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Contemporary Fashion Collections within Museums and the Role of the Conservator

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Textile
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Abstract

This project is an investigation into the current culture of collecting and exhibiting contemporary fashion within museums, how this has increased in recent years and the impact this has on the role of the conservator. A literature review reveals a number of key texts within fashion and dress history, but very little written within conservation. Eight interviews were carried out with museum curators and textile conservators from different UK institutions to highlight current attitudes and practices relating to contemporary collecting and the conservators response. A number of issues were highlighted from the study, including the importance of the retention of information through detailed documentation of tangible and intangible aspects of the objects provenance and mainly the issue of modern or unusual materials used for the designs. This includes the use of designer interviews drawing on similarities with the recent research conducted on artist interviews. In response to this, two case studies were carried out looking at the work of two young Scottish designers. Each study focussed on one piece of contemporary fashion with the aim of highlighting practical issues raised when documenting and analysing modern dress for collection within museums.

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PART ONE:

Introduction:

In recent years, the topic of contemporary fashion within museums has caught the attention of scholars and the media alike due to an explosion of high fashion exhibitions displaying current and archival pieces from top fashion designers.¹ The resulting popularity of these large displays has meant other smaller institutions are following suit and the trend is quickly spreading. Temporary fashion exhibitions are being replaced with increasing permanent collections, but does this change mean the role of the conservator within the museum will change?

A number of recent academic conferences on modern materials in twentieth century collections highlight the need to address the issue of deteriorating objects as early as possible. The research is at a point now where it is possible to start looking to the past to predict issues for the future.

This extension of the purpose of fashion garments beyond simply an item of clothing draws many parallels with textile art, therefore should strategies used in museums for caring for contemporary art be used for fashion collections? Can recent initiatives within the profession to collect information from artists to ensure the longevity of their design concepts be applied to fashion pieces? Does this need to be a collective way of thinking?

For this project, 'contemporary' can be attributed to fashion post 1980's. This is for conservation based reasons, in that there should be minimal damage to the object from deterioration at this stage, the objects will have been made during most visitors life times, and the fashion designer is likely to be alive and able to be interviewed. Contemporary and modern are also used interchangeably in this project, signifying current ideas and trends.

It is through this research project that I hope to acknowledge the significance of the rise in fashion exhibitions and permanent collecting and give a better understanding of the conservator's professional responsibility in respect to modern garments.

A thorough literature review followed by face-to-face interviews will give a good insight into the current trends within the profession. The research gathered will be used to form a critical discussion

¹ Rosemary Harden. "From Museum of Costume to Fashion Museum: the Case of the Fashion Museum in Bath." In *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014.) 139.

of two contemporary fashion case studies. This allows conservation related questions which would be asked in a real acquisition meeting for a museum, to be applied in a controlled manner.

The overall aims and objectives of this research project have been outlined below.

Project Aims and Objectives:

Aims:

- To outline the current trends in museums for contemporary fashion exhibitions and objects entering collections, focussing on UK institutions in order to create a more manageable and thorough body of research.
- To determine current policies for collecting and conserving contemporary fashion already in place.
- To define the conservator's role within the museum in relation to the care and display of contemporary fashion.
- To identify the nature of the working relationships between curators, conservators and designers in regard to professional responsibility and communication.
- To highlight issues related to the storage and display of contemporary costume and then identify current or potential strategies for long-term care.

Objectives:

- Discuss the current literature available on this topic, using a literature review of published and unpublished sources related to fashion within museums, including conservation articles, dress and textile sources, and online sources.
- Look at secondary sources on this subject, discussing the history of contemporary collecting and exhibiting within museums and...
- Collect primary research by carrying out face-to-face interviews with curators and conservators from different UK institutions housing costume collections. I hope to determine the current policies for collecting and conserving contemporary fashion already in place and also highlight particular issues related to the storage and display of these objects.

- Interview two current fashion designers, using a similar interview format developed for contemporary artists in several recent publications. From this information I will produce object records focussing on one piece of their work as case studies of contemporary costume to highlight relevant issues raised from these specific examples.

A literature review on related subjects will now follow.

PART ONE:

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction:

This review will discuss published and unpublished literature related to contemporary fashion collections within museums and the conservation of these objects. By conducting this review it is hoped to highlight areas for further research, thereby validating my chosen research topic. Fashion within museums and the different subject areas this encompasses are broad, however these have been tackled by dividing them into sub-headed sections.

This research project will be mainly looking at the role of the conservator, but in order to fully understand the context of contemporary objects it is important to look at the museum sector as a whole. Therefore this review will begin by broadly discussing general sources on the key UK costume and fashion institutes. The focus will then be dress and textile history looking at fashion in museums and the start of contemporary branded fashion exhibitions. Finally conservation based literature will be discussed. The significance of museum collecting policies on the role of the conservator was only revealed during later interviews with curators and as a result this review was revised to include it.

Although there are several leading international fashion institutions, this review will only focus on UK museums in order to have a manageable amount of research for the scope of this project. Also, the breadth of literature available on fashion collections published by cultural institutions means that only selected papers containing significant collections have been discussed here. As there is minimal conservation literature on contemporary collecting, the review will also look at closely related subjects, including modern materials and contemporary textile based art. Conservation literature detailing case studies of twentieth century fashion collecting will be analysed along with the issues that have arisen from the subsequent conservation of these objects. It is hoped these can be used to inform preventive measures for twenty-first century contemporary collecting.

1.2 Setting the Scene: UK Fashion Museums and Exhibitions

As is often the case, most well established museums produce illustrative publications for each exhibition or key area of their collections in the form of dress history books.² As a result, there are

² Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). 11.

many sources of predominantly image focussed exhibition catalogues for contemporary fashion. Unfortunately, listing all of those available is beyond the scope of this research project, but examples of UK texts relevant to this study include the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2013 *Gallery of Fashion* publication, which charts the collection from the last 400 years. Although there is limited description of the collection, it concludes with a chapter dedicated to contemporary fashion garments from 1990-2012.³ The Fashion Museum at Bath's current catalogue entitled *Fashion Museum Treasures*, features their twenty-first century 'Dress of the Year' acquisitions.⁴ An introduction to the chapter outlines trends within contemporary fashion design but also justifies the inclusion of fashion within the museum, acknowledging this change within the sector.

Modern Dress in Detail, a costume-based publication published in 1991, shows objects from the late 1980's featuring them alongside early twentieth century designs, showing that the focus on contemporary dress has been well established within the V & A.⁵ These catalogues are readily available to visitors and non-professionals, as are a number of newspaper articles reviewing fashion exhibitions. Some also explore the topic of contemporary fashion exhibitions at a more academic level.⁶ Museum websites are also an excellent source of accessible information on contemporary museum collections, featuring online object databases and publicly detailing recent acquisitions.⁷

Literature aimed at dress history professionals provides a wide source base for research and critical discussion of the rise of fashion displays within museums. This response to the increasing presence of modern fashion in museums begins with the first literature published in 1998 by Valerie Steele, leading dress historian and curator at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. She challenges criticism of fashion within museums in her article *A Museum of Fashion is more than a Clothes Bag*.⁸ She begins by outlining the importance of fashion theory and material culture methodologies for scholars, in order to ultimately justify this new phenomenon against disapproval from a number of art critics and journalists. A decade later, Steele revisits this topic and the controversy which surrounds it, but this time focussing on the origins and changes taking place at that time.

³ Claire Wilcox and Jenny Lister, *V&A Gallery of Fashion* (London: V&A Publishing, 2013).

⁴ Rosemary Harden, *Fashion Museum Treasures*, (London: Scala Art and Heritage, 2014).

⁵ Claire Wilcox and Valerie Mendes, *Modern Fashion in Detail* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991).

⁶ Suzy Menkes, "Gone Global: Fashion as Art", *The New York Times*, July 4, 2011, Online edition.

⁷ Manchester City Galleries, "Recent Acquisitions," <http://www.manchestergalleries.org/the-collections>, Accessed March 30, 2014.

⁸ Valerie Steele, "A Museum of Fashion is More Than a Clothes Bag," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2, no. 4 (1998): 327-335, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/136270498779476109>

Fiona Anderson's 2000 article, *Museums as Fashion Media* continues this theme by addressing the lack of published work on the subject in relation to the exponential growth of fashion exhibitions.⁹ Unlike Steele, she explores the economic and social catalysts for the changing attitudes within museums and the preconceptions of dress history that have led to criticism of contemporary dress display. Anderson analyses these changing practices through three case studies of the V & A, Judith Clark Costume Gallery and Hussein Chalayan exhibition at the Atlantis Gallery, London.

In *Establishing Dress History*, Lou Taylor critically examines the extended history of costume collections within museums since the 19th century until the present day.¹⁰ As well as a useful reference for dress history since the 16th century, Taylor also uses this as a gender study, linking culture, society and dress. It is a stand out publication, crosslinking museology and social history, which although not pertinent to this project, helps the reader to fully understand the varied contributing factors to the rising presence of costume and more recently fashion in museums.

In many recent publications there has been a greater focus on examining the historical rise of fashion in museums, either attributed to Diana Vreeland in 1973 or Cecil Beaton in 1971 with his exhibition *Fashion: an Anthology by Cecil Beaton*.¹¹ Amy de la Haye and Judith Clark cite this exhibition as a pivotal point in fashion history in their 2014 book, giving great detail and discussion to exhibitions post-1971 showing Cecil Beaton's influence on future exhibition styles. This book is an excellent source for detailed and pictorial fashion history but as with the other sources described here, it does not refer to conservation issues. In *Fashion and Museums*, the V & A's 1994 exhibition *Street style: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* has also been described as significant, encouraging other experimental fashion displays.¹²

The V&A as an early 'showcase for new products' has been used as a case study in several sources of literature on contemporary collections.¹³ Their own publication the V&A 'Conservation Journal',

⁹ Fiona Anderson, "Museums as Fashion Media," in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, 371-389 (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰ Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Clark, Judith and Amy De La Haye with Jeffrey Horsley. *Exhibiting Fashion : Before and After 1971*. London: Yale University Press, 2014.

¹² José Teunissen, "Understanding fashion Through the Museum," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 35 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Valerie Steele, "Museum Quality: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 12, no.1 (2008): 7-30, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/175174108X268127>

¹³ Susan Lambert, "Contemporary V&A," *V&A Conservation Journal* 34, (2000), www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-34/contemporary-v-and-a/

details new initiatives in the display of contemporary objects, including the 'Fashion in Motion' project.¹⁴

Most recently there have been a number of publications and conferences focussed solely on fashion curation. *Fashion in Museums* is an excellent reference on the subject from the 2011 Stockholm conference: 'Public Wardrobe: Rethinking Dress and Fashion in Museums.'

Marie Riegels Melchoir gives a concise overview of the history of fashion within museums, dividing the change in practice into three time periods.¹⁵ In the same publication, José Teunissen discusses previous key texts on the subject, giving an overview of the current exhibition style.¹⁶ He discusses the notion of 'avant garde' fashion design as a response to the entry of fashion in museums or galleries and the changing purpose of fashion from aesthetic to conceptual. Again, it is a theoretical study of the subject using case studies of significant exhibitions to illustrate current thinking.

Similarly, The Berg Fashion Encyclopaedia also provides valid discussion and details of the rise of fashion exhibitions written by leading fashion historians.¹⁷ Nadia Buick's 2012 doctoral thesis on fashion curation provides a useful critique of several points raised in this review, including the fashion as art debate and visitor's expectations of fashion garments that are culturally familiar as apposed to historic garments.¹⁸

The Dress and Textile Specialists (DATS) journal published annually, is aimed at a professional audience, taking the form of case studies by museum curators, including The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle and The Fashion Museum, Bath.¹⁹ These articles outline more practical issues within the developing museums, mainly upon display considerations and solutions.

1.3 Fashion as Art: Parallels with Contemporary Art

¹⁴ 'Fashion in Motion.' The Victoria & Albert Museum Channel. Podcast video.

http://www.vam.ac.uk/channel/happenings/fashion_in_motion/fashion_in_motion_craig_lawrence/

¹⁵ Marie Reigels Melchoir, "Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 1-18 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹⁶ José Teunissen, "Understanding Fashion Through the Museum," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 33-45 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹⁷ Jean L. Druessedow, "Dress and Fashion Exhibits," *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* 10, no.5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/BEWDF/EDch10042>

¹⁸ Nadia Buick, "Framing Fashion Curation: A Theoretical, Historical and Practical Perspective" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2012).

¹⁹ Joanna Hashagen, "Access and the New fashion and Textile Gallery, the Bowes Museum," *DATS Spring Journal*, (2008): 31-34; Rosemary, Harden, "From Museum of Costume to Fashion Museum: the Case of the Fashion Museum in Bath," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 127-138 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Since the end of the 1990's, as a response to the increase in contemporary fashion within museums and alongside the critical backlash that ensued, a number of journal papers have begun to discuss fashion and whether it can be defined and accepted as art.²⁰ This art history response runs parallel to the dress history analysis often interlinking themes.²¹

With a number of similarly titled articles, study in this area can overlap further, showing the high level of discussion. Crucial texts include Sung Bok Kim's 1998 in depth research paper examining the categorisation of fashion as art from an analysis of thirty-two separate exhibition reviews. Sanda Miller follows this up with her 2008 article of the same name, further discussing the crossover of the two disciplines and the context in which an art form can be defined.

Teunissen talks about definitions of fashion, tracing 'artistic expression of ideas and concepts' back much earlier to the 1960's and talks of 'avant garde fashion designers' without mention of garments displayed for social or aesthetic purposes.²² Conversely, John Potvin's recent article asks the question about the right of non-avant garde fashion to be displayed in an art gallery, centred around the *Giorgio Armani: A Retrospective* exhibition in 2000. He attributes negative press coverage as 'inhibiting the progress these exhibitions might make towards collective knowledge and meaningful cultural exchanges.'²³

Once again, the degree of public interest in this accessible subject is demonstrated through coverage in newspaper articles.²⁴ The concept of contemporary fashion being akin to contemporary art will be explored further in chapter five of this project.

²⁰ Sung Bok Kim, "Is Fashion Art?" *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 2, no.1 (1998): 51-71, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/136270498779754515>; Sanda Miller, "Fashion as Art: Is Fashion Art?," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 11, no.1 (2007): 25-40, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/136270407779934551>; Alice Mockrell, *The Impact of Art on Fashion and Fashion on Art* (London: Batsford, 2005).

²¹ Valerie Steele, "A Museum of Fashion is More Than a Clothes Bag," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 2, no.4 (1998):327-335, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/136270498779476109>

²² José Teunissen, "Understanding Fashion Through the Museum, in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Riegels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 44 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

²³ John Potvin, "Fashion and the Art Museum: When Giorgio Armani Went to the Guggenheim," *Journal of Cultural Studies* 1, no.1 (2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jcs.1.1.47_1

²⁴ Elizabeth McMeekin, "The Art of Haute Couture: Is Fashion Art?," *Herald Scotland*, 20 August, 2012, Online Edition, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts-ents/visual/the-art-of-haute-couture.1345428247>; Suzy Menkes, "Gone Global: Fashion as Art," *The New York Times*, July 4, 2011, Online Edition, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/05/fashion/is-fashion-really-museum-art.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&

In recent years there have been a number of publications highlighting conservation issues and solutions for the treatment of contemporary art, in a response to rapidly degrading synthetics and other unusual material choices.²⁵ Although there has been no literature discussing these solutions in the context of fashion pieces that are considered art, therefore it is one of the aims of this project to combine these areas of study.

1.4 Contemporary Collection Policies

The idea of the avant-garde or experimental fashion designer and the haute couture designer are explored in museology sources about collection policies.²⁶ Curatorial literature, although charting the cultural events that initiated the rise in contemporary exhibitions, do not investigate the practicalities of collecting modern objects that is of most use to conservators. Museology publications discuss general issues with collecting all mediums of contemporary objects including fashion and textiles. Although these are also aimed at curators, they raise several interesting curatorial considerations or limitations for collecting fashion and the variety of objects that may be brought in to the museum.²⁷

In addition, there is recognition of institutions replacing the title 'costume' with 'fashion' in their names or descriptions. This is in order to remain relevant and step away from 'obsolete' and 'retro' displays of costume.²⁸

The Collections and Collecting Policies of the Major British Costume Museums is an good comparative article showing past attitudes to collections and clearly stating the limitations of collecting during the 1980's.²⁹ Funding issues still affect most museums today, as described in museology sources, the reaction has been the financially lucrative fashion exhibitions that are proven to increase visitor

²⁵ Yvonne. R. Shashoua. *Conservation of Plastics*. Oxford: Elsevier Ltd, 2008.

²⁶ Krosten Toftegaard, "Collecting Practice: Designmuseum Danmark," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Riegels Melchior and Birgitta Svensson, 139-151 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

²⁷ Owain Rhys. *Contemporary Collecting: Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh: MuseumEtc Ltd, 2011

²⁸ Marco Pecorari, "Collecting fashion," *Fashion Project*, December 11, 2009, Online Edition, <http://www.fashionprojects.org/?p=652>

²⁹ S.D. Chapman and Donald King, "The Collections and Collecting Policies of the Major British Costume Museums," *Textile History* 15, no.2 (1985): 146-170, <http://www.maneyonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/004049684793690290?queryID=50%2F532754>

numbers and a 'change or die' attitude.³⁰ More recent texts reiterate this policy for selective purchasing as it continues at the V&A.³¹

1.5 Modern Materials within Museum Collections

It is at this point that the literature becomes more conservation focused, both written by conservators or conservation scientists and featured in conservation publications. In *Plastics-Why Not?*, Susan Lambert critically discusses collecting plastics that are potentially problematic and the prejudice against their acquisition, which she describes as more attitudinal than fuelled by conservation concerns. As curator at the Museum of Design in Plastics, Dorset, she discusses the importance of collecting contemporary objects for their cultural significance and not allowing the material to influence the curator's judgement.³²

In general, literature on the study of synthetics within museums has come as a response to twentieth century collecting, with the earliest texts predating the theoretical study of contemporary dress within museums.³³ This is due to historical synthetics and semi-synthetics starting to deteriorate within collections. Therefore a number of textile conservation case studies exist detailing treatment decisions for failing rubbers and plastics.³⁴ Key texts include the post prints of *The Future of the 20th Century* edited by Cordelia Rogerson and Paul Garside, and *Plastics: Looking at the Future and Learning from the Past*, edited by Brenda Keneghan and Louise Egan.³⁵ These publications include case studies on the most problematic areas of modern materials in collections, including in particular contemporary artwork. Keneghan also writes in the *V&A Conservation Journal* suggesting

³⁰ Graham Black, *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2012), 5.

³¹ The Victoria and Albert Museum, "Collecting the Twentieth Century," http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-collecting-the_new.html. (Accessed June 23 2014)

³² Susan Lambert, "Plastics - Why Not? A Perspective from the Museum of Design in Plastics," in *Extreme Collecting*, ed. by Graeme Were and J.C.H. King, 168-180 (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

³³ S.H. Zeronian, "Preservation Problems Related to Synthetic Fibres," in *Conservation and Restoration of Textiles at the International Conference* (Milan: C.I.S.S.T, 1980); Sharon Blank, "An Introduction to Plastics and Rubbers in Collections," in *Studies in Conservation* 35, no.2 (1990): 53-63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1506193>

³⁴ Tímár-Balázs, Ágnes and Dinah Eastop. "Case Study of Mary Quant Raincoat." In *Chemical Principles of Textile Conservation*, p139. Oxford: Elsevier, 2011.

³⁵ Cordelia Rogerson and Paul Garside, *The Future of The 20th Century: Collecting, Interpreting and Conserving Modern Materials* (London: Archetype Publications, 2006); Brenda Keneghan and Louise Egan, *Plastics: Looking at the Future and Learning from the Past* (London Archetype, 2008).

‘a proactive strategy’ for dealing with plastics before they deteriorate fully.³⁶ She provides a long-term strategy for future materials, looking at the wider contributing factors that could be adapted to prevent potential issues occurring, and is one of the only sources to do so. In *Conservation of Plastics* by Yvonne Shashoua, similar strategies for the future care of plastic objects are described within the field of conservation but looking widely at art school education and professional information interfaces.³⁷ This publication is a fully encompassing reference for the conservation of plastics, including the chemistry of deterioration and historical case studies on mostly twentieth century objects. *Plastics: Collecting and Conserving* is another easily accessible source for understanding the degradation process of plastics, but concentrates mainly on the well known problematic materials and their prevention.³⁸

Over the last decade, The V&A is leading the way with material analysis in the UK, with their exploration into the science of synthetics and the subsequent translation into modern object care. Collaborations between research centres have provided well-publicised research and raised awareness of plastics within collections, including the testing of modern materials implemented by research focussed institutions, including the V&A and Textile Conservation Centre.³⁹

Theories on the future of modern collections were summarised well by Jonathan Ashley-Smith in his 2000 article, described the issues which will befall all synthetic objects. Although heavily focused on digital technology, much of his reasoning can also be translated to modern textiles.⁴⁰

1.6 Contemporary Fashion Conservation Case Studies

There have been very limited publications on the conservation of contemporary fashion, when defined as post 1980’s. However, the following sources are on more recently collected objects, and the issues which have been revealed.

³⁶ Brenda Keneghan, “Developing a Strategy for Dealing with Plastics in the Collections of the V&A,” in *V&A Conservation Journal* 61 (2013), www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/spring-2013-issue-61/developing-a-strategy-for-dealing-with-plastics-in-the-collections-of-the-v-and-a/

³⁷ Yvonne. R Shashoua, *Conservation of Plastics* (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd, 2008).

³⁸ Anita Quye and Colin Williamson, *Plastics: Collecting and Conserving* (Edinburgh: NMS Publishing, 1999).

³⁹ Capucine Korenburg, “How Fast Do Polyester Fabrics Age in the Museum Environment?,” *The V&A Conservation Journal* 44, (2003), <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-44/how-fast-do-polyester-fabrics-age-in-the-museum-environment/>; Sarah E. Braddock and Marie O’ Mahoney, *Techno Textiles: Revolutionary Fabrics for Fashion and Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

⁴⁰ Jonathan Ashley-Smith, “Twenty-First Century Conservation,” *V&A Conservation Journal* 34, (2000), www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-34/twenty-first-century-conservation/

The V&A is once again one of the forerunners in this type of research. In *Taking a Risk: Collecting for the Future*, current thinking at the museum is explored regarding the preservation of the vast amount of plastic objects or components in their textile collection.⁴¹ The issues with plastic in the V&A collection were only officially recognised in 2003, but since a major survey was conducted are now closely monitored for signs of deterioration. Objects post 1990's are discussed in the article as already showing serious signs of degradation, as well as potential acquisition issues. The article also addresses the need to collect additional information about the object's context, including interviews with designers, manufacturing methods or digital archive. Ultimately, concluding that although these objects pose an almost immediate risk of degradation, it is within the museum's collection policy to acquire new and innovative designs that are often made from unstable synthetics.

The blog following preparations for *Wedding Dresses 1775-2014* gives an interesting insight into the working practices of the museum. Images and details of designers aiding the display of their designs are brief but show the level of their involvement.⁴² Other innovative methods of sharing the work of the curatorial and conservation teams include the V&A channel showing the *Fashion in Motion* initiative and podcast interviews with fashion designers showing the close link with the fashion world.⁴³

A particularly pertinent article, by Susana de Sá et al. focuses on polyurethane garments and questions of authenticity in considering replicas within deteriorating contemporary fashion collections.⁴⁴ As with the V&A case studies, polyurethane objects manufactured only ten to twenty years ago are already showing significant degradation and are predicted to be complete losses within the museum collection soon. The main points again, emphasis the importance of thorough documentation of objects that may degrade rapidly.

⁴¹ Sue Prichard and Suzanne Smith, "Taking a Risk: Collecting For the Future," in *Plastics: Looking at the Future and Learning from the Past*, ed. Brenda Keneghan and Louise Egan, 132-137 (London, Archetype, 2008).

⁴² Susanna Cordner, "Here Comes the Bride," *The Victoria and Albert Museum Blog*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/here-come-brides/blog-entry>

⁴³ Glenn Adamson, Curating Contemporary Fashion, Podcast Audio, V&A Podcast, 1:8, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/v-and-a-podcast-curating-contemporary-fashion/>; The Victoria and Albert Channel, *Fashion in Motion*, Podcast Video, http://www.vam.ac.uk/channel/happenings/fashion_in_motion/fashion_in_motion_craig_lawrence/

⁴⁴ Susana de Sá, Joana Ferreira, Ana Ramos, Barbara Coutinho and Rita Macedo, "How to Keep What Was Intended to be Temporarily Functional? Reflections on Decision Making for the Conservation of Polyurethane Ready-to-Wear Fashion," in *Authenticity and Replication: the "Real Thing" in Art and Conservation, The International Conference 2012*, ed. by Rebecca Gordon, Erma Hermens and Frances Lennard, (London: Archetype Publications, 2014).

1.7 Conclusion

There is extensive literature available documenting the relatively recent rise of fashion exhibitions in museums and the curatorial responses to negative media criticism. Alongside dress history publications on collection policies and related issues of accessioning contemporary objects, these can be useful sources for conservators to fully understand the increase in modern fashion items entering collections and curatorial concerns or incentives.

In contrast, there is a lack of corresponding conservation based articles on modern fashion collecting, which link the common curatorial themes together in the context of fashion items made of modern materials entering a museum. The few articles featured in this review including Susana de Sá et al and the V&A publications show valuable forward thinking based on issues already seen in rapidly degrading twentieth century and even twenty-first century synthetic objects. The need for more published research into modern plastics, preventive measures and thorough methods of documentation, will inform the next stages of this project.

Chapter 2: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter will provide a brief overview of certain aspects of contemporary fashion collecting and exhibiting, including the origins of fashion exhibitions, their recent popularity with visitors and museum directors, and the current climate within the framework of dress history. Understanding the context of contemporary fashion garments, their significance within the museum and the range of styles available, can help inform conservation approaches to contemporary fashion treatment.

2.2 The Beginnings:

Currently within museums, 'fashion is exploding in popularity', but what has led to this sudden increase in high profile contemporary displays?⁴⁵ It is in fact a relatively new concept, having risen steadily over the last thirty years in a bid to break away from traditional costume displays and now firmly taking hold within cultural institutions.⁴⁶

To many fashion historians, the emergence of what we now understand to be contemporary fashion exhibitions can either be attributed to Diana Vreeland or Cecil Beaton during the 1970's. Diana Vreeland was a twentieth century socialite, fashion icon and magazine editor, who in 1973 implemented a revolutionary style of fashion exhibit while working as a special consultant at The Costume Institute, New York.⁴⁷ These exhibitions were 'highly staged and imaginative shows' representing the style of the time.⁴⁸ Although at the time and since, the shows were criticised for their 'commercialism and historical inaccuracy' the seed of change has been firmly planted.⁴⁹ In 1983, Vreeland again stirred up the museum world by hosting the first solo exhibition of a living designer, the Yves Saint Laurent retrospective, which again received much criticism and praise.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Marie Reigels melchoir, "Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 9 (London, Bloomsbury, 2014)

⁴⁶ Amy de la Haye, "Dress and Fashion in the Context of the Museum," *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* 10, no.5.

⁴⁷ Nadia Buck, "Framing Fashion Curation: A Theoretical, Historical and Practical Perspective" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2012)

⁴⁸ Marie Reigels Melchoir, "Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 8 (London, Bloomsbury, 2014)

⁴⁹ Valerie Steele, "Museum Quality: the Rise of the Exhibition," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 12, no.1 (2008): 4. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/175174108X268127>

⁵⁰ Steele, 2008. 7-30.

Nearly a decade earlier, Doris Langley Moore had already established The Costume Museum at Bath and begun collecting the contemporary 'Dress of the Year' which has continued since 1963 to the present day.⁵¹

To other historians, this founding accomplishment can be assigned to Cecil Beaton, fashion photographer and special consultant at The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. In 1971, his exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton* was the inspiration for a new style of costume exhibition.⁵² The image to the left (fig.1) shows Beaton's new style of contemporary fashion display photographed in 1971, which is theatrical and dynamic in its appearance and would not look out of place in a museum today.

Figure 1: Photograph of Cecil Beaton's 1971 pivotal exhibition: *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton*. The V&A, London.

A number of high profile exhibitions followed, with venues becoming more unusual and controversial, such as the Giorgio Armani exhibition at the Guggenheim, New York in 2000, sparking wide debate about the legitimacy of fashion within art galleries.⁵³ Although highly popular with visitors, these contemporary branded shows have been criticised by journalists and art historians based on the opinion of the 'low status of fashion within academia'.⁵⁴ This debate continues today, but the popularity and accessibility of contemporary fashion displays for visitors has a strong financial and reputational incentive to continue their presence.

⁵¹ The Fashion Museum, "Explore the Collection,"

http://www.museumofcostume.co.uk/explore_the_collection.aspx, (Accessed March 30, 2014).

⁵² Judith Clark and Amy De La Haye with Jeffrey Horsley. *Exhibiting Fashion : Before and After 1971*. London: Yale University Press, 2014.

⁵³ Fiona Anderson, "Museums as Fashion Media," in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. by Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, 375 (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁵⁴ Marie Reigels melchoir, "Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, 8 (London, Bloomsbury, 2014)

2.3 Key Fashion Collections in the UK

In 2014, the main UK institutions currently featuring costume collections with contemporary fashion are listed below:

- The Victoria and Albert Museum, London.⁵⁵
- The Fashion Museum, Bath.⁵⁶
- Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, Manchester City Galleries.⁵⁷
- The Bowes Museum, Bernard Castle.⁵⁸
- National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh.⁵⁹
- Ulster Museum, Northern Ireland.⁶⁰
- The Fashion and Textile Museum, London.⁶¹

These museums are deemed to be significant due to academic literature published on their collections and the fashion focussed publicity promoted on their websites.

Figure 2: *Dress of the Year 2013* at The Fashion Museum, Bath.

www.museumofcostume.co.uk

⁵⁵ The Victoria and Albert Museum, "Collections," <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>, (Accessed March 30, 2014).

⁵⁶ The Fashion Museum, "Explore the Collection," http://www.museumofcostume.co.uk/explore_the_collection.aspx, (Accessed March 30, 2014).

⁵⁷ Manchester City Galleries, "The Collections," <http://www.manchestergalleries.org/the-collections>, (Accessed March 30, 2014).

⁵⁸ The Bowes Museum, <http://www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk/>, (Accessed March 30, 2014).

⁵⁹ Glasgow Museums, "Collections," <http://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/>

⁶⁰ Ulster Museum, "Collections," <http://www.nmni.com/um/Collections>

⁶¹ The Fashion and Textile Museum. "About The Fashion and Textile Museum" <http://ftmlondon.org/about-us/>. Accessed March 30, 2014.

2.4 The Current Trend:

Since the success of 'mega-museums' such as the V&A following their ground breaking fashion exhibitions, other smaller museums have begun to implement similar ideas. Museums dedicated solely to fashion have sprung up in the UK as the cultural status of fashion increases and its success continues.⁶² This includes The Fashion and Textile Museum in London, founded by Zandra Rhodes in 2003.⁶³ Exhibiting contemporary fashion, especially from top fashion designers, has been proved to be mutually beneficial to both the designers and the host museum. Collecting and exhibiting contemporary fashion, 'valorises the work' of the designer while in turn bringing in new visitors, especially young fashion students.⁶⁴ This comes at a time when museums are acting more like businesses as government funding wanes.

However, many smaller museums aspire to the 'quality and breadth' of the V&A collections but do not have the resources to put into place the long term collection strategies to house potentially problematic contemporary objects.⁶⁵ One way in which this has been countered is to exhibit objects on loan from designers and other museum collections. A recent observation made by the author during a trip to The Fashion and Textile Museum, London, was that all the objects in the exhibition on Mexican dress were credited as on loan, removing the need for permanent storage or conservators.⁶⁶

In recent years there has been an increase in academic conferences on the subject of fashion history and fashion museology, stepping away from dress history. For example, the 2011 conference in Stockholm: "Public Wardrobe: Rethinking Dress and Fashion in Museums."⁶⁷

⁶³ The Fashion and Textile Museum. "About The Fashion and Textile Museum" <http://ftmlondon.org/about-us/>. Accessed March 30, 2014.

⁶⁴ Bruce Altshuler, *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, (Woodstock: Princeto University Press, 2005), 2.

⁶⁵ Marie Reigels Melchoir , 2014. 4

⁶⁶ The Fashion and Textile Museum, "About the Fashion and Textile Museum," <http://ftmlondon.org/about-us/> (Accessed March 30, 2014).

⁶⁷ Marie Reigels Melchoir . "Introduction: Understanding Fashion and Dress Museology," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Marie Reigels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-18.

2.5 Definitions of Contemporary Fashion

The term 'contemporary fashion' has several definitions that encompass different styles of design. Since conducting the literature review it is clear that the range of design styles can have direct correlation on the type of object received into a museum and the ensuing conservation treatment required.

The two main types of contemporary fashion design most relevant to this study are avant garde and haute couture. Avant garde being experimental artistic dress blurring the lines between fashion and art, or haute couture being the more traditional handmade high quality tailored garment.⁶⁸

The issues of everyday, mass produced manufactured dress is another aspect to consider but is not within the scope of this project. Neither is clothing which artists create to illustrate an idea. Instead hand crafted, one-off garments will be the main focus and clothing designed as clothing by those who predominately describe themselves as designers, not artists.

Avant garde design has been more easily accepted into art galleries by critics, as it closer resembles conceptual artists sculptural work. 'Fashion merged with art and art overlapped with fashion, so that it was no longer possible to distinguish which belonged where.'⁶⁹ However, by its experimental nature it could be more likely to have used unusual and untested products that are not fit for commercial distribution.

Designers which could be considered as contemporary avant garde designers are Hussein Chayalan and Iris van Herpen who push the boundaries of wearable dress with highly conceptual designs.

Haute couture fashion design is created for different reasons, as it fits into the notion of 'the fashion system', which consists of the production, distribution, and consumption of garments.⁷⁰ As such, Haute couture is more likely to be made from stable materials and be fully manufactured.

Both types of dress have issues surrounding the retention of information while it is still readily available. The 'fashion system' is based around 'identity' and 'change' so by collecting design

⁶⁸ Sung Bok Kim, "Is Fashion Art?" *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 2, no.1 (1998): 51-71, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/136270498779754515>; Sanda Miller, "Fashion as Art: Is Fashion Art?" *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 11, no.1 (2007): 25-40, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.2752/136270407779934551>; Alice Mockrell, *The Impact of Art on Fashion and Fashion on Art* (London: Batsford, 2005).

⁶⁹ Florence Muller, *Art and Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 15.

⁷⁰ Marie Riegels Melchoir and Birgitta Svensson, *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3.

drawings or information about social change, otherwise 'dresses with no provenance...are partly detached from the fashion system.'⁷¹ This highlights the importance of collecting intangible information surrounding the object whenever possible.

2.6 Collecting the Contemporary

When contemporary fashion pieces are acquired for permanent collections, it is important to consider the collection policy of the museum as this will inform the types of object being collected and therefore what will ultimately end up in the conservation studio. As with contemporary art and sculpture, the range of materials and construction methods can vary dramatically, from simple wearable objects to more complex designs, for example, designs by conceptual designer Iris van Herpen.

Innovative fashion designer Alexander Wang has created heat sensitive clothing in cutting edge fashion, which has received extensive media attention to be considered an iconic piece of the future. Therefore it may be an ideal piece to collect, but what would be the conservation considerations when it is not known how these objects will react in the long term? These issues will be addressed further in the next two chapters.

2.7 Conclusion

It is clear from the academic texts and general discussion on the subject of fashion within museums that this is a highly topical subject in the twenty-first century. The cross over within some areas of fashion and art, and the increasing presence of these objects entering museum collections mean that the subject of contemporary fashion is a vast subject that has only been briefly touched upon in this chapter.

The next chapter is an analysis of interviews carried out with current curators and conservators to ascertain the current policies, professional opinions on fashion within museums, and practical issues related to objects within such a wide criterion entering the permanent collection.

⁷¹ Bruce Altshuler, *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Woodstock: Princetown University Press, 2005).

Chapter 3: Museum Professionals: Interview Analysis

3.1 Introduction

In order to build upon the literature review carried out on the study of contemporary fashion within museums and related subjects, additional primary research in the form of face-to-face interviews was conducted. The main aim was to assess the current process of contemporary collecting within a select number of UK institutions, which would in turn inform the fashion case studies detailed in the final chapter of this project.

3.2 Aims and Objectives of the Interviews

The aims of these interviews are:

2. To record the experiences of curators and conservators when working with contemporary fashion items within UK museums and highlight conservation issues they may have encountered.
3. To assess the current collection policies of these museums and how this may influence the types of objects entering the museum.
4. To define the working relationship between curator, conservator and designer when displaying or treating contemporary collecting.
5. To ascertain where professional responsibility lies regarding the long term care of contemporary costume.
6. To develop guidelines for a conservation strategy regarding collecting contemporary fashion.

These aims will be fulfilled by:

- Conducting face-to-face recorded interviews with conservators and curators.
- Drawing upon the experiences of the participants as examples.
- Recording the professional opinions of the interviewees on collecting fashion.

3.3 Method

Face to face interviews were established as the most effective method of qualitative data collection for this project. In order to collect professional opinions and specific information on different

aspects of contemporary collecting, interviews allow for extended discussion using open questions and enabling answers to be clarified. This is in comparison to questionnaires with closed questions, which only allow for short answers.

Curators and conservators from museums with known costume collections, as listed in chapter 2, were approached via e-mail requesting their participation in this study. The positive responses led to interviews being conducted with four curators of costume including one written response, as well as four textile conservators including one further written response, as shown in Table 1 & 2 below.

The original objective was to conduct face-to-face interviews with all participants, however two interviewees were only able to commit to a written response. Although difficult to compare to the interview responses in some instances, it was felt that gathering the information in any medium was more beneficial than not collecting it at all.

The extent of the contemporary fashion objects currently held by each museum vary, allowing for a comparison between more established fashion museum collections and those less developed.

Table 1: Group 1: Curatorial Participants for Qualitative Research.

<i>Curators:</i>	<i>Location:</i>	<i>Title:</i>	<i>Face to face Interview:</i>	<i>Written Response:</i>
Georgina Ripley	National Museums Scotland	Curator of Modern and Contemporary Fashion and Textiles	Yes	-
Rebecca Quinton	Glasgow Museums	Curator of European Costume and Textiles	Yes	-
Joanna Hashagen	The Bowes Museum	Curator of Fashion and Textiles	Yes	-
Miles Lambert	Manchester City Galleries	Curator: The Gallery of Costume.	-	Yes

Table 2: Group 2: Textile Conservation Participants for Qualitative Research.

<i>Conservator:</i>	<i>Location:</i>	<i>Title:</i>	<i>Face to Face Interview:</i>	<i>Written Response:</i>
Lynn McClean and Miriam McLeod	National Museums Scotland	Principle Conservator: Paper and Textiles Textile Conservator	Yes- (Joint interview conducted)	-
Maggie Dobbie	Glasgow Museums	Textile Conservator	Yes	-
Roisin Morris	The Victoria and Albert Museum	Senior Textile Conservator	-	Yes
Janie Lightfoot	Janie Lightfoot Ltd. Private Conservation Studio	Textile Conservator	Yes	-

The interviews were carried out throughout June and July 2014. The author visited the interviewees respective places of work and the recorded interviews were conducted on site.

Questions were formulated separately for each group based on the main areas of interest highlighted from the literature review carried out. These areas include, but are not limited to:

- Current or recent activity within the museum regarding contemporary fashion.
- Current policies for collecting or exhibiting contemporary fashion,
- Opinions on the museum as a platform for fashion exhibitions,
- The involvement of fashion designers in the display and storage of their work, and the extent of information gathered for documentation when entering the museum collection,
- The extent to which the designer's original intent is considered when displaying or storing objects.
- A comparison of contemporary and historical fashion storage and display,
- If assessments are carried out by a conservator for all objects entering the collection,
- The priority given to contemporary objects within the conservation studio.

- The preventive conservation measures already in place for contemporary fashion garments,
- The properties of contemporary fashion that pose the greatest risk to their own long term care.

The interviews were not rigidly structured, but instead questions were asked as appropriate to the flow of the discussion and ensuring all points had been covered. Once finalised, the list of questions was sent to each interviewee ahead of the meeting. Consent forms for the use of this data in the final project were fully explained at the beginning of the interview and signed before proceeding. See Appendices C, D & E for full lists of the questions asked of each group.

The completed interviews have been stored as secure sound files and will be used solely as a reference to this project. Due to the number of interviews conducted, the files have not been transcribed but quotes have been extracted and included in following discussion.

3.4 Discussion

The responses given by the interviewees will now be analysed in a critical comparison. The discussion has been divided into subheadings to focus the responses on the most important aspects, as previously listed.

3.4.a Collection Policies and Limitations:

All the museums involved in this study have established historical costume collections, however the interviews have revealed that some are currently in the process of increasing their permanent collections of contemporary fashion. It was a particularly insightful time to talk to the curators and conservators who are in the process of adjusting their working practices to accommodate this new collecting policy.

The Bowes Museum has had a relatively passive collecting policy up until recently but the museum directors are currently requesting that the presence of fashion within the costume galleries is increased through the acquisition of 'big name' contemporary pieces.⁷² The galleries already have a regular biannual programme of temporary fashion exhibitions held alongside their permanent costume display. The popularity of these exhibitions can be clearly seen in the increased visitor numbers for displays, such as *Vivienne Westwood: Shoes*, which saw record numbers of visitors attending, especially young fashion students.⁷³ However, these temporary exhibitions are becoming

⁷² Joanna Hashagen, interviewed by the author, July 2014.

⁷³ Hashagen, Joanna. "Access and the New Fashion and Textile Gallery, The Bowes Museum." *DATS Spring Journal*: (2008): 31-34

increasingly expensive to host, with the cost of loaning the objects, providing travel and accommodation for couriers and other expenses, as Joanna Hashagen, Curator of Fashion and Textiles at The Bowes Museum explained.

It was also felt that there can be an 'over-expectation of contemporary exhibitions' even in smaller museums because the larger institutions are putting on highly elaborate shows, e.g. Jean Paul Gautier currently on at The Barbican or Alexander McQueen at the V&A later this year. This is not always feasible for a small museum and must be considered when exhibiting.

Institutions like the V&A have a reputation for attracting designers to them because of their well-established reputation. Miles Lambert explained how at Platt Hall they purchase nearly all their garments and that the V&A 'had a near monopoly' on getting garments direct from the designer.

The source of the objects could have a direct link to the amount of information available, access to the designer and the condition in which the object arrives at the museum. Kerry Taylor auctions was mentioned by all the curators interviewed; this auction house based in London works closely with a number of museums purchasing objects. Objects can be tried on prior to the auction, which reveals a great deal about the attitude of the public to modern fashion.

Another limitation of contemporary costume collecting is that big name designers tend to be much more in demand, and therefore have an increased cost compared to historical costume as there is a broader appeal and demand when the pieces are auctioned.

In order to be effective and most beneficial to the museum the collection policy must be able to surpass the changes in museum staff to work long term, otherwise it can create inconsistencies within the collection. This is a consideration currently in progress at The Bowes Museum.⁷⁴ It has also been an issue at Glasgow Museums where active collecting ended in the 1990's, and there are now gaps in the collection.⁷⁵

Georgina Ripley, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Fashion and Textiles at NMS, outlines the current collecting policy for the new costume gallery planned for the museum in Edinburgh.

Presently, there is very little costume on display in the museum but with the closure of The Costume Museum at Shambellie House, the collection will be re-displayed alongside the rest of the collection. There has also been the creation of a new curatorial department 'Art and Design' which includes

⁷⁴ Joanna Hashagen, interviewed by the author, July 2014.

⁷⁵ Rebecca Quinton, interviewed by the author, July 2014.

costume. She is currently purchasing contemporary fashion garments for a new *Cutting Edge* section of the display, showcasing innovative technology and design since the 1980's.⁷⁶

Miles Lambert also describes the 'considerable push' there has been at Manchester City Galleries to acquire contemporary couture for the collections over the last ten years.⁷⁷ Manchester has had an active collecting policy for the last ten years, so as with The V&A their contemporary collection has been growing rapidly for some time.

The sources of obtaining contemporary costume were similar in all cases, ranging from passive collecting relying on donations, active purchasing or gifts direct from the designer.

Glasgow Museums currently exercises a passive collecting policy in most areas of costume, although the current focus has been contemporary sportswear for inclusion in displays at *The Riverside Transport Museum*. Rebecca Quinton, Curator of European Dress and Textiles describes the very selective modern textile policy currently in place, comprising of local designers and sportswear to relate to the excitement of the 2014 Commonwealth Games held in Glasgow.⁷⁸

When interviewing curators it was clear that the reasoning for collecting contemporary fashion directly influenced the types of objects entering the collections and the types of conservation issues that may arise. It was also evident that it was a collaborative process with the curators and conservators working closely with each other to make decisions on new acquisitions.

3.4.b Working with Fashion Designers:

It was agreed that the ideal is to have the designer involved with the treatment or display of his or her own work. However, most often there has been minimal discussion in person. Maggie Dobbie and Roisin Morris both explained that when the designer has been in discussion with the conservator it has mainly been during the display process.⁷⁹ The Scottish fashion designer Jilly Blackwood worked with Maggie Dobbie briefly to mount a contemporary piper costumes from 2010. The only contact was for mounting the display and aiding the dressing of the garments. Miles Lambert, backed this up by stating that designers often wanted 'artistic involvement but no financial.'

⁷⁶ Georgina Ripley, interviewed by the author, June 2014.

⁷⁷ Miles Lambert, e-mail correspondence with author, July 2014.

⁷⁸ Rebecca Quinton, Interviewed by the author, July 2014.

⁷⁹ Roisin Morris, e-mail correspondence with the author, June 2014.

Documentation:

Overall, both curators and conservators agree on the need to record designers 'inspirations and intentions'.⁸⁰ Obtaining information directly from the designer to include in the object documentation is ideal but not always possible due to time constraints and designers not being available to speak to. However, it is a great way to gather intangible information about the piece while it is currently available, to be kept as part of its documentation. This is particularly important for objects that may deteriorate relatively rapidly as their physical properties gradually change over time and it may be unclear how they were originally, e.g. movement, stretch, structure.

Rebecca Quinton, collected similar data from the manufacturers or catalogues of sportswear within the collection. However, she observed that obtaining details of materials from manufacturers was a time consuming process and not always possible.

The need to record the complete look of the outfit, including accessories, as imagined by the designer is integral to the object. Most objects enter the museum as a single object, if there is the opportunity to see the full outfit, it can help historical interpretation of the dress.

Janie Lightfoot described the lack of information provided to her when taking museum objects as it could inform the conservation treatment. There was also a lack of dialogue with the curators.

Collating information and the provenance of the object is considered the role of the curator at NMS and Glasgow Museums. The conservator's role is the condition of the materials and construction.

In Georgina Ripley's experience, when purchasing directly from auction houses, information on the provenance of the object was supplied as part of their buying incentive. Photography was considered the most accurate way to capture information and create an archive.

3.4.c Conservation Requirements:

Assessment:

It is the case that all objects either entering the permanent collection or when going on display, are assessed by a conservator. However, at the V&A, this is in general in line with their policy to 'consider each costume individually' regardless of if it is historical or contemporary.⁸¹ Glasgow Museums has a similar policy.

⁸⁰ Joanna Hashagen interviewed by the author, July 2014.

⁸¹ Roisin Morris, 2014.

Materials:

At The Bowes there was a hesitation regarding collecting garments made from synthetic materials (plastics) as it is known that earlier 20th Century objects are causing issues within collections as they begin to deteriorate. If key pieces from a designer were deemed to be made from unsuitable materials then they would not be collected, which may come under criticism but there is only guaranteed to be conservation staff at the museum for the next three years and the objects need to be cared for long term.

At NMS, Lynn McLean and Miriam McLeod expressed that they would not advise against any object for acquisition based upon the materials it was made from. Rebecca Quinton also reiterated this.

The main conservation concern raised is the long term care of modern materials or 'incompatible mixed media.'⁸² In general, the unknown life span of the materials has not been a reason to reject potential objects from the collection but acquiring them does mean a long-term conservation strategy has to be devised for their care. This can include careful environmental monitoring, isolation of potentially volatile materials, development of custom-made storage and detailed documentation of the current features.

Miles Lambert specified that some object have unusual construction techniques, e.g. 'short term catwalk techniques such as use of glue instead of stitching when last minute.'

Storage:

At The Bowes Museum, an increase in contemporary fashion could encourage students to visit for study, however this would require staff to be available to supervise viewings. This would need to be considered in the acquisition or storage of objects, access to objects is becoming more important to museums. Other storage would need to be considered, either hanging or boxed. All the museums have limited space.

Otherwise, most interviewees listed equipment to use, including acid free tissue, controlled environment, and isolation. The issue of space and object stability can mean not knowing what may be acquired. At NMS storing on a figure on a custom made form to hold shape.

⁸² Janie Lightfoot, Interviewed by the author, June 2014.

Display:

Joanna Hashagen felt there is an 'over-expectation' when it comes to the display of contemporary fashion which is not always feasible for smaller museums to compete with.⁸³

At Glasgow the concern was the open display of objects, NMS felt that modern dress is disproportionate and requires elongated 'very slim hipped' mannequins. The aim is to avoid the 'association with the catwalk' when using lifelike mannequins, according to Georgina Ripley.

As the only private textile conservator interviewed, Janie Lightfoot revealed the expectations of private clients when treating contemporary fashion. Miriam McLoid also felt there is a different attitude towards historical and contemporary objects; there is a certain 'status' that historical objects have. This requires educating museum staff as well as visitors to ensure the correct handling of objects is observed.

Although there may be less interventive treatment required on modern garments, in the experience of the conservator, Maggie Dobbie, this does not necessarily mean that less time will be spent on mounting, modern garments can require 'creative mounting' solutions for their unusual shapes or more elaborate demands from curators because they have stronger materials to work with. Curator's may also ask for a more dynamic mounting style, which they perhaps wouldn't ask for if it was a historical object. Visitors are also more likely to touch contemporary dress than historic if on open display, which they have found at NMS.

3.5 Conclusion

The implementation and increase in collecting contemporary costume for permanent collections shows that in the case of these museums the popularity of modern fashion displays has been recognised.

In reality, the process of acquiring contemporary fashion items requires the collaboration of curators and conservators to gather the information at the time and put into place the correct preventive care. It has been seen that curators are generally responsible for selecting new acquisitions based on the collection policy of the museum, gathering data and corresponding with fashion designers. It is

⁸³ Joanna Hashagen, Interviewed by the author, July 2014.

the role of the textile conservator to focus on the practical object focused aspects of each object, including the material considerations, display/dressing of mounts and mannequins, and storage solutions. Now these museums are beginning to acquire more unusual objects with unknown long term issues it will require a crossover of these responsibilities to ensure the most suitable treatments are given to the objects.

The issue of collecting contemporary fashion cannot be assessed from a purely conservation perspective, it is essential to understand all the factors effecting decisions which ultimately end with the conservator treating an object.

For smaller museums, looking to follow larger museums like the V&A, the requirement for extra storage space, monitoring, potential research of unknown materials, may limit the types of objects able to be collected. Working with curators and conservators to deem the most manageable objects appropriate for the collection policy and working within the confines of what is available and affordable, there is a change from passive to active collecting.

Another main issue of collecting contemporary fashion is the 'unknown', unlike historical garments which are usually made from a select few materials and have fairly standard silhouettes; modern fashion can be made from a very wide range of materials and take any form. This requires curators and conservators to be highly adaptable concerning display methods and storage solutions. However, it cannot be disputed that contemporary fashion is extremely popular with visitors and those that would not usually visit historical collections. Record high visitor numbers and media coverage confirms this. From the museum professionals interviewed, there is certainly a push for contemporary fashion to be exhibited from museum directors, which does have repercussions for curators and conservators, but may be necessary in order to remain relevant and keep up with other leading fashion museums.

Collecting of object even though they may deteriorate can provide future research and understanding of these materials, something is to be gained from greater knowledge of these modern materials for the contemporary fashion collections of the future.

Chapter 4: Designer Case Studies

4.1 Introduction:

Conservation is an object focussed profession, therefore it is only fitting that this report will conclude by applying the research already conducted onto a real or in this case a hypothetical situation where the objects are assessed by a conservator. This part of the report will focus on two object based case studies, looking at one fashion garment from each of two practising fashion designers, then discussing the issues and considerations required for such items should they enter a museum collection in their current condition.

Both designers were interviewed face to face, following templates devised in relation to the care of contemporary art, in order to gather information vital to the preservation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of the garments, which will inform conservation treatment carried out. The template for these designer interviews has been selected and adapted from recent publications on artists interviews, including '*The Artist Interview*' and '*Modern Art: Who Cares?*'.⁸⁴

The recent scholarly interest in the importance of recording detailed documentation from living artists, whose work is part of a museum collection, has prompted several highly useful references for conservators and curators of contemporary fine art. There are clear parallels between conservation issues raised by contemporary art and contemporary fashion, of which there has also been recent discussion, as highlighted in chapter 2 of this thesis. For example, issues of materials used and construction techniques are particularly relevant to both disciplines, as is the designer or artist's intention.

The object selected for each case study was viewed and discussed with the designer as the main focus of the questioning, in addition to more general investigation into the designers creative style and background information. In response to this, a conservation object report has been created for each piece, including object description, photography and recommendations for future care. The sections of this report, the interview responses and the subsequent issues raised will be the main focus of the discussion in this chapter.

⁸⁴ Hummelen, Ijsbrand. "The Decision Making Model, for the Conservation and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art." In *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, edited by Ijsbrand Hummelen and Dionne Sillé, 164-172. London: Archetype, 2005.

These designers were approached to participate in this study because their work showed innovative and unusual materials or methods of production. Although not all modern fashion pieces entering museum collections will display such extreme examples of potential issues, these pieces were selected because they have a number of interesting aspects to discuss as well as being high quality examples of twenty-first century design.

4.2 The Designer Interview

The interview layout was reduced and adapted from existing questions created for contemporary artists to aid the documentation and conservation of their work within the museum or gallery setting. Many aspects of the artist interview can be used for the same purpose when talking to contemporary designers, indeed the aim of compiling these case studies is to demonstrate the advantage of doing so, in the context of more detailed documentation.

The structure for the artist interview as described in detail in *'The Artist Interview'*. The publication states explicitly the practical guidelines for carrying out the interview and the most important aspects to focus the questions upon. It also gives useful practical advice on conducting the interview for museum professionals who are not familiar with collecting oral history. Some questions were deemed irrelevant and in order to make the interview concise and compact were omitted.

The artist interview or at the least research into the artist's work has been deemed vital 'in choosing informed non-invasive treatments that are not influenced merely by personal interpretation.'

As the previous chapter highlighted, the main focus of conservators in relation to contemporary fashion collecting is highly object focussed. As a result, the main care considerations for conservators are the materials used and construction techniques employed. Although from this research, it was apparent that the intangible data collection was generally felt to be the responsibility of the curator, it has been included in these case studies in order to give a well-rounded view of the objects and demonstrate the aspects that should be included in the report. Also it may not be the case that curators are responsible in all museums, in some institutions or smaller museums it may fall to the conservator to gather contemporary data about the object.

4.3 Documentation

Documentation templates for contemporary works, which are an expanded form of commonly used conservation reports, require a number of other aspects to be addressed. For this project I have used the traditional layout for conservation reports as taught at The Centre for Textile Conservation and those seen universally in conservation departments throughout the UK.

'Modern Art: Who Cares?' Goes to great lengths to give examples and details of new registration models to record information related to modern and contemporary art that was also used to form the interview questions for the designers. The Victoria and Albert Museum Conservation Journal have also released details of their methodology in formed documentation for contemporary objects.⁸⁵

The questions asked for this study followed the simple structure of the artist interview, while being based upon the artist's documentation. Beginning with opening questions designed as an introduction to the interview, then a broad discussion about the designer or artists work, while gradually honing the interview onto the chosen object. The meaning behind the work was not heavily dwelt upon, instead the focus was the physical aspects of the clothing.

4.4 Case Study 1: Heather Archibald

4.4.1 Introduction to the designer

Heather Archibald is a 2012 Edinburgh College of Art fashion design graduate, and is currently working from her 'Analys: Art and Fashion Studio' based in Glasgow. Archibald's creative process for her clothing collections involves thorough pre-collection research and experimental work, creating conceptual art work prior to her final fashion pieces, which have been exhibited alongside each other to inspire a responsive collection. Her highly conceptual and innovative work blurs the boundaries between art and fashion, although she categorises herself as neither artist nor designer but a combination of both.⁸⁶ She produces 'visual art in a fashion context', hence the studio name encompassing both disciplines and being described as a fashion label.

Archibald likes to present her work in neutral spaces to move away from the traditional catwalk event. Therefore the interpretation of the collection falls to the audience about whether it is art or fashion, but it is always centred on the human form. Furthermore, she is careful about the use of the words 'show' and 'showcasing' as there are preconceptions about fashion and catwalks, so she uses words such as 'an event'. An event attended by the author was a pre-collection performance to inform Archibald's next collection, which has the theme of movement on the human form, focussing on distortions and contortions of the human body. The event included audience participation and interaction with the collection, using photography to capture dynamics of the performance piece. See images at the end of this chapter for the case study object details.

4.4.2 Focus on the object

⁸⁵ 'Contemporary Art of Documentation.' *Conservation Journal*. 2011. 59. www.vam.ac.uk

⁸⁶ Heather Archibald, interviewed by the author, June 2014.

The primary focus of this case study is a piece taken from Archibald's undergraduate final year collection in which the theme centred around the dynamics of clothing in water. Prior to producing the work, Archibald captured photographic images of fabric underwater, hiring out a swimming pool to capture the movement of models under the water and producing an exhibition as a response. From the images taken she was able to create a series of sculptural relief panels capturing the movement of fabric in water and then from this the final clothing collection.

The object is an oversized t-shirt, which is simplistic in shape but complex in construction technique. Casting clear epoxy resin onto a habotai silk base has created the structure of the t-shirt. When tacky the sheet is manipulated in the desired form over a mannequin. Seams are fingers pressed together using the tacky resin to adhere to itself, then reinforced with stitching. When dry the resin is no longer tacky and becomes stiff. Varying sizes of glass bead weights have been added to the resin at the shoulder points. Their significance is to recreate the weighting of the water on fabric. See image below for detail. The resin creates a 'snapshot' of the movement of water when 'fabric clings to the body.'⁸⁷

Potential conservation issues raised by the materials used:

Epoxy resin has been used for the whole object. The hardened shell of the resin set into a silk base and the stiff nature of the resin could mean that incorrect handling could cause fractures and cracks in the objects surface. The relatively weak fibre structure of the silk means that over time it too would crack and the object would become structurally unsound. The interaction and chemical bonds between the silk fibre surface and the resin are untested in this case, further information regarding the ratio used. Academic publications for industrial manufacture have looked into silk as a reinforcement agent for epoxy resins, although traditional materials are more likely to be glass or flax. In the studies, silk was proved to not to be as strong as other materials in its rigidity, making it unsuitable to industrial purposes. Also a careful balance between flexibility, ease of application and adhesion to the silk fibres was deemed vital to prevent deterioration. The woven structure was however proved to be stronger than separate fibres. The process of casting the fabric using a liquid resin bed then allowing a dry time of twenty-four hours is the same process as the designers.

In the case of the resin object the materials have been produced as part of an experimental fashion collection, therefore the conditions of construction and the resulting process of deterioration is difficult to predict.

Potential conservation issues raised by the construction techniques:

⁸⁷ Heather Archibald, Interviewed by the author, June 2014.

The seams are tacked together during the drying process of the object, which could be a possible area of damage during handling.

The inflexibility of the resin formed in its three dimensional nature would require custom made storage facilities, with the object padded or supported in its correct form and adequate space left around it.

As mentioned above, the meaning of the fashion pieces are held in a neutral, non-fashion suggestive setting, therefore in this case the style of mannequin and surroundings could directly affect the artists intended outcome for the piece. This would need to be considered when displaying such conceptual work. However, in response to questions about the display of her work stated that she felt her 'work could be adequately displayed in a static museum exhibition. Archibald expressed her interest in seeing how museum staff would interpret her work without her creative input.

The production of accompanying art pieces which have informed the collection, mean that it seems imperative to include details of these in the object documentation. Discussion with the designer also helped to highlight how integral to the design process the creation of these preceding artworks are, how each stage informs the next concluding with the final clothing collection. Therefore, for display purposes it may help to enhance visitor understanding of the piece to have evidence of the full design process shown, or at the very least to include photographs and details in the object documentation so that this integral process is not lost to time. As a stand alone piece, although an interesting and sculptural object, the artists intent adds a deeper meaning to the piece, allowing the viewer to fully engage with the display.

4.4.3 Conclusion

The analysis of this object leads to the conclusion that it would create significant conservation issues should it enter a museum collection. The size and inflexibility of the shape would mean a large storage space would be required to accommodate the object with custom made form to support the inside.

This object could be a potential acquisition for a number of reasons due to an example of young local Scottish designers, or housed in an art gallery collection due to its conceptual design. The potential deterioration of the epoxy resin is unknown, and may need to be isolated, which a large storage container would provide. The known hardening and cracking of the object as described by the designer would mean that after a certain time it would be unable to be manipulated for display.

Is it only possible for large museums to take on such objects because they can afford to manage their upkeep and potential disposal in the future? If early twentieth century objects were not collected we would have lost valuable information about design and culture at that time. It is a shame to reject potentially significant objects because their physical future is unknown but museums do need to carefully consider whether there is the long-term care available to firstly document and then prolong the life of objects that will deteriorate within our lifetimes.

One answer may be to limit the number of problematic objects entering the collection, or there may only be the documentation remaining as an archival record of an object which once was there and has since deteriorated. The potential loss of objects makes collecting information even more vital at the point of entry in the museum collection, because if the object changes and deteriorates then there is no record of their original form. If the answer is to not permanently collect objects so the responsibility is never with the museum, then the tragedy is that these objects are never collected or recorded under museum standards at all and an interesting part of fashion history could be forgotten.

4.5 Case Study 2: Natalie Adamson-Wain

Natalie Adamson-Wain is a 2013 Royal College of Art (RCA) masters graduate. Prior to studying at the college she has had an impressive career teaching textile design methods in art colleges, including Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot Watt University.⁸⁸ She has also worked for and sold her work to top name fashion houses producing textile designs, as well as producing her own commercial fashion and accessory range available in select boutiques. With her return to studying she has developed a conceptual and experimental direction with her work, producing a distinct mixed media collection. This masters collection prompted her to be nominated as Scottish Graduate of the Year at The Scottish Fashion Awards 2013.

4.5.1 Focus on the object

Concept: The object under discussion in this case study is a strapless A-line dress from Adamson-Wain's RCA masters collection. The inspiration behind these designs lies in the architectural landscape of the designer's hometown of Edinburgh shown in the surface decoration and structure of the garments. As a trained textile designer as apposed to a fashion designer, Adamson-Wain has kept her designs simplistic in shape, instead choosing to focus on surface decoration and texture

⁸⁸ Natalie Adamson-Wain, Interviewed by the author, July 2014.

combinations. A visit to The Edinburgh Blind School first sparked her interest in creating highly tactile textiles and this collection has seen a continuation of this theme. The collection features an unconventional combination of materials, including laser cut wood veneer, tufted wool, silk chiffon, knitted cashmere and heat set polyurethane (PU) film. See images at the end of the chapter for details of this collection.

The grey cashmere dress selected for further discussion as mentioned previously, is A-line in structure with a supporting elasticated band above the bust and decorative detail around the lower third of the front and back skirt panels. The decoration comprises of laser cut walnut and birch wood veneer overlaid with polyurethane heat set film; there is also a small amount of screen-printed glitter gel captured beneath the film.

The PU film and wood veneer have been laser cut to the designer's specification using equipment located at the RCA. The wood veneer is solely adhered to the dress by being sandwiched between the cashmere and PU film using a heat plate. Adamson-Wain describes the experimental process that this technique required, as the recommended guidelines for heat setting the PU film initially burnt the surface of the cashmere leaving brown scorched areas. After further testing a temperature was found of 140 degrees at 40 seconds, which heat set the film onto the cashmere without burning the surface. The stiffness of the PU film once adhered to the cashmere helps to create a voluminous shape to the skirt, giving it the dual purpose of surface decoration and structure.

The materials were chosen by the designer and have been selected for their high end luxury materials of cashmere and high quality wood veneer.

Construction is of high significance in this piece as the designs were created based on shapes, structures and decorative features found within architecture. When discussing her work, Adamson-Wain spoke animatedly about the structure created by the polyurethane film. When treating this object it should be a primary focus to maintain the original drape and trapezium shape of the skirt.

Sponsorship of her final collection has meant that many aspects of the designs have been commercially manufactured for her work, including the tuft work by Turnberry Rugworks and the finely knitted cashmere by Peter Scott Knitwear. These machine made areas will have a more uniformed finish, which will potentially resist deterioration for longer than some handmade objects.

By talking to the designer who has experience working within the commercial fashion and textile industry it was of note that she discussed the commercial manufacturing aspects of her work. When producing designs that will be purchased by clients there is a certain standard of manufacturing

which must be achieved in order to produce work of a quality that will stand up to wear. These can be categorised as ready to wear collections or some haute couture pieces.

However, more experimental collections, like the two discussed in this project have been hand made by the designers and feature experimental techniques. However, designs such as these may be of more significance than mass produced items, depending on the collection policy of the museum and the designer in question.

Some aspects of the dress feature less highly in the designer's vision, as the metallic elasticated waistband was not the original look for the garment. The designer seemed displeased with the outcome of this part of the design, as it was a quick solution to complete the dress when faced with the deadline. This information is also informative for conservation treatments; it could be replaced if it has deteriorated badly so it no longer performs its function in the future. Instead of the hesitancy and decision to do nothing which accompanies the unknown intentions of a designer. It creates more options.

The organic materials on the object do not hold many new issues for conservators however the combination of organic and non-organic materials mean they may need to be treated differently.

One particular issue which may affect this object is the use of polyurethane film. A number of publications have featured issues surrounding PU mainly as foam, as it is one of the key plastics that are causing problems within museum collections as it begins to rapidly degrade.⁸⁹ There is little written about the films even though polyurethane has been used for fashion construction since its first production in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹⁰

The combination of stretchy wool and solid film means they have begun to separate already. The fibrous surface of the wool yarns make strong adhesion difficult with this technique, with the main problem areas located near the wood veneer sections.

The high temperature heat setting of the PU film has already caused damage to the object, in several areas the cashmere yarns have been degraded causing small areas of loss to appear and scorched areas around the PU film. As revealed through the interviews with museum professionals, the

⁸⁹ Coles, Fran. "Challenge of Materials? A New Approach to Collecting Modern Materials at the Science Museum London." In *Plastics: Looking at the Future and Learning from the Past* edited by Brenda Keneghan and Louise Egan, 125-131. London: Archetype, 2008.

⁹⁰ Wet look in 1960's furniture design In *The Future of the 20th Century: Collecting, Interpreting and Conserving Modern Materials*, Ed. Cordelia Rogerson and Paul Garside. London: Archetype Publications: 2006. P128.

general conservation approach is to treat contemporary garments as historical garments would be treated and the knitted cashmere can be treated this way.

By fully understanding the construction techniques of fashion garments, the patterns of degradation are explained and may be seen as the object ages within the collection.

4.6 Object Record:

The object records produced for these case studies and designer interviews will highlight the areas that may be vital to the future care of these garments and offer an example of how it fits within general object documentation. Either for deterioration

Each museum or conservation studio has their own methods and templates for documenting objects, but the underlying areas of interest shown in this study can be transferred when working with any contemporary garment. Conceptual objects need detailed descriptions of the materials used and construction methods in order to inform future treatments.

4.7 Conclusion:

By conducting these two case studies, it is clear that contemporary fashion needs a significantly different approach than historical costume and can take inspiration from literature on the conservation of modern art. The two pieces described here are different in their design approach and would require adaptable display and storage methods.

It is important to gain information like the brand names of products used and construction methods, in order to have a deeper understanding to try and capture essence of the piece. However, interviews can be time consuming and there are the limitations of not being able to talk to the designer.

After conducting these interviews, it is clear that museum professionals cannot expect designers to adapt their work for more long lasting materials, as they are often integral to their design. A greater understanding of the properties of materials taught at degree level would perhaps influence designer's decisions, perhaps even if it were a change in adhesives or using other inert materials. Especially in the case of plastics, because the main 'malignant plastics' should be avoided in art work if possible and are not integral to the design.

It cannot be stressed enough how important and useful the creation of detailed documentation for contemporary fashion objects are, by recording materials and techniques to help inform the most appropriate treatment method. Through these case studies the usefulness of collecting data about an object directly from the designer has been demonstrated. The evidence shows that there is a distinct advantage to the future care and overall understanding of contemporary fashion in compiling thorough documentation.

Commercial pieces which are designed to be sold, may be more stable as they are designed to last longer, however more conceptual pieces that border into 'art' are not designed to last as long and may be highly experimental. If they are valued enough to be included in a museum collection then all objects are treated equally and they must be worked with to preserve them for as long as possible.

If the designer interview can become an acknowledged part of the museum accession process, much like the artist interview is becoming then perhaps it will be more widely accepted by designers to spare the time and for museums to allow the time to create these documents and carry out the research.

Figure 3 & 4: Front and back view of resin and silk t-shirt.

Figure 5: Detail of right shoulder showing glass beading set into the resin.

Figure 6: Detail showing the drape of the silk and resin t-shirt at the right shoulder.

Figure 7: Detail showing front neckline of silk and resin t-shirt.

Figure 10: Detail of wood veneer on cashmere A-line dress.

Figure 11: Detail showing polyurethane film on cashmere and slight lifting along the bottom edge.

Figure 8 & 9: Front and Back images showing the A-line dress styled by the designer.

Figure 12: Detail showing decoration on front dress panel

Figure 13: Elasticated band above bust and small area of damage to the left.

Conclusion:

The research gathered in this project has shown how we can learn from past objects, to implement conservation strategies today and successfully manage the contemporary collections of the future.

In conclusion, the interviews for museum professionals have given an interesting and valuable insight into the current opinions and practices regarding contemporary fashion collections in museums.

The main points raised have been:

- Focussing on the retention of information (inclusion of designer interviews) and highlighting problem areas while giving recommendations for the most appropriate on-going methods of care. Will not go into detail about hypothetical treatments or condition issues, as the objects assessed have been produced in the last year/5 years. Or focus on treatment/ material costs. Although some contemporary objects in this bracket (post 1980's) may already have some signs of deterioration which will be recorded as any historical/object entering a museum collection should be. There are limitations on the amount of information able to be collected due to time, man power.
- Some information can only be sort from the designer and if they can be consulted it is very beneficial. Other sources such as manufacturers are possible.
- From the author's experience, talking to the designer can create a true understanding of the work and therefore a better interpretation of the piece and better notes.
- Plastics have had a controversial entry into museum collections, reference, as have fashion items, the combination of the two could understandably be a daunting prospect for curators and conservators.
- Fashion is generally categorised as a decorative art and not a fine art, therefore attracting a different response within the museum and from collectors. However, as clothing designs can be highly unusual in construction, structure and materials used the line between fashion and art becomes blurred.

- Contemporary fashion just as with contemporary artwork is about dealing with the unknown. In some cases there can be a huge crossover of materials into other disciplines. Unusual for dress, e.g. silk, cotton, linen, leather.
- Display for contemporary fashion can either be designed to enhance the modern style, catwalk look that its known for being similar to historical garments within the collection so that it is better integrated.
- Defined as objects which are not yet degrading but how could conservators be involved in their assessment and care? Looking at haute couture fashion collections not mass produced, the focus is on fashion which borders art not social history.
- Intangible information (which goes with the object, e.g. capturing the movement of the object, thoughts/ideas of the designer, process of unusual manufacturer, seize the opportunity to preserve as much information about the object in the present day while the sources are available and when degradation occurs in the future information is available to be more informed.
- Current exhibitions are highly publicised through Twitter accounts, blogs, gaining hype about the shows.
- Fashion has often blurred the lines of Art with numerous designers defining themselves as artists or working very closely with them. This has been supported by exhibits on Schiaparelli, one of the best known surrealist designers working closely with Salvador Dali and perhaps this is more acceptable to the non-believers who think fashion doesn't have a place amongst historical objects as it more like the traditional types of objects 'art' which are in museums?
- Use of 'modern' instead of contemporary, which means current or relating to present or recent times. Contemporary means 'belonging to the same period of time' as something.
- As museums look to expand and fill their costume collections up to the present day, in order to share in the success of contemporary designers exhibiting. new objects will enter the collections which conservators will need to adapt and develop preventive and interventive methods to preserve them long term in the museum.
- Requires a different approach, the 'unknown' can be daunting or involve a change in practice style and adaptability but its worth it in the long run with increased visitor numbers oiling the business machine, could be a case of getting left behind.
- Although initially contemporary costume may seem straight forward as it has not yet had time to deteriorate and require interventive treatment, it can actually be just as time

consuming as historical dress or more so as there are a number of considerations required (as mentioned previously) and the structure/materials may all be unknowns which require careful thought and then art parallels throw more in plus high cost. The role of the conservator has to adapt, there may not be a great deal of interventive work but they are certainly required to make assessments on potential acquisitions and plan preventive strategies for long term care. Gathering information falls to the curator, but identification of materials/knowledge of the materials is more the conservator.

- Collaborations with students exhibiting in museums is also becoming popular (Bowes etc.) is this the point at which to start educating young designers in longevity of materials, and museum practice? As this is the beginning of the popularity of fashion in museums, what's in store for fashion designs and what's in store for the future of museum exhibiting or collecting.
- There is an awareness of the potential risks to costume made from modern materials. It is considered. Also as soon as objects enter the museum/conservation studio they become treated the same as any other textile (historical) however this may seem the best thing for the objects but do contemporary objects need an adapted approach in order to treat and document them in the best way?
- For unknown modern materials should there be an immediate preventive system in place even if the degradation process is unknown.
- Very broad subject: needs to be defined by social collecting or technological collecting.
- With the artist/designer interviews it has been demonstrated that it is difficult to obtain all the ideal information required from the designer. The remit of this project meant I found designers who were willing to share their work with me instead of having art work and then needing to persuade designers to disclose details. Even in this context it was difficult to work with different designers who had other pressures on their time and who had heard very little of conservation before our meetings. It cannot be disputed that gathering this information is highly useful and often vital to the preservation of the object, but is the reality that it is very hard to get all this information or even sit the designer down? More education on the role of the conservator.

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Interview: Georgina Ripley, National Museums Scotland

Project title:

‘Contemporary Fashion Collections within Museums and the Role of the Conservator’

The main aims of this research project are:

- To identify the nature of the working relationships between curators, conservators and designers, in the context of the care and display of contemporary fashion collections.
- To define the textile conservator’s role within the museum environment in regard to contemporary costume.
- To highlight issues related to the storage and display of contemporary costume and then identify current or potential strategies for long term care.

Notes:

- ‘Contemporary fashion’ refers to costume including accessories (from 1980’s onwards).

Questions:

1. What is the current policy for collecting or exhibiting contemporary fashion at National Museums Scotland?
Can you give any examples of any previous or future projects which you have worked on involving contemporary garments?
2. From your experience, do contemporary fashion designers want to be involved in the display or storage of their work? Are they always approached by the museum to be involved?
3. Is information about each garment (e.g. materials used, dressing instructions) supplied by the designer? How and where is this information stored?
4. To what extent is original design intent considered when displaying or treating a contemporary fashion garment? (E.g. considering the garments original intended movement or silhouette on a figure.) How does this impact on curatorial decisions?
5. In what way (if at all) do display or storage options differ for contemporary costume compared to historical costume?
6. Are all contemporary pieces assessed by a conservator when they enter the museum, either when on loan or accessioned? If not, why are some not assessed?
7. Are there any preventive measures or strategies currently in place for the long term care of contemporary objects entering the museum?
8. Which aspect/s do you feel poses the greatest risk to the long term preservation of contemporary costume (e.g. modern materials, structure, loss of information)?
9. Do you have any other comments or examples which you feel may be relevant?

Interview: *Lynn McClean and Miriam McLeod, National Museums Scotland.*

Project title:

‘Contemporary Fashion Collections within Museums and the Role of the Conservator’

The main aims of this research project are:

- To define the textile conservator’s role in relation to the care and display of contemporary fashion collections in comparison to historical textiles.
- To identify the nature of the working relationships between conservator, curator and designer.
- To highlight issues related to the storage and display of contemporary costume and then identify current or potential strategies for long term care.

Notes:

- ‘Contemporary fashion’ refers to costume including accessories (from the 1980’s onwards).

Questions:

10. As a textile conservator working within a museum, in what way/s have you been involved in the conservation of contemporary costume? Can you give examples of any previous or future projects? Or any particular objects?
11. Are all contemporary pieces assessed by a conservator when they enter the museum, either when on loan or accessioned? If not, why are some not assessed?
12. In what way (if at all) do conservation treatment options differ for contemporary costume compared to historical costume?
13. Do you feel contemporary objects are given equal priority within the conservation studio compared to historical objects? If not, why do you think this is?
14. From your experience, which aspect/s poses the greatest risk to the long term care of contemporary costume (e.g. modern materials, structure, loss of information)?
15. What preventive measures or strategies do you have/would you recommend for the long term care of contemporary costume?
16. To what extent do conversations between conservators, museum curators and designers take place? Has this ever involved being in contact with a designer directly?
17. Is information about each garment (e.g. materials used, dressing instructions) supplied by the designer in order to inform treatments? How and where is this information generally stored? How involved is the conservator in the documentation?

18. To what extent do you feel original design intent is considered when treating a contemporary fashion garment compared to historical garments? (E.g. considering the garments original intended movement or silhouette on a figure.) How does this impact on conservation decisions?
19. Do you have any other comments or examples which you feel may be relevant?

Interview: Heather Archibald, Analys Art Fashion Studio.

Project title:

‘Contemporary Fashion Collections within Museums and the Role of the Conservator’

The main aims of this research project are:

- To identify the nature of the working relationships between curators, conservators and designers, in the context of the care and display of contemporary fashion collections.
- To define the textile conservator’s role within the museum environment in regard to contemporary costume.
- To highlight issues related to the storage and display of contemporary costume and then identify current or potential strategies for long term care.
- To address the need for artist/designer interviews to inform display/storage options/long term retention of information.

Questions:

1. Overview:

- Can you tell me a little about your background and training leading up this point as a designer?
- Looking at your current work, can you talk me through your design process? (Use examples if easier.)
- To what extent are your designs intended to be wearable garments?
- What aspect of your work do you feel is particularly important to the overall design? E.g. Movement, colour, materials, touch.
- There is a strong link between fashion design and art in your work, do you see yourself as more of a fashion designer or an artist? Do you feel they should be defined differently?

2. Exhibiting/displaying the work:

- In what ways has your work been showcased or exhibited to date? (Catwalk shows, performance, static displays?)
- To what extent are you involved in the display of your garments?
- Do you feel your work could be adequately showcased in a static display? Lose meaning?

3. Conservation:

- What do you know about conservation?
- How do you see yourself involved in the conservation of your work?
- During your training at Art School, was there a focus on materials, their properties and how to use them?

- Do you feel that the choice of materials is integral to your designs?
- *Would you consider adapting the materials you used for your work if you knew them to be unstable for long term use?
- Are any of your designs intended to deteriorate?

4. Specific Garment/s: (Looking at selected objects.)

- Can you talk me through the meaning behind these designs? Most important aspect/s?
- What materials were used to create this piece/s? Brand names/product details if possible.
- Are any of the materials modified at all? In what way?
- What construction methods were used to create this piece/s? Can you describe the process?
- Multiple pieces? Unusual construction?
- Is it/are they part of a larger collection? Can they be exhibited separately?

5. Anything else to add?

Photographs? Possible viewing of pieces later? (conservation is heavily object based.)