

JUDITH BEYER (2025) *ANTIGENDER FASHION*

THE POSSIBILITIES OF GENDER-FLUID AND NON-BINARY FASHION DESIGN

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Fashion has always been a crucial arena for exploring and challenging traditional notions of gender, yet its pluriversal modes of being and progressive capacities have in recent years become increasingly amplified. Against a backdrop of growing social and political debates surrounding the politicization of gender and the scapegoating of queer and BIPOC communities under rising right-wing ideologies, Judith Beyer's *Antigender Fashion: The Possibilities of Gender-Fluid and Non-Binary Fashion Design* offers a timely and well-researched resource that engages with the growing field of gender-fluid fashion, while introducing "antigender fashion" as a related but more radical concept that resists the very categorization of gender itself. It presents not only a critical interrogation of dominant structures within the fashion system, but also, given that fashion reflects broader sociocultural shifts and plays a key role in the construction of identities, articulates a vision for an inclusive, antigender future that extends beyond fashion into the fabric of wider society.

Beyer frames fashion not merely as a commercial or aesthetic practice but as a site of resistance and identity construction. Through the lens of *antigender fashion*, a concept coined by Karaminas and Taylor (2022) that actively resists traditional gender categorization, the book seeks to answer the central question: "How does antigender fashion disrupt, challenge and trouble binary gender norms?"

The introduction outlines the book's methodology, with a particular focus on internet-mediated research and document analysis. Beyer draws on primary sources including advertising imagery, social media posts, and moving images such as catwalk shows, live streams, and fashion films. This approach allows her to capture the ephemeral and performative qualities of fashion in the digital age. The book is structured in two main sections: the first establishes the theoretical, historical, and methodological frameworks. The second section presents four case studies: JW Anderson, Gucci, Art School, and No Sesso, that exemplify

antigender fashion practices in diverse ways.¹ The book's first chapter establishes the theoretical framework, drawing from queer theory and poststructuralist thought, particularly the works of Judith Butler (2006) and Jack Halberstam (2018). This first chapter engages with Butler's concept of *gender performativity* and Halberstam's exploration of the contemporary state of gender, challenging the fixed categories often used to structure identity and fashion. Beyer effectively links these theories to fashion studies, suggesting that gender is not an inherent identity but a repeated stylized act, one that is largely performed through clothing. The incorporation of Patrizia Calefato's (2017) semiotic reading of fashion further deepens this argument, demonstrating how fashion operates as a system of meaning saturated with gendered codes. By grounding the analysis in queer and critical fashion studies, Beyer provides the reader with a robust framework for interpreting the expressive, performative dimensions of dress, and how their subversion might challenge or destabilize heteronormative gender identities.

The discussion then shifts toward a historical perspective in chapter two, *Tracing Fluidity: Understanding Moments of Gender-Blurring Fashion*, which maps key instances of gender-blurring in fashion to contextualize the emergence of fluid identities in dress, ranging from bohemian and flapper styles to the Peacock Revolution, punk, glam rock, and grunge youth subcultures. In doing so, the chapter effectively establishes a historical baseline for understanding today's gender-fluid fashion practices and how

1 JW Anderson was founded in 2008 by Northern Irish designer Jonathan Anderson. JW Anderson is widely recognized for its innovative approach to menswear and later womenswear, known for challenging traditional gender boundaries through form, silhouette, and material.

Gucci was established in Florence in 1921 by Guccio Gucci (1881–1953) as a luxury leather goods company before expanding into fashion. The brand has undergone multiple creative transformations, most notably under Alessandro Michele, who served as creative director from 2015 to 2022 and introduced a fluid approach to gender through design, styling, and presentation.

Art School was founded in London in 2016 by Eden Loweth and Tom Barratt, and from 2020 onwards has been led solely by Loweth. Emerging from London's queer creative scene, the brand has been committed to inclusivity and representation, using its collections and runway shows to center non-binary, trans, and queer identities, and is known for its inclusive tailoring based on adaptable forms.

No Sesso was founded in Los Angeles in 2015 by designer Pierre Davis, later joined by Arin Hayes and Autumn Randolph. No Sesso (Italian for "no sex/no gender") explicitly positions itself as a non-binary, inclusive label. With a community-driven modus operandi, the brand combines storytelling, activism, and collaborative design practices.

they have never been fixed or immune to cultural reinterpretation. Particularly helpful is the distinction between *androgyny*, *unisex fashion*, and *gender-fluidity*, with Beyer arguing that unisex fashion often neutralizes gender but remains confined within a binary logic. Gender-fluid fashion, in contrast, actively seeks to destabilize and reconfigure those very logics.

Chapter three, *Antigender Fashion: Or, Why Can't Girls Have Dicks and Boys Have Boobs?*, introduces the central concept of antigender fashion. Like anti-fashion, which “refers to all styles of adornment which fall outside the organized system of fashion change” (Polhemus, 2019, p. 42), antigender fashion “uses the language of gendered fashion to reveal its construction and subvert its signs” (Beyer, 2025, p. 80). In doing so, it establishes the critical lens for the analysis of the subsequent case studies.

The second section of the book comprises four case studies, selected according to the following criteria: a) Adoption of a design approach that deconstructs and reconfigures gender signifiers to challenge norms; b) Application of an intersectional lens that accounts for race, class, age, ability, and body size; c) Incorporation of inclusive construction methods to accommodate diverse bodies; d) Maintain strong visibility within the fashion industry and media, particularly around gender fluidity. Collectively, these case studies illustrate how antigender principles have manifested in fashion design, production practices, and media representation, covering a time span of roughly twenty years. It is evident that Judith Beyer has selected some compelling case studies, though their relevance to the central argument varies. The first two, JW Anderson and Gucci under the creative direction of Alessandro Michele, illustrate how traditionally feminine signifiers are integrated into menswear collections, and vice versa. Their engagement with antigender fashion is primarily aesthetic, manifesting in choices of color, fabric, and pattern. For instance, Gucci's Fall/Winter 2015 collection featured “large accessories, like chunky rimmed glasses, heirloom rings, bobble hats and fur-lined loafers; colourful coats with occasional fur cuffs and military double-button rows; flowing dresses and tailored suits with botanic floral prints; and chiffon blouses with *lavallière* bows worn by all genders” (Beyer, 2025, p. 123). While visually engaging, it must be noted that gender fluidity involves more than an eclectic blend of traditional

gender signifiers. JW Anderson and Gucci rarely incorporate the lived experiences of queer, trans, or BIPOC communities, nor do they truly challenge the capitalist structures that underpin mainstream fashion. As such, their treatment of antigender fashion seems to foreground aesthetic experimentation rather than a sustained political critique.

By contrast, Art School and No Sesso are portrayed as deeply embedded within their respective communities and as embracing an explicitly intersectional perspective. These younger, self-directed labels actively engage with anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-patriarchal politics through both design and practice. Queer, trans, and BIPOC individuals are involved not solely as models, but as integral creative contributors, suggesting a collaborative authorship that extends beyond representation. In addition, Art School and No Sesso's use of adaptable pattern cutting, stretch fabrics, and diverse casting choices marks a material and symbolic commitment to inclusivity. Importantly, Beyer frames these brands as more than just progressive aesthetics; they represent new systems of production and representation that seek to dismantle fashion's long-standing hierarchies, reaching beyond that of gender.

The first two case studies brought a notable sense of innovation during their initial emergence. Yet, when considered in the context of contemporary LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC discourses, their relevance and contributions appear more constrained, which somewhat limits their resonance within the book's broader critical framework. This limitation stems from the fact that both JW Anderson and Michele's Gucci primarily engage with stylistic, sartorial choices and garment taxonomies, rather than addressing the deeper socio-political dimensions of identity, embodiment, or intersectionality. As such, their approach remains largely surface-level, with little regard for the lived realities of marginalized communities or the structural inequalities embedded within the fashion system. Art School and No Sesso, on the other hand, show how fashion can be used as a tool for empowerment and collective identity formation.

While the case studies are compelling on their own, the book would benefit from a comparative synthesis that brings them into dialogue using the theoretical tools developed in the first half of the book. A concluding chapter that reflects critically on the successes and limitations of each label, and

what lessons they offer for the future of antigender fashion, would have enhanced the analytical cohesion of the work.

Nevertheless, Beyer's clear and well-structured writing, balancing complex theoretical material with accessible explanation, proves pedagogically effective. Her integration of primary source analysis, including advertising imagery, social media content, and moving images such as fashion films and runway shows, allows abstract concepts such as gender performativity, cyborg theory, afrofuturism and sartorial signifiers to be translated into real-world examples. In doing so, the book offers students and scholars alike valuable tools for critically engaging with fashion's role in contemporary identity constructions and expressions.

Antigender Fashion makes a fresh and necessary contribution to the growing intersection of fashion studies, queer theory, and cultural politics. By grounding its arguments in both theory and design practice, the book demonstrates how fashion can function as a site of resistance and possibility. Its adoption of antigender as a conceptual lens adds depth to discussions of fashion and gender, moving beyond surface-level aesthetics to interrogate the systems of meaning, power, and representation that underlie them.

Through Beyer's ability to move fluently between theoretical abstraction and practical application, she illustrates that fashion design, when liberated from the constraints of binary logic, can offer expansive, imaginative alternatives to the gender system. Importantly, these alternatives do not only serve non-binary individuals; they challenge all of us to rethink how gender is constructed, performed, and perceived.

In a time when gender diversity is increasingly under attack, Beyer's book is a timely and hopeful intervention. It demonstrates fashion's potential to challenge normative structures and open up space for more inclusive and fluid forms of self-expression. This book will be of particular interest to scholars of fashion, gender, and visual culture, as well as to readers engaged in exploring how dress intersects with the politics of embodiment and representation.

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