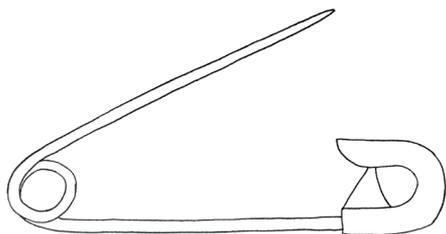


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JOURNAL OF DRESS PRACTICE



FASHION + VIOLENCE

DRESS PRACTICE COLLECTIVE
MISSION STATEMENT

The Dress Practice Collective is a New School student-run organization aimed at joining elements of visual culture, fashion theory, design studies and personal practice through a variety of media. We hope to spark conversations and initiate collaborations between students, faculty and members of the greater community. The organization was founded in Spring 2013 for the purpose of presenting exhibitions, organizing workshops, and publishing original content.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Violence is a particularly on-the-nose theme. In the collective imagination, brand-crazed “fashion victims,” fur obsessed Cruella de Vils, and certain Prada-loving demons hint at the relation between fashion and latent brutality. Alexander McQueen’s Spring/Summer 2001 blood slide embellished gown and Schiaparelli’s 1938 tear dress make the connection literal – violence is always in fashion.

The fourth issue of *BIAS* offers challenging, definitive, and insightful perspectives on the manifold connections between the violent and fashionable. Some essays in this issue confront literal cruelty against garment laborers and animals, while others evidence symbolic and embodied violence in fashion, photography, and film.

We have had the pleasure of reading and editing essays ranging from representations of violence to philosophical and historical examinations and personal narratives. Special thanks go to Dr. Alison Matthews David and Joshua Katcher, who shared in interviews their perspectives on the theme as fashion researchers and practitioners.

BIAS’s trajectory from its initial issue, *Healing*, through the later *Politics*, and our prior issue, *Surveillance*, deals with themes of mounting anxiety, a trend we think reflects fashion’s ever-strengthening ties to our socio-political spheres and to our personal lives. It is now more relevant than ever to negotiate and debate fashion’s problematics and potentialities, violent and otherwise, and we hope this issue inspires further investigation.

– Aimee Williams and Veronica Maldonado
BIAS Editors 2016

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PART ONE

REPRESENTATIONS IN FILM

THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL WOMAN: ARTIFICE AND VIOLENCE IN *UNDER THE SKIN*

By Jessica Williams



A paradoxical message infiltrates fiction, media, and reality: Woman is powerless due to her supposed preoccupation with beauty, yet simultaneously dangerous because she possesses beauty. A discourse within sci-fi cinema illuminates this patriarchal contradiction through the predatory alien woman, a trope portraying a traditional feminine allure on the surface, hiding underneath an extraterrestrial body. Violence weaves together a narrative of disembodiment that is justified by alien woman's precarious, albeit psychopathic nature. Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2014) complicates and adheres to sci-fi's established predatory alien woman. Critical reception attributes the film's brilliance to

alien seductress' rapacious characteristics, yet an oversight of fashion's didactic role undermines the film's more intricate examinations. The character in the film resonates as a noir heroine, drawing reference to Ava Gardner or Marlene Dietrich.¹ *Under the Skin's* surfaces—the alien heroine's faux-fur coat, her smooth red lipstick, and the shiny surface of the dark pool where men meet their demise – reveal that feminine materiality functions as an inevitable gateway to violence.

Clothing is the currency of exchange between life and death in the film. A fashioning process fixes the central narrative, as the alien's clothing choices identifying her as woman initiate not only man's demise, but also her own. The fash-

ioning process begins with the alien woman's construction—we hear a sinister developmental language process at film's opening, then an anonymous man on a motorcycle recycles one woman's body and aesthetic to a new feminine form. Johansson's character presumably continues a process unbeknownst to the viewer, taking clothing from the vacant female body and dressing herself with it. At this point, the man on the motorcycle seems to have fashioned the alien woman.

Thwarting expectations of the alien heroine's action, the next scene drops us on an escalator in a crowded mall, where the alien woman reconfigures her appearance. Her choice materials—faux-fur animal print and denim—are visually consequential. Supposedly (based upon her recent "birth") unaware that these materials signify an amalgam of classic Hollywood femininity (the faux-fur coat) and normalcy (the jeans), she selects with certainty fashion that enables



her to prey (especially symbolized in the animal print of the coat) on and identify with humans. Her red lipstick also denotes a traditional femininity both idealized and abhorred in generic fictional conventions.

The alien woman's aesthetic ambiguously toys with the idea that women are inherently drawn to signifiers of evil (lipstick, for example, easily functions as the apple that lured the mythical Adam into sin). We only understand the alien heroine to be a dangerous seduc-

tress after these feminine indicators, yet the film later complicates this danger with vulnerability.

The alien's self-fashioned ensemble and man's response to it create a rhetoric of violence. Male retorts to the alien woman's presentation follow a recurring process starting with man identifying positive feminine attributes, eroticizing her body through Laura Mulvey's classic male gaze (therefore rendering the woman's body unthreatening), and completing the process in death: either the death of the

male or, eventually, the death of the alien heroine. Material exchanges—clothing and human—advance and maintain this rhetoric. The alien navigates Glasgow's streets in a van, searching for visual information: the victim must be isolated, curious, and sexually responsive to her aesthetics. Supplemented by an economy of "realism," the film crew's hidden cameras record unwitting Glasgow spectators react to Johansson's character with unadulterated inquisitiveness (a produc-

tion value emphasized by Glazer in interviews). It is also significant that Scarlett Johansson fulfills this role, because of her recognizable alto voice. Glazer hardly utilizes Johansson's well-known quality, further emphasizing aesthetics as a means of communication. Despite the alien woman's ingenuous conversation skills, she lures men with her facade alone.

Violence completes the film's most significant material exchanges. As the alien woman wan-



ders outside her van, a group of unruly women lead her into a dark club. Note here that these women unquestionably accept her due to her wardrobe of normalcy—she physically fits into this party with faux-fur and heels. The heroine is now immersed in an alien world. Through her vulnerability, a predatory man approaches her, and she reads his visual information as opportunity. Like scenes previous to this, the man "goes home" with her, and as she progressively removes her clothing, she leaves a trail of

materials for him to follow, while he too removes his clothes, prepared to be sexually gratified by what he thinks he's hunted down at the club. The material trail leads to his immateriality under a dark, glue-like sphere where we learn men are harvested through yet another material exchange—a de-birthing process. Fully submerged, we are privileged this man's perspective of what lies beneath the surface. Suspended in a womb-like gel, another form emerges, distinct enough to recognize as a human male, although his

body is hollow. In a brief encounter, the two men meet with a gaze, and in an instant, the man from the club watches as the other man immaterializes into skin.

Knowledge of man's doom beneath the alien woman's shiny surface informs the next exchange, comprising a pivotal encounter in which the alien heroine performs a kind of re-birth. The inclusion of a human with a figure-altering condition (actor Adam Pearson was born with neurofibromatosis) supports and complicates the film's idea of aesthetic exchanges. The alien woman reads this man's appearance as alien to other men, and takes pity on him based upon his disfigurement. A cycle is broken when she releases this man from being harvested, yet a new cycle begins: the humanization and eventual destruction of the alien woman's body.

The film begins with lifeless woman's body and ends in its demise when the alien woman burns to death after a series of events, in isolation in the forest outside of the city, bringing forth questions of the film's self-awareness. Does the narrative ultimately punish its protagonist in flames, or protest masculinity's harmful nature? The answer may lie in the sympathy we bestow upon the alien heroine; we are sutured to her perspective. In an interview for *Film4*, Glazer says his alien character "views the world through an alien lens," and yet, her notions of human, feminine beauty are innate, almost as if she miraculously self-actualized, only to experience firsthand the violent reality of womanhood.² +



VIOLENCE, VEHEMENCE, AND THE PHANTASMAGORIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FETISHISM IN STANLEY KUBRICK'S *EYES WIDE SHUT*

Kristen Elizabeth See

NICK

*You couldn't get in anyway in those clothes...because everyone is always
costumed and masked.*

Stanley Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) is an erotic thriller that fosters a Kafkaesque tendency to communicate through the uncanny. Although it was widely criticized for its crooked perversity and lack of narrative coherence, Kubrick's cerebral dream odyssey grants its audience a peek behind the curtain of what Roland Barthes' called the *punctum* or, "that accident which pricks me."¹ The story revolves around Dr. Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) and his hallucinatory quest to find solace after his wife, Alice (Nicole Kidman) admits to flirting with the possibility of infidelity. Over the span of three days, Bill remains haunted; disturbed yet stimulated by the image of his wife in the arms of a naval officer and

as he succumbs to disillusionment, the viewer begins to understand the rhetoric imbued within the phrase, "eyes wide shut". Barthes states, "To say nothing, to shut my eyes is to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness."² This premise functions as the psychosexual catalyst and pejorative tenor of the film – a notion which renders Bill unhinged and left grappling with the insidious nature of one's ego and the violent plasticity of interpersonal relationships.

Those familiar with the *Eyes Wide Shut* will recall its pornographic extravagance. However, the film has much to do with the insecurities, emotions, and desires that lie dormant within the folds of



the subconscious. As a result, *Eyes Wide Shut* is a nod to *film noir* inso-much as it expresses the corrup-tion, paranoia, and anxiety of man's masculinity via thematized "flash-back" sequences. Furthermore, the film monopolizes the role of the *femme fatale* (portrayed by Kidman) and succeeds in depicting the seedy underbelly and urbane fantasies of the metropolitan upper class. Film theorist, Janey Place claims, "the iconography of the film noir is explicitly sexual and often explic-itly violent,"³ so true is this state-ment when considering the plot of Kubrick's thriller. Likewise, in her essay, "Noir Fashion and Noir as Fashion", Ula Lukszo notes,

*The fantasy of noir is an escape from the complications of modern gender roles, an exciting and effortless receding into a story that does not question women's body-bug-ging dresses...These elements, along with the bygone glamour that is perceived in men who wear suits all the time, elide issues of female subordination, male-on-female violence, and punishment of sex-uality provocative women into a careless fetish for stylish, if dated, clothing.*⁴

Suffused in a phantas-magorical haze, *Eyes Wide Shut* prompts the viewer to contemplate the "masks" we all wear in society. While the film primarily chronicles the lavish yet degenerate *phantasies* of a powerful, middle-aged, white brotherhood, Kubrick doesn't fail to articulate the façade of the lay-man. Take into consideration the appearance of "Domino" (Vinessa Shaw), a prostitute who lures Bill

off the streets of lower Manhattan and into her studio. From her alias and conspicuous demeanor to her garish faux fur wardrobe, Domino bears a mask that serves to carefully conceal her identity, revealing only the subtext of her sexuality. Similar deductions could be made for nearly every working-class charac-ter, including the hotel desk clerk (Alan Cumming) and Mr. Milich's daughter (Leelee Sobieski). Valerie Steele suggests, "There are times in social life when clothing functions as a kind of masquerade costume, subversively disguising the individ-ual in the apparel of fantasy itself."⁵

Henceforth, this essay seeks to unpack Stanley Kubrick's filmic interpretation of Modernist anxiety, as it is weaved into the cos-tumes of *Eyes Wide Shut*. In treating Bill as the Baudelairean *Flâneur* or cloaked dandy who looks but does not touch, elements of surveillance, voyeurism, and the performativity/masking of identity manifest as salient themes privy to the discussion of costume as fetish and costume as barometer of psychosomatic vio-lence. Moreover, this essay will draw from the writings of Laura Mulvey, Molly Haskell, and Constance Pen-ley and their subsequent dialogues with Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. This paper will also integrate theories proposed by Val-erie Steele and Jonathan Faiers as they relate to the dissonance in the gilding of fetish wear. Attention will be given to three scenes; name-ly, the Ziegler Christmas party; the subsequent exchange in the Har-

ford's bedroom; and finally, Bill's midnight rendezvous, concluding that costume can be adorned and fetishized as both physical garment and performed identity.

As the opening credits role, punctuated by Dmitri Shostakovich's *Jazz Suite No. 2: VI. Waltz 2*, the audience is presented with a brief shot of Alice who is viewed standing in front of her bedroom mirror in a black evening dress; backside to the viewer. Upon unzipping her attire, which slides smoothly down her supple flesh, Alice stands apathetically nude on weighted hip—wearing nothing but *heels*. This act immediately marks Alice as legible fetish and substitute phallus. Here, Kubrick is quick to pepper the notion of *scopophilic gaze*. She appears vulnerable; she is a body consumed by an audience observing the scene comfortably within the shadowed obscurity of the cinema. Mulvey writes,

But the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the specta-

*tor an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performed.*⁶

Cut to Bill who, in contrast, appears fully clothed in a black suit frantically searching for his wallet. As he hastens his pace, Bill joins Alice in the bathroom where they begin to converse. Here, Alice is positioned on the toilet. The image is familiar yet jarring. No longer is Alice the flesh of fantasy she appeared to be less than a minute prior. Eventually, when she stands to meet Bill, we are given the first glimpse of her dress yet despite Alice's attractive figure, the full-length slit in her gown fails to feign illusion. Instead, the audience experiences her as the body of abjection—one that is not only *leaking* but also one understood as *castrated*, connoted by the simple act of sitting on (opposed to standing over) the basin. One could even argue that it is also Bill's indifference towards Alice and his failure to engage in face-to-face that prohibits the projection of male fantasy, otherwise known as "phallogocentricism." As castrated female, she reinforces order in Bill's world and, for the moment, symbolizes the "nurturing female" or "hero's link to an ideal that serves as an alternative to the *dangerous woman*" endemic in film noir.⁷ Nevertheless, the gender paradigm shifts upon the Harford's arrival at the Ziegler's

Christmas party.

Here, while Bill mingles, Alice lingers intoxicated and dolegged at the lounge bar. The camera begins to oscillate around her figure but halts to draw focus to the exposed flesh of her backless dress. Once again, in the solitude of her stupor, Alice appears vulnerable yet remains illuminated by the eyes of a hidden predator. As Barthes suggests, “Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes? It is the flash itself which seduces.”⁸ As time passes, she becomes the prey of a wealthy Hungarian gentleman named Sandor Szavost whose exoticism heightens her own erotic value, or *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Once entangled in their waltz, the viewer abandons the previous image of Alice as lack. Independent from Bill, she invites the gaze of other men—strangers who know not of her lack and whose excitation is driven by Oedipal pleasure. In this scene, Szavost has replaced Bill as man’s “on-screen surrogate”⁹ and has re-positioned Alice as fetish object—a “passive receptacle for male fantasy.”¹⁰

As Alice and the Hungarian begin to flirt with the prospect of a *quick* affair, Alice eventually succumbs to the weight of her marital status. That said, her admittance is coolly glossed over by Szavost who is eager to financially invest in Alice’s recently-insolvent SoHo art gallery. Intrigued by his offer, Alice tapers tongued innuendo as if toying with the moral exceptions of prostitution as a business trans-

action. The couple continue their breathy exchange as they wantonly waltz around the ballroom. The rhythm of their dance is bewitching against the backdrop of the room’s humid, ambient afterglow. The scene is dizzying, as if Szavost is attempting to disorient Alice; he is ravenous and tumescent in his advances—the body heat is palpable. However, despite teasing the sanctity of her marriage to Bill, their waltz culminates into libidinous chastity. Interestingly, Alice leaves the scene *untouched*. Recalling that castration occurs at the moment a *man* discovers a woman’s lack, in abstaining from a tryst with the Hungarian, Alice retains her role as fetish object.

Moving forward, attention shifts to Bill who is found engaging in a seductive repartee with two tipsy young women. Akin to Szavost’s relationship with Alice, Bill becomes the “controlling figure with whom the audience can identify with.”¹¹ Bill’s gaze articulates their *to-be-looked-at-ness* and their undiscovered tryst lacks not only spark the genesis of fetishization but also allow Bill to assert male dominance. One could surmise that this notion resonates on a subliminal (subconscious) level inasmuch as Bill appears erect; his ego enlarged by the arm-in-arm accompaniment of two accessory bodies. As the conversation between the threesome swells, both women reveal themselves to be “models” and in exchange Bill asserts his role as “doctor”. Similar to a flash of skin, the performance



or costuming of identity and subsequent fetishization of these career roles, such as “doctor”, become a key element of the film. Steele suggests, “titles reveal how fetishism involves erotic scenarios.”¹² She contends that the uniformed body “symbolizes authority and evokes fantasies of dominance and submission... [Uniforms] also signify that the wearers are legally endowed with state-sanctioned power”¹³— suffice to say a power that hints at wealth and sexual desirability.

An instance of such fetishization of power can be seen towards the close of the Ziegler’s party wherein Bill is requested upstairs to aid an unconscious prostitute known as Mandy. In summoning her back to life, Bill underscores and secures his masculinity, further berating Mandy’s attempt to reproduce the power of male phallus as marker of sex. Mulvey states,

“Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.”¹⁴

Bill in particular is one such character who rests heavily on role-play. Not only is his title fetishized by the female-other but also the proclamation of his identity as “doctor” *earns* him the position of capable anti-hero.

Following the scopophilic disparities of the Ziegler’s Christmas party, we return to the Harford’s bedroom affronted by the image of Alice who stands demonstrably nude in front of her vanity mirror. Once again, with her backside offered to the audience and her breasts prominently featured

in her reflection, Alice's flesh is an arresting sight—sexually charged by a visceral glow. In this moment of introspection, one should note the peculiarity of Alice's glasses. That is, while her specs were absent from her formal attire, the audience might recall their adornment in the opening scene of the film where she presides as castrated wife. As a result, one could argue that Alice's glasses (incidentally, a fetish to some) represent a masking of her domestic life as submissive female. Indeed, this image is complicated by her nudity—a juxtaposition boasting both “virgin” and “whore”.

However, seconds into the scene, Bill enters the frame, shirtless, to relieve this tension. He removes Alice's glasses—her material mask - and fondles her breasts. His arousal enables the engendering of his wife's to-be-looked-at-ness and based on the fact that the reading of the female body depends on

Bill's gaze—as maker of meaning—Alice, in this case, is once again the flesh of man's phantasy. Mulvey remarks, “A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror.”¹⁵ Borrowing from Jacques Lacan, Mulvey proposes that the mirror is crucial to the construction of the ego. Yet, while Bill abandons his reflection, it is in fact Alice who maintains an embolden mirror gaze. As a result, this scene ends with a chaotic inversion of gender roles; a foreshadowing of disequilibrium that consequently piques the viewer's anxiety.

The film progresses via montage, linking the former act to the subsequent scene of discussion. Incidentally, this dynamic series of vignettes establishes a foundational



understanding of the hyper-familial binary that exists between the Harfords. Namely, Bill, as “doctor” is tactfully portrayed as discernible breadwinner in contrast to Alice as “stay-at-home mother” (and failing gallerina). In these fragmentary moments, Alice is seen wrapping Christmas gifts, brushing her daughter’s hair, swiping on deodorant (sniffing her armpit for good measure) and fastening the clasp of her bra, which palpably contrasts the image of Bill’s bare breasted patients. Here, it should be noted that Alice is once again captured in her glasses as if firmly rooting her maternity in her mask. However, Bill’s costume remains superfluous to his role inasmuch as he his patients repeatedly refer to him as “doctor Harford” in each shot. How curious that the woman requires physical demarcation while the man can circumvent submission. Perhaps it is enough just to be “man” when in comparison to woman. Mulvey has defined this as the “mask of visibility” whereby cosmetics, wardrobe, etc. retain an indexical relationship to a woman’s body. She states, “Her mask of visibility conceals behind it the diverse and complex nature of woman’s place in the social and economic order, where sexual difference is a matter of division of labour, differences and divisions which have no image [and] no form.”¹⁶

As the aforementioned sequence of daily rituals tapers into evening hours, the Harfords reunite in their bedroom. In due time, un-

der the influence of marijuana, what starts out as romantic foreplay soon transitions into manic austerity. Here, Alice is costumed without her glasses, wearing only white panty-briefs and a white tank top, visibly braless. Without a doubt, her image is complicated and not unlike her disposition in the previous act. It henceforth becomes necessary to consider the codes of her costume. Arguably, the whiteness of Alice’s wardrobe connotes her role as both “bride” and “wife,” tenuously positioned between “virgin” and “whore”—“whore” represented through the presence of her erect nipples. One might go on to note that the whiteness of her apparel also highlights her sex; her lack; castration and vulnerability. According to Steele, the spectacle of a woman’s undergarments creates a “crotch consciousness” whereby the concealment of the genitals heightens sexual curiosity and alludes to the promise of exposure.¹⁷ That is, by weaving erotic fantasy into the garment, Alice’s panties work to conceal the “humiliating trauma” mentioned above. However, there remains something undeniably perverse in the specific costuming of white. In Jonathan Faiers’ chapter, “White lies and the Tailoring of Evil”, he contends that while the whiteness of a woman’s garment may indeed be equated with purity and sanctity, such is not the case for men’s wear. In fact, a man’s white suit, more often than not, suggests cruelty, arrogance, mania and condescension.

Stella Bruzzi believes this trope derives directly from the socio-pathic brutality emblematic in the characterization of Al Capone.¹⁸ Echoing the same tone, Faiers remarks, “These snowy psychopaths know only too well the saintly camouflage that white can provide and they use to deadly effect the outré distraction they generate.”¹⁹ He continues, white is “the colour of annihilation”—an “invisible darkness” that hangs in sharp contrast to a film’s ideological position.²⁰ In spite of this gendered perspective, this essay would like to propose that these transgressive nuances are likewise applicable to Alice’s white undergarments. Indeed, Alice is a character at play, “hell-bent on destruction” and as the scene unfolds around her monologue musing with caprice, her performance ultimately spawns the formation of the film’s punctum. That is, upon confessing to nearly succumbing to infidelity, stipulating that she was willing to give up everything for her fantasy to be real, Alice disavows her role as “wife”. No longer is Alice “mother”, fetishized as the “signifier of censorship” committed to the oppressive yoke of patriarchal domination. Rather, Alice removes her mask—a mask *molded* by Bill—to counter the male phallus, further striking Bill’s ego and abolishing his belief that women are inherently more faithful in marriage. Returning to Faiers, “Dressing evil characters in white subverts the universally accepted cinematic convention of white signifying good and black

signifying bad.”²¹ Thus, in treating Alice’s monochromatic wardrobe akin to that of a man’s white suit, Alice relentlessly supersedes Bill’s dominant (fe)male. Now framed through a prism of horror, Alice’s heretical soliloquy paralyzes Bill but concludes abruptly upon being interrupted by a phone call. For a time, the ring goes unanswered, a proverbial ellipsis in their dialogue. In any event, Bill is beckoned to make an urgent house call. Yet, despite this reverberation of Bill’s power as “doctor” in demand, he is now at odds with his own ego. In the wake of his imagination, he manifests as truncated submissive and is further tormented by “phantasms” of Alice as he grapples with a solution to thwart his own castration.

Leading up to the final scene of analysis, Bill wanders the city streets after hours. Palpably vexed by his ideological loss of masculinity, his anxiety is heightened as he encounters a gang of varsity jocks who rapaciously heckle and forcibly shove him into traffic, shouting, “faggot” at the sight of his black dandy-like overcoat. Suffice to their taunts provoke another phantasm of Alice. However, shortly after, Bill is approached and solicited by Domino—a chance encounter which affords him the opportunity to recover and reassert his dominance over woman, as a consumer of woman. Parenthetically, Bill does not fail to mention his wealth. Steele notes, “The adult male fetishist knows perfectly well

that women do not have penises. Nevertheless, on an unconscious level, he may still be fearful about sexuality and especially when he feels emotionally threatened, he may seek to reassure himself about his manliness by choosing a sexual partner whose frightening feminine aspects are disguised behind a veil of phallic signifiers.²² Still, despite Domino's predatory advances and discernible animalism imbued within the adornment of her faux fur zebra print safari coat (and stuffed tiger pillow on her bed), Bill finds himself distracted and unable to take control of the affair, which is coincidentally cut short by a phone call from Alice, who is seen smoking and gingerly eating chocolate cookies—indulging in indifference—in the Harford's kitchen. Although having wasted Domino's time, Bill compensates her in full—a transparent and somewhat flippant gesture that allows Bill the ability to abandon the scene *seemingly* unharmed (masculinity in tact).

At this juncture, Bill once again trolls the streets of New York but this time attention is placed on the fashioning of his own wardrobe. As he subtly yet compulsively adjusts his overcoat, notions of the “vestimentary façade” become pertinent to the discussion of the film's costuming. A basic reading of the overcoat will point to the socio-economic status and sartorial respectability of the wearer. However, Faiers has much to contribute to the concept of such “cloaking devices” stating, “Worn for warmth

and protection, other functions lie dormant, embedded in their weave receptive to the wearer's aspirations, desires and fears; they are emotional triggers that will transform [the garments] into coats of repression, coats of vulnerability and coats of obsession.”²³ Here, one could argue that Bill's coat does more than just suggest weather and wealth. In theory, his tendency to fidget with the collar and sleeves represents his rising existential struggle—a struggle that is emasculating and vehemently requires concealment, one that literally wears heavy on Bill. “Under the gaze of strangers, a coat cannot help but make an impression on passersby and therefore has occupied a central role in film that deals with clothing a signification, as an indicator of social position and as the garment that can either cloak existing identities or assist in the assumption of new ones.”²⁴ In acknowledging that Bill is both avidly searching and anxious to shed his overcoat as second skin, Kubrick's decision to hone in on costume foreshadows Bill's cataclysmic transition from public spectacle (submissive) to private spectator (dominant). Curiously enough, the veiling of an overcoat is also a locus of fantasy—not unlike the fetishistic cloaks worn during the forthcoming masquerade.

In spite of Kubrick's nod towards sexual absolution, Bill has yet to vanquish his phantasms and emphatically seeks refuge in a conversation with former college colleague, Nick (Todd Field). Seat-



ed in the cellar of a dive bar, Nick informs him of a debauchorous masked soiree that is being hosted by a collective of anonymous high-rollers outside the city. As a pianist, Nick has been hired to perform—blindfolded. Naturally, this cryptic detail wildly excites Bill but upon being told that he would be denied entry, Bill feverishly protests his insinuated inferiority. After all, if Nick (a man of the working-class) can attend, why can't *Doctor* Bill Harford? Defeated, Nick releases the event details and eventually steers Bill towards a costume shop for the appropriate attire.

Yet again, Bill desperately relies on his status as “doctor” in hopes of coaxing the shop owner, Mr. Milich (Rade Serbedzija) in to opening the doors after hours; going so far as flashing his “state-sanctioned” medical license and successfully bribing Milich with a cash offer he can't refuse. his lucrative exchange is Bill's penultimate attempt to reprise his role as

dominant male.

With his costume in tact, Bill arrives at the unknown location only to discover a quazi-religious sexual ritual being performed for a masked congregation. This phantasmagorical spectacle is one of virile violence, steeped in patriarchal agency and puritanical menace. Here, it becomes obvious that both male and female bodies have been costumed to distinguish their sex—a visible sequestering of Dominants and Submissives. Cloaked in black, men navigate the scene as a devouring force. Steele states, “Black is the colour of evil and sin. The concept of infernal, satanic black proves perversely erotic. Yet, black carries other, antisexual meanings connected with the ascetic garb of the Catholic clergy.”²⁵ Similar to the semiotic codes imbued within Alice's white undergarments, Bill's black cloak connotes a challenging polarity—two colors suggestive of both good and evil, both perverse and bewitching. Indeed, significant



emphasis is placed on consume as signifier in this scene, and while this essay has thus far unpacked Kubrick's depiction of the ideological masks we are damned to wear, this masquerade explicates, through fetishization, the ways in which garments aid in the fabrication of one's primordial sensibility. "Obviously, people who dress up as, for example, master and slave are acting out a fantasy of some sort. But fantasy is a complicated concept. As commonly used, the word 'fantasy' denotes imagination, illusions, exaggerated or unreal images. But fantasy is not just 'unreal'. Fantasy also has particular psychological meaning, involving the fulfillment of psychic needs."²⁶ That said, one could surmise that fetishization begins with the overt appropriation and articulation of "religious garb"—cloaks fetishized for their sanctity and signification of supremacy. This wardrobe choice also provides man with a buffer, free from the

vulnerability of phallic castration; at once, such fetish fashion draws attention to the sexed body while simultaneously restricting access to it. Moreover, it is precisely this fear of disavowal that cements the foundation of fetishization and establishes the fetish as something fundamentally violent. For instance, considering the trajectory of Bill's wounded ego, it comes as no surprise that the film would crescendo into a profound expression of sadomasochism whereby woman is sexually violated for shattering man's belief in the maternal phallus. That said, one could deduce that Alice's admittance to entertaining extramarital reverie is what spawns Bill's pursuit for the restoration of the "primal bond". Akin to his belittlement of Mandy, the prostitute at the Ziegler's party, the threat of the femme fatale must be disciplined. Glenn Wilson calls this aggression a "dominance failure."²⁷ Thus, according to Freud, the only way the

adult fetishist can surmount his aversion of the female genitals is to endow woman with characteristics which make her a tolerable sexual object.²⁸

As a result, the image of the masked female resonates on a harrowing level in this scene. While Bill remains cloaked, *biding* in plain sight among a legion of commanding men, women slink and meander through porticos as a cult of subservient flesh. The female body is observed supine and pandering to the voyeuristic pleasure of the bourgeois male; they are, of course, hired escorts whose costumes are comprised of exaggerated Venetian masks, black thongs, and black stilettos (without variation or identity—they exist to be interchangeable props). As Lidewij Edelkoort, author of *Fetishism in Fashion* states, “This fetishistic approach demonstrates the victim as fashion icon. All dressed up with masks and veils, ready to go on stage for the catwalk.”²⁹ Definitive of sadomasochism, clothing is associated with power and nakedness its lack. Nevertheless, these women submit to man’s idealism; they are faceless, debased and gilded in fetish costume to reaffirm the ultimate power of masculinity. Additionally, one cannot help but notice the baring of woman’s breasts—fetishistic in their own right as source of “mothers’ milk”, they also soothe the male ego inasmuch as they hint at a mother’s role before man’s acknowledgement of (her) lack. Haskell suggests, “The partially or fully

clothed body will always be more tantalizing than the nude, which simply provokes nervousness but rarely erotic pleasure.”³⁰

Beginning with the Venetian masks, one could argue that such feathered plumage and peacocking manifests as a “characteristic which makes her a tolerable sexual object”. To be sure, these savage details reference animalistic reverence (akin to Domino). As Steele asserts, “In the animal world, secondary sexual features (antlers, vivid colors etc.) might be considered biological fashions in the sense that variations in those characteristics can enhance or inhibit sexual attractiveness.”³¹ Perhaps, in the Freudian tradition of making “dream associations”, one could posit that the wild detail of these masks can likewise be seen in Alice’s kinky *red* hair—a color emblematic of fetish, blood and savagery. Nonetheless, similar to the accentuated spikes and straps of fetish wear, the Venetian mask ultimately signifies sexual punishment and, as Bill was warned, the removal of one’s costume would result in violent ridicule.

Likewise, these sentiments could be applied to the adornment of the black thong. Comparable to Alice’s panty-briefs, Freud believes, “Pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.”³² That is, in fetishizing the blackness of woman’s thong, it transpires as erotic yet subconsciously violent.

Finally, fetish reaches culmination in the exhibition of woman's black stiletto. Not unlike the image of Alice described above (stepping out of her dress at the start of the film), the black spike is prominently featured throughout the masquerade. Perhaps the most notorious fetish object in the realm of costume, the black stiletto recalls the practice of Chinese foot binding; a form of bondage inhibiting movement all the while placing the lower half of the body in a state of tension; emphasizing hips, buttocks and the contours of the leg. Some have even argued that a woman's tottering steps can be fetishized as this is thought to tighten the muscles of the vagina.³³ In contrast, Steele writes, "The foot becomes a mysterious weapon, which threatens the passive male and he glorifies in being conquered. The high-heeled shoe is a symbol of love and also a symbol of aggression. It signifies power. It indicates domination."³⁴ In regard to Kubrick's masquerade, one could argue that the stiletto was chosen for a myriad of reasons, possibly for its role as fetish object or status symbol; for the ways in which the pump elongates and flatters woman's figure; to suggest foot fetishism or, drawing on Steele, for the purpose of punishment.

Without a doubt, Kubrick's masquerade is an arresting sight but what remains fascinating is the overall neutralizing effect of the scene. As Haskell states, "Flaunting the flesh has little to do

with the celebration of sensuality and everything to do with shock value" and upon becoming attuned to the rhetoric of pornographic exuberance, Haskell believes "the forbidden" consequently proves "boring."³⁵ Ironically, the nudity in *Eyes Wide Shut* is shocking in large part due to the guilt-ridden taboos of Judeo-Christian morality. While the viewer may feel morally unfazed from within the comfort of the cinema, the adornment of ritualistic fetish costume successfully unmasks visceral idiosyncrasies that would otherwise disturb hegemonic ideals. Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* explores the violent frontier between the dichotomy of "Dominant" and "Submissive"; man and woman; and Bill and Alice as intrinsically weaved into the fabric of identity and interpersonal relationships. Edelkoort maintains,

*Instinct and object become one. The fetish is a tool that is able to guide our needs into other territories, such as avoiding a fear of sexual organs by imposing a guardian that will help the transition from reality into fantasy. Transposing the attention onto an object of worship outside the body liberates sexual partners and loosens up the often-troubled male/female relationship. Thus the need for fetish fashions.*³⁶

The concurrent veiling and unveiling of masks seems to repair the primal bond between the Harfords—a relationship made all the more believable by the off-screen marriage of Cruise and Kidman. In acknowledging that the phantasms

of Alice's body have punished Bill, the physical costuming and ideological masking within this fantastical womb narrative, underscore the desire to conceal both male and female castration. The film suggests that there is a latent fragility, a precarious crack in our everyday facades whereby titles and roles qualify one's fictive performance, and so with this in mind, Kubrick offers his viewers temporal filmic resolve. Constance Penley asserts that such films "leave you with the impression that women are more interesting and forceful than men, fascinating but ultimately destructive."³⁷ In a world where simply being "man" is the ultimate mask, women bear the sartorial difference of having to ceaselessly adorn themselves in order to exert power – a power that challenges man's role, ego and ideals. Some might contend that *Eyes Wide Shut* comments solely on the masculine desire to literally strip the

female body down to fetish object. Certainly, the viewer witnesses this as man is seen hidden (perhaps cowering) under his cloak while woman is raucously paraded around. Yet, despite Kubrick's grotesque vulgarity, the film succeeds in demonstrating the menace and turmoil imbued within the costumes. †



ON VIOLENCE IN FASHION

Rachel Wu

When the early pictorialism of fashion photography drew to an ellipsis mid-century, the genre was promptly and decisively propelled towards a new style, one that was singularly marked by morbidity.¹ Though shocking in its vehemence it was a largely congruent evolution—the pictorialist paradigm was, by nature, far too inert to vehicle the concerns of the post-war generation. Ultra-violence had become the searing prism of modern culture, faceted to refract the tenors of ideological disquiet endemic to the era. Fashion advertising and editorial inserts were aggressively appropriated by photographers like Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin, and as such transformed into the martial grounds of acute interpretation. In a brutal, heliotropic movement

that saw no limits to what could be pinned under strobe light, women's bodies were mined to generate the liminal pawns of societal anxiety. Edged along the planks of a distressed public imagination to eventually swell up against the wares of fashionable industry in a dismembered wash, these icons of ostracized flesh synthesized a visual rhetoric that has since become emblematic of fashion imagery.

Hence the past few decades of fashion representation have seen a complacent convergence of visual motifs that unequivocally incriminate the form as a spiraling blood sport. But to toll the violence solely by signaling its statistical ubiquity or the mounting effervescence of perversity is to overlook the full implications of the abuse of the medium. For if

the output of the '70s managed to compel and convince as both a subversive diagnosis and barbaric neutralization of social neuroses, the consummation of its codes as convention is the radical gratification of conservatism.² When bodies and clothes are presented in such a way that one intuitively registers the indignity and gratuity of provocation, it is that the receptive consciousness has been affronted with the very contradictions of amoral motif-making. On one hand, absolutist fictions are staged with exorbitant impunity; on the other, its articulations are willfully held hostage at the erotic surface of the sign. In the bid for a discarnate aesthetic, the signified is evacuated from the sign, and meaning is simultaneously justified and denied in a mutually consensual investiture and abortion of its tyranny. Senuously ambiguous, the formalism that embalms contemporary fashion imagery is violence in bad faith.

While the most abject advertising continues to resist from the ivory towers of reflexive ignorance, the reception of efforts with intentions of at least a nominal integrity are a clear indication that fashion imagery is far from exempt from its own inconsistencies, that troubling power vacuums exist in its depoliticized jurisdiction. Take two recent examples: a fashion spread entitled "The Wrong Turn" by Indian photographer Raj Shetye, made public in August 2014, and *Vogue Italia's* centerfold editorial "Horror Story," shot by Steven Meisel for its

April 2014 issue. Both projects take on violence against women as their subject matter; more interestingly, their creators have also publicly positioned their works as an interrogation, denunciatory or reflective, of the crimes that fill out the images. A priori these claims have every right to be taken seriously; to accept this, even tentatively, is to affirm the possibility for fashion representation to be a productive critical medium. If it can be contended, however, that images speak louder than words—and in the case of Raj Shetye and *Vogue Italia*, even more so than the charivari of Internet censure—it is that ultimately, the work itself is its own best judge. Legitimately so, since it is necessarily an elaboration of the artist's onus. Proportionately so, for style and content are one and the same.³ The photographs, harnessed under the unilateral will of a spectatorial choreography, indict a complete confusion, if not indifference, towards the nature of visual representation, where there is an essential unity between formal and dialectical elements. One can only read scorn in the aesthetic decision to frame an unconscious woman in an unscrupulous diagonal to the stairs she lies on, then to flush her in optimal, highly suggestive scarlet. The question of commercial credits is minor—through his loaded tableaux and the engrossing roam of his lens, Shetye puts a woman's struggle up for auction.

The dawn of the World Wide Web coalesced the horizons of fashion and capitalism, which

have for a long time hovered within intimate proximity. At the very core of fashion is an idealist infrastructure; the art has always subsisted by transcendental delegation, realizing its essence through the fabric of dreams. With fashion's migration to the cloud, image has itself become product, autonomous and alienable—the hologram of post-modern capital.

Today there is a growing sense of collective nausea towards the crunch-style consumption of the goods of mediated reality. As with the overleveraged pipes of value in twenty-first century finance, the congeries of content that channel through the circuits of fashion media are programmed by agamic formulas geared towards “feeding the feed.”⁴ In this opiate realm of demiurgic tautology, desire is kept aloft through a continuous chain of stimulation, set in motion by the constant deferral of merchandise from one simulacrum to the next. In the abstraction of its parts to infinity, fashion discourse threatens to be extorted to the arbitrary totality of a vacant dialogue, the glassy mosaic of a fungible narrative.

A tangible violence feeds on this factor of fatigue,⁵ one that is leveled against the planet and humanity. Outstripped by warp rates of demand, the global fashion production cycle is running on empty; while the bulk of the deficits continue to be bought up by the most vulnerable, externalities are increasingly weighing down on stakeholders across the whole spectrum of

the industry. Crucial standards of producer welfare and investments in green practices are considered expenditure jetsam in a system that runs on a myopic logic of quantified growth and profit.⁶ The average consumer dollar is being exchanged against a growing mediocrity of product; landfills have become the secondary warehouses of fast fashion and the raw material of parasitic transactions on the informal markets of the developing world.⁷ Creative professionals are forced to work at the same speed at which money and hype are moved in the media mill.⁸ Fashion businesses are too big, and they're failing—a dysfunction that ultimately disparages the very principle of their existence, which is to commit to socially enriching innovation. It is only by emancipatory reform that we can put an end to the pauperization of dress practice and clothe future generations equitably, ethically, and freely. †



SUSPIRIA

DARIO ARGENTO'S AESTHETIC HORROR

Aimee Williams

Fashion has an outstanding predilection for the macabre, the uncanny, and the supernatural. Opulent luxury items attached to provocative scenarios in editorials and advertisements, or haute violence, have become commonplace, albeit ingrained within contemporary visual culture. Nowhere is ambiguous eroticism more apparent than in 1970's fashion photography. Women's disembodied legs draped over velvet couches set against jewel-colored walls conjure a sense of brutal glamour, models in silk gowns cast ominous shadows within a dimly lit mauve room rouse occult connotations. Contrasts—death and glamour, violence and beauty, pleasure and pain—create an opaque canon of references. Violence repulses and beauty compels, obscuring the boundaries between desire and fear. Especially

from the work of Helmut Newton, Chris von Wangenheim, and Guy Bourdin in particular, a graphic visual canon penetrates the consciousness of the late 20th century, a time when women were represented as professionally and sexually liberated across all forms of media. The images are incomplete, *en medias res* narratives that resonate uneasily, a visual effect produced with dark connotations that evoke a cinematic violence with the glamour of fashion imagery. Premiering at the same time in 1970s, Italian director Dario Argento's giallo horror films rely on strong aesthetics rather than plot or a distinctive narrative to frame a story fraught with both referential and narrative tension.

Fashion studies has not yet produced an in-depth analysis of fashion's place within horror cinema, although the groundwork

for the examination of provocative, albeit violent modernity has been laid out by both fashion and film scholars.¹ Drawing from these writings, this essay explores *Suspiria*'s visual narrative by comparing the film to what I argue is its aesthetic counterpart—the fashion photograph. Frame by frame, *Suspiria* (1977) consciously juxtaposes fashionable dress and hair, grandiose architecture, and effervescent interior spaces with horrific gore and drawn-out violence. Argento subverts visual expectations commonplace to the horror genre using fashion and decoration, creating an ambiguous viewing experience. *Suspiria* is worth examining in tangent with 1970's and 80's fashion photographs by Guy Bourdin, whose work provokes a similar sense of simultaneous aesthetic appeal and alienation with graphic poses, vivid color, and narrative-shaping lighting techniques. This essay examines the function of fashion and fashionable aesthetics in horror films, as well as the way violence is framed through fashion. Feminist film criticism and the writings of fashion theorists like Caroline Evans and Rebecca Arnold to examine how horror film and fashion images have been read within a theoretical context, and how the two together can form a sort of revisionist way of considering Argento's horror films through a fashion studies lens. This analysis connects to mediums that create and perpetuate existing discourses within and about popular culture that reflects perceptions

of women, morality, sexuality, and aesthetics. In order to examine the way fashion functions within this film, an overview of the context and cultural conditions that inform the work is necessary in order to examine the different outcomes fashion and violence manufacture.

David Lavery describes horror as a genre whose “primary effect is to surprise, terrify, or alienate an audience by means of a narrative and cinematic techniques which are disorienting and aggressive, violent, or discomforting.”² When *Suspiria* premiered in 1977, horror movie-goers were already familiar with big-screen gore. The growing body of Hollywood slashers and art house B horror movies presented spectators with a brutality that was once unthinkable, leaving nothing to the imagination. The overarching ethos of 1970s Hollywood horror was realistically violent. Even when the narrative was based around the supernatural, the visuals were starkly convincing, as in the cases of *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Last House on the Left* (1972), and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), all centered on their violent narratives and grisly imagery. Italian horror cinema had already produced a similarly gory film canon a decade before, but this body of work contrasted with the stark violence American cinema produced. The influence of giallo auteur Mario Bava prompted a sort of subversion of the American slasher film, especially with Bava's *Black Sunday* (1963) and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964). The latter film ac-

tually centers on a fashion narrative, with a model at the center of the plot. Giallo films tend to embrace aesthetics as well as aesthetic industries. Later in the 1970's, American films began to take on these conventions in thriller cinema, visible in productions like *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978), in which a murder mystery centers around a New York City fashion photographer whose work is renowned for its opposing femininity and violence (clearly drawing on Guy Bourdin for reference).

Lavery's essay cites early cinematography's Surrealist penchant for uncanny, realistic violence, of which imagery of the late 20th century was directly influenced:

By 1929, a train pulling into a station was no longer perceived as a menace, and Buñuel and Dalí, in Un Chien Andalou, had to resort to a razor blade slicing an eyeball to push the viewer past the pain threshold. And now many sophisticated 1980's moviegoers cannot even be scared by the numerous projectiles and appendages thrown at them.³

In widely released horror movies, realistic violence is inflicted onto subjects—usually women—who are often passive, yet central figures to horror and fashion imagery. Violence of this sort was and still is commonplace, and horror films have largely been a competition of the goriest. The context into which *Suspiria* was released evidences the particular spectatorship Argento's film might appeal to other than the horror cinephile—a more ambiva-

lent voyeur who demonstrates an appreciation of aesthetics through a referential knowledge of fashion, culture, and cinema. At a time when women were at once encouraged to become sexually liberated and inundated with representations of conventional beauty in media, Bourdin and Argento's work both touch on the conflicting messaging and ambiguity of this context. Using spectacular lighting, vibrant colors, and giving special attention to his female protagonists' clothes, Argento, by way of Bava, revolutionized and internationalized giallo horror, elevating the B-horror genre to critical esteem. At the same time, Bourdin made waves for his brand of provocative fashion editorials and advertisements, including a Surrealist-fetishist footwear campaign for shoe company Charles Jourdan, ad campaigns for Issey Miyake, Chanel, Versace, Pentax, and Bloomingdales, amongst private work that surfaced and exhibited after his death in 1991. This wide-ranging, well-received body of work canonizes Bourdin as the father of modern fashion photography with his use of models in compromised, albeit pornographic positioning. Elements of sadomasochism pervade both the horror film genre and the work of Bourdin. In one of his iconic images for the Pentax calendar in 1980, a model is on her stomach, head turned to the side, with a red substance between nail polish and blood in a pool by her lips. Her face is streaked pink with blush that mimics bruising,

looking like she suffered trauma only moments before. The image is saturated with tension that refuses any explanation, leaving it up to the viewer's imagination to construct the rest of the story. In her essay "The Brutalized Body," scholar Rebecca Arnold describes the female body in the fashion photograph, but her analysis applies well to horror cinema, specifically Argento's body of work, as well as giallo cinema in general. Ambiguous narratives are centered around the female form as "a site of conflict, where frustration and anger are inscribed on the skin in contradictory images of anguish and pleasure, the flesh symbolically punished for the desires it provokes."⁴ Both Bourdin and Argento expressed darkness in Technicolor during the 1970's, a time when women's liberation gained more prominence in mainstream culture. Disembodied heroines are the centerfolds of Bourdin's fractured narratives, 'the "living' and 'dead' ideal woman uneasily cohabited in a single, surreal image."⁵ Rebecca Arnold suggests the models embody "the same sense of fatal beauty embodied by the heroines of forties films, viewed as sexualized and dangerous, bringing with them confusion and potential destruction. The erotic nature of their being represents a deadly trick to lure and disarm."⁶ Bourdin was published in a range of media, in sexually-driven magazines like *Playboy*, *Oui*, and *Viva*, while also in high fashion editorials and brand advertisements for international editions of *Vogue*,

and *Harpers*, and for Bloomingdale's. Bourdin's imagery relies upon a sense of Surrealist placelessness, eliciting a sense that the artist had conflicting viewpoints on his female subjects, and perhaps of femininity in general.

Argento's *Suspiria* privileges maximalist, decorative aesthetics in a narrative centered on a murderous coven fronting as a ballet academy. The director clearly values artifice over substantial dialogue or complex plot, yet there is an untapped complexity latent within the costuming, positioning, and framing of women in the film. *Suspiria* embodies Argento's most influential use of his career-defining death *mise-en-scène*, one in which he pays special attention to the way fashion characterizes the female characters within the film. After a male voice-over sets up this story that follows American ballet student Suzy Bannion arrives in Germany, exiting through a recognizable space, an airport, that is made uncanny as ominous red lighting spears through the stark airport exit, while Suzy's unusually fashionable plane-mates strut in jewel-tone fur coats and wide-brimmed hats to their final destinations, conjuring the bewitching ethos that pervades the narrative. Suzy arrives in the middle of a storm. Attempting to hail a cab, the relentless rain drenches her white silk accrements. From the opening scene, *Suspiria* evades narrative clarity, producing an alienating sense of placelessness with frenetic, uncanny visuals. En route to the prestigious



academy, artificial neon blue light infiltrates the cab and envelopes Suzy, illuminating the whiteness of her skin and dress like a halo. When she arrives, Suzy attempts to enter the sprawling mansion, but the buzzer only produces the distressed voice of a fellow dancer urging her to go away. As a foreigner, Suzy experiences a kind of placelessness, trapped in a purgatory between the airport and the ballet academy. Suzy returns to the cab after witnessing one of the dancers emerge from the Neo-gothic structure in a state of panic, and again from the moving cab as the girl runs in the forest, visible through the thick trees in a white nightgown. Chaos ensues with the first of the film's hallucinatory death sequences. Now in a minty silk robe with a ruffled front, a supernatural force stalks Pat Hingle, an expelled dancer at the academy, as she runs through the woods to the soundtrack of prog-rock band Goblin. Hingle arrives at her friend's apartment in town, where she stands distressed in front of

magenta velvet curtains and an ornate, gold enshrouded vanity. The still looks like a fashion editorial. The music intensifies along with Hingle's fear as she attempts her escape. Suddenly, disembodied arms emerge and smash her screaming face against the windowpane. Her contorted expression bursts from the glass as it shatters from the pressure. While her female friend desperately bangs on the door yelling for Pat to unlock it, the scene continues, following Pat as she is stabbed repeatedly. This is accented with a series of wide shots within an extravagant, art deco building, with bright red walls and matching carpeting, with a high ceiling made of effervescent stained glass. Now it is clear *Suspiria* isn't about who kills as much as it is about killing itself, and the surrounding environment the murder takes place within. The scene finally ends with a close-up of Pat, still in her nightgown, accented with the sheen of bright red blood as the camera moves from her face to her opened chest. She is



stabbed through the heart just before she is hung from the vaulting above a stained-glass ceiling, shattering through a vibrant spectrum of color dangling from a rope, yet her nightgown continues to flow as if she was walking down a long hallway, even when her body has stopped moving. That this soft, girlish femininity has warranted such a level of violence—a Technicolor brutality—is nearly inconceivable, surpassing conventional threshold probabilities of the typical horror narrative.

Film scholar Linda Schulte-Sasse suggests the scene is palatable to viewers only because of Argento's "aesthetics that literally reduce her to an objet d'art...our reception shifts wildly from the closeness of identification to the pleasure of aesthetic distance."⁷ Jewel-toned lighting and kinetic cinematography creates a frenzied visual experience in the middle of Pat's murder. A collision of the non-diegetic soundtrack and Pat's cries each time the knife spears her

results in a confusing collision of realism and fantasy. But it is arguably Pat herself, specifically the way in which she is posed and framed in her silky nightgown at the end of the scene that instills her status as "objet d'art." This scene features two victims, ending with a wide-shot of Pat's friend on her back with a slice of glass severing her face. Blood flowing from perfectly tousled curls, her blank eyes seem to look up to Pat. She is positioned in a beige silk skirt, a white sweater between strategically placed geometric shards of glass against the black-and-white-tiled floor. Martyred in anonymity, this victim retains an unnatural beauty that reads like a fashion editorial—the textures of her garments almost palpable with tight framing.

The word *giallo* means "yellow," originally used to describe Italian crime novels, where murders are more creative and drawn out (like the first scene in *Suspiria*), with a convergence of sensuality and violence.⁸ In McDonagh's *Bro-*

ken Mirrors/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento, the director explains that with *Suspiria* he was trying to reproduce the color of Walt Disney's *Snow White*; adding a nuance to the familiar Technicolor hues that first appeared in Disney cartoons and Doris Day films. This artificiality is a key component to the surreal impact of the film. Technicolor hints at the horrific inhumanity of the slasher film while rejecting the unembellished realism of American slasher films. Narrative carried in the visuals, in movement, shadows, dimension of light, and in the costumes worn by the women in *Suspiria*. A 1970's viewer would have recognized pleated skirts, loose, feminine silhouettes, fabrics, naturalistic hairstyles, and perhaps even the references to other fashion photographers. In a still from a scene in which the ballet academy gathers in formal dress, the dancers group in a line that extends across a highly decorous room with painted trees and flowers on wallpaper, red and pink carpet, colored beverages in flutes on a table with orchids. The set is visually opulent, and each dancer's dress aligns with where she is placed in the room. This placement of actors as models in a still from a moving image echoes the way Deborah Turbeville groups models in her darkly ethereal fashion photographs from the early 1970s. In her "Bathhouse" photograph series, models are arranged to convey a sense of ambiguity – some pose directly looking at the camera as if they know they

are in a photoshoot, others limply hang off the walls, glancing away like they are experiencing pain, or under distress. In a placeless setting, Turbeville's mise en scène features contemplative, nostalgic compositions of women in abstruse positions, while Bourdin's similarly placeless interiors invoke a sense of the mystical, represented in his series for Bloomingdales, "Sighs and Whispers." In one image, three women stand around an illuminated gold shell, dressed in silk, pink and grey dresses, with two of the models casting long shadows against the darkened pink walls. The effect here is similar to Turbeville's imagery, in which a kind of supernatural quality is placed in tangent with femininity darkened by the surroundings. Considered together, these aforementioned works test the visual literacy of the viewers by confronting them with ostensibly problematic imagery that challenges viewers to push past easy conclusions.

Caroline Evans in *Fashion at the Edge* discusses the way contemporary fashion has utilized and stylized death and morbidity to create an ambiguous fashion image, or "the idea of beauty inflected with horror."⁹ Such as in the runway presentations of Alexander McQueen, whose *Highland Rape* collection caused a stir and was largely misinterpreted for its violent connotations against women, the spectator's initial reaction to the Referring to Argento's *Opera* (1987), Hunt suggests the film "violates the spectator but at the same

time aestheticizes sadistic violence as spectacle. It combines the Oedipal violence of the giallo with the prenarrative of the American slasher film with the extremely self-conscious narrational strategies characteristic of art cinema.”¹⁰ In *Suspiria*, the choreographed death scenes carry the same appeal as the literary and visual references its aesthetics draw from – the deaths of beautiful women of the gothic narratives of Edgar Allan Poe paired with hallucinogenic lighting framing. It is notable that in the two major death sequences in the film, both dancers wear fluid nightgowns in pastel and white, set against walls saturated with vibrant hues of ruby, emerald, gold, and sapphire. Color is a visual cue in this film, and indicates further contrasts. Suzy’s wardrobe is consistently a pallet of neutrals while her classmates often are much more ostentatiously dressed. For example, when she has to initially stay with academy peer Olga, the girls are featured together in Olga’s apartment. The black and white floral wallpaper and art deco furniture compliment Olga’s own overdone makeup and hair, while her dress mirrors one of the school’s directors, Madame La Blanc, with gold jewelry topping off her fully considered appearance. She paints her nails blood red while apathetically discussing the horrific murder of Pat with Suzy, who leans against the wall in her girlish short-sleeved, off-white dress. The contrast is set – in a room full of inorganic depictions of the organic, Suzy represents the

“natural,” or organic - purity. Notably, Olga is one of few dancers not targeted by the witches, whose furnishings are similarly artificial.

Argento’s claustrophobically tight framing is balanced by the use of reflective mirrors that add dimension and depth perspective, which lends to a 360-degree view of interior objects and characters’ dress. These techniques, as well as the film’s object fixation, align visually with 1970s German new wave cinema more so than they equate with contemporaneous horror movies. Most notable is Argento’s uncomfortable use of the close-up for his death scenes. Using the cinematic mode popularized French film auteur Jean Luc Godard, Argento’s close-up elicits very different results than the French auteur with the same techniques. Every gruesome detail is amplified, but so is the fashion. Blood spurts down dancers orifices onto bows and nightgowns, and the camera zooms close enough to view the movements of the actresses’ pupils. The contrast between gore and beauty, pain and pleasure, and life and death are intensified as the spectator must confront the scenes directly. Feminist film scholar Shohini Chaudhuri references critic Barbara Creed’s psychoanalytic work on the abject visualized within horror cinema: “the abject both fascinates and horrifies: it thrives on ambiguity and transgression of taboos and boundaries.”¹¹ Considered in relation to the use of the confrontational close-up, which forces view-



ers to either encounter or become blind to the violence inflicted onto a character they may have identified with, are forced to either disassociate, or look away. This knee-jerk reaction is something Argento himself has acknowledged, and symbolically criticized viewers for in his film *Opera* (1987), where the female protagonist is kidnapped on several occasions by her stalker, with needles taped just under her eyelids so that she is forced to keep her eyes open to watch gruesome murders. The film also deals more directly with fashion, with the murder of the opera-singing protagonists' costume designer who closely resembles Coco Chanel when she is murdered in her pearl necklace and black ensemble.

With the use of close-up cinematography in his aesthetic narrative, Argento re-problematizes violence by showing it in its full extent. But the glaring issue, or the source of ambiguity here is that the violence is focused on adolescent female characters. It is important to consider the director's rationale for using women as murder victims in

his films:

Most of my central characters are women because I like women. [I] describe them as characters with the light because I remember my own mother...specialized in photographing women using the light. So I grew up with this vision of the woman through the camera - very beautiful - because she knew just where to place the lights.¹²

In his films, Argento shows a distinctive preference for the feminine and for fashion, claiming in an interview the importance of clothes “especially for female characters. They tell a lot about them.”¹³ Clothes, as well as non-clothing objects in the film contain multiple, layered readings. A key example, German instructor Miss Tanner overrules the ballet academy in wide-shoulder skirt suits and carries a pointer—a symbolically power-wielding phallic object is also a less-than-symbolic witches' wand, hinting at the true powers residing at the academy. Her harsh mannerisms and masculine style of dress and hair (rigidly coiffed and hair-sprayed) foils the dancers' light, airy dresses and girl-

ish sweater sets, but Miss Tanner's dress serves a double function—hinting at the Sapphic undercurrent throughout this film entirely centered around women.¹⁴ Bourdin's images have been characterized for their lesbian overtones. His work is imbued with boundary-testing sexuality, especially in the uncanny matching of the models to their interiors and to each other in several of his photograph series. The idea of uncanny doubling in fashion imagery is a topic Caroline Evans references throughout *Fashion at the Edge*, drawing from Walter Benjamin's notion that reproduction is a symptom of capitalist excess, and that sexuality is tied to inorganic objects. Bourdin uses inanimate objects just as Argento demonstrates an object fixation in the framing of his films, both using the deathliness or inorganic qualities of these objects to catalyze their narratives. Argento particularly emphasizes the organic by showing the living in gory death scenes, while amplifying the inorganic with constant wide-pans of the academy's interiors.

In *Suspiria*, fashion favors the dominant sex. The few male characters are dressed plainly, as secondary to the dominate women, garbed more provincial clothes that resemble uniforms in comparison to the ornate, decorative, and evidently self-fashioned clothes the female dancers and instructors, wear. With every scene, the women in the academy are characterized with colorful pastels and vibrant jewels. Further instilling this contrast is

the unassumingly dressed Daniel, the academy's blind pianist, whose walking cane literally and symbolically externalizes his vulnerability, as opposed to Tanner who carries a stick to exemplify feminine power, supernatural and otherwise. Notably, one of the few times the narrative extends beyond the mansion is when Daniel is murdered under the influence of the coven after offending the academy, he is attacked by his own dog in an empty, vast city square at night. While the scene ends in a close-up of Daniel's bleeding mouth after being mauled by his possessed dog, the scene contrasts with the deaths of the dancers as it is with less decorum and outside the confines of the academy. The symbolism here is on the nose. Daniel is blind, holding a cane he needs for walking, basic functioning. Miss Tanner is unimpaired, and holds a long stick, representing a literal witch wand, but it also enforces her position as castrator, and as the bearer of knowledge within the patriarchy.

It is interesting to consider this film in contrast with other horror films in which women are at the center of the narrative—unlike many contemporaneous slasher films, there are no overt erotic overtones in the murders. However, as Argento points out, there is a Sapphic undercurrent that pervades *Suspiria*.¹⁵ This is an interesting launching point through which to consider framing, close-ups, and to incorporate feminist and post feminist film theory. At the

end of the film, when the heroine in a knitted sweater set, Suzy, vanquishes Helena Markus—the coven head—whose salon looks remarkably like make-up entrepreneur and art collector Helena Rubinstein’s—objects, art, mirrors, walls begin to disintegrate along with the rest of the mansion. It is not entirely clear what kind of statement Argento is making about the morality of fashion or femininity, but it is evident that objects and fashion in particular are integral to the creation of his nonlinear visual narrative. By killing the source of evil in the academy, Suzy unleashes a kind of power she has no ability to harness, as she is pushed her away from the coven and into the natural world as the academy crumbles in the end. Despite inconsistencies, *Suspiria* operates using a recognizable, albeit simple plot structure. Argento could be seen to either reconfigure or return to the whore/angel dichotomy by costuming organic/inorganic, light/evil binaries through the mostly female cast while removing men almost altogether from the film. Similarly Bourdin has been at once criticized and lauded for his ostensible treatment of his models and the image of women he projects in his opaque visual narratives.

Suzy’s costuming throughout demonstrates her position as the hero American in the film. To draw from Creed’s term, she is the “last-girl” of sorts, but within a matriarchy rather than a patriarchal narrative structure. On another level of symbolism, this “good always

triumphs evil” ending is a cliché, but also an allusion to America’s triumph over European Fascism, especially considering the figure spot-on fascist figure Miss Tanner and her prominence within the plot. Furthermore, when dancers gain any kind of insight or investigate into the academy’s dark underpinnings, the person becomes a problem for the witches, resulting in elimination.

With *Suspiria*, Argento repositions violence by framing it within a fashionable, highly referential aesthetic. This examination of scenes within *Suspiria*, the director’s deconstructed fairytale, represents his signature *mise en scène*. This is exemplary of the relationship of violence and fashion as stylized and romanticized in cinema. Argento’s film reads like a fashion photograph, and Bourdin’s images register as film stills. Both of their influence extends into 21st century media. Their visual language manifests in film and fashion imagery, the forms through which they were originally presented within.

Film theorist Robin Wood suggest that the horror film is a return of “all that our civilization represses or oppresses.”¹⁶ If subjugated subjects haunt the cinema screen and the fashion imagery of the 70s—then, as a part of a broader visual discourse, perhaps *Suspiria* helps to recall the repressed violence of the 20th century that now permeates the present. ✦

PART TWO

VIOLENT GARMENTS



London, W. L. G. Carter, Printseller, Bookseller &c. 42, Abchurch Lane, Street, Pall Mall.

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THE HORRORS OF CRINOLINE & THE DESTRUCTION OF HUMAN LIFE.

VICTIMS OF FASHION:
AN INTERVIEW WITH
ALISON MATTHEWS DAVID

Veronica Maldonado

Graduate Director of Ryerson's MA Fashion Program, Alison Matthews David, recently finished her Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded research, which culminated in the Bata Shoe Museum exhibit, *Fashion Victims: The Pleasures and Perils of Dress in the 19th Century*, co-curated with senior curator Elizabeth Semmelhack, and Matthews David's own book *Fashion Victims: The Dangers of Dress Past and Present*. BLAS editor Veronica Maldonado discusses accidents, clothes, and disease with Matthews David, and the ongoing partnership between fashion and violence.

With your research for both the Fashion Victims book and exhibit, you must have some thoughts on fashion's relationship to violence.

I think it's complex, obviously, but I think that the two ways I've been interested, it appears in things like fashion photography frequently, like you know the editorials by Steven Meisel in *Vogue Italia* and places like that, but I think historically, one of the biggest themes in my work is that the making of fashion has done physical harm to both its makers and wearers. I've been interested in both, but I think we often forget the makers. It depends on how you define violence, too. Is poisoning violence? Accidents? A worker getting their clothing or their hair entangled in machinery, for example. A ballerina catching on fire. The other kind of way I'm going to be looking at violence for my next project is with the connection between clothing and crime, where fashion items or clothing are used as accessories to crime. Someone actually being strangled by undergarments or nylons, for example. For my research, I actually went to the Museum of London, and was amazed at how many items of clothing were actually implicated in crimes, including women strangled by 1930s nylons, people with brass knuckle jewelry, that kind of thing. Literally, violence though something you wear on your body.

Clothing as an amplification of violence?

Exactly, or accessory to the fact; for example, crimes of passion or sexual crimes often happen when people are undressing or dressing, so what's the nearest thing at hand? Well, it's an item of clothing.

From what you've been telling me, it sounds like fashion and violence have an entwined relationship. Perhaps more than people see nowadays, especially since factories have moved far away from the consumer. Now, for example, you get a shirt but you don't know where or how it was made, and so all the potential violence remains a secret.

Exactly, that's why I was looking at artifacts from the past. For example, I was looking at the mercury in hats. These things are still toxic, they were in plastic bags with skulls and crossbones on them, so the substance is still present and dangerous in the very fiber of the item. Violence is always inherent to the object, but it's become more invisible as fashion production has been globalized. Historically, that's one of the things that made it so interesting to track fashion victims. The medical literature was there because the clothing was being produced and worn in the same place, so trauma to the body was much more evident.

Do you think fashion is still just as violent, we just don't see it?

Yes, unfortunately. I think at least in terms of the themes I was examining in the book. For example, as society became industrialized and transport became mechanized and motorized, there were a lot of accidents where largely women were getting caught, because they wore flowing garments, and the

fashion didn't keep up with the technology, or deliberately flouted it through excess. Then I looked at the modern example - found medical reports on the dangers of, for example, riding on a motorcycle or using agricultural machinery while wearing a shawl or a scarf, these things could become entangled in the wheels of a motorcycle, or car. Violence was often pretty shocking and graphically reported in medical and media reports, certainly. Historically, media reports were grisly.

I always think of the Isadora Duncan incident with the scarf, but I'm sure there's been a lot more. I remember when you gave your lecture at Parsons you talked about all the issues women had with hobble skirts, that they literally made the transportation system change. In a way the violence in fashion has almost shaped society, not in a big scale, but has kind of made these invisible changes in other aspects of interaction.

Totally, often it's so subtle we don't realize it. When violence happens in such a mediatized and graphic way, when it happens to people that are perceived as more vulnerable, women and children, then the changes are drastic and immediate. Like flame deaths. They immediately tried to make flame-proof flannelette, for children's pajamas, for example. They were bathed in carcinogens, of course, but it was all to try and stop the violence. Other kinds of things are more invisible, for example children don't wear scarves to school anymore or don't have toggles in their coats because these were getting caught on school bus doors and children were being dragged or strangled on playground equipment. Those are things that aren't very visible. I don't think many people would be like, "Oh, you know, look at that coat, it doesn't have a toggle anymore." It's little details we might not even notice, but they've been formed by violence. I think it has affected the way clothing is made and worn, but often in such subtle ways we're not aware of it.

Oh yeah, for sure, that's one of the big things that your work instilled in me, is just to see how we talk about fashion evolution in history, but we rarely look at violence as a driving force that changes the way we dress and the way others perceive dress. Violence can be really bad, obviously, nobody wants to catch fire on stage - but in another way, it's kind of pushed innovation in fashion.

It has, exactly. Immediately after Emma Livry died in flames—well, she died eight months later - the textile people were trying to market more flame-proof fabrics, and theaters were putting smothering blankets on stage and redesigning lamps. Again, we don't even think of our built environment as something designed in relation to violence. I think these things often go under the radar because they have to do with dress and clothing, which seems very trivial to so many people.



THE ARSENIC WALTZ.

THE NEW DANCE OF DEATH. (DEDICATED TO THE GREEN WREATH AND DRESS-MONGERS.)



Yeah. Because it's seen as so frivolous, it becomes even more important, because it just goes unspoken.

Another thing I would say—and I'm only starting to think about this—violence in fashion in some ways is accidental. Some of it was deliberate; for example, the hatters knew that mercury was going to kill them, but they still used it. But then there are things like the famous Russian spy in the late 70s, who was killed with poison in an umbrella tip that was jabbed into his leg, which was clearly deliberate. Clothing can be, again, used to conceal or disguise and as an accessory to violence as well.

I remember one time, I think at a museum in Spain, there were fans that literally had little pockets for poison. Just in case, I guess.

Exactly, like poison rings, too. There's these legends of the poison garment. If you think of all the kinds of clothing designed to protect our bodies - from extremes like bulletproof vests and spacesuits, to just our daily clothes that keep us warm - we have this trust built with garments. Clothing that betrays that trust is particularly psychologically disturbing.

In a more strictly "fashion" sense, that makes me think of Alexander McQueen's blood vial dresses, and that kind of thing.

I haven't thought enough about what's going on now, how violence is or isn't expressed on the runway these days, but I think it's street wear, in particular, that is in touch with the issue of clothing as a kind of shield from other people.

Like people wearing bomber jackets or military gear on a daily basis. Yes. Oh yeah, those constant military fashions are really interesting.

It's fascinating to see how these militaristic themes, which are inherently violent in nature, filter through things and you end up with brands like Lemaire who consistently use Russian military inspired garments.

I read an article in *Fashion Theory* years ago called "Decorated Men" (2003) that was part of my PhD thesis on the glamour of the uniform, so it's natural that fashion draws on this tradition of military glamour and spectacle.

It speaks to relationship between violence and power, and how the ability to cause violence is related to the illusion of power.

They say that people copy the uniforms of the most victorious and powerful nations. During the Napoleonic period, everyone was copying French uniforms. After the Franco-Prussian war, it was Prussian and German uniforms.

And sometimes, for example, I think it was the 70s? Garments like the M60 jacket, which were issued for the Vietnam war, started being

used as symbols of counter cultural rebellion and peace. These things that are seen as powerful because they're violent, for some people, were seen as powerful signs of non-violence for others. Exactly. Appropriating it for the messages of peace.

There's the obvious issue where you can trip and fall in high heels and break your leg, and then there's the side where violence has pushed fashion. But then there is also a way that violence has been flipped to use fashion in non-violent way, if that makes sense?

Yes, I think there's a potential to take those symbols. It's interesting because the technology of clothing military bodies has produced so much for civilian fashion. The Prada backpack would not exist without an army and the silk nylon it's made of. There's all these things that are military innovations born from trying to create these disciplined, regulated, and potentially lethal bodies, but then they become symbols of fashion and get re-appropriated in all sorts of ways.

Yeah, that's what I find so fascinating about your research. First of all, it's morbid stuff, so it's interesting on that level, but it also touches on this tension between fashion and violence, and the ways they shape each other that aren't entirely obvious.

Caroline Evans's work was like an inspiration to me in that way, the kind of darkness of fashion, the dark side of fashion. It always makes me laugh when people are like, "And she looks at the dark side of fashion." I was like, "Well, fashion has always had an extremely dark side." +



PAIN'S GHOST

Laura Snelgrove

The late designer Alexander McQueen created clothing and runway spectacles with a dark, twisted edge. He was frequently accused of misogyny and exploitation due to a willingness to expose and magnify the harshest and most violent aspects of life for modern women. However, his stated intention, by way of explanation for why his models so often appeared strange and cruel to the conventional eye, was to create a woman “who looks so fabulous you wouldn’t dare lay a hand on her.”¹ His work contained a confrontational awareness of the gender-based violence that threatens all women and an imaginative space in which clothing could be part of their protection and self-defense.

The following is an excerpt of my scholarly work, titled, “So Fabulous You Wouldn’t Dare Lay a Hand on Her: McQueen’s Fashioning of the Tough Woman,” the seed for which was planted when I read the above quote in Caroline Evans’s *Fashion at the Edge*. Although McQueen is far from the only, or even the first, creative fashion professional to identify and market this tough version of femininity, I chose to study his work because of the explicit link he had made between dress and a consciousness of violence, and because of the prevalence of signifiers of tough, edgy strength within his

oeuvre. His women often appeared as brutalized and damaged as they did scary, strange, and dominating; in every case, the characters he created were knowing, resilient, and responding to the harshest realities of womanhood.

Though I choose an interpretation of McQueen’s quote that sees women as aware, self-protective, and accepting of the responsibilities of maturity, it is too easy to extend the sentiment to blame victims for failing to look sufficiently ‘fabulous.’ In either case, at the crux of his statement is the conviction that a woman’s dress choices can have an effect on how she is perceived by others, and that it can be a perception of increased respect, even intimidation. McQueen’s clothing and runway presentations were the creation of an imaginary realm in which his stated intention to protect women from harm through design is achievable, unlike in the real world.

In 2011, the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art mounted *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, a posthumous retrospective of McQueen’s work. The exhibit was visited by a record-breaking 661,509 people with millions more accessing its content through sales of the catalogue, the museum’s website, and media coverage.² The museum context is inherently different than the com-

mercial and spectacular spaces in which fashion is most often seen; it is hushed, quiet, and contemplative, whereas the runway is bold, loud, and brash. Furthermore, the canonization of an artist's work that occurs when it enters a museum freezes some of its possible meanings according to curatorial decisions. Neither the show's wall text nor the accompanying catalogue dealt explicitly with the accusations of violence and misogyny that were made toward McQueen throughout his career. Rather, there is a marked emphasis on darkness as it refers to death and "the Gothic" and an ostensible focus on the themes of Romanticism in his work.

The catalogue traces the most notable of McQueen's collections and the press's reaction to them, most memorably *Highland Rape* (1995) and *Dante* (1996). The latter collection features many of the style signatures that define the violence-aware toughness of McQueen's work, including the use of bones, crucifixes, a crown of thorns, facial spikes, masks, high collars, sharp pointed edges, and military detailing.

Though oblique, the catalogue's visualization of violence is far more haunting than would have been possible by addressing the theme directly. The garments were photographed on live models digitally abstracted to resemble mannequins, resting comfortably in the liminal space where reality cleaves from illusion. A special white acrylic paint, formulated not



Fig. 1: Dress, *Sarabande*, spring/summer 2007. Photograph © Solve Sundsbø/Art + Commerce.

to stain the clothing, was used to cover the models' bodies for the catalogue photographs. The models' heads were removed, or their faces abstracted, in digital post-production. A (presumably unintended) side effect of this process was that the paint began to rub off the models during the shoot, leaving skin exposed in patches and creases. A *New York Times* article described this effect as "the only evidence of their humanity," with the photographer noting, "she is both artificial and flesh and blood."³ Moreover, the exposed areas resemble nothing more than bruises, scrapes, and cuts, in startling locations on the body, especially the neck, lower back, and inner thighs. This result has an uncanny effect upon the images, essentially casting a shadow of violence and menace over every



Fig. 2: Suit, *Highland Rape*, autumn/winter 1995–96 (jacket and skirt not worn together on the runway). From the collection of Isabella Blow courtesy of the Hon. Daphne Guinness. Photograph © Sølve Sundsbø/Art + Commerce. Text © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

garment.

One image in particular provides a disturbing sense of victimization without recourse, with no evidence of a fierce ‘fabulousness’ having developed in response. A dress of extreme proportions, from the 2007 *Sarabande* collection, is made of mauve silk and shaped by a boned panier skirt into an exaggerated silhouette that doubles the width of the model’s hips [Fig. 1]. The neckline, low in front and over the shoulders, overflows in all directions with silk and fresh flowers. Bell sleeves explode with

blooms, and more are visible under the translucent silk of the skirt, trapped in the cage surrounding her legs. The model/mannequin’s chest is covered in the paint-smudge marks described above, in this case resembling the traces of wounding hands. Her hands lie limp at the end of her sleeves, the paint worn off her fingertips as though from frenzied grasping. It is unclear if the construction of the corset is forcing her upper body forward, but she pitches toward the camera breast-first in a pose that recalls nothing so much as supplication. Without the aid of a face with which to scowl or scoff in defiance, the body reads as staggering in pain. The flowers bursting forth from the gaps between body and garment—flowers used, according to McQueen, “because they die”—become innards, spilling out from gashes at the neck and wrists.⁴ In spite of the dress’s construction, which demands more space for the woman’s body than she would naturally occupy, it ultimately has not protected her, and the breaching of its borders exposed her to harm.

Similarly, a tartan ensemble from *Highland Rape* makes the original criticism of the collection’s exploitation of sexual assault seem somewhat apt once photographed for the book [Fig. 2].* A bell-sleeved tailored jacket with sharp lapels that

* When *Highland Rape* was shown in 1995, much of the fashion press reacted negatively to the runway depiction of women in tattered clothing, appearing battered and smeared with dirt. He was accused of sensationalizing rape for shock value. His response was the explanation that the collection (and show) referenced instead the historical ‘rape’ of Scotland by England.

point upward beyond the shoulders is paired with a matching low-slung skirt. The model-mannequin's pose is again markedly unlike the tough stances seen so often on McQueen's runways; she stands with her arms straight at her sides. The jacket is worn with no shirt, and it buttons only from the waist to below the ribs, exposing the bust and the apparent bruising thereupon, which mars only the breasts themselves rather than the chest or neck. The cut of this opening in the jacket is such that it is rounded over the breasts, appearing to have been thrown or ripped open. The markings on her breasts coupled with her immobility, give the impression of an invasion of her body that has stunned and shocked her into frozen submission.

Directly facing this submissive image is another that responds to it [Fig. 3]. The model, again headless, is also in a *Highland Rape* tartan jacket, this time with a high, tubular collar trimmed with a white ruff. The jacket is again worn over a bare chest, which shows some worn spots of paint, like skin raw from scrapes. This model, however, is standing with a cocked hip, tilted shoulder, and both hands grasping her jacket, pulling it partially closed across her breasts. Alongside the scrapes, the collar seems medical, as though she has just tended to her injuries and is dressing again to re-enter the world. Here we see the essence of McQueen's knowing, violence-aware toughness in a woman who responds to pain with

defiance, even incorporating a neck brace into her fabulous ensemble. She re-covers herself, though notably not completely, insinuating that the marks left on her body are not sources of shame, but proof of survival. This is the fabulous woman of McQueen's imagination: reactive, unafraid, and utterly aware. +

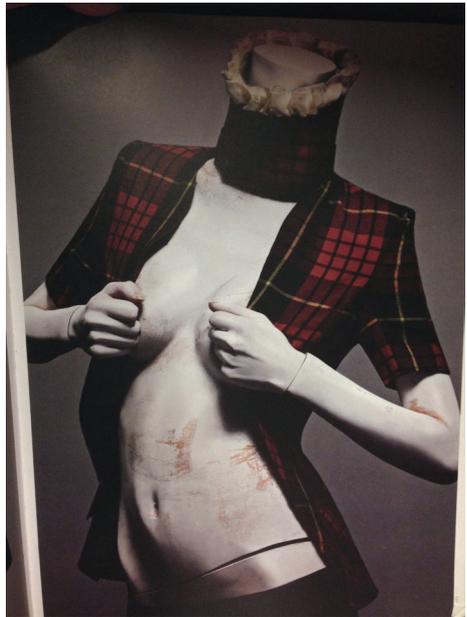


Fig. 3: Suit, *Highland Rape*, autumn/winter 1995–96 (jacket and skirt not worn together on the runway). From the collection of Isabella Blow courtesy of the Hon. Daphne Guinness. Photograph © Sølve Sundsbø/Art + Commerce. Text © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

FASHIONING VIOLENCE: DEPICTING THE WOUNDED WOMAN

Harriet Richards

Fashion is thoroughly immersed in the pursuit of newness. While the industry is inherently determined by the past, what Walter Benjamin calls the “tiger’s leap of fashion, into the thickets of long ago” and by the unknown future, it is also crucially and constantly preoccupied with the pursuit of “newness”.¹ The processes of reinvention that this pursuit engenders generally work to produce images of extreme ideals of beauty. This is particularly the case in women’s fashion, where pictures of largely unattainable, yet deeply aspirational perfection are constructed so as to promote longing and want in the female consumer. However, there are times when this relentless pursuit of newness results in the representation of aggressively brutal eroticism. In such images, the conflict between what Rebecca Arnold

calls the simultaneous “fascination with and hatred of female flesh and the power it can wield” goes beyond erotic sexualisation and enters the realm of violence.²

Jenna Sauers, a journalist at feminist culture blog Jezebel, remarks that “the history of fashion is rife with depictions of and reference to violence against women”.³ Arnold contends that the “balancing act between eroticism and violence,” was one of the defining aspects of the representation of fashion in the 1990s. For example, Alexander McQueen’s work frequently illustrated this balancing act, both on the runway and in his advertising campaigns. His models were repeatedly presented in various stages of undress, disarray and dereliction. Caroline Evans writes of his Spring/Summer 1995 collection, *The Birds*, in which the mod-

els “were bound in sticky tape and streaked with oily tyre marks... to look as if [they] had been driven over.” And of his Autumn/Winter 1995-1996 collection, *Highland Rape*, in which his “staggering and blood-splattered models appeared wild and distraught, their breasts and bottoms exposed by tattered laces and torn suedes.”⁴

More recently, a number of high fashion brands have produced imagery depicting and referencing violence against women. In 2006 Jimmy Choo published an advertisement in which musician Quincy Jones, brandishing a spade, digs a hole in the desert, whilst model Molly Sims lies—seemingly murdered—in the trunk of his car. Similarly, in 2007 Dolce & Gabbana released an advertisement in which a female model “pinned to the ground by the wrists by a bare-chested man, with other men in the background looking on,” implied a simulated scene of gang rape.⁵ And in 2012, *Pop* magazine produced a fashion editorial in which 16-year-old model Hailey Clauson was pictured, in one photograph, being strangled by the hands of an unseen man.

The most explicit recent example of the way in which fashion photography can descend into violence is a 2012 editorial published in the beauty section of an independent Bulgarian fashion magazine entitled *12*. This spread, labelled “Victim of Beauty”, garnered particularly vociferous international consternation due to the

shockingly graphic nature of the photographs. One of the photographs portrays a young woman whose throat had been cut; her high-cheek-boned face is upturned to expose her slashed neck. Another model is portrayed as the victim of an acid attack; her green eyes stare blankly out from her scarred red face. Subsequent images show another pale young model having had facial piercings ripped from her skin, and yet another having had her face viciously gouged.

The 6-page editorial provoked much controversy among the online fashion community concerning the continued representation of violence against women in fashion. Sauers published a disparaging report on the feature, declaring it, “appalling [and] sickening”.⁶ Likewise, Cheryl Wischhover, beauty editor for *Fashionista.com*, expressed “disgust, shock and ‘Why?!’”.⁷ Sauers’s article was particularly provocative, sparking a hostile response from *12*’s editor-in-chief, Huben Hubenov who accused Sauers of being, “superficial, one-sided, and narrow-minded”.⁸ Hubenov claimed that Sauers did not have “a positive view of the world [because she can...] only see the ugly, completely missing the beauty”.⁹ Although the female body is most often depicted in fashion imagery in line with conventional ideals of feminine beauty and the erotic desire of the male gaze, in these images it is represented conversely, through the lens of violence. Arnold suggests that such

imagery reveals “the dark side of sexual desire [...and] the vulnerability of the body”.¹⁰ The continued portrayal of the wounded woman compels us to ask why this form of representation prevails in both independent and mainstream fashion media.

In response to such a question, Arnold suggests that the representation of women as exploited, abused or brutalised in both fashion imagery and on the runway is “a form of resistance to the constant clarion call for health and beauty”.¹¹ Such shocking references to violence within fashion are designed to make the audience feel uncomfortable. Arnold writes that “such images have the potential to enable a form of liberation from fashion’s perfected bodies,” yet, as she continues, “this presents problems, in terms both of who controls and constructs the images and of the way they are received by the wider culture”.¹² The portrayal of brutality and violence in fashion imagery may be an attempt to challenge preconceived notions of beauty and disrupt “the fantasy of perfection that usually dominates” in order to act “as a taunt to the squeamish who wish only to see a sanitized view of the world”.¹³ However, while such brutal imagery certainly successfully de-sanitizes our view of fashion, it also repeatedly perpetuates social perceptions concerning female victimisation. Sauers notes that the ‘Victim of Beauty’ editorial explicitly puns on the “empty idea of the fashion con-

sumer as fashion victim”¹⁴ drawing the connection between the metaphorical victim of fashion and the literal victim of violence. In doing so, the spread trivializes the reality of violence, positioning it within the realm of artificially constructed beauty, rather than genuine brutality. Whether depicting the female body as a fantasy of perfection or as a wounded woman, the fashion industry continues to explore extreme imagery in its relentless pursuit of spectacular notness. ✦

CLOAK AND SWAGGER: THE VIOLENT HISTORY OF THE FASHIONABLE RENAISSANCE CLOAK

Bethany Pleydell

In 1536, Thomas Warley wrote to Lady Lisle informing her of the latest gossip at court: the English courtier, Robert Whethill, sparked the jealousy of his peers by dressing in a brilliant red and yellow suit:

[he] brags freshly in the Court in a coat of crimson taffeta, cut and lined with yellow sarcenet, a shirt wrought with gold, his hose scarlet, the breeches crimson velvet, cut and edged and lined with yellow sarcenet, his shoes crimson velvet and likewise his sword-girdle and scabbard, a cloake of red frisado, a scarlet cap with feathers red and yellow.

With a coat, breeches, shoes, cloak and cap fashioned from brightly-colored silk textiles, it is of little surprise that Warley concludes that Whethill “hath many lookers-over.”¹ What is remarkable here, however, is that the cloak, now a fanciful and vibrant garment used to showcase Whethill’s sartorial novelty, derived from a more sombre and functional item of military garb. Traditionally, cloaks comprised an important part of military livery, intended to keep the soldier warm whilst illustrating his political allegiance.² However, with the discovery of the New World at the end of the fifteenth century, the boom

in global trade routes prompted the arrival of new and exciting textiles on the European market. These sartorial networks offered consumers an almost infinite variety of dyes, textiles and adornments with which they could fabricate their wardrobes according to personal tastes and emulate larger fashion trends circulating Europe.³

With this shift in the use and styling of the cloak, came a change in the representation and reception of the cloaked male. Portraiture and prints from this period reveal the fashionable Renaissance male either standing with his arm akimbo and a cloak swung across one shoulder; or on horseback, his cloak billowing behind him. The effect is striking, perhaps even jaunty in some instances; but essentially fashion-forward. On face value, the sixteenth-century cloaked male may not appear to conjure up images of violence, war or traditional “masculinity;” however, as a number of sources reveal, the cloak, and the cloaked male, were frequently described in terms of their military, criminal and masculine connotations. It is not a coincidence, for example, that the trope of the Spanish male—a stereotypically “war-thirsty” individual in the eyes

of the English—was a cloaked one.⁴ Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the cloak became a definitive feature of male dress, most popularly worn in Spain, replacing the codpiece, and the earlier-still broad shouldered robes of Henry VIII's court, as a typically "masculine" garment, despite being worn by both sexes. Whilst cloaks were no longer used primarily in military garb, this article examines how their usage in fashionable day-to-day dress was still laden with military connotations in the sixteenth century. It was this residual 'violent' undertone of the cloak that, I argue, also influenced the Renaissance construction of masculinity as inherently powerful, virile and violent.

The role of the men's cloak as a gendered item of clothing, akin to the codpiece or broad-shouldered robe, has been largely overlooked in dress history, with scholars such as Will Fisher and Tatiana String privileging more obvious indicators of masculinity—codpieces, robes, doublets and beards - in their studies on the role of clothing in the construction of male identity.⁵ In spite of their focus, both Fisher and String offer valuable theories regarding the role of clothing and gesture as gendered prostheses which helped to formulate ideas concerning normative gender roles within the public realm of the Renaissance court. These theories are applicable to the Renaissance cloak, whose complex history as both livery and fashion

piece led to its popular usage by European courtiers who sought to convey, amongst other humanist ideals, a keen eye for fashion and an adept knowledge of warfare.⁶ The gendered usage of the *women's* cloak has been explored in relation to the veiled ladies of early modern Spain and Spanish America. In their article, Laura Bass and Amanda Wunder examine how, contrary to their male counterparts for whom the cloak was an important part of civic dress, the cloaked female was "a clearly recognizable social type: seductive, defiant, and disruptive of the social order."⁷ Thus, whilst cloaked men were occasionally viewed with caution for fear their clothing may be a disguise for a criminal activity, the "crisis of social recognition" which accompanied cloaked or veiled women was closely tied to the sexual anxieties of male onlookers.⁸ The cloak's violent associations of crime and warfare very much belonged to the masculine realm.

Within the field of dress history, ideas circulating masculinity and military warfare have generally triggered research into the use of armour as both a violent and protective second skin. What requires further study is how accompanying garments, such as bases and cloaks, worn as more colorful livery, still connoted violence, bravery and military loyalty. Maria Hayward, in her essay on Henry VIII's silk bases, describes how "Along with a suitable suit of armour, the base was a key part of a knight's attire, both for

ceremonial occasions, such as the royal coronation, and for jousts.” The base and trapper, Hayward continues, were important garments worn during such “displays of strength and bravery”. In her research, Hayward turns to contemporary pattern books to ascertain the cut and construction of these bases and, interestingly, finds that the closest resemblance is a “felt cloak with skirts.”⁹ It is therefore likely that early military cloaks used as livery fell under the same retinue as bases and would have been made with similarly colored fabrics. Their role were both practical and highly ceremonial; intended to convey the military loyalties and expertise of the wearer.

As the most explicitly visible component of male dress, cloaks increasingly became an important site where individuals expressed their personal taste through unique combinations of textiles and adornments. Furthermore, cloaks helped the individual perform his social identity by allowing him to emulate or rival the dress of his peers. According to Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass, clothes fashion the wearer’s social identity by leaving “a ‘print or character’ upon the observer and wearer alike.”¹⁰ Clothing’s prescribed connotations and characteristics are translated onto the body and the social identity of the wearer to both positive and negative affect. New-fangled styles of clothing have, historically, come under fire from moralising writers who expressed concerns to-



Fig.1: Cloak, c.1500s, Spanish, silk with metal thread, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

wards the purportedly vainglorious and superficial effects of clothing styles and the almost frenetic manner with which individuals took them up. The cloak, as a garment which allowed for individual sartorial expression, was often ridiculed for indicating a frivolous, proud and superficial character—sentiments at odds with the cloak’s practical military roots. At the other end of the spectrum, we also hear of the cloaked male as being grave in nature, suggesting that despite its absorption into ‘high fashion’, the cloak never truly lost its violent or military connotations.

Of all the cloak designs produced during this period, it was the round-cut cloak which proved to be the most enduring in the sixteenth century [Fig.1].¹¹ It was designed to be worn over one shoulder, as secured by a braid tied across the opposite shoulder, so that, upon turning the body sharply, the fullness of the garment would be revealed to onlookers. Its effect was theatrical; perhaps a central reason for its later, dramatic portrayal in Golden Age mystery plays,

“cloak and dagger” literature and, more recently, action films. Cloaks assumed an unprecedented importance in the lives of their elite wearers during this period, as their often eye-catching display of silk textiles and decorative adornment were believed to reflect the power, wealth and military acumen of their fashionable wearers. In acts of self-fashioning, the dressed individual became a self-made man whose social body was created—quite literally “fashioned”—through clothing. This was a social body which, according to Susan Vincent, “gathered meaning through being seen in the public domain.”¹²

The Military Origins of the Renaissance Cloak

According to Lillian Wilson, in Roman times it was believed that to “put on the sagum”—a short military cloak—was “equivalent to ‘buckling on the sword,’ and laying aside the sagum meant making peace.”¹³ The Renaissance cloak did not differ so much in its military connotations from the Roman sagum: the Spanish *berreuelo* cloak, for instance, popular during the mid- to late-sixteenth century, was in fact named after the German (*ferrueruelo*) soldiers who fought under Charles V during early 1500s.¹⁴ Curiously, the arrival of the Spanish half-length cloak in the mid-sixteenth century not only welcomed in a wave of fashionable decorations, dyes and textiles, but also a new manner with which military men conducted themselves.

As Brian Reade notes, these shorter cloaks were popular with “the energetic man” owing to their roomy feel, “They were less cumbersome on horseback, particularly when the rider mounted and dismounted; and they were more convenient to wear over the Spanish and Italian rapiers then coming into use, which were so long that they had to be bounced up into a horizontal position before they could be un-sheathed.”¹⁵ This transition to shorter cloaks, from the previous full-length woolen cloaks, responded to the military needs of the wearers whilst in battle and subsequently altered their methods of swordsmanship. Military cloaks not only provided the wearer with a valuable layer of warmth; but, as livery, constituted important visual markers of the individual’s institutional membership by indicating which army he belonged to and which monarch he supported.¹⁶ Given their military and political background, it is of little surprise, then, that cloaks should enter the linguistic register as political terminology. In sixteenth century England, the phrase “to turn one’s cloak” meant to change allies or deflect loyalty. In a letter to Archibald Douglas in 1586, for instance, the Scottish nobleman Master of Gray wrote of the rumors circulating that he had pledged allegiance to France, a decision which he claimed would incur Elizabeth I’s wrath upon Scotland:

In the last you wrote to me that, if I undertook the voyage for his Majesty’s title,

*that it would be thought there I had turned my cloak and was become French. If they will trust opinions I cannot "remed," but I mind not to be so "solist" as I have been for any conceits, and, truly, they shall find me as constant a poor man as ever they dealt with in their time. If any cause be to complain, it is on my side, and not on theirs. If I turn my cloak, good faith, the Queen of England may quit her friendship in Scotland.*¹⁷

We also read of cloaks being used for seditious purposes. In 1589, the Lord Walshingham was informed by letter of the disloyal actions of Fergus O'Farrell, who received a "Spanish cloak of great value and a pair of spurs" from Brian O'Rourke, Lord of West Bréifne in Ireland, who aided Spanish fleets during the Armada.¹⁸

Cloaks were also used in other criminal activities, to hide perpetrators and aide their unsavory behavior. In the State Papers belonging to Elizabeth I's reign, between the years 1558-1589, we hear of numerous accounts where cloaks were used to escape the law, disguise appearances or hide weapons. For instance, in 1560, it was recorded that a bookbinder was saved the fate of being burnt at the stake by an anonymous group of individuals who distracted the authorities whilst smuggling the bookbinder to safety underneath a cloak: "On the 29th Jan. a poor man, a binder of books, was condemned to be burnt for heresy [...] The same riding in a cart between two friars to be burnt, a quarrel was made with the ser-

geant who convoyed him, and he was unhorsed, the poor man taken out of the cart, his hands loosed, and a cloak thrown over him, and conveyed out of the hands of his enemies."¹⁹ A few years later, the cloak reappeared in a letter from the Earl of Warwick to Elizabeth I, who reported that the Duke of Guise had been murdered by a man disguised as a German horserider: "Guise is slain by a gentleman who, disguised like a reiter, and mounted upon a Spanish jennet, came to the trench [...] feigning to have some matter of importance to communicate. The Duke came towards him, who, instead of a letter, presented a pistolet (hid under his long cloak), and shot him through the shoulder, of which he died four days after."²⁰

Alongside these criminal and military activities, the cloak was also engaged in other more entertaining, but nonetheless violent pastimes: sporting activities such as fencing. The phrase "cloak and dagger," which is now commonly used to refer to Golden Age mystery plays, originally referred to a fencing technique employed by swordsmen up until the mid-sixteenth century.²¹ These amateur swordsmen used compendia for martial arts, known as *Fechtbucher*, to learn the tricks of the trade, finding the "cloak and dagger" technique to be the most fruitful. The Spanish manual, *Libro de las Grandezas de la Espada* (1600), for instance, exalts the use of the cloak in combat, stating: "the sword and cloak are the best weapons because

they cover the swordsman, protect the arm and engulf the enemy as if he were a bull.”²² Indeed, as Achille Marozzo’s famous manual, *Opera Nova dell’Arte delle Armi*, also illustrates, the “cloak and dagger” technique was effective insofar as it both safeguarded the swordsman and disarmed his opponent: he swordsman would wear his cloak wrapped around his left arm, holding it tightly in his left hand, and fence using his right arm.²³ This type of combative sport, along with hunting, was the reserve of the wealthy and was considered a reflection of the individual’s potential capabilities in warfare. From battlefield to playing field, then, the cloak became synonymous with military prowess; an association it carried through to the social circles of Europe’s elite when it transitioned from protective, practical garb to “fashion piece.” By the mid-sixteenth century, “cloak and dagger” fighting had fallen out of favor with the elite and it was within the theatrical space of the royal court that the cloaked courtier’s

swagger—his manner of parading himself—became his weapon of choice.

Residual Violence in the Fashionable Renaissance Cloak

In Spain, where shorter cloaks were most popularly received, four styles of cloak were widely worn from the mid-sixteenth century to the first quarter of the seventeenth century: the *capa*, a semi-circular cloak with a long hood or cowl, known as a *capilla*, which measured half the total length of the cloak; the *herrueruelo*, a semi-circular cloak with a flat collar [Figs. 2-3]; the *tudesco*, a voluminous cloak with wide sleeves which was worn loosely atop the shoulders; and finally, the *bohémio*, a cloak made exclusively for the aristocracy and decorated with a thick border of fur or metallic embroidery.²⁴ The cut of these cloaks is most clearly recorded in Juan de Alcega’s famous pattern book *Libro de Geometria, Practica y Traça* (and later emulated in similar books by Diego de Freyle, Francisco de la Rocha



Figs.2-3: Cloak (with detail), 1560-80, Spanish, silk with metal thread, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Burguen and Martin de Anduxar) which was intended as a guide to journeymen tailors on how to cut their garments economically.²⁵

Despite these patterns, it seems that very little expense was spared in selecting luxurious textiles and adornments for these garments. In his moralizing diatribe, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), the puritan Philip Stubbes derided the expense and effort of making cloaks claiming that “the day hath been when one might have bought him two clokes for lesse than now he can have one of these clokes made for, they have such store of workmanship bestowed upon them.”²⁶ If Stubbes’ descriptions are to be true, the possibility of cloak design and adornment was seemingly infinite: he mentions the use of a broad spectrum of colored dyes; textiles, including “cloth, silk, velvet, taffetic”; and decorations, including “Velvette gardes, or [...] costly lace, either of golde, silver.”²⁷ Contemporary letters and inven-

tories can testify to this variety in cloak designs. The Stowe Inventory, pertaining to the wardrobe of Elizabeth I, lists a selection of brilliant cloaks made in 1603, including “one shorte cloake of perfumed leather, enbrodered with three small borders of Venice golde, sylver, and crimson silke,” another of “heare-colour raized mosseworke, enbrodered like stubbes of dead trees, set with fourteen buttons enbrodered like butterflies,” and a third of “blacke taphata, enbrodered all over with droppes of Venice golde, blacke silke, and spangles.”²⁸ Whilst these entries describe women’s garments, they would have matched men’s cloaks in quality and adornment. Vibrant red cloaks were particularly popular amongst male consumers, with the London merchant John Husee writing to Lady Lisle in 1537 requesting that she purchased his son, John, a vibrant red cloak.²⁹ Perhaps derivative of the religious red cope, two examples of surviving red cloaks



Fig. 4: Spanish cloak, c.1560-69, silk cut velvet with gold silk fringe, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 5: French cloak, c.1580-1600, satin with silver thread, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

can be found at the Victoria and Albert Museum where their bases of red stamped velvet [Fig. 4] and satin [Fig. 5] are dressed with gold embroidery and silver thread and fringe, respectively.³⁰ The elaborate designs of many cloaks at this time were reflected in contemporary sumptuary legislation which offers a commentary upon the social mores governing the sartorial habits of the elite. In 1574, for instance, Elizabeth I ordered that “None shall wear in his apparel: [...] sarsanet, camlet, or taffeta in facing of gowns and cloaks,” a rule which many consumers evidently chose to forgo.³¹

Whilst contemporary sumptuary legislation may illustrate, on a very general level, the resistance towards new styles of cloaks as expensive and gaudy emulations of aristocratic dress, other contemporary sources, such as satirical engravings and costume books, reveal the more violent, and often negative, connotations of military warfare that these garments continued to evoke long after their abandonment from soldiery clothing. The Spanish elite, who were most famously associated with the round-cut cloak, were frequently described in ambivalent terms in populist European satires which closely associated them with warfare. In Gilles Rousselet’s engraving *Le Capitaine Espagnol* (c.1635, Bibliothèque nationale de France), for instance, the image of a cloaked Spanish captain is accompanied by the caption “I am the terror the

brave men of the Earth/ All Nations bow under my law/ I do not want peace at all; I only like War.”³² Here, Rousselet’s Spaniard is presented as a ludicrous caricature with his finely curled moustache, bulging doublet and distinctive round-cut cloak. In Cesare Vecellio’s famous 1590 costume book *De gli Habiti Antichi e Moderni di Diversi Parti di Mondo*, too, cloaked Spaniards are described as being “grave by nature, shrewd, and very thrifty [...] They dress in black more than in any other color. The Spaniard is astute, brave in warfare.”³³ These reactions to the cloaked Spanish male are perhaps indicative of the general feeling of malaise and xenophobia towards Spain during this period, rather than a genuine dislike of the round-cut cloak. Indeed, during the mid- to late-sixteenth century, Spain was the producer of the most popular and widely-disseminated fashions.³⁴

Cloaks were worn throughout Europe by elite males who endeavored to fashion themselves as ideal masculine courtiers. It is commonly understood that these cloaks, which swung with great flourish when worn loosely over the shoulders, allowed the wearer to make a dramatic entrance or exit. Contrary to the rest of the male wardrobe—comprised padded doublets and jerkins, stiff ruffs and high collars—the cloak welcomed quick movement to allow its luxurious fabric and embroidery to be fully appreciated. The very theatricality of these cloaks (particular-

ly those worn by the elite classes) played into the idea that the royal court was a stage upon which the courtier acted. Indeed, clothes became inscribed in a complex ceremony in which *courtiers-cum-actors* “performed” their courtly identities through dress as a means of securing their status in the cockpit of the royal court.³⁵ In visual culture too, the cloaked male was often depicted confidently swaggering about on foot or horseback with his cloak hung jauntily across his shoulder, appearing proud and sartorially savvy. Nicholas Hilliard’s miniature, *Young Man Amongst Roses*, with its romantic depiction of a young courtier scantily-clad in short breeches, his long slender legs exposed and his black cape lazily draped across his left shoulder, does not necessarily conjure the same ideas of virile masculinity as presented in history paintings and hunting scenes such as Titian’s *Charles V* (1548, Museo del Prado) or Velázquez’ *Philip IV in Hunting Dress* (c.1632-34, Museo del Prado). With his hand placed over his heart, he perhaps better represents chivalric love than military prowess. However, the arrangement of his garments, particularly the cloak, reflected similar compositions found in court portraits, such as Paul van Somer’s *James I* (early 1600s, Museo del Prado), Sofonisba Anguissola’s *Alessandro Farnese* (c.1560, National Gallery of Ireland) or Bartolomé González’ *Archduke Leopoldo* (c.1608, Museo del Prado), where the male sitter is reflected as elegant, domineering

and masculine.

The conflation of military and sartorial realms is best evidenced in Rubens’ portrait of *Philip II of Spain*, painted in 1628 (Museo del Prado). What is remarkable about this portrait is the myriad of technical devices and sartorial features used by Rubens to fabricate an image of the Spanish king as fashion-forward, brave in warfare, and masculine. By placing the monarch on horseback, Rubens already overcame the issue of Philip’s famously diminutive stature to create the illusion of height, and exalts his military prowess by introducing the allegory of Victory to crown him for his success at the Battle of San Quentín. Rubens perhaps responded here also to Titian’s aforementioned portrait of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and Philip’s own father, whose greatness he sought to emulate and pay homage to in his art and relic collections, and the construction of his palace-monastery, El Escorial. Most interesting to us here, however, are the decorative textile accoutrements used to adorn Philip and his noble steed: the combination of red velvet and gold embroidery for his saddle, his fashionable straw hat (likely an Italian creation), his intricate silver and gold armor, and black damask cloak demonstrate a happy union between the worlds of fashion and war. This portrait acts as more than a recording of Philip’s elaborate wardrobe: it serves to commemorate Philip as an ideal Renaissance courtier, whose capa-

bilities in warfare are matched by a keen interest in fashion and an understanding of the value of clothing as a powerful communicator of meaning.

As Tatiana String finds, by the mid-sixteenth century, gestures and garments such as the codpiece, the ‘arm akimbo,’ and the ‘legs astride’ had already enjoyed a long tradition in courtly portraiture as cultural signifiers of virile masculinity and fashionable know-how. Heavy shoulders in men, for instance, were seen to “metaphorically bear weight and assume burdens” whilst a broad gait implied a balanced male.³⁶ When studying the construction of gender in Renaissance Europe, String explains, “Masculinity must be distinguished from straightforward ‘maleness,’ which is a biological fact; masculinity, instead, can be understood in terms of the performance of agreed, conventional, or internalized social roles.”³⁷ Gender was very much performed through clothing and comportment. At a time when the codpiece had almost fallen out of fashion, the cloak entered centre-stage bearing these gendered connotations. No longer used solely as protective outerwear to shield the wearer from the harsh extremes of weather or as livery for the military, Renaissance cloaks were now wielded as powerful and decorative signifiers of masculinity, and courtly and military prowess.

If we return to Thomas Warley’s earlier letter, concerning Robert Whethill’s grand entrance

at court in his dazzling suit of red and gold, we can see there was more at play here than Whethill simply wishing to show off his sartorial taste. Within the competitive space of the Renaissance European court, elite males used clothing to perform a social and gendered identity which could secure their hierarchical position. Above all, they sought to illustrate their courtly capabilities by demonstrating a keen eye for fashionable novelties and a firm knowledge and experience of military warfare: the makings of the “manly” man. As this article has sought to demonstrate, whilst the codpiece and broad-shouldered robes of the sixteenth-century had previously been used as signifiers of masculinity (their aggrandizing effects on the male anatomy alluding to a virile masculinity,) it was the round-cut cloak, whose apogee as the height of fashionable male garb in the mid- to late-sixteenth saw it undergo a number of colorful and decorative transmutations—that which became a dominant “masculine” feature in a number of court portraits. The cloak’s violent origins, coupled with its later fashionable variations, therefore contributed to the construction of a Renaissance masculinity which was both tinted with the violence of war and influenced by the ever-changing and expanding sartorial world. ✚

FEMININITY,
FREEDOM AND
FRAGILITY:
FASHION AND
VIOLENCE IN THE
DESIGNS OF
ELSA SCHIAPARELLI,
C.1933 - 1939

Lucy Moyses



Fig. 1: Elsa Schiaparelli, Coat with Bullet Casing Buttons, ca. 1933. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In 1934, *Vogue* wrote that within women's fashion "exhalations of fragility abound."¹ What kind of fragility did it refer to? How were women fragile within life, and how was this reflected, expressed, and addressed by their clothing? Within the same article, the author went on to state that "women are genuinely trying to regain the kingdom of power." Given the article's context within a high fashion magazine, how, precisely, could this effort to defeat fragility be manifested sartorially? Was there a tangible, visible endeavor to regain 'power' within dress? And what did such references to fragility and power allude to? By the mid-late 1930s, political events began to overshadow Europe and America, and impacting fashion, as the threat of the Second World War began to hover ominously. Elsa Schiaparelli has typically been noted for her playful, flirtatious, Surrealist and artistic tactics. However, during the later 1930s, pieces began to emerge within her otherwise high-spirited collections that revealed a frisson of the tension and anxiety that emerged on the international, contextual scene. This article will take Schiaparelli as a case study, and examine key examples of her output at this time that express explicit, physical violence.

It will consider how they can be seen to enable women to cope with the violent onslaught of modernity through an aesthetic of attack.

Elegant lines of cream cotton in a corded weave fall gracefully from neatly pleated shoulders, to an elegant mid-calf level [Fig. 1]. Weighty folds give a sense of high quality, stylish comfort, and ease. A well-placed collar, finished to a flattering point, sets off the ensemble with assurance. However, strategically placed pockets begin to raise questions about the conformity of this fashionable piece. Their raised position deliberately evokes contemporary hunting jackets, such as in figure 2, with fully functional flaps, deepening the sense of sturdy practicality. Schiaparelli was by no means the first designer to take influence from violent pursuits by ca.1933, when she produced this piece. Such crossovers occurred centuries previously, but peaked with the onset of the First World War. For example, in October 1914, just as the conflict began, the British newspaper *The Guardian* wrote that “one is decidedly struck with the tendency to adopt—or rather adapt—several military styles,”² specifically referencing “coats and capes,” much like Schiaparelli’s later version, as especially receptive to this sentiment. Whilst such adaptations concurred on the level of line and form, to the foundation of Schiaparelli’s piece, as described, she highlighted and exaggerated this tendency to a new level. Whilst two lines of buttons stand strikingly

down the center, in a conventional, double-breasted style, the buttons themselves are far from conventional. From a distance, they appear to be elegant, uniform pieces of molded brass. Upon closer inspection, however, they have been modeled to resemble convincing bullet casings. Indeed, their resemblances to figure 3, which shows contemporary examples, reveals the detail to which this has been carried out, linking the case to the bullet inside. In Schiaparelli’s case, this “bullet” is prompted in the imagination, but this does not weaken the potential power and violence of the perceived bullet within.

Bullets were not the only objects that Schiaparelli employed in order to subvert norms and expectations, to question and counter conventionality, and add a frisson of fun. In other collections, objects took more innocuous forms, such as shells or lips. The explicit introduction of violence onto an otherwise refined, traditional, though no less fashionable and thoughtfully-designed coat, then, makes a deliberate statement. On one hand, she characteristically played with already implicit elements of hunting on the coat by exaggerating the reference considerably. It overtakes previous military influences, and creates a cunning, knowing dialogue. Political developments in the international scene were beginning to deteriorate, and this sudden exaggeration on a very specific theme resonates precisely and hauntingly. That January, Adolf



Fig. 2: Franklyn's Cigarettes advertisement featuring hunting jackets, c.1914.



Fig. 3: Early 1930s bullet casing. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany. While the consequences of this were not appreciated at the time, other consequent events pointed towards an unfavorable outcome, including the Reichstag Fire, and subsequent decree of the same name, completion of the first concentration camp, setting up of the Gestapo secret police, the officialisation of Hitler's dictatorship, and legalisation of eugenic sterilisation. Whilst the locus was clearly in Germany, its implications were to affect the wider international scene. In the same year, the Four Power Pact was signed between Germany, France, Britain and Italy, which, according to contemporary sources in Britain and France, such as the (British-published) *International Press Correspondence*, provoked "uneasiness" and "watchfulness"³ despite having been conceived by Mussolini supposedly to promote the opposite. Furthermore, on 12th August that year, Winston Churchill gave a public speech warning that Germany was rearming, and emphasized the danger this posed. This plethora of disquieting events, of which the above are but a selection, was reported widely across Europe and America, and their occurrence within the same year as the production of Schiaparelli's piece, due to their ubiquity, seems unlikely to be a coincidence. By escalating the military crossover in dress to this scale, as political events simultaneously escalated, she made a direct comment.

Since the context of this

comment, of course, manifested in dress, it thereby manifested upon the body(/ies) of the (female) wearer(s). In this light, the placement of the bullets has particular resonance. Contrasting the coat's pale wheat hue with dark brass, they form two strong, direct lines, running from either side of the wearer's neck, down the torso. Their placement is unmistakable: certainly one of the most evident and noticeable elements of the piece. What is the implication of an overtly military object being so purposefully placed in this way? On one hand, removing bullets from their usual context, and placing them, quite literally, onto the female body brings them into physical contact with (potential) violence. However, the consequences were not necessarily negative or passive. Whilst the main body of the coat is unassuming, the bullets serve to confound and shock the viewer upon realization of their form, especially if they had not been identified at first sight. This effect acts to counter the male gaze, which women were increasingly exposed to during the inter-war period as they gained more and more independence to navigate the modern city alone. Furthermore, in relation to the escalating turbulence of events in 1933, the presence of the bullet cases served as a walking sign and reminder of mounting anxiety, showing Schiaparelli's engagement with the wider world, in both seriousness and at play.

Such anxiety continued to grow. In 1936, civil war broke out

in Spain, which would go on to seep unrest into Europe and America, inciting external action. Although it remained neutral, America was all too aware of the implications. For instance, in 1939, *Life* magazine would comment on the impact, that it had been "a testing ground for the tools of battle... a dress rehearsal for the next World War..." and described the "lessons" that "the world's general staffs learned" as a result.⁴ Also in 1939, Benjamin Munn Ziegler commented that the "Spanish 'civil' war ha[d] rocked a none too stable world precariously to and fro,"⁵ which again emphasized the repercussions it had outside of Spain, and highlighted the widespread existing tension of the time, which the civil war only served to heighten.

During the same year, Schiaparelli produced a pair of gloves [Fig. 4]. They were by no means her first, and appeared within a collection that featured hands as a large theme; however, they differed considerably from their precursors and peers. Whilst other examples played with coloured fingernails and animal skins, this pair took a more somber approach. Produced in black calf velvet, the gloves are elegant, dark and refined. Yet at the end of each finger is a golden false nail. On one hand, this queried notions of the body and its boundaries, re-defining the relationship between the body and dress - fingernails are expected to lie beneath the fabric of a glove, to externalize them is a form of sub-

version. Yet by producing the ‘nails’ in a material that does not appear natural or realistic, and is defiantly un-living and metallic, a connection can be drawn between the golden, metallic tones of the bullets and the brassiness of the bullet-casing coat. Whilst the gloves are not directly associated with violence, they are charged with its potential. Indeed, just as there is no deliberate attempt to mimic natural fingernails in color or texture, the nail shape itself is much more akin to claws, “pointed and curved.” The sharp point equips the wearer with the power to wreak devastation at whim. This rectified, at least conceptually, the destabilization that was wreaking havoc within Europe, and its repercussions in America, allowing the wearer an opportunity to regain a sense of control.

This concept was clearly important to the designer, as two years later—as the Spanish civil war and its effects continued (as it would until 1939)—it appeared amongst her work in a different guise, that of a ring. It was comprised of three separate parts, designed to be worn on the same finger, with a capped piece at the end, and two more conventionally shaped rings to be worn along the length. Each piece is much thicker and wider than the norm, meaning that it covers almost the entire length of the finger. This, in conjunction with its tough construction materials of metal and diamond, and the way it allows the finger joints to move freely despite the hard overlay, lends an

armor-like quality. This serves to support the sharp pointed piece, designed for the tip of the finger: a weapon that can be used with the assistance of armored protection. Not only did it provide a protective layer for a section of the body commonly exposed, but it enhanced this quality with the assurance of a prospective weapon.

The same year, Schiaparelli produced her *Tear Dress* [Fig. 5], which also employed tropes of concealment and exposure, but on a larger scale. It appeared in her Circus collection, but differed from its accompanying garments, which took after the title. Originally pale blue, the outfit is an elegant ensemble, carefully skimming the contours of the body, and crowned with a flowing, matching veil. Breaking up this smooth surface, however, is a profuse pattern, composed of dark pink and purple abstract, splattered shapes, each mirrored by a small black and light pink design below. In this way, they deliberately take the form of *trompe-l’oeil* tears or rips, with the lower half of each shape resembling a piece of hanging, torn fabric. This is a clear act of (artistic) assault, with imagined violence inflicted in order to impose the rips. The contours of the ripped shapes are deliberately ragged; nevertheless, this air of a spontaneous outburst is carefully controlled with smooth edges and deliberate placements. In the veil, the rips are further exaggerated, produced through physical cuts. The ensemble was produced with

controlled, precise cuts that defy the violent act it mimics, or is, in the case of the veil, in which the lower half of each 'tear' truly does hang as a second piece of 'ripped' fabric.

This ripping came with particular controversy. Despite widespread coverage of the Circus collection as a whole, the dress received relatively little attention, and, was not reported by any French publication. Considering Schiaparelli's stature by this point, this was likely a conscious decision reflecting the controversial nature of the design. During the same year, a torn dress provoked similar outrage. Howard Hawks' *Bringing up Baby* premiered during the same month as Schiaparelli's dress, February 1938. The female lead (played by Katharine Hepburn) stood up during an evening out, and inadvertently revealed a prominent rip in her dress. Accordingly, her male counterpart, played by Cary Grant, was forced to farcically walk closely behind her to preserve her modesty, only to later tear his own clothing [Fig. 6]. It was only due to the comedic context that this scene passed censors. This incident emphasises the risk and controversy Schiaparelli played with in her Tear Dress, revealing conservative attitudes towards women.

Whilst the tears were shocked in the context of dress, similarities appeared shortly beforehand within art. Schiaparelli worked in conjunction with Salvador Dalí, who designed the print of the piece. The dress has close



Fig. 4: Schiaparelli, Claw Gloves, 1938. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 5: Schiaparelli, Tear Dress, 1938. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

parallels with several of his paintings, produced slightly earlier, including *Three Young Surrealist Women Holding in their Arms the Skins of an Orchestra*, and *Necrophiliac Springtime*, both of which Schiaparelli owned, 1936. In the latter, a single woman stands before a misty background, sun-scorched buildings in the back, and a mysterious seated male figure in the mid-ground. Nevertheless, there is no interaction, and her stance is decisively solitary. She wears a long, clinging, white gown, which flares out slightly towards the feet, creating an elegant yet dramatic effect that matches her pose. Her head is obscured and comprised entirely of flowers, (another interaction between Dalí and Schiaparelli, when she took inspiration from this element for her *Shocking* perfume bottles the following year). Most relevant is what has taken place upon, or towards the dress: rips cut up the long sleeves, destroying any semblance of modesty, and add to the dark and used quality of the garment. Clear slashes of exposed flesh appear through the shredded material, adding a sense of horror. This motif is subtly repeated along the main body of the dress, however it is unclear whether the darkness here represents tears, dirt, or shadow. Here, three women are sheathed in similarly tight-fitting, full length, full sleeved gowns, though it is the central figure who is of most relevance here. Similar to the previous painting, there are clear slashes and rips in the material, again exposing the flesh. Dalí's

pieces make clear the association between flesh and dress, through the medium of painting, emphasized by the surrealistic and haunting settings. When translated into tangible, physical dress in Schiaparelli's piece, the oscillation becomes embodied and real.

What is the implication of these rips in Schiaparelli's context, which oscillated on the border of control and a lack thereof, of seamlessness and violence? Dily Blum perceives "torn patches of fur... as if the gown were made from an animal skin turned inside out."⁶ Caroline Evans, on the other hand, describes them as "the colors of bruised and torn flesh; yet it is completely unclear whether the illusion is meant to suggest torn fabric or flesh. Is the cloth below the "tears" textile or skin? Do the rips designate poverty (rags not riches) or some form of attack?"⁷ Both interpretations demonstrate clearly that Schiaparelli deliberately invokes the violence of torn flesh, and conflates it with dress. Schiaparelli's connection to the Surrealists, including her partnerships with Dalí, strengthen the conflation. One example of beauty treasured and perpetuated by the group was the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse)'s 1869 description of "the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table"⁸—as a simile to evoke beauty. Curiously, the objects chosen, an umbrella, sewing machine, and dissection table, all relate to the body. Several artists made the

body's role abundantly clear, as in Oscar Domínguez's *Electrosexual Sewing Machine*, an illustrated plate in a Surrealist edition of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, both 1934, which each place a woman beneath the needle of large, sewing machine contraptions. Did Schiaparelli's tears also represent an attack, and does this refer to women, the intended wearer(s) of such garb: are they a direct assault upon the body?

Whilst Dalí directly influenced the print, similar examples can be found in several works, another artist involved in the Surrealist group, Leonor Fini, at the time concentrated on a large number of pieces with similar themes: women wearing ripped clothing. In her 1938 *Self Portrait with a Scorpion*, for example, she stares directly out of the canvas, eyebrow fiercely arched, gaze direct, and hand defiantly on her hip. Her pose displays her forearm and elbow, above each of which is a large slash in her clothing. The holes are made more prominent by the fact that elsewhere, her clothing is modest to an exaggerated extent: full sleeved and coming up to the base of the neck. The shoulders are particularly pronounced with ruffled material, very much in vein of Schiaparelli's contemporaneous designs. Seemingly in order to heighten this sense of enclosure, two extra folds are present in the chest region, and excess material gathers in the sleeves. In contrast, the two patches of pale skin appear even more exposed and overt. Like Schiaparelli's tears,

these are assertively cut, though in Fini's elbow, loose threads can just be seen, emphasizing the violent action necessary to produce such an effect. She further heightened the effect through wearing only one glove, an incongruous grey shade, as compared to the warm tones of the remainder of the outfit. Furthermore, it is folded up at the base, revealing not just her wrist, but the tail of a scorpion. This potential violence illuminates the rest of the piece, the red undershirt then becomes a gaping slash, fraught with the violent connotations of red explored in the previous section. Despite the ravaging that has taken place on her dress, and the imminent danger enclosed within her hand, her cool gaze speaks volumes. It asserts power and control, even in the face of potential harm. Her compromising position could easily translate to victimization, but her composure communicates the opposite: it is the viewer, not her, being threatened. Can the same be said of Schiaparelli's Tear Dress, considering the similarities in design at play? Like Fini's ensemble, the wearer of the Tear Dress is surprisingly enclosed, the piece is unexpectedly modest. While the gown is strapless, it is full-length and not overly low-cut. Furthermore, the veil, whilst slightly sheer, provides additional coverage. In addition, it was presented with a pair of long gloves which covered most of the arm. The immediate impression for an onlooker is of exposed skin, yet this is trumped upon realization

that the tears are merely a clever trick of design. The flesh-tone of the gloves works in conjunction, appearing nude from a distance but actually protecting the skin. The outfit initially creates an impression of vulnerability and violation, yet poses a concealed attack upon the viewer, through feigning damage. Palmer White has, in other contexts of Schiaparelli's oeuvre, described

what he deemed her "hard chic" aesthetic as able to "protect... the New Woman from counter-attacks by the male."⁹ In this context, not only does the dress rebound any predatory male visual advances, but it provides protection on a greater scale: it becomes armor, taking on any feminine vulnerabilities and whole-heartedly rebuking them.

By this stage, Euro-Amer-



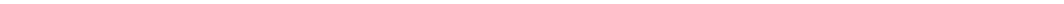
Fig. 6: Still from the film *Bringing Up Baby* (1938).

ican developments had intensified considerably. Nazism escalated, and in 1938 Hitler took full, singular control of the German military, and German troops occupied Austria, leading to a Europe-wide crisis. The British Ambassador to Germany attempted to pacify relations, with a refused agreement to not use warfare to change African borders in exchange for power. Alliances were made (and turned down) among several countries should war strike,

including a confirmation from France that it would aid Czechoslovakia if Germany invaded, and a refusal on Britain's part that it would not side with the USSR. Despite reassurances to the contrary after the Munich agreement between Britain, France, Germany and Italy, the moves made clearly built up to the outbreak of war. Alongside this, the ongoing Spanish Civil War, as Richard Martin has highlighted, made it clear that "Fascism was

spreading throughout Europe.”¹⁰ He directly related this to Schiaparelli’s Tear Dress, asserting that “references to shattered glass and rent fabric would have held strong implications for both the political and visual worlds.”¹¹ This is certainly valid, but the same can be said of its links to the wider, and similarly threatening happenings. It embodied mounting fear and anxiety, and played out the potential destruction around the corner. Not only was pressure and anxiety prevalent in the nucleus of the modern city, but newspaper headlines and cinema newsreels were a constant reminder of oncoming danger. Highlighting this, and placing the potential violent effects of such danger upon the body was a way to take ownership, power, and protection; a way to prepare.

Schiaparelli deliberately used notions of vulnerability, and modified them into cunning modes of attack, drawing on specific and outlandish tropes of violence. Over the course of the interwar period, women’s experiences transformed from vulnerability to a two-fold dialogue with the problems and delights of modernity, forming an embodiment of these issues of potentially violent defense, critically before the outbreak of an arguably even more destructive war. ✦



PART THREE

MODERN INJUSTICE



AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA KATCHER

Aimee Williams

“In a world clogged with too much stuff, any designer who can produce more of their own without harming animals, and by extension the environment, is onto something,” journalist Nicole Meyer writes in her review of Stella McCartney’s Fall 2016 collection. Adjunct professor of fashion at Parsons and founder of *The Discerning Brute* blog and vegan menswear store Brave GentleMan, Joshua Katcher’s intrepid approach to menswear aims to disrupt complacency regarding the use of animal materials in fashion. *BLAS* editor Aimee Williams discusses the facets of veganism and fashion with Katcher, and the reasons why perceptions of luxury are rooted in violence.

What is your approach to sustainable fashion?

Before you can begin talking about sustainable fashion, you have to look at the contributors to the worst environmental problems and their involvement in the fashion industry. Those are the animal industries. They are the top contributors to green house gas emissions, and most fresh water and land usage.

Why is it that no one talks about that aspect? Because it's uncomfortable to think about?

It's ideological. Ideology is often invisible. We live in a society that takes animal use for granted. There are many frameworks that support the idea that animals are for us to use. That view keeps us from realizing that using animals in fashion is choice, not a given. When we talk about animals and fashion, we're often talking about the pursuit of representing power through fashion. When you seemingly take that away, suddenly it's a threat. You get all these businesses upset, because you're threatening their power. You're also threatening their perception of what quality and beauty and authenticity is. When you think of the leather industry, they've put a lot of money into owning terms like real, genuine, authentic.

When did creating animal-free menswear become your choice?

It became my choice when I realized that animals didn't have one. That for me, makes this a social justice issue. The more we learn about animal intelligence, we realize how we've underestimated the capacity that animals have for memory and experience and emotion and all of these things we would like to say are just a human experience. I chose this because I didn't see it as any different than choosing not to use a sweatshop. I'm avoiding something that's easily avoidable within the fashion context.

What is not so easily avoidable are the years or research it takes to create a material that looks like a cashmere or a wool tweed. Choosing this path in my fashion has made what I'm doing so much more exciting, meaningful, and so much more satisfying to actually get something done. I mean, I do menswear. There's only so many ways you can cut a blazer. What I'm so excited about is the materials that we're using. That is where most of this visionary innovation is happening.

That's what I think is so interesting about what you're doing, because it is menswear. These ideals are so entrenched in masculinity. Can you talk a little bit about that? What you're doing to challenge these ideals?

I started my blog *The Discerning Brute* specifically to address that problem. Masculinity is very tied up in these antiquated notions of dominating animals. How we establish paternity is through animal sacrifice, through the

threat of being harmed but not being harmed because we're doing it to the animal instead and it could have been you. When you look at the pharmaceutical industry, testing on animals, the threat is always, well at least this isn't a person. This could be you, but we're sacrificing the animal. Therefore, by doing that, you are born, you are alive. That is how paternity is established. I made my blog to start a conversation that would be appealing to the mainstream male. That was why I did it in the format that I did. That's why I involved fashion, and lifestyle and art and food. I wanted it to be something like *GQ* or *Esquire*, but that elevated the role of the hero, the protector, the defender as opposed to the destroyer and the dominator and killer. These are masculine qualities that I think mainstream men can relate to, like being a hero.

You teach fashion at Parsons part time. Is there an interest in using alternative textiles within that group?

Absolutely. The students are hungry for innovation. But I'm finding that they're not really getting it.

Why is that?

I don't know. I think a lot of people haven't pinpointed what the problems are and what the solution is. I've taken a very stringent approach, saying that animals do not belong in the fashion production model.

How do your students react to that?

They're very open to it and excited about it. Obviously I get one or two students that want to push back and they're like, "Well, everything has to die." But once they have the information, once they're shown how things are done, what business as usual looks like for animals in fashion production, most students - there isn't that desire anymore. You can't look at materials in the same way knowing the amount of suffering that went into it. Then there's so much exciting innovation happening. We're on the brink of a revolution in textile manufacturing in making materials from a biological standpoint. Growing them, engineering them, customizing them, 3-D printing them, bio-printing them. To be empowered to feel like you can solve a problem, a very large problem, I think is incredibly valuable to expose fashion students to at this time.

Besides pedagogy, what are some other issues that you face teaching your design philosophy?

It's a lack of investment. The major problem, and this is an ideological problem, that fashion is frivolous and trivial. That it doesn't matter what happens inside fashion because fashion in and of itself is ultimately unimportant. That is how the culture at large sees fashion right now. That is a very dangerous combination because to have the perception that fashion is trivial while at the same time it has these huge global impacts.

On top of it, you don't see investment in students using these new materials. You have industries like the fur industry and the leather industry coming to the school and offering students incentives and money and training, and "Here's free product to put it in your senior thesis. We're going to fly you out to Europe and train you." There are all of these financial incentives around these traditional materials, and not very many financial incentives around using new innovative materials that solve these problems. We have to do fundraising and provide students with actual incentives to be using these materials.



Something that I'm trying to do at Parsons is start a textile library that specifically focuses on materials that are both sustainable and free of animal products and fairly made.

I want to talk more about the materials that you use for Brave Gentleman. Can you tell me about where you source them and what they are?

They are sourced from all over the place. It took me years to really find things that met my criteria. I was not willing to compromise much, but you have to compromise a little bit because you're never going to find the perfect zero-impact textile.

I source some from a mill in Brazil. Brazil has a very big garbage problem. What they did was, they said, "All right, there's all this textile waste entering the waste stream. Let's take it out of waste stream before it ends up in a landfill. We'll color separate it, we'll clean it and grind it back down to fiber and spin new materials out of it." You end up with a dye free process that is recycling garbage into beautiful tactile wool-like materials. On top of it, the mill has a social justice mission of only hiring women that need living wage jobs to work there.

It's not longer just, "How little impact can I have?" It's about, "How can fashion have a positive impact? How can it affect people's lives in a positive way? " I feel like a lot of this talk of sustainability is sort of stuck in the 90's with the idea that you're trying to almost remove yourself from the equation. If you want to bring about cultural change, and you want to inspire people and you want to impact in a positive way, that's a different approach. You're not just looking to have clean hands.

We also work with organic cotton that's grown in India on sustainable farms. They have problems in India right now with cotton farmers losing their livelihoods. When you invest in these organic cotton projects in India, it gives farmers a better livelihood. It exposes them less to toxic herbicides and pesticides.

We also work with a high tech Italian micro-fiber that's EU eco-label certified. The future leather that we use, it's a high tech microfiber and it's more durable, it's more weather resistant, it breaks in, it breathes. It does everything you would want leather to do, except there's no animal involved.

The shoes are made in Portugal under fair labor conditions. Our hats are made with a felt that's felted here in the United States from recycled soda and water bottles

If you don't have passion and patience and drive, if you don't set it up for students and young designers to have an easier way of doing it, it's understandable why they give up and why they throw their hands in the air and say, "This is impossible." There's no textile stores that are selling even something like a simple recycled poly for lining. You can find, if you're lucky, maybe a

bit of organic cotton or maybe a little hemp and it's usually really ugly and there's only a tiny bit left. There's really no one that's taking it seriously in the textile industry.

For me, it's a symbolic gesture of showing, "Look what can be done." If I can do this, then of course the major brands can do it. If I can source these materials and make them a beautiful, aspirational, luxury item then there's no reason why a company like Gucci or Prada or Saint Laurent can't also do the same thing.

Why do you think it is that people have such strong opinions about fur, but then other animal materials like wool and leather kind of slip under the conversation?

There's a couple reasons for that. Leather is a little more ubiquitous than fur. It's everywhere so it isn't seen necessarily as powerful of a visual symbol. The amount of cruelty that goes into either one could be comparable but leather has a much higher volume of production. The amount of leather produced in one year would equate to the weight of 19 Empire State Buildings.

Fur is very visually loud. It's something that's meant to be seen as symbol of power and status and class and sex. From the fashion viewpoint, those are very sought after characteristics. In Medieval Europe, King Edward III passed the Sumptuary Laws, which told people what to wear, what was allowable for their class and their status and society. Often fur went to the very top. You could not wear most types of fur unless you were a nobleman or in the court or a lady or a knight or a royalty. If you were wearing ermine specifically, you had to be royalty. You had these laws that then lasted hundreds of years and now we have generation after generation of people believing that only the most powerful people wear fur.

Fur also came to represent rebellion against a perceived do-gooder. When you look at the anti-fur movement of 1980s and '90s, the counter to that was the rejection of wholesome values. Now, fur represents being a rebel. It's a very interesting mind trick that happened. Fur is still part of the established power dominant ideology of power but has managed to make itself seem like a subculture. But what are you really rebelling against? When you look at it, they're not really rebelling against anything other than a minority of activists. They're rebelling against a challenge to their symbol of power. If you look at something like how the raccoon coat became a trend and then affected entire ecosystems, it was because the cool kids were wearing it. The automobile brought about the trend of the raccoon coat because automobiles did not have heating and people wanted to stay warm. So in Europe they started farming raccoons, which are non native. Now, they have a huge problem with an invasive species.

You can see how something as simple as a fashion trend can affect an en-

tire ecological landscape. The story is the same for many other animals and fashion trends. Look at the millinery [industry], how many species of birds went extinct because of hat trends. If you look at fur trade, how many species of animals went extinct from over-hunting fur.

So what you're kind of saying is violence breeds violence. That's what it sounds like.

It's interconnected, being the villain, embracing the aesthetics of the fictionalized villain is another way of embracing the path of least resistance to power. If you want to be hero, you have to have consistency, and values, and knowledge, and that's a lot of work. Being a villain is easy. If there's a path of least resistance to power, you're going to take that. That happens to be harming that are those most vulnerable, such as animals.

In "The Philosophy of Evil" Lars Svensen writes about the problem of aesthetic irrationality where, because something is pretty it's seen as good. We deal with this problem in fashion all the time. The prettiness of an object becomes its justification, becomes its goodness.

It's interesting to see how groups like PETA have been at odds with feminism and even sustainability because of how they have countered this violence with other kinds of violence rather than working towards solutions. Do you think that that has set back animal rights endeavors or kept it out of fashion?

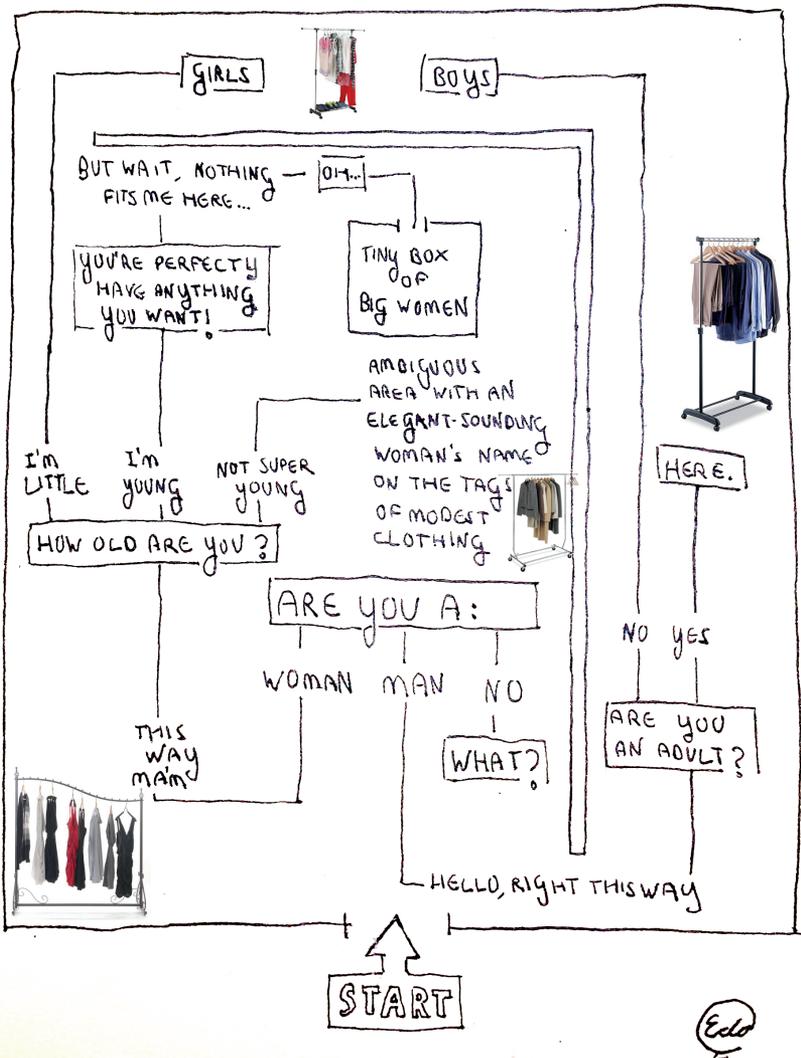
I don't know if I would consider protests to be a form of violence. I don't even know if I would consider property destruction to be a form of violence. I consider violence to be something that harms the living being. I think what happens often is, certain organizations who are more media savvy know how to get attention through spectacle. Do I agree with every tactic that every animal rights organization has used? Absolutely not.

We live in a sex obsessed, patriarchal, beauty obsessed culture. I think that certain organizations try to play that game to gain mainstream media attention, and end up getting accused of the very things that we should be accusing the entire media industry of, not just them. I think we expect because they're trying to do good, we hold them to higher standards. We say, "You should know better." There is that interesting line that a lot of them have to walk of, "How do we reach everyone while also not compromising too much?" It's a tricky question.

I think that what a lot of animal organizations do is incredibly valuable. Sometimes people need to see that controversial spectacle in order to have a spark go off. ✚

AGAINST THE SIGNS: MICRO-AGGRESSIONS OF A CLOTHING STORE

Eda Cakmak



Every Istanbul Pride Parade, when we pass the global fashion chain MANGO, we chant 'Homophobic MANGO, transphobic MANGO, homophobic, transphobic MANGO' to the tune of "Those were the days my friend." Why? Because seven or eight years ago, a trans man was not allowed to try on a pair of men's pants in the dressing room.

The story was definitely not the first of its kind, but it became widespread—and boy, once you're made into a chant, you're stuck with it.

Whenever we walk into a store, we are helpfully guided by arrows and signs into the section deemed most appropriate for us. That is, if you happily identify as cis-gender, are a size celebrated by the fashion industry, and pride yourself on dressing "age-appropriately."

But if you identify with a gender different than what people usually read you as, or simply like clothing that carries a tag different than your gender, you're in for a trip against the stream. Or in this case, the arrows.

If you're above a certain size, say, US20/Eur50 like me, you're not even sure you'll find clothing that fits your body. Unless you go somewhere that specifically caters to larger sizes (a sight for sore eyes), you're going to find your size in a tiny section of the store, labeled "plus size." A label that not so subtly suggests you don't fit in with everyone else, it's you versus those who are normal sized.

Age is also insinuated in varying levels of subtlety. Sometimes you will find a sign saying "young women" or maybe "teens" in a section that carries more colorful, upbeat clothing. Or there might be another language suggesting this, a language of images; where a line of more modest, albeit slightly grim clothing, is presented by older models placed in a certain area while

other sections carry pictures of happy young women. This is where you belong. Know your place.

Mere categories, seemingly harmless, carry violence for those that don't fit into them. It's not the WHAM BAM kind of violence that creates a lot of noise and everyone sees, it's more like a post-it that reads "freak" on your back. There is no way around shopping for clothes. If you want to avoid the awkwardness of not "fitting" into any categories in real life, or cannot find clothing that fits your needs you could always try online, but the arrows are still there, now pointing at categories and sub-categories instead of floors and sections.

Sara Ahmed uses the metaphor of a couch molded to one's body to describe the feeling of comfort. Someone who the couch has molded to, and has been shaped by the couch in return, does not recognize this as comfort. However, the body that does not "sink in" to a couch already shaped to someone else feels discomfort: disoriented, out of place, awkward, unsettled.¹ The queer, fat, aged body, does not fit into the shape of clothing stores molded to the heteronormative, slim, young body. It goes against the signs. ✦

LOOKING THE PART: THE LIBERATION AND CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK MASCULINITY THROUGH STYLE AND ADORNMENT

Rikki Byrd



When I visited home in December 2014 for the holidays, I asked my father to take me on a ride through Ferguson, MO—the epicenter that some have argued rebirthed the realities of race relations in the United States. After riding by the burned down buildings that protestors had set ablaze after the death of Michael Brown and the non-indictment of his killer, police officer Darren Wilson, we drove down Canfield Drive, where Brown’s body laid for four hours after his murder on August 9, 2014. My father parked at the edge of an apartment complex’s parking lot, while I got out of the car to take

pictures of the evolving memorial that sat in the middle of the street filled with flowers, R.I.P. signs and teddy bears. Among these items was a pair of Crocs shoes and a baseball cap with the logo of the St. Louis Cardinals team that the teen was wearing on that day. While I photographed the items, my dad took pictures from inside of his car, refusing to get out. He wore his fear almost on his sleeve because he, too, is a black man, and despite his freshly cleaned Mercedes Benz with the leather interior, his crisply ironed pants, collared shirt and Oxford sweater, he feared that this could, at any moment, be his me-

morial. Standing there at the crossroads of Brown's Crocs and baseball cap and my dad's luxury car and crisp clothing, I could not help but to think of how significant a marker clothing has become in the criminalization and eventual deaths of black men; even despite the fact that, historically, black men have used clothing to subvert their subaltern positioning and oppression.

In his essay "Race Prejudice As a Sense of Group Position", Herbert Blumer writes "it is the events seemingly loaded with great collective significance that are the focal points of the public discussion"¹. When Trayvon Martin was murdered by George Zimmerman on February 26, 2014, the teen's parents released a photo of him wearing a hoodie, an item that Zimmerman used to describe Martin in his phone call to the police the day he murdered the teen. The photo became rife with racial implications as the case whirled on unsuccessfully, rendering Martin dead, Zimmerman free and justice certainly not being served. The death of Martin reminded America of its widely underscoring race problem – with the continuous killing of innocent black boys and men acting as a reminder.

As young as 12 years old, black boys and men are yet again getting handed the short end of the stick. In a historical analysis of the hoodie, contributing writer to *Vice Magazine*, Jeremy Lewis writes "hoodies are now tangled up in a seemingly never-ending conversa-

tion America is having about race, socioeconomic status, and violence perpetrated against black bodies." He writes that it is no irony that when Tamir Rice was killed on November 22, 2014, he, too, was wearing a hoodie.²

The criminalization of the hoodie is nothing new. As Lewis writes, passing by any gas station one might see a sign that reads "no hoodies," as robbers are often known to wear them. What is problematic, however, is the marginalization of race, specifically concerning black men, through the hoodie. This is something that is perhaps more understood by the black men it affects rather than by those just seeing the hoodie as a clothing item.

After the death of Trayvon Martin, the hoodie became a sign of solidarity for black men. The Miami Heat basketball team wore hoodies to show their support for Martin's family and acknowledgement of the teen's death. In a political stance, Representative Bobby Rush took the floor of Congress, following Martin's death in 2012, and made a statement about the racial profiling surrounding black men and the hoodie. After his statement, Rush removed his suit jacket and pulled a hooded sweatshirt over his head. Due to laws prohibiting the wearing of hats, Rush was escorted from the House floor. His dismissal from the House floor holds more of a symbolic meaning than him simply violating the rules of the House. His dismissal was an-

other reminder of just how quickly the true issues of injustice are dismissed because America is simply not ready to talk about race.

The solidarity of black men wearing hoodies not only memorialized Trayvon Martin's death, but also acted as a point of reference to the ways in which black men have chosen to adorn themselves and how that act has been a site of racialization and criminalization when the intent can be arguably seen as a form of liberation. From zoot suits in the Jazz Age to gold chains and gold teeth worn in the hip-hop era, the ways in which black men have come to style themselves has as much to do with the subversion of their oppression as it does with their criminalization—a contradiction that this essay analyzes.

Clothing seems to be one of the few freedoms black men have enjoyed in an effort to liberate themselves; and their styling practices has had a cultural influence that supersedes the black community. It has been appropriated at the hands of popular culture, which takes from the black man one of the few forms of self-liberation that he has found since his enslavement. This essay situates style and adornment in the construction of black manhood. Through theories of social class, racial representation, economics and gender, I will use the zoot suit, styles popularized in the hip-hop era and the recent killings of unarmed black boys to examine how clothing acts as a binary

conflict for black masculinity by (1) being used as a tool for subverting historical racialized constructs of the subaltern positioning of black men, and (2) questioning how elements of that subversion are used as a tool by dominant culture to racially profile and reify the subordination of black men.

Scholars have offered in-depth insight on the ways in which black style has acted as a mode of freedom for those within the African diaspora. Monica Miller, in her book *Slaves to Fashion*, unpacks the ways in which men of the African diaspora have found liberation through clothing. Miller's analysis considers dandyism as a form of flamboyant dress that allowed African American men to subvert their oppression by white Americans and exude pride through adornment.

Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, in their book *Cool Pose*, consider a similar notion: the ways in which black men used clothing to define themselves against whiteness. The authors claim that black men's desire to style themselves was a way to not only subvert their oppression, but also to display themselves as markedly different and better at being cool than white men. Style gives black men an opportunity to say, "white man this is my turf. You can't outdo me here."³

In his essay "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," Stuart Hall considers popular culture and the ways in which the black body acts as a form of capital, writing that "the black body is the

only cultural capital” people of the African diaspora have. “We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation.”⁴

These scholars have certainly paved the way for a dialogue on the binary that turns black Americans’, specifically black men’s, liberation through dress and adornment into a site that reifies their oppression. Although they have heavily researched the ways in which style and adornment has either acted as a point of subversion or a site of criminalization, none of these scholars have put these two distinctions into dialogue to consider how they might inform our vast conversations surrounding racial disparities and how dress further problematizes race.

The zoot suit during the Jazz Age offers a preliminary example of how black men altered their bodies to reclaim themselves against oppression and prevailing stereotypes. In her essay on the history and influence of the zoot suit, Holly Arnold writes that the suit was often worn by young men in the 1930s and 1940s, who were “socially and culturally disadvantaged,” and that it was a “refusal or gesture to submit to the norm of not only white society, but of the older generation.”⁵ Arnold adds that the visual aesthetic of the suit, which was often purchased in elaborate colors and featured a plaid or houndstooth print, could be assimilated to argot. Argot is a type of slang that was primarily used in the African American community,

“partly to put the white man off, partly to put him down.”⁶

The same occurs when considering the vernacular of hip hop, which also came with its inflections of style that offered black male DJs and MCs the opportunity to subvert their oppression through self-expression. In his essay “The Signature of Hip Hop,” E. Jerry Persaud explains that hip hop “was created as rhetoric resistance primarily to racial discrimination and oppression” and that it “emerged in direct response to ruling class power.”⁷ In similar fashion as the zoot suit, the hip-hop era in the 1980s provided an element of self-expression through music and dress. In its beginning stages, rap artists often paid homage to black political leaders, wearing hats, t-shirts, jackets and sweatshirts with the names of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr. and more. Run DMC went on to popularize Adidas shell-toe sneakers and track suits, and the Kangol bucket hat. During the 1990s and early 2000s, gangster rap pushed rap artists to wear their money on their sleeves.⁸ They often wore luxury brands such as Gucci and Burberry from head to toe or oversized clothing such as baggy pants and shirts and baseball caps turned backward. Style allowed them to express the social, cultural and economic capital they had not been able to access due to systemic economic, social and cultural barriers.

However, as much as these historical moments in style and adornment offered liberation for

black men—to the point that they were even appropriated by dominant popular culture—they also act as cases in which style choices of black men have become criminalized. In *Stylin*, Shane White and Graham J. White write “blacks have created that style in the white world, a world in which black bodies have been regarded with a mixture of envy and contempt, as something to emulate but also as a target for violence”.⁹

In her analysis of the zoot suit, Arnold writes “by 1942 the zoot suit wearers began to become stereotyped with criminal activity.”¹⁰ In 1943, the Zoot Suit Riots cost the lives of 600 Mexican American and African American youth, who were named “zoot suitors.” The media furthered the criminalization of these youth using headlines that perpetuated racial stereotypes that had come to be associated with the suit.¹⁰



Similar racialized messaging is found in the style and dress of hip hop artists. In 2004, both the New York Police Department and Miami Police Department admitted to using special task forces to “gather intelligence and keep tabs on Hip Hop artists and their entourages.”¹¹ In March of that year, *The Source* Magazine’s cover included the mugshots of several hip-hop artists and posed the question “Are

Rappers the New Target of America’s Criminal Justice System.” In an interview with Business Wire, the co-founder and CEO of *The Source* stated:

The mere existence of these so-called ‘Hip Hop Task Forces’ proves that there are serious consequences to the misleading and damaging stereotypes that exist in mainstream society regarding Hip-Hop music, culture and the millions of people across the globe who make up the Hip-Hop

generation.¹²

The article goes on to state that the perception of hip hop as violent is linked to the fact that most of the music from artists of the genre come from places with unwavering statistics that disproportionately affect their success: poor education, unemployment, and lack of proper health care.

In her essay “Reconstructing Black Masculinity” from her book *Black Looks*, bell hooks writes that stereotypes “of black men as lazy and shiftless so quickly became common in public imagination.”¹³ hooks continues this argument by writing that such stereotypes were used by “white racists to erase the significance of black male labor from public consciousness” and later used as “reasons to deny black men jobs.” From education to employment, statistics prove that black men in America suffer great systemic injustices based solely on the color of their skin.

When entering the education system, black students face a great deal of discrimination based on race. In their analysis of the desegregation of schools, Darity and Jolla write that talent and ability in the education system is “constructed ... on racial grounds.”¹⁴ Furthermore, black men are statistically “overrepresented in low-wage jobs and underrepresented in high wage jobs,” a fact which Algernon, Darity and Hamilton argue is based on labor market discrimination based on race.¹⁵

Even behind bars black

men face an “added disadvantage” based solely on race.¹⁶ As Pager reports, “nearly 10 percent of young black men between the ages of 25 and 29 are behind bars.” This fact is coupled alongside Pager’s research that supports the claim that black men with criminal records have a harder time finding employment after being incarcerated, leading to a lack in economic capital for black men.

With these statistics in mind, it makes sense, as William Darity Jr. writes, that blacks have historically been deprived of their ability to acquire wealth. He writes “blacks have a much smaller stock of wealth because of a sustained historical pattern of deprivation of the capacity to accumulate property.”¹⁷ Thus Stuart Hall’s argument of the black body as cultural capital is once again upheld. Furthermore, in her essay, “Reconstructing Black Masculinity,” bell hooks writes, “black men have never critiqued the dominant culture’s norms of masculine identity, even though they have reworked those norms to suit their social situation.”

In considering both zoot suits of the 30s and 40s and the style and fashion of hip hop artists from the 80s through the early 2000s, it is not hard then to connect the ways in which clothing has acted as a form of criminalizing black males. From Trayvon Martin to Michael Brown and the many black boys and men in between and after that were innocently killed at the hands of police, their choice of

clothing has been used as a form of justification for their deaths.

It cannot be ignored that styles from these various eras have had an undeniable impact on mainstream culture. In both Arnold's analysis of the zoot suit and Mitchell's *Los Angeles Times* article, it is mentioned how these looks were picked up by the white mainstream culture. However, the contrasting criminalization of these style choices disproportionately affects black Americans far more than it affects those who appropriate these looks. Such ignored disparities further complicate the growing problems of race relations in this country.

For so long, black men have lived in a state of fear based merely on the color of their skin. As I have shown, it seems that their fears also align with what they choose to wear, even if the very ways in which they clothe themselves was a way for them to subvert their fear. In their respective essays, "What is 'Black' In Black Popular Culture" and "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," Hall and hooks offer recommendations for how to overcome the issue of representation—which adornment is certainly a part of—concerning blackness and black masculinity. Hall writes that his interest lies in cultural strategies that can make a difference and shift the dispositions of power.¹⁸ bell hooks writes that changing the representations of black men must be a collective task.¹⁹

In order to transcend the criminalization and deaths of black

men based on clothing, we must first understand the problematic power relations that have allowed adornment to be the only means of outward expression and liberation for black men. As displayed statistically, black men lag behind in everything from education to employment, occupy the most space in jails, and are killed by police far more often than any other racial group.

Revealing historical truths and the ways in which such instances have repeated themselves, and identifying the prevailing catalyst that continues to allow such injustices to occur can only remedy such a contrasting issue. It would be difficult to say that effective policies can be achieved without considering the three of these suggestions congruently. With these suggestions in mind, perhaps it can become commonplace to see the advancement and betterment of black men rather than the commonality of seeing their names strewn across t-shirts memorializing their deaths. †

HOW DOES THE GENDERING SPECIFIC TO THE CLOTHING AND TEXTILE INDUSTRY AFFECT THE WOMEN WHO WORK WITHIN IT?

Sabrina Tager

One of the many reasons women choose to enter the textile and clothing industry is because it is viewed as a culturally appropriate form of employment. Indeed, entering the industry is acceptable because it is seen as an extension of women's natural home-making abilities. Because sewing and mending are perceived as inherently feminine activities by many cultures, jobs doing similar tasks are accepted as feminine as well. In fact, women often become the preferred workforce because they are perceived as "docile, easily manipulated and willing to do boring,

repetitive assembly work."¹ Employers claim that their "natural patience" and "manual dexterity" makes them ideal workers.² Additionally, "because of their ties to the household, it is deemed 'socially acceptable' that women be drawn into employment for one period, to return to their 'household responsibilities' the rest of the year."³ This therefore deprives women of stable employment, and allows textile and clothing companies to profit from this "flexible" workforce.

The Marxist feminist explanation for gender inequality is that, "by demeaning women's abilities and keeping them from learning valuable technological skills, bosses preserve them as a cheap and exploitable reserve army of labor."⁴ Indeed, the gendering of jobs and people has lucrative effects for those who are able to treat women poorly. As a structure, gender not only divides work in the home but also in economic production, "legitimizing those in authority and justifying exploitation."⁵ Organizations in the clothing and textile industry operate within a gendered structure that depends on this exploitation. This cycle means that even if corporations and leaders do not intentionally look to exploit women, it is increasingly difficult to escape the pressure of the industry to do so. In other words, the organizations are victim to these self-fulfilling cycles because women are such a profitable, flexible workforce. The feminized global workplace places women workers in low-income jobs

that threaten basic worker rights, especially compromising their ability to retain a stable job.⁶ Indeed, the “requirement of global production that this workforce is temporary helps to maintain the gendered division of labor.”⁷

Today, there are about 40 million garment workers in the world, more than 80 percent of which are women.⁸ According to the producer of the documentary film *The True Cost*, “this is not an accident.”⁹ Women are therefore central to any argument about garment and textile worker’s rights. It is necessary to highlight the gendered nature of the processes that characterize the garment industry to be able to make valid arguments about the current situation it is in. Gender influences labor practices in many ways—from the level of payment, to the conditions the worker is subject to, to the terms of the job (lack of a contract, maternity leave, right to organize, pensions).¹⁰ Gendered job terms are arguably the most difficult to overcome as multinational clothing and textile corporations depend on flexible female labor to make a profit. Job insecurity and lack of benefits is informed by gender-based norms of what is socially acceptable, and varies based on location and situation. However, there are striking commonalities between many different parts of the world.

The South African Case

South Africa is an ideal location from which to stem my

research for various reasons. First, the country’s clothing and textile industry has an interesting history. Its long-established garment industry was severely damaged in the 1990s when the free market policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO) opened South Africa’s economy to an influx of imported goods and competition from other countries.¹¹ Today, the country is currently increasing its presence in the global market, with local yarn manufacturer *Sans Fibres* supplying 80% of the sewing thread used in the world’s apparel sewing operations.¹² Second, the industry is heavily unionized, with more than 80% of the industry’s workforce belonging to the South African Clothing and Textile Worker’s Union (SACTWU).¹³ I spent the summer of 2014 within the research division of the union, which allowed me to gain valuable access and insight into the country’s industry in ways that would not have been possible in other countries. I was able to collect the oral histories of garment workers, many of whom were union leaders, to bring to light the characteristics of the industry that are echoed in other parts of the world. My research partner, Justin Bryant, aided me in the collection and transcription. The union leaders, or shop stewards, were both male and female. Their names are Thembani, Mavo, Simangaliso, Ankita, Thembela, Menzi and Sisipho. They work in various clothing and textile factories throughout South Africa. The strong union participation in the

country also means that workers are in a good position to negotiate for better conditions. This process sets the industry apart from other countries and allows for a distinctive look into an industry that is in flux between empowered workers (whom we can learn most from) and difficult conditions similar to ones in countries known for their exploitative practices. Third, the legacy of apartheid still plays a role in present day race relations, impacting dynamics within the clothing and textile industry. The legal racial structures that were put in place during apartheid affect how workforces are distributed and treated. This makes South Africa an ideal point of comparison to other countries with strong racial and class issues at play. Finally, the amount of women in the country's garment industry labor force is similar to worldwide figures, with a predominantly female workforce. Therefore, South Africa is an ideal model of the way in which gender influences labor practices against which we can compare and add the narratives of other regions. These gender influences on labor practices include effects on wage, job terms (lack of a contract, maternity leave, right to organize, pensions) and working conditions.

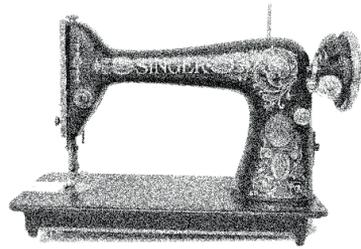
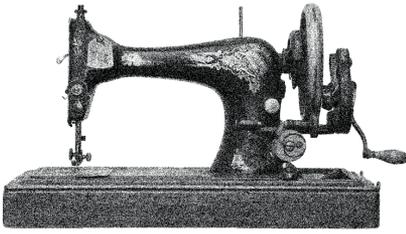
Gender and Job Terms

Another key characteristic of the global garment industry that is influenced by gender is job terms, which includes both job security and benefits. Job insecurity is a key

characteristic of the global garment industry, and this is mostly due to unstable waves of demand from multinational corporations, but also the perception by factory management that workers can be treated as temporary employees. This perception is influenced by gender because management utilizes women's secondary status to justify layoffs during slow periods.¹⁴ Oftentimes, when demand is low, women will be forced to take shorter work weeks (and smaller paychecks), while men are kept on as full-time employees. Employers are qualifying women's employment and careers as less vital or important than men's. Them-bela, a SACTWU shop steward, discussed the implications of the short-time work:

*I am saddened when there is not enough work in the factory. When I hear employers talking about a short time, I become very worried, because I know where the workers are coming from. I represent workers in many different departments who come from very different homes, and some come from very poor backgrounds. Some are the only ones able to work and support their households. That's why I'm so worried about the workers. If I see a worker cry, it is difficult to me. They are the same as my family.*¹⁵

Forced short-time work keeps workers from being able to provide for their children. This is especially true for many of the single mothers who are their family's sole breadwinner, often supporting multiple children. Because an important amount of SACTWU

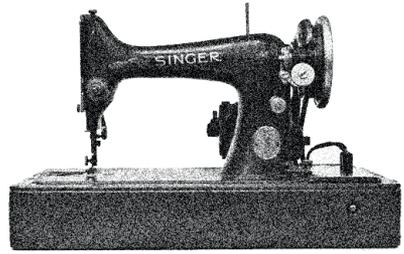


workers are single mothers, forced short-time and layoffs impact members greatly, making the issue a priority for the union.

Similarly, stable employment is often not granted to individuals seen as coming from a secondary social class or racial group. These individuals are not seen as needing a stable career path in the same way as their peers in higher social classes or dominating racial groups are. They are perceived as unworthy of this luxury, and so are not awarded the same job security. In this vein, women (and especially women of lower social classes or oppressed racial groups) are not seen as worthy or requiring of contracts as their male counterparts are. Because of their secondary status, they are cycled in and out based on demand, which leaves them without a stable income. Their low status within the factory is also permanent, with few options to move up. Men, however, can become shop-floor managers or leaders. Even in countries such as South Africa, where advances are being made thanks to unionization, many of the shop stewards (or union representatives) are still men. Women

are encouraged to speak up and become leaders, but men are often the ones that end up representing the women and their interests. Especially because they are working in a feminized occupation, both peers and factory management consider men as best suited for the leadership roles. Even though these men experience similar disadvantages related to race and social class, they do not fully understand the added pressure of gender inequality. Helen Safa notes that the limited “occupational mobility offered to women in [developing nations] could simply amount to a new form of [...] subordination.”¹⁶ Their gender, race and social class intersect to inform the way they are employed because they are seen as inferior.

In addition, benefits such as maternity or medical leaves and pensions are scarce. Pregnancy and illness are seen as impeding corporate profit, making for ineffective workers that can be replaced. Because of the unstable nature of employment within the industry, women can be cycled in and out if they are pregnant, sick, or getting too old. In fact, according to Fuentes and Ehrenreich, “multina-



tionals prefer single women with no children and no plans to have any. Pregnancy tests are routinely given to potential employees to avoid the issue of maternity benefits.”¹⁷ In some factories, female workers must “show soiled pads or cloths every month to prove they are not pregnant.”¹⁸ Indeed, in many places, women are forced to make the choice to send their children away or not have any at all in order to get and keep jobs. These practices not only violate women’s rights to equal employment but also keep them from being able to make their own decisions about pregnancy. They also have serious consequences for the health of both the workers themselves and their children. Women who become pregnant may “try to hide their condition as long as possible, resulting in lack of adequate nutrition, poor pre-natal care, and potential exposure to work hazards that can cause birth defects, premature birth, low-weight babies and other health problems.”¹⁹ Philippino trade unions report that “pregnant workers were forced to work overtime, including at night, in the free trade zone of Cavite, while a woman worker in another

garment factory had a miscarriage inside a company comfort room after being forbidden to take leave.”²⁰ A similar story was reported by Thembani, a SACTWU shop steward:

*There was one incident where a female worker by the name of Noki gave birth to twins in the factory. She was working the night shift and was locked inside. Workers found out something was wrong and called the ambulance, which was not able to get inside because it was locked.*²¹

Women are not only monitored to ensure they are not pregnant, but are also subject to abuse if they do become pregnant. In this way, management control over women’s sexuality has become a condition of employment.

Because gender, race and social class inform the precarious nature of women’s employment in the clothing and textile industry, they are not granted the job benefits most find in a stable job. Not only is maternity leave not granted, but women are routinely fired for being pregnant. Sick leave is also not granted, as many factories do not feel a responsibility to their workers and will not keep a position open

for a returning ill individual. Even when injuries are incurred on the job, many women report being laid off for other reasons because they are not able to produce as much as before.²² Some workers report being fired for taking time off to recover from an injury or illness.²³ Worker's secondary status inhibits them from being seen as worthy of being tracked into a stable job. This lack of stability also translates to a lack of pension or retirement plan. Workers are repeatedly denied this right because of their secondary status. They are compensated by the piece or by the hour, and their work is not respected or regarded as a career. The gendered and often racialized structure of the global garment industry does not account for pensions or other benefits that are granted to workers in other industries that are not typed in the same way.

Finally, women working in the garment business are often denied the right to organize. The female worker's opinion is often not recognized or respected. Unionization is considered threatening to factory productivity. Although some women are able to join unions, many feel that they are at risk of losing their jobs if they do. Them-bani highlighted that when some factory owners "find that people are joining unions, they leave the area and go to an area where people don't have as much knowledge in terms of unions." In some cases, the workers are not aware that their jobs are at risk: "Employers don't

give notification. You find yourself in a situation where it's Friday, you're coming back to report to duty, and it's too late. The employer is gone. They don't give notice; they just pack up their stuff and leave."²⁴

This hostility towards unionization is especially true in factories that have a uniquely female workforce. Women feel that they do not have the power to be able to face the management. In the documentary film *The True Cost*, by director and writer Andrew Morgan,²⁵ one of the main interviewees is a 24 year-old textile worker from Bangladesh named Shima Akhter. Shima was able to organize a union within her factory, of which she was elected president. She then attempted to submit a set of demands to the managers, who locked the doors of the factory and proceeded to beat the women who had formed the union. A female SACTWU shop steward, Sisipho, also reported a similar story:

We were told to strike at the stadium. It lasted one month, but we never got what we wanted. Many of us were dismissed when we got back and there was a lot of violence. The security [hired] by the company was beating the workers for striking.²⁶

Some women are even targeted by management if they take up leadership positions within the union. Mavo, a retired union organizer for SACTWU, discussed a case in which this targeting occurred:

One day, the union had requested that her company allow the shop steward to attend a training session at the SACTWU headquarters. The company was supposed to respond to the request; they never did. However, her supervisor did ask the shop steward what time the meeting started. She said 9:00. She was told that since the union office was right across the road, she had to report to work at 7:00, work until 9:00, and then she could leave. She instead went straight to the SACTWU office to attend the meeting. When she returned to work, a disciplinary case was filed against her, and she was fired.²⁷

This underlines the constrained agency of the women within the factory and their helplessness in the face of an oppressive management. Gender influences job insecurity and lack of benefits, two facets of employment that work to limit women's power over their employment and their lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, different axes of oppression, including gender, race and socio-economic status, combined with remote geographic location, work together to constrain agency and create vulnerability for female clothing and textile workers around the world. This concept of agency comes from Paul Farmer's argument about the impact of structural violence, which is the "historically given, and often economically driven, processes and forces that conspire to constrain agency."²⁸ Farmer argues that we need to revise our idea of what violence is and expand its definition, which can take on

many different forms. In this way, the international economic forces that constrain women in the industry are ideal examples of structural violence, which leave women forced into precarious employment. In fact, the global garment system has become dependent on the constrained agency of its female workers to make a profit, especially as prices are being driven down to remain competitive. Firms are relying on the "flexibility" of their female workers to be able to remain profitable. Furthermore, the organizations themselves are also subject to structural violence, because they have been formatted to work efficiently thanks to women's inferior status as workers. Indeed, "flexible female labor is thus often located in particular nodes of the supply chain where governance and power of individual firms [ie locally owned factories] is weaker, acting as a buffer against insecurity and risk."²⁹ To many, being able to compete in the clothing and textile market is dependent on the low wages and working standards that come with outsourcing production to countries where women's inferior status can be used as a justification for second-class treatment. Multi-national fashion houses are operating within a global system that depends on exploitative structures already put in place. The structure itself is most powerful, even over individual motivation. †

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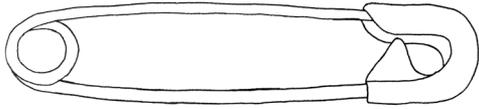
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