FASHION CURATING

Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond

Edited by

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BOUTIQUE—WHERE ART AND FASHION MEET: CURATING AS COLLABORATION AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

Annamari Vänskä

This chapter takes as its subject an exhibition project *Boutique—Where Art and Fashion Meet* (2012) and its transformations into three edited versions in 2013, 2014 and 2016. The initial exhibition was a wide-ranging interdisciplinary show, reminiscent of the Wagnerian "total work of art" which fused art, fashion, music and dance by bringing together artists and designers to collaborate on a mutual project. The original version of *Boutique* was displayed at the Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki, Finland in 2012 in the wider frame of the World Design Capital Helsinki project. Afterwards, the exhibition became a body of works that was then edited into new exhibitions in collaboration with other curators and institutions in Washington and New York (2013), Tokyo (2014), and Berlin (2016).

This chapter discusses *Boutique* and its subsequent editions as an example of the various meanings and forms of curating as collaboration and cultural critique. It discusses what interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and designers meant in this exhibition, how collaboration should be seen as the standard curatorial method, and how curating can function as cultural critique. The chapter not only shifts focus from the curator as the star of the show to the relationships between curators, artists and designers but also between institutions, works, spaces and locations which also essentially shape works, exhibitions and the meaning of both. This viewpoint contextualizes *Boutique* and its editions in the ongoing discussion about new ways of displaying fashion beyond garments and how fashion exhibitions in art contexts tend to surpass the tradition of the object-based model of displaying dress (e.g. Anderson 2000: 371–389; Taylor 1998: 337–358; Taylor 2004; Clark this volume; Debo this volume; Pecorari this volume). The idea of curating as collaboration also takes a stand on the ongoing discussion about the "curator's power" (Brenson 1998; O'Neill 2007; Vidokle 2010). This theme has identified a shift of

focus from works and artists to the makers of exhibitions since the 1990s. It has recognized the curator's growing role as *the* mediator and manager of exhibitions, their experience and understanding. *Boutique* and its editions challenge this myth of the curator as the non-relational, non-interactive and non-participatory genius whose "art work" the exhibition is, and show instead that exhibition making is always teamwork. Doing so, the chapter situates this particular project within the so-called "collaborative turn" (Lind 2007) that has defined recent curatorial practices within contemporary art and debunked the idea of the curator as the central agent reminiscent of the modernist, heroic and non-relational, non-interactive and non-participatory artistic genius.

The chapter is divided into four parts. First, it focuses on how the exhibition *Boutique* was initiated and how and why collaboration was chosen as its focus. Secondly, the chapter discusses the exhibition as a body of works that opened up possibilities for curating new exhibitions in new venues, new geographical locations and in collaboration with other curators and artists. Thirdly, collaboration is discussed as a curatorial method and curating as a form of cultural critique.

Where art and fashion meet: collaboration as curatorial theme

When the exhibition *Boutique* was initiated, the city of Helsinki was announced as the next World Design Capital in 2012. "World Design Capital" is an international program that selects one or more cities annually to be a "design capital," and to showcase to "the rest of the world" the chosen city's accomplishments in design in improving its citizens' quality of life (www.icsid.org/about/history/). Within this wider framing, it seemed fitting to curate an exhibition that brought fashion center-stage. Another framing for the exhibition came from a still largely existing value hierarchy between art, fashion and design in Finland. Although the idea of fashion as the representation of "all things bad" from moral decay and women's oppression to being a too frivolous field of intellectual inquiry within academia (see e.g. Wilson 1985; Davis 1992; Lipovetsky 1994; Kawamura 2005; Barnard 2007) has largely subsided, Finland has not valued fashion as highly as other fields of design. Unlike the other Scandinavian countries, Finland has never identified itself as a "fashion-nation." While Sweden, Denmark and Norway have explicitly constructed themselves as "fashion-nations" since the early-2000s (Melchior 2011: 177–200), Finland has begun to identify fashion as an important part of design only after the "Design Capital" project (see e.g. Pöppönen 2012; Väkevä 2015; Mankkinen 2016). This may seem odd since Finland has a strong internationally recognized identity as a "design-nation" and it has even included design in the national innovation system and by establishing a state-led official "Finnish design" policy scheme in the early 2000s (e.g. Valtonen 2005). In this policy scheme, however, fashion has not been recognized in the same way as other fields of design.[1] One of the aims of curating *Boutique* was therefore to show, through the fruitful collaboration of artists and designers, that neither the ancient cultural hierarchy, nor the design-hierarchy applies. The aim was to make a statement that art and fashion interconnect, that Finland is a budding "fashion-nation" and that fashion is not only about consuming but also about posing critical questions about culture.

These ideas led to the invention of the curatorial concept of the exhibition: collaboration, cooperation and community between art and design. The title of the exhibition, *Boutique* was initially a working title for the exhibition but it stuck because the etymology of the word seemed suitable for the whole project. In Greek etymology *boutique* refers to "storage," and in English it used to mean "apothecary" while in French it first meant a "shop" before developing into its current form "boutique," meaning specifically a "clothes' shop." These multi-layered meanings seemed to bring fashion and curating aptly together by referring to an exhibition as a "storage of ideas," to fashion through the metaphor of the "clothes shop," and to curating as "curing" the dated understanding of fashion as opposite to art and design. The exhibition's subtitle, *where art and fashion meet* was simultaneously an ironic reference to marketing speak—especially to the memorable Finnish marketing slogan *Nokia—Connecting people*—as well as to the idea of museum as a place for meeting, cooperating and staging ideas. These meanings were also mediated in the press and taken up by the public reception of the show.

In terms of curating, collaboration meant inviting "pairs" and "teams" instead of individuals and asking them to collaborate on a project that neither would realize on their own. Most teams consisted of an artist and a designer but there was also a dance company. This kind of working method presupposes a strong vision about the end result, but, even more importantly, it calls for trust between the artists, the venue, and the curator. The process started from a simple question to the teams: how would they like to contribute, and what was their yet-unrealized dream. This kind of working method, which uses an idea as a platform or a springboard for initiating projects allows for uncertainty and surprise. It accepts that it is impossible to know what exactly—if anything!—will emerge. It identifies each participant as an expert who contributes to the project with their special knowledge. It also makes the curatorial process more open and transforms the curator into a project manager. In the first stage of the process it was therefore important to curate individuals who were willing to collaborate. This method makes the relationship between the curator and the participating artists and designers more equal. While the curator is in charge of managing the project and maintaining its progress in a way that reduces the risk of failure, the participating artists and designers are responsible for producing the end result, their own project. Collaboration and division of labor produces the final exhibition. But who were the teams and what did they come up with?

Beyond garments: fashion as installation

Collaboration had interesting results: all finished works were installations and with the exception of one piece, none of the exhibited works consisted of clothing. Instead, all works were installations and included still or moving images as if to highlight fashion as a conceptual practice beyond garments. Another reason for the format of the works might be due to the method of interdisciplinary collaboration for which art provides more flexibility than fashion design. Secondly, the nature of the finished works might also have to do with the display context which was an art museum. An exhibition is a special type of discourse, mediation and a form of communication (O'Neill 2007: 14). It also has a canonical model

Figure 7.1 Paola Suhonen and Mikko Ijäs, from the installation "The Land of Seven Fairy Tales," room no. 2, "Route 66." Installation view, Helsinki, 2012. Photo: Kari Siltala. © Amos Anderson Art Museum.

of presentation which in the context of contemporary art and design often means space-specific installation. Related to this was the way in which the project was carried out. After the selection of artists and designers, the senior curator Kaj Martin from the Amos Anderson Museum and I allocated a space of for each team in which to realize their project.

The installation "The Land of the Seven Fairy Tales" by the designer Paola Suhonen and visual artist Mikko Ijäs consisted of seven succeeding "mood-rooms" that were constructed around seven short films reminiscent of fashion's "mood-videos" (see Figure 7.1). Each film conveyed an atmospheric short story based on a specific location and fashion collection, and the atmosphere of each room reflected this mood. The central claim of the work was the importance of imagining that connects art and fashion—and how important a role visual imagery has come to play in narrating fashion (see e.g. Uhlirova 2013: 118–132; Reinach 2013: 144–154; Shinkle 2013: 175–192). Instead of being a visual display of clothes, the main focus of the installation was on the films and their narrative. In the films, the main characters—the models—wore costumes that were dresses from the collections. Later on, when this piece was displayed in Berlin, and the cost for constructing rooms was too expensive, the installation was displayed relief-like on the wall: representing films on tablet computers in combination with actual garments connecting to the films. This decision to exhibit two different types of fashion objects—films and garments—side by side complemented each other and gave both contexts that would otherwise not have been there.

Figure 7.2 Tero Puha and Teemu Muurimäki, "Body Beautiful (Remix)." Installation view, Helsinki, 2012. Photo: Kari Siltala. © Amos Anderson Art Museum.

Another installation focusing on the power of visual representation was "Body Beautiful (Remix)" by the artist Tero Puha and the designer Teemu Muurimäki (see Figure 7.2). It was an investigation about the central role of the image in branding and constructing product identity. The duo created a product, a "scentless fragrance," marketing imagery surrounding it, and a slogan *Body Beautiful remix—Become Who You Are* reminiscent of many perfume adverts. In many ways the installation was a deconstruction of the 1990s trend in advertising which created product and brand identity through the use of memorable images—such is the case in Calvin Klein's *Be* and *One*, for example. The centerpiece of the tongue-in-cheek installation was a commercial where languid androgynous models first walk aimlessly on a beach, and ultimately end up holding the perfume bottle reverberating the empty slogans used by many actual brands, "become who you are," spoken in a soft and alluring male voice. The giant advertising posters surrounding the commercial and the product represented the models, all of them with the same head but different bodies. The model had an Afro hairstyle, signifying "Africanness," facial features referring to "Asianness" and body types representing a thin, muscular, fat, and hairy body. The racial stereotyping in the installation commented on how fashion advertising has taken part in the blending of global and local cultures and their meanings like in the case of Benetton. It was a tongue-in-cheek commentary about the ways in which global fashion brands tend to fuse local characteristics such as race, ethnicity or nationality into easily digestible symbols through the color of skin, for example. In fashion

advertising, race, ethnicity and nationality are not shown as biological or unchangeable categories, let alone facts. Rather they are tools with which advertising aims at addressing the viewer personally. In this sense, the installation was a critique of the persuasive power of marketing images. Simultaneously it was an astute analysis about the ways in which fashion advertising contributes to the "reality" into which contemporary consumers are socialized.

The role of images that connect brands with consumers was also at the core of shoe designer Minna Parikka and artist Jani Leinonen's installation "Shoe Liberation Army" (see Plate 17). At the center were cartoon figures from global brands such as Hello Kitty, Kellogg's Leo the Lion, and M&Ms. The installation merged the cartoon characters together to form a pattern that was printed on the shoes and made into wallpaper. The wallpaper was used for covering a distorted installation space, which also became a stage for showing the shoes. The work aimed to comment upon authenticity, copying and plagiarism—all themes that bind art and fashion together. "Shoe Liberation Army" also became an interesting study about the power of brands to affect what can be shown in an exhibition. In Helsinki, prior to the exhibition, the team had to make sure with a lawyer that the installation was not an infringement of copyrights. Later on, when the installation was reproduced in Tokyo, the Hello Kitty character had to be removed from the installation in order to avoid a possible infringement lawsuit. The installation made palpable the power of brands in setting the rules of display and discourse. Simultaneously, the shoes also became objects of desire as many of the visitors wanted to buy a pair—especially after one pair was given to Lady Gaga when she visited the exhibition in conjunction with her concert in Helsinki, and ended by wearing the pair in a photograph displayed on the photographer Terry Richardson's website. Celebrities are essential to contemporary fashion industry (Church Gibson 2012)—an aspect which also bound "Shoe Liberation Army" to the installation *Cinderella* by the artist Erina Matusui and shoe designer Noritaka Tatehana in the Tokyo edition. Tatehena is known for designing shoes for Lady Gaga among others. In Berlin, "Shoe Liberation Army" transformed into a completely different kind of ensemble: a pink wall—a reference to the Berlin Wall—on which the shoes were scattered forming a shoe relief.

Some of the projects also brought live bodies in the exhibition—as if making a commentary about the absence of bodies in fashion exhibitions. These pieces concentrated on the problematic relation with the body, as in the dance piece "un-fit" by Anna Mustonen & Co., fashion's role in constructing classed identities in "Cultural Dresscode" by artists Heidi Lunabba and Tärähtäneet Ämmät (Nutty Tarts), the unsustainability of the fashion industry in the installation "15 %" by Timo Rissanen and Salla Salin and the loss of history and eradication of values of the clothing industry in the installation "Girl Evacuees" consisting of an "army of girls," i.e. of ten life-size mannequin dolls by Katja Tukiainen and Samu-Jussi Koski. "un-fit" investigated the boundaries between the body and fashion. It was a critical intervention to the ways in which the fashion industry uses the body as malleable material to connote "fashionability," while simultaneously producing personal feelings of inadequacy in people. The core of the installation was a dance piece, which brought live bodies into the exhibition—reflecting on ideas about museum display of garments as static or even a graveyard of dead clothes (Steele 1998: 334). The dancers connected the museum display to everyday fashion

Figure 7.3 Timo Wright, still-image from the video accompanying the dance piece "un-fit," 2012. © Timo Wright.

practices, bringing the body back to the fashion exhibition, as it were. The work also consisted of a video work by Timo Wright. The video represented a female body caught in a pose which gradually disappears from the screen as the image begins to scratch—only to re-appear in the same pose over and over, in a loop. The installation also included "talking fashion photographs" of nude and partly veiled women by Federico Cabrera. The photographs were accompanied by loudspeakers, and every time a viewer passed by the images, a female voice asked, for example, "why do you look at me?" (see Figure 7.3).

The installation "Cultural Dresscode" also investigated ways in which people differentiate themselves from others and construct their identities through clothing. Originally, this piece was based on ethnographic interviews in six socio-economically different locations in Helsinki. The artists set up an interview booth in a public space, and invited passers-by to fill in a questionnaire about their relationship to clothing and what they wanted to communicate through it. They also photographed each interviewee and eventually created "an ideal outfit" that represented the typology of each socio-economic group in each location. The results of the interviews, photographs of interviewees and the ideal outfits of each location were installed in a fitting room in the exhibition. Later on, when "Cultural Dresscode" was displayed in New York, Tokyo and Berlin, it was modified in many ways to fit in each specific location. First, the name was shortened to "Dresscode" which already includes the idea that conventions and norms regarding dress and dressing up are always culturally constructed, not natural facts. In New York the project was realized in the same spirit as in Helsinki, but in three different locations area: the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn. The results from each location were represented in fitting rooms under the title of each borough. However, when the exhibition travelled to Tokyo, there was no funding to realize the research project. An alternative way of representing the piece had to be

Figure 7.4. Heidi Lunabba and Tärähtäneet Ämmät, "Dresscode." Installation view, Tokyo, 2014. Photo: Akihide Mishima, Courtesy of SPIRAL/Wacoal Art Center.

imagined. In collaboration with the artists we decided to exhibit the previous cities as results of visual research on screens installed in fitting rooms with the name of the respective city "Helsinki" and "New York." What is more, the current exhibiting location, "Tokyo," became a platform of an ongoing research process. This was realized by setting up a photo studio in the exhibition space and asking visitors to take a photograph of themselves which were streamed to a screen in the "Tokyo" fitting room (see Figure 7.4). The same method was utilized in Berlin—this time the ongoing process was realized by asking visitors to take a selfie and to send it online to a certain address where the images were collected to be shown on-screen in a fitting room entitled "Berlin." Currently the installation consists of hundreds of photographs of street styles in Helsinki, New York, Tokyo and Berlin. It has become a valuable form of documentation and a large corpus of visual material for future research of fashion. It exemplifies how fashion curating need not only be about displaying *haute couture*, but also about everyday fashions. It is also an example of how interdisciplinary collaboration and socially engaging projects can produce results that are widely accessible and underline the democratic appeal of fashion.

The installation "15 %" commented on the darker side of the garment and fashion industry. Central to the piece was a quasi "assembly line" in a "sweat-shop." In Helsinki, the installation was constructed in a windowless white room with fluorescent lights and tables around which a tailor, performer Janelle Abbott individually cut, sewed and ironed ordinary white cotton t-shirts. Central to the piece was the surplus fabric: every t-shirt that is currently produced in the well-oiled machinery of the fast-fashion system sends an average 15% of produced and treated fabric to waste. This is part of the production

Figure 7.5 Timo Rissanen and Salla Salin, “15 %.” Installation view with performer Janelle Abbott, New York, 2013. Photo: Timo Rissanen.

process that the consumer usually never sees but in “15 %” the surplus fabric was transformed into the central piece of the whole installation. After finishing a t-shirt, Abbott numbered it and put it in a paper bag reminiscent of brand-logo high-fashion shopping bags. What is more, she wrapped the waste fabric in silk paper and packaged it with the t-shirt in the same bag. In Helsinki, all the shirts were sold at a prize of 4.99€ which is the average price of a fast-fashion t-shirt. This time around, however, the customer also had to take the waste with them and decide what they do with it. All the money raised by selling the t-shirts was given to charity.

When “15 %” was realized in New York, the sweatshop was installed in the Aronson Gallery, Parsons School of Design, which has a large shop-like window facing Fifth Avenue. Here Janelle Abbott sat at the window, and produced t-shirts every day throughout the whole exhibition (see Figure 7.5). In this context the installation became an exclamation point about the industry’s dark undercurrent and displayed to passers-by how the fashion industry exploits natural resources and labor. Abbott worked long hours, every day from the opening of the exhibition until its closing, which made visible the repetitious—and boring—work of dressmakers in the garment industry. In this case, exhibition visitors lightened the tediousness of sewing as many talked with her about the work. The installation thus also focused on the “behind-the-scenes” labor as it placed Abbott who represented the worker, as the central figure of the work. The exploitation of garment workers in the fast-fashion industry became even more highlighted when Abbott went on strike, underlining the fact how little workers are paid for their hard work. In fact, hiring Abbott for the Tokyo and Berlin editions was too expensive. Therefore “15 %” was displayed as documentation in these locations, consisting of video screens showing

footage from the previous exhibitions, as well as an installation with sewing machines and paper bags, remeniscent of the work done in previous exhibitions.

If “15 %” had to do with the various unsustainable practices and aspects of fashion, how the industry treats matter as disposable, and exploits workers, the idea behind “Girl Evacuees” was the opposite. This installation, consisting of ten life-size fiberglass dolls with ten gowns designed for them drew from the history of Finnish refugees during the First and Second World Wars. During both wars, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Finland known as Karelia, forcing Karelians to flee their homes and taking only their most valuable belongings with them. In many cases, the most valuable things that women could take along were their full dresses. The installation thus made the violent history of war visible through clothing. Simultaneously, the installation also drew attention to the fact that while fashion is fundamentally a material practice and we live in a thoroughly materialist culture, the current fast-fashion system treats matter as mute and disposable (e.g. Scaturro 2008). In contemporary culture, clothing hardly counts as most valuable belongings—rather, it is easy to discard and leave behind. Later on, when the exhibition traveled, the number of mannequin dolls was reduced due to travel costs. In Tokyo, the installation consisted of six dolls and in Berlin, three. While in Helsinki and in Tokyo the dolls were represented in the same space as if an army of girls, in Berlin the dolls were scattered around the exhibition space, which was a three-storey open space with the dolls binding the space and the exhibition together.

The history of collaboration between artists or artists and designers shows that the collaborative method used in *Boutique* and its editions is by no means new. On the contrary, it is long and multifaceted and extends from sixteenth-century artists’ studio work to twentieth-century collaborations in Andy Warhol’s pseudo-industrial Factory (Lind 2007: 16–17). Collaboration between artists and fashion designers also has its own history, ranging from Futurist manifestos on “utopian anti-fashion” and Constructivist (and Communist) fantasies about the fashioned future-citizen, to collaborations between surrealist artists and fashion designers such as Salvador Dalí and Elsa Schiaparelli in the 1930s (Stern 2004; English 2007). More recently, it has materialized in Yves Saint Laurent’s interpretation of Piet Mondrian’s painting in his “Mondrian Dress” design from 1965 (Mackrell 2005; Geczy and Karaminas 2012) and in collaborations between contemporary artists and global brands such as Louis Vuitton and Dior (Bengtsen this volume; Bai this volume). Art-fashion collaborations have recently become an important tool in associating the fashion brand with cultural capital, in attracting new consumers—and in increasing the brand’s economic value.

The multifaceted history of collaborations and overlaps between art and fashion exemplifies how independent curators often tend to work when they commission works. They go from concepts and ideas and do not necessarily assume the conventional role of the dress historian whose principal task has long been to research the history of a particular designer’s oeuvre or a fashion moment, and to select key examples from it for display along the conventions of dress historical presentation (see e.g. Taylor 1998, 2002). The contemporary fashion curator is more like a project-researcher (see e.g. Steele 1998: 327–335; Breward 2008: 83–94) whom the museum—or a gallery—hires for the duration of the curatorial project. But what happens once the exhibition is over? What happened to *Boutique*?

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New editions: New York–Tokyo–Berlin

Usually, exhibitions are solitary events—most commonly due to lack of funding for taking the exhibition elsewhere, and due to the nature of the exhibition as a site-specific event. *Boutique* was undoubtedly a site-specific exhibition. It comprised installations each of which was constructed on the spot to a specific space. This also meant that the works were flexible: it was possible to realize modifications or editions from the original pieces according to each new space. In this sense *Boutique* was essentially a body of concepts and ideas that could take new material forms. The malleability of the works made it much easier to bring the exhibition elsewhere and to realize every new edition in collaboration with people from each exhibition location in order to contextualize the show in that particular place.

The first edition of *Boutique* was co-curated with Hazel Clark for the Aronson Gallery at Parsons School of Design in 2013. The collaboration began when Clark visited Helsinki to see the original exhibition since the other artist behind the installation "15 %," Timo Rissanen, also worked at Parsons in New York. After seeing the exhibition, Clark selected three pieces from it on the basis of their critical stance against the unsustainable fashion industry and the size of the possible exhibition space: "15 %," "Dresscode" and "un-fit." In the frame of New York which is *the* global fashion city (e.g. Rantisi 2006: 109–122) and a gallery within *the* design school with a shop-window facing the Fifth Avenue, the major thoroughfare, the exhibition had to be a critical intervention and to mediate an alternative view of fashion to students and to other visitors. The critical potential of fashion was also highlighted through changing the name of the exhibition, from *Boutique* to *Fashion Interactions.* The new name also underlined the potential of art and fashion in creating critical discourse as well as the possibility of fashion curators to use fashion as a reflective practice. Organizing an international symposium on fashion curating—*Fashion Curating Now*—further emphasized this by focusing on possibilities and challenges of contemporary fashion curating on a global scale. The symposium hosted many of the authors included in this book: Judith Clark, Kaat Debo, Nathalie Khan, and Alexandra Palmer.

The second edition of *Boutique* went to Japan and was exhibited in one of the most prominent design exhibition spaces in Tokyo, the Spiral Art Center, and co-curated with Spiral's curator Ikuko Kato. The name of the exhibition was altered slightly: *Boutique! Thinking about Fashion, Through Art* and co-produced with Spiral, the Finnish Institute in Japan and the Finnish Embassy in Tokyo (2014). This time around, all installations were displayed as more or less modified versions to fit the exhibition space and the production budget. In fact, most of the works were produced on site which was a more affordable solution than transporting the works from Finland. In Tokyo the idea of collaboration was also extended to cooperation between two nations: Japan and Finland. This means that the original exhibition was enlarged with Japanese artists and designers whose works conversed with the themes of the Finnish works, modifying and adding new meanings to all.

Inspired by the story of Katja Tukiainen and Samu-Jussi Koski's "Girl Evacuees"*,* the installation "Fukiyose" by matohu and Kenmei Nagaoka reflected on the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011, and what people took with them when fleeing their homes (see Figure 7.6). In the context of Tokyo, the story behind the dresses by Koski became an important mediator

Figure 7.6 Installation view with matohu and Kenmei Nagaoka, "Fukiyose" (foreground) and Katja Tukiainen and Samu-Jussi Koski, "Girl Evacuees" (background). Tokyo, 2014. Photo: Akihide Mishima, Courtesy of SPIRAL/Wacoal Art Center.

between the two nations and the way in which a disaster, be it war or a nuclear catastrophe, affects individuals. Simultaneously, the designer matohu and artist Kenmei Nagaoka's installation also connected to "15 %": it included a jacket assembled from matohu's previous designs and discarded fabric, as a reminder that unsustainability is a dilemma that binds the Japanese, Finnish and global fashion industries and consumers together. The unwanted by-product of economic activity in fashion is the negative impact on the environment and humans—both on those who work in production and on those who over-consume fashion.

The third edition of *Boutique* was exhibited in Berlin (2016) under its original title and produced by the Embassy of Finland. The frame for this edition was the local Berlin Fashion Week and the exhibition space, Felleshus, which is the home of the Nordic embassies in Berlin. Felleshus is an outspokenly political stage: the exhibiting times are divided between each Scandinavian country so that each has annually a three-month time slot to display the *crème-de-la-crème* of the respective country to German audiences. Berlin Fashion Week, on the other hand, is known for its unconventionality among the fashion week concept (www.fashion-week-berlin.com/en/about-us.html). A major part was dedicated to panel discussions and projects on sustainable fashion. In this double frame—the context of the fashion week and the context of a national showcase—the exhibition was, on the one hand, a socio-political intervention critiquing the fashion industry and, on the other, a staging of the innovative collaboration of young Finnish artists and designers. In Berlin, the exhibition was again accompanied by a one-day international symposium, *Curating: Fashion in Context* which I co-organized with Hazel Clark,

addressing how to teach critical fashion curating and what the aims and practices of fashion curating could be in museums, galleries and commercial spaces in the future.

Most of the works installed in Berlin were only slight modifications of the original exhibition. “The Land of The Seven Fairy Tales,” for example, became an installation consisting of seven short films paired with garments from the collections shown on the films. The dance piece “un-fit,” on the other hand, was transformed into a dialogue between two works: a video by Timo Wright from the dance piece and an installation called “Hate Couture” by Tärähtäneet Ämmät. While the video exhibits the disintegration of the body, “Hate Couture” consists of nude colored garments featuring undesirable bodily features such as veins, saggy breasts, fat and body hair—a work reminiscent of Rei Kawakubo’s/ Comme des Garçon’s spring/summer 1997 collection “Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body.” A new work was also included in the Berlin exhibition: a hat performance by the performance artist and milliner Mimosa Pale. On the opening night, three performers wore Pale’s large sculptural hats with designs drawing from art history, e.g. from the Japanese Hokusai’s “The Great Wave” (1829–1832). The performance made references to the history of collaborations between avant-garde artists and designers as noted above, while also making visible the dying profession of millinery in contemporary fashion.

Fashion curating: a form of cultural analysis

“An exhibition is not an illustration,” Hans Ulrich Obrist states in the concluding chapter of *Ways of Curating* (2014: 167). What he means is that exhibitions are not merely illustrations or representations about something—they produce reality itself. This was certainly the case with *Boutique* and its editions. It was not a traditional illustration of dress or fashions of a certain moment—rather, it was a materialization of interdisciplinary collaboration. But more than that, it was also what Mieke Bal (2004: 9) calls “cultural analysis” as it focused on issues of fashion that have cultural and societal relevance, and aimed to contribute in topical debates through the exhibited works. Although I, the curator, played an important role in setting the exhibition project in motion, it was neither me nor the artists and designers alone who gave the project and its works meaning. It was the collaboration between artists, designers, institutions, geographical locations and their audiences that ultimately produced the meanings of the exhibition and its works. The whole project goes to show that curatorial work is not about the curator as an individual and that the exhibition is not the materialization of her/his intentions contrary to what for example Diana Vreeland suggested through her exhibitions. The curator is often seminal in setting a project in motion but, once the show is on, it is open to multiple interpretations in the same way as artworks. After opening, the curator steps aside and the public takes over. It produces meanings in dialogue with the exhibition and makes its own interpretations. This makes the curator first and foremost an enabler: someone who works to create space for establishing, experiencing and understanding, also in ways that s/he did not intend. Like the artist and the designer, the curator is therefore only partially involved in the production of meaning.

The reception of *Boutique* indicates this: most of the audience read the exhibition and its editions as a form of cultural critique and as critical analysis of fashion. This also made

the exhibition quite popular among the audiences in the different locations—it felt as if this kind of approach had been long anticipated. The popularity of the exhibition was immediately evident on the opening night with a queue of over 500 people outside the museum throughout the opening. Over the three-month exhibiting period, it attracted over 20,000 people which was remarkable for a museum with approximately 50,000 annual visitors (*Boutique* statistics Helsinki 2012). In comparison, the Berlin edition attracted over 17,000 visitors during its three-month exhibition time (*Boutique* statistics Berlin 2016) and Tokyo over 11,000 visitors over its two-week exhibition time (*Boutique* statistics Tokyo 2015). Furthermore, the Helsinki exhibition was mentioned about sixty times in the media and in blogs—and met with enthusiasm and praise (*Boutique* in the media 2012) and the Tokyo edition over eighty times (*Boutique* statistics Tokyo 2015). The same enthusiasm was present in the Berlin edition where the guest book had sixty-three pages with entries from the visitors, stating for example:

> "As researcher of cultural studies, first time in Berlin, absolutely fabulous!"
>
> "Exceptional, and much awaited! Exciting, typically Nordic—well presented in this beautiful and light space."
>
> "Unorthodox, innovative, unconventional."
>
> "A wonderful statement."
>
> "An interesting and stimulating exhibition. I would have wanted to see more."
>
> "Timely, fantastic, avant-gardist, a beautiful mixture of architecture and spatial installation."
>
> "An inspiring exhibition which criticizes the whitewashed and blind contemporary fashion industry."
>
> *BOUTIQUE* STATISTICS BERLIN 2016, translated from German by the author

Boutique and its edited versions clearly filled a gap in the ongoing discussion regarding the art–fashion conundrum and the challenges and problems of the fashion industry, and how fashion can also function as a critical discourse. In retrospect, it seems that the exhibition may have seemed more critical to the audience because it intertwined fashion with art—and because it did not display clothing. The framing of the exhibition within an art institution may thus have lent meanings to the exhibition that might not have materialized had it been exhibited in another kind of location. The various editions thus produced "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988: 575–599) about art, fashion and their relevance to cultural debate—exemplifying how knowledge about fashion is made and disseminated, and how this knowledge is always framed, affecting the meanings and their very formation. The series of edited exhibitions also made me as a curator and as a researcher of fashion ever more aware of the specificity of knowledge and meaning of production and especially, how the meanings of fashion change depending on framing and the context of display.

The feedback of the exhibition exemplifies how *Boutique* and its editions succeeded in creating self-reflexive and critical discourse about fashion and art. It also assured me that

fashion curating is a viable format of critical discourse and cultural analysis. It particularly enabled me to understand fashion as a local phenomenon. Although fashion is globally distributed, the meanings that we read from it and that make it intelligible, are often locally specific. Fashion must always become local in order for it to affect. In this exhibition, this need was materialized in the edited versions of the original exhibition through the inclusion of local artists and designers. The editions therefore suggest that fashion curating is always particular and embodied. It is a culturally specific activity, and a platform for interpersonal and intercultural negotiation despite the fact that new visualization methods and media technologies persuade us to believe that fashion transcends all cultural boundaries. *Boutique* and its editions showed that fashion is site-specific. Travel and change of location alter and add meaning. Fashion curating changes places but each place always changes the exhibition and the works included in it.

Note

1 This has changed gradually, especially since fashion design students have started to be recognized at the annual Hyéres Festival in France which promotes young fashion designers (see e.g. Frilander 2015; Heikkilä 2016).

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