Curatorial Interruption: Critical analysis of sources of decision-making bias in dress/fashion curators and examination of the impact of curatorial bias on wearer/object biography in worn clothing acquired by institutional collections in the United Kingdom

(One of Two Volumes)

By

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Abstract

The research in this thesis identifies an under-explored area in dress and fashion curatorship: how curatorial bias impacts the interpretation of wearer and object biography. This thesis responds to the growing focus on object biography and underrepresented histories in the discipline through examination of the experts charged with analysing, interpreting, and documenting these biographies.

Theories are drawn from ethnography, neuroscience, phenomenology, new materialist studies, and material culture studies to construct an understanding of practitioner experience when analysing and interpreting worn clothing objects. The impact of curatorial bias on object biography during material culture analysis is identified using the original concept "curatorial interruption".

A discipline-specific foundational survey establishes a data set detailing the demographics and working environments of practitioners engaging with garments held in UK public collections. This is supported by an in-depth study of curatorial practice establishing sources of individual subjectivity and discipline-wide factors informing decision-making during material culture analysis.

Drawing on methodologies from relevant fields including anthropology, textile conservation, cognitive and forensic science, this research aims to propose practical strategies specific to the analysis of worn garments which mitigate curatorial bias and improve the retention of object (and wearer) biography.

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Introduction

'to whom it may concern

in the dead stones of a planet

no longer remembered as earth

may he decipher this opaque hieroglyph

perform an archaeology of soul

on these precious fragments

all that remains of our vanished days…' (Jarman, 2022, p. xv)

In this thesis, I propose five sources of decision-making bias in dress/fashion (a term expanded on p. 21) curators undertaking material culture analysis of worn garments, an activity I argue contributes to the action of rupturing wearer and object biography which I have identified with the original term, curatorial interruption.

Specifically, the research in this thesis examines the analysis of worn garments which have been acquired into institutional collections in the United Kingdom (UK) without explicit contextualising testimony from the original wearer. The introduction to this thesis opens with the above quote from the artist Derek Jarman, and his words articulate what I view as the essential skill at the core of curatorial practice: interpretation. I contextualise the curator as deciphering what Jarman termed the 'precious fragments' (Jarman, 2022, p. xv) of biographical authorship left behind in garments in the wake of an absent wearer: 'all that remains' of their 'vanished days' (Jarman, 2022, p. xv).

Throughout this thesis, I argue that the dress/fashion curator has an ethical responsibility when they participate in the practice of the interpretation of worn garments within the institution. The institutional collection has been positioned in Western culture as a keeper of history, and yet has rarely represented a plurality of histories. Thus, I argue that the responsibility of the curator is to ensure the

retention and preservation of the wearer's biography through their practice, and to ensure the inclusion of that biography within the documentation of institutional collection. The aim of the research in this thesis is not to tell the "truth" on behalf of un-, under-, or mis-represented communities, or to examine in-depth which histories have been included in UK institutions, but make a critical analysis of one aspect of curatorial practice. Prior to this research, the existence of curatorial bias has only been acknowledged, but not closely examined for sources of this bias nor how to mitigate it. This thesis addresses a gap in knowledge within dress/fashion curation regarding the sources of curatorial bias. This thesis contributes a new museological concept (curatorial interruption) which can be applied to identify the historical impact of this aspect of curatorial practice and further develop critical museology.

Thus, my original contribution to knowledge in dress/fashion curation and the wider field of museology would be, through critical analysis of curatorial practice, the identification of those factors informing decision-making at the time of the analysis of worn garments, and how they impact the retention of object and wearer biography. Additionally, this research will suggest pedagogical and practical strategies that do not rely strictly on technology or institutions, but on a critical approach to curatorial practice. I argue that this approach will assist curators, and the institutions they work within, in improving preservation of embedded biography in worn garments for future research and display.

The research question guiding this thesis asks if the existence and impact of curatorial interruption can be established through a close study and critical assessment of dress/fashion curatorial practice at what is arguably the most vulnerable point for the retention of wearer and object biography: the initial application of material culture analysis after being acquired into the institutional collection, and if strategies can be developed which mitigate impact on retention of embedded wearer/object biography.

Aims and Objectives

In response to this research question I have applied following aims:

- Aim: To establish an understanding of curatorial interruption through identification of the sources of decision-making bias in dress/fashion curators working within institutional collections, during the initial material culture analysis of worn clothing.
- Aim: To provide suggestions, both pedagogical and practical, towards mitigating these sources of bias.

To achieve these aims, I have engaged with the following objectives:

- Objective: To identify a data set of the demographic makeup and working conditions of curators working with collections holding dress and fashion objects in UK, through a quantitative survey of curators.
- Objective: To undertake a close study of individual curators to form an in-depth understanding of how personal and professional factors inform the decisions of the curator, through the analysis of digitised garments, observation of material culture analysis, and semi-structured interviews with curators.

Institutional collections of clothing in the UK contain millions of objects housed in boxes and rolling racks. For many acquired garments, the initial analysis and documentation stage will often be the maximum attention the garment is paid before it is stored, and will create the most visible and accessible method of identifying the garment for further research. If the details of a garment documented at the time of that first examination are coloured with the subjectivities of the curator performing the analysis, this has the potential to privilege the biases of the curator, effectively discarding biographical elements of

the garment which may expand and enrich how it is interpreted by other and future researchers.

The intent of this research, however, is not to avoid the subjectivities or biases within the curator. How the curator experiences the world informs these subjectivities and is at the core of their expertise. The purpose of this research is to understand the sources informing decision-making bias in the dress/fashion curator, and to suggest strategies for the curator to apply in practice and for future research which mitigate these subjectivities and improve retention of object, and thus original wearer, biography. This thesis aims to apply the strengths of the theoretical and practical aspects of dress/fashion curation to this research through close study of curatorial practice and analysis of the everyday activities that working in a collection entails.

Clothing can endure long after our lives have ended, and leave powerful testimony of our identities in our wake, thus this thesis argues for wearer/object biography (a term expanded on p. 14) as material culture worthy of close study. This thesis argues that embedded wearer/object biography is as essential to the material culture of the garment as any label or textile and is integral to the historical meaning of a institutionally collected garment. Although the importance of embedded biography in worn clothing is championed across the discipline (see Mida and Kim, 2015; Bide, 2017; Whyman, 2021), to this date there has been no critical research into the impact of curatorial bias on this material document. Further discussion of material culture and embedded biography as a form of life-writing will be explored in the chapter on *Authorship*.

This introduction summarises this research, organised under the following headings: *Defining the Discipline of Dress/Fashion Curation*; *Wearer/Object Biography and Curatorial Interruption*; *Theoretical Approach to Research*; *Impetus of Research; Positionality as Researcher; Terminology*; and will conclude with a

brief synopsis of each chapter in this thesis.

Defining the Discipline of Dress/Fashion Curation

As will be elaborated on further in the chapters *The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation* and *Disciplinary Bias*, the discipline of dress/fashion curation draws on theories and methods developed in anthropology, art history, sociology, and the commercial and editorial fashion industries. From one practitioner to another, defining the discipline of dress/fashion curation will emphasise different facets of the area. Recent scholarship has attempted to reach consensus on the origins of dress/fashion museology and what practices the discipline encompasses (de la Haye and Clark, 2013; Melchior and Svensson, 2014; Clark and Vänskä, 2018). The boundaries of what activities dress/fashion museology entails are porous and varied and include historical and social research, writing, exhibition-making, and material culture analysis. Though the role of the curator (particularly in smaller institutions) can also include registrar duties, archiving, and conservation, this thesis considers these roles the domain of separate specialists. To maintain the scope of this thesis, these areas are only discussed where they intersect directly with curatorial activity (for example, in the subsection addressing textile conservators on p. 301 of the chapter *Working Environment Bias*). Dress/fashion curators undertake activity with objects other than clothing, as collections can also include such objects as ephemera from the business of making and selling clothing, photography, and illustrations. However, this thesis is exclusively concerned with worn garments within dress/fashion collections. Most critically for this thesis, the discipline has applied the practice of studying clothing to develop what fashion theorist Hazel Clark has described as 'an important tool for mediating critical thinking, social engagement and cultural analysis' (Clark and Vänskä, 2018, p. 4).

Susan Pearce identified the research of collection studies as encompassing three areas of investigation: collection policies and documentation systems; history of

collections, tracing acquisitions and dispersals from the inception of the practice and biographies of key collectors; the nature of collections, what they do and do not contain (1994, pp. 193-194). When her text *Interpreting Objects and Collections* was published in 1994, Pearce observed that collection studies were in their infancy, reflecting an overdue examination of museology from the practitioners working within the profession. I would offer that wider museology has embraced institutional critique to varying degrees (institutional critique as an area of museological and artistic practice will be discussed in a dedicated section beginning on p. 261), with reports such as *Empowering Collections* (2019), released by Museums Association, stipulating eleven key recommendations which could contribute to making collections 'empowering, relevant and dynamic' (Museums Association, 2019). This demonstrates that institutional collections are being held to account for what they contain and who they represent, though how they respond to this may vary. However, it is only very recently that dress/fashion collections, with which this thesis is concerned, have been considered worthy of the same scrutiny as other aspects of the institutional collection. I argue that this scrutiny is crucial, not only from an ethical standpoint, but as Pearce wrote 'when practitioners turn their attention to the history and nature of their own field, and begin to develop a critical historiography proper to it, that the field can be said to have come of age' (Pearce, 1994, p. 193).

Thus, the research in this thesis arrives at a time when there is an evident urgency for criticality around contemporary dress/fashion museological practices. Curators working within collections of dress/fashion have identified the need to question the nature of their existing collections, and the policies around new acquisitions. In response to what was identified as Western dress collections privileging 'wealthy, able-bodied, mainstream, Eurocentric ideals' (Costume Society of America, 2020) the Costume Society of America held an online roundtable in September 2020 including Georgina Ripley, curator at National Museums Scotland. Ripley highlighted the need 'to be honest about the collections that

you have or what you have or haven't done in the past' (Costume Society of America, 2020). Another call for accountability in dress/fashion museology has come from museologist Marie Riegels Melchior. She stated that the discipline must 'sharpen its critical edge' in order to better explore the complexities of 'our past and present' (Riegels Melchior, 2014, p. 13) who is being represented by exhibitions of dress/fashion. Melchior Riegels' focus on exhibitions is representative of how it has been the output of the curator (collection growth, exhibitions, publications) rather than factors informing curatorial decision-making which has been the focus of close study and critique.

This thesis then identifies and addresses a gap in knowledge in a discipline that has predominately been concerned with achieving legitimacy (but is now firmly ensconced) in the wider field of museology (discussed further in the chapter *The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation*), by looking closely at a core practice (material culture analysis) within the discipline. Through critical examination of curatorial practice, this thesis lays the foundations for further research on how to mitigate curatorial bias and increase retention of wearer/object biography for future research and interpretation.

Wearer/Object Biography and Curatorial Interruption

Two core concepts are now introduced which are applied throughout this thesis: wearer/object biography, and curatorial interruption.

Wearer/Object Biography. *Object* biography can be widely viewed as the life cycle of a commodity, from creation to destruction, and the way it informs and conforms to aspects of the human world through transmutations of meaning (Kopytoff, 1986; Gosden and Marshall, 1999). This thesis argues that *wearer/object* biography signifies the period of a garment's life where it is worn and thus informs (intentionally or not) how the wearer experiences the world around them.

This concept applies Igor Kopytoff's seminal biographical approach to understanding the relationships between people and objects, with the awareness of multiple biographies existing within the same object, pulled into focus depending on the framework through which it is assessed. Kopytoff's assertion that the 'biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure' (Kopytoff, 1986, p. 67) underscores how material analysis of worn clothing suggests an understanding of the wearer, in absence of their own testimony.

Curatorial Interruption. In this thesis, I introduce a new concept to the dress/fashion museological lexicon. Currently the term "intervention" is often employed in museology to describe the activity where curatorial strategies temporarily illuminate specific aspects of an object.[1] Describing her approach to dress/fashion exhibition-making, Judith Clark has identified 'intervention as a part of interpretation' (Clark and Phillips, 2010, p. 113), an opportunity to create new associations and understanding of an object for the visitor. While this term is appropriate for application in exhibitions, for material culture analysis I suggest the usage of the term *curatorial interruption* to describe the impact of curatorial activity on wearer/object biography.

The etymological difference between the two words is crucial to this proposal: intervene originates from the Latin 'between' and 'come' (Oxford University Press, 2022b), while interrupt is more final, meaning 'between' and 'to break' (Oxford University Press, 2022c). Therefore, curatorial interruption specifies an action on the part of the curator which has the potential to irreparably alter wearer/object biography. An example of this could be the way a garment is folded by the original wearer, as with worn trousers acquired from the Francis Golding

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[1] This term is also applied in textile conservation to describe strategies implemented in object care, however this thesis is exclusively concerned with this term within the context of curation.

Collection, found as he left them in his wardrobe drawers (Madsen, 2018). This everyday act holds narrative potential about the original wearer's personality, habits, and gestures. When the garment goes through the process of material culture analysis it may be refolded or hung in a manner conforming to conservation or collection management protocols, and thus begins a process of erasing the marks of touch (the embedded biography) of the wearer. In this case, an essential part of the wearer/object biography would be irrevocably changed. Curatorial interruption signifies the action of an outsider, the curator working in the institutional collection, which disrupts the authorship which I argue is embedded in worn garments. The second aim of this thesis is to suggest strategies to minimise occurrences of biographical loss, while satisfying the working requirements of the institutional collection.

Theoretical Approach to Research

The theoretical approach to the research in this thesis reflects its dual aims: establishing an epistemological understanding of curatorial interruption; and conceiving a practical application of mitigating its impact. The two key theoretical frameworks underpinning this research are outlined in dedicated chapters on *Phenomenology* (p. 77) and *New Materialism* (p. 87). Taking these approaches to this thesis encourages the investigation of subjectivity, reflexivity, and plural and contigent meanings, as framed within the perspective of new materialism. A phenomenological framework is applied to the examination of the curator's practice; the ways that individuals experience and come to understand the world, specifically the embodied, sensory-based theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012). This approach reflects the multi-sensory nature of material culture analysis.

Impetus of Research

In 2015, Museum of London (hereafter in this thesis, MoL) and London College of Fashion (hereafter in this thesis, LCF) Archives were offered the possibility of

acquiring pieces from the wardrobe of independent architectural, planning and conservation consultant Francis Golding (b.1944 - d.2013). Golding's widower, art historian Satish Padiyar, had kept much of his partner's clothing in situ at their North London home just as Golding had left it at the time of his death in 2013 from a cycling accident.

As a whole, the collection comprised hundreds of garments, ranging from high street to designer purchases, worn by Golding over the course of his life (Museum of London, 2017). By all available accounts including his own, held in letters acquired by MoL, Golding was a keen observer of and participator in the world around him, and his wardrobe reflected this. His clothing choices ran the gamut from smart tailored garments to subcultural clothing; pieces purchased on his global travels, and from local London market stalls. To look at his wardrobe is to see the material evidence of a man who was (among many other qualities) known as an 'original' dresser to colleagues and friends (Padiyar, 2021).

After the acquisition and division of the Golding wardrobe (hereafter referred to as the Golding Collection, marking its transition into the institution) between MoL and LCF Archives in 2016, I became involved as a collection volunteer at MoL. Under the guidance of then-Fashion & Decorative Arts curator Timothy Long, I was part of a small team which worked closely with Golding's objects to analyse, catalogue and photograph the Collection. During this process it became evident that the pockets of many pieces, particularly jackets and coats, contained additional objects.

In one particular jacket (**Figure 0.1 - Appendix, p. 1**), where it might be expected to find the usual pocket contents of lint and discarded packaging were ticket stubs from operas, tickets for planes and trains, the crumbled fragments of a dried leaf, a black and white photo of Golding, his eyes wide against the glare of the flash (**Figure 0.2 - Appendix, p. 2**). In that secret place on the dressed body,

the pocket, Golding had seemingly built a private collection of mementos from his life: a material document of his experience of the world. This is an argument I explore further using Golding's garments as examples in dedicated sections on *Embedded Biography* (p. 87) and *Authorship* (p. 106). I became preoccupied with finding out if this was true, had Golding collected *his own life*? To show to someone? If so, what did he want his pocket contents to say to them?

My preoccupation with the pocket contents in the Golding Collection became the subject of my MA research, drawing on my own curatorial activity to question the garment as a site of embedded biography of wearer and to examine the role of the curator as potential interrupter of this biography. Over the course of that project, a paucity of critical scholarship directed at the practice of the dress/fashion curator became evident, and inspired my continued focus and subsequent PhD research. In the course of this thesis, the reader will see my own preoccupation with the Golding collection as a representative case of an LGBTQIA2S+ narrative emerge through my study of his collection. This is only one segment of human history that has been un-, under-, and mis-represented in institutional collections of dress/fashion (Delin, 2002; Sandell, 2007; Winchester, 2012), and there are countless people who will never have their stories included in the telling of our collective history.

Positionality as Researcher

At this point, it is relevant to state my own position to, and within, this research. I am a researcher and curator undertaking a fully-funded doctoral research degree jointly supported by MoL and LCF, and my practice includes the acquisition, analysis, and cataloguing of worn dress. Thus, I have undertaken this study with an inside view of the institutional collection, and my research role in these institutions has afforded me the ability to participate in academic and practical collection-based training. My position as a PhD candidate at LCF has allowed me relatively open access to the Archives, and the ability to experiment with

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techniques such as photogrammetry, which might not otherwise be supported. At MoL, I have received training on the museum collecting policy, object entry and naming practices, as well as Mimsy XG training, the collection database used to catalogue and store object documentation. This knowledge has both assisted me in understanding the specific demands made of the curator, and indoctrinated me in the same systems of classification which I argue limit the retention of wearer/object biography. Questioning these systems, while also needing to function within them in the present, is an apt example of the professional tightrope many curators working within cultural institutions must walk.

Additionally, I have exhibited (*Requiem: Material/Memory*, 2019; *The Absent Muse*, 2022), published research (Madsen, 2019a; Madsen, 2021) and lectured (Madsen, 2019b; Madsen, 2020; Madsen, 2022) founded on my belief that the biographies of the wearer and their garments are inextricable. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, my previous study has informed my interest in the topic of curatorial subjectivity as my own practice has engaged with objects of worn dress, particularly in the Francis Golding Collection, of which I have curated exhibitions (*Francis Golding: A Sartorial Biography*, 2017; *The Sacred Profane: Reliquary of Francis Golding*, 2018) using objects from the Golding Collection. My conviction that embedded biography is as valuable an "object" as the material it is enmeshed with is my own preoccupation; where some other curators may hone expertise in specific areas of dress/fashion history or design, my specialist focus is on the potential for worn clothing to tell intimate, personal histories of the wearer and their experience of the world, which will be discussed further in the chapter *Authorship.*

Examining my own background and practice, as I have asked of my study participants, is an essential part of the approach of this research. I am a white, formally educated woman in my late thirties, based in England: I fall neatly within the demographic that this research has observed to be representational of those

populating the discipline of dress/fashion curation, discussed in the chapter *Survey of Dress/Fashion Curators in the UK*. I have been educated in Canada and England, my personal and professional experience is based in Western, primarily Eurocentric clothing.

Terminology

Throughout this thesis, terms and practices are utilised which are central and specific to this research. This section, organised alphabetically, will define and contextualise their usage.

Bias. This term describes the processes which influence decision-making. This concept, and specific forms of bias, will be discussed at length in the chapter *Cognitive Bias*.

Curator. The professional whose practice of object analysis and interpretation are the focus of this research. They can undertake curatorial activity with garments (the scope of this research), and also dress/fashion-related photography, ephemera, and textiles. Practitioners in the discipline of dress/fashion curation do not neatly fall under one job description. Notwithstanding what formal title their employment or research role might designate, informally they might refer to themselves as "curators", "dress historians", "researchers", or even "exhibition-makers". This can indicate a standpoint assumed through their training, or an ideological position fostered over the course of their career, as with Clark's distinction that "exhibition-making" requires her activity to be equally focused on curating and designing an exhibition (dal Bosco, 2021). It is important to note that this thesis focuses on the collection-based practice of material culture analysis, and not the staging of exhibitions nor other public-facing curatorial outputs.

The implications of the title "curator" are complicated by the source it originates from. The Oxford Dictionary is spare, describing the word simply as a noun

meaning:

'A keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection.' (Oxford University Press, 2022a)

In *Exhibitions in Museums*, the museum designer and consultant Michael Belcher broke down the term to a job posting description:

'The curator. To provide specialist information on the subject matter and undertake any research necessary. To be the major contributor to the brief. To identify, locate, select and if necessary negotiate the acquisition and/or loan of material. Prepare lists of exhibits and information. Provide draft copy for labels, references for illustrations, etc. Possibly write the catalogue. Above all, to be enthusiastic about his/her subject, and understanding of the designer's role.' (Belcher, 1991, p. 78)

Art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist took a distinctly more historical and slightly more romantic route, beginning with the Latin etymology of 'curare', to take care of, and making his assessment that:

'Different kinds of care taking have sprung from this root word over the centuries, but the work of the contemporary curator remains surprisingly close to the sense in curare of cultivating, growing, pruning and trying to help people and their shared contexts to thrive.' (Obrist, 2014, p. 25)

In the spirit of this research, built on the foundational theory of plural and contingent meanings of things, which also require definition to function practically, "curator" is all of these definitions and more. The term is used to situate the dress/fashion practitioner within the wider field of museological practice, with an understanding that using a single term does not homogenise the varied experiences, training, and specialities of those practitioners it describes. In

this thesis, a curator is the practitioner working directly with objects of clothing in a public collection.

Dress/Fashion. The term describing the area of specialism this research is situated within. This term defines the discipline, and the overarching themes it concerns itself with. The term in question is the most fundamental, and scrutinised, in the discipline. A word that describes the material and immaterial nature of clothing; not just the garment itself, but the social, psychological, and economic implications of being clothed. The definition and redefinition of commonly used terms such as "costume", "dress", and "fashion" are often the focus of scholarly examination (Wilson, 2003; Taylor, 2013; Entwistle, 2015; Nicklas and Pollen, 2015; Jenss, 2016). Thirty years ago, Suzanne Baizerman, Joanne B. Eicher, and Catherine Cerny pointed out the "inherent bias" in the term 'costume', and its power to reiterate the otherness of clothing from outside the Eurocentric tradition (1993, p. 23). This thesis does not use the term costume, unless specifically describing a type of performance ensemble, or where it is the title of a practitioner or institution (i.e.: "Keeper of Costume", "Gallery of Costume", "ICOM Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume"). Therefore, "dress" and "fashion", and the term "dress/fashion" are examined here for usability.

Over their extensive careers studying the dressing habits of people around the world, anthropologists Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Eicher have evolved their definition of "dress", which they described finally in 1992 as:

'…unambiguous, free of personal or social valuing or bias, usable in descriptions across national and cultural boundaries, and inclusive of all phenomena that can accurately be designated as dress. According to this definition, dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body.' (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992, p. 1)

Applying the term "dress" in this way is not unambiguous or free of bias; the term "dress" has gendered connotations particularly in the west, as Roach-Higgins and Eicher acknowledged. Their insistence that the term remained objective because it was recognised in multiple dictionaries at the time (1992, p. 2), does not recognise that dictionaries are written by people, and therefore reflect the biases inherent in our vocabulary. More anecdotally, referring to oneself as a "dress historian" to people outside of the discipline will often have the listener asking you about gowns and wedding apparel, demonstrating that this purported clarity of language does not extend far beyond specialist circles. However, a term which emphasises the material object, describes the multiple meanings of the clothed body, the diversity of adornment around the globe, and includes not just textile-based additions to the body (they include hairstyles, tattoos, and scented breath in their list of supplements) is useful.

The term "fashion" to describe clothing is similarly loaded with meaning. Jeffrey Horsley used the term in his study of exhibitions to describe 'clothing and accessories, whether historic or contemporary' (Horsley, 2013, p. 170). The umbrella of "fashion" objects could also be extended to textile fragments, illustrations, photography, and the term also describes the broader economic system of clothing production. In the field of "fashion studies", the topic has often been viewed through the prism of Euromodernism: the concept of modernity contingent to developments in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (Kaiser, 2013, p. 25). Riegels Melchior observed in *Fashion and Museums* (2014) that the implication of the term "fashion" is also theoretical and 'representative of popular culture and avant-garde design' (Riegels Melchior, 2014, p. 6). Her analysis considered what she viewed as a shift from object-focused *dress* museology in the early 20th century to the focus on conceptual and spectacular *fashion* museology, seen most clearly in temporary, visitor-facing exhibitions. For the purposes of this research, fashion does not wholly satisfy

either; this thesis is concerned with worn clothing in collections, in the embedded biography in the garments, and the people working with it behind-the-scenes.

The term ultimately used in this thesis, dress/fashion, is attributed to South African fashion curator Erica de Greef. In her own search for a term which would describe not just clothing, but disturb the 'disciplinary underpinnings that have segregated clothing objects and their practices along a colonialist (and related, capitalist) politics of taste' (de Greef, 2019, p. xi), she sought to reject the binary of the two terms; one implying tradition and the other modernity. De Greef took inspiration in part from Carol Tulloch, who in 2010 linked 'Style–fashion–dress" into "a term that constitutes a system of concepts that signifies the multitude of meanings and frameworks that are always 'whole-and-part' of dress studies' (Tulloch, 2010, p. 275) in her analysis of the the terminology used to describe the garments and bodies of Black people in the African diaspora.

Like Tulloch before her, by contracting these independently insufficient words together de Greef created what she argued was a new and more precise term to describe the plurality of meaning within clothing. By applying dress/fashion to the wider discipline of dress/fashion curation, I hope to trouble the bias hidden within our specialist vocabularies, encompass the multiple meanings of worn garments, and to imply that this research belongs both the material and theoretical aspects of dress/fashion museology. Unless a specific term is required by an author in a title or quotation (for example, 'Museum of London Dress and Textiles Collection'), dress/fashion is applied.

Institutional Collection. This thesis defines the institutional collection through consideration of a question posed by museologists André Desvallées and François Mairesse:

'How does one define a museum? By a conceptual approach (museum, heritage,

institution, society, ethics, museal), by theoretical and practical considerations (museology, museography), by its functions (object, collection, musealisation), through its players (professionals, public), or by the activities which ensue from it (preservation, research, communication, education, exhibition, mediation, management, architecture)?' (Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010, p. 20)

In the context of this research, this term describes both the physical location of objects in a publicly-accessible institution (gallery, library, archive, or museum), and the conceptual framework of material assembled under the pretext of being historically meaningful. Questions around *whose* history and *what* meaning will be further addressed in the *Disciplinary Bias* chapter beginning on p. 234. Discussions around the concept of musealisation and critical museological practice (such as in Peter Vergo's *The New Museology* (1989)) are addressed in a dedication section on p. 261). For clarity, clothing collections belonging to private individuals prior to being acquired into the institutional or public (terms used interchangeably in this thesis) collection will be referred to as a "wardrobe", implying the intimate nature of personal assemblages.

LGBTQIA2S+ and Queer. For discussions surrounding ideas and events concerning the wider community outside the heteronormative, this thesis applies the acronym "LGBTQIA2S+" and where appropriate or referenced from other research, "queer". The inclusive acronym LGBTQIA2S+ is used to indicate the wide and fluid community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, 2-Spirit) existing outside of a colonial, heteronormative construct. For rationale in the use of queer, I refer to the definitions suggested by Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas in *Queer Style* (2013), including 'social and bodily types that do not conform to a model that is 'straight', namely heterosexual, conventional and middle class' (Geczy and Karaminas, 2013, p. 2). One term is difficult to ascribe to many diverse identities, and there are both problems (experiences of trauma and persecution) and benefits (empowerment, signifying of shared experiences) of

reclaiming the term queer to describe non-heterosexual, non-cis-gendered identities. However, Geczy and Karaminas argue that awareness of the insufficiency of the term and regular re-evaluation of what it encompasses, 'ensures its ongoing life and that it keeps desiring' (Geczy and Karaminas, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, the term queer leaves space for redefinition and growth.

Object, clothing, garment. Object, clothing, and garment are used interchangeably in this thesis to describe the material at the core of this research. Occasionally "thing" might be applied to the immaterial, ultra-sensory relationship between the object and the person, contextualised by the *Thing Theory* of Bill Brown: "thing" being able to 'to index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable.' (Brown, 2001, p. 4)

Wearer. The person who wore and possessed the garment prior to its acquisition. The focus of this research is on worn garments acquired *in absentia* of the original wearer, where the lack of their direct autobiographical testimony requires the curator to make a full analysis and interpretation of the object. Therefore the wearer is considered distinct from a donor who might have owned but not worn the garment, or vendor (collector, auction house) an object is purchased from.

Chapter Synopsis

Having introduced this research, the rest of the thesis is divided into four parts. The first part establishes a foundational understanding of key areas of research through a critical review and analysis of relevant interdisciplinary scholarship on: material culture studies; embedded biography; authorship; dress/fashion museology; institutional collections; institutional critique; cognition; and sensory engagement. Scholarship is drawn from fields including: anthropology; fashion studies; forensic and cognitive sciences; museology; sociology; and psychoanalysis to contextualise the theoretical and methodological approach to this research and to situate the sources of decision-making bias and to identify the concept of curatorial interruption. The first proposed source of decision-making bias, rooted in curator cognition, is examined. The chapters within Part 1 are organised: *Contextual Review*; *The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation*; *Material Culture*; *Cognitive Bias*; *Phenomenology*; *New Materialism*; *Embedded Biography*; *Authorship*; *Contextual Review Conclusion*.

The second part identifies the quantitative and qualitative primary research methods employed in this research, which were used to gather demographic, working environment, and experiential data about the UK-based dress/fashion curator. The chapters within Part 2 are organised: *Primary Research*; *Research Context*; *Survey of Dress/Fashion Curators in the UK*; *In-Person Study of Curatorial Practice*; *Emergent Themes in Primary Research Data*.

The third part proposes and examines four additional sources of decision-making bias informing curatorial interruption organised under chapters: *Sources of Decision-Making Bias in Dress/Fashion Curators*; *Sensory Engagement Bias*; *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*; *Disciplinary Bias*; *Working Environment Bias*; *Summary of Sources of Bias*. These sources in Part 3 are identified and linked to examples in the primary research, using the factors as an analytical framework for assessing the impact of curatorial decisions on the retention of embedded

biography.

The fourth part draws on the research from first three chapters to suggest strategies to mitigate the impact of curatorial interruption on worn clothing in the institutional collection, both in museological pedagogy and for practicing curators at work today. The chapters in Part 4 are organised: *Suggestions Toward Mitigating Curatorial Interruption*; *Cognitive Bias*; *Sensory Engagement Bias*; *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*; *Disciplinary Bias*; *Working Environment Bias*; *Summary of Suggestions Toward Mitigating Curatorial Interruption*.

The conclusion to this thesis summarises my original contribution to knowledge. While this thesis does not aim to eliminate the subjectivity and inherent biases of the curator working with worn clothing, it identifies five sources of bias which I argue inform how curators interpret wearer/object biography in worn garments, and what information about the garment is entered into the institutional collection for future use. The conclusion will summarise these points and reiterate the strategies suggested to mitigate bias and curatorial interruption, laying the foundation for new critical practices within dress/fashion museology.

Part 1

Contextual Review

Part 1 of this thesis reviews the landscape of previous and current scholarship and practice relating to the key themes of this research.

Chapter 1 attends to *The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation*; Chapter 2 examines *Material Culture: Background and Methodologies* applied in the analysis of garments; Chapter 3 introduces the first proposed factor in curatorial interruption, *Cognitive Bias*; Chapter 4 *Phenomenology* and Chapter 5 *New Materialism* establish the theoretical approach to this research; Chapter 6 contextualises the meaning *Embedded Biography* in worn clothing; and Chapter 7 makes a case for the importance of worn clothing as a form of wearer *Authorship.*

These chapters review interdisciplinary areas of scholarship and practice from fields including museology, sociology, cognitive science, and historiography in order to frame the core argument of this research: that contact with the curator creates an irreversible and significant rupture in wearer/object biography: curatorial interruption.

1.1 The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation

This chapter provides a brief overview of previous foundational research documenting the trajectory of dress/fashion curation within UK institutional collections[2] and academia, reflecting on key moments in the development in the discipline. An ever-growing body of scholarship by historians and curators practicing in dress/fashion curation has established the foundation and progression of the discipline, much of it demonstrating the shared methodologies and interests of what individuals term "dress history, "fashion studies", and "fashion museology" (Breward, 2008; O'Neill, 2008; Steele, 2008; Thompson, 2010; Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014; Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014; Mida and Kim, 2015; Nicklas and Pollen, 2015; Buckley and Clark, 2016; Clark and Vänskä, 2018).

A considerable amount of previous scholarship, particularly that of UK dress historians Lou Taylor (Taylor, 1998; 2002; 2004; 2013; 2021) and Eleanor Thompson (née Wood) (2016), and curator Julia Petrov (Petrov, 2008; 2012; 2014; 2019), has been devoted to charting the growth of the discipline within the UK. This section specifically examines research, notably Taylor's foundational analyses of the discipline, for evidence of how early UK dress/fashion curatorial preoccupations informed the development of the discipline, asking 'what narratives and insights have been missed' (Gray and Leong, 2017, p. 4) in the study of this development.

In taking a critical approach to this examination of dress/fashion curation, as a

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[2] A couple of notes on the scope of this review: while there are unique issues facing independent curators working outside of institutional bounds, for instance within private collections or the archives of luxury brands (as has been discussed in Annamari Vänskä and Hazel Clark's *Fashion curating: critical practice in the museum and beyond* (2018)), the focus of this research remains on the growth of institutionally-based practice. Institutional collections are shaped by a complex mix of structural ideologies or collecting policies, and practical considerations such as purchase funds, donations of objects, and storage capacity, concerns which will be discussed further in the chapter on *Working Environment Bias*.

researcher situated within the discipline myself, I recognise the hard work and tenacity of my forebears in establishing a distinct and legitimate area of museology. I also argue that after nearly a century of formal development, the discipline is mature enough to face nuanced critique on the context and ethical considerations surrounding curatorial practice, particularly as it intersects with critical self-reflection during analysis and documentation of worn clothing. Although there is ongoing evaluation and critique of the output (publications and exhibitions) of the curator across academia and the media, there are relatively few studies of the impact of working practice itself, and fewer still examining the direct interaction between curator and object during material culture analysis (abbreviated hereafter in this thesis to MCA), which this thesis aims to rectify. Professor of museology and exhibition-maker Judith Clark articulated the need for disciplinary self-reflection in an interview discussing the relatively rapid growth of dress/fashion curation:

"...I also think that everyone at that time was in such a hurry to justify its existence within the museum, that some of the implications of that were missed along the way. I think it needs to be far more politicised and it's time to really look carefully at what we are saying." (dal Bosco, 2021)

Over the course of this thesis, I will identify some of the implications which I argue were missed in the course of the discipline growth: inclusion and exclusion of global adornment in "fashion"-based institutional collections, and how early curatorial preoccupations have shaped not only the objects within collections, but also the demographics of the dress/fashion curator in the UK. These implications are relevant to this thesis and its concern with how curatorial bias interrupts the histories included within institutional collections.

An Overview of the Discipline within the UK

Dress/fashion curation is a discipline informed by aspects of anthropology, art

history, sociology, and the commercial and editorial fashion industries, which have become formalised primarily within the boundaries of academia and the institutional collection (Breward, 2008; Taylor, 2013). Institutional collections in the UK have long acquired and exhibited clothing, accessories, and other objects of adornment from around the globe, for the purposes of art history research, for ethnographic study, or for demonstrating textile-making techniques. However, it was only in the first half of the 20th century that Western European dress/fashion objects began to be intentionally collected and studied on their own merit in the UK, motivated by dedicated museum professionals who were interested in the cultural meaning of these garments (Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2004; Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014; Petrov, 2019).

Although there is now a proliferation of institutional collections holding dress/fashion objects, the foundation of acquiring clothing for study and display was not laid in these institutions, but rather in the private collections and *Wunderkammer* of the late 16th century (Taylor, 2004; Thompson, 2010). Objects taken from communities around the world were brought back to Western Europe as ethnographic curios, evidence of "other" cultures, and what curator Eleanor Thompson pinpointed as evidence of 'Europeans' views of their own superiority' (Thompson, 2010, p. 296). At this time, everyday garments from UK communities were generally not acquired as similar objects of interest, despite a missive written by Sir Richard Steele in The Spectator in 1712, where he called for a dedicated space to study fashion with 'a Keeper appointed, who shall be a Gentleman qualify'd with a competent Knowledge in Clothes' (Steele, 1712). Garments which survive from this early period are primarily archaeological finds, from private collections (subsequently donated to or the basis in forming institutional collections), or surviving family heirlooms. In the first two scenarios, wearer biography was often unknown or undocumented, and in the third, the context of the garment was reliant on second- and third-hand family testimony.

As institutions were formally established in the 19th century for the edification of the public, garments continued to be acquired. This was particularly notable in the creation of major institutions the Museum of Manufactures in London in 1852 (subsequently relocated and renamed the South Kensington Museum (1857) and then the V&A in 1899) and the Industrial Museum of Scotland in 1854 (amalgamated with National Museum of Antiquities in 1985, now National Museums Scotland). These museums marked a pivotal shift in dress/fashion collecting, from amassing objects of curiosity, to also acquiring historical European clothing as historical evidence and examples of textile-making techniques and technologies (Ginsburg, 1984; Taylor, 2004). While national collections focused on the lofty goals of educating the nation (Taylor, 2004, p. 107) regional museums often passively built their dress/fashion collections with acquisitions from private donations and collections, driven by curatorial imperative to represent the local community (Taylor, 2004, p. 143).

Despite the shift in newly-formed national collections regarding historical clothing, contemporary garments were generally not viewed as useful or tasteful in regard to manufacture and craft, and thus were deemed 'ephemeral, frivolous, commercial, and of little value' for the education of the public (Thompson, 2010, p. 295). Taylor ascribed this prejudice to the views of male managers overseeing collecting projects. She contested that fashionable garments were not intentionally acquired on their own merits by the V&A in particular until the appointment of women curators from the late 1940s who had 'professional and committed specific interest in fashion' (Taylor, 2004, p. 120).

Institutional attitudes and collecting policies aside, two pivotal characters in the early development of dress/fashion research were indeed men: medical doctor and dress/fashion collector C.W. Cunnington, and historian James Laver. The two men, incidentally colleagues of Taylor's mother, the graphic artist Pearl Binder (Taylor, 2004, p. 64), grew to prominence in the 1930s for their respective studies

of women's clothing. Cunnington and his wife Phillis were passionate collectors of historical Western womenswear, much of which was purchased by the city of Manchester as the basis for the then-Gallery of English Costume, Platt Hall (hereafter referred to by its current title, Manchester Art Gallery), who published extensively on the findings of their object-led studies. Despite their material culture approach to their research, it has been noted that wearer biography in clothing they acquired was deemed 'worthless' (Cunnington quoted in Jarvis, 1999, p. 7) and thus not documented. The output of Laver focused on the theoretical aspects of fashionability including cycles of consumption and the concept of "taste".

Despite their different approaches to the subject, Taylor identified a shared interest between Cunnington and Laver,[3] in their oversimplification of dress/fashion and what they viewed as the sexual nature of womenswear. In what could be regarded as bias dictated by gender norms of the time, Cunnington and Laver had determined through their research that women used clothing to attract the opposite sex and therefore their garments were 'functional in no other sense' (Laver, 1966, p. 22). This is a viewpoint which has been subject to feminist critique since, notably in 1986 by then-Keeper at Manchester Art Gallery, Jane Tozer, and again in the PhD research of Eleanor Thompson (2016). The separate approaches (object-led and theoretical) to the study of dress/fashion popularised by the Cunningtons and Laver can be viewed as an early ideological split which has endured over the development of the discipline.[4]

Taylor contended that the myopic institutional view of contemporary clothing was shifted through the gradual installation of a 'triumvirate of post-Second World

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[3] Without specifying why this is the case, much of Taylor's examination of the Cunnington collecting practice and publishing has focused on C.W., rather than his wife and research partner Phillis. Due to the lack of analysis of Phillis' practice, this thesis also focuses on the work of C.W. Cunnington.

[4] For examples of different approaches to discussion of this topic, see the two issues of *Fashion Theory* Journal published in 2008, edited by Alistair O'Neill, Valerie Steele, and Alexandra Palmer.

War women dress curators in England' (Taylor, 2021): Anne Buck and the founding of Platt Hall in 1947 (where the Cunnington collection was situated), Madeleine Ginsburg at the V&A in 1957, and founder of the Fashion Museum Bath (established in 1963) Doris Langley Moore. As with the Cunnington collection at Platt Hall, Langley Moore's private collection became the foundation for the museum in Bath. Active acquisitions continued under these curators which reflected their respective interests and what they viewed as relevant to the growth of collections under their care, such as the Fashion Museums annual *Dress of the Year* acquisition of an ensemble which 'encapsulates the prevailing mood of fashion, represents the past year and captures the imagination' (Bath & North East Somerset Council, 2021). With the appointment of subject specialist curators in institutional collections, the tide had begun to turn in the recognition of the cultural value of Western fashion.

The Cecil Beaton-fronted exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology* (1971) at the V&A was identified by Clark, Amy de la Haye, and Jeffrey Horsley in *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971* as a seminal moment in the UK arm of the discipline, not least for the landmark 800 individual objects (many luxury "fashion" garments) acquired for the exhibition (Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014, pp. 69-70). The acquisition of these garments reflected Beaton's personal interest in (primarily) women's clothing and his own social connections (Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014, p. 71), and the volume of the acquisition meant that in most cases, despite his own interest in the women who had worn the garments, analysis and documentation of wearer biography was at best 'hasty' (Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014, p. 157).

In the "after" of Beaton's successful, landmark exhibition (Wilcox, 2018), there has been few remaining questions as to the cultural meaning of contemporary Western clothing, with institutions continually acquiring dress/fashion objects for research and exhibition under the eye of successive dress/fashion curators.

Reflecting the impact of Beaton's narrative emphasis on fashionability, the majority of the public-facing output from this collecting practice has been reflected in large-scale exhibitions which focus on the designer and the structure of garments rather than on wearer/object biography embedded in garments (for example *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (V&A, 2015); *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* (V&A, 2019); *Beyond the Little Black Dress* (National Museums Scotland; 2023); *Unpicking Couture* (Manchester Art Gallery, 2023-2025).

The decades since Beaton's exhibition definitively proved the popularity of institutional displays of dress/fashion, with a particularly sharp rise in dress/fashion-focused exhibitions in the past 20 years (Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014; Riegels Melchior, 2014). Dress/fashion has become well-established in UK collections and in the wider field of museological practice, proven through rigorous, peer-reviewed scholarly output (see journals including *Costume*; *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty*; *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*; *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*; *Fashion Theory*), through establishment within the academy (see The Courtauld, MA History of Art; University of the Arts London, MA Fashion Curation and Cultural Programming; University of Brighton, History of Design and Material Culture MA; University of Glasgow, Art History: Dress & Textile Histories MLitt), and in the record numbers (prior to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic) attending exhibitions of dress/fashion (Clark and Vänskä, 2018; BBC, 2019). In 2015, the Dress and Textile Specialists organisation compiled an online list and corresponding map which identified 150 collections holding what they term 'dress and textiles in the British Isles including the Republic of Ireland'[5] (Dress and Textile Specialists, 2023). This list demonstrates the current breadth of the discipline, spanning institutional

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[5] As this thesis has set the scope of research within the United Kingdom, it should be noted that currently only one collection, National Museum of Ireland – Decorative Arts and History in Dublin, is identified on the DATS list.

collecting policies which prioritise anthropological, ethnographic, social history and art and design foci.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of dress/fashion curation, identifying key figures in the establishment and growth of the discipline within the UK, where the research in this thesis is situated. The ideological approaches to the study of garments (object-led and theoretical) and the focus on Western Eurocentric fashionable clothing within institutional collections were discussed. The research and practice of key figures such as Cunnington and Laver, Langley Moore, Beaton, and Taylor has demonstrated how individual research interests have shaped the growth of the wider discipline of dress/fashion museology. Due to the contributions of these key figures in building collections and developing dress/fashion museology, it is now well-established area of study within cultural heritage institutions and academia. Further investigation of how curator preoccupations have impacted the development of the discipline and the interpretation of wearer/object biography in worn garments acquired by UK institutions will be discussed in the *Disciplinary Bias* chapter on p.326.

In the chapter immediately following this, *Material Culture: Background and Methodologies*, discussion moves from the expansion of the discipline to an in-depth examination of one of the key tools applied by dress/fashion curators: material culture analysis.

1.2 Material Culture

This chapter critiques the practice of MCA through a review of relevant interdisciplinary scholarship from fields which analyse objects, including the focus of this thesis, worn garments. This practice is a tool applied in material culture studies, the research of the meaning of objects in relation to humans and human society. Material culture studies originated in archaeology and anthropology, but has expanded its application to areas including geography, art history, and social history, to trace the complexities and meaning of human life (for example, Pearce, 1992; 1994; Miller, 1997; Hallam and Hockey, 2001; Prown, 2001; Küchler and Miller, 2005; Miller, 2005; 2009; Ingold, 2007; Knell, 2007; Dudley, 2010; 2012, Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands and Spyer, 2013). Anthropologists including Sandra Dudley, Joanne Eicher, Susanne Küchler, Daniel Miller, museologist Susan Pearce, and sociologist Sophie Woodward are of particular note to this thesis, as their research has examined the material culture of garments; the multisensory nature of clothing and being dressed; and garments within the context of the museum.

The discipline of dress/fashion curation is equally engaged with the theory and practice of MCA, particularly in object-led curatorial practice (Steele, 1998; Taylor, 2002; 2004; de la Haye and Clark, 2008; Palmer, 2013; O'Neill, 2018). The study of material culture is relevant to the central concern of this thesis: MCA as the initial contact point of curatorial interruption between the curator and worn garments acquired into the institutional collection. To supplement perspectives on MCA drawn from dress/fashion museology, scholarship from fields which also engage with object analysis, including archaeology, anthropology, and forensic science are examined.

The approach to this chapter is framed in part by the theory of evocative objects proposed by psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas. Using the example of a swing, Bollas suggested that objects can stimulate us in at least six ways (Bollas, 1992,

pp. 34-36): sensationally (as a material and sensorially perceived phenomenon, sitting and holding the chain of the swing); structurally (how its materiality impacts our interaction with the object, as with pushing oneself on the swing); conceptually (how an object embodies ideas, such as childhood pleasure and movement); symbolically (the other associations of an object word, such as swing music or mood swings); Mnemically (remembered experiences of an object, being pushed on a swing by a friend); and projectively (conjuring a specific sense of self through the object, such as wanting to take a child on a swing to be a good parent).

While Bollas used this theory as a psychoanalytic tool to evoke the analysand's inner states through their engagement with objects, instead I broadly apply this theory as a method of contextualising how individuals experience material culture as culturally situated. As archaeologist Bjørnar Olsen observed, those 'who read the text -' the text in this thesis being worn garments, 'often in different historical and cultural settings – bring to it other voices, other texts, and create meanings far beyond the author's intentions' (Olsen, 2013, p. 87).

The following sections in this chapter review key texts from wider material culture studies and address the specific practice of MCA within the context of dress/fashion and institutional collections. This review is organised under the sections: *Material Culture and Clothing: A Background*; *The Colonial Roots of Material Culture Studies*; *Material Culture and Forensic Science*; and *Material Culture Methodologies and the Analysis of Dress/Fashion*.

Material Culture Studies

From its roots in 19th century anthropology material culture studies has grown into a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary sphere of study concerned with the areas of object creation, distribution, consumption, usage, and meaning (see Belk, 1988; Martin, 1993; Pearce, 1994; Miller, 1997; Tilley, 1994; Hallam and Hockey,

2001; Dudley, 2012; Thomas, 2013; Tilley et al., 2013). Of particular relevance to this research are the object "life" theories of anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff, in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986). Appadurai argued that through the flow of exchange, commodities (materials with economic value) have "social lives", highlighting cultural structures through their contextualised value. Kopytoff continued from this by asserting that objects also have multifaceted biographies, aspects of which rise to the fore depending on the frame they are viewed through. Further expanding on Kopytoff's argument of multifaceted object biographies is a quote from anthropologist Janet Hoskins:

'What I discovered, quite to my surprise, was that I could not collect the histories of objects and the life histories of persons separately. People and the things they valued were so complexly intertwined they could not be disentangled…I obtained more introspective, intimate, and "personal" accounts of many people's lives when I asked them about objects, and traced the path of many objects in interviews supposedly focused on persons.' (Hoskins, 1998, p. 2)

Hoskins emphasises the inextricable nature of object biography and user biography, and in this thesis I argue this to be especially true in worn garments - some of the most intimate of human things. The importance of retaining that connection when the worn garment has left the personal wardrobe and enters the public collection is one of the core concerns of this research and why the act of MCA in worn clothing is ripe for critical examination.

The accretion of history in objects, and how that history is relocated to the public collection, externally interpreted, and re-contextualised has been written about at length by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill in *Museums & the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000). She acknowledges the "encoding" of personal experiences and memories into objects (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 109) yet recognises that

objects 'can have meanings deliberately imposed upon them through the context in which they are placed…' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 110) This thesis argues that curatorial interpretation of object biography can be a part of this deliberate meaning-making, meanings that obscure or erase the encoded memories of the wearer. Thus, this section must establish the roots of material culture studies as they relate to the practice of MCA and the subjectivity of the analyst. MCA can be viewed as fundamental museological practice: adhering to industry-wide collecting policies where object analysis is embedded as best practice in new acquisitions, an essential step towards documenting and cataloguing the objects.

Comprehensive reviews of the field of material culture studies have been undertaken throughout the years, with many addressing the historic tensions between semiotic- and theory-based material culturists, and object-centred researchers (Dyer, 2021; Miller, 2005; Taylor, 1998). During the early 20th century epoch of materialist ontology, cultural information was divided into three strands: ideological (written or oral information), sociological (study of human behaviour), or material (things made by humans) (Schlereth, 1985, p. 22). Although object analysis continued in museums through the twentieth century, it fell out of vogue in academic circles (Reynolds, 1983; Schlereth, 1985, p. 22; Taylor, 1998; Breward, 2008) until the "material turn" of the 1960s and 70s, when study of the objects themselves, rather than the symbolic meaning they represented in abstract, returned to the fore and cohered in the field much as it exists today (Dyer, 2021).

This thesis argues that MCA is a means of using tangible object research to explore intangible biographical themes (for example, sexuality, gender, ethnicity). While the distinction between theoretical and practical approaches may exist in terms of a researcher's prior experience, I argue that applying these two strands of practice provides a more durable interpretation of wearer/object biography.

The Colonial Roots of Material Culture Studies

An issue which is beginning to be addressed is the problematic origins of MCA within colonising cultures and how that legacy of hierarchies, binaries, and bias informs current dress/fashion museological practice (for example, Žarić, 2019; *Fibres, Threads and Fabrics: Textiles and Cloth as Material Culture*, 2022; Moloney, Lephoto and de Greef, 2022). This is a complex subject, and this section will only undertake a brief survey of the field from this approach, aiming to premise MCA as simultaneously a problematic (in using practitioner interpretation to establish "facts") and useful practice (as an epistemological method) that generates a *version* of understanding culture from specific perspectives, and requires a critical approach in its application.

The object-based study of material culture, what folklorist Henry Glassie described as the 'tangible yield of human conduct' (Glassie, 1999, p. 41) has grown out of the long obsession in the Western world with the "other". Since the pre-modern era of the *kunst-* or *wunderkammer*, when the 'aristocracy and men of middling rank' (Taylor, 2004, p. 68) gathered disparate examples of the natural and man-made world in private collections, objects have been used to study and attempt to comprehend the lives of those far from us in time, space, and experience. In the nineteenth century, these collections moved from the private to the public realm with the formation of public collections in museums and the formalisation of the fields of archaeology and anthropology (Pearce, 1994; Schlereth, 1985).

Museums in the UK were founded on a colonial collecting model: museum representatives removed objects from context and communities inside of the British empire, and brought them into the empire's collection for storage and interpretation through the eyes of the coloniser (Hicks, 2020; Procter, 2020). This model endures today with the inherent issues concerning autonomy, authorship and affect. Historian Leora Auslander identified in the article *Beyond Words* (2005) a universal human need for '…things to individuate, differentiate, and

identify…' (Auslander, 2005, p. 1019) in the context of institutional collecting it could be argued this is a specifically Western European compulsion, spread globally through academia and museums in the colonial diaspora. The research of early anthropologists and archaeologists used objects as a tool for demonstrating the hierarchy of "evolution" of human culture; with western post-industrialist objects at the pinnacle of this growth. The founder of Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, extolled the research value of "material arts" in *The Evolution of Culture* (1875):

'…these words and these implements are but the outward signs or symbols of particular ideas in the mind; and the sequence, if any, which we observe to connect them together, is but the outward sign of the succession of ideas in the brain. It is the mind that we study by means of these symbols.' (Pitt-Rivers, 1875, p. 23)

Curator Dan Hicks pointed out in *The Brutish Museums* (2020) that the anthropological institutions created for the study of material culture in nineteenth century Britain 'are filled with objects that have not been given, but taken' (Hicks, 2020, p. 20) from communities around the world. In that context he was interrogating Britain's pillaging of the Benin Bronzes, though the foundational methods of acquisition for garments in these collections were based on the same principles. Since its earliest days, material culture studies has intersected with the collecting and analysis of dress/fashion objects, as with the example of anthropologist Franz Boas and his acquisition of garments from North American Indigenous Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw communities for "life-group" tableau-style displays in late 19th century American museums (Jacknis, 1988). Boaz used garments as a visual aid to contextualise the lives of "others" from "outside" of Western European and North American culture, and I argue that this early style of ethnographic display was foundational in establishing a hierarchy for institutionally collected garments. This is reflected in the ongoing contemporary division between collections containing "dress", "fashion", "decorative arts", or

"textiles"; and collections containing garments organised by geographical location or termed "costume" or "ethnographic".

The V&A, the UK national art and design museum founded in 1852, contains objects with deeply troubling histories as noted by many practitioners, including VARI Artist-in-Residence Victoria Adukwei Bulley who created a response to an absence of narratives of enslaved people in the collection (2018), and art historian Alice Procter's in-depth analysis of Tipu's Tiger (2020). The V&A Textiles and Fashion Collection, regarded as one of the finest public collections of fashion in the world, is an example of a museum exhibiting predominately Eurocentric clothing in its "fashion" gallery, while clothing from other regions is held in geographically-specific displays. The V&A Textile and Fashion catalogue is also peppered with garments acquired from areas colonised by the British. One example is a small shoe, pictured in the V&A catalogue and described as a child's "moccasin" circa 1900 and from either Cree or Inuit communities (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009). It is worth asking what MCA process, if any, was performed which would result in a vague and inaccurate (conflating two geographically and culturally distinct communities such as Cree and Inuit) object interpretation and catalogue document. The shoe originates from a time when children were being forcibly removed from their families and placed in residential schools, and although it could have been acquired in an ethical and consensual manner, that context is not provided on the digital public-facing catalogue. The focus of this thesis is how curatorial decision-making bias impacts what aspects of wearer/object biography are interpreted during MCA, specifically that of un-, under-, and mis-represented communities, and considering how MCA processes applied in the analysis of worn garments are impacted by bias will be explored further specifically in the chapters in Part 3 of this thesis.

The violent colonial roots of material culture studies tend to be buried by the outputs of progressive contemporary curatorial praxis. In this practice, emphasis

has been placed on the connections and understandings which can be made between disparate cultures through the study of their objects. It is in this complicated reality that this research lays its foundation. Objects help orient the curator and create a tangible connection to the history they are researching; comparing the temporal experience of living here and now with living there and then to produce a historical narrative. Materiality has an ability to invoke individual curator memories and emotions in a way that theoretical discussions may not, but the same common factors that forge understanding between distinct experiences can also be those that create blindspots to object biography.

Sandra Dudley wrote of the intense reaction she had to a Chinese Han Dynasty bronze funerary horse in the Compton Verney gallery in Warwickshire, borne in part from her discovery of the details of what it was and how it came to be in the collection (2012, pp. 1-3). Her initial visceral response to encountering the horse was then enriched with the context provided by the gallery on the physical description, social, and design history of the object. It is important to note that in the exhibition guide at the time of Dudley's visit in 2010 (2012, p. 2), and in the Compton Verney online catalogue in 2023, neither the artist nor the recipient, nor the circumstances of acquisition of the funerary offering are named. Institutional catalogues are often the sole document remaining from initial acquisition analysis, and the questions that these absences throw up (Why is the horse in the collection and not the tomb? Who did it belong to? Who made it?) reflect which aspects of object biography were interpreted during MCA. The aim of this thesis is to identify sources of bias which inform curatorial decisions about these aspects.

Material Culture Methodologies and the Analysis of Dress/Fashion

Dress historian Serena Dyer has acknowledged the lack of a unified methodology in material culture research, but instead the existence of a wide range of approaches which cover close object reading, the study of commodities and

trade, and thinking about the meanings of objects in relation to human life (2021, p. 283). Material culture methodologies are applied widely to the study of clothing, particularly in research around the dressed self, and these approaches often revolve around discussion of clothing with the wearer themselves.

Sociologist Sophie Woodward and theorist Sara Chong Kwan have each used interviews with wearers discussing their clothing choices in situ at the wearer's home (Woodward, 2007; Woodward and Greasley, 2017) or in tandem with MCA (Chong Kwan, 2012; 2020), while ethnologist Ingun Grimstad Klepp and design anthropologist Mari Bjerck used what they term the "wardrobe studies" (Klepp and Bjerck, 2014, p. 373) approach which included creating an inventory of garments, analysing clothing storage, interviewing the wearer, and MCA to examine how clothing is worn and why it is worn. These scholars have explored the phenomenological experience of being dressed by combining object analysis and interviews with the wearers of clothing, often carried out in the intimacy of the wearers' bedrooms. This type of research, which relies on first-hand accounts of being dressed, further highlights the subjective nature of interpreting worn clothing in the absence of the wearer.

As this thesis is concerned with the practice of object analysis of worn clothing *without* the testimony of the wearer, this section will examine three formal object-focused methodologies commonly employed by dress/fashion curators: *Artifact Study: A Proposed Model* (1974) by historian E. McClung Fleming, *Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method* (2001) by art historian Jules Prown, and *The Slow Approach to Seeing* suggested by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim in the *The Dress Detective* (2015). These methodologies are the most applied in the discipline of dress/fashion curation, and yet prior to this research, they have not been investigated to determine how each might inform curatorial bias and the subsequent impact of that bias on the interpretation of wearer/object biography.

E. McClung Fleming

The foundation for object-based MCA as a formal methodology was laid by McClung Fleming in 1974, the first to consider a discrete process for analysing decorative arts objects. His process consisted of five classifications (history; material; construction; design; function) and four sequential operations to be followed during analysis (identification; evaluation; cultural analysis; interpretation). While he didn't explicitly mention clothing among these objects, this is perhaps more indicative of the time it was written in. In the 1970s dress/fashion scholarship was still establishing itself both as a discipline and within the field of material culture studies, though as will be discussed, later material culture processes were developed from his initial proposal which took clothing into consideration. Much of McClung Fleming's procedural emphasis is on what he termed "factual" classification of the object, with these facts being determined in part by practitioner evaluation of aesthetic quality and comparative verification of authenticity. McClung Fleming explains that "conoisseurship" originated in practically learned knowledge, which could then be augmented with cataloguing, exhibiting, and scientific examination and evolve into "curatorship" (McClung Fleming, 1974, p. 157). His "interpretation" stage allows the analyst to associate a feature of the object to some 'key aspect of our current value system' to create a 'self-evident meaning, significance, or relevance' (McClung Fleming, 1974, p. 161). McClung Fleming asserts there can be many interpretations of an object, yet he neglects to indicate how the initial interpretation of the experts, connoisseur or curator, might bias subsequent interpretations of the object. This is particularly important when looking back at his "identification" argument, which included outputs such as catalogues which would then supplement the comparison of other objects to determine "authenticity". This attention to comparison as a means of establishing "facts" creates a feedback loop that reiterates a singular and potentially inaccurate or incomplete interpretation of objects. Thus McClung Fleming establishes the subjectivity of object analysis, but does not examine the

sources of bias or impact on object biography.

Jules Prown

Prown built on McClung Fleming's work with his seminal model, outlining three distinct, sequential, and cumulative stages of information gathering: "description"; "deduction"; and "speculation", to be applied to what he identified as the six categories of objects 'made by man or modified by man' (Prown, 2001, p. 71). Notably, this now included clothing under the category of "adornment", though at the time of his original writing in 1982, Prown notes that 'little significant work' had been done in the area in terms of MCA (Prown, 2001, p. 89).

Sixteen years later, curator Valerie Steele directly addressed the lack of formal dress/fashion-specific MCA methodology in an article for *Fashion Theory* (1998), referencing Prown's methodology in a call for dress/fashion researchers to increase engagement with object analysis as part of their scholarship. She also incorporated elements of McClung Fleming's methodology, particularly comparative cultural analysis, and her own method of measuring a number of corsets to draw conclusions about typical waist sizes in this period. In the same issue of *Fashion Theory*, Taylor wrote of the importance of (and prejudice faced by) object-focused curators (Taylor, 1998) in the wider world of academic scholarship. Perhaps in response to what was clearly a shared concern of the discipline, Taylor published the comprehensive treatise *The Study of Dress History* in 2002. Taylor's suggestions were not as prescriptive a methodology as those authored by McClung Fleming or Prown, instead she offered practical examples of object study in concert with theory as a means of analysing objects of dress/fashion. Steele and Taylor were not the first dress/fashion specialists to advocate for object-based study; other scholars including Buck and fellow curator Doris Langley Moore (founder of Fashion Museum, Bath) were advocating the interpretive value of object analysis from the mid-20th century (Jarvis, 2009;

Moore and Fonteyn, 1949) while historian Janet Arnold used the process of drafting patterns from existing historic garments to better understand how they might have been made or worn (see Arnold, 1977a; Arnold, 1977b; Arnold, 1985; Arnold, 2008).

Steele noted that in teaching Prown's process, her students often had to face their own subjectivity during object analysis in the "deduction" stage as they examined what of their "knowledge" about an object was based on personal feelings or biases (1998, p. 330). Prown was reflective of the potential issues researcher subjectivity might cause, clearly identifying the biasing factors of 'nation, locality, class, religion, politics, occupation, gender, age, race ethnicity' (Prown, 2001, p. 74) which might influence how an object is perceived. However, he insisted that the material culture approach to analysis created an 'objectivity of scientific method' (Prown, 2001, p. 75) and created an awareness and transparency of one's own cultural biases. Interestingly, he cited analyst engagement with the affective and sensory nature of objects as a method of achieving objectivity through experiencing another culture, rather than an experience which might bias decision-making in the analyst, as this thesis will investigate.

In part because it allowed for consideration of the researcher's own experience of objects, Prown's methodology remained the most useful in dress/fashion object research for over thirty years. Chong Kwan applied it to a study of wearers' sensory engagement with their garments, having her participants progress through stages of Prown's methodology to assess their relationship to their worn clothing (Chong Kwan, 2012). Chong Kwan argued that Prown's methodology was even more useful when applied in tandem with oral testimony from the wearer, as a means of contextualising the 'untidy, messy, chaotic and ever changing' (Chong Kwan, 2012, p. 5) nature of wearer/object relations. This thesis focuses on clothing acquired *without* owner testimony, reiterating the need for a critical approach to any methodology that allows the researcher to hypothesise on the

meaning of the garment to the original wearer.

These multiple meanings, and the affective relationships between wearer and garment and garment and researcher, are part of the complex (or as cultural theorist Bethan Bide identified it, "messy" (Bide, 2017, p. 453)) engagements which occur during MCA. Prown posited MCA as a structuralist methodology, rich with semiotic meaning that can be understood through the patterns that emerge through study (2001, pp. 76-77), yet he also acknowledged that semiotics will change depending on the "reader" of the material. It is for this reason he created his model, as a means of 'overcoming the distortions of our particular cultural stance, and, of almost equal importance, it makes visible the otherwise invisible, unconscious biases of our own cultural perspective.' (Prown, 2001, p. 75) This thesis argues that searching for emergent patterns in worn garments privileges the curator's biases; we will see what we are conditioned to see, and will miss what we aren't looking for, or do not value.

Rather than a structuralist, formal methodology, which purports to eliminate researcher bias through identification of the biases, this thesis proposes a new materialist understanding of the MCA of clothing: yes, worn garments are indeed imbued with meaning, but that meaning is transient and plural, dependant upon the person reading that meaning. MCA as a methodology for interpreting garments is inarguably useful in organising one way of looking at a garment and gathering aspects of biographical information, but it is an entirely subjective process and resists the objective and tidy categorisation prescribed by the institutional collection. Interestingly, Prown puts forward this model with this intent, but simultaneously problematises his third step, "speculation", writing that specifically "expert" speculation 'can colour, perhaps permanently, the perception of others. Regardless of the validity of the interpretation, the state of mind of the listener or reader is altered, innocence is lost, what has been said cannot be unsaid, the aesthetic experience is irredeemably changed.' (Prown, 2001, p. 88)

Reviewing Prown's methodology, it is clear that he is aware of the subjective nature of MCA and the potential for researchers to impact object biography, but does not examine the sources of this bias nor interrogate how they inform interpretation of object biography, which will be addressed by the research in this thesis.

Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim

I contacted curator Ingrid Mida directly to discuss her research in dress/fashion-based MCA, and Mida told me in email correspondence that after studying Prown's process she found it 'inadequate in relation to dress' (Mida, 2022), though she did not elaborate on why it was not sufficient. Together with fellow curator Alexandra Kim, Mida developed the first exclusively dress/fashion-focused MCA methodology with *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-Based Research in Fashion* (2015). Mida wrote to me that she believed she could improve on Prown and develop a method 'to avoid "forgetting" to examine a particular aspect of a garment and to properly document one's observations and gather documentation' (Mida, 2022). The resulting process, which the authors titled *The Slow Approach to Seeing* (hereafter referred to as *TSAS*) refines theoretical methodologies such as Prown's to specifically target the study of dress/fashion objects. Much like Steele, Mida and Kim were searching for a pedagogical methodology for their students, often needing guidance about information-gathering when approaching the analysis of dress/fashion for the first time. While Steele found Prown's "speculation" stage left her students with a 'string of unanswered questions' (Steele, 1998, p. 331), Mida and Kim found their own pupils unsure of 'what to do with the evidence that they have gathered' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 22) after object analysis.

Rather than lean into the possibility of questions and insecurity, with the analyst providing an open-ended interpretation of what they experience of the object, Mida and Kim developed a question-prompt and checklist approach to MCA.

Three phases of analysis are introduced, "observation"; "reflection"; and "interpretation" (Mida and Kim, 2015, pp. 27-31), mirroring Prown's three stages of "description", "deduction", and "speculation". Mida and Kim offered checklists for the "observation" and "reflection" stages, with the "observation" checklist consisting of forty questions divided into six sections ("general"; "construction"; "textile"; "labels"; "use, alteration, and wear"; "supporting material"). While it is not possible to examine every question on the checklists in this thesis, several examples of questions will now be examined using the practical element of Mida and Kim's process (analysis question prompts) to assess two of the factors informing the larger themes of this research: expert knowledge and inherent bias.

Mida and Kim direct all adherers of their methodology toward categorisations of information that they (from individual curatorial experience) have deemed most relevant to interpreting and documenting the object. Mida asserts that the checklist "slows down" how the researcher looks at the garment, offering a 'systematic route' (Mida, 2017, p. 281) to engagement and documentation. The "observation" stage is designed to gather enough 'factual information' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 19) about the object that reading the description would conjure an accurate visual representation in the mind of the reader. This is problematic at a fundamental level, due to the lack of precise and discipline-specific vocabulary used to describe objects. Currently, there is only one list of vocabulary recommended for use by the International Committee for the Museums and Collections of Costume (ICOM): the *Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume* (2011), any other descriptive language used is the choice of the curator. It should be noted that the ICOM terminology was developed in part by curator Anne Buck (Jarvis, 2009), and it should be considered as neither objective nor absolute, rather as a means of establishing defined search criteria based on a sample of expert knowledge.

In her 2017 article *The Curator's Sketchbook: Reflections on Learning to See*, Mida contests that by using *TSAS*, one can provide 'a more thoughtful, nuanced and complete narrative" (Mida, 2017, p 283). This thesis argues that there is no "complete narrative" of objects, and certainly not one that is available to a curator performing MCA on worn clothing *in absentia* of the wearer. The checklist prompts provided by Mida and Kim are ultimately dictated by their own bias as to what information about the material is relevant to document. For example, in the checklist for "observation", question 14 asks:

'Are there any remarkable features in the construction, such as a bias cut, or use of nontraditional materials or structural elements?' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 217)

The term "nontraditional" is relative and throws up issues of what qualifies as a "traditional" material. PVC plastic has been a traditional material in British clothing design since its popularisation in the 1960s, for example a Mary Quant coat from 1973 in the Museum of London collection (Object 74.330/7a) (Museum of London, 2020). Sealskin has been a traditional material since time immemorial for Northern communities, such as a pair of boots originating in late nineteenth century Qeqertarsuaq, now located in the Pitt Rivers collection (Object [1902.4.12 .1 - .2]) (The Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2012). Knowledge of what wide range of textiles qualify as "nontraditional" to what individual and in which time period implies that the curator will have comprehensive knowledge of every material used to construct garments worldwide and throughout history. In her critique of *The Dress Detective*, curator Julia Petrov noted that their methodology assumes any adopters will have basic textile or dress/fashion knowledge (Petrov, 2017, p, 357). In UK institutional collections, subject specialism cannot be assumed. Recent studies from Art Fund and the UK Museums Association have identified that permanent roles of subject specialist curators within institutional collections in the UK are in decline (Art Fund, 2017; Kendall Adams, 2019) a trend likely to continue in the wake of institutional austerity and economic recession.

Even if the curator tasked with analysing acquired objects is a dress/fashion specialist (and not, for instance, an art historian, or general collections manager, or a volunteer without a high level of expertise), not every specialist will have comprehensive knowledge of every design, production method, or garment material employed in every culture. Referring back to the evocative objects proposed by Christopher Bollas at the beginning of this chapter, and to the colonial nature of institutional collections, describing something as "nontraditional" then is a completely subjective and situated observation, specific to the analyst.

Question 1b in the "Checklist for Observation" contains an example of vocabulary which demonstrates how quickly terminology used to describe clothing, and the people who wear them, changes. It also evidences how this vocabulary can be a factor in drawing out curator bias:

'Is the garment intended for: Male, Female, Unisex?' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 216)

Without the wearer there to verify, determining the gender of the wearer has the potential to be difficult to discern; certainly, there are design hallmarks of "womenswear" and "menswear",[6] but "unisex" can complicate this determination – and is a contested and out-moded term. As Judith Butler wrote in the seminal *Gender Trouble* (1990), assuming one's gender through their clothing category is slippery: 'it is no longer possible to derive a judgment about stable anatomy from the clothes that cover and articulate the body.' (Butler, 2006, xxiv) American studies professor Jo. B. Paoletti dated use of "unisex", particularly in describing clothing 'referring to styles intentionally designed to blur or cross gender lines', to the late 1960s (Paoletti, 2015, p. 30). A half century later, psychologists Aurore

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[6] Additionally, gendered language is built into the checklist - for example, question 9 asks for measurements of the "bust" (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 217), a term typically used to describe the female chest.

Bardey, Judith Achumba-Wöllenstein, and Pak Chiu studied designer and consumer reception to the term, and determined that it is not only limiting, but misleading. Garments are not inherently gendered, but rather by the culture they exist within, which are 'continually labeling it as thus reinforcing the way it is perceived' (Bardey, A., Achumba-Wöllenstein, J. and Chiu, P., 2020, p. 422).

Attributing a gender to a wearer through their clothing alone can be inaccurate and potentially erase an essential part of a person's identity (Daybell et al., 2020, p. 111). Further, it fails to accommodate the sometimes unfixed nature of gender specifically within LGBTQIA2S+ communities. Sherry Nakhaeizadeh, et al. confirmed the inaccuracy of gendering a person based on the perceived gender of their clothing in the 2017 forensic anthropological study of mock crime scene gravesites. When assessing the gender of "victim"skeletons, participants who saw the clothing the skeleton was dressed in overly relied on this contextualising information rather than the bones themselves (Sherry Nakhaeizadeh, et al., 2017). This study used what they termed "female" and "gender neutral" clothing on "male" skeletons (2017, p. 2), further entangling the gender norms associated with clothing and who *"should"* be wearing what.

By asking what gender a garment is "intended for" in analysing worn clothing, rather than simply noting the design or construction, a curator runs the risk of misgendering the wearer. Public collections have a long, troubled history with the exclusion of transgender and non-gender conforming histories in their collections of clothing, which are often divided into binary categories (Proctor, 2018, p. 524; Bosold, Scott and Chantraine, 2020; Collections Trust, 2022). This question prompt succinctly highlights issues with binary categories in cataloguing, the importance of precise vocabulary, the speed with which descriptive terminology can evolve; issues which will be addressed in more depth in the section on cataloguing in the *Working Enivronment* chapter. It also hints at the insertion of their own personal moral judgement by Mida and Kim into a formal guide

intended to be implemented by their peers in dress/fashion curation. Question 1b highlights how easily opportunities for unconscious bias to inform the documentation of wearer/object biography can arise during MCA, as providing leading prompts can be seen as a contextually biasing factor, affecting how a wearer/owner biography will be interpreted by the curator.

Mida wrote in her email correspondence to me that she developed *TSAS* in part to 'encourage people to reflect on how their background influences their study' (Mida, 2022), and Mida and Kim asserted in the "reflection" chapter of *The Dress Detective* that curator backgrounds will colour 'our observations and the results of our research, since each of us has a cultural stance that reflects the age of the time we live in' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 62). Interestingly, *The Dress Detective* does not reflect on how Mida and Kim's own backgrounds influence their authorship of the text. They intend for the "Reflection" stage to provide a 'time of thoughtful contemplation' where the analyst can query their own assumptions about a garment. To do so, they provide a list of twenty questions under "sensory reactions", "personal reactions", and "contextual information".

While this line of interrogation of the curator could be interesting as a form of supplementary documentation contextualising what of the wearer/object biography is documented, with questions such as 'Are you the same gender and size as the person who wore or owned the garment?' and 'How would it feel on your body?' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 65), the bias of the curator is centred rather than critically assessed. Additionally, where Prown emphasised the importance of following his stages in sequence, Mida and Kim argue that research is not linear (Mida and Kim, 2015, p.63), and therefore the "reflection" stage with these can happen prior to, during or after analysis of the garment. This non-linearity further complicates the impact of curatorial bias on MCA. Mida and Kim's methodology acknowledges and focuses on the subjectivity of the analyst during MCA, however rather than investigating further or mitigating this bias, *TSAS* further

embeds it in the interpretation of objects during MCA, centring the experience of the analyst in how the object is documented.

These three formal methodologies (McClung Fleming; Prown; Mida and Kim) highlight how little scholarly attention has been paid to sources of bias in the affective relationship between subject analyst and the object during MCA. As they are the most widely recognised processes in the discipline, this can mean that bias built into each methodology is potentially reproduced with every application to object analysis. MCA can thus be viewed as a pivotal point of curatorial interruption. Acknowledging that the subjectivity of the analyst has an impact on the interpretation of objects is important, but addressing the *sources* of these biases is key in understanding how to mitigate their impact on object biography.

Material Culture and Forensic Science

Forensic science is comparative field (comparative in that it is also relatively young and applies close object study as a means of establishing histories) which is also concerned with the evidence of human biography, and how that is interpreted by practitioners. Forensic science applies scientific methods to the collection, preservation, and analysis of evidence, often related to the investigation of breaches of criminal and civil laws. Forensic science engages routinely with the analysis of clothing which have become separated from their original wearer, and is also grapples with how analyst process impacts research outcomes (see Kerstholt, Paashuis and Sjerps, 2006; Nakhaeizadeh et al., 2017; van den Eeden, de Poot, van Koppen 2016; Zapf and Dror, 2017).

Research linking forensic analysis of objects used to adorn the body to the wearer of these objects is growing, as with the impetus of Toronto Metropolitan University *The Fabric of Crime* (no date) project examining the role of clothing in crime, and the research of textile artist Shelley Goldsmith, who has found parallels

between forensic science and her own practice. In 2010, Goldsmith collaborated with the Forensic Science Service (FSS) to discover methods of extracting and interpreting evidence from worn garments in order to construct narratives, though Goldsmith notes the FSS were establishing "facts" while her application of this evidence was used to explore "ideas" (Goldsmith, 2018, p. 325). It is important to note that Alison Fendly, the senior FSS biologist who Goldsmith collaborated with, argued that their outputs were each a 'different kind of truth' (Goldsmith, 2018, p. 325). There are also forensic investigations of garments happening in the field of textile conservation, as with the study of a pair of whaler's breeches in the collection at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which will be discussed further on p. 308. The scholarship of two practitioners in particular are pioneering new research methods bridging forensic science and dress/fashion studies. Historian Amber Butchart has been working closely with forensic services since 2018 as a forensic garment analyst as part of the National Crime Agency, aiding in identification of garments found at crime scenes and training crime scene investigators on the application of informal MCA techniques to the investigation of clothing-based evidence (Wiseman, 2019; Butchart, 2022a). Forensic jeweller Maria Mclennan has developed a discipline of study which applies analysis of the characteristics unique to jewellery such as hallmarks and gemstones (Maclennan, 2020, p. 45), to identifying victim remains. In part due to the early stage of these disciplines, to this point, the question of analyst bias influencing interpretation of evidence has not been addressed in their research.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on research from across fields including anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and forensic science, as well as dress/fashion museology, in order to critique the practice of MCA. This critique has highlighted the situated and subjective nature of MCA, a practice rooted in colonial collecting practices. The lack of a definitive and formal MCA practice which is applied across dress/fashion curation was also identified. Through the examination in this

chapter, I have identified a gap in knowledge regarding how material culture analysis methodologies reiterate curatorial bias during object analysis.

In this chapter though I have criticised MCA, particularly within the setting of the institutional collection, I recognise that object-led analysis is deeply embedded in the fabric of dress/fashion museology. I have taken an in-depth analysis of the three MCA methodologies most commonly-employed in the study of garments, and found that they not only do not address possible sources of bias emerging during the practice, but provide opportunities for bias to deeply influence how an object is interpreted. As was discussed in the previous chapter on *The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation*, foundational figures in UK dress history have long advocated for object-led research, and institutional collections across the UK are actively acquiring clothing and staging exhibitions using worn garments. Ultimately, the systems of analysis currently in place in the discipline privilege MCA, which justifies my aim in this thesis, to take a critical look at current practices and to suggest how we might think of them otherwise. The field of forensic science has been demonstrated to be a comparable area of study to consider for possible critical tools to apply in meeting this aim.

To do so, sources of bias impacting the decision-making of the dress/fashion curator during MCA of worn garments must be identified, and the following chapter introduces the first proposed source of curatorial decision-making bias: *Cognitive Bias.*

1.3 Cognitive Bias

Establishing a foundational understanding of the psychological underpinnings of bias, and how it has become a byproduct of essential brain function in a stimuli-dense world, frames how this chapter proceeds in addressing bias: as a problem to be navigated, and not necessarily a moral failing on the part of the curator. This section will briefly establish the parameters of the study of bias within this thesis, and the following subsection on *Contextualising Cognitive Bias* will examine in detail theories on potential sources of cognitive bias.

The study of cognitive bias is a complex field encompassing many areas of knowledge including biology, neuroscience, and psychology, tracing its roots to the theories on influence and the mind by Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (Gilbert, 1991) and English philosopher Francis Bacon (Bacon, 1620; Dror, 2009). Neuroscientist Itiel Dror, a figure whose approach to understanding cognitive bias is key to this thesis, has written that bias is often read as an ethical issue, rather than the result of "computational tradeoffs" (Dror, 2011, p. 177) in the brain, which aid the constant decision-making processes required to live. Understanding that bias is inherent to human function is key to understanding practitioner subjectivity. Bias within the context of this thesis can be understood as the thought processes, both automatic and deliberate, of the dress/fashion curator.

Despite the inherent nature of bias, the term carries negative associations implying a conscious and potentially chauvinistic act on the part of the practitioner. Possibly due to these associations, to this point in dress/fashion curation there has only been acknowledgment of the influence of bias or subjectivity, but there has not been an in-depth study of the sources of curatorial bias nor the impact on wearer/object biography. I argue that establishing a base of understanding of what cognitive bias is, and the particular and inherent factors

informing bias in the dress/fashion curator, can remove the stigma around the term and contribute to progress in mitigating the impact of curatorial bias on wearer/object biography. This is essential to improving the retention of wearer/object biography for future interpretation, where narratives not immediately apparent to the curator performing the initial object analysis might eventually be revealed. I argue the dress/fashion curator is accountable for situating themself in the practice of MCA and acknowledging that our biases *do* inform our interpretations of worn garments and thus the production of history. 'Neutrality is not an option because we are part of the story' (Abrams, 2010, p. 58) wrote historian Lynn Abrams in her overview of oral history research, and therefore examining the curator is essential to improving overall material culture practice.

This thesis aims to identify the sources of decision-making bias specific to dress/fashion curators undertaking MCA of worn clothing. To lay the foundation for this research, this chapter will first establish an understanding of a fundamental source of bias, cognition, through theories drawn from psychology and neuroscience. Discussion of Bacon and Dror's research will be used to set the parameters for the examination of additional sources of curatorial bias. Two specific forms of cognitive bias are identified and these phenomenons are examined in relation to the dress/fashion curator. This is followed by an overview of how practitioner bias has previously been acknowledged within the context of dress/fashion curation and in comparable fields.

Contextualising Cognitive Bias

Underpinning this thesis is the concept of cognitive bias, a basic understanding of which will be introduced in this section in order to support the hypothesised sources of curatorial interruption referred to throughout this research. In her 1988 essay *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), feminist scholar Donna Haraway wrote of

understanding the limitations of objectivity through a feminist lens. Rather than studying bias to transcend it and achieve a god-like 'infinite vision' (Haraway, 1988, p. 582), this thesis examines bias to contextualise what Haraway termed our "situated knowledges" and understand the curator's particular, embodied experience of objects. Haraway's theory is supported by the positionality discussed by museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who argued that the 'meanings of objects are constructed from the position from which they are viewed' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 103). Therefore, by beginning to understand what informs our biases, we can begin to 'become answerable for what we learn how to see' (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

The world is awash with stimuli which humans navigate using cognition. To move efficiently through this world and without experiencing cognitive overload, our brains engage in mental shortcuts, or heuristics, which are based in part on our previous experiences of similar situations. While heuristics are useful in processing stimuli, they can result in blindspots, or what psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman termed "cognitive biases", during decision-making (Tversky, and Kahneman, 1974; Ayton, 2012; Korteling, Brouwer and Toet, 2018). In their landmark article *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (1974), Tversky and Kahneman identified three major heuristics which emerged when decisions were made in ambiguous situations: representativeness (how much one thing resembles another); availability (assessing the likelihood of something occurring based on ease of remembering similar situations); and adjustment and anchoring (using indicators in a problem as a starting point for its solution) (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Kahneman and psychologist Shane Frederick later modified the latter heuristic from adjustment and anchoring to *affect* heuristic, identifying the importance of affect and that 'every stimulus evokes an affective evaluation, and that this evaluation can occur outside of awareness' (Kahneman and Frederick, 2002, pp. 56-57). Within the context of heuristics, affect is a 'useful oversimplification' (Kahneman and Frederick, 2002, p. 57) of perception into

binary interpretations of an object, for example: large or small; soft or hard; strong or weak.

These three heuristics: representativeness, availability, and affect, can be applied directly to the MCA of worn clothing. Even when they have not encountered an individual garment previously, the dress/fashion curator based in UK institutional collections will have examined similar (often Western European) garments that they are familiar with (representativeness); will recall knowledge from previous analyses to identify aspects of the garment (availability); and will engage with the object sensorially (affect). The more MCA experience a curator accrues, the more apparently efficient they will be at making decisions about what an object *is* and what it might represent.

The division between decision-making that relies on heuristics, and more deliberate cognitive operation is termed "dual-process theory" in neuroscience. Psychologists Keith E. Stanovich and Richard F. West gathered cognitive processes under two systems, "System 1" being fast, low-effort, and 'highly contextualized, personalized, and socialized' to the person and "System 2" being slower, high-effort, and a more controlled analytical process which can 'decontextualize and depersonalize problems' (Stanovich and West, 2002, p. 436). Kahneman and Frederick observe that neither system of cognition is more likely to produce bias than the other, with System 1 hosting inherent bias and System 2 accommodating learned bias. However, for experts such as the dress/fashion curator, System 1 is the cognitive process often applied during MCA due to its innate efficiency, which then dictates System 2 processes. For example, System 1 thinking would analyse a garment, note that it appears similar in style to a previous dress the curator has examined, and proceed to analyse this garment as though it were also a "dress" with the attending inherent cultural assumptions and associations concerning femininity and design. Ideally, the curator would have time to engage with System 2 thinking, taking these automatic associations

and analysing them for 'the quality of these proposals, which it may endorse, correct, or override' (Kahneman and Frederick, 2002, p. 51). However, in this thesis I hypothesise that factors specific to the working conditions in institutional collections of dress/fashion in the UK do not allow for this length of processing time. These fundamental processes of brain function, heuristics and cognitive processing, are viewed within this thesis as "Cognitive Factors" informing curatorial bias.

Addressing Bias in Dress/Fashion Curation

Despite the number of subject specialist experts at the core of the discipline, the exploration of cognitive bias has remained at the periphery of dress/fashion museology, with little consideration for the potential impact of bias on wearer/object biography. Where the concept of bias *has* been acknowledged, it is viewed as the byproduct of a curator's lived experience to be navigated or applied as a tool during MCA (Mida and Kim, 2015; Bide, 2017; Lamothe and Pearn, 2023). This can be understood as positionality (following Haraway and Hooper-Greenhill), and distinct from the original approach taken in this thesis, which addresses the sources informing decision-making bias.

Most comprehensive reviews of the history of a dress/fashion have noted how previous, rather than current, curatorial preoccupations have shaped the development and content of collections (for example Taylor, 2004; Wood, 2016). These passive observations have been made retrospectively, as in the extensive research of dress historian Lou Taylor who observed the historical 'lack of interest' (Taylor, 2002, p. 51) by dress/fashion curators in collecting garments from outside of Western European, elite womenswear. Curator Miles Lambert similarly identified generalised 'curatorial interests' (Lambert, 2021, p. 46) as impacting the contents of the collection at Platt Hall, Manchester, rather than identifying the specific factors informing curatorial bias.

The influence of curatorial bias was identified by curators Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim in *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-Based Research in Fashion* (2015). They wrote that 'personal biases and beliefs' should be identified and documented lest they 'unwittingly transfer the expression of sexuality, gender roles, class, and status' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 66) from the curator's own location to the garment. Mida and Kim were correct that these aspects are social constructs situated in specific temporal and geographic locations and are therefore susceptible to misinterpretation, but they did not examine how this can be mitigated other than to privately identify and note the 'stylistic preferences and cultural biases' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 66) of the curator. The example they used to illustrate the manifestation of bias is the potential contemporary repulsion to a once high-status garment, the mink stole, which seemed to conflate conscious personal preference with cognitive bias (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 66). This methodology was examined in *Material Culture Methodologies* (p. 51). In this thesis, I argue that simply acknowledging bias is not enough to mitigate curatorial interruption, nor its potential impact on the interpretation of a garment or on the retention of wearer/object biography.

The MCA methodology suggested by Mida and Kim was incorporated into the research of fashion historian Bethan Bide, who combined her own corporeal experience of being dressed and personal memories with the close study of historical garments. Bide identified the difficulty in being subjective when analysing the material culture of clothing, however she viewed this subjectivity as a research tool and applied the 'shared bodily knowledge through which we relate to clothes' (Bide, 2017, pp. 453-454) and Mida and Kim's methodology to her examination of objects.

Addressing Bias Outside of Dress/Fashion Curation

The lack of previous critical research on the impact of cognitive bias on decisions made by the dress/fashion curator during MCA demonstrates a gap of knowledge

within the discipline. This thesis aims to address this gap, while suggesting potential strategies to mitigate these effects. To support this aim, theories are drawn from comparable fields which incorporate the analysis of history and/or material culture into regular practice, and which have addressed cognitive bias in their practitioners, including psychoanalysis, textile conservation, and museology more broadly.

Psychoanalysis is a field which relies on examination of the unconscious to treat the conscious mind, through patient dialogue with an analyst. The question of bias in analysts and how this can impact the treatment of a patient is a long-standing area of critical attention (Bion, 1970; 1984; Bollas, 1992; Lacewing, 2013). It was an area of particular interest for psychoanalyst Wilfred Ruprecht Bion, who wrote in *Attention and Interpretation* (1970) of the danger in an analyst desiring a particular reaction or non-reaction from a patient during treatment, which he argued blocked the patient's unconscious from truly emerging during analysis. Bion posited that if an analyst was 'looking with bias, you will miss the truth of the object' yet he followed this statement immediately with the seeming contradiction that 'there is no truth of an object, no "ultimate reality", only the knowledge of the object through its experience' (Bion, 1970, p. 40). In the context of MCA of other people's worn clothing, is it ever possible to know the "ultimate reality" of wearer/object biography, when the curator will never *be* the original wearer? It could be argued that if a curator is looking at a garment with an expectation of a particular narrative (an example of confirmation bias) they will certainly miss aspects of wearer/object biography that do not fit that narrative.

The concept of desire on the part of the analyst was identified by historian Carolyn Steedman in *Dust* (2001), who located the archive as a place 'to do with longing and appropriation' (Steedman, 2001, p. 80) and the motivation to make sense of the assemblage at the heart of history-writing. Researcher Joan Scott further incorporated the concept of practitioner motivation into her examination

of psychohistorians, observing that their incorporation of psychoanalysis into their examination of time and causality allowed them to examine 'their own motives, perhaps their personal reasons for taking up or avoiding certain projects' (Scott, 2012, p. 78). Scott pointed out that individual practice did not necessarily make the wider discipline more critical of bias in the study of history. Her observation is reflected in dress/fashion curation, where I argue that while individual curators may be aware of potential sources of bias, this is not reflected in a wider study of the factors informing which aspects of wearer/object biography are interpreted by curators and thus documented in institutional collections.

Australian museologists Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton argued that the institutional structure plays an important role in establishing how objects are interpreted and histories are represented. In their 2019 examination of the historical exclusion of queer biographies in museum collections, they identified that the 'massive over-representation of white, middle/upper class, able-bodied, cisgender men in positions of power' was reflected in the collected objects, and the histories represented in these objects (Sullivan and Middleton, 2019, p. 60). They contended that regardless of the motivations of the *individual* practitioner, collections would be 'highly politicized, and full of bias' (Sullivan and Middleton, 2019, p. 62) and dictated by the wider institutional environment.

The unifying concern which has emerged from the research in these fields is that practitioner bias *does* exist and can deeply impact research, particularly if it is undertaken without giving due consideration to the factors shaping this bias. In this thesis, focus on both internal and external factors informing curatorial bias will be addressed. Given that there are many forms of bias available to study, the following section establishes a rationale for determining which areas are examined in this thesis.

The Four Idols

In this research, I applied Itiel Dror's contemporary interpretation of theories from 17th century English philosopher Francis Bacon to establish the parameters of the study of bias in this thesis. Bacon was a foundational figure in the study of scientific methodology and empirical knowledge (Klein and Giglioni, 2020), who four centuries ago wrote *Novum Organum* (1620), his analysis of human understanding. In the text, Bacon founded an early theory of bias through his doctrine of "idols" or "eidola": what he viewed as the causes of erroneous perception of the world (Oxford Reference, 2023). Using this model, he categorised four sources of bias: *Idola Tribus* (translated as idols of the tribe); *Idola Specus* (idols of the den or cave); *Idola Fori* (idols of the market); *Idola Theatri* (idols of theatre) (Bacon, 1620).

In 2009, Itiel Dror built on Bacon's model and revised it for contemporary application in his examination of forensic practice, creating a framework for understanding and countering points of potential bias when examining material from crime scenes. Much like contemporary dress/fashion museology, Bacon believed that simply being aware of bias was enough to control it, whereas Dror argued that identification of bias must be combined with critical examination and practical methods to mitigate them, as I argue in this thesis.

This section will briefly outline and analyse Bacon's idols alongside Dror's updated interpretation: Bacon's *Idola Tribus* (what Dror interpreted as: inherent perceptional bias); *Idola Specus* (practitioner preoccupation and expertise); *Idola Fori* (the form and flow of information between practitioners and within a discipline); and finally *Idola Theatre* (practitioner belief, or "superstition") (Dror, 2009).

Idola Tribus (Idols of the Tribe)

Bacon wrote that this idol was 'inherent in human nature' with perceptions that

are specific 'to man and not to the universe' (Bacon, 1620, p. 20), and that human minds are 'uneven mirrors' which impart their own distorted reflections of the objects around them (Bacon, 1620, p. 21). Therefore, we can understand Bacon's *Idola Tribus* as the acknowledgement of the basic subjectivity of human perception. This is reflected in the concept of heuristics discussed earlier in this chapter, which prioritise and synthesise information and result in our ability to only perceive certain aspects of any object at one time. Dror argues that Bacon identified the selective nature of cognition through this idol, noting that it is a consequence of 'the architecture of cognition that defines our perception, judgments, and decision making' (Dror, 2009, p. 96).

In the context of the dress/fashion curator, the process of MCA with worn clothing engages both "bottom-up" and "top-down" brain processes: Bottom-up referring to incoming information, and top-down drawn from pre-existing knowledge (Dror, 2011, p. 182). Bottom-up processing is a direct reaction to sensory stimuli and when examining a worn garment, it could be the practitioner's response to wafting scent, the feel or colour of the fabric. Top-down can be influenced by factors including the context of the presented information, past experiences and knowledge, or expectations of findings. Experts rely more on top-down information, which allows more efficient processing than bottom-up data, but this reliance can distort how the data is processed. Top-down processing is dictated by the individual's personal experience and expectations of what they are engaging with: they understand from prior experience that the scent is perfume or body odour or a fabric is silk or wool, rather than processing these as new stimuli. It is important to understand that these processes are inherent to the function of our brain, and are therefore deeply ingrained in every activity we undertake. The potential sources of bias derived from these sensory engagements were discussed in the previous section addressing heuristics and cognitive processing, and will be addressed further in the section on *Sensory Engagement Bias* (p. 207).

Idola Specus (Idols of the Den or Cave)

For Bacon, education and experience held powerful sway over human perception, whether these impressions came from 'intercourse with others, or from his reading, and the authority acquired by those whom he reverences and admires' (Bacon, 1620, p. 21). We can understand Bacon's *Idola Specus* as those learned (rather than inherent) preferences, what Dror identified as a 'function of nurture' (Dror, 2009, p. 99) which includes personal preoccupations and motivations. He notes that this goes beyond mere motivation and include 'how individuals see themselves and with whom they want to identify' (Dror, 2009, p. 101)

In dress/fashion curation, this can include interest in specific research areas, subject specialism, and professional affiliations with colleagues and institutions. This thesis argues that dress/fashion curation is a discipline formed of highly specialised practitioners in a closely interconnected network, and that production of object analyses which reiterate and reinforce dominant areas of disciplinary interest, contributes to establishing and maintaining their status as an expert within the discipline. This source of bias will be discussed further in the chapter *Disciplinary Bias* (p. 234).

Idola Fori (Idols of the Market)

Bacon wrote that *Idola Fori* was concerned with language, the 'commerce and association of men with each other' (Bacon, 1620, p. 21) and the way words can be misunderstood and misconstrued by our peers. In modern forensic science, Dror identified this issue with miscommunication as based in unclear 'terminology, vocabulary and jargon' and a lack of 'measurable criteria, definition, and quantification' (Dror, 2009, p 103) in the processes currently used to identify evidence.

Within dress/fashion curation, there are many practical processes and systems

employed during the analysis and documentation of worn clothing, and they can vary depending on the institution. Although the focus of this thesis is on the individual methodology and biases of the curator, it is necessary to take into account the wider working environment and how this might factor into the formation of curatorial bias. This can include the influence of collecting policy, collection database systems, physical location of their workspace, and the constraints of time and job security on their individual practice. These factors will be examined in the chapter *Working Environment* bias (p. 277).

Idola Theatri (Idols of Theatre)

The last in Bacon's series was *Idol Theatri*, which he viewed as 'various dogmas of peculiar systems of philosophy' (Bacon, 1620, p. 22). He argued that (at the time of his writing the text) too much emphasis was placed on theoretical rather than empirical understanding of the world, and he was particularly concerned about those who based their understanding of the world on "superstition", seeking and deriving 'the sciences from spirits and genii' (Bacon, 1620, p. 35). Translated to the contemporary area of forensic investigation, Dror observed that in each decision a practitioner made, there would be that which they verified through analysis of data, and that which they innately *believed* to be true (2009, pp. 106-107).

Applying this particular idol to the MCA of worn clothing requires closer examination, as dress/fashion curation is situated in the humanities and not science. Furthermore, the interpretation of wearer/object biography in an individual garment is a form of qualitative rather than quantitive data gathering and therefore cannot be substantiated in the same way that forensic evidence might be. However, I believe that this theory can still be useful in framing the emotional and affective aspects of handling and interpreting worn clothing. In his time Bacon viewed superstition as an external factor (owing to religion or philosophy), however I argue that in the centuries since he wrote his text, a more

nuanced view of our systems of belief and how they inform our understanding of the world has developed. Therefore, rather than a byproduct of organised religion, *Idola Theatri* can be understood as influenced emotion and affect, two sources of bias which will be explored in the section on *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias* (p. 221).

The interpretation of *The Four Idols* by Dror has been used in this section as a guiding method for setting parameters on which areas of cognitive bias to examine, and as a method of highlighting cognitive issues specific to dress/fashion curators.

Having established the areas which will be examined for sources contributing to decision-making bias (the senses, working environment, the discipline of dress/fashion curation, memory and emotion), two particular forms of cognitive bias are discussed as foundational sources, and which will be used as points of reference throughout this thesis: *confirmation bias* and *expert bias*. These two particular forms were selected upon review of scholarship which has previously addressed bias, drawn from fields where practitioners work closely with material culture, namely in forensic science.

Confirmation bias can be understood as the search for information which verifies an assumption, and which will cause the observer to look for evidence which specifically corroborates this belief (Braisby and Gellatly, 2012; Kahneman, 2013). In their examination of confirmation bias in forensics experts Saul Kassin, Itiel Dror, and Jeff Kukucka argued that these 'pre-existing beliefs, expectations, motives, and situational context' can 'influence the collection, perception, and interpretation of evidence' (Kassin, Dror, Kukucka, 2013, p.45). As was discussed in the chapter on *Material Culture* (p. 38), forensic science is a field where analysts often employ strategies involving the close investigation of objects (what they term "evidence"). Forensic scientists apply methods comparable to those used in

the MCA of clothing: analysis of types of textiles, signs of wear or staining, comparison with similar styles of clothing. Forensic scientists are attempting to construct a narrative of events illustrated by material evidence, much like the dress/fashion curator is analysing worn clothing to establish historical narratives. Examples of confirmation bias in the analysis of worn clothing could be assuming the gender of wearer based on the design of the garment, or interpreting signs of wear to support a pre-determined hypothesis about an aspect of the wearer/object biography.

This thesis is focused on worn clothing objects acquired without the explicit autobiographical testimony of the original wearer, these circumstances may include donation by a family member, purchase at auction, or an unsolicited object may be deposited at an institutional collection anonymously.[7] Thus any accompanying biographical information (or lack thereof) which is provided at the time of the acquisition will ultimately be the interpretation of someone who was not the original wearer (for example a family member or auction house specialist). These subjective interpretations may be used by the dress/fashion curator to establish a hypothesis about wearer/object biography prior to MCA, which they then seek confirmation for during object analysis. Confirmation bias can be exacerbated if contextual biographical information is provided to a curator by a donor or colleague with particular status or experience in the discipline (Forensic Science Regulator, 2015), which may be considered by the curator to be a definitive narrative, or if an object has been acquired because an aspect of its material design or biography meets specific collecting criteria.

Psychologists Nancy Pennington and Reid Hastie argued that confirmation bias can be considered an 'explanation-based' model of decision-making, where

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[7] There are legal and ethical issues with acquiring unsolicited anonymous donations due to unknown or unclear provenance (Museums Association, 2020). This would be an issue for collecting committees and outside of the scope of this thesis, which focuses on the period after an object has been approved for acquisition.

'decision makers begin their process by constructing a causal model to explain the available facts' (Pennington and Hastie, 1993, p. 123). They posited that the decision maker (in this research, the curator undertaking MCA) builds their story, reliant on second- and third-hand information which creates gaps in a narrative, susceptible to inference from material evidence. In the case of analysis of worn clothing, this information may be provided by testimony from a donor about circumstances of a garments wear. The curator then seeks material evidence to support this hypothetical narrative. If this evidence is found, a decision is made about the veracity of this narrative, which is then typically documented by the curator in the institutional collection catalogue, thus an interpretation of wearer/object biography is enshrined as historical fact.

Expert bias[8] occurs in those practitioners who have highly developed cognitive abilities specific to a certain task and can handle a high level of information (termed 'cognitive load') at a more efficient level than novices, which allows them able to perform this task efficiently and without seeming to "think" about it (Dror, 2011; Braisby and Gellatly, 2012). In dress/fashion curation, the analysis and handling of objects often becomes second nature to curators employed in institutional collections. Over the course of their career, these skills accrue and may become innate to their practice. Through this sustained activity, experts acquire causal knowledge of expected outcomes in their research, creating a contextual narrative first and then seeking evidence to support this narrative. Cognitive psychologists Jan Maarten Schraagen and Henk Leijenhorst studied this manifestation of tacit knowledge in forensic scientists, observing that the constructed narrative directed them in their search process:

'[…] it determines the relative importance of the exhibits, where to search on the

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[8] This thesis applies Dror's distinction of expertise as a cognitive function obtained through repetitive experience and training, rather than a construct based on institutional certification or professional-social qualification (Dror, 2011).

exhibit, when to stop, and what traces to preserve. The story also justifies why particular traces are not being preserved.' (Maarten Schraagen and Leijenhorst, 2001, p. 264)

They further observed that the ability to construct the narrative at all was indication of expertise. In Dror's examination of expert bias, he determined that selective attention, reliance on heuristics, and the expectations arising from honed expertise rendered seasoned experts *more* likely to make biased decisions (Dror, 2020, p. 7999). The same cognitive tools developed to administer this expertise can also 'restrict flexibility and control' causing 'experts to miss and ignore important information' (Dror, 2011, p. 177) creating a tunnel vision for which aspects they perceive and interpret. For the dress/fashion curator, who museologist Michael Belcher identified as the 'communicators and interpreters' of institutional collections and who 'by virtue of their expert knowledge, decide on topics for exhibitions and how the collections will be interpreted' (Belcher, 1991, p. 77), this expertise can also create a myopic view of which aspects of wearer/object biography are interpreted. This can be related in terms of Bacon's *Idola Specus*: biases which arise from factors including education and what he termed "habit" (Bacon, 1620, p. 28).

Conclusion

This chapter has established an understanding of cognitive bias through theories and examples drawn from fields including psychology and neuroscience, and has identified a gap in knowledge regarding cognitive bias within dress/fashion museology. Prior to this thesis, the brain processes of curators have not been examined as a source of decision-making bias informing the interpretation of worn clothing. Having established this source, the concepts of confirmation and expert bias have been identified as specific forms of foundational bias which impact the analysis of objects. Examination of Dror's contemporary interpretation of *The Four Idols* has been used to set the parameters for the investigation of

additional sources of decision-making bias in the dress/fashion curator during the MCA of worn clothing: *Sensory Engagement, Disciplinary* and *Working Environment, Mnemonic and Emotional.*

With this groundwork laid in understanding cognitive bias, the following chapters will weave the concept throughout the review and discussion of scholarship which provides the theoretical and contextual approach to this thesis.

1.4 Phenomenology

This thesis discusses material and immaterial wearer/object biography, the experience of the curator, and the points of contact between these. This has required a research approach which is sympathetic and useful to both the theoretical and practical aspects of these topics. In a 1972 conversation between philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Deleuze emphasised the importance of theory as a tool and stressed that without practical use or function, theories are "worthless" (Foucault, 1980, p. 208). At points during my research, I was concerned that unravelling and making sense of these theories can be a dense and time-consuming process, and overemphasis on the theoretical underpinnings has the potential to draw the focus from the practice-led nature of this research. By taking a broadly phenomenological (discussed in the following chapter) and new materialist approach to this research (discussed further in chapter 5), I argue that both the real-world, tangible aspects of undertaking the MCA of worn clothing, and the intangible elements of experience (both being dressed and encountering clothing during practice) are given their due consideration.

This chapter surveys previous scholarship drawn from fields including archaeology, fashion studies, and quantum physics to situate one of the key theoretical approaches to the research in this thesis, phenomenology: the study of experience, consciousness, and phenomena. Archaeologist Julian Thomas identified this as 'the human encounter, experience and understanding of worldly things, and with how these happenings come to be possible' (Thomas, 2013, p. 43). This chapter provides a background and rationale for selecting the phenomenological approach of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as a research framework. Despite the widely acknowledged sensory power of textiles and clothing (Dudley, 2010; Chong Kwan, 2016; 2020), to this point in dress/fashion museology, there has been relatively little application of a phenomenological approach to the curatorial practice of MCA. Therefore, previous relevant academic research from

fields including anthropology, archaeology, and dress/fashion theory will be used to support this understanding of the 'lived world of everyday activity' (Thomas, 2013, p. 47).

Experience of the world informs the main concern of this thesis: how the wearer interacts with the world through their dressed body, and how the dress/fashion curator perceives an object of worn clothing during MCA. These encounters form an understanding of the world: for the wearer, experience informs their embodied interaction with the world through their clothing; for the curator, their experience of the world will inform their subjectivities and biases. This also includes factors which were discussed in chapters on cognitive function (p. 60), and will be discussed in chapters on sensory (p. 207), affective (p. 89) and emotional engagement (p. 221). "Embodied" in this thesis, following from the definition of anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas, refers to the state of 'perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world' (Csordas, 1996, p. 12). The nature of this research requires a theory centred in the body, leading to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodied consciousness in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).

In his text, Merleau-Ponty rejected the separation of mind and body presented by 17th century French philosopher René Descartes and built on the study of phenomena proposed by philosophers including Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of "being-in-the-world", Merleau-Ponty presented perception as a unification of cognition and corporeality: an embodied experience. He proposed that as we come to grasp the phenomena of the world sensorially and through the positionality of our individual bodies, we come to understand it 'from a perspective that is my own' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. lxxii). He argued that while we can attempt to view the world objectively and to put ourselves in the position of how another might experience it, we cannot transcend our own experience, and that our relative positions demonstrate that

no one cultural standpoint is central to understanding the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 119; Jackson, 1996, p. 9). Merleau-Ponty also stressed that we are not simply removed observers of phenomena but that we participate in systems of experience and, to paraphrase feminist philosopher Silvia Stoller in her examination of poststructuralist critique of phenomenology, we build on these experiences to investigate the phenomena in the world around us (Stoller, 2009, p. 709).

Merleau-Ponty's focus on sensory modes of comprehending the world is fundamental to the practical element of this research. As will be discussed in the chapter on *Sensory Engagement Bias* (p. 207), when dress/fashion curators investigate the material of worn clothing, they are performing an embodied analysis with their senses engaged on nearly every level. This can include visual inspection, olfactory assessment (for example, sniffing for signs of wear), and using comparative analysis with their own experience of being dressed to construct a proprioceptive (the sense of the body in motion) understanding of how a garment might have been worn. The only defined sense[9] not usually playing a part in the material culture analysis of worn clothing is taste, though an argument could be made for particles inhaled by the curator (which will be discussed further on p. 93) also being perceived gustatorily. To further contextualise the phenomenological approach to MCA I will provide a practical example. When a dress/fashion curator encounters a garment they have never seen before, they can begin to understand how it might have been worn through touching it (often, through gloves), through their kinaesthetic experience of the clothes they are themselves wearing, through smelling the textile. These sensory experiences become 'linked together, motivate each other, and are involved in each other' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 317) and produce an understanding of the

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[9] Definition of senses is culturally formed, which will be discussed further in the chapter on *Sensory Engagement Bias*. When this thesis refers to sensory engagement, it is situated within the Western sensory tradition, as this research is situated in the UK and focused on UK-based curators.

object we now behold.

In his foreword to *Phenomenology of Perception*, philosopher Taylor Carman wrote that phenomenology uses the first person perspective to attempt to 'describe the basic structures of human experience and understanding' (Carman, 2012, p. viii), grounding the theory in a subjective experience of the world. In part because of its materialisation of human experience, this framework has often been applied to the study of material culture, particularly in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, and sociology (Crossley, 1996; Jackson, 1996; Miller, 2005; Tilley *et al.*, 2013). In his examination of phenomenological approaches to material culture, Thomas observed that studies of spaces such as architecture and landscapes have more frequently used this approach than to he what terms 'portable artefacts', or in this thesis, garments. Thomas does not indicate why this might be the case (Thomas, 2013, p. 57), drawing on positionality and sensory engagement to elucidate an understanding of places that carry a meaning otherwise difficult to grasp from our contemporary experience. He refers specifically to the study of British pre-historic landscapes by archaeologist Christopher Tilley, noting that Tilley's physical experience of these areas highlights his positionality as an able-bodied 'white, middle-class man' (Thomas, 2013, p. 55), and that his understanding of these spaces is rooted in his first-hand experience. Phenomenology, by Thomas' logic, is an approach which emphasises the entirely subjective experience of phenomena. I extend this approach to the phenomena of being dressed, which although a universal human practice, is also a subjective experience based on the 'moods, attunements and emotional states' (Thomas, 2013, p. 57) of the people encountering and wearing clothing.

Although he did not address clothing in great depth, Merleau-Ponty did acknowledge the potential of garments to become 'appendages of the body' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 93). He emphasised their haptic qualities, characteristics which can aid in understanding how the wearer perceives the world *through* their

dressed body, for instance, the hand feeling the inside fabric of a glove while simultaneously feeling a surface *through the* glove. This approach also offers a method of assessing clothing as a materialised extension of the self, and intrinsic to our 'corporeal schema' (Negrin, 2016, p. 130), therefore not only how we perceive the world but how we are perceived by others. The embodied self, with clothing-as-appendages included in that self, is a concept central to dress/fashion studies, with an early crucial connection established by sociologist Joanne Entwistle. She used Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework as an acknowledgment of 'the way in which dress works on the body which in turn works on and mediates the experience of self' (Entwistle, 2000, p. 334). For Entwistle, clothing is part of the material connective tissue in the relationship between the body and culture, and her framing of getting dressed as a 'situated bodily practice' (Entwistle, 2000, p. 34) has resulted in Merleau-Ponty's approach now regularly being applied by fashion theorists in wardrobe studies (Woodward, 2007; Chong Kwan, 2016; Whyman, 2019; Sampson, 2020; Ruggerone and Stauss, 2022).

Merleau-Ponty did not account for the complexities of gendered corporeal experience (Negrin, 2016, p.122), nor did he examine the intersecting phenomena of sexual identity, social class, or race. As discussed above, these experiences will dictate how the world is experienced by a subject. Despite these limitations, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is still useful in framing not just a generalised "self", but the many intricate factors which we now know inform how people dress to express themselves in the world. For example, theorist Sophie Woodward drew on Merleau-Ponty to articulate how the embodied nature of clothing affects both proprioception and self-actualisation in *Why Women Wear What they Wear* (2007):

'This embodied self-perception arises from how women feel in their own bodies, as their legs feel longer, their backs are straightened; this is also based upon how the

body looks. The smirk from passers-by can shatter the confidence of the woman who had been assertively striding forth in high heels. This encounter with how their bodies look is also faced alone in front of the mirror, as women are wondering not only whether they like their new skirt, but whether it makes their legs look too short or their bottom look too big.' (Woodward, 2007, p. 17)

Similarly, fashion theorist Sara Chong Kwan has routinely applied Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to her studies of the wearer's experience of their everyday worn clothing (Chong Kwan, 2016; 2020), de-centring the visual assessment of the dressed self and examining the wider sensory 'dressed atmosphere' (Chong Kwan, 2016, p. 290) which worn clothing creates. I would propose that this atmosphere can include elements of social performance, an aspect theorist Judith Butler invoked in an early examination of gender. Butler applied Merleau-Ponty to their examination of gender performance, specifically his statement that humans are an 'historical idea, not a natural species' (2012, p. 174). Butler viewed this concept as the body constantly and actively in a 'process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities' (1988, p. 521), of which clothing is a tool. Although she did not apply Merleau-Ponty specifically in her research on the queer dressed body, sociologist Ruth Holliday documented the phenomenological nature of dressing through her analysis of videotaped diaries submitted by members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community. The wearers discussed their presentation of self in public and how their garments made them feel both physically and emotionally, with an emphasis on "comfort". Comfort was expressed as both a haptic sensation and a sense of ease and a way to 'close the gap between performance (acting) and ontology (being)' (Holliday, 2001, p. 222), gesturing toward Butler's work and the idea of clothing as both a personal and a public tool.

This thesis is concerned with how the curator perceives an object during interpretation and how their subjectivity informs this perception, and I argue that

phenomenology is an appropriate framework in considering the subjective (we perceive phenomena) and objectifying (we are perceived as phenomena) nature of wearing and analysing clothing. Despite the sensory, embodied nature of object analysis, little scholarly research has applied Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to this aspect of the dress/fashion curator's practice. Curators Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim quote Merleau-Ponty in their dress/fashion-specific MCA approach *The Dress Detective* (2015):

'In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it.' (Merleau-Ponty quoted in Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 40)

Unfortunately, they did not critically examine what this selected text might mean in terms of curatorial positionality, nor how this subjectivity might factor into decisions around object interpretation and documentation.

Focus on habitation or embodiment has arguably always been present in dress/fashion curatorial practice, although it has not often been identified as phenomenology. As a discipline, close study of material objects designed for the body has been at the core of dress/fashion research, and this has been particularly true amongst those curators grounded in object-based practice (Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2002; de la Haye and Clark, 2008; Palmer, 2013; Davidson, 2016; Mida, 2017). A notable exception is the research of Ellen Sampson, who has been heavily influenced by the concept of bodily schema put forward by Merleau-Ponty, particularly in viewing accessories as an extension of the body. In *Worn* (2020a) Sampson documented the process of making, wearing, and photographing shoes as an embodied method of grasping the affective nature of footwear within institutional collections. As her practice situated and made 'inseparable' (Sampson, 2020a, p. 43) her specific experience of wear, it provided a poetic example of object analysis praxis. However, I argue this would not be a

practical approach to assessing bias in the working environment due to its time-consuming nature, the specificity of the skill applied in her approach, and its centring of curatorial subjectivity in object interpretation. The lack of scholarly research in the discipline examining how embodiment and subjectivity are intrinsic factors in decision-making during MCA highlights the need for the research offered in this thesis.

A phenomenological approach to object engagement has been embraced in the wider field of museology, as evidenced by the work of foundational Susan Pearce. Pearce framed her study of visitors' common cultural recognition of exhibited objects through Husserl's concept of "essence" or shared perception (1992, pp. 211-216). Two decades later, anthropologist Howard Morphy had observed enough progress in the field to identify a clear "phenomenological turn", with increased interest in 'the body and theories of embodiment and steps toward an anthropology of the senses' (Morphy, 2010, 278). Scholarship examining visitor engagement in museums has often been the locus for a Merleau-Pontian phenomenological research approach, precisely because of the shared interest in sensory engagement beyond the purely visual (Zimmer, Jefferies and Srinivasan, 2008; Belova, 2012; Rees Leahy, 2012; Pallasmaa, 2014). This was the concern of Julia Petrov, who drew on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in her doctoral analysis of historical dress/fashion exhibitions held in museums, which she argued 'provide a space for intellectual and physical encounters between people, things, and ideas' (Petrov, 2012, p. 194). She noted that the traditional museological focus on visuality had decontextualised and dematerialised displayed clothing in a dress/fashion exhibition held within institutional spaces and away from their functional previous lives. Petrov pointed to the resulting 'uncomfortable and uncanny difference between lived experience and the appearance of museum simulacra' (2012, pp. 252-253). Her research highlighted that the comprehension of curated dress/fashion exhibitions relies on the visitor having an embodied understanding of what it feels and means to be dressed.

Framing the subjective nature of the curator's perception is a key concern of this thesis, and Merleau-Ponty was clear in his belief that humans orient their experience of the world through their individual embodied position within it. Applying a phenomenological framework to dress/fashion curatorial practice, MCA can be viewed as a subjective experience and one which fundamentally shapes representation of wearer/object biography within the institutional collection according to how it is perceived by the curator at the time of initial analysis and documentation. The curator encounters an object and understands it to have particular meanings according to which aspects of the object become apparent to them during contact and their own perception of the object (informed through the senses, emotion, and memory). Committing these subjective epistemological understandings to the "official" documentation (catalogues, databases) of the institutional collection will affect the meaning and potentially the materialised nature of the worn garment. Although arguably this could happen during any contact between a practitioner (researcher, conservator) and the worn garment, it is the role of the curator as the interpreter and documentarian of wearer/object biography during the initial point of acquisition MCA that is the focus of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has framed the wearer's life experience and the curator's experience of MCA using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories, which emphasise the multisensory nature of coming to know and experience the world around us. Clothing is presented as appendage to our corporeal bodies, which shapes how we perceive the world: informing our sensory experiences, and guiding our public performance. Despite the embodied nature of object analysis, it was determined that little previous critical scholarship has applied his theories specifically this area of curatorial practice. Thus, discussion of how this approach has been used in other relevant fields concerned with material culture, including sociology, fashion

studies, anthropology, and archaeology, has been used to rationalise it as a foundation for understanding the embodied, sensory nature of MCA. Phenomenology has been applied to contextualise the experience of the curator and how their perception of the world informs curatorial subjectivity and their interpretation of worn garments.

The following chapter examines the theoretical implications of the curator coming into contact with worn garments, through the approach of new materialist thought.

1.5 New Materialism

While phenomenology anchors the experience of encountering the world through the body of the curator, consideration must also be made for the other factor directly involved in MCA: the material object. The following section establishes the affective nature of non-human matter during MCA, as framed by new materialist theory. The term "affect" will be defined, followed by a review of relevant previous scholarship in museology and dress/fashion studies which has applied a new materialist framework, supported by similar approaches taken in sociology, physics, and material culture studies. As the research in this thesis is situated within the UK, and is studying UK-based practitioners, this chapter draws on primarily Western ways of knowing and Western sources discussing affect.

In one respect, this thesis applies a question asked by Gilles Deleuze in his materialist analysis of *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988): 'how can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world?' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 126). It is an ethical question which emerges throughout this thesis in the discussion of curatorial practice. Deleuze has been retroactively labelled as a new materialist (Ansell-Pearson, 2017) for his Spinozian ethology, which focused on the affects and assemblages between and of matter. (Deleuze, 1988; Fox and Alldred, 2021). Perhaps in part because they used the warp and weft of textiles as a practical example of affect, Deleuze's collaboration with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, has often been applied to previous studies of materiality in dress/fashion studies (Smelik, 2016; Ruggerone, 2017; Sampson, 2020b). Though this thesis does refer to Deleuzian theory, it is the interdisciplinary *new* materialisms which grew out of his early philosophical study which underpin this research.

New materialism formally developed in part from Deleuze's Spinozist ontology and his collaborations with Guattari, spreading across fields including feminist, queer, political, and scientific philosophy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries

(see Barad, 2003; 2007; Ahmed, 2009; Bennett, 2010; Coole and Frost, 2010; Braidotti, 2013). As a research approach, it places an emphasis on what social theorists Nick J. Fox and Pam Alldred identified as the affective yet immaterial "macro-structures" of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and desires (2015b). It can be broadly described as a philosophical understanding of affective relationships which defy dualist nature/culture hierarchies of affected/affecting, displace the human/researcher from a central position from which knowledge emerges, and considers research to be an ongoing and contingent assemblage rather than as possessing a fixed meaning (Deleuze, 1988; Bennett, 2010; Fox and Alldred, 2015a; 2015b). Fox and Alldred describe new materialism as a monist (rather than dualist) ontology which looks 'away from hierarchies, systems or structures beyond or beneath the surface of everyday activities and interactions' (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p. 2-3).

This approach would seem to have limits in describing the nature of the institutional collection, which was established on systems of structural hierarchies both internal (cataloguing and record-keeping) and external (the perception of the institutional collection as the keeper of "official" and true historical facts). In fact, the "affective turn" in museology most recently reviewed by cultural historian Marzia Varutti (2022) demonstrates that curatorial interest in the influence of affect, the senses, and emotions on practice has been emerging since the beginning of this century. This research has incorporated affective theory and new materialist approaches to study both the structures of museums and galleries, and the encounters which occur between people and objects within them (for example, Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2006; Dudley, 2010; Smith, Wetherell and Campbell, 2018; Varutti, 2021). The structures and systems of the institutional collection will be examined further in the chapter on *Working Environment Bias* (p. 277), however in this section new materialism is applied primarily to the individual interactions between wearer and garment, and curator and garment.

Introducing Affect

Affect is a core concept in this thesis: the ways intangible meanings are transposed between clothing and humans, and how this interaction generates experiences and understandings of the world. The most salient definition of the term "affect" comes from researchers Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth in *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), they are quoted at length here:

Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves…affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-. affect is born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness.' (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010, pp. 1-2)

The question of whether affect is a separate experience from emotion is debated: sociologist Lucia Ruggerone argued that affect is pre-cognitive, emerging as emotion only if they 'surface in the conscience' (Ruggerone, 2017, p. 585). She based this on what she read as a Deleuzian distinction (2017, p. 580). However, Sampson saw the two not in opposition, but as interpretations of the same experience which 'sit at the edge of or beyond language' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 4). In this research, I draw on the Indigenous dress theory developed by fashion researcher Shawkay Ottmann to frame affect as a type of energy emanating from matter, and emotion as the friction that results when affective energies interact.

Ottman understood what she termed the "energy" of worn clothing through

Indigenous (including Algonquian and Iroquoian) epistemologies. These ways of knowing, emphasise the interconnectedness between humans, and the transformation of energy between animate and inanimate objects, particularly the process of decomposition which nourishes plants which feed animals from whom textiles (leather, wool) are harvested to make clothing (Ottmann, 2020, pp. 6-7). Ottmann posited the dressed body as its own environment, one that interacts with other environments in a continuous exchange of energy, causing the 'dress to possess something of the wearer' (Ottmann, 2020, p. 7) even in their absence, in the case of her research, in clothing removed from children forced into residential schools. Framing worn clothing in this way implies that the energy of the wearer persists in acquired clothing, and while this might materialise in signs of wear, it may be perceived in a way that sociologist Lucia Ruggerone has observed is 'not reproducible in a strictly analytical form or vocabulary' (Ruggerone, 2017, pp. 577-578).

Affect and Absence

As an approach to understanding the material world, new materialism has been critiqued by political theorist Paul Rekret for dissolving too many boundaries between the human and non-human, and expecting an ontology to emerge which is not 'situated in human subjectivity' (Rekret, 2016, p. 229). Fox and Alldred too identified the limits of a new materialist approach in its 'conception of agency not tied to human action' (Fox and Alldred, 2015b, p. 399). These are valid criticisms, particularly as the primary stated concern of this thesis is the impact of human subjectivity on material biography. However, this is complicated by the power of clothing to equally affect humans through its sensory, social, political, economic, and environmental interactions. Therefore this thesis considers new materialism an approach that recognises the mutually affective natures of both clothing *and* humans.

In his examination of contemporary social theory, *People Without Things* (2010), archaeologist Severin Fowles levelled his criticism at new materialist theory for its focus on present, tangible objects. While this thesis is dealing ostensibly with the affective nature of material objects, this includes the affect in the intangible aspects of worn clothing, so this is worth considering. This thesis argues that despite Fowles criticism, the affective nature of the intangible is not a concept necessarily at odds with new materialism. Framing intangible qualities that Fowles identified as 'non-things, negative spaces, lost or forsaken objects, voids or gaps – absences, in other words' (Fowles, 2010, p. 25) lends them affective heft. They aren't simply *nothing*, but gaps and absences which can still be "felt" by the curator when they experience the uncanny or intuitive feeling that something is off.

Fowles also observed that "absences perform labor, frequently intensifying our emotional or cognitive engagement with that which is manifestly not present." (2010, p. 27) He built on the work of archaeologist Douglass Bailey, who studied faceless Neolithic figurines from south-eastern Europe (2007) to assess the constitutive process of "looking" at absence. Where there is a lack, or as Bailey framed it, cropped or disembodied abstractions of the human figure, the observer begins to make inferences about what is not there in order to flesh out their understanding of the figure, using 'each individual viewer's particular beliefs, understandings, interests, backgrounds and desires' (2007, p. 118) to do so. Fowles and Bailey highlight how absences can be perceived in a similar manner to the material, and be subject to the same impact of curatorial bias. This rationalises taking a phenomenological *and* new materialist approach to examining how curators might perceive the immaterial aspects of wearer/object biography.

It is the nature of dress/fashion objects to have some sort of absence which will be experienced by the curator during object analysis. These forms can be

material: 'the holes left by stitches, the impressions and the corrosions and the challenge of unpacking incomplete, incoherent remains' (Davidson, 2016, p. 240) or immaterial, like Ottman's concept of energy or what Ellen Sampson has identified as the 'encounter with an absent/present body' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 12). In the context of this thesis, it is also the absence of wearer testimony about how, where, why, and when they wore a garment. This absence creates opportunity for curatorial analysis to be led by contingent factors unrelated to wearer/object biography, such as the curator's research preoccupations or personal associations with sensory elements of the garment. Therefore how these absences are interpreted will be affected by the circumstances under which the curator makes contact with the garment.

I argue that interpretation of any aspect of a worn garment, including absences in wearer/object biography, will be biased by sources which include the affective nature of the material they are analysing (discussed further in the chapter *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*, p. 221). As with phenomenology however, there has been very little published research which directly incorporates affect theory into the examination of dress/fashion curatorial practice, specifically while undertaking MCA within the institutional collection. Two texts which do take a relevant approach are discussed in the following section, highlighting previous research incorporating affect theory into curatorial practice. While both texts discuss MCA, they do not consider affect as a source of curatorial bias, identifying a gap in knowledge and establishing the need for a critical approach to examining how curatorial bias might impact the retention of wearer/object biography, which I aim to meet in this thesis.

Affect and MCA

Dress historian Hilary Davidson drew on theory proposed by Gregg and Seigworth to understand the affective nature of decaying Nonconformist Christian burial clothing on her own practice. In her poignant analysis *Grave Emotions:*

Textiles and Clothing from Nineteenth-Century London Cemeteries (2016),
Davidson wrote of her reaction to deteriorated and fragmented material grave
garments which she analysed as part of a MoL investigation. She examined how
her close physical proximity to these objects, including a four month old baby's
satin bonnet, drew out a 'resonant emotional response' (Davidson, 2016, p. 239)
from her and in turn highlighted the reciprocal affective and sensory nature of
object analysis. She viewed this as part of the 'interpretative spheres that curators
tap into when telling stories through exhibitions or cataloging' (Davidson, 2016,
p. 239). She viewed these engagements as a demarcation of her practice, but she
did not probe how they might also act as a subjective boundary limiting which
aspects of the garments she observed and documented to the catalogue. It could
be argued that leaning into her emotional responses allowed her to locate her
own experiences, rather than that of the wearers, in the garments.

Davidson alludes to this herself, writing of how she chafed against the science-
based archaeological reports she was required to submit, which did not permit
her to include her personal, emotional responses to the garments. Deeply
affected by these garments, some of which still carried physical remains of the
people who had worn them, Davidson reflected on the personal connections they
evoked in her. She wrote that the myriad emotions she felt during analysis,
including tenderness and repulsion, lingered in her memories for years after
engaging with the objects. As she had worked closely with the material, analysing
and studying the fabric, Davidson pondered 'who was I breathing in when I forgot
my dust mask?' (Davidson, 2016, p. 239). The exchange of affect and matter
between the curator and the object, and the meaning generated from this
exchange, is worth interrogating. Would another curator, for whom these pieces
invoked different associations, have drawn different conclusions to be entered
into MoL collection catalogue? This is a question posed in the primary research
component of this thesis (p. 137), where the MCA of worn garments by three
dress/fashion curators demonstrates the variance in individual object

interpretations.

Davidson's research was built upon by Sampson in her project *The Afterlives of Clothes* (2018), where she undertook analysis and photography of worn accessories from the collection at The Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Sampson posited that garments in archives are 'both containers and producers of affect' which are impacted by curatorial practice: 'accession, storage, conservation, and display' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 1). She did not specify which aspects of accession (what I propose as the initial point of contact between garment and curator) might inform this impact, nor did she investigate what this impact might mean for the retention of wearer/object biography. However, she did identify the archive (as she termed the collection) as an emotional structure designed to 'induce and retain certain feelings' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 4). She posited that signs of wear in clothing are an opportunity for the curator to 'project aspects' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 14) of themselves during object interpretation in order to make sense of these otherwise 'absent gestures' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 9). Sampson argued that worn clothing is not simply a material document of the life lived, but a 'blurring of subject and object' and 'a rearrangement of matter so that one becomes part of another' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 11). I agree with her assessment of the power of the worn garment, reinforcing how problematic it is for the curator to project elements of themselves into any perceived absences in wearer/object biography. These two practical examples of curatorial interruption provide evidence of how an affective engagement between the dress/fashion curator and the object might impact the interpretation, documentation and thus retention of personal histories within the institutional collection.

This research approaches wearer/object biography as a form of individual life-writing, and the institutional collection as an assemblage of material which forms a version of history, which will be discussed further in the chapters *Embedded*

Biography and *Authorship*. Within this framework, it follows that the acquisition of worn garments into institutional collections will contribute material evidence toward the construction of that institution's version of history. This thesis questions how, in working within the structure and practical demands of institutional collecting policies, curators might use their practice to reiterate or resist historical marginalisation of individuals and communities through alteration, omission or inclusion of aspects of wearer/object biography. This will be addressed further in the section on *Institutional Critique*. To be clear, this research does not consider itself explicitly in the field of social justice museology (for example Sandell, 2002; 2007; Sandell and Nightingale, 2012; Cole, 2018; Scott, 2018; Langham, 2020). However, it does aim to align itself with the broader interests of representation in the UK institutional collection, of the 'phenomenology of diverse lives as they are actually lived— often in ways that are at odds with abstract normative theories or official ideologies' (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 27).

Intra-active theory and Material Evidence

Understanding how the embodied self (of the wearer; of the curator) in the world affects and is affected by other matter (human and non-human) is supported by the "intra-active" theory proposed by theorist Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Barad clarifies the difference between *interaction*, which assumes distinct agents coming to meet, and "intra-action" which they define as 'the mutual constitution of objects and agencies of observation within phenomena' (Barad, 2007, p. 197), emphasising the entangled nature of these agencies (Barad, 2007, p. 50). Barad uses quantum physics as the testing field for their theories and while this is an area of study seemingly discordant with dress/fashion museology, their approach is useful in thinking about the vacillating way curators are affected by objects, form and impose cognitive biases on object interpretation, and how these biases inform object documentation.

Barad developed their concept of "agential-realism" as an 'epistemological-

ontological-ethical' (Barad, 2007, p. 26) framework. Barad looked to contemporary physics to argue their theories, in part because physics considers matter in ongoing entanglements which work to reveal or conceal the aspects of things. In a rare previous application of Baradian theory to dress/fashion studies, theorist Ilya Parkins (2008) argued that Barad's agential-realism is a valuable feminist theoretical tool for assessment of the discursive, material, and ephemeral nature of fashion practice. This is equally true for this thesis, with particular emphasis on Barad's argument that 'matter is produced and productive, generated and generative.' (Barad, 2007, p. 137) There is a generative nature to worn clothing in the institutional collection, clothing which has materially changed through intra-action with the wearer and will transform continually despite being acquired into the collection. The worn garment will change materially, as an object now worthy of professional conservation and storage, and yet also material which will steadily degrade within the collection. It will undergo a semiotic change: it is no longer an object used for protection, warmth, or expression, but becomes a representation of different narratives in exhibitions and research or potentially as an invisible, unworn thing not destined to be removed from storage again. Barad's concept of dynamic matter can also be applied to the curator. We are changed materially with every object we encounter in the collection; we inhale microscopic fibres (Davidson, 2016, p. 239), we acquire new knowledge about the object before us which will affect and inform our future practice.

Another example of the affective relationship between matter and those studying it is found in science, specifically in proteomics research (the study of proteins produced by living cells). A 2018 research project led by chemist Alfonsina D'Amato analysed the unwashed shirt worn by author Anton Chekov at his time of death from tuberculosis. The researchers placed chemically-treated ethyl vinyl acetate discs on the garment for 60-90 minutes, subsequently analysing the discs using high resolution mass spectrometry. The results gathered from this testing determined that blood proteins for Chekov remained on the shirt, in line with his

previous diagnosis, as well as keratins (proteins from hair, skin, and nails) which could have been distributed from Chekov's fingerprints, or 'traces left over by subsequent handling of the same tissue by the museum curators when handling it' (D'Amato *et al.*, 2018, p. 6). Much as Davidson was affected by inhaling fibres on a worn garment, in the example of Chekov's shirt, the affect flowed from the curators handling the garment. These are practical examples of how the object and curator intra-act and 'are shaped by and with one another in an ongoing becoming.' (McGregor, 2019, p. 2)

As will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis, institutional collections are structures built on the acquisition of materialised evidence of history, whether this takes the form of oral histories, material culture, digital files, or curator-authored documentation. For many individuals and communities, their history is not easily found in any of these categories, it is found instead in their undocumented gestures, performances, and in the context of this research, their dressed bodies. By considering traces, ephemera, and absences - the intangible and difficult evidence of intra-actions between matter - through the lens of new materialism, this thesis argues that the curator can improve the retention of wearer/object biography in the institutional collection. This concept is drawn in part from queer methodology considering what histories survive in the margins of "official" modes of documentation.

Searching for "proof" of queer life, theorist José Esteban Muñoz found it outside of the 'dominant public sphere's visible historical narratives' (Muñoz, 1996, p. 5). Although his foundational text *Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts* (1996) was situated within performance studies, his destabilisation of evidence as something fixed and material chimes with the tenets of new materialisms. For Muñoz, "ephemeral" was not an epithet, but instead evidence of 'lives, powers, and possibilities' (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6). He argued that for the "minoritarian subject" 'ephemera, memory, performativity, or the anecdotal' were

'strategies of self-enactment' (Muñoz, 1996, p. 11) working in opposition to marginalisation. He identified as one of those marginalising forces, the archive, a place which is not structured to hold the immaterial affects and ephemeral evidence of life. This thesis argues that wearer/object biography in worn clothing (whether belonging to an LGBTQIA2S+ individual or not) be considered a form of Muñozian ephemera, and understood as affective material evidence.

Self-Diffractive Positionality of the Researcher and Curator

Many curators within UK institutions are now pursuing dress/fashion acquisitions from a broader spectrum of individuals and communities (Behlen and Khanom, no date; Woode, 2022), with a plurality of garment meanings which may not be intelligible to the curator. Christopher Tilley identified this as polysemy: there can be no one single, universal meaning of an object, because its meaning is contingent on the context of its analysis: why and where it is being examined, and by who (1994a, p. 72). Even those garments which fall within a curator's speciality will still carry what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill further distinguished as 'polysemic meanings' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 111). Without the original wearer's testimony, object meanings become intelligible through MCA, and will be contingent on the 'meaning-making sensibility' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 111) specific to the context of the analysis and to the analyst. There will be aspects of an object the curator is looking for, objects are acquired into institutional collections for specific reasons, but the concern of this thesis is what aspects are missed because of these preoccupations. This thesis argues that applying a new materialist framework to MCA provides a rigorous theoretical foundation which legitimises study of affect and contingency within the institutional collection, as a structural mechanism which has traditionally not viewed these as aspects of materiality. The collecting policies and other structures of institutional collections will be discussed in the *Working Environment Bias* chapter.

In order to understand the affective nature of the contact between curator and

object, a discussion of the positioning of the two is required. Typically in qualitative research this has been identified as "reflexivity", however I prefer the term Barad borrows from feminist scholar Donna Haraway: "diffraction" (Barad, 2007, p. 29). In *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* (1992) Haraway refuted the 'illusion of essential, fixed position' which reflection implies, while diffraction delineates the 'effects of difference' (Haraway, 1992, p. 300). In terms of the curator, due to the changing nature of being a person in-the-world and the practical elements of working, it is arguable that there could ever be a fixed position from which they always engage with objects. At points in this thesis, I draw on my first-person experience as a curator and thus must situate myself as a form of contingent, affective material in the research process. The choices I have made over the course of this research, particularly in the methods of primary research, have affected the outcome of this thesis, and have been dependent on my position in relation to the process. This self-diffractive awareness of my own practice, has incorporated auto-ethnographic methods including a practice journal (**Appendix, pp. 135-159**) to document my own bias during MCA.

As this thesis aims to show, there are multiple, conditional factors framing the contact between dress/fashion curator and worn garment, and informing the decisions about which aspects of wearer/object biography are interpreted and documented. Theorist Jane Bennett poetically summed up the way these factors assemble in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010):

'For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on.' (Bennett, 2010, p. 5)

This quote illustrates the subjective, affective nature of engagements between objects and people, supporting my argument that the dress/fashion curator is not

a neutral analyst during MCA, but is active matter, equally affective and affected by the worn garments they are interpreting.

Critical Optimistic Historiography

Adjacent to the affect theory put forward by new materialism, will be discussion of historiography as it relates to the documentation of personal histories within the institutional collection. As has been highlighted in the section on *Terminology* (p. 20), dress/fashion curators often identify themselves simultaneously as "historians". The vast amount of primary research undertaken through practice, in conjunction with the documentation and cataloguing required of curators working in institutional collections, more than justifies the usage of this term. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that the curator is a constructor of history within the institutional collection.

Interdisciplinary scholarship drawn from historiography, museology, and philosophy has taken a poststructuralist to the study and critique of the documenting of history. This research has often considered the pluralistic nature of history telling and/or have been rooted in the material and immaterial evidence used to construct histories (Carr, 1961; Stedman Jones, 1976; Pearce, 1994; Benjamin, 1996; Lehmann, 1999). These will be expanded upon further in the chapter on *Authorship*, this section however, will briefly discuss the historiographic theories of poststructuralist scholar Michel de Certeau, which set a tone for comprehending the fragmented yet potentially resilient nature of historical evidence. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau's study of strategic resistance in routine, has been studied in fashion (Briggs, 2013; Buckley and Clark, 2012; 2017) as a way of framing 'reinvention and resistance' within the fashion system (Buckley and Clark, 2017, p. 9). However, it is de Certeau's earlier work, *The Writing of History* (1975) that is most relevant in considering MCA, collection documentation, and curatorial interruption as forms of history-writing.

De Certeau theorised on history-making both within and outside of the Western tradition, with a particular interest in the everyday lived experience, and what is left behind in the process of interpreting history. His historiography was in part based on his own practical research experience, where he gained understanding of how history is "made", as such de Certeau viewed the historian as an embedded actor within history, continually attempting to make the 'absent past become visible' (Weymans, 2004, p. 166). He maintained that history was a problematic construction of the historian (Weymans, 2004, p. 165), and this thesis argues, an affective process. De Certeau viewed collections as generators of historical evidence by which things are removed from their previous use, studied, and give a new application as historical material (1988b, p. 73). He viewed this process as a quest for intelligibility of historical events according to contemporary 'intellectual and social relevance' (de Certeau, 1988b, p. 74) that would necessarily result in ruptures which left out from history 'shards created by the selection of materials' (de Certeau, 1988a, p. 4). Despite this, because he viewed history as constructed rather than self-evident, 'breakage' as he termed it was the 'postulate of interpretation' (de Certeau, 1988a, p. 4), a necessary act of the present in sorting out the past. His view underscores the disjunctive concept of curatorial interruption in this thesis, and the research aim of establishing sources of bias which lead to the historical documentation of some aspects of wearer/object biography, and erase others: if MCA and documentation are essential components of institutional collections, is there a way to mitigate this interruption?

To this end, de Certeau was hopeful, much like Muñoz, that these shards could survive at the 'edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies' (de Certeau, 1988a, p. 4). He argued that in Western discourse, where this thesis is situated, they could remerge and disrupt the perceived forward movement of history, giving previously repressed, unintelligible histories a chance to form new, thinkable identities. Optimism that objects removed from their functional context and

transformed into historical evidence might retain or transform in meaning and affective power is the basis for Sandra Dudley's anthropological study of the movement of people and their material culture in *Displaced Things: Loss, Liminality and Hopeful Encounters* (2021). She frames displacement in three stages: departure from a point of origin, a liminal in-between, and finding a new 'abode' and role (2021, p. 9). Dudley notes these stages are rarely straightforward, with objects repeating this process throughout their lives. Her second stage, of the neither here nor there when the object is in (potentially metaphorical and literal) transit between their original and subsequent homes, is the point that this thesis hinges on. The liminal space of the new acquisition, where the garment has left the wearer's wardrobe and has yet to find a permanent place in the collection store, is the affective point of contact with the curator. Her hope is that the institutional collection is not simply a keeper of mute things or an instrument for cleaving apart objects from their meaning, but instead is a location which can hold memories and generate new meanings.

Dudley also meditates on whether researchers *should* tell the stories of the 'artists, makers, communities, periods and places from which artefacts come' (Dudley, 2021, p. 21), this is particularly true for individuals and communities who have routinely been "othered" through Western collecting practice. In her seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith argued that history is about power, and revisiting the commonly accepted modernist construction of history is valuable even to those (in her research, specifically Indigenous communities) who have been harmed by Western history-writing. Smith posits that 'to hold alternate histories is to hold alternate knowledges' (Smith, 2012, pp. 35-36), knowledges which can be used to identify the injustices of the past and resist ongoing acts of erasure and misrepresentation.

The research in this thesis is situated within a Western history-writing tradition and

in UK institutional collections, which have been wielded as tools of colonisation. The question of whether a wearer would *want* their biography acquired and interpreted within this system, if they hadn't expressly bequeathed it, is worthy of consideration, however that is beyond that scope of this research. The focus of this research is on garments acquired from an absent wearer who didn't provide testimony about their garments. However, Dudley argues that flattening the movement of people and their objects through displacement into a monolithic traumatic experience works to 'devalue, remove and appropriate the experience and agency' (Dudley, 2021, p. 25) of the individual. She instead views the institutional collection as a complex space of transformation, encompassing the negative and positive aspects of displaced material culture, which allows for the possibility of new understandings and a locus for 'thing-centred effect' (Dudley, 2021, p. 26). This research proceeds with good faith on the predicate that acquisitions of worn clothing are ongoing despite the absence of the original wearer, as with the Francis Golding Collection, which was acquired by MoL and LCF Archives after his death. Therefore, consistently practicing care for the original wearer is at the forefront of this research, in hopes of contributing to a body of critical material historiography which carries the optimism of de Certeau, Muñoz, and Dudley, and contributes to the generation of new knowledges advocated by Smith.

Phenomenological New Materialisms

The previous chapter discussed the embodied nature of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and in this chapter the consideration of human and non-human matter was positioned within a new materialist framework. Educational researcher Kristidel McGregor argued that phenomenology and new materialism can work together to produce an understanding of how subjectivity is produced 'with and in the world' (McGregor, 2020, p. 507). McGregor proposed a phenomenology of the material where the subject-object relationship is shifting and constantly "becoming" (McGregor, 2020, p. 508), drawing this definition in part from Barad's

ontology, specifically their concept of "things-in-phenomena" (Barad, 2007, p. 140): a dynamic, constant process of coming into being. By investigating the undulations of Barad's ontology, McGregor reveals the 'careful, thoughtful tracing of the marks left on living bodies (human and nonhuman)' (McGregor, 2020, p. 510) in these ongoing exchanges.

McGregor's invocation of traces and marks is relevant in thinking about worn clothing and the way the experience of the wearer is both affected by the clothes they wear in the world, and how their garments are affected through being worn. This wave of affect ebbs and flows in both directions constantly and creates what she calls a 'pluralistic real' (McGregor, 2020, p. 512), mimicking the plural meanings contained within a worn garment. It is in this shifting realm of material and immaterial, affecting and affected where the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis lay. I argue that it is the role of the dress/fashion curator to interpret and select these meanings for documentation within the institutional collection, and thus the curator is also responsible for the un-, under-, or mis-represented aspects of wearer/object biography within the institutional collection.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed new materialist theory as an additional theoretical approach to this thesis, as a means of framing the mutually affective relationship between people and objects. Discussion of scholarship from fields including quantum physics, chemistry, historiography, Indigenous, and queer theory have highlighted the interconnected intra-actions between dress/fashion curator and the affective energy of the worn garments they analyse during MCA. This affective energy has been demonstrated to exist in both the material garment, and in an immaterial form through absence. This includes the absence of wearer testimony, which creates an opportunity for curatorial inference about biographical narratives. Examination of how these exchanges impact which aspects of wearer/object biography might be interpreted was explored through two

examples of curators who have discussed the affective nature of worn clothing: Davidson, and Sampson and the material of the garment itself. This has reoriented the dress/fashion curator as an active, affective agent in the process of MCA and as examination of this practice proceeds, situates the curator as responsible for the material and immaterial impacts of their practice on wearer/object biography.

The new materialist analysis in this chapter, and the theories discussed in the preceding chapter on *Phenomenology,* are proposed as a shared 'phenomenology of the material' (after McGregor) approach to this thesis. These chapters have sought to make theoretical concepts relevant to examination of the practical day-to-day contact between curator and garment, and the implications of this experience on the construction of histories articulated as curatorial interruption. The following chapter will concentrate on arguments around the value and meaning of embedded biography in dress/fashion objects, both to the wearer and the curator.

1.6 Embedded Biography

The chapter on *Material Culture* (p. 38) reviewed the wider field of material culture studies and three formal MCA methodologies commonly-applied in the analysis of worn clothing. The review determined that all three methodologies created opportunity for analyst bias to inform object interpretation. Taking that determination into consideration, this thesis argues that MCA analysis of the worn garment is a key point of curatorial interruption, as the curator comes into close contact with embedded wearer/object biography. Embedded biography, the tangible material signs and intangible meaning which I propose are imprinted through wear, can offer valuable evidence about the wearer's life and experiences in the absence of their own testimony, supporting future research and enriching exhibition narratives.

To contextualise the biographical value of worn clothing, this section will first analyse frameworks addressing clothing the self for private and public presentation to establish how clothing aids our operation within the social world. The methodological approach of wardrobe studies is introduced to support the argument that embedded biography is acquired through use[10], which facilitates or impedes encounters in the wearer's life. Scholarship considering the affective, sensory nature of worn clothing, and the mnemonic status garments attain through use is reviewed to reiterate the significance of embedded object biography during interpretation of wearer biography. Research exploring the intangible and affective nature of material biography will be used to frame how worn clothing becomes the materialised evidence of these experiences, drawing on practical MCA examples of clothing from the Francis Golding collection.

Dressing the Self

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[10] Or disuse; this idea feels contradictory but is still imbued with wearer experience. For instance, purchasing a garment which was never worn but instead stored for an occasion which never occurred, and bears the marks of storage (creasing, fading) is still evidence of a life lived - simply one not lived in that garment.

'One might indeed say that dress is the complication of social life made visible - made indeed 'material', in fabric…' (Harvey, 1995, p. 17)

The above quote from art and literary critic John Harvey provides a succinct assessment of the argument presented in this chapter, that immaterial aspects of wearer biography become materialised through the clothes they wear. This chapter approaches this argument with evidence drawn from research areas including forensic science, sociology, fashion studies, and anthropology, specifically with scholarship concerned with examining how clothing aids in creating a sense of self in the world. The concept of "self in the world" can be viewed through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of clothing as a haptic appendage (discussed on p. 80), or the concept of possessions as an extension of the "self in the world" as explored by consumer theorist Russell W. Belk in *Possessions and the Extended Self* (1988). In his examination of the draining of colour from British menswear ensembles in the 19th and 20th centuries, *Men in Black* (1995), Harvey highlighted the overwhelming myriad of dress habits populating our world. Theories which either directly address (for example, Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (*1990); Christopher Breward in *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (1995) or have been subsequently applied to (see Roland Barthes *The Language of Fashion* (2013)) the performative nature of fashionable dress, have laid essential groundwork for the critical analysis of the semiotics of dressed (and undressed) bodies of different subcultures, genders, and classes. Relevant to discussions of performance is Michel Foucault's (1977) concept of the body as a site of institutional power discourse and subject to continual surveillance resulting in self-normalisation of behaviour. Foucault did not discuss dress/fashion specifically, though Butler built upon his work, making a strong argument for gender as a continuous performative act incorporating clothing (1990).

While it could be argued that semiotics permeate even the most intimate of dressing habits, this thesis is concerned with the clothing object as a material method of engaging with and memorialising our lived experience in the social world. As sociologist Tim Dant framed it, the relationship between wearer and garment is as intrinsic to giving clothing meaning as any aspect of design, production, or consumption (1999, p. 107). Therefore, this section reviews those texts which investigate the meaning of worn clothing in the formation of self and memory.

The early study of human "performance" by sociologist Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) is a foundational text assessing the dressed body in the context of social activity. His wider matrix of 'personal fronts' (Goffman, 1959, p. 34) included generalised "clothing" as one of the pieces of 'expressive equipment' (Goffman, 1959, p. 34) which combined to perform a social self, and he included clothing as part of the 'identity kit' (Goffman, 1965, p. 246) which we use to control our appearance to others. However, Goffman did not delve into how specific garments might inform the layered and shifting performances of different dressed selves.

Anthropologist Joanne Eicher articulated the dressed self as a concept which is contingent to the situation the self is presented in, through the decades-long evolution of her "Public, Private and Secret" (PPS) selves model (Eicher, 1981; Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Eicher and Miller, 1994, Eicher, 2020). To do so, Eicher drew on Gregory P. Stone's *Appearance and the Self* (1995). Stone saw dressed presentation as part of the transactional discourse that constructs the social self, with dressing specifically "programmed" towards and reviewed by an audience (Stone in Eicher, Johnson, and Roach-Higgins, 1995, p. 28). However, Eicher viewed the discursive relationship with a public (school, work, activities) audience as only one arena for how an individual governs the decisions about dressing themselves. She proposed that the private self (dressing for family,

friends, and home life), and the secret self (dressing for oneself or intimate partner) (Eicher, 2020, pp. 785-790) were as essential to fleshing out the *total* self. Eicher wrote in her 2020 refinement of the PPS model that while the divisions between the three categories have gradually become more porous, for example the kimono being a public-facing garment in Japan and adopted as private leisure wear in the US (2000, p. 790), that the secret self is still an understudied area of dress identity theory due to people being unwilling to disclose their practice. She emphasises the fantasy and sexual nature of the secret self (2000, pp. 789-790), which still requires interpreting dressing for oneself as a public performance (as per Goffman), or as a program requiring external review for validation (per Stone). The PPS model can be used to contexualise the many facets of the dressed individual that are revealed, emphasised, and concealed as we navigate life. The following section looks to other areas of research for a concept to frame the dressed secret self as intrinsic to the wearer and tied to their specific embodied experience.

Cultural historian Carole Hunt has developed a unique contextualising framework for the public and private memory held within textiles, which this thesis applies to describe the experience of being dressed: the "Miniature" and the "Gigantic". With these terms, Hunt created a new vocabulary with which to describe the intertwined public and private experiences of material "memory" (Hunt, 2014), the plurality of biographies in worn garments, and how they might be retained after they have left the private body of the original wearer and entered the institutional collection; key themes to this research. Hunt reflected on the need for a concept which allows simultaneous analysis of textile memory as it relates to both the private ("Miniature") and institutional ("Gigantic") realm. She argued that used textiles have particularly potent ability 'to embody both a communal, historical moment and a local individual, specific story…' (Hunt, 2014, p. 226). Hunt's framework can offer a nuanced approach to studying embedded biography, the "memory" in clothing.

Hunt suggested that these words 'abstractly become metaphors of containment; small and large, unofficial and authorised, separate and social' (2014, p. 215) and yet are not completely disconnected from each other. Although Hunt utilised this framework to critically assess artists working with textiles and writers who reference textiles, I suggest that this framework contributes to a fuller understanding of the worn garment. The clothing we choose becomes a part of our representation, as Goffman, Stone, and Eicher all agree. Joanne Entwistle wrote in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory* (2015 [2001]) that the clothing we select to wear in the world 'represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires.' (Entwistle, 2015, p. 115) The success of our dressed public selves, the "Gigantic" nature of social presentation, is often dependent on an outward appearance which heavily relies on the discursive signifiers found in clothing; appropriateness to social situations, utility, cleanliness and tidiness. Accordingly, "Miniature" could be used to describe our private, intimate feelings of comfort, confidence, or security (or the lack thereof) in the clothing we wear as we navigate the world.

For example: Francis Golding, the cosmopolitan architectural consultant and art collector with a fervent interest in clothing and theatre whose clothing has been the subject of my analysis, deliberately sought out unique and specific garments (Golding, 1970). Golding was gay, and worked in fields (the UK Civil Service, city planning) holding generally conservative views, including on dressing. He bears witness in a letter dated from 1970 that '…any deviation at all from the bourgeois sexual norms…' was '…a very bad sign indeed.' (**Appendix, p. 3**) This indicated his awareness of the ability for clothing to restrict or permit access to social spaces, and for his comfort (as being dressed "appropriately" or "inappropriately") within those spaces. It could be argued that through his selection of tailored masculine garments in his professional life, Golding

supported his perceived heteronormative masculinity and thus was able to move through his "Gigantic" domain with relative ease. Yet in selecting outfits which varied from standard office suiting, Golding discerned himself from his peers and established himself as a creatively-minded 'dandy', permitting him to accrue what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as social capital (1993), influencing the events he attended and relationships he made, granting him access to the artistic spaces he found so personally gratifying (Golding, 2015): his "Miniature".

In *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel* (2000), menswear curator Shaun Cole examined 20th century clothing signifiers which enabled gay men to connect with members of their community while minimising or avoiding detection by the 'outside' world: a pair of grey suede shoes in early 20th century Britain, or Levi's jeans with precise fading in 1970s San Francisco. These signifiers fall under the performance identified by Jose Esteban Muñoz as an immaterial trace that identifies evidence of a life (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6). Dressing in clothing to selectively participate in social spheres can be framed by Gilles Deleuze's reading of Baruch Spinoza's "ethology": 'The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior.' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125) Deleuze was directing this translation toward the relations that comprise our being, of which clothing and presenting ourselves is an essential part. In his research, Cole argued that clothing choices enact and enable access to experiences, an assertion recalling Kopytoff on parsing the biography of a thing: 'What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in the period and culture…' (Kopytoff, 1986, p. 66). These experiences, happening *in* and also *because* of the clothes we wear, point to an affective, intra-active reciprocity between a wearer and object: the material of object is shaped by the wearer, but the wearer is also shaped by the experiences the object affords them.

Recognition of the personal and public exchanges which occur in everyday events, in part because of the clothing we wear, are substantiated in the growing

body of research in wardrobe studies (see Cwerner, 2001; Chong Kwan, 2016; Woodward, 2007; 2016; Woodward and Greasley, 2017; Skjold, 2020; Maguire and Fahy, 2022) an area of scholarship examining the wardrobe (understood as a storage space for and/or collection of clothing) as "the material framework of everyday dress practices" (Klepp & Bjerck, 2014, p. 375). In wardrobe studies, anthropological fieldwork methods including interviews and observations are applied to the wearer to generate an understanding about 'clothing actions, relationships, meanings and material effects' (Fletcher and Klepp, 2017, p. 3). Objects which arrive to a collection in the absence of the wearer and without their explicit testimony cannot directly benefit from this approach to studying the materialised biography in clothing. Where wearer testimony is not available, however, it may be useful to consider data gathered in wardrobe studies as representative examples of how people experience garments and being dressed in the world.

Accounts of dressing for social encounters has been gathered in the participant interviews discussing everyday dressing habits by Sophie Woodward (2005; 2007), and the wardrobes of notable public figures by fashion theorist Benjamin Whyman (2019). Through connecting testimony to object, Woodward and Whyman were able to highlight how the materiality of clothing, the social signifiers embedded in ensembles, and the personal confidence an outfit provided worked to enable access to spaces and experiences. Woodward wrote of how the individual clothing choices of two participants materially coalesced 'the particular anxieties and concerns engendered by significant social occasions' (2007, pp. 26-27). During the MCA of a worn pair of trousers once belonging to art collector Mark Reed and acquired into the V&A collection, Whyman found a piece of sheet music in a pocket. In a subsequent interview Reed disclosed to Whyman that he had likely purchased the suit for a friend's poetry evening, where he knew that there would be an opportunity for him to play the piano (2019, pp. 241-242). Whyman subsequently argued that object biography is a means of

materially augmenting "official" written accounts of a wearer's life.

Analysis of the Golding collections at the MoL and LCF Archives demonstrate that while his body changed size over the course of his lifetime, Golding retained and stored his garments in his home, decades past functional use. Coupled with his pocket contents which included ephemera such as ballet tickets, a hotel matchbook, and a party guest list, Golding's rich social life begins to take material shape. Although Golding isn't present to say precisely why he kept his old clothes, evidence might be found in Woodward's fundamental wardrobe studies text *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007). Wardrobe studies participant 'Theresa' confirmed she kept certain garments based on the strong associations they had with positive experiences in her life, such as a "lucky" jacket which instilled her with confidence when she wore it in her workplace (2007, p. 53). Much of the wardrobe scholarship examining the practice of holding onto garments when they are no longer fit for wear has enriched the field of sustainability studies, with discussions of emotional durability in fashion design connected to a wearer's reuse and repair of clothing (Burcikova, 2019; Esculapio, 2020).

It is clear that the wearer testimonials gathered through wardrobe studies can also illustrate the affective nature of worn clothing. Retaining worn garments beyond functional use may act as a material reminder of personal feelings and public situations to be revisited and re-experienced on demand. Affect presents itself tangibly as wrinkles, smells, or mending in garments, with the intangible nature of affect in the mnemonic meaning of a garment to a wearer (Niinimäki and Armstrong, 2013) or how it represents (positive and/or negative) aspects of their identity (Banim and Guy, 2001, pp. 206-207). This affect can be understood to be the embedded biography of the worn garment.

The Affect of Embedded Biography

Comprehending embedded biography requires consideration of the ways the tangible and intangible results of wear are materialised through worn clothing. Philosopher Walter Benjamin was not writing specifically about garments in *The Work of Art in the Age of the Mechanical Reproduction* (2008 [1936]), though his thoughts on the "aura" lost through duplication of an object speak to the unique nature of clothing belonging to and becoming document of a person's life. In part, this included the "historical witness" borne by the "genuine article" (Benjamin, 2008, pp. 6-7). Benjamin was identifying the sometimes intangible quality of biography materialised in objects, an incorporeality Bill Brown recognised as:

'…what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects - their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems.' (Brown, 2001, p. 5)

For Ellen Sampson, aura is 'an ambiguous term that links magical, religious and perceptual experience' (Sampson, 2013, p. 24) and she applied Benjamin's concept in her exploration of biography embedded in garments through wear, with what she termed (which recalls Brown's "thingness" (Brown, 2001, pp. 4-5)) the "wornness" in clothing:

'…the experience of the body enveloped in clothes and the resultant imprints upon the garment. It brings to the fore the sensory and psychic processes of wearing; the intimate and unarticulated relationships with clothing that constitute a part of our daily lives.' (Sampson, 2020a, p. xv)

Sampson wrote of the intimacy of daily wear, where we are enacting the secret aspects or Hunt's "Miniature" of our lives: the clothing we wear absorbs the secretions stemming from our anticipation or anxiety about situations we

encounter whilst wearing them; we fill our pockets with ephemera, or fold and refold a too-long cuff. Our clothing preferences extend beyond the aesthetic or functional, those factors we can easily identify, and into the primal and psychological; and these preferences become embedded in the material of our garments.

In *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (2015), Joanne Entwistle called the act of wearing garments a "totality"; of body, self, and dress. Without the body and self she wrote, the garment loses meaning (2015, p. 10). While the body and self provide clarity of context to the garment, it is clear that meaning remains in the material of worn clothing. In *Divestments*, Carol Mara, a grieving mother who had kept the clothing her son was wearing on the day of his accidental death, wrote of how they were the 'objects which had last contact with his conscious body' (Mara, 1998, p. 59). In analysis of Mara's account, anthropologists Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey identify the material bridge between the internal self and the external world that garments provide, with his personhood 'residing within the clothes' (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, p. 115). Hunt wrote of the worn garment holding otherwise intangible memory in what she terms the 'mnemonic energy and properties of textiles' (Hunt, 2014, p. 208).

The ongoing affective nature of worn clothing when separated from the wearer is highlighted within the context of the institutional collection, where the aura of the wearer lingers in the object. In *Adorned in Dreams* (2003), fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson meditated on the uncanny nature of clothing removed from the wearer and put on display in a museum gallery:

'For clothes are so much part of our living, moving selves that, frozen on display in the mausoleums of culture, they hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening; the atrophy of the body, and the evanescence of life.' (Wilson, 2003, p. 1)

Viewed in isolation, worn garments are not disconnected, mute objects but instead are broken links between the private body of the wearer and the social world (Wilson, 2003). Anthropologist Jeffrey David Feldman developed a theoretical approach to understanding the separation of body and object in the museum space through "contact points[11]" (Feldman, 2006, pp. 245-246). He framed the contact point within the context of colonial collecting, but understood them more generally as the 'sensual products of unequal encounters' (Feldman, 2006, p. 247). The inherent colonial practice of museum collecting aside, clothing acquired into the institutional collection with the wearer *in absentia* (even if they had approved of the acquisition but not provided biographical testimony along with it) is by nature an unequal encounter. The separation of the wearer's body from the garment through entering the museum becomes what Feldman termed a "metonymic contact point" (Feldman, 2006, p. 256), with the 'an object associated with one part of the body that stands symbolically for the whole' (Feldman, 2006, p. 256). The garment becomes a representation of the wearer, with the curator dictating the boundaries of what is documented of the person in the collection.

Although the concepts of "wornness" or "contact points" emphasise the intangible nature of wearer biography, forensic studies have determined that clothing retains tangible, quantitative evidence of the wearer through DNA transfer after only seconds of contact with their body (Locard, 1930; Sessa, Salerno, Bertozzi et al., 2019). With long-term wear, the proximity of our garments to our bodies results in fabric becoming shaped and adapted to our corporeal frame; sweat discolours a jacket lining, an overfilled pocket sags from the weight of its contents, a rolled up cuff becomes deeply creased. This closeness of garment to flesh means that, even unintentionally, we imbue our clothing with

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[11] Not to be confused with the concept of the museum as "contact zone" developed by James Clifford (1997), discussed further on p. 263 of this thesis.

material confirmation of our lives.

In arguing that worn clothing can be deeply affecting, it is important to make a distinction between the affect, and autonomy, of material. Though Karen Barad has said that 'matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers' (Barad, 2012, p. 60), in discussing the objects populating museum collections, Gaynor Kavanagh has cautioned against imbuing objects with self-determination. She argued that the 'object does not have free will or the right to make a point about something' (Kavanagh, 2000, p. 101), rather that they act as a conduit for human action and thus memory. This thesis acknowledges that garments do not make active choices about what happens to the person they adorn. Rather, wearing our clothing enables us to participate (or not) in certain social areas and experiences *because* we are wearing them (Ruggerone, 2017, p. 582), and the residue they become embedded with *because* of our experiences alters their own form.

Sandra Dudley offered the term "potentiality" to describe qualities 'not yet or currently actualised' (Dudley, 2021, p. 20) in objects. This is a useful term in describing how biography is interpreted during the MCA process: the potentialities of an object are actualised through recognition from the curator. It is a more difficult term to apply to the engagement between wearer and object, requiring an acceptance of the implication that there are infinite potentialities within a garment, simply waiting to be selected and enacted by the wearer. Instead, this thesis argues this as a reciprocal affective relationship between distinct matter (wearer; garment) which produces embedded wearer/object biography, or as Jane Bennett observed: 'things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power' (Bennett, 2010, p. 3). This can be viewed as a purely affective relationship, rather than what Christopher Tilley described as an anthropomorphising of objects, for example which become ascribed with an individual name or gender, where biography of the subject becomes so

enmeshed with the object that 'the thing is the person and the person is the thing' (Tilley, 2013, p. 63).

To the wearer, much of the meaning in a worn garment can be drawn from what was experienced when it was worn, or how it made them feel. Framing the idea of the "lived" object in the psychosocial analysis of researchers Lynn Froggett and Myna Trustram, 'We form strong embodied connections to such objects that we "use" according to their particular properties, entering into relationships with them that permit us to express personal idiom.' (Froggett and Trustram, 2014, p. 484) As Tilley framed the dialectical relationship between subject and object, 'we touch the things and the things simultaneously touch us. The relationship is reciprocal' (Tilley, 2013, p. 61). With a garment, its lived value is accrued through wear, a meaning which may have little correspondence to its ascribed, through design or commodity, value.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that being dressed (or undressed) is a human experience which gives meaning to both the clothing through its wear, and to the wearer through the garments they do or do not select for wear. Being dressed in the world is a highly socialised activity, as was made evident in the research of Goffman, Eicher, and Hunt. Their respective theories on being dressed, and the memory embedded in clothing highlight how different aspects of ourselves are represented in public, private, and secret through our garments. This is particularly true for marginalised communities who can communicate their culture through their clothing, as was demonstrated through the example of Francis Golding's wardrobe. The scholarship cited in this chapter reinforces my argument that embedded biography in worn garments is comprised of both the material marks and measurable DNA from the corporeal body, and the immaterial traces of experience which can act as a guide for interpreting how the wearer might have positioned themselves within and experienced their world. Whyman wrote of the

ability of worn clothing to 'augment the biography' (Whyman, 2017, p. 44) of the lives of the wearers, while Feldman's concept of contact points supports that this augmentation is at the discretion of the curator when they come into contact with the garment during MCA.

In the following chapter, I will build on Whyman's proposition of object biography as supplementary evidence in examining wearer biographies, to posit that wearer/object biography is *itself* a form of life-writing, termed the "egodocument" and a historical source that deserves particular care when it enters the institutional collection.

1.7 Authorship[12]

For Christine Checinska, the first curator of African and African diaspora fashion at the V&A (appointed in June 2020), oppression in part has taken the form of over a century of 'miscategorization and undervaluation' (Friedman, 2020) of Black fashion within institutional collections. For Museum of Transology founder and curator E-J Scott, the absence of autobiographical objects belonging to trans people in museum collections meant that trans lives were viewed as that of the 'grotesque or the barely-believable freak-of-nature' (Bosold, Scott and Chantraine, 2020, p. 218). This small sample of testimonies, from curators who work within the mechanisms and systems of institutional collecting, are a strong indictment of the absence in the collection left by biased practice. The role curators have played in shaping these collections will be explored further in the chapters *Disciplinary Bias* and *Working Environment Bias*. The following chapter instead advocates for wearer/object biography as an important form of authorship of personal history, particularly in cases of un-, under-, and mis-represented people, and examines curatorial interruption in relation to this authorship.

The first section of this chapter establishes wearer/object biography as a form of life-writing, termed the "egodocument", applying practical examples including those from the Francis Golding collection to illustrate this term. The following section will use scholarship from areas including historiography, philosophy, and museology to argue that the authorship of "official" history is a subjective and selective experience based on causal factors constructed by and informing the historian (in this thesis, the dress/fashion curator), which has resulted in the exclusion of marginalised individuals and communities from dress/fashion collections. The section will conclude with examining how dress/fashion curatorial practice generates absences, which are tantamount to a rewriting of personal

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[12] This chapter draws on research I presented in a paper at the *Everyday Fashion: Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Clothes* conference in 2019, and will be expanded upon in a forthcoming chapter (publication date to be determined) for an edited collection published by Bloomsbury Publishing.

history, and how through enshrinement in the institutional collection, public history.

The Egodocument

"Collections are material autobiography, written as we go along and left behind us as our monument." (Pearce, 1995, p. 272)

With the above quote, Susan Pearce illustrated the biographical meaning of our objects, and the testimonial value they can provide within the context of the institutional collection. It was a meaning echoed by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who argued that 'writing and collecting are two forms of production of the self' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 99). Building on Pearce and Hooper-Greenhill, this section positions wearer/object biography as a form of authorship. Understanding worn clothing as a form of material authorship, particularly as a form of life-writing, is a growing area of scholarship. This concept was applied by Benjamin Whyman in his examination of the personal menswear wardrobes of three cultural figures (Whyman, 2017; 2019), by Felice McDowell in her study of high-profile fashion industry personalities (McDowell, 2019), and in Karolína Zlámalová's analysis of the role of physicality and clothing in non-binary memoir (Zlámalová, 2021).

This section uses this previous scholarship as a foundation for contextualising worn clothing as a form of "egodocument". In the 1950s, Dutch historian Jacob (Jacques) Presser identified the egodocument (or "ego-document") as a tradition of writing where the author's feelings and experiences are centred (Dekker, 2002, p. 1). Historian Rudolf Dekker's translation from the Dutch definition of the term is 'those historical sources in which the user is confronted with an 'I', or occasionally 'he', continuously present in the text as the writing and describing subject.' (Presser, 1958, quoted in Dekker, 2002). Typically, this has included written material such as diaries, journals, letters; with the substance of the document

being intimate testimony of personal experience, rather than a formal or "official" record of contemporary events. The egodocument is viewed as an historical output, distinct from the qualitative research method of "autoethnography", which Hooper-Greenhill (borrowing from theorist Mary Louise Pratt) applied to the process of colonised subjects representing themselves using the language of the coloniser. Hooper-Greenhill included the use of material objects to "write culture" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 86) using the autoethnographic method.

As a historical source, the egodocument has fallen in and out of favour based on the contemporary values assigned to the recollections of the individual at the time (Dekker, 2002, pp. 9-13). The reemergence of close study of egodocuments in the 21st century is in part due to Dekker, founder of The Center for the Study of Egodocuments and History. The Center encourages the wider examination and appreciation of biographical authorship from voices not typically included in historical discourse (Center for the Study of Egodocuments and History, no date), a concern shared with institutional collections of dress/fashion realising the absence of diverse histories they have traditionally acquired.

Criticism of the egodocument as lacking the "objectivity" of institutional documents does not take into account how these "official" documents exclude the majority of perspectives in their creation. Dekker countered this criticism himself with the argument that the subjectivity of these egodocuments permits them to be "used to write the history of groups which are underrepresented in "official" sources, such as women, labourers and ethnic minorities." (2002, p. 16) Being dressed in the world is a fundamental human experience which transects boundaries of gender, class, or race. Applying Dekker's argument to worn clothing, the subjective experience of an individual accruing embodied biography in their worn clothing takes a vital authorial capacity, telling a history which otherwise may not be recorded. This form of egodocument identifies the time and place they lived in and their position in society, physical characteristics, and

even personal preference.

An example of such a document as it related to dressing the self is found in the *Klaidungsbüchlein* ("book of fashion") created in the 16th century by bookkeeper Matthäus Schwarz. Living in Renaissance-era Augsburg and working under the employ of the powerful Fugger family, he created one of the earliest surviving documents of the dressed self which encompasses the period from his early adulthood until shortly before his death (Mentges, 2003; Rublack and Hayward, 2015). In the book, intricate commissioned artist's illustrations depict Schwarz in his wardrobe, featuring meticulous ensembles which narrowly skirted the sumptuary laws of the time. Schwarz accompanied the portraits with the date and his handwritten observations of coetaneous personal and public affairs, with his garments as the locus of his experience of these events:

'October 11, 1515, when Francesco, king of France, rode into Milan after the battle, master Ambrosio clad me in this way, not from silk…' (Schwarz, 2015, p.77)

'On 2 December, 1521, during the plague in Augsburg. The gown with a velvet trimming, the bonnet embroidered with velvet, the lining of the best marten fur…' (Schwarz, 2015, p. 101)

In *Fashion, Time and the Consumption of a Renaissance Man in Germany: The Costume Book of Matthäus Schwarz of Augsburg, 1496-1564* (2003) historian Gabriele Mentges positioned Schwarz's book in the wider discourse of masculinities, suggesting it as an example of an egodocument. Mentges argued that by documenting almost exclusively his own dressed body and his perceptions of his life, Schwarz 'combined in his own person both the beholder-subject and the beheld object' (Mentges, 2003, p.17) and demonstrated his 'process of coming to grips with himself and the world' (Mentges, 2003, p. 29). Although the clothes Schwarz wore have not survived, his book of fashion

provides a unique view into the life of a middle-class man during key events of the Renaissance.

Establishing Authorship

In presenting worn clothing as an egodocument, with the wearer as the author of this document, questions may be asked about the intention of this authorship. With diaries, journals, or letters, there is a presumed reader; whether a recipient or for the author to reflect back on at some point in the future. With clothing, there isn't a natural assumption that we dress each day and wear our clothing in hopes they might be analysed for historical narratives decades after our death. Why then, would we presume them to be an essential part of telling history?

A relevant question was originally posed about the boundaries of output by Michel Foucault in his 1969 lecture *What is an Author?:*[13]

'…is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work?…But what if, in a notebook filled with aphorisms, we find a reference, a reminder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill, should this be included in his works? Why not?' (Foucault, 1980, p.118-119)

These items, not assumed to be as meaningful as "official" output, can be viewed as just as enlightening about the total biography of the author. Dekker encountered this dilemma when sifting through the diversity of biographical output in his study of Dutch egodocuments from the early modern period. He wrote that the material form of these egodocuments may be 'little more than a collection of scraps of paper' (Dekker, 1999, p. 258), as with the diary kept by 19th

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[13] Foucault's lecture is generally viewed as a response to the 1967 essay by Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, which argued that the text (in this thesis, worn clothing) must be separated from the author (wearer) in order to be interpreted. This thesis argues that this separation would render object interpretation much more unstable, and while meaning *is* contingent on the reader (curator), there must always be understanding that the "text" was created uniquely by the "author".

century Utrecht apothecary Hendrik Keettell, inscribed on 'two thousand sheets of tissue paper used for wrapping medicines.' (Dekker, 1999, p. 258) Dekker determined that the form of the tissue paper, as an emblem of Keettell's profession, was as integral to materialising the life of the writer as the content written therein.

Archivist Catherine Hobbs echoed Mentges' reflection on personal outputs as generative and ongoing works of knowing oneself in the wider context of their world. Hobbs addressed the importance of including personal notes through her analysis of the archives of literary figures, observing that these "mere scribbles" not directed toward an external reader are evidence of 'a process and a way of living in the world, written for no one, and are tools created by the writer to spur on his or her own work' (Hobbs, 2001, p. 130).

This thesis agrees with Dekker, Mentges, and Hobbs that the egodocument, the personal work, should be included in an author's total oeuvre. The worn garment as egodocument can be included in what curator Oliver Winchester identified as contextualising 'habits, patterns of living, social interactions between individuals or their collecting habits' (Winchester, 2012, p. 149). Winchester argued for the inclusion in his analysis of the boundaries of LGBTQIA2S+ biography, but as has been stated in this section, this could be applied to any historically under- or mis-documented individual. This argument provides an answer to Foucault's question about the boundaries of an author's work: that *personal* outputs are evidence which help contextualise the *public* work. Though we may not dress ourselves with the intention of providing materialised autobiography in our absence, we dress with intention for engaging with our day-to-day lives. Applying this argument to worn clothing, this means that wearer/object biography is not only represented through publicly documented oral testimony or textual evidence of their lives and experiences, but through the personal, material egodocument in the clothing.

The pocket contents of Francis Golding, part of the wear accrued in his garments, provide a practical example of worn clothing as egodocument. Golding participated in his public life, attending social events and professional functions. These events created interactions and experiences which he personally documented, even if unintentionally, through his retention of contents in the pockets of his garments. Those contents, acquired into MoL and LCF Archives, are now potential interpretative material evidence identifying where and when Golding was in history: thus documenting the comings and goings of a man living in times and in places (pre-Sexual Offences Act England; Singapore)[14] where being gay was illegal. The general lack of "official" historical documentation of LGBTQIA2S+ histories in institutional collections that do not pivot around negative narratives of criminality or the AIDS crisis, which are often not documented by those within the community (see Vanegas, 2002; Cole, 2018; Sandell et al., 2018; Bosold, Scott, and Chantraine 2020), demonstrates that having evidence which encompasses the many shades of experience such as Golding's and documented by the person who lived them, are extremely important to preserve.

Constructing History

As discussed in the chapter on theoretical approaches, the study of historiography reaches far outside the discipline of dress/fashion curation. As a vast area of interdisciplinary research it is outside of the scope of this thesis to investigate every field producing scholarly work on the topic. This section will instead discuss the output of key scholars who have taken a materialist approach to historiography, or who have investigated archives and material evidence to address a core concern of this thesis: how the position (culturally and temporally)

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[14] The Sexual Offences Act 1967 legalised aspects of homosexuality between men in England and Wales, and Section 377A of the criminal code in Singapore which criminalised sex between consenting male adults, was only repealed on November 29th, 2022.

and the bias of the historian impacts the authorship of history.

In *What Is History?* (1961), English political scientist E.H. Carr examined how evidence is selectively utilised by the historian to construct histories, and how this selection is based on the positionality of the historian; or what can be understood as their personal biases. Though Carr did not discuss clothing specifically,[15] this thesis understands the process of selection as a feature of MCA of worn clothing. Carr was noted for his rejection of historical empiricism, specifically in the work of Leopold von Ranke in the 19th century. Carr cast a critical eye on the selective telling of "facts" by historians who were bestowed with the ability 'simply to show how it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)' (Ranke, quoted in Carr, 1961). Carr pointed out that to do so required an impossible and 'complete separation between subject and objects' (1961, p. 9) during the process of examining evidence. Carr was also critical of the idealist approach of early 20th century philosopher Robin George Collingwood. He questioned Collingwood's belief that history was an interpretation borne in the mind of the historian. Carr understood that while there are no "pure facts" of history (Carr, 1961, p. 22), there is evidence which can interpreted by historians to construct a 'continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past' (Carr, 1961, p. 30). The belief that history is in a constant state of retelling based on the context of the reader is firmly embedded across fields engaged with material culture studies (for example Moreland, 1999; Joy, 2009), and though Carr's work predates the movement by half a century, his theory is supported by the dynamic and contingent new materialist approach to research in this thesis.

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[15] Carr relegated what could be termed material culture as the domain "auxiliary sciences of history", with experts such as archaeologists possessing the "special skills" (Carr, 1961, p. 11) to identify and date objects and therefore distinct from the historian who was an interpreter of historical evidence. This is a dubious distinction, as for example, dress/fashion curators are both experts with specialist skill sets, and the authors of history through documentation of objects in collection catalogues and research outputs such as books and exhibitions.

Seventy years later, Carr's discursive framework is still valid in understanding the dialogue which occurs between the object and curator. The dress/fashion object, even with the best conservation and storage efforts, is in an ongoing process of material decay and contextual displacement; the dress/fashion curator acquires new knowledge on an ongoing basis as part of their professional research and their personal engagement with the world. The curator enters the process of MCA with a "question" in mind, a form of confirmation bias: documenting the provenance of this garment which has been acquired into the institutional collection because it meets a certain remit. Therefore they decide the 'hierarchy of significance' (Munslow, 1997) and 'which facts to give the floor' (Carr, 1961, p. 11). These subjective, peripatetic factors will impact how an object is comprehended by the curator, and thus how the curator constructs the historical narratives of worn clothing. These insights will also change as different curators work with the objects, a natural progression that is part of the object being located for perpetuity in the institutional collection while generations of practitioners are employed in the collection. Documenting as many aspects of the object at the time of acquisition, when it is "closest" in proximity to the wearer, will contribute to improving the retention of the wearer/object biography in the long-term, despite these factors.

Scholar of working-class histories Gareth Stedman Jones (1976) furthered Carr's theory of active interaction between subject and object by positing that the 'residues of the past' (Stedman Jones, 1976, p. 296) the locations, documents, ephemera, etc. are what historians investigate rather than a constructed idea of a definitive past. Not only in concept, but in vocabulary, is this phrase relevant to the study of worn clothing. *In absentia* of the wearer, the experiential residue of wearer/object biography, remains to be studied and used to piece together historical narratives according the to approach of the curator.

This approach falls under what Stedman Jones termed the 'explicit or implicit

theory of social causation' (1976, p. 296) in his assessment of the relationship between history and sociology. He argued that the historian identified research problems to which they found evidence-based solutions based on a process taking place 'in the present and in the head' (1976, p. 296) of the practitioner. Although Stedman Jones does not address the dress/fashion curator specifically, the issue remains that the individual curator will decide (consciously or not) what aspects of the worn garment are documented in the institutional collection and thus are committed to history.

Walter Benjamin is oft-quoted in dress/fashion studies, being one of the few foundational theorists to directly address the topic. His theory of *Tigersprung* or 'a tiger's leap into the past' (Benjamin, 1996, p. 395) is frequently used to assess the cyclical, non-linear nature of fashion.[16] It is specifically the interpretation of *Tigersprung* by fashion theorist Ulrich Lehmann (1999) that is most relevant to this thesis. Lehmann viewed Benjamin's method of evaluating history as 'activating the past by injecting the present into it' (Lehmann, 1999, p. 298), as rooted in historical materialism, with individual historical events never isolated from a larger continuum. Lehmann applied *Tigersprung* to the investigation of fashion and modernity and the way fashion uses a 'method of quotation' to conduct an 'aesthetic rewriting of history' (Lehmann, 1999, p. 301) rather than to the discursive relationship between wearer/object biography and the curator in the authorship of history. Museologist Gaynor Kavanagh countered this by arguing that formal study of history provided 'perspective and objectivity that is often denied in personal memory' (Kavanagh, 2005, p. 5). This thesis argues that perspective is entirely subjective, in part based on the personal memory of the curator, and that every selection of what to document in a institutional collection is a decision influenced by factors in part specific to the historian, regardless of how much evidence they have at their disposal. This is a point Kavanagh draws on

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[16] Also relevant to the dress/fashion curator are Benjamin's reflections on the mnemonic power of objects (books) and the passion of collecting in his 1931 essay, *Unpacking My Library*.

further in her evaluation of museums as history-makers, locations where 'history is both remembered and forgotten, as curators have to decide what to collect and what to let go, what to record and what to ignore' (Gaynor, 2005, p. 5). Her recognition of the need to be 'comfortable with plural, even contradictory, histories' (Gaynor, 2005, p. 7) is one that underpins the aims of this research. In becoming comfortable with the factors influencing curator decision-making, we can work to mitigate the erasure of wearer/object biography.

This thesis argues that every curator will have their own preoccupations and perceptions of history, therefore curators will focus on those aspects of an object during analysis. This can be particularly so when this experience goes beyond conscious comprehension and engages with cognitive processes such as the senses or what Lehmann terms the 'emotive cord within our perception' (Lehmann, 1999, p. 300). These concepts are discussed at length in chapters on *Cognitive Bias*, *Sensory Engagement Bias*, and *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*. MCA requires handling worn garments, which retain sensory evidence of wearer/object biography and have the potential to trigger this emotive cord.

Curatorial Interruption: Erasing Authorship

In this thesis, I am primarily examining curatorial interruption as the actions of a single curator, who undertakes MCA immediately after an object is acquired into the institutional collection. Individual curatorial decisions accumulate over time, with the decisions made by subsequent generations of curators shaping the contents of the institutional collection, and its version of public history.

Understanding wearer/object biography as a type of authorship of personal history engages with what curator Oliver Winchester identified in biographical collections as 'broader notions of inheritance, reproduction and life legacy' (Winchester, 2012, p. 149). This recognition, as has been addressed in the section on egodocuments, has been historically denied to the majority of the world. The

institutional collection, and in particular dress/fashion collections, has participated in that erasure of recognition. Philosopher Charles Taylor wrote that our identities are shaped in part by our acknowledgement by others. He argued that absence, misrepresentation, and 'demeaning or contemptible' representations 'inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.' (Taylor, 1995, p. 25) Consider the central arguments of this thesis:

- that wearer/object biography is a form of authorship
- that this biography comes into contact with curators during MCA
- that curators often employ practical MCA methodologies which invite personal bias into the interpretation and documentation of the garment
- that this bias will influence which aspects of wearer/object biography are documented in the institutional collection and therefore recorded into public history

Following these arguments, mis-recognition or absence of identity in the institutional collection becomes, in the vein of Taylor, a form of oppression - unintentional though this may be.

Earlier in this section, Foucault's questioning of the author and the boundaries of their output was applied to the wearer. Foucault defined his author as:

'…a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.' (Foucault, 2002a, p. 221)

Foucault could also be describing the curator as the person who "limits, excludes, and chooses" which aspects of a garment are documented in the collection.

Evidence of what is not present in documentation due to curatorial bias impacting on MCA is difficult to account for, however other actions in curatorial practice engage with subjectivity and can be used to demonstrate how curatorial interruption will render aspects of wearer/object biography mute, unintelligible, and effectively invisible once acquired in the institutional collection.

Museum processes, such as the point of acquisition itself (prior to MCA and cataloguing) and collection dispersals, have been examined by previous dress/fashion practitioners (and in particular, Pearce in *Museums, objects and collections: a cultural study* (1992)). Investigation of these "broken relationships" rendered between garment and wearer, as termed by museologist Anne-Sofie Hjemdahl (2014), have often mourned what narratives are lost by breaking up a personal wardrobe or collection (Thompson, 2010; Wilcox, 2012; Mida and Kim, 2018), rather than in the analysis of individual objects. Benjamin, for instance, lamented the loss of meaning of the private collection once the owner is gone. He observed that institutional collections may be more useful academically and socially, but that objects only got their 'due' in the private collection (Benjamin, 2007, p. 67).

Poet Ruth Hoberman wrote of the disruptive nature of the 'pre-museal past' (Hoberman, 2011, P. 79) of objects, even after they are acquired into the museum collection. However, disruptive persistence of biography is something that Winchester argued is flattened by 'the always present fact that museums function through exclusion in order to make sense of the material to hand, filtering ideas out from the chaos of things' (Winchester, 2012, p. 142). Michel de Certeau touched upon both of these aspects in his theories of selection and breakage in the creation of intelligibility in Western history-writing. As discussed in the section on new materialism and historiography, de Certeau believed that fragments of neglected histories could survive 'edges of discourse' (de Certeau, 1988, p. 4). In a review of de Certeau's historiography, cultural theorist Ben Highmore saw this

optimism as a new way of viewing history, unbound by either a false objectivity or an indifference to telling it at all. Highmore writes that historians work in a world of 'partial views' (Highmore, 2007, p.16) formed from memories, texts written by someone with their own pretext for perpetuating that aspect of history, or in the case of this thesis, worn garments separated from their wearer. This thesis argues that these partial views provide an opportunity for seeing the countless narratives that exist in any experience, as long as one is not privileged as an inarguable truth.

Applying the idea of multiple narratives, authorship in worn clothing can be considered through a practical example put forward by a multidisciplinary research team who developed the "Gendered objects methodology" (2020). Daybell *et al.* investigated objects in museum collections through materiality, production, use, design, and previous curatorial interpretation in order to better understand their function in early modern society and beyond. Through the analysis of a 16th century British wool cap identified in the V&A collection as possibly belonging to a young boy or "small-headed" man, in consultation with textual material from the same period, Daybell *et al.* determined that early modern people assigned female at birth wore similar hats for many reasons ranging from aesthetics, to street safety, to aligning their presentation with their own gendered subjectivity (Daybell *et al.*, 2020, pp. 110-111). By searching through the discourse of the age around gender and headwear, they opened up the possibility of considering otherwise erased authorship.

This is not to be confused with the "critical fabulation" (Hartman, 2008, p. 11), a writing methodology developed by Saidiya Hartman, which speculated at and fleshed out histories[17] previously limited by absences in the archive based on research and incorporating subjunctive narratives. Instead, the gendering objects

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[17] In *Venus in Two Acts* (2008), Hartman wrote specifically about an anonymous enslaved and murdered girl whom Hartman had discovered a mention of in a legal archive and named 'Venus'.

methodology refuses the definitive gendering of an item in the catalogue based on supplementary research. Dress curator Alexandra Palmer wrote of the 'myriad of ways' a single object can interpreted for exhibition (Palmer, 2018, p. 40), ways that change depending on the curatorial narrative. The biography of objects being intelligible once acquired was an issue that director of the V&A, Tristram Hunt, acknowledged as a growing concern to institutions in *The Lives of the Objects* (2020). Though it would seem from Hunt's writing that some of his concern stems from the political implications of object provenance, rather than interest in biography exclusively.

In her 2002 text, *The Study of Dress History*, Lou Taylor wrote of the then burgeoning interest in the biographical nature of worn garments in dress/fashion museology. She observed the dramatic change publicly acquired clothing underwent from being worn on living, dynamic bodies to becoming 'static and empty vessels' which were 'venerable, valuable and treasured icons' (Taylor, 2002, p. 18) through acquisition into the institutional collection. Despite this, her discussion of good practice in garment conservation was directed to preservation of the textile construction, rather than that of materialised wearer/object biography. Curator Amy De La Haye had an early debate with her colleagues about removing the mud from a pair of boots being acquired in the V&A for the *Streetstyle* exhibition (1994), owing to the fact that the mud was part of the biography the boots were meant to represent (de la Haye, 2010; 2021). Perhaps surprisingly, dress/fashion conservators have devoted more research to the implications of interventions in relation to preserving wearer/object biography (Eastop and Brooks, 1996; Eastop and Brooks, 2006; Scaturro, 2018), in part because their discipline requires immediate assessment of the "chemical" impact of some signs of wear, and procedural accounts of any interventions made (French, 2022).

Conclusion

This chapter opened with two indictments of the impact of curatorial bias, contextualised through the erasure of Black and trans lives from institutional collections of dress/fashion in the UK. In the face of being maligned from "official" historical documents, un-, under-, and mis-identified people have sought to assert their place through other means, including the clothing they wear. Thus, in this chapter worn clothing has been argued to be a form of life-writing, originally identified as a form of ego-document. Study of two men's experience of the world through their clothing, Matthäus Schwarz and Francis Golding, has provided evidence in their own words of how integral their garments were to understanding their biography.

Despite the vital authorial nature of worn clothing, how the sources of decision-making bias cohere and impact this authorship has not been examined prior to this thesis. Theories of how history is constructed and who does this construction from de Certeau and Carr have been used to frame the wider impact of curatorial practice on the authorship of public history. The concept of curatorial interruption has been reiterated to contextualise how interpretations of wearer/object biography can erase or misinterpret essential aspects of a person's history and ultimately influence whose histories are told within the institutional collection.

Contextual Review Conclusion

The chapters comprising the first part of this thesis has drawn on texts across a diversity of fields and disciplines to establish and examine key theoretical areas: the development of dress/fashion curation, the field of material culture studies as it relates to the study of dress/fashion within institutions, the application of phenomenology to studying embodied experience, and new materialist approaches to the affective relationships between matter (including garments and people).

Cognitive bias has been introduced and investigated as a source of decision-making bias in the dress/fashion curator. I have identified a gap in knowledge regarding how MCA methods have addressed curatorial bias, and argued that in fact they *reiterate* curatorial bias during practice. To set the research parameters for further study of curatorial bias in this thesis, I have made an original application of Itiel Dror's interpretation of Francis Bacon's *Four Idols* which established areas for further examination: *Sensory Engagement*, *Disciplinary* and *Working Environment*, *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias.* The meaning and importance of wearer/object biography (both material and immaterial) has been elucidated through examinations of scholarship concerned with the construction of history and who has been included in public histories. I have proposed that worn garments are a form of life-writing, the ego-document, which can and should be included in the construction of public histories.

Part 2 of this thesis will address the primary research components undertaken in this thesis, including a survey of dress/fashion curators in the UK, a close study of MCA practice, and interviews which gather first-hand testimony from dress/fashion curators employed in the discipline.

Part 2

Primary Research

This thesis balances a theoretical approach to understanding the interpretation of biography embedded within worn clothing, while seeking to establish the practical considerations framing how this biography is interpreted by dress/fashion curators. I have taken an interdisciplinary approach to the primary research data collection in this thesis, including the application of methods drawn from fields including sociology and anthropology. These have been used to construct a macro view of demographics and working environments within the discipline of dress/fashion curation, as well as taking a close study of individual curatorial practice.

Part 2 of thesis addresses the research aims, quantitative and qualitative methods applied to collect data, and the subsequent analysis of this data, which forms the empirical evidence supporting this thesis. Discussion of these methods is divided into the following chapters: *Research Context*; *Survey of Dress/Fashion Curators in the UK*; *Study of Curatorial Practice*; and concludes with *Emergent Themes in Primary Research Data.* These methods are contextualised by the theories on phenomenology, new materialism, material culture, embedded biography, and authorship which were discussed in Part 1 of this thesis. The empirical evidence gathered in this chapter will be used as real-world examples which support the proposed sources of decision-making bias in dress/fashion curators during the interpretation of wearer/object biography in worn clothing, examined in Part 3 of this thesis.

2.1 Research Context

Previous to the research in this thesis, there has been little empirical understanding of the demographics comprising dress/fashion curators at work in the discipline, and of the factors informing curatorial MCA practice.

Discipline-specific demographic data collected about who is working in dress/fashion curation has been compiled through association membership, for example to the Dress and Textile Specialists (the principal formal organisation of practitioners in the British Isles and the Republic of Ireland) though this has been superficial data: name, job title, organisation, and address. Previous analysis of curatorial practice has been primarily focused on individual case studies, as with the study of the curators who have worked in the costume, textiles and fashion collections at Manchester Art Gallery examined in Eleanor Wood's thesis *Displaying Dress: New Methodologies for Historic Collections* (2016) or has been used to develop disciplinary instructional guides, as in *The Dress Detective* (2015) written by curators Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim.

While this thesis is concerned with establishing a broad understanding of the demographics and experience of dress/fashion curators from across the UK, the primary research of this thesis originated from and was completed in London, as I am a doctoral researcher in collaboration with MoL and LCF, who was living in London over the course of this research. Two additional motivations for concentrating this research in the already culturally-dominant area of London were: the highest concentration of institutional collections holding dress/fashion objects is found in the London and Southeast Region, with 37 holdings according to a map compiled by the Dress and Textiles Specialists (Dress and Textile Specialists, 2023); and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initial contextual research for this thesis began in October 2019 and at an early stage of planning was impacted by the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020.

My ability to access in-person and on-site collections research was restricted from March 2020 to November 2021, as institutions adjusted to social distancing and limitations on capacity in institutional object stores and archives. In addition to impacting practical considerations in my research, it was also important to consider what sociologist Deborah Lupton identified in *Doing fieldwork in a pandemic* (2020) as the '"affective atmospheres" of conducting any kind of social research in a pandemic, when normal routines are disrupted and many people are feeling uncertain and worried, or are ill or caring for ill family members' (Lupton, 2020, p. 20).

To accommodate both the safety and comfort of participants and practical considerations, much of the primary object- and collections-based research in this thesis happened in the period commencing from January 2022. These limitations on time, access, and resources therefore dictated the size of research samples: some to positive effect (as with the number of responses to the online survey) and some negatively (as with the comparatively low number of participants I secured for the observational study). Ultimately, locating my research in London allowed me to be more flexible and to complete my primary research with minimal contingencies regarding travel and accessing research spaces.

Prior to commencing primary research, ethics approval was received by the UAL Research Ethics Subcommittee on November 18, 2020 (survey) (**Appendix, pp. 30-42**) and on March 31, 2022 (study of curatorial practice) (**Appendix, pp. 43-51**).

2.2 Survey of Dress/Fashion Curators in the UK

This section addresses the development, collection, and analysis of an original survey undertaken for this thesis, then-titled *Curating Dress in the UK*[18]. This survey aimed to gather demographic and experiential data and testimony from practitioners working in UK collections of dress/fashion. The method was applied to provide empirical evidence for what I proposed to be a factor in curatorial bias: the real-world employment and working conditions within this specific area of dress/fashion museology. The survey was undertaken in late 2021 toward the end of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions in the UK, and the results have established a foundational data set for studying what I propose in this thesis is a source of *Working Environment Bias* in dress/fashion curators.

The discussion of this research is organised under subsections: *Research Aims of Survey*, *Survey Methodology*, *Survey Participants*, *Survey Design*, and *Data Analysis.* This chapter contributes participant responses to support my proposal that working environments (discussed in the chapter *Cognitive Bias*) inform the decision-making bias of the curator during MCA of worn clothing. Data and testimony generated through this survey will be used throughout the following chapters as supporting evidence in the examination of the day-to-day curatorial practice. The full survey including ethics permission from UAL (**Appendix, pp. 30-42**), consent form (**Appendix, pp. 52-78**), survey questions with results (**Appendix, pp. 79-121**) can be referred to in the appendix to this thesis.

Research Aims of Survey

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[18] As was stated in the *Terminology* chapter of this thesis, not every practitioner will identify professionally as a curator, however in order to not be mired in the variance of terminology, this survey stated from the outset that it was interested in the experiences of:

'all practitioners based in the UK over the age of 18, at any stage of their career, who at some point in their professional or creative practice have worked with clothing in a public collection or archive. We understand that those working with objects of dress will be employed under a range of job titles, and may not work exclusively in one collection, or a collection that is specific to only dress objects' (**Appendix, pp. 52-53**).

The survey as a quantitative data gathering method is concerned with gathering information through posing questions (often with pre-determined answer choices) to a sample group of respondents, who are representative of the larger group being studied. The aims applying this method to this research were twofold. First, to establish an understanding of the demographics of practitioners working with collections of dress/fashion in the UK by gathering a representative data set; second, to gain a broad understanding of the working environments of these individuals. The results of this survey would then be analysed to highlight common factors informing working environment bias and contribute to the overarching aims of this thesis: establishing an understanding of curatorial interruption through identification of the sources of decision-making bias, and developing suggestions towards mitigating these sources of bias.

Survey as Method

This survey is the first application of this method in the UK to gather representative data about who is working within dress/fashion curation into one report. Previously, information has been anecdotal or focused on one aspect of the discipline. For example, in 2004, Lou Taylor observed that the majority of scholars studying dress/fashion since the 19th century have been women. While stating this as a "fact" (Taylor, 2004, p. 2), Taylor did not provide data-driven evidence of this and her statement presumably drew upon her own professional experience, her research into the history of the discipline (Taylor, 1998; 2002; 2004), and the demographic breakdown of her network of colleagues. Taylor's assertion can be viewed as what cultural theorists Susan Kaiser and Denise Nicole Green termed "educated guesses" (Kaiser and Green, 2016, p. 164) in their own approach to fashion research. This survey attempts to apply, as Kaiser and Green did, both qualitative and quantitive data collection to provide an empirical basis for a contemporary assessment of the state of the discipline.

Aspects of the discipline[19] which have been recently examined using comparative methods include the mapping of public collections of dress in the UK produced by the Dress and Textiles Specialists (DATS) organisation (Dress and Textile Specialists, 2023), a survey of the impact of class on career advancement within the arts sector in the UK (Carey *et al.*, 2020; Evans, 2020), a study of practitioner access and collecting practices within dress/fashion collections specific to COVID-19 (Dress and Textile Specialists, 2021), and the results of a survey published in 2020 by the United States-based Fashion Studies Journal (FSJ), *Making it Work* (Fashion Studies Journal, 2020). This research is of particular relevance to the development of the survey in this thesis, as FSJ gathered demographic data relating to employment and the finances of those in the broader field of dress/fashion studies.

The survey design for this thesis sought to collect both a representative sample of data from practitioners reflective of the subjective experiences of respondents, and to produce a snapshot of the practical working conditions within institutional collections. This raw data could then be used as a foundational sample for potential future comparisons and to track changes in the discipline. To accomplish both of these needs, this survey collected both quantitive data through closed questions (yes/no and multiple choice), and qualitative data through open questions which enabled respondents to provide answers in their own words.

Quantitative data collection could be considered positivist in nature (Kaiser and Green, 2016) as generally it requires a straightforward, fixed response which would lack the insights into practitioner subjectivity I sought to access. Respondents can also become 'frustrated by the constraint' (Coolican, 2018, p. 217) of the possible options provided. Further, the options provided for closed

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[19] Outside of dress/fashion museology, *The 21st-century curator: A report into the evolving role of the UK museum curator, and their needs for the future* (Art Fund, 2017) identified the state of curatorship more broadly within UK institutions.

questions reflect my own bias. To mitigate these issues, where relevant, I provided opportunities for open responses or self-description, allowing for the self-identification of demographic information, and the subjective experience of the respondent to emerge.

Qualitative data collection has faced its own criticism of bias, as it often pivots on anecdotal responses, and can therefore prove difficult to analyse (Kawamura, 2011). For the purposes of this thesis, where the positionality of the curator is under examination, anecdotal information is valuable in understanding how certain aspects of the working environment might impact individual curatorial practice. Collection of qualitative data also contributes to the phenomenological approach taken to this thesis, in contributing to an understanding of curatorial experience. When collecting qualitative data, there can be a reticence for the respondent to provide candid disclosures, particularly if this response might be perceived as at odds with or negative about a particular aspect of the discipline (for example, a workplace or colleague). The factor of "social desirability" bias (Coolican, 2018, p. 217) was mitigated by not requiring a respondent to disclose identifying information such as name or specific location, and allowed them to respond more generally and at their own discretion to open-ended questions, or respond "Prefer not to say" where appropriate. This approach also worked to avoid potential General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) issues and adhere to UAL ethical considerations regarding privacy while still gathering pertinent demographic data.

After determining the content of survey questions, the survey was reviewed with UAL-based psychologist Soljana Çili and Jeffrey Horsley, and a test survey was completed by menswear theorist Benjamin Whyman prior to public distribution of the survey. These reviews did not produce any substantial criticism, but instead helped to shape the clarity of question wording. The survey was designed and administered using the Qualtrics software developed by XM, a software

programme approved for data collection by UAL. This software generated a unique, anonymous link which could be distributed to respondents, where they could access the survey at any point (until they completed all questions) between the period of October 15, 2021 and November 14, 2021.At the end of this period, the link became inactive and displayed a message stating that the survey had ended. This method was therefore accessible to any respondent with access to a computer and internet. Informed consent was obtained from respondents through the provision of an information page at the start of the survey detailing the purpose of the survey , as well as a consent declaration to review and accept, which indicated their approval for the use of their responses in this thesis (**Appendix, pp. 52-55**). Additionally, they were advised that they were able to terminate their participation in the survey at any time, without providing a reason.

Survey Participants

As the information and consent pages of the survey stipulated, respondents were required to be over 18 years of age, and were ideally practitioners working or who had at some point in their practice worked with dress/fashion in UK collections (**Appendix, pp. 52-55**). To ensure that these criteria were met, the survey was distributed via professional networks including the DATS and Centre for Fashion Curation (CfFC) at University of the Arts London mailing lists, the twitter accounts of Dr Lucie Whitmore and myself, and through direct content with colleagues. The limitations of these methods are that curators who are not a part of these networks or without access to the internet could potentially not be included in respondent group, unless they were notified of the survey and given access to a computer by one of their colleagues.

As stated in the section on *Terminology* (p. 20), identifying the number of curators (under any form of job description) is difficult, but to provide context for the potential number of respondents in the discipline: the DATS 2021 Annual Report stated they had 324 active members, 122 individual members, and 66 institutional

members (Dress and Textile Specialists, 2021, p. 2), and CfFC mailing list had approximately 670 members. I argue that that many of these networks will share members, though it would require disclosure of GDPR information to confirm this. It is not possible to know how many respondents came through the other public points of distribution, in part due to the anonymous nature of the link, however this is an indicator of the larger pool of professionals from which this representative sample was drawn. My aim was for 50-75 respondents to the survey, in total 90 respondents consented to their participation in the survey. Once a filter was applied to the survey results which only accepted answers from those respondents residing in the UK, 70 total respondents participated in the survey. Based on the network membership numbers above, if every member was distinct from each other (which as I have argued is unlikely), this would mean that the sample group of respondents represents 5.9% of curators within the discipline in the UK. the resulting number of responses varied for each question (and can be seen to decline over the course of the survey, possibly due to the length),

Survey Design

The design of the demographic portion of the survey (Questions 1 through 13) was modelled on related questions provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in an attempt to 'achieve a harmonised approach in the data collection process that will allow for consistency and comparability of statistical outputs from different sources across the UK' (Office for National Statistics, 2021). This research was based at an institution in England and therefore the ONS stipulations specific to this nation were followed.[20] Consideration to variance in responses from those based in other nations inside the UK was provided through the self-description and open-ended survey questions, where the respondent could self-identify (or decline to) as they preferred. Due to the potential for demographic questions to

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[20] Although this research is interested in dress/fashion curators based in the entirety of the UK, and there are specific requirements for demographic questions regarding ethnic group, national identity and religious affiliation specifically within Scotland and Northern Ireland, ONS guidance advises 'following the recommended country-specific options' (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

be perceived as intrusive (Kawamura, 2011), it was made clear on the participant information and consent form that the rationale for questions and potential responses were based on ONS guidance, with a link to this information.

The second portion of the survey (Questions 14 through 39) focused on collecting information about individual practitioner methods, and the working environments they practiced in. These questions in part were based on my own working knowledge of dress/fashion curation: for example, Question 21 (**Appendix, p. 99**) offers several options of informal MCA methods which I have encountered colleagues in the discipline using in their practices. The initial outline of questions which pertained to workplace issues or working practices which I had encountered was supported by questions in similar surveys including *Making It Work* (2020) which identified common areas of concern, including the educational background of practitioners. The *Making It Work* survey focused on stressors internal and external to individual careers such as personal finances and job advancement, primarily from respondents in the United States. While the analysis of the socio-economic situations of practitioners working dress/fashion curation in the UK is a ripe area for examination, with future potential for developing my theory of *Working Environment* bias, the scope of the survey in this thesis required the establishment of a broad foundation of previously-uncollected data on the discipline. Thus, questions in this section were aiming to gather a representative understanding of the commonalities between individual methodologies and methods, and establishing under what practical conditions MCA in UK institutional collections "typically" occur.

Data Analysis

The following subsections discuss the results of the survey, and detail the process of analysis which establishes original empirical data on the demographic makeup of dress/fashion curators in the UK, and the working environments they undertake

MCA within. This chapter concludes with discussion of the findings of this component of the primary research.

Demographic Data

Analysis of the survey data began through a review of the quantitive data collated by the Qualtrics software, with options to view data numerically or as percentages. As this survey aimed to gather representative data about the discipline, I refer to the percentage results throughout this section, unless specific qualitative responses are presented as examples. The following section discusses the results of as they pertain to aims of this survey: establishing demographic and experiential understanding of UK-based collections practitioners working with dress/fashion objects, based on the representative sample set.

The demographics of the sample drawn from survey analysis establishes that from 70 respondents, 98.57% identified as a member of a white ethnic group (Question 1, **Appendix, pp. 80-81**). From the same number of respondents, 71.43% identified as heterosexual (Question 4, **Appendix, pp. 82-83**), and 87.14% respondents do not have a disability (Question 5, **Appendix, p. 83**). The age of 74.28% respondents fell between 25-54 years of age (Question 6, **Appendix, p. 84**). From 69 respondents, 92.75% identified as female (Question 3, **Appendix, p. 82**), and of 68 respondents, 100% of respondents have obtained some level of post-secondary education (Question 10, **Appendix, p. 87**).

This survey took into consideration the working knowledge of job precarity within the discipline (discussed further in the chapter *Working Environment Bias*), allowing respondents to reply to Question 14 (**Appendix, p. 92**) on the location of their day-to-day activity with any options that applied. While this can be viewed as impacting the clarity of responses, I argue this structure enabled practitioners who divide their time between multiple workplaces to disclose their answer more fully. In response to Question 14, of 65 respondents, 81% work in institutional

collections, whether a GLAM, academic collection, or collection held in a public trust. Within their individual roles, of 63 respondents, 73.02% stated that their practice includes the close study or analysis of dress/fashion objects (Question 15, **Appendix, pp. 93-94**); with 70.24% of respondents undertaking this activity at least weekly when at work.

Based on the analysis of this representative sample of data, it can be said that the primary demographic of dress/fashion curators working within institutional collections in the UK is comprised of formally educated, white, heterosexual, non-disabled women between the ages of 25-54 who are regularly engaging with MCA of dress/fashion objects.

Working Environment

The qualitative data within survey responses was analysed through thematic, inductive coding (Seale, 2012), a method where survey answers are studied and 'precise themes are suggested empirically from the data' (Seale, 2012, p. 368). As previously discussed, I constructed the questions based on my hypothesis that the working environment of the curator will factor into their decision-making during MCA, however it was through the coding of open-ended responses that common themes emerged. This could be viewed as a form of "open coding", drawn from sociologist's Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss foundational text *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* (1967). Grounded theory is concerned with discovering 'new, unanticipated findings' (Timonen, Foley and Conlon, 2018, p. 6) through qualitative research, and I argue that due to my informed position within the discipline of dress/fashion curation I cannot fully subscribe to application of the method. However, the emphasis placed on understanding phenomena through analysis of qualitative data in Grounded Theory is relevant in application to this survey.

While the entirety of the survey provided valuable data on education and

methodologies employed during curatorial practice, particularly during MCA, the following section highlights seven specific questions which were analysed to establish an understanding of the working environment of the dress/fashion curator:

- Question 25 - Do you apply identical methods and/or methodologies to each object you analyse/study? (**Appendix, p. 103**)
- Question 26 - If you answered 'no' to the previous question, please explain why (**Appendix, p. 104**)
- Question 27 - Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you consult available donor or original wearer information (e.g., notes, interviews) about the object? (**Appendix, pp. 105-106**)
- Question 28 - Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with colleagues? (**Appendix, pp. 106-107**)
- Question 29 - When you are analysing/studying an object, are you in a dedicated study space (e.g., Collections store, office with examining table)? (**Appendix, pp. 107-109**)
- Question 30 - During analysis/close study, is working with the object the sole focus of your time? (**Appendix, pp. 110-111**)
- Question 39 - When documenting objects, is recording information the sole focus of your time? (**Appendix, p. 121**)

I applied an iterative process of reviewing the survey responses on hard copy, processing emergent themes within the responses, and highlighted these themes using a colour-coded system broadly organised within the parameters (*Cognitive Bias*; *Sensory Engagement Bias*; *Disciplinary Bias*; *Working Environment Bias*; *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias)* initially set by the adaptation of Dror's interpretation of the *Four Idols* (p. 68) to dress/fashion curation. These themes were:

- Pink - Resource constraints (for example: time, energy, staff, equipment, access to objects)

- Yellow - Systems, standards, non-curatorial colleagues within the collection (for example: adhering to collection database parameters, best practice)

- Green - Disciplinary or Curatorial practice (for example: feeling or interest in objects, perception of value or meaning of object)

- Blue - Institutional demands (for example: collecting policies, analysis for a curatorial output such as exhibition)

- Purple - Object-specific responses

In analysis of both the quantitive results and of the open-ended responses, the following concepts emerged:

- Demands on Focus - Drawn from 51 respondents, 54.90% indicated that "Yes" they were able to focus solely on the object during MCA. Open-ended responses to "Sometimes" and "No" indicated a lack of dedicated time to spend during MCA, whether due to the curator being the only member of staff able to perform this task, or due to needing to perform multiple duties, with one respondent commenting 'I have many other responsibilities so am frequently interrupted during examination of objects.' (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 50) I propose that this is a factor informing *Working Environment* and *Cognitive Bias*, and is discussed further in the section on *Practical Employment Considerations* (p. 296).

- Practical Constraints - Despite 70.59% of 51 respondents indicating that they had a dedicated physical study space for MCA, open-ended answers throughout the survey indicated that consistent access to objects (not withstanding those who commented on their COVID-19-related access) was contingent on workload, with object handling often undertaken for other purposes such as photography or mounting exhibition objects. Even among those respondents with dedicated spaces, often these were tables

which were temporarily set up in offices, or in other "out of use" areas within the institution: 'No back room so I set up a table in the galleries. Try to do it when closed to the public.' (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 48) I propose that this is a factor informing *Sensory Engagement*, *Cognitive*, and *Working Environment Bias*.

- Disciplinary Reliance - Responses frequently mentioned consultation with colleagues, or wider disciplinary networks, providing evidence that object analysis was often made in collaboration with other practitioners' interpretations. This professional collaboration was made even where the object had not been analysed in person, as in the respondent who used Facebook groups (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 45). Additionally, one respondent wrote of being 'discouraged from spending too much time' investigating object/wearer biography (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 43) I propose that this is a factor informing *Disciplinary Bias*.

- Curatorial Subjectivity - Variants of the word "depend" were used 20 times in the open-ended responses to these highlighted questions. This indicates that the curator must be both adaptable to what they perceive as the specificities of the object, but also what aspects they are motivated to examine when undertaking MCA. One respondent wrote that '…with some objects some of the methods flow more easily' (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 40), while other respondents noted the perceived "complex" (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 39) nature or "significance" of certain objects (Curating Dress in the UK, 2021, p. 40). I propose that this is a factor informing *Disciplinary* and *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*.

Discussion

The application of the survey method to this research has been beneficial for providing a representative demographic data set to examine in this thesis. Future application of this method might consider the length and content of the survey, and how these impact the decrease in number of responses over the course of the survey, particularly amongst curators who are demonstrably under time constraints. Further research would be required to determine how much membership crossover between networks there is, and how this might impact the distribution of the survey. Targeted in-person distribution (at institution or professional events) might increase responses from those curators who are not members of these networks, or who do not have access to the resources needed to complete the survey.

While these survey results are a representative sample, they do provide data-driven evidence to substantiate Lou Taylor's assertion from nearly 20 years ago, demonstrating that little of the demographic dominance of women in dress/fashion curation has changed since that time. The original, empirical data gathered in this thesis provides evidence that the interpretation of worn garments acquired into institutional collections is overwhelmingly being performed by a demographically homogenous group. It is not my suggestion that any group is monolithic, and that there are not nuances within this sample demographic. Additionally, the responses to this survey have illustrated the working practice and environment of the UK dress/fashion curator. This aids in understanding under what conditions the MCA of worn garments and the interpretation of wearer/object biography occur under, and lays a foundation for subsequent primary research methods, including close study of curatorial practice.

This survey has produced evidence supporting the hypothesis of this thesis, that there are identifiable sources of decision-making bias impacting the dress/fashion curator. Through increasing an understanding of the practical working

experiences and common factors impacting the decision-making of this closely affiliated group of experts, the secondary aim of this thesis can be achieved: to develop suggestions for mitigating these biases.

The following sections address the next components of the primary research in this thesis, the observation of digital and material culture analysis and interviews with dress/fashion curators about their experience and practice.

2.3 In-Person Study of Curatorial Practice

As was discussed in the section on *Material Culture Methodologies* (p. 45), the focus of previous scholarship prior to this thesis, has been primarily the results of dress/fashion MCA (Buck, 1963; Palmer, 1997; de la Haye and Clark, 2008; Bide, 2017; Fisk, 2019), rather than an analysis of the methods used. The two notable examples were produced by curators Valerie Steele (1998), Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim (2015), however their research operates as MCA guidance for other researchers, rather than a critical analysis of the decision-making process involved in the practice. Dress/fashion curatorship, particularly in the years before it was formally introduced to academia, is a discipline which relies heavily on mentorship as a means of teaching methodology (Jarvis, 2009; Mida and Kim, 2015). The implications of this knowledge sharing will be examined further in the chapter on *Disciplinary Bias* (p. 234). Practically, this has meant that methods and methodologies have been shared verbally or through physical demonstration at the time of MCA and have gone undocumented, or have been examined in retrospect (Taylor, 2002; Taylor, 2004; Wood, 2016). These forms of oral and tacit knowledge-sharing have meant that at this point, no formal critical analysis of this aspect of dress/fashion curatorial practice has been undertaken and documented.

The in-person primary research in this thesis was comprised of three interconnected components: on-screen analysis of digitised garments; material culture analysis of dress/fashion objects; and a semi-structured interview with participant curators. The subsections in this chapter address: *Research Aims*; *Methodology*; *Participant Selection*; *Study Component Design* (with subsections for *Digitised Garment Analysis*, *Photogrammetry*, *Eye Gaze Tracking*, *Material Culture Analysis*, *Interviews*); *Data Analysis of Study of Curatorial Practice* (with subsections for *Interviews*, *Digitised Garment Analysis*, *MCA*); and *Discussion of Primary Research*.

Research Aims of In-Person Study of Curatorial Practice

The research aims of the in-person component of the primary research was to gather empirical qualitative data of: the methods applied in the analysis of worn clothing, particularly those aspects of practice which are not possible to analyse through a quantitative method such as the survey; and how the curator perceived and experienced worn clothing during MCA, in their own words.

Three different forms of data collection: eye gaze tracking (digitised garment analysis), video recording (MCA), and semi-structured interviews were used to gather evidence illustrating the phenomenological experience of the dress/fashion curator. These methods aimed to enable the participant to share their wider experience of clothing, the methods and tools of their practice, their experience of the study and of their day-to-day work. This data advances a deeper understanding and documented evidence of the sources of decision-making bias at work in these particular curators.

Research Methods

'An anthropologist's conservations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense.' (Behar, 1996, p. 7)

The above quote from *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), by anthropologist Ruth Behar, highlights the subjective and fleeting nature of using ethnographic methods to observe and document culture. Social anthropologist Sarah Pink described ethnography as 'a range of qualitative research practices, employed, with varying levels of theoretical engagement, in academic and applied research contexts' (Pink, 2015a, p. 4). Pink's critical approach to ethnography is particularly relevant in this thesis as she insists that these methods are not applied by a researcher at a remove, as has been suggested (but that they are reflexive, experiential practices (2015a, pp. 4-6)). Her approach challenges the colonial

roots of the practice, which originated in the study of primarily non-Western individuals and communities (Atkinson, 2007; Jenss, 2016). In Behar's research, she presented ethnography as an emotional, empathetic method without easily defined boundaries between the observer and the observed. While it is important to stress that I am not an ethnographer, I have found it useful to draw on ethnographic methods in the primary research of this thesis in part due to my embedded position within the discipline. My position as a dress/fashion curator studying other curators reiterates these shifting boundaries, and I have an insider's understanding of the embodied nature of MCA.

As was discussed in the previous section on the survey, while qualitative research is useful in gathering immaterial aspects of phenomena, it can be difficult to neatly organise and reproduce the collected data. Moreover, ethnography can often reflect the opinion and aims of the observer more than it does the observed. The straightforward solution to this might be to practice a critical self-reflection during my analysis, to use what anthropologist Clifford Geertz termed "confessionalism" (Geertz, 1988, p. 145), where my own experience of the research becomes the focus. He was particularly critical of those researchers who believe that 'authorial self-inspection for "bias" or "subjectivity"' (Geertz, 1988, p. 145) will somehow render their accounts of phenomena more than just that - an account. Geertz argued that 'all ethnographic descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer's descriptions, not those of the described' (Geertz, 1988, pp. 144-145), and his critique of ethnographic research could throw a theoretical wrench in my attempt to situate myself as the researcher collecting and understanding the phenomenological experience of the dress/fashion curator during MCA of worn clothing.

Behar, however, rejected Geertz's low valuation of researcher self-reflection (Behar, 1996, p.19) and instead centralised her subjective emotional response in her ethnographic writing, fully implicating herself in her ethnographic practice. I

argue that in order to contextualise how other curators experience the immaterial and affective nature of wearer/object biography, and how the sources of decision-making bias impact that experience, documenting my own experiences aids in establishing a form of disciplinary empathy. The intention of this thesis is not to assign blame or to indulge in the negative connotations associated with the concept of "bias", but to better understand under what conditions my peers in the discipline are undertaking MCA of worn garments. I argue that incorporating the approaches of Pink and Behar enable a richer understanding of the discipline I work within, strengthen my own self-reflexivity, and encourage a critical discourse around MCA practice within dress/fashion museology.

The research in this thesis is concerned with the close study of curatorial practice, and as the sole researcher I am a curator with close ties to the Museum of London and London College of Fashion archives, and my own object-based analysis practice. Undeniably, I am situated "within" the area of study, and accordingly my approach to primary research collection needed to reflect my position. Ethnography, with its emphasis on 'understanding that we learn "about" by being "with/in"' (Coffey, 2018), was the method I applied when planning how to study the practice and phenomenology of the dress/fashion curator. Thus, I have kept a journal documenting my primary research process, including (when access to Museum of London was reinstated post-COVID-19) my own object analysis (**Appendix, pp. 135-159**).

This journal is not, as anthropologist Michael Agar suggested, an 'elaborate life history interview' (Agar, 1980, p. 99) of the ethnographer. Agar suggested undertaking this prior to commencing research, in order to identify biases to compare findings against. I argue that this might be viewed as a document centring "confessionalism", as per Geertz. Instead, I used this journal as a casual place where I could reflect on my own experience of developing the research, and of object analysis, using a form of self-reflexive writing-based auto-

ethnography (Adams and Jones, 2008; Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis, 2008).

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, I argue that the process of MCA is an embodied, sensory experience: in order to interpret the garment, the dress/fashion curator must come close to see, to touch, to potentially inhale (and through this, ingest) detritus from the material. During this process, the curator is temporarily sharing and experiencing the affective atmosphere of the worn garment. This embodied practice requires "exercise", and over the course of COVID-19, my practice became stagnant. Documenting my research process allowed me to think again as though as I was working within an institutional collection, and to re-position myself as a peer to my study participants. Positioning myself in this way, I was able to apply the ethnographic method of "participant observation" to the in-person data collection. Ethnographers Stephen Schensul, Jean Schensul and Margaret Diane LeCompteas suggested this research approach for the following reasons:

• to identify and guide relationships with participants
• to aid the researcher in understanding how things are organised and prioritised, how people interrelate, and what are the cultural parameters within a society are
• to show the researcher what the cultural members deem to be important in manners, leadership, politics, social interaction, and taboos
• to help the researcher become known to the cultural members, thereby easing facilitation of the research process
• to provide the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants (Schensul, LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, p. 91).

In this thesis, the concept of "culture" can be understood as the discipline of dress/fashion curation. Building on this approach, theorist Barbara Kawulich suggested this method as a means of understanding 'definitions of terms that

participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants' (Kawulich, 2005, p. 4). Though the ordering of this research follows Schencul, LeCompte and Schensul, as the participant observation occurred prior to the interviews, Kawulich's approach is useful in supporting one of the aims of this study: to establish an understanding of the phenomenological experience of the curator in ways they may not be able to articulate in the interview. This includes observing the physiological response of the practitioner to the worn garment and specific MCA methodology (if any) followed in the course of analysis.

Participant Selection

Two criteria guided participant recruitment: that the demographic of the participants reflected the demographic majority gathered through the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey, and that they currently practiced within an institutional collection typical of those populating the UK. The rationale for this was to see if observation of curatorial practice would support the themes which emerged through the results of the survey (resource constraints; systems and standards within the collection; disciplinary or curatorial practice; institutional demands; object-specific responses). As was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the number of participants was also directed by the timeframe available as LCF facilities re-opened and the need to reschedule study dates as one participant contracted COVID-19 and was required to quarantine.

Participants 2 and 3 were recruited through my professional network, which serves to highlight my own position as an "insider" (Tooth-Murphy, 2020) within the discipline, as I was able to contact possible participants directly. It also brings to bear considerations of bias in constructing the research, as I selected potential participants who I anticipated would be receptive to the exploratory and

experimental methods I would be employing during the study. While it would have been ideal to have been contacted by all potential participants of their own volition to mitigate this aspect of my research bias, only one respondent (Participant 1) was recruited through contacting my UAL email which had been provided at the end of the survey for respondents who wished to be contacted about further research (**Appendix, p. 78**).

On arrival to the study, participants were provided with and signed an information sheet and consent form (**Appendix, pp. 163-164**) detailing the purpose of the study, the methods and technology which would be used on the day, and GDPR and data storage information. They were also provided the demographic segment of the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey to complete, so that I could determine where in the demographic schema they were situated. For uniformity all participants are referred to using a pseudonym in this thesis. The participants reflect the demographic of the discipline presented in the previous section (p. 148) and at the time of the research were active practitioners, situated in institutional collections typically representative of those holding dress/fashion objects in the UK. All three participants completed the three study components outlined in this chapter.

Study Component Design

The study took place on-site at LCF John Princes Street (JPS), using a selection of worn garments loaned from LCF Archives. Although in-situ study of the participants in their workplace would have been ideal, the individual restrictions around external visitors to various institutional sites meant that securing one consistent location ensured the highest attendance rate and ability to control study parameters. The study dates took place on April 4th (Participant 1 (hereafter referred to in this thesis as P1)), April 13th (Participant 2 (P2)), and April 29th (Participant 3 (P3)).

Digitised Garment Analysis

The design of the digitised garment analysis (hereafter referred to in this thesis as DGA) section of this study was developed through my research into alternative ways of measuring the sensory experience of MCA. Initially, as I documented in my practice journal on November 5th, 2021, I had hoped to create a VR environment where participant vital signs could be measured while they handled a garment, in the style of a "lie detector" test (**Appendix, p. 138**). The development and application of such a study was outside of the scope of this research, and upon reflection I am not convinced that this approach (conducted in a completely virtual environment) would have provided evidence of sources of bias.

I continued discussions for other possibilities of studying haptic engagement during MCA and the limitations of textile biosensors with Douglas Atkinson, researcher in wearable technology at LCF. Through our conversations, I determined that the technology required to measure curatorial handling of objects was not available to me in my position as a PhD researcher. Currently the options to measure haptic engagement either require a purpose-made biosensor textile (outside of the financial scope of this study, and as a new fabric this would not provide any wearer/object biography for curatorial interpretation), or that sensors be attached to garments (against LCF Archives object handling policy).

I was aware of collections which had previously generated 3D digitised models of clothing for online exhibition, such as the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, and began thinking about how this technology could be employed in MCA. Through discussions with Peter Hill, Technical Manager 3D Design and Material Science at LCF and with the approval of LCF Archives curator Susanna Corner, I determined that photogrammetry and 3D modelling of garments could be manipulated on a screen by participants. In conjunction with this on-screen manipulation, I could use eye gaze tracking to gather data on aspects similar to

MCA, such as where a curator's eye landed first or how long they spent looking at a particular feature on a garment. Despite what I argue is a need to study sensory engagement beyond ocularcentrism, the parameters of this particular research project have necessarily, due to lack of access to these technologies, focused on visual engagement.

A note on technology: While I learned to use photogrammetry and associated modelling and eye gaze tracking programs for the purpose of this study, I am not a proficient technician with this technology. Nor is it the intent of this thesis to examine these technologies in depth, but rather to consider how they can or can not be used to assess sources of bias. Therefore, I am providing an explanation of these systems as I have come to understand them, which I believe will also go some way in explaining the limitations I encountered in using these systems and may be useful for other dress/fashion curators considering this method.

Photogrammetry

Photogrammetry has its roots in 19th century land surveying (Polidori, 2021, p. 168) when it was used to measure accurate distances, though digital photogrammetry began to evolve from the microcomputing in the 1970s (Polidori, 2021, p. 174) Contemporary digital photogrammetry involves taking overlapping photographs of an object from multiple angles, in order to extract enough visual data to upload into software which creates a map from a cloud of common points between each photo, rendering a 3D mesh with texture. (Wyatt-Spratt and Thoeming, 2019). As a tool for creating richer images of objects, photogrammetry is relatively accessible for collection use, with free apps such as Scandy Pro requiring a camera phone as the primary equipment.

Accordingly, this method is growing in popularity for researching dress/fashion within institutional collections, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19 when most collections had to close their doors to the public for extended periods (for

example, O'Neill, 2021; *Dressing Above Your Station: Fashion and Textiles in the Life and Work of the Artist Stephen Campbell*, 2022; de Tender, 2023). At the *Under the Magnifying Glass* symposium held at the Rijksmuseum, Netherlands in April 2023, several papers discussed their recent application (and the limitations they found) of photogrammetry in dress/fashion-based research projects, including at ModeMuze (Netherlands), Germanisches Nationalmuseum (Germany), and Meiji Jingu Museum (Japan).

For this study, I was able to book several sessions with the Digital Learning Lab (DLL) at LCF, where technicians Musen Guan and Elliot Denman used a photogrammetry rig populated with 60 digital SLR cameras to capture the images. They then used Blender and Metashape software to mesh the images, conform textures, and erase backgrounds from the objects. For the initial test shoot (November 5th, 2021), I used a navy pinstriped wool blazer of my own, as I was unable to secure objects from LCF Archives for the session (**Figure 2.1, Appendix, p. 4**). I noted in my practice journal after this session:

'Anything reflective, transparent, with "frills" (IE: lace) or too dark a colour confuses the computer and will create a distorted image. Clothing w/ discernible "texture" in bright or varied colours captures well.' (**Appendix, p. 137**)

I also noted that photogrammetry is only able to model what it "sees", meaning the exterior of the static photographed. While the rendered digital image appears to have an "interior", it is only a mirrored image of the exterior. In a second meeting (November 26th, 2021) with the technicians, I was given a basic tutorial on how to model images myself for the final shoot, as they did not have the time to edit my final images for me.

The next step in the photogrammetry process involved selecting objects to use for modelling from LCF Archives. I was provided a catalogue list by then-Archives

and Curatorial Assistant, Leah Gouget-Levy, and began to select 16 objects for viewing at JPS on January 19th, 2022. My criteria for object selection was informed by what I had learned during the photogrammetry test shoots, as well as the focus of this thesis: retention of wearer/object biography. The criteria was:

- A previously worn garment.

- A garment with provenance of who the original wearer was, to compare against possible interpretations made by study participants.

- Garments that could represent Western womenswear, menswear, and non-gender specific, to represent what might typically be found in a dress/fashion collection in the UK.

- Garments which conformed to the technical specifications outlined above.

Ultimately three garments were selected for loan:

- Object 1: A blue jacket from a two piece 'Mattli' suit in the Cecile Korner collection. Only the jacket was selected for use, as the skirt was missing a waistband and was not able to be mounted on a mannequin without conservation (**Figure 2.2, Appendix, p. 5**).
    - Documented provenance in LCF Archives records: 'Belonged to Mrs Korner, a Kensington Socialite/bankers wife in the 1950's/60's. Mr A. Korner: "Again this looks like it is for Brazil, very light weight and yet formal" (Interview date 22/10/99) Exhibited at 'The Englishnessness of English Dress', LCF/Judith Clark Costume, 2000. See related catalogue.'
- Object 2: A pair of black cotton and jute espadrilles in the Francis Golding collection (**Figure 2.3, Appendix, p. 6**).
    - There is no documented provenance about these espadrilles, other than they were donated to LCF Archives as owned and worn by

Golding.

- Object 3: A green suede jacket from the Percy Savage collection (**Figure 2.4, Appendix, p. 7**).

  - There is no documented provenance about this jacket, other than it was donated to LCF Archives as owned and worn by Savage

These garments were shot on a mannequin (Object 1 and 3) and on a plexiglass mount (Object 2) in the LCF photogrammetry rig on February 8th, 2022 (**Figure 2.5, Appendix, p 8**; **Figure 2.6, Appendix, p. 9**). Note that Object 3 was not photographed on the mannequin due to time constraints) and rendered into a 3D model by Musen Guan, for final modelling by myself offsite. The limitations of my skillset became apparent in modelling the images used in the study, where the shoulder areas of Object 1 could not be "smoothed" sufficiently (**Figure 2.7, Appendix, p. 10**). However, the remainder of the garment was useable and the object was included in the study. The digitised garment models were then uploaded to Sketchfab, a 3D modelling platform website. From this location, the individual images could be loaded onto a LCF laptop equipped with eye gaze tracking equipment.

Eye Gaze Tracking

Eye gaze tracking is a method of documenting and analysing the position and movement of a participant's pupils and the behaviour of their gaze as they look at an image. This method is employed across fields which are concerned with attention span and how objects are visually observed, including neuroscience, psychology, consumer behaviour, and aerospace studies (for overviews, see Liversedge, Gilchrist and Everling, 2011; Holmqvist, Örbom, Hooge *et al.*, 2023). Although this thesis is the first time it has been applied to the study of dress/fashion curatorial practice, eye movement recording has been previously used in museology to study how viewers experience and perceive art and objects in an exhibition setting (Saunderson, Cruickshank and McSorley, 2010; Ashrafi and

Garbutt, 2017; Reitstätter, Brinkmann, Santini *et al.*, 2020; Sherman, Cupo and Mithlo, 2020; Jin, 2021).

The purpose of using eye gaze tracking in this study was to form a data set tracking the curator's gaze fixations as they encountered objects, generating a relatively "objective" document of cognitive process, to compare against their own testimony of experiencing a garment. In their chapter T*he Eyes Have It: Eye movements and the debatable differences between original objects and reproductions*, researchers Helen Saunderson, Alice Cruickshank and Eugene McSorley wrote that 'measures of eye movement are direct, objective and quantifiable' (Saunderson, Cruickshank and McSorley, 2010, p. 91). For example, if the eye gaze recording showed the first fixation point of their gaze on a noticeable mark of wear on a test garment, but in their testimony they say that the first thing they observed was the design of the garment, would there be valuable insight to gather from this discrepancy.

Once again, a note on my technical proficiency with eye gaze tracking. At the time I loaned the eye gaze tracking equipment (Tobii X2-30 tracker) from the DLL, this equipment had never been used previously within LCF. Therefore, once the tracker and the software (Tobii Pro Lab) were installed on a PC laptop by the LCF technicians, I taught myself how to calibrate and operate the equipment. Had there been fully trained technicians available to operate this equipment, the outcome might have been different to the data I gathered, however I consider this experimental research a meaningful assessment of its potential use in this thesis and for future research.

Ideally, I would have secured a fixed location for the study, and secured the same room (JPS 305) for each study date. However, due to term time restarting and the demand on rooms and space for students to distance it was not possible to have the same room, so the third session was situated in JPS 511. The tracking laptop

was situated at a desk with a chair in front of it, which the participant could move as required to get comfortably seated (**Figure 2.8** (**Appendix, p. 11**)). The Tobii tracker requires calibration prior to beginning a study, which allows for some head movement by the participant (comparable to some methods which require a static participant). As the study participant would need to be manipulating the digitised garments using a mouse pointer, looking down and back to the screen, this was a useful feature of this particular system.

To test the study, on March 16th, 2022 I recruited Gouget-Levy as a participant (**Figure 2.9** (**Appendix, p. 12**)). She went through the the first two sections (DGA and MCA) in JPS 305, and fed back on her impressions of the study design. While there were notes such as the comfort of sitting upright for the duration of DGA, or the comfort of camera equipment during MCA (discussed further in this chapter), the most significant feedback she provided was on the constructed environment of the laptop and tracker, and how she felt observed while engaging with the object with me in the room.

The potential impact of the presence of the observer on the actions of the observed is a well-noted phenomenon, with Michel Foucault theorising extensively on self-surveillance (Foucault, 1989; 2002a; 2002b), and psychoanalyst Wilfred Ruprecht Bion studying the effect of memory and desire in the analyst on the analysand (Bion, 1970). Itiel Dror has also identified the thorny issue and impact of having one expert check another's work during research (Dror, 2009). However, considering that this equipment required manual calibration which the participants were not trained for, and that DGA was likely a new experience for the participants, I decided that remaining present but out of the participant's sightline outweighed these concerns.

Upon entering the study room, the participant was shown how to sit in the chair provided, and how to operate the equipment, using a mouse or keyboard to

manipulate the garments. Calibration requires the participant to follow a visual target as it moves across the laptop monitor, so the tracker can configure itself to the position of the participant's eyes in relation to the stimuli. The software then maps this data onto a 3D eye model, accounting for the 'natural variation in the shape and geometry of the eyes' (Tobii Pro Lab, 2021). Once calibrated, as long as the participant did not spend a significant amount of time with their eyes looking offscreen, or move their head significantly, it is valid for the duration of the study. Due to the disruptive nature of calibration, with the above discussed issues with intervention and observation in mind, the structure of the study was sequenced based on method (DGA, MCA) rather than by each of the three study objects. This sequencing also minimised possible discrepancy between calibrations, for example, if participants had to recalibrate for each object, this could impact the collected data.

Participants had been asked to bring any materials they might commonly use to document object interpretations (though none brought any), and were provided with a pen and paper to use during the study. They were given no time limit in which to analyse each digitised object, which had been pre-loaded into browser windows prior to calibration. A control object (a pair of black leather sandals from the Francis Golding collection (**Figure 2.10, Appendix, p. 13**)) had been modelled and were provided as an orienting object to practice manipulating before Object 1 was loaded onscreen. Once they had finished analysing each object, they maintained their position while I transitioned into the next sequential object browser window.

Once the three objects had been analysed, this section of the study ended, and we proceeded to the second section: MCA.

Material Culture Analysis

The wider practice of MCA has been discussed at length throughout this thesis,

while this section focuses on the design of the MCA section of the primary research study. Where the DGA had been an experimental data collecting technology, MCA is a practice that is common for all of the selected participants. Thus, I saw an opportunity to mitigate the previously mentioned potential impact on participant behaviour during observation, by removing myself as a direct observer. Instead, I employed the use of a GoPro camera to record how the participant interacted with the study objects. This research attempted to strike a balance between documenting the affective and phenomenological meeting between worn dress/fashion objects and curators during MCA, in an situation that was an approximation of the participant's practice, rather than a reproduction of it.

The rooms used for this section of the study were at LCF JPS, with Participant 1 (P1) and Participant 2 (P2) in JPS 320 and Participant 3 (P3) in JPS 522. These rooms were selected as neutral office-style spaces which would balance replicating typical institutional collection working environments (supported by the *Curating Dress in the UK* data which demonstrated a common setup is tables in office spaces or in collection stores (**Appendix, pp. 129-131**), and the artificial environment required for a replicable study.

After a basic introduction to guidelines of LCF Archives object handling, the participant was fitted with a GoPro[21] camera worn on a head strap mount, with a digital SLR camera recording at a three foot distance from the work table. The footage from the SLR cameras was not planned for use in data analysis, but as a backup in case of failure on the part of the GoPro. The three study objects had been laid out on the work table, and participants were able to engage with them in any order they wished. After the participant was situated in the room and the GoPro was confirmed recording, I left the room and sat in the hallway outside.

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[21] GoPro cameras are commonly used in extreme sports, as the size (71 x 55 x 33.6 mm; 5.6 oz) allows them to be attached to a body easily and with minimal impact to the wearer.

From here, the GoPro fed a livefeed of the recording to an app installed on my iPhone, which I observed in real time.

The purpose of using a GoPro camera for "passive capture" (Lee et al., 2008, p. 341) of curatorial practice aimed for what scientists Jonathan Skinner and Gerard Gormley identified as 'making visible the unverbalizable' (Skinner and Gormley, 2016, p. 235). In their article *Point of view filming and the elicitation interview* (2016), they argued that recording from the point of view of a participant 'allows the interviewer to see, with his/her own eyes, an approximation of what participants were actually experiencing during their activity' (Skinner and Gormley, 2016, p. 238) and contribute towards a 'cognitive anthropology examining the underpinnings of bodily practices as they unfold' (Skinner and Gormley, 2016, p. 236). In *Going Forward Through the World: Thinking Theoretically About First Person Perspective Digital Ethnography* (2015b) Sarah Pink acknowledged that while this method does not offer an unbiased view of how others experience the world, it offers 'a new form of subjectivity and situatedness' (Pink, 2015b, p. 246) for the researcher to explore.

The GoPro recorded both video and audio of the participant's process of MCA, while they used the methodology they usually apply during analysis. As with the DGA component, they were given no specific time limit and were invited to bring any materials they might use in their regular practice, and were provided with appropriate gloves for object handling, as well as a pencil and paper for documentation. This method of video elicitation (Lupton, 2020, p. 3) aimed to engage with the subject's view of the garment as closely as possible, something that is enabled by the camera and would not have been physically possible unless I leaned over their shoulder while they worked, which as previously discussed, would impact how they performed their object analysis. I term this technique a "proxy gaze" method of study. The recording was intended to provide data to review and compare against the DGA for information such as how a practitioner

was analysing a garment, what aspects of the garment they might linger on.

Once again, Gouget-Levy was used as a test participant, and her feedback on the comfort of the head mount for the GoPro informed how tight it was installed on the participants' heads. Once the MCA of all three objects had been completed, the participant notified me, the GoPro was shut off and removed, and we proceeded to the next section of the study.

Interviews

The two practice studies were supported by a semi-structured interview session with the same participants, immediately following the completion of MCA and in the same location. The interview was audio-only, recorded on an iPhone placed on the work table, with the garments out and available for reference. Performing a face-to-face interview allowed for a discursive exchange (Lupton, 2020), but also the ability to informally observe the participants' body language during their responses. In the wake of COVID-19 remote meetings, being able to engage with gestures and body language of participants allowed for a more natural flow of conversation. Creating opportunity for open discourse with the practitioner, albeit in the artificial study environment, aimed to elicit answers regarding their practice and allowed them to "talk back" at me about their background and methodology. Although this technique has not previously been applied specifically to the investigation of the phenomenology or MCA practice of the dress/fashion curator, it is one that has been engaged with in the study of the experience of worn clothing (Woodward, 2007; Chong Kwan, 2012; Klepp and Bjerck, 2014; Whyman, 2019) and institutional historiography (Hawkins, 2012; Sandino, 2012; 2013).

In 2012, historian Sue Hawkins wrote of her oral history gathering with curators and scientists employed at the Natural History Museum (NHM), London. Hawkins observed that 'oral history (if used appropriately) can have a profoundly democratising effect on the creation of an institutional history' (Hawkins, 2012, p.

45) noting in her research that this method provided project participants an opportunity to speak relatively freely about working in the museum, with emphasis often focusing on recounting 'childhood obsessions, adventure, institutional loyalties (and tensions), and social commentary' (Hawkins, 2012, p. 51). She proposed that these personal recollections revealed much about society in the 20th and 21st centuries and fostered a deeper understanding of the scientists who "make sense" of the material world, and enshrine their findings in the collections of the museum. The purpose of this section of the study was to gather similar experiential testimony from experts (dress/fashion curators) working within a specialist discipline, who usually disseminate their research through publication or exhibition, but do not often have opportunities to discuss in-depth their personal practice in object analysis.

In her study of wearers and the sensorial nature of worn clothing, Sara Chong Kwan used the comparable method of oral history, stressing the importance of testimony as a tool of understanding objects and the 'complex biography and constant process of transformation and use' (Chong Kwan, 2012, p. 5) with which they are enmeshed. Cultural theorists Ingun Grimstad Klepp and Mari Bjerck have pointed out that while interviews can provide a well of knowledge about the interaction between an object and its owner, 'interviews only produce material on how clothes are discussed in the context of the interview' (Klepp and Bjerck, 2014, p. 377). I argue that this is a limitation of the straightforward question and answer interview (or indeed, the quantitative survey), and therefore this research required a discursive interview method. Criticism of this methodology is often focused on the potential for an interviewee to direct their answers according to their impressions of the interviewer (Abrams, 2010). As this study hinges on understanding the phenomenological experience of the practitioner, these kind of subjectivities will be discussed further in the section on *Data Analysis*.

The key to a successful interview, as outlined by cognitive scientists Simon

Høffding and Kristin Martiny (2016), means establishing a common ground of understanding between interviewer and interviewee. This was established through my insider status as interviewer *and* fellow curator, with my attendant experience and knowledge of the wider discipline and demands within institutional collections of dress. Museologist Gaynor Kavanagh discusses engaging with reminisces to augment museum collections in *Dream Spaces* (2000), advising that questions be as open ended as possible, with minimal intervention to interviewees responses. The interviewer must also possess enough knowledge to 'move the topic both forward or deeper' (Kavanagh, 2000, p. 82) when necessary.

Further, interviews require patient and careful listening by the interviewer to responses from the participant, and drawing out 'nuanced descriptions (rather than opinions or theories' (Høffding, Martiny and Roepstorff, 2021, para 9) from the interviewee. Høffding et al. refer to this as a co-generation of data rather than data collection, due to the interviewer leading the nature of the responses from the subject. Although this method was informed by my own biased research aims, it can be argued this bias is a necessary component of gathering phenomenological information: I can dictate the topic of the conversation and form appropriate questions based on the information I am attempting to gain, but an understanding of how the subject experiences the topic will only be gained through their specific and individual answers. Addressing objections to this methodology, Høffding et al. argue that the validity of this method remains if it adheres to the standards of transparency through disclosure of the steps and the rationale for implementing them, as this chapter illustrates, and the consistency or the ability to replicate the application of these steps in every interview (Høffding et al., 2021). I argue that my selection of this interview method was supported by the overarching phenomenological approach framing this thesis. It is an entangled approach, which emphasises the subjective and affective nature of research. As educational researcher Kristidel McGregor has

observed, we who conduct research 'from a material phenomenology framework do not do research on people…but with' (McGregor, 2020, p. 512).

I argue that interviews are an affective and intersubjective method of data generation, and that the discourse between interviewer and narrator reflects the affective and intersubjective nature of object analysis. As historian Lynn Abrams observed of the method, 'a different interviewer would solicit different words, perhaps even a very different story or version of it' (Abrams, 2010, p. 54). The nature of object analysis is subjective, opening a universe of possible interpretations based on the curator's background, expertise, subjectivity - and the same could be said of the semi-structured interview. The aim of this discursive interview technique was to avoid imposing my own preconceptions and biases on the participants responses by limiting provenance information about the objects as we discussed them, and refraining from offering my own perceptions or experiences of objects or situations.

Instead, I aimed to use empathetic listening and questioning drawn from interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a technique which accepts the subjective nature of participant responses and the subjective position of the interviewer. The goal was to use this approach to work together with the participant to reconstruct and co-construct an understanding of their experience through ongoing dialogue (Griffin and May, 2012, pp. 448-449).

The interview questions were constructed around three research concerns: the life of the participant as it pertains to their current role; the professional practice of the participant; and their experience of the sections of the study. In total the same 28 structured questions (**Appendix, pp. 169-171**) were prepared for all three participants, with the form and content of questioning adapted as the individual participant answered. The first question asked of each participant was "What is your first memory of clothing?" A question serving dual purposes: to relax and

engage the participant, and to gain an insight into formative experiences with clothing. The question was left open as to whether this is clothing in a museum, something the participant wore, or perhaps a garment they recall seeing in the world. The following interview questions followed a roughly chronological timeline (early experience; education and professional practice; participant experience of the primary research components) and were asked in a conservational, informal manner to encourage open dialogue from the participant. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were invited to feedback on the process, and any questions participants had about the objects I could answer at this point.

Data Analysis of In-Person Study of Curatorial Practice

The following sections review and examine the implementation of each component of the primary research study of curatorial practice, considering how the methods were applied, the challenges and limitations of these methods, and key themes which emerged through the course of the study. Specific instances drawn from the collected data are used to elucidate these themes, while further examples are woven through the remainder of the thesis to illustrate and support what I propose are sources of decision-making bias of the dress/fashion curator.

On the three study days, the running sequence of the components was: Digitised garment analysis (DGA), Material culture analysis (MCA), concluding with the semi-structured interview. However, as the interview included questions about the participants' experience of the DGA and MCA process, in the following section, the analysis of the interviews are discussed first.

Interviews

Analysis of the semi-structured interview component was framed by a loosely narrative and IPA approach. Narrative analysis considers participant testimony as a whole, and considers chronology a central part of understanding the content of

participant responses (Griffin and May, 2012), which mirrors the broader chronological structure of questions posed to the participants.

Alongside narrative analysis is the application of IPA to the examination of participant responses which requires an 'immersion in and close scrutiny of the material' (Griffin and May, 2012, p. 450). To do this, I manually transcribed the three interviews into a Microsoft Word file, using playback of the interview audio. Although I had considered input of the audio recordings into Nvivo qualitative data analysis computer software, I determined that the embodied, sensory nature of manual transcription was more conducive to the themes in this thesis, and to application of IPA. Manual transcription was a meticulous task which required me to listen back closely to the conversational tone and content of the responses, to use my hands to type the audio into written words which I could then visually review. This process of transcription provided the opportunity to consider how the meaning of one answer might develop or change when considered in light of the entire interview. After transcription was completed, I then began re-reading and synthesising the responses with brief keywords or phrases, and from these, identified larger themes which had consistently emerged through participant answers (**Appendix, pp. 172-279**). The final step was to identify the common themes between each practitioner.

I recognise these approaches emphasise my subjectivity as researcher, drawing on themes which emerge in my own mind, based on my own phenomenological experience of the world, and more specifically of my experiences within the discipline of dress/fashion curation. As psychologists Sabine Kowal and Daniel C. O'Connell have observed, 'all transcription is in principle selective and entails the inevitable risk of systematic bias' (Kowal and O'Connell, 2014). By recording and transcribing the interviews, however, I argue that I have created an opportunity for future review where the contingencies of the researcher might draw out other themes to examine.

The following section provides a brief synopsis of each interview, discusses the themes which emerged, and notable reflections on the process of the interview itself.

Participant 1

This participant discussed their first memory of clothing as a traumatic incident involving falling into the water at a harbour, and being rescued by their father. They associate this experience with a red woollen sweater, but are unclear if this is their own memory, or borne out of family mythology about the incident. They stated, interestingly, that they don't feel emotional about the garment despite the context of the memory it was recalled in.

They framed their youth and early education with growing up outside of a major fashion city, second-hand shopping, a growing interest in fashion history, and making their own clothing. Their later education followed the trajectory of undergraduate, to postgraduate (Royal College of Art), to doctoral research (University of Leeds), while working in curatorial positions of various descriptions throughout due to financial need. They identify themselves as a specialist in menswear, and are currently situated within an institutional menswear collection. They discussed changing jobs often due to institutional funding being cancelled or temporary job roles. When discussing their MCA practice, they stated it was not a conscious, formal practice, but an innate practice they applied to analysing dress/fashion objects. They also credit much of their knowledge to other members of the discipline, who have trained them on the job or shared their expertise through professional networks such as Museums Associations or DATS.

Key themes which consistently emerged throughout the interview were:

- A lifelong interest in historical fashionable clothing, both Western and

Pacific Islander, considers themselves now an expert in Western menswear.

- An informal, innate MCA practice.

- Working practice dictated by employment conditions including time and resource constraints.

- Career trajectory guided by employment precarity.

- An interest in the design aspects and gendered nature of clothing.

- A mix of skepticism and curiosity about DGA and excitement about MCA.

- A deep respect for the expertise and knowledge shared by colleagues across the discipline, especially across regional social history collections and including museum volunteers.

- A sense of discomfort when they felt they were not adhering to the standards or a perceived level of expertise within their discipline, as with the example of a curator coming to collection and interpreting a coat as a different style and era (**Appendix, pp. 198-199**); a student re-interpreting a garment previously identified by the curator (**Appendix, p. 197**); misgendering garment during DGA (**Appendix, p. 207**) I use the term "professional embarrassment" from their own description of the feeling:

'Um, yeah, my assumption was that was women's, these, on the size? Women's. But I've seen images of men wearing espadrilles in 20th, particularly in the 20th century, so, um, and that as I said I originally got myself completely in a mess, which is somewhat embarrassing given what I look after.' (**Appendix, p. 214**)

The interview took one hour and nine minutes, and functioned successfully as a way of generating knowledge of how P1 has come to be a curator, how their research interests have been guided by personal preoccupations but also by employment opportunities. The initial questions engaged with anecdotes from P1's youth, however in the majority, responses related directly to professional experiences. As I re-read through the transcript it became evident where, due in part to enthusiasm over themes raised in P1's answers, that I had been overly

talkative, and was mindful to minimise this with the following two interviews.

Participant 2

The memory this participant shared as an early memory of clothing was being a child with their grandparents and needing to urgently buy a new outfit, and getting a mass-produced high street set that the participant would not have been allowed by their mother, and thought was "cool" in comparison to the "traditional" clothing their mother dressed them in normally. They viewed this as an act of rebellion and part of the association they make between clothing and identity, and also associate clothing with their grandparents (grandfather was a womenswear tailor in London).

Clothing is an all-consuming aspect of their lives, as they deal in vintage clothing as well as having curated institutional collections holding dress/fashion objects. Their higher education has been focused on clothing, completing an undergraduate in fashion design, before taking two museum placements which changed their focus, completing a postgraduate degree (Royal College of Art and V&A) in history of art, then working in regional social history museum collections. After encouragement from a senior figure in the discipline of dress/fashion curation, they completed their doctoral degree at University of Brighton. Previously, they have worked in various curatorial positions, which they noted were not financially sustainable, and are currently employed on a postdoctoral fellowship which involves research with digitised objects rather than material culture objects.

When discussing their MCA practice, they emphasised they usually intend to employ a formal methodology, but aspects of their neurodiversity or time constraints would prevent them from doing so. They identify themselves as both a specialist in wholesale womenswear couture, as well as a generalist. They credit colleagues with shaping their knowledge of MCA practice and the way they

believe practice should be applied to object analysis, specifically citing curators Lou Taylor (**Appendix, p. 222**), Suzanne Rowland (**Appendix, p. 230**), and Alison Carter (**Appendix, p. 246**) as examples.

Key themes which consistently emerged throughout the interview were:

- The affective, "all-consuming" nature of clothing in all aspects of their life.
- The impact of their family (particularly grandparents) and colleagues on how they perceive their professional skills.
- Label identification within garments is important to practice for contextualising object biography and wearer biography.
- They have a defined idea of what the correct methods of MCA are, and compares their own practice against peers within the discipline (**Appendix, p. 222; 230**).
- They have experience with DGA but ultimately values the information gathered during MCA more.

This interview one hour and four minutes, with the discourse generating interesting anecdotes about the participant's experience of clothing (both practice and collecting) and of their experience within the discipline of dress/fashion curation.

Having the study objects in the room during the interview meant that P2's answers often referred back to the clothing, particularly with Object 1, which as an object of womenswear tailoring, aligned with the participant's research interest and expertise in wholesale couture womenswear. The presence of the garments in the interview space allowed participants more generally to gesture toward garments to illustrate their answers, and perhaps prompted different disclosures than if the participants had to recall the objects from their memory. Further application of this method might investigate the impact of visual prompts or aids on participant disclosure during semi-structured interviews.

Participant 3

The early memory of clothing shared by P3 concerned a pair of platform shoes. They spoke engagingly about how they made them feel when they wore them, the amount of use they had, and how they differentiated them from their twin sibling, an important aspect of their identity. Clothing as a source of identity was discussed throughout the interview, both in their personal life, and as a mode of understanding clothing acquired into the institutional collection. They mentioned several times how imagining wearing objects might help to contextualise the object biography.

Their higher education was a BA from University of Manchester, and after working and saving money over several years, achieved an MA at the Courtauld. They volunteered at a regional social history museum after their MA and then were hired for a short-term position at another regional institution, before being hired into a permanent, part-time curator role at the museum they had once volunteered at. They did not speak much of colleagues, mentioning one teacher who informed their area of study at the Courtauld, and a conservator colleague at their current position whose opinion they hold in high esteem. They often referred to the significant pressure at their current institution to monetise the collection and justify their role, often to the detriment of objects, and they feel that they have to push back against unethical practice.

While they do consider themselves a specialist within wider museology, they do not consider themselves a specialist within the discipline due to the breadth of their education - influenced in part by the MA course leader's interests. They have very strong opinions about what their research preferences are, and do not prescribe to a formal object analysis methodology.

Key themes which consistently emerged throughout the interview were:

- The value of objects: whether in their personal life, as with childhood platform shoes they wore until they fell apart or a long-outgrown pair of trousers they were trying to have remade; or in their professional life, where objects must be suitable for exhibition to have perceived value to the collection.

- Pressure to justify their own expert position within the institution.

- The constraints of time and resources informing their approach to object analysis.

- Intersections of class and sexuality in development of research interests and career trajectory.

- Interest in garments is often contextualised through the experience of wearing them (or imagining wearing them).

The session with P3 was one hour long, with a comfortable, informal tone. P3 noted that their answers were often long or diffuse, with one particular instance:

CM – 34:45

No, no, no, no. This is interesting, I'm just thinking how to –

P3 – 34:51

Reign me in, I talk shit.

CM – 34:52

No, not reign you in. But how to, how to, because so much of this is about collections, working with collections, but also the practical working situations, of working with collections. (**P3, Appendix, p. 264**)

My challenge was to bring the often highly anecdotal and detailed responses back to the question topic, without discouraging P3 from sharing their

experiences in their responses. Many of the digressions P3 made in the course of answering questions in fact revealed important aspects of their experience of the world, supporting my application of a discursive interview structure. Their anecdotes provided background on how the influence of class, sexuality, and cultural interests have informed their interest in clothing, their practice, and their career trajectory.

Discussion of Key Themes

The following subsection discusses the emergent themes common to the three interviews, which were identified through the analysis of the interview transcripts.

Cognitive Function: All of the participants spoke about how object analysis often felt like an automatic action, as P1 observed 'it's like my brain just kicks in to doing that' (**P1, Appendix, p. 195**) and P3 referred to their practice as "intuitive" (**P3, Appendix, p. 274**), yet P2 also observed that their practice is guided in many ways by their neurodivergence:

'So I'm very much like a best intentions person. But actually, I am, I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic and extremely chaotic in pretty much everything I do[…] Like, because what I always find will happen, is I'll get distracted halfway through what I'm writing, and then write some other notes, and then I won't have followed through the careful sheet…' (**P2, Appendix, pp. 229-230**)

Sensory Engagement with Objects: The respondents often spoke of what they saw in objects, highlighting the primarily visual terms dress/fashion curators apply to contextualise worn clothing. The emphasis on visual engagement in museology will be discussed further in the *Sensory Engagement Bias* chapter. Haptics and the tactile nature of clothing was also discussed, particularly in relation to the study activities when they could investigate the textiles during MCA. Frustrations when the participants' could not see objects clearly (during the DGA) was contrasted

with their palpable sense of discovery, as with P1 saying '"Oh my gosh!" there's extra pockets and then hand hole pockets, the um, vertical ones, which I hadn't noticed to start with' during the MCA component of the study (**P1, Appendix, pp. 207-208**).

Emotional Nature of Objects: The affective nature of clothing was repeatedly emphasised by P2 and P3, as it related to their recollections of personal experiences wearing and collecting clothing. This emotional and mnemonic connection informed their professional practice, with P2 articulating that they felt 'when something goes into a museum or an archive, it becomes so differently charged.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 225**) and P3 arguing that their area of specialism was located in part because 'you're probably interested in fashion because that's what you wore, so you're interested in 20th century fashion.'(**P3, Appendix, p. 258**).

Disciplinary Pressures: Consistently throughout all three interviews, were the participant's insistence that they did not employ a formal methodology in their object analysis practice, whether in their regular working life or during the primary research study. Where they differed in the disclosure of this information was the tone. P1 and P2 often seemed apologetic or slightly sheepish about not employing formal methodologies, for example:

'there's so many things where I think my practice would be improved if I was perhaps a bit more consistent, or I did make use of some of that guidance' (**P1, Appendix, p. 196**)

'And it's probably what you should do. Um, but I just get really, really distracted.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 230**).

P3, however, attributed their approach to object analysis as:

'to do with personalities as well. So it's sort of, I'm interested in objects and their stories, but also I like objects and I like that creative process of understanding something' (**P3, Appendix, p. 274**).

All three participants spoke highly of their colleagues' practice (whether fellow curators or conservators), particularly in comparison to how they applied their own methods.

Working Conditions: All three participants stressed the precarious nature of work in the discipline, with short-term contracts, positions which relied on unstable external funding, or a need to prove the value of their expertise within the institution. P2 specifically identified her reason for leaving a position: 'as with everything with museums, the pay was terrible' (**P2, Appendix, p. 224**). Time and resource constraints were mentioned throughout the interview sessions, with research projects needing to be completed in their personal time.

Digitised Garment Analysis

This section examines the application of eye gaze tracking to the study of digitised garments through a review of the practical application of this research component, analysing the data that was gathered, and considering to what extent eye gaze tracking is a useful method in objectively measuring the attention and gaze of the dress/fashion curator. Previous to this study, only P2 had used eye gaze tracking in plotting exhibition spaces, though all three had viewed 3D digitised garments in the course of their curatorial practice.

On each study date, I set up the eye gaze tracker prior to each participant arrival, and calibrated the tracker once the participant had arrived, had completed the information and consent form, were seated and had indicated they were ready to begin the session. Overall, calibration was achieved and the session with P1 was straightforward; calibration had to be initiated several times due to the software

crashing prior to a successful calibration and session with P2; and due to P3 wearing glasses during calibration (which can impact how the tracker is able to measure eye movement) it was decided that they would remove their glasses, recalibrate, and proceed through the session without them on.

I recorded each session within the Tobii Pro Lab software, selecting gaze plots as the visual indicator of where participants were looking at the object. It became evident from the first participant that having to intervene to toggle between windows meant that their focus would be on aspects of the changing screen before they looked at the digitised garment, as can be seen in **Figure 2.12** (**Appendix, p. 15**). This phenomena has been discussed by the eye tracking research team led by Kenneth Holmqvist at Lund University, who observed that a basic limitation of eye gaze tracking research is the ambiguity of fixation points (Holmqvist, 2011, p. 71).

To contextualise this: think about how many times you've stared "into space" while thinking about something: an eye gaze tracker with its "objective" measurement of fixation points would record the area you are staring at as a point of interest. In actuality, you may not even have been aware of what that point is or be able to identify the spot. The correlation between eye gaze fixation point and actual attention can only be supported with testimony, and due to the time required for analysis of the eye gaze tracking recordings and the available time in the session/availability of professional participants, it was not possible to review the entirety of the digitised object analysis recordings with them and ask if they had intended to look at a particular fixation point. Future application of this method might select areas of interest on garments, which can then act as measurable targets for gaze data, and review these for discussion with participants to better understand their visual engagement with the object.

In reviewing the recordings it became evident that due to limitations in my skill at

operating the eye gaze tracker they were unsuitable for documenting "objective" looking. Further, in attempting to achieve a form of methodological neutrality, I had effectively contradicted my argument for the embodied, sensorial, contingent nature of researching worn clothing. I had made decisions about what results *should* be drawn from the primary research which were informed by my own bias, rather than taking a new materialist approach towards examining 'what things do, rather than what they 'are'; towards processes and flows rather than structures and stable forms' (Fox and Alldred, 2015b, p. 407). Further, I had focused on how eye gaze tracking might be used as evidence to prove/disprove the phenomenological experience of the dress/fashion curator, rather than how it might be used as a prompt to study 'what things do' (following Fox and Alldred) to curatorial decision-making. In reflecting on this component of my primary research, I re-assert my position that there can be no objective interpretation of curatorial practice. With this reframing, I once again approached my analysis of the recordings.

After watching back the three recordings several more times, I revisited the participants' interview testimony about the experience of DGA. Instead of measuring their gaze objectively, I argue that DGA had highlighted aspects of subjectivity in their perception of wearer/object biography in worn clothing, and how that subjectivity informed their interpretation of the garments.

The following section isolates each garment with an interpretation of it shared by each participant during the interview component of the primary research.

Object 1 - Blue Jacket - Figure 2.14 (Appendix, p. 17)
Participant 1: '[…] the first thing I noted down was the material, which I have down "pale blue slub linen, question mark", then that it's a women's jacket.' (**P1, Appendix, p. 206**)
Interpretation: Colour; material; gender; design.

Participant 2: 'And so that jacket, Object number 1, I thought was really badly damaged, by – because it looked to me like it was frayed […]'
(P2, Appendix, p. 233)
Interpretation: Condition.

Participant 3: 'well the first thing I looked at, I think, was the shoulders. Cos I think the thing, and I think that's to do with my time at the Courtauld, is one of the first things I want to do is actually know what the object is and what it dates from, and the thing for me is always about dating stuff. So, once I can date something, it then fits into more of a, it's a schema in my head obviously, and then I can sort of, but maybe that's the wrong way of doing it.' (P3, Appendix, p. 268)
Interpretation: Design; date.

Object 2 - Black Cotton and Jute Espadrilles - Figure 2.13 (Appendix, p. 16)

Participant 1: 'Um, it was the rope soles, um so I would describe them as espadrilles, so it was something I recognised. Yeah, the rope soles, then the difference between the toe material and the heel material, and the black tape, um, on them. Um, and the wear to the soles, um, the binding […]' (P1, Appendix, p. 207)
Interpretation: Material; design; familiarity; wear

Participant 2: 'Well, they're some kind of Spanish espadrille, I'm fairly sure they are actual Spanish ones, as well. Either the materials and the construction of them, like they just look right. Um, something in my head put them at being like 1930s, but also they're in such bad condition, they're not even in that bad of condition, they just look really, really well worn. So in that sense, they could be much, much later, as well. I really just wasn't sure what to think of them, and I think in some ways, I was hindered by the fact that I've owned loads of pairs of Spanish espadrilles, and I was like, "But they still look like that now."' (P2,

Appendix, pp. 235-236)

Interpretation: Geographical origin; material; design; date; wear; personal connection

Participant 3: 'Well, I thought they were replicas, and I thought, "Are they Roman replicas?" But, so they're used for sort of, like, education, or kids sort of coming in to – they are men's though, I assumed they were men's. Are they men's? I don't know. Are they yours?' (P3, Appendix, p. 269)
Interpretation: Function; cultural origin; gender

Object 3 - Green Suede Jacket - Figure 2.15 (Appendix, p. 18)

Participant 1: 'I said it was women's. Which is wrong! I always get confused with the buttoning […] Which is ridiculous, given that I work with a menswear collection. I always try to imagine myself the other way around, and then getting it wrong. Um, and then that it was suede. Again, it was the material and the colour. Um, um, the colour, then the button details on the front, and then the distinctive front panels.'
(P1, Appendix, p. 207)
Interpretation: Gender; design; material; colour

Participant 2: '"I think it's men's, but I'm not sure, I'm not certain, certain, anyway." Interestingly as well, when I first looked at it I was like, I think it's cotton, which I was then like, oh maybe it's suede […]' (P2, Appendix, p. 207)
Interpretation: Gender; material

Participant 3: '[…] the first thing that hit me was its horrible condition. Sorry! I did, I looked at it and I thought, "Oh, that's some really…" But it's actually a really nice jacket. Um, men's. I knew it was men's. I thought it was from the '90s, but it's probably from the late '80s, early '90s.' (P3, Appendix, pp. 269-270)
Interpretation: Condition; preference for object; gender; date

From these selected object interpretations, a sense of the curatorial process emerges, where visual stimuli is connected with expert knowledge or what P3 termed a "schema" (**Appendix, p. 268**) to produce a relatively objective description of the object (for example, "blue", "cotton"). The subjective nature of curatorial interpretation is made evident in the usage of personal context to frame the objects, as with P1 noting that they have owned many pairs of espadrilles themself, or P3 connecting the jacket to the 1980s or 1990s, an era they have a stated interest in[22].

Two primary common limitations of DGA were identified by the participants: clarity of visual stimuli, and haptic frustration:

'I mean there were areas where it was definitely frustrating, or, frustrating is not quite the right word. I suppose, the limitations, rather than frustration, in terms of, "Oh, I think this is the case because of what I'm looking at, but I don't know because I can't feel it, or the image isn't quite good enough, or I can't look inside, or whatever."' (**P1, Appendix, p. 202**)

While in comparing the experience of the DGA with MCA, P2 noted '[…] it's interesting obviously that the photogrammetry, I couldn't see that either of the two jackets had a label in them, which in person you can see straight away.' (**P2, Appendix, pp. 233-234**).

P3 observed that 'So it obviously didn't render the fabrics particularly well, and I think that was the barrier, I think. And again, in fashion history, as in most things, the intrinsic value of materials is an indicator of what that object is. ' (**P3, Appendix, p. 279**)

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[22] 'Love it. I think it's, I mean, obviously I'm partisan, well, I don't know, but I do think the '80s is one of the most exciting decades for me.' (**P3, Appendix, p. 259**)

The participants' frustration highlights how much of object analysis is multisensory, but how interpretation informed by contextual information such as garment labels, or perceived quality of a garment based on the textile it is made from. Based on this analysis, I propose that two potential sources of decision-making bias identified in this component of the study are based on *mnemonic affect* or *sensory engagement*.

MCA

This section discusses key themes identified during analysis of the MCA component of the primary research. Undertaking the analysis, I uploaded the recordings to my computer and reviewed each multiple times, drawing in part on the approaches taken to sensory ethnography recordings by Sarah Pink (2015a; 2015b). Pink emphasises how taking an embodied approach to analysis means using the researcher's own experiences to assist in imagining oneself 'into the corporeality represented by the video tapes' (Pink, 2015a, p. 146).

Rather than trying to be "objective" about analysing the MCA recordings, I have applied my own experience in object analysis to draw out what I have identified as points of interest. This included listening for atypical sounds beyond the rustle of garments such as comments or verbal noises from participants, and looking for methods of MCA practice beyond the commonly-employed MCA methods of visual analysis, measurement of the garments, and note-taking. These points of interest were compared against responses the participants provided about their experience of the MCA component, to support what I perceived in the audiovisual element with their own testimony, and to further draw out real-world examples of decision-making bias.

A note on the proxy gaze method: The quality of video and audio for each Go-Pro recording was clear and provided a generally good proxy gaze of their

process. At points during each of P1 and P2's sessions, the camera became repositioned on their head, however, it was still possible to obtain a partial view of how they were analysing garments. I decided at the time of the study not to intervene to reset the camera, as I felt that it would be more disruptive to their practice than beneficial to the documentation. Overall, I believe that this was a relatively unobtrusive method of filming practice, however in future application I would advise participants not to adjust the camera on their head once it had been installed.

Cognition: This concerns the focus and attention paid by each participant to the analysis of the objects. Despite being given no guidance as to which garment to analyse first, P1 and P2 addressed the garments sequentially in the same order they had been presented during DGA (Object 1-3), while P3 analysed them in the reverse order, addressing Object 3 first. In their interview, P3 observed that 'Well, the green I realised was a really good fabric. Because in my mind it was a cheap synthetic. Yeah, I realised it was suede. And I thought, "Oh! That's a really nice jacket!" […] I was really interested to have a look, more.' (**P3, Appendix, p. 277**).

Attention was also demonstrated in the duration spent on the objects: P2 spent approximately nine minutes analysing Object 1, revisiting the object three separate times over the course of their session, compared with single analyses of three minutes (Object 2) and ten minutes (Object 3). In their interview, P2 mentioned the jacket repeatedly, highlighting how it fell within their area of specialism and impacted their interpretation of wearer/object biography:

'[…] I've looked at so many different designers now, I couldn't tell you on every designer, but I doubt I've probably seen in person about 20 Mattli pieces. So it's like, another garment collected in my head. And because I'm quite visual I've like, logged it in my brain. But actually, seeing the Mattli label, it instantly gave me different thoughts about the wearer, and also, not only the wearer, but the level of

wear as well.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 227**)

Sensory Engagement: What became evident from examining the Go-Pro recordings is not only a version of what the participant was *viewing* during MCA, but of what Pink termed the 'embodied and emplaced experience' (Pink, 2015b, p. 245) of the curator. The movement of the camera illustrates the kinetic nature of the practice: participants manipulate the garments: turning them over for a rear view (**Figure 2.16, Appendix, p. 19**), manipulating a collar to measure the garment (**Figure 2.17, Appendix, p. 20**), unwinding laces and undoing buttons (**Figure 2.18, Appendix, p. 21**). This reinforces the corporeal, sensory engagement of object analysis.

In the interviews, all three participants noted how they could interpret much more from the garments during MCA than during DGA, with P1 noting '[…] how much on the object I had been able to get from the digital, but then also how much from the object wasn't available to me, um, the actual materiality […]' (**P1, Appendix, p. 209**). There is also the affective aspect of embodied engagement with the garments, as P2 articulated in their interview:

'In the past couple of weeks, I've done a few things, where I've been in a room with museum objects, and or archival objects, and it's just the sheer feeling of delight you get from them[…]I guess it's the excitement of when you're in a museum and it's sort of the gentleness with which you'll treat it as well, which is quite exciting. With your own stuff, you know, even if I have, I do own some quite rare, amazing things, but I arguably don't treat them with as much respect as I should – just because those objects are not charged in that same way.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 225**).

In addition to video, the Go-Pro recorded the atmospheric sounds of the workspace, as with the loud sirens at the beginning and the tapping from the window blinds throughout P1's session. The audio recorded moments of

discovery which were not visible through the proxy gaze, as with P2 laughing and saying "Ahh!" while looking at Object 3. In their testimony, they offered that when analysing the garment:

'[…] I was like, "Oh, this looks really nicely made. What do I think that-" and then I opened it up, and I could see a little bit of the label poking out, so I just moved slightly aside the um, the kind of the sweat pad, and then it's funny with me, for me seeing certain labels, for me it's like seeing old friends.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 226**)

A similar moment occurred with P3 saying "Ah! Okay." during analysis of Object 2. This could possibly be linked to P3's response in the interview when asked what different aspects of objects were perceived during MCA: 'The espadrilles I thought, "Nah, they're not bloody replicas, you plonker."' (**P3, Appendix, p. 278**)

Mnemonic Engagement: While P1 did not speculate on wearer/object biography in their descriptions of the objects, relying on interpretations primarily of aspects such as colour, design, and material, P2 and P3 made more connections between the garments and possible biographical narratives. In the handwritten MCA notes from their analysis of Object 1, P2 wrote 'Probs a middle aged type garment?' and P3 made an interesting speculation on the wearer/object biography of Object 3. The themes of class emerged frequently throughout the interview with P3, and this perspective on clothing is reflected in their interpretation, which will be discussed further on p. 223 of *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*.

Disciplinary Standards: A surprisingly illuminating element of the footage was how it documented the act of *caring* for garments, a practice that is implied in the title of the curator and is materialised in the preservation or secure display of objects, but is not frequently documented in action. An example is the way the fabric of the objects was smoothed at the end of analysis, or the specific methods for turning Object 1 and 3 (folding in half, supporting the weight of the garment,

then turning it over), which reflected both standards of practice within the discipline and individual thought toward how the material could "rest" with minimal creasing.

These actions also speak to the need to be perceived as *adhering* to disciplinary best practice when being observed by a peer (myself). Speaking about the experience of wearing the Go-Pro during MCA, P1 stated:

'I don't even think about the camera. Um, actually that's not quite true. I did a little bit, I was like "Okay, I put gloves on! I have to be careful when I do that!" And "Oh! My measuring tape, I've left it on the object!"' (**P1, Appendix, pp. 210-211**)

Discussion of Primary Research

This subsection summarises the success and challenges of the methods used to gather primary research in this thesis. This is followed by a subsection which synthesises the key themes which emerged through the analysis of the data collected during the four components of primary research: *Curating Dress in the UK* survey; DGA; MCA; and Semi-structured interviews.

In light of the limitations imposed on my research due to COVID-19, I feel the availability of study participants and resources and overall scope of the primary research was impacted. Ideally, the primary research stage would have happened earlier, and included 5-7 study participants. However, I do feel that with the foundational representative sample dataset collected through the survey, I was able to scale the study to a manageable size within the scope of time/resources available and still investigate the practices and experiences of curators who are indicative of the wider demographic of dress/fashion curation in the UK.

The survey gathered vital information which has been used to frame the following primary research, and has generated and analysed new demographic information.

It has provided evidence of the dominant group in the field, and highlighted how a majority of formally educated, white, heterosexual, non-disabled women between the ages of 25-54 have been the primary interpreters of history, as it is materialised through worn clothing within institutional collections. Future research might build on this dataset by taking more targeted approaches to gathering respondents from outside of institutional organisations, ensuring that responses aren't siloed into a few disciplinary-specific associations.

The experimental method of DGA was developed and applied with the aim of examining an aspect of cognitive process (sensing visual stimuli) that might only otherwise be understood through a participant's testimony. Testimony, as the recounting of events from the point of view of the participant, is a highly subjective account. While understanding curatorial subjectivity is at the core of this thesis, I also wanted an "objective" form of evidence to compare and contrast with curatorial testimony, and therefore support or refute the participant's account of how they engage with and interpret objects.

The method of photogrammetry was impacted by independent variables such as my skill level: by rendering and modelling the 3D images myself, as a novice, there was elements of the materiality of the garment lost in translation to the digital rendering. In future research, this would be improved with a specialist technician producing the 3D models. Currently, the nature of photogrammetry is that it can only photograph the exterior of garments, a limitation which has reemerged throughout the technique's application in dress/fashion curation. This limitation was discussed in several papers presented at the *Under the Magnifying Glass* (2023) symposium at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, and was made clear by all three of the participants in the testimony gathered in this thesis.

After applying and analysing the results of eye gaze tracking, I am unconvinced that this is a useful approach to studying curatorial practice if applied by a

relatively novice practitioner such as myself. Certainly, I do not think this method has contributed to understanding the sources of decision-making bias informing curatorial decisions regarding object interpretation. I still believe that measuring the senses of the curator during object analysis can be an important source of knowledge, but I believe that this requires further study of the available technologies and their application.

In contrast, I believe the MCA technique of the proxy gaze using a head-mounted Go-Pro camera to record object analysis was very useful in illustrating curatorial practice. The recording captured the atmosphere in the room during analysis, the sounds of garments and the participants, as well as background noise. The recording provides visual evidence of MCA practice including the use of tools such as pencils, paper, and measuring tapes by the participants. It recorded the approximate time participants spent analysing each garment, and the sequence they implemented their practice.

Overall, the recording connects the phenomenological experience of the curator made in the interview with sensorial evidence which can be repeatedly analysed by an external researcher. In future applications of this method, I would modify the GoPro mount to ensure it had improved framing of the recorded MCA, and I would brief the participants on how to adjust the mount if needed, without altering the point of view it was capturing.

I propose that the semi-structure interview technique I employed was well-implemented, and was invaluable in generating knowledge about curatorial practice, and in providing examples of phenomenological experiences of clothing and object analysis.

The discursive nature of this method allowed themes to emerge which may not have in a more formal structure, and enabled my interview style to remain

reactive, adaptable, and shaped by the comfort (in understanding the topics

being discussed) and tension (in participants wanting to account for their practice

within the discipline) of my "insider" status.

2.4 Emergent Themes in Primary Research Data

Through the primary research, recurrent themes emerged in the data and testimony collected from respondents and participants. Undertaking the methods of research in sequence has allowed me to examine a wide pool of survey data, identify several key common issues which I could then use to guide the questions in the semi-structured interviews. The testimony gathered in the interviews in turn contributed tangible voices to the primarily quantitive-driven survey data. The study, specifically the MCA component, provided practical evidence of these issues in action. From synthesising these sources of primary research data, I have identified the following themes:

From the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey:

- Demands on Focus
- Practical Constraints
- Disciplinary Reliance
- Curatorial Subjectivity

- From the study of curatorial practice (DGA; MCA; Semi-structured interview):
- Sensory Engagement with Objects
- Emotional Nature of Objects
- Mnemonic Engagement
- Disciplinary Pressures
- Working Conditions

The primary research in this thesis has established a group of themes impacting dress/fashion curator decision-making during the interpretation of wearer/object biography in garments. Part III of this thesis applies a framework drawn from cognitive science and supported by interdisciplinary scholarship and empirical evidence to cohere these themes into clearly identifiable sources of bias. An

investigation is made into the context and factors contributing to these biases, and finally, suggestions are made toward mitigating the impact of these biases on the retention of wearer/object biography in worn clothing, termed curatorial interruption.

Part 3

Sources of Decision-Making Bias in Dress/Fashion Curators

In Part 3 of the thesis, I propose five sources of decision-making bias in the dress/fashion curator during MCA of worn clothing. These sources cohered from the themes which have emerged over the course of primary and secondary research undertaken in this thesis, and are used to make connections between the working reality of curators situated within institutional collections in the UK, and theoretical concepts of phenomenology, affect, and what I term curatorial interruption of wearer/object biograp*hy.*

To illustrate these sources of bias, in the following chapter I introduce a model I have adapted (**Figure 3.1, Appendix, p. 22**) which was originally proposed by Itiel Dror for application in forensic science. To address the specificities of the discipline of dress/fashion curation, Dror's model has been made specific to dress/fashion curation using themes identified in the primary research of this thesis. Dror's original model and rationale is outlined, followed by an explanation of the adaptations which make the model appropriate to the practice of MCA of worn clothing in an institutional collection. This section expands from the foundation of Bacon's idols, and Itiel Dror's contemporary interpretation of them (discussed on p. 68), to identify what I propose are the discipline-specific sources of bias informing curatorial decisions on what aspects of wearer/object biography are interpreted and documented during MCA. To do so, in the following chapter I consider the concepts introduced by Dror in his article *Cognitive and Human Factors in Expert Decision Making: Six Fallacies and the Eight Sources of Bias* (2020), where he addressed fundamental issues with accepting the existence of bias and identified sources specific to experts working in forensics.

3.1 Modelling Sources of Decision-Making Bias

In modelling a framework for identifying sources of bias, this section addresses the dual aims of this thesis: establishing factors in decision-making bias common to the experts working in the discipline; and providing a model to revisit at the end of this thesis in order to develop suggestions towards mitigating these sources of bias. This section will first briefly discuss Dror's fallacies of bias, then outline his original sources of expert bias. Discussion of modified sources of biases specific to the dress/fashion curator follows.

The research of Itiel Dror is primarily concerned with how theoretical scientific understandings of cognition can be applied to real-world practice. Much of his research concerns the practice of forensic scientists, as has been stated, yet it is relevant to this thesis due to his study of the impact of cognitive bias on evidence, or material culture. This includes encountering disciplinary resistance to acknowledging the existence of bias. This became evident in the response to his 2021 study of cognitive bias in forensic pathologists, which resulted in heated back-and-forth between experts supporting and rejecting his findings (for the original article and 22 articled responses see Dror *et al.*, 2021).

A general resistance to acknowledging the specific factors of expert bias has been based on what he identified in 2020 as six *fallacies*: ethical issues (viewing biases as only in corrupt or malicious practitioners); bad apples (practitioner competency rather than wider systemic issues); expert immunity (the belief that expertise makes one immune to bias); technological protection (reliance on technology to eliminate bias); bias blind spot (believing oneself to be exempt from bias); and illusion of control (believing willpower and awareness is enough to mitigate bias) (Dror, 2020, pp. 7998-7999). Although it is the sources of bias this thesis is examining, I suggest that these fallacies might be a relevant further area of interest for the discipline of dress/fashion curation, specifically expert immunity, technological protection, and illusion of control. These fallacies have emerged in

my research as primary factors for impeding a critical examination of sources of bias during MCA and would be of interest for future study.

Dror organised what he suggested were eight sources of cognitive bias in forensic practitioners: human and cognitive factors (biases which result from brain systems and function, and cognitive processing); data (biasing information found within the material evidence); reference materials (bias drawn from external sources); contextual information (bias generated from exposure to irrelevant information); base rate (bias founded on previous case results), organisational factors (bias resulting from working environment including pressures, hierarchies, or professional associations); education and training (bias guided by foundational knowledge and methods), and personal factors (the impact on bias of practitioner motivation, personal ideology and beliefs, private stressors) (2020, p. 7999-8000). These sources of bias, while specific to the discipline of forensic science[23] can find parallels in practical examples drawn from dress/fashion curatorial practice.

Human nature and cognitive factors are inherent to the brain function of the expert, and aid in the processing of information. Dror observed that the architecture and capacity of our brains simply do not allow us to process all incoming information at any one time, and it is natural that we will miss sometimes vital material evidence during analysis (Dror, 2020, p. 8002). These processes were discussed in the *Cognitive Bias* chapter and in this thesis are considered foundational cognitive functions in the dress/fashion curator. They will be specific to the individual, and may require adjustments based on ability, and thus require both personal reflection on the part of the curator, and further research into the impact of distinct cognitive functions on MCA which is beyond

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[23] For example, base rate data on causes of death versus manner of death are, thankfully, generally not applicable to the study of worn clothing in institutional dress/fashion collections, though there is still a relevant area of crossover in wider dress/fashion material culture studies as the forensic research of Butchart (Wiseman, 2019; Butchart, 2022a), Goedhart *et al.* (2022), and Maria Maclennan (2020; 2023).

the scope of this thesis.

Several of the sources outlined by Dror qualify as factors informing confirmation bias (defined on p. 72), including reference materials, contextual information, and base rate. Dror highlighted how in all of these cases examiners were searching for evidence to support a preconceived theory or pattern, which directed 'cognitive resources and attention toward a certain stimulus or signal (while suppressing and ignoring others)' (2020, p. 8000-8001). This impacts the expert on a sensory level, and in this thesis is identified as *Sensory Engagement Bias*, discussed in the following chapter.

Dror wrote that although some data is neutral (he uses the example of fingerprint ridges), he argued that other data (citing the forensics example of voice recordings) contains information which can 'evoke emotions which can impact decision making' (Dror, 2020, p. 7999) specific to the practitioner. I argue that while some material might be relatively straightforward to quantify (an example in dress/fashion curation might be the fibre composition of a garment), the *interpretation* of this information during analysis is still subject to the associations of the analyst. Thus, I counter that no data can be neutral. In this thesis, I identify the source of bias based on intangible engagement with an object as *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*, which will be discussed in a chapter beginning on p. 221.

In forensics, contextual information might be provided by a colleague to a practitioner which is irrelevant to that stage of their particular task (for example, telling a fingerprint analyst that a certain suspect has already confessed the crime to investigators). In curation, this source of bias might emerge in cases where a garment has been donated *in absentia* of the wearer but arrives with a convincing testimony about wearer/object biography from an external informant. This information might bias the subsequent MCA and interpretation of findings. Similarly, consulting with an internal colleague who asserts their interpretation or

expectation of wearer/object biography might impact what narratives the curator focuses on due to professional affiliation or pressure (Dror, Charlton, Péron, 2006; Dror, 2020). This source of bias can also be informed by the educational background and working experience of the curator. In the context of this thesis, information provided about the garment by those within the professional network of the curator, or bias informed by education and training specific to dress/fashion museology is considered *Disciplinary Bias* and will be discussed in the chapter on p. 234.

As Dror noted, any factor ranging from budget and time constraints to institutional expectations will impact the working conditions of a practitioner and bias the results of their research. This is not specific to forensic science, and as will be evidenced through the results of a practitioner survey undertaken in the course of this thesis, effects the majority of dress/fashion curators situated within institutional collections in the UK. The practical structures and systems which frame dress/fashion museology, which I propose are a source of *Working Environment Bias* will be examined in detail in a dedicated chapter on p. 277.

Conclusion

This chapter has adapted a model originally constructed for analysis of sources of bias in forensic practitioners to organise what I propose are factors informing bias in dress/fashion curators. This model provides a method of visualising these sources in order to meet the aims of this thesis: identifying the material and immaterial sources of curatorial interruption, and beginning to formulate methods of mitigating these factors. As Dror wrote of his own attempt to classify and attend to bias, one of the first steps to recognise the fallacies conceptualising what bias *is* so that we can then begin to address the underlying factors informing expert decision-making (2020, p. 8003). This model establishes a previously unexplored foundation for understanding why dress/fashion curators make certain decisions during the interpretation of wearer/object biography.

The following chapters apply a review of previous scholarship and original primary research to expand on the sources of bias outlined above to identify and examine in detail the many factors which comprise these sources.

3.2 Sensory Engagement Bias

'I mean, there's one thing in the collection I would love to wear, and it's this amazing coat from the early nineteenth century, a man's greatcoat, it's made up of super fine brown wool. And I just want to, "Whoosh!"' (P3, Appendix, p. 276)

The quote which opens this section is from testimony provided by a curatorial participant in the primary research undertaken in this thesis. Their passion for the colour, texture, and potential kinetics of the greatcoat illustrates the sensory, evocative nature of clothing acquired by the institutional collection. I propose in this thesis that *Sensory Engagement Bias*, specifically the way that the dress/fashion curator senses the material they are analysing, is a factor contributing to curatorial bias during the MCA of worn clothing.

To support this proposition, I refer to previous scholarship from fields including psychology, anthropology, and fashion studies to establish an understanding of what is meant in this thesis by "the senses" or "sensory engagement" in relation to perceiving garments. The following section locates the senses and sensory engagement within Western scholarship, and reviews how the senses have been considered as they relate to understanding material culture, specifically clothing as both a worn garment and as collected object. This is followed by a section which reviews scholarship addressing the subjective nature of sensory engagement including the roles of cognition and linguistics. I argue this supports how the dress/fashion curator engages sensorially with worn garments during MCA, and is a source of decision-making bias.

Situating the Senses

In this thesis, a distinction is made between *sensing* and *perception.* This follows the definition of the two terms outlined by psychologists Graham Pike and Graham Edgar, who identified *sensing* as the initial detection of stimuli (such as light or sound waves) in the body and *perception* as the construction of an

understanding of the world based on this sensory stimuli (Pike and Edgar, 2012, p. 73). In this thesis, I accept the received knowledge of the physiological functions of the sensory organs (Calvert, Spence and Stein, 2004; Mather, 2009), and do not seek to explore in depth the path between the stimuli and the receptor, or the processes of the brain. This section instead focuses on the possible *implications* of how the curator senses worn clothing and how this might be a factor informing curatorial bias. The theoretical approach this thesis takes to our embodied *perception* of the world, was discussed in the *Phenomenology* chapter.

It should be noted that to maintain the scope of this thesis, this research proceeds with a general assumption of what is considered typical cognitive capacities of the dress/fashion curator. There are myriad ways which physiological or cognitive differences might affect the sensing of objects. Examining visual stimuli processing for examples: colour is sensed dependent upon the function of the eye and may be impacted by anomalous trichromacy ("colour blindness") (Saunders *et al.*, 1995); examples of perceptual phenomena such as colour-based synaesthesia where individuals experience colour as letters, words or digits (Mattingley and Rich, 2004) are situations which reflect the diversity of sensing. Additionally, the examination of concepts in this thesis which are fundamental to MCA, such as colour, are understood to be situated in Western scholarship.

As was discussed in the *Cognitive Bias* chapter, sensory engagement is linked to top-down cognitive processing: we learn through our senses about the world around us, and this sensory engagement becomes a foundation for how we perceive objects. Sensing is based in physical receptors, and the intersection between sensing and cognition has been explored in fields including linguistics and psychology (see Wierzbicka, 2006; Steinvall, 2007; MacDonald, Biggam and Paramei, 2018) while the way that we *perceive* what we sense of our world can depend on factors including our social and cultural location (Howes, 1991;

Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Wierzbicka, 2008; Chong Kwan, 2020).

Much of the previous research into sensory engagement and bias has been situated in the Western concept of five senses: sight (visual), sound (auditory), taste (gustatory), touch (haptic), and smell (olfactory). Ethnographer Sarah Pink wrote of the deeply embedded nature of these senses in Western scholarship, as much research has been developed by and conveyed to primarily Western audiences who come to understand their world within this particular sensory scope. She argues that this is not the only possible model for researching the senses (Pink, 2015, p. 60), nor are these the only physiological measure of stimuli by our bodies (Stein, Jiang and Stanford, 2004; Braisby and Gellatly, 2012), however as this thesis examines practice within institutional collections in the UK, discussion of sensory engagement is framed within these five Western aspects (referred to as "the senses"). In particular, examples are drawn from the most commonly studied aspects of clothing: haptics and visuality.

Sensing in The Institution

There is an extensive body of scholarship devoted to examining the importance and meaning of sensory engagement within anthropology and wider museology (Pearce, 1994; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Tilley, 2001; Pye, 2007; Chatterjee, MacDonald, Prytherch and Noble, 2008; Dudley, 2010; 2012; Dudley, Barnes, Binnie, Petrov and Walklate, 2011; Young, 2013; Levent, Pascual-Leone and Lacey, 2014; Classen, 2017). This research has considered both the senses of the practitioner and of the visitor, and has contemplated the ocularcentric position of the museum, and museological methods which have been employed (or not employed) to reconnect our senses to collected material culture. Primarily, this research has focused on visual and haptic engagement, and this is reflected in the literature discussed in this section.

Cultural heritage institutions have principally privileged visuality above all other

senses: for visitors, by enclosing objects on display in cases and behind cordons; and to some extent in working curatorial practice, where wearing gloves and minimising interaction with objects has become standard. Although there are valid conservation arguments for minimising or eliminating touch of objects to prevent degradation and loss (Canadian Conservation Institute, 2017; The Institute of Conservation, 2020), I argue that ocularcentrism privileges Western ways of knowledge, reinforces the institution as a gate-keeper of knowledge and the visitor as passive *receiver* of this knowledge.

Two key figures in the examination of the cultural hierarchy of the senses are historian Constance Classen and anthropologist David Howes. They have observed how the senses have been judged as either "high" (vision; hearing) or "low" (touch, taste, smell) (Howes, 2011), and the senses being further assigned as inherent to particular genders (Classen, 1997a; 1997b; 2005) or ethnicities (Howes, 2009; 2011). Eilean Hooper-Greenhill wrote that in wider Western culture the dominance of sight over other senses grew to prominence after the invention of the printing press, when visuality became associated with rationality and 'objective, linear, and analytical' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 112) thinking. It follows from this arbitrary taxonomy of the senses that material culture has also been classed according to which sense they engage most closely with, as with the example of such as paintings (visual) and baskets (touch) observed by Howes in his 2011 paper, *The Craft of the Senses*. Though he did not address textiles or clothing directly, they fall in a possibly unique space of engaging with nearly all of the senses.[24]

In her analysis of sensory engagement with collections, Classen argued that there

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[24] While there has been some research in wider museology (for example in the chapter *A Taste of Heaven: Relics and Rarities* in Classen, 2017), study of the gustatory properties of collected clothing is an under-explored area of dress/fashion museology, with current research primarily concerned with the concept of "taste" as a form of cultural consumption rather than a physiological process (Geczy and Karaminas, 2022; Marra-Alvarez, and Way, 2022).

was a gradual shift from 17th and early 18th century private collections where engagement with collected objects was multisensory and encouraged touch (Classen, 2005; 2017; Classen and Howes, 2006), to public institutions which initiated the separation between who could hold and dispense knowledge, and who could observe and learn from it. She posited that this separation was tied in part to class, with visually-focused museum visits a part of the "training" in the physical comportment of the late 18th- and 19th-century working-class museum visitor to get 'control of their bodies as they enlightened their minds' (Classen, 2005, p. 282). Howes supported this analysis, highlighting that while the modern iteration of the museum has not typically encouraged touch as a point of engagement with the visitor, early collections emphasised the importance of visitor touch in learning, aesthetic appreciation, identification with the original creators and as a source of potentially healing talismanic power of objects (2014, p. 260).

Classen determined that social training reinforced ideals of what was a "museum quality" (and thus, untouchable) object in the mind of the public, but also embedded a cultural idea that touch was not cognitively valuable (2005, p. 282). In 2014, Howes wrote of the institutional return to "sensory museology", and in particular the renewed focus on the sense of touch within the museum collection and exhibitions (2014, p. 259). The question of who can participate in this power has been explored across anthropology (Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2006; Fowles, 2010; Turner, 2021; Xepoleas and Hayflick, 2022). Anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, archaeologist Chris Gosden, and art historian Ruth B. Phillips observed in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture* (2006) that the institutional methods employed during the classification and display of objects are specifically tied to Western colonial ways of thinking. These methods reiterate the '…modernist empowerment of visual inspection and experience as primary modes of understanding and pleasure…' (Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2006, p. 2), denying visitors from engaging with material in a manner that might

be more resonant for them culturally.

In the wider field of fashion studies, anthropologist Joanne B. Eicher has examined how clothing engages the senses, whether it is the 'kinetic qualities' of garments or the way the dressed body 'permeates airspace' (Eicher, 2010, p. 3). Accordingly, she recently updated her Public, Private, Secret (PPS) model of understanding possible motivations for dressing the self to include engagement with the five Western senses (Eicher, 2020). Theorist Sara Chong Kwan has produced meaningful scholarship on the sensory experience of being dressed within the context of personal wardrobes (Chong Kwan, 2016), and has considered how this experience might be applied to the MCA of garments to identify 'meanings that may be hidden from observers and that challenge the power of the gaze' (Chong Kwan, 2020, p. 13). Through her research, she identified what she termed "sensory gaps" (Chong Kwan, 2020, p. 2) in dress/fashion studies, with an overemphasis being placed on the visual aspects of clothing within institutional collections in the UK. This emphasis is partly culturally motivated, as will be discussed, but is also part of human cognition.

Assuming a person has the ability to sense visual stimuli, research has demonstrated that the human brain devotes more energy to visual processing than to any other sense. This primacy enables us to navigate our world safely and to participate in social life (Pike and Graham, 2012, pp. 74-75). The fields of neuroscience and psychology are currently in the process of reassessing bias in their own data, and there is ongoing debate of whether previous study results concluding that there is an inherent emphasis on cognitive processing of visual stimuli was culturally situated (see Ueda et al, 2018; Willey and Liu, 2022). Being dressed and analysing worn clothing, however, both engage with more than visuality. Contemporary scholars are applying a multisensory approach to dress/fashion studies (see Johnson and Foster, 2007; Woodward, 2007; Holliday, 2011; Eicher, 2020), with a symposium co-convened by Chong Kwan at LCF in

2015, *Fashion and The Senses*, addressing these concerns.

Curator Julia Petrov has observed the role of institutional ocularcentrism in her study of the '(dis)embodied interactions' (Petrov, 2011, p. 230) between exhibited clothing and museum visitors. Petrov noted the dissonance between the immateriality of museum displays of clothing, often sealed behind glass, and visitors' embodied knowledge of the experience of being dressed (Petrov, 2011). Her scholarship reflects the research concern of dress/fashion museology to date, where discussion of the multisensory nature of clothing in collections has focused on curatorial outputs such as exhibitions which have employed non-visual (usually haptic or auditory) methods of display (see also Palmer, 2008; Pecorari, 2017, Textil Museet, no date).

For curators analysing worn clothing, it could be argued that interpreting garments which have shaped and have been shaped *by* the experiences of the wearer necessitates multisensory engagement with the material culture. Even when employing best practice of minimal contact, MCA in the institutional collection affords a privileged opportunity for the curator to sense garments and enrich what wearer/object biographical narratives might be interpreted. This close contact puts the curator in a position where they might comprehend many aspects of a garment at once, and as Hooper-Greenhill pointed out, this means that 'the initial reaction to an object may be at a tacit and sensory rather than an articulated verbal level' (Hooper-Greenhill, E., 2000, p. 112). I argue that this sensory "reaction" to a garment can be understood as a source of curatorial bias during the interpretation of wearer/object biography due to the subjective sensory experience of the curator, and sensory-memory associations. The following section considers the subjectivity of the senses, while the following chapter *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*, considers the connection between memories and sensory engagement.

Subjectivity of The Senses

As has been discussed, the sensing of material is highly subjective and is formed in part by physiology and partly by social and cultural location. Additionally, our individual sensory systems have developed subjective impressions, or "quales", of stimuli (ie: hue in the visual system, tickle or itch for haptics, pitch for auditory systems) (Stein, Jian and Stanford, 2004, p. 244). Despite these specificities, there is still an expectation that material which was worn by one person can be comprehended and interpreted accurately by another in potentially vastly different cognitive, temporal, and spatial locations.

The role of sensory engagement in relation to interpreting wearer/object biography was highlighted in the primary research of this thesis. In interviews reflecting on their experience during the study of curatorial practice, participants articulated the importance of needing to manipulate and look inside of a garment to see additional details, as with P1 discussing how during the MCA component they could 'look on the inside, I can look under the collar' (**P1, Appendix, p. 211**). P3 noted their impression of a garment changed upon handling the garment:

'Well, the green I realised was a really good fabric. Because in my mind it was a cheap synthetic. Yeah, I realised it was suede. And I thought, "Oh! That's a really nice jacket!"' (**P3, Appendix, p. 277**)

P2 observed how owning clothing is different than working with it in a professional context because 'you can touch [garments] in a way that you can't in sort of a work environment' (**P2, Appendix, p. 220**). The importance of haptic engagement was articulated by P1, who said of the limitations of the digitised garment:

'I mean there were areas where it was definitely frustrating, or, frustrating is not quite the right word. I suppose, limitations, rather than frustration, in terms of, "Oh,

I think this is the case because of what I'm looking at, but I don't know because I can't feel it, or the image isn't quite good enough, or I can't look inside, or whatever.' (**P1, Appendix, pp. 201-202**)

A haptic example can be drawn from historian Mark M. Smith, who argued in *Sensory History* (2007) that to "truly" understand the experience of a past wearer, garments 'can, and should, be read inside out as well as from outside in so that the quality and feel of the clothing on the inside, how it was understood to either caress or rub the skin of the wearer by spectators, is appreciated thoroughly' (Smith, 2007, p.107). This belies the fact that not everyone senses stimuli in the same way, for example, the difference in sensory engagements with autistic, neurodivergent, and disabled people (see Saunders, 1995; Pellicano and Burr, 2012; Kyriacou, Forrester-Jones and Trantafyllopoulou, 2019; *In Plain Sight*, 2022/23). Participant 2 in the primary research of this thesis also discussed how their neurodivergence influenced how they engaged with objects during MCA. Smith noted that sensory experience is historically situated, a point supported by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim in the example of the mink stole discussed on p. 65 of this thesis: what is considered a pleasing sensory experience in one situation can be considered repulsive in another.

While touching a garment can be used to provide an *approximate* understanding of the experience of wearing it, it cannot be assumed that the limited tactile experience of the curator will be analogous to what the wearer felt in the garment. Handling a garment does not communicate the fullness of sensation (pressure, weight, temperature) of wearing a garment. Projecting the curator's sensory experience of certain fabrics onto their analysis of a garment, invites a biased interpretation of how a garment might have felt to the original wearer. An example might be a garment which is perceived as sensorially negative for a curator (due to degradation or material evidence of wear) might decrease the amount of time spent they spend analysing the garment, permitting the

emergence of confirmation bias and causing omission of evidence of wearer/object biography in the process.

A visual example of sensorial subjectivity which has both cognitive and practical implications, is the communication of colour. Colour is central to the museological study of garments and description of objects, and can be used to identify provenance, pinpoint a production date or, as is of particular note to this research, aspects of wearer/object biography (Stoeva-Holm, 2007; Best, 2012; Barthes, 2013; Sanad, 2018). The colour of clothing can be a key tool in gathering individuals together and signalling their membership to a community, a point explored further in this section. Despite the breadth of research which relies on the accurate identification of garment colour, there is currently no standard terminology in place to do so. In fact, there is no objective measurement for describing colour. Description relies on how the observer characterises the stimuli, and as psychologist Michael Webster and linguist Paul Kay observed in their study of variations in colour naming, 'this has left open the debate of whether these descriptions reflect the characteristics of perceptual or linguistic processes' (Webster and Kay, 2007, p. 29).

Even the fundamental concept within Western material culture studies of "colour" is biased, notably because it suggests that colours are universal concepts with an associated word throughout every language. In actuality there are many languages which do not have an equivalent to the word "colour" nor have a word which corresponds to the English for, say, "red" (Saunders, 1995; Saunders, 2007; Wierzbicka, 2006). This presents an additional layer of bias contingent on the cultural position of the dress/fashion curator, and how they have come to communicate visual stimuli.

The vagaries of description within dress/fashion curation are not isolated to this discipline, with forensic science also acknowledging a lack of specific criterion in

the case of something as fundamental and potentially meaningful as colour. The subjective nature of communicating sensed colour was discussed in Itiel Dror's 2009 examination of the forensic analysis of bruises. Dror observed that the age of a bruise is dated by the analyst based on the colour of the contusion they see, yet describing a bruise as "yellow" might have an entirely different interpretation from one analyst to another (Dror, 2009). The same can be said when describing dress: what is yellow to one person, might be ochre to another, and yet those two lexical terms have the potential for very different associations and interpretations. In her 2020 discussion of her development of a new method of material investigation, studying jewellery, forensic jeweller Maria Maclennan highlighted the continued issues with 'inconsistent or ambiguous terminology [...] variations in both informal and formal language, translation barriers, and the natural subjectivity of interpretation' (Maclennan, 2020, p. 53) in forensics, highlighting the difficulties in finding a common vocabulary even within specialist areas.

Although there are models available for matching and identifying colour such as the proprietary commercial classification of Pantone or the Munsell system,[25] currently in the discipline of dress/fashion curation there is no single standardised system employed when interpreting colour during MCA. Emily Austin, Conservator of Textiles at the Museum of London, has used Pantone swatching to colour match textiles, though she found it did not provide exact matches, leading her to feel that she was possibly 'aiming for the wrong colour or inaccurately recording the colour' (Austin, 2020). Therefore, despite the available tools, sensing a garment's colour and the subsequent description of that colour remains subjective and liable to bias which may have meaningful biographical implications on how it is interpreted.

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[25] The Munsell colour system was first published by art professor Albert Munsell in 1905 as a practical open tool to standardise colour descriptions. Munsell found the existing characterisation of colour in his time 'incongruous and bizarre' (Munsell, 1919, p. 10) which used descriptive words from other senses ("tone") or of objects (pea green, grass green, sage green) to create "inaccurate" and "innappropriate" (Munsell, 1919, p. 10) classifications. In response, he created a system specific to the three aspects of colour: hue, value and chroma.

A practical example might be in interpreting the colour of a handkerchief belonging to a member of the gay community who followed the "hanky code". This code, particularly active in the "clone" scene of the 1970s (Cole, 2000; Fischer, 2015) provided specific information for members about a wearer's relationship status and sexual preferences based on the colour (and placement) of a cotton handkerchief. Menswear historian Shaun Cole reproduced a table outlining the specific handkerchief colours (Cole, 2000, p. 114) in his essential book on gay men's style in the 20th century, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel* (2000). The chart demonstrates the specificity of colour: dark blue, light blue, and robin's egg blue are all provided as colours with vastly different corresponding meanings.

This example demonstrates that colour can be vital in interpreting intimate details of wearer/object biographical which otherwise may not be available without wearer testimony. In the absence of this testimony, accurate description of colour can provide improved avenues for further biographical research. From speaking to gay men across Britain, Cole determined that colour could be evidence not only of aspects of personal identity, but also provide chronological or geographical information about the wearer. For example, he wrote that in 1930s Britain grey or brown 'suede shoes were a sure sign of deviancy' (Cole, 2000, pp. 62-63), but by the 1950s the same style of footwear had been adopted by the heterosexual smart set. This is an example of a cultural specificity located within material culture which may be identified and used to highlight an underrepresented community within a collection, in this case gay men.

Discussing the analysis of World War II Women's Land Army uniforms acquired by Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, curator Amy de la Haye noted the complexities of interpreting their colour particularly with changes in common lexicon over time. Uniforms which were considered "khaki" in the 1940s would not be

representative of the contemporary perception of the term (Clark and de la Haye, 2008, p. 147). Additionally, de lay Haye points out that fabric will not only have faded through use prior to acquisition, but once acquired will continue to degrade, highlighting the importance of clear documentation at the time of initial MCA.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the concept of *sensing*, the detection of stimuli, as a core function of the dress/fashion curator. Despite the embodied nature of sensing garments during MCA, the ocularcentric nature of cultural heritage institutions has impacted to what level curators are able to engage with garments. Previous scholarship was drawn from across the related fields including anthropology, psychology, and museology to examine how a Western focus on five senses has assigned sensing to a culturally-situated hierarchy, which has been reiterated through the institutional emphasis on the visual aspect of objects.

The subjective nature of sensing has been discussed, specifically in the barriers to understanding how the wearer might have sensed their clothing, which includes negative sensorial reactions to objects which may deter the curator from fully engaging with MCA. The lack of universal terminology applied to interpreting the visual aspects of garments has been highlighted using the example of garment colour, which is a core descriptor within the ocularcentric space of the institutional collection. In this chapter, I have identified a lack of formal curatorial methods for describing the sensory nature of worn clothing, and have provided examples (in gay men's handkerchiefs and shoes, and land army uniforms) of how this can impact the interpretation of wearer/object biography.

Testimony gathered from curator participants has emphasised the importance of sensory engagement during MCA, and how being able to see, touch, and manipulate a garment is central to their interpretation of it. When this empirical

research is taken in conjunction with previous scholarship around sensing, I propose that *Sensory Engagement* is a form of decision-making bias informing curatorial interruption and impacting the interpretation of wearer/object biography in worn garments.

The following chapter addresses how curators perceive the immaterial, or extra-sensory aspects of wearer/object biography: memory and emotion.

3.3 Mnemonic and Emotional Bias

'[…]I think clothes have always been really important to how I feel as a person. Clothes are kind of what makes me, me. Like clothes are at the centre of everything I do.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 219**)

The participant quote above articulates the the focus of this chapter, which investigates the immaterial connections humans make to garments, how we sense this immateriality, and how this might impact curatorial decision-making during MCA. This chapter discusses two aspects of analysing worn clothing which could be considered part of what David Howes described in *The Sixth Sense Reader* (2009) as the "extra/senses" (Howes, 2006, p. 36): memory and emotion. Howes delves into the concept of the 'sensorium', an early modern descriptor for ways of experiencing the world which straddle 'the divide between mind and body, cognition and sensation' (Howes, 2006, p. 1) including the concepts of "psychic sense", "paranormalcy", and "animal senses". These concepts would make interesting future approaches to researching into the affective nature of clothing, however to maintain the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on memory and emotion. These are the extra senses which are most often studied in relation to the embodied sensory experience of worn clothing in scholarship (for example, Johnson and Foster, 2007; Hunt, 2014; Burcikova, 2019).

To consider the role of memory and emotion in curatorial decision-making during MCA, this chapter draws on research connecting the Western five senses and memory and discussion of the emotional nature of material culture. This scholarship is applied to frame testimony drawn from the primary research in this thesis, to propose *Mnemonic and Emotional* engagement as factors informing decision-making bias of the dress/fashion curator.

There is a porousness between the concept of the senses and memory, and the concepts of affect and emotion. Although there is some crossover in these areas,

in the interest of thesis organisation, the mnemonic nature of sensory engagement is broadly examined first, and this is followed by an investigation of how the senses intersect with affect and emotion. Much as the previous chapter discussed the practical implications of sensing from a physiological and cognitive standpoint, this chapter applies scholarship drawn from fields including anthropology, sociology, and dress/fashion studies to situate the *material* implications of *immaterial* feelings.

Mnemonic Bias

Scientific research demonstrates that our senses are deeply connected to our memories, with one physiological example being that olfactory stimuli are processed in the region of the brain, the limbic system, the same area associated with generating memory and emotion (Sullivan *et al.*, 2015; Walsh, 2020). An often-cited literary example highlighting the deep connection between sensing and memory is evoked in the Marcel Proust novel *In Search of Lost Time (*1913), where the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea becomes a gustatory key which unlocked an otherwise forgotten childhood memory. For anyone who has caught a glimpse of a stranger on the street wearing a familiar garment, or caught a waft of transporting perfume, there is a demonstrably lasting link between what we experience through our senses, and how memories of these initial encounters informs how we subsequently perceive the world.

The connection between sensing, memory, and emotions has been examined across fields of study concerned with how humans come to understand the world including philosophy, sociology, and museology. One approach to considering this connection is found in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), where Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote about "memory-colour", or how we view colours in the present through memory recall from past experiences (2012, p. 21). He proposed that colours become signifiers of meaning in our mind rather than a 'real part' of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 14). The colour red, for example, becomes a

signifier of a certain memory or emotion: for example, a red high heel could become representative of certain occasions or a type of wearer because of how we have seen it before. It could be argued that how we initially sensed a thing, will inform how we come to know what an object "is", and for dress/fashion curators particularly, subsequent interpretations of what that thing might represent.

In their interview, P2 observed how their relationship to clothing, both personally and professionally, is closely tied to memories of being taken care of by their grandmother:

'[…] that's why that would stick out like a really important early clothing memory, because it was like, even if the clothes were picked for me by my nan, I felt like me, and I felt like I had some agency over it, which perhaps, perhaps I didn't feel like. So yeah, it's quite a nice, my nan is like honestly, she's just – well, she died earlier this year, but like at 94. She's an amazing, absolute superstar and had a big place in a lot of my early clothing memories.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 219**)

Throughout their interview P2 referenced caretaking clothing, using phrases such as 'old friends' (**P2, Appendix, p. 226**) to describe clothing, treating objects with "gentleness" (**P2, Appendix, p. 225** and needing to "detach" from garments that 'deserve to be re-released' into the world (**P2, Appendix, p. 220**). The connection between clothing and care was established early in P2's childhood, and I argue is evident in the manner they currently practice curation.

P3 discussed how pivotal their working class background (**P3, Appendix, p. 247; p. 252**) was to their own relationship with clothing, including sharing their early memory of a pair of platform shoes from their childhood:

'The shoes, again, absolutely loved them, because they were sort of the first entré

into sort of clothing that I really wanted rather than being dressed […] I wore them to death' (**P3, Appendix, p. 248**)

In their analysis of Object 3, P3 suggested an elaborate biographical narrative which they had not done for either Object 1 or 2:

'I knew it was a man's, and I thought it was possibly sort of, like, maybe a working class guy, because I thought it was synthetic fabric. And I saw it as being sort of, slightly, um, mass-produced rather than actually what it is, so I saw it maybe just, sort of a bog standard – the condition was really bad as well, so somebody wore that, a lot. You know, and that, the wear that I saw on the screen looked to me that it had not been stored badly over the years, it's actually been worn to death. And that again says to me that someone doesn't have a lot of money, so they're wearing objects, or clothing, for a long time, so again it was sort of a lower, you know, working class, lower middle class guy.' (**P3, Appendix, p. 272**)

When I asked if the participant would include this narrative in catalogue documentation for the object, they said:

'I wouldn't include a profile, because it's just too subjective. So I would include man's, synthetic, bomber jacket, late '80s, early '90s. You know, worn, you know, worn a lot. Stuff like that. It would be stuff that is not subjective.' (**P3, Appendix, p. 272**)

This demonstrates how a curator can both be *aware* of their own subjectivity, and still infuse ostensibly "objective" documentation with their interpretation. The interpretation that the jacket belonged to a man and had been worn extensively are not objective observations. I argue that this particular object interpretation can be seen as influenced by the participant's own memories of clothing quality, gendering of garments, and associations with wear. This further demonstrates the

need to identify sources of decision-making bias, rather than simply acknowledge them, which does not work to mitigate the impact on wearer/object biography.

Embedded biography in the materiality of clothing can have a powerful effect on what historian Alison Slater terms the "true memory" recollection of a garment, rather than the use of a representation (photo, oral history) to trigger recall (Slater, 2014, pp. 135-136). Through touching, smelling or otherwise engaging sensorially with a garment, the curator will be prompted to recall memories of similar previous object engagements. Considering that this affective material is carried across the threshold of the public collection along with the acquired garment, it is important to note that sensory engagement with other people's worn clothing is both a part of curatorial practice, and yet will hold and trigger different associations and memories.

Sociologists Jennifer Mason and Katherine Davies studied the entanglement between tangible and intangible sensory experience in their project analysing familial resemblance. Through participants' descriptions and comparisons of family members pictured in photos, Mason and Davies identified what they termed "sensory intangibility". They described this as a way of knowing what something is like (in this case, related people) which is borne from the "mystique" 'located within and beyond the sensory' (Mason and Davies, 2009, p. 599): prior experience and familiarity. Chong Kwan similarly wrote of the "atmosphere" around dressed bodies in her study of sensory engagement with clothing, *The Ambient Gaze: Sensory Atmosphere and the Dressed Body* (2020). She posited that our embodied sensory knowledge of the world is constructed from 'our own memories and lived experience of the sensory properties of clothing' (Chong Kwan, 2020, p. 6) which are formed by our individual cultural location and experience. Viewing wearer/object biography from this perspective, we see how the perception of the sensory and extra-sensory aspects of a garment can both act as interpretative evidence for the dress/fashion curator, but also evocative

material capable of biasing how they interpret a garment.

Museologist Gaynor Kavanagh effectively highlighted the persuasive nature of memories, particularly as related to museum objects and mnemonic evocation, in *Making Histories in Museums* (2005):

'Memories are context dependent. We do not perceive or remember things in a vacuum. Feelings, smells, objects, places, spaces, colours can prompt them and they tumble, however welcome, into our minds. That is why the 'dream space' in museums, mentioned above, is so affecting and effective.' (Kavanagh, 2005, p. 8)

She furthered cautioned against reading too much into memories, which are 'faulty and flawed' (Kavanagh, 2005, p. 8) constructions, which will change depending on the context of and motivation for their recollection. Kavanagh is reinforcing the generally accepted idea that our memories are imperfect, and yet the dress/fashion curator spends much of their time in MCA recalling memories of previous garments and previously encountered stitches, colours, and textile designs in order to interpret the meaning of the object before them. This interpretation lay, as psychosociologist Lynn Froggett and historian Myna Trustram wrote, 'somewhere in between the interior world of the imagination and the external material world' (Froggett and Trustram, 2014, p. 491). They framed visitor engagement with museum objects within concepts drawn from psychoanalysis, including the research of Wilfred Bion, arguing that an object has meaning for those who behold it when it becomes endowed with a personal significance (Froggett and Trustram, 2014).

Wilfred Bion studied the phenomenon of psychoanalysts assigning meaning to interpretations in *Attention and Interpretation* (1970), examining the impact of the analyst's mind and subjectivity on treatment of the analysand. Bion was concerned that the analyst's experience of the world, their own 'memories and

their desires' (Bion, 1970, p. 31) for particular outcomes, might bias what a patient shared during treatment, and how this information was interpreted.

For the dress/fashion curator, memory can be a source of bias in how we interpret an object. With a familiar garment, we may look for narratives which correspond to previous experiences of similar objects; while for garments which we are unfamiliar with, we search for aspects which are "like" something we *are* familiar with. I argue that this is a point of curatorial interruption: our memories influence our perception of what an object is, and thus we focus our attention on aspects of wearer/object biography which are legible to our own previous experience, and mentally discard those which are not.

Emotional Bias

The affective, emotional nature of engaging with material culture has been discussed in scholarship spanning archaeology, anthropology, and the broader field of dress/fashion studies (for example Tarlow, 2000; 2012; Johnson and Foster, 2007; Dudley, 2010; 2012; 2021; Fowles, 2010; Harris and Sørensen, 2010; Moran and O'Brien, 2014; Chong Kwan, 2016; Ruggerone, 2017; Smith, Wetherell and Campbell, 2018), as well as in research groups such as *The Bodies, Emotions and Material Culture Collective* (no date).

The above sample of scholarship is evidence that emotional engagement with clothing is a well established area of research. This can be understood through the observation from Lucia Ruggerone discussed in the *New Materialism* chapter. Ruggerone, in discussing the feeling of being dressed, noted that 'at least part of this experience is extra-cognitive, in the flesh and therefore not not reproducible in a strictly analytical form or vocabulary' (Ruggerone, 2017, pp. 577-578). Accepting then, that there is an emotional, intangible aspect to clothing, and that the curator can potentially sense this from a worn garment, what impact might this have on wearer/object biographical interpretation during MCA?

Archivist Jane Hattrick addressed her own emotional bias while researching the belongings of couturier Norman Hartnell. In her essay *Seduced by the Archive* (2014), she discussed working in situ for seven years amongst the Hartnell archive, which had been rehoused after his death in the home of his close friend and business associate George Mitchison (also deceased). Hattrick framed the intimate objects found in Hartnell's archive within her own experience, specifically privileging her experience as a lesbian. Hattrick wrote that she had fostered an emotional attachment to the gay aspect of Hartnell's biography and this had subsequently informed her research focus. She reflected on her activity in the archive and identified that in addition to her own sexuality, her proximity to the objects nurtured this attachment, but argued that this perspective aided in highlighting previously ignored aspects of his biography (Hattrick, 2014, p. 98). In going against what she termed 'masculinist art-historical practice' and in utilising emotion and empathy in her research, she was able to 'identify the overlooked histories and to uncover these other "truths"' (Hattrick, 2014, p. 93). She both acknowledged her bias, and viewed the way it shaped the documentation of Hartnell's biography as an asset to highlighting an otherwise obscured aspect of his biography.

Hattrick's research identifies the double-edged sword of emotional bias: where it might establish a close focus in the curator which reveals intimate aspects of wearer/object biography, while obscuring other aspects. Her research has been key in locating myself as a researcher working closely and for a sustained period with (what I perceive as) emotionally-charged clothing in my own practice. In the case of the Francis Golding collections, I have spent years studying the clothing of a man who had worn them to participate in the many social and professional facets of his life, and who had subsequently died and left these remnants of his experience in his wake. Over this extended period of time, I revisited the material of his garments, searching for evidence of his worn biography which

complemented my early interpretation of his life as an urbane, cultured man. This interpretation guided how I analysed the garments, and how I attuned my sensing of the garments.

Peter Stallybrass (2012) wrote in *Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things* about being overcome with emotion years after the death of his close friend and collaborator Allon White. In wearing White's jacket to a lecture, Stallybrass' own movement had reactivated the fabric's material memory, and suddenly White 'was there in the wrinkles of the elbows[…]he was there in the stains of the jacket, he was there in the smell of the armpits' (Stallybrass, 2012, p. 69). This engagement between White's jacket and Stallybrass demonstrates a parallel to the curatorial interruption proposed by this thesis, where an outside intervention (Stallybrass wearing White's jacket) created a new and altered perception of the garment. Stallybrass sensitively articulated the material and immaterial nature of sensing garments: retaining both the tangible material memory of the wearer's body and self after being separated from the garment, and the immaterial essence in the material which activates the memories and emotions of the person handling the garment in their wake.

As Stallybrass observed, and as previous discussion of our physiology has evidenced, odour is a powerful and direct trigger of memory. What I hypothesise as mnemonic bias is demonstrated in my own initial examination of Francis Golding's clothing at MoL. I noted an odour of stale smoke emanating from some of the older worn garments, and in reflecting on my own experiences, I could recall the smell of my own clothes after an evening spent in a smoky bar, and began imagining that he had worn them in similar circumstances. I queried curator Timothy Long if there was available testimony from Golding's partner that he had been a cigarette smoker, but there was no evidence that he had been. This raised the question of when and where the garment might have been last worn by Golding, as smoking indoors in public spaces had been outlawed in

London as of July 2007 (Health Act 2006). Although this might seem a minor point, it potentially locates the garment, and Golding, temporally and geographically.

Due to my own mnemonic engagement with the odour, I had started a line of query which directed my attention away from (and possibly obscured) other aspects of the clothing which *was* relevant to Golding's biography. The period available to visit the MoL stores and analyse his clothing meant that by the time I had discarded this line of inquiry, it has been installed in the temperature- and pest-controlled environment of the MoL collection stores for several months, and had lost that original odour I had sensed during the initial MCA, when the clothing was the closest in proximity to Golding it would ever be. Any subsequent curator who encounters his clothing will not have the same sensory evidence to draw on that I did, and thus other olfactory aspects of wearer/object biography which I missed, might be lost. Susan Pearce (1992) has said that objects are "continuously re-presenting ourselves to ourselves, and telling the stories of our lives in ways which would otherwise be impossible' (Pearce, 1992, p. 47). In smelling what I believed to be cigarette smoke on Golding's jacket, it is worth questioning whether I was interpreting his biography, or recalling my own?

Curator Ellen Sampson observed the "seductive" narrative gaps in the dress/fashion collection during her fellowship at The Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, gaps into which those working in the collection were able to 'project aspects of the self' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 14). Sampson, as with fellow researchers Hattrick, Bethan Bide (2017), Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim (2015), viewed this projection as a research tool, drawing on their emotional engagement to interpret objects.

In her chapter *Virginia Woolf's Glasses: Material encounters in the literary/artistic house museum* (2010), historian Nuala Hancock discussed the way working with

'sensorially laden, psychically charged' (Hancock, 2010, p. 114) worn garments could 'offer us the possibility of "sensing" the other through the enduring fabric of their material lives' (Hancock, 2010, p. 119). Hancock was referencing her analysis of a pair of Woolf's worn glasses, which contained material signs of wear, but also through feeling the weight of the frame and peering through (empty) lenses, provided a method of embodied emotional interpretation of Woolf's view of the world. She acknowledged that in examining the object so closely, she had the power to 'break into' (Hancock, 2010, p. 119) and to "tamper" with another person's life - to imagine how Woolf might have felt in wearing the glasses because of how Hancock felt when she handled them. Hancock also contradicts her assignment of agency, by identifying this tampering as a form of "voyeurism" (Hancock, 2010, p. 119): implying a passive observance, rather than an active interruption of wearer/object biography.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill took a slightly different approach to framing the emotions elicited by objects, terming this "tacit knowledge":

'Tacit knowledge produces powerful 'gut reactions', mobilising feelings and emotions, but in a nonexamined way. Objects, known tacitly, also have this effect. Unspoken feelings influence behaviour, attitudes and values, and are perhaps especially powerful precisely because they remain unexamined.' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 116)

Hooper-Greenhill posited that because this tacit knowledge is non-verbal and unarticulated, it cannot be analysed and assessed, despite being what she asserted was a powerful force on 'behaviour, attitudes and values', or what in this thesis is known as bias. I argue that much like our broader sensing, perception of the energy or atmosphere around a worn garment will vary according to the curator's own cultural and social position. This highlights a need for dress/fashion curators to not only acknowledge that objects can be emotional, but that the

emotions being evoked are their *own*, and not necessarily reflective of how the original wearer felt. Retrospection and contextual knowledge of a wearer, in addition to the personal experience of the curator, can all contribute to emotional bias during MCA.

Conclusion

This chapter has situated two intangible ways of perceiving: mnemonic and emotional as sources of decision-making bias in the dress fashion curator. Previous scholarship drawn from fields which engage with material culture has established that objects are evocative of personal recollections and feelings in those who behold them. This has been supported by testimony drawn from the primary research interviews in this thesis, where a connection can be made between the memories and experiences of the dress/fashion curator, and how they engage with MCA and interpret objects. Thus, I argue that the curator is not immune to mnemonic and emotional factors, particularly when in close or sustained proximity to worn clothing. While this has been generally accepted in the discipline of dress/fashion curation, to this date it has been positioned as a research tool or an accepted reality of working with collections. In this thesis, I propose that they are sources of bias which should be mitigated when interpreting people's biographies.

My own experience has supported this, where my insistence upon following a certain line of inquiry in the Golding collection, based on my own memories and emotions, proved to be unsubstantiated. The loss of olfactory "access" to his garments once they had been stored in the MoL collection reinforced the ephemeral nature of sensory aspects in acquired clothing. The nature of UK dress/fashion collections is that there is likely to only be one curator undertaking MCA, in a limited period of time (working conditions which will be explored further in the *Working Environment Bias* chapter). Therefore, I propose that *Mnemonic and Emotional bias* are products of a curator's personal and

professional experience and a source of decision-making bias informing curatorial interruption and impacting the interpretation of wearer/object biography in worn garments.

The following chapter moves on from the examination of research considering sensory and extra-sensory bias, to discussion of the discipline-specific factors informing curatorial bias.

3.4 Disciplinary Bias

'I think along the path of my career, I have a met a lot of really amazing, I mean I'm not going to single it out and just say it's women, but on the whole, it has been, I find that the richer material culture experience you get and understanding of dress and textiles, it does feel like it's a very female-dominated experience. I don't know why that is[…]I think you know, like, you pick little things and little bits of knowledge from people all the way, but like, like a lot of those skills start, that she taught me, really stuck with me.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 246**)

This quote, from P2 of the primary research in this thesis, encapsulates the nature of the discipline of dress/fashion curation, which has emerged through the empirical demographic data and curator testimony collected in this thesis. From the sample gathered in the survey, the typical dress/fashion curator in the UK is a formally educated, white, heterosexual, non-disabled woman between the ages of 25-54. Testimony from all three participant interviews highlighted the importance of peer knowledge sharing, which will be discussed further throughout this chapter.

In the chapter *Sources of Decision-Making Bias*, I proposed that the professional network of the curator, and education and training specific to dress/fashion museology are sources of bias impacting the curator during the MCA of worn clothing, termed *Disciplinary Bias*. Having traced the wider study of the discipline in *The Foundation and Evolution of Dress/Fashion Curation* (p. 30), this chapter will examine this proposal through the construction and analysis of a set of curatorial professional profiles, rationalising and implementing an original conceptual diagram, *The Curatorial Rhizome*, which visualises the network of professional connections between curators. The subsection *Analysis of The Curatorial Rhizome* examines this network and considers the possible disciplinary implications of these connections.

The final subsection of this chapter, *Institutional Critique*, introduces and investigates the concept of "musealisation", a term introduced and expanded on p. 261, discusses its impact on wearer/object biography, and reviews scholarship discussing critical curatorial practice within dress/fashion museology and in wider institutional practice.

The Curatorial Rhizome

In considering those who Lou Taylor termed the 'foundation stones' (Taylor, 2021, p. 149) of the discipline, and in regard of the current UK landscape of dress/fashion curation, a through line emerges bridging decades of professionals: the interconnected working relationships of practitioners. Taylor articulated this sense of community in her obituary to early curator Madeleine Ginsburg, mourning the loss of 'one of us[…]the dress history family' (Taylor, 2021, p. 149). Though this type of peer network is not exclusive to the discipline of dress/fashion curation, due to its relatively young formalised state I hypothesise that it is possible to identify direct links between practitioners and to trace how these networks have formed the connective tissue for the discipline.

It could be argued that rather than individuals educated in disparate schools of thought coming together to work in public collections, dress/fashion curators have often educated in the same programs and trained under the same practitioners before moving in and out of the 'few and highly prized' (de la Haye, 2010, p. 285) curatorial posts in collections. I argue in this thesis that the result is an interconnected community of professionals with highly specialised knowledge and methods, who share their 'expertise to next-generation colleagues' (de la Haye, 2010, p. 285) through what Ingrid Mida and Alexandra termed discipline-specific 'tricks of the trade' (Mida and Kim, 2015, p. 13).

The strength of the discipline is its highly skilled practitioners, situated within a robust peer network. However, I argue it can also contribute to what I term *Disciplinary Bias*. Through his study of highly skilled specialists, neuroscientist Itiel Dror has concluded that what he termed "expert bias" is produced by the very components which make these specialists excellent at their line of work. These components include experience and training, efficiency in processing typical

schemas[26] encountered during work, and expectations developed from previous experiences of analysis: 'top-down cognitive processes which create *a priori* assumptions and expectations' (Dror, 2020, p. 7999). These components are reflected in dress/fashion curatorial practice: successive generations of colleagues being trained and educated on similar material and methods, conforming to the way things have been typically "done" in the discipline, and encountering many of the same type of garments in collections. In this study of dress/fashion curators, I hypothesise that the subjectivities of these antecedent practitioners becomes reiterated through these networks and ingrained as standard, accepted practice, constructing ideologies which inform object analysis.

The influence of previous generations of practitioners methods on those currently employed in the discipline was articulated by P1, who noted that even with their formal education to PhD level in dress/fashion studies, '[…] in terms of actually what it's like to work with a collection, and work with objects? I learned that from my colleagues.' (**P1, Appendix, p. 187**)

Methodology for Curatorial Rhizome

As a method of establishing the peer network connecting early dress/fashion curators to the present cohort working in the collections which they once cared for, I considered Judith Clark's definition of "generations" of practitioners, particularly what she identified as the academic response (the foundation of LCF MA Fashion Curation in 2004) to a developing "second generation" (Clark, 2008, p. 326) within the discipline. Her use of the term evokes both successive familial relationships and broader movements of feminist ideology. This is apt for describing a discipline in which many view its watershed moment in the

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[26] The term "schema" was specifically used by P3 in their description of how they identify garments, which they related back to their training at the Courtauld under historian Aileen Ribeiro (**P3, Appendix, p. 268**). Similarly, P2 noted that MCA of objects was like '[…]another garment collected in my head. And because I'm quite visual I've like, logged it in my brain' (**P2, Appendix, p. 227**).

appointment of women curators. However, as generations are generally emergent every 20-30 years, I would suggest that Clark and her cohort were actually the *third* generation of practitioners. The concept of generations is then based broadly on schools of practice, rather than the age of the practitioners.

I suggest the evolution of the discipline can be framed this way:

- The first generation of collections-based, object-led curators were situated in the foundational 15 year period following WWII, identified by Taylor.
- The second generation inherited these positions in the 1970s, working within the institutional parameters established by their predecessors while establishing dress/fashion studies in the UK academy, for example at University of Brighton in the mid-1970s (Taylor, no date) and the creation of the MA History of Dress and Textiles at The Courtauld by Aileen Ribeiro in 1977 (The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2023).
- The third generation emerged in the 1990s with an increased emphasis on critical and theoretical approaches to curating the public collection, informed in part by *The New Museology* (Vergo, 1989).
- Finally, I propose that a fourth generation developed in the UK in the years following two key events which represented a distinct moment of growth in the discipline: the establishment of the dedicated MA Fashion Curation course at LCF in 2004, and the back-to-back *Fashion Theory* issues devoted to analysis of dress/fashion curatorial practice in 2008. As a graduate of the MA Fashion Curation course in 2018, I count myself as a member of this fourth generation.

Framed in this way, the concept of the hereditary family tree naturally presents itself as a way of visually rendering these generational connections. However, the precarious and often temporary nature of dress/fashion curatorial positions in public collections (causes for this will be addressed in the following chapter on

Working Environment Bias) means that rather than branching off in a single career direction from fixed origin and end points and a limited number of direct colleagues, curatorial careers are often multifaceted and practitioners will often work with peers from other generations at various points in their career, in different roles. This was highlighted in the primary research interview with P1, who recounted the trajectory of the various short- and fixed-term curatorial positions they had held and noted, '[…] it's like "Oh and this happened, and this happened!" - It didn't feel like that at the time' (**P1, Appendix, p. 182**). To better illustrate the nature of the discipline, the applied methodology instead draws loosely on the rhizome presented by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1992), where they argued that unlike trees which grow forth from a fixed point, the rhizome can be 'connected to anything other, and must be' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1992, p. 7).

Thinking of the affective relationships and shared knowledges in the discipline in this way opens up the possibility for infinite new connections between curators, with emergent schools of practice bursting to the fore and becoming visible like mushrooms growing from the rhizomorph mycelium, only to disappear to reconfigure and reemerge in a different time. Therefore, the networks drawn in the diagram following are complex, overlapping, and not fixed. In the abridged profiles, education and training is noted in italics, while employment is unitalicised. Where connections are not immediately evident through shared durations at institutions, I have specified if there was a different point of connection ie: internship or collaboration. The aim of this method is to not to provide a comprehensive account of the career of every practitioner who has ever engaged with the discipline, nor to define for them where they would situate themselves within a school of practice, but to provide a sample selection of curators with a wide reach across the discipline in order to highlight any emergent patterns of practice.

The criteria for selecting the curators is as follows:

- A curator representing each of the proposed four generations of practitioners.
- Curators who have had their approach to object analysis examined (whether by themselves or by others), providing clear evidence of their practice.
- A selection of curators from different locations across the UK, demonstrating the spread of knowledge beyond institutional borders.
- Due to the relatively small discipline, there is often some interaction between practitioners, however where possible curators who have not *formally* trained or worked at an institution together have been selected for the curatorial rhizome. This has been done to better demonstrate that an approach to practice is specific to the curator, rather than a requirement of the institution.

Finally, in analysing the implications of the curatorial rhizome, I find it important to situate myself in this exercise as part of the self-diffractive research approach of this thesis, and as a curator embedded in the discipline. Therefore, I have identified the following curators for analysis: Anne Buck (first generation - green), Lou Taylor (second generation - red), Claire Wilcox (third generation - purple), and Cyana Madsen (fourth generation - orange).

Profiling Curatorial Practice from the Curatorial Rhizome

The following section provides abridged profiles of the four practitioners identified as representatives from their respective disciplinary generation in the curatorial rhizome, found in the appendix to this thesis, on p. 23. Relevant background information is gathered to profile each curator and the curatorial rhizome model is applied to trace the connections between them in order to compare and contrast their approaches to analysis of worn clothing.

Anne Buck

Anne Buck (b. 1910 - d. 2005) was raised in Hertfordshire, 'the daughter of a local tradesman who was famed as an avid collector of books, documents and antique objects of all kinds' (Geraint Jenkins, 1980, p. 1). She graduated in English and History from London University in 1932. Prior to her appointment as Keeper of the Gallery of English Costume at Platt Hall, Manchester, she spent several years in the information department at the Times Book Club, followed by curatorial positions at the Luton Museum.

After the war, she was the founding Keeper at Platt Hall, where she demonstrated 'great curatorial skill, significant collecting, meticulous recording, careful conservation and fastidious display' (Geraint Jenkins, 1980, p. 3). In her analysis of Buck's time at Platt Hall, Eleanor Wood cited an address Buck gave in 1957 to the North Western Federation of Museums and Art Galleries, where she stated that 'The curators work is […] the foundation of objectivity' (Buck quoted in Wood, 2016, p. 172). Wood writes that this could be seen as a natural reaction to the practice of Cunnington, who had little time for meticulous documentation and was openly subjective about his interpretation of clothing (see p. 34). Despite her emphasis on objectivity and interest in the provenance of objects, Buck was known for her fastidious cleaning, mending, and ironing of garments. This is evidence of her choosing to privilege a 'pristine' (Levitt, Halls and Bentley, 2006, p. 124) example of a garment, rather than maintaining wearer/object biography. Buck's focus on fastidiousness can also be contextualised within disciplinary interests of the time, which were not generally concerned with the study of materialised wearer/object biography but with garment design and construction, and social history.

Buck has been identified as an object-led curator through accounts of her career (Taylor, 2004; Jarvis, 2009; Wood, 2016) and her own extensive body of

scholarship, highlighting her precise material culture analysis of garments. A representative example was her publication of the results of the close examination of 54 "countrymen's smocks", shirts worn during the 18th and 19th centuries in primarily rural areas of the England. Buck closely studied the styles of smocking and embroidery on the garments, compared with contemporary accounts of the shirts, as a means of determining the context of wear for the everyday working garment (Buck, 1963). Additionally, she was influential in the creation of fundamental texts such as the Museums Association *Handbook for Museum Curators: Costume* (1958) and designed the International Committee for Museums (ICOM) and Collections of Costume, Fashion and Textiles *Guidelines for Cataloguing Costume* and its *Vocabulary of Basic Costume Terms* (Jarvis, 2009), which are still the only available terms provided by ICOM today.

In terms of collecting interests, curator Anthea Jarvis noted in her profile of Buck that while she launched an ambitious collecting campaign to supplement the collection at Platt Hall which included acquisition of 1950s couture womenswear, she was (uniquely for her time) 'more interested in the much rarer survivals of everyday and working dress' (Jarvis, 2009, pp. 132-133). Miles Lambert, curator at the current location of the collection, Manchester Art Gallery, notes that the *Dandy Style* (2022-2023) exhibition was conceivable in part because of the paucity in Western European masculine garments identified and subsequently rectified by Buck (Lambert, 2021, p. 38). Though reflection on her own preoccupations and practices is unavailable, the comprehensive assemblage of testimonials in Wood's thesis paints a portrait of woman who viewed objects as fact-based evidence to be acquired as proof of history, a view which she passed to her eventual successor at Platt Hall, Christina Walkley, whom she had trained in her methodologies.

Lou Taylor

Lou Taylor (b. 1942) was born in London to parents Pearl Binder (Baroness Elwyn-

Jones) and Frederick Elwyn Jones (Baron Elwyn-Jones). Taylor's father was a barrister and Labour politician, while her mother was a graphic artist who as previously mentioned worked with Cunnington and Laver, notably on the BBC series *Clothesline* (1937), where Laver and Binder studied aspects of historical clothing from Cunnington's collection.

Following a fashion design degree at what was then St. Martin's School of Art (now Central Saint Martins), Taylor worked in millinery and in the dress collection at was the Royal Scottish Museum (now part of National Museums Scotland). After relocating to Brighton, Taylor became involved as a lecturer at both St. Martin's and University of Brighton and worked as a 'museum dress curator from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s' (Taylor, 2013, p. 41), also co-curating the exhibition *Fashion and Fancy Dress - The Messel Family Dress Collection 1865-2005* (2005-2006) with de la Haye and Wood at Brighton Museum. Taylor is now Professor Emerita at the University of Brighton.

Taylor has firmly situated her practice as an object-led approach, writing of her 'passionate interest in artefacts of clothing, probably imbued by my mother' (Taylor, 2004, p. 2) and has indicated her interest in 'surviving period clothing and the cultural meanings of all kinds of dress' (Taylor, 2004, p. 2). In addition to her curatorial approach, Taylor is unique amongst all of the curators profiled in her prolific scholarly research and publication on dress/fashion historiography. Although there had been critical analysis of dress/fashion collecting practice prior to *Establishing Dress History*, for example Tozer's reframing of Cunnington's theories on women's dressing habits, to this date it is Taylor who has most comprehensively traced growth across the UK branch of the discipline, and her research provides the basis of nearly every contextual review (this thesis included) of UK-based (and beyond) dress/fashion curation (see again the list of publishing from embedded curators at the start of this section). Reviewing subsequent accounts of the development of the discipline such as in Clark, de la Haye and

Horsley; Petrov; or Wood, it becomes clear that Taylor's in-depth research of the personalities and policies forming the structure UK public dress/fashion collections informs much of how the discipline has since studied and come to understand itself.

Claire Wilcox

Claire Wilcox (b. 1954) is a lifelong Londoner, who assisted in her parents haberdashery shops throughout her youth, before graduating from Exeter University in English. Her career working at the V&A was initially four years of short contracts, including working as assistant curator to Valerie Mendes, before returning to education for an art foundation course at Camberwell College of Arts. Following several years of freelance research, writing and curation, under the encouragement of Mendes (Green, 2015) Wilcox rejoined the V&A in 1999 as curator, and became senior curator of fashion in 2004.

In her time at the V&A, Wilcox has curated some of the most high profile exhibitions from the institution which identifies itself as 'the world's leading museum of art, design and performance' (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). This has included the major exhibitions *Vivienne Westwood* (2004), *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (2015), and *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear* (2022). She described her practice in a 2015 interview as motivated by 'objectivity, passion, knowledge, expertise, sensitivity to objects, being aware you are a custodian of items owned by the general public' (Green, 2015). In her autobiography *Patch work: a life amongst clothes* (2020), Wilcox poetically described her practice as object-led: 'our curators' hands are there not just to handle and hold, but to gain tacit knowledge of our objects, to feel their history through stitch and thread' (Wilcox, 2020, p. 10) and her approach to object analysis as intimate and gloveless, 'observing every detail, counting every button, notating every anomaly, inside and out[…]the thousand sensors in our fingertips to authenticate and explore the dresses through touch' (Wilcox, 2020, pp. 9-11).

In *Patch work*, Wilcox wrote that in curating exhibitions, she had brought together 'things that have never been grouped, creat[ing] a unified ensemble from clothes that have had multiple owners' (Wilcox, 2020, p. 10) indicating that within her practice, as situated in an art and design institution, exhibition narratives privileged chronology and design rather than the integrity and retention of wearer/object biography.

In addition to her curatorial output, Wilcox is a Chair in Fashion Curation at LCF, where she lectures (including leading one MA session in 2018 which I attended), and she sits on the editorial advisory board for the *Fashion Theory* journal.

Cyana Madsen

I was born in 1983 and spent my early childhood across various provinces across Canada, spending my teen years on the unceded territories of the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw First Nation on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, the daughter of a military then commercial pilot. I graduated from Ryerson (now Toronto Metropolitan) University with a BA in Radio and Television Arts, before spending over a decade working in different capacities in broadcasting, including archiving, production management, and costume design. After relocating to the UK, I became a volunteer in 2016 in the Dress and Textiles Collection at MoL under the tutelage of then-curator Timothy Long. In 2018, I obtained my MA in Fashion Curation (studying under Judith Clark, Amy De La Haye, and Jeffrey Horsley) while working as an archivist at the private hire archive, The Contemporary Wardrobe Collection in Bloomsbury.

My approach to object analysis is driven by my interest in the representation of life in clothing: the signs of wearer/object biography. As has been discussed previously in this thesis, my initial (and formative) experience in MCA was the Francis Golding collection, which contextualised the importance of close object study, the meaning of clothing for the wearer, and the role of the curator in

interpreting the wearer's life through analysis of their clothing. I was approached in 2021 to facilitate the acquisition of a collection of worn contemporary Western European menswear by LCF Archives, *in absentia* of the original wearer. Like Golding, the wearer was a gay man living in London who had died unexpectedly, and my experience with the Golding collection was the primary reason why I was approached as an intermediary for the acquisition, which was unfortunately not successful. Reflecting on my experiences with the object analysis of worn clothing once belonging to the now deceased, I feel that my practice is driven by my sensory and emotional engagement with the material.

This section has profiles four figures within the UK discipline of dress/fashion curation, and positioned them within my proposed four current generations of practitioners. The following subsection, *Analysis of The Curatorial Rhizome*, will trace the connections from the first three generations of curators through the model of the curatorial rhizome with myself as end point (as a fourth generation, early career curator), followed by analysis of the ideological implications of these connections.

Analysis of The Curatorial Rhizome

This subsection applies an analysis of the curatorial rhizome (**Appendix, p. 23**) to study the interconnected practitioners within the discipline of dress/fashion curation, and to consider: how individual practices and preoccupations are passed through the disciplinary network, how the connectivity of the discipline might create and maintain a hegemonic approach to object analysis, and how these contribute to factors informing ideological bias in the dress/fashion curator when analysing wearer/object biography in worn clothing, discussed later in this subsection as 'allegiance effect'.

Practice within Dress/Fashion Curation

It is important at this point to clarify and differentiate between practice and ideology. Practice in this thesis aligns with the practice theory proposed by cultural theorist Andreas Reckwitz, who identified it as a de-centring of the 'mind, texts and conversation' and centring 'bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine' (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 259). This theory speaks to the embodied nature of the methods and methodologies in dress/fashion curatorial practice, and as I argue in this thesis, the ways in which phenomenological, embodied experiences inform curatorial practice. Ideology in this thesis, is defined as the broader associations between curators with like-minded practices. This can be seen as organised broadly (as was discussed in the previous subsection) in four generations of curators made distinctive through their approaches to the study of garments.

In 2002, Taylor defined the relevant practices applied to what she termed the study of dress history: artefact-based (in this thesis, labeled object-led), literary sources, visual analysis (including paintings, drawings, cartoons, photography, and film), ethnographic, and oral history. Swedish ethnologist Birgitta Svensson made the distinction between approaches as being either "dress museology" which she viewed as a form of conoisseurship determining which 'skill is connected to the

artifact [sic]' (Svensson, 2014, p. 202) or fashion museology, connected with 'audience-friendly contemporary designers, creativity and imagination, but also commerce and branding' (Svensson, 2014, p. 203). I argue that this is a false distinction. For dress/fashion curation specifically, the approach to MCA must be *object-led*, by virtue of the activity. However, the supplementary interdisciplinary methods curators draw on in their practice can also include any of the above approaches, and I would add the critical theoretical approach to studying clothing which emerged in the 1980s with the New Museology (see Vergo, 1989); a curator-led approach, meaning a line of research dictated by their individual, sole idea.

Clark and Vänskä use Diana Vreeland at the Met as an example in United States (2018, p.5), with her vision of fashionability and influence as a notable personality dictating collecting and exhibiting practices. I suggest that Cecil Beaton was her UK counterpart in terms of pursuing personal interests as a line of research, which led to the acquisition of objects for the V&A collection, though it is questionable that either curator was closely involved in analysis of the acquired garments. Curator Paul O'Neill addressed this "curatorial turn" within contemporary art curation in *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse* (2007), which he saw as borne out of the "demystification" of curatorial process in the 1960s, evolving four decades later into focus on 'individual practice, the first-person narrative and curator self-positioning' (O'Neill, 2007, p. 14)

Contemporary curatorial practices in object analysis might also include the design-led approach, which considers object analysis and interpretation through the concepts of modernity and consumption. This approach can include: the interpretation of objects framed by the approved themes of luxury design houses sponsoring monograph blockbuster exhibitions;[27] sensory-led (distinct from an

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[27] This is an area of research with its own extensive body of critical scholarship (see Caponigri, 2017; Riegels Melchior, 2019; Bide, 2021; Madsen, 2022b).

object-led approach in that sensory engagement is the starting point for analysis); and biographically-led practices, which prioritise the analysis of embedded object biography. It is the last approach which this thesis contributes to, in advocating for the affective nature of biography that exists in not just the material garment, but the immaterial aspects of worn clothing.

Connecting Curators

The aim of the curatorial rhizome is to visualise how practice might be shared and transferred through the working environment amongst colleagues, teachers, and students. The importance of examining how knowledge is passed from curator to curator was articulated by Michel de Certeau in his study of the archaeologies of history. Cultural historian Jeremy Ahearne articulated Certeau's theory of repetitions which were borne from 'historical formations which precede the interpreter, but whose effects continue to inform the interpreter's work' (Ahearne, 1995, p. 40) The connecting lines in the curatorial rhizome, while not exhaustive, can be used to visually demonstrate how practical knowledge is disseminated and reiterated through the discipline. Key points identifying the disciplinary impact of the identified curators are drawn on to demonstrate how they endure today, through these connections.

Anne Buck

Buck was renowned for her meticulous practice in the acquisition and analysis of clothing which she 'accurately and objectively' (Levitt, Halls and Bentley, 2006, p. 120) recorded her interpretations of, while entering objects into a categorisation system of her own devising, based on library standards (Levitt, Halls and Bentley, 2006, p. 120). Her practice was informed by her previously discussed conviction that the curator, their practice, and the garments themselves were objective: 'The knowledge and understanding of the curator must be implicit, and never appear as something apart from the object' (Buck quoted in Wood, 2016, p. 173). This conviction that the curator was a merely a presenter of facts, rather than an

interpreter of material, informed the foundational categorising texts for museum standards such as Museums Association and ICOM.

The *Costume* journal obituary dedicated to Buck, co-authored by her former assistant Zillah Halls, made clear that Buck's legacy was not only found directly in her curatorial output, but also in the 'writing of her assistants in their later careers' (Levitt, Halls and Bentley, 2006, pp. 119-120). Halls worked with Buck at Platt Hall in the 1950s and went on to be a curator at MoL alongside Kay Staniland, who had also trained under Buck. The network from Buck extends through the history of the curatorial team at MoL: from Staniland's colleague Edwina Ehrman, through crossover with Ehrman's successor in 2007, Beatrice Behlen (current Senior Curator, Fashion & Decorative Arts). Behlen subsequently worked with both Timothy Long, who trained me in the collection, and my PhD supervisor at MoL, curator Lucie Whitmore.

Lou Taylor

The influence of Taylor has been reiterated through her oft-cited publications which have provided in-depth studies of the discipline. The comprehensive groundwork she has laid has yet to be repeated, with the closest comparable research providing examinations of focused areas in the discipline. For example: study of the development of the discipline positioned before and after the 1971 Beaton exhibition (Clark, de la Haye and Horsley, 2014); the analysis of historical exhibitions of dress/fashion (Petrov, 2012); and a case study of Platt Hall (Wood, 2016).

However, as with the above texts, Taylor's historiography has been informed by her own view of the development of the discipline. Throughout her research, she has articulated her frustration with what she viewed as a consistent historical maligning of dress/fashion in museums that was based on a binary gendered

bias[28], and the lack of understanding around the importance of an object-led or material culture approach in academia (Taylor, 1998; 2002; 2004; 2013; 2021). Yet Taylor has also noted that the basis for some of the most substantial institutional acquisitions of historical garments (at MoL and the V&A) originated from late Victorian-era male donors Edwin Austin Abbey, John Seymour Lucas, and Talbot Hughes, who studied material garments for their artistic practice (Taylor, 2004; Petrov, 2008; Petrov, 2014), implying not only a historical but aesthetic interest in what they had acquired. Taylor recounts how Hughes published a volume on his collection, donated to the V&A in 1913, part of a series intended to be useful for modern dressmakers (Taylor, 2004, pp. 47-49) and containing detailed garment patterns, a practice that was popularised decades later by dress historians including Janet Arnold. She wrote that it is 'not clear whether Hughes undertook this work himself' (Taylor, 2004, p. 49) demonstrating her assumption that despite his career as an artist, Hughes might have outsourced the material culture and analysis and drawings to an unnamed labourer, though she does not indicate why, nor does she provide evidence to support this assumption.

The paucity of menswear (particularly historical menswear) in UK public collections is well documented (Horsley, 2017; Whyman, 2019; Lambert, 2021) and in her review of the *Museum of Transology* (2017) exhibition at LCF's Fashion Space Gallery, Alex Esculapio noted the otherwise significant gap in fashion museology addressing the clothing of non-binary people (Esculapio, 2017). While there are a number of factors informing this lack (including survival of garments) it is worth considering how the peer network of women educating and training other women has impacted what has been collected, and what of wearer/object biography has subsequently been interpreted and documented. P3 in their primary research

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[28] Her point on the gendered nature of collecting is not a baseless conclusion: since their foundation, museums have been primarily spaces for educated, wealthy, presumably white, men. Collecting among women has historically not been held in the same esteem as men (Belk and Wallendorf, 1994; Pearce, 1995; Pearce, 1998), and in Petrov's studies of historical fashion exhibitions (2014; 2019) she found that women donors tended to be erased completely from the dress/fashion collections they had accrued (2014, p. 90).

interview suggested that '[...] some women are very interested in fashion in the sense of, it's a reflection of who they are [...] I think they're able to see it as something they potentially would wear, or potentially wouldn't wear. So they would look at it in that way. "Oh, I wouldn't like that" or "I'd love to wear that."' (P3, Appendix, pp. 275-276)

I argue that it is reductive to say that curators are only interested in studying what they themselves wear. However, in a discipline where knowledge sharing is encouraged (as P1 noted in their interview (P1, Appendix, p. 198) it is natural that a shared preoccupations will receive increased attention, and both collections and colleagues will begin to reflect these shared preoccupations. This is further reiterated through formal scholarship such as Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim's *The Dress Detective.*

Consulting the curatorial rhizome, it is clear that Taylor has connected with many curators directly, whether through working on exhibitions, publications, academic projects, or mentorship. The network connecting Taylor and myself, aside from my having studied her research closely, connects through her colleague and my MA Fashion Curation Professor and PhD supervisor, Amy De La Haye, and one of my primary research study participants. P1 spoke of the impact Taylor had on their career trajectory:

'[...] she asked me to go to the conference in Paris, I think? And this conference was like, there was loads of like, key people there. And Lou got up in the middle of this lunch, now pretty much anyone who Lou has taken under her wing has like an identical story to this, but Lou got up in the middle of this like, conference lunch, she's like, "So who's supervising [P1's] PhD?" and I was like, "Argh!" And at this point I'd had no thinking of doing a PhD, I was like, "Once I finish my master's, I'll just work in museums." So that was like, that was kind of my plan. But that, I kind of felt like, "If Lou thinks I'm good enough, then I must be good enough."' (P1,

This testimony reasserts Taylor's standing within the discipline, and how her influence has shaped countless careers and formal understanding of the history of dress/fashion curation.

Claire Wilcox

From an arts and design perspective, Wilcox has had a great impact on the contemporary understanding of dress/fashion curation, including the shift in emphasis from collections-based research to public-facing outputs such as exhibitions and publications. As has been discussed, she has been responsible for some of the most high-profile and successful exhibitions in recent years, becoming the de facto household name of the discipline in the UK (Cooke, 2020; Wilcox, 2020a; Gormally, 2021). Wilcox is as object-led in her individual practice as Buck or Taylor, as she makes clear in *Patch Work* (2020b), an often elegiac ode to the ties between memory and the material of clothing. In her professional output, however, the interpretation of object biography is primarily concerned with the design elements of garments, and how they are used to tell narratives around the 'more theoretical' (Clark, 2008, p. 326) aspects of fashion: from the inspiration behind couture, to concepts of masculinity.

As the curatorial rhizome illustrates, Wilcox has extensive connections to both current and previous generations of curators: to Anne Buck through Wilcox's mentor Valerie Mendes, to Lou Taylor through her V&A colleagues Cassie Davies-Strodder and Jenny Lister. This is in part due to her length of practice, the amount of curators who have trained with her on the collection at the V&A, and the reach of her academic presence as well - which is how I came into direct contact with her. My recollection of our session together in 2018 is that we were to bring a clothing object to the session and write a short descriptive label for it, conforming to V&A standards. As this was our only session exclusively focused on producing

label text, our own cohort was thus trained strictly in the conventions of Wilcox and the V&A. It could be argued that this reiterated any in-built bias from Wilcox into our own practice.

Observations

In this thesis, I propose that each practitioner brings their own experience of the world to bear on their practice, therefore it would be contradictory to suggest that the practice of these curators would pass to their peers "undiluted". However, reviewing the curatorial rhizome (and once again reiterating that it is a hypothetical sample model of the discipline), the interconnected nature of colleagues in the discipline and the high level of formal education practitioners possess from relatively few academic institutions, becomes apparent. I argue that this demonstrates these factors are reiterating the preoccupations of curators back onto each other, and instilling them in early career curators. This contributes to the creation of an ideological hegemony that is difficult to critique or break from from within the discipline, discussed further in the following subsection. During their primary research interview, P3 substantiated this, highlighting how their MA curriculum reflected the interests of professor Aileen Ribeiro: 'Aileen absolutely adores, her whole specialist knowledge is around the 18th century. So there was a lot on 18th century…' (**P3, Appendix, p. 258**).

The following section reviews research and published work which further supports this argument. As has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, there has been very little critical discussion of curatorial practice during MCA, with most reflections being made long after the fact, as with the case of later curators mourning what provenance their predecessors did not document at the time of acquisition (Taylor, 2004; Wood, 2016). The curatorial activity of analysing newly acquired objects within the public collection is mostly invisible labour, a private practice. Therefore, despite this thesis being concerned with MCA at the time of acquisition, much of the following testimony discusses public-facing aspects of

curatorial practice, including exhibitions and publications.

On the Shoulders of Giants - Respect and Hegemony

Fashion scholar Marco Pecorari wrote that curatorial practice is not only day-to-day research and activity, but a construction of 'relationships of intimacy between professionals' (Pecorari, 2017, p. 194). The curatorial rhizome visualised in this section has thrown these professional relationships into high relief, and implicated the peer network which facilitates the sharing of skills and knowledge along generational and ideological lines. Tozer wrote in her analysis of early dress historian practice that it is impossible to collect 'without invoking one's own tastes and prejudices' (Tozer, 1986, p. 3). Just as those individual curatorial preoccupations have shaped the material growth of collections, I argue that they have contributed to creating what I identify as ideological bias within the discipline, privileging certain approaches to wearer/object biography and factoring into curatorial interruption of this biography during analysis of worn clothing.

Training and working closely with one's peers, in a relatively insular network, can have two major outcomes: adherence to the status quo, and critiquing from the inside. Wood wrote of how Buck's successors Walkley, then Vanda Foster, were 'overawed' (Wood, 2016, p. 63) by Buck and her legacy in Platt Hall and the wider discipline. The result was that Platt Hall exhibitions maintained Buck's practices, and 'between 1972 and 1978, the gallery's temporary exhibitions were primarily restricted to a narrow and repetitive range of middle-class, female-orientated subjects' (Wood, 2016, p. 64). Discussing the consciousness of legacy on how objects are handled in a collection, Whitmore observed how a collection of Marks and Spencer brand underwear donated by Staniland to MoL made her think "differently" (Whitmore, 2022) about how she analysed the objects. Whitmore did not mean in standards of care, but in interpretation of objects once owned by a respected senior colleague. In an interview for this research, Whitmore noted that

she constantly encounters what she termed the "legacies" (Whitmore, 2022) of her forebears in the MoL collection, through what they determined was worthy of acquisition, and their catalogue descriptions of garments.

My own career has been shaped by the mentorship and knowledge of my forebears, with particular early support from Timothy Long, then curator of dress and textiles at MoL. Long supervised the initial acquisition process of the Francis Golding Collection, and our shared interest in researching niche London-based designers, a perceived lack of representation of everyday (rather than tailoring or militaria) menswear and of LGBTQIA2S+ subcultural clothing in dress/fashion collections directed our research of the collection. Long, as a graduate of the LCF MA Fashion History and Cultures, encouraged my application to the school's MA Fashion Curation programme, which has shaped my trajectory since. On a practice-level, his methodology of MCA incorporated internet research, object photography, and crowd-sourcing object provenance through Instagram: tools not necessarily available to previous generations of curators. These methods for researching garments has informed my digitally-focused approach to MCA, as was evidenced in the primary research components (employing photogrammetry, 3D modelling, eye gaze tracking, and GoPro and digital SLR cameras) in this thesis.

Allegiance effect, first coined in 1975 by Lester Luborsky, Barton Singer, and Lise Luborsky in their comparative analysis of psychotherapies, can be understood as the effect of influential practitioners on subsequent assessments of their work (Leykin and DeRubeis, 2009; Dror, 2020). It could be argued that not only is the quality of a predecessor's practice a factor in its being passed along the peer network, but their stature in the discipline. Thus, it can be difficult to critique foundational practice, particularly when a curator or their immediate successors are still active in the discipline. Being two or more generations removed can prove beneficial in removing the allegiance effect and allowing a critical

perspective on the subjectivities of a certain approach. This was the case when Tozer sought to counterbalance Cunnington's collection of Victorian womenswear, by rapidly collecting 2500 objects for the Platt Hall collection between 1970-1985, primarily everyday and "typical" examples of Western European clothing (Wood, 2016, p. 69). She followed this with a paper examining what she termed the 'scientific and schematic approach' (Tozer, 1986, p. 2) of Cunnington's practice of object analysis, calling for an approach that considered social and biographical factors in analysing garments. The feminist lens with which Tozer critiqued her male predecessor has been well received, but as the following examples demonstrate, attempts at countering the hegemony in dress/fashion curation has not always been embraced.

Despite sharing an area of research, there has been a historical friction between object-led and theory-led dress/fashion researchers, as articulated by Taylor with what she observed in 1998 as an ideological division in the study of dress/fashion history:

'between the object-centered methods of the curator/collector versus "academic" social/economic history and cultural theory approaches as practiced in the university world.' (Taylor, 1998, p. 338)

That same year curator Christopher Breward presented a conference paper identifying the value of a cultural studies approach to the interpretation of fashion, recognising a need to employ methods of analysis which took 'account of multiple meanings and interpretations' (Breward, 1998, p. 304) in dress/fashion. His thoughts were so poorly received, in revisiting the topic ten years later, Breward wrote that:

'Protagonists from both sides seemed to become more entrenched in the comforting prejudices of their own familiar points of reference—refusing to

countenance the ideas of the opposing camp, insults were traded, and even the proceedings of the conference were published along the fault-lines of the schism' (Breward, 2008, p. 84)

By the time he had revisited the topic, Breward could see the generational shift, with emergent curators au fait with the "cultural turn" following *The New Museology*, a decreased emphasis on 'deep object-based scholarship' and a 'sense of alienation sometimes felt by their senior colleagues' (Breward, 2008, p. 84) who believed that object-led research was the only foundation for dress/fashion curation in the public collection. Although generally I would argue that in the fourth generation of curators a variety of approaches to studying dress/fashion are welcomed, as was discussed earlier in this subsection, distinctions are still being made by scholars such as Svensson (2014).

Taylor has frequently advocated for the value of object-led research throughout her research (Taylor, 1998; 2002; 2004; 2013), and this disjuncture between the object and the theory was one of her chief criticisms of curator Judith Clark's V&A exhibition *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (2005). The exhibition was what she viewed as a 'domination' of 'ideas and settings' over the exhibited clothing (Taylor, 2006, p. 17). The exhibition was predicated on Caroline Evans' book on the haunting nature of fashion in *Fashion at the Edge* (2003), and the cyclical nature of fashionable clothing, using innovative exhibition design to present clothing as the materialisation of these larger concepts. Clark's exhibition offered an alternative to Buck and Langley Moore's view of a 'total entity that could be grasped by a panoramic gaze (Wood, 2016, p. 178). This did not sit well with Taylor, who wrote review of the exhibition:

'This galled me, finally. Examples of stunning, key fashion garments were trivialised and marginalised by the design weight of these vast sets. There was a lack of respect here for the selected clothes, for the work of key, innovative designers and

for the generations of makers and wearers of these garments.' (Taylor, 2006, p. 17)

For Wood, who had co-curated '*Fashion and Fancy Dress: The Messel Family Dress Collection 1865–2005* (2005) with de la Haye and Taylor at Brighton Museum the same year as *Spectres*, this identified a conflict between her own practice and that of her colleague, Taylor. Although it is unconfirmed if Wood discussed this at the time, ten years later she made clear in her PhD thesis that 'Taylor did not represent my opinions' (Wood, 2016, p. 27) on curatorial methodologies. Having worked closely with a colleague with a defined ideological stance, Wood realised that she was 'personally involved with the critical debates' inherent to dress/fashion curation. I argue in this thesis that ideological bias is a potential factor in how the curator will interpret wearer/object biography, not only based on the knowledge and skills they have acquired from their peers, but due to pressure to refrain from critiquing influential figures in the discipline.

A Bridge Over Troubled Ideological Waters

Critique of ideological differences need not be as contentious as the rift highlighted in Taylor's review of *Spectres*. In *One Object: Multiple Interpretations* (2008), Clark and de la Haye reflected on their approach to curating Women's Land Army (WLA) uniforms in the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery exhibition *Land Girls: Cinderellas of the Soil* (2009/10). In the article, de la Haye identifies her practice as object-led and tied to close study of the material culture of the garments, yet also informed by her broader decades-spanning interest in the WLA, which informs the exhibition strategies. Clark's practice makes the output of exhibition-making indivisible from object analysis, with the two activities mutually informing each other. De la Haye recognised the value of collaborating with Clark, who trained outside of the typical dress/fashion-specific spheres as an architect and who incorporates her design experience into her interpretations of objects. The result is a rich and more ideological diverse approach to curatorial output,

that can perhaps be used to resist the unconscious repetitions observed by de Certeau on p. 249.

The hypothetical model of the curatorial rhizome has illustrated the interconnected nature of the discipline of dress/fashion curation within the UK, and has demonstrated that knowledge travels through the practice of the a selection of curators who populate the discipline. Future application of this method might model a larger group of curators, and gather primary research testimony directly from them about these connections, to further investigate the impact of generations of curators on each other. While this knowledge-sharing has strengthened some areas of dress/fashion research, I argue that it can also entrench ideologies and biases through generations of practitioners, even as their approach to MCA might evolve. This reiteration of bias through peers and colleagues contributes to what I have identified as *Disciplinary Bias*.

The final subsection of this chapter builds on this discussion of disciplinary critique, by shifting focus from the practice of individual dress/fashion curators, to a broader critique of the culture heritage institutions which curators work within, and the transformative force these institutions exert on the objects they acquire.

Institutional Critique

While the structures and systems implemented in institutional dress/fashion collections will be discussed in the following chapter, *Working Environment Bias,* this subsection instead addresses two areas of discourse: musealisation, and critical responses to the power of the institutional collection. The scope of this thesis concentrates on worn garments acquired *in absentia* of the wearer, and used as the basis for the subsequent interpretation of wearer/object biography - a situation in which, I argue, that there is an inherent power imbalance in the form of curatorial interruption, between the absent wearer and the curator.

The aim of identifying and addressing curatorial interruption is not to tell the "correct" story on behalf of un-, under-, and mis-represented communities, but to demonstrate professional accountability to the lives we document and commit to historical record as curators. As much of the previous research on this imbalance has been generated by anthropologists and museologists working outside of dress/fashion museology, there is a gap concerning this issue in critical research within the discipline of dress/fashion curation, which this thesis identifies and aims to address.

I argue that during the practice of MCA, the curator becomes the intermediary between the functional, worn life of the garment and its entry into the institutional collection, a space which Linda Tuhiwai Smith observed is itself 'an artefact and a construct of culture' (Smith, 2012, p. 53). In the context of this thesis, which focuses on curatorial practice within the institutional collection, the curator is viewed as an agent of musealisation. Musealisation being: the transformation from functional object to exceptional artefact through the removal of a thing from its context and its relocation within the institution.

This subsection asks how the curator is implicated in this transformation, and how their position in the process of musealisation contributes to what I identify as

Disciplinary Bias.

I draw on research from anthropology and wider museology to contextualise dress/fashion collection as a site of, in the words of cultural theorist Mary Louise Pratt, 'highly asymmetrical relations of power' (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). I argue that the curator should have an ethical mandate to act as an advocate for retention of wearer/object biography from the inside of the institution, and to mitigate curatorial interruption during MCA and documentation of object interpretations in the institutional catalogue. The argument is framed by the concept of "institutional critique" first discussed by artist and scholar Andrea Fraser in a 1985 article on the practice of Louise Lawler, *In and Out of Place* (1985), and subsequently revisited and reflected on by Fraser in 2005.

Musealisation and Becoming "Museum Quality"

'[…] there's something about completely, to me, when something goes into a museum or an archive, it becomes so differently charged. It's just not the same thing anymore. I mean, it's, I guess it's that kind of thing that it stops being a living object in the same way.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 225**)

Testimony gathered from P2 in their primary research interview articulates the result of musealisation, a theoretical and practical process which changes the status and meaning of an object. This process can be understood within a commodities framework, as in the research of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff explored on p. 40, or in the examinations of museological practice made by Ruth Hoberman and Oliver Winchester on p. 132 of this thesis. It is specifically the museological practice which this research is concerned with, and the implications of this practice on authorship of biography and history-writing.

For a worn garment, musealisation means removing it from the context of a wearer's body and life, relocating it within the institutional collection, and

positioning it as a venerated material example of a specific narrative dictated by the curator. This process was articulated by P2 in their interview, when they spoke of the "charged" (**P2, Appendix, p. 225**) nature of museum objects. Whether the narrative selected by the curator is design, manufacture, or culturally-led will partially depend on the collecting policy of the institution collecting the garment, the distinction between these policies will be discussed on p. 280, though the curator is an active agent in interpreting these collecting policies. The processes of separation, classification, and organisation inherent to the institutional collection do not naturally accommodate the multiple meanings and potential narratives within worn garments. The resulting deadening of the vivacity and plurality of meaning when objects are acquired was perhaps best captured by German philosopher Theodor Adorno, who likened the museum to the mausoleum, through more than 'phonetic association' (Adorno, 1981, p. 175). Elizabeth Wilson, quoted on p. 115, drew on Adorno in her observation of the ghostly visual of disembodied clothing separated from the body of the wearer and exhibited in the museum, but did not further examine the haunting absences in history resulting from the process of musealisation.

The institution as a site of musealisation can be supported by the "contact zones" theory proposed by James Clifford, previously referenced on p. 116. The term was initially suggested by Pratt in *The Arts of the Contact Zone* (1991) to describe 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other' (Pratt, 1991, p. 34), often through the 'coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (Pratt, 1992, p. 6) of colonialism, slavery, or the ongoing repercussions of these which continue through the present day. Clifford narrowed the focus of Pratt's theory to the museum, qualifying the institutional structure of the collection as an 'ongoing historical, political, moral relationship' (Clifford, 1997, p. 192).

To Clifford, the museum was a centre with defined borders to be breached by objects which were 'routinely blocked by budgets and curatorial control, by

restrictive definitions of art and culture…' (Clifford, 1997, p. 204), but which equally had potential as a site for collaboration and dialogue. Clifford's research has subsequently been applied by museums seeking to engage with communities and individuals as a means of enriching the understanding of collected objects and expanded into, for example, the collaborative museum-community 'interrogative museum' model proposed by museologists Ivan Karp and Corinne A. Kratz (2015).

Both Clifford and Pratt situated their research from the position of geographical or social colonialism, I would add that the institution is equally a cultural coloniser of communities who have been regularly excluded from the intellectual and historical capital of the museum, for example working class, disabled, and LGBTQIA2S+ groups. Engaging with these communities is often reactive on the part of the institution, and does not easily accommodate the specificities of collecting these histories. As articulated by historian Tamara de Szegheo Lang, within excluded communities there is a instilled anxiety in how their histories will be handled by institutions:

'In the face of institutional neglect that has cost marginalized people so much of their history, there is a well-founded distrust of mainstream institutions…and a well-founded suspicion that such institutions might not reliably accept non-traditional sources and conserve LGTBQ archival materials.' (de Szegheo Lang, 2017, p. 853)

In 2011, museologist Robin Boast observed how contact zone theory had been uncritically adopted by institutions rendering it a neocolonial instrument of 'masking far more fundamental asymmetries, appropriations, and biases' (Boast, 2011, p. 67), through over-emphasis on the potential for positive exchanges of knowledge. He argued that as the contact zone, the museum remained situated as an authoritarian centre of knowledge, 'the ultimate caretaker of the object, as the ultimate arbiter of the identity of the object, as its documenter' (Boast, 2011,

p. 67). As a site of interaction between the curator and the object, I argue that the dress/fashion collection *is* a contact zone. As has been emphasised in examples throughout this thesis thus far, the inequality of the meeting between worn clothing without testimony from its wearer, and the curator who determines how it is to be understood within the context of the collection is a fundamentally unequal power exchange. Thus, the onus is on the curator to advocate for and implement interpretation and documentation practices which do not limit the opportunity for study of the plural narratives within worn garments. I argue that the ethical imperative of the dress/fashion curator is to ensure the acquisition does not exclusively serve the needs of the institution, but also the authorship of the wearer.

As I have observed within the discipline of dress/fashion curation, the lack of scholarship addressing the musealisation of dress/fashion objects indicates this process has generally been accepted without realising its impact on wearer/object biography, and the ramifications for wider history-writing. In fact, much of the critical literature considering the acquisition of dress/fashion by institutions has celebrated musealisation as tacit acknowledgement of dress/fashion as a legitimate area of study (for example Steele, 1998; Taylor, 1998). Marie Riegels Melchior observed that the enshrinement of clothing within institutions, fashionable clothing in particular, has diminished critique of 'the purpose of museums and their impact on society and its citizens' (Riegels Melchior, 2019, p. 30). She compared what she termed "fashion museology" to the New Museology framework proposed by scholars in the 1980s. Formalised in the text *The New Museology* (1989), editor Peter Vergo observed that institutions were created to 'acquire, safeguard, conserve and display' (Vergo, 1989, p. 41) and to 'inform, educate, and entertain, but most importantly assign worth to objects' (Vergo, 1989, p. 2). Two decades later in their definition of musealisation, French museologists André Desvallées and François Mairesse questioned this perceived worth endowed by the institution, particularly because within this

context, the museum object is proposed as being 'authentic evidence of reality' (Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010, p. 51). They argued that by being removed from its functional context, the museum object was already a facsimile of that reality, a single materialised narrative standing in for a plural and 'abstract whole' (Clifford, 1988, p. 220).

If objects in dress/fashion collections in the UK are to be understood as evidence of reality, it is a myopic version of reality. Rather than representing a diversity of dressed realities, these collections are populated by clothing once worn by primarily white, European, middle- and upper-class women. This is particularly true in art and design institutions collecting *haute couture* garments. Susan Pearce framed the musealisation of material culture as deciding what is '"not-art" and "uncultured", in the genteel sense of culture' (Pearce, 1995, p. 289) and what belongs 'outside museums, in the "ordinary" world of daily commerce and commodity' (Pearce, 1995, p. 289). Following Pearce, institutional collections use their status as sites of education and historiography to reinforce that only *certain* types of clothing (and thus the type of people who would wear them) are meaningful through the objects they acquire. I would add to this, in the case of dress/fashion, that the *type* of institution a garment is acquired into also assigns a specific, and limiting, meaning to it. Is the perception of meaning assigned to a garment acquired by a social history or an ethnographic museum the same as that acquired by a museum of art and design?

The contributing factors guiding which objects are acquired by institutions include the aforementioned collecting policies; surviving examples[29] of garments, and curatorial preoccupation. Directions for future research might delve more deeply into the first two factors, however the focus of this thesis is on curatorial

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[29] In her search for historical maternity garments in institutional collections, Catriona Fisk has argued that the lack of surviving garments should be used as a motivation for further research, rather than a 'problematic absence' (Fisk, 2019, p. 407) to be brushed aside.

preoccupation. Accepting the curator as an agent of musealisation requires examination of the factors informing their biases, which in turn determine the objects, and wearer/object biographies they enshrine (or as art historian Douglas Crimp put it, "fetishise" (Crimp, 1993)) as "museum quality".

The Musealisation of Dress/Fashion Objects

There is an existing body of scholarship which has studied the cultural and historical implications of collecting practices (for example Cardinal and Elsner, 1994; Knell, 2007; Dudley *et al.*, 2011; Herle, 2012), with Pearce's research on the gendered nature of collecting being particularly influential in contextualising the nature of institutional dress/fashion collections (Pearce, 1992; Pearce, 1994; Pearce, 1995; Pearce, 1999). A three-point critique of musealisation was proposed by Buren in *Function of the Museum* (1993) focusing on the museal ability to perpetuate aesthetic viewpoints; economic value (also explored by Andreas Huyssen in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (1995)); and the "mystical" elevation of the acquired object to artefact status through acquisition (Buren, 1993, p. 189). The criticism of musealisation has more recently come to include the decontextualisation of acquired objects, particularly those violently removed from their original function (Hoberman, 2011; Procter, 2020; Hicks, 2020). The stripping of object meaning through musealisation was examined by feminist scholar Sara Ahmed in *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use* (2019), with a specific critique of the museal notion of "taking care":

'The politics of preservation so often involves the rights of some to appropriate what is of use to others, because they assume they alone have the technologies needed to preserve things.' (Ahmed, 2019, p. 33)

As has been discussed previously in this thesis, this research focuses on worn clothing acquired *in absentia* of the wearer, and proceeds in good faith that the donation does not contravene the wishes of the original wearer. However, Ahmed

has identified one of the core issues of the institutional collection: which is its representation as a neutral, objective, and safe place for storing historical evidence. Having good, paternalistic intentions of caring for other people's culture was identified by Smith in the researcher's belief that they are 'serving a greater good "for mankind", or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community' (Smith, 2012, p. 2). I argue in this thesis that the dress/fashion curator (as the one tasked with the direct action of "taking care" of acquired garments) must practice with accountability during MCA. This includes actively moving beyond the acknowledgement that they are neither neutral nor objective, and understanding that institutions are not spaces which have respected the originating cultures of every acquired worn garment which finds itself assimilated there.

In the discipline of dress/fashion curation, critique of institutions has often focused on the issue of whether object-based research and "fashion" is taken seriously within these spaces (see Steele, 1998; Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2002; Taylor, 2004). It is only in recent years that complex questions are being asked about how sexuality, race, gender, class, or geography have impacted who has been excluded from the concept of "fashion", and why there is such a narrow representation of dressed humanity in institutionally-acquired objects. Much of this questioning is happening outside of the UK, and is focused on wider institutional policy (Cole, 2018; Proctor, 2018; Costume Society of America, 2020; Friedman, 2020; Xepoleas and Hayflick, 2022; Square, no date). This may be due in part to the political climate in the UK, where questioning of complex and violent histories often meets legislative resistance (see for example, the UK government's "retain and explain" policy (Communities Secretary, 2021) which requires extensive public consultation before modifications of historic monuments). The result is that discussions around what garments have been collected by UK institutions, and who they have represented, is only recently being examined (Scott, 2018; Woode, 2022). An intervention of particular note is

the online *The Fashion and Race Database*, founded by American fashion scholar Kimberly Jenkins, which aims to 'expand the narrative of fashion history and challenge mis-representation within the fashion system.' (Jenkins, 2020)

The scope of this thesis is on MCA of newly acquired worn garments, rather than revisiting historically acquired objects. However, as was discussed in the chapter *Material Culture* p. 41, institutional collections of dress/fashion in the UK were founded through colonial collecting practices, and contemporary collecting policies reflect that legacy through categorisation and taxonomy (as explored in the Pitt Rivers Museum project *Labelling Matters: Reviewing the Pitt Rivers Museum's use of language for the 21st century* (no date)). Reflecting on this impact is relevant to considering curatorial practice moving into the future. It is only recently that some UK dress/fashion collections have begun acquiring global clothing as "fashion" rather than "ethnographic" objects (for example, garments acquired for the exhibitions *Africa Fashion* (2022/23) and *HALLYU! THE KOREAN WAVE* (2022/23) at the V&A). Further evidence of colonial legacy is reflected in institutional resistance to devote resources to revisiting the biographical and cultural meaning of clothing originally collected and classified as ethnographic.

At the art and design-focused V&A, there is a distinction made between objects housed in the Textiles and Fashion Collection, as with a pair of mid-19th century kid leather shoes worn by Queen Victoria (Pair of Shoes, 2022a), donated to the museum by the department store Harrods in 1913, and objects in the geographically-located collections. For example, an elaborate gold and green early 19th century scarf once worn by the Queen of Oude (Scarf, 2022b) which was acquired from the India Museum in 1879 and subsequently catalogued in the South and South East Asia Collection. Two objects, both 19th century accessories identified as belonging to and worn by royalty, and yet only the object of European origin is catalogued as a fashionable item.

These distinctions are a relic of the period when they were collected, as most dress/fashion collections now house historical Western European clothing with contemporary clothing and contemporary global garments now acquired as fashionable objects, yet historical global clothing primarily remains relegated as evidence of regional craft. Defining collected historical global clothing as ethnographic material robs them of the narrative plurality and the potentiality to be viewed as complex materialised objects of wearer biography, keeping them contextualised exclusively in relation to their contact with colonial collectors. As Sandra Dudley observed of the personal material of immigrants, '"displacement" does not always equate to "predicament"' (Dudley, 2021, p. 20). Situating global clothing alongside Western Eurocentric garments in the collection allows for the potential of wider interpretation of both the garments and dress/fashion collections.

These distinctions persist today despite an increased demand for the decolonisation of collections (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019; de Greef, 2020; Dalal-Clayton and Puri Purini, 2022). Considering examples of ethnographic institutions which hold clothing and accessories in their collections, there are no specific dress/fashion subject specialist curatorial posts in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, nor the British Museum in London.[30] Comparatively, the Netherland's Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (translated as National Museum of World Cultures) appointed a curator of Fashion and Popular Culture in 2015, in what they claim is the first such position to be created in an ethnographic museum worldwide (Ling and van Dartel, 2019). This curator, Daan van Dartel, has posited that recognising that the modernity of fashion is not exclusive to post-Enlightenment Western European cultures, has existed globally, and can be a valuable tool in ongoing museum decolonisation projects (van Dartel, 2022).

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[30] There are collections care staff who handle objects identified as textiles, for example Helen Wolfe, Collections Manager, Textiles at the British Museum, who retired in 2021 after 45 years at the museum (Wolfe, 2022).

There remains the question of whether objects can be "decolonised" at all while still situated within the colonial collection, or if decoloniality is what co-curator of *The Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire* (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 2017-2018) Sumaya Kassim termed a 'necessarily unreachable, necessarily indefinable' goal (Kassim, 2017).[31]

Critiquing the Institution

As the discipline of dress/fashion curation develops, it requires initiative among the practitioners working within institutional collections to demonstrate an ethical approach to MCA and object interpretation. In 2011, Julia Petrov emphasised the lack of understanding of 'the efficacy of the fashion museum (or the fashion exhibition) as a medium of social control and communication' (Petrov, 2011, p. 240). Her call was echoed by Australian dress/fashion curator Nadia Buick the following year, lamenting what she viewed at the time as lack of critical self-reflection on curatorial 'processes of practice' (Buick, 2012, p. 91). She identified two exceptional articles, published separately in a 2008 issue of *Fashion Theory*, by Italian curator Maria Luisa Frisa; and by Judith Clark and Amy de la Haye. In the articles, the three curators discussed their individual motivations and approaches to exhibition development, but did not discuss the impact of their practice on wearer/object biography during MCA or in the garments they used in exhibitions. Unfortunately, in the years following Petrov and Buick's research, little progress has been made in published self-reflective dress/fashion-specific MCA practices. This thesis aims to address this gap in knowledge, by encouraging reflection from research participants on their own practices, and examination of how their individual MCA techniques impact the interpretation of wearer/object biography.

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[31] There is a vast and rapidly growing body of work analysing the difficulties and strains on those participating in decolonising efforts within institutions (for example Minott, 2019; Artquest, 2021), which falls outside of the scope of this research, but is worthy of further study within the context of dress/fashion initiatives.

With the curator identified as an agent of musealisation through their role as material culture analyst, interpreter, and documentarian of worn clothing acquired by the institution, I now revisit the original Latin etymology of 'curare': to take care of something. I argue that a curator must decide if they are taking care of the interests of the institution or of wearer/object biography - and if it possible to do both at the same time. Particularly in the case of worn garment and wearer/object biography, which have been established as forms of authorship, I argue that the curator must emphasise *providing* care *for* the objects and the material (and immaterial) evidence of wearer biography within them. This includes ensuring that their initial MCA does not impede future interpretations of the object, and that their practice aims to encourage and facilitate future interpretations. Discussing the link between storytelling and collecting through analysis of Walter Benjamin, cultural theorist Ackbar Abbas emphasised the "responsibility" of the two practices (not incidentally both of which fall under the remit of the curator), writing that 'objects acquire a history and become the material means by which this history is passed on' (Abbas, 1988, p. 233). The dress/fashion curator is responsible for what wearer/object narratives are documented and shared in the institution, and thus must make ethical considerations for how their own bias impacts this transmission.

Despite the clear ethical considerations of dress/fashion curatorship, scholarship on museum ethics have not addressed the dress/fashion curator (Edson, 1997; McCarthy, C. and Schorch, 2019). This reflects the uncertain place the worn garment occupies under collecting policies that typically categorise by geographical location, craft, art or design value, or as evidence of social cultures. Within the dress/fashion discipline, there has been no formal ethical mandate for the curator to advocate for the retention of wearer/object biography during MCA. Our colleagues, textile conservators, are under a strict mandate issued by the International Council for Museums - Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC) to record any treatment they undertake with an object. Curators merely have best

practice guidelines (ICOM International Committee for Museums and Collections of Costume, 1986; American Association of Museums Curators Committee, 2009; Miles, Cordner and Kavanagh, 2020) which do not address interpretation of wearer/object biography and are often quickly outdated in suggested terminology or how to describe a wearer's identity. In searching for a framework to apply to the ethical aspect of this thesis, aspects of new museology, including acknowledging the institutional collection as a fraught contact zone, are adopted alongside the institutional critique movement in contemporary art.

"Institutional critique" as a movement emerged in the late 1960s through the work of artists concerned with challenging the power structures of art museums and galleries, with key figures including Hans Haacke (*MoMA Poll*, 1970), Daniel Buren (*Peinture-Sculpture*), and Louise Lawler (*Untitled 1950-51*, 1987). Fraser (who has had her own work included in the movement) argued that the practitioner is a part of the larger apparatus that is the institution, alongside departments with disparate interests in the collected objects: marketing, records and conservation. I argue that the dress/fashion curator as practitioners within an institution are similarly a part of this apparatus. Therefore, it is not only the institutional structure, but individual curatorial practice, which impacts the production of history. As Fraser wrote, 'We are the institution[…]Because the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals' (Fraser, 2005, p. 105)

Fraser reflected back on the long-term potency of the movement in her 2005 essay for *Artforum*, noting the launch of a major installation at the Guggenheim by Buren that year, despite his work being censored by the museum in the 1970s and his criticism of the institution as an economically-motivated agent of "isolation" (Buren, 1993, p. 191). To Fraser, his willingness to engage with the museum was evidence that "the institution" is not simply a physical location:

'It is also internalized and embodied in people. It is internalized in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception that allow us to produce, write about, and understand art, or simply to recognize art as art, whether as artists, critics, curators, art historians, dealers, collectors, or museum visitors. And above all, it exists in the interests, aspirations, and criteria of value that orient our actions and define our sense of worth.' (Fraser, 2005)

Buick acknowledged the limits of institutional critique in her application of the concept to the dress/fashion curator creating exhibitions within the institution. She argued that criticality implies a notion of autonomy, which is not the state of the person employed by the museum (Buick, 2012, pp. 89-90). This was echoed by historian Sarah Longair who noted that despite a 'unified public face' the 'internal organization of the institution imposes limitations and restrictions on curatorial authority for a variety of intellectual, practical, or financial reasons.' (Longair, 2015, p. 4) I counter that the curator is still an individual practitioner operating within the institution, and as has been demonstrated in the chapter *Material Culture*, is a practitioner who applies their own methods to MCA. Incorporating intellectual approaches to interpreting objects that question curatorial bias and the primacy and structure of the institution are not reliant on endorsement from the institution itself. There have been examples of collaborative initiatives which endeavour to change the museum structurally, as with *The Empathetic Museum* (2019) project and its five qualities of institutional-level practice: 'Civic Vision, Institutional Body Language, Community Resonance, Timeliness, and Performance Measures' (Jennings et al, 2019, p. 510). These initiatives include a growing movement of interactive and primarily online-based organisations such as Museum Detox (2019); The White Pube (2021); The Shittish Museum (2021); and UAL Decolonising Arts Institute (2023) which are contributing to institutional critique through crowd-sourced research and testimony from museum professionals and practitioners working within the institutional system, and which have the ability to be agile and respond quickly to current events.

While these are useful in terms of solidarity and attempting structural change, I argue in this thesis that as the intermediary who decides (following Pearce) what of wearer/object biography belongs *inside* the museum through their individual professional practice, it is a *curatorial imperative* to take accountability for what histories might be lost in this transition, and to advocate for practical measures which can be taken to mitigate this loss.

The aim of this thesis is to identify sources of bias in the dress/fashion curator. Contextualising musealisation as a result of internalised biases within the curator (whether stemming from *Disciplinary* or *Working Environment* factors) validates the application of institutional critique to this research. Institutional critique can also be viewed as a new materialist approach to curatorial practice based on the contingent, generative relationship between object, curator, and institutional collection:

'There is, of course, an "outside" of the institution, but it has no fixed, substantive characteristics […] just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. […] It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside ourselves' (Fraser, 2005).

There is a curiosity inherent to the curator, and a drive to select and to study objects. As curators working within institutions, we perpetuate musealisation through our selection of objects for enshrinement. Our bias toward which aspects of a worn garment's biography are interpreted and subsequently documented in the institutional collection maintains a hegemonic understanding of whose histories matter.

Conclusion

This chapter has contextualised the discipline through an analysis of the interconnected network of experts populating the discipline, through an original hypothetical model, the curatorial rhizome. The analysis of this model has highlighted not only what I propose is a network of specialist knowledge and shared methods, but one where individual biases are able to be reiterated across generations of curators. This has resulted in entrenched ideologies which are difficult to critique from within the discipline. The practical implication of this is that within the UK, interrogations of what kinds of garments have been considered "fashionable" and thus worthy of institutional collection are relatively young. This thesis aims to contribute to this ongoing investigation.

Supplementing this close analysis of dress/fashion museology, is discussion of wider institutional critique. This has revealed that the curator is implicated as an agent of musealisation, removing worn garments from their previous contexts and situating them as objects representative of specific narratives, and not necessarily representative of wearer/object biography. I have argued that the curator must implement an ethical mandate, comparable to that of textile conservators (which will be discussed further in a dedicated section on p. 301) to act as an advocate for the retention of wearer/object biography within the institution.

This chapter has contributed research which situates this thesis within a movement of critical museology, recognising that to this point, there has not been a discipline-wide ethical demand made of the dress/fashion curator in the context of their MCA practice. This has resulted in a paucity of diverse biographies represented within institutional dress/fashion collections, establishing *Disciplinary Bias* as contributing factor in curatorial interruption.

3.5 Working Environment Bias

'[…] my line manager said to me, "Look –" because it was the financial crisis, they said, "Look, you have to be doing stuff that's seen to be public-facing, that there is an outcome quite quickly, because if all you're doing is documentation, one of the managers don't see that, and they're thinking, 'Oh, is this person bringing something, not every day' you need to be seen doing stuff to sort of justify your position."' (**P3, Appendix, pp. 261-262**)

The testimony collected from P3 articulates one of the core concerns of this chapter, which is the impact of the practical and ideological procedures of the cultural heritage institution on the dress/fashion curator situated within them. Collections are places which inscribe meaning on objects through their acquisition, with Ellen Sampson observing that collections are 'sites on which particular power structures and knowledges are reproduced and maintained' (Sampson, 2020b, p. 4), and the focus of this chapter is on the practical aspects of institutional acquisition rather than the theoretical, as was discussed in the section on *Institutional Critique* (p. 261).

In a dedicated chapter considering the workplace of the curator (p. 277), I proposed that functional considerations in the day-to-day activity of the curator are a factor informing what I term *Working Environment Bias.* This understanding has been supported by the empirical research collected from this thesis' *Curating Dress in the UK* survey, demonstrating the commonality of these issues across different institutions. These pressures, parameters, and hierarchies external to the dress/fashion curator comprise the practical conditions under which the process of MCA takes place, and may impact the objects selected for acquisition, and the interpretation and documentation, and thus retention of wearer/object biography once acquired. Examining the cataloguing systems within ethnographic institutions, museologist Hannah Turner identified the legacy of 'material and historical practices that continue to affect current ethical considerations' (Turner,

2020, p. 4). In this chapter, I will discuss cataloguing standards and systems, as well as collecting policies, physical location of curator workspace, time constraints, and collaboration with colleagues.

The specific areas examined in this chapter were selected based on my own experience of MCA and cataloguing practice within institutional collections at the Museum of London and London College of Fashion Archives. Having direct knowledge of the practical reality of collections work has enabled me to focus on what I understand are key factors guiding where, when, and how MCA occurs. The resulting areas are examined as they apply to the subjectivity of the curator, and this chapter does not set out to be a large-scale study of institutional processes. The diversity of collecting policies and practices of institutions in the UK which hold dress/fashion objects would require a dedicated, individual study, which is not the aim of this thesis. Rather, this thesis presents an overview of the state of the discipline through examination of the five identified sources of bias. The proposition made in this chapter, that working environments influence curatorial practice, is distinct from the section on *Institutional Critique* (p. 261), which established the institution as a site of historiography, and addressed the concept of musealisation within the institution.

Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp described the museum as a "social technology", one which engages with conflicting mandates from departments within the museum (the interests of a marketing department are not necessary shared with the focus of the curatorial team) and from outside parties including donors, community partners, and the visiting audience. They saw James Clifford's contact zones (discussed on p. 116 and p. 263) as too neatly situated within the museum, and suggested instead "museum frictions" incorporating 'the idea of the museum as a varied and often changing set of practices, processes, and interactions' (Karp and Kratz, 2006, pp. 1-3). The concept of frictions is useful in thinking about the many external factors framing the contact point between the dress/fashion curator and

wearer/object biography in worn clothing.

This chapter is organised into the following sections: *Institutional Structures and Systems* (including sub-sections *Institutional Collecting Policies* and *Cataloguing Databases*, and *Terminologies*), *Practical Employment Considerations*, and concludes with a brief discussion contextualising the intersection between the practice of dress/fashion curators and our (often closest) colleagues, *Textile Conservators*. The purpose of bringing these sections together is to demonstrate the many factors which comprise *Working Environment Bias.*

Institutional Collecting Policies

This chapter does not intend to be a review of institutional collecting policies for organisations acquiring dress/fashion, as has been studied in previous literature (Byrde, *et al.*, 1984; Taylor, 2004; Wood, 2016; de la Haye, 2018), nor a discussion of the wider implications of institutional collecting (Pearce, 1992; 1995; Knell, 2004; Morgan and MacDonald, 2020). It draws instead on museological scholarship and an example from empirical material culture research to argue that these policies, which often determine which objects are ultimately acquired into an institutional collection, inform *Working Environment* bias, and require mitigation by the curator.

In her study *Representing Possibility: Mourning, Memorial, and Queer Museology* (2010), curator Anna Conlan wrote of how institutional collecting enshrines certain histories, while relegating those which aren't collected to the margins, rendering them "illegitimate":

'Omission from the museum does not simply mean marginalization; it formally classifies certain lives, histories, and practices as insignificant, renders them invisible, marks them as unintelligible, and, thereby, casts them into the realm of the unreal.' (Conlan, 2010, p. 257)

Conlan supports a central concern motivating the research in this thesis: that without wearer testimony, what is experienced and interpreted by the curator during the initial MCA of a worn garment will become the overriding narrative of the object. Often the curator is not dictating what is or is not acquired, but implementing a mandate that is dictated by institutional collecting policies. Understanding the remit under which objects are selected for acquisition into the collection is essential because as Gaynor Kavanagh observed in *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (2000), 'the collection serves as a resource from which all other museum functions stem: exhibitions, educational work, identification and

research, education and outreach.' (Kavanagh, 2000, p. 98) Though the bulk of a collection may never been experienced by the visitor, it provides the well of history from which the curators draw to create public-facing outputs. A collection which does not reflect a breadth of narratives in these outputs might be viewed, particularly in an ongoing era of arts funding cuts and institutional responsibility to address diversities, as a costly exercise in storage.

Institutional collecting can be understood to begin with two approaches: passive collecting, where unsolicited donations are offered to the collection; and active collecting, where specific objects are sought out for acquisition. This second approach includes rapid response collecting programs, which have become more prolific in the last ten years (Bowley, 2017; Goldstein, 2020; Victoria and Albert Museum, 2023a). Both will inform how the collection is shaped: passive collecting can result in an overemphasis on certain narratives. Julia Petrov argued that as women have historically been the keepers of family history and are the ones donating heirlooms, this has impacted the amount of womenswear in Western institutional collections (Petrov, 2014, pp. 87-88).[32] I propose that collections reflect the bias of the dress/fashion curator, and in the female-dominated UK discipline, narratives privileging women's biographies have been consistently drawn out of the material which has been acquired, whether passively or actively.

Depending on the institution, the acquisition may then require approval from a collecting committee. In the UK, Collections Trust provides guidelines for collecting policies and procedures based on their *Spectrum* standards, which discuss legal and ethical considerations, confirmation of provenance, and copyright amongst other concerns (Collections Trust, 2022b). While this

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[32] This was quantified in Jeffrey Horsley's article *The absent shadow: Reflections on the incidence of menswear in recent fashion exhibitions* (2017), where he generated statistics demonstrating that between the years 2000 - 2016, only 1.9 percent of Western-situated dress/fashion exhibitions were exclusively devoted to menswear, versus 13.1 percent to womenswear (Horsley, 2017, pp. 14-15). Future research avenues might consider how much that balance has changed in the intervening years, and consider this specifically within the context of UK exhibitions.

undoubtedly impacts the decision-making bias of a curator by virtue of the object needing to have been acquired in order to be analysed, the scope of this thesis is concerned with objects which *have* been approved for institutional acquisition, and therefore will not examine this process at length.

Wearer/Object Biography and Collecting Policy

The typology of institutional collections holding dress/fashion objects can be broadly understood to be housed within the cultural heritage acronym GLAM, as described in *Terminology* (p. 20): Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums. This may also include study collections within academic institutions (as with LCF Archives). Within these, collecting policies will focus on areas including social histories of the local community (for example, The Highland Folk Museum, Inverness-Shire; MoL), aspects of arts and design (Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, County Antrim; V&A), ethnographic or archaeological study (British Museum, London; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; or specialist collections (Bishopsgate Institute, London; Science Museum, London).

Not all collections which acquire worn clothing will purport to be interested in the biography of the wearer. For example, the most recent V&A collection development policy states that their interest is in seeking objects of 'outstanding aesthetic quality, technical excellence in cut and construction, and/or good provenance, as well as objects which reveal the making process' (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019). This policy clearly does not prioritise collecting wearer biography, yet analysis of their collection reveals a proliferation of worn clothing, and exhibition labels often mention aspects of wearer biography. Examining the V&A policy with examples of their acquisitions of worn clothing, the impact of this on curatorial decision-making becomes evident.

Curator Eleanor Thompson discovered how the emphasis on designer provenance resulted in the division of 66 1960s couture outfits donated to the

V&A by textile expert Brenda Azario in 1971, with curators analysing the collection and only acquiring what they perceived to be the most 'interesting or important designer pieces' (Thompson, 2010, p. 298), dispersing the remainder of the collection amongst Brighton Museum and the National Museums, Liverpool against the wishes of Azario. This curatorial decision resulted in ensembles which had been worn together by Azario being ultimately 'no longer housed in the same museum' (Thompson, 2010, p. 298), privileging institutional collecting policy above the wearer/object biography.

Another example of curatorial bias being informed by the working environment of the institution can be found in a collection of Vivienne Westwood clothing, once owned and worn by London nightlife promoter Gerlinde Costiff. Costiff and her husband Michael were ardent fans of Westwood's designs, purchasing key pieces and sometimes total looks from nearly every season Westwood produced. It was only with the sudden death of Gerlinde in 1994, that the continuous purchasing and wearing of garments ceased, and her active wardrobe became static. In 2003, The Michael and Gerlinde Costiff Costume Collection as it became known, was purchased from Michael by the V&A. Among the collection were 16 corsets, a signature piece of both the Westwood design house and of Gerlinde's personal style, with Michael noting in an interview in the acquisition file that she 'wore a corset like other people wore a T-shirt' (Costiff and Blewett, 2003).

In 2018, during my research of The Michael and Gerlinde Costiff Costume Collection, I discovered that an online search of the V&A collection using Gerlinde's name yielded only one result of a Westwood leopard print ensemble she had worn. This was surprising given that curator Sonnet Stanfill stated in 2016 that 'nearly three hundred Vivienne Westwood garments' had been purchased by the V&A (Stanfill, 2016, p. 463), and in Room 40 of the Fashion Galleries at the V&A's South Kensington site a Westwood 'Buffalo' ensemble owned and worn by Gerlinde was on permanent display. Upon contacting the V&A, it was

communicated by Collection Management Assistant, Ruby Hodgson, that the collection had never been catalogued under Gerlinde nor Michael's names (Hodgson, 2018), but as Westwood garments. In raising this point, the catalogue has been updated with a tag to the collection, and an identical search ('The Michael and Gerlinde Costiff Costume Collection' through Search the Collections) on May 10th, 2023 has 179 results. In May 2018, I arranged an appointment with the V&A Clothworker's Centre to view four of Gerlinde's corsets. During visual (due to handling restrictions) MCA of the objects, I discovered visible materialised evidence of Gerlinde's wear in the fabric.

Although all four corsets selected were examined, the focus of the research was a white nylon long sleeved Vivienne Westwood corset (**Figure 3.3, Appendix, p. 24**). The physical description of the corset in the V&A online catalogue is 'Off-white nylon corset with long sleeves. Stains on arms, shoulders and back' (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002). With initial observation it was evident that the corset was stained throughout, including a faded pink smear on the rear right panel (**Figure 3.4, Appendix, p. 25**), and possible perspiration stains under the arms (**Figure 3.5, Appendix, p. 26**). Upon closer inspection, there were also threads pulling loose around the exterior of the right cuff (**Figure 3.6, Appendix, p. 27**), and the boning on the interior of the bodice was poking through the bottom of the lining, the plastic filaments are separating and jagged (**Figure 3.7, Appendix, p. 28**). Reflecting upon this latter evidence, the protruding boning would sit close to the skin with the potential to irritate or gouge the wearer's flesh. Based on this object analysis, on Michael's testimony that Westwood corsets were items of dress in constant use by Gerlinde, and that she often had scabbing on her abdomen from where the boning on the corsets dug into her skin (Costiff and Blewett, 2003), it can be understood that these are not intentional design decisions made by Westwood, but the specific marks of authorship produced from Gerlinde's wear.

Walter Benjamin wrote that 'living means leaving traces' (Benjamin, 1969, p. 169), and in worn clothing, I argue that these traces are individual documents of actions, experiences, and the person who wore it. Yet until May 2018, if one were to seek to find this corset through V&A Collections online, it would not be through searching the name of the person who created these traces that one could have found it. At the time of writing this thesis, the corset carries no further mention of Gerlinde's biography. The name of the owner of this corset, Gerlinde Costiff, who had amassed and worn 'one of the largest collections of Westwood clothes in existence' (Wilcox, 2004, p. 16) had not been attached to the online records. The richness of the wearer/object biography embedded into these garments had been effectively erased in lieu of highlighting the connection to the designer Vivienne Westwood.

Due to lack of information on who performed the initial MCA of the corset, I can only speculate on why Gerlinde's biography was not included in the catalogue, but the V&A's emphasis on collecting exemplary design objects indicates that her biography was not prioritised nor protected. This example joins another woman collector, only known as "Miss Mallet" who had her authorship erased after garments from her collection were acquired by the V&A in 1913, as highlighted by Julia Petrov (Petrov, 2014, p. 90). These examples imply that these garments serve no purpose outside of the V&A context and so only "relevant" information is documented. Were a curator from another institution researching Gerlinde's life, they would not have found these garments and this important evidence would effectively be lost, an example of the impact of *Working Environment Bias* on wearer/object biography.

In 2008, Amy De La Haye pointed out that dress/fashion collections are often populated by the "singular": garments which are notable because of their rarity and perceived value (de la Haye and Clark, 2008). Yet, if early museum objects were acquired to be what Hannah Turner states in *Cataloguing Culture: Legacies*

of Colonialism in Museum Documentation (2021) were the "observable phenomena" and "evidence" (Turner, 2021, p. 11) representative of a typology, then the worn garment disturbs this representation within the dress/fashion collection focused on design aspects only. A garment may be representative of a particular designer's work, but the fact that it was worn and became representative of the wearer's experiences, the materialised document of their history, means that it no longer represents the singularity of the designer's vision. As historian Catriona Fisk stated, garments in particular 'do not cease to exist at the point of construction but are integrated in the ongoing lives of their wearers, demanding negotiation with their inherent material properties (as evidenced in alteration, repair, reuse and decay)' (Fisk, 2019, p. 430). However, I argue that it is possible to meet the remit of an institutional collecting policy without interrupting wearer/object biography.

Unsettling Collecting Policy

The example of Gerlinde Costiff highlights what Judith Clark and psychologist Adam Phillips identified as the 'double loss of life' in acquiring worn clothing: 'the garment without its body, and the garment out of sight, embedded within an archive…what are we storing when we are storing dress?' (Clark and Phillips, 2010, p. 110). This loss was reiterated ten years later by archaeologist Dan Hicks, who viewed the "double historicity" of an acquired object as 'its existence before and after the act of accession.' (Hicks, 2020, p. xiv). Museologists Elke Krasny and Lara Perry have argued that museum collecting is a form of dominance, wielded as a colonising tool specifically within ethnographic collections (Krasny and Perry, 2020, p. 133).

In her 1988 analysis of the relationship between visitors and the museum structure, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill wrote of the curator obtaining a 'legitimation and a power that is accorded them by this institutional context' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1988, p. 222) and yet 'the history of the institution and the decisions

made over collection policies by former curators will deeply influence what is possible in the present and the future' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1988, p. 225). Fashion historians Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark have argued in a similar vein that despite the parameters of specific collecting policies, curators are central to the formation of collections (Buckley and Clark, 2016, p. 36). Within the context of this thesis, which considers objects which have already been acquired, I argue this formation is made during the MCA and interpretation of collected objects. In the section on *Institutional Critique* (p. 261), I posited that the curator who is situated within the institution is an agent of musealisation, with an ethical imperative to incorporate an understanding of the factors informing their biases, and to attempt at mitigating these.

A practical example of this practice in relation to collecting policy can be found in curator E-J Scott's Museum of Transology. The collection acquires (amongst other types of objects) worn garments from trans and intersex donors, with themes determined by *donors* upon the acquisition into the collection, rather than the museum or the curator. Krasny and Perry argue that this method resists the collecting policy as a method of institutional colonisation through refusing 'the typical museum classificatory principles of originality, preciousness, or comprehensiveness' (Krasny and Perry, 2020, p. 136). By acquiring objects representative of trans and intersex people's histories while also allowing donors to determine their narrative, Scott's curation satisfies a collecting policy while also protecting wearer/object biography. Scott not only unsettles the power structure of institutional collecting practice within its own structure, but as The Museum of Transology in now housed at the Bishopsgate Institute, raises interesting further research questions about how different collections might collaborate on acquisitions to meet the needs of the wearer/object biography. As this thesis considers acquisitions *without* wearer testimony, and strategies to mitigate *Working Environment* bias, is there a comparable way for the curator to model this type of resistance within their own practice?

This subsection has discussed how collecting policies inform *Working Environment* bias by privileging aspects of object biography, regardless of the plural nature of that biography. Analysis of the Azario and Costiff collections of worn clothing in the V&A demonstrate how this bias has contributed to curatorial interruption of wearer/object biography. The institution is reiterated as a site of dominance and meaning-making, while practices employed in the acquisition of objects from living donors for the Museum of Transology demonstrate one strategy for how curators can meet the needs of institutional policies, while resisting this dominance and respecting the authorship of wearers in their own clothing.

Cataloguing Databases

This subsection briefly addresses cataloguing databases as the primary institutional system for object documentation, and thus retention of easily searchable wearer/object biography. Examination of the construction and operation of these systems is not the focus of this discussion, but rather drawing on data from this thesis' *Curating Dress in the UK* survey to investigate the curatorial experience of using these systems and how this informs the curator's individual practice. Collections databases in this thesis can be considered any organisational computer software which allows information about an object to be entered and saved for future reference. This can be Microsoft Excel spreadsheets (as is currently used at LCF Archives) or advanced programs developed for GLAM usage.

Survey responses indicated that 77.08% of 48 dress/fashion creators are regularly using a cataloguing database to document object descriptions. Commonly used programs cited were Mimsy XG, MuseumPlus, Modes, Axiell, and EMu (Question 35, **Appendix, p. 116**). All of these systems conform to Collections Trust *Spectrum* standards (Collections Trust, 2022c), which specify that catalogues:

- Records, maintains up to date minimum information needed for inventory.
- Securely linked to the material objects via unique accession numbers.
- Can be cross-referenced to relevant contextual information held in the collection.
- Information can be reliably retrieved and is backed up.

The types of information captured in catalogues is suggested, rather than mandated by Collections Trust, and includes object description and history. The most recent edition (5.1) of the *Spectrum* cataloguing standards addresses bias:

'You may also wish to acknowledge and record unconscious biases that may have

influenced the collections information that has been recorded, or indeed not recorded, over time.' (Collections Trust, 2022c, p. 10)

It could be argued that this addition has been made in response to decolonisation initiatives within collections, though *Spectrum* does not indicate nor advise institutions on how acknowledging these biases might be approached. Nor does *Spectrum* identify the sources of such biases, which this thesis aims to address.

Often, cataloguing databases will have open-ended fields for descriptions but fixed pre-programmed selections for cataloguing information, as with this example of garment style and material in Mimsy XG (**Figure 3.8, Appendix, p. 29**), used at MoL. This determines what information can be documented by the curator, and often doesn't make room for the intangible, affective aspects of object interpretation. Respondents to the Question 23 of the survey noted that their individual MCA methods were often not compatible with catalogue documentation, noting the 'restrictive' (**Appendix, p. 101**) nature of software. Despite the multisensory nature of worn clothing, it is often only visual interpretations (photos, written descriptions) which are included in object catalogues, reinforcing the ocularcentrism of the institutional collection. Over time, knowing what a catalogue will or will not accept in terms of object information may begin to impact what decisions a curator makes during MCA. If they have limited time to analyse an object, is it worth spending this time investigating aspects of wearer/object biography that cannot be documented? This in effect shapes the practice of the curator, and contributes to *Working Environment* bias.

Limited choices dictated by cataloguing databases can also result in documented information about wearer/object biography needing to conform to the taxonomy designed by the database programmer, a factor informing *Working Environment*

bias. Issues with programming machines to organise and categorise humans, or in the context of this thesis the materialised biography of people, has been extensively researched by data theorists Kate Crawford and Trevor Paglen in their 2019-2020 exhibition at Fondazione Prada, Milan, *Training Humans* (2019/2020), the companion exhibition essay, *Excavating AI: The Politics of Training Sets for Machine Learning* (2019), and Paglen's concurrent exhibition at the Barbican Gallery, *From 'Apple' to 'Anomaly'* (2019-2020). Through their extensive review of AI training data sets, they identified the recapitulation of problematic historical politics and what 'normative patterns of life were assumed, supported, and reproduced' (Crawford and Paglen, 2019) through classification by these machine-operated systems. Their research makes evident the embedding of individual and organisational biases of developers and researchers during the training of AI, which is subsequently applied to the categorisation of people.

Through his analysis of the lineage of register documents at the former Royal Scottish Museum (now National Museums Scotland), researcher Geoffrey Swinney identified object knowledge as embodied or tacit within the curator, knowledge which is then translated (or mistranslated, or is perhaps *incapable* of being translated) from the curator into the context of what he termed the museum register. Swinney identified how easily this tacit knowledge could be lost when colleagues responsible for documenting it left an institution (Swinney, 2011). Although any information catalogued about an object is ultimately the interpretation of the curator undertaking MCA, archiving their knowledge fully provides a document which might be used in future research or analysis, when the curator who performed MCA is no longer at the institution, the object is inaccessible, or material may have degraded and materialised aspects of wearer/object biography have been lost.

Terminologies

An area of cataloguing which has a comparatively limitless number of options, is

the terminology used to describe aspects of dress/fashion objects and wearer/object biography with collection documentation. As has already been discussed in this thesis through the frameworks of sensory engagement (p. 216), and design (p. 52), there is a distinct lack of agreed terminology applied within UK dress/fashion museology,[33] specifically to the description of worn clothing. The *Curating Dress in the UK* survey provided evidence of this paucity, with Questions 31-34 asking respondents to detail their usage of formalised guides for describing objects. The majority answered "No" when asked if they applied formal guides when describing objects (**Appendix, pp. 111-116**). This demonstrates how individual curatorial bias (whether cognitive, sensory, mnemonic, emotional, or workplace-based) informs object descriptions.

Despite the lack of contemporary terminologies to apply to new acquisitions, there are a growing number of projects and committees within UK institutions which have responded to the need for review and redress of problematic terminologies in the wider institutional collection, and who are producing accompanying literature to these initiatives (see *Labelling Matters,* Pitt Rivers Museum, no date; *Provisional Semantics*, Tate, no date; V&A, *Tackling racist language in collections* in Collections Trust, 2021; *Decolonising Language*, Bristol's Free Museums and Historic Houses (Barnett, 2022)).

This thesis is concerned with the limits of terminologies used to describe the wearer/object biography of *newly acquired* garments in UK institutions through *Working Environment* bias, rather than reassessment of terminology used in legacy collections. Therefore, it is necessary to draw on scholarship discussing dress/fashion terminology from outside of the UK and from studies of non-dress/fashion-specific collections within the UK to examine how dress/fashion

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[33] There are more generally agreed terms in wider museology, as drawn from an international editorial committee and published the English-language text, *Dictionary of Museology* (Mairesse, 2023).

curatorial decision-making might be impacted by terminologies.

Accessibility and Durability of Terminologies

Outside of the UK, the European Fashion Heritage Association have been in ongoing study of the issues presented by terminology and have created a discipline-specific thesaurus to share online via the *Europeana Fashion* site. The thesaurus shares descriptive vocabulary across 10 European languages (European Fashion Heritage Association, 2023), however this thesaurus requires images for entries to be included. This requirement potentially limits the participation of smaller, less-resourced collections, reiterates the ocularcentrism of institutions, and marginalises immaterial aspects of dress/fashion objects which cannot be captured through images or the written word.

A similar project, from the Modemuze network, aims to "clean" and publish data from 18 Dutch/Flemish museums to provide wider online access to collections. Yet project manager Anneclaire van Veelen has identified what she has described as difficulties in deciding on descriptions for objects due to differing curatorial opinions or 'contradictions' (van Veelen, 2023) of terminology.[34] Though she did not provide a specific example for what these might be, a possible example might be if a senior colleague contradicts the interpretation of a junior curator, and their interpretation is used due to their perceived level of expertise.

The *DE-BIAS* project (funded from 2023-2025 by the European Commission) is

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[34] In 2021, the UK-based Arts and Humanities Research Council announced a five-year funding programme for *TOWARDS A NATIONAL COLLECTION* with aims to 'dissolve barriers between different collections, opening them up to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research' within the devolved nations (Towards A National Collection, no date). Collections Trust announced in December 2022 the launch of the Museum Data Service, anticipated in late 2023 (Collections Trust, 2022d). The project aims to be collaboration between the trust, Art UK, and the Institute for Digital Culture at University of Leicester, which will harvest and pool collections data from UK-based museums, though at the time of this writing there is little information available on planned methodological approach to gathering this information, nor how it will improve object descriptions.

attempting to 'define a typology of language-based bias in cultural metadata' (Taes and Truyen, 2023) and collaborate with curators and individuals from previously un-, under-, and mis-represented communities to establish a multilingual vocabulary tool. The project plans to develop and apply an AI-powered tool to automatically detect problematic terms within catalogues included on the Europeana database (including those holding dress/fashion objects), yet in a workshop presentation in April 2023, had no distinct plans on how to navigate the inherent bias within AI. The program is also intended to address legacy issues with terminology, and not to address bias at its source.

The *DE-BIAS* project highlights the issues surrounding short-term funded projects which aim to improve representation within institutional collections. They have claimed that they will 'introduce capacity building activities and materials to foster the understanding and analysis of bias in collections and enable bottom-up community work' (Taes and Truyen, 2023), but I argue that the logistics and feasibility of accomplishing a review, community collaboration, and catalogue update within the two years the project is funded, is questionable.[35] This type of temporary strategy can be viewed as a factor informing curatorial bias in terms of the pressure it applies to deliver on a wide-ranging project in a brief window.

Although this thesis is concerned with newly acquired objects, rather than legacy collections as many of these projects are, the question remains of how to implement terminology that acknowledges both the 'contextual and historical' nature of the object (Turner, 2020, p. 4). As this research is based in the UK, it is

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[35] Involving communities in rectifying the problems of bias within collections without a care-driven, secure, and collaborative plan in place serves to highlight what Linda Tuhiwai Smith argued for in Decolonizing Methodologies. In her examination of research amongst Indigenous communities, she asserted that long-term knowledge sharing and accountability from outsider researchers was essential to ethical research (2012, p. 16). I argue that institutional organisations which are engaging external experts for projects which include distressing and inaccurate material without due consideration, implies a further layer of the colonisation of knowledge, and allows the institution to retain authority as meaning-maker at the cost of the communities they are claiming to help.

assumed that the majority of collections will use English to describe their objects, and it will be incumbent on the curator to use the terminology available to them at the time of MCA. Feminist philosopher Monika Rogowska-Stangret highlighted the difficulty of fixing meaning through language, writing that despite its difficulties, classification is required to 'map out, navigate through conundrums of real-life and virtual-life, ethically, politically, socially, planetarily, identitarianly, digitally, technologically, and so on' (Rogowska-Stangret, 2019, p. 841). She offered a reframing of lexicons and glossaries as a "genre", where "classifictions" can merely claim a representation of the plural histories within things.

Understanding terminologies then as unfixed and liable to change, and ultimately insufficient is a frustrating conclusion, and one that can be seen to impact the decision-making bias of the curator during MCA. The language a curator selects to describe an object will be based not only on their own perception of an object, but what language is used within a particular institution, or is approved by colleagues. The lack of an established dress/fashion terminology drawn and evolving from a diversity of involved, collaborative communities highlights how the subjectivity of the curator becomes tied to the object interpretation through language enshrined in collection documentation, a form of *Working Environment Bias*.

Practical Employment Considerations

This subsection briefly discusses the state of the discipline of dress/fashion curation, in terms of what I view as two key practical employment concerns. These are organised under *Job Security* and *Time Constraints*. As a practitioner who has been working between multiple jobs in the discipline since 2016, I have come to understand how much these day-to-day considerations might impact the focus of the curator. Drawing on data collected from the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey, trade journals and publications from dress/fashion and wider museology, and other in-depth studies of curatorial practice, I argue that the security and ease a curator feels professionally will inform *Working Environment* bias.

Job Security

In the UK, years of financial austerity measures have made a significant dent in arts and culture sector public funding, with a direct impact on the ability for institutions to hire and retain subject specialist curators, particularly in regional collections most reliant on externally-generated funding (Art Fund, 2017, pp. 14-15; Museums Association, 2021). In 2017, *The 21st-century Curator* report compiled by Art Fund spelled out the industry-wide concern among curators who were being stretched ever thinner while subject specialist knowledge was being lost with their departing colleagues. The effects of years of budget cuts and underfunding to institutions has been exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Kendall Adams, 2022a; Stephens, 2023). The sudden drop off of visitor numbers over several "lockdown" periods in the UK not only effected the revenue entering institutions, but restricted access to collections and the ability to generate research and the highly visible visitor-facing exhibitions and events which help to validate the role of the subject specialist curator.

Despite the fact that dress/fashion collections and their public outputs remain some of the highest grossing in UK institutions (Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014; Petrov, 2019; Wallenberg, 2020; Bide, 2021), the slow return of visitors to

these institutions further endangers the survival of an in-house subject specialist curator.

In light of the above, the discipline of dress/fashion curation can be seen as having to constantly re-legitimise itself within the institutional collection, with a tangible effect on availability of secure employment, particularly in smaller, regional collections. This has resulted in discipline wide job precarity in the UK. Precarious work can be broadly understood as work which includes 'temporary or contractual workers, with low remuneration and limited opportunities for employee participation' (Wiengarten *et al.*, 2021). I argue this is a factor informing *Working Environment* bias in two ways: first, that increased stress from overwork or job insecurity will impact the focus of the curator; second, that it acts as a barrier for who can feasibly afford to work in dress/fashion museology.

The first issue of overwork and job insecurity is reflected in research which has studied the impact of stress on job performance, notably in the research of curator Kathleen Lawther and her workshop presentation on *Motivations, money and management: impacts on collections work* (2023), and the study *Exploring the performance implications of precarious work* (Wiengarten *et al.*, 2021) which examined how a precarious workforce impacts finances, operations, and health and safety in manufacturing. The researchers determined that precarity ultimately translated to 'workers who are at risk, stressed and unhealthy, and whose jobs have precarious characteristics, do not develop or contribute to the organization' (Wiengarten *et al.*, 2021, p. 930).

The impact of precarity on manufacturing workers can be considered a vastly different area to draw research from, compared to dress/fashion curation. However considering the scarcity of scholarship addressing the impact of working conditions on dress/fashion curators, and the potentially repetitive, dextrous nature of MCA, as was observed by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim in their

discussion of analysis and dispersal of the Suddon-Cleaver collection of clothing (Mida and Kim, 2018, p. 499), I believe it is worth considering how transferable these results might be to the future study of curatorial work environments.

Employment precarity was an issue which emerged multiple times throughout each of the primary research interviews in this thesis. As was discussed on p. 185, P2 noted that due to poor pay they had left a museum job that they had "really loved", while P3 said of their institution's management:

'I think there's an idea that they don't respect specialist knowledge, they're not really interested in specialist knowledge, they're certainly not interested in paying for specialist knowledge, big time.' (**P3, Appendix, p. 265**)

P3 further asserted that the future of institutional collections will not include permanent curators at all, arguing that management will '[…]bring in the specialist knowledge to work on exhibitions, and they won't employ curators full time. But I think that's the way the world is going.' (**P3, Appendix, p. 265**)

The second issue of who can afford to work within institutions has been highlighted primarily through industry organisations such as the Museums Association (Kendall Adams, 2022b; 2022c; Museums Association, 2022) and grassroots organisations *Fair Museums Jobs* (no date), with the trade union Prospect reporting that hourly pay for curators had fallen 18% between 2011-2022 (Kendall Adams, 2022c; Prospect, 2022). There are of course additional barriers to entering employment in the discipline which exist for curators from intersectional underrepresented or marginalised backgrounds, which can include ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexuality, or gender. This has been studied most notably by occupational psychologist Samantha Evans in her PhD thesis, *Struggles for distinction: class and classed inequality in UK museum work* (2020), through the AHRC-funded project *Making Museum Professionals project*, and the

May 2023 workshop *Making Museum Professionals Workshop 1: Museum Work: Hierarchies and Barriers, Exclusion and Inclusion*. The workshop addressed 'hierarchies within and barriers to museum work have developed historically and are in evidence today, and how such hierarchies were and continue to be challenged and negotiated by those excluded and disempowered by museums' (Making Museum Professionals, 2023).

Who is working in collections, and under what conditions, can therefore be seen to have a direct impact on what aspects of wearer/object biography might be interpreted during MCA, and thus whose histories are being represented by institutional collections (Woode, 2022; Art Fund, Museum X and Culture&, 2022; Kendall Adams, 2023).

Time Constraints

In 2004, Lou Taylor noted the working environments of curators translated into a lack of time for 'serious archival artefact research' (Taylor, 2004, p. 315), an issue clearly unchanged in the intervening years, as evidenced by Mida, who wrote in 2017 about the time consuming nature of her preferred method of MCA, drawing. Mida observed that this process made her become 'intimately familiar and even emotionally connected to the artefact' at hand (Mida, 2017, p. 277), yet working time constraints meant that she was only able to analyse *some* objects in this way (Mida, 2017, p. 277). Though she asserted that she still would look at every object *as though* she was drawing it, it implies an inconsistent approach to analysis which impacts her decision-making about which objects she will spend her time with in close analysis. This demonstrates *Working Environment* bias: how time constraints impact curatorial decisions about which garments are "worthy" of a more time-consuming approach to MCA.

Data collected in the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey and testimony from primary

research interviews with curators have provided evidence that time constraints are an ongoing concern for dress/fashion curators. In Question 25 of the survey, which asked 53 respondents if they applied identical methods and/or methodologies to each object they analysed, six of the open-ended answers referenced modifications of their practice they had made based on the anticipated duration of the analysis (**Appendix, p. 103**). Of 51 respondents to the Question 30 'During analysis/close study, is working with the object the sole focus of your time?', only 54.90% responded 'Yes' (**Appendix, pp. 110-111**), with many providing testimony of the multi-tasking (teaching, supervising colleagues) they were doing alongside object analysis. One respondent to this question added that 'specific periods of time are created to work with objects, but if something crops up this time is put on hold - so dealing with a colleague or answering the phone' (**Appendix, p. 110**).

P1 in their primary research interview drew a direct correlation between institutional resources and their practice:

'I would like when I, actually, probably look at an object when it comes in to have it laid out, possibly put on a mannequin as well, to look at the shape. Um, to be able to spend as much time as I need to properly look at it. Um, and then do that description and analysis, versus um, I don't have that time.' (**P1, Appendix, p. 192**)

The limited time curators have available to spend on MCA raises the question of what aspects of wearer/object biography will be interpreted in that time, a clear impact on curatorial decision-making. As P2 noted during their primary research interview:

'[…]so often, in the actual object analysis of things, you're, you're so time-pressured to get thing, to look at things quickly, and get out, and get them done, or you feel someone is always there with the next thing to look at.' (**P2, Appendix, p. 242**)

This is particularly salient for those aspects which may fall outside of the expert experience of the curator and therefore be more easily perceived, and subsequently documented into the catalogue. Moreover, a lack of time to spend with objects has an impact on curatorial knowledge of what biographies are held in the collection, informing what narratives might be drawn out in visitor-facing outputs.

Textile Conservator

'The fashion conservator […] is slowly beginning to emerge from behind the curator's shadow as a collaborative professional who harnesses materiality to manifest the curator's vision. Yet, digging deeper, the material turn finds the conservator also as a creative agent whose unique knowledge and skillset alters the perception and biography of objects, going so far as to even make objects on the brink of "death" viable for display yet again.' (Scaturro, 2018, p. 22)

The professional network of the dress/fashion curator extends beyond our own discipline, our practice intersecting with many other roles within the institutional collection. In *Fashion, history, museums: inventing the display of dress* (2019), curator Julia Petrov made an in-depth examination of the development of methodologies in staging museum-based historic fashion exhibitions in Britain, Canada, and the United States. From her position within the institution, Petrov was familiar with the day-to-day 'series of decisions made by many actors' (Petrov, 2019, p. 9) which contribute to the outputs generally credited to curators. Though concentrated on exhibition-making, Petrov's research highlights the professional structures which curators operate within. There are compromises a curator will have to make when working as part of a larger network of colleagues with potentially different job-specific goals, and rarely are plans for the acquisition of an object made with complete autonomy.

The acquisition of an object may involve registrars (broadly responsible for ownership, legality, and rights protection of objects internally and externally to the institution); database managers (maintenance of catalogue software); marketing departments (responsible for publicising the institution and its collections); collections care technicians (object moves and store conditions); and collection committee members (overseeing and approving applications for acquisitions). However, it is with our closest collaborative colleague, the conservator, this section is concerned with.

This section is not intended to be a comprehensive review of scholarship addressing individual conservator practice, nor of the discipline of conservation at large. Rather, this section is concerned with establishing how the working relationship between curator and conservator may contribute to the *Working Environment Bias* of the dress/fashion curator. To do so, selected conservation scholarship is organised under the following headings: *Conservation and Dissociation*; *Curator and Conservator: A Professional Partnership*; *The Conservator and Working Environment Bias*, including subsections on *Cascade Bias*, *Treatment of Wearer/Object Biography*, and *Loss Aversion*; *Scholarship Addressing Bias in Conservators*.

Conservation and Dissociation

The science of conservation is inherently concerned with how an object might change materially over time, and has devoted much research to considering preventative measures against this process (for example, *Journal of Conservation & Museum Studies*; Pye and Sully, 2007; Ewer and Lennard, 2010; Brooks and Eastop, 2012; Nilsson and Blume, 2021). A key text informing the discipline was developed by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) in the 1980s, which identified ten "agents of deterioration": physical forces; fire; pests; light; humidity; thieves and vandals; water; pollutants; temperature; and, most vitally to

this thesis, dissociation[36] (Canadian Conservation Institute, 2017).

Curator Lucie Whitmore has applied dissociation in dress/fashion collections to denote 'lost stories' (Whitmore, 2019, p. 52) when garments are separated from their provenance. CCI identifies dissociation as the 'loss of objects, or object-related data, or the ability to retrieve or associate objects and data' which impacts the 'legal, intellectual, and/or cultural aspects of an object' (Canadian Conservation Institute, 2017) rather than its physical state, which is of particular relevance to the concept of curatorial interruption. They do not identify conservator preventative interventions as a potential cause of dissociation. Nor does CCI identify bias as a specific cause of dissociation, though they note that 'incomplete or inadequate record keeping' and 'cultural value not understood or appreciated by custodians' (Canadian Conservation Institute, 2017) are factors contributing to this type of deterioration. Conservator Jane Henderson has situated dissociation in conservation as a prioritising of 'continuity of something's physical condition' over its 'continuity of meaning' (Henderson, 2020, p. 230).

Accepting that conservators *do* impact the materiality (and as Scaturro pointed out, the immateriality) of objects and have devoted much study to understanding at what point each 'subsequent intrusion moves the object farther from its original state' (Ward, 1986, p. 20). Conservator Philip Ward wrote in *The Nature of Conservation: A Race against Time* (1986) of the "ethical imperative for minimizing treatment" (Ward, 1986, p. 20) of objects, whether for preventative or restorative purposes, in order to preserve as much "originality" of the object as possible. Considerations of the ethical nature of conservation has continued in the discipline through subsequent decades, with ongoing discussions of the "trade-off" between conserving the material object for institutional usage and the loss of immaterial aspects of its biography (Eastop and Brooks, 1996; Eastop,

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[36] Originally, there were nine agents in the framework, with "custodial neglect" added by Robert Waller in 1995, which has since been retitled "dissociation" (Waller, 1995).

2000; Muñoz Viñas, 2004; French, 2015). I propose that the concept of dissociation is useful in contextualising those narratives which are lost through the contact of curatorial interruption.

Curator and Conservator: A Professional Partnership

If, as was discussed on p. 296, the job security of subject specialist curators is precarious in the UK, the availability of full-time institutional conservators can be seen as equally so, as these positions are often the luxury of larger institutions (Tonkin, 2016; Tanga, 2021). Where conservators *are* situated within collections, they are not only experts with a professional mandate to ensure the longevity of the collection, but are often a sounding board for and advisor to dress/fashion curators. In *Confronting fashion's death drive: conservation, ghost labor, and the material turn within fashion curation* (2018) conservator Sarah Scaturro examined what she viewed as the essential yet under-analysed (in dress/fashion museological scholarship) role of the dress/fashion conservator, positioning conservators as the 'constant, mediating factor in both the preservation (back-stage/dress museology) and presentation (front-stage/fashion museology) of fashion objects' (Scaturro, 2018, p. 27). Scaturro asserted that within the collection, the conservator is an equal "creative agent" to the curator, with a comparable ability to make decisions which fundamentally alter wearer/object biography.

The cooperative nature of the curator and conservator was substantiated by responses to the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey, where respondants indicated that it is often the textile conservator to whom curators turn to for advice when analysing objects of worn clothing. Four answers to the open-ended option in Question 28: 'Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with colleagues?' explicitly identified the conservator as a collaborative partner, particularly in relation to textile identification or object mounting

(**Appendix, pp. 106-107**). These responses illustrate that the conservator is the colleague with whom (if available) curators agree treatment and storage interventions: both are practices which Scaturro suggested 'potentially impacts the object's immaterial interpretation by altering its physicality' (Scaturro, 2018, p. 31).

For the contemporary conservator, deciding on treatments or interventions requires balancing the preservation of a garment's previous function, with the ability for it to be used in its new one, as institutional object for display and research. This might find the priorities of the curator, for whom access to objects is essential, at odds with the risk management of the conservator, or with the communities from where objects originally emerged. Archaeological conservators Elizabeth Pye and Dean Sully discussed the need for conservators to evolve their practice and involve a wider view on the social implications of conservation, writing that awareness of the diversity of meanings within objects will 'affect the retention, use, and conservation of cultural materials' (Pye and Sully, 2007, p. 22)

Discussion is ongoing regarding the balance of the conservator's own ethical, professional imperative to provide appropriate care for objects, with accessibility to the collection. Conservator Ann French proposed viewing conservation as not only a science, but a collaborative part of a social practice which contributes toward the "shared outcomes" of functional, accessible collections (French, 2015, p. 76), while Henderson has identified 'the fair parcelling-out of use-benefit over time or in terms of permissions granted or withheld' as 'loaded and socially charged issues that can speak of power and control' (Henderson, 2020, p. 201).

The Conservator and *Working Environment* Bias

Considering the collaborative, interconnected nature of the individual practices of collection-based dress/fashion curators and of conservators, this subsection presents examples of how the priorities of the conservator might inform decisions

made by the curator during MCA of newly acquired worn garments. Through examination of scholarship from forensic science and textile conservation discussing professional collaboration, I argue that there are three potential aspects of conservator practice which, through this professional relationship, may contribute to curatorial bias: cascading their own bias and influencing the curator; treatments which alter wearer/object biography; or aversion to treatment in case of material loss.

Cascade Bias

The first aspect, the sharing of interpretations of material culture between conservator and curator, can be described using what Itiel Dror termed "cascade bias" (Dror, 2020, p. 8003). Dror identified this as a process where practitioners cascade their bias to colleagues, 'turning from influenced to influencers, perpetuating the bias and impacting others' (Dror, 2020, p. 8003). An example of this can be found in the curatorial interview with P3 undertaken for this thesis, during discussion of their MCA practice in relation to their colleagues. The participant posited that 'conservators do look at stuff in very different ways', and provided an example of how a discussion with the conservator informed the interpretation of a pair of shoes:

'…she said about these shoes, "You know, Lee wore these shoes to death, because she loved them. And these were her favourite dancing shoes." Well, you don't know that. But the thing is, because of her experience, she can sort of, she can see, and she says, "As a woman, I know these were her favourite dancing shoes."' (**P3, Appendix, p. 275**)

Their response made evident how the input of the conservator can inform interpretation of wearer/object biography. In their response, P3 can be seen to be biased in their own interpretation of the object for two reasons: that the conservator has professional knowledge ('because of her experience'), and

gendered corporeal knowledge ('"as a woman, I know"'). I argue that this, the cascading bias of conservator expertise, is a source of *Working Environment* bias.

Treatment of Wearer/Object Biography

Conservators Dinah Eastop and Mary Brooks have produced a body of work (Eastop and Brooks, 1996; Brooks, 2000; Eastop, 2000; Brooks and Eastop, 2006) contemplating the decision to clean objects for the sake of preservation, while noting the potentially irreversible impact of treatments on the biography of the textile, and how this might effect the 'evidential value' and 'true nature' (Eastop and Brooks, 1996, pp. 228-229) of the object. In their article, *To Clean or Not to Clean: The Value of Soils and Creases* (1996), Eastop and Brooks discussed the impossibility of objectively identifying this so-called true nature, and that any decisions made to intervene with cleaning a textile will be in the subjective interest of serving one specific narrative (Eastop and Brooks, 1996, p. 229). They cited the case of a 1950s motorcycle jacket acquired by the York Castle Museum, where the decision to not clean the garment meant preserving signs of wear accrued by the original teenage wearer and the associations with "macho" youth culture (Eastop and Brooks, 1996, p. 231). Cleaning the garment would have erased the wearer/object biography, and thus "sanitised" the historical narrative of the garment. They argued that deciding to maintain a textile in the state that it was acquired, even with possible material degradation once in storage, maintained opportunities for future investigation when circumstances around resources and interest might have changed.

Following Eastop and Brooks, conservator Sherry Doyal has concurred that 'evidence embodied in objects or deposited upon their surfaces may be all that is left to speak for a people without written records' (Doyal, 2000, p. 29) and yet often this is material which can accelerate the (inevitable) degradation of textiles. I argue that materialised signs of wear in garments are the embedded authorship of the life of the wearer. When conserving worn garments, particularly from

individuals historically un-, under-, or mis-represented within institutional collections, what is the risk that a conservator's treatment will impact the ability for the curator to identify and interpret vital aspects of wearer/object biography?

Loss Aversion

The third aspect of conservator expertise which can impact the interpretation of wearer/object biography is in the opposite to the treatment: avoiding intervention on an object. How might the conservator's hesitancy to act, based on their professional priorities (to preserve the material integrity of the textile), interfere with the preservation of wearer/object biography? A case which highlights this complexity is found in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Netherlands. A pair of 18th century breeches have been awaiting treatment by conservators since their excavation in 1980 from the grave of a Dutch whaler on the Arctic island of Zeeuwse Uitkijk, Spitsbergen. The breeches contained unidentified grave matter, and decades of conservators had refrained from treating the breeches due to uncertainty of what this matter was, and what strategies were required to preserve the item. Additionally, as Rijksmuseum conservator Suzan Meijer noted, the collections team found the breeches "rather disgusting" (Meijer, 2023) and avoided working with them.

The latter aversion to treat the objects could be contextualised as forms of sensory and emotional bias in the conservator, where unknown grave materials with potentially unpleasant textures or scents draw out negative associations within the mind of the conservator. Avoiding treatment due to a lack of clear knowledge about how to proceed and the resources to do so, raises the associated risks of further material degradation in the mind of the conservator, resulting in what Jane Henderson identifies as 'loss aversion bias' (Henderson, 2020, p. 207). Henderson, along with colleagues Robert Waller and David Hopes, has been studying the role of cognitive bias in relation to risk within conservation decision-making (Henderson and Waller, 2016; Henderson, Waller and Hopes,

2020). Henderson and Waller noted that when there is a high level of uncertainty of what the outcome of a certain treatment might be 'there will be a strong pressure to being risk averse and to create a bias towards inaction' (Henderson and Waller, 2016, p. 311). This bias, they have concluded, is particularly influenced by a lack of time to consider all risks to the material. Meijer noted that having the appropriate resources to analyse the breeches was not an option until the museum was approached by forensic scientist Yoram Ray Goedhart, who wanted to analyse the breeches as part of his PhD research.

The resulting study of the breeches concluded that amongst other external contaminants, there was likely human remains from the original wearer which had adhered to the textiles through decomposition of the body while in the grave (Goedhart *et al.*, 2022, pp. 11-14). In a discussion about the study at the *Under the Magnifying Glass* symposium (2023), Meijer noted that this research complicates not only the treatment of the breeches (how to preserve the textile without removing human tissue), but how to store them (as possibly being considered human remains). This case presents two practical implications for the decision-making of a dress/fashion curator who may subsequently undertake MCA of these breeches: first, that the emotional or sensory response of the conservators (disgust) to the breeches will be articulated to the curator, informing how they perceive the garment; second, that decades of inaction allowed further degradation and contamination to occur and further obscured material evidence of wearer/object biography, which now may not be available for interpretation by the curator. I argue that these factors contribute to the bias of the curator and to the interruption of the authorship of wearer, as materialised within the garment.

Scholarship Addressing Bias in Conservators

This thesis has identified a lack of critical scholarship addressing bias in dress/fashion curators, yet there has been decades of ongoing meaningful examination and research emerging within textile conservation. As Henderson

noted, 'if neither museums nor conservation practices are neutral, then the mechanism by which interactions are managed deserves scrutiny' (Henderson, 2020, p. 201). A disciplinary level of reflection has been articulated in The Institute of Conservation (ICON) *Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics* guide (2020). This text was initially developed in 1999, updated with periodic revisions that maintain its relevance to discourse within the discipline, and provides a framework for accountable practice which includes individual practitioner accountability for object treatments and interventions. This subsection discusses research within the discipline of conservation which has examined the impact of bias and conservation practice on wearer/object biography, and which I propose can be drawn upon by dress/fashion curators for our own practice.

In addition to her research with Brooks, Eastop has individually examined the plural nature of biographies held within material in *Textiles as Multiple and Competing Histories* (2000), considering the impact of practical decisions made by curators and conservators on history-writing. Eastop argued that textiles are not representative of one 'single, uncontested history, but are open to multiple, interpenetrating interpretations' (Eastop, 2000, p. 26). History is told not just through *which* objects are acquired (or not acquired) into the collection by a curator, but *how* these objects are 'stored, displayed or treated' using methods which can 'significantly (and sometimes irreversibly)' (Eastop, 2000, p. 26) change them, and thus their meaning. She emphasised the need to acknowledge this impact as 'textile conservators are active in prioritising one history over another' (Eastop, 2000, p. 26).

In *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (2005), Salvador Muñoz Viñas discussed understanding the 'moral duty' of the conservator to 'represent the interests of future users' (Muñoz Viñas, 2005, pp. 204-205) in preserving objects, while acknowledging that some object narratives will be damaged or destroyed through interventions and the 'symbolic or evidential' (Muñoz Viñas, 2005, p. 193)

cost this preservation comes at. Muñoz Viñas pointed out that meaning is subjective, and will be contextualised by the values of the object's location. Scaturro further contextualised the difficulty in balancing the conservator mandate to "do no harm" to objects (including their intangible biography) during interventions, with meeting the remit of the institution. In Scaturro's experience, this meant serving the policy of museums concerned which valued garments as examples of excellence in design, rather than documents of the wearer's life and experience: 'Conservators in art museums are faced with the question: how do we maintain this history, the aura of this object, while still allowing this object to function as the epitome of its kind?' (Scaturro, 2013)

Reflecting on the evolution of her textile conservation practice at The Whitworth Gallery at The University of Manchester, French focused on what she termed the 'value systems' which in part informed conservator decision-making. She identified these systems as broadly 'personal, social, economic, cultural, locational and historically specific' (French, 2015, p. 74).[37] Although she did not examine these sources of bias in depth, French argued that these were constructed systems which rendered conservator decision-making as an 'entirely subjective process' (French, 2015, p. 74). She argued that awareness of conservator ability to alter the material of objects to reflect the 'culture and value systems of the institution in which it now resides, rather than those of its originating function, culture and context or even of the collector' (French, 2015, p. 74) required critical reflection within the discipline. French called on her peers to 'analyze and to challenge our pre-suppositions and to assess the appropriateness of our knowledge, understanding and beliefs within the overall context in which we practice' (French, 2015, p. 75).

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[37] The determination of the institution to decide which objects are "worth" the resources to preserve them, and how this bias has informed the preservation of Black histories was explored in the American Institute For Conservation/Foundation for Advancement in Conservation workshop, *Conservation is Not Neutral: Emotion and Bias in our Work* (2021).

Conclusion

This chapter has applied empirical evidence gathered in an original survey of dress/fashion curators in the UK, in primary research interviews, and a review of global museological practice and scholarship to establish a representative understanding of both the demographic makeup of the discipline, and foundational understanding of common pressures and experiences of curators working within institutional collections. This research together contextualises common issues for the dress/fashion curator undertaking MCA within an institutional collection. This chapter highlights how a scarcity of time and resources dictate how long is spent analysing objects, and at what depth. The facilities and working conditions (including employment precarity) have been proposed as contributing factors to bias. The regularity with which dress/fashion curators engage with cataloguing databases and terminologies become factors informing the interpretative decisions curators make during MCA of worn garments.

The nature of dissociation as an agent of object deterioration has been established within conservation practice, and it has been proposed that this concept could be applied within dress/fashion curation to describe what happens to wearer/object biography after an act of curatorial interruption. The working partnership between textile conservators and dress/fashion curators situated together within institutional collections has been demonstrated to be a close and collaborative one. Due to this partnership, three aspects of conservator practice have been proposed to be factors informing curatorial bias: cascade bias (the influence of the conservator sharing their knowledge with the curator); treatment (where wearer/object biography is treated for conservation purposes and to prevent object degradation); and loss aversion (where the conservator's concern about risk to a garment results in a lack of treatment).

All of these external factors contribute to what I have proposed is *Working Environment Bias*, a source instrumental to the act of curatorial interruption.

Summary of Sources of Decision-Making Bias

The preceding chapters in this thesis have applied a review of previous scholarship and the examination of empirical evidence collected from primary qualitative and quantitive research methods to identify sources of decision-making bias in the institutionally-situated dress/fashion curator during the practice of MCA on worn garments.

The five identified sources range from basic elements of human cognition to circumstances specific to the working conditions of the curator: *Cognitive Bias*; *Sensory Engagement Bias*; *Mnemonics and Emotional Bias*; *Disciplinary Bias*; *Working Environment Bias*. It is noted that the identified sources are not exhaustive, but instead provide a framework for interrogating how curatorial practice directly impacts the authorship of histories. Through the identification of these five sources of decision-making bias, I have met the first aim of this thesis, to understand what I have termed curatorial interruption: the impact of curatorial practice on the retention of wearer/object biography when a garment is acquired into the institutional collection.

The final chapter in this thesis addresses the second aim of this thesis: to provide suggestions, both pedagogical and practical, towards mitigating these sources of bias.

<u>Part 4</u>

Suggestions Toward Mitigating Curatorial Interruption

The first aim of this thesis has been to establish an understanding of the act which I have termed curatorial interruption. This aim was achieved through identification and examination of the five sources of decision-making bias. The second aim of this thesis is to provide pedagogical and practical suggestions, towards mitigating the established sources of decision-making bias in the dress/fashion curator, with the goal of retaining wearer/object biography of worn garments acquired into institutional collections. This aim was set at the beginning of this research project, with the intention of providing a "solution" to the proposed problem of curatorial interruption.

Reflecting over the course of this research, it has become evident that providing solutions to the five multi-faceted and complex sources of bias presented in this thesis requires further dedicated study and testing of how to appropriately address each source. Additionally, research would require region- and institution-specific studies to advise on how to effectively implement mitigation procedures. It has not been within the scope of this thesis to undertake the studies necessary to determine comprehensive strategies addressing each source. However, through the review and analysis of the research in this thesis, I have identified strategies which have been applied in related fields to mitigate the impact of practitioner subjectivity during the analysis of material culture, and in the interpretation of history. I draw on these in Part 4 of this thesis to make suggestions for future research and actionable strategies within the discipline of dress/fashion curation.

In each of the following chapters, I will review the five sources of bias and where possible, draw on theories and practices applied in fields which I have drawn on consistently throughout this thesis, including cognitive science, anthropology, forensic science, and textile conservation to suggest potential methods of

mitigating curatorial bias. Where strategies have not yet been identified, I will make suggestions for further areas of research which may address how to mitigate these sources of bias.

The goal is to provide practical, low-resource professional adjustments which can be implemented on an individual level, with the aim of contributing to larger, structural change. The majority of the following suggestions situate the imperative within the personal practice of the curator, or require minor modifications of best practice within the institutional collection.

4.1 Cognitive Bias

Cognitive bias has been established in thesis as rooted in the function of our brains, in the processes which not only allow us to move through the world but to hone our specialist skills. I have proposed two key biases specific to cognitive function: *confirmation* and *expert*, as central to the decision-making of the dress/fashion curator.

Confirmation bias begins with the curator receiving contextual biographical information (not provided by the original wearer) included alongside an acquisition, which a curator then has in mind during MCA, with the result being that they apply garment analysis to find corroborating evidence of certain biographical narratives.

Suggestions for Mitigating *Confirmation Bias*: To limit the impact of confirmation bias on the MCA process, contextual information about the garment should retained by collections managers or registrars until after the completion of MCA by the dress/fashion curator. This context management framework in forensic science is known as *Linear Sequential Unmasking-Expanded* (LSU-E) (Dror and Kukucka, 2021). This is an operational sequence where contextual information in a case is provided to investigators only *after* their examination is complete. In the instance that a specific curator actively initiated the acquisition process based a certain collecting interest, another curator, or in the case of smaller institutions where there is only one curator, an external practitioner should perform the analysis. This could be facilitated by a curator-focused network where practitioners "trade" MCA time with each other.

Participant 1 in this thesis' primary research interview recalled being involved in a program funded by Museums Association addressing the loss of senior expertise through specialist retirement. In response, Museums Association coordinated cross-institutional workshops focused on collecting and sharing this knowledge

from exiting specialists (**P1, Appendix, pp. 198-199**). Targeted network support should be extended to early-career curators from marginalised communities with sessions focused on MCA of new acquisitions. These sessions would allow a form of LSU to take place while also deepening disciplinary knowledge about what objects are being collected around the UK, and providing real-world experience for curators who have experienced barriers to accessing employment in the discipline. A model is the Museum of Transology *Archiving Lates* (Bishopsgate Foundation, 2023), where volunteers are trained in archiving skills while they contribute to accessioning new donations to the collection. This would also respond to the call in the Art Fund report, *The 21st-century curator: A report into the evolving role of the UK museum curator, and their needs for the future* (2017). The report appealed for national museums and universities to offer support to smaller regional institutions and for collections staff to 'have some level of responsibility to share knowledge, and to ensure their collections' profiles are raised and their diverse use better understood' (Art Fund, 2017, p. 48). A curator-driven (rather than institutionally-situated) network would empower practitioners to get involved in interpreting biography without reiterating the dominance of national institutions.

The other central form of cognitive bias proposed in this thesis, expert bias, develops from the refined abilities and tacit knowledge accrued over time. This enables curators to perform familiar tasks with high efficiency, acquired through repeated and sustained practice. As dress/fashion curators become more familiar with MCA, their expert bias will increase, and the blindspots to exploring different aspects of materialised biography will diminish.

Suggestions for Mitigating *Expert Bias*: The repetitive nature of MCA has been addressed by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim in their discussion of the dispersal of the Suddon-Cleaver collection of historical Western clothing (2018), which involved the systematic analysis and cataloguing of a large collection of garments

within a fixed time period, requiring a high level of expert efficiency. Mida and Kim wrote that 'to help maintain momentum and avoid excessive fatigue' (Mida and Kim, 2018, p. 499), members of the project team alternated their tasks routinely. This is useful if the resources are available, however if a curator is working alone and is analysing more than one object in a day, alternating with other colleagues or tasks may not be possible.

This also does not account for how expert bias is accrued over the course of a career. Itiel Dror has identified the reliance on top-down cognitive functions in expert performance across a variety of fields, including the use of schemas and selective attention to increase efficiency (Dror, 2011, p. 177). The findings in this thesis might be used for further study of expert bias in dress/fashion curators which examines how early career curators establish mental schemas for object identification, and if these schemas are modified or solidified with repeated exposure to similar objects. Another area of research might use the research in this thesis as a basis for conducting a comprehensive review of outputs from senior curators to distinguish how selective attention forms patterns in object interpretation, and investigate the sources these patterns have emerged from.

4.2 Sensory Engagement Bias

In this thesis, the sensing of garments has been framed as a subjective, physiologically- and culturally-informed process, which I have termed *Sensory Engagement Bias*. Despite evidence which demonstrates the multisensory nature of worn garments, as a discipline dress/fashion museology is firmly entrenched in MCA practice which privileges ocularcentric outputs and conforms to the heirarchies of institutional museology, and of Western culture more generally. This includes producing documentation which does not account for non-visual (photos; written descriptions) ways of experiencing garments. The result is that aspects of culture which we are sensorially unfamiliar with, and which our practices and systems cannot document, become lost.

Suggestions for Mitigating *Sensory Engagement Bias*: Sarah Pink has suggested a reflexive approach to sensory research, which goes beyond a basic awareness of the researcher's sensory experience and establishes a multifaceted understanding of how our 'ways of knowing in and about and engaging with our environments' (Pink, 2015a, p. 63) negotiate the identities of the researcher and researched, and are reconstituted over time. Within the context of MCA of worn clothing, I suggest this intersubjectivity can be viewed as the encounter between the dress/fashion curator and wearer/object biography: as discussed in the chapters on *Phenomenology* (p. 77) and *New Materialism* (p. 87)

Pink, drawing on the research of Constance Classen and David Howes, suggested that the researcher create an autoethnography of the senses, proposing that this method of self-reflection could 'equip the researcher with an awareness of how he or she uses (culturally and biographically specific) sensory categories to classify and represent multisensory and embodied knowing.' (Pink, 2015a, p. 60). I argue that this is valuable in conceptualising where one's biases may lay, comparable to the documentation of personal reactions recommended by Mida and Kim in *The Dress Detective*, but does little to mitigate their impact in practice.

Pink also advised researchers to educate themselves on the sensoria outside of their own culture, to create opportunities for experiencing other ways of knowing (2015a, p. 60). This requires dress/fashion curators actively researching outside of the Western fashion centres, and studying sensing and being dressed outside of their own experience. I argue Pink's method has more potential for capturing additional aspects of wearer/object biography and mitigating bias through de-centring the sensory experience of the curator, if the curator incorporates these interpretations into descriptions of objects. Making the inclusion of descriptions of familiar sensory stimuli (including haptic, olfactory, and auditory) standard practice alongside those of design elements, measurements, and textile composition might encourage further consideration of how garments might have been experienced beyond the Western five senses. This would also document immaterial elements of the worn garment at the time of acquisition, which otherwise might degrade and be lost over time.

Additionally, sensory education must be incorporated into the formal training available to curators, and the academic programmes currently teaching dress/fashion museology must expand their focus on studying how garments and the dressed body can be sensed and perceived outside of the modern Western five senses. For example, in 2022, I designed and taught a term module to the BA Fashion History and Theory students at Central Saint Martins (UAL) titled *Fashion Curating and The Senses*, which encouraged experimentation in how to display non-visual phenomena of dress/fashion, an area overdue for further investigation.

4.3 Mnemonic and Emotional Bias

This thesis has argued that worn garments are inherently emotional material documents of a life lived, perceived during MCA through the prism of the previous experiences of the dress/fashion curator. During the close proximity of object analysis, interpretations of wearer/object biography will be influenced by the memories of and emotional connections to the curator's own understanding of being dressed in the world, resulting in what I propose as *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias*. This form of bias can obscure aspects of embedded wearer/object biography which are incomprehensible to the curator, and which may rely on immaterial evidence (such as scent) as which will vanish over time in the institutional collection.

Suggestions for Mitigating *Mnemonic and Emotional Bias:* This source of bias, in line with the affective, auratic, and immaterial nature of memory and emotion, has been the most difficult to provide a direct strategy of mitigation for. In part, this is because this source of bias is so closely connected to the corporeal senses, a distinction made on p. 207, but also due to the deeply intimate and individual character of these areas. Further research in this area could approach understanding how this bias impacts wearer/object biography through a psychoanalytical framework, or perhaps a study of physiological responses to certain objects. Establishing a foundation of knowledge to how curators react to certain objects might help to highlight specific and recurring instances of bias and better focus techniques of mitigating mnemonic and emotional bias. However, I suggest that finding a solution to such profound responses may be impossible, and perhaps a distraction from a deeper conversation in historiography and museology: the fallacy of objectivity.

Revisiting the concept of "diffraction" discussed on p. 99, what if the dress/fashion curator's mnemonic and emotional responses to worn garments were recorded in object descriptions and used to contextualise how they were

interpreted at the time of acquisition? Donna Haraway wrote in her landmark

text *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of*

Partial Perspective (1988) of 'the greased pole leading to a usable doctrine of

objectivity' (Haraway, 1988, p. 580) and the fallacy of the 'infinite vision'

suggested by scientific objectivity (1988, 582). Haraway took a feminist stance on

the arbitrary and generative nature of "objectivity", arguing instead for an

embodied objectivity, what she termed "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, p.

581). Situated knowledge, rather than purporting to conclude with an all-seeing

truth or objectivity, 'privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate

construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformations of systems of

knowledge and ways of seeing' (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). Moreover, situated

knowledges seek out other ways of seeing and knowing.

Applying situated knowledges to the interpretation of worn clothing, could the

process of MCA become less cloistered, less hermetically sealed behind

collection store doors? If many curators, as was evidenced in the empirical

evidence in this thesis, are already analysing objects in "makeshift" workrooms or

in "whatever space is on offer" (**Appendix, pp. 107-109**), is there a way to

undertake MCA that draws on the memories and responses of external observers,

such as visitors, who might view the objects during initial analysis and provide

new and additional insights on wearer/object biography. This was discussed by

National Museums Scotland researcher Phoenix Archer and curator John Giblin in

relation to the NMS *Exchange: Community-Led Collections Research* (2022)

project, which included participants from South Asian, African and Caribbean

diaspora groups in researching their collections (Archer and Giblin, 2023). As I

discussed on p. 294, this involvement of the public requires sustainable

engagement and care from curators, and compensation for participant's time and

knowledge (which was delivered by the NMS project (National Museums

Scotland, 2023, p. 27)), to be implemented ethically. Inclusion of participants from

outside of the discipline does not throw into question the skill set in object care

and handling of the curator. Instead, this inclusion unsettles the cloistered nature of MCA and the primacy of the curator's response to the garment when determining its interpretation and documentation in institutional collections.

Two models of transparent museological practice are demonstrated in the Museum of London collecting project *What Muslims Wear* (2014) which addressed the under-representation of visibly Muslim contemporary clothing in the museum dress and textiles collection, and *Weaving London's Stories: Collecting British Bangladeshi Dress* (2021), which collected the clothing and oral histories of British Bangladeshi women and children in Tower Hamlets, London. These projects drew on community engagement and wearer testimony to acquire garments which highlighted the 'the spiritual, practical and experimental motivations' embedded within worn clothing (Behlen and Khanom, no date, p. 16). Within the context of this thesis, considering worn clothing which is acquired in absentia of the original wearer's testimony, might it be possible to identify aspects of these motivations through similar engagement with other members of a community? This is not to suggest any community experience of being dressed is monolithic, but that mnemonic or emotional aspects of wearer/object biography might be revealed when individuals with similar experiences encounter the objects. In terms of transparency of practice, there is the development of spaces such as the V&A East Storehouse, a building designed with a glass-walled collection to facilitate literal transparency where the V&A has stated that visitors can observe and participate in collections activities (V&A, 2023b; Black, 2023).

To truly accept our curatorial subjectivity, our "situated knowledge" as Haraway would have it, curators must accept that while we are specialists in a specific area of material culture studies and museology, our expertise only extends as far as our own experiences. Requiring the active inclusion of other phenomenological experiences of garments at the point of initial MCA will create opportunity for the

contestations and connections that prevent a garment from being locked into one narrative. I argue that offering multiple interpretations of an object in a catalogue description reframes how we approach our expertise, prioritising the plurality of wearer/object biography over our own research or institutional motivations. Rather than aspiring to a false scientific conclusion, object interpretations embrace the humanity of material culture. As conservator Philip Ward wrote, 'science deals in measurement, produces quantifiable results, and enjoys the benefit of precision. Conservation applies those results to problems of infinite variety, the solutions of which have no absolutes' (Ward, 1986, p. 29). The same logic can be applied to the interpretation of worn garments without the explicit testimony of the wearer: if there can be no ultimate, objective understanding of garment, should curators not encourage their potential for multiple interpretations?

4.4 Disciplinary Bias

In the chapter addressing *Disciplinary Bias* (p. 234), the curatorial rhizome highlighted the interconnected professional network of dress/fashion curators in the UK. I argue that this network has reiterated the foundational practices of early curators through subsequent generations of practitioners and discouraged critique within the discipline, resulting in the advancement of an ideological hegemony which has privileged the interpretation and retention of certain aspects of wearer/object biographies: primarily narratives of Western, elite womenswear. The consequence being that many collections in the UK have neglected to document the histories of individuals and communities who do not reside within that demographic.

Suggestions for Mitigating *Disciplinary Bias*

Revisiting the point made by Sherry Doyal in the section on *Textile Conservators* (p. 307) that the embedded biography of objects is often 'all that is left to speak for a people without written records' (Doyal, 2000, p. 29), the question must be asked of whether dress/fashion curators should be interpreting material unfamiliar to their own area of experience.

The empirical data gathered in this thesis is evidence that in the UK discipline, the practicing hegemony is formally educated, white, heterosexual, non-disabled women between the ages of 25-54. Taking the contents of institutional dress/fashion collections at face value, this is a relatively historically well-represented group. This begs the question of whether we should be tasked with interpreting objects from outside of our demographic at all, considering that our bias will render aspects of unfamiliar wearer/object biography unintelligible no matter what steps we take toward mitigation. As phrased by curators Sue Wilkinson and Isobel Hughes, 'how does one group, even with the best of intentions, cater for another group whose perspective it does not share and whose needs and interests are unfamiliar?' (Wilkinson and Hughes, 1991, p. 27)

While Doyal asked further complex questions of her discipline: '"Whose culture?" "Who's research?" "Should we be representing others?" Objects can represent truth but whose truth it is it?' (Doyal, 2000, p. 29)

For an answer to these questions, and for a strategy toward mitigating *Disciplinary Bias*, I turn to Museum of Transology founder and curator E-J Scott. Scott understood that to achieve representation in history, there must be representation amongst those *writing* history. He is quoted at length from an interview with dress/fashion scholar Cicely Proctor, saying that the issue is:

'…akin to asking whether or not male fashion curators should collect items of suffragette dress, or whether white fashion curators should collect modern African fashions? I believe all fashion curators must be encouraged to collect dress owned and worn by trans people— not least because there are very few trans people working within the museum sector […] Until this underrepresentation is addressed, collecting by curators who are not trans needs to be done in consultation with trans people." (Proctor, 2018, p. 527)

Scott highlights the importance of advocating for the inclusion of experts from outside of the hegemony in our discipline. While we may not be able to overcome inherent biases such as cognition or our senses, dress/fashion curators can mitigate the *reiteration* of biases common to specific demographics by supporting and promoting the research and employment of peers who challenge the predominant culture. This includes being open to critique when our practice focuses on a limited interpretation of history, and offering opportunities to practitioners outside of our network of peers. It is also, I argue, incumbent on educators teaching on formal academic programmes training future dress/fashion curators to not just expand their curriculums to teach intersectional dress/fashion curatorial practice, but to actively engage in recruiting and supporting students from outside of the current demographic majority. Academic courses can focus on

researching together *with* students to draw on their experience of clothing and being dressed to co-generate ways of interpreting worn garments. Future research might consider developing pedagogical approaches to teaching material culture research methodologies which are not situated in the Western Eurocentric canon (for example: Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008; Willson, S. 2008; Smith, 2012).

4.5 Working Environment Bias

The practical constraints and demands placed on the dress/fashion curator working within institutional collections in the UK has been made clear through testimony and data collected in this research. This evidence demonstrates how curators are working with diminished resources and often under pressure to produce engaging public-facing outputs while caring for and researching acquired objects. This amounts to a *Working Environment Bias* which causes objects to not receive the attention level many curators would prefer during MCA and interpretation.

It could be argued that institutions have been slow moving in reassessing and recategorising what enters their collections and how these objects are documented on a structural level. I argue that as the closest intermediary between the worn garment in its previous functional life and its musealisation once acquired, the dress/fashion curator must be the advocate for the retention of wearer/object biography within this structure.

Suggestions for Mitigating *Working Environment Bias:* Any strategies provided to mitigate this source of bias must meet institutional collection care and best practice standards, while also not allowing wearer/object biography to be subsumed by these standards (as with the example of the Gerlinde Costiff collection at the V&A discussed on p. 283). Strategies might consider how to improve working conditions across the discipline, such as joining unions and associations for institutional employees (for example, *Museum as Muck*, *Museum Space Invaders*, or *Museum Detox* networks), or as *The 21st-century curator: A report into the evolving role of the UK museum curator, and their needs for the future* suggested, joining subject specialist networks for support and solidarity (2017, p. 44). These organisations might help working conditions in terms of collective bargaining for increased job security, improved practice environments, and liveable wages for curators.

Curators might reflect on the collaborative professional relationship they have with colleagues such as textile conservators, and reassess how this relationship informs their own practice. Further research in conjunction with conservators, who are mandated in their own discipline to document their practice (as discussed on p. 310), might yield additional insights on how to engage with and account for subjectivity during MCA.

Incorporating recommendations from critical reports such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded *Provisional Semantics - GLAM cataloguing resources and guidance* (no date) or the *Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources* (2022) can be a impactful way to effect structural change through individual practice. *Provisional Semantics* provides a collated resource addressing structural racism within historiography, including terminologies and cataloguing guidance.

The *Metadata Best Practices* report, specifically developed by over 100 collections professionals to improve 'the description and classification of trans and gender diverse people in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums, and Special Collections (GLAMS) and other information systems' (Collections Trust, 2022a), made a series of recommendations which I argue can be applied for many historically un-, under-, and mis-represented communities. This includes transparency in how interpretations of objects are documented, making 'descriptive standards, rationale, and context publicly available, providing methods for user feedback, and collaborating with community members (with consent and compensation)' (Collections Trust, 2022a); and 'embedding responsibility' through use of the active voice in catalogues.

4.6 Identifying the Curator

Many of the suggestions made in this chapter for mitigating sources of decision-making bias hinge on a fundamental element: the identity of the dress/fashion curator. Framing all suggestions for mitigating bias, is the need to provide context for the circumstances in which an object was interpreted. Thus, as E.H. Carr wrote, 'our first concern should be not with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it' (Carr, 1961, p. 22).

The phenomenological new materialist approach taken to this thesis has argued that the contact between the curator and wearer/object biography is contingent and affective. Within the context of this contact is where interpretations and meanings are produced, and subsequently documented within the collection. Archaeologist Severin Fowles observed that humans 'cannot add and subtract relations without leaving residues' (Fowles, 2010, p. 30), yet often the curators tasked with interpreting wearer/object biography and the writing of history remain anonymous. For example, in object catalogues at the Museum of London occasionally a set of initials might appear at the end of an object description, but for the most part entries have been made without any information which situates how the description was generated.

Therefore, I argue that mitigation of bias also includes the assignation of the impact of bias on the retention of wearer/object biography, and there must be increased transparency about *who* is interpreting materialised history. I believe that dress/fashion curators must fully embrace their subjectivity, rather than gesture towards it. This requires putting our names, our *own* biographies, and the context under which MCA was completed into the history we are authoring. Any documentation associated with MCA, which becomes the "official" document of wearer/object biography within the institutional collection, must be contextualised by who interpreted this object and when they interpreted it. This form of accountability can be seen in our closest colleagues, textile conservators

(French, 2015; Scaturro, 2018; The Institute of Conservation, 2020), who are required to document and be accountable to all treatments and interventions they undertake. Organisations such as Collections Trust, or the discipline-specific Dress and Textile Specialists network, might consider implementing a comparable code of ethical curatorial practice which requires documentation of the working conditions and inclusion of a summary of personal and professional biography from curators undertaking MCA.

In forensic science, the form of accountability is termed the "chain of custody" or what forensic scientist Yoram Ray Goedhart identified as 'the chronological documentation of evidence transfer' which 'ensures safe-keeping of trace material' (Goedhart *et al.*, 2022, p. 3). Goedhart has recommended the implementation of a similar accountability within cultural heritage institutions, and I agree with this assessment. By including contextualising information about the curator who analysed a garment in collection documentation and the circumstances of the garment's analysis, curators can not only be held accountable for the decisions we make, but also included within the history we are writing.

Currently the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums carries no specific guidance for curators analysing worn clothing, no protocols for how to ensure that the integrity of this form of authorship is not compromised by curatorial bias. Despite the lack of specificity, fashion law scholar Felicia Caponigri has argued that the display of dress/fashion is "cultural heritage" and therefore due the application of the ICOM code. Caponigri wrote that 'allowing museum professionals or trustees to effectively opt out of minimum international standards just because they are displaying fashion compromises the public's ability to appreciate certain items of fashion as part of our cultural heritage and to truly accept fashion in the museum space.' (Caponigri, 2017, p. 138). Making our object research transparent and accountable therefore can be seen to further legitimise our position within

institutional and wider museology.

Sarah Scaturro wrote that the documentation process in textile conservation allows practitioners to create an understanding of the strata of material traces on an object and to ethically 'move forward and change the future of the object. Although the object might be physically changed, its former life has been captured and recorded so that—somehow—its original essence is retained' (Scaturro, 2018, p. 35). Scaturro acknowledged that conservation documentation itself was subjective and not neutral, but that it was a proactive practice aiming to leave treated objects 'in such a state that [they] can be rematerialized again and again by future conservators' (Scaturro, 2018, p. 35). Creating a contextualising biographical entry for curators within the institution's catalogue, alongside the garments they interpret, would allow future generations of researchers to better situate and re-approach these interpretations of wearer/object biography from new perspectives.

Summary of Suggestions Toward Mitigating Curatorial Interruption

Part 4 of this thesis has answered the second aim of this thesis by making suggestions for future research and actionable strategies toward mitigating the five sources of decision-making bias which inform the act of curatorial interruption. This addresses the gap in knowledge of how to address bias in the dress/fashion curator and provides a foundation for proactive change within the discipline.

The suggested strategies range from modifications to professional practice, to the establishment of wider organisational networks and mandates. Forensic science and textile conservation in particular can offer practical, implementable strategies which address working concerns and issues of accountability. These strategies have been situated primarily on the dress/fashion curator (rather than on institutions) who I argue must act as an advocate for both the retention of wearer/object biography within the institutional collection, and for their own role as a highly specialised, ethical expert.

The five chapters have made suggestions for mitigation specific to the sources of decision-making bias (*Cognitive*; *Sensory Engagement*; *Mnemonic and Emotional*; *Disciplinary*; *Working Environment*). However, it is the final chapter which focused on the professional accountability of the dress/fashion curator themselves which I view as the most essential strategy for positioning our practice as a vital element in growing institutional collections of dress/fashion that are inclusive, expansive, and equipped for future interpretation of wearer/object biography.

Conclusion

The purpose of identifying and addressing curatorial interruption is to take professional accountability for the wearer/object biography we interpret, analyse, and document within the institutional collection. The practice we implement to do this, MCA, is not one which can construct, as Ingrid Mida has argued, a 'complete narrative' (Mida, 2017, p 283). Rather, MCA is an affective and contingent process of interpretation which can never fully capture the plurality of meanings within embedded wearer/object biography. A lack of examination of the impact of MCA undertaken within the environment of the institutional collection has resulted in aspects of wearer/object biography being left out of public history-writing. This has produced an over-representation of certain narratives while others remain un-, under-, and mis-represented within collections.

The research in this thesis has highlighted the expertise possessed by dress/fashion curators situated within the UK, and has argued that to support a representation of diverse lives within institutions, critical practice must involve addressing sources of decision-making bias. This is particularly vital as subject specialist roles are becoming increasingly precarious and curators are having to reassert their value as future-facing practitioners. Through investigation of the different factors informing curatorial practice, ranging from those based in human nature and cognition to the effect of environment, culture, and experience, the research in this thesis has demonstrated the complexities framing a fundamental curatorial practice such as MCA.

While positioning the curator as an interpreter of wearer/object biography, in this thesis I have also studied the experience of worn clothing from the perspective of the wearer. I have argued that garments are a form of life-writing, an ego-document, which are material evidence of lives lived. I have also considered the *immaterial* aspects of worn garments, and the potential for these immaterialities to act as a point of resistance to the musealisation imposed by the institution,

particularly for those individuals who have not historically been represented within "official" documentation. Through the research in this thesis, I have identified and examined five sources of decision-making bias impacting the MCA of worn clothing by dress/fashion curators in the UK. I have made suggestions for curators to implement in an effective move toward mitigating the impact of these sources of bias on the interpretation and retention of wearer/object biography within institutional collections. In this conclusion, I highlight the most significant contributions the research in this thesis has made in relation to gaps in knowledge I have identified within the discipline of dress/fashion museology, including the concept of curatorial interruption.

Critical Study of the Discipline of Dress/Fashion Curation

The dress/fashion curator is a trained expert who, through MCA, makes an embodied study of the complex histories materialised within worn garments. While they may not always be prioritising evidence of wearer/object biography, as with the example of those curators working within arts and design institutions, they are nevertheless making contact with it and becoming a part of that garment's biography. The process of MCA requires a close proximity to and engagement with the garment which affects both parties materially and immaterially, generating interpretations which are contingent on the circumstances under which they make contact, and which may not have been those intended by the original wearer. What narrative threads are identified by the curator at the time of the initial acquisition MCA will likely be the most enduring interpretation of a garment, and can dictate how it is researched and exhibited in the future.

Part 1 of this thesis provided a framework for understanding the position of the UK-based dress/fashion curator when they make contact with wearer/object biography embedded in worn clothing. Chapters 1.1 and 1.2 found that the early research interests of key figures in the discipline had shaped the development of

dress/fashion museology, including its emphasis on applying an object-led approach to studying garments, and the establishment of Western Eurocentric standards of fashionability within the institution. Though MCA is a well-established approach to object study, and the bias of the curator has been generally *acknowledged* within the discipline, three of the most commonly-adopted MCA methodologies applied in the analysis of garments (E. McClung Fleming; Jules Prown; Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim) have not properly addressed the *sources* of bias. After close examination of all three, I determined that not only do they not consider the underlying sources of bias, but they in fact *enable* opportunities for bias to be embedded in formalised practice. A lack of critical examination of curatorial bias has meant that these methodologies have been implemented to interpret worn garments without consideration for what narratives they might have been privileging.

Without a prior foundation of scholarship, the investigation of sources of bias in this thesis required narrowing down the possible scope of study to those sources most relevant to the discipline. This necessitated establishing an understanding of the most foundational element of MCA: object as stimuli, framed by a psychoanalytical theory of evocative objects (Bollas, 1992). Despite the fundamental need for humans to navigate their world by filtering out stimuli, cognition has never been examined as a source of bias in the dress/fashion curator as was made evident in Chapter 1.3 of this thesis. Two specific forms of cognitive bias, *confirmation* and *expert* emerged through review of comparable practices in forensic science, and these were presented as examples of how cognitive bias is manifested in curatorial practice. To further distinguish the field of study and make this research most effective, further potential areas of bias were identified through a discipline-specific adaptation of Itiel Dror's interpretation of Francis Bacon's *The Four Idols*: *Sensory Engagement*, *Disciplinary* and *Working Environment*, *Mnemonic and Emotional*.

Chapter 1.4 established the theoretical approach to this research, emphasising Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the sensory, embodied nature of being in the world. This was used to contextualise both being dressed in the world, which has been discussed extensively throughout wider dress/fashion studies; and the practice of analysing worn clothing within an institutional environment, which has not. Thus, his theory was used to identify clothing as an appendage of the corporeal body in the world: informing how the wearer experienced being in the world, and situating the dress/fashion creator as a subjective perceiver of the phenomena of worn clothing. The clothing we wear governs and guides much of the way we experience our world, whether in the (as Joanne Eicher identified them) public, private, or secret realms of our lives. This can be particularly true for individuals who have been historically marginalised, as clothing can grant or deny access to particular social spaces, becoming a material document of their experience of the world. More than just supporting evidence to "officially" documented biographies, I have argued that worn clothing is a form of ego-document itself, subverting the need for lives to be recognised by hegemonic notions of history. The example of Francis Golding's pocket contents, as an extension of himself within his worn garments, reaches out across time to articulate experiences in his life which may have otherwise been unintelligible. Assigned with such vital meaning, clothing is clearly imbued with an energy that is perceptible both materially, in visible signs of wear, and immaterially in the absences left in the wake of wearer. Without direct testimony to contextualise them, the curator begins making inferences to fill in these voids, generating interpretations which are based on their intra-action with the worn garment and not necessarily representative of wearer/object biography.

Dress/fashion curators can be viewed then as subject specialist experts who contribute to the construction of public history through their interpretation of worn garments. I have argued that the curator decides which (if any) aspects of wearer/object biography to retain in "official" documentation via the institutional

collection catalogue. This further reinforces the need for a critical examination of curatorial practice, when much of our historical authority relies on the decisions about which narratives will be represented within institutional collections.

My research question at the outset of this thesis asked if the existence and impact of my original concept, curatorial interruption, could be established through the close study and critical assessment of dress/fashion curatorial practice. Part 2 of this thesis approached this critical assessment through four primary research components: a survey of dress/fashion curators, a study of curatorial analysis of digitised garments, a study of material culture analysis, and a semi-structured interview exploring curatorial experience. These components generated a body of new and original empirical knowledge which addressed gaps in knowledge about essential elements of the discipline. Prior to the research in this thesis, the demographic makeup of dress/fashion curators has been based on anecdotal evidence. Through the design, distribution, and analysis of the *Curating Dress in the UK* survey, I collected quantitative and qualitative data from a representative sample of respondents which definitively identifies the typical dress/fashion curator as a formally educated, white, heterosexual, non-disabled woman between the ages of 25-54.

These findings have provided contextualising evidence for exploring which narratives have been overrepresented within institutional collections, based on the demographics of who has been collecting, interpreting, and documenting worn garments. Which is not to say that a curator is *only* capable of identifying aspects of wearer/object biography familiar to their own life experience, but that they are more likely to recognise narratives that resonate with their own knowledge of the world. The survey also revealed quantitative and testimonial evidence about the working environment of curators in the UK. It is clear from this data that demands on the time and focus of curators consistently draws them away from being able to employ in-depth, self-diffractive MCA of garments, with

object analysis being only one facet of their role within the institution. Despite how essential MCA practice is to collections care, and ensuring accredited institutions adhere to Collections Trust guidelines (2022b; 2022c), prior to this thesis there has been no in-person study of how dress/fashion curators analyse worn clothing. This component of the primary research allowed a "proxy gaze" approach to studying the methods used, attention paid, and reaction to garments by curators during MCA.

Aside from highlighting the practical demands, the research in this thesis has underscored ideological demands the institution makes of the curator. These demands were reiterated through the original testimony of curatorial experience and practice collected during the interview component of the primary research. What emerged was a clear need for the dress/fashion curator to justify their position within the institution, which means that emphasis is often put on visitor-facing outputs, such as exhibitions, over the analysis of newly acquired objects.

In the past century, dress/fashion curators have built a distinct discipline within wider museology, and this has often necessitated relying on their network of peers for support, both in research and professionally. This reliance has meant that criticism of curatorial practice might be viewed as breaking ranks with the accepted hegemony, with frictions emerging between generations of curators in exhibition reviews and scholarship when this breakage has occurred. The need to be seen as 'one of us[…]the dress history family' (Taylor, 2021, p. 149) provides one rationale for why, previous to this thesis, there has been no in-depth critical examination of how curators interpret objects. Not just a gap in disciplinary knowledge, this is a conscious blind spot in dress/fashion curation, requiring what Judith Clark identified as a need to examine the wider impact of our practice (dal Bosco, 2021). As a member of what I have termed the fourth generation of dress/fashion curators in the UK, I suggest that self-diffractive, critical assessment of museological practice, bias, and the impact of these on public history could be

the hallmark of our approach to the study of worn garments.

Five Sources of Decision-Making Bias in Dress/Fashion Curators

The themes which emerged from empirical data and testimony collected through the primary research methods in this thesis were organised within the parameters of study established through Bollas' theories of evocative objects, and Dror's adaptation of *The Four Idols*. My introduction and adaptation of Dror's theories on cognition and bias in relation to dress/fashion museology has created an entirely new approach to studying curatorial practice. To finally identify key sources of bias specific to UK dress/fashion curators undertaking MCA of worn garments within institutional collections, Dror's study of the sources of decision-making bias in forensic science was drawn on to cohere and contextualise these themes. The emergence of parallels between forensic science and dress/fashion curation has been revelatory in this research, and situates this thesis in a growing area of scholarship (see Butchart, 2022a; Maclennan, 2020; 2023; *The Fabric of Crime*, no date) which recognises the practical and ideological crossover between two areas concerned with constructing "true" narratives from evidence. The collaborative research of dress/fashion scholars such as Amber Butchart and Maria Maclennan with forensic teams has demonstrated how valuable the expertise of dress/fashion scholars is outside of the discipline. The scope for future study between the two areas might consider how forensic best practices such as the "chain of custody" which documents who has handled material and under what circumstances (Goedhart et al., 2022, p. 3) might be implemented in dress/fashion curation.

The scope of this thesis has centred on newly acquired objects, investigating the initial contact point between curator and object, the stage when I argue that there are still opportunities to mitigate curatorial interruption. The key word is "mitigate", as entirely eliminating curatorial interruption is an impossibility. I have established that like every human, dress/fashion curators are biased by our very

physiology: our cognition, senses, memories, and emotions which underpin our biases *also* form the specialist expertise which situates us within the wider field of museology. Curatorial bias (or as it has been identified, subjectivity) has been acknowledged in previous scholarship within the discipline (Taylor, 2002; Mida and Kim, 2015; Bide, 2017; Lambert, 2021; Lamothe and Pearn, 2023), however I argue that mere acknowledgement of bias is insufficient in mitigating its effects on the retention of wearer/object biography. To continue the development of a distinct discipline, dress/fashion curation must implement critical practices which further strengthen our approach to the study of material culture.

The lack of examination of bias, despite being demonstrated as fundamental to the expertise of the curator, has created a false sense of distance between the curator and the person whose garments they are analysing. In reality, MCA is an embodied, sensory, and affective experience which I have argued impacts both the curator and the object in their care. The critical study of this affective relationship in this thesis benefits the curator by providing an ethical imperative within the increasingly contested space of the institutional collection. This research reiterates the importance and meaning of the dress/fashion curator within institutional collections, as an interpreter of wearer/object biography within the material garment, and as an advocate for retention of this biography within the institutional catalogue.

Moving beyond acknowledging the existence of bias, in Part 3 of this thesis I have identified five sources of decision-making bias: *Cognitive*, *Sensory Engagement*; *Mnemonic and Emotional*; *Disciplinary*; and *Working Environment*. Far from being the exclusive sources of bias, these sources can now provide a foundation for testing the impact each source on specific areas of MCA. Further research might focus on specific sources, to consider for example how mnemonic associations in curators from marginalised backgrounds might impact their interpretation of garments from un-, under-, or mis-represented individuals. Studying how certain

stimuli will be perceived by curators based on their cognitive and sensory abilities would be valuable in providing insights into the under-representation of disabled curators within the discipline.

Beyond the discipline of dress/fashion curation, other areas of museology might consider what sources of bias are comparable to, or specific to, their areas of research and how this has impacted the shape of their collections. The interdisciplinary nature of the supporting scholarship used to illustrate sources of decision-making bias in the dress/fashion curator demonstrates that sensory engagement (as discussed through the research of Constance Classen and David Howes), objects as metonymic contact points (Feldman, 2006), external working pressures, and practical employment considerations (Art Fund, 2017; Museums Association, 2021) are certainly common concerns across museology.

Dress/fashion curation is an established discipline within museology, populated by what I have proposed are four generations of practitioners. The interconnected nature of this discipline means that expertise is shared and reiterated between curators, and this practical peer knowledge at times has superseded academic learning (**P1, Appendix, pp. 186-187**). This has also meant that challenges to hegemonic ideologies, or taking new approaches to curatorial practice have at times been met with resistance (Taylor, 2006; Breward, 2008). This might indicate why, prior to the research in this thesis, *Disciplinary Bias* has not been properly examined.

Although this thesis focuses on the curator situated within the institution, this research has made evident how mutually affective the relationship between practitioner and collection is. When worn garments are acquired into institutional collections and become musealised, I argue that satisfying the binary mechanisms of the collection (collected rather than not collected; documented rather than undocumented; conserved rather than unconserved; stored rather than unhoused)

take precedent over preserving the plural, contingent narratives embedded in worn clothing. For example, the ocularcentric focus of the institution has privileged visual analysis and description during MCA; a positive association or recognition of familiar themes in certain garments by the curator has privileged these narratives within the collection.

Dress/fashion curation is a highly specialised and developed area of expertise, yet the research in this thesis has identified distinct lack of formal tools within dress/fashion to articulate how objects are interpreted and documented within the collection. There is currently no standard nor universal method for describing colour, and the only recommended terminology (International Committee for the Museums and Collections of Costume, 2011) for describing clothing is outdated and reiterates gendered and Western Eurocentric ideology. Future research might continue to explore how worn garments from outside of this hegemony can be described using concepts and terms appropriate to the wearer/object biography. Without the appropriate tools to interpret unfamiliar narratives, dress/fashion curators will continue to reiterate their own biases in objects, regardless of the garment's origin.

Curatorial Interruption

The five sources of decision-making bias, and the empirical research I have collected to support them, have provided evidence which definitively proves my theory of curatorial interruption: the action which occurs due to the interpretive decisions taken by the curator, which disrupts the authorship embedded in worn garments. The impact of curatorial interruption is manifested in the confected taxonomy which documents garments as "ethnographic" or "fashion" objects, a lack of diverse biographical and cultural narratives represented within institutional collections of dress/fashion objects, and a historical overemphasis of ocularcentrism as a method of engaging visitors with exhibitions of dress/fashion. The concept of curatorial interruption can now be used as a term to describe a

contributing factor to larger issues within the discipline, making it an original and significant contribution to the critical study of dress/fashion museology.

The suggestions toward mitigating curatorial interruption were discussed in Part 4 of this thesis, divided into specific suggestions aligning with the five identified sources of bias. Chapter 4.6 offered an additional, and what I argue is the most important suggestion, toward accounting for curatorial interruption. I propose the inclusion of the curator's own biography and the context of their interpretation of the garment in the institution's catalogue, holding them accountable for their practice, and contextualising wearer/object biography at the time of initial acquisition MCA for future researchers. The research in this thesis has established that the dress/fashion curator working within the institutional collection is a factor of musealisation who selects which aspects of wearer/object biography to retain in history, and they should *also* be a custodian of the lived experiences embedded in worn clothing. This requires the curators who shape the institutional version of history which is presented to the public, to be clearly identified in their work.

When only *some* aspects of a garment are interpreted and documented into the collection, other aspects are rendered illegible to future researchers. What Sandra Dudley termed the "potentialities" (Dudley, 2021) of wearer/object biography are unrealised, and aspects of the wearer's *personal* history are effectively erased from *public* history. A contemporary concern of institutional collections, particularly in the UK where this research is situated, is how to retroactively recover and/or uncover these histories from previously collected objects (Delin, 2002; Winchester, 2012; Buckley and Clark, 2016; Cole, 2018; Scott; 2018; Fisk, 2019; Friedman, 2020). However, garments naturally degrade over time, losing both material and immaterial aspects of wearer/object biography, limiting what aspects of biography can be reclaimed. Through the documentation of the conditions under which the curator interpreted the object, they can contextualise

to future interpreters what might have been missed or mis-interpreted during the initial MCA process. I have suggested in this thesis that dress/fashion curators document themselves within the institutional catalogue, and link this biography to the garments they care for. Dress/fashion museology requires a code of ethical practice which holds us accountable for the work we do to tell people's stories, and legitimises our position as responsible interpreters and writers of history.

Rather than gesturing toward some impossible neutrality, or merely acknowledging our unexamined bias, I have provided the concept of curatorial interruption to articulate the impact of practice on objects, and a clear way forward in tackling this impact: by situating ourselves within it. By applying a self-diffractive approach to practice, we position ourselves at the point of MCA in relation to the objects we care for, and contextualise the public history written by the institution as only *one* temporary version of events. Through critical curatorial practice, the dress/fashion collection can be reframed as a site where people and objects make contact and produce unfixed, plural meanings, and wearer/object biography can be interpreted and reinterpreted to represent the full richness of dressed human life.

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Due to privacy reasons, emails have been removed from this thesis. If you have any queries, please contact the author.

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Curatorial Interruption: Critical analysis of sources of decision-making bias in dress/fashion curators and examination of the impact of curatorial bias on wearer/object biography in worn clothing acquired by institutional collections in the United Kingdom

(Two of Two Volumes)

By

Cyana Madsen

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

In Collaboration with:

Museum of London

And

University of the Arts London
London College of Fashion

July 2023

Volume Two Contents

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Appendix

Figure 0.1: 2016.40/21a Browns jacket owned and worn by Francis Golding (accessed Museum of London, 30/08/2018). Photo by Museum of London.

Figure 0.2: 2016.40/21b-o Pocket contents of Browns jacket owned and worn by Francis Golding (accessed Museum of London, 30/08/2018). Photo by Museum of London.

accustoming to.
The real purpose of this letter is to tell you that my P.U. is under way and that any reference to this & similar events had better be couched by you in the most vague terms possible. I happen to know they pen one's letters & regard any deviation at all from the bourgeois sexual norms as a very bad sign indeed. I specially don't want to fail, as I am getting on so well with Sir Michael Cary. He's lunching me at Boodles tomorrow, Brooks's being closed.

These 2 events + a few little improvements to Colebrooke Row are all that I've done since my return. Proper bookshelves at last & a light outside the door + an old brass milk lamp from home with a dark green shade. & I'm on the track of some really wonderful cushions + a giant mirror.
I too have some New Man velvet jeans;

Figure 1.1: Excerpt from letter written by Francis Golding, dated 20/09/1970. In acquisition file for 2016.40 at Museum of London.

Figure 2.1: Navy pinstriped blazer - Photogrammetry test, November 5, 2021

Figure 2.2: Object 1 - Blue jacket (LCF Archives - Cecile Korner collection)

Figure 2.3: Object 2 - A pair of black cotton and jute espadrilles (LCF Archives - Francis Golding collection)

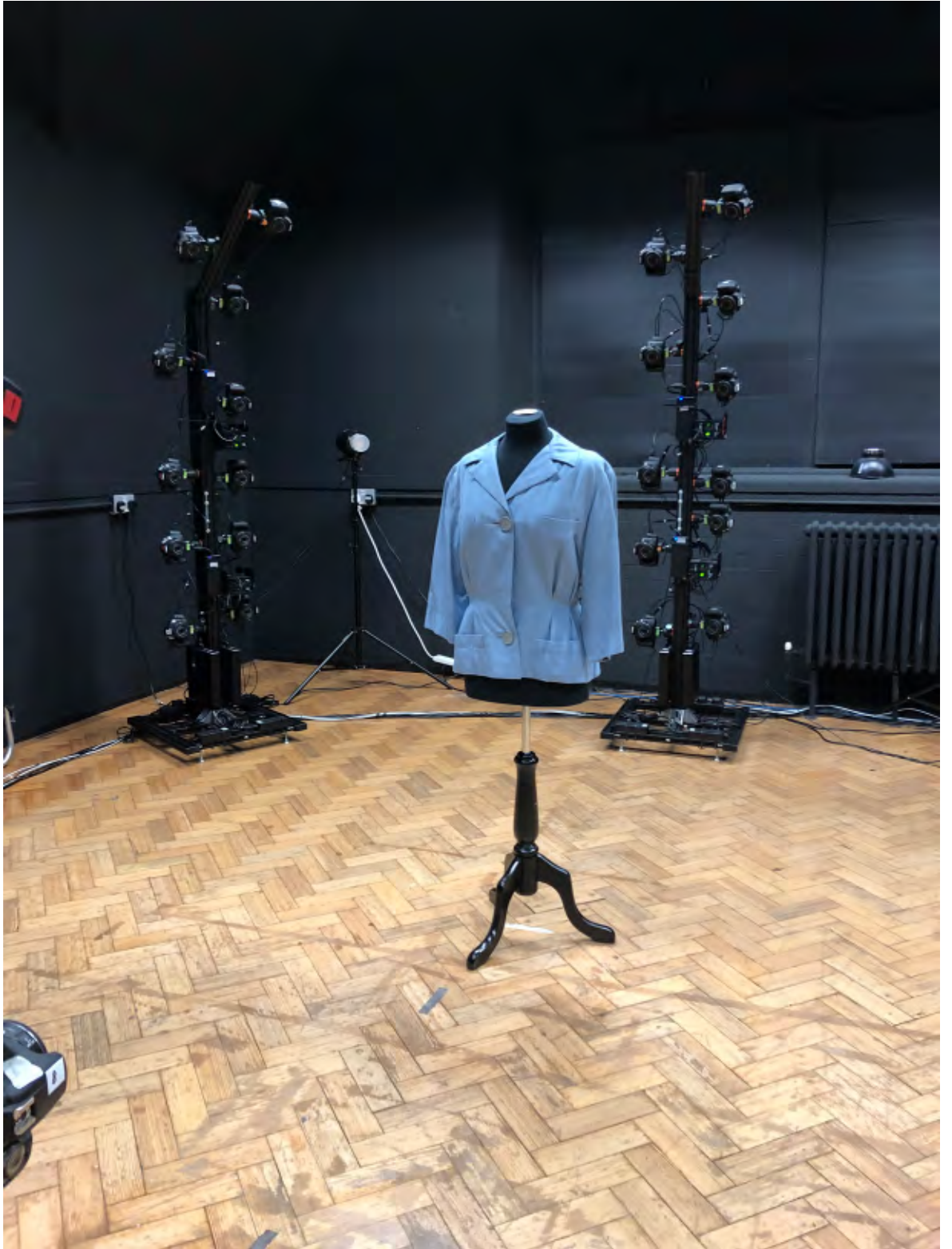*Figure 2.4: Object 3 - A green suede jacket (LCF Archives - Percy Savage collection)*

Figure 2.5: Object 1 - Photogrammetry, February 8, 2022

Figure 2.6: Object 2 - Photogrammetry, February 8, 2022
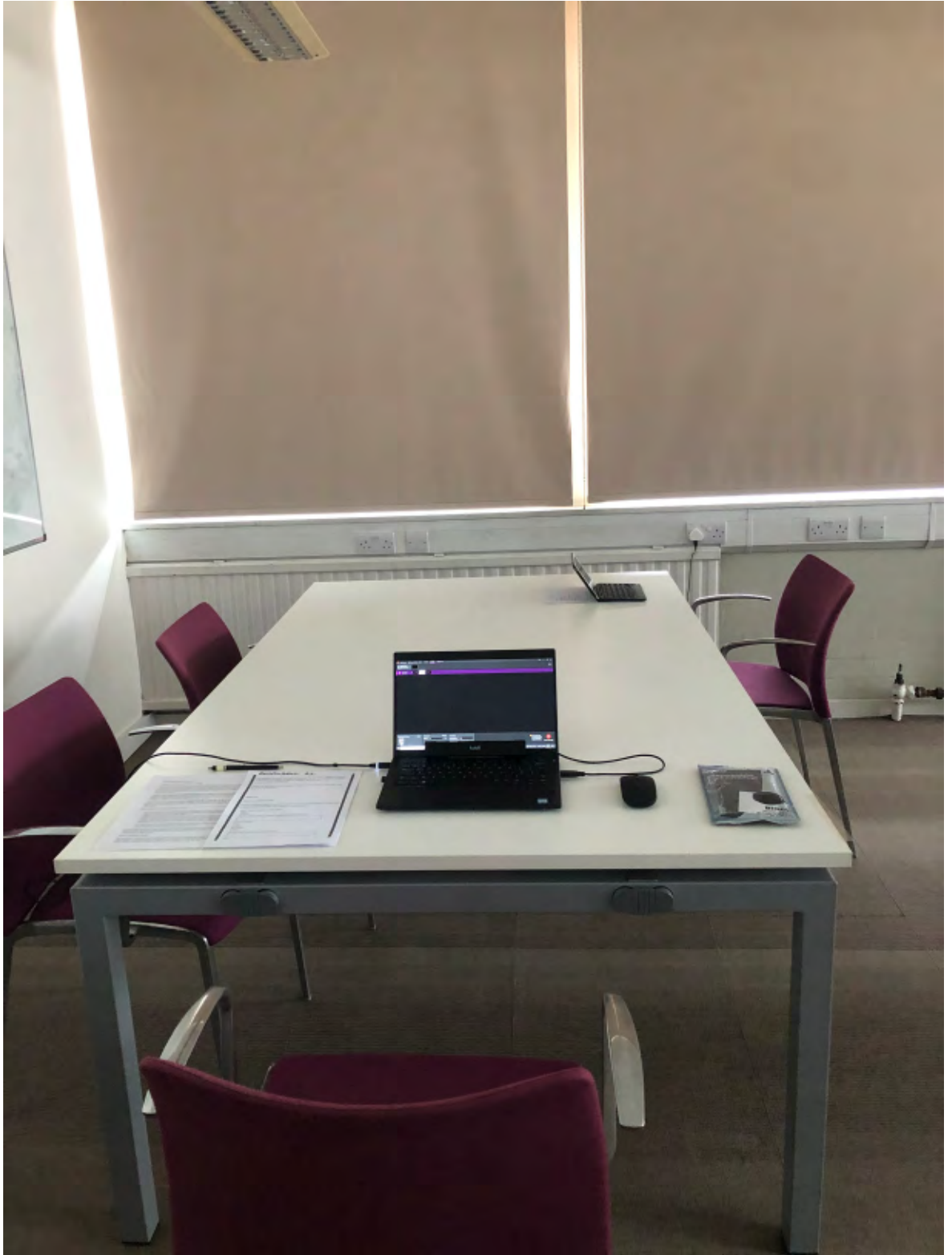
Figure 2.7: Object 1 - Detail of 3D modelling flaws

Figure 2.8: Tobii Eye Gaze Tracking Setup - JPS 305
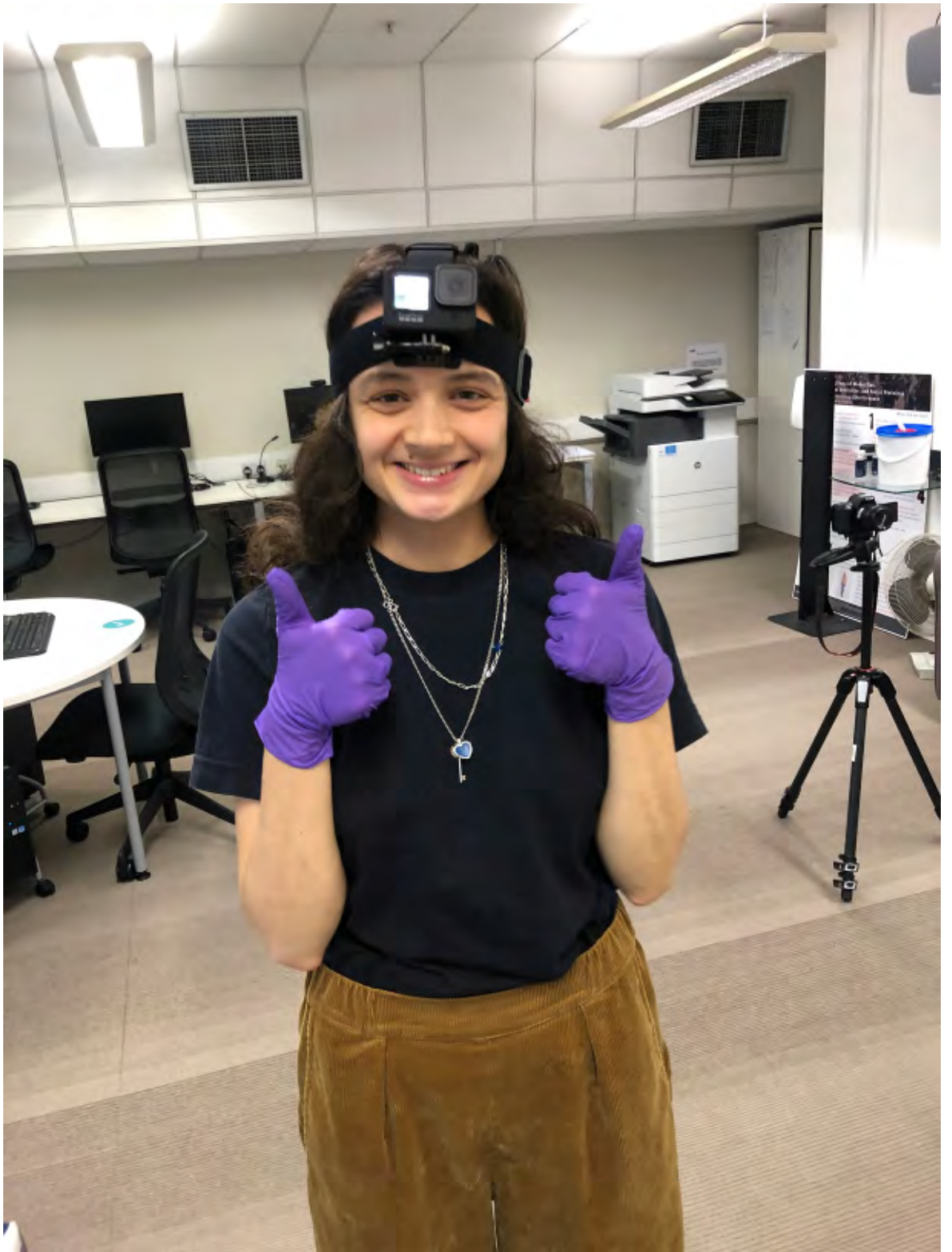
Figure 2.9: Leah Gouget-Levy during DGA and MCA Test, March 16, 2022

Figure 2.10: DGA Test Object - A pair of black leather sandals (LCF Archives - Francis Golding collection)

Figure 2.11: MCA Room Setup - JPS 320

*Figure 2.12: DGA - Eye Gaze Fixation Points During Screen Change
(Participant 1, Object 1)*

Figure 2.13: DGA - Eye Gaze Fixation Points (Participant 1, Object 2)

Figure 2.14: DGA - Eye Gaze Fixation Points (Participant 2, Object 1)

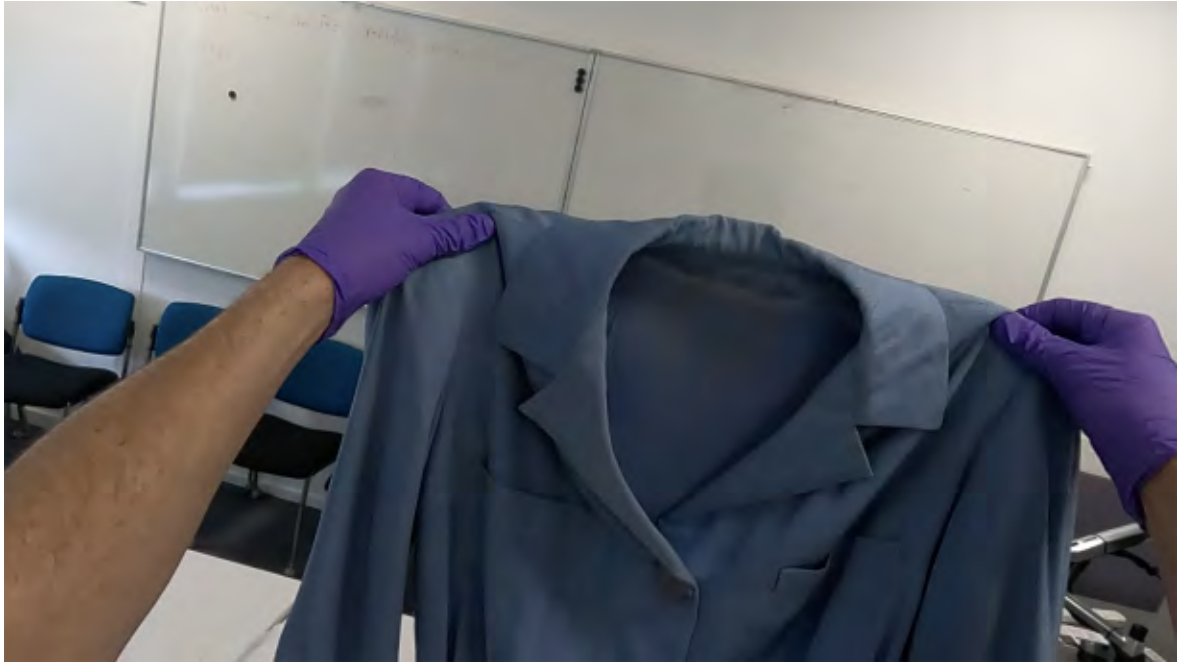*Figure 2.15: DGA - Eye Gaze Fixation Points (Participant 3, Object 3)*

Figure 2.16: MCA - Participant 3, Object 1

Figure 2.17: MCA - Participant 1, Object 3
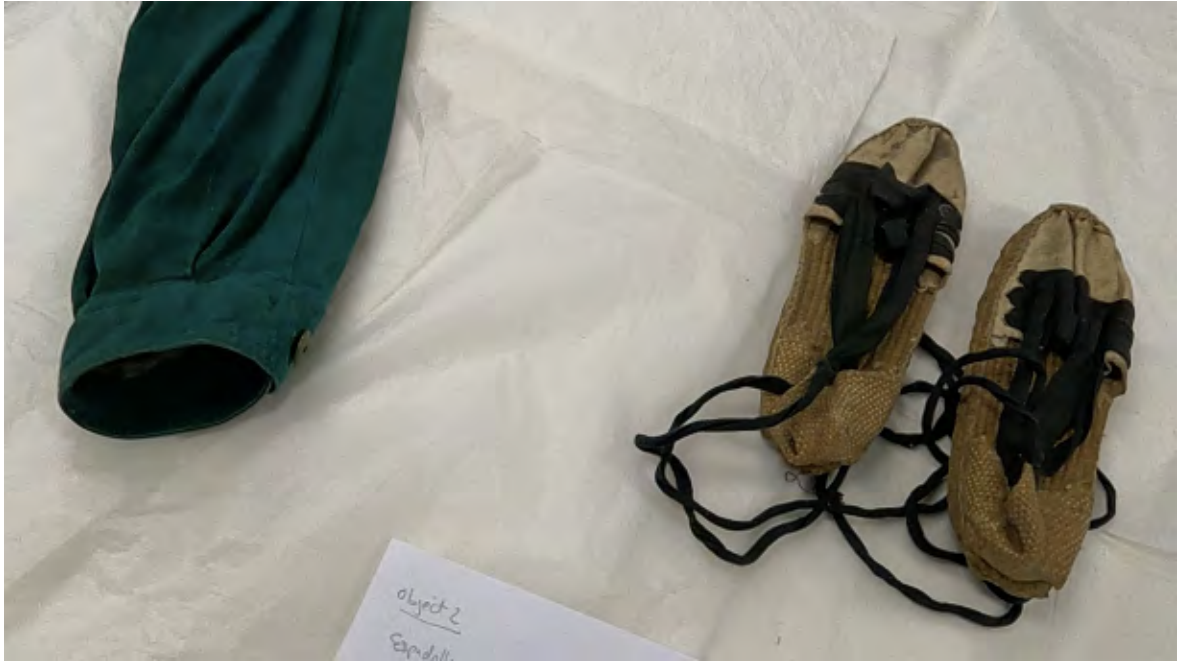
Figure 2.18: MCA - Participant 2, Object 2

Working Environment Bias

Disciplinary Bias

Mnemonic and Emotional Bias

Sensory Engagement Bias

Cognitive Bias

Environment, Culture, and Experience

Human Nature and Cognition
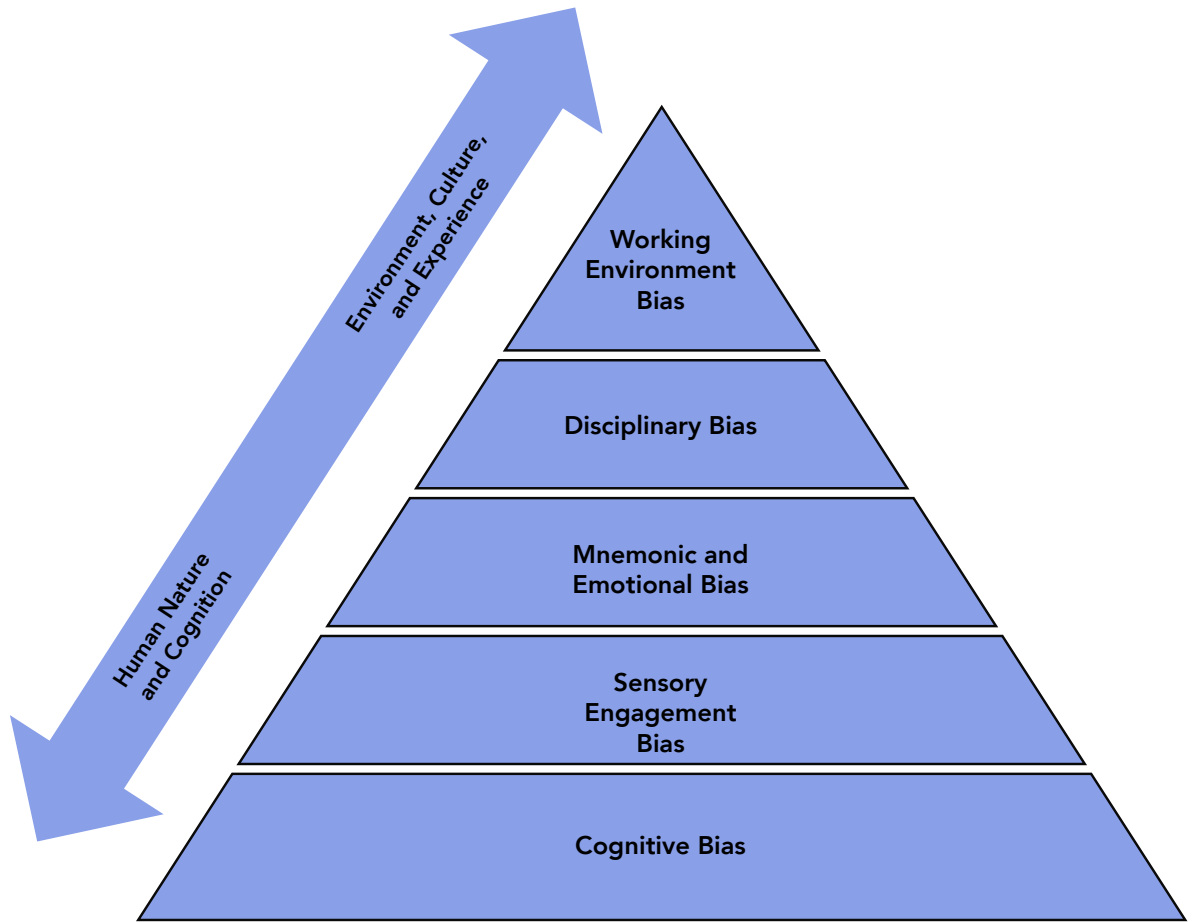
SOURCES OF DECISION-MAKING BIAS IN DRESS/FASHION CURATORS

Figure 3.2: Curatorial Rhizome

Figure 3.3: Off-white nylon corset with long sleeves, V&A Collection, museum number T.199-2002 (Photograph Cyana Madsen - May 9, 2018)

Figure 3.4: Pink smear detail, Off-white nylon corset with long sleeves,
V&A Collection, museum number T.199-2002 (Photograph Cyana Madsen - May 9, 2018)

Figure 3.5: Possible perspiration stain detail, Off-white nylon corset with long sleeves, V&A Collection, museum number T.199-2002 (Photograph Cyana Madsen - May 9, 2018)

Figure 3.6: Loose thread detail, Off-white nylon corset with long sleeves, V&A Collection, museum number T.199-2002 (Photograph Cyana Madsen - May 9, 2018)

Figure 3.7: Boning detail, Off-white nylon corset with long sleeves,
V&A Collection, museum number T.199-2002 (Photograph Cyana Madsen -
May 9, 2018)

Figure 3.8: Mimsy XG Object Entry Form Detail (Museum of London)

ual:

Post-Registration Research Ethics Approval Form

Guidance:

* Please ensure that you have read the *'UAL Guidance for Research Ethics Approval'* and *'UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics'* before completing this form. All supporting documentation on research ethics can be found in the UAL Research Degrees section on Moodle
* Please complete this form electronically
* **Section A and Appendix 1** (if applicable) are to be completed by the student and supervisors
* **Section B** is for UAL Committee use only
* Once Section A (and Appendix 1 if necessary) has been completed, including all necessary signatures, the form should be submitted to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk by the student
* Incomplete forms, including any that are missing signatures, will be returned to the student for completion

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SECTION A   **TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT**

Name:	**Cyana Madsen**
College:	**London College of Fashion**

1. Please provide a 100-word summary of your proposed research. Explain in terms appropriate to a layperson.

This research is focused on professionals working with public collections of worn objects of dress, specifically in the UK. The aim of this research is to use both qualitative (Interviews) and quantitative (Voluntary anonymous survey) methods to gather key demographic information from practitioners in the field.

Both the interview and survey will gather information from the subjects on race, ethnic, gender, sexuality, educational backgrounds, research interests, and what methods they employ in the day-to-day activities associated with their roles.

Information gathered using these methods will be used to study possible commonalities, assessed critically against known issues in diversity and representation within public collections of dress, and used as a

2. Does your research involve participants

	No*
X	Yes

*If you answer 'No', you do not need to complete Questions 3 to 12, instead please go to Question 13 and continue from there.

3. Who will the participants be? Please tick as appropriate.

X	Students at the University
X	Staff at the University
X	Other*

*If you answered 'Other' please specify below

-Professionals (Curators, Collection Practitioners) working in the field of dress-based curation.

---

4. How will participants be recruited and how many will be involved?

-Participants will be recruited using professional word-of-mouth, via UAL networks (Centre for Fashion Curation), social media (Twitter and Instagram).
-Number of Participants for Survey – To be determined: Will be based on voluntary response to open survey.
-Number of Participants for Interview – 20

---

5. What will participants be asked to do? Explain in terms appropriate to a layperson.

-Survey:
 -Volunteer respondents to an online survey (created via surveymonkey.com) will be asked to self-identify information anonymously about their age, race, ethnic background, gender identity, sexual identity, educational background, religious background, research interests, educational and professional background.

-Interview:
 -Interviews will be performed with professionals remotely via online (Zoom, Teams, Skype, etc.), telephone, and only if UK government COVID-19 guidance permits, in person.
 -Interviewees will be asked about aspects of their professional practice and methods employed during object analysis, collecting, research, and day-to-day professional activities. They may be asked to self-identify information their age, race, ethnic background, gender identity, sexual identity, educational background, religious background, research interests, educational and professional background.

---

6. What potential risks to the interests of participants do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? A participant's interests include their physical and psychological well-being, their commercial interests, and their rights of privacy and reputation.

-Privacy and reputation:
-Survey will not ask for respondent's name or identifying specifics about their professional role. Results will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive.
-Interviewees will have the right to review the recording and transcript on request and redact any information they wish. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive.
-COVID-19:
-It is expected given the current COVID-19 situation and guidance that interviews will be conducted online (Zoom, Teams, Skype, etc.) In person interviews will only happen if permitted by UK government guidance at the time of the scheduled interview. All social distancing and health and safety protocols (disinfecting, masks) will be followed in the case of in person interviews.

7. What potential risks do you foresee to yourself as the researcher and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? E.g. does your research raise issues of personal safety for you or others involved in the project, especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises.

-Personal safety:
-Survey – None forseen.
-Interviews – Most interviews expected to take place remotely (online, telephone). In the case of in person interviews, location and duration of interviews will be logged with Supervisory team.
-COVID-19:
-It is expected given the current COVID-19 situation and guidance that interviews will be conducted online (Zoom, Teams, Skype, etc.) In person interviews will only happen if permitted by UK government guidance at the time of the scheduled interview. All social distancing and health and safety protocols (disinfecting, masks) will be followed in the case of in person interviews.

8. Please attach a copy of proposed written consent form and information sheet to be given to participants. If you are not obtaining written consent or supplying an information sheet, please explain the reasons for this.

X	Please tick here if the written consent form and information sheet are attached

9. Does your project involve children or vulnerable adults? E.g. a person with a learning disability.

X	No. Go to Question 10
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must refer to Section 4 in the 'Guidance for Research Ethics Approval' AND obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly known as a CRB check).

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

	I confirm that I have obtained a DBS check

10. Does your research concern groups which may be construed as terrorist or extremist?

X	No. Go to Question 11
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must refer to Section 5.5 in the *'Guidance for Research Ethics Approval'* **AND** complete the questionnaire at **Appendix 1** of this form.

Please Note:

It is a presumption of academic research that, wherever possible and feasible, the information on which the research is based should be preserved, so that it can be made available to future researchers. However, the privacy of participants must be respected. Please refer to the guidance note on data protection before answering Question 11.

11. Will you be obtaining personal information from any of the participants? E.g. name, personal opinions, address, recorded images or audio, date of birth, notes and observations.

	No. Go to Question 12
X	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', please give details. In your response, please consider: How will you store and use this information during the course of your research? What parts of this information will need to be confidential and how? Will you exhibit or publish the information? Will you retain information after the research is concluded? If information is to be destroyed, explain why this is appropriate.

All personal information disclosed by survey respondents and interviewees will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive. Responding to the online survey operates as informed consent to use the anonymous data provided in research outputs (research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet). Interviewees will be provided with and Information Sheet and Written Consent form, which specifies possible outputs (as above) and may decline to have specific information or quotes attributed to

12. Will payments to participants be made?

X	No. Go to Question 13
	Yes*

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

*If you answer 'Yes', please state amount and whether payment is for out-of-pocket expenses or a

13. If the project is to receive financial support from outside the University, please give details. Include any restrictions that have been imposed upon the conduct of the research. Please discuss this with your Director of Studies. Both financial propriety and the protection of commercial rights are important for you, the University and other third parties (e.g. sponsors, participants etc.)

14. Will any restrictions be placed on the publication of results?

X	No. Go to Question 15
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', please state the nature of the restrictions, e.g. details of any confidentiality agreement.

15. Have you attached a detailed outline of the research project to this form?

X	Yes, the detailed outline is attached
	No

Student Declaration:

16. I confirm my responsibility to deliver the project in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Ethics of the University of the Arts London (the University). In signing this form I am also confirming that:

a) The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

b) There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.

c) I undertake to conduct the project as set out in the application unless deviation is agreed by the University and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

d) I understand and accept that the ethical propriety of this project may be monitored by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

Signature of Student:	
Date *(dd/mm/yyyy)*	04/11/2020

Director of Studies Declaration:

17. I support this project and have reviewed it with the applicant.

Name:	Jeffrey Horsley
Signature of Director of Studies:	
Date *(dd/mm/yyyy):*	05 November 2020

SECTION B   **FOR UAL COMMITTEE USE ONLY**

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

Approval of Post-Registration Ethics (CRDSC):

- The College Research Degrees Sub-Committee (CRDSC) recommends that:

  This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **minimal ethical risk.** This decision and a copy of the form will be sent to RESC for noting at their next meeting.
  This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **more than minimal ethical risk** and so will be forwarded to RESC for final approval

X   This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted, and the following **required** modifications should be made (*see below*)

	A good application, with a few modifications to be made
	1) Clarity on what the role of students and staff at the university are – the study seems targeted at professionals in the museum context, there is no confirmation of how students and staff are involved.
	2) Further to the above point, if staff are to join the study, it is important to consider how that could affect biases in the results.
	3) There's discussion of the data being stored as part of a permanent public resource (eg. Research outputs) but managed by the researcher. Clarification needed here on how the researcher will store and manage the research data in context with University protocols.
	4) Further to the above, there isn't a right of withdrawal, therefore it will need to be clarified how the storage of the data will retain anonymity.
	5) It's stated that taking the survey will be taken as consent, but there needs to be a paragraph included within the survey clearly indicating what consent is being given.
Required Modifications List *(if applicable)*	**Cyana Madsen Modifications:**
	1) – While the survey is focused on professionals working in the field, due to crossover between practice and placement in collections settings, UAL students and staff may also be respondents to the survey. Additionally, students and staff who have previously practiced or do practice in public collections may be engaged for interviews over the course of the research.
	2) This is considered, however as both the survey and interviews are aiming to elicit responses on each practitioner's individual background and experience of working in the field, the expectation is that responses will be representative of the respondent and therefore may include bias.
	3) Please note survey will now be conducted vial UAL's Qualtrics account (rather than Surveymonkey, as was outlined in original application). The survey introduction will be clear that responses will be used as quantitative data in research output, as responses will be anonymous there will be no right of withdrawal, however data will be stored in Qualtrics (until deletion of the account) and on a password-protected external hard drive.
	Interview participants will be given a consent form which clearly indicates that their responses may be used in research output. They will be required to provide informed and signed consent and will be notified of their right to withdraw their participation at any time, and that their responses will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive in perpetuity.
	4) Please see #3 regarding interview participants right to withdrawal, for Survey participants, the anonymizing feature of UAL's Qualtrics account will be used to ensure anonymity of participants. This is facilitated (as per Qualtrics):
	When responses are gathered with the anonymous link, enabling this setting will remove the respondents' IP address and location data from your results. When responses are gathered with the individual link, enabling this setting will remove the IP address and location data and disconnect the response from the contact who provided it. In this way, you can know which contacts have responded (through your distribution history and contact history), but not which response belongs to which contact.
	5) A statement will be included in the introduction of the survey which clearly states that participation in the survey indicates consent in the information being gathered, analysed, and used in research output.

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

	i) It might be prudent that the researcher be open to the chances that the total number of participants in the study may change, given constantly shifting current circumstances.
Suggested Modifications List *(if applicable)*	**Cyana Madsen Modifications:** 1) Agreed, thank you!
Name	Agnes Rocamora & Sandy Black	**Date** *(dd/mm/yyyy)*	18.11.20
Signature *College Associate Dean of Research or Chair of CRDSC*			

Approval of Post-Registration Ethics (RESC):

- The Research Ethics Subcommittee (RESC) recommends that:

  This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **minimal ethical risk**
  This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **more than minimal ethical risk**
  This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted, and the following modifications should be made (see below)

Required Modifications List *(if applicable)*	
Suggested Modifications List *(if applicable)*	
Name	**Date** *(dd/mm/yyyy)*
Signature *Chair of RESC*	

Appendix 1 - Post-Registration Research Ethics Approval Form

Please note – you only need to complete this *Appendix 1 – Post-Registration Research Ethics Approval Form* **if you answered 'Yes' to Question 10 in Section A**

The Terrorism Act (2006) outlaws the dissemination of records, statements and other documents that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts. The University supports its researchers in undertaking research using security sensitive material, but takes seriously the need to protect them from the misinterpretation of intent by authorities, which can result in legal sanction. It is therefore important that the University is aware of the research before it begins and can ensure proper data management and oversight.

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

1. Does your research involve the storage on a computer of any such records, statements or other documents?
No
Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must respond to Question 3

2. Might your research involve the electronic transmission (e.g. as an email attachment) of such records or statements?
No
Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must respond to Question 3

3. If you answered 'Yes' to Questions 1 or 2, you are advised to store the relevant records or statements electronically on a secure university file store. The same applies to paper documents with the same sort of content. These should be scanned and uploaded. Access to this file store will be protected by a password unique to you. You agree to store all documents relevant to Questions 1 and 2 on that file store:
Yes
3a. You agree not to transmit electronically to any third party documents in the document store:
Yes

4. Will your research involve visits to websites that might be associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?
No.
Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must respond to Question 5

5. If you answer 'Yes' to Question 4, you are advised that such sites may be subject to surveillance by the police. Accessing those sites from university IP addresses might lead to police enquiries. Please acknowledge that you understand this risk by putting an 'X' in the 'Yes' box.

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

	Yes

6. By submitting to the ethics process, you accept that University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (RESC) will have access to a list of titles of documents (but not the contents of documents) in your document store. The titles will only be available to RESC.

Please acknowledge that you understand this risk by putting an 'X' in the 'Yes' box.

	Yes

Subject: Re: Research Ethics Meeting Dates

Date: Tuesday, 24 August 2021 at 13:15:39 British Summer Time

From: Felicity Colman

To: Cyana Madsen

CC: Daniel Taylor, Ellen Smith, Agnes Rocamora, Jeffrey Horsley

Hi Cyana

Thank you for the updates - yes I'm happy to sign off on this ethics application, please proceed with your work.

Kind Regards
Felicity

Professor Felicity Colman
professor of media arts
she/her

Associate Dean of Research
London College of Fashion
University of the Arts London
20 John Princes Street
London. W1G 0BJ
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 7588 407524
E: f.colman@arts.ac.uk
https://www.arts.ac.uk/research/ual-staff-researchers/felicity-colman

www.arts.ac.uk/fashion
Twitter I Facebook I Instagram

Please consider the environment before printing this email.

From: Cyana Madsen <c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk>
Sent: 24 August 2021 13:12
To: Felicity Colman <f.colman@arts.ac.uk>
Cc: Daniel Taylor <d.taylor@arts.ac.uk>; Ellen Smith <e.v.smith@fashion.arts.ac.uk>; Agnes Rocamora <a.rocamora@fashion.arts.ac.uk>; Jeffrey Horsley <j.horsley@fashion.arts.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Research Ethics Meeting Dates

Hi Felicity,

I hope all is well - following up on this to see if I need any further modifications, or if these have been accepted.

Thanks,
Cyana

Cyana Madsen
UAL PhD Candidate
c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk
cyanamadsen.com

From: Cyana Madsen <c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk>
Sent: 26 July 2021 17:44
To: Felicity Colman <f.colman@arts.ac.uk>
Cc: Daniel Taylor <d.taylor@arts.ac.uk>; Ellen Smith <e.v.smith@fashion.arts.ac.uk>; Agnes Rocamora <a.rocamora@fashion.arts.ac.uk>; Jeffrey Horsley <j.horsley@fashion.arts.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Research Ethics Meeting Dates

Hi Felicity,

I hope you are well, and didn't get too drenched in that downpour over the weekend!

Please see attached for my Research Ethics Application, with the modifications Agnès had requested. If you could please confirm once this has been accepted so I can proceed with constructing the survey and interviews, that would be great.

Thanks!
Cyana

Cyana Madsen
UAL PhD Candidate
c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk
cyanamadsen.com

From: Cyana Madsen <c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk>
Sent: 21 July 2021 15:14
To: Agnes Rocamora <a.rocamora@fashion.arts.ac.uk>
Cc: Daniel Taylor <d.taylor@arts.ac.uk>; Felicity Colman <f.colman@arts.ac.uk>; Ellen Smith <e.v.smith@fashion.arts.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Research Ethics Meeting Dates

Hi Agnès,

Thanks for the update RE: Chair's action, I'll likely have it done over the next few weeks, so I'll submit to Felicity.

That sounds like an ideal holiday, I hope it is restorative and fun- see you in September!
Cyana

Cyana Madsen
UAL PhD Candidate
c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk

ual:

Post-Registration Research Ethics Approval Form

Guidance:

- Please ensure that you have read the *'UAL Guidance for Research Ethics Approval'* and *'UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics'* before completing this form. All supporting documentation on research ethics can be found in the UAL Research Degrees section on Moodle
- Please complete this form electronically
- **Section A and Appendix 1** (if applicable) are to be completed by the student and supervisors
- **Section B** is for UAL Committee use only
- Once Section A (and Appendix 1 if necessary) has been completed, including all necessary signatures, the form should be submitted to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk by the student
- Incomplete forms, including any that are missing signatures, will be returned to the student for completion

---

SECTION A   **TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT**

Name:	**Cyana Madsen**
College:	**London College of Fashion**

1. Please provide a 100-word summary of your proposed research. Explain in terms appropriate to a layperson.

This primary research project will use observational study of professional practice and semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data on the experience of the curator during analysis of objects of worn dress. The observational study segments will additionally provide quantitive data in the form of gaze tokens (points on the 3D rendered garment used to identify where the participant is looking), which can then be used to create a fuller understanding of where a curator is looking at an object during analysis.

2. Does your research involve participants

	No*
X	Yes

*If you answer 'No', you do not need to complete Questions 3 to 12, instead please go to Question 13 and continue from there.

3. Who will the participants be? Please tick as appropriate.

	Students at the University
X	Staff at the University
X	Other*

*If you answered 'Other' please specify below

Working adult professionals in the discipline of fashion curation/dress collections.

4. How will participants be recruited and how many will be involved?

Participants are recruited via professional networks / 3-4 total

5. What will participants be asked to do? Explain in terms appropriate to a layperson.

This primary research project will consist of a test with Archives and Curatorial Assistant, LCF Archives Leah Gouget-Levy, and data collection with two voluntary external participants, who are professionals working in UK-based collections of dress. The project will consist of an observational study based at LCF John Princes Street, in JPS 305, wherein the participants:

* Wear eye gaze tracking equipment while looking at a computer screen with 3D images of three garments from LCF Archives collection. Participants will be free to use a mouse to manipulate the garment and perform visual analysis (30 minutes duration).
* Short comfort break (10 minutes duration).
* Wear head-mounted GoPro camera and perform material culture analysis on the same three garments used in the visual analysis portion. They will be free to use their own process in analysing the garments, while adhering to LCF Archives object-handling standards of wearing nitrile gloves and using a pencil for any note-taking. In addition to the GoPro camera, a second camera with microphone will be positioned in the room with a live feed to where I am observing the footage from a separate JPS classroom. (45 minutes duration).
* Short comfort break (10 minutes).
* Participate in semi-structured interview on their professional curatorial practice and experience, the methods employed during the observational study, and any relevant personal experience related to their work with collections of dress (85 minutes duration).

6. What potential risks to the interests of participants do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? A participant's interests include their physical and psychological well-being, their commercial interests; and their rights of privacy and reputation.

Potential risks to participants are in the recording of the analysis and their responses to the interview. The participants will be fully informed in an information disclosure and consent form (attached) of what is being recorded, that they have the right to stop the study and cease participation at any point with no repercussions to themselves. Participants will have the option to consent to use of their name or a pseudonym to identify them in research outputs, to provide explicit consent for the gathering and use of any audio and video recordings made during the three stages of the study.

The recordings will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive that only I have access to, and they will be able to obtain a copy of any and all recordings on demand. Recordings will be kept for ten years after the completion of this PhD research, at which point they will be destroyed.

Any publication of the images of the participants (rather than the data collected during study) will require their explicit informed consent. The eye gaze tracking equipment and GoPro head mount are both safe equipment constructed with the wearer's comfort in mind, however, the participants will be informed that they can remove them at any time should they prove uncomfortable.

UAL and UK government COVID guidance will be followed regarding ventilation in study areas, face coverings, and social distancing.

7. What potential risks do you foresee to yourself as the researcher and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? E.g. does your research raise issues of personal safety for you or others involved in the project, especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises.

None foreseen, COVID guidance will be followed as above.

8. Please attach a copy of proposed written consent form and information sheet to be given to participants. If you are not obtaining written consent or supplying an information sheet, please explain the reasons for this.

X	Please tick here if the written consent form and information sheet are attached

9. Does your project involve children or vulnerable adults? E.g. a person with a learning disability.

X	No. Go to Question 10
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must refer to Section 4 in the 'Guidance for Research Ethics Approval' AND obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly known as a CRB check).

	I confirm that I have obtained a DBS check

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

10. Does your research concern groups which may be construed as terrorist or extremist?

X	No. Go to Question 11
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must refer to Section 5.5 in the *'Guidance for Research Ethics Approval'* AND complete the questionnaire at Appendix 1 of this form.

Please Note:

It is a presumption of academic research that, wherever possible and feasible, the information on which the research is based should be preserved, so that it can be made available to future researchers. However, the privacy of participants must be respected. Please refer to the guidance note on data protection before answering Question 11.

---

11. Will you be obtaining personal information from any of the participants? E.g. name, personal opinions, address, recorded images or audio, date of birth, notes and observations

	No. Go to Question 12
X	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', please give details. In your response, please consider: How will you store and use this information during the course of your research? What parts of this information will need to be confidential and how? Will you exhibit or publish the information? Will you retain information after the research is concluded? If information is to be destroyed, explain why this is appropriate.

Information on the participants personal history may be disclosed during responses in the semi-structured interview. The participant has the right to request omission of any answers they provide at any point. Personal information will be stored and disposed of as indicated in question 6.

---

12. Will payments to participants be made?

X	No. Go to Question 13
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', please state amount and whether payment is for out-of-pocket expenses or a

---

13. If the project is to receive financial support from outside the University, please give details. Include any restrictions that have been imposed upon the conduct of the research. Please discuss this with your Director of Studies. Both financial propriety and the protection of commercial rights are important for you, the University and other third parties (e.g. sponsors, participants etc.)

N/A

14. Will any restrictions be placed on the publication of results?

X	No. Go to Question 15
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', please state the nature of the restrictions, e.g. details of any confidentiality agreement.

15. Have you attached a detailed outline of the research project to this form?

X	Yes, the detailed outline is attached
	No

Student Declaration:

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

16. I confirm my responsibility to deliver the project in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Ethics of the University of the Arts London (the University). In signing this form I am also confirming that:

a) The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

b) There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.

c) I undertake to conduct the project as set out in the application unless deviation is agreed by the University and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

d) I understand and accept that the ethical propriety of this project may be monitored by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

Signature of Student:	
Date (dd/mm/yyyy):	01/03/2022

Director of Studies Declaration:

17. I support this project and have reviewed it with the applicant.

Name:	Jeffrey Horsley
Signature of Director of Studies:	
Date (dd/mm/yyyy):	01 March 2022

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

Approval of Post-Registration Ethics (CRDSC):

- The College Research Degrees Sub-Committee (CRDSC) recommends that:

X This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **minimal ethical risk.** This decision and a copy of the form will be sent to RESC for noting at their next meeting.

This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **more** than minimal ethical risk and so will be forwarded to RESC for final approval

This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted, and the following **required** modifications should be made (see below)

Required Modifications List (if applicable)	na		
Suggested Modifications List (if applicable)	na		
Name	Prof Agnès Rocamora	**Date** (dd/mm/yyyy)	31 March 22
Signature College Associate Dean of Research or Chair of CRDSC			

Approval of Post-Registration Ethics (RESC):

- The Research Ethics Subcommittee (RESC) recommends that:

This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **minimal ethical risk**

This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form is approved as **more than minimal ethical risk**

This student's Post-Registration Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted, and the following modifications should be made (see below)

Required Modifications List (if applicable)			
Suggested Modifications List (if applicable)			
Name		**Date** (dd/mm/yyyy)	

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

Signature
Chair of RESC

Appendix 1 - Post-Registration Research Ethics Approval Form

Please note – you only need to complete this *Appendix 1 – Post-Registration Research Ethics Approval Form* if you answered 'Yes' to Question 10 in Section A

The Terrorism Act (2006) outlaws the dissemination of records, statements and other documents that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts. The University supports its researchers in undertaking research using security sensitive material, but takes seriously the need to protect them from the misinterpretation of intent by authorities, which can result in legal sanction. It is therefore important that the University is aware of the research before it begins and can ensure proper data management and oversight.

1. Does your research involve the storage on a computer of any such records, statements or other documents?
No
Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must respond to Question 3

2. Might your research involve the electronic transmission (e.g. as an email attachment) of such records or statements?
No
Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must respond to Question 3

3. If you answered 'Yes' to Questions 1 or 2, you are advised to store the relevant records or statements electronically on a secure university file store. The same applies to paper documents with the same sort of content. These should be scanned and uploaded. Access to this file store will be protected by a password unique to you. You agree to store all documents relevant to Questions 1 and 2 on that file store:
Yes
3a. You agree not to transmit electronically to any third party documents in the document store:
Yes

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

4. Will your research involve visits to websites that might be associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	
	No.
	Yes*

*If you answer 'Yes', you must respond to Question 5

5. if you answer 'Yes' to Question 4, you are advised that such sites may be subject to surveillance by the police. Accessing those sites from university IP addresses might lead to police enquiries. Please acknowledge that you understand this risk by putting an 'X' in the 'Yes' box.
Yes

6. By submitting to the ethics process, you accept that University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (RESC) will have access to a list of titles of documents (but not the contents of documents) in your document store. The titles will only be available to RESC. Please acknowledge that you understand this risk by putting an 'X' in the 'Yes' box.
Yes

Completed forms should be sent to researchdegrees@arts.ac.uk

UK Fashion and Dress-based Collection Practitioner Survey

Informed Consent

Curating Dress in the UK

Participant Information and Consent Form

This survey contributes to an AHRC Technē-funded doctoral research project based out of the Centre for Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (UAL). The field of fashion- and dress-based studies is rapidly growing, and this survey hopes to establish a base of understanding about the people doing this work, and the tools they are using to study objects.

The aim of this survey is to gather **general demographic and experiential information about the people working with objects of dress in UK** archives and collections. The data collected in this survey will be compiled, analysed and published as part of a final PhD thesis (with potential conference or additional published outputs e.g., journal articles) examining the experiences of those practitioners working with objects of dress.

We invite responses from **all practitioners based in the UK over the age**

of 18, at any stage of their career, who at some point in their professional or creative practice have worked with clothing in a public collection or archive. We understand that those working with objects of dress will be employed under a range of job titles, and may not work exclusively in one collection, or a collection that is specific to only dress objects.

This survey should take approximately **15-25 minutes** of your time during which you will be asked a series of questions about your background and experience.

You are under no obligation to participate in this survey, and at any point you can select "Prefer not to say" or skip any questions you do not want to answer. You are also free to withdraw completely from the study without giving a reason. You can withdraw by simply closing your browser before you submit your responses. Please note that, due to the anonymous nature of the study, it will not be possible to withdraw and ask for your data to be destroyed after you have submitted your responses. The researcher will not be able to identify them.

Privacy and Data Protection

The information you provide in this survey is voluntary, anonymous, and will be held in strict confidence. Data is collected via the Qualtrics survey platform, your answers are anonymised and will be stored on a password-protected external drive for up to 10 years after the completion of the research. On request, updated information about the data and research

can be provided to participants. Data collected will be analysed and stored following the Data Protection Act 2018 and according to the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

Some questions may ask you to explain your answer, in these instances please provide general answers about your wider practice, rather than specific instances or examples which might identify you.

The methodology of this survey is based in part on demographic surveys of the Office for National Statistics and the *Making It Work* survey by The Fashion Studies Journal.

If you have any questions or require more information prior to participating in this survey, please contact:

Cyana Madsen

c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge:

- You understand that this survey contributes to AHRC Technē-funded academic research on curators of dress in the UK, supported

I consent, begin the survey

I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Block 4

The first section of this survey will gather demographic data on **who** is working with dress-based archives and collections in the UK.

We understand that identity is complex, may not be easily definable, will vary from person to person, and that your description may depend on where you are located in the UK.

The categories provided are based on guidelines for data being collected in England as provided by the Office for National Statistics, and are used to facilitate consistency and comparability of responses.

Please use the option to self-describe if needed, in order to help us record the many facets of our colleagues.

About You

What is your **ethnic group**?

Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background. If you feel that no option provided describes you, please provide your own.

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

African

Caribbean

Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe:

[   ]

Asian/Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Any other Asian background, please describe:

[   ]

White

English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British

Irish

Gypsy or Irish Traveller

Any other White background, please describe:

> [   ]

Other ethnic group

Arab

Any other ethnic group, please describe:

> [   ]

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups

Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe:

> [   ]

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe

> [   ]

What is your **religious belief**?

Note: The Office for National Statistics identifies religious belief as those "typically expected to be held by followers of a religion and how important those beliefs are to a person's life". If you feel that no option provided best describes you, please provide your own.

Buddhist

Hindu

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Agnostic

Atheist

No religion

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe

What is your **gender**?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe

What is your **sexuality**?

Gay

Lesbian

Straight

Bisexual

Pansexual

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe

Do you have a **disability**?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe

What is your **age**?

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65 - 74

75 - 84

85 or older

Prefer not to say

Where do you **reside**?

Wales

England

Northern Ireland

Scotland

Prefer not to say

Other

Is your **place of work** in the **same nation** as your **residence**?

Yes

No (Please specify nation you work in)

Prefer not to say

What best describes your **current job title**? (Select all that apply)

Professor

Lecturer

Curator

Conservator

Archivist

Collections Care

Registrar

Artist

Independent Researcher

BA Student

MA Student

Doctoral Student/Candidate

Postdoctoral Fellow

Not currently employed

Job seeker

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self-describe

What is the **highest level of formal education** you hold?

Doctorate / PhD

MPhil

MA

MFA

BA

GSCE

A Level

Prefer not to say

Other

Do you hold **specialist certification** outside of formal education?

Yes (Please describe)

No

Prefer not to say

Are you **currently** pursuing or **planning** to pursue **further formal education** or **specialist training**?

Yes (Please describe)

Maybe (Please describe)

[text input box]

No

Prefer not to say

Has the **primary focus** of your **education** been concerned with aspects of **dress-based objects**?

Yes

No (Please indicate your primary field of study)

[text input box]

Prefer not to say

Intro To Practice Questions

The next section seeks to find out about **your work** in **archives and collections**.

Reflect on your **individual** (rather than organisational) **creative** or **professional practice** with **objects of dress** (defined as clothing, shoes, accessories, or other objects for adorning the body) in responding to the

following questions.

If restrictions due to COVID-19 have meant that you are currently working from home and not working directly with objects, please reflect on your **past practice** and answer based on this experience.

Analysis

Is your **day-to-day creative/professional activity** based in any of the following (choose all that apply):

Public Archive / Collection
Private Archive / Collection
Gallery
Museum
Studio
Prefer not to say
Other (please specify)

Is the **primary focus** of your **day-to-day working activity** spent with **objects with dress**?

Yes

No

Sometimes (Please explain)

In the course of your practice, do you **perform close study** or **analysis** of **objects of dress**?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

If you answered yes to the previous question, how **frequently** do you **analyse/close study objects of dress**?

Daily

2-4 times a week

Once a week

Monthly

Other (please specify)

Prefer not to say

How many **years** has analysis/close study of objects of dress been a part of your **creative/professional activity**?

Less than one year
1-5 years
6-10 years
11-15 years
16-20 years
21-25 years
26-30 years
Over 30 years
Prefer not to say

When you **analyse/engage in close study of objects of dress**, do you use a **formal methodology** in the process?
(e.g., the material culture theory and method suggested by Jules David Prown (1982), or *The Slow Approach to Seeing* (2015) methodology developed by Ingrid E. Mida and Alexandra Kim)

Yes (Please specify)

No

Prefer not to say

If you answered 'yes' to previous question, where did you **learn** this
methodology? (Select any that apply)

Formal education

Specialist training

Colleagues / Co-workers

Individual study

Developed independently

Other (Please specify)

Prefer not to say

Do you use any of the following **methods** in the **analysis/close study of
objects of dress** (Select any that apply):

Drawing / Sketching

Painting

Photography

Creative writing (e.g., journalling, stream of consciousness)

Remaking / Sewing

Pattern-making

Measurement (e.g., length, width, weight)

Descriptive writing (e.g., colour, texture, design)

Other (Please specify)

```

```

None

Prefer not to say

If you answered 'yes' to previous question, where did you **learn** these methods? (Select any that apply)

Formal education

Specialist training

Colleagues / Co-workers

Individual study

Developed independently

Other (Please specify)

```

```

Prefer not to say

Are any of the **outputs/information** gathered from these methods **included in the collection/archive documentation or database**?

Yes

Sometimes (Please explain)

[text box]

No

Prefer not to say

Which of the **outputs/information** gathered from these methods **included** in the **collection/archive documentation or database**? (Select any that apply)

Drawing/Sketching

Painting

Photography

Creative writing (e.g., journalling, stream of consciousness)

Remaking/Sewing

Pattern-making

Measurement (e.g., length, width, weight)

Descriptive writing (e.g., colour, texture, design)

Other (Please specify)

[text box]

Does not apply

Prefer not to say

Do you **apply identical methods** and/or **methodologies** to **each object** you analyse/study?

Yes

No

Sometimes (Please explain)

[text box]

Prefer not to say

If you answered 'no' to the previous question, **please explain why**: (Select all that apply)

Time constraints

Availability of materials/tools

Not appropriate to study of object

Access to object does not allow application of this method

Other (Please specify)

[text box]

Prefer not to say

Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you consult available **donor or original wearer information** (e.g., notes, interviews) about the object?
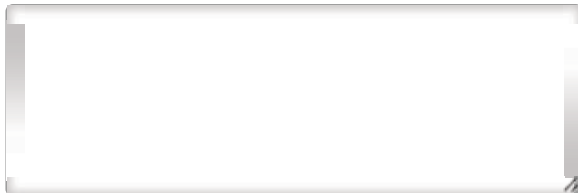
Yes

Sometimes (Please explain)

No

Prefer not to say

Not applicable

Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with **colleagues**?
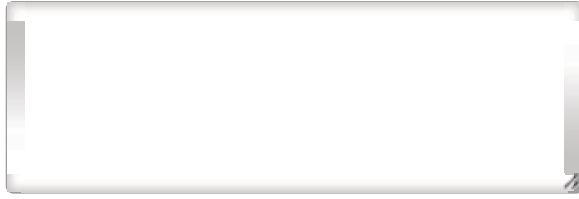
Yes

Sometimes (Please explain)
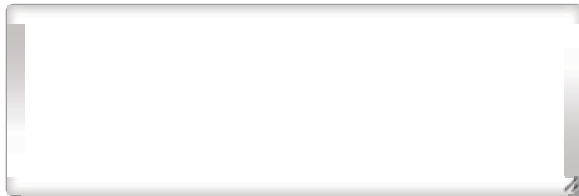
No

Prefer not to say

Not applicable

When you are analysing/studying an object, are you in a **dedicated study**

space (e.g., Collections store, office with examining table)?

Yes (Please generally describe type of space)

[ ]

Sometimes (Please generally describe type of space)

[ ]

No (Please generally describe type of space)

[ ]
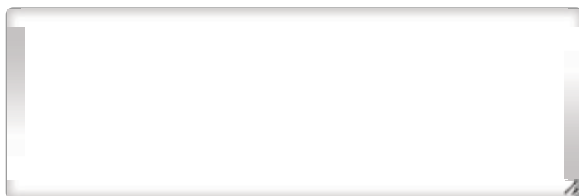
Prefer not to say

Not applicable
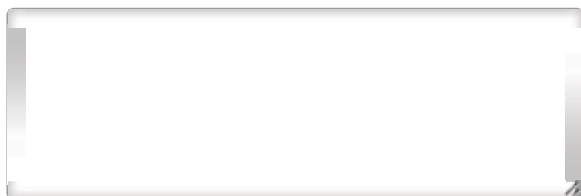
During analysis/close study, is working with the object the **sole focus** of your time?

Yes

Sometimes (Please explain)

[ ]

No (Please explain)

[text box]

Prefer not to say

Not applicable
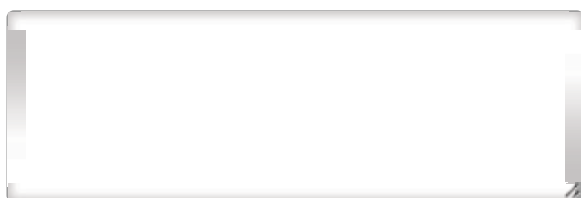
Documentation

When you use descriptive writing to document object **colour**, do you use a formal guide (e.g., Munsell, Pantone)?

Yes (Please specify)

[text box]

Sometimes (Please specify)

[text box]

No

Prefer not to say

Not applicable

When you use descriptive writing to document object **texture**, do you use a formal guide (e.g., Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Ancien (CIETA) Vocabulary of technical terms: Fabrics)?

Yes (Please specify)

Sometimes (Please specify)

No
Prefer not to say
Not applicable

When you use descriptive writing to document object **design**, do you use a formal guide (e.g., ICOM Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume)

Yes (Please specify)

Sometimes (Please specify)

[text input box]

No

Prefer not to say
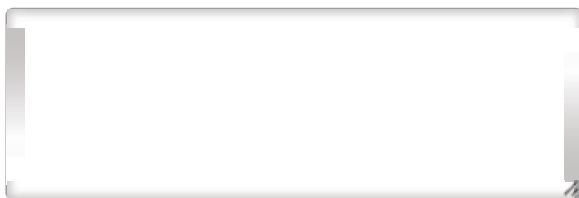
Not applicable

When you use descriptive writing to document object **condition**, do you use a formal guide? (e.g., SHARE Museums East Condition Reoporting Crib Sheet)

Yes (Please specify)

[text input box]

Sometimes (Please specify)

[text input box]

No

Prefer not to say

Not applicable

Do you use a **collections database management system** to **document descriptions** of objects of dress?

Yes (Please specify which software e.g., EMu, Axiell Collections)

Sometimes (Please specify)

No
Prefer not to say
Not applicable

If you answered **no** to the previous question, **how do you document descriptions** of objects?

Please specify

Not applicable

When **documenting** objects, do you include available **donor or original wearer information** regarding description of the object?

Yes

Sometimes (Please specify)
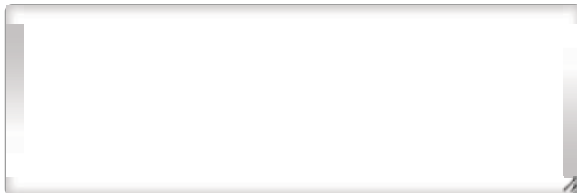
```
[                    ]
```

No

Prefer not to say

Not applicable

When documenting objects, do you **consult with colleagues** regarding descriptions?

Yes

Sometimes (Please specify)

```
[                    ]
```

No

Prefer not to say

Not applicable

When documenting objects, is **recording information** the **sole focus** of

your time?

    Yes

    Sometimes (Please specify)

    No

    Prefer not to say

    Not applicable

Block 7

Thank you for your time and honesty.

If you would like an update on this research project or would like to be contacted about participating in further research into the experiences of practitioners working with objects of dress, please contact:

Cyana Madsen

c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk

This study is considered to be minimal risk and as such should not have had any negative impact on you. However, if the study has harmed you in any way or you wish to make a complaint about its conduct, you can contact:
researchethics@arts.ac.uk

70 Responses

70 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
By clicking the button below, you acknowledge: You understand that this survey contributes to AHRC Technē-funded academic research on curators of dress in the UK, supported by UAL. Your participation in the study is voluntary and anonymous. You are over 18 years of age. You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation completely at any time before submitting your responses, without giving a reason. You consent for your answers to be used in the above stated research project and subsequent research outputs.	1	1	1	0	0	70

70 Responses

Field	Percentage
I consent, begin the survey	100.00%
I do not consent, I do not wish to participate	0.00%

Question 1 - What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background. If you feel that no option provided describes you, please provide your own.

70 Responses

70 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background. If you feel that no option provided describes you, please provide your own. - Selected Choice	9	17	10	1	2	70

70 Responses

Field	Percentage
African	0.00%
Caribbean	0.00%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe:	0.00%
Indian	0.00%
Pakistani	0.00%
Bangladeshi	0.00%
Chinese	0.00%
Any other Asian background, please describe:	0.00%
English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	78.57%
Irish	2.86%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.00%
Any other White background, please describe:	15.71%
Arab	1.43%
Any other ethnic group, please describe:	0.00%
Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe:	0.00%
Prefer not to say	0.00%
Prefer to self-describe	1.43%

10 Responses

Any other White background, please describe: - Text

New Zealand pakeha / British

American

New Zealand

German/British dual citizenship

European

1 Responses

Prefer to self-describe - Text

Mediterranean

Question 2 - What is your religious belief? Note: The Office for National Statistics identifies religious belief as those "typically expected to be held by followers of a religion and how important those beliefs are to a person's life". If you feel that no option provided best describes you, please provide your own.

68 Responses

68 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
What is your religious belief? Note: The Office for National Statistics identifies religious belief as those "typically expected to be held by followers of a religion and how important those beliefs are to a person's life". If you feel that no option provided best describes you, please provide your own. - Selected Choice	3	11	7	3	7	68

68 Responses

Field	Percentage
Buddhist	0.00%
Hindu	0.00%
Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	27.94%
Jewish	0.00%
Muslim	1.47%
Sikh	0.00%
Agnostic	4.41%
Atheist	17.65%
No religion	38.24%
Prefer not to say	7.35%
Prefer to self-describe	2.94%

Question 3 - What is your gender?

69 Responses
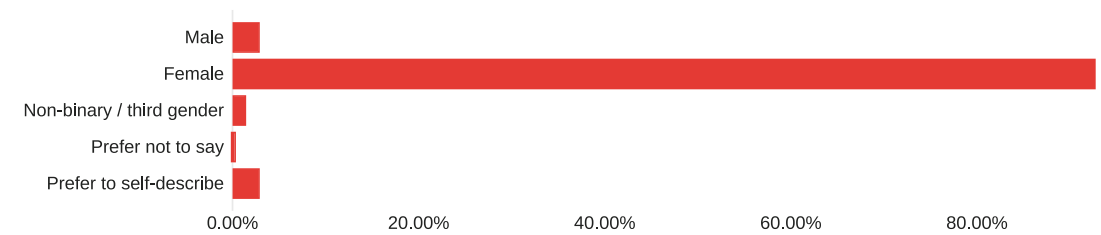
69 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
What is your gender? - Selected Choice	1	5	2	1	0	69

69 Responses

Field		Percentage
Male	100.00%	2.90%
Female	100.00%	92.75%
Non-binary / third gender	100.00%	1.45%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Prefer to self-describe	100.00%	2.90%
Total		

7

Question 4 - What is your sexuality?

70 Responses
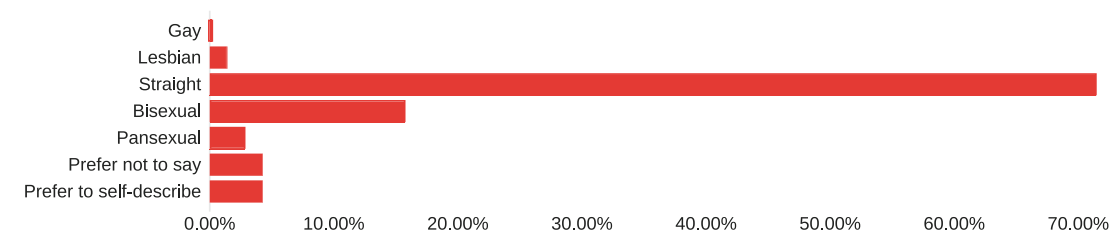
70 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
What is your sexuality? - Selected Choice	2	7	4	1	1	70

Field	Percentage	
Gay	100.00%	0.00%
Lesbian	100.00%	1.43%
Straight	100.00%	71.43%
Bisexual	100.00%	15.71%
Pansexual	100.00%	2.86%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	4.29%
Prefer to self-describe	100.00%	4.29%
Total		

1 Responses

Prefer to self-describe - Text

Asexual, panromantic

Question 5 - Do you have a disability?

70 Responses
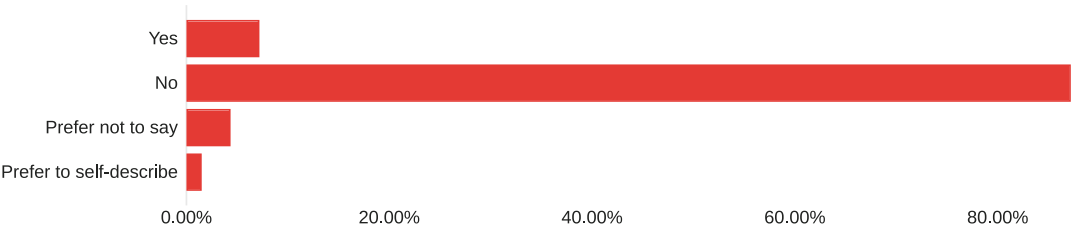
70 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Do you have a disability? - Selected Choice	1	4	2	0	0	70

70 Responses

Field	Percentage	
Yes	100.00%	7.14%
No	100.00%	87.14%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	4.29%
Prefer to self-describe	100.00%	1.43%
Total		

Question 6 - What is your age?

70 Responses

Age	Percentage
18 - 24	
25 - 34	
35 - 44	
45 - 54	
55 - 64	
65 - 74	
75 - 84	
85 or older	
Prefer not to say	

0.00%   5.00%   10.00%   15.00%   20.00%   25.00%   30.00%   35.00%
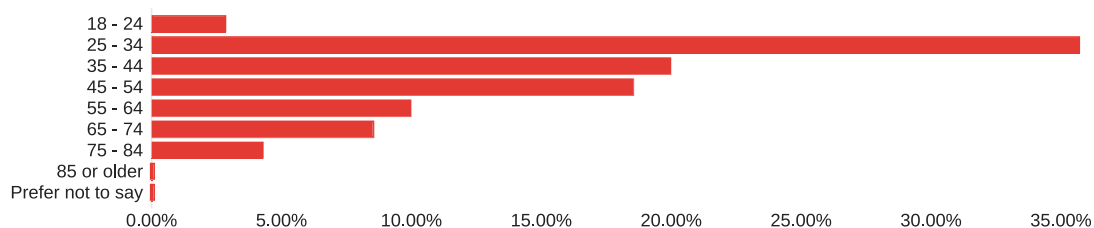
70 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
What is your age?	1	7	3	2	2	70

70 Responses

Field		Percentage
18 - 24	100.00%	2.86%
25 - 34	100.00%	35.71%
35 - 44	100.00%	20.00%
45 - 54	100.00%	18.57%
55 - 64	100.00%	10.00%
65 - 74	100.00%	8.57%
75 - 84	100.00%	4.29%
85 or older	100.00%	0.00%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

Question 7 - Where do you reside?

70 Responses

Place	
Wales	
England	
Northern Ireland	
Scotland	
Prefer not to say	
Other	

0.00%   20.00%   40.00%   60.00%   80.00%
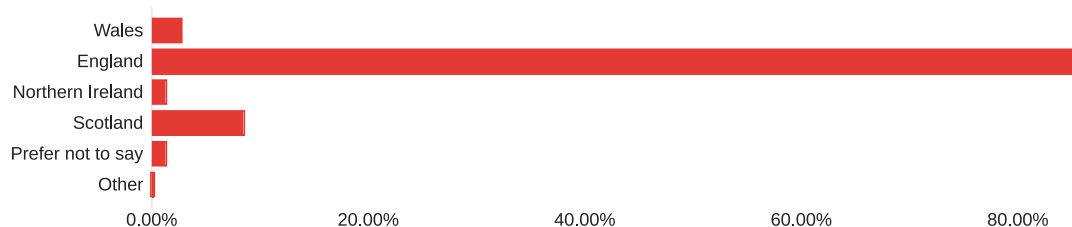
70 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Where do you reside? - Selected Choice	1	5	2	1	0	70

Field	Percentage	
Wales	100.00%	2.86%
England	100.00%	85.71%
Northern Ireland	100.00%	1.43%
Scotland	100.00%	8.57%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	1.43%
Other	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

Question 8 - Is your place of work in the same nation as your residence?

68 Responses
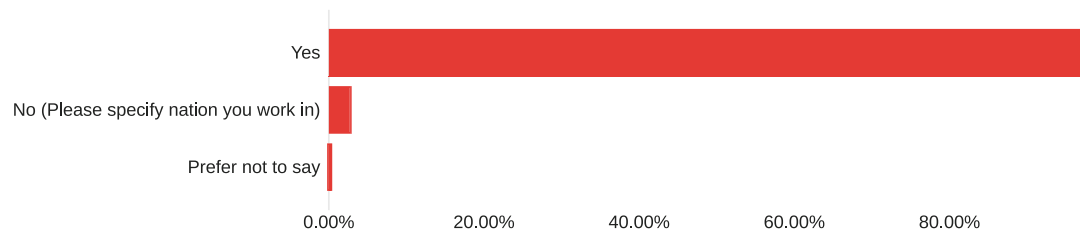
68 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Is your place of work in the same nation as your residence? - Selected Choice	1	2	1	0	0	68

68 Responses

Field	Percentage	
Yes	100.00%	97.06%
No (Please specify nation you work in)	100.00%	2.94%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

2 Responses

No (Please specify nation you work in) - Text

I'm retired, so nolonger employed
Scotland

Question 9 - What best describes your current job title? (Select all that apply)

68 Responses
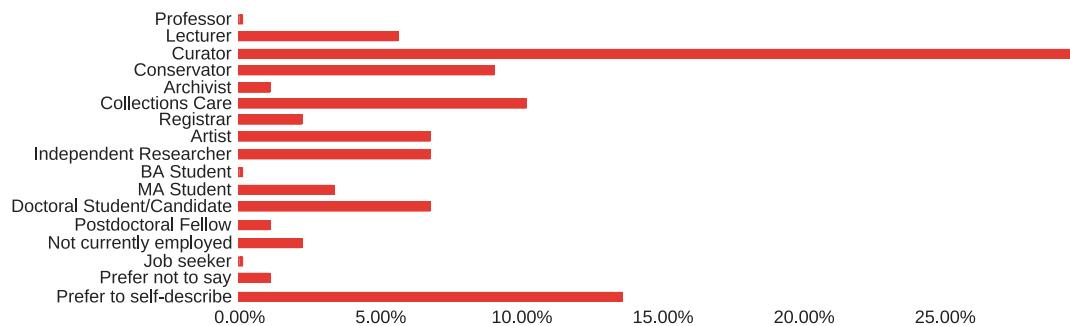
68 Responses

Field	Percentage of Choices	
Professor	100.00%	0.00%
Lecturer	100.00%	5.68%
Curator	100.00%	29.55%
Conservator	100.00%	9.09%
Archivist	100.00%	1.14%
Collections Care	100.00%	10.23%
Registrar	100.00%	2.27%
Artist	100.00%	6.82%
Independent Researcher	100.00%	6.82%
BA Student	100.00%	0.00%
MA Student	100.00%	3.41%
Doctoral Student/Candidate	100.00%	6.82%
Postdoctoral Fellow	100.00%	1.14%
Not currently employed	100.00%	2.27%
Job seeker	100.00%	0.00%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	1.14%
Prefer to self-describe	100.00%	13.64%
Total		

12 Responses

Prefer to self-describe - Text

Volunteer

Auctioneer

Retired curator

I was a curator, managing a Social History collection with a large costume section

Collector

Project Manager

Engagement Officer

Costume Mounter

Museum volunteer. Freelance dress and textile advisor

Editor, trustee and writer

Costume mounter :)

Retired textile conservator

Question 10 - What is the highest level of formal education you hold?

68 Responses
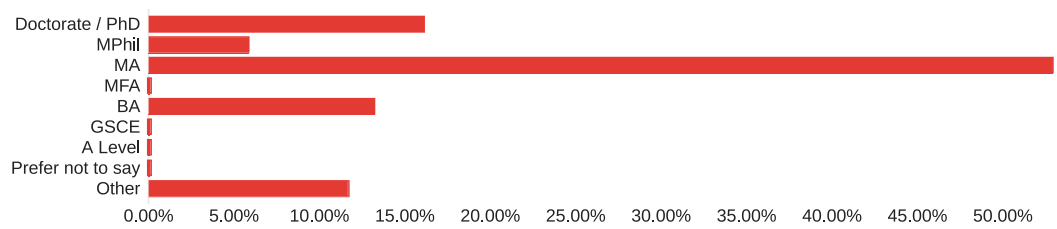
Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
What is the highest level of formal education you hold? - Selected Choice	1	9	4	2	5	68

68 Responses

Field		Percentage
Doctorate / PhD	100.00%	16.18%
MPhil	100.00%	5.88%
MA	100.00%	52.94%
MFA	100.00%	0.00%
BA	100.00%	13.24%
GSCE	100.00%	0.00%
A Level	100.00%	0.00%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Other	100.00%	11.76%
Total		

7 Responses

Other - Text
BSc
B Sc PGCE AKC
DipAD 1968
MSc
PG Diploma
CCHD
Postgraduate Diploma

Question 11 - Do you hold specialist certification outside of formal education?

65 Responses
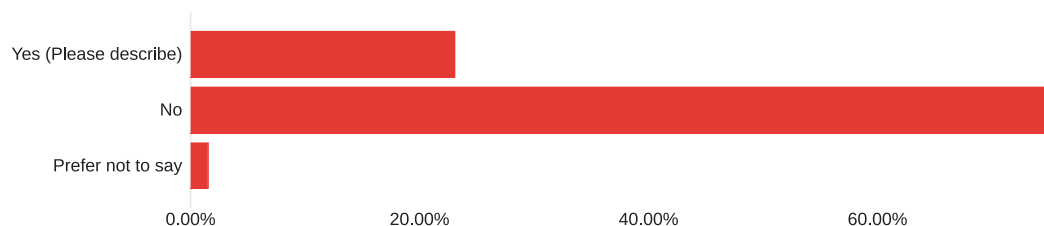
65 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Do you hold specialist certification outside of formal education? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	0	0	65

65 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please describe)	100.00%	23.08%
No	100.00%	75.38%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	1.54%
Total		

14 Responses

Yes (Please describe) - Text
Conservation Accreditation
Associate Membership of the Museums Association - AMA (UK)
Project Management - Prince 2
Accredited Conservator Restorer
Associate of Museums Association (AMA)
I have a fork lift truck licence
Museums Diploma
Associateship of the Museums Association
Accredited Conservator (ACR) awarded by the Institute of Conservation (ICON)
CIM Certificate in Marketing
Fellow, Museums Association
Associateship of the Museums Association
Associate of the Museums Association (UK)
Accredited Conservator-Restorer from Icon

Question 12 - Are you currently pursuing or planning to pursue further formal education or specialist training?

68 Responses
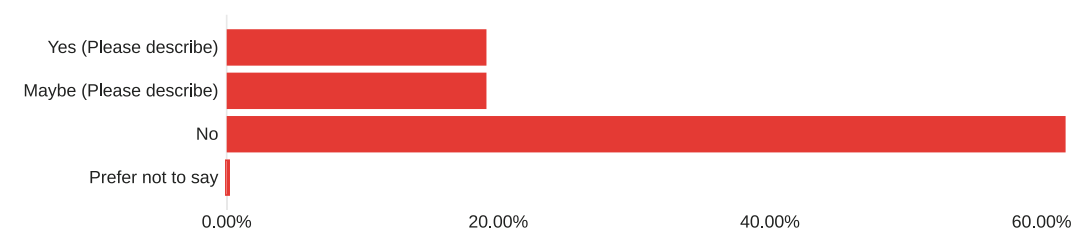
68 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Are you currently pursuing or planning to pursue further formal education or specialist training? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	68

68 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please describe)	100.00%	19.12%
Maybe (Please describe)	100.00%	19.12%
No	100.00%	61.76%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

13 Responses

Yes (Please describe) - Text
PhD
Currently studying MA Not sure if I will take up a PhD in the future
Possibly a Phd depending on funding, it may never happen
I'm a Phd candidate
Museums Association AMA
Post graduate certificate in advanced practice
PhD in Fashion Curation (applying)
AMA, masters
Hoping to undertake a PhD at some stage in the near future.
Completing a doctorate
Currently pursuing a doctorate in history
Planning for phd
PGCHE

Question 13 - Has the primary focus of your education been concerned with aspects of dress-based objects?

66 Responses

	0.00%	20.00%	40.00%
Yes			
No (Please indicate your primary field of ...			
Prefer not to say			
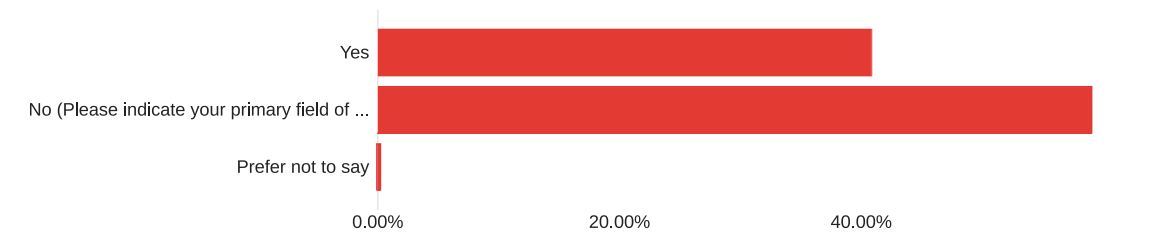
66 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Has the primary focus of your education been concerned with aspects of dress-based objects? - Selected Choice	1	2	2	0	0	66

66 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	40.91%
No (Please indicate your primary field of study)	100.00%	59.09%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

37 Responses

No (Please indicate your primary field of study) - Text

I studied English Literature

Xx

Collections Management

My primary field of study has been history [BA, MA (first class hons), MA (RCA), PhD]. Within that I have frequently focused on dress-based objects but not exclusively.

Object conservation

Physics

Archaeology

Art (painting)

Archaeology

Indirectly more broad based social studies

Textile conservation - all textile based objects

History of Art

Art history/local history

Museum Studies, Archaeology

Museum Studies

Media

First degree in Psychology, MA in Seventeenth Century Studies, MA in Museum Studies

Textile conservation

Decorative Art including but not limited to dress-based objects

Object based, not necessarily focused on dress.

Archaeology

History of Art, focused on Architectural History

English literature (BA), Museum Studies (PG Dip)

History of Art and Anthropology

History (early modern popular and gender politics)

Art History

Mix of dress and textiles

My first degree was BA(Hons) FAshioand and Textile design specialising in Contour Fashion. I worked for 11 years i garment manufacturing working for a supplier to a major high street retailer.

Museum and heritage studies

Museum studies

Design History

History and ethnography (not no focus on material culture)

Museum studies/history

Japanese studies and art history

Archaeology as an undergraduate, followed by Museums Studies in Art, and AMA in Art.

Object conservation

History

Question 14 - Is your day-to-day creative/professional activity based in any of the following (choose all that apply):

65 Responses
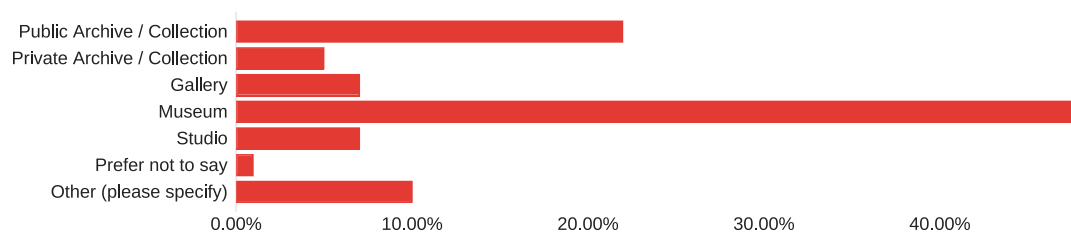
Field	Percentage of Choices
Public Archive / Collection	22.00%
Private Archive / Collection	5.00%
Gallery	7.00%
Museum	48.00%
Studio	7.00%
Prefer not to say	1.00%
Other (please specify)	10.00%

65 Responses

10 Responses

Other (please specify) - Text
The collection is a university teaching collection so not completely public.
Stately Home
Auction house
at home
NA
The above applied to my work when I was employed
Heritage organisation
At home
Interviews
Textile Conservation Studio - National Trust

Question 15 - Is the primary focus of your day-to-day working activity spent with objects with dress?

63 Responses
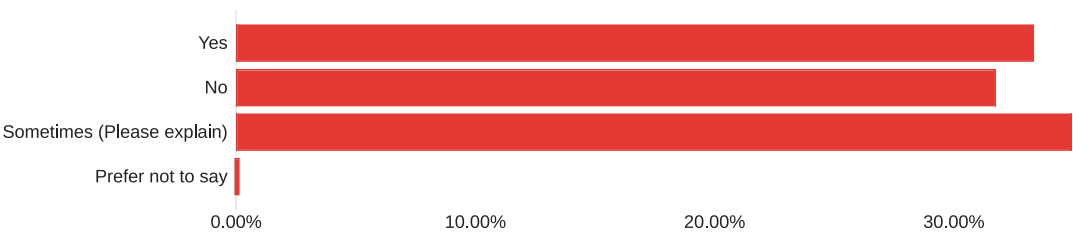
63 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Is the primary focus of your day-to-day working activity spent with objects with dress? - Selected Choice	1.00	3.00	2.02	0.83	0.68	63

63 Responses

Field	Percentage
Yes	33%
No	32%
Sometimes (Please explain)	35%
Prefer not to say	0%

21 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

I care for a wide range of collections and objects of dress form part of these collections.

My day to day workload & objectives varies, but I have spent a significant amount of time recently curating a costume exhibition

My fellowship is in theory related to fashion and textiles, but I have been focusing on digital outputs rather than actual objects.

I was a Keeper of Social History, so wasn't working exclusively with dress

My day to day work is with objects of dress, however, not always physically with collections.

I'm the Fine and Decorative Arts Curator with responsibility for fine art, decorative art, costume and textiles.

Working on the production of exhibitions, the level to which I work with objects varies for each project. On smaller displays, I handle most objects, visit archives and manage condition reporting

I curate a human history collection of which costume and textiles is a sub-collection.

Textiles and dress

My role has become more 'managerial' in recent years, so I spend more time with attending meetings, administration, line management.

I work with a collection of fine and decorative art which includes dress and textiles

Before the covid restructure, I was the Assistant Curator of Costume and Textiles. Because of covid, all the subject specialist roles went. I still work with the dress and textiles collection, and am the most experienced with textiles in the curatorial team, but I also work across the whole of the collection now (buildings and objects, post-medieval, including social and military history).

Curatorial remit also includes textiles. Currently at end of middle-management transfer that entails line & non-curatorial remit project management responsibilites

Our Museums/Galleries hold objects of dress which we occasionally work with

I am a fashion designer so work with clothing very often in making it. When studying it, I usually rely on interviews as I am studying clothing systems rather than the design of garments themselves.

I work with a wide variety of textiles, some fo which are dress based. e.g. I am currently discussing and supporting work on a Court mantua c.1748. I have worked on several pieces of 17th century men's dress. However my primary conservation pratice at the moment is the treatment of a tapestry c.1720.

Contextual work with archival and art historical material alongside research involving dress collections

Dress is part of the collection and bring my research speciality I do focus where I can on dress

The collection I currently work in has aspects of dress in the collection

Textiles and garments form a major part of the collection I work with, but are not the only objects.

My work covered various aspects of textile conservation

Question 16 - In the course of your practice, do you perform close study or analysis of objects of dress?

63 Responses
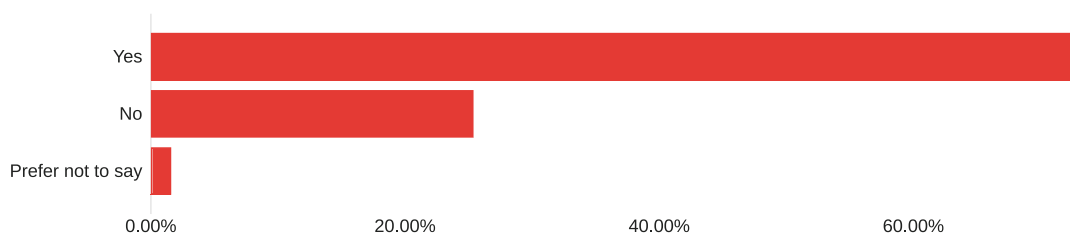
63 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
In the course of your practice, do you perform close study or analysis of objects of dress?	1	3	1	0	0	63

63 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	73.02%
No	100.00%	25.40%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	1.59%
Total		

Question 17 - If you answered yes to the previous question, how frequently do you analyse/close study objects of dress?

48 Responses
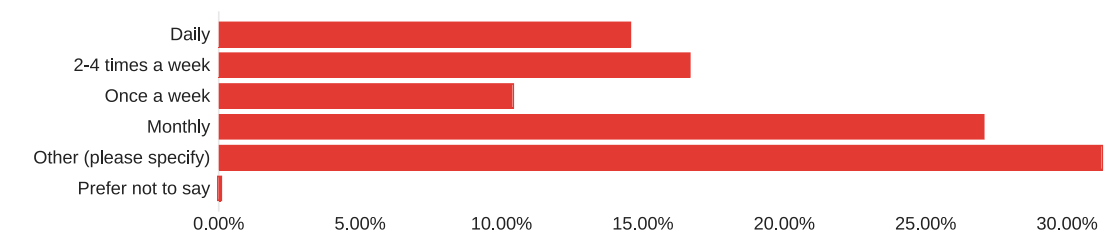
48 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
If you answered yes to the previous question, how frequently do you analyse/close study objects of dress? - Selected Choice	1	5	3	1	2	48

48 Responses

Field	Percentage
Daily	14.58%
2-4 times a week	16.67%
Once a week	10.42%
Monthly	27.08%
Other (please specify)	31.25%
Prefer not to say	0.00%

14 Responses

Other (please specify) - Text

A few times a year

only when needed

Varies per project, am currently working on a textiles/fashion display so at least weekly. Other times, only once or twice in a 6 month period

When the opportunity arises, particularly for display or time-limited collections reviews.

Depends - sometimes every other month or might be more often. Depends what I am working on, or what comes my way

Before covid it was 2-4 times a week. Now it's a few times a month.

When in substantive post 2-4 times a week, but during transfer monthly. Currently still working remotely from home

When required

There are some garments in the collection so I will occasionally be in contact with them but the collection is large and there are many other objects that need care too. (Although the garments are my favourite!)

Every once every 1-2 years due to variety of work undertaken (various textile types)

As needed for specific projects

Project related 4-5 times a year for 2-4 weeks

I worked for 24 years as a costume & textiles specialist, then took a break, and went back into the profession as a free-lancer (where about 50% of my time was spent with object based study)

As required to condition check for exhibition or loan

Question 18 - How many years has analysis/close study of objects of dress been a part of your creative/professional activity?

56 Responses
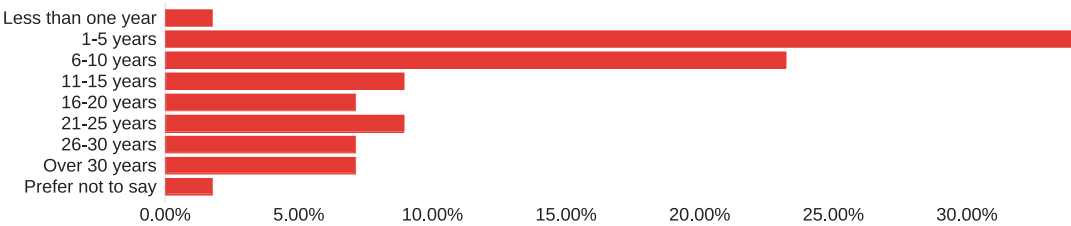
56 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
How many years has analysis/close study of objects of dress been a part of your creative/professional activity?	1	9	4	2	4	56

56 Responses

Field		Percentage
Less than one year	100.00%	1.79%
1-5 years	100.00%	33.93%
6-10 years	100.00%	23.21%
11-15 years	100.00%	8.93%
16-20 years	100.00%	7.14%
21-25 years	100.00%	8.93%
26-30 years	100.00%	7.14%
Over 30 years	100.00%	7.14%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	1.79%
Total		

Question 19 - When you analyse/engage in close study of objects of dress, do you use a formal methodology in the process? (e.g., the material culture theory and method suggested by Jules David Prown (1982), or The Slow Approach to Seeing (2015) methodology developed by Ingrid E. Mida and Alexandra Kim)

56 Responses

56 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you analyse/engage in close study of objects of dress, do you use a formal methodology in the process? (e.g., the material culture theory and method suggested by Jules David Prown (1982), or The Slow Approach to Seeing (2015) methodology developed by Ingrid E. Mida and Alexandra Kim) - Selected Choice	1	2	2	0	0	56

56 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please specify)	100.00%	46.43%
No	100.00%	53.57%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

24 Responses

Yes (Please specify) - Text

Slow approach to seeing informs it

Used to use both during MA course at LCF

My practise is based on this methodology but I don't usually have time to do it as thoroughly as I would like.

Conservator's eye. Definitely not any trademarked study put forth by Mida et al which is a disservice to the field.

Prown

Yes, but one I evolved myself on the job/and through training having been working in the field long before these publications were available or known of.

Loosely Prownian

Spectrum and ICON procedures

Not always, but I do like using Prown.

I use a mix of methodologies depending on the situation.

Based on Prown, but bring in own aspects and elements of others, such as PEST analysis

Use methodology based on previous curators work and adapted/changed through using it

Slow Approach to Seeing / technical analysis of construction details

We use our cataloguing programme's condition reporting system

Mixture of slow seeing, drawing, and object based theory approach.

I do but I'm not familar with those identified as a methodology. I am led by my practice as someone who was originally a designer/pattern cutter/writer of production specs and then by my training as a textile conservator looking at an objects condition and historic use and weave structure, fibre and dye analysis, seam structure and seaming techniques etc. I also studied decorative arts and it heps me place an object in an historic context. Drawing a a great tool for recording information as it forces you to look.

I use Prown and Mida & Kim now as a doctoral student but in my professional practice I used Janet Arnold and Norah Waugh

ICOM approach combined with training in analysis as pioneered by Anne Buck and other curators in the post-1960 period

Dress detective book

A practical guide to costume mounting by Lara Flecker

The Slow Approach to Seeing by Ingrid Mida - especially for conservation assessments

Jules Prown, Susan Pierce

Dress Detective

Prown

Question 20 - If you answered 'yes' to previous question, where did you learn this methodology? (Select any that apply)

27 Responses
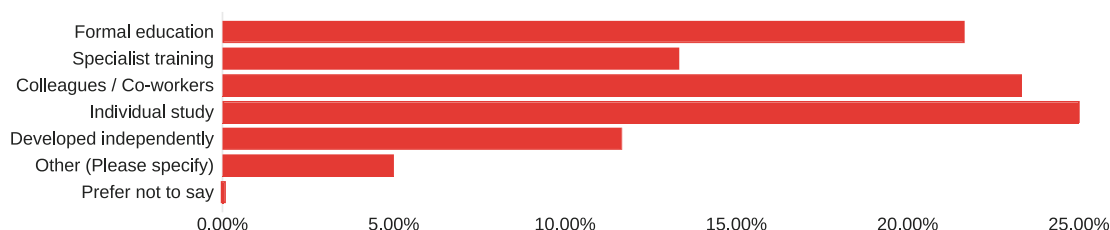
27 Responses

Field	Percentage of Choices	
Formal education	100.00%	21.67%
Specialist training	100.00%	13.33%
Colleagues / Co-workers	100.00%	23.33%
Individual study	100.00%	25.00%
Developed independently	100.00%	11.67%
Other (Please specify)	100.00%	5.00%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

3 Responses

Other (Please specify) - Text

Learnt through working with the local university. I also find general art historical methodologies exceptionally useful in the close study of dress.

Career led / enhanced by formal training in conservation

A mixture of all the categories above; this is a complex business and requires diverse and flexible approaches

Question 21 - Do you use any of the following methods in the analysis/close study of objects of dress (Select any that apply):

55 Responses

| Drawing / Sketching |
| Painting |
| Photography |
| Creative writing (e.g., journalling, stream ... |
| Remaking / Sewing |
| Pattern-making |
| Measurement (e.g., length, width, weight) |
| Descriptive writing (e.g., colour, texture, ... |
| Other (Please specify) |
| None |
| Prefer not to say |

0.00% 2.00% 4.00% 6.00% 8.00% 10.00% 12.00% 14.00% 16.00% 18.00% 20.00%

55 Responses

Field	Responses
Do you use any of the following methods in the analysis/close study of objects of dress (Select any that apply): - Selected Choice	228

55 Responses

Field	Percentage of Choices	
Drawing / Sketching	100.00%	13.60%
Painting	100.00%	0.88%
Photography	100.00%	20.18%
Creative writing (e.g., journalling, stream of consciousness)	100.00%	2.19%
Remaking / Sewing	100.00%	8.77%
Pattern-making	100.00%	6.14%
Measurement (e.g., length, width, weight)	100.00%	21.49%
Descriptive writing (e.g., colour, texture, design)	100.00%	20.61%
Other (Please specify)	100.00%	5.70%
None	100.00%	0.44%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

13 Responses

Other (Please specify) - Text

Wearing!

Conservator's eye

Making basic toiles of objects for planning mounting.

Utilising object notes/acquisition forms to help speculate an object's history.

I consult more knowledgeable people

I founded and, until covid, ran a volunteer sewing group reproducing items of clothing from the collection for staff and volunteers to wear in a living history context. One of the ways we sought understanding was in the wearing of reproduction dress/feedback from those who wore it.

For the close study of dress, I developed a checklist (which doubled as the instructions for writing the object description for our catalogue), working macro to micro, outer to inner. This was based on one used in Scotland and available online - also informed by a system developed by ICOM.

I also find that mounting historical dress is an excellent way of learning far more about it - it's a vehicle for close study and necessitates a really intimate knowledge of the object.

Inventory object mounting onto bust forms and relevant underpinnings.
Research, inc. genealogy on makers and wearers to inform biography of object

Information for database which includes all of the above specified plus historical and personal context such as maker information, wearer's information

Reading of dress-related text (books, journals...) for reference

Technical writing: weave types, fibre type, hand/machine stitched etc

fibre analysis, weave analysis, dye analysis (as necessary) cross referencing with relevant desgn/costume texts

Voice recordings

Comparisons to other materials known and/or studied
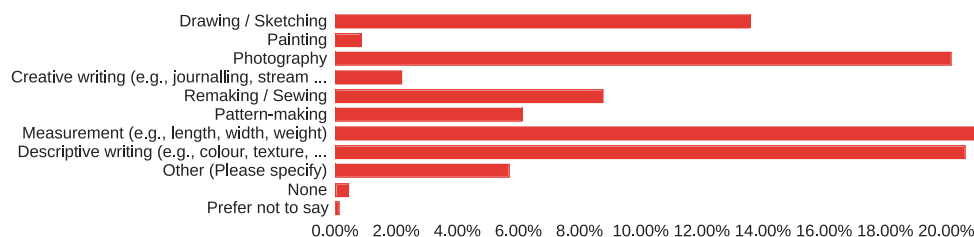
Question 22 - If you answered 'yes' to previous question, where did you learn these methods? (Select any that apply)

52 Responses
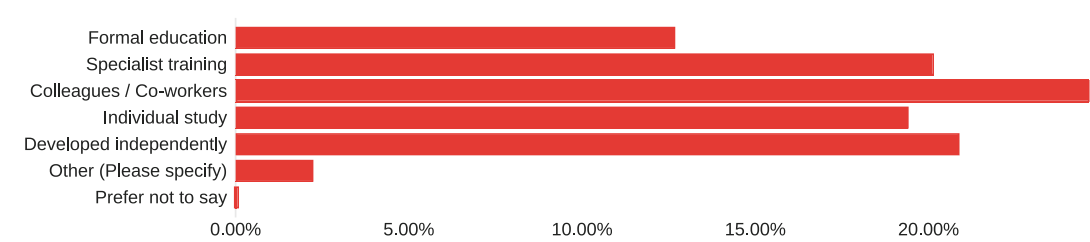
52 Responses

Field	Percentage of Choices	
Formal education	100.00%	12.69%
Specialist training	100.00%	20.15%
Colleagues / Co-workers	100.00%	24.63%
Individual study	100.00%	19.40%
Developed independently	100.00%	20.90%
Other (Please specify)	100.00%	2.24%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

3 Responses

Other (Please specify) - Text

A combination of the above!

I spent over a year taking short courses at LCF in 2015-2017 to make up for the fact that I did not get a fashion BA / MA. I also bought books on fashion design and took sewing classes, and the rest I learned by practice in launching my own brand and working closely with pattern makers and tailors.

All of the above

Question 23 - Are any of the outputs/information gathered from these methods included in the collection/archive documentation or database?

55 Responses

55 Responses

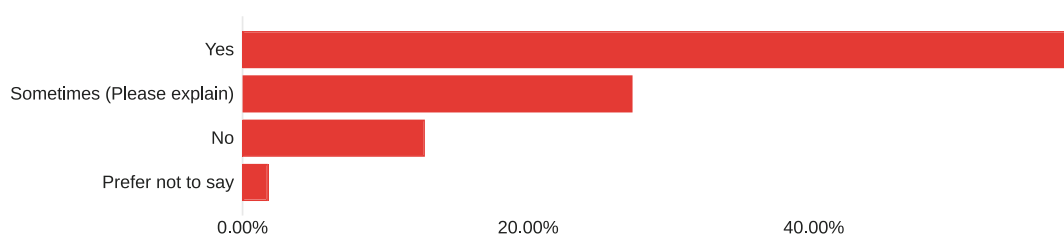| Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Are any of the outputs/information gathered from these methods included in the collection/archive documentation or database? - Selected Choice	1	4	2	1	1	55

55 Responses

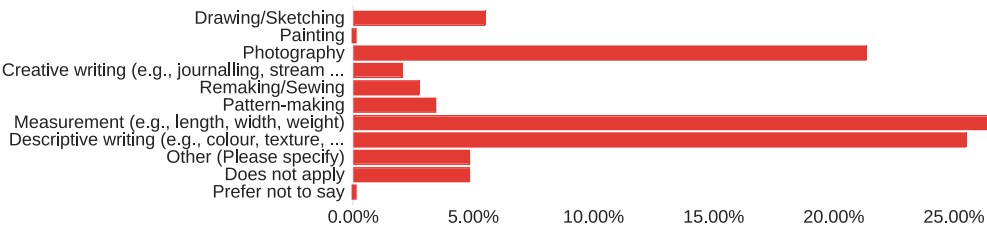| Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	58.18%
Sometimes (Please explain)	100.00%	27.27%
No	100.00%	12.73%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	1.82%
Total		

15 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

I don't understand this question
Online Photography Archive
Our database does not allow to include all of this information
Noted on condition reports which are kept on record for future reference.
Depends on time to add - sometimes bul k information is added to the object history file
Descriptions of objects are in our internal database. For the public database, we sometimes simplify them or take them to have more room for interpretation.
Depends on the database/what things can and cannot be entered. It also depends on time allocated for data input.
Where appropriate they're put on the collections management database. We produced a lot of reproduction garments that are worn, plus a lot of mounts and toiles etc. - not all of this is appropriate to record on the collections management system, so we document it thoroughly on our intranet.
Where possible, measurement data from garments is inserted into our Collections Database, although this can be very restrictive.
May be used to enhance an existing descriptive record, if it is poor or not correct. As a conservator I have to describe condition and this may also include photgraphs.
Not yet, but there are plans to add the outputs into the archive within which I am studying
When client requests treatment report
Shared in blogs or social media online or for future exhibitions
Some information is gathered for exhibition interpretation, and might not all be relevant for inclusion in the database
Logged to a private e-Hive account

Question 24 - Which of the outputs/information gathered from these methods included in the collection/archive documentation or database? (Select any that apply)

55 Responses

55 Responses

Field	Responses
Which of the outputs/information gathered from these methods included in the collection/archive documentation or database? (Select any that apply) - Selected Choice	145

55 Responses

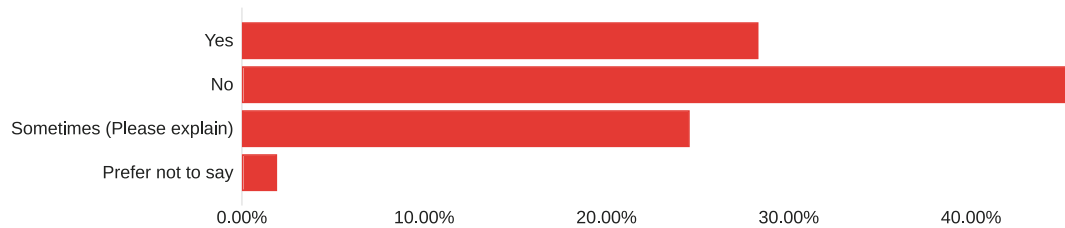| Field		Percentage of Choices
Drawing/Sketching	100.00%	5.52%
Painting	100.00%	0.00%
Photography	100.00%	21.38%
Creative writing (e.g., journalling, stream of consciousness)	100.00%	2.07%
Remaking/Sewing	100.00%	2.76%
Pattern-making	100.00%	3.45%
Measurement (e.g., length, width, weight)	100.00%	29.66%
Descriptive writing (e.g., colour, texture, design)	100.00%	25.52%
Other (Please specify)	100.00%	4.83%
Does not apply	100.00%	4.83%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

7 Responses

Other (Please specify) - Text

Contextual information.

Conservator's report

Object/garment condition

Maker and wear biographies.

Maker information
Wearer information
Subject category
Toe shape, heel shape and height

I don't think I understand this question so will leave it empty as to not mess with your data.

Comparative material elsewhere

Question 25 - Do you apply identical methods and/or methodologies to each object you analyse/study?

53 Responses

53 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Do you apply identical methods and/or methodologies to each object you analyse/study? - Selected Choice	1	4	2	1	1	53

53 Responses

Field	Percentage
Yes	28.30%
No	45.28%
Sometimes (Please explain)	24.53%
Prefer not to say	1.89%

13 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

We try to be consistent. Drawings aren't usually done nowadays because photography is easier & database compliant.

The difference is more between close analysis for complex objects, and more 'superficial' analysis for something that seems less complex, e.g. an 18th century gown as opposed to a 1960s bonded jersey shift dress.

If I have time I will ask a colleague in another organisation to look at the item of dress

Depends on the object, its condition, whether there's provenance, etc. While consistency can be useful, I find it most useful to have a toolkit I can mix and match from depending on the needs of the object.

Identical basic methods applied to taxonomic groups, but may differ between those groups, e.g. dresses vs fans. Detailed study on case by case basis.

It depends how long I have to work on the object, and whether it is a straightforward mount, or something more complicated.

Mostly we apply identical methods for consistency, but we do adapt them depending on the object if needed

Contemporary fashion probably gets less technical analysis than historic items. X-ray or fibre ID etc

The basics are always the same. Measurments and description of the style and structure. Condition (Excellent, good, fair, poor - Highly unstable, stable etc. Wear and damage. Alterations. Conservation treatment suggested and actual.

Sometimes particular methods seem more appropriate than others but I always begin with the same methods, however with some objects some of the methods flow more easily
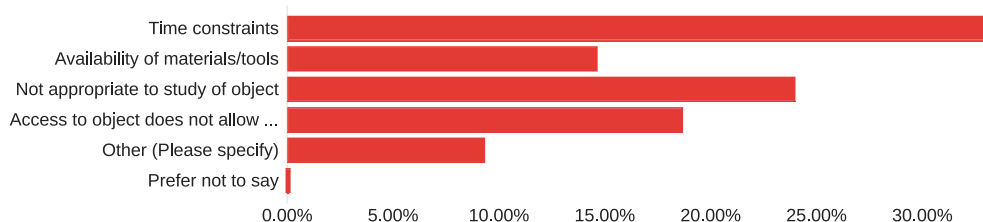
As artefacts differ in scale and significance they require differing analysis and approach

If time allows I try to do it for every object

It depends on the object and the purpose for why I am analysing it

Question 26 - If you answered 'no' to the previous question, please explain why: (Select all that apply)

28 Responses

28 Responses

Field	Percentage of Choices	
Time constraints	100.00%	33.33%
Availability of materials/tools	100.00%	14.67%
Not appropriate to study of object	100.00%	24.00%
Access to object does not allow application of this method	100.00%	18.67%
Other (Please specify)	100.00%	9.33%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

7 Responses

Other (Please specify) - Text

Depends on goal. Also- treatment goal.

It depends on the reason the object is being studied. The degree of detail may not be necessary in all cases. Or in some cases a photograph may clearly show details of the object, but in more complex cases a drawn diagram or annotated image can help show detail of damage for example.

Depends on the nature of the task. Is it a new acquisition, am I studying it for an exhibition/research etc

There can be other reasons. It entirely depends on the object.

Availability / lack of suitable space in historic/over-crowded stores.
Availability / lack of good lighting.

Often for my design work I use archival references, but these are not available to me to fully study or dissect. So I take what I can get / go where I am inspired. I may spend a half day sketching a garment at the V&A or another going through Vogue magazines from the 80s or 90s and another looking up a collection from that same era to understand more how the garments are constructed. (This is for my fashion design and part of the process I adore the most).

Items in museums on display - usually sketched

Question 27 - Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you consult available donor or original wearer information (e.g., notes, interviews) about the object?

50 Responses

50 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you consult available donor or original wearer information (e.g., notes, interviews) about the object? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	0	50

50 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	56.00%
Sometimes (Please explain)	100.00%	38.00%
No	100.00%	6.00%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

18 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

If these are available. For much of our collection we don't have that information.

If provenance is available at time of consignment then I will collect and apply that information, or I may discover that information in the course of my research

if available or needed

If there was an element of a piece of costume that could be worn if different ways, I would consult with the specialist curators and also check any object documentation to see if there was any explanation to how it may have been worn. Mostly looking at images but also any written descriptions. This is particularly the case when preparing to mount something for display.

Where appropriate.

Only in the case of loan items - otherwise no

Often that happens afterwards, partly due to the accessibility of the files with this information.

Due to decisions made in the 1980s, some of the objects have been divorced from their provenance, and it isn't possibly to reunite them in the time we have.

As before - it depends on the amount of time I have to work with the object. Contextual information does not often come into the remit of my role and I've been discouraged from spending too much time on this kind of thing, but personal interest and curiosity leads me to research them. Of course, if the original wearer is known it's useful to refer to their bodyshape in creating a suitable mount, but most likely, we'll create the figure to the costume measurements.

Depends on situation

When the notes or condition reports are available then I always consult them, but sometimes the donor/original wearer information is not available or was not collected.

The original dodnor is usually no longer alive! However when I work on a piece from a private client background history of use and wear is very useful

Depends what is available

When available

If possible but usually no donor information is recorded or it's part of an estate gifted

This information is only occasionally available in our documentation

We rarely have this information

Some objects in my collection have stories from the previous owner

Question 28 - Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with colleagues?

52 Responses

52 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with colleagues? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	0	52

52 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	36.54%
Sometimes (Please explain)	100.00%	51.92%
No	100.00%	11.54%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

When necessary.

Previous jobs I've been the only dress/textiles specialist so it's not relevant.

It depends what it is being done for and which colleagues are involved. If I am looking at construction with a pattern cutter for example.

If I need a second opinion I will consult my boss

Often working alone, consult with colleagues including conservators when possible

Depends on context.

I would discuss object sensitivity with colleagues or lender before handling

I am the only curator working with the human history/costume collection.

Depends on who you are working with. Sometimes you are on your own. Sometimes you ask wider as well - eg facebook groups

Usually talk to curator but not always

I'd probably discuss it during, rather than prior to analysis. With difficult to identify fabrics, I'd consult a conservator. Or with objects with a complex pattern, I'd consult someone who knows more about that aspect. If possible I'd involve a specialist, e.g. someone who knows about lace, bonnets, tailoring.

Depends on the object and the context

I'm the only textile specialist here. I often discuss the objects with colleagues when there's one available and interested, but I more usually discussed the object(s) with subject specialist volunteers.

No curatorial colleagues, but will discuss with textile conservator if object being mounted for display and/or photography.

I am the only person who works with this collection and sometimes I consult a colleague for an extra opinion

Yes when my colleagues are available (we are very short staffed right now) or if I have concerns about handling the object.

Often I undergo this process alone as the main designer in my brand.
When I have had a team work with me, which has ebbed and flowed over the past years, I often share my thinking and references with them at a time when my thinking is more developed.

If its a known donor who has given other things we may discuss known issues, like the presence of personal touches, marks or just shape/size

Refer to colleagues and relevant house/ regional curator (National Trust).

If it makes sense to do so - namely if they add information

I work independently sometimes

I am part of a very small team, so there is not always scope for discussion with my colleagues

I did not have a specialist conservator on my team, but when I had the resources I would discuss the object with them. And on occasion, professional costume makers or fashion designers.

Consulting with experts about particular aspects

Question 29 - When you are analysing/studying an object, are you in a dedicated study space (e.g., Collections store, office with examining table)?

51 Responses

Category	
Yes (Please generally describe type of ...	
Sometimes (Please generally describe ...	
No (Please generally describe type of space)	

0.00%   20.00%   40.00%   60.00%

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you are analysing/studying an object, are you in a dedicated study space (e.g., Collections store, office with examining table)? - Selected Choice	1	3	1	1	0	51

51 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please generally describe type of space)	100.00%	70.59%
Sometimes (Please generally describe type of space)	100.00%	19.61%
No (Please generally describe type of space)	100.00%	9.80%
Total		

32 Responses

Yes (Please generally describe type of space) - Text

Collections store, on a designated work table. We don't have much available space so depending on how big the object is, we may use other spaces/locations onsite that fit our needs.

The collection is housed in one room with a table and mannequins that can be used to look at garments.

Lab or viewing room.

Collections store with work tables

Our multi-purpose workspace

Usually objects are brought to the textile conservation studio, which has a large table and good lighting. Sometimes smaller objects are looked at in the main store space, but as the lighting is not very bright that generally only happens for quick assessments.

Dress and textiles store or lab

Store work space with table

Costume store

Collections store or gallery

We have a separate costume store and a workroom/lab with layout space.

Empty gallery space with examining tables

Workroom adjacent to store with large central table.

Dedicated but not purpose built textile store with work table

Either the store or a study room.

Collections store for inventorying - okay lighting, table space, database
Research room for detailed research - better lighting, table space, database
Conservation studio for further detailed research, prior/during treatments and/or mounting - best lighting, table space, database, magnifying equipment

Small office available within the collection store. Also in a small office in main museum building available which is separate to the collections store

Textile Conservation Studio.

Collections store

Conservation studio or store room

Textile Conservation studio with work table and natural daylight lighting and available analytical equipment (microscope, linen counter used as necessary.
Can be a historic house store when carrying out a conservation survey, but examination time is limited. Lighting is usually quite poor.

Workroom

Textiles conservation studio, desk

Study room in museum

Archive Vault or Conservation Suite

There is a table for looking at objects in the dress/textiles area of the museum store.

Study room and table in store

Collections store with large table

Archive or store space, large table or appropriate space for photographing.

Collection store

Table in store or conservation studio

A study room ot studio

10 Responses

Sometimes (Please generally describe type of space) - Text

depends on the collection

Most often in a collection space, sometimes more makeshift.

depends on what object and where - our collections are in multiple locations and a photo may be taken in a general store and the object not moved elsewhere

Work with costumes was in a previous role. All collections were in an off site store, so would often be worked on there. On occasion items would be brought back to the museum

Either on a table in store or I will bring item to another space with better light

Office space set up for looking at collections (padded tables, no food/drinks)

There is a conservation office available with a big table in it to lay pieces out on. If this is in use, then it is up to the individual to find another space. I work in a stately home collection so usually we always have some rooms off route that can be used for a temporary workroom.

Initial analysis was undertaken in a studio space but now the objects are studied within the archival space

As a freelance I go to whatever space is on offer

Sometimes this work can be done in a studio with plenty of space, but when the studio is in use for education sessions then collections work has to be done in store, where there is limited space and no table available.

5 Responses

No (Please generally describe type of space) - Text

This is complicated because of the various sites I've worked at...

It's an all-purpose room with tables, or the photography studio, which can also be turned to other purposes. We have a very large collection with very diverse materials, and we don't have the space for a dedicated textile study area.
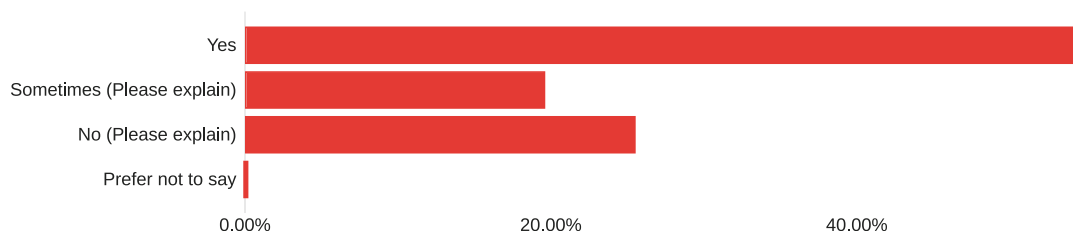
Wherever the object is (museum, library, etc)

No back room so I set up a table in the galleries. Try to do it when closed to the public

Lately at home in my study but replicating archival environments as much as possible

Question 30 - During analysis/close study, is working with the object the sole focus of your time?

51 Responses

51 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
During analysis/close study, is working with the object the sole focus of your time? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	51

51 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	54.90%
Sometimes (Please explain)	100.00%	19.61%
No (Please explain)	100.00%	25.49%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

10 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

If I am looking at an object with a student or students I'm also teaching.

Might have multiple goals.

Sometimes (and when working from home) images are used; some time is also spent researching donors and wearers through donor history files and other means

Sometimes object study is concurrent with other activities including supervising volunteers

Depends on why you are looking - it could be related to many objects - eg bulk photography

Now that I teach conservation, communicating what I'm doing to students is partly the focus.

Some close study may be result of teaching - where focus is on the students or facilitating study appointments - where focus is on the researcher and their queries

Specific periods of time are created to work with objects, but if something crops up this time is put on hold - so dealing with a colleague or answering the phone

not clear what you mean?

See above - if possible discussion with an informed colleague will form an element in the process

11 Responses

No (Please explain) - Text

I have many other responsibilities so am frequently interrupted during examination of objects.

The condition of the object is the focus but other analysis can come from this for curators, collections team

Preparing the object to be exhibited

My role included curating, collections management, documentation, education and exhibitions, so I tended to have multiple projects and focuses.

Often called away to deal with other things so it is difficult to carve out dedicated time for focus on one object.

It's often worth researching similar items in other collections, or in our collection, and/or engaging in other research, to better understand the object. Also, if I'm making a reproduction, I'll be working from the object, but also working on the pattern, and then I'll be working on the toile with direct reference to either the object or photographs. In that case, I spend maybe 15% of my time looking at the object.

Mounting project management to do with exhibitions / studio management / working on multiple projects.

My job includes the collections care for a historic house collection and we have to get the hall ready for visitors each day along side showroom checks and other tasks. Working close up with objects is a part of our tasks but it is one of many in our job role.

I try and spend as little time with the object as possible and spend the majority of my time creating an appropriate support for the object to be displayed.

Always multitasking! Rarely do I get more than a couple of hours with objects at any given time.

Contextual research is equally important for my current project

Question 31 - When you use descriptive writing to document object colour, do you use a formal guide (e.g., Munsell, Pantone)?

49 Responses
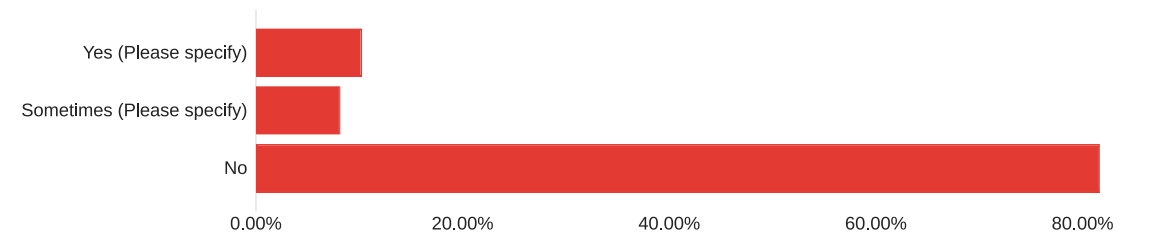
49 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you use descriptive writing to document object colour, do you use a formal guide (e.g., Munsell, Pantone)? - Selected Choice	1	3	3	1	0	49

49 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please specify)	100.00%	10.20%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	8.16%
No	100.00%	81.63%
Total		

4 Responses

Yes (Please specify) - Text

Color chart in photograph. Conservation standard.

Inhouse documentation manual created through experience and need for database documentation conformity

Only in my career as a garment designer - I used Pantone and ths was usually contected with pront ad weave designs.
I don't use this in my current practice as a textile conservator - only general terminology to identify colour, yellow, red crimson, light mid, dark etc

Pantone

4 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

We use basic colour names (red, black blue etc.) with a modifier (dark, light, bright etc.), and we make an effort to avoid using ambiguous terms.
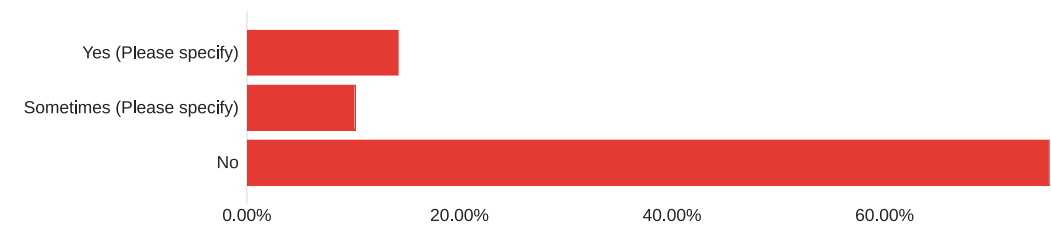
Yes when cataloguing. No on condition reports (can be more descriptive, eg pea green or bright green as apposed to just green)

Depends on the item.

Depends very much on the object and its provenance

Question 32 - When you use descriptive writing to detail texture, do you use a formal guide (e.g., Centre Inter...

49 Responses

49 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you use descriptive writing to detail texture, do you use a formal guide (e.g., Centre Inter... - Selected Choice	1	3	3	1	1	49

49 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please specify)	100.00%	14.29%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	10.20%
No	100.00%	75.51%
Total		

6 Responses

Yes (Please specify) - Text

Emery's Primary structure. Burnam, too.

These are outlined in software that is used

Tend to use Emory and the Washington system.

Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Ancien (CIETA) Vocabulary of technical terms: Fabrics

DATS and CIETA

Inhouse documentation manual created through experience and need for database documentation conformity

5 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

limited by time and access to reference

Not Cieta - it's an expensive and usually taught in French in Europe. I have been taught to recognise many structures and use known texts but would use a similar system but some weave structures are highly complex so I would give an indcation of what is might be wth a question mark to show this was not a definitive opinion.

If pertinent, not always needed

Where applicable

This was not available for most of my working life, but we had developed basic terminology to follow during documentation.

Question 33 - When you use descriptive writing to document object design, do you use a formal guide (e.g., ICOM Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume)

49 Responses
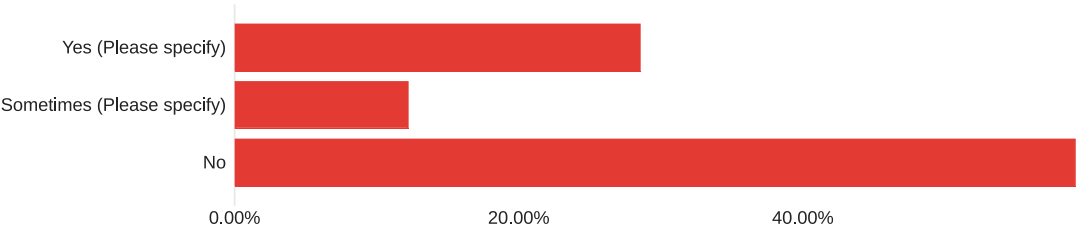
49 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you use descriptive writing to document object design, do you use a formal guide (e.g., ICOM Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume) - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	49

49 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please specify)	100.00%	28.57%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	12.24%
No	100.00%	59.18%
Total		

11 Responses

Yes (Please specify) - Text
I try to use this but it is not comprehensive enough for our collection.
Wetherby's guide to racehorse owners' colours
ICOM SHIC for objects not included in ICOM vocabulary
ICOM
ICOM
ICOM Vocabulary of Basic Terms for Cataloguing Costume
ICOM
ICOM Vocabulary used for basic terms, but adapted re. gender, and expanded by concatenating with more specialist terms or additional in-house glossaries for religious dress, sports & leisure wear and performance costumes.
Inhouse documentation manual created through experience and need for database documentation conformity
ICOM
Icom

5 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

Mostly - except for headwear which we expand on

Mostly I use what I know from previuos training, ond refer to ICOM terminology if I need more guidance.

As required by the actual item

I study non-European dress and the ICOM terms are often not applicable or suitable

Icom sometimes

Question 34 - When you use descriptive writing to document object condition, do you use a formal guide? (e.g., SHARE Museums East Condition Reoporting Crib Sheet)

47 Responses
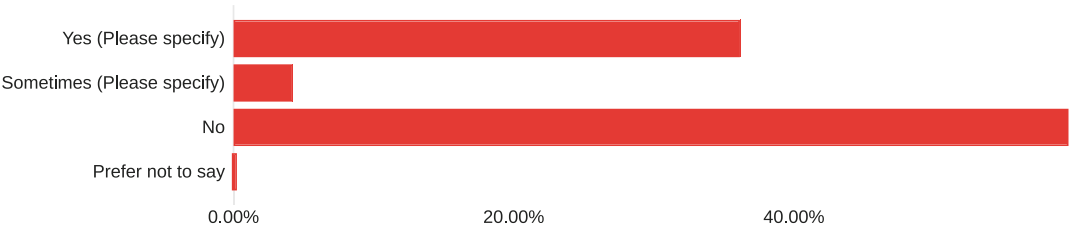
47 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you use descriptive writing to document object condition, do you use a formal guide? (e.g., SHARE Museums East Condition Reoporting Crib Sheet) - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	47

47 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please specify)	100.00%	36.17%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	4.26%
No	100.00%	59.57%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

16 Responses

Yes (Please specify) - Text

We use MODES pre-determined keywords (poor, fair, good). Any additional comments would go in a notes field.

System developed by institution's conservation unit; previously used own list of categories

We use a condition reporting tool called Articheck

Based on previous condition reports carried out by external textile conservator.

In house condition report form developed using a National Trust document.

We use our own internal designations

We have our own internal guide.

Condition reports from Collections Trust which have been modified to suit the collections needs

We are asked to use the National Trust condition report codes and technique.

SHARE.

I use and a studio form and also refer to the National trust Conservation reporting system - as condition reporting is part of my training I am very aware of what is needed to record an object's condition.

Own design documents

Crib sheet

My institution had its own guide.

Costume core

Use an object condition template

2 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

We have a version of a condition reporting guide which I use sometimes.

I use my experience.

Question 35 - Do you use a collections database management system to document descriptions of objects of dress?

48 Responses
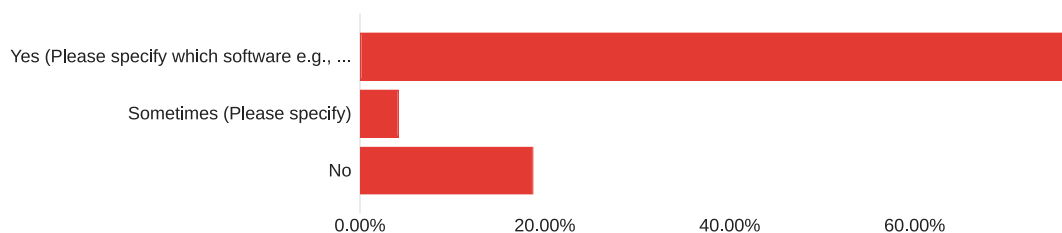
48 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Do you use a collections database management system to document descriptions of objects of dress? - Selected Choice	1	3	1	1	1	48

48 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes (Please specify which software e.g., EMu, Axiell Collections)	100.00%	77.08%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	4.17%
No	100.00%	18.75%
Total		

35 Responses

Yes (Please specify which software e.g., EMu, Axiell Collections) - Text

MODES

AtoM

Tms

MuseumPlus

Mimsy

Mimsy XG

Mimsy

Modes

The Collections team uses Museum Plus and for temporary loans, we use Articheck

Axiell Collections (formally AdLib).

MODES+ (As specified before, this was in a previous role when collection software was relatively new)

Emu

Mimsy XG

Museum Plus

The Museum System

EMu

Adlib

MimsyXG

MODES

Axiell

Museum index

TMS

Not sure

I fill out forms which are generated by the NAtional Trust's Collections Management System (CMS) - the information is then uploaded. I shoudl be training to use the system directly in the next few months. I also use more formal longer reports for more complex bjects, when needed and these are uplaoded to the CMS system.

Modes

CMS

I use Ad Lib now, but have preferred worked with EMu and CMS

EMu

Moby Doc CMS system

MODES

Adlib/Axiell Collections

ModesPlus, and Emu, and Axiell Collections

Costume core

EMu

E-Hive

2 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

Currently Filemaker - with view to transfer to a new system

It depended on where I was working

Question 36 - If you answered no to the previous question, how do you document descriptions of objects?
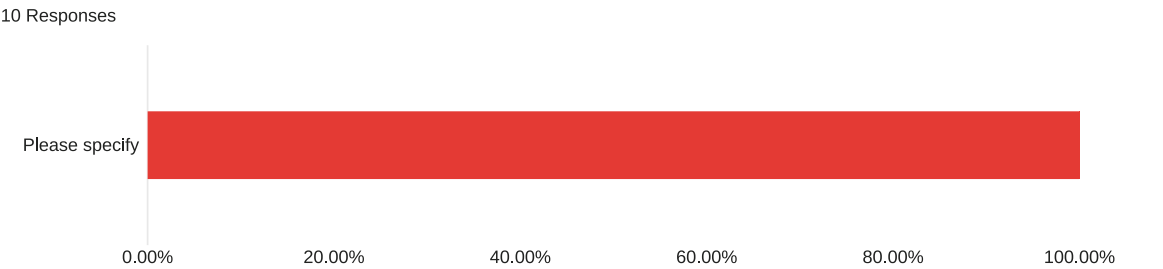
10 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
If you answered no to the previous question, how do you document descriptions of objects? - Selected Choice	1	1	1	0	0	10

10 Responses

Field	Percentage	
Please specify	100.00%	100.00%
Total		

10 Responses

Please specify - Text

Notebooks, etc.

Paper

Technical analysis required by costume mounters does not have space in our CMS to have this data included. It's a massive hole in the system, and I'm constantly infuriated that each time we mount a garment we basically have to start from scratch - no matter how many times the piece has been mounted.

I am not yet trained to catalogue (starting training soon) until then I write the description and give it to one of my colleagues who is trained.

I usually just take notes by hand when needed

Microsoft Excel

As of yet there is no formal system to document the description within the archives system. There are plans to implement this with a 'proof on concept' in development as part of my PhD

As a freelance I don't need to formally document descriptions

Work freelance so use existing museum condition information and add details

Personal records only - notebooks

Question 37 - When documenting objects, do you include available donor or original wearer information regarding description of the object?

46 Responses
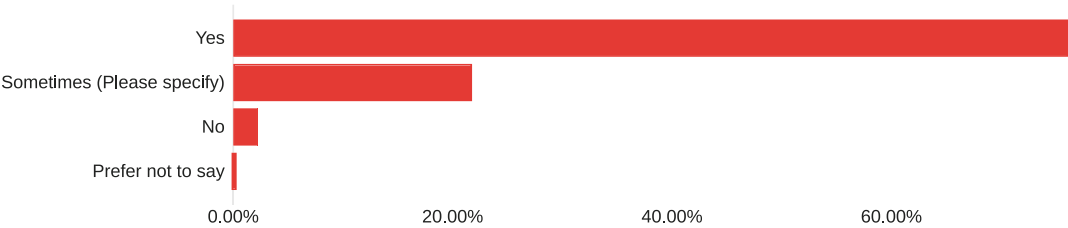
46 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When documenting objects, do you include available donor or original wearer information regarding description of the object? - Selected Choice	1	3	1	0	0	46

46 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	76.09%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	21.74%
No	100.00%	2.17%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

7 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

If we know it

If the donor is happy for us to share this information then yes.

Where we have access to that information, yes. Ours is an old collection, and we don't always have access to the provenance thanks to re-numbering projects undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s.

All donor information stored on Mimsy but not in description field and may be viewer-restricted if subject to GDPR. Original wearer info may be included in description field if not subject to GDPR, but full biographies in People Authority record.

This would normally be undertaken by the relevant curator. I would included the information in any condition reporting. - houwever I may do this for a private client object.

If it's available but most of the objects I study have limited formal information with them, that has emerged through my research

Where this is relevant

Question 38 - When documenting objects, do you consult with colleagues regarding descriptions?

46 Responses
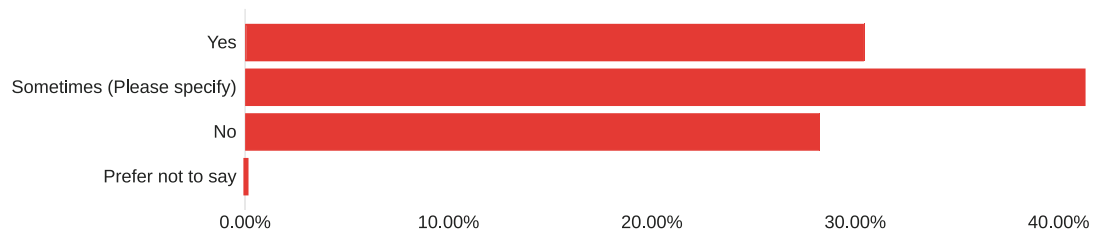
Category	
Yes	
Sometimes (Please specify)	
No	
Prefer not to say	

0.00%   10.00%   20.00%   30.00%   40.00%

46 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When documenting objects, do you consult with colleagues regarding descriptions? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	46

46 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes	100.00%	30.43%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	41.30%
No	100.00%	28.26%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

15 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

I work alone so I am usually reliant on my own judgement but I will discuss with colleagues from my wider team or DATS list for some aspects of documentation.

Mostly no, but depends on the object(s)

I will consult colleagues on specific terms or areas outside my specialism

Depends on the object and who else is involved with the collection including volunteers.

If my knowledge is not good enough

Conversations with curator colleagues if the objects are from unfamiliar cultures.

As above - if I am unsure I will consult others.

If appropriate - I am the most experience in terms of cataloguing dress collections

At times I would ask a colleague in another organisation or one of our volunteers who is an expert sewer

During audits, I generally consult with subject-specialist volunteers when there's ambiguity or I can't recall a term. I don't usually consult with colleagues on textile items as that isn't their specialism.

Will consult with curatorial colleagues if object crosses-over with other remits, e.g. will check with Curator of East Asian Art for specialist terms and iconography on 19th-century Cantonese fans exported for European use

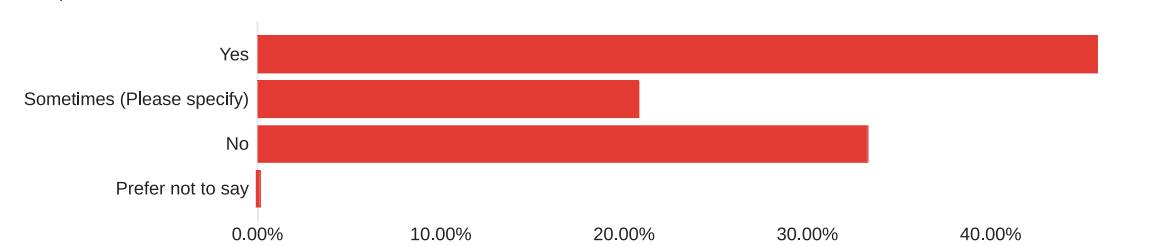If I feel they can help - most don;t do much work on items of dress.

If I have access to a dress expert then I consult them

Only if the project requires this

If I want some advice I will

Question 39 - When documenting objects, is recording information the sole focus of your time?

48 Responses

48 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When documenting objects, is recording information the sole focus of your time? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	48

48 Responses

Field	Percentage	
Yes	100.00%	45.83%
Sometimes (Please specify)	100.00%	20.83%
No	100.00%	33.33%
Prefer not to say	100.00%	0.00%
Total		

8 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

I am often juggling several tasks when I am documenting and I am under time constraints so I am not able to document as thoroughly as I would like.

Sometimes combine recording information with writing comments regarding social history, or planning a 'case for acquisition'.

I try to make time exclusively for documentation tasks, but my role and our very small team means I may be called away.

Often also rationalising and upgrading the storage of the object.

Recording information, cleaning, packing the object and condition checking are often done at the same time to avoid double handling the object.

Sometimes it's simply to enjoy the experience of being with the object

Contextual information may form significant feature

I have clean, pack and find a suitable location for the item too

Question 25 - Do you apply identical methods and/or methodologies to each object you analyse/study?

53 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Do you apply identical methods and/or methodologies to each object you analyse/study? - Selected Choice	1	4	2	1	1	53

53 Responses

Field	Percentage
Yes	28.30%
No	45.28%
Sometimes (Please explain)	24.53%
Prefer not to say	1.89%

13 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

We try to be consistent. Drawings aren't usually done nowadays because photography is easier & database compliant.

The difference is more between close analysis for complex objects, and more 'superficial' analysis for something that seems less complex, e.g. an 18th century gown as opposed to a 1960s bonded jersey shift dress.

If I have time I will ask a colleague in another organisation to look at the item of dress

Depends on the object, its condition, whether there's provenance, etc. While consistency can be useful, I find it most useful to have a toolkit I can mix and match from depending on the needs of the object.

Identical basic methods applied to taxonomic groups, but may differ between those groups, e.g. dresses vs fans. Detailed study on case by case basis.

It depends how long I have to work on the object, and whether it is a straightforward mount, or something more complicated.

Mostly we apply identical methods for consistency, but we do adapt them depending on the object if needed

Contemporary fashion probably gets less technical analysis than historic items. X-ray or fibre ID etc

The basics are always the same. Measurements and description of the style and structure. Condition (Excellent, good, fair, poor - Highly unstable, stable etc. Wear and damage. Alterations. Conservation treatment suggested and actual.

Sometimes particular methods seem more appropriate than others but I always begin with the same methods, however with some objects some of the methods they more easily
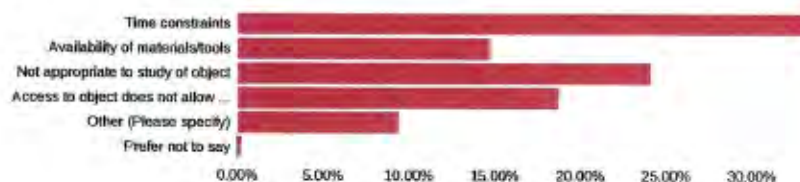
As artefacts differ in scale and significance they require differing analysis and approach

If time allows I try to do it for every object

It depends on the object and the purpose for why I am analysing it

Question 26 - If you answered 'no' to the previous question, please explain why: (Select all that apply)

28 Responses

28 Responses

Field		Percentage of Choices
Time constraints		33.33%
Availability of materials/tools		14.67%
Not appropriate to study of object		24.00%
Access to object does not allow application of this method		18.67%
Other (Please specify)		9.33%
Prefer not to say		0.00%
Total		

7 Responses

Other (Please specify) - Text

Depends on goal. Also- treatment goal.

It depends on the reason the object is being studied. The degree of detail may not be necessary in all cases. Or in some cases a photograph may clearly show details of the object, but in more complex cases a drawn diagram or annotated image can help show detail of damage for example.

Depends on the nature of the task. Is it a new acquisition, am I studying it for an exhibition/research etc.

There can be other reasons. It entirely depends on the object.

Availability / lack of suitable space in historic/over-crowded stores.
Availability / lack of good lighting.

Often for my design work I use archival references, but these are not available to me to fully study or dissect. So I take what I can get (go where I am inspired.) may spend a half day sketching a garment at the V&A or another going through Vogue magazines from the 80s or 90s and another looking up a collection from that same era to understand more how the garments are constructed. (This is for my fashion design and part of the process I adore the most)

Items in museums on display - usually sketched

Question 27 - Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you consult available donor or original wearer information (e.g., notes, interviews) about the object?

50 Responses

50 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you consult available donor or original wearer information (e.g., notes, interviews) about the object? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	0	50

50 Responses

Field	Percentage
Yes	56.00%
Sometimes (Please explain)	38.00%
No	6.00%
Prefer not to say	0.00%
Total	

18 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

If these are available. For much of our collection we don't have that information.

If provenance is available at time of consignment then I will collect and apply that information, or I may discover that information in the course of my research

If available or selected

If there was an element of a piece of costume that could be worn if different ways, I would consult with the specialist curators and also check any object documentation to see if there was any explanation to how it may have been worn. Mostly looking at images but also any written descriptions. This is particularly the case when preparing to mount something for display.

Where appropriate

Only in the case of loan items - otherwise no

Often that happens afterwards, partly due to the accessibility of the files with this information.

Due to decisions made in the 1980s, some of the objects have been divorced from their provenance, and it isn't possibly to reunite them in the time we have.

As before - it depends on the amount of time I have to work with the object. Contextual information does not often come into the remit of my role and I've been discouraged from spending too much time on this kind of thing, but personal interest and curiosity leads me to research them. Of course, if the original wearer is known it's useful to refer to their bodyshape in creating a suitable mount, but most likely, we'll create the figure to the costume measurements.

Depends on situation

When the notes or condition reports are available then I always consult them, but sometimes the donor/original wearer information is not available or was not collected.

The original dodnor is usually no longer alive! However when I work on a piece from a private client background history of use and wear is very useful

Depends what is available

When available

If possible but usually no donor information is recorded or it's part of an estate gifted

This information is only occasionally available in our documentation

We rarely have this information

Some objects in my collection have stories from the previous owner

Question 28 - Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with colleagues?

52 Responses

52 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
Prior to analysis/close study of objects, do you discuss the physical object with colleagues? – Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	0	52

52 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes		36.54%
Sometimes (Please explain)		51.92%
No		11.54%
Prefer not to say		0.00%
Total		

24 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

When necessary.

Previous jobs I've been the only dress/textiles specialist so it's not relevant.

It depends what it is being done for and which colleagues are involved. If I am looking at construction with a pattern cutter for example.

If I need a second opinion I will consult my boss.

Often working alone, consult with colleagues including conservators when possible

Depends on context.

I would discuss object sensitivity with colleagues or lender before handling

I am the only curator working with the human history/costume collection.

Depends on who you are working with. Sometimes you are on your own. Sometimes you ask wider as well - eg facebook groups

Usually talk to curator but not always

I'd probably discuss it during, rather than prior to analysis. With difficult to identify fabrics, I'd consult a conservator. Or with objects with a complex pattern, I'd consult someone who knows more about that aspect. If possible I'd involve a specialist, e.g. someone who knows about lace, bonnets, tailoring.

Depends on the object and the context.

I'm the only textile specialist here. I often discuss the objects with colleagues when there's one available and interested, but I more usually discussed the object(s) with subject specialist volunteers.

No curatorial colleagues, but will discuss with textile conservator if object being mounted for display and/or photography.

I am the only person who works with this collection and sometimes I consult a colleague for an extra opinion

Yes when my colleagues are available (we are very short staffed right now) or if I have concerns about handling the object.

Often I undergo this process alone as the main designer in my brand.
When I have had a team work with me, which has ebbed and flowed over the past years, I often share my thinking and references with them at a time when my thinking is more developed.

If its a known donor who has given other things we may discuss known issues, like the presence of personal touches, marks or just shape/size

Refer to colleagues and relevant house/ regional curator (National Trust).

If it makes sense to do so - namely if they add information

I work independently sometimes

I am part of a very small team, so there is not always scope for discussion with my colleagues

I did not have a specialist conservator on my team, but when I had the resources I would discuss the object with them. And on occasion, professional costume makers or fashion designers.

Consulting with experts about particular aspects

Question 29 - When you are analysing/studying an object, are you in a dedicated study space (e.g., Collections store, office with examining table)?

51 Responses

51 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When you are analysing/studying an object, are you in a dedicated study space (e.g., Collections store, office with examining table)? - Selected Choice	1	3	1	1	0	51

51 Responses

Field	Percentage
Yes (Please generally describe type of space)	70.59%
Sometimes (Please generally describe type of space)	19.61%
No (Please generally describe type of space)	9.80%
Total	

32 Responses

Yes (Please generally describe type of space) - Text

Collections store, on a designated work table. We don't have much available space so depending on how big the object is, we may use other spaces/locations onsite that fit our needs.

The collection is housed in one room with a table and mannequins that can be used to look at garments.

Lab or viewing room.

Collections store with work tables

Our multi-purpose workspace

Usually objects are brought to the textile conservation studio, which has a large table and good lighting. Sometimes smaller objects are looked at in the main store space, but as the lighting is not very bright that generally only happens for quick assessments.

Dress and textiles store or lab

Store work space with table

Costume store

Collections store or gallery

We have a separate costume store and a workroom/lab with layout space.

Empty gallery space with examining tables

Workroom adjacent to store with large central table.

Dedicated but not purpose built textile store with work table

Either the store or a study room.

Collections store for inventorying - okay lighting, table space, database
Research room for detailed research - better lighting, table space, database
Conservation studio for further detailed research, prior/during treatments and/or mounting - best lighting, table space, database, magnifying equipment

Small office available within the collection store. Also in a small office in main museum building available which is separate to the collections store

Textile Conservation Studio.

Collections store

Conservation studio or store room

Textile Conservation studio with work table and natural daylight lighting and available analytical equipment (microscope, linen counter used as necessary.
Can be a historic house store when carrying out a conservation survey, but examination time is limited. Lighting is usually quite poor.

Workroom

Textiles conservation studio, desk

Study room in museum

Archive Vault or Conservation Suite

There is a table for looking at objects in the dress/textiles area of the museum store.

Study room and table in store

Collections store with large table

Archive or store space, large table or appropriate space for photographing.

Collection store

Table in store or conservation studio

A study room ot studio

10 Responses

Sometimes (Please generally describe type of space) - Text

depends on the collection

Most often in a collection space, sometimes more makeshift.

depends on what object and where - our collections are in multiple locations and a photo may be taken in a general store and the object not moved elsewhere

Work with costumes was in a previous role. All collections were in an off site store, so would often be worked on there. On occasion items would be brought back to the museum

Either on a table in store or I will bring item to another space with better light

Office space set up for looking at collections (padded tables, no food/drinks)

There is a conservation office available with a big table in it to lay pieces out on. If this is in use, then it is up to the individual to find another space. I work in a stately home collection so usually we always have some rooms off route that can be used for a temporary workroom.

Initial analysis was undertaken in a studio space but now the objects are studied within the archival space

As a freelance I go to whatever space is on offer

Sometimes this work can be done in a studio with plenty of space, but when the studio is in use for education sessions then collections work has to be done in store, where there is limited space and no table available.

5 Responses

No (Please generally describe type of space) – Text

This is complicated because of the various sites I've worked at...

It's an all-purpose room with tables, or the photography studio, which can also be turned to other purposes. We have a very large collection with very diverse materials, and we don't have the space for a dedicated textile study area.

Wherever the object is (museum, library, etc)

No back room so I set up a table in the galleries. Try to do it when closed to the public

Lately at home in my study but replicating archival environments as much as possible

Question 30 - During analysis/close study, is working with the object the sole focus of your time?

51 Responses

51 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
During analysis/close study, is working with the object the sole focus of your time? - Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	51

51 Responses

Field	Percentage
Yes	54.90%
Sometimes (Please explain)	19.61%
No (Please explain)	25.49%
Prefer not to say	0.00%
Total	

10 Responses

Sometimes (Please explain) - Text

If I am looking at an object with a student or students I'm also teaching.

Might have multiple goals.

Sometimes (and when working from home) images are used; some time is also spent researching donors and wearers through donor history files and other means

Sometimes object study is concurrent with other activities including supervising volunteers

Depends on why you are looking - it could be related to many objects - eg bulk photography

Now that I teach conservation, communicating what I'm doing to students is partly the focus.

132

Some close study may be result of teaching - where focus is on the students or facilitating study appointments - where focus is on the researcher and their queries

Specific periods of time are created to work with objects, but if something crops up this time is put on hold - so dealing with a colleague or answering the phone

not clear what you mean?

See above - if possible discussion with an informed colleague will form an element in the process

11 Responses

No (Please explain) - Text

I have many other responsibilities so am frequently interrupted during examination of objects.

The condition of the object is the focus but other analysis can come from this for curators, collections team

Preparing the object to be exhibited

My role included curating, collections management, documentation, education and exhibitions, so I tended to have multiple projects and focuses.

Often called away to deal with other things so it is difficult to carve out dedicated time for focus on one object.

It's often worth researching similar items in other collections, or in our collection, and/or engaging in other research, to better understand the object. Also, if I'm making a reproduction, I'll be working from the object, but also working on the pattern, and then I'll be working on the toile with direct reference to either the object or photographs. In that case, I spend maybe 15% of my time looking at the object.

Mounting project management to do with exhibitions / studio management / working on multiple projects.

My job includes the collections care for a historic house collection and we have to get the hall ready for visitors each day along side showroom checks and other tasks. Working close up with objects is a part of our tasks but it is one of many in our job role.

I try and spend as little time with the object as possible and spend the majority of my time creating an appropriate support for the object to be displayed.

Always multitasking! Rarely do I get more than a couple of hours with objects at any given time.

Contextual research is equally important for my current project

Question 39 - When documenting objects, is recording information the sole focus of your time?
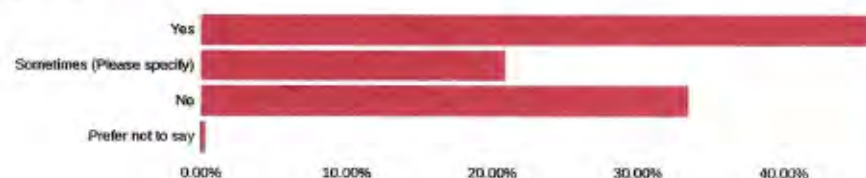
48 Responses

48 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
When documenting objects, is recording information the sole focus of your time? – Selected Choice	1	3	2	1	1	48

48 Responses

Field		Percentage
Yes		45.83%
Sometimes (Please specify)		20.83%
No		33.33%
Prefer not to say		0.00%
Total		

8 Responses

Sometimes (Please specify) - Text

I am often juggling several tasks when I am documenting and I am under time constraints so I am not able to document as thoroughly as I would like.

Sometimes combine recording information with writing comments regarding social history, or planning a 'case for acquisition'.

I try to make time exclusively for documentation tasks, but my role and our very small team means I may be called away.

Often also rationalising and upgrading the storage of the object.

Recording information, cleaning, packing the object and condition checking are often done at the same time to avoid double handling the object.

Sometimes it's simply to enjoy the experience of being with the object.

Contextual information may form significant feature

I have clean, pack and find a suitable location for the item too

134

I HAVE STARTED THIS JOURNAL ON THE ADVICE 6/5/21

OF MY DIRECTOR OF STUDIES, DR JEFFREY HORSLEY, IN ORDER TO TRACK THE PRACTICE-BASED ELEMENTS OF MY PHD RESEARCH.

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE MY OWN PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS & REFLECTIONS OF MY RESEARCH PROCESS.

AS MY RESEARCH CONSIDERS BIAS, SUBJECTIVITY & PHENOMENOLOGY, IT WILL CONTAIN ALL OF THESE THINGS, UNVARNISHED.

THESE PERSONAL NOTES WILL BE USED TO TRACK, DOCUMENT & CONSIDER MY PRACTICE, IN ORDER TO BETTER CRITICALLY ASSESS MY PLACE WITHIN MY OWN RESEARCH.

- CWobson

ON APRIL 19th, 2021 I SIGNED OUT A GO-PRO CAMERA FROM THE UNIVERSITY TO TEST AS A POSSIBLE "PROXY EYE" DURING OBSERVATIONAL STUDY. I FOUND IN SIMULATING A HEAD MOUNT, THAT THE CAMERA REACTED AS I HOPED, TRACKING THE MOVEMENT OF THE HEAD (AND THEREFORE, EYES/NOSE/EARS) WHEN EXAMINING A GARMENT.

OBVIOUSLY, I WILL NEED TO TEST IN THE PROPER SPACE (@ LCF), WITH AN ACTUAL HEAD MOUNT (TO TEST PARTICIPANT COMFORT/MOBILITY), AND THE ACTUAL TEST OBJECTS (LCF ARCHIVES - (ON APRIL 26th - NO RESPONSE) yet.)

I HAVE APPLIED FOR SSF FUNDING, SO I CAN HAVE TO THE TIME TO REALLY LEARN THE CAMERA, DEVELOP HOW TO RECORD/LIVE FEED ETC.

CURATOR NOTES: 12/08/21

- NATALIE ROTHSTEIN
    · WOVEN SILKS (1600-1850 ENGLAND)
    · V&A CURATOR (1952 → ?) ⇒ CONSULTANT @ M&L?
    · INCREDIBLY DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS, PRIMARILY CONCERNED
      WITH "DESIGN" → ALTERATIONS SEEN FROM THIS POV.

- SANTINA LEVEY
    · 16TH + 17TH @ TEXTILES

PHOTOGRAMMETRY TEST @ LIME GROVE. -5/10/2021

DUE TO LCF ARCHIVES NOT RESPONDING TO
MY REQUEST TO BORROW GARMENTS FOR
THIS TEST, I BROUGHT MY 1980S NAVY
WOOL PINSTRIPED YSL RIVE GAUCHE DB BLAZER.
ELLIOT DENMAN INTRODUCED ME TO THE
PHOTOGRAMMETRY RIG, AND SHOT THE BLAZER.
WE USED A BLACK COTTON - COVERED HALF
(FEMALE) MANNEQUIN TO SHOOT, WHICH HIGHLIGHTED
A FEW LIMITS OF THE PROCESS.

  - ANYTHING REFLECTIVE, TRANSPARENT, WITH "FRILLS" (IE: LACE) OR
    TOO DARK A COLOUR CONFUSES THE COMPUTER AND
    WILL CREATE A DISTORTED IMAGE.
  - CLOTHING IN DISCERNABLE "TEXTURE" IN BRIGHT
    OR VARIED COLOURS CAPTURES WELL ⟶

· HUMAN-SHAPED MANNEQUINS ("FULL BODY") CAPTURE WELL.

MY MOTIVATION FOR USING THIS TECHNOLOGY IS TO ATTEMPT A VIRTUAL GARMENT FOR OBSERVATIONAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS TO "EXAMINE" WHILE I MEASURE THEIR EYE GAZE. I WANT TO SEE WHERE THEY "LOOK" FIRST, FOR HOW LONG, AND HOW THIS COMPARES AGAINST REAL-LIFE MATERIAL CULTURE ANALYSIS, AND THEIR INTERVIEW RESPONSES, IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL BIAS POINTS, OR AT LEAST A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBJECTIVE NATURE OF ANALYSING GARMENTS.

I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE THEM ENGAGE WITH GARMENT IN A VR ENVIRONMENT, AND MEASURE THEIR VITALS (IE "LIE DETECTOR") AS THEY VIRTUALLY "HANDLED" THE GARMENT BUT LIMITATIONS ON HAPTIC FEEDBACK IN THOSE

PHOTOGRAMMETRY STILL CONT'D.

NAMELY, THAT I NEED THESE TO BE WORN GARMENTS, BUT HAPTIC FEEDBACK IS MEASURED THROUGH PURPOSE-MADE TEXTILE PIECES OR READERS PLACED ON A TEXTILE MAKES THAT NIGH IMPOSSIBLE AT THE MOMENT. → AND BRAENOUGH AWZI VIDEO GAME.

ANYWAY, SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM USED PHOTOGRAMMETRY TO CAPTURE GARMENTS FROM THE COLLECTION IN 2015, AND EVEN THEN THE CAPTURE & ABILITY TO ZOOM IN ON SIGNS OF WEAR IS QUITE GOOD, ITS JUST THE EDGES & INTERIORS ARE A BIT MUDDLED. WILL TRY TO MINIMISE THAT USING "BLENDER" SOFTWARE..... WHICH I MUST TEACH MYSELF.☺ ALSO, THE PARTICIPANTS WON'T BE ABLE TO LOOK AT INTERIOR OF VIRTUAL GARMENT, WHICH IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE IN MY COMPARISON. ALSO TO CONSIDER↘

PHOTOGRAMMETRY.   · 5/11/21 ·

→ IS THIS ITEM WILL PROBABLY BE FOREIG
TO MOST PARTICIPANTS, I DON'T WANT
TO FREAK THEM OUT TOO MUCH, AND
OVERLY IMPACT POTENTIAL RESULTS.
(BROADWAY LAKE)   · 26/11/21 ·
PHOTOGRAMMETRY MEETING II

· MARBLING & HIGHER PROCESSING TIMES
        ↳ CLEANER IMAGE.
· PHYSICAL TARGETS ON MODEL
· CLOVE 3D · PROGRAM -
· NAOMI DINES ➝ · RESEARCH GATE ·
                    · EXPLODING FASHION
                    · TOWARDS A NATIONAL COLLECTION ·
→ EMAIL ELLIOT & MOHAMMED EL S ·

· SETTING TRIPODS BETWEEN RIG POSTS ·
· UPDATE IMAGE MAPPING PROGRAM LICENSE (METASHAPE)
· RIG IS MOVING IN 2022 ?

NOTES FROM M⌀L DRESS & TEXTILES COLLECTION - 30/11/21 -
VISIT - P. 19/11/21 :

THIS WAS MY FIRST VISIT BACK IN THE STORES
SINCE FEBRUARY 2020 (!) ON THE AGENDA
WAS: · RON HITCHINS ACQUISITION → ANALYSIS
→ CATALOGUING
→ STORE
· OBSERVE LUCIE ANALYSING THE LAZARE
SYLVESTRE ACQUISITION.

HITCHINS ACQUISITION (2021.199)

+ NEW ACQUISITION CONSISTING OF 13 DRESS OBJECTS
AND 3 PRINT OBJECTS (NOT PART OF MY ANALYSIS,
AS BELONGING TO PRINTS, PAINTINGS & DRAWINGS DEPT.) p.100%
MADE FROM ARTIST & FLAMENCO DANCER RON HITCHINS (d.2019)
THE ORIGINAL SELECTION OF CLOTHING WAS ~~[crossed out]~~
IDENTIFIED BY TOM REDLY (M⌀L CURATOR, P & D.)
~~[crossed out]~~ AND A SELECTION
MADE BY LUCIE W. & BEATRICE B.
- MEASURED (NO SPECIFIC GUIDANCE FROM M⌀L OTHER THAN
MEASURING IN MM) THE GARMENTS USING A SELF-GUIDED
METHODOLOGY - BASICALLY THINKING HOW A GARMENT
MIGHT BE VISUALLY MATCHED TO ITS RECORD
(E. THIS REQUIRE SHOULDER TO CUFF, PIT TO PIT, NAPE
TO HEM, TROUSERS: WAIST, INSEAM, EXTERNAL SEAM ETC.)
CREATED AN OBJECT (IE: TANGIBLE/MATERIAL OBJECT) DESCRIPTION. THIS WAS USING
NO SPECIFIC METHODOLOGY, BUT THINKING OF THE
RESEARCH I HAVE ENCOUNTERED AROUND DESCRIPTIVE

LANGUAGE "OBJECTIVITY"; WHAT COLOURS TERMS ARE MORE SUBJECTIVE? HOW CAN SIGNS OF WEAR BE DESCRIBED W/O ASCRIBING MY ASSUMPTIONS ON CAUSE OR MEANING TO THEM?

⇒ I ENCOUNTERED AN ISSUE WITH THIS AS BEATRICE BEHLEN'S INITIAL NOTE (SIMPLE IDENTIFIERS FOR ENTERING THE OBJECT INTO MIMSY) HAD CALLED ONE VELVET ENSEMBLE "PINK", WHEN TO ME IT WAS A DARK RED/BURGUNDY. AFTER DISCUSSION W LUCIE, I CALLED IT "MID-TONE PINK-RED" WHICH WOULD HOPEFULLY CAPTURE THE NUANCED COLOUR OF THE ACTUAL OBJECT, CLOSEST TO THE TIME RON WOULD HAVE WORN IT.

FOR CONTENT (CONTEXT + BIOGRAPHY) DESCRIPTION, WHERE I HAD INTENDED TO WRITE HITCHINS BIOGRAPHY (EXTENSIVELY DOCUMENTED ON THE RONHITCHINS.COM WEBSITE) AND ATTEMPT SOME PRELIMINARY RESEARCH TO CONTEXTUALISE THE INDIVIDUAL PIECES, THERE SIMPLY WASN'T ENOUGH TIME, AS OUR WORKING SCHEDULE (BOOKED BECAUSE OF COVID RESTRICTIONS) ALLOWED ONE DAY FOR BOTH AGENDA ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED.   ⟶

INSTEAD, I USED THE SAME ~~BASIC!~~ DESCRIPTION OF HITCHINS "JEWELLER, ARTIST, FASHION DESIGNER & MARKET STALL HOLDER" IN EACH GARMENT, AND INDICATED AS PER BERTRIDGE'S INITIAL NOTES, AND THE APPEARANCE OF THE CLOTHING IF THEY POSSIBLY MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE BY HITCHINS.

LAZARE SYLVESTRE

OBSERVING LUCIE AT THIS ANALYSIS WAS USED TO TRIGGER MY OWN THOUGHTS AROUND THE NEEDS & DESIGN OF THE OBJECT ANALYSIS PORTION OF THE OBSERVATIONAL STUDY.

NOTABLE

LUCIE NOTED SHE WISHED SHE HAD MORE TIME FOR IN-DEPTH FIBRE ANALYSIS OF THE SYLVESTRE GARMENTS (TAILORED 2 PC. SUIT), SHE ALSO NOTED THAT SHE WAS "DOING MORE" THAN SHE MIGHT NORMALLY IN HER ANALYSIS AS A) I WAS WATCHING HER & B) SHE IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THAT ACQUISITION. FINALLY, A SOILED & FOLDED PAPER TOWEL WAS FOUND IN THE →

RIGHT EXT. FRONT SUIT JACKET POCKET. WHOE
DECIDED TO NOT KEEP IT, BUT NOTE IT IN
THE MIMSY FILE — AT THE TIME OF THIS
WRITING THERE IS NO NOTE IN MIMSY.

Summary.

· TIME WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CONSIDER
IN UNDERTAKING ANALYSIS & RESEARCH/SURVEY ELUDED
↳ BUILD THIS INTO OBSERVATIONAL STUDY
TO REPLICATE USUAL/COMMON WORKING
SCENARIOS?.

↳ THIS ABSOLUTELY IMPACTS HOW
MUCH/HOW DEEPLY OBJECT BIOGRAPHY
IS DOCUMENTED.

LCF ARCHIVES OBJECT SELECTION   20/12/21

- CRITERIA: · WORN
            · KNOWN PROVENANCE OF ORIGINAL WEARER
            · MENSWEAR / WOMENSWEAR / NON-GENDER SPECIFIC
            · COMPLIES TO PHOTOGRAMMETRY REQUIREMENTS

→ INTERESTING CONDITION DESCRIPTORS IN LCF ARCHIVES
  EXCEL FILES FOR OBJECTS (CATALOGUE)
        · "GRUBBY"
        · "AMATEUR"

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS LONGLIST:

   CRITERIA: · COLLECTIONS-BASED → BUT NOT EXCLUSIVE TO.
             · REPRESENTATIVE OF DISCIPLINE AS
               IDENTIFIED IN SURVEY RESPONSES
               (PRIMARILY)
                      · ENGLISH
                      · FEMALE
                      · 25-45·
                      · WHITE·

WOULD LIKE TO HAVE REPRESENTATION OF
DIFFERENT EXPERIENTIAL BACKGROUNDS.

PHOTOGRAMMETRY SESSION
OBJECT SELECTION - LCF ARCHIVES. 19/1/24

* SEE EXCEL SPREADSHEET NOTES *

AFTER SUPPLYING LCF ARCHIVES WITH A
PRELIMINARY LIST OF 16 POTENTIAL OBJECTS
BASED ON THE SELECTION CRITERIA:

- VISIBLY CLASSIFIABLE AS "MENSWEAR"
  "WOMENSWEAR", OR NON-GENDERED
- WORN CLOTHING → VISIBLE SIGNS OF WEAR
- KNOWN PROVENANCE.
- CONFORMS TO BEST-PHOTO STANDARDS =
  PHOTOGRAMMETRY.

LEAH BROUGHT-VAN, ASSISTANT CURATOR @ LCF ARCHIVES
BROUGHT THESE ITEMS FROM THE ARCHIVES

PHOTOGRAMMETRY SHOOT IN TEST GARMENTS. - 8/2/22-

SEE PHOTOS IN MY PHONE -

THIS WAS EXCITING & STRESSFUL.

HANDLING THE GARMENTS AND
FINDING AN APPROPRIATE MANNEQUIN
(STRANGELY DIFFICULT, AT A FASHION
SCHOOL?) ON MY OWN.

WANTING TO CAPTURE THEM "WELL",
BUT BEING WITHIN THE TIME/TECH.
LIMITATIONS WAS FRUSTRATING. I DO
THINK WE CAPTURED THE ELEMENTS
OF WEAR, WHICH IS IMPORTANT,
I THINK (BIAS?)

TOBII EYE TRACKER(S) INSTALL +
HOME TEST.   · 15/3/22

· MUST BE SAVED TO C: DRIVE.
· EXPORT VIDEO ⇒ OS DISK (C:)
· CALIBRATE PARTICIPANT
· FAMILIARISE W ONE OBJECT.
· MARK OUT CHAIR ON FLOOR + LAPTOP ON
  (↳ FACIAL DISTANCE FROM SCREEN.   TABLE
· HOW TO TOGGLE BETWEEN OBJECTS SEAMLESS
  ↳ LOOK @ LVL 2.

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY TESTING - DAY 1   16/5/22.

- LOCATION JPS 305.
- TEST STUDY PARTICIPANT - LEAH GOULLET - LEVY (LCF ALUMNI)

SETTING UP TECH:

SUPPLIES:
- NITRILE GLOVES
- PENCIL
- ANTI-BAC SKIN-FRIENDLY WIPES.

- GO-PRO
  - NEEDS TO BE SET TO SHOOT FRONT-FACING.
  - OPERATE VIA GO-PRO QUIK ON PHONE.
  - CLEAR CARD.
  - DON'T WEAR HAIR UP → HEAD MOUNT.

- CANON CAMERAS
  - CLEAR CARDS
  - SET TO RECORD PRIOR TO LEAVING ROOM/ STARTING INTERVIEW.

* NOTES FROM LGL:
- CONSTRUCTED ENVIRONMENT "/ FEELING OBSERVED
- THREE TABLES ⇒ FLUID MOVEMENT / NATURAL PROCESS
- PHYSICAL COMFORT ⇒ SITTING UPRIGHT / TIGHTNESS OF HEAD STRAP.

CONT'D.

TOBII.

- SET RECORDING TO SAVE TO C://DRIVE
- OPEN FIRST WINDOW / FULLSCREEN / ALT + TAB
  TO TOGGLE TO RECORDING.
- CONFIGURE.

RE-TESTING TOBII

· USING NOTES FROM 16/3/22 IN-PERSON TEST
+ UPDATED TOBII PRO LAB SOFTWARE,
SETTING PROCESS FOR EYE GLAZE
TRACKING.

TIMELINE

- · TEST OBJECT — WHITE BACKGROUND TO MATCH SKETCHFAB
- · CONFIGURATION — 5 CALIBRATION POINTS/TIMED (TOBII STANDARD)
- · OBJECT 1 ↳ USED FOR WEBCAM

USING "SCREEN RECORDING" SETTING AS MOST
APPROPRIATE TO RECORDING IMAGES OF STIMULI
EYE GLAZE IS FOCUSED ON.
· 25 FPS (TOBII STANDARD) / HIGH SCREEN RESOLUTION

NOTE:
INTERVIEW QUESTION SET SHOULD INCLUDE HOW
THE PROCESS FELT FOR THE PARTICIPANTS.

OBJECT 1: 2016 40/21

1ST OBSERVATION - I KNOW IT SO WELL! HELLO, FRANCIS

BROWN, RED, GREY CHECK WOOL JACKET
 ↳ ORANGE, GREEN, YELLOW THREADS IN WEAVE.
- BLAZER STYLE
TWO MULTI-BROWN/GREY BUTTONS - "HORN" STYLE
- BUTTONS LEFT? ⇒ DOUBLE CHECKED W UNCLE, SHE WOULDN'T USE THAT DESCRIPTION.
  ↳ D. 2 BUTTONS SEWN ON CENTRE
     RIGHT EXTERIOR - 2CM DIAMETRE
     2 BUTTON HOLES FINISHED W̄ GREEN-GREY
     STITCHING: - 10CM APART / 3CM WIDE OPENING.
- 2) POCKETS AT ← EXTERNAL FRONT LEFT + 16.5CM WIDE
     .19CM WIDE EXTERNAL FRONT RIGHT ↗ 20CM LONG
     .19.8CM LONG
     MOTH CASING AT LEFT EXTERNAL TOP EDGE OF
     RIGHT POCKET - ⇒ REMOVED & DISPOSED OF BY LW
= LUNCH BREAK =
- 2 BUTTONS AT EACH WRIST - 1CM DIAMETRE
LINED WITH LIGHT BROWN TIGHTLY WOVEN
LIGHT-WEIGHT MATERIAL.
INTERIOR POCKET AT EACH SIDE OF CHEST
⇒ RIGHT POCKET HAS WHITE LABEL WITH GREEN PRINTED
WRITING READING "BROWN'S"
- AT LEFT POCKET HAS WHITE LABEL W/ BLACK EMBROIDERED
  "PURE NEW WOOL" "DRY CLEAN ONLY"

* SPENT ROUGHLY 90 MINUTES ⓦ OBJECT.

. I PAUSE PERIODICALLY TO SPEAK TO LUCIE ABOUT THE OBJECT (A MEN'S JACKET FOR THE MEN EXHIBITION SHE IS WORKING ON. MARY THE CONSERVATOR COMES BY TO CONSULT ON POTENTIAL MOUNTING/ CONSERVATION TIME. "MAN - NO, WOMAN - POWER" AS SHE SAYS, IMPLYING THERE ARE FEW MEN WORK IN CONSERVATION.

= LUCIE ASKS FOR MY INPUT ON DATING 2 PAIRS OF MILITARY RIDING BOOTS - I REALISE BEYOND GOOGLING THE NAME, I HAVE VERY LITTLE MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE (OLD) BOOTS. I SEE SPOTS FOR SPURS ON ONE, AND THAT THE SOLES ARE HOBNAILED LEATHER BUT THIS IS NOT MUCH HELP.

= I'VE FORGOTTEN I WAS BEING FILMED, AND ONLY JUST REMEMBERED AFTER SNIFFING THE GARMENT - I LOOK LIKE A PERV!

THE POCKET CONTENTS AREN'T STORED WITH THE JACKET I THINK THAT'S A SHAME THE JACKET FEELS DE-PERSONALISED WITHOUT THEM. I KNOW THEY ARE MISSING THOUGH, HAD I NOT IT WOULDN'T FEEL SO INCOMPLETE ──▷ CONT

OBJECT 1 (CONT'D)

BROWN CORD LOOP AT CENTRE INTERIOR NAPE
OF NECK

- THE LINING SHOWS SIGNS OF WEAR.
  - WRINKLING THROUGHOUT THE INTERIOR LINING
  - STAIN EXTENDING BETWEEN LINING HEM @
    INT. REAR RIGHT AND APPROX. 14CM UPWARD
    (PHOTO AVAILABLE)
  - WRINKLING & DISCOLOURATION AT ARMPITS
    IN LINING
→ EXT LEFT CHEST POCKET

VENT GOING UP CENTRE REAR OF JACKET.
THE JACKET SMELLS OF THE MUSEUM, A
KIND OF SANITISED MUSTY SMELL → THERE
IS NO SCENT AROUND THE NECK OR
COLLAR, OR CUFFS (OR EVEN THE INTERIOR
LINING) THAT IMPLIES COLOGNE, SWEAT, ANYTHING
ORGANIC TO A HUMAN OR SYNTHETIC WORN
BY A HUMAN

- FRONT RIGHT EXT. POCKET HAS ADDITIONAL
  INTERIOR POCKET MADE OF BROWN UMM
  FABRIC → 10CM WIDE
- WHERE THE COLLAR IS LINED WITH BROWN FELT

- PIT TO PIT - ~~45cm~~ 45cm.
  TOP OF COLLAR.
- INT. ~~NECK~~ ✓CENTRE DOWN TO HEM - 77.5cm
- TOP OF SHOULDER SEAM TO CUFF.
  - RIGHT ARM - 63cm.
  - LEFT ARM - 62.5 cm.

OBJECT 2: "MYSTERY OBJECT"   .29/9/22.

5cm

- SELECTED BY LUCIE
    · CRITERION: · WORN GARMENT
                · NO SPECIFIC ERA
                · NO SPECIFIC KNOWN WEARER.

BEFORE I OPEN THE TYVEK STORAGE BAG, I'M
HOPING IT'S SOMETHING "INTERESTING". FIRST THING
COMING TO MIND IS A CANDY-COLOURED 18TH
CENTURY GOWN. THE BAG IS BIG ENOUGH, MAYBE.
BUT IT WAS STORED IN A PART OF
THE DRESS STORES WHERE I DON'T THINK
THOSE THINGS ARE. ALSO, LUCIE IS WORKING
ON THE JEWISH FASHION EXHIBITION RIGHT NOW,
SO I FEEL LIKE SELECTING ONE OF THOSE
OBJECTS WOULD BE TOP OF MIND FOR HER.
SHE REMOVED THE OBJECT ID HANG-TAG, SO
I AM ABOUT TO FIND OUT!

- BLACK HEAVYWEIGHT WOOL
- LONG JACKET/COAT ⟹ WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE? ICON?
- BLACK VELVET EXTERIOR COLLAR
- DARK METAL CHAIN STITCHED INTO INTERIOR NAPE OF NECK

I'VE INTERRUPTED ANALYSIS TO THINK ABOUT FRANCIS' JACKET AGAIN. I ALWAYS WONDER IF ITS THE LAST TIME I'LL SEE HIS OBJECTS EVERY TIME I PUT THEM AWAY.

1
- BLACK PLASTIC BUTTON UNDER RIGHT SIDE OF COLLAR - 1.8 cm D.

- 4 BLACK PLASTIC BUTTONS RUNNING DOWN EXT. RIGHT FRONT OF COAT - 2.5 cm D.
- 4 BLACK FINISHED BUTTONHOLES, CONCEALED BY FLAP
- POCKET W FLAP AT EACH SIDE AT HIP
    - ⟹ OPENING: RIGHT - 16 cm
      LEFT - 18 cm
    - ⟹ LINED W̄ BROWN FABRIC.
- INT CHEST SLASH POCKET AT EACH SIDE
    - RIGHT - 13 cm
    - LEFT - 16 cm.

- TOP INT. LINING BROWN W̄ BLUE, PINK, WHITE VERTICAL STRIPES ⟹ FINE WEAVE

BOTTOM INT. LINING TAN, DARK BLUE + YELLOW CHECK
    - ⟹ HEAVY WEAVE !!

CUFFS HAVE 4 LINES OF STITCHING GOING
AROUND THEM (PHOTO AVAILABLE)
EXT
SHOULDER SEAM TO CUFF >70CM
INT TOP COLLAR TO HEM >116CM
LINING HEAVILY HOLED/CHEWED BY MOTHS
EXT RIGHT CHEST (BY BUTTONS) LONG MOTH
HOLE
· RIGHT EXT. POCKET HAS BLACK RE INFORCED
STITCHING AROUND THE LEFT EDGE
· INTERIOR RIGHT COLLAR AT SEAM OF
VELVET IS PULLING APART FROM WOOL
- BURN OF LIGHT MOTH & MILDEW STAINS
↓   ↓
THROUGHOUT   ON SHOULDERS

- SIGNS OF WEAR UNDER BOTH ARMS TO
WOOL, STITCHING IS LIGHT BREAKING TO THREADS
DISCERNABLE SCENT... OTHER THAN "MUSEUM"
BASED ON WHAT I'VE OBSERVED, I BELIEVE
THIS IS A PARTIALLY MACHINE-MADE, PARTIALLY
HAND STITCHED COAT, POSSIBLY MADE AS A ONE-OFF,
DUE TO LACK OF LABELS, SO NOT MASS PRODUCED
IS A SOLID ITEM.
THE STYLE IS DESIGNED FOR COOL WEATHER,
POSSIBLY DAMP DUE TO WEIGHT & DENSE
WEAVE OF WOOL, PRE-TECH FABRICS —D

THE VELVET COLLAR IMPLIES SOMEONE
DRESSING FOR STATUS. SO PERHAPS
A DOORMAN? STYLE APPEARS TO ME
TO BE LATE 19th CENTURY / EARLY 20th CENTURY;
PRE-WWI.

- SIZE + LACK OF "TYPICAL" WOMENSWEAR
  DESIGN ELEMENTS SUCH AS BREAST DARTS
  SUGGEST A MAN WORE IT, BUT
  NOT HEAVILY.

- MOTH DAMAGE OCCURED IN STORAGE
  ACCESSION NUMBER (49.78/11) SUGGESTS 1949
  DONATION DATE → PERHAPS STORED HANGING
  BETWEEN END OF WORN LIFE + DONATION
  TYPICAL OR WESTERN MENSWEAR

CYANA MADSEN HYPOTHESIS

· MAN
· CIRCA 1900
· WORKING WEAR

·MOSS BROS. DONATION

Observational Study & Interview

Participant Information and Consent Form

This study contributes to Cyana Madsen's AHRC Technē-funded doctoral research project based out of the Centre for Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (UAL), titled "Collecting Dress, Collecting Biography: Developing a dress-specific methodology for preserving biographic narratives in clothing acquired by public collections."
The field of fashion- and dress-based studies is rapidly growing, and this study hopes to establish a base of understanding about the people doing this work, and the tools they are using to study objects.

The aim of this study is to gather phenomenological and experiential information about the people working with objects of dress in UK archives and collections. The data collected in this study will be compiled, analysed and published as part of a final PhD thesis (with potential conference or additional published outputs e.g., journal articles) examining the experiences of those practitioners working with objects of dress.

I, the researcher, have invited participants based in the UK over the age of 18, at any stage of their career, who currently work with clothing in a public collection or archive. We understand that those working with objects of dress will be employed under a range of job titles, and may not work exclusively in one collection, or a collection that is specific to only dress objects.

This study should take approximately 3 hours of your time during which you will be based at LCF John Princes Street. During this time you will:

•   Wear a Tobii eye tracking head mounted device while you look at and visually analyse three 3D renderings of garments. This eye tracking device will be recording your head and eye movements. ** Please notify Cyana Madsen if you have issues with epilepsy or seizures due to flashing lights **
•   Perform material culture analysis of three garments as per your standard working practice, wearing a head-mounted Go-Pro camera which will feed video and audio remotely to Cyana Madsen. You will be working independently during this time, while a digital camera records audio and video for subsequent analysis. ** Please notify Cyana Madsen if you have issues wearing a head mount with a 158g camera on it **
•   You will participate in a semi-structured interview with researcher Cyana Madsen. During this time you will asked a series of questions about your working background and experience, and this interview will be recorded with audio and video.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study, and at any point you can withdraw completely from the study without giving a reason. You can withdraw by notifying Cyana Madsen, either in person during the study, or at any point afterwords via email: c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk

Privacy and Data Protection

The information you provide in this study is voluntary and be treated with respect. No video footage or audio recordings will be used for publication or presentation outside of the thesis, without your explicit and prior approval. Data is collected via the Tobii eye tracker, Go-Pro camera, and Canon camera. Video and audio recordings will be stored on a password-protected external drive for up to 10 years after the completion of the research. On request, updated information about the data and research can be provided to participants. Data collected will be analysed and stored following the Data Protection Act 2018 and according to the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

Please indicate if you consent to the use of your name in any research outputs, or if you consent to be referred to under a pseudonym (e.g.: "Respondent 1" or "Respondent X" in any research outputs: (Please initial your choice)

_____ I consent to being identified by my name in research outputs.

_____ I consent to being identified under a pseudonym in research outputs.

If you have any questions or require more information prior to participating in this study, please contact:

Cyana Madsen
c.madsen0820171@arts.ac.uk

This study is considered to be minimal risk and as such should not have had any negative impact on you. However, if the study has harmed you in any way or you wish to make a complaint about its conduct, you can contact:

researchethics@arts.ac.uk

I, (_____PRINT NAME_____), consent to participate in the above outlined study and for data gathered from this study to be used in the above outlined research and its applicable outputs.

I, (_____PRINT NAME_____), consent to video and audio capture of myself on recordings made during the three segments of the study for use solely in research outputs: (Please initial consent for each)

_____ Eye gaze tracking.

_____ Material culture analysis.

_____ Interview.

I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any point during or after the study has been completed.

_____ _____
SIGNATURE   DATE

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Privacy and Data Protection

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_____ ~~████████~~ _____   _____
                  SIGNATURE   DATE

...on a password-protected external drive for up to 10 years after the ...ch. On request, updated information about the data and research can ...nts. Data collected will be analysed and stored following the Data ...according to the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics.

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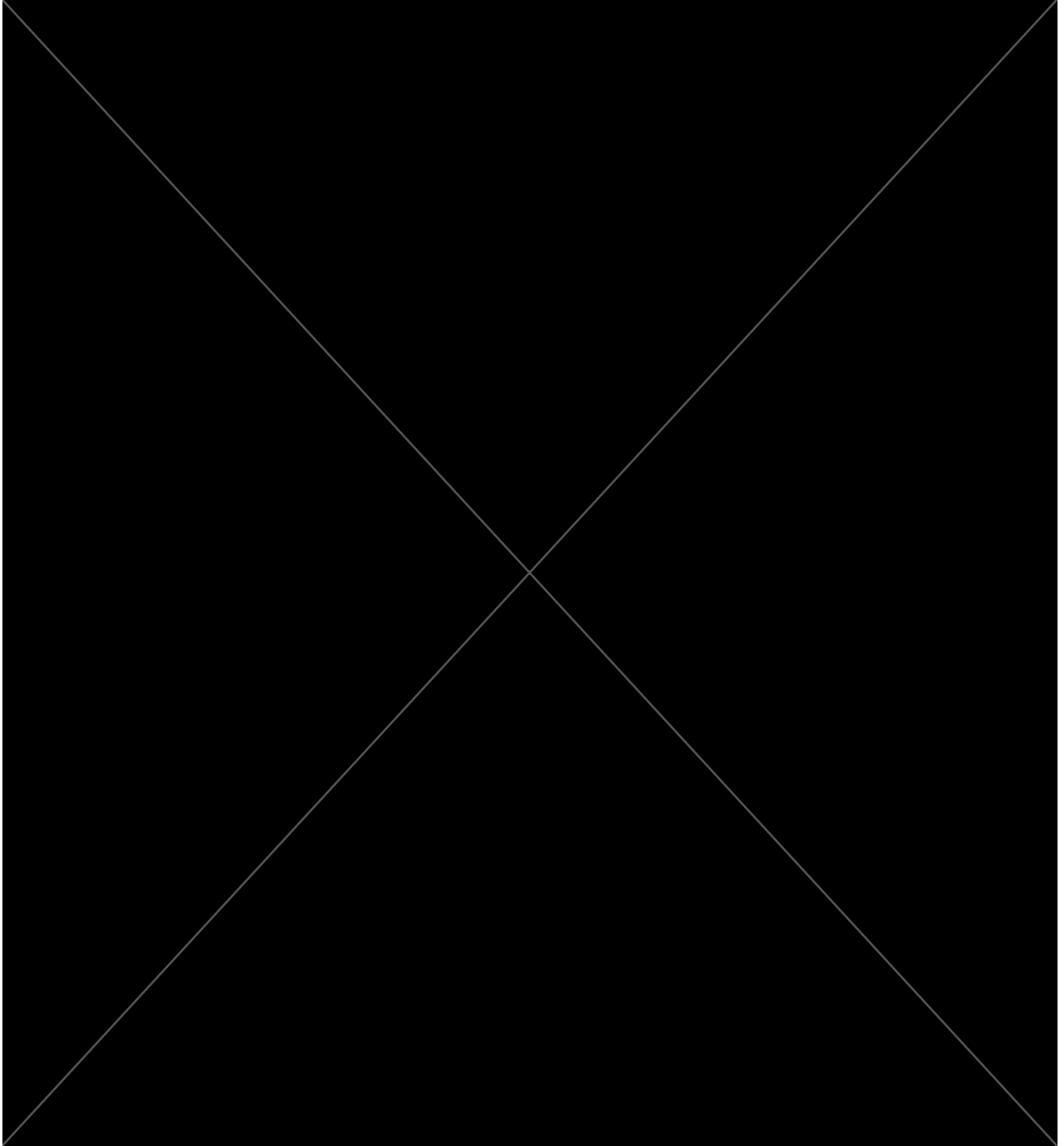
researchethics@arts.ac.uk

Hi Cyana

Thanks for getting in touch – it was great to see you too.

I am happy for you to use my name in your research outputs.

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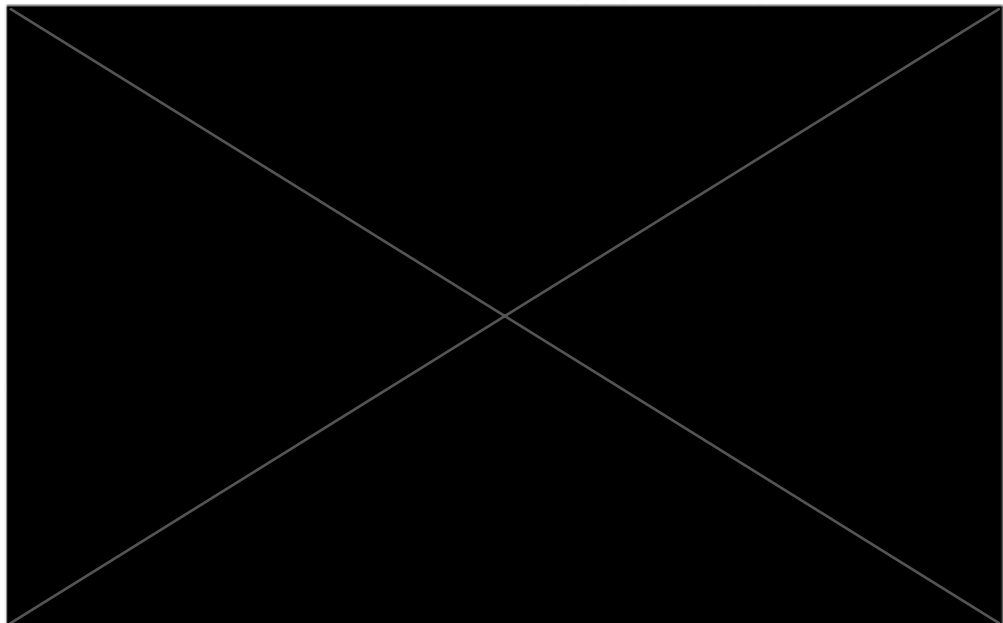___✓ I consent to being identified by my name in research outputs.

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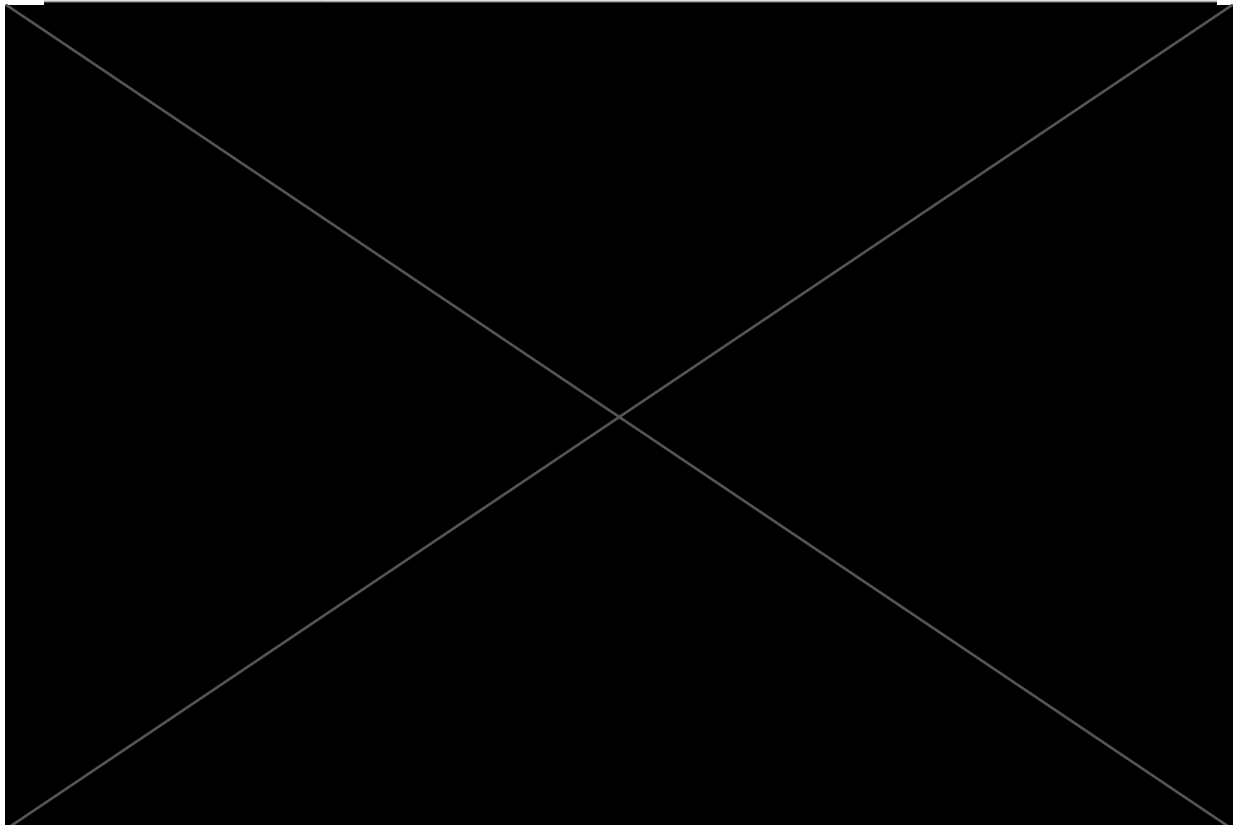✓ I consent to being identified by my name in research outputs.

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Interview Questions

Opening

1. Thank you for participating today, and for engaging in this interview. I have been studying biography in clothing collections for about 6 years now, and this study has now focused on establishing the variety of experiences those of us who closely engage with object biography have when we are working in collections.

Background & Practice

1. Tell me about your first memory of clothing
    a. Can you describe the garment?
    b. Do you remember how it made you feel?
2. How would you describe your interest in clothing outside of collections work?
3. Tell me about your educational/training background
4. Tell me about your working experience with clothing collections (ie: volunteering, first job, trajectory)
5. Do you have a specific subject area you specialise or have interest in?
    a. How often are you able to engage with this interest area in your professional career? (ie: publications, exhibitions, tours of the collection)
6. Would you describe yourself as having a specific practice working in clothing collections?
    a. What does it entail? Equipment, environment, making, exhibiting etc.
7. When you analyse a garment, do you apply a specific object analysis methodology in approaching the garment (ie: "stepped" process like Mida & Kim, Prown)
    a. If yes, where/when did you learn this methodology
    b. If no, have you developed your own method of analysis, or was it knowledge you acquired?
        i. Explain where/when/how
8. Is there an aspect of collected garments you usually look for? (ie: design, signs of wear, labels, etc.)

Digital Garment Analysis

1. Tell me about your experience using the eye gaze tracking and 3D garment analysis.
    a. Physical experience
    b. Mental experience

c. Emotional experience

2. Have you used eye gaze tracking before?

3. Have you used a digital rendering of a garment in your work previously?

4. Describe the three garments you analysed:

    a. Object 1 (Blue Jacket)

    b. Object 2 (Shoes)

    c. Object 3 (Green Jacket)

5. What was the first aspect of

    a. Object 1 that you observed?

    b. Object 2 that you observed?

    c. Object 3 that you observed?

6. Could you hypothesise on the biography/history of the garment based on your analysis?

    a. Object 1

    b. Object 2

    c. Object 3a

7. What about the garment leads you to this hypothesis?

Material Culture

1. Tell me about your experience of material culture analysis with the garments.

2. How did your experience of the digital analysis compare to your experience of the material culture analysis?

3. Describe the three garments you analysed:

    a. Object 1 (Blue Jacket)

    b. Object 2 (Shoes)

    c. Object 3 (Green Jacket)

4. What was the first aspect of

    a. Object 1 that you observed?

    b. Object 2 that you observed?

    c. Object 3 that you observed?

5. Could you hypothesise on the biography/history of the garment based on your analysis?

    a. Object 1

    b. Object 2

    c. Object 3

6. What about the garment leads you to this hypothesis?

7. Did you use a specific process in your material culture analysis of the garments today?

8. Is this typical of the process you would use in a typical working day?

9. How did the experience today differ from a typical working day where you analyse an object?

10. How frequently do you analyse objects of dress in your day-to-day work?

11. What environment do you do this analysis in?

    a. Physical space

    b. Working conditions

    c. Colleagues

Closing

1. Is there any thoughts or feelings about today you'd like to add before we end this interview?

Interview – 04/04/2022

Interviewer: Cyana Madsen (CM)

Interviewee: Participant 1 (P1)

Key:

• ▓▓▓▓ - Analysis Description

CM – 00:45

So I've been looking at biography for about six years now, in clothing collections, and over the course of my PhD it's kind of turned from the collection, to the people working with the collection. So what I'm trying to get at, through all of this, trying to see things through your eyes, and gather, you know, testimony of your experience with garments is kind of what I'm going for. So, I've got a set amount of questions, but this is very much, we can chat through things. Yeah, okay, so I just wanted to start a little more esoterically: can you tell me your first memory of clothing?

P1 – 01:31

Whoo! Um…
Surprise

CM – 01:37

If you need a minute, just spring that one on you!

P1 – 01:40

Shuffling through my head, trying to go backwards in time. Um, well the one that comes to me now, is one of these memories which I'm not sure if it's my memory or if it's I was told the story so many times, that it's kind of become part of my history.
Authorship of biography

CM – 02:01

Yeah, yeah, yeah, okay.

P1 - 02:04

Of when I was about four or five, and um, and we were down at Auckland harbour and, which is the marina with lots of sort of, sailboats and stuff. And apparently I – maybe I was younger, maybe I was more like three or four, um, and I fell in the water, and apparently plunged like a stone, and my dad jumped in after me and pulled me out. And I had – again, I'm not sure if this is my, I have this memory of wearing a red cardigan, associated with it. But I have no idea if that's the case or not. But that's what I have an association with, so that's what's come to me now.
Authorship of biography; Accuracy of memory; Colour

CM – 02:54

Okay, so, so you said it's a red cardigan, is it just kind of a nebulous red cardigan in your mind, or is it something that you specifically could like, recreate if you had the ability to?

P1 – 03:09

Um, just a round neck, um yeah, buttons, I'm not sure, woollen, but quite bright red.
Colour; Texture; Material

CM – 03:22

So when you think of that, um, garment, is there like a feeling that comes with it when you think about it?

P1 – 03:32

Um, not specifically, because it's tied to closely to this event, and the way that my family told it, my dad in particular in terms of being this kind of, quite, well this sort of scary moment for my dad in particular. And I suppose a level of, almost hero-ism? You know, that he jumped into the Auckland harbour after his daughter. Um, because he describes, yeah sort of coming down below me and pushing me up out of the water.
Authorship of biography; Ownership of history; Family; Emotional intensity

CM – 04:06

Aw, dad.

P1 – 04:09

Um, but as I say, I don't think I really have a memory of it, it's more of a sort of story that was told and maybe it's just a couple things of that time come together. So yeah, no particular feeling.

<mark>Authorship of biography; Accuracy of memory</mark>

CM – 04:26

Cool. So, to bring it more to the present, um, how would you describe your interest in clothing, outside of your professional collections work?

P1 – 04:39

Um, from when I was very young, again about five, my parents bought me – I think it was for my fifth or sixth birthday – a history of *Vogue*.

<mark>Family; Fashion history</mark>

CM – 04:55

Amazing.

P1 – 04:56

And my dad again tells a story of bringing home some, um, cuz New Zealand you know, we were quite cut off. Things took a long time to get to New Zealand, so things like magazines and stuff. So again, some of this time, when I was really quite young, maybe five, six, seven, he said he brought home some *Vogue* maga-zines and I said to him, "Daddy, you know, they're not the current ones." I was quite disparaging. Even though, he'd brought me this history of *Vogue*. And I just loved looking at the pictures, I used to just look at this book all of the time. And because again, music, well, a mixture of things: not having a huge amount of

money, but also clothes and stuff in New Zealand were really expensive, because there was lots of import duties, and so my mum used to take us to what we call "op shops", second hand shops, charity shops to get our clothes, so lots of that. My mum liked clothes, but again didn't have a lot of money. So that was always uh, and she talked about clothes that she remembers, like the terrible school uniforms that her mum made for her, but also the clothes that she wore and bought when she was in London in the 60s. But um, a lot of it was around not having money, so she could afford Biba, Mary Quant was like, way – well, she did have one Mary Quant second hand dress, she used to buy things that were practical as well because she walked all the time to save money on bus fares, it was always about money! Yeah, so there were those kind of, um for people that I grew up with, sort of my parents friends, again some of them were quite creative, so you know, hippies, so there was lots of sort of second hand clothing, making our own clothes, knitting, sewing, that kind of thing. But in terms of my historical interest, yeah again, when I came, when we came here when I was nine, and I was given book tokens, and I went to, oh, what's the big bookshop on?

==Family; Finances; Fashion history; Making and creativity; Buying second-hand==

CM – 07:29

Foyle's?

P1 – 07:30

Foyle's! When that was old school Foyle's, it was really confusing, anyway I spent my book vouchers on this amazing book by Christine [sic] Dars of photographs by the Séeberger brothers, from like the 1910s, 1920s. So that was the book I chose when I was nine.

==Fashion history==

CM – 07:49

That's impressive!

175

P1 – 07:51

So yeah, it's kind of long-standing, and then when I was a teenager I was living in Auckland – again a lot of it was money, I don't have the money to buy the boutique clothes which I really liked, because that was super expensive. But I could buy really amazing, beautiful second-hand old clothes that I really liked for a lot less money, and kind of, I suppose, do my own thing. So I was buying second-hand, but I really particularly liked 40s and earlier from when I was about, thirteen fourteen and then wore those as well right through my teens. And I've continued that since then.

<mark>Fashionability; Finances; Buying second-hand; Fashion history</mark>

CM – 08:36

Cool. Um, so you've said, this is obviously an interest in a kind of historical clothing that started really young. Um, how did that parlay into your education and training from, from your kind of teen years, I suppose.

P1 – 08:52

Well, as a teenager I was kind of considered academic. I went to a girl's school where there was still differentiation between sort of academic and non-academic. So to do, so I'd made clothes, and done all sorts of stuff where I grew up and in, well a quite hippie community and all these people making stuff. So I had been doing that since I was young, and was taught to sew when I was five. But then going to high school in the city, to do clothing – it was, I can't even remember what it was called, I can't remember if it was clothing technology or, but it was home ec, home economics, so that was sort of, non-academic.

<mark>Education; Making and creativity</mark>

CM – 09:43

Right, yeah.

P1 – 09:44

And it wasn't even really, I never even talked about it with my parents, in terms of

being interested in maybe doing it, because it just felt that was not what I ought to do. So I did history, and sort of academic subjects, and that's where I suppose I maintained it, and in through my – and then when I went to university, I did history, a BA at Auckland. Um, again there wasn't really much option of doing anything related, because it wasn't really, in New Zealand at that time there were fine art schools, there were polytechnics which were just, this was in the 90s, they were just turning into, um, universities. But again, there was this kind of, that was considered non-academic, and I didn't, yeah. Yeah, it just never even occurred to me, really. Then when I finished my BA, I did a Master's, I remember thinking – maybe it was towards the end of my BA, um, maybe there was some way I could possibly do something around fashion history. In the library, at the university at the time, there was these, sort of, they were books of courses, they weren't, you could look up other universities and other things.

<mark>Education; Family expectations; Fashion history</mark>

CM – 11:21

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 11:22

And I discovered, looking through that there was this place called The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, and they did a Master's course in fashion history, and I remember looking going "oh my god, that would be amazing." But had no idea how or any of that, it was like completely impossible. You know, and then I did my Master's, and at that time Master's was a two-year course, first year taught, second year thesis, and I had fantastic, um, lecturer in the department who I'd done stuff with before, who was a gender historian, and by the time I got to do my thesis, I had worked out that I could do something around fashion history.

<mark>Education; Finances; Family expectations; Fashion history; Gender studies</mark>

CM – 12:13

P1 – 12:14

In terms of gender studies. So that's what I did for my Master's thesis, because there'd been virtually no writing at that point in New Zealand on that subject. There were a couple of people who had done, but not really, so I did it in my thesis and got first class honours. Yeah, so that was the way I kind of got into it, and then I had another gap working at libraries, and then did um, again looked and was like "Right, what is it that I really, really enjoy? What do I love?" And then came back to fashion history, and looked at some things that I could possibly do, and applied to the Courtauld Master's, and the history of design Master's at Royal College of Art.

==Education; Finances; Fashion history; Travel; Lack of discipline in New Zealand==

CM – 13:02

Oh, okay.

P1 – 13:03

And I got into both of those, but decided to do the RCA course.

==Education; Travel; Fashion history==

CM – 13:07

Amazing. Awesome. Um, so from there, so then you did your PhD.

P1 – 13:16

Yeah, after working, a bit after my MA at the RCA, which again was a two-year course.

==Education; Finances==

CM – 13:21

Yeah.

P1 – 13:23

I did a year of, or a year and a half of doing sort of different stuff to make money.

==Finances==

CM – 13:27

As you do!

P1 – 13:28

And then applying for museum jobs, and it was just at the time, well. Renaissance and the Regions had been around for a couple of, or a few years before that?

<mark>Employment opportunities</mark>

CM – 13:38

Alright.

P1 – 13:39

But then East Anglia got money through Renaissance and the Regions and decided to put it into curatorial posts, so there were two jobs actually advertised in East Anglia, um, one at Luton and one at Colchester and Ipswich. I applied for both, and was interviewed for both, and got the Colchester job.

<mark>Employment opportunities</mark>

CM – 14:02

Oh, cool! Okay. Um, so then –

P1 – 14:03

Which they folded in as the costume, costume and textiles curator.

<mark>Nature of employment</mark>

CM – 14:10

Okay, okay.

P1 – 14:11

And then Renaissance and the Regions money got pulled, I knew that my job was going to disappear, because one of the major restructuring, and um, the PhD studentship came up. So, yeah. Anyway, timing!

CM – 14:23

Off I go! And then, so, I'm just trying to get the full picture trajectory, so then you did your PhD at Leeds.

P1 – 14:38

I did it, it was a collaborative doctoral award that had been put together at University of Leeds and Leeds Museums & Galleries, and that was to look at a particular part of the collection, um, on the Leeds tailoring industry. Um, I had a very good working, great relationship with the curator who was my supervisor, but we really worked together because of my museum experience. And we did an exhibition together while I was there.

Education; Fashion history; Colleague relationships; Practice

CM – 15:12

Oh, cool.

P1 – 15:13

On tailoring, we did womenswear as well. Um, which was really successful, um, and then part way through my PhD –

Fashion history; Practice

CM – 15:27 (Goes to close window in interview room)

I'm going to pause you there. I think the choice is between being boiling hot or this noisy flapping. Let's give this a try, and if it gets really hot then I'll have to rethink this.

P1 – 15:41

No, because you don't want it to go over the recording. So then, yes, I was having issues with my PhD, and my funding had finished, so I got a job, it was a maternity cover at Cook Museum in York, and it was for ten months. And it was

of opening, so they were about to close, they'd made the decision to close the museum, for financial reasons. They needed someone to deliver the last exhibition, and then help with the move, which actually didn't end up happening, which was a huge relief.

<mark>Education; Employment opportunities; Employment precarity; Practice</mark>

CM – 16:26

Yeah.

P1 – 16:27

Yeah, but I did that for nearly a year, which saved my sanity. Um, and then yep, I finished my PhD, and then got my current job at the end.

<mark>Education; Mental health; Employment opportunities</mark>

CM – 16:38

Westminster?

P1 – 16:39

Oh yeah, I did another maternity cover.

<mark>Employment opportunities; Employment precarity; Finances</mark>

CM – 16:42

I totally get it.

P1 – 16:43

At the end of my PhD, Natalie, the curator at Leeds went on maternity, so I had that job, and ended up only doing it not – I delivered the exhibition that needed to be delivered. But then the job at Westminster came up.

<mark>Colleague relationships; Employment opportunities; Employment precarity; Finances; Practice</mark>

CM – 17:03

Nice. Okay, cool.

P1 – 17:04

And yeah, it's kind it's like "Oh and this happened, and this happened!" It didn't feel like that at the time.

<mark>Employment opportunities; Employment precarity; Feeling stress</mark>

CM – 17:10

Of course not, no. It's never like a smooth "Well, I just went from one job to another and everything was not stressful and fine!" Um, so, so thinking about your kind of history, and your interests, and then doing the gender, kind of gender studies stroke fashion history MA, and then doing the Leeds placement with the tailoring, which was menswear specific?

P1 - 17:43

Yep.

CM – 17:44

So do you, yourself identify as having like, "I have a specialist area." Or do you, is it broader than that for you?

P1 – 17:55

Um, when I was, yeah. I suppose it depends on at what point you would ask that question.

<mark>Development of practice</mark>

CM – 18:09

I guess thinking about it from where you are now, like if you were to –

P1 – 18:18

Now I would say I'm a menswear specialist. And that is actually not just because of the PhD and the job that I do now. So when I did my MA in New Zealand, I was looking at representations of gender and fashion in the 1920s and 1930s, but I looked at menswear as well, I didn't just do womenswear, I did a comparative

womenswear and menswear. And then my thesis, my dissertation for my RCA course, I looked at a garment called a Lavalavas which is a Pacific Island sort of wrap garment, and which is worn by men and women.

Development of practice; Diversity of experience; Education; Gender studies; Fashion history; Travel

CM – 18:55

Oh, okay.

P1 – 18:56

And I was particularly inspired by that because I thought – I had been at the exhibition called Men in Skirts.

Development of practice; Disciplinary engagement with colleague practice

CM – 19:04

Okay, okay.

P1 – 19:05

So those interests were there kind of there, um but when I was working as a curator, especially at Colchester and Ipswich, you had, you couldn't be a specialist really, because the collection included pieces from 17th century right through to contemporary, included textiles, all sorts of different things.

Research interests; Employment requirements; Development of practice

CM – 19:29

Yeah, yeah.

P1 – 19:30

And I was also, I was looking at helping support collections across the East Anglia as well, which is quite varied, so I was specialist in that I was costumes and textiles, but museums is actually quite specialised already.

Development of practice; Employment requirements

CM – 19:46

Yeah, especially kind of smaller, more regional museums, right?

P1 – 19:50

Completely. Now definitely menswear.
<mark>Development of practice; Research Interests</mark>

CM – 19:52

Okay, cool. Um, I mean this question probably answers itself, considering where you are posted right now. But, how often are you able to engage with this interest area career. So, I guess beyond day-to-day working, thinking about like, obviously there was the exhibition, god, it was a few years ago now because it was pre-COVID, feels like only yesterday!

P1 – 20:19

I know!

CM – 20:22

But like publications, that kind of thing, is it something that you feel that you are able to engage with frequently, or?

P1 – 20:29

Um, yes. Because of my line manager, who is very supportive, because the day-to-day job basically does take up everything, so trying to carve out time for other things is a challenge. But I suppose I'm interested in that, and then my line manager is very supportive, and then because I work so closely particularly with Andrew Groves, who is Director of Westminster Archive, but even moreso since he became a professor, I think it was in 2018? And then he stopped being the course leader for, well, he stopped the role he was in, which was the head of BA Fashion disappeared. And then they changed it to a course leader role and he became a professor. So that meant that he then he was expected to do some research-type activities in a very different way. So his roles changed, and with that

role has a bit as well. So, before that happened, I was doing some of those publications, conference-type things based on, using my PhD research. I tried to get that published, whereas when Andrew changed and had more time to do those other sorts of activities, it's been more focused on menswear archive. So that's been, I suppose, the main shift. But it's a struggle, you know we're currently working on a book project, and I really struggle to make any time to ever do what's needed for it.

<mark>Time to research; Employment conditions; Employment precarity</mark>

CM – 22:18

Of course. It's like "You get Easter holiday, get writin'!"

P1 – 22:25

Well, I just had that conversation this morning, because there's another piece of writing that we would deliver at the end of April, and the only way that I'm going to be able to do it, is when I'm on leave.

<mark>Time to research; Employment conditions</mark>

CM – 22:39

There you go, there you go. So, um -

P1 – 22:45

So just on that note, very quickly, because my contract is um, is under the university administrative professional services, so I actually have no research or teaching hours as part of my contract. So any of those, any publications or, it's not that my job description doesn't, it doesn't exclude research, but I have no research hours in terms of the university and no teaching hours in terms of the university. So anything that I do at the moment, for example, doesn't count towards the REF.

<mark>Time to research; Employment conditions</mark>

CM - 23:23

Right, right, okay.

P1 – 23:24

That's a caveat.

CM – 23:29

Um, so, moving into kind of today then, literally today, would you describe yourself as having a specific practice when you're working with clothing collections. And that's the million pound question that we had earlier today when you came in.

P1 – 23:54

Yeah, um, see I, well actually, I was going to say I wouldn't have and then it's like "Step back and actually think about what I have written and done." And actually I have, because in my PhD thesis, I talk about object study, I talk about the different people sort of, looked at it; Prown, and Valerie Steele, and Lou Taylor. So actually, I see myself within that.

==Object analysis Practice; Situating themselves within discipline==

CM – 24:24

Okay!

P1 – 24:25

Um, but also saying that, that also I have learned a huge amount from my peers working in museums. An enormous amount, in terms of, um, um, what you are doing on a day-to-day with objects.

==Object analysis Practice; Colleague relationships; Education through employment==

CM – 24:48

So would you say there is like, knowledge-sharing?

P1 – 24:52

Completely, yeah. I mean, I learned a huge amount at my first proper museum job at Colchester, because I came to it from a sort of academic standpoint. With the experience of having had years of collecting vintage clothing and those kind of things, so being aware of historical garments. But in terms of actually what it's like to work with a collection, and work with objects? I learned that from my colleagues.

Object analysis Practice; Colleague relationships; Fashion history; Education through employment

CM – 25:24

Um, was it ever anything that was like – because obviously as you said, there's the Steeles, Taylor, Prown, Mida and Kim, was there – thinking through your various positions, was there a prescriptive way of doing things? Or was it more like "You should think of looking for this." Or more that kind of thing?

P1 – 25:45

In terms of my working as curator, or in my, in an academic sense?

CM – 25:51

Um, I guess, I think, we're thinking in terms of object analysis, so in your day-to-day, probably more likely?

P1 – 25:59

Um, no. In terms of curatorial practice, no. Um, no.

Object analysis Practice

CM – 26:07

Okay.

P1 – 26:08

I mean possibly – I'm just trying to think of the conservators I've worked with as

CM – 26:13

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 26:20

Um, nothing explicit. Actually, probably the person probably from that point of view that I would have got that from was our collections – ugh, what was his title? Collections officer. Um, because he was responsible for the stores, and for object movement, and all of those kinds of things. So him and the conservator, oh and the curator. But again, a lot of it was sort of case-by-case – it wasn't a, "This is how you do this."

CM – 26:54

Yeah, yeah.

P1 – 26:55

You know, "This is what we do at Colchester." You know, it was very much "Okay, you have to fill an entry form." What do you need to put on the form?

CM – 27:05

Yeah, yeah.

P1 – 27:05

"Oh, it would have been helpful if you said what colour it was, or what size it was. This needs to go in the freezer, or it doesn't! Oh my god, I need to ask the con-servator does, can I put this in the freezer."

CM – 27:17

So it was really case-by-case, then. Individual –

P1 – 27:18

Yeah. And then "Oh! We have to set up to take photographs of things on mannequins. Oh my gosh, what do we get? Does this work or no?"

Object analysis Practice; Collection standards; Colleague relationships; Education through employment

CM – 27:30

So that's, so it's not just –

P1 – 27:35

"Oh no we can't put that on, it will fall apart! That goes back in the box."

Object analysis Practice; Collection standards; Colleague relationships; Education through employment

CM – 27:39

Exactly. So it was kind of collections care, we can say, conservators, and then curatorial that were all kind of feeding into the, yeah?

P1 – 27:48

Yeah.

CM – 27:50

Um, so now when you're working in the archive, um, is there anything when you –

P1 – 28:02

Oh sorry, I just remembered, I did look at some of the guidance that had been –

DATS was amazing, so Dress and Textiles Specialists. And because I was in East Anglia, and because there were three, four of us, no, three costume and textile curators who had Renaissance funding, so we had responsibilities across the region, and there were some other people who had been doing quite a lot of work in the region as well. So we used to have regular meetings to share knowledge, because we had training and various things as well, so that was a way of learning by doing, as well.

<mark>Object analysis Practice; Disciplinary support; Knowledge sharing; Colleague relationships</mark>

CM – 28:35

Yeah!

P1 – 28:36

And exchanging ideas, because we all had different, came at things from different sort of, experiences and different collections experience, and collections. So that was great. And also the publications, um, which were godsends. So DATS had done some, and then there was, it's quite, it's really old now, I think it was originally published by the Museums and Libraries Council, or something about care of dress and textiles or costume and textiles –

<mark>Object analysis Practice; Disciplinary support; Knowledge sharing; Colleague relationships</mark>

CM – 29:08

Oh, I'll have to look that up.

P1 – 29:09

Collections. And that was great, because it was like a very nice, easy to read, very clear guidance on this practice. In terms of, from storage, a little bit on cataloguing, but that was kind of my bible. Um, and things like, at Colchester we used SHIC, which is the social history, um sort of, subject areas. And then I also used the ICOM costume committee, just sort of basic in terms of doing cataloguing.

CM – 29:47

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 29:48

So that in terms of object studies probably where I had to learn to do that more consistently because I was creating catalogue records that needed to be read by other people, and were understandable.

CM – 29:58

Right, yeah, okay. Um, that's great, I'll have to have a look at the Museums and Libraries –

P1 – 30:05

It's still available on the Collections' Trust, I think.

CM – 30:08

Oh brilliant, oh cool, I'll have a look for that. Um, and now when you're in the archive, is there anything, so when you – when new objects are coming in, I don't know if they still are, but I know they were fast and furious -

P1 – 30:25

They are! We just bought some more this morning.

CM – 30:27

Oh nice, there you go! Is there, is there anything particular I would say, to you,

when it comes in you're like "This is what I need to get started on this on this object"? Is it like, and I mean anything, even like, you know, "I hate fluorescent lighting so I turn the fluorescent lights off and have a lamp." Like that sort of thing.

P1 – 30:50

Oh wow, okay.

CM – 30:51

Anything that, and you can say no, but if there's anything that's not so much about procedure, as it is about your own personal –

P1 – 31:04

This is the difference between how I'd like things to be and how they are.
<mark>Object analysis Practice; Employment conditions</mark>

CM – 31:07

And how they are!

P1 – 31:13

Um, I would like when I, actually, probably look at an object when it comes in to have it laid out, possibly put on a mannequin as well, to look at the shape. Um, to be able to spend as much time as I need to properly look at it. Um, and then do that description and analysis, versus um, I don't have that time.
<mark>Object analysis Practice; Visual engagement; Haptic engagement; Time constraints; Employment conditions</mark>

CM – 31:44

Yep, yep.

P1 – 31:48

So, my initial look at something is just to be able to do a very succinct title

cataloguing process, I usually – just, it takes me longer to catalogue! I try to do at least a one-paragraph object description so, of the main elements and label on the catalogue. So that does involve looking at an object.

==Object analysis Practice; Time constraints; Visual engagement==

CM – 32:28

Right, yeah.

P1 – 32:29

And I try to do that in an area where there is light, my office is quite light. Ideally, I'd like to do it in the space, rather than having it cramped on my knee or on the hanger. Um, yeah, but it's reality. It's unfortunately, yeah.

==Object analysis Practice; Time constraints; Resource contraints; Employment conditions==

CM – 32:49

Um, so when you're acquiring at Westminster, because if I remember correctly, it's like everything: eBay, primarily, I believe –

P1 – 33:00

Yep.

CM – 33:01

So when you're getting pieces, are you getting worn pieces, or is it?

P1 – 33:05

Yes.

CM – 33:06

Ok, so do you, when you get those, is it a mandate, or I guess remit, whatever we want to call it, of Westminster to document that? Or is it kind of like it enters the

collection as a design piece? Is that more the focus of the collection.

P1 – 33:22

It does depend on the object, I mean we do have a primary focus on design elements. I mean design in terms of the garment being used for design purposes –

Object analysis Practice; Collection requirements; Employment conditions

CM – 33:34

Because it's a working archive.

P1 – 33:35

Rather than it necessarily being a designer piece. But, we need to recognise something about it that we think will be useful for our students, or industry, and then sort of, that's the first criteria. And then secondary is maybe a more, sort of, broadly, I suppose, social-cultural meaning, or reference to the history of menswear.

Object analysis Practice; Fashion history; Collection requirements; Employment conditions

CM – 34:07

Yep.

P1 – 34:08

Luckily, often, those things combine or [unclear] actually, and so we do collect worn pieces, we do collect, um, things that have damage. I mean, we try not to, because of what that means in terms of looking after them, long-term. But then saying that, some of the new pieces we have because of their fabrications, are usually problematic as well, so it's not a guarantee. Um, even things that are not that old. Yeah, and when I do cataloguing, or do that analysis, which I then interpret in terms of the catalogue, the way I, damage, or staining, or any of those kinds of things are included in the description, they're not ignored.

Object analysis Practice; Collection requirements; Conservation considerations; Employment conditions

CM – 35:09

Yeah. I think this is going to be a bit of a re-tread question, so, but let's again think of your current, your current post. When you're doing garment analysis, I think you've already answered it, but do you take a kind of "stepped" process, like Prown, or Mida and Kim, and apply it?

P1 – 35:34

Um, I think I kind of – I think I subconsciously do. It's one of those things I, it's part of what I do because I'm always looking at garments in that way, almost. Object analysis Practice; Subconscious thinking; Visual engagement

CM – 35:55

Okay, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 35:56

Or not always, always. But, it's like my brain just kicks in to doing that. And I may not even be, because I think, is it Prown or, who is it that talks about – maybe it's Ingrid Mida, where you just sort of do the sensory "What do I?", you take time – Object analysis Practice; Subconscious thinking; Disciplinary standards

CM – 36:15

Yeah, it's very time – and like, the Slow Approach to Seeing, like a lot of like, reflection and –

P1 – 36:23

Yeah, but I think, it's not a shortcut, but I think I'm doing that all the time. No, it's not so formalised, but I think I do follow a process. And part of that is, I suppose, efficiency, as well. Like if I'm cataloguing and really looking at something, then I

do take notice of the guidance in terms of: it's good to start from the front going down and yeah. And then having a last look in case you might have missed something, or check the pockets or, you know, but it's not, I don't have a piece of paper where I'm like, "Have I gone through this?"

Object analysis Practice; Professional embarrassment; Time constraints; Visual engagement

CM – 37:03

Tick box kind of thing, yeah.

P1 – 37:06

Which actually I think, possibly, because I remember when in your survey you gave some examples of possible resources, I was like "I didn't know that was a – " you know?

Object analysis Practice; Knowledge

CM – 37:13

Yeah.

P1 – 37:14

Because there's so many things where I think my practice would be improved if I was perhaps a bit more consistent, or I did make use of some of those, um, some of that guidance. Or just remembered, remind myself of it.

Object analysis Practice; Professional embarrassment

CM – 37:28

Yeah. Well, it's that push-pull between, it's like, there's theoretically, theoretically practice doesn't make sense, but theoretically what you would like to do in your practice, and there's the reality of doing your work, you know? So yeah, it's interesting –

P1 – 37:51

I realise even with something where I was, so I gave a talk about this, and I had actually catalogued it – no, had I catalogued it? Um, and I thought I'd looked at it properly, and then a student, oh no, maybe I had it out for something or I was showing it to someone. I was like "Oh my god! There's these things that I missed that make this other stuff make sense! How did I miss that?"

==Object analysis Practice; Visual engagement; Professional embarrassment==

CM – 38:13

Yeah, yeah.

P1 – 38:15

And a lot of it is time, because I'm like "Ahhh!"

==Time constraints; Resource constraints==

CM – 38:20

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

P1 – 38:21

But it was a bit of a, oh! I thought, I said that when I talked about this in the paper that "Oh no there aren't these extra fastenings." Oh yes, they're there, I just didn't see them properly.

==Professional embarrassment; Visual engagement==

CM – 38:34

It's a journey. Knowledge is a journey. Um, so. Again I don't want to re-tread too much, so we've talked about your awareness of these methodologies, and the survey like you said, I learned things when I was trying – because a lot of them, there isn't a wide breadth of these things, so I was like "There's got to be something!" So kind of found it by looking, but um, yeah, I was going to say how did you learn it or it something you've acquired, but I think you've covered that. Is there anything else you'd want to add to that?

P1 – 39:13

Um, no, except I suppose, yeah DATS again, cause they run various training things over the years. And yeah, having, we had, when I was at Colchester we had a, I can't remember the title, so the Museums Association was worried about loss of knowledge among curators, so pay, funded this scheme to, for recently retired, or about to retire curators who had a lot of experience to run workshops and training events in their area of specialism. And I think that they were sort of funded over a year, or year and a half –

==Object analysis Practice; Professional embarrassment; Employment opportunities; Training and education; Disciplinary support==

CM – 40:05

Do you remember when that was? I'll have to look that up as well.

P1 – 40:07

That would have been – well, I was at Colchester between 2007 and 2011.

CM – 40:14

Okay. I'll have to look at that.

P1 – 40:15

So it definitely would have been in that period, probably middle of that period? Um, and so Althea MacKenzie, MacKenzie? Her first name is Althea definitely, she was involved with the Costume Society for a while, but she was a curator at Platt Hall, at Manchester Art Gallery for a long time. And so she, I went to a couple of the workshops she did, she did one up at Preston, and then we got her to come to the, East Anglia and do a similar version for us. And part of it was she came in our stores, and looked at some things, and it was extraordinary watching her work, and the way she could very quickly assess an object. So the one that really sticks in my mind was we had this coat with sort of layered um, capes. You know, like double-layer cape over the shoulders, um, that had been catalogued as a

menswear from the early 19th century. And she took one look at it, and said that's a woman's driving coat from probably the nineteen, around 1910.

CM – 41:35

Okay.

P1 – 41:36

And because she had this build up of this, years and years of experience, and of working with objects, and working with a really good collection, because that was the thing that I often struggled with, because at Colchester and Ipswich we have like maybe one dress from the 1840s, and it was like "Okay, so is this a typical one? Is this weird stuff going on with it? How, is that weird, or is that typical?" If you've got, you know, a collection where you've got five or six of them, or you've gone to see other collections, you start – you've got those pictures in your head, and that's what I struggled with often, we'd just have these old things –

CM – 42:12

One example.

P1 – 42:13

And trying to put them together. So, the shared experience of other curators when that happened, and as I said before, being able to have the support of the other curators in East Anglia, and we'd look at each other's collections and we'd do visits and people would always say – and also volunteers, and members of the public too, because I did quite a lot of public-facing work and people would come in and be like "Oh, I know what that is!" or share something. And once there was a guy in Colchester who worked for years designing uniforms for the British Army, because Colchester was a garrison town, and there was a unit that designed uniform, and told me about way that they used to design the um, gold-

process for that.

CM – 43:04

Yeah.

P1 – 43:05

And he was a member of the public that came to an event that I did. So, it was kind of learning from as much, anybody, I could.

CM – 43:13

Amazing. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 43:14

And the [unclear] in the end was the same because people, the volunteers were [unclear] and I had 25 volunteers and it was about [unclear] so there were people who knew heaps about [unclear], so it was those kind of things.

CM – 43:30

Cool, oh that's amazing. Okay, so to round out that section, is there, when you're first faced with an object, and I guess, we'll move into talking about objects today, so we'll explore that a little bit more. Is there an aspect of a garment that you usually look for first. And whether it's something that demands it because of where you're, I'm thinking of your current posting, um, that you're specifically looking out for, or is it something you're drawn to? Is there anything you can think of?

P1 – 44:08

I don't think so. No, I can't think of one thing, no.

CM - 44:18

That's a totally fine answer.

P1 – 44:22

Well, maybe the material?
==Haptic engagement; Visual engagement==

CM – 44:26

Okay.

P1 – 44:30

Yeah, I can't think of anything.

CM – 44:33

That's fantastic. Okay, so let's talk about today. Let's talk about all the things I made you do today. So, tell me, and you can be totally honest, I, honesty is truly the best policy, I will not be offended. Um, tell me about your experience of using the eye gaze tracker, and the 3D garments today.

P1 – 44:56

I was initially really skeptical. And especially when I saw the first image, I was like "Ooh, what is this?"
==Skepticism; Curiousity==

CM – 45:04

Yep, yep.

P1 – 45:05

But actually, when I properly looked, I was amazed at how much I started writing down. And I felt that I could glean or understand. I mean there were areas where it was definitely frustrating, or, frustrating is not quite the right word. I suppose,

limitations, rather than frustration, in terms of, "Oh, I think this is the case because of what I'm looking at, but I don't know because I can't feel it, or the image isn't quite good enough, or I can't look inside, or whatever." But yeah, I was quite skeptical and was surprised, actually, at how much.

==Visual engagement; Interpretation; Frustration; Skepticism==

CM – 45:47

Oh, that's cool. I like hearing that! Um, so I guess to extrapolate on that, um, physically, did you find it, was it an okay process, was there anything kind of physically that was strange, or uncomfortable, or?

P1 – 46:06

No, not that I can think of.

CM – 46:09

And then um –

P1 – 46:13

I suppose the one thing was, yeah, I think I said that it all seemed to be around a pivot point so you couldn't move, so if you zoomed up, it was mainly on the test object, actually, because there was some writing on the shoe, and so I had to zoom up, and then I went off the screen, but you couldn't shift it so that you could see, but actually that wasn't a problem for any of the others.

==Visual engagement; Frustration; Use of technology==

CM – 46:36

Oh good.

P1 – 46:37

I think it was just because the way the, yeah. But that was all.

CM – 46:41

Okay, cool. Um, and thinking about using that technology, we'll say, to encounter the object, how did you feel about the objects? Was there, um, yeah, how did you feel when you encountered them?

P1 – 47:08

Um, that they weren't complete. That it wasn't a complete picture of them, that it was a version of them that I was looking at, and there was qui- as I said before, there was more information in that version than I was expecting, but it was a version of, yeah.
Visual engagement; Interpretation; Frustration

CM – 47:30

Yeah, cool. Um, so –

P1 – 47:35

I mean, yeah so I was curious, I suppose, because of the exercise, and that meant I looked at them in a way that maybe if I'd just encountered them that, on some-thing else, I probably wouldn't – as I said because of my scepticism, so I don't know if it was an exhibition and it was something like that, I'd probably go "No."
Visual engagement; Disciplinary support; Interpretation; Frustration; Skepticism

CM – 48:00

Not good enough!

P1 – 48:02

Because I'm really prejudice!
Professional embarrassment

CM – 48:06

Um, so do you feel then, to build on that, do you feel like, I'm trying not to put words in your mouth here, but can you articulate that feeling for me; was it like an

uncanny valley feeling, or was it like a facsimile feeling, or –

P1 – 48:26

Yeah, I think just knowing that this was a version, that this was a scan of this garment, that there, from what I could interpret from it, it was based on a real garment, it didn't feel like a um, computer, um –

==Visual engagement; Interpretation; Frustration; Skepticism==

CM – 48:46

A generated?

P1 – 48:47

A generated digital one, it did feel like it was a version of, um, that it was of a particular quality which meant that, yeah, yeah, so it was more that.

==Visual engagement; Interpretation; Frustration; Skepticism==

CM - 48:59

Okay, cool. Um, and then I asked you this previously, but just so that I've got it on the tape, you, had you ever used eye tracking before?

P1 - 49:05

No, I haven't.

CM – 49:09

And also, I've asked you this as well. Have you ever used digital renderings of garments in your work?

P1 – 49:15

Um, once.

CM – 49:16

Okay.

P1 – 49:17

So, in 2020, at the end of 2020, a colleague at Westminster, so he teaches fashion illustration and drawing, and because of all of the restrictions, we looked at a way that he could do his teaching using garments from the Menswear Archive, but in a digital way, online. So, um, we, he's really mean! He makes these really complicated outfits with like, really hard details on them for the students. When we were doing them, I was like "Wow, poor students!" So, he selected garments digitally, from photographs, then he worked on outfits, we put the outfits on a mannequin, and then they were scanned digitally. We had a hand-held digital scanner, that's how it was done, as an outfit. And then we had still photographs as well, so he used both of those in his teaching online for the students. So yeah, I saw the results of the rendering of those outfits, and it was similar to the ones that you probably had to use. Um, but I didn't directly use them, um, Richard used them. ==Visual engagement; Colleague relationships; Digital practice; Interpretation; Frustration; Skepticism==

CM – 50:43

Okay. Um –

P1 – 50:45

They were good enough that when students came into the archive, they were like "Oh!"

CM – 50:47

They could pick it out? Yeah.

P1 – 50:50

I mean, they were quite distinctive. The pattern, and textures, and – ==Visual engagement; Haptic engagement==

CM – 50:56

Well, it's good that they can do that. Um, so can you describe the three garments you analysed, thinking about the eye gaze tracking specifically, and you've got your notes, obviously from it. So, I'll keep those, I don't think you need to read them verbatim, but could you –

P1 – 51:23

It's a bit bad when I've got them right here, as well.

CM – 51:25

I know, I know, this might be a bit difficult. Um, I guess maybe the better question is, what was the first aspect of Object 1 so that would be –

P1 – 51:38

Yeah, so in terms of my notes, the first thing I noted down was the material, which I have down "pale blue slub linen, question mark" then that it's a women's jacket. The two-button fastening, and then the description of the buttons, the collar, notch lapel, v-neck, the pocket detailing, the sleeve length, um, the pleats at the front waist and the back, um, darts at back and side, and then I went back and looked more closely at the panels across the chest, because I realised it was a seam going right across. Um, oh, four welted pockets, um, yeah.
<mark>Textiles; Visual engagement; Design; Making</mark>

CM – 52:31

Okay, cool. And then for Object 2, so look at these here, what was the first thing you noticed about them? Or observed about them?

P1 – 52:41

Um, it was the rope soles, um so I would describe them as espadrilles, so it was something I recognised. Yeah, the rope soles, then the difference between the toe material and the heel material, and the black tape, um, on them. Um, and the

to the soles, um, the binding, I found it quite confusing to understand the tape detailing at the front, because I couldn't, because they're sort of crumpled, so it was hard to actually understand how that worked, but I did a little sketch to try and understand. And then the stitching around the sole edges, the um, the reinforcement to the toe, and then yeah the wear to the sole.

Textiles; Visual engagement; Frustration; Drawing methodology

CM – 53:40

And then the final, Object 3, here.

P1 – 53:42

Um, again, ooh! I said it was women's. Which is wrong! I always get confused with the buttoning –

Gender; Interpretation; Frustration; Professional embarrassment

CM – 53:51

Yeah, yes.

P1 – 53:52

Which is ridiculous, given that I work with a menswear collection. I always try to imagine myself the other way around, and then getting it wrong. Um, and then that it was suede. Again, it was the material and the colour. Um, um, the colour, then the button details on the front, and then the distinctive front panels. Again, I tried to draw a sketch to just work out – that's silly, I've just put "left over right" and then sort of, um, I'm sure I wrote, I wrote a lot more. Because of the complicated cut, and the panelling, um, that all the seams are double-stitched. I thought I could see press stud closure underneath, um, and in the way the shoulder seams sat as well, um, could see the different panels. Um, the buttons on the cuff, the yoke panel at the back, centre back seam, elasticated waist, the buttons at the side waist, and then the variations in colour. Which again, given the rendering, I wasn't sure whether that was just because, but it did appear to have quite a lot of

variation in colour and evidence of wear and discolouration, and then went back and looked at more detail on the pockets, where I noticed a few more details. Oh! And right at the very end, I was like "Oh my gosh!" there's extra pockets and then hand hole pockets, the um, vertical ones, which I hadn't noticed to start with.
==Professional embarrassment; Visual engagement; Design; Textile; Colour==

CM – 55:36

Cool. Um, so based on looking at the garments, using that technology, could you, um, make any assertations about the, the, the, I guess we'll say biography of the garment, but like, would you feel comfortable if you were cataloguing, at that point, making an assertation about where it had come from, or who might have worn it, or?

P1 – 56:10

No. Maybe date, I could do a guess on date, and whether something had been worn, because it did appear to be evidence of wear. But anything else would be really, yeah. I don't know that I would feel that there was enough, enough information to know, yeah.
==Interpretation; Expertise; Design==

CM – 56:35
Okay.

P1 – 56:36
I mean, yeah. Just from the object, yeah.

CM – 56:41
Okay! So then moving on to when you were in the room, physically with the garments, tell me about the experience of doing material culture analysis with these garments.

P1 – 56:55

Um, it was really interesting comparing to what I'd just seen. And then what felt, what, what, how much, how much on the object I had been able to get from the digital, but then also how much from the object wasn't available to me. Um, the actual materiality, I didn't feel it without gloves, but I'm still not quite sure exactly what it is, I'm, initially I thought linen but looking at it again, I thought maybe it's silk. Um, a lot of the seam details on the cutting, which I couldn't interpret properly, um, because I couldn't see it all, little things like the fact that the lower button has a jetted buttonhole and the top one is just a slit. And then all of the stuff on the inside, in terms of make and stitching, so a lot of evidence of hand-stitching, which I couldn't pick up at all. And the undercollar, which again I'd only looked at right at the end. Like "Oh! There's a whole lot of hand-stitching there!" Oh, and things I guess like discolouration on the lining, the sweatpads under the arms, um, yeah. And the quality of the lining, because you couldn't really see the lining at all in the –

==Haptic engagement; Material culture importance; Visual engagement; Design==

CM - 58:27

Yeah, you can't see any interior, unfortunately.

P1 – 58:30

Yeah, um, so those were the things. And then the measurements as well, because from the digital, could be mistaken.

==Haptic engagement; Material culture importance; Design==

CM – 58:41

Yeah, yeah, yeah. What about, I'm actually going to circle back to the, to the digital one for a minute. I was there in the room with you, obviously as we discussed, just in case you had computer issues. Um, was that okay? Me being there –

P1 – 59:03

Yeah.

CM – 59:04

Did that discomfit you at all, or?

P1 – 59:05

No, not at all.

<mark>Professional comfort</mark>

CM – 59:07

Um, so then coming back to the material culture analysis, obviously you had the camera in the room, and the camera on your head! That's, I would, you can tell me; is that a typical day of operation for you when you're analysing a garment?

P1 – 59:25

No.

CM – 59:27

So did you find it, um, well you tell me how, how you found that.

P1 – 59:33

Um, yeah, so initially with the digital, I was like "Oh, how do I do this?" then I was like "Well, normally I would write notes to myself about what I'm looking at. So I'll write notes!" And then once I got into it, it was like "Oh, okay, so it's kind of what I'm doing as if I was describing an object or sort of looking at it to describe it, I suppose. So that's what I'll do with the information that I can glean from the image that we had." Then in the room, um, again it was the same sort of thing of "Okay, I'm in here, with this thing on my head." I don't even think about the camera. Um, actually that's not quite true. I did a little bit, I was like "Okay, I put gloves on! I have to be careful when I do that!" And "Oh! My measuring tape, I've

object!"

CM – 01:00:33

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 01:00:34

But, and again it was, okay I'm going from a starting point and that I have seen a digital, well a, what I think is a digital version of this object, if all of this information I do know, what can I get from it that I hadn't got already. And "Oh! Look, that's different!" or there's this, I can look on the inside, I can look under the collar, you know, these things I can look at.

CM – 01:01:02

The kind of tangible –

P1 – 01:01:03

Yeah, and "Oh! That one's got a label in it! That's got several labels in it, interesting!" and "Oh wow, this is amazing that the shoes, the intricacy of the way those tapes are actually just threaded through, and it doesn't look like there's any stitching at all. Incredible."

CM – 01:01:19

Yeah. So then, with the comparison between the digital and the, the material, um, do you – so you've talked about the blue jacket, was there anything – and you've talked about the label in the green jacket, was there anything else that kind of, when you saw the garments in reality, that you were like, "Oh, whoa, I totally

missed that!" Oh was it – you tell me.

P1 – 01:01:51

Well the, yeah, the intricate, the way that the lacing on these sandals works, which I didn't really feel like I really quite worked out at all, but really amazing. Which I couldn't tell, I thought it was sort of, stitched down. But actually it looks like it's all just threaded through, and the way it's all threaded through the holes it looks like it might be stitched in some places? I'm not sure. But really intricate. Um, and then the label on the green jacket, the label over there, so it sort of confirmed my initial thoughts, but it was really interesting to actually see it, and see that. And then on the inside in particular, the wear, and really interesting on one side more than the other, and then the extra labels, which is where I would start to feel more able to perhaps do more of the biography to it.
==Object analysis practice; Haptic engagement; Visual engagement; Excitement about MCA==

CM – 01:02:50

Right.

P1 – 01:02:53

And then, actually saying about the blue jacket, things like in terms of the hand-stitching, and in terms of then starting to think, "Oh, who has made this, how's it been made, what was, who has it been made for?" You know, those kind of questions.
==Object analysis practice; Biography; Interpretation==

CM – 01:03:07

Okay, so to build on that then, could you, or would you, because it could be a "No" um, give a kind of brief, and thinking to the Museum of London session that we did last week, where it was kind of like "Here's an object, tell me a story!" Thinking about that, if these are objects that are entering the collection, this is what you have to go on, could you give me a kind of catalogue-sized biography

object?

P1 – 01:03:40

Just from the object? Not just –

CM – 01:03:44

Just from the object, yeah, if you didn't have any other information.

P1 – 01:03:48

Ah, speculatively, I mean in terms of date and –

CM – 01:03:55

And there's no wrong answers, by the way. It's not a test.

P1 – 01:03:57

No, no, no, it's not that. I mean, yeah, my guess was kind of late forties, maybe on this. Again the material without, yeah, but it feels like it's been made for some-body. I did think possibly like a really, really good dressmaker, but then it's got overlocking, so I was like ugh, I don't know, so yeah, I've got more on that sort of, bespoke end, possibly. These, I mean, they're way out of any, my area of knowl-edge, really. Umm, so 20th century? But yeah. I mean, they're great, I love them. ==Object analysis practice; Biography; Interpretation==

CM – 01:04:47

Yeah, they're really cool.

P1 – 01:04:51

Really nice. But yeah, no.

CM – 01:04:55

Would you, could you gender any of the garments?

P1 – 01:04:58

Um, yeah, my assumption was that was women's, these, on the size? Women's. But I've seen images of men wearing espadrilles in 20th, particularly in the 20th century, so, um, and that as I said I originally got myself completely in a mess, which is somewhat embarrassing given what I look after. Yes, by saying "left over right", and then seeing it was wrong. And then seeing it was from a menswear label. So yeah, um, late 70s, early 80s, um, yeah, when French design houses started to move into more casual women, and menswear as well. But heavily worn, so, yeah.

Object analysis practice; Gender; Fashion history; Biography; Interpretation; Professional embarrassment

CM – 01:06:04

Cool. Yeah, that's great. Cuz like I said there's no, I don't necessarily know the history myself, so, it's more like that workshop, it's like you kind of gather what you can. Um, so, I think that's just about, oh! So, you've talked about kind of what's led you to making those, we'll say hypothesizes about the biography, is today – I feel ridiculous asking this after what we've just talked about. Um, digital aside, because we know it's not, you've said that, this analysis that you undertook in material, is that typical? Is this like a typical environment, a typical process of going through things, or does it differ from your own?

P1 – 01:07:08

Um, I suppose that the main difference is that usually I would have more information to start with. So, I wouldn't be coming at something completely cold. In terms of my day-to-day work, that's a piece that usually, the objects that come in, I've seen. You know, we've purchased them seeing images of them, usually descriptions, but there are situations where yeah, I am just looking at something from the first time, um, and having to glean information from the object itself. Or you know, things that we've got in the collection that have been catalogued wrong, or don't have it, we do have some pieces that have like, no information

like, what can the object tell me?

CM – 01:08:08

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

P1 – 01:08:09

And it is going back to the object and going "Well, I don't have anything else, so I'll go back to the object, because it will be able to tell me some things." and often that is the case!

CM – 01:08:21

Get the story from it, if you can. Um, I mean, that's fantastic, thank you so much. Is there anything about today, that I haven't touched on, any feelings you had, thoughts, concerns, criticisms? I'll take it all.

P1 – 01:08:45

No, as I said, it was, I found it really interesting because when you're just doing things, you don't often have a chance to do that reflective process of "Oh! I do do this. Oh, my brain is starting to work in this particular way. Oh, okay, these things are kicking in. Oh right!" I'm starting to question "What is this?" So yeah, that was really interesting.

CM - 01:09:12

Oh cool.

P1 – 01:09:13

And then the comparison between the digital and the, yeah, was really interesting, as well. As I said, I was surprised, I'll say it again, surprised by how much I

actually get from all of it.

<mark>Object analysis practice; Digitised garment usefulness; Reflective practice</mark>

CM – 01:09:25

Oh that's good. Imagine if a professional was doing it, and not me! That's fantastic, RESPONDENT 1, thank you!

P1 – 01:09:34

You're welcome.

Interview – 13/04/2022

Interviewer: Cyana Madsen (CM)

Interviewee: Participant 2 (P2)

Key:

- <mark>_____</mark> - Analysis Description

CM – 00:43

So, I mean we've talked a couple times about this already, but just to kind of give you the lay of the land, um, I've been studying biography in clothing collections for about six years now, um, and it started with collections, and has now kind of shifted to the people working with collections. And so I'm interested in establishing a kind of base understanding of the variety of experiences of people who are working with clothing. Um, and those of us who engage with object biography when we're working with collections, so this interview will kind of, focus on that, but it's very much a dialogue between us –

P2 – 01:27

Yep.

CM – 01:28

So I'll ask you questions, and we can just kind of go back and forth.

P2 – 01:30

Okay.

CM – 01:31

Okay, let's start with an easy one: um, tell me about your first memory of clothing.

P2 – 01:37

Oh gosh!
<mark>Surprise</mark>

CM – 01:38

I know.

P2 – 01:39

First memory of clothing, um, I'm trying to think. I actually have a really, slightly ridiculous memory, which is probably the earliest thing I can think of, because I must have been about six at the time. And I can't remember why it happened, that we were out, I had to buy a whole new outfit of clothes, but I do remember. So what had happened was we were, I was with like, my nana and my granddad, and my nana and my granddad looked after me a lot when I was a kid, and we were in central London, and I must have been yeah, six? And, and, basically something had happened to my clothes, and we had to buy a whole new set of clothes for me. I assume I'd gotten something all over me, or something like that. Anyway, I can so clearly remember that we went into like, I assume it must have, probably have been on Oxford Street. And went into like, the big BHS and I got, it was like a pair of cycling shorts and a logo-print t-shirt. And I think it was probably a thing of panic, buying me whatever was cheap and easy to, sort of been replaced. And the reason why I remember it, is because at the time my mum loved to, and I don't necessarily remember these clothes, but I know that this was like a point of contention. My mum liked to dress me, in like traditional kind of clothes, and was horrified that my nana'd bought me like, what in the nineties, was like kind of cool clothes for a kid. Particularly the logo t-shirt. But the logo t-shirt, I loved it, so much and I wore it so many times. And it's just funny that, I don't know, clothes have always been a point, I suppose, of often rebellion within my life and it was a tiny rebellion – and really it was my nan that was the rebel, but I still so clearly remember this, particularly the t-shirt and the t-shirt being such a point of contention. And yeah, but yeah. My nan will say that my mum wouldn't let me have trainers as a child, I had to wear plimsolls, and my nan also bought me my first pair of trainers when I think I was about seven. Because she was like, "No one else wears plimsolls, it's silly that she makes you wear plimsolls all the time."

Family; Being messy; Mass-produced clothing; Finances; Being cool; Rebellion; Modern vs. Traditional clothing; Generational women

CM – 04:09

Um, amazing. Go, nan! So I guess to expand on that, then, because you mentioned rebellion.

P2 – 04:19

Yeah.

CM – 04:20

Is there, when you think of it, is there like a feeling that you get when you think of that oufit?

P2 – 04:25

Um, I think it was like, I think as a kid that was the first I felt cool. I think that's probably what it was. And I think as well, like I think it's probably something I've often strived for in life. But I don't know, like also I was, which is probably surprising considering what I look like now, but I was a really overweight child. And I think I never felt very comfortable in clothes, and I think I felt like very, I felt comfortable in that, and this brightly coloured logo t-shirt made me feel like, "I'm cool!"
==Being cool; Body consciousness; Pride; Colour==

CM – 05:02

That's so cute. Um, and what about now? Like when you think back on it now, as an adult, is the feeling kind of the same? Or is there –

P2 – 05:14

I think um, I think clothes have always been really important to how I feel as a person. Clothes are kind of what makes me, me. Like clothes are at the centre of everything I do. And I think for that reason I think that's why that would stick out like a really important early clothing memory, because it was like, even if the clothes were picked for me by my nan, I felt like me, and I felt like I had some agency over it, which perhaps, perhaps I didn't feel like. So yeah, it's quite a nice, my nan is like honestly, she's just – well, she died earlier this year, but like at 94. She's an amazing, absolute superstar and had a big place in a lot of my early clothing memories. *219*

CM – 06:00

Okay, okay. That's great, that's awesome. Um, so now, thinking of yourself as an adult, how would you describe your interest in clothing outside of your professional life.

P2 – 06:16

I mean for me, my interest in clothing is so all-encompassing. It's actually kind of inseparable. This is partly because I am a workaholic, and um, uh, I, I mean I'll just be open and honest here, I'll monetise anything. So I think that's part of the, perhaps, weird way that I would come about clothes. Because you know, aside from what I'm wearing is so intrinsic to what I do, often, and I – what I call my proper career is so tied up in clothing. But then also I run a business as a vintage dealer. So, and so often my wardrobe will end up becoming my stock. So my clothing is just like, it is, it is just kind of my life, and I am perpetually surrounded by clothes. Clothes are just everywhere and consume my, consume my waking thoughts!

CM – 07:21

That's totally fair! Um, that's why we're here. So would you say then, because clothes for you are, they kind of come through your life and then pass through in a, let's say in a business way, is clothing for you ephemeral then? Or is there attachment there?

P2 – 07:49

Ooh, interesting. Um, I would say that it's, it's, increasingly I am more able to detach from clothes than I used to be. And, but that's a financial thing. For a long time I used to buy things, and I collect them. And even if I didn't, and it used to be things I didn't wear, I just owned because I thought they were beautiful. And I want, obviously, if you own things yourself, you have that benefit, you can touch them in a way that you can't in sort of a work environment. So I would actually say that I was more

attached to clothes than I am now, but I became a bit more – I don't really know what hit, but in my late twenties, I got to this point where I was like, I think it had beyond being like a hobby and being like, an obsession. And I kind of felt like, you know what, I've got so much lovely stuff, beyond just talking about my stock, like in my house, um, I feel like some of these clothes deserve to be re-released, go back out into the world, be worn again, you know like, so much of the stuff, I've had so much lovely vintage that's particularly still so wearable, so I became a lot more ruthless. But that's, I'd say within the past three or four years. Before that, I wasn't ruthless at all.

==Importance of clothing; Emotional attachment to clothing; Haptic engagement; Clothing biography; Vintage clothing==

CM – 09:15

Um, okay so tell me about your educational, training background, but that with, what you said, clothing is all-encompassing, so take educational and training for whatever you kind of see as your trajectory, to the point where we are now.

P2 – 09:40

Yeah. I think it's actually really important to go quite a way back. So my, my grandfather, as in the grandfather attached to my nana who I mentioned previously, so he, uh, worked in womenswear, in the tailoring trade. So actually, just around the corner for a long time, he worked on Regent Street, he was a very, very talented man. And I have to say like, he, I can remember as kid being taught to use a treadle proper, old-fashioned treadle sewing machine with him. And I think that was a lot of the grounding behind sewing, textiles being a thing in my life. Um, and I kind of always, I went to a lot of exhibitions and stuff when I was a kid, and from a very early age, like about 11, I was like, "I want to be a fashion designer." Um, I'd convinced myself that that was the career path for me. And I had nothing else in my head. Like, I was completely like, "This is what I am going to do." So I studied fashion design, at uni. Um, but, and hilariously actually, my granddad whilst I was maybe in my first year, and I, he didn't say this to me, but after he died my nan told me this, he was like,

"She's not cut out for the fashion industry. She won't be able to do it. She's so sensitive. Like, it's just not the career for her." But the truth is, he was right. I found studying fashion design, like I loved to design, but I was so bad at pattern cutting, that actually it really, really hindered me, because anything I designed it could never - I just struggled to get it to actually look like the thing that I had in my head. So I had a four year degree, whilst I was doing that, I had in my, like a placement year, so I did like various different industry placements, to try and be like, "Okay, maybe I don't want to be a fashion designer, what do I want to do?" Um, and I did two museum ones. And that's how I kind of got into thinking, "Oh maybe, maybe it's more that I want to look at the history of clothes, rather than contemporary." And I'd always been interested in the history of fashion, but I never sort of saw it as a viable career path, and it was only when I was doing those placement years, and I, one of the people I worked with there, she kind of, she told me about the different path-ways I could take. And it was through her that she encouraged me to do a master's degree. And um, I applied for various different masters', I didn't get into the one I really wanted to, so I applied for the Courtauld and I thought, "Oh, I've got a shot." Because I'd read the, I'd read the reference I had for it, and it was like, it was so glowing, it was almost a bit sickening. But I didn't get in. So after I finished my undergrad degree, which I miraculously got a first in, which is one of the most hilarious things, because I was so, so bad at the actual, the physical making. So I did a master's at the Royal College of Art, in history of design, which was a combined course with the V&A. And that opened up a lot of opportunities. Whilst I was doing that, I actually started also working part-time actually for a group of museums in Surrey. And that just kind of, both of those things just opened quite a lot of doors, I suppose. Um, doing my master's I met Lou Taylor, who was really mean to me the first time I met her. Which was probably actually a good thing, because the work I was doing was pretty rubbish. But actually though, in the end Lou was amazing, and I really think like when you meet some people that they give you a sort of, it spurs you on in your sort of ways of working. And I think like Lou was really important for that. It's like, it's, I always think about that, you know, having a fashion design grounding makes you, it's this thing about objects and how focused you are on objects and how you're forever kind of going, "How is it made? How does it fit?

What would it be like when it's on?" I don't know. I think Lou kind of, she really reinforced that for me. And she was sort of one of the group of people I really kept kind of, coming back to. So yeah, so, when I do my master's, she knew what I was like and she asked me to go to the conference in Paris, I think? And this conference was like, there was loads of like, key people there. And Lou got up in the middle of this lunch, now pretty much anyone who Lou has taken under her wing has like an identical story to this, but Lou got up in the middle of this like, conference lunch, she's like, "So who's supervising Liz's PhD?" and I was like, "Argh!" And at this point I'd had no thinking of doing a PhD, I was like, "Once I finish my master's, I'll just work in museums." So that was like, that was kind of my plan. But that, I kind of felt like, "If Lou thinks I'm good enough, then I must be good enough." And that kind of made me start to think, and sort of, think about who, whether I would do one, where I would do it. Obviously that made me think should I do it in Brighton(?). But yeah, so after I finished my master's, I then ended up very fortuitously, very luckily getting a job as a curator. So I worked, I was the curator of the museum in Surrey, it was meant to be maternity cover but it got extended, I really stupidly left that job because I was like, "Eh!" I had, I did get PhD funding, I got a fully-funded PhD, I didn't need – and it was such a stupid idea, like in retrospect, like leaving that job when I did, kind of completely set my career back. Like it's been so, and I mean, they had a dress and textiles collection as well, whilst I was there working as a curator, I got like, they got a bit of funding and I re-packed the collection. Like, really cool stuff, and I was just like, 25 and just though, "I know I'm better than this."

==Importance of clothing; Family; Womenswear tailoring; Connection to grandparents through clothing; Fashion design; Success; Museum work; Education; Mentorship; Disciplinary Support; Professional embarrassment; Material culture practice; Finance; Career decisions==

CM – 16:44
The folly of youth.

By the time I hit like, 28, I was like, "Oh my god, what did I do!" So I did, sorry, then I did my PhD at Brighton, which was very, very heavily object-focused. But actually, because I was looking at London (unclear) the top end of the market, not really much in museums, so actually that's how I ended up like, I collected even more, because I was like, buying stuff for research purposes. So yeah, I was buying stuff for research purposes all the time, and it was a good experience, and I ended up with loads of teaching off of it as well, so I taught quite a bit. But like after I finished my PhD, like I finished my – I think I had my viva in like, November 2018? And at that point I was like, desperate to get back to museums, at that point I was like – but it wasn't even like I necessarily wanted to work with dress and textiles, by that point I was like, "Just give me objects." Like, I'd been teaching for a while and I just wanted, I just need stuff. The physical things. And I think that desire for stuff is really interesting, and I will come back to that in my current job. But yeah, after finishing my PhD I was still teaching for a bit, and two of my three contracts didn't get renewed, so I was like, "I really have to find another job." So I was applying for every museum job, basically, and eventually I got one, so then I went and I worked for Colchester Museum Service and Ipswich Museum Service, where also Danielle worked, and I was basically their social history curator, so a lot of my work was with dress and textiles, but not exclusively. And I really loved that job, and I would have happily stayed, but as with everything with museums, the pay was terrible, and it reached a point during the pandemic where I was like, "You know what, I'm worth more than this." And I really wanted to do something again that was more dress and textiles-focused, like I'd gotten to a point where tangentially I was dealing with dress and textiles, because social history, dress and textiles fell under that social history remit, but actually I just wanted to do something where I felt stretched in the way of where my expertise lies. So I applied for a couple of jobs, and I got a job at the V&A, so post-doc which is meant to be about the retail and consumer experi-ence, but is actually extremely focused on the metaverse. So it's all extremely future-focused. It is fashion, but one thing that I find very challenging about my job, which I think is fine to say, is that it's not object-focused in any way, shape, or form.

And I cannot tell you in my job how much I miss objects. It's been really fascinating, in the past couple of weeks, I've done a few things, where I've been in a room with museum objects, and or archival objects, and it's just the sheer feeling of delight you get from them. And also it's something really interesting because I was talking to someone about this, literally just this weekend, because they're like, "But you wear vintage all the time, so surely it's no different, you get to handle historical objects all the time." And I was like, it's completely different, like there's something about completely, to me, when something goes into a museum or an archive, it becomes so differently charged. It's just not the same thing anymore. I mean, it's, I guess it's that kind of thing that it stops being a living object in the same way, but the opportunities for preservation are so much better. And yeah, I guess it's the excitement of when you're in a museum and it's sort of the gentleness with which you'll treat it as well, which is quite exciting. With your own stuff, you know, even if I have, I do own some quite rare, amazing things, but I arguably don't treat them with as much respect as I should – just because those objects are not charged in that same way. That was an extremely long answer.

Career uncertainty; Education; Material culture practice; Collecting practice; Importance of clothing; Vintage reselling; Teaching; Museum work; Employment scarcity and precarity; Finances; Poor pay; Challenge to knowledge and skillset; Affective nature of clothing

CM – 21:48

No, I love it. That's what I want, I'm like, give me those juicy facts. Um, so I would like to talk a little bit about the "charged" object then. Can you flesh out that feeling for me? When you encounter a museum object.

P2 – 22:11

Yeah. I mean, I think there's different layers to this. So there's something about, really appealing, that I love about something that's a bit unknown. So, for example, I keep looking at the Mattli jacket, and I will explain why in a minute, so for example when your working in a museum and you've got a slightly rubbish digital record,

and you're like, you don't really know what you're going to find and it might say something like, I don't know, for example, I'm trying to think of a really good one from my last job. There were lots of these kind of things that were like, they sort of had, particularly stuff actually that had been accessioned recently, because there had been no dress and textiles expertise. And things would be like "Dress. 20th century?" and not have a picture. And you'd be like, what is it I'm going to find and it's that excitement I think, particularly of a museum object that you've got a really basic description, you might even have a photo, and it's kind of like opening a surprise present. You know, and you're so excited to see it, and then also sometimes these kind of, I suppose, changed object, and what they are, sometimes with those objects you don't know much about, it gives you an opportunity to start imagining what they could be, and that's quite exciting. Like this jacket here, when I saw it, I was like it looks really nicely made.

<mark>Employment conditions; Sense of discovery; Material culture importance; Affective nature of clothing; Interpretation</mark>

CM – 23:50

This is just for the recording, this is Object 1, the blue jacket.

P2 – 23:51

Object 1, the blue jacket. And I was like, "Oh, this looks really nicely made. What do I think that-" and then I opened it up, and I could see a little bit of the label poking out, so I just moved slightly aside the um, the kind of the sweat pad, and then it's funny with me, for me seeing certain labels, for me it's like seeing old friends. When I haven't seen one in a while, and I was like, "Oh, it's a Mattli jacket!" and so it's London couture, and actually sometimes London couture pieces from the period this is from, on the workmakship it isn't as, isn't perfect, but it does really speak of it. It's funny that just, you know I didn't, I didn't know what I going to find in this jacket, and it was the sort of, particularly because actually I think when you looked at the digital rendering of it, I don't think you could see the label in it. So I didn't expect to find that. And to me sometimes, you know like, seeing a label I know is like seeing an old friend. It's like, "Oh, I haven't seen one of you in a while!" And then you sort

of like, it just, once I knew it was a Mattli piece, it actually made me sort of take a step back, re-look at it again and be like, "Ohh actually, this makes sense."

<mark>Perception of Quality; Sense of discovery; Material culture importance; Affective nature of clothing; Frustration with digital; Interpretation</mark>

CM – 25:18

Okay. I love it, thank you. So I really want to plumb the depths of this, so I am trying to think how deep to go before returning to this regular scheduled program. So knowing what you know, from your professional, we'll say professional history, um, encompassing in that your vintage dealing and your education, and all that experience, when you find something like that, does it give you kind of a, do you feel that's an instant kind of boost of information on the potential wearer, or is it more about the history of the designer, where does your brain go when you encounter something like that, other than that kind of like, "Eeee!"

P2 – 26:20

I think there's two things here. I think there's like an instant gratification in like, it's almost like it's a I've collected another garmentby that designer, in my head. Which is really like, quite a satisfying thing to have. Because, like so often, particularly with British designers, you don't see a great deal come up by them. I mean, I've looked at so many different designers now, I couldn't tell you on every designer, but I doubt I've probably seen in person about 20 Mattli pieces. So it's like, another garment collected in my head. And because I'm quite visual I've like, logged it in my brain. But actually, seeing the Mattli label, it instantly gave me different thoughts about the wearer, and also, not only the wearer, but the level of wear as well. So for example, one thing I do think is quite interesting is, is it's got these big old sweat pads in it, which could, the way that they're stitched in, I think they're designed to be changed. Um, I was, it's just interesting they're so heavily soiled, but when you look underneath them, it's not really soiled at all. So I just get the impression somebody wore this really heavily for a short period of time. Um, that's what it speaks of to me. But it's like also, it's not just about, I think once I knew the maker, and then I was thinking about the cut and it gives you a bit of a different idea to then who might

have worn it, as well. So just thinking about that kind of like, semi-fitted style, I mean to me this is saying like, I think it's late 50s. Um, and I'm seeing sort of, maybe, quite stylish woman in maybe her 40s or thereabouts wearing it. It's not hyper-fashionable, but it's got nods to fashionable style – like it's, yeah. Yeah, I think it's, that's definitely opens up, it opens up different ways to see both as soon as you see the label. Thinking about who could have worn it, when they were wearing it, where they were wearing it. So, yeah.

Collecting practice; Satisfaction and gratification from experiencing object; Affective nature of clothing; Research interests; Expertise; Object biography; Wearer biography; Interpretation

CM – 28:44

Cool. Um, so let's – I think we'll revisit that later on, but let's go back to my boring old questions, cause I'm like "Yes, yes, yes!" So would you say that you have a specific specialist subject in your professional career now, as it stands?

P2 – 29:15

Sorry, oh my god. I joked with my friends the other day that all my career does is it branches further outwards into different avenues, it never goes upwards. So, I would say I am a hyper-specialist in a very small area which is London wholesale couture, but other than that I am quite a generalist. And I can quite comfortably, normally deal with most, pretty much any 20th century dress, and actually, I can deal with a lot of social history as well. Um, I've even written stuff on random things like 17th century drug jars, I've written about archaeology, like I'm quite, I like to learn so I will pick up a bit of anything, like whole couture is my absolute specialism, but yeah, I can be quite general. One thing I will say, particularly with this pair of shoes staring at me, I'm really rubbish with shoes, quite often, I'm like, "Hmmm!"

Career trajectory; Expertise; Wholesale couture; Generalism; Fashion history; Professional embarrassment

CM – 30:30

Um, so how often in your professional life now, so thinking of where you're

positioned now, are you able to engage with, with your, so it's London wholesale couture?

P2 – 30:46

Yep, yep.

CM – 30:48

So how often are you able to engage with that in publications, conferences, and like any kind of output?

P2 – 30:52

Um, um, I mean so right now it's a bit different because I have literally just finished writing a book on it, so it has been quite intense on it. But it doesn't actually con-nect in on my job at all. So it's very much like a free time thing. When I can pick it up and things like that, so.

Career trajectory; Authorship; Publishing; Expertise; Wholesale couture; Employ-ment conditions; Time constraints

CM – 31:13

Cool. And would you describe yourself as having a specific practice when you're working within a clothing collection?

P2 – 31:22

No, probably not actually.

Object analysis practice

CM – 31:23

Okay, cool. Um, when you're analysing a garment, do you apply a specific object analysis methodology to approaching it, so thinking like, Prown, Mida and Kim.

P2 – 31:38

Yep, so what I will say is that I intend to, and then never do. So I'm very much like a

best intentions person. But actually, I am, I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic and extremely chaotic in pretty much everything I do. And I always go into stuff, you know the amount of things I've gone to see in museum collections where I've gone in and gone, "I'm going to do this like, proper." And the Mida and Kim method is normally what I'd go for, but I never follow it through. Like, because what I always find will happen, is I'll get distracted halfway through what I'm writing, and then write some other notes, and then I won't have followed through the careful sheet that I've gone through. I mean I'm going to bring up an example here of someone who has done it really well which is so, Suzanne Rowland, who writes on blouses. So she, I think she writes about it actually in the 20ᵗʰ Century Everyday, no, it's not called 20ᵗʰ Century Everyday, uh, the Everyday Fashion book that I've edited. She really, really carefully follows, like she has, she treats in the same way. Which I think is amazing. And it's probably what you should do. Um, but I just get really, really distracted. Um, and often, particularly if I'm like in a collection and someone's got out loads of like, if I'm somewhere that's not somewhere I work and someone's got out loads of objects, I'll be like, "Oooh! Can I look at that first?" and then I just start writing notes and be like, "Oh." So like when I was doing this, I thought, "Oh, I'm done with that." And then I got to that one and I thought, "Oh no." and I went back to that one again. So yeah, I just don't have, I just don't work through things in a very methodical way.

==Object analysis practice; Neurodiversity; Cognition; Colleague practice; Disciplinary standards; Expertise; Professional embarrassment==

CM – 33:30

Okay, okay, cool. Um, so thinking about that then. Obviously it's, as you said, you've got dyslexia, dyspraxia, in the processes that you do follow, you've got the measuring tape, um, you've clearly got some, some practices that you incorporate. Where did you pick those up? Where did you learn those?

P2 – 34:04

So the biggest, the thing is I always measure things, like, and I always take my own measurements, rather than relying on what someone has given. Because that's

about thinking about who was the person who was wearing it. And to do the measuring myself, it helps me to think about that. But that's literally just from being a vintage dealer. So that's really where that kind of thing comes from. And I will say as well, kind of half going back to your previous question, is that, if I am working, if I am doing something in a professional circumstance where it's not just for me, I will be way more careful. I think it's one of those things, and it's sort of the separation of it – you know for example when you're looking at something for a potential accession, for example? And you're doing like an object analysis, pre- a potential accession, then I'll be much more like, methodical and go through it all. But I think often, particularly when you've requested it, garments (unclear) you just get over-excited, but no, I think, I think actually a lot of thing that I think about when I look at garments, whilst – I'm trying to think whether I did any museum stuff before I was selling vintage, maybe not. I think a lot of what I think about when I look at garments, particularly 20ᵗʰ century garments, has a bit of the, I think a bit of the vintage dealer is in my mind. And what I go to first, what I look at first, is always quite present.

<mark>Object analysis practice; Measurement; Haptic engagement; Interpretation; Object biography; Wearer biography; Vintage dealing; Expertise; Disciplinary standards; Expertise; Professional embarrassment; Visual engagement</mark>

CM – 35:48

And when you bring that skillset into the museum environment, has there ever been any kind of reaction from like, colleagues or anyone around you that's like, "That's great." Or, "That's not great." Or –

P2 – 36:04

Um, so in that sense, I don't like, the way I look at things I don't think is ever a problem, though I have had on a few occasions people be like, "Oh, I feel uncomfortable that you wear vintage in a museum environment." With dress and textiles. So when that was being said, was, what are we talking like, early 2010s?

<mark>Personal dressing habits; Colleague practice; Disciplinary standards; Expertise; Professional embarrassment</mark>

CM – 36:26

Okay.

P2 – 36:27

Maybe even a bit later than that, actually. The last time that was said to me was about 2016. I don't know if people would say that now, but that was like a little bit of a, "Are you going to want to try on the clothes?" I'm like, "No!" As I said to you like to me, they are completely different things. But I do think that people sometimes do get that vibe, or that fear from me that – don't worry, I'm not going to try, I'm not going to randomly like, hide in the stacks and put a dress on.
==Personal dressing habits; Colleague practice; Disciplinary standards; Expertise; Professional embarrassment==

CM – 36:58

Oh my lord! Okay. And then finally, for this kind of backgrounding, is there an aspect, you've mentioned with Object 1, with the blue jacket, you kind of saw the tag and went for it, but is there something when you first see an object, is there anything that you are initially on the lookout for?

P2 – 37:24

I mean tags, I'm always on the lookout for, because it's the easiest way to quickly date something. Um, interestingly, one big thing with that one is, and this would be probably the same for any suiting, is how the buttonhole's bound, as an instant sign of quality and how something is made. I'd say for me it's one, I find it the easiest indicator of whether something is going to be a high-quality piece or not. Um, yeah. I think it's labels, buttonholes, there'll like the quick, go-to things on the garment.
==Object analysis practice; Expertise; Perception of quality; Research interest; Interpretation; Object biography==

CM – 38:05

Cool, alright. So now, talking about today, so the digital garment analysis. Um, tell me about your experience using the eye gaze tracker and the 3D garment analysis,

so let's think problems with it crashing aside, but the actual physical experience, your mental experience, your emotional experience, tell me what it was like encountering the objects in that format.

P2 – 38:34

Um, so I would say overall it like, so like, it was fine –

CM – 38:42

And be honest, please. I won't be hurt!

P2 – 38:45

So it was totally fine, but for me, I was like – and this is a big thing that I find all of the time, I really struggled to figure out what any of the fabrics actually were. And even when I zoomed in, I was like, "Well, I'm not confident that I know for sure." So that was a big thing. I liked the fact that I got a real three dimensional sense of the object, but I felt like, I just wasn't confident looking at the, was it photogrammetry? Object analysis practice; Digitised garment analysis; Frustration with technology; Material culture importance

CM – 39:16

It's photogrammetry, yeah.

P2 – 39:17

I wasn't confident with the kind of, photogrammetry tech, like what they were made from. That was kind of the big that perhaps holding me back a bit. Um, and I also find, and this is always a thing, um, with photogrammetry I've noticed, sometimes you'll look at something and it just won't have quite, I suppose, have rendered properly? And so that jacket, Object number 1, I thought was really badly damaged, by – because it looked to me like it was frayed, and then when I saw it in person and I was like, "Oh, it's not frayed, it must be the, it must be just how the image, image picked it up." Um, and it's interesting obviously that the photogrammetry, I couldn't see that either of the two jackets had a label in them, which in person you can see

straight away. But yeah, I'd say, I mean, it's good for giving you an overview and like a three dimensional view, rather than so often with museum objects, you just see the one photo if you're (unclear)

Object analysis practice; Visual engagement; Digitised garment analysis; Frustration with technology; Material culture importance

CM – 40:21

Right, flat.

P2 – 40:22

And you're like, zooming in, zooming in and you're like, "Hmmm." I think it's like, like this is a big thing with photogrammetry, the only – was it, and I always pronounce this brand wrong, because I've never heard anyone say it in person, so I'm not sure, it's like cryocede, cryoside? Like a Cornish textiles brand, and they did, there's a few of their garments have been photogrammed. And they're quite good. But quite often you get the weird sort of, I suppose it's about the edges, like they just blur and you're a bit like, is there something wrong with it? Or is it just that it hasn't quite captured it? So it gives, like, I think with something like that, that tech, it would give me enough to be like, "Do I definitely want to see it in person?"

Object analysis practice; Visual engagement; Digitised garment analysis; Frustration with technology; Cornish textile brand; Material culture importance

CM – 41:15

Okay, okay. And does it, because you have, obviously, such a vis - maybe visceral is not the right word, but such a, kind of, engaged reaction to a physical object, how did you feel encountering them in a digital format? Was there any of that feeling?

P2 – 41:38

I was a bit, I think I was more, I was more excited with anticipation of the like, "Ooh, what's next?"

Object analysis practice; Material culture importance; Excitement about seeing the "real" thing

CM – 41:45

Okay, okay. Cool. And quick ones, have you used eye gaze tracking before?

P2 – 41:53

Um, yes, but for a very different purpose.

==Digitised garment analysis==

CM – 41:56

Oh, really.

P2 – 41:57

Yep. It was about, I don't know how well I can explain this, but it was about trying to plot the space for an exhibition –

==Exhibition-making; Digitised garment analysis==

CM – 42:05

Oh, cool! Okay. Great. Have you used digital rendering of garments in your work previously?

P2 – 42:16

Um, I'm trying to, yeah. So the current project I'm working on is heavily to do with that. I'm not, I haven't created them personally, but I know people who are part of it, it's like real-time cloth rendering which is extremely tough to do. Um, so yeah.

==Employment; Digitised garment analysis; Frustration with technology==

CM – 42:33

Okay, cool. Um, so, you've spoken about the blue jacket. So let's speak about Object 2, the shoes. Um, what can you tell me about the shoes?

P2 – 42:53

Well, they're some kind of Spanish espadrille, I'm fairly sure they are actual Spanish ones, as well. Either the materials and the construction of them, like they just look

right. Um, something in my head put them at being like 1930s, but also they're in such bad condition, they're not even in that bad of condition, they just look really, really well worn. So in that sense, they could be much, much later, as well. I really just wasn't sure what to think of them, and I think in some ways, I was hindered by the fact that I've owned loads of pairs of Spanish espadrilles, and I was like, "But they still look like that now." There's something about them, particularly the canvas upper that looks older. Um, when I measured them, initially I thought they were womens, but they're actually quite big. Um, so I was like, maybe they are actually men's, and obviously in Spain, certainly, traditionally worn by both men and women, so.

==Object description; Object biography; Design; Digitised garment analysis; Personal ownership; Gender; Measurement; Haptic engagement; Material culture importance==

CM – 43:55

Um, what was the first aspect of the shoe that you observed, and this can be thinking about the digital or the material.

P2 – 44:07

Um, it was, with both of them it was trying to work out what the fabric was, definitely. Um, to try and decide on how old I thought they were, because just from an instant view, I was like, they look quite old, so actually I'm not so sure. Yeah.

==Object description; Object biography; Design; Digitised garment analysis; Visual engagement==

CM – 44:24

Um, and based on the digital, just thinking about the digital encounter, would you or could you hypothesise on object biography based on that encounter?

P2 – 44:38

I think I would have really struggled with it from the digital, whereas I could with the physical. I think from my notes, like I didn't really make many notes on the digital version of this, cause I was like, "I don't know, I'm not sure." And even, one thing I

will say with the shoes, when I came in here, like, I picked them up because I was like, that was me trying to be like, "Hmm, what do I think?" But even still, I was like they just feel lightweight, and not that –

<mark>Object description; Object biography; Digitised garment analysis; Haptic engagement; Material culture importance</mark>

CM – 45:05

So, with having done the actual material, tangible analysis of them, would you be able to, would you or could you be able to hypothesise on the biography now?

P2 – 45:19

I could, but of all three it would be the one I would be least confident to do. And I actually probably wouldn't be that confident doing it, because I just couldn't narrow it down to what they are. It's, the big thing is, if I can't even have a vague confidence I've got the right date, I would be like –

<mark>Confidence; Expertise; Object biography</mark>

CM – 45:43

Yeah. So this is great, I'm curious then, how, if you were cataloguing something like this, that really throws up lots of questions, how would you – and I mean, I know this is like, how many ways can you catalogue something on the database, but what information do you think would be relevant to include in kind of a basic description of it?

P2 – 46:09

Oh, absolutely. So I would be totally including the fact that they seem to be Spanish espadrilles. They are made in a traditional style. And I would probably say that they look to be handmade as well, than any machine workmanship. Um, I would probably just put them at a broad 20th century, just to be on the safe side, because I just wouldn't be sure, and I would make quite clear in the catalogue description that shoes are still made in this style today, and have been for a considerable period of time, so that's why it's hard to date them. I'd also be very clear on the

measurements, in order to to put across that they could have been worn by men or women. I mean also the colour, really adds to that, I think. They're just so – everything about them is very neutral and difficult to sort of, define, I suppose.

Object description; Object biography; Design; Confidence; Digitised garment analysis; Gender; Measurement; Haptic engagement; Visual engagement; Colour; Neutrality

CM – 47:06

Cool. Um, so same – thinking the same way about Object 3 then, the green jacket. What was the first, what was your first –

P2 – 47:21

I was instantly drawn to on that the fact that I could see the label straight away, and it gave me a bit of a –

Visual engagement; Clothing label

CM – 47:26

When you were doing the material culture?

P2- 47:27

Yeah. On the, it's interesting, on the, when I was doing the digital one, I was like, "I think it's men's, but I'm not sure, I'm not certain, certain, anyway." Interestingly as well, when I first looked at it I was like, I think it's cotton, which I was then like, oh maybe it's suede, but like, as soon as I walked in the room and saw it, I was like, "It's obviously suede!" Like how could I have even thought it was cotton. But yeah, like, it was very clear, actually, I'd say probably of the three garments, even moreso than that, even though it's, kind of is my period, I'd say that's the most archetypal of its – so like, there's no real two ways about it, it's from the 80s. Like, and I think digitally, everything says that to you. And actually, that's sometimes the difference between something on the mannequin versus on the flat, because I think you see that kind of, voluminous, classic 80s shape a bit more on a mannequin, than you do when it's flat. So yeah, it doesn't, you could actually do a decent, as long as you knew what

the label was, you could do a decent analysis of that from the digital.

CM – 48:49

Okay, so then to kind of round that one out, so based on digital analysis could you feel, again, would you feel able to hypothesise on a wearer?

P2 – 49:01

Yeah, I would, yeah.

CM – 49:02

Okay, then folding in the material to that, you said you could, would you please – and again, there's no wrong answers, because I don't necessarily know anything about these.

P2 – 49:13

Um, so definitely for me, it's Charles Jourdan, a fairly nice, good quality make from the 80s. The one thing I would say, the one thing, I've now forgotten what it says on it, but the fabric label, it says something weird (unclear) skin, I was like, "Maybe it's something in French and it's one I don't know." But I wasn't sure from that what precisely it was. But it's a men's jacket, it's also, it's quite a large size, I think it's about 50, 50-something, which I know is, European sizes are a bit different, but it's a good size, good size piece, like it fits into that whole 80s era of oversized clothing anyway, but it's not a small garment, by any stretch. Really interestingly, particularly for something designed for men, it's got very sizeable shoulder pads in it, which is an interesting design feature. Some other things, it's clearly in really well worn, I get the impression the levels, the holes in the pockets and things like that, someone's really taken great pleasure in wearing this jacket. Interestingly, unlike this one which is heavily stained under the arms, this one is not, but then that's sort of symptomatic of it being the sort of jacket that it is. There is also a, what I think is a dry cleaning

label in there, and it might mean nothing, but it has a name, maybe it's the name of the owner? Of the previous owner. And it also has Fitzrovia, and obviously I instantly thought Fitzrovia is an area of London, I was like, "Ooh!" That just gave me like, a tantalising glimpse of maybe where it had come from. The label, I couldn't, I think the label's too faded to see anything now, but you know, that dry cleaning label might give you more information about when it was worn until. One thing that is interesting about this, as well, is about the colour, and the fade. And I think this is both a heavily worn garment, and a poorly stored garment, as well. So I think across the back and the shoulders, to me that says, maybe more poor storage at some point in its life? Rather than just that its been heavily worn. But yeah, for suede to have that many colours going on – I did look at it, and I was like, there's nowhere that isn't worn, so I'm not really sure what colour it started life as.

==Clothing label; Design; Perception of quality; Gender; Visual engagement; Textile; Knowledge of London; Colour; Wear; Expertise; Material culture importance==

CM – 51:55

Yeah, it's interesting because parts that you think would be quite faded like the arm right here, actually, is quite dark still.

P2 – 52:02

Yeah.

CM – 52:02

Okay, wonderful. Um, so when you were doing the material culture analysis, so just in this room with the garments, to go back to discussing, you know, process and that, you said you were kind of going between the two jackets, so was there anything specific you did today, any specific practice you followed, or anything like that?

P2 – 52:33

No, there wasn't really, it was just, I think the reason I went back to that was after I realised that this one had shoulder pads in it, I was like, "I never checked!"

CM – 52:41

Okay, okay.

P2 – 52:42

So sometimes, it's that whole thing of you'll, you'll notice something on another garment, and be like, actually I should have checked. And this is why, if I was sensible, and if I went by, you know, doing things in a proper manner, as I should do, then I would probably pick up all of these things, cos I'd look things over fully, but that's just not my vibe.

Object analysis practice; Visual engagement; Professional embarrassment

CM – 53:05

Yeah. Do you think, I mean obviously we're in a study situation here, in your professional, day-to-day life, would you have the option to revisit an object if you had noticed something like that where you were like, "It's shoulder pads" –

P2 – 53:24

Historically, yeah I would. I think in that, it's like a – I mean the only time I can think of not having had that opportunity was like, when I went and saw some stuff in, I went to look at some stuff at a collection in Edinburgh.

Access to research spaces

CM – 53:37

Oh, okay.

P2 – 53:38

And then I was like, after having gone to see those, there was a little part of me that was like, "Ugh, I didn't actually take everything I needed from it." Um, but – also one thing I would say as well, is I haven't had to do, like for my actual research, like for my wholesale couture research, I haven't had to do – I haven't had the chance

actually really to do that much in person object analysis, like proper, since before COVID. Which I think a lot of people will find? So I imagine that there's probably, you'll probably get other people who will do this and be like, "I feel a bit rusty." Because actually, you know for between 2015 and 2018, I was doing it all the time, I was always, and like, since then it's just not something I do, do as much. So.

<mark>Access to research spaces; Covid-19; Object analysis practice</mark>

CM – 54:37

Do you feel it's kind of like a muscle? A mental muscle?

P2 – 54:39

Yeah, yeah. I think so. And I think, even though like, what I said before about the fact that I'm a bit slapdash, or the way I do things, and you know, go with best intentions and don't follow it, like I think um, I think when you've done quite a lot in a short space of time, you're more like, "Right, and I will check this, and I will check that." and it's there a bit more in a way.

<mark>Professional embarrassment; Object analysis practice; Time constraints; Access to research spaces</mark>

CM - 55:01

So, again keeping in mind this is a study situation, this is a synthesised situation that you're in today, do you feel that it differed from your day-to-day working experience when you're in a collection?

P2 – 55:24

Um, I would say yes, because actually, one thing I would say is, that it's about time. So you didn't specify a time, and I was kind of like, "I've got as long as I want." But also, I think sometimes that's also quite a useful thing, because then you're like, "Oh, I'm not time-pressured." But so often, in the actual object analysis of things, you're, you're so time-pressured to get thing, to look at things quickly, and get out, and get them done, or you feel someone is always there with the next thing to look at. So, I think that's a kind of, that's a possible element of it.

CM – 56:05

Cool. So, you may have already answered this, but thinking about your job that you're in now, or thinking where you're at in your career now, let's be a little more broad, how frequently are you doing material culture analysis. In your day-to-day.

P2 – 56:33

Like, I mean, I will say my job is, I doubt I will do any whatsoever, which makes me really sad. Particularly because there's one thing I am quite, I'm meant to be writing a joint paper with someone, and I'm a little bit worried about writing about it without having seen it. I just, I just don't know if my analysis is going, is going to really be right without having been like, yeah. Anway, that's kind of – but in, I'd say I'm, I'm doing variations on material culture analysis a lot, because of just having to, having done the book. But then that material culture analysis takes on a whole different thing when it's your own thing, because I'm adding the extra layer where I put things on.

CM – 57:33

Um, okay wonderful. So just to close it off, any thoughts or feelings, anything I didn't touch on today that, about any of the sessions, or any of the objects, is there anything you'd like to throw in?

P2 – 57:53

Can you tell me how old the shoes are? Do you know?

CM – 57:55

I can roughly date them, they're, now that we're got all that out of the way, they're

part of the Francis Golding collection.

P2 – 58:07

Oh, are they?

CM – 58:08

So, he wore them and acquired them in his lifetime, so that would be any time from the 1940s up until uh, 2013. So, exact date I couldn't tell you right now, because I've tried to keep my mind like minimal about the information, because I really want to hear what everybody else has to say, without doing kind of like –

P2 – 58:30

Yeah, yeah. It's just fascinating, because sometimes like, I think, I really like the fact that its three quite different garments, that – I just think it's like, yeah, it just made me think actually, I was like, "God, I really am rubbish with shoes." I just looked at them and was like, "Eurgh." I suppose I don't know, it's just interesting, it's how evocative things, I mean I love looking at worn albeit a bit dirty, grimy garments. There's something extremely satisfying about it.

==Expertise; Professional embarrassment; Affective nature of clothing; Personal satisfaction==

CM – 59:07

I mean, I guess I have two final things then. We kind of touched on it with the shoes anyways then, but in thinking about documenting these objects, if it's something that you're really – because obviously there are things you've said that you're really attracted to, and you have quite an emotional response to, if it's something like that you have – I mean, to be fair, I would say that's an emotional response too, where you're like, "I don't know what this is, I don't feel comfortable like, speculating on it." Like I asked you, what information do you think would be important to include, but do you think like for instance the Object 1 would have, you'd be able to write a richer or more fleshed out biography based on just the object, versus these shoes? Or for you would it not matter, you're gonna include kind of the same level of

information?

P2 – 1:00:07

Um, I just couldn't offer the same level of information about those shoes. But it's also, it's not just because it's a label I know, it's because I have a material under-standing of how they're made.

<mark>Expertise; Confidence; Clothing label; Designer; Material culture knowledge</mark>

CM – 1:00:21

Right, yeah.

P2 – 1:00:22

And I think that's possibly as well where I find shoes a bit of a limitation. Because I'm a bit more like, I don't have the back, I've never made a pair of shoes, and I think that does come into things a lot. I think, like I wouldn't say everyone who's done these historic garments should have a, should be able to make, but I do think it gives you, it gives you a really good sort of – I think one of the big things that I find, is that my skills and my knowledge of making gives me a better idea of quality? That's one of the big things that I'd argue that comes with it. But obviously there's one thing here, and like, I could have, I don't even know why I did it, but I didn't bring my phone in here with me. But it's also that whole element of being like, in a normal circumstance, I would have probably done a bit of googling as well, on anything I wasn't sure of. But for some reason I just went right in and didn't have my phone on me.

<mark>Expertise; Confidence; Making ability; Object analysis practice; Methodology; Using the internet as a resource; Material culture knowledge</mark>

CM – 01:01:33

That's fine. That's totally fine! Um, and then final question for you, just to revisit Lou Taylor, who's obviously a stalwart in the field of dress history, and you said she was a champion of you, which is great, do you feel like when you were under her tutelage

or mentorship, that you picked up skills from her or – it's a silly question, did you pick up knowledge from her, but do you think there is anything you can directly trace to like, "That's a Lou Taylor, right there."

P2 – 01:02:06

Um, I wouldn't necessarily say that with Lou, actually, but there are others who really like, my, so, the first person who I really worked extensively with was called Alison Carter. And I just learned so much from her. Really, really experienced museum professional, her specialism is actually, she writes a lot about underwear, but her dress and textiles knowledge is incredible, but she taught me a lot, I learned a lot from her. And actually, awfully I can't remember her name, but her assistant, her first name is Caroline, I cannot remember her surname, um, who also just taught me a lot about textiles and fabrics and gave me a real rambling understanding. Like, I think along the path of my career, I have a met a lot of really amazing, I mean I'm not going to single it out and just say it's women, but on the whole, it has been, I find that the richer material culture experience you get and understanding of dress and textiles, it does feel like it's a very female-dominated experience. I don't know why that is. I couldn't put it to one specific thing. I'm trying to think if there's anyone else who's been really – yeah, I'd say actually it's been a lot of those really early experiences. When I was working with Alison, that would have been 2009, 2010, maybe? So it was a long time ago. But that was really important. I think you know, like, you pick little things and little bits of knowledge from people all the way, but like, like a lot of those skills start, that she taught me, really stuck with me.
Mentorship; Knowledge sharing; Colleague Practice; Women in the discipline; Education through employment; Object analysis practice; Methodology; Material culture knowledge

CM – 01:04:08
Cool. Amazing. Thank you so much!

P2 – 01:04:10
My pleasure.

Interview – 29/04/2022

Interviewer: Cyana Madsen (CM)

Interviewee: Participant 3 (P3)

Key:

* <mark>_____</mark>- Analysis Description

CM – 00:48

So just to kind of recap, I've been studying biography for about six years now, at the Museum of London, and I'm here and doing the MA and now I'm doing my PhD, and, um, as I was saying to you earlier, what I'm interested in now is less even the objects, and more the people who are dealing with the objects. So, what I'm trying to do with this whole study, with talking to you and the other participants, is just try to get a small sample of understanding of everyone's individual experiences they've had. So, as I've said to you, this is like, none of it's a test, or anything like that, it's just I want to hear how you experience things, basically.

P3 – 01:31

Okay.

CM – 01:32

So, so start on a softball. Um, what's your first memory of clothing?

P3 – 01:40

Oh, my god. Um, well I'm an identical twin. So, we were always dressed exactly the same. But because, my poor old mum, um, um, she, to make her life easier, she always chose the same clothes but different colours, so that we were different. So, I suppose my first memories of clothing are – I don't know, it's probably looking back in photographs, more than actual – I suppose my first memory of my actual clothing was, I was desperate to have a pair of platform shoes. This was in, what would this have been? This was in the mid-70s. And I was absolutely desperate to get, to have a pair of platform shoes. We come from a really working-class family, from Essex.

Eventually my mum relented, and we went to Pitsea market, and I bought some – I remember I couldn't walk home – I had a black pair, and my brother had a brown pair. And um, I absolutely loved them. But that was the first sort of, I suppose, the first thing I really coveted, I must have probably been about, what would that have been about, the mid-70s, so I would have been about eight, something like that. And I remember being at school, having really big flares, and being able to get the bible in my whole pocket side, um, not that I was particularly religious. The bible fitted – because we had really big bibles, but I had a really big pocket on the side, so I suppose they were the first – and it was always sort of, you wanted to look like, sort of, pop stars, David Bowie and stuff like that, obviously not going to do that. So yeah, no, the platform shoes were probably the first thing that were my own. But before that, it was clothes that my mum would have chosen, so it was, I remember we had shirts, and they had little metal stars on the collars. Like, little sort of cowboy shirts, with stars, a bit glammy, glam rock-y sort of stuff. But again, we had the same ones in different colours, um, yeah, so those are the first memories of my clothes.

==Surprise; Family; Being a twin; Clothing as identity; Finances; Shoes; Pop culture; Being cool==

CM – 03:53

Amazing. Um, so, do you remember – you can pick any one of those examples, but do you remember how they made you feel?

P3 – 04:04

Yes. The shoes, again, absolutely loved them, because they were sort of the first entre into sort of clothing that I really wanted rather than being dressed. Um, and um, I wore them to death. And um, you just, yeah, I can still see myself walking up, not really that well, because I was you know, walking up, because we lived on a street called Kimberley Road, on a road called Kimberley Road, walking up to the sweet shop in my platform shoes. And then they really wore out. I felt great in them, because they were mine. And they wore out, and I remember, uh, they were, the soles weren't solid, obviously they were hollow, but they had sort of a framework in

them, like squares, and I remember putting sort of pebbles and stones in them and sort of, imagining it was sort of secret codes, I don't know just sort of like (unclear) and something like that. So they had multiple purposes, I looked glamorous and I had a secret compartment.

Clothing as identity; Shoes; Being cool; Secrecy; Hiding things in clothing

CM – 05:04

Amazing.

P3 – 05:05

But, I obviously wore them for a long time, for them to be so knackered. But also my parents, they weren't wealthy, so we always got – things had to be worn. Yeah.

Wear; Usefulness; Finances; Family

CM – 05:13

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

P3 – 05:14

And I remember, actually, my brother still recounts the story, we were slightly older, and my parents went to Basildon and bought both of, my brother and I, a pair of shoes, and they were plastic. And I flat – I refused to wear them to school, because I knew people would absolutely take the piss out of me. So I didn't wear them, and my brother, my brother always slightly capitulated, did go to school in them, and quite rightly – not rightly, but everyone did take the piss out of him, so he had to come home. So yeah, it was horrible, so there was always real negotiation with clothes and with, cause as I say my parents never had any money, and it was just keeping their heads above water, so clothes were a real luxury. And it was always the kids at school, other kids at school, always had the stuff, we always had the crap stuff. And that's all hurts, I, I, it doesn't bother me now, but at the time it all hurts you because you wanna, you desperately want to fit when you're young, and when

you don't – yeah, clothes are a quick signifier to who you are, um yeah, so it was sort of, quite difficult. But yeah, my platform shoes, I adored.

CM – 06:25

Cool, aw I love it. Um, so how would you describe now, thinking about yourself as an adult, how would you describe your interest in clothing outside of your collections work?

P3 – 06:37

So my own personal clothing?

CM – 06:39

Yeah, so I guess –

P3 – 06:40

Slovenly. I'm sort of slightly serious, I've got, I sort of go in and out of caring, and um, which is really bad, and I sort of – my brother always has a go at me, my brother's obsessed with clothes to a degree. But I think because we are twins, I think we, like he's covered in tattoos, literally covered – and I have none. So we're always balancing that act between wanting to be ourselves, and acknowledging that we're twins. So he's obsessed by clothes, but he dresses what I consider too young. Um, which I think is fine in the gay world, you know? I don't know. But I am sort of slightly opposite to him, I go between really slightly caring about what I look like and sometimes, or most of the time, not really caring. But I am getting to an age now where I sort of am thinking, "Actually, just fucking step it up. Because you're looking slobby, and I hate it." Because lockdown I started – anyway. I'm just finding a tailor, actually, because I've got the most amazing pair of trousers – actually that's quite an interesting story, well it's not actually.

CM – 07:49

No, no, please!

P3 – 07:50

Um, one of my friends, one of my friends was at a party in Brighton in the 90s, she fell off a chair and broke her arm, and had to go to hospital. So we picked her up from Essex, and I went to a shop in Brighton – it was the first time I had been to Brighton – and they had a pair of trousers I absolutely loved, Vivienne Westwood, and so I bought them, and I really liked them, they suited me, if I may say so myself. And then as I got older, they didn't fit me, obviously. I wore them through university, because we had to dress for dinner at university, because I went to quite a, sort of, okay university. And so they saw me through university, my Vivienne Westwood – and then as I got older, they didn't fit me, and then one of my volunteers, I said, "Do you know anyone that cuts pattern?" this is in Brighton, after I lived there, you know I lived in Manchester – so I just visited and bought these trousers, and um, she said, it was about ten years ago, she said, "Oh yeah, I know Vivienne Westwood's old pattern cutter." So I went to see her, Karen, and she was like, "Oh I remember making these trousers." So she cut a pattern from my original trousers, and I've had a couple of pairs made. But finding a tailor is almost impossible in Brighton. It's unbelievable. So anyway, that's what I'm looking for.

==Brighton; Vivienne Westwood; Clothing as identity; Use and wear; Tailoring==

CM – 08:58

Oh, cool!

P3 – 08:59

I even thought about trying to make them myself, but everyone is going, "Don't, because they'll look shit."

==Making; Confidence==

CM – 09:03

I mean, my sewing machine collects dust in the corner, so I wouldn't be the one to

say, "Yeah, go for it! Give it a try!" Um, okay, so talking about university then, tell me about your, like, in relation to, actually no, not even in relation to dress. Tell me about your educational and your training background, so –

P3 – 09:25
From when I was young?

CM – 09:26
From when you were young. Yeah, til where we are today.

P3 – 09:28
Okay, so I went to, as I say my parents were really working class, so I went to – well, we were born in East London, but, my brother and I were born there, and they only expected to have one child, and then two came along, so they knew the house was going to be too small, so we moved out to a place called Benfleet, which was in the middle of Basildon and Southend, and it's a complete dump. There's nothing there. My mum always hated it. But my dad chose the house, because my mum couldn't go, so anyway, sorry. So we grew up in Benfleet, which was dreadful, and um, just went to a bog standard junior school, Kent Hill, and then infant's junior school, me and my brother were never in the same class, because they deliberately split us up, which I think is a good thing. And then we went to just a bog standard comprehensive, which was awful, my sister was really naughty, and she was in the fifth year when my brother and I started in the first year, and she was really naughty. She was obsessed by clothes as well. Like, she used to go clubbing when she was like, 14, my dad used to come and drag her out of the club and she'd be in a swimming costume and stilettos at 14. So my dad bought all her clothes to stop her from going out. And um, but she got expelled in the last year of school, because she never, ever went. So the teachers hated us. They said, "Eughhh, Pel. You're not related to Sonja, are you?" and I'd say, "Yeah, she's my sister." "EUGH!" It was a really awful school, they didn't, it was a crap school. Um, and there was no expectation that we'd ever go onto college, or university wasn't even mentioned. It was just

like, don't be ridiculous, just go, you know – and the expectation was that you'd finish school at 16 and you'd start work in London. That's what everyone did. And you'd get a job in a bank, or you'd get a job in – you know, that's what all my friends did. And that's what, my mum, you know, we'd come up to London and go down to the Jobcentre when the Jobcentre – but I just knew that wasn't for me, and I think being gay and growing up and you didn't see yourself reflected in anything. Um, so I, I left home when I was 17 cos I didn't get on with my dad, and then we just fell in with a group of people, and I just used to wear stupid clothes and lots of makeup, and sort of hot pants and sequinned – I had my tooth, someone headbutted me and knocked my tooth out in Southend, you know, because he didn't like my makeup. So yeah, it wasn't the best place to grow up gay. But you find a really small group of friends, just a small group of friends, we all hung out together and dressed up, and London, we'd just come to London. Jump on, it was really easy to get on the train, come to London and just go clubbing, and wait for the milk train at sort of five o'clock, something like that and just go home.

Working class; Family; Impact of sister's reputation on how was treated by teachers; Education; No expectation of higher education; Being gay; Regional life; Employment; Finance; Friendship; Subculture and clubbing

CM – 12:22

So what period would this have been, like the '80s?

P3 – 12:24

Yeah. So I left school in 83, um, and then I left home the next year, then I was living in sort of just, rooms with no heating and stuff like that. But you didn't care. And all, you were signed on the dole, so we got money, which was nothing. And my best mate Mark, he'd get his one week, and I'd mine the next week, on a Thursday. So we'd support each other, or um, we just had money. Or we just had money - we didn't really eat, we'd just have money to go clubbing. That's all we wanted to do was go out, you know, dress up and stuff like that. Just go to clubs in London, so there was clubs you'd always go to, so Monday there was Jungle, sort of destroyed now. Then there was Leigh Bowery's club Taboo on Wednesday. There was Daisy

Chain at the Fridge in Brixton on, was that Wednesday or Tuesday? And then there was Mud Club on Friday – anyways, you'd got no money, but you'd just blag away and stuff like that. And then, I sort of realised I was getting older, I was in my twenties, and I was, "This isn't sustainable." And so I – and I always read, I was always into some, and one of my friends said "Why don't you go to university?" but then she was really encouraging, and so I applied to the University of Manchester, and I went there. And I did my BA, my undergrad, in art history. And then I realised I wanted to do a post-grad, and I wanted to work in museums. So I decided to, um, I looked at the Courtauld, cos I saw the course and I thought "That looks brilliant!". Fashion and art history, textiles, and I thought, "God, that sounds really great nick to what I want to study." But again, you know, I had no money, right? So I worked in London, and I saved for about six, seven years? About 15 grand, because I wanted to support myself, and pay my fees. And I learned French, I did two years undergrad at Birbeck, when I was working in London. And, cos I hadn't done modern history, I still, I had my undergrad degree, but I didn't really have any backing history, and you had to do history for Courtauld. So I did two years of modern history, undergrad courses at Birkbeck, and then I learned French, and I applied to Courtauld, and thankfully they said yes. So I went there, and then I started volunteering up in the museum Brighton, and then I got my first job at Chertsey, and then Eleanor, who was at Brighton, was a curator there, she left. And then I applied for the job, and I've been there ever since.

==Finances; Employment; Lack of employment; Friendship; Subculture and clubbing; Importance of style; Aging and maturation; Education; Affordability and access to education; Learning French to attend Courtauld; Volunteering; Colleagues==

CM – 15:07

So, I'm sorry, did you say –

P3 – 15:11

Chertsey.

CM – 15:13

Chertsey. How do you spell that?

P3 – 15:14

C-H-E-R-T-S-E-Y. Chertsey Museum.

CM – 15:17

Okay, cool.

P3 – 15:18

And it is in Surrey, it's in Chertsey, which is by Virginia Water.

CM – 15:24

And you did the MA?

P3 – 15:26

History of Dress. It's history of art, because that's what Courtauld does, but it's, the MA is History of Dress.

Education

CM – 15:35

I've learned from my previous transcriptions, thankfully I've learned, transcribing the past ones, so as I'm going through, I'm like, "Oh, I need to –" because I know I'll be transcribing going, "What? What?" Um, fantastic, okay, great. So you said you started volunteering at Brighton, when you were – was that while you were doing your MA?

P3 – 15:56

Um, when I finished my MA. So I finished my MA, I did some, I did some research for my dissertation, and I said to Eleanor, I was there, um, "Do you take

volunteers?" she said "Yeah! Come along." So, she said come along in six months time, I said, I don't know, when I graduated. So I came along, and then I did volunteering for, that was hard actually, I was, "Oh god, what have I done!" Because my MA was so specific: history of dress, plus history of art, and I thought – and there were loads of people volunteering, and they would go, they would do the museum studies at Leicester, and so it gave them a really broad understanding of how museums work. And I didn't really have that, I just had specialist knowledge. And I was thinking, "Oh, what have I done? I've really gone and stuffed my chances of working in a museum."   Because these people were getting interviews all the time, because they had a very broad range of knowledge, but when jobs specifically came up, I would thankfully get an interview, but I wasn't very good at interviews. I'd get quite nervous. So I never, I couldn't really sell myself. So, but it took, I was volunteering full time for a year and a bit, and then I had to get a job properly. And I worked at American Express, and I started at six in the morning, and then I finished at two in the afternoon, and then I would go and volunteer again, just to keep – so it was hard. And then, thankfully, I got an interview at Chertsey, and I – cos I get so nervous, I did get so nervous, oh my god I did the interview, and I just thought, "That's it. I'm not doing it anymore, I hate it. I absolutely hate it, I'm done putting myself through it. I'm just gonna – " so I went to the pub with my husband and had a couple of drinks, and came home and just threw myself on the bed, and went to sleep. I was like – and then my husband, he wasn't my husband then, he shouted up the stairs, "Chertsey Museum's on the phone!"

==Volunteering; Colleagues; Competition for work; Expertise; Not being good interviewing; Employment; Finances; Balancing paid work with unpaid work; Confidence==

CM – 17:58

The same day?

P3 – 18:00

The same day, yeah. And then they offered me the job. I was like, and then it all sort of fell into place. It all seemed worth it. But it was tough.

CM – 18:08

So then how did you go from Chertsey to, to Brighton?

P3 – 18:11

Brighton. Well, I volunteered at Brighton, and while I had my job at Chertsey, Eleanor, who was the curator there, she decided to do her PhD at Manchester Platt Hall, and she left, literally, two months after I started at Chertsey. And I was there covering maternity. And I thought, "Oh, damn." You know I don't want to leave a job when I've just started, but it was the perfect job. But thankfully, thankfully, there was the economic crisis in 2008? 2007? When all the banks – so the museum didn't really know what they were doing with their funding, so they didn't advertise the post for a year. So by the time they advertised the post, I had, I'd almost come to the end of my contract at Chertsey, and I had good experience of putting on exhibitions, and budgets, and dealing with conservators, and all that experience, so it sort of worked really well. And then I applied for the job, had an interview, got the job, and then moved to Brighton and I've been there ever since. But I'm half time. So I do freelance work, I'm trying to do more freelance work. Yeah.
Colleagues; Job security; Finances; Employment; Practical museum experience; Job precarity

CM – 19:27

Okay, so, so you said you did history of art, history of kind of, fashion and texiles –

P3 – 19:37

History of dress, my MA is called. It's still called History of Art, though. The degree is still History of Art, the Courtauld only do History of Art. So really, History of Art for them was always to do with connoisseurship, so it's to do with understanding, it's really to do with paintings. And being able to look at an outfit in a painting, and what that outfit then can tell you about art and history – so it's an arm of art history.

CM – 20:04

Gotcha. Okay, so then with that and then moving to Chertsey, and Brighton, obviously before and after that, do you feel that there's a specific subject area that you have, do you feel like you're, do you have a specific subject area that you would consider yourself a specialist in?

P3 – 20:27

No, I wouldn't actually, and I think lots of people do have specific areas that they really specialise in, the other thing is, because of the Courtauld, I learned dress history from 1600 all the way through the 21st century. Strangely, Aileen, my old professor, she didn't really like 20th century, so she, and I, you know, like yourself, you're probably interested in fashion because that's what you wore, so you're interested in 20th century fashion. Firstly, because that's the decade you wear, then gradually you start to look back, um, and so you sort of educate yourself on 20th century fashion. So when I went to the Courtauld, I was quite versed on 20th century fashion, because you're just interested, then I got the whole lot going back. And Aileen absolutely adores, her whole specialist knowledge is around the 18th century. So there was a lot on 18th century, but also the specialist course was on 17th century, so that was six months looking at 17th century dress in (unclear), and then 19th century again you're with Frederick Worth from the 1860s onwards, and then you can – so you can sort of, I don't see any one area as stronger than the other, or weaker really. If anything, the last 20 years is rubbish. It is though! And I was thinking crikey, the '80s, anything earlier than that, right, I have no problem. Then the 90s start to get a bit muddy, even though I was there, and I was probably running around in pubs in London, so I wasn't with it. And then really, from the start of the 21st century, starts to get slightly – I mean, I don't really know much about contemporary fashion.

CM – 22:31

So do you, how do you feel about the '80s, like when you were, from what you said to me, when you became kind of cognisant of fashion, we'll say, when you were eight to kind of in your twenties, how do you feel about that era of fashion then?

P3 – 22:51

Love it. I think it's, I mean, obviously I'm partisan, well, I don't know, but I do think the '80s is one of the most exciting decades for me. Also I grew up, when I was 16, in 1983, and then for some bizarre reason, I don't, you probably don't remember these people but um, Steve Strange, who was sort of really big, you know, he started working for Westwood in about '76, and then – I mean, he looked incredible. And then he started the band Visage in the sort of, late '70s? He looked incredible, he was the whole, he was the guy that really started the whole New Romantics scene, Blitz club, all that, you know he was the first guy to take over a club and have a club night. That hadn't really happened before. So he looked amazing, and he had these incredible clubs and do do do do, um, you know, Boy George came out of that, Steve Linard he's a designer for – all these designers came – you know the most creative 200 people in London. For some bizarre reason, Steve Strange decided to open a club in Southend, when me and my brother were about 16. God knows why. Well, actually I think why, there was a club on Canvey called the Goldmine in the mid-'70s, and it was the most fashionable club, in, probably for a couple of years. But it was sort of like the place to go, it was sort of like soul music, but. So, I think Steve Strange was like, "I can open, I can do a like, Goldmine, thing." So he opened a club in Southend, in this crappy little club called Raines, it was on a Tuesday night. And I remember we couldn't quite believe it. We saw a poster for it in and were thinking, "Steve Strange!" We're quite incredulous when we're kids. Um, so we went along, and Steve Strange was outside with a cane, I mean, just looked amazing. We obviously looked shit. But we thought we looked good. We went there, and then everyone was there: Leigh Bowery was there, Princess Julia, Mark Moore who was in a band called S'Express, Tasty Tim who has kind of disappeared now. Like everyone, Steve Linard, everyone from the London club scene, because

he would bring a coach down to Southend. So we'd go there and we just started talking, and they'd say, "Oh, come to London, come to the clubs in London!" So, we just – we went to the Electric Ballroom and would just get in for nothing and just sort of, it was just like – looking back on it, it's a bit like "How did that happen?" but at the time you're just like "Yeah, it's normal!" So we just talked to Steve Strange who was slightly wasted, but um, it was amazing. And we used to go clubbing in London, there was always a really small group of people, so that sort of, Leigh Bowery, Matthew Glamorre, and all those people were – you'd just go around to those different clubs, it was the same group of people all the time, you'd just see. And when you're 17, it's just like, "Oh wow." My brother was interviewed for i-D magazine, and he had hundreds of gold chains on and a polo neck, and they interviewed him, and they said, "How old are you?" and he said, "17." And they said, "Oh my, they're getting younger!" And you think 17, what are you talking about? Mature! Even though we, me and my brother were really juvenile. 17, you know we looked about two. I remember going to see Divine, there was a band, there was a venue in Southend called Crocs, it's where Depeche Mode started, because Depeche Mode are from Basildon. Depeche Mode started, and Culture Club did their first gig there. I remember going to see Divine, the drag – me and my brother went, I think we were about oh, about 16. They said, "How old?" we must have looked about 12, and they didn't let us in. So we did, I think we went the year after. I've got photographs of me with Divine, but yeah, the '80s I absolutely think are one of the most creative decades. I don't think the '90s was like that, but as I say, it's a bit difficult for me, the '90s. I see the '80s as being like the '60s, but with a much more gay slant. So there was, the problem with the '80s was obviously HIV and AIDS. I mean that sort of really did destroy that hedonism, and I wasn't really interested in that side of gay life. I just wanted to dress up. My friends weren't really interested in that – I suppose you get friends that reflect who you are. So all we wanted to do was dress up and go clubbing. But yeah, I think the 80s are just – oh yeah, when I look back on the '70s, it always, it used to be said that '70s was the decade that taste forgot, then it got into the '80s was the decade that taste forgot. But I just think the later decades, both of them – but the '80s for me, was brilliant.

CM – 27:33

The one.

P3 – 27:35

Yep, the one. Sorry, that's a really long answer.

CM – 27:37

No, no, no. This is wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Um, this is going to seem like a very dry question after that, but, so you say you don't, you feel like you're more broad, but obviously, you clearly get fired up about the '80s, I would say. So, would you say you have particulary practice when you're working with a clothing collection? And when I say "practice", it's like, a style, or a method, of working when you're in a collection. And again, I want, this is not a judgment –

P3 – 28:25

Well, the thing is, I talk quite a lot.

CM – 28:25

No, no, no, I love it. I love it.

P3 – 28:28

The thing is, I'm part time. So it's really hard for you to be either – and the thing is, when I started my job, they said to me, my line manager said to me, "Look –" because it was the financial crisis, they said, "Look, you have to be doing stuff that's seen to be public-facing, that there is an outcome quite quickly, because if all you're doing is documentation, one of the managers don't see that, and they're thinking, 'Oh, is this person bringing something, not every day' you need to be seen doing

stuff to sort of justify your position." So, I've never really worked that, this sounds terrible, but I never really, I don't do masses of documentation, I don't work with the collection on that – I work with the collection on the level, does it work for a exhibition? So, yeah. So, I'm not really sort of sitting there thinking, "Oh okay, so let's document – " I mean, we are going down that road more now. But that's sort of a different argument. But yeah, my relationship with the collection is more to do with how it can work for exhibitions. Public-facing more than actually documenting stuff. Because no one sees that, and the management don't really care. Especially now, we've just become a charitable trust, our PM is museums, is a trust now, so we're a charity. We're no longer part of the council, we're not funded by the council. We have to be much more dynamic, we have to make our money. And we sink or swim on our own merits. So they want stuff that is going to bring people in.

Impact of financial crisis on collections; Employment conditions; Need to justify employment; Exhibition-making; Object analysis practice; Financial constraints

CM – 29:59

Yep, yep, yep. So, is the museum actively acquiring right now?

P3 – 30:10

No. The museum is actively de-acquiring. Deaccessioning. Because this is – this is a bit difficult for me, I had an email from someone last week from education, from the education department. They said, "Do you have a cane in the collection we can use, because it's, we've got an outfit of Mr. Busby or something, and he's going to be walking around the street and we want him with a cane." I don't even know who this person is, who this character is. But they obviously wanted something smart, cane with a silver top. And I said, "Well, if it's in my collections, it's going to be accessioned, so it's not possible for you to use it." And then the head of, one of the more senior curators, came back and said, um, I could tell from the wording, "Can you find a cane for Sue in education?" Not even "please", or "will you". "Can you find a cane." And he said you know, the new management, the new management have come in slightly with a sledgehammer, and they want, they've got this "dynamic

collections", um, which I don't know, it's a bit nebulous what that actually means, so I don't know where to go. But they want the collections to actually really work, but on lots of different levels. So, I sent them an email, and I said, "I don't think accessioned objects should have a life outside of being displayed. They don't have any other function apart from that." But, we're in a new place, we're in a new – so, I don't know. Either, there may come a point where we have to put our foot down. Because especially with costume, and fashion, but I do get the emails saying, "Do you hire stuff out?" And I'm like "No, these are yeah, no, you can't wear –" The thing is, we've got new management who are desperate to make money, so you know, I have to find this cane, I mean, I went and had a look for – you're really going to have to edit this, I'm sorry.

Employment conditions; Being pushed to unethical practice; Pressure from management; Colleague practice; Difficulty in practiting ethically; Protection of objects; Object biography; Wearer biography; Financial constraints

CM – 32:09

No, no, no, that's fine. Well here, let me note that, because I'll make sure that I redact this, so, cane -

P3 – 32:15

Oh, no! Oh, no, no, no, you don't have to, I'm just saying I just waffle so much.

CM – 32:19

Oh, no, no, no, that's fine. As long as you're okay with this being included in the, because if it's like state secrets, just let me know, and I can, I can -

P3 – 32:27

Um, if we can just that, you know, the collection's taking on a new direction, a "dynamic collection", and they're sort of being seen as, with wider uses. But I don't agree with that. But I will put my foot down.

Difficulty in practiting ethically; Protection of objects; Object biography; Wearer biography; Financial constraints

CM – 32:43

I mean, that's really interesting. Yeah, yeah.

P3 – 32:49

It's what ICOM, you know, I go to ICOM, you know the conference in Prague, and there's this whole, last year? Was it two years ago? I don't know, as you get older things –

<mark>Disciplinary organisations; ICOM; Aging</mark>

CM - 33:03

Well, with COVID, it's like, yeah.

P3 – 33:05

What are museums? You know, and everyone's saying, there's a new definition, someone proposed a new definition that museums are spaces where you know, everyone's welcome, obviously, people welcome, you can come and meet, you can – I can't remember, but essentially there was no mentions of collections. And it was like, for me, museums are fundamentally about collections. Because you can go and meet people in a community centre, but there is this move towards museums becoming community centres, and collections with a nice, few objects to maybe come and see. It's rubbish. And it's just fashionable. It's, I don't want to sound like some old git, but it's this whole sort of "everything is for everyone!", you know, it's only because we've not been exposed to it, but to me that's just absolute rubbish. You know, I don't care about football, and I don't feel I should be made to care about football. You know, I don't care if David Beckham wears a pair of hotpants, I'm not watching it. But you know what I mean? I find it insulting that some people aren't interested – you know, I took my sister, my sister has no interest in culture, she never read a book in her life. And so we took her to the National Gallery, and the place she felt comfortable was the shop. Because that's what she knows. She loves going to Lakeside, and Bluewater, listen to you. So, she loves that. She loves spend-ing money. For her to engage with culture, we had to do it through the shop. And I

just think, there is no point trying to force my sister to appreciate a Raphael paint-ing, and I'm not being patronising, it's not her bag. And this is the thing with muse-ums now, I don't know, anyway. Where do we go? Sorry.

CM – 34:45

No, no, no, no. This is interesting, I'm just thinking how to –

P3 – 34:51

Reign me in, I talk shit.

CM – 34:52

No, not reign you in. But how to, how to, because so much of this is about collec-tions, working with collections, but also the practical working situations, of working with collections. And it's interesting to me that you're in a situation where you're being actively encouraged to not dig into the collection care aspect of it.

P3 – 35:20

They are now, they are – and the new CEO you know, he did say, I think they've up with new job descriptions for us and 45% is to do with documentation, but the thing is my – this is going to sound big-headed and I don't mean to be – I do lots of exhibitions, and they prove popular, so I did the Stephen Jones show, which was really, had a good profile, just done the David Bowie, which the CEO said basically, "You saved the museum." Cos it brought in so many people, so much money. That it actually, and I get on, I quite like talking to people, but I meet a lot of people, so like we're now doing Lee Miller. So they just found all Lee Miller's clothes, so I've broached a relationship with Farleys and we're working with Lee Miller. And we're also doing, I've been working with ABBA Museum, because ABBA won the Eurovi-sion song contest in (unclear) 2024! So these things put people's bums on seats, so they want me to carry on doing those things, so they've sort of slightly been kind to

me, and let me get on with it. But there is an emphasis within my job description for me to work about 45% of my time on documentation, but I think that –

==Employment conditions; Pressures and expectations from institution; Exhibition-making; Time constraints; Connections with donors; Visitor numbers==

CM – 36:41

Within that part time structure.

P3 – 36:42

Yep, yep. But they've also now given us assistant curators. Which there never was. Which is going to be massively helpful. But I think in the long run, I think there's an idea that they don't respect specialist knowledge, they're not really interested in specialist knowledge, they're certainly not interested in paying for specialist knowledge, big time. And you know, I think there is an idea that at some point, curators will – once they've got really well-documented collections, cos they want to get rid of stuff as well, so there's a big push to de-accession stuff. Which is fair enough, because there's a lot of rubbish in my collection as well. And I'm sure most collections. Once that happens and they have really well-documented collections, I think then what they'll do is bring in the specialist knowledge to work on exhibitions, and they won't employ curators full time. But I think that's the way the world is going.

==Employment conditions; Pressures and expectations from institution; Expertise; Job security; Job precarity; Institutional priorities; Preference for certain objects; Exhibition-making==

CM – 37:36

Yep, no. Yeah, I have so many things to say, but I'll not say them.

P3 – 37:50

Oh, okay, yep, yep.

CM – 37:52

Okay, let's shift gears. And let's go into talking about today, then, and what I've put

you through. So tell me about your experience using the eye gaze tracker, and the 3D garments, and when I say that, I know it was a bit and we had our technical difficulties.

P3 – 38:10

It was fine apart from my glasses.
Issues with DGA

CM – 38:11

But I'm more thinking about the physical experience, the mental experience, for you. Less the like, starting and stopping the computer and all that stuff, but like how was that experience for you, using that equipment and those renderings of the garments?

P3 – 38:26

Yeah, well I have to obviously say that I couldn't wear my glasses, so it wasn't as – but it was, it was, it was good. I mean, it gave you a very, the experience of actually seeing the clothes was very different, obviously, so some of my conclusions were completely blown out the window when I actually saw the objects, but it was, it was helpful in the sense that it was like looking at an object, but you couldn't really see too many details. And I don't think that was to do with my glasses. I saw there was lots of stuff going on with the shoulder over the Matley thingy, obviously you couldn't see that either so, it was useful, in a remote way. But it doesn't compare to seeing the objects obviously.
Issues with DGA; Frustration; Visual engagement

CM – 39:17

Yeah, and have you ever used an eye tracker.

P3 – 39:22

I didn't really talk about that, sorry.

CM – 39:23

No, no. It's okay.

P3 – 39:24

No, I've never used an eye tracker. I don't know.

CM – 39:27

I mean, it's pretty niche, "I use them all the time!" but it's worth the ask. And have you ever used, but prior to that then, then, have you ever used a digital rendering, or a 3D rendering, or a photographic rendering?

P3 – 39:46

Not used, but I've seen them. There was, about 10 years ago actually, we spoke to, there was a meeting at the University of Brighton, and they were talking about this, "Ooh!" super new technology where you could do a 3D rendering of an object, as we have, or you have, and then we had this big meeting on sort of, how useful would it be for museums and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I was sort of, it's great, it really is great, it's, you know as I said, photography has been invented since 1839, but my collection's been, probably five percent, not even that, of my collection is photographed. Cos it's just so time-consuming. So this is a great tool, but if it's not plonked on curators. So yeah, no, it's useful. I'd like to see that more on websites, to be honest. I think Scotland use it on their website, and I was like, "Oh wow." Because you really do get a sense of the object in a way that you can't from a photograph. Just on looking for research. So yeah, as a tool for a researcher, you know, I'm here and it's there, it's brilliant.

==Issues with DGA; Frustration with technology; Realism of applying technology to collections; Sense of object; Visual engagement==

CM – 40:59

So, um, based on just that digital analysis, was there something, thinking about the three objects, what did you first notice about –

P3 – 41:14

What, when I walked in here?

CM – 41:15

No, just on the digital, on the digital. Was there anything that jumped out at you right away, on the blue jacket, on the Matley?

P3 – 41:23

Straight away?

CM – 41:29

Like, what was the first thing you noticed when you were looking at the digital rendering of it.

P3 – 41:35

Um, I don't, well the first thing I looked at, I think, was the shoulders. Cos I think the thing, and I think that's to do with my time at the Courtauld, is one of the first things I want to do is actually know what the object is and what it dates from, and the thing for me is always about dating stuff. So, once I can date something, it then fits into more of a, it's a schema in my head obviously, and then I can sort of, but maybe that's the wrong way of doing it. I don't know, rather than building up there. So, I was looking at the shoulder, I remember looking at the shoulders, and thinking, "Are they? Have they got padding in there? Is it got –" so then it gives me a silhou-ette. And then I just started to try – you could sort of see the silhouette, the shoul-ders were quite flat. So it was the shoulders I think I looked at, and then obviously the two buttons, and it was really just trying to work out the construction, sort of, you've got the seams here and then I could see them much better here. I actually thought, in my notes I thought it was homemade. But I couldn't quite see, so it was really the silhouette I was looking at, but trying to understand more fully. Maybe, I don't think it was my glasses. But it's just that idea of trying to date something.

<mark>Visual engagement; Dating objects; Fashion history; Education; Object analysis practice; Design; Professional embarrassment; Schema of knowledge</mark>

CM – 42:40

Yep. And then what about the shoes?

P3 – 42:43

Well, I thought they were replicas, and I thought, "Are they Roman replicas?" But, so they're used for sort of, like, education, or kids sort of coming in to – they are men's though, I assumed they were men's. Are they men's? I don't know. Are they yours?

==Use of object; Gender==

CM – 42:58

I, they're not mine. They're not mine, they're from the LCF Archives. But I won't say anything, because I want to hear your, yeah.

P3 – 43:08

I thought they were replicas, I was looking at them, and I again, trying to work out, well, men's, women's, they're men's. Um, what are the materials, sort of cotton, canvas-y sort of, espadrilles. Don't know if that's the right term, actually. But, the laces were quite long, that would go up your leg. And I thought, "Ooh, they're a replica, used for, um." Yeah, so that was my first sort of, but I couldn't quite work out what they were first of all. Then when I saw, understood, sort of, then I just built a picture up with why would these be in a museum? What, who, and I came up with replica.

==Gender; Textile; Visual engagement; Use of object; Situation within collection==

CM – 43:44

Amazing. And then what about the green jacket?

P3 – 43:47

Oh, well that was the only, the, the, on the render, the first thing that hit me was its horrible condition. Sorry! I did, I looked at it and I thought, "Oh, that's some really…" But it's actually a really nice jacket. Um, men's. I knew it was men's. I

thought it was from the '90s, but it's probably from the late '80s, early '90s. But I thought it's a nice jacket, but I didn't see a lot of detail. But I thought it was in a, I thought it was a synthetic fabric. So it looked quite shiny, but it's probably the sheen from the - But I noticed it's a nice cut, again, nice shoulders, that sort of, yeah, it's more late '80s, but it's a nice – actually, when you look at it, it's a really, the cut of it is lovely. It's really well made, and just the detail, but I was thinking, "Oh, I wouldn't take this into my collection." Only because, I'll tell you why, that's probably eight to ten thousand pounds to get conserved sitting there. So I'd think, forget it. It's never going to see the light of day.

<mark>Visual engagement; Gender; Dating objects; Fashion history; Textile; Design; Judgment of condition</mark>

CM – 45:00

So, when you do, talking about when you do having objects coming in, so is that part of your process?

P3 – 45:07

That's one of my primary considerations. When something comes in, I look at it and I think, "What condition is it in?" Because if it's in crap condition, it's going to cost me a fortune, the money's not there, and all that's going to happen is it's going to go into the store, and never be seen again. I mean, there are exceptions, when with Amy, we went to see a woman, and she had a Red Fern dress. I mean, it was mind-blowingly beautiful. 1860's, that whole really big – I mean it was on a, on a sort of tulle, a net, and then it had felt, green leaves cut out, and you could see the tulle underneath. I mean really, with a bodice all, I mean really gorgeous. But that is, again, at least ten grand to get conserved. But I'm never going to be offered that again. So, you take that in.

<mark>Judgment of condition; Use in collection; Financial constraints; Resource constraints; Rarity of donations</mark>

CM – 46:04

So, did you take it in the end?

P3 – 46:05

Yeah.

CM – 46:06

Oh, amazing. Cool.

P3 – 46:08

It's lovely, incredible. But again, it sat there for, cos there's no money for it. So you need to find pockets of money to get that conserved. And it needs to have a function in the sense of, is it going to be in an exhibition?

<mark>Judgment of condition; Use in collection; Financial constraints; Resource constraints; Exhibiton-making</mark>

CM – 46:19

Right, yeah. It would need to be a kind of star piece, yeah.

P3 – 46:22

So condition is my primary consideration.

<mark>Judgment of condition; Use in collection</mark>

CM – 46:27

That's interesting. Um, so based on just, just again the digital, not seeing them here now, if they were coming into your collection –

P3 – 46:39

The digital?

CM – 46:39

The digital, so thinking about just seeing the objects as digital, would you feel – could you, or would you be able to construct a biography of the garment? Or what would it, what would the kind of catalogue listing entail? Would it entail – you tell me.

P3 – 46:59

If I was looking at those objects, yeah there would be some sort of biography. So, I knew this was guy's, I knew this was a man's, I knew this was, and I, actually now I'm trying not to think about, just – I knew it was a man's, and I thought it was possibly sort of, like, maybe a working class guy, because I thought it was synthetic fabric. And I saw it as being sort of, slightly, um, mass-produced rather than actually what it is, so I saw it maybe just, sort of a bog standard – the condition was really bad as well, so somebody wore that, a lot. You know, and that, the wear that I saw on the screen looked to me that it had not been stored badly over the years, it's actually been worn to death. And that again says to me that someone doesn't have a lot of money, so they're wearing objects, or clothing, for a long time, so again it was sort of a lower, you know, working class, lower middle class guy. That was wearing this jacket, maybe, I don't imagine, maybe he went to football, I don't know. But yeah, you do in your head, you certainly do start to think, "Who would wear this outfit?"
==Object biography; Interpretation; Wearer biography; Judgment of condition; Gender; Class==

CM – 48:11

Would you include that in the documentation?

P3 – 48:13

No. No. I would include names, if I was only doing the, I wouldn't include a profile, because it's just too subjective. So I would include man's, synthetic, bomber jacket, late '80s, early '90s. You know, worn, you know, worn a lot. Stuff like that. It would be stuff that is not subjective. I wouldn't say – that would come later, once you've done some more research into it. From the point of view of provenance, but also from the point – I mean you can tell looking at that object, the pockets are really, you could construct some sort of worn history of that object, when you're interpreting it for display.
==Object biography; Wearer biography; Subjectivity of interpretation; Textile; Judgment of condition; Wear==

272

CM – 48:59

Okay, cool. So, then thinking about now the actual material, when you're in the room with the garments, how, how was that, I mean, how was that experience, is it comparable, kind of like, I know you've said –

P3 – 49:16

It's good, no, it's good.

CM – 49:18

I say your day-to-day, when you're working with objects. Is it comparable? The, the, it's kind of a silly question, because obviously we're in the university, it's not – but is it a comparable experience to your day-to-day working?

P3 – 49:32

What the digital compared to the?

CM – 49:33

Sorry, the material. Just thinking about the actual when you're with the objects.

P3 – 49:38

What do you mean? Because my process is the same.
<mark>Object analysis practice</mark>

CM – 49:42

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah, that's what I'm asking.

P3 – 49:45

Yeah, my process is the – because I always ask the same questions. So I'm always sort of looking, again it's about understanding what it was, and who wore it, maybe, and history of this garment. And I suppose because you're then, when I'm working in the museum, I'm always thinking about, if it isn't in the collection, does it have a place in the collection? So you have to build up that. If you have no, if you have no

provenance, if you have no history of that object, you have to sort of construct it yourself. And if it works, if it works. Yeah. So, this is, yeah, they are exactly the same questions I'd ask when I'm –

CM – 50:19

So when you're going through objects, and you say you always use the kind of, same process, is it like a prescriptive process that you use? You know, there's like the Mida and Kim, you know, Prown, that kind of thing. Is it something prescriptive like that? Or it something that you've –

P3 – 50:35

It's something just, I, myself. I've never, I've never really, I don't have a checklist of, I don't know what the Prown and the Ingrid Mida thing, but she based it on sort of, I can't remember what it is. But I, it's much more intuitive for me, so I'm sort of just looking at it, and, because the thing is, that would be a luxury. To have that, to be able to sit there, and there are some people who work like that. One of my prede-cessors who's now at Glasgow, Rebecca Quinton, she was very much like that. She was, you know the documentation in the collection is fantastic, because of her, of what she's worked on. You know, and that's sort of not me. So I think its to do with personalities as well. So it's sort of, I'm interested in objects and their stories, but also I like, I like objects and I like that creative process of understanding something, I don't have that sort of mind. Thankfully, my assistant curator does. That sort of, "Okay!" really sit there for, I'm not like that. That's not how I work. So, and I seem to have been okay so far.

CM – 51:49

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I mean, absolutely. So your kind of process of going through objects, going through, analysing objects, do you feel it's like, fed from your, is it

picked up from people you've worked with, like you've said, you've said "intuitive", so is that coming from your education, do you have some –

P3 – 52:12

Yeah. I think it's, I mean I never really, did we do any? I never really, I didn't really have someone say to me, "This is how you look at a garment." So it was sort of, I think it was it was always, the process was because of an outcome. So it was never the process just for the sake of it. And then you've got it documented so that sits there, and is maybe never looked at again. There was always a reason for me to be looking at a garment. Um, and it was probably to do with display. Or, not conservation so much, conservators do look at stuff in very different ways. But they're all able to tell – with the Lee Miller, actually. You know, Zenzie is the conservator, and just is able, you know she said about these shoes, "You know, Lee wore these shoes to death, because she loved them. And these were her favourite dancing shoes." She said. Well, you don't know that. But the thing is, because of her experience, she can sort of, she can see, and she says, "As a woman, I know these were her favourite dancing shoes."

Education; Object analysis practice; Outcome-based practice; Exhibitions; Colleague practice; Conservators; Gender

CM – 53:20

Interesting.

P3 – 53:21

Yeah, and that's something I would have never have asked. I wouldn't, because I'm not a woman, and I – well, I don't really go dancing anymore, and I didn't wear those shoes when I did go dancing. So it wasn't something, there is that, being a man, I look at things I think quite differently to a woman would look at – because most collections of fashion are womenswear, and that has been sort of, people do, women do sometimes ask questions, and I think, "Ooh, I've, I've never thought of that." But it's because I don't see myself wearing that garment. Whereas, I think some women, especially will come in, I think some women are very interested in

fashion in the sense of, it's a reflection of who they are, I don't, I've not said that right. Um, I think they see, their interest in clothing because of their, mind you I'm interested in clothing, but I think they're able to see it as something they potentially would wear, or potentially wouldn't wear. So they would look at it in that way. "Oh, I wouldn't like that" or "I'd love to wear that." Or something, whereas for me, it's never a question – I mean, there's one thing in the collection I would love to wear, and it's this amazing coat from the early 19ᵗʰ century, a man's greatcoat, it's made up of super fine brown wool. And I just want to, "Whoosh!" I do that. So that's the only time I got that real, "Ooh! Wouldn't it be lovely to put that on!" Um, but you know, we've got amazing Charles James', and I imagine for a woman, you'd think, "Oh, I'd look great in that!" Where that's not something that goes through my head.

==Aging; Gendered nature of collections; Gendered nature of practice; Affective nature of clothing; Wanting to wear garments; Haptic engagement; Proprioception==

CM – 54:56

What about when you were doing the Bowie show, obviously –

P3 – 54:59

Those were only photographs.

CM – 55:00

Ohhh. Okay.

P3 – 55:03

It was a photographer, I'm sorry.

CM – 55:05

No, no. So talking about the early 19ᵗʰ century men's jacket, in your encountering menswear, is that something that factors into your brain. That is kind of like – I know what you're saying, it's not picturing yourself in it, but there's a kind of intuitive, you know what it would feel like to be in that.

P3 – 55:25

Yeah. Exactly. I mean, I'm not a big fan of the '60s, I don't like the silhouette, so when I look at the '60's I think "Eh." Okay, '50s I love. And we've got this amazing, it's '47, actually, um, denim outfit, it's incredible, it's brand new from Wrangler, and it's even got, there's this amazing little booklet that's got all these cowboys lassoing. It's incredible! It's brand new, and it was in a denim show in the '90s in Brighton, and it's, again, I just think, "I'd love to put that jacket on!" And things that you think you'd look good in!

<mark>Research interests; Gendered nature of collections; Gendered nature of practice; Exhibition; Use of objects; Affective nature of clothing; Wanting to wear garments</mark>

CM – 55:59

Yeah, yeah, yeah. How cool.

P3 – 56:03

Yeah, so it is very subjective looking at stuff.

<mark>Subjectivity</mark>

CM – 56:07

Um, okay. So then, you said to me when we were coming into the room for the first time, and we saw the objects, and you were like, "Oh!" So tell me about, tell me about, what were the kind of like, "Whoa!" moments when you saw the objects in reality.

P3 – 56:24

Well, the green I realised was a really good fabric. Because in my mind it was a cheap synthetic. Yeah, I realised it was suede. And I thought, "Oh! That's a really nice jacket!" So it starts to, yeah, so it was, the jacket. And I was really interested to have a look, more. And it's a shame that, it's a lovely jacket. It would have been at the time. Something that I wouldn't have worn. I think it still is a bit – again, why am I thinking about me wearing it? It's something that I wouldn't wear, then, it was a bit too naff. You know, that sort of, but yeah when I actually saw it in the flesh, I realised

I was wrong about what the jacket was, on some levels. The espadrilles I thought, "Nah, they're not bloody replicas, you plonker." And then the Matley, I didn't know it was Matley, obviously, until I opened it up. But I thought, "Oh, it's much nicer than I thought." You know, the fabric is nicer, because it didn't look very, the fabric didn't look very good, I thought it was cotton. I just thought it was sort of a cheap, nasty cotton. And then at that point in my mind, or maybe when I started to look at the way this, these were done, and I was thinking, "Ohh." Because the fabric hasn't been cut into that shape, it's been sewn into that shape, which is – and then when I actually saw it, I thought, "Oh, this is done actually much more beautifully than I thought." And then inside it's all done, I mean the pocket detail on the image, the thingy, you can see you think, "Oh my god, that's the one of the things." Look at the shoulders, also I saw these things, I was like, "Oh, that's a really lovely detail." Along the seam in the bust. I thought there was a seam along there, but I was wrong. But yeah, then both of those turned into much nicer jackets than I thought.

Perception of quality; Textiles; Visual engagement; Not wanting to wear a garment; Professional embarrassment; Haptic engagement; Making; Design

CM – 58:21

So if you, again, thinking about if they were coming into the collection, and you were doing the documentation for them, would you, having seen them in real life, would this change what you documented about, thinking again about biography, would you be able to include more biography in it, or would it, or would it remain –

P3 – 58:46

The documentation would remain the same. Yeah, I wouldn't include anything that is subjective, because it is, the thing is, the problem with people including subjective comments, or things that are, sorry, in documentation, is that in years to come, it gets taken as fact. So it's too confusing. So people in 20, 30 years time, will look at it, and they'll take that as read. And they'll assume that where it's only my opinion, so I try to be as objective as possible. So it's just sort of, yeah, so I don't include biographical, or opinion.

Subjectivity; Authorship; Confusion of opinion with truth; Biography; Object documentation

mentation

CM – 59:24

Um, awesome. I mean, to be honest with you, I think we've kind of covered it. Is there anything else about today, or about the objects, or about processes, is there anything that kind of, pings for you? That you want to note? Thoughts or feelings?

P3 – 59:54

No, just, well, I suppose the main one was the difference in actually the objects. But, again, I didn't have my glasses on. But I'm not sure that, the quality of the fabric, was the one obviously, the big, this is suede, and this is a nice silk. But I thought it was some nasty, old cotton, and this was some synthetic. So it obviously didn't render the fabrics particularly well, and I think that was the barrier, I think. And again, in fashion history, as in most things, the intrinsic value of materials is an indicator of what that object is. So yeah, that could, if it's going to be used as a tool, I don't know. But no, it was, I always like to see objects. Two versions.

==Perception of quality; Textiles; Visual engagement; Frustration with DGA quality; Value of materials==

CM – 1:00:42

Yeah! Cool, okay, great. Okay, I'm going to stop.