Embedding the Personal: the construction of a 'fashion autobiography' as a museum exhibition, informed by innovative practice at ModeMuseum, Antwerp

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Abstract

My intention is to contribute to the field of exhibition-making a repertoire of presentation modes, previously not analysed or documented, that can be applied to the display of fashion in the museum and which will extend those techniques currently available to the exhibition-maker to create meaningful and stimulating exhibition environments.

Part 1 contextualises my investigation, through discussion of the exhibition as source material, the methods employed to execute the research and analysis of relevant literature. Part 1 concludes with an introduction to ModeMuseum, Antwerp, which is the primary location for my research.

Part 2 details the identification, description and definition of a repertoire of presentation modes, classified and distinguished as innovative through comparative analysis of over 100 exhibitions visited for this research, alongside investigation of the exhibition formats and structures that support deployment of the modes.

Part 3 relates the application of the presentation modes to the construction of a 'fashion autobiography' in the form of a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition, through examination of the processes utilised to develop the exhibition narrative and detailed account of the proposal in its final realisation.

In conclusion, I will critically reflect on the research executed, underlining the interrelationship of the theoretical and practice-based activities. Finally, I will detail opportunities taken to disseminate this research, and indicate possible directions for continued investigation.

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Appendices

Appendices are included in the form of pdf documents which can be accessed via the CD included with this thesis. Insert the CD and click on the **Appendices 1_2_3** icon. This will open a text which contains links to the Appendices as pdf documents.

Appendix 1: Documentation of Practice-based Research

Appendix 1 forms an archive of the practice-based research element of this thesis as an annotated version of five wire-bound volumes produced for review meetings with research supervisors. It also includes a photographic record of the *Hotel* project as realised in graphic and scale model form.

Volume 1 - Part 1

Volume 1 - Part 1 illustrates the initial stages in the documentation of my clothing as a collection for study including images of sorting purchase receipts and related ephemera, e-Bay screen grabs recording potential acquisitions and research informing the drafting of the collection inventory. An additional pdf document contains a complete version of the collection inventory from 2000 to 2010.

Volume 1 - Part 2

Volume 1 - Part 2 presents the first iteration of ideas that evolved into the themes *Rebellion, Identity* and *The Collector* as realised in the final renditions of the *Hotel* project.

Volume 2

Volume 2 records the description of projects that develop narrative ideas identified through the collection cataloguing process. These projects were ultimately abandoned as individual works, but were influential in developing the themes of *Conformity, Rebellion, Identity* and *The Collector* in the final renditions of the *Hotel* project.

Volume 3

Volume 3 records the compilation of reference material, including images and texts from multiple sources, in relation to the development of the themes of *Flamboyant, The Body, Repetition* and *The Collector* as they appear in the final renditions of the *Hotel* project. An additional pdf document contains a complete set of images from this stage of research for *The Collector.*

Volume 4

Volume 4 illustrates further development of research material and references towards the graphic rendering of the themes of *Rebellion, The Body, Repetition* and *The Collector* as realised in the *Hotel* project. An additional pdf document contains a complete set of images from this stage of research for *The Collector.*

Volume 5

Volume 5 represents the transition of source material towards the creation of the graphic rendering of the *Hotel* project including material for the volumes comprising *Conformity, The Body, Repetition* and *The Collector.*

The *Hotel* project

These images document the graphic and scale model renderings of the Hotel project including preliminary maquettes.

Appendix 2: Exhibitions Reviewed

Appendix 2 consists of a pdf document that provide a list of all exhibitions reviewed for this research, including those not referenced in the text, and a further pdf which contains images from some of those exhibitions reviewed.

Appendix 3: Thesis

A pdf version of the complete illustrated thesis text.

List of Illustrations

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Introduction

To commence the Introduction to this thesis, I will first acknowledge the exhibition which stands as the initial point of departure for my research and identify the research question it inspired. I follow this with a summary of my response to the research question outlining specific aims and objectives. I present arguments supporting the fundamental relationship between the theoretical and practice-based elements of this research programme and contextualise my investigation through reference to previous study and professional practice that bears influence on the perspective from which I conduct my analysis. Consequently, I propose what I consider to comprise my resultant contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making. To further contextualise the research question and my response I refer to recent writing on the subject of exhibiting fashion in the museum. I will end the Introduction with a summary of the content of each chapter of the thesis.

My interest in those issues that form the subject of this thesis dates to several years before the research project commenced. In 2001, while in Antwerp for the *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* festival, a celebration of the city's connection to the international fashion avant-garde, I visited the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) curated by Belgian fashion designer Dirk Van Saene. Initially intended as the opening exhibition for Antwerp's new fashion museum (ModeMuseum or MoMu as it is commonly known) the presentation had to be relocated due to delays in the MoMu construction programme. The exhibition, which explored the innovations of French couturier Gabrielle Chanel and Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, was eventually staged in the rococo interiors of the former Palace of the Belgian Royal Family.

The exhibition proved to be an astonishing experience. It was remarkable for the presentation strategies that were employed to display the exhibition material, exploiting both the elaborate period interiors of the Palace alongside dramatic constructions that used built environments, sound, light and aroma to create atmospheric, emotive spaces. The instructive texts generally so evident in the museum gallery - object labels and thematic information panels - were removed from the display and provided in a small booklet, encouraging the visitor to regard the presentation as an aesthetic and experiential composition appreciable without the influence of didactic interpretive text. Van Saene appeared to be striving to interpret the material on display through visual and spatial presentation strategies rather than explicatory text.

2Women-2Vrouwen suggested evidence of an approach to exhibition presentation that I had not previously experienced and which left me intrigued and curious. The exhibition exerted a considerable impression and I found that, when making subsequent visits to fashion exhibitions, I compared them to *2Women-2Vrouwen*. I became aware that I had, involuntarily, established the exhibition as a bench-mark by which I measured other exhibitions and their ability to engage and stimulate my interest. My experience of *2Women-2Vrouwen* inspired successive trips to MoMu and, over several visits to a number of different exhibitions, I noticed a recurrence of presentation strategies that provoked recollection of the experience of *2Women-2Vrouwen* which suggested that, rather than *2Women-2Vrouwen* being an isolated case, there might be a pattern to the approach to exhibition design evidenced. Due to this apparent recurrence of particular presentation strategies, sustained investigation of exhibition-making practice at MoMu became central to my research.

Whilst I will discuss the history and relevance of MoMu as the primary site for my research in Chapter 3, and give a detailed account of the

Mode2001 Landed-Geland festival and the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* in Chapter 4, it is sufficient to record at this point that the experience of visiting this exhibition, and my desire to rationalise and articulate my response gave rise to my research question: whether it is possible, through critical analysis of their scenography, to investigate and delineate the distinctive presentation strategies apparent in certain exhibitions staged at MoMu and to adapt and interpret these strategies in the execution of my professional exhibition-making practice?

In response to the research question I formulated a series of aims and objectives reflecting its two-part composition; my aims were to delineate the distinctive presentation strategies first evident in *2Women-2Vrouwen* and then to devise an exhibition project that would enable me to explore the presentation strategies in practice. Each aim would be achieved through the execution of specific objectives. In relation to the delineation of the presentation strategies, the first objective was to observe and examine a sample of fashion exhibitions to identify evidence of strategies comparable to those employed in *2Women-2Vrouwen*. Having become aware through the experience of visiting *2Women-2Vrouwen* that the impact of the presentation strategies used was not purely visual, but relied on multi-sensorial stimuli, I determined that it was of primary importance that exhibitions sampled should be scrutinised through first-hand experience. Whilst this might potentially limit the possible sample, I concluded that it would provide more profitable material for analysis. The selection of the exhibition sample and issues in relation to the exhibition as source material for research are dealt with in detail in Chapter 1.

The next objective was to subject the sample to a method of critical analysis through which I would be able to identify, describe and define the particular presentation strategies first observed in *2Women-2Vrouwen*. This process, also discussed in Chapter 1, would result in the delineation

of the presentation strategies, articulating them as a series of presentation 'modes', with detailed account of the various techniques that could potentially be employed in the realisation of each mode. Evidence gathered determined that four key exhibitions staged at MoMu, which I will introduce in Chapter 4, would become central to this analysis. This process of analysis, in part a comparative study of the exhibitions sampled, also allows for the identification of certain conventions in museum presentation. Through their adoption of alternative strategies to these conventions, it was possible to affirm the innovative nature of the presentation modes. Whilst it could be argued that in refuting convention, the presentation modes might only be described as 'unconventional', I would argue that the degree of creativity and imagination with which the modes are realised justifies their definition as innovative: they offer not merely the opposite of presentation conventions, but distinctive and complex scenographic alternatives. The theoretical research which encompasses the delineation of the presentation modes, which I define as 'threshold', 'landscape', 'object' and 'the body', is related in Chapters 6-9 and comprises the main body of Part 2 of this thesis.

In relation to the exploration of the presentation strategies in practice, I determined that my objectives would be to devise an exhibition project to which they could be applied, to execute and document this project, and to record critical reflection on the application of the presentation modes and the techniques employed to realise them. This practice-based research, I anticipated, would locate the repertoire of presentation modes in the process of exhibition-making, allowing me to examine them in practical application and, as a result, confirm their validity as legitimate strategies for the presentation of fashion in the museum.

I elected to devise a hypothetical exhibition project, to be staged in the MoMu exhibition galleries, rather than one staged in real life. I concluded

that a hypothetical project would allow me to concentrate fully on the realisation and consideration of the application of the presentation modes, rather than being occupied by issues of venue management, funding and arranging object loans, which would divert considerable time and resources from the key research activity – investigation of the presentation modes. The MoMu galleries were selected as the host venue so that my project would be determined by the same architectural and environmental conditions as the four key exhibitions identified as demonstrating evidence of the presentation strategies. The practice-based research activity relating to these objectives is documented in Part 3 of this thesis. Having stated, however, that one of my objectives was to employ the presentation strategies in my professional exhibition-making practice, I also include critical reflection on a particular exhibition from my professional out-put, *Lindow Man* (The Manchester Museum, Manchester, 2008), to which the modes were applied. My account of their application and ensuing public response, with reflection on their deployment in this particular exhibition context concludes Part 3 of this thesis.

This thesis, therefore, comprises three parts reflecting the interrelated research processes employed. Part 1 contextualises my work through review and analysis of source material and introduction to the main location for both my theoretical and practice-based research, MoMu, Antwerp, while Part 2 and Part 3 detail my theoretical research and practice-based research respectively. The research activities are documented in separate sections to reflect the chronology of their execution, the practice-based research being consequent on the findings of the theoretical and, primarily, in order to clarify their explication as each activity required very different research methods.

I would emphasise, however, that within this research programme I view both theoretical and practice-based research as fundamentally and

intrinsically interlinked and interdependent. They are interlinked in that both research activities share the same central location: four key exhibitions from MoMu provide the determining evidence for the identification of the repertoire of innovative presentation modes and MoMu provides the site for the exhibition proposal developed through the practice-based research. Both activities also centre on reflexive investigation: my location as participant-observer (which is discussed further in Chapter 1) is crucial to the exhibition analysis which forms the theoretical component of my research, whilst autobiographic narratives are central to the execution of the proposal for a hypothetical exhibition, which is the main activity performed for my practice-based research. The research activities are interdependent in that the identification, description and definition of the repertoire of innovative presentation modes that constitutes my theoretical research provides the subject for investigation in the practice-based research.

The successful testing of the modes, through the development of the exhibition project that constitutes the practice-based research element, confirms the modes as valid, practical presentation techniques to be deployed in exhibition-making. Further confirmation of their validity is provided by analysis of the application of the modes in the exhibition *Lindow Man*, for which I developed the exhibition concept and design, as discussed in Chapter 12. An additional connection between theoretical and practice-based activities was established during my practice-based research (detailed in Chapter 10) where exhibition publications that had served as reference material for theoretical research were the inspiration behind the execution of a series of graphic volumes employed as a developmental mechanism and, as critical to the process of the practice-based activity, were instrumental in developing the concept for the threshold mode as realised in my exhibition proposal. I will return to reflection on this interconnectivity in the Conclusion to this thesis.

Having stated my aims and objectives in response to the research question, and outlined the main activities that comprise this research programme, I consider it appropriate at this point to briefly relate prior study and professional experience that bears influence on the perspective from which my investigation is conducted.

Since 1987 I have maintained a professional practice in the museum and art gallery field, encompassing roles ranging from Technical Assistant to Designer and Curator. Most recently, from 2000-2010, I held the position of Head of Exhibitions at a major UK museum - The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester. My recent activity focussed on the development of innovative exhibitions and artists' programmes in collaboration with specialists in museum education and interpretation. I discuss this experience in more detail in Chapter 1 in relation to the definition of the term 'exhibition-maker', but at this point it is pertinent to state that my professional practice has concentrated principally on those presentation techniques employed in the construction of the exhibition scenography, and how these techniques are employed to create atmosphere and meaning and to communicate narrative. This professional focus, centred on the visual, spatial and sensory phenomenon of the physical environment in which the exhibition is experienced, is evident in my current investigation.

Alongside my professional experience are previous courses of study that also inform this research. Prior to commencing this doctoral programme I completed a Masters degree in which, through comparative analysis of images and related documentation, I proposed that there had been a marked shift towards narrative-based presentation of fashion in the areas of photography, retail and runway from the 1950s to the present day, that had no comparative trajectory in the presentation of fashion in museums. Knowledge gathered through this investigation was applied to practice-

based research, presented in an art gallery setting, which explored various techniques through which to construct work articulating autobiographic clothing-based narratives. This programme is relevant in relation to my current study in that it introduced me to the value and potential of combining theoretical and practice-based research methods (which I continue as a model into this research programme) and established the notion of the autobiographic examination of clothing (which provides the main focus for the practice-based activity executed for this investigation) as a central concern in my work.

I also propose that both my professional practice and research activities have also been influenced by my early training and work in theatre design. This schooling, I would suggest, established my conviction in the narrative and interpretive power of the constructed environment as realised and brought to influence in the theatrical setting. In this respect, it is significant that I use the term 'scenography' throughout this investigation to refer to the exhibition environment in its entirety - inclusive of architecture, construction, the visual language of the museum (such as texts, plinths, display cases and barriers), displayed objects, lighting, sound, and any associated sensory phenomena.

The terms 'scenography' and 'scenographer' are rarely employed in relation to exhibition design in related publications. This is borne out by examination of those texts on exhibition-making referenced in Chapter 2 to provide contextual orientation for my research. They invariably use the terms 'design' and 'designer' to denote both the activity, physical manifestation and the person responsible for the exhibition staging. MoMu exhibition catalogues, however, regularly credit a scenographer (including Debo and Verhelst (eds.) 2002, Debo and Verhelst (eds.) 2003, Debo and Bruloot (eds.) 2007, Debo 2008). This potentially indicates a continental prevalence for the term, reflecting its common use in European theatre

and, more importantly, the desire at MoMu to exploit an expression which eschews the traditional definition of exhibition designer in recognition of a more complex working practice. As stated by author and designer Philip Hughes, the exhibition designer is generally identified as 'responsible for the three-dimensional design of the structure as well as simple text panels and project management' (Hughes 2010: 20), whereas the exhibition scenographers active at MoMu demonstrate an integrated approach to curatorial and design activities more comparable to Robert Storr's understanding of the term 'exhibition-maker' (Storr 2006: 14), as cited in my terminology in Chapter 1.

The use of the term scenography is not unproblematic. Gottfried Korff, Professor of Cultural Studies and European Ethnology in Tübingen and Berlin, identifies scenography as 'the presentation of a topic without original objects' and in response proposes the term 'muséography' as 'the portrayal of a topic with the means of the museum, with objects, things, items from the past etc.' (Reinhardt and Teufel 2008: 39). Lukas Feireiss, author of *Staging Space* suggests the term '*mise-en-scène*' to define 'the calculated scenic arrangement in which image and space merge to form a narrative and sense-generating whole' (Feireiss 2010: 2).

Considering these options, my preference is to maintain the use of the term scenography. Whilst sympathetic to Korff's argument the expression muséography, in my experience, has made little inroad into discussions on exhibition-making or design, appearing only in this particular article. *Mise-en-scène*, I would argue, is also not an appropriate term, having an existing, and very specific use in film theory, to denote 'those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theatre: setting, lighting, costume and the behaviour of the figures' (Bordwell and Thompson 2003: 176). It is precisely because the actor's performance, which 'consists of visual elements (appearance, gestures, facial expression) and sound (voice,

effects)' (Bordwell and Thompson 2003: 198) is so crucial to the definition of the term, and most evidently absent in the exhibition-space, that I would consider it an inaccurate phrase to apply to the exhibition staging.

Informed by this discussion, and in the absence of a more suitable term, I maintain the use of the term scenography to describe the accumulated phenomenon of the exhibition environment and, returning to my account of those factors in my research and professional history that impact influence the perspective of my current research, I propose that it is through this scenographic lens that my investigation is executed. This establishes the location of a specific perspective for the execution of my research, focused on an examination of the phenomenological aspects of the exhibition alongside its intellectual content. This position differs from that occupied by the majority of authors reviewing or commenting on the presentation of fashion in the museum, invariably fashion and cultural historians focused on critique of the exhibition's intellectual content or argument.

Taking the above into account, it is relevant at this point to revisit and restate my research question and the related response which is the focus of this research: whether it is possible, through critical analysis of their scenography, to investigate and delineate the distinctive presentation strategies apparent in certain exhibitions staged at MoMu and to employ these strategies in the development of my professional exhibition-making practice? Therefore, my aims in response to this research question would be to identify, describe and define, through comparative critical analysis of a sample of exhibitions experienced at first-hand and viewed through a scenographic lense, a repertoire of innovative presentation modes and the techniques employed in their realisation. These innovative presentation modes would be further examined, in practice-based research, through their application to a detailed proposal for a hypothetical exhibition to be located in the MoMu exhibition gallery.

As my research progressed a further aim emerged in reaction to what I perceived as a lack of critical literature on exhibition-making written from a scenographic perspective in contrast to those publications that examined the museum or gallery from social, cultural or political perspectives. This position is illustrated by curator and critic Bruce Ferguson's assertion (cited in full as a preface to Part 1 of this thesis) that the critical industry based around museology has so far paid little attention to 'the architectonics of exhibitions' (Ferguson 1996: 176), and Gottfried Korff's statement that 'work undoubtedly needs to be done on an aesthetics of spatial installations in the service of knowledge' (Reinhardt and Teufel 2008: 39). These citations support my view that the critical literature published in relation to museology rarely focuses on phenomenological analysis of exhibition scenography, while the literature that focuses on exhibition scenography or design generally consists of illustrated case studies with little critique or analysis. It is into this gap that I would like to position my research and, through dissemination of my work through teaching, conference papers and publication, to add to the critical language and debate around exhibitions as examined through the scenographic lens.

Thus my contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making would be, through critical analysis of exhibition scenography, the identification, description and definition of a repertoire of presentation modes, previously not analysed or documented, that can be applied to the display of fashion in the museum. I propose that these modes, and the techniques employed in their realisation will extend those strategies currently available to the exhibition-maker to create meaningful and stimulating exhibition environments that positively impact on the visitors' experience and understanding of the objects on display, and dissemination of this research will contribute to the critical language and debate around exhibiting-making in relation to the display of fashion in the museum.

At this point, it is relevant to locate my investigation within the existing literature relating to the display of fashion in the museum (for clarity, I define the term 'fashion' as used in my thesis in Chapter 1). Although my research was initially inspired in reaction to a specific exhibition, *2Women-2Vrouwen*, it can be read in the context of issues repeatedly raised in writing on the presentation of fashion in museums: the perceived decontextualisation that results when clothing is displayed separated from the living, moving body for which it is made. This apparent disjuncture is eloquently described in Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilsons' article in the catalogue published to accompany the exhibition *Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1998):

> Dress, the body and the self constitute a totality, and when dress and body are pulled apart, as in the costume museum, we grasp only a fragment, a partial snapshot of dress, our understanding limited. Of course this is also true in a dress shop, except that in that situation we tend to visualise the garment as we would wear it, in addition to which the lively activity of the fashion boutique or department is usually very different from the hushed stillness of the museum, which transforms the garment into a fetish. Its displays cannot tell us how a garment moved when on the body, what it sounded like when it moved and how it felt to the wearer. When, as is often the practice, dress is displayed in museums as an art object, we loose something that art – painting, film – paradoxically returns to us: the sense of dress united with its body.
>
> (Entwistle and Wilson 1998: 111)

The exhibition, curated by Peter Wollen (at the time Professor of Film Studies, UCLA, California, USA) was intended as an exploration of 'the

dynamic and often conflicting relationship between optical and tactile, fine and applied art, a sense of pure form and a sense of design for use' (Wollen 1998: 18). It consisted of five thematic sections, each of which combined material made by artists and fashion designers, exercising no distinction between the fine and applied art objects in the manner of their presentation. The exhibition design, executed by architect Zaha Hadid, although stridently dynamic in its geometric response to the architecture of the Hayward Gallery, was absolutely conventional in its adoption of the visual language of the gallery and museum; picture frame, plinth, display case and vitrine [Figs. Intro.1, Intro.2]. The fashion content of the exhibition was almost exclusively presented on headless Stockman mannequins (occasionally suspended from the ceiling) typical of many museum fashion exhibitions, while retail-type mannequins were primarily evident in the presentation and construction of fine art pieces, such as Christo's *Wedding Dress* and Duchamp, Masson and Miro's surrealist compositions.[1] The site of the exhibition, on the occasion of its presentation in both London and Germany, were galleries principally concerned with the display of modern and contemporary art.[2]

While the thesis of the exhibition is very clearly articulated in Wollen's introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, it is pertinent that Entwistle and Wilson, who approach the study of fashion from the perspectives of a sociologist and cultural historian respectively, contributed a catalogue essay that examines the importance of the body in relation to clothing and the resultant impact of the absent body in museum displays. Wollen's exhibition presents both clothing and artwork as artefact, disembodied object, while Entwistle and Wilson's essay relates narratives regarding the intersection of body and garment. I would argue that for Wollen's thesis narratives of the garment as an item for wear were not significant, yet for Entwistle and Wilson they are essential, concluding that Entwistle and Wilsons' subtle insertion of their concerns regarding the exhibited garment

Figs. Intro. 1, Intro. 2 Installation views, *Addressing the Century.*

into their catalogue essay is indicative of the importance of narratives of the body to academics with an interest in a socially, or culturally-contextualised dress history.

Entwistle and Wilsons' essay does not, however, operate as an overt critique of either the themes or the presentation techniques demonstrated in *Addressing the Century*. Instead it very succinctly positions the concerns of dress historians and curators within a predominantly art-historical context and serves as a reminder that there are contextual concerns other than art- or design-historic strategies in the curation and display of fashion in the museum. Whilst the presentation of fashion within the museum or gallery is immensely valuable in providing first-hand experience of the aesthetic and technical aspects of garments, the articulation of complex narratives of identity, social history, economics and design is often reported by professionals in the field, as previously cited, as a an inherently problematic endeavour.

Reviewing the literature of exhibiting fashion in the museum, the difficulties arising from this activity are prominent as a recurring theme. Anne Buck, the first Keeper of Costume at the one of the UK's foremost dress collections, The Gallery of English Costume, Platt Hall, Manchester wrote as early as 1958 that:

> …the beauty of dress, always ephemeral, is so closely connected with the living, moving body which wore it and gave it final expression, that a dress surviving, uninhabited, may appear as an elaborate piece of fabric, an accidental repository of the textile arts, but little more.
>
> (Buck 1958: 3)

Forty-four years later, eminent curator, academic and dress historian Professor Lou Taylor (at the time Professor of Dress and Textile History, University of Brighton) cites Buck, adding that the 'whole range of human experience attached to the wearing of clothes is inevitably lost on the static dummy placed behind glass' (Taylor 2002: 24). Ethically bound by professional guidelines established by ICOM (the International Council of Museums, which prescribes agreed rules for the collection and care of material held in museum collections) it is no surprise that dress curators see the display of material as a 'challenge' (Taylor 2002: 24). Dress historian and curator Valerie Cumming's position is to argue that those of the opinion that dress displays in museums may only articulate narratives of 'stylistic change and technical innovation' overlook the 'imaginative role' of the curator (Cumming 2004: 73). Whilst in principle I would agree with Cumming, it is regrettable that she illustrates her argument with an image of a particularly conservative display, encased behind glass and dominated by explanatory text.

Without contradicting the validity of Entwistle and Wilson's argument (in fact a number fashion exhibitions I have experienced would support their observations) I am also encouraged from experience of truly innovative and imaginative presentations of fashion in museums to dispute their rather gothic vision of the gallery as 'haunted by the individuals who once wore the gowns and coats', and to question their statement that the museum 'cannot' communicate the phenomenon of a garment; its feel, its sound, its effect on the wearer (Entwistle and Wilson 1998: 110-111). In this thesis I will demonstrate through evidence gained through observation of exhibitions executed for this research programme that, as the museum itself creates the 'hushed stillness' (Entwistle and Wilson 1998: 111) and engenders the problematic disjuncture between garment and body, the museum can also adopt innovative strategies and presentation techniques

that are experiential, deeply engaging, and communicate complex narratives related to clothing.

Although illuminating in providing comparative contextual reference to my investigation, I cite these references primarily to illustrate that the existing work in relation to the presentation of fashion in the museum, whilst concerned with the problematic issues of presenting garments, rarely approaches the question from the scenographic perspective. I would suggest that, as those issues identified in the preceding texts arise from the act of putting garments on display in the museum gallery, possible solutions to these issues will be found in innovative scenographic strategies. I propose that the deployment of the repertoire of innovative presentation modes, identified through my investigation and defined as threshold, landscape, object and the body (discussed in detail in Chapters 6-9, and illustrated by comprehensive reference to four key presentations from MoMu) might be one possible solution to those problematic issues identified by Entwistle and Wilson, Taylor and Cumming.

Having introduced my research question, outlined the aims and objectives of my proposed response and the perspective from which it is constructed, stated my intended contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making and provided initial contextualisation for my research, I will conclude the Introduction with a brief outline of the content of each chapter of this thesis.

To introduce my research, Part 1, Chapter 1 provides the reader with a definition of terms used throughout the thesis and discussion on issues relating to the use of the exhibition as a source of reference, including the selection of exhibitions for review, the process of review and my research position in that process and how the exhibition as source material is

related to the reader. The chapter also includes discussion on the use of supplementary exhibition-related source material in my research.

Chapter 2 contextualises my theoretical research and practice based research through a review of secondary source material that provides reference and situates the elements of my research in the appropriate fields of expertise. Texts on the production of exhibitions and display of fashion are consulted in relation to my theoretical research, alongside published texts and sources in other media relating to fashion autobiography. The presentation of menswear in fashion exhibitions is discussed in relation to my practice-based research and is revealed as an area that has received comparatively little attention in the field of curating and exhibiting fashion. Through review of these sources and with reference to comparable work in the field of exhibition-making and the analysis of presentation modes, I aim to provide evidence to demonstrate the originality of my research and resultant contribution to knowledge in my field.

Chapter 3 completes Part 1 of my thesis and serves to introduce MoMu, the main site for both my theoretical and practice-based research, through a brief history of its collection, the development of the building that houses MoMu, and discussion of those factors that support MoMu as a site for innovation.

Part 2 details my theoretical research: the identification, description and definition of a repertoire of innovative presentation modes evident in the display of fashion in the museum. Chapter 4 documents my visit to the exhibition that would instigate this research, *2Women-2Vrouwen*, and records the first indications of those presentation modes central to my investigation. Chapter 4 closes with an introduction to those presentations at MoMu that are recognized as key sources of reference for my research.

Chapter 5 provides a critical investigation of various exhibition formats and structures identified through comparative analysis of information gathered during exhibition visits, and discusses the relative impact of various exhibition formats and structures on the physical manifestation of an exhibition.

Chapters 6 to 9 each document, in sequence, one of the innovative presentation modes previously identified; threshold, landscape, object and the body. The chapters tackle each mode in turn, first reiterating a definition of the mode and its realisation in *2Women-2Vrouven*, comparison of the mode with conventional approaches identified through the exhibition visits, and continuing with critical analysis of the execution of each mode as evidenced in the four key exhibitions from MoMu, supplemented, where appropriate with reference to presentations at other venues. Each chapter ends with consideration of the implications of the mode in relation to my practice-based research.

Part 3 details the practice-based element of my research: the application of the innovative presentation modes to the construction of a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition to be staged in the MoMu galleries. Chapter 10 commences this section of the thesis, introducing my previous research practice as justification for the autobiographic subject matter selected for my practice-based research. The chapter continues with a detailed account of the processes developed to implement the practice-based research; the construction of a collection catalogue as an investigative process to identify autobiographic narratives. The chapter concludes by relating those factors influential in the decision to utilise the production of a series of artist's books as a developmental tool and intermediary process between the cataloguing exercise and the final exhibition proposal.

Chapter 11 is a comprehensive account of the exhibition proposal, constructed in scale-model form, relating the implementation of the innovative presentation modes first described in Chapter 4 and developed in detail through Chapters 5-9. Chapter 11 commences with description of the format and structure, in both physical and conceptual terms, employed for the exhibition and informed by analysis related in Chapter 5. The main body of this chapter comprises detailed description of each of the eight rooms of the exhibition proposal. Each room is described in sequence with each account structured to recount the autobiographic narrative on which the room is based, the main themes to be communicated, how the ideas for the room were developed in graphic form, and how each of the innovative presentation modes are applied. The chapter concludes with reflection on the processes employed in constructing the proposal.

Chapter 12 concludes the account of my practice-based research, with a report of the innovative presentation modes employed in the public realm, through their application to a project staged at The Manchester Museum during my employment as Head of Exhibitions.

In the Conclusion, I will revisit my aims and objectives as previously outlined and reflect on the processes used to achieve them, with particular reference to those challenges faced, and solutions adopted in the completion of my theoretical and practice-based research activities. As a final summary, I will restate my intended contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making, detail those opportunities taken so far to disseminate my research, and indicate possible directions for continued investigation.

Part 1

Both the art object and the museum in which it is found are the special subjects of a new critical industry whose criticality often ignores the genres, systems, histories and architectonics of exhibitions and their reception. Uncannily, which means unconsciously, the active catalytic ingredient – the institutional tone of forceful articulation – the systematic delivery of art in a dynamic moment from object to concept – the exhibition – has been overlooked, for the most part.

(Ferguson 1996:176)

Chapter 1: Terminology and the Exhibition as Reference

In this chapter I will introduce my research through the definition of certain terms that are used frequently throughout this thesis and also through discussion of the exhibition and exhibition-related publication as source material for research. The first part of this chapter will provide the reader with a terminology, introducing a number of terms that recur through my text and proposing definitions that are appropriate within the context of this work. The key terms to be defined are 'fashion' and 'fashion autobiography, 'exhibition-maker', and 'exhibition' and 'presentation'. The second part of the chapter continues with discussion of issues relating to the use of the exhibition as source material, first examining some challenges that arise from the use of the exhibition as reference, followed by account of how the exhibition is represented in my research; the selection of exhibitions, how they are read and how they are communicated to the reader. Having introduced the exhibition as source material, I will describe the analytical process utilised in my research to identify, describe and define the innovative presentation modes central to this thesis. The chapter concludes with discussion of exhibition related material as reference, including exhibition catalogues, guides, web-based resources and marketing material, alongside justification for the exclusion of certain exhibition-related information such as institutional evaluative material and oral testimony from exhibition curators.

Terminology

At this point, in order to ensure clarity and consistency in reading of the chapters that follow, it is pertinent to introduce a number of terms that recur throughout the text and propose definitions that are appropriate to

the context of this work. Two of the terms to be defined, 'fashion' and 'exhibition', are in common usage, and my definition serves only to establish the fine-points of their parameters. The term 'exhibition-maker' is only recently coined and, even within the museum profession, rarely used, and the term 'fashion autobiography' is a phrase that has a particular meaning within this thesis.

'Fashion' – I use the term fashion to identify all clothing, related material culture and practices that, effected on the human body, transmit meaning to both wearer and viewer. In this respect the definition is based on that devised by Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and first presented at a workshop entitled *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning*, April 1989, in Oxford, and subsequently published in *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning* (Barnes and Eicher 1997). Central to their definition is the development of a classificatory system, realised in tabular form, which encompasses types of dress under main headings of 'Body Modifications' and 'Body Supplements' cross-referenced against properties such as 'Colour', 'Texture' and 'Odor' (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997: 18). Whilst their definition of dress is useful in establishing an all-encompassing approach that includes multi-sensory aspects of bodily adornment, their selection of the term 'dress' is determined by a desire to employ a term that is culturally- and, in particular, gender-neutral (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997: 15).

In the context of this investigation I consider it more accurate to adopt Eicher and Roach-Higgins inclusive definition but to apply the term fashion to describe what is, for the most part in my research, contemporary material manufactured for a western-centric market. I would assert that the use of the term fashion in this case is supported by comments made by Rosemary Harden, Curator and Museum Manager, The Fashion Museum, Bath, at a recent symposium in Stockholm at which we were both

speakers, organised by the Scandinavian Wardropenetwork. Harden spoke on the public consultation that been instrumental in supporting the Museum's change of title from The Museum of Costume to The Fashion Museum, reporting that the term fashion had been confirmed to be broadly understood as a generic term to represent all forms of clothing and associated material and practices across diverse geographic and temporal locations.[3]

'Fashion autobiography' – I use the term fashion autobiography to refer to a narrative or series of incidents, authored and narrated by the subject, that relates a personal history through fashion-related associations, recollections, description or allusion. The fashion autobiography, as any other autobiographical work, can take a literary, musical, cinematic, televisual or even exhibition form.

'Exhibition-maker' – there has been significant debate on the definition of the role and the meaning of the term curator in recent years, with the expression increasingly applied to activities beyond its traditional confines of the museum or gallery to encompass diverse non-museum activities; issues of *A Magazine*, published in Antwerp by A Publisher BVBA, are 'curated' by various fashion designers, the stock sold in London retail out-let Late Night Chameleon Café is 'curated' by owners John Skelton and Daniel Mitchell (Gibson 2011: 126), and the Deloitte Ignite event at The Royal Opera House, London, 4 September 2011, was 'curated' by film-maker Mike Figgis ("Deloitte Ignite" n.d.). The term is articulately debated by a number of authors but generally within the context of the art gallery rather than museum, and particularly in the context of contemporary art. Art critic and curator Lawrence Alloway succinctly describes the curator's traditional duties as:

(1) acquiring work for the museum, (2) supervising its preservation in store, and (3) displaying it, putting it on exhibition.

(Alloway 1996: 221)

As curatorial, or exhibition-making activity is increasingly performed by professionals who are not allied to a particular institution, or responsible for a collection, debate around the use and meaning of the term continues and alternatives are sought to accurately describe the activity of devising and producing exhibitions which combines the traditionally separate activities of curator and designer. With reference to film studies, sociologists Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak suggest the use of the term '*auteur*' to describe the role of an exhibition author who devises the exhibition concept and also determines content and design (Heinich and Pollak 1996: 238-241). This term is so heavily rooted in the discipline of cinema, however, that I would argue that an alternative term is needed to describe the role in relation to exhibitions located in the museum or gallery.

Artist and art critic Robert Storr proposes the term exhibition-maker in relation to the activity of exhibition production as an alternative to curator because:

…it acknowledges the existence of a specific and highly complex discipline and separates the care or preservation of art – a curator's primary concern – from its variable display.

(Storr 2006:14)

Storr's definition is pertinent in that it acknowledges that the curation of exhibitions is, within the professional museum and gallery field,

increasingly the responsibility of free-lance or specialist staff and is no longer an adjunct to the activities of care, research and acquisition related to a museum or gallery collection. It also, as Storr states, acknowledges the specialist skills that are increasingly recognised as being essential to the creation of exhibitions, including visual and spatial skills as well as linguistic communication skills (Storr 2006: 15). While Dirk Houtgraaf, Head of Exhibitions at the natural history museum Naturalis, Leiden, sees the creation of exhibition narratives and the exhibition design as distinct activities (whether executed sequentially or consecutively) performed by individual specialists (Houtgraaf 2008:41), Storr's definition implies a possible compression of activities traditionally seen as being the remit of distinct individuals moving towards what architect and exhibition designer David Dernie calls 'a significant form of creative expression' (Dernie 2006: 6). Dernie's text, however, serves to illustrate the unresolved state of the debate over the definition and use of the term curator and its possible alternatives: whilst adopting the verb-form of Storr's definition and repeatedly referring to the activity of 'exhibition-making', Dernie uses the conventional term 'exhibition designer' to refer to the person perpetrating the activity of determining the exhibition's aesthetic and related presentation techniques (Dernie 2006: 6).

For several years I have used the term exhibition-maker to describe my own professional activity, for exactly those reasons articulated by Storr above, and continue to do so throughout this thesis. In relation to Storr's definition, the collocation of the activities of exhibition curating and exhibition design amount to a holistic approach to conceptualising and realising an end product – the exhibition. It also allows the development of the creation of an exhibition to be approached from a perspective other than the art historical, which is the background of many curators. As a trained designer, my approach to the development of an exhibition is through the visual, not only in its presentation, but in its conceptualisation

and its interpretation. As fashion historian Caroline Evans remarks of Judith Clark's approach to the exhibition *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004):

> …this is the key that unlocks the magic door into this kind of curating: the optical (Judith's constructions, the edifice and the exhibits together) is a gateway into a world of ideas.
>
> (Evans 2004: 44-45)

As a definition of my own professional activity, I regard the term exhibition-maker as appropriate as it alludes to a sense of craft, of devising and constructing the physical manifestation. Taking into account the unresolved nature of the relevant terminology I recognise that the adoption of a particular title falls to personal preference and, bearing this in mind, I have made the decision to refer to those individuals responsible for the production of the exhibitions I reference by the title applied to them in the exhibition catalogue, associated publication or the exhibition publicity material. I maintain the phrase 'exhibition-making', however, to describe the activity of exhibition production, in relation to a process of simultaneously generating both exhibition content and physical manifestation.

'Exhibition' and 'presentation' – the terms exhibition and presentation are used to identify any display of fashion (as defined above) staged in a gallery or museum, or any other space temporarily given over for this use. Venues include museums that are devoted solely to fashion, as is MoMu, and other locations such as the Design Museum, London, and Somerset House, London, who host fashion displays as part of a programme of temporary exhibitions. Exhibition and presentation are used explicitly in relation to temporary events, that is those displays that have a defined

beginning and end date, as opposed to those displays of fashion often categorised as permanent displays such as the Fashion Gallery at the V&A, London. The terms exhibition and presentation (when used in the noun and verb form) are interchangeable within this text – the need for the use of both terms is led by a stylistic need for variety in the text to relieve the reader of the over repetitive use of exhibition.

The exhibition as reference

A considerable component of my research comprises reference to relevant museum exhibitions and I consider it to be essential, in a research programme that is concerned with the investigation and application of presentation techniques, that the exhibition and related publications are regarded as valuable and valid source material, or 'texts'. Whilst reference to the exhibition as text is invaluable to my research, particularly to the process of identifying and defining innovative presentation modes I recognise that it is, nonetheless, problematic as source material. Unlike a literary, cinematic or musical source temporary exhibitions are, by their nature, ephemeral and so whilst they can be referenced in a text, they cannot be directly reviewed for verification of fact by the reader. To provide as much direct reference as possible I have included significant photographic record, when available, to illustrate my argument. This in itself has posed challenges: in many fashion exhibitions the visitor is not permitted to take photographs, with reasons ranging from protecting the copyright of the items on display to risk of damage to sensitive material from over-exposure to camera flash. As many fashion exhibitions are staged in semi-darkness, photography without resorting to flash-light is almost useless. Where photographs of installations are included in my text, they come from a number of sources; personal photographs taken during the visit, images reproduced in associated publications, images provided by the institution. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that

some of the major institutions regularly presenting fashion exhibitions do not respond to requests for photographic material from researchers. Art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski, in her appraisal of installation styles at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, MOMA (which is assessed in more detail in the next chapter) notes a similar problem, where standard MOMA policy restricts the number of its images that can be used in one text (Staniszewski 2001: xxiii).

Presenting adequate pictorial representation is not the only challenge in the use of the exhibition as reference material. Neither the Harvard nor Chicago referencing systems have standard fields for reference to exhibitions, even though websites, music, film and television programmes are included. For this thesis, considering that so much of my reference material is in exhibition form, I have devised my own system for referring to exhibitions. Reference to an exhibition in the thesis text is by title, which appears italicised as is standard with a literary text. The title is chosen as main reference as the acknowledgement of a curator is inconsistent or often nonexistent and, in my experience, the title is the general reference point for an exhibition in everyday use. The title is followed, for the first appearance of an exhibition in each chapter, with the venue, city and year date of the exhibition opening. This information assists the reader in locating the exhibition geographically and temporally in relation to other exhibitions cited and to differentiate exhibitions from associated publications with the same title. I decided not to include all of the exhibition details every time an exhibition is mentioned. I discovered that, with the density of reference in some passages, this made the text almost unreadable.

Many exhibitions have composite and rather lengthy titles, which often appear in several formats (poster, leaflet, website, press release) with inconsistent punctuation. I have standardised titles by applying a colon

between main title and sub-title. Again, to aid readability, I state the full title and subtitle at the first reference to an exhibition in each chapter, with subsequent reference in that chapter by main title only. For exhibition entries in the reference section of this thesis, I list exhibitions alphabetically by title, to aid cross reference from the main text. In this section I supplement information regarding the exhibition venue and city location with the full dates of the exhibition run, and the curator or designers' names where known. In the UK and USA, curator and designer are standard terms. In mainland Europe other terms are often used, such as scenographer or *commissaire*. Where a person is credited with either of these roles I have included their name in the exhibition listing. This approach is duplicated in Appendix 2, where I give a complete list of exhibitions visited for this research.

The selection of exhibitions visited for this research was determined by two factors; content and accessibility. In relation to content, I considered it relevant to visit not only those presentations devoted to the material product of fashion, but also those exhibitions that examined the activities surrounding the production of fashion such as image-making and commercial presentation, and those exhibitions that positioned fashion in relation to other disciplines such as contemporary art or architecture. I included those presentations that focused on historic material (although the majority of presentations consisted of mainly material from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), or that combined historic and contemporary within a thematic narrative. I did not discriminate according to institution or venue, and have thus included exhibitions from institutions that do not hold fashion collections (such as The National Portrait Gallery, London, National Museum of Film, Photography and the Moving Image, Bradford) and those venues that regularly host touring exhibitions (such as Somerset House, London). In order to gather the maximum comparative

reference for my investigation I interpreted 'fashion exhibition' in the broadest sense.

I did not include in my research those presentations described as 'permanent displays' from institutional collections, for example the permanent galleries at Platt Hall Gallery of English Costume, Manchester, The Fashion Museum, Bath, and the Fashion Gallery at the V&A Museum, London. From previous observation I concluded that this type of display, often conceived to support learning in the UK schools GCSE curriculum, generally presents a conventional fashion chronology (or at least outfits are grouped by date) and employ traditional presentation techniques. In my experience of working at Platt Hall as Exhibition Designer from 1986-1992, the presentation techniques employed for semi-permanent displays tended to avoid experimentation and err on the side of tradition, partly so that they did not appear dated before next due for refurbishment (which could be anything from 5-15 years), and partly because the budgets for these displays were largely expended on expensive mannequins individually tailored for period garments. These galleries rarely attract high-profile sponsorship often associated with major temporary exhibitions which, in return, demand high-impact design to attract the media attention funders require. Practical issues of access determined the geographic catchment of my research, so that most of the exhibitions reviewed are from the UK or major European cities within easy reach of the UK.

Occasionally I make reference to exhibitions that I did not experience first-hand. These occurrences are limited, and only arise when I consider that the presentation has an invaluable role in my analysis and that the point made is adequately informed and supported by secondary reference material such as illustrated catalogues and associated publications. Reference to an installation is only made through secondary material when illustration is of excellent quality, such as the publications

commemorating *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004) and *Anglomania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006). Publications such as the catalogues for the exhibitions *De Ideale Man: Man in de Mode* (Gemeentemuseum, den Hague, 2008) and *Wild: Fashion Untamed* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005), which lack installation images, are only used as reference in relation to discussion of exhibition content. Further discussion of the uses of catalogues and associated publications follows later in this chapter.

As an appendix to this work I have drafted a table of exhibitions visited as reference material for my research, to date, a list of over 100 presentations. Central to the analysis of the exhibitions referenced are four key exhibitions from MoMu, Antwerp; *Genovanversaeviceversa* (2003), *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (2004), *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A.F. Vandevorst* (2005) and *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* (2007) which are introduced in more detail in Chapter 4. Although an examination of these four exhibitions will be the main source of evidence to support my research into innovative presentation modes, I will also make reference to other exhibitions which are relevant to my investigation. The complete list of exhibitions visited is given in Appendix 2 in the CD supplement to this thesis.

My reading of the exhibitions referenced is executed from two perspectives; that of the visitor in order to experience the effects of the presentation and that of a professional exhibition-maker in the process of critical analysis. In relation to locating my investigation from the experience of a visitor, I have tried to echo the approach advocated by Tomislav Sola, Professor of Museology at Zagreb University who, addressing a conference of museum professionals, encouraged them not

to 'forget the visitor inside themselves' when visiting museums and exhibitions.[4] I interpret Professor Sola's words to mean not only that we should try to visit exhibitions unencumbered by those professional museological concerns that fill our working lives, but that we should also try to open up to the total experience of the exhibition and to look with fresh eyes, from a perspective not prejudiced by individual specialist disciplines. In this spirit, I use the term 'the visitor' in my accounts of exhibitions (both those experienced through actual visit and those reviewed through photographic representation in associated publications) to locate myself within the activity of the visit and exhibition experience.

Though I attempt to describe the exhibition experience from a visitor's perspective, my subsequent analysis is deliberately focused through the lens of my professional knowledge and experience as an exhibition-maker. From this context my analysis of an exhibition is focussed not primarily on the objects displayed and the message conveyed explicitly through exhibition texts, but on those visual, spatial and sensory techniques that are employed to present the object. Unlike the majority of fashion exhibition reviews, often written by dress and cultural historians and which tend to focus principally on examination of the intellectual content and critique of the dominant narrative of the exhibition, my investigation concentrates on the techniques used to construct the exhibition environment and how these techniques are used to create atmosphere and meaning in the exhibition. My investigation is focused on the visual and spatial messages displayed in the exhibitions referenced and, as a result, places comparable emphasis on the emotional and sensory experience of the exhibition as the intellectual. I would argue that a reading of an exhibition from this perspective emphasises a holistic reading of the exhibition as a three-dimensional, multi-sensory phenomenon. Echoing this dual perspective of visitor and critic I developed a strategy of, when possible, visiting exhibitions twice. Even if

the two occasions of visit were separated only by a few hours, my first visit would be focussed on the experience of the exhibition, the second visit on the observation and documentation necessary for my analysis.

This dual perspective, of participant and observer may seem contradictory, indeed as Charlotte Aull Davies, Lecturer in Social Research Methods, University of Wales, notes, this split dynamic 'may appear oxymoronic, in that the two activities, or the roles they suggest, cannot be pursued simultaneously' (Aull Davies 1996: 72). Although this dual perspective is, as Aull Davies continues, 'usually taken as the archetypal form of research employed by ethnographers' (Aull Davies 1996: 67). Whilst not intending to divert my research into the field of ethnography I think it is useful, at this point, to further investigate the dynamic of the dual role of participant-observer and reflect on the implications for my research.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, at the time Professor of Social Sciences at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, illustrates the role of participant-observer using the terms 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant'. Citing psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, Geertz elaborates:

> An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone…might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied to others. An experience-distant concept is one that specialists…employ to forward their scientific, philosophical or practical aims.
>
> (Geertz 2000: 57)

Geertz suggests that the success of the participant-observer dynamic is not in the balance of the two roles, or the relative degree to which each is

adopted, but in the awareness of how each is deployed (Geertz 2000: 57). Relating this concept to my research, I propose that the experience-near dynamic is equivalent to the first exhibition visit, focused on the experience of the visit, being open to those sensory and intellectual stimuli composed by the curator, designer or exhibition-maker into the exhibition. The experience-distant dynamic is equivalent to my second visit, where a deliberately more analytical approach is taken. Rather than compromising my process, I would argue that the dual dynamic of participant-observer brings clarification: if I had not experienced the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) first in the near-experience mode, I might not have registered those emotional and sensory responses that, after reflecting on the effects of the visit, inspired closer scrutiny of the exhibition, eventually resulting in my current research. As Charlotte Aull Davies confirms, 'participation…is a means of facilitating observation' (Aull Davies 1996: 71).

I feel it is important to stress that during the process of the exhibition visit I did not intentionally strive to play the role of visitor or critic: there is no conscious transformational process or attempted role-play. As Geertz comments, the key to the deployment of this dual role is not 'the myth of the chameleon field-worker' (Geertz 2000: 56), which he further asserts by stating that he approaches the role of participant-observer 'not by imagining myself someone else' (Geertz 2000:58). Although the process of participant-observer is relevant to my work in relation to describing the dual role I play in my exhibition visit analysis, there are fundamental differences between my research and that of an ethnographer in the field. In the first instance the object of my observation is a space, not living people, which is not to say that the space is immobile or unresponsive, but that the mode of interaction between observer and space, and observer and person has obvious differences. Added to that, I originate, in the broadest terms, from the same society and culture that has created the

focus of my study and thus, I am familiar with the signs, symbols and meanings of my subject and not positioned, as the ethnographer invariably is, as an 'outsider'. Finally, I was generally able to perform the task of participant and observer on separate occasions and so able to consciously adjust to the demands of each activity, unlike the ethnographer, who must often perform both tasks simultaneously.

Despite these differences, reflection on the ethnographic comparison with my process is useful in prompting thoughts on the influence I bring, as viewer, to the process of analysis. Indeed Aull Davies asserts that:

> Observation must include reflexive observation – that is
> the ethnographer needs to be sensitive to the nature of,
> and conditions governing, their own participation.
>
> (Aull Davies 1996: 73)

In relation to the preceding discussion of the process of participant-observation and the need for reflexive observation, to further clarify my position in relation to the reading of the exhibition texts that I review and in the spirit of my autobiographic practice-based research, it is appropriate at this point to include a personal narrative diversion.

Aged 11 and in my first year at senior school in a small town in the north east of England, I went on an organised trip to London with my schoolmates and teachers. This was the first time I had visited London and the first time I had been away from home without my family. My memory of the trip is that of an exciting and emotional sensory overload. The city was beyond anything I had ever experienced. As one of the organised activities on the trip, we were taken to see the exhibition *The Genius of China* at The Royal Academy. From the visit to the exhibition I have a very clear recollection of approaching a narrow, dark corridor, at

the end of which I can just see a large glass cube, measuring approximately 2.5 metres in each dimension, glowing with light from its base. The corridor opens into a small chamber with the illuminated glass box at its centre, the foundation of which is sunk into the black-carpeted floor. In the glass box, presented below floor-level as if still partly interred, is the centrepiece of the exhibition: a complete burial suit, made for an ancient-Chinese princess, from tiny tablets of lustrous golden jade each held into the form of her body by small connecting red silk stitches at the corner. It was one of the most extraordinary things I have ever seen. The recollection of this vision still resonates with me to this day.

Considering the dynamic that the viewer brings to the process of observation, I think it is likely that I have been looking to repeat this experience ever since, and it is probably this sense of the theatrical, the revelatory, the emotive that I was looking for in every exhibition I visited afterwards. This experience undoubtedly shaped my perspective as a viewer, influencing my process as participant–observer to be predisposed to the kind of presentation techniques that might replicate this experience, and which are inherent in the presentations that have become central to my investigation. Taking into account reflection on the process of participant-observer and the ethnographer's need to be aware of their own influence, I find it relevant to recognise that, as a viewer, I am more predisposed to privilege certain exhibition experiences over others. I will revisit this notion of predisposition and expectation in relation to the exhibition experience in Chapter 12, when I discuss analysis of visitor reaction to the exhibition *Lindow Man* (The Manchester Museum, Manchester, 2009) through which I explored the presentation modes of threshold, landscape and object in practice.

Using the exhibition as source material, as a text that is not just visual and spatial, but primarily experiential, though not available in that form to the

reader, necessitates a translation from one medium to another: from the museum space to the printed page. Whilst it may seem, at times, that my account in the chapters in which I present exhibition analysis is descriptive, I consider that this is important in conveying a sense of the experience of the exhibition that is beyond the photographic record. Staniszewski notes the 'severe limitations of using one or several black and white reproductions representing a complex exhibition' but does not detail the limitations or their subsequent impact on her analysis (Staniszewski 2001: xxiii). As an art historian, photographic evidence may suffice to serve and illustrate her investigation. From my perspective as an exhibition-maker, concerned as I have already stated not only with the visual but also with the spatial and sensory phenomenon of the exhibition installation, it is imperative to attempt to convey these qualities to the reader. Therefore, I would argue that the descriptive passages through which I relate the experience of visiting an exhibition are an essential part of my process in communicating to the reader those particular sensations conjured in the exhibition space.

My accounts of exhibition visits are written in two modes. My account of the visit to the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* which inspired this research is written, as is the convention in contemporary publications dealing with interior design and architecture such as *Frame* and *Mark*,[5] in the present tense. I utilise this convention to communicate a sense of immediacy of experience, and to convey the exhilaration and animation that I experienced when visiting the exhibition. Subsequent accounts of visits, sited in the predominantly analytical chapters of my thesis are described in the past tense, in an attempt to convey the sense of reflective and temporal distance through which they came to be viewed.

As I have previously stated, the focus of my research is the identification, description and definition of a number of innovative presentation modes as

evidenced in fashion exhibitions in the context of the museum or gallery. The method of identification, description and definition, and also the recognition of the mode as innovative was achieved through the application of a process of comparative evaluation based on observation, documentation and critical analysis of the exhibitions visited. Initiated by the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen*, the methods employed were initially informal and unstructured as my research focus was, at that time, yet to be established. As the number of exhibitions I had visited grew, and recognition of those areas of innovative practice was consolidated, my processes became more established. It could be said that, in response to *2Women-2Vrouwen*, I was aware that there was something that warranted investigation but could not determine what 'it' was. Only after my curiosity had been aroused and I began specifically to look for evidence of experimentation could I identify those areas worthy of further investigation. This observational process is similar to that described by photographer Bill Cunningham who, for many years has chronicled fashion trends for the New York Times:

> …suddenly I see something…and then I see it again and I think…ah…there's an idea…
>
> (Press 2011: 0:10:06)

I agree with Bill Cunningham, that comparative observation and finding aesthetic (or spatial) patterns may start with a process of being visually 'open' to what is present in the environment. An awareness of exactly what I was looking for came, as with Cunningham, through the process of observation. Consideration of ideas that were developed as threshold and object began very shortly after the visit to *2Women-2Vrouwen* in 2001, though not described in those terms. Interest regarding the notion of threshold stemmed from the very obvious lack of a conventional introductory panel at the entrance to the exhibition. Curiosity regarding the

Fig. 1.1 Notes taken during a visit to the exhibition *Katharina Prospekt.*
Fig. 1.2 Notes taken during a visit to the exhibition *Malign Muses.*
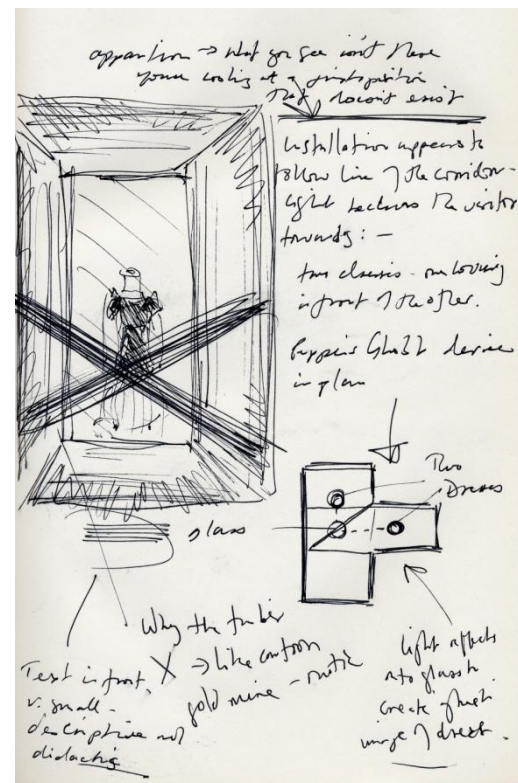
mode of object was consolidated by reflection on the inclusion of non-museum objects in the display in *Katharina Prospekt*. A sense of the mode I would later define as landscape was instigated by *Genovanversaeviceversa*, in 2003, whereas the body wasn't determined as a presentation mode for examination until I visited *Bernhard Willhelm* in 2007. Hence some of my analysis was executed immediately after a visit, and some several years later, through reference to documentation that I made during the visit such as notes and sketches, installation photographs and also through exhibition related publications.

The first stage of my analysis of an exhibition, identification, relates to the process of recognizing that which could be potentially determined as an innovative mode. This process consisted of, as I have indicated, visiting exhibitions and closely scrutinising the components of their installation and documenting them through notes and sketches made on-site and, where possible, installation photographs. The notes I made recorded not only the concrete aspects of the installation but any other sensory component such as sound or aroma. Through the notes I attempted to describe the atmosphere created in the exhibition space and my emotional and intellectual response [Figs. 1.1, 1.2]. Through my long-term experience of visiting exhibitions, and my professional experience as an exhibition-maker, I already had a sense of some of the conventions of exhibition installations, conventions which, as Staniszewski notes, derive from an institutional rejection of experimentation (Staniszewski 2001: 292). Through my extensive exhibition visits, I was able to confirm these conventions, observed as a technique or strategy adopted in the majority of presentations, and to use comparison with these conventions to identify both areas for investigation and instances of innovation. To illustrate this point, the majority of the exhibitions observed made use of the Stockman-type dress-maker's stand or retail mannequins as mounts for garments. The mannequins presented in *Bernhard Willhelm* stood in stark, obvious

contrast to general practice and thus I was able to identify not only the conventions of representing the body and in comparison an example of innovation, but also a presentation mode – the representation of the human body – for further investigation.

The next stage in my process was description, where I would use reference material gathered from the visit to focus on the manifestation of an identified point of innovation and describe in detail those techniques employed in its construction and the effect I felt as a visitor. To illustrate this point I refer to the threshold construction for *Katharina Prospekt* where the installation of realistically styled and dressed mannequins, alongside a Soviet-style ticket booth generated a series of emotional responses starting with impatience, leading to confusion and ending with amusement. The results of this process of description, notes which became the basis for my accounts of threshold, landscape, object and the body in Chapters 6 to 9, were also crucial to my final stage of analysis.

The third stage in my process of investigation, definition, mirrors the comparative analysis executed in the first stage, identification. To define the modes, however, I took those instances elaborated in the second stage, description, and through comparison identified commonalities, rather than difference. Thus through comparative analysis in the first stage, identification, I noted that several exhibitions had used complex structures to introduce the exhibition as opposed to the convention of an introductory text panel. In the second stage of analysis, description, I detailed an account of these constructions and the effects they exerted on me as a visitor. In the third stage, of definition, through comparison of the descriptive accounts, I was able to identify commonalities in relation to construction and effect, and define the presentation mode as threshold. These definitions of innovative modes, along with descriptions of those

alternative techniques noted as conventions are incorporated into the detailed account of each presentation mode in Chapters 6 to 9.

The exhibition catalogue and associated publications as source material

To complement the research carried out through exhibition visits, I have also drawn on associated publications such as catalogues and gallery guides, and more ephemeral material such as leaflets, publicity material and web-based resources as reference for my thesis. In this section I will account for the use of these materials, and also explain the omission of other available resources, notably institutional evaluative material and oral testimony gathered from exhibition curators and designers directly involved in those presentations referenced.

Exhibition guides can play an important role in the research process not only for their conventional interpretive function, but also as a useful *aide memoir* when reviewing the exhibition. The guide to *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (Somerset House, London, 2008) includes the main thematic section texts (as they appeared in the exhibition) and a detailed account of each object alongside a line drawing of both garments and architectural projects. Guides are also useful when, as in the case of *Bernhard Willhelm,* they include a plan of the exhibition layout - particularly in this instance as it features hand drawn pictograms that echo the cartoon-like style of the presentation to represent each section of the exhibition.

The guide to *Genovanversaeviceversa* is worth noting in that it goes beyond the conventions of providing an exhibition plan, object list and basic text; it also reflects the theoretical framework behind the exhibition and exists as a layer of interpretation parallel to, and mirroring, its complex

scenography. The guide presents itself as a 'lexicon of key words' whose function is not as a didactic text, or 'unequivocal explanation, but rather as a many-sided guide through the phantasmagorical world of Angelo Figus, the Sardinian-born fashion designer who acted as curator and scenographer (Bracke 2003: 3). On the introductory page, opposite a plan of the exhibition layout, the text is marked as if annotated by a reader, with certain words circled and linked. This simple graphic device echoes Figus' approach to the compilation of the exhibition as a 'stream of associative thoughts' (Bracke 2003: 3). Within the context of my research this economically produced leaflet is an invaluable aid to decoding the conceptual process behind the exhibition.

While gallery guides are usually produced at fairly low cost, the complex print and production processes necessary to deliver a catalogue in time for the exhibition preview usually mean that the publication is often in the final stages of production before the exhibition is installed, with the result that an important documentary opportunity to record and disseminate the installation (especially considering the ephemeral nature of most presentations) is sacrificed to commercial pressures. As a consequence, few catalogues reproduce images of the actual exhibition installation and although they may operate as an excellent record of the garments presented in the exhibition, they are of little use in this particular research project as a means by which to analyse the installation and related presentation techniques.

It is unfortunate, especially when the exhibition installation is planned or promoted to be as much a spectacle as the objects on display, that there is often not representative visual material in the exhibition catalogue. *The House of Viktor & Rolf* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2008) and *Balenciaga Paris* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007) are both examples of elaborate presentations that go unrecorded in the exhibition catalogue.

The Barbican Art Gallery installation was remarkable for an extraordinary dolls' house, 6 metres high, containing scaled-down versions of every dress on display, and while considerable reference was made to it in Caroline Evans' catalogue essay (Evans 2008: 17-18), confirming its importance as a device though which to understand both the exhibition and the designers' work, the only visual reference in the catalogue is a reproduction of a design rendering. The *Balenciaga Paris* installation, designed by Balenciaga creative director Nicholas Ghesquière in collaboration with artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, though credited that it 'took the laboratory spirit that characterizes Gonzalez-Foerster and Ghesquière's collaboration to another level' and 'resulted in an explosion of ideas' remains entirely undocumented in the associated catalogue (Vaudrey 2008: 98).

There are, however, excellent examples of publications where attempts are made to represent the direction taken with the exhibition installation. Although they do not include photographs of the actual exhibition, the catalogues for *Garde-robes: Intimités Dévoillé de Cléo de Mérode à…* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1999), *Ouverture pour Inventaire* (Musée Galliera, Paris, 2004) reproduced studio shots that preview the impending exhibition display [Fig. 1.3]. In *Garde-robes* garments were photographed in the studio in groups relating to each donor, some on dress-makers' forms, others hanging on coat-hangers either facing the camera or side-on, shoes lined up underneath their corresponding outfits, in complete replication of the gallery presentation. The catalogue for *Ouverture pour Inventaire* shows garments photographed in the Musée Galliera stores, replicating the exhibition setting, which recreated the Museum store's fittings and environment in the gallery space [Fig. 1.4].

As records of the exhibition installation, the volumes published to accompany *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Anglomania* are exemplary. Both
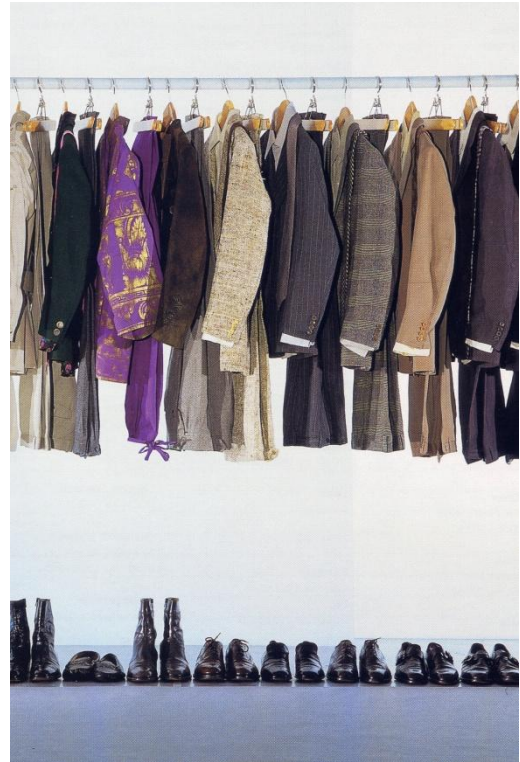
Fig. 1.3 Illustration from the catalogue to the exhibition *Ouverture pour Inventaire.*
Fig. 1.4 Illustration from the catalogue to the exhibition *Garderobes.*

exhibitions followed a similar pattern, using period rooms installed in the Museum as a setting for mannequins interacting in tableaux that evoke theatrical or cinematic scenes. The catalogues record each of the room-scapes alongside details of the staged scenes which, due to the dramatic arrangement of the mannequin 'characters', appear like film-stills, framing moments of action, rather than recording a static scene populated by 'dummies'. In this respect, the published images may give a better impression of the effect intended by the curators than the actual exhibition where the impact of the tableau device would fade as the visitor spent time in the space, its artifice becoming increasingly apparent through lack of movement from the participants. In the reproduced images, the tableaux translate seamlessly to the frozen photographed image. These publications show a clear recognition of the importance of the setting as part of the exhibition experience, and as a tool with which to assess the mode of presentation, these catalogues come as close to evoking the actual experience as could be possible in print. It is worth noting, however, that the publication for *Dangerous Liaisons* saw its first print run in 2006 – two years after the exhibition, but timely coinciding with the presentation of *Anglomania*.

The publications that accompany many of the exhibitions staged at MoMu include images of the exhibition installation. The booklet published for *Yohji Yamamoto: Dreamshop* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2006) for instance, includes images not only from the MoMu presentation, but also from the exhibition's previous incarnations *Correspondences* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 2005) and *Juste des Vêtements* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2005) allowing a direct comparison of the very different presentations of Yamamoto's work. As an institution that strategically promotes its role as a laboratory for exhibition-making it is fitting that MoMu should record and disseminate this work. Including a record of this innovative practice in the exhibition catalogues makes visible the institution's commitment to its

experimental exhibition-making activity and asserts that, in this context, the presentation techniques of the exhibition are of parallel importance to the objects, information or narrative that comprise the exhibition content.

Several of the catalogues published by MoMu go one step further than recording the exhibition and reveal the curatorial and design processes which were instrumental in developing and producing the presentation. The catalogue produced for *Genovanversaeviceversa* reproduces a photo-montage narrative that incorporates images of objects from the exhibition, abstract and symbolic visual references, into intricate collages which represent Angelo Figus' complex spatial construction for the exhibition and illustrate the associative process through which the exhibition concept and scenography were developed.

Visual references and essays in the catalogues for both *Katharina Prospekt* and *Bernhard Willhelm* articulate the exhibition-making process. In the catalogue for *Katharina Prospekt*, the curators, A.F. Vandevorst, provide a key to their exhibition, along the lines of Figus' lexicon but less deliberately obtuse, that explains not only their influences and inspirations, but also sheds light on aspects of their installation; the prevalence of the 'cross' shape, the use of the matryoshka, why certain items are protected behind glass. This account, related directly from the curators, operates as a guided tour to the exhibition, anecdotal rather than didactic. Indeed as they envisaged the exhibition as an avenue, or Prospekt, the aim of this text is to 'guide the reader along its most famous sights' (Brouns 2005: 15).

An essay in the catalogue for *Bernhard Willhelm* also describes and decodes the exhibition's staging (Nicol 2007: 128-130). Of more interest, perhaps, are the images that make up the body of the catalogue. In a seemingly chaotic fashion, which parallels the exhibition experience, the

catalogue presents several series of images which, on closer inspection, trace the development of the installation. Starting with photographs taken from runway presentations and look-books (printed publications produced to promote each season's collection) produced for Willhelm's fashion collections, the designer's distinctive aesthetic and visual iconography are established. Subsequent images, compiled from photographs, photomontages and scenes from the actual construction of the exhibition props and scenery in both workshop and gallery space, lead to images of the final installation. Through the visual overload that is characteristic of Willhelm's fashion work, the reader can trace the clear, linear development of the exhibition setting, from inspiration to realisation.

Revealing the processes behind the curation of *Malign Muses* was an explicit aim of the curator, Judith Clark. The exhibition set out to 'explore how 'curating dress' can be handled or understood' ("Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back" n.d.), and the catalogue continues and expands upon this revelatory direction. Conceived along the lines of a sketch-book, it 'avoids the polished summary in favour of a more open 'work-in-progress' compilation of views and ideas' (Holtby 2007: 7). The publication operates as a platform for Clark and her collaborators to display their individual practice and contribution to the exhibition whilst merging interrelated reference points, and takes form as a collage of intersecting texts, sketches, photographs and found images. Central to the book is a double-page spread of images arranged in a mind-map of dress typologies, a 'genealogy' that displays the fluid and 'infinite' connections between garments that are central to Clark's curatorial process (Clark 2004: 110-111). The catalogue transcends exhibition record or guide to expose the creative and curatorial activities behind the exhibition itself.

Like the other publications from MoMu, the catalogue to accompany *Malign Muses* reveals the making and the mechanics of the exhibition, as

well as celebrating and recording it. Unlike the publications produced to accompany monographic exhibitions such as *Balenciaga Paris*, *Christian Lacroix: Histoires de la Mode* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007), *Valentino: Themes and Variations* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2008), where often the only residue of the originating exhibition is a replication in printed form of a chronological or thematic structure, the MoMu catalogues record evidence of each curators' particularly innovative approach to exhibition-making.

Other exhibition related resources, particularly in relation to the key exhibitions from MoMu, were considered throughout my research, such as evaluative material carried out by the museum in relation to the exhibitions, and access to interview the curators and designers of these exhibitions. In the early stages of my research I had expected that these resources would be consulted and might give valuable insight into the MoMu exhibitions. As my research progressed and the use of the exhibition as primary resource was clarified, my position in relation to the experience of visiting, viewing and communicating the exhibitions was consolidated, and the central focus of my research – the identification, description and definition of innovative presentation modes – became concrete, I resolved against referring to these resources.

Although in the early stages of research I had considered that the inclusion of institutional evaluative material in relation to the MoMu exhibitions might be of value, I eventually decided not to reference this material in this thesis. As my core research activity was consolidated as the investigation of innovative presentation modes and their exploration through my own experience and practice this material seemed to assume less relevance. As the MoMu staff did not have any knowledge of my analytical framework or description of the modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body, they would evidently not be the subject of institutional visitor research and for any evaluation in relation to my research to have

significant meaning, it would need to be designed specifically to gather response to these techniques. I have, however, included reference in Chapter 12 to a study of visitor response carried out by a colleague in relation to the exhibition *Lindow Man* which I produced in 2009 during my employment at The Manchester Museum, and which used the presentation modes observed at MoMu. This evaluative research, carried out by a museum colleague, was partly designed to gather response to issues of display, and so is directly relevant to this research.

After much deliberation, I decided against consulting with, and directly referencing the curators and designers of the key MoMu exhibitions for several reasons. I considered that to maintain a consistent approach to each exhibition I would need to confer with the teams responsible for all four key exhibitions. The practical issues of access and economy concerned in realizing encounters with numerous busy design professionals, whose locations were spread throughout Europe made access to all parties unlikely. More importantly, I came to realise that my research was deliberately non-evaluative in relation to individual curators' intent: what they had set out to communicate or create was not critically relevant in comparison to my interpretation and analysis of those presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body that are central to my work. My research is not engaged with a search for intentionality, rather it is engaged with an analytical exploration of exhibition spaces and identifying, describing and defining the techniques used to construct them. In addition to this, as my review of equivalent activity in the field revealed no framework of analysis comparable to the presentation modes I identify, it would not be likely that the curator or designer of the exhibitions would have been aware of these modes, as I define them, when constructing the exhibition. Again, for the purpose of my research it was not important to ascertain whether they were aware of

modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body, and whether their intentions met with these criteria.

The final reason for not consulting with curators or designers involved with the key exhibitions was that I did not want potentially privileged information gathered outside of the exhibition experience, either pre or post visit, to influence my reading, response, or analysis of the presentation. It was important to my process of visiting, viewing and reflection to avoid a position where my experience might be determined by privileged or leading information regarding the exhibition. Whilst I do occasionally make reference to the individual curatorial voice, these citations are to give contextual information to the reader in relation to the exhibitions referenced, and are taken from sources in the public realm, such as exhibition related publications and marketing material, which would be readily available to any visitor.

Although I decided to avoid direct consultation with, and reference to the curators or designers of the key exhibitions, I have included citation from an interview held in December 2005, with Kaat Debo, then responsible for Exhibition Policy, MoMu. This informal interview was carried out before I embarked on this current research programme, and the original purpose was to gather information on MoMu and how the exhibition team organised and developed exhibitions. I have included citation from this interview in Chapter 3, where it serves the contextualising purpose of articulating the institutional aspirations of MoMu in relation to exhibition work, and illuminates some of the policy decisions that shaped the Museum's approach to its exhibition programme.

In this chapter, I have begun to contextualise my research by introducing the reader to a definition of terms that are used frequently through this text, in particular the notion of the exhibition-maker as an activity that

combines traditionally distinct processes of exhibition curation and presentation. Following the terminology, discussion on the use of the exhibition as reference material in my research initiated exploration of my location as participant-observer in relation to the activity of investigating an exhibition, and detail of the method of comparative analysis and resultant process of identification, description and definition of those presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body that form the core of my research. Finally, this chapter detailed the supplementary exhibition-related material that was utilised through my investigation. The following chapter will continue the contextualisation of my research by discussing those sources consulted to provide reference, to situate my work, and to present evidence to attest to the originality of the results of my research.

Chapter 2: Situating My Research

As the previous chapter introduced a definition of terms to be used throughout this work and presented some of the challenges in relation to use of the exhibition as reference material, in this chapter I will continue the process of contextualising my research through review of comparable work in those fields of expertise in which my investigation is located, to indicate points of reference, to situate my work and to demonstrate its originality. In order to address this contextualisation, it is appropriate to examine various fields of expertise, or activity, relevant to the two stages of my research – the theoretical and the practice-based.

To contextualise the first stage of my research, in which I intend to identify, describe and define a repertoire of innovative presentation modes in the display of fashion in the museum through comparative observation carried out through visits to relevant exhibitions, I will examine a number of texts relating to the production of exhibitions in the museum. In relation to my practice-based research, I will also examine these texts for discussion of authorial position in relation to exhibition-making, particularly that of autobiography. To contextualise the second stage of my research, the practice-based exploration of a repertoire of innovative presentation modes through the construction of a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition, I will address activity in those fields relevant to this research. These fields are determined by the subject and the location of my practice-based investigation, an autobiographic approach to the presentation of contemporary menswear realised in exhibition form. I will examine the incidence of contemporary fashion menswear evident in exhibitions, and the incidence of autobiography or autobiographic reference in fashion

exhibitions. Significant source material for investigation in both of these fields is drawn from the exhibition visits detailed in the previous chapter.

Texts on exhibition-making

To contextualise my theoretical research I have made reference to printed texts which are concerned with the practical process of the creation of exhibitions, authored by active practitioners in the field of exhibition production in the museum, and those texts which present compilations of exhibition case-studies. In assessing texts relating to exhibition production, I was looking for parallels in the definition of innovative presentation modes that form the core of my research. In assessing publications dedicated to compilations of exhibition reviews I was looking for parallels in both the definition of innovative presentation modes and exhibition review method equivalent to my process of comparative analysis, informed by visit, used to identify innovative presentation modes in my own investigation.

The texts identified for review were chosen because, as a research programme based on the analysis and implementation of exhibition presentation modes from the perspective of a practitioner, they relate most directly to my research and practice. I have selected source material to ensure that my review maintains a direct relevance to my field of expertise and research activity, the practice of making exhibitions in the museum, and have avoided diversion by texts that relate to other possible fields of museology (such as learning in the museum, curating collections object-focused texts or critique of the museum from social, cultural or political perspectives) rather than my field of expertise and research, the making of exhibitions. My review focuses on material concerned with the production of exhibitions or the review of exhibitions, and locates these texts within the following categories; those that are written as instructional manuals for

the purpose of exhibition production, those that are predominantly anthologies of exhibition case-studies, compilations of theoretical essays, monograph publications by design practices specialising in the field of making exhibitions, and those texts by dress historians and curators concerned with the display of garments.

Those publications that follow the exhibition production manual-type text approach exhibition-making from a logistic and project management perspective (Lord 2002, Houtgraaf and Vitali 2008). Their focus is on the processes of organisation and delivery and in developing a systematic approach to the realisation of an exhibition rather than specific techniques of display. Although both texts include sections on exhibition design (Lord 2002: 87-103, Houtgraaf and Vitali 2008: 48-58) these texts position design as one of several stages in a linear process of exhibition delivery, each controlled and performed by its expert 'director' (Houtgraaf and Vitali 2008: 62) and discuss design as a process rather than examining presentation techniques. With relation to the possibility of an autobiographic approach, Houtgraaf, at the time Head of Exhibitions at the natural history museum Naturalis, Leiden, and Vitali, Vice President of Public Programmes, The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, USA, do not address the issue of the role of the exhibition author in any depth and assume that an institutional message is being communicated, as opposed to a deliberately personal narrative (Houtgraaf and Vitali 2008: 39). Whilst Lord (2002) includes reference to exhibitions as illustrative examples of organising processes, these publications are primarily instructional, constructed around and, perhaps unintentionally, privileging a particularly institutionalised approach to exhibition-making without any discussion of alternative approaches.

A number of recent publications on exhibition production focus on design and predominantly follow a case-study format where each exhibition is

presented in isolation and each entry consists of a brief background text, descriptive texts that document materials or construction techniques, architects drawings or plans, computer generated renderings and images of the final installation (Bonet 2006, Dernie 2006, Vranckx 2006, Lorenc *et al* 2007, Reinhardt and Teufel 2008). These texts contain little critical evaluation, investigation of process or definition of presentation techniques that is equivalent to my research. Exhibition examples referenced are often organised by 'type' into chapters: other than this general categorisation there is no evidence of the type of comparative analysis so central to my research in these texts. The selected examples are presented without explanation as to the reasons behind their inclusion in the publication. These publications are produced for a design-based audience and privilege illustrative material over text. Written accounts of the exhibitions sampled give little indication that the writer visited the exhibition as there is rarely reference to sensory factors, such as sound or aroma, which could not be ascertained from photographic reference material. The accounts, unlike my own work, contain no reflective after-words in relation to the exhibitions featured.

These publications also tend towards a loose definition of 'exhibition' that includes trade fair stands, temporary architectural structures, pavilions and product design. Despite being titled as exhibition design publications, there are many examples illustrated in these texts where the presentation of museum objects plays no part, with a predominance of references located within the commercial sector rather than the museum or art gallery. This reflects a prevailing trend for exhibition and museum designers to be commissioned from companies with their roots in architectural practice. To emphasise this fact, Bonet's introduction places emphasis on exhibition structures as being valuable as 'a testing ground' for architects (Bonet 2006: 7).

What is Exhibition Design (Lorenc *et al* 2007), authored by designer Jan Lorenc and architects Lee H. Skolnick and Craig Berger, combines the case-study format with the exhibition manual in a publication that gives an outline history of the development of museum design, a typology of exhibitions, alongside a breakdown of the exhibition-making process and a selection of portfolios from prominent exhibition designers. The process-based section of the text touches on elements such as 'narrative' and 'narrator' in relation to the development of an exhibition although 'narrator' is viewed as a concrete element of the exhibition and defined by medium, 'text, graphics, technology or human guides' (Lorenc *et al* 2007: 252) rather than reflecting the notion of a narrator's position or argument: the notion of narrative positions, such as the autobiographic, is not explored. Ideas of exhibition structure and context, are mentioned, but without elaboration or analysis (Lorenc: 2007 104) and there is no analysis of specific presentation strategies or techniques.

In general, these texts lack depth and critical analysis, and tend to present opinion as fact – a particular approach to the mechanics of exhibition-making is presented, without discussing alternatives, as 'the' approach. A lack of comparative analysis of the exhibitions referenced result in fundamentally different types of exhibition and out-puts juxtaposed without comment or indication of the value of their juxtaposition. Bruce Mau's *Massive Change* exhibition at Vancouver Art Gallery, a highly-conceptual and heavily authored polemic, with few museum objects is presented alongside very conventional collection-based displays from the Museum of the American Indian (Lorenc *et al* 2007: 41-43). This arrangement of content reflects the authors' focus on design as a process of exhibition production rather than a creative and intellectual process for generating exhibition content.

Lorenc's typological grouping of exhibitions is organised by institutional type, so that they are defined as 'History Museums', 'Science museums', 'Showrooms'. The result is that exhibitions that are dissimilar in approach, content and intention are grouped together without reinforcing common goals or style. In comparison, the typology employed by architect and exhibition designer David Dernie in *Exhibition Design* (Dernie: 2006) is organised around the visitors' experience. Dernie classifies exhibitions as 'Narrative Space', 'Performative Space' and 'Simulated Experience', so that similarly intentioned examples can be read in juxtaposition.

Dernie's definition of 'narrative space' (Dernie: 2006 20-45) approaches the presentation mode of landscape identified at MoMu, discussed in detail in Chapter 7, and directly reinforces those ideas of episodic exhibition structures discussed in Chapter 5. Dernie also acknowledges the potential theatricality of the exhibition scenography, also suggestive of the mode of landscape, and the associative grouping of objects, 'building dialogue between groups of artefacts' which is one characteristic of the presentation mode, the object, that I discuss in Chapter 8 (Dernie 2006: 23). Whilst there are allusions in Dernie's text to those definitions of innovative presentation modes that I discuss in this thesis, his focus is not on specific techniques, relating rather to description and illustration of exhibition typologies than detailed definitions of presentation techniques. Dernie's introduction also refers to exhibition-making as 'a significant form of creative expression' (Dernie: 2006 6) which could potentially serve as an introduction to discussion of the presence and location of an authorial perspective, such as the autobiographic perspective from which my practice-based project is presented, but he refrains from exploring the notion of the exhibition as a creative medium and the presence of an author any further.

New Exhibition Design 01 (Reinhardt and Teufel 2008) also follows the case-study approach but the authors have a more rigorous focus on museum or gallery based installations than the previous publications, with few examples that exist as stand-alone architectural constructions. The examples referenced are also organised by type, such as 'Temporary Exhibition', 'Permanent Exhibition', 'Brand Museum', 'Showroom, Shop' (Reinhardt and Teufel 2008: 13) so that comparison of projects with similar location and intention is possible by the reader, but there is no comparative analysis provided by the authors between projects. The introduction to the publication also gives the rationale behind the author's selection of case-studies; whilst acknowledging that the selection is subjective, they also state their aim to highlight 'outstanding concepts of high quality in terms of design, art and technical features' (Reinhardt and Teufel 2008: 11) but do not define how they are able to assign these values. In contrast to my research, where I attempt to establish the credentials of innovative practice through comparative analysis, which in turn determines conventions and in relation, innovation, the authors do not elaborate on the process by which 'outstanding' is determined.

The authors, founder members of the Exhibition Design Institute in Düsseldorf expand their hypothesis in relation to exhibition production in an eclectic set of 21 'Theses', poetic fragments that convey their thoughts on the nature of the museum object, the use of text, and exhibition *mise-en-scène* (Reinhardt: 2008: 17-25). These 'Theses' do not refer explicitly to authorial modes or defined presentation techniques, but do allude to 'artistic and poetic methods such as collage, bricollage, decoding, text alchemy or projection' in relation to constructing an exhibition, (Reinhardt: 2008 21), which I discuss in the conclusion to this thesis as being instrumental in the execution of those innovative presentation modes that are identified and analysed in detail in following chapters.

There has also been a recent trend for design companies with considerable experience in exhibition design to publish monograph texts that illustrate the company's exhibition work. Both German design company Atelier Brückner and Amsterdam-based practice kossman.dejong have produced volumes in 2011 (Atelier Brückner 2010, Kosman and de Jong 2010). These publications are comparable to the monograph editions that have been produced by architects, graphic and product designers for many years and it is, perhaps, an indication of the growing interest in exhibition design that these books have been commissioned and published. Like many similar publications, they are incredibly well illustrated and contain texts that describe, manifesto-like, the practice's approach to its work, but neither volume contains any critical discourse beyond the practice's out-put, and no analysis equivalent to the detailed comparative analysis of presentations that comprises the theoretical component of my research.

In contrast to these predominantly pictorial publications, a few volumes consisting of compilations of essays, with exhibitions in the museum as their uniting theme, have been published recently (Greenberg 1996, Macleod 2005, Marincola 2006). Despite the growing interest in museology as a field for study, the focus on exhibition production and in particular presentation techniques is rarely the subject of these publications. These theoretically-based publications examine the exhibition as a production of the museum institution to be examined from social, cultural or political perspectives: 'the museum is a discourse, and the exhibition an utterance within that discourse' (Bal 1996: 214). The tendency in these publications is not to focus on the practice of exhibition-making, but rather on 'the exhibitionary apparatuses' (Bennet 1996: 102) as critiqued within the theoretical field of the author.

Whilst I have found several essays sourced in these publications to be relevant as reference, I have uncovered no material that is comparable to my research into innovative presentation modes. As already stated, these texts primarily assess exhibitions as institutional products and from theoretical standpoints reflecting cultural, sociological or political perspectives. There are, however, a number of texts written by practitioners, as in Marincola (2006), which reflect on production processes but these texts are almost exclusively concerned with the curation of exhibitions within a gallery context, of modern or contemporary art. Texts in these compilations written from the perspective of the exhibition-maker or exhibition designer are scarce and, when they do occur, invariably focus on examination of exhibition spaces as architectural phenomenon rather than the exhibition 'text' itself (Higgins, 2005, Greenberg 2005). Not surprisingly, although operating within the field of exhibition design, these authors were originally trained as architects. In relation to my investigation these texts offer little evidence of duplication with my research; written from theoretical perspectives, primarily focused on the curation of art gallery exhibitions, or interpreting the 'exhibition' as the space within which it is housed as opposed to its actual content and production techniques, they are not concerned with the detail of presentation techniques fundamental to my investigation. In common with the other volumes of the exhibition case-study or monograph-type, there is scarce reference to exhibitions of fashion or exhibitions with fashion-related themes in these publications.

Texts on aspects of display written from the perspective of the dress historian or curator tend to concentrate on the practicalities of display as dictated by conservation concerns. Some of these texts relate primarily to the curatorial care of the object when mounting and placing on display (Swann 2009) and are less concerned with interpretation. Other examples are important in giving a background to the development of fashion and

costume exhibitions in the recent past (Taylor 2002: 24-59, Cumming 2004: 68-81). The artefact-based approach prevalent in these texts concentrates discussion around methods of successfully replacing the three-dimensional form of the human body when preparing clothing for display (Taylor 2002: 24-50) and discussion of interpretation is confined to issues of text-based contextualisation over visual or spatial techniques (Taylor 2002: 50-59, Cumming 2004: 71-74). When addressing issues of understanding garments through literary sources, however, Taylor does provide considerable account of the relevance of autobiographic reference (Taylor 2002: 99-111), and I make citation from Taylor's work later in this chapter when discussing fashion and autobiography in relation to the practice-based element of my research.

Not surprisingly, authors and curators who identify with the academic study of dress expect the subjects of their study to be presented to reflect their particular approach. Accordingly, Lou Taylor cites Japanese designer Issey Miyake's exhibition *Issey Miyake: Making Things* (Centre Cartier, Paris, 1998), and notes her appreciation of Miyake's innovative display techniques but, viewed as aesthetic spectacle as opposed to an exhibition within a social or historical context, she regards the presentation as '"installation art" rather than a fashion display' (Taylor 2002: 27). Taylor and Cummings' texts articulate an approach to the presentation of clothing heavily framed by conservation concerns, the perceived limitations of the institutional and academic environment in which they operate, and their own academic practice, with discussion of presentation techniques influenced by practical issues and institutional methods rather than innovation or expressive practice.

My review of relevant source material has uncovered only one text where direct comparison to my research could be made and yet, I would argue, there are fundamental differences in aims, method and outcomes. *The*

Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art (Staniszewski 1999) is a critical review of exhibition design at the Museum of Modern Art, New York during the period 1929-1970. Art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski's thesis first locates the style of exhibition design promoted by the Museum in the turn-of-last-century work of Adolf Loos and the Bauhaus and continues with chapters devoted to the visual analysis of exhibition styles organised by content; art and sculpture, design, political propagandist, and installation art. Although comparable to my research in terms of a critical analysis of the exhibition at one venue over a sustained period, Staniszewski locates her authorship in the field of art history rather than exhibition-making.

Reading from within her discipline, trained to analyse and decipher 'image', Staniszewski's approach is positioned as 'filling a void in the art historical literature by treating installation design as an aesthetic medium' (Staniszewski 2001: xxii). Staniszewski's work exists as an art historical interpretation of installation 'styles' as opposed to the detailed examination of presentation techniques: by implication her accent is on investigation of the meaning of what has been made rather than a reading of how it has been made. While Staniszewski locates her reading of the exhibitions she reviews within her training as an art historian, she does not follow with explanation of the implications of her position (Staniszewski 2001: xxviii). Whilst I do not dispute the validity of Staniszewski's position and the interpretation and conclusions she makes, I would propose that my position and purpose as reader of the exhibition text is very different. My perspective in relation to the exhibition texts I review is thus two-fold; positioned as participating visitor, I attempt to experience the sensory and intellectual phenomenon of the exhibition and then positioned as the analytical reader I attempt to analyse, describe and define those presentation techniques through which the experience has been constructed. My aim in reviewing an exhibition is not, as in Staniszewski's

case, an exploration of installation design as social, cultural and political 'representations' (Stanizewski 2001: xxii), but is an investigation of the techniques of presentation and their immediate effects in the context of the practice of exhibition-making.

The two theses are also very different in how they are able to access their source material. As Staniszewski asserts, it is implicit in research where exhibitions are the subject that the exhibition can be read as any other visual text (Staniszewski 2001: xxviii). Staniszewski's investigation, however, is reliant on archive material and documentation rather than first-hand experience which, as she attests is limited (Staniszewski 2001: xxiii). I would suggest that she sees the installation as an 'aesthetic medium' partly because she is only able to experience the presentations she reviews through two-dimensional representation – photographic images or written account. Trained as a theatre designer, and with a professional practice as an exhibition-maker, curating and designing for both art galleries and museums, the exhibitions I reference are read through actual visit, and understood as an experiential as well as a visual medium, in that the readings are also influenced by multi-sensorial stimuli including sound-scapes and aromas. Noting the lack of visitors in archival photographs recording exhibition installations, Staniszewski omits to make explicit the repercussions of her own absence in regard to reviewing exhibition installations, and does not elaborate on the possible distortions of representation in the images she reads resulting from the photographic process: the atmosphere and quality of light in an exhibition installation, due to the use of specialist lighting, are notoriously difficult to capture in the photographic image.

I do not intend to imply that an exhibition cannot be understood from photographic record and I do, in my own investigative process resort to images of exhibitions as *aides memoire* in the analytical process, nor do I

mean to suggest that Staniszewski's reading of an installation through photographic representation is more subjectively skewed than my reading through actual visit, only that her view is filtered by that of the photographer who took the reference image. I would argue, however, that in missing the experience of the exhibition, and those sensory stimuli of light, sound and atmosphere that the exhibition's author would have so carefully considered and engineered, Staniszewski's reading lacks assessment of those essential exhibition components of the atmospheric and the phenomenological and, as a result, is incomplete. This is evident in the text on numerous occasions, in examples such as the review of Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich's *The Velvet and Silk Café: Women's Fashion Exhibition*, Berlin, 1927, where the author herself attests that:

> Black-and-white photographs convey no sense of this exhibition's striking colors. Gold, silver, black and lemon yellow silk and black, orange and red velvet were draped on chromed-steel tubular frames to create this space in which viewers were enveloped by opulent walls of rich, boldly colored fabric.
>
> (Staniszewski 2001: 41)

Whilst a fascinating, well illustrated and rigorous text Staniszewski's thesis, like the other publications reviewed in this section, differs from my research in several significant aspects. Although Staniszewski examines and defines styles of installation and their components, and some of the other publications reviewed describe typologies of exhibition from a visual perspective none describe in detail specific presentation techniques or elaborate on comparative definitions to those modes of threshold, landscape, the body and object which are central to my theoretical research. Whilst some of the authors write their exhibition reviews from a similar perspective to mine, that of a practicing exhibition-maker or

exhibition designer, their reviews are more descriptive than analytic, and none show evidence of comparative observation in order to investigate exhibition techniques. There is also little evidence in these published accounts that the authors had direct experience of the exhibitions reviewed and were thus able, or desirous, of taking into account the sensory aspects of the installations in their assessment.

The account given above serves to locate the theoretical aspect of my research within recent literature in the field of exhibition-making and, I would argue, provides evidence to demonstrate the lack of similar work. The following account, reviewing the incidence of menswear in exhibitions, and of autobiography or autobiographic reference in exhibitions, is intended to provide reference and location for my practice-based research, a fashion autobiography rendered as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition set in the MoMu galleries and realised as a detailed scale model, and again, to provide evidence which attests to the originality of my project.

Menswear and exhibitions

The exhibitions I have drawn on for this research evidence a wide range of fashion-related topics, from extensive designer monographs to theme-based exhibitions that cross centuries and continents in order to construct and illustrate their narrative, and include exhibitions that deal with fashion image-making as well as its material product. To dedicate my sample solely to exhibitions concerning contemporary menswear - the field of my practice-based research - for this contextual investigation would be severely restricting: from those exhibitions reviewed, none deal exclusively with contemporary menswear. From my research only four shows are devoted entirely to menswear and each of these comprises a combination of contemporary and historic material. The dearth of contemporary

menswear, or menswear in general in fashion exhibitions, is worth noting. When I raised this subject with a group of dress historians and fashion curators during informal discussion, general opinion gave two reasons for this lack of focus on menswear. First the group agreed that the disciplines of dress history and fashion curation have, traditionally, been dominated by women who allegedly take a greater interest in clothing produced for their own gender. Secondly, the group suggested that for the greater part of the twentieth century men's clothing has revolved around variations on monochrome suiting, whilst women's clothing has undergone drastic modulations in silhouette and is more likely to be subject to decorative treatments and dramatic design, therefore rendering it more highly aestheticised and of greater interest for display.[6]

Menswear is least likely to appear, it seems, in large monograph-type exhibitions. The Dutch designers Viktor & Rolf, who launched an innovative and successful menswear line for the autumn/winter 2003-04 season, titled *Monsieur*, excluded any examples from their newly-launched line in their Paris exhibition, *Viktor & Rolf par Viktor & Rolf, Première Décennie* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2003) and their recent Barbican show, *The House of Viktor & Rolf* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2008). An exhibition of work by Yohji Yamamoto, presented in a different form at three venues throughout Europe (Palazzo Pitti, Florence 2005, Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris 2005, MoMu, Antwerp, 2006) also excluded any of the designer's ground-breaking menswear. Vivienne Westwood, fêted for her anarchic and provocative menswear showed little menswear in the monograph exhibition which she co-curated at the V&A (London, 2004) and the accompanying 250 page publication features fewer than 30 images of menswear. In their recent anniversary exhibition, *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2008), menswear was confined to two sections at the end of the presentation; one which displayed an audio-visual record of a model casting, the second which

presented a tableau, using life-size cardboard cut-outs, recreating an event staged by the Maison at the Teatro Puccini, Florence in January 2006 as part of the Pitti Imagine Uomo trade fair. The tableau had originally been created to advertise the re-opening of the Honk Kong Margiela shop. The exception, in the monograph type, is *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective* (The Royal Academy, London, 2003) where comparatively equal exposure was given to menswear and womenswear.

My research indicates a greater balance between menswear and womenswear when there is a socio-historical, or anthropological focus to the exhibition. *Beyond Desire* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005), *Black British Style* (V&A, London, 2004), *Flowers in the Dustbin: Society and Fashion in Czechoslovakia in the Seventies* (Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague, 2007), *Mutilate?/Vermink?* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, 2001) and *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk* (Museum of London, London, 2004) all presented menswear alongside womenswear in contexts that focused less on the purely aesthetic qualities of dress and more on social and cultural readings. Combining fashion and sport, not unpredictably, creates an arena where the presentation of menswear seems unproblematic; both *Fashion v Sport* (V&A, London, 2008) and *Human Game: Winners and Losers* (Stazione Leopolda, Florence, 2006) exhibit a significant proportion of menswear and images of men's fashion.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is exceptional for the frequent inclusion of menswear in its thematic exhibitions, from *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed* (2001), *Dangerous Liaisons* (2004), *Wild: Fashion Untamed* (2004) to *Anglomania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion* (2006) they have consistently presented and represented menswear in their programme. It may be worth noting that in a profession dominated by women, these exhibitions were curated and organised by

two men: Andrew Bolton, Curator, and Harold Koda, Curator in Charge, The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

While these examples illustrate that menswear usually fares well in historic and socio-cultural themed exhibitions, the inverse occurs when the theme relates to contemporary design possibly due, as suggested in the opening paragraph of this section, to the fact that the historically-influenced view is that womenswear is more highly aestheticised. Menswear was entirely absent from *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (Somerset House, London, 2008), where there ought surely to have been a crucial role for the archetypically architectural menswear from fashion houses such as Prada, Jill Sander and Helmut Lang. *Patronen: Patterns* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003), which examined the role of pattern drafting and cutting in fashion, the translation of fabric from flat textile to three dimensional form, included only one piece of menswear - a jacket by Belgian designer Walter Van Beirendonk. *Glamour: Fashion + Industrial Design + Architecture* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 2005) ignored the indisputable fact that menswear designers successfully trade on constructing images of the 'glamorous' male: yet again, no menswear is evident, nothing from the fashion houses Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, Tom Ford for Gucci or Alexander McQueen.

Turning to those examples where menswear was presented exclusively, a number of common factors are apparent. *Material Man: Masculinity Sexuality Style* (Stazione Leopolda, Florence, 2000), *Men in Skirts* (V&A, London, 2003*), L'Homme Paré* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2005-06) and *De Ideale Man: Man in de Mode* (Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, 2008) all examined menswear in relation to gender and the construction of notions of masculinity through clothing. They all, also, related contemporary material to historic designs – contemporary menswear, or contemporary images of men were not evidenced in temporal isolation – so that

predominantly comparative narratives of contemporary masculinity were projected. All of the presentations, apart from *Material Man* focused entirely on the exceptional, the extraordinary, and the tolerated 'peacockery' of male fashion.

The evidence from my research indicates that within the exhibition format, menswear can be seen to operate within a restricted arena defined by the exhibition type. It is most likely to be absent from designer monographs and most likely to appear in exhibitions where fashion is not the sole determining context, but a component in a social, historical or anthropological narrative. Contemporary menswear is also less likely to appear in those exhibition arenas that consciously focus on the more aestheticised readings of fashion and yet, paradoxically, when menswear does appear in isolation, it appears in its most elaborate and exotic forms.

As menswear is so rarely the sole topic of an exhibition it was necessary to draw on a broad range of exhibition samples with the general theme of fashion and fashion-related image-making, that included exhibitions partly or predominantly consisting of womenswear, for my comparative analysis of presentation techniques. Considering the evidence revealed above, gathered through my exhibition visits, the fact that the focus for my practice-based research is the realisation of a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition in which the content is comprised exclusively of contemporary fashion menswear, places my practice-based research alongside a few comparable exhibition projects as a minority activity with regard to exhibiting in the museum.

Autobiography and fashion

Fashion as autobiography is the central theme for my practice-based research, and my exhibition visits have demonstrated evidence of several

fashion exhibitions that include autobiographic reference, and a small number of presentations in other media that could be identified as 'fashion autobiographies' which is, to recap my definition outlined in Chapter 1, an autobiographic account where the author communicates their life-story through reference to clothing, in any suitable medium, whether literary, visual or the exhibition format. In order to identify references, situate and attest to the originality of my practice-based research, it is necessary to scrutinise these particular presentations to identify similarities and highlight the distinguishing factors of my project: a fashion autobiography rendered as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition set in the MoMu galleries and realised as a detailed scale model.

For dress historians, autobiographic reference is considered an essential source of contextual material, giving unique insight into intimate narratives of consumption, identity, and the phenomenological aspects of clothing. As Lou Taylor attests:

> The use of text from personal diaries, letters and autobiographies related to clothing making, selection, purchase and wearing thus offers another way to the understanding of the cultural significance of clothing.
>
> (Taylor 2002: 103)

Taylor astutely identifies the value of these subjective accounts and, citing historian Tim Breen's analysis of eighteenth century consumer economy in America (Taylor 2002: 99) she confirms that these 'responses to "the complication of social life made visible" echo down to us from the past in few more vivid ways' (Taylor 2002: 99). Taylor's argument continues with examples illustrating how autobiographic texts can provide the dress historian with valuable information in relation to the wearing, socio-cultural reading, emotional response and sensory experience of clothing (Taylor

2002: 102-111) and subsequently increase our understanding of the reading of a garment in the socio-cultural context in which it was created and worn. The biography of the garment is thus inextricably entwined with the biography of the wearer.

As autobiographic evidence demonstrates a role in contextual approaches to garment histories, the place of autobiographic source material in exhibitions is, of course, dependent on its appropriateness to the exhibition narrative and the curatorial approach. My research revealed no examples that conformed entirely to my definition of fashion autobiography in exhibition form: unfortunately, as Taylor attests, despite the value of autobiographic account it is commonly lacking in exhibitions. From over 100 exhibitions visited through the course of my research, fewer than 15 contained explicit autobiographic reference; in only 7 of these exhibitions did autobiographic material comprise a significant contribution.

Even when the exhibition narrative promotes adequate opportunity, autobiographic reference is often absent. In a review of the exhibition *Men in Skirts,* curated by Andrew Bolton, Jane Malcolm-Davies (then Trustee of The Costume Society and Lecturer in Heritage Management at the University of Surrey) observed behavioural evidence that reflected a degree of disengagement amongst visitors, which she attributed to a lack of contextual reference, particularly first-hand testimony, of men describing the effect and experience of wearing a skirt in western society (Malcolm-Davies 2003: 105-106). *Flowers in the Dustbin* presented an absorbing and accomplished account of the production and consumption of fashion in 1970s Czechoslovakia. Of particular note was report of the cultural impact of western fashion and pop-cultures under an oppressive Communist regime to which autobiographic reference might have added powerful participant narratives. Although the accompanying catalogue describes the impact of sub-cultural movements such as 'hippie' and

'punk', there is no first-hand testimony from individuals who identified with subversive underground cultures and used fashion as a political statement in this context (Hlaváčková 2007).

Although a number of the exhibitions visited were of the designer monograph type, curated or co-curated by the designer/subject, these are predominantly autobiographic only in relation to the designer's aesthetic or technical development: reference to personal narratives were rare. One exception was *Hussein Chalayan: From Fashion and Back* (Design Museum, London 2009) which included autobiographic account relating to the designer's childhood and family life as intrinsically linked to the conceptualisation of his design practice. As fashion journalist Susannah Frankel writes:

> …the understanding of the psychological and cultural make-up of any creator adds to understanding of their work. In the case of Chalayan, whose work has often been infused with his own history, it seems nothing short of obstructive to separate the two.
>
> (Frankel 2011:18)

In accordance with Frankel's statement, the gallery guide for *Hussein Chalayan* related links between Chalayan's life-story and his fashion collections; Afterwords (autumn-winter 2000) took inspiration 'from observing how Turkish Cypriots, including members of his own family, were subjected to ethnic cleansing in Cyprus', Repose (autumn-winter 2006) expressed Chalayan's interest in flight and the notion of the airport as border, representing the 'cultural divide between his own Turkish Cypriot heritage and his life in London' (anon. 2009). These autobiographic themes were introduced in the gallery guide;

Many of the themes explored in his work derive from his own personal history and cultural identity combined with his experiences living and working in London.

<div align="right">(anon. 2009)</div>

It must be noted, however, that inclusion of autobiographic reference appeared to stem from its inseparable relation to the designer's work, as indicated in the exhibition guide, as opposed to an overt exhibition narrative or curatorial strategy. The exhibition took the form of a loosely structured series of installations grouped by collection. The autobiographic content lay in Chalayan's work itself rather than the exhibition.

When autobiographic material is included in exhibitions it is habitually present in one of two contexts; one instance relates a social or cultural history narrative, the second instance focuses on the life and personal style of a 'society' figure or celebrity. The social or cultural history type is illustrated by exhibitions such as *Black British Style*, *The London Look* and *The Land Girls: Cinderellas of the Soil* (Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, 2009). In these exhibitions and their accompanying publications, autobiographic reference appears in the form of texts transcribed from oral testimony illustrating or supporting the curators' thesis and the exhibition narrative. For example the publication accompanying *Black British Style* contained autobiographic reference, echoing texts evident in the exhibition, including testimony that articulated the origins of particular attitudes to dress in black culture:

I think the main thing that my father enforced is just that when you are going somewhere you have to dress this way. You have to wear these slacks and not jeans. You have to wear this long sleeve button down shirt and not

this old funky shirt…You have to be looking appropriate everywhere you are going.

(Kaiser *et al* 2004: 59)

Although these curated autobiographic statements were often used to describe particular activities, behaviours or locations, and types of garment and styles, rather than relating directly to specific garments in the exhibition, they provided fascinating and valuable contextual reference.

Examples of the society figure or celebrity type narrative include *Vivienne Westwood: The Collection of Romilly McAlpine* (Museum of London, London, 2000), *Jacqueline Kennedy: The Whitehouse Years* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2001), and *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Apfel Collection* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2005). In these exhibitions the subjects are presented as arbiters of unique individual style and predominantly as consumers of fashion; Iris Apfel's 'personal style that is both witty and exuberantly idiosyncratic' ("Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Barrel Apfel Collection" n.d.) Jacqueline Kennedy's 'enduring global influence on style' ("Jacqueline Kennedy: The Whitehouse Years." n.d.) and Romilly McAlpine, presented as a connoisseur who collects contemporary fashion as 'a new art form' (McDermott 2000: 10).

The catalogue published to accompany *Vivienne Westwood* has a lengthy interview in which the collector, fashion journalist Romilly McAlpine, recounts illuminating anecdotes relating to the purchase, occasions of wear and the effects felt by the wearer from the Westwood clothes in her collection. Particularly revealing are those comments that describe the interaction of clothing with the body, sensations that are experienced and communicable only by the wearer:

…and I love her collars. She always makes your neck and head stand up as if a plant or something exotic is emerging from the clothes.

(Kilfoyle 2000: 19)

McAlpine's contribution is supplemented by photographically illustrated autobiographic vignettes from another twenty-two Westwood fans, representing interaction between the designer and a more diverse customer-base (Kilfoyle 2000: 26-63).

Occasionally, the social history and society figure narratives unite in a single narrative. *Fashion and Fancy Dress: The Messel Family Dress Collection, 1865-2005*, curated by Amy de la Haye, Lou Taylor and Eleanor Thompson (Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Brighton, 2005), traced the fashion, fancy dress and ceremonial dress legacy of six generations of women from the upper-class Messel family over a period of one hundred and forty years. Central to the construction of the meticulously researched exhibition narrative are family archive, biographic and autobiographic material [Fig. 2.1]. Both the exhibition and associated publication benefitted from the inclusion of reference to personal scrap-books, correspondence, photographs and diaries in building a detailed picture of the women's personal relationships with their clothing and its acquisition and history (de la Haye *et al* 2005: 23-24). Most enlightening were notes written by some of the women revealing snippets of both biographic and autobiographic information regarding the fabrication and wearing of certain garments inserted into, or written on the boxes in which they were stored, introducing exactly those intimate narratives of consumption and wear whose presence Taylor so values [Fig. 2.2].

As we see from these examples, autobiographic reference can offer the exhibition visitor a privileged perspective and unique insight into garments

Fig. 2.1 Messel family scrapbook showing newspaper cuttings reporting the wedding of Anne and Michael Rosse.

Fig. 2.2 Note inserted into dress storage box by the wearer, Anne, Countess of Rosse.

on display. Unfortunately, these examples of autobiographic reference are in the minority, rendering the contradiction apparent: that while certain dress history approaches advocate autobiographic source material as an important tool in understanding and communicating dress and fashion, autobiographic account rarely appears (or provides the leading narrative) in fashion exhibitions:

> It remains true that all too many artefact-centred studies…omit to enter into any detailed debate on life-styles, beliefs, work or personal interests of the wearers whose clothes are under discussion. The relationship between consumers and their clothes is thus almost never dealt with in exhibitions and rarely in publications.
>
> (Taylor 2002: 50-51)

In the case of the exhibitions cited, autobiographic account is filtered through a curatorial narrative so that it becomes a composite part of a broader curatorial strategy. From my research it is evident that unmediated fashion autobiography is not to be found in the exhibition format. Although the exhibition format is unlikely to present fashion autobiography, it does occur in other media. Journalist and broadcaster Robert Elms' *The Way We Wore: A Life in Threads* (Elms 2005) is a detailed account of the writer's early life that links his passion for clothing to music, football, style publications and the energetic sub-cultures prevalent in working-class London during the last decades of the 20th century. Alongside documenting contemporary socio-cultural phenomena, Elms describes intensely personal responses to clothing, from the fetishisation of the skin-head uniform (Elms, 2005: 45-50) to the olfactory sensation of a pair of new shoes (Elms 2005: 51). As the author attests, clothing is inseparable from the multi-sensorial experiences and memory surrounding it:

> …every precious piece of the designer's craft, every shape of shoe, every variety of collar has lodged itself in my brain, with a million barnacles of association clinging to its threads. I recall events by what I was wearing, a button-down, chisel-toed, fly-fronted mnemonic.
>
> (Elms 2005: 4)

Fashion journalist Justine Picardie similarly traces a fashion autobiography in *My Mother's Wedding Dress: The Life and Afterlife of Clothes* (Picardie 2006). Picardie interweaves accounts of professional meetings with leading fashion designers through stories that express the ability of clothes as powerful triggers for memory and emotional response, tracing her life-story through the legacy of her mother's wedding dress. In *The Thoughtful Dresser* (Grant 2009), novelist and journalist Linda Grant documents autobiographic accounts that reflect the relationship between clothing and the construction of identity, particularly culturally determined notions of what is appropriate dress in relation to age and gender. Astutely, Grant identifies the power of the autobiographic account to communicate those narratives that fall outside the concern of much academic study:

> When academics write about the language of clothes and describe the various messages that are encrypted in the garments, they seldom include in that vast vocabulary the word *Rejoice*! Clothing as a social system is supposed to emit various significant social and cultural signals but not those piercing feelings of joy that new clothes can bring to the wearer…In other words ask not what the clothes do in the world, ask instead what the clothes do for you.
>
> (Grant, 2009: 155)

Pertinently, Grant confirms that though subjective and personal, autobiographic narratives are able to articulate those associations that form the foundation of our physical, emotional and psychological relationships with clothing. These unmediated autobiographic accounts, offer an emotional intensity rarely encountered in fashion exhibitions despite the presence of actual garments.

A comparative work in a different medium is the television programme *All the Young Dudes* (Connolly 2009), in which music critic and cultural historian Paul Morley presented an autobiographic account of his youth through various sartorial choices. As with Elms' account, Morley closely links his clothing narratives to contemporaneous pop music and youth movements, resulting in a narrative in which fashion is presented as a component part of sub-cultural life-styles. Whilst Morley is less fetishistic than Elms in his focus on the minutiae of sartorial detail in his reminiscences regarding his clothing, the programme is notebale in asserting the importance of fashion within the construction of masculine identities. Reading and viewing these fashion autobiographies, and imagining the compelling narratives that could be presented if first-hand accounts were expressed alongside actual garments through the use of imaginative, multi-sensory scenography, was the point of departure for the construction of my own fashion autobiography, in exhibition form, developed through my practice-based research.

While these literary works confirm the ability of autobiography to communicate essential narratives in relation to clothing, of emotion, identity and sensory experience, comparable autobiographic fashion narratives on the internet are a concerted response to assert fashion as an expression of individuality in relation to omnipresent marketing and the emergence of global fashion brands. The website for interior design

magazine *Apartamento* confirms a parallel move towards the recognition of self-expression in interior design:

> …a magazine interested in homes, living spaces, and design solutions as opposed to houses, photo ops and design dictatorships. The magazine is a logical result of the post-materialistic mind-shift. People are bored with the ostentatious and über-marketing. There is a real quest for identity in the midst of mass production and globalization, and that quest leads to what is personal, what is natural, what is real.
>
> ("apartamento/about" n.d.)

One of the first, and still one of the leading websites to reflect the assertion of individual style as a fashion phenomenon was photographer Scott Schuman's *The Sartorialist* (Schuman n.d.), begun in 2005, which publishes informal portraits that he considers to be 'more as a social document celebrating self-expression than as a catalogue for skirt lengths or heel heights' (Schuman 2009: 5). While the site's commitment to the dissemination of 'sartorial expression' (Schuman 2009: 5) can be seen to be following in the tradition of British style magazines from the 1980s,[7] and the 'on-the-street' photographic format pioneered by veteran New York fashion and society photographer Bill Cunningham, it epitomises a contemporary web-based trend to associate fashion with self-expression, individuality and by association with autobiography. Like many web-based fashion sites, it also promotes participation, providing a platform where visitors to the site can contribute to an on-line dialogue concerning each image. A similar approach is followed by Yvan Rodic's *Facehunter* (Rodic n.d.). Elisa Goodkind's website *Stylelikeu* (Goodkind n.d.) combines the approach of *The Sartorialist* and *Apartamento*, locating the photographic subjects in their own homes, recording their wardrobe spaces. Again, the

emphasis is on the personal, the individual's biographic narrative represented through interior decoration, clothing, gesture and attitude:

> It's the way that somebody moves in their clothes, it's the way that somebody lives in their clothes – it's not about the clothes it's about the person in the clothes and that's the point of this site.
>
> ("stylelikeu/about us/mission video" n.d.)

While Schuman, Rodic and Goodkinds' sites represent a contemporary web-based trend to associate fashion with identity, self-expression and individuality, often accompanied by autobiographic anecdote they are, like the majority of the exhibitions previously cited, mediated and edited, and present autobiographic reference rather than autobiography. There are, however, websites that act as personal style diaries of the author's fashion choices and offer unmediated autobiography. Poppy Disney's site, *What I Wore Today* (Disney n.d.) is a popular UK based site where the author has recorded and commented on the outfit she has worn every day since the first of January 2010. Recently re-designed, the new site enables users to up-load their own 'what I wore today' images with the facility to tag garments with their 'label', 'comments', the wearer's 'mood', and their 'situation'. The site has the facility to allow users to browse by these tags. *What I Wore Today* represents a contemporary web-based fashion autobiography whose success has attracted the attention of the fashion business and partnership advertising deals. It could be argued that the presence of advertising influences the author's fashion choices and compromises the true autobiographic integrity of the site, yet *What I Wore Today* still serves to illustrate how certain web-users consume fashion and understand the intrinsic links between fashion and identity through an autobiographic narrative.

An interesting coda is that, whilst these references are internet based (Grant's *The Thoughtful Dresser* blog (Grant n.d.) was started as a research tool for her book) they have all recently produced publications. Whilst generating websites creates a platform for the author, versions in print generate income and appear to engender concrete validation and return autobiography to its traditional, print-based format. As John Jannuzzi, author of fashion blogsite *Textbook* (Jannuzzi n.d.) confirms;

> Textbook makes no money, never has, never will, unless someone calls me and says they want to make this into a coffee-table book.
>
> (LaCava 2010: 159)

The transposition of the autobiography or autobiographic reference from website to publication is an easy matter. Schuman even supplements some of the images in his print version of *The Sartorialist* website with biographic anecdotes relating to the subject and autobiographic reference relating to the occasion of taking the photograph.

As my investigation indicates, while dress historians and curators value autobiographic reference and its ability to illuminate a garment's inherent narratives, this material is often omitted from exhibitions, and unmediated fashion autobiography appears not to exist in exhibition form. Literary and televisual fashion autobiographies do exist and demonstrate the ability to communicate vital narratives in relation to clothing. They also provide incomparable evidence of the conscious construction of identity through clothing in the context of wider socio-cultural forces. The possibility of the fashion autobiography as documentation of the expression of identity as realised through clothing is effectively articulated on a number of internet sites, where individual style is emphasised over industry-led fashion. The website *What I Wore Today* represents a contemporary fashion

autobiography whose success has attracted the attention of the fashion business and partnership advertising deals. *What I Wore Today*, most importantly, serves to illustrate how internet users understand and consume fashion, relating instinctively to the intrinsic links between fashion and identity through autobiographic narrative.

As the unmediated fashion autobiography was so rarely evident in exhibition form it was necessary to draw on a broad range of exhibition samples where autobiographic reference was present, and to examine the occurrence of the fashion autobiography in other media in order to provide references, situate and attest to the originality of my practice-based research. Taking into account the evidence revealed above, gathered through my review of exhibitions and supplementary references in other media, the lack of work comparable to my research proposes a strong case for my practice-based research, a fashion autobiography rendered as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition set in the MoMu galleries and realised as a detailed scale model, to be considered as a unique and original endeavour.

In this chapter I have addressed and critically assessed publications and sources in other media relevant to the fields in which my research operates, in order to locate reference material, situate my work and provide evidence to attest to its originality. Considering this evidence, which indicates no equivalent study, I would propose that the identification, description and definition of a repertoire of innovative presentation modes identified through comparative analysis executed through visits to exhibitions and explored through the construction of a fashion autobiography in exhibition form, which constitutes my contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making, should be considered as an original work. The following chapter, which concludes the contextual

element of this thesis, introduces the main location for my theoretical research and the site for my practice-based project, MoMu, Antwerp.

Chapter 3: ModeMuseum; Collection, Building, Policy

This chapter introduces ModeMuseum, The Fashion Museum of the Province of Antwerp, commonly known as MoMu, through a brief history of its collection and a description of the ModeNatie building that houses MoMu collection stores, library, offices and its exhibition galleries. Following this account, and concluding the chapter, is comment on the architectural factors, strategic policy decisions and working practices that, I would assert, encourage and accommodate experimental exhibition-making practice at MoMu and that are fundamental in enabling development of the innovative exhibition presentation modes covered in Chapters 6-9.

It is due to the exhibition work executed as a result of these determining factors of architecture, policy and practice that MoMu became central to my research: within its temporary exhibition programme, MoMu repeatedly evidenced those modes that form the core of my critical framework in the analysis of innovative presentation of fashion in the museum; threshold, landscape, object and the body. On a more practical level, Antwerp's proximity to the UK also supported issues of geographic and financial accessibility, which allowed repeated visits over a significant period of time. The exhibition galleries at MoMu were determined as the location for my practice-based research, the construction of a fashion autobiography as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition because, as I will discuss later in this chapter, they were specifically designed to minimise architectural limitations and conservation restrictions and to maximise the potential of exhibition scenography.

The MoMu collection

The history of the collection that now forms the core of MoMu can be traced back to the 1930s when a number of objects assembled by local historians (with the intention of opening a museum of Flemish cultural history) were given a home in Sterckshof Castle, Antwerp. Plans for a large-scale indoor and outdoor museum were never realised, but the Sterckshof collection grew, establishing particularly strong holdings in the area of the decorative arts. Although the development of the fashion and textile collection was not seen as a priority and was rarely exhibited, the collection attracted a number of significant donations including objects and archival material from Voortman, a major Belgian cotton printing firm. An unexpectedly popular exhibition of lace in 1967 led to the expansion of the lace collection, which was further supplemented by the donation of the library of local lace and textile expert, Lode Tryuens-Bredael.

Due to the expansion of the various collections housed at Sterckshof, the decision was made in 1977 to give the fashion and textile collection a home of their own and they were moved to Vrieselhof Castle in Ranst-Oelegem. The collections continued to expand through purchase, donation and the rationalisation of neighbouring collections; notable additions included the fashion and textile collection of the Museum voor Volkskunde (almost 2000 items collected from 1900 onwards) which was offered on permanent loan, the purchase of important pieces of lace from auction at Sotheby's, and donations from private collectors and individuals. The collection was also extended through the donation of various archives from local businesses and manufacturers, which included costume and textile items, documentation, correspondence, designs and fabricating tools and machinery. These additions ranged from the archive of the Brussels haute couture house, Valens, to material from Madame Roeis, an Antwerp dressmaker, along with the archives of several Belgian textile

companies; the lace manufacturers Jeanne Luig, La Campinoise and Lier, a major producer of embroidered net and beaded fabrics (Sorber 2002: 83-90).

The present collection numbers over 15,000 items comprising textiles and textile manufacturing paraphernalia, and a considerable collection of fashionable clothing – predominantly womenswear but including some menswear – mainly ranging in date from the eighteenth century to the present day. The collection continues to benefit from the tradition of donations from designers and manufacturers with local connections; the Antwerp-based designer Dries Van Noten donates several silhouettes from each of his collections and in 2006 fashion designer Bernhard Willhelm, who graduated from the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp, donated his complete archive to date. The strategic activity of MoMu staff also continues to expand the collection, with acquisition activities split equally between the purchase of historic and contemporary items. Historic material is acquired specifically to complement the existing strengths of the collection, and contemporary material is generally sought from designers who have close links with Antwerp or Belgium either through origin or education. An overview of the MoMu collection was the subject of the first exhibition, *Het ModeMuseum/The Fashion Museum: Backstage* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2002), presented in the new MoMu galleries when they opened in 2002 and is illustrated in Debo and Verhelst (2002).

The ModeNatie and MoMu

In the late 1980s Antwerp became the focus for interest from the global fashion community following the world-wide acclaim bestowed on the Antwerp-educated fashion designers who were given the title the 'Antwerp Six'. The original Antwerp Six comprised Dirk Bikkembergs, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Walter Van

Beirendonck and Marina Yee, who graduated from the Fashion Department of the Royal Academy, Antwerp in 1981, renamed in 1996 the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp. They achieved international recognition when they showed as a group at the London Designer Show in 1986 (Debo 2007: 35-42). The renown gained by these designers established the city of Antwerp as an internationally recognised centre for cutting-edge fashion design. Their success was partly due to a wave of initiatives launched by the Belgian government with the specific intention of reviving the country's flagging textile industry: programmes such as the Golden Spindle competition, first held in 1982, which gave the winning designers financial backing to work with Belgian manufacturers to present a collection (Debo 2007: 38). Through the much-publicised work of the Academy's graduates and national political initiatives, Antwerp established its reputation as an internationally recognised centre for radical, innovative fashion design.

Headed by Linda Loppa, who took over as Head of the Fashion Department at the Royal Academy in 1983, a small team of professionals with a vested interest in the fashion industry in Antwerp devised a proposal outlining how the city might best build on its reputation and consolidate its fashion-related resources. In 1998 these plans were mobilised when the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI) opened an office in Antwerp, Linda Loppa was appointed Director of MoMu, and the Council of the Province of Antwerp agreed to fund the refurbishment of a prominent city-centre building to become the home for MoMu (Debo 2007: 145-150). The chosen building had previously seen a number of varied uses; originally opened in 1894 as a hotel, it had also been used as a storehouse for the clothing company, New England, and from 1919-1960 as the headquarters of the Antwerp Electricity Company (Borret 2002:169-180).

Fig. 3.1 Exterior of the ModeNatie from Nationalestraat.

Located on Nationalestraat, the main boulevard linking central Antwerp and its affluent southern suburbs, the building is a city landmark that presents an imposing façade decorated with elaborate cornice and pediment work in the late nineteenth century Parisian style [Fig. 3.1]. Comprising two wings that follow the triangular street-plan of the block on which it is located, the most distinctive feature of the structure is the impressive, south-facing, domed rotunda from which the two main wings radiate. Belgian architect Marie-José Van Hee was appointed to renovate the building. Van Hee's preliminary strategy was to remove all internal additions – staircases, mezzanines, ceilings – that had accumulated throughout the building over the years in order to reveal the simplicity of its original design and to insert striking contemporary elements into the building's circulation spaces [Fig. 3.2]. Load-bearing columns, that give both structural integrity and architectural rhythm to the original building have been exposed and become a defining motif of the new internal spaces (Borret 2002: 169-170).

Areas of the building have been allocated to the various project partners; the third and fourth floors are given over to the ateliers, teaching spaces and social areas of the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, while the second floor houses the offices of the FFI alongside the MoMu offices and its archive, library and reading room. The ground floor is designated for public use; a bookshop and café have been installed, an inner courtyard created, and a small exhibition space and a larger, flexible space, the Forum, under the direction of the FFI. The original internal courtyard has been roofed to create a public atrium linking the two wings of the building. From this impressive circulation space rises a spectacular merbau timber-clad staircase that leading to the main MoMu exhibition gallery that takes up the entire first floor [Fig. 3.3].

Fig. 3.2 View of the MoMu exhibition gallery.
Fig. 3.3 The ModeNatie atrium, with stairs to the MoMu exhibition gallery.

The first floor exhibition gallery comprises both wings of the building with the axial rotunda at the south end of the building forming an apex. At the north end is a reception desk and lockers for public use and a corridor that links both wings of the gallery enabling a circular route around the exhibition space [Fig.3.4]. All superfluous interior construction has been removed from the gallery: interior surfaces are painted matt white and the floor faced with wood-block parquet. The girders and load-bearing columns that form the building's structure have been revealed and are the only interruptions to an otherwise open floor-plan allowing maximum possible freedom when planning exhibition scenography. The original fenestration has been maintained enabling views onto the street when required, while shutters are available to cover the windows and control light levels as necessary. When natural light is excluded, lighting track has been installed to allow for controlled artificial lighting. The space has also been fitted with environmental control facilities to automatically maintain optimum temperature and relative humidity levels in line with international conservation standards.

The decision to expend considerable resources on the installation of climatic control to the gallery spaces is indicative of the forward-thinking curatorial approach characteristic of MoMu. When interviewed by the author in 2005, Kaat Debo, at the time responsible for Exhibition Policy at MoMu, remarked that adopting this strategy enables exhibition material to be presented without the need for protective display cases, the intention being that this provision would 'add to the physical presence of the pieces and diminish their psychological distance from the viewer' (Debo 2005). This resolution also allows for spatial flexibility and the installation of environments created specifically for each exhibition, avoiding the restrictions present in venues such as the fashion galleries of Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, where large, permanent vitrines dominate and severely restrict the design for each exhibition. Plans for a substantial refit for the
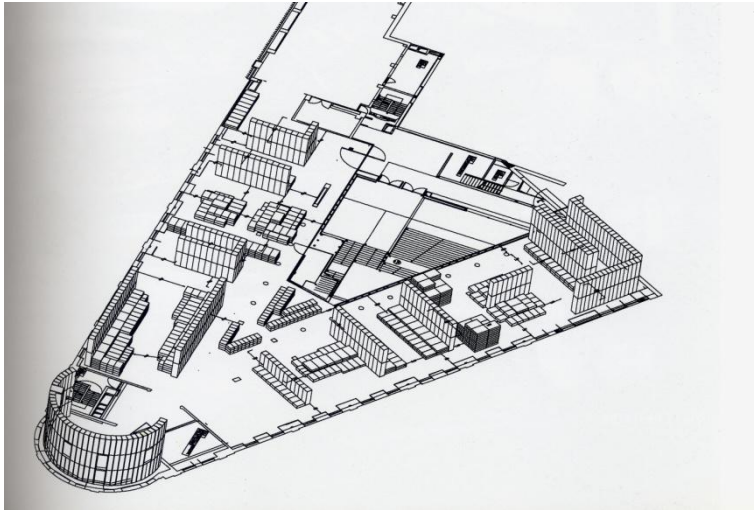
Fig. 3.4 Plan of the MoMu exhibition gallery, showing the two axial wings and the rotunda.

galleries of the Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, propose a reconfiguration echoing the approach taken for the MoMu galleries, which will provide, according to Director Thomas P. Campbell, 'a distinctly flexible space [where] the possibilities for creative interpretations of the collection are unlimited' ("Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Make $10 Million Gift" n.d.). This inbuilt capacity for flexible staging facilitates complex scenographic installations that are unique to each presentation and reflects the recognition at MoMu, of the importance of the setting constructed for exhibitions, both from an aesthetic perspective and in terms of contextualisation and interpretive possibilities. The architecture of the main MoMu exhibition space, at its most fundamental level, is engineered to support innovative exhibition design.

MoMu Exhibition Policy

Prior to the opening of the building in its complete state, a public event was staged in the ground floor Forum, open on weekends during 21 March-21 August 2002. Part consultation, part public relations, the event consisted of two large 'cubicles', the first of which contained information on the numerous aspects of the building and its intended functions; the architecture and building project, sponsorship and Friends organisations, public facilities, the MoMu collection and its exhibition policy. The second cubicle was painted with blackboard paint and chalk was provided for the public to leave their remarks, ideas and feed-back ("Forum/Cubicles Project" n.d.). The cubicle walls were regularly photographed, so that the comments could be recorded, before being cleaned to make way for further feed-back. Whilst comments were welcomed, the MoMu exhibition policy was, by this time largely determined.

MoMu's exhibition policy, led by Director Linda Loppa, was underpinned by a deliberate desire to establish a unique institutional style and voice.

During interview with the author, Kaat Debo voiced parallels between MoMu's lack of institutional history and its mission to establish a unique identity and the rise of the Antwerp Six in the 1980s:

> I think it's the same with Belgian fashion, we don't really have the history of French fashion, and I think that's why, at the beginning of the '80s, the Belgian designers could come up with something really new, because they didn't have that history of Belgian fashion.
>
> (Debo 2005)

Debo's remarks articulate the intrinsic ideological and spiritual links between MoMu and the contemporary fashion scene in Antwerp and, reflecting the reputation of the original Antwerp Six, express the ambition that MoMu's exhibition product, not constrained by previous practice, could be both distinctive and innovative. Whilst the MoMu collection was of a high standard, with exceptional strengths in certain areas, it is acknowledged by Debo that it could in no way rival the collections of the large national museums such as the V&A, London, Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, or the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York: MoMu would have to look to something more than just its collection to establish a unique reputation (Debo 2005).

A policy decision confirmed that there would be no permanent display of the collection, and that the main exhibition programme would comprise two thematic exhibitions each year. The intention was to produce a programme that was not reliant on either the conventional chronological reading of fashion (which Debo acknowledged in interview with the author is already done very well by museums with a more historically comprehensive collection) or on the increasingly popular format of

designer monograph shows, again asserting MoMu's intention to seek out new approaches to exhibition-making:

> I won't say that we're never going to work on one designer…but we're not going to do the history of, say, Dries Van Noten…we are going to work with separate designers, but we'll do it in a different way.
>
> (Debo 2005)

The idea of regularly working with designers and practitioners from non-museological disciplines on the exhibition programme, for both the main galleries and the smaller ground-floor space, of strategic collaboration, was embedded in MoMu's practice at the point of policy making ("Exhibition Policy" n.d.). The impact of these collaborations, particularly with partners from outside of the museum profession is that, within the context of MoMu's developing exhibition practice, museum conventions and the accepted cannons of design history would no longer dominate the curatorial process. This basic principle of MoMu's practice is reflected by curator Olivier Saillard, writing of his collaboration with Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto for on the exhibition *Yohji Yamamoto: Juste des Vêtements* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris 2005):

> Opening the reserve collection of a fashion museum to the designer is an opportunity to analyse the permeability that exists between him and the collected items…It is no longer possible to pigeonhole designers into periods and styles. The organisation of the reserve collection itself, by epoch and by name appears obsolete. An outmoded dress becomes contemporary in his eyes.
>
> (Saillard 2005: 165)

And whilst MoMu maintains working relationships with regular collaborators, such as Antwerp-based graphic designer Paul Boudens and scenographer Bob Verhelst, it frequently makes one-off partnerships for specific projects with the intention of 'allowing divergent views or perspectives' ("Exhibition Policy" n.d.), involving collaborators from outside the world of the museum, who bring conceptual and aesthetic influences from contemporary art, fashion design and architectural practice. These influences are encouraged to flourish at MoMu where a commitment to the interpretive value of creative exhibition design is part of the house philosophy:

> It is very important that we present fashion with a scenography, that you present it in a context because dresses themselves don't always tell you the whole story. You can look at dresses and be interested in textiles or how they are made, the pattern of the dress, but that doesn't tell you how it functions in society….
>
> (Debo 2005)

Throughout these collaborative projects, a strong guiding hand is maintained by MoMu staff to shape content and narratives, ensure sound museological practice, adherence to conservation standards and continuity in philosophy and approach. Underpinning this professional practice is a deeply embedded dedication to experimental and innovative exhibition-making practice:

> …MoMu also assumes an important laboratory function: the freedom to experiment with different interdisciplinary approaches, to take time out for research and to give the public time to dwell on the various aspects of fashion.
>
> ("Exhibition Policy" n.d.)

It cannot be overestimated how significant the factors summarized above, embedded in policy, philosophy and working practice, have been in shaping subsequent practice at MoMu; an architecture that minimises the physical limitations of the exhibition space, dedication to a thematic programme that side-steps fashion exhibition conventions, a commitment to collaboration with professionals from other creative fields, and an understanding of the effect and interpretive potential of spatial design. Above all, is the avowed commitment to experimentation of a new institution intent on finding its own unique voice, where 'a lack of history sometimes gives you freedom' (Debo 2005).

The building that houses the MoMu galleries, storage, offices and archive, alongside the Hogeschool and the offices for the FFI was christened 'ModeNatie': according to a floor-plan published by the FFI '*mode'* meaning fashion, and '*natie'* interpreted in the sense of 'national', but also in the Flemish meaning of 'warehousing/storage company' (anon. 2002). Thus ModeNatie presents multiple meanings; reflecting Antwerp's world-wide reputation as a centre for contemporary fashion, its tradition as a trading centre and major international port, and the building's function as a container, a vessel for the preservation and presentation of the city's fashion heritage and the promotion of its fashion future. ModeNatie celebrated the completion of building work with a public preview on the 15 June 2002 to which 20 Belgian designers contributed garments, graphic work or photographs and the first exhibition at MoMu, *Het ModeMuseum/The Fashion Museum: Backstage,* curated by Linda Loppa, opened to the public on the 21 September, 2002.

It had originally been intended, however, to open MoMu in the summer of 2001 as one of the central events of Antwerp's *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* festival but delays in the construction programme meant that the building was not complete and an alternative venue found for what had been

proposed as MoMu's inaugural exhibition, *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001). Although not staged in the MoMu galleries, analysis of *2Women-2Vrouwen* is relevant to my current research in that it gave my first direct experience of the presentation modes that subsequent observation and analysis would identify as suggestive of MoMu's innovative exhibition approach. Above all *2Women-2Vrouwen* aroused my personal curiosity and professional interest, prompting subsequent visits to MoMu. The inspirational experience of *2Women-2Vrouwen* lies at the foundation of my current research and the following chapter gives a background to the exhibition, relates an account of the exhibition experience and documents the first indications of those presentation modes that are the focus of Chapters 6-9 of my thesis; threshold, landscape, object, and the body.

Part 2

Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation.

(Storr 2006: 23)

Chapter 4: *Mode2001* Festival and the Exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen*

This chapter outlines the background of the *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* festival, an Antwerp-wide fashion event that included in its programme the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001). The account of *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* relates how, through significant investment in the festival, the city of Antwerp demonstrated its recognition of the potential cultural and economic benefits of building on its growing reputation as a centre of excellence in contemporary fashion. It was within the context of this festival, intended to increase tourism through consolidation of its reputation as an international fashion centre, that *2Women-2Vrouwen* was staged.

It is relevant to include an analysis of the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* at this point in my thesis as it proved, in retrospect, to be the moment of origination for my current research. Visiting the exhibition, in no other guise than that of a curious tourist with a personal interest in fashion and professional experience in creating museum exhibitions, I first became conscious of the potential existence of a repertoire of innovative presentation modes. Whilst my notions of these modes were not, at the time of my visit, consolidated or clarified, *2Women-2Vrouwen* marks the point at which I began to view fashion exhibitions from a different perspective, looking for the evidence through which to identify, describe and define these innovative modes. It is for this reason that I include a detailed account of the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* and accompany this account with reflection on my first experience of the presentation modes observed and which influenced the reading and analysis of subsequent exhibitions. The chapter concludes with an introduction to four key exhibitions from MoMu, alongside brief biographies of their curators that,

demonstrating significant evidence of those modes subsequently identified as threshold, landscape, object and the body, are central to this research.

Mode2001 Landed-Geland

Mode2001 Landed-Geland, which ran from 26 May 2001-7 October 2001, was conceived as a city-wide celebration of Antwerp's status as a fashion capital. Building on previous large-scale cultural projects (Antwerp Cultural Capital '93 and the Van Dyke Festival of 1999) *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* was an initiative 'focused on culture, tourism and image building' (Verbergt 2001: 3). The project had been in discussion since 1998 when Linda Loppa had first proposed the idea to Toerisme Vlaanderen, the official tourism office for Flanders, based in Brussels. The event was agreed in principal and production shared between Antwerpen Open (an independent arts organisation set up in 1997 to promote the artistic reputation of Antwerp and Flanders) and the FFI, with Toerisme Vlaanderen as marketing partner.

Fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck, one of the original designers known as the Antwerp Six, was appointed as the festival's artistic director in 1999. Van Beirendonck, born 1955, is known for clothing that uses vivid colours, contrasting fabrics and graphic slogans that engage with sexual politics and environmental issues, and is a central figure in the Antwerp fashion scene, having opened a dedicated retail outlet in Antwerp in 1998 and maintaining a post on staff in the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp since 1985 ("Walter van Beirendonck/fact file" n.d.).

An artistic strategy was drawn up for the festival and the aims of the festival were set out:

Accentuate Antwerp's and Flanders' international aura and image as an innovative and creative city/region.

Illuminate fashion's cultural dimension – fashion determines an identity; Mode2001 determines Antwerp's cultural identity.

Unleash the touristic [sic] trump card possessed by Antwerp and Flanders.

(Verbergt 2001: 6)

The project budget was estimated at €2.5-7.5 million. Van Beirendonck's slogan for the festival was 'Think and Dream'. An extraordinarily ambitious scheme of events, exhibitions and activities were planned which had to be trimmed as work (and fund-raising) progressed. Although some projects had to be abandoned, the final programme was extensive; four major exhibitions, five fashion shows, a wide-ranging series of public events, three publications and five immense, site-specific 'colour blocks' inserted as promotional markers throughout the city, the most notable of which was a 15 metre high scarlet 'A' placed on top of the 115 metre high KBC tower in central Antwerp, transforming the city-centre skyline. In its ambition to attract foreign visitors to Antwerp the festival was deemed a success - 36% of visitors to the festival were from outside of Belgium, with 33% visiting specially for *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* (Verbergt 2001: 27).

Visiting Antwerp in October 2001 to attend the *Mode2001 Landed-Geland* event, I was impressed and inspired by the quality of staging and evidence of innovation expressed in the exhibitions. One exhibition in particular prompted considerable reflection and, I considered, warranted further study and analysis due to what I perceived as the curator's ability to construct and convey meaning and atmosphere through the deliberate use of visual and spatial devices. The exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* was conceived in two parts - the first part examining the work of French

couturier Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel (1883-1971). Renowned for an elegant, *sportif* signature style that rebelled against the restrictive corsetry and overly-decorated silhouette of the nineteenth century, and exemplified by the now-iconic two-piece 'Chanel suit' with accompanying accessories of quilted chain-strap handbag, two-tone leather shoes and Byzantine-inspired costume jewellery, Chanel is possibly best remembered for her eponymous perfume – Chanel N°5 (Buttolph *et al* 1998: 98, Mendes and de la Haye, 2011: 59-66).

The second element of the exhibition consisted of a complementary 'statement' by Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo (born 1942) of fashion house Comme des Garçons. Kawakubo, who started the Comme des Garçons label in Tokyo, Japan, in 1969, gained international renown after showing asymmetric, draped garments that appeared to be torn, creased and unravelled, in Paris in 1981. She is widely recognised as one of the leading innovators in fashion retail and design, and maintains an aesthetically-challenging, avant-garde practice that continually side-steps accepted notions of silhouette and construction (Jones and Mair 2002: 244-251, Mendes and de la Haye 2011: 234). In the exhibition publicity the designers were paired as 'two women who have initiated revolutions in twentieth-century fashion history' (anon. 2001), and the project aimed to celebrate the 'single-mindedness and authenticity that had enabled them to leave their mark on the history of fashion in the twentieth century' (Genty 2001: 1).

The exhibition was curated by Belgian fashion designer Dirk Van Saene (born 1959), another of the original Antwerp Six who, from his base in Antwerp, continues to design and produce clothing in limited quantities for a restricted number of outlets and teaches at the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp. Van Saene collaborated on the exhibition design with B-architecten, an Antwerp based architecture and design

company. The exhibition publicity material broadcast Van Saene's deliberate intention to take a different approach from the thematic or chronological narratives often employed in designer-monograph exhibitions. His aim, according to publicity material, would be not merely to present Chanel's designs, but to contextualise her work in relation to the social climate in which it was produced and to reveal a sense of the designer's character and the impact and legacy of her ground-breaking accomplishments:

> Not only does one get a picture of the period in which Chanel lived, one also sees the huge influence this impassioned woman had and still has on her surroundings and the fashion world.

> (anon. 2002)

Kawakubo's statement was to consist of five presentations of her Comme des Garçons women's collection for autumn-winter 2001-2002. Staged at various locations around the city, four of the five events would be open to an invited audience only, while the fifth would be accessible to a limited number of ticket holders. General festival-goers would experience the shows after the event as screen-based displays in a room inserted into the *2Women-2Vrouwen* exhibition. Despite Kawakubo's resolutely avant-garde intervention, effectively presented in the exhibition on large plasma screens in a narrow room with only red-filtered light, it was the exhibition rooms devoted to Chanel which left a lasting impression and provoked further investigation.

Originally intended to be staged as the opening exhibition at MoMu, *2Women-2Vrouwen* had to be relocated due to delays in construction work and an arson attack on the unfinished building in July 2001 that set back the completion of ModeNatie (Verbergt 2001: 19). The replacement venue,

found at relatively short notice, was a suite of rooms on the first floor of a building that had previously been the Royal Palace in central Antwerp. The effect that the relocation had on the exhibition is not documented but, I would suggest, in terms of the aesthetic direction of the exhibition the necessitated move from the purpose built 'white box' gallery of MoMu to the complex, Rococo spaces of the Royal Palace was essentially instrumental (and ultimately fortuitous) in influencing the innovative exhibition concept and creative direction evident in the final presentation.

The following account of *2Women-2Vrouwen* bears heavily the influence of hindsight and is undoubtedly shaped by the subsequent comparative analysis of exhibitions that enabled me to identify and describe the presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body as they appear in the following chapters of this thesis. Revisiting the notes that I made immediately after the visit to *2Women-2Vrouwen*, looking back at photographs of the installation and re-reading the text in the exhibition guide, I cannot claim to have been conscious of these presentation modes, or the depth of meaning embedded in the scenography, and of how meaning was constructed and communicated in this exhibition at the time of visit. However, as a practicing museum professional and regular exhibition visitor, I was aware that there was something strikingly unconventional about Van Saene's approach.

2Women-2Vrouwen

The former palace of the Belgian Royal Family sits incongruously on the Meir, Antwerp's main shopping street. With its once imposing façade now grimy and flanked by garish branches of well-known high-street retail outlets it gives the impression of being a city-centre bank rather than a former seat of the State. To access *2Women-2Vrouwen*, visitors slip cautiously through an inauspicious doorway and into a stone-flagged

entrance hall. The eye is led immediately to a grand staircase, with elaborate wrought-iron balustrade, over which is hanging a large reproduction of a portrait by Robert Doisneau of the French couturier Gabrielle Chanel. The image, taken in 1953, shows Chanel on the stairs of her headquarters in rue Cambon, Paris, her image fractured and repeated in the multiple, vertically-panelled mirrors of the staircase walls. Doisneau's image is reproduced so that the figure of Chanel is larger than life-size and alongside the juxtaposition of the real and the photographed staircases it appears as if the exhibition designers, at the very entrance to the exhibition, have contrived a 'meeting' between visitor and designer - it almost seems as if Mademoiselle, eyes down-cast, were descending to meet you [Fig. 4.1]. Through this simple photographic device, the visitor's first experience of the exhibition is an encounter with the image of Chanel, and her role as an ever-present participant in the ensuing presentation is established.

To enter the exhibition it is necessary to ascend the staircase at the top of which is a pair of heavy, carved and panelled double-doors which bear the title La Chambre des Tailleurs in modernist, black, *sans serif* lettering. Opening the doors, the visitor encounters the first room of the exhibition: a grand Rococo state room is revealed with parquet floor, mirror-panelled walls, fluted pilasters and ornate gilded plaster-work decorating the walls and vaulted ceiling, all in a state of semi-decay [Fig. 4.2]. Three extravagant crystal chandeliers are the main source of light, and beneath the chandeliers, running the length of the room, is a vast, frameless glass vitrine. On the black-stained wooden floor of the vitrine stand ten Stockman dress-makers' forms, each wearing variations of the instantly-recognisable classic Chanel two-piece suit. Chanel's voice on a sound loop fills the room and intones:

La mode passe, le style reste.

Fig. 4.1 The entrance to *2Women-2Vrouwen*
Fig. 4.2 La Chambre des Tailleurs

L'élégance du vêtement, c'est la liberté de bouger.

La simplicité ne signifie pas la pauvreté.[8]

(Genty 2001: 11)

Van Saene's installation at first seems purely utilitarian: the vitrine contains and protects the garments as would any display case in a museum. Examining the construction more closely, however, reveals that the insertion of the contemporary vitrine into the historic interior creates an aesthetic tension that encourages a particular interpretation of the objects on display. In the first instance, Van Saene's intervention closely emulates the spirit of the couturier herself in its resounding modernity: its architectural scale and its unapologetically modernist design sit in opposition to the ornate surroundings. The visitor can read Van Saene's scenographic statement as echoing the impact of Chanel's revolutionary designs almost a century before, stripped of unnecessary decoration, functional, elegant and modern. Secondly, for those visitors with knowledge of the designer's biography and personal taste, the ornate Rococo room would be comparable to those interiors she customarily inhabited, such as the private suite at the Ritz, Paris which she maintained for many years and which, according to Chanel, were the only permissible location for decorative ornament (de la Haye 2011: 36).

Yet what is more note-worthy is the subliminal yet inescapable effect that the installation has on the visitor's perception of the garments - the grandeur of the space and the precision and simplicity of the presentation creates an aura of significant status around the objects on display. The suits stand in a regimented row, mounted on Stockman mannequins. There is no semblance of head, hand or leg, no intention to replace the human body other than the basic three-dimensional form needed to support each garment. These suits are presented as beyond clothing: they are shown to us not as they were made, as garments to be worn, but as

Fig. 4.3 La Chambre des Bijoux.
Fig. 4.4 Installation of Rei Kawakubo's 'statements'.

what they have become – icons of fashion, their status as objects of renown and devotion enhanced by the presence of a suit from Chanel's personal wardrobe. And whilst the visitor reflects on these icons, their creator asserts her presence, aurally, through the amplified recordings of her voice: Chanel's fast, staccato, imperious voice repeating in authoritarian tones her fashion mantra.

Opening the door into the next room reveals an unexpected contrast. La Chambre des Bijoux is a small, white-painted space with white-veiled windows. Plain glass covers sit on top of chest height stands made from a framework of white-painted, un-planed wood. Each stand presents a velvet cushion displaying Chanel's characteristic costume jewellery [Fig. 4.3]. Chanel's voice, again, is heard in this room. The sense of her presence, constructed through sound, still and moving image and projected quotations becomes a constant theme through the exhibition and maintains a sense of continuity as the visitor passes from room to room. The evocation of Chanel becomes a thematic device in the absence of an overt continuous narrative and she haunts each room of the exhibition, referencing herself appropriately in accordance with the subject of each space.

A suite of rooms follow; La Chambre Parlante, an entirely blacked-out space shows archive news-reel footage of an interview with Chanel as she presents her new collection for spring-summer 1959. The format repeats in La Chambre du Commentaire where sound-bites taken from interviews with Chanel are contrasted with images of important events from her times. In these rooms Chanel is depicted in her self-appointed role as commentator and style-maker. These rooms exhibit 'Chanel' herself, as opposed to concrete, fabricated, Chanel-designed products that would be the focus of more conventional exhibitions. The visitor is presented with and invited to scrutinise visual and aural representations of Chanel in lieu

of tangible material, the boundaries become blurred between Chanel the 'subject' of the exhibition, and Chanel the 'object' on display.

Inserted between these two rooms is a small, panelled, corridor-like space. Benches are ranged along one wall, and along the opposite wall, placed on the floor, large flat-screen monitors show film of Rei Kawakubo's 'statements'. These statements are filmed representations of each of five unique run-way presentations that Kawakubo had staged of the Comme des Garçons women's autumn/winter 2001-2002 collection at various venues around Antwerp. The window shutters are left open and light streams into the room, but the window glass, covered with translucent scarlet film colours all of the light in the space [Fig. 4.4]. Only the images on the screens, emitting their own light-source, retain their true colour – everything else is tinted blood-red. This control of light creates a jarring and unsettling effect in the space. Through the manipulation of light and the central location within the exhibition structure, Kawakubo's statements sit as a challenging and abrasive insertion at the very core of the exhibition.

As the visitor leaves Kawakubo's space, and returns to the world of Chanel in La Chambre des Secrets, the sense of objectification of the designer established in previous rooms returns. The visitor enters a comparatively plain, rectangular room where light is excluded by the closed shutters over the windows. Against one of the long walls there is a heavy, dark marble fire-place with an over-mantle mirror. The only light comes from projected texts citing Chanel that flicker around the cornice of the room and five narrow-beamed spotlights that each hang over a vitrine. The plain wooden construction of the five vitrines repeats the style seen in La Chambre des Bijoux, but the dimensions are different; with the supports painted black, they are waist height, low and rectangular and sit in the space like five glass coffins laid out on trestles [Fig. 4.5].

Fig. 4.5 La Chambre des Secrets
Fig. 4.6 La Chambre N°5
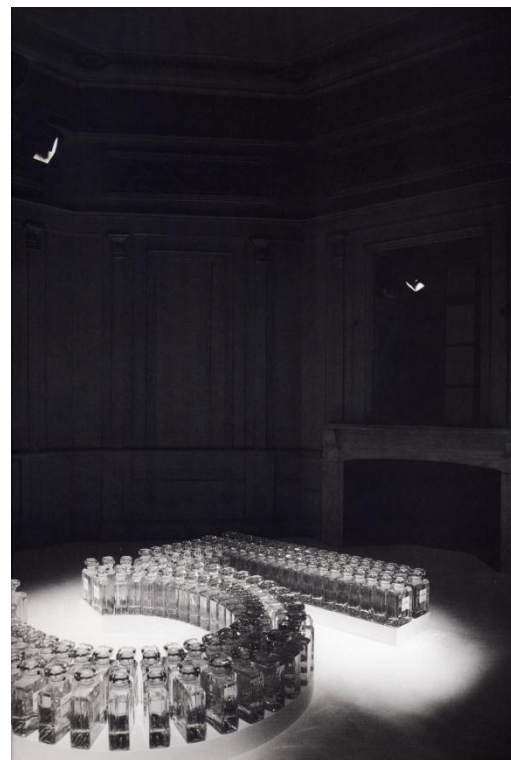
Each vitrine encloses objects that have become synonymous with our understanding of the Chanel style; a two-piece suit is displayed turned inside out so that the unique chain-weighted finishing can be seen, a pair of typical black and beige leather two-tone sling-back shoes, a range of cosmetics including Tan Pour L'Eté (the revolutionary body oil marketed by Chanel as the first cosmetic product to aid sun-tanning), a quilted leather 2.55 bag with flattened chain-link strap, a pair of sheers poised over a severed ponytail of hair represents the revolutionary 1920s *garçonne* hair-style. There is poignancy in this display - the objects are laid before us like grave-goods in an exposed tomb, or saintly relics set out to be revered. Chanel is distilled to a symbology of objects, products so synonymous with her being that they are able to stand in lieu of the designer herself.

Moving through into La Chambre N°5, a room dark from shuttered windows, crumbling decorative plaster-work and a large white marble fire surround with a marble-framed mirror above, the visitor is exposed to Chanel's ultimate 'secret'. In a pool of light on the floor, stretching almost from wall to wall is a large numeral '5' formed, in the instantly recognisable and distinctively modernist Chanel-brand typeface, by oversized glass flacons of Chanel N°5 perfume [Fig. 4.6]. Chanel's voice can be heard again - this time advocating repeatedly the value of being well-perfumed - over the soft hum of a humidifier which saturates the air of the room with fragrance. Van Saene renders Chanel's most famous and ephemeral product tangible and conjures the illusion that the designer has vaporised, and we are left only with her voice, her opinions and her perfume:

> Le parfum c'est ce qu'il y a de plus important. Comme le dit Paul Valéry: "Une femme mal parfumée n'a pas d'avenir."[9]
>
> (Genty 2001: 25)

The penultimate room, La Chambre Mademoiselle, presents the visitor with a puzzle. At first it seems as if an impenetrable construction of plywood shuttering on a rough timber frame fills the space, barely allowing the visitor to walk around the gap between it and the walls of the room. On one side, however, a discrete door opens to reveal an inner chamber harshly lit by bare light-bulbs, every surface entirely covered in black and white images of Mademoiselle Chanel [Fig. 4.7]. These images, spanning her entire career (formal portraits, images of her at work and informal pictures of Chanel on holiday) repeat the same face endlessly to astonishing but suffocating effect. The soundtrack plays a strident, abrasive passage from Russian composer Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacré du Printemps* (the controversial work which Chanel helped to finance and which was greeted with outrage when premiered on the evening of the 29 May, 1913, at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Paris) which reverberates against the hard wooden walls of the chamber. Although tomb-like, this room is not as silent as the grave.

Where previous rooms invite the visitor to consider the material culture that acts as legacy and memento of a renowned designer or present meditations on the less concrete interpretations of influence and stature, La Chambre Mademoiselle, through its unrelenting visual and aural declaration constructs an unequivocal assertion that the legend of Chanel is built on foundations not only of iconic design, but of iconoclasm, image-making and self-promotion:

> I invented the sports suit for myself; not because other women played sport, but because I played sport. The reason I designed fashion was because I went out, because I was the first person to live the life of this century.
>
> (Genty 2001: 26)

Fig. 4.7 La Chambre Mademoiselle.
Fig. 4.8 La Chambre du Style.
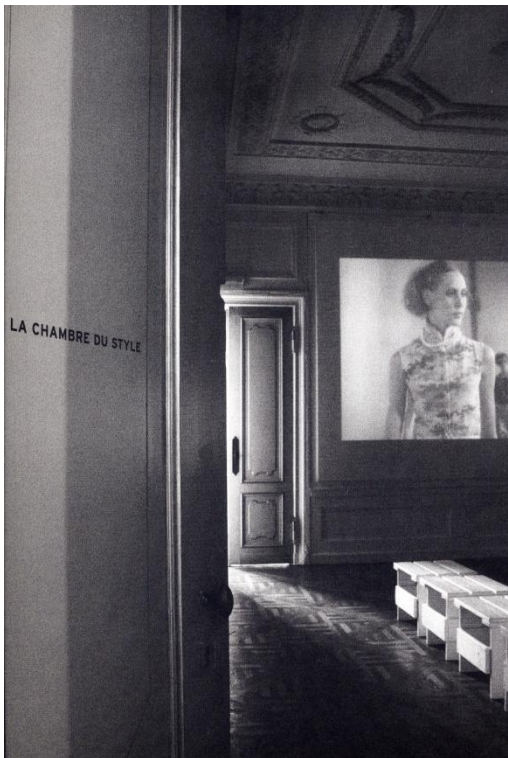
This room presents a bombastic, multi-sensory statement that illustrates how the designer repeatedly used her own image to promote her work, intentionally turning herself into one of her brands most consumed commodities. And yet, where other rooms implied an objectification of Chanel and evoked a certain pathos and respect, in this room, surrounded by her unflinching gaze, it is the visitor who feels overwhelmed and under scrutiny.

Emerging from this constructed insertion of cacophonic sound and image and back into one of the Palace's more typical rooms, the exhibition concludes with La Chambre du Style which presents the work of Karl Lagerfeld (born 1933) who has designed for the Chanel label since his debut collection in 1983 [Fig. 4.8]. Three films run concurrently, of haute couture collections by Lagerfeld for Chanel (Spring-Summer 1996, Spring-Summer 1998, Spring-Summer 2001) demonstrating how he interprets the design language of the label and re-presents the spirit of Chanel:

> These images from the fashion parades by Lagerfeld for Chanel illustrate how very much alive Chanel's designs and styles still are today. He applies them in a different way, but always with the respect for values and modernity that are so typical of Gabrielle Chanel.
>
> (Genty 2001: 27)

It is noticeable that in this room, where the focus is on the contemporary manifestation of her legacy, Chanel is not rendered present, or at least not represented; no voice, no quotations, no image. On Mr Lagerfeld's contribution to the Chanel legend…she makes no comment.

The experience of *2Women-2Vrouwen* was influential in inspiring my subsequent visits to Antwerp specifically to see MoMu exhibitions and in

shaping a potential analytical framework for the evaluation of subsequent exhibitions visited. As my evidence has accumulated, through visits to over one hundred fashion and fashion-themed exhibitions as part of this research, I have referred to my reflections on *2Women-2Wrouwen* to assist in identifying and defining a repertoire of innovative exhibition-making modes which are covered in detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis. At this point, however, it is possible to outline these modes and demonstrate that the root of their identification and definition stems from the experience of *2Women-2Vrouwen*.

Threshold, landscape, object and the body in *2Women-2Vrouwen*

The first notable feature of *2Women-2Vrouwen* was the entrance to the exhibition: there was no text panel, the conventional indicator of an exhibition entrance. Instead, there was the experience of ascending the staircase while taking in the architecture of the Palace, under the constant gaze of Mademoiselle Chanel introduced standing imperious in the large-format reproduction of Doisneau's photograph. In choosing to locate the photograph over the stairs, Van Saene constructed an exhibition entrance that was both spatial and performative; spatial in that it employed and exploited the architectural character and volume of the building to create atmosphere and meaning, performative in that the visitor was obliged to participate by ascending the staircase and engaging with the image of Chanel. Inspired by Van Saene's exhibition entrance, I define the mode 'threshold' to signify an exhibition entrance that exists as a spatial or performative construction and which, without reliance on text-based information, introduces both key narratives or subject matter and the aesthetic approach taken in the presentation of the exhibition.

Following on from threshold, I define the mode 'landscape' to describe an exhibition scenography which, as experienced in *2Women-2Vrouwen*, is

inhabited by both visitor and displayed object, and is designed to communicate or generate narrative or message. When Van Saene presents Chanel's modernist, refined suits in the crumbling opulence of the Royal Palace's Rococo stateroom, he places both visitor and object into a shared environment, but whilst the visitor might be awe-struck by the opulent surroundings, the exhibits appear to confidently command the space. He also exploits the found landscape of the imposing, ornately-decorated stateroom to suggest a particular reading, through visual juxtaposition, of the undecorated Chanel suit as a modernist icon. Van Saene employs the exhibition landscape to construct meaning around the object and generate sensory experience for the visitor.

Van Saene also employs a number of presentation strategies that redefine the notion of the displayed object. Returning to the display of iconic Chanel suits, Van Saene uses the process of object selection to construct a very particular narrative: had he instead chosen a selection of Chanel's beautifully crafted, more flamboyant sequined chiffon evening gowns the narrative would have been one of femininity, romance and privilege as opposed to masculinity, modernism and practicality. Van Saene resolutely manipulates the exhibition narrative through the selection of exhibited material. Van Saene also manipulates our view of the suits through the mechanics of display, presenting them in regimented form, revolving at a stately pace inside a monumental, minimalist vitrine. And where there is no material evidence or conventional museum object to communicate the narrative, Van Saene appropriates (the shears and ponytail), constructs (the scent of Chanel N^o5), or substitutes other media (sound, still and moving image). For these techniques of conveying narrative through the selection, manipulation, appropriation or construction of objects or the substitution of other media I identify the mode 'object'.

One of the most memorable aspects of *2Women-2Vrouwen* was the diversity of media used throughout the exhibition. Most often these were used to conjure Chanel's presence, aurally through amplified sound, visually through still and moving image, and olifactorally through the fragrance of her perfume. For a fashion exhibition, there were very few dressed mannequins yet the physical presence of Chanel was repeatedly invoked throughout the exhibition using sound, image and perfume. I identify the mode 'the body' for those techniques that, as used by Van Saene, suggest or make apparent a sense of gesture, spirit or physicality within the exhibition space.

Key exhibitions presented at MoMu

The identification, description and definition of the four presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body, first apparent in *2Women-2Vrouwen*, forms the basis of my theoretical research. Central to this investigation is a group of four key exhibitions that were presented at MoMu between 2003 and 2008; *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003), *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004), *Katharina Prospekt – The Russians* (MoMu, Antwerp 2005), and *Bernhard Willhelm - Het Totaal Rappel* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007). This core group is supplemented by reference to other fashion exhibitions, including examples from the major international fashion museums, the V&A, London, Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Most of the exhibitions referenced have been staged since 2000 and the majority I visited, and comment from first-hand experience, whilst the remainder have been reviewed through a detailed analysis of essays and images in exhibition catalogues. The following paragraphs introduce these key exhibitions.

Genovanversaeviceversa was a curatorial collaboration between MoMu and Angelo Figus, who is credited with the exhibition concept and scenography (Debo 2003: 94, Bracke 2003: 3). Figus was born in Cagliari, Sardinia, in 1975. He graduated from the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp, in 1999 with a menswear collection entitled *Quore di Cane*, inspired by his grandfather, a shepherd in rural Sardinia. With the support of fellow Belgian designer, Dries Van Noten, *Quore di Cane* was also presented in Paris during that summer's haute couture schedule (Windels 2001: 59-67). Figus went on to present several womenswear collections, his work being noted for its autobiographic references, drawing on themes from Figus' childhood and homeland, and dark, poetic feel:

> His signature approach: deeply personal, dreamlike even,
> but combined with both the romance of Sardinian
> childhood memories and the turmoil of adult emotions.
>
> (Jones and Mair 2003: 168)

Figus, who had previously studied architecture in Milan, has also designed for the theatre, contributing costume designs for productions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent and De Nederlandse Oper, Amsterdam (Jones and Mair 2003: 168).

Genovanversaeviceversa was a revision of an exhibition originally presented in Genoa in 2000 and re-staged in Antwerp as part of Belgium's 2003 Europalia festival. The original version of the exhibition, an academic examination of the design, production and use of silk textiles in Italy from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, was completely reworked by Figus into a presentation which intertwines the parallel cultural and economic growth of the ports of Antwerp and Genoa, filtered through his interpretation of 'the baroque' (Bracke 2001: 3). Figus devised not only the conceptual framework and related exhibition design, but also suggested

the selection of contemporary textiles designed by, or produced for Italian and Belgian fashion houses such as Missoni, Moschino, Gianfranco Ferré, Anne Demeulemeester, and Dries Van Noten. The addition of these contemporary fabrics adds a further layer of narrative to the original historic content of the exhibition. *Genovanversaeviceversa* differs from the other key exhibitions in that its content consisted almost exclusively of flat textiles rather than garments.

Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004), curated and designed by Judith Clark was staged first at MoMu and subsequently at the V&A, London with the title *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (V&A, London, 2005). Clark studied architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, and at the Architectural Association, London. She opened the gallery Judith Clark Costume, London, in February 1998 where she 'generated both historical and contemporary exhibitions in a distinctive manner, challenging traditional, and often conservative, museum costume displays and curatorial agendas' (Palmer 2003: 213). Clark currently continues her investigation into issues surrounding the display of fashion as an independent exhibition-maker and Professor in the Field of Fashion and Museology at London College of Fashion, London.

Malign Muses took as its starting point research by fashion historian Caroline Evans for her book *Fashion at the Edge* (Clark 2004: 12). The exhibition's central concern was an exploration of the relationship between contemporary and historical fashion and the notion of cross-reference. According to the V&A website:

> *Spectres* [*Malign Muses*] set out to reveal the shadows
> and experiences that formed a 'fashion memory' in
> contemporary dress. In showing the hidden, yet haunting,

connections between recent fashion and its past, it used pieces drawn from avant-garde designers, from the V&A fashion collection and from the archive at ModeMuseum in Antwerp.

<div align="right">("Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back, fashion installation" n.d.)</div>

For the presentation at MoMu, Clark created an exhibition space whose aesthetic referenced Russian constructivist design and was also inspired by the work of the architect Yuri Avvakumov. The installation was completed by contributions from fashion illustrator Rueben Toledo and jeweller Naomi Filmer.

Katharina Prospekt – The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005) was curated and designed by Belgian fashion designers A. F. Vandevorst (An Vandevorst, born 1968, and Filip Arickx, born 1971) who graduated from the Fashion Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp in 1991 ("A. F. Vandevorst/Curriculum Vitae" n.d.). They joined forces to establish their own label in 1997 and continue to show collections inspired by militaria, equestrian and medical accoutrements and the artist Joseph Beuys. A. F. Vandevorst are renowned for the drama and artistry of their runway presentations, often making use of specially selected, particularly atmospheric locations (a disused hospital ward, a nineteenth century swimming pool, a girls' school gymnasium) in which to present their collections (Mower 2005: 24). Alongside their own label, they have also designed clothing for Italian leather manufacturer Ruffo Research, and have contributed costume designs for productions in New York and at De Nederlandse Oper, Amsterdam ("A. F. Vandevorst/Curriculum Vitae" n.d.).

Katharina Prospekt, like Angelo Figus' *Genovanversaeviceversa*, was presented as part of the Belgium-wide Europalia festival, which in 2005 took Russia as its theme. In *Katharina Prospekt* the curators, according to exhibition publicity, 'show us their vision of Russia based on the universe of A. F. Vandevorst' (anon. 2005). The exhibition mixed items from A. F. Vandevorsts' womenswear collections with studio material they habitually use for reference and inspiration, alongside objects from The Russian State Historical Museum, Moscow and the MoMu collection. The exhibition also included work by contemporary designers and artists selected by the designers, including Olga Chernysheva, Alexander Kosolapov and Nathan Farb.

Bernhard Willhelm and his business partner, Jutta Kraus, curated *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007) to celebrate the donation to MoMu in 2006 of the designer's complete archive of over one thousand objects. Born in Ulm, Germany in 1972, Willhelm graduated from the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp in 1998 and set up his label a year later with business partner, Jutta Kraus. Willhelm's anarchic aesthetic mixes references from his childhood years growing up in the Black Forest region of southern Germany with contemporary pop and street culture, combining the hand-made and folkloric with the mass-produced and grotesquely cartoonish (Jones and Mair 2003: 520). Willhelm's collection presentations and related publications echo this aesthetic, with the presentations often staged as elaborate performances. Wilhelm has also designed for film and stage productions, including costumes for the musician Bjork's *Volta* tour in 2007 and for the Deutches Theater, Berlin ("Bernhard Willhelm/bio" n.d.).

For *Bernhard Willhelm*, Willhelm and Kraus commissioned Swiss-based design duo TONK (Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs) as art directors for the exhibition and catalogue. Onorato and Krebs took inspiration for the

design of the exhibition from work previously done with Willhelm on look-books and fashion shows for his label, transposing their work from printed page and run-way to the museum gallery.

From over one hundred exhibitions visited through the period of my research, these four exhibitions have been selected for closer scrutiny because, I would assert, they all show evidence of an outstanding level of experimentation and innovation in the practice of presenting fashion and textiles in the context of the museum. They have also been selected because they exemplify the innovative modes, first observed in *2Women-2Vrouwen*, central to my investigation; threshold, landscape, object and the body. Whilst each of these modes will be explored further in individual chapters of this thesis, the next chapter will first examine the exhibition formats and structures that are deployed by curators in order to identify those formats and structures which enable and support the deployment of innovative presentation techniques in the key exhibitions from MoMu.

Chapter 5: Investigating the Format and Structure of Fashion Exhibitions

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of the presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and body introduced in the previous chapter, it is relevant to examine the conceptual structures and subsequent spatial structures that form the foundation of the exhibitions reviewed. The purpose of this analysis is not only to gain greater insight into the construction of the key exhibitions from MoMu that are the focus of my research, but also to examine how the exhibition concept might influence the narrative structure and physical manifestation of the exhibition.

The chapter will commence with investigation of the various conceptual structures, or 'formats', that are employed as curatorial and narrative strategies throughout the exhibitions referenced, with the idea of format as a description of distinctive types prevalent within the medium of exhibitions. A comparison from another medium would be those formats used to describe television programmes, such as documentary, soap opera or drama. My analysis will first define potential fashion exhibition format types, detail their occurrence across my exhibition review, examine the link between format and narrative structure, and then apply this typology to the key exhibitions from MoMu. Informed by this analysis of exhibition formats, I will analyse the impact that particular formats have on the exhibition scenography, particularly on the spatial layout of the exhibition, again with reference to the key exhibitions from MoMu.

Format

Although several of the publications on exhibition design previously referenced categorise exhibition types as a way of organising content, the

categories have little application to my analysis. Generally, these publications survey such a broad field of exhibition work that the categories they define tend not to be based on presentation techniques and to be too general to apply to my research. Jan Lorenc and Bridget Vranckx both employ 'institutional' categories such as 'Science Museum', 'Corporate Museum', 'Showroom' (Lorenc *et al* 2007) or 'Business', 'Culture', 'Leisure' (Vranckx 2006). David Dernie and Robert Klanten define through experiential categories such as 'Narrative Space', 'Performative Space', 'Simulated Experience' (Dernie 2006) or 'Scenic Interior', 'Brand Experience', Spatial Exploration' (Klanten and Feireiss 2010). Herman Kossman and Mark de Jong, whose book *Engaging Spaces* documents the work of their design practice, kossman.dejong, focus on an abstraction of practice-based activities, 'Questions', 'Language', 'Practice', and examples referenced in all publications are presented as isolated case-studies without any comparative analysis.

To find a typology useful for this research, which is specific both to the museum as a venue and fashion-themed exhibitions, it is necessary to look to the first issue of *Fashion Theory*,[10] the journal conceived and edited by Valerie Steele (Director and Chief Curator of The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York) and first published in 1997. In this article, Steele reviewed the exhibition *Two by Two*, curated by Richard Martin and Harold Koda (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1996) and outlines a typology which, she suggests, describes the categories then prevalent in the curation of fashion exhibitions in major museums:

> Fashion exhibitions tend to fall into one of several
> categories: 1) The "period" exhibition, which focuses on an
> historical era, such as "the belle époque" or the 1960s; 2)
> the "decorative arts" exhibition, which investigates stylistic

variation and historical developments within a particular category of clothing, such as shoes; and 3) the "great designer" exhibition, which presents an individual fashion designer as an "artist" whose *oeuvre* is displayed and analyzed in terms of themes, techniques, and expressive elements, such as line, color, mass and texture.

(Steele 1997: 108-109)

Fourteen years later, Steele's typology is still relevant. Of the fashion and fashion-related exhibitions referenced for this research most could be accurately classified by Steele's categories. Although the period category would be scarcely represented in my exhibition assessment, due to the tendency for exhibitions in this category to take in the wider spectrum of art and design rather than focus purely on dress, many exhibitions would fall into the remaining definitions. If the boundaries of the decorative arts type were to include design or production techniques and garment styles, 16% of the exhibitions sampled would fall into this category, including *Les Marins Font la Mode* (Musée National de la Marine, Paris, 2009), *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (Somerset House, London, 2008) and *Wild: Fashion Untamed* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004). An overwhelming majority (approximately 40%) however, would come under the great designer group, amongst them exhibitions such as *Ossie Clark: A Retrospective* (Warrington Museum, Warrington, 1999), *Yohji Yamamoto* (V&A, London, 2011), *Balenciaga Paris* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007), *The House of Viktor & Rolf* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2008), *Hussein Chalayan: From Fashion and Back* (Design Museum, London, 2009) and *Madeleine Vionnet: Puriste de la Mode* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2009). These statistics indicate that amongst contemporary curators of dress and fashion in museums, the designer monograph is the most frequently adopted exhibition format. The popularity of this format might derive from a number

of reasons: from an institutional perspective it presents a category in accordance with accepted cannons of art and design history and represents an easily marketable product, and from a visitors' perspective the designer monograph reflects the cult of personality and celebrity associated with 'big name' fashion designers.

As these first categories leave a significant number of my sampled exhibitions unclassified it is necessary to look further into Steele's review to complete the typology. Steele's article continues with a possible suggestion for an additional category. Reflecting on Martin and Kodas' annual exhibition programme for The Costume Institute, she describes the areas of interest into which their exhibitions fall. The exhibition programmed during the winter slot she defines as the '"glamour show"', timed specifically to coincide with the celebrity-studded red carpet hype that accompanies The Costume Institute's annual fund-raising ball, giving examples such as *Orientalism* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994) and *Dior* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1996). The spring slot, Steele suggests, is regularly taken by an exhibition where 'the focus is on the body' (Steele 1997: 109) and she illustrates this using the example of Martin and Kodas' *Infra-Apparel* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1983), an exhibition that hypothesised on the influence of underwear, both aesthetically and conceptually, on garments intended as outerwear. For her third category, defining those exhibitions presented during the autumn period, Steele reports that:

> …Martin and Koda have one of their "thought shows"
> (such as *Swords Into Plowshares*, which dealt with the
> influence of military uniforms, and, of course, *Two by Two*,
> which is about gender). These at least make a stab at

addressing some of the cultural and social issues evoked by fashion…

(Steele 1997: 109)

Whilst Steele's comment may be read as implicitly critical of Martin and Koda's work, her label '"thought show"', interpreted as a more conceptual approach that places fashion into a broader social, cultural or historic context, recognises the particular value of this type of exhibition. The thought show definition could easily be adopted as an additional category in Steele's typology of fashion exhibition formats. Into this category would fall a remaining 40% of the exhibitions I have visited, including presentations such as *Beyond Desire* (ModeMuseum, Antwerp, 2005), *Fashination* (National Museum of Film and Photography, Bradford, 2005) and *Men in Skirts* (V&A, London, 2002). The label of thought show would be particularly appropriate to the increasingly common type of exhibition that takes fashion itself as its central focus. These reflexive presentations include subjects ranging from fashion and image making as in *Showstudio: Fashion Revolution* (Somerset House, London, 2009), and *Imperfect Beauty: The Making of Contemporary Fashion Photographs* (V&A, London, 2000), the presentation of fashion as in *Showtime* (Musée Galliera, Paris, 2006), to the relationship between fashion and other disciplines such as architecture or contemporary art as in *Rapture: Art's Seduction by Fashion* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2002). These exhibitions, all staged in the 15 years since Steele published her review, would certainly reinforce her comment that the thought show format positively contradicts the fact that:

…costume curators almost never engage viewers in socio-political questions. Indeed intellectuals often complain about the theoretical vacuum behind most fashion shows.

(Steele 1997: 109)

Although it is arguable that recent exhibitions of fashion maintain a 'theoretical vacuum', applying Steele's definitions to the key exhibitions from MoMu, we find that three of the four reflect the conceptual and contextual concerns of the thought show category; *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003), a fantasy meditation on the correspondence between Antwerp and Genoa filtered through curator/designer Angelo Figus' interpretation of the baroque, *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005), a presentation based on A. F. Vandevorsts' impressions of Russia, and *Malign Muses*: *When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004), Judith Clark's exploration of fashion's inclination to self-reference. *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rapell* (MoMu, Antwerp 2007), meanwhile, ostensibly appears to conform to the great designer type yet, as visual and spatial experience, it had little in common with other exhibitions referenced that could be assigned to this format, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In conclusion, it is possible through application of Steele's definitions to describe categories or formats for fashion presentations in a museum context. It is also evident that the thought show format most explicitly applies to the key presentations from MoMu, defining the term to include those exhibitions that do not follow canonical dress histories, present a personal argument, thesis or fiction as their central narrative whilst placing these narratives within a broader socio-cultural context. Having examined and defined the exhibition format in relation to the key exhibitions from MoMu, we can continue this analysis by looking at how the curator's chosen format influences the exhibition's physical structure.

Structure

As previously discussed, it is possible to describe a typology of exhibitions, as demonstrated by Valerie Steele's description of exhibition categories such as '"period"', '"decorative arts"' and '"great designer"' (Steele 1997: 108-109). Taking Steele's analysis further, it is also possible to identify alongside her typology organisational principles, or structures that give intellectual and physical shape to an exhibition. My research indicates that two structural types are most commonly used in fashion exhibitions; the chronology and the thematic structure. The chronological structure is most commonly apparent in what Steele defines as the great designer format such as *Viktor & Rolf par Viktor & Rolf: Première Dècennie* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2000), *Elsa Schiaparelli* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2004), and *Balenciaga Paris* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007), where it supports a linear reading of a designer's work and development. Implicit in the chronological structure is the idea of a sequential route through the exhibition which is necessary for its story to be understood by the visitor: intellectually and physically, the chronology is best suited to a singular, pre-determined path through the exhibition space.

An alternative to the chronological principle is the thematic approach, where selections of garments are grouped under headings which are generally derived from an aesthetic-led reading informed by design processes, production techniques and, on occasion, issues relating to the garment's intended use. Examples include *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective* (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2003) where the exhibition was divided into themes such as Minimalism, Ethnic, and Daywear, *Christian Lacroix: Histoires de la Mode* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007), where themes included Check, Stripes, Polka Dot, Tweed, and *Valentino: Themes and Variations* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2008)

where themes included Volume, Line, and Surface. A thematic approach does not necessarily rely on a linear physical path to communicate its narrative, but often on groups of similar garments that are placed in spatial juxtaposition or opposition so that a narrative is built through comparison or contrast.

As both the chronological and the thematic organisational principles may be employed across Steele's period, decorative arts and great designer formats so, occasionally, an exhibition will utilise both the chronological and thematic principles to determine its layout. *Vivienne Westwood* (V&A, London, 2004) employed a chronological reading for the first room of the exhibition (based on Westwood's early work Let It Rock, Sex, Seditionaries, Pirate, Witches, Hypnos) and a thematic reading for the second room (based on recurrent themes in Westwood's work, Tailoring, Tartan, Evening Wear, Country Wear). Whilst the first room told a sequential, chronological story of design development the second thematic room was, according to Ferhan Azman, the exhibition designer, intended to intensify 'the distinct visual experiences' relating to the thematic groups (Brown 2004: 122). Azman's comment confirms my previous statement that thematic structures are generally defined by visually determined, design-led criteria.

The additional format that I have previously suggested can be added to Steele's typology, the thought show, tends to utilise neither a chronological nor design-led thematic structure. From evidence gathered through my exhibition visits, I can determine that thought show types, such as *Black British Style* (V&A, London, 2004), *Fashion v Sport* (V&A, London, 2008) and *Black: Masters of Black in Fashion and Costume* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2010) generally employ thematic structures that are not determined by design-led criteria. Exhibitions in the thought show category are commonly structured in sections that deal with an idea or concept. *Black British Style*,

for instance, had sections such as Respect Yourself (the influence of the Civil Rights movement on black style), Win the Lost at Any Cost (clothing and the Black church) and Fix Up, Look Sharp (the interconnected histories of black fashion and music). *Black*, as well as having sections devoted to single contemporary designers, such as Ann Demeulemeester and Gareth Pugh, also contained concept-based sections such as Noble Black and Film Noir as well as material-led sections examining Embroidery, Lace, Feathers and Plumes.

In terms of defining the exhibition structure, rather than relying on juxtaposition or opposition as is the tendency with the design-led thematic structures, the self-contained sections of concept-based thought show structures work in combination, to gradually build a complete articulation of the exhibition's central narrative or concept. Concept-based structures are rarely reliant on any defined path through the exhibition and, informed by my exhibition research, I would propose that they construct narrative through cumulative episodes that can be read in any order. In this respect it is possible to differentiate the concept-based structures that are invariably linked to the thought show type from the design-led thematic structure by applying the term 'episodic' structure. The significance of consolidating this definition, particularly in relation to the application of the repertoire of innovative presentation modes to my practice-based research project, is the conclusion that the episodic structure which regularly forms the basis for the thought show format, does not rely on chronology or thematic juxtaposition, and thus does not necessitate a specific layout on which to construct the exhibition scenography.

It is apparent, however, from analysis of exhibitions such as *Vivienne Westwood,* a great designer type exhibition which employed both chronological and design-led thematic structures, that between various exhibition types and structures there can exist a degree of fluidity. In

2Women-2Vrouwen, although ostensibly conforming to Steele's great designer category, curator Dirk Van Saene adopted an atypical structure for this exhibition type. Rather than opting for chronology or the design-led thematic structure, he constructed a concept-based episodic structure so that, instead of a history of Chanel or a technical exploration of her work he authored, according to exhibition publicity, a loosely ordered thesis that presented Chanel through a series of ideas:

> This is not simply a chronological survey of her life and work: it highlights her most important achievements and her innovative view of the contemporary fashion world. The visitor walks through several thematic rooms, each of which presents a separate aspect of a lively career and life.
>
> (anon. 2001)

Even though the physical map - or layout - of the exhibition was entirely dictated by the enfilade structure of the rooms of the former Royal Palace [Fig. 5.1], rather than employing this pre-determined linear structure to default to a conventional chronological narrative, Van Saene installed a series of conceptual spaces which presented to the visitor his interpretation of Chanel, her character and work, and her legacy:

> Eight different rooms provide insight into Chanel, her creations, her vision and her acute observation, her drive and the importance she attached to non-conformism. They paint a picture of this designer, of her great achievements in life and her passion for everything that was new and modern.
>
> (Verbergt 2001: 7)

Unlike the majority of great designer exhibitions Van Saene used Chanel's work to construct a non-linear biographic study. By side-stepping the conventional exhibition structures for this exhibition type, the chronology or thematic structure, Van Saene asserted that he was inviting the visitor to examine the narrative of Chanel, the great designer from a new perspective.

Working in tandem with the concept-based thought show format and episodic structure Van Saene also instigated a phenomenological structure engineered through calculated variation in the physical attributes of the spaces through which the visitor moved. Controlled phenomena, such as marked differences in sound and light levels, corresponded with site-specific variations such as differences in the scale and the architectural features and qualities of adjoining rooms, to create a rhythm of sensation and experience. The effect of this structure, created through variations of sensory elements – light, sound, scent - was expressly evident in the location and construction of Rei Kawakubo's intervention. Sited at the very heart of *2Women-2Vrouwen*, within a landscape that was predominantly monochrome, Kawakubo's claustrophobic red-lit corridor contrived an extraordinarily dramatic and powerful shift in mood.

From the key exhibitions selected for scrutiny from MoMu, *Bernhard Willhelm* is the only great designer type exhibition that employed neither the thematic nor the chronological structure typical of this format. In this exhibition garments were grouped by collection, rather than technique or function but the groups were not arranged in chronological order. The visitor's path through the exhibition is in some instances determined by physical structures, so that moving only forward or backward was possible, synchronous with the numbers applied to the gallery floor denoting the sections as described in the exhibition guide [Fig. 5.2]. In other areas, however, there was no physical division between sections so that, visually
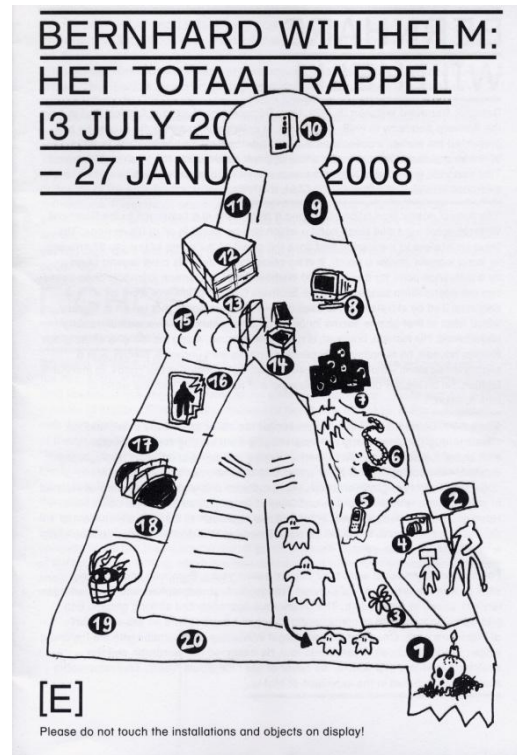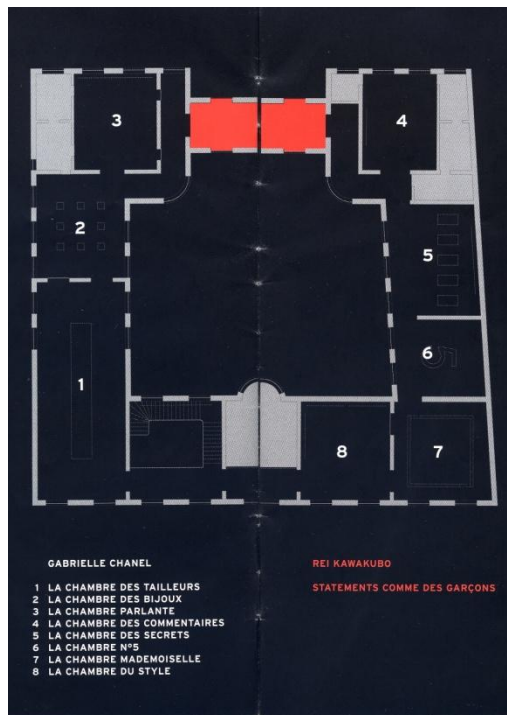
From top left clockwise: **Fig. 5.1** Plan of *2Women-2Wrouwen*, **Fig. 5.2** Plan of *Bernhard Willhelm*, **Fig. 5.3** Plan of *Genovanversaeviceversa*, **Fig. 5.4** Plan of *Malign Muses*.
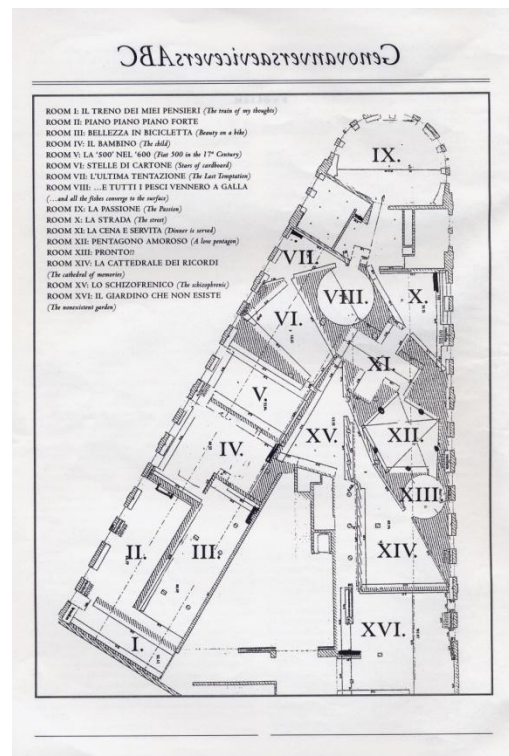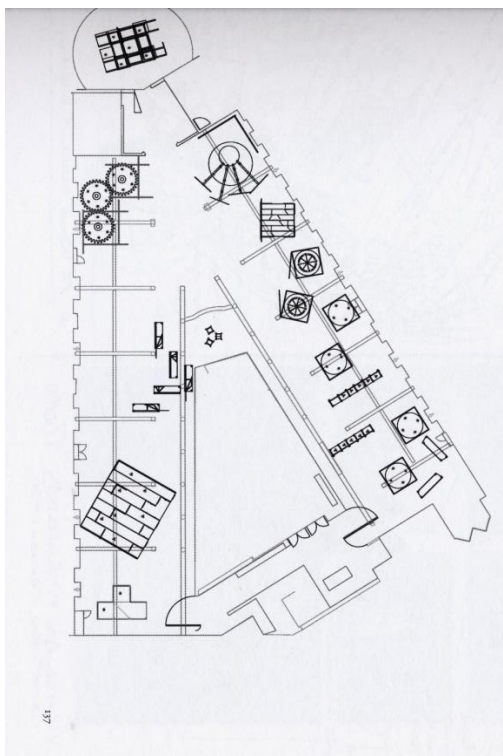
and spatially, they ran one into the next and the visitor had free choice of the order of viewing. The physical layout of *Bernhard Willhelm* appeared to be dependent only on the spatial enclosures necessary to realise the scenography for each section rather than the need to guide visitors through any particular route. From the perspective of the visitor, the lack of obvious logic to the exhibition layout reflected that chaotic world that the designer presented, and rather than any formal structure, the effect is that of being taken on a journey through an *ad hoc* series of referential landscapes and set-pieces; through ghost-trains and tunnels, over mountains and Alpine villages, across bridges, over lakes and through scenes of urban disintegration.

In contrast, *Genovanversaeviceversa* was laid out so that the visitor had only one route through the sixteen chambers that comprised the exhibition. The spatially complex exhibition ground-plan was determined by neither a chronological nor thematic structure, but instead sections and corresponding content were arranged to construct curator Angelo Figus' fictional narrative [Fig. 5.3]. Rather than a time-based or design-led structure informed by the objects on display, the visitor experienced a spatial flow where each room presented an incident in Figus' non-sequential labyrinthine narrative, and the dynamic rhythm of the exhibition was created through phenomenological variation of light, colour and texture to create encounters with a series of scenes, or episodes that composed a fictional 'journey' narrative.

Both *Malign Muse* and *Katharina Prospekt* were laid out so that the visitor was able to move freely from one section to the next and, apart from the integral architectural components of the exhibition space, there was no pre-determined route through the gallery. *Malign Muses* and *Katharina Prospekt* could accurately be described by Steele's thought show format as both proposed a concept or hypothesis as the basis for the exhibition

narrative; *Malign Muses* related curator Judith Clark's thesis on fashion and its dynamic of historic reference and *Katharina Prospekt* relayed definitions of 'Russianness' as perceived by its curators, the fashion designers A. F. Vandevorst. Like *Bernhard Willhelm* and *Genovanversaeviceversa* neither of these exhibitions had a chronological structure [Figs. 5.4, 5.5]. It was also apparent that the differentiation between sections in each exhibition was not decided using the aesthetic-led criteria generally applied to thematically organised presentations. In both of these exhibitions each section offered the visitor the opportunity to consider a particular aspect of the central concept of the exhibition.

My research indicates that the chronological structure and the design-led thematic structures prevalent in monographic and thematic fashion exhibitions rarely apply to those presentations defined by Steele's thought show format. Instead, they tend towards a structure where sections of the exhibition focus on a particular aspect of the central thesis, or a specific incident in the exhibition narrative. These episodic structures differ spatially from a chronological structure in that there is no need for an inherent linear path and they differ from the thematic structure in that they are not necessarily defined by the design or material qualities of the objects on display (and comparison or juxtaposition of these qualities) but on the reading of the objects on display in relation to the exhibition theme: the sections of the exhibition are defined conceptually rather than aesthetically. Although the format and content of the key exhibitions from MoMu differ, they all make use of an episodic structure as the organising principle for the conceptual development of the exhibition and it is this structure that underpins the physical layout of each exhibition, which in turn influences the scenography, or landscape of each presentation. I will return to this analysis of exhibition format and structure in Chapter 11, which details the application of a repertoire of presentation modes evident in the four key exhibitions presented at MoMu, and where I will describe

how this investigation into the format and structure of an exhibition has been applied to my practice-based research – the realisation of a fashion autobiography as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition.

Chapter 6: Identification, Description and Definition of the Presentation Mode 'Threshold'

In this chapter, in response to the introductory installation experienced in *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) detailed in Chapter 4, I intend to elaborate on the presentation mode defined as threshold. Having consolidated a definition of the notion of the threshold, I will continue with accounts of conventional exhibition entrance constructions (demarcated by text, iconic object, light levels and colour), followed by description and examination of more elaborate solutions (using figures and mannequins), and then with analysis of the complex threshold structures found in the key exhibitions at MoMu, which entail complex spatial constructions. I will also discuss the consequences that these constructions have as transformative and performative phenomena that effect a degree of role-play on the museum visitor. I will conclude the chapter by reflecting on the implications of a threshold construction in relation to my practice-based research.

My investigation of threshold concerns the built structures and curatorial strategies employed at the entrance to an exhibition space that orchestrate the visitor's shift from the outside world into that of the exhibition, and which introduce the exhibition's conceptual framework, narrative and aesthetic approach.[11] As observed in the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen*, curator Dirk Van Saene employed a combination of elements to construct a threshold experience that acted as a bridge between the world outside the exhibition walls and its interior landscape using the architectural character and configuration of the host venue (entrance hall and Rococo staircase), iconic image (the Doisneau portrait of Chanel), and a performative action (requiring the visitor to ascend the staircase and open a door to the exhibition space).

Whilst it is obvious that an exhibition presented within an interior space is likely to have an architectural feature that acts as a doorway, an entrance set into the walls that demarcate the exhibition space from surrounding spaces or rooms, I use the term threshold to describe a more complex construction. I would differentiate my concept of threshold as used in this research from these architectural necessities using the following definition: a threshold is a tangible, spatial phenomenon that bridges the exterior and the interior of the exhibition space, specifically devised to introduce the narrative or conceptual ideas and the aesthetic strategies to be encountered in the exhibition which, physically inhabited or performatively experienced by the visitor, is likely to effect a transformative experience on both visitor and gallery.

From evidence gathered through my exhibition visits, it is possible to state that there are numerous factors that might affect the visitor's ingress to an exhibition. Observing those variables that are within the control of the museum, gallery or host location, the visitor's experience of entering an exhibition space is most often influenced by a combination of the architectural configuration of the entrance to the space and the curatorial interventions and design schemes applied to that space. The organisation of these collective factors is critical in the process of transitioning the visitor from the outside world to the exhibition environment and subsequently determining the visitor's ability and desire to experience, understand and appreciate the presentation.

Throughout the exhibitions referenced, the most commonly observed curatorial tactic employed to determine the exhibition threshold is the provision of a text panel, generally wall-mounted just inside the entrance to an exhibition, which gives contextual information on the exhibition subject or theme. These text panels are usually authored anonymously, written in an objective voice, and propagate successive text panels

dispersed through the exhibition which elaborate on specific themes or incidents. Occasionally the text is supplemented by illustrative material.

In spaces that are regularly used for temporary exhibitions, or specifically constructed for that purpose, the architectural configuration of the entrance is often employed to support this text panel strategy. The main temporary exhibition space at the Barbican Centre, London – the Barbican Art Gallery - is arranged so that visitors enter a foyer space that houses, to the immediate left, a reception desk and beyond that, the gallery shop. Directly facing and to the right of the entrance are structural walls that demarcate a doorway to the exhibition space [Fig. 6.1]. These walls are regularly used as the location for introductory texts as evidenced in the exhibitions *Rapture: Art's Seduction by Fashion* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2002), *The House of Viktor & Rolf* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2008) and *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion* (Barbican Art Gallery, London 2010). A similar situation occurs in the fashion galleries of Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, where the visitor enters through double doors into a rectangular room constructed so that an opening in the wall opposite the entrance offers a view through into the galleries. This entrance space differs from the galleries themselves, in that it does not house any built-in display cases. An introductory text is invariably applied to either the wall to the left of the entrance, or to the wall directly facing the door, as in *Elsa Schiaparelli* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2004), *Christian Lacroix: Histories de la Mode* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007), *Histoire Idéale de la Mode Contemporaine, Parts 1-2* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2010 and 2011). In these examples, the architectural configuration of the exhibition space and the curatorial strategy of presenting an introductory panel are combined to create the exhibition entrance.

The convention of architecturally defined entrance and text panel is so established that venues without a suitably positioned wall often construct a

Fig. 6.1 Installation view of the exhibition *The House of Viktor & Rolf*, showing the convention of introductory text panel to demarcate the exhibition entrance.
Fig 6.2 Installation view of the exhibition *Hussein Chalayan: Fashion Narratives* showing the convention of introductory text panel and iconic object – one of Chalayan's 'buried' dresses - to demarcate the exhibition entrance.

temporary one specifically to bear the introductory text. This is regularly the occasion at the V&A, London, where the doors to the main temporary exhibition space are in the centre of the wall as the visitor enters the space. Temporary walls bearing introductory text are often constructed to the left of the entrance doors, as for *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957* (V&A, London, 2007) or directly facing the doors as for *Vivienne Westwood* (V&A, London, 2004). Either option regularly proves detrimental to visitor circulation, as visitors pausing to read the text impede the passage of other visitors into the space.

Occasionally the introductory text is accompanied by an iconic garment or object. In the case of *Hussein Chalayan: Fashion Narratives* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2011) one of Chalayan's renowned 'buried dresses' was positioned alongside the introductory text [Fig. 6.2]. These garments were first presented for his graduate collection in 1993 at Central St Martin's College of Art, London. Covered in iron filings which oxidise through a process of burial, they brought Chalayan international press attention and asserted his reputation as a designer with an autobiographic and conceptual approach to fashion. In the case of designer monographs, an image, symbol or logo equated with the designer is often deployed as an introductory device. At the entrance to *Madeleine Vionnet: Purist de la Mode* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2010) the introductory text was set next to a 1.5 metre version of the designer's logo fashioned from pink neon. Similarly, at the entrance to *Vivienne Westwood* the introductory text was set on a screen positioned opposite the gallery doors, with a projected moving image of the famous 'backwards' clock from the designer's World's End shop. Originally installed on the façade of the shop at 430, King's Road, London in 1979, the clock features a thirteen-numbered face and hands that run counter-clockwise and is an image synonymous with Westwood and her work. For *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp 2004-2005), curator Judith Clark installed a large

sculpture by collaborating architect Yuri Avvakumov in MoMu's ground floor hall. In *Yohji Yamamoto: Dreamshop* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2006) an expansive, iconic white wedding dress was installed on the main staircase [Fig. 6.3]. Whilst I would not categorise either of these installations as complex threshold constructions, they serve to illustrate how the deliberate location of a symbolic object can introduce the transition between the street and the gallery. For visitors with knowledge of the designer, these iconic objects or symbols act as an instantaneous visual cue that triggers recollection of their understanding of the designer's image and work.

Amongst the visual effects commonly encountered at the entrance to an exhibition, two appear most regularly and generally in collusion with the text panel and symbol/object strategy; a marked reduction in light levels and change of wall colour. Exhibitions of fashion or textiles, especially when the material comes from institutional collections, are advised by internationally recognised professional guidelines to require display light levels of no more than 50 lux. These guidelines, regarded in the museum profession as determinants of good practice, are prescribed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and published on their website (Swann n.d.). This results in a habitual reduction in light level in the exhibition space housing the material. This reduction is most perceptible in museums or galleries where the visitor enters from a bright, day lit reception space, such as Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, Museé Galliera, Paris, and the Design Museum, London. An abrupt change in light levels is often one of the most noticeable demarcators between the street and the exhibition space but the effect, though marked, is often disorientating and employed unintentionally and without specific meaning.

A change in wall colour is an effective and cost-efficient strategy in differentiating between the exhibition space and surrounding rooms and a distinguishing wall colour can act not only as a boundary, but also

Fig. 6.3 Wedding dress by Yohji Yamamoto announces the designer's exhibition in the MoMu atrium.

Fig. 6.4 Large-scale photographic image and change of wall colour denote the entrance to *Land Girls: Cinderellas of the Soil*.

establish a particular mood for the exhibition, even subliminally conveying meaning. The first room of the exhibition space for *Land Girls: Cinderellas of the Soil* (Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Brighton, 2009), was painted a distinctive lilac, which as well as evoking the period with which the exhibition was concerned, reflected a certain sense of femininity which was then contrasted with utilitarian green as the exhibition moved into telling the story of the land-girl work [Fig. 6.4]. A very different colour scheme was evident in *Mario Testino: Portraits* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 2002), where a particularly intense green and blue were amongst the colours used as a backdrop for Testino's glossy fashion images and celebrity portraits. These very contemporary colours asserted a visual separation between the exhibition space and the surrounding galleries of the National Portrait Gallery (which are generally decorated in pale, neutral tones for twentieth century work, and dark period colours in the historic galleries) and invoked a sensation of vibrancy and excitement that effectively conveyed the energy and glamour associated with Testino's work. For *Flowers in the Dustbin; Society and Fashion in Czechoslovakia in the Seventies* (Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague, 2007), a monochromatic colour scheme distinguished the exhibition space from the rest of the Museum's ornate period galleries. The monochromatic colour scheme was extended through the entire exhibition, even applied to furnished room settings (where furnishings were painted tones of grey) to symbolise the austere period of communist rule in Czechoslovakia in the twentieth century.

As witnessed throughout my exhibition sample, used in various combinations the elements of architectural configuration, introductory text, iconic object, image or symbol, manipulation of light levels and distinctive decorative scheme appear to comprise the default solution, or convention, to the construction of an exhibition entrance. And whilst texts can be informative and the accompanying visual elements helpful in

communicating information and setting a particular tone for a presentation, they occur so frequently it could be assumed that, as a convention, they are often initiated without due reflection, critique or consideration of potential alternative methods. Indeed, none of the texts on exhibition design consulted for this research demonstrate particular attention to the analysis of the phenomenon of the exhibition entrance. When they are used consciously and artfully, however, these common elements can be combined to dramatic and illuminating effect.

The entrance constructed for *Viktor & Rolf par Viktor & Rolf: Première Décennie* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2003), a review of the first ten years work from the Dutch design duo, employed the conventional entrance elements previously identified in an unusually unsettling installation which was, in my experience, unprecedented at this venue. Visitors moved directly from the day lit entrance hall of the museum into an exhibition space where the light levels were reduced to black-out - considerably darker than the conservation requirement of 50 lux. The deliberately extreme change in light levels exacerbated the process of the visual adjustment from light to darkness, and during this period of disorientation it appeared as if the designers stood side-by-side in the space greeting guests. In reality, two life-size, life-like wax figures of the designers had been placed in the first gallery, standing in front of an over-scaled replica of their label's sealing wax logo. This humorous installation belied a serious message, placing the logo and brand firmly in the visitor's consciousness at the very start of the show, and emphasising the role of the designers' own image in their work. Occasionally seen on the runway during both their menswear and womenswear shows, Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren have invented a personal image (like a fashion version of the British artist duo Gilbert & George) that is intrinsic to their brand and label, and so it should not be a surprise that the designers themselves, in the

form of wax likenesses, should exert their presence as hosts to their exhibition.

The representation of the human figure was used again at the entrance of two exhibitions curated by Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton and designed by Patrick Kinmonth for The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004) was staged in reconstructed period rooms, and examined the interplay between costume, furniture and etiquette in eighteenth century France. *AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006), explored the notion of 'Englishness [as] a romantic construct, formed by feelings attitudes and perceptions as opposed to Britishness, which is a political construct, based on shared practices and institutions' (Bolton 2006: 13) and juxtaposed garments of British design or manufacture from the eighteenth to the twentieth century mounted on mannequins in elaborate tableaux, again in reconstructed original period rooms.

At the entrance to *Dangerous Liaisons* a mannequin was positioned holding back drapes to reveal the exhibition entrance. Suitably attired in clothes from the period concerning the exhibition, the mannequin wore an elaborately embroidered eighteenth century velvet tail-coat suit, satin waistcoat and realistically modelled wig [Fig. 6.5]. 'He' stood on a wooden packing crate to hold back a heavy swag of ivory silk revealing the doorway to the galleries where the exhibition was installed, giving visitors a foretaste of the sumptuous garments, establishing the performative attitudes affected by the mannequins in the exhibition and literally beckoning the visitor to enter the galleries.

Fig. 6.5 Entrance to *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century*
Fig. 6.6 Entrance to *Anglomania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion.*

The entrance scene for *AngloMania*, entitled John Bull, presented mannequins standing to either side of the doorway on head-height scaffold. To one side a figure in eighteenth century red wool suit with powdered wig on a rough-hewn wooden platform, to the other side a figure dressed in Vivienne Westwood blue tartan bondage suit with white punk 'Mohican' hairstyle on a contemporary steel scaffold [Fig. 6.6]. Both figures held back the folds of a tattered Union flag to reveal a panel bearing the exhibition title and to enable the visitor to pass unimpeded into the exhibition. As a visual statement John Bull introduced two stereotypes that reflected the exhibition's themes – the tension between tradition and modernity in British fashion, and notions of class and patriotism. And again, as in the opening installation for *Dangerous Liaisons*, it established the performative role that the mannequins were to play in the ensuing tableaux.

Both installations might appear at first glance little more than decorative devices, and yet they function not only as visual introductions to the subject, spirit and aesthetic of the exhibition but also to prepare visitors for the uncommonly dramatic role that mannequins would perform in the exhibition staging. In practical terms, the gesture of the figures holding back the drapes, attracts attention to the exhibition entrance and, subsequently, encourages and aids the movement of the visitor into the actual exhibition space. In their deliberate and conscious augmentation of the conventional entrance elements (embodying the spirit and themes of the exhibition, presenting its aesthetic style and establishing the performative role of the mannequins), these constructions intimate the intellectual and emotional impact that the complex threshold constructions devised for the key exhibitions at MoMu produce.

It could be argued that the architectural configuration of ModeNatie and the circuitous ingress to the MoMu exhibition space encourage the

consideration of a more deliberate threshold solution. The location of the exhibition space on the first floor of the building necessitates the navigation of a number of architectural elements and considerable circulation space before the exhibition gallery itself can be entered; the door from the street and the ticket desk at ground level, the imposing staircase to first floor level, the MoMu gallery reception and a long corridor to the gallery space. Before reaching the exhibition space, the visitor has to traverse a considerable architectural threshold. It is possibly this no-man's-land between the entrance to the building and the entrance to the exhibition space that encourages curators at MoMu to place key objects outside of the exhibition space, or to construct a threshold that spills from the gallery into the building's circulation areas.

For *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2008) a small touring caravan was installed in the ModeNatie atrium, replicating a similar installation in the Maison's Paris headquarters, which functioned as the ticket desk for the duration of the exhibition. Spanning the main staircase of ModeNatie, like a triumphal arch, a chain-link fence with 'Maison Martin Margiela' spelt out by white plastic shopping bags threaded through the links, announced the presence of the exhibition and branded the space with the Maison's signature colour, white, and in its distinctive *ad hoc* style [Fig. 6.7]. Visitors ascended the stairs and passed through a hole cut in the fencing. The arch established a far more auspicious entrance to the show than the actual gallery entrance which, at the end of a narrow corridor and determined by the architecture of the building is on a far more modest scale.

It can also be seen from the illustration from *Maison Martin Margiela* that the doorway to the MoMu gallery is not configured to provide an obvious or commanding location for an introductory text panel [Fig 6.8]. Introductory texts are generally placed, as illustrated, on the door to the
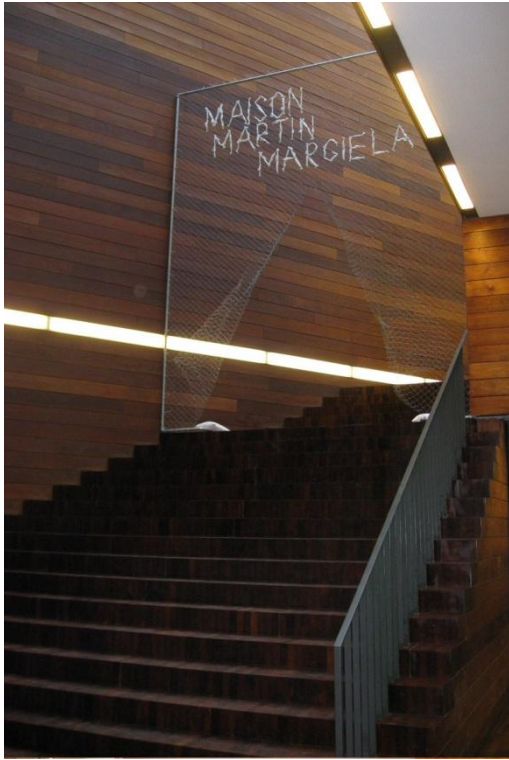
Fig. 6.7 Construction announcing *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition* in the MoMu atrium.

Fig 6.8 Introductory text panel for the exhibition *Maison Martin Margiela* in the corridor
leading to the exhibition space.
Fig. 6.9 Opening installation of the exhibition *Maison Martin Margiela*.

left of the entrance and, as a result of their location, do not immediately command the visitor's attention as in other venues. This lack of an obviously prominent location for an introductory text could be another factor that encourages curators at MoMu to consider alternative strategies. In reality, the more effective introduction to *Maison Martin Margiela* was established by the first installation, a rendering of a photograph of the Maison staff, cut from sheets of white polystyrene, and which symbolically announced the presence of the Maison, demonstrated one of its distinctive aesthetic characteristics (the use of white), and humorously referenced the Maison's notoriously unique feature – the complete anonymity of Martin Margiela, its founding designer [Fig 6.9].

Whilst the entrance constructions referenced so far partly fulfil the criteria of my definition of a threshold construction, in that they introduce the visitor to the exhibition's narrative and aesthetic, they tend to be spatially shallow and, not requiring the visitor to spend significant time passing through, do not exert any transformative or performative effect on the visitor. Unlike the following examples of threshold constructions from the key exhibitions at MoMu, they act as frames rather than portals. What differentiates the MoMu thresholds is the significant spatial volume given over to them: passing *through* rather than moving *past* these thresholds, the visitor is required to inhabit them spatially and temporally, and a truly transformative event is more likely to be experienced.

In *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rapell* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007) the exhibition tumbled from the gallery and out into the MoMu entrance, so that the visitor's first encounter was with a group of cartoon-like ghosts, their backs to the viewer, that paraded up the main stairs from the museum reception to the exhibition space [Fig. 6.10]. These figures were not even wearing what we would ordinarily think of as items suitable for presentation in a fashion exhibition, but were shrouded in floor-length
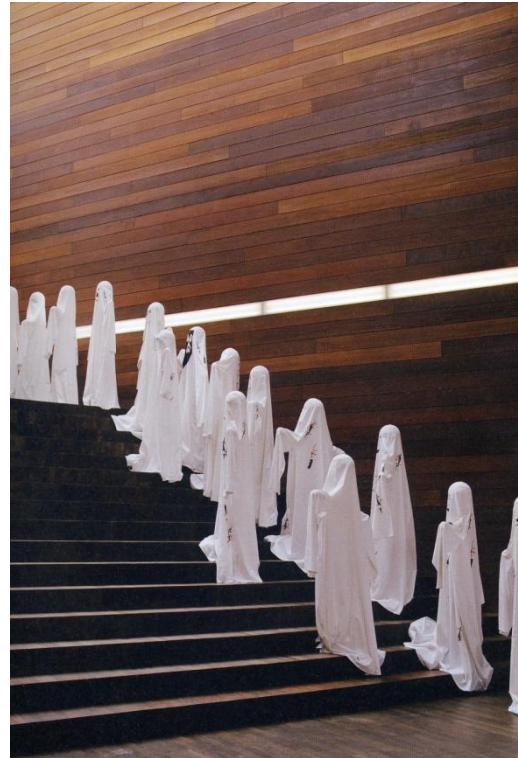
Fig. 6.10 Threshold construction for the exhibition *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel.*
Fig. 6.11 Threshold construction for the exhibition *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst.*

white sheet-like garments that were pierced, in a *trompe l'oeil* effect, by blood splattered cartoon daggers. As the visitor moved up the stairs the procession of perversely malign 'Caspers'[12] revealed cartoon-like ghoul faces. Whilst initially amusing, once the visitor noticed the holes cut for eyes and mouths, the disconcerting thought arose that there just might be someone inside one of these Halloween costumes. The ghost costumes (which were made for the film *Ghosts*, directed by artist Olaf Breuning and presented at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, to accompany Willhelm's spring/summer 2004 collection) introduce a theme that was important in the curation of the exhibition – the direct influence on the exhibition scenography of the other modes of presentation that Bernhard Willhelm employs, such as the seasonal collection look-books and runway presentations.

Forced to make the lengthy ascent to the exhibition space accompanied by these unsettling characters, the adult visitor may not have been filled with the kind of terror that they could invoke in children, yet they might still have been unnerved by the irrational unpredictability of the situation and the anxiety that one of the creatures may jump out and make you start. The ghost escort created an uneasy comic tension and transformed the visitor into a (willing) partner in Willhelm's cartoonish pranks. The visitor assumed the role of Willhelm's 'playmate', a role that was maintained throughout the course of the exhibition. The visitor's encounter with the ghost costumes initiated their transformation into an errant child, run amok amongst the 'bulimic extravagance of junk, puns, objects, references and gimmicks' (Nicol 2007: 128) employed by exhibition designers Nico Krebs and Tayo Onorato to conjure up a world fitting for the presentation of Willhelm's multi-coloured cartoon-inspired garments.

As *Bernhard Willhelm* used a replication of the human figure in a theatrical ruse to facilitate the visitor's transition from real world to exhibition world,

Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005) curated by designers A. F. Vandevorst, employed a similarly playful and illusory strategy. The entrance to the exhibition was light and open, with a small queue of people lined up at each of a pair of steel and glass ticket booths. They were wrapped close in dowdy, ordinary winter coats, hats and scarves - it was, after all, December in Antwerp and there was a cold sleet falling outside. You might have joined one of the queues and paused for a few seconds, before realising that the 'people' were, in fact, mannequins and that for a moment you had become part of the opening exhibit of *Katharina Prospekt* the visitor unintentionally yet effectively adopting the role of confused and disoriented tourist [Fig. 6.11].

In this brief moment of unwitting and unavoidable participation, the visitor was placed into a situation echoing the experiences of the fashion designers, An Vandevorst and Filip Arickx, when they travelled to Russia to carry out research for the exhibition. This reconstruction of a queue at the entrance to their exhibition operated not as much to illustrate a stereotypically Russian phenomenon as to place the exhibition visitor in the position of 'outsider': the disconcerting moment of discovery that you have lined up with a row of mannequins brings to mind those feelings when travelling to new places of unfamiliarity, of dislocation, a lack of understanding of local ways and customs. Through this construction A. F. Vandevorst contrived a shared experience between visitor and exhibition-makers that mirrored their personal experience, both visitor and curator looking for familiar signs and objects in an unfamiliar world (Brouns 2005: 16). This game enacted with the visitor also plays on our experience of a fashion exhibition by contradicting expectation – fashion exhibitions so often present the spectacular, the glamorous, the ostentatious, that the last thing we might expect to see would be 'normal' clothing. When the visitor entered *Katharina Prospekt* and in a split second read these figures - they were not raised on plinths, they were not in display cases, they were

wearing ordinary street clothes – it was easy to fall to the assumption that they were not 'exhibits'.

A similarly disorienting situation was constructed at the entrance to *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003). The visitor found themselves not in a gallery but in a reconstruction of a typical Belgian branch-line train, a familiar interior to local visitors, complete with authentic seats, window frames and over-head luggage racks. On closer inspection it became apparent that this was no ordinary train but that it had undergone a fantastical transformation. In the frames above the windows where you would expect to find contemporary advertisements there were seventeenth century cut velvets, instead of the usual stained and worn fabrics covering the seats there were flamboyant contemporary floral-print silks, by Italian fashion designer Gianfranco Ferré, that referenced the baroque blooms in the velvets above [Fig. 6.12]. To add to the sense of dislocation, the windows were blacked-out, and the visitor might eventually ascribe a growing sense of uncertainty in their surroundings to the perplexing realisation that the floor was not covered with the usual dirty linoleum, but with luxurious green-dyed goatskin.

The train interior, ostensibly ordinary and everyday was disrupted, turned upside down by the interventions of the exhibition's curator and scenographer, Angelo Figus. This constructed space, which was at the same time familiar and unfamiliar, connected the world the visitor had come from and the world they were about to enter - the exhibition-world of Figus' imagination. The transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary was confirmed by the replacement of lino on the floor with fur: the visitor was disoriented not by having the rug pulled from under their feet, but by having an unexpected one placed beneath their feet. That Figus should choose such an impractical and inappropriately sensual fabric as goat-skin to furnish his train was critical as it created a

Fig. 6.12 Threshold construction for the exhibition *Genovanversaeviceversa*.
Fig. 6.13 Threshold construction for the exhibition *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*.

disorienting, uncanny experience, preparing the visitor for the extravagant, baroque, hallucinatory world they were about to enter. In a very subtle way the goat-skin also represented Figus' presence as the author of the drama we were to experience: the designer is well known for including autobiographic reference in his work and the fur alludes to his rural childhood on the island of Sardinia where his grandfather worked as a shepherd.

Angelo Figus established the construction of the train at the entrance of the exhibition to frame the visitor as a 'traveller' about to embark on an experiential journey into the dream-world he had created. In the exhibition guide he calls this space The Train of My Thoughts and writes:

> I want to jump on the next train without knowing where it goes, where the velocity wipes everything out: the landscape, the floor, the windows, the lights.
>
> (Bracke 2001: 4)

Within the gallery space the train simulation existed as a device, a bridge bringing together the world of the visitor (the outside) and the world of the exhibition (the inside), by literally spanning the two spaces. As the first place of contact between the visitor and the material content of the exhibition, it also operated as a conceptual bridge, a place of 'fusion', between different locations and different times:

> I want to find this fusion of two different spirits talking about the same subject, two different languages in confrontation and rebalanced.
>
> (Bracke 2001: 4)

As a metaphor for travel, Figus' train, in effecting the visitor's initial encounter with the collision of antique and contemporary fabrics, transforms the visitor into a traveller, prepared and equipped to embark on an exploration of the exhibition world of *Genovanversaeviceversa*, in which time and space contract and collide.

As notions of the distortion of time and space were central to Figus' exhibition concept, so the temporal leaps associated with fashion's historical self-referencing were also central Judith Clark's *Malign Muses*, revealed to the visitor as they entered the exhibition space through the construction of a sophisticated threshold device. At the end of a darkened corridor, light was glowing from a large timber and ply-wood construction which at first glance resembled a large packing crate or container…as the visitor was drawn down the corridor towards the light, eyes gradually adjusting to the darkness, two night-dress like garments became visible, one seemingly transposed over the other, shimmering in and out of view…the phenomenon compelled the visitor to scrutinise the apparition, to disentangle the mirage-like image, but closer approach was prevented by a barrier, an 'X' of raw, unpainted timber [Fig. 6.13].

Almost a century separated the manufacture of the two garments suspended in front of you and yet seeing them brought together, through the use of an optical device, the 'Pepper's Ghost',[13] their commonalities were striking. Despite the difference in scale both garments presented similar silhouettes, fabrics and decorative techniques; one was a dress from 1999 by Belgian designer Veronique Branquinho, the other a child's baptism robe from 1900. The notion of 'retro', of looking to the past for inspiration, is well-trodden ground in the field of contemporary fashion design, but this deceptively simple installation and the conceptual statement that it presented revealed the complex intellectual process of visual association, and exemplified the subtle aesthetic exchange that

leaps between past and present, perhaps subconsciously, as designers search for a visual and material language to communicate their ideas. Through this installation, the visitor's first experience of *Malign Muses,* the underlying narrative of the exhibition was expressed not through words, but through constructed image, visual manipulation, evocation and emotion. Equally important, by using a visual device that was primarily reliant for its effect on the presence and juxtaposition of the two garments, Clark put the two dresses centre-stage giving the object - framed by a physical/conceptual construction - primacy in conveying her message without recourse to interpretive text.

Through the use of the Pepper's Ghost, Clark also introduced the visitor to the experience of distorted and manipulated vision that was further developed in other parts of the exhibition through the use of lenses, mirrors and shadows. These apparatus implied that as our views of the exhibition were filtered through, and framed by optical devices, fairground constructions and theatrical stages into which the garments on display were placed, so our view into the past is not always straightforward, clear or unimpeded. These installations, manufactured from lenses and mirrors, semi-transparent panels and open frameworks of raw timber that revealed the carpenters' markings and measures, further established the constructivist-inspired aesthetic first encountered with the spare, crate-like housing for the Pepper's Ghost. Framing the exhibition through this theatrical device, Clark transformed the museum visitor into an audience member, reveller, a curious fair-goer in a world of stages and side-shows where distortions, illusions, and spectral evocations were the norm.

In summary, the conventional practice in an exhibition is that, as previously stated, the entrance is marked by a written text presented as an introductory panel mounted to a suitably located architectural surface. These texts are used by the curator to frame the exhibition,

communicating its central theme or message and providing contextual information for the visitor about to enter the exhibition proper, and are often written in an anonymous, objective voice. The threshold constructions described here replace, or act in addition to word-based introductory texts. They exist as alternative 'texts', contextualising the exhibition through the use of visual and spatial language.

As illustrated by the examples I have presented, sophisticated threshold constructions are able to use location, construction, imagery, metaphor, performance and visitor participation to communicate the message and themes of the exhibition. These installations introduce the exhibition concept and narrative and, by their very physical nature, also introduce the aesthetic approach, the visual language of the exhibition itself. In some instances, either through autobiographic devices (as in Angelo Figus' use of goat-skin floor-covering) or direct replication (as in Viktor & Rolf's wax dummies), they are able to connect the visitor to the author of the exhibition. They are also manipulative constructions, invoking a transformative effect on the visitor and effecting the adoption of role-play, turning visitors into playmates, time-travellers and fair-goers. Although not read as consciously as the conventional written introduction, these threshold constructions potentially offer the visitor a richer and more thought-provoking introduction to the exhibition.

Taking the preceding description and analysis of threshold constructions, particularly those from the key exhibitions at MoMu, it was evident that significant consideration would need to be given to the threshold devised for the exhibition proposal prepared through my practice-based research. The exhibitions referenced have proved that the visitor's first encounter is critical in shaping their subsequent experience of an exhibition, and that an intelligently contrived threshold can ease the visitor's transition from the outside world into the exhibition space both physically and intellectually,

introduce the visitor to the exhibition's themes and aesthetic approach, and even exert a transformative effect on the visitor, so that they are better prepared and equipped for the exhibition experience that follows. My account of the threshold devised for the exhibition proposal, and reflections on the impact of those threshold constructions described in this chapter can be found in Chapter 11, which gives a detailed account the application of the presentation mode of threshold in my practice-based research: the realisation of a fashion autobiography as a detailed proposal for a hypothetical exhibition.

Chapter 7: Identification, Description and Definition of the Presentation Mode 'Landscape'

Following from my analysis of threshold in the previous chapter, this chapter examines how the nature of the threshold is developed into the exhibition scenography, or landscape. The chapter commences with my definition of the term 'landscape' within the context of a museum exhibition, setting this definition against examples of conventional museum scenography. After establishing this definition of landscape I will present examples of exhibition landscapes where existing interiors are exploited, for which I use the term 'found landscape', and those where the landscape is entirely manufactured, for which I use the term 'constructed landscape'. I will examine the notion of the exhibition landscape further by illustrating how landscape can be realised as recreation, representation or reflective space. I will conclude the chapter by reflecting on the implications of the notion of the exhibition landscape in relation to my practice-based research.

My investigation of landscape concerns those spatial techniques that are designed to create a distinctive environment or scenography for an exhibition. Within this research I use the term landscape to identify constructions that contextualise the objects on display by conferring meaning or narrative, that are inhabited by object and visitor on an equal footing and that transform the exhibition space: an exhibition landscape is not a solely decorative or illustrative environment. A landscape can occur as a found landscape, where an existing interior is appropriated to encourage a particular reading of the objects on display as demonstrated in *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) or, alternatively, as a constructed landscape which is installed for a specific exhibition as demonstrated by the key exhibitions from MoMu. As

previously discussed, the architectural qualities of the state room in the former Royal Palace, that comprised the first exhibition room of *2Women-2Vrouwen*, was utilised by curator Dirk Van Saene to construct a particular reading of the Chanel suits on display; underlying the simple modernity of the suits through contrast with the ornate architecture, and conferring status on the garments through the formality and majestic associations of the space.

The majority of the exhibitions visited for this research were installed either in dedicated galleries such as the fashion galleries of Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, in museums that hold collections of decorative arts such as the V&A, London, or in galleries or museums that have a design or fine art focus such as the Barbican Art Gallery, London, and the Design Museum, London. Unlike examples that illustrate found landscape, where the exhibition-maker exploits the architectural qualities of an existing space to lend meaning and narrative to the exhibition, most temporary exhibition venues are obliged to construct unique environments for each presentation. In locations such as the fashion galleries of Les Arts Décoratifs the potential to construct an exhibition landscape is severely restricted by the installation of large, permanent glazed display cases which dominate the gallery interior. Considering the venues in which these presentations take place, with their focus on aesthetic and visual stimuli, and the likelihood of a visually literate audience, it is no surprise that considerable resources are often employed in the creation of a suitable scenography for exhibitions.

In the majority of the exhibitions referenced for this research the gallery installation was devised from a repertoire that comprised display case, vitrine, plinth, dais, pedestal, stands, supports, text panels, graphic panels and image panels that belong intrinsically and emphatically to the visual language of the museum institution: what American artist Fred Wilson,

who has a long-term practice based in deconstructing such institutions, calls the 'palette' of the museum (Karp and Wilson 1996: 253). Many exhibitions reviewed exhibited almost infinite variations of this palette, in colour, texture and material, yet there generally appeared to be little or no intention of employing visual or spatial strategies to transform or disguise the institutional location or to disassemble the barrier between object and viewer as illustrated in the Introduction by the images of the exhibition *Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1998). They do not exhibit that transformative potential that Caroline Evans experiences in the landscape constructed for *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004):

> …a spatial allegory must surely be one that masquerades as another kind of space, such as an exhibition that is really a labyrinth, a fairground entertainment or an optical illusion…
>
> (Evans, 2004:45)

The use of this institutional palette establishes the conventions with which the majority of exhibition installations were constructed. In contrast, as described above, the exhibition landscape asserts a transformative effect on the exhibition space and visitor, and establishes an environment that communicates the exhibition narrative and creates a sense that visitor and displayed object inhabit the space in parity.

The transformative landscape invites the visitor to imagine that they have relocated to a space other than that of the exhibition space. Within this process of relocation, there are a number of techniques, employed to create spaces that are designed to be read as 'other' than the exhibition gallery. These spaces may be constructed as 'recreation', where an installation is constructed which copies another location, as

'representation', where visual signs from one location are introduced to the exhibition gallery to suggest that location, or as 'reflective', where the exhibition scenography operates on an aesthetic and emotional level to transform the atmosphere of the exhibition space rather than it's architecture.

The scenography, however, does not always fulfil the criteria used in this research to define the notion of an exhibition landscape. No matter how elaborate or effective the exhibition design, I would make a distinction between those constructions purposefully designed to carry meaning and narrative and those that are primarily decorative or illustrative. The installation by Japanese designer Sou Fujimoto for *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2010) consisted of large panels of semi-transparent white gauze that hung floor to ceiling in the gallery inspired by typical Japanese *shoji* screens (Dunmall 2011: 36). This intervention considerably softened the brutalist concrete and granite architecture of the Barbican Art Gallery space as well as defining routes through the exhibition but did not articulate meaning or narrative in relation to the garments on display: although hinting at their cultural origin, the installation existed primarily as a decorative backdrop for the avant-garde fashion [Fig 7.1]. For a section of *Vivienne Westwood* (V&A, London, 2004) UK-based Azman Owens Architects incorporated period furniture and paintings into a basic black-box set [Fig 7.2]. Intended to communicate the designer's propensity to reference styles from past eras in her work these tableaux effectively illustrate this notion but did not generate meaning or narrative in their own right (Brown 2004: 122). Whilst not every exhibition has need of a landscape to communicate meaning and narrative, what differentiates the key exhibitions at MoMu is the deliberate use of landscape to communicate narrative and meaning. According to Kaat Debo, at the time of interview responsible for Exhibitions Policy at MoMu;

Fig. 7.1 Installation view of *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion*.
Fig. 7.2 Installation view of *Vivienne Westwood*.

…it is sometimes very difficult to find harmony between the content and scenography, because scenography for me is not a décor, or decoration, it must tell a story…some subjects can have a more decorative scenography, others not.

(Debo 2005)

As apparent in *2Women-2Vrouwen*, and documented in Chapter 4, there are occasions when exhibitions are mounted in spaces other than purpose built galleries, and where the existing architectural qualities of a space are adopted to accommodate and enhance the exhibition. When these non-gallery spaces are adopted with the intent of mounting a particular exhibition, these found landscapes can be exploited to great effect.

The found landscape can often be contrived through creative and intelligent use of existing museum interiors. *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004) and *AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006) were both located within a museum, borrowing suites of lavishly furnished period rooms for their setting. *Dangerous Liaisons*, presented in The Wrightsman Galleries at The Metropolitan which comprise a series of elaborate eighteenth century interiors removed from architectural sources scattered throughout Europe, took as its theme an exploration of the interaction of dress, furniture and the decorated interior in the social behaviours of the eighteenth century aristocracy (Koda and Bolton 2006: 11). Appropriately attired mannequins were posed in the rooms in a narrative sequence of vignettes that were, in turn, informed by eighteenth century art and literature. It is evident that in this instance, the borrowed landscape of The Wrightsman Galleries was absolutely integral to both the concept and narrative of the exhibition [Fig 7.3]. The synergy between costume and

Fig. 7.3 Installation view of *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century*.

Fig. 7.4 Installation view of *Anglomania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion*.

interior in this instance was such that the transference of meaning apparently operated in exchange, with the result that to 'view the elaborately attired figures in the rooms was to understand the just proportions of the spaces' (de Montebello 2006: 9).

Similarly, *AngloMania* was set in a suite of reconstructed original historic English rooms, The Annie Laurie Aitken Galleries, a series of sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century period interiors transported from a number of locations in England where, as in *Dangerous Liaisons*, a series of fictive tableaux were staged. The theme of *AngloMania* was an exploration of 'Englishness' as represented through dress, art, and interior design (Bolton 2004: 13). Unlike the former exhibition, *AngloMania* showed combinations of garments and accessories from different periods, and the coiffure and make-up of the mannequins was highly-stylised. Mannequins were posed in fictional scenes that were not so closely modelled on contemporary paintings as in *Dangerous Liaisons,* with the effect of a more highly dramatised, theatrically arch *mise-en-scène* [Fig. 7.4]. Whilst benefitting from the borrowed landscape of the period rooms in terms of aesthetic and atmosphere, the landscape appeared less integral to the exhibition concept. The incorporation of furniture and decorative arts contemporary to garments on display is a well-tried method in the presentation of fashion in the museum, although rarely executed on such a scale as in *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Anglomania*. Whilst the settings for *Dangerous Liaisons* were fundamental in articulating the exhibition concept, the period rooms in *AngloMania* operate more as an aesthetic foil to the tableaux: they become scenery, rather than co-performer.

Grès: La Couture à L'Oevre (Musée Bourdelle, Paris, 2011), organised by the Musée Galliera, Paris, and presented at the Musée Bourdelle, demonstrated a particularly intelligent and sophisticated use of the found landscape. Due to closure for extensive refurbishment, the exhibition

programme of the Musée Galliera has been forced to look for external venues. For *Grès* they selected the Musée Bourdelle, in the 15th district of Paris. The Musée Bourdelle is dedicated to the work of French sculptor Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929), renowned for his monumental, classically-inspired modernist work, most notably the friezes that decorate the exterior of the Art Deco Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Paris. The Musée Bourdelle is set around the sculptor's former apartment, studios, alongside purpose-built museum extensions which were added in the 1950s and 1980s.

The exhibition featured the Musée Galliera's collection of work by Madame Grès, the Parisian couturier who also worked under the names Alix Barton and Alix and who, in the 1930s and 1940s established a distinctive style based on pleating and draping techniques that evoked the dress of classical sculpture (Mendes and de la Haye 2010: 76-106, Buttolph *et al* 1998: 198). The exhibition placed work by Madame Grès throughout the museum, exploiting both the unique architectural qualities of the space and the sculpture located within it. In one of the more intimate, timber-beamed former studio spaces, gowns were displayed on Stockman dress-maker's forms alongside life-size figurative sculptures, creating the effect of re-locating the human body into the dresses on display [Fig. 7.5]. In other galleries draped and pleated Grès models were displayed alongside bronze sculptures depicting figures wearing similarly pleated clothing that flowed and billowed with the movement of their bodies. Through juxtaposition with Bourdelle's sculpture, the visitor was given an impression of how Madame Grès' garments might interact with the moving body. In one of the palatial marble-clad Museum galleries Madame Grès' classically-inspired pleating technique was complemented by a statuesque figure depicting a warrior-goddess which emphasised, in contrast to the fluid effect of the garment in movement evoked in other juxtapositions, the columnar sobriety of the static gown [Fig. 7.6].

Figs. 7.5, 7.6 Installation views of *Grès: Couture à L'Oevre*.

In sympathy with the setting, the exhibition designers borrowed from the language of the studio for the exhibition furnishings; sketches and sample books were displayed on tables with bases formed from plain wooden trestles, and many of the mannequins in the exhibition were raised from the floor on wooden legged stands of the type used by sculptors to raise a block of stone or plaster to working height. Through sensitive location and the adoption of the visual language of the studio the exhibition was seamlessly integrated into its borrowed landscape which, in return bestowed meaning and narrative on the objects on display, articulating reference to the classical style as seen through the Art Deco revival, the sculptural form of the human body and the material quality of the garment in motion

The idea of the exhibition landscape as carrier of the exhibition message or narrative can be illustrated by reference to the structures in Judith Clark's *Malign Muses.* In a section entitled Locking In and Out garments were mounted on dress forms which were located around the perimeter of three large ply-wood cogs. The interlocking cogs rotated so that, where the cogs met, garments were brought together in juxtaposition before once again moving apart. The garments were selected in thematic pairs, with each pair placed on separate, adjacent cogs [Fig. 7.7]. The constant rotation of the cogs temporarily made the thematic links between garments apparent. Information on the MoMu website noted that as they were brought together 'there is an uncanny recognition, when they again diverge the past appears again remote' ("Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back" n.d.). The installation operated as a visual and physical realisation of Clark's thesis on fashion's tendency to reference the past. The cogs also acted as a metaphor for the fashion industry itself, a constantly turning machine that churns out 'new' ideas that are often a reworking of past styles:

> …three huge cogs, incessantly moving as a motif for the
> fashion system itself, promiscuous in its references.
> Fashion can't afford to get stuck anyway, but it also can't
> afford to be predictable. The question is how does fashion
> keep unlocking itself.
>
> ("Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back" n.d.)

The symbolic use of the exhibition landscape continues in *Katharina Prospekt – The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005) where fashion designers A. F. Vandevorst repeatedly use a cross motif as a link between their own fashion design work and their perception of a Russian aesthetic. They relate their own logo, the simple outline of a cross, to both the cruciform symbol of the Russian Orthodox Church and Kasimir Malevich's constructivist cross (Brouns 2005: 17). The cross symbol appeared in red paint on the floor of the exhibition space under a group of *matryoshka* and again formed by propagandist posters on the floor of a display which examined the symbolism of the traditional soviet women's headscarf in contemporary consumerist Russia [Fig. 7.8]. The cross also appeared in three-dimensional form, as a large glass enclosure that protected a collection of historic Russian uniforms, and as a three metre high red painted structure, cruciform in plan that housed a richly embroidered antique chasuble and mitre. In A. F. Vandevorst's exhibition-essay on their interpretation of 'Russianness' these examples illustrated how scenography can both carry the exhibition message, through the revelation of the cross as an inter-cultural graphic and symbolic reference and, through the realisation of the cross in architectural form, create an immersive environment inhabited by both exhibits and visitors simultaneously.

In *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2002) curator Angelo Figus created a fantasy landscape inspired by objects selected for the exhibition.

Fig. 7.7 Installation view of *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*, showing the section Locking In and Out.
Fig. 7.8 Installation view of *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* depicting the use of the 'cross' motif.

Figus abstracted decorative or narrative elements from selected objects and created complex symbolic narrative spaces. Taking a *toile de Jouy* style red printed English linen as a starting point, Figus conjured the mysteriously titled The Nonexistent Garden that comprised the final chamber of his exhibition [Figs. 7.9, 7.10]. Figus translated the single colour foliate decoration of the textile into a dreamlike white space with a grove of bare-branched scarlet trees at its centre. Carved wood antique theatre seats, upholstered in red leaf-patterned brocade bordered the walls, completing the effect of a mythical waiting room, the ante-chamber to either heaven or the underworld.

The fourth chamber of *Genovanversaeviceversa* presented a painting by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) entitled *Portrait of Ansaldo Pallavicino*. The exhibition guide tells the story that the painting, completed around 1624, had originally shown the young Ansaldo alongside his mother but, due to 'an inheritance partition', the picture was cut in two and the remains of Ansaldo's mother painted out (Bracke 2000: 5). The recently restored painting shows blank canvas where Ansoldo's mother had originally been depicted. Figus took this touching story and placed it at the centre of an atmospheric installation that communicated the emotions of a child's sense of loss and isolation [Fig. 7.11]. The walls were painted a deep mauve colour, with the wall that held the portrait covered in dark purple damask by contemporary Italian designer Romeo Gigli. The floor of the space was covered with antique toys and games, rocking horses, skittles, miniature furniture and musical instruments. Figus constructed the landscape of the space to communicate emotion and narrative: the colours, with their historic associations with mourning, suggested a sombre mood, and the old-fashioned toys showing the patina of use, although hinting at wealth in their abundance, suggested poignancy in their dilapidation. Inspired by van Dyck's painting, Figus invented a space that evoked a melancholy narrative.

Figs. 7.9, 7.10 Installation view of *Genovanversaeviceversa*, showing The Nonexistent Garden, and the *toile de Jouy* style fabric that was curator Angelo Figus' inspiration for the scenography.

Fig. 7.11 Installation view of landscape created around the Portrait of Ansaldo Pallavicino, *Genovanversaeviceversa*.
Fig. 7.12 Installation view of *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel.*

The landscape created for *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rapell* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007) conveyed a very different atmosphere but, like those constructed by Figus, communicated both narrative and atmosphere. Rather than taking reference directly from the specific objects that it presented, the scenography represented an exhibition-wide theme: the influence on his work of Willhelm's birthplace, the mountainous regions of southern Germany, and its folkloric traditions. One notable feature of the exhibition scenography took the form of a massive landslide that quite literally engulfed the MoMu exhibition space taking pillars and supporting columns into its mass. Painted brown on the outside and with a miniature train running across its slopes, the landslide sat like the foothills of an enormous mountain whose peak penetrated the ceiling of the exhibition space [Fig. 7.12]. An entrance was carved into the mountain walls and, once inside, the makeshift structure was revealed: a shambolic wooden framework supported a roof of chicken-wire and plaster-covered hessian. The wooden framework was covered in graffiti and child-like scrawling. Miniature animals and dinosaurs perched alongside cardboard cut-out figures wearing Willhelm's collections on the wooden beams which were interwoven with fake greenery. This installation contributed to the overall atmosphere of cartoon-like chaos that was a spatial interpretation of Willhelm's aesthetic.

The constructed landscape need not always be reliant on such extensive physical intervention. For the exhibition *The Art of Fashion: Installing Allusions* (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2009), co-curated by Jos Arts, Judith Clark and José Teunissen, five specially commissioned works by contemporary fashion designers formed focal points to other works that maintained thematic or aesthetic connections – the 'allusions' of the exhibition title. These allusions were complex and multi-directional, with each object expressing a thematic relationship to several other objects. Co-curator and exhibition designer Judith Clark

realised the intricate narrative of inter-relationships through a low-level framework of tubular pipes, radiating from the focal objects and articulating thematic links [Fig. 7.13]. Other allusions, discarded during the curatorial process were expressed as sketch-like markings on the gallery floor, hinting at alternative thematic possibilities. Clark's cartographic landscape elucidated not only the exhibition themes and narrative but revealed the curatorial process itself: as the gallery was transformed into a three-dimensional representation of curatorial process, visitors were transformed into potential curators, inviting them to consider the items on display within a framework of allusions of their own.

Whilst the borrowed landscape can play an essential role in reflecting meaning onto the objects on display and assisting in the communication of the exhibition narrative, they do not effect a transformation of the exhibition space as does a constructed landscape installed into an exhibition space. Examination of the key exhibitions from MoMu reveals this architecturally transformative process (that mirrors the transformative process effected on the visitor by threshold constructions as described in Chapter 6) and presents it as an important aspect in the definition of an exhibition landscape. In *Genovanversaeviceversa*, Angelo Figus imposed such a complete transformation of the exhibition galleries as to render them almost unrecognisable. From the threshold construction that introduces Figus' exhibition, the visitor was held within a labyrinthine structure of sixteen rooms with no way out other than the designated entrance or exit, and only one possible route to follow. Figus' installation controlled the visitor's passage through the landscape, and obliterated the MoMu gallery; there was no view of gallery walls and, in many rooms, even the floor was taken over by Figus' installation. Only the gallery ceiling remained as a reminder of the visitor's location. The spatial transformation was physically tangible and achieved by almost complete eradication of the gallery through installation of the maze-like structure maintaining the
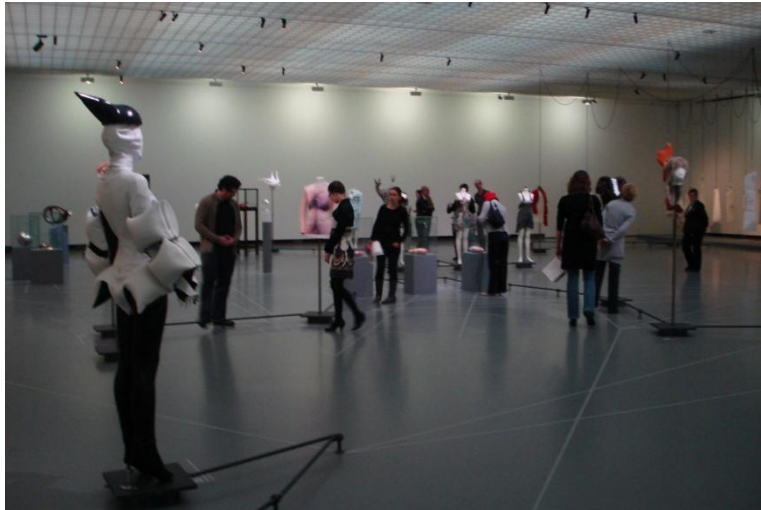
Fig. 7.13 Installation view of *The Art of Fashion: Installing Allusions.*
Fig. 7.14 Installation view of *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*, showing merry-go-round set .

threshold transformation of the visitor into a traveller, an explorer who encountered new worlds at every turn.

In *Malign Muses* and *Katharina Prospekt*, the transformation of the gallery was as much conceptual as physical. A. F. Vandevorst envisioned the gallery as 'an avenue along which people parade, absorbing a broad mélange of impressions as they move along.' (Brouns 2005: 16). Their symbolic transformation of the gallery into a street - the 'Katharina Prospekt' of the title - not only influenced the layout of the exhibits, which were placed in the space so that the visitor could wander freely from one section to the next, but also reinforced the transformative process of the exhibition's threshold. As described in Brouns' account, A. F. Vandevorst envisaged their visitor as a *boulevardier* strolling through the exhibition, selectively encountering the various episodes of the narrative as they so choose. In *Katharina Prospekt*, the narrative episodes had no physical boundaries and ran into one another as if to form a continuous street-scene. In *Malign Muses*, many of the episodes at first seemed self-contained, box-like constructions, booths, stages, circus rings and shadow theatres that enclosed, framed and distorted their contents. In reality, however, the visitor's passage from one episode to the next perpetrated a transformative action on the visitor and gallery space. In the process of traversing the space to view each exhibit the visitor's action initiated a spatial simile: moving through the exhibition from one perplexing attraction to the next was like walking through a fairground, or showground, and this transformation was heightened as the visitor was compelled to participate; looking through lenses, peep-holes, magnifying glasses, making connections [Fig. 7.14]. In effecting this spatial transformation, the exhibition landscape became, along with both displayed object and visitor, a holistic component of a three-dimensional event:

> But the stage also transforms, and in *Malign Muses* the
> stage itself is the exhibit, the object *of* display as much as
> the vehicle *for* display.
>
> <div align="right">(Evans 2004: 47)</div>

These examples illustrate not only the transformative action of an exhibition landscape on the gallery space but also the resultant transformation of the visitor into traveller, promenader, and fair-goer that continues from the visitor's transition through the exhibition threshold. This dual transformation determines another aspect of the definition of the concept of exhibition landscape: that objects and visitors equally inhabit the same narrative space. Whilst the environmental controls of the MoMu gallery mean that objects can be displayed without the need for display cases, and the episodic structures of the exhibitions allow free circulation amongst thematic groups of objects, the sense of co-habitation of the exhibition space is not purely a physical phenomenon. It is through the process of dual transformation, engendered through the exhibition landscape, that both objects and visitors inhabit the same narrative: the sense of co-habitation is conceptual as well as physical.

Whilst *Bernhardt Willhelm* employed similar physical landscape constructions as the previous examples from MoMu (timber constructions, large-scale graphic treatments, an assemblage of scenographic props) there was also a less overt, though equally powerful spatial transformation at work. Alongside the physical structures and installations that created *Bernhard Willhelm'*s chaotic cartoon world, the exhibition designers, Onorato and Krebs generated a less obvious, though no less unsettling effect, by undermining the intrinsic architectural logic of the Museum itself.

The process of undermining what could be defined as the innate architectural sense of the space began in the entrance hall where, as

described in Chapter 6, items from the exhibition made an unexpected appearance - invading what is architecturally designated as a public space rather than an exhibition space - to escort the visitor on their transition into the exhibition itself. As the visitor approached the exhibition space there were two possible entrances. The natural tendency is to turn to the right and move clockwise around the gallery, a tendency which is endorsed unanimously by the MoMu exhibitions I have visited. Onorato and Krebs, however, had visitors turn to the left so that the visit ran counter-clockwise and, also, counter-intuitively to the underlying logic of the architecture. Their continued challenge of the architectural presence of the building reached a climax when the visitor approached the rotunda.

It is in this space, central to the visit, pivotal to the building's layout and auspicious in its double-height ceiling, that most curators locate a dramatic centre-piece. Onorato and Krebs darkened the space to almost black-out and installed a drinks vending machine that glowed in the dark, with 'Out of Order' handwritten on a piece of paper taped to the front of the machine [Fig. 7.15]. At the exhibition's apex, Onorato and Krebs symbolised its narrative of disruptive, satirical anarchy by confounding our expectation with an installation that conveyed emptiness and disappointment: not only was the visitor deprived of the exhibition's expected climax, but frustration was exacerbated by the fact that the vending machine didn't even work. Onorato and Krebs generated a subliminal, emotional transformation of the space through their destabilization of the architecture of the gallery, indicating that the transformative landscape can be achieved through intervention not only in the form of constructed elements, but in the approach to the use of the gallery space itself.

Within the notion of the transformative landscape, a number of techniques – recreation, representation, reflective landscape – can be applied to realise the landscape construction. Scenographic recreations occur

Fig. 7.15 Installation view of *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel.*
Fig. 7.16 Installation view of recreation of design studio*, Yohji Yamamoto:*
Juste des Vêtements.

infrequently: *Yohji Yamamoto: Juste des Vêtements* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2005) included a detailed reconstruction of the Tokyo office of Yamamoto's head of *atelier*, so exact in the detail of its reconstruction that the visitor was easily able to imagine themselves transported away from the gallery [Fig. 7.16]. Although visitors were prevented from entering the reconstruction, the effect was enhanced by the opportunity to touch fabric samples and *toiles* hanging on a garment rail that doubled as a barrier to delineate the reconstructed space. The simple act of handling in itself established a sense of distance from the museum, where meaningful tactile encounter with objects is usually discouraged or prevented.

More commonly found are constructions intended as representations, where an interior is assembled to suggest rather than replicate another location. The technique of representation is found in the key exhibitions from MoMu; Figus' train carriage in *Genovanversaeviceversa*, Clark's fairground booths in *Malign Muses*, Bernhard Willhelm's mountains constructed from cardboard or piles of waste computers and the Tyrolean chalet built from speakers in *Bernhard Willhelm* [Fig. 7.17]. The technique of representation was also used in *Ouverture pour Inventaire* (Museé Galliera, Paris, 2004) where garments were displayed using museum-type storage cabinets and drawers, giving the effect of walking through the museum stores and conservation areas. Although successful in suggesting a transformation of the exhibition space, rather than the scenographic strategy achieving a revelatory 'opening up' of the museum, the implication of the scenography representing privileged access to those areas of the museum not generally open to the public had the contradictory effect of emphasising the exclusivity of the institution and its ownership of the objects on display.

Finally, there are what I would term reflective spaces, installations that are almost abstract in their relation to the garments on display, where meaning

Fig. 7.17 Installation view of *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel*, showing representational landscape – a mountain peak made from discarded computer hardware.
Fig. 7.18 Installation view of *Yohji Yamamoto: Dreamshop*, showing reflective landscape created purely by lighting.

is intimated through sensory and emotional response rather than narrative or intellectual understanding, as illustrated by the landscape created for *Yohji Yamamoto: Dreamshop* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2006). The exhibition was designed by Masao Nihei, a lighting designer whose practice encompasses fashion, theatre and dance. Nihei worked on the first Comme des Garçons show in Paris in 1981, and is a long-term collaborator with Yohji Yamamoto (Salazar 2010: 190). Other than the garments on display, the exhibition scenography appeared to be constructed almost entirely from light and mirrors [Fig. 7.19]. In the exhibition gallery, which was painted completely in white, bare fluorescent tubes were installed at each window to create an artificial daylight that flooded the space. In direct contradiction to the low light-levels conventionally experienced in fashion exhibitions the effect was of radiant light, at the same time harsh and shimmering:

> Here the light was strong and cold, defining shapes and places very precisely, and giving them a dreamlike dimension through the visual phenomenon of juxtaposition with the surrounding white. It is almost as though one were in a bubble, a place where something can happen that cannot happen in the rest of the museum.
>
> (Bonnet 2006: 11)

Nihei used light to transform the gallery space instead of physical construction, and through a shift in atmosphere created a landscape that while not principally communicating meaning or narrative, established sensory experience and engendered emotional response.

As evidenced by the examples cited, there are many creative strategies that can be adopted for the presentation of fashion in the museum beyond those common elements of plinth and display case. These spatial

strategies or landscapes, whether found (exploiting an existing interior architecture) or constructed (installed from scratch within an existing space), are able to enhance the visitor's experience by communicating the exhibition narrative and conferring meaning on objects and, through their architectural or spatial configuration generate the sensation that visitor and object inhabit the space equally. Not least, the exhibition landscape maintains the process of transformation effected on the visitor at the exhibition threshold and expands this phenomenon of transformation to the exhibition space itself. In Chapter 11 I will give a detailed account of how the presentation mode of landscape was applied to my practice-based research: the rendering of a fashion autobiography as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition.

Chapter 8: Identification, Description and Definition of the Presentation Mode 'Object'

This chapter examines the notion of the museum object in fashion exhibitions, with particular attention to the four key exhibitions from MoMu. I commence by proposing that, as evidenced in the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001), a definition of 'object' in the context of an exhibition might encompass all visual and sensory material that is presented by the curator for the visitors' gaze. Following from this, I will demonstrate, with evidence gathered through my exhibition research that, rather than having one intrinsic narrative museum objects have the capacity to reflect multiple narratives according to context. I will continue, by illustrating through reference to the key exhibitions from MoMu, that exhibition narratives can be constructed through processes of curatorial selection and presentation techniques and that exhibited objects relate meaning determined by curatorial manipulation. I will investigate presentation techniques such as selection, juxtaposition, scenographic framing and the inclusion of non-museum objects as strategies to construct narrative and influence the visitor's reading of an object. I will conclude the chapter with reflection on the implication of the techniques observed in relation to my practice-based research.

My investigation into the notion of the displayed object relates to the material and immaterial content of exhibitions, and how that content is selected and manipulated by the curator to convey a particular narrative or meaning. As observed in the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen*, curator Dirk Van Saene utilised a number of techniques to construct meaning around the objects presented; selection and juxtaposition of objects (the exclusive selection of the classic, modernist Chanel suit set against the elaborate Rococo interior) introduction of non-museum objects (shears and ponytail

to represent the *garçonne* hairstyle), physical manipulation of objects (presenting the Chanel suit turned inside-out to reveal structural techniques) and the presence of the ostensibly immaterial as object (aural and projected image representations of the designer, and (re)presentation of the iconic Chanel N°5 as an aroma). My definition of the term 'object' includes not only the museum object but also any additional material not from a museum collection included by the curator for presentation alongside multi-media, and sensory phenomena, including those objects that are framed through presentation techniques to communicate a specific meaning.

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, The Body, there are certain strategies in the mounting of garments, as evidenced in *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective* (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2003) that are employed to display those garments primarily for aesthetic appreciation. At this point it is enough to note that, coupled with other exhibition strategies such as minimal spatial design and contextual material, these techniques support a curatorial approach where the exhibition narrative is determined by an aestheticised reading of the garment which is presented as an 'objectified' specimen. As many of the exhibitions viewed demonstrate, this approach establishes a convention in exhibition design whereby the object of the visitor's intended focus, invariably the museum or archival object, is imbued with an increased sense of scarcity, preciousness and value emphasised through institutionalised presentation strategies that create a physical distance or barrier between visitor and object; setting the object on a plinth or dais, putting the object under a protective cover or display case, and distancing the audience from the object through the use of barriers, floor markings and raised platforms. Taken collectively, these strategies combine to create the landscape of many museum interiors, separating the museum object from its surroundings and emphasising the focal object for the visitor's gaze [Fig. 8.1].

Fig. 8.1 Distanced from the visitor by a low plinth and displayed against a plain background these garments in *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective*, presented without obvious visual distraction, are explicitly the focus for the viewer's gaze and reflect the status of the conventional museum object.

This approach is keenly evident in designer monograph exhibitions, where the exhibition narratives are very often based primarilly on the object's appearence; cut, colour, fabric, or decorative and construction techniques. This was evident in exhibitions such as *Versace* (V&A, London, 2002), *Sonia Rykiel; Exhibition* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2008) and *Yves Saint Laurent* (Petit Palais, Paris, 2010) and many other exhibitions visited. Architect and exhibition designer Paul Williams exemplifies this aestheticised approach to presentation that focuses primarily on material qualities:

> If I pick up any object, there are a number of different ways I can show it to you. I can show you its silhouette, whether or not the surface is reflective…When choosing how best to display an object you have to ask what is it that you're trying to get across. Is it the glaze, its weight or the shape of its handle?
>
> (Williams 2005: 30)

Although acknowledging that there are multiple readings inherent in an object (even when viewed from a purely aesthetic perspective) which can be emphasised through presentation techniques, Williams' also suggests that objects have an individual, deeply imbued meaning and an innate capability to communicate this meaning to visitors that ought not to be drowned out by curatorially-imposed narrative:

> Every object has its own voice and for me that voice needs to be heard first.
>
> (Williams 2005: 30)

My research reveals evidence that contradicts Williams' notion that museum objects are inherent transmitters of meaning, to be displayed with

ostensibly minimal curatorial or scenographic intervention, and supports an argument that the reading of an exhibited object is ultimately determined by highly subjective curatorial strategies. Reference to the work of American artist Fred Wilson who has, since the late 1980s, maintained a practice that investigates the power of the museum and its conventions of presentation to imbue meaning, provides evidence that the reading of an object is influenced by the presentation techniques employed in its display. Wilson describes an early project, staged in a museum in The Bronx, New York in the late 1980s entitled *Rooms With a View: The Struggle Between Cultural Context and the Context of Art*. For the project Wilson, acting as artist/curator, borrowed work from over 30 contemporary artists. To display the work he fitted out a series of rooms as 'a contemporary gallery, the white cube…a small ethnographic museum…a turn-of-the century salon space' (Karp and Wilson 1996:252). Wilson reports that the location of the artists' work significantly influenced how it was read, to the extent that a particular set of work, placed in Wilson's 'ethnographic museum' was read as 'ethnographic' by a dealer who had displayed the same objects in her contemporary art gallery the previous month (Karp and Wilson 1996: 252). Wilson describes that this project was, in terms of his practice, 'a watershed event', which prompted his conclusion that:

> Curators, whether they think about it or not, really create
> how you are to view and think about these objects.
>
> (Karp and Wilson 1996: 253)

David Dernie reiterates Wilson's conclusion, again in opposition to Williams' position:

> …what museums do is highly constructed: they clear
> space and make comments on objects…Winston

Churchill's teaspoon, for example, is just a dumb object when placed casually, but when reconstructed it can become an emotionally engaging fragment of history.

(Dernie 2006: 6)

Wilson and Dernie advocate a curatorial approach where, although an exhibition narrative might originate from the object, it is explicitly constructed and narrated by the curatorial voice. Indeed, rather than permitting an object to present meaning, Wilson sees the aestheticised approach as negating meaning and, with reference to ethnographic material in particular concludes that 'the aesthetic anaesthetizes the historic…and continues the dislocation of what these objects are about.' (Karp and Wilson 1996: 253).

That objects can reflect various curatorial readings is illustrated in the recent catalogue for the exhibition *Yohji Yamamoto* (V&A, London, 2011), where dress historian Alexis Romano contributes an essay in which she drafts a historiography of the appearance of Yamamoto's work in fashion exhibitions. Her analysis illustrates how the designer's work, appearing in various exhibition narratives, is open to multiple interpretations and can, depending on context, be read as 'exotically Japanese or revolutionary, high art or high fashion.' (Romano 2011: 98). Of course with a designer who produces several collections each year, each collection consisting of many garments, it is not surprising that selected garments can be used in various exhibition contexts to illustrate different narratives or concepts. If we take the same process, however, and apply it to one garment, we can see that a singular garment can also be used to reflect many meanings, and these meanings are selected, constructed and reconstructed by the curator as the exhibition narrative or themes demand.

Through my study of fashion exhibitions for this research, it is apparent not only that the work of certain designers, such as Comme des Garçons, Maison Martin Margiela, Hussein Chalayan, Junya Watanabe, Yohji Yamamoto, Viktor & Rolf, Alexander McQueen, appears in numerous exhibitions with very different themes as Romano attests, but that even individual garments repeatedly appear in exhibitions to illustrate very different narratives. Maison Martin Margiela's *Porcelain Waistcoat* features in *Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1998) to illustrate the reciprocal relationship between fashion and art in the twentieth century, *Goddess* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004) to show the influence of Classical sculpture on fashion and in *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2008) where it participates in a thematic analysis of the Maison's work, and in a section entitled Destroy and in *The Art of Fashion: Installing Allusions* (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2009) where it represented a conceptual and aesthetic reference point for newly commissioned work.

To illustrate that this phenomenon is not unique, a similar trajectory can be traced using garments from Junya Watanabe's *Techno Couture* womenswear collection for autumn/winter 2001-2002. Almost identical versions of these highly coloured, architectural garments sculpted from accordion pleated synthetic organza appear in *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2001) and *Mutilate?/Vermink?* (MUHKA, Antwerp, 2001) to illustrate the relationship between fashion and corporeal mutation, *Radical Fashion* (V&A, London, 2001) as representative of avant-garde practice, *Fashion in Colors* (Smithsonian Cooper Hewitt, New York, 2005) reflecting the use of colour in fashion, *XXIème CIEL: Mode in Japan* (Musée des Arts Asiatiques, Nice, 2003) and *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2010) as reflecting a contemporary Japanese aesthetic, and finally, in *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and*

Architecture (Somerset House, London, 2008), to illustrate comparative practice in fashion and architecture.

Evidence of an object's ability to assume relevance within varying exhibition narratives confirms that objects can reflect multiple interpretations and that the reading of an object is constructed through curatorial intervention. As Judith Clark writes in her statement in the catalogue to the exhibition *Het ModeMuseum/The Fashion Museum: Backstage* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2002):

> 5. Curating is like creating a new grammar, new patterns
> of time and reference. The readability of objects
> shifts…Unlike language, but more like the multiple
> meanings of a pack of tarot cards, objects can be read
> back to front and side to side.
>
> (Clark 2002: 147)

Observation of exhibition-making practice in the four key exhibitions from MoMu supports this argument, and the following analysis illustrates those techniques of discriminatory selection, juxtaposition, the appropriation of non-museum objects and manipulation of the visitor's view of an object, used to focus, construct and project meaning around the object on display.

Faced with the archives of The Russian State Historical Museum, A. F. Vandevorsts' selection strategy for the exhibition *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005) was to look for objects that corresponded to characteristic themes in their work and that generated an emotional response (Brouns 2005: 16). They chose objects such as boots, fur garments and uniforms that showed signs of wear instead of 'apparel from the times of the czars, or the gowns of the ladies-in-waiting at any given court' (Brouns 2005: 16). Shown a collection of

beautiful French-inspired lingerie, they opted instead for simple, commonplace stockings and underwear that had a particular resonance with their own designs. Their sympathy with these garments was received with consternation by the Museum curators, obviously keen to show the more magnificently impressive items from their collection. Their rigorous selection process, 'in search of things that fit into our tale, things that touch us' (Brouns 2005: 16), was led by an already established narrative determined by their existing aesthetic predilection and design practice: only those objects that passed through the filter of their pre-determined criteria appeared in the exhibition. The designers also attest to the selection being heavily influenced by emotional response. In selecting objects to illustrate a predetermined personal narrative, rather than forming the narrative from the objects available, A. F. Vandevorst preference and promote a particular aspect of the object, thus influencing the visitor's reading of the object through curatorial processes of selection and display.

In the exhibition catalogue, *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (Clark 2004) curator Judith Clark reveals a diagrammatic representation of her curatorial process; thumbnail images of the garments selected for display are printed on a double-page spread, each garment linked to others with thin black lines in a spider's web of reading and meaning (Clark 2004: 110-111). This 'genealogy' as Clark describes the diagram, is a family tree of the exhibition, but rather than offering a linear narrative, or clearly defined thematic groupings, it presents us with garments that have interlinked relationships whether based on a reading of concept or surface, where 'white' can also mean 'pleats' and where 'black' can also mean 'distressed' [Fig. 8.2]. The images of the exhibition selection are laid out like playing cards, and just like a deck of cards, their individual value can shift from suit, to colour, to number depending on the curator's hand. In revealing the curatorial process, Clark invites the reader or visitor to take

Fig. 8.2 Diagram by curator Judith Clark showing the 'genealogy' of objects presented in *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back.*
Fig. 8.3 The Harlequin Marionette Theatre from *Malign Muses.*

up the cards, shuffle them, and deal out new groupings. And as Clark's genealogy reveals her process of selection and thematic combination, it also, more importantly, reveals the curatorial process of juxtaposition that emphasises one particular reading of an object over another.

Viewing an image of an outfit by Dries Van Noten selected by Clark for the exhibition *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004), we may not instinctively regard the diamond-weave pattern as its most notable or remarkable feature, and we might focus instead on the drape of the neckline, the texture of the blanket-like weave, or the graphic emphasis of the red border pattern. When Clark, however, presented the same garment in the exhibition, interpreting the pattern as evocative of the traditional Harlequin's check and displaying the garment alongside other, more overt examples, particularly Parisian couturier Elsa Schiaparelli's *Harlequin Ensemble* from 1951, the pattern on the Van Noten outfit was amplified and the visitor's reading re-focused [Fig. 8.3]. Through a process of juxtaposition, Clark guided our gaze so that our focus came to rest on the association she, as curator, had decided to privilege:

> 7. Curating is about creating sympathetic allegiances between objects, investing them through association with a lop-sided elegance.
>
> (Clark 2002: 150)

Clark also used the exhibition design to accentuate the harlequin reading; the scene was framed by a proscenium constructed from a design by collaborator Ruben Toledo depicting two Harlequin-like figures standing one either side of the stage, looking into the scene with the same viewpoint as the visitor. Elegantly sketched, the graphic diamond-check pattern on the figures' clothes and the swags of cloth framing the stage repeated the section's visual message, subliminally reinforcing the

curatorial narrative. As Clark also used the exhibition set to underpin a particular meaning in relation to the objects she presented, there are other examples from the key exhibitions from MoMu where the process of creating meaning is not determined by those objects available from the museum collection and the exhibition scenography, but is constructed through the inclusion of non-museum objects which are imported to evoke associations, generate phenomenological effect and create meaning.

When A.F. Vandevorst imagined an installation in *Katharina Prospekt* inspired by a predilection for the use of heavy, military inspired boots in their own design work, they combined objects from their own collection (both their reference collection and womenswear collection) alongside those from the Moscow State Historical Museum, with items from neither collection set out to be viewed as isolated objects in glass vitrines [Fig. 8.4]. What the visitor experienced was a three metre high corridor formed by tall shelves constructed from steel warehouse racking, each set of shelves holding dozens of pairs of boots. These boots were arranged in barrack-room like rows, the regimented repetition, evoking military mass, power and conformity overwhelmed the visitor's view of any one particular pair. The visitor's experience was dominated by an abstract, experiential sense of the object, of serried ranks, a reiteration of shape, colour and texture, an overwhelming smell of leather and rubber, repeated evidence of dilapidation, use and wear.

It was only on close inspection that the visitor would realise that there were boots with singular markings, forms and patterns; boots from the Great War, elaborately tooled-leather boots from remote parts of Russia, elegant boots made to be worn with nineteenth century cavalry uniform, finely worked boots from A.F. Vandevorsts' own recent womenswear collection, all subsumed in row upon row of insignificant boots from army surplus stores purchased solely for the fabrication of this installation. In a
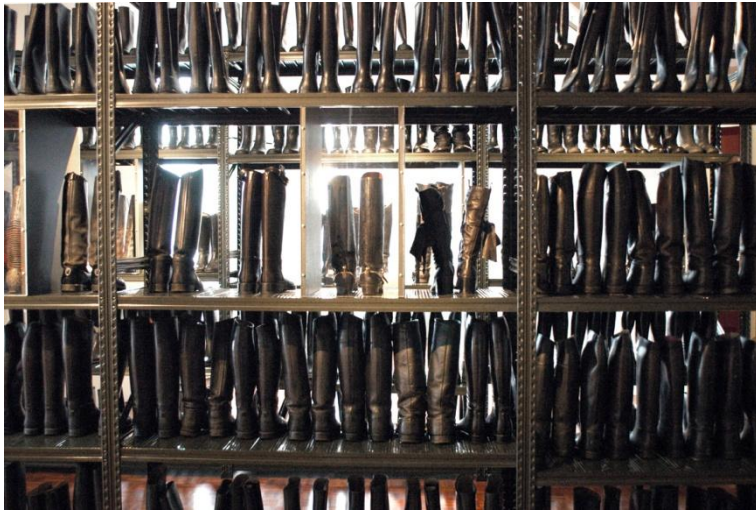
Fig. 8.4 Installation of military boots as presented in *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst.*
Fig. 8.5 Angelo Figus' installation L'Ultima Tentazione (The Last Temptation), *Genovanversaeviceversa.*

simulation of military anonymity, the authors sacrificed the individual museum object and the visitor's expectation to view this 'special' object in isolation, in order to emphasise the abstract sense of mass, the military source of the object and the associations and meanings it projects when worn, whether on the battle-field or the street. In this installation, A. F. Vandevorst eschew the convention of the isolated, objectified museum specimen and, through creative presentation, construct an evocative, associative installation. As critic and curator Germano Celant comments on the use of similar techniques in the curating of art exhibitions:

> This method has the merit of exhibiting not only objects, but the connections among various cultural processes as well as their political implications. Everything is thus reduced to a document of its time, so that "masterpieces" (as idealism would define them) are equivalent to so-called "minor works". Connotations of quality disappear and hierarchical differences are destroyed.
>
> (Celant 1996: 385)

Angelo Figus, in *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003) also explored the symbolism of footwear, but to communicate a very different message than A.F. Vandevorsts' installation of boots. In a small room towards the centre of his exhibition the visitor encountered a surreal scene - in a lime green coloured room a seventeenth century painting of an interior scene in a heavy gilt frame hung on the wall. The painting portrayed a fashionably-dressed young woman in the centre with two other women to her left. Under the painting was a Rococo-style sofa of white painted wood with gilt decoration [Fig. 8.5]. Either of these two objects could have been from a museum collection and thus be the conventional focus for the visitor's scrutiny, but neither were the sole focal point in the room. Attention was, instead, diverted to a tumultuous landslide of garishly

coloured stiletto-heeled shoes that came pouring through a false window on the left side of the room, threatening to engulf sofa, painting and visitor whose attention was challenged; with no one object singled out by display case or plinth, it was not immediately obvious what the 'object' in the scene was.

In the exhibition guide, or lexicon that Figus produced to accompany the exhibition, he titled this space L'Ultima Tentazione (The Last Temptation) and went on to give further clues as to the meaning of the assemblage. His motivation lies in the literary form of the *monologue intérieur* which he describes as a 'stream of consciousness or ideas' that:

> …manifests itself in the course of our everyday perceptions and experiences, and leads to surreal mutual connections.
>
> (Bracke 2003: 6)

Having explained his rationale, Figus gives further clues to the scene. The young woman in the painting lifts her dress very slightly to reveal the point of her satin shoe and Figus lexicon reads:

> …in the 17th Century shoes were not only erotically suggestive, they also reflected the status and wealth of their wearer.
>
> (Bracke 2003: 6)

The scene that we experienced is itself a product of Angelo Figus' own *monologue intérieur* and the associations that he creates. The cascade of stilettos, covered in startlingly-hued Mantero silks, are the contemporary equivalent of the satin shoe in the painting, echoing its pointed shape, seductively shimmering fabric and promise of erotic fetishisation. The

erotic associations can even extend to the bench, whose overly-sinuous leg, with its provocatively turned out foot, echoes the foot of the young girl in the painting, whose shoe-shape, in turn, is repeated in the tumult of stiletto-heeled shoes that engulf the room. Indeed as Figus exhibition guide insists, the meanings that we make are the result of our own - curatorially guided - associations:

> Just as the objects exhibited only assume any meaning in the context of their respective rooms, the concepts only take on their full significance in the stream of associative thoughts of each visitor-traveller.
>
> (Bracke 2003: 3)

Whilst he attests to the active role the visitor plays in creating narratives from the constructions he presents, it could also be suggested that Figus-as-author writes an unequivocally focussed script once the visual clues he compiles are put together. The objects that are used to compose Figus' shoe-scene are selected solely for the purpose of elucidating his narrative, which is constructed by their juxtaposition. As the purpose of the objects is to both suggest and recount narrative their origin, whether from the museum collection, high-street store, second-hand shop or personal collection, is irrelevant. The constructions created by Figus and A. F. Vandevorst usurp the supremacy of the museum object through processes of selection and accumulation, bringing objects from the world outside the museum together with collection material to create associations and installations that communicate narrative and meaning. The set-pieces that they assemble do not present the museum object in isolation and the objects that Figus and A. F. Vandevorst import into the museum are more than props or set dressing, they conspire to make meaning and carry narrative.

In *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rapell* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007) we see the wholescale importation of 'foreign objects', that is objects not belonging to the museum or borrowed from another museum collection or archive, taken to an extreme; severed mannequin 'zombie' heads, rubber bats with horned skulls, plastic dinosaurs, toy trains, defunct computers, monitors and key-boards, even a stuffed dog [Fig. 8.6]. The role of these objects was not always so narrative-specific as in the installations by Figus and A. F. Vandevorst, and they operated on a more scenographic level, reinforcing the sense of chaotic anarchy that was communicated through the exhibition installation. These objects assumed relevance through their role in contributing to the exhibition landscape: in constructing the stage or setting, the exhibition atmosphere, in which the museum objects were read.

The potential danger of incorporating non-museum objects into a display is that, without a specific role in the creation of meaning or narrative, they become merely props with little integrity or purpose. In *Maison Martin Margiela*, in a section titled Paint which elaborates on the Maison's signature technique of using special coatings to 'paint' garments and products, a pile of used domestic paint cans are left at the side of the installation [Fig. 8.7]. Whilst adding an element of humour to the display, they do not contribute anything significant to the reading of the objects on display or the exhibition narrative. Evidence gathered from my exhibition review can further illustrate this point with reference to two exhibitions of work by Yohji Yamamoto; *Yohji Yamamoto; Juste des Vêtements* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2005) and *Yohji Yamamoto at Work* (Fashionspace Gallery – London College of Fashion, London, 2011). Both exhibitions featured reconstruction of the designer's work space; *Juste des Vêtements* featured an 'Exact replica of Mrs. Shimosako's office, Head of Yohji Yamamoto's ateliers in Tokyo, April 2005' (Debo 2006: 43), whilst *Yohji Yamamoto at Work* appeared to be set in a version of a designer's

Fig. 8.6 A plethora of objects contribute to the overall landscape of *Bernhard Willhelm*.
Fig. 8.7 Abandoned paint pots in *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition*.

atelier. The meticulous reconstruction at Les Arts Décoratifs, which projected into the gallery from one of the permanent display cases, used shelving copied from the original atelier and a moveable workbench to form a barrier around the space. Viewed from outside, the effect was that of an authentic workspace, the cutting of a paper pattern, laid out on the table, as if just interrupted. These non-museum objects, brought into the museum to create this spatial construction create the effect of a privileged glimpse into the creative process of the designer.

For the installation at the Fashionspace Gallery which, according to information on the venue website, expressed a desire to be 'an immersive and multi-layered experience of creation' ("Exhibitions/current/Yohji Yamamoto" n.d.), the exhibition narrative revolved around the creation of a single garment by Yamamoto from conception to presentation. Amongst the fascinating material used to illustrate the narrative – photographs of the designer at work, toiles and fabric samples, casting sheets for the runway show – were what appeared to be boxes of buttons and rolls of paper that suggested the working environment of the studio. Close inspection, however, revealed that the boxes were empty, and the rolls of paper were blank rolls of white cartridge paper – the objects were simply props, set dressing, lacking authenticity. It might be argued that this lack of authenticity might not be noticed by the general visitor and, as Fred Wilson attests:

> It's only when you're in a field that you notice the smaller aspects that the average person does not see…you notice when the lighting is not right, when the labels are not right in a museum.
>
> (Karp and Wilson 1996: 252)

I would argue, however, that the contemporary visitor, familiar with 'handling material' and 'interactives' as an accepted part of the museum landscape, would be likely to investigate accessible material such as the boxes and rolls of paper and, having found that they reveal nothing, would sense a feeling of disappointment. Whilst the integration of non-museum objects can be indispensible in shaping the visitor's reading of the museum object and the exhibition narrative, I would argue that without purpose and integrity, their role is merely decorative. The non-museum objects in the key exhibitions from MoMu always justify their presence through the meaning and narrative that is invested in them and that they are intended to communicate, rather than as decorative props that furnish a scene.

While the previous examples reveal how a reading of objects can be influenced through their selection, juxtaposition with other objects and staging, there are also techniques that can be employed to visually influence the view or appearance of the object so that a particular reading is emphasised. In *Malign Muses* Judith Clark used a variety of visual devices - peep-holes, lenses and mirrors - to literally focus the visitor's view of an object; peep-holes were used to frame garments so that similarities were emphasised, lenses magnified details that embodied a particular narrative, concave mirrors presented simulacrum reflections that visually suggested the potentially distorting effect of looking back to the past [Fig. 8.8]. These devices were used to call into question how we look at the history of fashion and how we interpret what we see:

> …the exhibition considers what we are doing when we
> look at the past and how our looking might be visualised.
> Each of these objects both aid and distort the way we look
> back. We are always rooted in our point of view, looking

Fig. 8.8 Lenses used to distort the viewer's gaze in *Malign Muses*.
Fig. 8.9 Dior gown silhouetted against Ruben Toledo's spectral shadows in *Malign Muses.*

from somewhere in particular with a purpose in mind. Looking always transforms what it sees.

(Clark 2004: 22-23)

With its emphasis on the very act of looking as a way of making meaning, Clark's inclusion of optical devices not only manipulates how an object is seen, but also opens up the possibility of establishing the act of 'viewing' as a creative practice in itself. In this respect, the visitor-cum-fair-goer created through Clark's landscape construction becomes an ever more active participant in the making of the exhibition.

In a construction created in collaboration with illustrator Ruben Toledo, Clark set up a sophisticated visual pun on the notion of the dress silhouette. Toledo contributed a set of drawings of four exaggerated historic silhouettes from the early eighteenth to the twentieth century, which were fabricated from ply-wood as large-scale cut-outs and hung from a revolving wheel inside a framework structure covered in stretched fabric. The cut-out silhouettes, lit from behind and turning slowly created the effect of an enormous magic lantern, on whose surface the distorted shadows of recognisable period styles, stripped of decorative detail, eerily drifted in and out of focus. In front of this installation Clark placed a single black gown by Parisian couturier Christian Dior. The dress, a full-skirted, corseted, strapless evening dress in black silk faille from 1955, devoid of surface decoration, presented an exquisitely refined sculptural statement [Fig. 8.9]. In Clark's installation, the dress was lit so that it was visible to the visitor only as a silhouette, an emphatically solid black shape standing stately, while Toledo's ghoulish modes passed back and forth behind it. The Dior dress stood immobile, rooted to the spot, as if haunted by fashions of the past.

Clark's poetic installations, although very deliberately constructed were, by their very nature open to a number of readings. There were no didactic texts on display to the visitor to give a definitive interpretation of these theatrical vignettes. Instead, passages from fashion historian Caroline Evans' book *Fashion at the Edge,* included as citations and reproduced as images of annotated galley proofs in the accompanying catalogue (Clark 2004: 18-40), were posted at specific points throughout the exhibition, like a paper-trail of clues. Clark's catalogue texts gave an indication of the intended reading yet there are still ambiguities:

> In the fantasy past clothes can be anything we want them to be. In this conjuring of dress, clothes fit the body as a shadow does. The tricks of the circus, the typecasting of the harlequin and the shape-shifting of the shadows all distract us from history, masking its details.
>
> (Clark 2004: 30)

Titled Phantasmagoria, this particular construction in *Malign Muses* presented a fascinating puzzle where meaning faded in and out of focus as did the shadows projected by the magic lantern; was the two-dimensional Dior gown a blank screen onto which the visitor might project personal meaning? Do we lose some of the meaning of a garment when we view it through the filter of criteria such as 'silhouette'? Are modern designers haunted by the silhouettes of past eras? While a single reading was evasive, what cannot be disputed is that through the deliberate use of lighting to accentuate the silhouette, Clark manipulated the Dior dress so that one particular view of it was privileged: the usual museum narratives of design, manufacture and provenance were, in this instance set aside in favour of a narrative of aesthetic and temporal juxtaposition. The dress became a player in Clark and Toledo's silhouette game and was visible to

the visitor only as a flat black shadow inseparable in its role from the exhibition landscape in which it was placed:

> …the symbiotic process for bringing together both ideas and objects in the space was part of a continuing dialogue that characterised the very essence of the exhibition…the installation itself was as much its subject matter as the objects that would fill it.
>
> (Evans 2004: 43)

In extreme examples of curatorial manipulation the museum object can become subsumed in a narrative that does not have is roots in any obvious reading of the object's innate physical properties or any overt aspect of its biography, as evidenced in French artist Gotscho's scenography for *XXIème Ciel; Mode in Japan*. Gotscho, who often uses clothing and furniture as material in his work as a metaphor for human absence has regularly collaborated with fashion designers to make his work, including Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons and Italian couturier Ungaro ("Solo Gotscho/Ungaro Interview: Gotscho" n.d.). Asked to devise the scenography for an exhibition of contemporary Japanese fashion design, he created an installation where the garment's individual identity appeared to take second place to the work that is made from it [Fig. 8.10]. Although Gotscho worked with two eminent dress curators (Pamela Golbin, Head Curator of 20th and 21st Century Fashion, Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris and Patricia Mears, at the time Curator of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York) he asserted his position as both designer and curator of the show:

> The art direction of the show is totally my concept, totally under my control, you could say I am the curator too.
>
> ("Solo Gotscho/Ungaro Interview: Gotscho" n.d.)

Fig. 8.10 Installation by Gotscho incorporating a dress by Yohji Yamamoto in the exhibition *XXIème Ciel; Mode in Japan.*

Viewing Gotscho's work, however, it is apparent that unlike the curators responsible for the MoMu presentations, he uses the museum garments almost as raw material from which to create sculptural pieces for his own expression. It is worth noting that the venues planned for the exhibition tour were all contemporary art spaces. Gotscho's remarks, however, reflect Fred Wilson's opinion that in the situation of an artist working in the museum with collections, the museum object can be subsumed into the artist's work. As Wilson comments in relation to one of his museum projects:

> I didn't curate the show – this is my artwork. I make that distinction. Although people looked at the exhibition and saw it as a curated exhibition, which is fine, for me it's something else entirely, it's my work.
>
> (Karp and Wilson 1996: 254)

Bearing this in mind, it must be emphasised that the curatorial interventions that comprise key exhibits at MoMu always maintain a reading of the object, however personal, at their core and although presentation techniques are employed to manipulate the visitor's reading of an object, the transubstantiative process effected by artists such as Gotscho and Wilson are not evident.

Reflecting on Van Saene's exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* we must also consider what might be called the 'immaterial object': content presented through aural and visual media and other sensory phenomenon. Whilst this kind of material is usually viewed as supplementary interpretive material, to give background or context to the material objects on display or to create atmosphere, from the analysis of *2Women-2Vrouwen* we see that the immaterial - sound, projected film footage, even perfume - can be used to carry both concept and narrative in the same way as material

objects. I would assert that this makes a case for the expansion of the definition of object to include all material that is intended for the visitor's experience. Whilst this proposes an intriguing premise for curatorial practice, audience response to *2Women-2Vrouwen* indicates that, despite being given access to fascinating and rarely seen vintage footage and sound recordings of Chanel, visitors did not regard this material as equivalent to the conventional museum object:

> …revealed by comments written by visitors in the Visitors' Book. The drift was positive, undoubtedly, but here and there in its entirety it was thought to be too thin, or insufficiently explained or lacking depth.
>
> (Verbergt 2001:16)

To put these comments in context, however, it is also worth noting that statistical analysis of the 48,000 visitors to the show, reveals that more than half were older than 40 years of age and, I would argue, possibly less likely to have the same regard for the multi-media material that comprised a significant portion of the exhibition than a younger, 'digital-native' audience may have had.

As presented, the selection, placement and presentation of the object in the four key exhibitions from MoMu is often very different from the conventions expressed in the majority of exhibitions visited. In all four exhibitions cited from MoMu we experience a confusion of expectations, a blurring of the boundaries that usually delineate the manifestation and treatment of the object in a museum setting. Within the heavily constructed interiors of the MoMu presentations there is often little distinction made between museum objects and supplementary objects, or props, conscripted by the author to make meaning or carry the exhibition narrative. The visitor's reading of an object is often subject to, and

therefore profoundly influenced by, various curatorial techniques and presentation devices. These techniques are employed deliberately to influence the visitor's gaze, to manipulate the appearance or view of an object in order to construct or emphasise a particular reading concomitant with the author's narrative, concept or thesis.

In this selection of exhibitions the museum object, which in most exhibitions would be presented as a focal point, becomes part of an assemblage of objects and scenery, incorporated into a narrative landscape constructed from, and populated by, many objects of various provenances. As players in these presentations, all objects, whether from the museum, the designers' own collections, the antique shop or the toy shop have equal status. The curators of these constructions propose a sense of equivalence, of object 'parity' where the museum object may be the point of departure for their imagination or argument, but any museological status or canonical meaning is secondary to its place, alongside any other material, in the exhibition narrative.

The curators whose work is analysed here select the objects they present for their narrative or communicative purpose, no matter what its source or provenance. The collocation of the museum object and the found or appropriated object within a single narrative could imply a lack of regard for the museum object. I would argue, however, that it is important to emphasise that these techniques are not intended to disempower the museum object or to undermine its value or authenticity, but rather to assist the exhibition curator to express and communicate messages beyond the museum or dress-historical taxonomic codes of date, designer, place, fabric. As exemplified by Angelo Figus in *Genovanversaeviceversa*:

> …a setting was created in which the baroque objects,
> paintings, and fabrics come back to life in a contemporary

context, free from their rigid historical and academic framework…the concept of 'Baroque' is subjected to a contemporary 'interpretation', in which the restrictions of time, space and stereotypical definitions are questioned and gradually fade away.

(Bracke 2003: 3)

Within the context of the key MoMu exhibitions, the prime importance of all objects is to contribute to the communication of the curator's specific exhibition narrative. And while the museum object may be the inspiration for the factual or fictional exhibition narrative, once it takes its place in the story-space of the exhibition landscape the museum object is presented as being no more or less important than the objects with which it shares the narrative space. This definition of object as conduit of narrative and meaning in the exhibition is brought about, as demonstrated by the evidence presented in this chapter, by techniques of selection, juxtaposition and manipulation exerted by the curator. These techniques are employed to privilege a particular reading of an object and also reinforce its inclusion in the exhibition as a collaborative constituent in constructing an exhibition narrative. As Michelle Nicol remarks in relation to *Bernhard Willhelm*:

When I put a shoe on a white pedestal, I thereby state that the shoe is not just a commodity, but also a work of art. If that shoe is part of an installation that investigates the idea of 'shoe'…then I perceive the shoe as an 'intelligent particle' amongst other particles.

(Nicol 2005: 130)

Informed by analysis of the techniques of selection and presentation of the object as demonstrated in the exhibitions cited, the challenge in my

practice-based research is to replicate the approach so succinctly described by Nicol, of regarding and presenting the object on display not solely as a specimen imbued with value and meaning through conventional scenographic isolation on plinth, pedestal or under glass, but as an 'intelligent particle' in the exhibition narrative.

Chapter 9: Identification, Description and Definition of the Presentation Mode 'The Body'

This chapter focuses on the representation of the human body in fashion exhibitions. Inspired by scenographic techniques used by curator Dirk Van Saene in the exhibition *2Women-2Wrouven* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) discussed in Chapter 4 to evoke the presence of couturier Gabrielle Chanel, this chapter will bring together those techniques, observed through my extensive sample of fashion exhibitions, that dealt with the presence of the human body. I will commence the chapter by defining the notion of the body in the fashion museum in relation to my analysis. I will continue by illustrating my argument that the method of representing the body in relation to the display of clothing in the museum context shapes the viewer's understanding of a particular garment. I will present those conventions prevalent in representing the body observed in my research and follow this with analysis of a number of strategies, using two-dimensional pictorial, three-dimensional sculptural, performative, and multi-media techniques, observed in my exhibition visits that, I propose, successfully represent the human presence in the context of the museum fashion exhibition.

My investigation concerns the various techniques that are used in exhibitions both to replace the physical body for the display of garments and those methods that may be employed to render the body apparent in the exhibition space; within this research I use the term 'the body' to describe all sensory phenomena that can convey the body (image, sound, scent, activity or evidence of activity) rather than merely the plastic replication of a body form. As documented in my account of *2Women-2Vrouwen*, curator Dirk Van Saene used a variety of media – photographic images, transcribed citation, perfume, spoken word and projected moving

image – to effectively conjure the spirit of Chanel, to animate the presentation and establish the presence of the couturier in the exhibition.

One of the greatest challenges facing the curator or designer when staging fashion exhibitions in a museum is the provision of an adequate armature that will re-form and support the garment in its original flat-cut or three dimensional, sculptural shape, and at the same time satisfy recognised international museum conservation standards. In *The Study of Dress History* (Taylor 2002), Lou Taylor devotes considerable pages of her chapter on the display and interpretation of dress to the discussion of this issue.

Taylor notes that there has been a recent tendency in the design of substitute body forms for fashion exhibitions to construct a shape which supports the garment but that is invisible to the viewer:

> The latest transatlantic trend in static display design is the development of conservationally correct, hollow mannequins, each shaped to the exact measurements of the inner layer of the garment it will 'wear'.
>
> (Taylor 2002: 28)

This form of armature was used exclusively for the presentation of garments in *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective* (first staged at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2000 and latterly at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2003), where clear acrylic mounts were individually tailored to each garment so as to be almost invisible. Supremely elegant and discrete, even the shoe-string straps of jewelled halter-tops and evening gowns were held in mid-air by barely perceptible acrylic constructions [Fig. 9.1]. On the eve of the show's presentation in London, Christopher Breward, at the time Professor of Cultural History, London

Fig. 9.1 Installation view of *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective*, showing the 'invisible' mannequins that have recently become popular in fashion exhibitions.
Fig 9.2 Dress by Azzedine Alaïa, presented on an invisible mannequin in the exhibition *Histoire Idéale de la Mode*.

College of Fashion and Head of Research at the V&A, London, and currently Head of Edinburgh School of Art and Vice Chancellor of Edinburgh University, reviewed the exhibition as presented in New York. Breward remarked:

> The collection of more than 400 suits, coats and dresses, exquisitely mounted on near-invisible armatures, resembled a gathering of headless angels hovering in subtly lit clouds of pure colour…
>
> (Breward 2004)

Extremely costly to manufacture, this form of support is rarely used throughout an entire exhibition. Other examples indicate that this form of mount is often reserved for items where the viewer's gaze is encouraged towards an aestheticised reading of the object on display. In *Histoire Idéale de la Mode*; *Les Années 1900-2000* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2010), the second instalment of two exhibitions that documented the work of selected high-profile fashion designers throughout the later part of the twentieth century, most garments were displayed in groups, either on commercial mannequins or Stockman-type dress forms. In the display devoted to Paris-based designer Azzedine Alaïa, however, a single, architecturally sculpted garment was displayed on an invisible acrylic mount [Fig. 9.2]. Without doubt it was the curator's intention, through rendering the body invisible, to focus the viewer's gaze on the exaggerated hour-glass silhouette created by Alaïa through his trade-mark technique - the sophisticated and technically skilled manipulation of fabric to create beautiful sculptural form.

Similarly, writer and academic Eugenia Paulicelli, in a review for *Fashion Theory* of curator Valerie Steele's exhibition *Form Follows Fashion*

(Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 2004) observed that:

> The installation is key in this exhibit; in fact some of the dresses on display are literally made to stand on their own, without mannequins.
>
> (Paulicelli 2007: 111)

The indication that this form of mounting encourages the viewer to focus exclusively on the physical qualities of the garment on display is supported by Paulicelli's review:

> One of the great merits of the exhibition is in how it makes a strong case for studying fashion and dress at the abstract non-functional level of research and experiments in design and innovation in technology and textile.
>
> (Paulicelli 2007: 113)

The risk with this style of presentation is that although it may promote a focus on the aesthetic and technical aspects of the item being presented, the notion of a wearer is nullified through the rendering invisible of the supporting form, along with this nullification is the loss of the myriad possible contextual narratives that relate clothing and wearer. As Breward indicates with reference to the exhibition *Giorgio Armani*:

> In keeping with a curatorial style that elevates clothes to the status of iconic art pieces, the exhibits were presented as decontextualised objects for aesthetic appreciation…there was little attempt to inform the audience of the historical, social, technological, economic or geographical contexts that make fashion a subject

worthy of sustained study. The overriding impression was
of a glossy but ephemeral department-store window.

<div align="right">(Breward 2004)</div>

Whilst it may seem appropriate in venues more regularly used for the display of art to display garments as purely sculptural forms, as can be seen from Breward's comment, this method of display is evidently contentious. The polarity of opinion observed in the response to just one form of armature available to present dress underlines the critical role that the exhibition mount can play in constructing the viewer's reading and response to a garment. The provision of a satisfactory form that gives shape to an item is more than a practical issue of conservation, support or design: it is also an intellectual issue of interpretation and contextualisation.

As a dress historian and curator these contextual narratives are of paramount importance to Lou Taylor, and so it is no surprise that, despite seeing the seemingly invisible mount as a solution to the difficulties of 'inaccuracy and "dressing up"' associated with alternative display options, her general opinion is that they are 'Headless, armless and characterless' (Taylor 2002: 28). Taylor asserts that the ideal armature is one that does not just fulfil the concrete function of adequately supporting the garment in its three-dimensional form, but also affects a particular attitude, a sense of the body contemporary to the clothing it carries:

…every period and every culture has its own identifiable
way of standing, walking or sitting. This forms an integral
part of the 'look' of the time. If dress stands do not reflect
this accurately the clothing will simply look 'wrong'.

<div align="right">(Taylor 2002: 29)</div>

Taylor's text, emphasising the recreation of a sense of period verity, reflects her professional interests and her related museum practice bound, in her own words, by budget limitations and conservation protocol. Through a concise account of the inter-related history of the development of mannequins for retail display and museum use, Taylor examines four commonly used mannequin types (the artist's lay-figure, wax display figure, the commercial mannequin and custom-made museum mannequin). Taylor frames her account within a debate that examines the comparative advantages of realistic and stylised approaches to mannequin design and concludes that:

> The generally agreed view at the beginning of 2001 is that dress is best displayed on headless, simple, stylised, but correctly proportioned stands, with detailed, supportive, illustrative period material close by showing exactly how the garment would have been worn.
>
> (Taylor 2002: 47)

Taylor's examination of the available options is, undoubtedly, influenced by her own professional perspective, shaped within the context of her discipline at the time of writing and occupied with the care and display of heavily structured period fashion often in need of custom-made support, unlike many contemporary pieces. Placing her exhibits and interpretive strategy within the cannon of dress history, she determines that the only suitable armature is one that accurately replicates the appropriate, actual human form:

> … how can dress ever look meaningful unless it is displayed on lifelike, period-oriented mannequins posed with the correct stance, hair and cosmetics?
>
> (Taylor 2002: 41)

Concentrating on replication of the body, Taylor's approach loses what she herself has suggested as being crucially important when displaying dress or fashion; a sense of attitude representative of the human presence that goes beyond physical corporeality. Taylor's concerns are illustrated in the presentation strategies most commonly observed in my exhibition sample. The convention adopted in the majority of exhibitions documented indicates prevalence for the use of Stockman-type dress-makers forms or mannequins produced for retail display or specialist museum use: often a combination of forms is used, depending on the stock and finances of the particular museum. As previously mentioned by Taylor, the trend is for retail mannequins to be un-styled, that is without make-up or wigs. The effect is often a striving for invisibility of the form, and the impression, with both Stockman-type and un-styled retail mannequin, is that these forms supporting the garment are to be ignored by the viewer and add little value to the exhibiting of the garment.

I would argue that the 'meaningful' display of dress is not solely reliant on the adequate provision of an appropriate three-dimensional form for the garments selected for display, but that a variety of methods are possible that, within the narrative framework of each particular exhibition, can be used to express the human presence. And, just as our interaction with clothing in our everyday lives is more complex and subtle than whether the garment fits correctly, so the depiction of our interaction with a garment when presented in a museum context relies on more than an accurate three-dimensional support to tell many different stories of our relationship with clothing. In contrast to the conventional approach observed, evidence documented through my exhibition research indicates that, with careful consideration and creative thought and the professional talents of an exhibition-maker or designer, the problematic mannequin can be manipulated and modified to add further layers to both the exhibition aesthetic and narrative.

As previously indicated by Taylor, pictorial reference material can be a useful accompaniment when trying to contextualise a garment, to place it within a specific location, or to reproduce the typical manner in which it is worn. Many of the exhibitions I have evaluated for the purpose of this research use this technique; *A Family of Fashion, The Messels: Six Generations of Dress* (Millennium Galleries, Sheffield, 2003) made use of a considerable family photographic archive that included images of garments on display in the exhibition being worn in their original context. But where Taylor sees this material as 'supportive', within the narratives told in the exhibitions at MoMu pictorial representation of the body takes a more active, central, role in communicating the exhibition narrative.

In the exhibition *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005) curators A. F. Vandevorst constructed an installation that depicted the Russian propensity to wear fur which, they suggested, reflects their own fascination with the material and the regular use of fur in their own collections. This construction took the form of 'a gigantic closet with fur: blankets, scarves and shawls, boots, jackets and coats – real fur and imitation fur'. They created a 'wall of fur' which suggested the material, cultural and symbolic qualities of the material rather than the display of individual garments (Brouns 2005: 17).

Fur as clothing, rather than material, was presented in the form of a series of photographs by Russian artist, Olga Chernysheva, whose images depicted the backs of fur-clad Russian women under the harsh light of Moscow metro tunnels [Fig. 9.3]. The women were portrayed as anonymous, almost abstracted, reflecting a society where 'individuation requires heroism' (Degot 2005: 42). Chernysheva's images depict not only the transformative quality of fur, the anonymity it can provide, but also

Fig. 9.3 Image by Russian artist Olga Chernysheva, presented in *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst.*

hinted at the proximity of the harsh wilderness that lies close outside the city boundaries:

> Big, fury and self-absorbed animals make their way through the thick forest of the wintry Moscow megapolis [sic]. An army of busy moles, gophers and beavers parade through the subway.
>
> (Degot 2005: 42)

Rather than supportive, this graphic material encouraged a very particular reading of the garments displayed opposite, hung and folded on the wardrobe's rails and shelves. As A. F. Vandevorst reveal:

> Fur for us is Russia. It is a cliché perhaps, but it does tally with the real thing. If you arrive in Moscow in the winter, you see nothing else. They are all bears, walking around the streets.
>
> (Brouns 2005:17)

Chernysheva's images were used to steer the viewer towards an understanding of A. F. Vandevorsts' experience in a way that it would be difficult to achieve solely with the garments themselves. Her images showed the garments not just being worn, but being worn with what was perceived as a particular socio-culturally influenced 'attitude'. In this instance, the images were equally as important in communicating the exhibition's narrative as the garments.

Generally appearing in the form of printed illustrations or photographs, either as actual publications, photographic prints or enlarged exhibition reproductions, there are many alternative forms that two-dimensional pictorial depictions of the body can take within an exhibition narrative. For

Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004) illustrator Ruben Toledo responded to curator Judith Clark's invitation to collaborate with a visual essay exploring the exhibition's theme of referencing the past in fashion design. One of the sections from Toledo's proposal, The Avenue of Silhouettes, was subsequently commissioned by Clark for the exhibition.

Taking the form of unpainted ply-wood cut-outs that reached to the ceiling of the exhibition space, Toledo's distorted outlines of past modes dwarfed the visitor. Clark employed these representations of the fashionably-distorted body to prompt meditations on the idea of nostalgia and memory. The monumental scale of the silhouettes – 'monuments to moments' as Clark refers to them - suggests a tendency to idealise the past ("Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back, fashion installation" n.d.). These fanciful forms, based on fashions of the past, illustrated the body as a carrier of memory on which each era imprints its own signifying shape [Fig. 9.4]. But artistic licence and stylistic distortion, like the vagaries of memory, lend an ambiguity to Toledo's silhouettes; 'We are not sure whether the silhouettes are those of historical dresses or of designs for future dresses' ("Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back" n.d.). Clark communicated through Toledo's work the selective process of nostalgic memory, questioning the way in which some contemporary designers irreverently combine styles from the past in their work.

In the context of *Malign Muses*, Toledo's cartoon-like renderings of the body were much more than exaggerations of the typical silhouette used to illustrate over-simplified histories of fashion: rather they were the main vehicle that carried Clark's complex narrative. Angelo Figus, in *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003) also employed pictorial representations of the body to convey narrative but in a very different form. In an exhibition exclusively comprising flat textiles, Figus imported

Fig. 9.4 One of Ruben Toledo's monumental 'silhouettes', as presented in *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*.
Fig. 9.5 Angelo Figus Bellezza in Bicicletta (Beauty on a Bike), *Genovanversaeviceversa.*

figurative paintings to add a human dimension. Through a selection of portraits contemporary to the historic textiles on display, Figus was able to contextualise the precious silks and damasks by showing comparative examples through the clothing worn in the paintings. But Figus did not present these portraits so that the visitor might admire the drape of a fabric, or the way the cut of a sleeve fell – he encouraged the visitor to join with him in fictionalising the subjects of these portraits in a way that would be alien to their customary art gallery context. He abstracted the characters from the paintings to use them as protagonists in his surreal drama. In the third chamber of the exhibition, the aristocrat who is the subject of Genoese painter Bernardo Castelo's seventeenth century portrait becomes Figus' Bellezza in Bicicletta (Beauty on a Bike):

> I want the interior to compete with the exterior…I want to
> travel on two wheels through the avenue of my living
> room...

> (Bracke 2003: 4)

In this narrative of associations, the rich red figured velvet of her dress was juxtaposed with the modern velvet cushions (by Italian fashion and furnishings design company Etro) placed on the seats of the bicycles that participated in Figus *mise-en-scène* [Fig. 9.5]. Figus' strategy continued through the exhibition: in the fifth room was hung Milanese artist Carlo Francesco Nuvolone's *Portrait of a Young Woman with a Dog,* depicting a richly dressed female Genoese aristocrat of the early 1640s, displayed alongside an actual Fiat 500 re-upholstered in textiles by Belgian designer Dries Van Noten, captioned in the exhibition guide as:

> I want to see that beautiful Genoese lady, driving a Fiat
> 500 along the Scheldt…

> (Bracke 2003: 5)

Bernhard Willhelm also used two-dimensional pictorial representation of the human body to great narrative effect in *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007) where this 'post-modern successor to the Grimm brothers' conjured an equally surreal, but ultimately darker world (Debo 2007: 3). The exhibition comprised a series of installations made in collaboration with Swiss designers Tayo Onorato and Niko Krebs based on graphic concepts for Willhelm's look-books, where the representation of the body was central to the narrative. These installations were based on Willhelm's work which typically employs, in the words of the exhibition guide:

> …absurd visual imagery in which what at first glance seems innocent and even childlike is repeatedly, subtly undermined.
>
> (anon. 2007)

In two notable installations Willhelm combined graphic pictorial and multi-media techniques to give a characteristically gothic effect to photographic images.

To illustrate the look-book for his womenswear collection from autumn-winter 2005-2006, titled Tiger Collection, Willhelm presented a photographic image of a tableau of models wearing ensembles from the collection, styled with crimped hair and tiger-skin patterns printed over their faces [Fig. 9.6]. They posed with their hands held claw-like, in gestures that could resemble either a child acting out the motions of an attacking tiger, or the 'zombie' dance movements performed in the video for American popular music artist Michael Jackson's track *Thriller* (Landis 1983). The image was re-presented in the context of the museum exhibition as a free-standing cut-out, with the models' eyes replaced with twinkling red LED lights. In the Tyrolean Room, Willhelm presented his

Figs. 9.6, 9.7, Images showing projection and lighting techniques combined with two-dimensional photographic representations of the body in *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel*.

alpine-inspired folkloric collection through an image of young girls photographed against a twilight forest [Fig. 9.7]. The image was reproduced life-size mounted on the gallery wall and, to unsettling effect, the girls faces were projected as moving, singing images onto the photograph. Using simple two-dimensional representation combined with electronic media, Willhelm presented the body in ways that distinctively communicated the sensibility of his collections, and also created atmospheric, emotive situations within the gallery itself.

Bob Verhelst, scenographer for *Maison Martin Margiela 20 The Exhibition* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2008) also employed photographic imagery as a means of presenting the Maison's work in the exhibition. In the menswear section of the presentation, Verhelst installed a series of life-size cut-out black and white photographs taken at an event to celebrate the Maison's participation in the 2006 Pitti Immagine Uomo event in Florence. As documented in the exhibition guide, the event took the form of a party staged in a disused 1920s cinema where, alongside invited guests, 20 male models wore garments from previous menswear collections, each re-made in white fabric, the signature colour of the Maison (anon. 2008).

Verhelst set the cut-out images against a photographic back-drop showing the party location, with an actual mirror ball hanging from the ceiling, and party detritus – white balloons, glitter and plastic cups – littering the floor. Although the garments weren't on display, the installation gave visitors a sense of the occasion for which they had been created and worn, and a depiction of how the garments appeared as styled on the live models: that the garments are depicted photographically enabled the visitor to read them as part of the scene [Fig. 9.8]. In constructing the installation from life-size black and white photographs, Verhelst also made use of an effect characteristic of Maison Martin Margiela which is renowned for the use of *trompe-l'oeil* printing techniques on garments and in their retail and atelier

Fig. 9.8 Photographic representation of the body presented as three-dimensional installation in *Maison Martin Margiela '20' The Exhibition*.
Fig. 9.9 Naomi Filmer's sculptural addition to a Stockman form in *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*.

interiors. The effect is regarded as an 'outstanding metaphor for the House's complex relationship with time and history' (Debo, 2008: 4). In this installation, access to the designer's actual garments is sacrificed in order to present a construction, and evocation of an actual event, where they are contextualised not only on appropriate bodies, but with a sense of location, event and using an emblematic aesthetic strategy.

Whilst the previous examples show how creative use of two-dimensional media can effectively present the body in an exhibition space on most occasions, however, clothing in museums requires presentation on three-dimensional stands that replicate the human form. The key exhibitions from MoMu illustrate that three-dimensional techniques, ranging from very subtle additions to a drastic reworking of the body form, are possible within the guidelines of contemporary museum conservation standards.

An example of very subtle manipulation of the display form can be found in *Malign Muses* where Judith Clark employed the conventional Stockman dress-form to present garments. Although this adoption of a conventional strategy might at first appear mundane, the Stockman form, with its connotations of the work-room and the process of design and construction presented a visual equivalent of Clark's revelation of the processes of curating. The dress-forms were elevated from the commonplace, however, by jeweller Naomi Filmer's contribution to the project. Commissioned by Clark, Filmer crafted a series of sculptural interventions that added hints of the body to the Stockman forms. In some instances these were themed to the display as were a pair of arched feet wearing black-painted ballet-shoes, typical of those seen in period engravings of *commedia del' arte* characters which stood under a harlequin patterned outfit. In other scenes Filmer's additions seemed to fit to the dress form as a reminder of the actual body the form replaced; a white plaster hand floated in front of a mannequin's chest holding a mask that stood in for the figure's lower jaw

and lips, a sculptural form that looked like a body cast taken from clavicle to lower jaw sat on the shoulders of a Stockman form [Fig. 9.9]. Each of Filmer's pieces sat as evocative of a gesture on the Stockman mannequins and, in their fragmentary but life-like form evoked the body's presence whilst reminding us of its absence. Filmer's fragments appeared like incomplete memories of the body that, within Clark's exhibition narrative, equated with the idea of the transience and selective nature of memory.

Bernhard Willhelm indicated a less subtle approach to the fabrication of the forms used to display Bernhard Willhelm's work. Designers Tayo Onorato and Nico Krebs, employed as creative directors for the presentation devoted 'exceptional attention' to the dress forms for use in the exhibition, according to the exhibition guide creating;

> …new mannequins from second-hand dummies and scrap
> material, resulting in hybrid mannequins with several legs,
> arms and heads, reinforcing the dynamism and the
> humour in Willhelm's collections.
>
> (anon. 2007)

In some instances in *Bernhard Willhelm* the mannequin forms took on what could be described as a hysterical surreality, deconstructed and out-of-control, where only vestiges of the body remained; heads were replaced with slogan-bearing placards and limbs extended as crude wooden armatures as the building-site aesthetic of the Flowers in Construction Work collection (spring-summer 2003) bled into the anarchic demonstration of the Protest Room (autumn-winter 2002-2003) [Fig. 9.10]. In the Tyrolean Room mannequins stood atop mountain peaks constructed from technological waste; computers, monitors and keyboards. The mannequins, including a taxidermied dog, had monitors

Figs. 9.10, 9.11 Mannequin treatments as featured in
Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel

Figs. 9.12, 9.13 Mannequin treatments in *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* inspired by images in the look-book for the collection Framed Ghetto Boys (top).

for heads which were lit from the inside so that the redundant screen emitted an eerie glow [Fig. 9.11]. Dressed in clothes which took careful reference from traditional clothing of the Tyrol and Bavaria in both form and decorative techniques, the mannequins were manipulated to participate in a presentation that commented on the potential clash between tradition and technology in contemporary culture. The presentation of the body here was not only a pure extension of Willhelm's conceptual and aesthetic approach but was also mediated so that it carried a particular exhibition narrative, according to the designer:

"Actually it shows Tyrol in 3005…like nature in the future. It will probably be a combination of nature and trash."

(Harms 2005: 127)

Some of Onorato and Krebs' constructions were less disruptive to a sense of the body and, in fact, went some way to a literal replication. A very simple but effective technique was employed in two rooms; Japanese Workers (spring-summer 2005) and Framed Ghetto Boys (autumn-winter 2006-2007). In both instances photographic images of models heads were mounted onto mannequins, particularly effective in the Framed Ghetto Boys space, which was installed as a direct transposition of the look-book from the collection. Originally presented as a clash of contemporary urban and renaissance inspired imagery, Willhelm's Framed Ghetto Boys look-book showed images of urban-styled models in poses suggestive of a combination of street culture and renaissance painting. Each model was framed by a construction made from carved and gilt picture frame often combined with broken mirror or metal chain-link fencing [Fig. 9.12]. These frames were rebuilt in the exhibition space and the mannequins placed behind them with a photographic image of each model's head, including headwear, attached carefully onto the neck of the mannequin [Fig. 9.13]. The effect of this *trompe-l'oeil* technique was so life-like that the original

model literally appeared to replace the exhibition mannequin communicating the sense of character and personality so intrinsic to the creation and presentation of the collection itself.

Examples are also evident where the body was present in three-dimensional symbolic rather than literal form. A.F. Vandevorst used the *matryoshka*, or Russian doll, as an 'archetypal form' that represents the body in *Katharina Prospekt* (Brouns 2005: 19). The *matryoshka* appeared in several iterations; one over two metres high and covered in fur, others as a series of six standing as black abstract shapes in front of contemporary American photographer Nathan Farb's black and white images of real Russians taken in the 1960s. The most complex version was found in a display of Russian traditional dress loaned to A. F. Vandevorst for the exhibition from the State Historical Museum, Moscow. These ensembles comprised sets of exquisitely embroidered women's clothing, dating from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, with characteristic round-shouldered, bell-skirted silhouette. To protect the fragile textiles, A. F. Vandevorst displayed them inside oversized clear acrylic *matryoshka* [Fig. 9.14]. The clothing whose form suggests the very shape of the matryoshka to the designers was itself protected by the archetypical maternal form. A field of traditional, painted wood *matryoshka* surrounded the acrylic forms, keeping visitors at bay. In this installation, the body was present in its clothed form, its natural shape modified by the structure of the traditional garments, and in its symbolic form represented through the repeated *matryoshka*.

In contrast to this symbolic body, A. F. Vandevorst also employed what could be called 'performative' techniques to conjure the body in *Katharina Prospekt*. As previously described, the exhibition threshold comprised an installation where retail-type mannequins were dressed and posed to give the impression of a queue of live visitors. This humorous conceit was

continued through the exhibition where uniformed 'guards' were dressed and positioned to mimic the presence of live museum staff [Fig. 9.14].

In *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004) the notion of the performative mannequin was taken to a more complex and sophisticated level. Inspired by eighteenth century paintings and engravings, and alluding to recent imaging of the eighteenth century such as the film *Dangerous Liaisons* (Frears 1988), the exhibition was staged so that the position, grouping and gesture of the mannequins made them appear as characters in a series of *tableaux vivants*. In a suite of period rooms, a number of disconnected narratives were staged, the effect of which relied, to a large extent, on the positioning and poise of the exhibition mannequins.

The dramatic staging extended to the point where the standard upright position usually given to mannequins in fashion exhibitions, so as best to display the clothing they support without damage, was contravened. Mannequins instead were placed as their character and the action determined, sometimes standing, often sitting, but occasionally kneeling, or completely prostrate, as in the figure of a young woman who lies in a faint in The Withdrawing Room: A Helpful Valet [Fig. 9.15]. The uncommon variety of position lent each mannequin a particular energy. Mannequin groupings were used to create social dynamics within each tableau. Groups of mannequins were placed so that their arrangements created dramatic narratives; mannequins conversed on sofas, played cards and musical instruments, gossiped in groups and peered at the action from behind curtains. The mannequins used for this exhibition had articulated hands (covered in white stretch fabric also used for all exposed body areas) that allowed the creation of delicate and dramatic motions; hands held playing cards and fans, and were able to make recognisable and

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Fig. 14 Installation view of *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst*, showing matryoshka protecting objects on display, and one of the exhibition 'guards'. **Fig. 9.15** Mannequins 'perform' in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century*.

often subtle gestures [Fig. 9.16]. The combination of positioning, grouping, poise and gesture combined to give a life-like dynamic to the scenes that carried the narrative and imparted energy and spirit to the mannequins' performance in each tableaux.

In *Genovanversaeviceversa* Angelo Figus created a comparably dramatic installation in a room entitled Lo Schizofrenico (The Schizophrenic). In a stark white-painted room lit by bare light-bulbs collages of swatches of rare textiles, assembled by nineteenth century collectors, were set into the walls. A suite of Biedermeier furniture, sofas and chairs, were strewn about the room as if they had been upset during a violent struggle [Fig. 9.17]. Covered in embroidered textiles produced for Belgian fashion designer Dries Van Noten, cushions lay on the floor where they had apparently been thrown, and the upholstery on the seats was torn and dishevelled, indicating the aftermath of a violent struggle or outburst.

Unlike the aforementioned examples from the exhibition *Dangerous Liaisons*, Figus did not show the activity that resulted in the scene of chaos that the visitor encountered. He showed only the results of previous action that the viewer was left to piece together, to imagine cause or narrative. There were signs of both obsessive behaviour (the textile collages) and violent distress (the torn, disturbed furniture). Figus' exhibition guide gave a hint to illuminate his titling of the room:

> …one can link this sort of 'split personality' with the inner division of the baroque man, who did not succeed in achieving psychological harmony or synthesis. The sensory, the sensual, and an intense will to live were directly opposed to the yearning for the absolute and the transcendent. (Bracke, 2003: 10)

Fig. 9.16 Articulated hands on mannequins in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* perform subtle gestures and actions.
Fig. 9.17 The body represented by evidence of its actions in Lo Schizofrenico (The Schizophrenic), *Genovanversaeviceversa*.

In this installation Figus successfully and chillingly presented the body, in its absence, through a spatial construction that made visible the result of its actions.

Complementing these three-dimensional performative strategies, there is also evidence of electronic media techniques to represent the body in dress and fashion exhibitions. As illustrated in Van Seane's *2Women-2Vrouwen* the presence of Gabrielle Chanel, first evoked through the prominent installation of Doisneau's photographic portrait of the designer at the exhibition threshold, was repeatedly re-invoked through the exhibition by the use of broadcast recordings of the designer speaking. The fact that Chanel's words were broadcast in her own voice asserted the designer's presence both aurally and in terms of her character and spirit.

The moving image, made more accessible through digital media, is increasingly appropriated to market and communicate fashion. Many designers have recently used film as an alternative to runway presentations (Yves Saint Laurent menswear autumn-winter 2008-2009, Alexander McQueen menswear spring-summer 2010) and web sites such as Nick Night's Showstudio (Showstudio n.d.) act as creative focus for experimentation and dissemination of fashion in digital media. The communication of fashion through the internet is so popular it is hardly surprising that Alexander McQueen's spring/summer 2010 presentation, Plato's Atlantis, one of the first shows by an international designer to be streamed live, had so many subscribers that the host site shut down. In these circumstances, it should be no surprise that fashion exhibitions are increasingly using moving image and new media techniques to contextualise fashion displays. The exhibition *Mutilate?-Vermink?* (Museum of Contemporary Art (MUHKA), Antwerp, 2001), curated by Walter van Beirendonck, which related narratives exploring body

modification included a ground-breaking display in which visitors could adopt live, three dimensional avatars, taking the exhibition theme of body modification from the corporeal to the virtual world [Fig. 9.18]. Few fashion exhibitions have, however, utilised this very expensive technology although fashion houses have incorporated highly sophisticated augmented reality techniques into live presentations to extraordinary dramatic effect. These techniques, most famously the wraith-like 3D projection of Kate Moss as the finale of Alexander McQueen's autumn/winter 2006-2007 runway show Widows of Culloden ("Alexander McQueen/archive/women/2006/AW" n.d.) [Fig. 9.19] have now been developed so that simultaneous projection can appear to interact with live models, as evident in shows from Italian design company Diesel's Liquid Space presentation, staged at for the spring-summer 2008 preview at Pitti imagine, Florence, Italy ("Diesel Liquid Space" n.d.), and UK-based fashion company Burberry's Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down), staged in Beijing to launch the Burberry Prorsum autumn-winter 2011-2012 collection ("Burberry/Beijing" n.d.) [Fig. 9.20].

Designer Hussein Chalayan emulated augmented reality techniques in two sections of the exhibition Hussein Chalayan: Fashion Narratives (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2011). Chalayan used a technique similar to that developed by American artist Tony Oursler who creates installations where film footage of actors performing, with accompanying sound-track, is projected onto white spheres that form the heads of doll-like figures. Oursler refined this projection technique, often paired with dysfunctional, ranting sound-texts to create aggressive and disturbing installations. Chalayan used the technique in a less confrontational way: in I am Sad Leyla, he projected a moving image of the face of performer Sertab Erener onto a white cast of the singer wearing an outfit he designed for her performance. To represent his womenswear collection Sakoku, spring/summer 2011, which was originally presented as a film rather than
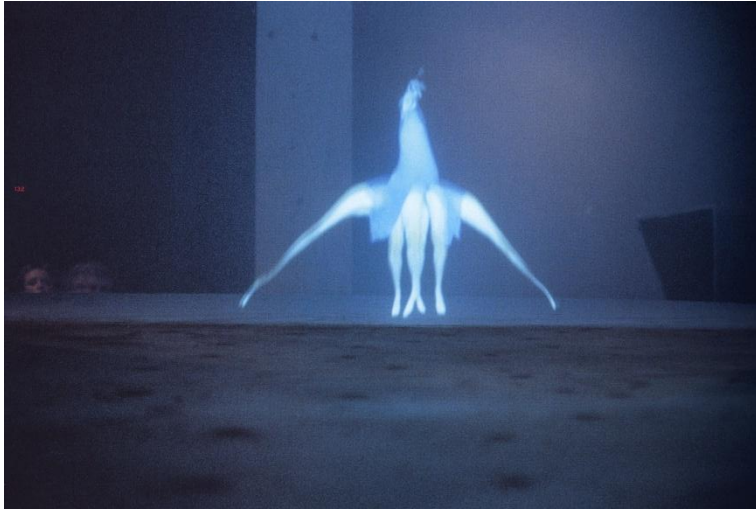
Fig. 9.18 An avatar projection presents the body as a virtual presence in the exhibition *Mutilate?/Vermink?*

Fig. 9.18 A wraith-like Kate Moss appears as a three-dimensional projection in the finale of Alexander McQueen's Widows of Culloden show.

Fig. 9.20 A 'live' model interacts with three-dimensional projected figures which shatter into fragments as they walk on the runway, in a presentation for British design company Burberry.
Fig. 9.21 Hussein Chalayan presents his collection Sakoku as a projection onto a mannequin and billowing chiffon dress in the exhibition *Hussein Chalayan: Fashion Narratives.*

Fig. 9.22 Flat-screen monitors show film of runway presentations in the exhibition *Yohji Yamamoto.*

Fig. 9.23 Life-size projection of runway footage gives the effect of models walking into the gallery space in the exhibition *The House of Viktor & Rolf*.

on the runway, Chalayan showed a life-like white mannequin wearing a white chiffon dress. The light chiffon of the dress was blown by electric fans, while the floral pattern of the chiffon and the model's face were projected onto the dressed mannequin, resulting in a surreal effect that brought movement and life to the display [Fig. 9.21].

Film of run-way presentations is often used in museums in conjunction with fashion displays; *Viktor & Rolf par Viktor & Rolf: Première Dècennie* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2003), *Showtime: Le Défilé de la Mode* (Musée Galliera, Paris, 2006), *Balenciaga Paris* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007), *Yohji Yamamoto* (V&A, London, 2011) all included screen-based moving image in their presentations [Fig. 9.22]. These films are often shown in small-screen format and, whilst giving some indication of the garment on a moving figure (although in a very specific context) they are usually of limited success in relation to communicating a sense of movement, energy and narrative in the exhibition space. Film of runway presentations can, however, be used to just these ends when the presentation is more dramatically integrated with the garments on display.

In *The House of Viktor & Rolf* (Barbican Art Gallery, London, 2008) the bays which form the upper floor of the exhibition space were each devoted to one collection by the designers. In each bay a low level platform extended into the space from the back wall and the exhibits were shown on mannequins placed at intervals along the platform. A film of the runway show for the collection was projected onto the back wall of each bay so that the cinematic run-way models were rendered life-size. In combination with the projection, the platform gave the effect of the runway extending into the exhibition space, blurring the boundary between film and museum space, runway model and museum mannequin [Fig. 9.23]. Through the simple juxtaposition of comparably scaled moving image and static mannequin, the exhibition designers were able to give a sense of

transposing some of the dynamic energy from the runway display onto the garments in the exhibition space.

Bernhard Willhelm also used moving image to present his autumn-winter 2004-2005 collection in his MoMu exhibition. Film was shown of two young women wearing garments from the collection which, as stated in the exhibition guide, were originally shown on the runway worn by 'punk girls and women picking their way across a pile of trash and junk' (anon. 2007), as they destroyed what appeared to be a teenager's bedroom with axes and hammers. The McDonalds 'Happy Meal' and Walt Disney cartoon inspired prints on the clothing were reflected in the decoration of the room, which was strewn with posters of pop stars, magazines and the teen-culture ephemera associated with young girls. This film, presented on a small screen, not only showed the garments in action on the body, but contextualised the collection's aesthetic by locating its influences in the bedroom setting.

The bedroom set used for the film had been constructed in the MoMu gallery and remained as part of the exhibition installation. Visitors were able to see - through windows that had been cut into one wall to allow filming – the result of the young women's destructive activity first-hand [Fig. 9.24]. This unsettling display of the detritus resulting from the aggressive, anarchic, performance, reminiscent of Angelo Figus' installation described earlier in this chapter, represented the spirit of the collection in a way that it would be difficult to communicate using the garments on mannequins. In this instance it could be said that the visible results of the young women's actions represent the absent body as inhabited by the radical, rebellious spirit of Willhelm's garments.

Although internationally recognised conservation standards prevent garments from being worn once they have been accessioned into a

Fig. 9.24 The detritus resulting from a 'teenage rampage' depicts the body through evidence of action in the exhibition *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel*.

collection, Willhelm and his designers side-stepped regulations by having the actors in the film wear garments that were not accessioned into the museum's collection. Despite Issey Miyake's experimentation with moving displays at the Centre Cartier, Paris, where garments were presented on sprung armatures that replicated the movement of dancers from the runway show, cited by both Saillard (2005: 167) and Taylor (2002: 27), clothing in the museum context is rarely shown in motion. Whereas in the past museum material has been worn for the purposes of photographic record it would now be considered unethical to put an original garment from a museum collection on a live body (Cumming 2004: 65). There are, however, strategies that curators have employed to show clothing on the living body.

The V&A, London, regularly organise *Fashion in Motion* events, where a designer presents work in the museum on live models. These events, which are hugely popular, side-step conservation requirements by using material from the designers' archive and collections rather than the Museum store. As the designers whose work is included in the event are often closely involved with its production, it is possible to assume that the *Fashion in Motion* format not only shows the clothing on the moving body, but addresses those issues of appropriate styling, stance, gait and gesture that (indicated in previous citation in this chapter from Lou Taylor) so exorcise dress historians and museum curators. While this form of presentation is successful in its vision to present clothing re-contextualised on the body to the public, it is more comparable in format to performance or runway presentations than exhibitions.

Only one exhibition from my sample presented the phenomenon of garments on a living body, made even more remarkable in that the body was that of the visitor. *Yohji Yamamoto: Dreamshop* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2006) included a section where clothes could be tried on by the visitor,

giving not only a sense of the garment on the body, but first-hand experience of the sensation of wearing it. Whilst designer Yamamoto saw this transgression of museum protocol as representative of his tradition of ground-breaking avant-garde design it was only possible, again, because the garments came from the designer's own archive and not the museum store. Having previously exhibited garments in the garden of the Hara Museum, Tokyo, Yamamoto finds 'the poetry of their disappearance or their being passed on to others preferable to investing great efforts in their preservation' – a characteristically reactionary assertion (Saillard 2005:164).

From the evidence gathered through my exhibition research, it is possible to conclude that the representation of the body in dress and fashion exhibitions in museums resonates far beyond the three-dimensional armature that supports a garment. The examples cited prove that there are many diverse forms and media that can be used and demonstrate that it is not purely the physical body that has need of replication, but that the representation of the body's actions and the conjuring of its spirit also give meaning to the garments on display. And while the body can be meaningfully represented physically and performatively in both two- and three-dimensional form, it can also be represented using sound and projected image and, in its absence, through visible signs of activity. Having prompted considerable reflection on the nature of the body in fashion exhibitions, and having experienced and analysed numerous techniques for realising the body in a museum context, my challenge is to consider these techniques and to utilise them in my practice-based research. Description of the implementation of the various techniques of representing the body that I have discussed in this chapter and reflection on their success in my practice based project are detailed in Chapter 11.

Part 3

Yet the installation, crucial component of any exhibition, is in and of itself *a form of modern work*, whose articulation, both spatial and visual, is worthy of consideration.

(Celant 1996: 373)

Chapter 10: Developing a Fashion Autobiography as a Proposal for a Hypothetical Exhibition

The practice-based research that constitutes a significant element of my current investigation is designed as an exercise in the practical application of the innovative presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body observed and analysed at MoMu and discussed in previous chapters. The tool intended for the implementation of this exercise, and with which to explore various resolutions in the application of these modes, is the realisation of a fashion autobiography as a detailed proposal for a hypothetical exhibition to be housed in the MoMu gallery.

The practice-based research executed during this course of study falls into four distinct phases; the inauguration and formalisation of a collection of clothing on which further research activity is based, the identification and implementation of an interrogative process intended to generate an exhibition concept, themes, and content, a developmental process designed to progress the concept and themes towards their final realisation, and the final realisation of the proposal in scale model form. This chapter begins by locating my current practice-based research in relation to previous projects and identifying those aspects intended for continued investigation alongside developmental aims. It continues with an account of the first two stages of my practice-based research; the processes of selection, ordering and inventory-making that establish the collection on which further enquiry will be based, and the development of cataloguing and documentation techniques used to identify potential narratives for the exhibition proposal. The chapter concludes by presenting reflection on exhibition publications produced for the four key exhibitions from MoMu, and how these publications influenced my

decision to use a graphic format as the developmental tool for the third stage of my practice-based research.

Continuing practice

In previous projects I carried out research into the narrative possibilities inherent in clothing, looking specifically at what could be called 'dysfunctional' relationships with clothing. This research was inspired by a text that identified one of the first documented cases of possible autistic behaviour: the story of Hugh Blair, son of a Scottish laird in the early eighteenth century. Amongst descriptions of Blair's eccentric behaviour are accounts of him entering the homes of neighbours and taking, without any indicated sense of impropriety, items of clothing (Frith 1989: 52). This inspired an exploration of my own dysfunctional behaviour in relation to clothing that resulted in a series of works which took themes such as overwhelming fixation with detail [Fig 10.1], the obsessive folding of clothes to specific dimensions for storage, an irrational and debilitating fear of disembodied gloves.

As the subject for the work developed it became increasingly introvert and autobiographical with no wider social or cultural context. These themes became the basis for a series of artworks, fabricated using digitally enhanced photography, drawing, photomontage and recorded performance techniques, and presented in a gallery space. The garments that were the focus of the work were not physically present when the work was displayed in the Holden Gallery, Manchester, 2005 [Fig. 10.2].

My intention through my current research programme is to continue with my autobiographic focus of developing themes that describe personal narratives in relation to clothing, but to place these narratives in a wider social and cultural context. I also intend to attempt to shift the focus of my
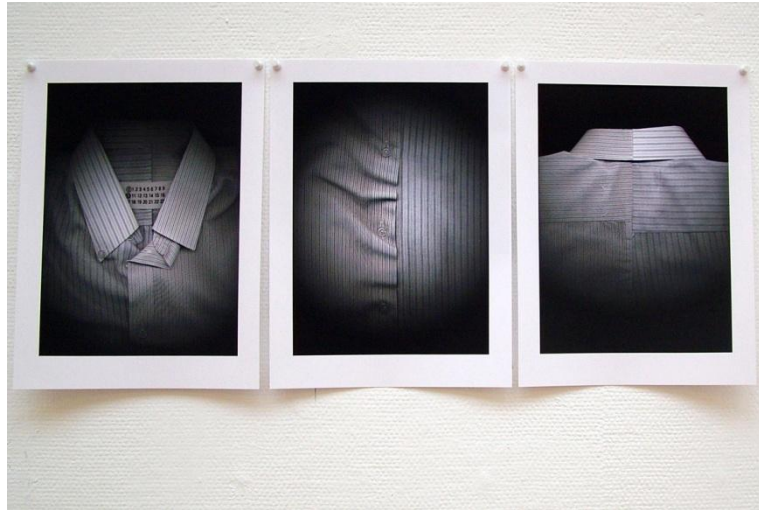
Fig. 10.1, 10.2 Previous work presented in the Holden Gallery, Manchester, 2005.

practice from a conventional art-based activity (manufacturing work) towards an exhibition-based activity (using objects from collections) to construct work where the actual garment is present and is situated in the museum rather than the art gallery. The impetus for this shift would be the application of innovative presentation modes observed and analysed at MoMu and the tool with which to realise the shift would be the application of these modes through the realisation of a detailed proposal for a hypothetical exhibition that would present a fashion autobiography through clothing-related narratives using the innovative presentation modes observed at MoMu.

Constructing a collection

Through previous research activity and practice, using my own garments as a subject, I had established a very self-conscious relationship with my clothing. This was not deliberate but, in retrospect, unavoidable as these garments had been the subject of hours of examination and contemplation through the various processes of making work. My clothes had become the focus of a practice that removed them from their essential everyday context and placed them under the lens of detailed analysis. This prolonged scrutiny had engendered a particularly artificial and atypical regard for these garments - viewed as the subject of my work they had become objectified. Although not initiated consciously the continued use of my clothing as the subject for my work had resulted in these garments becoming a resource for my work as well as an everyday wardrobe.

With the intention of locating the out-put of my current research in a museum context, it was an obvious step from the sense of objectification already built around my clothing to the notion of transforming these garments into a formalised collection: that is a documented, ordered and strategically developed compilation as opposed to a casually accumulated

assortment. The notion of regarding my clothing as a collection, the basic material in terms of content and narrative source for the exhibition proposal, seemed in step with the shift in location for my practice from gallery to museum. I was aware, however, that the notion of purposefully constructing a collection for this research project was an artificial process with potentially contrived results. There could be a contradictory expectation in utilising the prescribed, regulated methods of constructing a formal collection in relation to subjective, autobiographic narratives.

I am not a collector: I am not naturally predisposed to collecting, and so I searched for a steer, a guide that would lead me through the process of formulating a collection that would be the focus of my research. I found this guide not in the codes of museum practice and internationally recognised museological regulations for the ethical acquisition of objects, but in the fictionalised character of Sir William Hamilton, the British Envoy to Naples, as described by Susan Sontag in her novel *The Volcano Lover* (Sontag 1993). Sontag's novel, based on the unfortunate *ménage-à-trois* of Sir William Hamilton, his wife Emma, and Lord Nelson, follows the lives of the trio from Hamilton and Emma's first meeting and their life together on Naples, through Emma and Nelson's mutual infatuation, to her pitiful death in penury. A recurring theme throughout the novel is Hamilton's obsessive collecting, and Sontag's juxtaposition of his emotional connection to the objects he collects and his emotional attachment to his wife are at the centre of her meditations on collecting, collections and the disposition of the collector. Sontag's account of Hamilton's (or the Cavaliere, as she refers to him) processes and reflections on collecting, on the consideration and connoisseurship of selection, the anticipation and strategy of acquisition, the discipline of inventory-making, the pressures of custodianship due to the vulnerability of the collection to uncontrollable external forces were all transferred to my own practice.

Taking my cue from the Cavaliere I began to consider the activities necessary for the construction of a 'collection': the rationalisation of my current accumulation, guidelines to determine the focus for future acquisitions, a process of sorting, of ordering or classification. Prompted by Sontag's text, it became apparent that the first activity was to determine the scope of the collection. My clothing was subjected to a series of value judgements, consideration of what would be included, and what would be excluded from the collection. My rationale for determining the fate of each garment became a process of exclusion, rather than inclusion. It was easier to decide what not to collect.

The first exclusion: the clothes I wore for work had long been designated as a separate wardrobe to which I attributed little emotional attachment or financial investment. Mass produced, selected from expediency rather than attraction and worn until they are a little ragged, I considered my work wardrobe to be of little value - work clothes were excluded. This triggered a further series of rejections based on those items unlikely to be invested with autobiographic narratives. Disposable items such as underwear, socks, pyjamas, sports clothing were all set aside. Initially I had expected that other items considered disposable – t-shirts and sweatshirts, casual clothing from high street stores – should also be excluded. On reflection, this exclusion seemed to undermine the personal, individual nature of the collection, so I decided to include them in the collection. This marked an unplanned but significant shift from a design focused collection to one that was representative of a more personal context, an individual wardrobe.

Of the garments that remained, very few pre-dated 2000. I regarded this as an auspiciously logical start date for the collection and considered the exclusion of any item acquired before that date yet, on reflection, this decision seemed contradictory to the sense of the collection as a wardrobe, a personal accumulation. I resolved to include these items in

the collection curious to discover, through my subsequent investigations, whether there was some intrinsic value, either aesthetic or sentimental, that had enabled these few garments to survive while others had been dispatched to charity shops or used as cleaning rags. I had finally established the core collection that would form the basis for the exhibition.

But true collections aren't static as the nature of the collector, as Sontag attests, is at its heart acquisitive. In the spirit of formalising the collection I understood that it would be preferable to establish a logic and strategy for future acquisitions. I would need a collecting policy. From professional experience I was aware that curators of dress collections attributed particular value to sets of garments that comprised a complete outfit. My supposition was reinforced by information conveyed during an interview with Kaat Debo, responsible for Exhibition Policy at MoMu, about the institution's collecting process. She described that when collecting from contemporary designers they tried to acquire a set of garments, a complete silhouette or 'look' that embodied the essence of a particular collection, representative not only of the current state of the designer's work but also indicative of the current fashion *zeitgeist* (Debo 2005). As I've said previously, I'm not a collector by nature, but the notion of a look, of complete sets of garments resonates with the obsessive side of my personality. I decided to adopt this strategy as the foundation of any future collecting activity.

Cataloguing the collection

Whilst the content of the collection took shape, defined through the selection process and initiation of a collecting policy there was, as yet, no order or organisational structure to the collection. The compilation of an inventory offered an institutional convention that would necessitate an organisational structure and provide a site for recording details of the

garments, their physical qualities and information relating to manufacture and acquisition. I chose the conventional method of chronology to systematize the inventory. I considered arranging garments by type, by colour, by designer, but basing the inventory on a linear, chronological structure seemed, without doubt, the most rational and expedient way forward.

With a structure for the inventory determined, I needed to resolve the question of what form to give it and what data to record. With regard to the question of what to record in the inventory, I worked schematically, sketching out diagrams to identify all the potential fields of data I thought it might be possible to gather from a garment. I used these diagrams to outline groups that covered basic classificatory information such as manufacture, physical qualities and acquisition [Fig. 10.3]. In parallel to this process I looked at the websites of major costume collections in the UK (the V&A Museum, London, Platt Hall Gallery of English Costume, Manchester, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Brighton) to see what kind of data they made available in their on-line catalogues. I used on-line records for my survey as they are the most easily accessible and, I expected, museums would make the information that they considered most pertinent and valuable available through this most democratic medium. I focused my search on contemporary material most comparable to my own collection, although I consulted entries on womenswear and menswear in order to access a significant sample.

I found that the on-line entries from each institution were very similar; consistently presenting basic classificatory, or taxonomic information such as date, location of origin, fabric, sometimes manufacturing technique and, where known, the designer or manufacturer. Most entries also accompanied this information with an image of the garment, sometimes including images that highlighted interesting details, alongside passages
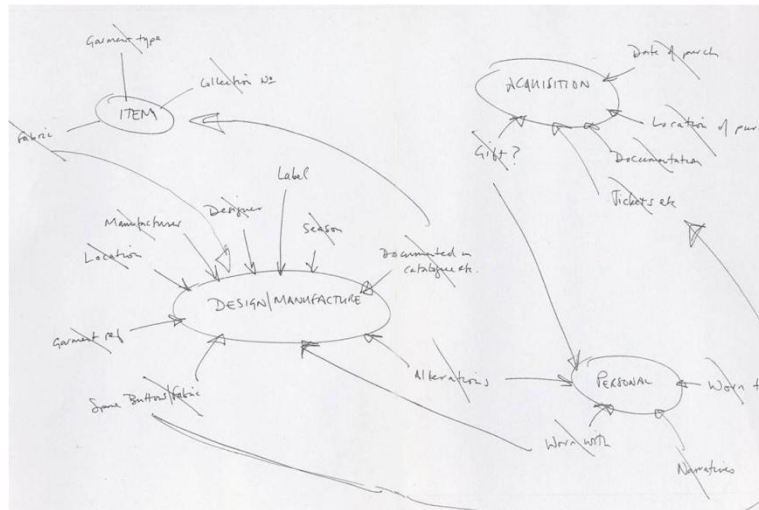
Fig. 10.3 Diagrammatic rendering of narrative possibilities in relation to clothing.
Fig. 10.4 Data sheet showing recording of cataloguing information.

Item	Jacket	Ref: 2007-CL013
Designer	Maison Martin Margiela	
Season	Spring/summer 2007	
Location	Paris, France	
Manufacturer	Staff International S.P.A.	
Location	Italy	
Model ref	00*EEM0 28BN0Z Fab. 35922 Col. 088	
Documentation		
Fabric	Outer; 70% wool, 28% polyester, 2% elastane, navy Lining; 52% cupro, 48% rayon, navy	
Size	50	
Label	MMM '14' label inside, left breast pocket MMM '14' logo woven into lining	
Alterations		
Purchase date	26 June 2007	
Price	£455.00 (reduced 30%)	
Location	Maison Martin Margiela, 1, Bruton Place, London	
Documentation	Receipt	
Packaging	White cotton covered hanger, white tyvek bag, white card log-embossed swing ticket containing spare buttons	
Worn with	Shirt: 2006-CI Scarf: 2006-CL Trousers: 2007-CL014 Shoes: 2007-SH002	
Notes		

of descriptive text derived from the observational process of institutional classification. Some entries credited the former owner or donor and were occasionally accompanied by short entries of biographic information or photographs. Few entries, even when the garment was very likely to have come from a living donor, cited any detailed account of the owner's relationship with the garment or any particularly relevant autobiographic insight. To cite Lou Taylor:

> It remains true that all too many artefact-centred studies…omit to enter into any detailed debate on life-styles, beliefs, work or personal interests of the wearers whose clothes are under discussion. The relationship between consumers and their clothes is thus almost never dealt with in exhibitions and rarely in publications.
>
> (Taylor 2002: 50-51)

What seemed evident from my reference to their on-line resources was that institutions appeared more likely to record and disseminate information relating to collection-based taxonomic activities than to publish personal narratives regarding the garment and donor or manufacturer. Of course museums are bound, as previously mentioned, by agreed internationally recognised protocols set by ICOM that determine collection documentation, and which preferences certain information. Yet once these obligations are fulfilled, a museum would be free to record and transmit whatever narratives it might consider to be of value or interest. I could only conclude, from my survey, that it appeared museums were likely to prioritise the information that they found most useful within institutional practice. It occurred to me that the value I could add to my process of documentation would be exactly that kind of intimate, first-hand, autobiographic information that Taylor draws attention to, and that I found lacking in the institutional on-line entries.

Informed by my on-line research and the accompanying schematic work I drafted a cataloguing document that I could complete for each item that had fields available for recording taxonomic data alongside fields in which to record subjective, autobiographic data which were inserted at the bottom of the document; 'Worn with', where I could record the most common combinations of garments and 'Notes', a catch-all category where I intended to record personal responses to each item [Fig. 10.4]. As the cataloguing process progressed it became obvious that this was not a satisfactory solution to adequately record the kind of information I desired to communicate. Inadvertently I had privileged the objective, institutional-type data, and subordinated that which I felt gave my work value, my own personal narratives. Despite faults that were latent in the cataloguing document (and that would be resolved at a later stage in the project), I now had the basic organising principle for the inventory (chronology) and a template defining the information I would gather from each garment (the cataloguing document). The next step in the process would be to locate each item within the chronological structure of the inventory and complete its documentation.

The process of chronological ordering at first seemed straightforward. I had kept receipts from the purchase of many of the items in the collection and once the receipts were sorted by date and matched to each item the chronological ordering of the garments began to take shape [Fig. 10.5]. I also decided to archive clothing-related ephemera such as receipts, swing tickets, spare buttons, fabric swatches, and packaging. Some of this material contained essential information in relation to completing the catalogue data fields relating to the occasion of the purchase. I also felt that the inclusion of this material would add contextual value to the collection in relation to the retailing and branding of the garments [Fig. 10.6].
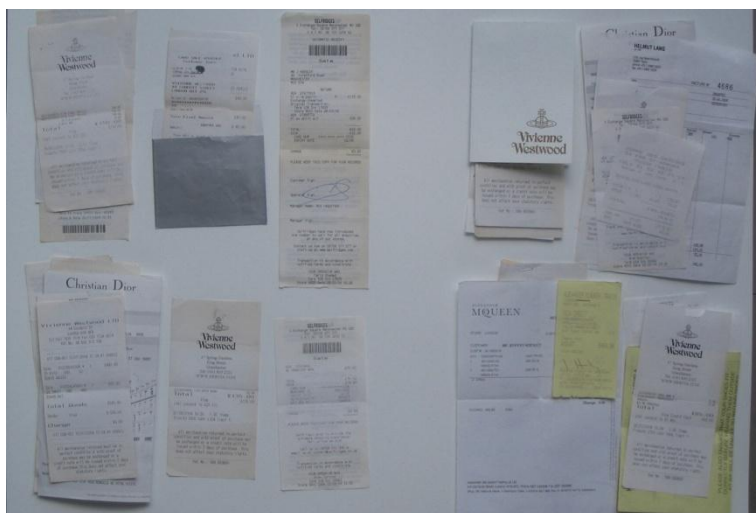
Figs. 10.5, 10.6 Receipts and ephemera ordered and sorted during the cataloguing process.

What I'd expected to be a fairly mechanical process became, at times, quite tortuous. Matching receipts to garments was not always such an easy process; there were receipts that did not appear to have a garment partner, receipts for items that I could neither identify nor remember buying or wearing, receipts from shops that I couldn't remember visiting. For those items without a receipt to give a purchase date alternative methods were needed to locate them in the chronology. These methods included reference to credit card statements, designer's collection catalogues, magazines and dating garments from personal photographs. In a few cases I had to resort to less direct sources; asking friends when they might have given something as a gift or when they might remember me wearing a particular piece of clothing.

It seemed paradoxical that the success of a seemingly objective process should come to rely so much on memory, on recollection and reminiscence and yet, in the very failings of this process, lay its success: through the simple act of placing items within a chronology, I was forced to make associations with each item, to recall memories, connections and related occasions. Inadvertently, even before I had started a detailed documentation of the garments themselves, the action of placing garments within systematic chronological order revealed itself as a process that could connect directly with those associated narratives I had hoped would be unearthed from the garments and from which to develop the exhibition proposal. It transpired that, through the adoption of an institutional process, I had initiated an investigative process that would reveal autobiographic narratives that might form the basis for the exhibition proposal.

To complete the data fields in the cataloguing document I employed several methods. Following from the reference to purchase documentation as a means to establishing the inventory chronology, I used the same

documentation to ascertain details regarding the purchase of each garment such as the item's cost and location of the purchase. Following this I employed several supplementary methods of examination; direct inspection of garments, photography and drawing. Each method entailed a different mode of engagement with the garments, and a different perspective for interrogation. These various ways of looking subsequently prompted different responses to the garments.

I began by taking each piece of clothing out of its drawer, or off its hanger to subject it to close scrutiny; inspecting the garments for labels that would give fabric details, designers' or manufacturers' branding, looking for signs of wear or alterations, gathering information that would enable me to complete the data fields for the production and the physical description of each item. I found myself handling garments in a completely different way than in the everyday situations of purchase, wearing or laundering. I found myself handling garments that I might not have touched for months or years. I found myself trying on clothes (some that I hadn't worn for a while, others that I wear habitually) but in a different context than the customary act of dressing. This close inspection placed the garments within a frame of interrogation that focused my perception on aspects of the garment's history – the original impetus to buy the garment and those occasions on which it had been worn. The process of direct handling also increased awareness of the physical qualities of each garment, drawing attention to those phenomenological sensations of fabric and cut.

I used photography to record some garments in groups; particular sets of clothing previously defined as complete looks from a designer. Composing these garments to be photographed together was a visual exercise, and increased my awareness of the garments' aesthetic qualities; pattern, colour, texture, and their effect in the assigned combinations of garments [Fig. 10.7]. If the process of direct examination brought me closer to the

Fig. 10.7 Photography was used to record aesthetic compositions of clothing.
Fig. 10.8 Drawing enabled documentation of the interaction between garment and body.
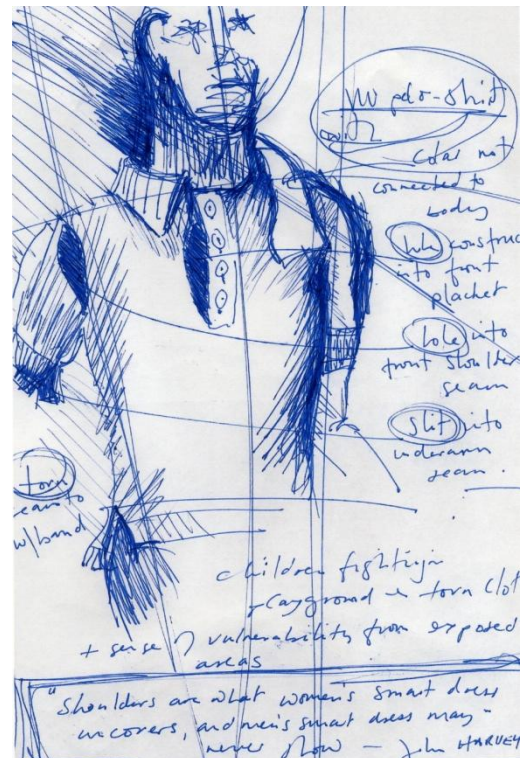
garments, the process of photography introduced a definite distancing effect. Out of all the methods of documentation I found this the least satisfactory to execute. The act of looking through the camera, and my lack of technical ability combined to create dissociation between myself and the garments that were my subject.

In relation to the process of direct inspection, I used drawing as a documentation tool in response to those garments where it was necessary to record the interface between clothing and the body. The act of drawing these particular garments to indicate specific interaction with and upon the body had the opposite effect to the sense of distancing created by photography. The drawings tended towards the diagrammatic, with annotations that described certain features of cut and construction and their effect on the wearer. The slow, more controlled process of observation and drawing and a concurrent recollection of the body within the garment encouraged reflection on the effect of these particular details when the garments are worn [Fig. 10.8].

Completing the catalogue

As the catalogue progressed, I realised that those fields that had initially been included to record personal response to the garments were not adequate. I altered the cataloguing document, deleting the fields 'Worn with' and 'Notes' and instead jotted down thoughts and responses to the garments in notebooks. Once the draft copies of the inventory were printed and spiral-bound I copied these notes, along with the drawings I had made during the documentation process, into those volumes. A prototype volume has been hard bound and features a double-page spread for each garment; on the right-hand page the classificatory information that is conventionally recorded in institutional collections (including garment photographs) completed as a printed form, on the

facing side my personal associations and responses to each garment, drawn and drafted by hand directly onto the page. The dual narratives, objective and subjective, sit side-by-side, each presented in an appropriate form, with no hierarchical distinction [Fig. 10.9].

Each interrogative process released different narratives from garments. The process of chronological identification for the inventory gave rise to reflection on situations of purchase and the various locations and scenarios of acquisition and the formalised interactions present in the process of consumption. The activity of direct examination prompted consideration of the material qualities of each garment and associations in relation to its purchase and the occasions and locations to which it was worn. The process of photography, focused on recording an aesthetic appreciation of the garments looking particularly at the interplay of surface qualities of colour and pattern in sets of garments. Drawing recorded the physical and emotional response to certain techniques of cut and construction and the interrelationship of garment and body.

Through narratives that arose from the documentation processes, I was able to define a central concept for the exhibition and a group of related themes that would determine the development of the exhibition. The exhibition concept would focus on the use of autobiographic narratives to explore how identity is constructed through clothing within the context of fashionable menswear from the 1960s to the present day. This concept, I considered, would comply with the definition of the thought show format (discussed in Chapter 5) that I wished to explore through application to my proposal, in that it wouldn't reflect canonical design or dress histories, but instead would present a personal, subjective thesis: autobiographic episodes located within a broader socio-cultural context.
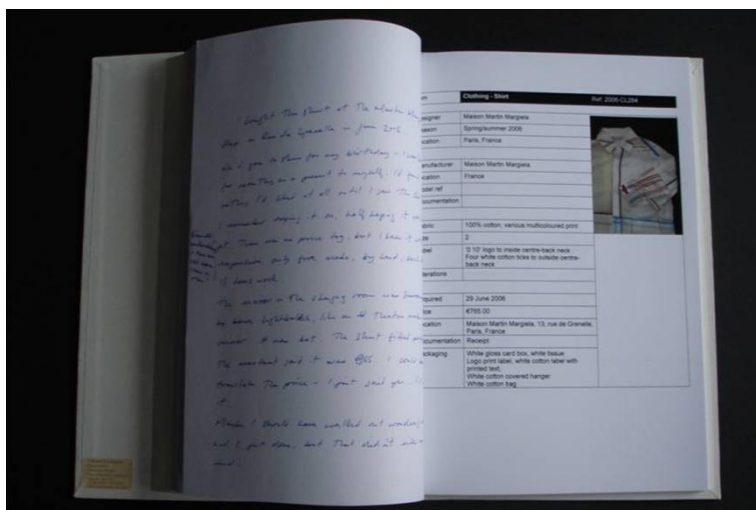
Fig. 10.9 Bound volume of collection catalogue showing complementary data entries on facing pages.

Fig. 10.10 Developmental sketch for a piece of work based on themes arising from the cataloguing process, subsequently abandoned.
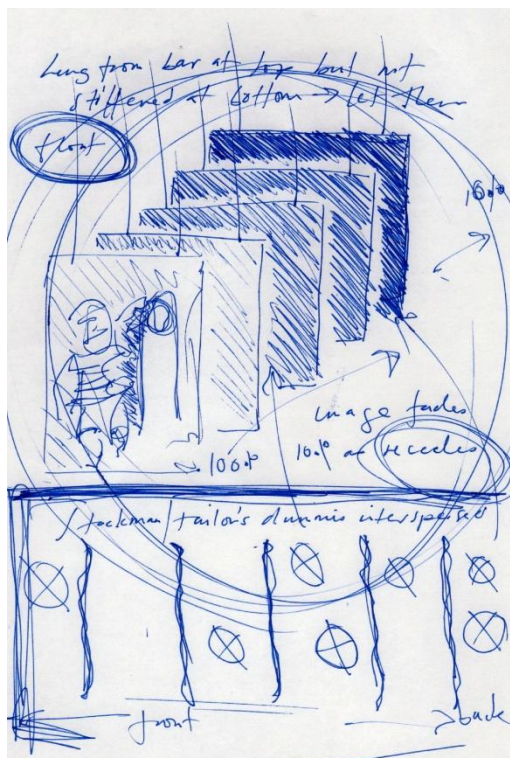
Themes in the exhibition would explore the factors that influence choices of clothing (patterns established in childhood, societal demands and media pressures), consumption (specifically factors influencing the process of purchase and formalised acquisition in the context of collecting), dress and dressing (clothing as signifiers of identity, clothing in relation to interpersonal and personal-locational dynamics), and sensation (sensory response to the physical and aesthetic characteristics of garments including reaction to cut, fabrication, surface, textile).

The process of constructing a catalogue and the related documentation techniques had already identified specific narratives within the selected themes I had defined. I began a process of developing these narratives towards an exhibition using diagrammatic sketches and written descriptions of possible exhibition constructions. One such installation related the influence of those choices made in childhood that reverberate throughout our adult clothing. The installation consisted of a photograph of me, at two years old, wearing a striped t-shirt projected onto a series of parallel semi-transparent screens. A photograph of myself taken recently, wearing a shirt in similarly coloured stripes would be projected from the opposite side. The two screens nearest the projector would show each image in full definition, but screens nearer the centre would show a progressive merging of the two images [Fig. 10.10].

I developed several ideas in this manner, using annotated drawings, but it soon became evident that I had reverted to describing a gallery-based practice, where works existed as self-contained entities without apparent reference to each other or a broader cultural context and without the need to present the actual garment that generated the narrative. I resolved to review my progress and to consider the use of a developmental tool, as I had used the process of documentation to reveal narratives from the

collection, which would mediate between the narratives arising from the documentation process and the project's final realisation as an exhibition.

Developing the proposal in graphic form

In the search for a suitable developmental tool, I went back to the exhibition catalogues produced as companions to the four key presentations from MoMu. Having referenced these publications frequently in my analysis of innovative practice at MoMu I was aware that they approached the compilation and publication of the exhibition catalogue from a particular and unconventional perspective. Through my research I had become aware that many publications that accompany fashion exhibitions reveal no details regarding the actual exhibition installation but exist almost as publications in their own right - even details referencing the exhibition location or dates are often discretely located in the end papers alongside publishers' details. Understandably, the institutions producing these expensive publications need to maximise the income generated from them. Economic pressures, I suspect, prevent the inclusion of installation photographs which would delay the availability of the publication until after the exhibition opening date. Discrete inclusion of the exhibition details means that the publication does not appear to be tied to a sell-by date, thus prolonging its viable shelf-life. Including essays that address the general subject of the exhibition rather than the exhibition process and installation itself probably extends the interested market, again increasing potential sales.

Reference to the MoMu publications, however, indicates that they avoid the trend to disassociate publication from exhibition, particularly in the early years of the Museum. Alongside publications such as those that commemorate the exhibitions *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,

2004), *AngloMania: Tradition and Transgressions in British Fashion* (The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2006) *Rei Kawakubo: Refusing Fashion* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, 2008) and *The Art of Fashion: Installing Allusions* (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2009), the catalogues produced for the key exhibitions at MoMu refer extensively to the exhibition production and installation.

At the most overt level of documenting the exhibition, the catalogues for both *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004) and *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007) are illustrated with photographs that record the exhibition installation. Both catalogues also feature images that document the development of the exhibition design, from sketches for initial design ideas through scale models to images of set construction (in both exhibition gallery and external workshop) and the installation process [Figs. 10.11, 10.12]. This documentation not only reveals the process of literally *making* an exhibition, but also indicates recognition by the institution of the intrinsic value of the exhibition's setting, a strategy recognised and valued by academic and cultural historian Christopher Breward in his introductory essay in the exhibition catalogue *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (Breward 2004: 15).

As well as the design processes, the curatorial processes involved in the rationalisation of an exhibition concept are also revealed in these publications. Texts in the catalogues for *Malign Muses*, *Bernhard Willhelm* and *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005-2006) elaborate on the conceptual development and curatorial process, most tellingly in *Malign Muses*, where exhibition-collaborator Caroline Evans discusses not only her personal take on curator Judith Clark's curatorial process but of the central role Clark's explication of this process takes in the exhibition and catalogue (Evans
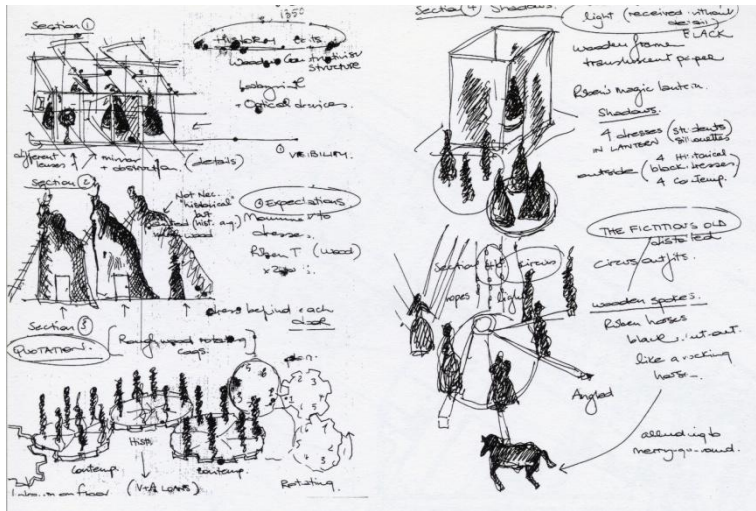
Fig. 10.11 Image from catalogue accompanying *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*, showing early sketches for the exhibition installation.
Fig. 10.12 Image from catalogue accompanying *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* showing elements from the exhibition in fabrication.
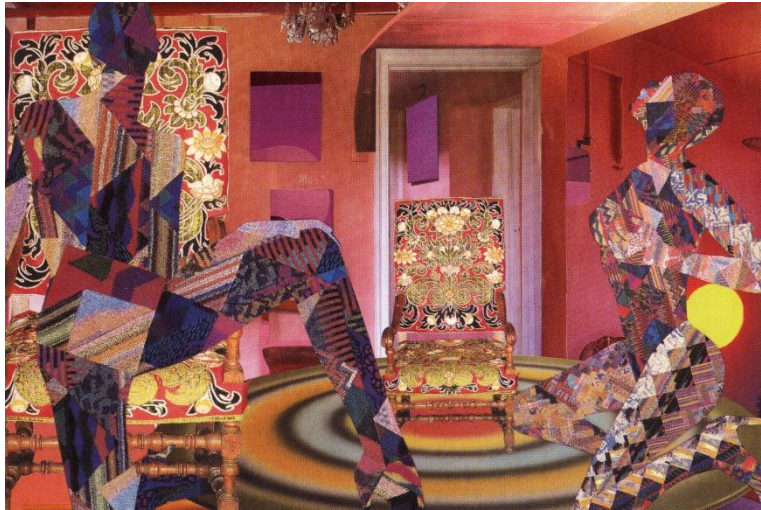
Fig. 10.13 Image from publication accompanying *Genovanversaeviceversa* showing one of curator Angelo Figus' preparatory collages.
Fig. 10.14 The collage takes three-dimensional form in the exhibition installation as the Pentagono Amoroso (A Love Pentagon).

2004: 42). Angelo Figus, curator and scenographer of *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2003), exposes his curatorial process in a printed guide, or lexicon that accompanies the exhibition. Unlike the catalogues for the other shows, this guide was given without charge to all visitors to accompany the visit, acting as a key to unlock the complexities of Figus' complex narrative landscape.

The catalogue that accompanies *Genovanversaeviceversa* is illustrated with consummately prepared collages by Figus that present two-dimensional renderings of the installations that appear in the exhibition. The collages, which provide 'a picture of this creative process' (Loppa, 2003: 7), so closely represent the actual installation and are so evocative, that they operate as both illustration of the creative process and record of the exhibition visit [Figs. 10.13, 10.14]. The collages are interspersed with atmospheric photographic images of stages of the moon by Luca Missoni, which further enhance the mystical quality of Figus' narrative. Continuing the practice of using graphic techniques to develop the exhibition design, the catalogue to *Bernhard Willhelm* features images from Willhelm's collection look-books, produced by photographer Carmen Freudenthal and stylist Elle Verhagen. These images are credited as being the inspiration for the exhibition designers, Tayo Onorato and Niko Krebs when preparing the exhibition design, and in many instances their scenography is a faithful three-dimensional interpretation of the original graphic work.

Drawing inspiration from the practice of developing the exhibition design using a graphic format, as evident in *Genovanversaeviceversa* and *Bernhard Willhelm* I decided to devise a printed work to act as a developmental tool for the exhibition, and to mediate between the narratives identified in the cataloguing process and the construction of the exhibition proposal. The creation of work in printed graphic format was already established in my practice. In research executed for my Masters

programme in 2005, I made a printed work titled *Gloria* which consisted of the same narrative told using various two-dimensional techniques. An exercise in story-telling, *Gloria* recounts the story of a woman who repeatedly crafts different outfits from the same ball of wool. Told in four different formats, the first chapter takes the form of a simple short story, the second chapter is a photographic rendition of the progressive stages of a crotched garment over seven days, the third chapter depicted drawings of the decreasing volume of a ball of yarn, whilst the final chapter contextualised the story by juxtaposing found images from knitting and crotchet patterns from the early 1960s with song lyrics from a contemporaneous chart hit.

Although *Gloria* related to my current research as having been executed in a similar graphic format, there were intrinsic differences between the two: while *Gloria* was a self-contained, stand-alone work, the graphic out-put from my current research would be primarily a developmental tool, a device intended to act as an intermediary stage between the concept, themes and narrative identified in the first research stage of documentation and the final stage of realising the proposal for a hypothetical exhibition in scale model form. Like *Gloria*, however, this graphic rendering would be more than a sketch-book, a pre-existing document into which ideas are drawn and noted, but it would be a series of graphic studies, constructed specifically to develop the exhibition narratives.

The *Hotel* project (as it became known – the relevance of the title will be explained in the next chapter) in print began as a compilation of reference material that related to the autobiographic narratives, much like a scrap book, but with material digitally scanned or photographed and collaged into double-page layouts [Figs. 10.15, 10.16]. As the reference material accumulated, it soon became clear that each narrative would need to be
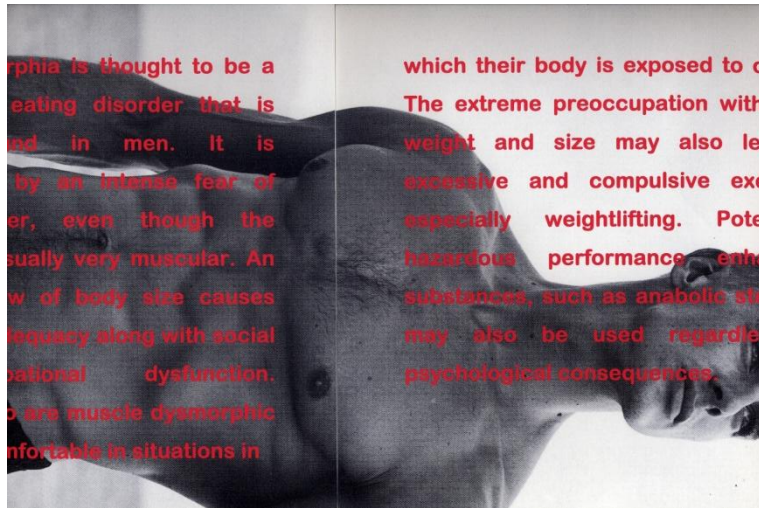
Figs. 10.15, 10.16 Preliminary 'sketch' versions of the graphic renderings of themes identified through the cataloguing process.
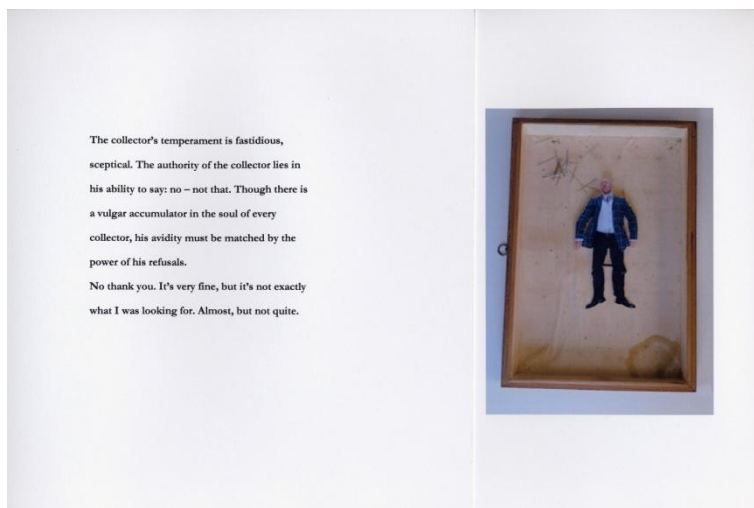
developed as a separate entity, partly because of the amount of research and illustrative material involved, and also because different narrative strands suggested different physical characteristics to convey their particular atmosphere; different papers, printing and manufacturing techniques.

As the content for the graphic rendition developed, so did the narrative content for the exhibition. Narratives identified through the documentation process were developed as a series of self-contained autobiographic episodes rather than being compiled to illustrate a singular theme. Each episode suggested a particular scenario or location, whether recreated, representational or reflective, following the landscape types previously identified in Chapter 7. The construction of the exhibition around these autobiographic episodes deliberately adopts the episodic structure previously identified in Chapter 5 as the prevalent structure for the thought though show format on which I intended to base the exhibition proposal. In the graphic rendition this results in a series of volumes that could be read in any order, the cumulative effect being an understanding of the exhibition themes, rather than a chronological reading of a biography.

The realisation of each of the autobiographic episodes is presented in the next chapter and, in order that the continuity of development in relation to my research process is made apparent, they are described in the following format. First the initial story as identified from the documentation and cataloguing process is related, followed by the themes with which the episode is concerned. Next is an account of the development of these themes through the graphic rendition and finally the account of the realisation of the episode in scale model form using the modes of landscape, object and body as identified and analysed through my theoretical research process. Reflection on the efficacy of the graphic rendition as a developmental mechanism, and the use of the scale model

as a tool through which to realise the final version of the exhibition proposal is covered in my conclusion.

Chapter 11: The *Hotel* Project – a Fashion Autobiography in Printed and Scale Model Form

The following account details the development of the proposal for a hypothetical exhibition that is the culmination of my practice-based research. The exhibition proposal is an exercise in the application of the innovative presentation modes observed through my exhibition research and identified previously as threshold, landscape, object and the body. The chapter first gives an account of the development of an overall aesthetic and structural concept for the exhibition, informed by discussion of format and structure discussed in Chapter 5, then demonstrates the realisation of a series of autobiographic episodes, identified and developed through the processes of documentation and graphic rendering detailed in the previous chapter, as individual spaces in the exhibition.

The chapter is structured to follow the eight rooms of the exhibition in a clockwise direction from the entrance and so delivers the account of the rooms in chronological order within the autobiographic framework of the exhibition. The account of the development and execution of each of the eight rooms is detailed similarly, beginning with a description of the autobiographic episode or Story, revealed through the documentation process described in Chapter 10, on which the room is based. The next section, Themes, details those topics central to the autobiographic episode to be communicated in the exhibition and the next section, Book, explains how the story was developed through the design and production of a printed volume towards realisation in the exhibition space. Next follow three sections that relate directly to previous chapters that analysed innovative modes and demonstrate how these modes have been incorporated into the exhibition proposal; Landscape, Object and The Body. The accounts are given in the present tense, as in the account of

the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) in Chapter 4, to add immediacy and heightened atmosphere to the description. Throughout the account I make direct comparative reference between the proposal and exhibitions experienced in my exhibition sample, so that the realisation of the mode is evident.

Hotel – format and structure

As detailed in Chapter 5, I had already concluded that the thought show format (an exhibition format that focuses on fashion within a social, cultural or historic context) would be the most appropriate format to employ in relation to the exhibition proposal. As previously stated, one of my aims was to place personal, autobiographic fashion narratives within a broader context and this format appeared to be the most applicable. Concomitant with this format is the notion of what I termed an episodic structure: that is a narrative structure that comprises self-contained elements that can be read in any order but which combine to create a complete narrative. As the narratives identified through the documentation process were developed through graphic renditions, they took the form of eight self-contained volumes. These volumes, although based on a chronology, could be read separately or in any particular sequence and, as such, reflected the episodic structure suitable to the thought show format.

As I began to consider transposing the graphic rendition to the three-dimensional exhibition space, it became apparent that there was no common aesthetic or structural layout that would hold the eight episodes together as an exhibition experience. Reverting to the MoMu publications as a source of reference and inspiration, I came across a photograph of what is now the MoMu exhibition gallery, in the exhibition catalogue *Het ModeMuseum/The Fashion Museum: Backstage* (Debo and Verhelst 2002: 178). The image, showing the space in its original incarnation as the

Hotel Central, depicts the converging corridors of the Hotel, seen from what is currently the apex of the exhibition space [Fig. 11.1]. The intriguing and evocative image immediately suggested a physical plan and concept for the exhibition project: the reinstatement of the Hotel Central corridors would provide a spatial layout where each of the eight autobiographic episodes would be housed in a separate room. The hotel structure would become a concrete representation of the exhibition narrative: a physical interior where intimate, autobiographic memories are both contained and revealed. The hotel acts as a conceptual composition, a metaphor for autobiography, where each room reveals a separate autobiographic episode or memory, with each memory linked to the next via the hotel corridor. The hotel structure also evokes the intimacy and revelatory nature of autobiography as each room is unlocked by the visitor, entered, and the autobiographic episode discovered.

Personal association confirmed that a hotel might be a suitable location for the exhibition; Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining* (Kubrick 1980), David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks* (Lynch 1990-1991) both used fictional hotels as the location for surreal, fantastical events. In French artist Sophie Calle's mixed-media work *The Hotel* (1981), the artist, 'unashamedly voyeuristic', posing as a chambermaid in a Venetian hotel surreptitiously photo-documents the personal belongings of hotel guests, invents fictional accounts of their lives and rummages through their belongings (Manchester n.d.). Calle's work establishes the hotel as a location where possible intrusion reveals personal, intimate narratives. Equally significant in the notion of adopting the concept of the hotel were the implications in relation to the nature of exhibition threshold, and the transformative role of both threshold and hotel setting on the exhibition space and exhibition visitor. The threshold would obviously be constructed as the hotel 'reception', thus the threshold device would spring naturally from the exhibition's overall spatial concept. Reinstatement of the Hotel

Central ground-plan would transform the exhibition gallery, and the realisation of the reception/threshold and the hotel setting would exert a transformation on the exhibition visitor into hotel 'guest'. The notion of the hotel as exhibition setting was confirmed, and *Hotel* became the working title for the project.

Realised in each of the eight volumes that comprise the graphic rendition of the project as a repeat image used as end papers, the photograph of Hotel Central frames each autobiographic episode [Fig. 11.2]. Translated into the exhibition gallery, the original layout of the building was reinstated in the scale model for the exhibition proposal so that the hotel corridors once again gave physical structure to the space, operating as a unifying landscape for the exhibition. Although, as already specified, the exhibition in both graphic and spatial renditions had been conceived with an episodic structure I decided, in the three-dimensional format, to reinstate the autobiographic chronology arranging the rooms from one to eight clock-wise from the exhibition entrance. Correspondingly, each of the eight volumes of the graphic rendition was numbered one to eight in chronological order. Adopting the chronology was a pragmatic decision forced by the need to put the episodes in some spatial order. This does not necessarily mean that visitors are forced to comply with this order as they remain free to discover each episode in any order they so choose.

Running parallel to this chronological structure is a less evident geographic structure, in which each of the eight rooms can be placed in an associated spatial location. This geographic structure reflects developmental shifts that align with a narrative that maps my age, increasing confidence and experience and cultural awareness. The first two rooms, *Conformity* and *Rebellion*, set in the village swimming pool and school-room reflect the world of the child and adolescent, a world whose boundaries are local. The next three rooms, *Flamboyant*, *The Body* and
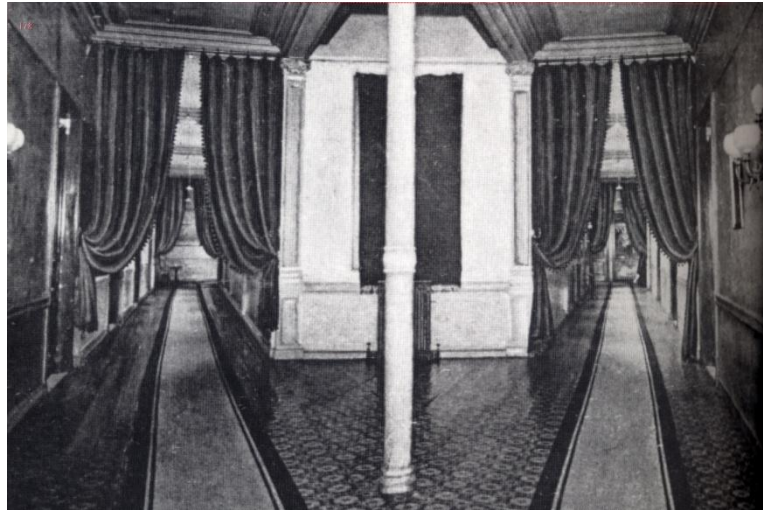
Fig. 11.1 Hotel Central corridors, as illustrated in the catalogue to *Het ModeMusem/The Fashion Museum; Backstage*

Fig. 11.2 Hotel Central image mirrored and printed as end-papers in the graphic volumes for *Hotel.*
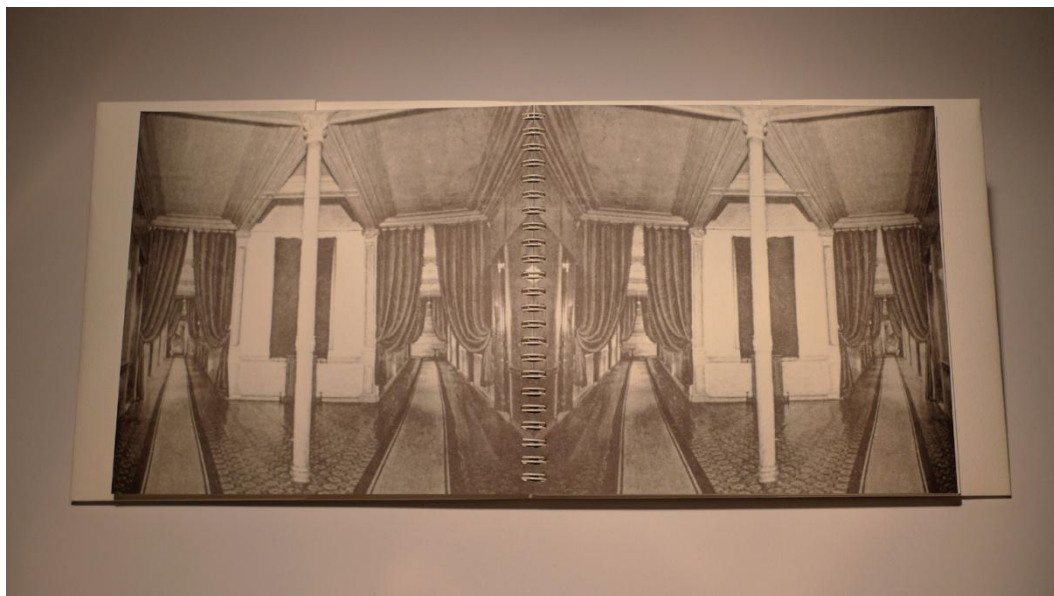
Repetition, reflect the world of the young adult who moves within a close group of friends and urban, regional locations but whose influences and cultural parameters are national. *A New Modernity* and *Identity* reflect a growing sophistication and awareness, and international influence. This geographic shift also echoes those influences that are exerted on our clothing choices from family, close friends, to internationally distributed media. The final room, *The Collector*, can be seen to move the geographic structure full-circle, bringing the international influences of a cosmopolitan fashion world back to the domestic – the enclosure of an individual's wardrobe.

The reinstatement of the Hotel Central ground-plan necessitated the reintroduction of the Hotel corridors into the space. As well as operating as a device that establishes the fictional hotel physically within the space, the corridors literally (as in their original manifestation) give access to each of the rooms containing the autobiographic episodes. Installation of the corridors also gave the opportunity to establish an overarching spatial and visual concept for the exhibition. On the corridor side, they appear as 'real' walls furnished to suggest the period when Hotel Central was built. They present authentic woodwork (doorframes, skirting, and dado rail) and cornice. The corridor walls are covered in a wallpaper design developed during research for the eighth graphic volume (as discussed later in this chapter) *The Collector*. The wallpaper depicts 'the collector', dressed in garments from the collection and pinned to the background like an insect specimen, in repeat pattern [Fig. 11.3]. Whilst the significance of the collector will become apparent later in this chapter, at this stage it is sufficient to mention that the wallpaper imparts a suitably surreal addition to the hotel installation.

Appearing solid from the corridor side, however, once the visitor enters each room the corridor walls are revealed as a temporary structure held by

Fig. 11.3 Preparatory design for The Collector wallpaper.

a raw timber stud-work frame. This structure becomes a continuous aesthetic theme throughout the exhibition and, along with the corridor installation brings a unifying aesthetic strategy to the diverse interiors of the eight autobiographic episodes [Fig. 11.4]. This unification is useful not only in providing a continuous visual theme through the aesthetically varied episodes, but helps to bring together spaces that, combining recreation, representational and reflective spaces (as discussed in Chapter 7) are very different in how they articulate location. The exposed framework also acts as an important conceptual device: always exposed in each of the rooms, it reminds visitors of the artificiality of the interiors they inhabit and reminds them that, however real, each interior is a construction and that the exhibition, although based on actual autobiographic narrative is also a construction, bordering on fiction.

Hotel - Threshold

The threshold for the *Hotel* project is conceived as a reception for the fictional hotel that inhabits the MoMu exhibition space. It is located on a spacious landing at the top of the main ModeNatie staircase, extending the exhibition experience out from the confines of the gallery space to meet the visitor as they ascend the stairs, as in the threshold construction devised for *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007). The threshold construction is designed to replicate a working hotel reception with a desk furnished with telephone, working computers and all of the standard accoutrements associated with a genuine reception desk. The wall behind the desk is covered with The Collector wallpaper and below a neon sign that reads 'HOTEL', three framed photographs hang on the wall; one depicts the exterior of ModeNatie as it is today, taken from Nationalstraat to show the rotunda, the second image is a reproduction of the photograph of the original Hotel Central taken from the same location as featured in the catalogue to *Het ModeMuseum/The Fashion Museum:*

Fig. 11.4 Image showing three of the rooms from *Hotel*, with the inner corridor on the left, and the stud-work frame is visible around the perimeter of the rooms creating aesthetic continuity throughout the eight autobiographic episodes.

Backstage (Debo and Verhelst 2002: 172), the first exhibition held at MoMu [Figs. 11.5, 11.6]. These images flank a central image, again featured in the *Backstage* catalogue (Debo and Verhelst 2002: 178), which shows the Hotel Central interior, the converging corridors on which the *Hotel* project interior is modelled and which the visitor will soon encounter. Whilst the reception is constructed and installed to function and appear genuine, the wall behind the desk clearly reveals the raw timber stud-wall framework that supports it. The intention behind revealing the supporting framework of the wall is the same at the reception as it is throughout the exhibition, a deliberate strategy to remind visitors that no matter how real or life-like the interior they inhabit, it is a construction, a fiction.

The images behind the desk are selected specifically to introduce and contextualise the *Hotel* concept: although the two images of the building are taken over one hundred years apart, they are instantly recognisable, due to the characteristic rotunda, as the same building. The sign on the earlier photograph, Hotel Central, is clearly visible. The paired photographs make a visual statement that reveals the ModeNatie's former use and locates the title of the exhibition in relation to the building. In the same way, the central image showing Hotel Central's converging corridors may, as visitors leave the exhibition, be recognised as the same interior that they have just occupied. The repeated image on The Collector wallpaper introduces the decorative scheme in the exhibition corridors, and, subliminally, locates the author at the very start of the experience.

The portrait depictions in the wallpaper are one manifestation of the body that visitors experience at the exhibition threshold. More obvious than this pictorial representation, however, is the use of live performers (the MoMu gallery staff), who expand on their normal duties to enact the role of hotel staff as an intrinsic part of the threshold construction. This approach realises the idea of the performative representation of the body,

Fig. 11.5 The ModeNatie building seen from Nationalestraat, 2001
Fig. 11.6 Hotel Central seen from Nationalestraat, early twentieth century.

positioning a live performer with a specific role into the action of the exhibition: with reference to the performative thresholds of *Bernhard Willhelm* and *Katharina Prospekt*: *The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2005) but in the instance of the *Hotel* project using live performers instead of mannequins. This performative aspect of the *Hotel* reception consolidates the transformative aspect essential to the definition of an exhibition threshold (as discussed in Chapter 6): with staff playing the role of receptionists, visitors to the exhibition are requested to check-in and are transformed into 'guests'. They will receive a key that enables them to enter the exhibition rooms and museum staff have the opportunity to explain the exhibition concept. Thus the receptionists perform a dual role of giving practical information on how visitors might negotiate an unfamiliar exhibition experience and through performance enhance the conceit of the hotel as concept and location for the exhibition.

As demonstrated, the *Hotel* project reception, in accordance with the notion of a threshold construction as defined in Chapter 6, introduces the exhibition concept, narrative and aesthetic. The exhibition concept, the use of the hotel as a metaphor for memory, and the reinstatement of the building's original use as physical layout for the exhibition are revealed in the reception construction and by the hotel staff as visitors are greeted at the desk. The exhibition narrative – the use of the autobiographic episode – is also explained as visitors are given the key with which they can access each of the exhibition rooms. The exhibition aesthetic is introduced through the use of The Collector wallpaper, which continues through the hotel corridors, and the exposure of the supporting framework to the reception structure which continues as a visual thematic device throughout the entire installation. Most importantly, the *Hotel* reception fulfils the transformative function of a threshold, as observed in *Genovanversaeviceversa*, *Bernhard Willhelm* and *Katharina Prospekt*, aiding the visitor's transition from the street to the interior world of the

exhibition and simultaneously locating them as guest within the hotel concept. And once the guest has checked in and has their key, they are prepared to walk down a corridor lined with The Collector wallpaper, and enter the first episode of *Hotel*.

Room 1 – *Conformity*

Story

The story for *Conformity* describes an autobiographic episode from my childhood and centres on an evocation of place (the changing room of the local swimming pool) and autobiographic reflection (a child's curiosity in relation to the adult body, sexualisation of the body and a nascent awareness of the gendered and social codes of dressing). The episode is an attempt to convey a growing consciousness of sexuality, masculinity and the dominant codes of dress and dressing within a certain socio-cultural demographic – a predominantly working-class mining village in the north-east of England in the late 1960s.

The swimming pool changing rooms were where I learned to dress. Not the basics of tying laces and fastening buttons, but those boyish tricks of laziness, where several layers of clothing are removed as one, shoes are slipped off without untying laces and ties are kept as a noose, all to speed up the process of re-dressing. The changing rooms were also my first experience of an all-male environment where I saw adult men naked. The unclothed bodies aroused a nervous curiosity as to those imminent changes in my own body. Observing men dress and undress in the changing room and seeing the clothes that they wore is my first remembered consideration of the notion of masculinity.

Themes

The themes for *Conformity* were suggested during the process of documenting my clothing by items that reminded me of garments I had owned, or coveted, as a child. These garments tended not to be from fashionable designers, but instead were anonymous archetypes of the male wardrobe; denim jacket, corduroy jacket, pea coat, jeans, polo shirt. It occurred to me that there were similarities between my adult wardrobe and childhood clothing and that these similarities were rooted in dress codes that I had learned as a child. I considered how I felt when wearing these particular garments and discovered that I associate them with a sense of security and inconspicuousness: these garments, in their conformity to accepted dress codes, allow me to pass unnoticed through daily life.

Through *Conformity* it is my intention to articulate questions regarding how the clothing choices made for us as children reverberate through our adult life, how clothing-related notions of gender-appropriate clothing and behaviours are established in childhood and the feelings of security and normality that can be generated by certain 'appropriate' garments. I also want to explore the physical interaction with clothing in the actions of dressing and undressing, the potential eroticisation of this interaction and resultant fetishisation of the body and certain garments or clothing types.

Book

In response to the autobiographic episode and the themes it provokes, the graphic rendering for *Conformity* is a compilation of material in various media that evoke the location of the swimming pool and represents actions of dressing and undressing and the related fetishisation of the male body. As content for the volume developed, it also suggested a potential selection of garments for the exhibition and a very location-specific strategy for their display.

The main body of the volume is framed by two double-page spreads depicting a male body swimming underwater. These images are taken from the film *A Bigger Splash* (Hazan 1975) which documents the disintegration of artist David Hockney's relationship with his lover, Peter Schlesinger. One scene in the film depicts Schlesinger being photographed by Hockney as he swims nude in a private pool in Los Angeles, the artist's adopted home at the time. Distanced from the scene through the device of the camera, Hockney's gaze is presented as voyeuristic, while Schlesinger is portrayed as the indifferent subject of Hockney's voyeuristic gaze. The images in the graphic rendering do not reproduce directly the images in the film. They are renditions taken from photographs of the film viewed on a TV screen of a sequence where the camera pans over one of Hockney's paintings of the pool scene. They are further manipulated through digital techniques to soften and blur the image [Fig. 11.7]. The cumulative processes of distancing from the original image (through graphic techniques and the filmed sequence selected) is intended to create an image that, whilst not a literal translation of the cinematic image, still carries the poetic atmospheric and emotional effect of the original, and maintains its cultural resonance. The two images also depict frames from the film several seconds apart, so that an actual progression of the swimmer across the page is depicted from one image to the next, conveying the physical action of swimming. The images are relevant to *Conformity* not only in their content, atmosphere and emotional resonance, but also in that the film is contemporaneous to the narrative episode.

In the main body of the volume two distinct elements are placed in juxtaposition. Images that depict certain garments relevant to the narrative from the collection are interspersed between photographs that show them in interaction with the body. The garments are represented through drawings that place them in the location of the swimming pool changing
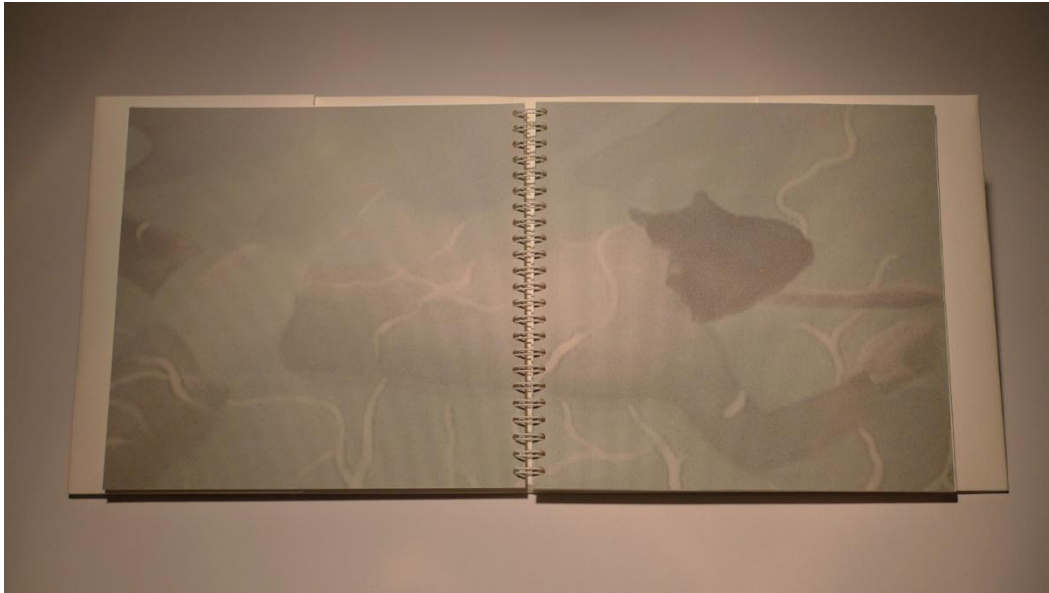
Fig. 11.7 The swimmer image taken from *A Bigger Splash* used as endpapers to the graphic rendition of *Conformity*.

cubicles. The garments are shown as if they have been hastily discarded during the process of undressing, left on the slatted benches or draped over the sides of the cubicles by a recently departed swimmer [Fig. 11.8]. The drawings were made from photographs of the garments using water soluble pencils and gouache. The style of the drawings and the selection of materials were adopted specifically to replicate drawings that I made at the age of the autobiographic episode. To reproduce the images for this volume they were digitally scanned and printed onto watercolour paper to emulate the original drawings.

Between the drawings are sequences of photographs that depict the garments from the drawings being put on, or taken off, the body. The photographs are cropped close to focus on particular details of the intersection of garment and body and to represent the partial view of the scene as if framed by the openings of the changing cubicles [Fig. 11.9]. The photographs record physical interaction between the garment and the human body and suggest the erotic charge generated through the act of surreptitious observation. The photographs were shot in colour, digitally transferred to black and white, but printed in colour ink-jet process onto water-colour paper. Printing the black and white image in colour process gives a richer tone, whilst printing onto watercolour paper creates a metallic sheen similar to a silver gelatine print. The resultant rendering, manipulated through printing techniques, is intended to produce an image quality that is suggestive of the images being located in the past, in distant memory.

The compilation of the graphic rendering of *Conformity* was influential in determining the content for the exhibition, the method of display for the garments and in developing the location for the exhibition space, both in terms of spatial layout, material qualities and atmosphere. My account of *Conformity* as realised in scale model form will illustrate how content
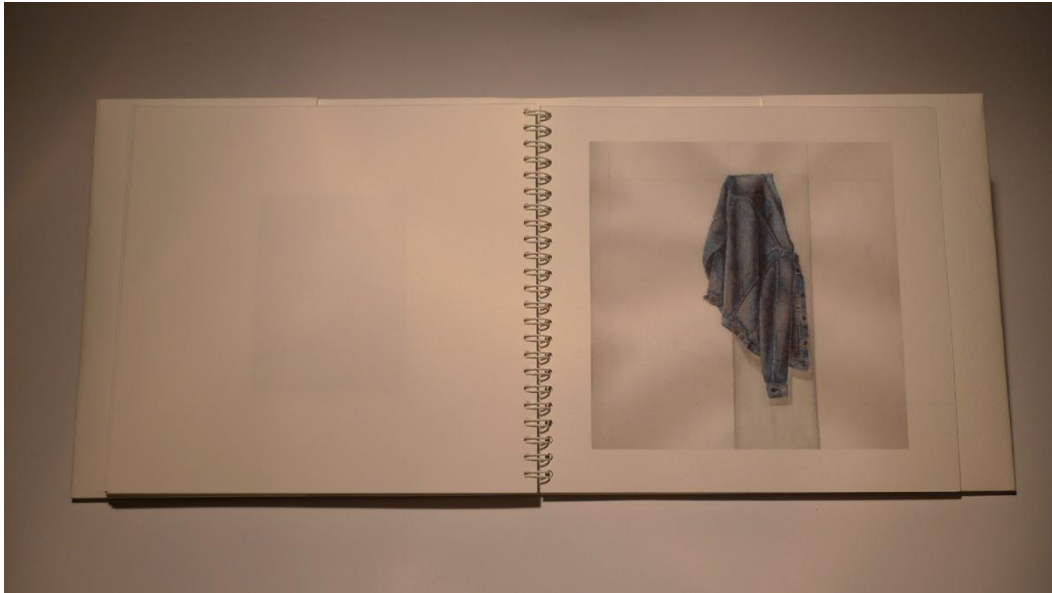
Fig. 11.8 Graphic volume for *Conformity* with drawings showing garments discarded in changing cubicles.
Fig. 11.9 Graphic volume for *Conformity* with photographic images of figures dressing/undressing.
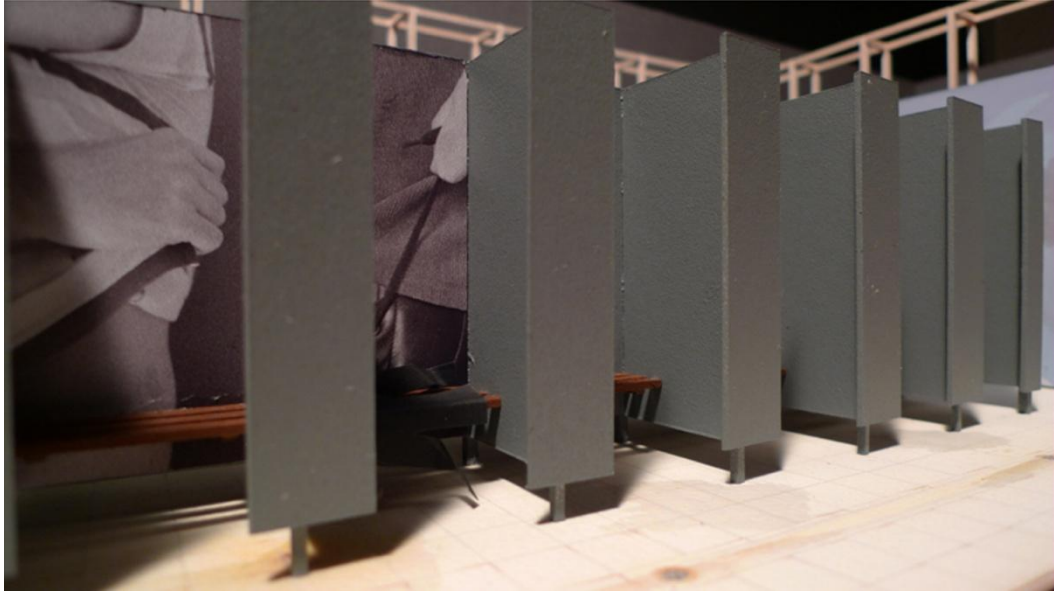
Fig. 11.10, 11.11 Views of the *Hotel* project model, showing the installation for *Conformity.*
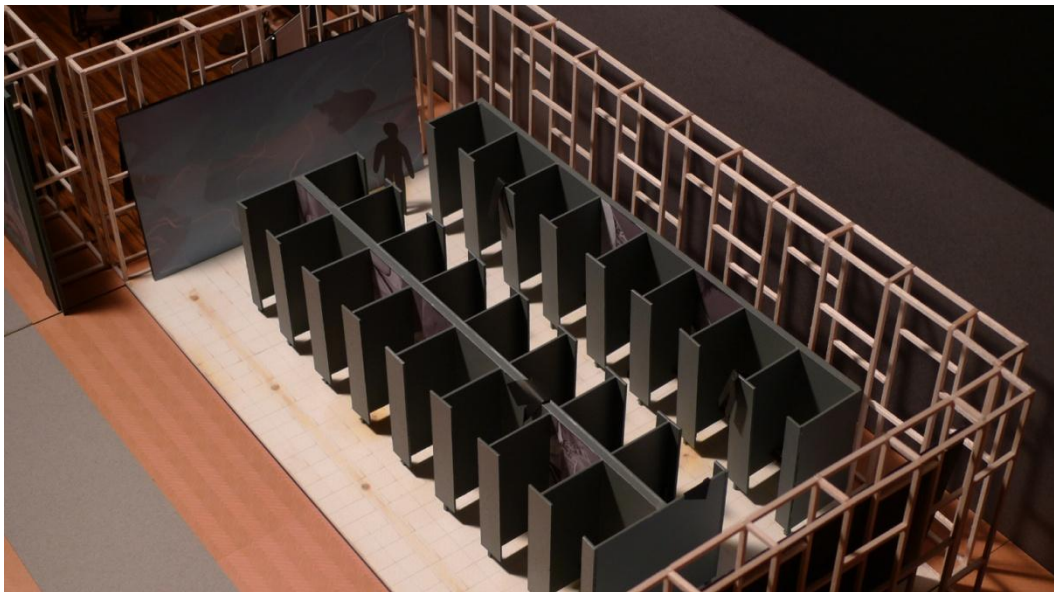
devised to communicate the autobiographic episode in print (the selection of objects for the drawings, the swimmer image, and black and white photographs) transferred directly to the exhibition proposal.

Particularly relevant to the development of the proposal were the drawings produced for the graphic rendition. Not only did the drawings necessitate consideration of the object selection for the exhibition proposal, but planning the drawings prompted consideration of the likely dimensions, construction method and materials for the changing cubicles which translated directly into their rendition in the scale model. Most importantly, the realisation of the drawings was critical in determining the manner in which the garments would be displayed, indicating precisely the presentation technique intended for the final exhibition. Depicted as if recently discarded by a hurriedly undressing swimmer or left behind in haste to exit the changing room, the garments are draped over cubicle walls, left on benches, and lying on the floor. In the graphic rendition, this depiction evokes the poignant absence of the human body present through the evidence of its actions: in the three-dimensional version of the scene the presentation technique adds to the atmosphere and dramatic conceit of the scene through implication of an inhabited space, where the visitor might encounter a real, living swimmer.

Landscape

The exhibition landscape created for *Conformity* replicates as realistically as possible the location of the swimming pool changing area almost to the point of complete recreation. The floor and changing cubicles are built from appropriate materials to add to the sensory realism of the scene. The cubicles are constructed from a material with a suitably authentic appearance, such as Formica Compact, or from spray-finished MDF. The slatted benches are stained timber, with an occasional slat broken. The floor is tiled, to give the appropriate sensation underfoot, with guttering

and drains represented and with details such as the rust staining around drains included. Poured clear acrylic resin simulates pools of water on the floor to add an atmospheric change of texture [Fig. 11.10]. Light comes from fluorescent tubes that hang overhead. Most importantly, the space should be saturated with the smell of chlorinated water and the distant sound of echoing voices and splashing water are present. The effects are deliberately engineered to instil a lyrical, poignant atmosphere that instantly evokes memories of familiar situations in the visitor, asserting the significance of memory in the construction of the autobiographic episodes represented in the exhibition.

The images of the swimmer, taken from *A Bigger Splash*, are transferred directly from the printed volume to appear in the model as large-format transparencies mounted on light-boxes and placed to form a vista when seen along the aisles between the cubicles. The light from the images is intended to create an atmospheric effect within space, emphasising the shadow of the rows of changing cubicles, and adds luminosity to the surface of the water depicted in the image [Fig. 11.12]. Incorporating the image into the scene has a practical as well as atmospheric purpose in that it prevents views directly into the neighbouring space and enhances a sense of enclosure and intimacy.

Within my definition of landscape as informed by analysis of the key exhibitions from MoMu (documented in Chapter 7), the exhibition scenography for *Conformity* corresponds as a carrier of narrative and as a transformative setting. The landscape, realised as the swimming pool changing area, creates a frame which is integral to the reading of the objects on display, presenting them within a very specific narrative determined by the autobiographic episode and which locates object and viewer equally within a particular landscape. The highly detailed scenographic construction momentarily transforms the MoMu gallery, and

the deliberately heightened atmosphere acts on the visitor's personal memory to transport them to similar locations within their experience.

Within the landscape categories of recreation, representative and reflective (as defined in Chapter 7), the landscape for *Conformity* is the only space in the *Hotel* project that corresponds to the recreation category. Visitors are presented with an evocatively realistic scene (albeit with a heightened, dramatised atmosphere) reminiscent of an interior the majority of visitors will have experienced, intended to acclimatise them to the phenomenological and emotionally oriented experience of the exhibition. Only the exposed stud-work frame around the perimeter of the room, as previously observed at the hotel reception, reminds visitors that this is not an actual swimming pool, but a recreation. The space is exposed as an artifice to remind visitors that however realistic or autobiographic the *Hotel* experience is, ultimately, a constructed fiction.

Object

Taking the definition of object to include all material that the visitor reads to make meaning within the exhibition space, object within *Conformity* is present in several manifestations. As is often the case, some items that could fall within the definition of object also fall into the category of other modes. This being the case, the swimmer image installed at either end of the gallery, and the images derived from the photographs in the printed volume of *Conformity* are also discussed later in this section under the definition of the body.

The swimmer image, read as object, is present both to depict the body, and to add atmosphere and sense of location to the scene. The black and white photographs from the printed rendition of *Conformity* are present as slow-motion moving images viewed on large-format screens that make up the rear wall of some of the changing cubicles. Again, read as object they

render the human body present in the scene and depict it in interaction with the clothing on display, focusing the visitor's attention on the interaction between garment and body and on those physical details of the garment, belt buckles, boot laces, zips and button fastenings, that express the mechanics of that interaction. The images reveal, in a slightly fetishised manner, the performative actions of dressing and undressing.

In the conventional sense of the museum object, garments are selected that represent nondescript, timeless, everyday menswear. These items are not fashion garments, and the intention is not to recreate a specific historic period, rather they express menswear types such as the pea-coat, denim jacket, jeans, polo shirt, boots, belt etc. In *Conformity* garments are selected from the collection and are supplemented with objects appropriated from other sources - it is more important that the items play their role in communicating the narrative and themes than that they are recognised as objects from a particular collection. The reading of the garments in relation to the narrative and its themes is expressed through the method of display (devised through the drawings made for the printed rendition of *Conformity*), in which garments are presented as if they had just been discarded during the process of dressing or undressing and the architecture of the changing cubicles is used to display the garments; folded and draped over benches, hanging over the cubicle walls and hanging from the corner of the front cubicle panel.

As concomitant with the definition of object informed by the key exhibitions at MoMu (discussed in Chapter 8), the notion of object in *Conformity* includes both garments from the collection, appropriate garments acquired from other sources and pictorial and audio-visual material. Most importantly, informed by observation and experience of the exhibitions at MoMu (particularly *Katharina Prospekt* and *Genovanversaeviceversa*), the garments are not presented for individual scrutiny, as in conventional

museum presentations, but are integrated into the exhibition landscape as carriers of meaning and narrative.

The Body

My definition of the body, as stated in Chapter 9, includes all of those techniques that can be called on in an exhibition to evoke a sense of spirit and attitude as well as the three-dimensional body form. In *Conformity* (informed by those techniques observed in the key exhibitions at MoMu, Antwerp) the body is represented through various media, including pictorial, aural, digital and performative via evidence of human activity. Pictorial representation is achieved through the swimmer image installed at either end of the space. This image is used to heighten the sense of location and atmosphere whilst depicting the body in motion. The image also acts as the location for speakers that play a low-level sound-track of the echoing voices and sounds of splashing water typical of a public swimming pool. The sound appears to emanate from the image, combining both pictorial and aural representation of the body.

The rear wall of some changing cubicles is faced with a large flat-screen monitor that shows a film of garments similar to those displayed being put on and removed, similar to the black and white images used in the printed volume for *Conformity*. The images are framed so that they are taken in close-up, and focus on details of the garment as they interact with the body. The images are manipulated so that they are presented as watery blue-grey duotones and played so that the action is slowed down almost as if the image was filmed under water. Both the close-up framing and the slowed projection speed are intended to create a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the image. The film is edited so that it intermittently cuts to a black screen. This is intended to replicate an impression of the body, glimpsed momentarily during dressing and undressing, through the changing cubicle doorway. Whilst implicating the

visitor as perpetrator of the voyeuristic action, their sense of security or propriety is not undermined, as the subject of their surreptitious gaze is virtual rather than real. The digitally transformed filmed image, located within the changing cubicle, is designed to present both body and garment as the location for a fetishised, erotically charged gaze.

There are no three-dimensional representations of the body in *Conformity*. Instead, the ordinary, everyday men's garments that are representative of generic working-class men's clothes are displayed in various situations - lying on the changing cubicle benches, draped over the cubicle walls, lying on the floor - as if recently discarded. As observed in *Genovanversaeviceversa* and *Bernhard Willhelm* (and recounted in Chapter 9), the objects are presented to suggest the evidence of recent human activity. Through the presentation of these garments the performative body, *in absentia*, is conjured to suggest the act of dressing and undressing. The garments, presented as discarded clothing and reminiscent of the domestic scene, are intended to evoke an atmosphere of familiarity and intimacy in order to tap into associative memories that the visitor might have of similar locations.

These various representations of the body in *Conformity*, inspired by techniques documented previously in Chapter 9, are intended to enhance the specific sense of place - the changing rooms of the public swimming pool - and to create a particular atmosphere for this autobiographic episode that is at once poignant, intimate, and that invites the visitor to become part of the scene in which the body and the act of dressing and undressing is central.

Room 2 – *Rebellion*

Story

The story for *Rebellion* arose from examination of a group of garments by British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood during the documentation process. Common to these garments were details of cut and structure, such as twisted seams, holes, over-scaled collars and cuffs, misaligned buttons and buttonholes that, when the garments are placed on the body, create a sense of dishevelment and disorder. Close scrutiny, through the process of drawing the intersection of garment and body, revelled that this sensation evoked memories and images of disorder typical of childhood dress – the un-tucked or miss-buttoned shirt, the torn sleeve or a hole in the elbow of a sweater. When transplanted to the adult male, as these garments are intended, the effect is of deliberate carelessness, a transgression of adult dress codes that inspire feelings of defiance and create an image of rebelliousness.

Westwood, born in Derbyshire in the north of England in 1941 is widely considered to be Britain's greatest living fashion designer, having won the British Fashion Council's Designer of the Year on three occasions to date. Famous for establishment-challenging styles from punk to nude body-stockings decorated with acrylic fig leaves, Westwood is now considered 'as much part of the establishment as she is anti-establishment, reflecting the paradoxical nature of her clothing' (Jones and Mair, 2003: 512). Westwood's design often reflects historic influences alongside innovative pattern-cutting techniques. In recent years, whilst maintaining international teaching commitments in Vienna and Berlin, she has campaigned for human rights and backed pro-environmental causes.

Taking the dual themes of childish miss-dress and rebellion that these garments inspire, the story for *Rebellion* describes a common narrative of

dispute – the point at which the child, striving to define a new, independent teenage identity clashes with the adult over what is appropriate dress. The story suggests that this teenager-adult contest is a rite of passage that locates fashion as a site of rebellion where new identities are forged, but that for some people this realisation of dress as a transgressive force is maintained throughout their adult life.

From an autobiographic perspective, I was instigating such dress-related disputes at the same time as the sub-cultural youth movement Punk became widely reported in mass-media, around 1976. Commonly acknowledged to have been originated by Vivienne Westwood and her entrepreneur partner, Malcolm McLaren, the punk style devised by Westwood, and its insurgent attitude are maintained in her work to this day, the legacy being those errant details of cut and construction that are the subject of this autobiographic episode.

Themes

Present in the narrative of *Rebellion* and the research carried out around the group of garments by Vivienne Westwood are themes that articulate the construction and projection of identity through clothing, the effect of the physical aspects of clothing in engendering behavioural attitudes, and the notion of dress that contravenes conventional dress codes as a transgressive force – clothing that symbolises rebellion.

Book

Rebellion began life as a response to the specific physical sensations experienced when wearing a selection of garments by Vivienne Westwood. A number of garments in the collection had features in their construction that, when placed on the body contrived a deliberate dishevelment reminiscent of childhood dress: I initially interpreted this phenomenon as a process of infantilisation. Having planned to explore this

narrative of the relationship between these particular clothes and the notion of infantilisation, I began to research the topic by reading biographies of Westwood (Vermorel 1996, Connolly 2002, Mulvagh 2003, Wilcox 2004). As I read the accounts of her early work it became apparent that the significance of these construction techniques lay not only in their effect of infantilisation but in the designer's expression of an anarchic and rebellious energy. The emphasis of the essay shifted to a study of the relationship in Westwood's work between youth, or childishness, and anarchy: a perspective from which, according to my research, her work has not previously been scrutinised. As preparation for the essay I read biographies of Westwood marking out every relevant passage. This process triggered memories of my first encounter with Westwood's designs, seen while I was at school in the 1970s in sensationalised tabloid articles. The essay format matched this temporal location and, instead of an actual essay, the project became the compilation of the fictional scrap-book of a fourteen year-old child. The title of the project is written into the first pages of the book: 'Rebellion: The anarchic aesthetic of Vivienne Westwood's menswear often relies on details of cut and construction that have their roots in the rebellion of the playground.'

The graphic rendering of *Rebellion* takes the form of a school exercise book, into which texts describing the connection between rebellion and youth in relation to Vivienne Westwood have been copied by hand. Alongside these texts are pasted relevant images of Westwood's designs as depicted on the runway, photographs documenting the punk era, and stills taken from films that show social and sartorial disintegration in relation to school-age children. These images are juxtaposed with diagrammatic renderings of the structural 'defects' in the Westwood garments in the collection that are the inspiration behind this autobiographic episode. All of the elements are collaged into the exercise

book as if it is being used to gather material for an illustrated school project [Fig. 11.12].

The preparation of the printed volume for *Rebellion* played an important role in re-focusing and rationalising the narrative of infantilisation originally identified in the documentation process into the version that appears in the exhibition. The construction of the graphic version of the narrative as a school exercise book implicitly suggests the location for the exhibition space. The process of compiling relevant texts and images was inspirational in devising the atmosphere to be created in the space, through the use of furniture and the type of mannequin, their styling and placement. Texts cited from Westwood's biographic sources, and images culled from cinematic sources are transposed directly from the graphic rendition of *Rebellion* into the exhibition space to generate atmosphere and add depth to the content.

Landscape

Rebellion is set in a space that evokes an old-fashioned class-room. The class-room is not presented as a direct recreation, but as a representational landscape constructed from elements (such as the wooden floor, blackboards, school-room furnishings) that unmistakably establish the location of the space. The floor is covered with heavily varnished floor-boards and propped against the walls are black-boards on easels with texts written in chalk. On a table, a film projector throws black and white film footage onto a portable screen erected in the opposite corner. The soundtrack has been removed so that the only noise comes from the mechanics of the projector. Light comes into the space from the direction of the stud-wall framework opposite the doors and falls on the floor as if coming through windows. The quality of light is that of an autumn afternoon, soft but cold, and the light is low enough so that the beam of the projector is apparent. The flickering light and constant

mechanical rattle from the projector add to the awkward and unsettling atmosphere. The space smells of floor polish and burning wood. Chairs and desks are piled into a corner of the room, with others strewn at random around the space. The visitor appears to have interrupted a scene of anarchic devastation [Fig. 11.13].

As with the landscapes curator Angelo Figus created for the exhibition *Genovanversaeviceversa*, the scenographic emphasis in this autobiographic episode is on locating the dramatic action of the narrative rather than accurately recreating a specific interior. The setting is theatrical and acts as a back-drop to the action that is imagined to have preceded the visitor's entrance. An air of tension underscores the scene and contrasts with the poetic feel of the previous scene. The scenography, although recognisable and evocative, places emphasis on the act of rebellion rather than the accuracy of realising the location. The landscape of *Rebellion* (in accordance with the definition established in Chapter 7) is established as a scenography that transforms the exhibition space and, as visitors are able to walk *into* the scene, it establishes a landscape that is inhabited by object, mannequin and visitor equally. The scenography transports the visitor to another location, creates atmosphere and, above all, carries and communicates the narrative.

Object

The garments presented in this room are original garments designed by Vivienne Westwood that are combined with basic school uniform pieces; black flannel blazers and trousers, white cotton shirts. The outfits are compiled to communicate a sense of the breakdown of the standardization and anonymity of the uniform, and assertion of an emergent identity through personalisation. Numerous combinations of standard uniform and Westwood garment are possible, and the ensembles are styled on a purely aesthetic basis. The Westwood garments are entirely incorporated
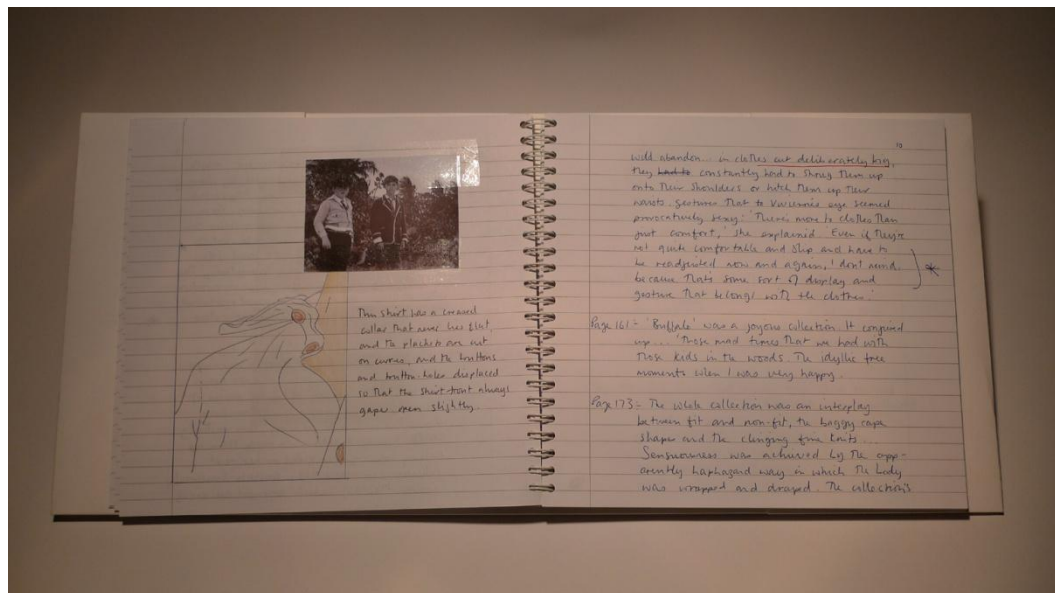
Fig. 11.12 Graphic volume for *Rebellion*.
Fig. 11.13 View of the *Hotel* project model showing the installation for *Rebellion*.

into the uniform ensembles, with only the mannequin positioned standing on the desk in the centre of the room dressed exclusively in Westwood garments. As with the installation of military boots in *Katharina Prospekt* (described in Chapter 8), the definition of object is manipulated by the juxtaposition of museum and non-museum object to create narrative. The styling of the various ensembles is inspired by images from two films, used to illustrate the graphic rendition of *Rebellion*; Lindsay Anderson's *If…* (Anderson 1968) and Peter Brook's cinematic adaptation of William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* (Brook 1963), which both depict sartorial disintegration in relation to traditional school uniforms. Clips from both films are selected to present contextualised images of violence and rebellion and are projected in the exhibition space.

Around the room are blackboards that bear chalk-written texts. These texts are taken from biographies of Vivienne Westwood, previously transcribed into the graphic volume for *Rebellion*, that cite specific references that relate her design work to the combined energies of youth and rebellion. The texts are written in chalk and may be erased by visitors. *Hotel* staff will re-write any texts that are erased. The texts are repeated on the school uniform garments worn by the mannequins; written in black felt-tip marker on the white shirts, and in white correction fluid on the black uniform blazers, along with anarchist symbols and childish doodles. This technique adds a further layer of disintegration to the scene, but also reflects a common practice in contemporary youth culture used to mark the transition from junior to senior school; at the end of the summer term, when children are moving on from junior school, it has become a tradition for classmates to write messages on each other's clothing. These garments thus become a souvenir, a material marker of a life transition, but are also evidence of a sanctioned act of sartorial rebellion.

Rebellion exploits the notion of object in its widest sense, as represented in the key presentations from MoMu and discussed in Chapter 8. As in *Katharina Prospekt*, museum (the Westwood garments) and non-museum objects (shop-bought school uniform) are combined to communicate narrative. Furniture is used to evoke dramatic incident, as in *Bernhard Willhelm* and, as in *2Women-2Vrouwen*, text and moving image as object are incorporated into the scenography to both carry narrative and create atmosphere.

The Body

Garments by Vivienne Westwood are mounted on an assortment of retail display-type mannequins, varying in style, but all of the type that realistically replicate facial features and hair. All of the mannequins are at child to youth height – between 130cm and 150cm - which specifies their place as pupils within the school-room setting and also represents the notion of infantilisation through dress from which this narrative originates. The over-scaling of collars and sleeves that are deliberately cut too large for adult dimensions is further emphasised on the child-size mannequin, and the dysfunctional nature of garments that are formulated to twist or gape when placed on the body is accentuated and contextualised as a form of childish mis-dressing.

Some of the mannequins show signs of damage, chipped surfaces, flaking paint and broken limbs or fingers which have been roughly repaired with adhesive tape, recalling the ad hoc use of retail mannequins in *Bernhard Willhelm*. The mannequins give the impression that they have been wounded in a fight. This state of injury relates directly to those garments that have runs or open seams incorporated into their manufacture and contextualises these imperfections with the implication that they are the result of play-ground skirmishes. The mannequins are placed around the exhibition space in realistic poses; one alone, sitting on the floor, a

conversing couple in the corner of the room. The majority of the mannequins are located as a massed group in the centre of the room, facing the entrance to the space, with one of the group standing on a desk. Despite their diminutive size, the effect is that of a massed, galvanised force. The technique observed in the exhibition *Dangerous Liaisons* (documented in Chapter 9) of recreating a sense of the body's spirit and attitude through location and positioning of the mannequin is used to dramatic effect in *Rebellion*.

The animate body is present in *Rebellion* through film-footage projected onto a screen in one corner of the room. Scenes from *If…* (Anderson 1968) that depict young students fighting in corridors and class-rooms, and scenes from *Lord of the Flies* (Brook 1963) recording the sartorial disintegration that befalls the young castaways who are the protagonists in the film, are projected at a slightly slower than normal speed and without sound.

Informed by the key exhibitions from MoMu my account of the body as presented in Chapter 9, the representations of the body demonstrated in *Rebellion* play a far more important role in the exhibition than mere supports for the garments on display. The mannequins are intended to enhance the specific sense of place (the schoolroom) and to convey an atmosphere of chaos, disorder and anarchy that is associated with Westwood's clothes and central to this biographic episode. The massed group of mannequins are arranged to create a feeling of confrontation and unease in the visitor, exacerbated by the flickering light and whirring noise from the film projector reflecting the narrative of adopting clothing as a mark of transgression. The cinematic representation of the body shows sartorial disintegration and rebellion in action, whilst adding atmospheric light and sound effects to the exhibition landscape. Overall, the representations of the body are constructed to assist in the creation of a

particular atmosphere of combative rebellion, personifying the dynamic and conveying the concept of the autobiographic episode.

Room 3 – *Flamboyant*

Story

The story recounted in *Flamboyant* was inspired by a conspicuous lack of material evidence, rather than its presence. Documenting the collection, I was aware that very few items remained with any tangible connection to the 1980s, and those few that did remain, I looked on with almost iconic regard. In the documentation for these items, I began to compile lists of the other garments that they were worn with, and these lists began to take the form of texts that were almost instructional in their description how particular outfits were put together.

From an autobiographic aspect, the story also recounts a personal creative partnership and the social dynamic of a close group of friends whose joint creative abilities combined to create a world isolated from the increasing urban decay in which we lived. Spurred on by recently published style magazines such as *The Face*, *i-D* and *Blitz*[14], and garnered by the androgynous image projected by the singers Boy George (who fronted the pop band *Culture Club*) and Marilyn, we used our combined skills to create 'fashion' in increasingly extreme manifestations, that both distinguished us as a particular clique, and distracted from the escalating social disintegration of the inner-city area in which we lived. Developing themes established in *Rebellion*, and in contrast to *Conformity*, the narrative episode *Flamboyant* depicts clothing as extreme self-expression.

Themes

The central theme of *Flamboyant* is the deliberate use of clothing to both explore and express personal notions of identity and gender whilst creating certain styles that enable 'tribal' identification and association, along with exploration of the performative aspect of clothing in relation to identity. Also present are narratives that explore the rejection of market-led fashion for the hand-made or individualised or customised garment, and the influence of peer-generated media on how we dress.

Book

The graphic rendering for *Flamboyant* began as a collage of images taken from style magazines from the early to mid 1980s that reflected the type of clothing that I, along with my peers would have made, or purchased and worn. These images stood as substitutes for actual garments from the period, which are no longer in my possession [Fig. 11.14]. Subsequently, I added those items from the collection that survived, incorporating them as photographic images. The photographs focus on particular details of the items, and they are presented as small images centred on the page with a substantial white border. They are printed with digitally enhanced colour, and both layout and printing techniques are intended to combine to create a sense of almost iconic preciousness [Fig. 11.15]. The outfits that these fragments represent are presented in completion through written descriptions. The descriptions are styled as methodical instructions with the implication that the outfits could be reconstructed if the texts were followed.

In contrast to the highly-coloured magazine collages and jewel-like photographs of objects are interspersed images of the area in which I lived at the time of the narrative. These images, although presented in the same format as the object photographs, are black and white. These images, culled from various internet sites, depict the Hulme area of central

Finally the joke glamour, tacky
parody and exotic drag queens of
many Hyper Hyper designers were
there to remind us what SF [Street
Fashion] is really about today.
Classic Street – the paradox and the
truth.

Vivienne Westwoo[d]
The Face no. 6[..]
June 198[.]

Fig. 11.14 Preparatory collages for the *Flamboyant* volume.
Fig. 11.15 Graphic rendition of *Flamboyant*.

Fig. 11.16 View of the *Hotel* project model, showing the installation for *Flamboyant*.
Fig. 11.17 Designer and performance artist Leigh Bowery in blue body-paint, replicated on the *Flamboyant* mannequins.

Manchester in the mid 1980s, and represent an inner city area with growing social problems and in desperate physical decay. These images are presented in direct contrast to the coloured, stylised images from the fashion plates and of the collection objects with the intention of communicating the discordant contrast between the clothing from the time and the physical surroundings in which it was made and worn.

The text that accompanies the printed volume for *Flamboyant* describes Button Castle: a meter high, home-made toy castle that we covered in miscellaneous buttons, both found in a charity shop, which became a distinctive feature of the interior decoration of the flat in which I lived. The recollection of Button Castle in the drafting of this text was instrumental in the development of the exhibition landscape, particularly the transposition of elements from the interior (such as the floor covering, and Button Castle which appears in the exhibition as a stage on which each mannequin performs) to the exhibition scenography. The creation of the *Flamboyant* volume was also integral in developing the idea of the presentation of the outfits relevant to this narrative as replicas, to recreate the long-lost original garments.

Landscape

The landscape for *Flamboyant* is defined by a set of platforms that are distributed throughout the space. These platforms are based on Button Castle and provide a stage on which each mannequin is presented as a performer. Printed backgrounds are located behind each stage; the front-facing side shows black and white images of exterior locations taken from the photographs of Hulme, Manchester, reproduced in the graphic version of *Flamboyant*, while the reverse shows a colour image depicting painted flowers [Fig. 11.16]. This image, printed on the banner and the floor of the exhibition space is taken from a seventeenth century Dutch still-life painting, reproduced as a gift-wrapping paper that was used as a floor

covering in the interior of the flat in which I lived. The lighting is low, so that the beam of the spotlights that fall on the performers and the banners behind them are visible.

The stud-work frame around the exhibition space is used to support replica bill-boards that are pasted with poster-scaled reproductions of the covers of style magazines contemporary to the narrative. The posters are pasted in repeat to emphasis the presence of the image, and the bill-board frames are dirty and distressed, as if they have been outdoors for a long period and subjected to long periods of inclement weather. Strip lights are set along the top edge of the poster frames to illuminate the images. The bill-board images are present in the landscape to communicate the impact of the burgeoning style press on the clothes we wore during this period.

The landscape for *Flamboyant* echoes those constructions made for *Genovanversaeviceversa* and *Bernhard Willhelm* in which emblematic locations are reappropriated to construct a fantasy landscape for the purposes of the narrative. This landscape falls within the category of representation as defined in Chapter 7, as it collides both authentic interior and exterior visual references that represent actual locations, to create a scenography that expresses the autobiographic narrative.

Object

Very few items remain in the collection from the early 1980s, having been discarded as they became worn out or unfashionable. It is proposed that those few enduring items are incorporated into recreations of outfits that were worn at the time, which are reconstructed from descriptions of the original garments from memory that were drafted for the *Flamboyant* volume. To differentiate the reconstructed garments from authentic pieces the replicas are made entirely from unbleached calico. The outfits are presented as *toiles* (a pattern used for fitting a garment, generally made

from calico) to establish a differentiation between them and the original items from the collection and, as evidence of a technique used in clothing manufacture, to suggest the self-made styling and practice of customisation prevalent during this period. The mainly monochrome effect of the calico outfits will also enable the silhouettes to stand out from the visually complex landscape construction employed in this space. The process of recreating historic garments was effectively used in *Mutilate?-Vermink?* (MUHKA, Antwerp, 2001), where curator Walter Van Beirendonck commissioned students of the Fashion Department of the Hogeschool, Antwerp, to make reproductions based on original garments. The recreated garments were made entirely from paper and displayed alongside authentic corsets from the same period.

In the autobiographic episode represented by *Flamboyant*, the objects presented comprise both material from the collection and garments that are fabricated to enhance the visitor's understanding of the original items by showing them contextualised as complete outfits. As previously demonstrated by several examples from my exhibition research, the technique of combining museum and non-museum objects can be adopted as a strategy to create narrative and construct meaning in relation to exhibited objects. The definition of object (as discussed in Chapter 8) is applied in *Flamboyant* to the large-scale images presented as bill-boards. Taken from magazine covers used in collages, originally included in the graphic rendition of this episode, these pictorial objects are juxtaposed with the recreated garments, and enable the visitor to read the replicas and images of the garments they are drawn from in juxtaposition.

The Body

The combination of original and replica items are mounted on mannequins that are positioned on podia located about the room. The mannequins, which are the most obvious representation of the body in this scene, are

identical, genderless and featureless. The faces and hands are painted in bright blue, red or green to suggest the make-up worn by artist/performers Leigh Bowery and Trojan, leading faces on the London club scene in the 1980s, as featured in Sheila Rock's photographs published in *The Face* magazine (White 1984: 56-57) [Fig. 11.17]. The mannequins are posed in exaggerated gesture, as if caught in performance: self-conscious rather than camp. They are styled to represent the androgynous and flamboyant fashion of the 1980s. Elevated on stage-like platforms, they are raised and set apart from the visitor and are presented as performers. The theatricality reflects an attitude prevalent in radical young London-based designers of this period such as BodyMap, Pam Hogg and Rachel Auburn, whose dramatic and unconventional designs were influenced by contemporary club-culture (McDowell 2000: 380). The unnatural colouring of the face and hands emphasises their artifice and asserts a disregard for convention that is characteristic of the clothing they wear.

Large-format prints depicting cover spreads from contemporaneous magazines mirror the stance and clothing of the mannequins, locating the extreme styling within this niche media and showing the influence and impact of newly established glossy style magazines such as *The Face* and *Blitz*. This pictorial representation of the body presents a contextualised comparison to the three-dimensional mannequins.

As *Flamboyant* presents the mannequin as performer, the body is also present in the form of the visitor who, as participating audience is effectively implicated in the scene. In relation to the definition of landscape as a transformative construction (as argued in Chapter 8), the combination of scenography (the stages) and mannequin (as performer) exerts a transformation on the exhibition visitor, turning them into an audience member viewing the *Flamboyant* performance.

Room 4 – *The Body*

Story

The story for *The Body* centres on one garment, a blue chambray shirt dating from the early 1990s. This shirt became a personal 'uniform' at a time when, along with many other young men, I was subjected to a significant shift in the depiction of masculinity in advertising and popular media. Whilst a particularly muscularised male body had been present in the work of photographers such as Herb Ritts and Bruce Weber from the early 1980s (Ritts 1984:69-73, Withers 1984:60), in the early 1990s a new body consciousness prevailed. Images of a 'new man', epitomised by advertising photography for American fashion designer Calvin Klein and exemplified in Patrick Anderson's photographs of the 21 year old rap star Marky Mark (Godfrey 1992:42-50) were relentless and ubiquitous in magazines, on television and in the cinema [Fig. 11.18]. Fashionable gender expression shifted from androgyny to re-fashioned masculinity, defined by models with naturally unachievable musculature. Men were faced with a marketing-led body-image of the kind that women had been subject to for many years. In complete contradiction, as men's ideal body shape became progressively more defined their clothes as demonstrated by this particular shirt, were cut to be baggy and less fitted. The story that accompanies the graphic rendition of *The Body* describes this shift in personal expression from clothing to physical presence.

Themes

Central to *The Body* are themes that articulate the effect that mass media can exert in constructing and determining popular definitions of masculinity. *The Body* also examines the impact that media-constructed images of masculinity have on personal identity, the individual's sense of body-image and the resultant effect on clothing choices.
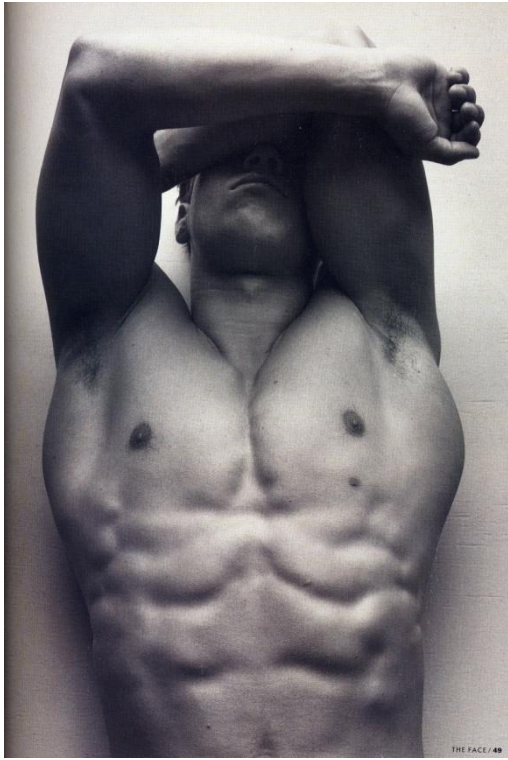
Fig. 11.18 Images of the over-muscularized male body, such as these photographs of Marky Mark by Patrick Anderson from *The Face*, November 1992, were prevalent in advertising and editorial in style magazines in the early 1990s.

Book

I began research for the graphic rendition of *The Body* by going back to the original source material implicated in the media-generated image of the muscularized new man. I compiled images from leading commercial photographers such as Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts, taken from magazine editorial and marketing images that depicted the active, athletic male model typical of the period. In contrast, I began reading texts that documented the rise of body-image disorders such as muscle dysmorphia that were, argued the authors, the direct result of constant exposure to the depiction of unrealistic, unattainable male body shape (Pope, Phillips and Olivardia 2000, Dugan and McReary 2008, Freson and Arthur 2008).

The first version of the graphic volume for *The Body* expressed this tension by placing image and textual citation on opposing pages. A subsequent iteration placed the text over the image, and in the final version the image is placed horizontally, in a deliberate attempt to undermine the statuesque nature of the models depicted [Fig. 11.19]. Further digital intervention ghosted the image, so that it visually recedes in relation to the text, with the text overprinted in vibrant pink-red, bleeding off all sides of the page. The text is presented not to be read but as a visual filter over the image which, as a result, is disempowered and no longer dominates the field of vision. Whilst the overprinted text reproduces a particular academic text in its entirety, extracts from the text are reprinted on pages that interleave with the image pages in a legible font and layout.

Research for the graphic rendition of *The Body* was essential in locating both pictorial and textual content for use in the exhibition. The digital and graphic techniques devised for the volume are directly transposed to the exhibition space.

Landscape

The landscape for *The Body* is an almost literal translation of the graphic version of the narrative into three dimensional form. Unlike the spaces allocated to other autobiographic episodes, the space for this section is organised as a long corridor that bridges the *Hotel* corridor and the next room - *Repetition*. Within the exhibition layout, the spatial configuration of the space for *The Body* is unique. The change in proportion of the space at this location is dictated by the architecture of the galleries, but is exploited to provide a different environmental experience for the visitor at the mid-point of the exhibition, creating a spatial dynamic similar to that documented in Chapter 4 in reference to Rei Kawakubo's intervention in *2Women-2Wrouwen*. The corridor-like nature of the room, with a doorway at either end, marks it as a transitional space in which the visitor is conscious of passage from one environment to the next [Fig. 11.20].

The narrowness of the corridor and the monumental scale of the advertising images potentially reinforce the imposing nature of the models depicted, but turned on their side (as in the printed volume) and repeated in mirror-image they are abstracted and appear almost as landscapes. In variation from the printed volume, extracts from the academic text are printed in strips that cut through the images. The space is lit from above, and the same red-pink used in the graphic version of *The Body* is applied to the flooring, so that the saturated colour reflects back onto the walls and tints the light in the entire space. The flat, graphic surface of the floor and walls is uninterrupted apart from one small display case, sunk into the centre of one of the walls so that the glazed front is flush with the surface of the wall. The printed image continues across the back of the case, while the graphic text runs over the glazed surface as if across the garment displayed in the case.

Fig. 11.19 A spread from the graphic rendition of *The Body*.
Fig. 11.20 View of the *Hotel* project model, showing the installation for *The Body*.

Object

Only one item is displayed in the space given over to *The Body* - a blue chambray shirt that was worn repeatedly throughout a particular period in the early 1990s. This garment is one of very few items from this period to have survived in the collection and, rather than supplement it with items acquired or appropriated from other sources it is displayed alone. Its scarcity in the collection appoints it a value beyond its financial or dress-historical worth and reflects the singularity prized by museums and collectors; it achieves its value through its rarity and its unique place in the author's autobiography. The garment is displayed in a conventional glass display case, borrowed from the visual repertoire of the museum, which is set into one of the corridor walls. The use of the museum display case confers a value on the garment, along with implications of preciousness and rarity which are further emphasised through the use of fibre-optic lighting of the type commonly found in luxury retail fit-outs. The design language of the museum is deliberately used to confer value on this everyday item of clothing establishing a conceptual tension between the object and the display method. As discussed with reference to *Malign Muses* in Chapter 8, where Judith Clark uses certain presentation techniques to manipulate the viewer's reading of a Dior gown, equivalent techniques are deliberately exploited in *The Body* to construct a particular reading of an object concurrent with the exhibition narrative.

In accordance with the definition of object presented in Chapter 8, the autobiographic episode of *The Body* is also communicated through the inclusion of image and graphic text. Both text and image are taken directly from the graphic version of *The Body*, reproducing the same digital manipulation effected in the printed version. Image and text as object integrate with the conventional object - the chambray shirt – as they form background and overlay to the display case that contains it. At the

intersection of the display case, object, image and text merge visually and achieve comparable status.

The Body

In this episode the body is represented by large-format images of partly unclothed male models with exaggeratedly athletic physiques, taken from photographs by Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts from catalogues produced to market the Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace, representative of the hyper-athletic male prevalent in advertising images of this period. In this installation, however, the images are presented on their side which, despite their scale, is intended to negate their statuesque poses. By showing the images horizontally, they are disempowered, and their excessive musculature is transformed into a landscape or decorative frieze.

The only garment in this section is presented mounted in a display case on a standard plastic coat-hanger. The coat-hanger represents and replaces a body form, and its commonplace nature reinforces the ordinariness of the garment it displays, establishing a tension between the mundane nature of both shirt and hanger and display strategies that imply value and preciousness. The use of the hanger, which lacks the rounded three-dimensional form of the actual body, also accentuates the oversize cut of the shirt, characteristic of 1990s menswear, which drapes lifelessly from the plastic form in contrast to the sculpted physique presented in the pictorial renditions of the body.

The representations of the body, constructed from both two-dimensional pictorial and three-dimensional sculptural form are formulated to convey the central narrative of this section of the exhibition: the pictorial representation, depicting the marketing vision of a hyper-muscular, fictionalised body, created to sell perfumes and underwear is set in

opposition to the particularly lifeless and limpid display of a single, everyday garment on a plastic coat-hanger. The juxtaposition uses contrasting representations of the body to highlight the stark difference between the unattainable body image presented in magazines and advertising that reached a peak in the 1990s and the mundane reality of the shirt, which stands in for the ordinary, average male physique.

Room 5 – *Repetition*

Story

The story for *Repetition* arose during documentation of the collection, around the realisation that the collection contained over twenty pairs of jeans, almost identical, and in many instances differentiated only by small details of cut or surface decoration. The process of locating the garments within the chronology of the inventory encouraged recollection of the impetus for their purchase and the locations and occasions at which they had been worn. An obvious pattern emerged: the jeans were generally purchased for an occasion such as a birthday, New Year's Eve or similar celebration and, correspondingly, almost always worn in the situation of a nightclub. It occurred to me that I used these garments, many by well-known contemporary fashion menswear designers (Dior Homme, Alexander McQueen, Junya Watanabe), and with distinctive cut or surface treatment (lacquered coating, printed text, embroidered detail) both to satisfy my desire to purchase a fashion garment for an occasion, and at the same time remain appropriate to the location in which they would be worn. The ubiquitous nature of the denim fabric would override any distinctive features of the design. The work-wear connotations of the denim would also allow the garments to perform within the club environment where the ubiquitous denim jean, since the early 1970s, has been a focus of sexualisation and fetishisation.

The written narrative that accompanies the graphic rendition of *Repetition* is a list, in alphabetical order, of all of the bars and clubs I can remember visiting. This narrative relates the specific location in which the garments were worn, and alludes to the repetitive nature of the garment in the collection, habituation of clubs and bars and, as realised in the exhibition landscape, to the repetitive nature of the music played in these locations

Themes

Repetition examines the notion of clothing as appropriate to location and occasion, focusing on denim jeans as both an anonymous, ubiquitous garment and, within the socio-cultural setting of the nightclub, a garment that is regarded to have sexualised and fetishised interpretations.

Book

The first version of the graphic rendition of *Repetition* consisted of digital scans of each pair of jeans in the collection printed onto white paper titled with the designer's name and date of purchase [Fig. 11.21]. The intention of the digital scan was to represent the uniformity of the fabric from one pair to the next. This idea was developed for the final version as a more complex iteration. In the final version of the *Repetition* volume, images are made by direct digital scans of the same location on each pair of jeans. The crotch of the jean is chosen as the location to represent the sexualised nature of the garment. The repetition of the location echoes the title of the autobiographic episode and also enables comparison of similarity and difference from one garment to the next. The scans are printed in high definition, at actual size, and then mounted as swatches onto the page of the printed volume. Presenting them in the form of a swatch is intended to suggest to the reader that they use the images as they would a paint chart or fabric samples, comparing and contrasting one with another, acknowledging the repetitive similarity whilst drawing attention to slight variations. Each swatch is set within a black frame which
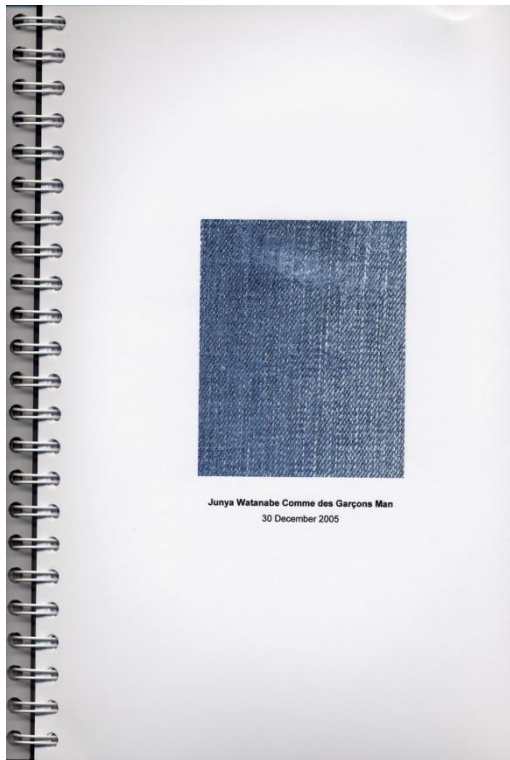
Fig. 11.21 Preliminary study for the graphic volume for *Repetition*.
Fig. 11.22 Spread from the graphic volume for *Repetition*.
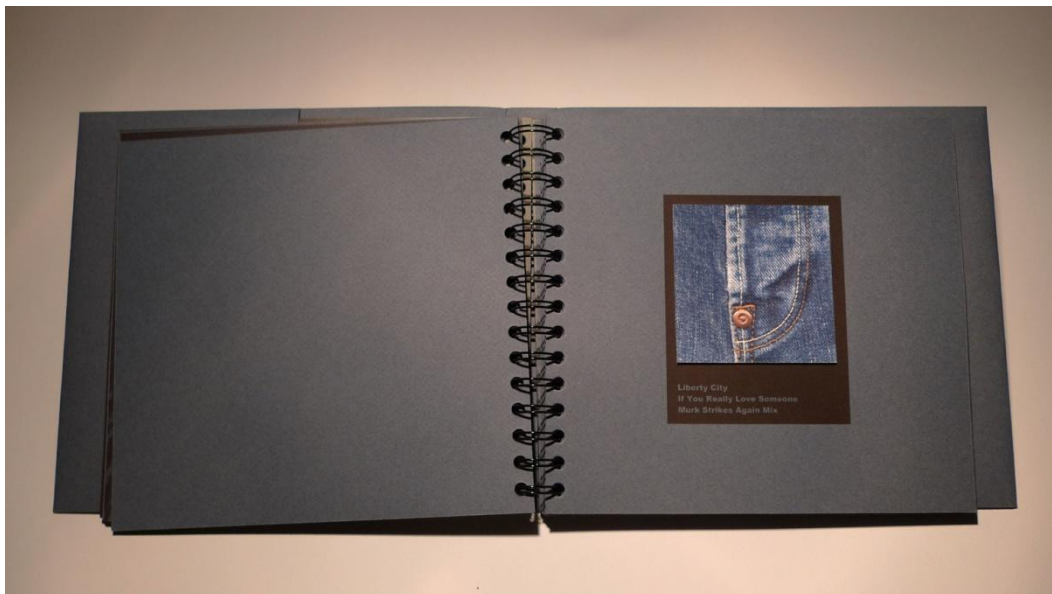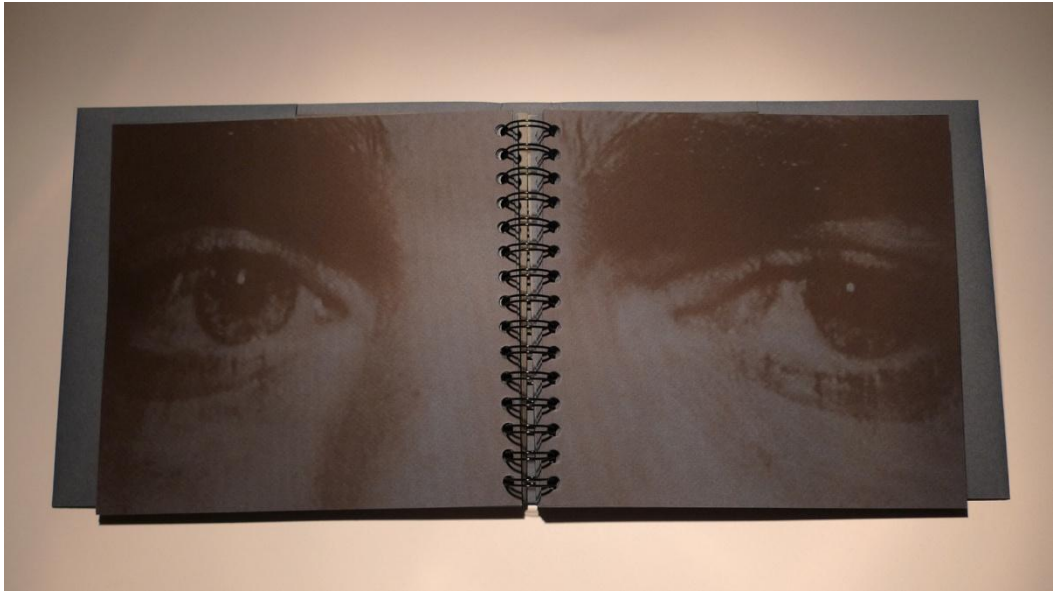
Fig. 11.23 Spread from the graphic rendition for *Repetition*.
Fig. 11.24 View of the Hotel project model showing the installation for *Repetition*.

gives the title and artist of favourite dance tracks that would have been played in clubs around the time the garments were made, representing both date and location of wear [Fig. 11.22].

The swatches are interspersed between images and transcribed dialogue taken from *Nighthawks* (Peck 1978). The film *Nighthawks* tells the story of a young gay man, Jim, in London in the mid 1970s. The film follows Jim through a series of casual sexual encounters initiated in London nightclubs. These repetitive encounters are set in contradiction to Jim's expressed wish of finding a 'meaningful' relationship. In a central scene Jim's movements are tracked through a nightclub, with the scene dominated by an extended close-up of Jim's eyes as he scans the crowd for potential partners. Images from this scene are photographed from a TV screen to give a degraded effect. The number of images needed for the volume is calculated and the scene divided into equal parts accordingly, thus the images are selected by mathematical pattern rather than subjective choice. The images are reproduced in sequence between each of the swatch pages [Fig. 11.23]. Excerpts of dialogue from the film are selected to illustrate the transition from Jim's first visit to a gay club, to one of the last scenes in the film where it becomes apparent that Jim's addiction to the 'scene' will jeopardise his current relationship. The dialogue is presented in script form, distributed at regular intervals through the volume. The volume is printed onto heavyweight dark blue matt paper that evokes the qualities of the denim fabric.

Compilation of the printed volume for *Repetition* was particularly critical in developing the idea for the scenography of the autobiographic episode in relation to suggesting a specific location. Consideration of the printing stock for the volume was also instrumental in suggesting the quality of the atmosphere for the landscape in relation to light levels and quality of light. Compiling the content for the printed volume, especially the decision to

include music track titles helped determine that aural content and quality of the space.

Landscape

Moving from the claustrophobic red-tinted space of *The Body*, the visitor enters the double height space of the MoMu rotunda. The space is dark; the walls are painted dark blue and the floor has an abstract camouflage-like painted pattern of dark blue, brown and black. The space is dominated by a scaffolding framework construction which delineates the floor-plan: the construction sits like a labyrinth in the gallery, creating corridors and dead ends. The space is hung with large-format images from the film *Nighthawks* (as reproduced for the graphic version of *Repetition*) that are printed onto canvass and suspended from the scaffolding supports. Images depicting Jim, the central character from the film, navigating the tightly packed corridors of a nightclub are reproduced so that the cinematic figures are life-size in the exhibition space to create the almost *trompe l'oeil* effect of an inhabited space. Images from the film that depict close-up shots of Jim's eyes cover the curving walls of the perimeter of the room, giving the impression that the visitor is under constant surveillance. Low ambient light is provided by lamps that pick out the cinematic images and the only obvious light source emanates from the mannequins that populate the space. The effect is that of a representational landscape (as discussed in Chapter 7), where recognisable elements are compiled to suggest a particular environment, rather than a detailed recreation [Fig. 11.24].

To enhance the visual effects, a complex sound-scape is installed in the space. At the doorway to the space the visitor encounters the sound of water falling over a weir coupled with a low repetitive bass beat that resonates through the floor, almost more tangible than audible. This combination of sounds, directly drawn from personal experience, are

associated with visits to a particular club set in the vaults under Leeds train station, and has strong emotional associations of excitement and anticipation. The bass beat heard at the entrance gets louder as the visitor moves toward the centre of the space. Adding a further level to the sound-scape, sound hoods hang at intervals from the ceiling, and play tracks selected from those that captioned the denim samples in the printed volume. The space smells of earth and damp brick.

The landscape of *Repetition* is intended to create a scenography that interprets the garments on display by presenting them within a specific, recognisable location and in doing so, corresponds to the criteria of landscape as defined in Chapter 7. Further fulfilling the criteria of landscape, the setting invokes a transformative effect on the visitor: as visitors pausing to look at Judith Clark's evocations of fairground booths and side-shows in *Malign Muses* become fair-goers, visitors moving through *Repetition*, navigating corridors hung with life-size images of populated corridors, become club-goers.

Object

Repetition focuses on the recurrence of denim jeans in the collection, contextualising the garments through the specificity of location and articulating the fetishisation of fabric and garment through the display method as discussed in the next paragraph. Mannequins each wear a pair of denim jeans from the collection, and the outfits are completed with plain, dark coloured shirts and footwear in a variety of styles. The garments that accompany the jeans are bought specifically for the purpose and do not necessarily come from the collection. Items are purchased that have no distinctive features – the focus should be maintained on the jeans. The outfits should be assembled so that the mannequins at first appear to be wearing similar outfits, and only on closer inspection are individual details apparent. The intention is to combine collection material

and acquired material to communicate a repetitive and fetishised uniformity.

The Body

In accordance with the definition of the body established in Chapter 9, *Repetition* utilises both two-dimensional pictorial and three-dimensional sculptural forms to introduce the notion of the body to the space. The pictorial is represented by large images taken from the film *Nighthawks* (Peck, 1978) that line the perimeter walls of the space and hang from structural elements. Long shots present the body in performative social interaction as Jim moves through the nightclub, a trajectory that is mirrored by the visitor's transition through the exhibition space. Close-up images of Jim's eyes, lining the walls of the exhibition space, depict the sexualised gaze and place the visitor in a constant state of surveillance that brings the predatory mood of the nightclub into the exhibition space. The cinematic body is presented in stylised social interaction which, through the location of the images throughout the room, extends to include the visitor in its performance space.

Retail-type male mannequins are placed into the exhibition structure alone and in groups of twos and threes. The mannequins are positioned to replicate the stance and gesture of social interaction, as observed in the exhibition *Dangerous Liaisons,* and mimic poses adopted by the actors in the images selected from *Nighthawks*. Many of the mannequins stand alone and communicate only through their gaze. This is articulated by the use of LEDs set into the mannequins' eye sockets which emit a visible beam of light, a technique observed in *Balenciaga Paris* (Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 2007). Each mannequin's gaze is directed so that the LED beams create tight pools of light on the bodies of other mannequins that share the space. This beam spotlights particular features of the garments on display and areas of the male body that are considered to be

erogenous zones thus fetishising both garment and body. It also makes evident the sexualised gaze typical of the environment and, as visitors pass through the beams of light that span the space, incorporates the visitor directly into the mannequins' performance.

Room 6 – A New Modernity

Story

Through the documentation of the collection, as described in Chapter 10, I employed a number of different techniques to place garments under scrutiny with the intention of identifying narrative material for my exhibition proposal. The story for *A New Modernity* arose directly from one of those processes of examination, in which I placed clothes by individual designers into groups to be photographed. Having completed this exercise, I observed that at a certain time there was a distinct shift in emphasis from ostentatious and overtly fashion outfits, to more sober ensembles by European fashion houses such as Maison Martin Margiela, Dior Homme and Helmut Lang. Reflecting on this development I wrote the narrative that accompanies the printed volume for *A New Modernity*, and trying to rationalise this shift, I looked back through my archive of fashion magazines to scrutinize the images to which I had been exposed. It was obvious that a new, leaner masculine style had been present long before I had adopted the image. There had been a time-delay in my reimagining of the notion of a fashionable male image. A new, modern look had almost passed me by.

This narrative describes the shift in my personal perception and interpretation of the nature of fashion as flamboyant and ostentatious to something more temperate and moderate. *A New Modernity*, although reflecting this autobiographic episode, implicitly asks whether this also

reflects a broader cultural shift towards 'minimalism' and sartorial sobriety in contemporaneous menswear.

Themes

A New Modernity suggests the ability of fashion to devise and propagate new notions of gender, identity and sexuality through aesthetic shifts, to transmit these new definitions through its product to the customer, and that primary conduits for these shifts are marketing images published in magazines.

Book

The impact of fashion imagery in popular media has already been illustrated in the third room of *Hotel, Flamboyant. A New Modernity* reflects further on this phenomenon, in a more singularly focused narrative, represented in the graphic rendering of the episode. The printed volume for *A New Modernity* is a photographic record, in chronological order, of every advertisement by the designers Helmut Lang and Hedi Slimane for Dior Homme that I would have seen in fashion magazines [Fig. 11.25]. These images, the culmination of their brand aesthetic, chart the design development of the two fashion houses from the late 1990s into the early years of the twenty-first century – the period when their work marked a revolutionary transition in menswear design. The advertising images are photographed directly from magazines, on the floor or on a table in the location that I was using to sort through them. The photographs are constructed so that not only the advertisement, but the entire magazine is presented as an object.

The format and layout of the volume is intended to reflect the designers' aesthetic; a spare, ordered layout, *sans serif* text, printed on bright white silk-finish paper. The volume attempts to document and emulate the

designers' distinctive visual approach and suggest the aesthetic ripple that emanates from their printed imagery.

Landscape

The landscape of *A New Modernity* is conceived as a reflective landscape (as defined in Chapter 7) which is not reminiscent of a specific location but is an attempt to transfer and communicate an abstract fashion aesthetic through a spatial construction as demonstrated by *Yohji Yamamoto: Dream Shop* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2006). The design is informed by advertising images and the experience of visiting Helmut Lang and Dior Homme stores in Paris and New York. The floor of the space is gloss white. Images from both designers' advertising form a backdrop as large-scale graphics, fragmented and inserted into a grid of frameless polished acrylic mounts supported on a black framework structure. Light is provided by fluorescent tubes hung in batteries in the ceiling. The quality of light is clear, but not cold or harsh [Fig. 11.26].

Two sculptural insertions are placed in the room, both matt finished in Lang's signature khaki. The first is a simple glass-topped vitrine that presents the magazines photographed for the graphic version of this narrative episode, open at the pages of the designers' advertisements. The vitrine is designed and constructed so that it would appear equally at home in a museum or one of Lang's retail outlets, and reflects the propensity for high-end retail to borrow from the visual language of the museum to confer a sense of value, rarity and preciousness on the items they sell. The second insertion cuts through the background construction, and contains an LED strip which presents texts from fashion publications that refer to the impact of the designer's work. The use of LED is a direct visual quote from Lang's former flagship store in Paris, which displayed an LED work by American artist Jenny Holzer inserted into the staircase wall.

Fig. 11.25 Spread from the graphic rendition of *A New Modernity*.
Fig. 11.26 View of the model of the *Hotel* project, showing the installation for *A New Modernity*.
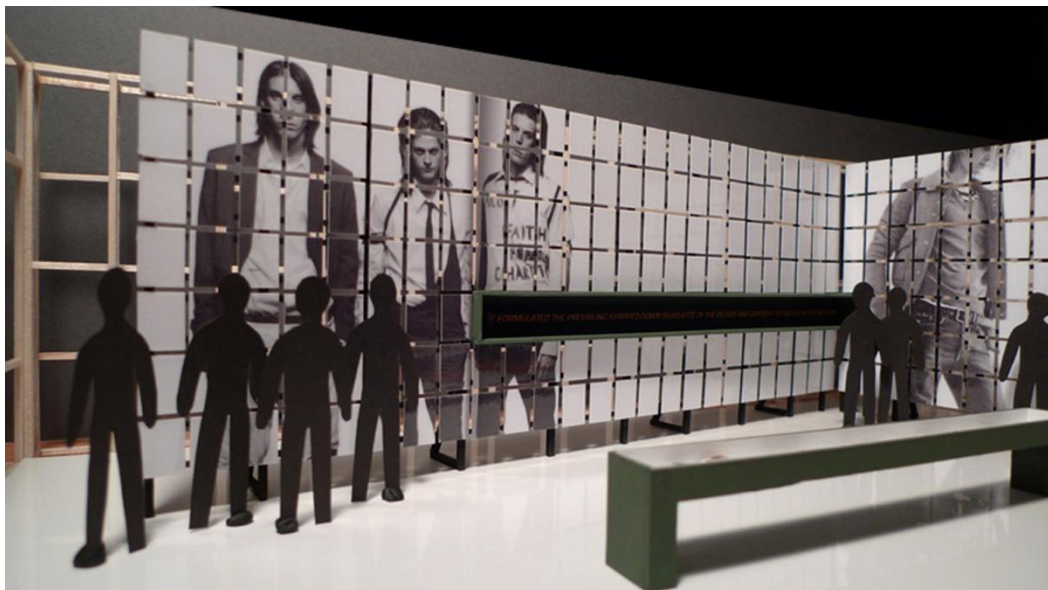
Object

The garments presented in *A New Modernity* are all from the collection and illustrate the radically slimmed-down silhouette, minimalist approach and limited colour palette expressed by designers Helmut Lang (O'Neil 2001: 42, Jones 2003: 276) and Hedi Slimane for Dior Homme (Davies 2008: 53-57, Jones 2003: 424) from the period between 2001-2005, during which they consolidated an influential reassessment of the cannon of men's fashion and re-evaluation of the notion of contemporary masculinity.

The aesthetic of these two designers is conveyed through the garments on display, the assemblage of large-format images taken from the designers' advertising, magazines showing the advertisements in context, alongside texts taken from fashion publications. The texts are present as LED messages as mentioned above. The intention is that the landscape and objects in this room correspond to communicate atmosphere and emotional response that evokes the work of Lang and Slimane, of a pared down reflection, rather than description of their work within the history of contemporary fashion or factual information.

The Body

Retail-style mannequins are grouped and posed to imitate the posture and manner of the models in the advertising images that are reproduced on the background construction. Hair, make-up and styling should be as realistic as possible and again, duplicate the look of the photographs as closely as possible. The five mannequins wearing Helmut Lang should, as in the background image, be grouped closely together as a pack and face the visitor, making eye contact. The three mannequins wearing Dior Homme should, again in reference to the background image, be positioned so that they convey a sense of isolation, with no direct eye contact with the visitor. The styling and articulation of the mannequins in

this autobiographic episode should strive to replicate as closely as possible the attitude and emotion equated with the work of the featured designers, as rendered in their advertising images, to the point of replication. The mannequins should mimic the attitude of the photographic images so that the visitor reads both pictorial and sculptural representations of the body as one. The intention is to place two-dimensional pictorial representation of live models in close proximity to three-dimensional mannequins so that a sense of the photographed body transfers to the sculpted body form.

Room 7 – *Identity*

Story

The story for *Identity* arose during the process of compiling the collection inventory, scrutinising receipts so that the garments could be placed within the chronology devised for documentation. Reference to the shop receipts for certain garments prompted me to reflect on the process and location of their acquisition which, in certain establishments is ritualised to the point of theatre. I considered transcribing a number of these retail 'scenes' as dramatic scripts for which I would produce dialogue and set designs based on the retail exchange. In the process of making sketches for a set design based on the Maison Martin Margiela shop in Bruton Place, London (the site of a number of acquisitions) I began to consider the aesthetic expression of a fashion designer as applied to an interior – the translation of sartorial aesthetic to exhibition space.

As a development of themes from *Flamboyant*, *The Body* and *A New Modernity*, which examine the impact of advertising and editorial images on personal identity, I began to consider the phenomenon of the process of the conflation of a designer's brand aesthetic and personal identity. This reflection centred on the brand Maison Martin Margiela, whose clothes I

have bought over a number of years, as the house has maintained a strong, distinctive aesthetic that translates seamlessly into the retail interior, and which has been regularly interpreted by fashion press and theorists alike – repeatedly defined by such terms as avant-garde, experimental, edgy, conceptual and intellectual.

Considering that this process of conflation occurs at the point of purchase, I re-appraised the sketches I had made, from memory of Margiela's Bruton Place store. Looking at these images, one of which depicted the fitting room, it occurred to me that the conflation of designer and personal identity reached culmination in the fitting room where, in a designer branded store, the purchaser assumes a designer branded garment and the designer's aesthetic and the customer's personal identity literally are brought together. The text that accompanies the graphic rendition of Identity describes this moment of aesthetic union.

Themes

Identity focuses on the theme of consumption, examining the processes of appraisal and selection that lead up to the purchase of a particular garment. It also examines how designers construct and project a brand image (interpreted through design and fashion press) and how we accommodate and incorporate this pre-determined aesthetic as part of our own identity – why we choose certain garments, with particular brand connotations, over others.

Book

The printed volume for *Identity* is an exercise in memory and recollection. To explore the visual impact of the brand identity of design house Maison Martin Margiela I set out a series of diagrammatic drawings in which I tried to record a detailed rendering of the layout, furnishings and decoration of the Maison's Bruton Place, London store. The drawings were made

entirely from memory, and I avoided visiting the store during the process. It transpired that whilst I thought I had a detailed recollection of the store interior I had little memory of many features, and even some aspects of the basic floor-plan evaded recall. What was implanted in my memory was a sense of atmosphere and brand image – even of aroma – rather than physical detail [Fig. 11.27].

During the period in which I made the drawings, the Bruton Place store closed and relocated. In a slight shift in focus in my realisation of the project, I gained access to the former store, now the headquarters for fashion and photography website Showstudio, and took photographs of the interior. Over these photographs I made drawings on tracing paper that depicted features from the Margiela store [Fig. 11.28]. The images from the Margiela interior sit like ghosts over the photographs of the interior as it is now. To accompany the drawings I wrote texts recollecting memories of visits to the store, establishing a tangible link between memory of the interior and occasions of consumer transaction. My original sketches of the layout and details of the interior furnishings, including a map of the store's location, are drawn on tracing paper, folded like Ordnance Survey maps, and inserted into pockets and distributed through the volume as 'memory guides'.

The production of the printed volume for *Identity* compelled me to clarify and refine the narrative for the autobiographic episode moving forward from the original concept of rendering it as a dramatic script. Drafting the text and images for the graphic rendition encouraged me to focus on those elements and decorative techniques of the Maison Martin Margiela store that were distinctive and which would subsequently be reproduced in the exhibition space.
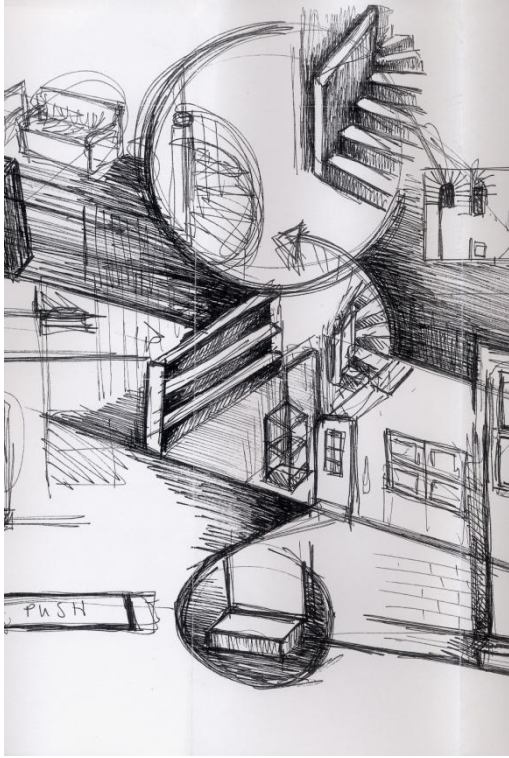
Fig. 11.27 Early study for the graphic rendition of *Identity*, showing drawings from memory of the Maison Martin Margiela store, Bruton Place, London.

Fig. 11.28 Spread from the graphic rendition of *Identity*.
Fig. 11.29 View of the model for the *Hotel* project, showing the installation for *Identity*.

Landscape

The landscape for *Identity* is constructed from design strategies characteristic of the fashion house Maison Martin Margiela and commonly featured in their retail spaces, some of which are realised in three dimensions, others are represented photographically. The actual floor of the MoMu exhibition gallery is over-painted in matt white paint, which will flake off with wear revealing patches of the original parquet – a device commonly employed in the Margiela aesthetic. The Bruton Place store is transported to the exhibition space through the use of life-size black and white photographic images (a *trompe-l'oeil* technique characteristically used in the Maison's interiors and to decorate clothing) which lean against the stud-wall framework of the space [Fig. 11.29]. The images do not form a continuous panorama, but are fragmented, to represent my incomplete recollection of the interior. A set of floor standing mirrors with white painted timber frames punctuated by inset light-bulbs – copied from the fitting room mirror at Bruton Place – are also placed to lean against the perimeter framework. The main focus of the exhibition space is a copy of the fitting room from the store, a basic white painted cubicle with an off-white cotton curtain that falls to the floor. The presence of the fitting room as a physical object, rather than represented as a photographic image, asserts its central role as a location in the aesthetic conflation of designer and consumer. Light is warm and evenly distributed across the interior. The exhibition space is filled with the scent of patchouli that is present as an olfactory signature in the Margiela stores, that impregnates the garments, which exude the scent long after they are brought home.

Like the scenography for *A New Modernity*, the setting of *Identity* is designed to communicate an aesthetic and atmosphere specific to a particular designer. This scenography, however, is not defined as reflective, but as representative in that it presents recognisable elements,

through photographic image, three-dimensional construction and aroma, of an actual location.

Object

Object, as according to my definition in Chapter 8, is represented in *Identity* by garments selected from the collection, photographic images, constructed elements and aroma. Mannequins in the exhibition space are dressed in complete outfits from Maison Martin Margiela. Over these garments, the mannequins carry sandwich boards with simple texts that reflect on the intersection of clothing and personal identity. The sandwich-board device is a direct reference to Margiela, who equipped studio assistants in the spring/summer 1999 show with sandwich-boards that bore images of garments from the collection. In this construction the museum object (the garment) and non-museum object (the sandwich-board) are combined to provoke visitors to consider how and why they make their clothing choices.

Other objects in the space, including life-size images of the Bruton Place store, a full-scale replica of the fitting room, and the scent of patchouli typical of Margiela retail interiors are present to communicate and emphasise the designer's aesthetic and to express the atmosphere experienced when visiting one of the brands' stores.

The Body

Garments by Maison Martin Margiela are mounted onto life-size artist's lay-figures, with any exposed 'flesh' painted matt white. There should be no attempt to replicate facial features with make-up or to simulate hair. The use of these stylised mannequins is a direct quote from the Maison's autumn/winter 1998-1999 womenswear presentation, where life-size lay-figures were used to present the collection. The use of white paint on the body cites the womenswear autumn/winter 1996-1997 collection, where

models legs were painted white. The figures wear reflective foil strips over their eyes in imitation of the models at the Maison's Pitti Imagine Uomo presentation, Florence, 2006, who all wore reflective foil strips over their eyes, mimicking the black-out strips that are usually drawn over models faces in the Maison's look-books. In a scenography that aims to raise discussion regarding the impact on individual identity when wearing clothes that carry a designer's recognisable signature and distinctive aesthetic, the sculptural representations of the body that wear the Margiela garments are subsumed by visual devices that articulate the Maison's aesthetic signature. The mannequins are not only dressed in Margiela, but they are branded as Margiela products.

The five lay-figures are located in a semi-circle in front of large floor-standing mirrors. Another figure stands in the facsimile changing cubicle, as if gazing at its reflection in the mirror that leans against its back wall. The mirrors located against the stud-work frame reflect the *trompe-l'oeil* images of the Bruton Street store on walls opposite so that visitors walking between image and mirror will, in the mirror's image, find themselves momentarily inhabiting the store interior. Walking past the mirrors, the visitor will also see themselves reflected in their image and thus the visitor's own body is immersed in the Margiela aesthetic and becomes part of the installation. The mirrors are used as a device to locate the visitor's body into the scenography, so that the body is not only present as the mannequin, but also in the reflections that visitors will see of themselves in the mirrors.

Room 8 – *The Collector*

Story

The story for *The Collector* is a reflection on the personal impact of using my own clothes as a subject for the creation of previous work and for this research. As an autobiographic episode it is in response to the activities described, documented and analysed in this practice-based research. The autobiographic episode reflects on how, as my clothes assumed a central role in my research and were defined as a collection, my attitude towards them changed. The collection assumed a formality and a shift in value. The episode responds to how the garments appeared to become more than clothes, but a cultural legacy with a concordant sense of weight. While I took great pleasure in the beauty and craftsmanship they expressed I also felt pressures connected to the process of collecting and the physical weight of collection itself. This anxiety was created as much by the financial cost of collecting as by the inherent tensions in locating and securing suitable acquisitions, and in the sheer mass of the growing collection itself. At times I felt physically trapped by the desire to collect and suffocated by the collection's weight and volume. The narrative that accompanies the graphic rendition of *The Collector* is a fictitious dialogue, where the Collector character expresses his feelings about the collection.

As the sense of value of the collection increased, the most-prized items were less and less likely to be worn. As the aspirations of the collection increased, the garments themselves appeared more rarefied, fragile and susceptible to damage. Wearing the garments that gave so much aesthetic satisfaction increasingly caused physical discomfort. I could not relax wearing items from the collection, being too nervous of the potential for accident or damage. When I was a child I had 'best clothes' that I chose because of their colour, cut or pattern. These clothes were more precious because they were usually more expensive than their everyday

counterparts. The same pattern of aesthetic pleasure and physical discomfort that haunted my childhood clothes repeated itself in the collection.

Themes

The Collector examines a number of interconnected themes; the notion of collecting as a formalised process of consumption and the emotional and psychological impact of the tensions inherent in the collecting process, the value that the collecting process effects on clothing and the result that this has on the sensation of wearing the garments, the impact on individual identity in relation to the assumption of a designer's aesthetic, response to clothing as an aesthetic phenomenon and, in a circular reference to the first room of the exhibition, *Conformity*, the repetition of clothing-related behaviours established in childhood,

Book

A set of photographs documenting the collection was the start for this project. The photographs were taken using a self-timer, and only the most complete outfits in the collection were captured. Once complete, the photographs presented a documentary record of the collection, but suggested no way forward in realising the themes of this narrative episode. Inspiration came from another project, working with natural history collections and, in particular, collections of invertebrates that were stored pinned into collecting boxes. These beautiful butterflies and insects, held through the thorax by steel pins and trapped in glass-fronted boxes, seemed to provide a perfect metaphor for the tension between the aesthetic attraction of the collection and the anxieties experienced through its accumulation.

I re-shot the photographs, posed lying on the floor to assume the pose of a dead, captured insect. The photographs were printed and cut-out, pinned

into collecting boxes or set as if having been pressed between the leaves of a book, and the assemblages were re-photographed. The resulting images show the collection as a series of still lives of life-less, captured, pinned and pressed bodies. The images present the collection as aesthetic pieces whilst suggesting the potential pain and pathos inherent in the collecting process. Between each image page a quote from Sontag's *The Volcano Lover* (Sontag 1993) which had been influential in the initial stages of research, articulating her meditations on collectors and collecting were inserted. The album was printed on pale green card, and the quotes and images are set into black borders to emphasise the poignancy of the narrative. The photographic prints are inserted into pages designed to suggest an old album, secured with transparent adhesive corners, and interleaved with glassine paper to imply an antique feel inspired by Sontag's novel [Fig. 11.30].

The printed volume for *The Collector* was instrumental in consolidating the autobiographic episode and in determining the selection of garments from the collection to be presented. The manner of presentation in exhibition format of the garments is an almost direct transposition of the photographic images conceived for the printed volume into three-dimensions. The aesthetic qualities of the volume, inspired by Sontag's novel are also reflected in the exhibition landscape, while passages from the novel are present in citation.

Landscape

The collecting boxes depicted in the photographic images printed in the graphic rendition of *The Collector* translate into the exhibition landscape as reclaimed domestic wardrobes. Wardrobes are selected that exhibit period details to suggest an abstract sense of the past and they are painted off-white to convey an institutional conformity. The wardrobes are placed in the exhibition space to evoke a storage room. The wardrobe

Fig. 11.30 Spread from the graphic rendition for *The Collector.*
Fig. 11.31 View of the model for the Hotel project showing the installation for *The Collector.*

doors are open to reveal life-size mannequins dressed in the collection pinned inside like insect specimens. Fibre-optic lights, concealed in the inner wardrobe frame give a theatrical highlight to the specimens. The floor of the exhibition space is covered with mid-grey and pale grey tiles that evoke the marble-tiled halls of country houses and again evoke a sense of antiquity which relates the exhibition space to the temporal location of Sontag's narrative. The light is the cold light of the inside of a marble-floored hall of a stately home on a bright winter morning. The space smells of dust and moth-balls [Fig. 11.31].

Within the categories of landscape established in Chapter 7, the scenography for *The Collector* presents a reflective landscape, where constructed elements suggest a particular atmosphere rather than location. As a landscape, the scenography of *The Collector* is integral in communicating and expressing the narrative of the autobiographic episode. The landscape also acts as a transformative space turning the visitor, through the nature of its constructed elements into an inquisitive observer in an antique interior reminiscent of a cabinet of curiosities.

Object

Sets of garments that represent a complete look taken from a particular season of a designer's work are presented. The designers featured include Alexander McQueen, Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons Man, and Lanvin – leading international menswear designer houses from the 2000s. Outfits are assembled to be as complete a representation of a particular season's look as possible, the complete nature of each set reflecting the obsessive nature of collecting. To accompany the collection and articulate the autobiographic episode two graphic devices are incorporated as objects into the scenography. On the reverse of the wardrobes into which the mannequins are placed are excerpts from Susan Sontag's novel *The Volcano Lover* as previously included in the graphic

rendition of *The Collector*. These texts are meditations on the notion of collecting and the character of the collector. They are printed on the reverse of the wardrobes in black type. Covering the interiors of the wardrobes are screen-grabs from the on-line auction site, eBay (www.ebay.co.uk n.d.) that document auction entries for garments similar to those on display. The eBay images reveal one of the processes used to assemble the collection, act as a visual reminder of the financial transaction that is part of the collecting process and assert a sense of the monetary value of the collection that is generally avoided in the display of institutional collections. In accordance with my definition of object as presented in Chapter 8, the conventional notion of the garment as the exhibition focus is expanded to include the physical construction used to present the garment and which also communicates the narrative of the autobiographic episode.

The Body

In *The Collector*, the body is presented in the form of mannequins that are symbolic representations of the collector himself. The mannequins are present as typical retail mannequins, broken and positioned to resemble the fractured bodies of insect specimens. The mannequins are dressed and placed in wardrobes, where they appear to be pinned to the back of the wardrobe interior in the manner of museum invertebrate displays. The dislocation of the limbs is subtle and not over-exaggerated. The effect is uncannily poignant rather than comic. The pins are scaled appropriately to human proportions and positioned as if they pierce the abdomen or thorax: whichever location disrupts the clothing the least. The heads of the mannequins are covered in a white matt stretch-jersey fabric, onto which is digitally printed a photographic image of the collector's face, eyes closed, as depicted in The Collector wallpaper that covers the back wall of the *Hotel* reception and corridors.

Here the body is present as both the collector, and the collected. In his passion for collecting the collector is subject to the inevitable tensions of the collecting process, the fretfulness of acquisition, the fragility of the collection, the addictive tendencies, and the financial burden. The garments presented are the most precious, the most expensive, the most delicate in the collection: aesthetically they give great pleasure yet their fragility renders them the least comfortable to wear. The pinned body is a metaphor for the anxieties of collecting and the dis-ease felt when wearing the garments. The body is present as an armature for the presentation of the garments and as an essential component of the scenographic landscape construction.

This account of the final room of the *Hotel* project concludes my detailed description of the realisation of the exhibition proposal that constitutes part of the practice-based research in relation to this investigation of innovative presentation modes for the display of fashion in the museum. The following chapter relates an account of the modes as applied to an actual exhibition, *Lindow Man*, held at The Manchester Museum from April 2009-April 2010, with discussion on the results of visitor evaluation in relation to the presentation modes as interpreted in the context of this exhibition. Reflection on the challenges and successes of my practice-based research follow in the Conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter 12: Application of the Presentation Modes to the Exhibition *Lindow Man*

As the previous chapter examined the application of the repertoire of innovative modes defined through my theoretical research to the hypothetical situation of a proposal for an exhibition to be staged in the MoMu galleries, this chapter examines their application in the public realm, and explores visitor response to the modes when applied to an actual exhibition.

During the execution of this research programme, until January 2011, I maintained a professional practice as Head of Exhibitions at The Manchester Museum – one of the largest university museums in the UK, with collections of over three million objects ranging from humanities (numismatics, archaeology, Egyptology, ethnography) to natural sciences (zoology, palaeontology, mineralogy). Whilst my professional practice did not engage with the field of fashion it has been an objective, as stated in the introduction, that this research programme should enrich my professional practice. Taking this into account, I consistently attempted to incorporate into practice those modes observed and analysed from MoMu in my professional work. Citing the example of the exhibition *Lindow Man*, I can demonstrate the innovative modes applied to a subject other than fashion (indicating their potential for extended application) and public response in a context other than the fashion museum.

The exhibition *Lindow Man* was staged at The Manchester Museum between April 2008 and March 2009. I was responsible not only for the delivery and project management of the exhibition, but also led on the concept and content development. In lieu of an in-house designer and the lack of funding to commission an external design company, I also led on

the exhibition design. Lindow Man is the name given to human remains that were discovered in a peat bog at Lindow Moss, Cheshire, UK in the early 1980s. The remains were originally the focus of a murder investigation before being carbon dated to the Bronze Age. The remains have previously been exhibited at the Museum on two occasions recently after their discovery, but remain in the collection of the British Museum, London, where they are displayed to this day.

The possession of the remains by the British Museum has been a source of contention locally since their discovery. Added to this, national Pagan organisations have long called for the reburial of ancient human remains, claiming their rights of ownership as 'ancestors' in the same vein that southern-hemisphere indigenous peoples have negotiated the repatriation and re-interment of human remains taken from Australia and New Zealand. Conscious of the potentially explosive issues surrounding the exhibition a public consultation event was put together to establish guidelines for the development of the exhibition. A steering group derived from attendees of this event met regularly to monitor progress on the exhibition development. Many of the ideas raised at this event were taken into account and directly influenced the exhibition.

Working with the guidelines from the consultation event, Museum staff began to formulate the exhibition concept. At a very early stage it was decided to take a different approach to the two previous exhibitions which had contextualised Lindow Man's remains within a generic narrative of Bronze Age Britain, told anonymously through an authoritarian, institutionalised voice and derived from a combination of data generated from similar discoveries and archaeological sites. Considering the few substantiated facts known about Lindow Man (gained through forensic examination shortly after his exhumation) the exhibition team took the decision to follow another route. Seven people who each had their own

relationship to Lindow Man (several of whom had participated at the consultation) were invited to join the Museum team to contribute to the exhibition. Their life stories would form the core of the exhibition content which became, in fact, seven individual biographic narratives that each related to Lindow Man. The narratives were told in the words of the participants, through audio recordings of interviews and transcriptions of this material. The contributors were all involved in the editing process of both audio and textual material (which was presented in both formats in the exhibition and on-line) and were also invited to lend or suggest objects to display that would illustrate their story. Material would be provided by the Museum that would supplement these objects, and we devised that each biographic section would include a library of related books and folders with supplementary information on the objects displayed and the themes covered.

The contributors were selected to illustrate the broad impact of Lindow Man's discovery and the varied personal resonances he inspired. Contributors comprised; one of the peat diggers who had discovered the remains, the forensic scientist who had examined the remains, a local archaeologist specialising in the archaeology of place, a local Pagan, an archaeologist from the British Museum who was responsible for care of the remains in London, an archaeologist from The Manchester Museum who specialised in Roman and Bronze Age Britain, and a woman who had been a pupil at Lindow Moss Primary School at the time of the discovery and who had been active in a local repatriation movement to return Lindow Man's remains to North West England.

At the point at which the exhibition was being developed my research, as realised in this thesis, was not entirely formulated but I discussed my ideas of threshold, landscape and object with the exhibition team and these were informally incorporated into our process. Those techniques relating

to the representation of the body were discussed and, in the context of the exhibition and issues regarding the sensitivity of displaying human remains were considered not to be relevant: there were no garments on display, and no intention to 'replace' Lindow Man in the exhibition in any way. The following paragraphs briefly describe how those presentation moides from my research were applied and realised in the exhibition.

The exhibition threshold was a construction that replicated the exhibition landscape installed in the gallery. It was placed directly outside the exhibition space in order to appear to welcome the visitor and introduce the exhibition aesthetic as the visitor transitioned from the bright, noisy reception area into the dimly lit, hushed exhibition space [Fig. 12.1]. Gallery staff were positioned at the threshold, and were given training specifically in order to be able to confidently and knowledgably engage visitors with the conceptual approach taken in the exhibition. Staff would introduce visitors to the idea that they were able to use the material in the exhibition as a library, and to construct their own narratives in relation to Lindow Man and his life. In the definition of threshold gallery staff were to actively participate in the transformation of visitor to 'archaeologist/researcher'. Unfortunately, after having suggested playing a more active role in exhibitions themselves, many of the staff refused to participate in this critical introductory role which, from visitor feedback, had a significant impact on visitor understanding of the exhibition and subsequently their ability to negotiate and benefit from the experience. Whilst the threshold construction in theory seemed to fulfil the definition and promise of those observed in Antwerp in practice, without the participation of gallery staff, it became no more than a piece of exhibition construction.

Fig. 12.1 Installation view of *Lindow Man*, showing the exhibition threshold.
Fig. 12.2 Installation view of *Lindow Man*, showing the exhibition landscape.

Fig. 12.3 Installation view of *Lindow Man*, showing the trench-like structure and combination of construction materials.
Fig. 12.4 Installation view of *Lindow Man*, showing objects embedded in the trench structure, and the combination of museum object (spades), borrowed objects (photographs), and appropriated objects (toy earth movers).

The exhibition landscape was determined by the need to present each of the seven narratives equally whilst providing a space devoid of obvious interpretation for Lindow Man himself. The landscape took the form of five constructions that made trench-like dissection of the space. They were fabricated from medium density fibre board (MDF), oriented strand board (OSB) and plywood, all surfaced with a selection of plastic laminates. These industrial materials were compiled into shelf-like constructions that afforded numerous niches for the location of audio and text based material. Objects were incorporated into the display by facing several of the niches with clear acrylic. Although the objects were contained in the niches and could not be said to physically occupy the landscape space on an equal footing with the visitor (as according to my definition of landscape), their containment was discreet and, as archaeological finds placed within the trench-structure, they occupied the same metaphoric space as the visitor-archaeologist [Fig. 12.2].

The structures formed strong horizontal patterns through the gallery, and the materials were left in their raw-edged state. Within the notion of landscape, the structures carried meaning and narrative through their metaphoric representation of archaeological trenches (within which content was buried) and library stacks – alluding to the transformation of the visitor into researcher. Empty spaces in the construction represented our lack of knowledge regarding Lindow Man and his life. The raw-edged materials, used in their natural state, and colour palette of browns, greys and greens were also intended to evoke the actual landscape of the Moss, a bleak, barren place, without direct reference or replication. According to my terminology, the construction could be interpreted as a reflective landscape [Fig. 12.3].

Within the definition of object as identified from my research, museum and non-museum objects were combined and presented to communicate

narrative. Some objects were lent by contributors (a wand and sacred cup from the Pagan) and some were bought to stand in for objects now lost – posters, record covers and a Care Bear (a child's soft toy popular in the 1980s) were bought to illustrate the narrative of the woman who had been at a local school at the time of Lindow Man's discovery [Fig. 12.4]. Material that would be considered conventionally appropriate to the exhibition (original Bronze Age artefacts from the British Museum that required higher security provision) was presented in a standard display case, with the case itself presented as object and labelled as 'A case of Bronze Age artefacts from the British Museum'. Conforming to my definition of object as including all exhibition content that communicates narrative and carries meaning, the objects were presented alongside reference texts, audio and text transcription of the contributors' testimonies, and photographic images. Concomitant with my definition of object, all of this material was presented in parity, located within the structures of the library stack/archaeological trench landscape.

Response to the *Lindow Man* exhibition was polarised, and many of the negative comments related to the concept of depicting Lindow Man's remains through contemporary biography and the 'unfinished' nature of the construction. Feedback from museum staff, in response to a particularly harsh review from a local on-line events site, was particularly critical. Pete Brown, at the time Head of Learning at The Manchester Museum, who had led on the exhibition's interpretation strategy, conducted visitor evaluation to document response to the exhibition and to ascertain whether comments from visitors fed back through staff were accurately represented. Brown's survey was carried out as the thesis component of his Masters research at the University of Leicester and submitted in 2009. Although his research was not designed specifically to evaluate the modes of threshold, landscape and object it was designed to gather response to the exhibition concept and design.

Brown's investigation resolved to ascertain how well the exhibition had fulfilled its goals of encouraging learning and provoking debate. Brown devised a survey using the principles of Personal Meaning Mapping[15] which was completed by 97 of the 113 visitors approached to participate. In contrast, 23 of the 100 staff surveys were returned completed. In relation to whether the exhibition encouraged learning, Brown's findings demonstrated that:

> …the exhibition approach prompted visitors to speculate about Lindow Man's life and death: to consider different perspectives; to engage emotionally with the themes, and to explore the ethics of displaying human remains.
>
> (Brown 2009: 67)

In relation to provoking debate, Brown's findings record that 73% of visitors included comments on the 'design, construction and atmosphere' and that the length of comments in this category, at an average of 33.4 words, were much longer than generally revealed in this evaluative process. The great majority of the comments indicated a positive response. The most critical feedback was isolated to a minority of participants who, from details gained through the evaluation questionnaire, had prior knowledge of the subject and were experienced museum visitors. These comments, however, echoed many of the critical comments voiced by Museum staff and, as Brown reports, focussed on what they considered lacking from the exhibition, notably an authoritative voice, 'factual' information, and 'proper' design, leading him to conclude that there was a correlation between specialist or professional interest and how the subject should be presented although, as Brown concludes:

> …why those opinions and feelings should lean towards the conventional or conservative is a question that requires further research.
>
> (Brown 2009: 83)

Despite evidence to the contrary, many staff refused to accept that the experimental approach to narrative and innovative presentation techniques had not alienated visitors (Brown 2009: 79).

An issue that was not addressed, as it was not relevant to Brown's research but assumes significant relevance here, was the difference in which MoMu and The Manchester Museum are positioned in relation to their audiences and subsequent audience expectation in relation to exhibition style and content. Branded and marketed as a design-focused museum, MoMu clearly positions itself as an institution that is concerned with the visual and the aesthetic and as such is likely to attract an audience with similar interests and a more than usual ability to understand, enjoy and be open to innovative presentation techniques. As a museum that charges an entry fee (which is likely to deter casual visitors) and which, from personal observation, attracts a significant proportion of visitors as groups and guided tours, it could also be argued that MoMu filters its audience to construct sympathetic participants in its experimentation with exhibition themes and presentation techniques. The Manchester Museum, however, positions itself as a twenty-first century museum with its roots still firmly in Victorian disciplinary traditions of humanities and natural sciences. The museum does not charge an entry fee and markets itself towards a family audience which constitutes a considerable portion of its visitors and who are recorded, in the results of audience surveys, as appreciating the museum's traditional foundations. Despite proximity to one of the UK's largest art and design universities, The Manchester Metropolitan University, the Museum does not regard the

art and design sector as a significant audience component. The Manchester Museum does not identify itself as a location for experimentation in presentation or as a site which strategically attracts visually literate visitors.

As demonstrated by the response to *Lindow Man*, an audience more actively attuned to and engaged with experimentation is critical in establishing and sustaining innovative practice. As Mary Anne Staniszewski attests in relation to exhibition presentation techniques at MOMA, New York, diversity of approach to presentation techniques reduced as 'institutional conventions were stabilized' and that 'certain types of installations perceived as "successful" were the ones to survive this period of experimentation.' Echoing experience with *Lindow Man*, she concludes that 'there were boundaries that could not be crossed' and that when they were the institution 'rejected such presentational techniques' (Staniszewski 2001: 292). Alas, Staniszewski's account attests to the role negative audience reception plays in curbing experimentation and innovative approaches to presentation.

Despite its problematic reception *Lindow Man* was a critical success; the subject of three positive articles in professional journals, listed by *The Times* newspaper in December 2009 as one of the UK's top attractions, named in the January 2010 issue of *Museums Journal* (the leading journal for museum and gallery professionals in the UK) as one of two outstanding exhibitions of the year. The exhibition also won the Archaeological Society Award for Innovation, 2010 and the *Design Week* (one of the leading magazines for the design profession in the UK) award for Best Exhibition Design, 2009.

This account of the *Lindow Man* exhibition indicates that the innovative modes observed at MoMu can be contentiously but successfully

(according to some views) applied to a real-life case. It also demonstrates that those presentation modes of threshold, landscape and object have a potentially wide-ranging application in exhibition-making, and are not necessarily confined to those exhibitions that take fashion or a fashion-related topic as their subject. From my research perspective, one of the most illuminating results of this exercise and the resultant visitor survey feed-back relates to discussion in Chapter 1 regarding the process of viewing exhibitions. As cited in that chapter, Clifford Geertz and Charlotte Aull Davies warn the ethnographer of the necessity to be conscious of what they bring to the process of observation when engaged in fieldwork. As the analysis Pete Brown offers from his visitor survey of *Lindow Man* suggests, what the visitor brings to the process of viewing an exhibition has great bearing on their reading of it and subsequent response. Those visitors who expressed the greatest degree of dissatisfaction articulated their discontent in relation to how the exhibition did not meet their expectations. I would agree with Brown's findings that certain visitors, not conscious of the preconceptions they brought to the viewing process, expressed frustration not at what was present in the exhibition, but at that which contradicted their expectations. I will return to discussion of the issue of the visitor and viewing the exhibition in the Conclusion, with reflections on my own viewing process as executed in the exhibition research I executed as part of this research.

Conclusion

To commence the Conclusion I will revisit briefly my research question and those aims and objectives that form my response as set out in the Introduction. Taking into account these aims and objectives, and the execution of my research as interrelated theoretical and practice-based activities, I then provide a summary of my research activity. Commencing with a reiteration of the interrelationship of theoretical and practice-based research in my investigation, I move on to critical reflection of the first stage of my enquiry – the theoretical research. This is followed by critical reflection on the application of the innovative presentation modes observed in this first stage to my practice-based research. Finally, I will restate what I consider to be my original contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making, briefly relate some of the opportunities through which I have disseminated this research, and outline possible directions for continued investigation.

As stated in the Introduction, my research question demanded whether, through critical analysis of their scenography, it was possible to investigate and delineate the distinctive presentation strategies apparent in certain exhibitions staged at MoMu and to employ these strategies in the development of my professional exhibition-making practice. The response to this research question – my aims and objectives in this investigation - would be to identify, describe and define, through comparative critical analysis of a sample of exhibitions experienced at first-hand and viewed through a scenographic lense, a repertoire of innovative presentation modes and the techniques employed in their realisation.

These innovative presentation modes would be further examined, in practice-based research, through their application to a detailed proposal for a hypothetical exhibition to be located in the MoMu exhibition gallery. This practice-based research would locate the repertoire of modes in the process of exhibition-making, exploring their practical application and, as a result, confirming their validity as legitimate strategies in the activity of exhibition-making in the museum. The practice-based project, conceived as a fashion autobiography in exhibition form, was intended to continue my previous autobiographic clothing-related practice. An additional aim would be to contribute to the critical language and debate around exhibition-making, from the scenographic perspective, by disseminating my research through teaching, conference papers and publication.

In response to the research question and the related aims and objectives of my investigation, I determined that it was my intention through this research programme to contribute to the field of exhibition-making a repertoire of innovative presentation modes previously not analysed or documented, that could be applied to the display of fashion in the museum and which would extend those techniques available to the exhibition-maker to create meaningful and stimulating exhibition environments.

Research review

Throughout this research programme, I have considered my investigation to be structured as two interlinked and interdependent activities; the theoretical research through which I would identify, describe and define the repertoire of innovative presentation modes, and the practice-based research, the construction of a fashion autobiography as a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition, as the activity and arena in which I would test their application. Despite the risks of fracture or dislocation involved in the execution of a research programme with related processes performed in

two such different arenas as the theoretical and practice-based, with each employing quite diverse methods, I would argue that the final result of my research, the identification of the presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body, and the documentation of the *Hotel* project, to which they have been applied, attests to the successful integration of the research processes.

I would propose that no serious problems were encountered because I had always planned for the two processes to be inextricably linked. Without the theoretical research to identify the innovative presentation modes, the practice-based research would have had nothing to test. Similarly, without the practice-based exercise of constructing the exhibition proposal, the presentation modes identified would have remained theoretical, rather than being confirmed as valid presentation strategies for use in the field of exhibition-making through their successful application to the hypothetical exhibition project.

This is not to say that the identification of the repertoire of innovative presentation modes would not have been of value alone, but as the process of their discovery was so deeply embedded in the experience of actual exhibitions, I consider that this investigation would be lacking a vital component if the practice-based activity of constructing the exhibition proposal had not been included as a significant and intrinsic element of the research. Evidence for the success of the identification, description and definition process which gave birth to the repertoire of modes is amply provided through their translation into the exhibition proposal in model form. How closely the two research processes are linked, I would argue, is more than adequately depicted in the description of the *Hotel* project, where techniques adopted in the model are frequently related back to their original point of reference: the exhibitions in which they were first observed. Additional confirmation of the modes as valid strategies for

exhibition-making was achieved through their application and review in the exhibition *Lindow Man* (The Manchester Museum, Manchester, 2009) as discussed in Chapter 12. Further discussion of the inherent connection between the two research processes is relayed later in this chapter, where I detail the cross-reference between resources consulted for the theoretical research and their beneficial impact on my practice-based activity.

Through my theoretical research, I set out to identify, describe and define a repertoire of innovative presentation modes that could be applied to the display of fashion in the museum. I achieved this through review of fashion and fashion related exhibitions, experienced first-hand through visits, and documented using written notes, drawings and photographs. This documentation, along with other relevant material associated with the exhibition, was employed in a process of comparative analysis. This process indicated conventions in presentation techniques which, by contrast, allowed the identification of innovation. Instances of innovation were compared to build up patterns which were defined as the modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body.

In relation to the activity of the exhibition research, one of the main challenges was in delineating a relevant sample of exhibitions. I discovered very early in the process that my sample would need to extend beyond the subject of my practice-based research, contemporary fashion menswear and the fashion autobiography, as there were very few exhibitions whose subject related directly to either autobiography or exclusively to menswear. Thus the resolution followed to extend the sample to all exhibitions on fashion or with a fashion-related theme. Visits to fashion-related exhibitions that didn't include actual three-dimensional garments were also included, after experience of a number of these indicated their relevance in providing information for my investigation. The

exhibition *Mario Testino: Portaits* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 2002) for instance, which consisted entirely of photographic material, indicated how pure colour could be used to define the landscape of an exhibition space. Other restrictions, such as the cost of travel, impacted on those exhibitions that could be sampled. My solution in relation to the challenge of delineating my exhibition sample was to decide, within the broad definition of exhibitions staged in museums or galleries with fashion or fashion-related themes, to visit as extensive a sample as possible.

Another challenge to this research activity was that the research question (the definition of the innovative modes) was clarified through the research process of the exhibition visits rather than being concrete at its outset. As described in Chapter 1, where I discuss the research process in relation to the exhibition sample, evidence of a particular mode was often recognised retrospectively. That is, prompted by an exhibition visit, I would recall a similar phenomenon in exhibitions experienced previously. A number of those exhibitions referenced were visited before this research programme commenced, and were the subject of another (related) enquiry. Undoubtedly, a scientific approach would have been to hypothesise the innovative modes and then look for evidence through the research to prove, or contradict their existence. I am confident, however, that the process I employed, which relied on documentation taken during visits and particularly on installation photographs is not compromised by its lack of chronological logic. The indisputable evidence of the innovative presentation modes, described in Chapters 6-9, attests to their existence.

Whilst the individual presentation modes were revealed at various stages of my exhibition investigation, once each mode had been identified the subsequent processes of description and definition proved to be straightforward. Even in those instances where a mode was identified part-way through the research, determining evidence retrospectively was not

problematic. Definition of the mode of the body, as I previously commented in Chapter 1, was not consolidated until the exhibition *Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2007). Once identified, however, evidence of this mode was noted in *Genovanversaeviceversa* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2002) and *Mailgn Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2004). Considering that the mode of the body was represented in *Genovanversaeviceversa* by *absence* of the body rather than *presence*, and in *Malign Muses* by Naomi Filmer's beautifully subtle sculptural interventions, despite being conscious of those multi-media techniques employed by Dirk Van Saene to conjure the presence of Gabrielle Chanel in *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001), it is no surprise that it took *Bernhard Willhelm*'s outrageously distorted mannequins to prompt investigation into the notion of human presence in the exhibition. Documentation taken during exhibition visits, alongside reference to associated publications was used to confirm and validate this retrospective identification.

The process of comparative analysis, also, was made more complex due to the extensive time period over which information was gathered through the visits. I occasionally suspected that an exhibition visited before one of the modes was identified may have exhibited evidence that would support its innovative nature, or provide evidence of comparative conventions, but without having been aware of that mode at the time of visit, evidence to provide comparison would not necessarily have been gathered. In this instance, I only refer to an exhibition in describing a comparative convention when photographic evidence is available.

The greatest challenge to this research activity was managing the dual process of participant-observer, that is being able to experience the exhibition and at the same time be able to observe and document relevant information. As discussed in Chapter 2, my solution to this challenge, to

visit the exhibition on two occasions with each privileged to the process of participant or observer, was established very early in the research activity with the result that I do not consider this potentially contradictory position to have had negative impact on my research. The research I performed in order to validate this dual position, drawn from ethnographic practice, was extremely useful in increasing my own awareness of the dynamics of viewing an exhibition and the potential impact of the viewer's individual position on any subsequent reading, and I was able to bring this knowledge to play in relation to my own viewing process, and in relation to visitor response to the exhibition *Lindow Man* as indicated in Chapter 12. Indeed, there is a direct relationship between my own experience of viewing the exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen* (Former Royal Palace, Antwerp, 2001) which initiated this investigation and responses documented in audience evaluation from *Lindow Man*. Comparable to those visitors who expressed dissatisfaction that *Lindow Man* did not meet expectations, one of my first reactions to *2Women-2Vrouwen* was to note the absence of the conventional introductory text and subsequent didactic text panels. Whilst un-met preconceptions in *Lindow Man* led to criticism from visitors, my response in relation to *2Women-2Vrouwen* was curiosity. In both instances, however, the viewers' gaze and subsequent response initially focused on what was not present, rather than what was.

An unexpected outcome of this research was that MoMu became such a central focus. Whilst there was early evidence that MoMu had been established with the intention of exploring innovative exhibition-making practice, I had not predicted that activity there would become so central to my work. As a result, I have visited the majority of their exhibitions staged between 2002-2010 and have built up a significant record of exhibition-making practice at this institution, experienced first-hand, which may be a resource for further investigation and research. Above all, the process of the exhibition visits was supremely thought provoking and visually

stimulating: through the sample I was able to procure information valuable not only to my theoretical research but also information on the incidence of autobiography and fashion, and the incidence of menswear in fashion exhibitions that proved useful as reference, to situate, and also to attest to the originality of my practice-based research.

Through my practice-based research I set out to devise a project where autobiographic, clothing-related narratives would be developed into a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition, using the innovative presentation modes identified through my theoretical research. This research was performed through the execution of three consecutive activities; the drafting of a catalogue of my clothing to identify autobiographic narratives, the development of themes identified during the cataloguing process through the production of a series of artists' books, and the realisation of the exhibition proposal as a detailed scale model.

The process of drafting the catalogue required a number of documentation techniques; compilation of an inventory, direct examination of garments, drawing and photography. While the relative merits of each of these processes are described in Chapter 10, further reflection on the cataloguing process is appropriate at this point in the context of a summary of my practice-based research.

Although replicating institutional practice, drafting the catalogue was invaluable in providing a mechanism of interrogation through which to identify themes and narratives that could be developed for the exhibition proposal. A disadvantage of the process was that it was incredibly time consuming and was so overwhelming in its scope that, at certain times it almost seemed to exist as a self-contained project separate from any other research activity. Despite the extended duration and energy expended on this activity its inherent value as an interrogative process,

documented in Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, became evident. The inventory process was incredibly thorough and allowed unbiased, systematic scrutiny of garments, not privileging one garment over another according to design or monetary value. The result being that compelling and complex autobiographic narratives were sourced from very ordinary garments: the opposite of most fashion exhibitions, where the extraordinary is generally the focus. The cataloguing process also instigated the various different approaches to inspecting garments, direct handling, drawing and photography, which in turn were responsible for generating a variety of narratives, so that themes relating to the physical nature of the garments were recorded alongside the more socio-cultural narratives that came from the process of compiling the inventory.

In hindsight, a less time-consuming process may have been possible, but the extensive periods spent producing the catalogue were crucial in terms of the time for contemplation and reflection they allowed. Many of the ideas that were carried into the exhibition came during the repetitive and mechanical processes of completing the inventory sheets. Although necessitating considerable time and attention, the cataloguing process was critical in identifying themes and narratives which informed the exhibition concept.

The process of employing a graphic exercise as a developmental tool, realised as the printed rendition of each autobiographic episode was, I consider, particularly effective. Linking to previous practice it gave me a sense of being on familiar ground at a point in the project where establishing focus was essential. Based on the publications associated with the key exhibitions investigated in my theoretical research, it brought resources consulted in this research activity directly into the practice-based research process. Like the collection catalogue, producing the graphic volumes was a time consuming activity and, due to the nature of

my practice, in which precision in manufacturing and a high level of attention to detail are inherent, the books were in danger of assuming the status of finished work rather than appearing, as intended, as a developmental mechanism.

Acknowledging and moving forward from this small drawback in the process, compiling the graphic renditions was essential to giving the exhibition spatial, aesthetic and conceptual structure. Developing the themes from the cataloguing process gave rise to each theme existing as a separate volume, pre-figuring the eight rooms of the final exhibition. As each of the volumes developed with its own physical characteristics in response to the autobiographic episode depicted, it became apparent that an over-arching aesthetic and spatial device would be needed to hold the episodes together. This device was discovered, as I relate in Chapter 11, by referring once again to the source material that had initially inspired the creation of the volumes – an exhibition catalogue. The notion of the hotel, revealed through the activity of producing the graphic renditions of the autobiographic episodes was, perhaps, the singular idea which gave distinctive shape to the whole exhibition.

As well as being instrumental in divining the aesthetic and conceptual master-plan of the exhibition, the volumes were intrinsic to the resolution of the exhibition landscape for each autobiographic episode. Details of the physical structures as well as the less tangible aspects of atmosphere were resolved through the graphic process; the dimensions of the changing cubicles were worked out through the drawings in the volume for *Conformity*, the blue paper on which was printed the *Repetition* volume was intended not only to reflect the denim prevalent in the items on display, but also represented the lighting and atmosphere for the respective exhibition space.

The graphic volumes were a perfect location for the compilation of source material, a large proportion of which was transferred either directly, or in a modified format, to the exhibition model. The photographs taken for the *Conformity* volume were transposed as moving image presentations, the texts transcribed into the *Rebellion* volume were then copied onto the blackboards in the school-room landscape, images from the *A New Modernity* volume shaped both the landscape and the approach to the presentation of the garments on the mannequins, the collecting-box photographs from *The Collector* volume were transformed into three-dimensional constructions that contextualised the garments on display and communicated the autobiographic narrative. They also began to suggest modes for the display of garments; clothing strewn over changing cubicles in *Conformity*, mannequins pinned into wardrobes like insect specimens for *The Collector*, and designer clothing by Vivienne Westwood mixed with shop-bought school uniform in *Rebellion*.

As a transitional tool, between concept and the spatial rendering of the exhibition in model form, the graphic volumes were a perfect two dimensional bridge between the intangible idea and the spatial, concrete form of the exhibition. The volumes connected concept and three-dimensional installation and allowed for the development from one form to the other, promoting exploration of the potential of the modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body even before the stage of three-dimensional realisation. In summary, the graphic rendition of each autobiographic episode became the location for the consolidation of theme, content and landscape.

The final process in the practice-based research was the realisation of the proposal as a hypothetical exhibition in detailed scale model form. Although it may seem a time-intensive and outmoded practice in the days of computer-aided design (CAD) and three-dimensional computer

generated simulation, model-making is still considered a valuable process by many designers. Renowned French product designers Erwan and Ronan Bouroullecs' design process reportedly 'regularly revisits three key terms: model making, testing, assessing' (Woods, 2011: 204), and British designers Sam Hecht and Kim Colin of Industrial Facility, product designers for Muji, Issey Miyake and Droog, 'depend almost entirely on full-size and scale models and use computers only for support' (Dunmall 2012: 180). Like the graphic renditions in the previous research stage, the construction of a scale model as a research tool was also a familiar process, as I have used this method for many years in designing both for theatre and exhibitions.

There were two main challenges to the process of realising the exhibition as a scale model. The first challenge was purely physical, in that the size of the model, even at 1:20 was large. It was not possible to build the entire MoMu gallery, and the same basic section had to be used for each of the symmetrical gallery wings. Even a model replicating only one half of the MoMu gallery measured over three metres in length. The solution was to build in sections. This allowed, to some degree, an overview of the design, as three of the four sections that comprised each wing could be seen at one time. The second drawback was not so easily addressed. It became obvious at this stage that devising the exhibition, normally a team activity, had been executed in isolation. I was very aware that external input, criticism and fresh ideas relating to the conception of some of the spaces was needed. The result is that, on reflection, some rooms are less well developed than others and, I consider, have less conceptual and visual integrity and are not so well realised. I believe that *A New Modernity* and *Identity*, particularly, would have benefitted from input provided by a team dynamic.

Even considering the drawbacks, the construction of the model gave the opportunity for critical reflection on the scenography, especially in considering the phenomenological rhythm that would create the sensory dynamic of moving from one autobiographic episode to another. Above all, the photographic images taken of the model allow the project to be seen from a new perspective, closer to that of the visitor and establish a critical distance that is perhaps not possible when viewing the actual model or graphic rendition with which, through the hours invested in their manufacture, I had such a tangible emotional and physical connection. The photographs taken of the model give, I consider, a convincing sense of being 'in' the space, and communicate the ideas invested in the proposal with strength and clarity. Indeed it was through viewing the model with the critical distance effected through the photographs that I identified those spaces mentioned above as potentially needing further attention and improvement.

Despite the potential for improvement in regard to some of the autobiographic episodes the modes of the body, object and landscape were, generally, unproblematic in the transition from identification in my theoretical research to application in my practice-based research. The mode of landscape, of devising spatial constructions that lend narrative and meaning to the objects on display, and which perform a transformative action on both exhibition space and visitor proved to be particularly redolent of the practice of theatre design for which I had trained many years previously. The term scenography, used in the context of exhibition-making seemed, in this instance entirely appropriate. I would consider that achieving those modes of object and the body were greatly, if unconsciously, aided by the traditions and techniques of styling and staging prevalent in fashion photography and run-way presentations, of which I have been an avid observer for many years. Clearly eased through the mechanism of the graphic volumes as a developmental tool, I would

also attest that the variety of interpretations of the modes accumulated through the exhibition sample provided significant stimulation in rendering solutions for my own project. In this respect, exposure to the modes as realised in the exhibitions analysed as part of my theoretical research impacted directly on the practice-based activity.

The mode that proved most problematic to transition was that of threshold which, for a considerable time, proved impossible to realise within my exhibition proposal. Again, illustrating the relationship between theory and practice in my research, the solution to the threshold for *Hotel* came from reference material consulted for the theoretical investigation: the publication that accompanied the exhibition *Het Modemusem/The Fashion Museum Backstage* (MoMu, Antwerp, 2002). As described in Chapter 11 the image of MoMu's previous incarnation, Hotel Central, as depicted in this volume, inspired a conceptual framework for the exhibition which, in turn, provided the solution for the exhibition threshold. Taking this into account, along with experience of the modes as realised in the exhibition *Lindow Man* (The Manchester Museum, Manchester, 2009) presented in Chapter 12, it is worthy of note that the mode of threshold proved, in these instances, to be the most complex and difficult to apply successfully. On reflection, I would suggest that this is due to the fact that of all the modes, threshold is possibly the most abstract and the most intimately allied to a clear resolution of the exhibition concept: in its role as physical and conceptual bridge between the outside world and that of the exhibition it is the most 'exposed' of the modes and, at the same time, as the first point of contact between exhibition and visitor, the most critical of the modes to resolve.

The final process to be documented was the application of the repertoire of innovative presentation modes to a real-life project in my professional practice. This process, documented in Chapter 12, involved the

exploration of the use of autobiographic reference as previously investigated through my practice-based research, and the deployment of the episodic structure and modes of threshold, landscape and object. Detailed reflection on this exercise is related in the relevant chapter. All there is to add at this stage is a final reflection on the process as summary. In relation to the actual exhibition project and my research, the major disadvantage was that this was not a fashion exhibition, or an exhibition that required the display of clothing, so there was no legitimate opportunity to explore the mode of the body. In hindsight, considering the response from staff and public, and taking into account the difference in position between MoMu and The Manchester Museum, this occasion might not have been the most advantageous to experiment with innovative presentation styles. That said, the overwhelmingly positive response gathered from more design-informed quarters suggests that the exercise was not without merit.

Final summary

As a concluding comment, I would like to restate what I consider to be my original contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making, relate some of the opportunities that I have taken to disseminate the knowledge gained through my research, and propose potential directions for continued investigation resultant from this project.

As my contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making, my intention was to identify, describe and define a repertoire of innovative presentation modes, not previously analysed or documented, that could be applied to the display of fashion in the museum and which would extend those techniques available to the exhibition-maker to create meaningful and stimulating exhibition environments that would positively impact on the visitor's experience and understanding of the objects on display. I would

attest that the account presented in Chapters 6-9, detailing those modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body fulfil this aim. The research process intended for this, the comparative analysis of evidence gathered through a sample of fashion and fashion-related exhibitions, executed through first-hand visit and documentation and reference to relevant associated material, is also given testament in these chapters. It was also my intention to further explore these modes through a practice-based research project, which would continue my previous autobiographic clothing-related practice, and be located in a museum space. This investigation is detailed in Chapters 10-12 of this thesis. With this evidence, I assert that my original contribution to knowledge in the field of exhibition-making, should be considered as the identification, description and definition of the presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body, as detailed in this thesis, and as explored in practice through the construction of a proposal for a hypothetical exhibition.

In addition to these intended aims, I would furthermore propose that the definition of the innovative presentation modes of threshold, landscape, object and the body provide a repertoire of techniques that is not only indispensable in constructing exhibitions, but also presents a critical framework for their appraisal. Applying these modes to an exhibition enables a structured analysis of such aspects as how effectively the exhibition concept, narrative and aesthetic is introduced to the visitor and how well their transition into the exhibition world is managed (threshold), how successfully the exhibition environment establishes a distinctive atmosphere and experience, and how it encourages the visitor to understand narrative and make meaning (landscape), how the curator uses the object selection and presentation methods to communicate and illustrate the exhibition themes (object) and, in the case of fashion exhibitions, how the curator is able to evoke a sense of the attitude, gesture, spirit and form of the human presence (the body). As a result, an

additional outcome of my research is a tool-box of references, a critical framework that can be deployed for both the construction and critique of exhibitions.

Throughout this research programme, I have taken a number of opportunities to disseminate my research. One such opportunity, the research as applied in the public realm to the exhibition *Lindow Man* has already been adequately discussed. I have also used reports of my ongoing research as the basis for teaching sessions on both the MA Art Gallery and Museum Studies course at The University of Manchester, and the MA Fashion Curation, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London. Material from my research has been presented at a number of conferences; *Untying the Ribbon: Archives/Investigation/Inspiration*, Research Centre for Fashion the Body and Material Cultures, University of the Arts, London, 2007, *Dress & Autobiography*, Centre for Autobiography and Education, Southampton University, 2008, *Narrative Space*, University of Leicester, 2010. Most recently I presented my research at a symposium *Public Wardrobe: Rethinking Dress and Fashion in Museums*, Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 10-11 November 2011, organised by the Scandinavian Wardropenetwork, with the paper submitted for publication in late 2012. In June 2012 I will present my research at the *Fashion Tales* conference, held at the Università Catolica, Milan, organised by the research hub MODACULT.

Finally, it remains to consider and suggest future directions for this research. Until the writing-up stage of this thesis, I had considered my subject to be the investigation of 'innovative exhibition-making' rather than 'innovative presentation modes'. On reflection, I realised that what I had examined and documented was not a process of innovation, but the tangible results: no less innovative, but physical, visual and spatial realisation rather than approach or process. Not to say that realisation

makes my work less valid, but it does suggest a route for further research: what are the circumstances and practices of exhibition-making that give rise to these modes?

Referring to the key exhibitions from MoMu it is evident that they are all curated and designed in collaboration with individuals or teams whose professional practice is located outside (or originated outside) of the museum. Angelo Figus and A. F. Vandevorst (*Genovanversaeviceversa* and *Katharina Prospekt: The Russians by A. F. Vandevorst*, respectively) were trained and work as fashion designers. Bernhard Willhelm and Jutta Kraus (*Bernhard Willhelm: Het Totaal Rappel*) are fashion designers whilst the art directors for their exhibition, Tayo Onorato and Nico Krebs, maintain a professional practice that includes 2- and 3-dimensional design for fashion and interiors. Judith Clark, curator of *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back*, whilst now established in the museum field originally studied architecture. The result of these collaborations, I would argue, is that new techniques are imported from other fields of creative practice, particularly fashion-related activities where, as a result of the continual drive to develop new products and presentation methods linked to the cycle of production and economic success, innovation is encouraged and expected.

As Mary Anne Staniszewski documents in relation to MOMA, once institutional presentation methods were established, innovation was subsequently only present in the work of artists invited to make installation work or to redisplay the collection (Staniszewski 2001: 295-296). The use of the outsider, whether artist, designer, writer or dancer as interrogator, commentator and agitator is now common to institutional museum practice. Indeed I instigated such a project at The Manchester Museum which, in its early stages positioned the artist/researcher as 'outsider' deliberately to challenge accepted and institutionalised practice.[16] What is

invaluable in these collaborations, as the work at MoMu attests, is that practitioners from fields other than museum design approach the project clear of what Staniszewski calls 'professional formulas' that inhibit innovation (Staniszewski 2001: 291). This is supported by Michelle Nicol's analysis of the processes employed by Swiss designers Tayo Onorato and Nico Krebs, who were responsible for the scenography for *Bernhard Willhelm*. Nicol attests to their use of 'the aesthetic strategies of contemporary art simply as a means for display' (Nicol 2007: 130). She follows with a list of these strategies:

> Appropriation, citation, irony, displacement, shift, exaggerating, destruction, painting, putting things on pedestals or in display cases, mental nomadism, hiding, mocking, holding onto form, embellishment, treatment, collage…All of these are, in this sense, simply different possibilities for making things and their connections intelligible.
>
> (Nicol 2007: 130)

I think Staniszewski and Nicol's findings point in the direction of a fascinating research project: to examine the location of those authors and the processes and practices, such as those described by Nicol, that they import into the museum from other disciplines and that impact on the practice of exhibition-making for the fashion museum in such beautiful, stimulating, inspiring and provocative ways.

Notes

Introduction

[1] American artist Christo showed his *Wedding Dress* in 1967, consisting of a large silk-wrapped boulder tethered by ropes to a live model. The artists Marcel Duchamp, André Masson and Antonio Miro each constructed sculptures using retail mannequins for the International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, 1938. Reconstructions from 1981 were exhibited in *Addressing the Century*.

[2] The exhibition was staged at the Hayward Gallery, London, 8 October 1998-11 January 1999 and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany, 26 February 1999-23 May 1999.

Chapter 1: Terminology and the Exhibition as Reference

[3] Author's notes from unpublished paper presented by Rosemary Harden, Museum Manager, The Fashion Museum, Bath, at the symposium *Public Wardrobe: Rethinking Dress and Fashion in Museums*, Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 10-11 November 2011, organised by the Scandinavian Wardropenetwork.

[4] From author's notes of an unpublished closing address to the conference *Museums and Public Engagement*, 6-7 October 2004, organised by the Department of Museum Studies, University of Manchester.

[5] *Frame* is a leading bi-monthly magazine that focuses on interior design and architecture, *Mark* focuses on architecture and the built environment. Both are published by FRAME Publishers, Amsterdam and distributed internationally.

Chapter 2: Situating My Research

[6] This discussion took place during the symposium *Public Wardrobe: Rethinking Dress and Fashion in Museums*, Nordiska Museet,

Stockholm, 10-11 November 2011, organised by the Scandinavian Wardropenetwork. Of the 17 participants only two, including myself, were male.

[7] Magazines such as *i-D*, edited by Terry Jones and launched in 1980 featured the 'straight-up', photographs taken of people on the street that combined fashion photography with social documentary, which themselves appear to be influenced by New York photographer Bill Cunningham's regular *On the Street* column for *The New York Times.*

Chapter 4: *Mode2001* Festival and the Exhibition *2Women-2Vrouwen*

[8] 'Fashion changes, style remains'

'The elegance of a garment is the freedom to be able to move'

'Simplicity has nothing to do with poverty'

[9] 'Perfume is the most important thing there is. Paul Valéry once said: "A badly perfumed woman has no future."'

Chapter 5: Investigating the Format and Structure of Fashion Exhibitions

[10] *Fashion Theory*, first published by Berg Publishing in 1997 continues to be edited by Valerie Steele, and is widely accepted as one of the leading academic journals publishing articles on contemporary fashion, historic dress, and the body as cultural phenomena.

Chapter 6: Identification, Description and Definition of the Presentation Mode 'Threshold'

[11] Whilst my research has revealed no comparative account of the concept of threshold applied to exhibition scenography, ideas of threshold, or liminality, are found in other disciplines. Anthropologist Victor Turner, in turn developing work published in 1909 by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (Abrahams 1995: ix) elaborates on the notion of the threshold or

'liminal' in ritual practice as a state of being and, by relation, a location, that is 'betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial' (Turner 1995: 95). Turner further distinguishes between the liminal and the liminoid, where 'liminoid' is interpreted as 'the more optional kinds of activities characteristic of open societies' (Abrahams 1995: xi). The term liminoid would thus be most accurately applicable to the exhibition threshold as defined in my investigation.

Turner's theories on ritual practice and liminality have been applied to the study of dramatic performance, particularly in the work of performance theorist Richard Schechner (Schechner 2003: 59-60, 188-190, Schechner 2006: 66-77) who, in relation to my definition of the exhibition threshold, locates the liminal in the theatre-space not only in terms of performative behaviour, but also specific physical space and architectural construction: the 'front frame of a proscenium stage' where the theatre, like the museum gallery 'is liminal, open to all kinds of possibilities' (Schechner 2006: 67).

Professors Erik Meyer and Ray Land, academics specialising in research into teaching and learning in Higher Education, first identified the notion of the 'threshold concept' in relation to the teaching of economics, which education theorist Professor Glynis Cousin interprets as 'certain concepts held by economists to be central to the mastery of their subject' (Cousin 2006a:4-5). Whilst undergoing the process of understanding a threshold concept Cousin describes the learner as being in a liminal state (Cousin 2006b: 139) which, arguably, is comparable to the state of the museum visitor at the entrance to an exhibition, whose concept must be understood in order to fully appreciate the ensuing presentation.

Within my own field of research, the concept of liminality has recently been applied to the economic cycle of fashion by designer Harald

Gruendl, who cites Turner's research to support his thesis that biannual retail sales reflect fashion's liminal state between seasonal collections in a ritualised performance of consumption (Gruendle 2007: 25-37).

[12] Casper the Friendly Ghost – the polite and likeable ghost of a young boy - was a character created by Seymour Reit and Joe Oriolo in 1939 for a children's book, became a popular animated series in 1945, and in 1995 was turned into a feature film directed by Brad Silberling.

[13] Pepper's Ghost is an illusory technique using plate glass and lighting, commonly used in the 19th century in theatres to 'conjure' spectral appearances on-stage. Invented in 1862 by Henry Dircks it was developed and popularised by John Henry Pepper.

Chapter 11: The *Hotel* Project - a Fashion Autobiography in Printed and Scale Model Form

[14] The 1980s saw a trio of style magazines published in London; *The Face*, edited by Nick Logan (1980-2011), *Blitz* (1980-1991), and *i-D* (1980-present) still published independently by founder Terry Jones. All three magazines were renowned for seamless incorporation of fashion, music, photography, the arts and current affairs. While each had a distinctive graphic style, all three combined street, commercial and high fashion (McDowell 2000:179-187, Mendes and de la Haye 2011: 224-225).

Chapter 12: Application of the Presentation Modes to the Exhibition *Lindow Man*

[15] Personal Meaning Mapping was devised by educational theorists Falk, Mousourri and Coulson as a method for ascertaining developmental learning through linguistic analysis.

Conclusion

[16] The project, titled *Alchemy,* ran for 5 years at The Manchester Museum, funded by the Arts Council North West. It was noteworthy in that it positioned selected artists as researchers within the Museum, with no expectation as to final product. Artists included Mark Dion, Ilana Halperin, Jamie Shovlin and Jordan Baseman.

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