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Volume 12 Number 2

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Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty | Volume 12 Number 2

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Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty

Volume 12 Number 2



intellect journals

ISSN 2040-4417

Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty

Volume 12 Number 2 2021

Aims and Scope

Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty (CSFB) engages analytically, critically and creatively with fashion and/or beauty. At times lumped together conceptually into 'the fashion-beauty complex', this journal acknowledges the problems associated with collapsing these terms, such as: (a) the conflation of fashion and beauty, concepts which encompass varying degrees and types of agency, change and dynamism; (b) the implicit reinforcement of white hegemonic femininity (and hence, the exclusion of masculinities, people of colour, older adults, differentially abled individuals, and queer and transgender subjectivities); and (c) the blurring of distinct industries. At the same time, the body is the centrepiece of fashion and beauty alike – in cultural representation as well as in everyday life. *CSFB* seeks to foster more diverse and inclusive ways of understanding the embodiment of aesthetics and politics. It does so by dismantling hegemonic assumptions and propelling fresh theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of fashion and/or beauty.

Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty is published twice a year by Intellect Ltd, The Mill, Parnall Road, Bristol, BS16 3JG. The current subscription rates are £40/\$73 (personal), £159/\$236 (institutional – online only) and £199/\$299 (institutional - print and online). Postage within the UK, US and Canada is free, whereas it is £10 within the EU and £14 elsewhere. Advertising enquiries should be addressed to journals@intellectbooks.com.

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by 4edge, UK.

 **intellect** journals

ISSN 2040-4417

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Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty

Volume 12 Number 2

© 2021 Intellect Ltd Introduction. English language. https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb_00033_2

INTRODUCTION

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Crisscrossing through critical fashion studies: Inclusive and interdisciplinary intersections

Abstract

In this introduction to the 12.2 issue of Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty, the editors preview and consider several crisscrossing themes across the articles and reviews: affect, the body and gender, as well as class, race, nationality and other subject positions. The articles and reviews also represent a range of places and times. Diversity and heterogeneity of themes and objects of enquiry are distinctive characteristics of critical fashion studies today. The crisscrossing of themes reflects an equal amount of crisscrossing of theories, methodologies and epistemologies in our highly interdisciplinary field. Crisscrossing can be described as intersecting paths that diverge in different directions at each crossroad or intersection. Imagine for example an irregular embroidery cross-stitch pattern: while emphasizing intersections, there may be differences in the lengths of the stitches and the ways in which they are arranged. The cross-stitches may be shaped in nonlinear formats, even more so when they are not so tidy and – instead – are random, abstract or ambiguous. The editors argue that the importance of ambiguity has long been a theme in critical fashion studies.

This issue of *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* (CSFB) cuts across several themes: affect, the body and gender, as well as class, race, nationality and other subject positions. The articles and reviews also represent a range of places and times. Diversity and heterogeneity of themes and objects of enquiry are distinctive characteristics of critical fashion studies today. The crisscrossing of themes reflects an equal amount of crisscrossing of theories, methodologies and epistemologies in our highly interdisciplinary field. Crisscrossing can be described as intersecting paths that diverge in different directions at each crossroad or intersection. Imagine for example an irregular embroidery cross-stitch pattern: while emphasizing intersections, there may be differences in the lengths of the stitches and the ways in which they are arranged. The cross-stitches may be shaped in nonlinear formats, even more so when they are not so tidy and – instead – are random, abstract or ambiguous. The importance of ambiguity in compelling change has long been a theme in critical fashion studies (see Wilson 1985; Davis 1992; Kaiser Nagasawa et al. 1991; Kaiser and Green 2021). The first article in this issue by Van Tienhoven and Smelik delves into ambiguity as an embodied response to fashion in the context of affect theory. Additionally, concepts such as the ‘subversive stitch’ (Parker 1984) and ‘style activism’ (Tulloch 2021) point to the ways in which unexpected patterns and ways of knowing are crucial in order to deconstruct hegemonic assumptions, to rethink the existing ‘social order’ and to open up new areas of enquiry.

All of this is to say that studying fashion in an inclusive, interdisciplinary and intercultural way requires a lot of crisscrossing. By crisscrossing we refer to the various and varied objects, themes, theories and methodologies, which CSFB is committed to explore and expand. There are some

Keywords

fashion
gender
affect
fatness
diversity
methodology
interdisciplinarity
inclusion

common threads to unravel in the crisscrossing texts published in this issue. First, we find an exceptional degree of interdisciplinary sources for the research that we are publishing here. The study of fashion necessarily covers a wide terrain, ranging from production, to distribution and consumption and systems of meaning and signification, for which scholars need an equally wide array of methodologies and theories from many disciplines. The contributors come from different backgrounds (ranging from the interdisciplinary humanities, sociology and cultural studies to art history and practice), adding extra layers of hybridity to an already heterogeneous field. Many of the authors engage with ideas from gender studies and critical race studies to study fashion more deeply and critically. We consider this diversity an advantage and even a necessity for the study of fashion.

The second crisscrossing intersection is geographic: this issue is quite international in its global outreach. Contributors to the articles and reviews cover fashion studies from China and Soviet Russia, to Europe, India and North America. Not only do the articles crisscross in time and space, but also across different political regimes, most notably the Communist ones in the Soviet Union and China, and the resistance to them through art, fashion and subcultural style. Quite interestingly, there seems to be a return of attention to the power of representation through fashion, by resisting politics through subcultural styles of dressing in certain political regimes. Or by resisting the contemporary and often relentless beauty ideal of slim bodies through artistic photography; the photo essay featured in this issue explores the intersections among body size, gender, race and fashion.

The third crisscrossing intersection is a shared commitment to build a field of critical enquiry that is specifically about fashion. This involves not only a selection of themes of topics, but also serious meta-discursive reflections on how the authors approach the topic, i.e. the methodologies that fashion studies scholars employ. The first article in particular is dedicated to developing a new methodology, by exploring the issue of affect and its relation to the fashioned body. The methodologies used in the articles in this issue range from discourse analysis to empirical research such as interviews and archival work, and from theoretical speculation to creative photography. It shows that fashion offers a rich platform from which to reflect on key social and cultural issues, from subcultural practices of consumption through to intersectional subjectivities.

In all the hybrid crisscrossing there is a communality of purpose: fashion is both global and grounded. The articles take different formations of fashion in different locations, but share global concerns. The margins of critical distance in this issue are mostly provided by gender analyses, whether it is the body shot through with affect in the first article, the masculine body in Soviet subcultures in the second one, the body of the modern Chinese woman in its many attires in the third article, or the fat body of self-identified cis-gender, trans, non-binary and two-spirit people across race and class in the fourth piece – which is in fact a creative photo essay. The body takes centre stage, as the locus of affect, which plays an important role in fashion as an experience in the body that precedes signification and interpretation. The articles each in turn show how clothes

can enchant, caress, resist, restrain, liberate, reveal, protect or provoke. Through fashion, men in the Soviet Union could resist the dominant regime of masculinity, while modern women in China provoked challenges to the traditional image of femininity, and fat people can take up new subject positions in clothes that reveal them as fabulous.

Fashion invites us to connect crisscrossing dots that might otherwise go asunder. It reminds us that we cannot do everything at once. We cannot attend to all of the dots, which do not line up in either a neat binary nor a linear format. Our hopes and aspirations in this issue are to make explicit the wealth and diversity of the topics, the geographical distribution of the contributors, the commonality of purpose, and the enormous energy of this field of research to ongoing critical enquiries about contemporary cultures.

We open this issue with a methodological article, 'The affect of fashion: An exploration of affective method'. Maaïke van Tienhoven and Anneke Smelik explore the way in which clothes affect our bodies and identities. After introducing the main tenets of affect theory, they make an effort to make the notoriously 'vague' notion of affect more concrete by developing an affective method for analysing fashion. The affective method aims to circumvent representation by focusing on what fashion can 'do'. In an experimental approach they analyse the affective force of fashion in two contrasting case studies: a couture dress designed by Dutch fashion designer Jan Taminiau; and a simple T-shirt produced for fast fashion giant Primark. The authors argue that affective method is a valuable and compelling tool that can break open material fashion research, by foregrounding the embodied experiences, feelings and emotions that play a key role in our relationship with fashion. Such an affective reading of fashion is highly theoretical, which in itself brings depth to the complex field of fashion study, but at the same time focuses on the humble materiality of the object. Van Tienhoven and Smelik thus reveal that clothes in their affective impact on the wearer have a certain 'agency'.

The next article addresses a lesser-known subculture from the Soviet Union. In 'Guys in a strange style: Subcultural masculinity of Soviet *Stiliagi*', Alla Myzelev explores the subcultural Soviet movement *Stiliagi* from its appearance in 1948 to the early 1960s. The movement created countercultural fashion styles for men for the first time since the Communist Revolution in 1917. Myzelev argues that the movement and its concomitant lifestyle contributed to a change in the representation of masculinity in the Soviet Union by introducing a type of urban man interested in fashion and contemporary (western) music like jazz. Myzelev not only looks at representations of *Stiliagi* in literary works, memoirs and the satirical press of the time, but also held many personal interviews with people who remember *Stiliagi* from those days. She unveils the complicated relationship to class, which was quite different in the Soviet Union from the West. *Stiliagi* offered a type of alternative masculinity that enabled the men to strategically navigate the dangerous landscape of Soviet ideological reality.

From one communist regime to another: in the next article Shuchen Wang analyses and contextualizes the most widespread representations of Chinese modern women's fashion in 'Fashioning Chinese feminism: Representations of women in the art history of modern China'. The images of women's fashion and beauty presented in modern China illustrate the challenging, changing and circuitous development of women's rights and feminism in the country. Discussing the many different images in the long twentieth century, Wang moves first from the geisha-like ladies of news illustrations before the 1911 Revolution, to the poster-calendar girls in the republican aesthetics of the 1920s and 1930s. She then continues to explore papercutting folk art as a medium that profiled women in the uniform aesthetics of Marxist–Leninist–Maoist propaganda from 1949 to 1976, before moving to the contemporary gender-specific art themes and materials applied by female artists after the opening-up policy in recent decades. Finally, she addresses feminist art in the Chinese contemporary art world. Wang's analysis elucidates the interconnections among fashion, art and women's status in China, throughout longstanding patriarchal cultural norms and values.

CSFB seeks to foster more diverse and inclusive ways of understanding the embodiment of aesthetics and politics. It does so by dismantling hegemonic assumptions and propelling fresh approaches to the study of fashion and/or beauty. One such fresh approach is presented in the photo essay 'Sizing up gender' that we are happy to present here. In a joint creative research project Calla Evans, Mindy Stricke, Ben Barry and May Friedman explore the intersections of gender, fatness and fashion through an innovative and evocative arts-based methodology. The photo essay involves collaboratively constructed close-up photographs, portraits and garment images. These images examine people's experiences at the intersections of fatness and gender through one of the most visible and embodied ways by which they construct and resist dominant narratives about these subject positions: fashion and self-fashioning. The 'Sizing up gender' project engages twelve self-identified cis-gender, trans, non-binary and two-spirit fat people across diverse race, class and other subject positions. Their narratives disrupt prevalent understandings of fat bodies and fashion and introduce joyfulness to the story of dressing fat bodies. In the short essay that precedes the photos, the authors connect these feelings of joy to Moore's concept of fabulousness. They illustrate how the participants' experiences of joy and risk can be attributed not only to genders, races and sexualities, but also to the ways in which these identities intersect with their fat embodiments and cultural constructs such as fatphobia and weight stigma. The images introduce a visual fabulousness, which is rarely afforded to fat bodies.

With this issue of *CSFB*, we welcome a book reviews editor, Chamutal Leket and two exhibition reviews editors, Satarupa Bhattacharya and Annamari Vänskä. We are delighted to include a book review and several exhibition reviews from different parts of the world for this issue, crisscrossing from India to Denmark and Belgium. Notably, the crisscrossing of geographic and subject-positional boundaries reminds us of the wide range of identities, cultural aesthetics and international

perspectives and critiques in the field. We hope to include book and exhibition reviews more regularly in forthcoming issues and truly appreciate the associate editors who are helping to expand the reach of the journal to a more international community of critical fashion and beauty scholars.

Along these same lines, *CSFB* has also renewed its Editorial Board and Advisory Board. We are very excited about the internationally and interdisciplinarily diverse array of members, with whom we recently had an inspiring discussion about future initiatives for the journal. We trust that the expanded boards will help to renew, refresh and advance the journal and take it into new directions, which we anticipate will include options for scholarship that highlights creative practice (such as the photo essay in this issue), new forums for curatorial reflections (to be featured in the next issue in 2022), and perhaps new avenues for scholars to share commentary in short essays on a range of cultural topics pertaining to fashion and beauty, so as to foster critical and creative discourse in our diverse, cross-cutting field.

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Suggested citation

Smelik, Anneke and Kaiser, Susan B. (2021), 'Crisscrossing through critical fashion studies: Inclusive and interdisciplinary intersections', *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty*, 12:2, pp. 155–61, https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb_00033_2

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