

Reading Log 11:

Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Chapters 1, 2, 9.

Alan Hunt is Professor of Sociology and Law at Ottawa's Carleton University. In this book, he seeks to develop limitations he perceived in his previous research into Michel Foucault and the ways in which societies govern themselves. He does this by attempting to look at what he calls the sociology of governance, specifically the social regulation of clothing.

Unfortunately, Hunt's backgrounds in law and sociology do not lend themselves to this sort of ambitious, if not unwieldy, project. While Hunt sets out to map the development of sumptuary laws in human societies, he fails to base his research upon a sound methodological approach. First, his temporal scope is too large: he seeks to trace an evolution that spans antiquity to the present. Second, his geographical parameters are too wide: he purports to present evidence not only from England, France, and Italy, but equally China and Japan. Perhaps some future researcher will possess the skills necessary to perform such tasks; Hunt does not. Just as he is completely unschooled in the historical contexts of European antiquity and dynastic China or imperial Japan, he is also completely dependant upon English language scholarship. This synthetic approach is dangerous as the author is unable to corroborate his findings. Perhaps most disturbing of all, however, is Hunt's desire to present sumptuary legislation as coherent. The author leaves his reader with a sense that all sumptuary legislation is somehow connected. He fails to take into account different social, geographic or historical forces that might have influenced different types of legislation at different times. These criticisms are not unique to my reading; they have been summarized also in the book review by Clare Crowston in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 103, 5 (1998): 1474-1477.

Hunt under-utilizes extant medieval scholarship and makes only passing, superficial references to the far more thorough work carried out, for example, by Diane Owen-Hughes (see logs 1, 3, and 15). His contribution to the existing body of research is limited, as is the impact his book made on me. Still, I will be able to use it in my research as a reference tool only as it

contains a general breakdown of pan-European clothing laws across the centuries. As a result of the problems mentioned, I doubt I will cite Hunt in my essay.

Additional Source:

Diane Owen-Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews, and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," *Past & Present* 112: 3 – 59.

SAMPLE READING LOG