FASHION CURATING

Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION: FASHION CURATING IN THE MUSEUM AND BEYOND

Hazel Clark and Annamari Vänskä

Fashion curating brought us together; first with an exhibition in New York in fall 2013, discussed in Chapter 7, then with the symposium that followed it, and now as the co-editors of this anthology, which originated in part from the symposium. This extended project has enabled us to work with some of the most able and informed curators, writers and critics of fashion, who are active today in major museums around the world, independently, and outside of museums, who have contributed to the three sections of this book. What we present in this volume is fashion curating as a collaborative enquiry, involving people occupied in shared endeavors, practically and intellectually, not simply as isolated professionals, and not only working with precious objects. The anthology resulted from a perceived need to reference fashion's contextual relationships to identity, performance, production, consumption and art, all of which sit at the heart of critical fashion curating, and have also been extended to the individual action of curating the self. In this Introduction we provide a sense of the more recent development of fashion curating, as practice and discourse, and as part of a broader "curatorial turn" (O'Neill, 2007). During recent times, especially in the last twenty years, curating has become a means not just of presenting fashion, but also of providing a critique of an increasingly complex, interesting, and pervasive part of the lives of greater numbers of people around the world. Fashion curating is by its very nature a critical practice.

Nevertheless, today there are relatively few titles that consider and analyze fashion *curating* directly, rather than focusing on museum practices, on historical dress, or the work of seminal designers, curators and institutions (Anderson 2000; Taylor 2002, 2004; O'Neill 2008; Steele 2008; Clark and de la Haye 2014; Riegels Melchior 2014). *Fashion Curating: Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond* adds to what has been written by opening up new viewpoints. Our volume builds upon and draws from what exists and continues the discourse. It also changes its course by turning a critical eye on theories and methods of curating and the professionals involved in developing it as a cultural practice. The outcome is to provide an enhanced understanding of fashion and its place in the exhibition space and also elsewhere. For fashion, curating has evolved from making historically oriented exhibitions that arrange extant garments according to epoch and style, to encompass thought-provoking, performative, creative and interventionist strategies, presented in museums, commercial galleries, public spaces, retail environments and other venues (see Plate 1).

From their distinct and knowledgeable perspectives, the authors in this anthology consider the aims, functions and practices of fashion, while problematizing curating as a professional activity and as an increasingly popular non-professional pursuit. We feature fashion curating as a multifaceted activity, which highlights an informed and collaborative practice, which has varied and interesting etymological and professional roots. We also feature it as a way of thinking, researching and analyzing fashion and culture critically and as a means of raising aesthetic, social, political and philosophical questions. Critical fashion curating is a way of producing knowledge which can visualize, display, and popularize fashion research in an accessible, even an “edutaining,” format while creating discourse. It is also a powerful way of attracting audiences within and outside of academia and engaging them in dialogues about how fashion interacts with ordinary as well as extraordinary contexts and experiences.

For some, the first encounter with the word *curate* came via the Anglican Church, where the curate was a junior clergyman who assisted the parish priest. He was in effect an intermediary between church and congregation, with pastoral responsibility, named from the Medieval Latin *curatus* and from *cura*, referring to spiritual oversight. His status was subservient, as was made memorably evident in the humorous illustration by George du Maurier published in the British satirical magazine *Punch* (1895). A meek curate is shown having breakfast with his bishop, who observes, “‘I’m afraid you’ve got a bad egg, Mr Jones,’ to which the curate replies ‘Oh no, my Lord, I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!”’[1]? As a result, the phrase, “the curate’s egg” was adopted into common parlance. Interestingly, a mere ten years later it was applied to fashion in a publication called *Minister’s Gazette of Fashion*, which noted how, “The past spring and summer season has seen much fluctuation. Like the curate’s egg, it has been excellent in parts.” The term *curator* shares the Latin roots of curate, but has been used more specifically to mean “care”, especially of museum objects, and for specific tasks including the guardian of a young person who is a minor (still extant in Scottish law). In the museum those entrusted with curatorial tasks would typically be highly informed experts who were not identified individually, to the public at least. This largely remains the case today, as made evident in Section One of this book “Inside the Museum.” So while experts remain, their more contemporary role in addressing fashion is greater than only interpreting objects for an ill-informed audience.

In their volume *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971* (2014) Amy de la Haye and Judith Clark trace the history of the fashion exhibition. Although museums started collecting and displaying industrial objects in the nineteenth century, fashionable dress was not considered worthy of these activities before the Second World War (de la Haye, 2014: 11; see also Taylor, 2004: 106). This was partly due to the culturally low status of fashion, and partly to the masculine nature of the profession: most curators were male. With the war, men were called to military service which opened up possibilities for women to become senior level curators in museums. Valerie Steele (2008: 7–30), on the other hand has traced the beginnings of the fashion exhibition more specifically. She shows how museums dedicated to art, design, history and ethnography were all sites where fashion has been exhibited since the opening of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1852. Despite the longish history of fashion and dress in museums however, it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that fashion was regarded as worthy of its own museums (Steele, 2008: 9) and not dismissed as "vulgar commerciality and valueless, ephemeral, feminine style" (Taylor, 1998: 341). What is paradoxical is that the aversion to fashion mainly applied to the contemporary. Pre-industrial dress and the clothing worn by the elite in non-Western cultures were collected and exhibited (Steele, 2008: 9). "Dress," with the implied sense of longevity and tradition, and "fashion," with the implication of the transitory and modern, were treated differently. Now the reception has changed. The *fashion* exhibition has taken precedence, and certain institutions have gained scholarly and popular acclaim for their shows. The Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, for instance, regularly displays historical and contemporary garments, as in the spring 2016 exhibition *Manus x Machina* (see Figure x.1).

Despite the existence of exhibitions of fashion and dress, the contemporary fashion curator only emerged in the 1950s when the V&A hired its first curator for dress, Madeleine Blumstein (de la Haye, 2014: 18). What was significant was the way in which Blumstein and her colleague Peter Thornton changed the display of garments: they used contemporary mannequins and aimed at creating "fashion stories" that reflected contemporary times. They also paired fashion with paintings and fashion plates in order to create context around the clothes (de la Haye, 2014: 20). But it was only in 1971 when a, now more familiar type of, fashion exhibition emerged. According to Amy de la Haye (2006: 129), the first major exhibition of fashion was the *Fashion: An Anthology of Cecil Beaton* at the V&A. It attracted more than 90,000 visitors and exhibited modern fashions from Great Britain and abroad. What was unique in the exhibition was that dresses collected from contemporary celebrities were on display and were afforded the same criteria as afforded to paintings and other artifacts: taste and quality (de la Haye, 2006: 130). Also, British *Vogue* was seminal in mediating the exhibition to the audience. It published an image-led preview of the exhibition, photographed historical dress on celebrities and argued that the exhibition displayed "milestones of fashion" (de la Haye, 2006: 132–133). Such connections also changed the role of the fashion curator away from someone who historically had been defined as a "custodian" who archived, catalogued and preserved works of art, which could include historical dress within the museum. The need to identify curation as a vital and growing practice, led to the verb "to curate" and the adjective "curatorial" entering the English language where once there was only a noun (Farquharson 2003, cited in O'Neill 2007).

Writing, more specifically, of the modern art museum, Grunenberg (1999: 28) argued that "innovations in museum display have generally evolved out of developments in art itself." Thus ten years after the arrival of modern art in America came the white cube: a simple gallery space, separated from the outside world, whose white walls were visible between the artwork. In this new space, the "new art" was more conceptual, and demanded interpretation, and the curator adopted the role of informed intermediary. As the art world changed dramatically in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, so too did curating. While museums struggled increasingly with public funding and declining visitor rates (Anderson 2000), the independent curator gained more visibility as the manager of exhibitions in and outside conventional institutions. Independent curators became more

Figure x.1 *Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology* (2016), Lower Level Gallery View: (Pleating), Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

prominent from the 1990s onwards, a decade in the art world that has been defined as the "curator's moment" (Brenson 1998) and as a "curatorial turn" (O'Neill 2007). The decade also produced the so-called star-curator who became the face and spokesperson of the exhibition and the primary mediator between the exhibition and the public. This phenomenon has lately been criticized for granting curators too much power, for putting the curator center-stage instead of the artist and the artworks, and for transforming the exhibition into the curator's work of art (Vidokle 2010). It has also produced "uncurated, un-juried, all-artists accepted" exhibitions (Kazalia 2014) which attempt to critique the curator's power and display a more democratic view of art and artists. Paradoxically such exhibitions end up undermining the role of curating as an important tool for mediating critical thinking, social engagement and cultural analysis as it is presented in this anthology. We address the rise of the curator as having transformed the practice positively and having widened understanding of what an exhibition or a curatorial project can mean. One of the criticized star-curators, but also arguably the most influential and prolific art curator of these times is Hans Ulrich Obrist (Balzer 2015). At the time of writing, he has curated over 250 art exhibitions internationally, expanding the field by simultaneously utilizing a range of platforms, including books, periodicals, conferences, conversations, as well as blogs and digital means to share his perspectives. Despite the range and sophistication of his work, Obrist defines the act of curating at its most basic as "simply about connecting cultures, bringing their elements into proximity with each other . . . to allow different elements to touch" (Obrist, 2014: 1).

While the trajectory for the development of fashion curation has been somewhat different in origins, content and aims from what took place in art museums, it was not entirely so. Especially since the 1990s, fashion curation has also developed in response to changes in the museum sector (Anderson, 2000), in the industry (Melchior, 2014) and in the study of fashion. Fashion scholar, historian and curator, Christopher Breward, charted such developments; writing in 2008 of his own experiences in a special issue of the academic journal *Fashion Theory*, titled "Exhibitionism," he noted the professional and intellectual changes between the museum and the academy in the previous ten years (Breward, 2008). One of the major and important professional distinctions that Breward witnessed and which we also highlight in this book is that of exhibition collaborations between those with distinct and complementary expertise, in terms of academic and curatorial approaches. Yet this is a relatively recent development, marked also perhaps by the fact that in the same year, 2008, Alistair O'Neill, one of the contributors to this book, edited a special issue of *Fashion Theory* on the subject of Fashion Curation. In that issue N.J. Stevenson wrote of the development of "The Fashion Retrospective" citing *The World of Balenciaga*, staged at the Costume Institute, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 1973 and curated by Diana Vreeland, as a pivotal moment, giving a fashion designer the accord formerly held for great artists (Stevenson 2008, 221–222).

While the contemporary curatorial profession in the art world emerged in the 1990s along with the development of biennials and more particular art venues, the fashion curator appeared earlier, in the 1970s, with the contemporary fashion exhibition. One of its figureheads was Diana Vreeland, who helped identify the fashion curator as central to the interpretation of fashion and dress history and the creation of narratives about fashion and its culture for audiences. Previously, those working as fashion curators were more like anonymous labourers who worked behind the scenes in museums, took care of the dress collections and created exhibitions that reflected the nature of the collection. In contrast, a new type of fashion curator emerged to become an identifiable person associated more directly with particular exhibitions. Diana Vreeland is an example par excellence: she created fashion exhibitions that were dictated solely by her personal vision. In this sense, the notion of the "curatorial turn" (O'Neill 2007) and the "curator's moment" (Brenson 1998) identified in art curation in the 1990s, had already happened in fashion curation two decades before. Vreeland insisted that the curator was not merely a mediator of fashion, but a central figure.

Mrs Vreeland was not trained in curation; her background was in fashion journalism. She had been a noted columnist at *Harper's Bazaar* and the editor-in-chief of American *Vogue*

(1962–1971) before becoming a special consultant and a curator at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1971. Vreeland's exhibitions were exaggerated theatrical and dramatic spectacles, open to historical interpretation and flexible in attention to the symbolic meanings of dress. Instead, they aimed at speaking about the "now" (Steele, 2008: 10–11) and in doing so brought a new, and for many a controversial, approach to exhibiting fashion (Silverman 1986). A prime example is Vreeland's designer-monograph show that succeeded Balenciaga: *Twenty-five years of Saint Laurent* (1983–1984). It proved especially controversial, not only in being devoted to a single designer, but to one who, unlike Balenciaga, was very much alive and active. Differing opinions apart, a line had certainly been crossed with this exhibition, but it did not prevent even greater criticism nearly twenty years later when a retrospective of the work of Giorgio Armani was staged in 2000–2001 at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, which travelled to venues including the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and the Guggenheim, Bilbao (www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/giorgio-armani–2). Rumours that the exhibition had followed a substantial gift by the company to the Guggenheim added to the critique. Writing in the UK, *The Observer* design critic Deyan Sudjic condemned this apparent blurring of commerce and culture in the art museum, stating that fashion was both "not art" and "parasitic" (Sudjic, 2001). Yet the curatorial pedigree of the show was stellar—although, as John Potvin (2012: 55) has noted, the curators' names were not actually publicized at the time. The exhibition was a collaboration between famed Italian art curator Germano Celant and Harold Koda (later to become chief curator at the Costume Institute), with the inspired addition of design by avant-garde stage designer Robert Wilson. In *The New York Times*, art critic Herbert Muschamp, never one to heap praise for its own sake, criticized the blurring of commerce and culture, while also noting "That there has never been a fixed order between cultural institutions and private enterprise," he described the Armani tableaux as "awesome" (Muschamp, 2000). Like it or hate it, the Armani show was also prescient in acknowledging the blurring between high art and mass culture, at a moment when, in the words of Harold Koda, "The [fashion] business becomes part of the process in a post-Warholian way where business becomes art" (Fowler, 2000).

In terms of display practices, Vreeland set many of the standards still in use in fashion exhibitions by mixing clothing with all kinds of props from elephants to scent. She used them to style the clothes, rather than necessarily to give them historical or cultural context. While these imaginary narratives had evident problems, Vreeland's importance is that she eradicated the "waxwork museum-look of corpses under glass" (Dwight cited in Steele, 2008: 12). In doing so she was able to revolutionize the display practices of fashion—and in the process she also attracted large audiences to her exhibitions. In many ways, fashion curatorial display practices still follow in the footsteps of Diana Vreeland. One example is the exhibitions staged at the ModeMuseum or MoMu in Antwerp which has become internationally known for its avant-gardist displays while still respecting history and fact. Their shows demonstrate how the aim of the contemporary fashion exhibition is clearly two-fold: to educate audiences about fashion, but also to provide them with the possibility to "drown themselves in beauty" as Diana Vreeland (Newhouse, 2006 cited in Steele, 2008: 11) put it.

As part of this changing trajectory, it should be noted how increasing numbers of fine artists have also engaged with fashion. The relationship between artists and fashion is not new, but rather infused modernity in the twentieth century. It took the form of now famous collaborations, such as between the designer Paul Poiret and the artist Raoul Dufy, or between Elsa Schiaparelli and Salvador Dali. The Surrealists had a particular fascination with fashion objects and especially with the mannequin. At the International Surrealist Exhibition held in Paris in 1938, visitors entered along a corridor where fashion house mannequins had been "curated" to be standing on an imaginary Paris street, and dressed by Surrealist artists. Fashionable clothing played a greater part in art as Pop art referenced the everyday and mass-produced clothing, with the likes of Andy Warhol's paper "The Souper Dress" (1966–1967) (see Plate 2). Simultaneously, art moved from the gallery wall and plinth into installations, including pieces such as Joseph Beuys' "Felt Suit" (1970); a two-piece outfit comprising a jacket and a pair of trousers made from coarse grey felt. While the paper dress was a throwaway, Beuys' suit—or "social sculpture" as it was also called—represented his notion that everyone could be an artist. After 1970, according to an exhibition at the Barbican Centre, London in 2002, art was "seduced" by fashion (Townsend 2002) leading to more innovative and elaborative collaborations—and curation. Fashion and art have remained intertwined. Many famous designers such as Karl Lagerfeld, Helmut Lang and Hussein Chalayan have started to make art. Likewise, contemporary artists have created clothes not as wearable objects, but as powerful conveyors of concepts that have referenced the likes of the body, identity, gender and global politics.

In the 2010s the merging of art and fashion appeared to have reached another moment of transition, maybe even a kind of peak. In 2012 the shop windows of the fashion department store Selfridges in London, for example, were transformed with the appearance of life-sized and miniature mannequin dolls modeled after the world-famous Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. Wearing red gowns patterned with Kusama's signature white polka dots, the mannequin dolls were surrounded by Louis Vuitton handbags in different sizes and colors, similarly printed. In 2016, this window display became an art installation that was included in the artist's solo exhibition *In Infinity* (October 7, 2016–January 22, 2017) at the Helsinki Art Museum (see Plate 3).

At the same time as the window display at Selfridges, the London-based Saatchi Gallery exhibited another show merging fashion with art. This was a travelling exhibition entitled *The Little Black Jacket*, dedicated to Chanel's signature garment, co-organized by the designer Karl Lagerfeld and former *Vogue* editor Carine Roitfeld. The exhibition featured over a hundred, mostly black-and-white photographic portraits of Chanel's models and other known celebrities, each interpreting the jacket to reflect their own personal style. The brand's involvement in curation was not unprecedented. This exhibition was preceded by an altogether more ambitious Chanel collaboration a few years earlier. Described as "Art and Commerce Canoodling" (Ouroussoff, 2008) when it appeared in New York's Central Park in the autumn of 2008, the Chanel Mobile Art pavilion was something of a pinnacle of curating fashion, art and the luxury brand. Initiated by Karl Lagerfeld, in a temporary structure designed by the architect Zaha Hadid (see Figure x.2), the project displayed commissioned artworks which referenced Chanel's classic 2.55 quilted chain strap handbag. New York was the third stop, after Hong Kong and Tokyo, on what was intended to be a world tour. The visitor experience was completely curated. A preciousness and exclusivity was established by the free tickets having to be booked online, or by waiting in

Figure x.2 NEW YORK—NOVEMBER 06: Chanel Mobile Art Exhibit at the Chanel Mobile Art event with XOJET Core Club at Rumsey Playfield, Central Park on November 6, 2008 in New York City. Photo: Amy Sussman/Getty Images for Chanel.

line in the park on chilly autumn days for any available spaces. Once inside, visitors were divested of personal items and fitted with MP3 players from which the sultry voice of French actress Jeanne Moreau guided their "personal journey." There was no question of who was in control. The brand was skilfully curating the visitors' experience, the art works themselves, and the consumer connection by also referencing the project in the Chanel stores in the city. As *The New York Times* journalist Nicolai Ouroussoff commented "It's not just that New York and much of the rest of the world are preoccupied by economic turmoil, although the timing could hardly be worse. It's that the pavilion sets out to drape an aura of refinement over a cynical marketing gimmick. Surveying its self-important exhibits, you can't help but hope that the era of exploiting the so-called intersection of architecture, art and fashion is finally over" (Ouroussoff 2008). His words proved prescient. The pavilion did not continue its planned tour after New York; the world economic turmoil to which he referred, served as the demise of the project, which nevertheless marked yet another watershed in fashion curating.

In the twenty-first century in particular, the curation of fashion underwent a tremendous cultural shift. Haute couture exhibitions featuring houses and designers including Dior, Alexander McQueen, Marc Jacobs, Hermès, and Jean-Paul Gaultier produced spectacular globetrotting exhibitions displayed in major art museums around the world. These exhibitions merge art and commerce and also reflect fashion's acknowledgement within the wider framework of the arts. Simultaneously fashion is playing a more significant role in culture, commerce, everyday life and entertainment. Many fashion boutiques are being described as "curated" and some include artwork (often in reproduction) in their interiors. This can serve to further to blur boundaries between fashion curating as a critical

Figure x.3 Acne Studios, Berlin. Courtesy of Acne Studios.

means of producing knowledge and as a means of personal branding and managing consumption with a meticulously pre-selected array of commodities. In fact, a fervent critic of curation—or "curationism" (another neologism)—David Balzer (2015: 111) has noted that people who work in fashion probably curate every day: "As a model scout, as a retail worker [. . .]. In fashion, the role of stylist has emerged as a prominent curationist profession. [. . .] Stylists are in true curatorial mode, collaborators, liaising with photographers, editors, designers and the model to determine which looks work best."

In the commercial world, the term *curator* has come to designate someone who pulls together, sifts through and selects to create some sort of sense, be it for a fashion store, at a public event, or on a website. Already in 2004 for instance, the website Trendwatching.com referenced "curated consumption" and a "new breed of curators" who cater for the needs of the new "spoilt-for-choice, switched-on, wired-to-the-teeth" consumer who is ever more demanding and knowledgeable about what they consume and how.[2] The rise of social media has enabled anyone to share their opinions, to select and present, or *curate,* a scenario, and thereby to function as an expert. In these new contexts, the curator is no longer the custodian of museum objects. On the contrary, s/he can even be a self-taught amateur who edits and pre-selects for others to buy, to experience, to wear, to read, to eat, to listen to . . . the list goes on. This suggests that fashion in particular has become hard currency for curating. It is a means of making value for fashionable commodities through meticulous selection and arrangement in boutiques and on shop floors (see Figure x.3).

This type of curating is not situated in the confines of museums or galleries—on the contrary, it occurs in similar places to which art has moved from the white cube: department stores, boutiques, and online shops. In these contexts curating does not necessarily have anything to do with the traditional meanings of the word. Rather, here it is used as an effective tool for creating an offering for consumption. Here curating is intended to give more value to shopping. It aims to transform the act of consuming into a work of art. The term "curate" and its variants has clearly come to be utilized to imply a value added, to create a sense of items having been carefully and even exclusively selected by an authority for the purpose of consumption. For instance, the "Beauty Curators" spotted downtown on Sixth Avenue in New York early in 2017, was belied by the fact that it was actually offering cheap cosmetics, as "Stealin Deals" (see Figure x.4). It was also evidence that "curators" provided status in the public domain, while at the same time that the professional connotations of the word had been completely eroded. Yet it reinforced an evident desire for the curator as expert to intervene and provide standing, somewhat ironically when elsewhere expertise was seeming to be of lesser significance. Maybe what is of greater importance here is how curating continues to fulfill the need for selectivity in an increasingly complex world, the world of fashion in particular.

Curating has also moved into more intangible realms, away from objects per se, to include people branding as evidenced by an expansion in the number of books devoted to personal life management, or "life curating." One, promises that it will inform how to "learn how to embrace your curating gifts to achieve your own brand of success" (Zaslofsky 2015). Another guidebook on life curating by Shannon Ables (2014) offers to help the reader to "curate the life of your dreams. . . no matter where you live, your income, or your relationship status." Preceding the publication of these guidebooks, the actress and model Blake Lively, was reported to have established a new company, named "Life Curating" (Beusman 2013). Its main element was "about storytelling and about living a very one-of-a-kind, curated life, and how to achieve that." While in the popular realm, *curating* came to be attached to activities as diverse as constructing a members only community, to hosting an event, or choosing guests for a child's birthday party, the reasons were not necessarily trivial. Writing in 2015, journalist Steven Rosenbaum attributed "life curation" to the Western world having become more uncertain, more subject to constant change, as well as to too much connectivity, too many options, an over-abundance of choices (Rosenbaum 2015). In the personal as well as the professional domains, in amateur and skilled activities, the curator and the "curator" found a role.

Also, display practices became essential tools in the representation and dissemination of fashion knowledge through the exhibition-format and beyond it. While this is perhaps most palpable in museums, it is also evident in the presentation of garments in commercial settings and in the virtual world. The authors writing in this volume, themselves variously fashion curators, critics, scholars and teachers, discuss methods and practices of display, as well as analyzing how the fashion industry, luxury fashion brands and retailers make use of curatorial strategies in their own commercial ventures. While fashion curating is essentially a spatialized discourse, the authors in Section Three, "Beyond the Museum" underline it as critical practice and cultural analysis, which not only produces exhibitions for audiences to view but also engenders ways of *thinking* about and *teaching* fashion.

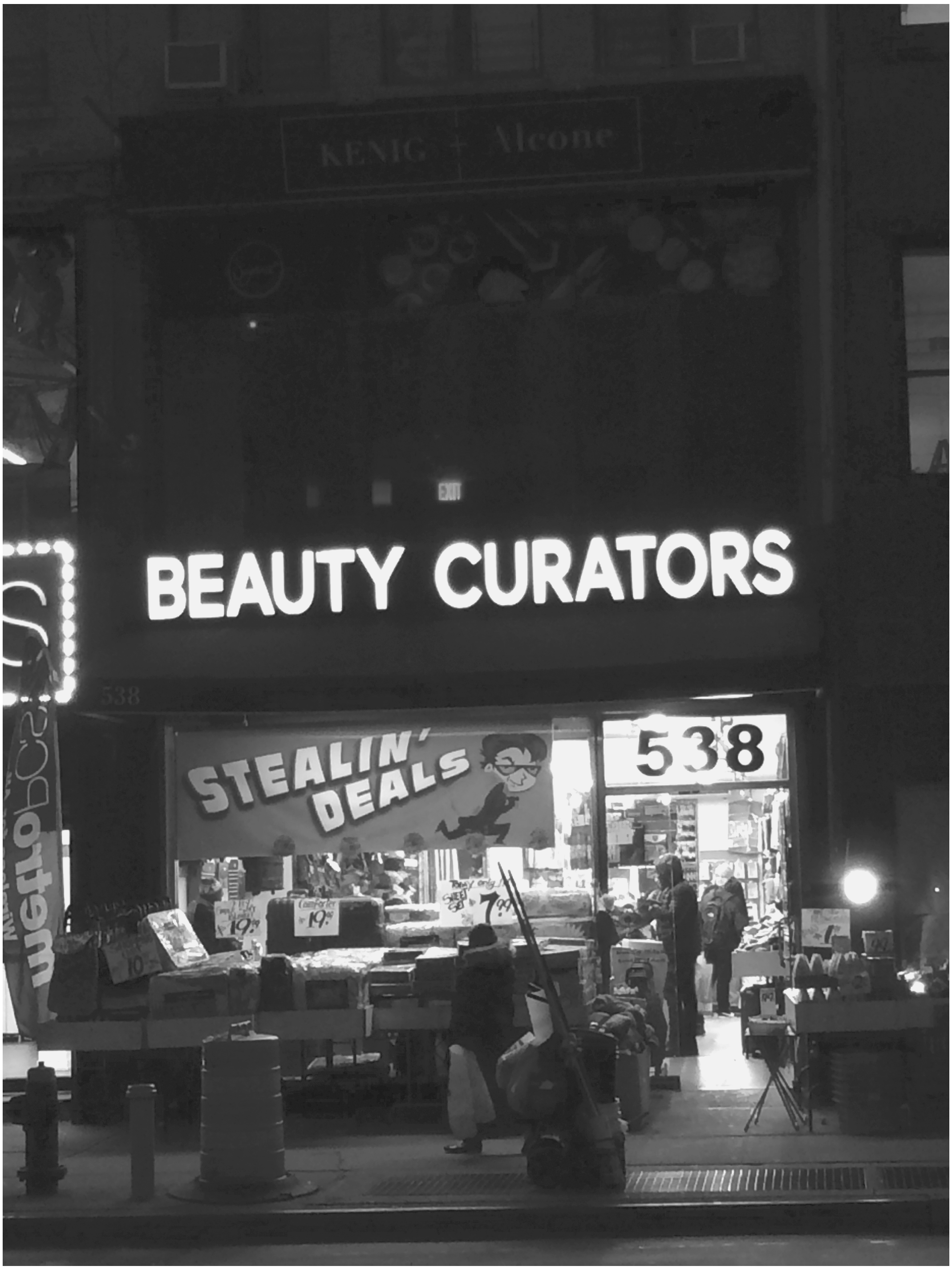
KENIG + Alcone
EXIT
BEAUTY CURATORS
538
STEALIN' DEALS
538
metroPCS

Figure x.4 Beauty Curators, 6th Avenue, New York, December 2016. Photo: Hazel Clark.

Fashion curation plays a critical role in managing and mediating aesthetic experience, framing cultural conditions in institutions and the fashion industry, and in constructing knowledge about fashion within academia. While "thinking" underpins critical fashion curation in fashion studies, it also references the emergence of more conceptual and intellectual approaches to fashion design.

The move towards more conceptual fashion has been recognized as beginning in the 1980s, in particular with the designs of the "big three" Japanese designers, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, and Yohji Yamamoto, and as continuing into the 1990s with the work of the "Antwerp Six" fashion designers, and Martin Margiela (Clark 2012). This shift coincided simultaneously with a focus on fashion in popular culture, with the then new and avant-garde fashion magazines such as *iD, Dazed and Confused,* and *The Face*—a history that is currently continuing in the fashion magazine *A Magazine Curated By*. The latter claims to be a fashion magazine that "explores the universe of a chosen fashion designer" in each issue by inviting "a guest curator—an international fashion designer, group or house—to develop innovative, personalized content to express their aesthetic and cultural values."[3] As this statement clearly indicates, fashion curating is constantly transforming at the border between art and commerce.

Conceptual fashion and fashion media are vehicles for mediating ideas, rather than representations of fashion as a commodity. This parallels the emergence of Fashion Studies in the academy, where traditional disciplinary boundaries were expanding to embrace diverse approaches; under the influence of the new art history, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, gender and sexuality studies and other developing fields. The emergence of the field of Fashion Studies in the 1990s embraced historical (Styles 1998) and contemporary practices, and scholars from diverse backgrounds began to study, write and teach about fashion as a critical discourse. In museums and beyond, *fashion* not just historic dress began to be curated in ways that veered away from the predictable chronological survey—typically of exclusive garments, to embrace more considered and thoughtful approaches (Steele 2008; Teunissen 2014). At the same time the museum curator recognized how they "had to compete with the latest retail emporiums" (Palmer 2008: 50). This was increasingly true as retail became subject to curation, as a way of managing an overwhelming array of consumer goods.

As a result of these recent developments, different actors, from ordinary people living their daily lives, to academic researchers and independent professionals to artists, designers, and luxury brands, have been made broadly familiar with curatorial approaches. Some have developed their interests by gaining degrees in art curation, as the number of courses and programs has increased in recent years. Fashion curating has been similarly embraced by the academy. In the 2000s, MA-level fashion curation programs started to emerge. The first was the MA in Fashion Curation at the London College of Fashion, the University of the Arts, London, which remains an internationally-respected graduate program. Courses, on fashion curation are being taught elsewhere—for example on the MA in Fashion Studies at Parsons School of Design, New York. Curating fashion is thus developing as a new academic and professional opportunity for the critical study of fashion.

Many of those who are involved in curating fashion today rely on sets of skills and experiences, sometimes developed over many years, but also fuelled by a critical perspective—the desire to "speak" about and through fashion. The contributors to this volume come into this category. While they do not necessarily share the same educational and professional backgrounds and they work in many different parts of the world, they have in common the objective of acknowledging fashion curating as a key constituent of critical cultural analysis. Far from the beleaguered curate mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction, these are dynamic professionals who are revealing new ideas and ways of looking at and thinking about fashion. Together the book's three sections: "From Inside the Museum," "The Independents," and "Beyond the Museum" analyze how fashion can be exhibited, experienced and understood in its various forms, and conceptualize fashion curating as an inquiry that produces knowledge and opens up possibilities, challenging what we already know and how we think about fashion. In this sense, the anthology uses the term *critical* in an evaluative sense: it turns its gaze to museum exhibitions, but also to commercial spaces, to the world and to the individual as well to curatorial practices and methods of display.

We invited contributors to this volume who could write with authority on fashion curating as praxis. For "Inside the Museum" we sought perspectives from different geographic locations, amounting to four countries and three continents, provided from the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Scaturro), the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada (Palmer), a selection of museums in Australia (Healy), and the ModeMuseum in Antwerp, Belgium (Debo). They also occupy different institutional positions, Palmer and Debo are full-time curators, although working in very different institutions, Scaturro is a conservator at the Costume Institute, and Healy is a former museum curator turned educator, who continues to curate. In their various ways they are working within conventional museum contexts, yet each brings original perspectives on the fashion object and exhibition. Another category of professional fashion curator has also emerged over the last twenty years—that of the freelance curator, who is employed by museums and galleries in particular, for specific exhibitions. Some of "the independents" bring perspectives on particular venues: Somerset House (O'Neill) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (Cole) in London. Others (J. Clark, and Vänskä) present projects that are more international, and reference more closely fashion and commerce. All demonstrate more specifically fashion curating as praxis, which is highlighted in Cole's focus on collecting and exhibiting LGBT fashion and dress, and Khan's case for feminist approaches to fashion curating. Moving "Beyond the Museum" demands consideration of the relationship between fashion as museum object, commodity and brand in particular. The greater and continuing international impact of that ongoing blurring is referenced particularly in the final two chapters of our book in Section Three "Beyond the Museum". Bengtsen and Bai show how fashion curating reflects cultural and commercial relationships. In this section Segre Reinach, and Pecorari also demonstrate how curating has become a means to extend our knowledge of fashion, and no longer rests only on the exhibition of garments.

Combined, the organization and contents of this book represent a new and an original point of departure for debates about the contemporary nature and presentation of fashion and demonstrates how curation can develop a discourse. Our anthology opens new avenues of thinking and means of responding in interesting and innovative ways that speak about fashion to its audiences. It highlights some of the challenges ahead, as curating continues to seek to interpret and transform the complex system of fashion into an engaged practice and a valid cultural critique.

Notes

1 “True Humility” by George du Maurier, originally published in *Punch*, November 9, 1895.

2 See http://trendwatching.com/trends/pdf/2004_08_curatedconsumption.pdf (accessed January 15, 2017).

3 See www.amagazinecuratedby.com/about/ (accessed June 29, 2017).

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