

80s 90s FACING BEAUTIES. Italian Fashion and Japanese Fashion at a Glance.

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Considerations After a Fashion Exhibit

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Fashion curation has become a central preoccupation within fashion studies. Several articles have been written on the subject - illustrating the development, ambivalences and controversies that such a practice entails: the controversy about Diana Vreeland (Steele 2008), the role of exhibitions within the “new fashion history” (M. Riegels 2011, C. Breward 2008), the theoretical (and visual) ambivalences in representing West and East in fashion (Fukai 2010).

Nowadays curation seems to be a particularly hot issue in fashion theory. The popularity of fashion in museums goes hand in hand with a new broader reception of what constitutes art, as well as a growing interest in fashion studies. (Fukai 2010b, Riegels 2011). Moving from dress museology to fashion museology entails a change into the practice and methodologies of curation (M. Riegels 2011). This is because fashion exhibits are more and more attracting people in museums and because, for both scholars and students, it is a way of experimenting with the materiality of fashion. It can be argued that there is a continuum, rather than a separation, between different ways in which fashion is exposed: retail, catwalk shows, fashion blogs are all involved in curation - that is in choosing the ways in which to transform cloths and garments into specific fashion statements.

On the other hand, the experience of professional fashion curators is totally crucial in deciding what is a *real* exhibit, and what it is just a communication device. In this sense the communication of the Chanel brand by Lagerfeld is a good example of the difficulty in separating marketing from art. But, at the end of the day, fashion exhibitions can be a site of innovative scholarship, while curating is shifting from the field of mere representation to a field of theoretical density.

A new branch, so to speak, of fashion curating, is in fact stemming from the academy and the fashion courses within the Universities. These exhibits are the result of in

depth research and they aim to be both entertaining and informative - with no other scope than being a tool for reasoning on the multiple facets of fashion history and fashion imagery. This is very interesting, especially in Italy, where exhibits can function as a substitute to a still missing proper fashion museum.

In the following paragraphs I will present the exhibition which I curated with the students of Fashion courses at Bologna University, Rimini Campus in October 2013.

The exhibition

The 80s-90s **FACING BEAUTIES** Italian Fashion and Japanese Fashion at a Glance exhibition explores the aesthetic, cultural and communicative innovations of the two important fashion systems at their peak during the 80's and 90's of the last century. The prêt-à-porter of Italian *stilisti* such as Armani, Versace, Ferré, Moschino, Coveri and the radical fashion of Japanese designers represented above all by Miyake, Kawakubo and Yamamoto, started with the famous fashion show of 1981 in Paris. During the 80's and 90's of the 20th Cent. fashion became a mass phenomenon; it established itself as an important sector of production, as a cultural industry and as one of the major instruments of communication. Japanese and Italian fashion came to represent the two main exponents of modern fashion, alongside the more traditional predominance of French fashion.

Despite the diversity of their histories and traditions, these two fashion trends share certain basic aspects at a time characterised by various forms of 'emancipation' from Paris. The subversion of traditional sartorial codes and of the rules of classic couture, the revisiting of male and female identity, the experimenting with materials and the exploration of new forms of design, distribution and consumption.

In those years, Italian and Japanese designers revolutionised the panorama fashion, each according to his own style and traditions, occasionally recovering but more often 'betraying' and turning them upside-down in ways that were sometimes similar, often completely different and occasionally complementary.

The exhibition opening was followed by a symposium with the participation of: prof. Akiko Kukai (Chief Curator, Kyoto Costume Institute), Romeo Gigli (Fashion

Designer), Antonio Mancinelli (Journalist and Fashion Writer), Attilio Mazzini (Archivi Mazzini), Lara Aragno (Fashion Historian).

The itinerary of the exhibition winds its way through the five rooms of the experimental space of the New Wing of the Rimini City Museum; each room focused on the themes in which Italian and Japanese designers were innovative precursors of the manners and trends which today constitute the heritage of the international culture of fashion. The last room is dedicated to the designer Romeo Gigli in whose work oriental and western style and aesthetic were combined.

The Archivio di Ricerca Mazzini of Massa Lombarda.

All the items of clothing in the exhibition – 130 pieces and 70 outfits – belong to the Archivio di Ricerca Mazzini in Massa Lombarda (Imola). Attilio Mazzini began collecting clothes in the late 70s of the last century, but it was during the 80s and 90s that his collection was notably enriched with pieces from diverse national and international sources. Today the Archivio Mazzini boasts more than 250,000 items of clothing and accessories which are used for stylistic consultancies. The Archivio receives many visits by fashion designers, businesses, fashion schools and professionals from all over the world. This is the first time that the pieces from the Archivio Mazzini, which is in practice a ‘museum in progress’, have been displayed in a didactic exhibition, designed in collaboration with students from the courses of Laurea Triennale in Culture e Tecniche della moda (BA) and Magistrale in Moda (MA) of the University of Bologna, Rimini Campus.

ROOM 1

DECONSTRUCTING FUNCTION: NEW SHAPES and FABRICS.

Outfits by Giorgio Armani and Issey Miyake.

Experimenting with materials and fibres and unusual accompanying of fabrics have made a profound impression on the forms of clothing and on the anthropology of dressing. Giorgio Armani and Issey Miyake, in different ways were the chief

exponents of the deconstruction of sartorial traditions, particularly through a new and never seen before use of natural, synthetic and artificial.

Giorgio Armani has adopted the traditional fabrics of men's fashion to re-invent women's suits and has feminised the man's suit by deconstructing the jacket. By combining opposing concepts such as coarse and fine, structured and loose, smart and sporting, male and female, Armani infused his fabrics with and unprecedented elegance and glamour.

"Polyester was embraced by the Japanese when Paris Couture was embalmed in a cocoon of silk" wrote the American journalist Suzy Menkes, underlining the innovation which had characterised Issey Miyake beginning with the meeting of the natural with the artificial. His modern and functional clothes made of single pieces fully represent his constant interest in the interaction between body, materials and the space which is formed between body and item of clothing (in Japanese: *ma*), as in his project: 'Pleats Please.'

ROOM 2

DRESSING DOWN/DRESSING THE PART:

CONCEAL/REVEAL.

Outfits by: Baila, Comme des Garçons, Enrico Coveri, Dolce & Gabbana, Gianfranco Ferré, Genny, Krizia, Issey Miyake, Moschino, Prada, Valentino, Gianni Versace.

The Aesthetics of Poverty (Japanese) vs Glamour (Italian).

The quiet uniformity, elitist and hermetic, of the Japanese contrasts with the blazing ostentation of the human body which characterises much of the output of Italian prêt-à-porter.

Japanese designers prefer understatement and offer a cerebral fashion, with asymmetrical cuts and with a visual imbalance, disconnected from the situations where it might be worn by a woman wanting to please above all herself.

By contrast, the principal connotations of the new Italian prêt-a-porter were of clothing for specific occasions: for daytime and for eveningwear, for work and for leisure, for

cruises and for travel, for country, for seaside and for the mountains; always in the name of glamour and seduction.

ROOM 3

BLACK and GRAPHICS: NEW CHROMATIC and ORNAMENTAL CODES.

Outfits by: Comme des Garçons, Gianfranco Ferré, Krizia, Missoni, Issey Miyake, Moschino, Gianni Versace, Yohji Yamamoto.

Black is modest and arrogant at the same time. Black is lazy and easy - but mysterious. But above all black says this: I don't bother you - don't bother me.

Yohji Yamamoto

Color spells Happiness. I learned from Enrico Coveri that colour means merriness and this was why he was the winner hands-down, because he managed to convey colour even when using grey: a magnificent thing.

Francesco Martini Coveri

The colour black completely dominates the early collections of Yamamoto and Kawakubo.

Patricia Mears writes that for the West, black has signified dignity and pathos, but for the Japanese it symbolised secretiveness, furtiveness and artifice.

The re-invention of the colour black by Japanese designers, that is to say a use that is completely different from both western and oriental sartorial traditions is one of the cornerstones of the Japanese revolution in fashion.

From the 80s onwards, as a consequence of the new use of this colour/non-colour, almost an absence more than a presence, black has moved definitively into the area of daily dress.

For Italian stylists colour, signs, contrasts, unusual combinations of colour and shape are decorative forms which go well beyond the surface and are a full expression of the triumph of the body and of the total look, of the effervescent, visionary and provocative mood made of re-visiting and irony.

Colour, decoration and prints have sanctioned the lightness of the democratic revolution which Italian style, with Milan as the capital of prêt-à-porter, has represented in fashion's new culture. An ever more international prêt-à-porter which has become known as 'made in Italy.'

ROOM 4

THE QUIET REVOLUTION: AMERICAN GIGOLOS and ANDROGYNOUS DANDIES.

Outfits by: Giorgio Armani, Comme des Garçons, Gianfranco Ferré, Matsuda, Missoni, Prada, Stone Island, Gianni Versace, Yohji Yamamoto.

Both Japanese and Italian fashion designers have contributed to the re-definition and transformation in depth of the male aesthetic, putting forward the image of a man who has put behind him once-and-for-all the 'Great Renunciation' of nineteenth century bourgeois man as theorised by the German psychologist John C. Flugel.

A new era opens with the feminisation of the male, or to put it another way, his entry into fields until then belonging almost exclusively to women, such as fashion and body care.

ROOM 5

ROMEO GIGLI: WEST MEETS EAST - EXCHANGE and CONTAMINATION.

Outfits by Romeo Gigli.

To the shameless sensuality of Versace woman and to the wide shoulders of the powerful Armani woman, Romeo Gigli opposes a subtle, fragile and cerebral femininity evoking the Japanese vision of feminine beauty. A careful connoisseur of the history of fashion and costume, both western and non-western, Gigli may be considered as the go-between of Japanese and Italian fashion of the 80s and 90s.

The Classification of the Garments.

Garments have been classified according to a methodology especially designed for the exhibition, aimed at describing the cultural biography of each garment.

Besides the general information - as brand/designer, type of garment, collection and date - it is indicated the origin of the garment before the Archivi di Ricerca Mazzini found/acquired it, and the presence of the garment on traditional and new media.

80s-90s Facing Beauties is an exhibition curated by Simona Segre Reinach with Ma and Ba students. Space Set Up and Graphics: Gioia Russo and Leandro Palanghi.

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She has written on fashion from a global perspective in the books, such as *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (2010), *The Fashion History Reader* (2010), as well as published articles in *Fashion Theory*, *Fashion Practice*, *Business and Economic History*, and *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*.

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She sits in the Editorial Board of *Fashion Theory*, *Dress Cultures*, *The International Journal of Fashion Studies*. She has been involved in the recent debates over future directions in fashion studies (Rimini University and Warwick University).

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