The Social Skin: Anthropology of Fashion  
ANTH 152A-1  

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Tuesday/Thursday 2-3:20pm  
Room: Brown 316

Office Hours: Tuesday 10-12:00pm  
Office: Brown 204

Course Description

An Ethnographic exploration of fashion as global capitalist industry and cultural practice. This course addresses how fashion shapes our gendered, ethnic and individual identities. Understanding how such seemingly personal processes unfold within larger economic structures illuminates linkages between power, modernity and capitalism.

Fashion is all around us. As a cultural practice and system of dress, fashion shapes and creates our gendered, ethnic, and individual identities. We dress our bodies conforming how we self-present to the world around us, simultaneously denoting who we are – how we want to be seen – and our belonging to larger communities. But fashion is also one of the largest and oldest global industries. The cotton trade was one of the first global industries, alongside coffee and
sugar, that was a driving force during the period of mass colonization. To this day, the fashion industry not only dresses and employs millions of people around the world.

**Objectives**

- Learn how to ethnographically study an object of material and visual culture
- Explore the links between macro-global processes (capitalism and fashion) and our micro-individual personal practices (what we buy, how we dress)
- Understand the relationship between fashion, visual self-presentation, power, and identity formation
- Explore the connection between capitalist industrial practices and aesthetic objects
- Analyze how fashion and clothing are used to produce meaning
- Analyze how intersectional categories (class, race, ethnicity, sexuality) are sustained and challenged, how power relations are embodied and expressed through our dress
- Analyze the relationship between fashion as industry in relation to the mass production of fashion images, media and popular culture
- Apply concepts, theories and research findings regarding clothing and the politics of appearance to contemporary societal issues
- Learn how to do visual and material analysis
- Learn how to critically write about objects and images
- Engage critically with our consumption practices while considering fashion’s environmental and labor impacts
- Engage critically with how digital media and other technological developments relate and conform practices of dress, identity formation and self-presentation

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance**
Regular, punctual attendance is non-negotiable. Attendance will be taken each class through a sign-in sheet. It is your responsibility to sign in. If you forget to sign in you will be marked as absent. Signing the name of a student who is not present is not allowed. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences. Three unexcused absences will result in a 1/3-grade markdown on the final course grade. Arriving to class more than 15 minutes late counts as 1/2 absence. Excused absences should be cleared with me before class, with the exception of extenuating last-minute emergencies. An excused absence will only be granted when the student provides some documentation for their reason for missing class. Reasons like “I have to study for another class,” or just saying “I’m not feeling well” will not be counted as excused absences.

**Participation**
Class participation is essential. Discussion is a central and important part of this class, the learning process, and your final grade. You are expected to attend class having done the assigned readings and ready to participate in class discussion with questions and comments. Bring your readings to class as well as notes on the readings, questions you have, and material you would like to discuss. Having the material present with you is important in fostering and maintaining a good and productive class discussion. Attending and participating during in-class workshops is part of your participation grade.
Discussions
Our classroom is a safe space. Regardless of the topic being discussed we will closely hear each other’s thoughts, feelings, opinions and responses. We will respond to each other in a respectful and thoughtful manner. As we engage with material we might have strong feelings about we will not insult, disrespect or devalue anyone’s feelings and comments. This classroom is a safe space of conversation, attentive and critical listening and discussion. An important learning objective is to develop the ability to grapple with sensitive subjects while engaging with differing perspectives and points of view in a critical, respectful and open manner.

Assignments
A number of assignments will be used to evaluate your progress in the course. Assignments vary in format, including essay writing, image production, and digital blog development. Any short projects developed during in-class Workshops also compose part of your participation grade. Late assignments will NOT be accepted. All due dates are stated in the course schedule. Assignments that are not digital or visual in nature must be handed in hard copy; emailed-electronic versions will not be accepted. In order to get full credit students must fulfill the stated word length of each assignment. At the end of the document you must include the word count of the document. Proofread all assignments before handing them in. All written assignments must be double-spaced using font size 12 and 1” margins.

Academic Integrity
The work you turn in for this class has to be your own and come from your own critical engagement and reflections on class material and discussion. However, students are strongly encouraged (and will sometimes be required) to collaborate on all other aspects of their coursework; including discussing assignments, reading each other’s work, and making suggestions for editing and revision. If you use, incorporate or discuss ideas in your work found elsewhere, you must cite and provide the source following a citation style. You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rr/).

Special Accommodations
If are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. Accommodations will not be granted retroactively.

Readings
Readings assigned should be completed before class meetings. Screenings will be done in class, unless stated so.

- Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, The Beautiful Generation: Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion
- All other readings will be available on LATTE

GRADE COMPONENTS
-Attendance and Participation (10%)

-Semester-long Fashion Blogging Project (20%)

-Garment/Style/Image analysis (20%)

-Fashion mini-Ethnography (20%)

-Personal Style or Street Style Blog Analysis (30%)

Class Schedule

Week 1: What is Fashion?

Thursday August 29 – First Day of Class

Syllabus
In-Class Exercise/Short Film?

***Blog Post Groups A

Week 2: Making Meaning out of Fashion

Tuesday September 3

-Roland Barthes. Written Clothing. The Fashion System

***Blog Post Groups B

Thursday September 5

-In-Class Material Culture Analysis Workshop

***Blog Post Groups A – Will be done as a post-workshop reflection

Week 3: Fashion and Modernity

Tuesday September 10


-Joanne Entwistle. The Dressed Body

***Blog Post Groups B
Thursday September 12


-Walter Benjamin. Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century. The Arcades Project

***Blog Posts Groups A

**Week 4: The Fashion Industry: Power and Class**

Tuesday September 17

Screening: September Issue, dir. R.J. Cutler

**Blog Posts Group B – Will be done as a post-screening response to film

Thursday September 19

-Thorstein Veblen. Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture. Theory of the Leisure Class

-Dick Hebdige. From Culture to Hegemony. Subculture: The Meaning of Style

***Blog Posts Group A

**Week 5: The Fashion Industry: Manufacture and Labor**

Tuesday September 24

Screening: The Cotton Road, dir. Laura Kissel

* Garment/Style/Image analysis DUE

***Blog Posts Group B – Will be done as a post-screening response to film

Thursday September 26

-Elizabeth Wilson, The Fashion Industry


***Blog Posts Group A

**Week 6: NO CLASS**

Tuesday October 1 – NO CLASS
Thursday October 3 – BRANDIEIS MONDAY – NO CLASS

Week 7: Factory Worlds

Tuesday October 8

The Beautiful Generation: Part I

-Crossing the Assembly Line: Skills, Knowledge, and the Borders of Fashion

-All in the Family? Kin, Gifts, and the Networks of Fashion

***Blog Posts Group B

Thursday October 10

-Kedron Thomas. Intellectual Property Law and the Ethics of Imitation in Guatemala

-*Jane Collins. On the Shop Floor in Aguas Calientes. Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry

***Blog Posts Group A

Week 8: The Mall

Tuesday October 15 – BRANDEIS MONDAY – NO CLASS

Thursday October 17

-Marianne Conroy. Discount Dreams: Factory Outlet Malls, Consumption, and the Performance of Middle-Class Identity


***Blog Posts Group B


Tuesday October 22


What Happens When Fashion Becomes Fast, Disposable and Cheap?
Fast Fashion is Creating an Environmental Crisis.  


***Blog Posts Group A

Thursday October 24

-Angela McRobbie, "Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket"


***Blog Posts Group B

**Week 10: Fashioning Gender**

Tuesday October 29

-Lee Wright, Objectifying Gender: The Stiletto Heel


*Fashion mini-Ethnography DUE*

***Blog Posts Group A

Thursday October 31

-Eddy Francisco Alvarez, Jr. Finding Sequins in the Rubble: Stitching Together an Archive of Trans Latina Los Angeles

-Ben Barry. Fabulous Masculinities: Refashioning the Fat and Disabled Male Body

***Blog Posts Group B

**Week 11 – On The Politics of Representation**

Tuesday November 5 –

Screening: Reel Injun, dir Catherine Brainbridge and Neil Diamond
***Blog Posts Group A – Will be done as a post-screening response to film

Thursday November 7 – Individual Work No Class Meeting

**Week 12: The Beautiful Generation Part II**

Tuesday November 12

-The Cultural Economy of Asian Chic

-“Material Mao”: Fashioning Histories out of Icons

***Blog Posts Group B

Thursday November 14

-Asia on my Mind: Transnational Intimacies and Cultural Genealogies

***Blog Posts Group A

**Week 13 – Cultural Appropriation**

Tuesday November 19

bell hooks. Eating the Other

Lisa Hix, "Why the 'Native' Fashion Trend Is Pissing Off Real Native Americans”

Adrienne, Keene. But Why Can’t I Wear a Hipster Headdress?


***Blog Posts Group B

Thursday November 21 – AAA No Class – SALIR MIERCOLES 5 o 6AM

**Week 14: Muslim Fashions**

Tuesday November 26
-Reina Lewis. Taste and Distinction: The Politics of Style. Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures

-Minh-Ha Pham. The Right to Fashion in the Age of Terrorism.

***Blog Posts Group A

Thursday November 28 – NO CLASSES THANKSGIVING

**Week 15: Street Style**

Tuesday December 3

-Karen de Perthius. People in Fashionable Clothes: Street Style Blogs and the Ontology of the Fashion Photograph

-Janice Cheddie. Theories on Race, Gender, the Street, and Resistance

***Blog Posts Group B

Thursday December 5

-Brent Luvaas. Indonesian Fashion Blogs: On the Promotional Subject of Personal Style

-Brent Luvaas. Internet Famous “in Real Life”: Becoming a Street Style Star at New York Fashion Week

***Blog Posts Group A

**Week 16: Fashion Blogs**

Tuesday December 10 – LAST DAY OF CLASSES

- Reina Lewis. Uncovering Modesty: Dejabis and Dewigies Expanding the Parameters of the Modest Fashion Blogosphere

-Minh-Ha T Pham. “I Click and Post and Breathe, Waiting for Others to See What I See”: On #FeministSelfies, Outfit Photos and Networked Vanity

***Blog Posts Group B

*BLOGS SHOULD BE COMPLETED

**Personal Style or Street Style Blog Analysis DUE – 16 December**
PROMPT - Semester-long Fashion Blogging Project

There will be 10 groups of 3 students. Each group is tasked with sustaining a weekly blog for class. You may select any platform you are familiar with. Every group must select a theme or concept for the blog, provide it with a title and visual identity/style. Members will take turns preparing the weekly post, one member will be in charge of the post per week. By the end of the semester each blog will have 12 posts and each group member will have done 4 posts.

5 of the Groups will post on the days assigned to Blog Posts A and 5 of the Groups will post on the days assigned to Blog Posts B. Posts MUST go up the day before class (Monday or Wednesday) no later than 8pm. Posts will be used to foster class discussion.

All will be critical responses to the themes, concepts, theories, objects that we will discuss that day. As good critical responses, the posts need to reflect on, engage with and pose questions related to the material assigned that day. The posts must cite the relevant texts (visual or written). Blog posts should be between 500 to 700 words. Finally, there is one last component to each blog post.

As an assignment that is modeled on fashion blogging, each blog post MUST be accompanied by the image of an outfit that represents or reflects the themes to be discussed that day/what you wrote about. These images may be fashion images you found online or in other forms of fashion media. You may also, and are greatly encouraged, to take your own photos for the blog. For example, you can put together and photograph an outfit that speaks to the topics or you can take a photograph of an outfit you saw someone else wearing. Each image should include a caption that briefly states (one or two sentences maximum) why or how that outfit relates to the topic.