

Introduction

Fashion Reinvention

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The fashion industry is changing. Over the last months and years, it has gone through events that have had a profound and probably long-lasting impact: the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and its consequences for energy supplies and trade, the growing awareness of climate change and its impact on consumption habits, to cite but a few. Those events have also shown that fashion is an industry that has an immense capacity to reinvent itself. One of the best examples of reinvention can be found in the personality of the British entrepreneur and designer Vivienne Westwood (1941–2022), who passed while we were proceeding to the very last stages of preparation for this volume. In 1971, Westwood, initially a school teacher, founded with her partner Malcolm McLaren a fashion shop that became known as SEX and was the epicenter for the birth of the punk movement. Westwood proved to be a ground-breaking designer, whose works challenged cultural boundaries and commented on society and politics. She was also a skilled businesswoman and created a brand with great longevity.

Over the decades, Westwood received recognition from the establishment, including an OBE, numerous design awards, and retrospective exhibitions of her work. She also always remained an activist, whose focus shifted towards environmental causes with a fierceness and an energy similar to that which she deployed when she was a punk. In 2015, she drove a tank to the then prime minister David Cameron's property to protest fracking in Great Britain.¹ This was, as always with Westwood, done with a great sense of humor, but was also symptomatic of Westwood's much older and broader commitment to environmentalism. Westwood was early to tell consumers to buy less and to own fewer and better things, a discourse that seems now very sensible to middle-class Western consumers, but was not mainstream when Westwood began to talk about it. Just like the fashion industry, Westwood managed to reinvent herself. It is fashion reinvention that this anthology is exploring.

The idea that fashion has come to an end is often discussed in the West and has been the topic of several books.² Often, views on the end of fashion have been linked to ideas of militant consumerism, especially in regard to labor conditions. Questions of human rights among fashion industry workers have returned throughout fashion's history, marked by tragic events, from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire that killed 146 in New York in 1911 to the Rana Plaza Factory disaster in Dhaka, which took place ten years ago, on April 24, 2013, and killed 1,132 people. This book examines both the tensions in fashion labor and the argument that better jobs can help start economies on a path to greater prosperity. Moreover, fashion was questioned, following in the footsteps of Vivienne Westwood, over its environmental footprint. The fashion industry was, for Westwood as well as for a growing number of consumer activist movements around the

world, producing too much, too fast, at too high a cost for the workers and the environment. It was time for new business models to emerge, and for rediscovering other forms of consumption, that included the ones studied in this book: buying second hand, sewing made-to-measure clothes, mending, and repairing.

More recently, new issues have been added to this debate, notably ruptures in the supply chain, especially since the war in Ukraine, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at every level of the trade. And yet, despite all these difficulties, fashion remains among the most dynamic industries globally. After the pandemic, fashion growth has been mainly driven by the luxury industry, and yet it has regained growth faster than expected. Fashion is not dead, but is changing. The recent additional speculation on where fashion may be going, and the pleas of numerous actors to change the course of its evolution, whether they be consumers' platforms or from the producers' ranks, have created renewed interest in the industry.

Historians and Fashion

The timespan covered by *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress* starts in the nineteenth century, with the aftermath of the consumers' revolution and the end of the Ancien Regime, and reaches all the way to the present. The fashion and garment industries have been international from the beginning and, as such, this volume looks at the history of fashion and dress through the lenses of both international and global history. However, because fashion is also a multifaceted subject with human agency at its core, at the confluence of the material (fabrics, clothing, dyes, tools, and machines) and the immaterial (savoir-faire, identities, images, and brands), this volume also adopts a transdisciplinary perspective, opening its pages to researchers from a variety of complementary fields to better circumscribe fashion's diffuse nature. As such, the historicization of fashion as an international and global phenomenon constitutes the common thread of this volume. The chapters in this book examine fashion through space and time in its plurality of definitions from art to industry, including consumption, production, creation, and reappropriation. Fashion and garment manufacturing still make up one of the world's most important industries, with a global value that, in 2020, represented 1.65 percent of the world's GDP.³ Despite this economic importance, fashion and dress have only recently gained prominence in historical research. They found a place first in museum curatorship and design teaching but long remained marginalized from the core of history as an academic discipline. Save for the works of historians on the consumers' revolution and on Ancien Regime consumption—including important works by such historians as Daniel Roche, Maxine Berg, and Jan de Vries⁴—fashion has been slow to infiltrate the canon of historical works. The characteristic gaps in fashion historiography have been observed by many scholars, notably by Lou Taylor in her major book published in 2002, *The Study of Dress History*.⁵ The reasons for this are multiple. The labor of fashion and dress was considered to be first and foremost a female activity, which contributed to its history being left in the shadows. Furthermore, the tension between fashion commodities, which have often been cast in Western culture as frivolous, and a production characterized by the poorest class of workers, contributed to keeping fashion in the margins of scholarship.

This is no longer the case. Over recent decades, fashion and dress history has become a thriving field of academic work. A domain at the intersection of numerous disciplines, fashion and dress history requires scholars to build bridges between cultural history,

fashion studies, economic history, art history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, gender studies, and more. The recent developments in gender history and the emergence of a material turn in the humanities and social sciences have led finally to a consolidation of the place of fashion and dress in the discipline of history. Such developments have resulted in a renewed interest not only in the objects themselves but also in the development of the economic history of fashion. Numerous scholars, from Karl Marx to Pierre Bourdieu, have shown fashionable dress to be a good example of commodity fetishism.⁶ The conditions of production of fashionable goods tended to disappear behind the marketing of those goods. Historians have set to the task of researching the economic history of fashion ecosystems. Such studies seek to explore the less visible actors in the fashion industry or, to use the same terms as Marx and Bourdieu, to *defetishize* fashionable commodities. This book, therefore, reconnects the history of fashion with the chains of production.

Most recently, historians and sociologists have argued for the need to “pull back the curtain” on fashion as an industry and to include exploration of the labor and business cultures behind the scenes, as in recent works by Regina Lee Blaszczyk, Giulia Mensitieri, and Alexandra Palmer.⁷ Following in their footsteps, the place of labor, the emotional economies of dress, the history of fashions as politics and as vehicles for propaganda, the environmental study of fashion, and the history of fashion firms all figure prominently in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress*.

Fashion and dress have historically been, as noted above, international industries. Focusing as it does on the last two centuries, this book explores the different stages of the internationalization of fashion. The conceptual tools of center and periphery occupy a central place in the history of fashion and dress. Cases selected in this anthology aim to address such questions, including by challenging common ideas of what constitutes center and periphery in the fashion industries. Some chapters in this volume take up global connections and flows, while others address cases situated in specific locations that work to convey the sense of the wider history. We have not attempted to cover the whole geography of the world in this volume; for example, we are not covering the entirety of Asia and South America but have instead chosen examples that illustrate the rise of fast fashion systems and the relocation of the production from the West to other continents, with particular attention paid to processes. In addition, we have worked to put forward relevant examples that address questions of the internationalization of the fashion industry in an up-to-date manner: the current economic weight of the fashion industries and fashion’s central place in the debates on globalization are good reasons to include the history of the present in the scope of these studies.

The Structure of the Book

The book is organized into five thematic sections. In Part I, six chapters focus on manufacturing and materiality, and engage with the social history of fashion and dress production by approaching the histories of multiple actors and practices. The turn to materiality and the history of globalization play an important role in the renewed interest in fashion manufacturing. This section of the book looks at the workshop and at the conditions of the production of dress. It shows the continuities in the garment-making process, centered on the sewing machine⁸—a technological innovation from the mid-nineteenth century that prevails to this day, as highlighted by David Edgerton in his milestone book *The Shock of the Old*.⁹ Today, sewing robots—also called sewbots—can

replace the human hand, but they remain much too expensive to be used widely. In Chapter 1, on the sewing machine, Andrew Godley tackles the history of this pivotal piece of technology from a global perspective, looking at its dissemination and use throughout key markets in Western Europe and North America as well as in Russia, the Balkans, Mexico, Japan, India, and the Middle East. Following the historicization of the influence and reach of this machine tool for the producers and consumers of fashion products, Audrey Millet focuses on the human variable in the chain of production in Chapter 2. Part I also examines innovations, particularly the industrial processes that gave us synthetic dyes and fabrics, which are at the heart of Chapter 3, by Regina Lee Blaszczyk. Anne Grosfilley's Chapter 4 historicizes the global trade in wax fabric through the prism of imperialism and colonialism, reflecting the relationship between Europe, Africa, and Asia as seen through this piece of cloth. In Chapter 5, Hanne Eide addresses the case of Sweden's fashion industry by looking at the development of the couture business from the mid-nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century. In Chapter 6, Anna König historicizes the practice of mending and repairing clothes, integrating consumers as an active agent in the reappropriation and dissemination of secondhand fashions.

Part II focuses on the political history of fashion and dress. The power of fashion as a communication tool intertwines with both its global nature and its regional and national anchoring. This section of the book addresses this intertwined history at the junctions of the regional, the national, the international, and the global, including fashion's entanglements with the politics of production. Fashion is an international industry, yet fashion is also the locus of the construction of national identities. This is the focus of the first three chapters of Part II. In Chapter 7, Annette Lynch and Jennifer van Haaften look at the role of dress in creating and fostering regional and national identities throughout the nineteenth century. This is followed by Toufoul Abou-Hodeib's chapter, studying the changing connections between Palestinian embroidery and a Palestinian national identity in the twentieth century. In Chapter 9, Elizabeth Way explores the development of fashions by African-American fashion designers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, testifying to their overlooked influence in shaping U.S. fashion culture. Fashions and clothes are powerful carriers of messages, as communication theory has shown in numerous works, among which is Malcolm Barnard's foundational study *Fashion as Communication*.¹⁰ These messages can be, and often are, ambiguous, as fashion tends to lend itself to desires both to blend in and to stand out, and can also be read through different lenses. In Chapter 10, Louise Wallenberg looks at the ambivalent two-way relationship between fashion and feminism, the latter having been influenced by the former while both influencing and criticizing it in return. Finally, the last two chapters of Part II look at the politics of fashion through government policies that can support the fashion industry as part of protectionist policies and foster national production or encourage the consumption of nationally—or regionally—made products. In Chapter 11, Eugenia Paulicelli examines the complexities of the ties between fashion and the Fascist regime of Italy from the interwar years to World War II, highlighting fashion's relationship with the many types of policy and politics adopted during this period. In Chapter 12, Vincent Dubé-Sénécal and Madeleine Goubau look at the relationship between fashion and diplomacy, combining diplomatic history, fashion studies, and communication studies to start a discussion on the diplomatic roles and multifaceted influences of fashion.

Part III builds upon the history of manufacturing developed in Part I and focuses on the economic history of fashion firms. Companies can be of extremely variable scale. The

challenges in apprehending the typology of fashion firms may be one of the reasons why fashion has been underrepresented in the work of economic historians. This anthology proves that fashion matters to economic history in all its facets, from the history of business models to those of technologies, intellectual property rights, and law. In Chapter 13, Lisa van Barneveld and Ben Wubs dive into the subject of innovation by looking at the changing nature of fashion forecasting through the advent of artificial intelligence, examining its influence on the gender balance of the fashion trend forecasting industry in Europe. This chapter then moves on to examine in more depth the genesis and development of various prominent segments of fashion industries that have had major economic influence. This is followed, in Chapter 14, by the work of José Antonio Miranda and Alba Roldán on the evolution of fast fashion as a business model, looking most notably at the Swedish H&M and Spanish Inditex (owner of Zara), and its transformation due to rapid technological changes, the popularization of a variety of social media platforms, and the rapid change in global distribution through online retailers. In Chapter 15, Shahidur Rahman studies the development of Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry, one of the global components enabling fast fashion's existence and growth, which also constitutes the backbone of Bangladesh's economic growth, generating considerable employment among women and contributing to their empowerment. In Chapter 16, Tolulope Omoyele pursues a history of the present by studying African Fashion Week Nigeria and the fashioning of a contemporary Yoruba cultural identity. In Chapter 17, Marco Belfanti discusses the way in which tangible and intangible cultural heritage have contributed to new brand identity strategies based on evolving marketing tools, from sponsored business histories to storytelling through corporate museum exhibitions. As such, Véronique Pouillard's Chapter 18 studies the relationship of fashion and the law from the perspective of intellectual property rights, showcasing the importance of examining the ties between fashion and the law from a multi-level perspective, as both national and international laws play key roles in the development of businesses along transnational lines. The chapters by Belfanti and by von Wachenfeldt especially examine the impact of the internet on the potential dematerialization of the fashion system, on consumer-centered practices, on supply chains, and on sustainability. In Chapter 19, Paula von Wachenfeldt examines the challenges faced by luxury fashion with the advent and subsequent popularization of social media platforms creating a new form of activism that scrutinizes fashion businesses and their brand images.

Part IV deepens the connection between the history of fashion and dress and the history of consumers, and contributes to the larger exploration of fashion as capital, especially in terms of symbolic capital. The choice is also made here to directly address the issue essential to fashion history: the dual history of fashion as body politics and as expression. While these themes are reflected throughout the chapters in Part IV, they are at the very core of Chapters 20 and 21. In Chapter 20, Jean Williams explores the relationship between sport and fashion, which places the active body at the heart of representations of age, class, and national and ethnic identities. This is followed, in Chapter 21, by Maude Bass-Krueger's work on the history of mourning dress, which centers on the historicization of emotions and social norms, linking the study of mourning dress to that of colonialism and imperialism. Fashion and dress provide means of both inclusion and distinction, as noted by theoreticians including Georg Simmel, Thorstein Veblen, and Pierre Bourdieu.¹¹ This part of the book addresses the questions posed by these theoreticians in a diachronic and global perspective, and further builds on the relation between fashion history and gender history. As such, in Chapter 22, Peter

McNeil examines the oft-overlooked history of men's fashion with a particular interest in the second half of the nineteenth century, when a myriad of actors from diverse cultural and countercultural backgrounds impacted men's fashion. In this regard, McNeil also integrates questions of sexual orientation and gender identity as part of the historicization of men's fashion. The questions of gender identities and sexual orientations and their relationship to fashion are deepened in the following three chapters. First, in Chapter 23, reprinted from her 1985 book *Fashion and Eroticism: The Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age*,¹² Valerie Steele addresses the relation between fashion and eroticism, this time with a focus on the interwar period. Second, getting closer in time to us, Chapter 24 by Katrina Sark proposes a history of the present time to examine several contemporary case studies from popular culture, investigating the ways in which gender identities are being dismantled and reframed through fashion within social media communities as well as more mainstream cultural media such as music. In Chapter 25, Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas present a historical overview of queer fashion starting from its emergence in the nineteenth century and examining its influence on mainstream fashion up until the beginning of the twenty-first century. In addition, Part IV also seeks to reinforce the interest of scholars in the emotional economies of fashion, which is a particularly powerful topic in the historiographical context of the material turn. In so doing, Part IV also builds particularly strong bridges with part II, on the history of fashion and dress politics. This is especially true of Chapters 26 and 27, looking at the washing of clothes and the cultural economies of secondhand clothes. In Chapter 26, Ingun Grimstad Klepp and Kirsi Laitala historicize humanity's relationship to dirt and cleanliness, showing how the understanding of dirty and clean clothes, as well as the methods to clean them, has evolved in the last 200 years. Klepp and Laitala examine this subject from multiple perspectives, integrating cultural differences between genders and between different generations as well as discussing the environmental impacts of laundry. This discussion on environmental impact is further expanded in Jennifer Le Zotte's Chapter 27, studying the evolution of secondhand clothing from its beginning as an activity of the poor to its development as a global industry in today's economy, integrating to this historicization the questions of environmental costs and labor abuses.

Part V is concerned with the sources for the history of fashion and dress, and offers a synthetic approach to the sources of fashion and dress history, thus reconnecting historical results with conditions of research feasibility. This part is the briefest, composed of one chapter. In Chapter 28, Karen Trivette builds on her extensive experience as head librarian of the FIT to foster the use of written and printed archival sources along with material sources. Her chapter also shows how the creation of digital repositories is changing the work of fashion and dress historians.

Alternative Readings

While the chapters in this volume are organized based on their relationship to five fields of study—economics and commerce, politics, business, identities, and historical sources—the chapters are also related to each other through several crosscutting themes that traverse each part and chapter, tying them together across their respective fields of study. We propose in this introduction five crosscutting themes, which all share the same roots in that they each represent historical phenomena that have influenced the field of fashion as well as having been influenced by it through both time and space in a way that both constrains and enables the decision-making of actors in the fashion industry.

The five cross-cutting themes are as follows: the dematerialization of fashion; manufacturing, reshoring, and more generally the rematerialization of fashion; consumption and the agency of consumers; environmental challenges and fashion change, and intellectual property and brand value. These themes are currently emphasized in fashion research, but also in the questions posed by policy makers and industry leaders in an industry that has been in perpetual change over the last two centuries. They are also open for cross-fertilization and comparative studies with other sectors of economic activity.

We invite readers to use this book creatively: chapters can be read in the order of the table of contents, or in different blocks, revisiting the themes described above. Last but not least, it is also possible to read the chapters according to geographies: the West, the East, and the South are all represented in different pieces, while some chapters embrace circulations, whether they be of influence, migrations, and trade. We have not sought to systematically cover each geographical area, a task that is beyond the scope of this volume. But we have tried to give relevant examples of the dynamics at work in the industry during these last two centuries. Paying particular attention to change, the chapters that concentrate on particular geographical areas focus on the emergence of new fashion systems and business models, whether they be in Sweden, Bangladesh, or Spain, or on the African continent, considered to be the “new frontier” of the industry, and therefore of great importance. This volume aims to go beyond the great fashion capitals and well-known fashion centers and point to the broader geographies of fashion. We hope that the readers will engage with the various modes of reading proposed here, and find that various paths are possible through the studies in the volume.

The first cross-cutting theme, the dematerialization of fashion, began with the advent of the fashion press in the nineteenth century and was pursued across the rise of the mass media in the early twentieth century, all the way to the development of digital media and literal digital fashions from video games to ones backed by non-fungible tokens (NFTs).¹³ The dematerialization of fashion has recently been the topic of numerous articles and books that aim to see how the trade in fabrics, textiles, and accessories was complemented, during the last centuries, by a growing trade in ideas. Vincent Dubé-Sénécal has shown, through his work in the archives of the French customs, how the trade in fashions from France was, for some parts, replaced by a trade in ideas during the interwar period.¹⁴ Issues of dematerialization and exports are examined here in Chapter 11 by Paulicelli on exporting fashion under Italian fascism and in Chapter 12 by Dubé-Sénécal and Goubeau on fashion and diplomacy. The history of fashion forecasters and consultants, which started during the nineteenth century, is another very important aspect of the dematerialization of some parts of the fashion industry. Trend forecasters are, to this day, selling trends rather than merchandise. Such business-to-business services, although not necessarily directly visible to the consumer, have an important impact on the trends that percolate from the designers to the mass market.¹⁵ In Chapter 13, Van Barneveld and Wubs examine the question of gender in the fashion forecasting business. The latest developments in the dematerialization of fashion bring the reader to the digital world, notably through exposure in the social media and in the virtual worlds of non-fungible tokens (NFTs). In Chapter 19, von Wachenfeldt analyzes the interrelations between recent media developments and creativity in luxury fashion.

The second theme that we are proposing to the reader is the “rematerialization” of fashion, grounded in the incremental patrimonialization of clothing during the second half of the nineteenth century and accelerating in the second half of the twentieth century with the advent of corporate museums and the global dissemination of this practice,¹⁶ as

examined by Belfanti in Chapter 17 on cultural heritage and intangible assets. Heritage and the significance of making is also at the core of several chapters, especially Chapter 4 by Grosfilley on the global trade of the wax fabric and Chapter 8 by Abou-Hodeib on Palestinian labor and embroidery. Elsewhere, the growing place of fashion in the museum has been an important creator of value for the industry, and contributes, as recently coined by Pierre-Yves Donzé, to selling Europe to the world.¹⁷ Rematerialization is also taking historians back into the workshop and the factory, revisiting the multifaceted aspects of materiality in the making of fashions. The chapters of Part I on manufacturing are relevant here, but also those that address the ways of doing things, to follow in the footsteps of Michel de Certeau,¹⁸ including mending, in König's Chapter 6, and washing, in Klepp and Laitala's Chapter 26.

The third theme is the growing agency of consumers as part of the globalizing and massifying consumer societies of the twentieth century's second half, most notably with the advent of the "ConsumActor," conveying the renewed agency of consumers in the production of value.¹⁹ Consumer activism has a long history and has systematically addressed the power of fashion in consumption. Early on, abolitionists in the United States and consumers' leagues in the western world have sought to promote moral consumption, and even chastized the activity.²⁰ The concerns voiced by militant consumers are at the heart of Millet's Chapter 2 on the chain of production. More complex relations between consumption and body politics are at the heart of Louise Wallenberg's Chapter 10 on fashion and feminism. At odds with consumer activism, the pressure for cheaper clothes, often called the democratization of fashion, is a red thread that runs through many chapters in the volume, among which are Chapter 14 by Miranda and Roldán on fast fashion, Chapter 15 by Rahman on the Bangladesh ready-made garment industry, and Chapter 20 by Jean Williams on sports in fashion.

The fourth theme, in line with the rise in consumer activism paralleling that of the "ConsumActors," is the corresponding growth of environmentalism in its various forms, from sustainable fashions to vegan clothing and reuse of secondhand garments, including abuse from producers of labels and the advent of greenwashing.²¹ Over the last couple of decades, new business models have emerged or were reinvigorated. For example, recent firms such as Rent the Runway have made renting fashionable and luxury garments a respected mode of consumption that aligns with greener practices of buying less and reusing.²² The last decade has been a fascinating laboratory for greener change in entrepreneurial and consumption practices that will without doubt inspire newer studies. In this volume, Chapter 6 by König on mending and repairing, Chapter 26 by Klepp and Laitala on washing clothes, and Chapter 27 by Le Zotte on the cultural economies of secondhand clothes propose ground-breaking approaches to these essential questions to the past and future of the fashion industry.

The fifth theme, the overarching question of intellectual property rights, is closely linked to that of innovation and intersects with the four previous crosscutting themes through questions of branding, patenting, and labeling. Chapter 5 by Eide on Swedish fashions demonstrates the constant need for fashions to disseminate in order to grow. Chapter 17 by Belfanti gives important insights into the value that fashion industries gain from patrimonialization, while Chapter 18 by Pouillard, Chapter 19 by von Wachenfeldt, and Chapter 20 by Williams discuss the challenges of protecting brands and of brand or designer exposure. Indeed, the historicization of the first four cross-cutting themes necessitates the examination of evolving national and international laws and regulations pertaining to controlling the dissemination and usage of brand images and their storied

past, ensuring the quality of the identities represented by brand images through labeling, and ensuring positive associations of brands with topical social issues to meet the demands for probity from the new generation of “ConsumActors.” Finally, documenting fashion for both consumers and historians has greatly benefited from the digitalization of its sources, which is the topic of Trivette’s Chapter 28 on the sources for the history of fashion.

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Notes

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