



BOOK REVIEWS

**THE STORIES CLOTHES TELL: VOICES OF WORKING-CLASS JAPAN,
TATSUICHI HORIKIRI (2016), TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY
REIKO WAGONER**

Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Rowman and Littlefield,
206 pp.,

ISBN: 9781442265103, Paperback, \$29.00,

ISBN: 9781442265110, Hardback, \$79.00

Reviewed by Christine M.E. Guth, Independent scholar

The Stories Clothes Tell is the product of over fifty years of collecting interviews carried out by a Japanese historian dedicated to recovering the voices of ordinary people through their material culture. The everyday wear discussed ranges from the functional garments donned by field workers, fishermen, miners and soldiers to the simple cotton costumes of travelling entertainers. Their stories, each one no more than a few pages in length, emerge from Horikiri's close reading of the patching, mending and recycling carried out to extend the lives of these garments, and from his skill in persuading their owners to reveal the often-painful histories they embody. The concluding, deeply affecting story, recounted by an elderly woman, about a short jacket (*hanten*) that she kept beneath the family altar in remembrance of the man who ransomed her from a brothel and whom she subsequently married, is a case in point.

Tatsuichi Horikiri (b.1925) is not a formally trained academic, but a collector and skilful storyteller whose lifework first gained public recognition through his newspaper articles. Each story in this collection was written originally as a standalone piece serialized in a local Japanese newspaper in the 1980s. These pieces were subsequently published in book form in 1990, two years before Horikiri donated his unique collection of more than 3500 items to the Kitakyushu Museum of Natural History in Kagoshima. In her sensitive translation, Reiko Wagoner has wisely reorganized the material to make it more cohesive and give it narrative pace. She has also provided excellent explanatory notes and appendices that help to contextualize each vignette for non-specialist readers. Unfortunately, the text is accompanied by only a limited number of illustrations in black and white, many of them of very poor quality.

Stories about Japan's colonial expansion and war in Asia told through clothing constitute a large part of the book. The opening story about how phys-

ical contact with a cotton *kasuri* (ikat) coverlet made by his mother consoled the author following an unjustified beating by his military superiors sets the tone for both the subjective approach and deeply felt anti-military stance that characterize the collection as a whole. Here as elsewhere, Horikiri underscores his belief that cloth has a special life or spirit that gives it agency to impact on human lives. The celebratory banners displayed when new conscripts were sent off to war prompt the author's reflections on 'forbidden tears': families were expected to maintain a stoic silence in the face of the likely death of their loved ones. His mother's efforts to prepare for her son a special cotton waistband stitched by 1000 women (*senninbari*), that was believed to bring the wearer good luck, prompts a heartfelt critique of the paranoid absurdity of decisions made by the Japanese military authorities: in the final years of the Pacific War, the practice was forbidden for fear 'that enemy spies might be able to estimate the size of the troops from the number of people gathered to do the stitching' (103). The story entitled 'A White Chima Jeogori' recounts Horikiri's friendship with a Korean engineer during his training period as a construction engineer in China. Its catalyst is the author's memories of the traditional Korean outfit that the latter's wife wore in his honour on the occasion of the farewell dinner that the couple hosted when Horikiri was conscripted.

While there are many English-language publications about farmers, fishermen and miners during the early twentieth century, by taking clothes as his starting point, Horikiri throws light on telling, intimate details of grueling family- and work-life overlooked in such conventional histories. How did women forced to return to work immediately after childbirth cope with engorged breasts? What were baby diapers made of and what role did they play in a bride's relationship with her mother-in-law? How did field workers and fishermen cope with only a single work outfit? In addressing such topics, Horikiri is sensitive to both the social inequities faced by the rural poor and the dignity they nonetheless brought to their activities. Although some of the accounts betray a touch of nostalgia, and Horikiri is alert to the danger that the memories of some of his interlocutors may not be entirely reliable, he argues that 'for the masses those "old days" were never good; theirs were an incessant struggle for survival' (5).

In sum, this compendium of 31 vignettes, most of them arising from the author's acquisition of an item of clothing or scrap of fabric during his travels in rural Japan, makes for compelling reading as an alternative to accounts of the development of fashionable urban dress in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Christine Guth led the Asian design history strand in the V&A/RCA History of Design Programme between 2007–16. She has written widely about aspects of the history of collecting, transnational cultural exchange and material culture, particularly in relation to Japan. She is currently working a book tentatively entitled *Making Things: Craft in Early Modern Japan*.

**DRESS HISTORY: NEW DIRECTIONS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE,
CHARLOTTE NICKLAS AND ANNABELLA POLLEN (EDS) (2015, FIRST
EDITION)**

London: Bloomsbury, 215 pp.,
ISBN: 9780857855411, Hardback, £85.00

Reviewed by Lauren Downing Peters, Stockholm University, Sweden

In the preface to Charlotte Nicklas and Annabella Pollen's recent volume, *Dress History: New Directions in Theory and Practice*, dress historian Lou Taylor revisits what she famously referred to as 'the great divide' in her benchmark text, *The Study of Dress History* (2002) – or the fact that there has long existed a rift between object-based dress history and the social and economic study of fashion. Given the global spread of the interdisciplinary and multi-methodological field of fashion studies over the past decade, it is an appropriate place for the editors to begin in order to gauge if and to what extent we have managed to bridge this so-called divide, as well as to assess how we draw disciplinary borders around the sister disciplines of 'dress history' and 'fashion studies' today. Optimistically, Taylor ultimately concludes that there is 'now little remaining dispute about the vital importance of interdisciplinarity across the field today' (xiii). Nicklas and Pollen, on the other hand, argue that there is still work to be done. In the introduction, the editors explain how, in spite of the great strides made towards legitimizing the study of dress history over the past thirty years, unfortunately, we continue to overlook peoples, objects and histories 'marginalized due to ethnicity, geography, gender or social position, or simply because they did not or do not fit neatly into pre-existing categories' (1).

Dress History: New Directions in Theory and Practice therefore stands as an attempt made by Nicklas and Pollen to reflect on how far we have come, but also, importantly, to jettison the study of dress history into the future – to propose new sites and spaces for studying dress history – as well as to interrogate the relationship between theory and practice in order to deepen our appreciation of fashion and dress as multivalent, global phenomena. Importantly, they note how the emergence of fashion studies as a named field of study has done much to push the study of dress history forward. With a strong bent towards critical theory – from queer theory to postcolonialism – the field of fashion studies has shown how theory may be actively employed in order to ground and enlighten object-based studies. Indeed, like the loupe or the conservator's white cotton gloves, theory is described here as a *tool* that, increasingly, is a vital part of the dress historian's practice. Yet, as with any tool, there is a steep learning curve in mastering its use to, for example, avoid the pitfalls of putting dress history through the proverbial 'meat grinder' of critical theory. Nicklas and Pollen are acutely aware of these challenges and have chosen thoughtful and self-aware essays that critically engage with these debates. In sum, they are as useful to a Master's student as they are to more seasoned scholars.

Nicklas and Pollen, however, are not content to attempt to cover the breadth and complexity of these issues in their brief introduction. They therefore chose to include a helpful historiography by Jonathan Friars that precedes the more analytical chapters, and which stands well on its own as an

introduction to the persistent *dress vs fashion* debate. While the lion's share of the essays that follow continues in the Eurocentric tradition of dress history (with several notable exceptions), all of the essays nevertheless make a clear break with the discipline's enduring penchant for hemline histories and its focus on the designer-as-genius. Indeed, it may be said that these are 'outsider' histories. Among them, I found Jennifer Clynk and Sharon Peoples's account of studying the dress histories of convict women in the absence of conserved clothing to be a well-conceived and highly original take on the merits of using ephemeral primary sources – such as museum records and news clippings – in the reconstruction of repressed memories. Here, 'the convict stain' is cleverly invoked both as a metaphor for the peripheral standing of such histories, but also as a practical justification for the absence of convict garments in dress collections. Theory in this example – but also across the volume – is put into action as a means of justifying the validity of reconstructing marginal histories, as well as to bolster the practices and methods of the dress historian. However, in a small handful of the essays, it is not explicitly clear how the author(s) bridge theory and practice in their respective case studies – an issue that, perhaps, could have been resolved with a bit more editorial intervention. Moreover, I would have welcomed a discussion of how an intersectional history of dress might be approached – perhaps one of the most pressing issues within campus discourse today. These criticisms, however, are minor.

Taken together, the essays in this volume provide an excellent model for how to create space for the inclusion of theoretical perspectives in dress history amid a rapidly evolving scholarly climate. Certainly, the changes we have witnessed in the study of dress history are the result of external pressures from within and outside of academia over the last decade – such as the expansion of the field of fashion studies and the public's growing interest in fashion history and theory, galvanized by marquee fashion exhibitions and popular niche fashion magazines. Indeed, with a deluge of fashion knowledge now as close as your smartphone, one could argue that the object-centered approach is in danger. However, Nicklas and Pollen make a convincing appeal for the 'deeply personal and affective sensual quality of garments' (6), as well as for the rare skill set possessed by dress historians that makes them uniquely able to 'unlock' the knowledge contained within these objects. Dress history is not in danger; far from it. Rather, as this book demonstrates, the inclusion of theory in the historian's toolkit has opened up the discipline to new lines of inquiry and approaches, as well as to evermore diverse and increasingly global communities of fashion scholars.

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FASHIONING IDENTITY: STATUS AMBIVALENCE IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION, MARIA MACKINNEY-VALENTIN (2017, FIRST EDITION)

London: Bloomsbury, 186 pp.,

ISBN: 9781474249102, Hardback, £84.99

Reviewed by Elizabeth Kutesko, Central St Martins, University of the Arts London, United Kingdom

In *Fashioning Identity: Status Ambivalence in Contemporary Fashion*, Maria Mackinney-Valentin grapples with the complexities and tensions in the social construction of identity through fashion. Published on the 25th anniversary of Fred Davis's seminal text, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), Mackinney-Valentin reconsiders his discussion of 'identity ambivalence' in light of our twenty-first-century social media vantage point from which, as the author articulates, we all use fashion 'to communicate who we are, or who we would like others to think we are' (backcover blurb). This is a timely book, written in an accessible and straightforward way by a well-informed scholar who is clearly tapped into contemporary fashion cultures and can draw on a wide array of case studies with ease and insight. Mackinney-Valentin has command of the relevant literature and a critical awareness of the central issues surrounding the concept of self-fashioning in a predominantly (but not exclusively) western context. Such issues have already been explored by Ana Marta Gonzalez and Laura Bovone in *Identities Through Fashion: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Bloomsbury, 2012) and Susan B. Kaiser in *Fashion and Cultural Studies* (Bloomsbury, 2012).

The book contains nine chapters, thematically organized, each of which draw on extensive research of print and online media, as well as fieldwork. It begins with reality TV star Kim Kardashian's nude selfie posted on Instagram in March 2016. Mackinney-Valentin uses the attention-grabbing headline 'When you're like I have nothing to wear LOL' to set the engaging tone of the book. She cites the subsequent social media storm surrounding Kardashian's widely circulated image as a prime example of the 'status ambivalence' of the fashioned body since, 'exposing your body may be an act of empowerment. Or it could simply reinforce the mechanisms that the action initially set out to dismantle' (1). The introductory chapter then provides the context for and summary of the following chapters. Mackinney-Valentin outlines Davis's concept of 'identity ambivalence' and articulates the numerous directions in which she contends that fashion can flow: *vertical; horizontal; upward; and scattered*.

The subsequent chapters are interesting, original and well-written. The author refers to key titles in the field and uses these to analyse various examples of negotiation, articulation and mediation in fashion, grappling with the nuances and complexities of identity construction in relation to themes such as novelty, age, gender, class, status, copy, culture and context. The examples explored are eclectic, and include the appeal of vintage clothing on a mass scale; the popularity of older women, such as Iris Apfel, as style icons; the appropriation of the Chinatown tote in high fashion; sportswear worn as formalwear to underplay status signals; the fashion longevity of leopard print; the heavy-metal-band T-shirt as a demonstration of fashion and fandom; the local and global tensions of the famous soccer-team T-shirt in Kenya; and the

social significance of the lumberjack shirt as a reflection of the *Zeitgeist*. The focus is predominantly western fashion, with the exception of Chapter 8, which provides insight into the exchange narratives in operation between Europe and Africa that are embedded within the social prestige of soccer-team fan T-shirts worn by young Kenyans. The book is intelligently assembled, with its various threads tied together by the overriding consensus that fashion is not simply clothing but a system of communication that, as with all forms of non-verbal messages, is subject to a potential *miscommunication* on the receiving end.

This book should be congratulated for its scope and will provide undergraduate and postgraduate students with a fresh account of the central issues and nuances surrounding the social construction of identities in contemporary fashion. Whilst Davis's text works well for the unity of the book, a little more critique of his arguments might have been beneficial to push Mackinney-Valentin's analysis further in relation to the twenty-first-century fashion landscape. It would also have been useful to integrate more global examples of identity ambivalence to underline the importance of fashion as a universal phenomenon, and not one manifested in the West/Europe. Nevertheless, *Fashioning Identity* provides a fresh, accessible and informative introduction to the subject which highlights the very personal nature of fashion, an important point that is reiterated by the author's inclusion of her own clothing narratives within the text.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Elizabeth Kutesko holds a Ph.D. in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art. She has published articles on the Congolese *Sapeurs*, Moroccan women's dress and contemporary Brazilian fashion designers, and is currently preparing her book, entitled *Fashioning Brazil: Globalization and the Representation of Brazilian Dress in National Geographic*.

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'BLACK FASHION: ART. PLEASURE. POLITICS', NOLIWE ROOKS (ED.), SPECIAL ISSUE, NKA JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART, 37 (2015)

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 132 pp.,

ISSN: 10757163, Paperback, \$27.00

e-ISSN: 2152-7792

Reviewed by Axelle Boyer, University of California, Santa Cruz, United States

'The field of contemporary African and African Diaspora art has been neglected within the art historical debate,' assert the editors of *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* on the publication's website (see *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* at <http://www.nkajournal.org>). Needless to say that, in the framework of art history, 'black fashion' has rarely been deemed worthy

of scholarly interest. A special issue of *Nka* was released in November 2015 to remedy that lack. Placed under the auspices of Noliwe Rooks, a pioneer of the research on the racial implications of beauty and fashion, *Nka's* 'Black Fashion: Art. Pleasure. Politics' special issue appears as a welcome addition to a field that, because of its location at the intersection of black and fashion studies, has remained largely unexplored.

The initiative is excellent, yet the scope of the enterprise remains to be defined. The terms 'black' and 'fashion' work for convenience purposes, but what they encompass is unclear. What is 'black fashion'? Fashion made by black people? Fashion worn by black people? African fashion? African diaspora fashion? The journal's cover, depicting a fashionable Josephine Baker on the streets of Paris, gives us the beginning of an answer – Baker having famously had *deux amours*, her country and Paris, placing black fashion automatically on an international scale. The fourteen pieces that comprise the issue further indicate that black fashion is, in fact, all of the above – a composite, versatile topic that can be addressed through a variety of lenses. Throughout the issue, academic articles alternate with more personal essays emanating from artists, curators, fashion personalities and other selected individuals who have had unique access to the subject matter.

Only a few pieces actually pertain to academia. Anne Anlin Cheng, who authored an article entitled 'Skin fashion: Josephine Baker and dressing race', forms the *pièce de résistance* of the issue. While seemingly reworking an overplayed topic – the fetishized body of Josephine Baker – Cheng moves beyond traditional interpretations, likening Baker's skin to the architectural elements of a house designed by Adolf Loom for the American performer. By doing so, Cheng opens new fruitful avenues to approach both Baker and the dressed black body. This first piece also confirms that skin and body belong to the realm of fashion studies, opening the way for a conversation that unfolds in the following pages. Sonya Clark, Bill Gaskins and Tiffany Gill each contributed a piece relating to black hair. Gaskins discusses a particular representation of black hair and its reception by black and white audiences; while Clark talks about the genesis of the 'Hair Craft Project', an award-winning art show that she directed. Tiffany Gill supplied what is perhaps the most interesting piece of the issue, an extremely well-documented article, in which Gill uses digital spaces dedicated to black hair as a point of entry for an exploration of the 'ways in which community is defined, cultivated, contested, and policed in the world of digital beauty' (see '#TeamNatural: Black hair and the politics of community in digital media' [pp. 70–79]).

The strength of the eclectic assortment that composes the black fashion issue resides in the inclusion of first-hand accounts. Anthony Barboza, one of the first black fashion photographers whose career began with shooting black models in the streets of Harlem for *Essence*, and later *GQ* and *Harper's Bazaar*, provides a unique insider's glimpse into the racial and gender politics of the fashion industry. Deborah Riley Draper, the filmmaker at the helm of the iconic documentary, *Versailles '73: American Runway Revolution* (2012), gives us a behind-the-scenes account of the legendary fashion show that catapulted black models to the forefront of fashion.

The issue broad-sweeps other popular topics at the intersection of black and fashion studies. Articles touch upon sustainable 'black fashion', black hair, 'black fashion' in museums, the representation of black bodies, and the articulation of black masculinities and femininities through clothing, to name a few. Here, the strength of the issue also becomes its main caveat: by trying

to be too comprehensive, the issue appears, at times, scattered, jumping from one subject to the next, only surfacing the many important topics it tries to address. The piece on African fashion epitomizes this shortcoming: although it acknowledges that Africa has a 'rich sartorial history' (44), the article reads as a directory of 'African' designers, from Yves Saint Laurent to Mimi Plange. Listing the many influences of Africa on western high fashion without underlining the problematic aspect of those many instances of cultural appropriation, the piece suffers from several shortcuts and generalizations – when, for instance, it speaks of African fashion as 'grounded in traditions' (see article by H. Jennings, 'A brief history of African fashion' [pp. 44–53]).

However, the variety of voices, topics, methods and approaches do make for a pleasant read and an overall accessible issue. This inaugural issue of *Nka* confirms the versatility and interdisciplinary nature of a field that includes, but is not limited to, the exhausted story of the batik fabric. It also provides a commentary on the evolving status of fashion, finally recognized as an art form in its own right.

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Axelle Boyer is a fashion historian and theorist, currently enrolled in a Ph.D. programme in History of Art and Visual Culture at UC Santa Cruz. She earned her MA in Fashion Studies from Parsons School of Design in New York, having previously graduated from law school in Paris, France. Her areas of specialization include dress and the black female body within varied world cultures.

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