

Asserting Creative Agencies through the Sartorial: (Re)Fashioning African and African Diasporic Masculinities

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Asserting Creative Agencies through the Sartorial: (Re)Fashioning African and African Diasporic Masculinities

Being well-dressed is an axis of meaning for African men.

Kopano Ratele (2012:113)

In essays for this special edition of *Critical Arts*, writers are invited to consider ways in which the sartorial (hereafter referred to using Carol Tulloch's (2010:274) tripartite structure of "style-fashion-dress")^[1] can be used as a means by which identities and subjectivities – specifically those of African and African Diasporic masculine subjects (hereafter also referred to as 'black^[2] masculinities'^[3]) – are imagined, constructed, produced, marketed, disseminated, received, and consumed. The core thematic of the edition is focused on how, through these practices and processes, cultural practitioners use style-fashion-dress as a form of *creative agency* through which to negotiate and articulate shifting notions of black masculinities in relation to particular temporal, geographic, socio-economic and political contexts. These cultural practitioners may encompass individuals, collectives and sub-cultural groups that assert forms of creative agency as part of their daily lived experiences^[4] and/or group identities, as well as visual/performance artists and fashion-designers, amongst others, working across a range of interdisciplinary genres and media.^[5]

Deployment of style-fashion-dress is often considered as a form of expression that (intentionally or unintentionally) involves processes of making and remaking of identities and subjectivities. Such forms of expression may be consciously or subconsciously *enacted, and critically read* as assertions of creative agency; forms of expression as assertions of creative agencies are therefore dependent on readings in which they are positioned as such. Furthermore, these enactments and readings depend

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on *how, by whom, and from which positionalities they are enacted, read and received.*

Forms of expression through style-fashion-dress that are *enacted and read* as assertions of creative agencies may take a multiplicity of forms, and are usually positioned in relation to constructs of race, gender, sexuality, normativity and power operative across a broad range of historical and contemporary contexts. For instance, assertion of creative agencies may be read in terms of the ways in which subjects engage, play with, uphold, or reinforce prevailing hetero-normative constructs. Yet, creative agencies may also be considered in light of ways in which they are used to negotiate, subvert, and/or resist dominant constructs, thereby highlighting the workings of, and questioning, the power-relations that these constructs embody. When used as a means of unsettling the status quo, creative agencies may be considered as forms what Deborah Willis (2003) calls “subversive resistance”: a term she uses to describe strategies used by black people to produce visual images that counter dominant meanings or stereotypes. Its impact often comes through nuanced presentation of one’s self, history and community that denote forms of disrupting, dislodging and troubling hegemonic and/or normative codes, as opposed to overt representations of active protest such rebellion, transgression or defiance. If read as forms of subversive resistance, creative agencies may include, but are not limited to:

- Use of style-fashion-dress to unsettle and dislodge hegemonic and/or hereto-normative codes through which stereotypical representations of African and African Diasporic masculinities are constructed, and expose the power-relations inherent within these representations.
- Practicing style-fashion-dress as a means to negotiate, challenge and/or assert a form of independence from colonial, western and/or patriarchal images of dehumanisation, degradation, infantilisation, objectification and disempowerment.
- Deploying style-fashion-dress as a means of countering erasure/invisibility/re-orderings of identity during periods of the Atlantic or Indian Ocean slave trade; European colonialism; Imperialism and apartheid.

[Please note that this is a shortened version of the CFP. Please refer to the complete CFP at <http://www.viad.co.za/call-for-papers/>]

[1] According to Susan Kaiser (2012:1), “Fashion is ... about producing clothes and appearances, working through ideas, negotiating subject positions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class), and navigating through power positions. It involves mixing, borrowing, belonging, and changing. It is a complex process that entangles multiple perspectives and approaches”. ‘Dress’ is a more neutral term used predominantly for historical and cultural comparative purposes in global fashion theory to describe the traditional, symbolic, or functional use of clothing (Kaiser 2012:7). ‘Dress style’ refers to the actual items of dress and the way they are combined and worn to create identity and difference. Carol Tulloch (2010:276) considers style as a form of agency “in the construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may, or may not, be ‘in fashion’ at the time of use”. Tulloch (2010:274) proposes the *articulation of style-fashion-dress* as a complex system

that can be broken down into part- and whole- relations between the parts (individual terms) and the wholes (the system that connects them) (Kaiser 2012:7). The larger articulation of *style-fashion-dress* locates style in the context of fashion: a social process in which style narratives are collectively “in flux with time” (Riello & McNeil cited in Kaiser 2012:7). Following Tulloch, the term “fashion-style” is used here to denote articulations of the style-fashion-dress system; a complex of shifting concepts that signifies the multitude of meanings and frameworks that operate within the 'whole-and-part' schema.

[2] The term 'black' is used with reference to 'the black Atlantic' (Gilroy 1993) and Afro-Asian communities that are descendants of the eastern movement of slaves across the Indian Ocean.

[3] With recognition that both terms are culturally, historically and politically constructed.

[4] The term 'lived-experience' is used here to denote forms of asserting creative agency in daily life by “subjects of action, subjected to power and law ... [who] have a rich and complex consciousness; that ... are capable of challenging their oppression”(Mbembe 2001:5-6). As Achille Mbembe (2001:5) notes, the complex phenomena of state and power take place in a material sense, as opposed to ways in which they are reduced in academic disciplines to abstractions such as 'discourses 'or 'representations'.

[5] Many visual practitioners place emphasis on the sartorial as the core component of their work, but extend and develop this component in fashion-; Fine Art- and documentary- photography; fashion-films; music videos; artworks, installations; performances; and in the commercial realm.

NOTES FOR AUTHORS

- Final essays should be **a minimum of 5000** and **a maximum of 6000 words. The maximum word count includes the title, abstract, endnotes and sources cited.**
- Up to 2 images may be included per article; each image is equivalent to 250 words. Therefore, if 2 images are included, the total word count of the **text** should be **5500 words**; if 1 image is included, the total word count of the **text** should be **5750 words**.
- Submissions must not have been published previously or submitted elsewhere.
- Formatting and layout should be according to the *Critical Arts* referencing style (which can be found on the last page of printed editions of the journal).
- Submissions should be prefaced by a title page containing:
 1. Title of the article.
 2. An abstract of approximately 300 words.
 3. The author's institutional affiliation and designation (if applicable).
 4. Contact details (primary e-mail address, telephone numbers).

Critical Arts is an IBSS-listed, SAPSE (Department of Higher Education and Training) accredited journal.

All essays in the volume will be subject to double blind peer-review before acceptance for publication. If applicable, final acceptance is dependent on the editor's and original reviewers' assessment of whether the reviewers' comments have been adequately addressed.

TIMELINE

- Call for papers circulated by **28 January 2016**.
- Abstracts to be submitted to the editor (leoraf@uj.ac.za) by **10 February**.
- Authors notified of acceptance by **15 February**.
- Manuscripts to be peer-reviewed must be submitted to the editor by **20 April**.
- Reviewer reports and editor's comments will be sent to authors by **1 June**.
- Revised manuscripts to be submitted to the editor by **24 June**.
- Liaison between author and editor from **25 June-15 July**.
- Final drafts to be sent to the *Critical Arts* Editorial office by **15 July**.
- Revised manuscripts to be sent out for final review after revisions have been implemented by **16 July**.
- Notification of final acceptance by **30 July**.
- Manuscripts will be sent for copy-editing by **1 August**.
- Proofs should be sent to authors from UNISA Press in **September**.

The expected publication date is **October 2016**.

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