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Pumps and Circumstance

Katia Jean Paul ruminates on the trends and the elements of style within the culture at large.

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Will Apple Watch Complement or Cramp our Style?

by Katia Jean Paul

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The unveiling of Apple Watch at the company's annual keynote address earlier this month marks the tech company's official foray into the fashion accessories market. The much-anticipated smartwatch—which will be available in two screen sizes, three cases, and half a dozen bracelet types come early 2015—looks fashionable enough. But despite different options to choose from, will consumers really have the final say in matters of style as Apple aims to position its connected timepiece at the forefront of the wearable technology movement?



Apple's chief executive Tim Cook unveils the Apple Watch during the keynote presentation at the Flint Centre for the Performing Arts in Cupertino, California on September 9, 2014. (Photo: twitter.com/TorontoStar)

"There's an Apple Watch for everyone," reads Apple's website. "Selecting a watch is very personal. As with all things you wear, how it looks is at least as important as what it does."

It would seem Apple has spent as much time fine-tuning its functionality as it did its design, recruiting former Burberry CEO Angela Ahrendts to help its design team create an appealing timepiece. And it is appealing, if a little ordinary. Apple Watch comes in three distinct collections: Watch, Watch Sport and Watch Edition, the latter of which, which includes six different styles with 18-karat gold cases in yellow or rose gold and deluxe bands to match, is the company's highest-end offering in that category. With the standard watch priced at \$349 and as *Business of Fashion's* Imran Améd argues, given Apple's propensity to set the value of its products above market price, it's not difficult to imagine Watch Edition models going for upwards of \$1,000 come their release.

But back to its design. A quick glance at the models on offer reveals that they're much sleeker than the average smartwatch. With stainless steel link and Milanese loop straps, and leather bands in soft pink, midnight blue, stone and other fashionable hues, Apple Watch will easily, if it hasn't already, appeal to the fashion-conscious consumer. In many ways, despite its heightened functionality, it resembles your run-of-the-mill mechanical timepiece and as such, will complement any wardrobe beautifully.



An Apple Watch Edition, with an 18-karat rose gold case and rose gray leather buckle band. (Photo: apple.com)

Plus, with three separate collections, experts agree, that's more choice than Apple has ever afforded consumers. 108 permutations, to be exact, concludes Charlene Li, founder and CEO of Altimeter Group.

While the sartorial possibilities are numerous, they're far from endless. On the surface, we're presented with what seems like a myriad of fashionable options, but what will become of the concept of personal style and self-expression when eventually, much like with the iPhone, everyone will possess what is in essence the same timepiece? Misty White Sidell, fashion, style and culture journalist, doesn't think the arrival of Apple Watch bodes well for fashion, arguing that it will eventually standardize the way we accessorize and possibly have more negative implications for fashion as a whole. In a *Time* magazine article titled, "Apple Is Killing the Joy of Personal Style", she writes, "Yes, the Apple Watch offers more customization than the company's products have in the past. But when you consider its potential social footprint, as well as Apple's take-no-prisoners approach to product introductions, the device's shape, colorways, and embellishments become a mandate, rather than a personal choice."

"In a worst-case scenario for fashion, Apple will not only attain a monopoly on the timepiece market, but also the confidence to wield a larger impact on how we dress ourselves each day. The watch is no doubt an indication of how Apple will approach future fashion products, offering the masses a constrictive framework in which to dress themselves, all under the guise of customizable 'self expression'."

Come to think of it, Sidell isn't far off in her estimation. Over the years, we have witnessed the standardization of our mobile devices and other technological gadgets across consumer bases and industries. Entire offices are outfitted with Apple products. TV and film mobile props almost always bear Apple's proverbial logo, so it isn't that extreme to assume the same could happen with Apple Watch.

"Every additional fashion creation from Apple will inadvertently create a less diverse shopping landscape. Sure, we could chalk it up to innovation—but if our timepieces become as uniform as our cell phones, the loss of the Rolexes, Seikos, Breitlings, Patek Philipps, and Swatches of the world would be an even sadder loss for fashion as a whole. And that's not to mention how if Apple continues down this path, clothing brands—from Gucci to Gap—could face similar impact," argues Sidell. With Apple Watch threatening one of our most potent modes of self-expression, perhaps we should reconsider drinking the Kool-Aid this time around.



Fashion, art, architecture, design, TV, and film: Katia Jean Paul is a Montreal-based writer who casts a critical eye on her many idées fixes, unearthing the aesthetic and cultural dimensions within each and every subject. / Follow Katia on Twitter: [@KatiaJeanPaul](#)

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