



CULTURES OF CONSUMPTION PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES

ABSTRACT

Clothing Desire

Christopher Breward,

Professor of Historical and Cultural Studies, London College of Fashion

Fashion producers and consumers are often caricatured as feckless, narcissistic dupes in thrall to irrational impulses. Contemporary western culture, in this view, has simply come to mirror fashion's solipsistic obsessions, with apocalyptic results. Professor Breward takes this position to task, arguing that a more nuanced exploration of the relationships between place, identity and the production and representation of fashion can provide a stimulating insight into the formation of historical and contemporary cultures of consumption. Focusing on the iconic figure of the 1960s 'Dolly Bird' he traces the ways in which fashion consumers have been framed both as progressive ciphers for personal and political emancipation and as agents of more reactionary, nostalgic and sentimental assumptions. In the end it is that tension between individualism and commodification, which has continually generated new versions of urban fashionability. Fashion here emerges as a field which stresses diversity, contingency and mystery.

BIOGRAPHY

Christopher Breward has been at the vanguard of the new fashion history. He has published widely on the culture of dress, masculinity and consumption and the development of the fashion city. He has been curator of fashion exhibitions at the British Council and the Museum of London. He is Chair of the Design History Society and co-director with Dr David Gilbert (Royal Holloway) of the Cultures of Consumption project "Shopping Routes: Networks of Fashion Consumption in London's West End 1945–1979."