

## Introductory Word

In May 2025, the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, organized for the first time a conference dedicated to the analysis of the phenomenon of fashion. The national scientific conference, entitled *The Social Life of Fashion in Serbia since the 19th Century*, brought together fifty-five researchers from various disciplines: ethnology and anthropology, art history, sociology, history, literary studies, and other related fields. Starting from an interdisciplinary approach, the participants examined the specific features of the fashion system and its practices in the local context, seeking to provide a deeper understanding of the social, economic, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of fashion in Serbia.

The conference took place under extremely difficult socio-political circumstances marked by student and civic protests, as well as continuing pressures on universities from the authorities. One of the biggest blows to the university community was the drastic reduction of compensation for scientific work with the complete suspension of salary for teaching activities. Ultimately, it was decided to proceed as an act of academic resistance and a symbol of the steadfastness and vitality of the university community. The organizing committee extends special thanks to students of Ethnology and Anthropology Nikolina Jovanović, Anđela Dulović, Anđela Milinković, and Tatjana Karamarković, for their generous assistance in organizing the conference panels and accompanying activities. We would also like to thank our colleague dr. Bogdan Dražeta for his invaluable support throughout the event.

### On the Topic of This Issue

Fashion embodies relations of production, ideology, morality, power, and social values; hence, the interpretation of this phenomenon is essential for an adequate understanding of both the modern and postmodern world. A comprehensive interpretation of fashion and clothing requires an in-depth study of its *social life* – from the complex processes of production and distribution, through diverse systems of representation, to the act of consumption itself. Such an analysis necessarily entails a deeper understanding of various clothing practices and the processes through which garments are signified and re-signified during and after the fashion cycle.

Since the 19th century, the fashion industry in Serbia has undergone numerous transformations. The most dramatic changes occurred in production: from

the gradual abandonment of artisanal tailoring, through the emergence of fashion salons modeled on Western Europe, to the beginnings of industrial clothing production in the early 20th century and its subsequent development during the period of self-managing socialism. The decline of major fashion companies in the 1990s, followed by the dominance of global brands in the post-October transition, also marked a radically altered economic and cultural environment.

The systems of distribution and dissemination of fashion trends have changed significantly, as have the ways in which they are received and adopted – particularly with the development of electronic media. Consumer culture itself has also undergone profound transformations. While in the 19th century fashionable garments primarily served as markers of class distinction and social mobility, the global democratization of fashion – as well as the establishment of socialism in this region – diminished the communicative potential of clothing as a status symbol.

The present issue of the *Journal of Ethnoanthropological Problems* brings together five papers from the conference *The Social Life of Fashion in Serbia since the 19th Century to the Present*. These texts trace the complex trajectory of fashion – from design and production processes, through media representation, to consumption. One of the papers discusses the persistent survival of *non-fashion* as a significant social counterpoint to fashion, exploring the boundaries between modernity and tradition in contemporary society.

**Danijela Velimirović**, in her paper *From Collective Creativity to Authorship: Examples of the Personalization of Fashion Designers in Socialist Yugoslavia*, analyzes the glorification and the erosion of the socialist ideal of collective creativity through the examples of three Yugoslav designers – Dobrila Vasiljević Smiljanić, Aleksandar Joksimović, and Mirjana Marić. She identifies the key mechanisms that led to the establishment and legitimization of authorship as a new value both in the economic sphere and in the field of (fashion) design.

In **Željka Manić's** paper *Self-Sewing Practices in Socialist Yugoslavia*, the author maps and analyzes the causes of the widespread home-sewing practice during socialism. She examines the class-related and material-cultural aspects of this mode of clothing production and lifestyle, arguing that independent garment production was an integral part of everyday life — an activity that redefined relationships to fashion, consumption, and domestic labor.

In *Patterns of Identity: Folk Costumes in Contemporary Society*, **Miloš Rašić** offers a critical analysis of ethnological studies on the “disappearance” of traditional clothing after the Second World War. He demonstrates how so-called folk costumes, through processes of aestheticization, stage use, institutionalization, and market commodification, have entered a “second life.” By doing so, he highlights key symbolic spaces and actors in the defining and reshaping of this living heritage, showing that traditional clothing today serves as a dynamic means of negotiating national and cultural belonging.

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The paper “*Hardly a House Where a Fashionista Lives*”: *An Analysis of Negative Narratives about Fashion in the Serbian Press at the Turn of the 20th Century* by **Jelena Ćuković** interprets conservative narratives about fashion published at the fin de siècle. In these texts, the figure of the *pomodarka* is consistently portrayed as a morally corrupted woman and even as a threat to the moral integrity of the entire community. The author uncovers the mechanisms through which traditional values were used to control, monitor, and discipline the female body and female cultural identities.

Finally, in *Spaces of Clothing Consumption and Consumer Practices of the Academic Community in Belgrade*, **Vera Backović** analyzes the meanings and values associated with clothing consumption among university employees in Belgrade. Based on insights gathered through an extensive online survey, the paper reveals contradictions between the ideological positions and practical behaviors of the academic community. Although respondents express strong critical attitudes toward shopping malls as “consumer Meccas,” there is little awareness of the principles of ecological lifestyles and sustainable fashion.

These are only some of the complex issues discussed at the conference. Others included the problems of unionization and insufficient protection of workers’ rights in today’s fashion industry, the ethical dimensions of design and production (especially regarding new technologies and smart clothing), the role of contemporary digital platforms and social networks in the dissemination of fashion and body discipline, and the dynamic interactions between fashion and anti-fashion practices. Questions of visual and textual representation of fashion, as well as the challenges of its musealization, were also raised.

We therefore express our hope that, in the near future, we will be able to publish a collection that will offer a more comprehensive overview of the topics presented at this scientific conference.

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