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BOOK REVIEW

TIME IN FASHION: INDUSTRIAL, ANTILINEAR AND UCHRONIC TEMPORALITIES, CAROLINE EVANS AND ALESSANDRA VACCARI (EDS) (2020)

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‘We pass through the present with our eyes blindfolded’ writes Milan Kundera in *Laughable Loves*. ‘We are permitted merely to sense and guess at what we are actually experiencing. Only later when the cloth is untied can we glance at the past and find out what we have experienced and what meaning it has’ (1969 [2020]: 5). Kundera’s use of a fabric metaphor reminds us how closely linked the material is to the temporal, a pertinent theme that Caroline Evans and Alessandra Vaccari explore in their co-edited anthology, *Time in Fashion: Industrial, Antilinear and Uchronic Temporalities*. While time is an abstract, intangible concept it offers a peculiar perspective on fashion, and vice versa, as the authors’ rich contributions underline, encompassing questions of how speed, production, consumption and representation shape material and social forms.

Time in Fashion responds to a current turn within the humanities, which has placed time, duration and temporality under urgent scrutiny. This is due to the new temporalities created by digital technologies but also responds to an increasing agitation for slower processes of making and consumption in light of environmental concerns. When read from the peculiar vantage point of July 2020, and in light of the Black Lives Matter protests, global pandemic, ecological collapse and our increasingly online existence, the anthology sits within pressing scholarship that questions how time is experienced and theorized. It chimes with Barbara Adam’s assertion that ‘any new perspective on the world entails a reconceptualization of the temporal relations involved’ (2014: 25).

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Evans and Vaccari contend that few phenomena have such a curious affinity with unorthodox models of time as fashion which, more than simply an image or object, plays a performative role as a time-based and time-specific medium 'uniquely poised between the past and the future' (2020: 3). The anthology returns readers to the eighteenth century in order to explore how time is crystallised in fashion. Rather than consider temporality in the conventional sense as a logical progression from past, present to future, the editors demonstrate how fashion has constructed different temporalities through new technologies, innovations and flows of capital, images and ideas. Evans and Vaccari take an interdisciplinary approach that juxtaposes recognized texts by Karl Marx, Georg Simmel and Ulrich Lehmann with lesser-known ones by Victoria Rovine, Emma Katherine Atwood and Greg French to demonstrate the materiality and complexity of time, but also the multiplicity of knowledges that arise from these processes. Taken together, these writings offer a unique theoretical and methodological model to challenge fashion's reliance on Eurocentric models of modernity – through a sustained mediation on futurity, speculation and how we might imagine alternative worlds. Including autobiography, journalism, press releases, fiction and online media alongside academic texts, the editors reflect on the relationship between fashion and time from three alternative perspectives: industrial time, anti-linear time and uchronic time.

Industrial time refers to the standardized, 'clock time' that dictates the seasonal nature of the fashion industry, often privileging narratives of 'western' modernity and teleological progress. It is something that I reflected on recently, standing still amidst the crowds on the meridian line at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. Due to Britain's imperial and naval prowess, representatives at the *International Meridian Conference* in Washington DC in 1884 chose to adopt Greenwich as the world's prime meridian (longitude 0°), dividing the world into 24 time zones, each one hour apart. London became the benchmark for a standardized global time system, orienting and ordering the globe with the British Empire at its heart. Industrial time is also modernist time and imperial time, without which the industry could not have expanded to the global scale of 24/7 instantaneous connectivity underpinned by digital capitalism in which, as Jonathan Crary articulates, 'no moment, place or situation now exists in which one can *not* shop, consume or exploit networked resources' (2013: 29–30, emphasis added).

Anti-linear time explores fashion as a continual process of adaption, reconstruction and re-presentation, in which nostalgia and revival play a crucial role. This concept owes much to Walter Benjamin's writings on time and history, which deliberately contested post-Enlightenment narratives of modernity that stressed linear chronologies. The idea of time as fluid is critical in defining anti-linear time as the antithesis of standardized 'clock time', which has been used to delineate cutting-edge imperial 'centres' from out-of-date 'peripheries'. Victoria Rovine makes this clear in her contribution on 'colonial time', which stresses the significance of fashion as a symbol of Africa's location in time, 'temporally and spatially remote from the swiftly changing present embodied by French clothing trends' (2020: 93).

Most resonant is the third category, uchronic time, which engages fashion's imaginary as a form of alternative history that speculates on the potential for the industry to reinvent itself ethically and socially. By employing a nineteenth-century neologism to describe fashion as uchronia, a term used by Roland Barthes, which suggests no time, or a time that does not exist (much

as utopia means no place), the editors use this concept as a structuring principle to provide possibilities for innovative thinking. This final category taps into pressing concerns in academic discourse and public debate surrounding what constitutes history and uses the imagination as a gateway to speculate on what a reimagined and decentred fashion history could look like. I would have liked even greater delving into the overlooked categories of queer time, women's time and decolonial time to open up the anthology's perspectives further still beyond the epistemological boundaries of North America and Europe.

Time in Fashion ultimately contributes to wider debates concerning visual and material cultures and their relationship to time. It feels topical in light of a global pandemic that has significantly altered our perception of time and the relationship between production, consumption and mobility, but also prompted a pressing need for thoughtful perspectives on a more sustainable and ethical industry. It is also timely – and not just because it overtook the delayed Met Costume exhibition *About Time: Fashion and Duration* by approximately two months – but since it asks larger questions about how we define fashion in relation to temporality, and whether our current frame of reference is indeed too narrow.

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