

Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas,  
*Libertine Fashion: Sexual Freedom, Rebellion, and  
Style*, Bloomsbury, 2020

Nicola Brajato\*

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The figure of the libertine has finally arrived in the fashion studies literature with an exquisitely researched book by Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas. *Libertine Fashion: Sexual Freedom, Rebellion, and Style* introduces the readers to one of the most fascinating characters in history, who has inspired centuries of sexual and social transgression.

The authors, already well-known for their contribution to a critical perspective on fashion, gender, and sexuality with some of their previous works, such as *Queer Style* (2013), *Critical Fashion Practice* (2017), and *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture* (2018), here move their focus to the phenomenon of libertinism as growing out of alternative or unorthodox philosophy and literature, and exemplified by a stream of intriguing and magnetic characters in art, fashion and life. In opening up a critical investigation of the libertine, Geczy and Karaminas examine the libertine identity, body, and experience as incompatible with the respectable and the normal, seeking the limits of human experience. Furthermore, the libertine's moral abjection becomes an embodied practice through what the authors define as sartorial libertinism, the "transgressive space where the materiality and representation of fashion communicates rebellion, political activism, and sexuality".

In using a multidisciplinary approach and wide-ranging references, which draw on historical literature, philosophy, popular culture, and fashion, Geczy and Karaminas retrace the genealogy of libertinism from its emergence in seventeenth-century Europe to contemporary fashion shows, providing a nuanced vision of the libertine capable of grasping its elusiveness, the ability to shape-shift, a fundamental feature at the heart of libertinism. Consequently, the book develops through selected case studies that beautifully exemplify the evolution of the concept under study and its transgressive fashion practices and ideologies.

Starting from Charles II's hedonistic royalty and its licentious lifestyle, where the loosening of moral strictures allows both male and female sexuality to be celebrated, the narration intelligently moves between the main libertine protagonists of the eighteenth century, the epicenter of libertinism, such as

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\* University of Antwerp (Belgium); ✉ [Nicola.Brajato@uantwerpen.be](mailto:Nicola.Brajato@uantwerpen.be)

the Marquis de Sade, father of sadism whose literary production defies authority and the limit between pure and impure, and Lord Byron, who represents a more modern form of the libertine figure in his consciousness of the manipulation of his image.

The volume continues the journey into the elusive world of libertinism moving to the nineteenth century, during which the libertine identity starts to incorporate more ambiguous gender relations and representations. The androgynous figures of George Sand and Colette, together with their cross-dressing practices and performances of gender ambiguity, offer an interesting example of new ways of conceptualizing female desire, also confirmed by French novelist Rachilde's fictional narratives, which explore gender transgression and deviant sexual perversion. Geczy and Karaminas identify in Oscar Wilde another relevant protagonist in this libertine destabilization of gender. Indeed, Wilde incorporates queerness into libertinism through his devotion to non-conformity, challenging Victorian society social mores with his renegotiation of masculinity and the male attire. The desire to deviate from the prescribed social norms is also depicted in the character of dancer Josephine Baker and her provocative performances. In her embodiment of different personae, she not only reflects the libertine's inclination for disguise, but she manages to expose race as performative and to become a model for the new woman's eroticism and sexual freedom.

In the last section of the book, the authors explore the libertine style and identity in the postmodernist era as characterized by two principle representations: as an unpredictable shape-shifter and as a form of fashion which uses the expressions of extreme sexuality as tropes within collections. The former finds its climax in British singer David Bowie's ability to constantly reinvent himself thanks to his multiple incarnations, which through androgyny and cross-dressing continue the libertine tendency to question sexual identity. As far as the second principle is concerned, Geczy and Karaminas consider French designer Jean-Paul Gaultier's staging of transgressive subjectivities on the catwalk one of the most effective examples of postmodern libertine fashion. Indeed, in proposing the mutability of human identity, Gaultier's fashion becomes a terrain for political statements concerning body, weight, sexuality, and the illusory reality of normalcy. Geczy and Karaminas conclude this genealogy of libertinism challenging the readers and proposing that perhaps today, in an era in which the spectacle of sex is available everywhere and the possibility of change ourselves is more accessible than ever, we are all libertines.

Through a continuous historical and cultural dialogue between the censor and the libertine, normalcy and deviation, *Libertine Fashion* provides an illuminating reading of the phenomenon of libertinism engaging with the power of fashion and style in materializing and embodying those subversive practices which defy normative and regulatory discourses on identity, gender, and sexuality. To conclude, Geczy and Karaminas' last work frames an essential and comprehensive reading and a valuable resource for researchers, students and scholars of fashion, cultural studies, gender, and sexuality.

## Bibliografia

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