

Title	Fashion and Memory
Type	Article
URL	http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/9219/
Date	2014
Citation	Chong Kwan, Sara and Laing, Morna and Roman, Mario, J. (2014) Fashion and Memory. <i>Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty</i> , 5 (2). pp. 201-205. ISSN 2040-4417
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Introduction: Fashion and Memory

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**First published in *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*:
Chong Kwan, S., Laing, M and Roman, M. J. (2014) (eds.) 'Fashion and Memory' in
Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty, 5:2, pp.201-204.
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/csfb.5.2.201_2**

Elizabeth Wilson writes that fashion can be understood as 'poised ambiguously between present and past' (2003 [1985]: vii). Being bound up intimately with time, as well as having a selective – and sometimes skewed – perspective on the past, fashion provides a lens through which to explore the cultural practices of remembering and forgetting. These themes informed 'Fashion and Re-collection', an interdisciplinary symposium held at London College of Fashion in January 2013.¹ Memory provided a common point of departure, facilitating meaningful exchange between scholars from different disciplines.

This thematic issue on fashion and memory brings together a selection of articles developed from, and in response to, the symposium theme. Although diverse in conceptual vocabulary, the papers share an emphasis on what could be remembered, or remembered differently, through the critical study of fashion. All contributions come from postgraduate scholars and so the issue also serves to showcase emerging doctoral research in the field. The opening article by Carole Hunt explores the role played by textiles in the preservation and articulation of memory. Reviewing literature from a range of disciplines, Hunt conceptualizes memory as both private and public, individual and collective. She then applies these theoretical insights to specific textile-based examples from the art world as well as from the writings of Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. In the context of this issue, Hunt's discussion lays the groundwork for the articles that follow by flagging themes that recur throughout: nostalgia for childhood; memory as both voluntary and involuntary; material memory, cloth, absence and mourning; textiles as repositories of information; and the role of textiles in cultural remembrance of the Holocaust.

¹ Full details of the symposium can be found online at <http://fashionandrecollection.wordpress.com>. The symposium brought together post-graduate scholars from a range of locations, both geographic and disciplinary, alongside keynote presentations by Professor Caroline Evans and Dr Linda Sandino (for details of ideas discussed see Evans 2013; Pye and Sandino 2013; and Sandino and Partington 2013).

One writer discussed by Hunt is Svetlana Boym, who suggests that ‘shared everyday frameworks of collective or cultural memory offer us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives’ (Boym 2001: 53). This notion resonates with Agata Zborowska’s article in this issue, which seeks to resurrect and reconstruct the controversial Comme des Garçons collection entitled ‘Sleep’ (AW 1995/1996). The collection – as catwalk event, material object, written text and image – has been erased almost completely from the world and its collective memory, leaving in its absence a ghostly shadow. Using Foucault’s (1972 [1969]) notion of ‘discourse’ as a methodological tool, Zborowska argues that, as the controversy unfolded, changing interpretations of the show emerged in the press, which collectively came to be interpreted as ‘truth’. This harks back to Marius Kwint’s assertion that ‘human memory has undergone a mutual evolution with the objects that inform it’ (Kwint 1999: 4). Just as objects can serve as evocations or records of memory, the way in which we decide to remember or ‘what persists in the mind’s eye’ also shapes our physical environment (1999: 4).

The notion of memory as never-neutral is again explored by Judith Simpson in her analysis of bereavement literature. Simpson explores the way clothing is used to both shape and share memories of deceased persons. Drawing upon ideas of presence and absence as well as voluntary and involuntary memories, Simpson foregrounds the materiality of clothing and its capacity to evoke the departed. Engaging with clothing therefore allows family members to mythologize the deceased, constructing an idealized image of them. The past as nostalgically remembered is also the focus of Morna Laing’s article, which considers the representation of woman as ‘at once sublime and childlike’ (Barthes 1990 [1967]), in the niche fashion magazine, *Lula, girl of my dreams*. Rather than accurately recalling the past, Laing argues that the *Lula girl* invites nostalgic re-imagining of childhood through the ‘pure gaze’ incited by discourses of Romantic innocence and ‘high’ fashion. As such, the *Lula girl* disavows the contradictions of contemporary womanhood as well as allowing the reader to forget the less palatable aspects of the fashion industry.

Yet fashion images are concerned not only with the past, but instead ‘stretch simultaneously back into the past *and* forward into the future’ (Evans 2003: 12, emphasis added). Similar notions are explored by Charlene K. Lau in her article on avant-garde fashion designer Bernhard Willhelm. Lau reads Willhelm’s aesthetic through the notions of romantic nationalism and ‘sartorial remembrance’ (Lehmann 2000). From there she argues that Willhelm’s oeuvre is comprised of contradictory narratives that sit out of time, or ‘against time’, in their blending of past, present and future. Finally, another article developed from the symposium, although not featured in this issue, was Laura Snelgrove’s piece entitled ‘Taking us into 2000: *Vogue*’s

struggle with time in the 1990s' (see Snelgrove 2013). This article appears in an earlier issue of this journal and explores ideas of past, present and future in the construction of the 1990s as a fashion category in American *Vogue*.

On reflection, 'Fashion and Re-collection' came at an opportune moment given the recent expansion of memory studies as a field of academic pursuit, as well as the growth in scholarly journals devoted to the study of memory (Fass 2010). The relationship between fashion and memory has been explored in two recent publications: the inaugural issue of *Vestoj: The Journal of Sartorial Matters* (Aronowsky Cronberg and Lynge-Jorlén 2009) and Issue 3 of *Fashion Projects* (Granata 2010). Yet remembrance is only one part of the picture. It is also worth considering what fashion wants to forget – whether sidelined histories or subjectivities, the conditions of production, landfill, or last season. In other words, 'Fashion and Re-collection' set out to question what fashion – as object, image and text – includes and excludes from its discursive ambit, as well as questioning the kind of methodologies that are appropriate for uncovering, or rather *reconstructing*, the past. In turn, the articles collected in this issue demonstrate that remembrance is very often about constructing a narrative – whether personal, collective or ideological. As such, being mindful of how we choose to remember, as researchers, is integral to the culture and future development of fashion studies.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank journal editors Efrat Tseëlon and Diana Crane for their guidance in the preparation of this special issue. Thank you to the symposium speakers for their intellectual contributions to the event and many thanks to the research office at London College of Fashion for helping to plan the symposium. We are grateful to our supervisors for their enduring support and to Agnès Rocamora for her generous guidance and advice throughout this endeavour.

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