



FASHION
FORWARD

THE SIXTH FASHION FORWARD SYMPOSIUM

THE FASHIONED BODY: FASHION, DRESS, AND PSYCHE

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On May 23rd 2021, **Fashion Forward** held its sixth public symposium, a speaker series on the topic of The Fashioned Body.

Speaker Series:

The Speaker Series included three 15-minute lectures with 5-minute Q+As from pioneering experts exploring the relationships between dress, fashion, and the body. Dr. Michael Spicher, Finnegan Shepard, and Zara Korutz came together to provide insights on The Fashioned Body.



According to **Dr. Michael Spicher**, body shaming is a phenomenon experienced by 92.7% of women and 86.5% of men. If that is the case, he suggests, then there may be a universal guideline held by society, against which individuals are benchmarked. To drive away from this idea, Dr. Spicher pointed to Plato's guiding philosophy: know yourself. Interpreting the self often manifests in the assessment of specific likes, dislikes, and character traits, but few seem to investigate the self in relation to the body. Nevertheless, the body is the key physical factor in our choice of garments, or what award-winning architect Suchi Reddy calls as the "first architecture" known to mankind. While there have been numerous studies that show that architecture affects our sense of well-being, fashion's impact on the psyche has been less explored. How then, how can we better get to know our unclothed bodies and the effects of the clothing that we put on them? One way is through experience and practice. By being exposed to different aesthetics and experiences, people develop taste. Developing a unique taste that can be expressed through clothing does not only strengthen confidence and increase well-being, but serves as a tool to develop empathy; this exercise, as Plato hinted, ultimately allows us to get to know ourselves and others.

“To be trans *is* to fashion your body”, began **Finnegan Shepard**. It is only ironic then, that the fashion industry is so neglectful of non-binary people, he continued. Indeed, there are a myriad of brands with agender lines, but they usually just make their mainline garments baggier, and use colors that are generally considered to be unisex. These brands fall short in their promise to address the trans community which consists of people with a wide range of body shapes and proportions. He argues that the trans community understands clothing in a more visceral way than most. A “t-shirt that effectively hides binder lines can make the difference between being called sir or ma’am, or getting a second suspicious looks in the bathroom...Clothing can solidify unexamined assumptions around gender, and it can also cross the wires of our assumptions, so it's incredibly effective in that way.” The most crucial problem, however, is the community’s lack of options. Over the last year, Shepard interviewed over 600 people from the community who encountered shared challenges. Marlo, one of Shepard’s interviewees, stated that “when you shop from cis outfitters, they don’t have your body in mind. They don’t even conceive of your body. The result is that your self esteem gets eroded over time.” Shepard, who successfully launched his own label *Both&* in 2020, integrated the results of his research into his products, which he releases in small scale “drops” throughout the year. He left us with this poignant thought: “as a trans man, I have to curate everything about my body and my identity, but I get to curate everything about my body and my identity. Nothing is unexamined and unintentional.”



Zara Korutz addressed sexuality and masculine social power as they relate to the fashioned body. Using the fictitious superhero Superman as an extended example, Korutz applied the philosopher Roland Barthes’ theoretical framework on semiotics to discuss the visual language and social significance of the body. She argued that the character Superman— especially his physique and the way in which it is dressed— can be used as a lens to investigate the 1960s Pop Culture movement and various coincidental social phenomena such as the gay liberation movement and the resurgence of “Camp” style.

Utilizing his superhero costume, or what fashion historian Christopher Breward would call his “weapon of style,” Superman transforms queer modes of representation into dominant ones and makes them part of the everyday discourse. In effect, Superman’s his body and his costume helped bring queer culture into mass discourse, and remains to this day a model that is referenced and emulated on a regular basis.

DR. MICHAEL SPICHER



ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Dr. Michael Spicher works as a writer, researcher, editor, and philosopher, mainly focused on art and aesthetics. He has published articles on beauty, taste, aesthetic experience, and state support of the arts. He teaches at Boston Architectural College and Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and previously taught at University of South Carolina and Boston University. Along with his own writing projects, he is an editor for the Leonardo Electronic Almanac (published by MIT Press) as well as the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Committed to advocating and educating for the value of esthetics, he founded the **Aesthetics Research Lab**.

FINNEGAN SHEPARD



Finnegan Shepard is a trans author, classicist, and entrepreneur with 1/3 of a PhD in philosophy from the University of Cambridge and 3/4s of an MFA in fiction from the University of New Mexico. He is the founder and CEO of Both&, an apparel company tailored for and by the trans community. He caught the bug for the start-up world and left academia for the final time in mid-2018 to (attempt to) co-found an online philosophy platform. He has since worked on numerous start-ups while writing a novella and a short story collection, founding **Both&**, and is currently launching Limns, a monthly newsletter in collaboration with artist Mischa de Stroumillo in early 2021.



Zara Korutz is a London-based lecturer, host of the **Unbiased Label podcast**, and PhD Researcher examining fashion and culture. With 10+ years in the advertising industry as a consultant, multi-media strategist, and content creator, She has worked for major U.S. media companies such as The Washington Post, Lee Enterprises, Sinclair Broadcast Group and OUTFRONT Media. Editorially, Zara has written for Fashion Unfiltered, and was a contributing editor for Fashion Washington. As a beauty artist and fashion stylist for 15+ years, her work has been seen in Vogue Italia, The Washington Post, CNN-Anderson Cooper 360, Meet the Press, Good Morning America, Good Day New York and Good Day DC.

The aim of this symposium was to help facilitate a discourse embracing inclusivity and diversity. We will be continuing this series in 2021 by featuring speakers from various backgrounds to discuss issues such as global subcultures, (de)colonial fashion, and more.

ABOUT FASHION FORWARD

Fashion Forward is a think tank founded to challenge the conventional discourse around the fashion system. We take macro frameworks of analysis and create multi-level solutions for some of the world's most pressing issues in fashion and fashion-adjacent industries. Through a multidisciplinary lens, we unravel changes and disruptions in fashion, distilling diverse and unexpected data into intelligent insights, and frame them within accessible media such as exhibitions, white papers, public speaking, cultural guides, and consulting services. We help people access critical information, empower thoughtful decision-making, and turn abstract ideas into human-centered solutions.

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