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Introduction: Fashioning the Global City

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“Fashioning the Global City” turns the focus of *Streetnotes* on the symbiotic relationship between the contemporary global metropolis and fashion. Inspired by the line of research opened up by *Fashion’s World Cities* (2006), Christopher Beward’s and David Gilbert’s seminal anthology on the historical geography of fashion’s urban centers, the issue explores how cities feed fashion’s imagination and, in turn, how fashion informs and performs urban lives and places. The fashion industry has historically drawn on the metropolis and its association with modernity to stir fascination and desire for novelty and change. Cities spatialize, ground, and give meaning to fashion by providing both its imagery and its physical context. Today cities are even more central to an increasingly global fashion system, serving as both sites of legitimation and concrete places from which to construct representations of urbanity. At the same time, fashion has come to redefine the urban landscape of cities through its posters, ads, photographs, tradeshows, flagship stores, designer boutiques, and the flow of labor and consumers. The contributions gathered in this special issue capture the distinctive trends that arise from the interplay of fashion with particular urban spaces. Taking the reader through the streets of Melbourne, Berlin, Tokyo, Johannesburg, and Douala, to name a few of the cities considered, this volume’s essays and poems enrich our understanding of the complex crisscrossing between city- and fashion-scapes. Among the number of themes and insights the contributors offer are elucidations on how cities provide added value to the fashion industry, on how photography and new communication media contribute to the popularization and iconic status of high fashion, on the linkages between haute couture and urban culture, on the efforts and stakes required to claim the status of fashion capital, and finally on the role of fashion in urban renewal.

The issue opens with my own essay, “Tailoring Cosmopolitanism in the Italian Nordest,” which describes how the clothing companies of the peripheral region of North East Italy were able to transform their labels into “cosmobrands” and gain a central place in the topography of transnational fashion networks by drawing on cities’ fashion-ability. Regional companies like Benetton and Diesel became renowned worldwide through marketing strategies centered upon a metropolitan multiculturalism that speaks to a savvy, youthful, urban crowd. In particular, the article examines Diesel’s rejection of established fashion circuits and its globalizing postnational branding, which favors affiliations to an imaginary global village rather than to the nation and its traditional and consolidated Made-in-Italy label. The Italian case study provides an entry point into the symbiotic relationship between fashion and cities by highlighting the reliance of brands on the added value of cities and urban life and by showing the mutual impact that cities and fashion have on each other.

If “Tailoring Cosmopolitanism” considers how the provincial clothing companies of the Italian Nordest shape the urban landscape of global cities with their billboards, posters, flagship stores, and sponsored art, Jesse Berry’s “The Metropolis in Masquerade: Melbourne ‘through the Looking-Glass’ Lens of Fashion Photography” analyzes the impact of fashion photography on cities. As Berry explains, photography contributes to the symbolic construction of a fashion capital by establishing its aesthetic codes, monuments, and landscapes and turning the city itself into an object of fashion. At the same time, fashion photography models and frames all urban locations according to those codes and iconic streetscapes. Berry’s essay sheds light on the rhetorical devices used by photographers to establish fashion capitals as style sites—as for instance, the unique and enduring identity of Paris as elegant and romantic and New York as modern and dynamic. Considering Melbourne’s fashion photographs from the 1950s and 60s, “The Metropolis in Masquerade” illustrates how fashion photography framed the city to recall the urban landscape of renowned fashion metropolises.

As Berry’s piece reveals, the fashion industry exerts pressure to conform to a landscape of established fashion capitals. At the same time, it draws from cities outside the traditional circuits of fashion for inspiration and new ideas. Peripheral centers are often more closely connected to the creative spaces of new urban landscapes than renowned metropolises where gentrification, high rents, corporatization of fashion and consumer culture, and the rise of big-brand and mass market designer clothes are prevalent. Susan Ingram’s and Michaela Alejandra Oberhofer’s articles expand the list of global fashion’s capitals, reminding us of the complex transnational cross-referential processes, competitions, borrowings, and linkages that feed the production of global fashion. Emmanuel Raymundo’s and Rebecca Scofield’s articles also illustrate aspects of these cross- and inter-referential processes, the former by analyzing the impact of street culture on *haute couture* and the latter by examining how acrylic nail culture has been incorporated into Japanese street fashion as well as local traditional ceremonies and costumes.

Ingram’s “Euro-Chic Berlin: Fashion’s Bread & Butter” analyzes Berlin’s active engagement in claiming and promoting the city’s connection to fashion, shedding light on the kind of branding battles cities wage for global city status, a position that greatly contributes to their economic and creative image. Ingram illustrates the role fashion has played in affirming Berlin not only as a top tier capital but also in positioning it as the new European city that embodies a post-national idea of Europe. Berlin and its fashion trade shows—Bread and Butter and Premium—have tailored a distinct Euro-Chic identity that is no longer based on Eurocentric classic fashion schemes, but rather on a confluence of discursively and materially constructed urban cultures. As Ingram describes, this style fashions “a globally oriented European identity” that takes the distance from the universalist and humanist tradition of old Europe (p. 51) and, in so doing, allows for alternative, flexible forms of identity and cultural citizenship.

At first sight, Ingram's description of Berlin's Euro-Chic recalls the cosmopolitan style manufactured by Diesel and the companies of the Italian Nordest. However, on a closer look the two styles appear to differ from each other in fundamental ways. On the one hand, the "post-Bildung urbanity and multiplicity" tailored by Berlin's fashion shows share Diesel's post-national social imaginary and its distancing from traditional fashion centers, the Made-in-Italy label, and Italy itself. On the other hand, the critical and political consciousness of Berlin's Euro-Chic and its rootedness in the proletarian heritage of the city stand in stark contrast with Diesel's intrinsically apolitical relativism and US-centeredness. Although fashion is not a political project per se, as Ingram reminds us, the kind of subjectivities and social imaginaries that it promotes have political valence. Given fashion's political potential, the vis-à-vis between Diesel's Cosmopolitanism and Berlin's Euro-Chic prompts us to question which of the two European styles will be able to negotiate political meanings and be able to survive the current global financial crisis and imploding Eurozone debt.

Oberhofer's article complicates the long-standing hierarchy of Western fashion's capitals by examining the work of three designers from South Africa, Nigeria, and Cameroon and the impact of the specific postcolonial African urban contexts in which they operate. Her "Fashioning African Cities: The Case of Johannesburg, Lagos and Douala" challenges Eurocentric perspectives that associate Africa with rural settings by demonstrating how ex-colonized urban centers are not simple sources of exotic inspiration for Western fashion, but rather active centers for both local and transcontinental consumers. Oberhofer's article illustrates how the three African designers she considers—Nkhensani Manganyi Nkosi (South Africa), Buki Akib (Nigeria), and Jules Wokam (Cameroon)—playfully wave together local and global clothing references. Oberhofer's detailed comparisons of these designers' work highlight not only their differences but also the complex inter-referential processes occurring across time periods both within the region and between different nations and continents.

Emmanuel Raymundo's essay, "Altman on Jacobs on Dior: Fashion Through Fractals and Archives," shows us how public discourse plays an important part in the popularization and iconic status of haute couture in ways that are similar to how photography symbolically constructs fashion. Replacing the public arenas once found in fashion cities, blogs and social networks such as Twitter and Facebook have popularized a business that remains the prerogative of a small elite and have shrunk the distance between the streets and the world of high fashion. At once examining the speculations that circulated on the new social media over Dior's nomination of a new head designer (after Galliano's dramatic firing) and Robert Altman's film *Prêt-à-Porter*, Raymundo's essay illustrates the connections between the public sphere of urban culture and the rarified world of the high fashion industry. Altman's filmic portrayal of fashion and his dissolution of the boundary between facts and fiction provide a backdrop for Raymundo's exploration of the interdependent tension between fashion

insiders and the masses, designers and the public, and the runway drama and street spectacles.

Addressing the popularity of artificial nails in Tokyo, Rebecca Scofield's article also sheds light on the contributing role of public discourse, as articulated by nail magazines and nail artists, in affirming and diffusing nail culture and in producing cutting-edge and extreme nails. Her "Nailed It: Producing and Consuming in Tokyo's Nail Industry" explains that the laborious and time-consuming fashion of acrylic nails—which at times are two or three inches long, with intricate designs and large jewels—is not just the prerogative of transgressive young women. Cutting across age, class, and ethnicity, the trend of artificial nails travels across and beyond Tokyo's topography of radical fashion tribes, often gaining entry even into the most traditional and conservative spaces of Japanese culture. Scofield's article shows how, within the highly divided urban landscape of Tokyo, acrylic nail culture creates microcosms where women of different socio-economic class, neighborhoods, and ages negotiate gender norms, traditional ideals of beauty, difference, and the pressures of Tokyo's urban living. In engaging with these tensions and contradictions, Scofield's essay points at the ambiguity of fashion in its simultaneous invocation and foreclosure of agency.

David Michalski's interview with Susan Kaiser speaks to several of the themes touched upon by the articles in this issue, offering insights into the distinct phases in the fashion circuit of production, representation, consumption, and identity regulation and discussing how the city provides a source of visual stimuli. In line with *Streetnotes'* commitment to different styles of reading and writing the city, Kaiser's interview is followed by two poems musing on women's clothed bodies in the city. Blagovesta Momchedjikova's "London Tube Scene" and Keisha-Gaye Anderson's "Fire Woman" both engage with the kind of urban and gendered bodies that clothing produces and performs. Bringing out a corporeal sense of fashion, the two poems address and translate fashion as a form of embodied behavior whose power lies in the scrutinizing gaze of an anonymous other.

To conclude, I would like to place the contributions of this "Fashioning the Global City" vis-à-vis a recent debate on street style and globalization appeared in the *New York Times* in the fall of 2011. In "Has Globalization Ruined Street Style?", fashion expert Valerie Steele and other commentators lament the fact that the internet has homogenized street fashion. Adriano Sack, another debater, concludes the discussion by acknowledging the equalizing effect of globalization and, at the same time, by noting how such an "effect looks dramatically different depending on the street." Judging from the essays and poems assembled here, particular streets and urban spaces interface with transnational trends in distinct ways with the end result that, every street, as Sack points out, presents its own re-rendering of fashion's global styles, thus confirming fashion's unique regenerative power.

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About the author

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