

FASHION STUDIES

Research Methods, Sites and Practices

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1 IN SEARCH OF THE EVERYDAY: MUSEUMS, COLLECTIONS, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF FASHION IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Evolving from a collaborative research project that explores the place and significance of fashion in everyday lives in twentieth-century Britain and the United States, we consider in this chapter how fashion has been collected and represented in museums, and how these methods impact the way fashion is conceptualized. Our focus is place-bound, in that we are looking particularly at leading institutions that collect fashion in our respective research sites, New York and London: The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), the Museum of the City of New York, the Museum of London, and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). We also refer to a few smaller independent and regional museums in Britain as well as the national collection of the Smithsonian Institution in the United States, to consider varied approaches to the collection of fashionable clothes. While our shared interest lies in tracing the roles of fashion in people's everyday lives in the urban contexts of New York and London (see Buckley and Clark 2012), it is the actual paucity of ordinary, everyday fashion in these cities' major museum collections—in comparison to a privileging of fashion from named designers, couturiers, or aristocratic wearers—that has sparked our reflections on fashion collecting methods, not least because

these methods form a significant historic foundation of the field of fashion studies. In tracing how everyday fashion has recently been exhibited and collected (or not), and drawing on interviews with museum curators, we want to shed light on the challenges of researching fashion in everyday lives.

Fashion collecting policies and everyday fashion practices

A key objective of museum collecting policies is to support strategic priorities articulated in their mission statements. It is important for national museums to be at the forefront in international terms, especially if they are located in major global cities with strong fashion associations, such as New York, London, Paris, or Milan. Collections in museums beyond major urban centers, by contrast, develop agendas that must also address their local and regional constituencies, which in turn affects what they collect. At the same time, museum collecting practices are the product of specific curatorial histories and disciplinary priorities that come from academic scholarship outside the museum—such legacies are evident in fashion collecting. Museums can play significant roles in institutionalizing specific forms of knowledge; those specializing in fashion, for example, may have substantial connections with the fashion industry (Melchior and Svensson 2014). As Pamela Church-Gibson puts it, “Cheap, ubiquitous clothes, which lack artistic merit of any kind are consigned not only to landfills in the real world, but also to hinterlands beyond scholarship” (Church-Gibson 2012, 18). Today, even with the increased scholarly interest in “fast fashion” (Moon 2014), there are few examples of these ubiquitous clothes in major museum collections. This has clear implications for the representation and visibility in museum collections of fashion that has been embedded in ordinary lives. In some major national museums such as the V&A, the acquisition of fashion has had a marginal, if not precarious curatorial position, particularly when viewed alongside other aspects of design and the decorative arts such as ceramics, furniture, silver, prints, and textiles. In others such as the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, acquisition originally reflected close ties to the theater and then to the fashion business. Upon scrutinizing the representations of fashion in museum collections as indicative of everyday lives, arguably both collecting practices and academic scholarship appear to have been determined in important ways by aesthetics, taste, and economics.

The central premise of this chapter is that museums have, until relatively recently, underrepresented the importance of fashion in everyday lives. Instead, their method has been to concentrate on the activities of selected designers, celebrities, and wealthy consumers, as well as extraordinary and/or avant-garde cultural practices. A related sub-point to consider is why fashion has been

marginal more generally in museum collections in the twentieth century. With regard to the latter, various fashion historians, writers, and critics have pointed to the hierarchies within specific categories of design and the decorative arts to reveal the effect of these on collecting practices. They have considered questions of gender, particularly in relation to curators of fashion, but also due to fashion's assumed affinities to women. They have examined the status of the discipline of dress history within academia, including its relationship to art history, and latterly social and economic history and to fashion studies, noting the denigration of object-based analysis prior to the rise of material culture studies and ethnography. They have shown how fashion's precarious status—as low culture, entertainment, popular media, business, and commerce—has facilitated its marginalization until recent years. And they have outlined the impact of specific institutional policies, historic practices, and distinctive place identities on the lack of sustained interest in fashion.¹ Notwithstanding these points, exhibitions of fashion have proved enormously popular in major museums, and the collecting of fashion and dress in national collections has gathered pace in the last thirty years.

Writing in 1998, Lou Taylor described how the hostile attitude “to the collection of seasonally-styled European fashion for women became enshrined within the (V&A) museum's collecting policy from the very start,” and how this was compounded by academic prejudice, particularly in economic and social history departments at the university, which “failed almost totally to address the significance of issues of fashion, style and seasonal change” (Taylor 1998, 340 and 346). Although one target of Taylor's criticism were those historians who failed to undertake object analysis, her observation foregrounds a common assumption made by many writers in dress and fashion history, that fashion is fundamentally about change and a specific “look.” This particular thesis, dominant in academic writing on dress and fashion history, is underpinned by the notion that fashion is essentially about change, that this speeds up as the twentieth-century progresses, and that it is intrinsic to the experience of being modern and to modernization. Although there has been some rethinking of fashion's relationship to modernity by writers like David Gilbert, who calls for a more outward-looking and nuanced understanding of fashion cities that notes “the ways in which there are different modernities in different places” (Beward and Gilbert 2006, 7), the core understanding of fashion—that it is about regular cycles of change and thus intimately tied to the “project of modernity”—remains largely intact. In contrast, the central thesis of our research informing this chapter is that, in order to fully interrogate fashion in the twentieth century, investigation is necessary of the ways in which *fashion*—as opposed to *dress*—infiltrated everyday lives in an ongoing, sustained way over time and across class, gender, ethnicity, and generation.² In the process, this reconstitutes our understanding of fashion's relationship to time. Greater knowledge of how individuals use and wear their clothes leads to an understanding of fashion as a form of material palimpsest—created from a

composite of garments and accessories that are new, with those that are reworn, altered, and generally “re-fashioned” (even if only in terms of when and where they are worn) by their users over time.

Additionally it is useful to explore how geography affected what people were wearing. As Gilbert put it, when discussing large cities in Britain such as Newcastle, Manchester, and Nottingham, although designers and companies from these cities operate globally, “the fashion cultures of these cities have often had an intensely local dimension” (Gilbert 2000, 12). A key argument underlying our research is that, while fashion in the twentieth century could be symbolic in a multitude of ways—aesthetically, culturally, socially, politically, and economically—it was (and remains) “an intimate part of embodied, everyday experience” (Beward and Gilbert 2006, 14). And, while some writers have argued that fashion does not only “come from the top,” there is a new “middle ground”—neither in the salon nor the street—rather “in the wardrobe” (Woodward 2007). With the exception of a few regional museums and exhibitions, however, we found it difficult to find examples of such everyday fashion in the major and national collections. Indeed curatorial practices have reaffirmed the focus on modern, avant-garde, extraordinary, and unusual design, often for strategically important reasons. These have included a desire to reposition fashion as “art,” to emphasize its aesthetic value, to stake a claim for its cultural significance, or to reiterate its economic importance. Thus it has been articulated as the output of highly creative individuals who approach fashion as an artistic practice, or that it is produced by designers who are sharply attuned to the contemporary world, or that it is the product of elusive fashion houses that are part of multinational companies locked into the global economy.

London

The exhibition and display of fashion in London and New York from the late 1970s through to the 1990s reflected an overall climate of change in museums. In Britain, this was partly as a result of changing governmental attitudes, which stimulated anxieties about funding and declining visitor numbers (Anderson 2000, 372). Museums adopted marketing strategies to survive, such as Saatchi & Saatchi’s advertising campaign for the V&A in the late 1980s, featuring the slogan “V&A: An ace caff, with quite a nice museum attached.”³ Despite such flights into populism, which did not always increase museum traffic, this was also the period when the impact of academic research methodologies and critical approaches started to become more evident generally in the museum, and in its treatment of fashion. Discussing the collecting of “contemporary design” at the V&A,⁴ Christopher Wilk, chief curator of the Department of Furnishing, Textiles and Fashion, observed that its collecting of these categories of objects was “largely episodic . . . undirected by museum-wide policies until quite recently” (Wilk 1997, 345). Outlining the often

controversial reasons for this that go back to one of the V&A's first donations (the Donaldson Collection in 1901) and the museum's policy to "show very little which is not at least 50 years old" and "by means of the finest examples," Wilk (1997, 345–53) observed that the interest in contemporary design was dependent upon the Circulation Department until 1977 when the director, Roy Strong (1974–87), allocated funds to departmental curators to collect excellent recent work. Although the Circulation Department had a transformative effect on curatorial practices, it collected neither large items, nor fashion, or dress as it was deemed too wide a field to collect and too difficult to display. While this chapter is not concerned with the details of the V&A's attitudes to collecting garments prior to the 1970s—this is well covered by others (Taylor 2004, 106–21)—it is worth noting how museum policy had a considerable impact not only on collecting, but also on the broader definition of fashion as part of everyday lives—particularly that which is not seen as unique, or overtly excellent, or of high artistic quality. Compounding this, curators faced a pragmatic decision: How to recognize the most "representative" fashion of a given moment? In New York, Harold Koda, the director of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, explained how one of his curator predecessors, Stella Blum, would never collect from the present moment, but preferred to wait ten or fifteen years "to see if something was really valid" (Koda and Reeder 2012). Presenting fashion as art obviated the need for this, and waiting for more than a decade before acquiring garments became one of the curatorial strategies in fashion museums in the early 1970s.

Indeed it was photographer Cecil Beaton's 1971 exhibition *Fashion, an Anthology* that has been credited as putting fashion "on the map" at the V&A (Taylor 2004, 122). The show, curated by Madeleine Ginsberg, drew together five hundred items of twentieth-century couture design and accessories. Exhibiting only high quality design and finish, this approach was reiterated in another V&A exhibition of a few years later *Fashion 1900–1939* (1975–76) when the curators aimed to show "the relationship between fashion, art and decorative arts in France."⁵ While presenting fashion as part of a continuum through art and the decorative arts, the exhibition also recognized the importance of economics, and it reflected dominant academic approaches at a time, when the emphasis was on the *producers* of fashion—those who designed, illustrated, and photographed it—rather than its *wearers* and consumers. In 1983, the V&A opened its refurbished Costume Court, featuring simpler display cases focusing attention on the clothes, and providing a model for other collections internationally (Taylor 2004, 122). Yet, the approach to this display "Four Centuries of the Art of Dressing" was criticized as being "not so much cool and pure as cold, hard, snobbish and elitist" (Horwell 1983, 37). Nevertheless, the refurbishment preempted many highly popular temporary exhibitions, at a time in Britain when more media and also government attention was being paid to fashion and design. According to one reviewer, although the target audience was not evident when the space was overhauled and opened as

the “Fashion Galleries” in 2012, “the grandeur and exuberance of the fashions on display will ultimately win over any critics” (Costume Society 2014). Even so, in the intervening years it was the less “grand” exhibitions that were the most innovative and that have edged the museum’s collection policy away from elitist fashion. An illustration of this was the exhibition *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* at the V&A (1994–95). The exhibition was accompanied by a book of the same name by Ted Polhemus (1994), informed by his anthropological approach to changes in fashion and drawing on the work of cultural studies’ scholar Dick Hebdige. The V&A exhibition, based on an idea, rather than a specific historical period, or designer, focused on fashion as an intrinsically youth-oriented practice, drawn from a unique collection of subcultural clothes worn from the 1940s to the 1990s. The curators who had made the acquisition, Amy de la Haye and Cathie Dingwall, also published an object-based book to “explore the multi-faceted nature of sub-cultural identity,” titled *Surfers, Soulies, Skinheads and Skaters* (1996, n.p.). Subsequently the V&A staged the exhibition *Black Style* (2004) curated by Carol Tulloch, followed by *Swinging Sixties* (2006–07) curated by Jenny Lister and sponsored by Miss Selfridge, both with their own publications. These exhibitions, revealed the shift in scholarship and curatorial practice that had taken place. While *Black Style* addressed the importance of black identities, ethnicities, and race, *Swinging Sixties* was an outcome of a UK Research Council project “Cultures of Consumption” that highlighted fashion’s diffusion as well as its production. Moving closer to the realm of the everyday, the key objective remained to capture a specific historical moment when a “new look” associated with a particular group, the young, contributed to the ascendancy of London as a city that was looked to for fashion leadership. *Swinging Sixties* reasserted fashion as generational, the epitome of modernity and defined by a “look,” while also presenting intellectual and curatorial challenges (Beward 2008, 88–90). *Black Style* focused more on how fashion looks and how particular garments were appropriated, redefined, and adapted to become embedded in everyday lives.

The shifting intellectual landscape has contributed to the collecting and exhibiting of fashion as dress, and to fashion history being reassessed within the context of the developing field of fashion studies. As Melchior and Svensson argue, a characteristic of this approach to fashion was, however, that it “diverted attention towards the manifestation of an underlying idea, with the clothes themselves forming no more than an illustration” (Melchior and Svensson 2014, 40)—although it is worth noting that the idea also could and did reference clothes as fashion. *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* curated by Judith Clark at the MoMU (ModeMuseum) Antwerp in 2004/05, and later at the V&A as *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* is indicative of this, as it drew on the ideas of fashion theorist Caroline Evans specifically as published in *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (2003). Evans’ approach to understanding fashion was conceptually challenging as it refused a narrative history, and to articulate this

Clark deployed curatorial innovation in the staging of fashion and in its suggestion that meaning was fluid and contingent (Scaturro 2010). By this time, the Judith Clark Costume Gallery, established in Notting Hill in February 1997, had had a substantial impact in developing the conceptual parameters of the “fashion exhibition.” Being independent, and run almost exclusively by Clark enabled the small gallery space to be highly innovative. Even in its rather short-lived existence from 1997 to 2003, Clark’s gallery paved the way for more adventurous approaches to fashion being taken by established institutions and curators. Conceptually, innovative curation most often involved theoretically challenging ideas, rather than the presentation of a historical narrative of discrete objects. This method has attracted criticism from some dress and fashion historians, but more important for the argument here, is that it marks an intellectual shift toward theory rather than history.

New York

The impact of individual fashion curators, some with interdisciplinary backgrounds (Judith Clark, for instance, was trained in architecture), was not insignificant on the development of fashion exhibitions. This applied equally to New York, where fashion curation added to the existing scholarship on the nature of fashion. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, New York City had a small but active number of museums devoted to fashion, and others that showed fashion occasionally. An interest in everyday lives and fashion had been evident in the 1986 exhibition *The East Village* at the museum at the FIT. In a review of the show in *Time* magazine, Jay Cocks called it “an eye-scalding, rambunctious and appropriately free-spirited tour of boho fashion, Manhattan style” (see Schiro 1999). Curated by the late Richard Martin, who was subsequently appointed as chief curator at the Costume Institute, *The East Village* was unlike anything Martin and his cocurator Harold Koda would have been able to stage at the Costume Institute. Housed within an educational institution, the shows at FIT could take a broad range of approaches, which reflected the curriculum in social history, anthropology, and merchandising, as well as in art and design. Koda described how there was “the whole range” of possibilities for the FIT shows, as compared to his later work at the Costume Institute where “it really is about the mastery of the craft” and “the artistic importance of the garment” with reference to the ideas of their designers (Koda and Reeder 2012).

The FIT collection, founded in 1969 as the Design Laboratory (which originated at the Brooklyn Museum in 1915) was intended to support the educational programs of the FIT, part of the State University of New York (SUNY). The museum at FIT remains one of a small number of museums in the world devoted exclusively to fashion. In the 1970s, prior to the museum forming its own collection, FIT’s

exhibitions drew from a collection on long-term loan from the Brooklyn Museum of Art, comprising over 50,000 garments and accessories from the eighteenth century to the present, textiles and other fashion-related material, deaccessioned in 2009, with many pieces going to the Costume Institute. In the 1980s, FIT began to stage shows under the auspices of its Shirley Goodman Resource Center, then responsible for exhibitions and collections, under the direction, until 1993, of Richard Martin with Harold Koda. Original in content and approach, they also included the exhibitions *Fashion and Surrealism* (1987), *Undercover Story* (1982), and *Three Women: Madeleine Vionnet, Claire McCardell, Rei Kawakubo* (1987). The Design Laboratory changed to its current name The Museum at FIT in 1993, the year Martin moved to the Costume Institute. Dr. Valerie Steele was appointed to its staff in 1997, and then named its director in 2003, the year she also launched the FIT annual fashion symposium (Fashion Institute of Technology 2014). She has developed the role of The Museum at FIT as the central focus of fashion design exhibitions in New York City, as well as playing a seminal role in fashion scholarship internationally through her many publications, and as the editor of the scholarly journal *Fashion Theory*.

The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a different and longer history. Formed in 1937 as the Museum of Costume Art, it owed its origins to Irene Lewisohn, founder of the Neighborhood Playhouse, a community theater in downtown Manhattan. With financial support from the fashion industry in 1946 and under the leadership of Dorothy Shaver, the vice president of the Fifth Avenue department store Lord and Taylor, the Museum of Costume Art merged with the Metropolitan Museum of Art as The Costume Institute before becoming a museum curatorial department in 1959. This close connection between fashion as a business and as a display at the museum has been pivotal in the curatorial development of the museum. When Richard Martin was appointed curator of costume in 1993, he was following in the footsteps of Diana Vreeland, who had served as special consultant from 1972 until her death in 1989. The former editor of the American *Vogue* had been responsible for bringing more flamboyant and popular shows to the Metropolitan Museum of Art including *The World of Balenciaga* (1973), *Hollywood Design* (1974), *The Glory of Russian Costume* (1976), *Vanity Fair* (1977), and *Yves Saint Laurent* (1983). The latter exhibition proved controversial by featuring the work of a living designer who was clearly situated within the fashion system, and as such it brought accusations from some quarters that commerce was overtaking culture (Storr 1987). Yet Vreeland's approach transformed public interest in fashion exhibitions. In her wake, Richard Martin's less showy exhibitions that brought a more scholarly and critical approach added new dimensions that helped to set fashion exhibitions and scholarship on a new path. Some shows were devoted to designers—*Gianni Versace* (1997), *Christian Dior* (1996), *Madame Grès* (1994)—but others took more critical approaches, which are evident even from their titles: *Cubism and Fashion* (1998), *American –Ingenuity: Sportswear, 1930's–1970's* (1998),

Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress (1994), *Swords into Ploughshares: Military Dress and the Civilian Wardrobe* (1995). Also, *Wordrobe* (1997) an original exhibition that took a historical look at clothing adorned with words, from poems to political slogans, which Martin described as “the reconciliation of textile and text” (Schiro 1999). Martin also added to the collection by accepting donations of clothing from designers and their clients, as well as by shopping at auctions, and flea markets. Indeed, included in what was to be his last show, *Our New Clothes: Acquisitions of the 1990’s* (1999), was a John Galliano dress purchased off the rack at the discount store *Century 21* (Schiro 1999). Bringing an academic rigor from his art history background, as well as a substantial intelligence, Richard Martin treated fashion and its objects as an intriguing and valuable part of cultural study. Through their different approaches, Martin and Vreeland both contributed to increasing the visibility, interest, and profitability of fashion exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, though few could be deemed everyday.

Comparatively, Richard Martin had much more flexibility in the range and subjects of the exhibitions he could stage and what he could collect at FIT than when he moved to the Costume Institute. The fact that the latter was, and continues to be, underwritten by the New York fashion industry (as part of the agreement when the foundational “Museum of Costume Art” collection was acquired in 1946) has shaped its collections policy and donors. While the link was most marked under Diana Vreeland, it was always present to some extent, for example, in its “party of the year.” Instituted in 1947 by Eleanor Lambert, a central figure in American fashion public relations, the annual gala was intended to contribute to the operating budget of the Costume Institute. In recent years, under the leadership of Anna Wintour, editor in chief of the American *Vogue* and artistic director of Condé Nast, it has raised so much money that it has been able to contribute to the capital funds needed for the Costume Institute’s recent refurbishment, including The Anna Wintour Costume Center, as well as specific exhibitions and acquisitions (Buckley and Clark 2012).

Fashion and city life

In marked contrast to the collections of the Costume Institute and the V&A are those of the Museum of London and the Museum of the City of New York. The Museum of London “has always seen dress as one of a variety of major cultural aspects of the life and culture of the city of London—of London’s memory” (Taylor 2004, 126). Its origins lay in the Guildhall Museum founded in 1826 and the London Museum founded in 1911, and its dress collection aims to “represent London’s role as a centre for the fashion and clothing industry from education through to design, production, promotion, retail and wear, [and to] reflect the diversity of life in London, recording and collecting the clothing of all London’s communities”

(Museum of London, Dress and Fashion 2012). With the consolidation of the new Museum of London from the merger of the Guildhall Museum and the London Museum in 1976, it aimed to collect “only objects found in London or manufactured in London” (Museum of London, History of Collections 2012). With dress integral from the outset and a costume catalog published in 1933, the Museum of London adopted a survey approach that drew from donated collections.⁶ It also houses an outstanding photographic collection depicting everyday lives in all areas of London at its disposal, which has been highly effective as contextualizing media. Typically, fashion at the museum has been shown as part of general displays and its thematic exhibitions have also included fashion. A good example of this is *Twenties London* (2003), which included numerous images, objects, and paintings that represented London as a global city—a “nerve-centre,” at once modern and traditional. Integral to this exhibition, fashion was presented as embedded in Londoners’ everyday lives, through displaying clothes worn by ordinary Londoners. A year later, the same museum staged *The London Look—Fashion from Street to Catwalk* (2004), an exhibition that responded to shifting scholarship within fashion history. Although some of the exhibited garments were examples of haute couture and the product of auteurs and designers, the exhibition equally included fashion that was sold by department stores and multiple stores, advertised in working women’s magazines, indicative of make-do and mend during wartime, and adapted, worn, and occasionally subverted on the street. This positioning of fashion as everyday, rather than exclusive, is clearly discernible in the museum’s acquisition list for 2009–10: a sweatshirt (1987), T-shirt (2004), apron (Laura Ashley, 1966–67), boots (UGG, 2009) (Museum of London, Museum of London Acquisitions 2012). Nevertheless, the exhibition of everyday fashion is more likely to be the product of a broader design, social or cultural history approach, and remains less common than the display of more showy and unusual items that are more visually appealing and instantly eye-catching to the museum visitor.

In New York City, the museum closest in mission and content to the Museum of London is the Museum of the City of New York, which was founded in 1923 to present the history of New York City and its people. Located on Fifth Avenue at the northern end of “museum mile,” the institution respects its neighborhood of East Harlem and offers free admission to the local community and stages shows that capture the ethnic and racial diversity of the city. Like the Museum of London, its collection includes garments, artifacts, paintings, and an extensive collection of photographs, the latter providing a comprehensive social documentary of the city since the late nineteenth century. In the 2000s, for instance, the Museum of the City of New York presented very original fashion exhibitions staged principally by Phyllis Magidson, curator of costumes and textiles, including *Black Style Now* (2006–07), and *Stephen Burrows: When Fashion Danced* (2013). In 2008–09, it also held a “twenties” show *Paris/New York: Design/Fashion/Culture 1925–1940*, by Donald Albrecht, curator of architecture and design at the museum, featuring

drawings, furnishings, decorative objects, costumes, photographs, posters, and films (Museum of the City of New York 2009). While that exhibition included what was designed, made, and consumed in the two cities, its focus was largely on the transatlantic creative “conversations” between Paris and New York, presented as centers of the artistic and cultural avant-garde. In doing so, it located fashion as part of a broader design/cultural history that touched upon everyday lives, as well as being informed by seasonal ready-to-wear and couture design in different locales. Continuing this interest in the wider cultural histories of New York, *Cecil Beaton: The New York Years* (2011–12), also curated by Albrecht, revealed the differences in curatorial approach to the V&A exhibition some 30 years earlier, as it documented—in photographs, drawings, and “costumes”—Beaton’s work. It presented him not as an arbiter of taste and style as at the V&A, but as a “chronicler” of the cultural life of New York City from the 1920s through the 1960s (Museum of the City of New York 2011). Typically the Museum of the City of New York stages some exhibitions devoted specifically to fashion, and also includes garments in many of its shows. One of the most notable in recent years had a close association with the V&A. *Black Style Now* (2006–07), cocurated by Phyllis Magidson, Michael McCollum, and Michael Henry Adams, was promoted as the first American exhibition to explore black fashion, and to highlight the impact of hip-hop on style (Museum of the City of New York 2006). Featuring street style that strongly referenced New York’s African American communities, in addition to high fashion represented by the work of black fashion designers, the exhibition began with Martine Barrat’s impressive street photography of people in Harlem in the 1980s and 1990s. This exhibition owed its existence to the earlier show *Black British Style*, curated by Carol Tulloch at the V&A Museum (2004–05). Drawing upon written, oral, and visual biographies, this particular exhibition considered aspects of fashion in everyday lives, and it highlighted the importance of curators, and other key individuals in the formation of collections and the development of exhibitions relative to specific institutional contexts and geographies (Tulloch 2004).

Beyond London and New York

For some curators, including those interviewed as part of this research, provenance is critical to their approach to acquisitions’ policy as this allows them to show fashion as part of everyday lives. Describing her arrival at the V&A in 1957, curator of dress Madeleine Ginsburg found to her dismay that the civil service administrators of the museum had “weeded” out files that held much of the key information about the background to the acquisitions, origins and reason for their acceptance (Taylor 2004, 120). Joanna Hashagen (2012), curator of fashion and textiles at the Bowes Museum in the north of England, stressed in a recent interview the legacy of Ann

Buck, curator at Platt Hall Museum, Manchester, England (who had trained her) in capturing the who, what, when, and why of specific acquisitions and donations. Keen to capture a lifetime in a wardrobe, Hashagen (2012) insists that without provenance fashion in museums is largely meaningless, particularly in a regional museum at some distance from the metropolis. Indeed Vanda Foster, a former colleague of Hashagen's (also trained by Buck) and the successor to Madeleine Ginsburg at Gunnersbury Museum in London still retains and uses the detailed, hand and typewritten accession cards that remain her key source of information in a small local-authority funded museum on the periphery of London. Importantly regional museums in Britain such as the Bowes Museum and Beamish, the Living Museum of the North, have been assiduous in collecting fashion that is part of everyday lives, including homemade and shop-bought items, on the basis that these are indicative of individual lives in the north of England as well as of broader social and cultural change (Hashagen 2012).

Regional collections are increasingly focusing on collecting local fashion, which attempts to appeal to their local constituency of visitors; and curators such as Lou Taylor and Amy de la Haye at the Brighton Museum in Britain, as well as curators at some national museum collection departments, including Alexandra Palmer at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, seek clothes worn by members in their communities. This reiterates the importance of curators and other key individuals to the formation of collections and the subject of exhibitions of fashion and dress, relative to specific institutional contexts and geographies. Curator Diana Baird N'Diaye (2012) at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, is leading a major research project, the "Will to Adorn" to document "cultural biographies of dress" among members of the African American population in a range of locations including New York City, Chicago, and the US Virgin Islands (see Smithsonian Institution 2010). Based on participant interviews and the interrogation of artifacts and photographs, N'Diaye's project is undoubtedly concerned with the everyday. What is of significance here also is N'Diaye's institutional affiliation as Folklife Curator and Cultural Heritage Specialist at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), not with one of the museum's collections of dress or textiles.

Conclusion

While definitions of the everyday have involved weighty conceptualization from a range of cultural theorists (e.g., Lefebvre 1988; de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol 1998; Benjamin 2002), the interest in fashion as part of mundane lives poses pragmatic acquisition problems and curatorial challenges as fashion is conceived as ordinary as well as extraordinary. Without examples of how ordinary people—as well as the rich, famous, and exceptional—engaged with fashion in museum collections,

it remains left to photographs, film, and personal testimony to capture this. A diversity of sources exists, which can include family snapshots and albums, oral histories, items from personal wardrobes, yard sales and flea markets, editorials and advertisements from general interest magazines such as *Picture Post* in Britain and *Life* or *Ebony* in the United States, some of which are being utilized by curators of fashion exhibitions (Bivins and Adams 2013), as well as autobiographies, biographies, and fiction (for an extended discussion of historic source materials see Taylor 2002 and 2013).

Reviewing the fashion collecting practices in these selected museums, our findings have reinforced our view that it is only through the questioning, and disruption, of scholarship and curatorial practices that fashion can be rearticulated within the realm of the everyday, and as this chapter demonstrates, the collection, representation, and interpretation of fashion in museums plays a pivotal role. In this reconceptualization, fashion is defined as embedded and ongoing in people's everyday lives, rather than as an exceptional event, a one-off "look," an activity associated with a stage of one's life, or only relevant to the elite. Central to this scholarship, rather than in its hinterland, is the fashion that is not only uniquely designed, exquisitely constructed, or stylistically exceptional. To date, the realization of these ideas in museum collections and exhibitions has been uneven and limited, and when "everyday approaches" have been in evidence, they have been due to specific factors: museum policies, curatorial strategies, shifting cultural geographies, and new scholarship combined with the foresight of specific curators.

The curator remains vital, not just as institutional gatekeeper, but also as intellectual arbiter between objects, images, and ideas—one who must function within the mission and parameters of an institution. Institutional policy also remains very important; the "art" museum, for instance, will always have the visual and aesthetic dimension as a priority. Yet, in the twenty-first century, when "everyone" can "curate" fashion, especially on a personal level and in the blogosphere, it begs the question of the future role of the professional museum curator and of fashion exhibitions. If freed from the mandate of collecting and showing the most aesthetically appealing pieces and leaders of taste, exhibitions might highlight more the individual and shared stories, and the memories and evocations that lie within the folds of fashionable clothes. Museums are only starting to grapple with how to deal with "collecting" fashion in the virtual realm; this will present another valuable insight into the increasing role of fashion as representation and entertainment in everyday life. Since the end of the last century, fashion has gained much greater inroads into the lives of ordinary people, through reality television shows, internet sites such as Style.com that report on designer fashion, as well as blogs by nonprofessionals. As clothes accumulate over time—hung at the back of the wardrobe, taken back out, added to and adapted, reassembled with a new scarf or pair of shoes, as "fast fashion," or in literally fleeting images, be it a family

snapshot, or in the twenty-first century a digital “selfie” in a blog—more museum collections and exhibitions must address these nuanced realities of fashion as constituting a vital part of everyday lives.

Notes

- 1 There is a developing body of research on this including Melchior, Marie Riegels and Birgitta Svensson. 2014. *Fashion and Museums. Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Bloomsbury; Taylor, Lou. 2004. *Establishing Dress History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Styles, John. 1998. “Dress in History: Reflections on a Contested Terrain” *Fashion Theory* 2 (4): 383–90; Mendes, Valerie and Amy de la Haye. 1999. *20th Century Fashion*. London: Thames and Hudson; Palmer, Alexandra. 2008. “Untouchable: Creating Desire and Knowledge in Museum Costume and Textile Exhibitions.” *Fashion Theory* 12 (1): 31–64; Breward, Christopher and David Gilbert. 2006. *Fashion’s World Cities*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- 2 We acknowledge that costume, dress, and fashion have different meanings: in using “costume,” we refer to the way that it has historically been used for clothing and accessories of a particular country, historical period, or in the theatrical context. In using “dress,” we describe the putting together and wearing of items of clothing (see also Eicher in this book). Yet, while “dress” is perhaps the most appropriate generic term to refer to clothing and to the body (“dressing” the hair for instance), this usage is nonetheless complicated by its common “female” connotation in Western societies as a specifically gendered garment. In using “fashion,” we describe the making or design, and wearing and assembling of clothes that can correspond to a recognizable look that involves acts of agency either by individuals, groups, or designers. We also propose that fashion has longevity, that it exists over time, and is not just the here and now, that it can be ordinary as well as extraordinary. The terms “costume” and “fashion” tend to be those used to refer to collections of clothing items, for example, The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, compared to the Department of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion at the V&A Museum, London. Terminology also changes to reflect changing attitudes in museums and scholarly discourse, which has been especially true in Britain and Europe, for example, the V&A changed the name of its display of clothing on several occasions, being instituted as the “Costume Court” in 1962, as the “Dress Court” in 1983 under the directorship of Sir Roy Strong, and the “Fashion Galleries” in 2012.
- 3 This poster was produced in the late 1980s as one of six in the campaign series for Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Ltd., London.
- 4 By which he meant “the new or the nearly new things still available in the marketplace at the time, or manufactured objects made within the past fifteen years or so that remain in continuous production.”
- 5 *Fashion 1900–1939*, Scottish Arts Council exhibition with the support of the Victoria and Albert Museum (London: Idea Books, 1975): 7. The exhibition was supported by Roy Strong who wrote the foreword, along with the director of the Scottish Arts Council—the exhibition opened at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh (December–January 1975–76) and then closed at the V&A (March–May 1976).

- 6 Key collections included the Seymour Lucas collection acquired in 1911. Like the V&A major donated collection, the Talbot Hughes collection of 1913, Lucas was a painter of historic portraits and landscapes and amassed his costume collection to give his paintings historical authenticity.

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