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The Fashioned Body

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Fashioned Body, second edition, by Joanne Entwistle, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2015, 273 pp., AUD39.95 (paperback), ISBN: 9780745649382

The central premise of *The Fashioned Body* is that dress is a fundamental means by which bodies are imbued with social and cultural meaning. People dressing their embodied selves create such meanings, and simultaneously articulate identities that visually speak their social class, taste, and gender. What is significant about this argument is that prior to the first edition of this title being published in 2000, there was a dearth of writing that sought to address fashion as an embodied practice. As such, Entwistle established a foundation from which a sociology of fashion could proceed by placing literature on bodies and literature on fashion and dress in conversation with one another, and by mapping the ways that systems and practices of fashion and dress involve a constant weave between the personal and the public, and between production and consumption.

In the preface to this second edition, Entwistle acknowledges that the intervening 15 years have seen a proliferation of theoretical work on fashion and dress. The preface selectively catalogues the ways that these studies extend the remit of her original work and also speaks to criticism the first edition attracted. By demonstrating the fruitful links that can be made between individuals and wider social, political, economic and technological developments, Entwistle developed a consideration of the complex ways in which fashion and dress can be understood as an iteration of micro-social order rather than simply a reflection of it. That this consideration focuses primarily on western modernity is supported by the author's definition of fashion as a system of dress characterised by a logic of regular, systemic change that is found in societies where social mobility is possible. She argues that this does not seek to privilege western modes of dress over non-western modes of dress, or suggest superiority of one at the behest of the other. Nonetheless, what this focus does is concentrate the content of the book on western modes of dress. This does not necessarily indicate a flaw in this work – it would be unreasonable to expect one study to catalogue all the ways in which dress is meaningful in all contexts – yet it does point towards the ways Entwistle's reading of dress as a 'situated bodily practice' could be taken up in relation to different localities. The author acknowledges this by correcting her original focus on western identity to redefine identity as intersectional, referring to Emma Tarlo's research on the role played by clothing in India in the construction of different familial, national, caste, religious and personal identities.

Chapter One offers a comprehensive survey of writing on the body, proposing a theoretical framework by which the body can be read both as embodied and socially constituted and, by extension, that dress should be understood as a situated bodily practice that locates individuals within society. Entwistle draws on the work of a diverse range of theorists to shape this framework, including Mauss, Douglas, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu and Goffman, many of whom do not address dress in their respective works. What is demonstrated through this discussion is that the body – taken to be both a biological and a socially constituted entity – is a dynamic site at which concerns of selfhood, society and culture are enacted, enforced, challenged and embodied, and that to overlook dress is to overlook a central way in which bodies are made social and rendered meaningful.

Chapter Two operates as a theoretical counterbalance to this initial consideration of the body, offering a sociological reading of writing on fashion and dress that, Entwistle argues, often overlooks the bodies doing the wearing. After defining the concepts of 'fashion' and 'dress', the author maps how writers from traditions as varied as anthropology, art history, sociology and structuralism have considered 'why' we adorn, while also critiquing these approaches for not considering how fashion is lived by individuals. In both chapters, Entwistle interrogates the relationship between gender and dress, suggesting that fashion has traditionally been overlooked or denigrated in sociological writing because of its connections to femininity and ephemerality, standing in supposed contrast to sociology's traditional focus on agency and rationality. The dismissal of fashion could be tied to the ways the feminine body is overlooked in the writing of the authors explored in the first chapter: Entwistle argues that women are more closely identified with the body and that the ways that women are required to monitor and work upon their bodies are distinct from men's experience. As such, the possibility inherent in dress for individuals to realise or resist discourses of gender and power is raised, a concern taken up in subsequent chapters.

Having established a theoretical intersection between theories of the body and theories of dress as both socially and culturally constituted and individually experienced, Entwistle turns to a consideration of the interplay between fashion and a number of other key sites of subjectivity – identity, gender, sexuality – (Chapters Four, Five and Six, respectively) as well as mapping the ways that dress is woven into social life (Chapter Three) and how concepts of the cultural and the aesthetic are inextricable from economic considerations (Chapter Seven). These discussions focus on western histories of dress, drawing strong connections between an individual's appearance and their social identities, namely those of class, occupation and gender.

What Entwistle convincingly and consistently demonstrates is the connection between socio-cultural developments, discourse, and conventions of dress. One interesting example is the study of the association between femininity and fashion, as explored in Chapter Five. The long-held connection between women and the production of textiles and garments is provided as a basis for this association, which developed in the medieval period as ladies were responsible for furnishing their person and their home. Being responsible for this aspect of household expenditure as well as demonstrating personal prowess in communicating wealth, taste and status represent two kinds of power that fashion made available to women, whilst also representing their restriction to the domestic sphere. Women thus became well-versed in the communicative qualities of fashion and their attention was directed towards it by their societal role, forms of knowledge later interpreted as exemplifying women's weakness and vanity. Here, Entwistle takes up the metaphoric association between women and fashion, both being characterised as inconstant and subject to arbitrary change, with women's interest in fashion and the body being indicative of their supposed moral laxity (as traced through Judeo-Christian attitudes towards the tempting female body) and social deficiencies (an interest in fashion demonstrating a woman's vanity and selfishness). That this is taken as a starting point for an interrogation of all the implicit assumptions such a conception of fashion makes about gender – that people who do not identify as women are unaffected or disinterested in fashion; that fashion can only reduce or limit women's social being-in-the-world; and that modes of gendered dress taken to be indicative of a period (for instance, the corset for Victorian women) were worn in the same way by all individuals – is indicative of the historical and theoretical breadth of this book, and the many avenues for further research on fashion, dress, the body and culture towards which it fruitfully points.

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Ecofeminism, second edition, by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, London, Zed Books, 2014, 360 pp., £12.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781780325637

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva first published *Ecofeminism* in 1993, contributing to a growing body of self-identified ecofeminist literature that made sense of the links between the oppression of women and the destruction of the environment. The book has been particularly influential among scholars of environmentalism, development studies, and transnational feminisms, and it has served as a model for feminist collaboration across the North/South divide. A second edition of *Ecofeminism* was newly released with a foreword by Ariel Salleh and prefaces by Mies and Shiva. The book remains relevant, given that, as Salleh notes: 'in the twenty years since *Ecofeminism* was first published, every key socio-economic and cultural-psychological problem discussed is still current – and many situations have even worsened under the stranglehold of neoliberalism' (xi). Some of the problems that received incisive critique in the original text and that have escalated in the intervening years include: the rise of fundamentalisms across the globe; the debt-trap associated with structural adjustment on developing nations; biopiracy and the expansion of patents on life; nuclear disaster (most recently at Japan's Fukushima plant); the commodification of reproduction, including surrogacy tourism; accelerating climate change, including super storms and desertification; and state investment in militaries and the seeming inevitability of a permanent state of war.

The authors may be best known for their critique of development. Shiva considers the growing poverty among women despite participation in development schemes: 'Women's increasing underdevelopment was not due to insufficient and inadequate "participation" in "development" rather, it was due to their enforced but asymmetric participation whereby they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits' (74). Mies's chapter on the 'myth of catching up development' is widely read and notes that asymmetrical gender relations are not the only problem; rather, the development enterprise *always* requires some colony from which labour and natural resources can be cheaply extracted. Yet *Ecofeminism* offers more than a narrowly economic analysis. It illuminates problematic relations across sexes (readers may be interested in chapters on the gendered division of labour, sexuality, and reproductive justice); it traces how specific kinds of economic and cultural activity in a region leave a devastating mark on the environment that is disproportionately borne by the region's poor (overrepresented by women and their children in the North and the South). Furthermore, Mies and Shiva show how capitalist patriarchies are supported by science, technology, and knowledge production. To shift these values, they advocate for a change in our political life from shallow participation in representative democracy to committed participatory democracy; similarly, our intellectual work must shift from research for intellectual gain and security in the academic job market toward action-based research for social change.

As such, *Ecofeminism* bridges economic, political, and social critique and the authors provide examples of communities whose values and economies are more life-centered (e.g. the Chipko movement in India, student commune movements in Germany, the consumer liberation Seikatsu Club in Japan). Ultimately, Mies and Shiva propose a move from a neocolonial, neoliberal market economy that recognises only producers and consumers to a 'subsistence perspective'