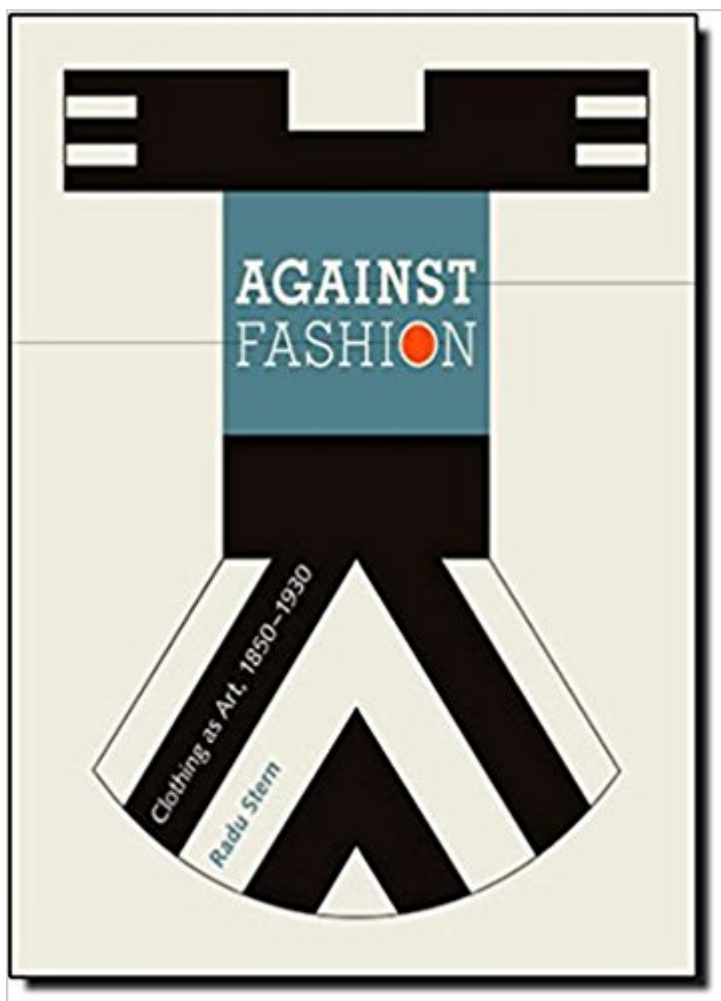


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# Against Fashion: Clothing As Art, 1850-1930 (MIT Press)



## Synopsis

The late nineteenth-century invention of "fashion" as we understand it today inspired avant-garde artists of the period to create an art form to counter commercial fashion. These artists saw clothing not as a symbol of class distinction but as a force for shaping experience -- an opportunity to make things new, to go beyond the traditional boundaries of art. For many artists, therefore, dress design was too important to be left to the fashion designers; they would appropriate clothing as an art form that could break through the traditional boundaries of "pure" art to act directly on life. Against Fashion is the history of the modern relationship between artists and this ideal "anti-fashion." Radu Stern traces the development of clothes as art by artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He discusses contributions to the new art form by various artistic movements of the historical avant-garde, including Art Nouveau, the Werkbund, Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, and the Bauhaus; he examines the work of such key figures as Henry van de Velde, Gustav Klimt, and Sonia Delaunay. The book includes more than 100 illustrations, many in color, as well as an anthology of essential writings and documents by artists and writers of the period, some of them translated into English for the first time. The artists and works examined display a diversity of styles and ideas, but all share the desire to reject the mercantile logic of commercial fashion and replace it with a utopian "anti-fashion."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A short window, a span of 80 years, is a microcosm of fashion at a crossroads, a time when artists

fully plied their aesthetic touches on fabrics and design. Curator and art historian Stern examines the impact and influence of such well-known practitioners as William Morris and Sonia Delaunay, plus lesser talents such as Giacomo Ballo and Ilia Chasnik, on the shape of women's clothing. The author prefaces 30 essays with some diagnostics of her own, tracing fashion from the 1850s through the Arts and Crafts period and on to the onset of the avant-garde. What perks up an often academic narrative are the illustrations and photographs of actual artwear--including Gustav Klimt adorned in one of his own creations. Quotes, too, help; after all, who could resist Oscar Wilde's notion that "there is hardly any form of torture that has not been inflicted on girls"? Or Darwin's observation that "the development of dress presents a strong analogy to that of organisms"? "Thoughtwear" for a rainy day. Barbara Jacobs Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

'Thoughtwear' for a rainy day. (Barbara Jacobs Booklist)

I really enjoyed this book. I had no idea how interested I'd become in the Artistic Dress/Dress Reform Movements and this book is where I first dove into it. The beginning of the book is an essay by the author about these various opinions and artistic philosophies that eventually led to 20th century clothing (which is so different than anything that proceeded it). The rest of the book is a series of essays written by those who were involved. I had no idea that people like Klimt, Oscar Wilde, and Henry van de Velde were all so concerned with women's clothing. This book actually raised a lot of questions for me which I answered by reading "Politics, Health, and Art: Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920" by Patricia A. Cunningham. "Against Fashion" does have quite a bit of information on men's fashion reform as well where Cunningham's book focuses only on women's dress. I would find the book worth the price just for the wonderful photos and illustrations - but it is definitely worth reading from cover to cover. I have studied the history of fashion for years, majored in Art History in college, and have always been very fascinated with the late 19th / early 20th century time period so how wonderful it was to have a whole new angle on this period in history to love.

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