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CURATION AND EXHIBITION

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Since the new millennium, an increasing number of informed fashion voices, including journalists, academics and other pundits, at various times, have alluded to the “end of fashion.” The beginning of the end, so to speak, might be charted back to *Wall Street Journal* reporter Teri Agins’s book *The End of Fashion* (2000). To be fair, the millennium was a somewhat inevitable historical watermark that infiltrated public consciousness around the globe due to the greater presence of the digital in everyday lives. Yet virtual communication also came into question—we can recall “Y2K” or the “Millennium Bug”¹ and the abounding anxieties that computers would cease to function effectively at the stroke of midnight. As we know, computers did not all shut down or scramble, but the example can serve as a reminder of the psychological significance that was attached to the year 2000. Then, all too soon and too tragically, came September 11, 2001 and the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. The collapse of the twin towers felt like a metaphorical crumbling of the twentieth century, the modern world, and its institutions. The coincidence of the timing with New York Fashion Week S/S 2002 served also to highlight fashion’s own sense of instability.

For Agins, the “end” came with the increasing market dominance by fashion brands. In the 1990s, the logo signified not just distinction, but also increasing competition between labels. It was no longer just a marker of the creative differences between styles. Agins notes how the branding of fashion “has taken on a critical role in an era when ... just about every store in the mall is peddling the same style of clothes.”² The consumer no longer went shopping for a particular style of garment, but rather for a “Calvin” or a “Ralph.” Choices reflected a desire to project the brand image, be it “severe urban minimalism” (Calvin Klein) or “athletic, American conservatism (Ralph Lauren).”³ The consumer, or more accurately speaking mass-marketing to the consumer, rather than the design of clothing, had become the seat of innovation as more and more brands competed for a

share in the business of fashion. According to Agins, “that’s why we’ve come to the end of fashion. Today, a designer’s creativity expresses itself more than ever in the marketing rather than in the actual clothes.”⁴ A sense of the designer being disempowered was reiterated by fashion theorist Barbara Vinken, who uses the term “postfashion” to describe the contemporary *Fashion Zeitgeist* where the designer loses absolute power.⁵ She attributes the origins of postfashion to the 1970s, and the completion of a hundred years of Western fashion, stretching from Worth to Saint Laurent, with its high point in the modern designs of Chanel and Schiaparelli. After that period, fashion praxis “deconstructs modernity and, in the end, leaves it behind.”⁶ In the process fashion design engaged with the old, ugliness, sentimentality, kitsch, bad taste, and traces of the past through endless historical citation and cultural plundering.

So while fashion did not actually end, many changes took place in the final years of the twentieth century that reflected fashion’s greater heterogeneity and ubiquity in commerce and culture, while exposing a dark side of the fashion system. Yet as fashion scholar Christopher Breward notes, taken from an historical perspective, “anxieties around the moral worth of fashion culture, or the ethical implications of sweated labor and global trade are as old as the first presentation of clothes designed for form as much as for function, for extrinsic as much as for intrinsic value.”⁷ Breward stresses how “an informed and critical apparatus for the study of historical and contemporary fashion is more important now than ever.”⁸ He would no doubt have included some fashion journalists and critics among those who were able to comment authoritatively and critically on the times. In their number we can count Vanessa Friedman, fashion director and chief fashion critic of *the New York Times*, whose neologism “fashionization” captured the growing presence of fashion in everyday life, not just as clothes, but also through a diverse range of methods of communication, including the internet, television, film, social media, and exhibitions.⁹ Breward was also reacting to a manifesto that had just been issued by fashion forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort. In it, as he notes, Edelkoort critiques the prevailing model of fashion education as perpetuating the myth of star designers, runway shows, and luxury brands.¹⁰ Declaring “the end of Fashion as we know it,” she hurls brickbats also at marketing, retailing, the press, and consumers, foreseeing an “exodus of fashion” in favor of a “culture” and “celebration” of clothes. Edelkoort’s manifesto ends with an “Afterthought” on the recent popularity of fashion exhibitions. She cites the hugely popular Alexander McQueen exhibition, *Savage Beauty*, originating at the Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (May 4–August 11, 2011) as evidence of nostalgia “for the heydays of creation and couture.” She observes, however, that brands increasingly host their own shows to control their brand identity and product placement, with the artworld a willing accomplice in the process. The outcome, Edelkoort concludes, is an iron grip by brands, which means that museums are less able to show fashion, and must

turn more to displaying clothes. Her corollary is that “the end of fashion curating is near.”¹¹ While there is strong evidence to demonstrate that the currency and future of the fashion exhibition are much less bleak than Edelkoort states, her words nevertheless indicate how, as a form, the exhibition has come to reflect the complex state and nature of fashion and thus demands scrutiny. It is the task of this chapter to consider fashion curation and the fashion exhibition, in particular since 2000, and to question its position and role at “the end of fashion.”

Expanding the field

To provide context we should begin with the late 1970s. It was then that art theorist and critic Rosalind Krauss published her seminal essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” to locate and investigate new sculptural practices that began in the late 1960s. Krauss cited work by artists such as Donald Judd, Mary Miss, and Robert Smithson, as having contributed to extending the conventional limits of the discipline into landscape and the jurisdiction of architecture, and to expanding the cultural field of modernism to postmodernism. In the process the very nature of what was sculpture became somewhat obscured:

We had thought to use a universal category to authenticate a group of particulars, but the category has now been forced to cover such a heterogeneity that it is, itself, in danger of collapsing. And so we stare at the pit in the earth and think we both do and don’t know what sculpture is.¹²

Now, exactly forty years later, we might say likewise of “fashion” that “we both do and don’t know what [it] is.” A hiatus appears to have been reached, an “end” of sorts, when the term “fashion” no longer defines clearly, but needs definition due to its expansion as praxis.¹³ The fashion exhibition has developed the potential both to recognize fashion in an expanded field, as a cultural practice as well as an industry, and to contribute to establishing a critical discourse around and belonging to fashion. While this discourse is overdue, overdue, it is now drawing the attention of fashion scholars, thinkers, and practitioners.

While working on her doctorate at the London College of Fashion, Jessica Bugg developed the hypothesis “that there can be clearly articulated alternative strategies for fashion design and communication that are concept and context based, rather than being driven by commerce, market and trends.”¹⁴ Advocating an interdisciplinary approach, she called into question the preeminence of industry-driven definitions of fashion, in order to encompass “beyond the confines of the catwalk, the traditional store space, and the printed page [into] ...fashion film, animation, the music industry, art photography, fashion illustration and fashion graphics, virtual space, performance, curated space, and the art gallery.”¹⁵ In

tandem, Bugg noted how fashion curation emerged as a named discipline,¹⁶ which could “be seen to reflect the shift towards contemporary fashion exhibition as a distinctive form, as opposed to the established practices of historical costume and fashion displays in museums.”¹⁷ This fashion “curatorial turn” was evident by the millennium, and, in common with developments in the fine arts, it had its origins in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Postmodern discourse, with its privileging of a plurality of voices over the grand narrative, was reflected in how and where fashion came to be exhibited.

The development of textile and clothing collections and their exhibition by museums since the nineteenth century have been well-documented, and do not need reiterating here.¹⁸ Scholars agree that it was not until the 1990s that exhibitions of fashion, and in particular contemporary fashion, became accepted and popular in museums and galleries internationally. Such exhibitions coincided with and reflected new approaches to fashion history and the establishment of fashion studies as an academic field that encompassed history, theory, and criticism. In the early twenty-first century, the intellectual and cultural context which succeeded postmodernism and is one premise for this book is philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s, *Living in End Times*.¹⁹ Fashion, serving as a reflection of its own (modern) times, is inevitably implicated. As I have written elsewhere, from the 1990s it was acknowledged that fashion, as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, had “infiltrated everyday lives in an ongoing, sustained way over time and across class, gender, ethnicity, and generation.”²⁰ At the same time fashion was “infiltrating” the museum to gain a status that was equivalent to that of the fine arts. A pivotal exhibition, well-documented in other accounts, was *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton*, held in 1971 at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A).²¹ By affording garments that had been worn by contemporary celebrities the status typically given to art objects, this exhibition marked a shift in the museum toward the display of *fashion* (rather than dress) that was also prescient, gaining the accolade of being previewed in British *Vogue*.²² The *fashion* exhibition had begun to emerge and would continue to develop apace.

Exhibition making

Christopher Breward has drawn attention to the central role played by academic research in shaping curatorial approaches to fashion—and vice versa, and its impact on the fashion exhibition.²³ Breward identifies three specific research constituencies. The first, and most familiar, were specialist dress scholars (academics and curators). While this group would continue to use archival sources, Breward highlights recent exhibitions that had used historical archives to provide a more in-depth case study approach. He cites, for example, *Fashion and Fancy Dress—The Messel Family Dress Collection: 1865–2005*,

curated by Eleanor Thompson, Amy de la Haye, and Lou Taylor at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery in the UK (October 2005–June 2006), where family archives facilitated deep empirical research. Breward's second constituency was contemporary fashion practice, which he credits with having “inspired the most innovative and controversial shows of the past few years.”²⁴ By mentioning Claire Wilcox's *Radical Fashion* at the V&A, London in 2003, and *Fashion* at Belsay Hall in the northeast of England a year later, Breward also draws attention to collaborative endeavors, specifically where curators worked actively with fashion designers to create new installations, rather than simply displaying existing work. A seminal example was *Malign Muses*, staged originally at the ModeMuseum Antwerp (2004) and then as *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* at the V&A (2005), by exhibition maker and curator Judith Clark, based on the writings of fashion scholar Caroline Evans. It was a collaboration that resulted in work being subjected to “an unprecedented layer of subjective interpretation and editing.”²⁵ Elsewhere, Judith Clark notes the importance of the *installation* for a fashion exhibition as well as the exhibition content.²⁶ Collaboration is a strategy that has also been reinforced by Breward's third constituency—mainstream fashion brands, which began to influence the content and delivery of fashion exhibitions, rather than merely acting as sponsors. Resulting exhibitions make the case. Breward mentions in particular *Giorgio Armani* held initially at the Guggenheim, New York (October 20, 2000–January 17, 2001), and subsequently at the Royal Academy, London and at the Guggenheim, Bilbao. Controversial for many due to the confusion over fashion being exhibited simultaneously as art and commerce, the venue and the installation by the avant-garde American theater designer Robert Wilson made for a visually arresting show. This exhibition also demonstrated Breward's perspective that the fashion exhibition was occupying more complex cultural terrain.

The three constituencies articulated by Breward provide a valuable framework for considering fashion research and ideas made explicit in exhibition practices, acknowledging that evidence from actual exhibitions indicate how these categories were not discreet. Together they underpin the more recent fashion exhibitions discussed in this chapter, which were held in different international venues close to the time of writing—in 2017. Staged, broadly speaking, “within a framework that encompasses performativity, temporality, spatiality, and materiality,”²⁷ they address and contribute to fashion as an expanded field of practice and as a mode of inquiry.²⁸ Acknowledging that the (fashion) exhibition is a public forum that needs to be experienced to be appreciated fully,²⁹ I will now focus mainly on exhibitions which I visited, and with a final example that I co-curated.

The first fashion exhibition I visited in 2017 was *The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined* curated by Judith Clark in collaboration with psychoanalyst Adam Phillips at The Barbican Centre, London (October 13, 2016–February 5, 2017). As in her earlier

work (including with Phillips), Clark raised complex issues, this time with an exhibition whose use of familiar museum vitrines and plinths at first belied the complexity of its thesis. Selecting garments from the last 500 years, the exhibition addressed matters of taste in fashion—bad as well as good, and what determines which is which. Some of the pieces shown could have been anticipated interpretations of the theme—an eighteenth-century mantua dress with a skirt extending 2.5 meters, or Walter Van Beirendonck's Spring/Summer 2014 "Elephant Dress" with a dangling phallic trunk at the front (Plate 19) Others proved a surprise—seventeenth-century white, lace collars presented in a stark black setting to indicate the vulgarity of such purity. The exhibition set up challenges about the vulgar, enhanced by the detailed museum texts that accompanied the pieces. Text featured prominently in the installation, and paralleled Clark and Phillips's previous collaboration, *The Concise Dictionary of Dress*, held at Blythe House, the V&A's collection store in West London in 2010. A review of the latter also demonstrates some of the distinctions and comparisons between the two exhibitions and their venues.³⁰ Each was "archival" in its sources, focusing attention on contemporary fashion's relationship to its own past, while posing questions, rather than providing answers about fashion. As Marco Pecorari observes, the fashion archive is "indeed a place where it is possible to rebuild the activity of objects and reactivate and retrace the networks in which they participate."³¹ Such reinterpretation in the guise of the fashion exhibition has been evident in different approaches to the display of garments from archives of major fashion designers, which not only bring together historic items, contemporary fashion practices and the brand, but also demonstrate how the exhibition can serve in an important reflexive role for fashion. To explain this further, there follows discussion of two exhibitions held in 2017, in different venues and cities, both devoted to the same subject—Balenciaga.

Balenciaga: A case in point

Admired as a master craftsman, the couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga could be described as a designers' designer, highly respected by his peers and his successors. The esteem in which he is held has resulted in substantial scholarly research³² and many exhibitions. The Museo Balenciaga, which opened in the designer's hometown of Getaria, Spain in 2012, is also devoted to his work. One of the earliest major Balenciaga exhibitions was *The World of Balenciaga*, curated by Diana Vreeland at the Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1973 (March 23–June 30). Opening a year to the day after the designer's death, the exhibition is also considered a landmark as having introduced "a brand new approach to costume exhibitions. In a spectacular setting a fashion designer for the first time was given the focus reserved in museums for great artists."³³ More recently, *Balenciaga Paris*, held at the Musée des Art Décoratifs in Paris (July 6,

2006–January 28, 2007), was a collaboration between the museum’s chief curator of fashion and textiles Pamela Golbin and Nicolas Ghesquière, then the creative director of the fashion house (1997–2012). This exhibition featured archival pieces, film footage illustrating Cristóbal Balenciaga at work, and garments designed for the house by Ghesquière. N. J. Stevenson notes how the strong presence of the work of the latter in the exhibition served to demonstrate a design continuity in the house, while also highlighting “a current phenomenon” where some of the Paris *grand maisons* had been relaunched under the leadership of younger designers.³⁴

Balenciaga’s fashion legacy was celebrated again with two major exhibitions, *Balenciaga: Working in Black*, at the Musée Bourdelle, Paris (March 8–July 16, 2017), and *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, at the V&A, in London (May 26, 2017–February 18, 2018). The timing of these two shows, ten years after the Arts Décoratifs exhibition was not coincidental, but rather marked the centenary of the opening of Balenciaga’s first fashion house in San Sebastian, Spain, and the eightieth anniversary of his house in Paris. The exhibitions each used archival material, but had different strategies toward presenting the designer’s work as the “juxtaposition of the old and the new.” This strategy has become more commonplace than the chronological and retrospective fashion exhibitions, but as Stevenson cautions, it is also potentially difficult, not least because a fashion exhibition can be subject to a plethora of different constraints and expectations, including from its audiences, donors, sponsors, and contributors.³⁵

The V&A described its venture as, “the first UK exhibition to explore the work and legacy of the Spanish couturier ... his protégés and contemporary designers working in the same innovative way today.”³⁶ It featured over 100 garments and hats, largely from the 1950s and 1960s, which is considered the creative highpoint of the couturier’s career. Supported by archival material, sketches, photographs, video, and fabric samples, the show also included “forensic” examination of some garments. A collaboration between X-ray artist Nick Veasey and pattern-cutting students at the London College of Fashion resulted in digital representations that revealed the detailed process and innovative structure characteristic of Balenciaga’s designs. For the show, the V&A used its own collection of Balenciaga pieces, the largest in the UK. These were originally acquired by Cecil Beaton, a longstanding friend of Balenciaga, for *Fashion: An Anthology* (1971). Its 2017 successor was staged on two levels, the ground floor featuring the work of the couturier, and the upper floor designs and video interviews from a diverse range of designers who had been influenced by Balenciaga, including Azzedine Alaïa, Oscar de la Renta, Comme des Garçons, Simone Rocha, JW Anderson, Céline, Iris Van Herpen, Erdem, Molly Goddard, and Rick Owens. Their inclusion brought currency to the heritage of the couturier, while potentially extending the audience of the exhibition to aficionados of contemporary fashion. Also included was the work of two of the house’s recent creative directors, Nicolas Ghesquière and Demna Gvasalia (2017–). A suit designed by Gvasalia was placed next

to a Balenciaga to construct a narrative of continuity, legacy, and relevance of the fashion house (Figure 11.1). Yet the increasingly rapid pace of change encountered by fashion brands and their employees can prove a challenge for exhibition making. This was highlighted by Cassie Davies-Strodder, curator of the V&A exhibition,

“When we started 18 months ago we didn’t know that the brand was going to be more prevalent than ever, so it’s really fortuitous,” said Davies-Strodder, referring to Gvasalia’s appointment and recent acclaimed collections adding, “We kick ourselves that Gvasalia’s latest collection which is so literal is just too late for us to include.”³⁷

For the collection in question, the Fall-Winter 2017 women’s wear show launched in Paris in early March 2016, Gvasalia plumbed the house archives and produced “nine modern takes on iconic Balenciaga looks, including two in black: a voluminous tulle gown pulled in as poufs at bust, waist, hip, and knee by black ribbon, and a black velvet column tied off at the waist with an enormous taffeta bow.” The homage was described as “a smart and timely business move,” but one intended also to respect the legacy of his predecessor Cristóbal Balenciaga.³⁸



Figure 11.1 Suits by Cristóbal Balenciaga, 1951 and Demna Gvasalia, 2016, shown at *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, May 24, 2017–February 18, 2018. Photo by Nicky J. Sims/Getty Images

The “juxtaposition of the old and the new” referred to earlier also characterizes a tendency in contemporary fashion, which is being overtly promoted by luxury brands in particular. In a highly competitive market, where some houses have been acquired by large luxury conglomerates, notably and most significantly in terms of scale and impact, LVMH and the Kering group (which owns Balenciaga), “heritage” has become a commercial strategy. As a result, contemporary designers are charged with representing continuity and change, referencing the archives of a house, when they exist, in order to do so. This tendency to look back and forward is also reflected in fashion exhibitions, particularly where they are funded by a brand or fashion group, but they can confuse the visitor, especially those anticipating a historical show or a designer retrospective. Stevenson notes how *Chanel* at the Costume Institute (April 5–August 13, 2005) was criticized for appearing “heavy on branding,” and for the amount of contemporary designs by the house’s premier, Karl Lagerfeld.³⁹ While Lagerfeld has become renowned in the fashion system for “updating” the house by not only paying homage to but also parodying some of Chanel’s classics, such juxtaposition does not necessarily sit comfortably in the museum exhibition, where certain expectations still prevail.

By comparison, *Balenciaga: Working in Black*, Musée Bourdelle, Paris was entirely historical in its content, and juxtaposed “old and new” somewhat differently, as a dialogue with its venue. The exhibition comprised seventy of Balenciaga’s designs, all in black, sourced from the archives of the Palais Galliera fashion museum. Among them were a famed cowl-back silk crepe cocktail dress, from 1958, and the also renowned origami dress from 1967. Added to the monotone garment selection, the staging of the exhibition was also striking. Garments and (black) toiles were displayed amid the bronzes and marbles of this museum devoted to the work of the early twentieth-century French sculptor Antoine Bourdelle. Some pieces were positioned theatrically high, causing the visitor to look up at them, as if on a stage. Others were shrouded in black full-length cloth structures and could only be seen with the theatrical drawing back of a (black) curtain to peer at the dresses inside. Bourdelle’s studio, which remains in tact, included Balenciaga hats in glass cases, which were hidden in plain sight among the artist’s sculptures and his working environment. As a result, the design of the exhibition proved frustrating to some, as it took some intention to *look*, as well as to *see*, on behalf of the viewer. Organized by the innovative curator Olivier Saillard, it followed his previous exhibition at the same venue in 2011, devoted to the work of Mme Grès, where dresses were similarly displayed among the sculpture. This strategy encouraged direct comparisons between the garments and the art works, and thus between haute couture and fine art, while also enhancing the visitors’ experience of the materiality of the fashion object.

Object lessons

As director of the Palais Galliera, Paris, Olivier Saillard was credited with having put that collection “back on the map in 2010,” the year of his appointment.⁴⁰ The Galliera was closed for renovation until 2013, when Saillard staged his first exhibition, a retrospective of the work of fashion designer Azzedine Alaïa. Subsequently he has reinvigorated the presentation of fashion history in the spirit of the contemporary. His curatorial contributions have reinforced the status of the object, as well as bringing attention to the performative and cooperative nature of fashion. Most notable were his two collaborations with the actress Tilda Swinton. The first *The Impossible Wardrobe* was staged at the Palais de Tokyo in September 2012, as part of the Spring/Summer 2013 fashion presentations. During three 40-minute performances, Swinton, wearing gloves and a white muslin coat, the typical attire of models in couture salons, and latterly by the staff of Martin Margiela, walked 57 different items along a short runway (Figure 11.2). Included were pieces from the museum archive, dating from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, designed by fashion luminaries including Christian Dior, Coco Chanel, Elsa Schiaparelli, Mariano Fortuny, and Yves Saint Laurent, among many others. Even though she was not wearing the garments, Swinton was performing the pieces enhanced by her gestures and facial expressions, reinforcing fashion’s corporeal interdependency. Other presentations by the curator and the actress did likewise. For *Eternity Dress* (2013), a garment was tailor-made on the body of the actress before a live audience. The following year *Cloakroom Vestiaire Obligatoire* had Swinton interacting with pieces of outerwear borrowed from members of the audience, whose personae she referenced by way of their garments.⁴¹

Through his curatorial projects Saillard has drawn upon historical archives to reinforce the relationship of contemporary fashion to its past. In June 2017, when it was announced that Saillard would be leaving his museum post in the following January to take up a position in the fashion industry, perhaps it was not surprising that he was joining a company with a long history. As the future “artistic, image, and culture director” of the French luxury men’s shoe and leather goods brand J.M. Weston, Saillard described himself as moving from “studying the past to creating for the present.”⁴² The choice of company is revealing—established in 1891, it still produces shoes by hand, giving the products a lineage in common with the pieces in the Galliera collection. The move of a museum curator, and one with a particularly high profile, into the business of fashion draws attention to the closer correspondence between the professional fashion worlds of the exhibition and the trade. Luxury fashion brands have created exhibitions to promote their products, either in their stores⁴³ or more ambitiously in art museums, often in collaboration with artists. Louis Vuitton has collaborated with Japanese artists Takashi Murakami and Yayoi Kusama. Hermès, Chanel,



Figure 11.2 Tilda Swinton presenting a postillion jacket from 1860 in *The Impossible Wardrobe*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, September 29, 2012. Photo: PIERO BIASION/AFP/Getty Images

and Dior have similarly included contemporary artists in exhibitions which have been staged internationally in major art museums. Such “artification”⁴⁴ has been employed to reinforce the exclusivity and authenticity of luxury brands. In parallel in the academy, conservator Sarah Scaturro points out how the “material turn” enabled fashion curators to reaffirm their object-based scholarship, in symbiosis with “disparate cultural approaches.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the ubiquity of the virtual in everyday existence has arguably served to fetishize the expensive and exclusive fashion object, as commodity and as cultural artifact. As luxury fashion brands sponsor exhibitions to demonstrate their longevity and “authenticity,” their heritage, associations with art, and their contemporary relevance, more (non-fashion specific) museums have begun to embrace fashion and its objects.

At the time of writing, the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) was about to open the exhibition *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* (October 1, 2017–January 28, 2018). This will be only the second fashion exhibition to be staged in the museum’s almost ninety-year history at its midtown Manhattan location (excluding its PS1 venue in Queens). Fashion is also absent from the museum’s permanent collection. The exhibition concept is based on its predecessor; held at the MoMA, be *Are Clothes Modern?* (November 28, 1944–March 4, 1945) was curated by architect and designer Bernard Rudofsky. While the rationale for that show is not clear, it was very unusual for the times; it has been credited as being “probably one of the earliest and most perceptive exhibitions on fashion.”⁴⁶ Rudofsky’s focus was on the relationship between fashion design, clothing and the body, and the way that bodies had been modified by garments, sometimes in what appeared an arbitrary and irrational way. While not a fashion scholar, Rudofsky’s objective, to reflect on fashion and its nature rather than just to show clothes, was ground breaking for its time. As a result the exhibition has been highlighted “as a paradigmatically relevant precursor for that typology of exhibitions that aim to question and re-define the very notion of fashion,” and compared to Judith Clark’s *Malign Muses/Spectres* exhibition, referred to earlier.⁴⁷ The 2017 MoMA exhibition will follow the museum’s object-focused trajectory in featuring “items” as a way of “exploring the present, past—and sometimes the future”⁴⁸ by means of 111 clothing typologies that emerged over the last hundred years. The MoMA co-curators Paola Antonelli and Michelle Millar Fisher have organized the exhibition into themes, including: mutating ideas of body and silhouette; the relationship between emancipation, modesty, introversion and rebellion; fashion and athleticism; everyday uniforms; and fashion and power. Existing and historical pieces will be enhanced by special commissions from designers, engineers, and manufacturers, who were charged by the curators with responding to “indispensable items with pioneering materials, approaches, and techniques.”⁴⁹ In answer to the questions why now?, why MoMA? a Press Release from the museum describes fashion as “a crucial field of design—[that] touches everyone, everywhere.”⁵⁰ According to Antonelli, the exhibition aims to present fashion as

A powerful form of creative and personal expression that can be approached from multiple angles of study, fashion is unquestionably also a form of design, with its pitch struck in negotiations between form and function, means and goals, automated technologies and craftsmanship, standardization and customization, universality and self-expression.⁵¹

In expressing fashion's relationship to creativity, personal identity and above all to design, Antonelli highlights aspects of fashion which often become lost in its more ubiquitous commercial arena, as well as in museum exhibitions. Recognition of fashion as a creative and *personal* expression also references fashion's everydayness, which is its extent beyond the realm of the art object. So while the MoMA is working within its established professional parameters of the curation of art and design objects, it is also contributing to expanding fashion's field. The status and popularity of the MoMA helps to reinforce fashion's social, cultural, and creative roles, and, moreover, its potential for critical self-reflection in the twenty-first century. The MoMA exhibition also follows after an increasing number of recent exhibitions that have taken a more critical position on fashion and highlight some of the issues associated with the "end of fashion." In the latter category are exhibitions that, in common with some of the MoMA items, are collaborations with designers and artists that have resulted in the production of new work, including site-specific installations. Two of these exhibitions are the subject of the next and final section of this chapter.

After Fashion

Dysfashional, curated by Luca Marchetti and Emanuele Quinz, in Luxembourg, Lausanne, Paris, Berlin, and Moscow (2007–2010), has been described as having less to do with clothing than with the sensibilities associated with what we wear, "gestures, noises, odors and self-image."⁵² Featuring the work of high-profile designers such as Raf Simons, Hussein Chalayan, and Maison Martin Margiela, the show took the form of installations that focused on fashion as a means of creative exploration. Its curators described *Dysfashional* as, "a site where the exhibition space becomes an experimental space, an exploration ground for both the artists and visitors." They did not exhibit clothes. The installation by Maison Martin Margiela for example, comprised tapestry, photographs, and trompe-l'oeil (Figure 11.3). The exhibition also included a "para-site" that is a temporary "guerilla store" where paintings, drawings, jewelry, and 3-D models inspired by fashion and produced by fifteen young creators were available for sale on-site and online during the show. The nature of the activities in the exhibition, rather than the actual physical space/s in which it was held, led to it being described as "a hybrid space, halfway between a boutique and an art gallery."⁵³ Its form and content reflected the curators' concept



Figure 11.3 *Dysfashional*, cur. Luca Marchetti and Emanuele Quinz (edition 2007, La Rotonde 1, Luxembourg and Great Region—European Capital of Culture, April 21–May 27, 2007); *Untitled*, installation by Maison Martin Margiela, mixed media, original commission and production. Photo: André Morin.

“that fashion is, beyond the objects that materialize it, an unstable state of sensibility.”⁵⁴ That sense of instability reiterates how fashion in the end times is an expanded field of practices that, through exhibitions, are becoming more self-reflexive.

It was the recognition of fashion’s capacity to reflect critically that preempted the exhibition that I co-curated, with Ilari Laamanen at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York (April 26–August 6, 2017).⁵⁵ Titled *fashion after Fashion*, the exhibition responded to critical authorities, including those cited at the beginning of this chapter, and the work of many fashion designers, suggesting that fashion had entered a new phase. *fashion after Fashion* took up this call, offering a contemporary understanding of fashion that drew upon a range of design and artistic practices and ideologies. The exhibition included new site-sensitive installations by six designer teams who were thinking about fashion, as well as working in different aspects of the fashion industry, producing garments and images. We used fashion (in the lowercase) to signal a more reflective, concerned, attentive, and creative process that is not determined solely by commerce, the market, and passing trends, in comparison to Fashion (in the uppercase). By calling into question the state and nature of Fashion, the exhibition sought to challenge some of its main constructs, including the myth of the individual designer as author, short-lived and commodity-driven products, gendered dressing, ideal bodies, and waste. The work demonstrated the need to redefine the term fashion to signal the way in which its practices have become more complex, diverse, critically informed, and socially relevant. Perhaps contrary to expectations for a fashion exhibition, *fashion after Fashion* did not feature well-known designer brands and names, or display garments on mannequins (an approach it shared with *Dysfashional*). Rather, it addressed fashion within the expanded field of practice that is determined by concept and context, and whose practitioners work collaboratively across areas of design and art, incorporating performances, photographs, video, and sculpture.

For *fashion after Fashion*, we chose to include the Danish artist and designer Henrik Vibskov, because of the breadth of his experience working as a fashion designer and also in producing performances and installations internationally in a variety of venues, including public spaces. His original gallery installation *Harmonic Mouth* had been staged as a performance piece, in a forest outside of Copenhagen, which was shown as a video in the exhibition. It combined many references, to the small and intimate spaces of fashion rather than to its public places, to the visceral qualities of bodies and their relationship to clothes, as well as to fashion’s relationship to the passage of time (Plate 20). The piece spoke to and about fashion, and like fashion it both confused and delighted, depending on the perspective and experience of the viewer. Next to it was an installation and video by Lucy Jones, a young, New York-based designer whose work aims to be inclusive of physical difference and disabilities. Her installation, comprising twenty-two fabric “elbows,” was a visually poetic response to the complexity of the relationship between bodies and garments, enhanced by her process-based

video (Figure 11.4). The Finnish artist duo *ensaemble* also addressed relationships between body and clothes by referencing the inside of garments. New York fashion designers Eckhaus Latta worked with video artist Alexa Karolinski to produce a video that emphasized how the intimacies of our human identities and emotions are related to how we look and what we wear. Toumas Laitinen and Chris Vidal Tenomaa based a piece on their magazine *SSAW*, which highlighted Fashion's obsession with images. Japanese designer Ryohei Kawanishi challenged the way that Fashion's value system can be so dependent on brands and designer labels. This piece also brings us back to where this chapter began, and the dominance of the brand—one of the trigger points of Terri Agins's end of fashion, and one of Christopher Breward's three fashion research constituencies.

Breward's references to the fashion exhibition's relationship to archival sources, contemporary fashion practice and business, and their cumulative intertwining remain a fitting overview of recent exhibition practices, and also of fashion itself. As the examples given earlier demonstrate, the fashion exhibition is now more varied in both its concept and its practice than ever before. It can and should be acknowledged as an expanded field of practice that contributes to the establishment of critical discourse for fashion. Timing is important. This discourse is not only much needed, but long overdue. While the "end times" are not to be taken literally, for fashion they can be seen as signaling a period of hiatus, of taking stock, when complexities need to be addressed. Now, the fashion exhibition is an essential praxis for these times.



Figure 11.4 "Inclusive fashion," by Lucy Jones. Installation view from *fashion after Fashion*, 2017, The Museum of Arts and Design, New York. Photo by Jenna Bascom. Courtesy of the Museum of Arts and Design