



## Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the Twentieth Century

By Rebecca Arnold

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Fashion, and the glossy magazines it inhabits, allow Western culture to dream. It permits a person to fantasize and to experiment with new identities. It flaunts glamour and success. Appearance becomes something to be perfected and admired.

These dreams and freedoms, Rebecca Arnold proposes, are contradictory. Fashion and its surrounding imagery elicit fear and anxiety in their consumers as well as pleasure. Fashion has come to incorporate the underside of modern life, with violence and decay becoming a dominant theme in clothing design and photography.

Arnold draws on diverse written sources to explore the complex nature of modern fashion. She discusses a range of key themes: how fashion uses and abuses the power of wealth; the alienating promotion of "good" taste; the power plays of sex and display; and how identities can be blurred to disguise and confuse. In order to unravel the contradictory emotions of desire and anxiety they provoke, she never loses sight of the historical and cultural contexts in which fashion designers and photographers perform.

Generously illustrated, Fashion, Desire and Anxiety focuses on the last thirty years, from photographic works of the 1970s to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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## **Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the Twentieth Century** By Rebecca Arnold **Bibliography**

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#### Review

"... presents a fast-paced yet comprehensive study that provides surprise connections between fashion and the wide culture on every page." -- *Shari Benstock, coeditor of Footnotes: On Shoes*

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#### From the Back Cover

Fashion, and the glossy magazines it inhabits, allow Western culture to dream. It permits a person to fantasize and to experiment with new identities. It flaunts glamour and success. Appearance becomes something to be perfected and admired. These dreams and freedoms, Rebecca Arnold proposes, are contradictory. Fashion and its surrounding imagery elicit fear and anxiety in their consumers as well as pleasure. Fashion has come to incorporate the underside of modern life, with violence and decay becoming a dominant theme in clothing design and photography. Arnold draws on diverse written sources to explore the complex nature of modern fashion. She discusses a range of key themes: how fashion uses and abuses the power of wealth; the alienating promotion of "good" taste; the power plays of sex and display; and how identities can be blurred to disguise and confuse. In order to unravel the contradictory emotions of desire and anxiety they provoke, she never loses sight of the historical and cultural contexts in which fashion designers and photographers perform.

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#### About the Author

Rebecca Arnold is a senior lecturer in cultural studies, fashion history and theory at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London.

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