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THINKING THROUGH FASHION
An Introduction

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'To think is to voyage.'
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 482)

PART I: THEORIZING FASHION

The role of the veil in the definition of contemporary Muslim identities; the representation of women in fashion magazines; the cultural history of men's underwear; the rise of fashion blogs; the origins of catwalk shows and their participation in the definition of modernity; the creative economy and globalized circulation of African fashion: these are a few only of the topics the growing academic literature on fashion has covered (see, for instance, respectively, Lewis, 2013; Jobling, 1999; Cole, 2009; Rocamora, 2012; Evans, 2013; Rabine, 2002). Common to all the texts is the desire to make sense of fashion, to unpack, comprehend and analyse the social and cultural dynamics of fashion, dress and appearance. Indeed, the field of fashion has now become a major topic of enquiry in social and cultural theory, with many analyses devoted to an understanding of this complex arena. Numerous enlightening interrogations of its many layers have shown that fashion offers a rich platform from which to reflect on key social and cultural issues, from practices of consumption and production through to identity politics.

Thinking through fashion, like thinking through any cultural processes and experiences, is an exciting and challenging exercise. It is dependent on

one's ability to critically engage with a vast array of theories and concepts, often from thinkers who, unlike in some other fields of cultural criticism, have not themselves written about fashion. The aim of the present book is to accompany readers through the process of thinking through fashion. It seeks to help them grasp both the relevance of social and cultural theory to the fields of fashion, dress and material culture, and, conversely, the relevance of those fields to social and cultural theory. It does so by guiding them through the work of selected major thinkers, introducing key concepts and ideas, discussing, when relevant, how they have been appropriated by other authors to engage with the topic of fashion, and looking at other ways they can be appropriated to reflect on this topic.

Thinking through Fashion uses the word fashion in the broad sense of the term, that is, as also referring to dress, appearance and style. We understand fashion as both material culture and as symbolic system (Kawamura, 2005). It is a commercial industry producing and selling material commodities; a socio-cultural force bound up with the dynamics of modernity and post-modernity; and an intangible system of signification. It is thus made of things and signs, as well as individual and collective agents, which all coalesce through practices of production, consumption, distribution and representation. The study of fashion necessarily covers a wide terrain, ranging from production to consumption and systems of meaning and signification, and scholars need an equally wide array of methodologies and theories from many disciplines. Thus whilst the study of dress, appearance and style was dominated by costume historians, art historians and museum curators until the early 1980s, it was also receiving the attention of anthropology, linguistics and cultural studies (Burman and Turbin, 2003; Mora et al., 2014). Cultural studies, in particular, was instrumental in the broadening of the field of fashion studies to wider social, cultural and economic concerns (Breward, 2003). Cultural studies is inherently interdisciplinary and influenced by most of the theorists discussed in the present volume.

Gradually the term 'fashion studies' has come to refer to the study of fashion in its broad meaning, covering many areas of research across many disciplines, from history (including costume history), philosophy, sociology, anthropology through to cultural studies, women's studies and media studies (Mora et al., 2014). It has brought together a range of approaches, from an object-based approach focused on the materiality of fashion, to a concern with fashion's more intangible dynamics and underpinnings such as globalization, post-colonialism or its key role as a creative industry (see, for instance, on globalization, Maynard, 2004; Rabine, 2002, on

post-colonialism, Hendrickson, 1996; Root, 2013 on fashion and the creative industries, Rantisi, 2004; Santagata, 2004).

Fashion studies, then, is by definition an interdisciplinary field. Even if scholars work in a particular discipline, say art history or material anthropology, they will always need to know or at least be aware of adjacent disciplines. This book helps to orient students and scholars to possible different backgrounds to 'thinking through fashion'. When researchers choose to focus on a particular dimension of fashion, for example production rather than consumption, or representation in the media rather than the wear and tear of material clothes, they will need to choose the appropriate methodologies and theories to carry out the research effectively and analyse the results. By providing evaluative introductions to key theorists in the context of fashion, the book provides readers with an accessible overview of relevant theories and concepts in order to help them 'think through fashion' more deeply and critically.

The underlying premise of *Thinking through Fashion* is that theorists provide invaluable tools to 'think through fashion', and that engaging with theory is essential in order to understand and analyse fashion. In the *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*, David Jary and Julia Jary define theory as: 'any set of hypotheses or propositions, linked by logical or mathematical arguments, which is advanced to explain an area of empirical reality or type of phenomenon' (1995: 686). To theorize fashion means to develop propositions and arguments that advance the understanding of its logic and manifestations. Theory aims to explain the many practices (Williams, 1983) involved in the making of fashion: practices of representation, of production and of consumption.

The conceptual dimension of theory has left it open to the accusation of being abstract, removed from the real world. However, 'The true difficulty of theory', as Eagleton notes, 'springs not from this sophistication, but from exactly the opposite – from its demand that we return to childhood by rejecting what seems natural and refusing to be fobbed off with shifty answers from well-meaning elders' (1990: 34–35). In other words, the student or scholar of fashion needs to look at the field of fashion with fresh eyes, clearing her or his mind of preconceived ideas and prejudices. This is why theory can help us better understand the dynamics of fashion. It allows us not to take for granted its many manifestations, but to instead question its obviousness or naturalness and give us the means to achieve the critical distance necessary to a full understanding of its layered complexity. In her chapter on Bruno Latour, Joanne Entwistle, for instance, shows how his notion of 'actant' can help us reconsider the role of non-humans in the making of

fashion. In Francesca Granata's discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin, the idea of the grotesque helps us understand the transgressive work of designers. Agnès Rocamora shows how Pierre Bourdieu's notion of field reminds us that creativity is a collective process; that a fashion collection does not simply originate in the mind of an isolated individual removed from the social world but is the product of various social, economic and cultural forces. And Peter McNeil explains how Georg Simmel's theorizing of everyday life as informed by dualism helps us understand the logic of fashion, at once fuelled by the desire to be like someone else, but also different from someone else or, to put it differently, fashion is as much about sameness as it is about difference.

Theory also involves the careful attention to and command of concepts in one's analysis and interpretation of a topic. As Stuart Mills observes, '"Theory" has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations' (2000 [1959]: 120). Indeed, 'specialized terminologies' (Hills, 2005: 40) are involved in one's practice of theory. These are the terminologies of the disciplines that a theoretical framework belongs to and engages with. This book focuses on social and cultural theory, the type of theory that informs the work of thinkers from the social sciences and humanities, which include disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and media studies.

The boundaries between disciplines are not always clear cut, and the work of many thinkers straddles one or two disciplines. Michel Foucault, for example, is often referred to as a historian, but also as a philosopher. Pierre Bourdieu's early career is informed by ethnography, but he later established himself in the field of sociology, and both disciplines underpin his thinking. The practice of theory then often involves engagement with a variety of 'sister' disciplines and attendant concepts. The work of all of the thinkers discussed in *Thinking through Fashion* can be related to, brought into dialogue with, other theories and ideas, concepts and arguments, which they appropriate to support their point and further the understanding of a particular phenomenon. Theorizing does not happen in a vacuum. It does not consist in one's formulation of arguments out of the blue, but in critical dialogue with existing works and theories; and 'with the objective of offering new tools by which to think about our world' (Barker, 2011: 37–38). As Michel de Certeau puts it: 'in spite of a persistent fiction, we never write on a blank page, but always on one that that has already been written on' (1988: 43).

This is also why, as Hills observes, theory 'always refers the reader to a set of texts beyond what is currently being read, gesturing towards a vast

intertextual web of material' (2005: 39). This web spreads across space – as in the many journals and books where theories can be found – but also across time. The work of Karl Marx for instance, although developed in the nineteenth century, informs the work of later authors, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard, who in his early work also cited that of Michel Foucault but later moved away from it (Best and Kellner, 1991); the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has influenced that of Gilles Deleuze; Judith Butler's thought is indebted to psychoanalysis and Foucault's theory of discourse and truth. The theories and concepts of past authors continue to live in the work of their contemporaries.

Because *Thinking through Fashion* is organized around the idea of individual thinkers as historical subjects, we have followed a simple chronological order of date of birth. Although the idea of a linear unfolding of time can allow one to grasp the past and the context and origins of some theories and concepts, it fails to capture the idea that the past and the present always intersect in the practice of theory. Our contributors, therefore, whilst introducing individual theories as historical subjects in their moment in time, also emphasize the cross-fertilization of ideas. The book thus highlights the intellectual proximity of authors distanced by history, an approach that also informs our discussion of strands and developments in theory in the next section.

Authors alive at the same time might follow a different timeline to fame and recognition. One has to keep in mind that some authors became known or acknowledged earlier than older authors. Also, there can be a discrepancy between the moment when a piece of work was written by its author and the moment it receives attention by other scholars, and in other languages. For example, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin was written in Russia in the 1930s and 1940s, but only received wider attention in Western Europe in the 1960s. Another example is the work of many French post-structuralist authors – such as Foucault and Derrida – who rose to prominence through the translations of American scholars. This phenomenon has been called the 'transatlantic connection' or rather 'disconnection' (Stanton, 1980) and has also been addressed as 'travelling theories' (Said, 1982). Theoretical work can be produced and received at different times in different countries, depending on trends in thinking, the availability of translations or social and cultural influences. These are the sorts of a-synchronicities that run alongside the linear organization by date of birth. As our thematic discussion in the next section demonstrates, although authors may be separate in time, their theories and ideas and the uses that are made of them can bring them close to each other.

Historical time, as Caroline Evans (2000: 104) notes, drawing on Walter Benjamin, is not 'something that flows smoothly from past to present but [is …] a more complex relay of turns and returns, in which the past is activated by injecting the present into it'. This is equally true of theory; there, as in historical time, 'the old and new interpenetrate' (Benjamin, cited in Evans, 2000: 102). Thus, the reader may well decide to read the book from beginning to end but could equally enter it through any chapter, or leap from one chapter to another – from Marx to Baudrillard, or from Freud to Butler – to then move on to yet another one. The 'turns and returns' will become apparent as the reader progresses through the whole collection, which presents theory as a constellation of ideas and concepts that flow across time and space and sediment in various guises in the work of various authors.

The didactic organization into chapters devoted to single authors aims to capture the significance of their thought to an understanding of the field of fashion, dress and material culture, as it does the importance of this field for a critical engagement with these authors' ideas. As editors we are highly aware that any collection involves a process of selection, which means acts of both inclusion and exclusion. This collection is intended to be selective rather than comprehensive. We decided to focus mainly on authors whose concepts and ideas have been both central to modern Western social and cultural theory and have been invaluable in thinking through fashion. This book introduces theories that we think are at this point in time essential to conduct the stimulating and demanding work of 'thinking through fashion'.

All the thinkers included in this book are the product of the Western tradition of thought and sciences, associated with western modernity. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but especially with the consolidation of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, new social, cultural and economic developments brought about new theories of the world. Thinkers such as Marx and Simmel attempted to make sense of the changes affecting society and developed theories that could help us comprehend shifting ways of being. Fashion was one of the topics some thinkers engaged with – Simmel (1971 [1904]) for instance devoted a whole paper to it – for in the west fashion was itself seen as a paradigm of modernity. The French poet Baudelaire famously described modernity as 'the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent' (1999: 518). This definition is equally applicable to fashion, and indeed he did see in fashion the perfect expression of modernity (Evans, 2003; Lehmann, 2000; Rocamora, 2009; Vinken, 2000).

Although fashion has been seen as paradigmatic of Western modernity, it does not mean that it is the preserve of the Western world (Mora et

al., 2014; Niessen et al., 2003; Rabine, 2002). There are indeed multiple co-existing modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000), and the presumed temporal sequence and geographical inscription of pre- or non-modernity, modernity, post-modernity has been problematized by various scholars (Chakrabarty, 2000; Gaonkar, 2001; Gilroy, 1993) to point to the co-existence of differ-ent modes of modernization not only across the globe but also within the imperial and metropolitan centre. Elizabeth Wilson (2003), for example, has demonstrated the uneven take-up of fashion in Europe.

By virtue of focusing on western thinkers whose thought has been cen-tral to thinking about Western modernity and the fashion that grew out of it, much of the book is devoted to Western fashion. Similarly the knowledge and expertise of most of the fashion scholars brought together in this book lie in their study of fashion as consumed and produced in the west. Most are based in Anglo-American or Western institutions and have English as their first language, which will have further slanted the book towards a Western focus. The fact that it is aimed at an English-reading audience, written in that language and with no provisions for the translation of chapters that may have been submitted in other languages also undoubtedly limits its geographic extent.[1] We welcome follow-up books that would shed light on systems of thoughts and fashion not framed by those of Western modernity.

Strands and Developments in Theory

To think – to develop, test and evaluate theories – is an act that occurs within a certain context; as we wrote above, theorizing does not happen in a vac-uum. The following section situates the key theorists in the broader con-text in which their thought emerged and circulated. In social and cultural theory it is common to speak of strands, movements or schools of thought that unite different thinkers across historical periods and academic discip-lines, for example Marxism, feminism or structuralism. As cultural studies can be seen as the defining framework for the emerging field of fashion stud-ies (Breward, 1995, 2003), we trace the development of theory from this particular vantage point. Incorporating a wide range of disciplines, cultural studies was formed by critical and cultural theory and mostly by theories of language (Cavallaro, 2001; Barker, 2011).

The Linguistic Turn

The starting point for our mapping exercise is Roland Barthes. He was the first theorist to bring structural linguistics to the study of popular culture, that is to say he further developed the structuralist ideas of Ferdinand De

Saussure (1996 [1916]) on semiotics, the science of signs (from the Greek *semeion*; sign). A sign is the smallest element that carries a meaning, consisting of a signifier (in French, *signifiant*), the material carrier of meaning, and a signified (in French, *signifié*), the content to which the reference is made. Saussurian semiotics upholds a binary opposition between signifier and signified, but also emphasizes the arbitrary relation between them: there is no intrinsic relation of the sounds and letters of a word and the object they signify (for a fuller explanation see the chapters on Barthes and Baudrillard). This focus on arbitrariness has been useful for an understanding of a text – or image, music or piece of clothing – as a convention, a construction that is made by humans without a natural or essential meaning tied to it.

This development is intimately bound up with the so-called 'linguistic turn'; a term that was invented by the American philosopher Richard Rorty (1967). Rorty claims that the linguistic turn marks a paradigm shift in the Western system of thought in which linguistics, semiotics, rhetoric and other models of textuality came to form the most important framework for critical reflections on contemporary art and culture. Saussure's writings on semiotics helped develop a structuralist analysis of the 'grammar' of any system, and Barthes was the first to apply it to fashion in *The Fashion System* in the early 1950s (published in English in 1967), and, more successfully, to all kinds of expressions of popular culture in *Mythologies* (1973 [1957]). The linguistic turn heralds the beginning of the success of a semiotic reading of any kind of sign system, be it food, a commercial, dress, film or a literary novel, for example in the work of anthropologist Lévi-Strauss on myth, the early Barthes on fashion, or Metz on cinema (Sim, 1998).

The idea that language is paradigmatic for meaning is then central to structuralism and post-structuralism as it was mostly developed by French thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s, of whom Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault are discussed in *Thinking through Fashion*. Mikhail Bakhtin is sometimes hailed as one of the predecessors, while Judith Butler's work can also be situated in that tradition; while on the contrary, a post-structuralist French thinker such as Gilles Deleuze was rather opposed to the idea of the centrality of language. Thinkers within the linguistic turn argued that systems of signs are structured in the same way as the grammar of language is a structure. Where Barthes (1967) looked for a 'grammar' of dress and Metz (1982) for a 'grammar' of film, Michel Foucault (1990 [1976], 2004 [1969]) developed the notion of 'discourse' as a way to analyse relations of power and truth. According to the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan (1977), even the unconscious is structured like a language.

The linguistic turn strongly puts the central focus on textuality, stretching, however, beyond the written text out towards images, music, architecture or, indeed, fashion. This approach opened up a whole new field of studying popular culture, as semiotics was now applied to all signifying practices, to 'culture as a whole way of life', in the famous words of Raymond Williams (1958). As Barthes showed in *Mythologies* (1973), an advertisement for Italian pasta, a glamorous photo of Greta Garbo or the new Citroën are all sites where meaning is encoded and can therefore be decoded. Popular culture was accorded a complexity previously little discussed. Barthes's project was new in its endeavour to analyse not only high culture but also mass culture, thus shaking the strict boundaries between the two. This is indeed one of the major characteristics of cultural studies (see for historical overviews Grossberg et al., 1992; During, 1993; Storey, 1996).

The Politics of Post-structuralism

Structuralism flowed into post-structuralism, although it is difficult to date or even point to a clear demarcation between the two bodies of thought. Roland Barthes straddles both ways of thinking, more structuralist in *The Fashion System* (1967), but definitely post-structuralist in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and *A Lover's Discourse* (1977).

Post-structuralist thinkers accept the centrality of language, but reject the idea of a stable subject position, the structure of binary pairs and the idea of universal truths (Barker, 2011: 84). Jacques Derrida's (1976) deconstructionism, for example, argues that language and meaning are fundamentally unstable and forever deferred and shifting. François Lyotard (1984) heralds the ending of 'Grand Narratives', proposing that ideologies can no longer authoritatively proclaim a truth nor promise a future of emancipation. Narratives can still present totalizing and unifying 'grand' stories, but we no longer accept their truth. Both Barthes (1967) and Foucault (1969) proclaimed 'the death of the author', marking the end of the author as the authoritative centre of meaning, to make room for multiple pleasures of the reader. The end of the belief in grand narratives and the death of the author coincide with the blossoming of many formerly oppressed or marginalized groups legitimating their particular stories from the 1960s onwards: youth, blacks, women, gays and lesbians, post-colonial groups and the many cross-overs between them (Woods, 1999). As a consequence, people got interested in 'small', fragmented stories of 'partial truths' and 'situated knowledges', as Donna Haraway (1988) would call it. The opportunity – or difficulty, depending on one's viewpoint – of finding modes for the distinct

voice of minority groups can be related to the emerging markets in fashion today when 'non-Western' designers find themselves commodified in relation to certain notions of cultural authenticity (Eicher, 1999; Kondo, 1997; Niessen et al., 2003).

Post-structuralism was informed by the left-wing revolution of May 1968 that spread from Paris all over the world. Language-inspired theories like semiotics were developed through radical re-readings of Marx and Freud. The combination of Marxism and psychoanalysis had already inspired thinkers from the Frankfurt School in the 1940s and 1950s like Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno, and this happened again after 1968. It is important to realize that many French thinkers were inspired by Marxism, although they – all be it much later – distanced themselves from the dictatorial regimes of communism. The British Birmingham School of Cultural Studies was equally left-wing inspired, which made for a strong focus on the issue of class in the analysis of popular culture (Williams, 1958; Hall, 1997). The post-structuralist project was led by politics to understand 'the cultural logic of capitalism' (to quote the famous subtitle by Jameson, 1991), as well as liberate sexuality from its bourgeois grip. The particular combination of semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalysis also helped to address the dominant meanings and ideologies of popular culture.

The renewed focus on psychoanalysis, mostly inspired by Lacan's (1977) radical rereading of Freud, was applied to the project of putting an end to the idea of the individual as an autonomous, self-knowing subject. A century earlier, Marx had critiqued the idea that human beings are self-determining individuals, asserting instead that they are produced by the forces of labour and capital (Marx, 1990 [1867]; Sturken and Cartwright, 2009: 100). Freud (1964 [1900]) had explained that the subject is more ruled by unconscious desires than rational will. Lacan pushed this even further and claimed that the subject is always already radically split from the moment it comes into being (Lacan, 1977).

While this may sound a rather negative formulation, Marxist and psychoanalytic bodies of thought opened up a new concept of identity as flexible and dynamic, rather than a fixed and unchanging essence that is given at birth by God, nature or chance. If identity is a social construct, that is to say something 'made' in a complex process of negotiation between the individual and society, between nature and culture, then it is also possible to change and transform it. This allowed for politically informed approaches calling for radical change, most notably feminism and black and post-colonial studies (Irigaray, 1985; Trinh, 1989; Gilroy, 1993). Moreover, it produced an intense

focus on the vicissitudes of desire in popular culture (Berger, 1995) and a critique of the normativity of bourgeois and heterosexual sexuality (Butler, 1990; Braidotti, 1991). The notion of ideology thus soon encompassed much more than class consciousness, and came to include 'race', ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Hutcheon, 1989; hooks, 1990, 1992). Identity has increasingly come to be considered fluid and flexible without an essential core (Sim, 1998: 367), an idea that is explored in the chapters on Gilles Deleuze and Judith Butler in the present book.

Post-structuralist theory had a significant impact on the social sciences and humanities, with an enthusiastic response in many new fields of study: gender studies, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, media studies and a bit more hesitantly, fashion studies. The idea that identity is now a question of 'fluctuating personality and tastes', as Gilles Lipovetsky writes (1994: 148–49), opens up the importance of dressing and clothing the body as a means of constructing one's identity. As a result of the fragmentation and changing structures of modernity, Lipovetsky argues that in contemporary society the grand narratives of modernity have been replaced by the logic of fashion and consumption (2005: 11–12), an idea that Baudrillard had also engaged with. The post-structuralist concept of identity as characterized by fluidity and flexibility is enhanced by a dynamics of fashion that enables individuals to continuously define their identities anew (2005: 84). As Fred Davis also argues, the meaning of contemporary fashion is characterized by 'awesome, if not overwhelming, ambiguity' (1992: 7). While many fashion theorists, like Davis and Lipovetsky, celebrate fashion's ambiguity and fluidity, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is more critical of the 'liquidity' of post-modern culture. He deplores the 'intrinsic volatility and unfixity of all or most identities' (2000: 83). Bauman is especially suspicious of the pivotal role that consumption plays in shaping identities within the socio-cultural power structures of fashion, not unlike Barbara Kruger's famous art work *I shop, therefore I am*. The post-modern condition has thus been celebrated as well as criticized for its flexible identities and free floating signifiers; a game that fashion is particularly adept at playing (Baudrillard, 1993 [1976]).

Old and New Materialisms

For Richard Rorty, the linguistic turn signified a paradigmatic shift in Western philosophy. Such a dramatic turn of paradigm does not happen so very often, and Rorty (1967) only signals three in the history of Western philosophy: from *things* in antique and medieval philosophy to *ideas* from the seventeenth till nineteenth century to *words* in the twentieth century. However, we now

live in a time where one turn follows the other more quickly than we can keep up reading about them: the visual turn, the experiential turn, the spatial turn, the cultural turn, the performative turn, the affective turn, the material turn, and so on. This not only signifies that the term 'turn' suffers a huge inflation, but also that we live and think in a time of fast change, a period after post-modernism that is not yet clearly defined (Vermeulen and Van den Akker, 2010).

The problem of the linguistic turn was that it put too much emphasis on language. This point has been addressed in fashion studies. Joanne Entwistle, for example, argues that structuralism and post-structuralism have 'effectively displace[d] the idea of embodiment and the individual and can give us no account of experience or agency' (2000: 70). In shaking off the dominant framework of textuality and semiotics, Entwistle and other scholars of fashion enlist different schools of thought, most notably the more sociological approach of Simmel, Goffman, Bourdieu and Latour, who are discussed in *Thinking through Fashion*. In all their differences, such a sociological approach allows us to understand fashion not only as a signifying system, but also as an embodied practice that takes place in a collectively shared social space.

This is where we touch upon the new, or rather revived, concept of materiality, introduced as 'new materialism' or 'the material turn' (Bennett and Joyce, 2010; Coole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012; Barrett and Bolt, 2013). These authors argue that the post-structuralist focus on language neglected the very matter and materiality of objects and the world. Barbara Bolt emphasizes the relevance of the material turn for the creative arts, including fashion, since its 'very materiality has disappeared into the textual, the linguistic and the discursive' (2013: 4). As Bill Brown argues, this not only holds for art or fashion, but also for our bodies and identities, which are constructed and mediated not only through signs but also *materially* (2010: 60). Identity 'matters'.

The material turn reopens highly relevant issues for fashion studies, such as practice, embodiment and experience. Our agency takes place through material things and objects – such as clothes. As Appadurai argued (2013 [1986]), people's relationship to objects is socially and culturally dependent, which in turn implies that things themselves have a social life. We mediate the social relations to objects, and social systems through which objects become meaningful (or not). Our identities function within a material culture, as we know all too well from our emotional relations to objects, whether it is a chocolate bar that soothes our anxiety, a song that reminds us of a lost love, or a particular dress that makes us feel sexy. Food, music or

clothes have a value. Of course, in high capitalism the value is always finan-cial, but, as Karl Marx demonstrated in *Das Kapital* (1990 [1867]), the value is mostly a surplus value because of our affective relations to material things. Matter, objects, have an intrinsic social quality. 'Stuff' – as the title of Daniel Miller's (2010) book runs – does not merely exist, but is always transformed by social interaction into a certain value: 'I shop, therefore I am'. Putting the emphasis on materiality therefore does not preclude an understanding of matter as symbolic; rather, it shows that there is a constant negotiation between the material and the symbolic.

New materialism claims to be 'new', which it is in the sense of refocus-ing on matter and materiality after decades of a dominant focus on text and textuality. Yet, materialism has a long and prestigious genealogy and is in fact influenced by several sources and disciplines (Bennett and Joyce, 2010). These theories should not be understood as being completely sepa-rated, because many of these theorists have been inspired or even set off by each other. The first is the historical materialism of Karl Marx with its emphasis on the praxis of production and labour, as is further explained in the chapter on Marx in this book. Second, Marxism has inspired a socio-logical approach to the culture of things as in the work of Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel (Brown, 2010: 62). Marxist Walter Benjamin has under-stood how the history of production and labour is intimately connected to circulation and consumption, and thus to 'a history of fascination, appre-hension, aspiration' (Brown, 2010: 63). Third, the sociological approach is closely related to cultural anthropology as the discipline that has put the 'very being of objects' as its central topic (Brown, 2001: 9). Fourth, the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) of Bruno Latour (2005) attributes some sort of agency to non-human actors, which helps to think about the agency of things and assemblages of human and non-human actors. Fifth, the phe-nomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty has put the focus on the materiality of the human body, exploring the experience of what he calls 'my-body-in-the-world' (2002: 167). Sixth, the materialist branch of feminism rethinks the materiality of the human body and its gendered nature (Braidotti, 2002). And finally, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987 [1980]) evoke on the one hand a materialism of the flesh that considers the body as intelligent matter, and on the other hand add a form of empiricism that rejects the tran-scendental idea of reason. The convergence of those two strands produces a vital materialism combining critique with creativity.

The fact that many of these theorists are discussed in *Thinking through Fashion* signals the importance of materialism for fashion studies. Fashion is not only

a system of signification but also a commercial industry producing and sell-ing material commodities. Fashion, perhaps more conspicuously than other cultural realms, consists of material objects and involves a bodily practice of dressing. This fact has not escaped scholars of fashion. The anthropological perspective has regarded clothes as objects in their own right or as mean-ingful within practices of dressing (Küchler and Miller, 2005). Daniel Miller (1998) argued for balancing theories to take on the specificity of material cultures. Ethnographic approaches are important methodologies for under-standing what people wear and why (Woodward, 2007). Entwistle (2000) has argued for an empirically grounded sociology that takes the embodied practice of dress seriously. Because these diverse approaches have always been vital methodologies for fashion studies, the claim of novelty of 'new materialism' seems a bit singular. In that sense it may be better to speak of 'renewed materialism'.

Fashion studies is then unique in combining many different strands of theory, where the extremes of the linguistic turn have been kept in check by the necessary focus on the very materiality of fashion: its mode of produc-tion, but also the textiles, and the clothes in our wardrobe or on our body. As Bill Brown wittily writes, 'culture itself is now appearing not as text but as textile' (2010: 64). *Thinking through Fashion* presents a range of theorists who are carefully chosen and discussed by expert and emergent scholars in the field of fashion studies. The authors of the present volume set up intellectual conversations amongst themselves and amongst the theorists they discuss, opening up new intellectual adventures for the reader. If anything, the book should disclose the particular dynamism of the field of fashion studies and its contribution to thinking through social and cultural theory. It should therefore be invaluable not only to fashion studies students and scholars, but also to those social and cultural theorists less familiar with the field of fash-ion, introducing a novel field through which to reflect on the strengths and weakness of the thinkers they and their students engage with.

Perhaps we can finish our necessarily brief mapping of theory and the-orists by evoking the *pleasure* of studying fashion. Theory has all too often connotations of dry abstraction or high degrees of difficulty. But it can be exciting and exhilarating to think through fashion. As Daniel Miller writes, to study the things and objects of fashion means to enjoy 'luxuriating in the detail: the sensuality of touch, colour and flow. A study of clothing should not be cold; it has to invoke the tactile, emotional, intimate world of feel-ings' (2010: 41). We hope that *Thinking through Fashion* will help to find a way

through the many theories that can induce us to immerse ourselves in the study of fashion, because, ultimately, fashion is not only fun, but it *matters*.

PART II: THE KEY THEORISTS: SUMMARIES

Chapter 2: Karl Marx (1818–1883)

The book opens with a discussion of Karl Marx's original critique of capitalism, which implicitly underpins the critical study of fashion. Anthony Sullivan sets out the rich theoretical resources that Marx offers to understanding fashion culturally and socially. *The Communist Manifesto*'s vivid characterization of capitalism as a society where change, contradiction and obsolescence trump continuity, stability and tradition, locates fashion's emergence in a milieu in which 'all that's solid melts into air' – to quote Marx's famous words. The chapter explains how in a capitalist 'mode of production' our 'species being' is 'estranged' from our labour and its products. As a result our relationships with each other and with nature are objectified. The Marxist approach has informed existing literature on the production of fashion and the psychologically infused, negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School of the 1940s and 1950s in Germany. Sullivan argues that Marx's distinctive approach to human culture as a conscious material transformation has often been overlooked; 'a dress only becomes a dress by being worn', claims Marx. Thus, Marx prefigured material culture approaches to fashion. Discussing the application of Marx specifically to fashion today, the chapter shows how his work enables us to understand how and why fashion remains so powerful and yet contradictory. Without Marx's analysis of 'commodity fetishism' the mystification and re-presentation of the objects of fashion, whether garments, bags or shoes, as magical and fabulous totems, remain incomprehensible. The chapter concludes by examining the strengths and limitations of Marx's work, focusing on one aspect of its legacy post-Marxism, in relation to understanding branded, ethical and slow fashion.

Chapter 3: Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

Janice Miller examines the ideas of Sigmund Freud and asks how they might help in the analysis of fashion and dress. She looks at Freud's ideas of a therapeutic technique named psychoanalysis, which he developed in the nineteenth century to treat mental illness. The framework of psychoanalytic concepts can be applied to the analysis of culture as instigated by Freud

himself and by the Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan half a century later. The chapter examines how psychoanalytic concepts such as 'fetishism' or 'the gaze' have been used by writers on fashion. Importantly however, Miller is interested in not only how some psychoanalytic ideas have been embraced as a mechanism to understand the cultural significance of fashion and dress, but also why others have been largely ignored. The aim of the chapter is to evaluate the potential of a variety of psychoanalytic ideas to the study of fashion. Miller ultimately argues that though fashion studies has seemed to prefer socio-cultural readings, psychoanalysis has the potential to refresh the frameworks that currently tend to circulate within the discipline.

Chapter 4: Georg Simmel (1858–1918)

Having lived most of his life in Berlin, Georg Simmel was indelibly formed by the fact of his maturing in one of the great fin-de-siècle European cities. As Peter McNeil shows, Simmel's approach to social forms played a major role in creating a model for understanding fashion that has been particularly influential in the United States of America since the 1910s, being revived in the 1950s and again in the 1980s, and continuing to resonate within many different strands of international fashion studies today. Simmel's analysis of the endless differentiation of objects and details in his contemporary society laid a bedrock for later theorists of everyday life including Roland Barthes. He also influenced the development of North American 'sociology of everyday life', or 'ethno-methodological' sociology and social psychology. Simmel's approach to fashion, embedded within his understanding of modernity, has influenced great writers on fashion, no matter their methodological or disciplinary affiliations. His writing style, according to McNeil, is akin to 'Impressionism' or 'Symbolism' in painting or music; he was, in fact, called 'a philosophical Monet' by the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács.

Chapter 5: Walter Benjamin (1892–1940)

Adam Geczy and Vicky Karaminas argue that the influence of Walter Benjamin on fashion studies lies in his idea of fashion as elaborated in the *Arcades Project*: fashion is inextricably bound up with modern culture and it is the most specific manifestation of capitalism's will-to-change – the influence of Karl Marx is most direct here. Fashion, style and sensibility are, for Benjamin, internal and fundamental to modern culture. Dress is not only an attribute of class recognition and aspiration, but also a pervasive and persistent statement of temporality. This temporality, as Geczy and Karaminas

discuss, is connected to the way in which modernity needs to maintain the semblance of change. Such change is not only economic but also narratalogical, because modernity is always both subverting and improving upon history. Thus fashion has to be seen as a tissue of historical references that are avowed yet also repressed in the name of the current and the new. Benjamin's impact on fashion studies also resides in his seminal insights into media and representation. Geczy and Karaminas note that Benjamin's notion of reproducibility and loss of aura in the much-studied essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility', can be of considerable profit to fashion studies. One point in particular is the way in which aura is reinvested or redeemed through the proliferation of reproductions, perpetuating presence and desirability. They argue that the representation of fashion in fantasy environments and against the armature of celebrity is one of the drivers of fashion industry. By engaging in a cross-pollination with art and history, in the past two decades high end fashion has engendered a new relation to time.

Chapter 6: Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975)

In an endnote to *Rabelais and his World*, the Russian scholar Mikhail M. Bakhtin writes that it would be 'interesting to trace the struggle of the grotesque and the classical concept [of the body] in the history of dress and fashion'. This remained unfortunately an unrealized project during his lifetime. Francesca Granata argues that Bakhtin's cultural history of the grotesque canon is of great relevance to the study of fashion and, more specifically, to the study of the history of the fashionable body. Epitomized by the open-ended collective body of carnival, and characterized by a transgression of borders, the grotesque stands in contrast to the 'sealed', atomized and individualized classical body – a body which has characterized much twentieth-century high fashion. Intersecting with writings in feminism, gender studies, queer theory and disability studies, Bakhtin's work provides the tools to examine fashion's unique position in upholding normality on the one hand, while paradoxically also being the vehicle to exceed, upend or, to use Bakhtinian terminology, carnivalize ideals of norms and deviation. Conversely, the study of fashion, as Bakhtin himself recognized, constitutes a central area for an application of his theory, thanks to fashion's inextricable relation to the body. Through the use of specific examples, circumscribed both historically and geographically, and by placing his work on a continuum with that of other theorists, Granata shows that fashion studies qualifies and better contextualizes his over-celebratory reading of the grotesque.

Chapter 7: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961)

Llewellyn Negrin explains that fashion, by dint of the fact that it is designed to be worn, is inextricably linked with the body. Yet much analysis of fashion has tended to neglect the experience of dress as a tactile and embodied form, treating it primarily as a 'text' to be decoded semiotically. As such, it has been viewed as a purely visual phenomenon while the nature of its interaction with the body of the wearer has been overlooked. In the process, what has been ignored is that fashion is not just the creation of a specific 'look', but is also the comportment of the body in space. Particular garments are significant not just for the meanings they communicate or for their aesthetic appearance, but because they produce certain modes of bodily demeanour. In its disassociation of fashion from the body, fashion theory has perpetuated the mind/body distinction, converting the body into a de-materialized surface of inscription, whose corporeal nature is overlooked. Rather than being regarded as integral to our experience of wearing clothes, the body has been treated as a *tabula rasa* onto which sartorial signs are superimposed. Negrin's chapter discusses how the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which foregrounds the embodied nature of our experience of the world, can be used to address this lacuna. Central to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is an awareness of the body not as a passive receptor of outside stimuli, but rather, as the medium through which we experience the world. As Merleau-Ponty has made clear, our bodies are not simply inert objects existing independently of our minds but rather, are the very means through which we come to know the world and articulate our sense of self. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Negrin argues, provides us with the theoretical tools with which to address fashion not simply as an aesthetic or symbolic phenomenon but as a haptic experience.

Chapter 8: Roland Barthes (1915–1980)

Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System* is a much misunderstood and maligned text (Rick Rylance called it his 'bleakest book'), but as the author himself argued, 'it poses the problem of knowing if there is really an object that we call fashion clothing'. At the heart of Barthes's enquiry is the hypothesis that real clothing – what we wear in our everyday existence – is secondary to the ways in which it can be articulated in the verbal and visual rhetoric of fashion editorials and fashion spreads: 'Without discourse there is no total Fashion, no essential Fashion.' In this chapter, therefore, Paul Jobling discusses the dialectic between two key terms that Barthes evinced – written clothing and

image clothing – to analyse the repetitive performativity of word and image in fashion texts. At the same time, Jobling mobilizes key works such as 'The Semantics of the Object' and *The Pleasure of the Text* to consider the relevance of Barthes' ideas concerning the status of fashion as a sign and the semiological meanings of garments, photographs and advertisements.

Chapter 9: Erving Goffman (1922–1982)

Goffman's seminal *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, and more specifically his notions of front and back regions, props and performance, offer useful tools for an understanding both of individuals' everyday engagement with fashion and of the division of labour and specialization through space that characterizes the fashion industry. In this chapter Efrat Tseëlon looks at Goffman's analysis of the dramaturgy of the social self to reflect on the role of fashion within it and the idea of fashion as communication. Goffman identified the kernel of social behaviour as a collective endeavour to avoid shame, loss of face and embarrassment. Combining a micro analysis of everyday behaviour together with insights based on a variety of empirical and fictional sources, he distilled the tacit rules and codes that structure Western society, interrogating their boundaries through their breach. The chapter provides empirical evidence to support the thrust of Goffman's dramaturgical thesis with regard to clothes, without falling into a common misconception of attributing authenticity to backstage and manipulation to front stage. Identity is created through performance, and clothes are a key tool in this process of self-construction. Clothes can be seen as 'props' central to the way individuals as performers negotiate their relations to others in various social settings, as Tseëlon discusses in relation to the idea of professional appearance. Although Goffman's study is mostly concerned with individuals' work of self-presentation, Tseëlon argues that it can be extended to organizational and institutional practices such as those at play in the field of fashion.

Chapter 10: Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995)

Gilles Deleuze's philosophy is often situated within the school of French post-structuralism, but his thought does not share the same emphasis on the centrality of language. Deleuze aims to come up with new concepts so as to rethink and revitalize life and he can thus be situated as a vitalist and materialist thinker. Although Deleuze's ideas have hardly yet been applied to fashion, Anneke Smelik argues that concepts such as 'becoming', the 'body-without-organs' and 'the fold' can illuminate the study of

contemporary fashion. The continuous process of creative transformations is what Deleuze and co-author Guattari (1987) understand by 'becoming'; for example becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-machine. Becoming implies a different way of thinking about human identity and the way one is dressed: not rigid and fixed from cradle to grave but fluid and flexible throughout life. The process of becoming is connected to the idea of the 'body-without-organs', which refers to re-organizing the way in which the body is given meaning. The notion of the body-without-organs can help to counter normative images of what a body should look like – not unlike much of high fashion's extravagant designs. Deleuze's concept of 'the fold' undoes a binary opposition between inside and outside, between appearance and essence. This insight involves a fundamental critique of the idea that fashion is a superficial game of exteriority covering over a 'deep' self hidden in the interior folds of the soul. Rather, identity can be understood as a set of folds; folding-in and folding-out – much like the folds of the garments we wear in daily life. The Deleuzean notion of the fold helps to see how fashion designs set the body in motion, potentially liberating it from the dominant modes of identity in the consumerist world of fast fashion.

Chapter 11: Michel Foucault (1926–1984)

Jane Tynan examines the practices and discourses of fashion through the work of Michel Foucault. His concern with the body as site of social control has inspired theorists from a range of academic disciplines to apply his ideas to the social practices linked to fashion, beauty, style and regulation clothing. The level of academic interest in Foucault's work is largely due to his theory of modern society, centred on the control of bodies in space, which is clearly applicable to the embodied practices of fashion and dress. Focusing on Foucault's concepts of discourse, governmentality and biopolitics, Tynan demonstrates how fashion and dress are implicated in maintaining collective identities. The discussion goes on to explore how subversive fashion practices challenge the forces that seek to normalize power over bodies. By theorizing the body as target of power in modernity, Foucault has given scholars and students of fashion studies scope to consider how dress can unite communities, but also how it divides them.

Chapter 12: Niklas Luhmann (1927–1998)

The work of German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has been fashionable in the social sciences and humanities since the 1990s. Sociologists, philosophers and literary scholars see the values of his universalistic project to

explain all things social. Indeed, his 'super theory' offers a general theory of social systems. Luhmann's project renewed the sociological systems theory tradition through the idea of 'autopoiesis' or self-producing systems, by which he aimed to embrace both constructivism and universalism. Luhmann's thought has been relatively understudied in the field of fashion studies, and Aurélie Van de Peer sets out to show how Luhmann's systems theory can offer a fruitful approach to fashion. Rather than explaining in detail Luhmann's framework, which he has gradually developed in over 50 books, she discusses several key ideas that are central to his thought and can be of particular relevance to the study of fashion. These key ideas refer to modern society as a functionally differentiated social system and the centrality of communication. Van de Peer wonders whether in such a society fashion has become an autonomous and autopoietic subsystem with its own paradoxes. If indeed a subsystem of fashion operates by following its own rationality, this has the potential to re-address what numerous fashion scholars have argued before: that fashion has been unrightfully treated with contempt.

Chapter 13: Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007)

One of the major thinkers of post-modernism, Jean Baudrillard blended neo-Marxist, psychoanalytic and post-semiotic linguistics insights to develop a theory of consumption based not on the fulfilment of needs or desires in objects, but on our relation to objects as a discursive system. In this system, objects function like 'signs' fulfilling insatiable desire for the image as a symbolic object. Efrat Tseëlon's analysis of the meaning of fashion in European history uses Baudrillard's three orders of signification of objects from a referential to a self-referential system. The first order of the pre-modern period is founded on imitation. It presupposes dualism in which appearances *reflect* reality, and clothes index social hierarchy. The second order of modernity is founded on production. Mechanization and urbanization made mass-produced clothes available to all classes simultaneously in fabrics and styles formerly reserved only for nobility. Consequently, people could claim a status which wasn't theirs: that is where appearances *mask* reality. The third order of post-modernity, as Tseëlon discusses, is founded on simulation: appearances no longer connect to underlying reality. They stop signifying and replace communication with seduction. They become a playful spectacle of artifice and signs that no longer signify anything, as when religious or national symbols are appropriated for their aesthetic, not symbolic value. In fact, at this stage, appearances *invent* reality.

Chapter 14: Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)

In her chapter on Pierre Bourdieu, Agnès Rocamora shows that the French sociologist's influential work provides invaluable tools for interrogating the topic of fashion. She introduces the readers to his key notions of field, cultural capital and habitus, which she also discusses in relation to Bourdieu's own work on the 1970s French field of high fashion. She then turns to his seminal book *Distinction*, where he insists on the importance of approaching the issue of taste through the lens of class, reminding us of the social and cultural forces at play in judgements of taste, such as tastes in fashion. Like many other thinkers discussed in this book Bourdieu wanted to denaturalize the processes and values which culture has turned into nature. In the remainder of the chapter, Rocamora appropriates Bourdieu's theoretical framework to look at fashion blogging. She discusses the relation between the traditional field of fashion journalism and that of fashion blogging to shed light on the changing nature of the contemporary fashion media.

Chapter 15: Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

Derrida has been one of the most significant thinkers to have addressed the insights of linguistics for theory in general, while questioning attempts to make definitive systems of these theories. It is this insistence not only on the importance of language to theory, but on the openness of all theory to the ambiguities and undecidable confusions of language which have made him a key *post*-structuralist thinker. Alison Gill takes on the challenge of revealing the relevance of Derrida's thought for fashion studies. Her chapter identifies examples where fashion designers appear to critically dismantle the principles of garment making. She first outlines the key features of deconstruction in philosophy, with a focus on the emergence of concepts such as text, trace and double-thinking. She shows how these can be relevant to an alternative thinking about fashion design, one that courts the expression of failure and acts out instability. In the second part of the chapter Gill identifies instabilities in fashion designs that challenge conventional notions of authorship, innovation and fashion history. Derridean thought about textual construction and deconstruction can help make sense of Maison Martin Margiela's unconventional analysis of fashion's very foundations in the materials, structure, techniques and construction of garments. The chapter discusses how to 'put under erasure' fashion's insistent drive to produce collections in line with a commercial system that prizes the aesthetic idealism of innovation, spectacle and seamlessness at a dizzying seasonal pace and a predictable relationship with time.

Chapter 16: Bruno Latour (1947–)

Joanne Entwistle examines the work of French sociologist Bruno Latour. Latour's work has been influential within science and technology studies (STS) and is responsible for inaugurating actor-network-theory or ANT. His work is a radical critique of the major concepts within sociology, such as 'nature' and 'culture', and challenges the conventional notion of the social 'actor': for ANT actors can be human or non-human by virtue of their ability to impact on the networks within which they are entangled. Latour's attention to these networks or 'assemblages' requires close ethnographic observation to the extent that ANT/STS might be better thought of as a methodology. Although important, his work has been little applied beyond studies of science and laboratories. Emerging out of this ANT approach, Michel Callon's work develops the idea of markets as networks, illuminating how markets come together in particular assemblages. In this chapter, Entwistle analyses how Latour's approach can be applied to the analysis of fashion networks that combine human and non-human actors. This approach provides a useful way into understanding fashion markets as particular sorts of assemblages of actors, and Entwistle gives the example of her own research on fashion models and fashion buyers to illustrate the applications of this approach.

Chapter 17: Judith Butler (1956–)

Elizabeth Wissinger explains how Judith Butler's reading of philosophy and feminism posits a body stylized into existence through cultural practice that, while heavily reliant on discourse, still produce a lived, sexed, body. Troubling assumptions about the body's essential nature, Butler's work highlights how performative processes irrevocably fuse self, body and garment. As such, the body expresses its gender via pre-given codes that are nonetheless subject to constant negotiation. Radically destabilizing gender, and interrogating it through her study of gay subcultures, Butler's work helped a nascent queer studies movement gain momentum. At the same time, her notion that all gender is a performance lent new weight to the role of fashion in understanding feminist debates about embodiment. Butler's radical re-reading of psychology and semiotics, Wissinger argues, is also useful to critique long-standing assumptions about fashion's role in social life. Butler's central contribution is her rethinking of agency as no longer residing in the self-determined subject, but rather in the body's unruly tendency to exceed its boundaries, to 'matter' on its own terms.

NOTES

1   The *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, which one of the co-editors of this book – Agnès Rocamora – launched with Emanuela Mora and Paolo Volonté, was created to attend to the issue of the English language's domination of Fashion Studies and its internationalization, by allowing for the peer-reviewing of articles in all languages.

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