

299 792 458 M / S



THE OVER WORKED BODY ISSUE

FOREWORD

BY MATTHEW LINDE

How to define a recent history of fashion?

This issue of *299 792 458 m/s* extends from the exhibition "The Overworked Body: An Anthology of 2000s Dress", opened in September 2017, spread across two Lower East Side locations; the non-profit project space *Ludlow38* funded by *Goethe-Institute* and the trans-atlantic enterprise *Mathew Gallery*.

The title of the exhibition alludes to Cecil Beaton's 1971 exhibition "Fashion: An Anthology" at the *Victoria & Albert Museum* in London. Heralded as an important curatorial landmark for fashion, it was the first instance in which fashionable modern dress received a museological moment. This new undertaking of 'fashionable modern dress' demonstrated a dilemma for the field as it required a different curatorial position from the usual custodians of historical dress, who had dealt with and analyzed these artifacts from either anthropological or sociological perspectives. "Fashion" as an artistic expression of modernity demanded an alternate treatment. With this interest in the creative act of 'now fashion', the bon vivant Beaton took on the task of "curating". For this purpose he used the format of an anthology - selecting as his whim dictated the most vivacious examples of fashionable clothing. This approach has set the tone for many fashion exhibitions since, most notably those produced by Diana Vreeland who in 1973 was appointed Special Consultant to the Costume Department at *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Vreeland, who had been the editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, was often criticized for her ahistorical groupings, which one might say was a betrayal of the curator's "fiduciary" duty to historical accuracy. In a more positive light one could argue her ability was to decipher fashion's ineffable élan regardless of trivial concerns such

as the what, why and when of the objects. "The Overworked Body" hijacked Beaton's and Vreeland's approach to the point of ad nauseam. Unlike Beaton's 1971 exhibition, which had clearly delineated chronology, charting the past decades of the century, this exhibition presented a period of fashion that is overloaded and "overworked".

Fashion during the 2000s could be described as a period of hybrid subcultural styles remixing former selves, championing the principle of individual expression. The decade also saw the industry of fast-fashion massively expand its market, proliferating the presence of smart-casual wear. As such, fashion during this time embodied the conflicting roles of both globalization and homogeneity alongside pastiche and pluralism. However, what makes fashion from the aughts so debatable to define is its proximity to the present. It is only through the machine of history that fashion finds its protagonists.

While "The Overworked Body" exists as a historical exhibition, insofar that all the works are from 2000-2009, it also became an exercise to challenge how we periodize fashion. If periodization is the process of aestheticizing time, as, for example, the 1970s are emblematic of the flower-child, could the exhibition exploit the retrospective ambiguity of the 2000s to explore the inherent slippery nature of periods? In an effort to obstruct our tendency to assign a specific style to a specific period, "The Overworked Body" circumvented tracing subcultural styles, for example, a neo-rave section, a hip-hop corner, a Paris Hilton homage etc. Nor did it survey luxury labels of the time who did quantitatively well in press and sales. Different to "survey" or "overview," an anthology describes a selection by choice. In this sense, the exhibition did not offer an explication of historicity but instead aimed to enact

the spirit of a fashion history yet to be understood. From graduate collections at acclaimed schools such as Central Saint Martins and the Antwerp Academy to designers' first collaborations with multinational companies such as Target and H&M; the exhibition packed the two modestly-sized galleries, presenting of over 50 participants. Underscored throughout were the fringe voices, or critical designers of the decade. Included were a mix of practitioners; from the excessive like *Viktor&Rolf*; the insurgent like *The Organization of Returning Fashion Interest*; the scholarly such as *Anke Loh*; the carnivalesque like *Walter van Beirendonck*; the multi-disciplinary like *BLESS*.

Weaving in between the closely placed mannequins, audiences encountered a dense aggregation, from an up-close and personal view, the designer outfits on display. Vague groupings of fashion localities were made across Vienna, Arnhem, Tokyo, Antwerp and New York. Archival "support material" such as publications, films, magazines and other printed matter were also included. Bernadette Corporation's *Made in USA* magazine was presented alongside early issues of *Purple* and the later issues of *Dutch*. Monitors showed video footage of exploratory runway presentations by designers such as *A.F. Vandevorst*, *Adeline André* and *Carol Christian Poell*. Look books and show invitations by *Bernhard Wilhelm* and *Shelley Fox* were also on view, all as a means to exemplify the porous and expanded nature of fashion practice. As if to combat the boredom of a mainstreamed industry, the anthological function of the exhibition was to assemble designers who continued to reconfigure the codification of dress in niche ways. Some embodied this in one-off creations (e.g. *Andrea Ayala Closa*); others expressed market-reflexive strategies (e.g. *Imitation of Christ, KEUPR/van BENTM*); while other "progressive" designers, as critic Ulrich Lehmann writes in his 2005 reviews, generously reprinted in this magazine, examine the semiotic relationship between generics and functionality (eg. *Lutz, Ann-Sofie Back, Wendy & Jim*).

Considering this anthology's mélange of looks, fashion here is not so caught up in singular "styles" but as the idea of speed itself. Fashion performs modernism – a force dedicated to futurity yet also eternally fugitive. Its ongoing sartorial rotation attests a system locked in stasis. As such, the overworked body could offer a possible metaphor. And just as Walter Benjamin remarked on the "new velocities" of 19th Century technological life, so too can we identify a gearshift in the 2000s with the emergence of digitization and the internet and its globalizing acceleration upon fashion. Perhaps then fashion periods would be better framed through its technological edifices.

In her essay for this issue, Laura Gardner writes about fashion as a semiology constructed vis-à-vis its technological apparatus. Gardner compares our current Y2K digitized moment to the upheaval of the early 20th Century photographic media and its effects on fashion-language, arguing a periodization of fashion as pre- and post-internet.

Francesca Granata discusses the capitulation of grotesque fashion, a concept she borrows from Mikhail Bakhtin, into the 2000s mainstream. Here the maligned dereliction of previous "avant-garde" fashions, that Caroline Evans also writes extensively in her 2003 book *Fashion at the Edge*, are normalized through the new pervasive logics of celebrity.

Examining Walter Benjamin's ruminations on the pace of 1930's life via the two design disciplines of fashion and architecture, Philipp Ekardt discusses the temporality of fashion and its symbiotic relationship to modernity. Jumping into the 2000s,

Helmut Lang and his two SoHo stores are evaluated in regards to the present's futurity.

As a fashion machine itself, this magazine is also in the business of reconstituting past gestures into a rationalized future. And despite appearing as an analogue object it will marry the contemporaneous digital processes to spread its seed. The fashion stories herein will soon enough exhale the *démodé*, but not before it drifts into future overworked bodies.

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