

the invaluable support of research assistants. My special thanks to Stephanie E. Herold, for her thoughtful and diligent work in helping me complete this book, including feedback on contents, proofreading, the organization of images, and many last-minute tasks around the finalization of the manuscript. My thanks go also to my former research assistants Leilah Vevaina, Corrinne Crewe, and Laura Snelgrove, who were involved in the organization of the symposium and who helped with preliminary research. For her creativity and work on the book cover design, I want to thank Cayla O'Connell.

For their considerate comments and scholarly advice at various stages of this book project I thank Rachel Lifter, Hazel Clark, Susan B. Kaiser, and Carol Tulloch, as well as the anonymous reviewers at Bloomsbury, whose comments helped shape this book. Anna Wright receives my special thanks for her excitement for and tireless belief in this book project, since I first approached her with the idea, and for her constructive comments and professional guidance. Further thanks to Joanne B. Eicher and Kathryn Earle for encouraging me to pursue this book, and especially to Hannah Crump and Ariadne Godwin for all their support, patience and for helping me to ensure that this book made the deadline.

## FOREWORD

Christopher Breward

At the time of writing (spring 2015), the practice and culture of fashion received one of those periodic frontal attacks from an industry insider. Lidewij Edelkoort, the most celebrated proponent of trend forecasting, has engineered optimum exposure for her own brand through the publication of her manifesto "Anti\_Fashion [*sic*]: Ten Reasons Why the Fashion System Is Obsolete." A call to arms, her document critiques the educational model in which—as she sees it—fashion students across the world are encouraged to believe in the delusional mirage of star designers, the catwalk show, and the luxury brand. It berates the narcissistic cult of celebrity that places individualism above community. It bemoans the loss of skill and an understanding of the value of craft that has destroyed the European textile industry, and regrets the exploitation of labor and natural resources in low-wage regions. It challenges a consumerist understanding of value, where low price and ephemeral modishness trump quality and pleasure. It ridicules the limited imaginations and historical amnesia of creatives within the industry. It dismisses the timidity and defensiveness of both the corporate face of fashion and its media reflection, damning standards of journalism and the pervasiveness of press relations. And finally, it welcomes the emergence of the new, informed antifashion consumer (increasingly, according to Edelkoort, men rather than women), emboldened by alternative networks, excited by independence and driven to seek uniqueness.

Setting aside the question of complicity (the polished messages of trend forecasters are perhaps at the root of many of these problems, and glossy consultancy has provided a dubious sheen for several global corporations whose practices put powerful industrial nations to shame), "Anti\_Fashion" nevertheless captures the spirit of our times and suggests that the concept of fashion, as it has existed for the past two decades, is ripe for reconstruction. Many of its points are hard to disagree with, though any historian of fashion worth their salt

would argue that such debates are not new, and that anxieties around the moral worth of fashion culture, or the ethical implications of sweated labor and global trade, are as old as the first presentation of clothes designed for form as much as for function, for extrinsic as much as for intrinsic value. That said, Edelkoort certainly gives us something to chew on, and shows us why an informed and critical apparatus for the study of historical and contemporary fashion is more important now than ever.

“Anti\_Fashion” also provokes reflection on the manner in which fashion discourse has changed since the turn of the twenty-first century. While innovation and standards have seemingly atrophied in the world of fashion business, critique and commentary have blossomed in academia, cultural institutions and in the free university that constitutes the blogosphere or the worldwide web. Edelkoort (herself onetime director of the Design Academy in Eindhoven) may despair of teaching in some fashion design schools, but there is no cause to lament the vibrancy of analysis that continues to open up in the humanities and social sciences, in exhibition spaces and galleries, and indeed in many forward-thinking practice-based fashion and textile college departments for whom research and social, economic, political, technical, and aesthetic contexts are primary concerns.

So, in recognition that this is the age of the manifesto (and its debased internet form the “listicle”), and as a foreword to the excellent primer for understanding twenty-first-century fashion through critical modes of research that this volume is, it seems apposite to identify ten points for the promotion, not of an “Anti\_Fashion” position, but of an informed understanding of fashion’s role in historical and contemporary cultures. Manifestos are perhaps the tools of revolutionaries and dictators. They are difficult to live up to. Aphorisms have a gentler philosophical function, and it is in the latter spirit that I offer these up, inspired here by the many different sites, materials, and practices of fashion that the work in this book exemplifies:

*Fashion is made manifest in material forms. It demands study in the same way that ancient artifacts are made meaningful by archaeologists: through careful excavation.*

*Fashion has a tendency to construct its own canons. Like every cultural form these should be documented and then subjected to debate and challenge. Art historians are expert creators and destroyers of these canons, as surely as modernism follows romanticism. Like art historians, fashion scholars need to look and question.*

*Fashion is not necessarily spectacular (though it often conforms to the theory of the society of the spectacle), it can also be demotic, ordinary, mundane, routine and humble. It is the stuff of the ethnographer and the anthropologist.*

*Fashion moves in space and time. It shares in the complexity of physics and mathematics, making patterns and networks, forming mazes and constellations. Through its forms we have an opportunity to re-unite art and science and to heal the rift of the two cultures.*

*Fashion is gossip. Never underestimate the power of gossip. Semiologists are driven into ecstasies of supposition by its whispers.*

*Fashion can be about confirmation, of self and others. But it is also about anxiety, ambiguity and worry. As an aid to understanding psychological complexities it is unsurpassed.*

*Fashion studies has always thrived, as many disciplines do, by positioning itself between borders and at the periphery. Its apparent lack of respectability provided energy. Now there are many journals and conferences to serve its purposes. They give more space for multiple points of view, but the field must strive to avoid co-option and exhaustion.*

*Fashion is intensely personal, in the same way that poetry is intensely personal. It is a medium through which personal stories can be told, memories re-lived and futures foretold.*

*Fashion is so all-encompassing and encyclopedic in its terrain that it seems tailor-made for the era of big-data. The old antiquarians used it to map national customs and habits. We have the tools to put it to the service of as yet unimagined projects, of even greater scope and impact.*

*Fashion does not define. It is instead a term that demands definition.*

That final aphorism is the property of Hazel Clark, who uttered it at the *Locating Fashion/Studies* conference organized by Heike Jenss at Parsons School of Design, The New School in 2010. Many of the scholars whose work is presented in this book first came together then and their work offers an insightful series of definitions that can set out the terrain for fashion studies in the future. Ranging across the consideration of fashion and dress as material culture and everyday artifact, as embodied and located practice, and as a form of intellectual and scholarly endeavor, the following chapters present a number of exemplary case studies that will aid students of this vibrant subject, as they hone their understanding of fashion’s multiple layers of meaning. Research, reflection, and good scholarship take time to perfect. Indeed, in that searching for quality and insight, for a version of “slow fashion,” perhaps we can find some common ground with Edelkoort’s

demands for deeper engagement. Whatever our motivations, I hope you will find this book to be as inspiring and as useful a tool, for the exploration of fashion and the methods necessary for its study, as I did. I hope it will provoke many more aphorisms and encourage the next generation of fashion scholars to do good work.

# **INTRODUCTION LOCATING FASHION/ STUDIES: RESEARCH METHODS, SITES AND PRACTICES**

**Heike Jenss**

Foregrounding methodological reflection on the exploration of fashion through material culture, ethnography, and the mixing of sources and methods through selected case studies, this book offers nuanced insights into how interdisciplinary scholars approach and make sense of fashion in its multifaceted appearances. Focusing on both fashion and its research as situated practices, this book moves from a discussion of fashion collecting in museums in London and New York to the study of fashion and dress in people's everyday lives. It includes ethnographic explorations of fashion conducted through working in the global garment industry, working in model casting agencies, making a street style blog, and observing the creative process in a fashion design school. And it offers examples of the bridging of theory and practice in fashion research, demonstrating the tailoring and fitting of methodological approaches to suit research interests as varied as the design collections of Martin Margiela in the 1990s, the fashioning of masculinities in early twenty-first-century America, or the practice-based exploration of fashion as a site of conflict. Through these wide-ranging examples, the chapters in this book illuminate together underexamined sites of fashion, including the "backstage" practices of the cultural production of fashion, as well as the possibilities and challenges that are part of the interpretive, intersubjective, and interdisciplinary practice of doing fashion research.

Jonathan S. Marion, *Ballroom: Culture and Costume in Competitive Dance*  
Dunja Brill, *Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality and Style*  
Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Value in  
Clothing and Modelling*  
Juanjuan Wu, *Chinese Fashion: From Mao to Now*  
Annette Lynch, *Porn Chic*  
Brent Luvaas, *DIY Style: Fashion, Music and Global Cultures*  
Jianhua Zhao, *The Chinese Fashion Industry*  
Eric Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*  
Karen Hansen and D. Soyini Madison, *African Dress: Fashion,  
Agency, Performance*  
Maria Mellins, *Vampire Culture*  
Lynne Hume, *The Religious Life of Dress*  
Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson, *Fashion and Museums*  
Masafumi Monden, *Japanese Fashion Cultures*  
Alfonso McClendon, *Fashion and Jazz*  
Phyllis G. Tortora, *Dress, Fashion and Technology*  
Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon, *The Superhero Costume*  
Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, *Fashion's Double*  
Yuniya Kawamura, *Sneakers*

# FASHION STUDIES

Research Methods, Sites and Practices

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Bloomsbury Academic  
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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