

# EN VOGUE: FROM FEATHERS TO LEATHER

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## COURSE SYLLABUS

Winter 2014

Instructor: Katie Gillespie

Vogue, Marie Claire, Elle. Gucci, Armani, Chanel. Karl Lagerfeld, Anna Wintour, Heidi Klum. Paris, New York, Milan. The modern fashion industry is an amalgamation of corporate media giants, designer brands, individual icons, and select urban centers. Fashion is also embodied in the functional, everyday choices we make about what to wear, how these articles of clothing contribute to the construction of our identities, and why we make the choices we do.

Thus, fashion is at once a celebration of the extraordinary, the astonishing, the unexpected *and* the ordinary, the mundane, the everyday. From the catwalks of Paris and Milan to the streets of Lynnwood and Tacoma, fashion—the clothing we wear—is connected to complex cultural, economic, political and ethical networks. And throughout time, animals have been deeply embedded at the heart of these networks through the use of their skin, their bones, their teeth, their hair, their feathers, their tails and other body parts in human fashion. These industries use various bodies and labor—human and animal—in commodity production.

Animal use is ubiquitous in fashion and this course uses animals and fashion as a lens to get at three important intellectual sites of inquiry: 1) It will offer students the chance to explore the complex political, economic, and cultural dimensions of a multi-billion dollar industry with relevance for their everyday experience, 2) it will encourage students to reflect on the personal, ethical, and intellectual dimensions of human/animal relations in specific empirical and more theoretically abstract ways, and 3) it will ask students to explore the ways in which aesthetics and a culture of consumption are deployed to obscure the exploitation of humans and animals alike in sites of commodity production.

In addition to the more overt explorations of animal justice in the fur, leather, feather, wool, silk, and bone industries, the course material also addresses issues of human and environmental justice. Humans and the environment, like animals, are made vulnerable by the production and reproduction of fashion trends and the networks that promote these trends. Thus, students will begin by engaging with questions of vulnerable economies of export around the globe, sweatshop and child labor, environmental destruction and toxic effects of the fashion industry. An intersectional approach not only connects social justice issues of animals, humans and the environment to each other, but it also acts as a location for students to personally engage with these issues on their own terms.

Students are asked to come to the first day of class having recently read Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* to spark a conversation about cultures of consumption and the power of aesthetics. Within the context of thinking about aesthetics and consumption, the first part of the course develops an empirical and theoretical base informed by a Marxist social anarchist critical theory

and an intersectional approach to thinking about humans and animals in the fashion industry. Building on this framework the course will explore in four specific case studies of animal use in fashion—fur, feathers, wool and leather. Part 3 of the course is focused on thinking through how we think about ‘activism,’ ‘terrorism,’ and alternatives in the fashion industry. Finally, Part 4 is dedicated to students sharing what they’ve learned about their own chosen topics through in-depth final project presentations.

## Course Requirements

### Assignments:

1. **Sharing hopeful items:** At times, the content of the course may be difficult and/or leave us feeling powerless to change things. To combat this feeling of powerlessness, students should plan to seek out examples of alternatives, inspiring forms of activism, and individuals making change to share with the class. We will share these at the beginning of class each day and discuss. Seeing what others are doing can be inspirational and empowering in the face of thinking critically about the fashion industry. Students will be responsible for sharing hopeful items **twice** during the quarter. [This contributes to your participation grade for the course].
2. **Journal:** Students will keep a journal throughout the quarter and will be required to write **one journal entry per week**. Thus, you should have a total of total of 9 entries for the quarter. Journal entries should be **at least 1-2 pages in length** and critically engage with the material for the week, as well as be a personal reaction to the material and class discussions. Journals will be checked WEEK 5 and WEEK 10.
3. **Brave New World Short Essay: DUE WEEK 3 – WEDNESDAY** – How does Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* help you to think about the role of aesthetics, consumption, and the individual versus the collective in society? How do you understand aesthetics in the novel? How do you understand the role of aesthetics in the fashion industry? What is the relationship between aesthetics and consumption and production practices?
4. **Final Project Check-in:** Students must meet with Katie during Week 4 of the quarter to pitch their final projects. This can be a brainstorming session and conversation, but students should at the minimum come with 1 or 2 concrete ideas for their final project, how they will go about completing it, and the ability to explain how it responds to the course material.
5. **Final Project:** This in-depth final project can take any form, but should be related to the subject of animals in the fashion industry. While related, the project should go well beyond the reach of what is covered in class to allow students the opportunity to engage

deeply with one particular topic of interest. The format can be a research paper, a documentary, a podcast, an art project, etc. **Projects will be due WEEK 10.**

Possible projects might include:

- **‘Project Runway’:** Design your own fashion ‘look’ or line using materials that do not harm animals, humans, or the environment. In addition to choosing materials and embellishments thoughtfully and planning the look, include a written analysis of why certain materials were chosen and how they respond to various problems addressed in the class. What limitations and/or benefits arise in thinking about mass producing this look? How does this look fit in to the global fashion industry and political economy of this industry?
- **‘Commodity Chain Analysis’:** Choose an article of clothing or an accessory made from an animal product and trace the commodity chain for that product, from animal to purchase of the final product (including the animal, environmental and human impacts of that product).
- **‘Fashion Icon’:** Choose one historical or contemporary icon from the fashion industry and design a research project exploring how that person was integral to either perpetuating or challenging the use of animals in fashion.

### **Required Texts:**

*Fashion: A Philosophy* by Lars Svendsen

*Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* by Elizabeth Cline

*Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights* by Bob Torres

*To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World*, Lucy Siegle

Course reader will be available at Rams Copy & Print on the Ave.

### **Grading**

- Class Participation 30%
- Short Essay 10%
- Research Check-in 10%
- Journal 20%
- Final Project 30%

## **Reading Schedule**

### **PART 1: THEORETICAL FRAMINGS**

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

**MONDAY JANUARY 6, 2014:**

Introductions & Syllabus Review

In class viewing of documentary *'The September Issue'*

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 8, 2014:**

Discussion of *'The September Issue'* and *A Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley

**Week 2: A Philosophy of Fashion**

**MONDAY JANUARY 13, 2014:**

Svendsen, Lars. 2006. *Fashion: A Philosophy*. Reaktion Books.

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 15, 2014:**

In class, watch and discuss *'Behind the Labels: Garment Workers on U.S. Saipan'*

**Week 3: Cost of Fashion**

**2-3 PAGE SHORT ESSAY DUE ON WEDNESDAY**

**MONDAY JANUARY 20, 2014:**

NO CLASS, DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 22, 2014:**

Cline, Elizabeth (2012). *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. Portfolio Hardcover.

**Week 4: Gender, Race, and Power in the International Fashion Industry**

**RESEARCH CHECK-IN MEETINGS WITH KATIE**

**MONDAY JANUARY 27, 2014:**

Entwistle, Joanne (2000). "Fashion and Gender" in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*.

**WEDNESDAY JANUARY 29, 2014:**

Davis, Angela (1994). "Afro-images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia" *Critical Inquiry*.

Woods, Vicki.(2008). 'Is Fashion Racist?' from *Vogue*

<http://www.vogue.com/magazine/article/is-fashion-racist/#1>

Wilson, Eric. (2013). 'Fashion's Blind Spot' from *The New York Times*

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/fashion/fashions-blind-spot.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/fashion/fashions-blind-spot.html?_r=0)

**Week 5: Political Economy of Animal Use Industries**

## **FIRST JOURNAL CHECK DUE ON WEDNESDAY**

### **MONDAY FEBRUARY 3, 2014:**

Torres, Bob. (2007) *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights*, AK Press.

### **WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2014:**

Hawthorne, Mark (2013) “Dressed to Kill: Animals Used for Fashion,” in *Bleating Hearts: The Hidden World of Animal Suffering*, Changemakers Books.

In class, viewing of documentary *Earthlings*

## **PART 2: CASE STUDIES**

### **Week 6: The Environment & Fur**

#### **MONDAY FEBRUARY 10, 2014:**

Siegle, Lucy (2011). “Fashion’s Footprint’ in *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?*

Skov, Lise (2005). “The Return of the Fur Coat: A Commodity Chain Perspective” *Current Sociology*. Vol. 53, No. 1.

#### **WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2014:**

In class, viewing of ‘*The Witness*’

Sauers, Jenna (2012). “Fur is Back Big Time—Here’s Why” *Jezebel*, Available at: <http://jezebel.com/5946371/fur-is-back-big-time-+-heres-why>

Anderson, Christina (2012). “The Reason That I Wear Fur” *Huffington Post*, Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christina-anderson/wearing-fur\\_b\\_2239881.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christina-anderson/wearing-fur_b_2239881.html)

Smith, PJ (2012). “The Humane Society Responds to ‘Why I Wear Fur’” *Huffington Post*, Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pj-smith/humane-society-fur\\_b\\_2318501.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=tw](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pj-smith/humane-society-fur_b_2318501.html?utm_hp_ref=tw)

#### ***Optional:***

HSUS (2009). “Toxic Fur: The Impacts of Fur Production on the Environment and the Risks to Human Health” Available at: <http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/fur/toxic-fur-january-22-2009.pdf>

### **Week 7: Feathers**

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 17, 2014:**

NO CLASS, PRESIDENT'S DAY

**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2014:**

Hanson, Thor (2012) TBD from *Feathers: The Evolution of a Natural Miracle*

English, Marianne (2011) "Rooster Feathers: Too Cruel for Fashion?" *Discovery News*, Available at <http://news.discovery.com/human/rooster-feathers-fashion-110914.html>

Selvaraj, A. (2012). "Seized feathers point to peacock poaching" *The Times of India*, Available at: [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-06-27/chennai/32442409\\_1\\_peacock-feathers-peacock-meat-national-bird](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-06-27/chennai/32442409_1_peacock-feathers-peacock-meat-national-bird)

On your own, read up on down feather production online and come to class ready to share some information you found.

**Week 8: Wool & Leather**

**MONDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2014:**

Siegle, Lucy. (2011). "Woolly thinking" in *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing out the World?* London: Fourth Estate.

Hustvedt, G. et al (2008). "Labelling wool products for animal welfare and environmental impact," *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Volume 32, Issue 5, Blackwell.

**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2014:**

Siegle, Lucy. (2011) "Lust for Leather" in *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing out the World?* London: Fourth Estate.

Friedrich, Bruce (2007). "Leather: Dead Skin, Environmental Nightmare," *Common Dreams*. Available at: <https://www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/04/30/863>

Sheppard, Kate (2011). "Is Fake Leather Really More Eco-Friendly than Real?" *Mother Jones*. Available at: <http://www.motherjones.com/blue-marble/2011/01/fake-leather-really-more-eco-friendly-real>

**PART 4: ACTIVISM/TERRORISM/ALTERNATIVES**

**Week 9: Thinking about Activism/ Terrorism and Alternatives**

**MONDAY MARCH 3, 2014:**

Watch 'If a Tree Falls'

Potter, Will. (2011). "Naming Names" *Green is the New Red*. City Lights, pp. 63-92.

**WEDNESDAY MARCH 5, 2014:**

Siegle, Lucy. (2011) "How Not to Buy" in *To Die For: Is Fashion Wearing out the World?*  
London: Fourth Estate.

**PART 3: FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**

**Week 10: Final Project Presentations**

***FINAL PROJECT DUE ON THE DAY YOU PRESENT***

***SECOND JOURNAL CHECK DUE ON MONDAY***