

A woman with grey hair, wearing a strapless, floor-length red gown with multiple layers of ruffles, stands in a room. She is positioned in front of a large, ornate mirror. The mirror reflects a classical painting of a woman in a similar pose. The woman in the foreground is holding a small bouquet of dried flowers. The room has light-colored walls and a patterned red rug.

# **FASHION**

## **THE WHOLE STORY**

**General Editor**  
**Marnie Fogg**

**Foreword by**  
**Valerie Steele**

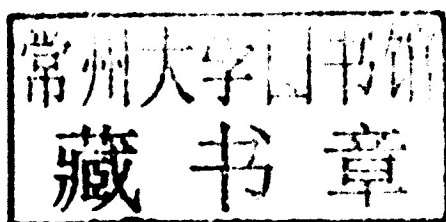
**Thames & Hudson**

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# FOREWORD

Is it possible to tell 'the whole story' of fashion? 'Fashion' is such a complicated concept. There are fashions in all kinds of things, not only clothes, but also ideas and even personal names. Indeed, fashion seems to be a kind of general mechanism that applies to many aspects of modern life, especially those involving taste. For example, just as we do not wear the same clothes as our parents and grandparents did, we also do not listen to the same music.

It helps to remember that fashion is also a verb. To fashion something is to make it in a particular way. We fashion our appearance, not only through our choice of clothing, but also with particular hairstyles, body language and behaviour. Changes in the way we make things—such as clothes—are obviously related to wider socio-economic changes, but other causal factors include developments within the field of clothing creation, as well as individual choices.

Even if we define 'fashion' more narrowly, as the prevailing style of clothing, subject to change (ie, fashionable dress), it may still be impossible to tell the whole story, because the subject involves such an enormous (and constantly expanding) body of information, involving new designers, new trends, new collections and new ideas. Moreover, scholars cannot even agree on when fashion began, and how it might be distinguished from other forms of dress and adornment.

Histories of fashion often begin by surveying the clothing styles of ancient Greece and Rome (from about 500 BC), although they might, with equal validity, begin with ancient China, Egypt or India. People in different parts of the world developed different styles of dress and adornment, which usually remained relatively stable over long periods of time. The rise of capitalism in 14th-century Europe helped inaugurate a new emphasis on a regular pattern of sartorial change. This is often identified as the 'beginning' of fashion. In recent years, however, scholars have emphasized that something like fashion also existed in a number of non-European countries. As early as the 7th century, in Tang-dynasty China, for example, there were already factories producing complex silk fabrics, which were made into a variety of elaborate styles of dress that changed significantly over time, and which differed from the styles of previous and subsequent dynasties.

One of the central characteristics of fashion is change over time. But it is unclear how rapidly, regularly and extensively changes in dress must occur before we can call the phenomenon 'fashion'. Perhaps it was only in the 18th century that regularly changing ('fashionable') styles of dress ceased to be the prerogative of small elites and became adopted by the majority of urban

people in western Europe. Because of the history of European capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, western fashions were eventually introduced around the globe. But styles also moved in the other direction, and today the fashion system is a global phenomenon.

Fashion touches on many aspects of life, including art, business, consumption, technology, the body, identity, modernity, globalization, social change, politics and the environment. The aesthetic aspects of fashion are extremely important, and much of the literature on modern fashion has focused on individual fashion designers. Whether or not fashion can be considered 'art', designers are typically regarded as the primary creators of fashion. However, designers only propose new styles; ultimately, consumers decide what is 'in' or 'out' of fashion.

Because we wear clothes on our bodies, and the clothes express our personal taste, which develops within a particular cultural context, fashion plays an especially important role in the individual's sense of identity. It is a kind of 'second skin' that conveys to others a sense of who we are—or who we would like to be.

Fashion is also a multi-billion-dollar global industry, employing a vast, international labour force. Indeed, we might better think of it as a network of industries, since the fashion system involves every activity, from the production of raw materials to the manufacture, distribution and marketing of a wide range of fashions—from couture ballgowns to blue jeans. Moreover, fashion exists, not only as objects, but also as image and meaning. In addition to those who create the clothes, many others (such as fashion photographers, journalists and even museum curators) create and disseminate images and ideas that tell us what these particular clothes might signify. Indeed, it is sometimes said that the fashion system is not so much about selling clothes but about selling lifestyles or dreams.

Fashion has often been dismissed as a trivial or frivolous subject, unworthy of serious attention. This could hardly be less true. Far from being a whirligig of meaningless change, fashion is a crucially important part of modern society and culture.



VALERIE STEELE  
MUSEUM DIRECTOR, CURATOR AND AUTHOR

# INTRODUCTION

With its origins in the Latin *facito*, literally 'making', the term 'fashion' has come to express a series of values that include such diverse notions as conformity and social connections, rebellion and eccentricity, social aspiration and status, seduction and beguilement. The desire to dress up transcends historical, cultural and geographical boundaries, and although form and content may vary, the motivation remains the same: the adornment of the human body as an expression of identity.

Some 11,000 years ago, once humanity had abandoned its hunter-gatherer existence for a more static way of life, fundamental requirements such as shelter, food and clothing were transformed into forms of cultural and artistic expression. Garments constructed from lengths of cloth required a fixed abode and temperate climates for the growing of raw materials, such as flax and cotton. Clothes constructed from animal skins worn through the Ice Ages necessitated a tanning procedure to soften the hide, and the beginning of the tailoring process was defined by the shaping of the hide to fit the body and the subsequent invention of the eyed needle. The phenomenon of fashion emerged from these two diverse sources: cuts based on the development of animal skins and garments dependent on the rectangular form of woven cloth.

The costume of the earlier civilizations of the Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans depended on the simple method of draping and wrapping cloth around the body (left), secured in place with a *fibula* (pin brooch). The weaving process was initially a method of tufting, and once this technique was applied to the borders of woven cloth, a shawl-type garment could be created, which was worn initially by Assyrians of both sexes. This was replaced, for the male costume, with a tunic and sleeves with ornate patterning, embroidery and jewelled embellishment, worn with a characteristic headdress known as a Phrygian cap. Silk was used in addition to wool and linen in Assyria, whereas the Egyptians thought wool unclean and confined themselves to linen. Hierarchical dress was already in place at this time: slaves were naked and clothes were worn only by the upper strata of society, of whom only kings and dignitaries wore the linen cloth stiffened and pleated. The chief garment of the Egyptians in the period before 1500 BC, known as the Old Kingdom, was the *schenti*, a length of cloth worn around the waist and secured by a belt. During the era of the New Kingdom, between 1500 and 332 BC, this developed into a semi-transparent, long, fringed tunic called a *kalasiris*, worn over the loincloth. For women, the garment reached to just under the breasts and was secured with shoulder straps. This stylized costume prevailed for 3,000 years until after the Greek conquest.

*Fashion: The Whole Story* begins with the draped, wrapped and bound clothing of the Hellenic Greeks and the Romans (see p.18) and draws a clear distinction between clothing and fashionable dress. Classical dress, although hierarchical, was not subject to fashionable change; it was rather a form of dress made from a woven rectangular length of cloth, partially sewn into simple tunics. However, throughout the history of dress, garments influenced by classical antiquity have been deemed fashionable, resurfacing in the 19th-century vogue for neoclassicism and again in the evening wear of the 1930s exemplified by the columnar classically draped designs of Parisian couturière Madame Grès (1903–93; see p.250). Likewise, the occupational dress of the English rural farmer—a voluminous smocked overshirt in rough, undyed

▼ A Roman copy dating from c. AD 40–60 of a Greek original marble statue of Dionysus, god of the grape harvest. The statue was reputedly found at Posillipo, Campania, Italy. Unlike most contemporary figurations of Dionysus as a lithe youth, the god is heavily draped in cloth with an ivy wreath and a long archaic-style beard.





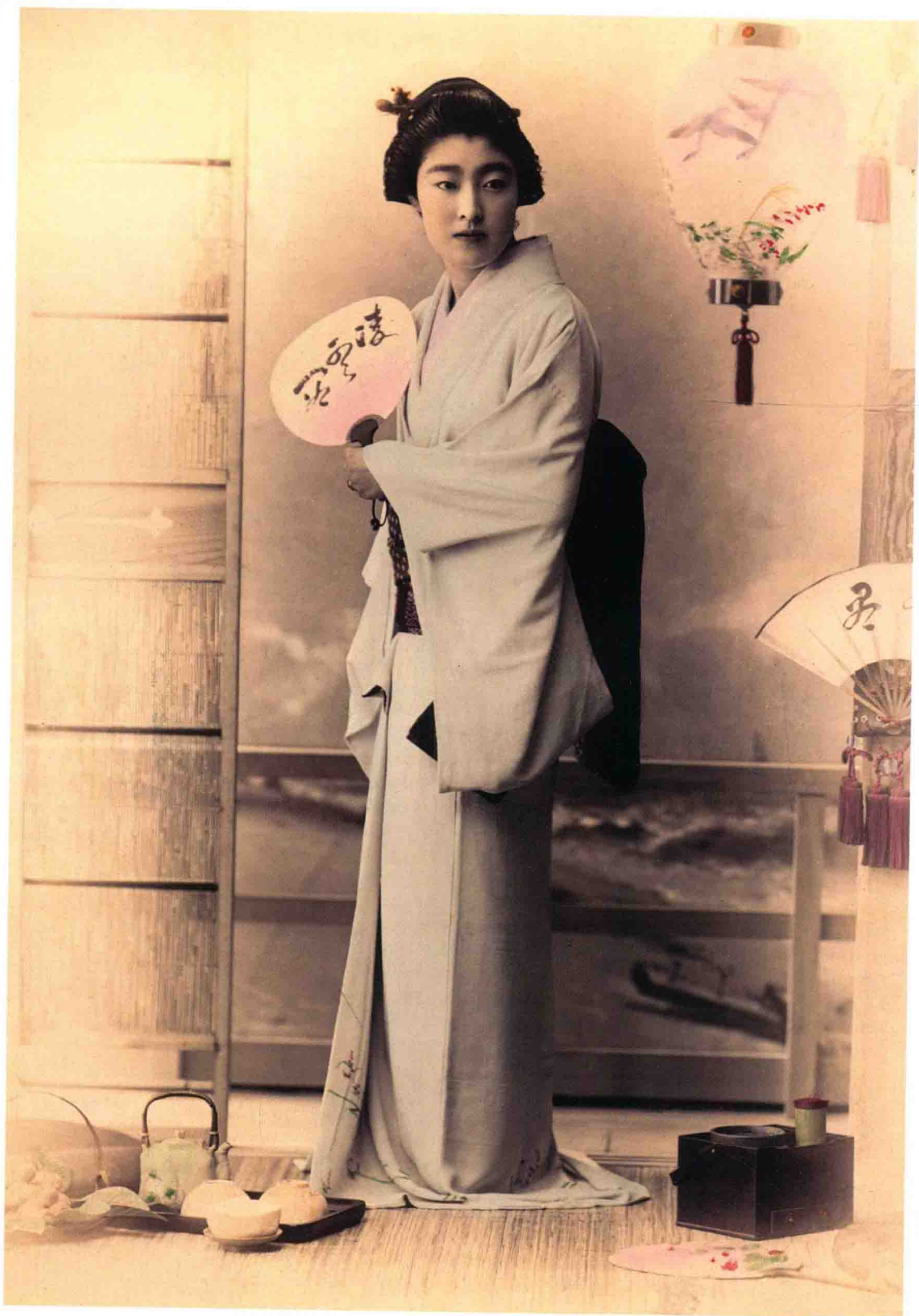


▲ The Arras tapestry *Offering of the Heart* (c. 1400–10) features a young knight wearing a robe of scarlet cloth. His robe is dyed with the *graine de kermes*, an intense red considered to be the most prestigious colour and a symbol of feudal power. The object of his passion wears blue, a colour associated with fidelity.

linen—was not considered fashion until it was adopted as such by the London emporium Liberty & Co at the beginning of the 20th century in an attempt to recapture the homespun pleasures and virtues of a fantastical Arcadia.

The concept of fashionable dress is often considered to be particular to Western society, and to have its roots in the royal courts of the 14th century, when a shift occurred from peasant dress to the French-inspired emphasis on contour and cut and the implementation of tailoring techniques (above). Reflecting a hierarchical society, various styles of clothing and fabrics were denied to the majority of the populace by the enforcement of sumptuary laws, a dress code that defined and allocated social status across both time and continents, from the regulation of silk wearing during the Japanese Tokugawa period (1600–1868) to the Statutes of Apparel issued in 1574 by Elizabeth I and her Privy Council, which forbade everyone except duchesses, marquises and countesses to wear certain materials including sable on their gowns.

Various historians consider the industrialization of society in the mid 19th century to be the starting point of fashion. It was at this time that fashionable styles came to be dictated by the work of the *couturier* or fashion designer. US *couturière* Elizabeth Hawes (1903–71) described this theory in her book *Fashion Is Spinach* (1938) as ‘the French legend’, that ‘all beautiful clothes are made in the houses of the French *couturiers* and all women want them’. However, contemporary theorists also acknowledge that fashion cycles occur in non-Western dress, alongside national and regional dress. This concept is explored throughout *Fashion: The Whole Story* in a series of essays that examine the costume of various cultures, including those of the American





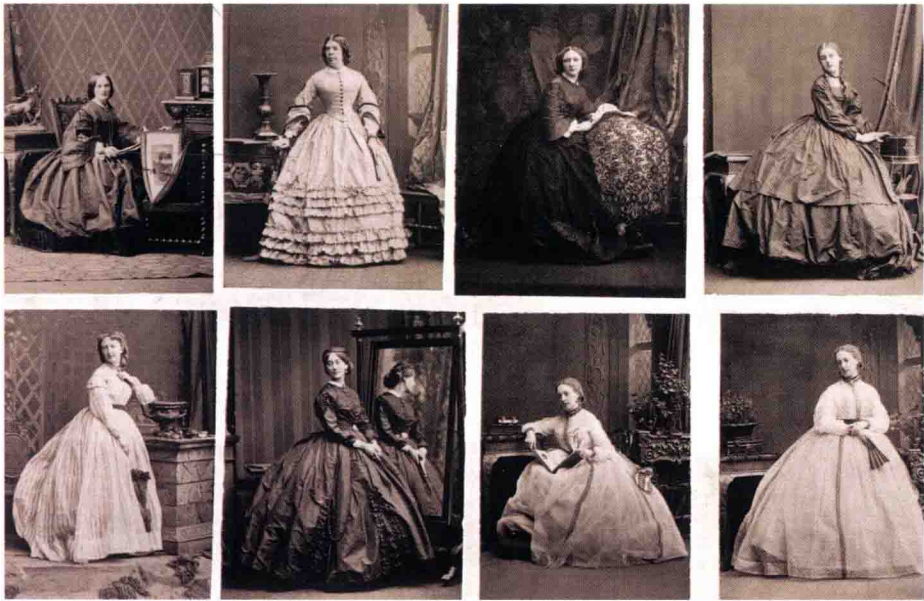
Southwest, Africa and Asia. Clothing in other cultures, such as those of China and Japan (opposite), continues to be influenced by and developed alongside contemporary Western fashion. The term 'kimono', meaning 'the thing worn', was first used during the Meiji period (1868–1912)—Japan's first era of modernization—and was introduced in response to the heightened awareness of Japanese clothing in the West following a period of enforced isolation.

The book also offers some complex connections. Conspicuous consumption was the reason for the monochrome severity of the man's top hat in Victorian England—signifying the purposeful quest for money in a newly industrialized Britain—in the same way that the lush court dress of 14th-century Italy represented a desire for magnificent adornment utilizing the luxurious silks on which the wealth of Venice and Florence was founded. Panniered skirts so broad that doorways had to be enlarged—a style that originated in Spain during the 17th century before spreading to France and the rest of Europe—flaunted material wealth and restricted movement to elite activities only. In addition, scientific advances accounted for certain fashions: the invention of starch in the 1560s allowed for the enormous circumference of the ruff during the Renaissance (see p.56); likewise the invention of the steel crinoline (see p.147), first patented in Britain in 1856, was responsible for the distortion of the Victorian silhouette (below). Sir Walter Raleigh could not have turned a shapely calf without the invention of the stocking frame by the Reverend William Lee in 1589, and the invention of tights in the 1960s allowed the mini skirt to be elevated to ever greater heights.

As Western fashion developed as a result of both a creative and an industrial process in the 19th century, the desire for change was accelerated by the dissemination of fashion information and the introduction of widely distributed illustrated magazines (see p.208). Advances in the production and distribution of garments, and the accessibility of new department stores with improved transport, contributed to an increase in consumption. For long periods in history, fashionable dress was women's only route to power, as seen in the court of Louis XV at the Palace of Versailles when the *déshabillé* garments of the boudoir enticed the king, and power was conferred on the mistress through association. With the onset of World War I, the hobble skirt

◀ Generally recognized as the national dress of Japan, the kimono is a simple 'T'-shape garment constructed from rectangular lengths of cloth forming a square-shaped sleeve, with a stitched seam allowing a small slit for the hand. The edges are padded and a sash, or obi, is used to secure the kimono around the body (c. 1900).

▼ The circumference of the cage crinoline underskirt was at its most excessive in the 1860s, when the steel crinoline replaced the earlier volume of weighty petticoats worn to give fullness. The width of the skirt rendered the woman both helpless and isolated, as the upper part of her body proved unreachable.



► Fashion dedicated to sportswear emerged after World War I, when women celebrated a new-found freedom in an increasingly leisured and consumerist society. This two-piece striped bathing suit by Parisian couturier Jean Patou, dating from c. 1928, is made from knitted woollen jersey, and the hip-length tunic top features the geometric Art Deco patterning then in vogue.



introduced by Paul Poiret (1879–1944) and the tortured silhouette of the ‘S’-shape corset were abandoned in favour of the functional easy-to-wear clothes epitomized by French couturière Coco Chanel (1883–1971), with simple cardigan suits, and the sportswear-influenced garments of Jean Patou (1880–1936; above). Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973) provided diversion with her Surrealist-inspired designs (see p.262), and the Hollywood film studios during the Great Depression of the 1930s offered escapism with the white satin and fox fur glamour of its stars and the androgynous appeal of Marlene Dietrich (see p.266).

Fashion is a great borrower, both from diverse cultures and from other times. The challenge of constructing a three-dimensional garment from a two-dimensional length of cloth involves a manipulation of material that often references very early ways of cutting and shaping fabric. The methods of attaching a sleeve or a skirt to a bodice, or utilizing the seams that create the bifurcation in a pair of trousers, might vary, but they are not infinite. Paris-based couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972; see p.306) perfected the dolman sleeve in the mid 20th century, at the height of the golden age of couture; cut in such a way that it was integral to the bodice of the dress yet allowed freedom of movement, it owes its provenance to the Hungarian *dolmány* jacket, derived from the Turkish *dolama* robe. Sarah Burton’s Ice Queen dress for Alexander McQueen (2011; see p.516) recalls Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger’s portrait of Elizabeth I (c. 1592), which depicts the queen in a dress that is strikingly similar in silhouette, fabric manipulation and embellishment. The queen’s face was whitened with Venetian ceruse, a poisonous powder derived from lead, whereas the contemporary model had bleached eyebrows to achieve the same effect.

Whether complex or simply constructed, garments arguably become fashion once they are placed within the context of a social, political and economic culture, thereby representing the aesthetic of the time. In Europe



and the United States, a cultural revolution occurred in the mid 20th century when youth movements rejected the fashions of their parents and defined their own look. The zoot-suited African American, the 1950s rebel in leather jacket and jeans, the hippie and the preppy each exemplified a distinctive form of fashion for the young. Although there have been times and circumstances when the sexes have appeared virtually indistinguishable, such as during the free-floating era of the counter-culture of the 1960s and early 1970s when both men and women wore jeans and long hair, serious attempts to formalize interchangeable outfits for men and women have failed, as seen in the 'unisex' outfits designed by Rudi Gernreich (1922–85) during the 1960s (see p.378). Despite this, appropriating the clothes of the opposite gender continues to provide designers with inspiration and transgressing dress codes no longer means vilification. With a new wave of feminism in the 1970s, the classic props of the seductress, the bra and the corset, were subverted by designers such as Jean-Paul Gaultier (b.1952) and Vivienne Westwood (b.1941) into items of female empowerment (see p.460). However, the consolidation of the US ready-to-wear industry in the 1970s eschewed such play on gender (see p.398). A new generation of US designers including Roy Halston Frowick (1932–90; below), Donna Karan (b.1948) and Calvin Klein (b.1942) offered pared-down minimalism in the style of the progenitor of modern US fashion Claire McCardell (1905–58), whereas Ralph Lauren (b.1939) built an empire on elegiac images of a golden past (see p.414).

An increasing interest in the 'designed' world, including fashion, marked the conspicuous consumerism of the 1980s, represented by the globalization of luxury fashion houses such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton (see p.453). This was offset only by the promulgation of the avant-garde and the emergence of radical designers such as Issey Miyake (b.1938), Rei Kawakubo (b.1942) of Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto (b.1943) showing for the first time on the Paris runway (see p.402).

▼ US designer Halston set the paradigm for sophisticated understatement. The simple, knee-length A-line dress in a single block of colour with dropped cap sleeves represents the designer's restrained sporty aesthetic and his emphasis on functional, easy-to-wear dressing (1980). Halston used a new artificial fibre known as 'ultrasuede' or 'liquid jersey' to achieve a fluid silhouette.

