

“In such sort as best suited with her very tender age.”
Introduction to the Issue about Fashion and Childhood

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PhD in Education, she is grant researcher at the Quality Life Studies Department of the University of Bologna. She Taught courses of Children’s Literature (University of Bolzano) and History of Picturebook at (ISIA- Superior Institute for Art and Design, Urbino). Author of: *Albi illustrati. Leggere, guardare, nominare il mondo nei libri per l’infanzia* (Carocci, 2012) and *Meraviglie mute. Silent book e letteratura per l’infanzia* (Carocci 2017; national award for best publication about education, CIRSE 2018). Among other projects she curates together with Gianino Stoppani Cooperativa Culturale The Extraordinary library exhibition (at its third edition in 2019), 100 books selected by Bologna Children’s Books Fair for Pitti Immagine Bimbo.

Along with games and books, clothing completes the fundamental triad on which the identity of childhood is materially created as a social category, and the identity of the child as the recipient of investments in care, affection and education. This slow process characterising Western European society from the start of the modern age was fully achieved between the 17th and 20th centuries. In his fundamental text *L'enfant et le vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (1960), after the second chapter on the "discovery of childhood", the central theme of his research, Philippe Ariès devotes the third chapter to children's dress and the fourth to the history of games. In fact, Ariès' theory is that the proof that leads us to think that childhood has become a "value" for society can be found in those "cares" represented by children's goods, which are starting to characterise a kind of publishing, game and clothing industry. Pedagogy is beginning to go beyond the pure theories and observe childhood for what it really is, in its material and social life, in its concrete physicalness, and for what it must be. In his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) John Locke dedicates a chapter to children's clothing, and to nutrition, games, books, etc., and in *Émile* (1762), Rousseau not only expresses harsh criticism towards the swaddling used to imprison newborn babies' bodies, but in his pedagogical novel offers several reflections on the topic of clothing.

Incorrectly considered less significant in educational and cultural terms than play or literature, clothing indeed plays a fundamental role in that "Pedagogy of the body" which, although implicit, is far more directive than other educational practices. Clothing not only holds the function of dressing the body according to physical need, but also contributes to *form* a person's identity (starting from their being male or female), as clothing *gives form* to the child's body, along with everything that aesthetically connotes them: from head to toe.

As with games and books, children's clothing relates to objects designed and created by adults, sold and bought by adults; the child is not the recipient. Studying children's clothing as a repertory that strongly defines the culture of childhood in the modern and post-modern ages means above all analysing the models adult society holds in relation to the children of its time, as their docile nature makes them open to attractive or unsettling practices of manipulation.

Fashion, clothing and costume constitute both collective and individual expressions, means of communication and the "silent presentation" of individuals and peoples: from prehistoric times onwards, their practical purposes have joined psychological and aesthetic practices and, last but not least, as Roland Barthes stated, the expression of a "natural right of the present over the past".

This monographic issue gathers the contributions of authors whom we wish to thank enormously for their work, scholars from a range of disciplines, invited to reflect on the issues of fashion and childhood. While on our journey researching the culture and history of fashion we also interrogate the "function of childhood" in all its forms, and have the possibility to look at both fields from different perspectives, multiplying their many facets, producing and underlining a vast range of compelling and original investigations.

We will read of knickerbockers, puffer sleeves in Constance Wilde's article that appeared in the magazine directed by Oscar Wilde, *the Woman's World*, which we have decided to reproduce here in the original version in our "backstage area", when we will meet some of the stars of the specialist press including *ELLE France* and *Vogue Bambino*, read about international shows and events and reviews of some critical texts offering food for thought and possible dictionaries.

If we have a look to the index of essays we'll find contributions of different voices, sociologists, educators, fashion historians, literary critics. We'd like to express our gratitude to all the wonderful authors that contributed to this issue. The inclusion of some contributions focusing on the educational, aesthetic and critical aspects of international children's literature and publishing underlines and mirrors the interests of the curators.

A special note is to be dedicated to the iconography proposed in this this issue. The magazine's digital format does not allow readers and scholars to browse the whole picture gallery as one whole single visual text, but the individual contributions really pictured and proposed a rich debate on the visual culture of children and fashion. This visual discourse borrows from and questions the various languages of photography, illustration, cinema, offering ideas for further studies on the visual representations of childhood through fashion and costume.

In her *Il costume e la moda*, essay that we hold dear for both scientific and sentimental reasons, Rosita

Levi Pisetzky includes, in her historical inquiry, a short paragraph on children's clothing for each century. As the centuries progress the paragraph becomes richer, underlining not only the lasting trend of dressing children in adults' "image and likeness" but also the progressive development of its own language, related closely to the needs of children's bodies and of course their imagination.

We close with a little gift for our readers and contributors, offering a literary image that appears in the very first historical paragraph dedicated the children's clothing in the 1200s:

Her dress, on that day, was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age. (translation by Gabriel Rossetti, 1861)

This is Dante Alighieri, in *Vita Nova*, describing a little girl's at the age of 9, her appearance and clothing: she is Beatrice, when he met her for the first time.