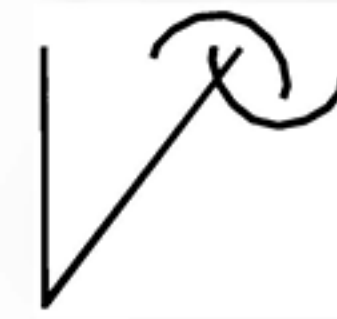


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Viscose
is a Journal
for Fashion
Criticism



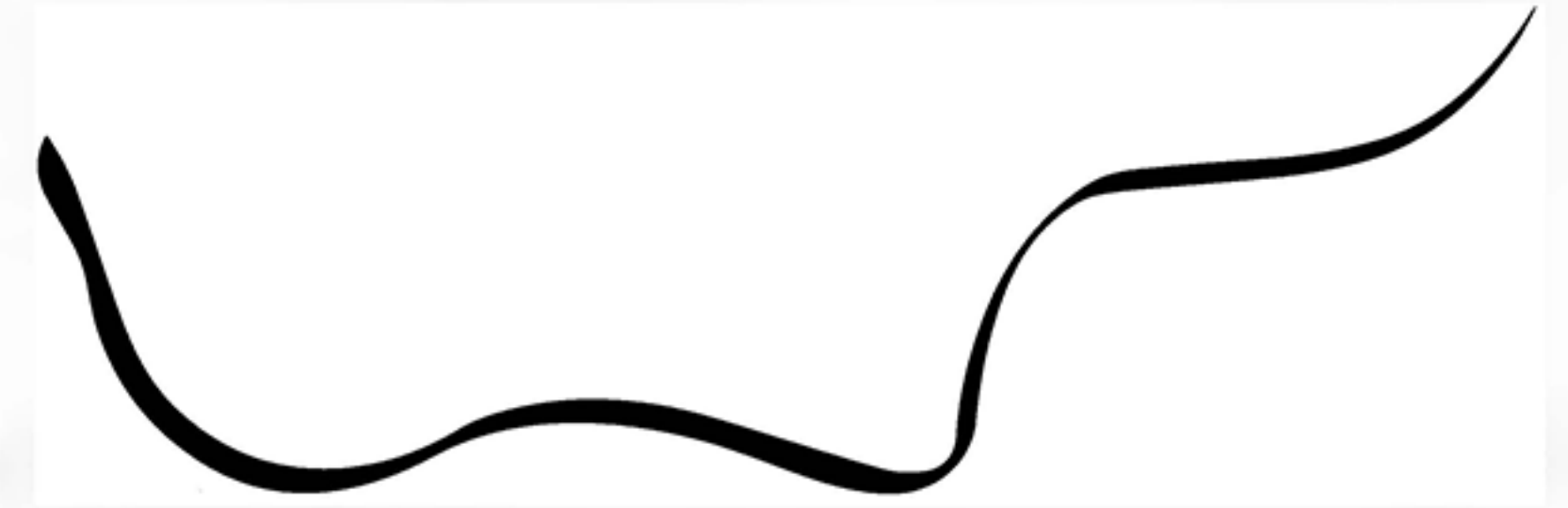
iscose is a journal for fashion criticism. The name gestures to the possibilities in thinking about a certain material and materiality as the qualities of a critical project: neither solid nor liquid, neither truly natural (like cotton, wool, or silk) nor truly synthetic (like nylon or polyester). Viscose, low-cost but ubiquitous throughout the clothing industry, falls somewhere in between categories; fashion criticism, too, we believe, must search for a place in-between categories, and function like a mimetic fiber that may resemble other things but ultimately undo them.

"Because fashion is constantly denigrated, the serious study of fashion has had repeatedly to justify itself," wrote Elizabeth Wilson in *Adorned in Dreams* some 35 years ago. Her seminal study of fashion would become foundational to modern fashion studies, and while this field has long flourished and solidified, many of Wilson's observations still ring true in a broader field of fashion discourse: namely, fashion's perpetual critical belittling as a cultural activity; its disciplinary entrapment as the obvious evidence of various theories; its instrumentalization by various forms of marketing; and its pigeon-holing in an industry concerned entirely with the advancement of its own mythology. Analytical writing on fashion maintains this pressure to repeatedly justify its own object of study, and as a result, tends to sway between the superficial and the overdetermined. Social change through clothes is drawn out in a cliché-ridden way, and fashion itself is overtheorized as an ontological concept. Fashion may constitute a system, art form, or type of cultural expression, but it does not exist in isolation as a "thing" in itself; its very ontology is symptomatic, indicative of the world, but it also always escapes indexicality to any given thing.

Contrary to art criticism, fashion criticism does not boast an obvious self-reflexive history: its historical lineage is sporadic and elusive. Critical fashion writing appears in fragments, covertly, as accidents or experiments, in shifting cultural spaces and types of media. *Viscose* is an attempt to provide a platform for these accidents, and to (re-)invent a form of fashion criticism for our current age. Our aim is that of an open inquiry into the relationships between phenomena (art, culture, politics, labor, economics, technology) where fashion appears as a symptom to be uncovered, broken up, discussed, and politicized. We wish to deepen fashion's own inquiry while throw fashion into spaces it seems not to belong.

Academic fashion publishing continues to exist as a number of isolated and archaic enterprises, largely predicated upon access to specialized research institutions, and deeply removed from the industries and systems it claims to examine. The writing coming out of Fashion Studies is growing ever-more introverted and hard to access to a broader public. Stylistically, the anxiety of academic interdisciplinarity results, ironically, in overt reliance *on disciplines*: the formulaic methodologies of sociology and anthropology are bastardized over and over, neutering fashion's elusive and playful nature in the process. Perhaps true fashion analysis is, in fact, *anti-disciplinary*—certainly, it requires innovation in critical method that is currently not encouraged within the academy.

In the realm of commercial publishing, on the other hand, writing has historically (and certainly in the past 40 years) been in the support of the fashion image, directed towards the purposes of marketing—of merchandise and consumer lifestyles, be it mainstream or subcultural. Because of its dependency on advertising (and its increasingly abstracted forms), fashion publishing remains enslaved to commerce and its advancement as/through mythology, and as a result, most fashion writing in magazines renders the reader a consumer and the author a covert salesperson. This, too, pertains to its latest aesthetic advanced by a range of print and digital titles in the last decade, and increasingly mimicked even in mainstream publications. Beyond fatigued runway reviews (which has lost relevance due to the collapse of, firstly, the collapse of fashion seasonal reporting, and secondly, the relative critical running-room for writers pre-2008 recession), the apex of fashion journalism seems to be the designer profile or interview, a plain promotional tactic for the corporately owned brands who can afford it (hastily written op-eds, sadly, do little more than satisfy online advertisers through crass clickbait tactics). Under the guise of independent editorial decision-making and analysis of industry, “exclusive” insights into the most-coveted fashion authors of our time work to perpetuate the magical narrative about artistic genius and their commodities that has driven fashion consumption for centuries—and does so often to promote particular new product lines. This is only accelerated in the age of digital content, where all spheres of cultural production are increasingly dictated by the algorithm and those who can pay to manipulate it: influencers, bloggers, independent magazines, and corporate media behemoths alike serve as little more but communication channels for an ever-more corporatizing fashion world where promotion is total and omnipresent.



These two polarities—between blatant commerce and stifled academia—have come to define the contemporary landscape of fashion writing, despite its broad popularity as a global intellectual activity, business, and form of cultural expression. In its most basic form, *Viscose* tries to disrupt this limiting condition for fashion criticism, rooted in the belief that fashion is the most telling activity of global capitalist society of the new millennium. Instead of thinking of fashion as one particular industry, discipline, or aesthetic phenomenon, *Viscose* engages it as an all-encompassing condition of human society, and as an intellectual prism or interface through which to examine important social, aesthetic, and material questions about society today. As an irregular periodical, *Viscose* will publish critical and theoretical texts by a wide range of authors under certain themes and give space to projects that challenge and expand the possibilities of “research,” “practice,” and “critique” in and of fashion (sometimes, completely non-textually). Our focus on contemporaneity will enable a critical contestation of both past, present, and future. Our rejection of professional titles will inspire contributions from a wide range of voices, on a wide range of themes. We address readers who feel unsatisfied in their pursuit and discussion of fashion in other spaces, and who believe that critical effort should not foreclose the possibility of play, experimentation, and entertainment. *Viscose* is a title for the intellectual fashion community anywhere: it takes fashion seriously as a practice and aims to seek out its discursive underpinnings while rejecting ghettoization in any scene, industry, or location. Our policy of non-structure is predicated upon the ephemerality and precarity of fashion practice; it is always changing, in fact, it must always change (in order to survive). So welcome! ✂

Jeppe Ugelvig
Founding Editor-in-Chief