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# **Preface to the Frederic Monneyron's book : Fashion : A Theory. Mapping the Sociological Landscapes of Fashion and Clothing.**

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Frederic Monneyron

# Fashion

**A Theory**

**OpenCulture**  
Academic Publishing

# Fashion

## A Theory

In Western societies, a long-standing philosophical tradition prioritizes deeper meanings over surface appearances, thus reducing clothes to mere false impressions, favoring an unvarnished truth instead. Then, to write on clothes implies the reversal of a whole philosophical attitude: trying no more to pose clothes as a source of mistakes, but as a mold, matrix, no longer as a secondary and accessory element, but as a very first and founding element, determining individual behaviors as the social structures. It is this reversal that this book tries to promote. And doing so, it tries to address what is obviously missing: a theory, and also –theories being reinforced by practices– the sociological practices of clothes and fashion.

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Frederic Monneyron, who writes both in French and English, is the author of more than fifty books. A professor of comparative literature and sociology, he has long been celebrated for his insightful analyses of fashion as a mirror to our identities and cultural shifts. His academic prowess, spanning across decades has yielding groundbreaking works that dissect the complex interplay between individuality, social expectations, and cultural expressions.

FREDERIC MONNEYRON

FASHION. A THEORY

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## PREFACE

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you this remarkable work, *Fashion: A Theory*, the result of Frederic Monneyron's passionate and rigorous efforts. As a sociologist specializing in the study of cultural phenomena and creative industries, I had the honor of following the evolution of this project until its completion in book form.

The structure of the book reflects Frédéric Monneyron's desire to offer a unified theory of fashion by articulating different disciplinary perspectives. The book opens with a first part entitled "Clothes and Societies", which explores the links between clothing and social anticipation. Monneyron highlights the importance of designers and fashion magazines in the construction of trends and sartorial imaginaries.

The second part, "Fashion Images and Social Figures", delves into the spatio-temporal dimension of fashion, as well as its relationship to sexual identities and sexuality. The author shows how fashion participates in the construction of social representations

and gender norms while offering spaces for subversion and creativity.

The chapter devoted to "Societies" is particularly enlightening. Monneyron analyzes how fashion reflects and shapes social dynamics by playing on the logics of distinction, imitation, and diffusion. He draws on numerous concrete examples, ranging from the dress codes of urban subcultures to the positioning strategies of major luxury houses.

The third part of the book, "Three Designers", offers a fascinating dive into the world of three iconic French designers: Yves Saint Laurent, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Christian Lacroix. Through these case studies, Monneyron highlights the connections between individual creation, socio-historical context, and collective imaginaries. The analysis of Yves Saint Laurent's work in the 1970s is particularly striking. Monneyron shows how the designer captured the spirit of an era marked by women's liberation movements and cultural revolutions while reinventing the codes of French elegance. The chapter on Jean-Paul Gaultier explores the subversive and ironic dimension of his work in relation to the social and cultural changes of the 1990s. Monneyron finely analyzes how Gaultier plays with gender stereotypes and marginal identities while establishing himself as a major figure in contemporary fashion.

Finally, the study devoted to Christian Lacroix highlights the uniqueness of this designer, who managed to assert himself "against the grain" of



dominant trends. Monneyron shows how Lacroix draws on Provençal sartorial traditions and decorative arts to create a baroque and flamboyant universe, going against the minimalism in vogue in the 1980s and 1990s.

Throughout these analyses, Frederic Monneyron skillfully brings together the tools of sociology, history, and semiology to decipher the deep springs of fashion creation. His approach, which in some respects echoes Gilbert Durand's work on the anthropological structures of the imaginary, offers a particularly fruitful framework for understanding fashion as a total social fact. Gilbert Durand was a major thinker who theorized a rehabilitation of the imaginary, long devalued by Western thought. In his seminal work *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (1960), he develops a figurative structuralism highlighting three major symbolic structures (heroic, mystical, and synthetic) that organize the productions of the imaginary. His multidisciplinary approach, combining philosophy, the study of myths, history of religions, depth psychology, and anthropology, paved the way for a genuine anthropology of the imaginary. However, while Durand's influence has been considerable in France and Europe, his reception in the United States has remained more limited. American sociology has developed more in a rationalist and positivist perspective, giving less space to the symbolic and imaginary dimensions of the social.

In this context, Frederic Monneyron's book "Fashion: A Theory" appears as an important

contribution to making the sociology of the imaginary known and legitimizing it across the Atlantic. By applying a Durandian approach to the analysis of fashion, Monneyron shows the fruitfulness of this current to illuminate a total social fact. Through his case studies on Yves Saint Laurent, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Christian Lacroix, he highlights how fashion designers mobilize and reconfigure the major anthropological structures of the imaginary identified by Durand. Monneyron thus shows how fashion, far from being reduced to a superficial phenomenon, is rooted in the collective imaginary and in turn helps to shape it. As he recognises himself : “Accordingly, clothing should be regarded not only as being part of the anthropological objects of Gilbert Durand’s mythoanalysis but also as a fundamental element of it”.

More broadly, *Fashion: A Theory* illustrates the relevance of the sociology of the imaginary for analyzing a multitude of fields of contemporary sociality, from the most classic to the most novel. By placing *homo imaginans* at the heart of sociological reflection, it opens up new perspectives to enrich our understanding of the social.

Ultimately, through its theoretical ambition and the richness of its empirical analyses, Monneyron's book appears as a major contribution to making the sociology of the imaginary known to the American public. It demonstrates the fruitfulness of this current to renew the sociological gaze by rehabilitating the place

of images, symbols, and myths in the construction of social reality.

Let us hope that *Fashion: A Theory* will spark new debates and open up new avenues of research on Fashion at the intersection of the social sciences and humanities.

Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb