

F for Fashion: A Collaborative and Multidisciplinary Project on Fake and Fashion

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Coordinated by Roy Menarini and Ines Tolic, F for Fashion is one of the initiatives promoted by the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of Bologna and by the Culture Fashion Communication International Research Centre during the 2020/2021 academic and pandemic year.

Reflecting on the commissioned theme of “fake” and connecting eleven international experts in Fashion Studies, this project explored new ways of teaching, doing research, and networking by virtually involving professors and students of the Bachelor’s Degree in Fashion Cultures and Practices, of the International Master’s in Fashion Studies, and the PhD Programme in Science and Culture of Well-being and Lifestyles of the University of Bologna — Rimini Campus.

Based on the number of experts involved, the project has been structured into eleven special lessons held through the Teams platform by lecturers from different disciplines, who presented their visions of the intersection of two keywords: “fake” and “fashion”. Consequently, ranging from Information Technology to Philosophy, from Communication to Art, from Design to Architecture, F for Fashion could be intended as a collective reflection on how the fake affects the fashion world and vice versa.

For example, Marta Franceschini (V&A Research Department), hosted by Massimo Giovanardi in the Marketing for the Fashion Industries course, retraced the first editions of the Festival della Moda Maschile (men’s fashion festival) held in Sanremo from 1952, analysing the impact it had on the city as a stage of this temporary display of men’s fashion.

Elena Fava (IUAV University of Venice), presented by Monica Sassatelli within the Sociology of Culture and Creative Industries course, added to this historical revival a particular reflection on the “falsifying” action of fashion on the city and its territory, taking into consideration the Mare Moda Capri event, which made the homonymous island a popular destination for the international jet set from the beginning of the Sixties until the end of the following decade.

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Furthermore, by introducing the cinematographic field into the discussion, Andrea Rabbito (Kore University of Enna) examined with students of the Cinema and Cultural Industry course by Roy Menarini a number of cult films directed by Antonioni, Almodóvar, Carax, and Winding Refn. It became an exploration of fashion as a complex universe in which authenticity, falsehood, and parody coexist.

In terms of communication, these deceiving terms have opened up many questions and possible research itineraries: invited by Ines Tolic within the History of Design and Contemporary Architecture course, Tommaso Delmastro (Polytechnic of Turin and Undesign) made his experience as a communicator stand out with a speech entitled “Fake a Life”, almost a slogan to stimulate reflections on the concept of reality in the Instagram era, “between communication, fashion, global pandemics, kittens, and post-truth”, as he stated.

Another call to action came from Ines Tolic to Vittorio Linfante, architect and researcher at the Polytechnic of Milan, who proposed the title “God Save the Fake”, framing the concept of fake as an open and increasingly tricky question for the design world. Indeed, through this lecture held within the Spaces of Contemporary Architecture course, he investigated the fake as a product identity, marketing strategy, and communicative action, in fashion as well as in other areas of creativity.

From the editorial front came the voice of Antonio Mancinelli, editor-in-chief of *Marie Claire*, who led the students of the History and Concepts of Photography course by Federica Muzzarelli to reflect on a subtle but substantial difference between counterfeiting and fake in the fashion world: if counterfeiting constitutes a crime and it is therefore reasonably condemnable, in the case of the fake the situation becomes more nuanced, to the point of assuming almost philosophical traits.

To remain in the philosophy area, the researcher, philosopher, and Professor Nickolas Pappas (City College of New York) was invited by Giovanni Matteucci to the Everyday Aesthetics course to speak about how Anti-Fashion (jeans, black clothing, tattoos, shaved head, men’s suits) retains something of the old philosophical enterprise of finding a true or natural way of being in society.

Moreover, approaching fashion from the Somaesthetic perspective, Richard Shusterman (Florida Atlantic University) hosted by Stefano Marino within the Pop Culture Theory course focused on the specific question of the role played by the so-called ‘fit model’ in today’s fashion industry. According to his research, the figure of the ‘fit model’ is emblematic of some paradoxical features of fashion that relate more generally to contrasting ambiguities in the concept of style, such as inclusion and exclusion, novelty and familiarity, group identity and personal distinction, classification, and evaluation.

As can be seen from these few hints, the choral reflection on ‘fake’ has been driven, through the episodes of F for Fashion, to many corners of the fashion reality, also observing from a new point of view certain mechanisms inherent in today’s industry and market.

For instance, Francesca Granata (Parsons School of Design - New York) intervened in the Fashion Curation course by Simona Segre Reinach, questioning the ideas of origin and authenticity in contemporary fashion, by introducing concepts like pre-aged garments, replicas, and trompe-l’œil techniques in ‘Deconstruction Fashion’. Examples such as the work of Demna Gvasalia for Balenciaga and previously for Vetements, or that of Alessandro Michele for Gucci, return in this lecture — as in other previous lectures — because of the importance of their exploration of authenticity and socio-cultural values of brand communication.

F for Fashion ended by investigating the ‘taste for truth’ in the hypermodern society and the search for ‘authentic’ that coexists with a growing dominance of ‘fake’. This was the focus of the lecture by Susana Conforti, full professor at Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE), who concluded this polyphonic, multidisciplinary, and international conversation by questioning — together with the audience of Roy Menarini’s Film and Fashion course — on the mechanisms of production and consumption in a society pervaded by artificiality, false luxury, authentic junk, and virtual truth.

This last episode is also conceptually linked to the first, conducted by Cosimo Laneve on 24 November 2020, and hosted by Gustavo Marfia within the Data Science and Immersive Technologies for Fashion E-commerce course of the two-year Master’s in Fashion Studies, during a period of great changes in

global markets and also in the general dynamics of consumption. In fact, Laneve — full professor at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Bologna — opened this cycle of lectures with “An Introduction to Blockchain and Decentralized Apps”, focusing on the evolving distribution technologies that are going to spread in the fashion market.

It was merely an introduction adapted to an audience of beginners, but it truly fits — and still fits — the challenges that global fashion and the cultural economy will have to face in the near future.

All the lectures — recorded by the authors of the project — were edited by students of the ZoneModa Team (Pier Antonio Biasiutti and Rebecca Costa) to become eleven podcasts. Provided with a theme song by Massimo Giovanardi, the F for Fashion podcasts are now available on Spotify, Spreaker Podcast Player, and Google Podcasts, through the ZoneModa channel.

As many other cultural institutions have done during the pandemic period, it was decided to record, archive, and disseminate the virtual lessons in podcast format, so as to experiment with new ways to make use of educational content and theme-specific talks.

The communication teams of the Rimini fashion courses (led by Giulia Caffaro, Ilaria Picardi, and Celeste Priore), ISA Topic, and the CFC International Research Centre were also involved in enhancing the choral dimension of this project.

The communication has been built on a *manifesto* (fig. 1) that — as well as the title — is inspired by the famous film “F for Fake” starring and directed by Orson Welles in 1973, only in this case Welles’ face hidden by a white glove has been replaced by an empty space, full of meanings and voices. This plurality also emerges in the eleven different colours through which the glove was expressed in the podcast covers.

To metaphorically summarize and conclude, we can say that between “F for Fake” and “F for Fashion” lies the whole bundle of proposals that have become the episodes and then the podcasts of this project. A product built collectively and distributed to both the expert and the general public, offering itself to the need for research, study, or simple curiosity of those who will listen to it.

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Figure 1. Manifesto of F for Fashion edited by Ilaria Picardi