

# Buckling Down And Buttoning Up

By VANESSA FRIEDMAN and GUY TREBAY

*Fashion month finally came to an end last week (or fashion 1.3 months, if you include men's as well as women's wear). It was a season of transition and self-examination, as designers posed questions about the point of the shows themselves, but certain trends stood out, both in style and substance, across the gender continuum. Vanessa Friedman, the women's fashion critic of The New York Times, and Guy Trebay, the men's wear critic, discuss the most notable of those trends and debate their significance.*

**VANESSA FRIEDMAN:** Guy, now that a number of brands have announced they are going to show men's wear with women's wear next season — and that, in fact, some are already showing women in men's clothes, and men in women's — I was wondering if you thought we were going to see chaos on the runways, or if things would get more coherent instead. Do men's wear and women's wear really inform and speak to each other? Put another way: Did you see on the men's runways what I was seeing on the women's?

Which was, if I had to pick one trend to start, a certain dualism between female sexuality, as embodied by lingerie dressing, and female power, as embodied by — of all things — the leather breastplate. I'm serious about this. Even Undercover had a gold breastplate. When Jun Takahashi and Nicolas Ghesquière at Louis Vuitton are on the same page, you've got to think something's going on.

**GUY TREBAY:** It's funny. You see power in the breastplate, and I see anxiety. There was an awful lot of armoring and concealment in both the men's and women's shows for fall. Military references ranged from the now-ubiquitous camouflage patterns to fairly literal interpretations of garments like greatcoats or cavalry tunics, as at Dries Van Noten and Balmain. Ditto all the capes, which had previously fallen out of use except by the police, the military and at Sherlock Holmes re-enactments. While I wouldn't necessarily go so far as to link November's terrorist attacks in Paris to the stuff we saw on so many runways, designers are clearly as susceptible to these fears as anyone else; they seep into the collective consciousness and are expressed in design.

Conversely, the trend to mix sexes in current collections doesn't give me the jitters. It may be designers are trying to make sense of the breakdown in traditional binaries. Equally, it could also be that brands are pressuring them to build collections reflective of the gender-agnostic way a lot of young people already dress.

**VF:** Capes! You said it. They were everywhere on the women's runways, too: long, short, sparkling, wool. I think you're right to connect this to the recent attacks, at least

abstractly (a free-floating sense of nerves, the desire for protection, the search for safety, and so on), and I'd go even further and throw the American election in there as well. It's all contributing to a general sense that things are getting very messy all over, and that we need to buckle down and button up, literally. While I agree this is partly a defensive measure — we all feel more secure when we are strapped in — I also think it has a warrior aspect to it that is more active. Boudicca and the Amazons kept popping into my mind, and for women's wear that connotes strength and self-sufficiency, which is no bad thing.

The other big outerwear strain happening over the last month was the renaissance of the puffer jacket, driven by fashion's new faux revolutionary darling, Vetements, and its insistence on the virtues of the street. (Speaking of Vetements, it may also bear some responsibility for the men's/women's merger since it has always had both sexes on its runway.) The elevation of streetwear is, of course, nothing new in fashion, which loves to co-opt a bit of rough whenever it can, but there's no question sweatshirts, especially with logos that pretend to be anti-establishment so the establishment can wear them and feel good, and down jackets are having a moment.

Personally, I liked the opera cape-cum-puffer Demna Gvasalia, who is a member of the Vetements collective, did in his debut as creative director of Balenciaga best, as it was both elegant and had less pretensions to "basic." So here's my question for you: cape or puffer?

**GT:** Ha! Cape or puffer: a question for the ages. I'm always looking at shows and thinking about which things will never make it into production. I felt that way about, say, the piebald pony cape at Gucci or the denim "Querelle" version at Prada. But I'm probably mistaken. Lord knows, I've called things wrong before. (I thought the fur-lined Gucci mules from Alessandro Michele's debut collection were absurd. And they were — so absurd they became an unstoppable best seller.)

I'm actually pleased to see puffers elevated to runway status, partly because I enjoy it when designers are in dialogue with the

everyday, rethinking staples or recasting the familiar. Todd Snyder is particularly skilled at this. (There's a reason he's huge in Japan.) So, when you strip away the styling, is Hedi Slimane, who designed a corduroy car coat a season or so just like one I had in sixth grade.

Now I have a question for you, one involving another way in which men's and women's wear are in dialogue: Was the Rick Owens Mastodon show — which presaged in January many of the motifs he repeated in February for women — as memorable for you as it was for me? I felt that of all the creators whose work we saw last season, his was perhaps most rigorously engaged with pure design.

**VF:** Rick's collection was certainly the most overtly engaged with the sense of global implosion that seems to be driving so much of the clothes for next season, though from what I have seen, the women's collection was both softer and more purposefully graceful than the men's, as if he had reached a certain kind of resolution. Indeed, I think it was one of the prettiest collections he's done yet, and "pretty" is not a word I normally associate with Rick Owens. But it left me feeling hopeful, which is a gift of sorts.

One last question for you, since you brought up Hedi Slimane, whose women's show was like stepping back in time to the go-go 1980s for me: Are you seeing the same revival I am, big shoulders, brassy personalities and all, and do you also think it has to do with a sense of the end of the American era? It feels very costume party-nostalgia to me, which I don't find particularly interesting. If I have to wear something that defines a time period, even a hard one, I'd rather it not reflect where we have been, but where we are going, like Rick's show. For me, that's the point of this whole exercise.

**GT:** The intervals between recycled decades seem to be shrinking: Gen Z kids are now sampling the '90s. Once they're finally done touring the 20th century, I'm hoping designers will train their sights ahead. The sculptor Do Ho Suh recently referred to clothes as "the smallest and most habitable space you can carry with you."

If the trans moment has underscored

anything it's that traditional understandings about the human body are not fixed: Anatomy is as much in flux as climate seems to be. Gender games and techno-

gimmicks (the wireless receivers built into Junya Watanabe's overcoats) can be a hoot. But there's an urgent need for designers to start creating new architecture for the body.

As Jenny Beavan, the "Mad Max: Fury Road" designer, pointed out when she won the Oscar, that dystopian future may not remain imaginary for long.



**ES(CAPES)** Top row, from left, Prada, Mulberry, Gucci, Erdem.

**PUFF YOU UP** Center row, Marques Almeida, Moncler Gamme Bleu, Balenciaga, Ralph Lauren.

**ARMORED ALL** Bottom row, Louis Vuitton, Loewe, Undercover, Comme des Garçons.

TOP ROW FROM LEFT: REGIS COLIN BERTHELE (NOWFASHION); TOM JAMESON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (MULBERRY, ERDEM); FRESHVIEW; CENTER ROW: GIO STALANO, NOWFASHION (ALMEIDA, MONCLER); VALERIO MEZZANOTTE (NOWFASHION); DAN LECCA (RALPH LAUREN); BOTTOM ROW: GILLESME ROUAS; NOWFASHION (LOUIS VUITTON, LOEWE, UNDERCOVER); GIO STALANO, NOWFASHION

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