



The Haunted Self: Melancholy in Fashion and the Body

HARRIETTE R. RICHARDS

DATE

Thursday 12 November

TIME

11.30am – 1pm

VENUE

EB.3.17, Parramatta (South) Campus

Please check
westernsydney.edu.au/ics/events
for the latest details.

NEXT SEMINAR

19 November

Christiane Kühling

'Photography in India'

ABSTRACT

The theme of melancholy as an aesthetic quality has been applied to and expressed within all manner of artistic production, from music and film to painting and literature. However, it seems that melancholy and fashion fit together in a wholly unique and exceptional way. In order to explore this extraordinary relationship, this research considers the haunted nature of fashion by way of an examination of the intimate connection fashion has to the body. What makes dress so significantly affective is that it is experienced bodily, physically associative, even when divorced from the body. Both dress and the body are sites of unease and ambiguity, ultimately unsettling. Elizabeth Wilson (1985) describes the unease felt in a museum of costume: "A dusty silence holds still the old gowns in glass cabinets. In the aquatic half light (to preserve the fragile stuffs) the deserted gallery seems *haunted*. The living observer moves, with a sense of mounting panic, through a world of the dead." In relation to the body, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1976) notes that unlike things, which are in space, the body "inhabits or *haunts* space." The connection between fashion and the body is undeniable. This research explores how this connection, this embedded relationship, is bound in melancholy.

In considering fashion as an especially melancholy form of aesthetic production, this research considers fashion from a structural perspective. In doing so, we do not mean to put aside questions of melancholy in the content of fashion; rather in understanding the haunted nature of fashion and the body we are better able to explore the melancholic tone of fashion styles that deal particularly with themes such as darkness, deathliness, loss and the sombre romantic gothic.

BIOGRAPHY

Harriette Richards is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Culture and Society. Her background is in political science, international relations and sociology. Her current research is a philosophical analysis of the relationship of fashion and melancholy, considering the aesthetics of sartorial re-presentation in the antipodes, particularly within the context Aotearoa New Zealand.



Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Photograph © Sølve Sundsbø / Art + Commerce