**Title:** *Fashion Exhibition as Film*

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**Abstract:** This paper reflects on the film project *1914 Now: Four Perspectives on Fashion Curation* (2014) in which I invited internationally renowned fashion curators to present their curatorial thesis on film rather than working with dress in three dimensions within the familiar context of the gallery or museum. When I devised this experimental project, I set out to test notions of curatorial authorship as evidenced upon the final public presentation and to appraise film as a medium for curatorial interpretation. This paper examines museological concepts associated with the curation of fashion and dress and assess curatorial trajectories and interventions, scenography, and the animation of objects as applied to film. What happens when a curator, used to dealing with the object, no longer has the object to install?

**Introduction**

The traditional role of the curator – originating from the Latin verb curare – embodies a professional, museum or gallery-based role with the responsibility to collect, care for and interpret for the public the objects within their guardianship. The context of the museum provides a tested museological framework for the exhibition programme – the form the exhibition will take and its realisation. The study of dress exhibitions within the museum setting has been extensively documented and analysed by Lou Taylor who writes ‘The boundaries are clear in museum work where curatorial and display skills function with recognised professional parameters’ (Taylor 2002: 41). Taylor’s work on the study of object-based dress history and museum curatorship has broadened the discourse on the presentation of fashion within museums internationally. My own curatorial practice, as a nomadic curator without a fixed venue, has facilitated an exploration of exhibition contexts and experimentation with the presentation of dress outside of this framework. *1914 Now* enticed four curators beyond the museum structure and into the virtual exhibition space of the internet and simultaneously into a Biennale setting. Spurred on by the expanded role of the curator, which today includes those who describe themselves as art directors, producers or exhibition-makers, I took on the role of commissioner and brought together an extraordinary group of collaborators including some of the most innovative and provocative fashion curators and filmmakers working today.

Contemporary curatorial practice is, perhaps, expressed most fluently outside of the museum’s walls where curators, in all their guises, are free to experiment with the exhibition format. Scholar of contemporary art and its institutions, Rafal Niemojewski, who describes himself as a Cultural Producer asserts ‘The newfound independence from the museum framework has fueled an explosion of experimental approaches, styles and ways of making exhibitions’ (Milliard *et al.*, 2016: 10). Niemojewski established Biennale Foundation in 2009, the first platform of its kind to create a network and to foster dialogue between art, architecture and design biennials which encourages interdisciplinary research and, in so doing, demonstrates the distinctive nature of these programmes from museum practices.

It was the curatorial director of a Biennale – the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014 – who inspired the experimental film project *1914 Now: four perspectives on fashion curation.* Architect, Rem Koolhass, put forward the brief ‘Absorbing Modernity 1914 – 2014’ to the commissioners of the national pavilions housed in the gardens of the Venice park. The multiple perspectives to the same brief reveal the nuanced landscape of a nation from an architectural perspective and, in so doing, reveal the diverse curatorial practices and artistic interventions employed when exhibitions are removed from the museum setting. As the pavilions presented multiple perspectives on architecture, *1914 Now* set out to present multiple perspectives on fashion and modernity, and to simultaneously consider the curatorial practices of four distinctive voices within the discipline and to interrogate the role of the curator in the interpretation of objects. The evolving role of the curator is an ongoing area of study and has been examined by practitioners and scholars alike, including Ivan Karp, formerly a curator in the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Writing with the American artist Fred Wilson they emphatically acknowledge the role of the curator in guiding the audience, writing ‘curators, whether they think about it or not, really create how you are to view and think about these objects’ (Karp and Wilson 1996: 181). The curators for *1914 Now* were invited for their idiosyncratic interpretation of objects and included Amy de la Haye, an object-based fashion historian; Judith Clark, an exhibition-maker; Walter Van Beirendonck, a fashion designer and curator and Kaat Debo, Director ModeMuseum, Antwerp, a space for experimentation within fashion display. The filmmakers who interpreted the curatorial briefs included Katerina Athanasopolou, an animation artist and filmmaker; James Norton, a producer of arts documentaries who began his career working on films by Derek Jarman, Terence Davies and Sally Potter; Bart Hess, an artist and designer whose practice straddles textile, fashion and animation; and Marie Schuller, a prominent fashion filmmaker.

The storytelling attributes and didactic communication shared by filmmakers and fashion curators informed the decision to experiment with film as a medium for fashion exhibition-making. This decision was guided by my own curatorial practice which focuses on developing unexpected alignments between artist and objects in order to present new readings and interpretations of contemporary life. I often commission new work from artists outside of fashion with the intent to explore the potential for these media to present new stories and to reach new audiences. As a curator based in a university my practice examines the role of exhibition-making and curation as research. These connections are also central to the work of  Rual Gschrey, curator, artist and academic who believes that curators ‘rather than providing structured arguments in the direction of a hypothesis, curatorial projects can be effective means of posing questions, raising awareness, and initiating discussions’ (Gshrey: 2016). It was with this spirit that *1914 Now* was devised with the ambition to test new ways of presenting fashion exhibitions through the framework of film.

Film has most frequently been used within fashion exhibitions as a means of providing subsidiary information. For example, curator of 20th century and contemporary fashion at the V&A, Sonnet Stanfill, has experimented with the use of film within her exhibitions dating back to her first for the institution – *Ossie Clark* (2003). Limited budgets restricted the use of full-figured mannequins so archive catwalk footage was a means of presenting the garments and stylised hair and make-up of the time. The moving image, she reflects “was a way of breathing life into the show” (S. Stanfill 2017, personal communication, 12 October). What is distinctive about *1914 Now* is that it set out to test film as the sole means by which curators could communicate their ideas as it is a media which can permeate across display contexts; from the gallery setting or cinematic environment through to online audiences. The resultant project embraced all these contexts with *1914 Now* opening in the physical display space of Spazio Punch, a non-for-profit independent gallery on Venice’s Giudecca, where the films were projected side-by-side onto the gallery wall. It simultaneously launched on the virtual space of SHOWstudio1; an experimental web-based exhibition space conceived by fashion photographer Nick Knight. When SHOWstudio launched in 2000 it unleashed endless possibilities for online audience interaction in the image-making process and accelerated the now ubiquitous medium of fashion film. In keeping with the ethos of digital projects such as the *Streaming Museum*, which presents its exhibitions as temporary screened installations in the public realm; the ambition with *1914 Now* was also to go to the audience who regularly access screens (Colangelo, 2015: 255). The Biennale context – as a site for curatorial experimentation – provided another opportunity to test this form of expression. Unleashed from the confines of the museum, curators can experiment with modes of communication, curatorial interventions and trajectories to present new possibilities for curatorial practice. As Juliana Engberg, curator of the Sydney Biennale, 2014, succinctly states ‘The thing I worry about is when biennales start to look like a museum exhibition, then they lose the energy that a biennale can create’ (Milliard *et al.*, 2016: 42).

**Film and Exhibition Making: Shared Attributes**

The principles behind exhibition and film-making have multitude shared attributes including archival research, editing of material and its arrangement visually in space. The increased significance of fashion exhibitions within gallery and museum programmes, as a consequence of its accessibility and cultural currency (Delhaye and Bergvelt: 2012), has brought with it an intense interest in the visual display of dress which has evolved radically over the last forty years with museum curators testing the context in which the static museum objects are placed. As Stanfill attests “The bus queue of mannequins in the gallery a long time ago stopped being an adequate way of telling the story” (S. Stanfill 2017, personal communication, 12 October). With the increasing number of venues programming fashion exhibitions and the digital technology used to support these displays, the visitors has been “trained” to expect a high-level of immersive experience (S. Stanfill 2017, personal communication, 12 October).

The staging of objects – the structure and its material composition – is as integral to the curatorial thesis as the positioning of the objects and their alignment with associated material (Vergo: 2000). Particular emphasis and scrutiny for innovation is placed on the temporary exhibition. Scenography as narrative is an attribute shared within filmmaking and exhibition displays where immersive environments provide context as well as spectacle which direct the audiences’ gaze. Architects and museum consultants, Tom Duncan and Noel McCauley, have through their own work within museums, combined the design and production of interactive interfaces and multichannel audio-visual environments to produce new and immersive experiences for the audience with the belief that

Film, exhibition and staging are related through the nexus of time, space and feeling used to meet their ultimate purpose: creating a rendering of the real or non-real that is not directly visible, regardless of whether that means distant views of unfamiliar places or past events (Duncan and McCauley, 2012: P 291).

Film as the interpretive medium for *1914 Now* enabled an alternative exploration of display contexts in which the curators could present their concepts and curatorial perspectives. As curators direct the audience with their narrative readings of objects so too do filmmakers direct the journey of the viewer. Through animation, filmmaker Katerina Athanasopolou guides the viewer as, through film “You can look at an object and you can weave a story out of it, you can make an audience sympathetic to traces on that object that perhaps are too tiny to see; you can magnify things” (K. Athanasopolou 2017, personal communication, 26 September).

In one of the four the collaborative films entitled *The Violet Hour* Anthanasopolou magnified curator Amy de la Haye’s curiosity in the tea gown, a garment first introduced in the 1870s and which has been substantially overlooked as an object of scholarly study. This style of dress, which was worn in the privacy of ones’ home, became a metaphor in the film for the cusp of modernity as its loose fitting style contrasted with the predominant corseted clothing of the day. In *The Violet Hour,* Athanasopolou takes the viewer straight into the private, domestic space of an Edwardian home, painstakingly reproduced using three-dimensional animation, and which depicts the intimate living room with its reproduction eighteenth century furniture and floral motif wallpaper. In the room stands the woman of the house, represented by a two-dimensional fashion illustration digitally cutout of a Liberty Catalogue housed in the Westminster Archive (figure 2). As fashion curators place objects within a scenography in the museum because the garments do not convey the entire narrative (Horsley 2005: 46), Athanasopolou recreated the interior of the home as the contextual setting for the object. This reconstructed setting is reminiscent of traditional museological modes employed in the staging of dress exhibitions where the display methods used in theatre and fashion merchandising were appropriated (Palmer: 2008). Such techniques employed to contextualize garments have themselves ebbed and flowed in their popularity and influence. The marginal status which fashion had within the hierarchy of the decorative arts resulted in exhibition formats where dress was featured within contextualised backdrops. As dress historian and curator de la Haye observes “We’ve moved onto a different period where garments are being put back into room settings, but often not in a way where they are trying to create something literal, but they are trying to create something theatrical or spectacular” (A. de la Haye 2017, personal communication, 12 June).

In *The Violet Hour* Anthanasoplou carefully navigates between the theatrical and spectacular with a sensitive and historically accurate reportage that represents the collaborative process between a filmmaker and curator. A visit to Preston Manor, an Edwardian house in Preston Park, Brighton, arranged by de la Haye and accompanied by Athanasopolou enabled a discussion and conveyed the sort of house and interior in which the dress might have been worn. Whilst Athanasopolou paid homage to de la Haye’s curatorial brief she also revealed the working practices of a curator and the archives in which they work. The animated film is intersected with real-time footage of an original tea gown, hanging in the archive of Brighton Museum with no curatorial intervention in its presentation. These behind-the-scene images are in keeping with a growing public demand for curators to reveal an exhibition’s development and how the curator ‘ticks’ (Farber 2007: 235). As the narrative of Athanasopolou’s film unfolds the audience encounters the archived tea gown as a curator would encounter it – on its hanger within the store, listless and without hint of the female form. Although the archive object remains still, it becomes a canvas for Athanasoplou to graphically superimpose vibrant illustrations of violets seemingly blossoming on its surface, and, in so doing, she provides an impression of movement.

**Motion and Performance within Film and Exhibitions**

It is widely recognised that dress curators are restricted by stringent conservation regulations in and challenged by the presentation of objects which are designed to be seen on the body and in motion. Interventions within the museum context have been devised to address this and have taken the form of performance-based live events. In 1999 *Fashion in Motion* was launched at the V&A, instigated by Claire Wilcox, Senior Curator of Fashion, who has conceived of some of the institutions most popular shows. *Fashion in Motion* had the explicit ambition to present garments on the living body with contemporary designers revealing their collections within a catwalk presentation, against the backdrop of the historic V&A galleries, with the audience following in a pied piper procession behind the models. The shows are now most frequently presented within the Raphael Gallery, with a seated audience and the event livestreamed.

More recently Paris-based fashion curator Olivier Saillard has addressed the restrictions imposed by archive objects by experimenting with fashion and performance in collaboration with actress Tilda Swinton. In one of a series of performance-based exhibitions entitled *The Impossible Wardrobe* (2012), Swinton becomes the experimental archivist in white dust coat and gloves, and carrying historically significant items from the Galliera archive; the archive object, its functionality, period and style, informing her gait and gestures. Although the objects remain static, they are brought to life through Swinton’s movement.

Fashion designers have long harnessed the potent potential of film to capture the essence of a seasons’ collection in motion and designer’s singular vision. As far back as 1911, Paul Poiret applied the use of film to transport his vision across the Atlantic (Evans: 2001). Today, the proliferation of fashion film has been propelled both by the economic accessibility of film-making equipment and by the pioneering work of Nick Knight’s SHOWstudio. Fashion film has evolved beyond the moving ‘look book of images’ to becoming experimental, narrative driven pieces. *1914 Now* provided an opportunity for curators to experiment with the medium in order to present garments in motion. The fluency with which this was done by menswear designer and curator Walter Van Beirendonck, in collaboration with artist and filmmaker Bart Hess, is reflective of his mastery of film as a means of communicating his collections and the freedom enabled when working with garments that are outside of museum jurisdiction. Van Beirendonck extensive body of work includes not only his collections, but also exhibition curation including *Powermask: The Power of Masks* (2017) at the Wereldmuseum. His film for *1914 Now* was based on his autumn/winter 2014 collection *Crossed Crocodiles Growl* when he was “struck by the racism, aggression, demonstrations and wars in the world” (W. Van Beirendonck 2014, personal communication, February 2014). For *1914 Now* this collection was translated into moving image with the film depicting a peaceful army of protestors unified by a single garment – a felt hat modelled on the helmet hat worn by men in the trenches in the First World War yet softened in pastels shades. This reimagined helmet hat unifies the film and the collection and demonstrates the power of one object to communicate an entire story. The peaceful ‘army’ was an infinite repetition of multiple shots of one model marching into darkness in an all-encompassing virtual barren landscape. The motion and magnitude of the army is the central motif which harnesses the scale of the spatial environments that film allows (figure 3).

It was similarly the performative element of MoMu Director Kaat Debo’s film which was central to the narrative whilst, unlike the other films, was distinct from the original curatorial intention. Debo conceived a filmic response for *1914 Now* which was driven by her interest in material innovation within fashion and its impact on the discourse of the discipline; a position which honours the remit of the museum. Debo’s film, directed by Marie Schuller, and titled *Incunabula* (the infancy or earliest stages of something), documented the wearing of a newly commissioned dress which tested the collaborative process of architect, Tobias Klein, and fashion designer, Alexandra Verschueren, and the possibilities of 3D printing technology. Together this team reimagined the early twentieth century lacework, held in the museum’s archive, and produced a three dimensional printed dress which embodied the tension between the search for the new and the desire for ornament which emerged with the onset of modernity. The resultant film, *Incunabula*, addresses the limitations of the static object with a narrative account of the emotive experience of wearing the dress. With the static museum garment

What it cannot tell us is how the garment was worn, how the garment moved when on a body, what is sounded like when it moved how it felt to the wearer. Without a body, dress lacks fullness and movement; it is incomplete (Mida 2015: 38).

Mida has studied the curatorial interventions applied to create the feeling of motion within museum presentations of dress and the how this contributes to the storytelling attributes and immersive experience of the audience. Through the film *Incunabula* the viewer is made acutely aware of the rigidity of the 3D printed resin garment which rendered it fragile when worn. The digitally designed fabric which had been turned inside out for the printing process, left sharp spikes in the lining of the dress, which despite its modernist silhouette, restricted the model’s movement (figure 4). It was ultimately the failure of the experimental dress which informed the narrative of the film, as filmmaker Marie Schuller reflects “the film therefore developed into a new concept during the shoot, which was basically the process of experimenting with this new garment, attempting to film it, and essentially, our failure to do so” (M. Schuller 2014, personal correspondence, November 2014). It was not the scenography but the narration by the model wearing the garment which elucidates for the audience its inherent defect. The model affirms; “the material resembles lace, it should be delicate and feminine. In fact, it’s merely a veneer and there is a violence behind it” (Refoufi in *Incunabula*, 2014 HD film). Within exhibitions, innovative design and pristine objects are usually privileged. SHOWstudio founder Nick Knight, however, sees the virtue in failure regarding failure “as a positive, a way of letting go in order to find something new and unseen. In science, an experiment not yielding the expected results is seen as a discovery, not as a failure” (Night, 2009: 3). In documenting the physical and emotional impact of the dress, *Incunabula* reveals a deeper understanding of the object and the limitations of new technology.

It is the performance of the curator herself which guides the narrative of Judith Clark’s film, directed by James Norton. Clark describes herself as an Exhibition Maker and through her practice she simultaneously identifies objects whilst designing the exhibition’s structure. The design of the structure is, in turn, informed by the objects and the site in which the exhibition is staged. Throughout her career, Clark has openly questioned and the role of the curator and her innovative approach to the display of dress has positioned her as one of the most influential and pioneering curators working today. Norton and Clark’s collaborative film is named after, and takes as its starting point, from the Futurist manifesto *Il Vestito Antineutrale* by Giacomo Balla, written in 1914, and which was a rallying cry to eradicate the everyday and the mundane. Clark’s film for a hypothetical exhibition is a palimpsest of ideas where she not only predicts a Futurist vision of fashion, but also presents her own manifesto and position on curation which echoes Raul Gschrey’s belief that curators should also be conduits of personal and distinctive ideas and thoughts (Gschrey: 2016). Staged not in a virtual or purpose-built space, but instead in the workshop of a set-builder and exhibition fabricator, *Il Vestito Antineutrale* opens with long shot of the building capturing the expansive space and industrial machines used within the construction of exhibitions. The all-encompassing immersive scenography of the film captures not only the spirit of Clark’s hypothetical exhibition and curatorial manifesto, but also the industrial and technological impact of modernity and the attitude of the Italian Futurists who inspired Clark’s response (figure 5). Like Clark, filmmaker Norton’s own interests lies in the Constructivist-style and the early Soviet Russian filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, Sergie Eisenstein and photographers including Rodchenko. The set-makers’ factory provided the ultimate backdrop for the narrative as it incorporated the industrial character which reflected the Futurists and Constructivist aesthetic.

Norton embedded the filmic techniques which the Futurists employed by combining the Futurists experiments in sound and the distorted image; created by the use of curved mirrors to seemingly stretch and contort the film (figure 6). From a curatorial reading this distortion represented the routes and returns and that are explored in exhibition process and the blurring of historical fact. From Norton’s perspective, these contortions reflect the uniqueness of film and the distortion of space and time which this medium enables. In particular, Norton notes that film “allows for changing proportions of the body which Judith and the Futurists were interested in. It’s a non-realist way of looking at the world and it’s using what would otherwise be a very rectilinear set-up and morphing that into something different” (J. Norton 2017, personal communication, October 17).

It was the Futurists’ progressive rhetoric which eschewed the classical rectilinear thinking which particularly appealed to Clark along with their intention to provoke and “therefore shake up what might be clues to a dialogue between the body and their immediate environment” (J. Clark 2017, personal communication, 13th September). In *Il Vestito Antineutrale*, it is Clark’s performance which gives clues to her curatorial practice and representation of the body within the exhibition. Dressed for the performance wearing a Tuta, inspired by the designs of Futurists artist Thayat, Clark is filmed at the exhibition-makers desk, translating the Futurist aesthetic into the design of an exhibition (figure 7). Whilst Norton has constructed on film the Futurists’ attitude through filmic techniques, he also captures Clark reinterpreting the Futurists iconography into an exhibition design. The exhibits for the hypothetical exhibition include aerodynamic headwear by Prada, Hussein Chalayan’s remote controlled Airplane Dress, and the wooden streamlined form of a mannequin designed by Simon Thorogood. The film documents Clark removing garments from protective archive tissue and dressing the mannequin; this gesture itself echoing the Futurists’ work. As Norton reflects “she didn’t have to act, she had to perform certain repetitive gestures which is almost mechanical which also relates to the avant-garde and the Futurists” (J. Norton 2017, personal communication, October 17).

Clark is not only the protagonist of her film, but also the narrator; reciting her manifesto and guiding the viewer through the sequence of events as a curator guides the audience through a sequence of carefully considered installations which entice the viewer on the curatorial journey. Clark had not originally intended to feature in her own film but later reflects that “for this film movement is key, gesture is key and that these elements needed to appear. The Futurists did of course star in their own work, they wore their waistcoats, they didn’t get a model to wear their waistcoats – it was something incredibly personal” (J. Clark 2017, personal communication, 13th September). It is the personal movement and the journey which are attributes shared by film and exhibitions, whether that is physical movement though the exhibition space or a journey through memories. It is this movement – either literal or emotional – that is intrinsic to the viewing of objects and as Duncan and McCauley state

By means of images or exhibits, fragments are processed for a twofold journey on the part of the viewer, with the two strands unfolding simultaneously: the actual movement of the object displayed (or of the viewer him or herself or, in other words extrinsic motion), and the emotional journey to the viewer’s own interior triggered by viewing the objects. In both cases, a kinetic process characterizes the narrative which is impossible without motion (Duncan and McCauley 2012: 291).

**The Curators Voice**

The selection and interpretation of objects in the exhibition-making process are equally as imbued with personal interpretation within the production of a film. The exhibition catalogue for *China: through the Looking Glass*, (2015), at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was art directed by filmmaker Wong Kar Wai states “Film, of course, is always at least one step removed from life: even the most judicious portrayals are products of particular points of view and acts of selection” (Bolton 2015: 58). The exhibition was curated by Andrew Bolton who has pioneered the use of film within fashion exhibitions, pushing its use to the extreme in a museum context through the exhibition *Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations* (2012). This exhibition explored the affinities between the Italian designers and through film presented a fictional conversation between them with actress Judy Davis playing the role of Schiaparelli starring opposite Miuccia Prada. Bolton continued to experiment with film as a curatorial intervention in *China: through the Looking Glass* and projected film clips which depicted from popular culture which would illuminate for the audience an essence of China.

The idiosyncratic approach and interpretation of the brief for *1914 Now* illuminated the nuanced preoccupations of each of the four curators and the curators as ‘exhibition authors’ (Greenberg *et al*, 1996: 166). *Il Vestito Antineutrale* extends Clark’s interest into the provocative attitude of the Futurists, work she first encountered whist studying at the Architectural Association where she was exploring ways in which she might make connections and incorporate dress into a story about architecture. Clark’s own manifesto in the film is a provocation to curators to resist the allure of neutrality and to deliberately eschew curatorial conventions, stating “we’re always to a certain extent both testing out existing rules and trying out new ones. It still holds a huge interest for me that one might have as a core intention the rearranging of the rules” (J. Clark 2017, personal communication, 13th September).

In *Il Vestito Antineutrale* Clark applies both the traditional rules of exhibition-making whilst layering her response with possible alternative routes and juxtapositions between objects and their interpretive display mechanisms. Much like the introduction panel to an exhibition, Clark’s narration in the film explicitly relays her intent and provides a didactic explanation of the Balla manifesto and its influence on her own curatorial practice. Objects are displayed on mannequins, each of which has distinctive characteristics which correspond to, or offer clues, to the narrative interpretation of the exhibited item. The mannequin is a ubiquitous tool within exhibition display, but Clark presents the possible curatorial interventions in the representation of the body as associated with the curatorial thesis; from the wooden rectilinear mannequin by Simon Thorogood (figure 8) to the featureless mannequin head which hints at the human form. Although the film documents the making of a hypothetical exhibition, Clark’s interpretation of the Futurists work and her own practice is authentic; staged in the workshop where Clark’s exhibitions are fabricated with the curator depicted wearing her own garments and so creating a piece which was part performance and part real. Clark’s position on the role of the curator questions the presentation, interpretation and contextualising of an object’s provenance as presented within displays, believing that “Usually people want to know who made it and when; but that’s not the end of the story. So, the question is does that always need to be somewhere? Or whether that at any point that is dispensable with or if that’s an outcry?” (J. Clark 2017, personal communication, 13th September). In *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* (2010)*,* produced in collaboration with pioneering arts organsiation Artangel, Clark presented a series of installations which situated textile artefacts, without the conventional museum interpretation, as bearers of ideas or “images” (Delhaye and Bergvelt: 2012) which is in stark contrast to their traditional role as conveyers of knowledge – either stylistic and cultural or as representation of ethno-geographical groups.

It was a garment without provenance, of the maker or wearer, that became the central motif or image in Amy de la Haye’s *The Violet Hour.* de la Haye’s curatorial practice is embedded in object-based readings and interpretations which she combines with historical accuracy to produces readings and narratives of the object which enable a didactic engagement with the audience. Through her curatorial work which includes *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* (1994) at the V&A, which, for the first time, brought the everyday dress of style tribes into the national museum and *The Land Girls: Cinderellas of the Soil* (2009) at Brighton Museum, de la Haye has been pivotal in foregrounding dress which has hitherto been overlooked in museum displays. For the project *1914 Now,* de la Haye started her curatorial exploration with a single object – the tea gown – and presented a garment of liminal status and without provenance, from which to build a narrative story for *The Violet Hour.* This lack of provenance enabled the creative freedom to build layers of historically accurate information around the object, as de la Haye states “I think curators certainly impose meanings, as do historians, its one way of telling one story and that story will be one that you’re preoccupied with” (A. de la Haye 2017, personal communication, 12 June). Although the garment was filmed unaltered, without conservation or curatorial intervention, it was in the filmmaking process which the garment evolves into a canvass on which animated violet flowers bloom (figure 9). It is only in this digital state that this metamorphosis can occur whilst the physical object remains comparatively constant (Frost 2010: 243).

Although animated film might be viewed as a paradox, with the hand-drawn illustration seemingly not as truthful as the photographic impression of the world, Athanasopolou’s film depicted undocumented moments and allowed them to be reimagined. As an animation filmmaker and artist, Athanasopolou is acutely aware of the discourse surrounding the accuracy of the medium and cites fashion’s bond with the illustrated image, reflecting that “Fashion has always had a deep connection with drawing in the making of it, and perhaps it never doubted the truthfulness of a drawing as a means of documenting, as a means of telling a story” (K. Athanasopolou 2017, personal communication, 26 September).

The virtual domestic scenography of the home built using three-dimensional animation could also be recreated in its physical form in a museum. However, it is the non-linear, ethereal moments of the film – amongst them the interior lining of the tea gown superimposed with an animated map of Europe reflecting the changing territories during the war, and the Vorticist-style fracturing of a scenescape painting of London - which captures the melancholic atmosphere and the anxiety of the onset of the First World War (figure 10). This combined with the original music score composed Jon Opstead and performed by cellist Heidi Parsons, exquisitely demonstrates the potential for this medium to add context and multiple layers of meaning to the static object. Had the provenance of the garment been known, the emphasis of the film would have been about the wearer and less so about the specific object “It would have been a portrait of her, rather than a portrait of the tea-gown. The emphasis was on a real garment but also on a specific moment in time for that garment. It was a swan song for the tea gown” (K. Athanasopolou 2017, personal communication, 26 September).

This transition is evoked in the film’s title taken from de la Haye’s readings of T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land* where he describes the sky between daylight and dusk as ‘the violet hour’. These connections are brought together by Athanasopolou and presented in a film without the spoken word but which relies on other forms of elucidation which curators have employed to compliment and expand the context of the object (Palmer 2008: 43). *The Violet Hour* calls upon fashion illustrations, the archive object, a reconstructed room which contains the ephemera of the time, including the fashion plates which falls open, as visual clues to aid the viewer on the journey. Increasingly within contemporary fashion exhibitions the supporting interpretation is intentionally less instructive, as it is understood that audiences have become active agents in the interpretative process (Delhaye and Bergvelt: 2012). It is the non-verbal forms of communication which *The Violet Hour* confidently appropriates as a means of storytelling in which “The audience was directed but they were not told where to look” (K. Athanasopolou 2017, personal communication, 26 September).

**Conclusion**

Although some museums have shifted their emphasis away from the object to new forms of digital interpretation or interactive media to engage the audience (Conn 2010: 22) there remains a tension between the display of the real object and its digital interpretation. It is within institutions such as the V&A, with one of the world’s most extensive collections of dress and fashion, that we still anticipate its display. It is perhaps within this context that the screening of *1914 Now*, where the films become exhibits, would appear unexpected or even obscure. It is in the digital or ‘networked’ space, that museums consultant Jennifer Trant observes

Museums find themselves unable to rely upon the semiotics of a century of museology symbols that have enabled them, in public buildings and spaces, to create the aura of authenticity and rarefication cultivated to communicate the uniqueness of each artefact, and the seriousness of the educational experience (Trant 2010: 307).

Trant has consulted widely on the implementation of technology within museum and gallery contexts and how this application can contribute to the work of these institutions. The use of digital media is complex within such established museological settings and requires careful navigation. In *The Glamour of Italian Fashion 1945-2014* (2014), Stanfill, motivated by the profusion of fashion film, commissioned a nonlinear film as a moment within the exhibition for reflection, in addition to the inclusion of didactic moving image. The expansive gallery spaces at the V&A’s Kensington site demand to be filled with objects. As Stanfill affirms “I would feel it would be irresponsible to leave a gallery bereft of objects for too much of a length of time because these objects belong to the people and galleries are a way of giving them their moment” (S. Stanfill 2017, personal communication, 12 October).

Although a filmic impression of an object cannot replace the experience of viewing the object first-hand, projects such as *1914 Now* might ignite the curiosity of the viewer to connect with the real object in a museum’s archive. This project set out to experiment with film to test the possibility for curators to harness this medium to present objects from the past on digital platforms which resonates with audiences today, and unlike the temporary nature of most collection-based exhibitions, film permits a permanence. Although, film as the medium for fashion exhibitions is still in the exploratory stage, without these moments of experimentation the conversation remains stagnant. As Clark observed “I think that everyone worked outside of their usual assumptions. Your work is a provocation. What if you ask these curators who are used to working in this context to work in another? I think it’s an exhibition that holds in its own right even if for only that reason” (J. Clark 2017, personal communication, 13th September).

Endnotes:

1 *1914 Now: Four Perspectives on Fashion* *Curation* can be viewed on SHOWstudio: <http://showstudio.com/project/1914_now> and a catalogue was produced to accompany the project: *1914 Now: Four Perspectives* *on Fashion Curation* (Moloney: 2014 with contributions from architecture historians and fashion curators.

Figure 1. *1914 Now: Four Perspectives on Fashion Curation* at Spazio Punch, Venice. Photography by Augusto Maurandi.

Figure 2. *The Violet Hour*, 2014, still from HD film by Katerina Athanasopolou with Amy de la Haye.

Figure 3. *Crossed Crocodiles Growl*, 2014, still from HD film by Bart Hess with Walter Van Beirendonck.

Figure 4. *Incunabula,* 2014, still from HD film by Marie Schuller with Kaat Debo.

Figure 5. *Il Vestito Antineutrale,* 2014, still from HD film by James Norton with Judith Clark.

Figure 6: *Il Vestito Antineutrale,* 2014, still from HD film by James Norton with Judith Clark.

Figure 7: *Il Vestito Antineutrale,* 2014, still from HD film by James Norton with Judith Clark.

Figure 8. *Il Vestito Antineutrale,* 2014, still from HD film by James Norton with Judith Clark.

Figure 9. *The Violet Hour*, 2014, still from HD film by Katerina Athanasopolou with Amy de la Haye.

Figure 10. *The Violet Hour*, 2014, still from HD film by Katerina Athanasopolou with Amy de la Haye.

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