

The Death of Taste - the future of fashion

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Moving from London to Vienna a few years back, I experienced an irrepressible and distinctly non-academic nostalgia induced by the plethora of quaint fashion-related specialist shops selling 'real' things with 'real' uses right in the centre of the city; from miniature tailor's dummies to 'proper' hand-made hats. Adjacent to the Versace designer flagship store a highly ornamented button shop (established in 1841) sold, just prior to its closure earlier this year, around 150 buttons a week to dedicated home dress-makers of Vienna. A tiny embroidery and haberdashery shop with an extraordinary range of diamante accessories, still incongruously co-exists metres away from the Timberland global casual-clothing store on one of the most prestigious shopping streets in Vienna. Only recently, the city's most famous traditional high-end clothing shop closed down to be taken over (marble fixtures, fittings and all) by the H&M mega-clothing store promoting their new Kylie Minogue collection to the eager Viennese consumer. Located in areas of 'prime' global real estate, sought by fashion labels desperate to secure their place in a city on the cusp of burgeoning new style markets of former Eastern Europe, oddities such as button shops and diamante specialists stand as the relics of a former fashion economy.

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~~From Veblen through to Simmel and Barthes, fashion has pre-occupied contemporary theorists as~~ the form of material culture most expressive of modernity's accelerated consumption of style and shifting social hierarchies. With the rise of a globalized fashion industry, where H & M clothing stores offer twenty-four seasons of fashion a year, in places as diverse as New York City and Slovenia, the dynamics of any discernible 'fashion system' have altered considerably since the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The contents of the 19th century mahogany drawers of a now demised Viennese button shop were once part of a local taste culture, mediated at different social levels by the dress –makers, consumers and couturiers of the city. In the 21st century the manifestation of style and taste, from London through to Iceland, Russia and Turkey, is underpinned in by a complex network of stylists, forecasters, buyers, post-production artists and on-line editors who mediate the seasonal style shifts in relation to local taste cultures. 'Fast-fashion' retailers such as UK fashion flagship store Top Shop pride themselves on being able to transform a 'static' (i.e. non-selling) t-shirt into a best-seller overnight; by removal en masse from the rails, shipping to a local warehouse where a style feature is adapted and the items re-positioned on the shop floor for sale again within hours.

Much contemporary clothing, its cut, its fabric and its style, is as ephemeral in its materiality as the editorial in which it is embedded. Future material culture study collections may happily contain the contents of a 19th century Viennese button shop; but will the Kylie Minogue bikini make it past the second washing machine cycle?

Observations regarding the accelerated temporality, changing materiality and place-specificity of style could just as easily be made of fashion in the 18th century (and indeed were). But the rise of an entire industry given over to the rationalization, harnessing and circulation of style knowledge, and the extraordinary rapidity of style change in the most everyday of our contemporary material cultures raises issues regarding the impact of a contemporary taste-making industry on other forms of material culture (from technologies through to food) and the ways in which style and taste are embedded in place.

The Death of Taste: the Future of Fashion, a London/Vienna symposium, explores the cultural phenomenon of contemporary style-change and taste-making from the perspective of its multiple agents (models, stylists, designers, consumers, retailers, editors, and buyers) asking how the differing materialities of clothing, from the fleetingly fashionable 1980s retro -neon T-shirt to the hand-made hat, can be understood (if at all) as a discrete entity of material culture called 'fashion'. Once the centre of 20th century Modernity, inspiring contemporary discourses around style and ornament, Vienna offers a unique venue for such a debate.

Organized by the department of design history and material culture at the University of Applied Arts Vienna in cooperation with London College of Fashion, the two-part symposium (the first held at the ICA, London November 2006) highlights the crucial intersection of place/style in the 'making' of material cultures.

Click below for contact details and conference program

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~~H & M, Graben, Vienna~~ The historically differing materialities of fashion cultures and economies is made evident by the contrast of the ephemeral, 'fast fashion' accessories with the stately marquetry display fittings of former fashion retailer E.Braun and Co.

22 - 23 June 2007

MAK Wien, Weiskirchnerstraße 3, 1010 Vienna

<http://www.thedeathoftaste.com>

'The Death of Taste: The Future of Fashion' questions the process of fashion-making beyond the simple allure of the catwalk and its designer clothes and accessories. In the 21st century, fashion is a global industry embracing modes of instant distribution that demand an ever-faster turn-over of styles and images linked to emerging fashion tastes. From London to Vienna, through to Russia and Turkey, stylists, forecasters, buyers, designers, post-production artists and editors mediate and manipulate the seasonal style shifts in relation to their local taste cultures. No longer can we consider fashion as a creative pursuit led by the creative genius of the lone fashion designer. Rather it is an increasingly complex cultural phenomenon involving an enormous range of cultural mediators. Fashion is both the fleeting moment of a 1980s retro-neon t-shirt and the enduring form of a bespoke suit.

Who's steering the fashion industry anyway and where does our taste in fashion really come from? Why is yellow 'in' one month and out the next? And isn't it too soon for a 1990s fashion revival?

Organised by Alison Clarke (University of Applied Arts Vienna), Joanne Entwistle (London College of Fashion) and Alistair O'Neill (Central St Martins London) as a London/Vienna debate The Death of Taste brings together, (in expert panel discussion) fashion industry experts, academics and designers at the cutting edge of fashion.

Speakers include Marios Schwab (New Designer of the Year 2006, UK), Penny Martin (editor in Chief of SHOWstudio.com), Christopher Beward (fashion historian and author), Elfie Semotan (fashion photographer), Klaus Mühlbauer (hat designer), Florian Ladstätter (contemporary jeweller), Gerda Buxbaum (fashion expert and author), Petar Petrov (fashion designer), Susie Coulthard (British fashion stylist), Thomas Ballhausen (Austria Film Archiv), Nick Ryan (sound designer/Hussein Chayalan shows), Myung Il Song (owner avant-garde fashion store), Nilgin Yusuf (fashion editor), Helga Schania (Wendy & Jim), Simone Springer (rosa mosa) etc.

PROGRAMME

Friday 22 June 2007

- 14:00-15.30
MAK Auditorium
FAST FASHION: SLOW FASHION Contemporary designers, art directors and fashion theorists including Klaus Mühlbauer, Anais Horn, WENDY& Jim, Wessie Ling and Joanne Entwistle discuss the temporalities of global and local fashion from luxury hand-made goods to high street fast-fashion. Can small scale and stylistically innovative fashion survive in a market driven by accelerated style change?
- 16.00-17.00
MAK Auditorium
FASHION IN FILM Thomas Ballhausen of the Filmarchiv Austria introduces original fashion archive from 1950s and 1970s Austrian newsreels revealing the unique history of Austrian fashion from haute couture to popular culture.

17.00-17.30

Auditorium Foyer

VERNISSAGE

SYNASTHESIA Nick Ryan introduces his collaborative online installation “Synaesthesia”, an interactive artwork exploring fashion as a multi-sensory phenomenon commissioned by “SHOWSTUDIO” and created in 2006 by Daniel Brown, Nick Ryan and Nick Knight.

GAME ON Wessie Ling introduces her interactive installation exploring how cities exploit fashion to achieve varied objectives beyond serving the fashion industry. The installation is a giant game board – a catwalk with a map highlighting the 85 cities that host fashion weeks displayed on the runway.

- 17:30-18:30

Auditorium Foyer

Reception

Saturday 23 June 2007

- 12:00-13.30

MAK Auditorium

FASHION CITIES in an era of global spectacle, fashion has become an important means by which cities assert themselves as having a unique, stylized identity. Exploring how place and style intersect, the session includes British and Austrian fashion historians, Christopher Beward and Gerda Buxbaum, jewellery designer Florian Ladstätter, fashion photographer Elfie Semotan and fashion theorist Alistair O’Neill discussing the politics and myths of fashion cities.

- 14:00-15:30

MAK Auditorium

DEMOCRACY OF FASHION With celebrities such as Kate Moss ‘designing’ high street fashion collections for mass consumption and the internet providing minute by minute style analysis, this session asks if fashion has become truly democratic. Is fashion now driven by consumption rather than production? Is there still space for the ‘avant-garde’ in fashion? The discussion includes leading fashion editor Penny Martin, conceptual fashion retailer Myung ILSong, fashion journalist Nilgin Yusuf, designer Simone Springer and design theorist/anthropologist Alison Clarke.

- 15.30-17:00

MAK Auditorium

STYLING VERSUS CONTENT Designers were once considered the innovative force of fashion, but increasingly the figure of the ‘stylist’ has assumed this role. In a discussion with leading London and Vienna based stylists, Susie Coulthard and Sammy Zayed, fashion designer Petar Petrov and magazine editor Kira Stachowitsch, fashion theorist Joanne Entwistle and Alistair O’Neill explore the impact of the styling and the future of

fashion.

- 17.00-18:00
Auditorium Foyer
Drinks
- 18.00-19:00
MAK Auditorium
KEYNOTE INTERVIEW: MARIOS SCHWAB, the young up-coming fashion designer favoured by the fashion elite, has received international acclaim and editorial ranging from Vogue, Harpers Bazaar, through to ID, SelfService and Dazed and Confused. His burgeoning success in cutting edge design is complemented by his appeal to accessible fashion consumption through the creation of a boutique collection designed for the leading UK fashion retailer Top Shop.

Admission

Day-pass: 9 / Concession 4.

Free admission for Academic staff and students of the Angewandte

Tickets available at the event.

Group bookings and reservations can be made via email to:

pr@dieangewandte.at

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