THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Displaying Fashion History
The Linear, Open, Virtual, and Absent Museum

Alessandro Bucci

Declaration

I declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in *History of Art* has been composed by myself, is entirely my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Alessandro Bucci

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Abstract

This doctoral project engages with historical and critical debates surrounding the presence of fashion exhibitions in the museum. In particular, it problematises the issue of the temporal distance between artefacts and audiences, presenting the idea that different ways of presenting fashion to audiences underlie different ways of constructing its history. It develops considerations on historiography and museology, supplementing the limiting distinction between historical, new historical and thematic exhibitions with a set of concepts that enable the discussion and the evaluation of the qualities of historical representations.

It does so by taking as its case studies selected exhibition formats developed by the Victoria & Albert Museum (London), Museu Do Design e da Moda (Lisbon), Mode Museum (Antwerp), and Pitti Immagine & Fondazione Pitti Discovery (Florence). By observing the material features of their strategies of display, this research considers their ability to trigger interaction between visitors and content. In particular, it evaluates the ability of these strategies of display to shape visitors' experiences by activating a gaze that has formed outside the museum, through the encounter with a broader culture of presentation. It sees the task of presenting the past through museum displays as grounded in practices of vision and modes of cognition in which experiences of temporality, narrative and modes of historical exploration surface as pre-formed and pre-individual.

This project considers potential interchanges between critical museology, fundamental epistemological shifts in fashion theory, and curatorial discourse. At the same time, it opens interdisciplinary avenues for the study of the historiography of fashion, its relation to exhibition-making and to the visual and material culture in which museums are immersed. In doing so, its considerations account for aspects of existence that modern historiography has neglected: our bodily and spatial relationship with the world and with objects.

In turn, the analysis develops considerations of the museum itself, utilising the chapters of the thesis also to build on the literature that has portrayed it as an institution invested in addressing conditions of cultural and temporal distance between artefacts and visitors. And thus, while on the one hand, the museum emerges as a strategic site for rethinking the history of fashion and its representations, on the other, presentations of fashion in the museum are seen as privileged contexts for the realisation of a contemporary form of museology: a practice which enacts processes of knowledge production through complex historical layering, negotiation with the world outside its premises, and the constant redefinition of canons.

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In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationdhip of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside, camping with their household goods, Ersilia's refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing.

They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They weave a similar pattern of strings which they would like to be more complex and at the same time more regular than the other. Then they abandon it and take themselves and their houses still farther away.

Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972), trans. Willian Weaver (London: Vintage Books, 1997), 68.

Introduction
The Linear, Open, Virtual, and Absent Museum

What may be called 'presence' (the 'unrepresented way the past is present in the present') is at least as important as 'meaning'.[1]

(Eelco Runia, philosopher)

Fashion exhibitions and conflicts of temporality: rationale and definitions

The first display of the 2016 Barbican exhibition *The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined*, at the Barbican Art Gallery, London, featured a 1937 evening ensemble by Elsa Schiaparelli and a fifteenth-century chasuble thought to be used in a liturgical setting. Protected by a glass case and warmly lit in contrast with the muted surroundings, the gold-coloured artefacts seemed to perform an emblematic function: 'to create a more enigmatic meaning,' rather than being a definite statement about the exhibition or the immediate significance of the study behind it.[2] And yet, in addition to evocating a cryptic atmosphere, an implicit narrative awaited the visitor, imagined simply standing by the glass case, after reaching it frontally from the exhibition's threshold.

The display highlighted the motif through which these two artefacts could be brought together: their vulgarity, rooted in their ostentatious patterns and materials, which due to their

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[1] Eelco Runia, 'Presence,' *History and Theory 45* (2006), 1.
[2] Judith Clark, *The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined* (London: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2016), 195.

cost, would be used by a few individuals, and mostly for decorative purposes. The display highlighted the recidivism of a code, which resonates across two moments from the past as well as the present, and in doing so manifests the 'particularly promiscuous historical behaviour' of fashion.[3] The restlessness of that code was precisely the point of that display, but juxtaposing the two artefacts, made more than 400 years apart, inevitably introduced a complex temporality into the exhibition venue. Thus, the temporal gap became part of the display, as much as the chasuble and the ensemble, epitomising fashion's capacity for self-renovation based on returns and repetitions, as well as ways of writing and talking about the interdependence of older and newer cultural forms, as T.S. Eliot expressed them in the 'Tradition and the Individual Talent:'

> no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, he shall cohere, is not onesided: what happens when a new work is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. [...] The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted [...].[4]

Eliot's passage offers many suggestions: while his concept of 'order' might be contested by problematising the perspective through which it is established, the originality of such a stance is evidenced in its identification of the mutual influences between artefacts produced at different times, including in contemporary and near-contemporary times. Drawing from Eliot's ideas, it is possible to consider the evolution of a critical perspective as a process of interrogating the past – remote or proximate – based on preoccupations that arise in the present. This approach often results in a detachment from traditional chronologies, and in the constant re-writing of history from the point of view of an ever-changing present. Thus, it requires – as Eliot explains – an awareness of 'the great responsibilities' that come with this pursuit.[5] However, as the different chapters that constitute this thesis will show, this is not only Eliot speaking, but also Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben.

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[3] Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 22.
[4] T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* [1920] (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), 37.
[5] Eliot, *Sacred Wood*, 37.

In the light of these considerations, curating can be understood as a process that problematises the temporal distance that divides artefacts from different times and audiences, that seeks to highlight those restless elements through which different artefacts can be brought together. But while the cultural historian might be accustomed to this way of studying the past, the relationships between artefacts that are culturally and temporally distant from visitors, as these relationships have been produced by the agency of the curator, might remain obscure to visitors. Thus, to give visibility to the relations and connections amongst artefacts, to offer objects 'an aura of the here and now', curators rely on different strategies of display and presentation.[6] In the case of the opening display of *The Vulgar*, this included: the fact that it contained only two, very proximate artefacts, immediately calling for a connection between them to be established; their frontal positioning in relation to the viewer; the lighting; and the presence of the glass case itself, solemnly emphasising the preciousness of the materials, and regulating sensorial access to the artefacts. Severed from their original contexts, they have been re-territorialised through their presentation in a display that enshrines a specific approach to reconstructing fashion history, as well as a specific mode of spectatorship. It is in the observation of some of these conditions that lies my primary concern: to demonstrate that different ways of displaying fashion underlie different ways of studying and constructing its history.

However, rather than looking at individual displays, as I have done through the example of the opening view of Judith Clark's *The Vulgar*, the thesis will consider the historical experience that emerges across 'formats'. These will be understood as museum programmes that encompass various shows over many years, and where a recurring 'presentation' has been utilised to present artefacts to audiences. In privileging 'presentation' as the terminology used, as opposed to 'exhibition' or 'exhibition design', I have instead sought to include a vast array of strategies of display that cannot be strictly defined as 'exhibitions', and that can also include presentations through live performance and digital interfaces.

Furthermore, in determining how this terminology is used throughout the thesis, I am referring to the definition offered by Julia Noordegraaf in her study on the history of exhibitions at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum. In *Strategies of Display,* Noordegraaf describes presentations as 'comprising the elements that mediate between the museum and its audience', including the 'order and arrangement of the objects in the display, the various display

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[6] Boris Groys, 'Politics of Installation,' *e-flux* 2 (2009).

techniques and different means of communication and visitor guidance'.[7] In particular, in looking at these aspects, the analysis will focus on the correspondence between a recurring approach to exhibiting fashion – a recurring presentation – and the specific experience of the past that it seeks to stimulate.

In considering the role played by the presentation in the reception of historical relations between artefacts, this thesis sets out to ascribe both temporal and spatial structures to specific relational conceptualisations. In particular, if historical narrative is, as Hayden White puts it, the 'problem of turning knowing into telling and the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning',[8] then the aim of this study is to identify how different ways of constructing fashion history imply different understandings of temporality and correspond to distinct ways of displaying artefacts. In other words, the central question that is asked in this thesis is whether different ways of presenting fashion in cultural heritage institutions correspond to different ways of interrogating its past – remote or proximate – and to different ways of constructing its history.

This research question is articulated through four case studies: 'Fashion in Motion' (the Victoria & Albert Museum, London), 'Único e Múltiplo' (MUDE, Museu Do Design e da Moda, Lisbon), the 'MoMu Explorer' (Antwerp), and lastly, the cultural programme developed by Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery (Florence). Co-existing with more traditional exhibitions and strategies of display, these formats are seen as illustrative of a provocative rethinking of the study of fashion history and originate from a reconfiguration of the structures of the modern museum. Thus, each chapter will look closely at a specific format, the positioning of artefacts and visitors within that specific context, and the possibilities for interaction, connection and aggregation that are made available to visitors. These four very different projects are at the heart of this thesis, and it is them that are referenced in its title as the Linear, Open, Virtual, and Absent museum. As the chapters that constitute the body of this thesis will show, such conceptualisations seek to describe a way of presenting artefacts, as well as an underlying experience of the past.

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[7] Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2012), 13.
[8] Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980), 5.

Following Noordegraaf, I also understand presentation as that which 'mediates the transfer of meaning between museums and their visitors'.[9] This emphasis on the 'transfer of meaning' and on representation also emerges in Fiona Anderson's important article presenting the idea of exhibitions as fashion media, where exhibitions are seen as creating and communicating new knowledge about fashion.[10] However, an underlying interest of this thesis is the functioning of this medium, the different features that it can take, and the ways in which various configurations of the exhibition/medium enable meaning to be transferred through interactions with audiences. Not only have these observations been taken as a given in the specific case of the museology of fashion, but also the relationship of the exhibition/medium to the temporal, spatial, and ideological platform in which it functions – and in which the 'transfer of meaning' takes place – has been left unproblematised.[11]

A perspective to consider these issues comes from recent critical research in media and in the understanding that media history is intrinsically the history of how media has been used. This cluster of research has thus shown interest towards the denotative meaning of media, and in 'revealing' and 'bringing forth' the epistemic conditions of its formation.[12] This pursuit has raised questions on the situatedness of media in a shared field of practice, in which the recurrence of phenomena, discourses, and conditions bears deeply on how 'mediation' and 'immediacy' are produced in interactions with media. In other words, this radical 'archaeological' perspective sets to acknowledge and isolate in the object of study the *presence* of past experiences that have determined the formation of meaning at a denotative level.[13] This presence is considered as meaning-full as the content that is carried by specific media, and as key to identifying how the 'transfer of meaning' can take place, creating the intersubjective

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[9] Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display,* 14.

[10] Fiona Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media,' in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations, and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi & Pamela Church Gibson, 371–89 (London; New York: Routledge).

[11] Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display,* 14.

[12] 'Revealing' and 'bringing forth' reference Heidegger's notion that technology can be understood as a 'way of revealing' the essence of the world. See p. 210 See: Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology,' in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Collins [1954] 1982), 12.

[13] See: Eelco Runia, 'Presence,' *History and Theory 45* (2006), 1-29. Runia's article describes 'presence' as 'the unrepresented way the past is present in the present.' In Runia's ontological philosophy, the *form* of historical narrative is itself the bringer of a level of meaning that he defines as denotative. As 'denotative', this level of meaning is thus inevitably tied to interaction with a world that pre-dates the narrative itself, and to experiences that have been internalised. Runia points out that this constitutes the inherent non-narrative qualities of historical representation.

terrain on which how individual interpretation can subsequently be formed.[14] If the view of exhibitions as media is accepted, this decidedly structural-materialist approach can help unpack the ability of various presentations to 'mediate' meaning, and to activate different kinds of interaction with their content. In turn, this understanding will help to analyse how different way of presenting artefacts stimulate different experiences of the past.

Thus, from a methodological point of view, I will be looking at various museum presentations as constructs with the ability to re-call (explicitly or, more often, implicitly) experiences of presentation that precede the museum visit. In doing so, museum presentations will be seen as deeply bound to a wider culture of presentation, representation and spectacle, whose origins need to be located outside the museum context in which they have made their appearance. In other words, in the search for some of the principles governing the intelligibility of museum presentations, these will be seen as embedding structures of experience encountered elsewhere, for example in commercial displays, performances, and through interaction with the digital media. Thus, besides being seen as 'direct experience', looking at museum presentations is also seen as a 'mediated experience of direct experience'.[15]

While the epistemological foundations of this assumption remain to be explored in Chapter I, it is important to acknowledge here that this approach has been informed by readings within the field of media archaeology, which I have come to understand primarily as *topos* and *commonplace* study, following Erkki Huhtamoh's 'brand' of the field.[16] Drawing on the perspective of cultural history and new historical thinking, topos study proposes to excavate in its object of study the 'presence' of cultural assumptions in the form of topoi, establishing how these have been 'handed down' from other cultural discourses. Using topos theory, I aim to examine museum presentations with the intent of isolating the structures through which artefacts/*parts* can be related with/within the presentation/*whole.* In establishing relations with presentations from outside the museum, I will then be interested in finding those that embed similar structures.[17] The pursuit of 'making sense of this intriguing network of interconnections'

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[14] For example see Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge, Polity: 2012). In this thesis see pp. 56-63.

[15] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 10.

[16] Erkki Huhtamo, 'Dismantling Fairy Engine,' in *Media Archaeology*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo & Jussi Parikka (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011), 28.

[17] The relationship between *parts* and *whole* has been the subject of philosophical investigation since Classical Greece. Plato and Aristotle used these concepts to discuss the composition of the subject. The key idea of their philosophy was that the 'whole' has its own form but is different from its constituent

is the real challenge of topos study, in a way that is transhistorical, and not necessarily dependent on the immediate context that is being analysed.[18]

However, Huhtamo explains that topoi are not to be seen as monolithic entities, but rather as travelling and changing manifestations of specific cultural assumptions. As such, they can also be found 'hiding' in other cultural entities and discourses. In this study, they are present as conceptualisations of various understandings of temporality and historicity. The transition from observing the general features of various presentations towards considering the typology of the historical experience that they stimulate is legitimised by White's understanding of narrative structures as having a universal and, indeed, denotative level of meaning. He supported this view by explaining that, before being the product of 'narrativized' acts of interpretation, the way in which the past is presented, is, at its deep-structural level, the result of a 'narrated' account of historical events, dependent on 'particular conceptions of historical reality' itself.[19]

By looking at each case study from this perspective – as a presentation modality underlying a specific way of presenting the past – the image of fashion exhibitions that will emerge at the end of the thesis is that of a polyform medium, whose different features correspond to different ways of constructing and exploring fashion history. In keeping with how media has been looked at in media archaeology, museum presentations too will be seen as multi-layered constructs, where different understandings of temporality, different understandings of the relation between *parts* and *whole*, as well as different understandings of fashion merge and are projected in space. Thus, the conceptualisations of the Linear, Open, Virtual and Absent museum will feature a discussion of various ways of presenting the past, their

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'parts'. See: Theodore Scaltsas, 'Is a Whole Identical to Its Parts?' *Mind. New Series.* 99-396 (1990), 583-98. Husserl explored the relationship between 'the whole' and 'the parts', making it the centre of his phenomenology. In general, a part is any element that can be distinguished in an object/text, and the relationships between the parts replicates structures of aggregation into 'wholes'. See: Einar Øverenget, 'The Presence of Husserl's Theory of Wholes and Parts in Heidegger's Phenomenology,' *Research in Phenomenology* 26.1 (1996), 171-97. When historiography is read in terms of the relationship between the 'whole' and 'the parts', the question is whether history as a whole has meaning and structure beyond the different events, perspectives, actions that constitute it ('the parts'). This is the precondition of hermeneutic historiography, which places emphasis on the interpretation of the parts to achieve greater understanding of historical reality. Thus, this approach does not see narratives of progress as compelling; rather, by focusing on the parts 'the interpreter actively construes the meaning of the whole text.' See: Walter Kintsch, *Comprehension: A Paradigm for Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The focus on the part, on the fragment invites questions on the accepted order of things, and highlights the existence of different modes of comprehension in the present.
[18] Huhtamo, 41.
[19] White, 'The Value of Narrativity,' 9.

origins in a wide aesthetic and cognitive surface, and the ability of these presentations to 'transfer' meaning.

As a multi- and inter-disciplinary project, this thesis considers potential interchanges between historiography, critical museology, and curatorial discourse. It weaves together the theory of display, fashion history, observations on the exhibition practices of four cultural heritage institutions, and the cultural agendas of as many European cities. In so doing, it inserts itself into the existing debates on curating fashion, which have so far been driven by interests on the changing perception of the role of curators from conservators to visionary practitioners, the development of collaborations with designers, the opposition between historical and thematic exhibitions, the roles of different professional figures in exhibition-making, and the possibility of displaying the complexity of fashion besides its manifestations in dress.[20] Motivated by these research strands, this project focuses instead on the relationship between historical representation, temporality, and display; on the contextualisation of fashion in fashion history; and most importantly, on the historical representation that is offered by museums. In discussing the features of different strategies of display, the aim is to supplement the limiting distinction between historical, new historical and thematic exhibitions with a set of concepts that enable to discuss and evaluate the qualities of historical representations. A key finding is that these qualities are internalised, and inherently non-narrative, despite the narrative that might or might not emerge in specific exhibitions or other forms of museological presentations.

I have engaged directly with all four institutions and developed my observations on-site as much as possible by directly experiencing the specific formats that I consider representative of a renewed approach to displaying fashion. This has meant developing an understanding of 'being in' cultural heritage institutions as itself a research tool. As a volunteer, an intern, and an embedded researcher at the V&A and MUDE, I also took on tasks and responsibilities beyond those that are immediately relevant to this thesis, which translated to conducting research as requested by senior staff, helping curators and conservators undress and dress mannequins, giving guided tours of exhibitions, and participating in the regular care of artefacts and exhibition

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[20] Hazel Clark and Annamari Vänskä have recently assessed the status of praxis and research within this field. Their recent anthology stems from 'the perceived need to reference fashion's contextual relationships to identity, performance, production, consumption and art' as these 'sit at the heart of critical fashion curating.' The anthology includes articles on the research strands that I mention here, focusing particularly on curatorial intention. See: Hazel Clark and Annamari Vänskä, *Fashion Curating. Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond* (London, Bloomsbury, 2018), 1. The body of literature which precedes this anthology and which grounds the field of fashion curating is explored in Chapter I. See pp. 16-26.

settings. This helped enhance my understanding of how large heritage institutions operate. At MoMu and Fondazione Pitti Discovery, I have conducted research independently, working in their archives, but also liaising with the practitioners that have been involved in developing the projects that are of interest to this thesis.

Such close contact with institutions has been fundamental because the understanding of museum displays as representations worthy of being preserved (and as affecting the future interpretation of the artefacts that they contain) is a recent one. This has constituted one of the main sources of difficulty of this project: depending on the institution, the availability of materials and resources to reconstruct curatorial histories varies starkly before and after such awareness developed. Thus, rather than relying solely on existing photographic representations of displays (when these have been collected and archived), I have also looked at correspondence exchanges between curators and designers (Chapter II), meeting minutes and funding approvals (Chapter III and IV), and commentaries on the curatorial history and exhibition policies of various institutions (Chapter II, III, IV, and V). For this reason, the images that I have used in this thesis are to be understood in support of my on-site observations, rather than as objects of analysis themselves.

In addition to this, I have engaged with practitioners who have been actively involved in defining the visions that ground them. Interviews with Claire Wilcox (Senior Curator at the V&A), Bárbara Coutinho (Founder-director and curator at MUDE), Kaat Debo (Director at MoMu), and Maria Luisa Frisa (Independent Curator) helped support of my observations and are attached to this thesis as an Appendix.[21] These interviews underline my interest in the perspectives of curators. However, while interviewing them, I have sought to capture whether the production of the presentation modalities that are of interest here has involved considerations about audiences, and in particular on the nature of the mechanisms that turn visitors into agents. These interviews have then been read through the lens of debates in critical museology, as well as, in the immediate context of the city in which they operate.

The interviews were conducted retrospectively, at the end of my stay at various institutions, allowing me time to familiarise myself with exhibition formats and their histories, for research, and to discuss ideas with others who also participated in defining them. I have not engaged with architects and space designers, for reasons that vary across the case studies. In Chapter II, I have considered the case of a live presentation with a limited and standardised

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[21] See pp. 323-67.

space design; in Chapter IV, I look at a presentation of dress through the digital space; in Chapter V, I look at the absence of consistency in a vast cultural programme as itself having an impact on historiography. In Chapter III, I work on a more traditional, static presentation, and examine the re-use of an inherited space with minimal intervention. I have instead met with other curators who have worked on different phases of the various exhibition formats (Chapter II & III), video-makers (Chapter II), user experience designers (Chapter IV), and graphic designers (Chapter V) who played substantial roles in designing the various formats, and in communicating them to audiences outside the museum. These were informal conversations, rather than structured interviews, but I have drawn from them and the thesis will not fail to reference their inputs.

The choice to support my observations, findings and theoretical considerations with interviews seeks to underline the embeddedness of both museum practitioners and audiences in a historically determined organisation of visual culture, representational practices, and culture of spectacle. It also acknowledges that the capacity for experience of both audiences and curators depends on relatable structures of embodied existence. An implication is that presentations are seen as both, as constructed by viewing habits, and as contributing to constructing them. It is in this context that I wish to locate my occasional use of the problematic term 'reception'. My use of this terminology does not lean on how 'reception' has been understood in the context of empiricist and social science-based disciplines. Rather, its occurrence references a tradition of critical studies in the history of modern subjectivity and modern perception, with the emphasis that structuralist and post-structural thought has placed on 'reading', 'interpreting', and 'meaning'. This is in keeping with how the experience of objects, representations, and media, has been discussed in a vast body of literature that supports this thesis in its core idea to establish a relationship between different experiences of the past and different strategies of display through the specific case of fashion curation.[22]

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[22] A series of authors have produced considerations on reception not through sociology, but rather in terms of the cultural history of perception and the formation of subjectivity. Amongst those that I have drawn from and I will reference later see: Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (1939), trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, *Selected Writings* [hereafter abbreviated *SW*] *Vol.4: 1938-1940*, ed. Marcus Bullock et al., (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 251–83, where he discusses the issue of the perception and reception of authenticity. See also: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1940) [hereafter abbreviated *AP*], trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), where he discusses the experience of the arcades and the reception of the model of history that resembles its construction. See: Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* [1967] trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Herward, (Berkeley: University of California Press,

From a structural point of view, the thesis builds its arguments through five chapters. The next chapter seeks to create a red thread among the vast body of literature and the debates that have informed its content and inspired its methodology. Then, four chapters will discuss the correlation between specific presentation modalities and different modes of historical exploration. These observations will also be framed by considerations on the role of fashion in those institutions, and those institutions in their urban environments. The rationale for such a framing of the main research question is to discuss why such formats came to exist, and the different connotations associated with fashion in different institutions, operating in different urban contexts. In taking such issues into account, I do not wish to fetishise processes over results, but aim to underline that to understand museum presentations, it is also important to consider the continuity between programming and the wider institutional context. Lastly, the concluding chapter will establish a genealogy of my interest in fashion curating and in museology and will sum up the key points and findings of each chapter/part, as well as of the thesis as a whole, while identifying the questions that this study has opened for future research.

1990), where he analyses how different codes of meaning operate in the fashion system, enabling the reception of meaning; See also: Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion* (New York: Verso, 2002), where she constructs a history of the practices of cinema based on the internalisation of a diverse variety of forms of visual and material expression by viewing and sensing subjects. See also Anne Friedberg, *Window shopping: Cinema and Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), where she reflects on viewers' experiences of consumption and how these have an impact of the reception of film, presenting it as a mobilised form of expression. Lastly see: Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) where he discusses a shift in observers' techniques and discourses that reconfigured modernist practices of vision, challenging the accepted assumption that in the 1870s and 1880s the medium of painting was at the origin of that change.

Chapter I
Displaying Fashion History:
Variety, Specificity, and Difference

> While the museum emerged as a kind of secular surrogate for divine memory during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, it is merely a finite material object—unlike infinite divine memory that can, as we know, include all the identities of all people who lived in the past, live now, and will live in the future. [1]
>
> (Boris Groys, art critic and media theorist)

At the end of the 1980s, early studies on the history of the museum traced its origins to the onset of Western modernity. Charged with lifting the population's cultural sensitivity, this institution emerged during the nineteenth century as a classifier, an authoritative holder, and as a place in which to encounter the rare and the extraordinary. In contrast, in the late twentieth century, having absorbed the logics of post-modernism, the museum began to be seen as a shared public space, a creator of experience, and a place where the past was no longer constructed through totalising and undisputable narratives.

The history of this transition is not linear. Instead, it is suspended between traditional practices and dynamic new prospects – often based on incompatible and opposing ideologies – demonstrating that the museum is deeply bound to other experiences of being in the world. As will be shown later in this chapter, fashion – with its almost complete exclusion from collections

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[1] Boris Groys, 'Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk.' *e-flux* 50 (2013).

during the 'century of the museum',[2] despite the present-day ongoing 'golden age' of fashion exhibitions – is caught at the heart of these changes.

These shifting views on the roles and responsibilities of the museum, along with the evolution of visual and material culture, have resulted in many changes in how collections have been presented to audiences. For example, the modern museum was established after the French Revolution as a means to make public the rare and unique artefacts which had previously belonged to aristocratic and church collections where 'dust and disorder reign[ed] supreme'.[3] In this process, the new institution acquired a disciplinary function, which in turn defined the presentation of objects through principles of rational classification, specialisation and universal history. In contrast, by being exposed to the logics of post-modernity, the contemporary museum has gradually challenged these same classifications – to begin with, by including in its collections objects that were previously considered 'low' in cultural valence. This inclusivity has been accompanied by a focus on curatorial interpretation and an openness towards the inputs of audiences.[4] The result is a variety of presentations through which the museum often generates 'aura' around its own practices, absorbing the affective potential that was once exclusive to the objects in its collections.[5] The observation of these very different attitudes indicate the state of perpetual transformation of the museum and suggests patterns of adaptability to the constellation of shifting epistemologies in which it is embedded.

Art theorist Boris Groys observes that the institution of the museum is 'immersed in the flow of time'.[6] This idea describes the engagement between the museum and other transient discourses of material culture, including, for example, architecture and media. While this thesis will touch upon these interactions, it does so to support its primary aim – to establish the continuity between the museum and changing approaches to history. The existence of such a

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[2] Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 294. In this quote, Crimp is referring to the nineteenth century.

[3] Thomas Greenwood describes smaller museums in British towns, where the logics of the cabinet of curiosities still survived in the nineteenth century; Greenwood is quoted in Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

[4] I offer an example of this interest in audiences' inputs in Chapter III, where I discuss the permanent exhibition at MUDE.

[5] In using the term 'aura' I am referring to Benjamin's use of the term. Further development of the notion aura can be found in Chapter I and II. In particular, the idea that the contemporary museum focuses its produces aura around its practice emerges in Chapter II, where I discuss the *Fashion in Motion* format developed by the V&A. Similar considerations could be developed for the MoMu Explorer, which is the focus of Chapter IV.

[6] Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2016), 3.

relationship has been noted by historian Randolph Starn, who sees the museum as the 'battlefield of choice' 'over the purposes and means of representing the past'.[7] Thus, by discussing how fashion history is displayed in the museum, this thesis draws attention to historiography as one of the evolving epistemologies at play in issues of representation and textuality. Conversely, the task of presenting the past in museum presentations is seen as grounded in modes of cognition and in practices of vision that have absorbed various understandings of the relationship between historical events (parts) and their telling (whole).

In exploring this relationship from both a philosophical perspective and one based on my own experience of being in museums and cultural heritage institutions, this doctoral project moves away from the classifications of exhibitions as thematic and chronological, historical or new-historical. Rather, it considers a variety of exhibition formats, and how the specificities of their features, produce different experiences of the past. In other words, it looks at how the past of fashion is presented through different types of presentations – including exhibitions, performances, and digital interfaces – and poses questions about the types of historical experiences that they create for audiences, as well as the principles regulating their intelligibility. By looking at specific formats the four case studies in this thesis also discuss different trajectories taken by the contemporary museum. The role of this chapter is instead to establish the context of these case studies and the perspectives from which they are analysed, by considering the epistemological shifts that influenced how fashion has been displayed in different museums.

To make sense of the vast variety of sources of this interdisciplinary project, I have organised the current chapter into three interrelated parts. Part I, Epistemic Shifts, unpacks the debates that enabled and sustained the inclusion of fashion in the museum, and those that have led to the development of different approaches to displaying fashion. After considering the changes in how fashion history has been studied academically, and the impact of research on museum practice, I will focus on the evolution of the roles and responsibilities of museums, and on changing definitions of curation. The notion of 'xenology' will be introduced as a theoretical tool to discuss the temporal challenges in displaying fashion in the museum, such as the inevitable temporal distance that exists between artefacts and visitors. Contemporary curating is thus presented as the process of responding to assertions of temporal and cultural otherness, by placing artefacts in contexts that simulate personal interpretation.

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[7] Randolph Starn, 'A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies,' *American Historical Review*, 110.1 (2005), 68.

Part II, Towards a Topology of Fashion Exhibitions, focuses on the methodology, outlining why and how topos theory has been used to look at presentations of fashion. Here, museum presentations are seen as being constructed upon modes of embodied experience that have been configured outside the context of the museum. This methodology seeks to excavate and isolate these cognitive modes, to then observe their emergence in a vast field of practices and viewing modalities. The aim is to illuminate their recurrence in museum presentations and their role in shaping how the past is experienced. Building on the idea of the relationship between museum presentations and historiography, these cognitive modes will also be seen as informing various understandings of temporality, and different ways of looking at the past. Therefore, explaining this methodology, my intention in Part II is to stress how different presentations and different ways of exploring and constructing the past comprise an interlocking field of experience and knowledge. In support of my decision to use topos study, I discuss a variety of sources that bring together observations of visual culture and the relation between history and history-writing.

Lastly, Part III considers how the methodology has been applied to each case study. I reflect on the conceptualisations of the linear, open, virtual, and absent museum, and present each case study in light of the cognitive structure embedded in them, and the experience of the past that they stimulate. Part III clarifies why and how these case studies have been identified and introduces the specificities of different museum presentations and the unique questions that they raise.

Part I
Epistemic shifts

Under the Watch of History and Theory

This section characterises the impact of academic research in fashion history and theory on museological research and curatorial practice. The aim is show that the fundamental change undergone by historical and critical studies in dress and fashion over the past 40 years, and the gradual integration of object-based methodologies with those informed by new art historical thinking and cultural studies, have had an impact on the work of museum practitioners, as well as on the status of dress and fashion collections in cultural heritage institutions.

In the 1960s the study of historic fashionable dress started to be recognised by art historians, both as a subject in its own right and as complementary to the study of history. Known

mostly as dress history, this discipline was concerned with the development of dress and textiles in time, looking at artefacts or their pictorial representations, often with methodologies that had been inherited from an earlier tradition set by studies of costume history. Despite this dominating perspective, the 1960s also witnessed the emergence of research that transcended the close observation of objects. An example is Roland Barthes's foundational study of fashion as a sign system,[8] which was influenced, on the one hand, by the Panofskyian theories on the iconographic and symbolic meanings of art, aiming to explain the correspondence between 'the visible event and its intelligible significance';[9] on the other hand, by Saussure's understanding of the sign as the arbitrary product of cultural conventions. Within this methodological framework, Barthes's study raised the possibility to look at the clothing system from perspectives that were no longer based on formalism, and through approaches with roots in linguistics, communication studies, and sociology. While Barthes's study has been, and continues to be, influential when looking at historical dress and contemporary fashion, it also needs to be seen as belonging to a tradition of theoretical studies that often overlooked those aspects of objects that resisted being thought of in terms of signification, focusing instead on fashion as a relational 'system' for the creation, perpetuation, and transgression of meaning.[10]

The opposition between formalist and textual approaches was considered by dress historian Lou Taylor in 1998 when she looked back at the previous two decades of research. [11]

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[8] Barthes, *The Fashion System*.

[9] Panofsky Erwin, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 28.

[10] The distinction between 'dress', 'fashion', and 'clothing' testifies to how these terms have been discussed in fashion studies and their association with specific disciplines and approaches. Quinton and Tuckett (2018: 151-162) explain that 'dress' refers to historic fashionable dress and its utility both as every day and as extraordinary practice of the clothed body. See Rebecca Quinton & Sally Tuckett, 'Looking back and moving forward: the Mitt in Dress and Textile Histories at the University of Glasgow' in *The International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 5:1 (2018), 151-162. However, the understanding of this term varies in the context of the museum, where it is used to refer to individual dresses regardless of the historical context that produced them. The term 'Fashion' is instead utilised to discuss both the material and the abstract dimension of modern and contemporary clothing. It escapes a fixed definition, to the point that Yuniya Kawamura claims that it should not be defined at all. See Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004). However, others have associated the concept of fashion to those of mutability and change, linking it to modernity and the social, technical, and aesthetic changes that came with it. On the definition of fashion see Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994); Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3-22; Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion and Communication* (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), 8; Patrizia Calefato, *The Clothed Body* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 7-9; Giorgio Riello, 'The Object of Fashion: Methodological Approaches to the History of Fashion,' in *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 3 (2011), 6. The term clothing has instead been used to designate everyday dressing practices.

[11] Lou Taylor, 'Doing the Laundry? A Reassessment of Object-based Dress History.' *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2 (1998), 337.

Taylor denounced the 'great divide' between the object-centred methods of the curator/conservator and the academic approaches of social histories and cultural theory as these were practised in British universities in the late twentieth century. However, she also pointed out that at times in which the museum and academia were universes apart, the latter had begun to witness the emergence of multi-disciplinary research with an interest in the study of objects, under the influence of Pierre Bourdieu and the renewed sense of importance that *things* were being given in those days.

Taylor's article was published in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* – founded only a year earlier – in a special issue featuring contributions from a 1997 conference held at Manchester's Platt Hall Gallery of Costume, on the occasion of its half centenary. The necessity for a methodology for the study of fashionable historic and contemporary dress that acknowledged both the epistemic role of objects and the importance of theoretical and critical perspectives, was widely supported by what she identified as a new academic community, consisting of scholars who had been engaged in the activities of art and design schools, and whose research was developing 'dynamic new approaches to the history, theory, and contemporary practice of fashion'.[12] Including Christopher Breward, Valerie Steele and John Styles, this group of scholars had embraced cultural Marxism, developing the perception of a critical deficiency among both traditional dress historians and those moved by an ideology based on stringent textual analysis.[13]

However, the Platt Hall conference highlighted that the polarisation that had been observed by these scholars still existed and was, indeed, tangible. Contributions from the same conference that referred instead to traditional object-based methodologies were published in *Costume, the Journal of the Costume Society* between its 1998 and 1999 issues. For instance, Naomi Tarrant's paper highlighted the difference in scope and methodology suggesting that cultural historians were more interested in theory than artefacts:

> And yet, the real thing, the original garments, the pieces of clothing which have
> been worn by real people, our ancestors who lived, breathed, worked, played,

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[12] Taylor, 'Doing the Laundry?,' 339.

[13] See: Christopher Breward, 'Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress,' *Fashion Theory*: *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2. 4 (1998): 301-13; See also: Valerie Steele, 'A Fashion Museum is More than A Clothes-Bag,' *Fashion Theory*: *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture,* 2.4 (1998), 327-25. See also: John Styles, 'Dress in History: Reflections on a Contested Terrain,' *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2 (1998), 383–9.

loved and died, have been marginalized.... [cultural historians] engage in various methodologies, trying to fit the study of clothes into their chosen sphere but usually not studying the actual physical garments, the real thing. If they do mention original pieces then it is often a token, without any true appreciation of the items.[14]

The comparison between these two perspectives unveils not only a different perception of the balance between objects and theory in research, but also distinctive views of the responsibilities of museums towards both collections and their audiences.

In this respect, an alternative was presented by Steele, who acknowledged the role played by objects in research and suggested a methodology to integrate theoretical considerations, based on the three-step 'mode of investigation' (description, deduction, and evaluation) that had been advanced earlier by her PhD supervisor, material culture historian Jules Prown .[15] What seems important to underline here is that, through her reference to Prown's methodology, Steele's remarks showed an openness towards the possibility of re-reading the past under present circumstances, and of contesting historical narratives through processes of deduction and evaluation that had been described as integral to the interpretative process. At the same time, Steele's considerations opened up to the possibility that different viewers might interpret artefacts differently, depending on the 'sensory engagement'[16] with the artefact and with the context within which it is exhibited, in a delicate balance between the description of experience and its subjective (deductive and evaluative) interpretation.[17]

The existence of often-irreconcilable positions on methodological issues should not be surprising for a field that was still in its infancy; it should be even less so when conjugated with

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[14] Naomi Tarrant, 'The Real Thing: The Study of Original Garments in Britain since 1947,' in *Costume* 33:1 (1999), 12-22.

[15] Jules David Prown. 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture,' in *Winterthur Portfolio* 17:1 (1982), 1-19. The first stage, description, is based on 'the recording of the internal evidence of the object itself' (Prown, 7). It thus starts from the 'substantial analysis' of objects (or their representation) that was at the centre of disagreement between traditional dress historians and theorists. The formal description of objects leads to the deduction stage, which aims to interpret 'the interaction between the object and the perceiver' (Prown, 8). This issue is important especially in the case of museum practitioners, as it unveils the impact of the beholder's cultural perspective on the study of objects and on the prioritisation of specific considerations. The last stage in Prown's model is the speculative one. This stage is dependent on the previous one, and consists in the formulation of questions that seem pressing in the present, and that move the attention from the object to the emotional, cultural, and psychological aspects of material culture.

[16] Prown, 9.

[17] The idea of the balance between subjective interpretation and objective experience (that is to say, recalling ways of looking at artefacts/contexts/presentations that have been learnt in the social sphere outside the museum) is central to this thesis, and will be looked at in Part II, where I develop considerations of my methodology.

fields – museology and curatorship – which have also proven to be hotly debated terrains among both cultural historians and practitioners. Breward refers to the Manchester conference in a later paper: in retrospect, the event was described as an experience in which 'protagonists from both sides seemed to become more entrenched in the comforting prejudices of their own familiar points of reference'.[18] In 2008 Breward observed that this discrepancy, which continued to exist despite the gradual overlap of these purviews over the previous ten years, could be resolved by integrating critical and historical investigations, for example through collaborations projects between museum practitioners and academics. In the same paper, Breward praised the emergence of academic approaches based on the convergence of various humanistic and social disciplines. This view was not aimed at challenging the aesthetic and disciplinary autonomy of art and design – which conservative academics considered as an undesirable side-effect of multi-disciplinarity – but it was moved by the aspiration to juxtapose the study of forms and styles with a critical analysis of functions, processes and receptions. This pursuit could only be achieved through multidisciplinary, which Breward saw necessary because of fashion's intrinsic ability to 'incorporate problems of identity, the body, gender and appearance'.[19]

Breward's work (particularly *The Culture of Fashion*), along Rebecca Arnold's *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety* and Ulrich Lehmann's *Tigersprung*, as well as research by their predecessors Elizabeth Wilson and Gilles Lipovetsky, has been important in placing dress and fashion in a multidisciplinary context. The necessity of doing so stemmed from the late twentieth-century idea that fashion is a tool for the mediation of the self and that this 'self' is the product of individual negotiations between and across various social discourses.[20] However, besides their emphasis on multidisciplinary, the impact of the work of these scholars on museological practise also originates from their innovative contextualisation of fashion in history, and from their shared idea that over-arching histories can become tools to reconstruct both micro and macro narratives, to study the past, but also the memory of that past, which is to say the implications of that past for the present.

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[18] Christopher Breward, 'Between the museum and the academy: fashion research and its constituencies,' in *Fashion Theory*: *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 12:1 (2008), 84.
[19] Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion. A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2.
[20] See: Breward, *Culture of Fashion.* See also: Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See: Ulrich Lehmann. *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.); see: Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); see: Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in dreams: fashion and modernity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press: 1987); see: Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994).

This new approach was utilised by all these authors to study the social, aesthetic, and technological impact of modernity on the forms and the functions of fashion in the following decades.

The impact of these ideas on museological practice was observed by Fiona Anderson in 'Museums as Fashion Media', where they were described as underlying the purviews of 'new fashion history'. [21] This was defined as a multidisciplinary subject that encouraged a more text-oriented production of knowledge; that was unquestionably object-based, but not strictly object-bound like 'dress history'. Another feature of 'new fashion history' was its preference towards theoretical and critical perspectives over the construct of linear temporality, which instead characterised conservative approaches to the study of dress history. The museum was seen as the fertile terrain for the development of this renewed balance between object-based observations and theory. As I will develop further in the next section, this view had roots in the fact that the traditional focus of museums on objects had already been juxtaposed by an interest in contextual discourse – which the 'new museum scholars' shared with the 'new fashion historians'. This was very different from the conventional classifications of the modern museum, which placed objects into narratives of the progress 'from simple to complex….from ancient to modern'.[22]

A critical and more comprehensive evaluation of the ideas underpinning new fashion historicism was articulated by Caroline Evans in *Fashion at the Edge*.[23] From a methodological point of view, her research aimed to 'develop a case study of a method' that could be used to discuss near-contemporary fashion practice and its context.[24] To do so, Evans took further some of the positions that had previously been taken by Lehmann, for instance, the idea that fashion renovates itself through 'citations' from its own sartorial past,[25] and referred to Benjamin's and Foucault's understandings of history to explore the mechanisms of social signification regulating these visual connections. The purpose was to show that designers construct meaning precisely through references to earlier historical moments and that this process can itself become a method of historical investigation. Thus, Evans observes that the reconstruction of events and forms of expression that are closer in time needs to go beyond their frames of reference. This is a pursuit,

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[21] Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media.'

[22] Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 262.

[23] Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness*. Yale University Press, New Haven. *1900-1929* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[24] Evans, 4.

[25] Lehmann, *Tigersprung,* xx.

as Evans explains, that can benefit from an approach that excavates their multiple traces in the past, problematising the echo of that past into the present. Developing a relationship of resonance between history, criticism, and design processes, this approach presupposes that the nature of representation rests both on the object itself and in the wider cultural context that engendered the social discourses whose implications resonate through the object decades later. Thus, the juxtaposition of distant moments does not equal to the 'crude historical equivalence between past and present'.[26] Rather, it emphasises the impact and implications of past events, processes, and contexts on the most recent forms taken by fashion.

Such dynamics are discussed by using the language of deconstructionist cultural critique: fashion history is made of 'returns' and 'repetitions', rather than clean breaks, and different connections can be made between the parts and a narrative whole. This terminology, and the idea of history underpinning its use, enabled a study of fashion – understood as dress, but also as spectacle, and performance – that could expose the social relations that it perpetuates and of which it is itself a product. As this thesis will demonstrate, this idea has trickled down to fashion exhibitions in multiple ways, resulting in a variety strategies of display, whose specific features underlie different understandings of the relationship between artefacts/parts and context/whole.

The critical-historical study of fashion history, the chronological and disciplinary fluidity that characterises its methodologies, along with the re-discovery of lifestyle and fashion as part of commodity culture that had already taken place in the 1990s, seem to have found fertile ground in cultural heritage institutions in a period in which they were also seeking to redefine their roles and methodologies. With this regard, further impact on the perspectives adopted by fashion curators have derived from an on-going process of institutionalisation of the study of fashion theory through academic conferences and degree programmes. An example is the conference 'Fashion Studies: Perspectives for the Future,' which was organised by Stockholm University in 2006, aiming to explore potential directions and theoretical paradigms for the study of fashion. The academics that gathered in Stockholm identified a highly interdisciplinary and dynamic field devoted to the theoretical and critical implications of fashion, understood as a complex sign and as a deep aesthetic discourse. At that point, the object-based study of dress seemed to the contributors only one of many methodologies available within the broader discipline that the Swedish University called *modevetenskap,* Fashion *Studies.* This name embraced the socio-ideological values of dress, while also seeking to consider critical approaches to various

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[26] Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 10.

professionalisms of the fashion system, e.g. those connected to communication, production, and consumer culture. In this sense, the aims of fashion studies were made to resonate with those of the wider discipline of cultural studies.[27]

Most importantly, the course of research was determined by 'theory' rather than through the engagement with objects, which were instead analysed often as secondary data. In other words, 'fashion theory' was the collective term for a range of theoretical approaches used to study the way in which 'fashion takes shape, how it penetrates the world, reproduces itself and conditions the social and power relations between individuals and society', to *then* apply such consideration to the study of objects.[28] A clarification on the balance between objects and theory in fashion studies is given by Giorgio Riello, who points out that,

> it is not entirely correct to say that whereas in dress history the object is central, fashion studies ignores the objects of fashion. Assertions such as these are common in the literature, but they forget that […] fashion studies has found a fertile ground within the research of museum curators.[29]

The development of research in fashion theory and its permeation into the museum (often through the collaborative approach suggested by Breward) has thus resulted in exhibitions that look at fashion as the materialisation of social, political, and emotional issues that sometimes have themselves become curatorial principles and organising motifs. Thus, fashion exhibitions have started to look at dress and its representations less from the perspective of chronology, and more from critical perspectives that have favoured the emergence of diachronic and 'ahistorical' viewing experiences.

While Judith Clark's *Spectres* is a forerunner of this idea, more recent examples include Serge Martynov and Sofia Hedman's *Utopian Bodies: Fashion Looks Forward* and JW Anderson's *Disobedient Bodies*, respectively held at Liljevalchs Art Gallery in Stockholm in 2015 and the Hepworth Wakefield museum in 2017. However, despite the way in which the logics of new historicism emerge through their organising principles and curatorial thesis, their relevance to fashion curation is also dependent on the open interpretive relation that they seek to establish

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[27] Louise Wallenberg, 'A Decade of Challenges and Possibilities: Establishing Fashion Studies at Stockholm University,' in *The International Journal of Fashion Studies* 5.1 (2018): 163-174.
[28] Riello, 'The Object of Fashion,' 2.
[29] Riello, 2.

between curator and audiences. For this reason, more development on these exhibitions will be offered later in this chapter.[30]

Conversely, it also seems possible to speculate that the rise of the status of dress and fashion collections within museums, alongside curators' success in re-reading collections through theory and critical-historical critique, has led, in turn, to further impact on academic research. Underlying a renewed interest in artefacts, this is what Riello defines as a study of the 'material culture of fashion', a mode of investigation in which objects define the course of research, as does theory.[31] Building upon Riello's considerations (but also on Evans's critical-historical research) scholars such as Francesca Granata and Marco Pecorari have defined this hybrid approach as standing 'in-between' the material and the evocative properties of fashion, using objects as starting points for considerations on theory, as much as theory as a starting point for considerations on objects.[32]

The popularity of this approach amongst scholars of contemporary fashion is not surprising. At the same time, its potentialities have increasingly been applied to the study of historical dress, following a trajectory that had already been traced by Breward in *Fashion* and *The Culture of Fashion*. This is evident in recent educational programs rooted in the study of the past, such as the MLitt in Dress History at Glasgow University which, as Quinton and Tuckett have explained, aims to lead students to interrogate artefacts in the light of the methodologies developed through fashion studies, seeking to expand the body of theoretical knowledge with dress in mind.[33] The MA is also symbolic of the collaborative effort between museums and academia, rising from an active collaboration between Glasgow Museums and Glasgow University.

The signs of a return, or even a 'revenge' of objects, in studies of dress and fashion, can be found in the growing importance of 'new materialist' approaches. This re-discovered interest in the 'matter' of things underlies the suspicion that post-structural theory alone is insufficient to fully acknowledge the embeddedness of the body in an open network of relations and correspondences with the external world. Thus, in departing from the observation of objects,

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[30] See pp. 50-51
[31] Riello, 'The Object of Fashion,' 6-7.
[32] See: Francesca Granata, 'Fashion Studies In-between: A Methodological Case Study and an Inquiry into the State of Fashion Studies,' in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, 16:1 (2012), 67-82. See also: Marco Pecorari, *Fashion Remains. The Epistemic Potential of Fashion Ephemera*, Doctoral Thesis in Fashion Studies (Stockholm: Stockholm University, Stockholm: 2015).
[33] Quinton & Tuckett, 'Looking back and moving forward,'151-62.

'new materialist' studies stress the idea that objects are not simply recipients of influences of cultural determination, but holders of affective strengths. Formulations of the form of recollection that derives from the close observation of objects have been put forward by scholar Anneke Smelik, who has called for a perspective that focuses on the matter of things and the material body – the body of things, but also the human body – in order to disclose considerations on 'fashion as materially embedded in a network of human and non-human actors'.[34] A variation of this object-based epistemology emerges in experimental work by Ellen Sampson, where a focus on subjective embodiment distils the relation between the parts – individual marks left on the body of objects – and the contextual whole through which they have come to exist, revealing the inalienable past of objects.[36]

     A corollary of this fascination with the memory of objects and materials, new materialism also attests to a 'material turn' in historiography. It speaks at once to embodied, nonlinear explorations of the past, as well as, to a fascination with collective memory, and with the idea of recovering the histories of previously excluded groups. Thus, in focusing on material specificity, this enterprise positions itself at the antipodes of the view of objects as registers of symbolic meaning, which dominated earlier textual approaches to the study of dress, rooted in a Barthesian understanding of fashion as a sign system. At the same time, the focus on objects has been accompanied by a re-found trust in the expertise and knowledge of the designer, the archivist, the conservator, and in general, of the specialised maker. The openness to these perspectives also displays the potential to re-discover both individual and group narratives, often in self-reflexive ways.

     As I will argue in Chapter IV, the focus on objects and their features, as opposed to the focus on chronologies and themes, grounds the experience that is created by the MoMu Explorer, albeit in a very simplified and systemic way. However, the logics of new materialism have permeated traditional exhibition practice by drawing attention to materiality and corporeality. Examples can be found in displays from the *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* exhibition, held at the V&A in 2018, which displays personal possessions with signs of usage and wear, of friction

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[34] Anneke Smelik, 'New Materialism: a Theoretical Framework for Fashion in the Age of Technological Innovation,' in *The International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 5.1 (2018), 34.

[36] Sampson does not use the terms 'parts' and 'whole' in her discussion. Here, her ideas are 'translated' in through the terminology that is used in this thesis. See Ellen Sampson, 'Entanglement, Affect and Experience: Walking and Wearing (Shoes) as Experimental Research Methodology.' *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, Vol.5.1 (2018), 55-76.

between flesh and materials. Highlighting a body of sensory knowledge that would otherwise be unaccountable, these displays reconstruct a personal narrative which in turn places the subject back at the heart of the discourse on important social issues (such as disability), where a focus on subjectivity had previously gone missing.[37]

Looking back at how the relationship between academic research and museological practice has evolved, as this relationship has been reconstructed thus far, it seems possible to speculate about its future developments. The recent emergence of journals and platforms devoted to yet more alternative writing genres and approaches can be interpreted as pointing in the direction of the typologies of reflections that might emerge through the practice of curating fashion.[38] An example is the research published by Anja Aronowsky Cronberg's *Vestoj,* which critically looks at the connection between fashion and key social challenges of the 2010s: the velocity of the fashion system, the clothed body as a terrain of political resistance, the manifestations of precariousness through fashion, different understandings of sustainability, among other perspectives that have the potential to open the discussion on some of the unfulfilled potentialities of Marxism. Another instance is Agnès Rocamora, Paolo Volenté, and Emanuela Mora's *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, which recognises the limitations intrinsic to an English-language dominated field. Both platforms demonstrate the necessity to develop museological, object-based practice through critical perspectives that integrate discussions of under-representation, with the aid of previously omitted standpoints, and in the light of an internationalism that has transformative effects on objects and people, but also on the perspectives through which present, past, and the relation between them can be studied. Originating from political concerns, these stances can be used to look at contemporary fashion practice, while also looking back at imperial modernity to historicise and problematise both of its defining terms.

While key changes in how fashion has been studied have had an impact on how it has been exhibited, other debates have played important roles, too. Above all, it is essential to point out that the institution of the museum has also gone through a complex process of identity definition. This is no small issue, and for this reason, the following two sections will trace the

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[37] For more development see: Alessandro Bucci, 'Cosmic Aspirations: Considerations on the Museum, Immortality, and Frida Kahlo', *Fashion Theory* (2019), t.b.c.

[38] Some examples of curatorial practice that has taken these perspectives into account already exists, but mostly as the initiative of smaller institutions, independent curators or as collaborations between designers and artists. The examples of *Utopian Bodies: Fashion Looks Forward* and *Disobedient Bodies* will be presented at pp. 50-51.

coordinates of this polyvocal debate. The aim is to highlight how the changing roles and responsibilities of museums towards both audiences and collections have sustained the entrance of fashion into the museum, as well as the emergence of diachronic viewing experiences.

Towards a 'New Museology'

In *Establishing Dress History*, dress historian Lou Taylor explains that even though collecting dress dates back to the early modern period, museums acquisitions of fashionable dress only started in the 1950s, while we would have to wait until the 1970s for exhibitions that include contemporary fashion.[40] In interpreting the belated entrance of fashion into the museum, Taylor observes that,

> the notion of collecting examples of masculine and feminine 'fashionable' historical dress, let alone contemporary styles, clearly proved to be anathema to male

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[40] This trajectory is described in Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). A reconstruction of the history of fashion curation in the UK is offered by Amy de la Haye, *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), where special attention to the V&A is paid. While this history will be considered again in Chapter II, and each chapter will touch upon the history of fashion exhibitions in the specific context that it explores, what is important to underline here is that the history of fashion exhibitions has taken very different directions in different contexts. Among the contexts that have not been looked at closely in this thesis, it seems important to briefly observe the case of France, where early exhibitions of fashionable dress date back to the beginning of the century, thus preceding those in the UK. The 1925 'Paris Exposition Des Arts Décoratifs' marked the debut of contemporary design in exhibition venues, and the importance of starting a process of culturisation of fashion was recognised by the existence of the *Société de l'Histoire du Costume* since 1907. The society pushed towards the creation of a museum where its 2000-pieces collection could be exhibited. After devolving the collection to the Carnavalet Museum, the Museum of Costume was inaugurated in 1956, to be renamed Palais Galliera Musée de la Mode et du Costume already in 1977. In the USA, Taylor observes, 'there are hundreds of museums that feature dress.' Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* , 183. Among landmark exhibitions produced in the US is Rudofski's 1949 'Are Clothes Modern?', whose title as been reprised in the museum's second fashion exhibition in 2017, titled 'Items: Is Fashion Modern?' The museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology started to present a programme focused on contemporary avant-garde in 1975. See: Valerie *Steele, '*Museum Quality: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition'. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 12 (2008), 9. At the MET, the Costume Institute was founded already in 1946, absorbing the pre-existing Museum of Costume Art, founded in 1937. Some of its presentations have had a profound impact on the history of fashion exhibitions nationally and internationally. In particular, Diana Vreeland's 'Inventive Clothes: 1909-1939' is described as being fundamental in bringing fashion exhibition to Japan, where the first exhibition 'The Origin of Contemporary Fashion (held in 1975 at National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto) was inspired and by Vreeland's exhibition and showcased many of its artefacts. See: Yoko Fujishima and Osamu Sakura 'The rise of historical and cultural perspectives in fashion studies in Japan,' in *The International Journal of Fashion Studies 5:1* (2018), 197-209. The success of the exhibition led to the foundation of the Kyoto Costume Institute (KCI) in April 1978, with the vision to collect and preserve Western clothing in the heart of Nipponese classic culture.

museums curators, even in museums devoted to debating issues of 'art and industry', where logic would suggest them to be found.[41]

This idea has often been cited by academics who wanted to explain why fashion seemed unworthy of being presented in museum venues.[42] However, this is a simplification which fails to consider other dynamics, for example, the resistant connotations of fashion as 'the very exemplum of superficiality, frivolity and vanity'[43] that collided with ambition of the modern museum to be a place of edification. These connotations can also be contrasted with the 'class-consciousness' of art and design history, which, as Greenhalgh explains in 1989, made 'anything pertaining to popular entertainment [...] unlikely [...] to receive attention from these disciplines' and from the institutions that were associated with them.[44] While fashion entered the museum at a time when the gender balance in the workforce at senior levels started to be questioned – a process which is itself dependent on complex social and political changes – an analysis based on its observation risks reinforcing gender stereotypes that marginalise the narration of the impact of the 'cultural turn' in the humanities. For the museum, this implied its gradual opening up traditionally 'unworthy' objects, such as fashionable historical and contemporary dress. This is just an example of the reasons why the rise of fashion in the museum needs to be put in the perspective of a profound questioning of the roles of the modern museum in contemporary society.

When approaching the literature on this matter, it becomes evident that, until the 1980s, the history of the museum has mostly been written by museum professionals. From these 'insider' perspectives, museum history was resolutely narrated as a story of progress, with little criticism.[45] However, one of the earliest initiatives to look back at these accounts, and to raise critical questions on museological practice, came from within the museum world itself, when the International Council of Museums (ICOM) wrote about the emergence of a 'Nouvelle Muséologie:'

> a movement of criticism and reform incorporating new developments in the social and human sciences with the aim of revitalizing techniques of displays,

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[41] Taylor, *Establishing Dress History*, 106.
[42] For example, see: Steele, 'Museum Quality,' 7-8.
[43] Barbara Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 3.
[44] Paul Greenhalgh, 'Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions,' in *The New Museology,* ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion, 1989), 77.
[45] For example, see Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums* (Nashville: AltaMira Press, 1979).

exhibition, and communication, and, ultimately, altering traditional relationships between the institution and the public.[46]

The ideas grounding this stance were later developed into a collection of essays by Peter Vergo, titled *The New Museology,* where both museum professionals and cultural studies scholars suggested that traditional ideas about museums and collection-based practices had begun to fail, determining the necessity for new prospects and new definitions.[47] Exposing some of the reasons that caused the 'old museology' to fail, the debate highlighted that traditional museological practice revolved around an idea of museums as institutions where 'the true' was upheld only in relation to specific social groups. Instead, in the tradition of cultural Marxism, the New Museology sought to promote the development of an institution that would address the relationship between high and low culture, experience and ideology, in a way that was appropriate to the democratic advancements that had followed the Second World War.

As a debate that was deeply concerned with the purposes of the museum, the new museology called for a redefinition of cultural heritage institutions as places with culture at their heart, with the multi-faceted meaning that the term had already acquired with cultural materialism, and the 'cultural turn' in the humanities. Another key influence guiding the new museology was the Foucauldian view on genealogy, which instigated the idea that the past would be looked at from multiple perspectives and levels of investigation. and on the multiple levels of investigation through which the past could be explored. Thus, in 'new museums' the development of collections and presentations should no longer be based on dogmatic principles of 'rarity', classification, and universalism. Rather, they should embody the vision of a museum that is critical of those orthodoxies, and that is made of 'contact zones', namely, a space permeable to objects which represent 'particular histories of dominance, hierarchy, resistance, and mobilization'.[48] This breaking up of hierarchies mirrored a position that had been previously been rehearsed in art practice itself: since the 1960s, the contestation of the traditional hierarchies that held painting and sculpture at the top brought into the exhibition space an iconology of the everyday, through intervention that symbolically questioned the disjuncture between the museum system and the cultural values of society at large. Contemporary fashion not only defied the principles of

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[46] 'Muséologie (Nouvelle),' in *Encyclopaedia Universalis Supplèment, Vol 2*. (Paris: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 1985), 958.

[47] Vergo, *New Museology*.

[48] James Clifford, 'Museums as Contact Zones,' in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 213.

classifications typical of the modern museum; but because of its associations with popular culture, it also offered opportunities to reflect on the balance between knowledge and power, structure and agency, and objectivity and subjectivity, as this balanced was being redefined in 'new museums'.

The new museology was also interested in how to contextualise objects and practices to maximise engagement with audiences. According to Peter Vergo, exhibition-makers until that point had developed presentations that where either focused on the idea that objects can 'speak for themselves', or that demanded a high level of effort from audiences, for example through reading long information texts.[49] The necessity for compromise also reflected a view of 'new' museums as places for both edification and entertainment. Greenhalgh discusses this dichotomy, defining the perceived division between these two terms as inherited from the modern divide between work and pleasure, which had informed presentations in the age of the Great Exhibitions. From this perspective, any object that 'hinted at amusement' was not included in displays, favouring instead only those that would elevate and inform audiences.[50] Anderson points out that, with its inherent relationship to the body and sexuality, fashionable dress was immediately linked to the lowest of pleasures, and therefore often overlooked until the cultural turn permeated the exhibition sector.[51] In the light of the education/entertainment dichotomy, the doubt is therefore whether the appearance of fashion in exhibiting venues accounts for a recognition of its importance as a phenomenon endowed with cultural significance or whether it is rather the result of considerations that have relied on its popularity.

We are, however, in a new phase, in which the need to offer a balance by relying on curatorial interpretation, is evolving into a view of that balance as based on multiple variables. As museums and cultural heritage institutions continue to redefine their functions in the twenty-first century, and to concern themselves with audiences, they are increasingly seen as instruments of empowerment, developing further an idea that was embryonic in the thought of the 'new museologists'. This has resulted in a variety of 'textual' approaches to displaying, namely, approaches which involve a concern with how visitors 'read' exhibitions and the artefacts that they display. For this reason, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests that in writing about museums,

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[49] Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion, 1989).
[50] Paul Greenhalgh, 'Education, Entertainment and Politics,' 87.
[51] Anderson, '*Museums as Fashion Media*,' 373.

one should 'look for differences, for change, and for rupture'.[52] This focus on interpretative strategies seems based on the idea that museum practices cannot be grounded on traditional aesthetic paradigms. Instead, their value needs to be assessed in relation to their ability to stimulate viewers and to activate them as producers of experience. Claire Bishop points out that contemporary art has already witnessed the emergence of a post-representational, 'radical' museum, focused on providing visitors with differentiated access to content.[53] Unlike the modern museum, this contemporary institution is a place invested more and more with methods of enquiry and individual experience, as well as with acknowledging the impossibility of accommodating global diversity through fixed conclusions and without problematising that past – remote or proximate – whose memory it seeks to preserve.

A major implication of Bishop's considerations is also a renewed balance in the relationship between the curator and the visitor, which can be best described through comparison with Barthes's and Foucault's views of the relationship between author and reader, presented respectively in *Death of the Author* and *What is an Author?*. Foucault's critique, much stronger than Barthes's, suggested that at the heart of this relationship lies a cult of personality that has traditionally filled authors' points of view with final and ultimate meaning.[54] Rejecting this idea, Barthes and Foucault view texts both as products and as producers of their own social, cultural, and historical discourses. This perspective is underpinned by a recognition of the active role of readers in the interpretation of the text as a whole. The task of the author thus consists in helping individual readers develop an awareness that they would have not developed without the text.

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[52] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 9. Hooper-Greenhill explains that this idea should be used also to look at displays of collections that precede the modern museum, such as the Renaissance Cabinet of Curiosities, the Wunderkammer, the Medici Palace, and the Repository of the Royal Society.

[53] Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology: or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2013), 16-28. See also: Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 2006), 10.

[54] While Barthes and Foucault reach similar conclusions on the place of authorship within society, and they both seek to activate the reader, their general perspective is different. Whereas Barthes focuses on the relationship between authorship and institutions, calling for a sociology of how language regulates such relationship, allowing authorship to be turned into a system of ownership, Foucault concentrates instead on the process of writing, namely, on the internal perspectives of the concept of authorship. For Foucault – and it is this idea that is of interest in this section – writing had become free from the necessity to express, ending up representing only itself, and ultimately getting in the way of its object of study, that is to say, discourse and its dissemination. See: Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' (1968), trans. Richard Howard, 'in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1996), 118– 22. See: Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?' (1969), in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1979), 141-60.

Borrowing Wallace Stevens's words, the author emerges as an 'intermediary between people and the world in which they live'.[55]

If these considerations are to be borrowed for the purpose of discussing contemporary curatorial practice, its aims in relation to audiences can be formulated as such: instead of leaning on the delivery of fixed narratives and interpretation, the curator should turn to the politics of participation, seeking to create the conditions that incorporate, stimulate and interpellate audiences. This is a kind of curatorial practice which underlies a view of exhibitions as stages for active spectatorship, a condition that philosopher Jacques Rancière points out to be the normal condition in the world: 'we learn and teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt'.[56] As I set out to show through the rest of this thesis, considerations of how museum practices can activate audiences not only highlight the obsolete nature of the view of the curator-as-custodian. They also have the potential to overcome the education/entertainment dichotomy, and to create the conditions to resolve the deadlock between the historic and the ahistoric exhibition.

The idea of a curatorial practice that enables and encourages visitors to produce their own considerations can be found in the four case studies that are at the heart of this thesis. While this idea is only embryonic in Chapter II, it is prominent in Chapter III and IV, which include considerations on what can be gained in contexts where curatorial work is not delivered as a fixed narrative for the consumption of visitors. However, it also emerges in Chapter V, which concludes by considering the case of a 'self-organised' form of programming, activated as a reaction to the limited openness of public institutions towards contemporary forms of expression. In very different ways, each of them is based on a practice of curating that mobilises the dialectic encounter between the past – remote or proximate – and the present moment of observation, and where non-traditional presentation modalities challenge – or surpass altogether – the teleological readings that often emerge in curated exhibitions.

To sustain these considerations, it seem important to introduce and explore the debate on the critique of the museum. In doing so, my intention is to trace a trajectory between the notion of 'distance', which underlies a view of museums as repositories of knowledge, and that of 'access', which enables active spectatorship to emerge as a key tool to address that 'distance'.

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[55] Wallace, Stevens. *Opus Posthumous* (1957) (New York: Vingate Books, 1990), 189.
[56] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011), 16.

Xenology

Calling for more interactive and inclusive strategies of display, for the inclusion of contemporary forms of expression in collections, and favouring textual and interpretative approaches to curating, the 'New Museology' represents the intersection of the 'cultural turn' with museum and curatorial studies and practice. However, its origin, evolution, and scope overlap with older debates, in which the museum emerges as a place of encounter with temporal, geographical and social difference. From this perspective, the museum has been described as a repository of dead objects, a 'mausoleum',[57] and a 'meditative necropolis'.[58] This idea is also at the heart of the critique produced in the context of Italian Futurism, where any museology was anathema. In highlighting the 'sinister juxtaposition of bodies that do not know one another', the Futurists incited to 'demolish museums' in the name of their insistent orientation towards present and future.[59] Conversely, the future-filled potential of archives was at the heart of the view of the museum of the early-twentieth-century Russian artistic and political vanguard of the Cosmists-Immortalists. They believed that, in withdrawing objects from the passing of time, and in subjecting them to the rules of preservation, the museum could become the model for a perfect communist state of equality across present and past. And while the Cosmists-Immortalists were also driven by a destructive impulse towards the work of existing museums, their short-lived radical display experiments suggested the necessity to reduce the distance between disciplines (natural and social histories, and the arts) in order to produce a real transformation of life outside the museum. All these views stem from the perception of an unaddressed condition of distance within collections and with audiences. However, rather than mere descriptions of the state of the museum, they need to be understood as calls for new, radical cultural projects.

The New Museology and the critique of the museum as an institution invested in the production of temporal, geographical, and social difference have complementary finalities. The New Museology discusses the necessity to develop strategies of acquisition and display that reflect the increasingly pluralistic nature of prospective audiences in the contemporary age. It is

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[57] Theodor Adorno, 'Valery Proust Museum in Memory of Hermann von Grab,' (1967), in *Prisms* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), 175.

[58] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' (1952), trans. Richard Mccleary, in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Lawlor Leonard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 262.

[59] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Manifesto of Futurism,' (1909), trans. R.W. Flint, in *The Underground Reader: Sources in the Trans-Atlantic Counterculture*, ed. Jeffrey H. Jackson, Robert Francis Saxe (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 45.

concerned with finding a balance between education and entertainment, and with the ideological dimension of collections. Instead, the critique of the museum has centred its critique around the relationship between objects, their accessibility and their relevance to audiences, reflecting on the anxieties that attend distance. This section considers the latter debate, problematising the nature of the distance between artefacts and visitors in presentations of fashion in the museum. This pursuit will then lead to the discussion of how different presentations have sought to address this condition of intrinsic and irreducible distance.

In 1803 Quatremère de Quincy criticised the opening of the Louvre and lamented that the availability of collections to the public was replacing fine connoisseurship with Kantian aesthetic judgment by audiences with no background in art. Art Historian Hans Belting explains:

> Quatremère had lived long enough without a museum. He did not want to join hands with the masses of the young Paris metropolis who were addicted to entertainment. He overlooked the fact that a middle-class public was taking shape at the time, without which the traditional museum would be impossible.[60]

While Quatremère saw this as a desecration, the ideal of the availability of heritage collections to everybody was still far from the reality of early museum audiences. However, his critique also aimed at the strategies of display of the museum. With its organising principles, the museum levelled the content of its collections, moving artefacts from their original context to a controlled space where the 'true' experience of art is impossible to pursue: the museum 'kills art to make history'.[61] Quatremère's views of the responsibilities of the museum towards collections and audiences are incompatible with the critique that would begin to emerge in the middle of the following century, when, according to Groys, programming begins to be informed by a new, supposedly democratic drive.[62] However, they already introduce the idea that the museum plays a role in mediating the experience of objects and their past.

On the other side of the spectrum from Quatramère, André Malraux proposed the conceptualisation of a 'museum without walls', a total museum containing all works ever produced and encouraging an endless and continuous dialogue between artefacts of all times and geographical origins.[63] This hypothetical museum had no limits of access, except for the fact that

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[60] Belting, 73.
[61] Quatremère de Quincy, quoted in Alexandra Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments 1795-1816* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 134.
[62] Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London; New York: Verso, 2016), 1.
[63] André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls* (1947), trans. Stuart Gilbert (London: Secker & Warburg) 1967.

it only existed as an individual mind-space whose conceptualisation was the result of the relative diffusion of the photographic image, which made 'artefacts', and even details of artefacts, potentially available to everyone, at all times, anywhere. Written after the Second World War, *The Museum Without Walls* would later reveal itself to be a precursor of the aspiration towards borderless, virtual collections, as well as of an historiographical model underpinned by the logics of the database (which I will consider in Chapter IV). However, more relevant to the discussion of the critique of the museum is the starting assumption that grounds Malraux's hypothesis: in detaching objects from their original contexts, the inflexible presentation modalities of the modern museum 'estrange the works they bring together'.[64]

The idea of the distance of artefacts from their original context is central to Walter Benjamin's analysis of the transformation of cultural memory in the museum. People visit the museum to witness the mysterious quality of artefacts to produce an 'aura' – a phenomenal structure which emerges from engaging with the object, but that exceeds its facticity and materiality.[65] Manifesting itself as a sensory condensation of uniqueness and authenticity, the artefact's aura has an indexical nature: it is not the representation of a sense of continuity between the moment of observation and the past, but rather the ghostly projection of that past onto the present. However, the perception of the aura of objects provokes the sudden awareness of a temporal gap, which makes the distance between present and past ultimately irreducible.

In particular, the interplay of physical proximity and cultural distance of artefacts plays a crucial role in defining the gaze of the beholder in the modern museum. As artefacts are removed from their original spatial and temporal contexts and are placed in the museum, their attachment to a living tradition is severed, their aura is scratched, and its emanation profoundly regulated. The modern museum accomplishes its role by interlocking the physical proximity between

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[64] Malraux, 9.

[65] This depends on the assumption that aura is not inherent to the artefact, but rather emerges from visual engagement with it, from the medium of perception. The idea of *perception* as a medium (not understood in McLuhan's technological sense, but rather as a conveyer of subjective experience) that is activated when looking at the artefact emerges through Benjamin's words about the subjects of early photography: 'There was an aura about them, a medium that lent fullness and security to their gaze even as it penetrated that medium'. (Benjamin, [1931] 2002, 515) This is a central theme for Benjamin, and thus the sources where 'aura' is discussed are too many to be listed here. A relevant selection includes one of its earliest mentions, which appears in Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography' (1931), trans. Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in *SW Vol 2. 1927-1934*, ed. Howard Jennings, et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2002), 447; 461; 518. See also: 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1939), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1992), 152–96. Benjamin's oft-quoted observation that 'the aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth' can be found on: Benjamin, *AP,* 447; See also: Benjamin, 515-17. Most famously, 'aura' is discussed in 'The Work of Art'.

artefacts and visitors with this sense of cultural distance. In particular, by limiting sensory access to artefacts, by reducing physical proximity (for example by creating barriers or by using vitrines) the museum makes artefacts objects of cultural devotion, thus re-performing their auratic structure. Thus, in the modern museum, objects are present but simultaneously withdrawn and ineffable. In this condition of distance-in-proximity, the aura of authenticity of the object is enabled to emerge.

The idea of museums as regulators of the interplay between proximity and distance is also present in Michel Foucault's description of the museum as a 'heterotopia', a concept which Foucault first introduced in 1967 and which was discussed it further in *The Order of Things.* His heterotopias correspond to real spaces, which enable the encounter between objects and bodies from different places and times. With regards to the heterotopia that is the museum, Foucault writes:

> Museums and libraries are heterotopias in which time never ceases to pile up and perch on its own summit, whereas in the seventeenth century, and up to the end of the seventeenth century still, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice. By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, the idea of constituting a sort of general archive, the desire to contain all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion, the project of thus organizing a kind of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move – well, in fact, all this belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias that are characteristic of Western culture in the nineteenth century.[66]

At the centre of Foucault's reflection is not only the proximity and distance between content of displays and visitor, but also between handed-down objects, whose juxtaposition stages and emphasises a layered experience of alterity. He observes that under the influence of the Enlightenment and the development of the rationalising approach of science, the distinguishing feature of nineteenth century museum displays was a 'disciplinary' organising motif based on the rules of specialisation, total history, and the transformation of sources into finished products. Displays were not organised to host alterity, but to promote and regulate existing classifying principles. Conversely, in displaying its methods of classification, the modern museum

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[66] Michel Foucault, 'Different Spaces' (1967), in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. Fames D. Faubion, 175-85 (London: Penguin, 1997), 182.

encouraged visitors to regulate themselves and internalise the categorisation. Museum historian Tony Bennett reprises Foucault's position,[67] to suggest that these principles of self-regulation are not dissimilar to those at play in Foucault's Panopticon: 'a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it' and in which the viewer is 'caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers'.[68] In this sense, the outlook of displays in the modern museum is ranged against other nineteenth century exhibitionary spaces, such as fairgrounds, were the absence of a didactic function corresponded to incongruous and disorderly displays.

However, Foucault believed that an intrinsic opportunity of displaying linear constructs of time and history, as well as fixed categories of classification, is that of also displaying the potential to discuss, criticise and transgress those conceptual conditions. While not overtly, this idea, was, indeed, inherent also to Benjamin's description of the museum as a dream-like, illusory space: it imposes its narrative on visitors, who have no choice but to consume the pre-constructed montage of artefacts and displays in the galleries. However, as the museum exposes the dialectic and disruptive tensions of montage, visitors can replicate its construction modality in the world outside its premises and re-acquire autonomy over the narrative. Therefore, Benjamin's *Arcades Project* has a political agenda which has too often been underestimated in studies of identity and fashion: the possibility of challenging the modern notions of categorisation and history as having a 'direction' can problematise the condition of precariousness and marginality experienced by the post-colonial, post-modern subject. These, however, are discussions for Chapter III and Chapter IV.

The idea of the museum as a regulator of the interplay of proximity and distance and as a heterotopia converge in Peter Sloterdijk's 1989 witty yet polemical call for a renewed and radicalised institution, able to operate as a *Schule des Befremdens*, a school of alienation, whose practices produce an encounter with 'the absolutely strange and non-appropriatable'.[69] This idea originates by looking back at nineteenth century museology, and in particular at the universal museum, which he suggestively describes as creating an experience of its collections comparable

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[67] Bennett also offers a benign reading of discipinary nature of the museum: 'it open[ed] objects to more public contexts of inspection and visibility'. Tony Bennett, 'Exhibitionary Complex,' *New Formations* 4 Spring (1988), 85.

[68] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 201.

[69] Peter Sloterdijk. 'Museum – School of Alienation,' (1989) trans. Ian Boyd White; intro. Mark Dorrian, *Art in Translation* 6, 2014, 448.

to that of watching 'a film in which the soundtrack that gives it sense has been turned off, so that nothing remains but an impenetrable and attention-grabbing swarm of facts'.[70] In suggesting a view of the museum as a space that incorporates the external world by domesticating distant times and spaces, the universal museum is described as an institution that internalises distance, institutionalises its presence, and thus emerges spontaneously as being devoted to the phenomenology of alterity: a xenological institution whose task it is to present difference and whose engine is 'the fresh gloss of strangeness' which 'sparkles meretriciously at us like a senseless novelty'.[71]

Despite this strong critique, it is – unexpectedly – in this idea that lies his formulation of the contemporary museum as a xenological institution, able to become a space of posthistorical contestation precisely by intensifying the logics of the nineteenth museum and by releasing the potentialities that they contain. Introducing Sloterdijk to the English-speaking academic community, Dorrian clarifies his thought, and explains that the programme for a museum as a school of alienation is aimed at presenting visitors with a kind of 'Hegelianism-in-reverse:'[72] in its pursuit to showcase the supposedly linear journey of assimilation of the world to humankind, it ends up achieving the opposite, in other words, it ends up displaying the unassimilable 'progress of the world in becoming other to its inhabitants'.[73] The representation of the past that emerges thus highlights the discrepancy between objects' meanings, their existence as the product of historically situated processes, and their reception by contemporary audiences. The result is a display reflecting the image of a world made alien precisely through the historical processes that led, on the one hand, to objects' obsolescence, on the other, to the development of new objects: a post-historical incorporation of the processes through which the Spirit has taken a new direction from the one where it came from.

Thus, instead of striving to uncover meaning and value through representation, in Sloterdijk's *School of Alienation* a centred view-point is missing, self-identification is impossible, and objects on display end up operating solely as markers of difference. Sloterdijk writes about this ideal museum:

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[70] Sloterdijk, 440.
[71] Sloterdijk, 441.
[72] Sloterdijk, 437-39.
[73] Sloterdijk, 448.

As the site of encounter with the beautiful other, it facilitates experiences on the xenophile spectrum such as delight in the new, recognition, vitalization, exoticism, and sympathy with the not-I [*Nicht Ich*]. As the site of the display of the ugly unfamiliar, the museum is tied to the xenophobe spectrum, with defensive reactions against the not-I, with contempt, antipathy, and repulsion against the dead, the unassimilated, the dissimilar.[74]

Sloterdijk's conceptualisation of an alternative model in the form of the museum as a school of alienation usefully highlights the different degrees of alterity that arise during the encounter between the fashion artefact, which is endowed with specific historic materiality, and the gaze of beholders, whose contemporaneity might be culturally and temporally distant from the objects in display. In doing so, it has the potential to underline the museum's role as a prominent and privileged site to re-read fashion's history, and fashion's ability to facilitate the production of this involuted museum.

To begin with, the historical understanding of fashion is made problematic by the fast pace at which fashion evolves, which makes it difficult for non-specialised audiences to interpret the link between a fashion signifier – e.g. a form, a colour, a pattern – and a social signified, between an object/sign and its function in time. This idea is complicated by a view of fashion not as mechanism – as it might have seemed in early work by Roland Barthes – but rather as living and dynamic system, that responses to the encounters and the relations of individual bodies. The way this applies to costume collections and fashionable historical dress is obvious. But near-contemporary fashion too poses such difficulties: produced 'at the edge'[75] of epochal transformations, which are in turn characterised by the complex interplay of technological and scientific innovations, changes in consumption modalities, the development (or restriction) of liberties and rights, and changes in popular and urban culture, fashion expresses a way of being contemporary in a specific time and space, and therefore its complex aesthetic specificities are inextricably bound to garments' materiality. This idea emerges in the work of fashion and cultural historians whose work has sought to create a conceptual framework for the study of fashion's materiality and its relationship with the past.[76] Through a variety of approaches, their researches have highlighted that fashion represents the reception of and the reaction to norms whose

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[74] Sloterdijk, 441.
[75] Evans, 2003: 4-7.
[76] See Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams;* Breward, 'Cultures, Identities, Histories;' See also: Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety.* See also: Evans, *Fashion at the Edge.* See also: Calefato, *The Clothed Body*. See also: Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*.

negotiation has relied on ephemeral and evolving variables; for this reason, its study can 'illuminate how we live in the world today and what it means to be a modern subject'.[77]

The complexity of this condition is ingrained in the processes through which fashion renovates itself: fashion is itself 'xenological', concerned not with perpetuation, but with the constant production of new forms. These, however, are delivered in the present as the complex interplay of distance and proximity that operate across chronologies and cultural differences. As mentioned earlier, Evans has shown that despite fashion's tendency towards being a paradigm of innovation, of the new, and the next, its renovation often stages diachronic processes of visual and conceptual returns from the past.[78] Barbara Vinken has highlighted fashion's inability to 'erase history as difference,' and 'to leave time behind in the perfection of the New,' thus highlighting the tensions between temporal distance and cultural proximity as intrinsic to fashion's *zeitgeist*.[79] Semiotician Patrizia Calefato has emphasised how the interplay between temporal distance and proximity is produced in everyday practices of the clothed body through the experiences of vintage and upcycling, though which the past is summoned, often nostalgically, for the creation of a new look. By utilising Benjamin's understanding of history as an interpretative framework, these three authors have emphasised that such repetitions are made possible precisely through the distance that exists between the present and the past, but also due to the proximity that is perceived between resonating aspects that allow fashion to go *beyond* itself and its forms in a moment in time.[80] Therefore, the experience of alterity – understood as the experience of becoming other from itself – produces a sense of past-in-the-future, which becomes future-in-the-past when exhibited in the museum. In this context, the complexity of this temporality might be hard to grasp without a critical curatorial interpretation whose aim is to facilitate the dialogue between visitors and fashion artefacts. In this sense, different typologies of contextualisation produce different ways of addressing this sense of alterity.

Furthermore, fashion exhibitions have developed a way of talking about fashion that differs from how fashion has traditionally been presented outside the museum by other fashion media. In these contexts, fashion is associated with the conceptual timeframe of the 'now' or the 'next': catwalks present collections for a season that is yet to come, and magazines are concerned

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[77] Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 9.
[78] Evans.
[79] Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 42.
[80] Patrizia Calefato, 'Fashion Beyond Fashion,' in *The End of Fashion* conference, Wellington, November 2016.

with the present or immediate future. Furthermore, alterity emerges with relation to the typology of sensorial engagement that is activated with objects: in the museum, objects are collocated in what Susan Stewart has defined 'an elaborately ritualized practice of refraining from touch:'[81] thus, even those that seem familiar, are 'musealised' through a no-touch policy that ends up regulating the emotional connection with them, and turns them into bearers of mystical symbolism. However, rather than being dependent on the primacy of vision itself, this transformation relies precisely on their removal from the tactile range: this is one of the ways by which the 'contagious magic' of museum displays regulates and the structures of Benjamin's aura, as this concept had been formulated in 'The Work of Art': protecting artefacts and slowing down their decay, stressing their value as museum pieces, and thus propelling them into a condition of irreducible distance.[82]

The complex temporalities that are intrinsic to the mechanisms through which fashion renovates itself, as well as to the reconstruction of its past, along the understanding of the fashion exhibition as a site for the problematisation of such complexity, will sit at the heart of this thesis. However, through Sloterdijk it seems possible to produce considerations on other forms of 'alterity' that are also inherent to fashion's mechanisms, in particular, those that regulate its functioning as 'media' for the representation of individual subjectivities.[83] The focus on inter-subjective 'alterity' emerges clearly in recent work by Lucia Ruggerone, who has argued for a vision of clothing – read through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari – as a 'way of becoming', that is to say, as a dynamic practice developing in a force field of encounters and relations with others and their reified subjectivities.[84] Drawing from the literature that has explored this theme, fashion thus emerges again a xenological practice, concerned with 'the self' as much as with its ability to affect and its relationship with 'the other'. Borrowing Sloterdijk's terminology, this is also a relationship that adopts all the forms contained between 'desire' and 'anxiety', all the shades contained between 'xenophilia' and 'xenophobia', across present and past. This is an important consideration, especially as the institution of the museum, which is not tasked with the

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[81] Stewart, 'From the Museum of Touch,' 17–36.

[82] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (1939), trans. Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, *SW4 1938-1940,* ed. Marcus Bullock et al. 251-83.(Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003).

[83] For example, see, Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000): 6-39. See also: Patrizia Calefato, *Mass Moda*, *Linguaggio e Immaginario del Corpo Rivestito* (Milan: Meltemi, 2007)

[84] Lucia Ruggerone, 'The Feeling of Being Dressed: Affect Studies and the Clothed Body,' *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, 21.5 (2017), 573–93.

suspension of disbelieves, confronts increasingly pluralistic and diverse audiences, in increasingly cosmopolitan cities. From this perspective, a re-interpretation and re-reading of collections that seeks to historicise the mutual exchanges, influences and appropriations that are inherent to fashion not only has the potential to become key to the problematising of alterity, but it also seems necessary to reflect the current position of the 'globalised twenty-first-century world as an entity with historical roots and challenging future'.[85] This consideration was motivated by the widespread underrepresentation in exhibitions of the different communities within the urban contexts in which they operate, as well as by the work of Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.[86] Underlying the most recurrent way in which alterity is thought of, this aspect will be discussed to a greater extent in Chapter IV, but it emerges again in the conclusions of the thesis, suggesting a trajectory of future development.

Reviewing this literature, along with the debate on the new museology, has revealed a growing tendency to combine questions the openness of collections with the issue of visitors' activation during the museum visit. In particular, whether the museum is seen as a dream-like space built through montage, a heterotopia, or a school of alienation – or whether debates are marked by the idea of subverting it altogether, as was the case for many twentieth-century avant-garde movements – the critique of the museum exposes a vitalist desire for an institution that is able to attend to the 'flow' of the present. In the case of museum presentations, the fulfilment of this aspiration presupposes the willingness to shape practices which reflect 'the transitory character and the rules that govern contemporary social behaviour'. These practices should create the conditions for meaning to emerge not as a construction for an enclosed group of viewers, outside of which self-identification and historical reflexivity are impossible, but rather through individual contact with such practices.[87]

Among those to whom this kind of museology seemed conceivable, the chapters of this thesis will often refer to the work of media scholar Boris Groys and architect Calum Storrie. In particular, Groys has presented the notion of a fast-changing institution, where the gap between collections and visitors is addressed through temporary curatorial projects in which artefacts

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[85] Christopher Breward, 'A Museum Perspective,' in *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. Jonathan Bate (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 175.
[86] See: Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993. See also: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). See also Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. (London: Macmillan, 1988).
[87] Groys, *In the Flow,* 5.

circulate from one viewing context to another, often in contradicting ways, thus offering diverse audiences different opportunities to engage with their content.[88] Paying particular attention to the potentialities of utilising digitised images and the internet, and of activating the forms of spectatorship that have been produced by the digital, Groys thus suggests the idea of a visionary museum that displays 'practices' rather than objects, that is to say, that engenders aura without objects. The result is a museum that works as a representation of the present, but – as Chapter II will show – that ultimately also ends up opening up the issue of accessibility to the source of emanation of the aura, that is to say, to the museum itself. In other words, by focusing on curatorial projects, engagement or participative practice – or by offering a combination of these – the museum has the potential to become a space tailored around the individual. However, the difficulty of reproducing such projects in their entirety for dissemination outside the immediate spatial and temporal coordinates within which they take place raises questions on the accessibility of such projects.

Storrie suggests instead that the gap between collections and audiences can be addressed by a museology whose practices represent the continuation of the discourses of the city. He points out that while urban environments 'have evolved over a long period of time […] with very little control', the association of the museum with discipline, classification and seemingly neutral taxonomies have diminished its potential to be a true reflection of the world outside its premises. However, unlike Sloterdijk, who stated that the result of this discrepancy was a display of a world that is ultimately alien from the present one, Storrie believes that the complexities of the external world are only curbed within the museum, and that due to their embeddedness in the urban environment 'all museums carry within them the seed of their own delirium'.[89] Through the image of the delirious museum, Storrie's aim is thus to explore multiple ways in which the 'messy vitality and richness of meaning', and theatricality of the city are absorbed by and resurface in the museum and its practices.[90]

With Groys and Storrie, this thesis also asks whether the museum that is figured in this kind of museology is viable, through the specific case of fashion curating. It does so by looking at formats that derive from a radical rethinking of the fashion museum, how it presents the past, and what viewing experiences it produces. The four case studies, however, do not represent a

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[88] See: 'Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk.' *e-flux* 50 (2013). See also: *In the Flow*. London: Verso Books, 2016.

[89] Calum Storrie, *The Delirious Museum. A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005): 2.

[90] Storrie, 3.

complete list of possibilities, and the thesis will conclude that the realisation of this form of museology is dependent on the specificities of pre-existing structures – both in terms of cognitive conventions and in terms of museological infrastructure. At the same time, it will also acknowledge that these involuted forms of museology cannot exist without a traditional museological practice that they seek to implement.

To discuss the applicability of theoretical ideas on contemporary museology to praxis, I will often utilise the term 'post-representational'. This terminology seems appropriate due to the underlying ambition of the case studies to move away from the canons of traditional museological practice and engage in re-thinking how knowledge is generated in the public territory of the museum. This terminology might echo the value that the term 'post-representation' has taken in academic reflections on affect, and more specifically through Nigel Thrift's notion of the 'non-representational'.[91] Indeed, while it shares with the latter the idea that practices of signification are pre-individual, it does so with caution. In particular, this choice of terminology distances itself from the anti-substantialist assumption of non-representational theory that value develops at a pre-semiotic level, namely, that the emergence of meaning can be discussed without ascribing it in the frame of representation or without acknowledging the textual nature of systems of signification. This discussion will be at the heart of Part II of this chapter, where the methodology is considered. However, it seems important to anticipate that my position is that the issue of representation is ever-present, albeit in complex ways; and that the emergence of personal interpretation through and beyond curatorial narratives is solicited by the diffusion of systems of representation, which by their nature are pre-individual, throughout the museum.

Beyond a/historical exhibitions

This project looks at some of the ways in which museums have sought to address the issue of the temporal distance between artefacts and with visitors through their presentation modalities. In particular, it will consider how different ways of presenting fashion in the museum correspond to different ways of talking about its past and of constructing a narrative. The aim is to overcome the distinction between chronological and thematic exhibitions, which, as this section will show, has polarised curatorial debates both within and beyond the field of fashion curating.

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[91] Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2007).

In *The Study of Dress History* Taylor calls for the chronological cohesion between fashion artefact and how it is presented. She explains that the mannequin should support the dress by reconstructing a look that is faithful to its historical expectations.[92] This includes accessories but also standing and sitting poses. Not exhibiting the fashion artefact on 'period-oriented mannequins posed with the correct stance, hair, and cosmetics' might impact its meanings, and make the distance between garment and its correct interpretation unbridgeable.[93] To avoid this, Taylor encourages the use of paintings, photographs, and illustrations that can show how specific garments used to be worn. At the same time, dress should be inserted in a display that provides the coordinates of its original historical context. In the vast landscape of fashion heritage institutions, the Kyoto Costume Institute exemplifies those whose exhibition policies are informed by the aim to represent fashion and costume history from the perspective of the past and of chronological cohesion. Chief Curator Akiko Fukai says about the strategies of display at the Kyoto Costume Institute: 'the exhibitions capture the elegance and the charm that the clothing had in its day, as though simply having been awakened after a long sleep'.[94] Re-enacting fashion's past by means of establishing the evolution of major tendencies and styles, this approach is based on formal observation and aims to abridge the temporal distance between artefacts and visitors through historical reconstruction.

When having to identify a controversial approach to curating fashion, most scholars and curators would point in Diana Vreeland's direction. In a time in which its presence in the museum was still meeting strong opposition, Diana Vreeland's role as curator of fashion differentiated itself from that of the museum conservator. In *Museum Quality: The Rise of Fashion in the Museum,* Valerie Steele explores some of the reasons why Diana Vreeland's exhibitions at the Costume Institute have met hostile criticism.[95] Accused of historical inaccuracy by many, her practice brought into the museum the influences of the fashion magazines – *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* – that she worked for as an editor. Silverman accused Vreeland of 'mistreating' history and her exhibitions to be anachronistic acts.[96] Steele notes the undeniable historical incongruences that characterised Vreeland's exhibitions derived from her idea that 'everything must look now,'

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[92] Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 29-47.
[93] Taylor, 41.
[94] Akiko Fukai, *Fashion. The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 6.
[95] Valerie Steele, 'Museum Quality.'
[96] Debora Silverman, *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 86.

a statement that incarnates the editorial stimuli embedded in her approach.[97] Despite this, Steele recognises Vreeland's curatorial practices as 'abolishing the aura of antiquarianism that had previously surrounded most costume display', and as offering freedom to her followers, with its legacies being visible in current displays of fashion. Vreeland's approach favoured a contemporary interpretation of artefacts, for example by matching clothing in a way that was relevant to her present, but that undermined their historical coherence. This, Steele notes, was a kind of interpretation that would make it easier beholders to identify in what was being presented to them.[98]

This particular aspect of Diana Vreeland's curatorial language has been re-assessed by an exhibition curated by Judith Clark and Maria Luisa Frisa at Venice Fortuny Palace. 'Diana Vreeland After Diana Vreeland' (2012) re-explored Vreeland's curatorial language, in particular that approach to objects' history that has divided critics. The point was to emphasises that her approach was one in which 'reading' objects becomes a retrospective activity that must be rooted in the now, and that must acknowledge that the reception of its meaning is inevitably influenced by a present condition, which wraps both audiences and curators. This approach has been earlier defined by Frisa as part of a 'critical exercise,' an analytical process that seeks to transmit the fashion artefact in relation to the 'world' around it. This includes the 'multiple traces, symptoms and fragments' coming from past and present together.[99] Frisa discusses her understanding of the artefact's historicity:

> My approach is not an effort to achieve historical fidelity to fashion, but rather a critical exercise that I believe is a necessary part of fashion as a process, where fashion is made meaningful by the very process of its development.[100]

Her research and curatorial practice thus take a distance from the reconstruction of institutional chronologies as a rigid necessity of an exhibition of fashion.

These two antithetical approaches arise from different understandings of the historicity of the fashion artefact, and result in distinctive ways of exhibiting fashion. On one hand, this is done through an approach based on the narration of chronologies. The fashion artefact thus

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[97] Diana Vreeland, quoted in Valerie Steele, 'Museum Quality,' 11.
[98] Steele reads Vreeland's historical inaccuracy at the light of the debate around the role of the 'new' museum. Thus, Steele says, Vreeland's exhibitions would show an inclination towards entertainment, as opposed to the exclusively educational aims of the 'old' museology. See: Valerie Steele, 'Museum Quality.'
[99] Maria Luisa Frisa. 'The Curator's Risk,' *Fashion Theory*, 12.2 (2008): 171.
[100] Frisa, 'The Curator's Risk,' 172.

becomes the document through which the curator tries to re-construct the historical context in which it was inserted, disconnecting it from the present. On the other hand, there is an approach based on the deconstruction of that same context, resulting in an open interpretative process of that looks at the reoccurrence of phenomena across chronological time, and which licences the juxtaposition of distinct historical periods. The first approach bridges the gap between present and past – remote or proximate – through a process of reconstruction that sees history as a continuum; the latter proposes to do so by re-enacting under present conditions, highlighting the 'tiger's leap' that invigorates the idea of fashion history as characterised by returns, repetitions, and raptures.[101] Through the latter approach the interpretation of fashion shares with fashion itself its paradoxes, aspirations, and transgressions, manifest themselves in the dialogue between present and past which is at play in the processes through which fashion renews itself.

Art exhibitions that cut across chronologies to highlight the correspondences between different times and discourses date back to the 1960s, but they began to be looked at critically only at the times of the new museology. Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne's *Thinking about Exhibitions* has gathered contributions that look at the ways in which objects and texts are assembled to create and convey meaning.[102] Within the anthology, Debora J. Meijers's 'The Museum and the 'ahistorical' exhibition' looks at the replacement of the rigid, authoritative chronological display with research-based exhibitions concerned with the production of discourse. Meijers notes that it is empathy towards the work of art (*Einfühlung*) that allows the curator to connect works from different eras and cultures and to reveal the correspondences between them.[103] The result is exhibitions that allow us 'to face up to the fact that the apparently unassailable notions which art historians employ are constructs'.[104] Describing this kind of exhibitions 'ahistorical', Meijers thus detaches this approach towards the past from its opposite, the 'historical' approach. 'Historical' and 'ahistorical' thus become meta-discourse terminologies that hold and impose their own conceptual framework, enabling and authorising specific approaches to curating and highlighting the purposes of exhibitions.

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[101] Walter Benjamin, 'Curriculum Vitae (VI): Walter Benjamin' (1940) trans. by Edmund Jephcott. *SW 4, 1938-1940,* ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2003), 395.
[102] Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 1996.
[103] Debora J. Meijers 'The Museum and the 'ahistorical' exhibition,' *Thinking about Exhibitions,* 8.
[104] Meijers, 19.

Fashion curating has also staged an opposition between the two tendencies identified by Meijers. On the one hand, one corresponding to a traditional historiography, based on a definition of historical reality and of the history of dress. On the other hand, there are approaches underpinned by new understandings of history, which draw much of their inspiration from developments in semiotics, literary theory, as well as by new fashion history. This strongly text-orientated historiography has proposed to intersect the present subject and the past, and in so doing, it has been accused of marginalising the relationship between artefacts and historical reality. However, because of the intrinsic recourse to the idea of historical accuracy (or lack of), contained in the definition of historical and ahistorical approaches, this differentiation might constitute a misleading classification of the intents behind so-called 'ahistorical' approaches. The risk included in perpetuating this distinction, especially as new historiographical models gain ground, is that the traditional history of dress would only succeed in becoming the isolated subject of a niche of researchers. This would be counter-productive with relation to the reasons why the study of dress sought inclusion in the museum in the first place, that is to say, to affirm its role as the embodiment of complex cultural values and as a terrain of exchange with wider aesthetic, social, and cultural discourses. Rather, the critical cultural historian might ask what is to be understood from historical reality if the way of thinking that underlies 'ahistorical' exhibitions is accepted.

Identifying innovative tendencies in curatorial practice, Bishop explains that presentation modalities that cut across chronologies have been a defining feature of curating the 'contemporary'. This is not to say, however, that such exhibitions are concerned with presentism: they embrace instead an understanding of the relation between present and past that 'names and identifies the problems of the present day, scouting the past for the origins of this present historical moment'.[105] Therefore, while exhibitions of contemporary fashion might also look at the past – remote or proximate – their aim is not its reconstruction through chronological or thematic, historical or ahistorical approaches. Rather, shedding light on those traces from that past that are still meaningful in the present becomes an essential condition to answer questions about the contemporary age.

The way of thinking that underpins this approach to exhibition-making can be read through epistemological investigations by Giorgio Agamben and Terry Smith, who both describe

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[105] Bishop, *Radical Museology,* 16.

the contemporary as a dimension that is intrinsically made of the discursive and aesthetic co-existence of multiple temporalities.[106] In particular, Agamben explains that, due to its 'excessive proximity' and 'traumatic character', experiencing the contemporary in an all-encompassing and total image/text is inherently impossible, and that this impossibility needs to be accepted as the most evident attribute and distinctive quality of the present. Therefore, distance (temporal, cultural, and spatial), which requires attention towards those past and un-lived experiences that push forcefully in shaping the present, becomes a necessary condition in the exhibitions about the contemporary. In Agamben's words:

> Every present thus contains a part of non-lived experience. Indeed, it is, at the limit, what remains non-lived in every life, that which, for its traumatic character or its excessive proximity remains unexperienced in every experience.[107]

Building on a tradition with roots in Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of his own 'contemporary' condition as an 'untimely' one in relation to his times, Agamben describes *attualità* [relevance] and *contemporaneità* [contemporariness][108] as positions announcing themselves in the guise of the 'out-of-joint'[109]. In quoting Hamlet, Agamben underlines the sense of incongruence which defines the contemporary subject and aims to identify a particular condition of being (the 'contemporary') made of the co-existence of multiple and often divergent temporal vectors. As a distinctive feature of being contemporary, this 'untimeliness', consists of a relationship with time that does not fully adhere to the present, and that shows signs of

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[106] They do so for different purposes. Agamben seeks to describe how philosophers, poets, and artists experience the state of being that characterises the contemporary (what he calls 'contemporaneità'). Instead, Smith sets out to show how the qualities of this state (which he describes by referring to Agamben's concept of 'contemporaneità') also characterise current artistic practice. See Giorgio Agamben, *Che Cos'è il Contemporaneo?* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2008). See also: Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: ICI, 2012).

[107] *Signature of All Things.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009, 101.

[108] Giorgio Agamben Che Cos'è il Contemporaneo?' 6.

[109] 'Out-of-joint' is an expression used by Shakespeare's Hamlet to describe his feeling of being incongruent with the rest of the universe, determining his inability to act in the narrative of the play. This expression, and the incongruence it describes, are then borrowed by Deleuze, Jameson, and Derrida. The lower common denominator of their use of Hamlet's expression describes the alternative conceptions of time that can arise in lieu of chronological succession and the recognition of the post-modern present as characterised by multiple temporalities. Agamben shares this position, but also uses it to define the condition of being contemporary in a given historical moment, as explained in the main text. See: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (1968) (London: Continuum, 2004). See also: Fredric Jameson, *Post-Modernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991). See also: Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1993) (New York; London. Routledge, 1994).

anachronism. According to Agamben, this disconnection gives the 'contemporary' subject the ability to 'step back' from the present, perceive their temporality, and produce forms of expression which contain the memory of past experiences that continue to live in the present. Thus being 'contemporary' is a condition grounded in memory and is described as an ability to resist the burden of unidirectional and chronological history, which, as Pierre Nora notes 'can only conceive the relative'.[110] As such, the study of the contemporary requires the application of archaeological philosophy: a methodology that is not based on a parallelism between present and past; but one which evaluates the incisiveness of one on the other, and the memory left by one on the other. An implication of this methodology is the acknowledgement that different elements of the same past can be transmitted differently across time and in relation to newer questions.

A closely connective practice of curating emerges in support of the layered dimension of the contemporary:

> …contemporary curating is embroiled in time, but not bound by it; entangled with periodizing urges, but not enslaved to them; committed to space, but of many kinds, actual and virtual; anxious about place, yet thrilled by dispersion's roller-coaster ride. It does not follow a set of rules; rather, it adopts an approach arising from an emergent set of attitudes. Can we say that the purpose of curating today is something like this: To exhibit (in the broad sense of show, offer, enable the experience of) contemporary presence and the currency that is contemporaneity as these are manifest in art present, past, and multitemporal, even atemporal? It follows that what is understood in the art world as 'Contemporary Art,' while it does in fact inspire contemporary curating of all kinds, including exhibitions of art from previous periods, does not bind curators to its time-bound imperatives.[111]

This approach to curating overcomes the distinction between the 'historical' and the 'ahistorical'. At the same time, it recognises that multiple temporalities exist within the horizon of both individual and shared experiences and reflect on the processes through which objects are made and experienced. It seeks to stimulate the understanding that the qualities of objects, images, and motifs from the past are contemporary when they echo as singular elements that can be read with ease and felt with intensity in the present. The aim of exhibiting artefacts from the past is thus to highlight components which continue to live in the present and which can illuminate a larger dimension of cultural interferences.

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[110] Nora, Pierre. 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.' *Representations* (1989), 9.
[111] Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 29.

The broader debate surrounding these issues in curating contemporary art and participative art practices has undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of these ideas in art organisations.[112] However, they have been on the rise in fashion curating too, and have informed landmark exhibitions.[113] An example is that of Sofia Hedman and Serge Martynov's *Utopian Bodies: Fashion Looks Forward* held at Liljevalchs Konsthall (Stockholm) in 2015. The exhibition, which was arguably too vast in its scope and intent, aimed to highlight the response of fashion to thirteen contemporary issues (including, for example, the relation between fashion and the environment, the implications of migratory fluxes present and past, the relation between craftsmanship and technology, designers' neo-surreal interpretations to the implications of global politics, among others). The exhibition showed that these issues are the heart of new fashion design processes as a result of pre-existing social, political, and technological dynamics; in doing so, it emphasised that the memory of such dynamics will be carried through fashion's future forms, too. However, beyond the content of the exhibition and individual artefacts, a significant role was played by its varied combination of strategies of display. These ranged from open plans to glass-cases, from 'exploratory' sites to interactive presentations enabling visitors to 'immerse' themselves in the displays.

A better example is the 2017 exhibition *Disobedient Bodies*, curated by fashion designer JW Anderson at the Hepworth Wakefield Museum (Wakefield, Yorkshire). The exhibition highlighted how strategies of resistance towards fixed understanding of subjectivity emerge in fashion, sculpture, and product design. It did so by suggesting that present manifestations of disobedience are informed by pre-existing conventions and limitations. Besides juxtaposing objects from different decades, the exhibition highlighted the implications of disobedience through its unusual possibilities of interaction with the installations. These were made with Anderson's textiles and invited viewers to defy the principle of 'refraining from touch'[114] which inevitably, but necessarily, filters the experience of fashion in the museum. The exhibition also

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[112] Examples of Journals that have hosted debates on this topic and that have been used to further my understanding of the issue are *the Exhibitionist*, *the Manifesta Journal*, and *Stages*.

[113] A recurrent example is that of the 2004 V&A exhibition *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back*. Seeking to highlight the 'haunting connections between recent fashion and its past,' Clark's exhibition overtly aimed to show that conditions that are contemporary in contemporary dress refer to collectively negotiated notions of style and its significance. See: Judith Clark, *Specters: When Fashion Turns Back* (London: V&A Publications, 2004), 3. In this sense, the exhibition was a conscious attempt to represent the dynamics of objects' influences across institutional chronologies, overcoming a vision of the history of dress as the evolution of a form into the next one. As I did not see *Spectres* I have supported this observation with examples of more recent projects.

[114] Stewart, 'From the Museum of Touch,' 28.

included 'atmospheric' display modalities, such as a Madame Gres's gown abandoned on Eileen Gray's Transat chair, striking like a punctum within the exhibition. With its disorientating disposition of small areas separated by curtains of fabric and textiles, the exhibition was also based on a complete abandonment of pre-determined sequences, favouring an interaction with narrative grounded on the individual reception of the exhibition.

These examples are based on a view of exhibitions which focuses on objects as well as on their presentation. This perspective is the product of a kind of curatorial practice whose aim is to stimulate audiences, and which draws its methods from the practice of curating itself rather than leaning on the 'cult value' of objects.[115] By focusing on methodology – on the difference between various approaches – it is possible to overcome the distinction between the historical and ahistorical. The result is instead 'a guided yet open-weave pattern of affective insights, each triggered by looking, that accumulates until the viewer has understood the curator's insight and, hopefully, arrived at insights previously unthought by both'.[116]

Thus, the aim of contemporary curating is not (only) to teach about the past of specific artefacts. Instead, it is to provide the intellectual tools for developing critical considerations about an individually experienced present, and potentially on how to build the future outside its walls. In this sense, these two exhibitions follow what Bishop has identified as a dominating tendency of curating today: 'if the last forty years have been marked by posts (post-war, post-colonialism,

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[115] The expression 'cult value' is borrowed from Benjamin, who introduces it in his famous text on the dynamics and the implications of mechanical reproduction on the circulation of artefacts. See: Walter, Benjamin 'The Work of Art.' According to Benjamin, there are two levels at which artistic production can be perceived and experienced: that of its 'cult value' and that of its 'exhibition value'. While the former is related to the authenticity of the artefact, its secularised ritual value and its existence prior to being viewed as a work of art, the latter refers to its spectacular potential, its availability to be mediated and disseminated for public contemplation. While the balance between these two levels of reception has varied in different historical moments, Benjamin points out that, at the turn of the century, artefacts' 'exhibition value' exceeds their 'cult value', signalling an epochal transformation in which the work of art is emancipated from 'its parasitical dependence on ritual' and acquires a new function. (Benjamin, 223). This new function is political because the increased circulation of the artwork through photography corresponds to its new levels of accessibility outside the restricted circle of those who can enjoy its material presence. For this reason, 'The Work of Art' is not at all a text about art, but rather about social change, politics, and access. It is not correct to assume that through his word-choice ('exhibition value') Benjamin was referring to the context of the museum. However, through the perspective of the new political function that he saw as being attributed to artefacts when emphasis is placed on their exhibition value, it seems possible to argue that as the museum started its long journey from being an elitist institution for the higher classes to being a space of participation and inclusivity, it also became one of those mediums involved in increasing collections' visibility, operating as a regulator of objects' exhibition value (through its displays – which is this section's main interest – but also through the dissemination of images through its catalogues, and more recently, through digitisation).
[116] Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 35.

post-modernism, post-communism), then today, we seem to be in a period of anticipation – an era that museums […] can help us collectively to sense and understand'.[117]

It is in this sense that the fashion exhibition can work as a fashion medium relevant today, namely, as a system involved in the production of knowledge about the fashion system, its functioning, and its challenges across past, present, and potentially, future. The strategies of display that I look at in the next four chapters have considered these issues and are the result of a profound questioning of the experiential aspects of exhibitions and how they can activate visitors to produce their own considerations. At the same time, I will observe that different organisations have accompanied this process with considerations on the role of fashion in their programming (Chapter II, III, and III); or even by questioning the organisational structure that best enables them to operate (Chapter V).

Part II

Towards a Topology of Fashion Exhibitions

Museum presentations and visual culture

Some literature on the relationship between artefacts and exhibition context places an emphasis on beholders. Charles Saumarez Smith calls for a study of museum and gallery presentations as 'complex decisions' which involve considerations on how both curators and visitors perceive artefacts and the relations between them.[119] This idea is echoed by Michael Baxandall, who defines exhibitions as a field in which three distinct terms are at play: 'makers of objects, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers of exhibited objects'.[120] In calling for visitor-oriented strategies of display, both suggest that successful presentations are in most cases those that stimulate and structure interaction without having to recourse to instructions and long explanatory texts, by relying instead on internalised mechanisms of interaction.

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[117] Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 62.
[119] Charles Saumarez Smith, 'Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings,' *The New Museology,* ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion, 1989), 6-21.
[120] Michael Baxandall, 'Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects.' In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics and Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 33-41.

This idea also emerges in Carol Duncan's description of museum visits as 'rituals', implying the formalisation of routines of action, vision, and communication, whose origins are to be located in the surrounding visual, social and even political environment. To sustain the idea of the ritualistic nature of museum visits, Duncan puts forth a theatrical simile, and explains that audiences engage with the displays and the architecture of the exhibition venue as if they were on a stage, 'enacting a performance of some kind'.[121] The museum and its displays thus become projections of structures of experience which originate outside of its walls, as do the artefacts in its collections.

One author who has investigated the relation between fashion and its presentation, and who has introduced the idea of visitors' interaction, is Fiona Anderson. In 'Museums as Fashion Media', Anderson compares presentations by three London-based museums and galleries: the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Judith Clark Costume Gallery, and the 1999 Atlantis Gallery's Hussein Chalayan *Echo Form* exhibition. She suggests that different interpretations of artefacts depend on how they are contextualised in the exhibition space. But to contextualise artefacts effectively, museums and galleries rely on strategies which originate 'from traditional museological practice' but are 'firmly located outside of fashion curatorial contexts'.[122] This idea is central in this thesis, as well as in the development of its methodology in this section.

The idea of an intimate relationship between museum presentations and the wider visual culture is also developed by Julia Noordegraaf, who studied the evolution of strategies of display at Rotterdam's Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum from its inauguration in 1784 to the present day.[123] In particular, Noordegraaf established that the history of the museum's presentations echoes key changes in the history of commercial displays, especially those found in department stores and shopping malls. Basing her observations on the definition of 'presentation' that I have been quoted in the Introduction of this thesis (see p. 5), Noordegraaf also argues that museum presentations appropriate, and rely upon, structures and codes of visuality that are typical of other environs. An implication is that changes in consumption practices outside the museum also signify a shift in how museums display artefacts and collections.

However, in building on Duncan's considerations on the 'ritual' enactment of social behaviours and viewing modalities in the museum, Noordegraaf overcomes the view of the role

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[121] Carol Duncan. *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 18.
[122] Anderson, 372.
[123] Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display.*

of visitors as passive that emerged in the earlier view of the museum as a 'dramatic field'.[124] Arguing instead for the reciprocal impact between museums' presentations and visitors' viewing habits, Noordegraaf's conclusion is that museum displays are emblematic of the way in which visual regimes both shape and are shaped by our experiences as beholders in the contemporary world.

The understanding of exhibitions as a ground of exchange between the gallery/museum and other modes of spectatorship seems particularly important for the case of fashion. As Greenberg notes in the introduction to *Thinking about Exhibitions,* exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known and where knowledge of art is created.[125] In the case of fashion, different media – the shop window, the magazine, the catwalk, the fashion blog, websites, and the exhibition – have produced knowledge in different ways, each generating specific discourses, each with their individual traditions based on heterogeneous regimes of vision, as well as on different experiences of objects and their representations. For this reason, in seeking to identify the relation between the four case studies of this thesis, and the modes of historical exploration underpinning them, I will often refer to presentations outside the museum, such as the catwalk, the arcade, the department store, or database-operated media. The rationale of doing so is not simply to establish the comparability between the appearance of presentation modalities in use inside and outside the museum, with specific reference to the case of the museology of fashion. Rather, by referring to how knowledge about fashion has been created in the commercial world, I am interested in highlighting how the recurring forms that can be found in various presentation modalities – i.e. what I will refer to as topoi (see p. 56) – represent different ways of structuring knowledge, and activate the cognitive and productive capacities of the viewing subject in different ways. This issue will be explained in more detail in the next section, however, at this point it is important to anticipate that the connection between different museum presentations and different experiences of the past lies in an understanding of strategies of display as inseparable from specific cognitive models.

There have been fashion exhibitions that have intentionally developed reflections on the relationship with commercial and popular displays. An example is that of Siebe Tettero's *The House of Victor&Rolf* held at the Barbican, London in 2008. The exhibition makes overt reference to the viewer's (and the curator's) viewing habits by calling into question the visual regime of shop

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[124] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals, 11.*
[125] Greenberg, et al. *Thinking about Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1-4.

windows through a reference to Victor&Rolf's Via Sant' Andrea boutique in Milan. At the same time, the use of figurines instead of mannequins, the possibility of looking at the house in its totality, as well as at individual 'scenes' taking place inside, the dimmed lighting and the sense of sacredness it produced, were described as evoking scenes of the classic Neapolitan presepio. 'The House of Viktor&Rolf' thus becomes a viewing experience that encompasses three more – that of the shop window, that of the manger, and that of the museum/gallery itself. It intended to provide clues on how to move in the exhibition space, and to affect visitors' understanding of Viktor&Rolf's approach to clothing the body.

The influences that various visual experiences play on museum presentations are not always as explicit as in Tettero's exhibition: so, this doctoral project aims to theorise and verify the existence of topoi that inform the exhibition presentation and engage visitors by calling on established ways of consuming fashion outside the museum. This is a fleshy understanding of space, deriving from the epistemological role of the museum as a key apparatus of modernity and post-modernity. As such, the museum is seen as produced by visual, material, and widely cultural discourses that reflect in its presentation modalities, as well as in those of other typically modern and post-modern spaces. In the following section I shall describe the methodological approach through which the four strategies of display that I analyse in this thesis will be explored, while also discussing the literature that supports its development.

Display study as topos study

'One who sees,' argues Jonathan Crary, is 'one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations'.[126] This view is essential in discussions on how meaning emerges in exhibitions, as it acknowledges that the contours of the act of looking are themselves defined by and within heterogeneous cultural, social, technological, and institutional discourses. In the case of museum presentations, this consideration also acknowledges that their 'mise-en-scène' relies on visitors' internalisation of codes of visuality, which operate to sustain and stimulate the connections between objects and ideas. Recalling the Foucauldian understanding of the limits of agency in the act of looking, this idea can also be used to discuss the connection between museum presentations and the broader visual culture, as it

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[126] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer,* 6.

emphasises that the way in which the visitor makes sense of presentations of objects recalls sets of conventions already in use elsewhere.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that debates on the curatorial have recently gravitated towards the idea that internalised 'conventions and limitations' can be staged with the purpose of 'reintegrating what lies estranged' between visitors and artefacts, as well as among artefacts.[127] These debates have considered how in the ocular-centric environment of the museum, the sets of conditions within which meaning occurs and relations are perceived, can be choreographed to mediate the encounter with objects and practices.[128] Gottfried Korff's position on museum 'atmospheres' is particularly relevant here, because, as Mark Dorrian has clarified, Korff explains that in the stabilisation of such conditions the museum offers a 'brokering service:'[129] it becomes a stage on which the interplay of cultural and temporal distance and physical proximity can be regulated through the (artificial) evocation of those shared 'conventions and limitations' which affect the visitor and stimulate movement and interpretation.[130]

Thus, in Korff's vision of the museum, both exhibition-makers and visitors are bestowed with a degree of agency that is missing, for example, in Duncan's work,[131] despite – or perhaps because of – his acknowledgement of the impact of pre-existing 'conventions and limitations'. While presenting visitors with what is *fremde* (foreign, strange, or other), the museum creates contexts which can stimulate interaction with objects that are culturally and temporally alien. This emerges in Korff's suggestion that 'cultural meaning reveals itself' through 'the movement of the viewer within a spatial arrangement of things'.[132] Defining this as an issue of the 'hermeneutics of the body', Korff implies that the emergence of meaning in museum exhibitions is itself related to the methodology of interpretation.[133] However, by invoking phenomenology to describe the transition from vision to cognition, Korff also suggests that visitors' interaction with the exhibiting context enable the immediate, individual, and intimate reading of the content of exhibitions, but

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[127] Mark Dorrian, 'Museum Atmospheres: Notes on Aura, Distance and Affect,' in *The Journal of Architecture* 19:2 (2014): 189.

[128] For example, see Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals;* see also: Gottfried Korff, 'Fremde (the Foreign, Strange, Other) and the Museum,' *Journal of the Society of the Anthropology of Europe* 2 (2002): 29-34. See also: Lisa Blackman, 'Affect, Mediation and Subjectivity as Encounter: Finding the Feeling of the Foundling,' *The Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5-1 (2016): 32-55.

[129] Dorrian, 'Museum Atmospheres,' 187.

[130] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 6.

[131] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals.*

[132] Korff, 'Fremde,' 30.

[133] Korff, 30.

it does so by relying on pre-formed modes of comprehension and understanding. In this in-between perspective, the 'ritual'[134] component of visiting museums reveals interpersonal features – through the visual 'conventions' and 'limitations' ascribed in the material characteristics of presentation modalities, looking at exhibitions produces synaesthetic suggestions of interaction with their content, as well as propositions of correlations between fragments and whole, within which personal and subjective interpretation is enabled.

Thinking about museological space as itself a *thing* that shapes visitors' interpretation, this thesis asks how varying configurations of this space determine different ways of experiencing the past and the historical relations among the artefacts therein. It looks at the structure of presentation modalities, seeking to identify how, beyond curatorial choices regarding content, the material features of exhibition formats both inform and limit visitors' interpretation of historical relations. This insistence on specificity (and difference) is based on the observation of various ways in which the *parts* (individual dresses or unitary displays) can be related within and with the *whole* (the exhibition or presentation in which they have been recontextualised), and on the fusions and insights that the structure of a presentation encourages. Where an exhibition format is seen as favouring the encounter with individual objects, rather than with their insertion into a narrative (for example in Chapter II and IV), I am interested to know what is to be gained in the place of a narrative whole, and what kind of experience of the past emerges from this kind of contextualisation.

Each of the four case studies considers the features of a unique presentation modality, focussing on the positioning of visitors and artefacts therein, and the opportunities for interaction, connection and aggregation that the presentation modalities facilitate. These sets of features will be seen as bearing on the relationships between the body and space, the artefacts/parts and the exhibition whole, as well as between artefacts and the original context from which they have been removed.[135] Identifying these characteristics highlights the mediating role of museum presentations, which, according to Korff and Dorrian, contextualise exhibited artefacts, and 'regulate the distance between the experience of the visitors and the displayed objects'.[136] In doing so, these sets of features will be discussed as unitary embedded 'structures,'

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[134] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 18; see also: Steward, 'From the Museum of Touch,' 28.
[135] The relationship between the parts and the whole takes on a different meaning in Chapter V. Here, it will be understood as the relationship between individual exhibitions, performances, and events (parts), and how the history of Italian fashion (whole) has been constructed in Italy thus far.
[136] Korff in Dorrian, 'Museum Atmospheres,' 193.

functioning as topoi – 'shells or vessels derived from the memory banks of tradition', which 'mould the meaning(s) of cultural objects'.[137] Such topoi engage visitors and echo specific experiences of space, and those of the spatialisation of time and temporality.

The approach that has been outlined thus far recalls recent theoretical and methodological articulations of topos study in the field of media archaeology,[138] where the notion of topos has been utilised to look at media as 'modes of sensation themselves' that 'can be seen as historically structured'.[139] For the media archaeologists, topoi identify and conceptualise archetypes and commonplaces that appear in media culture, serving as vehicles of meaning.[140] In this field, topoi have been understood as 'engines of the imaginary,' and as 'discursive engines', that 'mediate themes, forms, and fantasies across cultural traditions'.[141] To clarify the role of topoi in the transmission of meaning, Huhtamo explains that they are not to be 'mistaken for factual statements' – they are formulas that relate to form, and act as matrices that influence the reception of content. In other words, they represent a-priori possibilities for representation, within which representation can take place.[142]

An implication of this deep-structural understanding of topoi and the dynamics regulating their occurrence in media is the recognition of their ability to exist on an intersubjective level, as autonomous objects. It follows that the purpose of studying topoi in media archaeology is not merely to discuss their presence in different forms of cultural expression as structures that are themselves replete with meaning. Instead, it is to highlight intersubjectivity, by identifying the effects of the transference of topoi from one medium to another, and the kind of engagement

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[137] Erkki Huhtamo, 'Fairy Engine,' 28.

[138] Media archaeology is a field in which different approaches and methodologies have been developed in relation to various definitions of media. If, on the one hand, there are studies whose data are found in the material history of things, the machinic, and hardware technology, on the other hand, there is a cluster or research that has taken a pan-mediatic approach to defining systems of signification, and whose notion of media includes the 'theories of the mind and the brain'. See: Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, *Media Archaeology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 25. The lowest common denominator of studies in the latter group is a concern with media understood as apparata that carry images, the content of the images shown, and the effect of their attraction.

[139] Huhtamo and Parikka, 25.

[140] The term 'archetype' is useful in defining what a topos is and does, and it has indeed, been approached by Huhtamo in reference to the work of Carl Gustav Jung. See: Huhtamo 'Fairy Engine,' 31. Jung understood archetype as a 'structural condition of the psyche' that molds the individual consciousness and the reception of specific contents. According to Jung, these archetypes are primordial entities that have defined themselves through history. See: Carl Gustav Jung, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (London, Routledge: [1969] 1991). This aspect has been contested by Huhtamo, for whom, instead, topoi can originate at any time.

[141] Huhtamo and Parikka, *Media Archaeology*, 25.

[142] Erkki Huhtamo, 'Fairy Engine,' 30.

that they demand during this passage. Vivian Sobchack explains that this kind of intersubjective engagement is the product of a cognitive structure that predates the immediate encounter with mediated images; in this case, with the content of museum exhibitions. Instead, cognition

> emerges from the epistemological [...] specifics that are entailed not in interpretative discourse but in operative (and necessarily corporeal) *practice* and *knowledge.*[143]

Sobchack's emphasis on 'operative practice' helps to clarify the purpose of utilising topos theory in studying exhibition formats. This analysis frames the idea that museum presentations enable specific experiences of temporality, by recalling – implicitly or explicitly – spatial, temporal, and narrative conventions that have been encountered outside the museum, and whose (denotative) meaning has sedimented as a-priori knowledge.[144] The occurrence of such conventions in the museum affects visitors' ability for interpretation, creating the possibility for their semiotic (and connotative) freedom, albeit within the limits that are imposed by these conventions. An implication is that emphasis will be placed on how curators and their collaborators have envisaged the role of visitors within selected formats – sitting, walking through, standing around and interacting with a digital interface, or a combination of these and other positions. Visitors approach presentations through performative acts of knowing that are demanded by contexts that are simultaneously new (relating to the specific theme of the exhibition) and familiar (referring to the modality in which content is presented).

In line with the discussion from earlier in this chapter, the identification of topoi – Carey's 'system of conventions and limitations' – that are embedded in museum presentations has the potential to mark the continuity between the museum and the broader visual culture. Huhtamo's definition of topos seems apt to underline this idea. For the media archaeologist, a topos is

> the temporary manifestation of a persisting cultural tradition linked by numerous threads with other cultural phenomena both from the past and from the cultural context within which the topos has made its appearance.[145]

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[143] Vivian Sobchack, 'Afterword. Media Archaeology and Re-Presencing the Past,' in *Media Archaeology*, ed. Huhtamo and Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 324.
[144] Sobchack, 324.
[145] Huhtamo, 'Fairy Engine,' 41.

Applying topos theory to isolate the patterns that recur in presentation modalities involves making sense of this network of connections, conventions, and traces. Borrowing Sobchack's terminology, it means identifying the 're-presencing' of conventions that have originated in other realms of the visual and material, where they also 're-present' internalised and diffused 'epistemic conditions for seeing and knowing'.[146] In this sense, the arguments made in this thesis go beyond Noordergraff's idea that museum presentations follow those in use outside the museum during any particular historical period. These arguments will, in fact, be radicalised, claiming that it is also possible for museum presentations to bring to the surface viewing modalities that have originated (or have been popular) at historical moments other than the present, thus 're-presencing' them with implications on how they portray the past. Chapter II, for example, considers the effects of bringing the catwalk – underlying the spectacular presentation of content on a linear sequence with audiences watching from the sides – into the museum. However, the catwalk will be seen as fleshing out a decayed way of relating parts and whole that has gradually disappeared from media culture. Thus, chapter II will consider the effect of bringing the catwalk in the museum, and on how the past is experienced, at the same time, it will also develop considerations on why museums today are resorting to these presentation modalities.

Topos study highlights the continuities among different systems of signification and their situatedness on vast cultural surface. However, the ideas that underpin topos theory predate the way in which media archaeology has used them. In fact, before it was applied to the study of media history, topos theory was used in linguistics and the study of rhetoric within the structuralist tradition. It is also considered a key tool within literary studies, where it is utilised to isolate themes, images, and figures of speech that determine the development of a narrative by evoking established archetypal contexts and figures. In all these fields, topoi have been analysed as 'structures' and 'forms' that exist in the collective unconscious, which have been created and perpetuated through people's interaction with each other, the environment, and media. Despite the influence of literary studies on topos theory, visual topoi have been theorised in the context of Panofskyian iconography, demonstrating the evolution of traditions of representation and the migration of forms of expression through painting. Huhtamo, in contrast, applies topos theory to the study of audio-visual experiences created by current and past media. Thus, in utilising topos theory, this study draws on a long tradition of studies that have illuminated the ruptures and continuities in representation.

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[146] Sobchack, 'Afterword,' 323.

The possibility of ascribing patterns of representation to topological conceptualisations, and of isolating the occurrence of these conceptualisations in texts, artworks, media, and now exhibitions, has roots in Foucauldian genealogical theories and in Foucault's position in his 'archaeology' of knowledge. In *The Order of Things,* Foucault sheds light on the mechanisms regulating the production of 'statements' within systems of signification, which involve objects, texts, behaviours, and institutions that do not immediately belong to the domain of linguistic facts.[147] Processes, subjects, and objects, are considered neither as isolated, pre-formed entities, nor as the products of the evolution of one form into another. Rather, they are products of particular assemblages, entanglements, and structures that reappear and are carried through those processes, subjects, and objects, creating knowledge as discrete systems of thought comprising different strata. In other words, knowledge transmits itself in representations as a 'condition of existence'[148] that has been formed in a specific cultural context.[149] This idea foregrounds Foucault's understanding – as clarified by Stuart Hall – that relations between discursive texts inform bodies of knowledge, and conversely, that 'nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse'.[150] But a key aspect of Foucault's 'archaeology' is that this transmission is not necessarily linear, and so the process of studying it cannot be linear as well. Thus, in explaining the meaning of 'archaeology' Parikka states that 'archaeology here means digging into the background reasons why a certain object, statement, discourse […] is able to be born and picked up and sustain itself in a cultural situation'.[151]

Seeking to approach exhibitions as representations that carry these entangled forces (which I call topoi, following Huhtamo), this study recognises that different strategies of display are determined by and perpetuate different ways of understanding how artefacts/events relate

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[147] Language, to be accurate, is not excluded from Foucault's analysis, but it is not given the privileged position that it occupies in structuralist thought. It is, instead, a thing among others, a representation among others, and as such its use (or the mode in which it is used) also carries the 'episteme' that allows 'meaning' to emerge.

[148] Huhtamo and Parikka, *Media Archaeology*, 6.

[149] Interestingly, Foucault has rightly insisted that he does not see himself as a structuralist. However, while he abandons historicism, his archaeology of knowledge (which presents knowledge as contextually determined) retains the relativism that characterises structuralism. This apparent contradiction is, according to Hayden White, precisely what allows Foucault to emerge as 'post-structuralist' or even 'anti-structuralist'. See: Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 24. In his study of historical forms, White explains that for Foucault, traditional 'history' is not a 'mode of thought', but rather a reflection of the modern seriality of life onto the narrative of the passing of time. Therefore, by replacing 'history' with 'archaeology', he replaces 'linear time' with a sequence of ruptures.

[150] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1997), 33.

[151] Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?*, 6.

to each other. In particular, this research questions how the substance of the material relations between artefacts and the events that they represent can be configured in space. As such, this approach can define itself as 'archaeological' as it will dig back in the past of presentation modalities, elaborating on strategies of display and how we make sense of them today.[152]

At this point, it seems necessary to stress that I do not articulate topos theory and media archaeology as ways to study fashion itself.[153] Instead, I use topos theory to study how fashion is presented in the museum, and the implications on how its history is constructed through exhibitions. While exponents of the strand of media archaeology that is involved in studying the hardware of technical media would surely reject the idea of seeing exhibitions as media, this consideration appears to be legitimised by those with an interest in media as systems of signification, such as Huhtamo. In this sense, seeing fashion exhibitions as media underlines their ability to carry and produce historical, discoursive, and critical knowledge about fashion.[154]

Historiography as topos study

The aim of using topos theory to look at presentation modalities is not to produce a history of their formation and inclusion in the museum, should this even be at all possible. Instead, the objective is to produce a 'geneaology', in the Foucauldian sense[155] – to show that the formation of such topoi 'reflect[s] the functioning of a collective assemblage of disparate parts on a single social surface.'[156] As such, it seems apt to draw on presentations from outside the museum to analyse how different museum presentations enable different kinds of experience: because they are both about the management of bodies and objects, about their arrangement in space, and the stimulation of individual agency and interactivity in different ways.

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[152] In Chapter IV, I consider the applicability of the logics underlying media archaeology – in particular, its interest in excavating traces of the past in the present – to fashion, and the study of its past. In doing so, I reflect on the existence of research that has examined fashion forms of expression from this perspective.

[153] In Chapter IV, I outline opportunities to do so in future research.

[154] Parikka has expressed interest in a view of dress and fashion exhibitions as media in his reference to Judith Clark's exhibition, 'Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back'. Parikka's interest was based on the exhibition's promise to 'reveal the shadows and experiences that form a fashion memory in contemporary dress', and the exhibition design, which was inspired by old media like the phantasmagoria. See Huhtamo and Parikka, *Media Archaeology*, 21.

[155] See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1980), 117. See also: Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge.* See also Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 6-7.

[156] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 6.

In framing specific principles of spatial organisation as topoi and as objects of collective reference, each chapter treats them as systems of 'conventions and limitations' that are outcomes of 'more or less powerful arrangements of forces out of which the capacities of an observer are possible'.[157] Thus, I imply that even outside the context of the museum, different ways of presenting objects an audience mirror observers' capacities for reception. And if they do so, it is because these capacities permeate different layers of visual, material, and media culture. Carey and Bruno demonstrated this permeation in their studies on the 'gaze' that is involved in a variety of media formats, and on its changing constitution with the advent of modernity. In other words, a presentation modality is seen as underlying a cognitive structure that materialises in space. But also this structure – this understanding of the relations that can be established between parts and whole – can also be found in an historically situated vision of the relationship between events and their telling; specifically, in a historiographical mode.

As the next section will show, a variety of authors within the humanities and the anthropological sciences have looked at conceptualisations of space as projections of social, perceptual, and even affective imagery. However, Stewart – who considers the emergence of the narrative in museums as a means of domesticating objects and making them more relatable to visitors – implies an association between spatial arrangements and underlying experiences of temporality, suggesting a sort of existential continuity between them. In this case, curation is seen as an ideology-driven activity through which 'museums spatialize time', and literalises the passing of time through its routes.[158] Cultural and media theorists Mieke Bal and Roger Silverstone also consider this idea, stating that a museum's ability to convey a – historical or thematic – narrative lies in its capacity to define a route.[159] Expanding on these considerations, this thesis assumes that different presentation modalities correspond to various historiographical modes, and that different ways of displaying fashion correspond to different means of constructing its history.

Hayden White advances the possibility of conceptualising views of the past and its relationship to the present as topological structures, with the intention of producing an 'analysis of the deep structure of the historical imagination'.[160] In *Metahistory*, White argues for a vision of

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[157] Crary, 6.
[158] Stewart, 'From the Museum of Touch,' 34.
[159] Mieke Bal, 'Telling, Showing, Showing Off,' *Critical Inquiry* 18.3 (1992): 556–94; Roger Silverstone, 'Heritage as Media: Some Implications for Research,' *Heritage Interpretation, Vol. 2: The Visitor Experience*, ed. David Uzzell. (London: John Wiley, 1989), 138-48.
[160] White, *Metahistory* 2.

the writing of history as the (explicit or implicit) carrier of archetypical visions of historical reality. By analysing different principles of discursive combination in historical discourse, White thus differentiates four 'paradigms of the *form*' (emphasis mine) that 'a historical explanation, considered a discursive argument, may be conceived to take'.[161] He carries this philosophy forward in *Tropics of Discourse*, in which he identifies a tetrad of figures of speech and discourse organisation that embody specific forms of historical consciousness. White points out that historians' views of history and their political positions emerge from the tendency to use one of those four figures of speech, whose presence and predomination in writing shape a specific typology of historical consciousness. Thus, in the tradition of structuralism, historical discourse is defined as that which 'constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively'.[162]

What matters here is the notion of historiographical forms, which, returning to Sobchack's words, are themselves 'disciplined in the social',[163] and thus constitute themselves outside of and prior to the writing process. Arguing for a phenomenological theory, White stresses that the 'tropes' he analyses are the product of specific intellectual and cultural contexts, and as such, their recurrence in writing permeates the narration of historical events with meaning that is consonant with that vision. Thus, historical discourse becomes a 'mediative enterprise', and writing about the past an 'interpretative' and 'pre-interpretative' activity – 'it is always as much *about* the nature of interpretation itself as it is *about* the subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration'.[164] In doing so, White's vision of the writing of history surpasses the idea of an objective historian or chronicler, becoming instead an issue concerned with methodology.

In this thesis, the issues of methodology of display and historical writing are seen as coming together and as informing curatorial choices. So, with White (but also with Fiona Anderson), I say that besides the theme of the exhibition, or the content of individual displays, the representation of the past in exhibitions also relies on the 'form' of the presentation, and that this form produces 'content' by emplotting historical events within pre-existing generic structures. With Crary, I add that the interpretation of these generic structures – their ability to

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[161] White, 13.
[162] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 2.
[163] Sobchack, 'Afterword,' 329.
[164] White, *Tropics*, 4.

stimulate different kinds of interaction with the past of fashion – takes place within a 'system of conventions and limitations'.[165]

A topological approach to the study of museum presentations and the experiences of the past that emerges therein transcends the distinction between historical and a/historical exhibitions, and between the pros and cons of each; it moves instead towards a model based on the methodology of display and on the typology of connections that are available to the visitor. At the same time, while this approach allows for a study that focuses on curators' intentions, it also enables a discussion about the a priori knowledge on which visitors' individual receptions and interpretations are based. This approach will also show that, from the curator's perspective, choosing a strategy of display over another is not 'a matter of choosing between objectivity and distortion' of the past, but rather deciding 'between different strategies for constituting reality in thought'.[170] It follows that different ways of exploring the past have their own implications, for visitors as well as artefacts.

Topoi of space and time

The brief section aims to shed further light on topos theory by reviewing literature that has suggested – directly or indirectly – the possibility to conceptualise structures of narrative and temporality, and to observe their occurrence in visual culture. Engaging with the debates on modernity and/or post-modernity, this body of literature has produced a vision of different kinds of presentations – different ways of presenting artefacts, images, texts or events to beholders – as mobilised and embodied experiences, that replicate part/whole relations that have been experienced elsewhere. Despite their different materials, the connection amongst these studies is, firstly, the idea that presentation and display embody a collective vision of the relation between parts and whole; and secondly, that this collective vision is itself informed by specific epistemic modes, specific 'conditions of existence'.[171]

It is therefore not surprising for this section to start with Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. While Chapter III will dedicate extensive space to how these ideas emerge in Benjamin's

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[165] Crary, *Techniques*, 6.
[170] This quote refers to White's idea of the existence of various trajectories of historical narrative and on the possibility of analysing historical discourse as a 'mode' of knowledge production. See White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 22.
[171] Huhtamo and Parikka, *Media Archaeology*, 6.

unfinished work, at this point it is necessary to highlight the correspondence that it establishes between the 'outmoded' structure of the arcade and the late-modern understanding of history. The specific relationship between the parts and the whole that underlie this correlation is also found in other 'phantasmagorical'[172] spaces of the nineteenth century, among which is the modern museum. Characterised by the heterotopic succession of vitrines and objects, the space of the arcade became a metaphor for a construction of history based on the principle of montage. The arcade (and the modern museum) delivered montage as a fixed and itself 'consumable' sequence of unrelated images. But in doing so, it exposed visitors to its principles, implicitly suggesting that its innovative way of creating visual concatenations could be replicated outside the arcade into the writing of history. Thus, escaping from the oneiric space of the arcade, waking up from the dream, metaphorically represented the possibility of intensifying its logics, and thus of challenging received images of history characterised as having a unique and unchangeable direction. The necessity of historical and political awakening thus becomes the paradigm of Benjamin's dialectical thinking, while exposing the construct of linearity becomes key to questioning the view of history that resembles this construction. Another idea that made *The Arcades Project* a model for 'archaeological' cultural histories – and Benjamin a forerunner of topos theory – is its core idea of an open and shifting correspondence between the arcades and a vast array of forms of cultural expression, including photography, illustration, the built environment, and nineteenth-century public spectacles. In doing so, both spatiality and temporality were seen as ascribable to the same social surface of a nascent modernity.

The idea of the reciprocal ascendancy of space and time and presentation is central to Anne Friedberg's *Window Shopping*. Aiming to investigate the history of consumption of the moving image, Friedberg sought to overcome the understanding of vision as 'panoptical' but 'immobile' (as cinema had traditionally been discussed), in favour of a view of spectatorship as 'mobilised' and 'virtual'. [173] Friedberg's argument is built by identifying the experience of moving through vitrines, glasshouses, and arcades as key to the inspiring the idea that images could be seen in a fast sequence, and thus to the development of early moving image technologies. As

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[172] In using the term 'phantasmagoria' with relation to modern spaces of consumption, Benjamin is borrowing and expanding the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism. However, while Marx utilised this concept to discuss the implications of capitalist production on the development of a sense of class-consciousness through the increasing commodification of the products of both manual and intellectual work, Benjamin uses it to explore production's other side, namely, consumption. So, for Benjamin the commodity, as well as the spaces where commodities are consumed, are themselves 'phantasmagorical', that is to say, they show the effects and the implications of early industrialisation.
[173] Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 1-11.

early encounters between the (moving) body and (still) glass architecture determined the evolving dazzling juxtaposition of reflected and revealed images, the idea of the moving picture was born. It was this idea that was subsequently embedded in the development of early technologies of the moving image. Friedberg then considers how the experience of movement as it has been described here became commodified through the practice of shopping. To do so, she establishes a parallelism between the experience of movement in the modern city and the forms of shopping spectatorship produced at the same time. Friedberg thus considers the evolution and decline of the arcades, the rise of the department store decades later, and the post-war shopping mall. However, what matters to this thesis's discussions is Friedberg's view that different shopping presentation modalities carry within them, and are built around, different ways of moving in (urban) space, which in turn correspond to specific understandings of individual and shared temporalities. In this sense, Friedberg has demonstrated that the emergence of increasingly pluralistic audiences, has resulted in increasingly 'open' shopping presentation modalities: offering multiple ways of engaging with their content, their structures are both informed by and inform a gradual detemporalisation of personal routines. Friedberg's *Window Shopping* is an 'architecturalised' study of the development of presentation modalities, and has had a significant influence on this thesis, and in particular in its first three chapters, where the temporal logics at the grounds of forms of shopping spectatorship produced in modern, modernist, and post-modern times will often be evoked to sustain my considerations on the spatialisation of (historical) time.

The potential for topological and transmedial investigation of the relation between time and its telling is also developed by Giuliana Bruno. In her *Atlas of Emotion,* Bruno reconstructs the genealogy of a vast array of European forms of representation, ranging from cartography to film, from the sixteenth century to late-twentieth century.[174] In her writing, Bruno constructs the viewer of such visual experiences as a *voyageur*, a travelling and looking subject whose experiences in the world are perpetuated and 'fleshed out' in later systems of signification. From this perspective, Bruno sets out to demonstrate that the origin of the forms of representation that she analyses goes beyond their material existence as visual media, and evoke instead previous forms of (moving) encounters between the body and space. By extension, this 'mobilisation' is seen by Bruno as a driving force that spills out onto various artistic and cinematic displays. Talking about the museum, Bruno presents it as an institution that replicates into a public

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[174] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion* (New York: Verso, 2002).

space the corporeal, personal experience of movement in the modern urban environment, where the body first experiences the montage of unrelated images, artefacts, and textures. In this sense, through the succession of galleries and displays, museum routes flesh out the mental engagement with images and objects that can be experienced in the city. Bruno writes:

> the force that travelled through and across travel culture, reaching out into early cinematic reinventions that mobilized city views, speaks of geographical desire – a drive that is capable of creating historic fiction. […] Such an impulse, found in the genre of travel writing, was shared by a certain type of *veduta*. […] Here, a series of views acquires narrative potential and becomes a narrative space. The movement of sequentialization creates a fiction, and thus space, viewed as progression, is narrativized.[175]

Bruno, like Friedberg, takes film as a primary object of study; unlike Friedberg, however, Bruno does not see early technologies of the moving image as the earliest embodiment of the topos of movement in urban areas. Instead, it is the art exhibition and its practices that acquire a special position in the lineage that she has outlined in the *Atlas*. In Bruno's words:

> the spatial perusal that developed as a form of narration in the art of viewing was extended in the imaging that guided the spectacle of museum installation; […] in sequentializing pictures and transforming objects into images, art exhibition predated the montage of still images in film.[176]

At this point, Bruno presents a consideration that she does not explore further, but that allowed this thesis to gain confidence in its core idea of the complementary relationship between specific ways of constructing fashion history and their emergence in museum exhibitions. Bruno writes:

> the narrative effect of sequentialization was also achieved in evolving forms of artistic displays. In this respect, it is important to consider the kind of display that is involved in the exhibition of art: different forms on reception are created not only by the pictures themselves but by the way they are assembled and the way that space of display is organised.[177]

In concluding this section, it seems important to also mention Rem Koolhaas's identification of consumption itself (of artefacts and images) as a topos or a 'condition of existence' bearing its implications on world-making and on the relationship between the body, space, and time. As such,

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[175] Bruno, 188.
[176] Bruno, 189.
[177] Bruno, 188.

its modes inform a vast array of public spaces beyond those where consumption takes place. Koolhaas explains:

> shopping is arguably the last remaining form of public activity. Town centres, suburbs, streets, and now airports, train stations, museums, hospitals, schools, the Internet and the military are shaped by the mechanisms and spaces of shopping.[178]

Thus, what emerges in the *Project on the city* is that an increasingly 'open' shopping structure has been the result of progressive individualisation, while also actively favouring it. The reflections of the dialectics between the individual, processes of subjectivity formation, and changes in shopping modalities are also seen as informing other public spaces, among which is the museum, with the development of information technologies representing the latest expansion of such dynamics.

Besides stressing the idea of the contingency between the museum and its surroundings, more recently, Koolhaas has also suggested the possibility of thinking about the history of architecture in terms of the occurrence of fundamental architectural elements, which stand for modes of being in space in a specific time. This idea was explored at Venice Biennale 2014 in the 'Elements of Architecture' exhibition and its catalogue. In both contexts, the predominance of each of fifteen recurring structural elements in various architectonical ensembles is seen as corresponding to specific symbolic compositions. Their observation can shed light on a given historical moment's understanding of routines, the interplay of private and public life, and temporality. Like the topoi that I seek to identify in these exhibition modalities, each of them creates suggestions for interaction with space, and each of them enables different perceptions of the relationship between fragments and whole.

Inspired by this literature, in the chapters that follow I will argue that exhibition presentation modalities 'quote' spatial arrangements that are already in use outside the museum. In so doing, such spatial topoi become conceptualisations of diverse forms of mobilisation within different museological spaces, and of different possibilities of locating fragments within a historical whole. Such considerations will then be utilised to discuss the existence of various ways of constructing fashion's history through the medium of museum display, and the dependency of their trajectories on dynamics that informed spatial configurations. In keeping with this idea, the next section will introduce the four case studies that are at the heart of this thesis, discussing the

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[178] Rem Koolhaas. *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* (Köln: Taschen GmbH, 2001), 134.

way in which each chapter establishes the correspondence between different presentation modalities and different ways of constructing fashion history.

Part III
Case Studies

3.1. Line, Corridor, Open Plan, Database, Lack of Space

The primary objective of this study is to discuss the correspondence between different ways of presenting fashion in cultural heritage institutions and different ways of interrogating its past. To do so, the next four chapters consider innovative presentation modalities and initiatives developed by as many fashion heritage institutions in Europe. They consider four exhibition formats and how they foster visitors' interactions with artefacts, by stimulating them to discover networks of correspondences beyond those identified through the curatorial work, and to overcome the limits of chronological explorations. All except one of these formats are characterised by the perpetuation of a single presentation modality. The exception – the case of presentations by Pitti Immagine and Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery (Chapter V) – considers the reasons for the lack of a continuous exhibition format and its implications on how fashion history has been produced.

After describing the pragmatic and epistemological origins of these exhibition formats, each chapter considers them as sites of knowledge production with the ability to affect individuals and trigger interactions. I then move on to discuss the valence of such spatial structures as topoi, seeking to develop a genealogy of their formation and existence outside the museum. Due to the typology of the exhibitions under consideration – fashion exhibitions – there are recurrent references to how such topoi have worked in other fashion media, and what kind of gaze they activate. Finally, I discuss their origin and/or prevalence at specific historical moments, how they embody and spatialise an understanding the relationship between the parts and the whole that was specific to that era, and how this relationship is also fleshed out in the understanding of temporality and narrative that was predominant at that time. In other words, each topos becomes the structure that shapes a specific form of historical consciousness. The aim is to show that their occurrence in the museum activates visitors and requires them to engage with artefacts in space

in a 'ritualistic' way, which also becomes a mediative enterprise that impacts how and what kind of relations can be established.

Chapter II, Curating Fashion as Spectacle, looks at 'Fashion in Motion', a series of live performances held at London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) since 1999. While the literature on the V&A is abundant, and the museum's exhibitions are well documented in catalogues and academic reviews, magazines and newspapers, discussions on 'Fashion in Motion' are limited within the broader debate on curating fashion. Originating from an idea by Claire Wilcox, this unique exhibition format addresses the issue of the lack of the body in fashion exhibitions by presenting past collections of selected designers worn by professional models. Although within the history of the format it seems possible to identify two distinct phases that correspond to different forms of interactions among visitors, models, and the museum's galleries; both phases have created collective, immersive experiences where visitors witness a presentation unfold as a procession. The structure of linearity, a material asset of 'Fashion in Motion', and of catwalk shows, pageants, and processions, is identified here as a topos in which progression is understood in terms of inherent discontinuity. The chapter will show that the material features of the early modern topos of linearity, which privileges successions of fragmentary images over diegetic narration, informs the structure of media formats that were or became popular again in the last decades of the nineteenth century, before disappearing almost entirely in the twentieth-century. Characterised by plotless content, the success of such formats was based on the attraction created by the apparatus itself, and the only temporality that mattered was the one of the moment of contemplation. The chapter considers the implications of superimposing such logics on those of the museum; the result is a neutralisation of the awareness of the temporal distance between artefacts on the one hand, and an experience whose strength emanates from a fascination with the medium itself on the other. In addition to this, through the case of 'Fashion in Motion' I will thus argue that, in its latest permutation contemporary museology is bringing back to the surface an early modern museological culture, based not on the delivery of narratives or audiences' self-identification with exhibits, but rather on the evocation of sensation, spectacle, and excitation in the now.

Chapter III, Unique and Multiple Historical Explorations, will look at MUDE, Museu do Design e da Moda, Coleção Francisco Capelo, Lisbon, and its permanent fashion and furniture design exhibition. Titled 'Único e Múltiplo', this large exhibition was open to the public between 2010–2017 before the museum closed for substantial renovations. Since then, the institution has

been operating as a 'diffused' museum, namely setting exhibitions in various locations across the city. The aim of the exhibition, which used to rotate artefacts at regular intervals, was to offer visitors an overview of design history, as represented by the collection, from the 1850s to the present day. The specific features of MUDE's building, and the surviving elements of its past as a bank, create the conditions for the juxtaposition of two viewing experiences. In looking at these two experiences, the chapter considers how a more traditional presentation of exhibits along a timeline of institutional chronology is made to coexist with a labyrinthic experience, based on dispersion and reconfiguration, which intends to emphasise the repetitions and returns that characterise the past of design. It looks at how this exhibition format relies on the organisation of artefacts in sequence, recalling presentation modalities typical of corridors, arcades, and the modern gallery. On the other hand, it does so within an open plan, a multifunctional architectural feature of high modernism, and the product of a renewed and more flexible understanding of routines, social hierarchies, and of the relationship between the body and space. Thus, this chapter considers the topos of the corridor, and that of the open plan, and how subjectivity is propagated within the spaces that contain such structures. It will then compares the construction of public interior spaces that embed the topos of the corridor, and the modern idea of history as linear, to then question the significance of its decline in relation to the rise of the open plan. This is interpreted as foretelling a rejection of pre-given structures that will fully actualise itself only in the context of post-modernism.

Chapter IV, Curating Fashion History in the Age of the Database, looks at Antwerp's Mode Museum, focusing on the MoMu Explorer. Installed in 2015, this database-operated presentation modality gives visitors access to, and the ability to interact with, a vast part of the museum's digital collection via a 7x2 metres interactive screen placed at the museum's entrance. Comprising both digitised images and born-digital files, the database is a 'heterotopic' space, in that it supports the coexistence of 'artefacts' of different times, origins, and typologies, and it increases the potential of the museum to engage with increasingly pluralistic audiences. Browsing the collection is made possible through 'metadata' ('hashtags' that provide basic information and categorise 'artefacts' under multiple search modalities, such as author, country of origin, date of production, colour, etc.) and an algorithm based on randomisation. In this visitor-geared presentation, artefacts/files become loosened from their chronological bonds and are thus made available for a potentially infinite number of combinations and associations. The MoMu Explorer thus facilitates a 'performative' form of engagement with the past, based on individual queries,

and personal interpretations of the given answers. The topos analysed in this chapter is that of the database itself, seen as a concrete and measurable space of post-modernity. Lev Manovich identifies it as the 'symbolic form' of the computer age, as it also represents a conceptualisation of contemporary aesthetical, ethical, and poetical sensitivities.[179]

Manovich's idea was based on the new degree of flexibility that information acquires in its post-modern digital existence – no longer categorised by a limited number of criteria, the artefact/file acquires the ubiquity it could never have in the modern archive. By extension, the the ability of the database to parse individual features of files' contents – the part's parts – enables the file itself to be inserted in multiple searches, to be combined with other files in various ways, thus excluding the possibility of an invariable trajectory. This is also the idea underlying 'database histories', a model of experiencing the past that is based not on its narrative, but rather on a collection of 'infinitely retrievable fragments'.[180] The result is a media-specific mode of exploring the past, underpinned by a post-structural understanding of history, which challenges classical theories of cultural tradition in the name of personal interpretation, in the same way that database-operated presentations challenge the modern museum's traditional understanding of classification and categorisation. In this chapter, I also discuss 'archaeology' as a methodology for the study of fashion history itself (as opposed to the study of its representations in the museum), based on the isolation of episodes, artefacts, fragments and their alternative recombinations. Such recombinations are considered 'alternative' because they produce modes of exploring the past that overcome the opposition between linearity and non-linearity in order to focus instead on the typology of questions that are being asked. With a newfound interest in looking at objects and their material features, this is an approach that stems from an acknowledgement that the past can only and inevitably be interrogated through questions whose relevance depends on the moment at which they are asked. From this perspective, 'archaeology' differs from traditional dress history, the latter of which is based on the reconstruction of institutional chronologies and offers limited space for criticism. But more subtly, it also differs from new fashion history – also characterised by a study of returns and repetitions – which aims to identify in the present the re-occurrence and repercussion of past ideas. While 'archaeology' also produces overarching histories, it adopts individual and group interests/values established in the present as tools to re-

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[179] Lev Manovich, 'Database as Symbolic Form,' *Millennium Film Journal* (1999), 23-43.
[180] Steve Anderson. 'Past Indiscretions. Digital Archives and Recombinant History,' in *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities*, eds. Marsha Kinder and Tara McPherson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 101.

interrogate the past, re-reading it from perspectives that were previously repressed in the name of universality. From this perspective, the 'archaeological' approach to the studying of fashion's past appears to have close affinities with new fashion history – as its negative, or the other side of the same coin. In adopting this perspective, the chapter identifies the emergence in the 2010s of a tendency in the study of the history of fashion and dress that already reflects this way of thinking. By drawing on Heidegger's idea of the essence of technology is by 'no means anything technological',[181] the chapter argues that the development of this kind of historicism represents the metabolism of logics that are accommodated within the space of the database, which the visitor-geared 'MoMu Explain' helps illustrate, albeit in a simplified way.

Chapter V, Longing for the Absent Museum, considers practices by the Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana [Florence Centre for Italian Fashion] from the mid-1980s to the present day, through its redistribution of competencies with Pitti Immagine and the Pitti Discovery Foundation. While the chapter investigates the relationship between presentation modalities and historiography like the previous ones, the approach I take to discuss it is different. This is dictated by the organisation's lack of a permanent space for the presentation of its programme of events, which takes place at irregular intervals, at a variety of venues in the city of Florence, relying on the hospitability of others. To respond to the different specificities of these spaces, Pitti Immagine and Pitti Discovery's programming has comprised not only exhibitions, but also performances, installations, and talks. However, the museum is still central to this chapter; in particular, it is its absence – symbolising a lack of space within the wider institutional context – that is seen as informing specific processes of knowledge production.

Unlike the previous chapters, and reflecting on the fact that a museum of contemporary fashion does not currently exist in Italy, Chapter V does not consider a publicly funded institution for its case study. Instead, it looks at a private organisation whose research into the culture of fashion should be considered. The lack of a permanent space where fashion can be collected, preserved, and studied from a perspective that is autonomous from the obvious interests of brand museums, does not allow for the study of the strategies of display through the close observation of a single exhibition format. Instead, the chapter posits that the lack of such a space also acquires topological features, affecting how fashion history has been produced in Italy thus far. Such a lack of space results from a situation of institutional marginality with real implications for the contextualisation of fashion in heritage institutions, and affects how fashion history and theory

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[181] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology,' 4.

are studied and researched at the university level. Much has been written about the connotations of frivolity associated with the delayed inclusion of fashion into the museum, as well as in its definition as an academic subject.[182] In Italy, however, such difficulties are dictated by the existence of institutional barriers, making it hard for any young discipline to create its own space and become able to overcome those stereotypes that also hinder its institutionalisation. Following the example of contemporary art, with which it has established a relation of fluidity, fashion culture has thus flourished outside public institutions and has found fertile ground in forms of self-organisation and in the private realms of foundations. By extension, the relationship between the 'exhibition-maker' and the exhibition has moved closer to the manifestations of such a relationship in the 'militant',[183] contemporary art scene of biennials and foundations.

Thus, the lack of a permanent exhibiting venue and own collection, the close partnership between the organisation and the fairs, the nature of its funding, and the absence of pre-existing debates on the aims and methodologies of displaying dress and fashion, are seen as contributing factors to the emergence of a myriad of small narratives, presented in as many presentation modalities, within a fluid contemporary heritage institution that exists as a place only when events occur. The chapter considers the effects of such precariousness on cultural memory, suggesting that despite its rich fashion past, Italy still lacks a comprehensive fashion history, and its study has evolved instead as a sequence of micro-narratives.

These four chapters are arranged in the order in which they were written. In turn, this sequence was determined by loosely following the predominance of the topoi (as forms of spatial organisation and as historiographical constructs, but ultimately as conceptualisations of the relation between the parts and the whole) in time. This 'order' also reveals a gradual increase in the possibilities for recombination that can be established between artefacts/events in the museum, indicating increasing opportunities for individual explorations, re-readings, and re-interpretations of collections. So, the rest of the thesis starts by looking at the modern conceptualisation of linearity (Chapter II), to then consider its decline and the emergence of the modernist open plan (Chapter III). It continues on to investigate the post-modern multiplication of possibilities afforded by the database (Chapter IV). Finally, it ends by looking at the impact of the lack of space on fashion history, and the dissolution of the museum and its practices into the city and its discourses (Chapter V).

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[182] See Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media.' See also: Valerie Steele, 'The F-Word,' accessed December 4, 2017, http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/180/steele.htm
[183] Frisa, 'The Curator's Risk,' 172.

3.2. London, Lisbon, Antwerp, Florence

The institutions that I have introduced in the previous section operate in different urban, political, economic and widely cultural contexts. This is an important consideration, with implications on the cultural agendas with which institutions need to come to terms.

For this reason, each chapter sees the discussion on different presentations being prefixed by an overview of some of the specificities of the local contexts within which cultural heritage institutions operate. However, as this pursuit could easily turn into a different doctoral project from the one that I have outlined in the previous pages, I have chosen to place an emphasis on those issues that bear directly on my case studies, and to which their strategies of display represent – or have the potential to represent – a direct answer to. In doing so, I have sought to identify the role played by exhibitions of fashion within the aforementioned set of circumstances.

Inevitably, this is a reduction of the superstructural forces that play a role in shaping institutions; but nevertheless mentioning them seemed necessary to convey a view of museum practice as embedded in contemporary culture at large, and as increasingly located at the heart of local, national, and global imperatives. From this perspective, it became evident to me that cultural heritage institutions truly are 'a continuation of the street'.[184] This is a quote that could be utilised retrospectively to re-inforce the theoretical framework that I have outlined, implying a sense of continuity between exhibitions and contemporary visual culture. However, in borrowing Calum Storrie's words at this point, I imply that the strategies of display of different museums are, of course, the product of creative decisions, but also the result of dynamics whose origins lay outside cultural institutions.

At the same time, one of the main points of this thesis is that the past – remote or proximate – can be interrogated retrospectively through questions that are pressing in the present, and this became itself a method of investigation for the issues that I am raising here. In the time that I have spent in London, Lisbon, Antwerp and Florence, I have also let my perception of those cities inspire considerations of what seemed pressing issues to me and to the people that I collaborated with. Inevitably, as a cultural historian I have re-evaluated those present concerns historically, but at the same time, it seems important to underline that the relation between those

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[184] Storrie, *Delirious Museum*, 2.

presentation modalities and those external dynamics would not have been clear to me, had I not been in those cities in specific historical moments. This is true for all chapters, and it emerges very clearly in Chapter IV, which I researched and wrote during the months immediately before and after the UK's vote to leave the European Union. The (post-modern) issues that I have intertwined with the main objectives of my thesis include: the impact of the economic crisis on heritage institutions and their reactions to financial precariousness; the impact of urban regeneration drives on museums' activities (Chapter III); the need to re-define the concept of nationality through fashion (Chapter IV); the exclusivity of the fashion system and the obstacles to the accessibility of museums' events (Chapter II); the balance between local and national authorities in the administration of heritage and culture (Chapter V).

Limitations: A Western-European perspective

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between different strategies of display and different ways of constructing fashion history. I will unpack this issue by looking at four presentation modalities and the experiences of the past that they create. This choice of case studies is not to be understood as a comprehensive or exhaustive list of strategies of display. Conversely, the conceptualisations of the linear, open, virtual, and absent museum are not categories to which the presentations of other museums also need to be ascribed. Furthermore, different considerations could emerge by looking at formats by typologies of organisations that are not considered in this study, such as regional museums, brand collections, and art galleries.

Admittedly, in answering my research question through the perspective of the V&A, MUDE, MoMu, and Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery, I have limited my investigation to the Western European context. A practical necessity shaped my reasons for doing so: to be in the geographical proximity of my case so that I could allow myself to spend as much time as possible with these four museums, given the financial possibilities available to me for research.

It seems important to underline that the case studies were selected to support a historical-critical reading of various exhibition 'topoi' and their effects on displays of fashion in museums. Selecting diverse strategies of display was a priority, and despite the importance accorded to the immediate surroundings of these organisations, this thesis is not about 'fashion cities' or the state of the industry in different European countries. Another critical issue has been the availability of museums to collaborate on this project. While an initial selection also included

museums in France, my current case studies offered resources (i.e. access to staff, documentation, and archives) that helped me formulate my ideas regarding their work. In particular, at the V&A, MUDE and MoMu, I found a lively and welcoming environment for research, as well as opportunities for hands-on experience.[185] Instead, in writing about Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery, I have relied on materials and information that were given to me by curators, assistant curators, and collaborators acting in their private capacity. While this is another area of divergence between Chapter V and the previous chapters, the lack of institutional support seems in keeping with the conclusions that I reach in Chapter V.

Final remarks

In this chapter, I have laid the theoretical foundations of the study that will be carried on in the next four chapters. I have characterised this thesis as an interdisciplinary study, sustained by literature from the fields of contemporary art, critical museology, curatorial studies, historiography, fashion studies, architecture studies, and media archaeology. This research was conducted in an international art college, which offered extensive opportunities to engage with innovative research and practice from within and beyond these fields.

Under these premises, this study aims to contribute to existing debates on curating fashion and to the the broader field of museum studies. It was motivated by the perception that, despite the multi-, trans-, interdisciplinary nature of fashion and fashion studies, curating fashion has developed often self-referential debates, that have often neglected the wider discussions and practice developed within the fields of contemporary art and curatorial studies. The opposite also seems as true.

Lastly, for this thesis an exhibition is, in multiple ways, an intertextual terrain between various historical, historiographical, urban and media discourses. This view complicates itself further in the case of fashion exhibitions, because of fashion's ability to escape fixed definitions of what it is and what it is not. According to Calefato this tension is intrinsic to fashion and to the way in which it exceeds the dynamics of desire, power, and affect that it also mediates. It is thus this 'irreducible excess' that ultimately makes the concept of fashion difficult to contour.[186] An implication of this indefinite condition is the fact that fashion has found hospitability in different

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[185] See p. 8.
[186] Calefato, *Clothed Body*, 353.

kinds of cultural heritage institutions, where it has also found different kinds of characterisations. So, each chapter is also written with a different idea of what fashion might be in mind: fashion as spectacle at the V&A (London); fashion as design at MUDE (Lisbon); fashion as an institutionalised field through which other forms of expression, experiences and processes can be looked at critically (MoMu, Antwerp); and finally, fashion as pluriform, immaterial expression which shares the tensions and the driving forces of contemporary art (Pitti Immagine & Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery, Florence).

Chapter II

The Victoria & Albert Museum, London: Curating Fashion as Spectacle

> The fair confronted – and affronted – the museum as a still extant embodiment of the 'irrational' and 'chaotic' disorder that had characterised the museum's precursors. It was, so to speak, the museum's own pre-history come to haunt it.[1]
>
> (Tony Bennett, museum historian)

Introduction

On August 2, 2015, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) of London closed its spectacular exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. Re-curated by Claire Wilcox and previously exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the exhibition became the most visited in the history of the museum, with over 490,000 visitors and several all-night openings. Within the exhibition, audiences had the opportunity to experience a composite encounter with the life and practice of the British fashion designer, through a variety of display modalities and media. Stressing McQueen's fondness for the V&A, one of the opening rooms included footage of the first display of his work at the museum: a live performance of professional models strolling through the galleries, held in 1999 as the second instalment of the successful *Fashion in Motion* programme, which this chapter takes as its case study. Besides the use of glass cases, mannequins, and videos, the exhibition also relied on the awe effect of displays that are not focused on narrative, but rather on the seductive and evocative power of the

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[1] Bennet, *Birth of the Museum*, 3.

presence of *things* in space: a vast cabinet of curiosities, openly recalling the pre-modern strategy of display once used to showcase private collections of rare artefacts; and a black room with dim lighting, haunted by a ghostly hologram that made distance, and the impossibility of bridging it, all too evident. From the point of view of its strategies of display, weaving together narrative and spectacle, the exhibition represented the pinnacle of four decades of experience in exhibiting fashion in London.

Despite the high profile of this recent exhibition, fashion has had a less promising start at the V&A: it did not play any significant role at the museum that was envisaged after the Great Exhibition and, unlike textile, it was not extensively represented at the Crystal Palace.[3] A retrospective interpretation is the fact that, in celebrating achievements in modern industrial techniques, the Great Exhibition had found a reason to exhibit textiles in the technical elaboration of the manufacture of fabrics, rather than in the originality and the creativity of patterns and innovative designs. However, regardless of the exclusion of dress from the exhibition, the latest fashions were, indeed, on show, on the bodies of visitors. [4] These were observing subjects, whose attendance of the disorienting experience of the world's fair was driven not only by the ambition to grasp visions of the latest commodities and of a life structured around their consumption; but also by the opportunity of taking part in the spectacle of the exhibition, in its unmediated form. Meanwhile, the same motivation would lead crowds to gather outside the Crystal Palace to see what members of the leisured class were wearing when entering and exiting the many-acred glass building. This communal indulgence in curiosity, embracing, as it did, all social classes, relied heavily on the activity of 'staring at', and underlaid a cognitive model stimulated by parts and their ability to trigger reaction, sensation, and even judgement, individually rather than through the relations amongst themselves*.*

This focus on individual parts was very different from the gaze that was activated when looking at the exhibits, displayed according to the taxonomies of nations and stages of production. The Great Exhibition – where the cognitive models of the modern museum and the fairground coexisted – revealed the Janus face of modernity, contrasting the culture of

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[3] As Lou Taylor observes, the history of textile collections dates back to the late middle ages. Taylor, *Establishing Dress History,* 105.
[4] Alistair O'Neill, 'Exhibition,' *Fashion and Art*, ed. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas (London: Berg, 2013), 195.

spectacle with a culture of discipline based on systems of power which 'manifested itself precisely in continually displaying its ability to command, order, and control objects and bodies, living or dead'.[5] Thus, in the transition from the Crystal Palace to the institution that would take on the task to continue permanently the work of the Great Exhibition, modernity found in the museum an effective didactic apparatus. The strategies of display of this new institution became themselves 'disciplinary', and by focusing on classification and (later) on narrative, they stimulated a perceptive mode driven by the relations between parts.

This brief digression introduces the perspective through which this chapter looks at *Fashion in Motion* – that while spectacle and discipline followed different trajectories after the dismantling of the Crystal Palace, they converged again in the late 1990s. At the V&A this process was enacted as the response to a variety of challenges, including the necessity to bring increasingly deterritorialised and pluralistic audiences back into its galleries. This view will then be contrasted with the context of fashion consumption in those same years, which surrounded the museum, immersing it a culture of excitation and appetite for spectacle. The aim of this discussion is not to trace a fixed lineage, but to reveal how the logics of spectacle, sensation, and lack of narrative – which were discarded by the modern museum – have re-surfaced a century later, emerging in its sophisticated strategies of display. Therefore, *Fashion in Motion* becomes the symbol of this transformation; but it also enables to develop considerations on the implications of this transformation on fashion curation, and on museum presentations as narrative media.

In looking at the evolution of this unique format, which since 1999 has presented the past collections of selected designers worn by professional models, two distinct phases are identified. They correspond to different interactions between visitors, models, and the galleries within the museum. The first phase is characterised by a walk through various galleries in the ground floor of the V&A, whilst in the latter a very explicit staging of the fashion show makes the catwalk both a presentation modality and a unitary object of contemplation. The chapter then looks closely at the structure of catwalk shows, and how bodies – models, as well as viewers – are managed through this structure. The traditional assemblage of a linear succession of bodies as audiences watch will be identified as a topos in which progression is understood in terms of inherent discontinuity.

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[5] Bennett, 'Exhibitionary Complex,' 79.

The discussion then isolates the features of this topos and of the cognitive model underlying it. In tracing a genealogy, this topos will be found also in displays from the pre-history of the museum, as well as in a vast array of forms of popular entertainment and commercial displays which emerged or became popular between the second half of the nineteenth century and at the turn-of-the-century, including the pageant, the fashion show, and early technologies of the moving image. Characterised by plotless content and a preference for fragmentary images rather than diegetic narration, the success of practices that embedded this form of linear sequentialisation was based on the attraction created by the apparatus itself, and the only temporality that mattered was the one rooted in the present moment of observation.

Finally, the chapter considers the implications of the superimposition of such logics with those of the museum: a neutralisation of the awareness of temporal distance between artefacts on the one hand, and an experience whose strength emanates from the fascination for the medium itself on the other. In doing so, the study of *Fashion in Motion* triggers considerations on the relationship between museums and narrative, suggesting the existence of a tendency in post-representational museological practice to look back to pre- and early modern presentations based on the evocation of curiosity, sensation, and the experience of wonder.

The V&A, and fashion: from spectacle to discipline

The following two sections have a double function. On the one hand, they define the presence of fashion at the V&A in relation to the concept of 'spectacle'. This view will be problematised by continuing to look back at the origins of the museum in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, they consider how 'spectacle' defined presentations of fashion in Victorian London and again in the 1990s. These separate discussions have been woven together to put in genealogical perspective the reasons that have favoured the entrance and continued presence of fashion at the V&A, and to define the connotations under which this occurred. This line of enquiry seems necessary to then introduce *Fashion in Motion*, and to discuss the role that this format has played within the museum's programming. The aim is to show that, at the foundation of the V&A, a dormant tendency towards spectacle coexisted with its declared disciplinary function. In addition to this, I also claim that the logics of

'spectacle' have resurfaced in the 1990s, helping the museum re-define its identity in the eyes of audiences.

The Victoria & Albert Museum that we know today was founded in 1852 as the Museum of Manufactures. It was then renamed twice – Museum of Ornamental Art in 1853 and South Kensington Museum in 1857 – to acquire its current name in 1899. The foundation of the museum represents the legacy of the enormous success of the *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* of 1851, whose overt educational aim was in harmony with a pedagogic tradition that had been inherited from the Enlightenment: to educate the nation in order to improve the quality and the competiveness of British manufactures. According to urban historian Graeme Davison, this ambition reflected in the architectural structure of the Crystal Palace, which was designed as a sort of panopticon-in-reverse: a building that enabled everyone to see what was on display, and to encourage the internalisation of the Victorian disciplines of knowledge.[6]

However, the sensational character of the whole experience was instrumental to attracting audiences to the Crystal Palace. Very high numbers of visitors from all social classes came to see the glass, timber, and cast iron structure, and its contents. Audiences came from London, as well as from other regions in the United Kingdom. The charter Thomas Cook, for example, took people from the Midlands and the North to the Great Exhibition and charged them a fixed price for a return trip and entry ticket. The experience of arriving at the newly opened King's Cross station must have had an aura of its own: it combined the fastness of the train, the buzzing atmosphere of a growing city, and the monumental achievement of the exhibition itself. Motion, the compression of time and space, and the prodigy of urban glass architecture were themselves commodities, offered for a few shillings.

The spectacle within the conservatories of the Great Exhibition has been described within literary studies and consumption history. In these contexts, the Crystal Palace was depicted as creating 'an almost hallucinatory experience',[7] as 'a pleasure garden' and as a 'glazed urban phantasmagoria'.[8] These descriptions are consistent with numerous fictional and non-fictional accounts that portray the Crystal Palace as a vortex of forms whose

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[6] Bennett, 'Exhibitionary Complex,' 78.
[7] Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (London: Verso, 1991), 31.
[8] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241; 8.

overwhelming scale was conceived to dwarf its audiences. However, the insight into the Great Exhibition's spectacular character goes much deeper than its sensationalism.

Richards has used the term 'spectacle' to sketch how the relationship between people and objects was produced at the Great Exhibition. He has done so with reference to Guy Debord's 'spectacle', which described the instrumentality of consumption, and its inseparability from the power of seductive imagery. Debord's argument was tailored around the anxieties of a fully modernised consumer culture that he dated to the 1920s.[9]. However, in putting forward a celebration of commodities, and in perpetuating the social relations produced by the industrial system, the Great Exhibition actualised the idea that display and its modes had transformative powers on the visibility of objects and on their desirability. In other words, the experience of the Great Exhibition had affirmed the understanding that the process of creating awareness of objects was itself a process of aesthetisation, and that the ideas of promotion and presentation could be intertwined with the material composition of objects, intensifying the magnitude of their affect. Thus, while at the times of the Crystal Palace modern consumer culture was in its nascent stages, the understanding of display as a mediative enterprise was already formed, and it was deployed in support of the pedagogic function of the museum.

The dichotomy between discipline and spectacle at this time of transition has been discussed by Bennett and Crary, who argue that cultural historians and philosophers, including Foucault, have wrongly overstated their antinomy. Instead, they suggest that considering spectacle and discipline as entangled notions can provide a better framework to discuss how modern power relations have been exercised. Thus, Crary shows the conceptual vicinity of these two notions by pointing out that the spectacle is 'also a set of techniques for the management of bodies', and 'the management of attention'. His account of spectacle continues by using Foucault's words on discipline: 'its object is to fix, it is an anti-nomadic technique', 'for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities'.[10] This interpretation supports Bennett's view that this entanglement derived from the effort of various modern spaces (including the museum) and public spectacles (including the world's fair) to be more inclusive

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[9] Debord is not specific about this. In a commentary to the *The Society of the Spectacle,* he explains that as he was writing this book, spectacular culture was about forty years ago. See, Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la Société du Spectacle* (Paris, Editions Gerard Lebovici, 1988), 13.

[10] See Jonathan Crary, 'Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory,' *October* 50 (1989), 105

towards the working classes, in a 'movement which simultaneously helped to form a new public and inscribe it in new relations of sight and vision'.[11] This interplay between spectacle and discipline can also be found in the project that was thought as a permanent continuation of the work of the Great Exhibition.

It has been calculated that the exhibition made a profit of about £186,000.[12] Prince Albert had the vision to invest this money in the land in the western outskirts of London, where a museum and a college could provide sound foundation for the education of art, design, and science. In keeping with the ideas behind the foundation of the Victorian schools of Practical Art, this new London complex was thus to educate manufacturers and consumers, in order 'to increase the means of Industrial Education, and extend the influence of Science and Art upon Productive Industry'.[14] In addition to the combined museum and college, the premises would also host the headquarters of the newly founded Department of Practical Art, which saw the complex in 'Albertopolis' (so was half-jokingly named the area that is today known as South Kensington) as the fulcrum of a national network of colleges and museums of decorative arts and engineering.

Thus, the new museum had to be an inviting and spectacular destination.[15] This reflected, first and foremost, in its new monumental premises. For Debord the concept of spectacle did not refer to the specific features of architecture and works of art.[16] However, the building itself propagated the specific social relations that underlie his notion of

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[11] Bennett, 'Exhibitionary Complex,' 85.

[12] Richard Altick, *The shows of London.* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1978), 498.

[14] Royal College of Surgeons of England, 'The Estate of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851' (1981) *Survey of London: Volume 38, South Kensington Museums Area*, ed. Francis H. Sheppard, 11, accessed December 5 2016, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp49-73

[15] Christopher Marsden, ''Une espèce de monumentsocialiste moderne': Architecture for the South Kensington Museum,' *The Victoria and Albert Museum. Art and Design for All,* ed. Julius Bryant (London, V&A Publishing, 2011), 83.

[16] The view of museums' grand architectures as 'spectacular' (in Debord's sense of the term) was instead developed by Hal Foster, who describes Frank Gehry's project for the Bilbao Guggenheim as based on an idea of touristic veneration, and as the symptom of the triumph of corporate branding over content in the museum sector. See: Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002). This is an understanding in which spectacle is seen as a mode of engagement (rather than a discourse produced by the media) that relies on the sensory effect caused by the 'staging' of content. In this sense, the use of the term 'spectacle' recalls a line of enquiry that was already advanced by Aristotle in his discussion of rhetoric in the Greek tradition. Aristotle's 'spectacle' is a component of theatre and is dependent on the aesthetic forms within which the narrative of the play takes place. As spectacle involves the aesthetic elements of specific productions – seen as having overwhelming effects on viewers, and potentially as charging the author's words with meaning they don't have on their own – its authenticity is already decried and called into question.

spectacle, creating the basis for the 'attraction' of audiences. In this sense, the building of the new museum created different forms of emotional response as the result (and the perpetuation) of dynamics that were intrinsic to the social positioning of an extended and undifferentiated audience.[17] For the leisured classes, this translated in the magnitude of the building, its eclecticism, and the combination of Gothic, Renaissance, and exotic features, as well as in the symbolic celebration of the industrial system that sustained their wealth and lifestyle; for London's working class, this meant one of the city's free public refreshment rooms with warm water and gas lighting: the illusion of solidity, and perhaps ambition and aspiration. Thus, while the V&A's early displays seem to be un-spectacular and focused solely on objects and their classifications, the features of the building were the components that made the experience seductive. All the more, the attractiveness of the V&A played a major role within a wider dynamic: the spectacularisation of London itself, a fast-paced process aimed at turning the city into the confident and authoritative image of an industrialised nation, as well as of a vast British Empire that contributed to sustaining that industrialisation. Consumption and its temples were central to this process too, and while fashion might not have played a major role at the Crystal Palace or at the V&A during its early years, it played a key role outside their premises throughout the decaying Victorian period and the restless Edwardian era.[18]

Many scholars have discussed the role of fashion in London in this period, referring to the aspirational value of shopping in certain areas of the British capital (Savile Row, Regent Street, the West End and London's western suburbs). Both in the elite dressmaking sector and at larger retailers shopping in this period witnessed the emergence of spectacular stores and experiences characterised by the use of extravagant, sophisticated displays that made

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[17] The South Kensington Museum was the first in Britain to develop policies of access specifically designed to attract the working classes. Examples include the reduction of the entrance cost and the extension of traditional opening hours.

[18] According to Richard Altick, there is wide disagreement on the periodisation of the Victorian era. Regarding its start, some historians often reach back to the First Reform Bill (1832) and the electoral changes it brought in England and Wales, given the landmark event it represented in British history. Others exclude the 1830s from their periodisation of the Victorian era altogether, seeing it as a decade of transition between the Romantic age and the Victorian period. As for its end, modern historians argue that it came around 1880, as the later age echoes 'the contemporary mood in which values were being drastically re-ordered and intellectual energies were set working in new directions' (Altick, *Shows of London*, 16).

use of glass, lighting, and simple mechanics.[19] Evans has argued that besides the proliferation of more traditional shopping venues, the turn-of-the-century also saw London hosting its early fashion shows, although not as regularly as in Paris or New York. These include Lucile's exclusive shows in Hanover Square, and Poiret's presentations at Downing Street, to which it is possible to add the fashion shows held in the city's many department stores.[20] As Edwina Ehrman notes in *The London Look* in all these contexts, fashion was produced as a dazzling vision in the city, as 'the sun' of the metropolis.[21] In other words, with its symptoms of magnitude, sensation and the imposition of its venues as points of reference, consuming fashion in London took was a spectacular experience. This is meant in the Aristotelian sense, as shopping relied heavily on the aesthetic features that framed commodities, giving them the added connotations of objects of desire. However, such framing was spectacular also in Debord's sense, in that they sanctioned the growing importance of branding and amplified its resonance among consumers via advertisement. The understanding of fashion as a source of spectacle continued even during the First World War, when, along its representations, it worked as tools for distraction from the horrors of the conflict, as was pointed out in the last displays of the exhibition *Vogue 100* (National Portrait Gallery & Manchester Art Gallery, 2006).

However, while the fashion scene was lively in the British capital until the war, at the V&A the awareness of its valence as a form of expression worthy of being collected and exhibited was not yet developed. Following the tradition set in the context of the Great Exhibition, fashionable dress was collected only if the textile was considered significant. In 1914, the Director of the V&A Cecil Harcourt-Smith had specifically 'recommended that curators refrain from collecting modern specimens [of design]', due to a concern about 'the lack of historical distance and perspectives'.[22] This sentiment is indicative of fact that, in

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[19] Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Christopher Breward, 'Fashion in the Age of Imperialism: 1860-90,' *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*, ed. Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans (New Haven: Yale University Press and Museum of London, 2005), 47-60. Christopher Breward, 'Popular Dressing: 1890-1914,' *The London Look,* 61-79.

[20] Caroline Evans, *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 34-5; 67.

[21] See: Valerie Mendes & Amy de la Haye, *Fashion since 1990* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 76-154. See also: Edwina Ehrman, 'Clothing a World City,' in *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*, ed. Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans, 31-46 (New Haven: Yale University Press and Museum of London, 2005), 31.

[22] Amy de la Haye, *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 15.

carrying on its educative and disciplining function, the museum became the stage for exhibiting the distinction between high and low culture, for marking the terms of the opposition, and for affirming the idea that edification came from the former. This culture of discipline was especially marked when contrasted with presentation modalities in use in the entertainment or commercial sector at the same time. As will emerge later in the chapter, both those that originate at the beginning of the twentieth century (such as the catwalk), and those which became popular again in this period (such as the pageant), retained the logics of sensation and wonder that had been instead part of the museum's pre-history.

From discipline to spectacle

Valerie Mendes & Amy de la Haye and Ehrman noted that London fashion took an understated tone in the 1930s.[23] In response to the reduced consumer confidence across most sectors and all social classes, its presentations for the elite became more sombre, as did those by the larger retailers. This was followed by a period of inflation and cost rise, which culminated in the introduction of severe austerity measures, aimed at saving materials and labour.[24] This context had transformative effects on the British fashion industry: by the end of the Second World War,[25] despite governmental backing for the support of the British fashion industry and London couture, despite the promotional work carried out by Vogue, and the patronage of the Royal Family, the British attitude towards fashion was altered. Ehrman explains: 'Fashion, particularly in London, was on the cusp of change. The rising generation were […] less concerned with class and protocol and wanted more adventurous, youthful and sexy fashions that would be bought off the peg and wouldn't last a lifetime'.[26]

While between the two wars fashion had gone from being a beaming spectacle to being consciously un-spectacular (both from the perspective of its forms as well as of its modes of consumption), the situation changed again in the late 1950s and 1960s. This period saw the emergence of a tendency to render London and its youth fashion as a spectacle,

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[23] Edwina Ehrman. 'Broken Traditions: 1930-55', *The London Look,* 97-115.
[24] For further development on the role of fashion during the Second World War see: Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration: Style in the Second World War* (London: Profile and Imperial War Museum, 2015).
[25] During the Second World War, the V&A had remained open, however, by the end of the conflict its premises very largely empty as its collection had been stored safely out of London.
[26] Ehrman, 'Broken Traditions,'112.

under a new youth-oriented, subcultural, cutting-edge turn. Despite the modest dimensions of the British fashion industry, the ideas it embodied were real enough to open the city and its fashion scene to the inspection of national and international publics. The result was the spectacular image of a 'swinging London', which did not limit itself to defining the characteristics of an industry to perspective consumers; but it and also defined the identity of those consumers to themselves , particularly in relation to specific subcultural discourses. In this sense, the fashion 'spectacle' defined itself not through the scale and overwhelming grandeur of late modern commercial displays. Instead, as Debord had suggested, it consisted in the systematic implementation of the identity of objects with illusory units of meaning through their representation in the media.

Deeply rooted in popular culture, this was a form of spectacle produced through television, music, and in the pages of magazines, where sign-value took precedence over user-value. But this 'proliferation of signs' also originated in the streets of London, stressing the view that the source of the spectacle came precisely from its target audiences.[27] In facts, the spectacularisation of fashion was fuelled by subcultures too, through dynamics that their exponents claimed instead to be outside of. According to Dick Hebdige, as subcultures began to strike their own 'marketable pose', their frames of referentiality began to be identified by the members of those groups, as well as by others. In this process, subcultures were returned to mainstream culture, becoming a 'diverting spectacle within the dominant mythology' from which they had sought to detach themselves.[29] The result was, as was theorised by Debord, a culture of separation and autoregulation, and an internalisation of different categorises of conformity.[30]

In discussing how London was instrumental to the spectacularisation of the fashion industry in later decades, Evans's premise is that the lack of infrastructure had left the whole cultural sector in a stale state. This context led a group of newly graduated designers (among which were Alexander McQueen and John Galliano) to self-organise for the promotion of their work.[31] These 'fashion desperados started to organise fashion shows with often excessive features which relied on complex representation systems, and aimed to attract the

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[27] Jean Baudrillard, *La Sociéité de Consommation: Ses Mythes, Ses Structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 60.
[29] Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 93.
[30] Guy Debord, The *Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 24-25.
[31] Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 68-73.

attention of backers, the press, and ultimately perspective buyers, by generating shock. [32]

Thus, in these presentations, the Debordian and Aristotelian understandings of spectacle re-converged: designers exploited as opportunities the implications of the mediatic processes that defined the commodity spectacle; at the same time, such fashion shows took the connotations of luring, appealing, and indeed 'spectacular' experiences, that relied on the dynamics of 'staring at' and sensationalism. Comparing their use of the fashion show with that of Victorian dress-makers, Evans points out that: 'for these designers, like their Victorian predecessors, the spectacle of the fashion show […] was simultaneously enticement and advertisement'.[33] In other words, in the 1990s the reliance on excessive symbolism characterised the spectacularisation of the fashion industry; and this process was key to its international relaunch in the same way in which Victorian spectacular culture had been key to promoting industrialisation, consumption, and discipline at large.

At the V&A, the 1990s represented a turning point for the redefinition of the balance between spectacle, discipline and their respective value systems. Originating in this period of transition, *Fashion in Motion* can be seen as the product of a new 'spectacular turn', characterised by an emphasis on the logics of sensation, attraction and spectacle which had been suppressed in the modern museum. A variety of national and international pressures can be identified as contributing to this shift. The former derived from the perception that culture and heritage could be used strategically to define and promote the image of British cities. Heralded by a new centre-left government, this vision has been defined as part of a 'Golden Age' for the British cultural sector.[34] However, in describing its political origins, Robert Hewison points out that the inner contradictions of the cultural policies set by New Labour caused those policies to take different meanings for the operators of the cultural industries, artists, and the local and national administrations. For the latter, in particular, the understanding that 'culture' and 'the arts' could be strategically was tied to the idea that giving heritage and art institutions access to financial capital was key to stimulating the regeneration of cities, their competitiveness, property value growth, consumption and, thus, production (as opposed to the development of artistic and creative forms of expression, per

[32] Fabio Piras, quoted by Evans, 70.
[33] Evans, 71.
[34] Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital. The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (London: Verso, 2014), 3.

se).[35] In other words, culture was tasked, directly or indirectly, to turn the city itself into a source of curiosity, and ultimately into a commodity. The international dynamics have instead been described in Chapter I (pp.27-32) and correspond to the responses of museums to a complex and ever-evolving interweaving of societal changes, including the progressive blurring of social classes in Europe and North America; the proliferation of critical art and design practice that reflected on those societal changes; the multiplication of academic debates on popular culture; and the increasing diversification and fragmentation of museum audiences at large.

As a direct result of these dynamics, metropolitan museums began to question their identities, becoming embroiled in a process of redefinition of their roles and responsibilities towards audiences that were also increasingly deterritorialised. At the V&A, this process corresponded to an increasingly broad range of services, geared towards improving its shrunken participation figures.[37] Susan Lambert notes, 'the V&A was founded to be a contemporary museum'.[38] However, as contemporary forms of expression evolved more rapidly than its collection, the museum lost its connotation as an institution about the near-present. Thus, in 1997 the Contemporary Team was established to 'bring contemporary practice into the museum'.[39] One of the earliest proposals of the team came from Claire Wilcox, who had suggested the idea of hosting live fashion shows in the museum. As will emerge later in this chapter, Wilcox's idea to make fashion the cornerstone of the contemporary programme of the V&A was informed precisely by its cutting-edge presence

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[35] The policies that were introduced under the 1997 Labour government included universal free admission to British public museums, extra funding for museums and art galleries, as well as for the funding bodies, the funding of capital investment, including infrastructure and connections with cultural destinations. These policies (whose seeds had been planted in the last years of the earlier government) have been seen as contradictory and as funding the government's mission, rather than protecting and promoting the independence of the arts. Hewison explains that 'people working in the arts were happy to make their contribution – until they discovered that the machinery to achieve these aims threatened to crush the very creativity that it was intended to inspire.' See: Hewison, 62). In other words, this funding programme has been seen as determining a transfer of authority from artists, grassroots, and community groups (who in the previous two decades had to learn to 'duck and dive' in order to prosper) to a network of charitable organisations. See: Hewison, 37. In this sense, this neoliberal attitude towards the arts is also seen by Hewison as a form of conservatism.

[37] Centre for Public Impact. *Universal Free Admission to the UK's National Museums,* accessed December 10 2016, https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/free-entry-to-museums-in-the-uk/ See also: Claire Wilcox, 'In Conversation with Claire Wilcox,' interview by Alessandro Bucci, transcript (London, February 2015) 'Appendix,' 323-31.

[38] Susan Lambert, 'Contemporary V&A,' *Conservation Journal*, 34, accessed December 10 2016, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-34/contemporary-v-and-a/

[39] Wilcox, *Appendix,* 330.

in London in the second half of 1990s, which was grounded both in the clothes and in the concept of visibility and spectacle: two components which merged in the context of the fashion show.

Fashion in Motion was not a gamble for the V&A, where the success of contemporary fashion among audiences had already been tested, albeit not in any regular or continued way. In 1971, the museum had hosted its first major fashion exhibition, curated by Cecil Beaton[40]. Titled *Fashion: An Anthology*, this seminal exhibition presented dresses which had been donated by Beaton, and it has been looked at in the literature as a turning point after which the museum can be identified as a collector of contemporary fashion.[41] Following fashion exhibitions were sporadic and they included a Liberty retrospective (1975), *Issey Miyake* (1985) and *Pierre Cardin* (1991) as well as the collective shows *Fashion in Surrealism* (1988) and *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion* (1997). The recurring element of these exhibitions was their interest in couture and the evocation of iconic names, whose symbolic, spectacular value had already been established outside the museum by their circulation through the media. Thus, these exhibitions produced a form of seduction through which the museum relied heavily on brands and their symbolic value as commodities. Another major thematic exhibition predates *Fashion in Motion*. Curated by Amy de la Haye, *Streetstyle* (1994) looked at London's post-war subcultures. In drawing inspiration from London's street fashion, the exhibition was considered ground-breaking for including the under-represented lesbian and gay community.[42] However, in throwing light on street fashion, the exhibition relied on a phenomenon whose resonance in the media had largely

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[40] Before then, in 1946, the V&A had hosted 'Britain can make it'. The exhibition presented categories of goods that were seen as the basis for post-war economic growth, particularly – when not exclusively – with regards to international trade. Besides sections of raw materials, heat, light, and power technologies, printmaking and books, the exhibition also showcased dress, womenswear, children's wear and menswear. Fourteen couture houses (Hardy Amies, Creed, Angele Delanghe, Norman Hartnell, Peter Russell, Victor Stiebel, Strassner, Lachasse, Molyneux, Bianca Mosca, Worth, Digby Morton, and Jacqeline Vienne) presented two looks each. The exhibition also presented fabrics and accessories. Its displays were theatrical, with a revolving carousel being used to present to visitors the evening dress section. In this sense, this exhibition also stressed the importance of presentation in highlighting the values endorsed through design. The exhibition was seminal in the history of the V&A, as it came at a time in which the museum was almost completely empty, as most of its artefacts had been moved and stored securely outside of London.
[41] Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media,' 337. See also: Clark and de la Haye, *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971.'*
[42] Shaun Cole, 'From Lesbian and Gay to Queer: Challenging the Hegemony in Collecting and Exhibiting LGBT Fashion and Dress,' *Fashion Curating*, ed. Annamari Vänskä and Hazel Clark (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 137.

been established, especially among the younger audiences that the museum sought to attract.

These exhibitions proved to be very successful among visitors, but retrospectively some of them were accused, along their catalogues, of lacking a deep critical or historical framing of the contexts they sought to explore, or of the necessity to be looking at clothing in a cultural heritage institution. Thus, these isolated exhibitions continued the spectacularisation of fashion, as this phenomenon had been taking place in the city, with Frieze problematically suggesting that *The Cutting Edge* inspired and stimulated shopping in Knightsbridge.[43]

Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss identify the lack of critical and historical perspectives as the epitome of museological corporate branding, which characterises the work of large heritage institutions in the 1990s.[44] In particular, Foster notes that this is a period in which, due to the spectacularisation of culture, 'exhibition value has become all but autonomous'.[45] Foster continues:

> design and display in the service of exhibition and exchange values are
> foregrounded as never before: today what the museum exhibits above
> all else is its own spectacle-value – that is the principal point of
> attraction and the chief object of reference.[46]

From this criticism emerges the image of a museum capable, through its flashy exhibition designs, of turning itself into an object of contemplation. Its branding becomes an assertion of quality and authority, and the lens through which the content of exhibitions (and the historical/theoretical research underlying them) is delivered to the public.[47] In keeping with his views that, in the contemporary art system, aesthetic production has been uncritically integrated into commodity production, Foster locates contemporary display modalities in a general and wider view of design as purged of any element of resistance that might, instead, have characterised its emergence after the French and Industrial revolutions. In this sense,

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[43] Susan-Marie Best, 'The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion,' *Frieze*, 7 June 1997, accessed September 10, 2017, https://frieze.com/article/cutting-edge-50-years-british-fashion.
[44] See: Rosalind Krauss, 'The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalistic Museum,' *October* 54 (1990), 3-17; Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002).
[45] Foster, *Design and Crime,* 81.
[46] Foster.
[47] In this passage, Foster is using the expression 'exhibition value' which had been introduced by Benjamin in 'The Work of Art' to describe one of the levels at which artistic production can be perceived. This notion has been presented along that of 'cult value' in the previous chapter. See p. 52.

the reliance of museums on design (in the sense of display modalities, spectacular architectures, and by extension also programming based on the celebration of established brands) represents an uncritical absorption of cultural discourse, through which the museum replicates dynamics of appropriation of popular forms of expression, without problematising them. This kind of museology is thus a mere continuation of the discourses of other spectacular media in the disguise of radicalism.

However, it must also be considered that due to the mix of functional and aesthetic qualities, fashion is intrinsically interconnected to the consumption spectacle. In addition to this, fashion perpetuates social dynamics precisely by defining the body to the eyes of others, through codes and norms that separate individuals, and that often make the challenges to those imperatives problematic and painful pursuits.[48] This is amplified by the commercial reality of the fashion system, which has developed its own promotional 'spectacles', with their own rules and mechanisms of aesthetisation.[49] Because of these reasons, there can hardly be a museological context in which fashion can be fully uncontaminated by the production/consumption logics and by the celebration of its commodity status. However, following Foster's discussion on the absence of historical and critical perspective in exhibitions, it can also be argued that by re-energising critical analysis, the presence of fashion in the museum can problematise the quintessentially affective relations involved in its own spectacularisation.

This position emphasises the importance of fashion exhibitions that are the product of collaborations between curators, historians, theorists but also operators of the industry. Breward explains that this approach can develop 'a model of practice, based in a shared understanding of the value of research across both constituencies that recognises a third stage in the creation of knowledge'.[50] In practice, the result of this approach has been visible in exhibitions of the 2000s, including *Black British Style* (2004), *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (2005), which actively reflected on critical research in fashion history and theory. The

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[48] For a discussion of the ability of fashion to both expose and conceal, to define the body to others, see Calefato, *The Clothed Body.*

[49] For example, Evans has discussed the role of the catwalk as a fashion spectacle entrenched in the production of representation of fashion, and also as a commodity-driven system of social relations. See Evans, *Mechanical Smile.* See Also, Evans, *Fashion at the Edge,* 67-80. Marketa Uhlirova has considered cinematic costume as a spectacle that propels the production of relations and meaning in film. See Marketa Uhlirova, *Birds of Paradise* (London: Koenig Books, 2013).

[50] Breward, 'Between the Museum and the Academy,' 90.

concretisation of this collaborative approach has also been observed by Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer who point out the rapid change undergone by the figure of the dress conservator at the V&A, who, since the beginning of the current century, has become increasingly involved in interpretation initiatives, along historians and theorists, in a clear rupture with how the role was conceived in the first two decades of fashion exhibitions in South Kensington.[51]

However, Breward's defence of the 'value of research' and of the necessity to find shared ground between different constituencies is also an indicator of the threats brought to these values in the transition from the 'Golden Age' to the age of 'lead'.[52] Hewison observes that this transition brought a very different operational model, based on austerity cuts, conservative budgeting, and a reduction in both public and private support. This scenario emphasised the imperative for museums to reflect even more attentively on their offer, impact, and capacity for engagement. Thus, while this period consolidated the collaborative model advocated by Breward, it also emphasised the tendency to draw on inherently spectacular aspects, which emerged visibly in the multiplication of temporary, ticked exhibitions characterised by the recurrence to big names, 'safe' theme choices, and dramatic presentation modalities. Examples include *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* (2018) which relied heavily on the pre-existing fascination amongst the public with the Mexican artist. Despite this, the exhibition was successful in using a new materialist approach to highlight the sensual and fleshly aspects of bodily experience and to place subjectivity back at the heart of the discourse on disability. Another interesting way of displaying fashion occurred in *Ocean Liners* (2018), which offered a dreamy and elaborate representation of life during transatlantic sea travel, as well as of the aspiration of reaching America for business, leisure, or necessity. The exhibition displayed dresses by VIP guests along with furniture paintings, film, and architecture, in an exhibition which had absorbed the notion of interdisciplinarity fully. And finally, *Christian Dior: Designers of Dreams* (2019), which dealt with issues of authority by exploring the contributions and inspirations of Dior's six creative directors, while also generating queues of paying visitors and new members. These are just examples of three blockbuster exhibitions, where the logics of spectacle were at play, despite the careful treatment of their topics.

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[51] Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, *Textile Conservation* (London: Routledge, 2010), 33.
[52] Hewison, *Cultural Capital*, 172.

The tensions between the spectacular and the critical emerge even more boldly in *Fashion in Motion*. The introduction of the live fashion show in the museum has certainly involved a process of critical evaluation of the intrinsic features of this medium, for example by aiming to challenge the exclusive character and limited accessibility of today's commercial fashion show (whose audiences are usually constituted by invited guests and professionals whose applications for invitation normally need to meet minimum accreditation requirements) and by often devoting its platform to emerging designers. It also challeges the modern understanding of the museum, as well as its modalities of interaction between visitors, objects and space. However, its emphasis on experience, immediacy, and sensation are reminiscent of the gaze that was activated outside the Crystal Palace; of the cognitive modalities that were at play in Victorian spectacles and shopping modalities; and of emphasis placed by the pre-modern cabinet of curiosity on the ability of objects and atmospheres to affect us and provoke wonder. The rest of the chapter will argue that this museological culture is brought to the surface (more clearly than in the exhibitions mentioned above) by the absence of narrative that characterises the *Fashion in Motion,* which, in turn, is dependent on the specific way in which its composing parts can be related amongst themselves and with the whole. However, before developing these ideas, an introduction to *Fashion in Motion,* its origins, and its evolution in time, seems necessary.

1999

What follows examines the format titled *Fashion in Motion*, a distinct practice developed by the V&A in order to give visibility to selected contemporary fashion designers. It focuses on the period that has seen the development of the *Fashion in Motion* format, which is to say between 1999 and the present day. Originating from an idea of Claire Wilcox, this major project presents the work of contemporary fashion designers worn by professional models. Within this successful series of events, garments are presented in the format of a live performance, which is repeated several times on a chosen date. This results in an engaging presentation whose challenging aesthetics blur the intersections between the museum and live show at a degree that has varied greatly in its history, as a comparison between different phases in the format's evolution will reveal.

Fashion in Motion was introduced at a time of significant experimentation in the field of collecting and exhibiting fashion. For curators and fashion heritage institutions operating in the United Kingdom, this period is characterised by a considerable number of debates around how to integrate traditional object-based approaches rooted in the History of Art, with theoretical considerations on clothing and its social meaning. Still on the wave of the New Museology, which called for more 'self-conscious' presentations the V&A has founded its contemporary fashion programme on a revisionist approach towards traditional presentations, which often reduce fashion's intrinsic multi-sensoriality and spectalularity to the optic dimension and require visitors to engage with the void left by the body through displays that often can't but emphasise that void.

To this challenge the V&A has responded with strategies of immersion intended to offer an experience based on tactile perception. 'Tactile' is here understood not (exclusively) as calling into question the sense of touch, but rather as this term is used by Bruno, as a mode of perception that is stimulated by an experience with the ability to produce specific stimuli and specific forms of encounter between visitors and objects.[53] Thus, a tactile museological

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[53] In the *Atlas of Emotion,* Bruno uses the term 'tactile' to describe the experience of film and the perception deriving from a mode of engagement with images that is capable of 'touching' and affecting beholders. The development of this concept is inspired by Alois Riegl's distinction between the haptic and optic experience of art. See: Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901) (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1985). While 'haptic view' dialectically overcomes both the sense of touch and that of sight, it produces a kind of perception that is more similar to the tactile rather than the optical, as the former is based on the simultaneous experience of various, discontinuous and self-contained stimuli. For Riegl, the optical experience of objects is reliant on multiple variables, and thus creates room for subjective interpretations that might not be dependent on the referent, while tactile experience yields objective and deep knowledge of represented reality through the interaction between the human skin and surfaces with defined features. Instead, an 'haptic view' creates a balance between objective, 'touchable' facts and the inevitable emergence of subjective thought, with different historical periods producing this oscillation differently. In this sense, Bruno's understanding of haptic perception acquires a dimension of intersubjectivity and quasi-objectivity. This understanding has absorbed Benjamin's vision of film as producing optical stimuli with the ability to recall (multi-sensorial) experiences of the events that it presents. Bruno also considers the potential of this concept within the museum context, presenting a view that speaks to the 'material turn' in museum practice, but also to the transformation of the museum into sites of affective experience. However, it must be said that besides Bruno, a number of authors have drawn upon Riegl's notions of the haptic and haptic seeing. Just to name a few, Deleuze understood haptic seeing as what emerges when the dichotomy between sight and touch is surpassed. For Deleuze, a haptic sensing takes places when the eye 'touches' a surface after the other, removing any sense of the relations between those surfaces. See: Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Nancy's aesthetic philosophy argued instead that all sense experience involves touch, understood as a haptic sense. So, when we are looking at the appearance of an image, the image itself exceeds its phenomenological determination, and in so doing it 'touches' us, engaging all senses. See: Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Les Iris,' *Yale French Studies* 81 (1992), 46-63. The importance of Nancy's contribution is highlighted by Derrida, who also offers a lineage of philosophical reflections on touching and the haptic. Derrida clarifies that while touching has

experience is one that comprises a 'moving' and 'touching' interface, that projects the visitor into a three-dimensional space, which in turn stimulates personal interaction with artefacts. Unsurprisingly, in the case of fashion, the word 'tactile' can also evoke more literal connotations. However, even the emergence of practices that rely upon touch have to be understood against a dimension of 'touching' understood as the passage towards an embodied experience. An example is that of the V&A's *Touch Fashion,* a major display project that aimed to show garments inside glass cases with holes cut out on their surfaces to allow visitors to touch and feel fabrics, seams, and embroideries. Scheduled for autumn 1999, with the experience of *Fashion in Motion* in full development, *Touch Fashion* was never produced, arguably because of the impossibility of guaranteeing basic preservation requirements. A number of other exhibitions have since then sought to let visitors experience contemporary fashion through senses other than sight. An example is the 2011 Yojhi Yamamoto, curated by Ligaya Salazar, which aimed to highlight the designer's understanding that 'fabric is everything' in the creative processes of fashion.[54] To do so, the exhibition featured 80 looks, displayed without pedestals or glass vitrines, at the same height of visitors. This allowed them to get close to the fabrics, while respecting the ritual pact of having to 'refrain from touch'.[55] The exhibition also presented catalogues and lookbooks, extracts from the designer's fashion shows and fragments of videos from his collaborations with filmmakers, thus showing the exhibited garments through a variety of media formats that sought to reintegrate what was lost with the loss of the touch.

Displaying fashion in motion twists that idea of sensory sacrifice that is often intrinsic to fashion exhibitions, as it enables visitors to catch 'the glint of light off a beaded dress, a waterfall of sequins, the swing of a heavy skirt, the ethereal float of chiffon'.[56] But besides highlighting such qualities, the idea of displaying fashionable contemporary dress on real models needs to be understood as transporting the visitor into an embodied experience, which fully reveals the kinship between 'motion' and 'emotion', whose common

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been understood as privileging and signifying proximity, presence and immediacy, it can also be a repository of the intuition of distance between the beholder and the image. Thus, proximity has the potential to pose obstacles to the process of identifying the artefact and its content. See: Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[54] Victoria & Albert Museum. 'Yohji Yamamoto: Processes & Techniques,' accessed April 22 2015, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/y/processes-techniques/

[55] Stuart, 'From the Museum of Touch,' 28.

[56] Evans, *The Mechanical Smile,* 178.

etymological root is associated with the idea of transporting, projecting, moving out. In this key, it seems possible to retrospectively interpret the choice of *Fashion in Motion* as the title for the project, over its alternative 'Fashion in Action'.[57] From a conceptual point of view, motion represents the foundation of action, a non-symbolic process that prompts action to take place. 'Motion' can thus be seen as referring not only to the models but also to the production of a sensuous mobilisation of visitors, and of an interface that moves from contemplation to interaction, a process that is on display as much as the chosen artefacts.

As seen in *Chapter I*, during the second half of the 1990s the development of museological practice in the field of fashion took place in parallel to academic discussions that also intended to reinvigorate the role that objects had played in dress history until that point. And in the industry itself, the years in which *Fashion in Motion* was developed represented the pinnacle of a decade of radicalism and innovation for British fashion, which created enthusiasm both for its forms and for its presentation modalities.[58] In explaining what the triggers and motivations behind her initial idea for *Fashion in Motion,* Wilcox explains: 'I thought it was a brave new world in terms of fashion'.[59] The *Fashion in Motion* format has thus been produced in dialogue with a cultural field that includes the industry, academia and the 'laboratory' of museum and display practice.

The innovative character of the format, especially with regards to its levels of sensorial engagement, has been influential for other heritage institutions as well, where catwalk presentations have been included in programming, albeit as occasional events. Examples of institutions that have occasionally included the live performance format in their programmes are MUDE (Museu do Design e da Moda, Lisbon), MAXXI (Museo delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome), and MASP (Museu de Arte de São Paulo), and more recently, the National Museum of Scotland (Edinburgh), where Edinburgh College of Art's fashion graduates showcase their collections.

While since 1999 The *Fashion in Motion* format has hosted performances by several designers,[60] the literature about this fortunate format is limited. A newspaper article that

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[57] Personal conversation with Claire Wilcox, May 2015.
[58] For discussions on the values inspiring the British fashion industry in the 1990s, see: Claire Wilcox, ed., *Radical Fashion* (London: V&A Publications, 2001), and Evans, 'Cultural Capital: 1976-2000,' *The London Look,* 2005.
[59] Claire Wilcox, *Appendix,* 327.
[60] See *Appendix,*335-38.

stands out among those in the V&A Blythe Road archive is Susannah Frankel's 'Fashion: Art of Poise'. Frenkel's view here is that *Fashion in Motion* has democratized the fashion show, by allowing non-professionals to experience the fashion show.[61] While *Fashion in Motion* has certainly contributed to opening up the fashion show to the wider public, this chapter claims that some of the intrinsic mechanisms of the fashion system become obstacles to the full actualisation of this vision. In addition to this, the chapter will argue that due to the many difficulties in reproducing individual events, and in making them available for wider circulation online, the view of the museum as a space for all is degraded to a view of the museum as a space for those who attend the shows.

Fiona Anderson has looked at *Fashion in Motion* in her article on the mediatic role of fashion exhibitions. *Fashion in Motion* is here described as 'represent[ing] a move away from purist object-based approaches towards a greater contextualisation of the collection' by relying on a presentation whose origins are to be located in the commercial world.[62] This in keeping with the idea of a museum whose practices originate outside its premises, as a 'continuation of the street'.[63] Considerations on the relationship between the museum and the fashion show, which informs *Fashion in Motion*, will be central to the rest of the chapters, which also analyses how meaning is produced within the fashion show. These considerations will lead to an interpretation of the structure of the fashion show as the reoccurrence of a cognitive model whose origins are rooted in a longer tradition of popular entertainment. The aim of this trajectory will be to highlight how intrinsic lack of narrative of the format, and to discuss the (re)emergence of a museological culture based on the principles of attraction and wonder.

Fashion in Motion is also referred to in *The Study of Dress History*, in which Lou Taylor identifies it among a series of practices that have been devised to showcase the design characteristics of 'fabric weight and texture in movement'.[64] A forerunner of the idea of displaying artefacts in 'motion', is here identified in a 1972 installation at the Brooklyn Museum. Named *Costume Theatre*, this installation presented dressed mannequins on a moving belt, which enabled visitors to watch a mechanical procession while seated on a carpeted floor. Taylor stresses the function of this automatic installation to reveal the

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[61] Susannah Frankel, 'Art of poise,' *The Independent*. 1999. Fashion in Motion Box 1, V&A Blythe Road.
[62] Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media,' 376.
[63] Storrie, *Delirious Museum*, 2.
[64] Taylor, *Study of Dress History,* 27-8.

material properties of the garments. However, it is also important to point out that *Costume Theatre* revealed features of the sentient experience of the catwalk, including a specific lack of diegetic development that is involved in linear progressions. In 2016, the 'mechanical' catwalk was also utilised to display garments at the Rijksmuseum. The display was devised after the title of the exhibition, *Catwalk*, which showcased for the first time part of the museum's collection, focusing on Dutch fashion between 1625 and 1960, and its role in inspiring French couture, including Dior and Yves Saint Laurent in the twentieth century.

Fashion in Motion also received some criticism. In particular, it was seen as an 'over-simplistic' solution to the problem of lack of movement in traditional fashion display.[65] However, *Fashion in Motion* should not be seen simply as the answer to the absence of the body in fashion exhibition. It is also a presentation which has at its heart a fascination for the catwalk itself, seen as a unitary object with the ability to stimulate interaction with fashion. In addition to this, it also displays the rise of affective 'experience' as one of the priorities of contemporary museums.

Unlike Anderson, Buick sees *Fashion in Motion* as reinforcing the division between fashion inside the museum and fashion outside the museum. This idea also emerges from newspaper articles dating back to the early years of the format. Speaking about the forthcoming 'Fashion in Motion: Vivienne Tam and Jimmy Choo', The Guardian posits a question that summarises this issue: 'is fashion starting to take itself too seriously or is a new catwalk happening at the V&A merely another example of high culture swooping on low culture and getting tangled in the process?'[66] As will be argued further in the next chapter, the opposition between low and high culture, which created a distinction between what should and what should not appear in museum venues and delayed the appearance of fashion artefacts within these contexts, represents the legacy of the status of the humanities prior to the cultural and linguistic turn. In the late 1990s this sense of 'unworthiness' was widespread to the point that it was also experienced by many professionals working with fashion in heritage institutions. For instance, in writing back to Anna Sui, after the designer had complimented him for his new role at V&A, Andrew Bolton, one of the first curators of

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[65] Nadia Buick, 'Framing Fashion Curation: A Theoretical, Historical and Practical Perspective.' PhD diss. Queensland University of Technology, 2012, 39.
[66] 'Fashion in Motion: Vivienne Tam and Jmmy Choo,' *The Guardian* August 16, 1999.

Fashion in Motion, writes back: 'I am still reeling about the job. I cannot believe I am being paid to sit and think about contemporary fashion'.[67]

Fashion in Motion, in time

Fashion in Motion is a corpus of events with its own history and its own patterns for self-renovation. Over the past two decades, its structure has featured major changes and while it is still re-inventing itself, it seems possible to identify two main phases within its history. While having in common the idea of presenting dress in a live performance with professional models, these two phases activate distinctive modes of engagement between audiences, the models and the space.

The fact that a project like *Fashion in Motion* has changed profoundly should be unsurprising, and, in general, strategies of display should not be thought of as part of finished, immutable formats. They are rather the outcome of the mission, vision and policies of a museum, and as these also undergo changes, the aims, structures, and work procedures of exhibition practice are also renegotiated. All the more, exhibition practice is also defined by the experience accumulated by technological advancements, aby the changing roles of staff within and across institutions, and by academic debate on exhibitions and collections. In the specific case of fashion, there is also correlation between the evolution of presentation modalities and the different understandings of fashion's cultural value, including the way in which discourse around fashion is presented by other media formats.

To identify the rupture between the two phases of *Fashion in Motion*, it is useful to begin with an assessment of the format's events programme between 1999 and the present day (see *Appendix*, pp. 324-327). This list has been produced by combining information from the V&A's website (where only an incomplete list is available,) archival research, and thanks to the collaboration of Oriole Cullen, curator of *Fashion in Motion* since 2007, and Stephanie Wood, current project manager for the programme.

Fashion in Motion's first event took place in May 1999, and it was based on the work of at the time emerging milliner Philip Treacy with dresses by Antony Price. Since then, *Fashion in Motion* shows have tended to showcase the work of individual designers and fashion houses. However, while most of the presentations within *Fashion in Motion* are

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[67] Bolton, Andrew. Correspondence from Andrew Bolton to Anne Sui, 1999, Fashion in Motion Box 1, Blythe House Archive, London.

informed by this curatorial principle, it also seems possible to isolate examples of collective shows with a thematic approach. Examples include 'Fashion in Motion: Africa' (2005), which presented the works of Lamine Badian Kouyat, Joel Andrianomearisoa, and Hassan Hajjaj; 'Fashion in Motion: Iranian Night' (2004), which collectively celebrated the works of Iranian fashion designers; and 'Fashion in Motion: Men in Skirts' (2002), presenting the work of contemporary designers who made use of skirts in their men collections. The V&A's collaboration with Central Saint Martins resulted in three *Fashion in Motion* events, displaying graduates' works in 2002, 2004, and 2008.

Fashion in Motion has also featured presentations that stand out for focusing on accessories rather than dress. These include 'Fashion in Motion: Swarovski' – a sponsor of the format, along Mac and L'Oréal – for which various designers were asked to design new jewellery pieces. In 2009 'Millinery in Motion' celebrated millinery as one of London's key creative sectors by presenting Stephen Jones's work alongside that of five emerging London milliners. An isolated case is represented by 'Fashion in Motion: Olivier Saillard' (January 2012), which showcased the peculiar fashion performances by the French fashion curator. The show focused on the role of pose in collective imaginary, by presenting gestures that Saillard identified as incarnating the styles of different historical periods.

The decision to invite designers to present a selection of garments from their past collections is normally in the hands of the curatorial team. However, there has been a period when the museum's Public Affairs division – directed by Daniel Whitmore between 2003 and 2014 – requested presentations within the *Fashion in Motion* scheme to tie in with headlines exhibitions and exhibitions of the Contemporary Programme, a department within the division. Examples of *Fashion in Motion* events that were produced as a result, include: 'Fashion in Motion: Gareth Pugh', held on the occasion of V&A's exhibition *Surreal things: Surrealism and Design*; 'Fashion in Motion: Ma Ke Wuyong', on the occasion of the *China Design Now* exhibition (which also featured some of Ma Ke's clothes); 'Fashion in Motion: millinery', to compliment *Hats: An Anthology by Stephen Jones*; and 'Fashion in Motion: Yohji Yamamoto', held on the occasion of the *Yohji Yamamoto at the V&A* exhibition. This policy enabled visitors to explore the development of thematic areas across various departments of the museum and beyond the content of a single exhibition. Cullen managed to detach the choice of designers for *Fashion in Motion*, which currently seems to be a program depending

on designers' availability rather than on the restrictions imposed by the programme of exhibitions.

Fashion in Motion: 1999 – 2002

When asked what her triggers were when ideating *Fashion in Motion*, Wilcox explains:

> What was happening in terms of enlightening me was magazines: Visionaire, Dazed and Confused, and Nick Knight's photographs. If you think of the 1997 photograph of Devon Aoki wearing a dress from La Poupée, the cloudy contact lens, the safety pin through her forehead and her face like a manga heroine. That picture had an enormous impact on me at that time.[68]

Nick Knight's image of Devon Aoki seems to come from surreal terrains: its ability to make the body an 'open' discourse, able to cut across both institutional and subcultural contexts, generates the idea of a different order of existence; it does so while literalising the ability of fashion to change and disguise the body; to expose it to the gaze of others while turning the body itself into 'another'. And indeed, Devon Aoki's image appears recurrently in the documentation from *Fashion in Motion*'s incubation period. In this respect, the program can be seen as incorporating a transformative strength comparable to that produced by image-makers such as Nick Knight or those being published in magazines mentioned by the curator. It is this legacy that ultimately resides in the idea of an ephemeral display, designed to bring a dreamy atmosphere into the museum space. But besides its immediate impact on the space of the galleries, the *Fashion in Motion* programme has played a transformative role in the perception of the V&A by existing and new audiences.

When Wilcox re-joined the V&A in 1998 as curator of fashion, after curating *Satellites of Fashion* for the Crafts Council gallery, the museum's contemporary department had just been established as a team of two. Developed from an idea by Alan Borg and Sue Lambert, the team had the difficult task of repositioning the V&A in the mind of audiences as an institution that is also about the Contemporary. Wilcox explains that one of the aims was to increase visitor numbers, especially in galleries that were 'barely visited'.[69] In search of institutional transformation, Wilcox suggested the idea of project in which, just for a few hours, contemporary fashion could interact with those galleries, developing a bond between artefacts of different origins, the organic and the inorganic, motion and stillness, the ancient

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[68] Wilcox, *Appendix*, 327.
[69] Wilcox, *Appendix,* 326.

and the ultra-contemporary. Like in Aoki's image, the surreal beauty of *Fashion in Motion,* would originate its ability to juxtapose reciprocally alien objects and concepts. This underlying sense of surrealism transpires through Wilcox's words:

> I had imagined that not only would *Fashion in Motion* show the most remarkable contemporary fashion to visitors in the museum, who might or might not have known that this was happening, but it would situate fashion within the sculptures of the museum and this pipe effect would take visitors into galleries that were barely visited. It had to be in the ground floor. I had this idea that this parade would show also the beauty of the museum, of the environment. And particularly when I look at the photographs of the first two *Fashion in Motion*'s for Philip Treacy and Alexander McQueen I remember that jolt of appreciation of the fabric of the building, the beauty of the corridors, the marble floors, the sculptures, and how remarkable the fashion looked against this backdrop but also how beautiful the backdrop looked against fashion; and it seemed as if it was an equal relationship.[70]

The most recurrent path would start at the Main Entrance facing Cromwell Road. The models would then walk around the information desk and towards the cloakroom into the Sculpture Gallery. From there they would pass through the Samsung Gallery and then continue into the Cast Courts, among the plaster casts of Trajan's Column, Michelangelo's David and by the Gates of Paradise. They would then go back into the Samsung Gallery and head towards the Toshiba Gallery, the Tsui Gallery, the Medieval Treasury, the Garden, where they would stop by the fountain. They would then return inside the museum through Nehru and finally back into the Main Entrance passing through 47b, 47c, and 47d (Fig. 2.1). On the way, and without a clear destination, the models would pass and stop by preselected pieces of Korean, Japanese, Chinese, European, South Asian and Indian art from a range of historical periods. Had it not been pre-established through curatorial decisions, their walk could be seen as a psychogeographer's exploration, with the environment in which they moved being more than a matter of mere exteriority. In some of the earliest events, the path was indicated by fluorescent decals on the floor, such as the green '*Fashion in Motion*' signs for Philip Treacy or the pink vinyl quotes for the first Alexander McQueen event.

This way of using the museum characterises itself as the post-modern experience of jumping across chronologies and historical reality. This effect is produced by the fact that the models' walk followed a succession of galleries which, instead, had been organized through modern classifying principles. Their passage through the museum thus re-mixes the

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[70] Wilcox, *Appendix,* 326.

heterogeneous periodisation that underpins the layout of the galleries and the disposition of artefacts contained therein. The resulting clash of temporalities dissolves the chronological and spatial distance between models and artefacts in the museum as they interact: nothing works as a caption for anything, and visitors are left with a variety of fragments that can only be interpreted individually (Fig. 2.2).

This a-historical understanding is produced by the specific role that is taken by the models, whose presence is not to be understood as that of mannequins on commercial catwalks. Contracted through agencies to walk through the galleries, their qualities are closer to those of *la passante*, the literary figure of a working woman who walks through the streets of turn of the century Paris, making herself part of the process of 'spectacularisation' of fashion, enacting and perpetuating the social dynamics that produce its conventions.[71] Evans considers *la passante* walking in the city as the progenitor of the contemporary mannequin, who, instead, 'makes a profession of going nowhere'.[72] This 'task of going nowhere' will be taken by the models in *Fashion in Motion*'s later phase, when the walk through the galleries of the V&A would turn into a more contained format. In this yearly phase, the models walked through the remnants of the past, which are in permanent display in those galleries, framing their performance both materially and metaphorically.

It is along the models' path that the 'touching' dimension of this format abides. When visitors/spectators (who might or might have not known that *Fashion in Motion* was happening when visiting the museum) arrived at the galleries they entered a space that was hosting two presentations – the galleries' permanent exhibitions and *Fashion in Motion* – which inevitably interacted with one another. At their own pace, visitors/spectators could advance towards the exhibits, both the moving and still ones. They could decide to follow the beautiful models wearing the exhibits, or they could just watch them passing by, following them with their gaze before continuing their visits to galleries that were not involved in the parade. They could decide to see only part of the show and to look at it from an angle and at a distance of their choice. Drawn into *Fashion in Motion,* the event offered visitors/spectators the possibility to embrace a voyeuristic position and to abdicate the position of passive viewers. There is also evidence that this kind of viewing experience also offered visitors the pleasure of projecting themselves onto the figure of the models and of

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[71] For further expansion on the figure of la passante, see: Evans, *Mechanical Smile,* 27.
[72] Evans, *Mechanical Smile.*

imagining to be able to wear the designs being displayed. In a fax to designer Vivienne Tam, Andrew Bolton reports that her *Fashion in Motion* had been very successful and that a recurring question from members of the audience was about where in London it was possible to try on dresses from the designer's collections. In this way, models could be seen as projections of the visitors' selves, where looking became an embryonic act of appropriation. (Fig. 2.3 & 2.4).

The different perspectives through which the show can be experienced, the activities of walking and looking, the interplay between models and visitors/spectators merge in the work of video maker Russell Henderson, who directed the documentary videos of the first six *Fashion in Motion* events. Henderson had proposed to emphasise the experience of the walk by recording images from the perspective of the models. This result would be easily achievable nowadays, but at the state of technological advancement of 1999 it could hardly be produced without impacting the look of the models. Henderson explains that he had planned to resort to a system that he had used earlier for sports events (mainly skateboarding and mountain biking), in contexts where it would have affected neither the performance nor its visual qualities (personal conversation with Henderson, 2015). This system used a lipstick camera and a recording pack, which, before 1999, weighed around 10 Kg and needed to be worn in backpacks. The use of this technology for *Fashion in Motion* was made possible as Sony released their CX1 recorder on the market, which was smaller and lighter and could be hidden in a handbag. So, in the case of 'Fashion in Motion: Philip Treacy' (Fig. 2.5), through the handbag, a cable would pass up the sleeve up to the collar and through the hat, without impacting the performance or the look of the models. With the camera hidden in the hat, at times behind transparent coloured surfaces, images revealed the models' movement and visitors' reactions rather than the outfits. At the same time, a mini steady camera would be placed in front of models in order to record the models passing by as seen from the position of the viewer. The resulting video, alternating both points of view, was a synthesis of the two components of the show, of the active roles of watching and being watched.

Thus, Henderson's work helps visualise the idea that both the moving image and the catwalk are 'mobilised' formats, that is to say, they are indebted to the act of moving in space.[73] In the case of the moving image, this idea was theorised by Anne Friedberg, who saw

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[73] see Chapter I, pp. 65-70.

the emergence of its early forms as the technological projection of a cognitive model that originates as a result of the experience of walking in the city. Friedberg's view was that the movement of the flâneur/flaneuse in the modern urban environment produced the notion that unrelated images could appear in a sequence, as this sequence was produced in the gaze of the walking subject. However, Evans's theorisation of the role of *la passante*[74] reveals another implication of this realisation, namely that the conceptualisation of the walker's movement in the urban environment became embedded in two different forms of entertainment, whose evolution in time resulted in two distinct media formats: on the one hand, the moving image itself, capturing the internal perspective of the walking subject, looking at the urban environment around her; on the other hand, the catwalk, seizing and embedding the external perspective of a voyeur: a vision of the *passante,* of the subject passing by and her motion. In this sense, Henderson's discontinued work fused together these two perspectives as produced in the microcosm of the museum.

The format as it has been presented thus far had to be reframed in 2001. Wilcox explains why this reformulation needed to happen as she speaks about the last *Fashion in Motion* presentation in the galleries (Fig. 2.6):

> 'Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen & Shaun Leane' was the last to be held in the galleries – the main reason why it was moved was crowd control. The Alexander McQueen & Shaun Lee show was crazy, it was unbelievably crowded and the V&A found it a little bit scary […] It had become quite distractive. And long established curators thought it was not very 'V&A'. They thought it was out of control, which, to be honest, it really was sometimes. To be honest, at that point it was barely under control.[75]

Video recordings, along oral and written accounts describe the large crowd of visitors often occupying the path of the models and disrupting their walk through the galleries. Bolton says to Vivienne Tam in a fax: 'at times, the models (who were fantastic) could not even walk'.[76] Were it to continue, *Fashion in Motion* needed to address the risk associated with the safety of artefacts, visitors, and models. However, this was also the sign that *Fashion in Motion* had been successful in repositioning the V&A in the minds of visitors as a contemporary institution, able to engage with changing times.

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[74] Evans, *Mechanical Smile,* 24-7.
[75] Wilcox, *Appendix*, 329.
[76] Andrew Bolton. Correspondence from Andrew Bolton to Anne Sui, 1999, Fashion in Motion Box 1, Blythe House Archive, London.

***Fashion in Motion*: 2002 – 2017**

The moment of passage to a new configuration of the *Fashion in Motion* format is highlighted by a reduced frequency of performances over the year. While *Fashion in Motion* was originally conceived as a monthly event, only four, three and at times two shows per year took place after 'Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen & Shaun Leane'. This shift corresponded to a profound restructuring of the format after 2002, when the individual *Fashion in Motion* shows became more expensive to produce.

Inaugurated in 2002 with 'Men in Skirts', the current *Fashion in Motion* format typically consists of a catwalk show of approximately 30 minutes, which is repeated four times on a chosen day. The shows have since then taken place in the Raphael Gallery, room 48a, containing a permanent display of some of Raphael's most important surviving designs for the Sistine Chapel, owned by the Royal Family and on loan to the V&A since 1865. The gallery is also home to the late gothic gilded Spanish altarpiece of Saint George, a 15th century treasure from the medieval collection. *Fashion in Motion* is still open to the general public, although the introduction of seats made booking essential. While standing members of the public have been allowed at the beginning of this new phase, the hardening of the museum's health & safety policies have eliminated this possibility. The models walk down the Raphael Gallery's black and white mosaic floor as visitors occupy the seats on both sides of the space used as a catwalk (Fig. 7). The current *Fashion in Motion* format is described by the V&A as follows:

> *Fashion in Motion* is a series of live catwalk events presented at the V&A. Featuring some of the greatest designers of our time, *Fashion in Motion* brings catwalk couture to a wider audience by modelling it against the beautiful backdrop of the Museum.[77]

This phase of *Fashion in Motion* thus provides visitors with a form of engagement with the contemporary, which has been devised with a specific cultural object in mind: the catwalk. Besides aiming to present artefacts dynamically, it does so by recalling a specific way of communicating and consuming contemporary fashion, which informs visitors' perceptions of the event. This involves the activation of a way of looking and acting that preforms the

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[77] Victoria & Albert Museum, *Fashion in Motion*, accessed April 20 2015, http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/f/fashion-in-motion/

attendance of the live show or the way in which the museum has appropriated the catwalk. Differently from the earlier phase, in which the reference to the catwalk did not emerge if not in the interpretation of journalists, the catwalk becomes itself an object in the Raphael Gallery (Fig 2.7 & 2.8).

The introduction of tickets has also determined a change in the composition of the audience.[78] Different surveys undertaken by the museum have shown that the audience for this new reconfiguration of the format has become more specialised and largely composed by fashion students, bloggers, journalists, academics and professionals. This tendency was inverted again in the case of two *Fashion in Motion* events within this phase. The unticketed 'Fashion in Motion: Ma Ke Wuyong' (2008) and the 'Fashion in Motion: Grace Wales Bonner' (2015) allowed any visitor of the museum to attend the performance. This was possible because of the distinctive structure of these two events, which departed from the catwalk format. In the first case, models stood on pedestals, in the latter, on a photographic set (Fig 2.10).[79] In both cases, visitors were free to walk around the models in the Raphael Room. Thus, as a flashback from the early years of *Fashion in Motion,* the audiences of these two events were constituted by visitors with a general interest in fashion or who just happened to be in the museum to see other exhibitions.[80] Grace Wales Bonner's event also signals a further shift in the history of the format, one that is not consolidated yet, and that indicate a shift towards a new fluid canon, in which the features of individual events are constantly up for negotiation. 2017 was characterised entirely by this kind of experimentation, featuring a return of the format to the galleries and the Cast Courts ('Fashion in Motion: Inspired by Balenciaga') and by the use of imaginative set designs in the new Sainsbury Gallery ('Fashion in Motion: Molly Goddard', Fig. 2.9).

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[78] Tickets are free, but they need to be booked in advance. This limits the number of visitors that can enjoy each presentation. However, the V&A has tackled this issue by repeating each event four times and through maximising the number of occupied seats: a return queue allows people who have not been able to book to fill any seat that might have become available. As the V&A does not operate by sending tickets to visitors' addresses, but rather by retaining them to be collected prior to the event, the return queue thus gives a possibility to those who have not been able to book a ticket, as well as to visitors who might have not known that *Fashion in Motion* was happening during the day of their visit to the museum.

[79] Both events brought in the Raphael Gallery presentation modalities the designers had used previously for commercial purposes.

[80] On occasion of the Grace Wales Bonner event, I was asked to interview 500 visitors over the four performances. The aim was to investigate whether the redefinition of the format would engage new audiences.

Fashion in Motion presents contemporary fashion while having at its heart the relationship between the viewer, the catwalk, and the museum. This results in an exhibition format that reflexively presents contemporary fashion in the context of a live fashion show that has the museum as its venue. In so doing, the V&A has progressively encoded a presentation modality that has been in use by the fashion industry for more than a century, and that fosters visitors' interaction with contemporary fashion. As the next sections aim to show, in this process it originates a new understanding of the catwalk – regulating the relationship between the visitor/spectator and the recent past – as well as of the museum – revealing instead a shift in the understanding of its role from a repository of objects to a siting of experience.

The aura of the spectacle

Benjamin's concept of aura – and its reformulation by Gernot Böhme – can be utilised to analyse the ontological features that the catwalk acquires when it is itself seen as an object in the museum.[81] The aim of this discussion is to suggest a view of the fashion show as a part of a set of practices which have evolved in response to the increased circulation of objects and their representations during modernity. In what follows, I provide a critical reading of the origins of the fashion show, suggesting that it was tailored around the new connotations taken by 'authenticity' with the advent of mechanical reproduction. In particular, in looking at the evolution of the notion of authenticity, I will highlight how modernity placed an increased emphasis on the pre-existing idea of experiential immediacy and its ability to escape the processes of mechanical reproduction. Then, these considerations are utilised to discuss the role of the museum as a repository of authenticity, and its response to the paradigm shift undergone by authenticity itself. At the end of the discussion *Fashion in Motion* emerges as the example of a contemporary and post-representational museology, where 'aura' emanates no longer solely from objects, but also from practices whose experiential value makes them impossible to be reproduced.

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[81] Benjamin explains that 'aura', which enables the perception of the quality of originality, is not an intrinsic property of objects. Its emanation originates instead in the phenomenal engagement between beholders and objects, and in the act of perception. Rooted in this individual encounter, and dependent on the presence of both objects and beholders, the perception of aura is bound up in the social creation of meaning, and as such it is an issue of reception. While in *The Work of Art* Benjamin deconstructs the notion of aura to discuss the revolutionary potential of its demise in the age of mechanical reproduction, the idea of the aura as the product of a mode of reception is developed in 'Little History of Photography.'

'Aura' and 'authenticity' are profoundly interconnected concepts. Introduced in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', the notion of aura is developed to discuss the issue of the authenticity of objects, and the perception of such sense of authenticity by beholders. As such, the debate on aura also highlights that different historical periods, and the different economic, political, and social variables that characterise them, have produced different understandings of authenticity, and that the latter has captured the effects brought by technical and mechanical reproduction.

Benjamin describes the aura as a diaphanous halo flowing in the presence of the original artefact as a projection into the present of the cultural context within which it was produced. As such, the perception of this phenomenal haze becomes key to experiencing the unique essence and authenticity of the object. The determination of the authenticity of the work of art is thus the outcome of a contemplative process in which the beholder engages dialectically with the object, investing it uncontrollably with 'the ability to look back at us in return' for an instant.[82] However, at the completion of this process the beholder is left with the unwilling perception of the inaccessibility and irreducible cultural distance that separates them from the object: the aura is 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it [the object] may be'.[83]

Rather than resting solely upon objects, the perception of the aura is thus an interpersonal and intersubjective experience, entrenched in the sensing of their authenticity. Besides the value of individual objects as 'authentic', it was the immediacy of sensing their aura which determined the quality of the experience in the pre-history of the museum.[84] Therefore, because the aura manifests itself only in the immediate presence of original artefacts, the circulation of reproductions (e.g. through photography) brings a degradation of the aura and challenges the experience of authenticity: if the aura emanates from the presence and uniqueness of the object, then the replica, lacking any foregoing factor, will also have no aura. However, this loss is balanced by the liberation – or the illusion of liberation – that mediatic reproduction offers to the experience of art through its diffusion and dissemination. In other words, Benjamin observes that, through their increased circulation as reproductions, objects might lose their aura of authenticity, but they become accessible to wider audiences, who are thus enabled to participate in their appreciation.

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[82] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art,' *Illuminations*, 184.
[83] Benjamin, 216.
[84] For example, in the cabinet of curiosities.

One of the spaces where the aura is compromised is the modern museum, despite its mission to preserve objects and their authenticity by providing the conditions to prevent their material decay. As the original is removed from 'the domain of tradition', the object loses continuity with its original context, and while it might appear in proximity to the beholder, it is instead culturally, emotionally, and temporally distant.[85] In other words, in the museum, the sense of authenticity of the object is lost, leaving behind a mere representation, ready to be consumed and appropriated by a plurality of subjects, and to become itself the subject of a myriad of interpretations. In the tradition of cultural Marxism, however, the loss of the aura in the museum takes a less blatant twist than was previously thought: displaying the loss of the insertion of objects into tradition, also shows the potential to produce the dissolution of the social structures that sustained exclusive access to authenticity. In the passage of objects from private collections and cabinet of curiosities to the modern museum, the loss of the aura thus signifies the increasing democratisation of art.

An often unaccounted implication of the decay of the aura and of the affective strength of objects is key to discussing the role of the catwalk in the contemporary museum, and its ability – as a cultural object and as a spectacular practice – to emanate its own aura. Benjamin explains that, with the gradual blurring of social classes in the age of mechanical reproduction, the notion of authenticity began to shift towards a new paradigm, which was no longer associated exclusively to objects, but also to a non-articulated fetishisation of the experience of authenticity. The implications of this shift were part of a critical historical turning point in the second half of the nineteenth century that embedded the perception of authenticity in the domain of qualitative differentiation. This aspect is only marginal in 'The Work of Art', but it emerges in Benjamin's consideration that:

> precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, the intensive penetration of certain (mechanical) processes of reproduction was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity. To develop such differentiations was an important function of the trade in the work of art.[86]

The modern museum set out to make the experience of authenticity available to a wider audience; simultaneously, outside its walls the preservation of social distinction expanded

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[85] Benjamin, 215.
[86] Benjamin, 271.

the definition of authenticity dramatically, by annexing it to factors that were able to escape the processes of mechanical reproduction and whose immediacy was impenetrable to photography and film. Far from having disappeared, the decayed aura became key to a new hierarchical order, with different 'degrees' of authenticity corresponding to different degrees of openness of the experience of art and its modalities of presentation, divulgation, and consumption. According to Benjamin, the development of this 'grading' of experience became an important function of the commodification of art, with the ability to create and control an auratic experience becoming key to a variety of commercial activities, and a condition for the emergence of modern spectacular culture. This shift signals that, with modernity, the quest for and preservation of authenticity, which traditionally was an issue of the theory of art, started to turn into an issue of the politics of art; in particular, it started to turn into an issue about the accessibility of authentic experience.

The relationship between the concept of the aura – as conceived by Benjamin – and fashion is problematic. 'Aura' exists only outside the production/consumption chain, which is inevitably one of the existential conditions of the fashion system. In Benjamin's view, the phenomenal structure, the emotional haze that emanates from dress and other objects of desire is not aura, but rather the 'phony spell of the commodity', namely 'an aesthetic need' and the phantasmagoric cult of personality in the disguise of authenticity.[87]

A reformulation of the concept of aura that comes to terms with the dynamics of production and consumption is offered by Gernot Böhme, for whom Benjamin's concept becomes the starting point the conceptualisation of 'atmospheres'.[88] Presuppositions of this notion are the lack of clear boundaries between the commodity and the work of art, and the assumption that the commodity is also able to produce an intense aesthetic experience based on the evocation of a sense of uniqueness.

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[87] Benjamin, 231.

[88] See Dorrian, 'Museum atmospheres.' Here Dorrian points out that Böhme seems to understand Benjamin's 'aura' as undifferentiated from the concept of 'atmosphere'. According to Dorrian, Böhme's theorisation of atmospheres is aimed establishing the totality of the senses. However, in referring to Böhme's understanding of atmospheres and their dependence to the activation of the senses, Dorrian asks whether the experience of atmospheres is, in fact, dependent on the limitations of sensory experience created within the context of the museum. This is a key idea for this thesis too and the next section will indeed demonstrate how the specific 'narrative' mode and experience of the recent past created by *Fashion in Motion* is result of specific spatial conditions, determining the predominance of sight over other senses in the atmospheric experience of the fashion show. The same logic, albeit with very different conclusions, informs the observation of the case studies in the next chapters.

However, an 'atmosphere' emerges not exclusively from the referent – the tangible object, event, or person – or from the appreciation of their symbolic value. Rather, it corresponds to an embodied experience, in which the referent merges into its representation and vice versa. The result is a complex sensory experience that absorbs viewers and that influences the reception of the objects, events, and persons that the atmosphere encircles. As such atmospheres emerge as artificial 'spheres of the presence of something', as indefinite, hallucinatory and 'dreamlike' appearances, which, Böhme explains, 'seem to fill the space with a certain tone or feeling like a haze'.[89] An effect of the ontological unsituatedness of atmospheres, and of the difficulty to pin down the source of their enactment, is that atmospheres are located in a spatio-temporal in-betweenness, wherein agencies are blurred. Thus, according to Böhme, the perception of atmospheres surfaces as 'thinglike' and 'subjectlike' at the same time, that is to say, they end up acquiring a dimension of semi-objectivity, that can be experienced by other participants too.[90]

Böhme's reconfiguration of Benjamin's notion of aura addresses those professional branches devoted to the 'aestheticisation of reality' and the 'aesthetics of commodity', where 'it becomes apparent that this knowledge' (i.e. the evocation and manipulation of atmospheres) seems to be 'tacit'.[91] This idea is also picked up by Tonino Griffero, who explains that the high atmospheric power of design practices lies in the product, but also the value of its presentation.[92] Griffero develops further the idea of the constitutional unlocability of atmospheres in the relationship between product and presentation, by observing that atmospheres can be produced intentionally in art and design practice. Therefore, the difficulty of separating them from objects (but also the easiness of intertwining them with objects) makes atmospheres not just ontologically 'given'; rather, it makes them instruments and tools of aestheticised societies.

Not only these considerations open up the possibility that dress might enact the experience of aura, despite Benjamin's earlier dismissal of fashion as something that 'set[s]' aside' […] the individual genius author'.[93] But also, if its aura can be regulated – amplified or

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[89] Gernot Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics.' *Thesis Eleven*, 36 (1993): 122; 114.
[90] Böhme, 122.
[91] Böhme, 123.
[92] Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 55.
[93] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art,' 231.

reduced – by inserting it into a presentation, then the fashion show can be seen as a regulator of the aura of dress, in a way that recalls Korff's position on the museum as a 'brokering service' for the decayed aura of artefacts.[94] It regulates the aura of dress by engaging and enhancing the perceptions of beholders through symbolic gestures, gazes, and poses, in an event with an atmosphere of exclusivity.

Benjamin's observations on the emergence of differentiated experience can be utilised to consider the effects of mechanical reproduction on the consumption of fashion, particularly in terms of the new degree of accessibility of objects brought by the industrial revolution. In this light, the earliest forms of the fashion show can be seen as underlying the 'grading' of experience that Benjamin introduced in 'The Work of Art', safeguarding a tradition of class distinction that was being progressively corroded by modernity. This is the effect of a paradigm shift that intertwines dress with a presentation which acts simultaneously as a medium and as a unitary object of contemplation, able to produce an aura of its own. Thus, the decay of the aura of objects because of mechanical reproduction has contributed to the emergence of spectacular presentations, able to reintegrate the diminished affective potential of objects. In particular, precisely because of their limited reproducibility and the impossibility to mediate the sensory engagement involved in live presentations, early fashion shows developed the sense of exclusivity and prestige that was once associated with rare objects and with the private experience of their aura.

In looking back at the pre-history of the catwalk, Evans observes that its precursors date back to the 1850s, a time when production opened up the clothing system to a growing middle class and when the 'haute couture system was rapidly expanding'.[95] Early fashion shows did not initially involve models walking in sequence, but composing 'living pictures'.[96] While they did not initially develop around a structured format, they offered an experience of fashion that was very different from the one that was already available in busy urban arcades and department stores. As Evans points out, they were mostly exclusive events,

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[94] Dorrian, 'Museum Atmospheres,' 187.
[95] Evans, *The Mechanical Smile,* 11.
[96] Evans observes that the audiences of mid- and late nineteenth-century fashion shows were familiar with the kind of modelling involved in them from the traditions of *tableaux mouvants* and miming. Evans notes that these public performances were themselves based on the simulation of art coming to life in theatrical *tableaux vivents* and on domestic *poses plastiques*. See: Evans, 13. This genealogy suggests a view of early fashion shows as relying on the embodied and intersubjective experiences of spectators, models and designers, whose gaze and capacity to relate with this emerging category of spectacles had been shaped within a pre-existing field of representational practices.

where collections could be viewed 'in the privacy of the couture house'[97] or the homes of society women; in other words, far from the inconveniences of busy arcades and department stores.[98] Evans sketches the mood and the atmosphere of these early fashion shows through the words of Count Primoli on the events at house Worth: 'At Worth the aristocracy mingled with kept women, in the salon that ''exhales some atmosphere of degraded aristocracy, some heavy fragrance of elegance, wealth, and forbidden fruit'' [...] It was in this louche atmosphere that the Worth mannequins paraded'.[99]

This encapsulated ambience of exclusivity testified at once to a shift in the meanings and the modalities of consumption, and to the new aesthetic and representational functions that fashion was taking outside these contexts. The activities involved in attending the shows – receiving hand-crafted and personalised invitations, watching the models, buying the frocks, the opportunity of interacting with designers and with other guests – acquired features that were immediate, ephemeral, ritualistic, and – most relevantly this this discussion – irreproducible. In other words, if before modernity, dress might or might not have an aura of its own, depending on whether Benjamin's understanding of its relation to the commodity is accepted,[100] the fashion show, a set-up for a few selected guests, developed one of its own, inscribed in a decayed material and relational world where the latest fashions were not as accessible. Thus, while early fashion shows were certainly convenient for designers and for trade buyers, they also represented the opportunity for individual consumers to reconnect with a previous tradition of exclusivity and elitism, and

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[97] Evans, 12.

[98] Evans's historical reconstruction considers the perspective of models, designers, and consumers. For this discussion, I am referring here to her observations on consumers.

[99] Evans, 14.

[100] In Benjamin's formulation of the concept, aura flows from the object; however, the perception of aura reveals that the object, which might be in physic proximity, is, in facts, culturally distant from the beholder. Excluding the commodity dimension of clothing, this implication of the aura is in itself interesting when read in relation to fashion understood as everyday practice of the clothed body, and reinforces the conceptualisation of fashion as an intrinsically xenological practice (See Chapter I, p. 21). Building on Entwistle's and Calefato's considerations on the clothed body as a dynamic and inter-subjective carrier of meaning – Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body;* Calefato: *Clothed Body* –interactions with others inevitably reveal their distance, however small, that is to say, of their irreducible alterity. Manifesting itself through their clothes (but also through other signification systems), this is a 'cultural' difference, in Raymond Williams's sense of the term, which accounts for individual temporalities as well as for pre-subjective cultural dynamics. Being based on a sign system, the reception of this sense of difference does not necessarily demand attention, but also emerges in a state of distraction. In this sense, the aura is a kind of connecting tissue, enabling our perception of otherness and distance.

the attempt to maintain that order against the radical consequences of industrialisation on consumption.

Conversely, only an echo of this intense experience could (and, ideally, had to) be produced within the press and through words-of-mouth. The effect of the aura of early fashion shows to their participants can be described through Donna Haraway's description of the epistemological stance at the grounds of the self-contained representation that emerged in the turn-of-the-century dioramas: seeking to preserve the image of the pre-industrial class system against the progress-fueled 'threats' to that order, early fashion shows offered representations in which 'what is so painfully constructed appears effortlessly, spontaneously found, discovered, simply there'. [102] In other words, these modern spectacles produced an interplay of distance and proximity by anchoring a fading world into the present. The result was the temporary effect of the permanence of a system that was disappearing.

The idea of the exclusive nature of the fashion show was also at the heart of its later history, when the format started to embed a rationalised catwalk presentation. Evans explains that by 1910 fashion shows 'mimicked an élite occasion, fostering a sense of exclusivity' and had become events to which 'entry was by invitation only, usually handwritten, though gradually couturiers began to have engraved cards made, as if to a private party at home', often with the expectation that visitors would buy at least one frock.[104] By the beginning of the First World War, fashion shows were popular with department stores, but these were more accessible to the rising middle classes, and not as exclusive as the private events. In this sense, the fashion show, by virtue of its irreproducibility, put in place that 'grading' and differentiation of experience that was identified by Benjamin as a reaction of the loss of aura.

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[102] Donna Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,' *Social Text* 11 (1984): 34. In this paper, Haraway looks at the use of taxidermy and dioramas in the Akeley African Hall at the American Museum of National History in New York. Her position is the dioramas (which date back to the period between the late 1880s and early 1920s) offer representations of a 'typical' and ideal scenes of Africa as seen 'in the eyes' of its authors. However, in comparison with photography, the peacefulness that is evoked in the dioramas reveals the fear for the increased vicinity of that world, and for its threat to the order of pre-industrial patriarchal society. Thus, the immediacy of the representation offered through taxidermy becomes key to protecting the permanence of that order. However, in this case – unlike the context of the fashion show and the social relations that it encapsulated – sight emerges as privileged in the hierarchy of senses and as the sole tool of discovery. This is obvious, when considering that the activation of touch would have produced the opposite effect of revealing the deathliness of that order.

[104] Evans, *Mechanical Smile*, 32.

If the idea of the aura of the fashion show is accepted, then its presence in the museum problematises further the issue of aura's decay. While visitors come to see the work of individual designers, they are also brought to the museum for the format itself: a fashion show, a finite cultural object with defined material features, only temporarily on show. However, in displacing the catwalk from its traditional contexts, and democratising access to it, the museum also brings into its premises the irreproducibility of its value as an embodied experience. Thus, unlike the traditional museological objects of painting, sculpture, or dress, the live catwalk demonstrates its contingent, precarious, and eventful character in its dependence on viewers' attendance.

This is in keeping with a vision of museums and cultural heritage institutions as getting progressively distant from the image of universalist, materialist, and historicist institutions. In this permutation, museums place increasing emphasis on the contextualisation of objects and practices, rather than on objects themselves, turning from places where reproducible objects are stored to be displayed, to places where irreproducible curated events take place, requiring audiences to be present. Art critics Boris Groys and Mike Pepi have identified the logics underpinning mechanical and digital reproduction, determining collections to be more visible than ever before, as the main engine of this redefinition of the functions of museums:[105] as they seek to adapt to the increased circulation of reproductions of their collections, their programming has evolved to include installations, events, conferences, through which 'the flow of events inside' the museum can become 'often faster than outside its walls'.[106]

For many cultural heritage institutions, this has resulted in exhibitions and events that, like *Fashion in Motion*, emphasise relational aesthetics and require a degree of interaction by audiences. These projects can be advertised and documented, but they lose their value as embodied experiences when removed from the dimension of immediacy. But the 'grading' of experience, which Benjamin described as an implication of mechanical reproduction, is not only determined by the obvious impediments to the reproducibility of the sensorial involvement that *Fashion in Motion* demands. It is also determined by the strict set of policies, i.e. copyright, that regulate any attempt to reproduce the event for dissemination. This becomes especially evident in videos of individual *Fashion in Motion*

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[105] See: Gorys, 'Entering the Flow.' See also: Mike Pepi. 'Is a Museum a Database? Institutional Conditions in Net Utopia.' *e-flux* 60 (2014).
[106] Groys, 'Entering the Flow.'

events, available on the website of the museum. While its intention certainly is to democratise the event and to make the fashion show accessible to broader audiences, it can only offer partial representations of the events, delivered as remixes of views that do not breach the intellectual property of any of the parties involved. [107] The result is thus a derived podcast, which only shows some of the dresses, where the music score is royalty-free and almost always different from what was used in the original event, and where even views of the Raphael Gallery are reduced to a minimum. [108] In other words, by watching these videos, audiences who cannot be present at the V&A relate to the shows in a mode of documentation rather than through reproductions of the fashion show. This new level of representation of the catwalk event alters its resonance as an embodied experience, causing the irreducible excess that determined it as a 'tactile' experience to be lost. The circumstance of attending a *Fashion in Motion* event thus becomes inevitably unreproducible and, in doing so, the sense of privilege included in Benjamin's auratic structure is inevitably re-performed.[110]

The lack of continuity between individual *Fashion in Motion* events and their documentation also has 'narrative' implications that further contribute to layering the quality of the experience. As images and videos record what happened in the museum, each *Fashion in Motion* event enters a regime of story-telling and signified values that the fashion show – which is instead devoid of narrative and privileges showing to telling – does not have. This aspect determines a further shift on the historiographical implications of bringing the catwalk

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[107] Generally speaking, the right to use content – e.g. designs, artistic works, sound, symbols, names and models' images – for a live catwalk event enables photographers to take photographs/videos of the show on the basis that all such material is used for reporting purposes only. Issues arise as to how the content represented in such materials can be protected from being exploited for the commercial purposes of third parties when it is shared online. The situation can thus be summarised as such: audio-visual representations of individual *Fashion in Motion* events can certainly be produced, but it is unclear what resulting videos and images can be used for. Consequently, once video and images have been produced, the V&A has often been unable to license the images out to others. According to Roxanne Peters, Intellectual Property Manager at V&A, this represents a future opportunity for the museum, as by being able to license images, it would reinforce its international role as a centre for fashion curation.

[108] These views are out of copyright, but they requiring courtesy to the Royal Collection.

[110] *Fashion in Motion* is not the only example of practices that rely on relational aesthetics, and that cannot be reproduced without significant alterations to the experience of their qualities. Another example from the V&A's programming is that of *Friday Late*, an 'original contemporary event' where audiences can encounter artists and designers through live performance, installation, debate, DJs. See: *Friday Late.* V&A. Accessed: January 20, 2018 https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/friday-late This format is popular among audiences, but like *Fashion in Motion*, it also limits the experience of those seeking to perceive it from the outside. This is an issue of the irreproducibility of the level of sensorial engagement that *Friday Late* demands. But it is also an issue of the regulations that reduce the reproducibility of content.

inside the museum, because the collection of Fashion in Motion videos seems to account for episodes of the curatorial history of the museum, rather than being a contribution to fashion history. This is yet very different from the experience of the past that emerges in individual *Fashion in Motion* events.

The next section will focus on the structure of the catwalk and how its constituting parts relate amongst themselves and with the contextual whole. By following this line of enquiry, I will discuss how linear successions of fragmented images have informed the structure of media formats that were (or became popular again) in the last decades of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century. Characterised by plotless content, the success of media formats that embed linearity was based on the attraction created by the apparatus itself, in which the only temporality that mattered was the one rooted in the moment of contemplation. The result is a neutralisation of the awareness of temporal distance between artefacts on the one hand, and an experience whose strength emanates from the fascination for the medium itself on the other. Video reproductions loose these aspects, and in doing so they make evident the frailty of the aura of the spectacle.

Fragmentation and non-narrative

In the passage from the world of commerce to the microcosm of the museum, the contamination between the languages of the fashion industry and that of exhibitions has had implications on both. Instead of being used as a privileged space for the exclusive observation of 'next' collections, the *Fashion in Motion* catwalk becomes a tool for the celebration of the recent past. Looking at a designer's career, the V&A's catwalk is a retrospective one, which acquires the function of an anthology, in which both curator and designer work as compilers. Each show presents ensembles both the archive at V&A and from those of various fashion houses. By working together, curator and designer thus decontextualise the dress from the immediate context of the seasonal collection in which it was presented and re-actualise it within this new understanding of the catwalk format. In this process, its bonds with the specific collection within which it was produced become loosened, and, spoiled of this connection the dress/part acquires new specificities, which tie it to a new whole, grounded in immediacy.

Today's fashion shows are generally based on the structure of models walking in a line on a catwalk. Evans has observed that, while early fashion shows took a variety of features, it was only at the turn of the century that the *défilé* was adopted as the homogeneous element that still predominates today. Embodying both the exhibitionist tendency of the Victorian age and the rationalising sensibilities typical of modernism, this structure of the 'bodies walking in a line' is seen in this section as an asset which determines the lack of narrative within catwalk presentations. By focusing on how the catwalk embodies the tension between sensation and discipline, I aim two raise two issues. Firstly, that by bringing the catwalk in the museum *Fashion in Motion* overcomes the distinction between historical and a-historical exhibitions. Secondly, that in doing so, it exposes a new museological culture characterised by a shift towards sensation, immediacy, and experience.

While the concept of défilé is at the heart of the fashion show, from an epistemological point of view, it goes beyond that of the catwalk. Etymologically, the French term that is used to designate the catwalk originates from the idea of a passage within which it is only possible to walk in a line. This term was then utilised to describe the liner progression of people and objects. The *défilé de mode* can thus be understood as one variation of the topological configuration consisting of bodies walking in a line, and as belonging to a larger category of performances in which meaning emerges as a result of a recognisable distribution of the sensible, characterised by a standardised delimitation of spaces and times.[111] This aesthetic system includes collective public displays such as parades, marches, processions, and corteges, which embed the topos of the défilé, suggesting specific ways of establishing relations among the bodies/fragments that compose it.

The configuration of the 'bodies moving in a line' characterises the displays within this category, signalling the continuity between different and distant cultural traditions. The valance and the functioning of this assemblage as a topos can be described through Huhtamo's observation that a topos is 'a stereotypical formula evoked over and over again in different guises and for varying purposes', with each of its appearances becoming partly familiar and partly alien.[112] In other words, through the displays that embed a specific topos

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[111] Through this passage Rancière argues that aesthetic systems are determined by the organisation of their material features. These operate a distribution of the sensible which recalls Kant's delimitation of sense experience in the *sensus communis*.

[112] Huhtamo, 'Dismantling the Fairy Engine,' 28.

(in this case, that of 'bodies walking in a line') we experience otherness that is similar to something that we might have already come into contact with prior to watching them, either through direct or indirect experience. According to Huhtamo this is the paradox of topoi: to present 'the newest of the new' packaged in the old.[113] This has to do with the long history of a topos, which works as a 'discursive meaning processor' and as a vessel for the meaning of cultural objects, by activating the beholder's gaze in specific ways.[114] Claire Wilcox refers to this sense of familiarity when talking about her experience during the early days of *Fashion in Motion*:

> They [the models] are remote, beautiful, often very tall and rather unearthly. And it is them leading us on a route. I feel there is something special about following something. The same thing, I suppose, as in those marches, the big parades such as those in New Orleans or Brazil. There's that notion of activity. And as a visitor, you could stand and watch it go by or you could follow it. There was an element of pageantry.[115]

The process through which the topos of the 'bodies walking in a line' became embedded in the commercial catwalk is sketched within the history of *Fashion in Motion*, which also was not initially conceived with the catwalk in mind. Wilcox says: 'I initially thought of it as a promenade […] I always wanted *Fashion in Motion* to be a procession through the galleries'.[116] The défilé is then extrapolated as the essential feature of format's later reconfiguration. Like in the commercial world, the use of the catwalk in *Fashion in Motion* was the result of negotiations between different ways of presenting fashion to potential consumers, which gradually evolved into the linear pattern that consolidated around 1910. In this respect, it is interesting to point out that outside the museum, prior to the existence of fashion models, presentations of fashionable dress for commercial purposes also started in the absence of movement, on dolls sent by French dressmakers around Europe, dressed in their latest fashion.[117] The process through which *Fashion in Motion* came to exist thus inadvertently summarises the main phases of this history, producing presentations that arise from the need to abandon the mannequin and the glass case only gradually and tentatively evolving into the format of today's catwalk.

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[113] Huhtamo, 28.
[114] Huhtamo, 28.
[115] Wilcox, *Appendix*, 328.
[116] Wilcox, *Appendix*, 328.
[117] Evans, *Mechanical Smile*, 12.

From religious processions, to funeral parades in Ancient Greece, from those mentioned by Wilcox, to the catwalk itself, the syntactic element of the défilé manipulates space and time, creating a dimension with definite rules and norms. A défilé extracts its path from the space around it, normally privileging a central positioning. At the same time, its temporality simultaneously interrupts chronological time while also grounding itself in it. The long line patterning, in this spatial-chronological sense, becomes the semiotic principle which generates the axiomatic aura of parades. The strength of this topos is also revealed by looking at how it is embedded in practices of social walking. An example is the nineteenth-century défilé du Bois de Boulogne, a parade taking place on Good Friday, during which the fashionably dressed aristocratic class would walk down the Champs-Élyssés passing by an audience of paying non-aristocratic viewers sitting down on both sides of the road.[118] By creating its own spatial and chronological coordinates, the general construct of 'bodies walking in a line' also enables additional complementary structures: activity and receptivity, 'looking at' and 'being looked at', movement and gaze, action and passion, actors and spectators. It does so in a way that is different from live performances that presuppose a horizontal or circular organisation of space, such as the theatre, where spectators look at the events unfolding frontally on a stage.

The features of this topos, of that 'element of pageantry'[119] at the heart of the catwalk as well as *Fashion in Motion*, determine its e-motional potential – its ability to suggest a specific way to look at the exhibits and the typologies of the relations that can be established between them. In the practices in which it appears, the topos of 'the bodies walking in a line' enables a kind of development that does not make explicit the connection between their constituting elements. As such, the development of action through linear flows of bodies involves a progression based on inherent discontinuity, which privileges individual fragmentary images to diegetic narration. This is the case of the catwalk, in which, as Evans notes, 'beyond the claims of individual designers' there is very little narrative involved: 'some women come into a room, they walk up and down, and they exit. Other women, and a few men, look at them'.[120] This lack of narrative characterises other forms of display based on public staring. For example, a similar structure can be found in the pageant, which had a revival in turn-of-century Britain, focuses on a similar structure: while it was

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[118] Evans, 179-83.
[119] Wilcox, *Appendix*, 328.
[120] Evans, *Mechanical Smile,* 2

based on a self-enclosed narrative (often the history of the place where it took place) it seemed to privilege the representation of key events in the forms of *tableaux vivents* over the connection between them, thus dissolving diegesis into images, and the narrative into its constituting elements. The fragmentation of narratives also underpins Benjamin's understanding of history, resolved into individual images that flash by.

The kind of non-narrative development included in the linear succession of images is certainly very different from what is offered by the vast majority of today's story-telling media formats (including museum exhibitions). However, narrative discontinuity used to inform the structure of popular entertainment visual media at the turn of the century. Tom Gunning points out that before 1906-1907 even film was to be understood 'less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to the audience, fascinating because of their illusory power and exoticism'.[121] This was a 'cinema of attractions', which did not present a fluid story, but showed instead a 'series of transformations strung together with little connection'.[122] Based on 'magical attractions'[123], this exhibitionist film form established a direct visual relationship with the audience, with actors looking directly into the camera and, so to speak, through the medium. This strategy acknowledged the presence of audiences and implied the intention to satisfy their interest for the novelty of the medium itself. The rise of the catwalk can be seen as addressing a similar sensation: enthusiasm for immediacy, the legitimisation of the act looking, and the idea of novelty, a sense of revelation which is renewed with every model and which does not need any narrative to emerge.

What is relevant here is that the linear progression of bodies and images has been a popular way of understanding progression at the end of the nineteenth century, and has been at the heart of formats – including the catwalk, the pageant and early technologies of the moving image, that originated (or became popular again) in this period. It might be difficult to perceive how much the catwalk has in common with these media formats – having this non-narrative development been discarded through the decades.[124] However,

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[121] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,' in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative,* ed.Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 57.
[122] Gunning, 60.
[123] Gunning, 61.
[124] The insertion of 'unnecessary' scenes in modern films – such as those rich in special effects – is a remnant of the culture of sensation that characterised early film. The aesthetic power of this kind of scenes does not contribute to the plot, but satisfies the gaze and makes sure it does not wander outside

the valence of linearity – which encompasses fragmentation and rupture – as a dominating cognitive model of the turn-of-the-century, is implied by Saussure, who understands it as one of the a priori constituting elements of speech, in which sense (narrative) only emerges subsequently.[125] In Saussurean linguistics, the linear form of language informs communications processes and reflects a spontaneous and natural tendency to arrange signifiers in time and space.[126] This is the implication of the fragmentary nature of signifiers, whose succession makes speech a syntagmatic entity. The role of signifiers in turn-of-the-century linguistic theory is clarified by Gasparov:

> [...] das Bestimmende [the signifier] belongst o the world of physical objects. It is a 'thing' – a thing of a particular kind, to be sure, since it comes into existence solely by being connected to something it 'defines'; still, with or without this connection, it remains a piece of matter. Like any matter, it is *fragmentary*: it is a piece, a particle that exists along many other particles [...]. The world of signifiers [...] is a world of fragments. It is not whole: it exists only as a conglomeration of fragmentary entities; no matter how many signifiers are at hand, they never cease to be fragments.[127]

Linearity which Saussure defined as 'the axis of successions [...] on which only one thing can be considered at a time' thus enables potentially infinite recombinations of fragments into wholes.[128] Narrative and sense are absent at this stage, and emerge only when signifiers are linked to signifieds, through a passage that limits and locks the endless numbers of possible combinations available prior to this stage.

Saussure's thesis has been rejected by later philosophers of language (e.g. Jackobson) who emphasised the weaknesses and contradictions underpinning this understanding of linearity. However, it must be taken into account that Saussurean linguistics – with linearity being one of two fundamental features of the linguistic sign – embodies an understanding of language as form rather than substance, where nothing but difference can exist. The *Cours*, a collection of lessons in linguistics taught by Saussure between 1906 and 1911, and sketched more than a decade earlier, is the product of its times and a certain

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the screen. In the same way, the singular manifestations of the catwalk keep the eye focused on this whole made up of fragments.

[125] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) (London: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 70.

[126] In the sense that, time is needed to produce a sentence, which occupies a line, following a direction that beholders have learnt to follow: left to right, right to left or top to bottom.

[127] Boris Gasparov, *Beyond Pure Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 107.

[128] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 75-6.

synchronic analogy between its theory and media formats that developed and were popular around that time cannot go unnoticed.

Considering signifiers prior to their association with signifieds discloses the intrasystemic balance on which linguistic systems rest and that allows narrative to emerge. However, in the one-dimensional, dissociated world of signifiers, the only temporality that matters is the ephemeral one of their present and immediate enunciation. An implication is that in spectacles that embed this kind of sequentialisation the temporal distance among individual bodies/images/artefacts is intrinsically reduced, almost nullified by the lack of narrative framing.

The relational logics underpinning the topos of the 'bodies walking in a line' are at play both in the commercial catwalk and in *Fashion in Motion*. Highlighting the fragmentary nature of individual ensembles, that is to say, suggesting a focus on individual dresses and models rather than on the relation to what precedes or follows them in the presentation, creates an obstacle to the emergence of narrative. From this perspective, bringing the catwalk into the museum means transporting into its premises a format which intrinsically favours a-historical and non-narrative explorations of that past that it seeks to celebrate. Thus, in the Raphael Room a dress loosens its ties to a given collection, maintaining instead its fragmentary nature, as a fragment amongst other fragments. The remix of designers' past collections through *Fashion in Motion* thus brings into the museum the timeframe of immediate attraction and contemplation.

The lack of narrative within *Fashion in Motion* stimulates considerations on the role of museum presentations as narrative media and on the idea that, due to the educational role taken by the modern museum, its purpose is to deliver a narrative. However, its immediacy unearths the return of a culture of sensation and desire which dominated the pre-history of museums and galleries, and which affected the presentation of objects and collections differently from the turn-of-the-century museum. Characterising early presentations of collections was the idea of the inseparability of objects and their sensual and psychological effect on beholders, whose sense of wonder renovated itself with different artefacts. Examples include presentations of collections in wunderkammern and cabinets of curiosities, where wonder and curiosity were themselves principles of aesthetic presentation.

This force reached out to early modern displays, in which artefacts started to be seen as related to other artefacts, but still grabbed for attention individually, albeit with different degrees of intensity.[129] If a relationship between artefacts existed, it was feeble, and in the absence of narrative structures, their reception was based on their value as attractions, as awe-inspiring fragments with the ability of taking individual beholders onto emotive terrains and sentient journeys.

Far from implying a level of deceit, these declaredly exhibitionist presentations intended to produce viewing experiences in which visitors did not follow a narrative that had been pre-established through institutional and curatorial interpretation, but became part of an auratic experience of inner sensing. With the advent of modern narrative exhibitions – chronological or thematic, historical or ahistorical – and a significant expansion of the educational functions of museums, presentations confined spectatorship to a dimension characterised by the dichotomy between the optic and the haptic, often founding its rituals on the former. In this process, the power of the attraction of objects was not erased, but it was merely absorbed by the narrative itself, to emerge again precisely in the fetishisation of their authenticity through their removal from the tactile range. However, in *Fashion in Motion*, like in early modern presentations of objects and collections, emphasis on the function of objects as part of a narrative is lost, to be placed instead on the unitary dimension of the medium through which they are presented: a spectacular, cosmopolitan medium turning the dimension of opticality into an intense sensorial experience.

Summary & Conclusion

At the Victoria and Albert Museum audiences can discover fashion both within more traditional displays as well as, in motion, on the catwalk. By placing fashion artefacts within an interpretive frame that offers visitors a communal embodied experience grounded in its immediacy, the V&A has employed the catwalk as tool that addresses the issue of the lack of the body and movement in static presentations of fashion. On the other hand, it has created a format that requires visitors' presence in the museum, thus also making *Fashion in Motion*

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[129] This idea is explored by Richard Altick in his exploration of exhibitions in London in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Altick looks at a vast array of presentation modalities and typologies of 'exhibitions' (including mechanical shows, 'monster-mongers' painting exhibitions, large scene scenarios, panoramas, dioramas and 'eudophusikons'), explaining that those shows cater for 'the indulgence of curiosity and the sheer sense of wonder'(1978: 2-3).

part of a wider institutional strategy aimed at tackling audiences' increasing distance from cultural heritage institutions, brought by globalisation and the high availability of content online in the forms of digital replicas.

Chapter II began by looking for the conditions that determined the possibility of developing the *Fashion in Motion* format. These were found in the pre-existing connotations of fashion as spectacular, which have defined London fashion in the 1990s. In evoking the concept of spectacle, I have here referred, on the one hand, to the definition developed by Aristotle in the context of Greek rhetoric, where it was understood as an aesthetic frame creating an emotional response, but charging content with a new level of meaning; on the other hand, I have referred to Guy Debord's indictment of the estranging role of media in defining people's relation with commodities. In particular, the latter postulates that the end of last century represents the culmination of an 'historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life', establishing a form of seduction that ends up defining the identity of both objects and consumers.[130] The implications of both Aristotle's and Debord's understandings of spectacle were exploited as opportunities by the fashion industry in order to launch itself in 1990s.

The chapter has then drawn a parallel with the latest permutation in the history of the V&A and its exhibition policies, revealing a predisposition for spectacularisation that can be retrieved in its early years' mission and in the reasons that led its foundation. Aiming to produce a long-term effect on the British manufacturing industry, the spectacular character of the V&A emerged from the perceived necessity to refine people's taste and their role as consumers. This approach was revamped decades later in the late 1990s, by the emergence of a national cultural policy that demanded the cultural industries to be spectacular in order to improve the competitiveness of Britain and its cities, thus highlighting the transformation of culture itself into a commodity, as was predicted by Debord in 1967.

This particular aspect, the issue of the relationship between museums and spectacle in the 1990s, has been considered through the lens of Hal Foster's interpretation of the ubiquitous use of design by large institution to attract audiences, and his call for more critical display modalities. This has led to a discussion of the role of the *Fashion in Motion* format, which has encoded the spectacular character of the recognisable medium of the fashion show into a coherent script that stimulates users' interaction with designers' past collections.

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[130] Debord, *Society of Spectacle,* 42.

The format has played a key role in re-positioning the museum in the mind of audiences as an institution about the contemporary. However, at the same time, in challenging some of the defining features of the catwalk, particularly those associated with its regulated access and atmosphere of exclusivity, and in opening up to emerging designers (in contrast with the fashion exhibitions that were hosted at the V&A before that time) *Fashion in Motion* has also brought in the museum a level of criticism of the fashion system.

The exhibition logics of the museum and those of the catwalk overlap in other ways, too. In keeping with this thesis' main objectives to identify strategies of display that challenge traditional chronological and thematic narratives, the present chapter has focused on the dimension of immediacy within which designers' past collections are (re)collocated through the fashion show and on the nullification of temporal distance between artefacts and visitors. This has been seen as being dependant on the structure of the catwalk, based on the linear movement of models in space, but also on its reliance on visuality as well as on other senses. The strength of this topos has been discussed by looking at the historical context in which the catwalk was produced, and at the popularity of forms of entertainment that originated in the same period. In this sense, the catwalk has been considered as the surviving form of a vast category of presentation modes that reflected a lack of concern for the emergence of diegetic narration, underscoring instead a direct confrontation with the medium, and its palpable presence in space. Revolving around the idea of the linear succession of artefacts, images, or people these media formats were based on an aesthetics of sequentialisation and of fragmented views, in which the emergence of narrative was secondary to the idea of being involved by *things*, or by a situation which is determined by objects' presence.

As the immediacy and the materiality of the fashion show are brought in the museum, as themselves features of a displayed object, a new museological culture is brought to the surface, and in doing so, the sense of attraction created by the medium itself challenges our perception of what museum presentations might be for. This perception corrodes the understanding of exhibitions are narrative formats, thus also contesting the role of museums as mere repositories of objects. The shift towards a form of museological discourse as the siting of situational experience, thus reveals that contemporary, post-historical museology is looking back at the origins of collection presentations and the evocation of attraction and emotive response.

Directly following this chapter, the next one will consider a different form of linearity. Looking at the permanent exhibition at MUDE (Museu do Design e da Moda, Museum of Design and Fashion, Lisbon), linearity will be isolated in the succession of displays on a timeline that corresponds to the institutional chronology of dress and design history. The peculiarity of this exhibition format is that the reception of this historiographical model and its perceived transparency is made to co-exist with a mode that challenges it openly, by creating suggestions for visitors to cut across the path that has been pre-established by its curators and to establish their own connections and relations. This is possible because the 'corridor' of displays is produced within an open plan space, and the possibility of shifting from one to the other is always available.
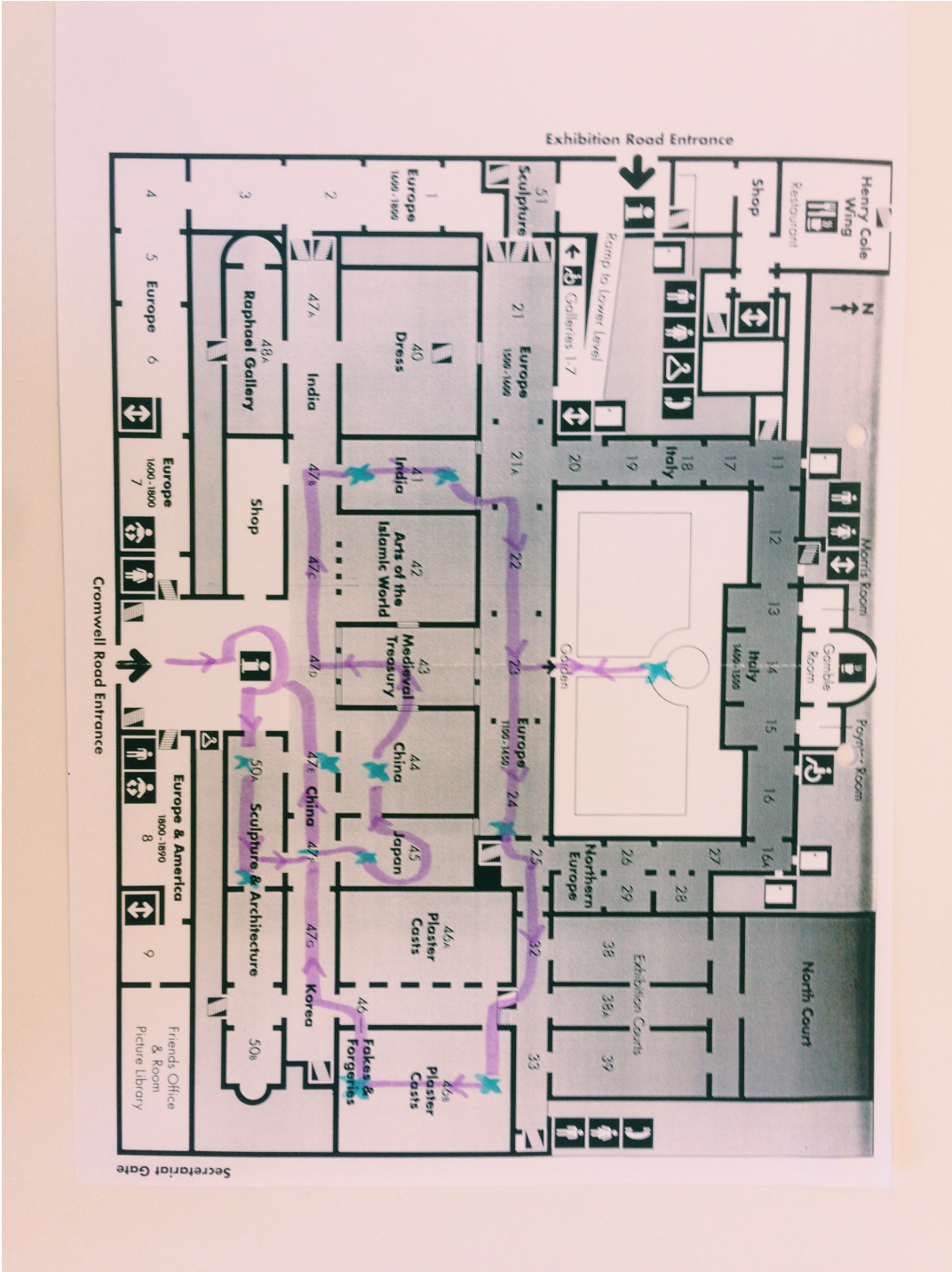
Fig. 2.1 A map of the ground floor of the V&A, marked by Andrew Bolton to show the path that models would walk across during the earliest Fashion in Motion events. Courtesy of the V&A.

Figure 2.2. 'Fashion in Motion: Vivienne Tam & Jimmy Choo' by Antonio Canova's Three Graces (1814-17). August 1999. Courtesy of the V&A.

Figure 2.3 & 2.4. 'Fashion in Motion: Vivienne Tam & Jimmy Choo' in the Cast Courts. August 1999. Courtesy of the V&A.

Figure 2.5. 'Fashion in Motion: Philip Treacy & Anthony Price' in The Cast Courts. May 1999. Courtesy of the V&A. This was the first Fashion in Motion event. The image shows a model walking across the Cast Courts. This was the earliest configuration of *Fashion in Motion* (1999-2001) before it was reframed in the Raphael Gallery in the form of a catwalk presentation.

Figure 2.6. 'Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen & Shaun Leane' in the Cast Courts. October 2001. This was the last *Fashion in Motion* event to take place in the galleries. Wilcox explains: 'The Alexander McQueen & Shaun Lee show was crazy, it was unbelievably crowded and the V&A found it a little bit scary […] Long established curators […] thought it was out of control, which, to be honest, it really was sometimes.' See *Apeendix,* p. 329. Courtesy of the V&A.

Fig. 2.7 'Fashion in Motion: Sibling' in the Raphael Gallery. Courtesy of the V&A.

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Fig. 2.8 'Fashion in Motion: Peter Pilotto in the Raphael Gallery. Saint George altarpiece in the background. Since 2001 this configuration emerged as the standard *Fashion in Motion* presentation. Models walk down the Raphael Gallery with ticketed visitor either sitting or standing at the sides. Courtesy of the V&A.

Fig. 2.9 'Fashion in Motion: Molly Goddard' in the Sainsbury Galley. 2017 was a year of experimentation for *Fashion in Motion*. Here it is set in the new Sainsbury Gallery, where the traditional catwalk is abandoned in favour of an imaginative stage evoking the conservation of casts in the archive. Courtesy of the V&A.

Fig. 2.10 'Fashion in Motion: Grace Wales Bonner' in the Raphael Gallery. This event departed from the original catwalk presentation by recalling the tradition of tableaux mouvants, where static poses were connected by transitions in movement. This image shows the positioning of the visitor: standing by and free to move around the display. Courtesy of the V&A.

Chapter III

MUDE, Lisbon:
Unique and Multiple Historical Explorations

> Linear time is a Western invention; time is not linear, it is a marvellous tangle where at any moment, points can be selected and solutions invented without beginning or end.[1]
>
> (Lina Bo Bardi, architect and curator)

Introduction

In the historical centre of Europe's westernmost capital lies MUDE, Lisbon's Museum of Design and Fashion. Founded in 2009, MUDE is one of Europe's youngest design heritage institutions with its collections offering a singular encounter between furniture and fashion design. Taking MUDE's permanent exhibition as its case study, this chapter will begin by considering the impact of heritage institutions on the regeneration of abandoned buildings and their areas, to then turn into an issue of how a pre-existing building can influence museum practices, aims, and vision.

   To do so, the first part of the chapter will consider the shift undergone by the concept of creativity in times of crisis, and how in Lisbon this renewed paradigm has contributed to the emergence of the concept of a 'work-in-progress' museum. Legitimised by the older, cosmopolitan trend of 'loft living' and by an established tradition of presentations of art in former industrial sites, at MUDE exhibitions take place in an edifice

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[1] Lina Bo Bardi, quoted by Olivia De Oliveira, *Lina Bo Bardi: Subtle substances of architecture* (São Paulo: Romano Guerra Editora, 2006).

that had previously undergone a visible process of abandonment and decay, with only minimal refurbishment done, and in which the exhibition programme takes place side by side to the requalification of the building (Fig. 3.1). The concept of a work-in-progress museum showcases this process as much as the exhibitions, highlighting its continuity the museum and a broader process of rebranding taking place in Lisbon's city centre.

The chapter will then consider MUDE's permanent display, *Único e Múltiplo: Two Centuries of Design* and the experience of the past that it creates. The setting of the exhibition in a vast open plan has favoured the juxtaposition of two modes of historical exploration: on the one hand, a traditional experience based on a route that follows institutional chronology; on the other hand, an experience based on dispersion and reconfiguration and driven by the impulses of visitors. In doing so, MUDE shows its potential to become the image of a post-representational museum in which traditional historiography can coexist with a conception of history as an endless interweaving of events. The existence of an established route and the possibilities to deviate from it, along the frequent rotation of displayed artefacts within the permanent exhibition, the dynamic relation between the museum and the surrounding streets, and the exhibition setting in a modern ruin, are factors that evoke Calum Storrie's model of a museum characterised by 'messiness, category confusion' and 'elaborate historical layering', through which the museum emerges as a reflection and an extension of the environment outside its walls.[2]

A museum of design and fashion for the city of Lisbon

In 2013, the ICOM Portugal and ICOM Europe joint conference highlighted the difficulties faced by museums in times of crisis. The conference discussed the extent of the impact of the recession on museums in Europe. At the same time, it called for the support of the European Commission through structural funds. The Lisbon declaration that was written on this occasion aimed to demonstrate that museums can contribute not only to the cultural and social development of a nation but also to its growth through the generation of income and employment. Thus, the conference also emphasised the role that museums can have in community life, particularly in relation to a broader strategy in the cultural policy of cities.[3]

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[2] Storrie, *Delirious Museum*, 3.
[3] ICOM, *Public Policies Toward Museums in Time of Crisis. Mapa Das Ideias* (Lisbon, 2013).

The fact that the event took place in Lisbon is significant. In 2008, Portugal was hit by the financial crisis, becoming affected by one of the worst recessions in the Eurozone, and at the times when this chapter is being written, Portugal has not yet recovered entirely. This period was characterised by a decline in private investment, which in turn produced a very tough atmosphere for the public sector and unprecedented austerity. Despite this, Lisbon has distinguished itself in Europe for making creativity a key part of its development strategy and drive for competiveness, affirming itself as a 'creative' environment by overcoming the old dichotomies between economy and culture, the local and the global, the ephemeral and the permanent. The 2009 opening of MUDE, operated as a department of the *Camera Municipal de Lisboa* – Lisbon City Council – can thus be inserted in a process of economic rehabilitation and city-branding that has largely invested on the creative industries and in which even museums managed to find room.

The literature on the benefits of culture-led investments on contemporary urban economy is wide and looks at the issue from a variety of points of view. If a cluster of research has looked at the direct economic benefits of cultural investments by market-oriented local governments (for example in terms of job creation or as touristic attraction,)[4] others have focused on their ineffable, often unquantifiable value. Urbanists Miles, Kirkham, and Kunzmann, for example, describe the role of such investments in changing the perception of a city, and in promoting better education and entertainment.[5] In the United Kingdom, an AHRC funded project titled *The Public Value of the Humanities*[6] has considered this issue from the perspectives of various disciplines: Jonatan Bate and Mike Press claim that investments in the humanities help improve the university system,[7] and Ian Borden explains that investing in architecture makes specific difference environmentally and socially.[8] Speaking about museums, Christopher Breward considers the implications of investments on

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[4] For example, see Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, 'Neoliberalizing Space,' *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, ed. Neil Brenner and Nick Theodore (Hoboken: Wiley, 2003). See also: Richard Florida, 'The rise of the creative class,' *The Washington Monthly* 34 (2002): 15-25. See also: Charles Landry. *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovator*s (London: Routledge 2008).

[5] See: Malcolm Miles, and Nicola Kirkham. *Cultures and Settlements, Advances in Art & Urban Futures* (Bristol: Intellect, 2003). See also: Klaus Kunzmann, 'Culture, Creativity and Spatial Planning', *TPR* 75.4 (2004): 383-404.

[6] Jonathan Bate, ed., *The Public Value of the Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

[7] See: Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction,' *The Public Value of the Humanities,* ed. Bate, 1-15. See: Mike Press, 'All this Useless Beauty,' In *The Public Value of the Humanities,* ed. Bate, 155-70.

[8] Iain Borden, 'Thinking about Architecture,' *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. Bate, 142-54.

the development of museological practice, in turn producing important social effects, for example the encouragement of inclusion and the rise of social capital.[9] Breward also suggests that investing in museums can 'kick-start urban regeneration' thus pointing in the direction of a vast cluster of research in the macro-area of creative investment.[10] An example of research in the purview of museum investments and urban regeneration is, for example, Richard Williams' study of role that the 1988 opening of a branch of Tate in Liverpool's abandoned Albert Dock has played in re-purposing its 'picturesque' brick and iron pavilions and in bringing life to an area with strong connotations of economic, social, and cultural decay.[11] This is a view that has stimulated the considerations on Lisbon that follow in next pages.

One of the quarters that have benefitted the most from the 'creative turn' in Lisbon City Council's policies is Lisbon's 'downtown', the Baixa Pombalina district, where MUDE lies. Built after the 1755 earthquake and current location of the government, this area architecturally reflects at the same time Portugal's past mercantile strength and the decline and stagnation suffered during 36 years of dictatorship. After the 1974 fall of Salazar's ascetic and reclusive regime, in Lisbon the transition to neoliberalism was driven by an industrious belief in modernisation, implying, among other aspects, the development of its industrial sector and the construction of new residential areas around the new factories. In this process, the dictatorship and the era that followed it, with Portugal's re-found connections with the external world, produced two different images of Lisbon, one incongruent with the other, one anti-urban, the other pro-growth and with metropolitan longings. Lisbon's boundaries were expanded considerably: its semi-rural areas disappeared in favour of highly densely populated suburban sites, characterised by an agglomeration of buildings and yet by the lack of adequate infrastructure.[12]

Lisbon's expansion happened at the expense at its historical heart: not connected to these new residential areas by public transport, with little parking and roads that were inaccessible to cars, with buildings that had already been left untouched for generations, the Baixa Pombalina became a breeding ground for criminality: a dystopic environment of

[9] Breward, 'A Museum Perspective.'
[10] Breward, 171.
[11] Richard Williams. *The Anxious City: English Urbanism in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2004).
[12] Albet, Abel, and João Seixas, *Urban Governance in Southern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012)

undefined use where it was unimaginable and undesirable to live.[13] As the sprawl of suburbia continued mainly through private development, nothing halted the process of physical and symbolic abrasion in the city centre: economical activities became fewer and fewer, and its population reached minimum numbers.[14] The process continued when a program for the reconstruction of Lisbon's peripheries started in 1986 following the beginning of Portugal's membership to the European Community. Developing an idea of creativity as instrumental to the successful achievement of economic goals, the city largely relied on the attraction of major cultural projects: in the 1990s Lisbon hosted the 1994 European Capital of Culture and Expo 98, Lisbon World Exposition, which brought to the development of the post-industrial residential and leisure area of Parque das Nações.[15]

A turning point for the Baixa Pombalina was reached with the 2007 election of a new centre-left local administration under the leadership of Antonio Costa (who later in 2015 would become Prime Minister). The new municipality actively produced policies, practices, and mind-sets aimed to develop public-private partnerships, nurture instruments to help deliver objectives, and generally put in place a vision for a more participatory form of governance (becoming the first city in Europe to adopt a Participatory Budgeting mode.[16] Examples of these policies are abundant: they range from the creation of fiscal incentives for rehabilitation work (e.g. VAT reduction from 26% to 6%) and extension of eligibility for them, to the establishment of supporting infrastructures (for example, the 'Startup Lisboa' project, a creative business incubator founded by Lisbon City Council to support companies during their first years, in order to increase their chances for success).

The process of regeneration of the Baixa Pombalina engendered a passionate relationship between memory and its representation. In 2007, the opening of the first

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[13] Francisco Serdoura, 'Rehabilitation of Baixa Pombalina in Lisbon. A Strategy for Environmental and Economic Sustainability,' *Sustainable Architecture and Urban Development 3*, ed. Steffen Lehmann, Husam Waer, and Jamal Al-Qawasmi (Amman: The Center Csaar for The Study of Architecture, 2010): 533-49.
[14] For an account of the implications of these phenomena in Libson see: Tiago Oliveira, Kerri Farnsworth, and Mike Gibson, *Report/Learning from Lisbon.* The Academy of Urbanism, accessed August 04 2015 https://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk/report-learning-from-lisbon/; and: Malcolm Jack, *Lisbon City of Sea. A History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 175-78.
[15] Samantha McArthur. 'Lisbon: Countdown to Expo 1998,' *Europe* 365 (1997): 37–38.
[16] João Costa, 'Urban rehabilitation societies: The Portuguese case, characteristics and potential,' *Journal of Urban Regeneration & Renewal* 3.4 (2010): 395–414; and: Simone Tulumello, 'Reconsidering neoliberal urban planning in times of crisis: urban regeneration policy in a 'dense' space in Lisbon,' *Urban Geography* 37.1 (2015): 117–40.

underground station in the district improved connectivity with the rest of the city, and in 2008 the new administration launched new measures for the approval of a master plan, focusing on the re-use of its real estate, as well as on the installation of a mix of cultural industries, institutions and activities, including music, design, publishing, and fashion. Branded as delivering 'a city for the future'[17] and as the '3 Rs plan' (re-use, rehabilitation, regeneration) the masterplan aimed to interrogate the social significance of the public space, and to create a vibrant urban environment able to attract both residents and tourists.[18] What emerges from the document is an expanded municipal interest in innovation, participation, and visual impact. The document announcing this masterplan also includes mention of MUDE's forthcoming opening on Rua Augusta – one of the arteries of the Baixa Pombalina – just one block away from the famous landmark arch on the Praça do Comércio and the Tagus river.[19]

It must be pointed out that the history of the foundation of the museum and that of its collections, its building, and its museological program reflects how the outbreak of the financial crisis produced a shift in the concept of 'creativity' that is referenced through those very policies. Deriving from the need to find a viable and more durable approach to thinking about innovation and its implications, this shift engendered considerations on how to utilise existing resources, both material and immaterial. In this respect at MUDE a sustainable and flexible solution was found in the establishment of exhibition venues in a central building that had not been fully refurbished, besides the basic health & safety improvements that were necessary to open and safely welcome both visitors and collections. Exhibitions have thus taken place side by side with the modernisation of the building, a process that has become an integral part of the museological programme and that slowed down due its success among audiences.[20] On the other hand, the aforementioned shift consists in the development of bottom-up approaches, requiring collaboration between institutions, the private sector and with citizens. This is represented by the fact that both the museum's

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[17] Oliveira, et al, *Report/Learning from Lisbon.* The Academy of Urbanism, 2012. Accessed august 04 2015, https://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk/report-learning-from-lisbon/

[18] Tulumello, 'Reconsidering neoliberal urban planning.'

[19] Camera Municipal de Lisboa, *Plano Diretor Municipal* (Lisbon: Camera Municiapal de Lisboa, 2012): 314.

[20] Bárbara Coutinho, 'In conversation with Bárbara Coutinho,' interview by Alessandro Bucci, transcript (Lisbon, May 2015), *Appendix*, 337-44.

fashion and the furniture design collections have been developed by an individual collector, Francisco Capelo, and only subsequently acquired by Lisbon City Council.

Displaying fashion in a modern ruin

With its eight floors and 15,000 square meters the grandiose building that today is home to MUDE lies in a key position in Lisbon's town centre, punctuating a long sequence of fast fashion shops, financial buildings, and noisy touristic amenities. It was built between 1952 and 1967 on a project by Portuguese architect Cristino da Silva to replace a former 18th century Pombaline building that had become too small for the needs of its new owner, the Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU – National Overseas Bank), a bank of issue for Portugal's ex colonies, that commissioned the works in order to move in its premises. As a metaphor of the power of its commissioner, whose name is engraved on the Neoclassical façade, a composition of sculptures of the coat of arms of Portugal as well as those of its former possessions over-seas – Goa, Macau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and East Timor – is overcome in grandness only by the building's imposing steel door. However, inside its monumental volumes hides a building carcass, stripped to its bone structure, and now in use as a museum of furniture design and fashion.

BNU ceased to exist in 2001. Following a merger with the government-owned bank Caixa Geral de Depósitos (CGD), the new owner of the Viennese-style building commissioned a corporate makeover of its interiors. The works were interrupted following intervention by the Portuguese Institute of Architectural Heritage (IGESPAR), which started to follow the building's conservation process and proposed significant alterations to the CGD's plans. These were aimed at preserving some of the original features and the heritage that they represented. Architectural critic David Cohn describes Silva's main banking floor as 'finished in exotic marbles, stainless-steel columns, and stucco ceilings with a glazed central dome' recalling 'late-19th and early-20th century Viennese interiors', Otto Wagner and Josef Hoffmann.[21] However, by the time of the intervention, all that survived was the bank's stone counter (which will become a key element of MUDE's permanent display *Único e Múltiplo*), some flooring and a mosaic by the entrance, an interesting colonial representation of

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[21] David Cohn, 'Record Interiors: Museum of Design & Fashion,' *Architectural Record* 197 (2009): 68.

otherness picturing the encounter between Portuguese explorers and the grey skinned inhabitants on the other side of Hercules' columns.

Whilst everything else had already been stripped off, the interiors' elegant coherence with the rest of the building is well documented by photographs that were taken while the bank was operative, by the architect's surviving original drawings, and interestingly, by a 2013 exhibition at MUDE titled *Nacional e Ultramarino. O BNU e a arquitectura do poder* (National and Overseas. BNU and the architecture of power). The exhibition, developed in collaboration with the *Museu de Artes Decorativas Portuguesas* (Portuguese Decorative Arts Museum) presented original furniture, a reconstruction of the CEO's office, projects, and designs for the public area of the bank. By displaying these artefacts and documents at MUDE, the exhibition put forth a re-enacting museological experience while also contributing to the development of the museum's agenda to educate about Portuguese design and to write its history. As the new plans after IGERSPAR's intervention became too expensive, the CGD decided to put the building on sale and relocate elsewhere: scarred by timing of the preservation process the building was abandoned in 2004.

In 2007, the history of the BNU building overlapped with that of the foundation of MUDE. This happened as Bárbara Coutinho, founder and current director of MUDE, was exploring different possible venues where a new design and fashion museum could be set on behalf of Lisbon City Council. One of her initial ideas included the possibility of using more than one premise, establishing a network of relationships with galleries, universities, schools, shops, where exhibitions would be held. This idea originated from and aimed to emphasise the council's sense of 'responsibility towards the public space', its regeneration, and its uses, largely highlighted in the master plan, and reflected also in the final choice of its current premises in the Baixa Pombalina.[22] At the same time, it sought to underline the strong connection felt by Coutinho between the materials of the collection and the city, understood both as generic urban fabric, and specifically as Lisbon. The idea of a 'diffused' museum was abandoned when the possibility of using the Rua Augusta building arose. Two more years passed and eventually in 2009 Lisbon City Council bought the building, allowing MUDE to move in for what was only meant to be a temporary solution.

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[22] Coutinho, *Appendix,* 338.

Despite its central position in the city's historic centre and in its inhabitants' collective imagination, at that point the building had been closed for three years. Coutinho explains what the conditions of the building were on her first visit:

> I took a part in the choice of the Banco Ultramarino as well. I visited the building in September 2007 with the mere and the collector. The museum then was like Bosnia just after the conflict. No water, no electricity, very unclean, because this whole building, in the heart of Lisbon, with its 15000 square meters had been closed for almost three years. [...] When I expressed my opinion about it, saying that it would be wonderful if the museum could be hosted in this building, the mere explained to me very directly that the Council did have the money to buy the building – which costed about 20,000,000 Euros - but did not have any money to refurbish its interiors.[23]

With only some essential work done MUDE started its activities at the ground floor of BNU's former building. This presented itself as a single hall, the size of the entire building block. Windows running all around, and doors at the centre of each façade, allow the whole area to lie in the light of natural sunlight and reveal from the inside the unique spatial relation between the building and the four roads around it. Architects Ricardo Carvalho and Joana Vilhena put forth an architectural proposal aiming to remove any signs of its most recent fit-out and to amplify this sense of space through the use of light. Through multiple light reflections, attention is draw to both the collection and the exposed concrete, making the area a highly stenographic and versatile environment. A single glass sheet was added to separate the main area from the café, a part of the museum which is currently in use only during exhibition openings and events. From the café, windows running around the room allow to look at Rua Augusta and vice-versa. Contributing to delivering the idea that this solution was provisional – and with honesty on the availability of resources – the proposed intervention also included the use of pallets, scaffolding sheeting, and white industrial paint. A seamless white elastic-copolymer sheet covers the inner side of the bank's counter, hiding a sequence of fluorescent lamps, and turning the marble structure into a glowing ring. With the passing of the years, MUDE has conquered different areas of the building with a permanent display, temporary exhibitions, a book shop, a café, and staff offices. At the times when this chapter is being written 4 of the building's 8 floors are in use. However, substantial

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[23] Coutinho, *Appendix*, 340.

developments in the history of MUDE and of its building are meant to take place in the near future, following the Council's approval in 2014 of an investment of 9 million euros.[24] The new plan will make all floors accessible, with the opening of a restaurant in one of the building's top floors and a store focusing on South Atlantic design at the ground floor where MUDE's permanent exhibition is being held.

With minimal work MUDE opened in a neglected building and made the ruin an integral part of its exhibitions, and its preservation a key element of its mission (Fig. 3.2 & 3.3). This choice has thus enabled the ruin to flourish not simply as background but also as symbol of the process of the negotiation between financial and time pressures in Lisbon's ongoing revival. But besides representing a compromise, making a museum in a such a challenging environment is legitimised by a contemporary fascination for the re-appropriation and functional historical re-qualification of abandoned buildings and neglected town centres. In Lisbon's historical centre, former markets have become trendy spaces for 'gourmet' food halls, former factories have become radical co-working spaces, bookstores and regional food shops, old banks have been turned into museums, planning development with a general acceptance of the decayed infrastructure. In his overview of MUDE's interiors for *Architectural Record* Cohn concludes that this is typical of that generation – to which architects Corvalho and Vilhena, but also Coutinho belong – that 'has returned from the suburbs to live in the long-neglected historical city center [sic]'.[25]

This trend, however, is not exclusive of Lisbon. On the contrary, the aesthetic cult of the inactive, abandoned building is a commonplace of urban regeneration processes in the post-industrial area. In particular, the siting of museums and art galleries in spaces that once used to have a utilitarian function and that have dramatically been transformed into exhibition spaces seems to have already defined specific concepts in the field of exhibition practices. Their typical format combines the repurpose of the modern ruin and their areas, and research on exhibited materials, engendering a viewing experience that emphasises and valorises both aspects. However, the use of post-industrial sites for cultural purposes, of which MUDE represents one of the most recent examples, seems to have a precedent in inhabiting solutions that blurred the line between home and studio.

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[24] Camera Municipal De Lisboa, *Programa Preliminar e o Projeto de Execução da Requalificação Integral do Edifício do MUDE* (Libson: Camera Municiapal de Lisboa, 2014).
[25] Cohn, 'Museum of Design & Fashion,' 69.

Identifying it as 'loft lifestyle', sociologist Sharon Zukin has explained that living in post-industrial remnants started in to be seen as an attractive possibility already in the 1970s.[26] This is particularly the case of those cities whose centres had been eroded by the growth of suburbia in the previous decades: as the case of Lisbon embodies belatedly, the peripheries were often the areas where factories relocated, and in doing so they brought with them new housing development. Zukin, who identified New York as a progenitor of the form of urban regeneration process re-purposing the modern ruin, considered how the industrial area of Lower Manhattan became an area where not only homes but also creative business could emerge, soon turning the area into the sophisticated centre it is today. Built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the premises for warehouses and light manufacturing industries, its buildings were abandoned by the 1960s. As these were often relatively cheap they represented an invitation for developers, who were keen to keep acquisition costs low. Living in a former factory, bank, or warehouse was considered 'neither chic nor comfortable – if the possibility was considered at all' and yet became popular among artists who saw in their disharmony the opportunity for large spaces at a small cost.[27] As they moved in using their often-modest means and making only minimal changes, their 'lofts' soon started to reveal the potential for new explorations of production of meaning.[28]

For those artists, in most cases Conceptualists and Fluxists, the critique of traditional living solutions often corresponded to a critique of traditional art practice. As they lived in former factories, industry provided them with both the tangible and ideological frame for their production: their full immersion in spaces that had been failed by capitalism was paralleled by their interruption of the credible celebration of industry put forward earlier in the context of Pop Art and Minimalism, which instead featured the structural logic and the characteristics of industrially produced objects, including their seriality and a greater awareness of the masses and their iconographies. Art historian Benjamin Buchloch explains that conceptual artists managed 'to purge artistic production of the aspiration towards an affirmative collaboration with the forces of industrial production and consumption'[29]

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[26] Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (London: Radius, 1988).
[27] Zukin, 58.
[28] Aaron Shkuda, *The Lofts of SoHo: Gentrification, Art, and Industry in New York, 1950–1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 5-8.
[29] Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,' *October* 55 (1990): 105-43.

developing and promoting instead a concept of 'art as idea, as idea'[30] and the declaration that the 'idea is the machine that makes art'.[31] This new philosophical drive formed the basis of a critical reflection of art's means of reference, developing a view of the work of art as something unique and bearing implications on the visual manifestations of meaning. The immediate result was the challenging of the traditional hierarchies between materials, conventions of representation and techniques, and a move beyond the medias of sculpture and painting to include art forms that did not necessarily produce finished objects, including large-scale installations and performances. These were often difficult to move and sell, and did not need to be viewed in a formal gallery. The dismissed factories in which artists lived and developed their practice provided the scale, flexibility, and informality required for making and showing their work. In this sense, these inhabiting solutions could no longer be identified with the traditional studio category, nor were they solely their homes: they became at the same time spaces of creation and promotion, in some cases putting forward a conceptual fusion between the work of art and the context of its display.

Zukin explains that the a shift in how the lofts were perceived was produced during the 1970s, as the middle-class began to appreciate the arts, historical preservation, the heritage built environment and, more generally, as she puts it, the 'authenticity' that they embodied.[32] The perception of abandoned buildings as not unideal began to form itself as an a-priori, a process that would pave the road of regeneration and gentrification: very soon Lower Manhattan's artists' lifestyle became a cultural model, and their lofts became a symbol of it As buildings that were once considered slums started to be re-colonised by the same class that had benefited from them when these were places of production, their cultural value increased and with it their price. This fascination was, as described by Robert Harbison in his exploration of urban perception *Eccentric Spaces*, a product of the imagination, which operates not by restoring the past that it is nostalgic of, but rather by dreaming of potential futures, which share very little with the past that had inspired the formerly abandoned buildings' new inhabitants.[33] In this sense, the contemporary appeal for the modern ruin

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[30] Joseph Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy' (1969), *Art After Philosophy and After: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 12.

[31] Sol Lewitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (1969), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 12.

[32] reflecting a tendency that would later announce the rise of the new museology, stemming from the idea that the arts and historical preservation were not any longer upper-class terrain.

[33] Robert Harbison, *Eccentric spaces* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

operates on a principle that recalls Benjamin's 'optical unconscious', substituting a 'space informed by human consciousness' with 'a space informed by the unconscious' and ascribing on buildings a patina of desirability that they didn't previously have.[34] The modern ruin thus already contains in itself the condition for a 'projection' which transforms the visual signs that characterise decay into a desirable image and an upscale commodity. In this passage, the recognition of modern ruins as the expression of post-industrial civilisation turns them into active sites of exchange, holding the peculiar status of modern and post-modern at the same time, belated yet contemporary.

The use of former warehouses, industrial lofts and former factories also started to be experimented for public spaces, becoming popular especially among the creative industries, including museums. In his recent study of the transformation of New York's lofts Aaron Shkuda observes that while the first gallery opened in South Manhattan only in 1969, by the end of the 70s there were more than 100.[35] More recently, examples of the 'Soho effect' have appeared in other areas of New York and elsewhere. In Long Island, PS1 was founded in 1971 initially as an organisation aiming to convert abandoned buildings into artist studios, to then become an exhibition space and gain an affiliation with MoMA. In 2004 the Hudson River town of Beacon (New York) saw the opening of Dia: Beacon in a box printing factory. Outside of New York, the development of The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASSMoCA) in former mills led to the opening of 19 galleries in 1999.

The trend reached Europe, too. Examples are abundant and it seems possible to comfortably limit the selection to those centres that also host programmes of fashion exhibitions. The most famous is perhaps Paris' Palais de Tokyo: once the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques building, its premises underwent decades of abandon and sat dormant since the 70s before being opened again in 2002. Before then, in occasion of the 1st Fashion Biennale in Florence (1996) Germano Celant and Ingrid Sischy used the Stazione Leopolda, (abandoned already by 1860) as the location for their exhibition *New Persona*.[36] Furthermore, both buildings are used regularly as the backdrop of fashion shows at Paris Fashion Week and Pitti Uomo. More recently Rome's Alta Roma has used the Ex Dogana (an ex train station custom house) in Rome's industrial San Lorenzo, instead the Campidoglio or Palazzo dei Congressi. In Portugal too, near Porto the Santo Thyrso incubator

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[34] Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography,' 243.
[35] Shkuda, *The Lofts of SoHo*, 6.
[36] See p. 265.

for fashion and design turned an abandoned building into a cultural and creative space where fashion start-ups show-case collections both through static displays and runways. Operating in a region that has been and continues to be the heart of the Portuguese textile industry, Santo Thyrso brought back to use the building of a textile factory founded in 1898: here the displacement from place of production to museum has never taken place, as clothes are displayed in the place where they used to be made.

The case of presentations of fashion (whether recent collections or fashionable dress from the past) in architectonical ruins inspires considerations on fashion's role as 'the measure of time'.[37] Producing commodities that press closest to the skin, fashion is defined by Benjamin as the 'sex appeal of the inorganic', a fascination for the devitalised nature surfacing the body and striving for novelty.[38] But the pursuit of the new contains the conditions for the emergence of the ruin, for our critical eye to see what is left behind as unrepresentative of the immediate present. This has to do with the process of symbolic abrasion – which precedes the material one – characterising itself as a process of semiotic decay through which the fashion artefact no longer sway over collective imagination, and ultimately shows itself as the product of the imagination it always was. In this sense, the process of *ruin*ification represents fashion's cycles, the 'senseless destruction' it celebrates, and the image of the ruin becomes a meaningful representation of its revolutionary power and what it leaves behind.[39] And just like for the requalification of the architectonical ruin in the urban environment, a dimension of nostalgia frames the recurrence of motives, garments, and techniques from the past in both daily practices and fashion design: their reappearance does not aim to reconstruct the 'fashion' and the contexts within which they first appeared, but rather they become the starting point for the creation of a new look by quoting elements from the past underlying a symbolic connection with the present. Considering architecture and fashion as systems that are geared towards the production of ruins underlines the dystopic relation between natural and symbolic temporalities. Displaying contemporary fashion in a modern ruin, thus integrates and help experience both construction and destruction into the present as tools with reconfigurative potentials.

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[37] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 165.
[38] Benjamin, *AP*, 70.
[39] Calefato, *Clothed Body,* 123.

This conceptual link becomes visible at MUDE, where the sudden interruption of the building's conversion and the surviving features of its past as a bank, reconnect visitors with its previous functions, inspiring speculation on its past routines. On the ground floor, for example, the bank's original marble counter has become a fundamental feature of its permanent exhibition and in the bank's strongroom, located in the basement passed two intimidating vault doors, visitors can experience some of MUDE's temporary fashion exhibitions (Fig. 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). Here exhibits are presented against the unusual setting of the 3532 stainless steel safes that were used to keep money, records, and other valuables safe from theft and other threats, including natural disasters. This impregnable area is also protected by an extraordinary system of secret passageways, which enabled security teams to access it, in the event in which its gates had been locked from the inside. All the more the building contains within itself the totality of the Pombaline period, the Lisbon Renaissance, during which it was built, offering visitors a constellation of suggestions that deterritorialise their dreamscape.

As fashion starts to be seen in relation to the former bank rather than the current ruin, a paradox occurs: the bank, an institution dedicated to the conservation and administration of capital, is turned into a museum of furniture design and fashion, celebrating the Symbolic value eradicated in them. In the bank-museum the meaning of value thus exceeds the boundaries of its monetary, quantifiable connotation and spills over the cultural that is included in the artefacts in the displays. At the same time, artefacts' value as cultural heritage is celebrated in the cycles of collecting, accumulating, preserving, planning, installing, viewing, discussing, worshiping: still a depository of value the museum is thus turned back into a bank.

The Francisco Capelo Collection

In establishing MUDE, the BNU building on Lisbon's Rua Augusta has abandoned its financial function and entered one of cultural industry, producing value through education and entertainment. However, this would have not been possible without the existence of a local private collection, reference to which is part of the institutions' full name: MUDE, Francisco Capelo Collection.

Consisting of 672 furniture design artefacts and 690 fashion artefacts, this small collection was established by keen collector Francisco Capelo, who started collecting furniture and fashion design after a carrier in investment banking and the media. The first is a collection that tells the history of design in mass production with important records of key designers. The latter includes mostly women's fashion, both couture and prêt-à-porter from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. Capelo explains that this has been built with the advice of friend Azzedine Alaïa, who also performed the restoration of many pieces bought at auction.[40]

In 1998 Capelo deposited the furniture design collection at Vittorio Gregotti's Centro Cultural de Belém, one of Lisbon's leading contemporary arts centres. At the time, this institution lacked members of staff who specialised in design collections, and because of the rarity of this professional figure in Portugal the administration decided to train their Head of Education, Bárbara Coutinho, in Design History and Theory. In 2006 Capelo sold the collection to Lisbon City Council, under the condition that it would never leave Portugal permanently. In the same year, as the main expert in the collection the Council had just bought but also due to contacts developed in her capacity at the Centro Cutural de Belém, Coutinho became involved in conversations about the foundation of a museum where the collection could be exhibited and of which she would end up becoming the first director two years later.

The first step was to create the archive, the space where the collection could be preserved with the appropriate conditions of temperature, light, and humidity. At this point the fashion collection joined the furniture design collection but unlike the latter, this had not been studied and, according to Coutinho, all the council had received with the artefacts were 'a list of names of designers, working photos, some dates and loads of question marks'.[41] This also meant that it was up to that team to understand what conservation requirements were needed.[42] The fashion collection, started in the 1990s, includes mostly women clothing with pieces dating back to as far as the end of the nineteenth century up until the beginning of

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[40] Francisco Capelo, 'A new home for MUDE, Design and Fashion Museum,' *MUDE. Museu Do Design E Da Moda* (Lisbon: Camera Municipal Lisboa, 2009): 5.

[41] Coutinho, *Appendix*, 340.

[42] Countinho explains that while the furniture design collection had been kept at the Centro Cultural de Belém, where a team of professionals had worked on its conservation, the fashion collection had been kept 'in a very small room' and 'all pieces were hung [...] The collection needed a much bigger space, some of the dresses needed to be place horizontally, to begin with'. Coutinho, *Appendix,* 340.

the 2000s. Clothing, shoes, and accessories trace the history of fashion through a selection of artefacts from key designers from various countries.[43] Other small collections and individual acquisitions joined this body of artefacts in the following years.

The work-in-progress museum

Coutinho explains MUDE's museological concept by referencing conceptualist artist Donald Judd as a source of inspiration.[44] In the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas – also an example of art institutions that have converted former industrial sites into their premises – Judd made use of a wide-open plan to display sculpture, a pursuit which he describes as placing an emphasis on the creative process in the making. In this space, Judd developed his work together with its installation in a tangible, durable, two-ways process:

> The installation of my work and that of others is contemporary with its creation. The work is not disembodied spatially, socially, temporally as most museums. The space surrounding my work is crucial to it.[45]

In the Chinati foundation, space is entangled in a dynamic relation with the processes of creation and interpretation of contemporary art, and its manifestations are produced as the direct response to the surrounding environment. In this ineffable connection between container and content, between particular and whole, Judd's Chinati foundation allows visitors to explore art, site, and the influences of one on the other. Reflecting Judd's understanding of sculpture and its setting as entities that cannot but develop simultaneously, the institution presents itself as long-term *work in progress*.

The concept of 'work-in-progress', a teleology of the uncomplete, provides a conceptual framework to define MUDE's museological programme. In 2015, just months

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[43] The collection includes pieces by Alaïa, Balenciaga, Pierre Balmain, Pierre Cardin, Comme des Garçons, Courrèges, Chanel, Dior, John Galliano, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Givenchy, Madame Grès, Gucci, Martin Margiela, Alexander McQueen, Yssey Myake, Mary Quant, Yves Saint Laurent, Prada, Rabanne, Sonia Rykiel, Schiapparelli, Ungaro, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dries Van Noten, Versace, Vivienne Westwood, Yamamoto and many others.
[44] Coutniho, *Appendix,* 340.
[45] Donald Judd, 'In Defence of My Work' (1977), *Donald Judd: Selected Writing*, ed. Caitlin Murray (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2016), 8-9.

ahead of the approval of significant changes to the building of the museum-bank, Countinho explains:

> even nowadays MUDE represents about 30% of what I conceived at the times and of what I see it becoming. There is still plenty to do. But obviously you must take into account that the context of 2006 was a very difficult one. And it's been difficult since then. For this reason, MUDE has had to become a resilient museum and I think this is precisely its strength. It's not ideal, it's not finished. It's complex, it's dynamic, it's living and it's in motion […] the construction of a museum is itself a design process and I think this is a key issue for the public to understand. […] And the vision of MUDE is to achieve this with its doors wide open.[46]

In the 'work-in-progress' museum visitors are likely to perceive the space in very different ways from visit from visit, through different exhibitions, but also through different exhibiting solutions. These are devised to keep the museum open as renovation works continue, often with significant economy of means and always in response to the building's architectural requirements. This way of understanding the museum emphasises those considerations that the foundation of every institution needs to go through, but that we visitors often do not get to experience. In doing so, this pursuit exposes both the collection and the processes behind the creation of a museum.

Against this constantly changing background, MUDE's programme has tended to investigate design and its historiography through a dense programme of collective and personal exhibitions. Its research explores particularly the relationships between present and past, in fashion and furniture design and the interconnections between them. On the one hand, it considers major developments in the history of design coming from abroad (particularly prior to the fall of the dictatorship); on the other hand, it reflects on national identity and collective Portuguese memory and celebrates contemporary Portuguese designers that have reached international recognition (e.g. Fatima Lopes and Felipe Oliveira Baptista). It emphasises the relationship between production and consumption of artefacts, stressing main changes against a background of economic change and industrial development. However, a comparison between MUDE and more established traditions of exhibiting fashion within heritage institutions reveals how MUDE's programme of exhibitions has not yet explored issues that have been at the heart of the international field of fashion

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[46] Coutinho, *Appendix,* 338

studies, such as those connecting dress to social identity, the body, gender, representation and appearance.

The choice of focusing on historic research and Portuguese memory as a general research direction is in keeping with the the status of fashion in Portugal both as an academic subject and as an industry. In Lisbon, the first courses in fashion design date back only to 1992, when the Faculty of Architecture opened its first BA and MA programmes. Earlier than that, courses in fashion design started to be offered in 1989 at ESAD college of Art and Design in Matosinhos, near Porto.[47] More recent fashion design courses are offered in the inland towns of Covilhã and Castelo Branco and besides these institutions, a small constellation of private organisations offer professional courses for different kinds of professionalisms within the fashion industry. Most fashion design curricula seem to be accompanied by compulsory courses in History of Art, yet rarely offer the option of studying the History of Fashion and its representations or Fashion Theory. In general, these are research areas that seem to suffer from those same stereotypes that have obstacled them in the UK prior to the cultural turn in the humanities. According to fashion designer and Lisbon University Professor Mario Matos Ribeiro the absence of staff with backgrounds specifically in these research areas seems to be the deterrent for the formation of courses in fashion history and theory and is used as a motivation by universities against the activation of courses in these fields.[48] Theoretical and historical studies in fashion thus seem to be unsupported by Portuguese universities and research in these fields mostly seems to rely on the effort of individual scholars. This also reflects in the fact that no journal in Portugal specialises on fashion history and theory, leaving a small but growing community of researchers that are interested in taking part to the ongoing debates to resort to Brazilian publications or, more often, either to History of Art and Cultural Studies journals in English.

A possible interpretation to the shortage of courses in fashion design, history & theory needs to take into account the status of the Portuguese fashion industry itself, which, according to Ribeiro and Soares, exists only as very weak reality originating in the wake of the Carnation Revolution in 1974 (with the exception of shoemaking), when the far right-

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[47] In 2011 ESAD in collaboration with Matosinhos Borough Council founded the aforementined Santo Thyrso incubator of fashion and design, an example of urban regeneration which turned an abandoned factory into a creative space specifically addressing fashion start-ups.
[48] Personal conversation with Mario Matos Ribeiro, 2015.

wing regime that had been in power since 1926 came to an end.[49] Ribeiro explains that this was hit by globalisation and by the move of productions to the Far East and the Balkans first, and then by the economic crisis of 2008. Following the events that characterised this period, Portugal's clothing industry seems to be small yet growing, consisting of little and very specialised production units.[50]

From a museological perspective, the National Museum of Costume (Museu Nacional do Traje) has been operating in Lisbon's periphery since 1976, displaying a collection of historical fashionable dress and accessories. In 2009 MUDE opened as the first museum in Portugal with a collection of contemporary fashion and since then Porto has shown interest in having a similar institution.[51] More recently, exhibitions of fashion have been hosted in some of the historical buildings of the town of Évora. An example is a 2015 exhibition of wedding gowns curated by Hubert de Givenchy.[52]

It thus seems possible to assert that while interest in the promotion of fashion is certainly still limited, attention seems on the rise both among academics, and within publicly funded heritage institutions. In particular, with regards to the role played by MUDE within these interlinked scenarios, the concept of 'work-in-progress' can be re-thought as exceeding the sense associated to the material renovation of the building and the production of its exhibition strategies, to also refer to a concrete contribution to the expansion of awareness towards the field. On the one hand, the establishment of an organisation where design and fashion artefacts can be collected, preserved, and displayed has become aligned with the creation of a space where these can be experienced as having historical roots and generating dialogue on their challenging futures. On the other hand, its activities take the form of practices that operate alongside and that are complimentary to the main work of exhibition-making, through the creation of a forum for debate and a space where knowledge production and cultural production can go hand in hand. Coutinho explains:

> There is a huge gap between Portugal and other countries when it comes to the history of design and there is still a lot to be done. But at least I know that

[49] Paola da Costa Soares, 'Portuguese Fashion Design Emerging Between Dictatorship and Fast Fashion,' *Fashion Theory*: *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 15.2 (2011): 225–238.

[50] Soares.

[51] Personal conversation with Bárbara Coutinho, 2015.

[52] Vogue, 'Unforgettable Wedding Gowns,' la Nueva Exposición de Givenchy, 2015. *Vogue.* Accessed December 3 2016. http://www.vogue.es/novias/articulos/unforgattable-wedding-gowns-la-nueva-exposicion-de-givenchy/22849

designers are aware that there is room for them in this country; that there is a place where they can present their work and see the work of others; where it can be preserved and where their skills can be passed on to the future generations.[53]

Talking about the importance of studying and preserving past design traditions, as represented within MUDE's collection, Coutinho is here also referring to how this re-found awareness can be used as an approach to looking at the work of contemporary designers, a recognition of the importance of engaging with national design communities. This is pursued particularly through collaborations with the University of Lisbon (e.g. promoting graduates' work through exhibitions; Fig. 3.7), and through the 'Made in Portugal' format, a series of temporary displays showcasing the work of smaller Portuguese brands, their history and current work.

Integral to the idea of museum exhibitions as tools for this kind of cultural promotion is the conception of them not only as the fruit of a mode of research action undertaken by the curator, but potentially also as a research and discovery tool for the visitors. Talking about what the opening of MUDE meant for fashion and design students, Coutinho says:

[Students] now don't need to necessarily travel to Madrid, or London, or Paris to see some of the works they have seen in books or online. That is a huge transformation with effects on the capacity to get inspired and create. But that's only the most immediate of results.[54]

Connecting design, social life and knowledge, the museum's mission is thus to engage with an extended curatorial field based on the entanglement of industry, academia, and heritage. This is quite the difference from an understanding of education and industry as self-determining agents. The idea of opening a museum of design and fashion in an austerity dominated country is thus certainly inserted in a neoliberal understanding of the role of the creative industries, as is also reflected by the fact that after its foundation, MUDE continued to be funded by Lisbon City Council and by the public authority for touristic promotion in the country: a sign that potentiality was seen in utilising a museum of fashion and design as a pole of touristic attraction.[55] But at the same time its programme seems to be turning into

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[53] Coutinho, *Appendix*, 343.
[54] Coutinho, *Appendix*, 343.
[55] The involvement of public authorities in MUDE's funding also involves their involvement in terms of management. In a personal conversation the director of MUDE, Bárbara Coutinho, explains that the

an occasion to enact critical processes of self-enlightenment. The slow change, or the longing for it, is pre-announced in the museum's name. Presenting the acronym of *Museu Do Design e da Moda* to reflect a recognisable tendency in naming international museums, it directly addresses the Portuguese speaking community through the imperative of the Portuguese verb *mudar*, meaning 'to change'. It thus calls for a change of perspectives as well as for the broader development of platform for debate.

The entanglement between curatorial strategies, research and education is evident particularly in MUDE's permanent exhibition *Único e Múltiplo: 2 Séculos De Design* [Unique and Multiple: Two Centuries of Design], in which the didactic approach to the history of fashion and furniture design has taken into account both traditional historiography and hermeneutical understandings of the relation between past events and the present.

Unique and Multiple historical explorations

What follows considers MUDE's permanent exhibition and the kind of historical experience that it creates for visitors. Titled 'Único e Múltiplo', it stems from MUDE's opening exhibition *Flashes*, which presented the museum's vision to display fashion and furniture design in conjunction. *Flashes* did not seem to offer any particular recollection of historical narratives. Its aim was instead to offer an overview of key pieces from the Francisco Capelo collection, while highlighting the idea that reciprocal influences regulate the relationship between furniture and fashion design. Like *Flashes, Único e Múltiplo* occupies the entire area of the ground floor of the building. Once dedicated to the client service of the bank, this 1400 square meters site is an open area, offering an interrupted view of the streets around the building block. As I will show later in this chapter, this configuration of the ground floor bears deeply on how the experience of the past is conceived within *Único e Múltiplo.*

Addressing the 'general public',[56] *Único e Múltiplo* presents key phases of furniture and fashion design history from the 1850s to the present day through a combination of pieces from the Francisco Capelo collection, acquisitions and loans. Its displays are changed recurrently: furniture artefacts are replaced every two years, fashion artefacts are replaced

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choice of her staff does not always rest with her or with an internal HR department, but rather on a national employment scheme assigning staff to governmental institutions based on a balance between their education and previous working experience.

[56] Bárbara Coutinho, *MUDE. Design and Fashion Museum. Francisco Capelo Collection* (*Lisbon*. London; New York: Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers, 2014), 15.

every three months. Accompanying texts offer an overview of general design trends and the contexts that informed them. They take by the hand visitors who are curious but uniformed, seeking to abridge the temporal gap between them and the artefact from the past. In turn, the artefact is presented as the product of social, political, economic, and technological changes, which are highlighted through a timeline of main international events. In doing so, fashion and design are situated in a wider narrative which is backed up by evidence and record, and which retains the presence of historical events: a history of causes and effect. The reduction of temporal distance through language-mediated facts is corresponded by a physical reduction of distance with the artefacts, which are displayed – with very few exceptions – without a glass case or other forms of isolation: furniture is exhibited directly on pallets while Stockman-type mannequins are used for fashion exhibits.

This curatorial choice echoes the necessity of opening a sustainable museum within a regime of financial difficulty, and is in keeping with the vision of the museum as work-in-progress. However, curator Anabela Becho (personal conversation, 2015) explains that this choice also aims to accentuate an understanding of design as the democratic declination of the decorative and the ornamental, deriving from the encounter between art's subjectivity and mass-production. This idea is central to *Único e Múltiplo*, which significantly places the Industrial and the French revolutions at the beginning of the timeline, and identifies them as the origin of the technical and societal changes which led to an expansion of production and the lowering of prices. The exhibition shows that this process engendered a tension between the status of the 'unique' piece – the artefact that exists in one specimen – and that of the 'multiple', deriving from serialisation. The key aim of *Único e Múltiplo* is thus to question how clothing and furniture design embody this tension. In relation to fashion, the exhibition focuses on how this tension emerges in both prêt-à-porter and couture.

Each display occupies one or two pallets and can be considered as the smallest unit of the exhibition. Working as a microcosm, it creates an image of a particular time, a variable number of years whose spirit is considered to be embodied in the artefacts it exhibits. In doing so, it spatialises time allowing it to emerge as/in space. The historical narrative of the exhibition, namely, the history of nearly two centuries of design, emerges through the connections that can be established between the displays. However, as these are scattered in the wide open plan area of the ground floor multiple possibilities to relate them arise while visiting the exhibition.

This layered experience is also referenced in the title, where 'unique' and 'multiple' also point at the interplay between chronological exploration and individual recollection. To identify how the exhibition stimulates these two different ways to establish connections amongst displays and artefacts, what follows will isolate in the presentation two distinct topoi. They will be used to conceptualise two different ways of arranging displays in space, and two different modes of reception. To reflect on the effects of these topoi in museum presentations, and their ability to co-exist within *Único e Múltiplo*, I will observe their occurrence outside the museum. In particular, I will consider how they regulate the consumption of images and artefacts within the passage-way/arcade and the department store.

In *Único e Múltiplo* the juxtaposition of these two seemingly incongruous experiences has been enabled by including the BNU's former counter in the presentation. Its presence defines an otherwise uninterrupted space, and it is emphasised by backlit white panels covering its inner side. Swerving through the ground floor, this solid marble stretch creates a wide square area at the centre to its right hand side (where employees used to conduct operations) and a large corridor to its left hand side (where clients were served). In the corridor, following the perimeter of the area, exhibits are displayed chronologically on a timeline as these were chapters in a student's history book: 'from the mid 20th Century to the First World War', 'WW1 to Post WW1'; 'From post war to consumer society'; 'the 60s' and 'the 70s' (Fig. 3.8 & 3.9). The corridor flows into the inner part, where displays of the remaining decades ('Post-modernism', and '1990-2000: Global design') are distributed in the wide inner area, at times facing the corridor, at times with their backs towards them (Fig.3.10). A series of interruptions in the counter serve as access points between these two areas.

Thus, when approaching MUDE's permanent exhibition the visitor is offered a choice: that of following the suggested path around the counter, following the given timeline of the history of furniture and fashion design, or rather to embrace the implicit suggestion to make her/his own path through the exhibition and thus of creating unexpected successions of displays. The first approach recalls a more traditional way of organising and looking at exhibitions as a pre-established succession of relations between artefacts on display, in which every display is ideologically connected to the previous one and the following one: in this case a chronological progression. The latter involves treating the area as an open plan,

looking on either side of the counter wall, walking through the access points and creating personal connections between displays and the artefacts they contain. Integral to this idea is a view of the exhibition as a process of research for the curators but also for the visitors. In Coutinho's words:

> There is a path that the visitor can follow, […], but you are also free and encouraged to find your own path and establish your own succession of pieces and relations, which other people, including us curators, might not have perceived, creating your own path.[59]

Running towards past and present, the counter, the remnant of the past of the building as bank and a striking feature of its present as museum, becomes the element which enables these two modalities of historical exploration to co-exist. As bank counter, it separated the institution from those that used it; as part of MUDE's permanent exhibition it becomes the border between two ways of approaching and looking at MUDE's permanent exhibition and its subject matter, the history of fashion and furniture design. These correspond to two different ways of creating narratives through the displays, two different ways of combining the parts into a whole: the first option underlies a mode of historical exploration based on a normative understanding of history; the latter proposes a view of the past based on the hermeneutical multiplicity of individual narratives. What follows will now consider each of these modalities separately.

The exhibition space as passage-way

The first way of experiencing *Único e Múltiplo* consists in following the path that has been pre-established by the curators. To discuss the experience of the past that emerges in this case, what follows considers the features of architectonical structures that embed the linear construct of the corridor. Designed to maximise a comforting compartmentalisation of life, the much older structure of the corridor became popular in Europe's private and public spaces during the late nineteenth century.[60] Pointing that the strength of this topological structure can still be perceived today, Rem Koolhaas observes that while the use of the corridor declined in architecture throughout the twentieth century in favour of

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[59] Coutinho, *Appendix,* 341.
[60] Rem Koolhas, 'Corridor,' *Elements of Architecture* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014), 951-63

arrangements that offer more fluidity and less separation, it has been 'increasing in metaphor', crystallising the conceptualisation of ideas of progression and continuity at its grounds.[61] Given this thesis' interest in the museology of fashion, I am going to consider its use at the service of fashion consumption within arcade/passageway.

When using the term 'passageway' in this context, I am seeking to recall Benjamin's formidable discussion of the specific form of shopping spectation produced within the glass and iron walkway in the modern city. Operating both as a passage between roads, and as a destination in its own right, the passageway was a space open to all, where the products of the newly industrialised economy were made available to potential customers on a corridor of commercial activities. However, in the *Passagenwerk,* the passageway's architectural structure, determining the bodily experience of passing through it, became a metaphor which Benjamin used to make his own passage through the complex psychic state of late-nineteenth-century Parisian culture: by observing the organising motif of its vitrines, Benjamin discussed the way in which images and artefacts were consumed in the late modern world, but more importantly, the passageway became the tangible manifestation of the modern relation between space, time, and its passing. A key part of such relationship was the specific mode of assemblage of the displayed goods/fragments, which, as Susan Buck-Morss eloquently explains, worked as 'a series of captions to the world outside the text'.[62] These were combined to build the passageway as the rebel fragment's opposite: a self-enclosed space presented as the result of a fluid 'montage' to be consumed by those passing through the passageway.

The collections of fragments in the inner route of the passageway were displayed behind glazed shopfronts, where, Anne Friedberg explains, the merchandise was lined up 'in […] vitrines as if they were antiquated objects in a natural history museum'.[63] While, the simile between the arcade and exhibition practice only assumes a descriptive function and is not explored further in Friedberg's work, her evocation of the natural history museum context is nevertheless interesting as it brings to the fore principles of selection and story-

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[61] Koolhas, 906.
[62] In using these words, Susan Buck-Morss is describing Benjamin's approach to writing as having in common with the arcades the modality of construction of montage. See: Susan, Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), x. Benjamin himself explains the aim of 'literary montage': 'I need say nothing. Only show' (Benjamin, quoted in Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 230).
[63] Friedberg, 50.

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telling as intrinsic to the construction of historical displays. This specific issue has instead been considered by Donna Haraway, who isolated in the pristine and virgin appearance of natural history displays a subtext of ideology-driven artificiality.[64] This is precisely the value that Benjamin's discussion of the experience of the passageway/arcade needs to be attributed: that of highlighting that its linearity can tell us something about the modern understanding of history and the relation between past and present, and that in becoming a conceptualisation of its linearity, the arcade also has the potential to expose the concealed secret of its constructed nature. It is thus not surprising that the modern museum, whose principles are embodied in Haraway's and Friedberg's natural history vitrines, is also summoned by Benjamin from the maze of urban debris in support of the cultural anthropology that has the arcades at its heart.

The passageway/arcade and the modern museum share features that emphasise the implications of montage. With their predetermined progression of displays, both the passageway and the museum are characterised as phantasmagorical places, where the relation between fragments is given for the gaze of the beholder. In both, space becomes the containers of units (its displays and vitrines) and their succession establishes a progression based on how the representation of the narrative is expected to be seen: artefacts are laid for masses of passers-by and visitors, who consume the exhibition vitrine after vitrine, room after room, in a progression which is linear and fixed. At the same time, both experiences are characterised by finitude and repetition: they present the same sequence of vitrines, the same montage, which offers itself as identical to all its visitors. Koolhaas notes that this idea is intrinsic to spaces that embed the linear structure of the corridor, and suggests that both in private and public spaces corridor-like structures correspond to design processes based on the projection of the individual onto a generalised structure of life and that encourage 'cellular, inhibited' behavior.[65]

The modes of visibility offered by the arcade and the modern museum assimilate the logics of montage. This led Benjamin to observe that these spaces take on a dream-like

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[64] Donna Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy,' 20-64.
[65] Koolhas, 'Corridor,' 903. The view of the corridor as an architectural form that projects individual routines onto a standardised format that does not accommodate the rise of individualism and the contemporary fracturing of social fabric arises especially when compared to more recent forms of architectural expression. However, its popularity in both public and private spaces at the turn of the century highlights its modernity with comparison to previously predominant spatial organisations. For example, it replaced the enfilade, within which people moved from one room to another, usually on a progression from the most public to the most intimate.

quality: they interrupt visitors' own temporalities, just as they would provide shelter from a rainy day. In doing so they impose their own succession of vivid, fragmentary, intense images, worked in a fluid flow with patterns of causation that they cannot but follow: entering the oneiric space, visitors experience and move through a miniature world, which offers its own truth in the form of concatenations of images. Presented in a cinematic succession, the combination of fragments that make the totality of the arcade is presented in the form of a universalism: only by waking up from the dream – a metaphor of the act of walking out of the arcade – can passers-by re-gain control over the montage. But having been exposed to the passageway's potential to constitute an alternative present by combining seemingly incongruent images and objects, individuals can now replicate in the world the meaning-making mode through which it came to exist, intensifying the logics of the arcades and developing montage into an opportunity for the affirmation of individual expression into everyday life and experience.

Significantly, Benjamin also thought that montage described the construction of an image of history understood as the juxtaposition of past events in a sequence and leading to a culminating present: an interpretative act based on the principle of 'quoting without quotations marks', namely, the principle of re-situating the elements that are quoted, producing fluidity with what precedes and follows them and literalising the sequence in the form of a rhetoric historical narrative.[66] According to Benjamin, the image of history based on linearity – underlying the approach of both historicists and progressives – is thus a construction of fragments that locks the relation among past events and with the present.[67] Looking at the construction of history as a 'montage', Benjamin, who believed in the subjective role of memory, aims to expose and criticise its telling as an ideologically functional linear image of past events leading to an unquestionable present, and invites to

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[66] Benjamin, *AP,* 458.

[67] Benjamin insists that the distinction between the two linear modes of historical exploration that were most prominent at the time when he was writing – historicism and progressivism – rests in the finality of undertaking studies of the past. His critique of historicism is that it is not possible to reconstruct the past from a position that is uninfluenced by the present. On the other hand, Benjamin also rejected the linear vision at the grounds of the progressive view of history, which privileges a narrative of improvement, transcending the past and its influence on the present. The critique of both historicism and progressivism led Benjamin to challenge the view of the present as a moment on a timeline, moving towards an understanding of it as a moment of agency and possibility, characterised by the ability to act today in order to confront the forces of the past and the causes of injustice.

discover 'that constellation of historical origins which has the power to explode history's 'continuum''.[68]

Exposing the construction of linearity as intrinsically constituted of discontinuity and decontextualisation, the arcade and its typical layout thus become metaphors of a weakened understanding of past and present as monolithic entities. In this sense, in providing a visual representation of linearity, the dream-like spaces of the arcade and the modern museum have the revolutionary potential to suggest that the principle of montage through which they are assembled can be carried over the writing of history, stimulating a profound questioning of received narratives and opening up to individual re-readings and contestations. Their role as public spaces, where at least in theory members of different social groups are brought together, emphasises further the deficiencies of linearity, both as an architectural form and as a mode of historical exploration: if on the one hand it exposes the montage through which it came to exist as a tool for individual expression, on the other hand, it also displays its limitations in accommodating pluralistic sensibilities, thus becoming the repository of the conditions for its own decline at the time in which Benjamin is writing.[69]

Benjamin's view on the conceptual structure of the telling of history as a montage and 'montage' being the process of construction of the dream-like spaces of the arcade and the museum come together in museum exhibitions that are based on chronological narrative, where the passing of time is translated into a form of spatial organisation that is thought as being linear and irreversible. Offering a profound intertwining of the concept of history telling with that of space, these are thus produced as a unique dimension. This organisation of artefacts in space can be described by referencing Lukács, who explains: 'time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' [...]: in short it becomes space'.[70] Whilst Lukács

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[68] Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing,* x.

[69] According to architectural historian Mark Jarzombek the modernity of the corridor lied in its ability to create opportunities for the co-existence of people from different social classes. This observation is developed particularly with regards to private interiors, where early modern nobility used the corridor to move through the household, sharing its spaces with their servants. However, its trajectory is then followed through corridic public institutions (such as parliament buildings, state houses, school buildings, hotels, etc.). Jarzombek explains that in the social history of architecture the corridor has been seen as promoting modern social cohesion, and that its demise in favour of the modernist open plan is a symptom of the rise of individualism. This issue, and its projection onto the world of consumption, will be looked at in the next section. See Mark Jarzombek, 'Corridor Spaces,' *Critical Inquiry,* 36.4 (2010), 728-70.

[70] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 90.

was referring here to the modern commodification of labour and the structuring of time into units that could quantify the rhythms of production, his investigation seems to describe a general tendency towards the intertwining of the dimensions of time and space. In the chronological exhibition, fragmented time (years, decades, centuries) becomes transformed into a pre-established walk in which the dimension of time becomes subordinated to that of space. Progression in space thus becomes the progression of time.

The mode of historical exploration that characterises *Único e Múltiplo* reflects the view of the history of fashion and design as a 'continuum' of events, particularly when the visitor decides to follow the path on the left-hand side of BNU's counter. In following the path of adjacent displays, visitors start their explorations in the 1850s to be taken by the hand through the decades up to the ultimate present: the exit of the exhibition, an open future. To reach this point the visitor experiences a sense of conceptual fragmentation which derives from the breaking up of the collection into displays and their re-connection in the form of an institutional, extra-museological narrative, emphasising a sense of finitude, conceptual and physical of its subject matter through its linear chronology. The transition between displays is thus produced as a montage that ultimately conforms to the narrative development of aesthetic innovation, in short, to the normative history and historiography of design from the industrial revolution to the present day, decade after decade, innovation after innovation. The texts that accompany the displays invigorate this institutional montage by providing a socio-economic frame of each decade, pointing out what main innovations were and to what historical, social, economical, and technical changes they corresponded. Offering the same narrative to every visitor of MUDE's permanent exhibition, this pathway recuperates the historically contingent: the result is a passageway of images, artefacts, and texts in which the visitor approaches the history of design, produced in retrospective as a fluid montage with no interruptions and no repetitions.

This way of experiencing *Único e Múltiplo* has thus far offered the opportunity to discuss the relation between the passageway/arcade, chronological narrative and the modern exhibition space, traditionally understood as a linear organisation of displays. The question that arises here is whether it is enough for exhibitions advocating non-linear and hauntological readings of the past to frame the scope of criticism towards the traditional, chronological understanding of history simply through the juxtaposition of artefacts from different times and thematic re-readings. While such exhibitions deconstruct history, they

do so through presentations of displays in choreographed sequences that the visitors have, once again, no option but to follow, room after room, concept after concept. In doing so, such exhibitions foreground registers of experience in which visitors are still seen primarily as consumers of meaning. In the contemporary, post-representational museum, further entanglement with visitors' temporalities, knowledge, and perspectives seems necessary. The following section, looking at a second way of approaching MUDE's permanent exhibition, considers how chronological narrative and curated content can be animated through visitors' participation, moving their experience of the past back in alternative assemblages of meaning.

This approach is dependent on the open structure of the ground floor of the building. Offering an experience in which displays no longer need to be thought as organised in a linear succession, the open plan enables visitors to determine their own experience during the visit, and to identify those overlaps and criss-crossings, but also the ruptures and disjunctions, whose existence is hypothesised within genealogical approaches to the study of the past. The exhibition is thus determined as montage plus something else. This implied surplus juxtaposes the representation of linear chronology and its interpretation through a sense of spatiality which replaces direction with personal exploration. As I will demonstrate in what follows, this gives MUDE the chance to become the image of a contemporary, post-representation museum in which the opposition between the chronological and the genealogical, between the historic and thematic can become secondary, putting forward instead a mode of looking that recalls the way in which Benjamin thought that the vast collection of materials in the *Passagenwerk* had to be read: through the application of an open-interpretative process requesting readers to create connections between fragments both within and outside the text.

The open plan as setting

One of Benjamin's key ideas is that the notion of an alternative temporality emerges only against the predominant version of chronological time, and it does so in the form of interruptions, discontinuities, and repetitions. In the awareness of historical narrative, the constituting elements of an alternative temporality 'do not manifest themselves as formless progressive tendencies, but are deeply rooted in every present in the form of the most

endangered, excoriated, and ridiculed ideas and products of the creative mind'.[71] This idea defines Benjamin's thought throughout his life, and anticipates post-modern, genealogical and hauntological visions of history, as well as the implications of those principles in later textual representations. This section thus seeks to identify a mode of historical exploration that intensifies the logics of the passageway, conceptualising it in the layout of the open plan and stressing how its experience can favour the negotiation of narratives from individual perspectives. Continuing to draw on Benjamin's discussion on the relationship between the dream space of the arcade and the writing of history, I will look at the appearance of the open plan in commercial spaces that gradually replaced the arcade as popular shopping destinations. This is in keeping with my chosen methodology, namely, with the idea of isolating conceptualisations of the relationship between fragments and whole, and the transposition of that relationship onto the writing of history.

In the history of consumption, the decline of the passageway/arcade corresponded to the rising popularity of new typologies of sites, in which individual experience could emerge through the surface of a predetermined selection of goods and displays. Geoffrey Crossick & Serve Jaumain, Rappaport, and Breward explain that while the department store existed even before mid-nineteenth-century, its prominence became unprecedented between the 1860s and 1890s and later.[72] At this point it is important to note that Benjamin looks at the structure of the passageway precisely when this was in its declining phase, and never gets tired of reminding readers that the arcade is the 'forerunner of the department store'.[73] The rise of the department store mirrors changes involving further social integration, which determined an increase in the mass production of goods and a further instrumentalisation of the gaze of the consumer. But as consumers give up the arcade, they enter a new commercial zone, where rules are different.

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[71] 'The Life of Students' is one of the earliest texts where Benjamin shows subvertion towards the 'Hegelian' view of progressive historical experience. See: Walter Benamin, 'The Life of Students' (1915), trans. Rodney Livingstone, *SW Vol. 1,* ed. Marcus Bullock et al (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996), 37.

[72] See: Geoffrey Crossick and Serve Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1999); Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 1-15; Breward, *Fashion,* 143-8, where he explains that in the UK most of the department stores that are still popular today were founded between as early as 1778 (Flint & Clark, later Clark & Debenham) and 1909 (Selfridges).

[73] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris: the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (1935), trans. Howard Heiland, *SW Vol. 3*. ed. Michael W. Jennings et al (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2002), 164.

Like the arcade, the department store provided an indoor space where people could buy products that had been produced elsewhere while getting protection from the inconveniences of the high street. Like the arcade, the department store exhibited and sold at a lower price a pluralism of typologies of goods. These, however, were grouped in a variety of departments, and presented merchandise to an audience that was more diversified than the times when the arcade was in vogue. In this new space of leisure time, goods and the displays that contained them were not organised as a progression that visitors had no choice but to follow as they passed through a walk-way among other buildings; instead, they were organised on a large open plan without walls or vitrines between them, an organising motif that is still able to coexist and be popular, among others, in our contemporary society. The fact that department stores were hosted in buildings that had been built for this purpose, usually in central districts, served by public transport, also increasingly made them a destination rather than a 'passage'.

Most of the literature states that the department store was a symbol of modernity,[74] particularly when considering the relation between women and commodities and between women and the city, or the blurring of social classes represented by its vast selection of merchandise.[75] Its structure, however, already proposed variations of the notion of montage identified by Benjamin as the model of consumption of images in modern times. Presenting its public area as an open space plan, the department store started to acknowledge differentiated needs and personal experience, favouring the emergence of successions of displays that were geared towards increasingly pluralistic audiences. In other words, if the passage-arcade goer relied on the succession of shops that had been pre-established, the department store visitor, although still constrained by the availability of a finite number of departments, has alternatives. It was not an experience of repetition: because of its structure as an open plan within which different departments operated individually, the department store could guarantee constant novelty and renovation. The valence of the open plan as a topos thus consists in reinstating at once the breaking up with those traditions that had

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[74] On this topic, see: Rosalid Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991; Crossick & Jumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption;* Rachel Bowlby. *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[75] Free entry to department stores allowed everyone to look at the merchandise on display without the obligation to buy.

previously reinforced the cellular division of spaces, and the rejection of scripted ways of using space as a trajectory.

The department store has thus transformed the meaning of montage embodied in Benjamin's arcade, and with it his sense of history as having a linear flow. In the department store individual visitors can and do make their own montage, going from section to section, from department to department. This modality of consumption thus complicates the bodily relation between audiences and displays and stimulates the distracted gaze of visitors for whom the shopping experience is no longer a matter of mere passing, but involves instead making a personalised passage, based on choices that range from the rational to the emotional. Visitors are thus requested to activate a perceptual mode involving speculation and enquiry of the surrounding space and objects in order to circulate in the commercial space. Similarly, the potentialities included in the image of history as montage, inspired by the structure of the arcade, or in montage itself as a historiographical method, reach new levels of actualisation when the concatenation of past events also enters a relation with the present moment in which visitors approach presentations of images and objects in the open plan.

The topos of the open plan, which characterises the configurations of the department store, became popular in modern architecture and was 'taken to its High-Modern extreme'.[76] However, its dismantling of physical barriers, the multiple trajectories it encouraged, its rejection of unique ways of engaging with space outlived it and re-appeared as features of later architecture. Fredric Jameson, one of the first scholars to theorise the cultural logics of post-modernism, sees the open plan as the architectonical reification of the post-modern condition. He explains that this was anticipated by Le Corbusier's *plan libre*, a solution which allowed to accommodate several architectonical programmes through walls that could be shifted. In his study of post-modernism Jameson writes: 'Le Corbusier's 'free plan' may be said in much the same sense to challenge the existence of the traditional room as a syntactic category and to produce an imperative to dwell in some new way'.[77]

The complete breaking up of physical barriers in open plans before and after Le Corbusier's *plan libre* thus also corresponded to the dismantling of conceptual ones: as a multifunctional space, the open plan was the stage where priorities, hierarchies, and habits

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[76] Charles Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1996): 36.
[77] Jameson, *Post-Modernism*, 107.

were less determined by partitions and could be challenged. The way of living that it could accommodate was, in other words, radically different from the one that took place within the pre-modern spatial layout of the enfilade, where, by contrast, compartmentalisation of daily life resulted in the fracturing of space into rooms arranged *en suite*, and with increasing distance from the main entrance signifying an increasing level of privacy. According to architecture scholar Alice Friedman while the open plan redefined private interiors through the fundamental idea of providing 'flexibility and a choice of experiences in daily life', its use in public spaces represented a move towards greater access, the reduction of conventional social structures, and the establishment of zones of contact between people carrying out different kinds of activities. In both, the open plan represented a challenge towards previous cultural assumptions about routines, hierarchies and circulation.[78]

In the context of consumption, the rise of the open plan signifies a progressive incorporation of individual patterns of progression in the experience of shopping as the popularity of department store grew. Looking at its structure – embedding the topos of the open plan – can thus help finding an encompassing standpoint from which the new way of relating fragments and whole is made possible. This offers an alternative to the one embodied in the passageway and in the model of history that resembles its construction, the decline of which was, indeed, foretold by Benjamin. From this perspective, while it could not be claimed that the department store already fulfils entirely the needs of post-modern, post-industrial consumers, it can be seen as containing their seeds within itself, in a sense becoming one of the cultural forms through which those needs will subsequently emerge.[79] For this reason, and despite its firm collocation in the timeline of modernism, post-

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[78] Alice Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 2007, 74. In this source, Friedman considers the use of the open plan in private interiors. A key idea is that the valence of the open plan as a layout that challenges traditional domestic conventions signals major shifts in the perception of gender hierarchies and domestic roles. For rurther consideration on the impact of the open plan on both private and public spaces see: Judith Attfield, 'Bringing modernity home: open plan in the British domestic interior,' in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space,* edited by Irene Cieraad (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 73-82; Robyn Dowling, 'Accommodating open plan: children, clutter, and containment in suburban houses in Sydney, Australia,' *Environment and Planning* 40 (2008): 536-49; Kirsi Saarikangas, 'Displays of the everyday: relations between gender and the visibility of domestic work in the modern Finnish kitchen from the 1930s to the 1950s,' *Gender, Place and Culture* 13.2 (2006): 161-72.
[79] The internet and/or database-operated technologies challenge the design consumption modalities that have just been presented, pointing at a further flexibility in the relationship between parts on whole. In Chapter IV, this discussion will be used to discuss the implications of post-modernism on historiography.

modernism should be seen as the most effective strategy for interrogating the socio-cultural codes of the department store, the topos of the open plan, and those dynamics that guarantee their popularity in later decades on the twentieth century as well.

In particular, this line of enquiry sheds light on the potentialities of a comparison between the open plan (as they have been described by looking at the department store) and the post-modern image of progression and temporality that I claim it anticipates. The latter are described by philosopher Espen Hammer, who writes:

> Post-modern culture has achieved something that lay dormant as an expectation in modern culture but was never fully actualised: namely, the creation of a more or less complete break with the continuities and expectations of tradition. Post-modern culture thus sparks off a crisis of historicity that itself seems to be registered in ideas like the end of art, the end of philosophy, the end of politics, and so on. It also, however, involves a rejection of any narrative of progress around which the pursuit of transcendent goals can be organised and thus – in stark opposition to modern culture – a loss of any determinate sense of futurity together with an almost complete disappearance, it would seem, of the utopian horizon that remained a hallmark of all the great modernisms since the French revolution.[80]

In this scenario 'meaning' is rather a construction for different users to interpret: if modernity fuelled a representation of history structured around the idea of linear time, its decline stemmed from questioning the nature and significance of narratives of progress; if montage could be sketched as the dream-like space of the passage-way, the open plan and its flexibility can be seen as foretelling a rejection of pre-given orders or structures that will fully actualise itself in the context of post-modernism.

Within *Único e Múltiplo* the possibility of experiencing this form of progression is given side-by-side with the more traditional, historical one. The height of the counter wall, the possibility of ignoring its role as a tool informing the walk, the presence of access points, and the openness of the space that it contains, suggest an alternative way of approaching the permanent exhibition and a different way of apprehending the content that has been prepared by the curators. The open plan offers visitors the possibility to make their own way through the exhibition, to mobilise their bodies in a sentient expanse in which exhibition-

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[80] Espen, Hammer. *Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 188.

seeing corresponds to a free exploration of the site, and to project themselves outward with the artefacts in space. In other words, in meandering amongst the displays without a clear sense of destination, visitors' sense of space becomes their sense of history. Thus, visitors can easily establish relations between the 1850s and the present day (whose display stands next to it yet across the counter) or between the 1980s and pre-war times, enabling personal considerations to emerge in the process, and creating connections that the curators might not have made explicit.

This understanding of the museum propagates subjectivity in a way that is not dissimilar to the way in which subjectivity is propagated in the department store: the visitor tries on different connections, with limited risk and the possibility of always going back to the previous point. The displacement of displays in the open plan invites to defer institutional chronologies, retailing instead a controllable substitution of personal interpretations. It proposes an active relationship with history, in which fashion and furniture design artefacts become the starting point for wider considerations. Thus, the visitor is faced the opportunity to escape the cognitive forms typical of modernity that were identified but criticised by Benjamin, that is to say the form of linear development, determining history as a 'chain of events'. Symbolically, the possibilities for a differentiated experience multiply because of the unique spatial relations between the exhibition site and the roads around the museum. The all-round windows connect with the outside as do the four access points, located on each side of the hall. These are now rarely open, however *Único e Múltiplo* was conceived as an exhibition format that would take advantage of this feature, in order to provide four different access and exit points between exhibition and the four roads around the building-block, thus multiplying the possibilities for individual engagement. The north access on Rua de São Julião, would allow visitors to start the exhibition right before WW2, Rua da Prata, on the building's east facade would allow visitors to walk straight into the 1960s, the one on Rua do Comércio at the beginning of the 1970s coming from the riverside. This feature, along the fact that the museum offers free entry to all visitors, to both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, evokes Culum Storrie's idea of a 'delirious' museum thought as a continuation of the post-modern street, and sharing with it its easy access, the unexpected encounter with images, text, and artefacts to be curious about, but also its not fully decipherable logics.[81]

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[81] Storrie, *Delirious Museum,* 1-6.

It is thus possible to notice two directions in MUDE's permanent exhibition. One comes from a conservative way of understanding a museum's function and purposes. The other one is an innovative way in which the museum functions as a stage for personal interpretations. Combining the two, the exhibition can thus be seen not as attempting to deliver the history of design as a single and complete account, but rather as acknowledging that there can be multiple approaches to telling this story. The ideas underpinning the opposition between historical and ahistorical, chronological and thematic exhibitions, thus meet on the counter, on the physical separation between the suggested route and the open plan, between confinement and dispersion. This issue is particularly important as it will also impact the question between passive and emancipated spectator. With its displays changing periodically but exploring the same themes (the history of design and the relation between unique, series, and multiple) *Único e Múltiplo* reduces all visitors to the position of being unable to gain an overview of all phases of the exhibition. After every visit a partial impression dominates the picture: instead of filling its space with history, it makes evident the impossibility to write a comprehensive history. This is also supported by the various references through the accompanying texts to events and characters that have little direct connection with the material reality of the museum's archive (e.g. change of designer in fashion houses but also developments in technology, human rights, international politics, etc.) also acknowledge that each output is a simplified version of the history that it seeks to tell. In doing so, the exhibition acknowledges selection as the basic structure of history writing processes.

In doing so, it displays the potential that something can be realised in the place of history itself. The exhibition thus explodes into a multiplicity: in a given moment in time, by spatially dispersing displays and by offering visitors the possibility to freely connect and relate its various displays; and in its totality, by innovating itself and by providing the certainty that while every visit will be about the same story, its contents will be different. And with them, the possibilities of individual re-collection. There is always something missing in a permanent exhibition of the history of fashion and design, and the *Único e Múltiplo* format displays this impossibility alongside the artefacts.

Summary & Conclusion

This chapter started by discussing the role played by MUDE in the ongoing process of regeneration of Lisbon's historical centre, to then consider the impact of using an abandoned building on the strategies of display of this young museum. This makes MUDE the example of a museum that has shaped its practices in response to the financial restraints of the heritage sector after the 2008 financial crisis. The museum thus used a pre-existing private collection, building the model of 'work-in-progress' museum, where exhibitions take place side by side to the renovation work of its premises. In integrating elements of the building that testify to its past as a bank, MUDE's permanent exhibition determines the unique juxtaposition of two ways to look at the past and construct a historical narrative.

Titled *Único e Múltiplo,* and available to the public between 2009 and 2016, the exhibition offered a singular encounter between fashion and furniture design and focussed on the tensions between the production of objects as unique pieces and in series. However, the title also suggests that the tension between the unique and the multiple is also the tension between universal chronology and individual recollections of past events, corresponding to two distinct ways of experiencing design and fashion history through *Único e Múltiplo.* The former accommodates an understanding of history as linear and unidirectional. It is delivered as institutional history and it is produced in the space of the museum as a fixed route, marked by entry and exit thresholds. The latter instead derives from the implied suggestion to abandon this route, and to dilute its sense of chronological progression into the open plan structure. The spatial layout of the open plan favours the free circulation of visitors in the exhibition and stimulates them to establish a dialogue with and among the multiple displays that simultaneously occupy their peripheral visual fields. In doing so, visitors' sense of space becomes their sense of history, and vice versa.

The use of the open plan at MUDE recalls a famous predecessor. In her 1968 installation of the permanent exhibition at the Museum of Art of São Paolo (MASP) curator Lina Bo Bardi utilised the modernist open plan to exhibit key pieces in the museum's art collection and to communicate a view of time as a 'marvellous tangle where at any moment, points can be selected and solutions invented without beginning or end'.[82] Thus, MASP presented the history of art as a field of associations where meanings are not found on the

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[82] Bo Bardi, quoted by De Oliveira, *Lina Bo Bardi*, 32.

surface, but need to be constructed from the fragments in view, their differences, and rely on the perspectives – both spatial and individual – from which they are joint together. This was, for Bo Bardi, a pedagogical position that emphasises her avant-garde view of the responsibilities of museums towards pluralistic audiences.

This is an early example of how new historical thinking has influenced museum exhibitions. As this chapter has demonstrated, it also grounds the vision of history that *Único e Múltiplo* promotes. However, the principles of new historicism have also been central to the development of more traditional exhibition practices at other fashion museums. Marco Pecorari points out that the dominating curatorial approach at Antwerp's Mode Museum has distinguished itself for recurrently embedding the logics of new historicism in curatorial practice.[83] However, as they follow a sequence of galleries of MoMu's temporary exhibitions, visitors often find themselves with no other option but to consume the narrative and the set of connections that the curator has made available.

The following chapter takes MoMu as its case study and suggests that the ability to activate visitors as producers rather than consumers of narrative informs the MoMu Explorer, an interactive presentation of the museum's digital collection. It thus seeks to demonstrate that new historicism is accommodated by the database, which multiplies its opportunites. The chapter will identify the database as a topological space of post-modernism, and as both the product and the producer of a shift in our awareness of the relationships between fragments and whole, with impacts on historical narrative and historiography. By looking at the features of the database, and the increasing use of digital spaces by cultural heritage institutions, the chapter also seeks to read the passage from the materiality of artefacts to the immateriality of data as part of a process through which museums scale themselves increasingly as databases: progressively accessible, indexed, and searchable.

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[83] Marco Pecorari, 'Contemporary Fashion History in Museums,' *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice,* ed. Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 54.

Fig. 3.1 Installation for Felipe Oliveira Baptista's retrospective exhibition (2013).
Fig. 3.2 & 3.3 Felipe Oliveira Baptista's retrospective exhibition (2013). The exhibition was set on the first floor of the museum. A series of mirrors were used to divide environments and as pedistals. They emphasise the state of abandon in which MUDE's building was found; but they also highlight that affordable solutions can take simple and effective forms, and that creativity must be at the heart of financial sustainability in times of crisis.

Fig. 3.4 View of the BNU's former vaults. Christian Lacroix's dresses have just been delivered from the archive. Lacroix's temporary exhibition was the first exhibition in this part of the building.

Fig. 3.5 Display from the exhibition 'Kaleidoscope: The Couture of Christian Lacroix' (2015), set in the BNU's former vaults.
Fig. 3.6 Installing 'Kaleidoscope: The Couture of Christian Lacroix'. In assisting curator Anabela Becho setting up this retrospective exhibition, the space exposed the relation between fashion and the museum as a repository of value.
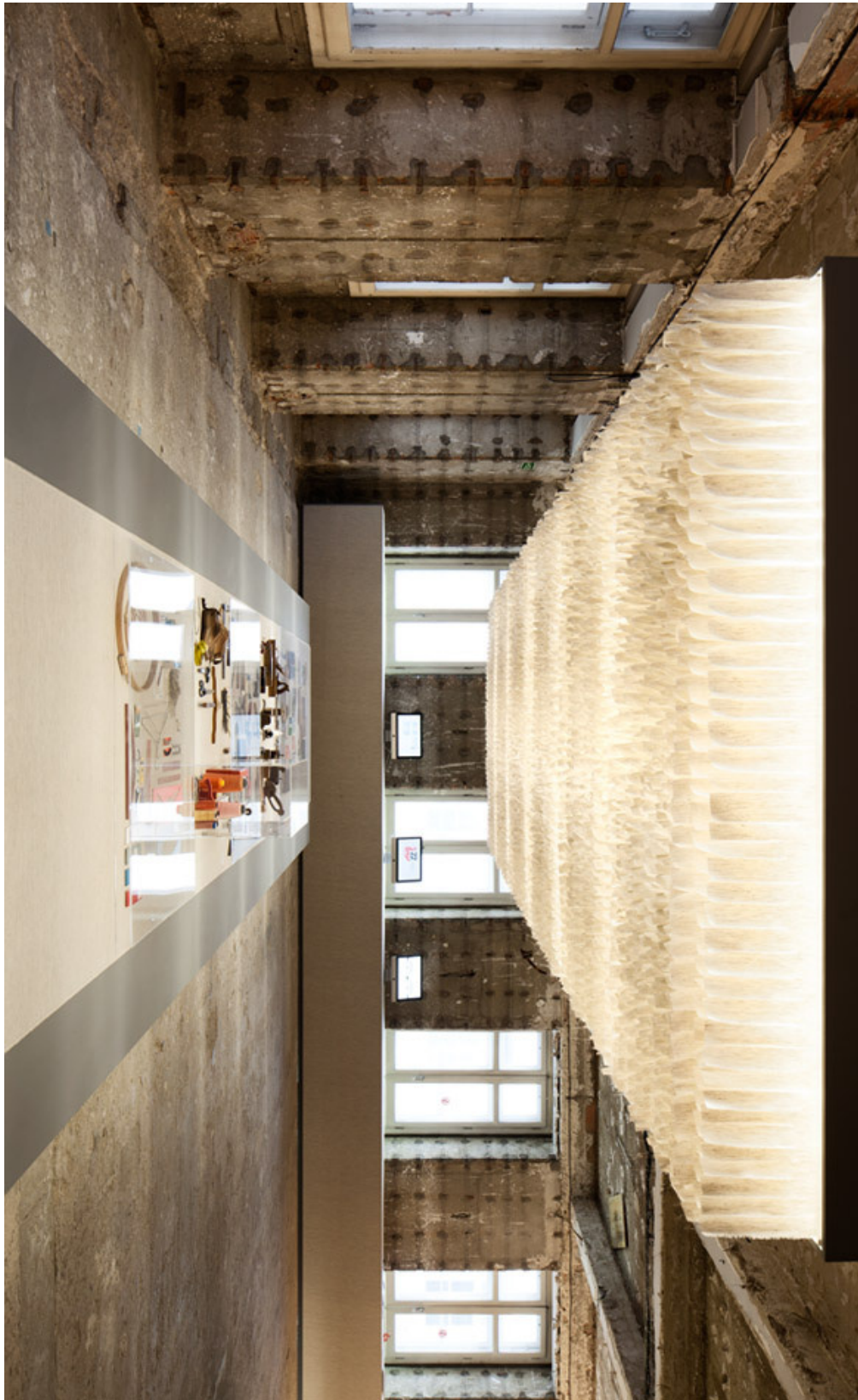
Fig. 3.7 *22 years of design at FAUL*, 2014, MUDE (photo courtesy of João Bacelar)

Fig. 3.8 & 3.9 '*Único e Múltiplo',* view of displays arranged in chronological succession. When approaching the exhibition, visitors can choose to follow the route that has been determined for them by the curators. This route takes visitors around the perimether of the museum and then to main entrance again via the central area of the floor. It corresponds to a chronological exploration of the history of fashion and furniture design, where a timeline contextualises key innovations against societal changes, historical events, both national and international.

Fig. 3.10 *Único e Múltiplo'*, view of one of the displays in the central part of the floor. As the setting of the exhibition is a vast open plan, visitors are encouraged to deviate from the route that has been suggested to them by the curators, and to meander in the hall without a predetermined destination. The presence of interruptions in the marble counter which separates the central area of the floor from its perimeter ensures that visitors can make their own route in the exhibition, and its low height of this counter enables a sense of visual continuity across the floor.

Chapter IV

MoMu, Antwerp:
Curating Fashion History in the Age of the Database

> …if the museum calls out to be modeled like a database, it will be because the museum has always stood as a symbolic reflection of a society's structure.[1]
>
> (Mike Pepi, writer, 2014)

Introduction

The foundation of Antwerp's Mode Museum, best known under the acronym MoMu, has its roots in the Sterckshof decorative arts museum in the provincial district of Deurne. The museum was home to collections of costume, lace, diamond, photography, and film, which were displayed to the public in a series of summer exhibitions. When the diamond, photography and film collections became the basis for the foundation of two new museums in Antwerp, the costume and lace collections were moved to Vrieselhof castle, where they were exhibited between 1977 and 1999 in exhibitions focusing on materials, textile, lace, and

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[1] Mike Pepi, 'Is a Museum a Database? Institutional Conditions in Net Utopia,' *e-flux* 60 (2014).

costume. The literature discussing its presentation modalities is almost non-existent, in keeping with the lack of interest towards display characterising dress and fashion history research at that time. However, those that remember Vrieselhof describe it as a beautiful countryside museum, visited mostly for its garden rather than for its dress exhibitions.

The move of the collections to Antwerp's city centre, and the subsequent opening of MoMu in 2002 represented the culmination of a set of policies and events aimed at developing and promoting Belgium's fashion industry. It is in this spirit that the opening of the ModeNatie building on Nationalestraat needs to be read: that of establishing a centre where the offices of the Flanders Fashion Institute,[2] the Fashion department of the Royal Academy, and MoMu, could be hosted under the same roof, a unique central venue that could favour visitors' encounter with Belgian fashion.

As the first part of the chapter aims to show, the concept of Belgian fashion is relatively recent, and its institutionalisation took place as a result of initiatives by the government, the Royal Academy and MoMu. This chapter introduces the process through which Belgian fashion affirmed itself. The aim of doing so is to suggest a reformulation of the notion of national identity in fashion through post- colonial theory, and to call for acquisition and exhibition policies that embed this reformulation. These considerations are overdue for all museums, but they are presented in this chapter because MoMu is the only case study to be devoted to collecting, preserving and displaying national fashion. They seem especially relevant as MoMu has been at the forefront of the digitisation and the virtual dissemination of its collections, which are accompanied by new modes of participation by increasingly wider and deterritorialised audiences.

At the time when this chapter was written, MoMu has hosted thematic and retrospective temporary exhibitions, with plans for a permanent exhibition being under consideration. These exhibitions have been guided by an interest in the relation between the material forms of clothing and the immateriality of designers' creative processes, which often incarnate in artefacts other than garments, such as invitations to fashion shows, look books, editorials, and advertisement. Pecorari points out that MoMu's exhibitions are informed by 'new fashion history', namely, they are based on an approach that privileges non-linear chronological explorations, aiming to illustrate and validate the recurrence of isolated

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[2] The Flanders Fashion Institute is a body for the national and international promotion of local designers funded by the Flemish government.

concepts, themes, and ideas.[3] This chapter aims to show that the ideas underpinning new historicism, and typical of post-modernism, are at play in their radicalised form in presentations of digitised images in the museum, despite a vision of digitisation as a naïve, uncritical and teleological tool of engagement and outreach.

This line of enquiry will be carried out in the second part of the chapter by focusing on the 'MoMu Explorer', a bespoke touch screen 'wall' installed in 2015 to enable visitors of the museum to browse part of its vast digital collection through various search criteria. This database-operated presentation modality brings into the museum the potential of digital technology for individual queries, mass scalability and randomisation, allowing artefacts/files to be loosened from their chronological bonds and to become available for endless recombinations. In doing so, the MoMu explorer shows the potential for interactive 'database histories', which Media Studies theorist Steve Anderson defines as 'histories that comprise not narratives describing an experience of the past, but collections of infinitely retrievable fragments, situated within categories and organised according to predetermined associations'.[4] These histories seem to find the right setting in the contemporary museum, where a degree of agency is offered for visitors who seek to deviate from the interpretation that is offered by the curator. The result is a media-specific experience, underpinned by a post-structural understanding of history, which challenges classical theories of cultural tradition under the logics of the database's algorithms, storage capabilities, and indexes.

Belgian Fashion: a Contradiction in Terms?

The notion of Belgian fashion is a relatively recent one. This is best explained through the words of Linda Loppa – MoMu's first director, designer and buyer – who in 1972 affirmed that 'Antwerp is not a source of creativity for fashion' and recommended aspiring Belgian designers to move to Paris or London for their education.[5] However, in the decades that followed this comment, Antwerp emerged as a fashion city, along more celebrated fashion capitals as the result of focused investments and strategic planning.

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[3] Marco Pecorari, 'Contemporary Fashion History in Museums,' 51-3.
[4] Steve Anderson, 'Past Indiscretions,' 101.
[5] Marco Pecorari, 'Diventare città della moda: il caso di Anversa,' in *Moda, Città, Immaginari*, ed. Alessandra Vaccari (Venice: Mimesis, 2016), 251, *translation mine.*

In surveying the literature dedicated to this transformation and to the rise of Belgian fashion, it seems important to start from a small cluster of research that has historicised the relationship between Belgium and fashion. Aileen Ribeiro highlights the importance of the Belgian textile industry as early as in XVI century (especially through the textile trade and for the production of luxury clothing)[6] and Seth Siegelaub notes that the textile industry has shaped the social and economic development in the city of Antwerp at the times of the industrial revolution.[7] Although this was a reality of small family-owned companies, texts of economic history describe the importance of the textile industry in the Flanders by emphasising that its strength were its exports to Germany, France, and the Netherlands. André Mommen stresses the role it played in both the national and the local economies by highlighting the void that was created by its recession following the 1973 oil crisis, which caused it to decline along other industrial sectors.[8] It is in this void, and in the subsequent decision by the government to re-launch the textile industry, that both Gimeno Martinez[9] and Marco Pecorari[10] see the origin of the Belgian fashion industry: in other words, the birth of Belgium's fashion industry has been considered the collateral effect of a comprehensive set of policies of economic regeneration that were originally aimed at re-launching the textile industry instead.

In addition, the decline of the textile industry also needs to be read in the perspective of the emerging geographies of labour that saw production forces being moved to developing markets, where employment, transport, and energy costs were lower. The decline of the Belgian textile industry can thus be interpreted as the product of a major shift in the distribution of the global industrial sector in at the end of the 70s. The 1978 *Interfutures* report depicts a scenario in which the developing countries were emerging as producers, while the developed economies continued a process of specialisation in creativity and technical expertise, corresponding to what Florida identifies as 'the rise of the creative class' in the post-industrial economies, where emphasis was placed on the creation of creative

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[6] Aileen Ribeiro, 'Fashion at Antwerp,' in *The Burlington Magazine* 119 (1977), 665–8.
[7] Seth Siegelaub, *Bibliographica Textilia Historiæ* (New York: International General, 1997), 57.
[8] André Mommen, *The Belgian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5-10.
[9] Javier Gimeno Martinez, 'Restructuring Plans for the Textile and Clothing Sector in Post-industrial Belgium and Spain,' *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design* 3 (2011): 197–224; Javier Gimeno Martinez, 'Selling Avant-Garde. How Antwerp Became a Fashion Capital (1990-2002),' *Urban Studies* 44 (2007): 2449-64.
[10] Pecorari, 'Diventare città della moda.'

content.[11] In a global context, these economies became unable to keep both the primary and the tertiary sectors competitively in-house; however technological and communication advancement made financially sustainable the outsourcing of the former to developing countries. In Belgium, the case of the development of a creative fashion industry from the ashes of its textile sector, the emergence of a prominent centre for fashion education, and of a museum devoted to the preservation and promotion of national fashion heritage demonstrate just this.

In the attempt to revitalise the textile industry, the Belgian state set out policies that sought to make it ready for the post-industrial age. In August 1980 the government, which remained responsible for the textile sector along those of coal, glass, steel, and shipbuilding, approved a five-year Textile Plan to help the textile industry recover from the crisis of the earlier decade through actions aimed at increasing market share, lower production costs, and provide no-interest loans. Guidance on the textile plan was provided by the *Instituut voor Textiel en Confectie van België* [Institute for Belgian Textile] which was founded 1981 to provide coordination to a series of communication projects. The most famous of these was the magazine: 'Mode, dit is Belgisch' [Fashion, this is Belgian], which aimed to define and promote the image of national *mode* for both national and international buyers, following models that have previously been set by France and Italy.

Pecorari points out that the concept of Belgian Fashion soon became a contradiction in terms:[12] after federalisation in 1986, funds for the development of a national fashion industry started to privilege the Flemish Region, and the Province of Antwerp in particular. Belgian fashion thus became unequivocally associated with the city of Antwerp.[13] In parallel, fashion education started to be promoted at the Antwerp Academie, with the Fashion Department being founded in 1963 in addition to its traditional courses in painting, sculpture and printmaking. In 1975 an iconic article by Agnes Adriaenssen for *Avenue Belgie* – a fashion magazine for the Dutch speaking cultural elite – is considered to have inspired aspiring designers from everywhere in Belgium to study fashion at the academy.[14] According to

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[11] Florida, 'The rise of the creative class,' 15-25.
[12] Pecorari, 'Diventare città della moda,' 252-4.
[13] This idea is presented in 2001 exhibition at FIT: curated by Valerie Steele, the exhibition *Belgian Fashion: Antwerp Style* was one of the first fashion exhibitions to present Belgian fashion abroad, and in doing so it stressed the relation with Antwerp-based designers.
[14] Walter Van Beirendonck, 'Introduction,' *Fashion Antwerp Academy 50*, ed. Bracha de Man (Tielft: Lanoo, 2013), 9.

MoMu Curator Karen Van Godtsenhoven the article resonated with aspiring contemporary designers Martin Margiela and Walter Van Beirendonck, who were attracted by the possibility of studying in what was described as 'the only place in Belgium where truly creative fashion designers were made'.[15] They moved respectively from Hasselt and Brecht, to be joined a year later by Marina Yee, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, and Dirk Bikkembergs. The Antwerp 'Six plus One', so was called this 'first' generation of Belgian designers, represented a cultural awakening for Belgian fashion at times during which this was a concept sounding like an oxymoron. The fact that a group of designers with marked differences were referred to through a common name underlines their valence as a turning point. At the same time, it resonates with Rebecca Arnold's understanding that an emphasis on the individual, 'is also a successful promotional tool, as it gives a focus for the identity of a fashion label'.[16]

Defined by the tension between individual designers and this new fashion system, the identity of the collective became more than the sum of its parts: the synecdoche seemed possible because of their education at the Academy, but also because of their shared subversion of notions of classical construction and cut, as these had been taught at the academy under Mary Pryot. Through their practice, the Antwerp Six plus Martin Margiela produced what soon enough became the defining features of Belgian fashion:

> disturbing many of the fundamentals of European fashion, such as fit, elegance, and style, their work explored themes of metamorphosis, seduction, identity, and androgyny, expressed by referring the world of fairy tales, S&M, violence, and aggression, via clothes that defied established conventions of making and wearing[17]

They were followed by a second generation of Belgian designers, including Veronique Branquinho, Raf Simons, Bruno Pieters, and Bernhard Willhelm, among others. As the first and second generation of Antwerp designers took part in tradeshows abroad, Antwerp

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[15] Karen Van Godtsenhoven, 'The Wonder Years of the Antwerp 6+1,' in: *Fashion Antwerp Academy 50*, 65.

[16] Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

[17] Hazel Clark, 'Conceptual Fashion,' in *Fashion and Art*, ed. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas (Oxford: Berg, 2013), 69. On the features of Belgian fashion see also, see also: Anabela Becho, 'Kindred Spirits: The Radical Poetry of Japanese and Belgian Designers,' in *Fashion Game Changers:* 135–59*;* Luc Derycke, and Sandra Van De Veire, *Belgian Fashion Design* (New York: D.A., 1999); Kaat Debo, 'Antwerp 6+,' in *Antwerp 6+*, ed. Gert Bruloot and Kaat Debo (Gent: Ludion, 2007).

started to be portrayed as a desirable alternative to the high streets of other fashion cities. Valerie Steele recognises the impact of the image of Antwerp as a fashion city on its tourism, describing it in an interview for the Financial Times: 'We've seen the growth of a certain kind of cultural tourism. Just as people go to Bilbao to see the museum […] people are also doing that for shopping. They try to find somewhere that's different and special, and that's Antwerp'.[18]

The success of the image of Antwerp as a fashion city in part also derived from events and exhibitions aimed at promoting the fashion culture. The most effective ones, however, were not those that recalled consolidated fashion formats, such as that of the Fashion Week.[19] Attracting the global press were instead those events that embodied the ambition towards subversion and decanonisation, which also characterised the figure of the designer associated with the 'Antwerp Six'. This feature manifested itself in the fact that events were not initially set in the city centre or in Antwerp's museums and galleries; but rather in its post-industrial peripheries (thus becoming at the same time accidental projects of city regeneration as well as of promotion for the fashion industry) and/or through site specific formats and practices of public engagement. The first was the Antwerp Fashion 93 exhibition, curated by Linda Loppa at the Sint-Felix Warehouse in the harbour of Antwerp.[20] This was followed by *Vitrines 1998* and *Mode 2001 Landed-Geland*.[21] This network of events was also supported by the foundation of independent magazines, such as *BAM*, *Weekend Knack*, and *A Magazine Curated By*, that promoted Belgian fashion while emphasising the creative conceptual milieu found in Antwerp. But most importantly this constellation of events,

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[18] The School of Management of the University of Antwerp has recently produced a study that quantifies the impact of fashion on Antwerp's local economy, surveying employment over 1407 Antwerp-based fashion companies. Their combined turnover was estimated at € 1.3 billion, which includes the impact of the fashion industry on the media coverage of the city of Antwerp, and ultimately the role of fashion tourism on Antwerp's GDP. However, the study points out that it's difficult to determine the exact impact of shopping tourism, as in most cases tourists visit Antwerp for multiple other reasons. However, the study shows that the existence of Antwerp's image as a fashion city is an essential reason for visiting it for 16-40% of total tourism. See: Antwerp Management School, Antwerp Management School. *Onderzoek naar de impact en toegevoegde waarde van Mode in Antwerpen* (Antwerp, 2013).

[19] One aspect that is not examined in the literature is the gentrification that followed the successful construction of the image of Antwerp as a vanguardist fashion capital, and the implications of this process on the city's ability to host the next generation of designers. As a result of the increasing price of accommodation, studios, and retailing space, Antwerp's city centre has increasingly been the target of large international companies, who can afford the rent cost and business rates. The museum's current director Kaat Debo has taken an active role challenging this dynamic cost through intensive lobbying.

[20] Pecorari, 'Diventare Città della Moda.'

[21] Michel Bauwens et al. *Mode 2001: Landed-Geland Part I* (Antwerp: Merz, 2002).

exhibitions, magazines, and zines, placed emphasis on the designer, a polyhedral figure whose frequently creativity manifested not only in the clothing but also in the practices, the processes and the ideas behind them: a celebration of fashion culture requiring the specific social and aesthetic engagement with the city of Antwerp.

Pecorari observes that due to its connections to the city of Antwerp, the definition of Belgian fashion is one that is able to overcome the concept of nationality and to acquire the connotations of a truly urban practice. To demonstrate this point, Pecorari points out that Bernhard Willhelm is celebrated as a Belgian designer despite his German origins and precisely because of his education in Antwerp[22]. Another example is that of Vetements' Demna Gvasalia, who has acknowledged that the push for creativity and conceptuality at the Royal Academy has informed his practice, thus also associating himself with a specific tradition of doing fashion in Antwerp.[23] This understanding of the relation between Antwerp and Belgian identity is also suggested by Suzy Menkes, who writes that 'in the current digital world that connects via cyberspace, personal and national identities are still strong in Antwerp'.[24]

However, both positions raise questions on whether the notion of nationality – when this is left unproblematised – creates room for the diversity that animates contemporary Belgium. These observations can also become problematic in the light of Spivak's observation that the fascination towards defining national identities often emerges in the West as 'a means to promote and develop its own intellectual contours'.[25] This process often ends up producing a sense of estrangement and non-identification by migrating subjects and their later generations, whose identities have been shaped in a tension between national discourses and discourses of peripheralisation, which still make the city and its neighbourhoods, but also the definition of urban identity and nationality – and its institutions – contested spaces.

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[22] Willhelm was also featured in the 'Antwerp Icons' installation: in occasion of the *Happy Birthday Dear Academie* exhibition (2013)

[23] Imran Amed, 'Demna Gvasalia Reveals Vetements' Plan to Disrupt the Fashion System,' *The Business of Fashion*, accessed March 14, 2017, https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/demna-gvasalia-reveals-vetements-plan-to-disrupt-the-fashion-system

[24] Suzy Menkes, 'A Sense of Place,' in *Fashion Antwerp Academy 50*, 44.

[25] Rey Chow, 'Where have all the natives gone?', in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question,* edited by Angelika Bammer (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994), 132.

According to Perrin, the current diversity of Belgian society has origins in the postcolonial migratory fluxes that have taken place in the 1960s and 1970s, intensified by reforms to the Code of Belgian citizenship that have taken place in the 1980s, aimed at simplifying the process of acquiring Belgian citizenship.[26] Despite the administrative changes, the public response has been slow to adapt: with ethnic reference being perceived as a 'taboo', Belgium has struggled to fade the boundaries between ethnic Belgians, immigrants from outside Europe and their descendants. In addition to this, like other European countries, Belgium has had to come to terms with more recent migratory fluxes, often struggling to reconcile it with the definition of nationality and with the transformations by the creation of a transnational space in the European Union, by the humanitarian emergencies present and past, and by globalisation. Because of its large population with migratory backgrounds, Antwerp is thus one of those urban centres where the dialogue on visibility and emancipation within definitions of national identity is vital.[27] The current director of the museum, Kaat Debo acknowledges this aspect, explaining that,

> If we look at the demographics of the city of Rotterdam, not far from here [Antwerp], one in two inhabitants has a migratory background. […] National statistics indicate said that by 2030 this will be the case for Antwerp as well.[28]

As public institutions operating in an age of intensified and accelerated exchange, national heritage museums also play a role in defining the contours of the concept of nationality. In addition to this, MoMu's vision to display not fashion 'masterpieces', but rather designers' lesser-known pieces that represent 'what people *wear*' reinforces the

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[26] Nicolas Perrin et al. 'The Objective Approaches of Ethnic Origins in Belgium: Methodological Alternatives and Statistical Implications,' In *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity in Classifications and Identity Politics,* ed. Patrick Simon, Victor Piché, and Amélie Gagnon. 191-209 (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 191.

[27] For data on this matter see: Van der Bracht, Koen, Bart Van de Putte, Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe, Klaartje Van Kerckem, 'Ethnic Diversity in Belgium: Old and New Migration, Old and New Developments. *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies,* 1.1 (2014), 73.

[28] Kaat Debo, 'In Conversation with Kaat Debo,' interview by Alessandro Bucci, transcript, *Appendix*, (Antwerp, July 2016), 345-54. On the topic of the relationship between white Flemish residents in Antwerp and people from different backgrounds see Ahu Alanya, et al., 'Close Encounters: Minority and Majority Perceptions of Discrimination and Intergroup Relations in Antwerp, Belgium.' *International Migration Review*, 51.1 (2017): 191-217; On the diversity of the Belgian population and its historical reasons see Rachel Waerniers, 'Neighborhood and Identity: An Explorative Study of the Local and Ethnic Identities of Young Ethnic Minorities in Belgium.' *City and Community*, 16:4 (2017), 380-98; and Nicolas Perrin et al. 'The Objective Approaches of Ethnic Origins in Belgium.'

necessity to investigate inclusiveness of its curatorial policies.[29] Another indicator of the necessity to question received concepts of nationality is the interest of the museum in the interconnections between the concept of Belgian Fashion and the urban identity of Antwerp, which, according to Pecorari has relied mostly on the institutionalisation of designers that have been educated in Antwerp and whose practices have been defined by local cultural discourses.[30]

Debo highlights the necessity for a new operational framework, aimed at questioning the concept of nationality and at re-thinking acquisition policies that take into account the formal and informal networks of relations operating in the infrastructure of collective identity. This necessity also reveals a fracture between the way in which museums' contemporary fashion collections evolve and the role of fashion as a practice that enables individuals to negotiate the meanings of abstract notions of belonging, Debo explains:

> Museums in Belgium have placed emphasis on diversity for years and years, but this was never a top priority for the construction of collections or exhibitions. The excuse was always that money wasn't enough. It was more understood as something for the learning and engagement departments, and mainly in terms of developing activities that would create room for differentiation and almost never on the level of acquisition or exhibition. When this was done, it my opinion, it was done in a way that was segregating by addressing specific communities (e.g. the black community, or the Jewish community, etc.) rather than in an inclusive manner. Our activities should try and have an intercultural perspective and address a society that is already very multicultural. I think that, so far, we have been doing this completely wrong and I feel this is a huge responsibility for the future.[31]

Far from delegitimising the museum as a national heritage institution, considerations on inclusivity can become the foundation for the institutionalisation and musealisation of contemporary fashion – and the writing of its history – under the aegis of a definition of nationality that considers the liminality that has become included in this concept.

The artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural turn in the humanities in the 80s, the debates on the need for a 'new museology' in the 1990s, must be credited for the entrance of ordinary objects in the museum, breaking the traditional hierarchies

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[29] Debo, *Appendix,* 340.
[30] Marco Pecorari, 'The MoMu Effect: On the Relation between Fashion Design and Fashion Museum.' In *Museum and Design Disciplines*, ed. Matteo Ballarin and Maddalena Della Mura (IUAV The University of Venice: Venice, 2011), 250-64.
[31] Debo, *Appendix*, 348.

between artefacts, artistic genres, and subjects, thus opening up to increasingly mixed audiences. However, its policies of acquisition, exhibition, and outreach have often failed to resonate with the variety of backgrounds that were part of those audiences. This seems to be the case especially for 'universal' museums, whose exhibitions often refer to specific cultures by taking the tones of ethnographic observations that fail to mirror the contemporary identity-based issues of people who negotiate their identity against mainstream discourses of gender, class, ethnical and national discourses. Fashion needs to be credited for bringing into the museum the diverse sexual orientations and for having questioned mainstream representations of masculinity and femininity, often despite the lack of specific acquisition and exhibition policies.[32] However, exhibiting fashion often fails to reflect the dynamics of exchange and cultural translation that are at play in the clothing system. What emerges from Debo's words is a necessity to develop considerations on the discursive formation of nationality and to reflect on how current acquisition policies often fail to address substantial parts of the society that contribute to their existence and sustainability.

Considerations on how to develop inclusive collection and exhibition policies also need to take into account Spivak's observation that the discursive institutions which regulate writing about the other – such as museums – are often shut off to postcolonial forms of scrutiny, making it difficult for certain groups to produce 'speech' acts within those institutions. Fashion museums risk making this mistake and producing exhibitions that are similar to ethnographic ones, even when these are not its declared intentions. The result, Spivak says, is representations of 'the-same-yet-not-the-same, different-but-not-different'.[33] In this sense, acquisition and exhibition policies should be developed in an attempt to define the 'other' not as the object of study and as something that knowledge should be extracted from, but rather emphasising the ability of shared images and practices to produce and re-

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[32] Cole expresses this point in his recent study on collecting policies regarding LGBTQ at the V&A. The author explains that despite the lack of direct reference to this issue, the museum's ambition to 'address political, cultural and social issues as climate change, health, and identity' (The V&A Collections Development Policy, quoted by Shaun Cole in 'From Lesbian and Gay to Queer,' 144) could be interpreted as covering it. According to Cole, this is also supported by a history of exhibitions that have proven to be inclusive with relation to artefacts of significance for the LGBTQ community. An example is the *Streetstyle* exhibition of 1994, where it was argued that gay men and women could be identified as subcultural groups.
[33] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 340.

assert collective identities in the present. These principles can ground approaches to display that progressively stimulate and produce inclusion, and ultimately emancipate spectatorship in the museum. Debo explains:

> We are not an ethnographic museum at the end of the day. Still, we will have to find a way to give different groups of people an access point and a way to connect with our collections. It is a huge challenge, and I think that if we fail to do that in ten years' time we will be no longer relevant and will find ourselves working with a white, niche, middle-aged audience.[34]

Cultural and post-colonial sociolinguistic theory has produced various conceptualisations of the nature of forms of expression that create a space of interaction between cultures. In particular, Homi K. Bhabha's notion of 'third space' can be used to discuss the representation of power dynamics regulating cultural differences and cultural diversity. Describing it as a site of enunciation of the intercultural subjectivity, Bhabha's 'third space' is not to be understood as the result of a full dialectical process, in which the initial terms are seen as unrelated entities. It is rather the expression of a reluctance to reiterate dualisms, and a theorisation of a space that 'overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space for translation [...] something that contests the terms and territories of both'.[35] The construction of a museum as a 'third space' would require the development of new practices aiming to turn it from a place of encounter with difference, to a discursive space of dialogue, a terrain of back and forth, where collections and exhibitions can illuminate 'the overlap and displacement of domains of difference' which are further magnified in the 'cosmopolitanized' life world of our time.[36] Bhabha explains that building 'texts' means bestowing represations with historica depth: '[It] is a sign that history is happening – within the pages of theory, within the systems and structures we construct to figure the passage of the historical'.[37] Conversely – and in anticipation of the discussion of the second part of this chapter – the idea of a historical narrative that excludes perspectives – which translates in the idea of a museum in which 'distance' appears greater for specific groups – is a precondition of the

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[34] Debo, *Appendix,* 348.

[35] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25.

[36] Bhabha, 5. In using the term 'cosmopolitanized', I am here referring to the work of Ulrich Beck (see: *Cosmopolitan Vision.* London: Polity, 2006) who sought to renew nation-based sociological methodologies to the study of politics in response to the perceived emergence of 'world' societies.

[37] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 37.

much-debated 'end of history', namely, of the emergence of new forms of self-reflexive narratives characterising contemporary historiographical approaches.

A model for an approach to collecting fashion informed by the idea of creating a dialogic space can be found in Goethe's notion of *weltliteratur* – a field of literary enquiry that transcends borders and languages and that holds attention towards migrating values and themes, and towards the interactions between national and global paradigms. This concept, Chow reminds, arose 'in the historical context of nascent nationalisms in Europe' and has taken part in creating 'the aspirations toward global peace, cosmopolitan right, and intellectual hospitality'.[38] Goethe's ambitious concept can inform approaches to study fashion –, even national fashion histories – and it can ground museum policies and practices. This could be done, for example, by involving communities much more closely in research processes or by developing considerations on staffing.[39] The risk implied in delaying this conversation is that of avoiding the issue of 'cultural translation' which, according to Calefato, occurs spontaneously in everyday dress practices, making the body an exemplary 'third space' of individual negotiation, hybridity, and articulation.[40]

One of MoMu's recent exhibitions missed the opportunity to work as a space of cultural translation. *Game Changers*, held in 2016, identified key shifts in the female silhouette in the last century. It suggested that the kimono was one of the most significant stylistic innovations in women's fashion. In doing so, it presented the work of Japanese designers who have become appreciated in the West, as well as the work of Western

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[38] Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 71.

[39] While national funding bodies often require commitment to the engagement of diverse communities, they rarely produce a framework of how this requirement translates in the projects and day-to-day operations of a museum. As a result, the strategic development of inclusive practices is left to the common sense of museums' operators, who often have to resort to aseptic quantitative data in order to provide a guarantee of the success of the investment that is sought. The complexity of this issue, however, is that due to the chronic lack of diversity within senior management teams, diversity is marked as something external to the museum system and its celebration often results in temporary projects that target specific groups. Recent studies of the UK and US museum system have highlighted that the lack of diversity at both operational and non-operational levels are an obstacle to the development of truly inclusive policies that are able to produce a lasting impact. For example, new research commissioned by the Office for Civil Society and the Charity Commission have found that 92% of trustees are white, older, and above the average national income. In the US, the Mellon Foundation in partnership with the American Alliance of Museums has revealed that staff diversity exists mainly in administration roles, but that more than 90% of creative roles are given to white American candidates (Mellon Foundation, *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey*, accessed March 20 2018. (https://mellon.org/resources/news/articles/Diversity-American-Art-Museums/

[40] Patrizia Calefato, 'Fashion as Cultural Translation,' 345.

designers who have used the construction techniques typical of this garment (with its supporting point being the shoulders rather than the waist) as a starting point for their designs. But the cultural discourse that presented this specific garment was based on the contrast between the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity', the former presented in relation to Japan, the latter in relation to Europe and North-America. This is in keeping with how the kimono has often been referenced in the West, namely, through 'japonisms' that almost never correspond to the original functions of the garment. In *A Critique of the Postcolonial Reason* Spivak also discusses the use and the representation of the kimono in the West. Spivak notes that descriptions of the kimono by Western media stress stereotypes of cultural difference by using adjectives –'minimalist', 'independent', 'abstract' – which also appear recurrently in *Game Changers* and its catalogue. [41] But most importantly, the Kimono was the only influence from non-western traditions to be included in the exhibition, while others, i.e. hijabs or saris were excluded altogether, despite the presence of these garments in the lives of many women in western cities, which encounter them either as wearers or in interactions with its representations. Representing specific religious identification, both the hijab and the sari are less easily appropriated by 'western' fashion, and precisely for this reason their inclusion in the exhibition would offer the opportunity for the foundation of Bhabha's 'third space' – besides acknowledging an important change in the female silhouette witnessed in the West in the course of the last century.

According to Pecorari, post-structuralism already informs the historical research at the grounds of some of MoMu's exhibitions.[42] However, to produce acquisition and collection policies that do not essentialise non-Western identity, and that do not produce a disavowing gaze, such policies also need to be reformulated through post-colonial perspectives. These two 'posts' developed simultaneously, and their strengths derive precisely from those *structuralisms* and those *colonialisms* that they seek to remove. When integrating one another, these approaches have the potential to disclose the necessity behind their origins fully. This becomes evident when considering some of the reasons behind Benjamin's critique of modern historicism in his latest works, and in particular in his

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[41] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 54. To contrast Spivak's observation with how the kimono is described in *Game Changers*, see: Akiko Fukai, 'The Discovery of Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Fashion,' *Fashion Game Changers,* ed. Karen Van Gotsenhoven, Miren Arzalluz and Kaat Debo (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 163-5.

[42] Marco Pecorari, 'Contemporary Fashion History in Museums.'

controversial *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and in the *Passagenwerk*. Modern historicism is described as 'dream-like' because it is based on narratives that create 'a causal connection between various moments in history', yet delivered as an 'eternal image'.[43] But the both the *Theses* and the *Passagenwerk* had a politically oriented aim: that of inciting people to wake up from this dream-like illusion, to see the phantasmagoria that Benjamin saw as embryonic in it, and to 'remain in control of their power […] to blast open the continuum of history'.[44] To fully understand the origin of this conception of history, it is essential to consider Benjamin's Jewish background and the existential precariousness of the historical moment in which the *Passagenwerk* was written. From this perspective, the necessity to wake up from the 'dream' of history, and to apply to its construction the dialectical, materialist and disruptive tensions that characterise 'montage', is also informed by the necessity to identify and subvert the signs of alterity through which minorities were identified, and this is something that can happen only when the discourses of structuralism and colonialism, and their hierarchical architectures, are reduced to debris.

There is a political necessity for this kind of consideration – to formulate an answer to the way in which national identity has been politicised in today's political discourse, namely without a meticulous and deeply critical perspective and based on obsolete considerations. Discussing such topics also highlights the responsibility of cultural institutions in today's climate and underlines the necessity to develop a global citizenship agenda in order to reaffirm that the concept of nationality – and its projections onto material culture – cannot be merely absorbed and communicated, but need to be discussed and defined. Furthermore, the development of collection policies that both challenge our sense of historical identification, and that engage local communities, seems necessary to reflect the fact that funding comes from organisations and governmental bodies whose taxing policies see no cultural barriers.

These considerations are especially relevant as museums become increasingly aware of their visitors, of the necessity for sound outreach strategies, and as audiences become implicated in processes of history-writing and self-reflexivity. They are also crucial as museums digitise their collections and get them ready to confront a kind of participation that

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[43] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on The Philosophy of History' (1942), *Illumination,* ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Penguin, 2015), 255 & 254.
[44] Benjamin, 245.

is increasingly 'implicit' – based on the interaction with unidentifiable audiences, spread within a borderless infosphere.[45] From this perspective, a terrain of experimentation for new paradigms is offered by digital media and by the emergent individual-centred modes of reception that they produce. Often dismissed as tools for teleological and disembodied engagement and as funding magnets, digital infrastructures can bring into the museum those tensions between the local and the global that have defined the production and the consumption of fashion for decades, and that are at the heart of contemporary processes of identity formation.

This is the reason why the following sections will discuss the importance of presentations of digitised images in the museum, highlighting how they create room for inclusive participation. This discussion will identify the database as a symbolic space of contemporary modernity, and as a medium with the ability to accommodate the pluralism and the fragmentation that characterise the concept of national identity today. Above all, what follows will discuss how database-operated presentations and the digital favour the autonomy of the individual and the fragment; but also that the epistemological modes at the heart of the modern relational database embed a pre-existing socio-cultural condition, which pushes against the smooth continuity of inherited narratives and structures of identity, and which exposes the falsity of singular classifications and linear narratives.

The 'MoMu Explorer': fashion history in the age of the database

The digitisation of MoMu's collection started with the Open Fashion Project (funded by the Flemish Government), which aimed to combine the archive of graduation projects of Antwerp Fashion Department with the Contemporary Fashion Archive, a platform based on an information network between institutions of different countries, gathering images of collections of experimental fashion designers for educational purposes.[46] Debo explains that

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[45] Explicit and implicit participation are identified by Schäfer as two different ways of expanding production and distribution of content into the domain of audiences. See: Miko Tobias Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

[46] The programme was funded through the European Commission's cultural programme, Culture 2000. It aimed to link fashion designers with stylists, photographers, graphic designers, make-up artists and other professionals. Its archive also included photographs, invitations, and catwalk images. Despite its ambition and success as one of the earliest digital platforms addressing fashion, the lack of funding caused it to come to a standstill in 2007. The current availability online of the Contemporary Fashion Archive's website with its un-maintained, slow, and out-of-date content, makes this post-modern digital

a boost towards digitisation came from the Europeana Fashion project, a European co-operation project funded by the Connecting Europe Facility, which sought to adopt international open data standards to create a database of open access digital content. It contains contributions from thirty fashion heritage institutions, including the V&A, MUDE, MoMu, and various archives used for exhibitions by Pitti Immagine.[47] MoMu contributed to Europeana Fashion with more than 37,000 digital images, making it one of its largest contributors.

With the exception of Europeana's content, MoMu's digital collection is not yet available remotely.[48] However, MoMu is currently working to this purpose in tandem with Antwerp's Photography Museum and the Silver & Diamond museum. In the meanwhile, the majority of this digital collection can be accessed on-site, through MoMu's 'touch wall', an interactive technology offering visitors of the ModeNatie building an experience based on individual query and recombination or archived materials.

Not named in any particular way by the museum, and identified as 'MoMu Explorer' by its developer Lab101, MoMu's digital touch wall was inaugurated in late February 2014, on the same day of the opening of the *Dries Van Noten: Inspirations* exhibition and on the occasion of the third Europeana Fashion conference. Titled *Digital Fashion Futures* the conference brought together academics, museum practitioners, UX designers, businesses and bloggers, seeking to investigate the impact of the digital on various fashion organisations and on the creation of valuable experience. This seemed an apt context to launch MoMu's touch wall, as this became the first digital museological experience in Europe specifically addressing fashion collections.

The MoMu Explorer is a multi-screen touch wall measuring 7 x 2 meters whose intuitive interface allows visitors to browse part of the museum's digital collections (Fig. 4.1). In this context, 'digital' is used as a catch-all term that stands for a wide variety of media formats and that includes the digitised images of the contemporary fashion collection, the lace collection, the historical dress and accessories collection, short catwalk podcasts, and images of previous exhibitions (such as posters and/or display photographs). In keeping with the requirements of the Province of Antwerp, the touch wall also provides information on

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ruin a witness of the vulnerability of database-operated projects. This issue will be touched upon in the final section of this chapter.

[47] Debo, *Appendix,* 346.

[48] This is because Europeana Content is subject to an open license – something that has not been achieved yet for rest of MoMu's collection due to existing I.P. & copyright regulation.

events happening in Antwerp, as well as on the activities of the academy. Among the digital content available to visitors/users through the MoMu Explorer are also images of the archive itself, with all the ontological issues arising from their display.

To start browsing the collection, visitors/users need to tap one of the icons as these floats unidirectionally on the screen.[49] Following the logic of icons on a desktop, the tapped icon enlarges to reveal the image that has been selected, while following the logics of social media a series of key-words appears next to the item, suggesting basic information such as – but not limited to – the designer's name, the country of provenance, the year when it was produced, the typology of garment, its colour, fabric, the exhibitions that it was displayed it, etc. (Fig. 4.2). As the visitor taps one of those words, the initial item disappears, showing instead five randomly selected items that respond to the specific keyword that the user has chosen. All information is provided in five different European languages.

The MoMu Explorer resulted from visitors' feedback about the difficulty of finding their way in the ModeNatie building. Debo explains:

> When you reach the museum, and you walk into its premises, you don't feel like you are in a museum at all. The exhibition space is upstairs on the first floor, while the ground floor is mostly an area of passage. You can appreciate the architecture of the building, but it might also happen that while you're looking for the exhibitions you might get lost – and feedback from visitors tells us that this has already happened too many times.[50]

The response of the museum to visitors' perceived difficulty was to commission a screen installation in the main hall that would provide indications and directions on the various exhibitions and events taking place in the building. When a call for projects was published by the museum – in keeping with the requirements of the Province of Antwerp for public procurement – Dos Santos, a local product design company, responded with the idea of the digital wall. Debo explains: 'it [their proposal] wasn't what we had asked for but, the more I

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[49] The motion of the icons on the screen, recalling the movement of a wave, was produced with Box2D, an open-source engine which allowed Lab101 to determine the attraction direction and velocity of each icon (Fig. 3.5).

[50] Debo, *Appendix,* 351. The interview was taken in June 2016, less than a year before the works for the expansion of MoMu would begin. Therefore, Debo's considerations about the difficulty perceived by visitors in exploring the areas contained in the ModeNatie building refers to its configuration before the expansion.

looked into it, the more it made sense'.[51] The project was later developed by Lab101, an Antwerp based company specialising in interactive installations. Developer Kris Meeusen explains that its hardware consists of 8 screens, which are activated through a capacitive touch system.[52] The database can be accessed online and through a computer located at the back of the screens. To give an idea of the power of the hardware of the MoMu Explorer, Meeuseen explains that while the dimensions of the touch wall only allow a limited number of visitors per time to interact with it, its hardware has the capacity to support more than a hundred requests at any time (Fig.4.3).

The installation of the MoMu Explorer has brought multiple advantages: its software enables visitors to browse the collection and become aware of the nature of its content; it allows them to view garments which have appeared in past exhibitions and that are not likely to be exhibited for a long time; it allows visitors to view garments that cannot be exhibited for conservation reasons;[53] it enables them to express preferences on images that they like, thus sending information that the museum could potentially use as data to shape its programme. At the same time, the touch wall works as a promotional tool for other exhibitions and events happening in the city. However, it must be pointed out that while the MoMu Explorer has proven successful among audiences with its current possibilities for interaction, the potentialities of its software are still unexplored and are assumed to be far-reaching in terms. This is acknowledged by both Debo and Meeusen who admit that its software is not to be thought as a finished presentation, but rather as experimental and likely to be implemented with new applications in future as new necessities emerge from the observation of how it affects audiences' experience. Meeusen pictures the potentiality of the machine with an automotive comparison: 'They have a Rolls-Royce, which they are currently using as a Fiat'.[54]

Far from being a critique, the recognition of the technology's unfulfilled potential arises from constantly developing considerations on what digitisation means for museums, and on how audiences relate to presentations of digital images. According to The University

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[51] Debo, *Appendix,* 352.

[52] This is different from standard optical touch technology, which could not be used due to the potential interference of sunlight and dust on the external setup and causes the software not to respond as quickly as it would allow otherwise.

[53] For example, garments in knitwear or crochetwork cannot be displayed for long periods of time as these would lose their original shape and firmness.

[54] This quote comes from a personal conversation between Meeusen and myself, 2016.

of Edinburgh's Digital Curation Centre, digitisation can be used to ensure the 'the sustainability of data in the long term' and to facilitate 'persistent access to reliable digital data', thus also becoming the precondition to democratise access to collections.[55] But as the museum transforms its assets into digital ones and as it integrates the imperatives of the database to each of its departments,[56] the necessity to assert its function in the material world of fast forming subjectivities become even more pressing. All the more, the processes through which digital and technological museum presentations are developed depend on considerations about how the consumption of digital content evolves outside its walls. Fashion seems yet again more sensitive than other forms of expression to this institutional shift, as fashion museum goers have become accustomed to consuming fashion and its representations online.

The issue of digitisation adds a new dimension to the critique of the museum started in the last decades of the twentieth century, particularly with regards to the necessity of creating interactive strategies of display that are inclusive, accessible, and dynamic. From this perspective, interactive digital technologies have the potential to challenge the traditional hierarchies between curators and visitors, which regulated the production and the consumption of content in the museum. The appeal of the digital is the open and virtually limitless, availability of collections, which have traditionally been set out of immediate public reach. In other words, in offering the possibility to look for and interact with images, presentations of digitised content diminish the spatial and temporal distance between visitors/users and museums' collections: objects are available to be looked at, queried, commented, and potentially, shared or brought home.

Despite its obvious potential to imbue visitors/users with agency over their personal experience of collections, digitisation also brings the risk of historical forgetfulness. This depends on the way in which images are extrapolated from their original context, to become part of an experience that is characterised by nonlinear recontextualization and post-narrative approaches to the experience of the past. What follows thus seeks to consider the

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[55] Daisy Abbott, 'What is Digital Curation?' *DCC Briefing Papers: Introduction to Curation.* Edinburgh: Digital Curation Centre, accessed June 5 2017, http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/briefing-papers/introduction-curation

[56] to explain some of the difficulties in establishing a standard of digital practice at MoMu, Debo observes that '…in order for it to become a working reality 'digital' should be on the mind of everybody working at the museum, regardless of what department they are from: staff from collections, education, communication, press, exhibitions' (Debo, *Appendix*, 347).

mode of exploration that is produced by database-operated presentation modalities. In considering this issue, the aim will be to identify what is to be gained in lieu of the complete severing of objects from linear chronology. This discussion will subsequently consider whether the logics of the database have had an impact on contemporary historicism outside the digital dimension.

The database as a post-modern topos

While digitisation was initially conceived as a means to make images, artefacts, and texts available outside the museum, to free objects and documents of the restrictions of time and place, and to maximise the potential of archives for engagement and outreach, in recent years the digital image has permeated the most traditional of exhibition spaces, sometimes in support of the display of artefacts, sometimes taking central stage in the exhibiting context. While the first approach has received approval from museum practitioners and academics alike, believing that digital media – such as video clips, photographs, and even holograms – can support the accurate representation of the artefact that is being exhibited,[57] the latter is met with ambivalent reactions: on the one hand, excitement at the new possibilities offered by digital culture, especially in terms of outreach and engagement; on the other hand, discontent and dismissal for the fetishisation of a technology that sets originals out of reach. In other words, if the artefact loses its aura when removed from its context and brought into the exhibition space, its post-modern digital existence is seen a sacrilege and 'an act of radical profanation' that disintegrates any trace of its original aura[58].

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[57] Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, 29-47.

[58] Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008), 86. Art and media theorist Boris Groys makes reference to Benjamin and his famous essay on the mechanical reproduction of artworks. Benjamin assumes that while identical reproduction makes the copy indistinguishable from the original, the artefact's aura of authenticity is lost in the process. The issue complicates itself in the case of fashion because of the way in which fashion gets digitised, that is to say, by emphasising garments' existence as three-dimensional objects beyond their appearance in the digital image: generally as a picture of a mannequin, against a monochromatic background, that is to say as a picture of a representation. Radicalising Benjamin's thought, it seems possible to say that in the case of dress, the relationship between the original artefact and its digitised image is not the same as the relationship between original and copy. The relationship between the fashion artefact and its digitised image becomes more similar to the relationship between artefact and its display in the museum, a place where Benjamin claims, the artefact's aura gets profoundly regulated. According to Groys, digitisation leaves us with the illusion that all we have is copies that circulate in the information networks. In the case of digital originals, such as the objects collected by MoMu (digital invitations, newsletters, look books), the digital image produced by software and hardware is the visible manifestation of original data that

Both perspectives leave out of the equation the fact that with digitisation also come computer-specific ways of structuring, searching, and making sense of data, underlain by a renewed relationship between parts/files and the whole of the digital archive, as well as by specific modalities of interacting with the digital space. What follows thus seeks to identify the impact of these logics on our relationship with the past, identifying the emergence of a mode of historical exploration which has at its heart the topos of the database.

In the post-Foucauldian age, the human capacity of perception has been theorised in terms of the existence and exercise of systems of thought that underpin 'the conditions of possibility of knowledge' at a specific historical time.[59] The emergence of the novel, for example, has shaped our understanding of narrative since the 18th century. Steve Anderson and Margaret Hedstrom note that the increased diffusion of illustration books in the 18th century impacted the modes of history-telling, disseminating the notion of the past as a visual experience.[60] Then, Malraux observes that as photography and film promoted a more detailed visual experience, viewers developed a tendency to establish connections between images that were previously considered to be unrelated.[61] But with an increased sense of realism, also came the idea that images can be deceiving, that they are not always reliable, and that they may be used for different narrative purposes. The database, deriving from technological advancements that allow storage of large quantities of information, represents the most recent permutation of this general epistemological trajectory. As I will argue, as the database increasingly became an integral part of the material world of today, and as it acquired an ability to receive stimuli and produce them, it has impacted our regime of memory. The result was described by Lev Manovich as 'the projection of the ontology of a

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is, by its nature, invisible and that exists inside the database. Groys, compares the experience of visualising the digital image with the experience of visualising the image of the divinity in iconoclastic religions: the invisible does not show itself through an individual image but rather through the history of its appearances, that is to say, through the original experiences of the visualisation of an invisible entity that refuses to be trapped in a unique image. An implication of this theological simile is that born-digital born files can only be visualised as originals: 'original presentations of the absent, invisible digital original' (Groys, 91). The tension between original and copy complicates itself even further with three-D printed objects: in this case, the exhibition space becomes the space where only material copies of an immaterial original file are displayed, but at the same time, each copy's unicity will depend on the individual moment when it's made and assembled. The result is a presentation of an unequal copy of an invisible original file; pure data converted into matter.

[59] Foucault, *The Order of Things*.
[60] Steve Anderson, 'Past Indiscretions. Digital Archives and Recombinant History;' Margaret Hedstrom, 'Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past,' *Archival Science* 2.1-2 (2002), 21–43.
[61] Malraux, *Museum Without Walls*.

computer onto culture itself', with repercussions on the possibilities of knowledge production and narrative progression. [62]

The idea of the database – a structured collection of data which contains different media types organised through multiple indexing modalities – as a topos is implied by Manovich, who suggests that besides being 'inherent to new media', the database has become a metaphor to conceptualise collective memory.[63] More relevantly to a discussion of the 'shape' of various modes of historical exploration, Manovich explains that the database is the 'symbolic form' of the computer age, suggesting that its features can be thought of as a way to conceptualise the aesthetical, ethical, and poetical issues typical of contemporaneity. But another level of complexity is at play in the relationship between technological advancement and the cognitive model at its grounds, and it is here that the database's function as a topos is fully revealed.

In 'The Work of Art', Benjamin explains that the skills of perception are absorbed automatically by individuals, in a mode of distracted participation with technological means.[64] This idea is also central to classic text 'The Question Concerning Technology', in which Heidegger explains that the skills that have been absorbed through the encounter with technology, also end up shaping technology further, in a cycle of influences between its instrumental mode and our perceptual, intuitive, and cognitive capacity. This reciprocal relationship is described by Heidegger as being based on the fact that 'the essence of technology is by no means anything technological:'[65] its essence, determining both the necessity for the new technology and the way in which it alters our perception, derives in turn from the mode of being in a specific historical moment. Heidegger also explains that an implication of this relationship is that it would not be accurate to describe technology merely in terms of what it enables users to do, or in terms of how it is operated. Instead, discussing technology involves distilling its non-technological essence, its mode of being, and the specific way of relating fragments and whole that has informed that technology but that has become our 'absorbed' capacity.

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[62] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 237.
[63] Manovich.
[64] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.'
[65] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology,' 309.

With specific reference to the digital, this idea is suggested in Charlie Gere's oft-quoted observation that,

> the digital refers not just to the effects and possibilities of a particular technology. It defines and encompasses the ways of thinking that are embodied within that technology, and which make its development possible.[66]

Gere's definition of the digital as that which informs technology, rather than as one of its features, recalls Heidegger's idea of a topological non-technological essence, suggesting an intersection between media and embodiment. In this sense, the relationship between the formation of the database and the post-modern subject can be described as dialectic: the latter determined the former, but the former contributed to shaping further the intellectual generation of post-modernism, and some of its cultural outputs. The essence of technology manifests itself, for example, in the almost-instinctive knowledge of how to approach and interact with highly technologised processes (e.g. touch screens), which, as Daniel Strutt observed, points out the 'relative materiality of data'.[67]. In the specific case of database-operated technologies, their 'essence' also manifests in the epistemological shift towards searching, re-organising, and comparing, which increase our agency, and which have become increasingly co-existent with the consumption of given information and narrative sequences. In this shift, the non-technological essence at the heart of the database shows itself also in its relationship with narrative – which Manovich describes as that of 'natural enemies'.[68]

The neutralisation of narratives emerges recurrently as a premise for the definition of the post-modern cultural output.[69] Ihab Hassan emphasises that it is brought by a rupture in the modes of knowing, producing, living, at the passage between modernism and post-modernism. While the former is characterised by processes of selection, purpose, determinacy, and distance, the post-modern experience evokes instead a contrasting constellation of values and attitudes: play, recombination, indeterminacy, which delineate

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[66] Charlie Gere, *Digital Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 13.

[67] Daniel Strutt's PhD thesis discusses the impact of contemporary digital screen cultures on our sense of being in the world. See: Daniel Strutt. 'The Difference The Digital Makes' (PhD diss. Goldsmith's College, 2012), 7. On this topic, see also Daniel Strutt, 'Digital Grammatisation,' *Dandelion* 5 (2015) which considers how digital visual media affect our corporeal intuition of reality; and Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* (London: Penguin, 2011) which explores the new kinds of attitudes towards problem-solving, participation, and sharing generated by the internet.

[68] Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 226.

[69] Thomas Docherty, 'Introduction,' *Post-Modernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Cambridge: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 1-2.

'ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt' and 'a vast will to unmaking' any traditional narrative practice'.[70] This idea also reflects in the understanding of post-modernism as a philosophical concept with implications on literary, artistic, and design practice rather than a movement with defined features. Thus, in taking indeterminacy as its main feature, post-modernism emphasises its own lack of narrative as the symptom of a crisis in historical identification.

In a passage focusing on narrative, Jameson describes the post-modern relationship between cultural production and history:

> Cultural production is thereby driven back inside a mental space which is no longer that of the old monadic subject, but rather that of some degraded collective 'objective spirit': it can no longer gaze on some putative real world, at some reconstruction of a past history which was once itself a present; rather, as in Plato's cave, it must trace our mental images of that past upon its confining walls.[71]

In comparing the experience of the past to a simulation on the walls of Plato's cave, the central substantive claim of Jameson's position acknowledges the writing of history as a profound depiction of post-modern subjectivity. The product of this new-found awareness is a cultural output that pushes against the structures of received discourses – including historical discourse – and that, by doing so, becomes capable of affirming its individuality. In this process emerges an understanding of historical narrative as open towards self-reflexivity, and as made by constellations of told and untold stories, past and present, that can be intertwined, often in unique and unexpected ways. The database accommodates this vision of the past, where it emerges through parts/files organised in records and tables. At the same time, the database also enables the parts to evade records and tables, and to become part of new ones. Media theorist Alan Liu highlights these new abilities through a metaphor: 'contemporary post-modern historicism is an escape structure', a constant escape from mainstream and institutionalised narratives.[72]

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[70] Ihab Hassan, 'The Post-Modern Turn' (1987), *Post-Modernism: A Reader*, ed. Docherty, 152-3.
[71] Jameson, *Post-Modernism*, 71.
[72] Alan Liu. *Local Transcendence. Essays on Post-Modern Historicism and the Database* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 240.

Vast and unwieldy, not quite territory, but very concretely measurable, the space of the database allows for the projection of the individual onto a sea of data, in which items are presented as a disorderly list. Digital Humanities scholar Tara McPherson describes this determined randomness as dependent on a structure that 'privileges abstract relations among data while also stripping "things'' of context'.[73] At the same time, however, the database can support the existence of fragments without a fixed categorisation and without a connection to a pre-existing totality: continuing with Jameson's allegory, as a no-longer monadic shadow on the walls of Plato's cave, each fragment/file retains its significance in isolation, in its self-containedness, and its bonds with history are thus loosened. Coincidently, the presentation of the past through the MoMu Explorer is also mediated by a wall, and produces a similar effect: historicity is lost in a post-modern force field that aims to preserve the past, but obscures any narrative of it.

As the artefact becomes virtually detached from its contextual historical whole, the emphasis that is placed on its fragmentary nature brings about what Jameson describes as 'a breakdown in the signifying chain', enabling the fragment to enter a variety of other relations and connections.[74] The new degree of flexibility acquired by the artefact in its digital existence reflects the post-modern idea that 'the past as "referent" finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether' and provides the foundation for the database to become the space for an historiographical mode based on a post-modern 'practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory', in which there can be nothing but 'heaps of fragments'.[75]

The virtual space of the database thus emerges as a space where the post-modern suspiciousness towards the idea (and the dynamics) of representation culminate in the loss of analogy and continuity between the individual fragment and a pre-existing context. However, despite post-modern scepticism towards representation, it is at play in the constrains that inevitably need to be put in place to enable users to navigate the database and to retrieve files. Digital Humanities scholar Joshua Sternfeld emphasises that the database does not constitute the totality of the technology with which users interact, and

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[73] Tara McPherson, 'Post-Archive: Scholarship in the Digital Age,' presented at the *Digital Arts and Humanities Lecture Series* (Providence: Brown University, 2011).
[74] Jameson, *Post-Modernism*, 25.
[75] Jameson, 71.

that an important role is played by the interface that is used to access it, as well as by the metadata used to describe the content of files.[76] Interface and metadata design processes, which ensure that the database can be searched, can be understood as the post-modern equivalent of the modern archival processes of selection and labelling. In keeping with this simile, they isolate the shift from acquisition to discerning, from adding to filtering, from creating the archive to querying it.

Navigating the sea of data

Before paintings started to be exhibited with space between them – a result of the idea that each demanded to be looked at individually and without the interferences of other paintings[77] – a traditional strategy of display consisted in presenting paintings wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling and frame-to-frame with minimal separation between them. This way of arranging painting, well represented on oil canvases by Johan Joseph Zoffany (*Tribuna degli Uffizi*, 1772), William Powell Frith (*A Private View at the Royal Academy*, 1881) and François-Joseph Heim (*Charles V Distributing Awards to the Artists at the Close of the Salon of 1824*, 1827) and very popular at Somerset House when this was still home to the Royal Academy, had one main arranging rule: to reflect the hierarchical relation between artists by placing the most esteemed towards the central section of the wall. This presentation modality was an interface which derived from an unspoken agreement between gallerists, artists, and the viewing public – each knowing how to make sense of the surfaces of those walls.

To the museum historian, the visual arrangement of images on the busy digital wall at MoMu recalls this old exhibiting practice. Like the former, the latter presents images with very little space between them on the full touch screen display. Like the former, the latter has its way of signalling the prominence of an image over another – and thus of attracting to it viewers' attentions: images that the museum is seeking to promote (usually those about their current exhibition) are more prominent and appear more recurrently than the others. This comparison reveals what the pre-modern and the post-modern presentation modality

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[76] Joshua Sternfeld, 'Archival Theory and Digital Historiography,' *The American Archivist.* 74.2 (2011), 544-575.
[77] This was a significant innovation in the history of museum strategies of display and it was brought in 1877 by the Grosvenor Gallery, London. See: Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Whistler Journal* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1921).

have in common: a lack of narrative and a pronounced preference for the episodic – the fragment – rather than the whole. However, in moving digital data from the space of invisible codes – the database – to the space of visible images – the display – the interface of the MoMu accommodates individual interests in the collection by means of an interface designed to enable visitors/users to trace unique trajectories among the totality of the files contained in the database.

Developer Chris Meeuseen explains that the design for the interface of the MoMu Explorer was aimed at highlighting the high quality of the images. Lab101 suggested a straightforward design process that would stimulate a direct and intuitive interaction with the content of the database – namely, without having to query the software through the insertion of keywords. This interface design process was instead based on the idea of immediacy and it aimed to recall the language of the desktop and its icons, which contemporary museum goers know and are familiar with.

Another principle of the interface design process was the necessity to create participatory flows of information and content between visitors/users and the museum. This is revealing of the process of reinvention that museums are going through as they seek to interact with increasingly larger and mixed audiences: in contrast with traditional static exhibitions, where the museum provides content for its visitors, the contemporary museum produces experiences in which visitors can act both as consumers of content and as critics and creators. In addition to giving visitors the ability to browse the database and to decide what to see, the MoMu Explorer interface also lets them express preferences on what they see, through an Instagram-like mechanism that enables them to 'like' content. In return, this creates information for the archivist, in a multidirectional flow of information between institution and visitors that Nina Simon describes as a defining feature of the 'participatory museum'.[78] This information can become key for strategic choices, such as those regarding future digital acquisitions, but potentially also the development of exhibition programmes, as well as exhibition content. Thus, the digitisation of MoMu's collection and its presentation through the MoMu Explorer creates the basis for the development of crowd-curated projects, in which visitors, directly or indirectly, take part to processes that have traditionally been the remit of museums' senior staff. This is something which cultural heritage

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[78] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), 1-3.

institutions have been exploring during the last decade, but that has never been experimented in the field of the museology of fashion.

While the use of this technology has not yet influenced the content of exhibitions, the MoMu Explorer has already been central to the development of a participatory project. In 2015, shortly after the digital wall's inauguration, MoMu invited primary school children to take part in a workshop in which they would search the collection to then draw their own textile patterns on computers in the museum's library. This user-generated content was then displayed on the MoMu Explorer. Not only does the project have clear educational potential with regards to textile drawing, but it also promoted children's engagement with the collection and the institution. At the same time, this experience emphasises this technology's participatory potential, and its ability to influence static exhibitions as well, for example, as has been suggested by Lab101, by asking visitors to select a few artefacts from a pre-curated list.

As the interface of the MoMu explorer has been devised to enhance independent discovery of MoMu's digital collection, its design process also sought to restrict the number of connections that visitors/users can establish and at showing a selection of images with commonalities, in what would otherwise be an 'open arena' of digital files. To help visitors/users retrieve images, the interface relies on metadata, whose function is summarised by White et al., as they explain how they support traditional browsers:

> search engines, bibliographic databases and digital libraries provide adequate support for users whose information needs are well-defined. However, they do not work well in situations where users lack the knowledge or contextual awareness to formulate queries or navigate complex information spaces. For example, what if you want to find something from a domain where you have a general interest but not specific knowledge?[79]

Effective metadata construction is thus tasked with enhancing access to files and their content, at once 'labelling' digital objects, classifying them under multiple categories, and making them retrievable along with other digital objects with similar features. An immediate implication is that through metadata the potentially unlimited range of associations between files becomes regimented through a word-led system that challenges the digital file's ubiquitous nature, and makes each file the central node of neural pathways of structured

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[79] Ryen White, et al., 'Exploratory Search Interfaces: Categorization, Clustering and Beyond,' *ACM SIGIR Forum* 39.2 (2005).

relationships with other files. For this reason, metadata are key tools in resource discovery, creating a web of trajectories through which the vast sea of data can be crossed. In practice, as metadata influence the process of re-contextualisation of files and turn data into answers to specific questions, the digital labelling of files through metadata can itself be thought as a curatorial process, invested in acts of interpretation and archival decision, and with the sharing of that interpretation with visitors/users: by following metadata they can independently discover affiliations between artefacts, which in their post-modern digital existence are brought together by an algorithm that highlights relationships on an interactive basis.[80]

So far, the metadata in use with the MoMu Explorer have been descriptors of straightforward search criteria, including designers' names, historical period, style, country of provenance, garment type, colour, exhibitions that it was presented in, material, etc. Their value is revealed not so much in providing information about what the user is looking at, but rather in functioning as discovery tools, traces to be followed to discover related content across the database. Their existence shows the potential to reconfigure the hierarchies of categories of knowledge from which artefacts are stored in the static archive.[81] This is a key difference, which determines the ability of objects to be immediately related to a variety of other objects that share one or more features, whatever those may be, instead of being

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[80] Because metadata take such an essential role in determining which kind of relationships can be established between files, the process of how information is assembled is as important as the information itself. While the issue of metadata creation is key to develop considerations on the historiographical model informed by the MoMu Explorer, this thesis is not the place for a debate on their construction. For a description of such dynamics see: Jeffrey Stuart, 'Resource Discovery and Curation of Complex and Interactive Digital Datasets,' *Revisualizing Visual Culture: Digital Research In The Arts*, ed. Chris Bailey and Hazel Gardiner (London: Routledge, 2010), 45-60.

[81] According to Oomen and Arroyo's account of the core challenges faced by cultural heritage institutions as they rely on the digital, considerations on metadata require advance planning on what categories will drive the research. This is a process that needs to precede the digitisation of images. See: Johan Oomen and Lora Arroyo, *Crowdsourcing in The Cultural Heritage Domain: Opportunities and Challenges.* Presented at the 5th International Conference on Communities & Technologies (Brisbane, 2011).This is a lesson to be learnt from Europeana Fashion: at a co-creation workshop held in 2016 at the Rijksmuseum, it soon became evident that many of the participants felt frustrated with the unreachability of some images. This is due to the initial lack of general instructions on what kind of metadata was to be associated with the images coming from different institutions, with the result that different museums took different pieces of information for granted. This was the case, for example, for brand archives, who omitted information relating to the name of the brand itself, assuming, of course, that all the images that they were sending to Europeana related to the same designer. When their files were pooled into the central database, none of them was retrievable in searches by designer, simply because that specific information had not been associated with the digitised images. This simple example shows that in the database, the visibility of content is dependent on metadata.

found in a specific location of the static archive, where all objects are archived under a universal criterion. According to McPherson, this acquired ubiquity of artefacts/files signals the passage towards a 'post-archival moment',[82] characterised by a shift from a focus on objects to a focus on of the relations that can be established amongst them. In particular, McPherson argues that by studying critically such relationships, it is possible to shed light on the naturalisation of cultural systems of meanings. In other words, the same structures of representation that are at play in the classification of artefacts in the physical world, emerge in the language of computational systems, and regulate the ability of artefacts/files to appear on a screen at our request.

An implication of this view is that an efficient and critical process of metadata construction can subvert the creation of static and univocal classifiers of knowledge. These classifiers were at the heart of Foucault's critique of the archive as an institutional structure that obscures the process by which knowledge itself is acquired and deployed, and conceals networks of power. However, Hedstrom also observes that as archivists regulate metadata categories, they inevitably provide an interpretative framework and determine what constitutes legitimate information about the past.[84] Thus, in seeing this as a limitation to individual interpretation and visitor emancipation, Hedstrom argues that no interface can ever be free of the dynamics of representation. This idea is central to the influential book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, in which Diana Taylor calls for further research on how metadata can have an impact on the hegemonies governing the representation of history in an archive.[85] In this sense, their non-technological essence is revealed in their ability to outline the categorisations governing the mind, as the mind seeks to order the database so that it can be accessed by others.

With regards to the considerations that have been developed in the previous section, the process of metadata construction has the potential to highlight thematic relations that pose a challenge to the hegemonies of traditional historiography. For example, this process could be guided by the intention to highlight the non-western influences on fashion, and to offer an innovative categorisation for dresses and textiles that would otherwise be inserted in the general history of fashion, read through the lenses of western modernity. Furthermore, current research within the field of digital museology is exploring the idea that the process

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[82] McPherson, 'Post-Archive: Scholarship in the Digital Age.'
[84] Hedstrom, 'Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past,' 21.
[85] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

through which metadata come to exist can itself become participatory. Simon explains that a possible application of this principle consists in the development of strategies aimed at offering visitors/users the possibility to suggest further 'tags' to content – thus contributing to the development of knowledge for the institutional catalogue, and stimulating other users' opinions.[86] This example highlights the potential of museums to engage with the evolution of digital archival practice as a critical framework, and to develop presentations of the digital image that go beyond their effectivity as engagement and outreach tools.

The previous two sections have developed the claim that post-narrative digital historiography is framed by paradigms of digitisation, interface design, and quantification of relevance through metadata. They have shown that these the non-technological essence of these technologies (the existence of which was theorised by Heidegger[87]) is modelled on the specific way in which images/texts and the relations between them are consumed in the context of post-modernity. Building on these points, the next section argues that besides manifesting themselves in contemporary screen culture, the logics regulating the post-modern consumption of images – fragmentation, the tension between individuality and pluralism, the hypertextual recombination of narratives – escape the database, and can increasingly be found at play in the creative processes of contemporary fashion practice. Then, I will highlight the existence of a new mode of exploring the past, which also unconsciously absorbs the non-technological essence of the database. Evolving directly from new historicism, it also surpasses it, becoming a tool to interrogate both contemporary fashion practice and older forms of expression through questions that have arisen in the present.

The End of Fashion History?

In 1987 German Art Historian Hans Belting published a provocative essay titled 'The End of the History of Art?'.[88] In this divisive publication, Belting presented the controversial idea that sometimes in the middle of the XX century, the methodologies in use to study the history of art had become no longer relevant to illuminate newer art practice. Belting recognised that the ideas of progress and cultural hegemony, used by art historians and

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[86] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, 6.
[87] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology.'
[88] Belting, Hans. *The End of The History of Art?*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

promoted by museums and galleries, had been rejected by avant-garde artists, who started to question the nature and the purpose of art itself, producing art that did not respond to the traditional paradigms of art history. The revolution that had taken place in contemporary art and the changes in the definition of what constitutes artistic quality were later examined by Art Historian Arthur Danto, who re-proposed the idea of the 'end of art' in 1997. He explained that the end of art represented the climax of a tradition stretching back to Hegel: the moment when the human spirit could not progress in the same direction where it came from. Danto explains:

> What I know is that the paroxysms subsided in the seventies, as if it had been the internal intention of the history of art to arrive at a philosophical conception of itself, and that the last stages of that history were somehow the hardest to work through, as art sought to break through the toughest outer membranes, and so itself became, in the process, paroxysmal. But now that the integument was broken, now that at least the glimpse of self-consciousness had been attained, that history was finished. It had delivered itself of a burden it could now hand over to the philosophers to carry. And artists, liberated from the burden of history, were free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all. That is the mark of contemporary art, and small wonder, in contrast with modernism, there is no such thing as a contemporary style.[89]

In a progressively self-conscious West, the emergence of an artistic practice that was quintessentially geared towards radical pluralism resulted in often controversial and confrontational art forms. Starting to put forth the perspectives of previously neglected, liminal subjects, and proposing to re-read dominating artistic discourse from those perspectives, these art forms represented a rupture with earlier art and its representational functions. At the same time – and with strong influences from cultural studies, post-structuralism and post-colonialism – these art forms resulted in the necessity to renew the methodologies in use to write and construct art history. The result was a new art historical thinking, influenced by the indefiniteness of art forms that had exploded the traditional hierarchies of styles and media, which favoured the conceptual fluidity between genres, discourses, and techniques. In other words, the aim of art history became to reconcile with the idea of heterogeneity and to develop a view of art as practice rather than finished objects.

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[89] Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 34.

More recently, theoretical considerations akin to those at the grounds of the idea of the end of art have led fashion theorists and historians to acknowledge that fashion has met a similar fate, with the formal announcement being given in 2016 by fashion forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort. The 'end of fashion' became subsequently the topic of a recent International conference at Massey University, in which academics, but also museum practitioners[90] discussed the idea of fashion's 'end', linking it to documented changes in production and, above all, consumption patterns, determined by – but also accentuating – current tensions between the global and the local, the immaterial and the material, conservative values and progress, the mass and the individual, and the Barthesian categories of value and taste. These represent some of the dichotomies of post-modernism, when, Huyssen maintains, the second terms are no longer necessarily privileged over the first.[91] Against this scenario, fashion was understood as a performative practice that is increasingly at the service of personal goals, taking forms that can't be contained in safe categories, leaving fashion historians and theorists with little a priori conceptions and with the impossibility to hold on to the models of the past in order to continue studying it.

As in contemporary art practice, in fashion too the concept of the 'end' was elaborated by designers long before historians and theorists perceived the necessity to develop a discursive framework. Margiela and Kawabuko, for example, disrupted the practices of the clothed body through the introduction of 'history' into the garment itself: decay, tears, holes, stresses, creating a short circuit between past, present and future of the garment. In his final collections, McQueen distanced himself from the fashion culture that surrounded him and used elements from past collections (his own but also those of other designers) to activate in the present fashion's transformative powers.[92] Westwood created a post-modern, hypertextual 'multiple quotation of elements taken from earlier styles or periods' by drawing upon eighteenth-century court dress codes and by making them pillars of her contemporary, politically active fashion practice.[93]

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[90] For example, see: Dori De Pont, 'The Role of the Museum in Mapping Out A New Fashion System,' accessed January 18 2017, http://www.nzmuseums.co.nz/news/the-role-of-the-museum-in-mapping-out-a-new-fashion-system/
[91] Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
[92] Alessandro Bucci, ''Black Duck Feathers' or, becoming-perfect.' *Fashion, Style, and Popular Culture* 4.3 (2017), 325-40.
[93] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Note on The Meaning of Post-'*Post-Modernism: A Reader,* ed. Thomas Docherty (Cambridge: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 147.

But crucially, before the 'end of fashion' trickled up to the catwalk, it manifested itself in everyday fashion, signalled by the conflation of the ability of the clothed body to stake out terrains of 'becoming' and to stage new social, transnational and sexual identities, in a constant process of negotiation between personal and social meanings. Through a process that can be traced back to the subcultural movements of the 1960s, and the aesthetics of a tense relationship between group and individual dynamics, fashion developed the ability to 'utter a mute resistance to the socially productive process of constructing an identity'.[94] A symbolic space of these acquired functions was the street, which inherited from the modern arcade the role of favouring the encounter of images, objects, and ideas that were previously considered unmatchable, making montage a shared social practice. The diffusion of the internet and the digital media then amplified the logics of the street and of street fashion. It did so by extending the range of the social spheres of individuals and the possibilities of interaction within them, with very real implications on how fashion sensibilities are formed, communicated and consumed. If the street was the modern 'dwelling place of the collective',[95] that is to say, a special place for the negotiation of fluid identities, a space of passage but also of self-exhibition, nowadays this role is taken by the internet.[96]

Feeding itself on that fluidity that defines it, fashion has thus inevitably acquired a techno-logical feature: inspirations, ideas informing our choices, as well as garments themselves, often travel through digital platforms, across databases through which the global and the local, the urban and the rural, past and present conflate. The implications are summarised by Calefato in her contribution to the Wellington conference:

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[94] Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 6.

[95] Benjamin, *AP*, 423.

[96] The impact of Web 2.0 on fashion production and consumption is well documented. In particular, a small cluster of research has placed fashion in the broader cultural context, in which its relationship with the digital emerges as the technological translation of deep-rooted cultural values and norms that intensify the dynamics of the street. On this topic, see Patrizia Calefato, *Mass Moda*, *Linguaggio e Immaginario Del Corpo Rivestito* (Milan: Meltemi, 2007), 321-328 where she looks at the formation of global subcultural groups through the internet) and Lisa Ehlin's doctoral thesis (on how the digital informs a form of fashion consumption with the ability to question the ideology of masculinity.) See: 'Becoming Image. Perspectives on Digital Culture, Fashion, and Technofeminism,' PhD Diss. (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2015). Another piece of literature that is relevant to the topics that are dealt in this chapter is Reina Lewis' investigation on the role of the internet in creating a meeting place for Muslim women, contributing to the proliferation of 'fashionable modesty,' which shares both local and global features. See: Reina Lewis, *Modest Fashion. Styling Bodies, Mediating Faith* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 2.

the typical fluidity of our times produces unpredictable exchanges, translations and fusions of the globally circulating signs of fashion and of the social imagery. […] Through clothing, accessories, daily signs, fashion acquires its own rules and inventions, stories, meanings, passions, values that are handed down, bringing fashion *beyond* fashion (*emphasis mine*).[97]

'The end of fashion as we know it'[98] is thus a death that does not need to be mourned, because it derives precisely from its affirmation as a pluralistic form of expression, as a force that refuses to be contained by the conventions of the past. The sense of displacement that is experienced in contemporary art runs deep in fashion too, bringing to the fore the idea that the concept of the 'end' originates precisely from that which is ending: from the erasure, the exclusion, the denial generated earlier within mainstream discourses, with the subsequent revolutionary, 'paroxysmal' yet often subtle acts that put into discussion the representative functions of fashion's past. As a result, the relationship between fashion and its own past becomes more complex than it has ever been: at once, contemporary fashion calls both for the end of previous 'fashions' and for the affirmation of practices that are truly significant. Paradoxically, in defining its own referents, inspiration to take a new direction is found in its own past, which is called upon to show that the conventions that fashion used to serve are the very precursors of its new determination to become free from them. The result is a critical fashion practice, which is determined to upset conventions of representation and existing attitudes of production, and which gives designers the ability that Kosuth saw as artists' responsibility: to analyse conventions and rediscover meaning.[99] From this perspective, the function of the theorisation of the 'end of fashion' today is to define the traditional roles, forms, and production modes of fashion as the origin of its own 'end'.

As such the telling of its history cannot but follow fashion itself and establish with it a relationship of reciprocity. Today's fashion historian and fashion curator join the designer in questioning the meanings of fashion, by problematising received models of historical enquiry into material culture, and by asking new kinds of questions. Their approach becomes 'new historicist', although when new historicism takes fashion and clothing cultures as

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[97] Patrizia Calefato, 'Fashion Beyond Fashion,' presented at *The End of Fashion* Conference. Wellington (2016).

[98] Lidewij Edelkoort, 'It's the End of Fashion as We Know It,' interview with Li Edelkoort, *Dezeen*. 2015, accessed January 25 2017, https://www.dezeen.com/2015/03/01/li-edelkoort-end-of-fashion-as-we-know-it-design-indaba-2015/

[99] Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy,' 12.

objects of study, can no longer be adequately summarised by the definition of 'new fashion history' as this was formulated at the beginning of the current century by Fiona Anderson,[100] namely as a discourse-oriented study of recent fashion history through the multi-disciplinary approach typical of post-structural relativism and cultural materialism. It instead embeds a shift in the scope of historical research, that is best explained through its identification as 'archaeological', in the Foucauldian sense:

> archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules.[101]

Suspicious of continuous historical discourse, this 'archaeology' seeks instead to highlight how distinct discourses exist and function independently from it.[102] The way of thinking presupposed by this approach is 'archaeological', in that it finds and isolates elements from the past (found, for instance, in an artefact, an image, a pattern, a label, an invitation, a letter, a phenomenon etc.) identifying them as repositories of values that resonate in the contemporary. However, the aim of this approach is not necessarily to formulate a genealogy of the contemporary, but rather to look back at the past, through questions that have emerged and become relevant in the present. In this sense, 'archaeology' has roots in new historicism, but it represents its negative, the other side of the coin.

While this approach has found multiple applications in media history, particularly within the field of media archaeology, no such term defines those studies that have already undertaken this perspective in critical fashion history. However, some historical research produced in the 2010s has opened to individual attempts to consider the existence of discontinuities, difference, and variety within a larger context of past and present, to follow traces and reconnect them. The aim of these studies is to demonstrate not only that the recurrence of past ideas can highlight their influence in modern and contemporary cultures,

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[100] Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media,' 371-2.
[101] Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 138.
[102] The re-reading of institutional, linear history through the lens of new historicism has determined the emergence of black histories, LGBT histories, women's histories, and a variety of other forms of historical discourse, based on self-reflexivity and internal conventions. New historicism has isolated the existence of these histories, showing 'in what way the set of rules that [discourses] put into operation is irreducible to any other' (Foucault, 139)

but crucially that the opposite is true as well. In other words, these studies recover histories that had previously been neglected or marginalised through questions that have become relevant in the present. The purpose is not simply to reveal these histories; but to evaluate their impact, and the impact of their marginalisation, on the present.

This kind of 'archaeological' research connects what may appear disparate projects, and evidence of how it differs from new historicism is best given through examples. Its historiographic strategies account for the emergence of certain counterhistories (e.g. the history of the stout body[103]), or the material history of the suit by acknowledging and locating its non-western influences,[104] or the structural history of the catwalk from the perspective of women and labourers.[105] Through an 'archaeological' approach, they exemplify the possibility of utilising perspectives that have developed in the present to acknowledge that the plurality of voices that characterises the present can also be found in the past; and that this past has direct consequences on how those voices are heard in the present. In doing so, these studies become calls for a significant historicism and for the end of traditional history, that saw the past as something 'other' form the present.

In its historical materialism and its insistence on variety, 'archaeology' thus underlies a way of looking at the past that contests the traditional historiography of 'how things were' through an interest in the multiple truths that animate that past. Using this approach means moving back and forth through the past, now understood as a much larger database that previously conceived, following and reconnecting traces as if these were constellations of metadata, which by their nature presuppose the returns and repetitions of the files that they describe.

Reflecting on new historicism by analysing Evans's methodology in *Fashion at the Edge,* Pecorari explains that in the redefinition of their practice 'designers act similarly to historians, creating ideas about our society by digging into the past and projecting it into the future'.[107] In light of the considerations that have been developed thus far, for 'archaeology' the opposite might prove as true: the fashion historian identifies the recurrence of ideas as well as the circumstances of their recurrence, demonstrating how such ideas have informed

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[103] Lauren Downing Peters, 'Stoutwear and the Discourses of Disorder: Constructing the Fat, Female Body in American Fashion in the Age of Standardization, 1915-1930' (PhD diss. Stockholm University, 2018).

[104] Christopher Breward, *The Suit: Form, Function & Style* (London: Reaktion, 2016).

[105] Evans, *The Mechanical Smile.*

[107] Pecorari, *Fashion Remains,* 54.

both designers' and everyday fashion practice. In doing so historians 'act similarly' to designers, who in turn project on the clothed body concerns manifested around them. The result is an approach to fashion history that considers how the concepts, beliefs, and concerns shaping new fashion can be used to interrogate and re-evaluate the past.

As part of the infrastructures of the fashion system, and having an active role in preserving the past and promoting its study, the fashion museum needs to reflect on the causes and the implications of the end of fashion. This could be done by developing research and exhibition policies that throw light on those changes that have already been perceived by designers and historians. Pecorari argues that new historicism has been absorbed by MoMu, and he has defined some of its exhibitions as part of the 'three-dimensional manifesto' of the museum.[108] In this group of exhibitions, Pecorari includes *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (2004), *Genovanversaeviceversa* (2003) and *Katarina Prospekt: the Russians by A.F. Vandevorst* (2005). To this list it seems possible to add some of MoMu's more recent exhibitions: the already mentioned *Game Changers* (2016), on the changes of the female silhouette; and *Rick Wouters & the Private Utopia* (2016), about the idea of 'simple living' and its translation into the decorative arts.

According to Pecorari, in these exhibitions the relationship between past and present is not seen 'as a chronological succession of events, objects or people' but as 'a force that scrambles time in a constant tension between past, present, and future'.[109] However, as insightful as the themes of these exhibitions remain, the complex dynamics of cutting across aesthetic and social discourses present and past, are propelled back in conventional displays of juxtaposed objects, which arrest the perception of the resulting networks of connections through their rigid display modalities. Thus, the visitor emerges in a way that recalls Benjamin's analogy between the city stroller and the exhibition goer: an outsider in front of whose eyes events take place. Conversely, these displays retain a teleological frame in which the curator remains the sole transmitter of discourse. In other words, with little agency left for the visitor, the emphasis is still placed on the narrative whole. Thus, while the research process at the heart of these exhibitions might have absorbed the logics of new historicism, these displays are the product of a view of the museum whose theoretical and conceptual

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[108] Pecorari, 55.
[109] Pecorari, 54.

matrix is Hegelian in its claim to imbue audience with a historical consciousness that is able to identify the set of variables through which the subject is determined.

Instead, the logics of archaeological historicism, with its emphasis on the fragment, on the part, as well as on the process through which it is 'excavated', find a home in the digital dimension. Not only, the digital enables the past (as this is represented within the database) to be navigated through a variety of questions and criteria; but due to its intertextual nature the digital also displays and emphasises the network of relations that make returns and repetitions possible. It also shows that new principles of categorisation can be generated by adding new metadata, and that by guiding audiences to do so, this can become a way of involving them into processes on knowledge production.

Thus, in breaching the boundary between material, code and image, the MoMu Explorer offers visitors/users the possibility to experiment a 'performative' encounter with fashion's far and recent past, with their attention being drawn firstly to the fragment, and secondly on how it can be related to other fragments.   Despite the limits of its current metadata, visitors also experiment a process based on following traces and on creating individual trajectories across the database, depending on the questions that they might have when approaching the display. Offering an experience of the past based not on the final historical narrative – of which no trace is left, and which is never presented as the outcome – but rather on the process of discovery and individual agency, the MoMu Explorer, thus sketches the relation between historical practice and the computer sciences, which digital humanist Alan Liu describes as wanting both 'the determination *and* the random access it believes make up the whole span […] of human life'.[110] In doing so, the MoMu Explorer, a spectacular object of our contemporary screen culture, enables visitors to experience the research logics from which the database itself originates, namely, those of individual 'archaeological' discovery.

Technology is often dismissed by curators as a mere tool for engagement. However, its existence and sustainability in the museum shows that its relationship with the ontology that it promotes – with the double meaning that this term acquires with the advent of computer sciences – is more complicated than mere cause-and-effect.[111] In particular, it

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[110] Liu. *Local Transcendence*, 261.
[111] Poli and Obrst explain the new meaning that is acquired by the term ontology with the advent of computer sciences: 'The notion of ontology today comes with two perspectives: one traditionally from

shows that the dynamics characterising the post-modern age of the database – pluralism,

the possibility of returns, the rejection of unique forms – have had an impact on historicism,

but also that the conditions at the grounds of any endism – fragmentality, individual

affirmation, fast change – have determined the necessity for the database, its structure and

its applications. It is in this sense that the digital permeates historicism, and it is in this same

sense that finds validity Heidegger's idea that 'everywhere we remain unfree and chained to

technology' and its non-technological essence 'whether we passionately affirm or deny it'.[112]

The museum *as* database: challenges for the future

In his 2014 *e-flux* contribution, New York writer Mike Pepi suggests that as the

critique of the museum[113] is carried in the twenty-first century, it is possible to think about

the contemporary museum *as* a database. The basis of this simile is polemical: as 'the

museum reformats its content towards structured, indexed, or digitally stored data sets or

sets of relations among data […] increasingly we access it, and its contents, by executing a

query'.[114] He suggests that this results in database-powered presentation modalities

produced by 'a new elite reconstituting the museum along technocratic logics', that is to say,

presupposing an ability to engage with technology.[115] Pepi also claims that the primary

benefits of digitisation – which have been mentioned earlier in this chapter by referring to

the framework of the University of Edinburgh's Digital Curation Centre – have been adopted

uncritically by museums. In particular, this applies to the idea of the democratisation of

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philosophy and one more recently from computer science. The philosophical perspective of ontology focuses on categorial analysis, i.e., what are the entities of the world and what are the categories of entities? […] The computer science perspective of ontology, i.e., ontology as technology, focuses on those same questions but the intention is distinct: to create engineering models of reality, artifacts which can be used by software, and perhaps directly interpreted and reasoned over by special software called inference engines, to imbue software with human level semantics. Philosophical ontology arguably begins with the Greek philosophers, more than 2,400 years ago. Computational ontology (sometimes called 'ontological' or 'ontology' engineering) began about 15 years ago.' Roberto Poli and Leo Obrst, 'The Interplay Between Ontology as Categorial Analysis and Ontology as Technology,' in *Theory and Applications of Ontology*, ed. Roberto Poli, Michael Healy, and Achilles Kameas (Patras: Springer, 2010), 1.

[112] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology,' 3.

[113] See pp. 32-44.

[114] Mike Pepi. 'Is a Museum a Database? Institutional Conditions in Net Utopia.' *e-flux* 60 (2014). Accessed June 13 2016. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/60/61026/is-a-museum-a-database-institutional-conditions-in-net-utopia/

[115] Pepi.

collections through their dissemination online, which has made cultural heritage institutions too deterritorialised. Pepi explains that in doing so:

> the museum cedes this control to databases, whose content circulates through networks governed by proprietary algorithms. Such an oversimplification is useful to frame the manner in which the museum's fundamental cultural position is drawn in, seduced by a transformation into an indexed collection, structured much the way a good database would be: consistent, atomic, scalable, and easily searchable.[116]

Ceding control to its database, the museum thus cedes control – or the illusion of control – to visitors over their experience with the museum's digital content. The risk implied by Pepi is that of producing a 'cult of the amateur', in the sense of Andrew Keen's explanation of the lowering of the 'cultural standard' brought by technologies based on the Web 2.0 that aim to engage visitors as participants:[117] focusing too much on individual experience – which in the case of the MoMu Explorer results in the production of recombinant histories – represents the convergence of historicism and informationalism, and generates the 'false idea that two plus two equals five'.[118]

Keen suggests that such mechanisms also create economical damage to institutions that have traditionally been associated with delivering content that now has the potential to circulate freely online. This aspect acquires meaning particularly in relation to the availability of images online and through applications that the MoMu Explorer might have in the future. Both Debo and Meeusen explain that one of the next functions of the digital wall might be that of allowing visitors/users to take images home, through the development of a software application through which users could be enabled to send files to their private email or social media accounts, following the example of other museums and thus aiming to further connect institutions and visitors after the visit.[119] The economic damage implied by Keen is

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[116] Pepi.

[117] Andrew Keen, *The Cult of The Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing our Culture* (London: Doubleday, 2007), 25.

[118] George Orwell, quoted in Keen, *The Cult of The Amateur*, 21.

[119] An example is the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Museum (New York) – a digital pen that allows to store information on chips embedded in the object labels to be then read at the interactive tables. Here, visitors can then explore and even manipulate the objects they have collected, discover related artefacts in the collection, retrieve contextual information, and ultimately share content. Mauseen, personal conversation, June 2017. Debo, *Appendix*, 352.

represented by the fact that by making images available to be taken home – through the connection and combination of media technologies that is typical of what Jenkins calls 'convergence culture' – the museum subjects files to the possibility of being shared endlessly, modified, and potentially exploited for commercial use.[120] Keen's thesis is not supported by data and economic analysis quantifying or verifying an institution's loss, and some museums with similar concerns did, indeed, lock down their digital content in order to avoid appropriation.[121] However, Debo contradicts this view by looking at the case of the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), an institution at the forefront of digitisation, in a country with a progressive approach towards copyright:

> The Rijksmuseum – and yes, most of their collection is copyright free because most of their collection is by artists that have been dead for longer than 75 years [122]– decided some years ago to put images of the entire collection online, on an open licence. […] In doing so, the museum noticed an increased income from selling images. Because images are there to be used and re-used for different kind of purposes, people that need high resolution files they will get in touch directly with the museum.[123]

The issue is complex, with different kinds of considerations needing to be developed for different categories of users, whist keeping in mind that with the digitised image, what is at stake is not only the work of the designer, but also that of photographers, models, and agencies, that might have taken part in the creation of the image and its content.[124]

Another obvious implication of the understanding of the museum *as* database is presented by Belting when discussing the consequences of the end of art history and the

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[120] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).
[121] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, 3.
[122] 75 years is the time that is needed for images to be in the public domain
[123] Debo, *Appendix,* 351. This has been verified by Joris Pekel in his study on the Rikjsmuseum's open access policy. The study shows that the development and implementation of such policy between 2010 and 2012 corresponded to substantial revue increase in high resolution images sales. Joris Pekel, *Democratising the Rijksmuseum*. Europeana, 2014. Accessed October 19 2017. URL https://pro.europeana.eu/post/democratising-the-rijksmuseum
[124] This is a sensitive issue for MoMu, and indeed for any fashion museum that has dealt with digitisation. While the design of garments is legally not subject to copyright law, there's an obvious moral responsibility to protect the creative work that is involved in the making of clothes. The issue complicates itself because while garments might not be subject to it, copyright might exist on the photograph itself, or on other elements included in image, such as models and trademarks. Even if museums were able to afford these fees, the dissemination of the digital image online makes it impossible for museums to act as guarantors of images and their content.

advent of digitisation: '[to] explore the technical structure in a given work rather than the work itself', which 'dissolves works into technical data and reduces the artist's personality to anonymous techniques'.[125] This issue affects all forms of expression, but it seems especially relevant for fashion, as the debate around the presentations of garments in the context of museum exhibitions has been dominated, especially in the first decade of the 2000s, by the issue of the lack of the body in fashion exhibitions, as well as by the sensory sacrifice that takes place when fashion enters the 'empire of sight' that the museum is.[126]

The generation of superficial information and the establishment of inaccurate relations between artefacts, the potential loss of copyright income for the parties involved in the creation of the digital image, and the loss of contact with artefacts thus seem to constitute an 'affront to the museum', an affront which is presented as necessary when seeking to engage with increasingly larger audiences.[127] And yet, in the age of endisms, there is a real necessity for the digital image to be exhibited in the museum: not only because of the way in which the logics of the database have permeated communication and research processes; but also because through the work of curators, conservators and archivists, the museum is enabled to create trustable data and sets of relations, and to moderate those that might eventually derive from crowd-curated projects. In other words, in displaying the digital image in the museum one becomes aware of the flexibility of its meanings, of the variety of narratives in which images and artefacts can be inserted, something which 'one is not so much aware if he or she is dealing only with the objects in the exhibition space'.[128] Groys puts this perspective in Marxist terms: digital images and their display in a museum allows the viewer to reflect on the structure, as well as on the superstructure.

So, what can be done? How can the logics of the database, and its ability to accept users' demands and expectations be channelled constructively? How can cultural heritage institutions' traditional role of preserving the past – remote or proximate – come to terms with the non-narrative nature and supposed autonomy of agency of the database? And above all, if the idea that the experiential aspects of database-operated presentations (such as the MoMu Explorer) are the outcome of a critical endeavor that emancipates visitors, what makes both the experience and its results consequential, so that their value is best

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[125] Belting, 'Place of Reflection or Place Of Sensation?' 139.
[126] Stewart, 'From the Museum of Touch,' 28.
[127] Pepi, 'Is a Museum a Database?' Accessed June 26 2016. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/60/61026/is-a-museum-a-database-institutional-conditions-in-net-utopia/
[128] Groys, *Art Power*, 89.

underlined in the museum, rather than on a PC? This series of questions, of course, is relevant not only for museums, or specifically fashion museums, but for the whole constellation of galleries, libraries, archives and museums that are currently embracing the digital and its implications. As the debate on the roles of cultural institutions continues to evolve, along the issue of finding a balance between education and entertainment, such questions need to be at the heart of new policy creation, with the aim of producing presentation modalities that are more than a 'remediation' of content.

According to Groys, a possibility is that of making the museum a place where events are staged, where lectures, readings, screenings, and fashion shows take place, and where 'the flow of events' inside is 'faster than outside its walls', be they material or digital ones.[129] Another possibility consists in making technology a key part of the development of participatory projects that ultimately stimulate visitors to go back into the exhibition venue, following some of the examples that have already been considered in the previous pages. But ultimately, the functions of the museum can be asserted by continuing to look at the rituals of relational aesthetics, whilst also considering how such aesthetics have changed with technology.

From this perspective, museums could turn towards curatorial projects that instrumentalise interactive technology, producing crowd-creative projects in which visitors and staff members use it to achieve shared goals. This seems important to avoid the assimilation of the museum into the digital dimension: curatorial projects can be documented online, but they remain unreproducible in their totality.[130] This could be done by using technology to offer the possibility to intervene in some of the curatorial choices; or by giving audiences suggestions on multiple pathways that can be followed in the exhibition venue; or by highlighting artefacts on the digital wall, so that they can be used as a starting point for the digital exploration, while also providing information on where those same artefacts can be found in the museum, where they are contextualised in a curated exhibition; or alternatively by displaying moderated questions about artefacts asked by other visitors. These are some examples of how personalised access to content could be guaranteed in projects that assert the importance of curators' knowledge and expertise.

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[129] Groys, 'Entering the Flow.' *e-flux* 50 (2013). Accessed July 28 2016. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59974/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/

[130] As demonstrated by the case of *Fashion in Motion* and the difficulty of truly enabling audiences to experience the format without attending the shows. See pp. 121-123.

Another risk of the view of the museum *as* a database is that of historical forgetfulness. The meaning that this can take in the case of database operated technology is less metaphorical than expected. As the way in which digital data is stored and visualised depends on the specific features of hardware and software technology, the digitisation of files and the creation of a database need to come to terms with the diversification of the machines that can read and distribute files, and which might be unable to read content coming from machines of the previous generation. According to Oomen and Aroyo's model for digitisation, this is an issue that needs to be considered ahead, and that involves considerations on future media and their ability to support current data.[131] Unstable storage media, rapidly expanding networks, and changing file formats represent a threat to the accessibility and longevity of the past, and have been a concern for film scholars for more than a decade[132]. The potential death of the database would have a negative impact especially on born-digital content: look books, invitations, newsletters, and blogs, that constitute a vast part of MoMu's collection of ephemera. In other words, the risk is that of turning the flexibility that has been acquired through the digital media into the inescapability of a black screen or an error page. To sum up the issue in Groys's words: '[…] today's technology thinks in terms of generation […] but where there are generations, there are also generation conflicts, Oedipal struggles'.[133]

Summary & Conclusion

Motivated by the polarisation of political views that has characterised the years when this thesis was written, this chapter began by considering the role of museums and fashion heritage institutions in defining and perpetuating an inclusive concept of national identity today. To do so, it looked at the case of Antwerp's Mode Museum (MoMu), whose foundation has been read as one of the actions taken to promote Belgian fashion for national and international audiences. After looking at the process through which the notion of Belgian fashion emerged in the late twentieth century, the chapter has highlighted the necessity for a meticulous debate on the responsibility of cultural institutions to contribute to the

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[131] Oomen and Arroyo, *Crowdsourcing in The Cultural Heritage Domain*.'
[132] David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007), 95.
[133] Groys, *Art Power*, 85.

development of a global citizenship agenda, in order to reaffirm that the concept of nationality – and its projections on material culture – needs to be discussed and defined critically.

According to Benedict Anderson, the birth of the museum in the nineteenth century is profoundly intertwined with the emergence of the nation-state apparatus, from which it has inherited the mentality of 'thinking about its domain'.[134] However, despite its role in imagining and communicating conceptualisations of national identity, the museum has often naively taken for granted the need to look at it as an historically and culturally specific issue. There is an obvious, implicit contradiction between the implications of this approach and today's attempts to make museum and its practices mirrors of their audiences, who, as the case of the old merchant city of Antwerp demonstrates, are characterised as increasingly diverse. By absorbing the assumed universality of cultural institutionalism without the activation of a critical perspective, the museum risks becoming a redundant institution, whose value as a form of representation is diachronic and selective. The fashion museum has the potential to emerge as a privileged site for the development of museological practices where new identities and new national definitions can be engaged with, precisely because the subject that it seeks to exhibit, study, and preserve already withholds the affirmation of fixed and fixing definitions of identity in practice, through its production modes, the intertextual exchanges that characterise its aesthetics, and through the choices of individual wearers.

It is in fashion's pluralism of forms, production processes, and consumption patterns that lie the ideological motivations that have recently led some historians and theorists to suggest that fashion, as we have known it so far, has ended.[135] The theorisation of the end of fashion, like the end art before it, corresponds to the necessity for new approaches to debate its forms, and for methodologies that further integrate its study as a system – which linguistic theory has provided in the past – with a view of subjectivity as its defining feature. At the same time, as emphasis on individual reception is also a hotly debated topic within the field of museum studies – a reaction to previous understandings of museums as places of exclusivity and rarity – and as museums themselves have become interested in producing

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[134] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (London: Verso, 1991), 188.
[135] See: Vicki Karaminas and Adam Geczy, *The End of Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018.

visitor-centred experiences of their displays, the debate on how narratives and definitions of fashion's past are delivered becomes especially relevant. The chapter has thus suggested that the possibility of interrogating archives and collections from deeply subjective perspectives is offered by those practices that bring the digital image in the museum through database-operated technologies: far from being mere instruments of outreach and funding magnets, or support tools for traditional displays, such presentation modalities can become powerful instruments to enable visitors to gain control over their experience of collections, and potentially to favour an exploration of the past from perspectives that might have previously been neglected.

As the first digital presentation modality addressing specifically fashion collections, the 'MoMu Explorer' was this chapter's case study. Installed in 2015 by the main entrance of the museum, this large touch screen installation allows visitors to access and interact with part of the digital collection of the museum, which comprises both digitised images and born-digital files. In this visitor-geared presentation modality, the bonds between artefacts/files and their collocation in a narrative form of progression – chronological or thematic – are loosened. In its post-modern digital existence, the artefact is thus bestowed with a new degree of flexibility: no longer limited to being categorised solely in the essential fields of the modern archive, the artefact/file acquires an ubiquity that it could not previously have. Instead, files/artefacts become available for a potentially infinite number of returns, combinations and associations, and their appearance becomes based on individual queries, as well as on the personal interpretations of the answers received.

This is also the idea at the grounds of 'database histories', a model of studying the past that is not based on its narrative, but rather on a collection of 'infinitely retrievable fragments'.[136] The result is a media-specific experience of the past, underpinned by a post-structural understanding of history, that challenges classical theories of cultural tradition in the same way in which database-operated presentations challenge the modern museum's traditional understanding of classification and categorisation. In this chapter, the way in which these dynamics have been absorbed by museums – through the example of the MoMu Explorer – has not been seen as a mere implication of the advent and diffusion of digital technologies, but rather the database has been seen as a space whose forms have evolved

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[136] Anderson, 'Past Indiscretions,' 101.

to accommodate and incorporate a cultural transformation characterised by the recognition of co-existing conditions of difference and distance.

By relying on the individual choices of visitors, digital presentations thus overcome the opposition between linear and non-linear modes of historical exploration. This is the implication of the fact that they can be operated only through the agency of visitors/users, who interrogate them through questions whose relevance is dependent on the moment in which they emerge and on the impulses that generate them. Another (paradoxical) implication is that the intrinsic lack of context of individual artefacts/files draws visitors' attention on objects and their material features. And thus, their materiality becomes the starting point of visitors' exploration, and what guides them as they make their trajectory across the database. Perhaps most importantly, this chapter has highlighted a third implication of the presence of the digital in the museum – that its tendency to model itself like a database – which surfaces in its aspirations towards individual access – originate because the museum works as a mirror of a society that has already absorbed the logics that are accommodated within the database – pluralism, fragmentality, and accessibility – and that are also symptoms of the end of art, the end of philosophy, and the end of fashion.

But with the digitisation of collections also come risks, especially when these are disseminated without curatorial mediation, and in the absence of a preliminary framework for effective interface construction and metadata tagging. Besides showing an uncritical absorption of the ideas of accessibility, availability of content and transparency, the implication of these aspects is the emergence of restrictions in the retrieval and display of content, thus revealing the database's ultimate attachment to the determinism that characterises the dynamics of representation, and which are at play in static archives. Another risk is the rapid obsolescence of hardware technologies and the potential unreadability of digital collections through more advanced machines. The danger in this circumstance is the potential loss of all stored information in a museological dystopia characterised by the sudden dismantling of an historical fabric woven in years. While physical objects remain, their acquired flexibility is lost, as is the information that can be built through participatory metadata construction processes. At the same time, even more substantial risks exist for born-digital content: the impossibility of translating code into image, of making them accessible to the human senses, of turning the authentic invisibility of data into visible, infinitely reproducible copies on a screen.

The idea of a museum that, by ceding to the internet parts of its modes of production, becomes less attached to a specific siting has suggested the idea of looking a context in which fashion exhibitions take place under the coordination of a unitary institution that is lacking permanent premises altogether. For this reason, the next chapter will look at the case of curating fashion in Italy, where despite the existence of a Costume Gallery in Florence's Palazzo Pitti, a museum devoted to collecting, preserving, and exhibiting contemporary fashion does not yet exist, and where exhibitions are produced by a disembodied and decentralised private organisation. Becoming embedded in the urban fabric of the city of Florence, the culture of fashion in Italy emerges through its connections with other forms of expression, with profound implications on how the history of Italian fashion has been constructed.
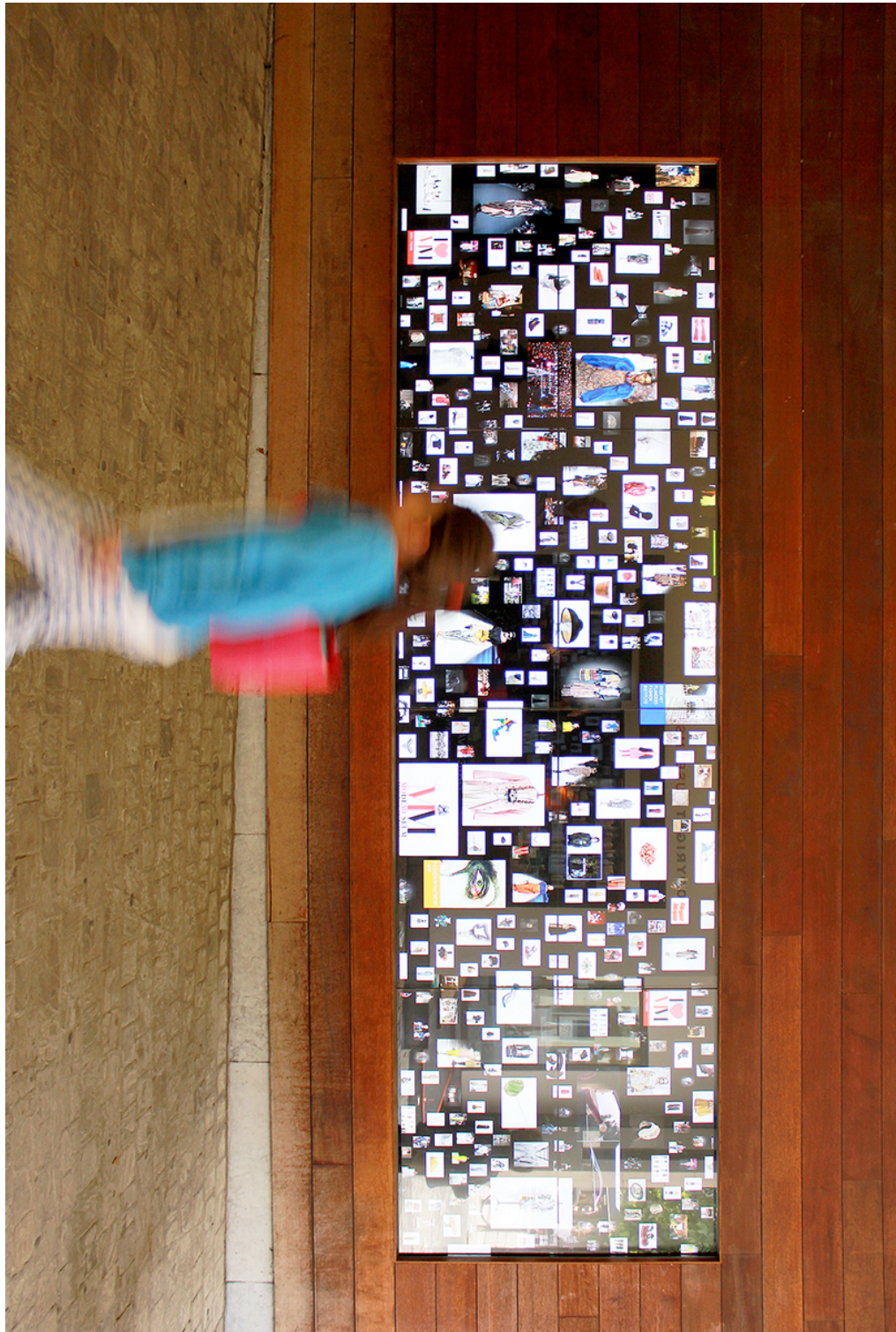
Fig. 4.1. The MoMu Explorer. Installed in 2015, this 7x2 metres touch screen installation allows users to independently browse part of the museum's digital collection. Its interface presents a variety of icons, flowing unidirectionally on the screen. The exploration of the database begins by selecting one of the icons, which opens to display the chosen artefact, providing basic information in the form of hashtags. These hashtags enable users to discover other artefacts that can be ground through the same metadata.
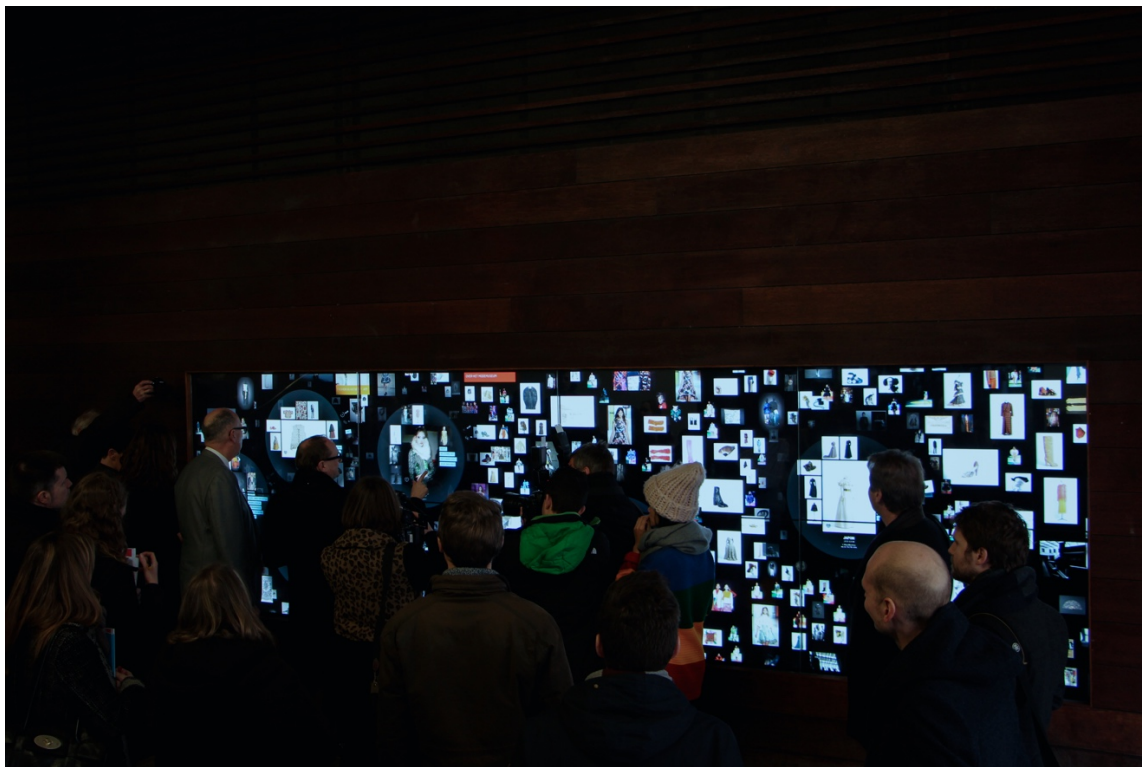
Fig. 4.2 The use of metadata enables users to browse the collection by interacting with 'hashtags'. Metadata describe items, and enable them to be categorised under a multitude of categories.In doing so, each artefact becomes tied to others not through chronology, but rather through recurring themes, patterns, ideas. This mechanism illustrates – albeit in a very simplified way – the capacity of the database for recombinant histories. In doing so, it shows that there are alternatives to chronological exploration.
Fig. 4.3 The software and hardware of the MoMu Explorer enable multiple visitors to interact with it at the same time.
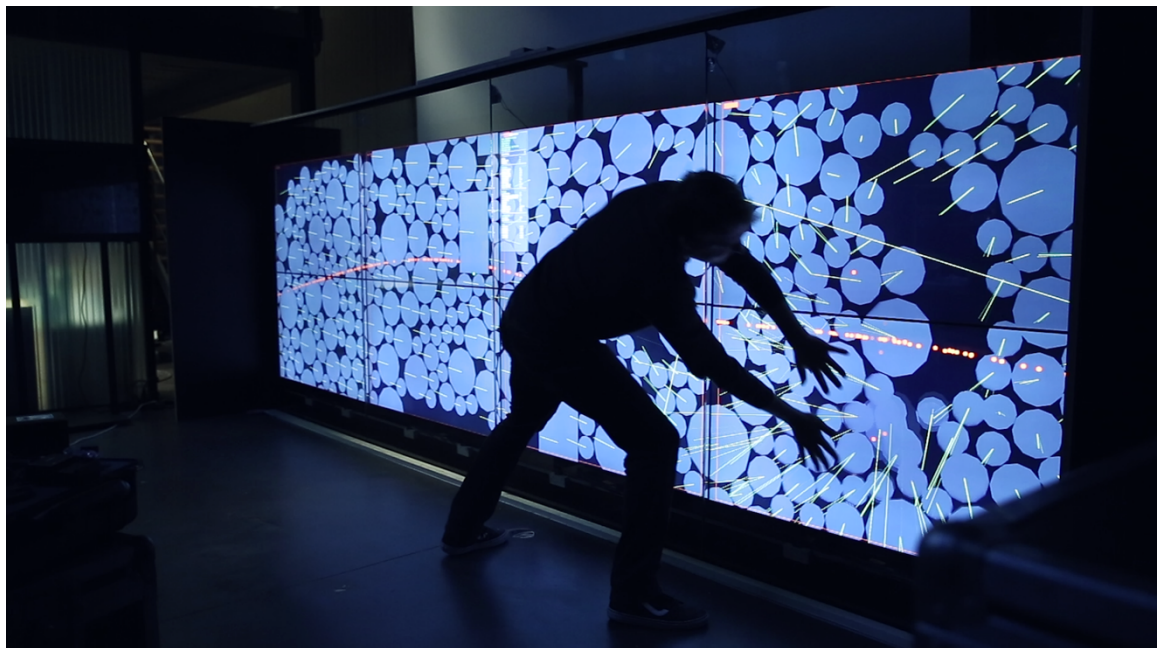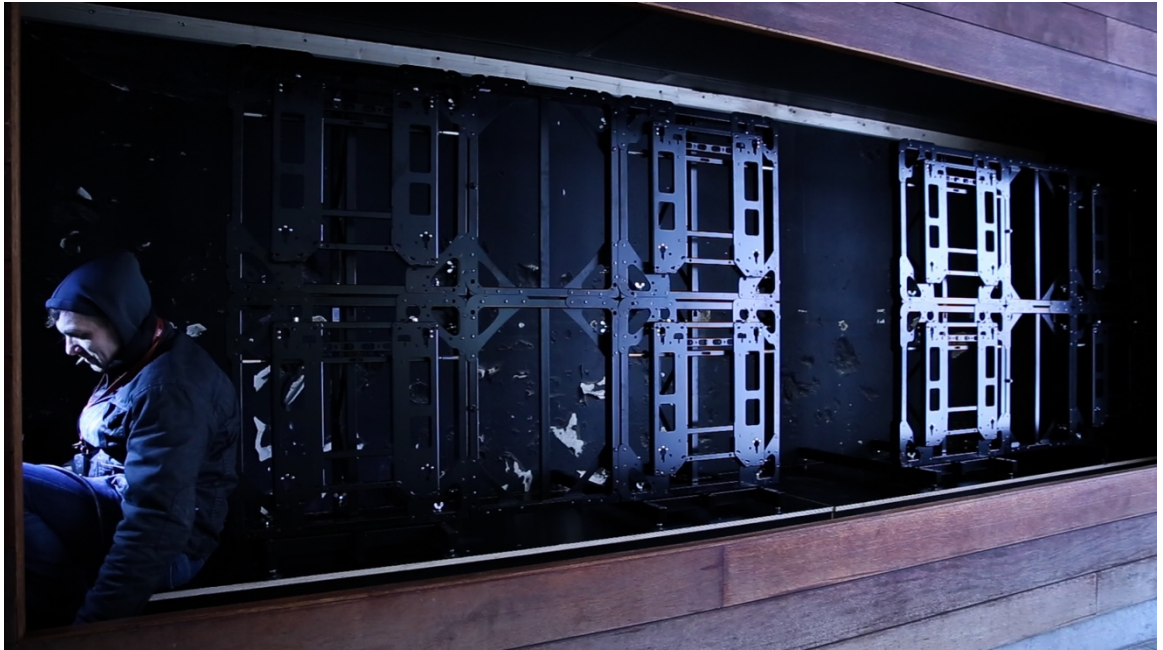
Fig. 4.4. Installing the eight screens of the MoMu Explorer.
Fig. 4.5 The motion of the icons was produced through the use of Box2D, an open source engine through which allowed Lab101 could determine the attraction direction and velocity of each icon.

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Chapter V
Pitti Immagine & Pitti Discovery, Florence: Longing for the Absent Museum

> I like art works and institutions that escape any physical presence. Things you can carry in your mind on in your pockets. It's not a matter of laziness or frustration: maybe it's a form of asceticism. With an imaginary museum you can do whatever you want […] And if it doesn't work, there is nothing to be ashamed of. You can always say that it was simply an exercise in loss. In the end, I just think there is a certain strength in being invisible.[1]
>
> (Maurizio Cattelan, artist)

Introduction

The idea of Milan as the Italian 'fashion capital' is a familiar one, and the city has indeed been mythologised both nationally and internationally for its ability to combine the strengths of the manufacturing and service industries with the media sector. However, recent academic attention towards the history of Italian fashion – combined with Italy's delicate balance between political and cultural regionalism and the issue of national identity – has led historians to formulate the idea of a decentralised fashion system, within which the recognition of different forms of specialisation, as well as of desynchronised experiences of

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[1] Mark Sanchez, and Jérôme Sans. *What Do You Expect from an Art Institution in the 21st Century?*. (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2001), 51.

modernity and urbanity, legitimise the identification of five other 'fashion cities': Turin, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples.

Despite Milan's current reputation, the years following the Second World War saw Italian fashion gain international recognition in Florence. In the Tuscan city, early international fashion shows took place, first as a private initiative by young entrepreneur Giovanni Battista Giorgini at his family home, then with the support of the local administration and the newly founded Centro di Firenze per Moda Italiana [Florence Centre for Italian Fashion, CFMI] at the Sala Bianca of Palazzo Pitti. After surveying the literature on the rise of the Florentine fashion system, the chapter explores the reasons leading to its fragmentation. The aim is to highlight the implications of the initial lack of a centralised body for the promotion of the sector (on the model, for example, of the British Fashion Council or the Flemish Fashion Institute). It will argue that the emergence of other Italian 'fashion cities' was the outcome of the autonomous actions of various local administrations, which sought to replicate the success of Florence for themselves by valorising their local sartorial traditions. This section might be perceived as a detour from the core topics of this thesis; however, its function is to highlight dynamics of institutional fragmentation and their origins. These dynamics are then found at the heart of the processes of 'culturisation' of fashion of the following years. In particular, the chapter will observe that the pre-existing fragmentation of the fashion system, along the absence of support from a central organisation have led to the emergence of cultural organisations outside the public realm, mostly with the support of private funding and, occasionally, the backing of local administrations.[2]

The chapter will then look at the CFMI, following its re-organisation into *Pitti Immagine* in the late 1980s and the foundation of *Pitti Immagine Discovery Foundation* as one of its divisions in the 2000s. It focuses on the CFMI's vision that, by promoting cultural discourse, the image of Florence could be relaunched, particularly in relation to the menswear sector. In a typically neoliberal attitude, the promotion of the 'culture of fashion' through exhibitions, events, publications, performances and research, became key to bringing prestige to the CFMI's international fairs, with an emphasis especially on *Pitti Uomo*. Speaking about the work of the CFMI's director Marco Rivetti (1987-1989) and its Head of

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[2] The support of local administrations to various events organised by Pitti Immagine and the Pitti Immagine Discovery Foundation has not always resulted in direct financial backing. More often, the support consisted in granting of authorisations for the use of council-owned buildings or simply in the formal recognition of the organising body as partner.

Communication Luigi Settembrini in this phase, Maria Luisa Frisa, who has curated some of Pitti Immagine's and Pitti Immagine Discovery's exhibitions, explains:

> They restyled the organisation and decided to bring prestige back to the fair. How did they do that? Through exhibitions and events, aimed at emphasising the cultural valence of fashion. As the great collector that he [Settembrini] is, this came naturally to him. So, on the one hand, he started commissioning installations for the Fortezza da Basso. On the other hand, he started organizing catwalks again. All this was backed by Pitti, who also bore most of the financial burden. Along Giannino Malossi, they organised Pitti's first exhibitions, which aimed to reconstruct the mythology of Pitti and rebuild the image of Florence within the fashion system.[3]

However, as in the case of the launch of the industrial in the early 1950s, the attempts to develop a 'culture of fashion' also came as a result of private investments and for promotional purposes. In the absence of a publicly funded institution where contemporary fashion could be preserved, studied, exhibited, and promoted through a programme of temporary and permanent exhibitions, curating fashion in Italy located itself in a tense impasse that meshed the commercial and research, melding and reforming each of these purviews.[4]

This final case study aims to capture the impact of the absence of publicly funded institutional space for fashion on the study of Italian fashion history. This chapter is thus different in its approaches from the previous ones: instead of looking at how fashion's past is spatialised through museum presentations, it argues that the lack of institutional space – manifesting itself through the fact that a museum devoted to contemporary fashion does not currently exist in Italy – has contributed to fashion's struggle for recognition as a subject of intellectual investigation, and in an inconsistent study of the history of Italian fashion and its representations. To highlight the extent of such lack of space, the chapter will draw a

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[3] Maria Luisa Frisa, 'In Conversation with Maria Luisa Frisa,' interview by Alessandro Bucci, transcript (Venice, October 2017), *Appendix*, 357.

[4] A direct implication of the fact that exhibitions, performances, and events are produced to promote the industry by emphasising fashion's cultural valence, is Pitti Immagine's focus on their consumption at the time in which they are available to the public. As a result, the archiving of documentary material that testifies to their content is not considered a high priority, with only occasional and rare photographic documentation being available for consultation. This is also in keeping with the general fact that, internationally, consistent interest in collecting and preserving images of displays as sources of interpretation and meaning has been part of collection development policies only in the early 2000s, when debates on museum and curatorial studies were already in full development.

comparison with this the obstacles met by fashion scholars and researchers within the public academic system: within both contexts, Italy has remained peripheral to the international debate on fashion curating, as Frisa herself admits in *Le Forme della Moda*. However, despite this condition, Florence represents a centre of reference, where fashion has found space and support in the local administration and in the private sector, despite its peripheral position in the national cultural agenda. Thus, in keeping with the previous three chapters, the museum is still central to the discussion that will be carried out in the following pages. In particular, it is this absent, missing museum that will be seen as bearing a two-fold implication on Pitti Immagine's and Pitti Immagine Discovery's cultural programme, its content, and presentation modalities.

On the one hand, the absence of a permanent museological institute has favoured the emergence of a programme of changing, occasional, and ephemeral curatorial projects, organised in various venues by various actors and taking multiple formats. In exploring this aspect, I will turn the image of the absent museum into that of an embedded institution, which negotiates with museums, civic buildings, and private spaces its presence in Florence. In doing so, fashion draws on Florence's pre-existing connotations as a museum-city and a city of museums. This is a pragmatic response to a condition of lack of space; but its implication is the emergence of a myriad of thematic, unrelated, and transitory narratives, which exist in the place of a systematic and chronological exploration of the history of Italian fashion. The chapter thus claims that the potentialities of non-linear and thematic approaches fulfil themselves in the presence of and against traditional historiography. This is an implication of Foucault's understanding of the modern museum as a heterotopia: if the presentation of collections through to pre-determined constructs of order, time and history emphasised the potential to transgress those conceptual conditions, then the absence of permanent opportunities to collect, study, and exhibit fashion reduces the critical potential of approaches that look back at the past and produce re-readings.

On the other hand, the lack of institutional space has resulted in the necessity to contextualise fashion within other cultural discourses. Continuing the tradition set by Giovanni Battista Giorgini's earliest fashion shows and by early Italian fashion photography, Pitti Immagine's and Pitti Immagine Discovery's events have presented fashion in juxtaposition with art, never institutionalising it as such, but rather underlining the existence

of both fashion and art within the same expanded field.[5] While this first resulted in presentations of dress against the backdrop of Florence's Renaissance architectural heritage, explorations of the relationship between fashion and art soon started to reflect the very different forms that art itself took in the last decades of the twentieth century: operating outside the circuits of mainstream, conservative, cultural discourses, in Florence presentations of fashion emerged as representations of a culture of fluidity, participation, and transmediality, often developing a 'militant', confrontational character.[6]

Finally, the chapter observes that while the relationship between fashion and art was key to relaunch Florence as a fashion city, the second part of the 2010s saw the beginning a new phase of exhibitions, which affirm individuality of fashion as a form of expression. Newly determined by modes of self-organisation, this shift took place under the changed connotations of the concept of self-organisation in curatorial practice over the past two decades, when independent curators became driven by a new ambition to work with public institutions, recognising this as a productive way to change perceptions.

Florence: hometown of Italian fashion

The attempt to historicise the origins of representations that communicated the existence of an insoluble connection between art, fashion, and the city of Florence – a view that will re-emerge in Pitti Immagine and Pitti Immagine Discovery's presentations – goes back to the events following the Second World War, when, for a brief time, the Tuscan capital was the main synonym of Italian fashion.

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[5] This choice of terminology aims to evoke Rosalind Krauss's influential notion of the expanded field of post-modernism, through which she re-maps the interactions between art, sculpture, architecture, and landscape, in order to designate an expanding field where the structural parameters of each are combined. See: Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' *October* 8 (1979), 30-44. Krauss emphasises that the task of redefining a field are 'a matter of history' (Krauss, 44) because the ultimate conditions that brought to the change of the field of art are ultimately those that determined the shift of post-modernism. In a sense – and in relation to the issues that have been explored towards the end of Chapter IV – the task of re-mapping the field of art and addressing its determinants is also a symptom of the 'End of Art'. Thus, the notion of an expanded field is here evoked to outline the understanding of fashion that surfaces in Pitti Immagine and Pitti Immagine Discovery's programming: an 'almost infinitely malleable' field, characterised by the adjacency, interaction, and even convergence between various forms of visual art, particularly contemporary art and architecture (Krauss, 30).
[6] Frisa, 'The Curator's Risk,' 172.

Like other European countries, in those years, Italy engaged in an intense process of economic reconstruction, which, for the young republic also involved a process of identity definition. Fashion ended up playing an essential role in both processes, even though in the years immediately after the conflict, 'Italian fashion' was not identifiable as a creative and economic system. Before the war, some couture houses existed in Rome, Florence, and Milan, and the fascist regime – which recognised fashion's role as an economic source as well as an effective tool of identity definition – had often, yet inconclusively, placed it at the heart of its campaigns, encouraging manufacturers 'to put an Italian slant' on clothing.[7] At the end of the conflict, the only thing that Italy had in abundance were artisans: throughout the peninsula, a constellation of small family-run businesses used to handcraft goods, both for their consumption and for wealthy European and American families. These businesses often used very ancient techniques; but rather than deriving from a nostalgic evocation of pre-war times, this was a consequence of the country's scarce industrialisation, widespread poverty, and relative isolation during the autocratic war years.

Observing the situation that Italy inherited from the *ventennio* (which has been reconstructed by Eugenia Paulicelli[8] and more recently by Mario Lupano and Alessandra Vaccari[9]) Nicola White unpacks some of the events leading to the development of an Italian sartorial system.[10] Building on economic and social histories, White highlights the importance of US financial, technological and structural support through the Marshall Plan as a means to allow small businesses to flourish, but also America's role in the marketing and promotion of the products of this industry both domestically and internationally. However, besides the publicity which Italian fashion received from Hollywood and Cinecittà, besides the individual acts of patronage of actresses, First Ladies and American socialites, an important role in defining and characterising Italian sartorial style was played by the editorials of *Vogue*, *Novità*, *Women's Wear Daily*, *Bellezza* and other magazines.[11] These publications featured

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[7] Guido Vergani, 'February 1951. Italian Fashion is Born,' *1951-2001 Made in Italy?* Edited by Luigi Settembrini (Milan: Skira, 2001), 134.

[8] Eugenia Paulicelli, *Fashion Under Fascism: Beyond The Black Shirt* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

[9] Mario Lupano and Alessandra Vaccari, *Fashion At The Time of Fascism: Italian Modernist Lifestyle 1922-1943*. Bologna: Damiani, 2011.

[10] Nicola White. *Reconstructing Italian Fashion: America and the Development Of The Italian Fashion Industry* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

[11] Giannino Malossi has gathered a large sample of articles from these magazines in the catalogue of the exhibition *La Sala Bianca: Nascita Della Moda Italiana* [The Sala Bianca: Birth of Italian Fashion, *translation mine*] one of Pitti Immagine's earliest exhibitions at Palazzo Strozzi held in summer 1992,

photographs that, unlike pre-war times – and unlike most photography of French fashion – were taken outside the walls of the studio: a genre with 'neo-realist' pretences[12] that juxtaposed desirable clothing, unmistakably 'Italian' models (women but also men, usually from working class and lower middle class origins) and some of the country's postcard landscapes and landmarks. Both in Italy and abroad, these images defined Italian fashion in the public imagination and reinforced the appeal for the Western values that America's support embodied, especially against portrayals of Communist villainy and incivility.[13]

The scenery was monumental Italy: against a backdrop of imperial and war ruins, Italian fashion's casual elegance, vibrant colours, and innovative cuts captured the American imagination. These features were portrayed by Pasquale de Antonis, Federico Garolla, Ugo Mulas, Regina Relang, David Lees, Elsa Robiola and other photographers as being dependent on people's lifestyles in the country's artistic cities. However, their evocative power originated from, and relied upon, a longer tradition of idealisation of life in the peninsula and its islands; an idealisation which was reliant on the country's artistic heritage, and that also impacted the way in which Italian fashion was communicated years later. Models were photographed in Rome's squares, by the Navigli, before Ponte Vecchio, the Venetian Canals, or Capri: places that were topoi in their own right, replete with meaning and which transferred their qualities onto the clothes for which they served as background.

The development of the perception of Italy as the country of the arts – besides the significance of Italy's artistic heritage – can be traced cross-historically. However, the origins of the perception that the specificities of the Italian (and specifically Florentine) urban lifestyle dependent its artistic heritage have roots in how the country was experienced by foreign visitors in the context of the Grand Tour in the nineteenth-century. The Grand Tour

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as well as in *Bellissima. Italy and High Fashion 1945-1968*. See: Giannino Malossi, *La Sala Bianca: Nascita della Moda Italiana* (Milan: Electa, 1992), 171-92. See also: Maria Luisa Frisa, Anna Mattirolo and Stefano Tonchi, eds. *Bellissima. Italy and High Fashion 1945-1968* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2014), 426-45.

[12] Stefano Tonchi, 'Neorealist,' *Bellissima*, 31.

[13] While the US provided financial support to Europe, in the conviction that Western Europe's rehabilitation was fundamental to American trade, dissatisfaction was brought to Italy by the winter crisis, undermining the authority of the government and strengthening the appeal of Communist parties and the Soviet influence. Thus, the success of the fashion industry, locally and in the US, was functional to the creation of an aspiration towards Western values. For a detailed account of the problematics faced by European countries when tailoring American initiative to local specificities see: is given in Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain And The Reconstruction Of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

represented the culmination of the education of the British and German gentleman, who reached Italy to dedicate themselves to writing, painting, and philosophy, often in total disconnection with the real socio-economic situation of the country. The purpose of the Italian part of the Grand Tour – mostly an urban experience – was to expose young men and, occasionally, women, to the glorious past of the territory and to sample elements of its present culture in theatres, opera houses, and coffeehouses. The grand traveller's writings, artworks and activities during the trip contributed significantly to the image of Italy as an arts' paradise. 'One comes to Italy to look at buildings, statues, pictures, people', wrote British grand-traveller Hester Piozzi Lynch,[14] and 'a man who has not been to Italy is always conscious of an inferiority from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see', said Samuel Johnson.[15]

Different cities within the Italian part of the Grand Tour created different kinds of expectations. While the descriptions of the most common destinations – Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples – might not be homogeneous, most accounts fostered an idealisation of Florence that relied, on the one hand, on the its role as a showpiece of the Grand Dukes' patronage. On the other hand, it presented Florence as the most inspiring of Italian destinations due to the role it had played in fostering the early revival of the arts during the period which after the times of the Grand Tour became known as the 'Renaissance'. Rosemary Sweet also points out that in addition to the images developed by foreign intellectuals, a strong case of patriotism within the Florentine Republic ended up influencing the perception of those whose information came from sources that were found in Italy. Sweet summarises each destination's general features as these were most commonly perpetuated through travel literature:

> Rome was the ultimate goal of the grand tourist, but heightened expectations were often disappointed when confronted with the prosaic reality of ruins which lacked the pristine clarity of Desgodetz's engravings. […] More prosaically, the social life and the entertainments on offer were often found wanting. Naples offered a livelier social scene, a benign climate and a wealth of curiosities, geological and antiquarian, in the surrounding *campagna*. But Naples as a city posed dangers as well as attractions. The architecture was too florid; the Catholicism too overt; the *lazzaroni* too idle.

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[14] Hesther Piozzi Lynch, *Observations And Reflections Made In The Course Of A Journey Through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 86.

[15] Johnson quoted in James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), 5

> Venice was extraordinary, but also claustrophobic, alien and discomfiting. Visitors frequently left it without regret after only a matter of days. Yet Florence, however, was frequently recommended as a most desirable place for prolonged residence in Italy.[16]

Even though after the Second World War Florence too needed to undergo a process of reconstruction, the baggage of associations between its city centre, the arts, and Italian cultural heritage became key to presenting and defining fashion to a new category of visitors: American buyers travelling to Tuscany to see the early international fashion shows organised by young entrepreneur Giovanni Battista Giorgini. The hypothesis that fashion could be a source of economic re-birth found affirmation and confidence in Florence's artistic heritage, and prevailed – although only temporarily – on Italy's strong regionalisms. Writing about a meeting with Giorgini, days before the 1951 event, John Fairchild explains: 'As I looked out of the window it seemed normal to me that a beautiful city like Florence had to be the centre of fashion' (*translation mine*).[17]

After receiving the thumbs down for a presentation of Italian fashion at the Brooklyn Museum in 1950, Giorgini announced to American buyers that an important event for the international fashion industry was going to take place in Florence, shortly after the shows in Paris. The event took place in Villa Torrigiani in 1951, as a private initiative that aimed to fill a gap that was specific of the fashion industry. In *Crafting Design in Italy,* Cat Rossi points out that furniture design and the decorative arts had a platform in the Triennale, which in 1951 was already at its 9th edition, but that excluded dress and fashion.[18] The success of the Villa Torrigiani event – the necessity for which had previously been advocated by Rosa Genoni – justified the magnified proportions of the one that would take place in July 1952 in the Sala Bianca of the Pitti Palace.

Built by private merchants and a symbol of Medici splendour, the Pitti Palace symbolised the nucleus of that Renaissance universe that had Florence as its sun, and the main scene of Art History. The event that officially represents the birth of Italian fashion thus became tied to a spectacular palace, whose connotations had been informed by a long tradition of representations that identified it as 'the residence of fine arts'.[19] In giving new

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[16] Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and The Grand Tour: The British In Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 67.

[17] John Fairchild, 'Grazie Giorgini, Grazie Firenze,' *La Sala Bianca: Nascita Della Moda Italiana*, 17.

[18] Cat Rossi, *Crafting Design in Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 28.

[19] Piozzi, quoted in Sweet, *Cities and The Grand Tour*, 81.

life to a place whose features were well defined in the common imagination, the fashion show also highlighted the innovative qualities of the clothes that it celebrated: elements of local and traditional craftsmanship that often predated modern times became inherent to the construction of garments that defied categories of dress and apparel, making them adhere to the requirements of contemporary life, and that challenged the established system of Parisian Fashion. Roberta Orsi Landini describes the features of that Italian fashion which was presented in the Sala Bianca:

> First he [Giorgini] showed models of what was known as 'boutique fashion' and ones for leisure and sport, types of collections that were not presented in Paris. The clothes were cheerful, startling and youthful, the colors [sic] an unexpected riot, the quality surprising, the prices incredibly attractive. In the evening wear the cuts were perfect, while the fabrics and decorations were stunning. The buyers realized at once that a market sector with unforeseeable prospects was opening up. […] the salient characteristics of Italian fashion were at once identified as simplicity of line and refined fabrics. 'Wearable' was the adjective that would constantly feature in reviews of the collections.[20]

However, it would be reductive to understand the Sala Bianca fashion show as simply aiming to showcase the work of some Italian fashion houses. The shared catwalk – a choice dictated by the imperfect seating capacity of the Sala Bianca, but also a strategy that would save journalists the effort of running between ateliers as it happened in Paris – sought to emphasise the existence of a unified Italian fashion system, identifiable by common features that could be ascribed in the venue were the presentation took place. In presenting collections to American buyers, Giorgini explained that these were quintessentially 'Italian' *because* they represented the legacy of an artistic tradition dating back directly to the Renaissance. In this sense, Orsi Landini explains that 'as had been Giorgini's dream, the Sala Bianca, myth and emblem of a style, had done its job'.[21] This was emphasised also by the fact that after 1965, most fringe events and presentations took place in venues that underlined, mainly to foreign audiences, that connection between Florence, art, and now fashion: the Boboli Gardens, the Belvedere, the city's ruins and monuments. In other words, the same idiosyncrasy that helped shaping Italian fashion photography in the 1950s also became an opportunity for cultural distinction in the decades to come.

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[20] Roberta Orsi Landini, 'The Sala Bianca,' *Bellissima. Italy and High Fashion 1945-1968,* ed. Maria Luisa Frisa, Anna Mattirolo and Stefano Tonchi Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2014), 325.
[21] Orsi Landini, 327.

Secessionism: Florence capital of Italian menswear

A series of events caused the Italian fashion system that was based in Florence to split. The Marshall plan had provided the technical and financial assistance required to consolidate the fashion industry, and Italian fashion had, indeed, become very popular across the Atlantic. However, tailoring American initiative to the specificities of Italian regionalism resulted in an initial lack of 'assertive state direction', which was required to reinforce 'normal market regulators'.[22] Where a central, unified body for the coordination and regulation of national fashion did not come into existence, the promotion of fashion started to rely instead on the lead of a variety of local administrations, recognising that fashion could make an important contribution to their economy and image, and seeking to make their city the main reference for fashion in Italy. In doing so, such organisations often showed opposition to Giorgini's initiative to gather in Florence the work of couturiers from the whole country, claiming that his success was based on the existence of a system which predated the 1951 event.[23] Thus, despite the popularity of what was beginning to affirm itself as 'Florentine' fashion, these local administrations started to operate in rivalry with one another, soon displaying the signs of 'secessionist' longings.

Wanting to split from the emergent Florentine fashion system, on the grounds that Italian High Fashion was produced chiefly in Rome, in 1953 a group of couturiers (including Fabiani, Simonetta, Sorelle Fontana, Ferdinandi, Gattinoni, and Gugenheim) founded the Sindacato Italiano Alta Moda [High Fashion Consortium] and started to present collections in their ateliers two days earlier than the shows in Florence, with the intention to become Italy's main show-case.[24] Turin had been the base of the Ente Italiano della Moda [Italian Fashion Board] since 1951, which in turn was founded on the ashes of the National Fashion Board; in Milan the Italian Fashion Centre, founded in the 1940s as the brainchild of former director of the Milanese Fascist institute Dino Alfieri, was also eager to promote the emerging prêt-à-porter industry; and in Naples the Circolo Mediterraneao dei Sarti [Mediterranean Tailors' Club] ensured that the southern city and its noble sartorial craft were granted some room on

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[22] Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*, 435.

[23] For further development on this, see: Cinzia Capalbo, 'In The Capital: Institutions in Support of Fashion,' *Bellissima.*

[24] Capalbo, 351.

the map of Italian fashion. In Florence, the success of Giorgini's initiative and of the first editions of the Sala Bianca show led to the foundation, in 1954, of the Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana (CFMI). The organisation became central to the continuation of Giorgini's work, and in the decades to come, it would also take a leading role in kick-starting the process of culturisation of fashion in Italy, by placing at the heart of its activities the connection between fashion, art, and Florence.

While the rest of the chapter will continue to look at the CFMI, it is important to point out that only in 1962 – a decade after the date that is associated with the birth of Italian fashion and only after fashion had proven to be an important tool of economic growth – would the sector organise in a union: the National Chamber of Italian Fashion was born, with the idea to offer unity and coordination to all the organisations that until that moment had tasked themselves with the promotion of Italian fashion. Having to work with a sector that was already fragmented, one of its earliest undertaking was to establish sectors of expertise, continuing the work that the various local organisations – which continued to exist – had previously started: Turin would have the clothing manufacturing industries, Milan, the textile manufacturing sectors, and Rome would be the centre for Haute Couture. Florence instead would be home of ready-to-wear fashion and menswear. According to economy historian Cinzia Capalbo this represented a 'move towards unification' of the Italian fashion system and would be useful for responding to the challenges of internationalisation in the following decades.[25]

Despite the offensive suffered from other cities, the switching back and forth of some fashion houses, and the slowness of the national government in recognising the importance of fashion to the economy and to Italian identity formation, the Florentine system started by Giorgini had its sails filled throughout the 1950s and early 1960s: many editions of the first Sala Bianca show followed the 1952 one, and in 1963 some menswear collections began to be shown in what was already considered a prestigious international context. Despite this, Giorgini's successful leadership was undermined in 1965 and he was made to abandon his position at CFMI. Further destabilising Florence's position as the main centre for Italian fashion, four days of torrential rain in November 1966 caused incredible damage to artworks and historic heritage across the peninsula. The Arno overflew its banks, reversing itself into the city centre and causing incalculable damage to the CFMI's archive. The event acquires a

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[25] Cinzia Capalbo, *Storia Della Moda A Roma* (Roma: Donzelli, 2012), 1-5.

symbolic status within the history of Italian fashion and can be identified as a turning point: in 1966, Florence temporarily stopped hosting fashion shows.

Simultaneously to the gradual weakening of Florence, the city of Milan was witnessing growing importance nationally and internationally as a city with a high concentration of manufacturing businesses and as a financial centre. Although the Lombard capital had not occupied a position of importance in the Italian fashion system until that point, its role during the first economic boom, the sophisticated cosmopolitism it was acquiring, and its competitive service sector, had made it the perfect place for the relocation of businesses from Florence to Milan. In addition to this, the emerging figure of the entrepreneur-designer and the popularity of the ready-to-wear started to finally provide the basis for a definition of the Italian fashion system that allowed it to fully escape any comparison with French fashion. Walter Albini, Caumont, Krizia, and Missoni began to desert Florence – where they had enjoyed many seasons of success – to show their women ready-to-wear collections in Milan. Along Giorgio Armani, Gianfranco Ferrè and Enrico Coveri, these designers became known for setting ready-to-wear not against high fashion – as happened in France – but for elevating it, by making invisible its industrial component and highlighting the design's aesthetic qualities: the concept was that of 'luxury ready-to-wear' in which 'dialogue between artisanal ability and textile industry could be created'.[26] In doing so, the women's sector joined the textile manufacturing one in Milan. Simona Segre Reinach emphasises a shift in the perception of Italian fashion as the ready-to-wear sector passed from Florence to Milan:

> The move of the center [sic] of ready-made fashion from Florence to Milan marked a change in the outlook of Italian fashion, from a product of culture and art, as American eyes had preferred to interpret it, to an enactment of modernity. At the international level, the rise of Milan was the start of the transformation of fashion from the expression of class and good taste to the dominating language of our time.[27]

On the one hand, in remaining in Florence, the menswear sector benefitted from the distance from Milan and from a form of branding that relied heavily on the celebrity and party culture of the Milanese fashion scene. On the other hand, in being associated with Florence, it retained the set of metaphorical values, virtues, and symbolism that the city had inherited

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[26] Simona Segre Reinach, Towards Ready-To-Wear,' *Bellissima*, 295.
[27] Segre Reinach.

from a tradition of representations stretching to a far as the De Medicis: that same relationship between Florence and art, which had been tested as a promotional tool by Giorgini, was to become newly central in the next phase of Pitti, particularly with regards to Pitti Uomo, the legendary menswear fair, which was founded in 1972 to consolidate Florence's association with the sector. In this context, however, fashion's perceived relationship with art became multifaceted: while Florence's architectural heritage continued to be the backdrop of fashion shows and the CFMI's early fashion exhibitions, a relationship of reciprocal support between fashion and the contemporary cultural scene began to flourish. This was a relationship with subcultural connotations that once again found fertile ground in Florence, where it received support from the CFMI.

Immagine: Florence, the stuff coming from the West, and the culture of fashion

Pier Vittorio Tondelli, one of the most influential writers of contemporary Italian literature, describes Florence as 'the only Italian capital' of the 'playful, party-loving, artsy' 1980s.[28] In this decade, Florence became a magnet for Italian youth across the peninsula, creating a context which was characterised by the presence of young designers, music bands, and theatre and video art groups. Their presence determined a lively – yet understudied – cultural scene, the memory of which emerges through the pages of magazines, fanzines, and avant-garde publications such as *Vanity* (edited by Anna Piaggi), *La voce del Boper* and, above all, *Westuff*. In reflection of the fluidity of Florence's underground scene, these publications crossed the boundaries between disciplines, as well as between the underground and the mainstream, and the international and the very local. They generated cult-like followings, through which the Tuscan capital could emerge in the landscape of Italian cities as 'the image of the West itself'.[29] *Westuff*'s determination to contribute actively to the construction of this image started with its name, which identified it as a magazine dedicated to creating debate around the 'stuff coming from the West', understood as a 'privileged space' and 'an unlimited geographical stretch, that also coincides with a sumptuous region of thought'.[30]

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[28] 'Firenze sembra proporsi, ormai da qualche anno, come l'unica capitale italiana di questi ludici, festaioli, artistoidi anni ottanta.' Pier Vittorio Tondelli, *Un Weekend Post-Moderno. Cronache Dagli Anni Ottanta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), Kindle Edition. *Translation mine.*
[29] Tondelli, *translation mine.*
[30] Westuff (1984), 1.

Westuff's aims were ambitious: it 'had to be the voice' and the 'seismograph' of this milieu (Fig. 5.1).[31]

Founded in 1984 by Maria Luisa Frisa and Stefano Tonchi, with architectural critic Mario Lupano, the story of *Westuff* overlaps with the history of the CFMI. Two years before its foundation, Frisa and Tonchi also contributed to the establishment of one of the CFMI's fairs, *Pitti Trend* (1984-1988), the first to be dedicated to the subcultural interconnections between fashion and the clubbing scene. Pitti Trend was often promoted through the pages of *Westuff* – as well as in Tondelli's writings – and hosted shows of designers of the likes of Vivienne Westwood, John Galliano, Romeo Gigli, Dries Van Noten, Scott Crolla, as well as members of the Italian Queer collective 'Che fine ha fatto Baby Jane?'. The idea of the magazine was simple: '[to] edit a magazine that we liked and which, in our opinion, did not exist in Italy'.[32] The perception of a condition of absence, as experienced by *Westuff*'s founders, corresponds to a notion of self-organisation as this was understood in the 1980s and 1990s, that is to say, as a fierce alternative and a reaction to mainstream cultural discourse. As discussed in the concluding section of this chapter, while binarism to a new interpretation of self-organisation, in the 1980s this concept's perceived incompatibility with the mainstream meant that *Westuff* could only have a short life. Frisa explains:

> Westuff only lasted ten issues and I always say that it was enough. I think that experiences as intense as that one are soon to be faced with a dilemma: either to become mainstream and start exploring more widely appealing subjects, or to last for a short time only.[33]

Through its ten issues, published over three years, the lifestyle magazine crossed the boundaries of different disciplines, publishing articles about Florence's vibrant nightlife, architecture, theatre, contemporary art, literature and film, while also often offering space to artists from the past. Fashion was a major part of it too, although Frisa points out that *Westuff* was not a fashion magazine, and that fashion was always contextualised within a wider aesthetic discourse. Not afraid of anachronistic digressions into the past and of flowing in and through any field its editors saw fit, the 'tabloid' can be seen as mirroring the way in which fashion was understood by the CFMI, and as anticipating some of the tendencies in curating fashion that arose in the next phase of its life, when Frisa and Tonchi would become

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[31] Frisa, *Appendix*, 356.
[32] Frisa, *Appendix*, 356.
[33] Frisa, *Appendix*, 357.

curators for Pitti Immagine (Fig. 5.2 & 5.3). To this extent, it seems possible to claim that the editorial stimuli provided by *Westuff* had a great influence on Pitti Immagine's early fashion exhibitions and their catalogues, which will be looked at in the next sections.

After the last edition of the Pitti Trend fair in 1988, and because of a period of stall that the Italian fashion industry was entering, the CFMI was motivated to cede its operational activities to *Pitti Immagine*, and to re-signify its function in the city as well as in the national landscape. Relying on a synecdoche that zooms again onto the Pitti Palace, the organisation's evocative new name, highlights the renewed ambition to make the city of Florence the image of Italian fashion, this time understood not only as product, but also – and chiefly – as culture. To do so, under the leadership of Marco Rivetti, *Pitti Immagine* started to promote its fairs through exhibitions, performances, art installations, publications and talks, aiming to stimulate critical and historical debate on the Italian fashion system.

The early exhibitions to be organised in occasion of Pitti Uomo aimed at producing a cultural history of the contribution of Florence and Florentine designers to the image of Italian fashion. These exhibitions took place in Palazzo Strozzi, considered to be one of the best examples of Renaissance architecture in Italy, and in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence's current town hall. Exhibitions included those dedicated to fashion designers whose names were proud synonyms of Florentine sartorial style: to begin with the *Salvatore Ferragamo* exhibition in 1985, curated by Guido Vergani, or the *Roberto Capucci: l'arte nella moda* [Roberto Capucci: art in fashion] exhibition, curated by Incontri Internazionali d'Arte in 1990, both at Palazzo Strozzi. There have been exhibitions of fashionable historical dress, too, for example those looking at the De Medicis' and Gabriele D'Annunzio's wardrobes. Other exhibitions highlighted Florence's connection with the menswear industry and suggested the existence of a relation of continuity between the exhibitions and the fair (e.g. *La Regola Estrosa*: *Cento Anni di Eleganza Maschile Italiana* [One Hundred Years of Male Elegance] in 1993 or *Latin Lover: A Sud Della Passione* in 1996 [Latin Lover: the South of Passion]).

Equally important to the task of promoting the culture of fashion on the national territory was that of creating connections abroad. The 1987 exhibition *Gli Anglo-Fiorentini. Una Storia D'Amore* [Anglo-Florentines: a love story], curated by Oreste Del Buono, Gherardo Frassa, and Luigi Settembrini had this function, as it aimed to shed light on a perceived affinity between Florence and London in the 1980s in terms of tensions between tradition and transgression. Another example of this kind of exhibition was Malossi's *Volare, l'icona*

italiana nella cultura globale (1998), which looked at Italy's contribution to global culture through various significations systems, including fashion. An important exhibition in this phase aimed at stressing Florence's role in the birth of Italian fashion, telling Giorgini's story and that of the Sala Bianca (e.g. the 1992 exhibition *La Sala Bianca: Nascita Della Moda Italiana,* curated by Cristina Aschengreen Piacenti).

Investigating selected parts of the brief history of Italian fashion, with a strong focus on menswear, these early fashion exhibitions were based on the idea that the culturisation of fashion could be a strategy to resolve the stall in which Italian fashion had found itself in the 1990s, as the process would enable the creation of a platform for debate aimed at stimulating investments on the one hand, and at increasing individual spending on the other. The programme thus needs to be seen as contributing to focusing audiences' attention on the relation between Florence and menswear, and above all, became the test of a communication strategy that used the culture of fashion as a tool to make the fair more appealing to international buyers. Perhaps most importantly, these exhibitions had the merit of starting a tradition of exhibiting dress that made use of ancient spaces, laden with history. This juxtaposition became a feature of fashion exhibitions in Italy, in Florence as well as in other Italian cities: far from being an exercise of nostalgia, or just an aesthetic decision, this was also a pragmatic choice, deriving from the fact that no permanent space for contemporary fashion exhibitions existed in Italy, and no plans to establish one existed at ministerial levels.

The lack of a permanent exhibition space also meant that the development of a consistent exhibition format could not take place in the way in which it happened in institutions examined in the previous chapters. Escaping the museum, another relationship was thus allowed to flourish: that between fashion and the urban environment. Not confined among the walls of a museum, in Florence fashion took a 'habit of using the city', as Frisa affirms in *Firenze Fashion Atlas,* a publication dedicated to exploring Florence's function as a fashion apparatus.[34] Dating back to this phase of Pitti Immagine, this 'habit' has profound roots in post-war Italian fashion photography and the 1952 fashion show, and sees fashion systematically take over Florence's private and public spaces, museums, gardens, theatres, mansions, schools and abandoned spaces:

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[34] Maria Luisa Frisa, ed., *Firenze Fashion Atlas* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2015).

In Florence fashion has projected itself forward by looking at the past in an uninhibited way. In Florence fashion has constructed a completely new and pulsating map of the city, one that has been defined over the years though short circuits between economic and symbolic systems, places of representation and at the same time moments of reflection.[35]

Earlier chapters developed the idea of the public museum as an important tool to develop critical and historical considerations on fashion. In Italy, the lack of a fashion heritage institution on the matrix of the modern museum has turned Florence's city centre into this tool. But setting presentations of fashion in the urban environment also facilitated the exploration of its direct relationships with other forms of expressions typical of urbanity, including the contemporary art scene that was celebrated by Tondelli. Sharing a condition of marginality in Italian public institutions, contemporary art and fashion developed a relationship that matured fully during the experience of the 1996 Fashion Biennale, an experiment that made the critique of the lack of space that both fashion and contemporary art had received in national institutional contexts the basis for the development of a new platform.

The Fashion Biennale

An important phase for Pitti Immagine started when Luigi Settembrini became Head of its communication department. Settembrini came to the position with the ambition to continue the process of culturisation of fashion started by his predecessors a decade earlier, aiming to install in Italy a 'culture of complexity, quality, and beauty'.[36] From this perspective, the proposal of a Fashion Biennale in Florence represented for this process what Giorgini's fashion show at the Sala Bianca had represented for the industry: the possibility to show, through a high resonance project, that fashion – this time understood as research, debate, and culture – could be an economic and cultural catalyst. Settembrini believed that emphasis on research would have helped rehabilitating a sector which, at the end of the 1990s, was

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[35]Frisa, 19.
[36] Luigi Settembrini, 'The Florence Biennale. A Cultural Study of The Contemporary,' *Looking At Fashion: Biennale Di Firenze,* ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Skira, 1996), 11.

undergoing a period of stasis, precisely because of the lack of investments valorising the industry, and helping to form a new generation of Italian designers.[37]

Titled 'Il Tempo e la Moda / Looking at Fashion', the festival explored the temporality of the contemporary through an investigation of the 'intricate and manifold relationship of time and fashion'.[38] Twenty years later in the catalogue of *Across Art and Fashion* exhibition at the Ferragamo Museum, Suzy Menkes remembers the first edition of the Fashion Biennale:

> From the Florentine event 'Il Tempo e la Moda' 20 years ago I have so many […] flashes of memory: Prada's Damien Hirst-inspired mini farm; Jean Paul Gaultier's display in the anatomical 'La Specola' wax museum; Gianni Versace rendering Roy Lichtenstein's art on silk; and the Palazzo Vecchio used to display a Yves Saint Laurent scarlet and golden dress. From Stazione Leopolda to Forte Belvedere, the displays in 19 different museums seemed at first like an elaborated game inspired by the late art critic Ingrid Sischy and executed with skill and depth by Germano Celant, then the curator of contemporary art at New York's Guggenheim'.[39]

The festival consisted of seven large exhibitions across nineteen museums in the cities of Florence and Prato, and it focused on the relationship between contemporary fashion and art. The city of Florence became a temporary host of volatile manifestations of this relationship, and a place where fashion designers and artists could enlarge the horizon of their practice and question the nature of the horizon itself. At the same time, the biennale also represented the opportunity to develop a platform dedicated to research and debate in contemporary art and fashion.

Filipovic, van Hal, and Øvstebø point out that 'for some sceptics the word biennial has come to signify nothing more than an overblown symptom of spectacular event culture'.[40] And the Fashion Biennale has, indeed, attracted this kind of criticism, with the New York Times dismissing it as a 'monster cocktail party'.[41] This strong criticism was moved in

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[37] Settembrini, 8.
[38] Settembrini, 6.
[39] Suzy Menkes, 'Art at the Heart of Fashion,' *Across Art and Fashion*, ed. Stefania Ricci (Florence: Mandragora, 2016), 18.
[40] Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø. *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 12.
[41] Amy Spindler, 'Fashion as Art. Or Maybe Not,' *The New York Times*, 15 September 1996, accessed December 12 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/15/arts/fashion-as-art-or-maybe-not.html

reference to the specific sector addressed by the Florence biennial, and it should not be surprising for 1996, a period when fashion's cultural valence was still questioned by the press, as well as, by exponents of traditional forms of museology and academia. Commenting on the Fashion Biennale, Splinder notes: 'fashion, when it takes itself too seriously, really bugs people'.[42]

The spectacular character is often intrinsic to the biennial format due to utilitarian connotations of biennials as tools of urban regeneration. However, the literature within the small field of biennialogy describes them as critical sites offering curators, exhibition-makers, artists, designers and the public a platform that is alternative to local museums and cultural organisations. For example, Basualdo's influential article points out that 'the configuration of interests found at the core of institutions like biennials' is different from those that gave origin to the modern museum and the modern institutional circuit of galleries and criticism, and that this difference makes them 'unstable' institutions.[44] Far from being a critique of the financial viability of the biennial model – which, in the case of the Florence Fashion Biennale, also needs to be considered – the instability of biennials indicates their ability to define their objectives in contrast with the perceived lack of flexibility of permanent institutions. According to Basualdo, biennials function as aesthetic containers whose shape is determined, edition after edition, in response to the cultural reality that surrounds them and by proposing a line of thinking that offers itself as an alternative to the existing institutional infrastructure. In their contexts, the practice of curating develops an 'antagonistic' feature, in the spirt of 'fomenting dissent' and aiming to make perceptible the erasure of issues, subjects, or topics from mainstream cultural discourse.[45]

In Florence, the temporary character of the biennial lent itself to a critique towards a missing platform for contemporary art and fashion. The necessity for such a platform is stressed by Settembrini in his *Introduction* to the catalogue of 'Il Tempo e la Moda':

> too often Italian official culture in engaged in a losing, rear-guard action, a
> desperate alliance with the Great Culture of the recent and distant past. All

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[42] Spindler.

[44] Carlos Basualdo, 'The Unstable Institution,' *Manifesta Journal* 2 (2003): 145.

[45] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon, France: Le Presses du Réel, 2002), 27-8. On the positioning of biennials with regards to museums and art galleries, besides Bourriad's and Basualdo's texts, see also: . Bruce Ferguson, Milena Hoegsberg, 'Talking and Thinking about Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity.' In *The Biennial Reader*; Juliana Engberg, 'Biennial Topology,' *Stages* 6 (2017): 2-7.

this has culminated in a paucity of results; save for a few isolated cases, the result of the hard work and personal integrity of rare individuals, even the simple preservation of historical, cultural, artistic, architectural and environmental heritage of what is now Italy has been hampered and hindered by a lack of resources, by widespread apathy and indifference, by half-baked efforts, by the prevalence of a mass tourism industry, by traffic, by spreading cement, and by the construction of hideous, and often, illegal, vacation homes in unspoilt wilderness or within a stone's throw of historical landmarks.[47]

The critique of the lack of space for contemporary forms of expression is especially significant when the Italian context is compared to the international scene, within which Settembrini and the other curators of the Fashion Biennale had developed their own practice as curators. If, on the one hand, the 1980s and 1990s had been decades during which national museums abroad, particularly in the UK and the US, had been slowly but gradually embracing contemporary art, and when major institutions had already started to exhibit fashionable dress, in Italy, on the other hand, national organisations devoted to contemporary art were scarce, and none had plans to exhibit contemporary fashion. In his presentation of the Fashion Biennale Settembrini wrote that: 'In Italy […] you can count on the fingers of one hand the institutions and the major artistic and cultural events of international importance that focus upon contemporary reality'.[48] This idea was reinforced by the fact that contemporary artistic practice was not dignified, at the time, with the establishment of a specialised Ministry.

The necessity for change was perceived especially by operators of the contemporary art system, who felt that Italy was 'a country that is contemporary, in spite of its official culture'.[49]. Settembrini thus believed that instead of reconstructing narratives from a remote past, which at the level of national planning had resulted almost in an equation between contemporary Italy and traditional Italy, Italian cultural industries needed to look no further than the present. Settembrini explained that this was not looked at with sufficient closeness by national cultural institutions, which he described as 'wasting time and precious energy on didactic commonplaces' that very often failed to reach the entire nation.[50] From this perspective, the Fashion Biennale also represented a clear rupture with the significant yet modest programme of exhibitions and events organised by the CFMI/Pitti Immagine in the

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[47] Settembrini, 'The Florence Biennale', 7-8.
[48] Settembrini, 7.
[49] Settembrini.
[50] Settembrini, 8.

previous years: instead of reconstructing histories of the past, it looked at the contemporary and at issues concerning the present; instead of understanding the juxtaposition of fashion and art merely as the presentation of the former in ancient buildings of undisputable cultural significance, various other contemporary forms of expression would share the stage with contemporary fashion, thus emphasising fashion's embeddedness in a wide aesthetic universe; instead of looking only at Italian fashion, the new programme of events acquired the international character that had previously been a defining feature of Pitti Trend. In the meanwhile, Milan continued to be the Italian capital of fashion – that issue was settled – but *Pitti Immagine* had a role to play in making Florence the official capital of contemporary culture and the 'capital of the spirit' that the underground scenes had already recognised it to be;[51] and the 1996 Fashion Biennale had to be its manifesto.

To do so, the exhibitions of the Biennale positioned contemporary art and fashion within the same framework of that heritage whose preservation was already part of Italian sensibility, stressing the presence of a variety of small museums, devoted to as many specialisms. An example is the *Visitors* exhibition, curated by Franca Sozzani and Luigi Settembrini (Fig. 5.4 & 5.5). In this context, fashion and art were used to build a visible construction within urban space for a public of *curieux* and *curieuses*: Armani at the Uffizi, Margiela at Museo Bardini, Jacobs, Todd Oldham, and Anna Sui at the Civic Museum in Prato, Dolce e Gabbana at the Anthropology Museum, Saint-Laurent and Blahnik at Palazzo Vecchio, Ferré at the Medici Chapel, Valentino at the Gallery of the Academy, Gaultier at La Specola museum, Miyake at the Gallery of Modern Art of Palazzo Pitti, Atkinson at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Donna Karan at Loggia Bigallo, Lacroix at Orsanmichele, Ozbek at the Horne Museum, Treacy at the Silver Museum, Tyler at the Science History Museum, Gigli at the Marini Museum. Their spread in the city of Florence enacted a form of nomadism between the permanent and the temporary, but also, utilising Benjamin's terminology, between the dreamlike dimension of the gallery and the state of sensorial waking up experienced in the city: an experience based on the modern epistemological paradigm of wandering among small cabinets of curiosities as well as on a post-modern boundary-crossing between genres, media and forms of expressions. Each exhibition became an operation absorbing sensuous layers of contamination: they were not a practice of art, but neither were they merely a

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[51] Settembrini, 11.

practice of curating. Each of them was rather an exploration of exhibition-making as a medium for transdisciplinarity and intertextuality.

Two other exhibitions stand out within the 1996 Florence Fashion Biennale for anticipating motives that would later become popular in the international landscape of fashion curating. *New Persona/New Universe* held at the Stazione Leopolda displayed the work of designers and artists that explored the concept of gender and the way in which the human body can be a tool for resistance against defined and defining categories of identity. The *Arte/Moda* [Art/Fashion] exhibition, curated by Germano Celant, Luigi Settembrini and Ingrid Sischy presented artistic work and garments that exceed the structural definitions of dress, sculpture, installation, photography, and painting revealing the unsituatedness of the boundary between fashion and art, and the impossibility to assimilate either of them in the immediate forms of artefacts. These were often the work of artists from the avant-gardes of Futurisms, Pop and Conceptual art, Deconstructivism, and Arte Povera, who utilised and reinterpreted dress as a means to question the ability of their contemporary fashion to represent the sense of continuity 'between the inside and the outside', that is to say to be a tool for the representation of subjectivity.[52] In addition to this, seven pavilions hosted as many commissioned installations, which were created jointly by a fashion designer and an artist (Fig. 5.6 & 5.7)[53]. Overlooking the historic centre of the city of Florence from Forte Belvedere, these installations represented the continuation in the present of that 'avant-garde tradition' (which had been explored in the other half of the exhibition through the work of Giacomo Balla, Salvador Dalì, Sonia Delaunay, and Lucio Fontana) of 'bringing art and fashion together in one same energy field'.[54] What *Art/Fashion* and *New Universe/New Persona* have in common is their ambition to experiment with fluidity across artistic genres, showing that the influences that aesthetic discourses play on one another are contingent, accidental, and yet recurrent and defining both fashion and art and the mechanisms through which they renovate themselves. Besides their individual themes, a red thread linking both exhibitions was their ambition to prompt reflections on the materiality of the sensations created through the encounter with clothes, a summa of which is represented by Jenny

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[52] Celant, *Looking at Fashion*, 19.

[53] Julian Schnabel and Azzedine Alaïa; Roy Lichtenstein and Gianni Versace; Jenny Holzer and Helmut Lang; Damien Hirst and Miuccia Prada; Tony Cragg and Karl Lagerfeld; Mario Merz and Jil Sander; Oliver Herring and Rei Kawakubo.

[54] Celant, 141.

Holzer's projection of words on the banks of river Arno: I smell you on my clothes. I breathe you. You are my own.[55]

Most importantly, their heterogeneous and unconventional strategies of display – the product of the collaboration between designers, artists, and curators – exemplify what curator Igor Zabel identified as the symptom of a change in the approach to curating at the end of the twentieth century:

> Today, when the idea of art is no longer connected only to a specific type of object but often to constellations, relationships, and interventions into different contexts, the division between artist and curator is less clear, especially since both activities tend to meet in an intermediate area.[56]

The exhibitions of the Fashion Biennale inhabited the 'intermediate area' described by Zabel, and the politics of display through which such exhibitions came to exist reflected the heterogeneous character of the art practices that they presented. While this was hardly innovative within the field of contemporary art, the expansion of the exhibition medium into a more dispersed format was certainly experimental for fashion curating in 1996; looking at the Biennale retrospectively, it seems possible to assert that its unconventional and heterogeneous strategies of display, enacting forms of knowledge production that facilitated the flow between genres and media, anticipated and legitimised some of the practices that would later become defining features of curating fashion in other heritage institutions. For instance, the idea of exhibiting dress in abandoned buildings, which would become a defining feature of MUDE's strategies of display, and the idea of the 'diffused museum' that the same institution began to employ during the works of requalification of its building in central Lisbon. Another example is the way in which some exhibitions within the 1996 Florence Biennale blurred the roles between the curator and the curating artist/designer. As Pecorari points out, this would become a defining feature of several of MoMu's exhibitions, where

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[55] Besides *Visitors,* curated by Luigi Settembrini and Franca Sozzani, *New Persona/New Universe*, curated by Germano Celant and Ingrid Sischy at the Leopolda Station, and *Arte/Moda*, curated by Germano Celant the other 4 exhibitions in the first edition of the Florence Fashion Biennale (1996) were Emilio Pucci's retrospective exhibition at the Sala Bianca, *Bruce Weber. Secret Love* at the Ferragamo Museum, *Elton John. Metamorphosis* at the Reali Poste degli Uffizi, and a Michelangelo Pistoletto exhibition at Prato's Pecci Centre for Contemporary Art.
[56] Igor Zabel, 'Making Art Visible,' *Igor Zabel: Contemporary Art Theory*, ed. Igor Spanjol (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2013), 154.

designers' subjective approaches have had an impact on the exhibition-making practice and curatorial choices of the museum's curator.[57] Rehearsing an approach that was already well known to contemporary art, the Fashion Biennale thus unfolded a certain interdependency between designers' practice and exhibition making. This collaborative approach resulted in highly subjective forms, whose narratives are not merely absorbed by the system of institutional historiography, but rather also become representations of contemporary conditions.

The Florence Fashion Biennale was followed by a second, much smaller edition, dedicated to exploring the relationship between fashion and cinema. Frisa explains why the experiment of a Fashion Biennale was short-lived:

> It was an extraordinary achievement. The problem with the Biennale was that Luigi suffers of gigantism. He decides to occupy the whole city and to involve everything and everyone in the process. As you know, the first Biennale was a tremendous success, but what you probably don't know is that it was a financial black hole. It was total bankruptcy.[58]

As a result of the events that have been narrated by Frisa, the relationship between Settembrini and Pitti soured. The experience could not be repeated, but it had set the tone of a way of curating fashion that distinguished Florence from other cities where fashion exhibitions were held. At the same time, it inspired and gave confidence to a group of curators and critics of contemporary art for the next phase of fashion exhibitions in Italy.

Discovery: curating as expanded field

The Fashion Biennale was not to be understood as an isolated event in a biannual calendar. Settembrini had envisioned that various editions of the Fashion Biennale would be spaced out by individual exhibitions, publications, discussion panels, conferences and performances, further investigating the macro-theme at the heart of the festival: the contemporary contaminations between fashion, art, architecture and other forms of expression, with the

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[57] Pecorari, 'Contemporary Fashion History in Museums,' 51.
[58] Frisa, *Appendix,* 357.

aim of 'emphasizing investments in preservation, reconstruction, and refinishing, as well as investments in organisation and communication'.[59]

Unlike the project of a biennial mega-exhibition, the varied programme of events between the editions of the festival was carried forward after 1998. This programme was developed by the Pitti Discovery Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation, founded in 1999 to continue the process of culturisation of fashion started by Pitti Immagine, thus filling the void left by the Fashion Biennale. Events by the Pitti Discovery Foundation are organised throughout the year, with exhibitions opening in occasion of Immagine's fairs, and with a major focus on menswear.

Inaugurated with *These Restless Minds,* a video installation by Californian artist Doug Aitken, in its early days Pitti Immagine Discovery consisted of a small art gallery in the historic centre of Florence. It continued to present leading contemporary artists whose practice problematise issues related to gender, sexuality, and the relationship between the body and social discourses, often venturing deep into political activism. Examples of Pitti Immagine Discovery's early exhibitions include Pipilotti Rist's *Sip My Ocean* video installation, exploring female sexuality with an empowering agenda, Sharon Lockhart's *Teatro Manaus,* a conceptual exploration of the artifice of ethnographic representations, and Juergen Teller's *Go-Sees*, a reportage on aspiring fashion models' vulnerability and ambition, a critique of the sometimes-impossible body and lifestyle images set by the fashion industry. While these were not exhibitions of dress, they created a lively forum to for social engagement on issues around the representation of the contemporary body that constitute vital stakes in fashion theory, as well as in contemporary fashion design. At the same time, they helped defining Pitti Immagine Discovery's aim to become an organisation seeking to 'promote and valorise cultural research and artistic production, especially in the areas in which fashion finds creative inspiration and form of experimentation'.[60]

This became possible especially when the foundation moved towards the model of a diffused art gallery, continuing the tradition of utilising various spaces of the city of Florence. Frisa describes the small Via Faenza gallery where Discovery started its activities as a 'physical and mental stage', a way of preparing visitors for the events that would be

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[59] Settembrini, 'The Florence Biennale', 13.
[60] Pitti Fondazione Discovery, accessed October 31 2017. http://www.pittidiscovery.com/discovery/globals/about-us/history.html Translation mine.

organised later by the foundation at the nearby Stazione Leopolda, at the Fortezza da Basso, as well as in 'the unknown courtyards of many of the city's townhouses'.[61]

The lack of a permanent exhibition space has actively contributed to the fluid programme of temporary projects: exhibitions, catwalks, lectures, screenings, as well as non-objectual practices, such as performances and installations, whose inclusion in the programme was favoured by the lack of a permanent collection, and of the need to build one. Rather than exploring and reconstructing the past, these events continued to look at fashion from a transdisciplinary perspective that integrates various aesthetic and social discourses, while also often explicitly promoting new designers' work. Events in this phase included, for example, the screening of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* series at the Rondò di Bacco theatre; the Vanessa Beecroft performance in the Tepidarium of Florence's Horticultural Garden (Fig. 5.8); Gareth Pugh's gothic installation and first fashion film projected on the ceiling of Museo Orsanmichele (Fig. 5.9); or Hedi Slimane's reconstruction of the Galerie des Glaces in the Palace of Versailles at Stazione Leopolda. More recently, Pitti Discovery has hosted experimental performances aiming to conceptually capture the immaterial dimension and remembered experience of fashion and clothing, such as *Cloakroom*, Olivier Saillard's and Tilda Swindon's introspective performance on clothes' memory at Saloncino della Pergola (Fig. 5.10). These are just examples of a long list of projects, each inscribed in a varying contingent material space with an eventful, finite, and precarious character. Together, they constitute an intense and individualistic 'museum of obsessions', to use Harald Szeemann's conceptualisation, an imaginary museum where artists' 'individual mythologies' are combined, abolishing the barrier between the specificities of their genres, as well as between contemporary forms of expression, Italian 'high art' and Renaissance architecture.[62] As the last section of this chapter will expose, the post-modern border-crossing that is put forward in Pitti Immagine Discovery's presentations has the potential to be a critique of the Italian institutional system, where a compartmentalisation of disciplines, forms of expression, older and newer subjects, is enshrined by the existence of 'scientific disciplinary sectors' that seek to describe and categorise research unambiguously, representing an obstacle to inter-, trans-, and multi-disciplinarity.

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[61] Frisa, *Firenze Fashion Atlas*, 18-19.
[62] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zürich: Presses du Reel, 2008), 91-3.

In this phase, Pitti Immagine Discovery has also hosted collective exhibitions, mostly held at Stazione Leopolda and occasionally at the Modern Art Gallery of the Pitti Palace. These exhibitions can be considered seminal for the field of fashion curating, as they put to test various new historical approaches to curating fashion at a time when fashion curators abroad – with exceptions and precursors – were experimenting with displays that offered a balance between historical reconstruction and thematic approaches, seeking to address the discrepancies between seemingly incompatible perspectives on how dress had to be studied, preserved, and exhibited[63]: *Uniform. Order and Disorder* (2001)*, The Fourth Sex* (2003)*, Excess* (2004)*, Human Game* (2006)*, The London Cut* (2007)*,* and *Workwear* (2009)*.* The catalyst of these exhibitions was a complex interface of aesthetics, politics, and ethics, that could be utilised as an unrestrained source of inspiration because of the absence of a consistent research and exhibition policy, or the necessity to programme as much in advance as museums. One exhibition stands out in this phase as the only retrospective show: curated by Judith Clark, Maria Luisa Frisa, and Vittoria Caratozzolo, *Simonetta: La Prima Donna della Moda Italiana* (2008) set out to capture Simonetta's role in informing Italian fashion. In so doing, this exhibition – smaller than all others in terms of number of displays and budget – has anticipated a current historicist movement in Italian fashion curating, that seeks to trace the origins of an 'Italian way' of doing fashion, with the intention to also show that fashion has already proven to be a creative and economic force: an approach to research that was unprecedented for Pitti Immagine Discovery, the necessity for which will be looked at in the next section.

Due to the varied typology of presentation modalities and artistic media characterising its programme, Pitti Immagine Discovery can be thought of as a loose institutional structure, a performative presence in the city, which exists as a place only when an event takes place. The foundation thus identifies not as a place for contemplation, but rather as a chain of events, dependent on the hospitality of others, and often produced with small budgets and without the support of national funding. The discrepancy between this modality of producing – and consuming – a cultural program and the one associated with the modern museum are clear: Boris Groys points out that in modern museums and art galleries exhibiting was understood as a practice through which artworks could resist 'the

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[63] See *Chapter I* for a review of the international debate (pp. 6–15 & 32-40).

flow of time'.[64] Not only were artefacts protected against time's destructive and wearing force, but they would become able to transcend it, becoming witnesses to it and overcoming historical oblivion. The same can be said about fashion's presence in the museum, both in those exhibitions that aim to study the periods of dress history and in more recent a-historical and thematic museum exhibitions, in which historic dress as well as recent collections are inserted into narratives of the past, through interpretations that will be preserved alongside the artefacts. Groys points out that the contemporary, post-representational art institution has instead moved towards a model in which objects are secondary to the specificities of temporary exhibitions and events, which are often produced without the expansion of the collection and the archive in mind. In turn, this has also corresponded to a growing interest in the immaterial dimensions of culture: in the case of fashion, presentations have increasingly been based not only on *dress* and its study through theories of aesthetic formalism, not only on the display of mannequins within the sanctioned space of museums and galleries, but rather on the idea of creating debate around *fashion,* seen as embodied in a variety of mediums, and with manifestations that often escape the definitional limits of objects, and whose reception is made easier through participative practices such as performances, installations, and projections.[65]

Often collectable only in the form of documentation, these practices allow institutions to become 'more and more involved in the flow of time', and to gradually abandon the ambition towards 'eternal truth, moral perfection [and], ideal beauty'.[66] Groys identifies this institutional form as one fashioned by the advent of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the total work of art, or total art event, that involves everything and everyone. Building up on the notion that was first hypothised by Richard Wagner, Groys' total art event presupposes individual artists/curators' complete instrumentalisation of the space of the museum in order to achieve the highest degree of creative freedom across various art forms and medias.[67] Groys compares the power of the artist within the space of the total art event to that of a 'dictator-performer', whose choices have the ability to produce an impact on the event itself and on the way in which his/her collaborators are mobilised to make the

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[64] Boris Groys, *In the Flow*, 9-22.
[65] The *Fashion in Motion* series, analysed in Chapter II is example of what is described in this passage.
[66] Groys, 3 & 11.
[67] See: Richard Wagner, 'The Art-Work of The Future' (1985), *Richard Wagner's Prose Works Vol.1* (Forgotten Books Limited, London, 2016).

exhibition possible.[68] However, Wagner is clear about the fate of the regime set by the artist-dictator within the total art event space: their 'dictatorship' is sustainable only if it is temporary, only if it has no continuation, and if it is followed by other regimes, another total art event, that admits no space for the memory of the previous one.

Implying the notion of exhibitions as authored subjectivities, Groys utilises Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to define the function of exhibitions and curatorial work in contemporary cultural heritage institutions: the exhibition as *Gesamtkunstwerk* 'instrumentalises all exhibited artworks, making them serve a common purpose that is formulated by the curator'.[69] The all-encompassing set of choices and decisions shaping the total art event turns the curator into an exhibition-maker, who evaluates what to welcome or exclude in the exhibition, and establishes relationships of dependence between artefacts, texts, documents, and the architecture of the place, its lighting, the set design; in order to do so, he/she liaises with artists and archives, but also with architects, technicians, graphic designers, whilst also working preventively to find premises for the exhibition. In doing so, the exhibition-maker takes the role of Groys' dictator: controlling the staging of the exhibition in the extended field of the discipline of curating, aiming to bring the exhibition space 'into the flow of time'.[70]

Groys' understanding of contemporary heritage institutions as stages for *Gesamtkunstwerken* can be utilised to describe Pitti Immagine Discovery's operations, and it also helps defining the understanding of fashion culture at the grounds of its presentations. While this reading is certainly favoured by the material conditions of the foundation – its lack of a permanent exhibiting venue, the lack of its own collection, its close partnership with the fairs, the nature of its funding – the multi-form presentation modalities and myriad of small narratives that have been produced thus far also seem the result of the specific background and approach to curating of those exhibition-makers that have shaped the foundation's vision through its first events. Developing their practice working with Italian contemporary art, in foundations and biennials, in the capacities of curators, critics, and editors, Francesco

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[68] Groys, 'Entering the Flow.'

[69] Boris Groys, *In the Flow*, 18.

[70] Groys, 18. The notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in relation to curatorial work has also been discussed by Paul O'Neill and Myers-Szupinska. See: Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 28-29; and Julian Myers-Szupinska, 'Exhibitions as Apparatus,' *The Exhibitionist: Journal on Exhibition Making: The First Six Years*, ed. Jens Hoffmann, Julian Myers-Szupinska, and Liz Glass (New York: The Exhibitionist, 2017), 16-23.

Bonami, Stefano Tonchi, Maria Luisa Frisa, Italo Rota, and Terry Jones approached curating fashion with the critical tools that they had acquired on those scenes, rather than those concerning the preservation and presentation of dress, in reflection of the fact that in Italy fashion had been pushed to the margins of cultural institutions and the debate on the aims and methodologies of displaying fashionable dress had not existed to any great extent. In a *Fashion Theory* article, Maria Luisa Frisa referred to the impact of her education and training on her practice as a curator: 'I studied art history specialising in contemporary art at a time when to concern yourself with contemporary art in Italy inevitably meant you had to be a militant critic'.[71] Later, Frisa affirmed that it was contemporary art that enabled her 'to relate not with the concept of 'beautiful', but rather to take the risk of critical interpretation'.[72]

Determining the impact of such background on their practice as curators of fashion involves considering how the balance between exhibition-maker and exhibited work operates in curatorial work; a balance which has been produced differently in the often self-organised, 'militant'[73] contemporary art scene of biennials and foundations, and in the museum in possession of fashion collections. Such difference seems determined by the very different questions that contemporary art curators were asking themselves in a period of time – between the end of the 1980s and early 2000s – when the legitimacy of fashion in the museum was still up for debate, and when, under the influence of new art historical thinking thematic and critical approaches to exhibiting fashion were just beginning to be seen a possible alternatives to the study of periods and chronologies.[74] The motivations of contemporary art curators were instead very different: based on curatorial and artistic debates invested in the assertion of curators' independence from the institutions of the museum and the kunsthalle (as opposed to the attempt of abridging the gap between academia and the museum), such debates dated back to the 1960s and saw curators' gestures gain an increasingly high level of awareness. This process gradually led the practice of curating to be seen in the 1980s as a fully recognised form of articulation where the dialogical, the aesthetic, the pedagogical, and the discursive converge. This trend continued in the 1990s, determining a real 'curator's moment', a period when contemporary art

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[71] Frisa, 'Curator's Risk,' *Fashion Theory* 12.2 (2008), 172.
[72] Frisa, *Appendix,* 358.
[73] Frisa, 'Curator's Risk,' 172.
[74] Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media,' 371-2.

curators achieved great visibility and curatorial discourse started to become itself the object of academic research, as well as of the literature that accompanies exhibitions.[75]

Crucially, as contemporary art curators became independent from institutions, a closer relationship with artists began to develop. This was accompanied by a view of exhibitions as unitary pieces of work – *gesamtkunstwerken* – and as all-embracing environments whose authorship could, at different levels, be claimed by both.[76] Such exhibitions were the product of what curator Seth Siegelaub called the 'demystification' of exhibition production, a term which sought to highlight curators' attempt to 'understand and be conscious' of the artistic actions at the grounds of a perceptible generational break, surfacing through the use of new media, as well as through artists' choice of themes and use of language.[77] Demystifying curatorial work meant asserting the importance of critical interpretation, and highlighting the shift from displaying for the appreciation of artefacts, to displaying for the production of discourse.[78] Coming from a field where the figure of the curator was already changing, Italian curators of fashion have thus found themselves abandoning very early the role of the historian to take on that of the critic. In the process they brought to the practice of curating fashion that culture of fluidity and transmediality that they had experienced in art practice.

Another implication of the closer relationship between exhibition-makers and artists was that the practice of exhibition-making itself became influenced by artists' preoccupations. A recurring issue for artists operating in Italy was the critique of the museum, with the idea that that any form of museology is unable to be a representation of the contemporary. This concern had deep roots in avant-garde art practice, dating back to Futurism, which proclaimed an absurdity and a paradox the fact that the past was considered more valuable than the present. This idea was then was carried forward by Conceptual Art, which in Italy took the form of Arte Povera. The trajectory of this sensation of discontent

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[75] Michael Brenson, 'The Curator's Moment,' *Art Journal* 57. 4 (1998): 16; Paul O'Neill, *Culture of Curating*, 9-49.

[76] Herald Szeemann is considered the first contemporary art curator to have developed an independent practice after leaving Kunsthalle Berne in 1969. His exhibition *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (The Tendency Towards the Total Work of Art) of 1983 focussed curatorial debate on the notion of trans-cultural and trans-medial artistic practice; at the same time, it presented the idea that finding opportunities for exhibitions is as important as the acts of selecting, arranging, and displaying.

[77] Seth Siegelaub, in O'Neill, 19.

[78] This is a newer concept for fashion curation within museums, with MoMu making collaborations with designers a central part of its strategies of display, and developing the idea that only designers can explain their work.

with the public museum then reached the Transavantgarde in the 1980s, and surfaced again in art practice from the 1990s. It was with these artists that exhibition-makers in Italy – including Bonami and Frisa – had been close to in the earlier stages of their careers.

In addition to the critique of the institution of the museum, a second aspect in which Transavantgarde art practice influenced Italian exhibition-making was its vision on the fluidity between medias. Representing the core idea of the transavantgardist painting, this notion ended up informing approaches to curating and publishing based on the synthesis of various visual and cultural experiences of the late 1980s: cult of hedonistic excess, glamour, show-politics, and neoliberalism. Thirdly, the Transavantgarde influenced exhibition-making with its position with regards to temporality and the rupture of chronologies: artists did not trust the progressive evolution of history, but rather they believed in the emancipatory power of the new, of the independent, and developed a critique of mainstream forms of representation to sustain the validity of its claims. In addition to this, the Transavantgarde put forward a deep questioning of compact identities, and highlighted the contradictions included in the formation of individual and common subjectivity, despite its features of a conservative post-modern movement. In doing so, everything fell within reach, without categories and hierarchies of present and past. The result were complex artworks that determined the much-desired rupture with Arte Povera: instead of minimalising, of impoverishing, their drive was towards the accumulation of symbols and allegories, appropriations and cross-overs.

With backgrounds as curators and critics of contemporary art, curators of fashion in Italy made these ideas and debates tools to activate critical exchanges about fashion. In keeping with the transavantgardist sense of fluidity between different media, fashion was understood earlier on not as limited to clothing, practice or representation, but always as a combination of these, and as irreducible to these individual definitions. The resulting exhibitions took the form of displays that were never object-oriented. Rather they inscribed exhibits in a contingent material space deriving from conceptual systems of investigation, beyond the techniques of applied museology and the outcomes of celebratory hagiography. In other words, the lack of a museological institution where fashion could be preserved and exhibited determined the early exposure of fashion to critical scrutiny. While fashion curators operating In Italy have since criticised this context, it must be pointed out that it favoured their independence from conservative academic and museological interrogations on how

dress had to be exhibited. In determining the impossibility to continue a tradition of exhibiting fashion inherited from earlier decades, it thus opened the road to experimental and untried strategies of display, inspired by the work of those artists that they had been working with.

The relation between the absence of a museological tradition and innovative display modalities was also observed by Olivier Saillard on occasion of his recent exhibition *The Ephemeral Museum of Fashion: Notes For An Ideal Museum* (2017) at the Palazzina della Meridiana of Palazzo Pitti, curated for Pitti Immagine Discovery in collaboration with Palais Galliera and Gallerie degli Uffizi. The exhibition displayed dresses from collections spanning the twentieth and twenty-first, on traditional displays and mannequins, as well as in presentations with more private, evocative, and indeed, haptic connotations: folded and ready for storage, 'abandoned' on a chair as they would appear after being worn, or surrounded by unused props from the museum's storage rooms (Fig. 5.11 & 5.12). In a conversation with Andrea Cavicchi, current director of the CFMI, Saillard explained that the the lack of a museological institution or of previous models to refer to inspired the experimental character of the displays: 'In Italy you don't have any fashion museums so maybe there is room to do things differently. You have to think with more poetry, with more romanticism'.[79] In retrospective, this observation can be used to explain why the body of fashion exhibitions and events by Pitti Immagine Discovery aligned themselves not with fashion curating as this was understood in the UK, France, and in the US, but rather with the debates and the praxis of displaying contemporary art. Fashion exhibitions in this phase thus where the product of a culture of curating that was developed and negotiated outside the museum that was so badly longed for.

The first large scale fashion exhibition at the Leopolda station, *Uniform* (2001) embodies these avant-garde ideals in an exemplary way. The exhibition was curated by Maria Luisa Frisa, Francesco Tonchi and Francesco Bonami. Frisa explains that in *Uniform*, rather than being the protagonist of the exhibition, dress was instrumentalised to discuss 'the theme of uniform, and the meaning of standardisation, and at a certain culture that dwells at the border between professionality and sexuality'.[80] To do so, clothing was displayed as it

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[79] Katia Foreman, 'Olivier Saillard on Reinventing the Fashion Museum,' *WWD*, accessed July 5 2017, https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/olivier-saillard-on-reinventing-the-fashion-museum-10913770/

[80] Frisa, *Appendix,* 358.

would appear through various forms of representation: hanging together as it would be in a shop (Fig. 5.13), through its presentation in magazines, and its artistic elaboration through art and film, or even through its appearances in reportage photography. The result was an exhibition about how each mode of representation feeds another, ultimately informing our understanding of and relation with the uniform, as concept, garment, and symbol of power relations. These media format were not to be understood as being utilised in support of the exhibition, as it often happens in exhibitions of fashion and as was advocated by Lou Taylor in reference to how dress and fashion should be exhibited in the context of the museum, and no specific medium prevailed among others.[81]

This approach is reflected in the catalogue as well. Bruce Ferguson observes that catalogues have become the most 'privileged fetish of curators'.[82] This statement becomes a truism in the case of exhibitions by Pitti Immagine Discovery, as the lack of a permanent space where collections can be preserved and presented in exhibitions makes exhibition catalogues especially important for the survival of the curatorial project – and its contribution to research – after the exhibition itself has finished. These catalogues were never thought as a re-mediation of the exhibition, but rather as autonomous editorial projects, able to maintain their independence from the exhibitions and their displays. Frisa explains that catalogues produced in this phase of exhibitions in Florence were the first not to include images of the artefacts in their displays, but rather images of how these appeared in representation (5.14 & 5.15). As in the pages of *Westuff* and *Flash Art* these books would present fashion among considerations of art, architecture, film, and non-fictional footage, challenging institutional chronologies and temporalities. Besides including texts on the main topic of the exhibition, the catalogue/book would also incorporate side comments: quotes, descriptions, historical information on the periods and genres of art and fashion history. Frisa explains: 'it was an hypertextual kind of writing. We aimed to imitate the process that takes place when you see an exhibition and your mind wanders from one thought to another'.[83]

Il quarto sesso [The Fourth Sex], curated by Francesco Bonami (who that year was also the curator of the 50th Venice Biennale of Art 'The Dictatorship of the Viewer') and Raf Simons in 2003, was presented at the Stazione Leopolda. Bonami explains that the exhibition

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[81] Taylor, *Study of Dress History*, 29-47.
[82] Ferguson, in O'Neill, *Culture of Curating,* 44.
[83] Frisa, *Appendix,* 359.

aimed to explore the 'sexually indefinite moment' of adolescence, and to portray the mental and psychological space of teenagers (Fig. 5.16). [84] Suzy Menkes writes about the exhibition: 'this thought-provoking show underscores the imaginative approach of Florence fashion, where art and commerce still merge fluidly, as in the days of the Medicis'.[85] *Il quarto sesso* continued the tradition, set by Frisa in the earlier exhibition, of producing a catalogue that would be able to survive independently from the exhibition, as a book on the topic of the restlessness of teenage tribes, offering a variety of supplementary materials. This level of fluidity and intermediality reached new heights with *Excess,* curated by Maria Luisa Frisa, Stefano Tonchi and Mario Lupano, with the catalogue/book including colour photocopies of the magazines themselves, with only minimal editing. This was certainty a creative editorial strategy, but it contributed to delivering that sense of continuity between the present time when the pages of the catalogued are leafed through and the historically situated fragments that are magazine pages, as well as amongst media formats within and outside the exhibition.

Beyond the myriad of performances, installations, and exhibitions and related 'catalogues', Pitti Immagine Discovery has also strengthened historical research through the publication of monographs by Italian fashion researchers. This pursuit has taken the form of a series of books that represent a stark contrast with the limited number of academic publications in the field of fashion history. However, most importantly, they constitute another act in the creation of a platform of intellectual investigation, adding to an already heteronomous set of apparatuses. In this sense, the vastness of Pitti Discovery's range of programmes mirrors Maria Lind's elaboration of the curatorial as a set of institutional initiatives that goes beyond presenting through exhibitions and installations and that characterises itself as 'a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, and fund raising'.[86] Fluidity as a mode of research, the lack of a tendency to be unified by a limited number of presentation modalities, the secondary nature of the specificities of display practices and formats, and 'hybridity' as an institutional identitarian construct thus define the image of an organisation operating in a post-modern expanded field of cultural production, whereby adjacent fields and competencies become tangled in a relationship of mimetic correspondence.

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[84] Fondazione Pitti Discovery. *The Fourth Sex. Adolescent Extremes*, accessed November 5 2017, http://www.pittidiscovery.com/en/discovery/events/list-event/2003ilquartosesso.html.

[85] Suzy Menkes, 'The Florence season / Art, Commerce and Clothes: The Fourth Sex: Probing the Spirit of Adolescence.' *The New York Times* (2003).

[86] Maria Lind, *Performing the Curatorial: With and Beyond Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 3.

The notion of the expanded field can be used to outline the variety of tensions that exist within the experimental presentations by Pitti Immagine Discovery. First conceptualised in the late 1970s by art historian Rosalind Krauss to discuss practices that are best described through an expansion of the grids of definition of modernist forms, materials and aesthetic categories, the model of the expanded field results from a negative dialectic that meshes the taxonomies of 'what-is' with those of 'what-not'. In this case, however, the expanded field does not merely refer to the complex siting of the referents of fashion, art, and architecture in the context of interplay, difference, and correspondence. Perhaps more relevantly to this context, this notion can show how contemporary curating too operates along similarly non-exclusionary interactions, becoming a practice and a mode of investigation based 'on an organisation of work that is not dictated by the conditions of a particular medium'.[87] The result is the initiation of a tension between non-representation (because it does not limit itself to addressing one discipline within its traditional remits) and transmediality (because traditional curatorial work is applied to a large variety of presentation modalities and translates itself into a far-reaching set of activities, ranging from exhibition making, to book editing, from research and critique to communicating for promotional purposes.

However, it must be taken into account that in formulating the conceptualisation of the expanded field to define the 'purpose' and 'pleasure' of new forms of expression that combined previously 'opposite' and 'different' categories, Krauss also recognised that the blurring of those categories was historically and culturally determined within the context of a reactionary post-modernism.[88] Similarly, the view of curating as an expanded field of tasks, actions, and responsibilities that range across the roles of a variety of professional figures, and that is interested in mediation in a broadest sense, can be detached neither from post-modernism, nor from considerations on a context in which a traditional division of labour could not be replicated. In this sense, the expansion of curatorial work and its mimetic correspondence with other professionalisms involved in exhibition making, is also a reaction and a way to adapt to the profound deficiencies of a powerful public institutional culture that has pushed fashion – but also contemporary art – to its margins, as was already observed by Settembrini in occasion of the 1996 Fashion Biennale. As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, another direct implication of fashion's peripheral existence within public

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[87] Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' 43.
[88] Krauss, 38.

cultural discourse is that curators within this field were left to look for the support of privates and, occasionally, of the local administration, working on projects whose ultimate function was to promote the sector's events or to support strategies for the development of the local economy, despite their experimental tone or their often avant-garde strategies of display.

The next section takes these issues into account, looking at the wider institutional context and seeking to define the implications of its features on how the history of Italian fashion have been constructed. These observations will be utilised to develop the claim that like Giorgini had autonomously questioned the consensus that Italy was not a fashion country, within today's heritage sector a new wave of reassessing inherited models has led some dissatisfied curators and researchers to develop a new way of relating to public institutions and national museums. In comparison with the series of presentations by the Fashion Biennale and Pitti Immagine, and with early events by Pitti Immagine Discovery, where being outside large public institutions seemed the only way forward and became – in the eyes of their curators – a form of critique of their perceived inability to embrace contemporary forms of expression, this new trajectory compromises with them and pursues their possibilities. This is in keeping with international dynamics within the contemporary art scene, as these have been observed by artist Andrea Fraser.[89] The result is, yet again, self-organisation, yet with a difference. Instead of taking a distance from the institution of the museum, exhibition-making within the field of fashion in Italy is increasingly involving the research for collaborations with institutional contexts whose visibility can turn into an opportunity for fashion's value as heritage to appear significant.[90]

As the next section shows, an implication of the passage into the museum has been the adoption of a measure of criticism rooted in the reconstruction of historical narratives and a sense of continuity. Thus, fashion curators in Italy have recently attempted to provide the historical coordinates within which the myriad of fragmented narratives can gain cohesion, fall into place, and elevate their critical potential.

No space: self-organisation & fashion history

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[89] Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,' *Artforum* 44 (2005): 278-85.

[90] Examples of institutions that have hosted recent fashion exhibitions, despite not having a tradition of working with fashion, include the Uffizi in Florence, MAXXI in Rome, or Palazzo Reale in Milan.

Besides a small number of exhibitions devoted to individual Italian fashion designers and editors (the 1997 Gianni Versace exhibition at MET, followed by a 2002 exhibition at the V&A; the Anna Piaggi 2006 exhibition at the V&A; Giorgio Armani's 2000 retrospective at the Guggenheim, and the 2014 Valentino retrospective at Somerset House), the first large exhibition seeking to produce a comprehensive history of Italian fashion, *Fashion Italian Style,* was curated by Valerie Steele for the Museum at FIT in 2003. It was followed by *The Glamour of Italian Fashion,* curated by Sonnet Stanfill at the V&A in 2014.[91] Both exhibitions considered the birth of the Italian fashion system and looked at the development of the Made in Italy brand in the subsequent decades. The last two displays of the V&A exhibition also presented the work of emerging Italian fashion designers, seeking to highlight the challenges posed to the industry by the fast-changing fashion system, and in doing so it also presented an open-ended question about its ability to adapt for the future. In a series of interviews in a final projection, some of the protagonists of contemporary Italian fashion – including designers and educators – identified bureaucratic and administrational factors as the main source of uncertainty and denounced the widespread absence of support from the national administration towards the industry as well as towards the education sector. This was also interpreted as the lack of recognition of the role that fashion has played, and continues to pay, in the economic and cultural life of the country, and was seen as generating obstacles in the formation and promotion of a future generations of Italian designers.

Despite its abstraction, the lack of public space acquires topological features and impacts the way in which fashion heritage has been preserved and studied thus far: as it is imbedded in various contexts – industry, university and cultural heritage institutions – such absence leaves designers, researchers, and curators seeking to continue their work with little choice but to look for alternative solutions. The lack of public space for fashion translates in different ways: for museum practitioners, it results in the impossibility of creating a consistent programme of exhibitions. For those operating in universities, it corresponds to

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[91] This list excludes retrospective exhibitions and permanent displays produced by brand museums and archives such as the Ferragamo Museum (Florence), the Gucci Museum (Florence) and Armani/Silos (Milan). The category of 'heritage-brand' museums with corporate fashion collections has been excluded from the analysis as their association with the companies that fund them suggests the development of promotional enterprise narratives that further complicate the relationship between fashion's cultural and commodity value, public museums, and the market. See: Lou Stoppard, 'Fashion brands build museums as archives gain value,' *Financial Times*, accessed July 22 2016 https://www.ft.com/content/7d838ca4-27ff-11e6-8ba3-cdd781d02d89?mhq5j=e2 Stoppard explains that these museums originate from brands' recent interest in 'heritage' and the potentialities of using the past to extend their brand message, with inevitable misbalances of authority.

further job uncertainty, and to the necessity to adapt research to the perspectives of other subjects. For the industry itself, the initial lack of a centralised body for the promotion and support of fashion businesses (such as the British Fashion Council or the Flanders Fashion Institute) has resulted in the existence of multiple 'capitals' of fashion, operating often in a climate of rivalry that seems to have appeased only when the National Chamber of Italian Fashion was founded.

Far from being limited to the Italian cultural landscape or specifically to the scenes of fashion and contemporary art, the lack of institutional space often results in the self-organisation of individuals, groups of individuals, and even corporations in structures where the obstacles limiting their work can be overcome, and where the existing relationship between fragments/individuals and wholes/institutions can be questioned. The movements of desire and refusal leading to self-organisation have been discussed as a reaction to the de-regulated flows of energy, ideas, and actions that animate the contemporary world, and that characterise post-modernity.[92] In the contemporary art system, this has resulted in formation of artist-run spaces, in which different interest groups – artists, curators, associations, individuals and collectives – have developed their practice of institutional critique collaboratively. More recently, self-organisation has become the focus of interest of academic investigation in dedicated conferences and publications (Hebert & Karlsen, 2013).

According to Fraser, the second half of the XX century has been characterised by two waves of self-organising movements:[93] one resulting in an escape from public institutions and the contradiction of existing heritage discourses, and a second one characterised by convergence, aiming to change institutions from within. The first is a reaction to refusal; the latter stems from the assumption that visibility within public institutions has the strength to reinforce the articulation of its expression and produce the change that is sought. What follows seeks to discuss whether these two tendencies have had an impact on the lack of space for contemporary fashion within public cultural discourse, and whether the shift that

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[92] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980) (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 75-110. To over-simplify their thought on this matter, self-organisation is seen as deriving from the breaking of pre-existing habits and the formation of new ones, in processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialization. See also: For example, see: Will Bradley et al., eds., *Self-organisation / Counter-Economic Strategies* (Helsinki: Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art & the Academy of Fine Arts, 2006).
[93] Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions,' 278-85.

is described by Fraser has had an impact on the writing of fashion history – in particular, Italian fashion history – by Italian public institutions.

At this point it seems important to reiterate that, at the time of writing, Italy lacked a permanent contemporary fashion museum funded by Italy's cultural ministries. Besides Pitti Immagine Discovery Foundation's exhibitions, performances, and installations, fashion exhibitions have occasionally been produced at Milan's Triennale and within the context of AltaRoma. However, even this context, funded through Rome's local authority, has recently found itself at the heart of a 'political drama' that threated to stop financial support for the organisation, amidst a variety of cuts that has characterised Rome's administration.[94] The only national museological institutions preserving and exhibiting dress are the Costume Gallery, hosted in the Pitti Palace, the Museo Boncompagni Ludovisi in Rome, and the Prato Textile Museum. While Eike Schmidt, the new director of Florence's Costume Gallery, has promised a broadening of museum's interests to include contemporary fashion, and to rename the organisation 'The Gallery of Costume and Fashion', the museum has so far focused on historical fashionable dress, thus bringing to the fore the existence of a hierarchy between costume and fashion that is reminiscent of the way in which the debate developed abroad before fashion started to be collected systematically and that is also emblematic of the survival of a division between high and low culture.

In *Establishing Dress History* Lou Taylor hypothesises that in the UK and in the US, fashion entered the museum only when women and gay curators started to be offered positions in national heritage institutions. As discussed in *Chapter I*, this point of view fails to account for a series of shifts within those institutions that ended up embracing fashion, particularly the cultural turn in the humanities that had taken place in the 1970s and the academic debates questioning the role of museums in society of the 1980s, which had already been anticipated by the contestation of traditional museological practice by conceptualist artists. The lack of space for fashion within Italian public heritage institutions further confirms the limits of Taylor's theory, while accentuating the belated and obstacled entry of cultural studies within Italian academia, which in turned resulted in a delay in the debate on the roles of publicly funded and publicly accessible museums today, as well as, on contemporary fashion's valence as heritage. But far from originating from individuals' lack of

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[94] Morabito, Rosario. 'AltaRoma Wasn't Built in a Day' *The Business of Fashion*, accessed July 5 2017, https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/alta-roma-wasnt-built-day

interest in these subjects, the difficulty for fashion to enter the academic and the heritage sectors, is determined by the specific structure of the institutional space making it difficult for fashion to be granted its own space. Following my observation on the limits of Taylor's theory, the task of unpacking the reasons of fashion's delayed entrance in the museum and its implications for the historiography of Italian fashion, reveals a complex network of relations with the education sector, and incites considerations on how the relationship between the academic study of fashion and its appearance in museums has played out in Anglo-American institutions. As examined in *Chapter I* there has been a relation of continuity between the two, stimulating the parallel development of a critical approach within the academia and the museum.[95] Similarly, there seems to be a relation of continuity between the difficulties faced by the study of fashion in the Italian academic environment, or limitedness thereof, and its entrance in Italian museums.

The reasons why research in fashion theory, history, and design is discouraged within the academic system are highlighted by Gabriele Monti and Mariavittoria Sargentini of IUAV Venice University, who stress the symptomatic anxiety felt by those who study fashion in Italy.[96] Monti explains that these subjects have traditionally been the remit of private universities, because only they fell outside the remit of the research and teaching quality evaluation systems in use in public education. These are defined by the existence of disciplinary areas, three-hundred and fifty subject-specific sectors within which every university course and research output needs to identify itself. Not being identified by any of them, fashion needs to adapt to the perspectives that are privileged by existing sectors. Introduced in 1990, on a group of research areas dating back to 1973, this system is certainly not unproblematic, and it actively contributes to preventing the predictable development of subjects that develop in time. Monti and Sargentini also explain that for the same reason, no doctoral degree in fashion exists, even though a PhD in a specific area represents an essential requirement to take part to open calls for applications to research and teach in Italian universities.[97]

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[95] Such dynamics are described in Anderson, ' Museums as Fashion Media,' 371-89; Peter McNeil, ''We're Not in the Fashion Business': Fashion in the Museum and the Academy,' *Fashion Theory*: *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 12.1 (2008), 65–81; and Breward, 'Between The Museum and The Academy,'83–93.
[96] Gabriele Monti and Mariavittoria Sargentini, 'Exploring the Boundaries Between Theory and Practice in Fashion Design at IUAV University of Venice,' *The International Journal of Fashion Studies* 5.1 (2018), 175-89.
[97] Monti and Sargentini, 175-89.

A system in which the division among disciplines rests in this fixed structure combines the power relations and discourse interactions that regulate the formulation and the promotion of knowledge, but it also controls the emergence of other discourses in an explicit way. This is the reification of a form of quasi-structuralism that reflects Foucault's understanding of the correspondence between the formal features of institutions and the mentalities of the communities that refer to those institutions (1980: 93-98). In this particular case, while the Italian academic system derives from the early modern concept of the division among disciplines, it also ends up defining the general perception of both what it includes and what it excludes. As a result, the study of fashion history and theory has had to find hospitability within a variety of departments and under other denominations, reiterating the idea that contextual and critical studies in fashion need to be legitimised by their proximity to other subjects. Fashion courses have thus been formed at Politecnico di Milano, where fashion studies elements are taught in practice-based courses within the industrial design sector, at the Rimini campus of the University of Bologna and at Rome's La Sapienza, where fashion theory can be studied in philosophy and multimedia production degrees, and at IUAV Venice University, where fashion design and fashion theory courses have been produced as curricula of degrees in Design and Art. The risks of the rigidity of such system is that of slowing down the processes through which institutions recreate themselves and evolve, that is to say, the state of flux in which Foucault considered institutions to be in.[98]

Besides this, when researchers succeed to gain funding for fashion related research, this is met with a baggage of stereotypes that still affects the subject: according to Monti and Sargentini the discipline of fashion studies – but also fashion design – is considered to be unsystematic and without methodological dignity, and is seen as unsupported by a consistent body of literature.[99] In Italy, fashion is still seen as the 'F' word, as Valerie Steele famously wrote,[100] a discipline that struggles to become accepted as a research area to invest on. The same stereotypes are seen by Frisa as the basis for the absence of a museum devoted to preserving, studying, and exhibiting fashion. Denouncing the situation in her book *Le Forme della Moda*, Frisa explains:

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[98] Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge*, 93-8.
[99] Monti and Sargentini, 'Exploring the Boundaries,' 175-8,
[100] Valerie Steele, 'The F-Word,' accessed December 5 2017. http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/180/steele.htm

> In Italy, fashion enters the museum word with great difficulty (there is no theoretical study on fashion curating) and sporadically. It's considered frivolous, and it must always find some kind of justification. Our culture ministers always fail to take it into account.[101]

Similar complains resonate in the debates produced within the contemporary art sector: in an enquiry on the difficulties faced by the operators of contemporary art system in Italy former *Flash Art* founder-director Giancarlo Politi re-addresses the issue for the international readership. In the survey, Fabio Cavallucci, director of the Galleria Civica d'Arte Contemporanea of Trento explains:

> only recently has Italy developed an interest in contemporary art, an interest still in its early phases. […]. In Italy, the world of culture has never completely separated itself from that of politics. For instance, how many museum directors are nominated through open contests? Almost none, because they are usually nominated according to political power dynamics. With every change in the political majority, or simply with a change of town counsellor, not only does the museum's staff change, but so does the planning for the museum's exhibitions. When matters are worse, even the institution's existence is questioned. As a result, it is […] hard to support Italian art efficiently and to represent the most advanced research in the field. While this is clearly a matter of money and infrastructure, it is also a question of mind-set.[102]

In the attempt to create the infrastructure needed to enable change, and at the same time to enact self-reinforcing dynamics, contemporary art has found a solution in bypassing the institution of the museum – seen as inefficient and neutralising – in search for an alternative space, where group and individual aspirations can be perpetuated. Support is thus found in a system characterised by self-organisation, in permanent constructive conflict with national cultural institutions, which are in turn portrayed as hollowed-out forms of the 'public'. While Settembrini used the Biennale as an opportunity to denounce the fact that both contemporary fashion and art had been pushed to the margins of institutional culture, Francesco Bonami explains that one of these alternative spaces is found in the non-for-profit foundation structure which breaks away from traditional cultural infrastructure and is driven by an ideological commitment to being outside the mainstream:

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[101] Maria Luisa Frisa, *Le Forme della Moda* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), 75.
[102] Cavallucci, quoted by Giancarlo Politi in 'Focus on Museums and Foundations,' *Flash Art International* 260 (2008), 128-9.

> In contrast with Italian public institutions and international ones, […] a private Italian Foundation is very quick in its response, and so are its managerial and programming tasks. The only downside is that a Foundation works in a territory devastated by fools' gold, where a good show by Glenn Brown is compared with an ugly exhibition of mediocre Van Gogh's in terms of audience response and the visibility provided by the national media. This only happens in Italy. Abroad, programs are evaluated according to different sectors, and cherries are not compared with socks.[103]

Organising into a foundation thus stems directly from a lack of space in the public sector, where institutional obstacles restrict the creation of a cultural offer that is able to flexibly frame projects whose cultural relevance has been established with time. This difficulty recalls Monti and Sargentini's criticism about fashion studies' fate in Italian universities, where the existence of 'scientific' disciplinary sectors impedes fashion's collocation within faculties and research departments. In Italy, in the model of the foundation system, characterised by fluidity and an international environment, the contemporary has found refuge, suppressing the preoccupation of having to find a justification and to fit in categories that have been defined decades ago. The present desire to escape fixed and fixing models of thought thus reflects in an escape from public institutional structures.

While Pitti Immagine Discovery has been the most active organisation in promoting the culture of fashion in Italy, other forms of self-organisation have also emerged in other cities with the intent of contributing to this process. An example is that of the Artisanal Intelligence (A. I.), a charity that originated to continue the work of AltaRoma when its future seemed at risk, and that is now able to exist throughout the year through donations, sponsorship, and private funding. Tying its research to the concept of couture and luxury that characterises Rome's Fashion Week, A.I.'s exhibitions and site-specific presentations have absorbed a recent trend for brand storytelling and engage with narratives of designers' techniques, choice of materials, background and training. The A.I. project presents new work, as well as artefacts from local dressmakers' archives, in various typologies of spaces, ranging from Rome's most classic venues to the ruins of modernity of abandoned train stations and custom houses.

In my view, this way of organising small non-for profit companies financed through private funding or through local administrations is not dissimilar to the self-organisation of designers into organisations and promotional platforms in the 1950s and 1960s, as a reaction

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[103] Bonami, quoted by Politi, 'Focus on Museums,' 128.

to the initial lack of a centralised body that led designers to open their ateliers and studios to the public or organise into collective shows. However, it seems important to point out that, as it was the case for the events that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, this is a form of self-organisation that stimulates alliances and partnerships, but also one within which fractions and feuds are easily articulated.

Self-organising into a typology of organisation with no permanent premises, no permanent collection, and with no necessity to build either, comes with implications on the way in which the past is preserved and its narrative is produced. Groys explains that 'breaking out of the museum' means 'becoming popular, alive, and present outside the closed circle of the established art world'.[104] At the same time, the museum theorist suggests that the escape from the museum is a kind of liberation, symbolically evoking the idea of 'becoming free from the burden of history' itself: in offering a series of quickly evolving, self-contained exhibitions and events, curatorial work emerges as 'truly alive and real – in opposition to the abstract, dead historical constructions represented by the museum system'.[105]

Due to their different aims, formats, magnitude, and the variety of critical perspectives underpinning them, it has been difficult to find a red thread among the presentations by Pitti Immagine and Pitti Immagine Discovery. However, along Groys's considerations on the correspondence between escaping the museum and the release from its historiographical functions, this difficulty suggests that if there is an underlying logic, it lies, indeed, in the individual way in which each presentation contradicts both the idea of traditional historical narrative and that of a coherent exploration of the past – remote or proximate – under a general institutional research policy. In other words, if each presentation works as a *gesamtkunstwerk*, then each *gesamtkunstwerk* comes with the idea of synchronising cultural representation with the present, and that the traces of previous *gesamtkunstwerken* must be erased in order to establish itself as the only referent in the time frame of the visit.

The lack of sense of continuity also becomes evident in the distinct lack of archived documentation about individual events. While the awareness of exhibitions as forms of representation worthy of being themselves preserved is recent, in the case of presentations by Pitti Immagine and Pitti Immagine Discovery documentation exists mostly in the private

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[104] Groys, *Art power*, 22.
[105] Groys, 23.

archives of curators and artists. This has constituted one of the main difficulties of this chapter and, indeed, of the whole thesis, reinforcing the idea that these presentations' main function was always to support the trade fairs, and that their presentism made their preservation a secondary matter, despite their often avant-guarde character. From this perspective, the vast body of presentations is like a collection in a messy cabinet of curiosities, but one containing not sensational objects, but rather unique *gesamtkunstwerken*, the aura of which reaches us only though their catalogues.

This insight reveals the unique trajectory taken by practices of curating fashion in Italy. The evolution of a cultural heritage institution into spaces of *gesamtkunstwerken* represents, for Groys, a spontaneous passage for the museum that begins to question its own role in a contemporary cultural landscape of diversified forms of expression and pluralistic audiences. In large institutions – such as the V&A (to limit the comparison to those considered in the context of this thesis) – the fluidity of working with 'artists-dictators' and 'curators-dictators', in Groys's interpretation of Wagner's concept, has been embraced alongside traditional museological practice, resulting in the juxtaposition of temporary exhibitions/events and their permanent displays, or alternatively, as in the case of MoMu, in a programme of temporary exhibitions that has been tailored to promote a collection built under a well determined acquisition policy. Through both approaches the museum develops an opportunity to participate in the dynamism of contemporary cultural output, while also carrying into the twenty-first century its traditional role of preserving, studying, and exhibiting the past, in a constant process of negotiation of the balance between education and entertainment. However, in those institutions this shift was the result of various dynamics: the juxtaposition of the museum's role as a place for contemplation with its acquired function as a place of socialisation, participation, and community-tightening; the evolution of critical historiography and cultural studies, the increasingly level of collaboration between museum practitioners and academics.

In a recent article for *La Repubblica delle Donne*, Frisa[106] discusses the need to supplement the temporary and the ephemeral, nourished within the structures of foundations and private arts organisations, with a permanent and protected space for research. Frisa explains that while Italy has produced some reference exhibitions for the

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[106] Maria Luisa Frisa, 'Per Favore, Qualcuno Mostri Quanto Siamo Bravi.' *La Repubblica delle Donne*, 27 May 2017, 82.

international field of fashion curating, nodding at this chapter's idea that the focus on fashion's relation with contemporary art practice has allowed exhibitions by Pitti Immagine Discovery to anticipate some of the trends that are currently characterising the curatorial strategies of fashion museums abroad, it has so far missed the opportunity of truly developing an understanding of fashion as cultural heritage, with the implication that Italian fashion's past is still under-studied and that no coherent historical account of Italian fashion exists. Frisa thus concludes that the lack of a permanent platform has directly limited Italy's possibilities of establishing the culture of fashion that the CFMI, Pitti Immagine, and Pitti Immagine Discovery saw as necessary for the relaunch of the industry itself. Calling for cooperation among scholars, curators and designers to raise fashion's critical potentialities within museums and universities, Frisa's perspective is that today, despite Italy's rich fashion past, a lot of work still needs to be done to re-construct a comprehensive fashion history against which the potentialities of critical analysis and re-readings can be emphasised.

In the mid-2010s, the necessity to disseminate the awareness of fashion as heritage has led some fashion curators operating in Italy to work independently, aiming to create a coherent program of exhibitions about the recent past of Italian fashion. Self-organisation has made a comeback, this time involving relationships – between researchers, archives, and exhibiting venues – which are more complex than those characterising the earlier separatist approach to existing heritage platforms, showing that autonomous positions are no longer necessarily a given. On the contrary, this new stance towards the creation of a space of investigation has involved reaching out to publicly funded institutions, foundations and cultural associations; in doing so, curators have shown a tendency towards stepping out from the platforms associated with alternative praxis and the anti-institutional positions that characterised the early phase of their careers as critics and curators of contemporary art. Besides emphasising the difficulty of gaining recognition and emancipation without institutional support – a claim which has been at the heart of the international critique of public institutions by curators, researchers, artists, and designers – this renewed understanding of self-organisation also shows that the desired change of mind-set can be produced more effectively from within those institutions.[107]

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[107] Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions,' 278; and Maibrit Borgen, 'The Inner and Outer Form of Self-Organisatio,' *Self-Organised*, ed. Anne S. Karlsen and Stine Hebert (Bergen, Norway: Open Editions, 2013), 43.

An exhibition that can be regarded as the product of this mentality is *Bellissima: Italy and High Fashion* at Rome's MAXXI (2 December 2014 – 03 May 2015), which in turn originated from the proposal of a smaller exhibition, tentatively titled *Roma Amor*, that had to represent a response to the cut of funds to AltaRoma. *Roma Amor* sought to reconstruct the history of Rome's couturiers in order to remind audiences and the authorities of the role they had played in the economy, as well as in the definition of Italian identity. The project acquired larger scope as a result of the virtuous collaboration between Frisa, creative director Silvia Fendi and Giovanna Melandri (MAXXI's new director, appointed two years earlier directly by the new secretary for Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism), AltaRoma and IUAV University, implying the fruitful collaboration between independent curators, the governmental, the industry, and the academic. Frisa explains the agenda included in this exhibition:

> We began discussing an exhibition about the new Made in Italy, but we realised that this operation would have been meaningful only if we had first shown and discussed properly the role that early Italian couturiers had played in defining Italian culture as well as in inspiring a whole economic and creative sector. The idea was to do an exhibition about them, all together, which had never been done before in Italy, that would open the road to an exhibition on the role and importance of emerging designers.[108]

Bellissima (fig. 17 & 18) explored the history of Italian fashion between 1945 and 1968, a seminal period for the reconstruction of the country, as well as for the construction of the shared features and individual characteristics of the fashion identified under the Made in Italy brand. While seeking to be an operation of historical reconstruction, it also critically interpreted the issue of the division of the Italian fashion system, intersecting its history with its geography, and highlighting the contributions of different cities, including southern ones, in creating the Italian Fashion System. The attempt to construct the situated narrative of Italian fashion, made of events, places, and subject-specific vocabulary, became evident in the idea that the catalogue would be able to exist as completely independent from the exhibition and from the institutions that hosted it, following the example set in 2001 and 2003 by the catalogue for *Uniforme* and *Excess*.

Like the books produced in occasion of *Uniforme* and *Excess, Bellissima,* also took a hybrid form: the bright pink volume contains articles and essays, but also short biographies

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[108] Frisa, *Appendix,* 361.

of Italy's tailors and 'elegant women', a vocabulary of the jargon used to debate and talk about fashion, newspaper and magazine cuttings, and sections dedicated to each 'capital' of Italian fashion: Turin, Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples. Mirroring the idea of curating as expanded-field, Frisa, Tonchi, and Mattiolo's work has extended to taking editorial and graphic design choices in collaboration with graphic artist Alessandro Gori, who also worked on other events for Pitti Immagine and Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery. Standing out among MAXXI's publications for its finish and detail, a summa of which is represented by the font that was specifically designed for this publication, *Bellissima* also shows a responsibility and an ambition that Frisa's earlier exhibitions/catalogues had not had, that is to say, to be an account of the past, a history of Italian fashion. Frisa describes the result: 'it [*Bellissima*] is the catalogue of an exhibition. It is a history book. It is a dictionary. It is an atlas'.[109]

Another recent fashion exhibition was *Il Nuovo Vocabolario della Moda Italiana* curated by Paola Bertola and Vittorio Linfante *at* Milan's Triennale in 2015, a vast project which aimed to be a snapshot of the current Italian fashion scene, made of designers, but also independent fashion magazines and blogs, photography, illustrations and fashion film. Most interestingly, the idea of the 'vocabulary' which is included in the title, and that inspired the exhibition's disposition of displays, implies the necessity of creating a shared, common ground from which discourse can emerge and in relation to which different positions can be taken subsequently.

These exhibitions thus differ from those presented by Pitti Immagine, the Pitti Immagine Discovery Foundation or the Fashion Biennale altogether: not only they look closely at the phenomenon of Italian fashion, but the relationship between fashion and art – which still surfaces as a defining feature of Italian fashion – is no longer central, both in terms of the influences that these discourses play on one another, and in terms of strategies of display, with dress becoming more prominent than its representations. From this perspective, these exhibitions have aligned themselves with the research undertaken by other European fashion museums, including those taken as case studies in other chapters of this study.

By claiming space in large national institutions, these experiences have thus claimed recognition of the value of fashion as heritage, in a process that has involved everyone:

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[109] Frisa, Appendix, 361.

designers, curators, but also academics and researchers working in Italy, as well as those who have found opportunities abroad. Frisa explains that this was precisely the aim: 'exhibition[s] allowed me to fulfil my ambition to involve a lot of people in a project. I think it is important, especially in Italy and that it is what you must do when you want to create a system'.[110] This mechanism resonates with O'Neill's definition of the role of curatorial work today:

> …the curatorial at its most productive priotizes a kind of working with others that allows for a temporary space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity to emerge in the process of doing and speaking together.[111]

This is a working method that, rather than being itself an organisational form, has the potential to allow researchers, curators, and designers to organise further, and to establish working networks of transmittable knowledge. In this sense, the collaborative process of investigating and reconstructing the past of Italian fashion has the potential to engage and enable, and to resist the 'magic' of how things work. Therefore, the success of such operations has to be determined by the mode of interaction that is produced therein, and by their level of self-critique and consciousness. Through the cooperation between institutions and people that have traditionally operated outside publicly funded institutions, fashion can thus re-acquire exhibition-value, in Benjamin's sense, based on the practice of politics. Politics here has nothing to do with party dynamics, but rather with something more primordial and that fashion outside the museum always had: that is to say, its presence and discursive potential in the public domain, its ability to be a tool to produce ruptures and rearrangements of those everyday perspectives through which things have been put in order.

Summary & Conclusion

This final chapter has considered the implications of the absence of a permanent museological space on the study of fashion's past. It claimed that the lack of a pre-existing narrative of Italian fashion based on the foundational models of modern historiography and associated with the institution of the modern museum limits the critical potential of existing initiatives to study the past of fashion. This view is motivated by Foucault's (and Benjamin's)

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[110] Frisa, *Appendix,* 361.
[111] O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, 57.

belief that exposing the modern construct of linear history has the potential to uncover the artificiality of received models, thus stimulating re-readings and re-interpretations.

Under these premises, the objectives of this chapter differed from those that preceded it: if chapter II, III, and IV have considered 'the structure' of modes of interaction with the past that challenge linear historiography, their reification into museum presentations, and the different ways in which they encourage the public to produce their own considerations, in chapter V the missing museum – which is in turn symbolic of a lack of space for fashion within the public sector – has been seen as having an impact on historical and critical research in fashion. The lack of institutional space for fashion within the Italian heritage system has been characterised as the lack of a museological institution where contemporary fashion can be systematically collected, archived, preserved, studied and exhibited, and where collections can grow under the consistency of acquisition policies. In this sense, the chapter has developed the claim – supported by curator Maria Luisa Frisa – that despite Italy's rich fashion past, existing research in its history is still limited, and consists mostly of a series of micro-narratives that can not be easily contextualised within a wider narrative of the history of Italian fashion.[112]

This claim was developed by looking specifically at the case of Pitti Immagine, a holding company that has been active in stimulating 'the promotion of the culture of fashion' in Italy.[113] From this perspective, the lack of institutional space in the public sector – in the form of a museum, but also within the academic system – has been seen as determining the existence of a 'gap' that could be filled by the private sector and its interests. Within the Italian context, organising exhibitions, events, and performances – especially until the mid-2010s – was aimed at raising the profile of the industry, at promoting Pitti Immagine's prestigious trade fairs, and at developing the image of Florence as a 'destination' with a distinct lifestyle in comparison to other Italian cities.[114] In order to contextualise and historicise these dynamics, the chapter has claimed that at times when the 'Italian fashion system' was in its infancy, a similar situation affected the industry as well. The initial lack of a centralised body for the development and promotion of the national fashion industry (for example, on the model of the British Fashion Council) has been seen as determining its current fragmentation and the co-existence of multiple 'capitals': while Rome, Turin, Milan,

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[112] Frisa, Appendix, 355-62.
[113] Pitti Immagine, accessed October 10 2017, http://www.pittimmagine.com/en/corporate/about.html
[114] Pitti Immagine.

Naples, Florence, and Venice are currently associated with different specialisms, the initial lack of coordination became an obstacle to the consolidation of Florence as a Italy's 'fashion capital', and determined a context characterised by dispersion, antagonism, and competition.

In evaluating the implications of this context on exhibition practice, the chapter has then considered how the lack of a permanent museological institution, implying the impossibility of perpetuating stable exhibitions formats, contributed to the emergence of often avant-garde presentation modalities. Besides having been interpreted in relation to the necessity of relying on the hospitability of various spaces and to tailor individual events to their specific features, the experimental character of Pitti Immagine's presentations has also been seen as originating from the absence of a tradition of curating dress and fashion collections within museums, as well as from the limited academic debate on this matter: operating instead in the scene of artist-run organisations, foundations, contemporary art biennials throughout the 1980s and 1990s, curators working with fashion in Italy have developed critical lenses that reflect the evolution of debates on displaying art, the relationship between curator and artists, and ultimately the critique of the museum, its aims and methodologies, that had been at the heart of Futurism, Arte Povera, and the Transavantgarde. In other words, exhibitions of fashion in Italy were the product of a culture of curating which originated outside that museum whose absence would later be condemned by their curators.

The outcome was a series of unrelated presentations produced mostly on occasion of Pitti Uomo (but occasionally also of other fairs by Pitti Immagine). The myriad of narratives that they put forward occasionally looked at individual designers or at key events in the history of Italian fashion (for example, the 1992 *La Sala Bianca: Nascita della Moda Italiana* exhibition or the 2008 *Simonetta: La Prima Donna della Moda Italiana* exhibition) or at other countries' contributions to the history of fashion (e.g. the 2007 exhibition *The London Cut*). However, on most occasions fashion was instrumental in exploring wider societal themes, whose manifestations appear through fashion and its representations as well as through contemporary art, advertisement, and film. A result of this understanding of the fluidity between different media was that exhibitions, performances, and events took a strong multi-media character, where no form of expression prevailed over others. Thus, key exhibitions looked at the theme of uniformity (*Uniform: Order and Disorder*, 2001), the complex political,

social and cultural transformations that took place in the 1980s (*Excess,* 2004), the role of sport in contemporary society (*Human Game*, 2006), the impact of adolescence on lifestyles and trends (*The Fourth Sex*, 2003), to give some examples. In other presentations, dress was absent altogether, and contemporary art became instead central to raise awareness of issues that are central to the fashion system. Examples include the presentation of Juergen Teller's reportage on aspiring fashion models' vulnerability and ambition; Vanessa Beecroft's critique of the lack of diversity of the fashion system; or Matthew Barney's exploration of the fluidity of gender identities and the processes of their formation through his Cremaster cycle of films.

The sense of fluidity between themes, research areas, and media formats, as well as between the contemporary and the past, has found fertile ground in the system of foundations and private art organisations, which has proved to be quicker and more reactive than national museums in its response to contemporary forms of expression. Francesco Bonami attributes the responsiveness of foundations to their disconnection from the mechanisms of national funding and from political dynamics.[115] The final section of this chapter has built up on Bonami's perspective, while also claiming that temporary exhibitions, performances, and events can help heritage institutions engage with a fast changing contemporary culture, while also offering opportunities for historical reflexivity and critical re-evaluation. While large fashion heritage institutions outside of Italy have often juxtaposed temporary projects with permanent displays of their collections, or used their collections for a programme of temporary exhibitions that are coherent with a precise mission, in Italy the lack of heritage institutions devoted to collecting, preserving and studying fashion has contributed to a context in which all that exists is a multitude of episodic narratives.

In the last few years, this situation has been decried by Italian curators of fashion, who have expressed the need for foundational work in the field of the museology of fashion and for a comprehensive history of fashion to be written. The necessity for this kind of work also stems from the fact that not only curators, but also researchers in fashion theory and history, feel that the marginality of fashion within public institutions is also dependant on those same stereotypes that delayed its entrance in museums and universities within the Anglo-American context with comparison to other forms of popular expression (Steele, 1998). In Italy, the possibility of combatting the stereotypes of frivolity are limited by the existence of an organisational framework dating back to 1973 that make it difficult for

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[115] Bonami, quoted by Politi, 'Focus on Museums,' 128.

courses in newer disciplines to be established, apply for funding, and contribute to the academic curricula.

While signs that change might be around the corner could be found, at the time of writing, in the 2017 announcement that Florence's Galleria del Costume (Costume Gallery) would be renamed Galleria Della Moda e Del Costume [Fashion and Costume Gallery] under the leadership of its new director Eike Schmidt, the perceived need to create a new platform for fashion history and heritage has led curators to re-think their relationship with public institutions. This new stance presupposes a model of self-organisation that is no longer based on the previous separatist approach to existing heritage institutions. On the contrary, the new approach has involved the idea that the desired change of mind-set can be produced more effectively from within those institutions. Resulting exhibitions have thus developed from collaborations with key heritage institutions in Italy: MAXXI (Rome), Palazzo Reale (Milan) and Uffizi (Florence) and have thus declaredly taken the function to establish a common ground, a narrative of the history of Italian fashion from which further research, re-readings, and re-interpretation can subsequently emerge.

Fig. 5.1 *Westuff*, April 1985, issue 1, pp. 52 53 – an example of Westuff's focus on the city of Florence, which it portrayed as the image of the West itself.
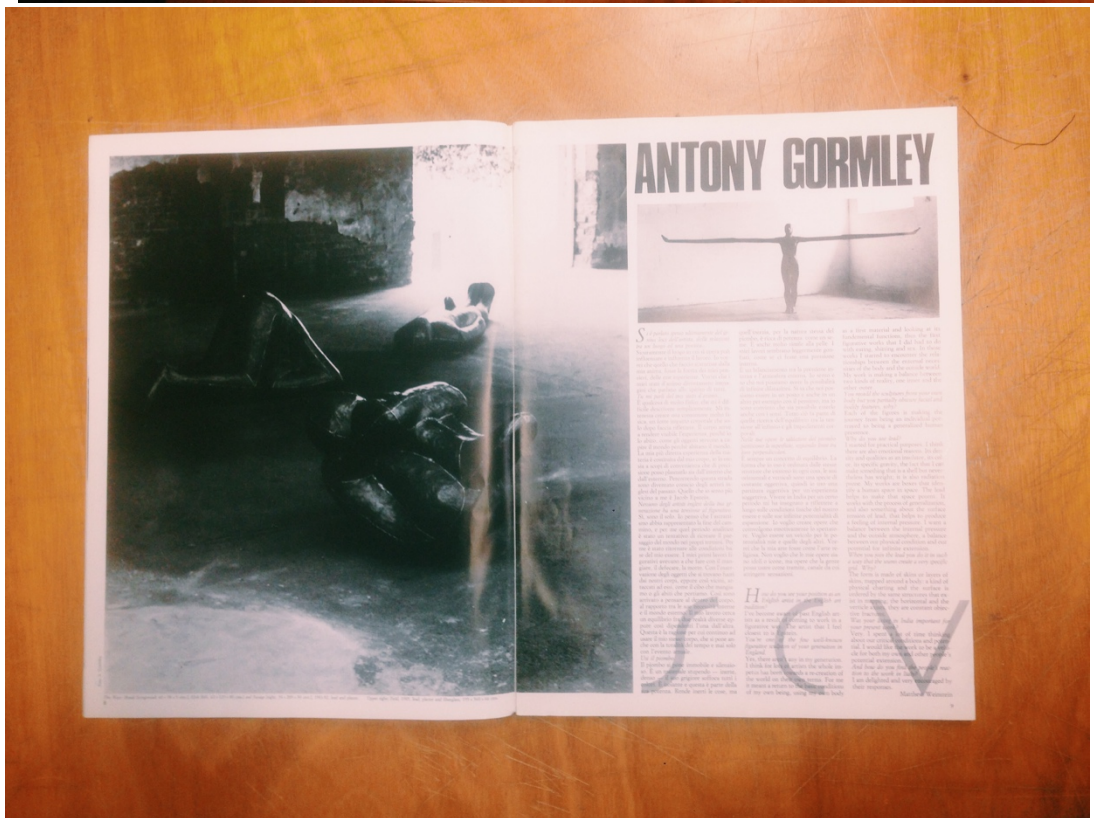
Fig. 5.2 & 5.3 *Westuff*, February 1987, issue 6, pp. 36-37 & Westuff, September 1985, issue 2, pp. 8-9

Fig. 5.4 1996 Fashion Biennale, Valentino/Visitors. Curated by L. Settembrini and F. Sozzani. Galleria dell'Accademia.
Fig. 5.5 1996 Fashion Biennale, Jean Paul Gaultier/Visitors. Curated by L. Settembrini and F. Sozzani. Museo La Specola.
These images are examples of the way in which the Fashion Biennale used the city of Florence and its museums.

Fig. 5.6. 1996 Fashion Biennale, Il tempo e la moda: Arte/Moda. Curated by Germano Celant. View of the seven pavilions containing installations by fashion designers and contemporary artists.

Fig. 57. 1996 Fashion Biennale, Il tempo e la moda: Arte/Moda. Curated by Germano Celant. Oliver Herring & Rei Kawakubo, Installation View.

Fig. 5.8. Venessa Beecroft's 'VB53' performance/installation at Tepidarium in Giardino dell' Orticultura, Florence, 2004. The performance aimed to be a critique of the lack of diversity in the fashion industry.

Fig. 5.9 Gareth Pugh at Museo Orsanmichele. Projection of his first film on the museum's ceiling. January 2011.
Fig. 5.10 Tilda Swindon performing in Olivier Saillard's *Cloakroom.* January 2015.

Fig. 5.11 & 5.12 *The Ephemeral Museum of Fashion*, 2017. Curated by Olivier Saillard.

Fig. 5.13 View of *Uniforme: Ordine e Disordine.* 2001. Curated by Maria Luisa Frisa, Stefano Tonchi, Francesco Bonami.

Fig. 5. 14 View of *Uniforme: Ordine e Disordine.* 2001. Edited by Maria Luisa Frisa, Stefano Tonchi, Francesco Bonami. This double page shows representations of the uniform through reportage photography of military schools and academies.

Fig. 5.15 View of *Uniforme: Ordine e Disordine.* 2001. Edited by Maria Luisa Frisa, Stefano Tonchi, Francesco Bonami. This page shows representations of the uniform through reportage photography of the household cavalry annual meeting, manifestations against Thatcher's government, and through film, in Andrew Niccol 'Gattaca'.

Fig. 5.16 Sculpture by Charles Ray in a display form *The Fourth Sex.* 2003. Curated by Francesco Bonami and Raf Simons.

Fig. 5.17 & 5.18. View of Bellissima at MAXXI, Rome, 2014. Curated by Maria Luisa Frisa, Anna Mattirolo, Stefano Tonchi.

Conclusions

The Delirious Museum is not an alternative to existing museums; it is the existing museum re-interpreted, '*détourned*' and intensified through its interaction with the city. If the Situationist city was a labyrinth in which to get lost and a site for play, if it was a place where misreadings and subversions of the predictable were there to be discovered, so too is the Delirious Museum

(Calum Storrie, exhibition designer)[1]

The genealogy of a research project

This brief closing chapter aims to summarise the core ideas of this thesis and to identify potential trajectories of future development. However, in order to locate its points of reference, a short genealogy of the research project itself seems necessary.

My entry into the fields of fashion studies and museum studies was driven by perspectives developed through a background in languages. I studied English and Russian at the University of Bari, Italy, in undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes dense with semiotics and general linguistics. These courses had a transformative effect on my own thinking: I started my studies with an insatiable curiosity for life abroad, and I concluded them with a fascination for language as a tool of representation, and for communication as

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[1] Storrie, *Delirious Museum*, 43.

a process that takes place within a system that precedes individual expression, making it possible. Here I became interested in the perspective that besides transferring meaning between languages, translation also takes place across disparate systems of representation. Through courses in sociolinguistics taught by Professor Patrizia Calefato, and my first encounter with Roland Barthes's *Fashion System* – a text whose complexity fascinated me then no less than it does today – fashion affirmed itself in my mind as the intersection across various languages, and as itself a language to 'speak' the emergence of different cultural and social identities.

The idea of fashion as a xenological set of practices, as infinitely geared towards the production of difference and otherness, while also being invested in making the body identifiable by a collective, consolidated during the two-year MA programme in Fashion Studies at Stockholm University. Here my view of fashion as a value system was reinforced, although through 'Meanings of Fashion', a course by Annamari Vänskä, this system began to appear less rigid than I had previously understood it to be, and more non-replicant, sentient and unexpected. Here, I was also encouraged to experiment with writing about fashion as discourse and practice, and to look at the relationship between fashion and art. In doing so, I soon distanced myself from the view of fashion as art; but at the same time, I found that art theory could stimulate interesting perspectives to think about fashion.

The interest in exhibition practice came as a result of working experience in an artist-led organisation in Italy first, and in a large institution in the UK then. In both, I had the opportunity to test out ideas and to develop my own curatorial projects. These had very little to do with fashion, but through them, I began thinking about the relationship between objects, exhibitions and narrative more widely. I now admit that the assumption that a curatorial project necessarily involves narrative was, of course, naive – as the case of *Fashion in Motion* has demonstrated – as was the idea of narrative solely as something to be produced by curators and consumed by beholders. The proximity with artists, curators, and their practice also demonstrated in a very tangible way that exhibitions mobilise new senses of temporality by combining unexpected elements that map the recurrence of ideas.

In Manchester, I also found more stable and sustainable employment working as a secondary school teacher in one of the city's southern suburbs. While apparently incongruous with what I had been doing before, and with what I hoped I would do afterwards, the diverse context of a comprehensive school soon highlighted what the missing

link between all my disparate interests was: the role and responsibility of publicly funded institutions in creating contexts that are accessible for all. Thus, while far from linear, the process that I have recollected in this section determined the emergence of the museum in my mind as the resilient point of intersection between cultural translation, exhibition practice, and the public sphere. In particular, fashion exhibitions surfaced as the ideal siting where individual voices and imaginings can be framed, and where audiences can be enabled to disturb the boundaries between the self and the other, past and present, the material and the immaterial, 'the beautiful other' and the 'ugly other'.[2]

Looking back at the museum, topos theory, and xenology

This doctoral project had multiple objectives. From the point of view of its research question, I looked at the functioning of the museum as a site of historical representation for fashion. In particular, it focussed on the relationship between practices of display and the experiences of the past that emerge from them. In doing so, it showed that different configurations of museological space arise from different ways of interrogating the past. This theme has been explored by looking at unique exhibition formats developed by four different cultural heritage institutions – the V&A, MUDE, MoMu, and Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery – focusing on one format per institution. These case studies have been selected for the unique kinds of interactions that they foster between audiences and artefacts. In examining them, I have focussed on their ability to stimulate visitors to discover networks of correspondences beyond the limits of traditional chronologies.

In terms of methodology, I approach the experience of engaging with museum displays as relying on a gaze trained outside the museum's premises through encounters with other forms of display, and with the wider visual and material culture. In particular, in looking at various strategies of display, I have first sought to isolate in them the occurrence of 'topoi'—discursive formations within which are sedimented 'modes of sensation' that influence our interpretation of content.

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[2] Sloterdijk, 'Museum—School of Alienation,' 440. See Chapter I p. 37.

Secondly, these topoi are seen as deeply historical. As such, the study explored how these topoi made their way into the museum from other cultural discourses and traditions of displaying artefacts. This is in keeping with Huhtamo's idea that the challenge of topos study is connecting these different traditions and highlighting the continuity between them.[3] Thirdly, I was interested in the impact of these topoi on museum presentations, particularly in how the past is represented using them. Thus, these topoi act as embedded cognitive structures that inform historically situated visions of the relationship between events and their telling, that is to say, 'particular conceptions of historical reality' itself.[4]

The added value of using topos theory is that it offers a new set of concepts to understand exhibitions, based on the kinds of interactions that they demand of visitors, and the kinds of historicity that emerge from them. Thus, through topos theory this study has identified different 'types' of fashion exhibitions, expanding Fiona Anderson's conception of museums as fashion media,[5] by describing the different forms that this medium can take. However, it is important to emphasise that the categories that I have identified are not exhaustive. Instead, this study demonstrates the possibility and the benefits of distinguishing exhibitions on these grounds, and what can be gained (or lost) through different ways of looking at the past.

This is a structural and materialist perspective that sees museums as deeply bound to a wider culture of presentation and display. It was inspired by readings within the field of media archaeology, and in particular, by how this field has been understood by Erkki Huhtamo. It is important to underline that this study does not apply media archaeology to the study of fashion history. Instead, it applies it to the study of museum displays and the representations of the past that emerge therein, specifically the museology of fashion. In particular, topos theory has been utilised to isolate different ways of presenting the past, which can be used in lieu of a chronological narrative, typical of modern epistemology. While this methodology can be applied to other forms of museology, it was fundamental to limit the discussion to a specific field, because of the inevitable considerations, specific to that field, that merge into display. In this case, it was important to consider the presence of such topoi in other fashion media, the existence (or the lack thereof) of ways of presenting fashion

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[3] Huhtamo, 'Dismantling the Fairy Engine.'
[4] White, 'The Value of Narrativity,' 9.
[5] Anderson, 'Museums as Fashion Media.'

inherited from the past, and the specific challenges of displaying fashion in the context of cultural heritage institutions.

In Chapter I, I have outlined these challenges by introducing the notion of xenology and by defining fashion as a xenological practice – infinitely directed towards the production of difference. Xenology is seen as intrinsic to the fashion system and how it renovates itself, both at the level of high fashion and everyday dressing practices. My position was that this underlying sense of alterity inevitably becomes more marked when dealing with artefacts from the past – remote or proximate. The notion of xenology was then reprised in the context of Peter Sloterdijk's proposal of a contemporary museum as a 'school of alienation' – a radicalised institution which takes on the task of highlighting alterity, difference, and distance by displaying 'the progress of the world in becoming other to its inhabitants'.[6] This idea became a theoretical tool to re-define contemporary curating as the process of responding to assertions of temporal and cultural otherness by placing artefacts in contexts which stimulate historical reflexivity and individual experience in the museum.

For this reason, in identifying case studies, I have looked for formats that emphasise the cross-overs, contradictions, and detournements that characterise fashion's past – the presence of which has been highlighted through critical post-modern theory and new historical thinking – not simply in the form of narratives to be absorbed by audiences. Rather, I was interested in formats in which these cross-overs, contradictions and detournements informed principles of curatorial research, which also create room for visitors' interpretations. This approach to curating finds a home in a museum that operates as a symbolic reflection of the world outside its walls, incorporating into its practices the complex dynamics that regulate visual and material culture. Calum Storrie suggests that this intensification of experience is necessary for a contemporary, radical, and ultimately 'delirious' museum: 'though the "map is not the territory" the diagram of the labyrinth is also a labyrinth'.[7]

In other words, strategies of display should aim to synchronise with the complexity of social, aesthetic, and historical phenomena by creating conditions that stimulate visitors to locate the content of an exhibition within their own cultural imaginary. This perspective challenges the idea of the museum as a space where visitors are asked to rely solely on

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[6] Sloterdijk, 'Museum—School of Alienation,' 448.
[7] Storrie, *Delirious Museum*, 16.

curatorial interpretations of artefacts and the relations between them. In this process, the museum can show, in tangible ways, its potential to fulfil 'the modernist dream that the 314theatre itself was never able to fully realise – of a t314heatre in which there is no clear boundary between the stage and the space of the audience'.[8] The objective here was to formulate an understanding of fashion exhibitions as privileged spaces for the realisation of this kind of museology, and conversely, of the museum as a strategic site for rethinking the history of fashion and its representations.

The relevance of reflecting on topoi – specifically, how these mechanisms can foster interactions between the body, artefacts, and space – and on their effects when they occur in museum displays, can be found in the structuralist understanding that it is by relying on systems of 'conventions and limitations', and by the fact that such structures are apprehended in the social, that visitors can acquire their interpretative freedom.[9] In addition, I have also shown the potential of topos theory to account for aspects of existence that have been neglected by modern historiography, and in general by modern epistemological traditions: our bodily and spatial relationships with the world and with objects. Identifying the recurrence of cognitive models within museum presentations, is thus to discuss, in a way that is both pragmatic and philosophical, the ways in which the past communicates itself to us through pre-formed structures.

Admittedly, I doubt whether a focus on audiences was the starting point for the development of the four practices that I have studied, and each chapter has also shown that my appreciation for these institutions is not without reservations. However, despite their limitations, the variety of propositions that these institutions have put forward display a tendency towards re-thinking the didactic inclinations of the museum, reconciling it with the 'exhibitionary' spirit that animated its pre-history. However, these four formats are not meant to be understood as the latest developments in a linear history of progress from the modern museum to its contemporary counterpart. Rather, the different forms that the museum can take demonstrates that in revitalising its practices, the history of the museum intersects with the histories of other media and how they have shaped human perception.

The chapters of this thesis are self-contained but also interconnected, each turning the distinctive structural features of individual formats into a conceptualisation of very

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[8] Groys, *In the Flow*, 20.
[9] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 6.

diverse ways of stimulating considerations on the history of fashion. A secondary, but important, aspect is that the selection of case studies included some institutions (e.g., MUDE and Pitti Immagine Discovery) that have been left in the periphery of critical debates on fashion curation, and whose contribution to this practice has been overlooked. The uniqueness of each case study ensured that each chapter has its own individual findings and makes specific contributions to the literature.

Chapter II looked at a spectacular format that addressed the lack of the body in fashion exhibitions. The topos of the defilé, a material asset of *Fashion in Motion* (the Victoria & Albert Museum), was identified as central to a kind of progression that privileges successions of fragmentary images over diegetic narration. On the one hand, this results in a neutralisation of visitors' awareness of the temporal distance between artefacts and themselves. On the other hand, the immediacy of the format brings to the surface an exhibitionary culture that is not concerned with narratives and the pedagogic principles of the modern museum. Thus, a key contribution of this chapter was the idea that in responding to contemporary challenges, the museum is looking back at its pre- and early modern predecessors, reclaiming territory for the evocation of sensation and wonder. However, the example of *Fashion in Motion* has also illustrated that, unlike pre-modern displays, 'aura' is no longer produced solely around artefacts. Rather, it emanates from practices, events, and performances that demand visitors' presence and that are characterised by a level of sensorial engagement that makes them irreproducible in their totality. This shift thus inevitably opens up new questions regarding the accessibility of the museum.

Chapter III considered the case of *Único e Múltiplo*, a permanent exhibition which offers a representation of linear, institutional chronology, along with an implicit suggestion to deviate from it, prompting visitors to pursue their own trajectory in the exhibition space. At Lisbon's Museu do Design e da Moda (MUDE), this was made possible by indicating a possible route within a vast, open hall. The resulting sense of dispersion and visitors' individual reconfigurations were also facilitated by the rearrangement of artefacts frequently, thus enabling visitors to explore the theme of the exhibition through displays that might vary from visit to visit. The added value of *Único e Múltiplo* – which embeds the topos of the corridor, as well as that of the open plan – is thus to show that chronological and thematical, and historical and a-historical, approaches do not need to be thought of as

irreconcilable. Rather, the possibility of switching from one to the other exposes what can be gained from each approach.

Chapter IV presented the case of a virtual presentation, based on the postmodern topos of the database, which enables visitors to browse Antwerp's Mode Museum's (MoMu) digital collection. Comprising both digitised images and born-digital objects, the database categorises artefacts/files under a multitude of classifications, thus giving them a ubiquity that they could never have had in the modern archive. Bereft of their chronological bonds, artefacts become searchable through a potentially infinite number of criteria, enabling visitors to experiment with a process based on tracing individual trajectories within and across the database. The possibility of combining these 'infinitely retrievable fragments' in personalised ways is also increased by the specificities of the algorithm, which further aims to randomise content.[10] Through this case study, the chapter sought to highlight that bringing the database into the museum, as one of the latest permutations in museological practice, is coherent with its ambition towards encouraging individual access and the contestation of fixed structures. While such technologies are often dismissed as strategies of outreach and engagement and as funding magnets, they can instead highlight the limitations of traditional archives and static display modalities. At the same time, they draw attention to how the lack of objects makes us newly interested in their materiality, in the features of artefacts that are described by metadata, and in the existence of artefacts as individual parts that can be inserted in a vast network on relations. Perhaps, most importantly, such display modalities also help establish, albeit currently only in a simplified form, that the past – remote or proximate – can be interrogated and re-interrogated through questions that seem relevant in the present and through perspectives that might not have been considered before.

Lastly, Chapter V looked at exhibitions that take place outside the context of the museum, as a reaction to the failure of public institutions to embrace contemporary fashion. In particular, the chapter looked at the Italian context, where the lack of a national institution where contemporary fashion can be collected, studied, preserved, and displayed through a programme of permanent and temporary exhibitions has resulted in the emergence of various initiatives driven by local administrations and the private sector (i.e., through Pitti Immagine). Seeking to promote the culture of fashion, these initiatives include exhibitions,

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[10] Anderson, 'Past Indiscretions. Digital Archives and Recombinant History,' 101.

performances, and editorial projects that rely on the hospitability of other organisations, and whose tone ranges from the confrontational to the merely promotional. Thus, rather than looking at a recurring topos, this chapter considered the effects of the absence of a structure on how the past is formulated into a history. In this chapter, I have argued that this absence has favoured the emergence of a myriad of micro-narratives, which exist in the place of a comprehensive and linear history of Italian fashion. In doing do, the aim was to demonstrate that the potential of temporary exhibitions for facilitating historical reflexivity is emphasised when they co-exist with traditional museology, as they exist as an intensification of the practices of the modern museum and as a critique of institutional historiography.

Final remarks and beyond

In its AW 2018 show, staged in spring 2018, Gucci's fashion show in Milan presented us with a new image to discuss fashion's mechanisms for renovation and its ability to mediate subjectivity: the operating theatre at an emergency department, a twenty-first-century topos and a forgotten heterotopia, where despite the prescriptive regulations of the world, the body can be transformed, healed, and even reinvented. Through its metaphoric tone, this image highlighted the potency of fashion to diversify discourse, to stimulate responses, and perhaps, to answer questions by generating more questions. In the specific framework of Alessandro Michele's fashion show, the image of the operating theatre became a reminder that the drive towards putting identity into watertight compartments is a fastidious problem, which fashion gives individuals the opportunity to challenge: it is fashion's task, it is its nature – if it has one – to address such fixing tendencies by taking forms that change and evolve relentlessly, across chronological time, across any structuralism and colonialism, mirroring the contradictions that are inherent in contemporary modernity.

In concluding this study, it is important to acknowledge that the complexity of these mechanisms has permeated the practices of fashion curators, who have developed logics of inclusion and exclusion of artefacts that overcome the limits of periodisation and linear chronology. This has been precisely the driving point of this doctoral project: to ask whether besides being a mode of research and a prerogative for curators, fashion's complex world-making processes and its ability to collapse linear temporality can be integrated in display through immersive strategies of display that stimulate visitors to produce new, personal, and

unexpected considerations. From this perspective, it seems possible to reprise Alessandro Michele's medical metaphor by characterising curating through its etymology, as suggested by Groys:

> [...] to curate is to cure. Curating cures the powerlessness of the image, its inability to show itself by itself. Exhibition practice is thus the cure that heals the originally ailing image, that gives it presence, visibility; it brings it to the public view and turns it into the object of judgment.[14]

This understanding underlines a view of curating as an inventive practice with the iconoclastic potential to address the complex temporalities of fashion and to interpellate museum visitors at the same time. As this thesis has implied, this icuratorial approach should extract value not only from objects, but also from the external material and immaterial practices that inform the ability of visitors to see and experience exhibitions, preceding their museum visit, and indeed, themselves. Similarly, pre-formed ways of understanding the relations between parts and the historical whole provide a frame within which their readings of the past can subsequently emerge. Thus, by virtue of its potential to activate visitors in different ways through different strategies of display, curating fashion has been portrayed as an operative practice that is always simultaneously symbolic, affective, aesthetic, historical, 'thinglike', 'subjectlike'.[15]

 While preparing to write this thesis, I have had the opportunity to spend time in the institutions that I have chosen as case studies. This position as an embedded researcher has also highlighted that there are other aspects of museum work that have an impact on exhibition-making. In particular, with regards to the relationship between fashion exhibitions and historiography, an area of further investigation is the integration of reflections on how collections are displayed, with considerations on how collections are formed through acquisitions, donations, and loans. The importance of weaving together these two aspects together surfaces in Groys's considerations on the relation between museum collections and historical reality:

> It seems to me that the numerous discourses on historical memory and its representation often overlook the complementary relationship that exists between reality and museum. The museum is not secondary to 'real'

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[14] Groys, *In the Flow*, 35.
[15] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,' 122.

history, nor is it merely a reflection and documentation of what 'really' happened outside its walls according to the autonomous laws of historical development. The contrary is true: 'reality' itself is secondary in relation to the museum — the 'real' can be defined only in comparison with the museum collection. This means that any change in the museum collection brings about a change in our perception of reality itself — after all, reality can be defined in this context as the sum of all things not yet being collected. So, history cannot be understood as a fully autonomous process which takes place outside the museum's walls. Our image of reality is dependent on our knowledge of the museum.[16]

While this thesis agrees with Groys's consideration that the museum is not outside 'reality', it has also implicitly asserted that it would be too much to invert the prejudice to say that 'reality' *tout court* becomes secondary to the museum. However, Groys's fascinating consideration suggests that the creation of strategies of display that help explore 'reality', as represented within the museum, is implicitly foregrounded by the issue of the acquisition of objects and the processes through which collections grow. Looking at the narratives of acquisition is especially relevant for large organisations, where it is an organisationally detached area of work which replicates a traditional division of labour within the art and heritage system. Considering the dynamics through which collections have come to exist and continue to evolve thus also means recognising that a further level of representation takes place in the preservation of historical reality through museum practice.

The implications of this kind of investigation are various. For older collections, this means looking at how they came to exist in the light of contemporary critical theory, and deconstructing the gaze that saw those objects as marked by aura. For newer collections, it means scrutinising how current policies are constituent of dynamics of power and cultural positioning. In both cases, this investigation presupposes the existence of an ontological difference between making, wearing, collecting, and preserving fashion, and as such it should again lean on considerations about specific institutions and their history, the shifting responsibility of museums towards both collections and audiences in the wider institutional context, and the ability of the museum to reflect through its collections the balance between individual collecting choices and impersonal mechanisms of power that are at play in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Once again, fashion can prove to be a privileged field for such observation, precisely because of its ability to foster the individual questioning of

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[16] Groys, *Art Power*, 23.

those mechanisms, to expose or hide conditions of liminality, and ultimately to articulate representations of identity in ways that are familiar to visitors. This materialist investigation of how collections come to exist does not seek to delegitimise the authority of the museum or highlight its fallacies. Instead it is grounded in the view of the museum as an essential tool of historical reflexivity, with the potential to enable us to participate in the realisation of the future outside its walls.

However, this thesis also attributes to the museum the ability to develop practices that materialise the human desire to make immortal seemingly neutral views of its contemporary world. This is why it is important to conclude by recalling Hayden White's notion that radically different ways of practicing history exist and that it if there is a pending task it is precisely to unravel their ultimate trajectories. Thus, the aim of the presence of fashion in the contemporary museum should not be to recover re-readings of the past only to communicate them as new absolute truth; but rather to disrupt the order of the present. It is to this end that the study of various strategies of display has been produced in this thesis, and it is my hope that this impulse will form the basis for a curatorial practice with visitors' experience at its heart.

Appendix

In Conversation with *Claire Wilcox*

(Chair in Fashion Curation, UAL – Senior Curator of Fashion, the V&A)

The V&A, Cromwell Road, Knightsbridge, London
10.02.2015

Alessandro Bucci (AB): Something I plan to ask every curator that I am going to meet is how everything started, how did you begin curating fashion exhibitions and what was your first one?

Claire Wilcox (CW): It is quite a long story but I had become aware of my passion for the arts while I was studying A–levels at school and as I was writing my dissertation, my History of Art teacher said that in order to research on my topic I needed to go a place called 'National Art Library'. She explained that it was in a museum in South–Kensington, the Victoria & Albert. So, I came along and I felt like I had come home; I remember walking into the library and thinking how incredible that achievement was and the fact that such a library was open to schoolgirls. So that was the beginning. I have been here since I was a child, basically. I can identify that as the beginning of my relationship with V&A. Then I went to university and I studied English Literature. I came back to London and I started trying to get some work at the V&A and I started off by volunteering. Then I got a three months' contract, and then I got a six months' contract. For the first year, I was on short term contracts and then in 1979 I got the job that today is called 'assistant curator'. I was very lucky because in was in that moment that the department of textiles and fashion was about to close for three years to work on the re–display of the fashion gallery; and I was also very lucky in that I was paired up with Valerie Mendes, who I have admired ever since. Valerie taught me the importance of display because she was extremely knowledgeable about twentieth century textiles and fashion and she also had a very good eye. So, I worked in the department doing sort of routine day–to–day jobs, and this was a different age, it was a different period; there were no computers, there was a typist and letters were all typed up and duplicated in carbon paper and all the letters we wrote had to be run past from a senior member of staff who would correct our grammar and spelling

and things like that, so it was a bit like being in school; but there was a very good grounding in the way the museum worked and what I found particularly intriguing was that every object had its own file and its own location card; so if you wanted to know where something was, you went to look at these index cards and that was how we kept track of everything. For the rest, it was the sort of way that we work now: each object has a number, each number has a location, it's as simple as that and then each file would have a lot more detail and there was this notion of a vast collection that has been managed decade upon decade since the 1850s when the museum began. I felt so much a part of a great continuum of curators and this happened particularly when Valerie told me that we were going to work on the re–display of the costume court, which was a magnificent re–display with new mannequins. That was an education. However, that came to a sort of natural end when the costume court opened and I realised that actually it would just be a question of going back to, you know, tasks of the everyday. So, I left and I went to art college for four years. But I always kept in contact with the museum. I always kept writing to them. It was very important for me to write; and then things happened, I had a family, I was practicing as an artist for a while and then my children were sort of quite young, sort of 4 and 6, or something like that. I went to the Crafts Council with a proposal to do an exhibition titled 'Satellites of Fashion' and that was in 1998, so, yes, my children would have been 5 and 7 and the reason I hadn't gone back to work earlier was that my children had some health problems so I couldn't do that. But in that time, I kept writing. I think I wrote a couple of books on bags. I wrote one for the V&A and then I wrote two for other publishers and I did some copy–editing. So, I did the Satellites of Fashion exhibition for the Crafts council and I remember that my fee was 3000 for three years' work. But it turned out to be very successful and I met a lot of people through doing that; I met people like Philip Treacy, and Chris Breward, who reviewed it. And suddenly everything seemed to happen for me. It was 1998/99. I hadn't really had an occasion to showcase my ideas, my children were better, I was relatively old, if you think about, you know, career progression. I mean, I have always done things late. Always. I think I am about 10 years behind most of my friends. I just have a delayed mechanism. I had children very late, for example. Then I got a part time job working in the learning department here at the V&A. It was two and a half days a week, but I found the work so easy; there seemed to do so little to do that I did most of it in half a day, which gave me two days to think and plot and plan. So, in that time I organised other events, such as conferences and study–weeks. I did a five–day course, which coincided with an exhibition here titled 'Cutting Edge', and I think that's when I got Alexander McQueen to speak. That might have been the first time I met him. Then I did another course called 'A man of Fashion' and then a series of very successful courses. And then the job came up in the Fashion and Textiles department as curator of Fashion; I applied for it and I got it. I can't believe it now but I actually had to think about it because I was actually very happy being free and free–lance and having this part time job in the learning department but I did take the job and I never looked back.

AB: As a former high school teacher, I am intrigued by something you said, that is that you did an A–level in History of Art. How does a little girl get interested in history of art to the point of wanting to take History of Art to A–levels?

CW: That's a good question. For me, it's because in the first years of my A–levels I was studying English, History, and Art. And the Art teacher also taught History of Art. She was called Berenice Goodwin. Miss Goodwin was a refugee from the Nazis, and she was one those magnificent women. She taught History of Art and then my school, Godolphin and Latymer had a very strong art department. She inspired generations of West London schoolgirls. She was absolutely wonderful. I remember her getting really cross with me one day because she showed a slide of a contemporary painting and all the colours were strange and different and

I was very naïve and I said, 'I don't understand it because the sky should be blue' and she shouted at me 'Claire, have you learnt nothing from me? The sky is never blue'. The interest came from her, she is the person who recommended me to go to the Nation Art Library, which started my love for the V&A. And then, my interest in the History of Art came from that sort of natural love for objects and that idea of the museum itself as an object and as a place of beauty; I sort of regard it as a cathedral and the belief in Art and artists and crafts is something that has informed my entire career. I also married an artist, so it matters hugely to me. And from the first moment I loved working at the V&A and with the objects at the V&A, which includes fashion. Objects are all treated equally here, so a curator of 18th century sculpture would be as respected as a fashion curator. Within the V&A it was the first time that I saw fashion treated seriously.

AB: Let's talk about the recent redisplay of the fashion gallery. It looks like a very challenging and daunting task that of presenting the history of fashion in such a limited space by choosing iconic pieces. Would you like to talk about that experience?

CW: Yes, before becoming involved in the 'from club to catwalk' exhibition, which wasn't an exhibition I have generated, I spent a year if not longer working on the re–display of the fashion gallery and I know it's a very quiet achievement, but if you were to ask me what was the most significant thing apart from Fashion in Motion, I would say re–displaying the fashion gallery. I got my heart and soul into it and it opened with no big mundane opening. It just opened and it was as if it had always been there and I still go down there and I still love it. I love it as much as I have always loved it and I will always love that gallery. I can't tell you what pride I took in doing that. But I also can't tell you how extraordinary was that I basically did it on my own. I had some help from a couple of colleagues but basically when you think about my previous experience with the same task, in a department which had been closed for three years to allow everybody in that department to work on it. When it came to re–displaying the fashion gallery it was just down to me, as well as doing my normal job. I didn't come up to the research department, I did it in my department. I don't know how I did it, but I do know it has been very very exhausting, especially with having to do the club to catwalk exhibition, you know, almost very soon afterwards. and even if it was only a display I think this is why I didn't do a big exhibition for such a long time. So, because I had exhausted myself I decided that it was time to have a career break for one year and my plan was to go off and write a book called 'Essays on Fashion', the simplest title.

AB: Was this when you relation with UAL started?

CW: Yes, the relation with UAL is very recent. I happened to mention 'Essays on Fashion' to Frances Corner, the Head of College of London and she said 'why don't you come to the college for a year to write your book, we'll pay you a salary, we'll give you lots of time and space to write it'. You know she is visionary in that way. So, the V&A agreed. They seemed slightly surprised about it but they did agree and I was about to start it. And then McQueen, which I had been trying to secure for the V&A for years, especially after the MET exhibition when the McQueen house weren't ready, suddenly they changed their mind and suddenly the McQueen exhibition was happening and it had to me that did it. It just had to be me. And I went back to Frances Corner and I said, I am afraid I can't do the sabbatical because the McQueen exhibition has come up and I must do it and she said 'don't worry, we'll extend your contract and you can do the McQueen exhibition and then you can do your book. In the meantime, it would be great if you could help our students, if you could come in and give lectures, do tutorials, supervise a couple of PhDs, we won't ask a lot of you but it would be great if the students could see you working on the McQueen exhibition, which of course, was

going to be big. So, that's been the arrangements and the arrangement continues but it's a three–year post now, so I have got another year to go. So, the plan is that when the Alexander McQueen exhibition comes down in August I will pack myself up and then I go and do my research and write book.

AB: Let's talk about *Fashion in Motion*. What role were you covering at V&A then *Fashion in Motion* started in 1999?

CW: I was Curator of Fashion. There are three levels. Assistant curator, which is entry level, Curator, and I can tell you it's very very difficult to make that transition and Senior Curator, and it's exceptionally difficult to make that transition and then the top post is Keeper. So, I was curator. I came in 1979 and 1983 I was assistant curator. When I came back, when I was 45 or something, I came in as curator.

AB: So, when did you start thinking about *Fashion in Motion*?

CW: I came in V&A bursting with ideas. As I said, I had been working in the education department part–time, I had done all these courses and I got a job in textiles. I had just done Satellites of Fashion and at the opening the person who was giving the opening speech said that she had some good news, which was that I had the job as curator at the V&A. Everybody clapped and that was really nice. I arrived with loads of ideas. I remember somebody saying to me 'Claire, can you stop having ideas? It's exhausting me' because of course they had a job to do and ideas mean hard work. I found it easy to have ideas but I also knew that I couldn't do everything so I had to choose the best ideas. And at the same time, Alan Borg and a curator called Sue Lambert, who was a Senior Curator in the Word and Image department, were founding the new contemporary team. She recruited Susan MacCormack, who now works at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and Sue and Susan sent a message around saying, 'has anybody got any ideas for the new contemporary department?' and I said 'yes, me me, I've got lots of ideas'. That was the *Fashion in Motion* idea, which I had thought of during a whole staff meeting. Our whole staff meetings are held in the Lecture Theatre and we were all sitting there and Alan Borg was talking about visitors figures at the V&A, which weren't very good and we all had to do something about it and I just remember thinking 'I know how to do that, it's going to have to be fashion, and we could have live fashion shows in the museum, and it sort of just came to me in a moment and that's exactly what happened and I rushed back to the office and started putting my ideas of paper.

AB: What was your trigger? How did your first idea change?

CW: The thing of my ideas is that they arrive in their pure forms. They are like crystals so for example when I imagined *Fashion in Motion*, it was exactly how it happened. It was about working with living fashion designers and professional models would be dressed completely as if on a catwalk, but they would walk through the galleries in the museum, many of which were completely empty and had no visitors at all. That was what I had imagined and that was exactly what it became. I had imagined that not only would *Fashion in Motion* show the most remarkable contemporary fashion to visitors in the museum, who might or might now have known that this was happening, but it would situate fashion within the sculptures of the museum and this pipe effect would take visitors into galleries that were barely visited. It had to be in the ground floor. I had this idea that this parade would show also the beauty of the museum, of the environment. And particularly when I look at the photographs of the first two *Fashion in Motion*'s for Philip Treacy and Alexander McQueen

I remember that jolt of appreciation of the fabric of the building, the beauty of the corridors, the marble floors, the sculptures, and how remarkable the fashion looked against this backdrop but also how beautiful the backdrop looked against fashion; and it seemed as if it was an equal relationship. This was particularly true for 'Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen'. Garments were from the 'NO. 13' collection and the pallet was natural colours and it was inspired by the Arts Crafts movement so it was a particularly pertinent show. In general, that's the thing with my ideas. Each project is like a crystallised image. I can see it, I can absolutely visualize it in the distance, and it's very small but crystal clear and all I have to do is get closer to that point, I just have to journey from where I am now to what I can see. So, with *Fashion in Motion*, as with 'Satellites of Fashion', or 'Radical Fashion', I could see it in the far distance, very clearly yet very small, and I just had to communicate to other people what I was trying to get to and once they had understood we would go on that same journey. What was happening in terms of enlightening me was magazines, *Visionaire*, *Dazed and Confused*, Nick Knight's photographs, if you think of the 1997 photograph of Devon Aoki with her wearing a dress from La Poupée, the cloudy contact lens, the safety pin through her forehead and her face is like a manga heroin. That picture has an enormous impact on me. It was the early days of digital technology, and I love the futuristic sense of it and that's why a lot of those alternative titles for radical fashion were futuristic. I thought it was a brave new world in terms of fashion. Alexander McQueen didn't feature in 'Satellites of Fashion' but my interest in him came via Nick Knight's work and the Dazed and Confused issue that McQueen guest–edited a bit later. Nick Knight was a sea change. Simultaneously, there is my discovery of Japanese fashion, which of course influenced McQueen. Nick is the person that made my eyes open to what was happening in fashion in 1997. And Nick was the person that I turned to for the lead image for Radical Fashion. He did a specially commissioned photo graph for the poster and the book cover. When I saw the images, I thought they were utterly beautiful and transformative and made me understand the presentation of humanity in a different way. Curatorially, my trigger was the images of Nick Knight.

AB: When you started thinking about *Fashion in Motion* did you think of it in terms of catwalk?

CW: No, I thought of it as a promenade. I always wanted *Fashion in Motion* to be a procession through the galleries. Think of it, on the one hand there was me, a 45 years old mother of two children: I had worked in the museum previously, I had kept friendly with people who worked here, I had done a couple of books on bags, unadventurous really. I was always an avid reader who loved art and crafts. On the other hand, there was fashion, I had started to go to a few fashion shows and I had been excited about them. It thought it was marvelous that I had discovered something called fashion and I wanted to share it with people and if you think about what was happening with fashion at the time, in the UK and abroad; think of Yohji Yamamoto, Comme des Garçon, Alaïa, Hussein Chalayan. Fashion was really exciting. And suddenly these two things came together, first in a modest way in Satellites of Fashion, but Chris Breward picked up on that, and then through Fashion in Motion. But, no I never wanted to reproduce the catwalk in the V&A.

AB: I know that it was your mission to reposition V&A in the mind of the public as an institution that is also about the contemporary. Would you say that *Fashion in Motion* was instrumental to this vision?

CW: Yes, it was. The notion of creating a contemporary team, a team of two, came from Alan Borg and Sue Lambert; I do remember at the time thinking that Valerie Mendes should have been in that team. Valerie Mendes is the most contemporary person I know, and she influenced

me greatly in a completely holistic way. She had an inner instinct for good design, she looked fantastic, but she was completely individual. Just being in her office was education. She was unusual and she was brave and she had an extremely good eye for display and she had a great understanding of contemporary fashion while being very objective about it. She could have taken much greater advantage of her role but she kept it cool. And she taught me to keep me cool, because I tend to get extremely enthusiastic and be subjective, but she taught me to be professional. So, the contemporary team was formed, it started with the notion of bringing contemporary practice into the museum, but I think that when they sent this message around saying, 'does anybody have any ideas?', I might have been the only one who put my hand up, but I remember looking at the very early pie chart of the first year of the Contemporary department and *Fashion in Motion* was a big piece of that project and activity. I remember that Susan and I ran the first few *Fashion in Motion* events, and we were both equally enthusiastic and really excited about it. When we first put up the first *Fashion in Motion* show we were sort of pushing people away so we could have a god look. We were always so excited, so enthusiastic. We had a really good time. We had fun.

AB: Let's look at how *Fashion in Motion* changed with time: what stayed the same in the last 15 years and what has changed in time?

CW: Up until 2001 with 'Fashion in Motion: Shaun Lee and Alexander McQueen', where we had about 3000 visitors in the main entrance, *Fashion in Motion* was held in the galleries. After that it had a proper catwalk in the Raphael. I didn't lose interest after that, but to me it was never quite the same and when I spoke to Sarah Burton about doing 'Fashion in Motion: Sarah Burton', she asked me whether we could go back to the old way. I said: 'absolutely, I don't know how we will control it but absolutely'. There was something special about doing it in the galleries. It was the beauty of following those models as they walked, and the way they walked, you know, how models walk with great concentration because they are self–conscious and they are probably wearing quite difficult clothes. They are remote and beautiful and often very tall and rather unearthly. And it's them leading us on a route. I feel there is something special about following something. The same thing, I suppose, as in those marches, the big parades such as those in New Orleans or Brazil. There's that notion of activity. And as a visitor, you could stand and watch it go by or you could follow it. There was an element of pageantry. There's that notion of activity, movement and you can decide to stand and watch it go by or you can follow it. In general, that element of pageantry emerges again in the fashion show and it surfaced more clearly when *Fashion in Motion* took place in the galleries. The thing about *Fashion in Motion*, especially in its earliest days, was that it was literately like the models were stepping out of the glass cases at the V&A, liked they had been released somehow What I really used to love what seeing the models come in and they'd look taller than me and younger than me and slim, but what I found completely extraordinary was seeing their beautification. They'd arrive looking pale and almost featureless and you sometimes weren't even sure whether they were the models or not; they had such a remote quality and then when they had their make-up and hair done and when they had their clothes and their shoes, to see that transformation into geisha like beauties and the remoteness of the fashion model and then seeing carefully stepping through the V&A, it is actually like transporting a creature from another world into the museum. And they all seemed like they had stepped out one of those fashion photographs that I like so much or emerging from a dream. They were like dream figures. And at the end of the day one could almost see them being stripped back again, the make-up removed, the clothes taken off, and then I used to see them leaving the V&A, being themselves again, just plain jeans and t–shirts, pale faces, hair straight back, going back to their personal lives. Then at some point, because I always believed strongly that it should be handed from curator to curator, I handed it on to Andrew Bolton who had come up to this

department on a three years LCF post. He started doing interesting things, he did men displays, he did 'Fashion in Motion: Men in Skirts', and he was developing people like Anna Sui. The people he took were different from the people I would have chosen, but it was great. And then he handed it on to Susanne Lussier. When Susanne took it over it became very remote from me. I was not involved at all then, I didn't go to meetings, I had no part in it at all. And I think it's important when people take control that they have got ownership so I never wanted to interfere. And then Oriole Cullen took over.

AB: What was the main reason why *Fashion in Motion* was moved from the galleries to the Raphael Gallery?

CW: 'Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen & Shaun Leane' was the last to be held in the galleries – the main reason why it was moved was crowd control. The Alexander McQueen & Shaun Lee show was crazy, it was unbelievably crowded and the V&A found it a little bit scary and at a certain point we had music, so we had somebody carrying a big box on their shoulders and then film crews and then more press and it had become quite distractive. And long established curators thought it was not very 'V&A'. They thought it was out of control, which, to be honest, it really was sometimes. To be honest, at that point it was barely under control.

AB: What kind of audiences attended *Fashion in Motion*?

CW: Sometimes it was just people who happened to be in the V&A, saw this pageant go by with a lot of noise and film crews. But then when we introduced tickets, the people who were booking them were fans, we developed fans, we had some obsessive fans in the early days; I remember one guy who somehow got a backstage pass and we just found him sort of milling around. We had a few obsessive fans, we had students, we had journalists, and Susannah Frankel was a very early champion. So, it was difficult to identify but it was mainly young audience.

AB: Do you think Fashion in Motion acquired a different character with each curator?

CW: Oh yeah, Susanne Luzzier did a lot of French couturiers, she did Gaultier, which was remarkable. Chris Breward did one, you know? I brought in a lot British and Japanese designers, that was my love. Andrew's were more Pacific Rim and American, Suzanne was French. At some point, we must have thought of working with the Belgian designers, I think we did one or two of them. The trouble was that if it was European or American designers it became very expensive. If it was a French couturier, oh boy, it became very expensive. But we would trade it off, and then we started doing graduates' shows and then we did the millinery one later. We did a few shows.

AB: Would you like to speak about the collaboration between designer and curator for *Fashion in Motion*?

CW: I was always very respectful of designer's knowledge of how their work should be best presented. So, it was always based on conversation. A show would be seen for the first time on a catwalk, journalists, press, whatever, then we would either reshow it here some months later or it would be a combination of various collections. Each designer, each event was different and for each designer I felt my job was to listen to what they thought would work best and what they would like to do. That's how I worked for 'Radical Fashion' as well. Instead

of imposing your curatorial view, if you listen first, and then have discussion, you'd often found that things worked best. When working for *Fashion in Motion*, I listened to what the designer wanted and this would be the situation; I'd explain the concept, I'd said who had already done it, and I'd say the format it'd have taken and I would say something about the budget and they'd probably ask about costs and models, make up, music. I got the most out of everything I have done by listening.

AB: What where the main obstacles? Internal and external?

CW: Never had any external criticism, all reviews were positive. My problems to begin with were working against the machinery of V&A which looking back on it now I can imagine that I must have been extremely irritating to other curators, other departments, and security staff but was very determined and I knew it was going to be brilliant. And I thought it was so important that we were opening the doors to another generation of people who were interested in design and fashion. I knew that for 'Radical Fashion' as well and for fashion exhibitions generally. I just knew that we had a golden goose with fashion but actually I've had to stop the museum overdoing fashion, I have been the break on many occasions when colleagues in other departments who don't really work with fashion. We had a senior member of staff here for many years who was very keen on throwing more fashion in many occasions it was be stopping them. If you treat fashion in silly or superficial way it would just turn bad; so, strangely enough I have been the break. My job as a curator of fashion is to manage the space and exhibitions we do and make sure that whatever we do is thoroughly researched and is at the highest possible standard.

AB: I would like to talk about 'Radical Fashion' which seems to play with questions around the theorisation of fashion and its relationship with the body. How did this manifest itself in the research project and installation of the exhibition?

CW: You know, it's such a big subject that exhibition. The thing about 'Radical Fashion' is that it was really important for museum exhibitions about fashion but also exhibitions which explored notions of modernity in fashion and that focused on display as being equally important to the objects. Rather like a theatrical performance or opera, to me set and costume are equally important. And I think I was the first curator to create sets, and in Radical Fashion I created 11 sets, each was totally different, with each I worked with the designer to understand their aesthetics, but I had my own ideas as well, and it usually ended up with it being a combination and in some cases, as with Comme des Garçon, it ends up being entirely my concept, which they liked. I consider myself a visual person, because I trained as an artist. Also, my parents had shops and I did the window display for the shops for years. Sometimes my window displays were so spectacular, sort of inappropriately spectacular that my father was almost embarrassed by them. I created gothic sets, with columns and drapes and I had such a good time doing it with my brother. And my brother was the runner: I'd say to my him to go and get me some black velvet curtains and he'd find everything and because the family business was a family affair everybody got involved, including my mother and the lovely guy who worked for them. Together we used to create these sets through the night and people would literally be driving past and go 'what is that?' It was my sense of theatre and set and props. I love props, I love clever lighting, I love sound, I love the textures, I love the other realities that an exhibition can create, and the beautiful thing about 'Radical Fashion' is that I could di 11 of these, plus, the overriding. The entrance to 'Radical Fashion' was through a giant eye and it was the eye, the mind of the designer, so the ideas was that of walking into that world, so you walked through the giant eye.

AB: While I am a fan of fashion and fashion exhibitions I often tend to forget that the fashion world is still victim of stereotypes and a lot of people actually think that it's not important to preserve fashion. Why is it important to include fashion in a museum of decorative art?

CW: I have never questioned the fact that the V&A should be the place where fashion was shown along other examples of design in order to inspire the industry, industrial designers. Fashion and textile are part of our national identity, if you think about the Macclesfield sink industry, if you think about the Manchester cotton trade, if you think about the lace workers in Bedfordshire, if you think about the tailors of Saville row, fashion clothing, textiles, millinery, leatherworking, are all an integral part of the UK's design and manufacturing culture and it was ever this, so how can you separate fashion and textiles from glasswork and ceramics tile and sculpture and civic sort of decorative motifs, and I think the V&A has got it right, people talk about the V&A as being a strange mixture of art and design and craft but that's what life is, isn't it? Conversely, I have no problem at all with fashion museums, that's another way of doing it, but the important thing about the V&A is the collections, everything comes from that grand scale of knowledge about objects. What I have a problem with is scholarly research into fashion and textiles that is divorced from the reality of the objects and I don't really understand it, I don't understand how theories can be supported without object led research.

Fashion in Motion: complete past programme

Date		Designer	Curator[690]
May	1999	Philip Treacy & Anthony Price	CW
June	1999	Alexander McQueen	CW
July	1999	Deborah Milner	CW
August	1999	Vivienne Tam & Jimmy Choo	CW
September	1999	Matthew Williamson	CW
November	1999	Shirin Guild	CW
November	1999	Dai Rees	CW
December	1999	Christian Lacroix	CW
January	2000	Arkadius	AB
February	2000	Anna Sui	AB
March	2000	Pip Hacket	SS
April	2000	Tristan Webber	AB
May	2000	Elspeth Gibson	EZ
June	2000	Stella McCartney	
July	2000	Collette Dinningan	SM
August	2000	Charles and Patricia Lester	
September	2000	Shelly Fox	AB
October	2000	Ten Ten & H.at	AB
November	2000	Yeohlee	AB
December	2000	Louis Vuitton	AB
January	2001	Simon Fraser jewellery with Frances Geesin textiles	

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[690] Legend: AB: Andrew Bolton; BC: Christopher Breward; CW: Claire Wilcox; EZ: Elizabeth Curry; LJ: Lucy Johnstone; OC: Oriole Cullen; SL: Suzanne Lussier; SM: Suzanne McCormack; SS: Sonnet Stanfill.

February	2001	Julien MacDonald	AB
March	2001	Antonio Berardi	AB
April	2001	Chunghie Lee	AB
May	2001	Issey Miyake	AB
June	2001	Richard James	CB
July	2001	Clements Ribiero	
August	2001	Catherine Walker	
September	2001	Robert Cary-Williams	
October	2001	Curvaceous	LJ
October	2001	Alexander McQueen and Shaun Leane	AB
February	2002	Men in Skirts	SZ
May	2002	Tata-Naka	SZ
September	2002	Central Saint Martins Graduates 2002	SZ
November	2002	Katerina Szczotarska	SZ
March	2003	Eley Kishimoto	SZ
May	2003	Jean Paul Gaultier	SZ
November	2003	Boudicca	SZ
November	2003	Missoni	SZ
January	2004	Iranian Night	SZ
April	2004	Vivienne Westwood	SZ
October	2004	Central Saint Martins Graduates 2004	SZ
November	2004	Swarovski: Runway Rocks	SZ
May	2005	Anne Valérie Hash	SZ
July	2005	Gianfranco Ferré	SZ
September	2005	Africa	SZ
November	2005	Ozwald Boateng	SZ
April	2006	Hardy Amies	SS
October	2006	Christian Lacroix	SS

June	2007	Gareth Pugh	OC
September	2007	Manish Arora	OC
May	2008	Ma Ke Wuyong	OC
September	2008	Central Saint Martins Graduates 2008	OC
November	2008	Roksanda Ilincic	
April	2009	Millinery in Motion	OC
		Stephen Jones	
		Justin Smith	
		Nasir Mazhar	
		Noel Stewart	
		Fiona McLean	
		Piers Atkinson	
July	2009	Giles Deacon	OC
December	2009	Erdem Moralioglu	OC
May	2010	Osman Yousefzada	OC
November	2010	Kenzo	OC
December	2010	Stéphane Rolland	OC
June	2011	Yohji Yamamoto	OC
November	2011	Peter Jensen	OC
January	2012	Olivier Saillard	OC
July	2012	Craig Lawrence	OC
December	2012	Fyodor Golan	OC
July	2013	Jenny Packham	OC
November	2013	Kansai Yamamoto	OC
December	2013	Meadham Kirchhoff	OC
October	2014	Ralph & Russo	OC
November	2014	Sibling	OC

April	2015	Grace Wales Bonner	OC
October	2015	ASHISH	OC
November	2015	Peter Pilotto	OC
April	2016	Christopher Raeburn	OC
October	2016	House of Holland	OC
June	2017	Mary Goddard	OC
August	2017	Inspired by Balenciaga	OC
October	2017	Phoebe English	OC
March	2018	John Alexander Skelton	OC

In Conversation with *Bárbara Coutinho*

(Founder & Director of MUDE, Museu do Design e da Moda, Lisbon)

MUDE, Rua Augusta 24, Lisbon
12.05.2015

Alessandro Bucci (AB): How did you become a curator of fashion and design? What kind of studies did you undertake?

Bárbara Coutinho (BC): If I had to start from the very beginning I would need to go as far behind as to primary school. What I can say to make a long story short, as it somehow has a relation with the choices that led me to become a curator and with what I do now is that when it came to deciding between the humanities, the arts, and the `exact' sciences in school, I was torn. I was almost certain I wanted to study medicine and become a surgeon because I was interested to understand the structure of the body, its mechanisms, how such a system could work, and perhaps what led to its development. I then decided to focus on the arts as I saw that as another way of accessing knowledge about the man, understood as mankind. Not through history, not through economics, or institutions, or through politics, which are all very important standpoints, but through the arts, because for me it represents the highest level of expression of spirituality of mankind. It's where you can retrieve its uniqueness, and relation between man and the environment, the idea of god, the idea of integrity, completeness, etc. So, I went into this path because it was truly interesting for me. I took a BA in Art History. I then always felt that my path passed between the areas of communication and education; not in a traditionally didactic way and certainly concerning the purposes and methodologies of art. That balance I am talking about I think it's achieved in MUDE. We will talk about it later but for now let me say that for me a museum has this unique role of being the place, in this moment the only place, where each one of us can have the possibility to dialogue directly with the objects – any kind of artefact. I had the perception that my path laid over there – I did not want to be only a creator and an artist – I love to take photos and I love to write but it's something private – and I did not want to have an exquisitely managerial position. I knew that my path passed through the education of art and that's why after my BA in History of Art, I did an MA in Education of Art and in Contemporary Art History. It was compulsory to study Portuguese Art and then in the meanwhile I became a high school teacher. I then applied for a position at the Centro

Cultural de Belém to be the Head of their new educational department. I thought ``Why not?'' It was a job on that crossroads that I was telling you about earlier. I was very lucky because not only I got the job, but I found myself at the right place for a coincidence to happen. I started working there in 1998, I was very young, and that was also the year when Francisco Capelo signed a protocol with the Portuguese Government to deposit his design collection. The Fashion Collection was not complete yet. It was kind of natural for me to start working with that collection. The director at the time organised a whole staff meeting and requested a volunteer to start studying design history and theory. Most conservators specialised in fine arts, so at the end, she asked me to do it, as my studies were somewhere in between Contemporary Art and Architecture. I said ``yes, let's start'' and I have been studying and researching it since then. In the meanwhile, I continued working there as Head of the Educational Department while doing some lectures and seminars at the University. I then decided that it was time to start my PhD. In the meanwhile, in 2006 I was invited by Lisbon City Council as a specialist in the collection and because of my work at Centro Cultural the Belém. And that's when the story of MUDE begins.

AB: A museum of design and Fashion for the city of Lisbon: would you briefly describe the museum's vision?

BC: It's changing but it's doing so while relying on sound pillars. I am the founder and director of the museum. When I started to think about it, I always felt that a museum of this kind in Lisbon should be very active. It is the first and only museum of design and fashion in Lisbon and from my knowledge of the dynamics of Portuguese cultural life I knew that it couldn't be a museum a 'traditional' way. I realise that nowadays it is very hard to define what 'traditional' means when speaking about museums. For sure it did not have a be a place just for exhibitions of the collection. It had to represent a balance between education and entertainment, and it had to have an active role within society. It's important to remember that while elsewhere museums of decorative arts started to be founded in the nineteenth century, in Portugal we had to wait until the beginning of the twenty-first century for conversations about a museum of design to begin taking place. This also reflects a delay in the processes that led to the development of design itself, for example, industrialisation, and consequently in everything that is connected to the education of design. The situation is improving now but the awareness that this development is necessary was very late. So, the issue of awakening sensibilities towards design and the fact that a museum would be instrumental to this process was always on top of my mind. When I came here and I started to think about a vision for the museum, I didn't even know it would be in this building, I was actually convinced it would be somewhere else, a much smaller building which was already owned by Lisbon City Council, in the historical and traditionally Portuguese heart of the city, the Barrio Alto. Because that building was so small, I began to conceive an idea of a museum with more than one premise. I started to establish a network of relations with curators, designers, academics, with shops, universities, and schools. So, the idea was that perhaps we could host exhibitions in all these places. This would have revealed the strong connection to the territory and the discourses of the city that I wanted the museum to make explicit. Also, as we are a municipal museum, from the very beginning it was very clear to me that MUDE had an important role, as a representative of the municipality's policies, in demonstrating its responsibility towards the public space. You see, my ideas were grand and that's why I say that even nowadays MUDE represent 30% of what I conceived then and of what I see it becoming. There's still plenty to do. But obviously you must take into account that the context of 2006 was a very difficult one. And it's been difficult since then. For this reason MUDE had to become a resilient and a pragmatic space and I think this is precisely its strength. It's not ideal, it's not finished. It's complex, it's dynamic, it's living and it's in motion, in the sense that it analyses with a very pragmatic perspective what it's possible to do and what it's not possible to do. In general I have always had this approach and I try to train my staff to it. It is an approach that is somewhere in between the theoretical reflection and the day to day problems that we must deal with. In order

to do that we have to be really creative but also to have very advanced problem solving skills, while keeping into account the budget. So in a way, we are making design. The construction of the museum is a process of design itself and I think this is a key issue for the public to understand. In order to become a part of it the public needs to understand that the construction of a museum is a hard, long process. And the vision of the museum is to achieve that while keeping the doors of the museum open.

AB: Let's talk about the name of the museum. From my poor knowledge of the Portuguese language I understand that MUDE is also the imperative of the verb ``to change''. Was it you choosing this name and why?

BC: It was a consequence of what we were talking about earlier, the need to get people to become more sensitive to design (when I am talking about design I am including both furniture design and fashion design). MUDE is the acronym for Museum of Design but I thought that it was a very strong, clear word that would work in English, too, as it could sound like the word ``mood''. But in Portuguese, like you said, it's the imperative of the verb MUDAR, meaning, ``to change''. It's not an invitation, it's an imperative. And I chose it because of that intention to do a specific kind of work with the public. But it also because when you change, the willingness to change already involves a different kind of consciousness. When you change your house, your partner, your job, when you change anything, you are committing yourself to a process which is very radical, which involves getting to know, evaluating, taking choices, and changing. MUDE is all about this process.

AB: You are the founder-director of the museum. What were your triggers in creating the concept of the museum?

BC: I normally say that MUDE started in my head very early, much earlier than I knew it would exist and that I would be the director of the Museum. It all started in Centro Cultural de Belém, in 1999. I saw loads of things, I had the opportunity to travel, to visit different museum in the most emblematic cities. Then I had a short yet important stay in 2001/2 in London for a course at Tate Modern. During all these occasions I wondered what elements of what I saw could work. I also used to compare what I was looking at to my theoretical studies and to my experience with teaching museum theory (I can isolate some interesting considerations of Marcel Duchamp or Frederick Kiesler or constructivism). I began to think that with the white cube philosophy was closing too much the perspective on the object and limiting the possibilities of real, concrete communication with the visitor. Speaking of big triggers, I remember the impact that my first visits to MAK in Vienna had on me. I was fascinated with their presentation strategies of the Baroque Rococo Collection for which they invited people like Donald Judd or Barbara Bloom for interventions. Bloom, for example organised a session with chairs into the corridors of the museum and she created a system of galanty shows that allowed visitors to only see the shadow of the chairs, but the public – of which I took a lot of photos – stood and stopped and tried to guess before walking around and reading the label. If those chairs had been put in a more traditional display, perhaps people would just go passed them. From that experience of photographing visitors at MAK I realised that displays require time and creativity. Nowadays you have so much information, so much different capacities of receiving information, you can see so many things that a museum can't compete with all that. In order to compete a museum cannot follow those flows, it rather needs to operate in the opposite way. Through a series of strategies it must highlight only the most important aspects and prevent visitors to get lost in the sea of information. As a consequence of this, for instance, for me it will always be forbidden to take photos in MUDE. It's not a question of the rights of the photos – which in Portugal is quite a big issue, too – it's just that I see the photograph as frontier, a filter between the piece, yourself and the moment when both come together. For me taking a picture to an artwork in a museum is a paradox of a situation. We want to be there, take a

selfie there with the artefact but we are not really there, we are thinking about taking the photos rather than about the object or what we feel in its presence. What we feel when taking a picture is the desire to perpetuate something through a medium other than the medium that the museum display is already. I saw loads of good things in different museums, I saw loads of bad practice in different museums, but the idea that I really wanted to bring to Lisbon was that the museum, as an old cultural institution, is a medium in itself, with its own language, its own codes. It's a device that does not need other mediums to be operated.

AB: What kind of material steps did you have to get all of this started?

BC: To begin with allow me to say that it's not been the most canonical of beginnings. And once again, that's what it is, it's life. There was a private collection. The private collection was deposed in Centro Cultural de Belém, but in the meanwhile the collector disagreed with the policies in act at the museum and decided to sell that same collection to Lisbon City Council. They bought it and even if it belonged to them it was kept of Centro Cultural de Belém for four years. At this point we are talking only about the furniture design collection because the fashion collection never moved there in the first place. In 2006 when Lisbon City Council invited me to start thinking about an institution I had two persons working with me – one is still here, it's Maria dos Anjos, my P.A. and the other one is a conservator. That was my team and together we started considering a series of fundamental issues. To begin with, we focused on the conservation of the collection: alongside a team of architects we had to design a new storage room (which you have already visited) with the right temperature, humidity and light. That was my top priority at the times. We moved the collection there as soon as it was ready. In there the fashion collection – which wasn't in the best of conditions -- joined the rest of the collection. Then I had to develop a concept and a museological program. It took a whole summer, a whole autumn and the beginning of winter to think about it, write it and organise it. The document contains the museum's goal, mission, and vision, the educational policies and the conservation policies, the role of different job titles in the team, the kind of exhibitions, etc. it's like the constitution of the museum. It's in Portuguese and it's not been translated yet, but I will send it to you. Then we had to deal with the building. I took a part in the choice of the Banco Ultramarino as well. I visited this building in September 2007 with the mere and the collector. The museum then was like Bosnia at the beginning of the 90s. No water, no electricity, all dirty, because this whole building in the heart of Lisbon, with its 15000 square meters had been closed for almost three years. Before then they had started a process of renovation of the building but they had to stop and basically abandon it when they realised they were destroying the interior of one of the most emblematic buildings in the city. As soon as I gave my opinion that it would be wonderful that the museum could be hosted in this building, the mere explained to me very directly that Lisbon City Council had the money to buy the building – which costed about 20,000,000 € -- but did not have any money at that moment to renovate the interior. Thus, I had to be extremely pragmatic and I thought that we could move in the building, to see it as a work in progress and to define the ruin as a heritage. This image and this concept became alive and I think that was best combination for MUDE. So, that's why I immediately started thinking about the program of exhibitions. At the beginning we only occupied the ground level and the first floor, we started organising exhibitions while structuring the concept of the museum, while still defining roles in the team and while developing the architectonical project for the whole building, which is yet to be completed.

AB: Earlier on you said that the fashion collection was not in a good condition, could you expand on that?

BC: It was kept in a very small room and all pieces were hung. It wasn't studied; we just had a list of names of designs, working photos, some dates and loads of questions marks. The collection

needed a much bigger space, some of the dresses needed to be placed horizontally. With the help of a group of professionals, the first action consisted in looking at them and figuring out what would be best for them, conservation-wise.

AB: Was there a point when you thought `it's going to be more difficult than I thought'?

BC: I always had the consciousness that it wasn't going to be a promenade but there were moments when I thought that I did not expect it to be so hard. A difficulty was organising the team. All team members are sent from the Lisbon City Council as I am not allowed to contract from outside and it's been difficult to find the right person for each post. That was difficult. The other difficulty is the financial restrictions that we were and are living. Thankfully I am somebody who thinks that skills and ideas are more important than money – of course money helps – but in honesty I have to say that financially speaking it's been really tough. The third thing, probably the only one I had not forecast, was that the fact that renovating the museum was an incredibly slow progress. On the other hand, we became imprisoned by our own success: I'm not sure whether this is a Portuguese dynamic but rather something than happens everywhere, but as everyone liked this `work in progress' format and considered to be innovative and interesting that caused us to slow down a little bit.

AB: What was the first exhibition at MUDE?

BC: MUDE's first exhibition was a permanent display called `Flash' – and that's exactly what it was, it was flashes from the collection, it took place on the ground floor. In *Flashes* one can already isolate some principles that inform nowadays' strategies of display for our permanent exhibition *Único e Múltiplo*. The first element is the fact that it is a permanent theme; the second idea is that it contains pieces from the furniture collection as well as pieces from the fashion collection, with no separation. As you know we have temporary exhibition of fashion design and temporary exhibition of furniture design, but the permanent exhibition establishes a dialogue between them, reflecting also the way in which the Francisco Capelo collection developed. It reflects an important aspect in the process of creation of design, that is the fact that often creators are influenced by or collaborate with people from other fields. The second idea was that the outfits and the furniture pieces had to be as close as possible to the public, so not presented as art pieces or object of impossible desire, but in proximity. Visitors should be able to perceive the real dimensions of a chair, to look around each outfit and see every detail of its fabrics. That proximity was very important and leads to the third thing that never changed, that is it being an open discourse. There is a path that the visitor can follow, you have short informative texts, but you are also free and encouraged to find your own path and establish your own succession of pieces and relations, which other people, including us curators, might not have perceived, creating your own path. I think that given the availability of information today, it would be almost utopian to think that people from the public have never seen some of the pieces that we have got on display here (especially for the furniture design collection, although this is likely to be a different case for the haute couture pieces). With that background of images already informing visitors' experience I think you don't need to explain details that people can discover very easily in other ways, but a museum needs, in my opinion, to create a discourse that is not merely cognitive but is also a matter of emotions and perceptions, of connections that develop subconsciously. I want to share that in the first days after the museum opened to the public a visitor that I can still remember today congratulated with me and said 'Congratulations! This is not a museum!' I firstly took it very negatively. I wondered ``how can somebody tell me so directly that this is not a museum?'' But then I reframed myself and I thought 'listen, Bárbara, this really is a compliment, because she is saying that this is so accessible, so easy to approach, that it doesn't even feel like being in a museum'. I think this is what

she meant and I think this is what we need to achieve, while respecting the value and the sacred force emanating from the piece, of course.

AB: Would you say that the strength of *Único e Múltiplo* is the possibility that it offers visitors to follow and establish personal chronologies besides having the availability of following the institutional chronology'? Would you say this is a fair comment?

BC: Yes, definitely. Once again, I must say that also from this point of view, there is something that is still missing at MUDE. This is already happening but it will be emphasised when the third and fourth floor of the building will be complete and devoted to our permanent exhibition. When that will happen, it will be possible to have that kind of disruptive dialogue between visitor and artefact, to interrupt the exhibition with installations, but also to provide education elements and inputs that would allow people to create their own contexts, and their own connections between pieces. While this is possible downstairs, it does not happen to the extent I aim to achieve. For example, at this moment with *Único e Múltiplo* at the ground floor people can create only visual connections; another limit is that if you want to find more information you have to do that before or after. My idea is that in the future you will be able to do that simultaneously but not side--by--side with the object. I don't know what sorts of ideas I will defend in ten years but for now I can't see me getting tired of saying that the aura of the object needs to be preserved. And if you want to deconstruct the piece, you'd be welcome and actually encouraged to do it but at a time that is different from that of contemplation. That's why the education department at MUDE still does not exist. Because I really want to start one that goes beyond the guided tour, leaning towards the creation of a highly personalized experience. For me an exhibition should be educational, but it's an education about mind processes rather than facts and chronologies.

AB: Do you know how to achieve this?

BC: I have some ideas, one is an installation made by designers and educators to explain in a practical way what design is, but I can't say no more right now; I also have other ideas involving the use of technology of course but, like I said, not side by side to the object, but just on some point of the path. Technology won't be used to read the pieces through but more about providing information aimed at making your own way in the museum.

AB: Does this connect to the new project of the shop for the ground floor? I am aware that the name shop is a bit reductive as I know what kind of idea you have in mind...

BC: The shop -- let's call it like that for now -- is something I am particularly excited. I will start working with a Portuguese designer called Marco Sousa Santos. He's going to design the shop. I love to work with him and I think we will achieve a fantastic result. It has to main goals. In the first place, the shop will be at the ground floor, and that's nothing new. In other museums you often need to cross the shop in other to get to the various galleries contained in the museum. This is where the shop at MUDE will start starts to differ. The counters of this former bank will contain it, and all the doors to four roads around the museum will be open, leading to the shop. So, the shop will be like an internal street connecting Rua Augusta to Rua da Prata. It will be like a new perpendicular to Rua Augusta, a new road. So, there will be this idea of going through the shop when you just need to go from one road to another on your way to wherever you need to go. In the second place, it will be a shop focusing on Portuguese, and generally speaking Iberian, and South Atlantic creativity. Why? When I think about the shops I like in other museums, for example the exquisite shop at V&A, I realise that I like them because they seem to have find their own place. They don't copy other museum shops; you can't find in them objects you can buy at any other museum. What I would like for MUDE is that individuality, the possibility to gather objects that you can only find

at MUDE. I also think that the shop has an important role with regards to one of the missions of the museum, that is the national mission of the museum, to help Portuguese creativity flourish. We have to create the link between designers, brands, and consumers. That's what's missing in Portugal. It would also be a place for consumers/visitors to know that they can find the best of design from this part of the world. So it really aims to become a pole of excellence linking different creators from the world that speaks Portuguese. Something global, but also something specific. The person who is going to be in charge of the shop will have to cooperate with the curators. His or her selection will have to follow museum policies and the museum's vision, otherwise it risks being out of focus. The idea is also to start producing some pieces that the museum considers as very important and create a brand, create a capacity for designers to produce their work.

AB: Would you say this is also going to emphasise the different between a museum of fine arts and a museum of design?

BC: Yes, of course. Design is a land that is so fascinating because it's such a multi-faceted place. In order to understand design you need to understand art, architecture, economics, you have to have a knowledge of technology, you have to understand production processes and philosophy. It's very challenging and fine art is definitely in a safer position when it comes to the place it occupies in the minds of people. Art doesn't need to be utilitarian – and if it is it's not art anymore – and it's really for contemplation and meditation, but design it's not the same thing. It's the other child of the relation between people and economics, industry, and democracy.

AB: Let's talk about the country. Is MUDE the only museum of design and Fashion in Portugal?

BC: There are other museums. Mainly two. One is the museum of Costume – Museu do Traje – and the other is a new museum called MAD in Evora. It's a museum of decorative arts and design, it's very small, it's a private collection so it does not have the dimensions and the strategies of a museum. In this respect I can say that MUDE really is unique in Portugal.

AB: Do you think MUDE has changed the cultural landscape of Lisbon?

BC: Absolutely, I have no doubt that it is happening. You can already notice some results, others will be clearer in the years to come. I think that the simple fact that we opened the doors and now students of fashion and design can come and see the real thing is already a positive result. They don't need to necessarily travel to Madrid, or London, or Paris, to see some of the works they are interested in and that they have seen in books on online. That's a huge transformation with effects on the capacity to get inspired and create. But that is the simplest of things. The rest of the results come from the work we have been doing with Portuguese design, presenting the pioneers of local design, publishing catalogues, collecting, studying, preserving. There is a huge gap between Portugal and other countries when it comes to the history of design, and there is still a lot to be done. But at least I know that designers are aware that there is room for them in this country; that there is a place where they can present their work, see the work of others; where their work can be preserved, and that there is an institution interested in passing on to future generations their skills and works. That's an immense thing. Other results will be shown with time.

AB: How would you describe the situation of design and fashion design in Portugal from the point of view of institutions that teach about design outside the museum?

BC: First of all, I think that a new category of very young designers is emerging in Portugal. In this case, I am talking mainly about product designers. When it comes to fashion, you are starting to

see that too but it's a field where we still are still peripheral. The new generation of designers is only now starting to be aware of the importance of communication and marketing. The previous generation sometimes ignored this. There is an effort to reach new markets now, and that can't but be a consequence of new university courses teaching about this. On the other hand, I am very critical of the number of university and courses teaching design. I think there are too many of them and I think the Bolognese system – whose core idea I think was really good – is failing. The issue is that younger generations leave university with less knowledge, with less maturity, and I think in the years to come something needs to be changed. From my experience as a lecturer at university I feel nowadays that if you are an excellent student the Bologna system helps you with your achievement to become an outstanding professional, but the majority, are becoming weaker: there is no time for anything in universities these days, and then you leave with BA or a MA that don't really mean much. Now we are going back to the times when the name of school is warrantee for you, and I am not sure how meritocratic that is.

AB: Last question: let's talk about future plans for the museum. You already spoke about the shop and the renovation of the Banco Ultramarino building, but I know you have some important collaborations in store. Would you like to talk about that?

BC: Well, once again MUDE is not very canonical. On the one hand, some serious works of requalification will start in the following months, on the other hand the development of the shop is about to start, and yet we have some international collaborations in store. I think it is important for MUDE to be placed into a network and there are several possibilities that are still being analysed. From the point of view out our fashion collection, it was very important for us to be part of Europeana, and now I look forward to be part of the new Europeana association. Even just for a matter of collaborating to the creation of a network of exhibitions, archives, and possibilities. The second important collaboration for us is the one with MoMu, in order to produce a co–curated exhibition curated by Miren Arzalluz. I think it will be important for the development of our experience; it can lead our team to gain more experience learning from an institution that has always differentiated itself for its effective communication strategies. I think it will be interesting to put our archives in dialogue. From the point of view of design I have been focusing my attention in trying to make our exhibition travel, especially those about Portuguese design. 2016 will be a year of international contexts with these exhibitions going to Madrid and Paris. And I hope this will merge well with the works of requalification, because in that case I could fulfill that initial ambition of dislocating MUDE, but now on a European level. There are also other collaborations with Portuguese museums, and I consider these as important as the international ones, because I think we should create a cultural offer of excellence for the ones that live and visit this country.

In Conversation with *Kaat Debo*
(Director of Mode Museum)

MoMu, ModeNatie, Nationalestraat 28, Antwerp, Belgium
04.07.2016

Alessandro Bucci (AB): So, to begin with Kaat, could you briefly give us the historical coordinates of Antwerp's Fashion museum.

Kaat Debo (KD): I think that what is important to mention about our history is that the collection of the museum originally belonged to the museum of decorative arts in Antwerp, which at a certain point of the last century, decided, in keeping with Governmental directives, to split its collections and to create three different museums. This event gave origin to the Diamond Museum, the Photography Museum, and the Textile & Costume museum in Vrieselholf. The latter was located outside of Antwerp and it focused on historic costume and textile. Its very diverse collection included an important lace collection mainly from the nineteenth century, accessories, and tools for the production of textile. As it was located in a castle outside of Antwerp, it didn't attract a lot of visitors. These would mainly go there to visit its gardens and the castle itself rather than the collection. In some cases, they would find out that the castle was home to a museum during their visit of said gardens. The situation began to change at the end of the 1990s, when, the province of Antwerp decided to do something with it and try to turn it into a touristic attraction. This was in keeping with the interest that had already been shown by the government towards the textile and fashion industry, and with the fact that the Antwerp's successful fashion scene was already about 20 years old. These two reasons meant that the museum had to be relocated in the centre of Antwerp.

AB: Was that the time when the museum changed its focus and acquisition policies?

KD: A new director was appointed and her task became the development of a new strategy that was more in line with the fashion identity of the city of Antwerp. I think that was an important moment for the museum. Linda Loppa, the new director, joined the museum at the end of the 1990s. At the time, Linda was head of the fashion department at the Academy, and had previously been a very active and renown buyer. In her previous career, she run two successful fashion boutiques in Antwerp, which had helped her create a very good network of contacts within the fashion scene. Around that same time, she had kick-started the Flanders Fashion Institute, an institution that is still active today and that can be compared to a smaller version of the British Fashion Council, with their goals being to support and promote young Flemish designers. Linda was also the director who decided that the museum was going to focus on Belgian fashion. The director before her did collect some Belgian fashion, however she didn't systematically go to Paris to the catwalks of Belgian designers, she didn't visit their showrooms. The acquisition policy, which is of course linked to the exhibition policy, also started to formally focus on Belgian fashion. Around that time, we were actively questioning what to do with our exhibition space. Did we want display cases? Did we want thematic exhibitions? As you know we currently only have one exhibition space. Because of the limited space, we ended up deciding rather than having a permanent display of the collection, we would have rotating thematic exhibitions and temporary presentations. We didn't want to invest in fixed exhibition furniture, as we wanted to be able to change the exhibition space with every new exhibition and we didn't want this investment to limit our possibilities. I joined the museum in 2001, we opened in 2002, so as Linda and I were working on the new exhibition policy we naively thought we'd have 6 exhibitions a year, without considering the period for dismantling an exhibition and installing a new one. We didn't take into account that curating and exhibiting fashion is a very labour intense activity, perhaps one of the most intense in the museum world. This, of course, is because fashion is not made for presentations in the museum. But we began very early to have a sense of how difficult and problematic it can be to translate the dynamics of fashion within an exhibition. Also, it must be considered that in 2001, there were few models of curatorial practice addressing fashion. In the past 15 years that has changed drastically. I remember the first exhibition I saw at the Costume Institute, which at the time was still in a basement. It consisted of a few display cases, which were basically clothes on mannequins in vitrines, with no extra exhibition design, very little visual context – whereas if you consider what they are doing now – think for example of the McQueen exhibition – there has been a huge evolution. This obviously reflects in the budgets that they spend nowadays on exhibition-making. And that change has been fast. However, from the very beginning it was very important for us to underline that we weren't interested in displaying garments only. It was clear to us that fashion is more than the clothes in our collection. It is about visual culture, world-making, atmosphere, the concept that is created by the designers. All this does exist in the collection, but not only. This understanding was very much linked to how fashion education is understood at the academy, that is to say, with an emphasis on concept and on the projection of this concept on a three-dimensional object thought with the body in mind. If the concept is strong, this will become evident in the garment itself, as well as it the world around it, in its presentation in a fashion show, in a photoshoot, in a shop window. And it should also be possible to trace its evolution through various collections. So, we recognised that there were a lot of nuances to be taken into account. I think I would rarely pick a designer that lacks this ability to conceptualise, that hops from one idea to another with no clear vision, strategy, no complex idea behind what they do. So, our question was about how to translate that world. I think this is very different from other museums work. At the Met, the garment is displayed like an artwork. They often exhibit the most spectacular pieces, for example. This is one way of doing things and it certainly recognises certain features of our contemporary fashion cultures. But I think that there are multiple ways of displaying fashion, just as there are multiple understandings of it. For us it's not about the masterpieces; it is not about the show pieces that might not even go into production. It is about what people wear.

AB: What other kinds of materials does the collection include?

KD: We have a library collection, but the library also has lots of archives, which can be company archives or textile and lace companies, patrons, samples. We also collect press releases produced by fashion houses, look books – where there has been a digital shift. We have invitations to fashion shows, fashion photography – both analogue collection and digital. We don't own copyright on all of them, so in some cases, we store images, but we can't disseminate them. This is also something we're working on, for example by making agreements with photographers and gaining permission to use images as well.

AB: I know the MoMu is a phase of transition – where do you see the museum going in the next years?

KD: We are currently preparing an extension of the museum, which will present a permanent exhibition of the collection on the ground floor. We are currently asking ourselves questions on what we want it to be. The thing is, such decisions are not only creative decisions. Exhibition design demands massive budgets, which also need to be split between the installation itself and acquisitions and loans. We can loan from all over the world, but that comes at a price. Luckily, we are at the heart of Europe and we're not far from Paris, so we're able to reduce our costs of transport by loaning from fashion houses there or from Galliera, or from other institutions near us. We are thinking of working with display cases, which is something I try to avoid in the case of our temporary exhibitions. There are pros and cons of this. The pro is that it allows us to display more objects: people can get closer and look at the details. However, without a display case the threshold with the artefact is lower, it's a more open presentation. It feels more welcoming for the visitor. And as a matter of fact, this has become evident also thanks to the feedback which we receive from our audiences, that is that they like exhibition designs that are more open. It is also important for the exhibition design to try and add something to the content. The digital will have a very important role in our future. I think museums are slowly embracing the digital. I remember reading a review some days ago written by Susy Menkes, in which she commented on the difficulty of making an exhibition without displaying video clips or digital images. But we are already seeing an evolution, with exhibitions that include holograms or more complex technologies. However, these are 'one-offs' and still an unexplored domain. To use technology to explain fashion's dynamics, that is something that I would really love to explore – while knowing of course that I will never ever the budget of the MET, a lot can be achieved with simple means, and if you can convince a company to sponsor a project, things become more concrete.

AB: In emphasising that technology can help you communicate about the dynamics of fashion, are you perhaps implying that the use of technology is part of the strategies that the museum uses to increase participation?

KD: Of course participation is a very fashionable word in museums nowadays. And yes, our digital strategy does go in that direction. However, that is simpler said than done, because in order to be a working reality the 'digital' needs to be on the mind of everybody working here, across all departments: staff from collections, education, communication, press, exhibitions… We're currently working on a new website, but for me the website is meant to be just a junction between what happens in the museum, our social media, our digital collection and the digital touch screen, and a space where people will be able to contribute, by adding stories, images, media. That's what I would like for our website. Are we going to do it and if so, how? I don't know, but I can tell you that this is my goal: to achieve full connection between our exhibitions, our collection and the wider

global public. I think that one of the biggest challenges for our museum but in general is to think about our future audiences, not only about the current ones. If we look at the demographics of the city of Rotterdam, not far from here, one in two inhabitants has a migratory background. One in two. This is something that we must consider. We know for a fact that it's already very hard for some people to relate to what we do and with our collection. We have a collection that focuses on western costume and fashion. Collecting is all about making choices of course, but if this wants to continue calling ourselves a fashion museum, such choices need to change to truly reflect how people are walking around Antwerp. This is especially true for our contemporary collection. Whereas our historical collection does more or less reflect clothing's past associations with a white higher-middle class and thus with those who commissioned fashion in Antwerp in the past centuries, our contemporary collection doesn't do that. But what are we going to do? Are we going to change our collection policy? We are not an ethnographic museum at the end of the day. Still, we will have to find a way to give different groups of people an access point and a way to connect with our collections. It is a huge challenge, and I think that if we fail to do that in ten years' time we will be no longer relevant and will find ourselves working with a white, niche, middle-aged audience.

AB: How does the museum take into account the need to represent the diversity that is included in the Belgian identity it seeks to represent?

KD: Museums in Belgium have placed on emphasis on diversity for years and years, but this was never a top priority for the construction of collections or exhibitions. The excuse was always that money wasn't enough. It was more understood as something for the learning and engagement departments, and mainly in terms of developing activities that would create room for differentiation and almost never on the level of acquisition or exhibition. When this was done, it my opinion, it was done in a way that was segregating by addressing specific communities (e.g. the black community, or the Jewish community, etc.) rather than in an inclusive manner. Our activities should try and have an intercultural perspective and address a society that is already very multicultural. I think that, so far, we have been doing this completely wrong and I feel this is a huge responsibility for the future. Understanding how to achieve this is hard. Perhaps crowd-curatorship could be a way, but this immediately rises a lot of questions. Is everybody a curator these days? Would it work? And how do we organise this in a way that is relevant and effective.

AB: The Mode Museum has distinguished itself for exhibitions that have been interested in representation – in the widest sent possible – rather than chronologies. Do you think that this happened under the influence of the development of academic research in cultural studies, and more specifically in fashion?

KD: I would say so. We have been working in an increasingly interdisciplinary way since we have been on Nationalestraat. The biggest difference is that when we were in Vrieselhof we had an historical approach, while now we prefer thematic exhibitions. We have always valued theoretical studies, for example by hosting academic conferences and seminars. But apart from the value that we give to fashion studies as a research area, the academic developments in this subject have helped us being taken more seriously. 15 years ago, our government was actually very critical towards what our activities. I remember the first feedback contained instructions to clarify what we are: 'what are you? Are you a museum? Are you a shop window?'. And Linda and I felt so insulted by the fact that they had no clue about what we did or about the kind of research which we conduct. Because of this we have always tried to place an emphasis on the research aspect of what we do. This is also because Fashion Studies is still not available in universities here in Belgium and fashion

is still met with strong resistance both in local academic traditions and in museums, where there's still a preference for fine arts.

AB: For example, how does this hierarchy between the fine arts and the applied arts manifest itself?

KD: Even in 2016 there's a variety of ways in which this happens, but for me the most important is one that also speaks of a gender discrepancy. In Belgium if you look at the directors of the fine art museums, they are all men; directors of the design museum, photography museums, fashion museum, they are all women. This speaks of preconception that informs the distinction between 'hard work museum' and the rest.

AB: Besides being the director of MoMu you're also on the board of directors of the University of Antwerp and on the advisory board of the Academy. How does your work for the museum feed into the university's or the academy's objectives?

KD: Within the university my goal is to pave the way for fashion to enter the university. Do I have a real strategy? No. Would it help me to have one? I don't think so. It's more about developing a network, making people aware that there is something called fashion studies, that contextual studies in fashion are serious disciplines. On the board of the university there's people from very different backgrounds and I try to show the relevance of fashion from the perspective of their subject. Recently I spoke to a radiologist. He was telling me that they have these scanners which are used for patients during daytime, while during night time they are used for objects. He was telling me that he scanned a 17th century shoe, and then he showed me this little video on his phone about scanning a shoe. So, I told him about the research that we are doing about 17th century lace. This is just an example about how a conversation flows and it's this kind of dialogue that helps us explain the academic foundation to what we do. I am convinced that fashion can be studied from within different typologies of academic departments, I myself come from literature. That's what I do on the board: I try to motivate people to do something with fashion, to attract PhD students that work with fashion, and this is what kick-starts research. I have to say that people have been very curious and receptive. I find it funny when they come to me and openly admit that they don't know anything about fashion. Imagine if I was a fine art museum director, would they come to me and say that they don't know anything about fine art? I wouldn't expect everybody to be a Rembrandt specialist, and yet when talk about fashion it feels like you must declare that you don't know anything about it. I don't know what people think but it feels like not knowing about fashion is a way for them to be taken seriously. I find it funny that this is often the way in which people decide to open a conversation with me. But then when you start telling them about the research activity that we do, they are always very interested, they visit the museum and they become very supportive.

AB: You mentioned that there's a project for a permanent exhibition. Where did the idea for a permanent exhibition come from and do you have any models?

Like I said, most decisions taken in a museum are not creative decisions. For the permanent presentation, we will get funding from the Province of Antwerp. This is a requirement from the government to all national museum: a permanent display of their collection. For 15 years, we haven't been in line with the rules. For 15 years, we have justified ourselves saying that since fabrics are very fragile it wouldn't be good to display them on a permanent basis. But that also opens a debate about what you decide to do with heritage. You can decide to preserve something without showing it to anybody, or you can decide to show it to an audience while acknowledging

that inevitably the collection will suffer from it, even under the best circumstances. Besides pointing out conservation reasons, for a long time, we also had the argument that we simply weren't ready for a permanent display of the collection. We didn't have space within this building. We rent this space so it was also an issue of money. I have been working on getting funding for the extension of the museum for 7 years now so that we would be able to have a permanent display. I feel that we've now become ready: we now have a collection of about 30,000 objects and we only show a tiny fraction of that number. So, bringing our collection out to our audience passed from being a regulatory requirement, to being something that we really want to do right now. There's also a practical reason why we want a permanent display and that is that we're closed for about 4-6 weeks between temporary exhibitions, which is the time that we need to dismantle and install exhibitions. That is even longer for more complex projects. That means more or less three months of no visitors, and therefore three months of no income. So, from a practical point of view, this is no longer viable. We need to be open all year around and be in line with the tourism policies of the city of Antwerp. It also needs to be observed that when you're working with tourism you must be able to communicate years in advance what your museum will show. With contemporary fashion, this is often impossible: if you asked designers whether they would be interested in doing an exhibition in 4-5 years' time, they simply wouldn't know what to answer. That has not to do with the fact that they might be busy – as you know, designers work on curating the exhibitions with our curatorial team – they just don't know whether their fashion house will still be working, whether they will have relocated somewhere else. So, a permanent display can help us with getting around these issues and communicate that besides our temporary exhibition, we also have something that is permanently on, which allows us and the touristic bodies to plan in advance. I must to say that for me the moment when I thought we were ready was when I realised that our digital collection was developed enough for us to include it in the permanent exhibition in order to strengthen our story-telling. We have amazing digital material, including film, photographs, interviews, fashion shows, that can help us create narrative and deliver it. The big challenge is how to make this connection work in a way that this material is not just something that is available on a touch screen for one user per time. I would like it to be something that expands the experience, and stimulates visitors.

AB: While we are on digitisation, when did you start digitising the collection? Was it before or after Europeana?

KD: We started before the Europeana project, but Europeana was a big boost. Before Europeana we had the Open Fashion Project. But it must be taken into account that technology has changed a lot since then. When we started the Open Fashion Project 4 MB was the highest resolution we could have, and it took one minute for the picture to open up on your screen. Now 4 MB for a picture is nothing. That keeps changing. Scanning too has changed a lot: we used to scan images here and the quality was low, and now we're able to work with companies that scan many images at the same time and at a high quality. All this change has taken place in 15 years. It's not an evolution, it's a revolution. But the next issue will be the implementation of a system or a structure to store all this digital material. So far, we have kept it in different folders on our server, which you can't browse. This is, of course, problematic and that our librarian is keeping on top of. We have recently started to work with two museums in Antwerp, the photography museum and the diamond & silver museum (DIVA), to develop a digital storage system that can store all our digital material, in a way that supports various formats, that can read CDs, DVDs, Bluerays, and that is ready to implement formats that are yet to be developed. This system should be able to allow us to add metadata and search the collections. The first aim would be to enable our teams to search the collection, but of course the final outcome is to open it to people with professional needs and the wider public.

AB. How is this system going to address the issue of copyright? If it's content is made available to public, is it going to be copy-right free?

KD: Yes and no. There' a digital institution that is helping us and that is also part-funding it. Their policy is to have everything on an open license, which is also our policy. But of course, we don't own copyright of all images and we are now in the process of closing deals with some photographers in order to convince them to allow us to use their images. We currently pay to use images in our catalogues and exhibitions, but if you put something online you must consider their potential to be used without limits, and it is important to clear rights in other to use such material for educational and public reason – not for commercial purposes. Some photographers are happy about this, some less so. But I think that we are witnessing with images the same shift that has already taken place with music: magazines no longer want to pay for images, bloggers just use images often without even thinking of copyright and sometimes without mentioning the photo credit. According to copyright law that would be theft and loss of income for the photographer. But it is happening all the time, and just like the music industry, I am sure new solutions will be developed. All I know is that, unfortunately, we cannot afford to pay for each image that we use at the official rates– it is just impossible. I want to pay, but we don't have that ability. There is also something else to be learnt from changing perspective on copyright in the domain of cultural heritage. The Rijksmuseum – and yes, most of their collection is copyright free because most of their authors have been dead for longer than 75 years, which is the time that is needed for images to be in the public domain – decided some years ago to put images of the entire collection online, on an open licence: you can also make commercial use of them, you can almost do whatever they want. In doing so, they noticed that the income they got from selling the images rose a lot. Because images are there to be used and re-used for different kind of purposes, people know that they exist, and those that need high resolution files end up getting in touch directly with the museum. This example goes to show that it's not because you put files online on an open license that you automatically lose all your income. Of course, working with images of living designers is more complicated than working with images of Rembrandt or Van Gogh. But still we already have a lot of images that we can use. But then as a museum you need to choose what is really important. Is it more important for the collection to be out there, inspiring people, stimulating them to learn, study, create, and discover or is it more relevant to gain from selling high resolution images of the collection?

AB: When you visit MoMu you realise very soon that there's been an emphasis on putting technology at the heart of what you do. I am thinking for example about the large touch screen wall just by the entrance. How did that project come about and what are you hoping it to become in the future?

KD: The touch wall was founded by Tourism Flanders for 60%. The matching 40% came from a variety of other bodies. In total, it costed about € 150,000. That is a budget that included the cost of both hardware and software, copyright, translations, and digitisation. It was a very good price for what it is – too good, in facts. It was made by Lab101, a local company, and I'd be very surprised and impressed if the made any money at all in the end. The original idea was something more conservative, aimed at addressing an issue that we have with the building: when you reach the museum, and you walk into its premises, you don't feel like you are in a museum at all. The exhibition space is upstairs on the first floor, while the ground floor is mostly an area of passage. You can appreciate the architecture of the building, but it might also happen that while you're looking for the exhibitions you might get lost – and feedback from visitors tells us that this has already happened too many times. So, I thought that there was a real necessity for something at the entrance with information on where to go. We thought of an installation with a few screens. We

opened a call for projects. A local product design studio called Dos Santos responded with the idea of the digital wall. That project was very different from what we have today – to begin with it was meant to go inside, rather than outside. I liked the idea as Dos Santos had proposed it: it wasn't what we had asked for, but the more I looked into it, the more it made sense. So, we thought that besides giving indications of where to go in the museum, the installation could become a tool to give people extra information, for example details about the collection. As the budget at the time was limited, we developed a project with still limited possibilities for engagement. That was when Kris Meeusen of Lab101, the developer, said to us: 'you have a Rolls-Royce, use it as a Rolls-Royce'. That means that the hardware allows us to do so much more than we're currently doing and to achieve a high level of interactivity. The plan is to start developing a new software for it. Now it's possible to 'like' images, but that's pretty much it. When I described what I wanted the wall to be I said that I wanted people to be able to find images they like and send them to your own email account or social media. I would like some game applications for children. I would like people to be able to make small donations to the museum (I was thinking of 1 Euro) in the most direct way, one or two taps on the touch screen, no more. We can already have videos on it, but I would like to add flexibility in relation to the size of window where you can watch the window. Now it's not that immediate: we can have videos as big as the wall, but this is still something that the developer needs to come and set up. There's still a lot to do. Technology also means development. What we raised with adding more technology and focusing more on the digital is that the whole museum requires a completely different organisation, everything should be connected to everything. For example, at the moment we don't have a collection database software which is connected to a storage system, and because of this, we need to add images manually to the wall. This is a very labour intensive task, when instead the process should be connected to the database so it can be faster. This would allow us to upload more and more content, and that is precisely the point of this technology, isn't it? If you display the same content for a year, then what is the point? It is conceived as a device where content is uploaded all the times, linked to exhibitions, present and past, but also well beyond them. One of the most important thing is to get the structural organisation of the museum right and make sure that the creation of the database is central to every activity of the museum. This is invisible work, which both our audiences, our users, and our government, our funder, have no clue exists. There is no guidebook for how to achieve this: there isn't a model museum that is already implementing all this. Of course, there are examples of good practice. For example, when talking about the wall, there is museum in the USA that has huge digital wall. It's much bigger than ours and it costed a lot more. It was a huge inspiration because it was this decorative arts museum with 50 exhibition spaces where you don't know where to begin from, so the wall at the entrance allowed you to select images, transfer them on an iPad, and then the iPad would create a tour for you to see those original artefacts in their displays. And it also allowed you to select somebody else's tour, and to follow that instead. This is in addition to the standard 'tours' made available by the museum. I thought that the possibility to offer a standard path, and then to deviate from it, is very inspiring.

AB: Would you say that enabling audiences to make their own way though the museum's content, either digitally or in the exhibition itself, is a step towards crowd-curatorship?

KD: Yes, and that's why I don't like audio-guides. I never use them in other museums as well. I think they destroy and remove all initiative and autonomy. I have a similar feeling towards textual information: it should be presented in a way that allows people to look at objects and react to them first. On the other hand, I also get very frustrated in museums with no textual information at all, and a lot of contemporary art museums do that, and I think that's very elitist because you cannot expect all visitors to be familiar with the entire body of work of that specific artist or with the historical context within which a specific artwork came to exist. You need to give some

background, always in the awareness that the background that is given by the curator is one among many others that are possible. To put it in practical terms: you should first be able to see a Margiela piece, to question it, and then to read to curator's interpretation. I think technology can help us coordinates these moments together as well. Of course, we curators are also museum goers and for me the exhibitions that I remember more clearly are those that were able to create an emotional impact. That's why I am always very happy when I meet people who have been to MoMu 8 years ago and are still able to tell me where they can give me detailed descriptions about what they have seen: this is not to be taken for granted in the age of accelerated visual culture. Creating an experience that stays with people, that inspires them and enriches them is very hard and is often down to how objects are displayed. I think that exhibitions where curators stuff rooms with lots of masterpieces can be overwhelming and end up having no emotional impact. I think Linda Loppa had a big impact on me: when we started, I had an academic background, she had a creative background, she was trained as a fashion designer and she taught me how to look at objects, and to trust your gut feeling, that this is also something to take seriously. That's also something that I am reminded of every single time I work with a designer.

AB: The wall allows you to browse part of the collection, learn about the museum, the city, the academy, through an intuitive interface people can look at images, read text, translate content in as much as 5 languages, express appreciation through an Instagram-like heart, most importantly they can discover and retrieve new content through a selection of tags. What does all this give you back as an institution?

KD: For us it's a means to bring our collection out in the world. Looking at the early years of Europeana and learning from that experience, we know that a collection database often remains something for professionals. Who is going to browse a collection database just for fun? And by analysing visitors' data on Europeana we have realised that general audiences don't browse the collection database. That's when curating comes in. Seeking to get more users, Europeana started to experiment with an Instagram page and with other kinds of curated content, and that worked. So, it comes down to how to curate the data you have. Tools like the digital wall help people browse in a user-friendly way. To browse a database requires pre-existing knowledge on what to browse: to put it simply, you can ask the browser to give you an answer if you know what the question is. We instead added search terms, tags, to the images, so that people can use them as an inspiration of what to look for. And that gives us information back on what people like. Of course, that requires a plan for how to use this information. I think we should work to produce different kinds of content for different groups. The wall is not something where people spend of long time – it follows the rhythm of social media, of a quick way of consuming images. On the other hand, we are a museum, which has a completely different rhythm from the one I've just described. I think technology allows us to bring real time into the museum, but the luxury that we offer, the museum time, is the possibility to spend as much time as you like in front of an object, giving time for reflection. So, everything that we do with the digital in mind needs to sit next to the museum experience. I am convinced of this – and we will have to do that to stay relevant. The other important thing that we do is producing books where we offer in depth research. However, the print-run of an exhibition catalogue is 3000-5000 books. 15.000 for very successful exhibitions. But how many read the catalogue from the first to the last page? If you look at the numbers of people you reach us through social media this is nothing. Numbers don't mean anything, I know that. But these are all ways of differentiating and addressing different typologies of audiences.

AB: We're getting close to the end of this interview. I've realised that throughout the interview we have mentioned your backgrounds, but we've not spoken about it much. How did you become the director of MoMu?

KD: My background is in Literature and Philosophy, with a focus on theatre studies – I studied at the University of Antwerp and then after my studies I worked for 3 and half years on a PhD in contemporary dance. But I soon found out that doing a PhD was so lonely. Also, I had to teach at the time and I realised that it wasn't my cup of tea. I was looking for a new job and I read on the newspaper that there was a position open at MoMu. As I always had an interest in fashion and had been reading some fashion theory for my studies, I applied for the post. I am not educated as a fashion historian and most of what I have learnt comes from making exhibitions. But I think that the tools I received from my education in literature helped me very much in studying fashion. When I joined the museum, Linda told me that she was looking for somebody with an academic background, but I soon learnt that making an exhibition requires not only that but also hands-on experience and the ability to trust your guts.

AB: Curator Maria Luisa Frisa said that, too. In 2008 article for Fashion Theory, Frisa stated that curating is a risky activity, requiring not only a critical eye but also instinct.

KD: Yes, I agree. And I would add that another difficulty in curating fashion is that when you see a dress in your archive, it is actually very difficult from the images of it on a model. On a catwalk show you see a dress on a body, in motion, with lighting creating a lot of drama. And then you put it on a mannequin and you think 'Oh my god, this is not at all what I saw'. With garments the difficulty is that you need to add something every time, and doing that requires creativity and a good eye. That is something you can only learn by doing and by doing mistakes. And curating an exhibition together with designers in the way that we do at MoMu means finding yourself always unprepared and requires curators to be open to doing things differently from what they have learnt in doing previous exhibitions. I am now working on an exhibition of Martin Margiela at Hermès, we're working with Martin and we're discussing a lot about how to display the garments. There are two difficulties. The first one is that the garments are very simple and pure and it's going to be all about materials. The second one is that he had very specific women in mind when designing the collection. He thought that the work he was making for Hermès could not be shown on young girls but rather for more mature women, which was also a fairer representation of Hermès buyers. So, the garments were shown of women who were 25-35-50-60. Our choice is somewhere between: we can show existing images or we can do something else. We want to do something else, but we don't know what that might be just yet. It's not going to be easy and we can't use previous curatorial examples.

In Conversation with *Maria Luisa Frisa*

(Independent Curator – Director of Studies in Fashion Design and Multimedia Arts at IUAV, University of Venice)

IUAV, Univeristy of Venice, Magazzino 7, Dorsoduro 1827, Venezia, Italy
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Alessandro Bucci (AB): In 'The Curator's Risk' you state that ten years ago being a contemporary art curator in Italy equalled to being a missionary. How did you become interested in exhibitions of fashion? To what extent has your background as a contemporary art critic and curator had an impact on your current practice?

Maria Luisa Frisa (MFL): There are aspects of my personality that have impacted greatly my practice as a fashion curator. To begin with, I was a restless teenager and a rebel young woman. My adolescence was characterized by episodes of antagonism with my family. I have had my first child at the age of 17, I didn't even complete college. At the time, I used to attend the famous 'Marco Polo' liceo classico – I married and I divorced almost immediately. I went to live in my family's countryside home in Tuscany and then, almost suddenly, I said to myself 'I can't continue living like this'. I moved to Florence, where I went back to school to gain some qualifications. I wanted to move to Bologna and study contemporary art at the university, as this was one of the rare institutions in Italy where it was on offer. But I was young mother and moving would have been too complicated. At the end, I decided to study History of Art in Florence where in the mid 70s the curriculum was based on the period between the renaissance and the nineteenth century. I was 25 years old when I started. I was an adult person: at that time one became adult much earlier than now. There were things that interested me, and despite the limitation of the course in relation to these interests, I picked a variety of courses that allowed me to explore some of them. I chose aesthetics, with Professor Ermanno Migliorini, History of Cinema, with Professor Pio Baldelli, and

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semiotics, with Egidio Mucci and Pier Luigi Tazzi. Bear in mind that this was fully the period of conceptual art, and that the Transvantguarde was at our door. The course I chose to attend were those that included debate over these movements. I loved that environment because, you know, more traditional history of art academic environments in Italy are often a bit stuffy, not masculine enough in my opinion. Carlo Bertocci told me at some point that *Flash Art*, the contemporary art magazine, was looking for Florence based writers. Something was beginning to happen at that time in Florence and Carlo asked me whether I would be interested in doing it. I told him that I had never written anything of the likes published by Flash Art. He told me to write some sample articles, and that he would have given me some feedback. Basically, he was telling me that he believed in me and that I had nothing to worry about. He called Giancarlo Politi – founder of Flash Art – and he said I could start writing for him. At that time things were that easy. He asked me to write a review of this art space with exhibitions of artists of the likes of Maurizio Nannucci. Bertocci was somebody that taught me a lot about writing about contemporary art. He taught me the right terminology and working with him was an invaluable experience. Naturally, I am talking about times in which drafts and documents were sent back and forth by mail; not even the fax existed yet. I sent him my review. Not too long after I sent it, Politi rang me at home and told me that it was very good that I should continue writing. This is basically how I entered the world of contemporary art as a critic. I soon became a point of reference for other contemporary art critics and artists, in Florence first, and then nationally due to various connections that I had established that year. This was the part of my life when I met Stefano Tonchi, who has c-curated many exhibitions with me and who now is Editor-in-Chief at *W Magazine*. He says that he used to enjoy reading the things I wrote and visiting the exhibitions I curated and rang me with the idea of founding a new magazine. This was to become 'Westuff'. He was based in Pistoia, he was younger than me, a handsome man full of energy and who used to organize events in various clubs. He loved fashion, he adored London and aimed to live in New York. And he wanted to do a magazine with me. Through Stefano I became part of Florence underground scene, its clubs, such as the Manila and the Tenax. There was a good vibe in Florence in those years. I had not met Professor Mario Lupano yet, I was in a relationship with somebody else, and it would be fair to say that my life was completely different back then. I then met Francesco Bonami, who was an artist at the time. A lot has been said about cross-overs and interdisciplinarity in the past decades: Florence already offered contexts to experiment the relationships between discourses that were never truly isolated. Florence had a vast theatre scene, an exciting music scene, and a vibrant art scene. Florence contained a world of people that wanted to get stuff done. We wanted to dress in a certain way. It was a very fun period for me. I then met Mario in Prato and I introduced him to Stefano. He joined our little team as an editor of design and architecture: Westuff was born. It was 1985. Westuff became a sort of apparatus – our magazine had to be the voice of this milieu. It had to be a seismograph of that flow that we so loved in Florence.

AB: How would you describe Westuff? Where did the idea come from and what was its vision?

MLF: Westuff originates from the idea of editing a magazine that we liked and which, in our opinion, did not exist in Italy. It had to be international, and for this reason it had to be written both in Italian and English. It also had to be a magazine that produced everything it published. Most of the editorials that we published were made *ad hoc;* very rarely we'd feature images that had been used elsewhere. The whole point was to have a tool that allowed us to express the way in which we saw things. Something that I and Mario did was also publishing things from the past – we were not after the new at all costs. Publishing an editorial about an artist from the 30s, such as Carlo Mollino, was not a problem for us. We were the first to make an editorial on Mollino's studio. When *Domus* published their editorial on it a while later they said they were the first, but that was an 'alternative fact'. That editorial is also a good example of the way in which we worked. Mario had been in

Turin and through various connections got this idea. All are choices were completely random. You could say that we had a snob attitude and we certainly couldn't be working like that today. Westuff only lasted ten issues and I always say that it was enough. I think that experiences as intense as that one are soon to be faced with a dilemma: either to become mainstream and start exploring more widely appealing subjects, or to last for a short time only. We were busy on other fronts, too. I was working on Pitti Trend, Stefano often had to travel to London. We were quite busy. It was while working for Pitti that I started to become interested in fashion – but still, I didn't think back then that it could become my job. I liked fashion already, I took care of the way I dressed, but I could not imagine that I'd become somebody that would deal with it on a daily basis. After Westuff Stefano started to work for L'Uomo Vogue as a stylist and that was the period when we saw each other the least as his job required him to travel often. Also, he was based in Milan, whist I stayed in Florence, where I started working for the Emporio Armani Magazine. It was then that I started looking at fashion from a critical perspective and brought that new point of view that I was developing to the Pitti Discovery Foundation.

AB: Let's talk a bit more about the Florence cultural scene. There was an underground scene that developed cultural discourses based on the cross-over between practices. But there also were some institutions, weren't there?

MLF: Palazzo Pitti was at the centre of this universe. Then came Pitti Immagine and the Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana, a non-for-profit organisation, that reinvests everything it earns. The dynamics between the different fairs organized by Pitti goes through a period of crisis in the 80. This is why Stefano, myself and Bruno Casini start thinking about Pitti Trend. It had to be an institution devoted to research. A turning point was when Marco Rivetti is appointed as president of Pitti. He changed everything for the organization. He hires Luigi Settembrini, who is a great communicator. They restyle the organisation and decide to bring prestige back to the fair. How did he do that? Through contemporary art. As the great collector that he is, this came naturally to him. So, on the one hand, he started commissioning installations for the Fortezza da Basso. On the other hand, he starts organizing catwalks again. All this is backed by Pitti, who also bore the financial burden of it. Along Giannino Malossi they organize Pitti's first exhibitions, which aim to reconstruct the mythology of Pitti and rebuild Florence within the fashion system.

AB: Do you remember the first exhibitions that were organised within this context?

MFL: To begin with, it's important to say that most exhibitions look at menswear and man's elegance. There was a true mandate to tailor projects around menswear. In Italy, as you know, when women fashion sector moved to Milan, the men sectors stayed in Florence. I believe strongly that menswear lends itself very interestingly to research. Early exhibitions were aimed at emphasizing the importance given in Florence to the culture of fashion. This often happened in an unaware manner, as it so often happens, certain things are understood only after they have been done. When Rivetti died, Luigi Settembrini decides that the culturisation of fashion needs to continue and that small exhibitions are not enough. This is how he started to think about the Biennale di Firenze. It was an extraordinary achievement. The problem with Biennale is that Luigi suffers of gigantism. He decides to occupy the whole city and to involve everything and everyone in the process. As you know, the first Biennale was a tremendous success, but what you probably don't know is that it was a financial black hole. It was total bankruptcy. Because of this the Biennale's second edition was a lot smaller, but most importantly, at that point the relationship between Settembrini and Pitti was fractured. There continued to be exhibitions with Malossi, who curated exhibitions like 'il motore della moda' [the engine of fashion], 'Volare: l'icona italiana nella cultura globale' ['Volare': Italian icons in global culture] and 'l'uomo oggetto' [material-man]. There was almost complete equivalence between the exhibitions and their catalogues. Giannino Malossi isn't a

curator – he has produced some ground-breaking research, but he's not an exhibition maker. I started curating exhibitions for Pitti Discovery soon after I joined. Pitti Discovery wasn't a foundation yet, but rather a very small gallery where I worked with the communication department. That's when Pitti Discovery begins to change yet again, but with a different sensibility. It wasn't Settembrini's grandeur, and it wasn't Malossi. It looked at what had happened in the 90s and it from inspiration from the independent scene. While I was working on the Emporio Armani Magazine, which I felt was a job that really suited my personality, Stefano approached me with another of his ideas: 'why don't do an exhibition of the concept of the uniform?' He thought it just weird that Pitti, an institution about menswear, had not done that yet. We spoke about it with Lapo Cianchi, Pitti's director of communication, and he agreed. Francesco Bonami also came on board as curator of the art section. *Uniforme: ordine e disordine* was my first exhibition for Pitti Discovery and my first exhibition that included fashion. More than the uniform itself, it looked at the theme of the uniform, at the meaning of standardization, and at a certain culture that dwells at the border between professionality and sexuality. I look back and it with a lot of fondness. The funniest part was when at the opening various kinds of military officers that I had been in touch with when researching for the exhibition came to the Leopolda station wearing their uniforms. In a first moment, there was some scepticism amongst them because of the subtitle of the exhibition, which was 'order and disorder' but in reality they were collaborative through the whole process. They understood perfectly what the exhibition was about.

AB: Why did you decide to exhibit fashion and contemporary art together?

MFL: Our idea was that these exhibitions had to function as apparatus to reflect on the concept of the uniform. We were interested in the fact that art and fashion co-exist within the same system, in a constant dialogue between them. The aim of most of the exhibitions I curate is to evoke an idea or a concept. This has very often very little to do with chronological historical exploration. It is more of a critical action. I never aim to narrate anything. For that exhibition, we wanted to consider the uniform certainly as a set of garments, but most importantly as a concept, a recurring theme, which can be associated with order and with disorder and antagonism at the same time.

AB: There are chronological exhibitions, but there are also other kinds of exhibitions and fashion curating abroad has transitioned from the first model to others, particularly since the 'curatorial turn' in museum praxis permeated fashion heritage institutions. Is it fair to say that Pitti Discovery's exhibition programme started instead from a fragmentary approach to curating fashion rather than a chronological one and that the critical perspective you apply when curating an exhibition, placing a hermeneutical emphasis on context rather than chronology, is something that comes from contemporary art?

MLF: Certainly, I was never interested on investigating the way in which people used to wear in a certain historical period. On the other hand, it is important to say that Italy lacks both the kind of historical awareness that comes from the study of fashion's past, and the theoretical awareness that comes from research in fashion studies. I often bump into freshly published newspaper articles that read like they were written several generations ago, without any critical perspective on fashion, and only talking about trivial concepts like 'the new'. I also never studied fashion history and theory, as the Italian academic system never offered anything remotely connected to it when I was a student in Florence. I owe my perspective to contemporary art. It taught me not to relate with the concept of 'beautiful', but rather to take the risk of critical interpretation. Obviously, the Italian lack of historical and theoretical awareness that I was talking about is the university system's fault. People that study fashion are rare and they are confined to departments were fashion is only a marginal interest. All the more, Italian fashion studies are often disconnected from the issues that are being considered in the industry, and the industry ignores the difference between those that do serious

research in fashion and the lowest quality fashion bloggers. For the Italian fashion industry and for the academia there is no difference between these profiles when talking about fashion. Sometimes our newspapers commission me to write 'something philosophical' on fashion. Obviously, philosophy has nothing to do with what I do and write. It's cultural studies and cultural critique. The problem is that these subjects are uncharted territory here and in Italy presenting fashion as being in the same universe as art makes things easier. Contemporary art and its methodologies have helped me develop an approach to presenting fashion that is sustainable in the Italian cultural context. I think that *Uniforme* with myself, Stefano Tonchi, and Francesco Bonami, all having backgrounds as critics and curators of contemporary art, displayed that very clearly. The result was an exhibition in which contemporary art and fashion had equal importance, but above all

AB: How did this reflect in the catalogue of the exhibition? I am also aware that 'catalogue' is probably not the term you prefer…

MLF: The 'catalogue' of the exhibition – let's call it 'catalogue' for now – shows that in my opinion. Andrew Bolton once told me that he really liked it and that he always keeps it on show on his table. More than a catalogue, it was a book not on the exhibition itself, but on the ideas at its grounds. We were never interested in publishing what is already in the exhibition. We used to as a tool to speak about the same concepts, yet in the language that characterizes the medium of the printed book. The exhibition allows to speak about a concept in a way that a book wouldn't and vice versa. It then became a sort of trend for other museums as well, but we have been doing it since *Uniforme*. Instead of photographing garments on a mannequin we decided to look at the way in which fashion has been published and advertised. We look at magazines for inspiration on how to edit the magazine and as you can see, these pages contain only images from magazines. This is something that Stefano and I used to do in our spare time: we would meet to scan through magazines, chat, and comment on images. This is something I really miss. We were interested in looking at fashion, not dress. This catalogue was made with a very small budget, it was designed by a graphic designer, but Stefano and I would have lots of inputs. Something that I think is interesting about this book are the texts. The texts were written by people that we enjoyed reading. As you know, fashion research in Italy was sporadic at the time, and in facts, the very small fashion academia wasn't a community. For example: Lorenzo Greco. I had read his texts about military identity and so I called his publisher to ask whether they would put us in touch. The same thing for Stefano Pistolini. I liked the flow of language in his texts. And Patrizia Calefato. I didn't know her but her books had been inspiring to me and so I got in touch with her. Besides these texts, some pages included comments. This is something that we did for later publications as well, for example *Total Living*. These comments correspond to different genres. Some are quotes, some are dictionary entries, some are meant to sound like dress history paragraphs. They are not footnotes, but they give information that would have not been included in the main text. Sometimes they were meant to clarify concepts, other times they were meant to fade the text with suggestion. Very often they were 'intrusions' into other fields, such as contemporary art history. These comments were related to the main text but there was no relation between them. I would say it was an hypertextual kind of writing. We aimed to imitate the process that takes place when you see an exhibition and your mind wanders from one thought to another. In doing so, the 'catalogue' becomes an 'atlas' and as such it is complimentary to the exhibition.

AB: Besides the impact of fashion representations, magazines, and contemporary art, were there other sources of inspirations from the field of the museology of fashion, especially in the experience of fashion exhibitions abroad?

MLF: Not in that moment. The great fashion exhibitions that were organized abroad had an impact of me only later on. In that early phase, I wasn't really looking at what was happening around me, which is a classic thing to do for a beginner. I also was surrounded by beginners – a term which I am using with no negative connotations – as my idea was to work with young architects, young graphic designers, young collaborators. Most importantly I wanted to work with people that didn't have much to do with fashion. The point was precisely that I didn't want to be influenced by the fashion world at that time. Nowadays my exhibitions are more focused on fashion than those I did for Pitti and still I work only with architects that do not work with fashion. This is a reason for disagreement and discussion between myself and Stefano. I think the reason is that I want to make exhibitions in a way in which nobody else does them: I always wanted my fashion exhibitions to be first and foremost exhibitions; exhibitions that contain fashion among other things.

AB: Let's compare *Uniforme* with more recent exhibitions of yours, for example *Diana Vreeland after Diana Vreeland* (which you co-curated with Judith Clark) and *Bellissima* (which you co-curated with Stefano Tonchi and Anna Mattirolo). How did experience impact your approach?

MLF: Surely there was a level of unawareness when I was working for *Uniform,* and I am sure I've lost that. Going back to the previous question, I can say that now I worry a lot about the fact that there are many, many fashion exhibitions around. The reason why I look at them now is the same reason why I didn't look at them at the times of *Uniforme:* I don't want to make just 'another' fashion exhibition. Something that hasn't changed is the fact that I want my curatorial projects to support an innovative way of looking at things and that I proceed truly randomly to find an approach. I work hard but I am a very messy person. I'm the opposite of systematic. Usually an idea comes to me while I am doing something else that has got nothing to do with the idea I just had. Because of this, I find myself doing many things at the same time. This has to do with what my understanding of a fashion exhibition is: for example, I can't simply do an exhibition on the golden years of Italian couture. It must have a clear angle of looking at couture. This is what I look for in retrospective exhibitions, too. Judith Clark and I co-curated an exhibition on Simonetta. I was interested in doing it because that was a moment in which in the present there was renewed interested in couture and I wanted to investigate when it came from by looking at the past. Coincidently, I attended a conference organized by Vittoria Caratozzolo in Rome and in that context, I started thinking that research on that topic needed to be supported by an exhibition. It wasn't a strategic move. It was pure desire to do something in a given moment. The other side of this coin is that I often abandon projects because I suddenly don't see them as being part of my present any longer. I consume things quickly. I can't even begin to imagine focusing on a single topic for my whole life, as somebody does. Maybe this is why I am so interested in the contemporary. It was like that for *Uniforme.* And it was certainly like that for *Total Living* (a book which never became an exhibition because it would have been too complex) which came from the idea to show that fashion is everywhere and that everything influences fashion. For me both fashion and an exhibition that contains it are ways to learn more about themes that I am interested in at a given moment in time. Ironically, despite the random approach to my job, this is something that I think will never change.

AB: Let's talk about *Bellissima.* It seems to me that this exhibition distances itself from the exhibitions you curate for Pitti Discovery, to align itself instead with the fashion exhibitions by museums in the UK and the US, both in its intent and in its displays. Is that a fair statement?

MLF: The idea of *Bellissima* came when I started to become closer to the Alta Roma scene – as you have realised by now I like such energetic contexts. Adriano Franchi had just become the Alta Roma's CEO and I approached him with the project of an exhibition defining the concept of alt aroma today. We organize a fashion photography exhibition dedicated to the photographer Pasquale De Antonis at the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica. The whole project didn't cost a lot of money. Following that experience, we began discussing an exhibition about the new Made in Italy, but we realised that in order to do that we first needed discuss properly the role of early Italian couturiers and put them to bed. The idea was to do an exhibition about them, all together, which had never been done before in Italy, that would open the road to an exhibition on emerging designers. The exhibition's name was ROMA AMOR. Of course, this exhibition had to cost a lot of money. At the same time, Giovanna Melandri becomes MAXXI's new president. After meeting Silvia Fendi and telling her that I had a project for an exhibition, she invited me to set the exhibition at MAXXI. I accepted but given the role of this museum in the national context I said her that the exhibition couldn't limit itself to exploring the work of Roman designers but that it had to open up to those from other cities as well. The aim became to tell about this wonderful season of high fashion in Italy, that is so important to our past but that is still so under-researched. At that point, we invited Stefano Tonchi to take part. The objective was to emphasize the Italy has multiple fashion 'capitals' and to investigate the connections between day couture and the prêt-à-porter industry. The 'catalogue' instead followed the example of *Uniforme*: it had to be a book that could exist independently from the exhibition. But it also had a function and a responsibility that *Uniforme* and *Excess* didn't have: to be an account of the history of Italian fashion. We included a 'dictionary of fashion' at the end, containing small stories and anecdotes. We included the great tailor's biographies and those of Italy's 'elegant women'. The main texts are written by established fashion researchers as well as emerging writers, PhD students from IUAV University of Venice, and other European universities. It is the catalogue of an exhibition. It is a fashion history book. It's a dictionary. It's an atlas. I think that while I had to adapt my approach to the necessity of reconstructing a historical narrative, that exhibition allowed me to fulfil my ambition to involve a lot of people in a project. I think it is important, especially in Italy and that it is what you must do when you want to create a system. In return, *Bellissima* gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of people and to become friend with a lot of people.

AB: What kind of projects do you think *Bellissima* has opened the road to?

MFL: I would like to continue working on the theme of reconstructing the history of Italian fashion. I am beginning to think about an exhibition which I'd like to title *Italiana* with Milan and Palazzo Reale as backdrops for this exhibition. I think that building the fabric of Italian fashion history is what we need to do right now in this country. In my opinion in Italy the approach to the past has been fragmentary thus far, but this doesn't mean that Italy is not capable of producing a comprehensive study of its dress history. The mistake was, in my opinion, that of thinking that haute couture was quintessentially French and that Italy in the 1950s aimed to copy that system. I think this mistake could be one of the reasons why fashion has often been seen as something that wasn't an authentic part of our cultural history. This is false, to say the least. Italian fashion has other qualities and it has contributed greatly to international fashion history, for example though the idea of day-time couture. In my next exhibition, I would like to show another side of the history we have already told through *Bellissima.* I would like to show that the richness of Italian fashion is, of course, determined by the creativity of Italian designers, but that there's a context – social, institutional, geographical, historical – that is unique and sophisticated and that has created the qualitative conditions for those designers to make fashion the way they did. Italy has many protagonists, but not all of them are people.

AB: So why do you think Italy in 2017 still lacks a museum of contemporary fashion (besides the Ferragamo and Gucci museums), despite the richness you describe? Why isn't public funding being used to create a public museum of fashion?

MLF: In Italy, there's always been a snobbish approach towards fashion. A contemporary fashion museum doesn't exist for the same reason why university courses teaching fashion history and theory have not existed until very recently. I think that this is a political problem, more than anything else. Politics has taken fashion for granted and has never had the awareness of the need to fund an institution devoted to preserving and exhibiting fashion. I am a big fan of Olivier Saillard, I attribute him many qualities and merits but I also know that, unlike me, Saillard has the backing of a whole country. Whenever I want to organise a fashion exhibition in Italy I really need to roll up my sleeves to make institutions understand that making a fashion exhibition is very far from making the scenography for a cocktail party, which is usually what they have in mind. I normally must start from scratch and from the very same conversations every time I deal with a new institution. Abroad there are museums that have team of fashion experts, that have a structure that is ready to welcome fashion exhibitions, that have a collection. Working under those circumstances must be much easier. Unfortunately, something like that has never been done in Italy. Perhaps for lightness, but also because fashion has never been given institutional importance. Fashion in Italy is still seen as produce rather than culture. This is the problem. Costume, instead, has a different status. The Galleria del Costume has managed to survive and grow because of this higher status. Another reason is that the Galleria del Costume benefits from being in Palazzo Pitti among other historical galleries.

AB: While we are talking about fashion education and the fact that courses where fashion is taught have also struggled in Italy, let me ask you about IUAV's fashion courses. Where does IUAV moda originate from and how did you inform its curriculum as its first director?

MLF: The project is the brainchild of professor Marco De Michelis, who funded it in collaboration with Treviso's Chamber of Commerce. In 2003, when he was the director at IUAV university of Venice of the school of design and art, he identified the need of a fashion design course in this region. Marco de Michelis is a Bauhaus expert, and the democratic school model that the movement was based on, that is a school where teachers and learners collaborate, has had an impact on his understanding on the role and structure of universities today. When he was working on the curriculum he called me. I thought he needed advice and an opinion but at some point, he looked at me and said: 'you don't seem to understand. I would like you to be the director of the fashion program at IUAV'. I accepted but for a while I kept thinking that I must have been crazy to do so. Before then I thought that teaching at university was not my inclination. Anyway, we started, we had a vast budget at the beginning. At the beginning, we were in Treviso. And I started travelling back to Venice more often. I'd come here twice or three times a week initially. At the beginning, I was very concerned that I couldn't keep up to academic standards, and I was also terrified by the idea of continuity and routine, but then I came to see this too as a curatorial job. The fact of choosing content, choosing people to come and teach here, organizing conferences and new courses. In Treviso, we also had a very large corridor within which we used to organize exhibitions. It truly became a way of creating a way of thinking around fashion and doing fashion. So, I would say that IUAV Fashion was useful for my growth as well, which, if you think about it, is in the spirit of the Bauhaus school.

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