

# Remodeling the Past, Cross-dressing the Future Postcolonial Self-Fashioning for the Global Art Market

Birgit Mersmann

## Art Fashion, Fashion Art? Conspiratorial Liaisons

This essay queries the neoliberal underpinnings of the fashion-art liaison and takes a critical look at the transcultural strategies of politicized fashion appropriation and reenactment clothing as applied by the British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE RA and the South African artist Mary Sibande. Utilizing excessive glamour and features of hybridity, the artists showcase fashion as a valid contemporary art form. By using fabric as their medium of artistic expression and for (cross)dressing performances, they embody the multiplicity of role play in search of their own persona and collective identities connected to their biographies. Common to their artworks is an interest in artistic self-fashioning as a form of transformative “othering” through self-portraiture. Through this particular approach, a new type of fashion art is produced in the (postcolonial) global context of contemporary art.

By investigating self-referential alter-ego reenactments through (predominantly Victorian) fashion transpositions, the postcolonial self-(re)fashioning of the artist between personal autobiography and colonial history, gender and race relations will be analyzed. To demonstrate how past histories can be remodeled and how future lives of emancipatory power designed through fashion practices of retro and cross-dressing, I will focus on Shonibare’s photo series “Diary of a Victorian Dandy” (1998) and Sibande’s “Long Live the Dead Queen” (2009). The main goal of the analysis is to reveal how the diasporic doubleness of the postcolonial subject as staged fashion figure not only subverts fashion as a Western paradigm of colonial embodiment, but also displaces and replaces it through African styles of hybridity that stand for a new, self-conscious politics of appearance and identity.

## Yinka Shonibare’s Self-Fashioning as Black Victorian Dandy

**All identity construction is a form of reenactment.**  
—Yinka Shonibare

The novel liaison between art and fashion, including the redefinition of fashion as valid and as an art form and artwork in its own right, is actively pursued and propelled by Shonibare. He was the first black British artist to be nominated by the queen as a member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) and to attain the status of a Royal Academician (RA), and in his career he has been highly successful at producing fashionable artworks for the contemporary art scene in the United Kingdom and internationally through his powerful use of fashion elements and strategies of self-fashioning himself in the role of a dandy. Especially by reenacting scenes depicted in Victorian-era historical paintings and restaging the noble figures and characters represented

in them, he has playfully demonstrated how the cultural and social mobility and nobility of fashion can serve as a marker of differentiation and means of effective identity transformation and elevation in status. The constructive aspect of the artist's fashion/able reenactments lies in the self-critical, even self-ironical, refashioning of the historical role models. The term "refashioning" is understood literally as the redesign of fashion for the purpose of recoding identity. The term is also meant to include the recodification of fashion itself as a paradigm of Western civilization, modernity, and progress-driven innovation through re-costumization.

Questioning of the role of the black African artist in the arena of international, globally oriented contemporary art became the key driver for Shonibare's self-understanding as an artist and for the self-fashioning of his work. To express his skepticism toward any form of fixed identity, in particular when it comes to stereotypically essentializing and racializing African identity, he deliberately selects "African" fabrics as his artistic, symbolically charged design medium: "The fabrics are signifiers, if you like, of 'Africanness' insofar as when people first view the fabric, they think of Africa."<sup>1</sup> Yet, the purpose of the explicit choice of African fabric is to unfold and deconstruct the modes and power-related mechanisms of artificial identity fabrication that underlie the textile in relation to its history of production and trading.<sup>2</sup>

The most powerful visual marker of almost all costumes in Shonibare's artworks is the reference to the Victorian era. The (prospectively) postcolonial re/fashioning of art is enacted through means of Victorian-African hybridizations: Victorian-style dresses for men, women, and children are tailored from Dutch wax fabrics—ambiguously oscillating between pseudo-African and authentic African cloth. The dress paradox could not be more extreme and racially radical: black African pride, as symbolized by the African fabric prints, is coupled with the imperial magnificence and splendor of Victorian rulers and nobles in *one-and-the same* dress. The design of a hybrid, postcolonial costume is driven by the artist's interest in showcasing the entangled histories and uneven relationships between Great Britain and Africa in colonial times.

Although it can be stated that the artist's entire oeuvre is conceptually imbued with Victorian references, some installation and photo works show more explicit articulations of Victorian fashion than others. In the installation *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* (1996–97), a parody of period museum rooms, all textile elements of the Victorian-style salon from the chaise longue to the drapery are redressed and redesigned in African fabrics with the motif of the black football player, thus letting the colonial legacy of British Victorian history surface on the furniture and overall decorum. The refashioning was intended to express the "relationship of patronage [...] between the 'haves,' the colonial philanthropist, and the so-called have-nots, the poor colonials."<sup>3</sup> *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation*, a composite installation arranged from five smaller

pieces for documenta 11 (2002),<sup>4</sup> uncovered the two-faced nature of the Victorian value system drawn between prudery and passion. The scenic reenactment of a Grand Tour of a country outing with life-size, fiberglass mannequins showcases the sexual excess of the noble society in all its pleasure and vulgarity. The figures involved in the sex orgies are headless, a feature that, on a reflective level, becomes metaphoric for their irrational, emotion- and instinct-driven behavior.

The headlessness of the African-Victorian mannequins is a highly visible marker for the loss of face and identity. It can be considered an effective artistic means for deconstructing the central power and authority of control, including the top of society and head of state. For Shonibare, the decapitation of the figures is "an allusion to the French Revolution and the beheading of the French landed gentry and aristocracy." He says: "It amused me to explore the possibility of bringing back the guillotine in the late 1990s, not for use on people, of course—my figures are mannequins—but for the use on the historical icons of power and deference."<sup>5</sup> Another reason for beheading the models was to avoid any racializing of the model figures. The mannequins' undefined skin color, shimmering between light brown, yellow, and white tones, emphasizes the consciously applied postcolonial strategy of de-racialization and de-identification. The fabrication of identity is restrictively delegated to the medium of fashion. A person's identity disappears under the guise and cover of a costume.

1 Shonibare quoted in Rahel Kent, ed., *Yinka Shonibare MBE* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 43.

2 In the colonial era of the nineteenth century, the Dutch colonizers started mass-producing the batiks in the East Indies with the intention to sell them on the local markets. For this reason, the fabric became also known as "Dutch wax." However, for anti-colonial reasons, the Indonesians preferred their locally produced, handcrafted batiks. Owing to this lacking demand, the Dutch exported the industrially produced fabric to Great Britain. From there, it was once again exported; this time to the African colonies. The textile products sold throughout West Africa were reimported to Great Britain by way of migrant traders where they were validated and sold as authentically African, see Delhaye in this volume.

3 Shonibare quoted in Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE*, 43.

4 It consists of *Parasol* (two life-size fiberglass mannequins, two metal and wood cases, Dutch wax-printed cotton, leather, wood, steel, collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody, New York), *Threesome* (three life-size fiberglass mannequins, Libra Art Collection), *Woman with Leg Up* (two life-size fiberglass mannequins, collection of Daniella Luxembourg, Geneva), *Fellatio* (two life-size fiberglass mannequins, collection of Jan and Daniel Lewis, Miami, Florida), and *Carriage* (wood, steel, leather, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, and James Cohan Gallery, New York).

5 Yinka Shonibare, "Setting the Stage," by Anthony Downey, in Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE*, 45.

A kind of culmination of Shonibare's work on this topic was reached with the "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" (1998), a photo series with five chromogenic prints. Funded, curated, and produced by the Institute of International Visual Arts in London and shortlisted for the Citibank Photography Prize in 1999, the work belongs to a group of photo works that include his earlier series "Dorian Gray" (2001) as well as later ones such as "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" (2008), "Fake Death Pictures" (2011), the "William Morris Family Album" (2014–15), and "La Méduse" (2015). These photographic series are bound together by the artist's interest in restaging historical paintings and figures from the Age of Enlightenment to modern times.<sup>6</sup> Throughout these photo series, selected historical figures are redressed with postcolonial costume designs that are made from Dutch wax fabrics. An exception to this hybrid African-Victorian fashion branding of figures in historical paintings constitutes the two earlier series, "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" and "Dorian Gray." In these, Shonibare casts himself in the role of the dandy in (presumably) authentic Victorian period clothing. With this self-staging and self-fashioning as a re(tro) dressed artist, he positions himself in the postmodernist tradition of theatrical reenactments of artworks from the Western canon of art history as it was most poignantly introduced by the artist, photographer, and filmmaker Cindy Sherman in her "History Portraits" (1988–90). Shonibare's self-related and self-enacted role play with figures from art and film history challenges fixed notions of identity.<sup>7</sup> Besides gender and social identity, racial identity above all is renegotiated and remodeled in the photographic reenactment scenes. The alter-ego stagings deal with Shonibare's self-definition as a "postcultural hybrid," his ambiguous role of acting as a black African artist in the British art world and society. Owing to this autobiographical, self-reflective perspective, the contemporary postcolonial take and twist on the historical figure of the white Victorian dandy is the central anchor point for the refashioning of the role model.

"Diary of a Victorian Dandy" depicts one day in the life of a Victorian dandy while focusing on five different times and activities of the day.<sup>8</sup> Shot by a professional photographer, the series was recorded in an English stately home with the participation of actors and actresses (fig. 48). The artist played the central figure of the Victorian dandy and was also the stage director for each scene. It should be noted that Shonibare was the only black person among white performers in his reenactment piece—a deliberate decision made on his part to disrupt role expectations and racial codes.

In terms of historization, "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" is a reenactment of William Hogarth's famous series "A Rake's Progress," which was painted in 1733. Why did Shonibare decide to adopt and reenact tableaux with reference to Hogarth's "A Rake's Progress"? The reasons for this are manifold. Britishness appears to be the first decisive factor for the refashioning of Hogarth's rake story. Shonibare

decided to use an English artist whose work is prominent within the art history of Great Britain. The "Englishness" of the Hogarthian work is related to the Shonibare's intensive preoccupation with English society and history, including English values and morals—he focuses on historical subjects from the viewpoint of a pictorial satirist, social critic, and cartoonist. Using parody and satire as sites of semantic ambiguity, Hogarth and Shonibare also share similar personal interests and approaches. In expressive drasticness, Hogarth uncovered social, racial, and gender-related problems and conflicts that existed within a divided English society. He directly exposed that inequality and issues



Fig. 48  
Yinka Shonibare,  
*Diary of a Victorian  
Dandy, 11 hours,*  
1998

6 In *Dorian Gray* Shonibare reenacts the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891); in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* he restages the etching by Francisco Goya of the same title (1799); in *Fake Death Pictures* he stages a series of five death paintings: Édouard Manet's *The Suicide* (1877), Henry Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton* (1856), Leonardo Alenza y Nieto's *Satire of the Romantic Suicide* (1839), François-Guillaume Ménageot's *Death of Leonardo da Vinci* (in the Arms of Francis I, 1781), and Bartholomé Carducho's *Death of St. Francis* (1593); in the *William Morris Family Album*, he uses a selection of photographs from the family album of the English artist, textile designer, and social activist William Morris; and in *La Méduse*, Caravaggio's *Medusa* (1597) and Théodore Géricault's

*The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19) are revisited.

7 Shonibare's photo series "Dorian Gray" is primarily based on the filmic adaption of Wilde's novel.

8 "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" was first shown in a public space during October 1998. In a large-scale, poster format, the photos were mounted on station walls throughout the London metro as a way to reach a much larger audience. In 1999 the photo series was shown in the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham as part of a larger solo exhibition, "Yinka Shonibare: Dressing Down." The prints were presented in large gilded frames on the wall, mimicking the hanging of (history) paintings. Because of the high theatricality of the staged photographs, they looked like film stills from costume dramas.

related to differences caused by the hierarchical class system in British Georgian society—at a time when society was witnessing the birth of industrialization and consumerism, and when extreme luxury and extreme poverty coexisted. Besides social, economic, and cultural differences, racial difference is openly visualized in Hogarth's graphic and painterly work. Human figures classified as "nonwhites," and ethnically categorized by Hogarth as Africans, American Indians, and as Orientals, have their set yet marginalized place in his work because they "are essential in the establishment of an allegedly genuine and singular English identity."<sup>9</sup> Arguably, the representation of the figure of the Other in Hogarth's socio-critical art, be it the racial, cultural, or social outsider of society at large or a particular stratum of it, was an important point of reference and identification for Shonibare's reappropriation. Since the figure of the rake in Hogarth's "A Rake's Progress" embodied the power and aesthetics of difference and disruption in a particularly pronounced way, it became the ideal role model for a reenactment and reinterpretation as a black Victorian dandy performed by Shonibare. The rakes of Georgian British society are seen as the *nouveau riches* of the upper class.<sup>10</sup> Because of their special status in society, expressed via a fashionable and luxurious lifestyle, they can be considered as historical forerunners of the dandy. Given this kinship, Shonibare's Victorian-dandyish reappropriation of the figure of the rake is the consequence of his own ambition of refashioning and remaking himself as a fully acknowledged black British artist: "As a black man living in the UK, I find myself in a position where I am not so-called upper class; however, in Nigeria I would be considered upper class. And this got me thinking about social and class mobility in the context of the dandy. The dandy can remake himself again and again; he can do that through the image, he can remake his own image and thereafter re-create and remake himself."<sup>11</sup> Shonibare reenacted the role of Hogarth's rake through the character of the dandy, "a figure of mobility who upsets the social order of things" by constantly remodeling his own image.<sup>12</sup>

One main artistic aim of Shonibare's opulent resetting of the Hogarthian rake story lies in the ability to create fictitious re-imaginings, even reversals of the past, particularly in relation to British imperial colonial history. The self-fashioned reenactments happen through theatrical staging, which was chosen for its pronounced artificiality: "Theatricality is certainly a device in my work. It is a way of setting the stage; it is also a fiction—a hyperreal, theatrical device that enables you to reimagine events from history. There is no obligation to truth in such a setting, so you have the leeway to create fiction or to dream."<sup>13</sup> The hyperreal playfulness and artifice of the theatrical restaging serves to break the "dichotomy in art history between frivolity, fashionability, decoration, and the apparent profundity of high art."<sup>14</sup> It is the shiny master figure of the artist-dandy who embodies theatricality, artificiality, and excess. In short, he is "constructed excess, constructed fantasy."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, due to his conception as a border crosser of the real, he represents a figure of social mobility.

"Historically, the dandy is usually an outsider whose only way in is through his wit and his style. Coming from a middle-class background, the dandy aspired to aristocratic standing so as to distinguish himself from both the lower and middle class. In this sense, his frivolous lifestyle is a political gesture of sort, containing with it a form of social mobility."<sup>16</sup> For Shonibare, Oscar Wilde's protagonist in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is an example of the dandy as a figure of mobility who upsets social order. This is why Shonibare also reenacted scenes featuring Dorian Gray. What fascinates Shonibare most about the dandy is that he is "both an insider and an outsider who disrupts such distinctions."<sup>17</sup> In that sense, he is the incarnation of a transcultural member of society. He uses masquerade and disguise to appear as somebody (an acknowledged member of the upper class) who in reality he is not. The subversive reappropriation of the establishment is part of the dandy's fashion practice and strategy of performance. The idea of the artist as a trickster, which Shonibare defined his character as playing, corresponds with the idea of the dandy. In "Diary of a Victorian Dandy," the figure and role of the African artist-trickster as an intermediary between the worlds, between reality and fantasy, is combined with the figure of the black dandy. Through hybrid images, which include the cross-dressing of characters and (art) histories, Shonibare succeeds not only in refashioning the black subject in art-historical representations, but also himself as a black British artist.

## Art-Fashioning in Mary Sibande's Migrating Self-Images

The practice of imaginary self-projection and self-refashioning also plays a major role in the work of the black South African artist Mary Sibande. For her first solo exhibition, "Long Live the Dead Queen," which was shown in the Momo Gallery in Johannesburg in 2009, the artist created a quasi-fictitious alter ego figure named Sophie. Through the mannequins, whose faces are a cast of the artist's own face, Sibande exposed her personal family history in a series of installations of the life-sized figures that is accompanied by photographs. She traced the labor and social history of her female ancestors, who had all

9 Peter Wagner, "Spotting the Symptoms: Hogarthian Bodies as Sites of Semantic Ambiguity," in *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference*, ed. Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 114.

10 For more information about the definition and depiction of rakes in the eighteenth century, see Mark Hallett, "Manly Satire: William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*," in Fort and Rosenthal, *Other Hogarth*, 145–47.

11 Shonibare, "Setting the Stage," 47.

12 Shonibare, 47.

13 Shonibare, 46.

14 Shonibare, 44.

15 Shonibare, 32.

16 Shonibare, 47.

17 Shonibare, 47.

worked as servants for wealthy white and black families, all the way back to her great-grandmother.<sup>18</sup> The artist is the first in her female genealogy to have broken with this servile, family tradition. Transposed in the art world, the oppressed and degraded servant figure of Sophie is represented as a super-heroine of imperial-power fantasies, for example, as a Victorian queen, as an empress on horseback, as a general leading her army to victory, as a female pope blessing her congregation, and as a music conductor. The alter-ego stagings draw on Western representations of the colonial/imperial image of the—usually white and male—ruler to disrupt expectations through postcolonial and feminist refashioning. Using aesthetics of image migration, the refashioning articulates processes of becoming as transitional experiences of border crossing. The reworking serves to symbolize the social mobility and advancement of individual people in the transition phase from the Apartheid regime to the post-Apartheid society in South Africa. The concept triad of race-class-gender is (set) on the move. In the design of traveling fashion,<sup>19</sup> which liquefies fixed identities and causes memories of personal and political histories to wander to new locations of material-aesthetic representation, the migration of the before-mentioned concepts are manifested.

In Sophie's clothing, two contrasting styles are combined: the maid's uniform with the courtly fashion of aristocracy, and clothing worn by servants with those worn by an empress. As a basis for dress designs, Sibande chooses the uniform of domestic workers. The indigo-blue, *shweshwe* cotton fabrics from which the artist tailors the dresses for the models is a cheap material traditionally used for worker uniforms and mass-produced outfits.<sup>20</sup> An additional aspect is that in South African Zionist church groups—religious movements known for mixing Christian elements with African ancestral beliefs—it is common for female members to wear dresses made from starched blue fabric that resemble servant uniforms. For Sibande, the color blue symbolizes servility, submissiveness, and slavery. However, in an act of self-empowerment, the maid's uniform is transformed into an aristocratic and imperial costume of the Victorian era. The design of the maidservant's apron is elongated and enlarged; the sleeves and skirts are puffed out. Frills and petticoats alter the limitations of the housemaid's uniform. Hems and trains imply bodily expansions of power and ensure that the mannequin dominates the space. By means of fluffing and boosting, the housemaid, Sophie, celebrates her visible presence as ruler. The figure of the servant whose traditional task is to work within the domestic and private space is unobtrusively transformed into a public person through the hybridization of the dress design. In the fashionable masquerade of the queen, Sophie gains the power to represent the whole nation with her black body. During the Joburg Art City project of 2010, Sibande's representations of Sophie from the series "Long Live the Dead Queen" were transferred into the urban public space. Positioned between murals and advertising posters, they were placed on empty walls on residential buildings

throughout the city. The translation of refashioned self-portraits of the artist into public space stresses the artist's pronounced interest in creating a new politics of visibility: the repressed visibility, by which the colonial past and its repercussions in post-Apartheid South Africa are meant, should be made public. The urban strategy follows the maxim of *inside out*: the interior is turned into the exterior, the domestic and domesticated are shifted to the public sphere of the *res publica* as *agoras* of (feminist) political debate, the inner self is disclosed to the outside world. The semiotic transcoding of clothing from servile to noble social status is a strategy to force the viewer to rethink social norms and past histories.

Sophie reveals the desire to escape the dichotomy between servant and ruler, slave and master. The representation of Sophie as an imperial authority from the epoch of European colonialism in the garb of a servant, presents a double articulation of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theorization. In Sophie's mimicry, in which mimesis and alienation coincide, the ambivalence of the colonial discourse is manifested; the imitation of the Other with foreignizing elements of one's own identity. Mimicry is performative since it always involves new negotiations of the mirror(ed) object and the identity of the person who is reflected. The effect of mimicry can be considered postcolonial insofar as it can help to transcode existing norms and hierarchies under protective camouflage.

The postcolonial refashioning of Sibande's alter-ego models for the purpose of revalorizing her own colonial family history on a personal level, and the history of black women on a more general level, is an increasingly ambivalent project. During the design excess of featuring oneself as a historically and socially distinct persona and authority, the imagination turns into monstrosity. The closed eyes of Sophie indicate that the figure is in a state of dreaming, that she undertakes an imaginary journey into a fictive world where the unimaginable and unreal can come true—as, for instance, the coronation of one's own person. In 2013 Sibande stopped fashioning Sophie in blue cloth. She redressed her as an empress figure clad in purple, and staged her in new spatial arrangements. The excess in (fashion) fantasies associated with deliberation and empowerment starts to colonize the body in the design process. Like myriad

18 She appears under the fictive name of Sophie-Elsie; the artist's grandmother figures under the name of Sophie-Merica; her mother under Sophie-Velucia; and Mary Sibande herself under the pseudonym Sophie-Ntombikayise.

19 Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002).

20 This same fabric was refashioned by the contemporary fashion brand Ethnix, thereby manifesting the postcolonial commodification of uniforms and dresses historically worn by colonized and suppressed people.

tentacles, the imaginary grows powerfully out of the body; it entwines the figure like a rhizome, and encapsulates the persona of the queen who is slave to her own boundless fantasies. In this image of entanglement, the self-ensembling nature and self-absorbing danger of the postcolonial refashioning of colonial-historical identities is uncovered in its full scope. Subversive appropriation of the empowering fashion practice of “dressing-up” turns into the exact opposite: the loss of autonomy and control over one’s own body, mind, and imagination. This experience illustrates the paradox of the postcolonial imaginary. According to postcolonial media theoretician Niti Sampat-Patel, the strategy of mimicry as double articulation “both enables power and signals a loss of agency by simultaneously stabilizing and destabilizing the position of power.”<sup>21</sup>

### The Fashion Art of Black Dandyism: Self-Fashioning as a Practice of Postcolonial Rebellion

The works discussed above, Shonibare’s “Diary of a Victorian Dandy” and Sibande’s mannequin installation and photo series “Long Live the Dead Queen,” share the goal of challenging and subverting the history, discourse, and claim of fashion as a Western paradigm of colonial subordination, embodiment, and sociocultural othering. Both artists make use of reenactments as a practice of re-othering, which is to be understood as *reversed othering*. Reclothed in African fabric, fashion from the Victorian and Edwardian era in England was chosen to refer to the peak of imperial colonial history and is reappropriated by black models—in particular the figure of the black artist (or family members, as in the case of Sibande). Figures and icons of British colonial and South African Apartheid history are reenacted and refashioned through self-embodied role as a way to reverse traditional societal roles. The essentializing and racializing positioning of white and black figures is disrupted by hybrid expressions of fashion mimicry. The historically colonized and socially marginalized are set on stage to imitate their colonizers and masters: royals and other noble figures of the European white elite are played by black figures to powerfully highlight the history of colonization and segregation, suppression and exploitation. Shonibare adopts the role model of the Victorian dandy, and Sibande refashions herself in dominant roles, such as the role of the queen or the pope. Identity is presented in its constructed and spectacularized form.

Ironic self-fashioning as a dandy can be ascertained for both Shonibare and Sibande, independent of the gender of their alter-ego figures of representation. The dandy-artist embodies social mobility and a life of luxury. This aspect is particularly relevant for contemporary black artists in the global art world

who wish to include a critical, transcultural perspective on the stereotype of poor Africa and the still predominant tendency among art critics and art historians of primitivizing and ethnicizing African art. The figure of the dandy has always been closely connected to social displacement and transcultural migration, and is therefore a suitable model for migrant and outsider artists to identify with.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of black dandyism, the figure of the dandy has become a diasporic cultural icon. In her 2009 study *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, Monica L. Miller points out that the tradition of black dandyism begins with the displacement of the slave trade. Dandyism was initially imposed on black servant-slaves in eighteenth-century England to enact a civilizing mission and make them fashionable for their new lives in aristocratic society. The dandified servants started refashioning their uniforms and they were soon known for their sartorial novelty. Hybridity in fashion culture was a result of this refashioning process. With regard to black (slave) history, the black dandy can be defined “as a self-fashioned gentleman who intentionally co-opts and then complicates classical European fashion with an African diasporan aesthetic and sensibilities.”<sup>23</sup>

Shonibare and Sibande draw upon this transcultural fashion history as an exercise of decolonizing political power. In their fashion reenactments of the figure of the black dandy, they appropriate and cultivate auratic images of superiority. Traditionally, the role of the dandy is identified with masculinity. From a critical postcolonial perspective, this gendered form of appearance and sexual practice of dandyism needs to be revised. If the dandy is defined as a figure of rebellion against false notions of social order, racial homogeneity, and cultural superiority, Sibande presents—mediated by her Sophie figure—the perfect incorporation of the black dandy since she “follows [...] in the footsteps of the male dandy rather than a female one, which most theorists define as those who dress as men, or appropriate male elements into their attire.”<sup>24</sup> Precisely by appropriating male dandyism, she is able to refashion and empower the role of black women in South African post-Apartheid society. For fashion and gender theorist Jeremy Kaye, the twenty-first-century re-codification of the Victorian dandy is connected with metrosexuality. This points “towards the breakdown of discreet boundaries, towards the continuity and

21 Niti Sampat-Patel, *Postcolonial Masquerades: Culture and Politics in Literature, Film, Video and Photography* (New York: Garland, 2001), xviii.

22 Outsider art refers to creative expressions that exist outside accepted cultural norms and the main(stream) art market.

23 Shantrelle P. Lewis, “Fashioning Black Masculinity: The Origins of the Dandy Lion Project,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 37 (2015): 55.

24 Mary Corrigan, “Sartorial Excess in Mary Sibande’s ‘Sophie,’” *Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press* 29, no. 2 (2015): 153.

fluidity of sex and gender roles. It denaturalizes gender categories, exposes them as social constructs, and perhaps even gestures toward the dissolution of the sex/gender system."<sup>25</sup>

The self-fashioning art of Shonibare and Sibande demonstrates the effective use of fashion commodities for social-value gain and political empowerment. Although this type of art deliberately exposes itself to the danger of commodification of art through fashion, it testifies as a means of relocation after displacement: dressing-up signifies upward mobility. Dandyism is the appropriate/d fashion style to express transition and transformation. As Charles Baudelaire already observed, dandyism is a topos of modernity appearing in phases of historical transition.<sup>26</sup> Twenty-first-century dandyism marks the significant transition from national to transnational migratory societies, from the Apartheid system to the post-Apartheid era, from colonial to postcolonial and even neo-colonial, neoliberal global culture. The fashioning of art through the self-fashioning of the artist is a particular, yet popular and effective means of representing and enacting change. The fake cult of fashion and beauty is no escape from factual realities of politics and history, but expresses a self-embodied luxury of the dandy featuring a clear postcolonial critique: "In styling himself, particularly in dress and mostly associated with a particular class, station in life, education, and social status of another race, the dandy cleverly manipulates clothing and attitude to exert agency rather than succumb to the limited ideals placed on him by society."<sup>27</sup> For the contemporary black dandy-artist as self-styled trickster, transcultural fashion design has turned into a politicized practice of postcolonial rebellion and means of social and artistic identity empowerment.

## Literature

Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. London: Phaidon, 1981.

Corrigal, Mary. "Sartorial Excess in Mary Sibande's 'Sophie.'" *Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press* 29, no. 2 (2015): 146–64.

Guha, Tania. "Double Dutch." *Third Text* 27, no. 8 (1994): 87–90.

Kaye, Jeremy. "Twenty-First-Century Victorian Dandy: What Metrosexuality and the Heterosexual Matrix Reveal about Victorian Men." *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 1 (2009): 109.

Kent, Rahel, ed. *Yinka Shonibare MBE*. Munich: Prestel, 2008.

Lewis, Shantrelle P. "Fashioning Black Masculinity: The Origins of the Dandy Lion Project." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 37 (2015): 54–61.

Miller, Monica L. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.

Oakley Smith, Mitchell, and Kubler, Alison. *Art/Fashion in the 21st Century*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2013.

Picton, John. "Undressing Ethnicity." *African Arts* 34, no. 3 (2003): 66–73.

Rabine, Leslie W. "Fashion and the Racial Construction of Gender." In *"Culture" and the Problem of Disciplines*, edited by John Carlos Rowe, 121–40. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

———. *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2002.

Sampat-Patel, Niti. *Postcolonial Masquerades: Culture and Politics in Literature, Film, Video and Photography*. New York: Garland, 2001.

25 Jeremy Kaye, "Twenty-First-Century Victorian Dandy: What Metrosexuality and the Heterosexual Matrix Reveal about Victorian Men," *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 1 (2009): 109.

26 "Dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just

beginning to rotten and fall." Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1981), 28.

27 Lewis, "Fashioning Black Masculinity," 56. To articulate the gendered doubleness of the dandy figure, I would suggest adding: "in styling herself."

**Fashion and Postcolonial Critique:  
An Introduction**

**Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton**

Fig. 1

Young women cutting and fitting clothing in class at Agricultural and Mechanical College, Greensboro, NC, 1899. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC; b/w film copy neg reproduction number: LC-USZ62-118917, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97510089/>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 2

Photograph of exhibit of the American Negroes at the Paris exposition, 1900. Taken from the *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 22, no. 130 (November 1900): 576. Library of Congress Washington, DC, reproduction number LC-DIG-ppmsc-04826 (digital file from original), LC-USZ62-132752 (b&w film copy neg.) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001697152>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 3

"The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line," chart prepared by Du Bois for the "American Negro" exhibit at the 1900 Paris World Exposition to show the routes of the African slave trade and the economic and social progress of African Americans since emancipation. Drawing, ink, and watercolor on board, 710 x 560 mm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC; Digital ID: ppmsca.33863, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.33863>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 4

*Portrait 1899*, displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, half-length portrait, seated, facing right]. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, Digital ID: (b&w film copy neg.) cph.3c24691, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24691>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 5

*Portrait 1899* displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, three-quarter length portrait,

seated with left arm over back of chair, facing front]. Gelatin silver photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington DC; Digital ID: (b/w film copy neg.) cph.3c24687, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24687>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 6

*Portrait 1899* displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, half-length portrait, facing slightly right 1899/1900]. Gelatin silver photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.; Digital ID: (b/w film copy neg.) cph.3c24796 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24796>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 7

*Portrait 1899/1900* displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing slightly right 1899/1900], photographic print: gelatin silver. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.; Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-124722 (b/w film copy neg.) <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3c20000/3c24000/3c24700/3c24722v.jpg>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 8

The Hidden Fashion Library, exhibition photo, staterooms Alte Post, Vienna, April 26–29, 2017. Gangart/Heinrich Pichler 2017. Courtesy of Gangart/Heinrich Pichler.

Fig. 9

Walé Oyéjidé, "After Migration," Ikeré Jones lookbook (Fall/Winter 2016/17). Walé Oyéjidé/Ikeré Jones 2016. Courtesy of Walé Oyéjidé.

**The Implementation of Western Culture in Austria: Colonial Concepts in Adolf Loos's Fashion Theory**

**Christian Kravagna**

Figs. 10–13

Heinz Frank, performance as a commentary to Adolf Loos's "Zur Herrenmode" (1898), 1970. Photo: Gabriela Brandenstein. Courtesy of Gabriela Brandenstein.

Fig. 14

Adolf Loos, *Das Andere*, no. 1, 1903

Fig. 15

Adolf Loos, Advertisement for *Das Andere* no. 2, 1903



**La Revue du Monde Noir: Nos Enquêtes**  
Louis Thomas Achille, Jean Baldoui,  
Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, Paulette Nardal,  
Rosario, and Clara W. Shepard

Fig. 16  
*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 2 (1931): 60.  
Figs. 17–21  
*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 3 (1932): 50–54.  
Figs. 22–24  
*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 4 (1932): 50–52.  
Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

**(Re-)fashioning African Diasporic Masculinities**

**Christine Checinska**

Fig. 25  
Bust of Jean-Jacques Dessalines.  
© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery Collection. Acquired with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund.  
Fig. 26  
Portrait of General Jean-Jacques Dessalines. [Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Jacques 1er), fondateur de l'Indépendance d'Haïti] Rouzier, Sémexan. *Dictionnaire géographique et administratif universel d'Haïti illustré ... ou Guide général en Haïti: avec gravures, illustrations, plans, cartes et vues dans le texte, et une carte coloriée de l'île d'Haïti*. Paris: Imprimerie brevetée Charles Blot, 1891, p. 89. Manioc, Bibliothèque numérique Caraïbe, Amazonie, Plateau des Guyanes. <http://www.manioc.org/images/SCH1300901131>. Courtesy of Manioc, Bibliothèque numérique Caraïbe, Amazonie, Plateau des Guyanes.

**Last Stop Palenque: Fashion Editorial**

**Hana Knížová and Sabrina Henry**

Figs. 27–35  
Hana Knížová, *Last Stop Palenque*, 2016. Fashion editorial for *Nataal.com*, styled by Sabrina Henry. Photo: Hana Knížová. © Hana Knížová and Sabrina Henry.

**A Brief History of Postcolonial African Fashion**

**Helen Jennings**

Fig. 36  
Designer: Wanda Lephoto – AW17 lookbook, Photo: Andile Buka, Models (left to right): Tebogo Gondo and Raymond Sibeko, Creative Direction and styling: The Sartists. Courtesy of Wanda Lephoto.

**Fresh Off the Boat: A Reflection on Fleeing, Migration, and Fashion (Theory)**

**Burcu Dogramaci**

Fig. 37  
Alice M. Huynh, *Fresh Off the Boat*, 2015. Six looks from the collection. Courtesy of Alice M. Huynh.  
Fig. 38  
Hussein Chalayan, “After Words,” Fall/Winter 2000. Photo: Chris Moore. [Robert Violette, *Hussein Chalayan* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 242–43] Courtesy of Hussein Chalayan.

**Reviewing Orientalism and Re-orienting**

**Fashion beyond Europe**

**Gabriele Mentges**

Fig. 39  
Women’s coat “Munisak” (minsak, mursak, also called “Kaltacha”), silk *ikat*, lining, printed cotton from Russia, Uzbekistan, 1900.

**212 Magazine: Picture Spread**

**Heval Okçuoğlu**

Fig. 40  
*212 Magazine* 1, “Strange Days” (2016). AES+F Group, *Allegoria Sacra*, 2011. Taken from *212 Magazine*, no. 1, “Strange Days.”  
Fig. 41  
Sandrine Dulermo and Michael Labica, *Strange Days—Visions of Futures Past*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine*, no. 1, “Strange Days.” Photography by Sandrine Dulermo and Michael Labica. Styling by Laurent Dombrowicz.  
Fig. 42  
Ekin Ozbicer, *Strange Days—The Bravest Tailor in the East*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine*, no. 1, Strange Days—The Bravest Tailor in the East, photography by Ekin Ozbicer, styling by Handan Yilmaz.  
Fig. 43  
Hellen Van Meene, *Romance Is the Glamour Which Turns the Dust of Everyday Life Into a Golden Haze*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine* Issue I, *Strange Days – Romance Is the Glamour Which Turns the Dust of Everyday Life into a Golden Haze*, photography and styling by Hellen Van Meene.  
Fig. 44  
Emre Dogru, *Local Fantasy Global Reality*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine* Issue II, *Locality – Local Fantasy Global Reality*, photography by Emre Dogru.  
Fig. 45  
Servet Koçyiğit, *Golden Lining*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine* Issue II, *Locality –*

Golden Lining by Servet Koçyiğit, 2016. All images courtesy of *212 Magazine*.

Fig. 46  
Murat Palta, *Modern Miniature*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine* Issue II, *Locality – Modern Miniature*, exclusive artwork by Murat Palta.

**Fashionscapes, Hybridity, and the White Gaze**  
**Birgit Haehnel**

Fig. 47  
Stella Jean, Pre-Fall Collection, 2017. <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/pre-fall-2017/stella-jean/slideshow/collection>. Courtesy of Condé Nast.

**Remodeling the Past, Cross-dressing the Future: Postcolonial Self-Fashioning for the Global Art Market**

**Birgit Mersmann**

Fig. 48  
Yinka Shonibare, *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, 11 hours, 1998. Courtesy of the artist.

**Re-mastering the Old World: Picture Spread from the Ikiré Jones Archive**

**Ikiré Jones/Walé Oyéjidé Esq.**

Figs. 49–53  
Walé Oyéjidé, *Re-mastering the Old World*, 2016–17. The Ikiré Jones Archive. Courtesy of Walé Oyéjidé Esq.

**Textiles Designing Another History: Wael Shawky's Cabaret Crusades**

**Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken**

Fig. 54  
Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa*, 2014, film stills, 54a | On-screen billing, 54b | Film scene *Mecca 681*, 54c | Film scene *Ramla 1192*; figs. a–c: courtesy of Wael Shawky and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/ Hamburg; 54d | *Perpetual Calendar*, Tab. II from “Catalan Atlas” by Abraham Creques, 1375 ©Bibliothèque National, Paris (<http://expositions.bnf.fr/ciel/catalan/index.htm>, 2017/05/12).  
Fig. 55  
Ebstorf Map, ca. 1290, reconstruction, ill. quoted from Ute Schneider, *Die Macht der Karten: Eine Geschichte der Kartographie vom Mittelalter bis heute* (Darmstadt: Primus 2004), 3. extended and updated ed. 2012), 160.  
Fig. 56  
World map from the Apocalypse commentary by Beatus von Liébana, 1086,

Burgo de Osma, fol.: 34v–35r, ill. quoted from John Williams, ed., *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse*, vol. 1 (London 1994), 51, ill. 21. (DadaWeb, Universität zu Köln, Kunsthistorisches Institut)  
Fig. 57

Wael Shawky, glass figures from *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa*, 2014, 57a | *Eleonore of Aquitaine*, 57b | *Ludwig VII of France*, 57c | *German King Conrad III*; ills. a–c: installation view, MoMA PS1, New York, 2015, photo: Nick Waldhör, 57d | *Muzalfat ad-Din Kawkaboori*, 57e | *Fatimid caliph Al Adid li-Din Allah*, 57f | *Yusuf (Salah ad-Din)*; ills. d–f: quoted from Wael Shawky: *Cabaret Crusades*, exh. cat., ed. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2015). All illustrations courtesy of Wael Shawky and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg.  
Fig. 58

Relics textiles, 9th/10th century, polychromed silk samite, Ev. Church Community Bad Gandersheim, Inv.-No. 396; ill. quoted from Christian Popp, “Reliquien im hochmittelalterlichen Weiheritus,” in *Seide im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Frauenstift: Besitz – Bedeutung – Umnutzung*, ed. Thomas Schilp and Annemarie Stauffer, Essener Forschungen zum Frauenstift, vol. 11 (Essen: Klartext, 2013), 160, ills. 3–4. Figs. 59a + b

Cathedral Treasury of Essen, textile relic cover, 10th to 11th century. Fig. 59a Silk textiles, 59b | Textile relic cover, 10th to 11th century, Cathedral Treasury of Essen; can r1 and r2, Inv.-Nr. E/r1 and E/r2-a1; ill. quoted from: Annemarie Stauffer, “Seide aus dem Frauenstift Essen: Befunde, Herkunft und Kontexte,” in *Seide im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Frauenstift: Besitz – Bedeutung – Umnutzung*, ed. Thomas Schilp and Annemarie Stauffer, Essener Forschungen zum Frauenstift, vol. 11 (Essen: Klartext, 2013), 105, ills. 2 and 106, ill. 3.

Fig. 60  
Cross of Otto and Mathilde, or: Cross of Abbess Mathilde, before 982, Cathedral Treasury of Essen, overall view and detail; ill. quoted from Klaus Beuckers, *Die Ottonen* (Petersberg: M. Imhof, 2002), 94. Fig. 61  
*Theophanu Cross*, 1039–1058, Cathedral Treasury of Essen, overall view and detail;

ill. quoted from Anne Kurtze, *Durchsichtig oder durchlässig. Zur Sichtbarkeit der Reliquien und Reliquiare des Essener Stiftschatzes im Mittelalter*, Studien zur internationalen Architektur- und Kunstgeschichte, 148 (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2017) 142, ill. II.3.3.

Fig. 62

Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa*, 2014. Four film stills from the "Battle of Hattin" scene. Courtesy of Wael Shawky and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg.

#### Traveling Fashion: Exoticism and Tropicalism Alexandra Karentzos

Fig. 63

Aldemir Martins, "Brazilian Look," collection for Rhodia, collection Brazilian Look, 1963. Dress above: print with abstract floral pattern design by Aldemir Martins. In *Manchete* 1963 (595): 44–45.

Fig. 64

Izabel Pons, "Brazilian Primitive," collection for Rhodia, collection Brazilian Primitive, 1965. Left: dress by Izabel Pons, bird-patterned print; right: dress with symbols of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé by Aldemir Martin. In *Jóia* magazine, 1965.

Fig. 65

Hélio Oiticica, Nildo of Mangueira with *Parangolé* P4 Cape 1, 1967. Courtesy of Projeto Helio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. In *Tropicália: Die 60s in Brasilien*. Edited by Gerald Matt, Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, with Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nürnberg, 2010. Exhibition catalogue, p. 41.

Fig. 66

Singer and composer Caetano Veloso wearing the *Parangolé* P4 Cape 1, 1968, Hélio Oiticica: P 04 *Parangolé* Cape 01 1964. Photo: Andreas Valentim. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica. In *Hélio Oiticica. Das große Labyrinth*. Edited by Susanne Gaensheimer, Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, with Hatje Cantz, 2013. Exhibition catalogue, p. 99.

#### The Production of African Wax Cloth in a Neoliberal Global Market: Vlisco and the Processes of Imitation and Appropriation Christine Delhaye

Fig. 67

Vlisco, collection "Splendeur", 2014, Photo: Vlisco. Photo: Frtiz Kok. Courtesy of Vlisco.

Fig. 68

Vlisco, collection "Celebrate with Style", 2017. Photo: Vlisco, Photography: Floor Knapen. Courtesy of Vlisco.

Fig. 69

Design 13/0036, Vlisco (Ankersmit), 1912. Photo: Vlisco. Courtesy of Vlisco.

Fig. 70

Design Lino, ABC 1906 (after Indonesian design "Tambal Miring"). Archive ABC (A RV-B110-2) Photo: Helen Elands. Courtesy of Helen Elands and ABC, Hyde.

#### Incommensurate T-shirts: Art/Economy from Senegal to the United States Leslie Rabine

Fig. 71

Streetwear designer Poulo (Mohamadou El Amine Diallo) sets up his heat-film laser printer in Dakar, Senegal, April 2015. Photo: Leslie Rabine.

Fig. 72

Graffiti artist Kemp Ndao prepares a T-shirt for heat-film transfer on the press in Poulo's first atelier in Dakar, Senegal. February 2012. Photo: Leslie Rabine.

Fig. 73

Graffiti artist Nourou (Mohamadou Nouroul Anwar Ndiaye) at a graffiti festival in Saint-Louis du Sénégal, December 2015. Photo: Leslie Rabine.

Fig. 74

Nourou, working at the atelier, has designed a T-shirt inscribed with "RSPCT EVRYBDY / TRST NBDY/ Build'Other," Dakar, Senegal, February 2017. Photo: Leslie Rabine.

Fig. 75

Nourou, at the atelier in Dakar, separates the laser-cut design element from the sheet of heat-film, March 2017. Photo: Leslie Rabine.

Fig. 76

Nourou places a piece of heat-film design element on a T-shirt before pressing it, March 2017. Photo: Leslie Rabine.