

culture analyses seen in the last decades. These studies attempt to tie what has traditionally been seen as an antiquarian descriptive perspective to developments in social analysis and changing ideas about society, through the use of a theoretical framework.

The use of material sources is another common feature in many of the texts and several of the authors discuss the process of 'reading' and decoding objects. Other recurring themes are changes in fashion practices and their social and cultural explanations and local practices formed by regional or global contacts.

Two interesting examples discussing the relationship between objects, practices and society are presented by Pernilla Rasmussen and Bjørn Sverre Hol Haugen. Rasmussen bridges the gap between practices decoded in extant objects and explanations found in the framework of society in her text about the working conditions of tailors and seamstresses and the technical development in the manufacture of women's clothes. She suggests and successfully argues that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century there were two parallel sets of technical traditions for the manufacture of women's clothes connected to the traditions of seamstresses and tailors respectively, an Anglo-French one and a German and Nordic one.

Hol Haugen reflects on the cultural relationship between human and nonhuman actors, people and objects, and its association with situated practices as he approaches a group of eighteenth-century peasant stays from the perspective of actor network theory. He discusses the process of observation, formulation of questions, analysis and deduction, which takes place during the encounter between the researcher and the material sources. This is exemplified with his own experiences of studying objects in museum storage.

The contributions from scholars working in different traditions denote a shift from a cultural historical perspective towards a perspective of social and political

history, which the study of fashion history is undergoing. As a whole the anthology gives a good insight into questions addressed and methods and theories now in use among Scandinavian researchers. It shows a mix of traditional approaches and more novel ones.

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SUSAN ELIZABETH RYAN, *Garments of Paradise: Wearable Discourse in the Digital Age*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, 2014. 326 pp., 98 b/w illus. £24.95/\$35. ISBN: 978026202741

This book's evocative title *Garments of Paradise* hints at connections to the ancient and primal, and to utopian dreams of a future world where dressing as technological embodiment is full of as yet uncategorised possibilities. The title does not disappoint. Author Susan Elizabeth Ryan lays bare her extensive research to define 'dress acts': acts of wearing that merge bodies, society, communication, materials and devices.

Ryan notes that the proliferation of the mechanical clock in the mid-fourteenth century coincided with the emergence of the concept of fashion and a society preoccupied with change and mutability. Today the wearing of timepieces is taken for granted, but must once have triggered significant sensory recalibration as people assimilated clockwork time into their perceptual schema. Apple's newly launched watch is advertised as their most personal device yet. Our bodies have long been schooled in hand-eye coordination, and I wonder if Apple's wristwatch will confirm that the web's kaleidoscope has superseded linear time as the universal, cultural mainspring. Apple's watch launch comes just months after Google halted sales of its 'Google Glasses'. Both these developments post-date this publication, and serve to evidence the unpredictable, emergent nature of wearable technology (WT) that Ryan so ably narrates throughout, as being due to the dynamic interactions of fashion,

technological innovation and the market for commodities.

Eugenics, sci-fi, cyborgs, comic books, miniaturisation, superheroes and the Second World War are cited amongst many other disparate influences on society's fascination with the 'machinic' body and WT. As the chapters unfolded, I found it pleasing to read about the experimental work of many designers, artists, inventors and research labs alongside that of philosophers and observers, where Ryan equally acknowledges the contributions of practice and theory. Mann, Apple, CuteCircuit, Orta, NASA, Phillips, Orth, Tillotson, MIT, Bersowska, rub shoulders with Agamben, De Landa, Deleuze and Guattari, Barthes, Lurie, Wilson, Evans, Entwistle.

It is a complex area with many threads and Ryan has knitted a fascinating panorama of WT's digital oeuvre. There is a binary quality to its landscape: a mix of plain and purl. She explains how this emerging medium has been constantly torn apart by the conflicting momentums of archaism and futurism: swinging between the aspiration for augmentation and technical function, to the desire for adornment and fashion's inherent cycles of obsolescence. On another level still, Ryan reflects on the fundamental conflict of being naked or clothed, that Agamben references as the body's binary 'theological signature' (p. 135).

Ryan writes: '... the body that wears technology is a body dominated by ideological meaning and augmentation that too easily relinquishes agency' (p. 249). Some may consider 'twas ever thus. Digital WT may become the latest manifestation of the cultural interface of dress, an embodied medium practiced by individuals and groups over centuries to find connection and meaning, where tensions between personal identification and social programming have been ever present.

Often interpreted as frivolous display, mere symbols of fashion and consumerism, the effect of dressing has been consistently underestimated in academic, commercial and public discourse. By conveying progress

and conflicts within WT to date, Ryan reveals aspects of the effect of dressing and wearing on the sensate body, and their significance to personal autonomy and lived experience, which may not yet be well understood by technology stakeholders. Her intelligent, expansive narrative has potential to inform and challenge naïve or deprecating interpretations.

Reference to Agamben's theological light-clad body of redemption, Tanaka's Electric Dress, Co's Halo, the conductive threads of Diffus Design's Climate Dress and images of garments that integrate LEDs, flashing colour or sensory information, all combined to connect me with prior knowledge of the textile craft of Shisha mirror embroidery. Embellishment with light-reflecting substances is a worldwide, ancient practice: 'dress acts' that protect wearers from evil spirits, materialise skill, identity and community. Contemporary forms of digital WT can appear clumsy and even anachronistic when compared to a wearable craft like Shisha, where there are no batteries or digital components and materials use the light of the sun, moon and stars to power up the garments.

Wearable devices may still be categorised as novelties by many, yet the wearable technology market is predicted to increase tenfold to \$50 billion over the next three to five years. Influential applications may include medicine, gaming, health and fitness, as well as other forms of augmented dress evolving from 'dress acts' in the arenas of art and fashion, where spectacle has fuelled experimentation and raised awareness. WT will transform the way we experience our bodies, the way we live and interact.

Susan Elizabeth Ryan's impressive critical analysis conveys multiple perspectives that enable imagination to travel across time. *Garments of Paradise* extends and updates knowledge of the forces that transform social ideology, behaviour and consumption, along with our primal instinct to ward off evils: to look and feel good.

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