

Rezensionen zum Themenschwerpunkt

Ulinka Rublack, **Dressing up. Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe**, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 2010, XXI, 354 pp., EUR 29,99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-19-964518-3.

Reading Ulinka Rublack's multifarious survey of the Reformation's sartorial splendour, man's universal propensity to give himself or herself shape comes immediately to the fore. Designing seems to be the key to the history of fashion in the form of cultural history, as advocated in "Dressing Up". From the twelfth century onwards, techniques to model cloth were developed and the production of elegant, tight-fitting and figure-hugging dresses of courtly culture could start (7–8). Shaping up, and thus at the same time becoming somebody or even something else as well as acquiring a personal model or personality, became more and more decisive in people's life – of course all depending on financial means, location and social status. Erasmus of Rotterdam thought about clothing as the 'body's body' (17), and that seems to be an apt metaphor to address the issue of how, when and why costume changes recorded here for Reformation Germany occurred. Not surprisingly Rublack originally started her career in that country writing about the Reformation. That transitory period called for new models due to religious changes but also due to the import of various new goods and ideas from all over the world. At the same time, Erasmus' metaphor indicates a constant in the occurrences sketched in this book. Fashion simultaneously implies change, without which fashion would not exist, and adjustment to convention and tradition. Vestments are a second skin that transforms a man or woman into a person who can move around in society, thus turning a mere being into a participant in a spectacle. The theatrical aspect of clothing is not to be overlooked, because a definite shape and techniques to create this are indispensable for the creation or the transformation of a mere physique into a body. Many costume books therefore begin with an image of a naked man on his way to the tailor.

The author did not set out to create a style guide, and fortunately refrains from light-hearted puns, sticking to clear and elegant, but serious description and analysis. In the mind of the reader, however, there will no doubt be a connection with the phrasing of contemporary fashion blogs, which, considering the wealth of costume books selected

especially for this study, have a long tradition. The same goes for parental criticism of short skirts, tight or even patched-up trousers, which were common until the late 1970s when stone-washed skinny jeans with artificial tears and patches became standard wear. In the long term there is seldom something really new in the world of fashion. Thanks to collections of letters and diaries, Rublack was able to recover a “grammar of vestimentary codes” (229) and “moral geography” (146–149) of clothing. According to the preserved Behaim family correspondence in the 1570s, Nuremberg mother Magdalena kept sending clean and new shirts, caps, trousers and even a small fork and a wig to her student sons in Germany and Italy. Rags and holes in clothes represented misconduct and failure; depending on the event, the scions of wealthy merchant families generally had to appear “*städtlich*” – urbane in the sense of honourable decent and decorous. People not only did think in terms of appearances, they also positioned themselves with the help of sartorial choices, and the Behaims wished to live up to their social aspirations (chapter VI).

Rublack exemplarily explored the various aspects of sixteenth century possibilities for fashioning the self or the other respectively by delineating taste communities in Southern and Eastern Germany. For this she relied mainly on the – very cunningly unearthed – sources, such as the already mentioned costume books, which were mainly produced in that area as well as in Italy, ego documents and *alba amicorum*. In addition, she relied on the sumptuary laws proclaimed in many European cities that forbid too much colour, too much visible skin and of course too many accessories. Matthäus Schwarz’s (1497–1574) “Book of Clothes” (“Kleidungsbüchlein”, started in 1520) is the most impressive of the sources. The Augsburg bookkeeper of the Fugger family created a sixteenth century version of the modern photo album, recording his visual appearance throughout his adult life in combination with notes on his lifestyle and state of mind. Readers of Rublack’s survey are soon freed from clichés concerning the supposed austerity of Reformation dressing. The preference of black was certainly there, but mainly because of its relation to fashionable tastefulness. It was not about being as simple as possible – the days of Saint Francis, the son of a rich textile merchant who gave away all his clothes at the start of his religious career, were long gone. The relation with Lutheranism and later austere Calvinism is less direct than often thought. Luther dressed up after having shed his monk’s cassock, instead of dressing down (97). His new rank had to be defined, and this included meeting the vestimentary criteria of civil and also stylish burghers. Since church dignitaries had to stand out from their believers, he was presented with a red gown.

The subtitle of the book reads “Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe”, but the argumentation is based on Southern and Eastern Germany, the regions where the Reformation struck heavily and society was rocked to its foundations. An extra argument for the author to concentrate on this country’s wealthy commercial towns and university cities is the urge of its inhabitants to redefine themselves, not only because of the religious changes but also due to commercial and intellectual relations with both the Italian and the Flemish-Dutch city landscapes. Additionally, the discovery of new parts of the world and new forms of mediality in printing and visualisation techniques,

which also partly originated from the researched region, are brought into the discussion. This highlights the importance of what Fernand Braudel called 'cultural frontiers', which usually did not coincide with national borders. As a variation on the notorious 'coffee border', we encounter here the dividing line between sewn and draped clothes. Up to today this has been a vital distinction, seen in its west–east dimension, which is also valid in chronological respect. Sewing techniques enabled Western Europeans from the twelfth century onwards to slim their figures. One can even wonder whether this propensity towards tightness is locally inherent, since as early as antiquity the trouser-wearing people of the north were shapelier than the Greek or Roman togati.

The concentration on sixteenth-century South-Eastern Germany and its society is explored to determine 'why looks became deeply embedded in how people felt about themselves and others' in 'creative exchange with the material world'. The reader is challenged to falsify the account and produce counter-suggestions from his or her own expertise or social and cultural background. Some of the most scrupulously utilised costume books stem from Italy and are akin to other kinds of categorisation works in botany, anatomy, physiognomy and ethnography produced there, a finding Rublack does not elaborate on. Abraham de Bruyn (ca. 1538–1580), the author of the frequently cited "Omnium poenegentium imagines" (1577), is also not German. He only temporarily dwelled in Cologne, originating from Antwerp, where he collaborated with the printer Christoffel Plantijn. A more systematic comparison with other regions seems advisable, as the tentative explorations in chapter V "Looking at others" are insufficient.

The same goes for the underpinning of chronological demarcations. Although something is said about the Renaissance as a period from 1300 to 1600, the reasoning focuses on the sixteenth century with glances at the seventeenth and even eighteenth century. Apart from the fact that the resurrection of the ancients associated with the Renaissance is not decisive for the topic – even staunch humanists did not revert to gowns – it seems that starting earlier, e.g. in the twelfth century, would have been rewarding, certainly since constants and universal phenomena are at stake here. Of course Rublack is excused for not having done all of this; it is the high quality of her contentions that makes the reader long for more.

"Dressing up" is only the beginning of a new kind of costume history. Thanks to Rublack it can emancipate costume history from an art historical subspecialism pursued by (female) museum conservators to a common focus of attention in religious history, economic history, gender history and political history. All can hugely profit from her enlightening insights. By shining a light on 'gender' she expands on traditional opinions about the negative outcome of the Renaissance for women. Their involvement with trade and manufacture helped them to create a new identity, meeting the novel requirements of decency paired with decorousness, thus proving that it was possible to combine beauty and virtue. Traditional notions of female inferiority could be countered. Clearly, having trained as a general historian who likes to dive deep into the sources, Rublack mainly observes and analyses, avoiding long theoretical elaborations.

She makes reference to historical anthropology (Gilles Lipovetzky, Georg Simmel and Keith Thomas, 10–11), but positions her work within the visual studies founded by Aby Warburg and taken further by Horst Bredekamp (22–23).

Although clothes are of course primarily meant to make one look better and to delight the eye, they are worn on the skin and consequently *make* the body, as Erasmus' metaphor of clothes as a second skin suggests. It is therefore strange that 'material' in "Dressing up" only refers to cloth and not to the physical aspect. Allusions to another historical subspecialism, body history, which recently shook off the notion of cultural construction, are absent, and one wonders why, because the author wrote very beautiful articles in that field. This does not make the book less valuable, since Rublack did a great job of delving into a new field for general historians and immediately writing a convincing book. After this fortunately richly illustrated book, clothing is not likely to disappear from the focus of pre-modern historians, and they can start filling the gaps in sartorial knowledge and its societal repercussions.

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Sabine Arnaud Hg., **La philosophie des vapeurs: Suivie d'une Dissertation sur les vapeurs et les pertes de sang** (= Le temps retrouvé), Paris: Mercure de France 2009, EUR 17,20, ISBN 978-2-7152-2864-1.

In der Frühen Neuzeit waren die sogenannten *vapores* fester Bestandteil des Repertoires pathologischer Befindlichkeiten, die in erster Linie Frauen betreffen konnten. Verstanden wurden darunter im Sinne der Säftelehre Dämpfe, die sich in der Matrix, der Gebärmutter, bildeten, im Körper bis in den Kopf aufstiegen und die Sinne der Person beeinträchtigten. Im 18. Jahrhundert berief man sich vermehrt auf die Wirkung der sogenannten Lebensgeister (*esprits animaux*), des Blutes oder der Nerven. Die Folgen einer solchen Überhitzung beziehungsweise Unordnung des weiblichen wie männlichen Körpers – und des Gemüts – waren Unwohlsein, scheinbar unkontrollierte Tränenergüsse, Atemnot und Schwindel, Krämpfe bis hin zu Ohnmacht. Ebenfalls im 18. Jahrhundert erlebte dieser als immer temporär verstandene Ausnahmezustand von Körper und Geist eine besondere Konjunktur, besonders in Frankreich und dort in Paris, nicht zuletzt dank seiner mindestens bis ins 17. Jahrhundert zurückreichenden Tradition des Konvulsiven. Die *vapores* zeigten sich nicht mehr nur als medizinisches Problem, sondern hielten als mondäner Schwächezustand Einzug in das Gesellschaftsleben. Davon zeugt auch das umfangreiche zeitgenössische Schrifttum, das im Kontext der breiteren Tendenz zur Herausbildung einer ‚medizinischen Öffentlichkeit‘ die wissenschaftliche und die gesellschaftliche Neugier gleichermaßen bediente.

Zwei sehr unterschiedliche dieser Texte hat nun die am Berliner Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte tätige Historikerin Sabine Arnaud für den vorliegenden