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The absent shadow: Reflections on the incidence of menswear in recent fashion exhibitions

ABSTRACT

This article examines the incidence of menswear in fashion exhibitions, staged worldwide, over the past 45 years. Drawing on two related sets of data I delineate statistical and thematic tendencies relating to the exhibition of menswear and, through examination of a sample of exhibitions visited, I reflect on the inclusion of menswear in fashion exhibitions in relation to a defined typology of fashion exhibitions. Subsequently, I discuss in detail the presence and presentation of menswear in one particular fashion exhibition type – the designer monograph. The article is completed with analysis of Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear 1715–2015, a recent major exhibition dedicated to menswear.

KEYWORDS

exhibiting menswear
fashion curation
fashion exhibitions
men's fashion
menswear exhibitions
menswear

INTRODUCTION

On the 14 April 2015, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, posted a press release announcing details of their forthcoming exhibition, *China: Through the Looking Glass*. Amongst the exhibition's register of international designers was London-based Craig Green. Green's selection was noteworthy not only, as

Vogue commented, because he was a relative newcomer in comparison to other designers selected (Remsen 2015) but because he is a menswear designer. The other eminent contemporary brands named (including Roberto Cavalli, Jean Paul Gaultier, Ralph Lauren, Martin Margiela, Alexander McQueen, Dries van Noten, Paul Smith and Vivienne Westwood) all produced prominent womenswear lines alongside their menswear collections. Did Green's inclusion indicate that the exhibition would feature a significant complement of menswear? Viewing the show revealed that, other than several antique Chinese court robes and Mao-styled suits, Green's was the principal representation of men's clothing. Despite being featured in a prominent display, constructed from glowing acrylic tubes that simulated a soaring bamboo grove, Green's menswear was evidently in the minority. Once again it appeared that – as I had observed in visits to many fashion exhibitions – womenswear stood firmly in the spotlight and menswear, in comparison, was merely a shadow.

THE PROCESS OF REFLECTION

My aim in this article is to reflect on the incidence of menswear in recent fashion exhibitions. It would be impossible, within the scope of this text, to draft a definitive, analytical record of the occurrence of menswear exhibitions and the inclusion of menswear in all fashion exhibitions worldwide. Instead, it is my intention to reveal how menswear has featured on the fashion exhibition landscape over recent years. I propose to execute this through the analysis of two sets of data that inform two related evaluative exercises. The first exercise consists of the compilation of statistical information regarding the number of exhibitions exclusively presenting menswear alongside a picture of their temporal distribution from 1971 to the present day. The second exercise examines the inclusion of menswear in various exhibition types, focusing in detail on the incidence of menswear in the most prevalent category – the designer monograph.

To clarify the parameters of my investigation, I use the term 'menswear' to comprise historic and contemporary clothing and accessories designed for, or worn by individuals identifying as male. I define 'fashion exhibitions' as those displays primarily presenting items of historic and contemporary clothing and accessories. I have not included exhibitions that exclusively comprise wearable art, flat textiles, fashion photography or illustration, tattooing, hair-styles or body modification, or exhibitions presenting clothing within an ethnographic or archaeological context. I have also excluded exhibitions comprised solely of costume designed for performance. My sample includes exhibitions presented in both cultural and commercial arenas: fashion brands increasingly understand the promotional power of exhibitions and recent years have seen an increase in installations produced outside of conventional museum venues by major fashion producers.

I have applied 1971 as a start date for my data sample as it reflects the demarcation of an inventory of fashion exhibitions I contributed to the publication *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971* (Clark et al., 2014: 167–245). In that instance the date related to the staging of *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, which author Amy de la Haye identifies as a watershed moment in fashion curation (Clark et al. 2014: 6). Experience of compiling the inventory – admittedly incomplete – revealed that access to exhibition records is variable and increasingly difficult as time becomes more distant. To expedite this research I have built on this existing inventory (which covered the period 1971–2013) and supplemented

this with a number of recent exhibitions. My investigation is also focused exclusively on temporary exhibitions, defined as presentations staged for a limited period, concurrent with guidelines for the display of fashion and costume established by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which stipulate that textile-based items should not be on permanent display (n.d.). I make no distinction with regard to the scale of exhibitions and the sample I have drawn upon contains a range from small displays to major exhibitions.

Two associated narratives frame my deliberation: the increased prevalence of fashion exhibitions and the rapid growth of the commercial menswear sector. It is now acknowledged that fashion exhibitions are a valid and valuable cultural phenomenon, increasingly recognized by museums as both popular and profitable (Melchior 2014: 2–6). My previous research records a rise in fashion exhibitions staged worldwide from seven in 1971 to a peak of over 50 new exhibitions opening in 2007 and 2010 (Clark et al. 2014: 170). Recent years have also seen a marked intensification of interest in fashionable menswear in the commercial field resulting in the inauguration of dedicated menswear presentations including *London Collections Men* (premiered in 2012 and staged biannually in January and June) and *New York Fashion Week: Men's* (premiered in 2015 and staged biannually in February and July) which complement existing men's fashion events in Paris, Milan and Florence. Additionally, a marked upturn in sales for menswear has created a global menswear market for 2015 worth £289bn (Smith 2015), the British Fashion Council recorded UK menswear sales of £12.9bn for 2013 (2015). Market research firm Mintel confirm that menswear retail is growing at a faster rate than womenswear (2016). Without adequate temporal distance it is not yet feasible to measure the incidence of menswear in fashion exhibitions against these phenomena. I consider it relevant to bring them to attention, however, as evaluation of their relative impact on menswear exhibitions could be a valuable path for future research.

EVIDENCE AND INVESTIGATION

Two sets of data are the basis for my investigation: each records a distinct level of information and, therefore, distinctive potential for evaluation as outlined in the two analytical exercises that follow. The first set of data, as stated above, was compiled for the publication *Exhibiting Fashion* (2014). This data records the title, venue, city and country location and dates for over 880 fashion exhibitions staged worldwide between 1971 and 2013. It was compiled using a variety of sources including exhibition reviews featured in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society* and *Dress: The Journal of the Costume Society of America*. The websites of a number of institutions who regularly stage fashion exhibitions were also consulted. Information was also solicited from an international network of professional colleagues who provided data from their own institutional record and suggested other contacts that I might follow. The second set of data references evidence gathered from personal visits to 129 fashion exhibitions between 1999 and the present, predominantly at venues in the United Kingdom, Paris and Antwerp. The process of gathering evidence during these visits was informed by ethnographic practice and is discussed in more detail in 'A fashion "muséographie"' (Horsley 2015: 45). This information is supplemented by a collection of catalogues, fashion exhibition ephemera, and online resources relating to the exhibitions visited. Exhibitions are referred to

by title in the text and listed alphabetically at the end of the article along with details of venue and dates.

The first analytical exercise uses a combination of information from both data sets – aligning the information gathered in the first set with equivalent information from the second data set. This results in basic information (title, venue, dates) for a total of 941 fashion exhibitions. Analytical potential is limited but it is possible, using this evidence and referring directly to exhibition titles, to surmise the number of menswear exhibitions staged between 1971 and 2016, their dates and locations. Referencing only those titles that explicitly indicate menswear as the exhibition subject, eighteen exhibitions can be identified that are likely to have presented menswear exclusively (Table 1).

Exhibition title	Dates	Venue
1 <i>Material Man: Masculinity, Sexuality, Style</i>	14–30 January 2000	Stazione Leopolda, Florence, Italy
2 <i>Men in Skirts</i>	8 February–12 May 2002	V&A, London, UK
3 <i>Clothes Make the Man</i>	17 May 2002–5 January 2003	McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal, Canada
4 <i>Of Men and Their Elegance</i>	3 July–17 November 2002	Kent State University Museum, Kent, USA
5 <i>21st Century Dandy</i>	June 2003	British Council at the Moscow Arts Centre, Moscow, Russia
6 <i>The Nureyev Style</i>	2005	The Fashion Museum, Bath, UK
7 <i>L’Homme Paré (Man Adorned)</i>	30 October 2005–30 April 2006	Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France
8 <i>De Ideale Man (The Ideal Man)</i>	26 July–26 October 2008	Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, Netherlands
9 <i>Esquire’s Singular Suit</i>	31 July–31 August 2009	Somerset House, London, UK
10 <i>Dandyn (Dandy)</i>	2010	Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
11 <i>Tailoring Philadelphia: Tradition and Innovation in Menswear</i>	2 October 2010–16 October 2011	Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA
12 <i>Män I Baddräkt (Men in Bathing Suits)</i>	25 January–18 September 2011	Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
13 <i>The Peacock Male: Exuberance and Extremes in Masculine Dress</i>	22 January–18 September 2011	Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA
14 <i>ManStyle</i>	11 March–30 October 2011	National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
15 <i>Return of the Rudeboy</i>	13 June–27 April 2014	Somerset House, London, UK
16 <i>Mad About the Boy</i>	8 January–2 April 2016	Fashion Space Gallery, London, UK
17 <i>Moses, Mods and Mr. Fish: The Menswear Revolution</i>	31 March–19 June 2016	Jewish Museum, London, UK
18 <i>Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear 1715–2015</i>	10 April–21 August 2016	Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, USA

Table 1.

Statistically, this generates a figure of 1.9 per cent of the total sample that were exhibitions dedicated to menswear. Using the same method for titles that refer explicitly to womenswear (excluding exhibitions of named designers) generates a comparative percentage of 13.1 per cent of the exhibition sample dedicated exclusively to womenswear.

As indicated in Table 1, the earliest menswear exhibition recorded through this research was staged in 2000 while the most recent was 2016. Peak years occurred in 2011 and 2016 with the opening of three menswear exhibitions in each year. It is possible that the first exhibition recorded in this sample dedicated to menswear is *A Century of Flowered Waistcoats* although, applying the logic of this exercise, it is not possible to confirm solely from the title that this comprised only menswear. Elaborately decorated eighteenth-century men's clothing, however, regularly exemplifies male dress in exhibitions: a number of such items constitute a significant proportion of the menswear displayed in *Fashion Forward, 3 Siècles de Mode (1715–2016)*.

It is also evident that there is a considerable geographic spread, with menswear exhibitions staged in Europe, North America and Australia. Other than London, menswear exhibitions do not appear to be prevalent in those cities generally considered international fashion – and fashion exhibition – centres; Paris, Milan and New York. Indeed, Stockholm and Philadelphia demonstrate comparatively greater evidence. It is no surprise that London, with its parallel traditions of Savile Row tailoring, male-dominated sub-cultures and experimental fashion colleges indicates a propensity for menswear exhibitions. Comparatively, it may be due to its long and protected history as the global centre for womenswear, along with the tradition of exclusively womenswear-dominated couture houses, that Paris, despite its proclivity for fashion exhibitions, shows little evidence of exhibitions exclusively of menswear. Whatever conclusions are drawn from this analysis it is reassuring that menswear exhibitions have an incontestably global reach.

Examining the language of the exhibition titles it is possible to deduce three recurrent themes: tailoring and tradition (*Esquire's Singular Suit, Tailoring Philadelphia: Tradition and Innovation in Menswear*); extravagance and dandyism (*Of Men and Their Elegance, L'Homme Paré, Dandyn, The Peacock Male*); exploring masculinity, (*Material Man, Men in Skirts, De Ideale Man*). Yet all three themes, from their particular perspectives, engage with a debate that has been central to menswear since the 1960s and the so-called Peacock Revolution, when the dominance of the suit as the convention for male dress was challenged. This exploration and expression of a tension between conformity/uniformity and extravagance/innovation in menswear appears to be an ongoing concern. In the exhibition context the complementary forces of menswear derived from traditional tailoring and menswear exhibiting dandyish extravagance balance on the fulcrum of those displays that endeavour to examine current states of masculinity and men's fashion.

The second analytical exercise uses only the second data set – that is the sample of 129 fashion exhibitions that I have visited since 1999 – and to facilitate more detailed examination of this exhibition sample (particularly to determine patterns in the type of fashion exhibitions that include or exclude menswear) I have utilized a fashion exhibition typology devised by Valerie Steele, Director and Chief Curator of the Museum at the Institute of Fashion and Technology, New York. Originally published almost twenty years ago,

Steele's typology delineates four categories of fashion exhibition informed by exhibition topic, curatorial narrative and object content. Her typology describes: the 'period' exhibition 'which focuses on an historical era'; the 'decorative arts' exhibition 'which investigates stylistic variation and historical developments'; the 'great designer' exhibition 'which presents an individual fashion designer as an "artist"'; the 'thought show' which addresses 'some of the cultural and social issues evoked by fashion' (Steele 1997: 108–09). These categories are by no means definitive – a number of exhibitions could fall into more than one category – but they establish a useful evaluative framework. To facilitate evaluation of the exhibition sample I have extended Steele's 'decorative arts' category to include general historical surveys, exhibitions about collectors and personal wardrobes and exhibitions scrutinizing museum collections. Across my sample of 129 exhibitions Steele's typography is distributed according to the following proportional breakdown: 'period' exhibitions 6.2%; 'thought show' exhibitions 14%; 'decorative arts' exhibitions 37.2%; 'great designer' or monograph exhibitions 42.6%. This demonstrates that monographic exhibitions, reflecting on the work of a single designer, are the most popular form of fashion exhibition in the sample.

Studying the subject or curatorial narrative of exhibitions included in this sample it is apparent that menswear would inevitably be excepted from a proportion of the sample. Exhibitions exploring specifically female garment types (such as *Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950*), a particular woman's wardrobe (*Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore!*, *La Mode Retrouvée: les Robes Trésors de la Comtesse Greffulhe*, *Vivienne Westwood: The Collection of Romilly McAlpine*), or an exclusively female narrative (such as *Land Girls: Cinderellas of the Soil*) would, naturally, exclude menswear. Additionally, exhibitions of work by designers whose output does not engage with menswear (including *Alaïa*, *Elsa Schiaparelli*, *Grès: la Couture à l'Œuvre*, *Madeleine Vionnet: Puriste de la Mode*) or exhibitions examining couture as a fashion discipline traditionally employed only in womenswear (such as *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–1957*), would also exclude menswear. Identifying exhibitions centred on these themes eliminates 36 from the total of 129 leaving 93 exhibitions, or 72 per cent of the original sample, for further examination.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of menswear across the exhibition sample segmented according to the applied exhibition typology. The table headings should be read as;

- 'Exclude' – not appropriate for inclusion of menswear
- 'None' – presenting no menswear items
- 'Minimal' – presenting a proportionately small number of menswear items
- 'Equal' – presenting comparative equivalence between menswear and womenswear
- 'Exclusive' – presenting only menswear
- 'Query' – an exhibition where my documentation could not confirm content.

Of the total sample of 129 exhibitions, 71 (55%) did not include menswear and only six (4.6%) of the total sample were exhibitions dedicated to menswear. A figure particularly worth noting is that of the 93 exhibitions that had the potential to include menswear 35 (38.7%) contained no menswear items.

	Exclude	None	Minimal	Equal	Exclusive	Query	Total
Period	1	2	1	3	0	1	8
Thought show	2	4	3	5	3	1	18
Monograph	19	17	9	10	0	0	55
Dec Arts	14	12	11	8	3	0	48
Total	36	35	24	26	6	2	129

Table 2.

24 (25.8%) of the sample contained a small proportion of menswear items, 26 (27.9%) contained a relatively balanced proportion of menswear to womenswear and six (6.4%) exhibited menswear exclusively. Those exhibitions dedicated to menswear encompassed three in the 'thought show' category and three in the 'decorative arts' category. The 'decorative arts' exhibitions comprised;

- *Men in Skirts* – an examination of contemporary expressions and the historic and ethnographic precedents of non-bifurcated garments for men
- *L'Homme Paré (Man Adorned)* – celebrating extravagant embellishment and ornate decoration over four centuries of men's dress
- *Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear 1715–2015* – a thematic exploration of three hundred years of fashionable menswear.

The 'thought show' exhibitions comprised;

- *Return of the Rudeboy* – documenting the cross-cultural style and contemporary expression of the Rudeboy aesthetic: a sub-cultural style originating in 1960s Jamaican street culture
- *Mad About the Boy* – investigating contemporary fashion's obsession with boyhood and male youth
- *Moses, Mods and Mr Fish: The Menswear Revolution* – charting the involvement of Jewish firms and designers in fashion around London's 'Peacock Revolution' in the mid-1960s.

The statistics also indicate that 'thought show' exhibitions are most likely to present menswear with eleven exhibitions (61%) from the category total of eighteen featuring a proportion of menswear. Approximately 50% of the 'period' exhibitions included menswear and 45.8% of the decorative arts category. 'Great designer' or monographic exhibitions – the most popular category – are the exhibition type least likely to contain menswear, with only nineteen of the 55 sampled (34.5%) incorporating menswear. As stated previously this is due, in part, to the exclusion of menswear from some designers' output which is most prevalent with designers from the early to mid-twentieth century, particularly those working within the Paris couture system. Conversely, a significant proportion of internationally recognized contemporary womenswear brands have parallel menswear lines. Additionally, it is a challenge to recall an internationally renowned brand which produces only menswear: since Thom Browne recently introduced womenswear Raf Simons is one of the few brands to come to mind.

Looking in more detail at a selection of the monograph type exhibitions it is clear that brands and designers appear reluctant to promote menswear separately from women's fashion. Yohji Yamamoto first showed his women's line Yohji Yamamoto Femme in Paris in 1981 and followed shortly after with his men's line Yohji Yamamoto Homme in 1984. Yamamoto has been the subject of at least ten monographic museum exhibitions between 2001 and 2011 (Luna 2014: 316–363) and yet only two shows have included menswear; the first, *Yohji Yamamoto*, displayed eighteen male looks in relation to 45 female looks (V&A, 2011), the second, *Yohji Yamamoto: SHOWSPACE* included twelve garments for men in a total of 70 on display. Vivienne Westwood's runway presentations featured clothes for both men and women simultaneously from 1970 to 1990. Despite a reputation for innovative, avant-garde fashions for men, the exhibition *Vivienne Westwood* displayed only a small percentage of menswear (predominantly from earlier collections) with Westwood admitting, in her introduction to the accompanying publication, that her mainline women's collections were privileged in both exhibition selection and catalogue illustrations (Wilcox 2004: 7).

Even designers renowned for their menswear appear reluctant to foreground menswear when selecting for exhibitions. Paul Smith, who launched his menswear line in Paris in 1976 and first showed womenswear in 1993, presented an equivalent number of men's and womenswear looks in the exhibition *Hello! My Name is Paul Smith*, co-curated by Smith and Donna Loveday, Head of Exhibitions, Design Museum. The looks – 42 in total, presented on almost genderless tailor's forms – were exhibited in the penultimate room of the exhibition in gender-mixed thematic groups (Figure 1). Items for men and women were presented with parity and aesthetic connections between outfits were evident. As Giorgio Armani is renowned for producing unstructured men's tailoring in the 1980s, Germano Celant, Senior Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum



Figure 1: Hello! My Name is Paul Smith. Installation shot showing men's and women's garments presented on tailors' forms. Image © Jeffrey Horsley, courtesy Design Museum.

and Harold Koda, Guest Curator, also collocated menswear and womenswear in *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective*. They incorporated menswear into several of the exhibition's thematic sections although women's items significantly outnumbered the men's. Dries Van Noten, also with an international reputation for innovative and commercially successful men's clothing, included menswear but tipped the balance in favour of womenswear in his exhibition *Dries Van Noten: Inspirations*. The display was organized in over twenty thematic sections many of which presented clothing of each gender independently.

Some design houses who at the time their monographic exhibitions were staged had celebrated menswear lines preferred not to include menswear in their exhibition selection. *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* did not include representation of the McQueen brand's menswear line. Design duo Viktor & Rolf (Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren) excluded menswear from both of their monographs; *Viktor & Rolf par Viktor & Rolf: Première Décennie* and *The House of Viktor & Rolf*. Of note is that the designers' brand image was closely tied to their menswear: they were regularly photographed wearing items from their menswear collections and, indeed, they used themselves as runway and look-book models for several collections (Viktor & Rolf n.d.). *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition*, structured over 23 thematic sections, featured over 150 items. Despite having a number of creative and commercially viable menswear lines under the brand only a handful of men's garments were displayed (ModeMuseum 2009). The section titled Maison Martin Margiela 'Men', the last section of the exhibition, comprised only photographic representation of the house's menswear lines (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition. Installation shot showing menswear represented by life-size photographic images. Image © Jeffrey Horsley, courtesy MoMu.

This analysis suggests that major fashion brands, represented in monographic exhibitions, prefer to focus on womenswear rather than menswear even when their menswear lines comprise a critically recognized element of the house's creative reputation or brand image. From information gathered through this research we can only suggest reasons for this phenomenon: despite current retail trends womenswear maintains its lead as primary economic force; womenswear generates more publicity than menswear; designers see their womenswear lines as more technically and creatively directional. It is also possible that the figurehead designer's focus is steered towards creating clothing lines for women rather than men. This is the case at Vivienne Westwood, whose MAN range is reportedly designed by husband Andreas Kronthaler (Mulvagh 2003: 326) and at Lanvin where, until recently, menswear was led by Lucas Ossendrijver under the guidance of Creative Director Alber Elbaz. It could be surmised that in many cases the lead designer has, potentially, less creative investment in the menswear lines and sees them as secondary to womenswear. As designers and design houses (and, it must be assumed their press and public relations teams) become increasingly involved in co-curating or creating exhibitions, it will be increasingly relevant to consider how this impacts on the narratives and content of fashion exhibitions.

In summary, it is apposite to revisit statistical evidence reported previously. Findings indicate that from a sample of 941 exhibitions only eighteen (1.9%) were likely to have presented menswear exclusively whereas, employing the same investigative method, exhibitions presenting only womenswear could be estimated at 123 (13.1%). Further investigation of a sample of 129 exhibitions demonstrated that 36 (28%) would have automatically excluded menswear due to their subject. Of the 93 exhibitions remaining, 35 (38.7%) contained no menswear. In the most popular exhibition category, the designer monograph, there were no examples of exhibitions presenting menswear exclusively. As stated previously, this research is not definitive and there have been menswear exhibitions documented prior to 1971: de la Haye notes *Male Costume from 1350*, V&A, London, October 1947 to January 1948 and *Adam in the Looking Glass*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 13 January to 30 July 1950 (Clark et al. 2014: 18/38). Admittedly, examples of menswear exhibitions have possibly been overlooked. It is as likely that even more exhibitions presenting womenswear will also have been omitted. Considering the size of the sample, its temporal and geographic spread, I propose that in comparison to the incidence of womenswear in fashion exhibitions, the presence of menswear is but a trace.

Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear 1715–2015

Within the context of this article, I consider it apposite to look in detail at a recent menswear exhibition, *Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear 1715–2015* (Los Angeles County Museum [LACMA], Los Angeles, USA, April 10–21 August 2016), curated by Sharon Sadako Takeda, Senior Curator and Department Head of the Costume and Textiles Department, Kaye Durland Spilker, Curator of the Costume and Textiles Department and Clarissa M. Esguerra, Assistant Curator of the Costume and Textiles Department. *Reigning Men* follows *Breaking the Mode: Contemporary Fashion from the Permanent Collection* and *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail 1700–1915*, major fashion exhibitions that have toured internationally and contributed to

LACMA's growing reputation as a centre for fashion curation. This reputation has, in no small part, been consolidated through active support from Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, and a number of major acquisitions including, in 2009, the procurement of over 500 items from the collections of Martin Kamber and Wolfgang Ruf (LACMA 2009).

My analysis of the exhibition is informed throughout by a conversation with exhibition curators Sharon Takeda and Kaye Spilker (Horsley 2016) and examines both the exhibition content and the form of its presentation. To provide a framework for discussion I have drawn on a repertoire of exhibition presentation modes identified in previous research into innovative exhibition-making (Horsley 2015). These modes include: 'threshold', which describes the transitional space into the exhibition; 'landscape', which relates to the exhibition scenography; 'object', which scrutinizes the nature of the objects on display (Horsley 2015); 'the body' which examines representation of the human form (Horsley 2014). In relation to Steele's fashion exhibition typology, *Reigning Men* most appropriately corresponds to the 'decorative arts' category. I would suggest that, although a time period is denoted in its title, it does not conform to the 'period' category as its 300-year timeline extends through the stylistic variations of many eras. The exhibition is most evidently not a monograph and nor does it relate to the 'thought show' type as its focus is not primarily on a sociocultural contextualization of menswear. As an exhibition that illustrates thematic similarities, stylistic and technical developments over time and geography, it most appropriately corresponds to the 'decorative arts' category. It is also important to note that the exhibition, framed by the context of LACMA as an art museum, concentrates on fashionable male dress rather than quotidian clothing; that is on examples of excellence in execution and technique alongside directional and influential design.

The curatorial team resolved early in the project's development to follow a thematic rather than chronological configuration despite having access to a comprehensive, encyclopaedic collection – their rationale being that a thematic configuration would facilitate the development of a more multifaceted, insightful exhibition narrative. Consequently, the exhibition is organized according to five thematic sections: Revolution/Evolution; East/West; Uniformity; Body Consciousness; The Splendid Man. Each thematic unit encompasses a number of sub-themes and so Uniformity includes sections headed Military Wear, Work Wear, Business Wear, Informal Wear, Active Wear and Formal Wear. These themes and sub-themes, to a degree, echo the recurrent themes of tailoring, extravagance and explorations of masculinity identified in menswear exhibitions in my first analytical exercise.

The sub-themes allow the insertion of micro-narratives into each section rendering the expansive themes more digestible and promoting illuminating and provocative juxtapositions. In Military Wear, for instance, a 1940s camouflage pattern Tank Suit stands alongside a Jean Paul Gaultier puffer coat, from 2011, whose transparent outer layer reveals feather filling in camouflage colours, contrasted with an outfit in fluorescent camouflage pattern from Jeremy Scott for Adidas from 2013 (Figure 3).

The threshold of the exhibition is largely determined by the architectural configuration of the exhibition space. Emerging either from the lift or stairs, a large, glazed lobby housed the entrances to *Reigning Men* and the photography exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium* on opposite walls. Within these physical constraints there are few obvious options to construct a more complex threshold or introductory space. The exhibition designers



Figure 3: Reigning Men. Installation shot showing the section on Military Wear. Image © Jeffrey Horsley, courtesy LACMA.



Figure 4: Reigning Men. Installation shot showing the entrance to the exhibition. Image © Jeffrey Horsley, courtesy LACMA.

(Los Angeles-based Commune) elected for a predominantly graphic solution: bringing the dark blue from the walls of the first gallery out into the lobby as the background for a large-scale rendering of the exhibition title and an introductory text applied directly to the wall adjacent to the ingress. The two-dimensional elements were complemented by a small, angular plinth jutting through the doorway, anticipating similar, larger structures in the following galleries (Figure 4).

The architectural plan of the exhibition space determines the lay-out of the exhibition so that the visitor progresses sequentially through the six galleries, each housing one major theme, with the final smaller space dedicated to a display of footwear. The exhibition landscape is principally created by angular plinths on which displays are mounted and decorative, oversize cornices, distinctly styled to each room, which serve the purpose of effectively lowering the visual ceiling height and allowing for atmospheric uplighting. An island plinth occupies the centre of each gallery highlighting objects that give recognizable visual pointers to the theme discussed. The use of a distinctive colour for each gallery, applied to the walls and plinths, demarcates each themed space. The spatial design is conceived and executed very much as a backdrop to the exhibits. The most remarkable feature is that the majority of exhibits (save for a few very delicate items and loans from other institutions) are on open display. This is a laudable strategy: the arrangement of mannequin groups is unimpeded by glass walls and visitors are able to see close detail without interference from reflections. It is a generous gesture on behalf of the institution (although not without impact as conservation teams are on a regular cleaning rota to ensure items are kept free of dust) which immediately renders the exhibits more accessible both visually and conceptually.

The majority of the objects on display come from LACMA's collection – some of which had been acquired specifically for the exhibition, most famously a 1940s zoot suit which, when bought at auction, set a record for an item of twentieth-century menswear (Takeda in Horsley 2016: 10/58–61). It was the curators' intention, from the outset, to present as many complete ensembles as possible. Their rationale being that, as audiences are less familiar with menswear, complete looks would facilitate a greater understanding particularly of period styles. To this end, a percentage of the complete looks are composed of authentic and fabricated items – contemporary creations generally limited to furnishings such as lace cuffs, stocks, hose. These contemporary accompaniments, potentially disquieting to traditionalist dress historians, are extremely successful in their intention to present convincing, resolved silhouettes. Particularly effective are pairs of plain, black leather shoes that accompany the eighteenth-century ensembles made with exacting reference to original period styles. It would have been impossible to display the appropriate, authentic buckles without these modern additions.

Correspondingly, several contemporary ensembles are assemblages of items from different design houses – a suit from Alexander McQueen paired with a trench coat from Burberry, for instance (Cody 2016: 125). The curators argue that combining items from various sources reflects how most people dress and that the components of period ensembles would likely come from different sources. Again, this strategy might concern purists but only one compilation jarred to my eyes: a sheer T-shirt from 1993 by Jean Paul Gaultier depicting images of Christ and the Virgin matched with a pair of black cotton trousers from 2003 by Helmut Lang (Cody 2016: 190–91). The juxtaposition of garments from designers with a contrasting aesthetic, spanning either side

of a pivotal stylistic moment in recent men's fashion, seemed unpersuasive. For the most part, however, I found the curators' collations to be aesthetically convincing and historically rigorous, exemplifying an approach that is certainly worthy of further exploration.

Providing suitable supports for the material on display presented the curatorial and conservation team with a considerable challenge. A range of solutions were employed; invisible mounts, full mannequin forms and part-mannequin forms. Considering the quantity of outfits and the time-frame the exhibition covered there was a significant variation in silhouette to be accommodated. Invisible mounts were used for single garments, generally jackets and coats, which were suspended on wires. Part-mannequins, comprising upper thighs, torsos and arms were used for a number of the bathing suits and swimming costumes for the sub-theme of Exposing Skin in the Body Conscious section (Cody 2016: 185). It seemed contrary to remove parts of the human form from a narrative concerned with physical exposure yet the curators assured me, from previous experience, that full mannequins dressed in scanty modern swimwear resulted in an awkward visual effect.

Full mannequins were used for the complete looks and the range of garments to be fitted necessitated the use of five different mannequin types with a variety of facial configuration. As can be seen in the photographs that illustrate the accompanying publication, considerable thought was given to the gesture and stance of each mannequin so that its pose reflected its given



Figure 5: Reigning Men. Back view of a wig made to complement an eighteenth-century ensemble. Image © Jeffrey Horsley, courtesy LACMA.

outfit. To complete each look mannequins were furnished with individual wigs. One hundred and sixteen wigs were made by independent Costume Keyperson Deborah Ambrosino. Ambrosino (who regularly creates costume and accessories for major Hollywood films) advanced the paper technique used for many years to replicate hairstyles by using hair canvas commonly applied in tailoring to stiffen men's jackets. The hair canvas not only made a conceptual link to the exhibition's subject but also provided Ambrosino with a material that could be formed and moulded to create sculptural and textured versions of period and contemporary hair styles (Figure 5). Coloured a uniform pale grey, Ambrosino's additions match the mannequins' surface. They are at the same time discrete yet bring a sense of individuality to each figure and are an extraordinary addition to the display.

The exhibition had a lengthy gestation, from the spark of an idea in 2007, to its premiere in 2016. Taking this into account, it is obvious that the curators anticipated the marked increase in the public's interest in menswear previously referenced rather than responding to it. Whilst many of the display techniques employed repeat or build on fashion exhibition conventions the impact of the exhibition is in the scale, range and quality of the menswear displayed and the precision of its presentation. It is unfortunate that LACMA will not be able to evaluate visitor figures in comparison to previous comparable exhibitions of womenswear. *Reigning Men* had an entry charge (joint tickets also provided entry to the Robert Mapplethorpe show) in contrast to previous fashion exhibitions which were free and visitors were only counted at one of the exhibition's entrance points. In my opinion *Reigning Men*, comparable in scope, quality and ambition to the many major surveys of womenswear, registers an important moment in the exhibition of menswear in museums.

CONCLUSION

In summary, statistical evidence demonstrates that menswear in fashion exhibitions is merely a shadow of the dominating presence of womenswear. This research suggests, however, a growing interest in menswear in fashion exhibitions with nine exhibitions dedicated to menswear since 2010. Supporting this positive trend is the indication that this interest is global and not confined to traditional fashion exhibition centres. Certainly a presentation on the scale of *Reigning Men* illustrates that institutions see potential in collecting, curating and exhibiting menswear.

It was never the purpose of this paper to investigate why menswear has, and has had, so little presence in fashion exhibitions. It is debateable as to whether this would be a valuable line of enquiry and, I would suggest, other questions revealed through this research pose more appealing paths of enquiry to follow. For instance, it would constitute a fascinating and illuminating research project to examine in detail the trajectory of those fashion exhibitions focused exclusively on menswear and to make comprehensive, comparative analysis of their content, from Laver's 1947 exhibition to *Reigning Men* in 2016. It would also be revealing to investigate recurring themes that appear in menswear exhibitions (tailoring and tradition, extravagance and dandyism) to assess how they develop over time and to interrogate them in a sociocultural setting of changing attitudes to sexuality and gender. Future investigation will, ultimately, be able to respond to the question of whether the retail upturn in menswear and the increased popularity of fashion exhibitions impacts positively on the incidence of menswear in fashion exhibitions.

A final question hangs over those exhibitions where menswear could have been included and yet was omitted: the significant proportion of exhibitions where menswear is not merely a shadow, but an absent shadow, its presence denied. This is a particularly perplexing phenomenon. Certainly in the case of designer monographs, the exclusion of menswear now runs against industry trends. Even though the current pattern is driven by economics, as Christopher Bailey, Burberry Chief Creative Officer discloses (Amed and Abnett 2016) decisions by major houses – including Burberry, Tom Ford, Vêtements and Gucci – to no longer hold single-gendered runway shows indicates an industry-led strategy that places equal value on men's and womenswear. Economics aside, Gucci's Creative Director, Alessandro Michele, echoing sentiments expressed by Bailey, asserts that it is 'only natural' to present menswear alongside womenswear and that it will promote 'a different kind of approach to my storytelling' (Elan 2016). While *Reigning Men* marks a contemporary threshold in the representation of menswear in exhibitions, a more significant shift may be a tangible increase in those exhibitions that simultaneously engage with fashion for all genders. The fashion industry moves at a quicker pace than cultural institutions: major exhibitions, as we can see from the lead-in time engaged for *Reigning Men*, take significant preparation. It will be interesting to see if future fashion exhibitions reflect the fashion industry's strategy and move towards increasing parity in the presentation of womenswear and menswear.

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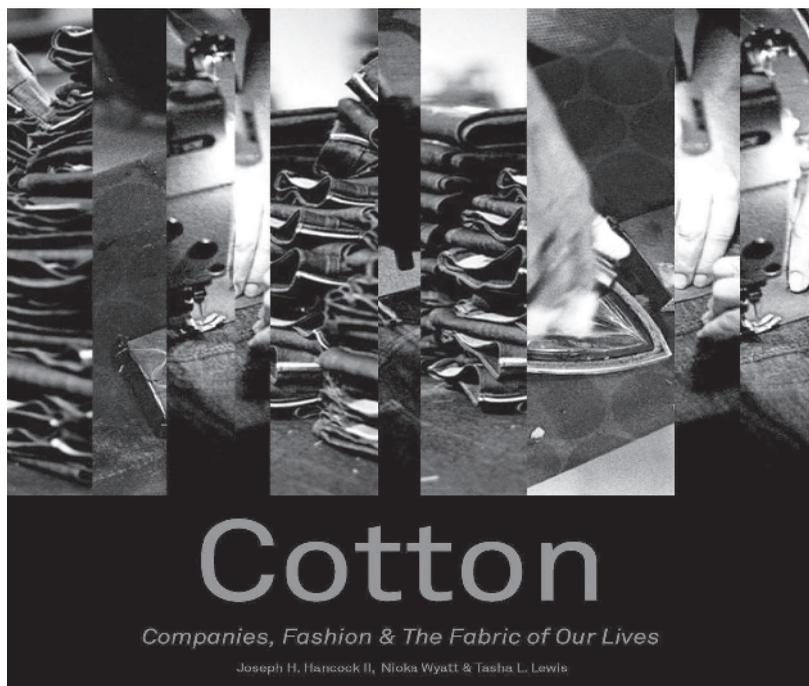
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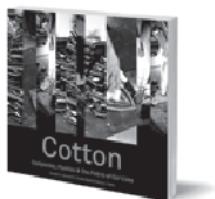
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Cotton

Companies, Fashion & The Fabric of Our Lives

Edited by Joseph H. Hancock II, Nioka N. Wyatt
and Tasha L. Lewis



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This book brings together contributors from a wide range of disciplines to explore the importance of cotton as a major resource for US fashion businesses. It is rooted in a lengthy investigative research project that deployed undergraduate and graduate students and faculty researchers to US fashion businesses that rely on cotton to make their garments— with the goal of better understanding how such a key resource is sourced, priced, transported, manipulated, and, ultimately, sold on to the consumer as a stylish garment.

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