

A methodological approach to the materiality of clothing: Wardrobe studies

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The material is not just ‘a carrier’ of different types of symbols, but an active element in the practices. Bringing this to the fore requires new research methods. This article discusses a methodological approach, we call it a wardrobe study, which allows for the analysis of the way in which clothes relate to each other on the whole or within parts of the wardrobe. More specifically, we discuss how this method can contribute to increasing the materiality of clothes studies. The theoretical point of departure for this approach is a practice theory in which the material enters as an integral part. First, the article briefly discusses developments within the study of dress and fashion. Second, the methods combined and developed in wardrobe studies are discussed. The emphasis here is primarily not only on the weaknesses of the individual methods in practice-oriented dress studies, but also on how they jointly can contribute to the wardrobe study.

Keywords: method; materiality; clothes; wardrobe

Introduction

In this article, we will discuss the analyses of relationships between clothes and between the clothes and the user through a method, which we call as the wardrobe studies. More specifically, we will discuss how this method can contribute to increasing the material element – as opposed to the symbolic element – and how this method may be a fruitful approach to other research fields. Wardrobe studies are a methodological approach that analyses the way in which clothes relate to each other on the whole or in parts of the wardrobe. The term wardrobe may be taken literally or metaphorically as one may have a number of wardrobes for various occasions and situations. Some may be for social functions, work, or exercise. Others may be for different aspects of ourselves, as indicated by the expression ‘out of the closet’ in relation to homosexual men. These different wardrobes may, but will not necessarily, be physically distinct or mutually exclusive.

We will begin by discussing developments within the study of dress and fashion. In the effort to make these studies more based on the material and physical as opposed to symbolic element, the focus is on the relationship between the body and the clothes. As an alternative approach, we propose the study of the relationship of clothes to other clothes within a greater whole (the wardrobe) as a way to highlight the materiality of clothing. The theoretical point of departure for this approach is a

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practice theory in which the material enters as an integral part (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Second, the methods combined and developed in wardrobe studies are discussed. This is illustrated with examples from studies from The Norwegian Institute of Consumer Research (Statens institutt for forbruksforskning [SIFO]). The project touches on different kinds of wardrobes: work wear in male-dominated manual jobs, sportswear and leisurewear, and clothes that are no longer used.

Clothing and materiality

In just a few years, the study of dress and fashion has changed from being scattered between a number of disciplines and institutions into a field of study with a high degree of international exchange, unifying institutions, and publishing channels. At the same time as fashion studies were changing, focus on materiality and the human body increased. The connection between the material and the body, both developing as a research area around the same time, inspired the emerging field of dress and fashion studies and opened a rich field of research. Dress and fashion studies are now an interdisciplinary field that encompasses a number of different approaches and, therefore, also a variety of methods.

Clothes are a suitable subject for the study of the relationship between the body and the materiality as they break down the distinction between nature and culture (Wilson, 1985). In social theory, interest in the body has in part been attributed to the rise of consumer culture (Fraser & Greco, 2005; Howson, 2004; Shilling, 2004). This development sparked renewed interest in earlier research on the importance of the body for social interaction (Bourdieu, 1984; Elias, 1982; Foucault, 1979; Goffman, 1963; Mauss, 1979). Clothes have the ability to transform the body (Andrewes, 2005) and can be seen and studied as 'lived garments' (e.g. Kuchler & Miller, 2005; Miller, 2005). Anthropologists, such as Tim Ingold, Igor Kopytoff, and Arjun Appadurai, contributed to an understanding of the biography and commoditisation of 'things.' Within consumer research, books from Campbell (1987); Douglas and Isherwood (1979); Miller (1987); Slater (1997) were important in increasing the understanding of consumption as a relationship between the social and the material.

The focus on the body in exploring the materiality of clothes has contributed to the exclusion of other perspectives of the material. According to Taylor (1998, p. 238), an important divide is between the object-centered methods and the curator/collectors vs. 'academic' social/economic history and cultural theory approaches. Like much other social research, the latter has been dominated by textual analysis and qualitative interviews, methods are dependent on verbal statements. Since the material is verbal, analysis and text production seems easier, but it also limits what these methods are suited to analyzing.

Moore and Sanders (2006, p. 11) recognize the translation of the nonlinguistic, such as practices tied to clothing, through the medium of language as a main challenge. Much of what concerns our clothes practices will be 'tacit knowledge.' Clothes are involved in a number of everyday routines (Gronow & Warde, 2001) that, among other things, are characterized by being automated and thus invisible even to the person who practices them. Our 'body' feels when something is wrong, but it is to a lesser extent able to explain why (Klepp, 2008). One of the scientific problems in studies of materiality is to grasp the nonverbalized experiences and to

translate the nonverbalized experiences of clothes in use into written academic language.

Wardrobe studies

In English the term wardrobe has two meanings: one refers to spaces of storage and the other to a collection of clothes. The first meaning is also covered by the term closet (Hansen, 2000, p. 102). This duality not only points to the clothes, but also points to the material frames within which they are kept. These frames refer not only to the physical walls of the closet, but also to an entire structure of different storage spaces with corresponding criteria for where and what clothes should be kept and how clothes should be moved between them. Maintenance, cleanliness, acquisition, and disposal are parts of that structure, as is the practice of dressing in which garments and accessories are chosen and put together.

Wardrobe studies as a method are developed within an understanding of practice where materiality is at the core. The term practice is here understood as a fundamental unit of social existence. It is redeveloped from central works of a range of great social researchers such as Bourdieu (1984); de Certeau (1984); Giddens (1984); Foucault (1979). Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) has defined practice in relation to materiality as 'a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another' in which 'things' and their use is an integral part. As Shove and Pantzar (2005) write, 'all practice has a material aspect.' Practice theory therefore decenters the central objects of dominant social theories – minds, text, and conversations – and instead emphasizes bodily movements, things, practical knowledge, and routine (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 259).

In order to get a better understanding of how clothes are used and why, we need better knowledge of the material framework of everyday dress practices, whether for work, leisure, sports, or social events. Our contribution is to address this as a methodological challenge where we build on well-known methods and close dialog with a network of interested and competent researchers.¹ Due to its emphasis upon practices and attempt to grasp materiality, this combination of methods may also be used within consumer studies, design studies, business studies (marketing and user-centered innovation), cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and by anyone who is interested in the micro-dynamics of everyday life. The material is not just 'a carrier' of different types of symbols, but an active element in the practices (Latour, 1996). Bringing this to the fore requires new methods.

A four-cornered closet

The wardrobe study consists of an inventory of clothes in a wardrobe. Much like Woodward (2007) has done by studying the process of finding clothes that fit through a fieldwork entailed sitting on a bed and observing young women getting dressed. We follow the material frames for practices: the clothes, the wardrobes, the laundry baskets, and the uniform storage rooms. The goal is to look at the relationship between the individual item of clothing and the larger material totalities. This approach is of course not new. It is at the core of what is called the Diderot effect (McCracken, 1988): if you paint the wall you immediately notice that the floor looks more worn. Yet the focus on the relationship between individual objects and

Table 1. An overview of the methods combined in wardrobe studies.

Method	Dominant discipline	Limitations	Scope
Interview	Sociology	Language based	Narratives, interpretations
Fieldwork	Anthropology	Generalizability, access	Context
Inventories/ records	Ethnology	Relationship between part and whole	Relationship between part and whole
Laboratory testing	Textile engineering	The isolated reality of the laboratory	Technical qualities

series is also very relevant in a more concrete sense (Brük, 1995). A first rate ski boot is useless without its twin, just like a suit jacket without its matching trousers.

The method combines and preserves well-known methods such as qualitative research interviews, field work, inventories, and laboratory testing. In Table 1 they are presented in order from the most language-based to the methods that use clothes as study objects. Inventories and records are methods that are particularly important in museums and collections. In our use of these methods, we refer primarily to the ethnological tradition. We will look at some of the limitations of these methods along with the contribution of wardrobe studies.

Table 2. An overview of the projects from which the examples in the text are taken.

Project name	Goal	Scope
Clothing Disposal <i>Why are clothes disposed of? Disposal seen in relation to women's' clothing habits</i>	Why and how do Norwegian women around the age of 40 dispose of their clothes?	Clothes that women have stopped using
Textile Waste <i>From waste to material resources in a cradle perspective – A stakeholder approach to the textile value chain</i>	How can a multidisciplinary approach to waste reduction contribute to reducing the material flow and turning waste into material resources?	Clothes that families have stopped using
Leisure Wear <i>Leisure and Sustainable Development: part of the problem or part of the solution?</i>	Explain the increase in consumption within the sports and leisurewear market in Norway. Map the environmental discourses and discuss the barriers for participation	Clothes used in families for three main activities: Skiing, Bicycling Walking/ running
Uni-Form <i>Work clothes for women in male dominated occupations</i>	Develop competence based products for women in construction, industry, offshore, fisheries, handicraft and the army	Clothes used for work in the relevant occupations
Norwegian Wool <i>Valuing Norwegian Wool</i>	How is wool used in Norway and England?	Clothes made of wool or wool blends in the wardrobes of whole families

Concrete examples are taken from four studies conducted at SIFO. An overview of this material is found in Table 2. Since wardrobes by their very nature are changeable and complex and therefore hard to pin down, we have made an effort to establish a fixed point or a scope for all the projects. This makes it easier to set something in relief against a broader context and to make comparisons.

Interviews: narratives and interpretations

Interviews provide a great amount of information and a rich access to people's knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and discourses. However, interviews only produce material on how clothes are discussed in the context of the interview. The fact that other contexts may produce different discussions about the same clothes (Storm-Mathisen, 2008) and that conclusions of actual use cannot be drawn from these interviews are frequently discussed in methodology literature, but easily overlooked. In wardrobe studies, interviews are used both as a supplement and as an integrated part of the method.

The use of audio recording, interview guides, transcriptions, and descriptions of the interview context and different qualitative and quantitative analytical tools are all part of the wardrobe study and taken from this specific methodological tradition. However, in the wardrobe study questions are directly tied to each individual garment and asked again and again. In this way the conversation with the informants is directed from the general – and therefore often more ideological – to something concrete and related to practice. The wardrobe study is less a conversation about abstract issues and subjects and more narratives of individual garments and specific events. With their physical presence they remind the informant about specific considerations, experiences, emotions, etc. A parallel to this is 'Talking-whilst-walking interviews' (Hitchings & Jones, 2004). These also allow for a co-fabrication of data between researcher and subject, with a reference to the material surroundings. Researching a topic that involves encounters between humans and their material surroundings, while moving together in the actual surroundings under scrutiny, help to stimulate communication and the ability to describe experiences (Waite, Gill, & Head, 2009).

An example of this ability of wardrobe studies to stimulate rich descriptions and stories comes from the study of leisurewear, where the researcher asked the informants to show him/her all the clothes they had in the house for the selected activities (see Table 2). Faced with a mountain of gloves, all for downhill cycling, the father tries to answer the question of who owns what. 'No, some of them are mine and some of them are Christopher's (the son). I don't really remember.' Mother then adds: 'Christopher remembers everything. He (the father) is not allowed to use his. He is really strict: 'Have you taken my gloves!' (the mother). The information that emerges is concrete and rich. It is unlikely that we would have thought to ask in an interview situation whether there were different perceptions of who may use what in the family, and if we had, it is quite likely that the information would have been more general.

In anthropological discussions of notation techniques and their significance, one of the debated issues is the way in which our memory makes recollections more general and less specific and concrete (Nielsen, 1996). In the same way that notes help evoke memories from fieldwork it is possible to use objects and photographs to evoke informants' stories and memories, as we saw in the example of the gloves.

This has also been discussed in connection with ethnological analyses (Ljungström, 1990) where the point is that the objects, which are historical and contemporary at the same time, evoke memories, emotions, and thus produce thicker descriptions. A related idea is found within recent materiality studies in the form of presence theory (Damsholt, Simonsen, & Mordhorst, 2009). Literary historian Gumbrecht (1997) tries to show how our experience of our surroundings is not only formed by the significance we attach to it. A different and more fundamental dimension is the way in which we ‘perceive’ our surroundings on a nonverbal level. Wardrobe studies use the presence of the object in two ways. The clothes are present and thus influence the informants’ memories and narratives. Secondly, recording, photographing, and even handling the object itself contribute to the researcher’s recollection and empathy, and provide opportunity for new knowledge.

Another characteristic of the wardrobe study is that the same information is gathered for many pieces of clothing, which enables a quantitative analysis of the material. One example of this is the study of clothes that women have discarded wherein they have estimated the time of acquisition for all clothes and when they were last used. Against the background of this information, the lifecycle of the piece of clothing is constructed. Different lifecycles can be compared to each other within the wardrobe or to other clothes. There is little reason to believe that people know how long their clothes, on average, sit idly between uses or what percent of the discarded clothes have never been used, even if we had asked. Interviews vs. wardrobe studies paint the picture of the wardrobes differently. An example of this can be found in the wardrobe studies connected to ‘Valuing Norwegian wool’ (see Table 2). In the interviews, sweaters, above all other garments, were most connected to wool and were the first garments both the Norwegian and the British informants talk about. However, when we took a closer look into the wardrobes in Norway, it was clear that they were actually dominated by woollen long underwear. Undergarments and socks made up 43% of the wardrobes, while sweaters and jacket/cardigans only consisted of 22% of the clothes in the three Norwegian wardrobes. Woollen undergarments do not exist in the British wardrobes. The interviews therefore give a more similar picture than the wardrobe studies when comparing the families of the two countries (Hebrok, Klepp, & Turney, 2013).

Fieldwork: generalization and access

The anthropological fieldwork encompasses a range of different methods. Fieldwork is well suited to ‘getting beyond the words’ (Hastrup, 1992). A lot of the technique concerns acquiring knowledge of the ‘secret society,’ be it invisible, hidden, unconscious, wordless, dispersed, buried in the body, repressed, denied, or managed (Nielsen, 1996). The fieldwork thereby solves some of the problems that the interview raised.

Fieldwork can be used both as a part of and as a method in combination with the wardrobe study. The study of work wear and uniforms involves this combination of methods. The fieldwork in ‘Uni-Form’ (see Table 2) was done in different male-dominated manual occupations, such as construction, industrial sites, handicraft, fishing, and onboard Norwegian marine vessels. These sites enabled observation of variation in dress and types of work wear – in addition to the relations that the clothes engaged in – gender, work, and social integration. In the wardrobe study, ‘the field’ consisted of wardrobes, hangers, lockers, and drawers limited to

the work site. Here the different clothes used at work were brought forth, registered, photographed, and discussed.

In this study, female workers generally downplayed the importance of femininity and appearances in the work context during interviews. However, facing the clothes directly showed that the clothes most often in use were those they felt looked good on them both in terms of fit and esthetics, leading the female workers to stress the importance of being feminine and wanting to 'look as good as [they] could.' As such, appearance and gender, though initially found to be subordinate qualities, turned to have a great impact upon the female workers' dress practices. Focusing on the wardrobe and tying verbal expressions of the clothes in use closer to the actual garments leads to a study that incorporates material realities to a much larger degree.

One problem with fieldwork is that rich descriptions and analyses are difficult to compare and use for generalizations. Another problem is that fieldwork presupposes a particular access to a particular kind of 'visibility,' namely what can be observed, smelled, tasted, etc. somewhere (field), be it physical or virtual. Woodward's (2007) fieldwork, where she has sat on the bed and observed the informant's getting dressed, was a method that would not have been possible if the subjects had been middle-aged husbands and wives. She pushed frontier of what is closed to direct observation in our culture. In wardrobe studies, access is a problem and it has not only to do with the borders of intimacy. The wardrobe is also closed in a more literal sense. What is taken out of the wardrobe has a relation to what is hidden within. Access to the field may be closed for other reasons, too, such as security policies on an oil platform.

Generalizability is a problem in the fieldwork method that is not specific to wardrobe studies. However, it may be the case that the need for comparable knowledge is greater. The study of dress and fashion is a relatively new research field and statistics are not particularly developed. There will hence be less common knowledge to which studies can be related. The textile industry and fashion are global phenomena, whereas clothes practices are indeed one of the things that constitute differences (Melchior, 2008). As the example of wool in the Norwegian and British wardrobes shows, such comparisons reveal fewer differences when they are based solely on the way clothes are spoken of in interviews and other language-based sources.

In the work of going through the clothes, it becomes clear where the borders for other people's access are laid. In this way, we not only gain knowledge about the categories and distinctions that the informants are consciously aware of, but also about how the clothes are actually categorized and prioritized spatially and mentally. This process makes the informants aware of the clothes in new ways, as the example of the man with clothes for cycling showed. They had more cycling gear than he was even aware of.

Inventory and catalog: traces of practice

Object-based research consists of the meticulous study and recording of objects' form, material, condition, and distribution. This gives information about the production, such as whom, where, and when objects are made as well as what has happened since. Critique of such studies focuses on the lack of theories and perspectives. This kind of critique also applies to ethnology, a research field that

was developed in close relation to the cultural history museums and the idea of saving and conserving the popular culture.

In the modernization of ethnology, there has been a great deal of discussion around the relation to the material, both in terms of the extent to which the field has moved away from the material cultural objects as sources and to what extent the material is interesting in itself or just a means of acquiring knowledge about people (Brück, 1995). Both questions are rendered superfluous by the insistence of practice theory on the material as an inherent part of practice. Nascent elements of this thinking can be found in early ethnology's view of the material as a 'result of action and part of action,' without the consequences being fully realized. An important lesson from ethnology is how material objects pass on culture (Grimstad, 1991; Klepp, 1980) and traditions are created culturally, without direct contact between people. Objects are 'direct remnants of a cultural situation and historical reality' (Pedersen, 1991). Therefore, they can provide information about actions that took place in a different time. This aspect, too, is addressed in newer studies of materiality and presence by Gumbrecht (1997) and Runia (2006).

The anachronistic aspect of the material makes it suited both to studies of contemporaneity and cultural inconsistency as well as to the tracing of ideologies and practices from other times and places, as is done in both archaeology and forensics. Even if cataloging has a scientific-historical place in abandoned positivist ideas of charting the cultural totality, many studies with a more hermeneutic approach could benefit from increased systematic registration. This allows for a reduced distinction between quantitative and qualitative researches.

Registration within wardrobe studies may include everything from simple numbering and photography to a full gathering of clothes that enable different forms of further analysis. In the registration process, the informant's stories about the individual garments and combinations are central, but so is information such as the state of the garment, its brand, and where it is placed within or outside the wardrobe. The wardrobe study of women and uniforms entailed registering each daily outfit, taking the women aside from their work to talk to them more intimately about their work clothes and looking into their wardrobes. The latter allowed us to see the variation of clothes as well as the physical form of the wardrobe in order to address a number of related questions: where were the clothes kept – in a locker, in a dressing room? Did they have their own dressing rooms? Were the clothes locked up? Were there separate places for dirty and clean clothes? What did the wardrobes contain and were the clothes taken home or kept at work? Were there any differences between the male wardrobes and the female ones?

The registration process ensures a minimum amount of common information about all garments included in the analysis. This makes it possible to see the garments in connection. Yet, one problem in all of the projects is the scope of this work and the wish for both systematic order and totality. We experienced difficulties in making clear delimitations. Still, we think that the efforts to do so have yielded great opportunities. There are surprisingly large variations between the different wardrobes. In the Textile Waste project, for example, discarding was registered for a period of six months (see Table 2). On average, informants discarded 18, 4 garments, yet one man in his 50s did not discard a single garment, whereas a seven-year-old girl stopped using 54 garments. In the study of sportswear, there were great variations as well. One family who were actively pursuing outdoor activities still did not have the right 'specialized' gear, but borrowed or used their every-

day clothes. Those who had the most clothes had up to 40 garments per person for one single activity. One family of four had around 200 garments in total for the walking, running, biking, and skiing. As mentioned above, there were differences between British and Norwegian families when it came to amount of undergarments and total woollen objects in general. While three Norwegian families had a total of 522 woollen garments, the British families of the same size and economic background had only 91 woollen garments (Hebrok et al., 2013).

All clothes contain traces of the ways in which they have been used. These traces shed light on the story of their use, particularly in the context of repair and mending. Repairs of clothes are an important question in terms of environmental impact. When asked, 'Do you repair clothes?' responses are often characterized by general assumptions that 'nobody' repairs clothes 'anymore' (Klepp, 2001). Yet by going through a larger number of discarded garments in order to see what and how they have been repaired, we learn what kinds of repairs have been carried out and on which kinds of garments. Questions of who have done the repairs and why will not be answerable by the study of clothes alone, but the wardrobe study allows us to combine questions with a registration process and therefore link between the material and the explanations. Furthermore, by registering the degree and the type of wear and tear for a larger number of garments it is possible to say something directly about practice. This, in turn, may then be analyzed in conjunction with what informants have said about the clothes or their clothes habits generally (Klepp, 2004).

Laboratory testing: artificial repetitiveness

The laboratory is the ideal of positivist knowledge. Here the phenomenon that is to be studied is isolated from all contextual influence and the study thereby becomes positive and repeatable and by the same token removed from reality. In order to conduct laboratory tests, we must acquire clothes from the informants and physically move them to the laboratory. The connections the wardrobe studies make between concrete objects and practical use and associations make it possible to connect knowledge from laboratory back to real examples.

Testing provides knowledge about the textiles' actual properties in relation to predefined scales and measurements. They can therefore easily be compared to each other or to demands defined in regulations, labeling systems, or in tenders. What we do not know as much about, however, is the relation between these abstract scales and the reality they simulate. Since we study practice, we either have to find methods to translate between abstract measurements and real life or use the knowledge about clothes that testing provides together with other information. When we have both clothes and knowledge about their social life, we will be able to combine these two perspectives and extend our understanding of the tests' relation to practice as well as the material preconditions and consequences of practices. A number of questions which are important for developing better life-cycle assessment analyses and other tools which are used in environmental research are dependent of this kind of knowledge. Today the question revolves around product lifetime both as a limited social and technical phenomenon (Environmental Resources Management [ERM] 2010; Resource Recovery Forum, 2004). One example of laboratory testing to increase the understanding of practice can be found in the project Uni-Form, where one woman's story about her work clothes went contrary to assumed truths about the actual properties of the textiles. The woman had a high-risk occupation

with strict safety measures and extensive contact with toxic crude oil. She said that the oil constantly seeped through the clothes and onto her skin. She therefore changed several times a day. Her constant clothes changes could easily be interpreted as an example of women not fitting in workplaces where you have to ‘get your hands dirty.’ The employer had generally strict demands regarding safe clothing for his employees, and there was no reason to doubt that the requirements for oil resistance were also under control. The woman’s experiences then contrasted with the assumed properties of the employer’s clothing. The tests showed that the boiler suits did not pass the tests for oil resistance that apply to such clothes (Almgren & Schander, 2010). By providing information about some of the material elements in practice, tests like these give us greater opportunity to understand what motivates actions.

Among the various projects, Textile Waste is the one that most systematically uses laboratory tests as part of the wardrobe study, where as many discarded garments as possible will be collected and analyzed further at SIFO. We will, as far as possible, use standardized scales to describe the clothes’ condition, and this information together with information about the use and age of the clothes will be used in comparison with tests of corresponding garments. In this way we seek knowledge about the relation between tests and actual use. We will gain a better understanding of what kind of technical ageing contributes to short stage of use and thus how this can be prevented, as well as how clothes are worn out, through washing or through use. The analysis will contribute to the project’s overall questions concerning what may contribute to reducing the material flow (Laitala & Boks, 2012; Laitala, Klepp, & Boks, 2012).

New questions require new methods

Despite the fact that the study of dress and fashion is a growing discipline, much still remains to be done. We have increasing knowledge of how people think, talk, and write about clothes, and about the production of clothes and fashion. Important methodological approaches include discourse analysis, qualitative research interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork among academic researchers. Within the museum world and folk costume studies, analyses of preserved costume material have been conducted. While stability, authenticity, reconstruction and revitalization, or style historical periodization have been central perspectives in this type of research, fashion, change, identity, and body have been dominant in the other.

We still know little about how women and men, young and old, actually dress and why. Costume research has addressed a very narrow field of current – and past – clothes practices and in a too limited degree been able to relate what they call costume to the study of dress and fashion more generally. The problem with much of the academic research is that the perspective has been too narrow. The focus on explaining clothes as fashion, and thus change, has provided little critical distance to the industry that gets its livelihood from telling us just this that we constantly have to buy something new to be beautiful and happy. It has given us little capacity to recognize stability and problems with developing perspectives on sustainable clothes consumption. We hope that wardrobe studies can inspire research that to a greater degree manages to integrate different perspectives and methods – and thus contributes to opening up new perspectives.

The theoretical work concerning practice breaks down the distinction between subjects and objects and between nature, culture, and society. It opens up new possibilities of uniting natural and social sciences. We have very different methodological traditions, and it will take time to fully see them in context. Method triangulation has so far been about using several (often language-based) social scientific methods, both quantitative and qualitative. Compared to the major changes that the theories of materiality actually try to accomplish, these are quite modest steps. We hope that wardrobe studies can inspire the exploration of methods that to a greater degree capture materiality, not limited to studies involving clothing.

The very challenge wardrobe studies take as a starting point is a desire to incorporate the materiality and practice common in a lot of research today. It has been referred to as an ‘ontological turn’ that has swept the social sciences reviving the concern among anthropologists for the relations between theory and practice. Recent discussion of ontology can be seen to represent a turning back to practice in response to a prolonged period of debate around representation and discourse, influenced by philosophical concerns with ‘anti-representationalism.’ In the article, we have drawn similarities with methods developed for other research fields that do not include clothing, such as talking-whilst-walking interviews relating to gardens, and natural environments (Hitchings & Jones, 2004), and interviews related to items such as the study of what people have on their walls (Londos, 1993). Experiences from the wardrobe studies will be able to be further developed for studies of subjects other than clothing. Studies such as those inspired by Latour, who sought to pursue things and their practices, and in studies of sustainability.

In the understanding of consumption we have more knowledge of the market itself – what is bought and sold and what people say they do – than we know about how things are actually used. Things are drunk and smoked more than they are bought and sold and people have the tendency to respond ‘politically correctly’ to questions that are asked of them. Studies of materiality’s frames and slots can therefore contribute to paint the full picture. One area, for example, can be the use of medications and different forms for health and appearance-related preparations. A ‘wardrobe study’ here can reveal what a family has, how old they are, the relationship between the preparations and the information that comes from the Health officials, and how they are stored both in relation to temperature, availability, and categorization. This is a typical theme where one can expect many right answers about what one asks, and where researchers can also reveal patterns that the informants themselves were not aware of (such as connections to expiration dates and age).

Sustainability is the other field worth mentioning here. Sustainability stands out because it so obviously encompasses both what we as humans do and the way that ‘nature’ is influenced by these actions. The issues are therefore inherently multidisciplinary and methods suitable to break down the distinction between these sciences are therefore particularly relevant. Methods inspired by wardrobe studies are particularly relevant here in relation to seeing how the way things are used fits together and depends on each other. This can be studied with a starting point in special leisure interests, such as leisure boats, pets, fishing, or golf, but also in connection energy use. Such perspectives show the relationship between assets and activities. If we look at the relationship between children’s toys and access to toys, this is quite evident. Toys not only have an environmental effect in production, but they also influence the indoor environment and pollutants. What children have, where and

how often they are played with, whether they are used for show, or simply take up space is therefore relevant for understanding the consumption patterns.

Research, like all other practices, is not just about what we say and think, but also about what we take for granted, do, and have. Research, too, has a spatial organization and an infrastructure. Interdisciplinary collaboration and access to both social and natural scientific traditions and infrastructure provide the possibility to develop methods that allow for the updated understanding of reality that is found within practice and materiality studies. Just as the material culture that is the object of our studies carries in it distilled ideology, so does the materiality of the research world. These material structures contribute to constraining and opposing the changes that these theories open up.

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Note

1. Researchers at SIFO: Laitala, Silje Skuland, and Hebrok. Important international participants have been Kate Fletcher, Sophie Woodward, Joanne Turney, and Karen Tranberg Hansen. Read more about the network and its participants at: http://www.cbs.dk/forskning/institutter_centre/projekter/wardrobe_network/menu/wardrobe_netvaerk

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