

5.1 “Fashion Curating: Broadening the Scope”^o
— Jose Teunissen

The recent interest in fashion curation relates to the fact that the fashion exhibition has become a very strong medium to bring forward underlying cultural meanings of fashion in an accessible way: it can underline how fashion – a phenomenon that we primarily experience unconsciously – functions and how it is interwoven with our cultural and social lives. This is why universities and fashion schools are currently developing courses in fashion curation as a new way of understanding fashion and a new way to open up or disseminate fashion studies theories to a broader audience.

At the same time, the fashion industry is embracing ‘curation’ as a new practice and a new tool to ‘market’ a brand, as Comme des Garçons perfectly illustrates with its pop-up stores.

The interest from both the academic and commercial world arises from the fact that fashion ‘behind the object’ has a (cultural) story to tell, or can engage with an audience by arranging visual ‘artefacts’ in a specific way. As such, the curated fashion exhibition or presentation fills a gap that traditional catwalk shows, fashion photography, fashion magazines and written studies were not able to cover. In this essay, I would like to explore why curation has an empowering capacity for fashion and try to find arguments why it has become so popular as an educational and commercial tool.

Discovering the potential of fashion curation

In the exhibitions I started to curate in Utrecht’s Centraal Museum in the Netherlands in the period 2000-2005, I invariably used a current fashion theme as a starting point, whose underlying layers I wished to bring to the surface. In 2000, one of my first exhibitions was on *Droog & Dutch Design* in which we showed how Dutch fashion designers such as Alexander van Slobbe and Viktor & Rolf were working within the same philosophy – Dutch modernism – as product designers like Hella Jongerius, Richard Hutten and Marcel Wanders (Teunissen, Van Zijl 2000). For the exhibition *Woman by* (2003) nine fashion houses, including Maison Martin Margiela, Ann Demeulemeester, Dior and Viktor & Rolf were asked to design an installation that expressed their specific vision of the feminine ideal in fashion and their idea of femininity (Teunissen, 2004). With this exhibition I wanted not only to show that today’s fashion designers were working with very different representations of women, but also to emphasise that for fashion designers like Martin Margiela and Hussein Chalayan the design concept comes first and the chosen model serves merely as a vehicle for its presentation. For example, Margiela’s catwalk models were often blindfolded, so as not to distract the audience’s eyes from the clothes. Hussein Chalayan developed an installation, *Kinship Journey* (2003),^A in which a trampoline, a confessional booth and a boat / coffin together represent the three essential phases of life. The three objects were originally made for the exhibition *Woman by*, but were removed from the exhibition for two days to serve as décor for the presentation of the collection of the same name in Paris. On the one hand, the theme of *Woman by* made it clear that contemporary fashion design has

become much more conceptual and that the design concept itself has taken centre stage. On the other hand, it also showed how ideals of femininity, in today’s post-feminist age, are defined in different ways by different fashion designers (Teunissen, 2004, pp. 63–77). Where Vivienne Westwood and Veronique Leroy presented classical femininity and the game of seduction as ‘empowerment’ of the modern woman, Ann Demeulemeester depicted a feminist, emancipated woman – one that is delicate, soft, elfin-like and who comes across tough and nonchalant at the same time.



A



B



C

The exhibition *Global Fashion, Local Tradition* (2005)^B illustrated how while the internet has made fashion more global, it also calls on a sense of local identity by using regional crafts (Teunissen, 2005). I took this insight to another level in the exhibition *The Future of Fashion is Now* in 2014^C. Almost ten years later, the prediction of 2005 had become reality. The newest generation of fashion designers could hail from any continent and are no longer required to relocate to Paris, London or Milan to be discovered and to build up a career. They could achieve an international reputation right in their own country by means of web shops, blogs, social media and local fashion weeks, without the intermediate step of discovery in Paris or London by fashion journalists and

buyers (Teunissen, 2005, pp. 7-23). Many newcomers in the fashion world did not grow up with knowledge of Western fashion history and the related movements, such as postmodernism, conceptualism and modernism. As a consequence – and this was the new insight! – the new generation of fashion designers has a different way of employing *origins* and *cultural* traditions: they explicitly link local styles and craftsmanship with new technologies and new notions of what fashion and clothing might mean in society, both now and in the future, and they do this in a quite natural way. Today's designers are no longer searching for an 'authentic' style and a local tradition that references their origins; their main concern is to critique the present fashion system with its consumerism and its excessive and barely sustainable production methods and to embrace new technologies, resulting in new ways of imagining fashion.

Origin, authenticity and identity are still important concepts in the world of fashion, but they are no longer being used to advance a 'national identity' as was already a noticeable trend in the art world, as described by Bourriaud in *The Radicant*. (2009, p. 21). The youngest generation of designers deploy origin, craftsmanship, tradition and identity as fragments for sketching out an image of the future. Their fragments of identity acquire meaning in the context of the *project*, in which the focus is not on the product but on the process. In the working process of today's designers, new forms of presentation become essential. Most designers show their 'innovative' vision not by means of a single garment or product, but by inviting the observer to accompany them throughout the entire design and thought process, which is presented – as a curated presentation – by means of *storytelling* and *future scenarios*. The fashion campaign, the catwalk and the fashion magazine are no longer the ideal platforms that everyone takes for granted. New presentation sites are being sought out, from empty factories and technology fairs to urban hubs and social networks. Akira Minagawa of the label Minä Perhonen (Japan) builds poetic stories around particular motifs, which he shows off again and again and reworks in many different forms, such as curtains and upholstery. Elisa van Joolen (Netherlands) presented the project *11" x 17"* in an Amsterdam dry cleaner's shop. Mary Ping from the label Slow and Steady Wins the Race (United States) always organises an exhibition in a gallery or museum to accompany her new, sustainable outfits. Adele Varcoe (Australia) unravelled Chanel's brand identity by means of a performance, *Imagining Chanel*^P. Lucia Cuba (Peru)^E uses her work (*Articulo 6*, 2012) to create social cohesion, thereby delivering the political message that such cohesion is missing in today's society.



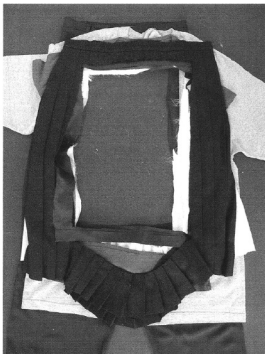
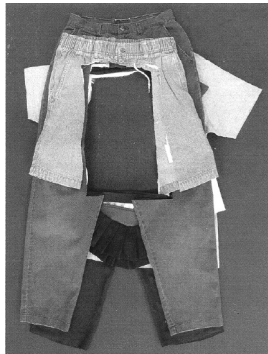
D



E

The focus in all these projects being presented in *The Future of Fashion is Now* (2014) is on the process and not on the final product, as the work of Elisa van Joolen illustrates very clearly. In her *11" x 17"* project, she plays with the identities of various fashion brands. Almost every brand has a crew neck sweater in its collection, and what Van Joolen wants to know is how you can create a unique, authentic and original product if everybody else is making the same garment. Van Joolen makes the question of brand identity visible by asking different brands to give her samples of their sweaters, which she cuts into A3-shaped pieces and then frames^F. For the viewer, this is the beginning of a semiotic exploration: after the fragments are placed side by side, the differences and similarities in material and stitch suddenly become apparent, thereby demonstrating that every brand is different at a materialistic micro-level. It isn't the final result that's important here – the framed parts of the sweaters – but what they set in motion: the search for differences. The *11" x 17"* project plays with brand identities and brand characteristics by isolating them and placing them next to each other, so that different layers of information are involved.

It might be clear that 'curated' presentations use (crucial) objects, outfits or installations as cornerstones, but the main focus is on unravelling the underlying concepts and narratives by showing the process by means of an installation, a film, or a special space, or through lighting and scenography, which give insight into the story behind the product and present underlying layers and processes. In the same way, many designers are using 'curated' presentations to be able to address the contradictions and ethical issues of the fashion industry that they are dealing with.



F

The 1960: the start of a fashion evolution

Using an exhibition to reveal concepts and societal processes is a recent phenomenon in the field of fashion. Right up until the 1960s, museum dress and fashion collections were usually part of the domain of the applied arts department within these museums. Most collections were composed of luxurious, exclusive pieces donated by elitist families. For each dress object, careful research was carried out concerning crafting techniques and tailoring, as well as about who had worn the garment and on what occasion. Dress and fashion, in short, were collected as separate historic and aesthetic artefacts, described in terms of style, form, fabric, craft, and the personal history of the wearer (Taylor, 1998, p. 317).

Only when fashion in the 1960s was democratised and transformed from an exclusive luxury product for the elite into a clothes culture accessible to the masses, did the museum world and the fashion world adjust their perspective: what would have to be collected in order to follow and display the most important developments in contemporary fashion – *haute couture*? The newest Paris *prêt-à-porter*? Street fashion? More important still, how was this contemporary fashion to be studied? Suddenly, it was no longer sufficient to focus on the clothing object itself; an eye would have to be developed for the societal and political context of clothing, and for the fact that fashion was now being expressed in a number of popular visual cultures such as media, art and music (Lipovetsky, 1994, p. 149; Teunissen, 2009, p. 11).

Next, fashion was no longer all about the presentation of a feminine ideal and the display of wealth. A scenography of elegance has been replaced by a theatricality of meaning (Lipovetsky, 2002, p. 8). From now on, clothes would allow us not only to create our own identities, but also to consciously propagate political ideals, just as punks did in the late 1970s with printed T-shirts. In the 21st century, fashion designer Hussein Chalayan used installations such as *Afterwords* (a/w 2000), *Kinship Journeys* (2003), *Readings* (2008), and *Micro Geography* (2009) in art museums to raise political and societal issues such as migration, alienation, and the effects of globalisation on daily life. In this way, it became widely visible and accepted that fashion could deliver a message beyond an aesthetic expression of style. From the 1960s onward, the fact that fashion could arise on the street meant that it was no longer a product made by a designer for a consumer; this hierarchy disappeared and was replaced by a dialogue, an exchange between fashion designer and wearer, in which the media played a crucial role (Martin, 2009, p. 27). These changes transformed fashion into an important phenomenon of our visual culture whose social impact and manifestations became increasingly important (Lipovetsky, 1994, p. 88).

In all these ways, fashion increasingly became an expression of ideas and concepts. The fashion avant-garde had escaped the straitjacket of the functional demands traditionally made by the applied arts: fashion had become the product of a design which was 'attached' to the human body, but which also researched and explored its own relationship with this body, with identity, self-image, and environment. In doing so it had come to strongly resemble Pop Art and the performance art emerging in the visual arts (Teunissen, 2009, p. 24).

These new fashion developments have also changed attitudes towards fashion in academic circles. Newer disciplines such as cultural studies, visual culture and women's studies shared this new interest in fashion as part of popular culture. They have started studying fashion much more as a cultural phenomenon than was the case in classic art history studies, in which the object itself, its history, and its place in dress history are central (Steele, 2008, p. 25).



G

Finally fashion designers themselves have been altering essential components of classical fashion since the 1970s. For Viktor & Rolf, for example, the environment of an art museum or gallery has always been an ideal platform for the presentation of their ideas. From the start of their career, the design concept is not at the forefront in the work of Viktor&Rolf, but the designs and the imaginary worlds they have inhabited are inextricably linked. To be able to focus more on their concept and ideas, the duo recently decided to stop their commercial lines – fed up as they were with the rat race of the fast fashion industry. Since then, they have used the haute couture platform to present their 'wearable art' pieces while earning a living from their very successful perfume^A.

In short, since the 1970s, exhibitions and new fashion curation practices start to provide insight into the phenomenon of fashion as part of a larger narrative and a broader context. It diverts attention towards the manifestation of an underlying idea in fashion design. For the audience, the exhibition has become a 'new' way for understanding fashion as a part of our contemporary visual culture. Fashion became the product of a design which was attached to the human body, but which also researched and explored its own relationships with this body, with identity, self-image, and the social environment. Since, scholars and fashion studies discovered fashion curation as an adequate way to do a partly visual and 'iterative' research and to disseminate results and bring forward underlying cultural principles of the fashion system. For the industry, for retailers and for many designers, curation is a new visual language with its own sets of rules for showcasing ideas or telling the (commercial or cultural) stories behind a product. As such, together, they all give birth to this new fashion narrative, which places greater emphasis on fashion as a part of our digitalised, commoditised and social culture and less on fashion as a tangible object.

- A.** Hussein Chalayan, *Kinship Journey* (2003) part of the exhibition *Woman By*, Centraal Museum Utrecht
- B.** Exhibition *Global Fashion Local Tradition*, 2005 Centraal Museum Utrecht.
- C.** *D&K, Brand Delusions* (2014) part of the exhibition *The Future of Fashion is Now* Boijmans, Rotterdam 2014, Shanghai 2015
- D.** Adele Varcoe (Australia) unravels Chanel's brand identity by means of a performance, *Imagining Chanel*
- E.** Lucia Cuba (Peru, *Exercises with Health* 2014 part of the exhibition *the Future of Fashion is Now*, Boijmans, Rotterdam 2014, Shanghai 201
- F.** Elisa van Joolen, *11"x 17"*, 2014
- G.** Viktor&Rolf, *Zen Garden*, a/w 2013.

5.2 “Mediated Materiality and Meaning: Curating Experience Through the Body and Dress”^o
— Jessica Bugg

“Fashion & Performance; Materiality, Meaning, Media” is an evolving research-driven exhibition collaboratively curated by Jessica Bugg and Anna-Nicole Ziesche for the Design Hub, Melbourne, in 2015 and was the performative development of a smaller pilot exhibition of the same name for the Arnhem Mode Biennale in 2013.

Fashion & Performance: Materiality, Meaning, Media

In 2012, I began an ongoing research conversation with the visual artist Anna Nicole Ziesche, drawing on our training in fashion design and subsequent shift towards the use of performance methodologies and film within our practice. Our shared understanding of the relationship of fashion as well as performance in contemporary practice and the role of film in this paradigm led to the conception of the exhibition “Fashion & Performance: Materiality, Meaning, Media” as an outcome of our individual, collaborative and ongoing research. The exhibition drew on the need to recognise and understand this hybrid contemporary practice, where, from our perspective, the relationship of worn and performed clothing is undeniably tightly interlinked with both performance and fashion. Our early discussions focused on the distinct differences and shifts in methodologies in both disciplines and precedents in performance art where fluidity of methods and shared concerns have led to works that occupy this interface that broadens definitions, terminology and practice.

I have written elsewhere of the many examples of fashion practitioners embracing the mechanics of the stage in catwalk presentation, the increasing instances of performance-based methods in the production of fashion design and examples of performance makers moving into fashion space and performers working with designers in the communication of their work (Bugg, 2011, 2013, 2014). The exhibition goes beyond these perspectives, focusing on cross-disciplinary artists who draw on an inherent awareness of both fashion and performance within their methodologies, aesthetic and communication methods. Discussed outside commercial imperatives usually associated with fashion, there was a commitment to investigate and communicate ideas around fashion and dress, the body and performance in ways which go beyond the traditional parameters of either fashion or performance (Bugg, 2014, 2013). As researchers and practitioners our intention was to not only discuss this very specific area of practice but to uncover through the performing body an experiential and embodied communication in the curation of time-based works.

The first iteration of *Fashion & Performance: Materiality, Meaning, Media* was curated for the Arnhem Mode Biennale 2013 (MoBA), supported by Li Edelkoort and the London College of Fashion. This provided an experiential platform to develop the exhibition concept and curatorial approach, drawing on theoretical research and a deeper analysis of our own practice in relation to that of

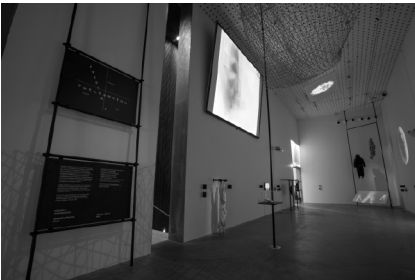
others. The curation was developed through an iterative and reflective process that continues as it moves to other contexts, enabling the research to be disseminated and extended. Ongoing wearer and visitor analysis continues to inform the research.

In 2015, the exhibition was developed for RMIT Design Hub gallery in Melbourne as part of the Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival Cultural Program, supported by the School of Fashion and Textiles at RMIT. It included 21 established and emerging international practitioners: Anna Baumgart, Maria Blaisse, Ulrik Martin Larsen, Charlotte Gyllenhammar, Imme van der Haak, Bart Hess & Lucy McCrae, B O U D I C C A, Jessica Bugg, Anna-Nicole Ziesche, HEYNIK, Pyuupiru, Luke White & Remi Weekes, Marie and Kristian Schuller, Jacob Kok, Nirma Madhoo, Hussein Chalayan, Margret Wibmer, Henrik Vibskov & Andreas Emenius, Adele Varcoe, D & K (Ricarda Bigolin and Nella Themelios), Lucy + Jorg Orta. Coming from diverse backgrounds in fashion, textiles, architecture and the visual arts, some of the artists have trained or worked in more than one discipline and all have a preoccupation with clothing the visual, experiential and performing body.

The Design Hub was an ideal venue as it is “dedicated to design research, interdisciplinary practice and collaborative thinking intending to operate less like a traditional gallery than with the intensity of a studio environment [...] enabling research exchange” (Rhodes and Watson, 2015). This afforded the opportunity to test concepts and approaches working with an experienced team of curators in an environment where we could experiment with curatorial approaches within the gallery as opposed to mounting a pre-designed exhibition.

Bibliography

- BARTHES, R. (1967), *Système de la mode*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- BLANCHARD, T. (2004), *Fashion and Graphic Design*. London: Laurence King Publishing.
- BREWARD, C. (2008), 'Between the Museum and the Academy: Fashion Research and its Constituencies', in *Fashion Theory*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 83–95.
- FUKAI, A. (1999), 'Visions of the Body' in: *Visions of the Body*, Kyoto: the Kyoto Costume Institute, pp. 190–193.
- FUKAI, A. (2006), 'Japan and Fashion', in Jan Brand & José Teunissen (eds.), *The Power of Fashion. On design and meaning*, Arnhem: Terra/ArtEZ Press, pp. 288–314.
- GREGG DUNCAN, G. (2006), 'The greatest show on earth', in: Jan Brand & José Teunissen (eds.), *The Power of Fashion. On design and meaning*, Arnhem: Terra/ArtEZ Press, pp. 222–248.
- EVANS, C. (2003), *Fashion at the Edge*, London: Yale University Press.
- HOLLANDER, A. (1975), *Seeing through Clothes*, New York: Avedon.
- KAMITSIS, L. (2009), 'An impressionistic history of fashion shows since the 1960s', in Jan Brand & José Teunissen (eds.), *Fashion and Imagination*, Arnhem: d'jonge Hond/ArtEZ Press, pp. 92–104.
- LIPOVETSKY, G. (1998), *The Empire of Fashion. Dressing modern democracy*, New York: Princeton University Press.
- LIPOVETSKY, G. (2002), 'More than fashion' in *Chic Clicks*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Publishers.
- MARTIN, R. (2009), 'Beyond appearances and beyond custom. The avant-garde sensibility of fashion and art since the 1960s', in: Jan Brand & José Teunissen (eds.), *Fashion and Imagination*, Arnhem: d'jonge Hond/ArtEZ Press, pp. 26–44.
- PALMER, A. (2008), 'Untouchable: Creating Desire and Knowledge in Museum Costume and Textile Exhibitions', in *Fashion Theory*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 31–65.
- STEELE, V. (2004), 'The Corset', in Jan Brand & José Teunissen (eds.), *The Ideal Woman*, Nijmegen: SUN/ArtEZ Press, pp. 77–80
- STEELE, V. (2008), 'Museum Quality: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition', in *Fashion Theory*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 7–31.
- STEVENSON, N.J. (2008), 'The Fashion Retrospective', in *Fashion Theory*, Oxford: Berg, Volume 12, issue 2, pp. 219–223.
- SUDJIC, D. (1990), *Rei Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons*, London: Westbourne Grove.
- TAYLOR, L. (1998), 'Doing the Laundry? A Reassessment of Object-based Dress History', in *Fashion Theory*, Oxford: Berg, vol. 2, issue 4, pp. 337–358.
- TEUNISSEN, J. (2003), *Woman by*, Utrecht: Centraal Museum.
- TEUNISSEN, J. (2004), 'Knocking woman off her pedestal', in Jan BRAND & José TEUNISSEN (eds.), *The Ideal Woman*, Nijmegen: SUN/ArtEZ Press, pp. 63–77.
- TEUNISSEN, J. (2005), 'Global Fashion, Local Tradition', in BRAND, J. & TEUNISSEN, J. (eds.), *Global Fashion, Local Tradition*, Arnhem: Terra/ArtEZ press, pp. 8–23.
- TEUNISSEN, J. (2009), 'Fashion and Art', in BRAND, J. & TEUNISSEN, J. (eds.), *Fashion and Imagination*, Arnhem: d'jonge Hond/ArtEZ Press, pp. 10–25.
- TEUNISSEN, J. & VAN ZIJL, I. (2000), *Droog & Dutch Design*, Exhibition catalogue, Central Museum, Utrecht.
- VINKEN, B. (2009), 'Fashion: art of dying, art of living', in BRAND, J. & TEUNISSEN, J. (eds.), *Fashion and Imagination*, Arnhem: d'jonge Hond/ArtEZ Press, pp. 82–92.



A



B