Re-Presenting Kahlo: Curating Otherness and Empathy

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

University of the Arts London
London College Of Fashion

November 2024

Abstract

This thesis proposes that fashion exhibitions can serve as a medium for destigmatising disability through the configuration of fashion objects in the exhibition context. It presents fashion curation as a means of creating new visual languages capable of breaking down barriers between visibility and the invisibility traditionally associated with disabled bodies.

The research project adopts a series of qualitative approaches and draws from curatorial studies, fashion theory, disability studies, and visual studies. It also considers the adaptation of existing curatorial methodologies to create positive associations around the concept of disability and otherness. These are all techniques that I, as the researcher, have adopted to communicate with different audiences.

In the pilot study, a 2012 Mexico City exhibition on Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, I presented the collection of her prosthetics and personal belongings discovered at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2004. I analyse this exhibition using a holistic, object-based approach to fashion curation, to show how I addressed the subject of disability.

In the main case study, a 2018 London exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the presentation of the same collection of objects expanded the potential for creating different visual meanings and experiences, according to the context in which they were placed.

This study uses fashion exhibitions to reinterpret and reassess disability and otherness through the themes of staring and looking, concealing and revealing, stigma, and fashion performance and performativity. These emerging themes framed an evocative display through which the researcher-as-curator sought to create new visual languages to challenge perceptions around disability and otherness. The resulting object-based approach and curatorial framework

present a combination of methodologies and tools with the potential to generate positive associations and empathy, and fulfil the main objectives.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis results from incredible trust, collaboration, and a love for fashion and Frida Kahlo. It has been an undertaking genuinely global in scale and team. From Mexico to London to Singapore, I've had the support, counsel, and expertise of many collaborators, without whom these exhibitions and this thesis would have never been possible.

Carlos Phillips Olmedo, the then director general of Museums Dolores Olmedo, Frida Kahlo y Diego Rivera Anahuacalli and Hilda Trujillo, the then director at the Frida Kahlo Museum, entrusted me with this endeavour from day one. They gave me complete freedom to create and curate the exhibition used as the pilot study of this thesis, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo,* held at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2012. I am eternally grateful to them for this remarkable opportunity.

This research began when I read "'Her Dress Hangs Here': De-frocking the Kahlo Cult" in the *Oxford Art Journal*, a 1991 essay by my Director of Studies Oriana Baddeley. Oriana, thank you for your forward-looking texts and art perspectives. You have been my inspiration, and I am thankful to you for having mentored me on this challenging journey.

Thank you for your teachings, Gannit Ankori, my friend and long-time collaborator, exceptional Kahlo scholar and art historian an inspiration to me. Your outstanding work and book *Imaging Her Selves* (2002), which analysed Kahlo's paintings as deliberate examinations of Kahlo's different identities, has been a seminal text in my career. Thank you for your generosity and for continuing this journey with me till today.

I am eternally grateful to Judith Clark and Amy de la Haye for their mentorship, support, guidance, and dedication during my MA in Fashion Curation studies at London College of Fashion in 2009. Their unique approach to exhibition curation and making gave me all the tools that made me the

curator I am today. Working with Judith on the pilot study *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2012 has marked me personally and professionally for the rest of my career. As my teacher and supervisor, her teaching and our ongoing conversations have proved invaluable and I will always treasure them profoundly.

The exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum in 2018, used as the main case study of this thesis, would not have been possible without the vision and trust of Linda Lloyd Jones, the then director of exhibitions at the V&A, who gave me the confidence to present and expand my research at the museum. My colleague, friend and co-curator Claire Wilcox opened the doors of the V&A research department for me to spend 18 months working with her. Her love for photography and her unique curatorial eye brought a wealth of knowledge to this exhibition and my professional growth. I treasure our dialogues and conversations. Thank you for your kindness and friendship. I am indebted to the teams at the V&A for receiving me with so much care and respect for me to develop this work.

To Krista Brugnara, who made the exhibition at the de Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco happen, thank you for your confidence in my work and your love and patience during the pandemic. Thank you for being my friend.

My sincerest thanks to Nur Hidayah Abu Bakar at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, for her unconditional support, allowing me the time to travel between Singapore, London, and Mexico to make all these exhibitions possible. You have been an essential person in this journey and my life and I am grateful to you.

I am indebted to Harah Chon, my friend and colleague, who helped me structure my thoughts to explain and define the methodology in Chapter 3 and

for sharing with me her mapping method. Thank you for your love, patience, and teachings always.

Cibeles Henestrosa, my aunt, thank you for passing on our family Tehuana traditions to me; you are my inspiration. Thank you to Daniela Monasterios-Tan for your dedication and love for Frida Kahlo in all these years we've been working together. Thank you to Stella Britzolaki for your meticulous eye and attention to detail and Chris Purnawan for your dedication, friendship and patience. I thank you, Muriel Altchek Mercier, for your friendship and for introducing me to the perfect people in Paris and New York to make my exhibitions happen.

I want to express my gratitude to my friend Miren Arzalluz, who has been there for me during this journey and who made my exhibition in Paris possible.

I am grateful to Frances Corner for supporting us; London College of Fashion has always been there for as has LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore.

Special thanks to the Banco de México, Fiduciary of the Trust of the Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo Museums, their trustees, Jessica Serrano, Luis Rodrigo Saldana, Carla Barri, and my colleagues at the Blue House: Perla Labarthe, Claudia Romo, and Luanda Lopez, for their continuous support and confidence.

I express my sincere appreciation for my colleagues, family, and friends who have been with me on this journey:
Tomoka Aya, Karina Balderas, Rocio Bermejo, Claudia Bermúdez, Manuela, Martin Bonney, Stella Britzolaki, Manuela Buttiglione, Susan Chapman, Ginette Chittick, Steve Dixon, Robyn Earl, Claire Everitt, Natalia Ferreiro, Gabriel Gutiérrez, Aleph Henestrosa, Cassandra Henestrosa, Adrian Huang, Tristram Hunt, Olivia Ingraham, Ishiuchi Miyako, Kate Morais, Wolfgang Muench, Mariana Palma, Catherine Poust, Venka Purushothaman, Ramón Reverté, Charles Rezandi, Bridget Rutherford, Paola Santos Coy, Sarah Scott, Tom Scutt,

Wai Kit Seetoh, Natsuko Teruya, Matt Thornley, Agnes Wan, Nadya Wang, Christopher Wilk, and Ling Wu.

These Frida Kahlo exhibitions and this thesis are dedicated to my mother, Noris Henestrosa, whom I miss profoundly and eternally love. I am thankful to her for being there for me and always encouraging me to voice and defend my ideas.

To Dave Ellison, my beloved husband, thank you for your love, support, and kindness all these years with Frida.

Circe Henestrosa

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In 2004, when it seemed that there was little more to say or learn about Frida Kahlo, her wardrobe was discovered at La Casa Azul (today the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico City). Kahlo's wardrobe and personal belongings had been kept for more than 50 years in the upper part of the house, in the white tiled bathroom adjacent to the artist's bedroom, by specific request of her husband, Mexican muralist Rivera, and later by the couple's patron and friend Dolores Olmedo. Before Rivera passed away in 1957, he set up an irrevocable trust in the Bank of Mexico, ceding items from Kahlo and Rivera's estate—including the Blue House and its contents—to the Mexican people. The terms stated that objects stored in the bathrooms, cellar, several trunks, wardrobes, cupboards and boxes in the Blue House should be concealed for 15 years following his death. On July 12, 1958, the year after Rivera passed away, the Blue House became the Museo Frida Kahlo. Rivera left his good friend and long-time art patron Dolores Olmedo in charge of Kahlo's estate and the museum; she was the Museum's first director. At the 15-year mark, Olmedo decided to keep the private archive concealed for longer, until after her lifetime, meaning the items were hidden for a total of 50 years, potentially because this collection contained private correspondence linked to Rivera and Kahlo's Communist party affiliations, still recent history in Mexico at the time.

Finally, in 2004, the committee of the Banco de México, Fiduciary of the Trust of the Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo Museums, and the director general of Museums Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera Anahuacalli (Dolores Olmedo's son, Carlos Phillips Olmedo), gave authorisation for the sealed rooms to be unlocked. A total of 6,000 photographs, 22,000 documents and most remarkably, around 300 of Kahlo's personal items including medicines, orthopaedic devices, clothing, jewellery, and accessories had survived the passage of time. Most of the garments were brightly coloured Mexican Tehuana blouses and skirts familiar from Kahlo's self-portraits and

photographs. There were also garments from other parts of Mexico, and from Guatemala, China, Europe, and the United States, as well as orthopaedic devices, shoes, jewellery, medicines, and makeup.

I was interested in the disability and ethnicity aspects of Kahlo's wardrobe and how they were interlinked. My starting point was the ethnicity aspect of her dress—partly due to a personal relationship with Tehuana dress. I myself am a wearer of this dress; my family on my father's side are from the Tehuantepec Isthmus, a matriarchal society in south-east Mexico, where women administrate the society and dress in Tehuana attire. My great-aunts were close friends to Rivera and Kahlo back in the 1920s and 1930s. My indigenous Tehuantepec aunt Alfa Rios Henestrosa gave Kahlo some of her Tajuana dresses; Kahlo never visited the Tehuantepec Isthmus. The photo below (Figure 1), taken by Nickolas Muray in 1938, shows my aunts Alfa and Nereida Ríos with Kahlo, all wearing their Tehuana attires. My aunts used to bring Kahlo her Tehuana outfits from the Tehuantepec Isthmus at the time Kahlo decided to wear this dress.

Figure 1 Reunion in San Angel (left to right: Alfa and Nereida Ríos Pineda, Rosa Covarrubias and Frida Kahlo). Photograph by Nickolas Muray, 1938.

The exhibition *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo,* shown at the Museo Frida Kahlo in 2012, was the first-ever exhibition of Kahlo's wardrobe. That exhibition and my thesis presented Kahlo's identity through objects that showcased her disability, ethnicity, and political outlook. The exhibition demonstrated how Kahlo's adoption of this hybrid style was conscious and considered, both distracting and purposeful, a complex combination of her mixed heritage, her political beliefs and her Mexicanidad, and a reaction to her disabilities. The ethnicity aspect of the research was supported by the existing scholarship on nationalist and anti-colonialist connotations which distinguish Kahlo's dress (Baddeley, 1991). The disability aspect of the exhibition was supported by the analysis of existing medical documents in Kahlo's archive, her own paintings and diary entries, medical literature and medical analysis of the medicines and different orthopaedic devices. The exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up,* shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 2018, developed from my first exhibition *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo,* shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2012.

Inhabiting the dual role of researcher and curator, I wanted to expand on the existing literature and further explore disability as part of the human experience and as a compelling metaphor for femininity in the V&A main case study of this thesis. For clarity and the purpose of this thesis, the exhibition *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo,* shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2012 in Mexico will be referenced as the pilot study, and will act as background to develop the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* shown at the V&A in 2018, and referenced as the main case study.

Through this study, I aim to change perceptions of disability by *re-lensing* the disabled body in the exhibition context. Re-lensing is defined as refocusing the viewer's attention to form a new way of seeing, refocusing, and emphasising an area of attention. For example, in the V&A exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up,* I wanted to shift perceptions around disability by strategically

configuring fashion objects within the exhibition space. The evocative display of objects by the researcher-as-curator creates new visual languages that challenge perceptions of *disability* and *otherness*.

Staszak (2009) defines otherness as "the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us,' the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them,' Other) by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. To state it naïvely, difference belongs to the realm of fact, and otherness belongs to the realm of discourse. Thus, biological sex is a difference, whereas gender is otherness" (p. 2).

In the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.-a), *diversity* is defined as "the condition or fact of being different". According to Tapia (2009), "Diversity is about the mix. Inclusion is about making the mix work" (p. 12). For Frances-Winters (2014), inclusion involves "creating an environment that acknowledges, welcomes, and accepts different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences, to allow all to reach their potential" (p. 206).

There is relatively little academic scholarship on the role of fashion in disability studies. Scholars who have made significant contributions in this area include Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (1997), Jane Lamb (2001), Olga Vainshtein (2012), Martha Hall and Belinda Orzada (2013), Alba Aragón (2014), Florentina Andreescu (2014), and Ingun Klepp and Mari Rysst (2017). Unfortunately, there is still a gap at the intersection of fashion and disability studies, with sparse examples of exhibitions focusing on fashion and disability.[1] Kahlo is celebrated as an enduring icon of femininity, disability, and

[1] The Welcome Trust has an incredible permanent collection of prosthetics, but their programme focuses on the intersection between science, medicine, life, and art. In 2012, they hosted the exhibition *Superhuman,* which looked at objects that augmented human beauty, intelligence, and health. The items on display were diverse, including an ancient Egyptian prosthetic toe, and a packet of Viagra, alongside contributions from artists, scientists, ethicists and commentators working in the area of modern science. This exhibition was focused on the intersection between science and medicine, and arts and design. *Superhuman* and the pilot study *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* coincided, showing in the same year.

diversity. In contemporary fashion, accessories, adornments, and body extensions serve as metaphors for the acts of concealing and revealing. Texts from disability studies, medical studies, fashion, and visual culture helped me situate my own practice. Therefore, the analysis of other media, such as theory, was critical for illustrating the practice of this study.

By curating the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* at the V&A, I aimed to extend the discussion space explored by researchers and theoreticians. Through the themes of *concealing and revealing, staring and looking, stigma* and *performance and performativity*, I introduced a visual language framework based on different curatorial methodologies. The intention is to shift viewers' perceptions by re-imagining existing interpretations and advancing potential new interpretations of disability and otherness.

1.2 Purpose of the Study: Research Aims and Objectives

I based this research on the premise that fashion curation practice is an intuitive and subjective process involving an experience shared between the curator, the collection of objects, and the audiences, set within *spatiotemporal* constraints. Considering Dewey's (1934/1980) notion of experience as a unified whole, this study addresses the need to deconstruct curatorial practice and identify the individual parts and relations forming a set of methodologies, in a bid to create positive associations in the exhibition space. The research questions framing this thesis are as follows:

Research Question 1
How can the subject of disability and otherness be re-contextualised through the configuration of objects in fashion exhibitions?

Research Question 2
How can curatorial methodologies be applied to express a framework (both visual and textual) that generates positive associations and creates a shift in viewers' perceptions of disability and otherness?

The first question considers objects as repositories of meaning that are instrumental in translating the curator's intentions to develop a visual language through the exhibition. I conducted a comparative study of how the same collection of objects can lead to different experiences: Adopting an object-based approach to fashion curation allowed topics such as disability and diversity to be meaningfully communicated. The second question addresses the need for curatorial methodologies that promote discussion on issues of disability, empathy, and otherness in the exhibition space to create desired positive associations, grounding curatorial practice within notions of perception and experience.

Through this research, I aim to destigmatise disability through fashion, dress, and identity in the exhibition context. This will close gaps in curatorial research that have failed to introduce conceptual frameworks and tools to mediate and redefine the constructs of *stigma*, disability, and otherness in fashion exhibitions. The aim of this research is, through a considered selection of techniques and methodologies, to develop and apply a visual and textual framework that considers the following: (a) the role of objects, (b) the significance of context in defining spatiotemporal relations, and (c) the development of tangible and intangible experiences. These overarching concepts are used to structure an object-based approach and framework, through selected curatorial methodologies where criteria for selection are discussed, helping to create positive associations that fulfil the main objectives of this study.

1.3 Significance of the Research

This research takes the form of a practice-based thesis in which disability is redefined and recontextualised within fashion exhibitions. The study reviews the object-based approach and produces a curatorial visual and textual language framework to create positive associations and reconfigure viewers' perceptions of disability and otherness. The conceptual framework is developed through an in-depth analysis of the researcher's curatorial practice

(represented by the Mexico City pilot study and London main case study), leading to the definition of three key tools for fashion curation in this context.

The justification for this study is based on the following grounds:

- The existing literature focusing on disability within the scope of fashion curation is limited and varied.
- There are no established, clear frameworks within curatorial practice defining the relationship between fashion and disability.
- A curatorial framework in this context has not been explored in depth.

This thesis bridges the above gaps with a threefold contribution. First, it defines a curatorial perspective through an object-based approach. Second, it builds a curatorial framework that can be applied broadly across multiple exhibition themes and concepts. Third, it identifies three tools—wonder, re-lensing, and memory—for producing experiences and developing conceptions based on the curator's own curatorial experience and practice.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six main chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Disability in Context, (3) Methodological Positioning (based on my own curatorial experience), (4) Object-Based Approaches, (5) Curatorial Framework, and (6) Conclusion.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the fashion theories and concepts relating to the study of disability within fashion exhibitions. The chapter provides a comprehensive overview of fashion theories and models of disability, as well as of the study of dress history, collections, curation, and disability exhibitions.

In Chapter 3, I detail the methodological positioning and use of my own experience and reflections as sources of knowledge. I explain the reasons for including the Mexico pilot study and London main case study from which the curatorial framework and identifying tools are later derived.

In Chapter 4, I discuss and review the role of exhibition spaces through the Mexico City pilot study. The theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 2 are further elaborated and interpreted through examples of fashion curation to define a curatorial framework incorporating an object-based approach within a spatiotemporal space. From the curatorial perspectives introduced in Chapter 4, four emerging themes are identified as exhibition concepts.

These concepts are further explored and analysed in Chapter 5 through the main case study, leading to the formation of the curatorial framework. The methodology presents a broad-based approach to fashion curation using three primary tools: “invisible threads”, “mirrors”, and “cabinets”.

In Chapter 6, I summarise the thesis and recapitulate the research aims and objectives introduced in Chapter 1. In this final chapter, the key contributions of the thesis are highlighted: (a) the object-based approach, (b) the curatorial perspectives, (c) the role of tensions within exhibition design, and (d) the curatorial framework. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a review of the study’s practical implications, the research, and future directions for disability exhibition design.

This thesis is complemented by a visual portfolio documenting my process behind creating and co-curating the original *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* exhibition at the V&A in London in 2018. The portfolio complements the thesis by charting my interaction with these objects and exhibition spaces, expanding on the visual materials, processes, and complementary programmes that contributed to making the show a research output. Elements such as the installation shots, object list, labels, exhibition panels, mannequin selection, education programme, and curator discussions are shown in this portfolio. It captures how this project came about and how it was developed.

Chapter 2: Disability in Context

2.1 Introduction

People with disabilities, and their stories, are mostly recorded as oddities. Frequently, often unconsciously, they are denied or limited access to the quotidian, and theirs is a life often experienced as *other*. From this view, familiar concepts and events such as citizenship, work, and home take on new meaning. War and natural disasters have resulted in familiarity with disability, shifting perceptions toward challenging assumptions to transform our understandings and connections with one another. Just as ethnicity and race do not fall within a rigid either/or classification, neither does disability: A person is not always disabled or unable to do all things. The often-arbitrary categories used to identify people and the language used to describe people with disabilities have evolved across eras and locations. Concepts of beauty and attitudes towards disabilities have also changed.

An overview of existing fashion theories and disability studies follows, with a review of prosthetics as fashionable objects or as part of an individual's identity. The analysis is centred on existing models of disability and research addressing prosthetics in the fashion realm that challenge notions of normalcy. Following the discussion of pivotal fashion theories and models of disability, the theoretical framework underpinning the exhibition space is presented, drawing from different theoretical perspectives on object-based interpretations of garments, collections, and the work of curators today. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of disability exhibitions and exploration of how the concept of otherness has been represented through the fashion lens.

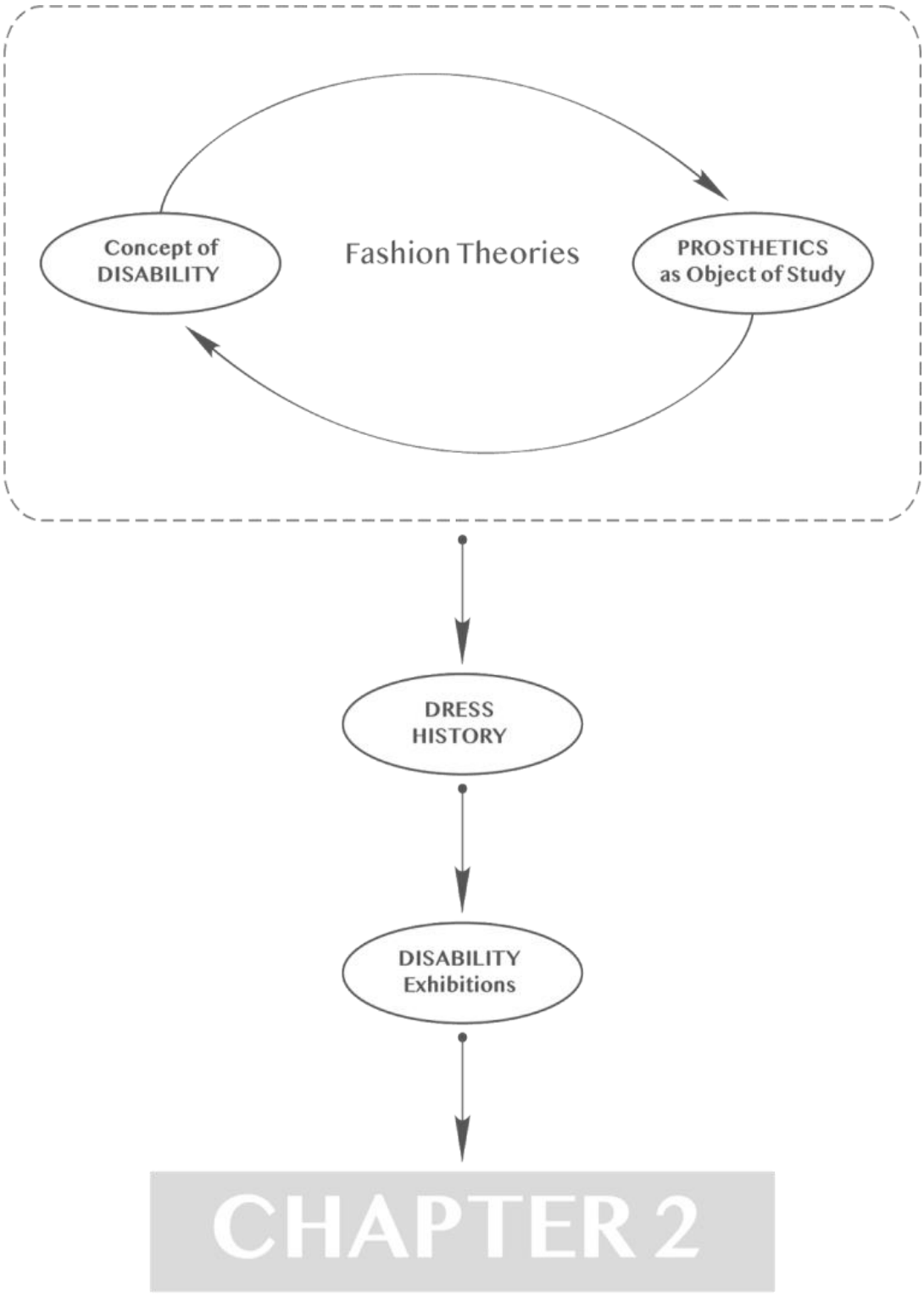

Figure 2 Framework of Literature Review

2.2 Fashion Theories and Models of Disability

2.2.1 Historical Overview

Historically, there are two approaches to the sociology of disability: the medical model and the social model, as defined by Swain and French (2000). The medical model of disability stems from human biology, where someone with disabilities is considered inherently or fundamentally impaired, as proposed by Swain and French (2000). Some scholars assert that society considers disabled individuals defective (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2011; Richardson, 2010). This concept relies on binary thinking, and defines the body as abled/disabled, functioning/non-functioning, or normal/abnormal (Richardson, 2010, as cited in Hall & Orzada, 2013, p. 21). These studies, primarily from the humanities and social sciences in the 1950s, progressed into the propositions of clothing as a rehabilitation tool (Newton, 1976; Yep, 1977), disability as a design problem (Scott, 1961; Kernaleguen, 1978; Hoffman, 1979; Watkins, 1984; Chase & Quinn, 1990), and disability as a perceptual cue (Miller, 1982; Nisbett & Johnson, 1992).

Later activists and scholars in the 1990s, particularly from the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada, viewed disability as a social construct rather than an individualised model. Although the authors' given names for these models varied, they all viewed prior conceptions of disability (referred to as biological, moral, medical, or individual models) as the root of repressive policies and practices. Consequently, social models—also referred to as socio-political or minority group models—came to describe a new perspective on disability, informed by the experiences of individuals with disabilities.

However, it is worth noting that these experiences often include adverse responses towards physical appearance, leading to a sense of detachment from prevailing fashion trends (Freeman, Kaiser, & Wingate, 1985). The perspective that disability should be understood as a social construct rather than an isolated medical issue is central to contemporary studies by disability-rights

advocates.[2] Disability studies provide opportunities for research on dress and appearance in the lives of disabled people, according to Lamb (2001). Kaiser and Damhorst (1991) consider that humans continually construct and interpret impressions as they define, shape, and organise their perceptions of daily life.

In 2000, Swain and French proposed an intrinsically optimistic, new model of disability, focused on the individual not in physical or social terms but rather in terms of their innate dignity and self-worth. Therefore, as Hall and Orzada (2013) point out, "It follows that a person with bodily differences does not need to be cured by the medical community, nor should they be patronised by society. Instead, this person has intrinsic meaning and value" (p. 22). For Swain and French (2000), this viewpoint shaped an affirmative model of disability.

In essence, the affirmative model adopts a non-tragic view of disability and impairment, encompassing positive social (individual and collective) identities for disabled people, grounded in the benefits of the lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled. It arose in direct opposition to the existing primary model of disability and impairment, that of personal tragedy, and built on the liberatory imperative of the social model (Swain & French, 2000, p. 560).

In particular, Swain and French argue that the social model of disability cannot adequately handle the challenges associated with rejecting a tragic perspective and establishing a positive framework. The social model fundamentally redefines the concept of "the problem". Disability is not attributed to impairment or individual characteristics, but rather to the systemic oppression experienced by those having these characteristics within a culture that perpetuates crippling conditions. The alternative perspective on disability, which is not centred around tragedy, focuses on disability as a constructive

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[2] In terms of legislation, it is worth noting that in the United States, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was followed by the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. In the United Kingdom, the Disability Dis-crimination Acts of 1995 and 2005 were amended in 2010 as the Equalities Act 2010.

individual and societal identity. It emphasises the potential for these people to lead meaningful and gratifying lives.

This stance is elaborated by Garland-Thompson, who argues for the importance of positivity and the process of "re-symbolisation" in relation to disability (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 23). In her work, Garland-Thomson (2002) used the image of a fashion model with physical disabilities to illustrate re-symbolization. These models have the potential to evoke and simultaneously demonstrate disability pride, as they combine "two previously antithetical visual discourses: fashion and disability" (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 23).

The lack of academic scholarship in the fields of fashion and disability to date represents an existing and interesting gap in this area of research, especially for curatorial studies. When *Dazed & Confused's* "Fashion-able" issue was published in 1998, guest-edited by Alexander McQueen, it seemed like a critical moment in fashion—disability had just emerged as a focus topic.

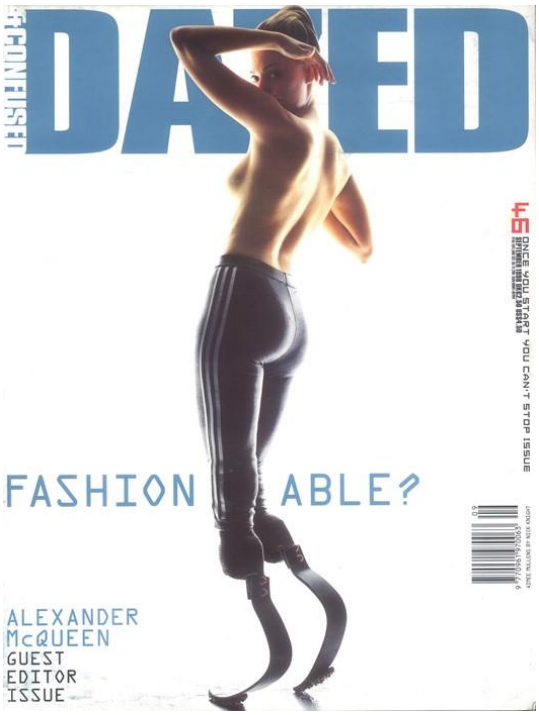

Figure 3 Aimee Mullins for the magazine *Dazed & Confused*. Photograph by Nick Knight, 1998.

Alexander McQueen placed Aimee Mullins on the cover of *Dazed & Confused*, semi-naked, in her cheetah prosthetic legs, making a statement; the cover questioned how we design for different bodies and how we look at the disabled body (see Figure 3). For this issue, the disabled models were cast just as non-disabled models are typically cast, with applicants asked to send in their pictures through an open call. This generated an overwhelming response, and the editorial team decided to proceed with the issue.

Jefferson Hack describes how this story transformed *Dazed & Confused*, catapulting it from niche status in the UK:

> We tripled our circulation overnight because we had everyone talking about this amazingly creative way of bringing fashion and disability together. So those kinds of things would become a national debate afterwards because newspapers would write about it, and it would be on TV, and it would be an issue of debate about identity and beauty. (Odell, 2013)

Later in 1998, for his Spring/Summer fashion show, Alexander McQueen featured Aimee Mullins walking the runway in her wooden carved prosthetic legs (see Figure 4). This statement marked a historic moment for fashion and disability—notably, no new academic literature linking fashion and disability was published until 2012.

Figure 4 Aimee Mullins for the magazine *Dazed & Confused*. Photograph by Nick Knight, 1998.

However, the industry had made some earlier attempts to engage with disability and fashion. In 2008, BBC Three launched *Britain's Missing Top Model,* a reality show in search of the next disabled model. This show followed eight women with different disabilities competing to win a spread in the British *Marie Claire* magazine, photographed by Rankin. The competition's winner was model Kelly Knox, who was born without a lower arm. In 2010, Debenhams also launched a campaign using models on wheelchairs. The same year, male model Mario Galla showed his amputated prosthetic leg at Berlin Fashion Week (Galla & Amjend, 2011, as cited in Vainshtein, 2012, p. 168). In 2011, Sophie de Oliveira Barata founded The Alternative Limb Project, a company specialised in making "artistic" (Vainsthein, 2012, p. 148) or "expressive" (Hall & Orzada, 2013, p. 10) prostheses. De Oliveira has created various expressive prostheses, including the vine arm for Kelly Knox (see Figure 5). Nick Knight's 2013 SHOWstudio special *Prosthetics* issue featured the works of Dai Rees, Naomi Filmer, Una Burke, and Bethenny Bernon (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019).

Figure 5 The Alternative Limb Project. A collaborative design by Sophie de Oliveira Barata, Dani Clode, Jason Taylor, & Hugo Elias. For Kelly Knox. Photograph by Omkaar Kotedia, 2017.

Recent decades have seen an interest in examining this intersection between fashion and disability. In 2001, Lamb analysed the relationship between textiles and disability; more recent contributions have come from Vainshtein (2012), Hall and Orzada (2013), Aragón (2014), Andreescu (2014), Klepp and Rysst (2016), and Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds (2019). The year 2012 coincides with the first exhibition of Kahlo's wardrobe, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving*, at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico City. This exhibition explored how Kahlo's disability and ethnicity served as a vehicle for expression of her identity and creativity. The Mexico City exhibition will serve as a pivotal reference to inform the latter main case study at the V&A analysed in this thesis.

Garland-Thomson (1997/2017) has repeatedly observed that the strategies and processes of what she calls mainstreaming have been the most frequent route to visibility for non-normative bodies. In recent years, the amputated body in particular has gained a great deal of visibility, and an exciting shift is evident in popular use from medicalised prosthetics to fashionable prosthetics. In addition, a small number of fashion scholars have now started to explore prosthetics outside the medical realm. This section will look at existing literature on the intersection between fashion and prosthetics and define the terms used throughout this study.

2.2.2 Definition of Terms

This section defines the terminology used in this study to refer to *fashion, dress,* and identity. The definitions articulate how disability and otherness are registered through representations of prosthetics in fashion and will be further explored in Chapter 4 through the Mexico City pilot study.

Diversity

Diversity is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.-a) as the condition or fact of being different. Further, according to Tapia (2009), "diversity is about the mix. Inclusion is about making the mix work" (p. 12). For Mary Frances-

Winters (2014), inclusion is the act of "creating an environment that acknowledges, welcomes, and accepts different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences, to allow all to reach their potential" (p. 206).

Disability

This research study adopts the World Health Organization definition (2023, March 7), which considers disabilities an overarching term covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is defined as a problem in a person's body function or structure which extends to activity limitations and difficulties in executing an everyday task or action.

Dress

The study of dress has moved towards the analysis of process, focusing on agency and the factors shaping the negotiation of identity.

Eicher and Sumberg (1999) define dress as:

> An assemblage to the body modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body; includes obvious items placed on the body (the supplements) such as garments, jewellery and accessories and changes in colour, texture, smell and shape made to the body directly. Dressing the body can involve all five senses. Fabric, textures, lipstick or lip pomade, perfume or shaving lotion fragrance and the sounds made by wearing jewellery stimulate the senses of touch, taste, smell and hearing. (p. 298)

According to Stone (1962), a symbolic interactionist, appraisal of dress precedes and sets the stage for face-to-face verbal exchange. Moreover, Eicher and Sumberg (1999) distinguish between clothing, dress, and fashion. These differences are disregarded by scholars like Davis, author of *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (1992). Eicher and Sumberg (1999), however, argue that dress and clothing are not the same, because clothing excludes body modifications included in dress. For example, a person who wears a tattoo is dressing the body with either a permanent or a temporary tattoo, and in this case, the tattoo acts as a body modification which is independent of the clothing this person

chooses to wear. Likewise, fashion and dress are not synonyms; fashion can be found in other forms such as film or photography, not only in clothes and body adornment. In this thesis, references to dress follow Eicher and Sumberg's definition.

Empathy

Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (2011) observe that the concept of empathy originated within the realm of moral psychology in 18th century Scottish philosophy, while its terminology emerged from the aesthetic theory of 19th century German philosophy. The word "Einfühlung" (Lipps, 1903), which means to experience "feeling into", (Coplan & Goldie, 2011, p. XII) was initially introduced in 1873 by Robert Vischer as a means to elucidate the emotional importance of artistic form. Shortly thereafter, Theodor Lipps (1903) extended the concept beyond its original use in aesthetics to encompass our understanding of the psychological experiences of others. This includes perceiving people as individuals with their own inner lives which are comparable to our own in terms of cognitive, conative, and moral aspects. The term Einfühlung was adopted into the English language as 'empathy' during the early 20th century (p. XII). The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.-b) defines empathy as the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining how it would feel to be in that person's situation.

Fashion

Eicher and Sumberg (1999) define fashion as "a process involving change, from the introduction of a variation of a cultural form to its acceptance, discarding, and replacement by another cultural form" (p. 299). For Roach-Higgins (1981), an essential aspect of fashion is awareness of the changes in dress that occur during one's lifetime. Indeed, she asserts that this awareness of change is necessary for fashion to exist. Therefore, if people in a society are not conscious of a change in form of dress during their lifetimes, fashion does not exist in that society.

Eicher and Sumberg (1999) also make the distinction between fashion and clothes because "not all clothes (are) fashionable dress" (p. 299). For example, soldiers in the army wear a uniform as a working outfit, and these clothes are not fashionable in this context. This distinction thus introduces the issue of choice.

For de la Haye, fashion is "an indicator of individual and group identity. Furthermore, its fluidity reflects shifts in the social matrix" (Mendes & de la Haye, 1999, p. 8). Steele (1997) defines fashion as "the cultural construction of the embodied identity" (p. 1).

In conclusion, fashion can be defined as the individual and group acceptance of a cultural form chosen by one or many individuals, changing over time, and extending beyond issues of dress. For this study, however, references to fashion follow its definition as the "cultural form" in relation to the embodied identity proposed by Steele (1997, p. 1).

Identity

Stuart Hall (1990) defines identity as "a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (p. 222). Similarly, Dorinne Kondo (1990) discusses complex and fluid identities, whereby "identity is not a fixed 'thing'" and "is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous—the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings" (p. 24). For Ankori (2002), too, identity is "neither a static nor a monolithic 'given', but rather a complex construction and a shifting configuration" (p. 31).

Otherness

Otherness is defined as "the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us', the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them', Other) by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination (Staszak, 2008). To

state it naïvely, difference belongs to the realm of fact, and otherness belongs to the realm of discourse. Thus, biological sex is a difference, whereas gender is otherness" (p. 2).

Prosthetics and Prostheses

Today, the term "prosthetic" is attributed to the branch of surgery that replaces missing or defective limbs. However, for the Ancient Greeks, this concept was far more assertive: it meant "to add", "to advance", or "to give power to". The etymology of the word prosthesis dates from the mid-16th century via late Latin from Greek *prosthesis,* from *pros,* meaning in "addition" + *tithenai,* meaning "to place". The term "prosthetic" appeared in 1837 in grammar, and in 1902 it appeared in the surgical sense, from the Latinized form of Greek prosthetics, meaning disposed to add; from prosthetos, defined as added or fitted to; and as a verbal adjective of prostithenai, meaning to put to, add to (Etymology Dictionary, n.d.).

For this study, the terms *prosthetics* and *prostheses* will be used interchangeably about an addition to the body. In the medical context, there are two types of medical prosthetics. The first, the essential "functional" prosthetic, consisting either of a metal bar arm with a bifurcated hook or a metal bar leg with a rubber foot, is the model issued to patients in hospitals (Mital & Pierce, 1971, as cited in Hall & Orzada, 2013, p. 4). The second type of prosthetic is naturalistic, designed to look realistic, and is made of a metal core covered by silicon to simulate human skin. A prosthetic leg of this type is called cosmesis (Mullins, 2009b).

Expressive Prostheses

Hall and Orzada (2013) define expressive prostheses as those that challenge pre-existing conceptions about the physically disabled community. Historically, the purpose of prosthetic limbs was to act as a substitute to regain lost functionality and/or to replace the absent body part, restoring physical cohesiveness to the individual. Traditional functional and cosmetic limbs were

designed to meet basic needs while providing users with the assumed desired discretion. Expressive prostheses, on the other hand, "solicit attention to the wearer, rendering the individual far from invisible to social scrutiny" (Hall & Orzada, 2013, p. 27).

Prosthesis Use

Prosthesis use can be considered to fulfil three requirements: the operational, the visible, and the social (Sousa et al., 2009, as cited in Hall & Orzada, 2013, p. 14).

Expressive Needs

When dress fulfils the wearer's expressive needs, its social and psychological role is apparent: it communicates identity (Kaiser, 1997). Expressive designs are used to communicate the wearer's values and sense of self. One of the fundamental aspects of dress is its role as a medium for self-expression (Kaiser, 1997; Lamb & Kalla, 1992).

While language changes in response to new attitudes, the terms defined above underpin both our understanding and the following discussion of how disability and otherness are expressed and received in fashion culture, particularly through the use of prostheses to define identity, challenge preconceptions and shape empathy. By decorating, embellishing, and displaying her corsets, Kahlo transforms them into expressive artworks, and at times, fashionable accessories. She deploys her corsets and clothes as a second skin, making them an essential part of her self-constructed identity.

Her willingness to expose her injuries and medical devices (such as corsets and prosthetic leg) defied societal expectations of concealment, instead transforming Kahlo's body and medical apparatuses into a canvas for self-expression and resilience.

2.2.3 Fashion and Prosthetics

Vainshtein (2012) describes the use of prosthetics for accessorising as well as redefining the body, in her article "I have a Suitcase Just Full of Legs Because I need Options for Different Clothing": "Artistic prostheses mark the birth of a new type of accessory, serving as fashionable extension of the body blurring the conventional corporeal boundaries" (p. 148). Although prostheses are usually designed to replace a missing body part, they could serve as fashionable accessories, functioning as unique additions to the identity and appearance of an individual (Pullin, 2009; Vainshtein, 2012). Furthermore, Vainshtein (2012) argues that once the prosthesis has made the transition from medical device to accessory, it passes into the visual arena of fashion: "the accessory should attract attention, and this is precisely what is happening to aesthetic prosthesis" (p. 146).

Vainshtein (2012) analyses how the fashion system reimagines prostheses with bold and visually arresting aesthetics through catwalk models with missing limbs in fashion shows and advertising campaigns. For her, images of disabled bodies are not so much transgressive as expansive, moving the conversation beyond the limits of the able-bodied, the human condition and the fashion system (Vainshtein, 2012).

For Vainshtein (2012), that system has always projected collective desire onto the body of the model, something which works equally in favour of the disabled model:

> Fashion shows with disabled models could contribute to widening the range of the normative emotional response of the audience and, at the same time, function as an exercise in empowerment for disabled people. Yet making the cultural spectacle of non-normative bodies, as we see it, is a double-edged practice: the darker side of this glamour action is that fashion houses, brands, and media publications gain income from the commodification of disabled models; however, at the same time it is breaking down conventional stereotypes of beauty in advertising and fashion shows, widening the frame of public tolerance. (Vainshtein, 2012, p. 163)

The essence of fashion is the concept of novelty, and this is one of the reasons why the fantastical nature of fashion spaces has such power to change the systems of perception and representation of disabled bodies (Vainshtein, 2012). Accentuating the role of fashion in this context opens up new avenues to its social function. Illuminated in this way, fashion takes a leading role in our experience and sense of the body itself, becoming a conduit for our emotions in the face of difference. Here, fashion meets diversity, helping shape a new inclusive and global environment (Vainshtein, 2012). Fashion, to Vainshtein (2012), brings an artistic sensibility to prosthetics design, helping the amputee to "preserve human dignity" (p. 148) and "the observers to retune their emotions in the face of otherness" (p. 164) by way of connecting with the disabled individual. Fashion goes beyond its mooted superficiality to become, for both wearer and viewer, an emotional connection between disabled people and non-disabled people, redefining the relationship between amputees and their bodies.

Likewise, designers and dress scholars Hall and Orzada (2013) have approached prosthetic design with the concept of expressing the identity and fulfilling the self-expression of the users. Hall and Orzada (2013) argue that while the traditional/essential functions of disguising loss and enabling quotidian tasks remain core, beyond those, prostheses must also help identity construction and communication, functions relatively new to a field in which they have no significance. By way of example, they highlight a new generation of expressive prostheses with visually captivating designs intended to provide aesthetic pleasure. Instead of camouflaging the disability, these enable the wearer to "pass" as able-bodied. The prostheses "draw attention to the source of the perceived stigmatization of the limb absence" (Hall & Orzada, 2013, p. 28). By inverting expectations, disabled identities become inspirational rather than isolated, reversing the design starting point, from functionality to aesthetics and identity, the prostheses transition from a place of need to one of desire and consumption. In this context, they are not intended to be hidden

from society's gaze; au contraire, they are very much deliberate fashion choices.

Vainshtein (2012) joins Hall and Orzada (2013) in celebrating new technologies that are designed to meet aesthetic needs as well as functional ones. Similarly, Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds (2019) look at how amputees are situated and integrated into the visual mainstream, using a new generation of fashionable prosthetics to help shift the narrative around normalcy. Japanese artist Mari Katayama, American athlete Aimee Mullis, and British artist Viktoria Modesta serve as examples. Despite sharing the idea of aesthetics as a powerful tool to move the conversation away from the medical realm, these figures take a different stance, viewing the disabled body as a consumer. Subverting notions of the amputee body as represented in the context of fashion and art in the manner of Vainshtein (2012), they also consider those whose non-normative limbs are essential to their aesthetic identities.

Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds (2019) argue that a new form emerges with "expressive and aesthetic" artificial limbs (p. 199). Bodies and prostheses come together to produce a new form of body, combining the technological with the fashionable realms. Viktoria Modesta and Aimee Mullins describe their prosthetic body parts as accessories or assemblages between their bodies and fashion (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019). The amputated body, as proposed here, is not medically resolved or augmented; rather, it is symbiotic, meaning the "body does not wear fashion—it becomes fashion, at least some of its parts do" (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019, p. 9).

Mari Katayama features herself in her photography, surrounded by objects created by her. She was born with a rare congenital disorder affecting her shin bones and hand. When she was only 9 years old, she chose to have her legs amputated. In 2016, Katayama visited the island of Naoshima, where she discovered an all-female style bunraku, a traditional Japanese puppet theatre. She photographed the puppeteers' hands, printed them on fabric, and turned

them into wearable soft sculptures. They represented a cross between a tentacle creature and a cloak of invisibility, with arms and legs turned everywhere, to create a poetic visual language out of her disability. Katayama says, "I just want to present the experiences that I have through my body" (Black, 2019, p. 1). Katayama expresses her lived experience through art, identity, and dress.

Independent of contextual cultural differences, the authors recognise the break with tradition that Mullins, Modesta, and Katayama all embrace. They pose a challenge to a fashion system that has routinely insisted on a rigidly normative body type (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019).

Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds (2019) argue that "disability has been written out of visual culture and especially from the images of women it seeks to fetishise and commoditize—for decades" (p. 202). They put forward the responses to the recent exhibition in London's V&A Museum, *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, as a testament to this assumption:

> Multiple reviewers (Judah, 2018; Healy, 2018) have noted that despite audiences' general awareness of the Mexican artist's work and turbulent love life, only very few people realized that Kahlo had a disability that influenced her self-identity and her signature fashion style. The exhibition attempted to undo this erasure by creating an entire "Endurance" room dedicated to Kahlo's prosthetic devices and medical history. It featured rare photographs of the artist in a wheelchair, her exchanges with her doctors, her hand-painted back braces, and the intricate prosthetic leg featuring exquisite fashion materials such as silk and embroidery, thus reinstating her disabled identity as part of the conversation about her. (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019, p. 202)

The exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* (see Figure 6) articulated what the three authors had proposed before: that fashion has the capacity to transform existing norms and generate new ones. Kahlo's image was widely consumed by popular culture, but typically not from a perspective where her disabilities informed her identity formation and her creative process though art and dress. The exhibition centred Kahlo's physical impairment identity as an integral part of the conversation about her. More than 50 years ago, in

decorating her prosthetic leg and corsets as objects of art and an extension of her body, Kahlo embodied what the authors today term expressive prosthetics.

Figure 6 Installation shot of the Endurance section from *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

By placing Kahlo's orthopaedic devices in the exhibition context, the curator proposed an installation that showcased disability in a different light. Rather than the objects being displayed as medical devices, they were exhibited as precious objects of desire through an evocative installation. The objects were thus displayed in the exhibition space as fashion artefacts, turning a social rather than medical lens on disability, as a medium to create new meanings and new languages of fashion that could challenge the status quo.

Disability scholar Garland-Thomson (2002) notes:

> The freedom to be appropriated by consumer culture. In a democracy, to reject this paradoxical liberty is one thing; not to be granted it is another. … [These images] enable [disabled] people … to imagine themselves as a part of the ordinary, albeit consumerist, world rather than as a particular class of excluded untouchables and unviewable. (Garland-Thomson, 2002, pp. 24–25)

Fraser and Greco (2005) consider one's visibility to be inseparable from one's consumer habits. Thus the surest path to visibility for the disabled body is through a conscious integration into the consumer culture. These scholars view this as an essentially positive act of identity politics (Fraser & Greco, 2005, p. 12). Gender scholar Walker (1993) points out that "privileging visibility has become a tactic in which participants often symbolise their demands for social justice by celebrating visual signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination" (Walker, 1993, as cited in Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019, p. 214).

As previously stated, fashion has the potential to create and re-signify existing norms to produce new norms. Whether the fashion industry reinforces the relationship to the "prosthetised" body remains to be seen. Nonetheless, this study is committed to empathising with the disabled body through increased representation and inclusive processes that incorporate more voices. In his book *Disability Aesthetics,* Siebers (2010) proposes another type of gaze: one that allows us "to elaborate disability as an aesthetic value in itself", and that is based not on imposing normalcy but on exploring alternative modes of embodiment (Siebers, 2010, p. 3). Strategies for supporting such a framework include "moving the previously glamorized amputee bodies beyond the tired narratives of super-ability, consumption, medical need, or the survivor lens" (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019, p. 203).

This section highlights recent scholarship contributing to the intersection between fashion, disability, and prosthetics to advance this area of research. The authors featured in this section propose that viewing amputees through a consumer lens over a medical one results in this group's destigmatisation and acceptance by consumer culture. This study supports Sobchack's (2006) notion that "a more embodied 'sense-ability' of the prosthetic by cultural critics and artists will lead to a greater apprehension of 'response-ability' in its discursive use" (Sobchack, 2006, p. 19).

2.3 The Study of Dress History, Collections, and Curating

In considering the role of dress history, collections, and curating, I look at different scholars' perspectives on the object-based interpretation of garments as well as consider Taylor's argument on the "great divide" (2004, p. 64) between curatorial and academic approaches to the study of clothing. This section explores the role of fashion exhibitions today as spaces for reassessing fashion. It also provides three examples of curated disability exhibitions that offer insight into the different approaches adopted by curators addressing disability in the exhibition context. This context is useful in evaluating disability-related work in the museum space since 2012—the year marking the first exhibition of Kahlo's wardrobe at the Frida Kahlo Museum (the Mexico City pilot study, discussed in Chapter 4).

2.3.1 Dress History and Curation

For the last 20 years, Professor Taylor (2004) has conducted numerous studies on the discussion of clothing objects in their historical, material culture, and museology settings. In her book *Establishing Dress History* (2004), Taylor traces the history of dress and discusses the creation and interpretation of dress collections in museums in Britain and other parts of the world. Taylor's application of material culture and consumption studies has transformed dress history. Her conviction is that transdisciplinary approaches to the construction of history, including working with surviving garments, offer a fresh understanding and perspective, honing the cultural "eye" of a specific period or community.

In *Establishing Dress History* (2004), Taylor emphasises the vital role of the curator and the institution in determining what is collected or excluded, and how a collection is maintained, studied, and exhibited. Taylor calls for the future generation of curators to be self-aware, cohesive, and well-informed when collecting.

In her essay "Doing the Laundry? A Reassessment of Object-Based Dress History" (1998), Taylor calls attention to the professional divide between those who study surviving garments and accessories (particularly in museums) and those who research dress through images and words (often in higher education). She observes that for the past 150 years, as the number of art museums increased and new academic disciplines became established in universities, the study of historical clothing and the history of clothing remained marginalised in these institutions. However, these views have now evolved to embrace a more open, responsive arena where influential curators and dress historians contribute to higher education.

Another essential division Taylor pinpoints is gender. Practitioners of the object-based approach originally were—and still are—predominantly women (Taylor, 1998). Taylor points out that it was not until the 1930s that museums in London, Paris, and New York started taking dress collections more seriously. This was thanks to the work of a generation of curators such as Anne Buck, the first professionally trained costume curator at the Gallery of English Costume at Platt Hall; Doris Langley Moore, who fought to find a home for her stunning dress collection for years—and finally did so at The Museum of Costume in Bath in 1963; Madelaine Blumstein and Natalie Rothstein who did pioneering work at the V&A Museum; and Madelaine Delpierre who managed to fund the Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris.

More recent examples include Ruth Barnes, Valerie Guillaume, Valerie Steele, Judith Clark, and Amy de la Haye, the dress historian and curator who broke the boundaries of collection policy in museums when presenting her controversial exhibition *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* at the V&A Museum in 1994. Taylor points out that this exhibition, showing garments representing young, radical, subcultural clothing of the British and American post-war period, addressed the realities of late 20th-century British design processes that had to be considered in museum collections (Taylor, 1998).

De la Haye, in her article, "Where's the Dummy now?" for the January/February 2003 *Tate Arts and Culture* magazine, challenges the role of fashion exhibitions in museums today. She stresses that for fashion to be taken seriously as an art and to enjoy the merit some of it truly deserves, exhibitions have to be curated well and with a keen and clear vision (de la Haye, 2003). De la Haye (2003) calls for curators to find ways of challenging the public intellectually by marrying curatorial approaches and critical theory.

Increasingly, museums have identified fashion as an important means of attracting new audiences. One need only look back at the fashion exhibitions of the past decade to realise that fashion is becoming progressively more accessible. Displays showcase various fashions, from women's wardrobes to superhero clothes and haute couture. *Nan Kempner: American Chic* was an exhibition showing the wardrobe of Nan Kemper, a patron of fine fashion, at the de Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, in June 2007. *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–1957,* curated by Claire Wilcox, was a show presenting Christian Dior's 1947 New Look, showing Paris's leadership in couture and London's contribution to tailoring during that decade. This show was presented in September 2007 at the V&A; another Dior show was held at the V&A from February to September 2019.

2.3.2 Fashion Retrospectives and Collections

Extensive retrospectives of late and living designers mark the trend of celebrating the lives of designers as makers of culture. An example is the homage exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* in 2011 (see Figure 7) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curated by Andrew Bolton, which featured McQueen's pieces from the Alexander McQueen Archive as well as pieces from the time McQueen was head designer at Givenchy (1996 through 2001), in addition to pieces from private collections. The show was composed of six separate galleries, arranged by theme: The Romantic Mind, featuring some of his oldest work from the early 1990s; Romantic Gothic and the Cabinet of Curiosities, featuring his exploration of Victorian gothic; Romantic

Nationalism, examining Scottish and British identity; Romantic Exoticism, examining non-western influences in his designs; Romantic Primitivism, featuring natural materials and organic designs; and Romantic Naturalism, featuring his integration of themes from the natural world with visual technologies.

Figure 7 Installation shot of the Cabinet of Curiosities from *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. Metropolitan Museum, 2011.

Other examples of exhibitions celebrating the works of living designers include the show *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk* in 2011 (see Figure 8), the first international retrospective devoted to the famous French designer. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts produced the exhibition in collaboration with Maison Jean Paul Gaultier. The show attracted over 2 million visitors in 12 cities around the world. Dries van Noten, the Antwerp-based fashion designer, had his exhibition *Dries van Noten—Inspirations,* held at the Paris Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 2014 and in 2015 at the ModeMuseum (MoMu) in Antwerp. The work of Rei Kawakubo

was recently celebrated in 2017 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in *Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between.*

A common exhibition theme is the trendy performance/celebrity/wardrobe shows such as *The Story of The Supremes* from the Mary Wilson Collection, which was presented at the V&A in 2008. This exhibition showed the changing fashions of the famous recording group, The Supremes, during the 1960s, from the members' early outfits to the wild Hollywood-inspired costumes they donned at the pinnacle of their careers. Archival television footage, photographs, and magazine images supplemented this exhibition.

Figure 8 Installation at *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk.* The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2011.

Another exhibition, *Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore* (see Figure 9), of the late fashion editor, fashion icon and patron, showed at Somerset House in 2013. This exhibition, curated by Alistair O'Neill and Shonagh Marshall, displayed more than a hundred pieces from Blow's collection. The collection is one of the most important private collections containing late 20th-century and early 21st-century British fashion design. The exhibition highlighted Blow's iconic style and the relationship she established with all the designers she supported. Designed by set designer Shona Heath, this exhibition successfully portrayed

the essence of Blow's enigmatic persona. Another example of such shows was the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* shown at the V&A Museum in 2018.

These two exhibitions touched on Goffman's (1963/1990) notion of performance: His interpretation of theatre as a setting for consequential human action is shaped by the concepts of self-presentation and metaphor. Actors can communicate information about themselves purposefully (by design), or involuntarily. This metaphor featured in both Blow and Kahlo as iconic female figures who played with identity construction by concealing and revealing through fashion and dress as a performative masquerade.

Figure 9 Installation at *Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore*. Somerset House, 2013.

A 2005 exhibition that continues to be a subject of analysis for many curators is Spectres: *When Fashion Turns Back* (see Figure 10). Not only was it influential for many curators, but it also informed the cognitive and thought processes for their thesis case studies. In *Spectres* (2005), curator Judith Clark explored the continuing influence of the past on the present, the power of the historical muse and fashion memory in shaping contemporary fashion design today. Based on Evans's (2003) book *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle,*

Modernity, and Deathliness, the Spectres exhibition reassessed historical references and themes to understand and explain the various motives and complexities that drive designers to create particular garments for their collections today.

Spectres reflected the different themes as a labyrinth of associations through miscellaneous settings taken from Victorian fairgrounds and theatres. It employed visual elements such as magic lanterns, magnifying glasses, and mirrors. An in-and-out installation simulated a clock's mechanism, continuously bringing together and separating costumes from the past and present, and alluding to time. This concept resonated through the whole installation in a variety of settings, where designers from past and present were brought together. An example is the pairing of a Mary Quant black-and-white check Pierrot dress from 1956 with a Bernard Willhelm black-and-white striped

Figure 10 Installation at *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back*. Victoria and Albert Museum, 2005.

dress from his Autumn-Winter 2002/2003 collection. This exhibition invited viewers to observe the objects in a particular way that emphasised how they looked at and saw the objects, through looking devices, by explicitly editing and coercing the views, and using Ruben Toledo's "eyes".

The following chapter will discuss the existing relationships between the idea of staring and looking, to explain how the collection of Kahlo's orthopaedic devices was contextualised and displayed.

In a similar vein, and because the main case study of this thesis was conducted at the V&A Museum, it is essential to mention that the exhibition *Black British Style*, curated by Carol Tulloch and Shaun Cole, was showing at the V&A from October 2004 to January 2005. This exhibition highlighted the importance of diversity and ethnicity to inform the exhibition narrative. This seminal exhibition was the first in the UK to illustrate the power and influence of Black fashion, dress, and styling on British culture over the past 50 years, from everyday clothes and Sunday outfits for church to contemporary street-styling dress practices, interwoven with a strong influence of Black music and dance from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Americas. The exhibition was ground-breaking in using the exhibition space to articulate diverse and more inclusive debates around fashion and dress. This exhibition challenged stereotypes associated with Black identities and influenced by migration, religion, or political choices. Additionally, it underscored the historical legacy of differences that underpins particular styles of different cultural groups in an authentic sense of personality and life experience.

2.3.3 Object-Based Approaches

According to Aileen Ribeiro, author of *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England* (2006), in the last 20 years, the study of the culture of clothing in art has been entrenched as a key approach to dress history (Ribeiro, 1998). On the other hand, Taylor (2002) said that the place of dress is so crucial in today's society that the observation and analysis of a dress object provide scholars with powerful tools for historical and contemporary sociocultural investigation. Alongside this sociocultural focus, other authors have explicitly linked fashion and the more comprehensive visual arts. Ribeiro (1998), for example, refers to the work of James Laver, author of *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History of Costume* (1965) and Francoise Boucher, author

of *A History of Costume in the West* (1967), who both describe dress using a wide range of visual elements to illustrate their books, and established a close relationship between clothes and the visual media.

Stella Mary Newton (1953), founder of the Postgraduate Programme of Dress History at Courtauld Institute in 1965 took the lead in the study of dress and art. Newton ran a detailed analysis of clothing in painting at the National Gallery in London. She selected a series of Renaissance paintings and discussed the clothes in the paintings at great length and in detail. She was the first dress historian to use painting as a reference point in the history of dress. Ribeiro (1998) highlights that Newton (1953) was first to establish as fact that "artists paint the fashions of their own time, and that all their work—even historical, allegorical, religious, and mythological scenes—is informed by a knowledge of dress, whether consciously or unconsciously applied" (Newton, 1953, as cited in Ribeiro, 1998, p. 316).

In the summer of 2002, the National Gallery in London again replicated this approach, perhaps less successfully, in their show *Fabric of Vision: Dress and Drapery in Painting*. The exhibition explored how dress and drapery were depicted by artists from the Renaissance to the early 20th century. Anne Hollander, art historian, critic, and historian of dress curated the exhibition.

Taking her argument to its logical extreme, Ribeiro (1998) effectively posits the culture of clothing in art as one of the fundamental approaches to dress history. Fully concurring with Daniel Roche's (1989) approach to *La Culture des Appearances*, i.e., that the study of dress requires the skills of both historian and art historian, Ribeiro (1998) extends the idea and proposes: "The dress historian should never look at only one aspect of the subject—whether art object, surviving garments, documentary sources or theory—in isolation; a wide-ranging and comprehensive approach is much more desirable" (p. 316).

Ribeiro (1998) goes on to say that even when looking at surviving clothes, "we can rarely know how it was worn and with what; internal evidence tells us about textiles and sewing techniques … but nothing about the person who wore it, and the context(s) in which it was worn" (p. 316). By contrast, in the case of Kahlo, ample photographic and visual documentation provide a wealth of information about the wearer.

In light of both approaches, the pilot case study in Chapter 4 will focus on Kahlo's construction of identity through the use of dress by examining several of her works and the role of the dresses and orthopaedic devices within them, alongside the material objects. The study will then explore the importance of a particular dress in a specific painting, thus drawing explicit links of identity between her art and her painted dress. Material garments are also a central component in the study: They closely link all the objects when designing the exhibition—paintings, photographs, and personal physical objects.

In this material culture study, I apply Jules Prown's (1982) object analysis process of description, deduction, and speculation, complemented by the approach proposed by Mida and Kim (2015): observation (capturing the information from the dress artefacts), reflection (considering the embodied experience and contextual materials), and interpretation (linking the observations and reflections to theory) (p. 27). I explain Kahlo's layers of meaning by extracting information and "clues" about the wearer's identity from descriptions of clothes, personal objects, and orthopaedic devices. Paintings and photographs inform viewers of the wearer's attitudes and styles.

Finally, as Taylor (2002) observes, "where the valid fine line is to be drawn between Prown's process of leading out from the object into theory, or working back from theory to object is the essence of future debate" (p. 85).

2.4 Disability Exhibitions

This section analyses three exhibitions addressing disability curated by three curators to better understand the various angles curators have used since Kahlo's wardrobe exhibition in 2012, where disability informed a significant aspect of the curatorial stance.

Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting (see Figure 11) was an exhibition curated by Alexandra Palmer and shown at the Royal Ontario Museum in 2014. The exhibition featured 12 looks of contemporary clothing by IZ Adaptive, founded by Canadian fashion designer Izzy Camilleri.

IZ Adaptive focuses on designs for wheelchair users. The exhibition successfully addressed disability in a clever and evocative manner. The clothes were contextualised with six historic 18th- and 19th-century garments designed for a seated, L-shaped frame. The exhibition included two activists and journalists on exhibition chairs. It also had contributions from six wheelchair users in different fields of work like nutrition, engineering, and photography, and from a Paralympian. The pieces were displayed in seated and standing positions, even though the clothing was meant for wheelchair users.

Figure 11 Installation at *Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting*. Royal Ontario Museum, 2014.

When displayed on the mannequin, the folds of fabric and cutting details intended to be laid flat when the mannequin is seated could be observed. The wheelchair was not recreated but alluded to, through plinths that allowed the seated mannequin to be seen from different angles. Palmer (2014) was struck by how the trousers meant for wheelchair users looked like 18th-century breeches when worn standing. The adaptive line by Izzy was fashionable and functional in response to the "problem of sitting". The historical clothing highlighted a time when women were often seated to accommodate crinolines, articulating an essential part of the curatorial thesis. The inclusion of objects like a crinoline and a structured 19th-century cape were garments displayed as individual objects, alluding to appendages and additions that historically have been added to the body to create the most current silhouette.

Palmer (2001) notes that few academics succeed in combining material culture with other research methods and "remain bound in theoretical rhetoric" or adopt it "as decorative illustrative material" (p. 8). She explains her methodology as a combination of object analysis, oral history, archival research, and other documentary research. This 2014 exhibition is an example of her creative eye from a collection perspective to reinterpret fashion in the contemporary context. She presented a fresh perspective on diverse bodies and started a discussion on the topic of disability. The exhibition suggested that adaptive fashions should fit well. Palmer's contribution to the fashion and disability field through the exhibition context was evident in this exhibition.

Another recent related exhibition, *Access+Ability* (see Figure 12), was shown at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York in 2017. Curated by Cara McCarty and Rochelle Steiner, this exhibition was part of the Cooper Hewitt Lab: Design Access, as an initiative to broaden its audience and create more physical and digital accessibility. The exhibition presented an optimistic perspective of the innovations occurring in different areas of design that made everyday life easier for those with different abilities. It showed the marriage of design and technology through the objects exhibited, by highlighting design's

imaginative and technical approaches through four themes: digital technologies, customisation, environmental concerns, and well-being.

Figure 12 Installation at *Access+Ability*. Cooper Hewitt Museum, 2017.

The exhibition promoted the idea that inclusion of the user's voice in design, particularly for those with special needs or extreme conditions, is a critical change in contemporary design and innovation. It also advanced the idea that one need not be disabled to utilise techniques made for different abilities—hence the term "adaptive". The exhibition had multisensory programming meant for visitors with and without disabilities. It also highlighted specific objects on its blog. Despite this exhibition being more a design-and-technology-focused show, it spotlighted interesting issues around disability. Rather than challenging existing perceptions, this exhibition highlighted recent discoveries in the field of design and disability.

Body Beautiful: Diversity on the Catwalk was shown at the National Museum of Scotland in 2019 (see Figure 13). Curated by Georgina Ripley, a fashion curator at the National Museum, this exhibition focused on the recent rise of diversity showcased on the fashion runway. It explored five themes: size, gender, age, race, and disability and adopted a twofold approach: The first involved designers who were diverse in their casting or had shown their collections on

different sizes and ethnicities, and the second involved designers who embraced diversity within the clothing.

Figure 13 Installation at *Body Beautiful: Diversity on the Catwalk.* National Museum of Scotland, 2019.

Designers such as Vivienne Westwood were showcased in the disability section, with actor RJ Mitte, who has cerebral palsy, wearing her pieces. Teatum Jones was shown in the disability section with selections from his Spring-Summer 2018 collection, inspired by Natasha Baker, the British Paralympian. Antonio Urzi, who has worked with disabled models and wheelchair users, was part of the exhibition. Ashish Gupta showed only models of colour for his 2015 Spring/Summer collection, while his 2017 Spring/Summer collection celebrated Indian culture as an integral part of British culture. The exhibition also featured the hijab on the catwalk and a dress on a custom-made mannequin displaying one of writer Sinéad Burke's looks. While the curatorial lens was extensive, it was inclusive of the different voices contributing to the diversity debate through fashion in the exhibition context. The show did not necessarily challenge existing practices in its display or curatorial approaches, but it contributed to raising awareness about efforts in the fashion industry to engage in a more diverse and inclusive debate.

The Wellcome Collection, albeit not focused on fashion, has contributed to medical objects research. Sir Henry Wellcome, a pharmacist and renowned medical researcher, gathered a vast collection of historical medical objects across centuries and cultures. The collection remains in its place of origin, the original Wellcome building built to Sir Henry's specifications in 1932. The place supports and promotes Sir Henry's ethos, described as exploring the human condition. For example, the Medicine Man gallery features an interesting collection of prosthetics and artificial limbs. While this museum is not fashion related, some of its approaches were reflected in the main case study and considered when developing the curatorial methodology in Chapter 5.

2.5 Summary

This chapter discusses existing outcomes related to object-based approach theories and identifies different exhibitions engaging with disability in the exhibition space. The historical context of this study is addressed in Section 2.2.1 Historical Overview. In Section 2.2.3 Fashion and Prosthetics, I demonstrate how the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* (which will be further analysed in Chapter 4 as a pilot study) articulates the proposition that fashion has the capacity to re-signify norms to generate new norms.

Section 2.3 The Study of Dress History, Collections, and Curating and Section 2.3.1 Dress History and Curation provide the historical and theoretical context for the object-based research. They address the importance of both Newton's (1953) and Ribeiro's (1998) approach to the study of dress analysis. These approaches are further elaborated in the Mexico City pilot study and London main case study in Chapters 4 and 5, where garments are used to establish a close relationship between all objects–paintings, photographs, and personal physical objects. In this material culture analysis, I apply Prown's (1982) object analysis process of description, deduction and speculation, complemented by the approach proposed by Mida and Kim (2015) of observation, reflection and interpretation.

Section 2.3.2 Fashion Retrospectives and Collections highlights how the study addresses the space. The idea of performance as space plays a prominent role in the practical curatorial approach to this study and refers to the work of Benjamin (1999), Clark (2005), Samuel (1994) and Brejzek and Wallen (2017). This study continues to address Taylor's (2002) question regarding the fine line drawn between Prown's (1982) process of leading out from the object into theory or working back from theory to object, as this study considers both approaches (Taylor, 2002, p. 85), as discussed in Section 2.3.3. Section 2.4 provides an overview of recent disability exhibitions to reiterate further the fashion theories, historical concepts, and social implications of communicating notions of otherness through the presentation of prosthetics and objects signalling disability.

In Chapter 2, through a comprehensive literature review, I support the premise of this research as an inquiry into fashion exhibitions as a medium to destigmatise disability through the configuration of fashion objects within the exhibition context.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods utilised to develop concepts from the theoretical perspectives introduced earlier. I explain the research design of this study through the selection of methods, mode of practice, and synthesis of concepts explored throughout this thesis.

In Section 1.2, I introduced the two main research questions leading to the identification of research objectives discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review. I presented the background and context of this thesis in the previous chapter through a review of fashion theories, historical development of fashion curation, social concepts around disability, and examples of disability exhibitions. Then, through an extensive literature review, the central premise of the study was formulated, and the research methodology was constructed to investigate the implications and propositions for fashion curation.

Section 3.2 provides an overview of the research design, presenting a selected framework of the research methodologies and an overview of the research stages. The methods and tools will be illustrated through the presentation of practical case studies in Section 3.3: the Mexico City pilot study and London main case study. I analyse my curatorial practice through a retelling of the development to present a clear process and communicate positions of knowledge.

Addressing the relationship between fashion curation, fashion theory, and visual culture, this chapter introduces fashion exhibitions as a medium to destigmatise or transform perceptions of disability and address the research gap of evidence-based curatorial practice in concepts of disability and fashion. The main contribution of this research is in the presentation of selected methodologies that allowed me, as the researcher-as-curator, to present a view of the disabled body and identity in the main case study *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up,* by employing a curatorial methodology developed through a mapping process and explained in Section 3.3.3.

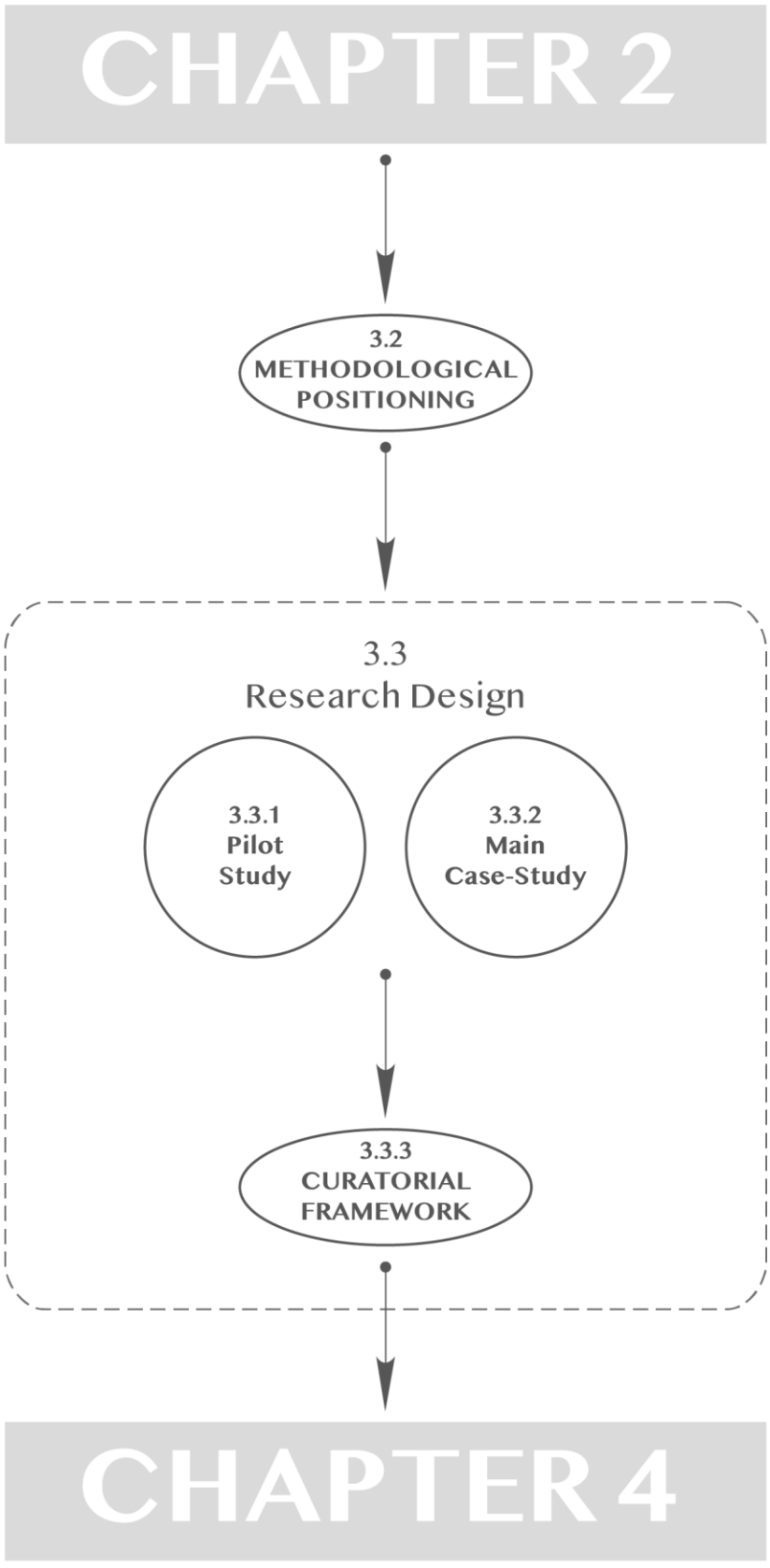

Figure 14 Framework of Chapter 3: Methodology

3.2 Methodological Positioning

The value of experience is stressed throughout this study, as all perceptions and meanings are interpreted across underlying structures of human experience. This relies on descriptions to illustrate and recreate the case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5. In addition, I introduce examples of fashion curation as content to be further analysed and interpreted, leading to the curator's involvement in the sense-making process as a means of communicating subjective experience.

This research is situated within the field and context of fashion curation. It relies on the subjective descriptions and interpretations of the curator, derived from my recent experience within the museum to further support the formulation of the curatorial methodological framework. Looking at disability studies in fashion, this research considers curatorial practice as a form of translating intangible concepts into tangible outcomes through exhibition experiences.

The methodological positioning of descriptive analysis and interpretation sets the premise for this study and the notion of experience as a form of inquiry in fashion curation. Considering the subjective and intuitive nature of the curatorial practice, my research does not restrict the study to a particular methodology or scientific approach. Instead, I further develop the concept of practice-as-inquiry through the curation of objects within the articulation of visual and spatial narratives. The curator is instrumentally positioned as the lens through which subjective experience can be presented and communicated.

3.3 Research Design

The objective of this study is to examine the role of curatorial practice within fashion exhibitions as one that changes and transforms perceptions of objects and the physical body. This section presents the stages of research following an extensive literature review: the identification of emerging themes, the

selection of case studies, the mode of analysis, and the formulation of the curatorial framework.

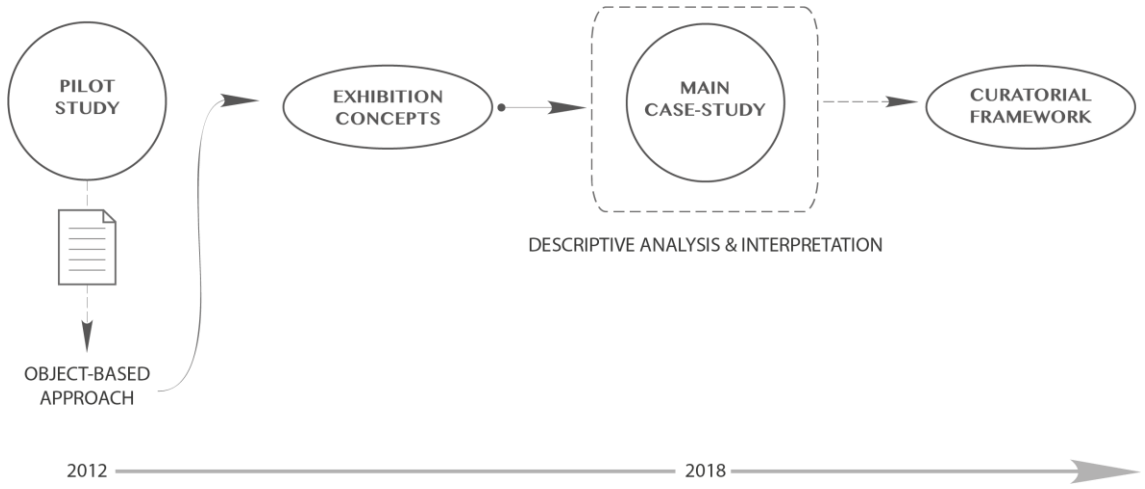

Figure 15 Research Design and Timeline

3.3.1 Mexico City Pilot Study

In Chapter 2, I provided a literature review of fashion theories and models of disability, the study and history of fashion curation, and disability exhibitions. Object-based approaches were introduced to illustrate how prosthetics can be integrated into an exhibition design to communicate the memories, elements of nostalgia, and deeper meanings of fashion objects. I explore this aspect further in Chapter 4, where the exhibition space is defined through the exhibition *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo*, introduced as the Mexico City pilot study, to understand how disability can be recontextualised within the fashion exhibition. The objective of including this exhibition as a case study is to re-lens or refocus the way we look at disability and other "stigmas" of race, gender, and diversity. Through the exhibition, I expose and highlight these aspects of Kahlo's persona boldly and unexpectedly, using powerful visual narratives and intelligent exhibition design. The exhibition presents fashion in novel ways by challenging preconceived notions of disability and otherness.

I analyse this exhibition by constructing a curatorial language through which the subsequent case studies are developed. The implications of the Mexico City pilot study are followed up in the London main case study to identify the intentions, patterns, reflections, and processes of my curatorial practice. Finally, in Section 4.3, I review the object-based approach in the framing of curatorial practice and discuss the role and function of objects in the translation of narratives to alter perceptions through experience.

3.3.2 London Main Case Study

The Mexico City pilot study informs four emerging themes: (a) staring and looking, (b) stigma and disability, (c) concealing and revealing, and (d) fashion, performance, and performativity. These provide the contextual framing for the London main case study and introduce the inclusion of prosthetics in fashion through the collection of objects and narratives. These themes are explored through the main study to examine and analyse object-based approaches around the curator's curatorial practice. I describe and analyse the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* in Section 5.3, building on the pilot study and providing a clear overview of my challenge to and reinterpretation of the stigma of disability through empathy and the fashion lens.

3.3.3 Development of the Curatorial Framework

This thesis presents my practice as content, which is clarified through descriptions and interpretations of the Mexico City pilot study and the London main case study. Self-reflections are emphasised as a discursive form of documentation and are chronologically presented and analysed. Considering the challenges of examining lived experiences, this study involves the study of objects and the dimensions of experience.

Mapping: Self-Reflective Analysis

As summarised in Section 3.2, the descriptive analysis relies on interpretation to translate the intangible to tangible, transform the implicit to explicit and make the invisible visible. This required that I, as the researcher, shift the

analysis of experience across a conceptual generalisation to form the hermeneutic interpretation. In documenting the experience of the Mexico City pilot study through self-reflection, I conceptualise the underlying framework and present an understanding through an emerging curatorial process, as seen in the London main case study.

Using a mapping process, I organised the related topics further and built a framework to structure the thesis, presenting an inductive research design. From the emerging themes identified in Section 5.2, I included a process of mapping as a visual thinking tool and "a generative process of creating structures through interpretations and sense-making" (Chon, 2020 p. 142). The steps of the mapping methodology included a list of related keywords and metaphors to draw linkages, descriptions, and reflections to formulate critical concepts and identify broader themes to set the boundaries outlining the context of experience. All insights were linked to the exhibition concepts presented in Section 5.2, where I highlighted all related categories and themes to inform the development of the curatorial framework.

Relational Interpretation

I further interpreted and elaborated the mapping through substantive cases, thematic categories, and topics of discussion. Section 5.4.1 presents the resulting process of organising the case studies into the development of the curatorial framework:

1. Reflections involve the object, the linking of objects to the subject using narratives, and my own experience of responding to the exhibition concepts.
2. I developed the initial structure to produce the underlying structure of the curatorial framework and clarify the relationship between object, subject, and dimensions of experience.
3. I used my own experience to interpret the role and function of objects within exhibition spaces, leading towards the presentation of a generalised methodology for fashion curation.

The mapping process led to the selection of three curatorial tools, which I define and further relate to notions of perception and experience in Section 5.4.2. Through this interpretative method, the curator is positioned as a key source of knowledge for experience to be explored in the development of a generalised curatorial framework. In this manner, my involvement in the case studies allows the examined experience to understand and articulate the object-based approach.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the methodological position of relying on descriptive analysis and interpretation to frame and present the research design. The primary content is drawn from the Mexico City pilot study and London main case study, to map my experience through a reflective journey as the main form of inquiry. By identifying patterns and approaches, the formation of the reflective process shapes the main output of this study through the curatorial framework.

The relevance of the thesis structure and investigation is supported by the arguments made throughout this chapter in favour of the curator's experience as a critical knowledge source of evidence-based practice, justifying a qualitative research methodology through reflections on case studies. Accordingly, this chapter presented the research design explored in Chapters 4 and 5 through the Mexico City pilot study and London main case study.

Chapter 4: Curatorial Approaches and Pilot Study: *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo*

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of existing fashion theories and disability studies addressing prosthetics as fashionable objects or as part of an individual's identity. My analysis focused on existing models of disability and scholars' work that addresses prosthetics in the fashion realm and challenges notions of normalcy (Vainshtein, 2012; Hall & Orzada, 2013; Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019). Following a review of key theories and concepts, the chapter discussed the varying theoretical perspectives on object-based interpretations of garments, collections, and the work of curators today that provided the theoretical framework underpinning the exhibition space (Newton, 1953; Prown, 1982; Ribeiro, 1998; Taylor, 2002; de la Haye et al., 2005; Clark, 2005; Mida & Kim, 2015). Expanding on this framework, I analysed three exhibitions on disability as examples of curatorial practices to interpret exhibitions in this field, providing a general review of existing curatorial approaches and a clear context.

Building on the literature review in Chapter 2, this chapter addresses how the display of objects in the exhibition space can create new visual languages capable of breaking down barriers between the notions of visibility and invisibility traditionally associated with disabled bodies (Vainshtein, 2012, p. 140). I discuss the role of the fashion exhibitions in Section 4.2 to set the premise for how the display of objects can destigmatise disability and create new narratives around fashion and impairment. Finally, Section 4.4 introduces exhibition concepts relating to the themes of staring and looking at stigma and disability, concealing and revealing, and fashion and performance in the exhibition space. I present these concepts as opposing tensions that allow the curator to create a visual vocabulary challenging pre-existing perceptions of disability, otherness, and empathy.

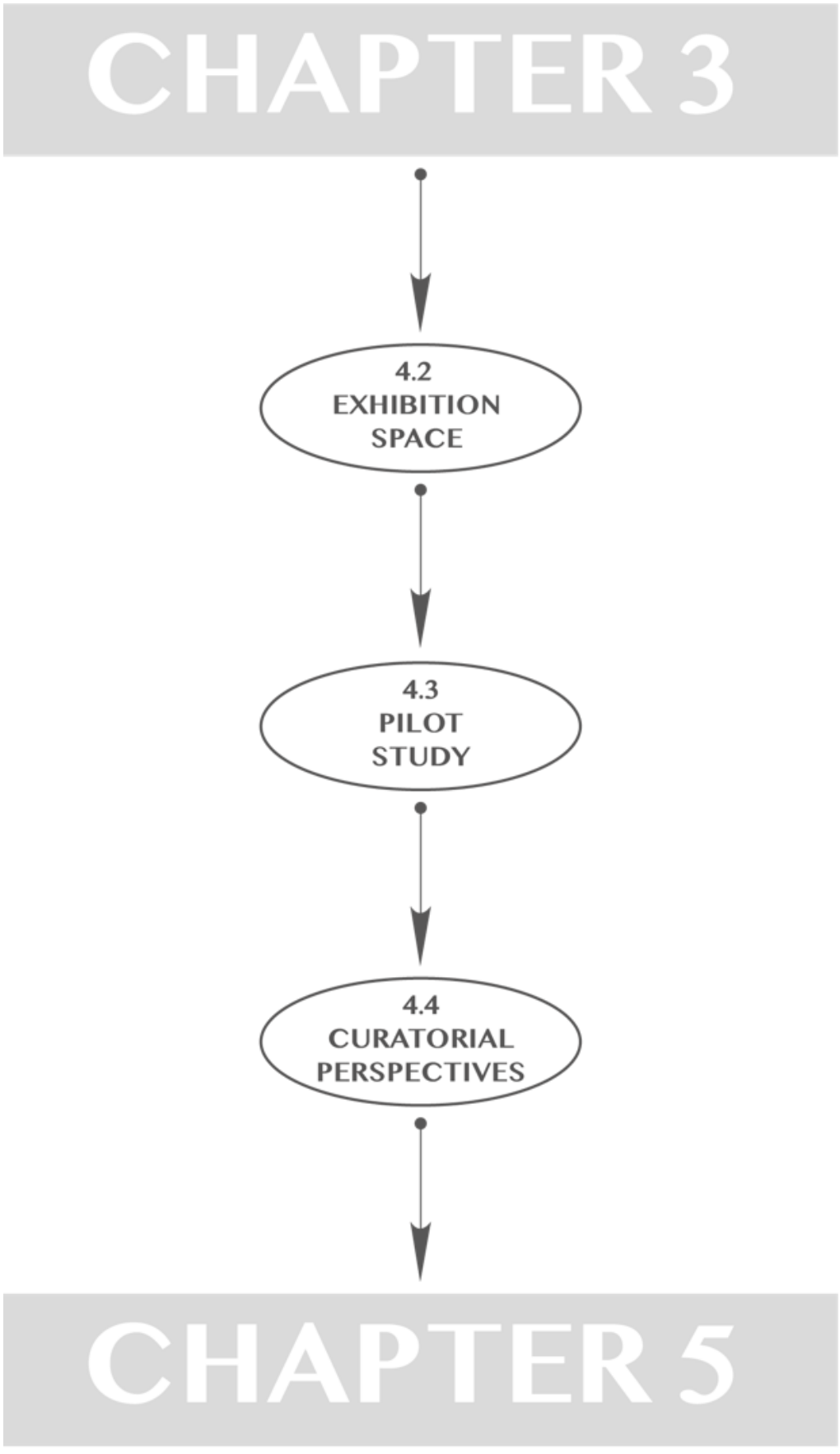

Figure 16 Framework of Chapter 3: Emerging Themes

4.2 Fashion Exhibitions: Through the Looking Glass

Valerie Steele (2008) in her essay "Museum Quality, The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition", asks, "What current fashion is widely popular, enduring, international and pulls in big bucks?" (p. 7). According to journalist Suzy Menkes (2000), the answer is the "Museum Show".

Different scholars such as Anderson (2000), Taylor (2002), de la Haye (2003), Steele (2008), and Palmer (2008) have discussed the rise of fashion exhibitions. Fashion continues to attract new audiences to unimaginable spaces spanning fine arts museums, decorative arts museums, design museums, and even naval and maritime museum spaces. Runway shows, retail spaces, and the museum space have become increasingly important for communicating fashion.

"The collection and exchange of objects play a vital role in our definition of cultural value", as Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska (2001) argue, and "there is a powerful web of links between the department store and the museum, which will continue to reflect—and change—the status of the things we make" (p. 1). The relationship between the museum and the retail space has always been intertwined, as large-scale exhibitions were staged to promote the culture, industry, and sense of identity. However, according to Clark et al. (2014, p. 11), "contemporary fashion was often exhibited in the context of 'industry'" to further blur the boundary between retail and museum spaces. This challenges the degree to which museum visitors can engage with fashion exhibitions, as Palmer (2008) observes:

> But is the museum visitor able to differentiate between the museum and the commercial space experience, especially when it comes to living designers and does it matter? The tactile experience we have as wearers is one of the main means to understand clothes, and touch is also a fundamental aspect of the sensual pleasure of shopping (p. 32).

Unlike other forms of design knowledge, fashion knowledge depends on "tactile experience to fulfil functional and ornamental purposes" (Chon, 2013, p. 1). The "personal knowledge of wearing clothing makes museum visitors

connoisseurs even before entering a dress exhibition", inviting visitors to "be involved with the objects exhibited through the sight and the remembered experience of the pleasure of touching and wearing what is on view" (Palmer, 2008, p. 32). Through the glass, a space for desire and imagination is created between the viewer and the garments. For the visitors, touching and wearing the garments is out of the question, for conservation purposes. Still, it is very much within the scope of the imagination of many visitors to feel how it would be to wear the garments behind those vitrines.

Design historians Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark (2017) assert that "well before the cinema became a widely popular pastime, the department store was educating people across the social spectrum to look and desire through glass, as window-shopping became a huge leisure pastime" (p. 73). The 19th-century department store was a product of this landscape where "in visualising the merchandise inside, their windows hastened purchases and kept the wheels of consumerism turning" (Romano, 2019, para. 5).

Our modes of perception may have expanded due to the numerous advancements in image-making technologies. However, the Victorian-era window sharpened onlookers' gazes, and these earlier practices continue to mediate our collective relationships with city space. In her opinion piece, *Whose Streets: The Fashion Window Now, A Contested Surface*, Romano (2019) articulates the role of window displays to "crystallise, animate and narrate" (para. 7) the different interpretations of fashion. While training us to view fashion in how it relates to lifestyle, window displays provide information on sartorial items and instruct us how to use them. According to Romano (2019), we are taught to "fantasise and aspire to certain ideals" (para. 7). The presence of window displays reinforces the idea that "fashion is life and spectacle" (para. 7). As in the past, they trained how we view fashion and dressed bodies in the forms of mannequins. Romano further asserts, "we project our likenesses onto the spectacle via glass panes, merging our

subjectivities with the images projected out to the street or within the Museum space" (para. 7).

These visual ideas are also explored by Walter Benjamin's writings and *The Arcades Project* (1999), an unfinished book celebrating the mid-19th century appeal and spread of mercantile galleries, or arcades, in Paris. Benjamin considers that the 19th century was the origin of the modernity that would shape contemporary historicism and a materialist interpretation of society:

> These arcades, a new invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble panelled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops so that the passage is a city, world in miniature. (Benjamin, 1999, p. 31)

Benjamin focuses on these structures as the organising metaphor for his study because they are a historically specific artefact of the period in question as well as a particular visual characteristic of 19th-century commodity capitalism, as Wilson (1985/2003) states.

On the other hand, Garland-Thomson (2009), Professor of English at Emory University with a focus on disability studies and feminist theory, says that the visual, the sense of looking, has been fuel for the imagination for the longest time. Using the "dynamics of looking" has been the basis of making sense and constructing a meaningful narrative, and "what interests us most, however, is novelty" (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 18). The physician Gregory Berns (2005) explains that novelty is "the one thing we all want" (p. 14). "You may not always like novelty", Berns says, "but your brain does" (p. XIII). The endless search for novelty, for the dopamine hit of the new, generates a pleasure that is not of the object itself but born purely of the thrill that its discovery brings.

I explored some of these concepts and ideas in the first Kahlo exhibition, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* (presented in Section 4.3 as the pilot study), and later on in the London main case study *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. Glass was used not only for conservation purposes,

but also to create a sense of wonder through the looking glass, to create novelty through the unexpected. This exhibition not only invited viewers to look casually; it also sought to capture viewers' attention and imagination by exposing them to Kahlo's personal belongings and prosthetics exhibited in a new light. Drawing from medical theory and fashion theory, and through the display of elements, I created new visual languages of visibility and invisibility usually associated with the disabled body.

4.3 Mexico City Pilot Study

Kahlo's identities are embodied through her art, dress, and photography. These relationships are highlighted through the objects in the exhibition context, as Kahlo constructed and performed her identity through art and dress. Her performance of self is reflected not only through the objects but also in the design of the exhibition; the space becomes the stage where Kahlo's identity is revealed through her collection of personal items. In *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo,*[3] shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2012, I adopted two primary thematic directions. The first was Kahlo's construction of style as a consequence of her disability and ethnic roots as a personal manifesto. The second showed how these elements had been translated into the contemporary language of fashion. (More information is available in the Portfolio, pp. 74-79)

In 1959, Goffman's analysis of clothing and appearance ushered in the concept of the "performance" of self; he introduced the notion of self-presentation as a dramaturgical metaphor that guided his analysis of the theatre as a framework for meaningful human action. To bring Kahlo's "performance" of self into the space, it is essential to first define "performance" further. Thornborrow and Coates (2005) use this term in two distinct ways: The first relates to the

[3] The exhibition *Frida Kahlo: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* was developed as part of the researcher's MA thesis in 2012. It is presented here as a pilot study to set the premise for exploring disability and prosthetics through fashion exhibitions, leading to the identification of exhibition concepts that will be used to frame, analyse, and evaluate the main case study in Chapter 5.

"performance of identity and the social self" (p. 9), and the second refers to the "telling of a story as performance" (p. 10) where this story can be a film, a dance, an exhibition, or a written form.

This pilot study considers Kahlo's performance and identity as a form of social self through the narratives of the objects and the telling of a story as performance through the exhibition space—the venue where the collection of objects is displayed. In this material culture study, I applied Prown's (1982) object analysis process of description, deduction, and speculation, complemented by the new approach proposed by Mida and Kim (2015) of "observation (capturing the information from the dress artefact), reflection (considering embodied experience, contextual material and interpretation linking the observations and reflections to theory)" (p. 27).

4.3.1 Overview of the Mexico City Pilot Study

Born in 1907, Kahlo lived her formative years against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), which shaped her enduring commitment to communism. Indeed, she later claimed to have been born the same year the revolution began. At the age of 21, she met, fell in love with, and married Mexican muralist Rivera. Their passionate and tempestuous relationship survived infidelities, the pressures of Rivera's career, a divorce and remarriage, and Kahlo's fragile health. She contracted polio at the age of six and suffered a near-fatal accident at age 18, on September 17, 1925. During her long and painful convalescence after the accident, the bedridden teenager began to paint, using a wooden folding easel and a mirror set into the canopy of her four-poster bed (Tibol, 2002, pp. 40-41; Herrera, 2002, p.63). All her life, she experienced medical complications, physical limitations, and intense pain. Through her self-portraits and adoption of indigenous Mexican dress, Kahlo explored her life, her political views, her health struggles, her accident, her turbulent marriage, her gender, and her inability to have children.

From her death in 1954 until the early 1980s, Kahlo was known mainly as Rivera's wife, and outside Mexico, her art was largely overshadowed by this fact. During her lifetime she had only two solo exhibitions: one in New York (1938) and one in Mexico (1953). It was not until 2 decades after Kahlo's death that the first publications about her life would be produced—Teresa del Conde's *Vida de Frida Kahlo* (1976) and Raquel Tibol's *Frida Kahlo: Crónica, testimonios y aproximaciones*—but it was following the international publication of Hayden Herrera's book *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* in 1983 that the artist shot to prominence.

Also fuelling Kahlo's rise to fame were the feminists in the second half of the twentieth century who considered her a role model in sexual politics and post-colonial debates (Baddeley, 1991; Ankori, 2005). Later, her international profile was spotlighted by Julie Taymor's 2002 film *Frida* (featuring Salma Hayek) and Gannit Ankori's book *Imaging Her Selves* (2002), which analysed Kahlo's paintings as deliberate examinations of her constructed identities (Ankori, 2002). A major 2005 retrospective at the Tate Modern in London followed, alongside numerous worldwide exhibitions of her work. Today, a simple Google search turns up more than 28 million entries about Kahlo. The unlocking of the archive at La Casa Azul in 2004 has revealed more about Kahlo's construction of identity through disability, ethnicity, her political outlook and gender identity, as well as how she used complementary modes of creativity—painting, photography, and her meticulously composed fashion— to express herself.

As a teenager, Kahlo used clothing to express her individuality and hide her damaged leg. As mentioned above, she embraced traditional Mexican dress in her twenties and wore it throughout her life. Although she created a singular hybrid style, mixing elements from diverse regions and periods (garments from Guatemala, China, Europe, and the United States, for example), she especially identified with indigenous women from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. Prominent Mexican artists and

scholars, Kahlo and Rivera among them, were attracted to the isthmus, known for its matriarchal society and rich native culture that resisted European domination. Although Kahlo never visited the isthmus, she adopted the clothing of the region, shaping her iconic self-image as the Tehuana.

The different iterations of this exhibition are based on the remarkable discovery of Kahlo's clothing and personal possessions in 2004 in the Casa Azul, her lifelong home. Hidden away for 50 years after her death in 1954, this is the first time these objects were shown in Mexico and outside Mexico. Her wardrobe is a portrayal of how she fashioned herself and constructed her image and identity, as informed by her ethnicity, disability, political outlook, and gender identity.

The pilot study looked at the collection of prosthetics and personal belongings of Kahlo, located at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2004. I curated this exhibition and Judith Clark designed it. This was the first exhibition to address Kahlo's disability and ethnicity as key elements informing her identity through fashion and dress. The exhibition demonstrated how Kahlo constructed her image and was informed by her cultural heritage, her experience of disability, and her political outlook. As a result, her unique approach to fashioning became a source and a subject of her art.

This pilot study is introduced to extract the language of the objects that constitute style, with its visual tropes and metaphors, as proposed by Prown (1995), to explain Kahlo's layers of meaning. The "visual cues" identified from Kahlo's archive of personal belongings help inform Kahlo's visual repertoire and show how dress informs art and how art informs dress. In addition, the objects create different relationships and statements about her self-fashioning, informed by her experience of disability and ethnicity, and her political beliefs.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Newton (1953) was the first dress historian to use painting as a point of study in the history of dress. Ribeiro (1998) highlights

that Newton (1953) was the first person to establish as fact that "artists paint the fashions of their time and that all their work—even historical, allegorical, religious, and mythological scenes—is informed by a knowledge of dress whether consciously or unconsciously applied" (Newton, 1953, as cited in Ribeiro, 1998, p. 316). Even when looking at surviving garments, Ribeiro (1998) continues, "we can rely on knowing when it was worn and with what, internal evidence tells us about the textiles and sewing techniques … but nothing about the person who wore it, and the context in which it was worn" (p. 316). In the case of Kahlo, there is enough photographic and visual documentation through her paintings to provide the curator with a wealth of information about the wearer's style and preferred looks.

4.3.2 The Role and Function of Space

Judith Clark (2015) explains how "space is fundamental" in a conversation with Ben Whyman in *Exhibition Catalogue: The Exhibition Judith Clark Studio Fashion Project:*

> Evoking space within a gallery context within one room is like an essay form, one sheet of paper, or a sentence. You have an opportunity to make a statement that the visitor will see the moment that they walk into the room. Space and how it is divided up, or how objects are given space, or how space is taken away, or how space is reimagined as a threat to an object, or how space is cordoned off, so to speak, because of an imagined barrier between visitor and object — these are all things that haunt curating, dress, and the very delicate textiles from which these objects are created. Conservation always comes into the picture somewhere as well. Space is a very loaded term within our job, as you know (Clark, 2015).

Furthermore, Valerie Steele (2018) says that the organisation (complex inter-relationship) of the objects is vital: This refers to the way they are arranged to speak to each other so that people looking at the objects can understand the narratives and what the exhibition is all about. For Valerie Steele (2018), "the choice of objects and the arrangement of the objects is the way you tell a story. Is not a book on the wall. You are conveying the message in another way" (p. 21).

The first exhibition of Kahlo's wardrobe, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* was held at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico City in 2012. The exhibition was divided into two main themes: Kahlo's construction of identity informed by her disability and ethnicity as a personal manifesto; and Kahlo in the avant-garde as portrayed by different contemporary designers.

After visitors saw the Blue House—where Kahlo was born, lived, and died—they crossed the garden to see Kahlo's wardrobe exhibition in the temporary exhibition space called The Annex. The Annex, comprising five small rooms, is where Kahlo's personal belongings were exhibited for the first time.

Judith Clark and I collaborated in this first exhibition together. I was Clark's understudy at the MA Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion, and Clark was very familiar with the curatorial narrative of my exhibition. With genuine admiration and respect for her work, I invited Clark to collaborate in this project.

Unfortunately, due to limited space, Clark had to reduce my first selection of objects by half, and the second selection was further reduced again by half. Hence, as curator, I had to be more precise in the choice of objects so that Clark could design.

Figure 17 The Blue House, Frida Kahlo Museum. Mexico City, 2012.

To evoke a different atmosphere in each one of the galleries, I wanted to create an exhibition layout resembling individual theatre sets that would tell Kahlo's story through the performance of her belongings within the space. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, "the term 'Theatrum' ('theatre,' 'Teatro') was used widely beyond the immediate discipline of theatre in the context of encyclopaedic collections and exhibitions in the form of 'art chambers' or enterable 'cabinet of curiosities'" (Brejzek & Wallen, 2017, pp. 49–50).

My thesis proposed that there was close relationship between Kahlo's disabled and fragmented body and the geometry of her Tehuana traditional dress.[4] Kahlo deliberately used these objects as her primary form of self-decoration when she was a wheelchair user, to direct attention to her upper body, which she used as a site of experimentation and composition. To communicate this idea visually, Clark proposed using a cabinet of curiosities in the third gallery to "dissect" Kahlo's body through her wardrobe into her chain stitch blouses, highly decorative necklaces, earrings, rings, and floral headpieces. This selection of Kahlo's possessions was displayed to emphasise "her adornment" as a parallel to the fragmentation of her body.

[4] The Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a region in the state of Oaxaca in the southeast of Mexico, is inhabited predominantly by indigenous Zapotec peoples. It is a matriarchal society in which women dominate and dress in Tehuana attire comprising floor-length skirts, richly embroidered blouses and long woven shawls, their hair dressed elaborately with ribbons and flowers. Kahlo popularised the Tehuana look.

Figure 18 Installation shot at *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo*. Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico, 2012. Photograph by Miguel Tovar, 2012.

Figure 19 Cabinet of Curiosities: Fragmentation, Geometry, and Composition. Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico, 2012.

The Cabinet of Curiosities was paired with Kahlo's photographs: These are cut-outs showing people from the torso up, which had been removed from larger photos, as well as the larger photos per se with the gaps. As Clark (2013) mentioned, the pictures "kept drawing attention to her editing and repetition—it is impossible to know which fragment should take on greater importance, her face or the square void".

Figure 20 Frida Kahlo's cut-out photographs. *Left*: Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Dr Layman and Miss Wolf (Rivera's assistant), ca 1940. *Centre*: Group of children, before 1954. *Right*: Frida Kahlo's head and torso, 1931. Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust.

The Cabinet of Curiosities reinforced the recurrent patterns of geometrical division throughout the exhibition design. The cabinet shelves divided Kahlo's belongings into sections, this dissection serving as a visual metaphor for Kahlo's fragmented body. Furthermore, the dissection/fragmentation was echoed by the five exhibition rooms, each of which formed an individual, independent mini "universe" of Kahlo's identity, with its own particular scene and unique atmosphere. Despite each room differing from the others, they remained interrelated, thus mirroring Kahlo's multifaceted identity. These five chambers of wonders gave visitors a sense of unlocking hidden treasures as they discovered each room and then each artefact.

As previously noted, glass panels in museum vitrines and retail windows create a space for imagination and desire between the viewer and the objects (Palmer, 2008; Romano, 2019). The Cabinet of Curiosities restricted viewers from experiencing the objects through touch, thereby compelling them to imagine reliving Kahlo's story, while also creating a sense of curiosity, wonder, and desire through the looking glass. The cabinet of curiosities will be one of the tools used in the curatorial framework in Chapter 5.

4.3.3 Identifying Attributes and Symbols

In her text *Props and Other Attributes: Fashion and Exhibition-Making,* Clark (2018) quotes Guy de Tervarent's (1958) definition of an attribute: "By attribute, one means an accessory that characterises and helps in the identification of the

central figure: Hercules' club, Jupiter's eagle, Cupid's arrow" (de Tervarent, 1958, p. XX, as cited in Clark, 2018, p. 96). To distinguish between an attribute and a symbol, Guy de Tervarent (1958) elaborates on the way that symbols are the representation of one entity by another: "loyalty by a dog, justice by a woman holding scales" (de Tervarent, p. XX as cited in Clark, 2018, p. 96). He then notes that an allegory finds its articulation in a group of figures. In Kahlo's case, the attribute would be her famous monobrow and the symbol would be the butterfly, signifying freedom, health, and transformation. An example of an allegory within Kahlo's paintings would be the representations of her animals as surrogate children.

During our collaboration in 2012,[5] Clark taught me how to build different visual associations and narratives between the design and historical aspects of the archive and the objects.

The following photos show examples of the relationships between the objects and the design elements using attributes and symbols, as taken from Kahlo's visual repertoire.

[5] The first iteration of Kahlo's wardrobe *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* in 2012 was exhibited at the Blue House, known today as the Frida Kahlo Museum. This exhibition originated from the conversation between Circe Henestrosa and Judith Clark over 3 years. Clark's use of attributes and props helped Henestrosa understand how props can be used as visual "aids" or "add ons" to the design of the exhibition, which support and expand the visual narratives of the objects in the exhibition context.

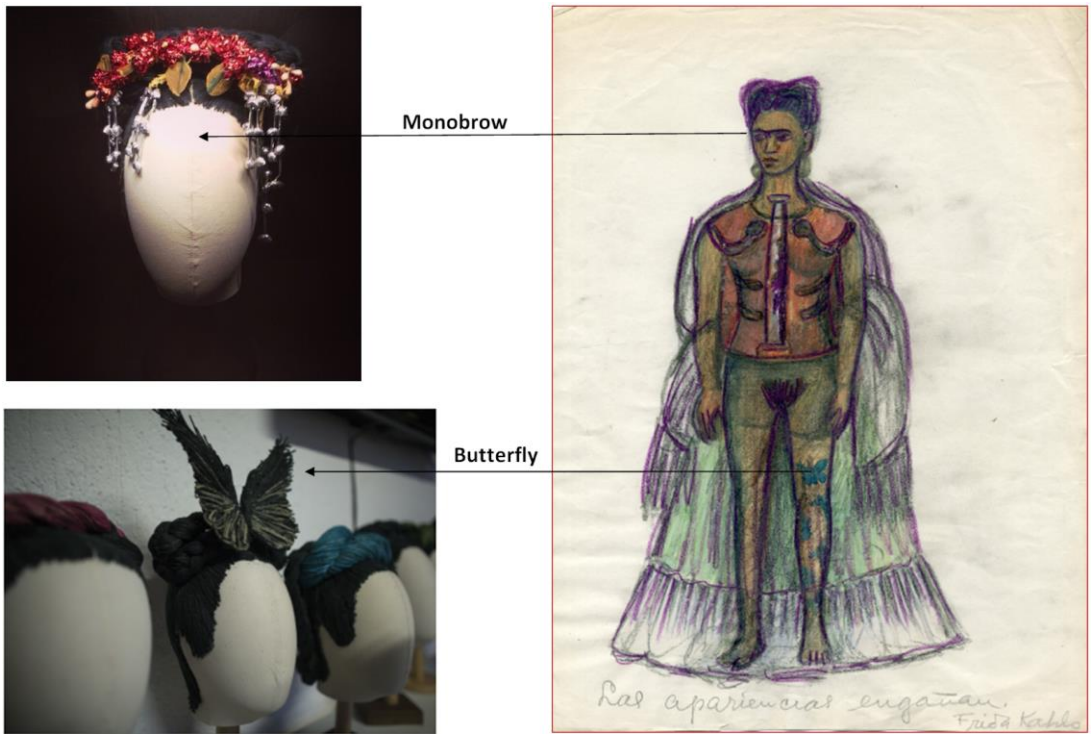

Figure 21 Installation shots at *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo.* Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico, 2012.

As seen in Figure 21, the butterfly on the mannequin head represents the significance of the butterfly to Kahlo as a symbol of freedom and health. In addition, each mannequin head does not feature a monobrow, but only a stitch down the centre of the face. Viewers associate this trait so strongly with Kahlo that they would naturally imagine a monobrow in place on the plain mannequin head. The designer proposed that the curator should intentionally not use Kahlo's iconic monobrow as an attribute, so as to draw attention to other aspects of Kahlo's identity being explored in the exhibition.

In the disability section, we decided to show the objects against a backdrop of a white tiled wall, to remind viewers of the bathroom where these objects were discovered at the Blue House in 2004, as well as of the time Kahlo spent in hospital. Kahlo had around 22 surgical interventions throughout her life, so much of her time was spent as a patient instead of in pursuit of her aspiration to become a doctor.

Figure 22 Frida Kahlo's bathroom, adjacent to her room in the Blue House, Mexico. Photograph by Graciela Iturbide, 2008.

Figure 23 Installation shot of Kahlo's orthopaedic devices at *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida K*ahlo. Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico, 2012. Photograph by Miguel Tovar, 2012.

Figure 24 Installation shot of Kahlo's orthopaedic devices at *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo.* Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico, 2012. Photograph by Miguel Tovar, 2012.

4.4 Curatorial Perspectives

As the pilot study marked the curator's first time displaying Kahlo's wardrobe and objects, a powerful visual narrative was needed.[6] This exhibition was distinct from previous exhibitions of Kahlo's paintings because it served as a dialogue on her identity construction through her self-fashioning and dress. In Kahlo's paintings and photographs, I would study how Kahlo styled herself—her gestures, her hairstyle, her different looks—as an insight into her worldview. The various objects spoke to each other, informing her identity construction: Dress informed painting, painting informed dress, orthopaedic device informed photography, photography informed styling, and so on.

With a body constantly dependent on medical attention, Kahlo's relationship with the corset was one of support and necessity. Instead of allowing the corset

[6] My interest in theatre as a discipline and my previous experience of working with diverse theatre projects at the British Council and the Royal Court Theatre influenced my curatorial practice. I wanted to create small rooms, like small theatre sets, where each topic of the exhibition had a powerful visual narrative and where the experience of the viewer would change from room to room.

to define her as an invalid, Kahlo decorated and embellished her corsets, making them appear worn deliberately. She used them as a second skin, making them an essential part of the composition of her looks. She de-medicalised them by transforming them into pieces and items of incredible beauty and, at times, into fashionable accessories.

In Figure 25, a photo taken by Florence Arquin in 1941, Kahlo displays her corset, which she has decorated and adorned with a hammer, sickle, and foetus, portraying her political beliefs and experience of trauma through her miscarriages. The symbols were an intentional act of rebellion, as she layered her body with meanings to represent the body-as-canvas.

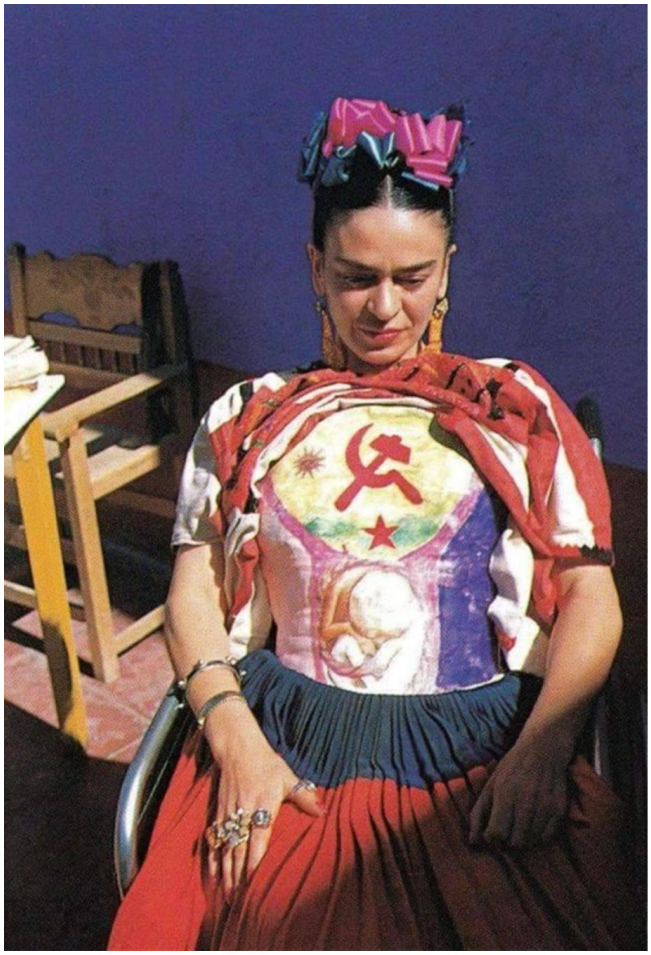

Figure 25 Frida Kahlo lifts her huipil to expose her plaster corset with hammer, sickle, and foetus. Photograph by Florence Arquin, 1941.

These pieces became an extension of her body. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vainshtein (2012) joins Hall and Orzada (2013) in celebrating new technologies designed to meet aesthetic and functional needs for the amputated body. Similarly, Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds (2019) claim that a new form emerges with "expressive and aesthetic" (p. 200) artificial limbs. Bodies and prostheses come together to produce a new body form that combines the realm of the technological with the fashionable.

As Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds (2019) note, Viktoria Modesta and Aimee Mullins describe their prosthetic body parts as fashion accessories or as an assemblage of their bodies with fashion (p. 8). The amputated body, as previously mentioned, is not medically resolved or augmented; it is symbiotic, that is to say, "body does not wear fashion—it becomes fashion, at least some of its parts do" (Burton & Melkumova-Reynolds, 2019, p. 200). This symbiotic relationship described by Burton and Melkumova-Reynolds was adopted by Kahlo almost 70 years ago; her corsets and her prosthetic leg were assimilated as her bodily identity, where body and prosthetic become one.

Throughout her life, Kahlo's right leg was affected by polio and her accident—and it had to be amputated. At first, Kahlo refused to wear her prosthetic leg. When she finally decided to use it, it took her 3 months to learn how to walk with it. A series of drawings from her diary illustrate her trauma and resignation during a period of her life when she felt restless and troubled.

Many of Kahlo's diary entries, letters to her doctors, her medical history, photographs, surviving medical apparatuses, and medicines provided a wealth of information to help us understand how she incorporated her disabilities as a part of her daily life, expressed creatively through her art and dress. In both the Mexico and London exhibitions, medical professionals were instrumental in helping us decipher and fill in gaps in information about her medical conditions: her orthopaedic corsets, medicines and dates. In Mexico, we sought the advice of a general practitioner and in London, we consulted the expertise of colleagues at the Wellcome Trust.

Figure 26 *Left*: Kahlo's diary drawing: "Feet, what do I need them for if I have wings to fly, 1953". *Centre*: Kahlo's prosthetic leg. *Right*: Kahlo's diary drawing, 1953. Kahlo expressed the relationship between composition, fragmentation, and geometry through her body, her styling, and her art. From the day Kahlo had polio to the day she died, she had been subjected to more than 22 surgical operations that left her body in a state of disintegration. This physical fragmentation resulted in a unique combination of identity and geometry, a material expression of Kahlo's self and its restrictive layers, as shown in the two diary drawings and photograph of the prosthetic leg above.

Figure 27 *Left and right:* Frida Kahlo seated in a wheelchair, 1946.

On the ethnicity front, various scholars suggest that Kahlo adopted the Tehuana dress to please her husband (Del Conde, 2007; Turok, 2007), who admired the powerful Zapotec women of the Tehuantepec Isthmus. But I would argue that her use of a hybrid dress was a calculated stylization. A photograph (Figure 28) found among the objects discovered in the bathroom in Kahlo's house shows Kahlo's mother, Matilde Calderón, dressed in the traditional Tehuana dress and sitting with Kahlo's maternal family. As this photograph was captured years before Kahlo met Rivera, this legacy predated her meeting him. This photo reveals where Kahlo's decision originated to embrace her ethnic outfit of the intricate hand-embroidered clothing and hairstyle with braids and flowers.

Kahlo's adoption of the Tehuana style was an entirely personal choice. On the one hand, it was a search for self-affirmation, possibly rooted in her mother's heritage. On the other, it represented an instinctive ability to position herself in the art world at a time when female artists were fighting for recognition based on the merit of their work—in Kahlo's case, this meant distinguishing herself as autonomous and distinct from her famous husband. Kahlo used traditional dress to strengthen her identity, while simultaneously reaffirming her political beliefs. The adoption of this dress was derived from the complex amalgam of her communist ideology, her *mexicanidad* and her response to her disabilities.

The Tehuana dress is an absolute representation of this convergence: the geometric focus on the heavily adorned upper body, the short square chain stitch blouses, and the gender-political statements implied by the dress. The geometric short square construction of the huipil helped make Kahlo look taller.

The heavily adorned jewellery and headpieces were concentrated from the torso up, leading viewers to direct their attention to the upper part of her body and distracting their gaze from her wounded legs. Kahlo was disabled at different points in her life and, at times, was a wheelchair user. When she was seated, the huipil prevented the fabric from bunching up around her waist, thus

preventing discomfort or drawing attention to itself (Figure 27). Kahlo and the Tehuana come together in a perfect union of identity, composition and fragmentation.

Figure 28 The Calderón González family, inscribed "Mother (Oaxaca) Matilde Calderón age 7", 1890.

4.4.1 Defining the Object-Based Approach

The pilot study followed Prown's (1982) object analysis process of description, deduction, and speculation, complemented by Mida and Kim's (2015) approach of "observation (capturing the information from the dress artefact), reflection (considering embodied experience and contextual material) and interpretation (linking the observations and reflections to theory)" (p. 27).

Table 1 Object-Based Approach

Development of the object-based approach				
Prown (1982)	Mida and Kim (2015)	Clark (2004)	Object-based approach	
Description as observation		Defining the attributes	Catalogue of objects	to capture "what is"
Deduction through reflection		Identifying the symbols	Painting and photography	to inform dress
Speculation into interpretation		Resonance/creating visual associations	Art, dress, and photography	to construct identity

Once the observation stage of Kahlo's objects was captured, the reflection stage involved studying the paintings and photography to inform dress. I observed paintings and photographs of the artists to gain insight into her self-fashioning and styling. During this process, I realised that all the different materials related to each other: Kahlo constructed her identity through art, dress, and photography, integrating her paintings, corsets, costumes, and photographs into the different compositions. In Mexico, I tried in some sense to prioritise dress over art, as this was the first time her wardrobe had ever been exhibited. In London, however, where the portraits were available, I deliberately dispensed with the hierarchical order of the objects, since all the objects were equally important in informing Kahlo's self-fashioning and construction of identity (i.e., her paintings were equally as important as her dress).

Kahlo styled her dress in the same way she composed her self-portraits and posed for the many photographs taken of her. In Mexico, because we only had one painting, the direct relationships between her art and dress were not as evident, as this exhibition was more about fashion.

By contrast, in the London exhibition, I had the opportunity to show many of her paintings and examine her diverse modes of creative production, by placing all these objects side by side, her personal belongings in conversation with her art. For Ankori (personal communication, February, 2018), this innovative approach demonstrated "how Kahlo's different modes of creativity informed her construction of identity".

It is essential to clarify that the objects of this archive are exceptionally intimate and personal, so many of the curatorial decisions followed Kahlo's lead. In line with the ethics of this exhibition, I only selected those objects that Kahlo herself decided to reveal to her audience. For example, if Kahlo painted herself wearing her corset in a painting like *The Broken Column* (1944), then this piece was shown and paired with its original reference. There are some objects in Kahlo's archive such as her false teeth, or medical enemas, that I decided not to show, as these are personal objects, not represented visually in her paintings or her photographs, nor mentioned in her letters. I felt compelled to follow the artist's lead and respect and preserve her sense of dignity. The themes of Kahlo's experience of disability, her heritage, and her political beliefs were woven through the narratives of the objects' groupings and sections.

The exhibition in Mexico is named after the drawing *Appearances Can be Deceiving* (see Figure 29), which was discovered at the Blue House in 2004. This modest drawing represents the genesis and starting point of this pilot study. The drawing reveals her layers of identity, where she presents her naked body, wearing her corset, with her spine represented by a crumbling column. Her withered right leg is noticeably thinner than the left. There are butterflies on the left leg—wings and butterflies symbolise freedom or health for Kahlo. We see the silhouette of Kahlo's Tehuana costume as camouflage, covering her body. Kahlo reiterates the visual message in her own words: "Appearances can be deceiving". Kahlo's layers of identity are presented as a personal manifesto.

Following the object-based approach set out in Table 1, anchoring the objects to Kahlo's paintings and photographs was developed into a curatorial framework. This framework considers how a set of objects was arranged to communicate how Kahlo cultivated her self-image through her wardrobe, which then informed her art, and vice versa.

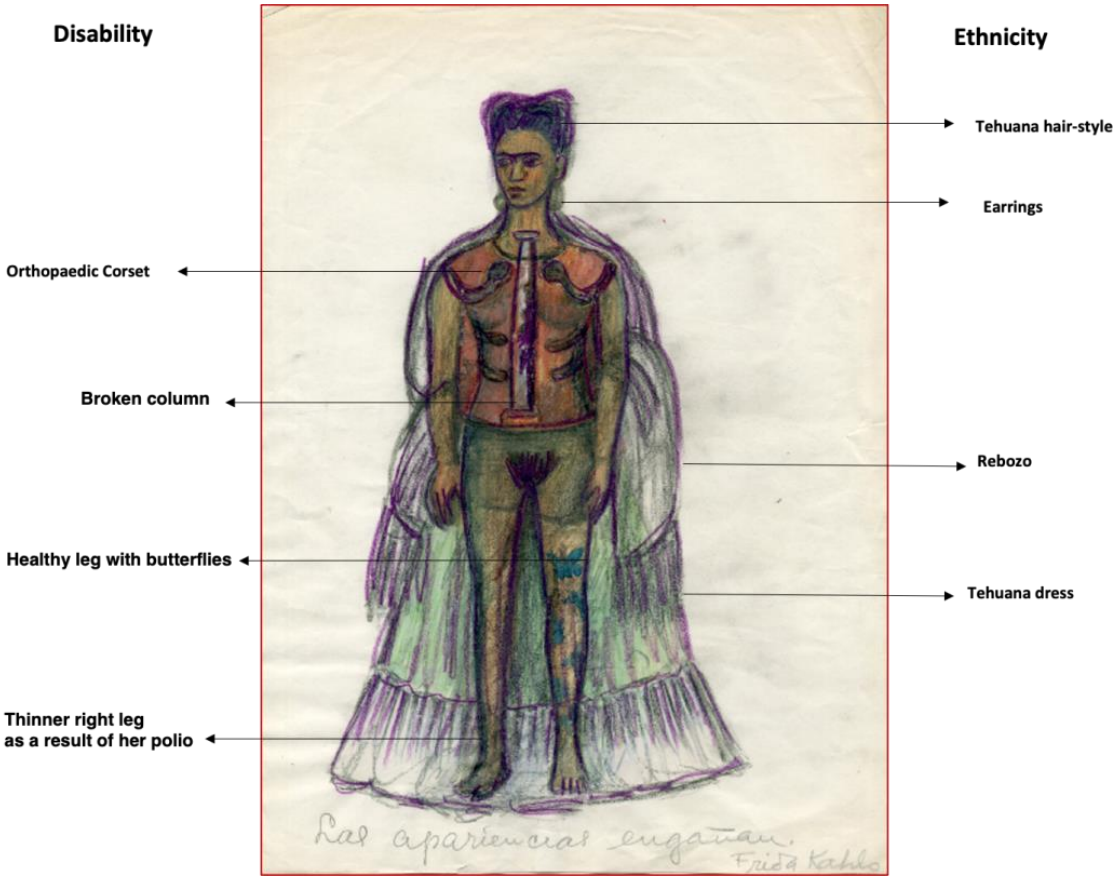

Figure 29 Frida Kahlo's drawing *Appearances Can be Deceiving*, charcoal and pencil on paper. Annotated, ca 1954.

4.4.2 Curatorial Methods

In Kahlo's 1946 painting, *Tree of Hope Stand Firm* (see Figure 30), her layers of disability and ethnicity are shown together, as in her previous drawing, *Appearances Can be Deceiving* (see Figure 29). Following the object-based approaches illustrated in Table 1, the existing archives dictated the grouping of objects: the back brace made of metal and leather, her red Tehuana look, and

the photograph by Nickolas Muray (1946) of her lying in hospital after her spinal fusion operation in New York. The 1946 painting *Tree of Hope Stand Firm* shows two Kahlos; an injured Kahlo lying down on a hospital bed, with blood running from the surgical incisions; and next to her, an upright Kahlo, sitting erect, dressed and adorned in full Tehuana attire, expressing hope in a time of adversity.

The objects are presented in relation to her wardrobe and art; the painting provides evidence of how her experience informed her self-fashioning of disability and ethnicity.

Figure 30 Relational linkages in the grouping of objects.

The relational linkages in Figure 30 illustrate the foundations for building the curatorial perspectives in Table 2, which serve as the guiding principles overarching through which the London main case study is developed, organised, and presented in Chapter 5. This framework is based on that shown in Table 1, which outlines the relationship between the methods of analysis and object-based approaches, to develop the object roles and define the tangible and intangible functions of the objects within the exhibition space. The Mexico City pilot study demonstrates the process of grouping objects, linking

narratives by positioning objects as complements and counterpoints, and forming object representations to communicate the visual language of otherness in fashion exhibitions.

The methods, approaches, and roles set the boundaries of object-based approaches, which extend into the tensions posed by the exhibition context.

Table 2 Curatorial Perspectives

Curatorial Perspectives			
Method of Analysis	Object-Based Approach		Object Roles
Description as **Observation**	Catalogue of objects	to capture "what is"	Grouping of objects
Deduction through **Reflection**	Painting and photography	to inform dress	Objects as complements versus counterpoints
Speculation into **Interpretation**	Art, dress, and photography	to construct identity	Objects to represent otherness (ethnicity, disability, stigma, gender identity, etc.)
Emerging Themes			
Staring and looking Stigma and disability Concealing and revealing Fashion, performance, and performativity			

Using the subject of Kahlo and the dualities that she represents through her art and dress, four emerging themes were identified from the Mexico City pilot study: staring and looking, stigma and disability, concealing and revealing, and fashion, performance and performativity. These emerging themes are introduced, discussed, and further explored in Chapter 5.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I introduce the historical development of exhibition spaces in Section 4.2 and discuss the relationship between the museum and the retail space through the looking glass. This is further expanded using the Mexico City pilot study in Section 4.3 and the introduction of Kahlo as a symbolic representation of disability within the fashion exhibition context. The pilot study presented the development of curatorial language through the display of Kahlo's paintings, her photographs, and the representation of her fragmented body through dress. This provided a space in which visitors could view disability through a medical lens while appreciating the aesthetics of Kahlo's decorated body, from her corsets to her styling of self.

Kahlo's archive of prosthetics, photographs and paintings highlight the tensions and relationships between staring and looking at the disabled body. The curation of these objects in the disability section of the exhibition aims to re-lens or re-configure the way viewers perceive disability. This is supported by the discussion of the object-based approach in Section 4.4.1, leading directly into the development of curatorial perspectives in Section 4.4.2. The implications of the curatorial methods, defining object roles and emerging themes, are further explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Narrativising the Object—*Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, a Case Study

5.1 Introduction

This chapter expands on the curatorial perspectives introduced in Chapter 4 by identifying emerging themes as exhibition concepts. These concepts are further explored and analysed through the London main case study, *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, leading to the formation of a curatorial methodological framework composed of a combination of methodologies and tools designed to create positive associations and create a shift in viewers' perceptions around disability and otherness, fulfilling the main objectives of this study.

In Section 5.2, I expand on the emerging themes identified in Chapter 4 as a discussion of critical tensions forming the concepts within the exhibition space. The curatorial perspectives introduced in Section 4.4.2 are further examined against the exhibition concepts and analysed through the London main case study to inform the development of the framework.

In the final sections of this chapter, I discuss the use of curatorial tools and apply the methodology through the London main case study to evaluate the reliability and validity of this research.

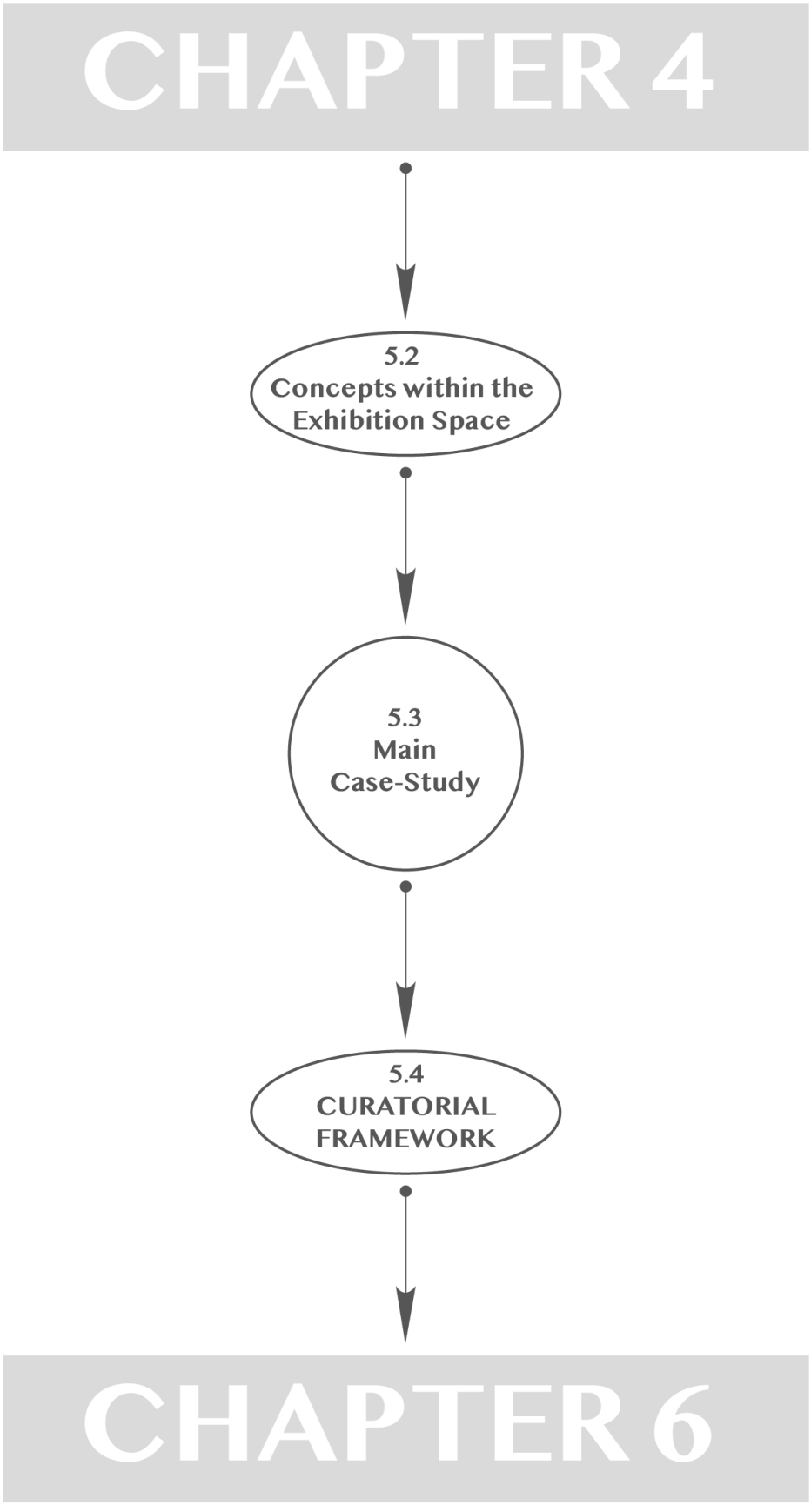

Figure 31 Framework of Chapter 5: Curatorial Framework

5.2 Concepts Within the Exhibition Space

In this section, I explore the Eurocentric fashion perspective by presenting issues of discrimination, inequality, and exploitation brought on by the modernity/coloniality structure (Jansen, 2020). A combination of the scrutiny of the scientific eye towards the human body, sumptuary laws, and later, eugenics, created a stigma around the disabled body and people of colour, different ethnic groups, women, and poor people. Furthermore, the dominating influence of Western (Euro-American) normative body cultures caused the diminution of diverse ways of fashioning the body; this led to the exploitation and abuse of culture, human life, and the Earth. Nonetheless, this should not be considered a normative universal framework in the likeness of dominant Eurocentric fashion discourse.

According to Jansen (2020), the purpose should be to create a space of plurality for fashioning the body. The objective is not to acknowledge other fashion systems as modern but to revalue a diversity that has been rendered invisible, erased, discriminated against, and defeatured by the coloniality of history and contemporary fashion.

In response to the influence of dominant fashion discourses, the curatorial approach represented by the London main case study considers the concepts of staring and looking (5.2.1), stigma and disability (5.2.2), concealing and revealing (5.2.3), fashion and performance (5.2.4) as posing tensions that allow the curator to create a visual vocabulary to challenge pre-existing perceptions of disability and otherness within the exhibition space. Figure 32 presents the relationship between the curatorial perspectives (see Table 2) introduced in Chapter 4 and the emergent themes discussed in Chapter 5 as key concepts guiding the curatorial approach of the London main case study for the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. Each idea is explored in terms of its theoretical foundations and development, leading to a comprehensive review of the different tensions allowing different and multiple perspectives to co-exist, framing the contextual effect of curating a collection of objects.

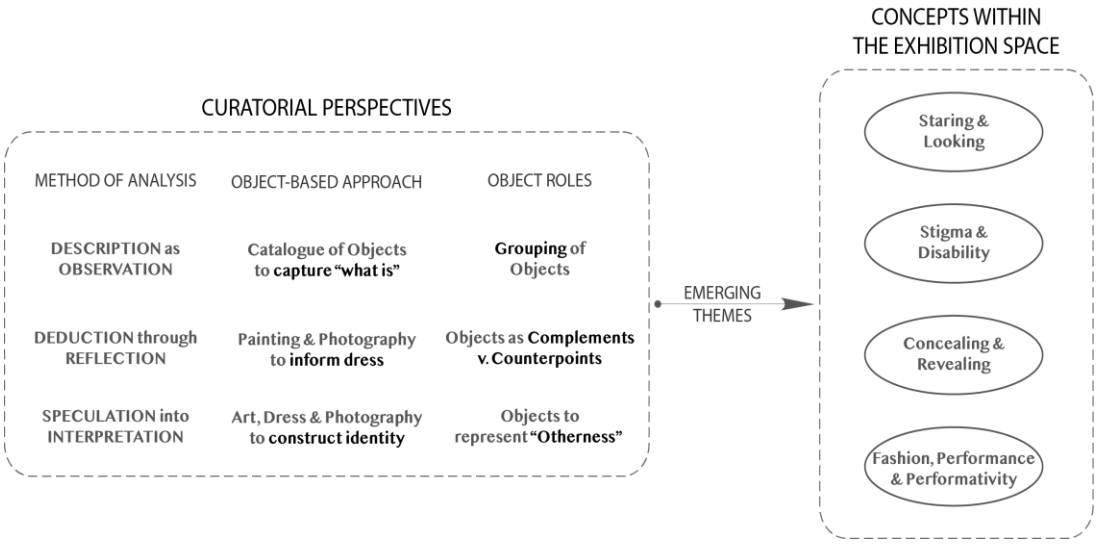

Figure 32 Emerging Themes to Exhibition Space Concepts

5.2.1 Staring and Looking: Fashioning the Disabled Body

> We may gaze at what we desire, but we stare at what astonishes us. (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 13)

In her seminal book *Staring: How We Look* (2009), Garland-Thomson distinguishes between the acts of looking and staring. Within this framework, Garland-Thomson contrasts "looking" with "staring", defining the former as a less intense, more casual, and socially acceptable form of visual engagement. She characterises looking as the typical visual interaction that does not involve the deep scrutiny or sustained focus typical of staring, suggesting that this conventional mode conforms to societal norms and rarely incites discomfort or confrontation. Garland-Thomson articulates how staring, by contrast, is an intense form of looking that we usually try to avoid or consider impolite in social interactions.

However, she argues that staring is a natural human response to what we perceive as different or novelty. "Staring, in its pure and simple essence, is the time required by the brain to make sense of the unexpected" (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 17). Through incisive analysis of the social dynamics underpinning staring, she argues that while it can perpetuate stereotypes and

entrench social hierarchies, it also holds the capacity to cultivate a profound understanding and appreciation of these very differences. The cultural differences between staring and looking are also reflected in the curatorial configuration of objects in Mexico versus that in London (see Section 5.3 for further analysis). These concepts also inform the curatorial methodology in Section 5.5.

In a world of constantly changing expectations, some people may appear to fall short of the ordinary, the normal, and consequently they are often confronted with unwelcome and less than civil attention. Beyond that, some people will always fail to blend in, no matter how detailed or constructed their daily presentations of self might be. "Sick, disabled or painted bodies both experience and invoke what Drew Leder (1990) calls 'disappearance', meaning that their differences from acquiescent bodies make them appear to us and others" (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 17).

Such bodies fascinate; they demand we take a second look, which is reiterated by the grotesque body as a body in process or in a constant state of becoming that is "continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin, 1965/1984, pp. 317–318). The Bakhtinian grotesque presents a phenomenon of reversing and unsettling bodily borders, defining the central attribute of the grotesque image as that which extends beyond and into body depths.

Bakhtin's (1965/1984) and Garland-Thomson's (2009) interest in bodily boundaries take us to the intersection between the history of medicine and the history of fashion and how the body is understood and imagined by these two discourses. "Novelty is fragile and staring volatile because the longer we look, the more accustomed a once surprising sight becomes", notes Garland-Thomson (2009, p. 18). She continues: "Here is the contradiction at the heart of staring; the extraordinary excites but alarms us; the ordinary assures but bores us. We won't surprise, but perhaps, even more, we want to tame that

pleasurable astonishment, to domesticate the strange sight into something so common as to be unnoticeable" (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 19). This presents the tension between staring and looking as a cultural practice of viewing, conceiving, and visualising the grotesque.

Normalising the Disabled Body Through Fashion

While this study looks specifically at how exhibitions can re-configure the way viewers perceive disability and create new visual languages capable of breaking down the barriers between visibility and invisibility traditionally associated with disabled bodies (Vainshtein, 2012, p. 140). This study presents fashion exhibitions as a medium to reinterpret and reassess fashion. In the case of Kahlo's exhibitions that I curated as researcher-as-curator, her wardrobe demonstrated how she constructed her image, informed by her experiences of disability, ethnicity, political outlook, and gender politics. The exhibition also showed how her different creative production modes informed her identity construction.

As Vainshtein (2012) observes, "Fashion is driven by novelty and this is one of the reasons why fashion dream spaces can easily change the system of perception and representation of disabled bodies" (p. 164). Accentuating the role of fashion in this context opens up new windows to its social function. Illuminated in this way, fashion takes a leading role in our experience and sense of the body itself, becoming a conduit for our emotions in the face of difference. Here, fashion meets diversity, helping shape a new, inclusive, more empathetic global environment. Fashion, according to Vainshtein (2012), brings an artistic sensibility to prosthetics design, for example, assisting the amputee to "preserve human dignity" (p. 148) and "the observers to retune their emotions in the face of otherness" (p. 164) by way of connecting with the disabled individual. Fashion goes beyond its mooted superficiality to become, for both wearer and viewer, an emotional connection between the disabled and the non-disabled, redefining the relationship between amputees and their bodies.

Garland-Thomson's (2009) words on the relationships between staring and looking, and desire sum up what this Kahlo exhibition case study intended to convey. By using a medical and social lens to view disability in the exhibition space, I, as the curator, exposed viewers to an experience of the unfamiliar and unexpected "novelty", with the intention of normalising it. Using Kahlo's collection of prosthetics, photographs, and paintings, this London main case study, the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, establishes these relationships between staring and looking at the disabled body, which informed the curatorial methods employed to positively re-lens or re-configure the viewer's perception of disability as portrayed through the objects.

5.2.2 Stigma and Disability

> Before the 19th century, in Western culture, the concept of the "ideal" was the regnant paradigm concerning for all bodies, so all bodies were less than ideal. The introduction of the normality concept created an imperative to be normal, as the eugenics movement proved by enshrining the bell curve (also known as the "normal curve") as the umbrella under whose demanding peak we should all stand. With the introduction of the bell curve, came the notion of "abnormal" bodies. And the rest is history. (Davis, 1999, p. 504)

Historical Development of Stigma

The stigma around disability has been constructed over time. According to Stiker (1982/1999), disability was accepted as a difference that was part of human nature, in the early ages. In earlier eras, the difference could signify death and be "overvalorized" (p. 183), in Stiker's terms. On the other hand, during the rehabilitation age, the difference was "undervalorized" (p. 183) because it suggested "disappearance in the regimes of normalisation ideologies" (Stiker, 1982/1999, p. XVII). Disability was treated as a temporary condition, where the objective was to attain inclusion in what was considered normal.

The Bible perceived the abnormal as part of being human, as a consequence of the fall of man (Stiker, 1982/1999). To the Babylonians, disability was considered a punishment for a known or unknown sin, whereas Egyptians

believed some disabled people were magical and sometimes regarded them as shamans. Egyptian art depicted "dwarves receiving honours or being carried on altars. The disabilities are not primarily pathogenic; the pathology of the disease is consigned to a rite, to charms, in short, to something shamanistic" (Stiker, 1982/1999, p. 42). Ancient Egyptian civilization revered the big toe, which was discovered in Egypt's earliest prosthetic wooden toe. This toe, worn nearly 3,000 years ago, showed that prosthetics were as much about functionality as identity.

Social Aspects of Stigma

The intolerance towards deformity and differences in Western society was followed by the rehabilitation and integration of disabled bodies (Stiker, 1982/1999). The flood of returning injured combatants during World War I necessitated rapid developments, especially in prosthetics. Soldiers were mutilated and disfigured on an unprecedented scale, accelerating the demand for artificial limbs. After the war, rehabilitation programmes were introduced to help disabled men and women re-enter the workforce. However, the social and economic disadvantages faced by disabled people were not addressed. Veterans and disabled people were expected to imitate non-disabled people and assimilate; their disabled bodies needed to be overcome to achieve society's goal of everyone being the same. Therefore, rehabilitation was about "making identical" without "making equal" (Stiker, 1982/1999, p. 150).

In 1982, Stiker highlighted the use of stigma categorisations by disadvantaged groups advocating for societal recognition. The term "stigma" refers to physical signs designed to reveal something unusual and negative about the moral status of the signifier. The term comes from the Latin word "stigma" (plural "stigmata") and the Greek word *stigmatos*.

Staring can be a social act that stigmatises people whose bodies or behaviours cannot be readily accepted into the visual status quo (Garland-Thomson, 2009). Goffman (1963/1986) states that stigmatisation socially discredits

people who are seen as different and less important than we are. He suggests it is not in the bodily attributes of the people considered "disreputable" but in social relations that some people are regarded inferior to others.

Staring is an example of social behaviour which assigns stigma to certain perceived traits. Goffman (1963/1986) describes a ranking of stigma categorisations, starting with a disability which he refers to as "abominations of the body" (p. 4). Next are character flaws such as dishonesty, weak will, or unnatural passions associated with alcoholism, homosexuality, mental disability, criminality, and unemployment. Lastly are what Goffman terms the "tribal stigma" related to race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion (p. 4). People without such stigmatised traits are deemed "normal", whereas those who possess these potentially discreditable characteristics are forced to navigate through ever-changing societal expectations and sources of status. "Staring, then, can be a matter of looking wrong and wrong looking for everyone in the encounter" (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 46).

Diversity and Frida Kahlo

Stiker (1982/1999) takes a standpoint in favour of difference. He emphasises that celebrating diversity is a path to human life, whereas the desire for similarity is potential societal violence, resulting in repression and rejection. This notion resonates with Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), which describes modernity as the era of standardisation and similarity, contributing to conditions which made the Holocaust possible. Bauman (1991) observes that the advent of the postmodern era, influenced by the slogan "Difference is beautiful" (p. 255), represents progress towards embracing human differences.

Kahlo is an example of a disabled woman who did not allow her disability to define her. Kahlo destigmatised the world's view of her, forcing it to address her on her terms, recognising and embracing her physical condition as an integral piece of who she was—but not the sole definition of it. By inventing

creative ways to expose and manage her trauma, she broke many taboos about the challenges women faced in overcoming illness and injury. She was exploring themes of gender fluidity, disability, trauma, and the female body as expressed through art and dress long before the related academic literature we have today even existed. Moreover, Kahlo's unique visual voice of a gender-fluid, disabled woman of colour resonates with diversity issues and diverse voices today. For all these reasons, Kahlo represented an opportunity for me to introduce and create new dialogues addressing fashion, diversity, empathy, and disability within the exhibition context.

5.2.3 Concealing and Revealing

Frida Kahlo looked into the human experience in depth, in ways considered eccentric and inappropriate in her time, but very relevant today. As outlined previously, while Kahlo covered her disability by styling herself from head to toe in traditional dress, she was prepared to reveal her disability through her art. Fashion is always concealing and revealing, as Entwistle (2000/2003, p. 112) states: "On the one hand, the clothes we choose to wear can be expressive of identity telling others something about our gender, class, status and so on. But, on the other hand, our clothes cannot always be read."

This tension between the role of clothes as revealing and concealing identity was addressed by Sennett (1977) and Finkelstein (1991). They examined how identity is inherent in appearance and can be hidden behind a disguise. The relationship between fashion, dress, and identity proposed by Entwistle (2000/2003) is present in Kahlo's work and persona. The theme of concealing and revealing runs throughout the exhibition space to reflect how Kahlo concealed and revealed her own disabled body. In her case, wardrobe informed art and art informed wardrobe. Kahlo's relationships with covering up and camouflaging versus camouflaging versus displaying and performing were

highlighted through the different grouping of objects and the design of the exhibition.[7]

The space plays an important role, as it is where all these objects co-exist. The props also play a main role: to contextualise the narrative around objects and dress in the physical space. In this study, space is then defined as the venue and design where the collection of objects is displayed. This is the place containing objects which hold memories, where each object becomes a fragment of a bigger narrative, and where the objects also contain of a history of their own through their memories and stories.

They carry the memories of the wearer in the past, and as interpreted in the contemporary and the present time. In his book *Theatres of Memory*, Samuel (1994) introduces the idea that "objects are emotion holders, traces of the past, and carriers of discourse from other times into the present" (Samuel, 1994, as cited in Evans, 2003, p. 12). Evans draws from this idea and suggests that images can also generate new ideas and meanings, and, in turn, these images also carry their discourse. Kahlo's archive is both intimate and powerful. It embodies Kahlo's experiences of disability, her political convictions, ethnicity, and gender identity through her objects. As Margaret Gibson (2008) says, while the body is absent, "the materiality of things is shown to be more permanent than the materiality of the body" (p. 1).

De la Haye (2020), on the other hand, writes that clothes which are kept beyond their fashionable life often have "symbolic qualities" and hold "personal

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[7] In a workshop conducted at the V&A on February 17, 2017, Gannit Ankori mentioned how in my thesis, disability was highlighted for the first time as a main component of Kahlo's construction of identity. The thesis established how Kahlo covered her disability through dress, but also how she uncovered it through her art. Ankori highlighted the importance of my thesis putting together both art and dress to inform her creative process, and also how the thesis evidenced the "Paradox—covering up; camouflaging; masking versus displaying, performing, constructing, defining". These concepts and relationships were further developed and expanded by the main case study researcher at the V&A in the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*.

memories" of the owner (p. 14). In his paper "Cosmic Aspirations: Considerations on the Museum, Immortality and Frida Kahlo for Fashion Theory", Bucci (2019, p. 1014) questions the idea of "the recovery of the soul through acts of preservation and display of the material body" as explored in the *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*[8] exhibition, one of the case studies referenced in his article. For Bucci (2019, p. 1014), the show represented "reflections on the immortality of physical archives" and their future potential; by presenting these objects as a record of bodily memory, my intention as curator was to bring these objects to life in the exhibition space, creating a sense of familiarity for a subject that is often difficult to look at. In this way, I used the exhibition space to challenge perceptions around disability and otherness.

In Table 3, some key terms are defined to clarify the terminology for the curatorial approach linking objects, collections, and narratives within exhibition spaces and contexts. These terms contribute to the discourse surrounding the curatorial practice and the concept of concealing and revealing as part of subject-object relations, assigning clear object roles and denoting the application of the tools and functions of curation.

5.2.4 Fashion, Performance, and Performativity

This section highlights Goffman's (1959) notion of performance, which will be adapted into the curatorial approach. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman (1959) presents a theatrical metaphor and employs a dramaturgical framework to analyse how a human being interacts and acts in the presence of others. By displaying Kahlo's art and dress, the London main case study exhibition incorporated Goffman's notion of performance. The exhibition space became the "stage" for revealing Kahlo's multiple modes of

[8] Discussed as the main case study of this thesis in Section 5.3.

creative production that informed her construction and performance of her multiple identities.

Clothing and Personal Appearance

Goffman (1959) proposes that when an individual enters the presence of others, they are trying to influence the definition of the situation. The individual "actor" communicates the self in two ways: deliberately, or inadvertently. Goffman (1959) believes we strive to manage our impressions primarily because we seek cooperation, or to prevent being embarrassed or humiliated.

The social actor asserts a certain kind of identity. They may therefore be "expected to possess certain attributes, capacities, and information which, taken together, fit together into a self that is at once coherently unified and appropriate for the occasion" (Goffman, 1959, p. 268). An individual's performance is reinforced by visual and material elements such as the use of grooming, clothing, props, and nonverbal cues, and is upheld by the conventions of embodied presentation: which limbs or body parts are typically visible or obscured, or which postures or bounds of personal space are considered acceptable. These unspoken protocols of "situational proprieties" determine the appropriate "bodily idiom" (Goffman, 1959). In the exhibition, for example, we emphasised Kahlo's use of hands to construct her appearance through her art and dress. We emphasised her hand gestures as a medium for posing, creating and performing identity. Her facial features were emphasised through her portrait paintings (her characteristic unibrow, red lips and Tehuana hair style with flowers), contrasted with the stone-like mannequin heads we used. (The mannequins are available to view in the Portfolio, p. 93.)

Table 3 Curatorial Terminology

Definition of terms in the curatorial approach	
Term	Definition
Material culture	"Material culture analysis is a research methodology that considers the relationship between objects and the ways in which we view the past and produce our narratives of what happened in the past" (Pearce, 1992, p. 192, as cited in Mida & Kim, 2015, p. 11).
Object	The etymology of the word "object" dates to the 14th century, where it is defined as a "tangible thing, something perceived with or presented to the senses" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.-b) An object is a repository of significance and value. "An artefact—a made object, whether you call it art or not—is a historical event, something that happened in the past. But unlike other historical events, it continues to exist in the present and can be re-experienced and studied as primary and authentic evidence surviving from the past" (Prown, 1995, p. 2). "The formal language of objects that constitutes style, with its own grammar of visual tropes and metaphors, provides evidence of unconscious belief, of culture" (Prown, 1995, p. 2). "Artifacts are primary data for the study of material culture, and, therefore, they can be used actively as evidence rather than passively as illustrations" (Prown, 1982, p. 1, as cited in Steele, 1998). "The role of the aesthetic object is to express ideas and stimulate perceptions through its perceivable qualities" (Chon, 2013, p. 2). Design objects are rhetorical artefacts with persuasive intentions.
Collection of objects	Refers to the selection of objects with which to tell a story, complemented by tools such as mannequins, plinths, props, and lighting.
Exhibition space or context	Refers to the venue and design where the collection of objects is displayed.
Text in the exhibition	Refers to the panels, subpanels, and captions. The text will complement the objects' narratives, at times as an add-on and directly related with the object, and at other times as a counterpoint to the objects of the exhibition.

By covering her disabilities in public, Kahlo personifies Goffman's (1959) "normative expectations" of embodied presentation. However, Kahlo does so in a way that challenges societal norms by adopting indigenous manners. Kahlo adopted an ethnic dress in the 1930s, a time when women in Mexico and the United States wore Parisian and American fashions. As beauty standards were dictated by Europe and Hollywood, not many women would wear the traditional Tehuana attire in Mexican society.

According to Goffman (1959), one's personal appearance and external clothing can be used to differentiate normative behaviour from the socially deviant. These represent a sort of "sustained self-monitoring": While meeting cultural expectations, they also define the actor as someone with agency. Despite not spotlighting fashion and personal appearance per se, Goffman (1959) did include clothes as one of the components constituting the "personal front" of the actor: racial characteristics, size and looks, or body language (pp. 23–24).

Embodiment and Performance

Butler (2004/2005) addressed the notion of embodiment as a discourse that explores the concept of the social construct of the gendered and sexual body. On the other hand, feminist theorists call for biological explanations and neurobiological statistics to be included in the understanding of *being in our bodies* (Fausto-Sterling 1985, 2000, 2010; Grosz 1994, 2005; Wilson, 2004).

In her book *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies*, Allegranti (2011) explains that "being in" our bodies is "not a reductive experience; it is a plural and multi-layered coalescence of the different anatomical body systems: biochemical, genetic, respiratory, muscular, cardiovascular, circulatory and reproductive, alongside a fleshy integration of psychological, social and cultural shaping" (p. 2). De Beauvoir (1949/1989) states that from the time of birth, our bodies inevitably become engaged in a complex process of becoming women and men. This process is lifelong and "temporally and geographically contingent" (Allegranti, 2011, p. 2). Allegranti (2011, pp. 3–4) describes the "social, cultural and psychological layers of the body as a complex situation",

as is the role these layers play in the development of our constantly evolving identities.

In the context of sexuality and gender, I consider Judith Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, which simultaneously intersects with, and yet is distinct from, the concept of performance. Elizabeth Wissinger (2016) highlights that Butler's "gender performativity" concept takes into account much more than the deliberate choices individuals make about their gestures, clothing, or style (p. 287).

Judith Butler's work shifts attention from the role of clothes in "creating or monitoring identities to the role of clothes in fashioning the body itself" (Wissinger, 2016, p. 286). Butler fundamentally interrogates the idea of subjectivity, questioning how identities are constructed, established and accepted through social acts. She challenges the assumption of having just male or female sexes, theorising how "the body itself is not something that just naturally occurs, but is made through interactions constrained by existing power structures" (Wissinger, 2016, p. 286). By doing so, Butler draws fashion into the discussion about bodies, where "the clothed body is an utterance reflecting existing relations of power", and provides an alternative way to look at clothes as "deployments in the game of shifting social forces, gendered, queer or otherwise" (Wissinger, 2016, p. 286).

Fashion Performativity and Frida Kahlo

Kahlo used a variety of clothes, hairstyles, and accessories to create alternative identities for herself. With a disregard for gender stereotypes, Kahlo explored the fluidity of her gender identity. In many of her self-portraits, Kahlo meticulously painted her dark facial hair to draw attention to what she regarded as her masculine or androgynous features. Along with these male features, she would also include female characteristics such as her red lips.

In "Frida Kahlo: The Fabric of her Art", Ankori (2005) says that Kahlo's paintings "coalesce into a visual discourse on identity, teaching us that identity

is neither a static nor a monolithic 'given', but rather a complex construction and a shifting configuration" (p. 31). Kahlo placed her body at the centre of her art and undermined the expectations of femininity in society. Not just powerful expressions of her inner turmoil (Herrera, 2002), Kahlo's artworks were also bold statements on sexuality and gender.

Before these topics were theorised by scholars, Kahlo's body of work addressed identity politics and postcolonial hybridities (Ankori, 2005) as well as themes of gender identity and disability. Kahlo often hybridised herself as non-binary, being both male and female. She even adopted hybrid identities that crossed with animals and plants. Kahlo's multiple complex identities were carefully portrayed through her art and dress. "Kahlo embarked on a more ambiguous ontological quest, which produced an innovative and multifaceted poetics of identity" (Ankori, 2005, p. 31).

Identity and Self

Descartes's primary definition of the self is a "self-conscious, thinking 'I' that is both the Self and the proof of its existence" (Glover, 1988, pp. 37–38, 49–50, 89, 129–130). Kant also describes a self that is "noumenal", meaning we can only know its existence and nothing else, because it has no visible properties and cannot be perceived by our bodily senses (Glover, 1988, p. 89). Kant further defines the self as an "entity that is governed by and defined as a will" (Glover, 1988, p. 89). According to Hume, the self possesses a distinctive set of experiences and is, therefore a "subjective recipient of sensations" (Glover, 1988, pp. 89–91). For Glover (1988), each person has an "inner" sense of self shaped by one's "inner story", which is based on edited and interpreted memories of one's past (pp. 109–162).

William James (1890/1981) recognises the "social self" as constituting the self, in addition to the "material" and the "spiritual" selves. This social self is constructed by emulating one's role models, behaving according to society's requirements and pressures, or associating with particular social and cultural values (Ankori, 2002, p. 10).

Self in Relation to Kahlo

Ankori (2002) illustrates how Kahlo's art was primarily influenced by her methodical and deliberate search for the self. Ankori (2002) argues that Kahlo "consciously investigated the possible definitions of the personal and generic Self through her art. Rather than present a fixed identity (the mythic/ false identity that hides the real/ true Self), she deliberately and systematically explored the numerous facets that compose her 'fractured' Self, or what may be viewed as her many Selves" (p. 7). Kahlo's awareness of the complex relationship between her sense of self and her physical being is evident in the paintings of her own body. Ankori (2002) describes Kahlo's body as "depicted both internally and externally; it appears covered and uncovered, adorned and wounded" (p. 10). Kahlo deliberately depicted her body as an "external presence perceived by the outside world and identified as a specific person, but also as a subjective, internally 'sensed' entity" (Ankori, 2002, p. 10).

A revolutionary artist, Kahlo's uncompromising style in art and dress extends beyond the notion of performance (Goffman, 1959) and personifies the performativity (Butler, 1990) and embodiment (Allegranti, 2011) of identity. Through her self-portraits and her adorned prosthetics, Kahlo liberated herself from oppressive identity stereotypes and societal norms. Kahlo's lifelong body of work in its entirety teaches us that an individual's identity is neither fixed, nor limited to a singular established self. Identity is subject to constant change and is multidimensional, consisting of many facets. By exposing viewers to Kahlo's various modes of self-expression, the London main case study exhibition revealed how Kahlo stayed true to herself by being many different selves.

5.3 Main Case Study: *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*

The London main case study, which is the *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* exhibition,[9] held at the V&A Museum in London from 16 June to 18 November 2018, builds on the pilot study from Chapter 4.[10]

By interweaving Kahlo's paintings, drawings, photographs, outfits, accessories, jewellery, medical corsets, and documents into a single cohesive exhibition, I shed light on the multiple modes of creative production that Kahlo employed to construct her unique and complex identity. It offered a fresh perspective on her compelling life story and presented an unparalleled insight into her life by revealing objects that had never been on show before. This main case study will present the opposing tensions previously discussed in Section 5.2. The disability section of the London main case study, titled "Endurance", will illustrate the opposing tensions of staring and looking, concealing and revealing, stigma and disability, and fashion performance and performativity, to destigmatise disability in the exhibition context.

When planning the London exhibition at the V&A, several challenges were considered:

• accommodating the number of visitors expected—Kahlo is an icon to many,
• accommodating diverse exhibits on a range of scales and different media,
• presenting "dress" alongside "art" on an equal footing,
• lighting the dress (which requires low lux levels) so it appears fresh and is not overshadowed by the paintings,
• encasing the objects (a requirement of the Frida Kahlo Museum) without creating distance, which necessitates non-reflective glass,
• interrogating the subjects of ethnicity and diversity with sensitivity,

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[9] Co-curated by the researcher Circe Henestrosa and Claire Wilcox with Gannit Ankori as curatorial advisor.
[10] Exhibition *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo*, curated by the researcher Circe Henestrosa and designed by Judith Clark, Frida Kahlo Museum, 2012.

• using light as a subtle guide to the narrative of the exhibition, and introducing tension without drama,
• ensuring that Kahlo's life tragedy does not overshadow the triumph of her art, which means using medical paraphernalia sparingly and embedding it in the centre of the exhibition so it is not the last thing visitors remember,
• providing access for those with disabilities in an inclusive and welcoming way.

The Blue House

In the exhibition in London, I needed to find a way to contextualise the Blue House as the place where Kahlo grew up, lived, and died, and where all these objects were discovered. The exhibition in Mexico was able to adopt a contextual approach without the need to explain Kahlo's biography in depth, as the house was physically in Mexico; the London exhibition, however, required the Blue House to be represented as a way to introduce Kahlo's life and biography. In the London exhibition, we adopted a biographical and contextual-thematic approach, as shown in the allocated exhibition sections and subsections shown in Table 4. (The digital tour of the exhibition and installation shots detailing the sections visually are in the Portfolio, pp. 6-26.)

In London, the Blue House context was evoked by using blue light in the same blue tone as in Mexico. The viewer started the exhibition in an almost church-like environment introducing Kahlo's life displayed in different niches. The biographical context of Kahlo's life and work was made apparent in the Blue House/Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico, where Kahlo's personal belongings revealed the story of her personal life, notably her relationship with Rivera, as well as her career as an artist.

Figure 33 Installation shot of the Introduction section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

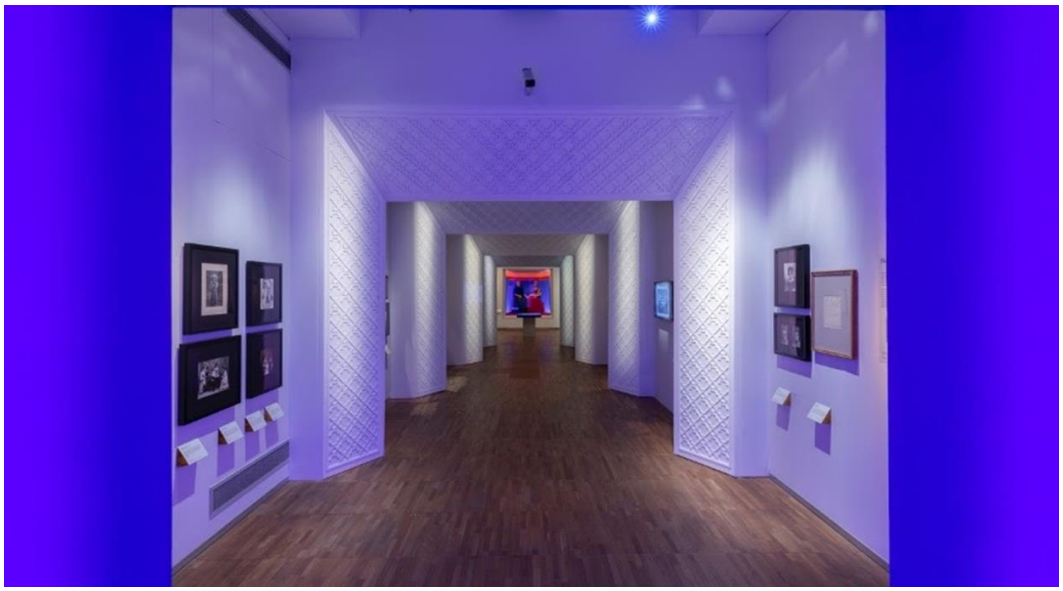

Figure 34 Installation shot of the Introduction section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Table 4 Sections of the Exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*

Sections within the exhibition gallery		
Section	Subsections	Description
1 Biography	Roots Sickness Guillermo Kahlo Self-Portraiture Art and Revolution Gringolandia	This section presented Kahlo's biographical information, her family roots, mixed heritage, childhood trauma, coming of age, her marriage to Rivera, and her time in the United States.
2 Blue House	The Locked Wardrobe	The Blue House section introduced the place where the artist was born, lived, and died, while also marking the physical location where these objects were discovered.
3 Picturing Mexico	Miracle Paintings	This section explained Kahlo's heritage and ethnicity aligned with the post-revolutionary ideals of *mexicanidad* promoted by the Minister of Education, Jose Vasconcelos. Many artists like Edward Weston and Tina Modotti travelled to the Tehuantepec region, where Kahlo's signature look originated.
4 Endurance	Surgery The Arms of Morpheus The Broken Column Longing	By displaying Kahlo's orthopaedic devices, this section presented her disability as a powerful vehicle for expressing her creativity.
5 Art and Dress	The Huipil The Rebozo, Skirts and Flounces I Paint My Reality I Have Enjoyed Being Contradictory	This section presented Kahlo's art and dress and showed all her looks paired with her portraits to establish a clear relationship between her wardrobe and her art.

At the beginning of the show, the introduction of the ethnicity theme was marked with the photograph of her maternal family all dressed in Tehuana attire, to emphasise Kahlo's ethnic roots. As this photograph marked the origins of the Kahlo exhibition in Mexico alongside the drawing *Appearances Can Be Deceiving*, it was the first object the viewer encountered in the London

exhibition to establish her ethnic roots from the maternal mother. The following photographs (Figure 35, Figure 36, and Figure 37) of the different niches illustrate how the biographical section was divided into various subthemes.

Roots Subsection

Figure 35 Installation shot of the Roots subsection at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Self-Portraiture Subsection

Figure 36 The Kahlo family. Photograph by Guillermo Kahlo, 1926. Museo Frida Kahlo.

As viewers learn about Kahlo's ethnic roots, they arrive at the second group of photographs revealing Kahlo's interest in self-portraiture. Ankori (personal communication, February, 2017) pointed out how Kahlo would pose in different photographs for her father, the photographer Wilhelm (Guillermo). She would

pose as a little girl, and while still in her teens, Kahlo constructed and performed distinct gendered identities in front of the camera.

On February 7, 1926, Guillermo Kahlo photographed his daughter, Frida, cross-dressed in a man's three-piece suit, holding an ornate walking stick like a youthful dandy. The exhibition in London explored Kahlo's gender identity through this single photograph demonstrating her gender fluidity and performance through dress with this magnificent three-piece suit. As Kahlo herself noted, "I have broken many social norms" (Grimberg, 2008, p. 91, as cited in Ankori, 2013, p. 124).

It is important to note at this point that many visitors in London wrote in to say they would have liked to see more of this gender-fluid side of Kahlo in the exhibition. We only had one photograph in London that evidenced Kahlo's queer identity. After London, I ensured that the exhibitions in New York, San Francisco, and Paris included a section called "Fashioning Gender".

Sickness Subsection

Figure 37 Installation shot of the Sickness subsection at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

The following section introduces Kahlo's experiences of disability as a child. This group of objects marked Kahlo's "sickness" as part of her biography to inform disability. Kahlo's near-fatal accident in 1925 at 18 meant the end of her

studies and her hopes of becoming a doctor. Bedbound and immobilised, she started to paint using a folding wooden easel and a mirror inset into the canopy of her four-poster bed. Self-portraiture became the primary focus of her art. Later in the exhibition, viewers would discover the Endurance gallery, devoted to how her disability informed her self-fashioning.

Figure 38 Installation shot of the Endurance section at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, V&A Museum, London, 2018.

The idea of "expressive prosthetics", discussed in Chapter 2, was adopted by Kahlo when decorating her prosthetic leg and corsets: she transformed them not only into art objects, but rather into fashionable accessories and as extensions of her body. All these objects composed Kahlo's visual repertoire for fashioning her disabled body.

Chapter 2 discussed the two approaches to the sociology of disability as defined by Swain and French (2000): the medical and social models. The Mexico City pilot case study viewed disability through a medical lens, which was a culturally acceptable representation, in that context. By contrast, the London exhibition shifted the emphasis to one of empathy, viewing disability through a social and affirmative lens. The objects were shown not as medical devices but as fashion items, precious objects of desire through an evocative

and novel installation, inviting the viewer to see them respectfully and humanely, not in terms of physicality or society, but rather in terms of their innate dignity and self-worth.

Considering these medical approaches and the geographical context (the UK), I proposed a human-centric installation that accommodated cultural differences: a softer approach to disability that negotiated depictions of pain, injury, and mortality, creating a sense of empathy where the viewers could imagine Kahlo's emotions or experiences by placing themselves in her shoes. The intention was to invite the viewers to look at the unfamiliar and thereby gain an understanding of Kahlo's inner sense of self and dignity.

To help achieve this, I proposed working with a theatre set designer to create different moods and theatrical atmospheres through light and space: Tom Scutt was the set designer who won the tender to work on the exhibition design. In London, the theme of fragmentation from Mexico was extended into a narrative of Kahlo's experience of disability, in the form of six glass cabinets resembling Kahlo's bed: each one represented part of an overarching disability narrative.

Tom Scutt proposed using the artist's four-poster bed to represent the many months she spent bedbound recovering from her accident (shown in the Portfolio, p. 19). Surrounding the "poster-bed" cabinets in the gallery were many drawings, and photographs of the artist on her hospital bed or in her wheelchair, painting. This was combined with considered object placement providing visual cues and associations between the imagery and the orthopaedic devices, to inform the narrative. These included 11 corsets, a pair of crutches, and Kahlo's prosthetic leg.

As the viewer entered the gallery, they would be confronted with a photograph of Kahlo lying in bed, looking intensely at the camera with a coquettish gaze (see Figure 39). While the viewer is looking at Kahlo, Kahlo appears to be

looking right back; the viewer "meets" Kahlo intimately for the first time through this act of staring and looking.

The different object groupings in *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* sharpened Kahlo's paradox between concealing, revealing and performing. In addition, access to more paintings and photographs for this exhibition allowed me to establish clearer interrelationships between her painting, dress, and photography and how they informed Kahlo's identity and creative process through her art, style and life.

Figure 39 Installation shot of the Endurance section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Kahlo's childhood photographs in the biographical section titled Sickness, which highlighted her polio and childhood trauma, mirrored her prosthetic leg later found in the Endurance room—Kahlo's right leg was amputated in 1953. This installation was again mirrored with the Kahlo's diary entry "Feet, What Do I Need Them for if I Have Wings to Fly", as shown in Figure 40. Mirrors reappear here as an installation aid to reflect Kahlo's act of covering up and camouflaging versus displaying and performing. The pairings also frequently

represented Kahlo's duality in her paintings and photographs. The tensions between concealing and revealing were communicated across the whole room and through the different object pairings. The entire room became like a chamber of wonders.

Figure 40 Installation shot of prosthetic leg in the Endurance section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Figure 41 Installation shot of Diary Entry section at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

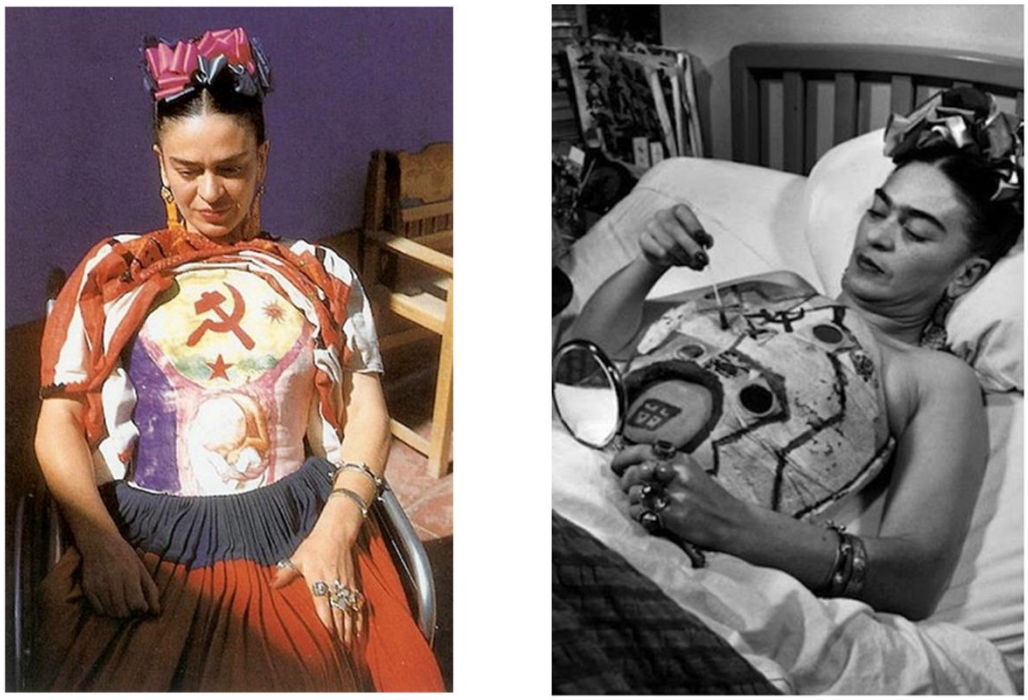

Figure 42 *Left*: Kahlo lifting her huipil to reveal her plaster corset. Florence Arquin, printed by Ava Avargas, Coyoacán, Mexico, ca 1951. *Right*: Kahlo at the American British Cowdrat (ABC) Hospital. Juan Guzmán, Mexico, ca 1951.

As shown in the pilot study, Kahlo painted and adorned her plaster corsets and integrated them into her wardrobe as if she had explicitly chosen to wear them. While lying in her hospital bed, she used a mirror to paint the surface of her corsets. The corsets were moulded to her body and remained in place for long periods. Kahlo noted: "I am not sick. I am broken. But I am happy to be alive as long as I can paint" (Kahlo et al. 1995, p. 23).

In Florence Arquin's photograph on the left (Figure 42), Kahlo lifts her loose-fitting huipil (tunic) to reveal the corset as if it was a second skin. In Juan Guzmán's photograph on the right (Figure 42), Kahlo is painting in her bed. These relationships between Kahlo concealing and revealing her disabled identity were evident in this room.

Textual and Visual Relationships

The next group of objects present a textual and visual example and demonstrate how the captions acted as complements or counterpoints. There

were seven section panels, 16 subsection panels, and 253 object labels in the exhibition. (Examples of subsection panels and object labels are available in the Portfolio, pp. 52-56).

Figure 43 shows these two painted corsets inside the cabinet paired with two other objects to highlight the relationships between objects. Kahlo's corsets were displayed on thin metal bars, evoking the metal bar that pierced Kahlo's pelvic bone during her accident at age 18. The labels were written in white typography on the plexiglass, as shown in Figure 43.

Figure 43 Installation shot of Diary Entry section at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

This specific grouping presented two halves of two plaster corsets paired with the lithograph *Frida and the Miscarriage* (1932) and her book *Principles and Practice of Obstetrics* (De Lee, 1913). These hardened plaster corsets had to be cut with surgical pliers to release Kahlo from them; the display showed the surviving front halves of these two painted and customised corset pieces. Although they mirrored each other, one showed a circular hole over the abdomen that may have been to provide ventilation, but it also suggested the absence of a foetus. The other showed an emblazoned hammer and sickle over

the chest, reflecting her communist ideas, while a carefully painted foetus lies curled up over the abdomen. These corsets and objects established a link between Kahlo's inside/outside through her experience of a miscarriage.

The two corsets were paired with the lithograph, *Frida and the Miscarriage* (1932) for the first time to establish clear relationships of presence and loss. She painted this lithograph 5 weeks after her miscarriage in Detroit. In this lithograph, Kahlo divides herself into two parts: One traced the loss of her unborn child, while the other showed nature's fecundity and her rebirth as an artist with a palette in hand.

The book *Principles and Practice of Obstetrics* (De Lee, 1913) serves to illustrate Kahlo's interest in the human body. She had intended to study medicine and remained interested in anatomy throughout her life. Following the miscarriage in 1932, she asked for a book of medical illustrations. Kahlo drew from these for her lithograph paired in this section. Dr. Eloesser, her doctor in San Francisco, sent her a foetus in a jar for her to draw. Kahlo kept it in her bedroom. The textual and visual presentations of objects narrate the story of Kahlo's female experience of her miscarriages. Viewers gain an understanding of Kahlo's miscarriage experiences from her artistic corset pieces, learn about Kahlo's interest in anatomy and medical history from her book, and have insight into Kahlo's political beliefs from the sickle and hammer painted on both corsets.

When viewers read the caption in Kahlo's book *Principles and Practice of Obstetrics* (De Lee, 1913), they learn of Kahlo's intention to study medicine to become a doctor, only to spend time in hospitals as a patient instead. On this occasion, the text acts as a counterpoint to this group of objects, providing viewers with additional information not necessarily represented by the visual narrative of the objects on their own.

Steele (2018) claimed that one has to tell the story with objects, assuming that people will not read the text (p. 21). On the other hand, Clark (2015) questions whether curating is about the "clarity of connections and if so, how are they made visual or literal: How can objects be presented as a way into different stories?" (p. 160). This grouping showed an example of how to create these associations; I propose later in this study (Section 5.4.2) a tool I chose to call the "invisible threads", which helped me make these textual and visual associations clearly emphasising aspects of disability and otherness.

The following two drawings served as a visual connection between the disability-themed gallery Endurance and the Art and Dress gallery. These two objects also marked a transition from the exhibition *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* in Mexico City (pilot study) to *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* at the V&A in London (main case study). The drawing *Appearances Can Be Deceiving* on the left (Figure 44) shows Kahlo's layers of identity covered and uncovered, informed by her disability and ethnicity. The untitled drawing on the right (Figure 44) shows Kahlo "composing" herself from the torso up, concentrating the viewer on the gestures in her upper body.

Figure 44 *Left*: *Appearances Can be Deceiving*, 1944-1954. *Right*: Untitled (Self-Portrait Drawing), Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust.

A “hallucinations” tunnel marked the transition between these two galleries, as shown in Figure 45. Viewers then arrive in a very intimate, celebratory gallery full of Kahlo’s dresses and looks, expressed through her paintings, photographs, jewellery, and wardrobe.

Figure 45 Installation shot of the tunnel towards the Art and Dress section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Figure 46 Installation shot of the Art and Dress section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

This gallery showcased Kahlo's performance of self as expressed in her various hybrid Tehuana looks. Kahlo's powerful self-portraits, her photographs, and uniquely composed outfits acted as complementary modes of artistic self-creation throughout her life. They were shown together in this gallery for the first time, where the Art and Dress section pairings served as complements and counterpoints.

The Art and Dress section showed subpanels which dissected Kahlo's look, the huipil, skirts, ruffles, and the rebozo, to highlight the composition of the Tehuana dress. This cluster of objects, for example, talks about the rebozo as a precious Mexican piece in Kahlo's wardrobe, showing her in the colour photographs Nickolas Muray took. This cluster of objects was placed directly in front of this look. The associations were made through her use of this specific magenta rebozo, in how she chose to wear it and style it in different ways, and her different poses in these photographs by Nickolas Muray.

The exhibition concluded with a ghostly installation of the resplandor look; this established a clear ethnicity link between the photo of her maternal family at the beginning of the show and her full Tehuana attire as a personal manifesto at the end of the exhibition.

Figure 47 Installation shot of the Art and Dress section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

The exhibition concluded with the following panel:

"I have enjoyed being contradictory" – Frida Kahlo.

Figure 48 *Left*: Photograph of maternal family in resplandor; *Centre and Right*: Kahlo is wearing a resplandor in photograph and painting.

Figure 49 Installation shot of the Art and Dress section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Appearances were important to Kahlo to the very end. When she died in 1954 at the age of 47, her friends dressed her body in a traditional white huipil, braided her hair with ribbons and flowers and adorned her fingers with rings, just as she would have appeared in life.

Even before the unveiling of her wardrobe in 2004, Kahlo's sense of fashion was regarded as unique, while the subversive nature of her art spurred André Breton to describe it as "a ribbon around a bomb". Today, she remains an object of fascination, embraced for her fierce individuality and her defiance in the face of adversity. But, above all, she is renowned for her self-made image through art and dress. These different examples demonstrate the textual and visual relationships between the text and the objects, and how the text acted as a complement or counterpoint to the objects.

5.4 Curatorial Framework

5.4.1 Development of the Framework

In the previous section, the London main case study illustrated the emergent themes as key exhibition concepts aimed at visually articulating the notions of stigma and otherness within the exhibition space. The curatorial framework highlights a combination of selected methodologies and tools chosen by the curator to create positive associations related to disability and otherness.

I decided to frame time, space, and experience, and define key tools mediating sources of tension through wonder, re-lensing, and memory. The framework presents an approach to fashion curation using three primary tools: invisible threads, mirrors, and cabinets. I, as the curator, chose to use these tools to emphasise aspects of disability and otherness as areas that needed focus.

Applying these exhibition-making/curatorial methodologies helped optimise the impact of subjective change in perception, which is the desired outcome in communication with different audiences. The framework also assists the development of other curatorial narratives, allowing students and aspiring fashion curators to translate their subjective and intangible ideas, similar or adjacent to some of the preoccupations of exhibition-making and curatorial practice into evocative tangible exhibition narratives.

I brought my subjective perspective, applied to the discipline of fashion curation, to contextualise this collection of objects belonging to Mexican artist Frida Kahlo for the first time outside Mexico.

Hans Ulrich Obrist defines the act of curating as: "simply about connecting cultures, bringing their elements into proximity with each other … to allow different elements to touch" (Obrist, 2014, p. 1).

Curatorial Framework

This curatorial framework shows the elements of curatorial practice that have underlined how they have been applied to change perceptions and generate positive associations. It considers time, space, and experience as the main contextual elements and outcomes, with a guiding narrative defined by key tools mediating sources of tension to create wonder, re-lensing, and memory.

This framework proposes the curator's subjective experience. It attempts to mitigate the apparent dichotomy, as discussed by Taylor (2002, p. 85), between Prown's process of "leading out" from the object into theory, or its converse, working back from theory to object. By allowing myself to directly build the narrative from both perspectives, either an object interpretation or a textual reference, the framework defines the physical or virtual space as the place where narratives are visually communicated and materialised through exhibition, book, film, etc.

I decided to group five stages, defined in Table 5, as a broader structure and framework of fashion curation. By clearly defining the topic, reviewing the literature, and situating the conceptual framing within time and space, the curator can develop a unique lens to select and curate a collection of objects against a clear narrative.

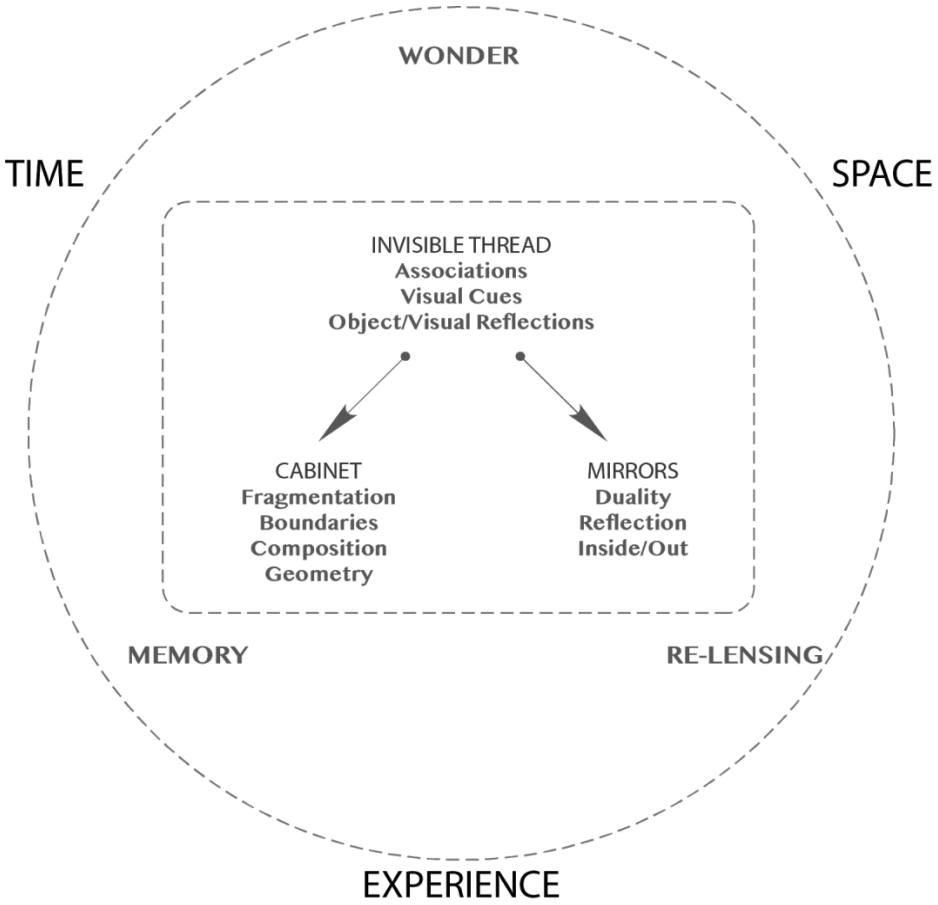

Figure 50 Curatorial Framework

This exhibition was designed to provoke debate, encouraging more varied conversations to stimulate different views. It considers time, space, and experience as main contextual elements and outcomes, with a guiding narrative defined by key tools mediating sources of tension to create wonder, re-lensing, and memory:

1. Re-lensing is defined as refocusing the viewer's attention into a new way of seeing, as refocusing an area of attention.

2. Wonder is a feeling of surprise and admiration when seeing or experiencing something beautiful, unusual, or unexpected; it is synonymous with awe. According to Fisher (1998), wonder is explained as "holding together aesthetic perception, with its pleasure, and thought, with its distinct process and pleasure" (p. 85). In this manner, wonder represents the transition from the unknown to the known and acts as the boundary between ignorance and knowledge.

Memory is the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information. The etymology of the word "memory" appeared in the late 13th century as "recollection (of someone or something); remembrance, awareness or consciousness (of someone or something)" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.-a). In this case, I sought to create a new memory, which represents the new knowledge derived from the wonder stage.

Table 5 Stages of the Curatorial Framework

Curatorial framework	
Stages	Description
1 Defining the exhibition topic	This stage requires the curator/researcher to bring their own experience and knowledge, using fashion theory and other theories, to define a core topic. First, the researcher should build a hypothesis: What are we looking at? Why are we looking at this topic now? Why is it relevant today? A 360-degree lens is required, and an interdisciplinary approach is desirable to define the exhibition topic. The topic can be developed using an existing collection of objects or a text or theoretical perspective.
2 Literature in context	In this stage, the curator/researcher looks at existing material published about the selected topic through a literature review on the topic. Looking at published books, exhibitions, and the different approaches of other curators or writers allowed me researcher to understand which outcomes already existed, so as to create new readings or new perspectives around Kahlo. What is the new lens or angle through which I could address this topic?
3 Situating time and space and audiences	Time and space are where specific narratives will visually materialise in a tangible physical or intangible digital space. Examples include exhibition space, books, films, digital spaces, and public and education programmes. The space and narratives are directly related to the audiences.
4 Defining the lenses	These are the historical, contextual, and structural lenses applied to this specific exhibition. • Through the historical lens, the researcher/curator takes a historical approach to the subject, looking at the social, economic, and/or political conditions of a specific period. This lens is usually chronological. For example, in the main case study *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, the exhibition had a historical/biographical section that contextualised Kahlo's biography in a foreign market. At the exhibition in Mexico, the pilot study of this thesis, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* at the

Curatorial framework	
Stages	Description
4 Defining the lenses	Blue House, the viewer learned about Kahlo's life as they went through her house, so there was no need to contextualise this biographical element. • The contextual lens usually involves a thematic lens that breaks the narrative into themes. The pilot study of this thesis, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo*, shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum (2012), adopted two main thematic directions, beginning with Kahlo's construction of style as a consequence of both her disability and her ethnic roots as a personal manifesto. The second direction showed how these elements had been translated into the contemporary language of fashion. These lenses were thematic rather than chronological, and the biographical aspects of Kahlo's life were established at the Blue House, as previously mentioned. This allowed the researcher to apply a contextual/thematic lens to view the topics of disability, ethnicity and the fragmented body expressed through contemporary fashion (corset in the avant-garde and lace and flowers as traditional elements in contemporary fashion). The main case study of this thesis, *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*, combined a historical/chronological lens to discuss her biography chronologically, to then explore more thematic aspects to describe her ethnicity, disability, political beliefs, queer identity, and relationship to her art and dress. • The structural lens focuses on the materiality of objects. In the main case study *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up,* shown at the V&A, the wealth and extent of the text to inform aspects of textiles techniques, the composition of the garments and the origins and materials of the objects was vibrant. The captions were not as extended in the pilot study *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo*, shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum (2012). The exhibition context called for more extended captions in the contemporary fashion sections, where people were less familiar with the objects. In this instance, audiences in Mexico would be more familiar with ethnic pieces than contemporary fashion pieces.
5 Constructing the visual narrative for diverse audiences	In this stage, the curator explores how the narrative could be organised in the exhibition space and through outreach programmes. What are the sections, and what is the visitor experience? What is the customer journey? What aspects of the exhibition need to be highlighted or emphasised to convey the message? This part considers the exhibition space, the website, the public programmes, education programmes, and academic conferences. For our given example of the Frida Kahlo exhibition in London, the exhibition looked at how the experiences of disability, ethnicity, gender identity and her political outlook defined Kahlo's art style and life. The mixed messages around disability and otherness had to be reflected in the exhibition and everything surrounding it with a 360-degree lens.

5.4.2 Tools

The curatorial framework adopts a broad-based approach to fashion curation, using three curatorial tools selected by the curator: invisible threads, mirrors, and the cabinet. These are the key tools that I, as the curator, chose to articulate the development of curatorial narratives and to create positive associations. This section references examples from the pilot study in Mexico City and main case study in London to illustrate how curatorial tools were directly employed to construct the elements of re-lensing, wonder, and memory. It is important to point out that these tools are employed to draw attention to or emphasise specific areas related to disability and otherness.

Invisible Threads

Curation is about building thread narratives. I decided to call the first tool "invisible threads". This is based on my experience in the pilot case study of this thesis, where I learned from Clark (2012) how to build different visual associations and how to create visual associations and narratives between the design, the historical aspects of the archive, and the objects. The invisible threads help create visual associations between objects and ideas. I decided to call these visual associations "visual cues", connecting intangible ideas through tangible objects and text.

The following section will demonstrate the application of invisible threads to emphasise and create visual cues and associations, informing viewers about Kahlo's ethnicity, heritage, and roots linked to her maternal family. Coined by Goethe in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), the German term *Rote Faden* (often referred to in the French calque as *fil rouge*), refers to a central theme or leitmotif running through a work. In this exhibition, the *fil rouge* was employed to create visual associations and emphasise links between the displayed objects. I chose to use the term invisible threads to represent the *fil rouge* for contextual reasons: In the exhibition context, the invisible threads guide the viewer through a physical and mental space. As well as representing a common set of themes, it provides a pathway of connections that move the viewer through the narrative in a 3D space. The invisible thread

alludes to Theseus and the thread Ariadne gave him to guide him safely through the labyrinth. As it relates to textual and visual clues within rooms and serves both purposes, this is subtly more apt wording.

For example, objects emphasising "ethnicity" were displayed across the different sections as follows. The first object viewers saw in the exhibition was a photograph of Kahlo's maternal family dressed in Tehuana attire and wearing the resplandor (Figure 51, left). This photograph demonstrates and explains Kahlo's relationship to the Tehuana dress well before meeting Rivera, as this photograph shows her mother wearing the Tehuana attire as a child. This photograph is followed by another photo of Kahlo wearing the resplandor as an adult (Figure 52, left). Then a third photograph shows Kahlo wearing a full Tehuana dress among a group of friends (Figure 53, left).

The Tehuana dress was a deliberate choice and a vehicle used by Kahlo to strengthen her sense of identity, her political beliefs, and mexicanidad. By associating objects within the Art and Dress section, invisible threads highlight the relationships between dress, art, and photography to inform viewers of Kahlo's relationship to the Tehuana dress and the resplandor headpiece. Through repetition, this grouping of objects facilitated the viewer's ability to make their connections between objects and ideas, forming a clearer understanding of Kahlo's construction of identity, as informed by her ethnic roots and mexicanidad. The ethnicity aspect of her identity is reassessed again at the end of the exhibition, where all her looks are grouped with her paintings, accessories, and photographs surrounding them.

Roots

Figure 51 *Left*: Photograph of Kahlo's maternal family. *Right*: Installation shot of the Roots sub-section at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

↓

Art and Dress

Figure 52 *Left*: Photograph of Kahlo wearing a resplandor. *Right*: Installation shot of the Art and Dress section at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

↓

Picturing Mexico

Figure 53 *Left*: Reunion in San Angel (left to right: Alfa and Nereida Ríos Pineda, Rosa Covarrubias and Frida Kahlo). Photograph by Nickolas Muray, 1938. *Right*: Installation shot of the Picturing Mexico section at the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

Mirrors

The second tool, mirrors, links the visual associations created between the objects through the invisible threads. Mirrors create tangible associations as equivalences and/or pairings between the object or the text, whereby the associations can act as complements or counterpoints. Complements contribute extra features to an object that improve or emphasise its qualities. Counterpoints highlight and emphasise the intended interpretation of the object through visual or textual contrasts.

Figure 54 Installation shot of Diary Entry section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

As mentioned before, this specific grouping from the Endurance section previously analysed in the main case study *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* in London presented two halves of two plaster corsets mirroring each other, paired with the lithograph *Frida and the Miscarriage* (1932) and her book *Principles and Practice of Obstetrics* (De Lee, 1913). The viewer learns about Kahlo's experience of disability and her miscarriage through this grouping of objects consisting of her painted corsets, her lithograph, and her medical book. These objects visually complement each other to inform the narrative of the miscarriage. If the viewer looks carefully, they will notice the mirrored

association between the corset with a foetus and the one with an absent foetus. They would also learn about Kahlo's political beliefs as informed by the mirrored sickle and hammer.

As previously mentioned, when the viewer reads the caption related to Kahlo's book *Principles and Practice of Obstetrics* (De Lee, 1913), they learn new information about Kahlo's interest in becoming a doctor, where the text acts as a counterpoint.

Another example of the application of the mirrors tool where objects act as counterpoints to each other is the pairing of the drawing *Appearances Can Be Deceiving* with Kahlo's *Untitled* drawing with the hands. For example, in Figure 55, the drawing on the left shows Kahlo's uncovered layers of identity informed by her disability and ethnicity. By contrast, the untitled drawing on the right shows Kahlo covered in full Tehuana attire, "making her self up" from the torso up.

Figure 55 *Left*: Appearances Can be Deceiving, 1944-1954. *Right*: Untitled (Self-Portrait Drawing).

Jacques Lacan (1977) establishes the mirror as a fundamental tool, crucial in the process of understanding the "I", as the mirror highlights its intrinsic link to the shaping of one's identity (Ankori, 2002, p. 11). These claims are supported by the examples provided, whereby mirrors materialise and reinforce the otherwise abstract associations between object, image, and text. It is important to note that mirrors played a vital role in the life and art of Kahlo and may be found in every corner of La Casa Azul—upon the dresser, set within the wardrobe, embedded in the patio walls, and even inside the canopy of the artist's four-poster bed. Posing, self-fashioning, and painting in front of a looking glass were frequent, everyday activities of the artist. This tool reflects Kahlo's relationship with mirrors and is taken from her visual repertoire.

Cabinet

This tool is inspired by the predecessor of modern museums, the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer,* which appeared in 16th-century Renaissance Europe. As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, also known as "wonder rooms", these were small collections of extraordinary objects which, like today's museums, attempted to categorise and tell stories about the wonders and oddities of the natural world. They ranged in size from a small, dedicated piece of furniture with small drawers, shelves and divisions, to entire rooms.

The cabinet as a tool already creates tensions in our process of "looking" because the cabinet is curious. However, this tool is problematic in terms of structure because of its curiosity connotations. Cabinets of curiosity can be defined as "privately-owned collections of extraordinary objects – that is, objects perceived to be rare, beautiful, strange, or ingenious" (Bowry, 2014, p. 30). Such cabinets featured *naturalia* (natural specimens and creatures) and *artificialia* (human-made materials). It has been argued that this type of collection first emerged in late 15th century Italy in the form of the *scrittoio*: "a private space for study or contemplation which sometimes contained small objects" (Arnold, 2006; MacGregor, 2007, as cited in Bowry, 2014, p. 30). These spaces usually contained painted, trompe l'oeil objects, an example being the

astrolabes which inhabited Federigo da Montefeltro's (1422–1482) scrittoio in Gubbio (MacGregor, 2007, p. 12). The spaces also typically contained three-dimensional objects, such as the Aztec sculptures in the scrittoio of Cosimo I de Medici (1519–1574) in Florence (Turpin, 2006, p. 66).

In the context of this exhibition, I used the cabinet as a tool to "hook" viewers. Just as cabinets of curiosities were used to display exotic objects, I decided to use the cabinet to confront viewers with objects that some would find uncomfortable to look at.

The cabinet becomes as important as the objects in it—it becomes an object in its own right, which conveys these tensions, bringing into focus a subject that is difficult to look at or comprehend.

For topics such as disability and identity, the cabinet is uniquely and intrinsically positioned as a powerful symbol and tool for presenting a fragmented composition and the exoticised, rare other.

Figure 56 Installation shot of Kahlo's orthopaedic devices at *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo.* Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico, 2012. Photograph by Miguel Tovar, 2012.

The design elements of fragmentation in the gallery showing Kahlo's orthopaedic devices (Figure 56) and in the Cabinet of Curiosities in Mexico (see pilot study) were translated into six glass cabinets resembling "beds" in the London exhibition (Figure 57). On this occasion, each cabinet contains a narrative related to Kahlo's experience of disability, as discussed previously. Each cabinet forms part of an overarching story communicated throughout the entire room. These fragmented narratives were displayed as individual statements through the collection of personal prosthetics, photographs, and works of Kahlo. The intention was that viewers would look at Kahlo's orthopaedic devices from a more humane perspective, using a social lens to view disability as opposed to the medical lens used in the Mexico exhibition. This room was about disability and creativity, representing inspiration to overcome trauma through creative means.

Kahlo was a pioneer in fashioning the disabled body, and this was highlighted through her painted corsets and prosthetic legs, paintings, and photographs. Re-lensing disability in an unexpectedly beautiful manner creates a sense of wonder for the viewer, who experiences a sense of surprise and admiration

Figure 57 Installation shot of the Endurance section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

when seeing something beautiful and unexpected. At this point, the viewer experiences wonder as they transition from the unknown to the known and cross the boundary from ignorance to knowledge. The cabinet informs new learning, and a new memory is created as a result of this experience.

The curator chose the concepts of re-lensing, wonder, and memory as key components within the exhibition space, to emphasise aspects of disability and otherness, inviting viewers to adopt a new perspective, thereby gaining new experiences and new knowledge. The pilot study exhibition in Mexico brought these elements together in each one of the rooms, whereas the main case study exhibition in London had points where wonder, re-lensing, and memory were given an enhanced focus, particularly in the Endurance and the Art and Dress rooms. The placement of these "enhanced" points of wonder was carefully considered by the curator.

The Art and Dress room in the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* provided another moment of "awe", when the viewer was immersed in a room full of Kahlo's looks, surrounded by her self-portraits and many photographs of her wearing her iconic hybrid Tehuana. The room was a homage to Kahlo, the artist and the woman. Kahlo's image endures because she was able to break a number of taboos around women's experiences and the challenges to overcome illness and physical injury, both exposing them and working through this trauma in creative ways. This resilience, her fighting attitude and determination to enjoy life despite the difficulties she encountered make her a powerful symbol, as she continues to speak to many different groups. Her iconic image communicates strength and the potential for change, as Kahlo expressed in her diary: "In spite of my long illness, I feel immense joy in LIVING" (Kahlo et al., 1995, p. 257). This message was conveyed through the exhibition's final room, shown in Figure 58, which demonstrates effective use of the cabinet as a tool to achieve a sense of wonder for the viewer.

Figure 58 Installation shot of the Art and Dress section at *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up*. V&A Museum, London, 2018.

5.5 Experience and Perception

Kahlo exemplifies Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) notion of a self-constructed identity derived from her experiences of the world and her use of the body as a means to know the world and articulate her sense of self. The experiential and emotional aspects of the exhibition are supported by Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) phenomenology as a theoretical perspective for addressing fashion as a haptic experience beyond aesthetics and symbolism. Negrin (2016) explains Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as "an awareness of the body not as a passive receptor of outside stimuli, but rather, as the medium through which we experience the world" (p. 115). According to Lipps (1903), the concept of Einfühlung, which can be translated as "feeling into", was adopted into the English language as "empathy" in the 20th century. It pertains to an internal process of imitation or resonance that arises from an innate urge, leading us to mimic the motions and expressions observed in both physical and social entities. The phenomenon of experiencing the emotions of others as our own can be attributed to the process of projecting our own emotions onto the other individual. In a similar vein, the attributes of aesthetic objects are subjectively experienced as our own, following from Lipps' (1903) assertion that these items

evoke responses akin to bodily expressions and movements, leading us to project our inner subjective qualities onto them.

According to Negrin's (2016) description of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology:

> Individuals do not passively internalize cultural systems of meaning imposed upon them from the outside. Instead, there is an active process of mediation between the two in which each is modified by the other. Through our corporeal schema, we engage with the social/cultural world at the same time that we are constituted by it. (p. 119)

The London main case study acknowledges this notion of individual agency. The viewer's interpretation and response to the exhibition would be determined by their personal engagement with the objects, as shaped by their existing points of view and attitudes. Through Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) concept of the "active process of mediation" and empathy, viewers will discover their meanings in constructing their perceptions through experience. The ability to alter and change shift viewers' perceptions through the exhibition experience becomes a key objective for successful curatorial practice and the broader intention of the curator's framework shown in this case study. (The statistics showing that 70% of people change their perceptions around disability are available to view in the Portfolio, p. 127.)

I ensured that the exhibition considered the viewers' experience not only in the gallery space but also on the website, marketing and communication materials, public programmes, education programmes, and academic conferences. These diverse messages and experiences around disability and diversity were constantly reinforced across the whole period of the exhibition. (The reach of the exhibition is available to view in the Portfolio, pp. 104-111.)

5.6 Summary

As presented throughout the chapter, the term "performance" can be defined as the presentation of identity and the social self; or as the telling of a story in the form of dance, film, exhibition, or text (Thornborrow & Coates, 2005). This section has considered the concept of telling a story as performance through the exhibition space, which is where all these objects are staged.

In this study, space is defined as the venue and design where the collection of objects is displayed. This is the place containing objects as repositories of memory, wherein each object becomes a fragment of a bigger narrative, while having a narrative of its own. They carry the memories and stories of the wearer, interpreted in the contemporary and present time: "Objects are emotion holders, traces of the past and carriers of discourse from other times into the present" (Samuel, 1994, as cited in Evans, 2003, p. 12). As Margaret Gibson (2008) said, while the body is absent, "the materiality of things is shown to be more permanent than the materiality of the body" (p. 1).

In this chapter, the emerging themes are reviewed in relation to the changing role and function of exhibition spaces as a means to communicate new visual languages. Section 5.2 presents the development of narratives around fashion and disability within the scope of fashion exhibitions. This is further explored by reviewing the exhibition concepts of staring and looking, stigma and disability, concealing and revealing, and fashion performance and performativity. The life and works of Kahlo were introduced to contextualise the case studies presented throughout Chapter 5. Through an analysis of the London main case study in Section 5.3, these examples were further elaborated to inform the theoretical implications of this study, leading to the development of a curatorial framework in Section 5.4. The curatorial framework frames time, space, and experience, and defines key tools chosen by the curator for mediating sources of tension through wonder, re-lensing, and memory. The framework presents a subjective approach to fashion curation using three primary tools: invisible threads, mirrors, and cabinet, to create positive associations around the topics of disability and otherness described in Section 5.4.2.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This thesis explores how the topics of disability and otherness can be destigmatised through fashion, dress, and identity. Addressing existing gaps in curatorial literature and practice, this study introduces conceptual frameworks and models leading towards the following: (a) the role of objects, (b) the contextual framing of spatiotemporal relations, and (c) the development of tangible and intangible experiences. Following a comprehensive literature review of key fashion theories and concepts, a Mexico City pilot study and London main case study were analysed and discussed to identify emergent themes and clarify the curatorial approaches. Chapter 5 concludes with a curatorial framework based on my subjective experience to structure and frame future practices. It proposes an open-ended approach to developing a curatorial language by re-lensing topics related to disability and otherness to make a meaningful impact.

This chapter discusses and evaluates the research objectives presented in Chapter 1 and the main contributions of this research. The thesis concludes with the impact of this study on future research and the broader implications for curatorial approaches in fashion.

6.2 Review of the Thesis

This thesis began with a question of how disability can be re-defined and re-contextualised through fashion objects in the exhibition context. The study involved a reflexive process of two case studies, as presented in the Mexico City pilot study and the London main case study. These studies reviewed the curator's curatorial experiences, which were evaluated through the documentation and analysis of the object-based approach to exhibition design as an experience. The emerging themes were further refined as the necessary tensions within fashion curation to be further explored and mediated through the tools and conceptions of the curated experience. Chapter 5 introduced a generalised, curatorial framework, based on my subjective experience, to

structure and frame future practices. It proposed an open-ended approach to developing a curatorial language, by re-lensing topics related to disability and otherness so as to meaningfully impact and generate positive associations in the future production of aesthetic experiences.

The research began with two main research questions in relation to two sets of objectives: (a) to define existing theories and models around the topic of fashion and disability, and (b) to develop broader curatorial perspectives through the building of a curatorial framework.

Research Question 1

How can the subject of disability and otherness be re-contextualised through the configuration of objects within fashion exhibitions?

Research Objective 1

1. To identify the key fashion theories and concepts around disability.

2. To identify curatorial perspectives and methodologies through an object-based approach.

3. To define the role and function of exhibition spaces.

Research Objective 1 was addressed through a literature review followed by the pilot study. The literature review revealed the limitations of conceptual models and frameworks in fashion curation studies. Through the pilot study, the curatorial approaches are categorically organised and presented to discuss how fashion exhibitions provide a space for disability to be re-configured and represented using an object-based approach. Chapter 4 presented selected curatorial methodologies to link the existing theories on object-based approaches to my practice, as explained through the pilot study.

Research Question 2

How can curatorial methodologies be applied to express a framework (both visual and textual) to generate positive associations and create a shift in the viewers' perceptions around disability and otherness?

Research Objective 2

1. To identify within my practice emergent themes as key exhibition concepts.

2. To develop a curatorial framework which incorporates notions of time, space, and experience.

3. To identify key tools within my curatorial practice which address the complexity of exhibition-making.

Research Objective 2 was addressed in Chapter 5 with a review of how the curatorial methodologies and perspectives informed the identification of the emerging themes, which were illustrated through the London main case study. Finally, Chapter 5 concluded with the development of a generalised curatorial framework based on the curator's own subjective experience, which integrates key curatorial tools to mediate and intervene in the tensions posed by the exhibition topics and themes.

The main output of this thesis is the exhibition *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* and a curatorial framework looking at existing curatorial methodologies that can be adapted to create positive associations around the concept of disability and otherness. These are all techniques that I have adapted in a considered manner to communicate with different audiences. While the framework is not based on tests and experiments, it was informed and constructed through descriptive analysis and interpretation considering practice as inquiry. Therefore, the evaluative process of the model was developed in relation to the progression of research development to support future research and practice.

6.3 Curatorial Reflections

The discussions, conceptual development, and findings of this thesis can be applied to fashion and dress studies, curatorial theories and practice, and the role of exhibition design in re-lensing the fashion identity.

I've been involved with Kahlo's personal archives for approximately 12 years. The initial exhibition showcasing her wardrobe, titled *Appearances Can Be Deceiving* (pilot study), was shown at the Frida Kahlo Museum in 2012. This project evolved from my master's thesis at the London College of Fashion in 2009. I collaborated with Professor Judith Clark on this exhibition: it was the product of our discussions over 3 years, where I curated the exhibition, and Judith took charge of its design. My involvement in this exhibition and collaboration with Clark marked the beginning of my curatorial research and my curatorial practice. I later extended this research to the 2018 exhibition at the V&A Museum, *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* (main case study), which gave me the chance to explore my ideas further. I curated this exhibition with Claire Wilcox, the then Senior Curator of Fashion at the V&A. Gannit Ankori was our curatorial advisor. The confirmation of this show in 2016 motivated me to pursue my PhD based on my curatorial practice.

Traditionally, discussions about Kahlo have focused either on her paintings or her personal life. I aimed to integrate these discussions through the lens of her fashion and dress. This led me to choose Professor Oriana Baddeley as my supervisor; she was among the few scholars who had analysed Kahlo's art, dress, and persona in her seminal 1991 essay "'Her dress hangs here': De-frocking the Kahlo cult" in the *Oxford Art Journal.* Judith Clark also agreed to continue working with me as part of my supervision team.

Following the success in London, I aimed to bring the exhibition to cities significant to Kahlo, such as New York (Brooklyn Museum), San Francisco (de Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco), and Paris (Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de Paris). In each city, I adapted my ideas to the specificities of the

given location. (The tour locations and dates are available to view in the Portfolio, pp. 128-129.)

After the Paris exhibition, I had the opportunity to develop some of these concepts further in a practical application with Christian Dior. Maria Grazia Chiuri, creative director at Dior, visited the exhibition in Paris at the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de Paris. Maria Grazia had visited the exhibition at the V&A and then in Paris. She explained how the narrative of my exhibition had inspired her to pay homage to Kahlo through her Cruise 2024 collection, and asked me to act as curatorial advisor to help her integrate indigenous textiles from Mexico (Mexican savoir faire) into the collection.

I worked with Chiuri and her Dior ready-to-wear creative teams over 3 months, from February to May of 2023, to develop the products created by Mexican artisans. I selected the artisans and different textile techniques based on existing techniques represented in Kahlo's wardrobe. I included artisans adopting an innovative approach towards their research and craft.

Maria Grazia wanted a venue connected to Kahlo for the fashion show, so I advised her to use the Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City. Today a museum and cultural centre, it used to be Kahlo's school, where in 1922 she first saw Rivera, painting his first mural *The Creation*. The Dior Cruise 2024 collection was shown at this venue on May 20, 2023, to great acclaim. (The Dior pieces produced by the Mexican communities for the Dior Cruise 2024 collection are available to view in the Portfolio, p. 131).

A future disability exhibition is being planned at the V&A for 2025. As part of its advisory team, I proposed an exhibition addressing fashion, design, arts, and disability that questions how we view able-minded, able-bodied, and disabled people. It should redefine our assumptions of difference, re-assess our relationship to the design world and allow for a rounded engagement with the sociocultural impact of design.

The Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico has expressed interest in publishing a book documenting all the iterations of the different Kahlo wardrobe exhibitions I have curated. The Museum would like to document creative aspects usually not represented in an exhibition catalogue: installation shots of the exhibitions, the work in progress, and the behind-the-scenes process in general.

The curatorial case studies, my exhibitions, my work with Dior and my PhD have undoubtedly allowed me to become a more reflective and confident curator. I hope this study and my own learnings are useful to students and aspiring curators.

6.4 Summary

This concluding chapter has reviewed the thesis and addressed the research objectives identified in Chapter 1. This study's main findings and contributions are presented through the development of transferable models and frameworks for fashion curation, as illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5. This chapter outlines the implications for future curatorial studies and practice. The final section of this chapter presents the theoretical contributions of this research in the form of a new curatorial methodology and its practical applications across fashion, dress, and curation.

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