

Affective Fashion(s)

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Since the 'affective turn' that occurred in the mid-1990s, the term 'affect' and its conceptualisations have been embraced by various humanistic disciplines to contribute to the ontological description of reality, hence sanctioning a deeper intellectual interest in the material body. In these contexts, the theoretical frameworks and methodologies of affect spread in reaction to the alleged inability of poststructuralism to properly account for the role of the body in the formation of human subjectivity. This panel seeks to foreground the uses of 'affect' in the analysis of fashion. This pursuit might, on the one hand, grasp how bodily sensations are mobilised and come to *matter* in everyday practices of self-fashioning, both individual and institutional; on the other, unpack how specific affects that are circulated across fashion media representations are revealing of the cultural systems in which they are embedded. Thus, through the lens of affect, our aim is to raise questions about the 'structures of feelings' informing fashion design, its processes and its representations. The papers featured in this panel address phenomenological experiences of self-fashioning in everyday life, the production and circulation of affect in media representations, emotional design strategies, and the affective component in fashion curatorial practices.

Speaker and Paper Abstracts:

Lost in Reflection: Clothes, mirrors and the self

Lucia Ruggerone (Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen)

Renate Stauss (American University Paris)

This paper explores the role of the mirror in the act of dressing and in prevalent interpretations of dress practices and clothes that ultimately equate 'feeling good' with 'looking good'. It argues that the common understanding of the mirror as a neutral reflective surface of 'bare facts', when applied to acts of dressing, reinforces a dualistic view of the body as passive flesh shaped and modified through the power of the mind. Moreover, just as our three-dimensional bodies are reflected into two-dimensions, the multi-sensorial experience of dress is reduced to an image. The paper contends that the centrality of the gaze in Western culture – and the constitution of subjectivity by relation of looking – fosters the assimilation between 'feeling good' and 'looking good', thereby confining dress practices in a static, representational function that dematerialises the body into a clothed image. In this process, the affective dimensions of the encounter between bodies and garments are lost, while the subjectivity of the wearer is posited as a consciousness intentionally creating a 'meaningful' self through clothes. Our article aims to challenge this prevalent approach to dressing practices and to emphasise the affective involvement we have with our clothes. We will use insights derived from phenomenology and theories of affect, firstly to draw connections between the prevalence of the gaze and a definition of dress practices as representative of self and, secondly, to explore the other sensorial engagements we feel with our clothes and to show how dress practices and selfhood are mutually shaping elements in a process of becoming.

'We Look for a Feeling – And It's not just Style': Affects and atmospheres in fashion mediation

Jana Melkumova-Reynolds (Chelsea College of Art and London College of Fashion / King's College London)

This paper applies theories of affect (Massumi 2002, Clough 2008) and 'atmosphere' (Böhme 1993, 2017) to the work processes of fashion intermediaries and tastemakers. It draws on the fieldwork conducted at Paris Fashion Week, where I observed, documented and participated in the work of fashion 'agents' – an intermediary role akin to that of the dealer in the art world. The paper unpacks the affects exerted, circulated and experienced by these professionals, arguing that fashion as a workplace is a site of conflicting *affective regimes*. I distinguish three key affects that are at play in fashion work. The key one is 'coolness', or 'glamour' (Thrift 2010), an affect grounded in 'making what is difficult appear easy' (Thrift 2010: 9) and channelling a 'relaxed, work-free situation' (Böhme 1993). It stands in opposition to 'zaniness', an affect of 'incessant doing, or of perpetual improvisation and adaptation to projects' (Ngai 2012: 189), predicated on 'an intensely willing and desiring subjectivity' (Ngai 2012: 184); this affect is especially palpable in fashion agents' speech, gestures and other forms of self-presentation. The third, and most complex, affect present in fashion mediation is 'stuplimity', a paradoxical affect of 'animated suspension'

that combines 'the excessive, if abrupt and fleeting excitation of shock and the prolonged lack of excitement we associate with boredom' (Ngai 2005: 261). The paper will demonstrate how these affects are distributed in fashion week's spaces, both online and offline, and conclude that these affective regimes are typical of the late-capitalist workplace as a whole.

Imaging the Plus-Size Body: Haptic visuality and the aesthetics of disgust in contemporary fashion photography

Lauren Downing Peters (Columbia College Chicago)

In March 2016, the plus-size retailer Lane Bryant rolled out a series of commercials and print advertisements with which the brand cemented itself as the unofficial ambassador of the body positivity movement. In the minimalist black and white spots, plus-size models are depicted engaging in a series of ordinary activities – from shadow boxing to breastfeeding – in various states of undress. Fat, female consumers who had long felt neglected by the fashion industry lauded the campaign as a triumph, but network censors regarded the two-minute commercial as too racy for primetime television. The problem? The models' copious amounts of unbounded flesh upon which the camera's lens unflinchingly lingered. In the contemporary fashion landscape, the Lane Bryant controversy is but one among a number of moments at which the fleshy bodies of plus-size models have been the subject of debate – the most recent of which being model Tess Holliday's appearance on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*. Using these contested and controversial fashion photographs as a jumping off point, this paper historicises these 'viscerally difficult' images and offers a critical re-reading of them through Laura Mulvey's theory of 'haptic visuality' and Michelle Meagher's notion of the 'aesthetics of disgust'. In doing so, this paper scrutinises how fashion's normativising gaze is destabilised and subverted in and through these affective images – thereby revealing the extent to which viewers experience themselves *as disgusting* when looking at images of the unruly fat, female body – while also considering how they might function to normalise radical modes of female embodiment.

Fashioning Emotional Durability: Framing the creation of emotional value in fashion practices and discourses

Alex Esculapio (University of Brighton)

The term 'emotional durability' was coined by design theorist Jonathan Chapman to describe a framework for sustainable product design which seeks to encourage and nourish long-term relationships between products and users (Chapman 2005, 2015). Emotionally durable design attempts to create the conditions for long-lasting, meaningful, enriching emotional experiences with the aim of reducing consumption and waste, which is framed by Chapman as 'the symptom of failed relationship' (2005). Research by sustainable fashion scholar Kate Fletcher (2011, 2017) and anthropologist Sophie Woodward (2007, 2014), however, has shown that durability in fashion, rather than the intentional outcome of specific design strategies, is more often than not an accidental outcome that results from the everyday practices of users. In order to bridge these two perspectives, the paper considers three case studies – each representing a different approach to fashion practice: design, mending, and storytelling – through an active understanding of fashion as 'fashioning', a process that occurs 'between an individual and clothes, as either maker or wearer', but also 'in networks of people and garments that produce the meaning of fashion' (Fisher and Woodward 2014). In doing so, the paper proposes that we look at emotionally durable fashion as an umbrella term that encompasses both 'processes of fashioning' – intentional creative processes – and 'acts of fashioning' – informal and everyday processes – through which the emotional value of clothing is continuously fashioned and re-fashioned. Through the analysis of these processes, the paper finally advances an understanding of the emotional value as 'accumulated positive affect' (Ahmed 2014) that might result from continuous encounters between bodies and fashion objects (Ruggerone 2017).

Affect and Sensation: A phenomenology of clothing in the archive

Ellen Sampson (Costume Institute, New York)

There is something macabre about the dress archive, with its host of garments no longer worn: bodiless bodies, trussed up or packed into boxes and drawers. Conservator Sarah Scaturro (2016) writes of the conservation lab as a morgue-like space but it is for the museum archive that this analogy holds most true. The intimate and bodily nature of clothing renders garments without bodies powerful sources of affect: a power that is particularly apparent in the case of garments that show traces of use and wear. This research presents a phenomenological approach to dress archives: to garments no longer worn. Drawing on practise-based research undertaken at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; it examines the sensory and embodied encounters with garments in museum collections and asks how these affects might be harnessed in the design and development of exhibitions of fashion and dress. Utilising the work of phenomenologists Schilder (1935) and Merleau-Ponty (1969), it positions meeting these absences/presences, these intimate and entangled artefacts, as meetings of bodies. It frames these encounters not only as metaphorical meetings of bodies, of 'distributed personhoods' (c.f. Weiner 1989), agencies embodied in and transmitted through the artefacts, but as a literal meeting of bodies, the meeting with garments that, through use, have become materially entangled with those who wore them.

When Bodies Are Not Enough: Affective fashion in the museum space

Caroline Bellios (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)

Our intense relationship to clothing, a malleable second skin, our chosen identity, is undeniably emotional, but this close interbody relationship creates challenges when viewing fashion in exhibition. Curators and exhibition designers confront multiple layers of distance created by our quotidian and commercial familiarity with garments and the disunion inherent in the inability to physically interact with objects we understand through touch. Affective strategies, from the intimate to the immersive, bridge this distance, interrupting and reframing our relationships to clothing on exhibit. 'Spectres' (V&A, 2005) compelled intimate looking to access submerged feelings and unlock personal memories and collective understandings; 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty' (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011) expanded immersive storyscapes to communal spectacle in which both guest and garment were characters. But the lenses of belonging and sentimentality explored by Lauren Berlant can also connect us to garments in exhibitions within the broader museum experience. 'Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity' (Art Institute of Chicago, 2013), a painting exhibition, integrated the physicality and specificity of garments to reorient our relationship to familiar works of art; 'Georgia O'Keeffe: Living Modern' (Brooklyn Museum, 2017) employed her wardrobe to suggest a Sonia Delaunay-like fluidity of meaning and representation between art and clothing; and 'Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up' (V&A, 2018) blurred the surfaces of art making and social identity, working across canvas and body. By exploiting its inherent affect, integrating feeling into the experience of exhibition, fashion can overcome the absence of bodies and touch to create compelling and provocative museum-going experiences.