

Response to Lou Taylor's review of *Fashion: Critical and Primary Sources*

Peter McNeill

It is gratifying to receive such a positive response from one of the leading scholars of dress and clothing in the contemporary academy. It was particularly pleasing that Professor Taylor suggests that my four-volume work manages to convey some of the *valences*, the interactions and ambiguities of the field. As the reviewer states, it is very challenging to focus on garments and styles 'when the entire four volumes have no images'. This was a condition of publication, and was something of a challenge for an art and design historian who frequently creates arguments from images.

Professor Taylor is expert in the nineteenth amongst other centuries and I was particularly interested to read her assessment of that part of the volume. The 'corset' debate was deliberately included as the style of argumentation batted back and forth in the 1970s seemed to me to be a genre of academic writing that has disappeared in our more polite and anodyne age. I was a little surprised that although Professor Taylor seemed to sigh a little at the 'inevitable' corset debate, she went on to explain at length how significant this was in popular debates over dress in the 1930s, indeed even in the work of her mother. I was also surprised to read that I seemed not so interested in the 'amateur' tradition of writing about dress when I included quite deliberately works by Heard, Gill, etc to demonstrate how embedded were debates about dress in general intellectual and cultural life. I also mentioned an anecdote in which the brilliant scholar Elizabeth Wilson described herself as the 'last fashion amateur'. The comment about my dating of Bogatyrev seemed a tad unfair as its original date and its place of publication is clearly indicated in Vol. IV at p. xxi and the publisher insisted upon the copyrighted dates of translations. It is possibly correct that this essay stands out amongst the other writings 'as there is no coverage of nineteenth and twentieth century peasant, or regional dress' – but that is why it was deliberately included, to alert readers to this domain. At times I have used essays to act as alerts, cues or punctuation points.

A few comments about material culture. It is very challenging to find a piece of writing by a museum curator without images. Most scholars of material culture work from the premise that the artefact informs the argument. I was subsequently unable to republish the work of Miller and Palmer, who are the PhD students of Taylor. But I wrote a prominent justification of the approach of Taylor herself in her fine piece of writing on 19th-century light woollens for women's dress, and also attempted to convey the realm of material culture via articles on Renaissance needlework, the Kashmir shawl, second hand clothes in Zambia (which is perhaps more of an ethnography), and Vionnet and the magic of drape.

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It was a great privilege to have the volumes reviewed by Professor Taylor, or Lou as she is often called within the community. She has trained a generation of scholars and done much to bring together the discursive operation of ideas and the sheer joy of confronting materiality. I was also gratified that the volumes were judged 'Best Anthology or Edited Book' by the Art Historians of Australasia (the AAANZ) at the 2010 Adelaide conference. The hard slog in a Swedish Winter hurts less in retrospect.

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