

Introduction, Special Issue on Fashion

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This special issue of the *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* on fashion and Surrealism emerges from a dialogue begun three years ago in the context of a symposium on Chicago Surrealism supported by the Terra Foundation's Art Design Chicago initiative. Perhaps counter to expectation, it was in the context of our exploration of the revolutionary politics of the Chicago group, particularly between 1968 and 1972 but also far beyond, that our shared interest in Surrealism's foundational relationship with fashion came into view, particularly in relation to the movement's attention to cyclical historical change. While this relationship has been described in formal terms—in the stylistic similarities between art, fashionable dress, and fashion publicity from the 1930s forward—our growing conversations, which we have aimed simply to initiate here, nonetheless felt like something of a beginning. After the wave of attention to questions provoked by the “culture industry” on the part of generations of scholars working in the wake of the Frankfurt School and 1968, and a great deal of distance that has been generated from the value judgments that have adhered to media often deemed commercial, feminine, or otherwise classified as minor, we believe there is still room to navigate and expand the field with the benefit of new methodologies and new questions.

All scholars who seek to make progress in this area remain indebted to Richard Martin's pioneering curatorial work, primarily the exhibition “Fashion and Surrealism” that took place in the Fashion Institute of Technology's galleries in 1987 and 1988. Martin approached the topic thematically, finding imagery of metamorphosis, dandyism and nature, among many other motifs, in both surrealist and Surrealism-inspired fashion designs and publicity, distinguishing between first and second generations by their relative openness to participation in commercial media. Martin's thematic approach lives on, let's say, in the way in which we might

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point to the language and conceptual moves of Surrealism (such as Reverdy's definition of the image as the bringing together of two otherwise distinct realities) as they are taken up in advertising, film, and theatre—for example, in the use of dream-sequences in movies. Alternately, surrealist (or surrealist-adjacent) artists such as Max Ernst, Man Ray, René Magritte, Eugène Atget, among others, have been described in terms of their engagement with fashion as subject; or Salvador Dalí, in terms of his collaboration with the fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli. Still, many of the objects and practices that might fall under this heading are generally understood to be outside of the purview of Surrealism itself, employing its language and strategies beyond practicing Surrealists—in photography (in everyday life as well as in fashion magazines, whether we are thinking about, say, Cecil Beaton, André Kertész, or Guy Bourdin's fetishistic stagings of desire, or Rei Kawakubo's research-based dialogue with the culture of Surrealism in *Six*), or theater design (as in the work of Pavel Tchelitchev all the way to Robert Wilson, forty years later). Whether anchored in a surrealist form of life or not, this Surrealism-inflected iconography or even world-making is often described as having a necessarily ambiguous and ambivalent relationship to economies of commodities.

Gilles Lipovetsky's *L'Empire de l'éphémère* (1987, translated 1994) fundamentally transformed the field by making fashion not merely the object of anthropological study or a materialist account based in Western Marxism, but the means of an anthropology of modernity itself. Lipovetsky defined fashion as the ephemeral, and as the technologization of seduction, which gave rise to a system of cyclical changes in values most typically involving commodities with a certain degree of autonomy from the physical stuff of clothing and textiles. That is, fashion functioned as a vessel for Lipovetsky's understanding of the temporality of modernity—its characteristic transience and deliquescence—a concept which owed much to Baudelaire and Surrealism. Something of this analytic of fashion is already available in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (1885), where Baudelaire speaks of his aim, “to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope.” This notion of fashion as a window onto experience beyond the frame, in movement, allowed theorists to access and describe concepts like the body and urban experience. Most notably, Walter Benjamin grasped the importance of Baudelaire, Surrealism, and a certain poetics of fashion, in the nascent methodology of the *Passagen-Werke* (1927-40). Conceptually deploying this guise of fashion as a tool for the consideration of modernity from Baudelaire to Surrealism, Ulrich Lehmann's *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (2000) articulated Benjamin's recasting of the Marxist leap to uncover an epistemology of fashion, modernity, and anachronistic modes of historicity. We could call this mode of questioning a form of philosophical anthropology, insisting on the value of the concept of fashion as such, and as apart from the idea of style, a field of study unto itself.

Indeed, more recent methodological approaches to fashion and Surrealism

are no longer pursuing a typology of so-called surrealist effects, and are not primarily concerned with style, or with aligning instantiations of a popular, vernacular, or even high-fashion surrealist aesthetic to a so-called original or authorized movement. Rather, we ask how fashion may expand the terms of Surrealism in ways that might not yet correspond to the movement's well-defined terminology. In no small part, this may transform our notion of the domain of Surrealism itself, even as the Paris-sanctioned surrealist group's language remains of great methodological value. Along these lines, we seek to build upon the crucial contribution of Hannah Crawforth in her essay "Surrealism and the Fashion Magazine" (2004), which found in the medium something structural that proved such a compelling venue for surrealist contributions, and certainly opens onto a host of adjacent cultural practices. That is, in addition to the contributions that Surrealism brought to fashion—photographic techniques, collage, an aesthetic of the unexpected, and so on—and like Crawforth, we would also seek to acknowledge what the phenomenon of fashion meant for the movement as a structure for understanding modern historicity and experience, and as a form of the dissemination of its ideas, not only through clothing but also through something like a worldview or anthropology.

Given the restrictions imposed under covid-19, which resulted in the general closing of libraries and archives, the call for papers was not restricted to the Americas. Yet it is clear that the phenomenon of fashion for the surrealist group was transatlantic, not least because of the meteoric rise of the movement's aesthetics across Europe and the United States in the 1930s in magazines, exhibitions, and increasingly in popular culture; it was also because of the status of the American artist Man Ray as an early exemplar of successful surrealist work across industries in Paris. A view of Surrealism that takes into account its fashionability also underscores its role as a cosmopolitan worldwide movement—here, for example, one may think of records of the self-presentation of Joyce Mansour between Egypt, England, and Paris, or of Suzanne Césaire between Martinique, New York, and Paris, but also of Toyen between Prague and Paris. Certain studies in this issue concentrate on surrealist taste, while others address what may be characterized as an initial micro-history or ethnomethodology of fashion in Surrealism anchored in the everyday life of the historic figures of the movement. Such methodologies—in a nascent stage, drawing upon newly available letters, photography, archives, but also continuing to mine those that are already very well known—might yet point to a rethinking of surrealist practice. (We note that Georges Bataille, after all, did begin a document titled "Le surréalisme au jour le jour" (1951)!)

Common threads that have emerged throughout this issue are the way in which fashion and fashionability introduce a longer duration for the surrealist movement than has been typically allowed, invoking an expanded timeline before the first codification of surrealist practices in 1924 and including the postwar period.

Further, the notion of fashion implies a more complicated temporality than that established in the art historical narrative of the movement's superlatives and "firsts," also incorporating interims, lags, or even lateness and decline. That is, the discussion of the movement's involvement in fashion both as idea and industry necessarily leads to an account of its fashionability, as inherently subjective yet traceable through a range of sources. For instance, Krzysztof Fijalkowski's essay, anchored in concrete, everyday realities of clothing (his preferred term) and based in a close reading of the literature and first-hand accounts, introduces the topic programmatically at the movement's emergence, pointing to new methodological avenues for the description and analysis of surrealist fashioning among its original practitioners in the social surrounds of the journal *Littérature* through the 1930s. In the context of the community of surrealist emigres in New York during the 1940s, Jennifer Cohen finds a complex web of meaning in the three shop windows staged by Marcel Duchamp in collaboration with a range of other figures, woven in such a way as to (somewhat) obscure their role as a means of marketing texts meaningful to or by André Breton. Both essays stage hyper-local sites and moments that see surrealist protagonists in a process of self-fashioning, whether through clothing as such or in the self-conscious utilization of commercial media.

Our collective experience across disciplines, from critical theory and literary studies to making and museum work, has productively brought literary and philosophical perspectives into dialogue with art historical and material methods. To stage this encounter more formally, we have initiated two new formats for contributions to the *JSA* in this issue: the object study and the interview. Both significantly more concise than the standard academic essay, these new formats provide an expanded forum for new, primary research emerging from objects and period participants themselves. The first examples of these new formats bring this project full-circle and back to the origin of this project in Chicago. In an interview with Chicago Surrealist Penelope Rosemont, who memorably witnessed the collectively authored assemblage of household objects titled *The Consumer* installed at the International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris in 1965, Abigail Susik explores the unexpected importance of fashion and clothing to the movement's many appearances, from their own exhibitions and protests, to the 1971 Telos conference in Buffalo, New York. Making use of the Art Institute of Chicago's extensive collection of books with unique bindings by Mary Reynolds, Jenny Harris inspects what was likely the artist's last rebinding treatment, Raymond Queneau's *Saint Glinglin* (1948). Through a close reading of the text and its décor, Harris shows the way in which Reynolds made them mutually integral, using her avant-garde network to advance the concept of the surrealist object into the postwar period while insisting on the continued relevance of the unique object viewed in a domestic context, one which is even now still gaining dimension as scholars do the painstaking work of attending to these objects, one-by-one. These approaches, in our view, are the basis

of a new set of questions that can extend from micro-studies of the infrastructure of fashion in surrealist practices and spanning from before its inception to well beyond the Parisian movement, allowing us to elucidate new aesthetic and philosophical aspects at the heart of the expansion and internationalization of Surrealism during the 1930s.