

The Graduate Center
The City University of New York

Fabric of Cultures.
Objects, Memory, Technology
MALS 71200- IDS 82000

W/6:30-8:30/Room 3309

Instructor: Prof. Eugenia Paulicelli
Office hours: W: 5:00-6:00 or by appointment
(Comparative Literature # 4116-11)
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“The history of clothing tells us much about civilisations; it reveals their codes.”

Daniele Roche

“In order to do interdisciplinary work, it is not enough to take ‘a subject’ (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinarity study consists in creating a new object, which belongs to no one.”

Roland Barthes

Course Description

Fashion is a behavioral phenomenon that intersects with media, race and gender, personal and collective identities, labor and technology.

The course will take the form of an interdisciplinary study of fashion and fabric and their bearing on a heterogeneous cultural identity. Fashion and identity--personal, collective, transnational--are the results of the multilayered fabric of cultures. They are also the manifestation of a dynamic process, a dialogue between self and other.

Self and identity are not defined on the basis of closure and homologous relations, but in terms of interplay between similarities, differences, reuses and translations.

Identity is a process of negotiation and understanding, a journey of becoming.

This process, although expressed through different aesthetic results, is very much at work in the textiles and clothing we will examine in the course.

The course will draw on writings from history, fashion studies, material culture, literature, and objects. The course is part of a digital archive project and lab designed to highlight and embrace the rich multicultural composition of New York and its boroughs and the central role clothing plays in our lives.

The Fabric of Cultures: Objects, Memory, Technology is a research and pedagogic lab that aims at further understanding fashion and local and global clothing as powerful manifestations of human and aesthetic expressions and as barometers of economic, social and technological transformations.

See: <http://fabricofcultures.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu>

The course has a tri-partite structure: **T** for T-shirt; **I** for Intersections and **P** for Pleats. The course asks students to work on and with specific objects following the **TIP** structure (more details on this are available on the above site and in the class schedule below). Please note that the three sections are interrelated units and are not to be considered in isolation from each other.

The readings for each section refer to topics and thematics that will be further developed later on in the course.

Students are required to engage with the readings, respond to the class blog assignments and produce written essays, all of which are requirements for the course.

This class is particularly exciting for the different opportunities offered to students. They are exposed to a multidisciplinary method and are asked to engage with written and material objects. The course also includes guest speakers and one field trip, to the manuscript and rare books archive at Rosenthal Library at Queens College. In addition, a selection of students' work will be chosen by the instructor to be included in an exhibition to be held at the Art Center, Rosenthal Library at Queens College in the Fall of 2017.

A component of the course will consist in contributing and selecting the objects that will be exhibited in the Fall 2017 exhibition to be held at The Art Center. These objects and writings will appear in a catalogue of the exhibition that is currently planned.

A parallel class will be taught for undergraduate students as part of the Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) at Queens College. These students will be required to interact with the class blog as well as attend targeted meetings the class being taught at the Graduate Center, CUNY in Fashion Studies, The Master of Arts and Liberal Studies.

In April after the Spring recess, a symposium will give students the chance to present the work they have completed for the course.

Fabric of Cultures Lab:

Each student, as well as the instructor, will be required to bring to class an item of clothing that they are thinking of discarding. A questionnaire will be distributed that will help students ask each other questions about the story of that particular garment. The aim of the lab is to bring that garment to a new life, so that for example a pair of pants can be reused as a skirt or a t-shirt as a scarf etc. Work on the reused items is to be completed by the end of the semester. Photographs and/or videos of the students' stories will be published on the blog (see some examples posted on the Fabric of Cultures site).

Either individually or in teams, students are required to work on an object and material of their choice. This could be a discarded t-shirt or paper or fabric. Student Supplies: T-shirt; Old Clothes (one or two garments to cut up); Old Ties if you have them; Scissors; Small Stack of newspapers; old magazines; hot glue gun; hot glue sticks; masking tape; steel ruler.

The course will include workshops by sculptor and artist Shelby Head (September 21); Tabitha St. Bernard, designer (Tabii Just/Zero Waste) and Minn Hur, designer (HVRMINN); Yael Rosenstock (CERRU) workshop on "Fashioning Identities" linked to the Annual Fashion Show that she organizes annually at Queens College. Date: TBA

Optional resources, extra reading materials and links will be posted on Blackboard

Required reading materials are posted on Blackboard.

Learning Objectives:

Students at the end of the course should:

1. **Be cognizant** of fashion as an industry and a symbolic force that is both national and global;

2. **Be familiar** with definitions and understand how and why fashion is not only clothing;
3. **Identify** the differences between fashion and clothing;
4. **Be able to understand** the connections between clothes and their impact on constructing identities;
5. **Connect their knowledge** of the case studies presented in the class;
6. **Understand clothing and fashion in the larger geopolitical context and in different historical epochs;**
7. **Understand and apply** through the fabric of cultures lab the materiality, lives, and memory of garments;
8. **Work to create** a reused garment of their own;
9. **Translate** in personal terms the intellectual underpinnings of the class.

Requirements:

1. Write short blog posts during the semester (see assignments) on specific questions or topics covered in class;
2. Give an oral presentation;
3. Complete a mid-term take-home examination;
4. Write a final paper and project that will be organized and structured as explained in the three sections and turn in the assignments described in the syllabus and on the Fabric of Cultures website;
5. Keep a scrap book containing writing on fashion based on specific topics and readings throughout the semester and including a description of your personal style and relationship to fashion.

Please remember that my main objective for the class is to support you during the learning stages of the semester. However, it is required that you do all assignments as best you can and that you turn them in on time. Failure to do so will impact your grade and hamper your learning experience.

In addition, two long term objectives of the class are to create a sustainable recycling lab based at Queens College as a service to the community in and outside the college.

Grading Scale:

Attendance and in Class Participation: 10%

Short papers: 10%

Final Projects: 45%

a) Fabric of Cultures Blog : 15%

b) Paper 15%

c) Scrap book 15%

Fabric of Cultures Lab: 5%

T section

In this section students will work on a T-shirt that they either still wear or wish to discard. The task will be to transform the T-shirt into another garment or object.

A guest designer will visit class to give a lesson on garment construction.

Based on the class readings, students you write a blog post linking the object they are working on with one of the objects in the T section of the class site.

Besides the essays listed below in the class schedule, all students are required to read the following two books by the class scheduled for October 19th:

Pietra Rivoli, *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist examines the Markets Power and Politics of the World Trade* (Wiley: 2009)

Richard Sennet, *The Craftsman* (Yale U. Press: 2009)

The texts are available in PDF in the class material section on Blackboard.

Week 1 August 31

Introduction to the course – What is fashion? What is the relationship between clothing and individual/collective identity?

Readings:

Umberto Eco, “Lumbar thought,” 315-17; Pietra Rivoli, “Two for a penny,” 564-568 (read rest of Rivoli’s book by October 19th)

Georg Simmel, *Fashion*

<http://sites.middlebury.edu/individualandthesociety/files/2010/09/Simmel.fashion.pdf>

Week 2 September 7

Readings: Umberto Eco: “Social life as a sign system,” 143-147; K. Marx, “The fetishism of the commodity and its secret,” 347-350; Negley Harte, “The study of fashion and dress,” 15-17; Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes mourning and the life of things”

Week 3
September 14

Readings: Jane Schneider, "From Potlach to Wal Mart. Courtly and capitalist hierarchies through dress," 3-27; Margaret Maynard, *Dress and Globalisation*, "Ethnic dress or fashionably 'ethnic'"; "Style and communication"; "Headwear: Negotiating meaning," 69-152

Week 4
September 21

Readings: P. Tortora, *Dress, Fashion and Technology*, "Tools that enable fashion change and innovations in dress" (124-139); "The fashion industry is born/Tools and processes expand options for dress and fashion," 143-159; Tortora, *Dress, Fashion and Technology*, "Transportation and its Effects (20th to 21st centuries)," 161-170; "The effects of sports, 19th to 21st centuries," 171-188; "Communications technologies that disseminate fashion information (19th to the 21st centuries)," 189-200

Workshop with Sculptor and Artist Shelby Head at Queens College (10:45-12:30)

Week 5
September 28

Readings: Tortora, "High tech enters"; "Technology contributes to the globalization of fashion: 20th and 21st centuries," 203-210; "Environments interact with technologies: 20th and 21st centuries," 211-216; "New technological frontiers for dress and fashion: 21st century," 217-229; Malcolm McCullough, "Abstracting craft: The practiced digital hand," 310-316; Richard Barbrook and Pit Schultz, *Digital artisans manifesto: European digital artisans network*, 317-19; Norbert Winer, "What is cybernetics? From the human use of humans," 303-309; Lucy E. Dunne, "Wearable technology," 613-16; Sarah Scaturro, "Digital and democratic," 586-588; Karl Marx, *Capital/The Development of machinery*, 69-77

See the Exhibition "Manus X Machina. Fashion in an Age of Technology." Online Catalogue and Eugenia Paulicelli's review:

<http://www.lavocedineyork.com/en/lifestyles/2016/07/29/manus-x-machina-fashion-beyond-mad-made/>

Week 6
October 5

JEANS

"Whoever says Industrial Revolution says cotton," Eric Hobsbawn

Readings:

Jennifer Craik and Sharon Peoples, "Case study: Jeans as Über fashion," 124-126; Michiel Scheffer, "Fashion design and technologies in a global context," 128-143; Sophie Woodward, "Humble blue jeans: Material culture approaches to understanding the ordinary, global, and the personal," 42-57; Beverly Lemire, "Introduction," 1-5, "A World Refashioned," 125-133

Workshop with Yael Rosenstock, Director of Programming, CERRU (Center for Ethnic, Racial & Religious Understanding), Queens College, CUNY

Week 7 October 19

Discussion of Pietra Rivoli (*The Travels of a T-Shirt*) and Richard Sennet (*The Craftsman*).

Students will be responsible of presenting and critiquing selected chapters of these books.

Intersections

Class visit to the Special Collection at the Rosenthal Library, Queens College to examine Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti Antichi et Moderni* published in Venice in 1590 and 1598. An English translation of the book will also be available.

Based on the library visit, readings and information contained in this section, students will work with a garment or object that features or contains a combination of elements and details from different cultures, time periods and/or categories examined in the course. Students will write about the object of their choice, connecting it to memory, family history, culture and social issues and experiences.

The 5 page paper will act as the starting point for developing your final 10 page paper for the class.

Fashion, Time and Space Renaissance Costume Books: Mapping the Global and the Local

Readings: Carole Collier Frick, "The courtier and fashion," 135-137); Eugenia Paulicelli, "Mapping the world. Dress in Cesare Vecellio's costume books," 138-159; Verity Wilson, "Western modes and Asian clothing. Reflections on borrowing other people's dress," 419-436; Beverly Lemire, "Cottage, mill, factory, plantation. The industrialization of cotton and the new world order, c. 1400-1850," 65-98

Week 8
October 26
Craft/Fashion/Art Revisited

Readings: Glen Adamson, "Introduction" from *Thinking through Craft*, 1-7 and "Introduction" from Adamson ed. *The Craft Reader*, 1-5; Sanda Miller, "Fashion as 'art' versus fashion as 'craft' revisited," 476-77); Rafael Cardoso, "Craft versus design: Moving beyond a tired dichotomy," 321-332

Week 9
November 2
Case Studies: Antonio Marras; Brunello Cucinelli/Part 1

Readings: Francesca Granata, "Fitting sources – Tailoring methods: A case study of Martin Margiela and the temporalities of fashion," 142-159); Alexandra Palmer, "Looking at fashion: The material object as subject," 268-300; Giuliana Bruno, "Surface, Fabric, Weave: The Fashioned World of Wong Kar-Wai" (pp. 83-105)

Viewing on your own: Wong Kar-Wai, *In the mood for love* (2000) and *The Hand* (2004)

PLEATS

In the third and final section, using digital research tools, students carry out in-depth research into an object of clothing of their choice. Students will explore the various layers of information made available by the digital archive.

Completed student research projects will be posted on the blog.

Week 10
November 9

Discussion of Case Studies

Reading: Christina Moon, "Ethnographic entanglements: Memory and narrative in the global fashion industry," 66-82

Workshop with Tabhita St. Bernard (Tabii Just/Zero Waste)

Week 11
November 16

Readings: Ulrich Lehmann, "Benjamin and the revolution of fashion modernity," 422-443; Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, "Thinking through fashion. An Introduction," 1-27; Rocamora, "Pierre Bourdieu. The field of fashion," 233-250; J.

Entwistle, "Bruno Latour. Actor-network-theory and fashion," 269-283; Elizabeth Wissinger, "Judith Butler. Fashion and Performativity," 284-299

Viewing on your own: Wim Wenders, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (1989)

Week 12
November 23

Words as Objects /Writing Fashion
Cultural Hybridity, Memory and Other Stories

Readings: Meena Alexander, Selected poems from *Raw Silk*

Sandra Cisneros, "Huipiles"

Mary Jo Bona, "The portable rebozo. Cisneros's Caramelo and Metafictional Histories"

Marjane Satrapi, *Embroideries*

Glossary of Fashion: Discussion, Interpretation, Additions

Week 13
November 30

Workshop with Designer and Creative Director: Minn Hur of Eponymovs by Hvrminn LLC

Students work on Fabric of Cultures Lab

Week 14
December 7

Student Presentations and Work on Fashion Cultures Lab

DATE (TBA) : Final Paper and Projects due

CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity

The [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity](http://www.cuny.edu/about/info/policies/academic-integrity.pdf)

(<http://www.cuny.edu/about/info/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>), as adopted by the Board, is available to all students. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in the City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion.

Use of Student Work

All programs in New York State undergo periodic reviews by accreditation agencies. For these purposes, samples of student work are occasionally made available to

those professionals conducting the review. Anonymity is assured under these circumstances. If you do not wish to have your work made available for these purposes, please let the professor know before the start of the second class. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Evaluations

During the final four weeks of the semester, you will be asked to complete an evaluation for this course by filling out a questionnaire.

Selected Textual Resources:

Adamson Glen, ed., *The Craft Reader*, Berg: 2010

Barnard Malcolm, ed., *Fashion Theory. A Reader*, Routledge: 2007

Black Sandy, De La Haye Amy et Al. eds., *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, Bloomsbury Academic: 2013

Craik Jennifer, *Fashion. The Key Concept*, Berg: 2009

Jenss Heike, ed., *Fashion Studies. Research Methods, Sites and Practices*, Bloomsbury Academic : 2016

Paulicelli Eugenia and Clark Hazel eds., *The Fabric of Cultures. Fashion, Identity, Globalization*, Routledge: 2009

Riello Giorgio and McNeill Peter eds., *The Fashion History Reader*, Routledge: 2010

Rocamora Agnès and Anneke Smelik, eds., *Thinking Through Fashion*, I.B. Tauris: 2016

Welters Linda and Lillethun Abby eds., *The Fashion Reader*, Berg: 2011