



## **Anna Keszeg: Redesigning Fashion. Media Operations of Contemporary Fashion /Case studies/<sup>1</sup>**

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**Emese LENGYEL**

University of Debrecen, Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies, Hungary  
lengyelemese1@gmail.com

Anna Keszeg has collected studies over seven years (at Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design and at the Metropolitan University of Budapest) in her new book titled *Redesigning Fashion. Media Operations of Contemporary Fashion*, published as the third book of the METU Theory series. As a society, culture, and media researcher, the author interprets the phenomenon of contemporary fashion over four chapters of studies. Some of the published writings have been updated; however, in the case of two chapters, it would have meant a complete rewriting, and the author emphasized: “The reason why I decided not to abandon these texts is that I am being warned how quickly the discussed phenomena become obsolete”<sup>2</sup> (p. 9).

Fashion researchers have to face several prejudices in the academic field, as “[...] the academic perception of fashion often overlaps with the everyday perception of those that are related to fashion” (p. 11). Nevertheless, this sub-discipline is exciting and engaging: fashion can be, for instance, examined as a clearly visible component – that brings meaning – of the contemporary world or the visual mediator of contemporary social, economic, political movements and tendencies. The first chapter gives an overview of the conceptual system of fashion, based on especially carefully and logically built subsections, so readers less familiar with the topic will soon become insiders of fashion research. First, the focus is on Malcolm Barnard’s concept, which appears in the author’s 2007 fashion theory textbook. Keszeg notes that this concept tries to objectify the phenomenon and writes that the word “fashion” has at least two accepted

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1 The original, Hungarian-language title of the book is: *Divat-újratervezés. A kortárs divat médiaműködései*.

2 All the quotes from the reviewed book are translated into English by the author of this review. The language of the book is Hungarian.

meanings in everyday use: “The two important meanings are the following: (1) fashion initially means those objects and techniques that cover or decorate the body, as well as the social practices related to this phenomenon (from the industries of production to the social practices of wearing them); (2) secondly, it means how we communicate with textiles and materials intended to cover, shape, and enforce bodies – timelessness, spatial awareness, identity, stance, etc.” (p. 12). The author adds that the Hungarian explanatory dictionary does not include the first meaning yet divides the second one into subsections. However, what is there to know about the academic embedding of fashion-related activities? This particular area is researched by the field of fashion studies, whose significant academic institutionalization took place over the past three decades, but the research of the phenomenon of fashion appears in several other disciplines as well such as sociology, media studies, art history, cultural studies, etc.

Anna Keszeg promises a research that is primarily based on communication and media studies and emphasizes the goal of comprehending the communication strategies and media logic that are behind the content made by contemporary personas of the fashion industry. A starting point of the communication strategies is that we can talk about constructing a universe in the case of the contemporary fashion industry, in the same sense as in many fields of the entertainment industry. First of all, fashion – as a cultural industry – is being discussed, and then the issues of immersion and universal likeness are brought up from the point of view of media convergence and transmediality. In the introductory fashion-related thoughts, we can find the following: “(1) fashion as the paradigm of searching for something new and inherent in modernity – I call this approach the avant-garde paradigm [...]; (2) fashion as the adaptation to social conventions, the area for self-expression – I call this one the social paradigm; (3) fashion as the most widely visible industry that is able to create meaning – I call this approach the cultural-industrial paradigm [...].” (p. 16).

The second chapter is titled *Universe Construction in Contemporary Fashion*, in which Anna Keszeg writes about fashion movies, the connection between fashion and contemporary TV series, the representation of the fashion industry in movies, as well as native advertising. The author describes the genre of digital fashion movies as follows: “The genre of fashion movies is not a new-fangled attempt to present the prominence, the unknowability, and the exclusivity of the visualization of this industry in a way that it differs from other procedures of promotion” (p. 41). The genre is the contact point of advertising, the movie, and the fashion industry. The author mentions that the co-operation between fashion and movies began around 1896, when the Lumière brothers recorded a dancer, and emphasizes that with the birth of narrative cinema two types of movies can be distinguished. One type is when the focus is on the phenomenon of fashion, alongside fashion-related representation. The other type includes

slightly documentary movies. The researcher gives an insight into the Chanel universe, and then the spotlight is turned on the relation between the art of movies and the art of fashion. Most of the motion picture references are well-known works (such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* or the *Sissi* trilogy); however, the Émile Zola adaptation series called *The Paradise* – which is a major success in public media channels – is the subject of a specific analysis. We can read about the latter in the context of fashion as the birth of the spatial system: the novel adaptation is a great example of a core novel of the psychology of shopping, one that theorizes the exploitation of women by the machinery called capitalism, and how it becomes an emphasized emancipatory narrative throughout the series.

How can social dynamics be interpreted in fashion consumption? Is the opposition of amateurs and professionals or content creators and consumers still valid? The third chapter, *inter alia*, seeks the answer to these questions by reviewing several disciplines. “In 2020, the fashion industry survived its most serious crisis of legitimacy. Such crisis was not a novelty: mass media had written about the fashion industry being the first, second, third, and so on most polluting industry [...], and taking these facts into account resulted in redesigning strategies in many cases” (p. 150) – with this phrase, the author introduces the line of thought behind the evaluation of the fashion industry and its current dynamic in 2021. Here, the concept of amateur is introduced both in a media- and a culture-related sense. First of all, it is stated that the science behind the contrast between the words amateur and professional does not take the pejorative Hungarian meaning of the word “amateur” into account. The author goes back to the amateur/academic concept pair, where Lévi-Strauss is mentioned among several others, and the museological approach to ethnography is also acknowledged. This is followed by the dynamics of professional positions; hence, the previous concepts are deepened. As the author writes, contemporary movements are dominated by three professional profiles that – when shown – can trace the rise of amateurism. These are craft designers, digital-fashion leaders, and experts whose elite-producing models prove that the dynamics of elite production in the field of contemporary fashion have accelerated on the one hand and have become more diversified on the other.

In this chapter, we can find the phenomenon of the so-called “Instagram-worthy” fashion, which is introduced along with the concept of entertainment, visibility, as well as their ability to be photographed and, later on, tagged (this is presented on a figure as well); afterwards, we are provided with an insight into the background of influencer culture. A typology is created along distinct concepts for the fashion phenomena appearing on Instagram. Three basic types of Instagram-worthy fashion are distinguished by the author: “(1) entertainment-based, shoppable, and competitive content – shoppable and entertaining Instagram media; (2) slacktivist, call-out-culture-related content that urges

action – activist Instagram media; (3) remixed, viral, trash fashion content – viral Instagram media” (p. 166). The ever-radical changes that have happened in the fashion industry due to the spread of social media platforms are also discussed.

Anna Keszeg wishes to see and show the movements in their entirety, which was successfully carried out with the presented examples. The avant-garde paradigm is emphasized, for it has dominated systemic movements since the 1970s yet started to be questioned in the middle of the 2000s: “Fashion that is fast and is based on quick changes of trends can no longer be labelled as timeless” (p. 205). However, in the case of the social paradigm, material functions have come forth into the spotlight. The author emphasizes that fashion is considered differently in the social subsystems by the challenges that the industry has to face (such as sustainable design concepts). The book is aiming to draw attention to how fashion has become mediatized in the past decades: “Something we have to strongly consider is the movement of the mediatization of fashion: fashion becomes media” (p. 207).

“Fashion is out of fashion” – is an opening sentence that the author has used several times in her lectures. Yet, what future does fashion have? How realistic is the textbook for redesigning? – we arrive at this issue in Anna Keszeg’s present-centred book, in which social movements come to the fore through the examination of fashion phenomena. With fast fashion in the past couple of years, the phrase “hyperfast fashion” took off. It is also noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic the presence of the latter concept has become abundantly clear, as it refers to the clothing sector that is specialized in online commerce.

The studies show clear engagement in the topic itself, with years of specialized research, while focusing on being current, which is an enormous challenge for researchers, considering the quick-paced change of trends. In addition, the book published by Metropolitan University of Budapest also features the exciting fashion illustrations of Ágnes Keszeg.