ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
BONNIE ENGLISH
Griffith University
b.english@griffith.edu.au

Historically, fashion scholars have relied on a range of cultural theories to explore the political significance of dress in studies of formal political protest. Yet both historical and contemporary constructions of identities are often fraught with contradiction and cultural contestation. This paper will discuss how a visual vocabulary of symbols can link fashion’s past with its present. It will demonstrate how fashionable dress has been used paradoxically to reveal social and racial insecurities, and how ‘the art of deconstruction’ in dress signified both socialist ideals and anti-mainstream ideologies inherent in the subcultures of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

What is more visible than the body as a walking billboard? If dress has been used to identify culture, social class status and position in society throughout history, then it can also be used as a powerful placard to express one’s belief structures and comment on intersections of inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, human rights and global justice. And it has.

Bonnie English is an Associate Professor in Art Theory at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. Her publications include A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20th Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk (2007) and Little Books of Culture: Fashion (forthcoming in 2009). She is currently working on Japanese Fashion Designers: The Work and Influence of Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo for Berg.