

B / A S

JOURNAL OF DRESS PRACTICE



FASHION + POLITICS

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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FASHION + POLITICS

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Stefania Merea wearing woven garments by Lucia Cuba

Photographed by Erasmo Wong S.



FASHION + POLITICS

issue 2

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Throughout history, the ever-changing worlds of fashion and politics have been inextricably linked. While some governments have reserved the power to dictate the dress of their citizens, fashion has conversely served as a way for citizens to boldly stand in the face of oppression. Still, as fashion writer Jane Audas commented in response to Show Studio's project on political fashion, "How can something so much concerned with surface have a political agenda of any depth?"

For this issue, contributors were challenged to consider the ways that fashion and politics intersect, as well as how fashion can be politicized. The diverse content featured within these pages comes from writers, artists, and designers from around the world. Their personal styles and political beliefs may differ, but each contributor is influenced by the inescapable forces of fashion and politics in our everyday lives. Whether it's the politics that affect garment manufacturers, the influence of dress choices made by our political leaders, or even the politics behind how a society views beauty, these pieces provide proof of how powerful these intersecting forces can be.

The journal you have before you is the result of late nights, long discussions, and the creative power of a dedicated team that I am proud to call my colleagues. We hope that this issue will provide you with new ways of looking at how both fashion and politics affect our lives, and will perhaps even spark a debate or two. After all, everyone has his or her own political biases. The difference is how—or if—we choose to cover them up.

Sara Harrison

The background features a large black triangle on the left side, pointing towards the top right. The rest of the image is filled with a complex, symmetrical pattern of fine, parallel lines that create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized star or a complex geometric design.

PRAXIS

FASHION PRAXIS

This issue of BIAS was created to explore the tension between fashion and politics and extend the dialogue which has been circulating at The New School over the past several years. These conversations have happened formally, in workshops and symposiums, and informally through personal projects and individual dress practices. In April 2012, a workshop titled "Fashion & Politics: Dressing in a Dangerous World" invited scholars from several international institutions to consider the wider political contexts and agendas which fashion impacts. They presented research on how fashion interacts with social, material, and corporeal functions in the context of geo- and bio-politics. The workshop was followed by the February 2014 symposium "Fashion Praxis" which brought together faculty members from The New School community to discuss themes of dress, the body, fashion design, experiential and embodied practices, media, community, and education related to fashion and politics.

The point of departure and conceptual framework for the symposium conversations is philosopher Hannah Arendt's influential 1958 work *The Human Condition*. Arendt's notion of praxis is particularly relevant to an examination of fashion, providing springboards for discussion and discovery, allowing the intersections between fashion and politics to be charted.

WHEN PLUS-SIZED IS POLITICAL
THOUGHTS FROM A FASHION PRAXIS PANELIST
Lauren Downing Peters

Fat activists contend that to be a fat (and specifically white) female in the United States is to possess one of the most stigmatizing identity complexes in contemporary Western culture. In making this case, they are quick to reference feminist scholars like Susie Orbach, Naomi Wolf, and Susan Bordo who have decried the patriarchal beauty system that underlies much of contemporary media for establishing and perpetuating unrealistic expectations for women. Additionally, marketers and retailers have mobilized this ideology in recent years to sell everything from soap to denim to so-called "real" women who have heretofore been underrepresented in the popular media. Within these spaces, to be fat, they argue, is to defy social mandates that require women's bodies to be tight, smooth, and controlled.

At the core of research lies the question: why is the fat body political and of what consequence is this to fashion consumers and practitioners? This question probes the fundamental relationship between bodies and dress. Joanne Entwistle has theorized the human body as an inherently *dressed* body with clothing being so "closely linked to identity that...dress, the body and the self...are not perceived separately but simultaneously, as a totality."¹ My central question shifts from the fat body as a political entity to the *dressed* fat body. Indeed, dress plays a vital role in facilitating our existence while simultaneously reflecting and precipitating our ways of being in the world.

In this sense, the fashion industry plays an instrumental role in the definition of what a fat body is via the imposition of sizes, and specifically plus-sizes (that is, garments size 12 and up). How then can we conceive of plus-size fashion in political terms? An answer to this question may lie in the revisionist philosophy of *praxis* as developed by Hannah Arendt.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt reinterprets the term *vita activa*—a branch of philosophical, political thought that groups everyday life into three distinct areas of human behavior: work, labor, and action. According to Arendt, while work and labor are the foundations for undifferentiated human existence, *action* is synonymous with *praxis*, or the process of political mobilization and exercising novel ideas.

For those who came before Arendt (specifically Marx and Hegel), *praxis* was nothing more than a contemplative, philosophical tenet; by contrast, she conceives of *praxis* as a practical concept for rethinking the supposedly predetermined nature of human existence. She does so via the ideas of *freedom and plurality*. *Freedom*, for Arendt, is the capacity to engage a new idea, while *plurality* pertains to the circumstances under which human behavior is made meaningful by the presence of an active audience. In these terms, any form of political action, including fat activism, can be understood as *praxis*.

However, Arendt also discusses *praxis* in relation to objects—a particularly valuable framework for thinking about the specificity of *fashion praxis*.

"The human condition," Arendt writes, "comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence...Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence."² Here, Arendt makes an appeal for the symbiotic relationship between humans and objects, echoing Entwistle's sentiments above. Applied to plus-size fashion, however, this sticky relationship and the political nature of plus-size fashion is manifest.

For fat women, plus-size clothing is a vital, though rather mundane, aspect of their existence. While Entwistle does not differentiate between different kinds of bodies in her texts, the simple fact that the plus-size body is an inherently *dressed* fat body cannot be overemphasized.

As I have written previously, to wear plus-size clothing is to stabilize an unruly, ever-shifting identity since the fashion industry only discerns between standard and plus-size, and therefore to *shop* plus-size is to *be* plus-size.³ The problem, and possible political implications, for plus-size fashion, then, lies in the fact that many fat women feel as if they are being underserved by a marketplace that has fabricated a seemingly arbitrary system of bodily differentiation. They are thus limited in their ability to navigate their social selves via *praxis* or action. As fat is not a stable identity marker, but is one that is informed by daily social encounters, anti-fat stigma, and microaggressions, plus-size fashion becomes political, when it thrusts a fat identity upon a reluctant consumer and when fat activists rail against these sartorial mandates.

The political nature of plus-size fashion considered in light of Arendt's philosophical inquiry is of great consequence for both fashion practitioners and consumers. As she wrote in her text, *On Revolution*, "Revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning."⁴ With plus-size fashion presently framed as a problem for fat consumers, it could then be perceived as a potential starting place for rethinking the design process entirely. Young designers and educators harness the capacity to revolutionize fashion for fat women, by eschewing outmoded notions of patternmaking and draping, practices grounded in an antiquated fashion pedagogy. And therein lies the political potential of plus-size.

THOUGHT POLICE

NARENDRA KUMAR'S RUNWAY POLITICS

Lauren Sagadore

The fashion runway may seem an unconventional site for political activism yet Indian designer Narendra Kumar has done just that, embracing the catwalk as a space for artistic resistance. His 2013 S/S collection, *Live Responsibly!!*, presented at Lakmé Fashion Week in Mumbai, opened a new chapter in catwalk history where political commentary through performance superseded the presentation of the fashionable collection. Lining the runway with men dressed in combat gear, batons barred, and the words "Thought Police" blazoned on their backs, it was evident that the show's intent was firstly about dissent and secondly about fashion. In fact, much of the menswear and womenswear collections were obscured from view due to the stunt. Through *Live Responsibility!!* Kumar challenged the police response to public protests in the wake of the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, and boldly questioned moral policing in Indian society. One of the most talked about shows of Lakmé Fashion Week, Kumar demonstrated that when fashion mixes with politics, conversations ignite.

This isn't the first political foray for Kumar. In 2006, he protested a new ruling that limited designers to showing at only one of the country's two top fashion weeks, as a result of the rivalry between the Fashion & Design Council of India and Lakmé Fashion Week. After losing an appeal on the issue, Kumar boldly used the runway as a platform to garner public attention to his cause. Aptly naming his collection *In Protest*, his models sauntered down the runway gagged, while silence filled



the space in the notable absence of music. His performance was controversial, but the ruling was subsequently overturned.

Kumar's successes using the runway for dramatic engagement with politics in the fashionable realm spotlights dissent, spreading the message to a broader audience. It's a union that draws press to both the cause and the designer; it seems likely the catwalk will be an increasingly valued platform for activism.



WEST --- REST

FASHION'S INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

Cayla O'Connell

In the academic field of fashion studies, a problematic language system has been codified and normalized by dress historians, fashion theorists, and students, as a result of longstanding opinions regarding modernity, globalization, and Western perspectives on world history. This cultural conditioning, a subsequence of European opinions of the historical progression of modern human development, has fostered a dangerously reductive view of fashion, its historicity, and its players.

According to the work of Sandra Niessen, in "Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress," fashion rhetoric and its definitions need to be revised. The existent and accepted terminology that surrounds fashion and its international classifications is glaringly discriminatory in nature and speaks to the problematic perspective on global development by Western positioning. Niessen's examination of fashion and its international disbursements condemn the prevailing binary of the 'West versus the Rest' mentality for misshaping the academic tradition. A concept recently addressed by Susan B. Kaiser in the book, *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, "Indeed, modern Western thought is riddled with either/or thinking that has limited what and how we know fashion in the context of a transnational world: fashionable (i.e. modern) dress versus 'fixed' (i.e. traditional) costume, Western dress versus 'the rest.'"¹

Historically, fashion has been defined by theorists and sociologists such as Georg Simmel and Thorstein Veblen, as a strictly "Western phenomenon"—a unique cultural paradigm, exclusively the product of modernization and 'civilized' societies, characterized by rapid change and economic hierarchy.² Joanne B. Eicher upholds this imperialistic claim in her essay, "Dress and Ethnicity: Change Across Space and Time," when she cites a Darwinian theory of societal development: "wearing of western dress was associated with a society moving from a state of 'primitivism' to one of 'civilization.'"³ While she explains the dissemination of fashion, dress, and clothing across global ethnoscaples (an Appaduraiian term for ethnic dimensions) quite successfully, her classifications unfortunately operate in the framework of oppositional structuring and have a distinctly discriminatory tone.⁴

In the opinion of Dorinne Kondo in her essay, "All About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater," attempts of fashion scholars and critics to address 'the Rest' in the fashion sphere is best characterized as Orientalist. Specifically, Kondo illuminates the tendency of historians and critics to problematically generalize and group fashion designers by nationality—despite their apparent diversities—as a protective tactic to preserve the exclusivity of fashion and its Western propriety. As "unsympathetic gatekeepers," fashion writers have consistently patronized non-Western designers in critical examination and review, by "tracing their commonalities to cultural continuity."⁵ According to Kondo, the only circumstance in which successful work by foreign designers may be lauded requires a contextualization of "national essence" or ethnic identity.⁶

As such, international acclaim is often founded upon the modernization or reinterpretation of traditional folk dress. A prime example of this at work is Bill Cunningham's review of Hanae Mori's 1988 collection in *Details* magazine. Though seemingly celebratory, Cunningham faults the designer's "years of misguided attempts to imitate European style," prior to her acclaimed haute-couture collection, crediting her then new-found success to a capitalization on her "ancient Japanese" heritage.⁷ Despite the fact that Hanae Mori received praise for her work worldwide, it was through a condescending lens of unabashed Orientalism.

Arguably, the blind acceptance of this prejudiced historical designation is a product of social constructions formed early in the educational stages of Western student experience. As most twentieth-century post-structuralist theory suggests, scholars often unknowingly internalize inherited opinions as truisms based on educational shaping and generational influence. In turn, learned platitudes subliminally affect critical stances and serve to shape the trajectory of the discourse. Such as in the case of fashion, the traditional definition has gone largely uncontested by theorists and historians despite its obviously reductive scope and troubling xenophobic undertones.

Challenging the presupposed oppositional binary of the 'West vs. the Rest,' critical conversations within the field of fashion have recently served to address its transnational intersections and convergences—finally acting to redefine fashion as a *global* system—characterized by inclusion, fluidity, and fashion for all.



WHAT DOES
FREEDOM
LOOK LIKE?

SILENCE
MIGHT
SHAME
MISERABLE

BORN FREE

OAKLAND + JOHANNESBURG + NEW YORK

Born Free is a project that explores, through photographs and workshops, the multiple dimensions and possibilities of style. It questions the ways in which people come to embody style, unraveling its sociocultural relevance and potential for activism and change. The project began in 2012 when Chun-Mui Miller created OAK Streetstyle, a blog documenting Oakland's irreverent sartorial flair. "I've always had that burning question, 'What does authenticity look like?'" says Miller. "I appreciate the city's historical and present social and cultural expression, and I wanted to explore how style speaks its story."

One of the project's photographers, Fred Shavies, traveled to South Africa for the event 'STR.CRD,' an annual international art, music, and fashion festival in Johannesburg that draws over 3,000 youth from all over South Africa. "I was so inspired," Miller exclaimed. "I could see from the images that there's a major activation of energy happening right now in South Africa. There was vibrancy, radiance, and creativity in the images that touched me in such a way that I knew I had to go myself. That's how Born Free came to be."

The next year, Miller herself went to South Africa with the Born Free Installation. She worked with Sophie Lan Hou to build an interactive and creative dialogue around style. "The centers of power in the world are dramatically shifting," says Lan Hou. "In collaboration with global communities, we aim to build a platform on which to have these dynamic conversations."











Born Free, enabled by the Ashoku U and Photowings Insights Grant, brought the exploration to The New School campus in New York City Fall 2013. In Spring 2014 the project will host a participatory workshop and exhibition.



WHAT DOES FREEDOM LOOK LIKE?

the future sky blue
F= Feeling
T= W
W= willing

Statue of Liberty

LAUGHTER & LOVE
NYC
GRRLS!
EXPRESS YOURSELF IN ANY FORM
TELL
ITE

LEARN FROM YOUR PAST & HAVE FUN WITH THE PRESENT
EFFICIENT AESTHETIC
Truth
generation together
SAFE



FREEDOM
LOOK LIKE?

LEADRA
FROM Y
PAST &
FUN WITH
PRES
EFFICIENT
AESTHET

TUNKY
FIATS
NYC

"YOU HAVE
NO LIMITS
TO WHAT YOU
CAN DO"

GRARRLS

EXPRESS
YOURSELF
IN
ANY FORM



generation
together

SAP

SPELL
KITE

FREEDOM
LOOK LIKE

POP!

FUNKY
FIATS NY

have
LIMITS
what you
DO!

SPRES
YOURSELF
IN
FOR



An abstract, high-contrast image featuring a woman's face, primarily in deep shadow and red tones. The background is a vibrant, painterly mix of reds, pinks, and purples, with some blue and white highlights. The overall effect is dramatic and artistic.

LEADING LADIES

DRESS DECISIONS ON THE POLITICAL STAGE

In the image-saturated culture of contemporary politics, dress decisions have the power to construct national identity and disrupt public confidence in leadership. The following pieces consider three influential political bodies and their representations of gender, power, and national identity.

Rachel François moves beyond a simple discussion of Michelle Obama's clothing to investigate the first lady's innovative use of fashion to represent and articulate a new American identity. Elizabeth Black explores Hillary Clinton's more complicated sartorial history, using the former U.S. Senator and Secretary of State's "Cleavage Gate" controversy to explore the gendered politics of fashion ambivalence. Nathaniel Dafydd Beard finds a more unlikely figure of political fashion in former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, arguing that her unexpectedly subversive, staunchly British dress was key to establishing her powerful "Iron Lady" persona.

Together, these articles aim to address how the awareness of fashion's vital role as an embodied performance – by politicians and voters alike – is understood and mobilized in political media.

ACTIVATING AGENCY:
MICHELLE OBAMA'S AMERICAN IDENTITY
Rachel François

From the earliest days of her husband's presidential campaign, Michelle Obama has been under the scrutinizing eye of the fashion press, which fervently chronicles the First Lady's wardrobe choices replete with designer credit taglines and comparisons to former First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. However, Obama's designers of choice have been a contentious point of discussion across audiences; after choosing an Alexander McQueen gown over that of an American designer for a 2011 state dinner hosting Chinese president Hu Jintao, the Council of Fashion Designers of America president Diane von Furstenberg expressed that the Council was "surprised and a little disappointed not to be represented for this major state dinner."¹ Further commentary from *Women's Wear Daily* editor Bridget Foley was much more blunt: "To wear something other than American at this particular trade-centric mega-fete embarrasses a major U.S. industry that continues to need all the help it can get."²



Though Obama proclaims her motto is to "wear what you love," it is clear that Obama cannot simply choose to wear the clothes she likes; as the First Lady of the United States, she is also expected to embody a sense of "Americanness." This highlights the issues of how American ideology and identity is imagined sartorially. Popular debate about the First Lady's choice of designers places us at a juncture to critically consider the material and immaterial dynamics of fashion identity politics. In her choice of designers, Obama is making a statement that is not just about fashion, but is also of much broader social and cultural import. In subtle ways, Obama has chosen to reinterpret American fashion identity on her own terms. As the first African-American First Lady, Obama chooses to wear the work of mostly young and ethnic designers such as Jason Wu, Rachel Roy, and Prabal Gurung. Through these decisions, she is altering the traditional political and sartorial narratives of American identity, race, and ethnicity.

Obama occupies a dialectical position in this discussion of material and immaterial evaluations of identity and nationhood. Her fashion is presumed to act as a mediating ploy of the state; its material expressions serve as illustrative points of patriotic and democratic traditions and a specific national identity. Every detail of her clothes is dissected for sensorial representations: bright colors signal optimism, while rolled shirtsleeves connote strong work ethic. Silhouettes are studied for their varying levels of sophistication or disregard, turning her fashion into contextual props of American ideologies and reducing Obama to mere clothes.³

This conceptualization mistakenly posits power on the materiality alone and neglects the embodied person through which the clothes are apprehended and subsequently comprehended. Obama's capacity to exercise human agency, textured by her own lived realities and values, offers an altogether different interpretation of the fashion worn and how it could be understood. Although most of the designers she wears identify as American, their hyphenated otherness as Asian-American or Cuban-American is the platform that appears to elevate and spotlight most of her fashion decisions.⁴

Though the fashion industry has acknowledged Obama's role in promoting American designers such as Narciso Rodriguez and Isabel Toledo, the "otherness" of their status as people of color is blanketed under the umbrella of American designers, ignoring nuanced difference and exacerbating the social and cultural distances wrought by its commodification of ethnicity.⁵ Obama effectively challenges this by transforming ethnicity from a fashionable commodity object into a culturally normative subject.⁶

Suggestions and comparisons are made about what former first ladies have done to exude ideals of American spirit in their style choices. However, it is negligent to simply reference their fashion without considering their racial difference. Susan Kaiser and Sarah Rebollosa McCullough examine how the multiple and intersecting layers of African diasporic identity constantly shape societal positions and perceptions.⁷ They define identity "not" statements as hegemonic regulations that frame ways of being and knowing, while "knot" situations are managements of those "not" statements transformed by individual or group agency.⁸

The relational terms of power are re-negotiated and "not" statements become empowered entanglements of "(k)nots." In this case, the "not" statements that previously denied African Americans status as first-class citizens and seats of elected political office are now "knotted" entanglements with the advent of the Obamas, the nation's premier African-American first family. As a fashion subject, Obama operates from intersecting positions, such as race, education, socio-economic standing, and occupation, that simultaneously blur and are always becoming; changing the meaning and value of what it is to be American.

As first lady, Obama has skillfully acted as a cultural intermediary who uses fashion to negotiate image and matter in this new, knotted American context. The debate surrounding her fashion choices not only raises the important question of what it means to (re)present an American narrative, but reveals the ethnocentricism, identity policing, and cultural anxiety at play. Obama has activated both her own agency and American designers' ethnic origins to illuminate the diversity of American identity, situating a new discursive tradition of American fashion that is plural and layered. Rather than chide Obama for supporting foreign designers, the fashion industry should strive to reflect the diversity that the First Lady represents.

FIGUREHEADS + APPARITIONS:

THE MINISTERS OF STYLE

Nathaniel Dafydd Beard

Within the British sociopolitical environment there exists a curious dichotomy where being seen as "too fashion" is not just a faux pas, but politically damaging. The role of "ordinary" attire holds a resonance with the general public that indicates a connection with contemporary values, and significantly, a demonstration of connected authenticity through sartorial engagement. Politicians commonly use articles of clothing picked up from down-market retailers to connect with their constituents. This tactic can go awry, such as when it was discovered that the current Prime Minister's wife, Samantha Cameron, was wearing a Marks & Spencer dress during a Conservative Party conference. The dress turned out not to be "off-the-rack" at all, but was in fact a style that had been re-created and specially made for her.¹ As the bastion and economic fashion bell-weather of the British high-street, Marks & Spencer's collusion in this charade indicates a desperate desire to maintain an illusion of camaraderie with the general public that does not actually exist in reality.

Developing an easily identifiable and relatable way of dressing is testament to the power of style over fashion, with many of the most renowned political leaders having developed a certain style of dressing. This is not only in support of their own personal stature, but also their ability to be seen as part of the zeitgeist, and their own abilities to lead and shape it. One of the best examples of this can perhaps be seen in the figure of Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first and, to date, only female Prime Minister.



In many ways, Thatcher used to present herself as kind of "super housewife." After all, if you can run a household, including budgeting the weekly bills, you can probably run a country just as well. A large part of her persona was built around her outfits, which became, in their own way, the "Iron Lady's" armour. Boxy skirt suits, pussy-bow blouses, a string of pearls, and the Asprey solid-frame leather handbag were all part of the look.² Seen lined-up at official overseas functions amongst a sea of black and grey suits, Thatcher's blue suits and pussy bows stood out, also helping Britain to stand up, and stand out. Yet, curiously, this was just the same outfit that many upper-middle-class ladies in London would don to run errands at John Lewis, a department store known for its reasonable prices and good quality.

Thatcher took up this image as her own, and magnified it so it became recognizable, reliable, and authentic. While the housewife has to constantly pre-plan and pre-empt the needs of the family, here was a woman who could set an agenda and get things done. Being seen to uphold such staunch values was also apparent in Thatcher's choice of stoical British brands such as Aquascutum, whose sturdy and tough clothing mirrored how Thatcher wanted her Britain to appear.

Thatcher's style persona as a political leader has continued to exert influence. In 1988 the provocative fashion designer Vivienne Westwood was photographed by Michael Roberts for the cover of *Tatler* magazine's "April Fool" issue dressed as Thatcher, complete with pearls and the infamous black leather handbag, alongside the slogan "This Woman was Once a Punk." Although the *Tatler* image was intended as a spoof and a provocation of Thatcher and her values, it highlights how Thatcher was, to an extent, also a pioneer in a subversive sense. As with Vivienne Westwood, a designer who has spent a great part of her career outside the mainstream of the fashion industry, so too did Margaret Thatcher find herself on the outside, ever the grocer's daughter, who, though highly educated and capable, still had to routinely prove herself in the male-dominated "old-boys club" environment of politics. In this image we see the political leader as both figurehead and apparition, and also a telling example of the combined power of fashion and politics, an indicative legacy that provides a sense of the "push-pull" allure of each in their own right and perhaps more powerful than any actual "Minister of Fashion" could be.

CLEAVAGE GATE

Elizabeth Black

"There was cleavage on display Wednesday afternoon on C-SPAN2," reported *Washington Post* writer Robin Givhan. "It belonged to Sen. Hillary Clinton."¹ The first two sentences of her July 20, 2007 article mimicked the style of a breaking news update. Wearing a rose-colored blazer over a black shirt, Clinton took the Senate floor to speak about the burdensome cost of higher education. While the amount of cleavage showing was minimal, the shirt's low v-neckline caught Givhan's attention, who found it "startling to see that small acknowledgment of sexuality and femininity peeking out of the conservative—*aesthetically speaking*—environment of Congress."²

Givhan's article generated a flurry of questions in the media about Clinton's sartorial intentionality, and the incident was dubbed "Cleavage Gate." When she began her role in the Senate, Clinton adopted a uniform of flattering, simple black pantsuits, initially eschewing any feminine sartorial statement; as her presidential campaign gained momentum, Clinton attempted to modify her senatorial black pantsuits with more cheerful pastels and soft floral prints. When she stepped to the Senate podium in a low-cut top, however, her overt display of femininity suddenly tipped whatever precarious balance she had managed to maintain. Possibly as a response to the growing criticism surrounding her "too masculine" appearance, Clinton made a tentative move to reaffirm her feminine identity. Her attempt failed, as the press, with Givhan leading the charge, expressed its discomfort at the "ghastly" sight of revealed cleavage.³

Ambivalence is defined as "the conflicting, sometimes contradictory, attitudes that characterize much of our emotional and psychological experience."⁴ This sense of ambivalence often plays out on the dressed body, with fashion acting as the cultural sign of fundamental inner conflicts.⁵ When operating at the unconscious level, this ambivalence produces a sense of anxiety when wanting to present an "accurate" sense of self. The interior sense of self is often at odds with the visible and public self, particularly in respect to appearance. To one degree or another, an individual's wardrobe is intrinsically connected to what one would like to reveal and/or conceal about the self. Anxiety regarding a gap between the private and hidden image of self and a public's perception, particularly in respect to dress and physical appearance, can prove psychologically crippling. While fashion provides us with the tools to help define and communicate an intended identity to the wider public, there is always room for error and for the anticipated message to fail or prove unconvincing.

With mounting pressure surrounding her choice of dress on the Senate floor, the press began to speculate that "Cleavage Gate" might have been an intentional move by Clinton. Denying calculation in appearance, Clinton publicly refuted feeling hurt or embarrassed in the face of the press' incessant attacks upon her for her misguided and failing efforts to fashion a more feminine identity. However, for a woman who has a reputation for precisely managing every aspect of her persona and public image, how believable is her denial?

Joanne Entwistle discusses the power of shame through dress:

Clothes are often spoken of in moral terms, using words like 'faultless,' 'good,' 'correct.' Few are immune to this social pressure, and most people are embarrassed by certain mistakes of dress...Dressed inappropriately for a situation we feel vulnerable and embarrassed, and so too when our dress 'fails' us... the embarrassment of such mistakes of dress is not simply that of a personal faux pas, but the shame of failing to meet the standards required of one by the moral order of the social space.⁶

Shame's power carries within itself the emotion of not wanting to be seen or even wanting to exist. Public embarrassment caused by inappropriate or unacceptable dress is such that, even people not interested in their appearance will dress well enough to avoid social censure, according to Quentin Bell. In the political arena where appearance is essential, a sartorial mistake is all the more devastating.

In *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman argues that the body is "the vehicle of identity, but this identity has to be managed in terms of the definitions of the social situation, which impose particular ways of being on the body."⁸ In the arena of politics, fostering a positive, powerful, and winning sense of self through dress is challenging for women. Choosing an appropriate outfit is burdensome, often riddled with anxiety and ambivalence. The more formal and conservative the occupation, the more constraints are laid upon the body.

Women on Capitol Hill have historically faced obstacles when transitioning into the "boys' club," and their dress reflects this tension. As Givhan pointed out in *The Washington Post* article about Clinton's "sartorial faux pas," women in Congress were not allowed to wear pants on the Senate floor until the early '90s.⁹ As Clinton dared to show a trace of her femininity at the podium, her discreet décolletage became a spectacle primed for ridicule. "Cleavage Gate" illustrates the way in which "dress is part of the micro-order of social interaction and intimately connected to our (rather fragile) sense of self, which is, in turn, threatened if we fail for conform to the standards governing a particular social situation."¹⁰



It is arguable that Clinton tried to walk the difficult gender tightrope in order to enhance her potential presidential profile. For psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, "The individual is a willing participant, driven by the need for integration. The body as image is central to this need, and clothing is a way of achieving this."¹¹ Using dress as a tool, Clinton hoped to communicate how, as a woman in politics, she could integrate femininity, strength, intelligence, and ambition to position herself as the stronger candidate. When her intended message failed, she became a subject of derision for Givhan:

*To display cleavage ... requires that a woman be utterly at ease in her skin, coolly confident about her appearance, unflinching about her sense of style. Any hint of ambivalence makes everyone uncomfortable. And in matters of style, Clinton is as noncommittal as ever.*¹²

According to Givhan, it is not Clinton's cleavage but her "noncommittal" approach to its presentation that is grounds for fashion shame.

Because fashion traditions limit men to the ubiquitous business suit, it is often women in politics who are left to make the critical decisions about how to dress. For women like Clinton, decisions about dress can affect the vote; consequently, they are always under the press' microscope concerning their fashion choices. Clinton has demonstrated ambivalence about how to present a gender balanced identity. This anxiousness was reflected in her fashion choice on July 20, 2007, and was noticeably exploited by fashion critic Robin Givhan. Hillary Clinton's long-troubled relationship with her sartorial image provides a meaningful insight into fashioned gender expression in American politics.

FASHION IS...

Styl




PERSONAL

- you choose it.
- makes a personal statement
- Reasons for style choices are complex, often private
- You own it.
- Self-fashioning, DIY, "house clothes"

POLITICAL



- people see it. oo
- makes a statement
- who's in? who's out?  Judgements are made, regardless of weaver's intent
- It's in the public domain.
- Fashion doesn't let you abstain—never beyond or outside of the fashion system. (Wilson?)

if I get dressed in a forest, and no one sees me, is it fashion?!

BOTH/AND à la KAISER
(Fashion & Cultural Studies)

FASHION'S 15%

A PERFORMANCE ON MATERIAL WASTE

Susana Aguirre

15% is a micro-simulation of the industrialized process of making t-shirts. The project centers on a performance by Janelle Abbot, a Parsons graduate who spent 26 days, from morning to night, making t-shirts from start to finish, one after another. The exhibit provided a sanitized glimpse at the global garment industry that employs millions of women, men, and children, for the most part under poor working conditions. The installation became a chance for the performer and audience to engage, by way of active participation, with the human and wasteful dimensions embedded, yet hidden, in much of our everyday clothing. 15% was created by Finnish artist Salla Salin and Timo Rissanen, Assistant Professor of Fashion Design and Sustainability at Parsons The New School for Design. The installation also took place in Helsinki and Washington D.C.

On her first day performing in New York, Janelle takes out a black notepad that accompanied her in Helsinki, where she clocked in 70 days of production/performance. She flips through the pages, arriving at the last one she had written on, which simply reads: "Done." Below it, Janelle begins to write:

(NOT)

11.11.13

DAY 71



Armed with humor, passion and delicate focus, Janelle talks me through the performance on the day she produced t-shirt #200 (for a cumulative 406 including those made in Helsinki), a milestone in her extraordinary yet draining career as a maker of tees. 15%, she explains, refers to the average amount of fabric waste generated when making a garment in the industrial process. In this performance, that 15% of fabric "waste" is no longer conceptualized as such. It is made protagonist when packaged along with the tee in a similar manner a purchase is packaged at a boutique. To reunite the residual fabric with the finalized t-shirt becomes an opportunity to envision a useful "life" for the sum of all pieces. At the culmination of the exhibit, visitors take the gift home in exchange for a promise of investing, time or otherwise, in a charity of their choosing.

Janelle picks out the pattern for a size small t-shirt from her corner supply station and lays it on the fabric. With disciplined serenity, she outlines the pattern with the smallest sliver of a triangle tailors chalk. She sets pieces of the t-shirt aside by the sewing machine. First, she will take care of the leftover fabric. Janelle charmingly arranges the scraps atop black tissue paper, creating an evolving narrative around them. The offcut scrap that materializes from cutting the neck of the t-shirt is a half circle that Janelle imagines as "a sunrise," while the L-shaped scraps that emerge from cutting the sides of the tee are wings "ready to take off." When visitors wander in, perhaps bitten by curiosity after peeking through the gallery's floor-to-ceiling window facing Fifth Avenue, they are met with this seeming absurdity; the audience is forced to acknowledge the material presence of fabric waste.



As she performs, Janelle constantly thinks about the people—"the comrades out there"—who do this for a living day in and day out. To visitors, she talks about the millions who are "enslaved around the world making t-shirts you can buy for \$5.99." She speaks with abrupt sincerity as if anxious for the public to come to terms with our lack of awareness and action against the widespread inhumane conditions in the garment industry. But in those quiet moments when it becomes Janelle and the repetitive production process, reality interferes with performance. The challenge to prepare mind and body for hours on end of labor; the sense of solitude, and moments of losing sight of direction and purpose; those moments of doubt and self-reflection proved overwhelming for Janelle, to the point where she orchestrated a short-lived, one-person strike midway through the piece. It was an instinctual reaction that exposed the human quality of the performance, the vulnerabilities that can emerge behind a sewing machine.

ESTADOS UNIDOS DE...
LUCIA CUBA



"Estados unidos de..." transposes three narratives of forcefully sterilized women in China, the United States and Peru. The repercussions of China's One-Child Policy, North Carolina's Eugenics Program and the Surgical Voluntary Birth Control Program implemented mainly in Andean communities of Peru are brought together critically, their domains inscribed and conversed in three garments that create a single visible body of contexts marked by State violence, discrimination and stigma, the extreme disregard of minorities and women's voices, and the manipulation of the female body.

The project uses weaving as the main media to build these garments, allowing for critical and cross-cultural dialogues represented through specific fibers, construction techniques, and design approaches. The fibers used include cotton from the United States, silk from China, and alpaca from Peru. These textiles serve to reference the social and geographical location of the cases narrated through the clothing. The three bodies are built with an "open line" in the back, emphasizing a condition of vulnerability and the bodily implications of the "patient's gown" —a garment used to access, examine, and "care" for a body in the context of power and hierarchy — each garment highlights a typical dress-form from the context and time in which the cases took place.

This work aims to trigger multidimensional and translocal dialogues around issues of gender, strength, and politics, enabling an expanded understanding of the condition of women from across different cultures and their political bodies in the world today.

These narratives have been edited and condensed from news articles and human rights reports.

PERU

At 33 years old, she was a mother of seven children. The public Health Center began subjecting her to harassment in 1996, pushing her to undergo a sterilization procedure. She and her husband were subject of a series of visits made by health providers, threatening to turn them to the police if they refused to have the procedure, and insisting that the government had dictated a law that specified that persons that had more than five kids would pay a fine and be taken to jail. She was sterilized on March 27, 1998 at the Regional Hospital in Cajamarca, without having been examined previously, and discharged 24 hours later. In the days that followed, her husband informed the public Health Center about his wife's deteriorating health, but he was told that these could be side effects of the anesthesia she was administered during the procedure. She passed away in her home on April 5, 1998.





CHINA

She was reportedly found dead, hanging from a wire atop a stairwell with her neck nearly severed. Though officially ruled as a suicide, heavy bruising on her body led some to suspect that the 42-year-old woman was murdered at the family-planning office, and, as a result, her death was made to look like a self-inflicted hanging. A Chinese newspaper reports that she was first sterilized in 1995, but that operation had failed. The paper also said she was then "dragged and forced to undergo a second surgery" by the local Family Planning Commission. She reportedly experienced chronic pain from the procedures for years, and was known to repeatedly petition the family-planning office to pay for pain medication that would offer her relief. On March 13, 2013 she left home to petition the office for relief. She never returned.

UNITED STATES

She remembers every detail of what happened to her in 1965, despite daily efforts to forget. She had a choice to make, and it was a wrenching decision for an 18-year-old who had just given birth to her first child. Her options? Sign a form from the Eugenics Board of North Carolina "consenting" to be sterilized, or have welfare payments for her mother and six brothers and sisters cut off. "To sit and think about it literally eats you - slow, real slow. It eats you piece by piece," she says. "That's why I don't want to go back there. Because it's a hell within a hell that you going through. It's like a cancer that eats." She is still trying to make sense of what happened. "Why me? That's what I want to know. Why me?" she asks. "Why you want to bother me?"





MADE IN AMERICA?

The following series of articles explore the controversy surrounding the label 'Made in America.' In an increasingly unstable political and economic world, American consumers seek comfort in the mythology of their nation mediated through clothing. American companies are currently presented with an unsavory reality: the international economy is dedicated to producing cheap garments fast, while the domestically appealing 'local' sourcing of textiles tends to be slow and costly. Denim particularly materializes the stability of the past, infusing the cloth with the power to restore both this balance and the fledgling American textile industry. Textile and garment production become politicized as nationalism is reasserted. Nostalgia leads to action.



Christina Frank

Unionmade, a men's boutique in San Francisco, opened on the border between the Castro and Mission neighborhoods in 2009. Their shelves are stocked with Levi's jeans, chambray shirts, and indigo dyed clothing that creates an aesthetic of nostalgic workwear. Each garment that is for sale has description of the product's origin and fabrication carefully outlined. Although the shop is called Unionmade, it does not actually specialize in selling goods made by unions. Only a few of their products (less than 6%) are made by union workers, and the employees of the store are not part of a union. It took nearly three years for whistleblowers to descend on the deceptively titled operation.

In 2012, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations demanded that the store change its logo, which pictured an image of two hands shaking—an icon uncomfortably similar to the logo used by the union itself. The incidental discovery of the store by the AFL-CIO represents a clear intersection between the worlds of fashion and politics while demonstrating incompatibility between the languages of both.

Before opening the store, owner Todd Barket worked as a creative director for Gap and Old Navy. Creating Unionmade was a way for Barket and his partner Carl Chiara, a former senior designer at Levi's, to move away from working within a corporate structure. Unlike many major retail stores like Gap, much of the stock at Unionmade is produced by American workers and attention is paid to the sourcing of materials. In one interview, Chiara equated this sensibility with the growing interest in sustainable and local foods.² The store owners maintained that the name of their shop was not intended to be a political reference. They describe the name as "a signifier of well-made and aesthetically timeless goods."³ The story of Unionmade appeared on several websites and caused significant backlash. Unions, and their supporters, found the store's explanation of their name to be offensive.

In choosing the name of their store, however, the owners of Unionmade initiated a political conversation that they had to take on. In an interview with Peter Dreier of the *Huffington Post*, owner Todd Barket was quoted as saying "it had nothing to do with unions, I'm surprised that people took the name literally." Unions, like the AFL-CIO, found it unthinkable that anyone would use the moniker as a means to sell fashion.

Yet the store's very existence highlights a variety of issues beyond the controversial name and logo. The nostalgia for work wear is significant in a city filled with many young people who are making millions by designing tech gadgets. The longing for beautiful handmade or craft goods is understandable from a culture that is faced with the unfortunate form and function of products like Google Glass. The popularity of the men's styles seen at Unionmade reflects a desire to reject the isolating laptop lifestyle and conjure the masculinity and coalition associated with physical work. This trend of glorification of work wear links back to the dress practices of the Beat Generation in the 1950s and the idealized masculinity of Castro gays in the 70s, both movements with strong San Francisco roots.

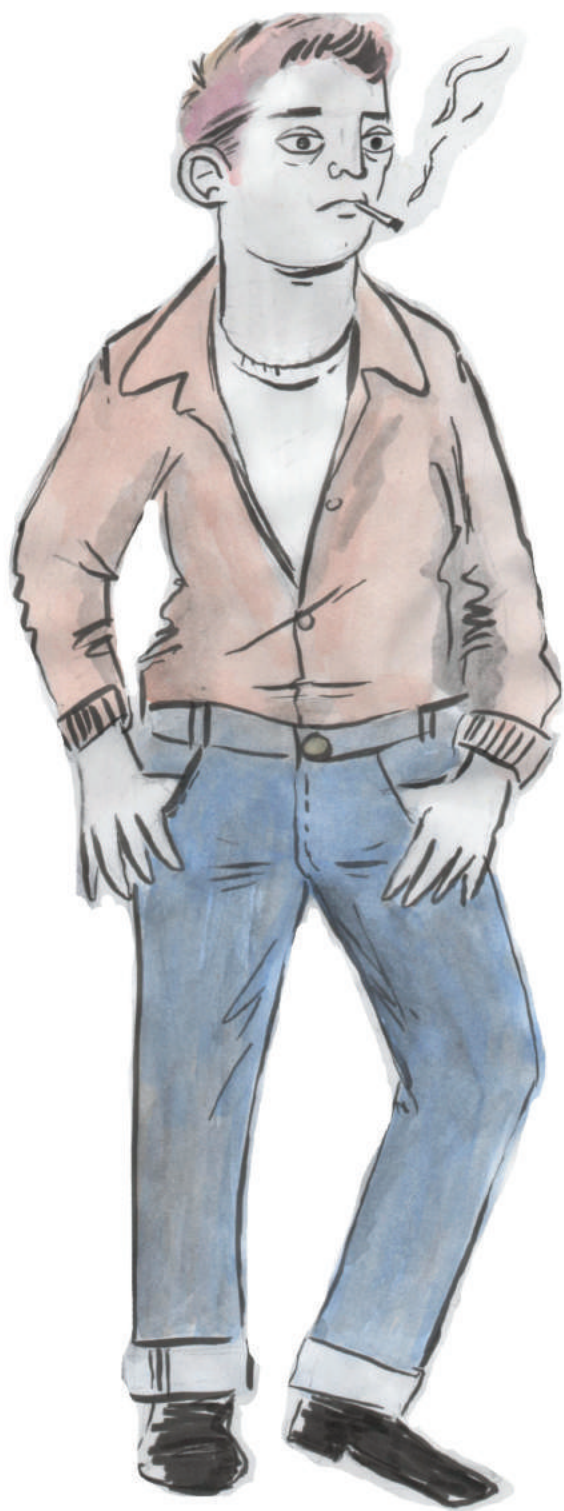
Unionmade uses a connection to American nostalgia to sell their fashionable clothing. However, whatever the original intention may have been its name and products connect the owners and the consumer to a political discourse. In the end, the store's name remained, but the logo was discontinued.

AMERICAN DENIM / AMERICAN DREAMS

Laurie Cone

Denim has become a global fabric, but is still viewed as an essentially American textile due to the rich heritage of the denim myth in popular consciousness. Brands like Levi's have promoted jeans in a very deliberate way, creating a conscious narrative that ties together denim with patriotism, authenticity, and the working-class roots of America. Popular visual culture mediums of photography and film are also contributors in the construction of the denim myth. Advertising for jeans has always drawn heavily on this mythological past of the cowboy on the frontier and the blue-collar worker operating the machine. For the 2009 Levi's "Go Forth" campaign, these archetypes of the cowboy and the worker were summoned, standing under bold taglines such as "I am the new American pioneer," "This country was not built by men in suits," and, "For those who toil." Images of people running across unbounded land wearing jeans clearly reference the heritage of American denim and the American dream.

Despite the contemporary emphasis on this nationalistic past, statistically denim production occurs largely off of American soil. The Office of Textiles and Apparel within the Department of Commerce cites that a mere two percent of jeans sold in the USA in 2012 were manufactured in the country.¹



Furthermore, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics claims that the staggering percentage of overseas production and imports in the denim industry has resulted in the loss of 270,000 manufacturing jobs between 2001 and 2010.² In response to the current state of the denim industry, there has been both a measured return of American denim manufacturing in the United States and a deliberate promotion of American-made denim by a niche group of designers, such as Flint & Tinder and Imogene & Willie. These manufacturers are interested in reclaiming parts of America's past while regenerating the domestic workforce. As a result, a cult of authenticity around American-made denim has arisen.

American-made denim appeals to consumers because of its resonance with culturally engrained ideas of national iconography and heritage. Consumer attention has shifted beyond the product to the manufacturing process. Contemporary American-made denim is alluring partly because it is produced locally, invoking feelings of re-established patriotism and environmental responsibility. American-made denim is also suffused with a sense of nostalgia for its cultural lineage, and pride in the resurgence of livelihoods from the return of innovative domestic manufacturing. When one wears American-made jeans, they are not only embodying the mythological past, but also championing local production and questioning the need for change.



AUTHENTICITY + THE AMERICAN OLYMPIC UNIFORM

Maureen Brewster

At the unveiling of the 2012 Team U.S.A. Olympic uniforms, there was an immediate outcry not over Ralph Lauren's athletic and trendy designs, but over the three little words that often go unnoticed on many a garment tag: "Made In China." With election-year political tensions running high and the state of the domestic economy unmistakably low, the revelation of the uniforms' international origins was interpreted by U.S. lawmakers as contradictory to the designer's intended message of American exceptionalism and authenticity, as well as an affront to the nation's struggling manufacturing industry.¹

When the 2014 Sochi Games snowboarding team uniforms were debuted, Vermont-based company Burton Snowboards was similarly criticized for producing the garments outside American borders—this time in Italy, Vietnam, Japan and Taiwan. With this disclosure, the faded patchwork quilt pattern of the jacket has been transformed from a simple nostalgic reference of classic Americana into a much more evocative metaphor for its global origins: the cultural mosaic materialized.

The controversial construction and production of these uniforms raises important questions about the inherent challenges in articulating and fashioning a national identity, particularly in an age of increased brand globalization and transnational production. The belief that the Team U.S.A. uniforms are made invalid and inauthentic by transnational production is reductive, and fails to account for not only the U.S.A.'s longstanding use of international industrial production, but also for a practical manifestation of the values of multicultural unity and cooperation that the Olympic Games—and theoretically the United States—claim to prize over politics.

Further, despite their overtly nationalist designs, the manufacturing of the 2012 and 2014 U.S.A. Olympic uniforms represents a new model of "Americanness" that problematizes pervading stereotypical myths of a monolithic American authenticity, creating instead a transnational fashion identity that more accurately reflects America's postmodern, globalized culture. After all, no matter what the embroidered label may say, no American—or beanie—is an island.

BODY POLITICS

Lea Vene

Marsha Rowe, one of the founders of feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, highlighted the weakest aspect of modern feminism in her recent interview for *Dazed Digital*. As she stated: "Modern feminism focuses quite narrowly on the body and so much anxiety gets centered on the woman's body." ¹

For centuries, the male gaze tended to dominate the female body without allowing for a woman's response. Women as objects of male voyeurism are thought of as "to-be-looked-at-ness" and not given an active role. The 1960s feminist slogan "the personal is political" encapsulated the work of many female performance artists, who insisted on raising political awareness while, at the same time, stressing the autobiographical nature of their performances. These works reflected the politics of a common lived experience and of female biology. Used as a unifying element, the naked female body becomes a literal and metaphorical site for performance art. That body, as the essence of femininity, was seen as a universal language accessible to every woman.

However, Lucy R. Lippard noticed that naked bodies in female performances, as exemplified in the work of Carolee Schneemann or Hannah Wilke, tended to reaffirm hegemonic beauty and cultural standards. From a materialist feminist perspective, the female body cannot be reduced to a sign liberated from connotation; the body will always be gender-marked. The de-eroticization of the female body is one possible strategy of resistance to objectification and bio-cultural stereotypes. The naked body of artist Frida Kahlo, for example, can be read as a site of subjective experience and pain rather than a trigger for the male gaze.

Canadian photographer Petra Collins reignited mainstream attention to these issues and representations of female bodies when her t-shirt design for American Apparel incited controversy across the internet and beyond. The "Period Power" t-shirt features a feminized hand touching a vagina that is gushing blood. Around the same time, the popular photo app Instagram blocked her account after she posted a photo of herself from the waist down wearing a bathing suit with an unshorn bikini line. She responded with a poignant open letter published in the online version of *Oyster Magazine*, expressing her outrage at the dominant representations of female bodies and sexuality.



Collins insists on the affirmation of women's perspectives on female sexuality in her own artistic practice and through *The Ardorous*, an art collective of young female artists and creative professionals that she curates. Her photography is marked by a documentary-like snapshot aesthetic as she captures moments in the everyday life of young women and she has curated shows that explore issues of identity and sexuality in the context of femininity. In the media she has been portrayed as a representative of 21st-century Girl Power: self-confident, critical, and creative.

Karley Sciortino, author of the blog *Slutever*, singles out Collins's work as an example of a new wave of feminism that is using the body as a tool of provocation and seduction. Today, the subversive and critical potential of the body, especially the female body, is increasingly dubious. Women's bodies are systematically re-appropriated by mass media and fashion, which transform a potentially subversive material into a product that circulates almost exclusively as visual stimulus.

While Collins's work responds and offers an alternative to phallocentric narratives of the female body, her photography is visually coded to that of fashion photography seen in magazines such as *Dazed and Confused*, *Purple* magazine, *Garage* or *i-D*. Therefore, when looking at her work, it can be hard to see an overt feminist agenda. Despite her self-proclaimed intentions, her collaboration with American Apparel is complicated by the company's coopting of visual culture and use of objectifying images in their advertising. In this instance, female nudity is transformed into capital and its commodification only perpetuates the processes of female objectification while encouraging material and visual consumption.

PLEDGING ALLEGIANCE:
POLITICS OF DRESS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC
Ann Jacoby

At the turn of the nineteenth century, an autonomous American nation was born, brimming with expectations of a prosperous future. Together, the American people set out to author a national image, or visual representation, that would convey the ideologies of their democratic identity and support the political philosophies that they intended to implement. In establishing core principles for their national subsistence, Americans sought ideas of moral virtue, self-government, and corporate integrity – ideals that had little or lost meaning to the monarchical countries across Europe. The cultivation of such principles in American society cannot be credited solely upon martial victory, but to the everyday practices that occurred within their culture in the formative years; dress serving as one of the most legible and strongly politicized agents of influence on national identity.

The national dress of the American republic, to be styled according to national principle, was weighted considerably upon the female population. Nineteenth-century women, who had limited power elsewhere in society, were at the helm of fashion and textile production in the early American state. Although they were disenfranchised from important political activities like voting, women found alternative ways to contribute to the development of politics and culture, particularly through the creation, consumption, and subsequent display of clothing. Women of the working classes participated in national movements toward "homespun" fibers and textiles, promoting American autonomy from European imports. Upper class women, who had access

to fashionable dress, used their wardrobe and prominence in society to transgress political spaces and fashion an image they saw fit for the American population. That did not always mean that the image projected was one of wholesome American character. With women's materially-driven license to contribute to the merging national identity came the fear that the pursuit of fashionable goods would lead to a worldly society. By juxtaposing a selection of features that characterized the potential threats of fashion (opulence, luxury) with the foundations of American democracy (virtue, simplicity), one can argue cases in which national identities conflicted with sartorial taste.

One select female figure of the early American republic provides a narrative punctuated by a wardrobe that audaciously proved to be an opposing force to national character formation. Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte, born in 1785 to a wealthy merchant family in Maryland, lived a life of inimitable curiosity. She was the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte's youngest brother, Jerome, giving her a name in Europe beyond the celebrity status she achieved in America. Her yearning for a life of title in European society was not only expressed privately in letters to her confidants but was also expressed publicly through her distinct imitation and application of French dress.

Fashionable French dress for women at the turn of the century was characterized by its neoclassical style of sheer, loose-fitting, and empire-waist gowns. The French women who sported these fashions exposed shocking amounts of bare skin from the arms to the chest and the back. Whereas most fashionable American women would engage in this trend on a more modest scale, those like Elizabeth,



who adopted it in its daringly authentic French style, pointed to the disgraceful desire of American women to attract attention by way of body-baring fashions, showcasing a penchant for "the gaudy tinsel of the empty coxcomb" instead of the "solid merit" of republican society.¹ Had the qualities of French fashion been less revealing or more attuned to American standards of politics and social life, perhaps her image would not have garnered such heated criticisms by her shocked peers.

Drawing on the symbolic power of dress, Elizabeth's sartorial behavior drew widespread attention as the American country to which she was natively linked and the European societies she emulated greatly differed in government and cultural sensibilities. Her image, formed by fashionable dress, helped to define American identity – not through the form of a model citizen but through a discordant appearance. Her kinship to America yet alliance to Europe visibly clashed, contested American character, and threatened the pursuit of democracy.

Unlike ideal figures of American republicanism like Abigail Adams, who strengthened the future of American democracy by increasing women's roles and education through the awareness of republican motherhood, or Dolley Madison, who encouraged an image of modest refinement, Elizabeth's dress choices defined American character by determining what the national image would *not* endorse – European nobility and unwarranted opulence, deemed by American patriots to be the precursors to a corrupted state.

Elizabeth's patrician manners exemplify the country's struggle and continual effort to designate appropriate standards for a markedly American culture. The controversy and recurrent publicity of her dress practices not only proved its importance to the social and cultural developments of that time but also allow us to conceptualize fashion as an incongruous performative act of both individual citizenship and collective national identity. Her distinct relationship to fashion and its bold statement against the conventions of American society make her an example of how fashion and nation are interlinked. Hers is a case worthy of study in that it shows, through example, the distinctive relationship between dress, the configuration of the American polity, and the temperament of national identity. A reflection on these themes leaves us with irrefutable proof of how very vital and meaningful clothing was in the early American state.

without memory, there is no responsibility

*I think about you
sitting there, sewing
waiting for the needle to strike
waiting for the blood to spill out
over this bundle of ten-dollar tops*

*I think about you
third hour past dawn
cutting bolts through
dust filling your throat
trembling with the walls as they buckle
leaving your dreams beneath the rubble*

*I think about you
standing before the loom
watching your feather-light hair
coming into the cloth
and the concave space created so quickly
between scream and scalp*

*I think about you
reaching out for a hand to hold
before the leap towards the street
as the flames from the shirtwaist fed fire
laugh at your back*

*the bell sounds
turning you back to hide in these hems
silencing you again as a trace of history*

*the sallow light calls
summoning me back to the sidewalk
with empty hands
to return to my wardrobe
of ten tattered rags*

exit | voice | loyalty

for years

*I chose to exit, haunted by you
paralyzed by a vow to clothe with compassion
but now I hear your whispers
asking for my voice*



BEVERLY JOHNSON:
En Vogue and Beyond
Erika T. Butler

In August of 1974, Beverly Johnson was the first model of African descent to appear on the cover of *American Vogue*. The historical significance of Johnson's *Vogue* cover and its impact as a groundbreaking moment for African-American and black fashion models within the mainstream, Eurocentric fashion system has yet to be adequately explored within the field of fashion studies. Johnson's August cover—and the political current within which it appeared—presented a turning point in perceptions of African-American beauty as represented through both white and African-American fashion media. These mediated perceptions, materialized in the products of the fashion and beauty industries, contribute to the larger American historical narrative of racial exclusion and the struggle for inclusion.

Why was Johnson's presence on the cover of *Vogue* so groundbreaking? Much of it lies in the fact that, since its inception in 1892, no woman of African descent had ever graced the magazine's cover. In other words, it took 82 years for the prestigious fashion publication to endorse and, consequently, validate the beauty of African-American women. Prior to this, the American fashion system operated—like most other American industries at the time—by catering to an audience that was overwhelmingly made up of middle to upper class white Americans. African-American women, therefore, were largely left out of fashion media until the '60s, when the social and political climate of the Civil Rights era incited change in many of America's industries and corporations. Moreover, the mediated images of African-Americans that were being printed prior to



VOGUE

AUG.
\$1

© 1990

our American-look issue

what you wear with what

how to put the great
new separates together

the super new accessories
that make everything work—
head to toe

at last!
wonderful skirts are back

your makeup
your hair
ways you'll want to look this fall

good health, good skin,
relaxation, vigor—all in the bath

**find your own
best looks**
play our surprise
clip-and-flip-the-pages game

get the most out of your summer:
tips from famous trend-setters

**urgent advice on
lifetime health care**

this time reproduced derogatory, stereotypical images of "blackness" that have been a part of the "Negro" narrative throughout American history. As historian Laila Haidarali writes:

The legacy of stereotyping African American women as desexualized Mammies, oversexualized Jezebels or grotesquely-formed hottentots, combined with atrocious histories of sexual abuse, demanded careful construction of the public representation of [African-American] women as models.¹

In addition to America's institutional racism, which dictated that African-American women were unworthy of attention within mainstream fashion mediation, the historic economic disparity between white and black Americans created a marked delineation between white Americans, who were considered to have "buying power," and African-Americans, who were not. As the fashion industry is predicated upon the practice of consumerism, the mediation of fashion advertisements targeted those white Americans who, in addition to outnumbering African-Americans, were seen as the main consumer base. As historian Janice M. Cheddie writes in her article "The Politics of the First" (2002):

It is maintained that it was black models' inability to sell consumer goods that emerged as the key factor which stopped their appearance within Anglo-American fashion magazines, prior to the emergence of [model Donyale] Luna in Harper's Bazaar in 1965.²

As Cheddie notes, the economic factor, or the idea that African-American models would not appeal to the majority of fashion consumers, certainly contributed to the exclusion of African-American models from fashion media. Significantly, the combination of economic considerations and the perpetuation of institutional, cultural racism kept African-American models out of the fashion industry. It was also this combination that kept *Vogue*, the quintessential fashion publication, devoid of brown faces for 82 years.³

Before Johnson's *Vogue* appearance, the representation of black women in mainstream (white) fashion and style publications, more generally, was nearly non-existent, as fashion journalist Rod Hagwood notes in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (2009):

*The highlights of black cover girls can be condensed into one paragraph: Donyale Luna was the first black model to appear on the cover of British Vogue in 1966 and . . . Naomi Sims was the first black model on the cover of Ladies' Home Journal in 1968. Naomi Campbell integrated Vogue Paris in August 1988.*⁴

While Naomi Campbell's cover of Parisian *Vogue* was the first of its kind for that particular publication, her cover was not the first for a black model in the European market. As Hagwood confirms, "Europe had been using black models on the cover of magazines for years before American *Vogue*. But in the U.S., Beverly's cover was a way for other mainstream [American] magazines to take a risk to put a black model on the cover."⁵ What is the "risk" which Hagwood

refers to? America's volatile history of the oppression of its African-American citizens created a climate for the fashion industry that was distinct (though not singular) from that of most European markets. For *Vogue* to suddenly exalt the African-American woman which had, for centuries, been dismissed as unworthy, ugly, lewd, and bestial, was not only politically risky—it also flirted with the danger of bankruptcy if white consumers had responded by boycotting the publication. This danger of the use of an African-American cover model, then, is intimately connected to America's history of the oppression of African-Americans and, in 1974—post-Civil Rights and in the midst of the Black Power movement—the cultural moment was one that had produced increased attention on African-American life in the United States.

Beverly Johnson's *Vogue* cover, therefore, was not an isolated instance of racial inclusion on the part of the fashion industry. It came about within a climate of social and political change, and as a result of the many decades that African-American women had spent fighting for equality and promoting a new image of American beauty—their own image. These historical realities became particularly relevant for Beverley Johnson when, following the release of *Vogue*'s August 1974 issue, she found herself thrust into the efforts of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement. She "became a poster child for the American civil rights movement... her name mentioned in the same breath as that of the Rev. Jesse Jackson (who was, all of a sudden, calling her to discuss race relations in America)."⁶ With her *Vogue* cover, Johnson had infiltrated fashion's ivory tower and, as a result, the face of black beauty confronted the consistent upholding of European standards of beauty.

As Hagwood notes, Beverly Johnson's cover was about more than *Vogue* and it was larger than fashion—it represented mainstream affirmation of the beauty of African-American women:

[The significance of Johnson's cover] was about mainstreaming black beauty. Just a year later, Diana Ross starred in Mahogany as an international cover girl. And the following years saw the rise of Pat Cleveland and Alva Chinn as catwalk queens in New York and Europe.'

Johnson positioned herself within the discourse of beauty aesthetics by embodying characteristics that had historically been abhorred by the mainstream media, presenting both the fashion world and American culture with a different image of beauty. The significance of this representation is, ultimately, that the politics of race and fashion leading up to her 1974 *Vogue* cover provided a unique opportunity for Johnson to transcend those cultural boundaries and to become a historical fashion icon who positively impacted American culture.

DISRUPTING ILLUSIONS

Alessandro Esculapio

A fashionable woman lying in the street. Glamorous shoes peeking out from rubble. Passers-by gaze at the scene with perplexed eyes. Yolanda Domínguez's performance art piece *Fashion Victims* disrupted the everyday routine on the streets of Madrid. The collective performance, an "urban action" to identify the "real fashion victims" according to Domínguez's website, followed the events of Rana Plaza in Dhaka, Bangladesh when more than 1,100 textile workers died after a factory building collapsed due to structural problems.¹ Despite regular inspections, the building violated security standards, as the four upper floors had been constructed illegally.

For several days after the April 2013 incident, the media was inundated with images of people trapped in debris, crying desperately, looking for their missing relatives. It happened far away, but consumers worldwide felt partly responsible. In our silent wardrobes, clothes made by those hands were hanging, reminding us that we, too, are fast fashion consumers. The victims were the workers that made garments for brands such as Mango, Primark and Benetton. Benetton spokesman, Luca Biondolillo, later denied the group's connections with the factory despite a document retrieved by labor activists that read otherwise.² But as media coverage trailed off in the weeks following, the public seemed to have forgotten about the tragedy. We had archived the events in the back of our minds after several CEOs and spokespeople of these fast fashion companies stated that they would compensate the relatives of the victims, somehow making it all better.

Dominguez and her performance remind us of a notion that is often translated as a mere spectacle of desperation in the media: humanity. To see a fashionable dresser under rubble in the streets of a European capital reminds us that we, too, could be those Bangladeshi victims- that their bodies are our bodies; fast fashion consumers are just lucky enough to have been born in a different country. Further, by staging *Fashion Victims* in front of the shops of the retailers that sourced their production from the factory in Rana Plaza, the artist called for a responsible and conscious approach to shopping and consumption. Anyone entering those stores that day would have to walk past the rubble....As Dominguez stated in a 2013 interview for Evangelische Omroep, the performance was an invitation to consumers to read the labels of our clothes before we purchase them, revealing the past that that we are becoming complicit in.

Dominguez's public performances have often dealt with other problematic aspects of the fashion industry; gender representations, the male gaze, social justice, and the cultural construction of the body are among the themes explored in her pieces. The social focus of her works puts her within a tradition of feminist performance art that has sought to bring forward women's perspectives on their role in society. The fashion industry and the garments it produces constitute a platform pregnant with possibilities; however, artists' positions with regard to the role of fashion in women's representation are sometimes left unclear, especially as fashion houses have increasingly become key-supporters of the arts.

Dominguez's work has nothing ambiguous about its political intents. She problematizes the representation of women in fashion with a radical approach. In her performances *Pose N°5* (2013) and *Poses* (2011), the artist had anonymous women pose in various streets around the world as if they were in fashion campaigns. The women were posing in everyday scenarios – whether in a queue, on a bench or in the middle of a square – in the same way that high fashion models do, highlighting the artificiality and the passivity of the depiction of women in much of fashion photography. The reactions of passers-by, just as in the case of *Fashion Victims*, was the most important part of the performance: many looked bewildered, some even tried to interact with the women, worried about their health or condition. *Pose N°5*, inspired by Chanel's 2013 Spring/Summer campaign shot by Karl Lagerfeld, was especially relevant since in 2009 Lagerfeld stated that the women criticizing the size of the average model were "fat mummies sitting with their bags of crisps in front of the television."³ The performance showed that "fat mummies" are also able to take up the public space and speak back to designers in denial about the industry's issues.

While visual representations such as photographs and magazine spreads are an important part of fashion, without its primary materials like textiles and threads, fashion would cease to exist. Some of Dominguez's pieces approach the material aspects of fashion. An early example of this is her 2010 street performance *Begging for a Chanel*, in which an actress started begging passers-by for money to purchase a Chanel bag in front of the brand's boutique in Madrid.



After a simulated nervous breakdown, the actress took a piece of cardboard and wrote "I BEG FOR A CHANEL" on it with red lipstick. Some of the people walking by did not take her seriously and reacted with scorn, but others gave her money. Brand obsession, shopping addiction, and a quasi-religious yearning to own a Chanel bag to hold it as if it were a magical talisman were ripped out of the private realm of desire and fully disclosed in public, causing anxiety and discomfort to the unaware audience.

In 2012, Dominguez collaborated with Spanish designer Sara Ostos to create her installation *Slaves*, which consisted of a small collection of garments created from burkas. Using the burka as a starting point, the installation juxtaposed the religious covering with corsets and other revealing Western garments.

According to the artist, much of Western clothing is as limiting as the burka is sometimes perceived to be because Western fashion forcibly imposes a perception of what a woman should look like. In this sense, both the burka and Western body-revealing clothing are sartorial impositions, produced by cultures that are, and often remain, patriarchal. *Slaves* shows how the body, specifically the female body, can become a preferential site of cultural control and power, regardless of geographic locale.

Performance art and fashion share many qualities including ephemerality, the central role of the body, a connection with the public space, and the presence of an audience. The role of clothing in performance art is so relevant that Anthony Howell, in his seminal text *The Analysis of Performance Art*, dedicated an entire chapter to this relationship entitled "Being Clothing."⁴ Reciprocally, the importance of performance in fashion is undeniable, not only on the runway, but also in our everyday lives. The disruption of mundane illusions of the fashion system created by Domínguez's work carries a unique value in our contemporary understanding of fashion as a cultural phenomenon; the artist's performances are an invitation to open our eyes to see "fashion," and all its trappings, in its entirety, and not in isolation as we often do. As the sign at Domínguez's 2012 show in at the Rojo Artspace in Milan read: "*Svegliati!*" or "Wake Up!".



A Short Note on the Political Aims of the Current State of Fashion

Ralf Wronsov

Secretary of State, The Current State of Fashion
Released by The Office of the Spokesperson/
Department of State

Global fashion today exists in a lawless state, with a surplus of cheap copies of horrible quality. It is a chaotic situation, similar to the "state of nature" which Thomas Hobbes noted to be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." In resonance with Hobbes, Karl Lagerfeld, one of today's greatest philosophers of fashion (and honorary citizen of The Current State of Fashion), has expounded how fashion is "ephemeral, dangerous and unfair." There is today an urgent need to administer fashion under the rule of law. As concerned fashionistas, we have assembled under the constitution of The Current State of Fashion.

The days of fashion tyranny dictated from Paris are finally over. We live in times where there are so many different accessible fashions that overlap, it may seem as if "anything goes". Yet, fast fashion and cheap consumerism are so ubiquitous that today nobody can opt out of the sociality of fashion. The tyranny of fashion is replaced by what political philosopher Sheldon Wolin

has called the "managed democracy" of "inverted totalitarianism," a corporate-run legitimization of the culture of consumerism where voters are as "predictable as consumers." Fashion may have lost Paris, but it has won the world.

There is a tendency to mainly regard fashion as a mere expression of lifestyle or as symbol. However, fashion is not a way of life in consumer culture, nor is it an identity issue. This needs to be made clear: fashion is an existential threat of the other to my own social well-being. Fashion guides the social relationships between me and other members of consumer culture. It negotiates rank, popularity and human worth in the attention economy. This makes fashion a political weapon in the arena of social warfare. You may be a pacifist, but your clothes are already on the battlefield, and today that theatre is ruled by chaos. There needs to be laws of war and engagement, *Jus in Bello*, upheld by the Laws of Fashion. The Current State of Fashion aims to regulate and "bracket" the social warfare under the rule of law, and establish a more peaceful world order: a *Pax Fashionabla*.

From the State's perspective, fashion is best approached through the lens of controversial German political philosopher Carl Schmitt. Aristotle's claim that man is a political animal, and that the political life is his highest accomplishment, has to Schmitt some drastic implications. In *The Concept of the Political* (1932/1996), he refers to "the political" as the friend/enemy distinction, which is translated in fashion as the foundational demarcation between in/out. To Schmitt, the "friend and enemy concepts are to be understood in their concrete and existential sense, not as metaphors or symbols." On the social arena

we need to take the consequences of Schmitt's argument seriously, as he proposes that the "friend, enemy, and combat concepts [...] refer to the real possibility of physical killing." Thus the politics of fashion have to involve real conflict and the real chance for (social) casualties. A political perspective on fashion must involve interpersonal violence. If there are no enemies, or no hostilities, there are no politics and there is no fashion.

Even if not all political conflicts involve real casualties or physical warfare, Schmitt makes clear that "[w]ar is neither the aim nor the purpose nor even the very content of politics. But as an ever present possibility, it is the leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behavior."⁵ We are thus approaching the brute reality of bullies, harassments, tyranny, and explicit social violence based on sartorial judgments. For Schmitt, the political antagonism should not be seen as personal hatred; instead, the conflict emerges because the enemy threatens the other's way of life, it's an "existential threat to one's own way of life." An overall morality, of tolerance or liberty, only breeds more hostility. The ancient ideal of a cosmopolis, a community embracing all "humanity," is a pacifist fiction: "whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat." The current situation of overlapping and confusing styles and seemingly parallel fashions may conceal some of the immanent conflicts of fashion, and the "democratization" of fashion may indeed seem "humanitarian." Yet, it is nothing but a masking of the necessarily cruel nature of fashion.



To Schmitt, power is the domination of the strong over the weak. This is indeed the aim of politics itself: to rule. Withdrawal from politics is a sure sign of defeat or even annihilation. Fashion that does not seek to rule is weak and will disappear. It will lack distinction and popularity and thus be annihilated and purged from the social realm. This is the cruel reality of fashion.

Schmitt reveals how liberalism is based on a perception that man is intrinsically good and seeks compromise. A similar view today would argue that consumer society disarms social conflict, and fashion theorist Gilles Lipovetsky even argues that fashion is part of such social pacification endeavor (1994) and thus defuses hatred and enmity. However, Schmitt would argue the contrary: "all genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil." If Lagerfeld argues that fashion is "ephemeral, dangerous and unfair," Schmitt would add that fashion needs to be so.

Yet, of course, the everyday fashionista refuses to see the blood on his hands, and wishes for an apolitical fashion. It may be of no surprise that leading fast fashion chains and a neutral aesthetic emerge from Sweden, a pacifist, socialist, and petit bourgeois nation of revisionists. Like the bourgeois, the fashionista is afraid of conflict and clings to the safe ground of possessions and the shielded consumption of mainstream fashion. As Schmitt argues:

The bourgeois is an individual who does not want to leave the apolitical riskless private sphere. He rests in the possession of his private property, and under the justification of his possessive individualism he acts as an individual against the totality.

The Current State of Fashion seeks to administer the rule of fashion in a peaceful manner through a social contract of fashion. As our constitution says:

We the People of the Current State of Fashion, in Order to form a more perfect sociality, establish The Concept of Fashion, insure global commitment to Consumerism, provide for the common Defense of the popular, promote Welfare for the few, and secure the Blessings of Possessions to ourselves and next season's Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Current State of Fashion.

We cannot liberate ourselves from fashion, and neither should we. A world free from fashion would be depoliticized, making social life meaningless and merely dulled and distanced entertainment. We must recognize fashion's power, celebrate it by consuming more and thus advance its influence on the social arena in order to further our own rights to be the popular, the beautiful, and the included.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that fashion violence is usually a weaponized flanking maneuver. A comment on someone's clothes seems to attack personal style, but it aims to strike at the soul of the wearer. Every public citizen of consumer society is drawn into its crossfire. You may be invested in neither fashion nor politics, but fashion and politics are invested in you. You better be dressed to kill.

We welcome you to submit to the laws of fashion and apply for visa to visit The Current State of Fashion.

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WHAT DOES FREEDOM LOOK LIKE?

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South Africa

Page 20: Floyd, co-creator of *The Smarteez*

Photographer: Peter Z Jones, Creative Director: Chun-Mui Miller, Art Direction: Mai-Lei Pecorari

Concept Design: Sophie Lan Hou

NYC

Photographer: Sophie Lan Hou, Production Team: Taylor Kuhn, June West

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FASHION'S 15% *Image of Bag by Salla Salin, Image of Janelle by Susana Aguirre*

ESTADOS UNIDOS DE...

Model Stefania Merea + *Image by Erasmo Wong S. + Garments by Lucia Cuba*

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Seal of the Current State of Fashion

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INSIDE BACK COVER

Pictured Left to Right: Ouigi Theodore of *Brooklyn Circus*; Justice Mukheli of *I See A Different You* (Soweto, SA); Travis Gumb and Josh Kissi of *Street Etiquette* (NYC); Innocent Mukheli of *I See A Different You*; Sam & Shaka of *Art Comes First* (London, BC). Photographer: Peter Z Jones, Creative Director: Chun-Mui Miller, Art Direction: Mai-Lei Pecorari, Concept Design: Sophie Lan Hou.

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