

# Editorial foreword

FCVC Network Special Issue

*Clothing Cultures*

*Copy edited version.*

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This special issue of *Clothing Cultures* is the first of several guest-edited issues of Intellect journals that started life as papers and conversations at Fashion, Costume and Visual Cultures (FCVC) Network events.

The FCVC Network originated in the summer of 2017, during a post-conference conversation over cheese and wine in Bloomsbury (London) with Petra Krpan about a forthcoming ‘small’ event at Zagreb University. This initial conversation evolved into excitable plans for co-organizing what was to become the three-day international conference FCVC2018 (17–19 July 2018) (See Figures 1-3). The inaugural interdisciplinary conference explored key issues, theoretical debates, new methodologies and case studies exploring fashion and costume design and their distinct, yet simultaneously symbiotic relationship with contemporary visual cultures. With keynote presentations from Prof. Vicki Karaminas and Pamela Church Gibson, FCVC2018 attracted around 120 delegates from across the United Kingdom, Croatia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Russia, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, France, Finland, Spain, Germany, Turkey and Israel. It brought established, early career and emerging scholars and practitioners together in the busy, cosmopolitan city of Zagreb to share ideas and network in a supportive and friendly environment (see Figures 4-6).

**Figures 1-3:** FCVC2018 conference preparations. Merchandise sponsored by the Zagreb Tourist Board, together with the British Academy. FCVC bags and lanyards designed by Ivan Klanac and Roko Jurjević. Photographs taken by Sarah Gilligan.

**Figures 4-6:** On the eve of FCVC2018 (16<sup>th</sup> July 2018), delegates were greeted upon their arrival by the crammed streets of a bustling and buoyant Zagreb. Football fans adorned in an array of red and white from across Croatia, packed the hot streets of the capital city to welcome home the national team after they reached the final of the 2018 World Cup in Russia on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Photographs by Sarah Gilligan.

In the spring of 2018, I was incredibly fortunate to be awarded the highly competitive and prestigious British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award in order to support establishing the FCVC Network and to date, I am the only recipient of this award who is working in a Further Education college in the United Kingdom. The British Academy funding award was vital in facilitating the logistics of FCVC2018, by helping to reduce the cost of delegate fees to improve accessibility and inclusion, and in particular for funding the spectacular launch of the FCVC Network at MUO – the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb – together with securing keynotes, attendance at other events and enabling open-access publications with our friends and collaborators at Intellect (see Figures 7-9).

**Figures 7-9:** Thanks to the support of the British Academy, the official launch of the FCVC Network took place at MUO – the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb. With an exhibition preview, live music and a fantastically well catered reception in the stunning courtyard, delegates ate, drank and conversed until late into the evening. Photographs by Sarah Gilligan.

Collaboration, collegiality and conviviality are central to the ethos of the FCVC Network. Krpan and I are committed to creating spaces where regardless of affiliation, rank (or lack thereof) scholars and practitioners can explore ideas, work-in-progress, and make connections with a global network of like-minded individuals. Some members of the FCVC Network are fortunate to be working in large faculties where their research is fully supported, but academia unfortunately is at times isolating, particularly for the precariously employed, independent scholars, early career and postgraduate researchers. Yet there is a plethora of innovative, exciting work being produced despite the continuing constraints, and cuts in education. For many FCVC Network members, their research is being undertaken at a (sometimes vast) geographic distance from other scholars; on top of heavy

teaching loads; family and personal commitments; or juggling part-time zero-hours employment and postgraduate research. Yet, at FCVC2018 and other FCVC events these individuals shone, breathing new life, bringing fresh case studies and challenging insights to the field. I was left wanting more. Through the spaces and conversations that emerged at FCVC2018, it became evident that there was a need and a desire to bring such scholars and practitioners together more often, to spend time together talking and exploring strategies for developing an inclusive, supportive network that encourages a diversity of creative thinking to thrive.

FCVC2018 led to Dr Theodora Thomadaki taking the lead in organizing the FCVC-affiliated New Reflections in Fashioning Identities event at University of Roehampton (14<sup>th</sup> June 2019), bringing keynote Dr Shaun Cole (Winchester School of Art), an ‘in conversation’ with TV presenter Gok Wan, and an array of established and early career academics together to examine lifestyles, emotion and celebrity culture. This was followed in July 2019 with FCVC2019 in Roubaix, France (9–11 July), where together with Dr Graham H. Roberts, we brought 130 speakers together for three days of papers, workshops, ‘network and natter’ sessions and roundtable events at IMMD, Roubaix Town Hall, Maisons de Mode – Le Vestiaire and the beautiful converted Art Deco swimming pool that is now the museum and gallery La Piscine (see Figures 10-15).

**Figures 10-15:** FCVC2019 took place in Roubaix, in the North of France (9-11 July 2019). Keynote presentations and panels took place in venues across Roubaix, enabling international delegates to see how the creative and cultural industries are central to regeneration in the city. Photographs by Sarah Gilligan.

Papers led to yet more publication plans and further conversations about collaborations and where the FCVC Network should next meet. At the time of writing,

there are a number of potential one-day FCVC Network events in the planning pipeline in the United Kingdom, Croatia, Italy, Belgium, the United States, Australia and New Zealand for 2020-21, with plans for another three-day conference in 2021. We would welcome applications from potential hosts for one-day FCVC events, and also the three-day conference. From January 2020, we will launch FCVC First Thursdays, where on the first Thursday of the month, no matter where in the world you are, FCVC Network members meet up face-to-face, or online – even with just one other person – to chat, share some food and a mug, glass or bottle or two of something and see where the conversation takes you. FCVC First Thursdays is a simple idea, but one that places a regular, consistent commitment to collaboration, collegiality, conviviality and most of all conversations and kindness at the heart of academia. I look forward to seeing how FCVC Network grows over the coming year as it develops a life of its own and welcomes your suggestions and input to helping the network thrive.

This issue of *Clothing Cultures* brings together a diverse selection of articles from scholars based in the United Kingdom, Israel, Turkey, Germany and New Zealand together to explore embroidery, blasphemous fashion and celebrity culture, emerging fashion cities, fake fashion, callout culture and makeover narratives. In editing such a collection of articles, although a dominant overarching ‘theme’ may not immediately appear apparent, the focus on the sheer diversity of contemporary clothing cultures unifies the issue. In offering a journey from the margins to the mainstream, each article and the issue overall aims to offer a fresh perspective, whether of a marginalized group, of politics, the clothing industry in different contexts, digital critiques or a challenge to the dominant textual readings. These are the voices of emerging and early career scholars, and some whose

voices may previously not have been heard in an English language publication. These articles should therefore be read as provocations, as interventions self-consciously intended to provoke ideas, questions, discussions, actions and ideas. All of the articles in this issue, like so many research outputs, can be read as ‘work-in-progress’, forming part of much larger research projects, at different stages of their journeys. They are not the end, conclusive proof or the final word, but a starting point to wider current debates. They each strive to provoke conversations with the authors and with other scholars, practitioners and the public. The articles aim to encourage you to engage, to question, share and offer insights which will support where these pieces of research may go next. In bringing their voices to this issue, it is hoped that the articles, like the FCVC Network events, will spark a desire to connect with those scholars featured and find out more about their research and the diverse contexts in which they are working. I actively encourage you to contact the contributors and discuss their ideas further.

**Figures 16-21:** Claire A. Baker’s recent exhibition ‘Place, Home, Loss and Legacy’ at Hartlepool Art Gallery, combined artefacts and photographs from her ethnographic research with the Chernobyl Babushka, with creative work by Baker. Photographs from the preview evening 27<sup>th</sup> September 2019, by Sarah Gilligan with permission of the artist.

This FCVC Network special issue opens with Claire A. Baker’s article ‘An experiential investigation into the embroidery practices of the Chernobyl Babushka’. Baker is a textile and embroidery artist in the North East of the United Kingdom, whose work combines empirical research centred upon observing, recording and gathering testimonies and histories in the field with practice-based research. Baker has recently exhibited at Hartlepool Art Gallery with her solo show ‘Place, Home, Loss and Legacy’ (28 September–2 November 2019, see Figures 16-21) and her work is also featured at a new

collective exhibition at the Bowes Museum in County Durham entitled ‘#Untitled10’ on display until 28 February 2020.<sup>[1]</sup> Central to Baker’s article, her exhibitions and her practice-based research is a focus upon the creative processes and concepts of craft and the importance of engaging with disenfranchised communities. Through engaging with the ageing Babushkas of Chernobyl, Baker’s work builds a connection between past and present in a context of the declining remains of a forgotten community. Her work-in-progress with the self-settlers at the site of the world’s worst nuclear accident is a timely, poignant and intimate investigation and preservation of a generation and their craft. The aim is as her project continues for her findings to offer clear insights into regional embroidery and enable further connections and understanding between transnational craft communities.

Anna Kleiman’s article ‘Dress to oppress: Performing blasphemy on the red carpet’ examines the 2017 Cannes Film Festival ‘Jerusalem Dress’ scandal, provoked by the dress worn by Miri Regev, the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sports. In offering an analysis of red carpet fashions that goes beyond the dominant academic focus on established movie stars and celebrities, Kleiman’s article examines how and why Regev’s dress can be read as blasphemous and spark such a cultural scandal. In decentering celebrity culture on the red carpet Kleiman offers insights to the cultural sensitivity that the line of a dress and the representation of an architectural print can offer a nationalist message. Kleiman examines the ways in using clothing as a political statement not only garnered media coverage, but also went viral and led to participatory mimicry practices via digital media, in which audiences were actively encouraged to create their own versions of the dress.

In ‘It’s hard to do fashion in Istanbul – Or is it?’ Nilay Ulusoy focuses upon the ways in which Istanbul is emerging as a new global fashion capital. In offering an overview of the contemporary Turkish fashion industry with a focus upon Neo Ottoman style, Ulusoy draws upon primary research undertaken through interviews with designers, social media specialists and textile engineers in Turkey. In tracing the landscape of a new fashion city that combines atmosphere, cultural heritage and mass textile production Ulusoy examines the tensions which emerge between the identity of Istanbul as a social construct and the realities of mass manufacturing, design education and economic regeneration through the creative industries.

Dagmar Venohr’s article ‘Fake\_fashion\_agency: Aesthetical making and vestimentary tactics between geniuses, creativity and Shanzai’ examines the proliferation of fake fashion and the ways in which it exhibits strategies of disguise. With reference to the seizure of fake sneakers by German customs officers, Diesel’s ‘Deisel’ pop-up store, Super Deluxe and Adidas, these recent case study examples are introduced alongside aesthetical and vestimentary practices of productive counterfeiting tactics. These contextual examples act as the springboard to the introduction of new work-in-progress of which the ‘fake fashion’ workshops with children in Hamburg marks the start. It is hoped that as the wider research project evolves, the playful, engaging workshops discussed in the article will prompt further collaborative ethnographic research that will offer new insights not only into the practices of fake fashion, but also into the ways in which audiences, and in particular children engage with an disrupt the fashion industry through creative play.



In ‘The *Diet Prada* effect: “Callout” culture in the contemporary “fashionscape”, New Zealand-based scholar Vanessa Gerrie examines the emergence of online ‘callout culture’ through the analysis of two case studies, the independent fashion critic sites *Diet Prada* and *The Fashion Law*, which have both gained popularity and notoriety since 2017 for their unrelenting agenda to call out ‘fashion’s indiscretions’ via digital media. Through her case studies, Gerrie’s article draws attention to the ways in which independent voices are gaining traction through Instagram and blogs and disrupting the dominance of the fashion industry. By holding the gatekeepers, from the designers, editors and marketers accountable for their opinions and copycat fashions, Gerrie aims to raise questions about the future direction of not only the industry, but fashion criticism more widely.

And lastly, in ‘Getting naked with Gok Wan: A psychoanalytic reading of *How to look good naked*’s transformational narratives’ Theodora Thomadaki focuses on the ways in which Gok Wan’s television series can be seen to have revolutionized the self-improvement genre. As a scholar who dedicated her Ph.D. research to *How to Look Good Naked*, Thomadaki offers a challenging perspective on the programme. Her work takes an unusually positive stance on the potential of the programme, arguing that through a playful, caring and ‘female friendly’ approach, the series offers the exploration of inner layers of subjectivity that enable a therapeutic playing that allows participants to self-discovery and self-acceptance. The article implicitly raises questions as to whether television really is a safe place for such intense emotional neurosis and the vulnerability of the body to be revealed. Additionally, whilst Gok Wan adopts a warmer approach than the likes of Trinny and Susannah in *What Not to Wear*, is he actually rendered without agency or as sexless as he may initially appear?

During his conversation with Thomadaki at the New Reflections event at the University of Roehampton, it was abundantly clear that ‘Gok Wan’ on and beyond the screen is a celebrity persona with an incredibly successful brand, and a loyal and devoted fan base. Gok Wan is a television and cross-media character created explicitly in order to commodify transformation narratives. Through offering an illusionary intimacy that promises participants and fans that they will get to know the ‘real’ Gok Wan, his brand becomes likeable and engages audiences. In sharing the narrative of his ‘own’ body dysmorphia issues with the audience, he self-consciously constructs a space in which individuals will open up to him. In the question and answer session that followed Thomadaki’s interview with Gok Wan, the celebrity persona pervaded. Questions from the audience were not traditionally ‘academic’, but rather informally addressed Gok Wan as a makeover expert and celebrity. What was particularly fascinating was the warmth and good humour with which he was received by an audience who typically could have been far more critical. At the end of the session, numerous members of the audience queued up for a selfie with Gok Wan, eager to capture and share the moment on social media. He turned the mirror back upon the audience and offered the promise of a moment of celebrity fame for all those who would join him (see Figure 22). The interactions between the celebrity and academics drew attention to the tensions and emotions that pervade Fashion, Media and Cultural Studies between our identities as scholars, fans and consumers.

**Figure 22:** Dr Theodora Thomadaki gets up close (but not naked) for a selfie with TV presenter Gok Wan at the end of the FCVC affiliated ‘New Reflections’ event at the University of Roehampton University (14<sup>th</sup> June 2019). Photograph by Theodora Thomadaki with the permission of Gok Wan.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I introduce this first special issue of articles that have been developed from papers and conversations at FCVC Network events. Further articles from FCVC Network members will be published in 2020 in *Film, Fashion and Consumption*, *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* and *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture*. Over time, we hope to extend the reach of the FCVC Network to collaborate with other editors of the Intellect 'fashion family' including: *Studies in Costume and Performance*, the *International Journal of Fashion Studies* and the *Journal of Fashion, Style and Popular Culture*. We want our FCVC Network members to feel 'at home', and through our collaboration with Intellect for authors to have a voice to express their ideas and insights in an authentic, undiluted fashion. Whether you are an established, early career or emerging scholar or practitioner, the editorial and production teams at Intellect are committed to providing judicious and supportive feedback to help your research reach an international audience and would love to hear from you. If you have any questions about the FCVC Network, or what to get involved with events, FCVC First Thursday meetups and publications, please contact me at: [sarah.gilligan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sarah.gilligan@hotmail.co.uk). I hope you enjoy the issue.

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Intellect and look forward to working with you in 2020 and beyond. I would also like to warmly thank the contributors to this special issue for their hard work, patience and perseverance. And of course, to Petra Krpan, Madaleine Trigg, Jacky Collins, Graham H. Roberts and Pamela Church Gibson for their continuing friendship and so much more.

## Note

[1]. <https://www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk/Exhibitions/2019/Untitled-10>. Accessed 03/11/2019.

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