

Dress and Dissent: Embodying protest

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From Pussy Hats on Women's Marches to all-black attire at awards ceremonies for the Time's Up campaign, the use of dress as a form of 'non-verbal resistance' (Crane, 2000) seems more prevalent than ever in recent times. Clothing's uniquely affective, declarative and performative capacity has meant it has long operated as a central communicative site for political activism and demands for social reform. This session gathers together international scholars to consider these intersections, past and present. Through fresh case studies, new theoretical perspectives and global viewpoints this session examines ways of understanding dress as and for protest in its widest sense.

Key questions, explored through the presentations, include:

- The role of dress in political resistance, activism and campaigns for social reform. Where have these actions arisen? What forms do they take? What methods should we deploy for their analysis?
- Subversion, transgression and refusal of/in clothing as sartorial statements for social reform and as acts of civil disobedience. How important is spectacle in calls for change? Must radical political messages result in radical design forms?
- Dress in countercultural and utopian social movements. How are beliefs signified and materialised in these practices? How do they shape as well as reflect political ideologies? Where is dress central, incidental or overlooked?
- T-shirts, tote bags, tie pins, tattoos, sashes, brassards and buttons: the body as placard. What are the symbolic repertoires at play? How can we measure the significance of such gestures? What are the challenges of an aestheticisation of politics?

Speakers and Abstracts

Dressing Abolitionists and the Enslaved: Slave-labour and free-labour gingham cloth in Carlisle in the 1850s

Anna Vaughan Kett (University of Brighton)

Against the backdrop of the transatlantic boycott of slave-grown cotton, from the 1840s to the 1860s a significant cohort of antislavery activists, primarily Quaker women, demanded 'slave-free' or 'free-labour' alternatives. A small, idealistic and highly efficient supply chain was established, linking Philadelphia, Manchester and Carlisle, to enable raw cotton grown on free farms in the American South to be shipped to Britain, manufactured in the North West and distributed for sale in Britain and America.

Through close examination of surviving samples made by John Wingrave of Carlisle, this paper makes a close examination of free-labour cotton cloth. Through *The Slave: His wrongs and their remedy*, the British mouthpiece of the Free Produce Movement, attitudes to wearing this extraordinary cloth will be unpacked. The focus is on gingham, the ubiquitous, striped and checked cloth of the 1850s. This cloth has several identities: humble textile of the labouring poor, hand-woven and bespoke cloth of abolitionists, and despised clothing of the enslaved on American plantations.

In the town of Carlisle, capitalistic enterprise and idealistic endeavour functioned side-by-side. Whilst Cumberland Gingham Co-Operative was making bespoke, free-cotton gingham for British and American abolitionists, a few streets away, Peter James Dixon & Son was making vast quantities of gingham specifically for the American market, where it dressed the enslaved. Samples of the two types of gingham are oddly similar; both are hand-loomed, heavyweight and woven in similar patterns and colours. Conclusions will connect abolitionist and enslaved political intent through cloth and clothing.

Performative Communities: The artistic brotherhoods of the 19th century

Julia Ramírez Blanco (Barcelona University)

This paper seeks to reread the history of the artistic brotherhoods of the 19th century, focusing on their performative dimensions and their forms of aestheticising community, placing a strong emphasis on the identarian role of clothing. Related to my current research on this topic, aimed at writing a book, the paper provides a brief journey through the cases of the Méditateurs in Paris, the Lukasbund and the group of women neoclassical sculptors in Rome, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in London and its later evolution into the Arts and Crafts movement through its establishment of communities in the countryside. Throughout this survey, the focus will be on how social imagination and concepts of community were staged within these groups through the use of symbols, dress and performative practices. It will thus show how these visual tools served not only to express but also to configure social and political discourses linked to forms of social experimentation. The methodology of this analysis will work at the intersection between studies of utopian practice and the history of artistic movements, in an approach close to the history of ideas and the social history of art.

Dressing for Heaven on Earth: Socialist women and politicised dress reform in Britain, 1880–1914

Dani Trew (Victoria & Albert Museum)

This paper explores the relationship between socialism, fashion and dress reform practices in Britain between 1880 and 1914. Examining this relationship reveals alternative, utopian visions of modernity, which although marginal and subcultural, fed into the formation of modern design and political culture in important, and underexplored ways. The paper also reflects on the ambiguous legacy of socialist dress reform – with its particular combination of aesthetics, biopolitics and social evolution – and argues that it fed into both welfare state modernism, and also fascism's 'aestheticisation of politics'.

Drawing on underexplored sources, such as women's columns in socialist newspapers, photographic postcards, diaries and letters, the paper focuses on three main areas. These are, firstly, outlining socialist critiques of fashion and arguments for dress reform. Secondly, extending the notion of 'socialist dress reform' into a set of practices related to the production and consumption of clothing. Finally – and the most fully expanded in this paper – examining what prominent socialist women actually wore.

Analysing the choices of individual women demonstrates how socialist clothing styles were fundamental to political positioning, signalling membership of an 'advanced' subcultural group, and materialising a shared vision of the future. Clothing choices also often emphasised functionality, enabling women to engage in platform speaking, to organise strikes, and, eventually – for the younger women examined in this paper – to become the first generation of female Labour MPs. Understanding 'socialist dress', therefore, is not only key to understanding the formation of modern dress, but also the formation of modern politics.

Dressing as Protest: Dalits' struggle against caste-imposed dressing in colonial South India

Jentle T Varghese (Government College, Kottayam, Kerala)

No longer attending

High-collared Rebellion. Protest and performativity in the Black Panther Party

Ruby Ellis (Universität Heidelberg)

Throughout its history the turtleneck has been characterised by contradictions: projecting a new American masculinity yet loved by the Women's Liberation Movement; covering the liminal space of the neck while emphasising the body's shape with clinging jersey fabric; worn by everyone from revolutionaries to 1950s couples in love to 1980s norm-core à la Steve Jobs.

Taking a journey via the sexually seditious 1920s, the apathetic *Zazous* of occupied Paris and the Existentialists of the Left Bank, this paper will focus on how the Black Panther Party (BPP) used the

turtleneck to perform resistance, utilising its contradictions to protest the condition of African Americans in 1970s USA.

Performativity, with its dual phenomena of iterability and citation, emphasises dress as an embodied practice, not only taking into account the underlying matrices of power but also placing the dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective under the microscope. Building on Derrida and his reading of Austin's Speech Act theory, Butler's work on the constitution of materiality and the construction of gender through performance, and theories on historical mimesis, the BPP's attempts to delegitimise the state through their wearing of the turtleneck are uncovered.

Photographs, text and video footage give an insight into the militaristic performance of Party members that questioned the state monopoly on violence and emphasised a masculinity commonly denied to black males. Through their use of this transnational protest symbol, members of the BPP linked themselves to previous struggles as a means of both legitimisation and delegitimisation.

This is What a Feminist Looks Like: Late nineteenth-century women activists seeking power through dress and coiffure

Artemis Alexiou (York St. John University)

Currently, there is an inadequacy in research that pays attention to the non-verbal messages found in late nineteenth-century general feminist periodicals, and a disparity in inquiries that focus on the sartorial and hairstyle choices of feminist women of this period. This paper focuses on both of these two types of non-verbal communication, and the hybrid message they conveyed, especially as they appeared within the *Women's Penny Paper/Woman's Herald* (1888-1892). It considers the portraits of women feminists published as part of the interview column; the message projected through the clothing and hair the sitters donned; and the ways in which these messages protested, or not, against the patriarchal ideals of the times. The paper reveals that these portraits included elements of True Womanhood combined with elements of New Womanhood, arguing that women feminists of the period actively sought mainstream/fashionable, or alternative/niche styles of dress and hair as a means of acquiring power. Women's dress and hairstyles are examined, and the hybrid rhetoric of these portraits is discussed. This is a journey into the mysteries of the unspoken messages communicated through the dress and hair of late nineteenth-century women activists, the capacity of specific dress and hair styles to accommodate such messages, and the ability of this type of 'symbolic communication' to protest against established patriarchal ideals.

Materialising Dissent: Pussy Riot's balaclavas, material culture and feminist agency

Paula Chambers (Leeds Arts University)

In February 2012, the Russian feminist group Pussy Riot was famously arrested for staging a performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. The media attention this arrest brought ensured worldwide notoriety, helped in no small part by the striking visuals of the homemade balaclavas worn by group members: a political strategy of resistance subsequently adopted by people all over the world who supported the women's stand on gender equality and women's rights. Following a recent rise in interest in new materialism and feminist activism, this paper explores the specific material qualities of Pussy Riot's balaclavas. The balaclavas are analysed here as objects of activist feminist materiality with reference to the 'feminine' qualities of the materiality itself (brightly coloured tights and woolly hats), also to processes of material engagement (hasty hacking, the home-made object), both materiality and making seen here as the manifestation of feminist agency and dissent. In the 2016 essay 'What is a Feminist Object? Feminist material culture and the making of the activist object', Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson propose a feminist system of objects within which the material culture of feminist activism is defined by the primacy of the object's political agency. Bartlett and Henderson identify four major categories of feminist objects: corporeal things, world-making things, knowledge and communicative things, and protest things. This paper analyses Pussy Riot's balaclavas in relation to the identificatory criteria of each of these categories, as such presenting the balaclavas as objects of material culture with feminist agency.

Being the Big Man: The role of performativity and aesthetic elements in 'big man' politics in Uganda

Siiima Itabaaza (Independent Scholar, Kampala, Uganda)

This paper explores some of the performative and aesthetic elements of 'big man' politics in Uganda and argues that performativity is central in 'big man rule'. It demonstrates how dress, together with language and gestures, are used to cultivate and subvert the image of the 'big man'. Using the case study of President Yoweri Museveni, this paper analyses how he uses his hat and military uniform to present himself as a 'big man'. It then compares Museveni to former member of parliament and current Executive Director of Oxfam, Winnie Byanyima, to examine how she used the West African Bubu dress to challenge 'big man rule' during her time in Ugandan politics. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of the findings from both case studies on leadership in Uganda and Africa.