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What is "Fashion" and How to Research it? Polybius for Punk Fashion Sociology

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Introduction

Cool is an area contested – is it a mask,[1] is it "captivation"?[2] Is it an aesthetic?[3] Is it a form of distanced and voluntary (and hence "modern") social membership?[4] Or is it the arrogance (or vulnerability) of those willing and able to bully others, as it would appear in the school environment? Instead of seeking to add yet another layer to understandings and interpretations such as these, we seek to focus on a concept we find related, yet more radical: punk as attitude for doing fashion sociology. After all, punk is cool enough today to be appropriated at the level of academia. And it is the very contradictory nature of punk – resistant and appropriated, collective and extremely individualist – that makes it such an interesting potential category for (re)thinking of fashion scholarship. Different sorts of fashion sociologies have emerged through the last hundred years and more – classical,[5] historical,[6] Bourdieusian,[7] economic,[8] cultural,[9] sartorial,[10] and so forth.[11] What we argue for here is not a sociological field of research, but rather a mood and attitude of *doing* fashion sociologies.

Some years back, "punk sociology" was debated by a number of UK-based scholars – mostly in the blogosphere. This wave followed the publication of a short book entitled *Punk Sociology*

[1] Thompson, Robert Farris, *Aesthetic of the Cool* (New York: Periscope Publishing, 2011).

[2] Walker, Rebecca, (ed) *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012).

[3] Thompson, *Aesthetic of the Cool*.

[4] Turner, Bryan S., "The Possibility of Primitiveness: Towards a Sociology of Body Marks in Cool Societies." *Body & Society*, vol. 5(2-3/1999): 39-50.

[5] Simmel, Georg, "Fashion," *International Quarterly*, vol. 10(1904): 130-55.; Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: Macmillan, 1899).

[6] Lipovetsky, Gilles, *The empire of fashion: dressing modern democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[7] Entwistle, Joanna and Agnes Rocamora, "The Field of Fashion Materialized: A Study of London Fashion Week," *Sociology*, vol. 40(4/2006): 735-51.

[8] Aspers, Patrik, *Orderly Fashion: A Sociology of Markets*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.; Aspers, Patrik, "Markets as Fashion Spaces." In *Handbook of Fashion Studies*, ed. Sandy Black, Amy de la Haye, Joanne Entwistle, Agnes Rocamora, R.A. Root and Helen Thomas (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 224-35.

[9] Crane, Diana and Laura Bovone. "Approaches to Material Culture: The Sociology of Fashion and Clothing." *Poetics*, vol. 34(6/2006): 319-33.; Almila, Anna-Mari. "Cultural Sociology of Fashion: On the Sartorial, Symbolic and Social" In *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, edited by David Inglis and Anna-Mari Almila (London: Sage, 2016), 510-26.

[10] Almila, Anna-Mari. "The Dressed Body, Material and Technology: Rethinking the Hijab through Sartorial Sociology" *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, vol. 5(2): 309-28.

[11] See Aspers, Patrik and Godart, Frederic, "Sociology of Fashion: Order and Change." *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 39(2013): 171–92.

by David Beer.[12] The success and spread of the book were limited – no doubt partly due to it not appearing in many standard university library collections, and it being rather pricey to get access to: the cheapest copy of the book in Amazon at the moment sells at £22.99. But there were also (in our view justified) criticisms of the book not really saying anything particularly new or radical.[13]

These developments in sociology happened in a wider scholarly frame of being inspired by punk – punk archaeology,[14] punk education,[15] and so forth. Clearly punk is very acceptable in the academic world today. Yet it is obvious that such acceptability brings with it the risk of tameness and institutionalization, akin to punk's appropriation by high fashion and high street fashion producers alike. Or perhaps this is punk scholarship conducted by those who once were punk themselves, rather like

> the desire to own [an] aspect of recent cultural history in material form is an impulse shared by other punks who are now in their middle years and want to claim their role in what is increasingly being claimed as the most important cultural phenomenon of the last quarter of the twentieth century.[16]

So why punk fashion scholarship? We, the authors, did not grow up with punk. But, after all, fashion studies knows quite a bit about punk, and from a different point of view from those focusing on the music element of it, such as is obvious also in Beer's take on punk. We feel that fashion studies is in a place today where, due to rapid expansion, it needs to reflect upon its nature, history and future.[17] Perhaps punk attitude could be useful in doing that.

Therefore, we first discuss ideas framing punk sociology, their strengths, weaknesses and potentials, before suggesting how a fashion focus would and could make it different. We thereby arrive at an idea as to how fashion sociology today can be radical, not in *form*, but in *attitude*. We suggest that one way of being radical is to look back much further in history than

[12] Beer, David, *Punk Sociology*, (London: Palgrave, 2014).

[13] Gofton, Les, "Punk Sociology, by David Beer," *Times Higher Education*, (May 1, 2014), https://www.timeshighereducation.com/books/punk-sociology-by-david-beer/2012917.article.

[14] Morgan, Colleen, "Punk, DIY, and Anarchy in Archaeological Thought and Practice," *Arqueologia Publica*, vol. 5(2015): 123-46.; Richardson, Lorna-Jane, "I'll Give You 'Punk Archaeology', Sunshine," *World Archaeology*, 49(3/2017): 306-17.

[15] Cordova, Rebekah, *DIY Punk as Education: From Mis?education to Educative Healing* (Charlotte, NC: IAP, 2016).

[16] O'Neill, Alistair, "Exhibition Review: Vivienne Westwood: 34 Years in Fashion," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 10(3/2006): 382.

[17] Almila, Anna-Mari and David Inglis. "What is 'Fashion' Really? The Promise of an Ecumenical Analytic for Fashion Studies and Beyond in a Globalized World" In *Epistemology and Transformation of Knowledge in Global Age*, edited by Zlatan Delić. (London: Intech, 2017), 63-83.

is usually the habit, and thereby to build rather unfashionable scholarship. Just as punk was anti-fashion (and then appropriated by fashion), punk fashion sociology should be against academic fashions (with the risk of becoming fashionable in the process).

"I was a punk before it got its name. I had that hairstyle and purple lipstick." – Vivienne Westwood

One dilemma in thinking what could be punk fashion sociology is to determine what punk itself was or is. For example, was it the form – hairstyle and lipstick – or was it the principle of not being named and thus categorized? According to Beer, "one of the defining characteristics of punk is this very discomfort with categorization and definition"[18] – hence Westwood stressing that she was there before the name. But at the same time, "the punk of Malcolm McLaren [Westwood's former business and romantic partner], notably referenced in the preface of [Beer's] book, is the punk interested in making money and individual success".[19] Indeed, this contradiction is very much alive today:

> Westwood and McLaren's designs have appeared with increasing regularity in British auction house sales of the last ten years, and the hammer prices they have fetched indicate that they are part of a very small group of living designers whose clothing designs have matured as collectable commodities on the international auction market.[20]

Therefore, as O'Brien would have it, "[i]t will be vitally important that punk sociology follows a different path to the punk music that culminated in the sale of butter, a product to be sold like the music".[21]

One of the problems with Beer's take on "punk ethos" – DIY, "attitude", not playing it safe and so forth – is that it is extremely generalist,[22] as well as taking punk in a very nostalgic and romantic light.[23] On the other hand, he is very focussed on parts of the form, such as communication: "One day the punk sociologist is writing a blog post, the next they are working on an audio podcast, the next they are creating posters, the next they are making

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[18] Beer, *Punk Sociology*, 21.
[19] O'Brien, Dave, "Book Review: Punk Sociology by David Beer," (March 27, 2014), https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/03/27/book-review-punk-sociology-by-david-beer/, n.p.
[20] O'Neill, "Exhibition Review," 382.
[21] O'Brien, "Book Review," n.p.
[22] Lupton, Deborah, "A review of Punk Sociology," (January 28, 2014), https://simplysociology.wordpress.com/2014/01/28/a-review-of-punk-sociology/.
[23] O'Brien, "Book Review".

short films, the next they are curating content".[24] This is very much in line with Beer's statement "This is a concept, this is another, this is a third, now be a sociologist".[25] We not only take an issue with the simplification of sociologists' job description, but also with the idea that a sociologist would simply be able to enter other fields of professionalism (such as film making and curating) by the force of punk ethos. While it is indeed a great opportunity that anyone can use youtube and sociological concepts alike, if sociological analyses are based upon this kind of fast scholarship, they are obviously at risk of superficiality, at least if Beer's suggestion is to be taken literally (which it of course does not need to be). Just as fast fashion does not last, so, we suspect, fast scholarship dies when the academic and political fashions that drive it die, as is the eventual destiny of all fashion.[26]

The idea of engaging with numerous social media channels is at the core of another problem with Beer's argument. His "is very literally an attention-seeking vision for sociology".[27] And while it is true that sociology's relative social marginalisation today may be partly due to certain professional conventions as regards publication and public engagement, one fundamental reason for such marginalisation is the socio-political atmosphere that demands a form of twitter sociology instead of careful analyses. Journalism is facing similar challenges today. So the question is whether it is worth the price to engage in twitter sociology or click journalism. If "[t]he person who doesn't tweet and blog or push or even present their research to their colleagues, or the newspapers or press, and is happy for it to gather dust somewhere" is *not* a punk sociologist,[28] then punk sociology is very much about external form and less so about scholarship and its requirements.

"All punk is is attitude. That's what makes it. The attitude." – Joey Ramone

If it is attitude, not form, that makes punk, then the primary enemy of punk is institutionalization. This, we believe, is why punk fashion sociology is so relevant right now. Fashion studies have been slowly institutionalized since the 1980s, and this has happened largely within fashion institutions.[29] While fashion scholarship is often based upon less strict

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[24] Beer, *Punk Sociology*, 50.
[25] Beer, *Punk Sociology*, 20.
[26] Simmel, "Fashion".; Baudrillard, Jean, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 1998).
[27] Carrigan, Mark," Review of Punk Sociology," (April 7, 2014), https://markcarrigan.net/2014/04/07/review-of-punk-sociology/, n.p.
[28] Empathyscience, "Who's not punking their sociology?" (March 23 2015), https://empathyscience.wordpress.com/2015/03/23/whos-not-punking-their-sociology/, n.p.
[29] Almila and Inglis, "What is 'Fashion' Really?".

disciplinary boundaries than, say, sociology, institutionalization has created new demands upon it, which potentially threaten creativity within the discipline (or field). This risks a relative emptiness of creative research strategies, in a way that Gofton criticizes Beer's punk ethos for sociology:

> Much of what is recommended [by Beer] is unexceptionable. Crossing boundaries, using varieties of "foreign" cultural and social resources and analytical strategies, refusing to accept the dominant orthodoxies and avoiding slavish adherence to methodological shibboleths and theoretical dogma… well, of course, and we should all brush our teeth three times a day.[30]

So what made the "original" punk more radical in attitude? Fashion scholarship can give us some hints of this. For example, punk women were able to radically use pornographic imagery to communicate deeply socio-morally disturbing alternative meanings: "When punk women appropriated the bad girl *look*, the separation of the look from its signified, sexual availability, constituted a form of deviance in itself".[31] The refusal to be pretty, and being menacing instead, was an extremely powerful means of existence for women – and yet it got quickly suffocated and appropriated by fashion and advertising industries, creating tension between anti-fashion and fashion. As Hebdige argues, "as soon as the original innovations which signify 'subculture' are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become 'frozen'".[32] Yet the attire may survive as a form of anti-fashion, as sort of a "tribal dress".[33] At the same time, punk was a reaction to something – both socio-politically and in terms of music: "they reserved their greatest scorn for aging rockers and veterans of 1968".[34] The dialectics of society, as well as fashion and anti-fashion, are at the core of punk as a phenomenon: "The punk style was initially greeted with horror. Yet within a very short time, it was a major influence on international fashion".[35]

In light of this, Beer's[36] argument for not playing safe and not doing research to serve league tables and other forms of neo-liberal measurement is both understandable and rather void. The means he suggests are very much in line with what neo-liberal governance demands of scholars today. This is the fundamental controversy that a scholar interested in punk scholarship must

[30] Gofton, "Punk Sociology", n.p.
[31] Evans, Caroline and Minna Thornton, *Women & Fashion: A New Look*, (London: Quartet, 1989), 19.
[32] Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1995), 96.
[33] Evans, Thornton, *Women & Fashion*, 33.
[34] Steele, Valerie, "Anti-Fashion: The 1970s." *Fashion Theory*, vol. 1(3/1997): 287.
[35] Steele, "Anti-Fashion", 288.
[36] Beer, *Punk Sociology*.

acknowledge (and which Beer does not recognize). Punk is bound to die, just as fashion is bound to die, but punk can at the same time survive as an attitude.

"It might seem odd", writes Beer in a blog commentary on his approach, "to look back nearly 40 years in order to inspire the future of our discipline, but it is in the sensibility of punk that we can find viable ways for ensuring sociology's vitality".[37] To us, this statement seems odd. Do not sociologists often look much further in history than 40 years, in order to understand today? In our view, they certainly should.[38] Instead of taking the form of three cords suggested by Beer, we argue that extensive reading and building of slow scholarship inspired by history is radical today, in light of the demands for ever faster, shorter, more grant-driven and often more superficial and fragmented scholarship. Just as punk was radical in its energy and quickness, slow scholarship is radical when enormous pace is asked for.

From punk Cynics to Polybius: A revolution in thinking about the world

To gain inspiration for punk fashion sociologies, we therefore propose to go back in time, not forty years but instead more than two thousand years. The texts that we take our inspiration from are the writings of the ancient Greek historian Polybius.[39] He lived in the 2nd century BCE, in the Hellenistic period, which saw the rise of what would later come to be called the Roman Empire. He acutely observed the massive and rapid expansion of Roman power across the Mediterranean world and further afield. He felt that the increasing interconnection of almost all parts of the known world in his time necessitated a radical re-thinking of the precepts of history writing and of what we today would call social scientific and humanities scholarship.

Polybius' analytical revolution in historiography was rooted strongly in the immediately preceding period of Greek intellectual culture, and particularly the philosophical schools of Cynicism and Stoicism.[40] Both schools developed political and moral philosophies of cosmopolitanism. The earliest advocates of such a disposition were the Cynics, who, in their outrageous behaviour and demeanour, flouting conventional moralities of the time and provoking the authorities of the Greek cities in which they lived, truly can be called the punks of the ancient world.[41] Diogenes, a founding figure of the Cynic school, "declared himself *a-*

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[37] Beer, David. "Punk Sociology". (2016) http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14684, n.p.

[38] Inglis David. "What is worth defending in sociology today? Presentism, historical vision and the uses of sociology". *Cultural Sociology* 8(2014/1) :99-118.

[39] Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

[40] Heater, Derek, *World Citizenship and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

[41] Sloterdijk, Peter, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

polis (without a city), *a-oikos* (homeless) and *kosmopolites* (a citizen of the universe)".[42] Taking their cue from the Cynics, the less confrontational, more socially acceptable and markedly more quietist Stoics argued that government (*politeia*) should be coextensive with the whole inhabited world (*oikoumene*) or the whole universe (kosmos), rather than being limited to any particular state.[43] All people, regardless of race or religion or place of origin, were to be understood as members of one single human brotherhood.[44] At a later point in time, Roman Stoics, most notably Marcus Aurelius and Cicero, further developed these ideas within the multi-ethnic conditions of the Roman Empire.[45]

These new cosmopolitan notions were rooted in, and helped to develop, broader visions of the world as a complex, increasingly interconnected whole that were common in Hellenistic Greece and the early Roman empire, not just among philosophical and elite minorities but among varied social strata.[46] It was out of this social, cultural, political and intellectual context that a new kind of historiography, called "Universal History" by its practitioners, appeared. This was very much a genre both of and for its time. It provided a view of history which was capable of giving an account of what people of the time thought was almost the entire world, which had first been opened up to the east of the Mediterranean by the conquests of Alexander the Great, and had then been increasingly brought under the systematizing military and administrative control of the burgeoning Roman imperium. This kind of historiography was both based upon, and helped to develop and make further sense of, a growing "sense of unity within diversity" within educated people of the time. The whole world was starting to seem to many like *one place*, in concrete actuality rather than just as an abstract philosophical notion, as it primarily had been slightly earlier in time, in the period of the very first cosmopolitan thinkers such as Diogenes.[47]

The guiding aim of this new type of social and historical analysis was "to acquaint people with the […] meaning of the international experience which they were living out".[48] Universal History took as its subject matter not particular political entities such as city-states or empires,

[42] Goulet-Cazé, Marie-Odile, *A Guide to Greek Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 329.
[43] Romm, James S., *The edges of the earth in ancient thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[44] Baldry, H.C., *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).
[45] Revell, Louise, *Roman Imperialism and Local Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[46] Inglis, David and Roland Robertson "The ecumenical analytic: 'Globalization', reflexivity and the revolution in Greek historiography". *European Journal of Social Theory* 8(2005/2): 9-122.
[47] Mortley, Raoul, *The idea of universal history from Hellenistic philosophy to early Christian historiography* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1996), 1.
[48] Mortley, *Idea of Universal History*, 1.

as previous historiography had, but rather the whole "inhabited world" (*oikoumene*). It sought to narrate the intermeshed affairs of the whole world, and not just specific parts of it. For the Universal Historian Diodorus of Sicily in the first century BCE, historiography regarded the "affairs of the entire world […] as if they were the affairs of some single city".[49] But the most ambitious and sophisticated of the Universal Historians was Polybius, writing in the middle of the second century BCE.[50] Tracing the history of Roman overseas expansion, he described the shift from an *oikoumene* made up of relatively disconnected places and nations, towards one characterized by increasingly interpenetrating forces:

> [I]n earlier times the world's history had consisted […] of a series of unrelated episodes, the origins and results of each being as widely separated as their localities, but then [after the Roman expansion had begun] history becomes an organic whole [*somatoeides*]: the affairs of Italy and Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end.[51]

As one later interpreter noted, Polybius' vision was centred upon the idea that "the differences between different states and different cities disappear [… and] the world increasingly resembles a single place".[52] Thus, while he drew upon Cynic and Stoic political-theoretical and metaphysical conceptions of the "whole world", part of the common intellectual currency of the time in the Greco-Roman cultural constellation, Polybius moved well beyond its understanding of that world being constituted of naturally and eternally separate places and polities, towards developing an explicit focus on the historical construction of the *somatoeides oikoumene*, the whole world being characterized by increasingly dense connectivity between all its constituent parts, and thus entering into a condition of what today we might call *complex globality*.[53] Here, then, was a very significant move beyond Cynic and Stoic metaphysics and political theory, for in the latter the world is merely *similar to* one single state, is empirically made up of multiple polities, and is a place where universal human brotherhood is just a theoretical abstraction. But for Polybius and other Universal Historians, the empirical world is

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[49] Diodorus. *Diodorus of Sicily, in twelve volumes*. Trans. C.H. Oldfather. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.
[50] Inglis and Robertson "The Ecumenical Analytic"
[51] Polybius, *The Rise*, 43.
[52] Fustel de Coulanges, N.St.D., "Polybe ou La Grece Conquise Par les Romains," In *Questions Historiques*, 140–80 (Paris: Hachette, 1893), 161.
[53] Inglis and Robertson "The Ecumenical Analytic"

moving in concrete directions towards making it *in actual fact* a single, if still internally diverse, entity.

Of course, this approach is in significant part propaganda for Polybius' patrons, the Roman political elite (rather like punk may be desirable to high-fashion elites), for it flatters the Romans' sense of having brought most of the world under their aegis, and in so doing, unifying it.[54] But Universal History still signifies a major intellectual shift in Cynic- and Stoic-influenced thought. As Cynic and Stoic moral and political philosophy is transformed into – and through – historiography, the focus shifts from abstract cosmic potentials to concrete real-world actualities.[55]

For Polybius it was not enough to describe using old categories and concepts the development of a densely interconnected world condition, where actions of human beings in one part of the whole could have all sorts of ramifications for people in all other places. Instead this new situation characterised by complex global connectivity had to be thematised and represented using new epistemological categories and novel methodological protocols. As a new ontological object – a highly connected world condition – came into existence, this required the forging of an equally novel epistemology, involving new concepts and methodological orientations in order to describe it, and to collect data upon it.

Polybius's meta-level reflection on how a changing world was necessitating changes to the scholarly field of history writing identified both the problems and possible solutions to those problems that what we today might call "globalization" was generating. He regarded the densely interconnected world situation both as the object for analysis *and* as the necessary condition for allowing that object *itself* to be investigated. For Polybius, Universal History revealed that a new form of writing and researching contemporary history is not only a *response* to the globalizing world condition, but also is *pragmatically made possible* by it.

What he meant by that is as follows. The key problem in understanding a world made up of places that previously were relatively disconnected from each other but now are highly connected in increasingly complicated ways, is that there is simply much more material and phenomena to be studied, both in terms of the number of locations and of the relations between them. The analyst cannot just rely on book-based sources, but instead must collect adequate

[54] Dubuisson, Michel, "La Vision Polybienne de Rome," In *Purposes of history: Studies in Greek historiography from the 4th to the 2nd centuries*, edited by Herman Verdin, G. Schepens, and Els de Keyser, 233–45, (Leuven: Dack and Dessel, 1990).
[55] Inglis and Robertson "The Ecumenical Analytic"

data on an ever greater range of locales. Polybius was profoundly aware of the fact that it is impossible for the analyst "to have seen with his own eyes all the different places in the world and observed their peculiar features", a situation especially compounded by the expansion of the number of places now involved in the globalized world condition.[56]

However, he also argued that while such developments made life more difficult for the analyst, they also made his or her work tasks pragmatically *possible* in the first place. Previous analysts had made errors because they had been unable to access reliable data on far-flung lands – rather like Simmel's[57] commentary on far-away places as regards fashion seems rather naïve today. The classical fashion thinkers of the 19th and early 20th century, despite of their efforts to discuss fashion in universal terms, were faced with an important methodological issue. They were drawing upon anthropological studies of their own time when seeking to understand fashion phenomena elsewhere.[58] But the very basis of such anthropological research's usefulness for understanding fashion can be questioned. After all, these were studies often based on a relatively short time spent with a local community, and the studies were also typically filtered through certain assumptions of stability.[59]

In times of Polybius, the epistemological problem of studying the world had been potentially resolved because "the special characteristic of the present age [is that] since every sea and every land can be visited" by the analyst, more accurate knowledge than was hitherto available could be achieved.[60] To put it simply and in 21st century terms, globalization processes create a world condition that is challenging to study, but they also provide the researcher with certain ways of dealing with those challenges. The analyst must master and generate information about many more locations and processes than hitherto, but the globalized world condition also furnishes them with opportunities to achieve precisely that.

Applying Polybius to rethinking of "fashion"

The Polybian meta-level reflection upon the intertwining relations between "globalization", and the scholarly fields which study it, can be dubbed an "ecumenical" approach to social science, deriving literally from Polybius' focus on the *oikoumene*, the whole world and the

[56] Polybius, *The Rise*, 210.
[57] Simmel, "Fashion".
[58] Carter, Michael, *Fashion classics from Carlyle to Barthes* (London: Berg, 2003).
[59] Cannon, Aubrey, "The cultural and historical contexts of fashion," In *Consuming fashion*, ed. A. Brydon and Sandra Niessen. (Oxford: Berg, 1998).
[60] Polybius, *The Rise*, 210.

dense modes of connectivity which over time increasingly characterise it.[61] This approach can be applied to fashion studies today, which seeks to study the globalization of fashion, but to do so effectively, is compelled to reflect more on both the challenges and the potential solutions thrown up for it by globalization processes themselves.[62] New empirical data is being created all the time about diverse locations of fashion across the planet, so we know more than ever about what is happening in different places, and researchers have greater access than ever to those places (albeit in very uneven and unequal ways). But there has not yet been a sufficient utilisation of those data for the purposes of fully reconsidering what fashion is, how it works, and how it may operate in ways different from the manners in which mainstream understandings of fashion think it does. A look into the history of fashion studies is in order here, so that we can more profoundly understand the challenges of today.[63]

Already Gabriel Tarde in the late 19th century associated fashion with a sort of cosmopolitan sensibility:

> In periods when custom is in the ascendant, men are more infatuated about their country than about their time; for it is the past which is pre-eminently praised. In ages when fashion rules, men are prouder, on the contrary, of their time than of their country.[64]

Fashion, for Tarde, is the process through which civilizations spread their influence beyond their borders. This kind of thinking, which happens in terms of civilizational "levels" of "development", and different kinds of "civilizations", has been at the core of fashion scholarship for an astonishingly long time.[65] In fact, all the establishing works either explicitly or implicitly share some ideas. First, there is a recurring theme of "civilization" or "western civilization" particularly in (cultural) historical approaches to fashion. Second, there is an idea of fashion's particular fit with "modern society" or, later on, "modernity". And finally, there is an overwhelming consensus that fashion emerged exclusively in Europe. Therefore, fashion scholarship has been constructed as Eurocentric despite efforts of many to make it otherwise.

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[61] Inglis and Robertson "Ecumenical Analytic"
[62] Almila and Inglis "What is 'Fashion' Really?"
[63] For a more thorough review of fashion studies, see Almila and Inglis "What Is 'Fashion' Really?".
[64] Tarde, Gabriel, *The Laws of Imitation*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1903), 247.
[65] Simmel, "Fashion"; Sombart, Werner, "Economy and fashion: a theoretical contribution on the formation of modern consumer demand." In *The rise of fashion*, ed. D.L. Purdy. (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 2004); Tönnies, Ferdinand, *Custom: an essay on social codes*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961); Flügel, John C., *The psychology of clothes*, (AMS Press, 1976); König, Rene, *The restless image: a sociology of fashion*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973); Davis, Fred, *Fashion, culture and identity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Many of the key concepts that appear in the works of the authors that established fashion studies in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Elizabeth Wilson,[66] Gilles Lipovetsky[67] and Christopher Breward,[68] are already present in the classical works: democracy,[69] urbanity,[70] capitalism.[71] These are in the 1980s and 1990s gathered under the umbrella of "modernity", a popular topic in the late 1970s and early 1980s social science. Yet few scholars actually analysed fashion's connection with "modernity" in any detail.[72]

One important shift of focus from classical works to those that established fashion studies later on was from the universal to the specific. This was already visible in the late 1940s in the work of Quentin Bell.[73] For Bell, "Fashion" and "fashion" were two different matters: a distinction that survives in today's scholarship in the distinction between "fashion system" and "fashion". He argued that seeking to find "universal" reasons (as had allegedly been done by previous scholarship) for the emergence of fashion ignores socio-economic, historically specific conditions that contributed to the birth of Fashion. Scholarship in the post-war Europe sought to conduct (historical) analyses of specific settings instead of generalising. Yet some elements of previous scholarship survived (as we have seen), and at the same time, in the process something may have been lost: the ambivalence of early accounts of fashion, so clearly present in the classical scholarship. Fashion was actually not considered as an exclusively "modern" or European phenomenon by the early thinkers.[74] Indeed, in the 1960s, empirical accounts were published where fashions in other geographical locations were discussed.[75]

The foundational works of fashions studies in the 1980s were by no means limited. They were detailed and powerful both in their analyses and in their critique of previous scholarship. For example, Wilson critiqued fashion's association with the "civilizing process". For her, this is an elitist stance, embedded in colonialism, imperialism and racism.[76] Lipovetsky, on the other hand, saw ambiguity in the relation between fashion and modernity:

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[66] Wilson, Elizabeth, *Adorned in dreams: fashion and modernity*, (London: Virago, 1985).
[67] Lipovetsky, *The Empire*.
[68] Breward, Christopher, *The culture of fashion*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
[69] Spencer, Herbert, "Manners and Fashion," In *Spencer: Essays*. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891).
[70] Simmel, "Fashion"; Tönnies, *Custom*.
[71] Tönnies, *Custom*.
[72] For exceptions, see Wilson, *Adorned*; Lipovetsky, *The Empire*; Breward, *The Culture*.
[73] Bell, Quentin, *On human finery*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1948).
[74] Sombart, "Economy and Fashion"; Simmel, "Fashion".
[75] Nakagava, K. and H. Rosovsky. "The case of the dying kimono: the influence of changing fashions on the development of the Japanese woollen industry." *Business History Review*, 37(1967):59-80.
[76] Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*.

Once we resituate fashion with the vast life span of societies […] it becomes an exceptional, highly problematic institution, a sociohistorical reality characteristic of the West and of modernity itself. From this standpoint, fashion is less a sign of class ambition than a way out of the world of tradition.[77]

Yet these accounts sometimes came to be fossilised in fashion scholarship, when others took them in a more generalising manner than probably was meant by the authors themselves. It is one matter to conduct an analysis of specific historical conditions in specific geographical location(s), and quite another to claim universality of those findings. Yet another way of reading and treating such analyses takes the claim to another direction: claiming that the emergence of fashion in Europe was such a specific circumstance that one should not claim that such processes happen elsewhere, as to claim so would in itself be Eurocentric.[78] Such a position would, obviously, evoke the problem as to what to call fashion phenomena in other geographical and historical circumstances where they have been and are empirically observed.[79]

Yet fashions and fashion systems today are fundamentally transnational, connected and, often, globalized.[80] In circumstances such as these, we feel that one can invoke the analytically ecumenical spirit of Polybius by showing how these systems may have impacted upon each other, with fashion phenomena moving across civilizational and cultural boundaries, both at particular points in the past and today. Fashion studies needs to bring to its analysis considerations of planetary connectivity that are obviously happening now, and also happened, sometimes in less obvious ways, in the past. Still too few studies are informed by such an ecumenical orientation, and we suggest that the field of fashion studies needs to be developed much further in this direction. Just as Polybius did, all case study material drawn from specific locations must be animated by and deployed for the purposes of a broader and genuinely ecumenical analytical framework.

Likewise, too many otherwise excellent studies still remain narrow in their focus, even when they treat of transnational connections which are involved in the creation and operation of fashion within the areas they study. They lack broader narratives that consider three things – first, both the explicit and implicit aspects of border-crossing as regards the fashion phenomena

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[77] Lipovetsky, *Empire of Fashion*, 4.
[78] Entwistle, Joanne, *The fashioned body: fashion, dress & modern social theory*. 2nd edition, (London: Polity, 2015).
[79] Finnane, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2007).
[80] Rofel, Lisa and Sylvia J. Yanagisako, *Fabricating Transnational Capitalism*, (Duke University Press, 2019).

under consideration; second, consideration of how fashion in that place compares with the workings of fashion at other times and places; third, and most profoundly, reflection upon how the empirical data, located within an ecumenical frame and narration, informs the ongoing questioning at the definitional level of what fashion "is" and how it works.

Therefore we feel that every specific study should contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of the definition of fashion, so that better, more empirically and historically adequate definitions can constantly be created and then critiqued in the light of new studies that are constantly emerging. Ecumenically-driven fashion studies requires specific kinds of scholars – those that know their "own" specific area of investigation inside out, while being able to locate it much more broadly, in terms of comparisons and considerations of empirical modes of interconnectivity. Such an approach requires scholars to familiarise themselves with a vast amount of literature and data from parts of the world they are not complete experts in, for the purposes of better situating their own studies and of rendering more effective their contributions to the grand questions about what fashion is and how it works. This, in academic world of increasing specialisation and fragmentation, is a truly radical position, reminiscent of punk attitude of the 1970s.

Conclusion: Punk your fashion sociology!

Fashion changes societies, and is also itself shaped by multiple socio-cultural processes, including processes of globalization. At the same time, fashion scholarship is not only speaking about and seeking to understand fashion, but is also actively formulating ideas, assumptions and understandings as to what fashion can be, and where in the history and geographical locations fashion can be found. As both fashion systems and fashion scholarship alike face more demanding challenges than ever, a radical kind of attitude is required of scholars engaged in fashion research. We have suggested that punk attitude, embedded in contradictions, allows for flexibility in recognising what right now is necessary for fashion scholarship, including fashion sociologies. Paradoxically, the pressing currency of our challenges requires the radical approach of looking far back in histories, in search for parallels and thereby inspiration.

We have suggested that the radical cosmopolitan ideas of the Cynics and the Stoics, and the later working upon of Polybius of such ideas, can be of use at the current time. We have argued elsewhere that fashion studies is experiencing a potentially ecumenical moment due to

globalization of the field.[81] What fashion sociology – or punk fashion sociology – can offer in this situation is wide-scale understandings of the global and historical conditions. Essentially, fashon globalization must be analyzed *because it happens*. But, as Polybius argued, localities are also shaped by globalization processes, and such phenomena must be analyzed too. Globalization itself makes these analyses possible. Under such conditions, the analyst is both *forced* and *enabled* to become less narrow and parochial, more ecumenical and cosmopolitan. Globality is both a single entity and diverse in its forms – just as fashion and fashion systems are both globalized and diverse. In such situation, where a potentially new fashion ontology emerges, new fashion epistemologies must also be created. We have suggested above what sort of principles could guide these developments.

So what is punk fashion sociology? It is not one thing, although we have suggested one approach it can involve. It is a different way of looking into fashion, working collaboratively across cultural, linguistic, national and other borders, towards understanding fashion in its complexity and simplicity, its unity and diversity. The promise of a genuinely ecumenical approach to fashion may still be beset by all sorts of challenges, but it is more within our collective grasp than ever before.

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[81] Almila and Inglis "What Is 'Fashion' Really?".

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