributed to shopping and shopping spaces and subjects were shown to be potentially unstable. Beyond stressing plural subjectivities and spatialities, Crewe (2001) also drew attention to the work of geographers who were drawing on feminist theories of the body to highlight overlooked shopping practices and shoppers, such as Longhurst’s (2000a, 2000b) studies of the embodied fashion practices of pregnant women. Coll (2004, 2006) developed Longhurst’s focus on embodiment by considering the significance of emotion in the consumer experiences of British women shopping for clothes, and in the process highlighted the significance of “the spatialities of the changing room, shop floor and the corporeal space of the ‘sized’ body” (2004, 583).

The western-centric focus of geographic work on shopping and consumption practices was challenged by Kothari and Laurie (2005, 226) who argued that geographers needed to think through the ways in which “different bodies [buy] and wear the same clothes across global-local spaces”. Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer (2007) answered this call by examining the nature of

transnational fashion consumption in London and Mumbai (see also Dwyer and Jackson 2003; Dwyer 2008). Rejecting simplistic and linear theorizations of globalisation and the Westernization of dress, their focus group evidence demonstrated how a variety of global influences were being indigenized within specific consumption contexts in London and Mumbai, enabling them to conclude that “traditions are never static, but continuously re-worked and reinvented, with the associated clothing practices gaining a complexity that supersedes simplistic ideas of ephemeral [and global] fashion” (Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer 2007, 922). Similarly drawing on focus groups, Goekariksel and Secor (2012, 847) demonstrated that the rise of “veiling-fashion” in Turkey, far from being the perfect “melding of fashion and piety” promoted by producers was rather, in practice, “rife with ambivalence”. Moreover, much in the same way Dwyer and Jackson (2003) did before them, Goekariksel and Secor (2010, 313) highlighted that cultural difference, in their case “Islamicness”, was “actively constituted” through processes of production *and* consumption and urged researchers to follow the way the stylized meanings of commodities were shaped as they moved along the commodity chain and across transnational networks.

This broader appeal to “follow-the-thing” (Cook et al 2004) enabled geographers to not only consider the shifting cultural meanings or “social lives” (Appadurai 1986) of fashion commodities as they move along and between sites of production and consumption but also their material journeys from earthly or synthetic origins to “slow decay” or “re-use” (Rivoli 2006; Knowles 2009; Stanes and Gibson 2017). However, in another key paper Crewe (2008) emphasized how fashion's commodity and supply chains are often fragmented and “unfollowable” (Hulme 2017), and therefore that linear commodity biographies can fail to grasp the complex geographical connections between sites of production and consumption in fashion. Instead, she argued that a relational understanding of geographical scale revealed “that the geographies of fashion cannot be reduced simply to fibres or garments, or production sites, or to shops, or consumers, but must be understood in terms of relationality; as a recursive loop that is characterized by complexity and connection, fragility and instability” (Crewe 2008, 26). Although also inspired by Appadurai's perspective on the circulation of commodities in social life, Crewe's combination of this perspective with non-representational theories of scale and relationality brought fashion's diverse

and often opaque sites not only into sharper focus but into “mutually constitutive view” (26, see also Goekariksel and Secor 2009; Brooks 2015).

The ability of geographers to recognize and theorize how fashion’s transformative force is felt from bodily to planetary scales and across terrains and temporalities underlines the important contribution geographic theory can and is making to fashion studies. A final trend that can be identified in the geographies of fashion by looking at Crewe’s (2017) work pertains to her recent examination of the problematic ecological (rather than simply global) connections and complexities of the fashion industry. Her work re-tracing the journeys of “bio-commodities”, such as a crocodile skin handbag from farm to arm, highlights the “complex connections that exist between bodies and economy, between life and capital” (Crewe 2017, 53) in contemporary fashion. This work gestures towards a geographical “conception of capitalism [and fashion] in which economy and ecology are increasingly unthinkable without each other” (Moore 2003, 447). For example, by charting the historical “biogeographies” of avian accessories, Patchett (2019, 2021) shows the ways in which life and labor, economy and ecology, and fashion and colonial capitalism have often violently intersected. Meanwhile Crang et al (2020, 2) highlight the violent relations that exist between the *bio* and the *geo* in the ever accumulating “Discardscapes” of the contemporary fashion industry, specifically the forms of “living, labor and harm” that take place on pre-consumer waste sites in Cambodia. Geographers are increasingly applying creative methodologies to apprehend the intersecting scales of fashion, from ‘getting close to clothes’ (Bide 2018) to using Lego to restage and think through difficult conversations and exchanges associated with the catastrophic Rana Plaza garment complex collapse in April 2013 (Cook et al 2017). Most recently geographers have been at the forefront of rethinking the fashion city and fashion’s connection to the urban (Bide 2020; Gilbert and Casadei 2020) and are also beginning to think through the ways austerity (Hall and Jayne 2016; Gilbert 2017), the internet (Luvaas 2018; Brydges and Hracz 2018) and Covid-19 (Brydges and Hanlon 2020; Lawrenuik 2020) are transforming the fashion industry and consumers. The overlapping temporalities and terrains – earthly, industrial and atmospheric – evinced through these various geographies à la mode, are testament to the pertinence of a geographic perspective on, and practices with, fashion and style. Stemming from the conference session and workshop from which this collection arose, the papers

in this forum tease out these intersecting scales and contexts, mobilising theories of relationality and practice, the body, sensation and affect as well as the global and earthly, in order to pluralise thinking around fashion and style in the geohumanities.

## **Geographies of Fashion and Style: 5 Impulses**

In the remainder of this introduction, we draw out five impulses that emerge at the intersections of geography, fashion and style, and which the articles included in this forum bring to the fore. In doing so, we demonstrate how concepts and practices of fashion and style, from the histories and processes of growing and making, to everyday sartorial choices, to the curation of fashion's narratives and archives, work in unique and diverse modes of creation and contestation towards renewed political and ontological agendas.

### *Theorizing*

Our first impulse is towards theories of fashion. This is a catalyst for developing conceptual accounts that shift how we understand and practice fashion and style. Fashion studies has traditionally drawn on a narrow range of sociological and semiotic theories, whether to demonstrate how fashions express a dynamic interplay between social 'imitation' and differentiation (Simmel, 2012 [1905]), to account for the production of 'habitus' within the fields of haute couture (Bourdieu, 1993), or to examine the orthodox 'codes' associated with sartorial choices, such as colour or uniform (Barthes, 1983). These texts continue to be considered cornerstone works in fashion studies and each shares an interest in what fashion and style can reveal about underlying social structures and practices. However, as Rocomora and Smelik (2016) demonstrate, there has been a shift in fashion studies to address the experiential dimensions of fashion in response to what was perceived as the reduction of fashion to structures of language and sociological interpretation. Notably, feminist theories and the notions of embodiment and performativity have been popularized in fashion studies to explore the 'situated bodily practices'



of dress (Wilson, 1985; Entwistle, 2000; Parkins, 2009). More recently, Faria (2014) and Ogunyankin (2016) have underlined how feminist geographic theories of emotion, affect and the ‘global intimate’ offer innovative ways to think through how cosmopolitanism is celebrated, contested and reworked in practice, whether in South Sudanese beauty parlours or on the web-series *An African City*. Postcolonial and critical race theories have also proven significant in writing on fashion (Gaugele & Tilton, 2019), not least in explorations of the role dress has played in negotiating migration and diasporic identities (Hall, 1992; Miller 2009; Tulloch 2016; Wallis 2019), in contesting the commodification of Blackness (hooks, 2006; Tulloch 2010), and in creating new terms and concepts when studying fashion and style (Skov 1996; Kawamura, 2004). Finally, theorizations have also drawn on new materialism and affect theories to articulate how dress is imbricated within processes of becoming (Manning, 2016; Seely, 2012; Smelik, 2015; Ruggerone, 2017). Sage Brice develops this approach in this forum by turning to Gilbert Simondon to examine the effect of sartorial choices on emergent identities. Theorizing the concept of style in this forum, Nina Williams turns to Gilles Deleuze and the fashion design practice of Sonia Delaunay, to argue that style, as a practice rather than genre, is more simultaneous, incorporeal, and transversal than hitherto conceptualized.

### *Queering*

The second impulse turns to queer theory and queer affects. What this involves is practices of ‘queering’ essentialist and normative discourses in fashion’s histories, presents, and futures. Through the theoretical influences of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Sara Ahmed, fashion studies has sought to deconstruct the heteronormative assumptions of fashion, which have been entrenched through the invention of haute couture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its dual sartorial icons: “*la Parisienne* and the bespoke British gentleman” (Ling, Lorusso and Reinach 2019, vii). As Lugones (2008) argues, however, we should be careful not to universalize this history: gender fluidity historically characterized many non-western territories before the colonial imposition of Eurocentric ideals. This impulse is not about identifying ‘queer’ fashion or people. It is rather a methodology for challenging gender and sexual orthodoxies and

patriarchal codes of fashion and style, doing so by affirming a diversity of ways of fashioning bodies and the transformative queerness of fashion itself. Vänskä (2014), for example, criticizes ‘A queer history of fashion’ – an exhibition at the Fashion Institute of Technology museum, New York (2013-4) – for its focus on the identities of gay designers rather than the way garments can and have historically queered fashion through, for example, the figure of the Dandy (Miller 2009; Yazan 2012; Mitchell 2019). Exposing modes of expression and contestation of gender through dress, Ivan Marković’s article in this forum examines the history of the smoking jacket from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1930s, revealing the mutability of Victorian, upper class ideas about masculinity and femininity. Through attention to the sensuous and olfactory dimensions of smoking attire, Marković gestures at the bridging of affect theory with queer theory – a turn which substituted the deconstructive and linguistically oriented projects typical of early queer theories, with, for example, the sensorial aspects of fashion photography as fertile grounds “for investigating queer world-making in action” (Filippello 2018, 135), or with radical aesthetic practices of ‘fabulousness’ as a way of contesting the everyday marginalization of racialized and sexualised identities (moore, 2018). The turn to queer affect, has moreover, engendered a more explicit engagement with the somatic and the biological, whereby theorists have rejected the queer body as a singular, organic entity (Lui, 2020). Speaking to this concern, Sage Brice’s article adopts the unique mode of fashion diary work to disrupt the status of the individual, prompting us to instead consider how such a figure is always in a state of becoming.

### *Decolonizing*

Our third impulse is concerned with the ways imperialism, coloniality and race have affected fashion histories and systems. This is a movement to, after Beatrice Angut Oola (in Lund, 2020), “deconstruct fashion”: to implement different ideas of fashion, to break stereotypes and change the narrative (see also Jenkins 2017). Disrupting the hegemony of European and North American fashion cultures and analytical frameworks, decolonial and critical race theorists have rejected the myth of Western superiority as the inventor or sole proprietor of fashion ideas and practices (Jenkins 2017; Checinska, 2018; Craik, 2020). For example, Gayatri Spivak (1999) challenged fashion theory for inadequately grasping the intersections of multiple forms of female

oppression under colonialism, decolonization, and globalization. She argues that the female subaltern subject “disappears [...] into a violent shutting that is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world-woman’ caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development” (1999, 304). Two key sites of contestation within decolonial impulses are fashion discourses and fashion archives, whereby critiques argue for the need to articulate alternative histories and to challenge hegemonic claims to knowledge (Gaugele and Tilton 2019). With regards to the former of these approaches, Merle Patchett’s paper in this forum fleshes-out a critical history of the ‘feather road’ - a global, colonial commodity-chain between the Cape of South Africa and fashion markets in Europe and North America - arguing that the co-labors of growing and making ostrich plumes have been historically implicated in colonial, economic and ecological violence. With regards to the latter, Jansen (2020) presents two key dimensions of the decolonial fashion discourse: to critique the erasure of a diversity of ways to fashioning the body, and to highlight the exploitation and abuse of cultural heritages, human beings and natural resources. Jansen (2020: 816) writes that decolonial fashion discourse therefore constitutes a framework that enables us to redefine fashion as “a multitude of possibilities rather than a normative framework falsely claiming universality”. At the same time however, Oola argues that the focus on decolonizing discourse does not go far enough to “move beyond the jargon and actively piece together a more inclusive definition of fashion, past and present” (in Lund, 2020). Delacey Tedesco’s paper in this forum speaks to these problems by way of enacting a methodology of curatorial practice that works against dominant, narrow stories of political spaces and subjects.

### *Ecologizing*

Our fourth impulse addresses the ecological impact of fashion and seeks to highlight the diversity of ecologies within which fashion and style can be understood. The fashion industry, with its seasonal calendar, energy- and resource-intensive manufacturing, and mountains of waste has dramatic environmental impacts on soils and seas, flora and fauna, air and climate (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). Calls for sustainability within the industry are thus widespread and often take the shape of appeals for a circular economic model (Crang et al.,

2020), as is exemplified in practice through the ‘Not Buying New’ social media trend and the rise of clothing rental platforms. ‘Sustainability’ itself, however, is increasingly considered a problematic term, reduced to managerial ‘solutions’ rather than regenerative action (Gerlach 2020). Regeneration is at the heart of the biodesign practice of Carole Collet. In an interview in this forum, Collet discusses her ethos of collaborating with and learning from plant systems - beyond the trappings of notions of sustainability, this presents us with a new ontology of nature pertinent for understanding and caring for the imbrication of social and environmental ecologies. On the other hand, the sustainability discourse is equally deemed inadequate as a mode of addressing the intersections between environmental and social injustice. At stake here is what Glowczewski (2020) calls the ‘double arrogance’ of the Anthropocene: the pernicious assumption that climate change is the result of the human as a species rather than, more specifically, the principles of western industrialization and practices of colonial exploitation. Environmental sustainability, then, is not a term deemed capable of accounting for the disparate ecological impacts felt at ‘Fashion’s Sacrifice Zones’ (Niessen, 2020), nor for enacting ecological reparation for indigenous and forcibly displaced populations – which as Patchett shows in this forum can be both human and non-human – that have historically and continue to be exploited through practices of environmental extraction or insecure and deadly labor. “Sustainability is not just a matter of ecological footprint”, Niessen argues (2020, 860). “It cannot be achieved unless there is racial justice and systems of patriarchy and white supremacy are dismantled” (*ibid.*). Yet, what remains problematic about Niessen’s discussion is the assumption that ‘Fashion’s Sacrifice Zones’ are themselves without fashion, for this renders garment workers and indigenous actors incapable of agency and contestation. Instead, we might turn to Seck’s (2018, 144-5) proposal that we see garment workers as ‘relational beings’ and ‘corporeal citizens’, or to Peirson-Smith and Craik’s (2020) call for a ‘decolonial, nature-centred’ approach to sustainable fashion. Both of these amount to a more expansive perspective on sustainability whereby multiple ecologies – from the earthly, biological and atmospheric, to the institutional, organisational and (micro)social, as Williams and Collet infer in this forum – must be incorporated as part of any movement for environmental justice.

*Curating*

The final impulse explores curation as an important site through which the impulses introduced thus far can be thought or staged. The imperative here is to critically appraise curatorial work, exhibition narratives and the decisions made therein about what to put on display and what to omit. The museum, as Wallenberg attests, has become “an essential, cardinal fashion space” since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and yet one that “does not embrace its full potential in displaying and problematizing fashion’s close and real relation to actual life, and especially, the very lives that produce it” (2020, 1). How, then, might the fashion museum and its archives be made “to speak... what it has been designed to silence” (Wevers and Melken 2019,10)? And what of the “forgotten and disavowed fashion histories” (de Greef 2020, 914)? Responding to these concerns in this forum, Bethan Bide challenges the dominant narratives of ‘blockbuster fashion exhibitions’, probing the ethical obligations of museums as institutions which are acting as the gatekeepers of heritage narratives and that operate in both exclusive and homogenizing ways. What Bide’s paper points towards is a constraint and demand of curation. On the one hand, curation is constrained such that it inherently produces omissions. This is a problem insofar as the dominant discourses exhibitions give rise to have tended to inadequately contest the violences produced by and sustaining the fashion industry. Equally, and through this constraint, however, curatorial work can also speak to a certain demand to foster knowledge that seeks to retell fashion histories (Patchett et al, 2012) and challenge dominant narratives (Jenkins 2017; 2018; Leket, 2019; de Greef, 2020). Curatorial work in this way has the potential to attend to multiple forms of creativity, beyond the spectacle of couture or the genius of the designer, that work towards solidaritarian means (Enigbokan and Patchett, 2012, Wallenberg, 2020). This is a demand at stake in Delacey Tedesco’s paper in this forum, which presents curation as an “affective methodology” for working with difficult tensions, paradoxes and uncertainties of political subjectivities and analysis.

## **Conclusion**

What we have emphasized in this introduction is the pertinence of fashion and style as sites for developing broader themes and scholarship of concern in the geohumanities, including gender, subjectivity and the body; modernity, globalization and decolonialization; and practices of

growing, making, dressing and styling. The papers assembled in this forum examine fashion and style through texts, visual images, material objects and processes of growing and making, as lived experiences and performative practices and, crucially, as concepts and practices that travel and mutate over time and place. As micro-political appraisals of fashion and style, they work through various engagements with the embodied, disruptive and yet still often problematic practices of growing, making, dressing and styling. The papers variously seek to disrupt what is made visible, challenge singular aesthetics, and subvert power dynamics, both reinforced and contested through fashion. Taken as a collection, they thus piece together more inclusive and plural ecologies, histories and practices of fashion and style.

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