



*Defining the Contours of
Dress Studies*

Dress and Body Association
annual conference

October 29-30, 2021

Our Mission Statement

“Dress” is a highly inclusive concept that includes all varieties of body supplements and body modifications* found in human cultures around the world. It is not limited to clothing, costume, or fashion or to any particular time, place, or economic structure. The mission of the Dress and Body Association (DBA) is to bring together scholars from diverse disciplines and areas of the world to share academic research about dress and body practices understood broadly, to offer quality opportunities for networking, and to forge links with like-minded individuals and organizations.

The Dress and Body Association is based entirely online, an essential structure for

1. Flexibility: In-person conferences are cumbersome and expensive to plan, which makes them difficult to change or adapt to new circumstances.
2. Accessibility: Travel is expensive and time-consuming. Many scholars cannot afford to travel. Even scholars with funding may have restrictions due to caretaking responsibilities, health issues, difficulty obtaining a visa, etc.
3. Inclusivity: ‘Dress and the body’ is a subject that pertains to all human cultures; the DBA is committed to including scholars from diverse disciplines and areas of the world.
4. Sustainability: International travel is not only expensive, but harmful to the planet. Online activities reduce consumption and waste.

*Joanne B. Eicher (2000), “Dress,” *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women’s Issues and Knowledge*, edited by Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender, New York, Routledge: 422-423.

The Dress and Body Association is registered as a non-profit organization (501(c)(3)) in the state of Indiana (United States). Donations are tax-deductible.

Conference Program

Friday, October 29th

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 8:15 US (EST) | Welcome |
| 8:30 US (EST) | Keynote lecture by Lauren Downing Peters |
| 10:00 US (EST) | Panel 1: Recognizing Resistance |
| 12:00 US (EST) | Panel 2: Costuming Cultures |
| 2:30 US (EST) | Virtual café |

Saturday, October 30th

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 7:00 US (EST) | Virtual café |
| 8:00 US (EST) | Panel 3: Complicating Representations |
| 10:00 US (EST) | Panel 4: Time and Temporality |
| 12:00 US (EST) | Panel 5: Performing Gender |
| 2:00 US (EST) | Virtual café |

Keynote Lecture

The forgotten woman: Some reflections on bias, archival silences and recovering marginalized histories

In this lecture, Lauren Downing Peters will reflect on her decade of research into the history and theory of fat fashion and dressed embodiment. Divided into three parts, the lecture will first broadly address the issue of survival bias in costume archives and how it affects our perception of fashion history. The second part of the lecture will present a speculative history of fat fashion through *sartorial remnants*, or objects that typically evade collection and conservation. The lecture will conclude with a discussion of how archival silences and historical omissions bear on contemporary fashion systems and practices, and namely the design and manufacture of plus-size and curve fashions.

Lauren Downing Peters is Assistant Professor of Fashion Studies and Director of the Fashion Study Collection at Columbia College Chicago. She holds an MA from Parsons School of Design and a Ph.D. from The Centre for Fashion Studies at Stockholm University. For more, see: www.laurendowningpeters.com.



List of Presenters

Recognizing Resistance

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Lidia Kniaź-Hunek

*Jo Weldon

Costuming Cultures

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Marie Duecker

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*Stefan Rabitsch

Time and Temporality

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Performing Gender

*Heather Akou

Johanna Lance

Ted Richthofen

* panel chair

Abstracts (alphabetical order)

Heather Akou

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“Playing Pocahontas: Performing (White) Womanhood and Leadership through Secret Society Regalia”

Secret societies such as the Freemasons and Odd Fellows were very popular in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This presentation explores how members of a little-known (but uniquely American) secret society for women—known as the Degree of Pocahontas—used regalia to carry out their rituals and to engage in abstract concepts such as “womanhood” and “leadership.” Although scholars have written about secret societies as sites for entertainment, social connection, philanthropy, and mutual aid (particularly as an early form of life insurance), they have rarely considered how and why women participated in these organizations. They have also paid little attention to the material culture of secret societies, even though scenery, props, and costumes played an essential role in distinguishing members from non-members and helping participants “get into character” for rituals.

Olga Annanurova

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“Representing fashion: the structure of time in cinemagraphs”

From the point of view of temporality, fashion may seem to be associated with speed and immediacy, however repetitions and decelerations deserve no less attention. Fashion practices are represented in a wide variety of media: in graphics and photographs, in film and video formats, each of them conveying the experience of time in different ways. Cinemagraphs—digital photographs that combine static image with a moving fragment or fragments, thus representing subtle and repetitive motion—appear to be of particular interest in this respect. Cinemagraphs exist mainly in GIF image format, but they can also be recorded in video formats, such as MPEG and others, the main thing being their ability to convey the illusion of a partially “living” image. The first such images were created by two authors, photographer Jamie Beck and web designer Kevin Berg in 2011, and have since become a widespread technology. The technique has been used to create professional advertising as well as amateur images, which now make up a significant volume of content posted on social networks.

In the paper the images will be examined from the point of view of Media Archeology, in particular, based on the ideas of Wolfgang Ernst and Erki Huhtamo, as well as referencing earlier ideas of Friedrich Kittler. I will try to consider how the analog and digital nature of the image is combined in cinemagraphs, and how this type of media can influence the perception of fashion, offering the viewer the effects of slow, repetitive motion. The paper fits into the topic of “Digital Representations of Dress and the Body” and more broadly, raises the questions of studying the representation of fashion and its relationship with the material qualities of the image.

Elizabeth Bourgeois

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“Paper Wigs in Performance: Museum Display Meets ‘Orlando’”

This paper describes the design, prototyping, and construction methods used to create stage-worthy wearable paper wigs for a live theatrical production of Virginia Woolf’s “Orlando”.

World museums commonly employ paper to suggest historic hairstyle and period silhouette in costume exhibits, but there are few tutorials or guides describing their construction. With careful material selection and explorative building methods, paper wigs are stage-worthy and wearable. The study of fashion museum exhibits and curatorial testimonies, combined with paper art and origami methods, testing of specialized paper materials, adaptation of theatrical millinery and costume craft techniques, and implementation of unique assembly methods led to the successful realization of a theatrical wig design, depicting 300 years of fashion.

Relevant to the study and practice of costume design and technology, it describes an innovative approach to costume construction and wig-making, while offering technical perspective on museum objects. By documenting and illustrating the observations, challenges, and outcomes of the experiment, this paper offers alternative materials and methods to costume and museum practitioners.

Charlotte Brachtendorf

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“Material Dress and Immaterial Fashion? On the Entanglement of Dress and Fashion”

Dress and fashion have been subjects of investigation for a long time. Both terms, however, have emerged out of distinct disciplines, histories, and traditions, leading to two separate fields of study. Fashion is commonly associated with Western modernity, where it is considered intrinsically elusive and transitory, as early sociologists have observed. Most interestingly, fashion is frequently described as immaterial, for example, by Yuniya Kawamura, who claims that ‘fashion is an intangible object’ or ‘the invisible elements included in clothing’ (Kawamura 2005, 2–4). Dress, on the other hand, has close ties with anthropology, where it has often described the bodily adornment of non-Western peoples. Unlike the study of fashion, dress research has always been interested in the material culture of things, how textiles are made and how meanings arise from the material. Despite being called material culture, this approach is equally concerned with meaning-making and aesthetic variation, a feature sometimes overlooked by fashion scholars. In this line of thought, fashion is perceived as immaterial, whereas dress is defined through its materiality. This paper argues that dress and fashion may be considered two sides of the same coin. Any analysis of fashion as purely immaterial or dress as merely material, fails to recognize that we live in a world where matter and meaning are always already entangled. Through Karen Barad’s agential realism, I want to propose an understanding of fashion-dress (or dress-fashion) that is discursive as it is material; that can explain how matter comes to matter. When viewed as a material-discursive phenomenon one might then be able to reconcile the differences ascribed to fashion and dress.

Boris Calic

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“Interpretation of Montenegrin National Costume as Fashion in the Films of Živko Nikolić”

Folk costumes can generally be defined as a premodern phenomenon, and in that sense as an anti-fashion. This means that they, as folk handicrafts, do not yet presuppose either the mode of production and trade, characteristic of the modern age, or the aesthetic meaning that is appropriate to fashion as a modern (basically capitalist phenomenon). Folk costume, however, builds a symbolic system, it implies a certain meaning, regardless of the fact that it is the product of individual, not typical or standardized production, and systematic aestheticization. This meaning can be understood as its first instance or primary semiological system. Modern interpretations of folk costumes, on the other hand, starting from this primary meaning, represent the construction of secondary semiological systems, in which the original meanings are upgraded and distorted, in the sense of establishing the political economy of the sign.

In my presentation, I will try to present this process, on the example of the films of the Montenegrin director Živko Nikolić, ie his achievements made in Yugoslavia, during the eighties of the twentieth century. Živko Nikolić is a filmmaker who, in many of his achievements, built on the thematization of the Montenegrin tradition. This primarily refers to his feature films - *The Unseen Miracle*, *The Beauty of Vice* and *The Temptation of the Devil* - and in a sense the TV series *Đekna has not died yet, and when it will* - it is not known, which, however, lags far behind Nikolić in terms of artistic qualities film achievements. In the mentioned works, the folk costume is interpreted as an expression of this alienation, ie hypostasis of traditional prohibitions, which, however, obscure the completely modern efforts of people who, seemingly, take tradition as an imperative for building social relations. In contrast to the costume, which masks the characters and intentions of the people who wear it, and unjustifiably determines their status in social relations, the nudity of the body is presented by Nikolić as true autonomy, which resolves subordination to social relations that have no principled basis, but represent the confrontation of individual desires, of universal law, or humanity.

In other words, Nikolić understands the folk costume in its modern use, where it takes on the characteristics of fashion, in the sense of accepting a social pattern that is only seemingly traditional, but in fact - petty-bourgeois, because its wearers seek to realize their interests beyond any traditional paradigm, in the shadow of capitalist individuality. On the other hand, the nudity of the body is for Nikolić an expression of true humanity, and in that sense a true aesthetic phenomenon, which surpasses the capitalist sense of fashion. This is especially evident in the realization of *The Beauty of Vice*, in which the main protagonist, a woman from a remote Montenegrin village who works in a nudist camp, finally frees her clothes - and together with a pair of nudists symbolically builds a different communication society.

Arturo Corujo

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“It was not a very white jacket, but white enough...’ Surface Reading, Material Culture, and Queer Fabrics On Board Melville’s Neversink”

Herman Melville’s literary representations of clothing constitute a Gordian Knot throughout his work. From Ishmael’s homoerotic, fetishistic attraction to Queequeg’s poncho in *Moby-Dick* (1851) to the mysterious costumes that lay bare the performativity of the self in *The Confidence-Man* (1857), Melville seems to be genuinely interested in the intersections between body, clothing, and identity. Among his works, *White-Jacket* (1850) stands as the text to reflect on our times: an anonymous working sailor narrates his labor routine aboard the frigate USS Neversink. He decides to protect his body from the bad weather by making an overcoat: a white jacket. Then, he receives the very name of White-Jacket, alluding to the eye-catching fabric that frustrates his attempts to go unnoticed on the precarious decks inhabited by black-jacketed sailors of his rank. As the story unfolds, the jacket ages, shrinks, and gets dirty due to the wear and tear of daily life. Unlike readings of the jacket as “an emblem of personal alienation, illusory independence, and class superiority,” as well as an analogy between “skin color and texture in narratives of slavery” (Otter), my reading stresses the “temporality of matter” (Butler) for a study of clothing that draws away from readers’ projected signifieds onto signifiers, and revalues the actual properties of the jacket—its color, weight, drape, stretch—as a powerful source of meaning. In his reading of Adorno, Bill Brown highlights that “accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such” (12). Melville’s jacket becomes the door to the rethinking of the self in his constitutive interaction with (the passing of) time and (the unavoidable contact with) otherness. Inspired by the fields of Dress and Body Studies and Thing Theory, my paper aims to unpack the very first sentence of the novel as a (queer) theory of clothing.

Works cited:

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2011.

Brown, Bill. “Thing Theory”. *Critical Inquiry*. 28. 1. (2001): 1-22.

Otter, Samuel. *Melville’s Anatomies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Marie Duecker

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“Cottagecore, Costumes, and Civil War Chic: The Emergence of the Cottagecore Dress Aesthetic in Popular Culture during the COVID-19 Pandemic”

Greta Gerwig’s modern and highly popular take on Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* in late 2019, only months before the COVID-19 pandemic started to sweep through the nations, initiated an upsurge in a turn towards domesticity within fascinated fans of the movie across social media, falling in love with the costumes seen in the movie adaptation of the classic from 1869. This fascination with the fashion from the Civil War era and known from American regionalist writing of the 19th century suddenly took over Instagram and started appearing in Taylor Swift’s music videos of some of her pieces of her “Folklore” album and even computer games such as *Animal Crossing* among other examples of modern-day pop culture. This essay aims to elucidate on modern day influencers and individuals inspired by 19th century regionalist aesthetics and domesticity mirrored in clothing and dresses. I claim that the fascination with the costumes as seen in Gerwig’s adaptation that then slowly bled into several other examples of popular culture stems from an array of escapist tendencies to relieve oneself from the pandemic’s heightened sense for reality. In my talk I argue that the popularity of period-clothing mirroring the standards of the 19th century—domesticity, family life, and off-grid as well as self-sufficient living—requires for the body to be free from constraints as embodied by the pieces seen in Gerwig’s film and consciously curated by costume designer Jacqueline Durran. Once a necessity for women living in the 19th century who needed their clothing and dress to be practical reappeared during the pandemic, which caused a rethinking of dressing due to changing requirements for clothing to function and work in novel ways due to working remotely, switching the office for home office, and a general turn towards escapist comfort resulting in a stronger sense of self.

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“Empty jars and progress narratives: exhibiting historical cosmetics”

While various items of clothing have a comparatively long and indisputably rich history as collectibles preserved and exhibited both by private individuals and public bodies such as museums and archives, objects related to the history of cosmetics have proved more elusive and thus only scantily represented in collections and displays dedicated to fashion and dress cultures. Particularly, nineteenth-century Western beauty practices are largely overlooked in exhibition narratives, as if mirroring that period’s disdainful attitude to make-up.

Drawing mainly on the examples of cosmetics displayed in museums of Moscow, Russia, the proposed paper will focus on the two sets of questions: 1) What is deemed worth preserving and exhibiting? when? by whom? and why? 2) How can sensory experiences of using cosmetics be conveyed through exhibition design and media technologies? In answer to the first, I will suggest a classification of the existing exhibition narratives involving cosmetic items — or rather, their packaging, which is most frequently represented within the context of art and design history or as part of a particular brand’s heritage. In contrast to that, in displays dedicated to theatre and film, it is the absent or shriveled contents of cosmetic jars and boxes that is evoked, to evoke in its turn the actors’ embodied presence.

In the second part of the paper I will examine the representation of cosmetic items on museums’ websites, arguing that virtual reality can be a conducive environment for uncovering the materiality and multi-sensory properties of historical cosmetic items.

Marley Healy

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“It's a Stylish World After All: Exploring Disney Fashion Cultures”

Since Disneyland first opened in 1955 and with subsequent parks and experiences established around the world in the past 66 years, these magical lands have offered visitors places to enjoy worlds of epic adventure, the optimistic future, and sublime fantasy. With branded merchandise available at every turn on site, visitors can show their love for favorite characters and experiences by adorning themselves in everything from emblazoned t-shirts, to full on character costumes, and, of course, the iconic Minnie Mouse ears headband that has come to symbolize a Disney parks vacation. However, in recent years, unofficial Disney-themed dress styles have been developed by fans and enthusiasts that take dressing for Disney to a more sophisticated and complex level. This includes Disneybounding, the practice of creating outfits that are inspired by Disney characters, and the fashions of events like Dapper Day where practitioners wear vintage or vintage-inspired clothing, often with themes that allude to favorite Disney characters. It also includes analysis of ubiquitous clothing items purveyed at the parks such as branded clothing and accessories that have become cult favorites with Disney enthusiasts around the world. My research investigates the myriad of fashion trends and experiences that are inspired by Disney and take place on Disney properties, including theme parks, resorts, and even the high seas. This presentation discusses several fashion trends under the umbrella of what I have termed “Disney fashion cultures,” shares my current methodologies of study, and explains why these styles elicit thoughtful academic attention in the field of Fashion Studies.

Gwyneth Holland

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“Virtual bodies and simulated garments: perpetuating slim ideals”

The acceleration of digital fashion (such as NFTs, digital fashion shows and virtual garments) during the pandemic has promised a utopian future in which garments can be simulated virtually, making them accessible to every body. Affordable pricing and the adaptability of virtual garments to different body shapes have been framed as inclusive, helping to resolve some of the inequality created by fashion brands’ straight/plus size distinctions.

Fashion brands, casting agents and media have often cited the lack of available garments in larger sizes as a reason to represent a single idea of bodies in fashion images and events – designers only produce garments in small sample sizes, so the models must be equally small. However, with some shift towards virtual fashion shows and imagery, these restrictions should no longer exist. When virtual garments are draped over virtual bodies, or layered over real bodies using augmented reality, they no longer have the limits of size.

However, many of the virtual models created to show garments online perpetuate extant ideals, from slim and tall forms (similar to the traditional idea of the fashion model) to the “slim thick” shape popularised on social media, which balances a slim waist with curvaceous hips and thighs. Bigger or differently shaped bodies can be just as easily produced and rendered by 3D modelling systems, but many modellers rely on standardised, slim templates, indicating that even without material restrictions, “compulsory thinness” endures.

This paper examines the role of 3D modelling templates in maintaining body ideas and focuses on the work of virtual fashion designers such as Balmlabs and The Fabricant, as well as virtual fashion shows by Hanifa and speculative work by the Fashion Innovation Agency. My research considers how virtual fashion visualisation offers potential for greater size inclusivity, but questions how sizeism and body ideals constrain the potential of this technology to improve representation for fat or plus-size women, thereby maintaining hierarchies of power through restrictive body ideals.

This paper takes a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on theories of embodiment, fat studies and fashion studies to examine how societal body ideals manifest in new ways through innovative technology, and maintain the abjection of fat in fashion media.

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“Afrofuturist Attires as Wearable Technology in Contemporary Music Videos”

Afrofuturism defined as a discourse, cultural practice, and theoretical lens (Womack 2013) has always been associated with a certain aesthetic reflected across various media and artistic forms. At least since 1974 when Sun Ra’s self-directed film *Space is the Place* was released (two decades before the term “Afrofuturism” was coined by White cultural critic, Mark Dery), Black speculative aesthetic has been repeatedly manifested through garments, marrying fashion choices derived from the science fiction tradition with the elements inspired by West and North African cultural heritage.

The purpose of the presentation is to scrutinize selected Afrofuturist attires in the context of dress and/as technology. Due to the large volume of examples spanning from Solange Knowles’ stage attire that she wore during her performance on “Saturday Night Live” in November 2016 to Childish Gambino fluorescent headset present on the cover of his studio album “*Awaken, My Love!*” and sculptural headpieces constructed from salvaged scrap materials created by a Kenyan artist Cyrus Kabiru, the presentation will focus only on Afrofuturist attires and accessories presented in contemporary American music videos. The talk will analyze such examples as Missy Elliot’s inflatable cyborg costume in “*The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)*” (dir. Hype Williams, 1997), Janelle Monáe’s black and white tuxedo in “*Q.U.E.E.N.*” feat. Erykah Badu (dir. Alan Ferguson, 2013) and Mndsgn’s jewelry and headsets prevalent in “*Cosmic Perspective*” (dir. Eric Coleman, 2016). As the analysis of selected examples will indicate, clothing may be regarded as a wearable technology that allows its users to hack their intersectional identities and serve as a tool for political resistance.

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“When fashion is freedom--Barbara Hoff's anti-communist fashion campaign in “Przekrój”

Fashion history foregrounds the wealthy who could afford visual representations of their clothes through the art of portraiture (Welters and Lillethun 2018). Also fashion theory accentuates the link between fashion and social elites (Veblen 1899, Simmel 1904, Blumer 1969). Viewed as stimulating conspicuous consumption and boosting individualism, fashion has been theorised within the framework of the capitalist societies and many studies of fashion address the connection between fashion and identity (Edwards 2007, Entwistle 2000, Wilson 1985, Hebdige 1979) as well as self-expression. More recently fashion has been vilified for serving the interests of the greedy market-driven global economies based on exploitation of natural resources and of the human workforce (McRobbie 1998, Hoskins 2014). Because as John Burger noted fashion is “capitalism’s favourite child” (qtd. in Hoskins 9), so far there has been little interest in contemporary sartorial practices outside capitalism, with no major research being conducted on the role of fashion in Europe’s Eastern (Communist) Block. Between 1945 and 1989 in the People’s Republic of Poland, fashion was often an issue of contention, for the Communist authorities openly targeted subculture groups imitating Western fashions (e.g. beatniks and hippies) as well as all those people who sartorially resisted the Communist drabness and lack of style. Barbara Hoff, a fashion columnist and a fashion designer was a pioneer of Poland’s anti-Communist fashion rebellion. It was through her columns in weekly “Przekrój” that she introduced Western European trends to Polish (mostly female) readers and launched a cultural/sartorial revolution against the mainstream styleless dressing habits. The current analysis examines the representation of fashion in Hoff’s writings from 1975 as a metaphor of freedom and connectivity with the world outside the Iron Curtain. Her weekly columns featuring tips on how to achieve the fashionable look with the limited resources available at that time in Poland also render Hoff as a forerunner of contemporary sustainable DIY fashion aesthetic.

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“Speed is Essential’: A recreation of a 1920s leather motoring hat from Weldon’s Artistic Leathercraft”

The expansion of motoring as a leisure practice for women in Britain in the 1920s was accompanied by a corresponding boom in fashion advice on what to wear while at the wheel. Articles and adverts emphasised the importance of garments, especially hats, that embodied new ideas about speed and streamlined modernity. In 1929 *Vogue* enthused that for the modern, emancipated woman flitting between social occasions, ‘Speed is essential.’ The machine-age aesthetic was reflected through headwear where Modernism met popular culture: streamlined, helmet-like hats were worn by women drivers, pilots and by sun-worshipping bathers in smooth waterproof versions with chinstraps, while the modishly sleek cloche hat epitomised the era. Motoring attire was a new clothing category for women and a material means by which to engage with modernity.

This paper examines the intersection of the interwar vogue for female motoring attire and the boom in amateur millinery and handicrafts, through the case study of a recreation of a 1920s woman’s driving hat taken from the pages of popular craft magazine *Weldon’s Artistic Leathercraft*. The pattern will be considered in relation to the wider context: to examples of motoring dress and its meanings, and to amateur hat making as a practice. These are contextualised within the interwar conceptualisation of the female motorist as the epitome of emancipated modern femininity in fashion, fine art and popular culture.

Using original leathercraft instructions and with direct reference to an extant hand-made 1920s leather driving hat from the collection at Worthing Museum, I will recreate the type of hat it was possible to make as an amateur hat maker in this period, using and interpreting similar materials and processes to those suggested at the time. This paper considers the processes of making and seeks to illuminate amateur making as an often-overlooked form of knowledge which fuses technical knowhow with tacit knowledge. The make-it-yourself guides of the 1920s and 30s are indicative of a cultural belief that fashion knowledge, whether for pleasure, profit or social achievement could be self-taught. They reveal the impressive variety of skills required for making the types of hats considered fashionable at the time, the aesthetic and social knowledge that women were supposed to have or develop for creative and sartorial success. They also elucidate the cultural assumptions of the time that endowed the practice of millinery with a mystique, perceived to be particularly suitable for amateur female crafters. My leathercraft project shows clearly how an item of high-fashion motoring attire had been translated for a mass-audience and adapted for the domestic maker. This paper therefore highlights the importance of amateur handicrafts in expanding women’s wardrobes between the wars, enabling them to participate both in a creative leisure activity, and the tantalising modern world of glamorous motorists dressed for speed and adventure.

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“Laying the batt for petasus americanus: Felting fibrous entanglement between American Studies and Dress Studies”

“Making a hat is a black-magic business.”

– John Milano in *Cowboys & Hatters* (1996)

In an ad released on their Instagram channel in the summer of 2020, hat shaper Ryan McBride of The Best Hat Store in Fort Worth, TX has proclaimed that “the cowboy hat is the most recognizable piece of apparel on planet Earth.” The polemics and their attendant American exceptionalism notwithstanding, in singling out the cowboy hat and attributing such singular significance to it, he has pointed to something rather tangible which cannot easily be reduced to this headwear’s particular shape, or as a hatter would say, its silhouette. Deceivably simple in their materiality, iconicity, and the associations attributed to them, cowboy hats belie a complex cultural history which—surprisingly—has yet to be tendered in a comprehensive format. In order to adequately capture the history of the cowboy hat—henceforth *petasus americanus*—it is only logical to build, or rather felt a methodological fabric out of as well as between American Studies and Dress Studies which is the principle goal of this proposed paper.

In line with the “exceptional” iconography ascribed to the cowboy hat, felt, which is one of two materials that are most commonly used to build these cranial covers, offers the cultural studies/cultural history scholar similarly “unique” (Gordon, 1980: 10) properties for approaching, reading, and interfacing with Dress Studies from an American Studies vantage point. In this paper, I will employ the principle properties that allow wool and fur fibers to be made into felt—i.e., the directional fiber effect and the fibers’ crimp—to lay the conceptual batt for fulling an interdisciplinary felt which shall serve as the methodological basis for a larger book project. Just like wool and fur fibers, the concerns and attendant toolboxes of American Studies and Dress Studies should easily entangle; whereas the former aims to critically engage with American lifeworlds—i.e., the multicultural environment of the United States as it is constituted by discourses, symbols, and narratives and their attendant powerful albeit asymmetrically distributed effects as well as affects—the latter places the bodies that constitute cultural communities front and center, understanding dress as “both as environment and as means of intervening between the body and environment” (Roach/Eicher, 1973: xxiv). Consequently, thinking and understanding American lifeworlds in terms of a multicultural felt(ing) has distinct advantages over other metaphors that continue to have—often problematic—currency in American Studies (e.g., a melting pot, a cookie cutter, a salad bowl, a mosaic, a quilt). Ultimately, the conceptual labor informing this paper seeks to craft an interface, or rather an interfelt within which to locate and tell the story of the cowboy hat as a significant, signifying, wearable, and thus nomadic cultural silhouette.

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“Trans-Masculinity, Race, and Class in Early 20th Century America”

The intensely shifting cultural and economic climate in the United States at the turn of the 20th century created pockets of society where transmasculine Americans could participate openly in public life and gain access to full American citizenship. Transmasculinity can be defined as cross-gendered activities by AFAB (assigned female at birth) individuals, such as cross-dressing and engaging in strictly gendered behaviors and privileges of a given time, such as voting, marrying women, or owning property. Examples of such spaces include Harlem, NY, Greenwich Village, NY, Chicago, IL, and several frontier towns in the West (Skidmore 2017 ; Stryker 2008 ; Boag, 2005 ; Cromwell 1999 ; Gearhardt 2019 ; Halberstam 1998). Gender, like race, in the context of American history, is constructed as a marker for who is allowed to wield power and citizenship (Butler 1990 ; Matthews 2003). The existence of transmasculine individuals, and masculine cross-dressing activities in early 20th century America offered a counter-ideology to defined notions of racial and gender hierarchy through gendered patterns of dress and behavior, and proves that these hierarchies must constantly be asserted, defined, and maintained in order to exist. Individuals who were able to “pass” as male through dress and behavior were able to gain access to social and economic mobility that was withheld from them. Quite similarly to Berlin in Weimar Era Germany, there was a sort of “Queer revolution” happening across the US in various racial and class groups in the 1900s-20s. These groups challenged fading Victorian notions of separate gender spheres, and coincided with women’s rights movements for equal participation in political, educational, and economic American life (Faderman, 1991; Horak, 2016; Chauncey 1983; Erenberg, 1981). This “open queerness” also coincided with a marked increase in immigration, urbanization, and the rise of capitalist consumer culture. However, public opinion turned and increasingly criminalized and culturally repressed gender clothing transgression due to a coinciding “Heterosexual revolution” created by the fear that white males were losing their hegemonic power in an increasingly diverse society. These fears also coincided with the popularity in the sexual sciences that attempted to tie theories about civilization with evolution and race, as well as anxieties about Frederick Jackson Turner’s theory of the closing of the frontier. Gender transgression was increasingly tied to racial degeneration theories, and was cohabited by interests in primitivism and white supremacy (Bederman 1995 ; Boag 2005 ; Chauncey 1983). Major scientific and intellectual think-pieces from this era on gender conflate white supremacy and having a perfect civilization with the idea of separate gender/sex roles, and aimed to pathologize white gender transgressive people, and primitivize gender transgressive people of color. Through this lens, I investigate how a transmasculine dresser from a particular background might have subverted or supported white male supremacy, and how they might have fit into the changing notion of gender roles in society.

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“Heels on the Street, Umbrellas in the Sky: Sex Worker Dress as Identity, Statement, and Resistance in the 21st Century”

This presentation will survey the ways in which 21st-century sex worker activists engage critically with dress as a medium to express identity and resistance. While some view the influence of sex industry workers on culture as an alarming "pornification" of the world, sex workers have a different understanding of the phenomenon. The clear platform high-heeled shoe, likened to Cinderella's glass slipper, has become a symbol for stripper strikes and pride marches; Jacq the Stripper used the slogan "Tip Her" on hats and t-shirts to acknowledge the value of erotic labor; and trans activist Monica Jones used original art and graphics on clothing sold to fundraise for legal fees after being arrested on sex-work-related charges. AMMAR in Argentina employed the recognizable dress of street workers to make a statement about families, sex work, and human rights. Organizations such as Daspu in Brazil and Sistaaz of the Castle in South Africa have developed their own styles, and have brought a bold and colorful aesthetic inspired by their workwear to the streets, to fashion show runways, and to art galleries. And above all, the red umbrella, with its vivid sartorial flair, has become the global symbol of sex workers' rights. These culture-makers are not content to be profiled as outsiders whose influence is bad; they are recognizing themselves as parents, artists, and political figures.

Call for Papers for 2022

The Beginner's Mind: Telling and Asking Questions About Dress Studies

If you're new to Dress Studies...

- What questions do you have?
- How is dress viewed within your discipline?
- How did you first encounter Dress Studies?
- Why bother to study dress and the body?

If you're not new to Dress Studies...

- How did you first get involved?
- Is there anything you wish you had known earlier?
- What have been some of the key texts/theories/methods for you?
- What advice do you have for scholars who are new to Dress Studies?

You're welcome to submit an abstract about any topic related to dress and/or the body, but our hope is that these presentations will lead to a special edited volume of a journal. Stay tuned!

Join us on next year on October 28th and 29th!