

Conceptualizing Fashion in Everyday Lives

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- 1 This work will culminate in a book, *Fashion and Everyday Life: Britain and America*, 20C, to be published by Bloomsbury in 2014.
- 2 See Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold's *The World of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1993). In particular, chapters 9-11 contain a very useful discussion of the economics and manufacturing of the fashion system.
- 3 See, e.g., Thorstein B. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Macmillan, 1899); Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *International Quarterly* 10 (1904): 130-55; and Charles Baudelaire, *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. Patrick Edward Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
- 4 Georg Simmel, *La Tragedie de la Culture* (Paris: Rivages, 1988), quoted in Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 181.
- 5 See, e.g., Hazel Clark and David Brody, *Design Studies: A Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2009); Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson eds. *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1993); Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press and Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
- 6 See, e.g., Barbara Burman Baines, *Fashion Revivals from the Elizabethan Age to the Present Day* (London:

Introduction

Despite the recognition of fashion as being intricately intertwined with the development of city living in the twentieth century, the need remains for a critical framework for the study of fashion in everyday life in the urban context. This article undertakes this task by offering insights into the broader methodological, historiographical, and theoretical questions that underpin fashion studies and fashion history, while also beginning to develop a critique of the fashion system's overemphasis on modernity.¹ Integral to this study is a reconsideration of the relationships between fashion and the modern world, and a rethinking of the assumption that fashion is implicitly modern: designed only by professionals, symbolic, and intrinsic to modernity. In tracing fashion in everyday life, we examine three key themes: theories of everyday life that provide tools for exploring the routine elements of fashion, historiographies of fashion to understand historians' approach to everyday dress, and research methods that allow an investigation of fashion as an aspect of everyday life.

Prompted by new technologies (e.g., the sewing-machine, paper patterns, machine-made textiles, and ready-to-wear systems); improved methods of distribution, dissemination, and retailing; and shifting social and economic structures, fashionable dress permeated ordinary, everyday lives as never before in the period from 1900 to 2000.² Nevertheless, scholarship in fashion studies and fashion history has tended to focus on the avant-garde, the extraordinary, and the unusual, especially regarding its origination and design. Indeed, within fashion's discourses, the truly "ordinary" remains elusive. In part, this oversight has resulted from the positioning of fashion in relation to modernity by writers such as Thorstein Veblen, Charles Baudelaire, and Georg Simmel;³ as the latter put it, "fashion increasingly sharpens our sense of the present."⁴ Indicative of modernity, what attracted the interest of these early theorists of modern life was, to paraphrase Baudelaire, fashion's transitory, fugitive, and contingent qualities, rather than its adaptability and longevity. We seek to unsettle these dominant

Batsford, 1981); Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Elizabeth Wilson and Lou Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: BBC, 1989); Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Christopher Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Joanne Eicher, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, 10 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Margaret Maynard, *Dress and Globalisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); and Carol Tulloch, *Black Style* (London: V&A, 1995).

- 7 See, e.g., Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994); Frank Mort, "Boy's Own? Masculinity, Style and Popular Culture," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, eds. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 193-224; and John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion, 1995).
- 8 See Angela McRobbie, *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music* (London: Macmillan, 1989); also see Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, *Women and Fashion: A New Look* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), particularly chapters 2, 3, and 4.
- 9 Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 6.
- 10 McRobbie, *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses*, Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark, eds. *Old Clothes New Looks: Second Hand Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).
- 11 For an articulation of microhistory, see John Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 1 (2010): 87-109.
- 12 See Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002); Barry Sandywell, "The

views by understanding fashion as a manifestation of routine daily lives that remains with people over time; and to do so, we examine the ways in which the everyday use, appropriation, circulation, remaking, and constant remodeling of fashionable clothes over time by diverse social groups run counter to the dominant views: these are anti-modern and non-progressive; exemplify continuity and tradition; are responsive to regional and national subtleties, as well as global ones; and are disruptive of fashion's structures and systems, as well as its visual codes and norms of consumption.

At its roots, fashion studies is interdisciplinary and, like design studies, it seeks to integrate history, theory, and practice.⁵ Exemplary work examining aspects of everyday fashion can be found in the disciplines of fashion studies and fashion history; influential writers include Barbara Burman, Carol Tulloch, Christopher Breward, Elizabeth Wilson, Joanne Eicher, Lou Taylor, and Margaret Maynard.⁶ Scholars from other disciplines also address aspects of the everyday in fashion, including Dick Hebdige from cultural studies, Raphael Samuel from history, Anne Hollander from art history, John Harvey from literature and visual culture, and Frank Mort from gender studies.⁷ Some scholars, such as Angela McRobbie, have reassessed fashion's multiplicity and the recirculation of styles since the 1970s, while others have shown that one person's "everyday" is part of another's fashion statement.⁸ However, a predominant interest remains in the fashion "syntaxes" of the young, the novelty of the "look," and the currency of the latest style—whether recycled, second-hand, revivalist, or new. Although such issues without a doubt remain an important part of what constitutes fashion, other vast swathes of fashionable dressing remain outside the scope of these categories. This aspect of fashion—"design in the lower case," to quote Judy Attfield—comprises the ordinary and mundane practices of wearing, where items are drawn from the personal wardrobe in a routine manner.⁹ Accumulated over time, such fashion can encapsulate at least one lifetime—particularly as clothes are handed down, recycled, or remodeled.¹⁰

The critical framework that we propose draws its methods from different disciplines (i.e., design history, social history, visual culture, urban studies, and gender studies), but using a micro-history approach, it prioritizes archival investigation, visual and textual analysis, and oral history.¹¹ The project's conceptual framework derives from the theories of everyday life first articulated by social theorists and then reinterpreted by subsequent writers. In the former category are Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, and Walter Benjamin, while Ben Highmore, Barry Sandywell, and Michael Sheringham have offered useful insights into the application of such ideas in a variety of domains.¹² In attempting to "write the real," we also examine the work of social, cultural, and

feminist historians, such as Edward P. Thompson, Sally Alexander, and Carol Steedman, who have grappled with the everyday experiences, actions, and habits of ordinary people.¹³ Both Benjamin and Lefebvre were drawn to fashion as they explored the ordinary, mundane aspects of life; meanwhile, de Certeau, in studying the everyday, exposes the “instruments of analysis” that underpin specific disciplines. Thus, by developing a critical framework for tracing fashion in everyday lives, this article also highlights a number of theoretical and methodological questions for fashion history and fashion studies.

Everyday Life Theories and Fashion

Discussing his “Critique of Everyday Life,” Seigworth and Gardiner note that for Lefebvre everyday life is “defined by ‘what is left over’ after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out for analysis.”¹⁴ Fashion—as typically studied through the fashion system—has comprised the “distinct, superior, specialized, and structured.” It is not “what is left over;” rather, says Entwistle, it “refers to regular (conventionally, bi-annual) stylistic innovation, and a production system that is geared toward making and distributing clothes.”¹⁵ Nonetheless, everyday clothes as routinely worn by people in the West in the twentieth century reveal an on-going engagement with fashion on a scale ranging from extraordinary to ordinary; indeed, “where the ordinary is exemplified by commonplace phenomena that are taken for granted and unnoticed, the extraordinary marks the disturbing eruption of the rare and the highly valued. Like other forms of *extravagant* experience, the extraordinary exceeds the limits and boundaries of ordinariness.”¹⁶ While the extraordinariness of “high fashion” has been clearly visible, “ordinary” fashion has been resolutely invisible. Yet visual sources that depict people going about their daily routines show how they have interpreted fashion’s cycles, even if these interpretations were not always the latest nor articulated as a coherent “look.” Such fashion was heterogeneous and represented a bringing together of familiar garments, accumulated in closets and wardrobes over time. To these might be added something new—a latest coat or hat—but most often they remain ensembles of clothes acquired during a number of years. Arguably, this complex relationship between everyday fashion and modernity was sharpened after 1970 by the effect of post-structuralist and postmodern discourses—particularly the reassessment of modernity’s progressive, technological agenda. Some theorists have argued that the ordinary and the routine are representative of tradition; in effect, these are the mundane practices that “predate the differentiated idioms of modernity.”¹⁷ In this context, the ordinary or everyday is indicative of a pre-modern world, whereas the extraordinary is what

Myth of Everyday Life,” *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 160-80; and Sheringham, *Everyday Life*.

- 13 See Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Pelican, 1963); Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman* (London: Virago, 1994); and Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: Two Women’s Lives* (London: Virago, 1986).
- 14 Gregory J. Seigworth and Michael E. Gardiner, “Rethinking Everyday Life: And Then Nothing Turns Itself Inside Out,” *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 147.
- 15 Joanne Entwistle, *The Aesthetic Economy of Fashion: Markets and Values in Clothing and Modelling*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), 9.
- 16 Sandywell, “The Myth of Everyday Life,” 162.
- 17 *Ibid.*

has characterized modernity, representing the ordinary punctuated by “the ‘effervescence’ of social orders rendered fluid and mobile.”¹⁸ Responding to this characterization, Highmore proposes the notion of an “everyday modernity:” “Everyday life registers the process of modernization as an incessant accumulation of debris: Modernity produces obsolescence as part of its continual demand for the new (the latest version becomes last year’s model with increasing frequency).”¹⁹ From the late nineteenth century, with seasonal regularity, fashion has complied with this regime; however, these cyclical acquisitions have been discarded only by those with the wealth or the cultural capital to do so. Inspired in part by Baudelaire’s observations about the crowd, Walter Benjamin saw the modern city as a place for “increased accumulation and intensified sensation.”²⁰ This understanding of acquisition as a key feature of “everyday modernity” is crucial for this discussion because the capacity to consume ordinary fashion grew exponentially as the twentieth century progressed. Only in the past 20 years has the price accessibility of fashionable clothes in the West (the likes of Primark in Britain and Forever 21 in the United States) enabled those on low incomes to regularly and routinely consume and discard fashionable clothing. Meanwhile, Benjamin’s interest in the haptic experiences of the modern city points to an “everyday modernity” shaped by “feel” and “touch,” as well as by the visual. Indeed, if touch and feel are as indicative of everyday modernity as seeing, consider the physical, tactile sensation of wearing rayon (artificial or every woman’s silk) in 1930s’ London and New York.²¹ Nevertheless, writers remain entranced by fashion that is technically and visually innovative, determined by regular, seasonal change, and “of its time.”²² Combining this fascination with a zealous commitment to fashion’s spectacular—although frequently transitory—qualities, some writers have proposed that fashion, by its very nature, cannot be “everyday.” While not ignoring these fundamental qualities of fashion and its historically close relationship to the wealthier members of society (via one-off luxury items, couture, and designer fashion), we nevertheless want to argue that fashion *can* be ordinary as well as extraordinary. A central problematic of the everyday—the relationship between valuing the latest styles on the one hand and valuing tradition on the other—is nevertheless intrinsic to it, as Sheringham argues: “What sets the tone is without doubt the newest, but only where it emerges in the medium of the oldest, the longest past, the most ingrained.”²³ Observing that “the everyday” typically is antithetical to the modern in that “everyday experience is what happens in typical form today as it has done yesterday and will do tomorrow,” some theorists of the everyday have proposed that in the first part of the twentieth century, there was a conjunction of modernity and everydayness

18 Ibid.

19 Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 61.

20 Ibid. We note the gendered nature of this particular urban modernity, which ignores the domestic arena of home and foregrounds the public space of the city. Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 28.

21 Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 26.

22 A good example of this perspective is the relatively recent *20th-Century Dress in the United States* by Jane Farrell-Beck and Jean Parsons (New York: Fairchild, 2007).

23 Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, 182.

around the notion of consumption.²⁴ Re-conceptualized as mass experience, “the everyday” is a construction of modernity that is “couched in terms of the commercialization, trivialization, and banalization of experience as a consequence of the new technologies of cultural (re)production and dissemination.”²⁵ Commonality, mass-experience, and accelerated consumption have been fundamental to fashion at specific historical junctures—for example, in relation to female mass magazine readership in the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood cinema in the 1930s, men’s magazines in the 1980s and 1990s, and Internet shopping in the 2000s. At the intersection of modernity and the everyday, mass-culture has contributed to both the ordinariness and the extraordinariness of fashion.

In tracing fashion in everyday life, it may seem—as Highmore has argued—that what is everyday might be perceived to be obvious, readily exposed by searching out alternative sources (e.g., diaries, letters, and photographs, rather than, for example, government papers).²⁶ In fact, it can be stubbornly invisible and difficult to interpret; and, as Lefebvre observes, “The *unrecognised*, that is, the everyday, still has some surprises in store for us.”²⁷ One surprise in particular is that it is hard to know: “Either way, you somehow have missed it because the everyday passes by, passes through.”²⁸ The ordinary escapes notice because it fails to stand out; here again, fashion provides an exemplar. The clothes worn by most people going about their daily lives have been typically a synthesis of new, old, bold, and mundane. This perception that the everyday is hard to locate, difficult to know, and outside of traditional fields of knowledge demands an alternative approach when dealing with a subject such as fashion because of the need to counteract fashion’s “distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities.” By looking beyond fashion’s familiar terrain—the catwalk, the magazine, the boutique, the department store, the designer—we can trace a complementary, everyday fashion trajectory over the past hundred or so years. We argue that fashion has been embedded and contingent in the practices of people’s daily lives, and it has been located in some familiar spaces, including the street—although not only on the major thoroughfares of the modern city but also at its margins. It has taken shape in some intimate places—the wardrobe or the sewing box—as well as in the rituals and commonplace social interactions of weddings, and evenings out on the town or dancing. Gilbert has noted the symbolic ordering of cities such as Paris, New York, and London by the fashion system and the conjunction of designer names, famous brands, and specific districts to create the identity of fashion’s world cities; however, he also points to the city as a place of “local taste constellations” arranged around fashion, music, dance, and clubs, as well as also around family and work activities and events.²⁹ In these other city spaces—interstitial and

24 Sandywell, “The Myth of Everyday Life,” 163.

25 Ibid., 165.

26 Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

27 Henri Lefebvre, “Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx’s Death,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 78.

28 Seigworth and Gardiner, “Rethinking Everyday Life,” 140.

29 Christopher Breward and David Gilbert, eds. *Fashion’s World Cities* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006); David Gilbert, “Urban Outfitting: The City and the Spaces of Fashion Culture,” in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, eds. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 12.

peripheral to the city's traditional fashion centers—fashion in everyday lives can be observed. These places are not only for the young; indeed part of our argument is to question the generational, market-driven myth of fashion, as we examine, for example, getting married, dressing for church or for grocery shopping, going to the races or the soccer game, or heading to work.

Breward proposes that fashion is “a kind of contemporary Esperanto, immediately accessible across social and geographical boundaries,” while Craik describes fashion as “a technique of acculturation—a means by which individuals and groups learn to be visually at home with themselves in their culture.”³⁰ As a form of communication and a process of acculturation, fashion both accelerated and proliferated during the twentieth century as various social groups (shaped by race, class, gender, age, and geography) perpetually used and reused fashion's past and present languages in their everyday lives. In fact, it has been possible to recognize within fashion the “overarching structure” that articulates an aesthetic or “look” and to discern an “accumulation of particularity.”³¹ By this, we mean that fashion as a practice of everyday life involves the acquisition of single garments that add to a wardrobe and help to reconfigure it, but at the same time, it can mean the purchase of a complete outfit that encapsulates “a look.”

Michel de Certeau regards everyday life as a set of practices that, although established, offer the potential for creativity. In addition to “making do” with this everyday culture, people have also been “making with” it and thus transforming and inventing by appropriating and redeploying it; as he suggests, “Creativity is the act of reusing and recombining heterogeneous materials.”³² Characteristic of self-fashioning and refashioning, this articulation of the everyday also recognizes the possibility of reinvention and resistance as the fashion system is refused, recycled, and redefined from within the realm of the everyday. At various points in the twentieth century, women re-cut and re-made existing clothes for a variety of purposes, including fashionability. Some groups of people—teenagers being an obvious example—refused fashion *per se* to create their own “identities” in opposition to an increasingly homogenous consumer marketplace, while in parallel the fashion system appropriated and redefined the ordinary as extraordinary with the annexing of sub-cultural street styles. This dialectical relationship between the past and present has been noted by Benjamin: “Each time, what sets the tone is without doubt the newest, but only where it emerges in the medium of the oldest, the longest past, and the most ingrained. This spectacle, the unique self-construction of the newest in the medium of what has been, makes for the true dialectical theatre of fashion.”³³

30 Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, 229; Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, 10.

31 Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 5.

32 Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 148.

33 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 64.

History and Fashion

Because of the proliferation of production, distribution, marketing, and retailing (particularly after 1900, initially in the West but later globally), the effect of fashion on people's lives has been difficult for historians to ignore. Mass-production and mass-consumption meant that an array of goods—including clothes—became more visible as they were made in factories; sold in retail stores; promoted and advertised in magazines, newspapers, at the cinema, on television, and eventually on the Internet; and worn by people on the street. In response, histories of fashion have been produced by writers from different but adjacent fields, including economic and social historians, those working in cultural studies and gender studies, and those working within art and design history, as well as film studies. Prompted by new methods and approaches, fashion scholars have been increasingly interested in the multitude of clothes worn by ordinary people. Fashion history's engagement with ideas originating in psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism has created an arena for critical questioning about the nature of fashion and its histories. An interdisciplinary approach is evident in Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson's *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day*. Published to accompany a British BBC television series of the same name, it set out to "explore what ordinary women and men, as well as the rich and fashionable, wore in the past and are wearing today, their strategies for following the fashion, or simply getting by."³⁴ It built on earlier works by both authors that had also addressed aspects of everyday fashion—particularly Taylor's *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History*, a work on Victorian mourning dress, and Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams*, a ground-breaking study of the relationship between fashion and modernity, both of which were published in the 1980s.³⁵ Taylor and Wilson share an interest in social history, but they also brought other influences to bear: Taylor with her extensive knowledge of dress history and Wilson with her expertise in women's history and gender studies.³⁶ With a strong interest in social class and gender, together they articulate an approach to fashion grounded in careful historical analysis that rejects "a tradition in dress history which overemphasises the fashion of the rich, and haute couture in particular."³⁷ They propose that fashion is "a kind of meeting point for intersecting aspects of our culture. Fashion is perhaps most usefully seen as a field where economics and industry meet aesthetics and art; where individual psychology meets the social organisation of a group, a class, an age."³⁸

Barbara Burman, another writer whose work contributed to the rethinking of fashion history, has expertise and interest in both art history and dress history. Her book, *Fashion Revivals from the*

34 Wilson and Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass*, 12.

35 Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983) and Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985).

36 In fact, Wilson, with a social sciences background, had already written two influential accounts of women in post-war Britain: *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock, 1977) and *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain: 1945-1968* (London: Tavistock, 1980).

37 Wilson and Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass*, 12.

38 *Ibid.*, 13.

Elizabethan Age to the Present Day, made a significant contribution to the subject by showing that fashion was not driven solely by new, novel, and original designs. Demonstrating how historical memory has played into fashion via revivals, Burman instead argues that these revivals are “overlaid with fresh style and rearranged by affectionate nostalgia. In many cases, revivals alter the originals sufficiently to turn them into *arrivals*, and some old favorites, never out of use, are as much *survivals* as revivals.”³⁹ This understanding of fashion as being recycled and re-invented time and again is very useful for tracing the mundane practices of fashion in everyday life. More recently in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*—a compilation of essays published in 1999—Burman offers further evidence of fashion’s everydayness: “The ordinariness and domesticity of home dressmaking would seem to have contributed to its invisibility and the lack of analytical purchase on the part of historians in related fields.”⁴⁰ Noting that historians regarded clothing as peripheral to historical inquiry because it was “too ephemeral or too everyday,” she observes that some historians have also been indifferent “to the real world of objects without high aesthetic value.”⁴¹ By focusing on home dressmaking, Burman’s book brings us firmly into the realm of the everyday—in terms of both the production and the consumption of fashion.

In addition to these, the academic field of film studies has also made an important contribution to the debate about fashion and everyday life—perhaps a surprising one, given that film glamour more closely approximates high fashion than ordinary life. In fact, this relationship between high fashion, film glamour, consumption, and everyday life is what film scholars such as Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog have explored. Informed by feminism and gender studies, they have been interested in the “construction” of the female image and its consumption by ordinary women. In *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, they write, “We are trained in clothes, and early become practiced in presentational postures, learning in the age of mechanical reproduction to carry the mirror’s eye within the mind, as though one might at any moment be photographed.”⁴² Reiterating this, film historian Jackie Stacey discussed the ways in which working-class and middle-class women in Britain learned these skills via the cinema—particularly in its heyday in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴³ The relationship between (self) representation, fashion and consumption is exemplified in the essay, “The Carole Lombard in Macy’s Window,” by Charles Eckert, reproduced in Gaines and Herzog’s volume; in effect the essay explores modernity, mass culture, and the everyday. Demonstrating how department stores used tie-ins with Hollywood films to sell their goods, the essay

39 Burman Baines, *Fashion Revivals*, 12-13.

40 Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 3.

41 Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) cited in Burman, *The Culture of Sewing*, 3.

42 Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 4.

43 Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994).

shows how merchandising “imagined” the ordinary working girl and targeted her with a range of products from LUX bubble bath to a \$40 copy of Carole Lombard’s gown in the film, *Rumba*.⁴⁴

In the past 20 years, scholarship on fashion’s histories has taken an interdisciplinary “turn;” it has experienced a qualitative and quantitative shift, but it has also become more self-reflective. Note, for example, Lou Taylor’s *The Study of Dress History* (2002) and *Establishing Dress History* (2004) and consider the effect of the journal, *Fashion Theory*, which began in 1997. Together, this scholarship has contributed to a remapping of the field that has led to the questioning of the subject’s fundamental premises.

Defining fashion, Breward writes, “It is a bounded thing, fixed and experienced in space—an amalgamation of seams and textiles, an interface between the body and its environment. It is a practice, a fulcrum for the display of taste and status, a site for the production and consumption of objects and beliefs; and it is an event, both spectacular and routine, cyclical in its adherence to the natural and commercial seasons, [innovative] in its bursts of avant-gardism, and sequential in its guise as a palimpsest of memories and traditions”⁴⁵ (emphasis ours). Breward thus recognizes both the routine and the spectacular, while also pointing to fashion as a site for the accumulated layers and traces of preceding looks. This complex view is vital because on close inspection, certain fashions have had a particular resilience and resistance over time; certain garments, shapes, fabrics, and styles persist; they are recirculated and reframed within different contexts. This endurance can be unintentional, representing “the unmanaged construction of the past in the present.”⁴⁶ But at the same time, in creating a current “look,” fashion provides a means to “go from one configuration of daily existence to another.”⁴⁷ This configuration can be and has been a subversive act that defines agency: it can be avowedly “fashionable” and “of the time,” representing “a look” that refuses the everyday, and it can be an “accidental heterology,” where the past coalesces with the present and strongly connects to the everyday.

The impact of these scholars has been profound as they have enriched and challenged the ways in which the production and consumption of clothes have been interpreted. However, the study of fashion as part of routine, mundane lives remains erratic, occurring largely when the ordinary impinges on the extraordinary, such as when fashion from the “street”—influenced by popular cultures—affects designer-led fashion. In contrast, our proposal is that by probing fashion’s multi-layered complexities, a study of fashion can help to unearth the “never quite heard” or the “inner speech” of identity and everyday life that de Certeau tried to describe.⁴⁸ Indeed, by examining fashion as a practice of everyday

44 Charles Eckert, “The Carole Lombard in Macy’s Window” in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, eds. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990), 100-21.

45 Breward, *Fashioning London*, 11.

46 Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 2.

47 Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, 180.

48 Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 13.

life, the networks of power and the repetitive practices that permeate fashion's broader discourses are thrown into sharp relief. Indeed, as de Certeau explained, "We know poorly the types of operations at stake in ordinary practices, their registers and their combinations, because our instruments of analysis, modelling, and formalization were constructed for other objects and with other aims."⁴⁹ By developing a robust, critical framework that allows an interrogation of such ideas and by deploying appropriate research methods, we can begin to explore fashion in everyday lives.

Research Methods

Historical focus and theoretical priorities are interdependent with research methods. To study the ordinary, mundane practices of fashion requires a different set of procedures or methods than those that provide a "single, superior point of view."⁵⁰ In this final section, we identify our research methodologies—in particular, the case study approach. Raphael Samuel describes history as "a social form of knowledge...the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded, or a dialectic of past–present relations rehearsed."⁵¹ This is our view of fashion. What people wore constituted an on-going practice that rehearsed, among many things, the complexities of modernity and tradition, progress and stasis. One method that allows a focused discussion of these practices is the case study. Writing on histories of everyday life, Brewer outlines two approaches: "prospect history," so named because it looks down from above and surveys a broad scene, and "refuge history," which is "close-up and on the small scale."⁵² Researchers adopting the latter method look at "place" rather than "space;" they emphasize "interiority and intimacy rather than surface and distance."⁵³ In proposing histories that are focused and small-scale and by critically examining historical metanarratives—particularly those that privilege modernity and modernization—Brewer's ideas illuminate our study. Rejecting the prerogative of modernization that depends on "a single, linear progressive model of time against which all societies are measured," he draws on the work of social historians and micro-historians who have proposed that "inexorable modernization" has been univocal—both in its exclusion of different voices and in its failure to recognize the contradictions and conflicts of modernization.⁵⁴ Such ideas have a bearing on our work by providing the theoretical and methodological tools that allow us to re-conceptualize fashion's relationship to modernization; in particular, we question the assumption that the drive of modernity was progressive, consistent, and pervasive. Insofar as a significant portion of this design—in "the lower case"—has remained "hidden" in the domestic and private spheres, we see a

49 Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life* vol. 2, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 256.

50 Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," 89.

51 Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 8.

52 Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," 89.

53 Ibid.

54 Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," 93. He cites, in particular, Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi writing about Italy, as well as Carolyn Steedman in Britain, 90.

parallel here with the work of feminist historians who, like Sally Alexander and Sheila Rowbotham, have mapped that which was “hidden from history.”⁵⁵ The on-going methodological challenge, then, is to find the means to research the things, people, and ideas that have remained unobserved, to locate and interpret the intimate, rather than take a “prospect” approach that delineates the surface and distance of fashion. The everyday offers us that opportunity.

Conclusion

One of the outcomes of researching fashion in everyday life is that we become keenly aware of the paucity of information on the ordinary, especially in comparison to the extraordinary in which fashion is typically located. Designer names, celebrity wearers, sensational performances, and extravagant visual images have prevailed. Within such a context, the everyday can remain overlooked and can appear to lack significance. However, being at the intersection of the personal and the social, we would argue that fashion is and has been both “things with attitude” and “design in the lower case.”⁵⁶ Over time and within an everyday context, these two categories of fashion both can “evade notice” and can avoid doing “as they are told.”⁵⁷ They exist in a dialectical relationship to fashion’s rules—sometimes in response to straightforward practical necessities or circumstances but nevertheless providing the material stuff of self-identification within routine, ordinary lives. Central to these arguments, fashion’s “ordinariness becomes a generic index of hitherto un-investigated processes through which people make sense of their lives given the material and cultural resources available to them.”⁵⁸ As a material and cultural artifact, fashion has been instrumental in defining the self—whether consciously or unconsciously. In this discussion, our aim has been to question key assumptions about the nature of fashion, its relationship to modernity, and its presumption of change. By focusing on a number of theoretical, historiographical, and methodological themes, we have begun to articulate the ways in which fashion has been integral to the practices of everyday life, and in doing so, to expand the critical framework for the study of fashion in the future.

55 See Alexander, *Becoming a Woman* and Sheila Rowbotham, *A New World for Women: Stella Browne, Socialist Feminist* (London: Pluto Press, 1977); Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973).

56 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 6.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Sandywell, “The Myth of Everyday Life,” 176.