

FASHION STUDIES

Research Methods, Sites and Practices

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INTRODUCTION

LOCATING FASHION/ STUDIES: RESEARCH METHODS, SITES AND PRACTICES

Heike Jenss

Foregrounding methodological reflection on the exploration of fashion through material culture, ethnography, and the mixing of sources and methods through selected case studies, this book offers nuanced insights into how interdisciplinary scholars approach and make sense of fashion in its multifaceted appearances. Focusing on both fashion and its research as situated practices, this book moves from a discussion of fashion collecting in museums in London and New York to the study of fashion and dress in people's everyday lives. It includes ethnographic explorations of fashion conducted through working in the global garment industry, working in model casting agencies, making a street style blog, and observing the creative process in a fashion design school. And it offers examples of the bridging of theory and practice in fashion research, demonstrating the tailoring and fitting of methodological approaches to suit research interests as varied as the design collections of Martin Margiela in the 1990s, the fashioning of masculinities in early twenty-first-century America, or the practice-based exploration of fashion as a site of conflict. Through these wide-ranging examples, the chapters in this book illuminate together underexamined sites of fashion, including the "backstage" practices of the cultural production of fashion, as well as the possibilities and challenges that are part of the interpretive, intersubjective, and interdisciplinary practice of doing fashion research.

In recent decades the study of fashion has expanded across academic disciplines into a thriving field of scholarly investigation and is becoming further institutionalized through the founding of new courses and research concentrations at universities internationally, fostering the critical analysis of fashion in its varied and complex material and visual manifestations. In light of the rising interdisciplinary and global scope of fashion and fashion studies, there is a growing need to discuss research methods and practices that aid students and scholars in exploring the wide-ranging and multilayered forms, experiences, and meaning dimensions of fashion—from the intimate, corporeal sensations of making an appearance with the wearing of fashion and clothes, to the designing, making, mediation, or distribution of fashion in objects, images, and imaginaries.

Facing the wide scope of fashion as a global industry and as matter, practice, and dynamics that shape and change bodies and identities, figuring out one's method/s in the conducting of fashion research is anything but a straightforward process. In the context of fashion studies, this seems to be even more so the case since the field has evolved without a defined “methodological canon,” as traditionally part of longer existing university disciplines, such as anthropology or art history, which along with numerous other disciplines and fields feed into research and knowledge formation in fashion studies. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2015) implies the significance of method in the formation and identification of academic fields and disciplines, by defining “method” as a “special form of procedure or characteristic set of procedures employed . . . in an intellectual discipline or field of study as a mode of investigation and inquiry.” Following such a definition, method—or more specifically the development and use of “characteristic” methods—can be understood as part of the principles, beliefs, and concepts that underlie academic disciplines or fields. As procedures, or modes of doing research, which are intertwined with ontological assumptions about the world, methods form an integral part of the constitution and learning of disciplinary and professional practices, knowledges and “positions.” However, the briefness and abstractness of such a dictionary definition does not reflect much of the actual interdisciplinary and intersubjective dynamics of research and methodological practices, particularly as they have emerged in scholarly work over the last decades, which have led to the development of more fluid, multimethodological fields of scholarly inquiry—such as the field of fashion studies.

Fashion studies: Evolving research interests and approaches

What is today referred to as the interdisciplinary field of fashion studies is an outcome of the “blurring of genres” and disciplinary approaches that emerged with the increasing “migration” of scholars across academic fields during the 1970s

and 1980s, which Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln describe in their historic tracing of qualitative research practices: “Humanists migrated to the social sciences, searching for new social theory, new ways to study popular culture and its local ethnographic contexts. Social scientists turned to the humanities, hoping to learn how to do complex structural and post-structural readings of social texts” (2005, 3). With such “blurring” and “methodological diaspora” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3) scholars developed new methodological practices and techniques that made them akin to a bricoleur, someone who makes do by “adapting the *bricoles* of the world” (de Certeau 1984, xv; quoted in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 4). The development of cultural studies (see Grossberg 2010) and material culture studies (see Miller 2005) are some of the achievements of such scholarly migration and methodological “do-it-yourself” practices. The impact of these two fields—along with many others—opened up new questions and modes of inquiry for the critical study of fashion and dress in the 1990s: for example, by beginning to foreground new interests in the social, cultural, and material practices and relations that are part of the consumption and production of fashion and dress (see Breward 1998; McRobbie 1998).

Historical roots and routes

Intellectual engagements with fashion and dress have a long history that can be traced to the contemplation on fashion in philosophy and literature (for overviews see Purdy 2004; Johnson, Torntore, and Eicher 2003; Kawamura 2005; Entwistle 2000; Wilson 1985). They can also be traced to the long existing interest in documenting people’s habits and manners, including dress and appearance, in etchings and engravings that would lead to the development and publication of costume books in early modernity. For example, those that became part of Europe’s visual mapping of “world cultures,” serving as visual instruments—and methods—in the creation of social, cultural, and geographic classification and hierarchies of peoples and “races,” tying together assumptions based on appearance, place, and time: such as urban versus rural or civilized/modern/Western versus primitive/traditional/other (for discussions, see Taylor 2004, 4–43; Lillethun, Welters, and Eicher 2012; Kaiser 2012, 2 and 32, Gaugele 2015). Such binary modes of thinking have been at the heart of the history of fashion in euro-modernity, where fashion came to be defined as “the prevailing style of dress or behavior at any given time, with the strong implication that fashion is characterized by change” (Steele 2005, 12), which historically has been viewed to typically occur in urban European contexts (see Steele 2005, 13). In the Romance languages as well as in many Germanic languages, though interestingly not in English, the word for fashion is *mode* or *moda* derived from the Latin word *modus* for shape or manner, which is also a root of the word “modernity,” associated with the fast-paced urban life in European capitals for which fashion (or *la mode*) became a symbol or metaphor (see Baudelaire 2004).

A substantial material and institutional ground for the emergence of the academic study of fashion and dress in European and Anglo-American contexts has been formed by the history of collecting historic and “exotic” items of dress, privately, for example, in sixteenth-century cabinets of curiosities or *Wunderkammern*, and later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ institutionalized form of museum collections. These include ethnographic collections of “other” cultures’ forms of dress (“folk,” regional, rural, or non-Western dress), and later also the distinct development of collections of Western costume and dress, in particular, examples of haute couture and high fashion clothing of upper class (and mostly female) provenance (for an overview on the history of dress collections, see Taylor 2004). Academically, the study of fashion and dress is further deeply informed by theories and approaches evolving in the context of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century formation and diversification of specialized university disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, history, economics, and sociology, with some scholars (especially among the latter two) also paying increasing attention to understanding and explaining fashion as an overarching system and social dynamic, embedded in (or driving) the rise and conditions of capitalism and the process and discourse of “modernity” (for an overview see König, Mentges and Müller 2015).

The conceptualization of fashion as a form, or rather a “natural,” inherently time-bound dynamic of social distinction through change—as theorized in various ways, for example, by the sociologist Georg Simmel (2004), economist Werner Sombart (2004), and economist Thorstein Veblen (2004)—has been perhaps the most pronounced and enduring idea in the development of fashion theory in the twentieth century. The interest in fashion as a mode of social distinction and overarching dynamic driving social life, should not only be understood to center on the class-bound vertical flow of fashion, “trickling down” from the top to the lower social strata as outlined by Simmel (2004) in the early twentieth century. But further entangled with these early theories of fashion is also the emphasis on fashion in establishing gender distinctions, including the conception and marginalizing of fashion—and its research—as an essentially “female” domain or activity (see Veblen 2004 and Flügel 2004, for further discussion, also Taylor 2004, 44–65). Moreover, the concept of fashion as a material mode of articulating distinction by spearheading or adapting to what has often been described as the “rapid” change in clothing and appearance styles was, as noted above, seen as a distinctly urban-Western phenomenon—aiding in the construction of ethnic or racial distinctions (“West vs. the rest,” the lack of cultural or ethnic diversity in “Western” representations of fashion history, etc.). Other disciplines, perhaps most notably anthropology, substantially contributed to this discourse by assuming and representing “other” cultures—structured by the norms and methods of classical ethnography—as “timeless,” as “an ‘object’ to be archived” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 15; for further discussion, see also Fabian 1983 and 2007).

One indicator which also points to the idea of the exclusiveness of fashion to euro-modernity was the avoidance of the use of the temporality and change

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implying word “fashion” or “mode” in relation to non-Western (and nonurban) contexts, and instead the use of the apparently more neutral, or universal term “dress”—to describe the human practice of adorning the body (see Entwistle 2000, 42–43; also Eicher 2001 and in this book). Furthermore, as pointed out by anthropologists in the 1970s, much early ethnographic work, while otherwise so attuned to the investigation of material culture, paid only little serious attention to dress. In part, such limited consideration of dress in early ethnographic accounts is likely due to the gendering and marginalization of clothing and dress as “unworthy” or “unserious” fields of study on the part of (historically predominantly) male anthropologists. However, it also means that such ethnographies ignored or misrepresented a part of human embodiment, which—if seriously acknowledged or considered—may likely have forced perspectives on “time” and “change” into the ethnographer’s gaze. Ronald Schwarz notes in an article in 1979 “that clothing is a subject about which anthropologists should have much to say yet remain mysteriously silent. . . . Descriptions of clothing are so rare in some texts of social anthropology . . . that the casual reader might easily conclude the natives go naked” (Schwarz 1979, 23; in Taylor 2002, 195). The creation of such an image or imaginary of the “other” as naked, painted through a limited and ethnocentric view on what ethnographically depicted people wore, certainly aided in the conception or euro-modern narrative of fashion as exclusively Western-urban, which has until rather recently informed much of the writing in the field of fashion studies (for a discussion, see Niessen 2003; Hansen 2004; Lillethun, Welters, and Eicher 2012; Riello and McNeil 2010, 357 ff.).

The early theorizing of fashion or dress, both in the context of sociology and anthropology, was driven by, as Joanne Entwistle puts it, an interest in overarching “why” questions, which led to the development of meta-theories around the overarching meaning or function of fashion and dress that do not consider the time- and place-bound nuances and complexities of fashion and dress as practices (Entwistle 2000, 55–57). Such “modernist” meta-theories of fashion and dress formed a backdrop for the emergence of new feminist perspectives on fashion and dress in the latter half of the twentieth century, as demonstrated in the seminal books by Elizabeth Wilson *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) or Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton’s book *Women and Fashion: A New Look* (1989); these texts critique the limitations, and inherent gender bias, of early twentieth-century theories of fashion, pointing to new directions that would broaden the study of fashion and dress in the following decades.

Formation and expansion of fashion studies

The field of fashion studies owes its formation to a variety of approaches and perspectives that inform the study of fashion and dress, including the work of philosophers, sociologists, art and design scholars, anthropologists, economists,

and historians. The term “fashion studies,” however, has only been used in the more recent decades in Anglo-American contexts. Much of the scholarship that today forms the foundation of fashion studies has emerged under the umbrella terms of “costume” or “dress history,” in close proximity to museum work. This is reflected also in early scholarly journals, with a predominantly historic focus (*Dress, Costume* or the former German journal *Waffen and Kostümkunde*). Another important dimension of fashion studies has developed from university programs in textile and apparel studies and also from home economics and consumer studies departments (for a discussion, see Palmer 1997; Mentges 2005; Eicher and Evinson 2014). There has been a growing academic interest in fashion and dress in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (here just some selected examples: Eicher and Roach 1965 and 1973; Hollander 1978; Kaiser 1985; Steele 1985; Ribeiro 1986; Roche 1989/1994), yet a shift in the labeling of these scholarly areas of research from costume history, to dress history and dress studies (in the 1990s), to fashion studies, only occurred more recently. A shift in nomenclature, in particular from “history” to “studies” reflects the broadening of interests, most notably with increasing interests in theoretical discourse, as well as in more contemporary issues and practices.

New approaches and methods for the exploration of fashion evolved with the new art history (for a discussion, see Breward 1998; Granata 2012) and also particularly within the field of cultural studies, with a group of scholars, including Dick Hebdige, John Clark, Angela McRobbie, and Paul Willis focusing on postwar youth subcultural styles in Britain. Informed by structuralism, post-structuralism, and semiotics, and drawing on the work of Roland Barthes, Antonio Gramsci, and others, Hebdige’s book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) exemplifies the approach of reading subcultural styles as forms of resistance to the dominant order. Utilizing the idea of bricolage, as theorized by Claude Levi Strauss, he shows how hegemonic meanings of clothing (such as the suit) are not fixed but can be subverted to take on new meanings, in a symbolic fit with subcultural ideologies of resistance. This work had a substantial impact on the scholarship of fashion, by highlighting questions of identity and agency, and challenging the idea of a “trickle-down” of fashion by drawing attention to the dynamics and impact of youth cultural styles (for discussions, see Evans 1997; Hodkinson 2002). Cultural studies in particular emphasized the importance of context and constructionism, to “offer knowledge that did not claim to necessarily encompass the whole world . . . to stand against scientific and epistemological universalism” (Grossberg 2010, 17). The underlying belief in the approach of cultural studies is that

human beings live in a world that is, at least in part, of their own making, and that world is constructed through practices (of many different forms of agency, including individual, and institutional, human and non-human) that build and transform the simultaneously and intimately connected discursive and nondiscursive (both material) realities. . . . To put it simply, what culture we live

in, what cultural practices we use, what cultural forms we place and insert into reality, have consequences for the way reality is organized and lived. (Grossberg 2010, 23–24)

Building on the increased “blurring of genres” and disciplines in the 1970s and 1980s and the paradigm shift toward the emphasis on contextuality and constructionism, fashion studies started to crystallize more clearly in the context of the 1990s. These studies were deeply informed by the impact of the wider social and intellectual developments in the second half of the twentieth century, including the feminist movement, civil rights, gay and lesbian rights movements—and theoretical developments, including post-structuralism, gender, queer, and postcolonial theories, working against the “fixing” of ultimate meanings of cultures, bodies, and identities (see Kaiser 2012, 11; Breward 1998). These developments, including the critical unpacking of historical ideas such as essentialist concepts of gender, race, and ethnicity, have helped to “unframe,” in Susan Kaiser’s words, “some of the frameworks that had previously been taken for granted as ‘natural’ or ‘the way it should be’” (2012, 11). One of the texts clearly signaling this turn in the scholarly inquiry of fashion in the early 1990s is Elizabeth Wilson’s essay “Fashion and the Postmodern Body” in *Chic Thrills*, one of the first “reader” type publications in the field (Ash and Wilson 1992). Wilson contextualizes the rising academic interest in fashion and dress with the discourse around postmodernity and the “end of grand narratives”: the breakdown of “totalizing” narratives and “overarching theories” underpinning the idea of Western modernity and “civilization” from the eighteenth century onward, in which fashion and its idea of continuous change had been conceptualized as a sign of the “progress” and “modernity” of the West and its superiority and distinctiveness from “the rest” (Wilson 1992, 6–7).

Along with a growing scholarly interest in the cultural construction of body and identity through fashion and dress, influenced, among others, by Judith Butler’s theorizing of gender as a performative act, and Michel Foucault’s work on self-disciplining, self-monitoring, and technologies of the self, there emerged in the 1990s an increasing acknowledgment and exploration of the relationships between fashion, body, and identity. This is evident in the title and content of Wilson’s essay, in which she highlights the “postmodern fragmentation” of knowledge, histories, and identities and discusses the increasing impact of media technologies, late twentieth-century politics, and the widening scope of globalization processes following the end of the Cold War. Together, these developments culminate in what can broadly be framed as the “postmodernism debate,” which in Wilson’s words, “helped rescue the study of dress from its lowly status, and has created—or at least *named*—a climate in which any cultural and aesthetic object may be taken seriously” (Wilson 1992, 6). She describes dress as a constitutive component in the process of subject formation and embodiment, one that is “tactile, visual . . . colours, shapes. It embodies culture” (Wilson 1992, 14). Citing Roy Boyne, she

also highlights embodiment together with the emphasis placed on practices that would inform much of the work in fashion studies in the following decades: a shift “from knowledge to experience, from theory to practice, from mind to body” (Boyne 1988, 527, cited in Wilson 1992, 14).

This emphasis on fashion in relation to the body and self became a core theme in 1990s fashion scholarship that underpins the development of this field to date. One of the publications that aided in the broadening of perspectives and approaches to fashion was Jennifer Craik’s book *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (1993), in which she argues for the need to frame fashion in broader terms, in which “designer fashion” is just one variant of multiple, coexisting, and interacting systems of fashion (1993, xi), and highlights the role of fashion in everyday life: “Styles, conventions, and dress codes can be identified in all groups, including subcultures, ethnic groups, alternative life styles, workplace and leisure cultures” (1993, xii). Her consideration of fashion, as she notes, draws parallels with ethnographic studies of non-Western dress, in order to shed light on nonelite, everyday fashion, which she finds has been only superficially researched, endeavoring in her book to methodologically “piece together fashion histories and sift available material in order to map various fields of fashion practice” (1993, xii). The perspective on fashion as practice—and as a body technique—has been further framed in her book by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and Marcel Mauss’ concept of technologies of the body, which she utilizes to explore fashion and dress as techniques of femininity, and also masculinity. Erving Goffman’s work on the presentation of the self in everyday life and the performance of identities was also influential in the field’s increased engagement with bodily practices, opening up avenues for more experiential approaches to the study of fashion, body, and gender (see for example, Tseëlon 1995).

In the 1990s, fashion and dress were studied in a wide variety of fields and disciplines such as fashion and dress history, art history, gender and queer studies, design studies, film and media studies, literature studies, cultural geography, urban studies, postcolonial studies, history, economics, marketing, and so on. These together formed a concentrated enough area of scholarly inquiry (and an identifiable “market”) that would spark the launch of the journal *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, edited by Valerie Steele, and the *Dress, Body, Culture* book series edited by Joanne Eicher; both developed with Kathryn Earle at Berg Publishers (see also Eicher’s chapter in this book). Published in four issues per year, and not tied to an association—such as the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (1982–), *Dress: Journal of the Costume Society of America* (1975–), or *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society* (1968–) that up to that time were leading “organs” for scholars of dress, paving the way for fashion studies—*Fashion Theory* would help to substantially expand the output and distribution of interdisciplinary research on fashion and dress (for a broader discussion and

detailed numbers on the increase of publications on fashion in the last two decades, see King and Clement 2012).

The expanding academic interest in fashion during that time evolved also in response to the global expansion of the fashion industries, through the acceleration of fashion production processes, including image production, through the rise of new media and communication technologies, and the faster circulation of fashionable goods through the so-called “democratization” of fashion consumption (at the cost of cheap, outsourced production labor). While much of the work in the 1990s concentrated particularly on fashion, body, and identity often through modes of representation, for example, in film and photography, and also increasingly with a focus on consumption practices, reflecting the “acknowledging of consumption,” particularly in new material culture studies at the time (see Miller 1995; Breward 1998), there also emerged the call to expand fashion studies into the exploration of production, inspiring also much of the work in this edited volume. A particularly influential work was Angela McRobbie’s 1998 book *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry*, in which she critiqued the then predominant interest within fashion studies in meaning-making processes through fashion, in particular, on the part of middle-class consumers, while ignoring almost entirely the conditions or contexts in which fashion is produced. Through qualitative interviews with subjects working in fashion design and fashion media, McRobbie’s study offered firsthand insights into the working conditions of the fashion and creative industries in England in the 1990s. The dearth of such perspectives on design and production was also noted by the fashion designer and educator Ian Griffith, who in 2000 commented on the field of fashion studies, that the “voices of practitioners, or indeed, the practice of fashion do not figure large in its academy, and consequently a whole world of information is hidden from view” (Griffith 2000, 89–90). He thus pointed to an area of fashion studies that was by the turn of the millennium still a widely underexamined one (though, for an early study, see Blumer 1969), but which has since then received increasing attention from scholars of fashion (some selected examples: Kawamura 2004; Skov 2004; Hethorn and Ulasewicz 2008; Entwistle 2009; Fletcher 2014), leading a decade later to the founding of a new platform for fashion scholarship with *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process and the Fashion Industry* (2009–), coedited by Sandy Black and Marilyn de Long. This increasing interest in practice is a demonstration how the “blurring of genres” described earlier, extends beyond the humanities and social sciences, into the integration of fields of “theory” and “practice,” showing the impact of design thinking and design-based research in the recent decade.

As Joanne Entwistle notes in the introduction to her book *The Fashioned Body*, understanding fashion requires understanding the relationship between “different bodies operating in fashion: fashion colleges and students, designers and design houses, tailors and seamstresses, models and photographers, as well as fashion

editors, distributors, retailers fashion buyers, shops and consumers” (Entwistle 2000, 1). In addition, there are multiple systems, cultures, and markets of fashion with distinct practices, infrastructures, spatialities, and temporalities, from the fast fashion distributed by global chains (see Maynard 2013; Moon 2014) to the diversification of global secondhand markets (see Gregson and Crewe 2003; Norris 2012). Entangled with or making up this global, material scope of fashion(s) are the bodies using and making, or in the literal sense of the word “fashioning,” the sites, clothes, images, imaginaries, looks—“the stuff”—to be felt, looked at, shaped, experienced and changed by. One of the most recent key publications in the field, *The Handbook of Fashion Studies* (Black et al. 2013), exemplifies the richness and breadth of the field of fashion studies today, which has evidently bridged the “divides” previously addressed by scholars in the field between the museum and the academy, theory and practice, consumption or production, etc.

The Handbook of Fashion Studies, along with many other recent publications including, for example, a number of special issues in *Fashion Theory* and the project of *The Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, edited by Joanne Eicher (2010, and discussed in this book), demonstrates the development of an increased international collaboration in the field, fostered in part through the initiation of more international conferences. This leads to a greater consideration and integration of broader global, or international, perspectives on fashion and dress, bringing new—or hitherto absent—insights into the Anglo-American (-centric) field of fashion studies. In the context of the ongoing multiplication of fashion studies research in this age of increased global interconnectedness, a new “organ” or publication outlet in the field—the *International Journal of Fashion Studies* launched in 2014—has made it its agenda to foster the inclusion of international scholarship and decentralize fashion studies’ predominantly English-speaking point of view (see Mora, Rocamora, and Volonté 2014).

The wider academic impact of fashion studies scholarship is not only visible in the growing volume of publications dedicated to fashion or dress by, for example, publishers like I. B. Tauris, Routledge, Bloomsbury, and Intellect; the latter has also pushed the launch of further new journals that provide a forum for the diversification of and specialization within the field, including *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*, *Clothing Cultures*, *Critical Studies in Men’s Fashion*, or *Fashion, Style and Popular Culture*. But in addition, the academic impact of fashion studies, a field that has traditionally borrowed from many disciplines, is also demonstrated in the inclusion of special issues edited by scholars of fashion in journals of other fields, such as Eugenia Paulicelli’s and Elizabeth Wissinger’s special issue for *Women’s Studies Quarterly* in 2013, in which they transfer the notion of “fashion’s essence as constant change” to the field of fashion studies: which may “never come to rest but rather will continually evolve, reaching out and making new connections between formerly disparate ideas and considerations” (Paulicelli and Wissinger 2013, 19).

Research as practice: Fashioning methods

Fashion and fashion studies' wide reach and also its "in-between-ness" (Granata 2012) makes for an exciting field of research, yet the "escalation of interdisciplinary research" (Taylor 2013, 23) can also feel overwhelming, not least for students and emerging scholars, who are trying to find their footing in the field. It is perhaps due to the field's dense interdisciplinary entanglements, which bring a wide range of methods to the field—and the essential need for the use, combination, and adaption of multiple methods in the exploration of fashion considering its diverse forms and practices, as will be frequently addressed in this book—that so far, only a few publications have focused in on research methods and practices in fashion studies.

Where researchers in longer established fields and disciplines are supported through an overwhelming number of research handbooks, discussions of methodology in fashion studies are still rather scattered across the literature in the field. They are usually included in the compressed form of a few paragraphs in a section of a book, in an article's introduction, or attached in an appendix, leaving students and scholars with few resources from which to learn about methodological practices in fashion studies in a more concentrated form. The two exceptional works, referenced here before, providing a foundational study of research methods in the field, are written by dress historian Lou Taylor, titled *The Study of Dress History* (2002) and *Establishing Dress History* (2004). Both books are based on a historic review of interdisciplinary methodological approaches, yet with a particular focus on dress history studies, and their adjacency to the context and history of museum collecting practices. The journal *Fashion Theory* also included a special issue on methodologies in the study of dress history one year after its launch (Jarvis 1998), as well as occasional articles dedicated to methodological discussion (Palmer 1997; Tseëlon 2001; Granata 2012), but more commonly the focus has been on historic or museum and exhibition methods (see the special issue by Steele and Palmer 2008). More recently, Joe Hancock (2015) edited an issue dedicated to methodologies in the new journal *Clothing Cultures*, with articles exemplifying a range of methodologies from historical methods to focus groups and quantitative analysis. Other than this, there are only a few publications more broadly dedicated to the discussion of methodologies in dress and fashion studies. These include publications focused on research for the fashion industry (Flynn and Foster 2009) and in fashion design (Gaimster 2011), as well as the book *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress* written by Yuniya Kawamura (2011) as an introductory guide to research methods used in fashion studies, ranging from object-based research to semiotics and mixed methods, including brief "how to" instructional guidelines.

It could be argued that because fashion studies is so interdisciplinary it is well served by drawing on the resources of the fields that inform fashion studies, including methods books in adjacent fields, of which there are many useful ones that suit research interests and sites in fashion studies (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2005 for qualitative methods; Rose 2012 for visual methodologies; Pickering 2008 for cultural studies methods). However, “methods books” can also have a tendency to be (like the word “method” itself) rather abstract when they isolate or decontextualize the discussion of “methods” from the broader trajectories or bodies of research. One productive way to learn about research methods in fashion studies can therefore be quite simply to carefully read the works of other scholars for their ways of doing research—by paying attention to not only what may be explicitly mapped out in an introduction or in a “methods chapter,” but by looking closely into what their use of sources and methods (and theories) makes possible: What insights can an author produce through their particular modes of research and investigation, what kinds of questions and interests are formulated, and how are these methodologically approached and adjusted? What do scholars of fashion look at, how do they come to know—how do they develop insights and interpretations with and of their selected materials? Research methods are embedded in context (academically, historically, socially, culturally, personally) and the actual use of methods in the practice of research is therefore a much more dynamic or fluid undertaking than the dictionary sense of method as “rational procedure”—and its underlying temporal notion of defining and planning an activity ahead of time and following it through according to plan—implies.

For scholars of fashion “a method” emerges more likely in one’s exchange with the agents (human and nonhuman) and site/s of exploration, as a tailoring and fitting of research approaches along with the shaping of research interests and contexts. According to Roy Dilley, context or rather contextualization, can be understood as a performative act, embedded in the environment, background, or disciplinary location (quoted in Coleman and Collins 2007, 8). In this conception, research is as much a situated practice as we understand fashion to be a situated practice (see Entwistle 2000). As the anthropologists Simon Coleman and Peter Collins emphasize, fields or contexts—historical or contemporary—become generated by social relationships and they can be understood as events that are in a constant process of becoming, rather than fixed in space and time. They can be created anew each time a researcher invokes a field in the process of research and writing (Coleman and Collins 2007, 12). And as such fields cannot be seen—spatially, temporarily, or ethically—disconnected from the academy (Coleman and Collins 2007, 11), the institutional or (inter-)disciplinary location in which research is embedded in turn impacts the field—they are interwoven with each other. Along with the crossover of scholars between the humanities and social sciences came the development of texts “that refused to be read in

simplistic, linear, incontrovertible terms” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3). This has also led to blurring the lines between text and context, or theory and practice, and the acknowledgment of the intersubjective and interpretive dynamics of research mapped out by Denzin and Lincoln in a definition of qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self” (2005, 3). So researching or “locating” fashion, is also linked with locating oneself as a researcher in time and place, through the selection or shaping of specific themes and fields, the ignoring of others, the raising of certain questions, the developing or integration of particular theoretical frameworks, etc.

The approach of this book

Equivalent to the researcher as bricoleur and “quilt maker,” described by Denzin and Lincoln as someone who assembles and combines tools and techniques of research and “stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together” (2005, 3), Caroline Evans used the metaphor of ragpicking to describe her approach to the analysis of experimental fashion design in the 1990s, which she conceptualized as a “case study of what to do with a method” (Evans 2003, 11). Establishing an equivalence between the designer and the design historian, and drawing on the figure of the ragpicker who moves between the material culture of the past and present, the 1990s designers she examines, rummage “in the historical wardrobe, scavenging images for re-use just as the nineteenth century ragpicker scavenged materials for recycling”—a practice Evans utilizes to fashion her own method of “scavenging images from the past to examine and reinterpret those of the present” (Evans 2003, 13). Research in or as a practice, is a dynamic back and forth between the often distinctly conceived spheres of “theory” and “practice,” and as the chapters in this book will show, it involves the interpersonal entanglements between the researching self and research subject/s. As many of the chapters and case studies in this book will also show, research is an embodied practice, located or happening in specific time/s and place/s, which also means that it can often involve a quite fluid up and down in one’s own feelings and emotions (see Alford 1998, 22). Much of this fluidity of the doing of research in practice is often not conveyed in the final “products” of research. What we are presented with instead are usually the polished and orderly arrangements of words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters that systematically present “research outcomes” in a clear narrative with a beginning and an end: a linearity that overshadows a researcher’s previous (often yearlong)

movements in a field of research and on the “tracks” between empirical and theoretical inquiry (Alford 1998, 23). Rarely do the research products in the form of fashion studies texts (although some examples are Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Moon 2009) provide a reader or student with a sense of what it was like to embark on a project: how does one actually enter or begin to construct a field of research; where and how can one find, collect or produce “data,” how can one for example “do fashion studies,” so to speak, in the very concrete production sites of fashion—the sites that usually remain invisible behind the allure of fashion as it comes to circulate each season in new clothes, enticing images of fashionable bodies or in compelling advertising campaigns.

One of the reasons why fashion is so powerful and deeply affective is that the very practices through which the “magic of fashion” is produced are effectively hidden from view. Some of those practices that are part of the production and experience of fashion will be the focus of the chapters in this book. In particular, this book takes an interest in researching fashion as part of everyday practices—not just of the wearing of clothes—but also of the routine practices that are part of the work of and in fashion. The authors in this book will approach this by examining fashion sites and practices by foregrounding reflection on the “doing” of research. This requires, in many cases, a self-reflective mode of thinking and writing, that often does not find space in the writing of final research outcomes, that is, books or articles, often simply due to the limits of word counts, or to not distract from the narrative of presenting “outcomes” of research. Yet, the narratives of “embarking” on and “doing” research are no less valuable for scholars, especially in light of the proliferation of many diverse research practices and methods in fashion studies as they emerge through the aforementioned cross-pollination of the multiple academic fields, interests, and perspectives that make up this field.

As Lou Taylor notes in a recent introductory chapter on methods in fashion and dress history: “No one can possibly be skilled in every one of these academic fields, each of which has its own sets of specific critical approaches, interests, standpoints” (Taylor 2013, 23). Lou Taylor introduces in her overview, theoretical and methodological approaches relating to her fields of scholarship, dress history, including object-based and material culture approaches; social, economic, and business history; oral history; the use of photography and film; among others that are used in the study of dress history. To complement and further expand the perspectives on methods in existing publications on methods in fashion studies, this edited volume follows a case-study approach in which interdisciplinary scholars discuss their own research approaches and tailoring of methods with a specific focus on the use of material culture, ethnography, and mixed methods, as ways to investigate and make sense of contemporary sites and practices of fashion.

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