



Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

***Fashioning the Archive: new approaches to materialising
textile history***

Saturday January 11 2014

**Ben Pimlott Building, Goldsmiths, University of London,
New Cross, London SE14 6NW**



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Programme and Abstracts

- 9.30-10** **Registration, coffee and welcome**
- 10-11** **Keynote speaker**
Dr Patrik Steorn, Centre for Fashion Studies, Stockholm University
'Swedish fashion in the US. A transnational perspective.'
- 11-11.20** **Coffee**
- 11.20-12.20** **Session 1: Embodying the Archive**
Chair: Vivienne Richmond
- Debra Roberts, Leeds College of Art**
'Conversation Pieces'
- Kimberly Wahl, School of Fashion, Ryerson University**
'Textiles, Image and Text: Embodying the Ephemera of British Suffrage, 1900-1914.'
- 12.20-1.20** **Lunch** - There will be an opportunity to see items from the Goldsmiths Textile Collection during lunch.
- 1.20-2.20** **Session 2: The Performed Archive**
Chair: Jane Custance Baker
- Caroline Hamilton, Kings College London**
'Behind the seams of the Ballets Russes: An investigation into the Company's surviving costumes and their role as a historical resource'
- Claire Suckall, Scenographer**
'A New Way to Design Costume: The process of reading and imprinting traces of performance in costume.'
- 2.20-2.30** **Comfort break**
- 2.30-3.30** **Session 3: Digitizing the Archive**
Chair: Janis Jefferies
- Tincuta Heinzl, University of Arts Berlin**
'Artists in Industry. Challenges of collecting a missing piece of puzzle of the Romanian institutionalized textile history.'
- Dinah Eastop, The National Archives, and Anna Brass, artist and film-maker**

'Sensory experience online: texture in image and sound for the BT Design Register, 1839-1991.'

3.30-3.50 Tea

3.50-4.50 Session 4: Refashioning the Archive

Chair: Fiona Hackney

Ruby Hoette, Goldsmiths, University of London

'Fashion: The 'New' and the Archive'

Jenny Doussan, Goldsmiths, University of London

'Fashion, Epistemology, and the Forgettable: Rethinking the archive'

4.50-5 Closing comments

The Conference is supported by the Pasold Research Fund, Goldsmiths Department of Design, The Goldsmiths' Textile Collection & Constance Howard Gallery and Goldsmiths Department of History. Image use by kind permission of the Norman Parkinson Archive.

Conference webpage and booking form:

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/history/research/pasoldconference/>

Dr Patrik Steorn

Centre for Fashion Studies, Stockholm University

Swedish fashion in the US. A transnational perspective

Fashion's capacity to add symbolic value and agency to material clothes is crucial to the understanding of fashion's role in transnational communications. Accounts of Swedish dress of the post war era state that Sweden had an ambivalent attitude towards fashion, but looking at Swedish fashion from abroad provides a different viewpoint. The American reception of Swedish fashion in the 1960s indicates that fashionable goods from Sweden were commercially successful in the global sphere. Through a combination of the material and the symbolic effects of 'fashion', an image of a 'fashionable' and contemporary Sweden was exported together with the actual garments. Photography and writing in American fashion and lifestyle press brought ideas of Sweden as a progressive and modern society together with conceptions of a candid culture with a morality without boundaries; the sensual qualities of dress and of models were transformed into alluring images of Swedishness. The archival material indicates that New York played a certain role for the Swedish fashion scene on the one hand, and on the other, that narratives of "Swedishness" affected the fashion culture in America.

Biography:

Dr. Patrik Steorn is a Researcher and a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Fashion Studies, Stockholm University, currently funded through an awarded grant from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Steorn holds a PhD in art history from Stockholm University (2006), where he has been affiliated to the Centre for Fashion Studies since 2007. He was Swedish Fulbright Visiting Scholar at CUNY, New York in 2009, and associated research partner in "Fashioning the Early Modern in Europe. Creativity and Innovation 1500-1800" (2010-2011), financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme. Steorn is also active outside Stockholm University as a curator for exhibitions on fashion, art and photography, Vice President of AICA Sweden, and communicates with a wider audience through writings and lectures on various topics within art history, visual culture, fashion studies, as well as gender and queer studies.

Debra Roberts

Leeds College of Art

Conversation Pieces

Cloth holds an imprint that contains the trace of another human being, and the focus of my research was to reveal the hidden histories within found fragments of 18th century fabric. It would be impossible to know the real history, but as an ‘...archaeologist of memory...’ (Lowenthal, 1985, p251), it might be possible to piece together the clues to construct new meanings and narratives.

As a forensic insight into the history of an object, the work questions accessibility to the past, and how we construct a private history of which we have no personal or experiential memory or knowledge. A combination of object, archival, practice, and text-based research methods informed and clarified the evidence. As an ‘archaeologist of cloth’, meticulous examination of the fabric revealed the minute detail, traces of folds and stitch marks, thread, where fabric had been stitched, unpicked, altered, enabling a literal tracing of how the fragments had been altered over time, that they had originally been part of a dress, and speculate how the dress may have looked.

The marks and traces are a record of minor, everyday events, of an everyday life, that is both foreign and unknown to us. Mapping the surface of the fabric presented a visual record of the history, as a means to navigate the unknown terrain; the mapping process both records those events and interprets the data in order to access what might be inaccessible, and explore the geography of the past as a foreign country.

Talking to curators, looking at archives enabled the historical contextualization of the fragments. Reconstructing a partially made dress revealed disembodied material traces of absence, making possible imagined biographies. Process and material evoke memories of an object that cannot speak, inventing an associated history or story where the imagined and the real can meet as a physical connection to the past.



Debra Roberts Debroberts1@googlemail.com
Fig 1 Reconstructed dress back view ©Deb Roberts

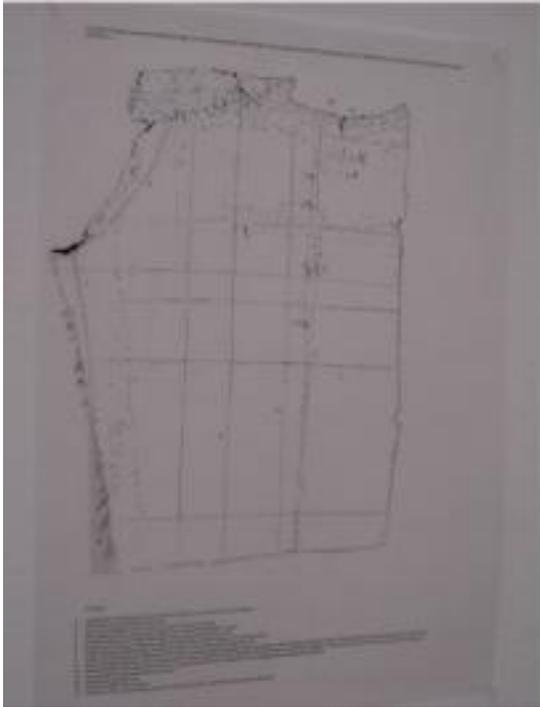


Fig 2 Map detail of back bodice ©Deb Roberts

The maps added a visual representation of the information held within the fabric, and a means to engage the audience with the past by revealing detail that is hidden within the material.



Fig 3 Fragment of the original back bodice ©Deb Roberts

The work represents a new way of decoding the past, presenting the transient values of objects over time, and within location.

Dr. Kimberly Wahl

School of Fashion, Ryerson University

Textiles, Image and Text: Embodying the Ephemera of British Suffrage, 1900-1914.

Complex relations exist between textile-based archival/material histories of the suffrage movement and its representation and dissemination through visual sources such as print culture and photography. These visual and material links between bodies, clothing, and related ephemera are suggestive and absorbing, from the shoe of Christabel Pankhurst lost during a political demonstration (held by the Museum of London), to the evocative photographs by Christina Broom, a noted documentarian of the movement. A unique value may be assigned to the objective and material remnants of the Suffrage movement —particularly those items which don't fall easily under the heading of traditional textile history (banner designs, everyday clothing worn on the body without special status or connoisseurial value, sashes/badges and other ephemera in connection with the bodily articulation of suffrage ideals). Their relationship to other forms of visual and material culture (photography, jewellery, and manuscripts/journalism/print culture, to name a few) is crucial in framing and expanding debates regarding the gendered body and its highly constructed nature in suffrage campaigns at the turn of the century in Britain. The importance of a consideration of textiles cannot be overstated, particularly in terms of their ephemeral qualities and their ability to complement other forms of visual and material culture. This paper follows an evolution of ideas about gender, textiles and the body, through the most militant phases of the suffrage movement. Only through a combination of approaches can 'traces' of the past infuse the present with a full understanding of the imbricated nature of both visual and material accounts in the textured histories of clothing and culture.

Caroline Hamilton

Kings College London

Behind the seams of the Ballets Russes: An investigation into the Companies surviving costumes and their role as a historical resource

Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, from 1909 to 1929, was arguably one of the most influential ballet companies of the 20th Century. Despite being known for its innovative and in some cases controversial design little study has been conducted surrounding the surviving costumes of the Ballets Russes. Ballet costumes are unique working objects that beneath the years of sweat and ancient make-up can tell us more about the internal workings of a ballet company than anything else. Every stain, rip, alteration and hasty mend can yield unique stories. This paper will endeavour to explore how a detailed study of the construction and working 'life' of these costumes can provide information into both the day to day running of the company as well as vital details regarding performance. The paper will use the detailed study of a unique costume held at the Museum of London as its primary example. This costume was acquired during the Sotheby's auctions of Ballets Russes material held in the late 1960s and remained in the museum's store misidentified until 2010. The costume, a hand painted tunic identified as a corps de ballets costume from the 1910 production of *The Firebird*, led to an intriguing investigation. This piece when studied and identified proved to be a missing link in how *The Firebird* had evolved as a ballet reflecting the important role that costumes played within the company.

Claire Suckall

Scenographer

A New Way to Design Costume: The process of reading and imprinting traces of performance in costume

My praxis as a Scenographer explores ways in which historical costume can be re imagined in order to produce new costume, choreography and movement.

The motivation behind this research stems from my 8-year career as a Special Effects Textile Technician. During this time I have technically realised designs for a wide variety of Scenographers from across the world by: dying, printing, painting and problem solving textile surface effects. I have developed a deep understanding of the textile chemistry, textile alchemy and curious scientific textile processes behind many of the costumes we see on stage.

Once the costume is realised and then embodied by a performer, the textiles will transform again. For example; the wearer will potentially age, rip and stretch areas of fabric, eat, drink, sweat, cause stains and leave human traces of dry skin, hairs, sneezes, coughs and crumbs. Traces of body shape, movement and habits will be ingrained in the textiles.

I use my working scientific knowledge of textiles to actively conduct quasi-scientific experiments and have invented real and imaginary processes of extracting information from a variety of historical body/textile sources in order to engineer new and innovative ways to design costume. This is demonstrated by two experiments, which include:

- A new costume and dance generated through the reinterpretation of textiles and properties contained in an 18th century Baroque dress.
- The invention of a machine that enables a new way to dye flesh tone, based on the artist Walter Sickert and his paintings of nudes.

These case studies reveal how challenging textiles in the process of designing and constructing costume can produce a variety of movements, sensations and transformations, allowing costume to perform beyond the archive.

Education:

2001-2005 - Goldsmiths University of London

BA (hons) Textiles – **First Class Degree**

2011 – 2012 – Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

MA Scenography - **Distinction**

Web links to related work:

<http://clairesuckall.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/practice-flesh-tone-part-2.html>

<http://clairesuckall.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/flesh-tones.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/clairesuckall>

<http://prezi.com/gs4hslhdgpoi/copy-of-re-encounters-my-encounters/>

<http://prezi.com/j8c8iln8c9pg/presentation-160413/>

Tincuta Heinzl

University of Arts Berlin

Artists in Industry. Challenges of collecting a missing piece of puzzle of the Romanian institutionalized textile history.

„Artists in Industry“ (www.artistsinindustry.com) project is an attempt to critically problematize the status of the contemporary design, particularly in Romania, but also in a larger context. Still, if it is to offer a critical and yet contextualized perspective, some references to the discipline's past ask to be sketched. But the information related to the modern industrial design in Romania is lacking and it is barely studied. That's why in the first step of the project we tried to counteract an institutional indifference in presenting and displaying applied and decorative arts beyond an ethnographic interest – currently in Romania there are ethnographic collections, but there are no museums or centers dedicated to modern design or architecture.

Dealing at first with Romanian textile design was justified by the fact that the Romanian textile industry was the second largest in Europe. *In these conditions, it is a paradox that there are so few data which can attest about the activity of Romanian designers. And we can notice this informational vacuum even in comparison with other East-European countries. The recent studies concerning the fashion in Eastern Europe, if it is to mention here only the studies of Djurdja Bartlett, do not make any reference to the Romanian textile design. And certainly this is not the fault of the researchers, but simply a lack of information.*

Thus, an analysis of the status of design in socialist Romania required, in the first place, the creation of an archive of projects realized during that time. Collecting the necessary information proved to be a difficult task. After a preliminary research we have learned that most of the design projects realized in the Romanian enterprises were either thrown away, or burned out during the massive and ad-hoc privatization processes. We cannot say with precision how much it was about voluntary acts or bereft of reason. But certainly, such situations are telling a lot about the status and the importance accorded to design in the Romanian context and they also translate the ideological fluctuations related to the industry's status in the latest 75 years.

By making use of oral history methods and by digitalizing the still to be found design projects, “Artists in Industry. Romanian textiles arts between 1945-2000” project had tried to recover some historical data and also to rebalance certain historiographical directions. *It is also our conviction that the paradox of the Romanian industrial design in*

particular can help us to extract theoretical tools for a better understanding of the problems a designer has to face today.

Biography

Following Visual Arts and Cultural Anthropology studies in Cluj (Romania), Tincuta Heinzl completed in 2012 her PhD thesis at Paris 1 University (France). She is interested in the relationship between art and technoscience, with a special focus on smart textiles and wearable technologies. Her artistic production focuses on electronic textiles, video and interactive installations and engages the ways in which technologies can be diverted in order to bring into the light their common places and potentialities. She initiated, curated and/or coordinated several projects, such as “Areas of Conflu(x)ence” in the frame of Luxembourg and Sibiu 2007 – European Capitals of Culture, “Artists in Industry” (Bucharest, 2011-2013) and “Haptosonics” (Oslo, 2013). As an editor, she published “Art, Space and Memory in the Digital Era” at Paidia Publishing House (Bucharest, 2010) and coordinated Studia Philosophia’s issue on the “Phenomenology of Digital Technology” (no.3/2010).

She joined the Design Research Lab (University of Arts Berlin) in August 2013 to work on the *UHCI – Universal Home Control Interfaces* project and focuses on the integration of electronic textiles in domestic contexts.

Website: www.artistsinindustry.com, www.textiltronics.com.

Dinah Eastop, PhD, MA, FIIC, ACR

Curatorial Research Fellow, The National Archives,

Anna Brass, MA, BA,

Artist and film-maker

Sensory experience online: texture in image and sound for the BT Design Register, 1839-1991

The Board of Trade Design Register comprises registration records and *representations* of nearly 3 million designs registered 1839-1991. Textile designs are represented by cloth samples, drawings, tracings, photographs and complete artefacts. The Design Register is held by The National Archives [of the UK government] which preserves the collection and makes it accessible as a public record. The National Archives' online catalogue provides Series-level information on the whole collection, and item-level, searchable transcriptions of the registers covering 1842-1884 (BT44). Enhancing access to the designs themselves, whether in person or online, is challenging for many reasons, e.g. the millions of *designs*, the large size and weight of the volumes containing many of the *representations*, and the diverse media, scale and condition of the *representations*. We have been investigating ways to represent online the sensory appeal of textiles (as well as of non-textile *representations*, e.g. straw-work and wallpaper). Two modes of representing these tangible features will be demonstrated. One is a short film (of 4 minutes' duration) made to capture the experience of handling, examining and recording the designs. This is not a documentary but an evocation of the rhythm and repetition of page-turning, and of unfolding and refolding designs; it captures texture in both image and sound. The other is an image capture and processing technique, which combines virtual re-lighting with a zoom facility, and can provide a hyper-real, sensory experience (polynomial texture mapping, PTM).

Our 20-minute presentation would introduce the BT Design Register (~6 minutes), introduce and show the film (~6 minutes), and introduce and demonstrate PTM (~6 minutes').



Still from: *The Volunteer Experience* (Brass 2013): examining kerchief designs.

Ruby Hoette

Lecturer in Design (Fashion and Textiles). Goldsmiths University of London

Fashion: The 'New' and the Archive

Fashion has a rather ambivalent relationship with time. Walter Benjamin claimed that fashion is 'the eternal recurrence of the new' and indeed it seems that the principle of fashion over the last century has been to increase the speed at which garments are deemed superfluous, old and 'out of fashion' to make way for the new which is then momentarily 'in fashion' before also being replaced. This insistence on originality and innovation has led to the belief that fashion only looks to the future and that fashion designers are the ultimate creators of the new, a role that has seen some of them rise to superstar status. However, the function of the archive in the fashion system is often overlooked. In fact fashion is in constant dialogue with its past serving as material to be recycled and substituted for the new. These cycles have accelerated to the point where today seasonal collections and styles overlap and new product lines appear in stores as often as every few weeks.

On a much smaller scale the personal wardrobe is like a living archive. Each built upon an individual sense of style or 'collections policy'. Objects/garments from various origins and times and with diverse histories are collected and together offer insight into a specific social and cultural context. Some pieces are 'exhibited' or worn often and others are kept hidden as reminders of times/memories/trends past.

My research examines the changing relationship fashion has with the archive. It explores examples of the role it plays for brands and small designers, how it is used for inspiration and curated both personally and commercially. Discussing ways in which the archive is employed to justify the authenticity of the brand, create and reveal value and meaning and as a source of design ideas suggests that perhaps the 'new' is out of fashion. Does the archive now embody the essence of fashion – exclusivity, craftsmanship and authenticity – that has become so elusive in the contemporary fashion industry characterised by mass production at an unsustainable pace?

Jenny Doussan

Goldsmiths, University of London

Fashion, Epistemology, and the Forgettable: Rethinking the archive

In response to the “open season” declared on post-war social architecture, which stands in contrast to the increasing prominence in public discourse of *preservation*, the architecture research group OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) led by Rem Koolhaas presented the exhibition *Cronocaos* at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2010. The exhibition, re-staged the following year at the New Museum in Lower Manhattan, emphasized through material evidence in architecture, the “wrenching simultaneity of preservation and destruction that is destroying any sense of a linear evolution of time.” These conflicting tensions reflect on the one hand an insistence upon *ruin* in which historical moments of decay should be eradicated from our material and psychical landscapes and on the other the drive to *restore* in pristine form those moments that are deemed valuable as objects of memory.

This condition of temporal collapse, however, does not quite work when we transpose the model from architecture on to fashion. As Giorgio Agamben has pointed out in his essay ‘What Is the Contemporary?’ (2008), in fashion such a simultaneity is impossible as its temporality “always takes the form of an ungraspable threshold between a ‘not yet’ and a ‘no more’.” Fashion “constitutively anticipates itself and consequently is also always too late.” This, he argues, is the very condition of contemporariness. We may then say that fashion, as a continuous obliteration and resuscitation of styles, insulates us from the radical temporal stasis of *cronocaos*. Fashion, in which irreverence is the only rule, is thus a force of resistance against preservation’s “undeclared ideology” of authenticating certain historical truths at the cost of suppressing others.

But what happens when fashion becomes archive? Does it not give in to this ideology of preservation—an ideology founded upon superlatives and proclamations of the exceptional, in which, in OMA’s words, “the exceptional becomes the norm” and there is no means for preserving the mediocre or the generic? With the increasing diminution of public resources, the rhetoric of the exceptional used to justify value becomes ever more crucial to the existence of the archive.

While OMA concludes that it is a regime of demolition that could restore the possibility of liberation in the new, this paper instead argues for a regime of *forgetting*, for the forgettable. Drawing from the Socratic epistemology of Plato’s *Symposium*, it proposes a reconception of the archive as the repository of the forgotten, and an ontology of fashion grounded in the cycle of forgetting and remembrance—free of the tropes of nostalgia that hinge upon the ideology of value.