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Letter from the Editors

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**Rita M. Andrade
and Regina A. Root**

Letter from the Editors

Rita M. Andrade is an Assistant Professor of Arts and Visual Culture at the Universidade Federal de Goiás, Brazil. She writes on Brazilian fashion and dress history. From 2000 to 2002, she initiated a translation project that brought *Fashion Theory* to Brazil and which opened a forum through which to engage Brazilian fashion studies. Her current research examines museum dress collections.
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Brazilian fashion has recently expanded into an international arena hungry for design and network innovations. This opportunity has launched new markets, marked by the presence of foreign journalists at Brazilian fashion shows and the inclusion of Brazilian design concepts in international fashion exhibitions. With a consolidated fashion calendar created by industry leaders, many Brazilian designers and entrepreneurs, not to mention design interventions, have stood out on the global stage because of their unique cross-cultural approach to fashion, connecting at once to a rich set of interpretations that speak to the region's biodiversity, cultural diversity, and a so-called and unabashedly stereotypical "way of life." São Paulo is often lauded in the press for having

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risen to take the place of the world's fifth largest fashion event.¹ Recent scholarship and exhibitions have confirmed the emergence of Brazilian luxury goods, unique consumption practices and fashion brands. While certainly informative, scholarly contributions tend to overlook the archival research, object-based analysis, and critical debates guiding fashion studies within and outside of Brazil. As a result, there is no way to ground truly meaningful theoretical discussions. While this special issue surely cannot be comprehensive in its address of the issues still in need of exploration, it offers a first step in this direction. As this issue's inside cover image suggests,² scholars are going to have to sift through fashion records much more carefully in order to unlock the significance and implications of Brazilian fashion. Without such a deep reading, our conclusions about contemporary Brazilian fashion are at best tentative.

This particular collection of essays recovers the concept of Brazilian fashion through its archives, its theorists, and its culture. Fashion studies scholars who write about contemporary fashion regularly turn to official industry and government data that emphasize the relevance of contemporary design brands. Perhaps for this reason, some scholars have mistaken this rise to prominence as some kind of "coming of age" moment.³ As the essays in this special issue reveal, however, Brazilian fashion is hardly a "new" concept and, as the second largest city in the Americas, São Paulo is certainly not a newcomer to the global story of fashion. Brazilian hues and styles have long influenced the fashions and trends of Europe and the United States.⁴ The scholarly record is largely silent on the dynamics of appropriation and cross-cultural currents that influence these contemporary Brazilian fashion proposals. For this reason, the field of fashion theory and history seems inexplicably haunted by its own blinders, as one would expect Latin American fashion experts to sort out what are the truly innovative and original contributions (Root 2013, 403).

As we embarked on this project, it became clear that there are many reasons why the past is critical to legitimizing Brazilian fashion and fashion studies in general. The field has only begun to reach a consensus on the terminology and methodology that can be used to analyze data and issues in a more inclusive and rigorous way (Black et al. 2013).⁵ Only through the careful analysis of the past will scholars reach the fullest understanding of present and future inspirations, record scientifically those trends impacting dress over time, assess accurately the significance of fashion vis-à-vis socio-historical events. And, perhaps most important, the process of engaging the past will allow new ways of seeing what is wholly new in Brazilian fashion and what has been thoroughly discarded. When confronting the stereotypes circulating about Brazilian fashion—from Havaiana sandals to the Brazilian bikini⁶—scholars will no longer be faced with an unnecessary exercise in unraveling deceptive marketing strategies: truth can lie behind assessments of novelty and originality. The industry may have put the cart before the horse when it

sidestepped the historical record but that does not mean this represents a productive approach to scholarship. It is not enough, in other words, to reproduce dominant ideologies that position concepts such as Brazilian fashion as an additional chapter of a larger global fashion story; scholars would instead be wise to unmask the truth and reckon with the “unfinished nature” of the fashion canon.⁷ The responses generated by the call for papers for this issue on Brazilian fashion revealed that scholars are just beginning the archival work and object-based studies necessary to stake legitimate claims that will move the field forward.⁸

This conversation has a history. Berg Publishers of the United Kingdom published the first issue of *Fashion Theory* in March 1997. From 2002 to 2004, the journal launched a Brazilian Portuguese language translation of its pages on the other side of the Atlantic, a project carried out by Rita Andrade. Eleven issues of *Fashion Theory Brazil* were published during that time, with each translated issue adding one original essay by a Brazilian scholar. The enterprise was initially sponsored in part by the Brazilian Textile and Apparel Industry Association, which viewed the enterprise as an opportunity for a more meaningful exchange with the country’s fashion design programs. Also in 2002, the University of Santa Catarina began online the first Brazilian fashion studies journal under the title of *ModaPalavra*, fashioning the words “fashion” and “word” into one consolidated concept; its first issue emphasized the role of technology in the industry. At its onset, *Fashion Theory Brazil*, like its English counterpart, promoted interdisciplinary connections to assess dress, body, and culture. The inaugural March 2002 issue of *Fashion Theory Brazil* translated the March 2000 issue of *Fashion Theory*, and there was a particular reason for that choice.⁹ Dedicated to Richard Martin, the late curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute and a scholar in his own right, the issue included the seminal essay that later helped launch *The Latin American Fashion Reader* and an entire field of study.¹⁰ Within Brazil, contributions emphasized scholarly interpretations of everything from fashion photography to contemporary design proposals. Just to cite an example, an essay by Carol Garcia recorded the 2004 collection of designer Jum Nakao shown as part of São Paulo Fashion Week, which proposed the idea of an invisible couture.¹¹ As the number of publication venues for Brazilian fashion studies expanded, *Fashion Theory Brazil* ceased publication (Andrade and Root 2010). One might have expected its currents to have crossed back over the Atlantic. This issue thus represents that moment, a project that has taken over a decade to materialize. A new publisher, Taylor and Francis, now brings *Fashion Theory* to print. Moving forward, one can imagine the day when the journal we hold dear for its support of international fashion studies scholarship will no longer need special issues to redress the foundations of global fashion history.

Over the years, Brazilian fashion studies has made many twists and turns. Foundational studies on the nineteenth century frame a pivotal

juncture in the formation of the Brazilian nation-state. The role of the mass media in constructing fashion trends has been a great source of study and has produced significant results (Bonadio 2014; Rainho 2002, 2014). All in all, the literature has often privileged a European fashion heritage associated with the country's middle and affluent classes; however, this work also challenges the fixed categories of such assessments (Affonso 1923; Andrade 2005; Braga and Prado 2011; Souza 1987). Those rare glimpses into the roots of indigenous and African Brazilian dress have emerged from the field of anthropology but these studies are not anchored in the methodologies of fashion and dress studies (Freire 1987/2009; Lagrou 2009). To imagine how marginalized social sectors dressed the body over time is still part of a larger recovery project; scholars have only begun to cull the archives for clues about the dress of enslaved African Brazilians and indigenous communities (which is never the homogenous entity that some scholars and publishers seek to consolidate). It is possible that the dress of the more vulnerable individuals in society, including children, tend to be overlooked because their assessments often rely on secondary rather than primary sources. Complicating matters, those pioneering studies on African Brazilian dress by Brazilian scholars have not always reached an international audience because, with rare exceptions, the work is only available in Portuguese (one exception might be Damgaard 2015). Another thematic interest has stressed the inadequate working conditions of textile and clothing manufacturers, particularly as these relate to questions of gender and power (Abreu 1986; Maleronka 2008). As if to anticipate the challenges of conducting archival and object-based research, a 2013 Brazilian presidential decree mandated that museums and other public institutions locate, assess, and make transparent their holdings; while a daunting task, and one that forced a few major museums to close their doors even while we were preparing this letter for print, a comprehensive evaluation of existing artifacts will undoubtedly generate future research collaborations and help reframe the terms of Brazilian fashion history.¹²

The essays in this special issue turn to understudied dress collections, national archives, and contemporary media. "The Exotic West: The Circuit of *Carioca* Featherwork in the Nineteenth Century," the first essay, turns our attention to a fashionable art form popularly known as the "Brazilian," or a rigid fan made of feathers and produced with colonial-era craftsmanship for European consumption. Maria Cristina Volpi, the essay's author, centers her observations on a fan that is part of the Jerônimo Ferreira das Neves Collection at the D. João VI Museum in Rio de Janeiro. Balancing her analysis with archival findings, Volpi challenges the exoticism with which the international press—then and now—has tended to approach the cross-cultural dimensions of fashion. She details the fan's production, collection, exhibition and sale, offering compelling insights with which to imagine nineteenth-century social

practices and to comprehend more fully the meaning of contemporary Brazilian fashions integrating featherwork.

In “Moda da Bahia: An Analysis of Contemporary Vendor Dress in Salvador,” Kelly Mohs Gage delves into the archives to understand why twenty-first-century street vendors of Bahia wear the styles of their enslaved ancestors. Within Brazil, there have always been multivalent internal influences that gave shape to distinct ways of dressing. To construct a more comprehensive fashion register, Gage turns to documents like nineteenth-century fugitive slave announcements and travel accounts while engaging fieldwork to assess contemporary interpretations of ancestral dress. While Gage found that African Brazilian vendors connect their ancestral styles carefully, especially because each vendor honors her own unique cultural heritage, this practice also gives pause: if the plight of the enslaved ancestor is what a vendor uses to sell wares in tourist areas, does such a practice not recirculate domination? These are the types of questions with which the field must wrestle.

When it comes to recirculating domination, perhaps no text has been more studied in terms of its incongruences than *National Geographic*. Elizabeth Kutesko’s essay on “Fashioning Brazil: Globalization and the Representation of Brazilian Dress in *National Geographic* since 1988” takes to task a magazine that was once considered the armchair traveler’s guide to the world, at least before airplane travel and global tourism became commonplace. Emphasizing visual representations of Brazilian dress in the magazine’s 100th anniversary issue, something that scholars who analyze *National Geographic* have tended to overlook in favor of other thematic or disciplinary interests, Kutesko analyzes the potentially liberatory meaning of single snapshots to give some idea of Brazilian dress and identity. To frame her analysis, Kutesko turns to the “aesthetics of garbage,” a theoretical concept coined by Brazilian film specialist Robert Stam, who sought to understand the visual pastiche of postmodern culture. While Kutesko finds the usual tropes juxtaposing traditional customs and urban culture, she argues that the representations of Brazil may be just as much about resisting categories as recycling them.

In “Telenovelas: Consumption and Dissemination of a Brazilian Fashion,” Maria Claudia Bonadio and Maria Eduarda Guimarães convey the impact of fashionable images disseminated by popular telenovelas. Turning to three case studies from the late 1970s and onwards, the authors detail the craft of costume designers whose collaborations sharpened costumes and sometimes became the most relevant feature of a soap opera’s artistic direction. From the discotheque-inspired narrative *Dancing Days* (1978–1979) to a drama about human cloning (*O Clone*, 2001–2002), Bonadio and Guimarães propose that the costume design of these soap operas helped amalgamate mainstream fashion trends and local popular culture. This phenomenon also meant solid profit for those networks that branded the products revealed on air. The export of Brazilian soap operas to other world markets, however, may bring about

unforeseen challenges when the terms of conspicuous consumption and globalization overwhelm newly formed national identities elsewhere.

This issue closes with some research notes detailing a recent fashion exhibition commemorating the late designer Zuzu Angel's work. In guiding *Fashion Theory* readers through the many spaces that literally defined an "Occupation" (the exhibit had staged the show as "Occupation Zuzu"), Denise Pollini explains how this exhibit alters dramatically the chronology of Brazilian fashion history when exposing participants to the legacy of military dictatorship that museums have not addressed sufficiently, if at all. Scholars have begun to note how many fashion exhibitions—both within and outside of Brazil—undermine the centrality of memory and the state of the archives in their assessments of dress and fashion registers. It would seem that exhibits appeal more to the "new" and the "emergent," as if understanding contemporary Brazilian fashion were only about this very moment in time. The truth is that Brazilian fashion has always been significantly global. During the colonial invasions of the region known today as Brazil, abundant mines of gold and jewels and reserves of native dyes in Brazilwood red, indigo blue and saffron yellow, transformed the very symbolic nature of European fashion. Into the twenty-first century, the terms of a so-called "emergence" may be different but they are no less transformative. Brazilian fashion is here to stay.

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Notes

1. Newspaper and industry reports about this phenomenon abound. For the perspective of one fashion journalist who also serves as an industry strategist (see Young 2011).
2. The inner cover reveals reproductions of X-ray images from "Projeto Replicar," an initiative of the Museu Paulista da Universidade de São Paulo that engages conservation protocols to replicate historical dress. Protocols usually mean that museum objects are

treated with as little intervention as possible. The series of images provided were used to confirm a bodice's inner padding to analyze its otherwise invisible materials. See the website dedicated to this curatorial project by Teresa C. T. de Paula and Rita M. Andrade at <http://www.mp.usp.br/replicar/original.html> (Accessed 30 December 2015).

3. Of course such data provides fashion studies scholars with important entry points into trends and forecasts. Brazil is the eighth largest consumer of clothing and textiles in the world and has experienced its share of growing pains due to the increase in imported goods and apparel. Industry representatives often cite scholarly work that is limited in scope to confirm how they can compete domestically and internationally. Whether this is the goal of fashion studies and Brazilian fashion studies is another matter altogether and the crux of our argument. For the latest in market analysis (see ABIT 2015).
4. Some contemporary Brazilian designers became representatives of globalized Brazilian fashion outside of their native countries after launching new career phases as creative directors of their own brands. Some of their lines coordinated dress with everything from suitcases to sunglasses.
5. *The Handbook of Fashion Studies* brought together a host of international fashion experts who, working together over several years, brought to print the field's first consensus of what constitutes a methodologically rigorous and theoretically informed approach to global fashion studies (Black et al. 2013). Scholars who are not aware of this significant contribution would be wise to include it in their pursuits and/or responses. The field cannot keep inventing terminology that already exists; there is more important work to do.
6. When configuring proposals in the late 1990s for *The Latin American Fashion Reader*, the publisher proposed the inclusion of a chapter on the Brazilian bikini as essential Latin American fashion coverage. Nizia Villaça wrote the chapter (2005). For an earlier and more comprehensive assessment of tropical fashions from a Brazilian perspective, see Castilho and García (2001).
7. This argument is the very heart of renowned Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (2000).
8. Scholars interested in the story of material culture will find most helpful those seminal works that understand Latin American material culture through a mixed methodology, such as Orlove (1997) and Bauer (2001), to cite just two. Some works in the context of Spanish America may provide important frameworks as well: *The Handbook of Fashion Studies* has compiled an extensive bibliography for this purpose, including one scholarly bibliography dedicated to Latin American fashion studies (Root 2013, 403–407).

9. Over two years, *Fashion Theory Brazil* published 12 original essays and reviews in Portuguese. It had a print run of 300 copies that were available in bookstores throughout Brazil.
10. This particular contribution theorized the postcolonial moment and nineteenth-century dress in the River Plate region (see Root 2000). The story behind this essay and the launch of Latin American fashion studies from the pages of *Fashion Theory* is described in Root's introduction to the *Latin American Fashion Now* special issue (Root 2014).
11. For that proposal, Nakao claims to have used a ton of paper and 700 work hours to fashion Playmobil-styled models in delicate dresses who later destroyed his creations upon request. See <http://www.jumnakao.com/portfolios/a-costura-do-invisivel/>.
12. In 2013 the Brazilian government initiated a National Museum Register to consolidate and make transparent museum holdings from over 3000 museums (the Cadastro Nacional de Museus/IBRAM). For more information on the government initiative, see Presidential decree No. 8.124, October 17, 2013, regulating bylaws No. 11.904/2009 and 11.906/2009, Ministry of Culture (MinC). Accessed 29 December 2015. <https://www.museus.gov.br/presidencia-publica-decreto-que-regulamenta-o-estatuto-de-museus>.

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