

THE FASHION OBJECT, DEATH DIALECTS, AND THE CONTRADICTION OF HISTORIC
TIME: A RE-EXAMINATION OF HISTORICISM THAT ACCOUNTS FOR FASHION'S
EMBODIED PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The Fashion Object, Death Dialects, and the Contradiction of Historic Time: A Re-examination of Historicism That Accounts for Fashion's Embodied Practices

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This thesis examines contradictions in approaches to fashion cataloging and exhibition by considering how the fashion artifact is used as physical evidence for public memory of the past. As a memorial practice and timekeeper, fashion demands a complex cultural understanding of artistic production, aging, and history. How does this understanding of fashion as a cultural index and narrative challenge our knowledge of history and the problems inherent in trying to produce a historical narrative through cloth? Where do we fall short in dress reconstructions and our understanding of time and aging through approaches to fashion and dressing? How do these considerations challenge cultural attitudes toward fashion's role in helping understand death and aging in the larger cultural lexicon? By addressing fashion's relationship to time and what might be termed the death aspect of dress as connected to bodies from the past, we allow for a less biased approach to historic fashion that will account for more regional, communal, and individual tastes in dress. This method of inquiry permits a more balanced understanding of dressing ideals across socioeconomic levels regarding garment production and reproduction. Continually addressing the personal in fashion reinforces the unique nature of each garment and its relationship with the body as part of fashion's corporeal register.

Keywords: Fashion Artifact, Garment Production, Garment Reproduction, Reconstruction, Corporeal, Embodiment, Eastern Time, Historicism, Public Memory, Memorial, Aging, Western Time

PREFACE

This thesis began as an extension of my research in my master's program. My master's degree included a major project in which I assisted in organizing and digitizing a local museum's textile collection (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). The project culminated in an exhibition in the main historic house, which displayed local women's garments from the 1890s to the 1930s. The exhibition's theme was how clothing operated as text, indexing significant cultural processes and movements, such as how the selected garment's politics and economics were evidenced in its construction (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). Part of this work involved an approach to fashion objects that was multifaceted to show the fashion object's significance in relation to other forms of cultural production, particularly in literature, photography, and visual art. In organizing and cataloging the textiles, however, I discovered several interesting things about historical fashion collections. The first was that in this specific collection, most of the donated garments were formal and often related to special occasions. The majority of the collection featured various wedding and christening gowns. Second, most examples I had access to were young women's dresses, except for a mother-of-the-bride gown, which she wore when she was in her forties (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). Finally, any items that contained an extended background story were typically designer-made or related to an affluent family in the area. I found it very difficult to find the personal stories of these pieces and examples of dress outside of such special occasions.

Before the pandemic hit and access to museums was largely restricted, I had planned to investigate other textile collections in southern Ontario and highlight what factors were being

considered in artifact collections within fashion-based archives.¹ Further, I wanted to closely examine a series of case studies to highlight the personal aspects of dress that I find lacking in many fashion scholarship projects. For example, fashion projects tend to rely on thematic representations in dress. Such objects are selected as they relate to more universal themes: for instance dresses that showcase tenets of the Aesthetic movement (Calvert, 2012; Pecora, 2011). When my project had to pivot due to Covid travel restrictions, I discovered that many people were still actively engaging with fashion artifacts online. The online community includes an interesting mix of fashion enthusiasts, such as scholars, curators, people in the design industry, reconstructionists, and vintage hobbyists. Having followed several accounts on Instagram and YouTube, I discovered an approach to fashion scholarship that was engaging both to museum enthusiasts and the general populace. Further, the approach appeared to be an effective way of disseminating fashion projects, as we see through the Instagram accounts “In Pretty Finery” or “The Costume Journal,” both of which post fashion objects from museum collections around the world (inprettyfinery, 2016; thecostumejournal, 2017). Shop accounts like “American Duchess” use social media to share individual design’s history, as well as original patents for its recreated shoes (americanduchess, 2015). However, these platforms potentially create misinformation about fashion histories, and we see this in accounts that post videos or images with little historical perspective or that offer a complete simplification of a demographic’s dress interests, such as Glam’s series of clips “100 Years of Fashion” (Glam Inc., 2015).

The release date of the program “Bridgerton” (Shondaland, 2020) coincided with one of the pandemic lockdowns. The series became hugely popular and increased interest in online

¹ The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in March 2019 (with shutdowns occurring in March 2020), affected museum closures for the subsequent three years; further, remote work made it harder to contact Museum officials. I attempted to reach out to several larger organizations at the beginning of this project and found them lacking the time/materials to help due to pandemic restrictions.

historical fashion channels and forums. In response, many of the channels' hosts, including Asta Darling (asta.darling, 2012), Karolina Zebrowska (karolinazebrowska, 2012), Mena Lazar (makethishistoricallook, 2018), Gabi (gabis_vintage, 2021) and Katy Werlin (timetravelingredhead, 2013), began creating content on Regency fashion, as understood from archive collections and based on ideas built up in television and film productions. This led to the dissemination of many versions of history that were both personal and, to varying degrees, authentic to a perception of historic fashion. For example, Karolina Zebrowska made a Regency-inspired gown for a Bridgerton-themed ball, which she clarified was not historically accurate but more of an homage to the show's costume choices (karolinazebrowska, 2012). What I discovered from this was that the larger field of fashion history and its theoretical framework is beginning to develop a more dynamic approach to fashion histories that exists outside of the physical archive space. We see this reflected in the New York Metropolitan's latest exhibition, "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion," which uses digital technologies to reconfigure garments that cannot be displayed any longer because of their frailty (MET, 2024; McDowell, 2024), or the Victoria and Albert Museum's "Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser," which displayed costuming related to the Lewis Carroll novel from various historical periods, including examples of modern recreations (V&A, 2021). The SCAD FASH Museum of Fashion and Film's exhibit "Ruth E. Carter: Afrofuturism in Costume Design," paired the costumer's works with her various historical influences to show how she re-created fashions of the past (SCAD FASH, 2021). Further, people's understanding of the past, particularly historic fashion, often plays into the unintentional biases that I found in the physical archives (e.g. a lack of working class and older people's garments). By this, I mean that historic fashion enthusiasts who flock to online or public displays tended to be more interested in the aesthetic quality of the garments. They wanted to see

items that were avant-garde rather than something closer to an approximation of historic reality including all life stages and classes. Very few platforms I analyzed engaged with ideas outside of an upper-class dress ideal. The costumes were not made to reflect a working-class dynamic, and if they engaged with ideas of class and race, it was more about fantasy. One example of this would be considering racialized bodies in an upper-class gown (timetravelingredhead, 2013). Further, these forums show that history is still being actively shaped by the present social system and its values and interests. For example, garments that are recreated or highlighted in these social media forums are often ones that reflect current social concerns and ethics, such as the feminism of today, as evidenced in objects of the past (gabis_vintage, 2018; karolinazebrowska, 2012). This led me to my current project which considers how we organize historic time and its impacts on our understanding of fashion history within museum and academic spaces. What I hope to demonstrate is the value of reconstruction practice, or contemporary recreations of period fashion, together with the challenges the industry of historic fashion faces in attempting to catalog and understand fashion objects of the past that are both deeply personal to the wearers and transcendent to the time in which they were originally produced, in that they have an existence in museum spaces. I will suggest a way of performing reconstruction itself that values the positionality of the museum industry while filling in the gaps we find in archival practice. As a whole, my project reconsiders how to address the corporeal value of fashion and offers a presentation of the personal and embodied practice of fashion history and reconstruction that allows for a more democratic approach to fashion scholarship that is inclusive of other bodies and voices.

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GLOSSARY

Corporeal- refers to being of the body, in fashion, this refers to the quality of the garments to act as part of the wearer's body as a second skin that operates as a cultural medium to the social system that informs the personal presentation of the wearer.

Demimondaine- the social class of the demimonde (1871-1914), who were of French origin and lived as courtesans or wealthy lovers of rich men. On the fringe of society, these women became synonymous with fashionable dress and were considered morally suspect for this lifestyle of luxury they promoted through sexuality.

Eastern Time- as part of Eastern cultural production and its undertakings it is understood to be cyclical and constantly recurring. History through Eastern time is cataloged as a continuous process that doesn't lead to an end goal or ultimate process but rather is constantly renewing practices of the past and its cultures.

Embodiment- is the representation or expression of an idea in a tangible, physical form. In the study of fashion, embodiment practice is used to create a deeper understanding of the fashion object by having the researcher take part in its construction or by wearing the item.

Historicism- is a late eighteenth-century philosophy that understood history as its own form of knowledge by attempting to define it as a method of knowing (such as chemistry). Historicism regards historical development as a basic aspect of human existence that is governed by an idea of laws and processes.

Intergenerational knowledge- is a form of knowledge transfer that allows the practice of one group or generation to be passed along to the next. In fashion, this transfer is a significant aspect of creating relevance to the practice of fashion reconstruction such as a tannery process or a style of embroidery passed down from one maker to another.

Material Culture- refers to the social relationships built between people and their cultural objects. In fashion theory, material culture examines the social life of the garments made and worn by people within a particular era.

Memorial- within the practice of history is an object or place that serves as a commemoration or as a reminder to a community of a person, place, or event intended to be remembered a certain way.

Nouveau riche- a French term that refers to "new" rich or "new" money families that gained their wealth within one generation rather than through a line of familial inheritance.

Public Memory- is the collective recollection of the past and its events by a particular community through an idea of what they remember, how it is framed, and an attempt to fill in the gaps of what has been forgotten. The practice is imperfect but serves as a way for a culture to understand and circulate an idea of tradition within their community.

Reconstruction- is an attempt to recreate a garment from a historical period through available source material. This can include a recreation of a specific historical garment or designing a garment based on a particular era and some of its construction practices, such as a silhouette style.

Re-enactment- is an educational or entertainment-based activity in which historians and hobbyists attempt to recreate a historic event such as a battle in the American Civil War through costuming and set design.

Textile Culture- refers to the production of cultural ideas by making and exchanging cloth. An extension of material culture that examines how textiles are made and used to codify both the people and places where they are used.

The '400'-refers to a list of upper-class New York society families during the Gilded Age that were considered suitable to engage with by the elites. This group was formed to keep newcomers from entering the upper-class social system when industrialization allowed new wealth opportunities.

Vivification- to animate or bring to life. The practice of vivification in the museum and academic fashion space is used to suggest the life of the wearers in a garment even when the wearer is not present. The attempt to vivify the fashion object has been a site of contestation as most archival practices will not allow the wearing of historic clothing by a contemporary body.

Western Time- as part of Western cultural production and its undertakings it is understood to be linear, directional, advancing, and non-repetitive. History through Western timelines is cataloged as periods of advancement that lead to the present cultural values and systems

INTRODUCTION

How the fashion object tells a story continues to fascinate fashion scholars. As fashion designer Vivienne Westwood once stated: “My clothes have a story. They have an identity. They have a character and a purpose. That’s why they become classics. Because they keep on telling a story. They are still telling it.” (Kelly, 2014)

When working on my dress exhibition at the Clarington Museum and Archives in 2019, I had to decide what dresses could best tell the story of the community and the people who lived there. Many beautiful garments existed, but very few had a full accession record. While cataloging garments, I came across a dress from the turn of the century that had started to rot. The dress was in a box for potential permanent storage as it was considered likely too difficult for display. Through my research, I discovered that it was donated by one of the families that lived in the main exhibition house that was part of the museum compound: Annie Jury (the first wife) wore it on their eldest daughter’s wedding day (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). The dress tells a story of the family, its mother-daughter relationship, and its changing family dynamics. It was one of Annie Jury’s last formal pieces worn as she died shortly afterwards. Both mother and daughter had kept written records of the day in diary entries and letters that marked the significance of the dress (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). I also came across a family portrait from the wedding in which the dress was featured. The garment and its story became a key element of my exhibition. To display the dress, I had to repair the garment by tacking the lace and beadwork to the silks underneath. I came to see my hand-stitching as adding to the story of the gown and its long history, reinscribing its potential for the present. Despite

having passed away over a century earlier, Mrs. Jury became active in the current display through the memory traces she left behind in this garment.

I came to my current project through this quest to discover dress's personal and embodied practices and its power to tell stories across timelines. Over the last decade, my experiences within the museum field have been shaped by the approaches to cataloging that each heritage center has taken to artifact collection. Working with both small-scale and large-scale museum operations, the issue presented by textiles lay in interpreting an artifact that answers the concerns of vivification and embodiment while reinforcing the heritage site's current interpretive goals. Before my cataloging work with the Clarington Archives, I contacted several other museums interested in organizing their textile collections (including the Canadian Canoe Museum, Parkwood Estates, and the Peterborough Museum and Archives). Many had kept most dress samples in storage and had yet to categorize the objects as part of their larger collections. When I was presenting at an international conference in America's Midwest, I was able to explore private artifact collections and storage systems at Kent State University's School of Fashion, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Western Reserve Historical Society. In doing so, I was able to examine some of the ways that artifact collection has impacted each center's capacity for display. For example, in my work with the Clarington Archives collection, I learned that the textiles collection was developed in the early 1950s by one of the conservators who hoped to initiate a fashion archive (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). Despite her efforts, most objects remained in storage with little supporting material. The conservator's interests in collection and the practices of the time (1950s) influenced what I could access and what stories I could tell from the items she deemed worthy of collection. One contention I explore throughout my current project is how cultural theorists expand the field of fashion to include artifact examples

corresponding to today's interests when collection practices of the past have shaped what we can study. Finer examples of dress and costume were perceived to be worth keeping over less formal pieces. Further, the nature of artifact survival has shaped what can be accessed, textiles being one of the more complicated objects to preserve and maintain.

What's exciting about the field of fashion studies is that it continues to evolve as a discipline, expanding its frameworks as the value of fashion has become more broadly acknowledged within cultural media and the arts. While the fashion object has been used for display purposes for over a century, it was often reinforced as an example of other cultural media, such as paintings, photography, or literature. In the 1980s, this began to change as fashion theory was acknowledged as its own field. Barthe's text *The Fashion System* (1967) applied linguistic theory to fashion as a unique cultural system; since then, scholars have applied feminism, scientific exploration, art history, and sociology through a fashion lens to create the field known today, as further evidenced in texts like Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) and Allison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes* (1981). Projects previously developed for fashion scholarship have argued for fashion as an art form and tried to evaluate it through the lens of high art. As a result, I found it challenging to find research that considers fashion's conditions as a cultural index and practice with own merits.

One way that fashion scholarship sought to distinguish itself is as a corporeal practice (of the body) lies in instances where clothing is referred to as a wearer's second or social skin. If fashion itself stands as representing an absent body, dress has come to be understood as an artifact that verifies historic timelines, thus positioning design as a linear progression likened to bodily development. This perspective relies on simplifying design and the various influences that lead to this progression. A linear timeline captures the big picture but tends to ignore nuance. As a

result, most collections have fashion displays that position design through a specified narrative or theme while ignoring individual histories and the cultural moments of the garment's time. I evaluate collection conditions through the corporeal value of clothing and its relationship to the past. I then contemplate how we might contradict biases surrounding fashion scholarship, particularly in how we position dress within a Western progressive linear timeline.

For my first project in this work, I offer an overview of fashion scholarship by looking at how the fashion object has been positioned historically. I also consider the nature of production and how others have used timelines to verify fashion's value. I did this by reviewing fashion exhibitions over the last decade, looking at how they organized specific fashion artifacts for the general public and the problems inherent in some of these aestheticizing practices in display. I argue that by its nature, cloth exists beyond the time of its production, allowing ideas of historicism to be adaptable, multifaceted, and challenging to transcribe within a Western historical tradition of linear time. Cloth exists both for the individuals of the past and is also available for use in present and future productions in design. Caroline Evan's analysis of death dialects in the high fashion show clarifies that design is about scavenging images of the past to make sense of present methods of deathly speech (how a culture speaks of death/the morbid) and time (Evans, p. 14, 2003). According to this analysis, fashion is more about refashioning ideas of the past to understand the possibilities of the future, and these anxieties of time are about clarifying the current culture's position within its modernity and responding to the instability of present cultural traditions. I thus argue that the study of cloth resists a linear approach to dress histories typically seen in current display methods. The bias in presenting dress artifacts and reconstructed pieces is that we work from an assumption of the wearer's conditions and beliefs while attempting to align them with our own. We consider dress history as evidence of the past's

public memory, all in a reflection of our own public memory. Fashion itself exists based on previous designs, its needs and uses for present social conditions, and its uses and re-inscriptions for the future. Its changeable and adaptable nature allows it to exist in each new social present and, therefore, it is not strictly an object of one period despite our continued efforts to display it as such.

Recent fashion practice has acknowledged display biases by attempting to answer the corporeal value of dress; fashion scholarship itself has attempted to address the role of embodiment and the personal through vivifying attempts. Some examples include “The Impossible Wardrobe” at the Palais Galleria [2012], where curators attempted to feature museum garments in motion to account for bodily movement, as well as “Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting” at the ROM [2015], which examined the fashion industry’s reliance on form over function by examining clothing made for wheelchair users and bodily “others”. Or the KCU’s exhibition “A Life in Style: The Wardrobe of James E. Mulholland” [2023] which focused on Mulholland’s wardrobe over forty years, examining his personal tastes and choices as he aged. Beyond vivifying (bringing to life) display practice, fashion scholarship has also attempted to view the embodied practice of fashion and the personal through re-evaluating globalization in the industry and its potential uses for a decolonized Western historical practice. Scholars like Rosner (2020) argue that various voices and backgrounds are needed to speak to dress embodiment (for example, having students explore fashion traditions through their family demographics, such as French Polynesian design). While this addresses the personal in current design practice, I struggled to identify how display practices could more fully address ideas of personal embodiment in dress artifacts of the past, which led to my discussion of approaches as part of the thesis.

The examination of garments through collection cards is the first step in many historians' engagement with fashion history, although this examination remains mainly in the background of scholarship in fashion. My investigations reinforce a need to reframe fashion artifacts as individual artifacts that exist beyond an examination that defines them through other cultural themes and objects. The dress artifact can and should be understood not just through its aesthetic value and position historically but also through its value for the wearer, its positionality within its own era and the time that it is collected and re-examined within, and through its lasting impact on garment production and the understanding of textile collections in the future. Using Mida and Kim's seminal text on what they term the slow approach, I applied their practice to the fashion object to highlight the personal value of dress. The "Slow Approach to Seeing" uses the foundations of visual cataloging in art history to understand the fashion artifact through its construction, highlighting fashion changes, the availability of material, and the personal choices reflected in the seams of each garment. Using art history, archeology and science, the method undertakes object analysis through three stages of investigation by focusing on a methodology specific to fashion artifacts and offering a series of steps that work from an evidence-based approach to cataloging. By following the guidelines of this object-focused approach, I examine my garment case studies through the stages of observation, reflection, and interpretation.

In my study, I analyse a late Gilded Age children's lawn dress and a woman's walking dress to focus on casual, altered, and inhabited clothing that tells something of the wearer's history. The intention was to illuminate a broader perspective on dressing, contrasting with the elite examples we typically see displayed in public fashion exhibitions. I explore fashion's relation to different eras of production and aging in more detail through examples of subjectivity revealed in these objects of the past, as well as their associations with present cultural attitudes towards

bodily development. This component of the thesis addresses the personal and subjective quality of garments to reinforce the uniqueness of the fashion object while providing potential re-readings of the artifact that demystify the past, reconsider its linearity, and allow a more adaptable perspective to archive collection and practice that brings back absent narratives in history. Because representation of these absent histories is restricted by limitations within the archives (again, what was collected and survived historically), I had to consider present alternatives to historic dress collections that exist through the practice of reconstruction.

In my final project in the thesis, I constructed a Gilded Age dinner reception dress based on my own measurements using available design patterns via garment reconstruction texts and fabric shops. Through this construction I explore the challenges of current museum and academic cataloging and suggest the potential of historic reconstructions to help address some of these gaps found in the archives. This involved a reconsideration of the practice of reconstruction that includes focused designs (ones that answer a specific research question or explore a specific design principle) and a recreation of overlooked histories. It attempted to challenge and capture the everyday aspects of dressing, including items often discounted from the archives, such as worn dress objects, while considering examples of dress outside the aestheticizing tradition. I supplement my practice by exploring the scholarship around reconstruction practices and the evaluations of authenticity as defined by the various fashion industries. Reconstruction has not received much critical attention, and my work offers a more in-depth examination of the community practices as I argue for a more consolidated approach.

I intended to make my dress reconstruction to examine my relationship to fashion objects of the past and their techniques, such as stitching and material considerations. When I completed my garment, I discovered that I didn't avoid the aestheticizing bias I continue to see in fashion

scholarship. By continuing this bias, however, I uncovered the issues that many reconstructionists and historic costumers face in their attempts to capture historic dress practices. My compromises regarding material considerations such as expense, availability, and use furthered this experience. Wearing the garment and maneuvering through the spaces of a heritage site, as I did within the Glanmore estate in Belleville, moving within the confines of a historic garment design, I also furthered an embodied practice, which I argue for throughout my other projects in the thesis. By acknowledging an aestheticizing bias, I learned the restrictions that reconstruction practice faces to advance the conditions of embodiment beyond the fashionable scholarship and frameworks that continue to be at the forefront of historic fashion cataloging and display. However, I could not rely only on my reconstruction experiences and secondary texts. I wanted to explore other makers' experiences and approaches to fashion history through their experience of embodiment practices in garment reconstruction culture.

Therefore, in the final project in the thesis, I created and disseminated a survey featuring twelve questions that were approached during the draft stages of my reconstruction project.² The participants were found primarily through the Costume Society of America's online community forum and through contacts previously gained through work in the Ontario Museum industry. This survey intended to highlight the biases and contentions that are considered when recreating historical dress and how this contradicts ideas of authenticity and the understanding of historical timelines. The different conflicts and industry standards reinforce the misconceptions of public memory. Reconstruction is not restricted to one field of fashion, and the design standards are different in each discipline. Despite this, most reconstructionists defend the practice as a more egalitarian approach to history that keeps history alive for future generations. By highlighting

² See Appendix D Figure 4.1 Historic Reconstructionist Survey, May 2023.

their practices and limitations, my survey reveals some of the complications that reproductionists face and the potential to continue reinforcing historical appropriation through simplified aesthetic designs also reinforced in present public memory.

Beyond formal spaces, I contend that there can be a more democratic approach to design. I explored my subjective design considerations, my likes and dislikes, and my body and background restrictions. It stands to reason that if other bodies could explore practices of the past through an analysis of embodiment within reconstruction, a broader and more diverse collection of garments could be produced. Reconstruction can become more democratic by reconsidering the community and its points of access. Many reconstruction novices struggle due to a lack of support and guidance. Until we acknowledge the divisions within the maker's community and the separatist platforming that occurs through social media, a more collective democratic making will not occur. Validating and participating in embodied-making practices is the first step in legitimizing reconstruction practice to allow these other voices to engage with dress history.

By concluding my thesis with reconstructionist theory, I address the cultural cataloging bias that we have reinforced through our present public memory of time periods while also offering more credence to the past's public memory, by which I mean how they understood concepts of time and how they framed their social conditions based on publicly held beliefs about their pasts. By repositioning reconstruction practice within museum theory, we can access ideas of subjectivity, personal timelines, and the role of the corporeal as part of a new approach to defining the dress artifact that both demystifies fashion as art and makes the past more accessible to the present. I recommend reconsidering this aestheticizing tradition in fashion and its artifacts by highlighting some of the members of this reconstruction community and their challenges designing within a Western linear understanding of time and memorial. Reconstruction has the

potential to highlight the personal and subjective quality of fashion while accounting for public perceptions and offering a different approach to museology. These distinct social and individual perceptions of time move beyond a linear presentation of history. In reconsidering this trajectory, not only will we account for other forms of historic cataloging that exist outside of current Western historical practices, but we can also deconstruct such perceptions performed in design through a cultural anxiety about the corporeal and its attempts to fix concepts of time.

APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY: HOW MY PROPOSAL WORKS IN PRACTICE

What I propose in advocating for a more egalitarian approach to the archives and their collections is a practice of reconstruction theory defined by a more interdisciplinary approach that accounts for different fashion disciplines while developing a more focused practice within reconstruction. The latter would need to avoid costuming or cosplay recreations that are aesthetic in nature to consider a more holistic approach to design practices that, in turn, will allow for a more democratic approach to fashion histories.

What is at stake in this approach is a way to account for the bodies of the past that have been left out of the archives. As Pitman and Hohti have argued, reconstructions have the potential to mark the absences in fashion records. Still, in highlighting what is overlooked, they suggest that reconstruction has been too speculative in its practices (Pitman & Hohti, 2023, pp. 6-7). The recent special edition of *Textile History* focuses on reconstruction applications in textile practices. It suggests a need for a collaborative and more public methodology in disseminating results, which the authors argue will legitimate the practice (Pitman & Hohti, 2023, pp. 7-8). They suggest, like I do, a need to engage different backgrounds within the field, including conservators, scientists, citizen makers, and craftspeople, to create a more cross-disciplinary practice reflective of the field of fashion (Pitman & Hohti, 2023, pp. 6-7). I offer in my methodology a step further: not only do we need to engage and publicize different backgrounds within this field, but we also need to offer a series of guidelines and practices to integrate the various fields of study to offer a more unified approach to reconstruction that can be understood across disciplines.

In Malcolm-Davies' recent publication on reconstruction, she offers an approach for streamlining reconstruction using an interdisciplinary methodology. This methodology primarily

offers analytical techniques from natural science, which she then applies to the humanities. This approach uses observational data from molecular, micro, and macro levels of analysis (Malcolm-Davies, 2023, p. 2). The approach also uses business modeling to streamline reconstructionist objectives, including the well-known elements in the SMART model, which are 1. Specific, 2. Measurable, 3. Attainable/Assignable, 4. Relevant/Realistic, and 5. Timely (Malcolm-Davies, 2023, p.3). Both of these methods are useful in grounding reconstruction in a more factual framework that allows the practice to be measured for success variables, which are primarily assessed subjectively at this time. As an example, reconstructionists define their success principally through their own value systems of what a successful reconstruction should be (Smith & Standard, 2021). Malcolm-Davies also suggests grounding the practice through the scientific method, positioning reconstruction practice as “experimental doing” with a set of controls, a summarization of data, and an evaluation of outcomes (Malcolm-Davies, 2023, p.12). Her approach is effective and clearly defined, and I use most of these applications as part of my methodology. However, in grounding this practice within the sciences, we still need to acknowledge the speculative value of the reconstruction as part of the arts. Just as Hilary Davidson argues for what she terms the “embodied turn” (Davidson, 2019), I also argue for an acknowledgment of the bodily habitus in the maker’s practice. In Zanetti’s reconstruction, dress or garments are referred to as affective artifacts mediating collective and individual attachment, a sort of encloded cognition key to reconstruction (Zanetti, 2023, p.55). This suggests a nuance to the material agency expressed in a multisensorial engagement, which evaluates the body through the fittings process and can offer an approach to the intellectual process of making/remaking that acknowledges affective ties (Zanetti, 2023, pp.55-56). My method also draws on the value of embodied practice. It grounds it within scientific processes and the slow approach method, which

I argue for throughout my project in chapter two, to streamline the reconstruction approach without limiting some of its speculative value.

My methodology outlines the basis of the scientific method, by asking each reconstructionist to start their project with a specific research question and hypothesis. They should start by asking: What do they hope to gain from this project? How do they propose to get there? What controls can they put in place? What variables do they have to account for? and What will be a successful versus an unsuccessful outcome? Part of the method also includes planning out a set of objectives and guidelines based on their industry's rules (e.g., museum display restrictions or a grant's guidelines). I suggest using Malcolm-Davies' approach to the SMART method for this, which will offer a clear overview of budget, time, and material constraints. The next part of my approach lends itself to art history practice by applying Ingrid and Mida's "Slow Approach" (2015). I ask scholars to consider what they are trying to recreate. If it is a specific artifact, I argue that starting by analyzing the original object is necessary. If it is a recreation of a specific type of dress or design principle, then an overview of the garment's history is needed. In this case, the slow approach will be used in a twofold manner: first, with an analysis of the garment they are trying to recreate and then an analysis of their recreated garment. The slow approach asks first for an observatory practice, which would include an overview of the original construction and then of the recreated piece. This includes a consideration of the piece's dimensions, its closures, supports, material use, decorative elements, and in the case of the original, signs of wear (e.g. sweat stains, tears, adjustments) (Mida & Kim, 2015). The observatory practice specific to fashion artifacts will ground some of the researcher's indexes for design, acknowledging historically constructed practices and comparing them to their own approaches to making. The second stage of the slow approach is also key for my methodology,

and it brings in the bodily habitus that reconstruction is known for. The reflection stage of the approach asks the reconstructionist to consider reactions to their garment and the pieces they were trying to recreate, such as sensory reactions, e.g. what does it feel like, how does it smell, and what kind of sounds do they make in movement? The practice of reflection asks the reconstructionist to evaluate their perception of the object both historically and for their own uses (Mida & Kim, 2015). This offers the kind of speculative approach that reconstruction is known for but grounds it in a practice that moves beyond simple likes and dislikes. It asks the researcher to evaluate their feelings towards the garment and what drove them to remake it as they did.

The slow approach, as I apply it to reconstruction methods, offers a set of steps to evaluate reconstruction practice while acknowledging embodied making. Through my method, I suggest taking the reflection stage one step further, asking the maker to evaluate how their body feels wearing the garment and how the embodied practice of making informs some of their practices and their relationship to the past. I argue that we should use the slow approach for this and also account for intergenerational knowledge in the making process. As a practice, reconstruction's value lies in its ability to "do" the history by including an acknowledgment by the maker of what practices of intergenerational knowledge they used in the process of their design. This could include weaving, dying, hand stitching, and embroidery, among other practices. The reconstruction is more firmly grounded in a practice of history rather than contemporary design when it acknowledges intergenerational knowledge methods. The final stage of the slow approach, reflection, through my methodology, returns to a more science-based approach. I ask the scholars to cite what they were able to learn in their making project by specifying what avenue of fashion they were trying to explore (e.g. 18th-century pastoral dress) and evaluate their outcomes by observing what they did well and where other reconstructionists could go further in

their respective fields (museum, theater, gallery, market, etc.). By combining analytical with speculative approaches, reconstruction can move beyond aestheticizing practices to a more holistic approach allowing different types of practitioners to engage across disciplines and skill levels.

I propose that the ideal fashion exhibition going forward will include reconstructions that complement the exhibition: ideally ones that highlight middle-class or working-class dress that is not present in the archives. As part of this inclusion, the reconstructions themselves should include the maker's information, including an overview of their approach and the limitations of the design. The reconstructions will be displayed alongside original pieces from the archives. These pieces would ideally have included an element of the slow approach in their making. In other words, they would be highlighted as objects with individual value explored via some of their construction elements and personal design features. The garments could still be grouped by theme and period. However, the hope would be that the exhibition would supplement its themes with supporting archival material, including photography or paintings, music, and sensory objects that reinforce fashion as its own cultural product. Finally, an exhibition that asks its public to participate in the cultural practice would highlight the embodied value of dress and its making. The Textile Museum of Canada has offered something like this in its learning hub, in which the public can attempt some of the making techniques on recreated equipment; for instance, weaving on looms (TMC, 2025). This kind of practice also highlights intergenerational knowledge, a practice that will demystify the past and its processes as something that has continuity in the present and value for the future.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HAUNTING AND CORPOREAL: FASHION'S CONTRADICTIONARY APPROACH TO HISTORIC TIMELINES AND THE AGING BODY

In this project, I address the conceptual framework for the basis of my larger work's theoretical approach, including fashion theory as it relates to death and aging as understood in the Western cultural tradition. Working additionally within the historic considerations of the Gilded Age as a fashion epoch, I will argue that the Gilded Age was among one of the first periods in which fashion was considered a cultural product in that it was introduced into spaces of cultural production, including museums and archives, as part of the contemporary space and understood as historically significant to its present cultural system. I will also address the use of reconstructionist theory for understanding historic dress and its use to perpetuate what I call fashion's nihilism, as well as fashion's role as a memory keeper today.

The major theorists of fashion display and museum theory include Davies (2020), Petrov (2019), Riello (2011), and Anderson (1982) who argue for fashion museums to simulate vivifying practice in the use of mannequin display and the exhibition space that would allow for a more dynamic approach to individual identities in historic fashion. I am also building on the theoretical foundations of Bide (2017), Horsley (2014; 2012), and Verbyc'ka (2014) who articulate an approach to scholarship that accounts for the individual in dress practice and a presentation of memory within the exhibition space. I suggest going beyond these practices to include globalist approaches as outlined by theorists Welters, Lillethun, and Whitley (2023) and Rosner (2018) by applying these approaches within the field of reconstruction, as articulated by scholars Daugbjerg (2019), Cortellesi, Harpley, and Kernan (2018) and Daugbjerg, Rivka-Syd,

and Knudsen (2014) to further include the personal and the practices of memory within fashion exhibition spaces through inhabitations both past and present.

We continue to produce and display clothing of the Gilded Age as a key component of fashion's theoretical interest in the social presentation of personhood through the fashion object. Recent publications such as Baxter's *In the Age of Empire* (Baxter, 2021) and Chinn's *Inventing Modern Adolescence* (Chinn, 2009), as well as numerous museum exhibitions including "Fashion After Dark" (Western Reserve Historical Society, 2023), consider the Gilded Age a key moment in fashion history that still has relevance for today's fashion needs and considerations. The Gilded Age³ refers to a period specific to the history of the United States from the 1870s to 1900. The period was defined by rapid economic growth due to industrialization expansion that led to industry monopolies and changes to the social system, including a rise in immigration and the start of American Nativism,⁴ which led to class anxiety, political corruption, and a rise in labour movements (Campbell, 1999; Shrock, 2004; Calhoun, 2007). I use these indexes of the Gilded Age to approach the historic fashion object from a holistic perspective that accounts for these historic anxieties and their influences on dress production. By working through the main canons in current fashion theory, including the approach to fashion cataloging outlined by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim in *The Dress Detective* (Mida & Kim, 2015)⁵, as well as addressing the

³ Believed to have derived its namesake from the famous novel of the same name by Mark Twain, published in 1873 with Charles Dudley Warner. The novel created caricatures of life in Washington then, highlighting the corruption of politics and the industrialists who ruled the day (Twain, 1873).

⁴ This movement arose from resentment towards immigrants. Its idea was to prize native-born people over new immigrants and create a new idea of "Americanism" based on a prized birthright (white Anglo-Saxon), excluding Eastern Europeans, Catholics, and people of colour (Friedman, 1967) (Oxx, 2013).

⁵ This cataloging format takes the basis of art theory collection practices and Berger's "Slow Approach" as defined in his text on the role of culture in image creation, *Ways of Seeing* (Berger, 1972). Further, the cataloging format is based on previous material object guides put forth by scholars within the fashion artifact field (Palmer, 2013; Pearce, 1992; Prown, 1982) as well as early fashion investigative guides put forth in Arnold's *Handbook of Costume* (Arnold, 1973) and Doris Langley Moore's collection record cards and

larger canon of museum theory (Witcomb & Message, 2020; Macdonald, 2006; Jacobson, 2016; McClellan, 2003; Marstine, 2008) in producing dress as an artifact in the museum space and as part of a westernized historical timeline, I will address the present assumptions and biases towards the dress artifact's role in cultural production. Taking museum theory, including reconstructionist frameworks⁶, that to date are underutilized and undervalued within the current fashion canon (Petrov, 2019; Wood, 2016; Kun Ding & E Lang, 2024; Harris, 1995), my research remarks on the lack of foundational approaches to reconstruction within museum theory, combining museum theory within the position of reconstruction with fashion theory including foundational works (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016; Barnard, 2020; Reilly, 2021; Entwistle, 2015). I intend to present a more concrete approach to dress attitudes toward aging and death culture across disciplines. This will demystify aspects of the dress artifact's ghostly auras that have been reinforced through traditional Western timelines. Meaning that a more adaptive approach to fashion artifacts can be undertaken that considers past bodies as more than these morbid connotations and as active to the current cultural processes of dress. I suggest a series of contradictions in approaches to fashion cataloging practices of the past. We see these in how we catalog items for museum archives and whether items are accepted for accession based on conditions of the collection, which are dependent on each museum and their demographic and geographic interests, typically focusing on cause-and-effect process for dress samples (Entwistle, 2015). In attempting to vivify objects for the present culture, a Western linear approach to dress

cataloging practice as one of the earliest examples of a fashion cataloger and a self-taught historian (Moore, 1949) (Moore, 1971).

⁶ Reconstruction frameworks refer to the guidelines people who have undertaken remaking historic clothing have followed. There is little evidence of a unified framework that reconstructionists follow specifically for fashion. Instead, many have relied on a reconstruction foundation outside the field (Samulski, 2023). There are guides to how to create "authentic" period garments, such as the Dover Publications collection of dress patterns (Harris, 1999), or guides for historic collectors, such as the Schiffer publications (Harris, 2002), that are consulted as a way to validate the process of remaking historical dress.

history neglects dress's individual and personal aspects, which make fashion artifacts more dynamic for each cultural period and its interests. A more flexible understanding of fashion theory that includes approaches outside the current academic framework, like reconstructions, allows the inclusion of different voices and perspectives. This permits conditions of class, race, and the geopolitical conditions that museums attempt to engage with in their practice to come to the fore. Engaging with different bodies and forms of scholarship allows this more dynamic approach to the question of time and mortality that fashion historians have struggled to contend with (Reilly, 2021). This struggle to contend with the mortal associations of dress has led to vivifying attempts within museum displays that focus on fashion artifacts that inspire current design practices; these attempts have stifled fashion scholarship to move beyond past versus present display formats rather than embrace its embodied values as unique to the cultural dress object.

Current approaches to displaying historic dress based on myth-building in museum dress practice will be addressed, such as the use of the “original” artifacts in dress display and the presentation of the idealized body as the only body historically, as well as the collection framework⁷ that posits existing dress as evidence of a progression of fashion politics and ideals that uphold our own beliefs. By addressing works, including those by Wallenberg (2020), Webb (2016), Morris (2007) and Matassa (2017) that position museum collection practices through today's needs, I argue that we have not managed to capture reality in dress history but rather

⁷ A collection framework is a set of foundational components set out by each museum's relevant organizations used to design, monitor, and review the process of artifacts kept in their archives. A framework will primarily consider an object based on the mission and purpose of the existing collection and the policy, plans, and procedures available to the institution. For example, smaller community museums will have different collection guidelines than government-led ones. This can be a benefit in that they typically have greater flexibility in what can be accepted. However, resources and budgets tend to be much more restrictive in smaller museum organizations (Collections Trust, 2020).

reinforced a cultural bias in a fashion that is rooted in present concerns about history and culture. For example, this might include framing dresses from the Depression era as fashion's obsession with iconoclasm rather than unpacking some of the drives behind dress design and its responses to the economic turmoil, as evidenced in previous exhibitions of 1930s dress, such as the London College of Fashion exhibition, "Elegance in an Age of Crises: Fashions of the 1930s" (UAL, 2013) or articles like "A 1930s Fashion Lesson: Goddess Gowns, Surrealism, and More Trends of the Escapist Era" from *Vogue* (Ramzi, 2024). While these exhibitions unpack the drive behind the iconoclast's use of escapist design techniques within the Depression era, neither exhibition offers a perspective beyond the aesthetic dress samples. Instead, we reinforce current interests in celebrity dress and fashion culture by relying on the past's attempts at aestheticism rather than examining its day-to-day reality (Smithsonian, 2012). In both heritage and recreated pieces, we cannot know everything about regional backgrounds or other influences on designs of the past, and this gap plays a large role in creating an elitist bias in dress timelines and history as evidence for the past's public memory. In other words, the collective public memory in the past, how they understood their relationship to the past based on publicly held beliefs, becomes a reflection of our own public memory. I will be demonstrating this bias by examining what some of these collections have prized and continue to display in exhibition and research materials but also by considering the limitations museums face in counteracting biases, given questions of garment survivability and what people are willing to donate to a museum collection, as well as industry mandates (Robbins, 2017; Merckx et al., 2018). These mandates often include a selection process based on the heritage center's historic intent (including the location or background of the heritage site), such as only collecting from specific dress periods or groups of people. This can also

include standards for museum display based on the industry's country or region (Robbine, 2017; Merckx et al., 2018).

Our obsession with capturing an age and linking time in a neat and orderly way has perpetuated a complicated affair with our clothes. We attempt to organize history as a linear process through dress artifacts of the past by framing these garments as a natural progression of increasing liberty in design choices that have come to reflect our own. For example, an increase in recent exhibitions around clothes that celebrate naturalism and ideas of the environment in dresses of the past is used as evidence for our current attitudes towards environmentalism and protection practices, as seen in the Victoria and Albert's "Fashioned from Nature" (V&A, 2019) and the recent Grand Rapids Museum Exhibition, "Fashion and Nature" (GRPM, 2023). In attempting to capture a singular moment through dress that we both wear and recreate, we hope to reflect to others what we are in that moment. Barthes aptly considers this an attempt to fix ourselves against the pain of the past and future and to stage ourselves as a certain being, even if only temporarily (Barthes, 1981). Fashion scholar Riello clarifies that this attempt at staging a particular movement or timeline through the fashion object unnecessarily distills its individual value: "These abstract assertions (in time and space) are then "applied" (confirmed, critiqued, or challenged) through case studies often involving the analysis of artifacts. Objects are often reduced to a subordinate position in turning theory concrete within the everyday practices of men and women" (Riello, 8865). He then posits that the corporeal position in fashion offers conflicted representations by virtue of the inorganic nature of the dress artifact: "Nor does material culture follow the rhythms of biological life. Objects do not inevitably decay from within like a human body. The histories of things follow a different course, in which metamorphosis and adaptation play a stronger role across human generations" (Riello, 8868). As fashion scholarship continues

to struggle to display time and legacy, I argue that clothing offers an important consideration for understanding this cross-cultural anxiety of time and aging.

Consider the use of children and the elderly in dress pieces and how various designs attempt to address the developing body and the “failing” body as part of this anxiety. Clothing seeks to hide the uncomfortable aspects of aging while highlighting a specific design element that speaks to the time of its construction in capturing a piece in that moment. Fashion, as transient and unfixable, is linked to this death perception (as part of the body in its corporeal nature, it expresses the mortality of its wearer who is no longer present), and clothing is viewed as both of a specific time and contrarily existing out of time as suggested by such scholars as Hughes (2006) Wilson (1985) and Riello (2011). As Wilson on Barthes’ mutability of fashion clarifies, “for the real body an abstract ideal body; that is the body as an idea rather than an organism. The very way in which fashion constantly changes actually serves to fix the body as unchanging and eternal” (Wilson, 58). In this case, she refers to the human body being supplemented by the fashioned body (the clothing that covers the human form) as allowing the mortal aspects of the body to become immortal by shaping the dress as an object that exists beyond the reality of age and decay. Riello clarifies that the problem that continues to face the fashion artifact is the tendency to explain not only the object itself but also its placement within a time and space that gives fashion a sense of false perfect congruency in its development (Riello, 8867). This false congruency of time that he refers to makes the morbid aspect of dress (the signs of the aging subject) less fearsome by rationalizing the dress object as something separate from the time and place of its production. We use fashion to combat death (Arnold, 2001; Rogers, 2024; Gruber, et al. 2024) because, as a cultural product, it is the most corporeal of cultural artifacts, acting as a second skin to past cultures and past selves, both when we recreate clothing of the past and also

when faced with older clothing of our own that no longer fits our current body, reminding us of our presence in time. Theorists such as Petrov, in her examination of museum dress display practices that attempt to account for absent bodies (Petrov, 2019); Shahida Bari, in her study of the object of dress as a character of popular culture (Bari, 2019), and Mida and Kim, in their approach to analyzing dress artifacts through the slow approach (Mida & Kim, 2015) have all asserted in their work an engagement with fashion's ghostly aura in reference to the body and time by addressing both the traces left in clothing and the haunted quality of dress in engaging with the corporeal. As Petrov posits, as a constructed medium, historic fashion makes history accessible and lively to the present (Petrov, 2019).

While some have attempted to address this idea of the second skin, such as Kennedy and Strickfaden in their diaristic project of a dress and its process of becoming "worn",⁸ few have attempted to address the relationships between the past and present as part of a dress object's development and its use in understanding life's timelines (from birth to death) both personally and as a part of a larger cultural lexicon. Examinations of the corporeal role in fashion, including examinations of femininity and identity politics, have increased in recent fashion publications (Entwistle, 2000; Cereda, 2013; Bray & Colebrook, 1998). However, I still see a gap in presenting theories of the corporeal within examinations of historical wardrobes over an extended period. These texts still rely on contemporary examples of dress subjectivity or wardrobes from the past through a universal examination of the corporeal rather than individual evidence. Dress as a memorial captures an ideal version of the departed person at a moment in

⁸ Kennedy and Strickfaden applied Hodder's theory of entanglement (2012) to blogger Elizabeth Withey's "Frock Around the Clock" blogger diary (2015) in which she wore a black cotton dress she called "Laverne" for a year. The study examined how the dress gained agency through the mutual reliance Whitey found between herself and the frock. The frock gained its own character that Whitey saw as an extension of her personhood (Kennedy & Strickfaden, 2019).

time and fixes an idea of bodily evidence. Bodily evidence in this context would be the traces of the lives of the textile garment as found in the textile's alterations, stretching of fibers, and stains such as blood or sweat. As I examine the value of the corporeal in renegotiating how to present dress history, this bodily evidence is an important link in understanding the fashion object's connection to death and aging in the larger cultural lexicon. I will use it to explore how these traces impact approaches to timelines and the death dialect we still contend with in dealing with the dress object as part of historic cataloging. In this case, it is not just the clothing used in mourning practice that is at issue but also the examples of dress that enact either personal memories or a collective memory based on an idea of the past. The memorial, as preservation of memory, enacts itself through a desire to remember both the subject and object. A recent exhibition at the MET, for instance, "About Time: Fashion and Duration," explored this idea around a disruptive timeline by examining dress's temporal associations. These associations conflate the past with present interests by contending with objects of the present that are contrarily linear and cyclical in their attempt to revive such fashion objects of the past for present values. The fashion artifacts are built on notions of memory/memorial and the preservation of the "ghostly" aura of dress (MET, 2020). The underlying practice of memorial is preservation, primarily of memory and its traces through an idea that there is a risk of loss (Viejo-Rose, 2011). By examining some of these attempts at creating a memorial in fashion (Lan & Liu, 2023; Sorita Paris, 2023; Dryer, 2023; deGreef, 2014), I argue that clothing does not just memorialize a singular person but also a lost era, or the idea of an era. Clothing, understood as a time capsule and of a very specific space and place (Heike, 2013; Van de Peer, 2014; Van de Peer, 2015), does not account for the individual reality and some of the personal aspects of clothing. Fashion historians tend to focus on what is avant-garde and new rather than dress practice from an

everyday perspective. We see this in Steele's often-cited criticism of the museum industry's focus on high-end fashion designers in exhibition displays (Steele, 2008; Crane, 1997; Teunissen, 2014). In addressing fashion museums' cataloging approach to Western timelines and the deathly or memorializing associations of dress, I argue that we can allow for a less biased approach to historic fashion that will account for more regional influences (differences in a dress based within a particular geographical location, like wool quality in South England), the communal (the influences of the family or town's dress style e.g. the different Tartans of Scottish clans), and individual tastes in dress (e.g. a woman has more rose coloured garments, reflective of her favourite colour). This method of inquiry permits a more balanced understanding of dressing ideals across socioeconomic levels within garment production and reproduction, compared to traditional methods of analysis in fashion history that might include grouping costumes by era, movement, or designer. Several scholars have analyzed the latter in this context, both for its potential within the museum space and in terms of its limitations in issues of historical scope (De La Haye, 2018; Babula, 2003). Continually addressing the personal in fashion reinforces the unique nature of each garment and its relationship with the body as part of fashion's corporeal register.

The Use of Historic Timelines and their Contestation in Current Theoretical Approaches

Throughout the larger project, I will refer to the concept of historic time and the use of the "timeline" that has dominated the traditional cataloging approach to the fashion object and its corporeal nature. This approach is how museums have historically cataloged fashion artifacts, as

outlined previously, either by era, designer, or museum theme, as contested by Pecorari and Varley within their critical frameworks of fashion cataloging (Pecorari, 2022; Varley, et al., 2024). The traditional timeline refers to the visual representation of past events arranged linearly and chronologically in the study of history (Rosenberg & Grafton, 2013a; Lubar, 2013b; Boyd-Davis & Krautli, 2014). For example, a timeline could be created for the history of World War II and its major events within a cultural context such as Canadian history. In this example, a major chronological point on this timeline would be September 1939, when the war broke out for Canadians. However, if it were an American timeline, the chronology would likely focus on dates after December 1941, when the country joined the war. The start date of the war will remain the same (1939), but a timeline that focuses on American history will likely offer more attention to dates after 1941 rather than before. I use this example to illustrate some of the issues that categorizing history through timelines creates. Both countries were in the same war, but the versions of history will already be limited and incomplete in terms of the dates through which individual timelines are created to catalog these historic events within a linear framework. When dress samples are illustrated on a timeline, larger components of a garment history will be excluded to fit within the parameters of the highlighted chronology. This continued use of chronology to categorize dress limits potential readings of the individual textile artifact.

In his presidential address to the American Historical Association, historian Carl Becker suggested that history comprises a twofold practice of understanding the past. The first consists of the actual events that occurred, whereas the second is the association of the past based on memory, which will be relative and open to change (Becker, 1931). This suggests that such timelines are an arbitrary way of categorizing the past and are largely contingent on the space and place that they produced within, such as an American cultural system. History cannot be

observed or directly tested, so it is about working from a trace history (Becker, 1931). This is where historic timelines has been performed to legitimate the practice of history as a study through a concrete approach to the past that follows a linear trajectory of cause and effect, as outlined by several social history scholars' use of timelines (Bussey, 2009; Narayan, 2005; Azevedo, 1997). As Becker further posits, our understanding of time is mainly abstract, as the idea of the present is created and articulated through the past. We use past events to anticipate a future that directs knowledge from a place of recollection and public memory (Becker, 1931). Historical investigations will often move beyond the use of a timeline to a more in-depth analysis of particular events and artifacts, but they operate from the assumptions of this chronology and a linear progression of history, which is both centralist and generic in its presentation of the past.

Timelines, as part of historical investigations, are useful in their simplicity and their organization of large and complex concepts such as war or famine. However, handling history in this way has specific and lasting consequences. As the historian Denial offers, timelines are useful for presenting a big picture of a historic period. However, they do so by sacrificing authorship and it works from a concept of completeness (one that ignores the nuances of historic events, and the various bodies involved). Further, historic timelines and their preponderant use of a linear trajectory will privilege a Western perspective that ignores specific places (like a rural town) and environments (class, background, material availability) (Denial, 2013), a contention several scholars have further supported in their examination of historical chronology practices (Mills, 2020; Tilley, 2016). The big-picture ideal that these historic timelines allow for is part of why they continue to be used and reinforced in the context of the museum exhibition space and fashion event venues. As some scholars like Davis and Krautli have suggested, digital

technologies work well with the visual and spatial presentation that such timelines and their chronology offer. As the authors claim:

Yet such chronographics should be capable of supporting sophisticated thinking about history and historiography, especially if they take full advantage of the capabilities of digital technologies. They should enable even professional academic historians to 'make sense' of history in new ways, allowing them insights they would not otherwise have achieved. (Boyd-Davis & Krautli, 2014)

By digitizing the past, these scholars suggest a more adaptable version of history that will allow for greater democratization, including, I would argue, representing absent voices in the archives and those unable to access the museum space. However, I would also suggest that while digital technologies offer opportunities for present voices, they will ignore and simplify historic voices and the nuances of past events not deemed novel or large enough to be included on a timeline or as part of a period's chronology. Further, as Becker suggests, historic knowledge operates from an artificial memory extension as we form a picture of the past based on what was preserved.

This understanding of the past is not without influence, and it is placed in association with what we believe the future and its concerns to be (Becker, 1931). This focus on influences on the past through present memory and its future interests has been explored in depth since Becker's talk in the 1930s, including scholarly work on the uses of historical memory in producing artificial knowledge (Cubitt, 2013; Nerone, 1989; Landsberg, 2015). If we create the past through the needs and assumptions of present bias, the concept and use of the timeline will continue to reflect a generic view of the past that ignores individual agency and the personal's influence on historic cultural production.

I have suggested there is a use for these timelines, but I have yet to address why I think we should continue to contest this linear chronology based on the Western perspective on time. The scholar Laroui critiques the temporal presuppositions of the timeline, or the assumption that if history exists on a timeline, we are constantly evolving and improving upon the past. Laroui does this by suggesting the only way for history to become more democratic is through a universalist, de-centrist approach arrived at by considering historic values through globalist perspectives (Riecken, 2015). As a scholar in a post-colonialist context, Laroui has developed ideas of historicism through Western linear chronologies and Eastern understandings of time. Postcolonial approaches to history, he argues, must move beyond ideas of a linear cause-and-effect progression to one that exists within a specific location and an idea of time that is more interrelated (across timelines and locations) (Riecken, 2015). I would argue that this interrelation of different concepts of time is hardly a new idea; for example, in art history, there is an understanding that the artist is both creator and shaper of history. Such conditions of time have been explored for a longer period in the practice of art history, as seen in art theories surrounding concepts of flexible time (Shiff, 1994) and considerations of art writing in a non-linear field (Preziosi, 1989). This non-linear field means art scholarship can consider its practice within multiple timelines and geographies. Art historians and artists consider time as elastic and relative to what and where one decides to focus the creative process (Hwee Kan, 2011). Also, as art historian Hween Kan clarifies, no overarching history encapsulates one style of art, so artists will often consider their forms across various historic periods rather than through an obvious progression (Hwee Kan, 2011). If art historians can consider time as something more flexible, other practices of history should be able to move beyond a static understanding of the past that works on principles of succession to one of the accession of various pasts and voices.

Where does the fashion artifact fit within such a reconsideration of historic time and the use of timelines? I argue that cloth, by its nature, exists beyond the time of its production, allowing for ideas of historicism to be seen as more adaptable and multifaceted. By existing both for the individuals of the past and available for use in present and future productions, the study of cloth resists strict linear approaches to its histories. This has been explored in works such as Greer and Barbieri's post-modernist perspective on exhibitions that account for non-linear time (Greer & Barbieri, 2013), as well as through Cook's exploration of children's dress, in which he suggests that a progressive perspective on examinations of children's historical development and linear timelines limits the reality of childhood fashion historically (Thomas-Cook, 2011). In other words, this idea of a perfect developmental process exhibited in children's dress ignores the historical understanding of childhood and the developmental foundations of the past. Further, Hjemdahl explores receptions of timelines through museums' presentation of the historic body as outside linear time (Hjemdahl, 2014). In Denial's project for reconsidering timelines, she had her students offer an alternative approach to cataloging in which fabric and its fabrications were key to such a reframing of timelines. Earlier cataloging practices include early textile cataloging cards, as Vance Austen suggests in her examination of Kansas University archives (Vance Austen, 1978), the Costume Society of America's roundtable conversation of 2014 on digital accession in the archives (Kirkland et al., 2014) as well as Marcketti, Fitzpatrick, Keist and Kadoplh's research on cataloging practices in university collections through curatorial interviews (Marcketti et al., 2011), all of which suggest a challenge in articulating and cataloging textile based artifacts within current frameworks. One student example was a collection of fabric scraps in a box, which was used to suggest that the order of a collection can change depending on the scraps being highlighted and those ignored. The various scraps included hinted at the bias of

historic cataloging as the finer cloths were in better shape based on the care they had received. Further, the scraps highlighted the changing values of beauty historically, as pieces woven together offered evidence of the personal choices in taste that go into cloth manufacturing (Denial, 2013). Another student explored timelines through fabrications by weaving scraps into a larger textile, in which each strip was treated as an individual story. The loose weave suggested that parts could be moved and repurposed to reconsider events of the past that were dependent on different perspectives of the physical, ideological, and temporal (Denial, 2013).

The students in Denial's project suggest the potential that cloth carries in contesting Westernized linear timelines. I want to consider these potential contestations as part of reconsidering the practice of cataloging fashion in museum and academic spaces. We see the latter in more recent case studies, including cataloging attempts on the part of smaller museum collections as studied by Wall (2021) and Southern's examination of label practices in North Carolina art collections (Southern, 2023). I offer this reconsideration primarily through reflecting on absent fashion histories (from the archives) but also through the practice of dress reconstructions and their potential to demystify the assumptions of timelines. The speculative or counterfactual approach to history (that which may not have happened but could have, the "what if" in historicism) is useful in considering plausible alternatives to what has been included in historical timelines. The counterfactual approach, when used in tandem with historical inquiry, answers questions around the incomplete, fragmentary, and assumption-based bias that historic collection practices have failed to account for (Wenzlhuemer, 2009). In continuing to challenge these assumptions about time and the Western historic timeline, I offer alternative approaches to fashion historicism that will challenge these biases while allowing for the personal, past and present, to be considered in fashion history.

The Gilded Age as Fashion History's Cultural Epoch

The Gilded Age is an important era for the study of fashion because of the role that the fashion objects gained through cultural production derived both from the rapid expansion of empires and reinforced through developing technologies, particularly within textile industries during this period. The embodied stakes of an era's cultural production and the anxiety present within a particular fashion period both factor into my consideration of the corporeal register and fashion's embodied practice (Levy, 2003; Prettyman, 2001; Scobey, 1989). While focusing on the Industrial period and Gilded Age America, we see this anxiety around embodiment in fashion through the uncertainties of technology and the turn of the century *fin de siècle* understood as a break from tradition and embracing of modernity.⁹ Fashion in *fin-de-siècle* was similarly defined through a break from tradition with designs reflective of modern city life, technological optimism, and democratization of textile industries that allowed the middle and working classes to engage in concepts of fashionable dress (Cox & Hobley, 2014; Wood, 2006; Leach, 1984). Inventions like electric sewing machines, mass-produced sewing patterns, and the rise of department stores with ready-to-wear collections are examples of some of these emerging technologies and industries that made fashion more affordable and accessible. In turn, these technologies and industries challenged who had the right to wear finer dress examples when pieces were easier and cheaper to come by (Wilson, 1985). As a significant shift in market systems, communications, and class restructuring took place with the advent of reproducing

⁹ *Fin De Siecle* is a French term meaning "end of century" commonly applied to the end of the 19th century when mass technological changes challenged cultural traditions and made way for the idea of "modernity" in arts and culture. While the term was used before the nineteenth century, it was during the last decades that a cultural shift occurred in how traditional Western society was moving. The term came to be understood not only as the end of the century but as a historical discontinuity to the past, an apocalyptic break from the past and its traditions, shown in contemporary arts and culture of the period (The Tate, 2024).

technologies (which includes early film, photography, and print technologies), the late nineteenth century was marked as a time of restless change and economic turmoil. Anxieties about class, race, and modernity emerged from what Walter Benjamin terms mechanical reproducibility in arts and culture (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 181-182). The new forms of communication, such as film and the camera, made various cultural forms available to the masses as commodities, which led to social reconsideration of who had the right to cultural exchange (Carter, 2007, p. 66). This means that emerging technological systems challenged the rights to rule by the upper classes and allowed middle and working-class peoples, including the racially “othered,” to challenge the previous conditions of cultural production to include popular culture, which they could actively shape and define through their interests and active buying power.

In New York during the 1870s, society struggled to define a set of rules and systems to take account of the vast wealth being assembled by families seemingly overnight, and largely due to investments within American Industrialization (such as Vanderbilt’s railway wealth) (MacColl & Wallace, 2012, pp. 13-17). Ward McAllister, a British immigrant, became one spokesperson for high society and was tasked with creating a system that would keep new wealth from corrupting the traditions of the old money families that had previously overseen New York society (Parrow, 2021). He was chosen by the old money “knickerbocker” families (in particular the Astors) primarily for his long lineage; he was moderately wealthy but poor compared to the rest of the society he helped shape. His task was to set up the rules and regulations for what defined the upper class in America. The system developed through what became known as “the Patriarchs,” a system which clarified a family’s social fitness through a pedigree defined through no less than four generations of wealth (Vanderbilt II, 2013, pp. 94-95). This meant that any money made from the Industrial period within America could not be included in such an elite accounting

because the wealth for these families would have been made in three generations or less (i.e. new money rather than generational money). The Astors, who were the primary gatekeepers for this system, provided the impulse towards the “400 club” (because Mrs. Astor’s ballroom could only fit four hundred people). Only those of generational wealth were allowed to join the social calendar or participate in the arts, including gaining access to exclusive music halls. These upper-class Americans wanted to establish a system mimicking the European aristocracy that defined tradition through legacy (Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 97). When excluded, the new wealth circles developed their own cultural sites and adopted modern forms of entertainment such as dance halls and cinema houses (Chinn, 2009, pp. 15-18). This movement away from a supposed birthright (a belief that certain races and backgrounds had more of a right to cultural production) (Painter, 2010) to a more open and democratized series of cultural systems led to tensions between race, class, and gender as bodies crossed boundaries both physical and metaphorical to seek new social opportunities (Carter, 65).

The Arts and Crafts movement¹⁰ grew in response to ideas around industrialization, new concepts of femininity, increased social activities within the public sphere, and a more open idea of what constituted art, leading to an acceptance of decorative and craft-based designs by art academies during the Gilded Age (Casto, 2009, pp. 127-130). The movement originated in England through the work of John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who sought a revival of Late Medieval and Early Renaissance painting. Such works were inspired by nature

¹⁰ The Arts and Crafts Movement was primarily one of design reform and a belief that a decline in standards was occurring with increased mechanization, it promoted a romantic ideal of past art forms and a value in tradition (Kaplan, 1987). The movement, often referred to as having a religious relativism, was primarily a movement within The English Isles and the United States that promoted art against materialism in which it celebrated a return to handicrafts and decorative arts (Winter, 1975, p. 36). The Arts and Crafts movement succeeded more formal artistic movements of previous decades. Its style reflected an anti-industrialist and antimodernist sentiment, promoting art forms derived from pre-industrial methods (Stankiewicz, 1992, pp.165).

and a moralistic adherence to traditional handicrafts and pre-industrial technologies (MET, Meagher, 2004). While the movement was considered mainly anti-modernist, its approach to traditional handicrafts inadvertently led to an avenue within art and society for women previously in the domestic sphere actively to take part and shape ideas of the public sphere (Casto, 2009, p. 133). Further, despite the movement's attempt to celebrate ideals of the past, the shift from high art to decorative led to a more democratized cultural system because of technologies of reproducibility and their relative affordability. It led to a more active interest in leisure and social exchanges within a more diverse cultural system that was not just the trickle-down effect of the cultural elite to the lower classes that we see in previous "high art" movements (Stankiewicz, 1992). Society was shifting towards viewing culture as a commodity, as opposed to being class-specific. This emerging idea that status could be bought (the Vanderbilts, for example, bought their way into the "400 society" through their purchasing power of the cultural spaces and products) (MacCall & Wallace, 2012) made the role of fashion more important for identity politics. As one's image rather than title or station could now speak to the person's character and that of their family, cloth worked as a mediator for subjectivity.

The *fin de siècle*, which saw an overhaul of the cultural value system positioned in America over the previous two hundred years (Scobey, 1989; Levy, 2003), expresses these changes to culture through economics, technologies, and class systems within the realm of clothing and fashion. We see this exemplified in such works as Stepinak's on the living fashion model of the 19th century (Stepinak, 2019) and Buckley and Fawcett's book on feminine fashion as influenced by the *fin de siècle* political landscape (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002). Further, philosopher Georg Simmel clarifies that this rapid change within the social system is in the nature of the bourgeois

condition¹¹ and the expanding middle class that formed during this period of modernity. Fashion is emphasized in what critics have called a nervous age like the Gilded Age, for its potential equalization and individualization and its use in imitation and conspicuousness. Fashion is the cultural tool for such attempts at equality and individuality (McNeil, 2016, pp. 74-75). Fashion (including historic fashion artifacts) considers constant change as its cultural advantage over the social conditions of linear time. The fashion artifact is one of the few cultural products that attempts to keep pace with the constant social changes of an expanding society (McNeil, 2016, p. 77). Other cultural pieces may still speak to a particular time of production but do not lose their relevance in quite the same way that a dress would, and while a painting can hang for years, a dress is likely to change within the next social season (for the wealthy and middle classes). In understanding fashion as a product of change (Robenstine & Kelley, 1981; Aspers & Godart, 2013; Viera Lopes, 2019), we should consider the contrary nature of its purpose as an item that cites a clear point in history, despite its attempts to be something unfixable in its nature. Despite cultural cataloging attempts to fix fashion within a certain cultural moment, the fashion product's attempt to be a constantly evolving object of cultural production contradicts its positioning within a Western linear timeline. As key to adaptation of the body and changing cultural tastes, fashion will modify itself to meet the needs of its corporeal value within different social periods and conditions.

The Machine Age¹² saw new beauty ideals transferred through the work of the camera. The camera was significant for its association with mechanical reproducing technologies and its

¹¹ The Bourgeois condition is a condition of the middle class that attempts to gain status in comparison to other social strata through both invention and imitation. It involves control over the means of production through land, machinery, and capital. The bourgeoisie in this era referred to those disrupting the system of status through industry, forming a new idea of class, specifically a new version of middle class.

¹² The Mechanical age or Machine age, marked by technological advancement, dates from approximately 1860 to 1945 and refers to the shift from manual labor to mechanical energy during the industrial period.

ability to capture a person more truthfully than in portrait art. Its relative speed meant it captured people “in the moment.” As part of this relative speed in the art of the camera, wealthier people came to desire to view themselves contemporaneously in the moment. A significant component of presenting contemporaneously was considering how one looked publicly, particularly “new” money families desiring current fashions (Severa, 1995; DeNipoti, 1994). By presenting a clearer image of the face and body than paintings had ever done, the camera’s use led to an increased focus on enhancing one’s looks through styling and adornment, including cosmetics and dressing that would highlight and hide certain aspects of the body deemed less desirable by the era’s beauty standards. Emerging sports, music, and media technologies played a large role in what inspired fashion design and considerations of how to dress through an understanding of modernity (Wilson, 1985, p.158). A general anxiety about the mechanization of production was perhaps most apparent in fashion, as modern cultures saw the importance of street dress, and an emerging sense of fashion as significant to creating new social standing. One could exhibit one’s character and read another’s character through how they wore their garments in an expanded public sphere. The corporeal takes on a new meaning as a kind of democratized dress (Springgay, 2003; Negrin & Merleau-Ponty, 2015), which means the garments reflect personal character while also being used to disguise or highlight tensions and anxieties on the part of the wearer and their place within this social system. The concerns around class and the status of the fashion object were contentious throughout the nineteenth century. However, I argue it was the Gilded Age that best addressed these anxieties because, during this period, new technologies led to a restructuring of the social conditions that Americans had relied on to create class boundaries.

Industry processes sped up production and shifted the tradition of labor. This mechanization also challenged cultural production, and societal ideals shifted to match modernity, defined by constant change and invention (Benjamin, 1968, pp.179-180).

This restructuring was less pronounced but still significant for the poor in the Gilded Age. The world of the “Shop Girls,” a rising counterculture created through fashionable dress was significant for situating ideas of gender and equality in the city space (Odem, 1998; Benson-Porter, 1996). These department store girls’ use of the latest designs from the shops in a more affordable emulation of high fashion challenged their working-class positions within America’s restricted fashion system. Further, the democratized education system and development of working-class leisure spaces like dance halls, cinema houses, and public resorts expanded cultural spaces outside the ruling ideologies of the upper class and a distinct dressing style and culture for working-class families and youth (Chinn, 2008). In another context, through the Vanderbilts, Whitmores, and other “new” money families challenging and overtaking the old structure enforced by families like the Astors, the “new” money families illuminated the power that certain cultural productions (like the fashion object) can have in creating a new system of meaning and power.

The Gilded Age, as a transient era (Baxter, 2021), which was always changing and unfixable as part of the process of modernity, expressed a shifting cultural subject, as both people and processes sped up to meet the modernist challenge of constant change as seen in fashion’s approach to mechanical reproducibility and attitudes towards modernity that emerged as part of these associations (Severa, 1995; DeNipoti, 1994; Benjamin, 1968). In contrast, the working class, who did not have the luxury of being constantly “in fashion,” still found their dynamics for clothing shifted in the emulative practices that these newer technologies allowed for, including at-home sewing patterns and mass-produced fashion accessories that allowed for their own versions of upper-class stylings (Penney, 2019; Noddings 2011). An example of an emerging modern culture and its influence on the forming subject can be seen in the works of Impressionist

artists and the practice of 19th-century portraiture. As late 19th century artists, James Jacques Joseph Tissot and John Singer Sargent became synonymous with presentations of the fashionable subject. Tissot, having worked within the fashion industry as an illustrator of fashion prints (Marshall, 2009, p. 208), aptly revealed the way the objects that surround the portrait subject helped to shape the latter's worldview and the manner in which these objects would limit or offer liberties through their use and ownership by the subject. While Tissot was a French artist of the French Belle Epoque movement, his artistic styling inspired the Gilded Age's portraitists who also focused on fashionable objects to express the character of their sitter. Sargent was trained in the French style and worked in art academies across Europe. However, because he was American, he was credited as a key independent American artist by nationalists (Stephenson, 2023, p. 57). Sargent understood that his younger subjects desired to be considered objects of fashion. Because the dresses were a large part of his portraiture design, the display of the garments determined the sitter's character and the character of the art piece itself (Ormond, 2023, p. 16). Both Tissot and Sargent's paintings and other examples of 19th-century portraiture provide us with a context for how people did things, what they thought was important in their lives, and what had value in their culture.¹³ For example, Tissot's *In Full Sun*, circa 1881, shows women and children dressed for the conditions of their activities and in the latest stylings. They are surrounded by objects of leisure that were popular during the period and present themselves as caught in a moment of repose, enjoying an activity (in this case, picnicking in their gardens) suited to their class and station.¹⁴ This is how artists like Tissot, as part of the Second Empire,¹⁵

¹³ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figures 1.1 and 1.2 James Tissot's, *In Full Sun* 1881 and James Sargent's, *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* 1892.

¹⁴ See Visual Resource Appendix, Tissot's Paintings.

¹⁵ Bourgeoise Materialism and the Second Empire refers to the artistic/cultural movement of the late 19th century that was an eclectic mix of decorative arts and neoclassicism. In portraiture, it was art that sought to

sought to depict their subjects as mirrors of their contemporary society. Rather than depicting an idea of familial virtue or historicity as portraitists did before this period, he portrays them “in the moment” and as subjects of a materialist condition in which adornment speaks almost as much as his subjects’ station (Musée d’Orsay, 2020).

Similarly, the American portraitist John Singer Sargent, also captured the position of his sitters through their surrounding adornments. For my argument, it is worth understanding how the arts in this period shifted perceptions of subjectivity in portraiture style, highlighting the value that contemporary dress and its associations had for larger Gilded Age culture and the understanding of modernist subjectivity. Sargent and his work in portraiture was found to be beneficial to the field of fashion. His sitters found his works could situate their conspicuous consumption in a way that validated their position to their peers while simultaneously immortalizing their name through presentation within the academies (Corbeau-Parsons, 2023, pp. 26-29). Further, because Americans were attempting to define their identity as separate from European identity, they sought artists like Sargent out of the belief that he would be more capable of understanding the nuances of Gilded Age elites and the American way of life (Stephenson, 2023, p. 63). However, critics of the era saw Sargent’s work as reshaping portraiture and the subjectivity of his sitters to that of a commodity rather than art (Corbeau-Parsons, 2023, p. 29). From a materialist perspective, the production process shapes a culture’s symbolic systems and set of laws they will follow (Barthes, 1967; Miller, 1987; Porpora, 1993). Both artists demonstrate this productive process by presenting the products of the nouveau riche within their painting’s settings, as well as by having the subjects interact with these objects, thereby

depict middle-class life through reflections of the modern culture defined by commercialization and depictions of contemporary fashion and modern cultural objects (Musée D’Orsay, 2020).

presenting late nineteenth-century subjects as consumerist beings in this new cultural system (Marshall, 2009, p. 208). Sargent's work *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* (1892) saw great success at The Royal Academy and helped position him as the chief painter for the international elite (Corbeau-Parsons, 2023, p. 31). In this portrait, the subject is positioned in a sitting room chair where the setting speaks to her class and tastes as much as her garment does. Rather than referencing the past, she expresses herself as a woman of the moment. Her adornments speak to tradition while suggesting that she keeps up with present tastes. Sargent's rising popularity as a portraitist meant his paintings began to be mass-produced in print form through press houses for those who could not obtain a private audience. This solidified in some critics' opinions of the commodification of portraiture from classical form to contemporary product (Crobeau-Parsons, 2023, pp. 31-32). The morbid¹⁶ and transient aspects surrounding this type of representation (one grounded in contemporary society) result from these depictions of fashion. The people presented have been fixed in time; and rather than alluding to past ideals and cultures as other painters have done, the portraitists of the late nineteenth century offer an image of the moment because subjects are depicted in contemporary dress and settings, shaping the artist's subjects as existing within a time and place which suggests that they are mortal, not immortal beings. This association with contemporary settings alludes to a society that had shifted from the traditions of its past, divorced from its foundations of culture and time. This led to anxiety around these depictions, suggesting that in positioning art in the present, artists showed that these traditions did not guarantee immortality for the cultural producers and its consumers but rather were shaped by constant change and the inability to stop time (Marshall, 2009).

¹⁶ The term morbid refers to the deathly associations of contemporary understandings of time within fashion. It refers to a particular space and place that will pass and no longer fit the connotations of the next cultural production, thus suggesting the "deathly" aspects of time (Bari, 2019; Barthes, 1967).



Figure 1.1 and 1.2 Paintings by James Tissot *In Full Sun* Circa 1881 and James Singer Sargent *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* Circa 1892

The essence of the Gilded Age's production of culture, as most nineteenth-century portraiture depicts it, is epitomized in the fashionable and transient (Musée d'Orsay, 2020; MET, 2013), and I would argue that there is no underlying continuity in the fashionable object but rather an unstable cultural production: one that survives through its continual repurposing and renewal rather than being built on a foundation of past cultural ideals (Miller, 1987; Barthes, 1967). For example, in both paintings *In Full Sun* (1881) and *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* (1892), the figures are presented in the latest fashion with special attention to newer elements of textile manufacturing like machine lace and embroidery. Further, rather than alluding to a well-known fable or historic moment as previous painters have done, Tissot and Sargent, like other late nineteenth-century artists, surround their subjects with objects of their own time, including their sun hats, magazines, and objects of leisure. The painters' works, like the Gilded Age fashion industry, are ephemeral as other paintings are also ephemeral. However, they are also constantly evolving to reflect the modifications in the new social order that reproducibility allows for

(Marshall, 2009, p. 210). These modifications include the changing approaches to culture from technological advances, which allow for continual renewal of tastes and trends within fashion, art, and media, shifting how culture is produced and consumed within class systems. This instability of the new form of Western European culture is part of the *fin de siècle* attitude of the period, which marked the death of old cultural values and eras. In Sargent's transnational success, he was known for capturing the ideals of the expanding world of art and fashion in ways that modernized the practice of portraiture so that it appeared up-to-date and nuanced (Stephenson, 2023, p. 68), including the depiction of contemporary dress and objects. The paintings I have highlighted here position the characters in one place and space as part of a fixed reality for the contemporary viewers of the Gilded Age. The critics of the day saw works like Tissot's and Sargent's as vulgar in that these contemporary artists made the culture confront its reality and, ultimately, its fear of death, in recognizing that they are products of their time rather than referential subjects existing out of time (Musée d'Orsay, 2020; MET, 2013). In being timely and of the present, what artists like Tissot, Sargent, and the fashion industry highlight is a constantly changing social order and the reality that, as subjects, we too are continually changing, aging, and thus facing our mortality and unfixability within a traditional timeline. They reference this unfixability by showing continuous development within modern associations of culture, suggesting one cannot place oneself within one specific space and place because time is constantly shifting and changing the positionality of its cultural subjects.

Looking at women's dress and life stages within the cultural indexes of the Gilded Age, we can perceive how aging impacts the cultural sense of self and the stories we tell through choices in cloth. Aging in fashion is part of a corporeal anxiety around the embodied stakes of dressing that challenges cataloging practices that attempt to position the fashion object outside of time

(often ignoring the organic nature of the bodies that the fashion objects house). Culturally, Western fashion attempts to negate and hide the aging form; the developing body as an abject body is harder to classify and categorize (Fortunati, et al., 2003; Russo, 1994; Cooks & Wagelie, 2021). Nevertheless, how a woman elects to adorn or remove an object from her person is symbolic of the story she wants to tell and that is told by the dominant culture. In an interview, Heidi Julavits describes the phenomenon of women's fashion as a gateway into the cultural traditions of a group and individual embodiment:

To understand their style was to be a tourist in the habits and traditions of a strange world. To watch them was not terribly different from reading a book. I learned that style isn't what you wear, its how you wear it... -Heidi Julavits (Heti, et al. 2014, p. 6).

The idea that one could learn of individual and communal habits through a person's sense of style offers a way to reconsider dress outside of a static timeline to account for the personality that forms within the social conditions of a culture. In the Gilded Age, the role of dressing was complicated by ever-changing class structures and through the expanding garment industry and the rise of women's emancipation (Cable, 2018a; Keefe, 2018b; Muller, 2012). The way that women had to navigate the complicated precipice of what we now call the modern era indicates as to how dress protected and resisted the trained and untrained bodies of women, both young and old (Eckersley & Duff, 2020). For the upper classes, dress reinforced their stations, while the rising middle class used fashion to gain acceptance in the upper-class's cultural spaces. For the lower/working classes, dress was a way to gain rights and autonomy over their bodies in the working system.

The embodied value in clothes (Ravnlokke, et al. 2023; Buse & Twigg, 2015; Weber, 2010; Colls, 2003) did not suddenly emerge in the Gilded Age. However, during this time, upper and

middle-class cultural milieus started to understand a dress's value in shaping and reflecting the cultural conditions within which bodies and their garments existed (Baxter, 2021). The work of the society columns in newspapers primarily situated the status of a family and their circles by what people wore and how they wore it (MacColl & Wallace, 2012). Adornment and clothing choices became a signifier of where people came from and where they resided within the social system. The fancy dress balls of the upper classes were a key social event during the fin-de-siècle period; for example, they became more about dressing in costumes based on a concept that reflected on objects or a known cultural experience; for example, performers of the Dresden quadrille came costumed as Dresden China (Museum of New York, Broyles, 2013). It also reinforced social position through costumes that offered an idea of ancestry and tradition by embodying a specific historic period or person, such as Queen Elizabeth I (Porsella, 2023, p. 109).

During the Gilded Age, women dressed with the intent to show off personality and familial characteristics rather than to present a costume that hid these aspects as the masquerades of the past may have done (Porsella, 2023, p. 109). For example, while the eighteenth-century masquerade was about concealing identity, the costumes in Gilded Age fancy dress balls reflected the wearer's personality and interests (Hirshler, p. 86). Subverting the masquerade became about reinforcing social positions. In this case, new money upper-class families attempted access to titled aristocratic circles by strengthening their financial status through an idea of historical legacy. Sargent himself had fancy dress costumes created by the House of Worth as part of some of his portrait themes. This created publicity for the events, sitters, and of

course, the artist himself, as we see in the case of English heiress Sybil Sassoon's 1923 portrait¹⁷ in a costume based on a portrait by Anthonis Mor of Anne of Austria (Hirshler, 2023, p. 89). She is presented along the lines of classical portraiture, but the work still lends itself to playfulness and jest because Sargent is not attempting to directly imitate the masters of the past (Hirshler, 2023, p. 89). Consider how modern invention challenged the sumptuary restrictions of the past so that dress became a catalyst for subjectivity. For example, the sumptuary laws of early American society were positioned from a Puritan standpoint regulating who could wear certain types of cloth and stylings. The old-money families of the Gilded Age continued a tradition of fashion that was well behind the current stylings as a point of moral fortitude (MacColl & Wallace, 2012). In this new society, the demimondaine¹⁸ could dress like the elite; fashion was about subversion and reinforcement that changed the social status of the upper class and those who attempted to enter their circles (Porsella, 2023, p. 112). Understanding this meant that dress became adornment and a way to challenge and reinforce the social conditions of the dominant cultures.

The Vanderbilt family is perhaps one of the best examples of how an American new-money family used the artifice of the fashionable to establish their name within the New York social elites. Alva, the daughter-in-law of William H. Vanderbilt, understood that fashionable presentation was important in reflecting the family's ambition. Her Fifth Avenue mansion was built in the style of the Chateau de Blois in Touraine, both to establish an idea of European lineage and to position themselves as tastemakers in the same way as the French at the time

¹⁷ See Appendix A Figures 1.3 and 1.4 Portrait of Sybil Sassoon Dutchess of Rocksavage, 1922 and House of Worth fancy-dress costume for Sybil Sassoon Dutchess of Rocksavage, 1922.

¹⁸ Demimondaine is a 19th-century French term referring to women on the fringes of polite society typically seen as a mistress to wealthy gentleman.

(Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 89-90; Lewis et al. 1987). However, her real challenge to the old system was in the Vanderbilt costume ball on March 26, 1883, which also happened to fall on a Monday evening (an evening typically reserved for Caroline Astor and her patriarch balls) (Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 103; Muller, 2012). Alva intended for the costume ball to establish her family in the cultural system of the New York elite and to challenge the power that Caroline Astor and her “400” had over the emerging industrial new money families. Her ball was heavily publicized in the papers, while the costumes chosen were imbued with the significance of the status that various new money families attempted to establish for themselves. Her husband Willie, for example, went as the Duc de Guise, whose portrait hung in his father’s art gallery. Her friend and newly titled heiress, Viscountess Mandeville, came as Princess Marie-Claire de Croy in a black gown based on a Vandyke portrait (Vanderbilt, 2013, p. 113; MacColl & Wallace, 2012). Their costumes highlighted an attempt at an implied legacy and ‘fitness’ of their station by referencing the aristocrats of Europe to infer an idea of cultural heritage for themselves and their newer American-based class systems.

Alva, as the host of the ball as well as the challenger to the system on which Caroline Astor had prided herself as matriarch, had to carefully choose a costume that would solidify her position within upper-class society while implying her ambitions to usurp the Astors’ position as gatekeeper. She wore a gown inspired by a Venetian Renaissance princess described in society column pages in detail as a white and yellow brocade evening gown with a blue satin embroidered train and sheer gold sleeves (Block, 2021; Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 113). While a fine example of costuming, it was also a significant choice both in its historical references and in the fact that Caroline Astor also attended the ball as a Venetian princess in a gown similarly embroidered with gold floral motifs and pearls, although made with dark velvet rather than

lighter silks (Block, 2012; Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 116). Similar costuming implied a challenge was taking place in matters of taste between the ruling matriarchs, one of old money and one of new money. Caroline covered her costume in heritage diamonds, including a diamond tiara and Marie Antoinette's diamond stomacher (King, 2008; Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 116). In comparison, Alva wore several strands of pearls worn by Catherine the Great of Russia and Empress Eugenie of France (King, 2008; Vanderbilt II, 2013, p. 113). Both used their wealth to create an idea of legacy or social fitness within their inherited items as worn by past European aristocrats. The Astors had a longer lineage, but Alva attempted to prove through her costuming choices that she could buy this legacy and create an idea of heritage through design. I would argue that it was Alice Vanderbilt, the sister-in-law to Alva, however, who challenged this idea of old money status by taking inspiration from the new in design to situate the place of the family oriented towards a future idea of America rather than the past.

Alice Vanderbilt suggested in her costume choice that with the right dress, one can gain entrance into society while challenging its dominant cultural ideals. Through her costume, the *Electric Light Dress*,¹⁹ which she wore to the ball in 1883, she suggested admiration of her family's wealth and an embrace of the "new" in its ideals and its people (Broyles, 2013). As one of the nouveau riche,²⁰ she used her electric dress to challenge the status safeguarding those with a "longer" history claimed through historic dress. Rather, by embodying her family's legacy of technological optimism, she chose something reflective of the future and her family's potential to control the new cultural conditions (Porsella, 2023, pp. 114-115; Stasz, 2000). Electricity was

¹⁹ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figures 1.4 and 1.5 Alice Vanderbilt's *Electric Light Dress*.

²⁰ Nouveau riche refers to people and families with recently acquired wealth, considered ostentatious and separate from old money and titled families. During the Gilded Age, this term was used to refer to the industrialist families as "undesirables" compared to the old money "knickerbockers" (MacColl & Wallace, 2012).

associated with enlightenment, through the use of which implied an understanding of liberty, including for those outside the old money culture. Thus, Alice's positioning as the electric lady was one of progressive ideals (Porsella, 2023, p. 117; Larsen, 2018, pp. 362-364). By embracing a modern concept for her costume, she challenged the designation of the "new" as negative by using the cultural milieu of the era to gain new signification for herself and her family through her dress choice (Porsella, 2023, p. 118; Larsen, 2018, p. 366).



Figure 1.5 and 1.6 Alice Posing in her Electric Light Dress 1883, The Electric Light Dress designed by Worth 1883, Housed in The Museum of The City of New York.

This signification in dress artifacts, as understood in the Gilded Age (Lowe, 2018, pp. 88-89; Tischleder, 2005; Fisher, 2001), impacts our understanding of dress artifacts within current cultural systems. If dress, not just costume, was produced with an understanding of the social condition within which it exists, then a reconsideration of the dress artifact as one that is not static but dynamic to the identity and the conditions in which it is worn challenges our understanding both of timelines (historic timelines, from a Western linear perspective) and the

so-called original artifact. The Gilded Age's focus on referent and reproducibility (as part of the cultural theory that emerged with the technologies of the camera and film) (Pauwels, 2024; Geczy & Karaminas, 2016, pp. 12-27; Harris, 1983), changed the system of fashion to account not only for aestheticism but also for the cultural indexes of its time, such as politics, economics, as well as gender and age. In considering the position of women historically within society, we can see that their position of power lay primarily in fashioning themselves. This could be viewed as an alternative form of expression outside the social realm, from which women were traditionally excluded (McNeil, 2016, p. 75). In the Gilded Age, this expanding concept of social milieu changed how women approached self-fashioning through their wardrobes to access these new positions of power in the social through choices in dress. This is seen, for example, in the case of cycling wear and tea dresses, both of which reflected the expanding social sphere for women with lighter, easy-wear fabrics. In addition, these garments were relatively easy to produce across class and station, suggesting an attempt at social climbing in all aspects of society (Ebert, 2010, pp. 25-28).

Cultural Theory's Attempt at Balancing Fashion's Historicism and Its Corporeal Value

Fashion theory emerges from a larger tradition of cultural investigation that reconsidered popular art forms during Benjamin's mechanical age through the process of reproducibility that emerging technologies allowed, as in new ways of recording music, and developments in literature, art, photography, and film. As a result of using technologies like the camera, a new way of considering objects and their use in image-making emerged (Sontag, 1973). The visual

culture of the camera and its contemporary technologies allow the object and its referent to exert a sort of duality, making the object an extension of subjectivity for the person who references the object. Barthes refers to posing for the camera as a making over of the self (Barthes, 1981, pp. 10-11). Just as one can transform oneself for the camera, scholars began to consider the possibility of transforming the self through other cultural forms, including fashion. Benjamin further clarifies this idea of self-fashioning that emerged when photographic technologies changed the nature of art: personality became a commodity supported or challenged through its surrounding objects and adornments (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 181-182). Self-fashioning reconsiders the role of the personal within cultural cataloging. If dressing with taste and personality in mind was as important as keeping on trend, then the dress artifact is not simply a mark of the time it was produced within but also a cataloging of the individual's interests and thoughts within a social milieu. A reconsideration of the individual self and its formations through visual culture continuously evolves and changes to suit the social conditions the subject exists within. Yet, I contend that fashion history considers clothing that is part of this process as static to the time it was produced within, as seen in critical works such as Perthuis's article on the "no place" of fashion photography and the continual attempts to place objects of fashion out of time (Perthuis, 2021), together with Geczy's analysis of the body that exists artificially in the fashion object display (Geczy, 2016). Further, recent museum scholarship has come to analyze and critique the stasis within which the fashion object continues to be exhibited, while considering performative values in recent exhibition practices, which they suggest might address this problem of stasis (Davies, 2020; Jenkins, 2018; Davis, 1995).

In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger claims that the face has become a "furnishable mask" through which dress communicates (Berger, 1972). There is a level of performativity in fashion and

visual media which has led to an idealized way of seeing that hides the imperfect to highlight an aesthetic ideal detached from the everyday practice of dressing. As I continue to argue, this idealized way of seeing surrounding the fashion object will negate historic realities and continue to create an inauthentic idealized timeline by highlighting the aesthetic and novel. Rather than positioning the dress as a functioning form within culture, it is detached and made to present a particular desire for what things should look like rather than what they are. Fashion images (mass-produced images of the commercial fashion industry, which uses magazine publications and fashion prints to sell a cultural ideal) act on the recycling of artifacts to produce the aura of an art object (Sontag, 1973, pp. 173-175). Fashion references its history by using artifacts to create symbolic meaning, giving fashion the presence of art while performing a ritual of the commodity within the social present. For example, one of the more recent fashion exhibitions on Alexander McQueen showcases his designs alongside the cultural artifacts he references, including vases from antiquity (NGV, 2022). I argue that fashion gains social importance through its reflexivity on past cultural systems while still challenging current cultural ideals through commodifying these past referents. I clarify that this duality that Berger hints at in the fashion object offers a contrary approach to views of fashion timelines attempting to produce themselves within the present but gaining relevance through references to the past. Fashion theorists often argue that fashion is contemporary to its time, without acknowledging how its referents are built upon past cultures and ideals, nullifying the idea of fashion's culture existing within the present without influences of the past. While cultural theorists deal primarily with the fashion image, they link visual culture and fashion's role in exhibiting and performing an idea of authenticity based on illusions of past and present connections. It is an illusion that argues fashion production has an "original" artifact and timeline that exists apart from this recycling of cultural products. I

am referring here to the belief that fashion is always new and evolving when it is more a reintegration of past practices reformed and situated for present uses, not necessarily new or evolved; instead, it's a shift of a previous intended purpose for current cultural interests.

The act of dressing allows subjectivity to occur through adornment choices reflective of personal tastes within the subject's social system. However, dressing also grants a continual formation of the body that emerges in the choice of dress (Ruggerone, 2017; Pomerantz, 2008; Entwistle, 2002). In fashion theory, the subjective act of dressing is key to understanding factors of production and approaches to fashion objects in their various contexts of time, as subjectivity shifts both through aging and the conditions of formation between the dresser and the dress object, dependent on where and when the dressing occurs. An encounter with different dress objects will provide new expressions of subjectivity. This posits the body's existence both within that moment of choice and as one still becoming and actively forming through other possibilities in dress (Eckersley & Duff, 2020, pp. 35-61). This process is class contingent, for those who can afford certain types of dress will have a more active choice in their formation. However, those with less buying power are still subject to this system despite a restriction in dress choice and formation that emerges from these constraints. This relationship of the body as comprised of two parts, the clothed and the unclothed, hints at the corporeal nature of fashion that other cultural mediums negate, which is the nature of the material in relation to the body itself. Clothing offers its wearers a subjective quality to the body as it performs as the social skin that frames the physical skin beneath. In cataloging practice, this is referenced in two approaches. The first is in how subjectivity in dress will create cataloging bias in the archives (Lilley, 1954). The second looks at challenges to the subjectivity of the past when cataloging for the subjectivity of present audiences (Cobb, 2020; Barbieri & Pantouvaki, 2014). In contrast, in the context of aging and

death, scholars engage more with a relation of embodiment that shifts the subjectivity of the wearer when the body ages and deteriorates, as in recent aging scholarship by Twigg (2010; 2007) and embodiment theorist Tulle (2015). Fashion allows the subject to see the body from outside itself through prescribed design choices that enhance and hide parts of the body and their various functions. The garment decides which life will be enhanced and which one will be denied within individual clothing choices (Bari, 2019; Emberly, 1987). Personality is prescribed through practice within social considerations. The subject is reiterative of the power it exists within; therefore, there can be no external relationship to the social (Butler, 1993, pp. 7-9). This suggests that either past or present fashion makers will be influenced by their social conditions, which will continue to shift as subjectivity shifts despite when the clothing was produced or what it was originally produced for. In current historic cataloging and reconstructions, this complicates the desire to capture the unaltered original garment as either an object of the past or present as understood through the present's cultural understanding of subjectivity within its social framework.

Fashion bridges the divide between questions of the body and questions about the social being (Wurst, 2007; Barthes, 1967). Barthes claims there is a link between the post-mortem photograph and its reference to the deceased's clothing and that this reference to clothing acts as a second grave for the loved one (Barthes, 1981, pp.64-65). It symbolizes the absent body and the garment as an extension of the body that is no longer able to adapt within the social context of this person's culture in death. It becomes absent from the individual's personal influence, with the subjectivity of the deceased no longer being present in the cloth. Wilson expands on this when she suggests:

[Barthes] sees fashion's perpetual mutability, its 'death wish', as a manic defense against the human reality of the changing body, against ageing and death. Fashion, Barthes' 'healing goddess', substitutes for the real body an abstract, ideal body; this is the body as an idea rather than as an organism. The very way in which fashion constantly changes actually serves to fix the idea of body as unchanging and eternal. (Wilson, 1985, p. 58)

The garment is of the body but is also a shield that acts as a projection of the personal ideal. The garment balances the individual and communal influences that go into the act of personhood. Through fashion, the body connects with influencing forces outside the self. Fashion circulates the design, materials, and signs of a particular culture and invokes responses from the self and from the self to others in the daily encounters of the clothed form (Eckersley & Duff, 2020, p.46). In this case, the body, both clothed and nude, cannot go through life without at least a level of cultural mediation. This cultural mediation of the body is a large part of the complexity surrounding cataloging practices in fashion, and one of the reasons that defining an object through its timeline is difficult, as each cultural milieu will challenge the practice of subjectivity in which the body either present or absent.

Clothing has a contradictory association with being both mortal and eternal. An unaltered garment speaks to a specific space, time, and personality. It thus faces the new body and new generation with the previous one, along with their mortality (for both the old body and the new body that inhabits the garment). In Caroline Evans' study *Fashion at the Edge*, she refers to this duality as it exists within high fashion markets, suggesting designers' use of historical imagery expresses an image of deathliness that in turn expresses a collective anxiety about people's place in time both for past and future concerns (Evans, 2003). The idea that used fibers can act as mediators for different bodies, classes, and personal boundaries comes from an embodied anxiety

connected to the time the garment exists within (Rose Shell, 2020, p. 12). This embodied anxiety and the corporeal nature of clothing allows for a more cross-cultural and embodied approach to cultural studies that other cultural media do not contend with. While fashion scholar Rose-Shell has written several studies on the anxieties surrounding the “shoddy” in used clothing, the corporeal value perceived in used and historic clothing has been explored across disciplines. Through environmentalism and fashion within the thrift industry, market research has explored the attitudes of people who dislike thrift clothing, together with the anxieties surrounding garments worn by others (Hur, 2020; Laitla & Grimstad-Klepp, 2018).

Despite this, fashion, especially within cultural theory, still problematizes the issues of producing a narrative of dress outside a conventional timeline. For example, more recent scholarship has prized digitizing fashion archives as a tool to explore historicism and memory while accounting for future practices. Digitizing does increase access points for fashion artifacts. However, scholarship tends to prioritize digitizing fashion data as a chronology, still using conventional timelines to examine dress despite including memory within this digital format (Vane, 2019; Martin & Vacca, 2018). The digital archivists offer an approach to memory through the combination of archival research surrounding the object, such as the inclusion of diary entries, letters, and photographs within the same accession catalog as the object, in order to offer a more complete background for the public to access. Often, cultural theory ignores the garment, which exists within the original cultural system of its production and within each new system that it acts as a referent within, negating the linear timeline. For example, cultural theory explores the relationship of the present to the past through fashion objects that shape present systems and attitudes, creating a link between what is worn today in response to what was worn historically as cause and effect rather than a multimodal process that has personal implications

(Grayer-Moore, 2015; Lehmann, 2000). There continues to be a resistance within academia to accept reconstructions as part of dress histories (Morena, 2013; Scott, 2019) and a greater value is placed on artifacts that do not have obvious alterations over those that do (Rumpball, 2018). Both tendencies suggest an avoidance of engaging with these altered garments which highlight embodied anxieties and questions around fashion as a mediator for multiple bodies and timelines. I will note that fashion museums have begun to question and resist approaches that look negatively at alterations and have considered more dynamic approaches, including reconstruction. However, because, historically, these biases exist, the archives have difficulty implementing such practices based on available materials (Brochu, Collections and Conservation; Scaturro, 2024). As Brochu offers:

Treatments and mounting practices usually aim to minimize the appearance of condition flaws and show artifacts to best advantage while providing support sufficient to limit stress and strain. Textiles unable to withstand the mounting process are generally turned down for exhibition in the early planning phase. While these practices conform to accepted professional standards and ideas of museum quality, condition and display, they can limit and/or avoid other areas of interpretation and dress history. (Brochu, Collections and Conservation, p. 2)

Fashion has often been considered as transient and as being very much of the time it was produced within. Forecasting is such a large part of the fashion industry today, for the success or failure of a collection derives from an understanding of the collective attitude of a society at that moment in time (Carvalho-Garcia, 2022; Tsan-Ming et al., 2014). The current political, economic, and social climate will impact what aspects of dress will be accepted based on that moment's fashionable subject's attitude. Nevertheless, the use of historic dress to support

timelines contradicts and ignores the aspects of these embodied traces that clothing of the past possesses. The overlooked personal aspects in dress create a more generalized idea of the social climates that place bodies within a single fashion space and place rather than seeing them as an artifact continually reworked and reembodied across cultures and timelines. As Evans suggests, fashion's deathliness is both a presentation of the body and its mortality but also the anxiety surrounding human continuity, past and present. Fashion's transformative ability reflects both the instability of loss and becoming; the invocation of historic fragments is a way for concerns of modernity and the future to be reflected in the ideals of the past (Evans, pp. 6-9, 2003).

The link between life and death in fashion is apparent through an understanding of philosophy in art history that recognizes the present and its own preoccupations within the objects of the past (Bal, 2021). This means that an object from the past will be seen as a reflection and verification of the present's cultural system (Thatcher-Ulrich, et al, 2015; Caple, 2006). This practice of verification is often used in interactive displays within museums and heritage sites. Ambry Linheim Muller, in her article on living history, comments that

The public's imagination and feelings of nostalgia fill in the gaps left by the documented past, and they can see it as their own ancestral past. For the public, the authenticity of a presentation is based not on historical documents and archaeology but on their experiences within the created landscape. (Ambry-Linheim-Muller, 2013)

The concerns for our futures are verified through a perceived similar anxiety within the past. For example, our anxiety surrounding perceptions of femininity within the fashion industry is often referenced through examples of past dress that support this present anxiety. Exhibitions including "Women Dressing Women" (MET, 2024) and one of the latest rotating exhibitions at La Galerie Dior "A Celebration of Women Artists and the House of Dior" (Galerie Dior, 2023) examine

historical objects as a verification tool for present concerns surrounding women in fashion and in feminism. Instead, such dress objects, like snapshots, only provide a trace image of history that is important for the present, one based on a lived temporality involving life and death. By positioning the bodies of the past in the position of today's anxieties about time, by imposing our concerns for future productions as a continuation of concerns from the past and our fears for cultural longevity as their own fears and anxieties. The mirroring of the present's anxiety around death and aging in the dress subject rather than the past's cultural attitudes towards subjectivity and their own perceptions of time are reflected in the presentation of these cultural dress artifacts.

In her theoretical work on narratology, Mieke Bal uses the example of a girl's court gown that symbolizes her transition from girlhood to womanhood through its social and historic associations, and in doing so, she verifies our cultural understanding of death and aging in cloth. Bal claims that clothing scars with its traces (Bal, 2021, p. 105). By this, she means that the evidence of the bodies that wore these garments verifies past lives and cultures. This past existed with its own idea of subjectivity that complicates our purposes for the present's cultural verification of our social systems. The death wish in clothing is the death of the past presented visually in a museum display, as it marks the difference in dressing attitudes between past and present as not being contingent on a continuity of cultural interests or ideals in dress. In other words, the cultural milieu of the dress artifact has elements of the socially contingent that we in the present can never fully understand as we do not exist within the time of its production. In Bal's example, the dressed subject is faced with the death of her previous self, along with the death of an era, as well as a new sort of death that emerges when her ancestors and a new contingent sociality adopts the dress and all its meanings. As a subject at the turn of the century,

the girl in Bal's example is faced with an emerging pubescent body through her first dress as a woman. This dress will fit her for this symbolic event and will become a referent to her no longer childlike body. Thus, the dress becomes evidence of her mortality. Further, as coming out balls lose favour in the new social system, the dress is symbolic of an era that no longer exists. Finally, after this girl and her ancestors have passed away, her body has little claim to the dress artifact that becomes part of a new social system through which the next generation will decide and verify its purpose to address their own concerns (Bal, 2021, p. 106). Cultural theory considers the implications of the present's relation to the past through dress artifacts by engaging with the death-life dichotomy of the dress. However, it often ignores how the past would have engaged with the piece in its own time, counting on the contemporary perspective to relay a dress artifact's meaning. Dress artifacts have their own meaning and perceptions based on the social conditions of their present. I position this anxiety of life-death perceptions within ideas of time as they pertain to the relationship between the past and present to highlight how this unease about time and perceptions of its passing have shifted. This shift reflects the anxieties of present scholarship on mortality (e.g. contemporary cultures' obsession with anti-aging practices and a celebration of youthful culture in fashion production) rather than a corporeal understanding of the past and its perspective on time and the body. When we only try to verify our ideals and concerns through historic dress objects without acknowledging the past social systems they existed within, we fail to link the larger attitudes towards the corporeal in fashion to our present. These attitudes towards the body include the past's perceptions of bodily ideals that differed from our own, including values of weight, age, height, etc. In doing so, we continue to reinforce the idea of the past as existing only to reinforce conditions of the present.

Fashion in the Museum Space: An Evolving Practice of Individual Histories:

To understand fashion's role in history and museum practice, we must consider how fashion has emerged as a part of cultural traditions within these spaces. Fashion in archival practice arose in the 19th century when a moralistic adherence to the study of cloth was prevalent. The earliest archiving practice of textiles was biased in favour of the idea of "progress" (Farwell, 2021; Claypool, 2020; Sikarskie, 2016). In other words, historical artifacts as evidence of a civilization that was improving, becoming more intelligent, healthy, and ethical were the focus of historical study and collection practice. Fashion was and arguably still is seen as representative of physical pleasures, together with low or popular culture, because of its material nature: as an organic object regularly used, it is expected to fall apart over time, offering itself as an aging object, much like the body. In addition, fashion tends to be feminized and therefore less legitimated as a practice (Pierson-Smith & Peirson-Smith, 2020, p. 275), tending to be viewed in practice within interdisciplinary terms rather than as meriting an approach of its own (Peirson-Smith & Peirson-Smith, 2020, pp. 274-276). It is presented under other cultural disciplines such as literary studies, history, art history, and even science but seldom discussed as constituting its own discipline. Again, we can look at fashion-based exhibitions that define fashion objects through other cultural processes, such as historical movements, like the Bata Shoe Museum's "The Great Divide: Footwear in the Enlightenment" (BATA, 2022) or through celebrities, as in the Victoria and Albert's ongoing exhibition "Taylor Swift's Songbook Trail" (V&A, 2024). Fashion is often placed within abstract interpretations that avoid stylistic and object-based analysis. In other words, the object tends to not be displayed in terms of its construction features or analyzed within a framework that shows it as a unique artifact. The object is often distilled and simplified

to fit another narratology (Riello, 2011, pp. 8865-8869). The solution thus far for cataloging the dress artifact is to place fashion objects in the broader framework of material culture and within history (de Medeiros Dantas, 2023a; Calia, 2023b; Kent, 2018), which again brings it within an interdisciplinary framework that does not necessarily have its own theoretical tradition to draw from. This means that the fashion object is still defined as an object of art rather than a unique cultural object with its own process of making.

Fashion displays will often value dress objects that work in tandem with other archival materials, as we see in exhibitions like “Fashioned by Sargent” (MFA, 2024), where the fashion objects are analyzed through portraiture or in “Naomi in Fashion” (V&A, 2025) which places fashion objects alongside the model's runway videos, journals, and interviews. Print forms such as texts, photographs, and illustrations are often given precedence over dress objects without cross-cultural references (Peirson-Smith & Peirson-Smith, 2020, pp. 2293-2294). The dress artifact is seldom allowed to be interpreted on its own merit, as an object of cultural production. Rather, it is placed in context with other cultural forms to give the practice of fashion a more recognizable framework. By this, I mean a framework that exists on the foundation of another discipline already accepted into academia, such as art history. For example, fashion will be presented through the lens of Impressionist art theory rather than considering fashion's influence on Impressionist art (Mancoff, 2012). We see this in the international exhibition “Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity” (Art Institute of Chicago, MET, Musée d'Orsay, 2013). The developing fashion archives of current cultural theory have become synonymous with this idea of dress as a memory keeper and as giving agency to the relationship between the object and the viewer, allowing for memory activation as a key influence of the artifact through the social, cultural, and

political processes wrought on the archival object. The archive acts as a repository for high and low cultural products that situate culture in a specific space and place (Bastian, 2014).

The fashion-based archive allows for a localized and situated perspective on the object, which questions the idea of a generic history and addresses some of the postcolonial complexities of cultural practices. As Peirson-Smith argues, the digitization of fashion archives has allowed for a further democratization of museum practice that welcomes the low culture of day-to-day practices into the museum space. The fashion archives are a multimodal text that can help navigate complex social experiences (Peirson-Smith & Peirson-Smith, 2020, pp. 285-287). However, the problem that continues to face the fashion artifact is the tendency to explain not only the object itself but also its placement in time and space: in this way, linear fashion gives a false sense of perfect congruency in fashion's development (Riello, 2011, p. 8868). We also offer a limited reading of dress practice that leaves itself open to bias and a misconstrued idea of dress practice in the past. The conditions of Gilded Age fashion collections tend to work in absolutes, such as offering the opulence of dress samples from those of the "new money" as being what upper-class people wore in the 1890s (Taylor, 2022; Perrot, 1994) or by exploring fashionable dress through counter-culture, celebrating the novel in design (Seys, 2021). In a small exhibition, "The Gilded Age of Fashion: 1890-1914" (Toronto Public Library, 2013), the curators explored theatrical dress and high-end fashion plates, for example, to show typical Gilded Age dress. In doing so, the present scholarship does not address the nuances of the middle-class practice of emulation or some of the ways the old money families rejected opulent styles in their versions of fashionable dress. In Lai's work on Gilded Age balls, she makes significant contributions to understanding how the elites of society defined identity through dress. While this is worthwhile research, it does not address the nuances between other classes and their approaches to identity

formation (Lai, 2013). Similarly, in Warner-Blanchard's book on fashionable style as traced through Oscar Wilde's influence on fashion, she explores this middle-class dynamic in insightful ways. However, she relies on avant garde examples of fashion and counterculture to make her claims (Warner-Blanchard, 1998). The research that has been conducted on class and fashion has been invaluable; I only intend to show where we can go further. However, part of the problem of displaying different classed samples of dress is the lack of source material outside elite and novel examples of fashion, which continues to define the kind of research fashion scholars have been able to do.

As Weber and Mitchell suggest (2004), fashion artifacts can be understood as "memory keepers" for past and present cultural considerations. This works by suggesting evidence of past lives' subjectivity in a piece's construction as well as influences on the clothed form through the cultural conditions of its production (Almond, 2021; Pastoureau, 2020; Weber & Mitchell, 2004). The implication is that as memory keepers, dress and their practices of both display and production need to attend to the corporeal register by acknowledging their stakes as a product that is part of the body (either past or present) as museum and heritage centers attempt to express the living element in such dress artifacts. Part of fashion's complicated relationship with archive and museum practice is the difficulty of imbuing life into a traditionally stationary form (Petrov, 2019). The practice of vivification (making an object lively or present) in historic clothing has been a practice fraught with contradictions (Cooks & Wagelie, 2021; Kuchler, 2003). This practice of vivifying represents an ongoing attempt in the museum space for at least a century (Petrov, 2019; Riello, 2011). The difficulty primarily is in trying to express the bodily traces of a deceased person while also attempting to enact their or our cultural will onto the dress object. This would entail pairing a dress's known biographies within a cultural framework that supports

its conditions within the heritage space, such as positioning its construction with ideas around naturalism. This endeavor to vivify continues to be attempted because fashion is the ideal means to think about historicity. For example, one can consider the 2023 exhibition at the NGV, “Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse,” where curators present a blend of artworks, interviews, shows, and mannequins to make the storytelling behind the collection “lively” and present (NGV, April 2023). As a constructed medium, historic fashion makes history accessible and lively to the present (Petrov, 2019). While the previous example is more contemporary, it considers the intention of the designer (who has passed away) and positions him within the present space through his memory traces (interviews, journals, sketches, etc.). Further, it considers the designer’s relationship with the past, including connections to ancient design, and links his contemporary fashions to past conditions, including Ancient Greek artistry. As a memory keeper, fashion presents the past as something that existed with its own social conditions as the people of the past were living entities with their own motivations that are not just reflective of our understanding of social production. The fashion object containing the memories of those who once wore the piece is imbued with life and the conditions that living allows, including its traces (evident in adjustments, staining, stretching, and garment wear).

Making the museum display a “living” entity is difficult if confined to traditionally stationary forms. Vivifying is important because of the larger consideration for fashion objects’ relationality to the corporeal register. This register considers the fashion object as something that can transcend its origins of making to position historic bodies as active agents in present cultural spaces. This active engagement allows for repositioning the relationship between the past and present, to reconstruct history as a living and adaptable practice. Fashion as part of the body is approximated to a living organism and historical sites struggle to make these objects appear

lively and active rather than as a presentation of the dead. Museums continue to consider relevancy by engaging concepts of the past for present use, and part of that involves making the past a living thing (Naumova, 2015; Ciolfli & McLoughlin, 2012; Anderson, 1982). The use of mannequins removes the bodies the garment once housed by replacing them with an abstract approximation of a body that does not account for memory traces. It takes the object of fashion and makes it a nonliving entity, stagnant to the present timeline. Why this is stagnant is because it positions the past and future as something separate and inactive from the present and its processes, marking history as deathly rather than as a functioning part of the present's understandings of culture. The 2023 exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, "Fashioned by Sargent" (MFA, 2023-2024), received several critical reviews regarding its inclusion of fashion within the fine arts space. These criticisms ultimately highlighted the cultural anxieties about fashion's deathly connotations as signs of past lives. These deathly connotations are understood as marking the bodies of the past as ghosts, the clothing a material grave. This anxiety stems from fears of an unstable cultural tradition within the present; if historic clothing marks that the process of the past is mortal, it presents the current modes of production as mortal as well. As art critic Johnathan Jones from *The Guardian* highlighted in his review:

Reconstructing the clothing [Sargeant's] sitters wore seems as perverse as digging up their skulls and displaying them complete with forensic reconstructions of their faces to see how accurately he painted them. The crinkled silks look as macabre as that to me.

They belong in an attic with a rocking horse that moves of its own accord. (Jones, 2024)

Jone's controversial comments point to an ongoing issue, namely that fashion scholars continue to have to defend fashion's value within cultural production. Despite the critic's lack of fashion

knowledge, he expresses the concerns that many heritage spaces have in presenting the fashion artifact so that it does not appear as a “ghost” or as morbid to present audiences. Attempting to engage with an idea of a lived past means presenting dress artifacts as active participants in culture rather than as relics of another time. The answer to avoiding time appearing as stagnant is to evaluate fashion artifacts as lively and active agents within fashion processes. The implication of this liveliness is a reframing of the past and its production as it relates to present cultural making. Thus, it allows an expression of the past beyond the mythic as having value within present constructions of time that is not strictly linear or one-way.

The International Council of Museums has strict regulations against wearing historic costumes as part of display practice, so other solutions are needed for vivifying the fashion object that does not directly conflict with conservation efforts (Petrov, 2019). What this vivification practice furthers is a more dynamic approach to fashion display that engages new forms of fashion scholarship. In recent years the museum industry has experimented with ideas around presenting the living entity in clothing while addressing the absent historical body. In the exhibition “A History of Fashion, Collecting & Exhibiting at the Palais Galliera,” (Palais Galliera, 2022), the curators featured a video from their earlier exhibition, “The Impossible Wardrobe” (Saillard & Swinton, 2012), in which Tilda Swinton, dressed in a lab coat and gloves, carried a collection of fifty-six garments down a runway at the Palais Tokyo in Paris. Part of Swinton’s performance was to create a dialogue dependent on each garment’s former owner, then create or embody an attitude inspired by the style of the garment and what was known about the wearer.²¹ The idea was to bring movement to clothing typically displayed in a stationary form (Wilson, 2013). In a more recent exhibition, the reissuing of the video of Tilda Swinton addressed the

²¹ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure 1.6 and 1.7 Tilda Swinton in *The Impossible Wardrobe*.

question of the surviving garments and their absent bodies, suggesting the video provided both a lively and haunted embodiment of the previous garment's owners. By placing a full-length mirror at the end of the exhibition, patrons were asked to address their own bodies and the clothes they chose to wear at that moment, thereby accounting for absent representations of former and future selves (Garcia-Rada, 2022, p. 185). This expresses the unique nature of the fashion object to time; it suggests that the bodies perform different versions of themselves in their textile selections, and past choices influence present and future practices of embodiment. This offers an interesting link to museum theory and archival practice, as museums will often attempt to express the subjectivity of garments from the past by including illustrations, photographs, letters, or the social conditions surrounding the object. At the same time, there is little to no record remaining of the person. The museum catalogue attempts to express these absences in a way that speaks to present subjectivity and acknowledges that only part of the story will be captured and explored and that it is based on what is present or that remains in the archive (Downing-Peters, 2019; Doussan, 2014).



Figure 1.7 and 1.8 Tilda Swinton with Chanel, and Tilda Swinton with Madame Gres *The Impossible Wardrobe* Photo Credit Piero Biasion

Addressing absent bodies is not the only way to attempt vivification in dress artifacts. In the exhibition “Fashion After Dark” (Western Reserve Historical Society, June 2024), the curators attempted vivification through an immersive atmosphere by addressing the social concerns of women’s dress during the initial appearance of gas lighting. They did so by adjusting the exhibition lighting to simulate that of gas. By placing the exhibits in an original home with period-accurate furnishing, they offered visitors a chance to experience how these dresses would have been seen.²² In the Wade Parlour, for example, the display was set to show the changes to shopping practices that occurred at this time. The arrangement of the room took the visitors

²² See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure 1.10 and 1.11 Empire Parlour and Wade Parlour in *Fashion After Dark*.

through the process of determining what the shopping experience was like when shops and magazines offered dressing advice based on the effects of lighting (WRHS, June 2024). The selected dress eras of 1860-1920s were further separated into different rooms with music and attire to match a social event from each era.²³ While the dress forms were stationary, the exhibit intended to create an atmosphere in which the current visitors could look at the clothing as the women in the past did, through gaslight. While visitors were not asked to imagine themselves embodied in the clothes, they were, through the experience, expected to come away with an understanding of what shaped these women's fashion choices for their embodiment.

The Kent State University Museum has vivified dress collections through a new approach to personalizing the exhibition space. It is new in the sense that it focuses on one body and wardrobe over several decades, highlighting personal choices and their evolutions as the body aged, further pairing it with personal recollections from the wearer and their experiences of selecting garments. As a collection with more contemporary examples of dress, the curators often engage with living bodies, allowing this personalization. In a recent exhibition, which focused on men's fashion, the curators studied the wardrobe of James E. Mulholland. Mulholland worked in the New York fashion industry during the so-called Designer Eras, i.e., 1980s and 1990s, and his wardrobe represents a collection spanning over forty years. In the exhibition "A Life in Style, The Wardrobe of James E. Mulholland" (KSU, October 2023), the curators had the unique opportunity to collaborate with the man behind the clothing (KSU, October 2023). While the exhibition's primary purpose was to highlight more of men's fashion, it offered a compelling opportunity for new ways to display fashion, focusing on the personal decisions that go into clothing. Many of the placards within the exhibition space featured quotations from Mulholland

²³ The Dining Room featured Robert Dett (1882-1943), Magnolia, Suite for Solo Piano, 1912, WRHS, 2023.

himself discussing his choices in dress and the decisions about his wardrobe. Featuring the fashion of just one individual or body, creates in effect a case study of an individual's past and present.²⁴ However, the concept works primarily because the person still lives and actively engages with what is being said. In addition, as a man with a background in the fashion industry, Mulholland's wardrobe offers more industry-focused perspectives and high-end styling rather than the everyday choices reflective of a more general populace.

Museum events have become another way to engage with ideas of the past that allows a blurring of traditional timelines and an active engagement with the personal in dress choices. As I continue to suggest as part of my argument, by demystifying and engaging with concepts of the past in the present space, a deconstructed perspective of time outside a traditional timeline will allow for a livelier perspective on the past and its known subjectivities. This in turn will lead to a more democratic practice of fashion collection that explores everyday dressing (Ando et al, 2023). Parkwood Estate in Oshawa, Ontario, developed a hat exhibition in 2023 that extended this idea around both the personal and the immersive in the museum space. In this one-night event, the curator and volunteers provided the attendees with the lived experience of hat-shopping in a department store from the 1940s and 1950s (Parkwood, November 2023). By using the estate's original family as an inspiration for the types of hats being worn, the attendees were able to gain some understanding of the choices in hats being displayed. Further, by being put in the position of patron, they could suspend the present timeline to imagine themselves as an active participant in the fashion choices of the day.²⁵ Events like these work through an illusion of the past for the present to engage in. Current modes of vivifying and personalizing the museum

²⁴ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure Nine and Ten Gallery Space in *A Life in Style The Wardrobe of James E. Mulholland*.

²⁵ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure 1.13 Event Space (Logia) *Historic Millinery Show and Tea*.

space are accessing more physical forms of engagement for the public. I have argued for a need to engage with dressing that demystifies its presentation as part of an abstract past and as an art object. In the cases I have outlined, vivifying dress practice has challenged the idea of the distant past in fashion, though it still relies on the aesthetic value of textiles. While the personal has become prevalent in fashion studies, the practice of displaying historic fashion could continue to challenge and demystify timelines by addressing both memory and the bodily experience of dress that exist beyond the novel quality that these projects have relied on in public engagement.

Cultural Theory and Memory in Clothing

Fashion scholars have considered the contentions of the corporeal in fashion and the body itself through the understanding of memory in clothing (Bissell & Haviland, 2018; Hunt, 2014; Berzowska, 2005). Memory cues offer traces of past lives within the dress artifact; the clothes are often associated with a particular event or time in someone's life, and the garment signifies that moment and its various associations through its signs of wear. The most obvious example of dress evoking memory would be a wedding or memorial dress; however, other dress objects are often imbued with memory (Bide, 2017, 449-451). For example, a mother's favourite sweater worn when her children were young calls to the type of woman she was at that time. The scholarship recognizes challenges in the functioning of memory and signs of mortality in dress in that it fails to be translated into museum and academic practice, as the dead cannot actively communicate their purposes to the present (Davididi, et al, 2022; Noy, 2018; Verbyc'ka, 2014). As Verbyc'ka stipulates:

Taking into account the fact, that the past continues to be the subject of political manipulations and means of social disintegration, an important task of a historical museum is social understanding and reconciliation regarding the controversial and sensitive pages of historical memory. (Verbyc'ka, 2014, p. 4)

Most museum displays will place a garment either within a thematic display such as 'feminism in dress' or to verify or support a particular timeline, e.g. 'this garment is typical of a style from 1960', rather than present a garment as worn by an individual with their purposes and desires attached to the piece (Wallenberg, 2020, pp.3-5). The importance of memory in dress, however, is that it brings the personal to the forefront of cultural investigation and allows for a broader understanding of how the social impacts of a particular culture shaped the individual's understanding of self.

An artifact with a narrative attached to it (meaning evidence of the body that inhabited the garment via journals, photography, paintings, etc.) is often included in pieces worn by celebrities, designers, and historically famous people and will reinforce important moments in their lives and how they fit within the way these people have framed themselves for the social sphere. Lady Diana Spencer's wardrobe often served as a backdrop to her tumultuous past within the royal family. One of the most famous examples of such a reference in clothing is the Black sheep sweater she wore to a polo match just before her wedding to the future king.²⁶ The lone black sheep on the field of white has come to represent her later attempts to go against the grain, her loss of innocence, and the outcast that she would become to the royals. While it is not evident that Lady Diana knew what she was doing when she donned this garment, her later attempts at

²⁶ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure 1.7 and 1.8 Lady Diana in the Black Sheep Sweater.

dressing for the public often worked within a sociopolitical understanding of her place within the royal line (Vanderhoof, 2023). Items like her sweater symbolize a social milieu that this woman lived and worked within. As a celebrity, the cultural memory surrounding Diana's wardrobe is interesting in that it has both a personal quality associated with her dress (one that she and her family would connect to) as well as a public one performed by the tabloids and news outlets that came to present the public memory of Diana's wardrobe in a way that framed her choices as part of British identity (Anderson, 2012; Conrad, 1999). One of the reasons public memories around celebrity dress are so compelling is because the performance of memory is two-fold; we have the private performance of memory, which is used by the subject and their families, as well as the public memories shaped by the subjectivity that they perform as a persona within a particular social milieu (Foltyn, 2019).

I use this more contemporary example of celebrity dress to show where the use of memory has been exhibited in fashion practice and theory to date. As previously mentioned, the work of memory in textile studies has been explored in various exhibitions and papers, but often within a contemporary context, as it is much easier to present memorial of a recent past, when public perceptions are still readily accessible. However, the Gilded Age, like any other historical period of dress, has its practice of dress positioned within public memory and memorial as well. Consider the preponderance of writing on memory in the period dressing practices of mourning (Byrd, 2024; Zielk, 2003). As Zielk suggests, "middle- and upper-middle-class Victorian women used the rituals and accoutrements of this practice to establish and disseminate a meaningful feminine identity and accessible historical memory" (Zielk, 2003). The awareness by these women that the performance of memory in dress could index their histories while referencing their subjectivity formed a large part of fashion's reference to memory. We can also consider the

exhibition at the MET, “Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire,” that indexes fashions that explore the concepts of memory and memorial while offering the wearer a certain subjectivity (MET, 2015). Memory as a practice is more than just retaining the past; it has the capacity to reflexively represent the past to the present subject, even if based in an illusion (Eckersley & Duff, 2020, p. 52). The power of memory in historic fashion studies is that it allows a move away from a linear understanding of history to include multifaceted approaches to cultural influences on embodied objects like clothing, by acknowledging the personal in the social. In the case of individual items, the approach may not capture the whole of the person’s clothing choice, although it does consider some of the ways the social may impact a favourite piece. There is a reason that these items were given to the archive, as the person and their family often see this garment as a significant part of their personal and social history offering a specific memory/memorial of the person who wore it.



Figure 1.9 and Figure 1.10 Princess Diana in Black Sheep Sweater, Getty Images Georges De Keerle, Tim Graham

The dominant museum practice and image accounts of fashion tend to highlight garments within larger cultural ideals of the museum and its cultural systems rather than addressing ideas of the fashion object within a personal and corporeal context. For example, the exhibition “Rebel: 30 Years of London Fashion” focuses on high couturier examples of dress in the context of the garment’s geography, the city of London (The Design Museum, 2024). It is an interesting exhibition that fails to address the fashion objects outside of their cultural system for the individual wearer. The use of the fashion object has been an appendix to other cultural ideals, with the object of fashion only becoming a feature worthy of examination in the last few decades. In Melchior’s examination of fashion museology, she argues for three phases of fashion’s use in museum display (Melchior, 2011, p. 22). The first period of fashion focused on dress studies highlighting the value of material classifications and preservation within the museum archive, including historic classifications of dress (Melchior, 2011, p. 22). The second period of fashion display focused on highlighting contemporary designers and fashion shows, whereas the third, which Melchior suggests is the “new” museology, focuses on reinvigorating museum spaces through exhibitions of popular culture, making the museum space interactive and approachable for the public (Melchior, 2011, pp. 24-25). Melchior highlights the more visually entertaining aspects of fashion as having the potential to democratize academic and museum spaces but fails to address what the fashion object can be other than reactive to the system it exists within. She further fails to address the personal aspects of dress or the impact that memory and bodily evidence have on the shaping of cultural examinations of dress. Rather, like other fashion scholars have done previously, she focuses on the visual entertainment that dress provides, which can be used to address other cultural concepts, such as feminism in the West. For example, the museum exhibit “Made it: The Women Who Revolutionized Fashion” at the

Peabody Essex Museum offered a collection of garments from over 250 years highlighting women designers (Peabody Essex Museum, 2021). While a worthy subject, the focus was on garments that reinforced a theme of feminist success and focused on designer garments rather than individual wearers and histories. Fashion scholar Valerie Steele offers a more rigorous approach to fashion in the museum space through a scrutiny of individual garments (similar to the slow approach that I will use in chapter two). However, she also does not highlight the use of memory in museum fashion displays or the individual's role in shaping the garment's history (Steele, 1998). The museum and image accounts currently used in fashion scholarship still often fail to examine the variety of voices, past and present, that shape these artifacts, as well as the role that memory in dress allows for in future scholarship practice (Romana et al, 2024; Horsley, 2014; Horsley, 2012).

By addressing memory in dress, the newer scholarship also allows for other voices to be heard, ones previously absent in fashion and history research. This works from an understanding that the fashion artifact is both personal and transcends the time of its production through its inscription of memory in its different processes (wearing, making, and displaying) that account for fashion outside of an aesthetic framing. Rosner claims that scholarship needs to reconsider inhabitancies (how bodies inhabit cultural objects and processes) that question how designs relate to the various bodies that work within a culture (Rosner, 2018, pp. 118). Looking at the history of fashion's relation to other cultural media and how it has helped to form and contest identities provides a basis for how one can consider the corporeal nature of garments and the various bodies with which they contend through the garment's inhabitancies. Fashion scholars grapple with these contentions by looking at each garment as a case study with its own constructions to consider and with a familial and personal memory imbued in their

manufacturing, staining, and adjustments (Reiley & DeLong, 2023; Chapman, 2020; Mida & Kim, 2015; Fleming, 1974). Such individual textile studies tell of the complexities in dress identity as they are supplemented by the body's identity and the garment artifact's identity, which is formed within the social conditions, including memory both for the wearers of the past and for the present public who views them in the exhibition space.

Fashion scholars have continued to struggle to contend with the tensions of the various bodies underneath the corporeal garment when framed within fashion studies and museum practice (Johnson & Lennon, 2014; Weber & Mitchel, 2004). These bodies are historic bodies that offer evidence both of the wearers and makers of the garment. However, because these identities are often absent from records (or because the garments contain evidence of multiple bodies and pasts), they are difficult to articulate within the conventional practice of fashion displays. As Bide clarifies, there is a way to address the individual body and the social influences of fashion's material record by addressing the material memory (memory tied to the textile through wear and use) of each object. This allows an exploration of how real people lived and experienced their culture through such traces in their clothing (Bide, 2017, pp. 449-451). These traces can include evidence of staining, such as blood, sweat, and chemical burns, as well as adaptations found within the garment, such as adjustments to hemlines or a new seam allowance at the bust or waist. These are often practical considerations but can also signal personal desires driven by dress choices in detail, such as a piece of embroidery or the addition of a pocket (Mida & Kim, 2015). How this is put into practice is much more difficult; however, due to the organic nature of the textiles and the lack of access and opportunity the public has to view a historic garment's construction. I discovered this during my research process, having had difficulty accessing larger collections of textiles, especially during Covid restrictions. However, other

scholars have also mentioned the difficulty of translating object analysis to the general public because of artifact restrictions (Lahoda et al, 2022; Mida, 2015). Current museum display regulations mean keeping garments on plinths or behind a wall of glass. Scholars must get special permission to see a piece firsthand, and access is usually obtained by working within the industry. One of the ways that scholars have tried to address this barrier is through technology. While a description of observation practice is difficult to make visible in display, the use of virtual technology can allow people to see close-up details of a garment's tears and its construction without having to touch the piece itself, allowing them to gain an understanding of individual inhabitancies in the garments (Bide, 2017). In fashion theory, this has been explored as a way to verify the lived body of the fashion object: the evidence of wear expresses evidence of the past and verifies its design values (Tonkin, 2023a; Vacca & Vandi, 2023b; Aspinall, 2023c).

Museums and academia have only recently started expanding their practice to include a theoretical approach to memory and the individual in fashion (Rinehart, 2022; Muntean et al, 2017; Chong Kwon et al., 2014). In the previous paragraphs, I argued that memory is an important aspect of clothing. However, despite this, other than through displays that focus on famous people or designers, fashion scholarship tends to remove ideas of memory from cloth to focus on the broader thematic element of dress. Memory works from a condition of individual and communal approaches to the fashion object within its design and use origins, while thematic displays create a universal story situated in current cultural interests, often distilling past memorials to suit the theme. For example, recent fashion exhibits at the R.O.M. include "The Cloth that Changed the World: India's Painted and Printed Cottons" (ROM, 2022), which focused on India's influence on the Chintz industry within the British Empires and "Christian

Dior” (ROM, 2018) which focused on Dior collections throughout the 1950s. Both explore an interesting element of fashion theory within a broad cultural context focused on geography and designer influence. Both refer to the practice of self-fashioning but within the context of larger cultural practice rather than the individual influences of dress and memory. The exhibition “*ECHO. Wrapped in Memory*” at the MOMU Fashion Museum explores the personal in memory in greater detail and shows the shift in recent scholarship towards the personal in fashion, but it still does so by framing memory through the lens of artists and designers (MOMU, 2024). Similarly, the MET Exhibition “About Time; Fashion and Duration” (MET, 2020) also explores memories in relation to fashion but does so through the lens of cultural memory that shapes future production rather than individual memory and its impact on subjectivity. I argue that these curations still do not challenge ideas surrounding historical realities that are separate from our present purposes; they still reflexively present the past for the purposes of today through present collective memory. As Petrov clarifies:

The slices of neat, ordered time in heterotopias, places like the museum: reflective of reality but so artificial and so different to it as to make viewers more aware of reality. Placing fashion into a space for intellectual difference and withdrawal from which to contemplate deathliness, its most frightening characteristic, neutralizes it. (Petrov, 2012, p. 228)

The corporeal is morbid because it reminds those who attempt to capture cultural production of this particular production’s time-bound nature. In verifying objects for present conditions, we reinforce current cultural ideals rather than reflecting on past cultural ideals and productions. Objects of the body highlight the mortal aspects of civilization rather than reinforce an idea of the immortal that cultural production attempts. As a result, museum and scholarship practice tend

to break the corporeal down and neutralize it. However, in placing things in ordered time, some scholars fail to see how the personal structures the cultural in meaningful but hidden ways (Kennedy et al., 2013; Ames, 2008; Rosendorfer, 1995). These personal influences, such as in decorative tastes and adjustments, hint at personal realities that exist within a culture, like the economic conditions of a family or their belief systems that build on or contradict the overarching values of the cultural system they were produced within. For example, at the turn of the century, shop girls adjusted their clothing to emulate the upper class while offering a countercultural fashion movement through bolder choices in colour and trimming in their wardrobes (Chinn, 2009). By framing these textiles in observatory practice, as Mida and Kim outline in their fashion scholarship analysis (Mida & Kim, 2015), the role of the actual reading of a garment in social histories become more pronounced (Prieto, 2020; Shukla, 2015). As Prieto stipulates in their observatory practice:

Researchers can trace the experiences of under-documented people by studying the making and wearing of clothing... how the material context of a piece of clothing matters to its interpretation. Fabric, cut, stitching, signs of wear, and alteration and repair, provide tangible evidence of how the garment was made and used – its social history. (Prieto, 2020)

Things like adjustments and cutouts on a garment suggest what an individual body went through to fit within their culture's expectations, such as the addition of extended side seams to hide an emerging pregnant body in a time when women were expected to stay at home. New insight can be gained about the individual versus the social identities placed upon them while expressing histories hitherto unexplored in the dominant scholarship. This is seen in recent dress scholarship that has been exploring various renditions of "the slow approach" that Mida and Kim have

suggested in their dress artifact practice (Maresca, 2023a; Smith-Glaviana, 2023b; Banning & Gam, 2018; Mida & Kim, 2015).

The Industry of Reconstructions: Current Fashion's Engagement with the Past

The industry of historic reconstruction is used to mediate the past without causing damage to the original artifacts. It is now viewed as a more acceptable way with which to address fashion history but it exists within an interdisciplinary framework that struggles to gain recognition across theoretical fields. As Katherine Johnson clarifies in her practice as both a historian and reconstructionist performer:

As both a historian and a performance studies scholar, my theoretical leanings reflect a merging of two disciplines... This liminal landscape appears inherently bilateral, occupied by the past and the present, the traditional and the avant-garde, the archive, and the repertoire. (Johnson, 2015, p. 36)

The practice of reconstruction primarily works by imitating a historic style, not designing an actual historic dress. This is significant because it implies working on an ideal of the past (such as recreating gilded brocade) rather than recreating an object of individual historic value. What this means for my argument is that reconstruction, as part of the theoretical cataloging of the fashion object, similarly struggles to relate the practice to ideas of the past fashion objects and their expression of the morbid and aging in fashion collections. By using reconstruction to create an object representative of a more significant historical trend, the practice neglects to reflect on

the past lives of those that wore such objects, removing the morbid to focus on fashionable objects and separating present embodied practice from the embodied practice of the past (McPherson, 2022; Davidson, 2019a; Daugbjerg, et al., 2019b). Reconstruction practice will consider the functional, expressive, and aesthetic needs of a creation, which may change the piece's accuracy (Smith & Stannard, 2016, pp. 287-288). The key purpose of the gown changes the historic outcome (by this, I mean what the reconstruction will be made to do or express when completed), just as a re-enactment ball will likely put ease of dancing over historical materiality (Smith & Stannard, 2016 p. 289). One of my key contentions is that an acceptable approach to practice the process of vivification is through reconstruction (V&A, 2015; Daugbjerg, et al., 2014; Schnapp, 2008), which complicates this narrative of history and our understanding of cultural motivations of the past. The reconstruction works as an idea of the past's motivations rather than as one based on a historic reality. However, this allows for fashion artifacts to be explored within a physical capacity, which allows for this engagement across timelines. To demystify the past, there must be a willingness to explore these ideas around constructions and the body (both present and ghostly past). The practice of embodiment is best explored in the practice of doing.

I will explore the practices of reconstruction in greater detail throughout the third chapter; for this chapter and literature review I want to examine some of the scholarship that currently exists in the field of reconstructions as a way to position the field regarding the issues of cataloging practices that I have found within the larger discipline of fashion and museum theory. This will highlight some of the implications reconstruction practice has for current academic frameworks. How this will contribute to my argument is to showcase where the biases regarding the fashion artifacts continue to perform, while highlighting where reconstruction practice, if it is

to develop a standard theoretical framework, needs to go in order to perform a more diverse spectrum of dressing practices. What I am suggesting is a standardized set of guidelines that will allow reconstructionists to legitimize their work across the fashion industries, allowing for a broader range of perspectives and makers, including emerging voices who do not have access to the academic and museum spaces due to economic and background restrictions. Reconstruction practice exists outside of the theoretical and academic spaces primarily because of its range of approaches, including high fashion, fast fashion, hobbyist, re-enactors, and academic stitch counters. As a result, there is not a streamlined approach to what counts as authentic dress practice (Smith & Stannard, 2016). In my subsequent chapters, the community of reconstructionist approaches will be explored in more detail. For my current purpose, it is more important to understand where the ideas of reconstruction have come to influence ideas of the past through the recycling of design inspiration. I have contested the version of history that tends to position fashion artifacts with present concerns without exploring past subjectivity and the personal elements of fashion. Evaluating reconstruction practice through the recycling of design inspiration fixes the practice of reconstruction within fashion theory as a paradigm for present design interests while also considering some of the cyclical values of past fashion practices. I think reconstruction has the potential to interpret past embodiment practices if given a clearer theoretical framework from which to draw that in turn moves away from some of the linear cataloging practices used in fashion cataloging (Brooks & Eastop, 2011; Baca, 2006). To consider reconstructions more broadly is to understand that fashion trends tend to be cyclical rather than linear, and therefore, constructions of the past tend to reemerge in dress practices of the present (Hebidge, 1979). The trends of previous years will be renewed within the current cultural mode, albeit distilled through current needs and values rather than those of the previous generation. As

an example, the use of jean pants has been around for several centuries, but the product has changed from working-class wardrobe to high-fashion luxury items and to everyday staples (Wilson, 1985). Its codex of meanings has changed, but many components of its original construction remain the same. Understanding this challenges the predominant mode of historical timekeeping and allows a reconsideration of the supposed “original” that preoccupies Western timelines, especially within the products of fashion.

In a recent exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art, the curators explored the idea of cultural transmission of fashion from the original. *Egyptomania: Fashion’s Conflicted Obsession* investigated ancient Egypt’s lasting impact on the garment industry (CMA, 2024). While not an examination of reconstructions specifically, it did consider artistic interpretations of the past through modern designs. It also considered the impact the present’s attempt at representing the past has on the general populace’s understanding of a culture’s history. The project explored both the commodification of ancient Egyptian artifacts and a garment’s potential to bridge the divide between past and present concerns of the culturally “othered” in the garment industry (CMA, 2024). By positioning the dresses amongst Egyptian artifacts, the patrons could understand some of the influences the past has on the present’s culture and design ideals.²⁷ The exhibition placed a focus on modern Egyptian designers in order to explore the potential reconstructions has for the inclusion of different voices.²⁸ It is one that reconsiders the past with a more ethnically diverse presentation of voices and ideas. Reconstruction practice, while based in the cultural milieu of its present, allows for the inclusion of pasts that have been ignored mainly under dominant cultural

²⁷ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure 1.14 Gallery 107 *Egyptomania Fashion’s Conflicted Obsession*.

²⁸ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figure 1.15 Gallery 234 *Egyptomania Fashion’s Conflicted Obsession*.

practices. This is a multi-step process that allows for and enhances both past and present concerns of dress practice.

A reconsideration of different cultural practices means a reconsideration of the framework that cultural products and their timelines reside within. Part of reconsidering the traditional frameworks is understanding the role that globalization has in the movement and reception of each artifact. What this entails is a reconsideration of how objects change throughout their histories and where they can be redefined by their making, reception, and reworking. This process acknowledges not only a cross-cultural relationship for the object but also a cross-historical relationship to the object (including reconstructions as well as reworkings of dress artifacts) (O'Connell, 2021, pp. 909-911). If this perspective were put into cultural practice, the meanings of objects would change not just through their production but also through their interpretations, collection practices, and the succession each object undergoes (Duffek, 2022, pp. 203-205).

An interviewee in a survey of First Nations makers as part of the book *Object Lives and Global Histories in Northern North America: Material Culture in Motion C.1780-1980* clarifies that her understanding of making (as a reconstructionist) came from intergenerational knowledge transfer within her nation. Not every object (especially the fashion object) will have a recorded history. One will learn through materials accessed and through their community and, in her case, watching her mother's practice (Duffek, 2022, p. 205). A reconsideration of globalist perspectives further challenges this linear timeline that fashion artifacts have existed within. However, it also presents a way of approaching the dress artifact from more personal cross-cultural perspectives which accounts for both present and past cultural considerations of making.

Academia's Current Challenges Within Fashion History for a Globalist Perspective

The Costume Society of America's roundtable presentation for 2022 considered the current attempts that academia has undertaken to innovate curricula that account for a more globalist perspective. By globalist, they mean both evidence of multiculturalism within a person's background and community, as well as the influences different countries have within fashion design and production, for example, the use of Batik printing in Western clothing graphics after the First World War. Consideration of a globalist perspective in fashion has become increasingly significant for understanding how cultures have adapted to account for cultural blending, which results from influences that pass between cultures via air travel, media such as social networks, and international broadcasting. I examine the theoretical framework around globalist perspectives as it is understood as a potential solution to reconfigure collection practices in fashion collections and their timeline bias. An understanding by globalist theorists is that in acknowledging the globalist fashion perspective, one can deconstruct fashion's linear timeline while also acknowledging the gaps in archival practice that move away from a focus on the novel and traditional upper-class Western examples of dress. For example, anime-style shows (based out of Japan but adapted globally) have become a large part of many Western cultures, combining Eastern and Western influences in television consumption. Those involved in the CSA roundtable claimed that Western timelines are not conducive to a more culturally diverse fashion curriculum (Welters et al., 2023, p. 10). The scholars primarily attempt to counteract traditional timelines by focusing on thematic approaches such as gender, body, identity, and age (Welters et al., 2023, p. 10). However, most of these thematic elements are still subjected to the biases of the present. Further, they will consider the framework of these themes through the timeline and

region in which the course is taught, for example, modern-day Midwest America. Fashion history courses focus on the chronology and geography of the dress artifacts students struggle with. Rather, the answer, as most in the roundtable suggested, would be a renewed focus on case studies in which each object is treated individually to understand the conditions it was worn and produced within (Welters et al., 2023, p. 4). This reframing to consider the individual object should allow for a more diverse range of influences in fashion to be accounted for, including transculturation, and identity politics.

A reconsideration of the timelines that fashion artifacts have been analyzed within is largely due to the changes to cultural cataloging from a globalist perspective (Murcia & Alejandra, 2023; Fliss, 2009). Cultural blending challenges the preservation tactics of cultural cataloging²⁹ within which present academia operates. If academia is to account for cultural borrowing within this cataloging process as defined by Woods, Fliss and others, there needs to be a theoretical reconsideration accounting for cultural complexities and museum theory's idea of authenticity. In this case, authenticity refers to the quality of an object authorized within a heritage collection to represent the collection's narrative (Wood, 2020). Historians and other cultural theorists have considered and reconsidered the "authenticity" factor in their cataloging approaches. The flexibility of the term is something I will explore in its various contexts as it relates to fashion artifacts and the practice of reconstruction, clarifying its place in current fashion theory and offering a way to reevaluate the "authentic" as a solution for fashion collection bias. In Gamble's review of the book *Cultural Appropriation in Fashion and Entertainment* (2022), she clarifies that cultural cataloging was easier when countries were more socially isolated. The

²⁹ Cultural cataloging refers to the systematic process of organizing and documenting aspects of a culture such as artworks, texts, textiles, etc. as a preservation of a particular society's way of life (Wood; 2020; Fliss, 2009).

classifications of cultural products within a community and its output were traceable. This cultural cataloging being referred to here is the practice of collecting artifacts that reinforces the narrative a culture presents as part of its identity. For example, in considering mummification practices of Ancient Egypt as part of Egyptian heritage and identity, artifacts of mummification would be prized in cultural cataloging (Lee, 2019; Coburn et al., 2010). Globalization has led to a more active re-territorializing and de-territorializing of communities, which complicates understanding the origin of a cultural product (Gamble, 2023, p. 188). In other words, the changes to a country's regions and the makeup of its people alter how cultural production and its origins are understood. For example, the popularity of pashmina from India, reproduced to suit different cultures and climates, will shift its original intention and purposes. While globalization allows access to various cultures and perspectives, it complicates the origins of the products through the sharing, adoption, and reconstruction of the product within each new community (Gamble, 2023, p. 189). As part of globalization and the globalist perspective, scholars have hesitated to classify what appreciation is versus what appropriation is. Appreciation tends towards an acknowledgment of a culture's product and an interest in emulating it. At the same time, appropriation suggests adopting a cultural product as part of their own culture with a blurring of its origins and intention. Cultural transmission is classified as the process of two distinct cultures merging, and whether this is good or bad is unclear. This is important for understanding how ideas of globalization continue to challenge the positionality of the dress artifact and its influences on production that exists outside of its understood social milieu to other cultural systems and periods. Richard Rogers, a cultural theorist, attempts to further classify cultural transmission by suggesting the concept of transculturation, which is not

necessarily the practice of appropriation but can still result in the degradation of culture through homogenization and a lack of authenticity (Gamble, 2023, p. 188).

Despite this complication that globalized perspectives account for, I argue that these scholars fail to clarify what should be considered authentic or inauthentic and how this idea of transculturation³⁰ fits within historical perspectives. As Gambles suggests, cultural borrowing was not seen as negative until cultures considered the prospect of globalization, especially through globalist media (Gamble, 2023, p. 188). When a study of the past's transculturation is considered, it becomes monumentally more complicated to make a case for preserving cultural cataloguing for the present. As an example, several Indigenous Nations within Canada have attempted to protect their disappearing heritages through the recapturing of traditional Indigenous practices. The problems that have arisen are the rights each community has to the practice; for example, a people's tradition from the plains being taken up by another Indigenous community from the coast challenges the origins and potential authenticity of a practice. The question of authenticity becomes whether the protection of culture is between the Indigenous communities or a more all-encompassing concept of indigeneity within Canada. Further, an understanding of globalization considers only recent technologies as allowing for this muddling of cultures. However, it does not consider the longer history of invasions, conquests, and technologies in travel that challenge this idea of the original or the pure cultural source. I posit that in addressing ideas of globalization before the globalist era, we can see evidence of cultural transmission throughout history and that in addressing these cases of cultural borrowing, a reconsideration of historic timekeeping will allow for a move away from fashion's linear

³⁰ Transculturation, as defined by anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, is the process of cultural transformation through the alteration and loss of cultural practices and an increase in new cultural practices, usually through conflict or confrontation with another culture (the most obvious example being colonization practices).

understanding (by this I mean the assumptions of a linear progression of history creates a broad contextual understanding of culture that fails to address the nuances of individual and cross-cultural identity, leading to problems of appropriation) to one of dynamic conditions of cultural production which accounts for the personal and bodily aspects of dress.

For my research and the study of the Gilded Age, it is important to consider how this cultural borrowing challenges assumptions of authentic dress practice and fashion cultures as understood in a specific cultural context, such as “American” dress practice in the Gilded Age. Developing ideas surrounding the transculturation of fashion allows for a nuanced approach to fashion cataloging that offers a space for reconstruction and the personal in dress cataloging practice. While this may not solve the disputes of the rights to cultural practice that I have highlighted above, reconsidering the ways that globalization impacts this idea of the “original” clarifies that appropriation is not a recent phenomenon but has gained importance in current ideological frameworks. Further, an investigation of historical appropriation will lead to a greater understanding of transculturation beyond present cultural frameworks to considerations of historical understandings of cultural practice and the rights to different cultural productions. This, in turn, will allow for a more nuanced approach to the fashion object that moves beyond the aestheticizing practice fashion historians continue to rely on.

Suppose academia is to account for transculturation with an understanding that the origin of a cultural practice is not guaranteed to exist unaltered in some form. By this, I am referring to the longer history of transculturation that challenges a cultural object or practice’s origins, such as the combination of Indigenous practices between nations now understood as a collective Indigenous cultural process. If that is the case, there needs to be a reconsideration that accounts for cultural complexities and this idea of authenticity. Doing so would allow for a more adaptive

approach to authentic cultural practices, this signals an artifacts cross-temporal approach to production. In the fashion artifact, this has been accomplished through the examination of construction practice and variations made to designs, allowing individual perspectives and realities to emerge. In a book review of *Clothed in Meaning: Literature, Labour, and Cotton in Nineteenth-Century America* (2023), the author make a case for the nineteenth-century revolution in cotton production by allowing makers and wearers a variety of projections of selfhood through the construction of cloth. This examination of garment construction in fashion moved beyond the elite to include people of all backgrounds who explored identity through the labor in and wearing of cotton (Fu, 2023, p. 99). By claiming that fabrication is not just the making of cloth but ideas, women began to explore their subjectivity through their attire during the industrialization of cotton (Fu, 2023, p. 99). Suppose we are to understand subjectivity as key to understanding an authentic dress practice. In that case, historic fashion can be reconsidered not just through its design cues but also in its uses for the individual within the social conditions in which they form their selfhood. This approach accounts for the fashionably elite of history and also considers the fashion choices of people who are generally left out of the formal archives.

The process of making and the identities and bodies that factor into this process are not at the forefront in the discussion of garment collections (Almond & Evans, 2022; Georgijevic, 2018; Lane, 2014). Past and present exhibitions tend to focus on design timelines (such as silhouettes popular in the 1950s), theoretical approaches (19th-century feminism as evidenced in these samples...), or famous peoples and designers (Paul Poiret, Dior, wardrobes of royalty, etc.). The collection efforts often include donation records but not a longer history of the body the garment or article housed or its significance to the one who wore it. For example, my work with local museums' textile collections within current cataloging practices involved assessing garment

history through artifact cards that shared the donation history and significant family names, but often offered nothing about the dress's maker, who wore it, and why. Present efforts have been made to rectify the histories of these garments and their cataloging practice, but the conditions of the collections are still being defined by the approach to curation that started in the 1950s; current attempts can only reflexively infer some of these conditions based on records provided (Clarrington Museum and Archives, 2019). The main factor here is that clothes outside of elite circles have not survived, nor were they donated or collected by museums or academic archives in the past. Part of accessing a more globalized and diverse perspective on fashion history is the issue of reconsidering what should be included in the study of fashion objects. In the museum exhibit "Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism," October 2023, the curators attempted to reconsider the role of fashion in the art to account for the women behind the dresses: the "washerwoman" (19th-century laundress) and their subjectivity in relation to the clothing they mended and cleaned (The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2024). This project contends with the absence of clothes (i.e. the museum does not have the washers' clothing) and such forgotten identities in history. By focusing on Degas' collection of works on the subject of the laundress, questions about the women who worked with the clothes are highlighted.³¹ These include questions about different identities and the social realities of the fashion industry. The project of self-fashioning can also be considered. The exhibit challenges mainstream academia to consider alternative approaches to the dress artifact in which analysis moves beyond the linear timeline to refocus on histories absent in the archives (Cleveland Museum of Art, 2024).

³¹ See Appendix A Visual Resources Figures 1.16, 1.17, and 1.18, *Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism*, Gallery space.

In a consideration of the Costume Society roundtable presentation “Innovation in the Fashion History Curriculum” the consensus suggests that fashion history could move away from an understanding of names and stylistic features to one that considers sociological perspectives (Welters et al., 2023, p. 15). Using a socio-political perspective within a formalist descriptive approach, fashion theory could offer a holistic framework around self-fashioning concerning available goods and social standards (Welters et al., 2023, p. 7). As one panelist offered in her analysis of globalist perspectives in the fashion curriculum, her students’ term projects account for more than one cultural focus, as she asks students to delve into the fashions of their own family histories. In studying photographs and garments of their ancestors, not only are students accounting for more diversity in the classroom, but they are also being asked to consider their family member’s choices within their own time, location, and background (Welters et al., 2023, p. 14). Both case studies and personal histories offer a compelling approach that moves away from a potentially fixed and stagnant timeline to account for the influences that go into garment making and wearing.

To reconsider the historic timeframes that Western cultures have relied on in archives and academia (based on a chronology surrounding larger social events, like the stock market fall of 1929), an artifact’s value to the past and present must be reconsidered. Fashion has become key to understanding culture within modernity and the modern period’s relation to time (Jansen, 2020; Lehmann, 2007a; Back, 2007b). As theorist Walter Benjamin clarifies, the fashion artifact can be seen as the concurrence of the past, present, and future transcribed through its overcoming of each. In other words, a garment of the present will always hold a dialectical relationship to the past (Geczy & Karaminas, 2016, pp. 82-83). While art (paintings, sculpture, etc.) will speak across a specific time, while also transcending time, fashion is inscribed by its succession (Geczy

& Karaminas, 2016, p. 87). It exists both based on previous designs, its needs and uses for the present social conditions, and its uses and re-inscription for the future. Its changeable and adaptable nature allows it to exist in each new social present. The fashion object is organic; it is the only object that might be seen to overcome death in that it is contemporary to each past and incorporates that departed time into the present (Geczy & Karaminas, 2016, p. 91). While an archeological artifact can also incorporate the departed time, the fashion object is understood to present the bodies of the past to the present, not just the objects that were used but also what was inhabited. In subsequent chapters, I will explore fashion's relation to timelines and aging through examples of present and inferred subjectivity in past and present fashion objects. Through an examination of two case studies from the Gilded Age as well as an examination of reproductions and their role in contemporary understandings of historic fashion, my project intends to address the death dialect³² in fashion and its function as part of the corporeal register. In doing so, revealing the personal and subjective quality of garments will reinforce the uniqueness of the fashion object while providing potential readings of the artifact that demystify the past, reconsider its timelines, and allow a more globalist perspective.

³² Death Dialect as the way in which the "speech" of fashion considers the conditions of the body it houses through ideas of the morbid including mourning practice (such as the use of black crepe) but also the conditions of a developing and aging body through controls and drapery that work to confine and hide the issues of the aging form.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BODY IN FLUX: HOW THE DEVELOPING BODY COMPLICATES FASHION'S
ATTEMPT AT REGULATING TIMELINES

The corporeal nature of dress as it both enhances and hides the body beneath allows it to act as the second skin, an idea that I addressed in the first chapter, as historic fashion has been used to offer bodily evidence of the past's cultures and their motivations. As fashion theorist Linda Grant expands upon in her work, *The Thoughtful Dresser* (2009), an understanding of fashion's corporeal nature as a relationship to the body has allowed for biographical association in considering fashion artifacts. Grant outlines how the life of cloth operates as a biography of its wearer:

Clothes as text, clothes as narration, clothes as a story. Clothes as the story of our lives. And if you were to gather all the clothes you have ever owned in all your life, each baby shoe and winter coat and wedding dress, you would have your autobiography. You could wear, once more, your own life in all its stages, from whatever they wrapped you in when you emerged from the dark red naked warmth of the womb to your deathbed. (Grant, 2009)

Grant's suggestion that clothing operates as autobiography emphasizes life stages, so that the fashion object's relationship to time and mortal associations have become a part of framing and understanding fashion (Van de Peer, 2014; Gruber, 2024; Mitchell, 2013). The ordered timeline for dresses within the fashion industry, as well as museum and academic spaces, has neutralized the anxieties around the individual body in time in considering fashion in terms of trends. However, it fails to examine why we have come to understand the developing body in a way that

conceals the relationship to mortality and that, therefore, appears as a form of cultural anxiety. Nor does such an attempt at neutralizing timelines address how these associations with development and aging impact our understanding of cultural production and the unequal approaches to the past that exist through clothing as public memorial. Memorials that focus on larger cultural events that act as the indexes of a whole culture; for example, sites such as a location of a former town might position its history only within the context of battles fought there. By laying out dress samples as evidence of bodily and psychosocial development for turn-of-the-century North American life from the woman's perspective, the case studies I examine will exemplify how anxieties about human mortality have continued to shape fashion production while offering some insight into what biases toward the fashion object we have developed in understanding fashion history. This, in turn, stands in the way of attempts to consider more inclusive histories. I am arguing for understanding fashion in biographical terms, while still acknowledging the communal influences of its production.

In general, I suggest a more in-depth examination of the fashion artifact through case studies that focus on object analysis, rather than placing the object solely within a historical framework. As I have outlined in Chapter One, ideas of object-based analysis have considered the individual potential of each fashion object (Prieto, 2020; Maresca, 2023; Smith-Glaviana, 2023). How this differs from previous approaches in fashion cataloging is evident primarily through the depth and breadth I will draw on to examine the artifacts as individual cases and examples of dress. This differs from the "lookbooks" and the fashion museum practice pertaining to the dress artifact that we have relied on in fashion scholarship since the 1980s (Martin & Vacca, 2018; Crawley & Barbieri, 2013a; Ambry, 2013b). Lookbooks in the fashion industry are used to express dress themes such as the Highland tartan (The House of Labhran, 2024a; Arnault

& Amiri, 2024b). They work to convey an idea of a chosen aesthetic and will offer a big-picture analysis of how to put a specific outfit together (CreativeSpline, September 2024). For example, a magazine spread will break down the fashion show collection by pairing items as part of a completed look rather than as individual objects. The descriptors of a lookbook include a itemization of each item and how each works in harmony with the other dress objects in the collection. However, the lookbook will often work from an aesthetization of the examples rather than a concrete examination of the objects with their history or symbolism for their wearers (de Vera, 2024). Similar to the Western timeline bias we continue to rely on to position fashion artifacts, the lookbook often considers its garments from the perspective of an evolution of styles rather than from a sociological and individualist understanding of the garment's production (Chai et al., 2007; Cappetta et al., 2006) that I will follow in examining individual garments in my case studies.

Museum fashion collection approaches will often consider the fashion artifact through object analysis in its archive collection (Farwell, 2021; Landsberg, 2015; Riccini, 2003). Consider the collection record card as a simplistic version of the object-based analysis that I argue for in my case studies. The collection record may include the history of a donation, the approximate year of production, and the garment's label history (if it has one). However, the card will neglect an examination of the item's personal history and the object's place within its social condition. It will not provide an in-depth overview of the construction qualities (including stitch changes around the hem or waist) (FIT, 2024; MET, 2024; McCord Stewart Museum, 2024; ROM, 2024; KCI, 2024). Beyond its simplistic approach, the collection card is seldom used in exhibitions. A museum is more likely to focus on the overarching themes of an exhibit and on garments that support a claim rather than address the value of the dress artifact as an individual

item. We can use the example of the “Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History” in the online collection of the MET. The Heilbrunn timeline catalogues dress artifacts through an examination of different chronologies. One timeline is the “Nineteenth-Century Silhouette and Support,” which itemizes a collection of aesthetically pleasing dress samples over a hundred-year history based on the changes to silhouettes during the 1800s (Glasscock, 2004). The nine pieces for the collection are all finer examples of dress from European backgrounds that support the chronology of the different silhouettes. However, the garments exist only through this lens, and individual items are only examined superficially against other kinds of silhouettes in the collection (Glasscock, 2004). Examining each garment through the collection cards is the first step in many historians’ approaches to fashion history. However, this type of examination remains largely in the background of fashion studies. Scholars like Mida and Kim have urged fashion scholars to return to this form of analysis, suggesting it is necessary to expand scholarship beyond the thematic approaches that have become standard practice in fashion display. The artifact examination stage is key for reevaluating the object through its own value system (Mida & Kim, 2015a; Shukla, 2015b; Babula, 2003). Instead, we tend to return to a chronological-based framework to support the claims of a fashion object, as if its merit only exists concerning other objects of cultural production that in fact neglect individual value. We see this in fashion exhibitions that connect clothing in the exhibition through themes, as for instance, the Victoria and Albert Museum’s exhibition “Diva,” which collected costumes in support of the idea of the celebrity diva in dress (V&A, 2024), or the Design Museum’s “Barbie at the Design Museum,” which does focus on an individual’s wardrobe, but through the framework of iconoclasm rather than individual style (Design Museum, 2024). However, that is not to say scholarship has not been interested in offering displays around garment construction

and individual garments. The Triennale Milano and Kito Museum's exhibition "Tailoring School. A Journey into Education" explores different types of tailoring construction history (Triennale Milano & Kito, 2024). However, it still relies on a collection theme and a sense of aestheticism within design rather than the individual embodied practice that an artifact-based approach allows for.

If object analysis has been practiced for years (Clark & de la Haye, 2014; Palmer, 2013; Levey, 1984; Prown, 1982), what is the advantage of the case studies that I will examine, beginning with an example of children's dress? I argue that there is a need to refocus on fashion artifacts as individual objects that exist beyond an examination that defines them through other cultural themes. The dress artifact can and should be understood not just through its aesthetic value and position historically but also through its value for the wearer, its positionality within its own time and in the time that it is collected and re-examined within, as well as through its lasting impact on the garment production and understanding of textile collections in the future. I will use the context of bodily aging and development to show how social condition influences design and how it challenges an understanding of chronology and linear time that is reinforced in academia and the museum space through the artifacts we collect and continue to display.

There are very few examples of children's dresses that address the aging or developing body in museum collections because not as many have survived in terms of artifact collection. Further, such garments often exist outside of the fashionable trends of their production period, which makes them harder to place in a specific chronology (Le Guennec & Rose, 2024; Schlereth, 1985). I will use the biological linear trajectory of birth to death to highlight the anxieties we have produced in clothing (anxieties of cultural decay and a mortal way of doing a cultural practice) that continue to inform artifact collection and frameworks today within a linear

framework. My examination, in part, serves to support the Western linear timeline but does so by questioning the artifact's relationship not only to its own time but also to its pasts and numerous futures that help inform its production, further suggesting that a chronological approach is too simplistic and limited for the future of fashion artifact research. By highlighting its individuality as an artifact, we move the fashion object beyond a matter of simple cause and effect to consider its relationship to the individual, the various systems that they exist within, and the lasting impact this has on our understanding of history and the various bodies involved.

The Importance of Case Studies in Renegotiating Fashion Artifacts in Historic and Cultural Practice

This chapter offers the genre of the case study, with two specific examples, as a key component of my argument about the personal in dress artifacts. Each will serve as an example of how the individual dress object reflects the embodied nature of fashion. By focusing on the object's construction, my case studies highlight the value of the individual object as having its own history and identity and explore the nuance of fashion objects outside of a thematic or chronological lens. They will address the aging body as key to fashion theories' production of ordered timelines. This is also seen in exhibition and cataloging scholarship, including Hjemdahl's book on the body and timelines in the museum (Hjemdahl, 2014), Bide's research on memory and materiality (Bide, 2017) as well as recent exhibitions like the MET's "About Time" (MET, 2021). Alexandra Kim and Ingrid Mida suggest that dress is a specialist category within material culture, as garments offer a closer relationship to the body that wears them (Mida &

Kim, 2015). As theorist Pearce clarifies, material cultural analysis considers how the present views the past and creates narratives of the past through its objects (Pearce, 1992). A fashion item or article allows the movement of a person to be imprinted within its fibers through actions that produce bodily fluids such as sweat and blood. This imprinting allows the dress to be understood as something that can shield, decorate, expose, and conceal the individual wearer (Mida & Kim, 2015, p. 27). Taking the museum practice of cataloging dress a few steps further by looking at the individual wearer's history, we get a better idea of how memory, the subject, and the social influences of a time shape the cultural artifacts of fashion. As mentioned earlier, a key aspect of my approach to garment construction analysis will be the so-called "Slow Approach to Seeing," a method in cultural theory initially put forth by John Berger and adapted by Kim and Mida, who suggest that through this method, one can discover details surrounding clothing manufacturing. In this kind of analysis, we see how individual styles and social perspectives can shape what was seen as appropriate and fashionable in relation to personal histories, including pregnancy, and the provenance of a piece that has been reworked and adapted through a person's lifetime (Mida & Kim, 2015, p. 33). This method uses the elements of visual cataloging drawn from art history (the foundations of which several scholars have positioned within cataloging practice (Van Eck & Winters, 2017; Cheetham et al., 2005; Belting, 1994) and that Mida further adapts as part of fashion theory (Mida, 2020). By taking the slow approach to individual garments, we are able to understand the fashion artifact through its construction, which highlights issues such as changes to fashion, the availability of material, and the personal choices evident in the seams of a garment. This method is based on the understanding that the dress object itself reflects the cultural beliefs and systems they are produced within. While this is arguably true of any historical approach, fashion theory as an interdisciplinary field needs to

return to the analysis of its unique object qualities in order to build its own foundational framework. Using art history, archeology, and science, the slow method uses object analysis throughout various stages of investigation by focusing on a methodology specific to fashion artifacts, which offers a series of steps that work from an evidence-based approach to cataloging (Mida & Kim, 2015, pp. 20-21).

While the practice of producing case studies in fashion archival practice is not new (Palmer, 2013; Taylor, 2004; Levey, 1984), by approaching fashion within a methodology based on observation, reflection, and interpretation as defined by Mida and Kim, the field of fashion gains a more streamlined way of addressing objects of the past that can also account for present bias. In this, the approach asks each scholar to address how social influences of their own time impact how they read dress objects of the past (Mida & Kim, 2015, pp. 64-66). For example, Mida and Kim might ask: “Do you have an emotional reaction to the garment? Does it appeal to you or repulse you? Does it remind you of something else? Consider whether your personal reactions are indicative of a shift in cultural beliefs” (Mida & Kim, 2015, p. 66). The potential for this “slow approach” theory is to unify various disciplines within fashion theory to account for past thought (Becker, 2017). As Becker stipulates:

Beginning researchers and those entrenched in longstanding research paths often forget to carefully consider these immensely important indexes of the past...However, even seasoned researchers can benefit from the carefully outlined methodology and reminders of the value of oft-forgotten objects. (Becker, 2017)

John Berger clarifies that what we see will be impacted by an understanding of what we believe to know already. We are impacted by our way of seeing, which creates a cultural mystification of the past, making people and their culture appear remote from our own through a difference of

perspective (Berger, 1972, pp. 8-11). I argue that the “slow approach” acknowledges these impacts and attempts to address them to mitigate the bias in fashion collection practices that traditionally prioritize unique and expensive dress samples in exhibitions that highlight social histories through high-end design, or alternatively, by attempting to position fashion objects as high art. The 2025 exhibit at the Louvre, “Louvre Couture, Art and Fashion: Statement Pieces” (Louvre, 2025), presents the gallery’s first collection of fashion by bringing in over forty-five high-end designers to highlight the dialogue between art and fashion from the 1960s to today. It is a beautiful exhibition that nonetheless supports the tendency to examine fashion objects through art history. We see a similar bias towards high fashion in exhibitions such as “The Vulgar; Fashion Redefined” (Barbican, 2017) or “Viktor & Rolf” (NGV, 2017), both of which offer interesting and aesthetic displays of dress that do not suggest fashion’s presence outside of the elite circles of design.

The process of learning to look, as Mida and Kim posit, is key to the approach that is important to take in individual garment case studies, especially given that the difficulty in understanding a dress artifact will increase the more removed a researcher is from the origin of the object creation. In other words, a familiar past versus a distant past will change the approach to the fashion object (Mida & Kim, 2015, p. 7). The distant past tends towards a greater level of myth-making in archival practice and within public or shared memory’s understanding because the tendency to try to make it familiar to our current cultural milieu negates most of the social conditions within which the individual garment was produced, together with the attitudes of its wearers. How historians attempt to mitigate against this is by positioning such objects of the distant past within the practice of visual object-based analysis, which endeavors to address the object by its own conditions of making before acknowledging its relation to the present or more

recent past. I suggest we need to position this as the predominant practice in fashion theory. One example to consider is when the fashion object was produced outside Western fashion modes, as ideas of time and place will differ drastically (Mida & Kim, 2015, p.7). This challenges how clothes outside Western archives are positioned and displayed in theoretical thought. Rather than presenting garments outside of a Western timeline, clothes might often be positioned in opposition to each other culturally: in other words, putting ideas of an “Eastern” culture in the position of “other,” as something against the Western tradition. Even though clothes outside of the Western tradition can be positioned positively (as aesthetically interesting and historically advanced), as Bussey and Maresca note, they are still being considered outside of this historical record-keeping practice (cyclical time versus linear time in its display). This in turn, presents challenges to the project of diversifying the fashion archives when objects continue to be viewed only within their respective timelines and cultural indexes (Bussey, 2009; Maresca, 2023). There are still challenges to how objects can fit together cross-culturally when the theoretical basis of cataloging continues to be considered diametrically opposed in Eastern and Western historiographies.

In contrast, the slow approach offers an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of each fashion object on its own merits, allowing for an approach that considers individual users and their histories. As in fashion theory, the personal has been considered a viable form from the perspective of the slow approach to address concerns regarding diversity, cataloging, and thematic practices (Ando Romana et al., 2023; Tulle, 2015; Horsley, 2014). While observational practice has been a part of theoretical and collection practice for centuries, as early as the mid-seventeenth century to the modern day (Richman-Abdou, 2018; Wallentine, 2016), the slow approach acknowledges the researcher's assumptions as part of its method. Addressing these

assumptions highlights the potential for bias towards the garment and, affirms that dress resists generalization. By generalization, I mean the way dress artifacts stand in for multiple designs or functions, such as an item performing as an example of an 1890s women's fashion rather than as an example of one woman's dress and tastes. As Slinkard offers in their work on museum practice: "Museums have a responsibility to educate their audiences and visitors on the significance of an object's origin, promoting respect and appreciation rather than endorsing the unchallenged blatant ignorant adoption of a style, design technique, motif, or overall look" (Slinkard, 2024, p. 147). Observation as a stage in this theoretical approach is the first step, according to Mida and Kim, towards a more in-depth analysis. In terms of practical issues, the researcher will consider whom the garment is made for, its fiber count, its dominant colour and patterns, its labels, condition, construction, and the elements it features (such as pockets), as well as any supporting material (such as pictures, letters, or other garments from the same family) (V&A, 2024; Georgijevic, 2018; Coburn, 2010). This necessary initial stage considers the material dimensions of each garment and will offer a preliminary recording of its properties as an object in history (Clark et al., 2014; Langley Moore, 1949). This creates a practical foundation in which to consider the object, such as the maker's access to resources, attention to stylings, and the object's known limitations. These limitations could include a lack of supportive materials for the object or damage to its construction. However, such initial description also highlights the differences between dress objects, despite their existing in the same space and place, and the potential individuality of each object and its social conditions. In other words, the object, even if a familiar sample of Westernized upper-class dress, when examined as an individual object, will hint at the personal influences exhibited in fashion and reflect the embodied practice of dressing for its wearer.

Reflection, the second step in the “slow approach” model, considers the emotional and personal involvement in each object’s history. Part of this approach consists in acknowledging how the beliefs of the current culture shape an understanding of the object that has been distorted through bias (Preito, 2020; Mida & Kim, 2015, pp. 62-63; Chon, 2013). For example, if a theorist operates from a feminist perspective, they will look to a garment that supports their ideas of what feminism was or should be in past garments. The garment’s ‘readings’ will be shaped by the current theory and understanding of femininity, which may ignore how the garment was presented and understood by the person who wore it previously. A key part of this analytical stage is also to acknowledge sensory reactions, as clothing is inherently sensual, so considering sensory reactions will play into a judgment of the item. A garment’s attraction and appeal are a large part of the interest or draw by both the researcher and the general public and often found a narrative of the fashion object (Farwell, 2021; Sikarskie, 2016). A piece that looks aesthetically appealing to the current culture will be seen as more engaging and valuable than an object that is unusual and unappealing to the current mode. An object deemed uncomfortable, smelly, or “foreign” to current ideals will more likely be dismissed. In chapter three, I further examine the role of sensory reactions in fashion reproductions and our continued desire to present something visually appealing for contemporary audiences, even when trying to produce an idea of the past. In theories of material culture, this aestheticization impacts the perceptions of an object’s agency and expresses a conflict between the past practice of embodiment and current forms of embodiment (Landsberg, 2015; Weber, 2010). Understanding the personal element in the pieces collected offers a deeper understanding of how bias has shaped ideas of the past, which has reinforced mythmaking in fashion, such as the classed and idealized designs that tend to be displayed and reproduced (Slinkard, 2024; Tonkin, 2023).

The final stage of the approach that I will follow is that of interpretation. This is more about directing the garment within the theoretical field of the researcher, which will change how the garment is being interpreted. For example, a researcher with an arts background will focus more on the garment's place within art history, whereas an economist will focus on market value. Interpretation involves understanding how the garment's embodiment will be shaped through the field of scope (Mida & Kim, 2015, pp. 78-79). Again, this is an acknowledgment that the object is presented through a specific contemporary thought process. Petrov suggests in her review of "slow approach" theory that it would be better to connect the three stages as interrelated rather than as three separate parts of an analysis. As she clarifies, the observation checklist likely overlaps with the reflection checklist and vice versa. The reflection checklist can potentially guide the process of determining design decisions and patterns of wear, which in turn furthers critical analysis for future fashion theorist projects (Petrov, 2016, pp. 357-358). Petrov challenges the separate order of things but offers a compelling way to further this approach in our case studies, which is to retroactively connect the three stages of seeing as critical to understanding the process of fashion both historically and for future theoretical processes (Petrov, 2016). As I approach my two case studies through the perspective of aging and mortality, I hope to highlight how the personal shapes the choice in clothing while highlighting the biases of timelines that continue to reinforce the mythic and aesthetic in fashion theory and historicism. I will reflect on the personal qualities of each garment, which will highlight the wearer as an individual with personal tastes that are reflected in the garments studied.

Angelic Ghosts: The Social and the Morbid Influences on the Child as an Emerging Subject

As I have previously suggested, each life stage is exhibited through choices in clothing design, which highlights the anxieties of each social system about fixing an idea of time and age through clothing (Flodin, 2019; Sweeney & Zionts, 1989). This theoretical approach to the idea of clothing as a second skin articulates clothes' transformative ability to perform selfhood differently depending on the cultural conditions of time and place for the wearer. Fashion's transience and planned succession that Walter Benjamin argues for conflicts with society's attempt at fixing the body within each developmental stage. While part of this dilemma is a condition of practicality that theory should make space for, the attempt to fix development is rooted in deeper anxiety cross-culturally about preserving youthfulness (Brown, 2023; Twigg, 2013). In my first case study, which highlights an object from childhood, questions of the rapidly developing body and the developing subject within the cultural system will be examined. In the podcast *Articles of Interest: Kids Clothes*, the host, Trufelman, makes an analogy between children's clothes and snake skins in that people adapt and shed their previous selves (clothes) to adapt to the changing and aging body (Trufelman, 2018). This is especially true in childhood, when time and maturation occur more quickly than in any other life stage. My take on this is that the signification of the evolving body is expressed through constant adaptation, something fashion theory still struggles to contend with in exhibition and cataloging practice where the attempts are made to display this linear/evolutionary trajectory without acknowledging the embodied anxiety present for this adaptive subjectivity in dress.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the child as innocent and separate from the rest of humanity was an important consideration for dress practices and children were deliberately dressed with social cultivation in mind. Children's clothes existed and continue to exist as a parody of adulthood to express an expectation of the subject that they will ideally become (Jones, 2013; Rawlins, 2006; Buck, 1996). As Consuelo Vanderbilt suggests: "It is a melancholy fact that childhood, so short when compared with the average span of life, should exert such a strong and permanent influence on character that no amount of self training afterwards can ever completely counter it" (Vanderbilt-Balsan, 1956). The social conditions that shape a childhood through the dress practice of a given era will also shape the conditions for the rest of the life stages, including the beliefs and biases of the person who exists within the social system in which the wardrobe is produced. Many have argued that "childhood" as a social category is a Victorian invention, like middle or older age (Modell, 2000a; Rose, 2000b; Buck, 1996). Childhood as an invented category is prescribed by the belief systems of its culture and the products (clothing) that define it.

At the forefront of any child's clothing designs is the notion of protection from themselves and outside forces, as wardrobes are to shield children from the world that the clothes are supposed to prepare them for. This still holds in children's fashion design today. As Morgan, a technical designer for a large children's apparel company, attests, companies must follow a set of guidelines when designing for children (Trufelman, 2018). For example, there can be no choking hazards, such as pull cords, so adult elements, like fastenings, are purely decorative and nonfunctional in children's clothes. These guidelines are implemented to prevent potential safety concerns and parental lawsuits (Trufelman, 2018). While this is a modern practice and not an approach in Gilded Age fashion, it was during the Gilded Age that children's dress was heavily

scrutinized for its protective qualities and potential to shield the “innocent” child while simultaneously preparing them for the “modern” world. These concerns in the Gilded Age have impacted how present children’s apparel companies approach design (Wolcott, 2015; Marten, 2014; Tanenhaus, 2010). Beyond the idea of protection, the children’s clothing market is designed primarily for the adults who raise them. As the children’s dress designer Morgan claims, when testing a new product, the focus group is adults, and designers work with those with the buying power (Trufelman, 2018). A child’s agency is seen as an increasingly important aspect of the modern era. However, the fashion industry still places children as pliable shells to be dressed by adult society and according to its desired subjectivity. This was especially true in the Gilded Age when children and their garments were meant to reflect the ideals and interests of their parents and the society they existed within (Rawlins, 2006; Schlereth, 1985). The protective practice of children’s dress design hints at anxiety about childhood as a time of unstable development that needs protective limitations as provided in children’s garment making.

The child and their wardrobe provide us with an understanding of how life stages have changed since the early modern period. Why I go back this far is to exemplify the historical shifts in dressing practices impacted by sociological approaches to embodiment and the ways these shape garment production. According to fashion theorist Anne Buck, the importance of studying children’s garments is best exemplified as a way to keep the children’s identities from the surviving garments as evidence of a past way of life and understanding of development (Buck, 1996, p. 15). By beginning with childhood, the following garment case study and textile examples I highlight serve as an important guide to the value of material culture in the context of Gilded Age ideas surrounding the role of youth and the developing subject in society (Brown, 2023; Baxter, 2022; Tanenhaus, 2010; Sweeney & Zionts, 1989). These clothing examples

further illuminate the attitudes towards childrearing that emerged as new technological and medical advancements changed the expectations of family life and the roles of each member (Bates, 1997). The concept of childhood as a separate stage from adulthood is only a very recent consideration within Western thought (Marten, 2014). However, by examining children's garments of the past, we can still find evidence of anxiety around the developing and aging body performed within each sociocultural system of youth garment making.

The Gilded Age as a fashion epoch, which I have outlined in the first chapter, marks when people started addressing the idea of the child as a significant social entity through the emergence of child-centered commercial items and child-centric wardrobes (Buck, 1996, p. 15). Their wardrobe influenced the subject the child was to become and placed the age's anxieties from the parents onto the youth. The various factors of aging and its representation in dress move beyond questions of childhood development, to the larger question of the forming subject (Franzmann, 2019; Twigg, 2018). The forming subject refers to the bodily development of the child and the social process of forming a particular cultural subjectivity. What makes dress studies of childhood compelling is that they offer considerable insight into a cultural understanding of human development and the larger political and social concerns of a classed being. At each life stage, I argue that there is a reconsideration of what sort of subject the fashioned being is called to be. Critics, including aging theorist Julia Twigg (2018; 2013) and adolescent theorists Ozdamar Ertekin Zeynep and Atik Deniz (2015) as well as historian Jones (2013), have remarked on this changing subjectivity in their studies of fashion and development. Children's clothes continue to exhibit an anxiety around time, in the fact that their clothes offer concrete evidence of time's passing as they only fit their owner briefly, and while the subject can still be living, their childhood wardrobe contains the spirit of a younger, more innocent self. The

growing pains associated with children's dress are of the not yet influenced subject. The child who had this boundless potential and the capacity to become something was not yet a decided subject (the decision of subjectivity being performed by the social pressures of their culture). While this may not be the experience of the actual child, it is understood that this is the experience of the socially imagined child. In the case of girlhood, the child was often treated as a "little woman," where the desired outcome is presented through what they are given to play with and wear. I will showcase in the case study this imagining and the reality that could contrarily exist at the same time in a child's wardrobe.

A Case Study for Childhood: White Lawn Dress Circa 1900

The child's wardrobe of the Gilded Age would follow several developmental stages from infancy to late adolescence. Depending on the cultural background and status of the child's family, childhood itself could last only a few years or close to two decades (Wolcott, 2015; Modell, 2000; Schlereth, 1985). This hints at some of the problems fashion historians (Calia, 2021; Shukla, 2015; Palomo-Lovinski & Faerm, 2014) have in approaching case studies of the past as a linear progression when different social backgrounds will change what is classified as childhood, as well as its length. Wardrobes would reflect the station the child would be called to be in later life, but it was during the Gilded Age that a more homogenous example of children's dress across classes emerged.

The case study I now turn to, following Mida and Kim's suggested approach, focuses on a simple white cotton lawn dress that would have been worn by a girl closer to the end of a

conventional childhood (the standard being a Gilded Age middle-class consideration of development). By using the “slow approach”, I will outline some of the ways that this specific garment suited a cultural ideal of girlhood dress and some of the ways that personal components of the garment reflect the anxieties of the time and the attempts to perform within a certain cultural milieu. The garment offers a series of contradictions in its attempt to fix the body to the time it was produced while also trying to straddle both the present and the future through the hopes of its social condition to prepare the developing child for their subjectivity within an evolving social sphere.



Figures 2.1 and 2.2 Summer lawn dress circa 1900, personal collection, 2023

Beginning with the practice of observation, the garment appears to be a girl’s summer dress intended for a pre-adolescent (age eight to twelve years) made with natural composition fibers. Based on measurements, the dress was likely worn by a child somewhere between ten and twelve years of age. The dominant colour is a soft off-white with a matching underskirt. The sleeves are

semi-sheer organza with white cotton embroidered polka dots that span the length of both arms. Based on its general construction, the garment can be dated to the late 19th or early 20th century, and it is similar in style to a lady's lawn dress from the same period. The garment does not feature padding or weights. However, it does feature interfacing at the waistband and a lighter underskirt attached to the bodice. The garment emphasizes the natural waistline and bodice through belting and gathered pleating, hinting at the emerging womanly body of the wearer. The dress shows evidence of both machine stitching and hand stitching throughout. The garment is partially lined through the front of the bodice and skirt, while some evidence suggests that part of the lining may have been removed for alterations.

The dominant material of the gown is cotton, which appears to have been treated with a bleaching process. The fabric has been pleated at the front of the blouse and fastened to the interior lining of the skirt. The front and back of the bodice feature a triple-threaded yoke and ruffled detail at the neckline. There is applied decoration with embroidery thread on the sleeves and bodice and through the threaded tassels on the decorative sash. The delineation between the bodice and skirt feminizes the childhood garment and speaks to the separate dress pieces that define a woman's wardrobe. The garment has been reinforced with several examples of backstitching, but no wiring or boning is present, suggesting a less corseted structure. This case study, as an older piece, does not offer much regarding labeling or manufacturer. There are no care or sizing instructions included, which are considered a more recent development in design. There is no maker label, which suggests it was not made by a couture designer. However, the dress shows evidence of a label having been removed from the back of the waistband that would be similar in size and design to a department store label, indicative of the emerging practice of ready-made wear being evidenced in this case study. The dress also offers a handstitched initial

that has been removed, which provides a bit of the personal history of one of the girls who wore it.

Signs of alteration have been a contention for curatorial practices and exigencies of cataloging, for both the difficulty in identifying what an original alteration versus a curatorial alteration is, as well as the changing value placed on objects that express signs of wear (Tonkin, 2023; Coburn et al., 2010). This garment has been structurally altered in several spots. For example, the skirt's hem, which is two inches in length, looks to have been added to an original hem. The clips at the waistband have been removed and restitched at least three times to allow for an expanding waistband and bodice. The dress is in fairly good working condition but does have several small holes forming in the finer material of the sleeves. There is evidence of sweat stains in the underskirt and lining. The outer skirt has an ink stain and a chemical burn. Where the label has been removed, there is discoloration, which means it was likely commercially made; the inclusion of a label at this time marked it as a store purchase. The garment still appears to be close to its original colour, showing no evidence of having been repurposed beyond that of a lawn dress. The dress could be a hybrid design since the structure is traditional to late 19th-century design, but some of the added detail appears to be more stylistic to around 1910. This suggests that this garment went through several modifications, likely to suit a changing body and social system. The dress was more than likely passed down between children and spanned several decades of wear, which is why the style straddles more than one era of dress styling. This case study is difficult to place because of its lack of supporting material. It was purchased online from another collector, so there is no history of the original owner or owners. That does remove some potential personal readings but the wear and tear to the gown express its history as

part of child's play and significantly, marks the aging form through its adjustments and general decay.



Figures 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5 additional examples of construction. Chemical stain or burn in which fabric has hardened and cracked, eyelets at the waist reattached in several places, stain from where dress label was removed.

Knowing the garment's general qualities, I now consider the second phase of the "slow" approach to artifacts: reflection. As the primary researcher, I contemplate potential sensory reactions to this garment in comparison to samples of children's dresses from my own cultural background and timeline. The stylistic features of the dress have no obvious religious or artistic connotations but offer a early nineteenth-century take on the neoclassical and pastoral look of the eighteenth-century. A look inspired by country life and an innocence connected to nature and pastoral poetry, the style appeared set against the increasingly industrialized cities and their stylings (Little, 2020). Pastoral-inspired dress tends to be made of predominantly lightweight white muslin, with gathered pleats and a simple A-line skirt. Such examples are prevalent in museum archives such as the French "chemise dress" in the Kyoto Institute archive (KCI, AC2086 79-5-16, 2024) or the plain white "muslin dress" circa 1800-1805 at the Victoria and Albert archives (V& A, 2024). The soft white fabric and gathered waist create an innocent,

ethereal look meant to promote a girlish innocence that contemporaries of the day were trying to capture in children's wardrobes. The white signals sexual immaturity and the fabric would be difficult to keep clean, which also suggests a classed being of the middle to upper-classes, who would have the means to maintain the dress through extensive laundry (Steele, 2001; Buck, 1996; Lurie, 1981). The dress here is slightly less structured than some children's garments from earlier in the decade, operating more as a casual example of dress. One sees some interesting stylistic choices in the garment, like the detailed sheer sleeves and the tasseled belt, a more unique variation on the basic lawn dress, which suggests a family interested in expressing a contemporary fashionable look. The dress is soft and yielding. The bust and hips have a fair amount of stretch, allowing growth and movement. While the garment would be floor length on the wearer, the skirts fit loosely, allowing freer movement that might be expressed in play.

While the period of this dress was known for having garments that made a particular sort of noise in motion (Liebling, 1985), interestingly, the construction of this garment suggests that it is meant to be silent. This could be a stylistic choice, harkening back to the idea of children as angelic. The soft and quiet movement of the skirt plays into the ethereal image the wearer or designer wanted to convey. The garment has a faint musty odor, likely from sweat embedded in the fibers. Adjustments have been made to allow it to be worn for at least a couple years of the owner's development. The style is simple, with heightened decorative qualities, such as ruffled detailing and the pleated bodice. The dress' stylings offer a look of ease and innocence, again reflecting childhood ideals. However, it also offers stylings more synonymous with a woman's wardrobe, such as the detailed bust and cinched waist, suggesting the dress straddles the developmental stages of childhood and pubescence.

The subject of this case study would not be an example of a particularly rare article of clothing from the period. Simple constraints of budget and access mean that my personal collection will not carry the same historically interesting pieces that a museum might have access to, which is a benefit in the sense that this garment is more reflective of several classes of dress style rather than an example of the cultural elite only. As previously mentioned, the museum space continues to struggle to display classed examples of dress given limitations to access that the archives has, as what has been donated over several decades tends to consist of novel and formal examples of dress culture (Farwell, 2021; Verbyc'ka, 2014). The other benefit of the choice of this garment as a popular dress style is the existence of a wealth of secondary records such as magazines, advertisements, and photographs from the period that reflect a similar type of garment.³³ While it is a common garment, a museum would likely have an example of something similar on hand because of its success historically as a fashion piece. For example, the Vogue Archive contains several advertisements including similar lawn dresses in their collection from the 1890s (Condé Nast, 2024), and the Royal Ontario Museum contains a number of cabinet cards with children in lawn dresses from the period (ROM, 2018.59.89.29, 2024). While the dress does not have an accessible personal record, it offers a helpful index for youth styles from this period. One can see such examples in the T. Eaton Company archive catalog of spring and summer 1894 which offers several children's lawn dresses of similar styling in various price ranges (T Eaton Archives, 381.10294 T11.6 1894, 2024).

I collected this lawn dress as a case study garment from a private collection in the Midwest of America. The collector offered pieces from the 1860s up to the 1960s based on a personal

³³ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figures 2.6 and 2.7 for examples of other lawn dresses from the same time frame.

interest in historical clothing and costuming, which she collected over thirty years. The seller primarily sold her items through the Etsy market; however, she worked with me through a mutual connection with the Costume Society of America. Her collection of dress artifacts had only recently gone up for sale after she decided to scale back from the hobby due to health concerns. As I was a student researcher, she offered me a lookbook of items she would sell at a discounted rate. When searching for an example of a childhood garment, my selection was somewhat limited as she only had a few pieces in her collection, two of which were from the Gilded Age (collections of children's garments and displays are still relatively underrepresented in the fashion museum space) (Le Guennec & Rose, 2024). The selection process was primarily defined by budget as I selected the cheapest options to ensure I could afford other items. While the dress is a common example of a lawn dress, it was important for this project that I find a garment reflective of children of different classes. I wanted something that spoke to a middle-class culture of childhood, but that could be translated into the wardrobes of the upper- and working-class child, depending on the fineness of trims and materiality. The garment was similar in style to children's lawn garments I have worked with in museum collections, except that it was more worn than the ones typically displayed. In this case, I thought these signs of wear were more important for this project to show evidence of a garment's past and its bodily traces. The benefit of this garment being a common collection item is that it moves away from the predominant approach to novel fashion displays and collections. Rather than examining something unusual and aesthetically different, the lawn dress highlights a more general fashion trend. As a common piece, its secondary elements, such as trim selection, highlight more of the individual tastes and values of the wearer and their background. Through these material elements, something of the personal emerges.

For the final stage of the slow approach, involving the interpretation of the object, we turn to the broader cultural significance of a garment, that an example such as this carries. For the emerging adolescent, this dress is a good example of the adolescent life stage in the Gilded Age and the implications that fashion had for the developing body. Stylistically, versions of this garment were quickly adapted for middle, upper, and even working-class children. New technologies through industrialization allowed for variations of finer garments to be made in cheaper, mass-production copies. The garment I examine has some more formal decorative elements that would suggest the owner had a degree of financial security. However, the evidence of a store label suggests the wearer was likely more middle-class to middle-upper class rather than part of the elite. In this era, the upper echelons of society still favoured couture and custom-made garments rather than shop purchases or catalogue items. This was true for the 1880s and 1890s, but by 1910, even the highest classes were purchasing department store clothing for their children. However, this case study garment has evidence of production beginning before this era, so it is more likely middle class.

The garment can be read through various social/cultural lenses, but perhaps most significant is its position within fashion's social anxiety about the developing woman and the ways both to hide and highlight this emerging femininity that adolescent bodies carry, as noted in several scholars' works on childhood fashion (Brown, 2023; Rawlins, 2006; Jame, 2000). By attempting to infantilize the adolescent body, the dress highlights an attempt to stall the rapid development of childhood and erase signs of the aging form, but paradoxically, by offering a cinched waist, the garment also highlights the emerging womanly body. The dress tries to emphasize childhood innocence while attempting to train the body for its next developmental stage by both attempting

to stop aging and to speed up the menarche of the girl. Evidence of this suggests the complicated approach the fashion object takes to these ideas of aging.

What happened in the late 19th century was historically significant not only for the emerging thought around childhood as a separate life stage but also through a growing concern for the group of people at the precipice of adulthood (Feixa, 2011; Chinn, 2009). The life stage we now identify as that of the teenager was not always considered a developmental stage historically (Tanenhaus, 2010). During the Gilded Age, an emerging consumer culture allowed for a growing mix between the classes through public leisure, including the early department stores, and through widespread visual media, like magazine advertisements, which ultimately allowed for the first version of a youth subculture (Getis, 1998a; Mechling, 1998b). The youth subculture was structured on the idea that youth might overturn the dominant worldview of their parents' society. Scholars of youth studies have identified a division between generations of early American immigrants, with children separating from the traditions of their parents to become more "Americanized" (Chinn, 2009; Odem, 1998). In the Gilded Age, this concern about potential rupture stemmed from the increased immigration to American cities in the second half of the 19th century, together with a youth-based culture supported through activist pursuits by these new immigrant children (Chinn, 2009, pp. 6-7). The upper classes, for example, saw a youth culture emerge within their social system. However, this would occur later in life than for immigrant and working-class youth, who, as workers, had access to the public space earlier than those raised in the nursery and under their parent's influence for a longer time. Industrialization and the urbanization of American cities alienated parents from youths through the economic freedom afforded to "tweens" (Chinn, 2009, p. 7). The establishment of social spaces for both genders called into question the role parents had in protecting their children from worldly influences

while at the same time making sure the child was prepared for adulthood. The growth in schooling for girls, for example, impacted social spaces and how youth perceived their roles in the new social order (Chinn, 2009, p. 8; Odem, 1998). In building youth-focused spaces, society was, in part, acknowledging another shift in considering childhood development.

The contradictions about aging that we see in the case study garment are reflected in debates about space. Allowing youngsters a space for leisure and education expanded the concerns of the debate over childhood by suggesting that girls and boys had a right to develop before entering the adult world (Feixa, 2011; Bates, 1997). For most middle- or lower-class families, there was a need for their children to help support the household. As a result, children often took up active space in the public sphere in a manner that was unregulated. The introduction of American child labor laws in the Gilded Age challenged what childhood should entail, including a certain amount of free time (Odem, 1998a; Mechling, 1998b). Commercial spaces were introduced as part of this tenuous balance of an expanded developmental period of childhood within cultural expectations emerging at the time (Getis, 1998; Calvert, 1992). While the concept of the teenager would not be fully developed for another four decades, it was the Gilded Age that challenged this idea of boundaries between childhood and adulthood and suggested how aging and maturity can be dynamic and contingent on the social and cultural factors one develops within; ultimately implying that growing up is not as static as one might have initially thought. The wardrobes of these youth can be read as showing this tenuous relationship between adulthood and childhood and a continued desire to express innocence in dress.

The Child as Vehicle for Emerging Worldviews in a Modern Era

Prior to the nineteenth century, little, historically, was considered in the development of childhood (Bates, 1997; Calvert, 1992). By which I mean children were not seen as having unique developmental considerations beyond the first couple years after birth. Aside from the infant, the child was considered an extension of the adult world (Schlereth, 1985). Once capable of walking, talking, and feeding themselves, the child was expected to contribute to the society in which they existed. In the 18th century, this viewpoint shifted as children were seen to develop more slowly over time and, therefore, as needing the space and place to grow into their future selves (Bates, 1997; Rousseau, 1762). Theorists saw the infant as an expression of perfect innocence, an innocence they could express because their interactions were limited to the domestic sphere and the family. As the importance of the domestic and its roles rose in prominence throughout the Victorian era, the idea of further protection for the child was also considered essential to creating a healthily developed adult. The child should learn of the world from the safety of their own home where their supposed innocence could be protected and valued. The role of the domestic sphere allowed for learning through play, as medical experts gave more credence to physiology. As a result, children's wardrobes developed to allow for a greater level of movement, such as shorter skirts to allow for greater exploration of the environment, with an understanding that a child's dress should be unencumbered by the fashion of adults. This can be seen in children's clothing choices that continued to be adapted for play and leisure in publications of the time, including the Eaton company catalogs of the 1890s (Eaton Co Archives, 2024) and the *Vogue* magazines of the 1890s (Condé Nast, 2024).

Infant mortality was an important factor in children's dress, and the preservation of their innocence. The mortality factors reinforced ideas of religiosity to deal with the grief of childhood deaths as a necessary part of faith, which was situated in "angelic" inspired clothing. According to PBS, the infant mortality rate in preindustrial Europe averaged 250 deaths per 1000 children. In contrast, post-industrial society (including North America) in 1900 averaged 160-170 deaths per 1000 children, and by 1997, an average of 7 deaths per 1000 children (PBS, 2024). The Gilded Age showed a decline in death rates with the advancements in medicine and other technologies. However, the death of a child was something still known by most families. In the United States, statistics show that children under the age of five had 462.9 deaths for every 1000 births in the year 1800 which meant approximately 46% of children did not make it to their fifth year (O'Neil, 2023). In working-class households, it was common practice not to name the child until at least its first birthday. Although by the 1890s, this number decreased drastically, the threat of death for children was still high.³⁴ Consider the years post-1870 when infant mortality rates increased from cholera, smallpox, and yellow fever (as more people moved to enclosed city centers) (Meckel, 1998). During World War I, another spike in children's death rates occurred from the Spanish Flu (O'Neil, 2023). Consideration of children's mortality rates had a significant bearing on children's clothes (a shift from asexual angelic dress to sexually trained garments for development) and the changes that came about when death rates declined. As children were expected to live longer, dressing practice began to include wardrobes designed to train the ideal social subject for adulthood moving away from the otherworldly angelic garments to ones that signaled a child's menarche.

³⁴ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.8.

The 19th century moved away from Enlightenment ideals, which argued that humanity was moving upward, to the idea that the great fall from the biblical tale had tainted human nature (Calvert, 1992). This philosophical worldview suggested that every individual had a dual nature and capacity for both good and evil. Children were considered the most innocent and good because they had lived in the world for the least amount of time (Calvert, 1992). This idea of innocence emerged from a Western Christian tradition, and the children as part of this ideal of innocence were primarily white Anglo-Saxon born. This interest in the dual nature as a philosophical standpoint was formed in part because of this preoccupation with child mortality. Children were understood to have a greater capacity for good because they had yet to be corrupted by worldly influences in the way adults had. Parents wanted to accentuate the good in babies and children by suppressing evil and worldly influences on them for as long as possible. This led to a vested interest in youth.

The role grief played in these ideas was also significant. Children's innocence allowed parents to deal with infant mortality through the belief that the child's death was tied to their perfect innocence and that they were never meant for the world (Wolcott, 2015; Schlereth, 1985). Visually angelic innocence was associated with dressing angelically in soft, flowing white fabrics trimmed with lace and feminine detailing. The child as an innocent or celestial being was represented first and foremost as asexual. This philosophical worldview and its view of childhood has been credited to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom many academics attribute to the modern understanding of childhood and its developments (Scholz, 2020; Koops, 2012). Having lived through the 18th century, Rousseau's teachings marked the end of the Age of Enlightenment, expressing an interest in universal liberty, a return to sentimentality, and a renewed interest in the expression of emotion through an attachment and return to nature

(Scholz, 2020). As part of his philosophical approach to Romanticism, he saw that children had a special relationship with the natural world as had their way of seeing (Rousseau, 1762).

Rousseau wrote treatises on the role that parents should have in children's development, expressing concern about society's readiness in placing children in adult society too soon (Koops, 2012).

In *Émile, or on Education* (1762), Rousseau argues that the lessons children should learn should be tied to their relationship with nature: "He believes he moves the child by making him attentive to the sensations by which he, the master, is himself moved. Pure stupidity! It is in man's heart that the life of nature's spectacle exists. To see it, one must feel it" (Rousseau, 1762, p. 168). Rather than instructions tied to adult behaviour and mannerisms, the child should be allowed to play, which has a significant part in this healthy development. The child's discovery of their bodily limits could teach more than the societal milestones the parents tried to enforce on them, according to Rousseau (Rousseau, 1762). There is harm in trying to force the child into maturation before they are ready. The idealized Romantic child as one who existed outside of time and history was increasingly important to celebrate throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. As we consider the Gilded Age, near the end of the industrial period, the divorce from the natural world seemed almost absolute as the city's life took over most ideals of the country. While this comes from a European context and Rousseau was a French scholar, these beliefs played a large part in American child-rearing practice. American mothers became known as overly protective and more actively involved in their children's education and social lives compared to their British counterparts, whom they attempted to emulate (MacColl & Wallace, 2012). The preservation of childhood through protection and an ahistorical wardrobe placed the child as outside time to create a delay for aging and their eventual maturation. Fashion became

about hiding and stalling the developing body, using fashion's attempt to fix time to stop the process of aging on the forming subjects by placing them outside the influences of an industrializing society.

By the latter half of the 19th century, childhood Romanticism combined with the advancements made in medical science (Koops, 2012; Helvenston, 1981). New medical journals and the contemporary authors of the day advocated for children to exercise often and early to develop healthy muscles, coalescing with how Rousseau argued for the freedom to play and be active outdoors. William Alcott, an American educator and physician, claimed that the range of motion for the human body could only be maximized through consistent activity. He prescribed that children's dress, even for those as old as ten, should offer no confinement of limbs, otherwise the child was unlikely to grow to the size and strength of their potential (Helvenston, 1981, p. 32). As we see in the case study garment, 19th century children's frocks were made shorter to reach just above the calves in younger children's dress and just above the ankles in the older child (Buck, 1996, p. 66). Exploration and cleanliness were an important part of medicine's role in dress practice as the role of health came to be associated with the idea of being clean. Another reason the colour white was so popular at this time was that an item more easily bleached could maintain the look of cleanliness and health for its wearer (Flanders, 2014).

With industrialization, the role of religion and traditional values in raising youth began to be questioned (Bates, 1997, p. 44). The fashion industry and the medical field were at odds as fashion saw attractiveness as tantamount, while health reformers saw plain clothes as the answer (Bates, 1997; Helvenston, 1981). The industry through which these clothing ideals were produced would not be criticized as to do so would be to question the market economy (Bates, 1997, pp. 50-51). The role of health and economics became intrinsically woven into the question

of what can and cannot be fashionable. In the case study garment, we see this dichotomy occur through the more straightforward dress cut and lower waistband designed around the idea of health practices at the time. While the decorative elements of the piece make it more fashionable and current to the 1890s, it could hardly be considered as conducive to play by today's standards. The cultural factors occurring before the garment is even considered will influence what can and cannot be placed under the cultural lexicon.

The Asexual Child and The Significance of Colour Theory

To be angelic meant not to have earthly bound desires resulting in non gender specific clothing typical for children in this period. Nongendered garments were a way of separating infancy from the stages of older childhood and adulthood (Calvert, 1992). The 1890s saw children's dress straddling this desire to preserve innocence while allowing children's "true natures" to be fulfilled (Marten, 2014; Lurie, 1981). With the advent of what came to be classed as the modern era, parents and society believed children should be prepared for adulthood early on in their lives. Boys would be given a suit matching that of their fathers, while girls would be given miniature versions of their mothers' dresses (Buck, 1996; Calvert, 1992). The case study garment is interesting in its construction, as it spans the two worldviews from this era. The decorative bosom and cinched waist are more typical of a girl's wardrobe. However, the use of white structured cotton and frilled collars and cuffs speaks more to the angelic asexual look. This design attempts to celebrate both cultural ideals.

Part of the “new look” that emerged in children’s wear in the 1890s was the removal of the bodice and skirt combination to form a single dress with a larger decorative yoke which featured more elaborate trims and tucking and embroidery elements. This type of dress allowed for more straightforward lines and materials with a loose-fitting bodice that could then be customized (Buck, 1996, p. 77). The use of elaborate trim was a direct reflection of the trends in adult fashions, specifically what was being worn by the mothers (Rose, 1989, p. 103). This new look, as a reflection of the mother’s wardrobe, captures this desire by the parents to keep their children in the mother’s mould, not as an individual, but as a product of the family. There was a continued desire to keep the child in the domestic sphere, not influenced by the outside society. Asexual desire tends to win out over the sex-typing garments, at least in early childhood.

In the Morris children’s portrait collection at the Library Company of Philadelphia, Morris’s photographs of his children, Marriott Jr, and Elliston Jr showcase how both children wore long dresses for most of their childhood despite the growing trend for sex-typed wardrobes.³⁵ While the family followed the day’s fashion trends, the desire to keep the angelic look also continued. A portrait from 1907 shows Janet, the younger sister of the two boys, wearing the same white frock that the boys had worn a few years previously (Van Denend, 2015). While the Morris’s were wealthy and had raised fashionable children, the desire for youthful innocence continued at the mother’s discretion. As evidence suggests, Elliston Jr had his hair cut short around age three, while his brother Marriot Jr kept his hair long, past the age of five. Their mother, Jane, ultimately decided to keep the angelic look going for as long as society would decently allow (Van Denend, 2015). While these examples are of a five-year-old dress, these angelic standards were kept up longer for a girl’s development, and the case study for a ten-year-old is held to a similar standard

³⁵ See Appendix A Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.9 and 2.10.

as the younger child's. Despite the growing challenges to the angelic child's worldview, parents still ultimately controlled how much of the public and its suggested subjectivity was required for their child's wardrobe to be acceptable, as explored by other scholars of childhood development and fashion including Brown (2023), Jones (2013), and Rawlins (2006).

While infants are associated with cherubs or angels, there is another reason for the white gown in the older child's wardrobe. The importance of colour or pattern, as fashion theorist Lurie stipulates, is how it may act as part of a dress's speech. Its "tone" will alter the meaning of a gown, while its trims and stylings can change what is being said: "In certain circumstances, some hues, like some tones of voice, are beyond the bounds of polite discourse. A bride in a black wedding dress, or a stockbroker greeting his clients in a shocking-pink three-piece suit, would be like people screaming aloud" (Lurie, 1981, p. 183). A large part of colour use is made appropriate or inappropriate when placed in certain settings. Trends also play an important part in what colour to wear and when. As I posited in the first chapter, fashion is known for its changeable nature; for example, black fifteen years ago at a wedding would be considered ill-mannered, but today would be more respectable in a contemporary Western setting. Generally, a socially acceptable colour will remain so for many years, but the hue of the colour, for example, will change depending on what is desirable each year (Lurie, 1981, pp. 183-184). The importance of white in adolescent dress culture was part of a society's movement away from a religious-based life to a secular one (Bowman, 2017; Evans, 2013). Religious symbols were slowly replaced with other forms of symbolic taboos found in dress as cultural objects. White had (and still does to some extent) a connotation of innocence and purity. Beyond its expression in a young child's wardrobe, it was also significant in adolescent dress. The notion of white as virginal had an important part to play in the evolution of childhood. A girl, up until her wedding

day, was still considered as a child and innocent, one who should not know worldly things such as passion or desire and who thus should not express these matters in her wardrobe (Seys, 2018; Rose, 2013; Rose 1989; Lurie, 1981). While this was true in most European cultures as well, the Americans of the Gilded Age primarily situated status through an understanding of dress symbolism that supported an idea of tradition that exists beyond the relatively short, recorded history they relied on to frame class (Block, 2021; Muller, 2012; Tischleder, 2005). White dress for American culture was aspirational as well. Wearing white meant you had ready access to laundries and maids to keep the garment white rather than grey or yellowed (Flanders, 2014).

Industrialization had a significant bearing on the role of fashionable dress and its meanings in the Gilded Age. Along with the industrial production of fabrics like muslin, fashion advertisements, and newspaper press became more widespread and accessible (Keefe, 2018; Calhoun, 2007). Such fashion texts celebrated the relatively easy manufacturing process of white dresses in materials like cotton and muslin, as they were seen as cheaper and easily changeable for the faster-paced fashion market. The way the white gown evolved in the market meant that it symbolically took on connotations of transience and changeability, and therefore, its symbolism in colour could shift as well (Seys, 2018, p. 35). In Wilkie Collins' novel, *The Woman in White* [1860], the white dress worn by one of the heroines is on both sides of the two dichotomies we see throughout the debate of adolescent girlhood. The use of white suggests a level of transparency or trust but also acts as a canvas on which the secrets and desires of the persona can be written. The person is both angelic and ghost-like (McLarney, 2022; Seys, 2018, p. 39). The girl in development is not strictly a subject; she is in a state of becoming that is fraught with uncertainty. By sitting at the juncture of two life stages, the young girl's subjectivity borders childhood and adulthood, and so she is both and neither at the same time.

White, in its performance of youthfulness, may be self-consciously chosen. The girl and her parents are aware of how the colour white works in presenting the “right” sort of subject (Blanchard, 1995). This further complicates the association with white in adolescence, as white does not guarantee one type of subject but is open to a host of potential subjectivities. Dorothea, in the novel *Middlemarch* [1871-2], has very specific convictions of what morality and life should offer and so wears white with a level of religious connotation. However, when she marries and becomes disillusioned with her role in womanhood, she also wears light grey, suggesting an innocence tinted by knowledge. She makes herself an image of half-mourning, of a ghostly figure lost to her youth (Lurie, 1981, pp. 194-195). White in fashion harkens back to the role of death and morality in clothing. The use of white in a young woman’s wardrobe symbolizes the concerns of the family and society about what aging means for girlhood and the question of purity versus knowledge. White is an attempt to capture such innocence in wardrobes and to slow the aging process. As Seys argues, whites in the Victorian era presented women as bridal, angelic, ghosts and martyrs, frauds, and ultimately fashionable women (Seys, 2018, p. 62; Cantoni, 2008). The colour white as it plays out for children was dependent on context and how family and society continued to challenge what youth versus maturity should entail and how it could be expressed in dress culture.

In the nineteenth century, differences between the dress of a child and a woman were defined primarily by their length and the degree of elaboration (Conde Nast, 2024; McCord Stewart Museum, 2024; Eaton Co Archives, 2024; Rose, 2013; Calvert, 1992). While it was still standard to dress the girl in a miniature version of her mother’s clothing, the changes within women’s fashion divided the role of children’s wear into two contrasting and popular styles for the child. The styles had to factor in both the innocent, angelic child and the child of the modern era, i.e.

the miniature adult (Bates, 1997; Rose, 1989; Helvenston, 1981). The first style, the working dress, consisted of a more uniform white blouse and dark skirt, which was in direct contrast to the second style, which consisted of a wide gored skirt with flounces, trims, and elaborate draping. Some of this tension was settled through class and lifestyle. For example, those who attended public school tended towards the tailored look of the 'New Woman' while those who had a home education or were at home for holidays required the flounce of the 'Boudoir' style dress. Despite entering the childhood stage, girls' wardrobes did still harken back to some of the androgynous styles of infancy in the popular sailor-style wardrobe of crisp white blouses and wide collars (Rose, 1989, p. 121). This exemplifies a hope to extend childhood and innocence for as long as possible, which continued in late 19th-century dress. While girls began wearing elaborate trims to exemplify the latest fashion, the age-typed dress of the child blurred in this period (Bates, 1997; Calvert, 1992).

This blurring of age typed fashion continued to evolve throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially with the newer considerations that childhood should exemplify comfort and the ability to play (Scholz, 2020; Zeynep & Deniz, 2015; Tanenhaus, 2010; Rose, 1989). Femininity and age were delineated by how the body developed and ultimately came down to class considerations. The age of the child did not matter when there was a class divide (Wolcott, 2015; Cantoni, 2008; Odem 1998). Fashion scholar Rose posits that the daughter of a wealthy household was treated as a different sort of being than a servant of the same age living under the same roof. As a working-class girl in an interview recalls: "I was small for fifteen and their own daughter, who was thirteen, had reached pubescence and I had not; I was never treated as a child in any way, or even as a young person" (Edith Hall, 1923, in Rose, 1989, p. 127). The girl of the house had developed a woman's form, while Edith remained small and prepubescent

despite having two years more to develop. Despite this, Edith had left childhood before entering service, while the wealthy girl had at least another four to five years before she was classed as an adult. The size of the wealthier girl mattered little regarding the expectations of her class. Edith was an adult woman, even if she did not exemplify a woman's form.

The role of femininity was also exhibited in subtler ways that were not associated with the sexually matured body. Sex typing was featured early on in a child's wardrobe to anticipate the adult figure they would become (Blanchard-Emerson, 2022; Marten, 2014; Lurie, 1981, p. 214). This continues to be a tradition in fashion studies of childhood. For example, in Franzmann's study of marketing and dress codes, she explores how these societal rules of dress shape the child's subjectivity in the school space (Franzmann, 2019). While adults and society were not looking to sexualize the child deliberately, they still wanted to situate their social positions. For example, art from this era often features a girl at play indoors or in a setting that suits her associated gender experience, such as a garden, a shop with her mother, or picnicking. Meanwhile, a boy would be featured in action as a playful explorer or an academic, but always out in the world. The painting *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont*³⁶ (1884) by Auguste Renoir, shows an upper-middle-class family of daughters, all typifying the "feminine" in their clothing and actions. While the context here is French, it is still worth pursuing its value within the Gilded Age American cultural system, which often sought to reflect French fashion modes. In the painting, the elder quietly reads, while the younger stands patiently waiting for her mother to repair her doll. The outdoors is brought in through the large picture window, bright furnishings, and potted plants. They are contained within the domesticated space. Garments in children's wardrobes often featured sex-typed imagery with flowers or domestic animals, suggesting the

³⁶ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.11.

wearer was soft and delicate like a flower or baby animal (Lurie, 1981, p. 214). In Renoir's painting *The Daughters of Catulle Mendes*³⁷ (1888) we see another group of children in similar blue and white dresses. The eldest daughter takes on the role of nurturer by taking the younger siblings through a musical lesson. The clothes are loose and simpler than a woman's wardrobe but are situated within the domestic sphere and a more formalized femininity. They are at play in a way that is fitting to their gender. Their clothes similarly reflect this in the flounces and decorative elements that add to a 'girlish' aesthetic. The dresses seen on the children in Renoir's works suggest a certain sort of disciplined femininity with a sailor-style paired with soft flowing lines, tulle, and lace. These clothes express a childhood style wrapped in the symbolically feminine as subject and ideal. For the interests of my argument, we can see this sex typing take place in my case study example through the gathered pleats at the bosom and the belt that defines the girl's waist. The garment lowers the menarche of the girl to situate her as the feminine ideal: she is not of age, but the dress complicates her timeline by positioning the body as more "adult" than reality.

The Democratizing of Childhood Through Fashion

One important factor in the larger debate on children's garment making in the Victorian period was who had the luxury of childhood. The role of aging and development in the Gilded Age was class-specific, as working-class children of this era were seen as an extension of the labor force and as such, fashion scholars and aging theorists have studied childhood development

³⁷ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.12.

within this historical context (Wolcott, 2015; Jones, 2013; Tanenhaus, 2010; Schlereth, 1985). As Schultz, an educational theorist, clarifies, up until the 1850s, education was affordable for the upper class only, and child labour within this cultural system was a necessity for most families, either by having children work in service or through an apprenticeship. The conditions of industrialization led to child labour laws and the beginning of mandatory schooling (Schultz, 2013, p.6). Attendance at primary school increased steadily after 1865 when state laws came into play over children's rights.³⁸ As more states made basic education a requirement, continuing education not only steeply increased, but the influx of child labour also began to level off in subsequent eras (Labour Economics, 2021). The increase in educational opportunities led to changes in the class structure which, of course, led to social class anxiety. One of the ways the democratization of childhood began to take place was through the clothing that schoolchildren wore. The clothing of the school child became one of contention between classes.

The way a child was dressed and accessorized played a large part in how the child and his or her roles were to be perceived (Brown, 2023; Gonzalez & Bovone, 2012; Tanenhaus, 2010). This was obvious in both the upper and lower classes at the time. In an interview postscript of the podcast *Articles of Interest: Kids Clothes*, Professor Johnathan Faiers' suggested the sailor suit derived from a desire for military regalia in miniature for children. It was a popular way of representing a strict and disciplined group of school subjects. The school garments called to mind the future careers the parents hoped the child could inhabit through their clothing (Faiers in, Trufelman, 2018). This appeal for subjectivity was used in working-class school uniforms as well. Charity schools offered pinafores or aprons to their young female students to prepare the

³⁸ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.13 and 2.14 education rates during the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

girls for their future as maidservants, as practiced in both American and British societies as several studies have examined (Penney, 2019; Stephenson, 2016; Harris & Bridgen, 2012) and that appear in the photo archives of *Dr. Bernardo's Homes for Children* (Library & Archives Canada, 2021) and (Heritage Toronto, 2023). Pinafores were associated with menial work and thus considered a good preparatory garment for the working-class students entering the classroom. However, the garment had a dual meaning when it took on the aspect of a fashionable accessory for the sporty middle-class woman. In the 1880s, the pinafore became part of the uniform for lawn tennis, first in Britain but also in North America (Rose, 2013, p. 158). The material initially meant to be an easy-wear garment for the working class became helpful in the leisure pursuits of the upper classes and as “proper” school clothing for children of middle-class lifestyles. Mixing fabrics meant careful attention to layering signification to define a specific type of subject. As this classed item became a shared fashion accessory, it had to take on various meanings to contend with emerging class anxiety.

The white pinafore led to a democratization within the school room, and how it was worn symbolized each child’s subjectivity (Penney, 2019; Stephenson, 2016). Combining the base garments with various accessories was used to indicate each child’s position within this expanded social network, along with their age and other status distinctions (Rose, 2013, p. 157). This mixing was largely decided by the parents and the class system within which they lived by layering their beliefs, including politics, into the garments of their children. There was an expectation of subjectivity exhibited in each uniform. Looking at school pictures from the era, these clothing pieces came to have a complicated and multi-level meaning as both lower-class and middle-class girls were wearing similar white frocks to school.³⁹ The middle-class girl’s

³⁹ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figures 2.15 and 2.16 children in their school uniforms for class photos.

distinction lies in the jewelry her mother gave her to wear and the level of detail on her under blouse. However, an initial look would not show an obvious class divide.

To return to my own case study, the garment analysed is not the best example of a school garment, but its shape and structure are emblematic of the uniformed style (late 1800s), including a mid-length open skirt, and simple white bodice (Eaton Co Archives, 2024). One can think of the popularity of the sailor suit as part of this evolution of “healthy” and symbolic children’s wardrobes. Rose explains that gymslip manufacturing became a mainstream staple with an open sashed waist tied just above the hips (reminiscent of the case study silhouette) with open sleeves and simple box pleats (Rose, 2013, pp. 127-128). While the case study’s trimmings elevate its expense and status, the shape resembles a gymslip’s. Teachers and dress reformers of the 1890s particularly liked the idea of a school uniform for its simpler manufacturing and less constrictive style (Penney, 2019). This would, in theory, allow for a more democratized learning space. While the uniform is relatively simplistic, it allowed for a layering of physical and metaphorical connotations as the child of limited agency acted as a social subject on their parents’ behalf while in the school room. The fashion world simultaneously broke down class restrictions in dress and childhood and reasserted them in other ways. The girl, as a school subject, was no less confined by the clothing she could afford to wear and how she wore it.



Figure 2.17 Dr. Bernardo's Home Children, Library and Archives Canada, Circa July 1883

Fashion's Boundaries and the Role of Memory for The Developing Body

Part of controlling and regulating time through the developing body was using what could be termed “boundaries” in clothing (Summers, 2001; Steele, 2000; Thompson & Koneschni, 1987). A boundary here is a construction practice in dress that actively shaped the developing body to fit a social standard of “good” development. This could include rods, binding, and straps to ensure the child's growth suits the needs of their social condition, such as a certain posture or gait considered desirable in the nineteenth century. The corset, as it was conceived for children, was worn around age two and gradually became more form-fitted as the child matured (Steele, 2000; Helvenston, 1980). The child's corset used at the turn of the century was considered part of healthy development, allowing for proper posture and stimulating bone growth correctly. Even though many doctors said that corsetry was unnecessary for childhood development, it remained

a requirement in most children's wardrobes (Summers, 2001, pp. 66). Dress Reform⁴⁰ (Downie, 2024; Seys, 2021; Jungnickel, 2015; Pecona, 2011) changed the child's corset to allow for freer movement by developing a buttoned rather than laced article of clothing, with cording rather than boning (Blanchard, 1995). The child's rational corset followed a young girl's shape rather than the standard corset, which trained and created a tiny waist (Bloomingdales Co, 2013; Steele, 2000). Despite this, the item was inherently stiff and structured. The child's wardrobe came to rely on corsetry as defining gender through a common belief at the time that femininity was more fluid than masculinity. So the feminine required boundaries to ensure the right development for the cultural system they grew up in (Brown, 2023; Odem, 1998). In early childhood, the corset worked with outerwear to define gender and suggest the significance of internalized gender roles (Summers, 2001, p. 75). The garment is used to both hide and highlight the differences of the child's sex. The corset worked as a signifier for the feminine but also presented the child as a sexed object. While the girl in the corset had no breasts or defined hips, the corset, as used in waist training, suggests an inherently female form, one that is sexually desirable.

Beyond corsetry, other tools were used to define and develop the ideal body. As Consuelo Vanderbilt recalls, in remembrance of early childhood, a steel rod was strapped to her spine and fastened across her shoulders and forehead to create an upright posture that would require her to look outwards rather than down (Balsan-Vanderbilt, 1956, p. 11). Her body was developed to conform to the stature of a perceived upper-class posture. The tools of the wardrobe exist to assert a physical and metaphorical boundary for the subjective qualities of the wearer. In

⁴⁰ The Rational Dress movement emerged in the late 19th century in part due to women's suffrage and the increase in social activities (cycling, camping, swimming, etc.), which saw clothes as restricting women from adequately engaging in recreation like their male counterparts. As health advancements changed healthy living ideas, the reformers sought to create "Rational Dresses," which were dresses designed with consideration for easy care and movement (Seys, 2022; The Lancet, 1888).

Thompson and Koneschni's study on memory in clothing, footwear was one of the most frequently recalled childhood fashion objects (Thompson & Koneschni, 1987, p. 80). Beyond shaping practice, the study also explored how the memory of certain clothing and types of dress by those surveyed shaped their early perceptions of the world. Some surveyed suggested they felt their subjectivity within childhood was shaped by what they wore and impacted their understanding of their roles as adults (Thompson & Koneschni, 1987). Shaping feet was an essential aspect of male and female child development. William Alcott, a child during the Gilded Age, remembers his parents making him wear tight boots and stiff stockings to promote smaller feet. Large feet were seen as unseemly for both genders (Helvenston, 1980, p. 39). The interaction between feet and thought in the developing child is significant, as babies and small children first learn about the world through navigating by their feet. Shoes work to ground our experiences in specific ways, presenting a certain subject through the navigation of the foot and the way it fits its mould (Bari, 2019, pp. 192-193). For the Gilded Age child, the stiff and formal shoe worked to situate the developing being as a refined and restrained version of femininity (Bata Shoe Archives, 2024; DeMello, 2009). While the case study example does not include footwear, this form of binding in childhood wardrobes is a significant part of controlling bodily development. As evidence of adolescent dress, the case study garment attempts to control and define the menarche of the developing body through restrictions to the clothing design, including a defined waistband and structured collar, which simulate a womanly carriage. The body's way of navigating the clothing contained and restrained within will help develop an understanding of the subjectivity the child will be required to express. The development of playtime and looser clothing did not mean that the child in girlhood was not shaped to be a certain kind of subject or fashioned being. Girlhood became more complicated as the subject had to navigate her

development through a wardrobe wrought with contentions and contradictions about what versions of femininity she had to express.

Children's clothing is not only subjected to the influence of the social system they exist within but is also further constrained by the choices of their parents and their own desired subjectivity. While I have been addressing Gilded Age children's dress, I argue that shaping the child through their wardrobes is still in practice today. In Celia Gomes' project, *Rethinking*, she suggests a level of agency for her children in that she allows them to compose their outfits, but she also notes that these items would be from a collection of gifts or purchases she made herself (Gomes, 2019). This positions the child as a particularly interesting subject as they carry expectations through their aging to become a certain kind of being but are proscribed and restricted by what their parents provide. Very little freedom is given to how they will present themselves initially. As Gomes posits, for her children, the act of dressing is an act of becoming, and they are selected to be a certain being. Even in the limited act of choice, they are carrying a certain subjectivity in a dress (Gomes, 2019). Gomes' case is a contemporary example, but it presents an exciting possibility for considering the role of the past and how memory plays into wardrobes. Clothing acts as a memory marker and attempts to capture and preserve an age. The clothes in her project are linked to this idea of a child's relationship to clothing as part of their development and a shared past of childhood experiences that other people feel looking back on their own childhood wardrobes (Gomes, 2019). The clothing her children choose to wear now will represent what they were discovering about themselves and their subjectivity at the time. It is an essential object of the past for marking a very particular type of aging and approach to maturation.

The role of the past's presentation within memory is further exemplified in the imperfections found within garments. By this, I am referring to the signs of wear, especially prevalent in children's dress, such as patching, adjustments, staining, and olfactory connotations that mark the passage of time and development that can often be connected to a specific embodiment of childhood. The role of children's dress and its role in shaping embodied practices has been explored in museum exhibitions such as the MFA in Boston's "Dressing up Children's Fashion 1720-1920" (MFA, March 1996) and the London Fashion and Textile Museum's "Oh Boy!" (Fashion & Textile Museum, March 2024). The signs of life in a childhood garment offer an embodied experience through the smell, texture, and image that provides a link between past and present (Gomes, 2019). The position of play in the signs of wear in clothing is particularly important as it is often limited to childhood: one seldom hears the term 'adults at play'. The clothing bond of the child (the favoured items) and the signs of wear are significant in that they mark that uncomfortable but rewarding experience of personal growth found in the seams of children's dresses. The scrapes, broken threads, and dirt stains show a body growing within and breaking the bonds of their wardrobe. What makes the object of a child's dress particular to the realm of the past is the fact the original owner can never again wear the wardrobe items. An adult's garment can be repurposed and reused by the owner for as long as they feel comfortable wearing it. While their bodies shift over time, this is not nearly as pronounced as the changes to the child's body, which will never be quite the same.

Thompson and Konetschni's study, which took place in 1987 as part of an introduction to a sociology course, clarifies that there are links between dress and the significant events of childhood that shape the subject's memories. Of the test subjects, which consisted of 127 students at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, thirty-five percent remarked on an

associated memory of their first day of school wardrobe. In contrast, a smaller percentage remarked on the clothes used for holidays and parties as a large part of their clothing memories (Thompson & Konetschni, 1987, p. 74). This study, as part of a larger university project on collegiate fashion and campus wardrobes, began in 1980 and ran for ten years, in which it was discovered that there is a strong association between memories of early childhood and the wardrobes that were chosen (Thompson & Konetschni, 1987, p. 73). The participants remember that certain types of clothes called them to be certain kinds of subjects; for example, more formal clothing required their “best” behaviour. This association between clothing and memory, particularly in the realm of childhood, is significant in linking clothing choices to a presentation of subjectivity, specifically regarding gender differences. Female participants remembered clothing associated with dressing up and for school functions, whereas males remembered clothing from specific sporting events or times of play (Thompson & Konetschni, 1987, p. 76). While the research has been conducted in recent years and gender roles have changed significantly from the Gilded Age, the participants suggest a division in the types of subjectivity boys and girls are called towards, even in their earliest memories. While most of the test subjects remember their clothing as early as age three, their understanding of societal expectations would have been evident even from their earliest development through the clothing they were given and expected to present. Since this study, other examinations of dress and memory have been conducted (Jenkinson, 2023; Weber & Mitchell, 2004). However, these studies continue to examine children’s dress and memory in contemporary culture; very little has been explored before the early 1900s in earlier periods of dress.

My case study dress from the 1890s is made from a light, cool material that is less formal and fussy than formal examples of dress from the era, but it still reflects the family and their

ideas of childhood dress at the time. The decorative elements added to the simple cotton silhouette tell us what kind of subject the girl was called to be. For example, the sash was made to define the waist, and the pleats were applied to the developing bosom. The subtle changes through alterations to the garment are also crucial in considering aging and the child. The mother or dressmaker was trying to keep the dress flexible for the changing dimensions of the maturing body, and the adjustments to the waist and skirt suggest evidence of this maturation. Childhood innocence is captured in the cloth even though the body continues to grow. The ghost of the subject is the constantly changing and adapting youth through which memory and evidence of wear in the cloth serve to preserve the past.

To understand the life stage of childhood and its various garments, we must return to the significance of developing a certain subjectivity in American Gilded Age society. As mentioned in my previous chapter, photography and fashion are closely linked as image makers. The passion for photography in the 19th century lay in the belief that photographs are inherently truthful and provide a clear sense of the subject being photographed. For the purposes of my case study, understanding the role of photography in truthful presentation has a bearing on how the child as the subject might be perceived, particularly in how they were presented to the public. As theorist and photographer Sontag argued, photographic images express “time’s relentless melt,” and a child’s portrait would mark this knowledge that time moves and people age (Sontag, 1973). The photograph then serves to make the mortal child immortal to its viewers. Photographers and their patrons sought to capture this immortality through the imagery of the ‘Romantic’ child, which existed outside of history and industry (Chinn, 2009, pp. 34-35). Building on the ideas of childhood that Rousseau argued for, the childhood stage encompassed the idea of a timeless, ahistorical romance as a subject that was both asexual and an emerging mirror of the parent and

society. The role of play and playfulness as part of the childhood experience was at the heart of the dress production in this period, in which styles were rooted in fancy dress practices that featured a mix of both ethnic and varied historical influences to capture the concept of the idealized Romantic child (Mozdyska-Nawotka, 2020, p. 26).

Despite some of the greater freedoms in childhood wardrobes and the remnants of androgynous style from infancy still being used and even celebrated, the role of the child still needed to be rooted in a gendered style. This idea that children are happiest when offered tasks or types of play more associated with their gender played out most specifically in their dress choices (Mozdyska-Nawotka, 2020; Rose, 2013; Lurie, 1981). As asexual and innocent beings, the formation of the childhood character, particularly of the girl, faced numerous contradictions about appropriate actions and clothing choices. Thus, the childhood stage came to be marked by the bond with the parents or guardians, in that the girl should admire the father and emulate the mother (Mozdyska-Nawotka, 2020, p. 25). The child's dress became symbolically feminine while still youthful and playful. The girl at school and at play balance the image of innocent and ahistorical while also preparing for an inherently feminine life and the time in which she lived. The childhood stage is considered the most formative when presenting the right sort of subjectivity, and as a result, attempts to both shape and restrict signs of maturation became prevalent in design and continue in children's garments today.

A Complicated Creature: The Evolving Nature of Gilded Age Womanhood

I will now examine an adulthood case study of dress to situate where the development practices of embodiment in fashion factor into a relatively long scale and slow growth process. Adulthood does not factor in many developmental changes, but the embodied practice through the social is constantly evolving. During the Gilded Age, women were expected to perform a myriad of social personifications that manifested in personal approaches to dressing that reflected the larger anxiety of times progression in fashion production. While stylistic and sizing changes were less pronounced than in a child's wardrobe, the adult's wardrobe continues to hold categorically the garments most examined and displayed in contemporary fashion theory and museum exhibitions. Recent exhibitions have all focused on thematic presentations of dress through adulthood examples, including Design Museum's "Rebel: 30 Years of London Fashion," which focuses on designer influences of the London fashion scene through adult dress (Design Museum, February 2024) and the Fashion and Lace Museum's "Diane Von Furstenberg. Women Before Fashion," that explored the designer's influence on women's fashion over her career (Fashion & Lace Museum, January 2024). Scholars such as Tranberg have outlined that the young adult wardrobe tends to be the most displayed and analyzed (Tranberg, 2004), while McAdams posits that as a stable developmental process, adulthood is interesting for its development primarily through social changes rather than the biological changes (McAdams, 2010). Further, these wardrobes offer continuity that supports an ideal of fashion as stable production and gradual timelines. Women of the Gilded Age offer an idea of the challenges of expressing personhood in dress and the performativity of these choices because of this slower development through their garments. Rather than the changes resulting from the maturation of

the body, the changes in adulthood result from the changing social world in which they perform. This suggests more about socio-cultural ideals of their garment production instead of the developing bodies. Our understanding of women's history is shaped by our present ideals of feminism or femininity, which partly inform what is offered in garment production today (Entwistle, 2023; Twigg, 2018; Evans, 2013). This implied static nature of adulthood illuminates in cloth the issues of the period's cultural condition and how this shapes future cultural production.

Fashion items, seen as an organic object and a corporeal one, overcome their natural death or obsolescence while simultaneously referencing their linkage to the past, meaning that dress exists as an object across timelines, both in the past and present through elements of dress that persist in contemporary design. Yet it also marks itself as a referent to a time that has passed because it exists beyond the body and society it was initially made for. It challenges the view of progressive time and contrarily supports Fashion's attempts to fix cultural production (Geczy & Karaminas, 2016, p. 91). The body is understood not just as an object but also as a tool to express the individual's personhood. Therefore, cloth is not just a covering; it is the social situation and grasp on the world that the body exhibits. How one clothes the body is one of the possibilities within the social system fashion supports (Bari, 2019, p. 78). As fashion theorist Bari stipulates, the making of a garment and its design express where the body may gain or lose an opportunity; its adjustments can enhance or deny the personhood of the wearer (Bari, 2019, pp. 62-63). My adulthood case study then examines not just the physical changes to the body but also how garment design and wear performance support and challenge cultural ideals that attempt to fix the body to its place within a particular social condition. While museums and galleries have attended to this process in previous scholarship and exhibition practices, they tend

to reflect on the positionality of the garment in the contemporary space only as it relates to the past and not its relationship to the types of social publics past and present it simultaneously performs within (Flodin, 2019; Evans, 2013a; Chon, 2013b).

Garment Case Study for Adulthood: Woman's Walking Set, Circa 1890-1900

By continuing to explore this idea of the corporeal register or dimension in fashion objects to outline both the significance of the personal in fashion practice and to highlight the complications in considering fashion in linear time, it is essential to understand where the body historically was repositioned in clothing to shape new expectations and moralities. The shift from girlhood to womanhood is primarily distinguished through sexual maturity (Brown, 2023; Blanchard-Emerson, 2022; Odem, 1998). However, the exhibition of womanhood and maturity reflected in dress is often contradictory and contentious. For example, the ideal of the “New Woman” as part of the Gilded Age depiction of womanhood did not represent a unified understanding of femininity. Different contexts and understandings of what this fictitious production of womanhood in the modern era should be was dependent on age, background, and cultural context; the aesthetes had one version, while the Gibson Girl was something else entirely (Dowling, 1979). The “New Woman” was a feminist ideal and a product of the literature of a fin-de- siècle society, as Mendes clarifies:

The New Woman was imbued with the contradictions of the fin de siècle, at once too sexual and not sexual enough, desiring a single emancipated lifestyle yet advocating eugenic procreation... The New Woman was a construct in both fiction and the periodical

press, attached to journalistic catchphrases such as the “Revolting Daughters,” the “Shrieking Sisterhood,” and the “Wild Woman.” She was linked to the degeneration of Victorian society and, simultaneously, a regenerative force for women who had spent their lives following patriarchal rule. (Mendes, 2011)

The “New Woman” of the 1890s was not one distinct figure, as she faced various ideas about what womanhood should and could be (Dowling, 1979; West, 1955). Her personhood, I argue, was shaped through the cloth with which she chose to adorn herself. The act of dressing and creating dress became important for shaping identity (Collins, 2010a; Stetz, 2010b; Albanese, 1999). The choice in what was created (specifically by women) could suggest a new way of considering the world and the role that women had within it. Middle and upper-class women saw sewing in this period as a means of liberty and an act that could create a more just and better world (Kortsch, 2016, p. 142). The “New Woman,” was not just a wife, mother, philosopher, or intellect; she was also an active shaper of cultural production through dress. As turn-of-the-century fashion designer Lucile Duff Gordon insisted:

I was an artist,’ she said. ‘Nothing more. As the sculptor sees his dreams translated into line, and the painter sees his in terms of colour, so mine were expressed in the drapery of a wisp of chiffon or the fall of a satin fold. It is a lesser form of art, I know, but to me it meant a great deal, my life’s work and I was tremendously in earnest over every dress I created. (Etherington-Smith & Pilcher, 1986, p. 59)

Despite dismissing her art as one of the lesser forms, Duff Gordon clarifies that she was indeed an artist. She presented a distinct femininity open to the possibilities of a different sort of womanhood and a level of choice in clothing. For the purposes of my argument, it is important to understand how this increase in choice as part of a clothed subjectivity challenged the

understanding of a uniform developmental process for both the cultural production of the fashion medium and the developing body that exists within it. The New Woman was not a new creature but one attempting to shape new experiences for herself and the next generation through challenges to mainstream dress practice, among other issues. This shift in subjectivity and the challenge to mainstream cultural practice is significant for its value in reinscribing the fashion object (as more than adornment) and its role in changing the value of dress for future generations.



Figures 2.18, 2.19, and 2.20 Side, Front, and Back of Walking Outfit Circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection

The slow approach to garment analysis implies the careful examination of dress objects through observation, reflection, and interpretation (Mida & Kim, 2015). In my case study of a woman's walking outfit, I will offer another examination of the developmental and personal conditions of a dress artifact by exploring both its construction history and the personal value it may have had as a dress artifact. I chose an example as representative of Gilded Age dress, with

connections to the childhood garment I analysed in the first case study in terms of similarities that are material, geographical, and cultural.⁴¹ This garment offers an example of dressing practices of the period while highlighting my argument around considerations of the developmental conditions of aging through its evidence of bodily interactions and alterations. Further, as we will see, the garment highlights both the shifting personal and social values of the dressed body and its relation to the fashion artifacts place within history and cultural display. I will first examine the garment through general observations, which include details surrounding its construction and material usage (see Mida & Kim, 2015).

The walking set features a detailed underskirt and an adjustable white cotton blouse, both middle-class Midwestern American⁴² examples of dress from approximately 1890-1900 (KCI Archives, 2024; FIT Digital Collection, 2024; MET Open Access, 2024). The skirt is an open-tied walking skirt of mid-length with a simple design and trim. The ensemble has a mix of materials of different costs, focusing on more elaborate trimmings at the hem and bust. It is not an unusual example of a walking dress (Eaton Co. Archive, 2024; Vogue Archives, 2024; Bloomingdales, 2024), except for the additions made by the wearer, including a pocket. The pocket has been handstitched onto a primarily machine-stitched skirt, and while it is made with the same material, the pocket has a different lining than the skirt. Further, the threading is a different cotton; the black thread is a slightly lighter dye than the rest of the skirt. The overskirt is a dark green moire silk with a black waistband and ruffle trim at the hem; the darker colour scheme was likely chosen for its ability to hide dirt.

⁴¹ Note that in terms of this case study's purchase history, the garment was from the same seller as the first case study example, One Moon Mercantile. The seller's collection was based in the American Midwest and featured local examples from the 1870s to the 1950s.

⁴² The seller was based in the Midwest, and garments were dated by comparison to digital archives with similar examples and through collection catalog guidelines (Harris, 2002; Queen & Berger, 2006).



Fig.2.21 Eaton Co. Archives, Spring and Summer Catalogue No.27 1894 Fig. 2.22 Bloomingdale Bros, Illustrated Fashion Catalogue: Summer, 1890

There are no additional padding or weights in the skirts or blouse. Historically, padding and weights in dresses were used to define and support the era's fashionable shapes, such as the large bustle skirt of the 1870s, which had padding at the back of the skirt (Timpani, 2005), and the cage crinoline of the 1850s and 1860s (Johnson, 2014) which transitioned the weight of the full skirts over its weighted cage structure (V&A Digital, 2024). A garment featuring no such structural supports implies it was meant for a more relaxed and casual fit, following the body's natural lines. The skirt's interior waistband features a dark brown linen band with a cording to adjust the waistline. The exterior of the skirt has a large open pocket on the right hip, which also suggests that the wearer was right-handed. The hemline is a simple stitch fold with ruffle detail in starched black cotton near the hem. The skirt does not have its original lining (likely the dark brown linen seen at the interior corded waist), so it was paired with a white cotton underskirt. The front closure seam of the blouse features a series of embroidered flowers and leaf details.

The back features a gathered waist, pleated and brought in with a decorative cotton tie. The blouse front has a gathered decorative yoke. The cuffs pair a similar pleated style with floral embroidery. Uncinched, the skirt measures 28 inches round; however, the skirt measures 23 inches when clasped. The bodice's looser fit allows for ease of movement, although the waistline measurements suggest the wearer still relied on stiff corsetry. I describe this garment in detail through observatory practices to highlight the individual conditions of the garments and its various constructions as part of its personal value, both for the wearer and as a historical dress object.



Fig.23, 24, 25, & 26 Close-Up Details of Lace and Shirring on White Blouse, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection

The ensemble is made with only natural fibers and threading. While the skirt has starched cotton elements, it is made primarily of a dark green moire silk fabric reinforced with heavy gauge cotton threads. The underskirt and blouse are made of a soft cotton lawn with cotton threading for the embroidery. The top of the yolk features a separate lace and embroidered piece of netting. The dress offers no labels, nor are there care instructions in the lining. The skirt's simple threading suggests it was likely homespun. The blouse has some evidence of machine sewing and features more decorative elements and stylings, suggesting it is more likely a store purchase. Any additional repair signs suggest that fixes to the blouse were made at home. The

garment shows several signs of structural alterations and appears to have had some components resized, the front clips having been moved over two inches. The back tie closure has been torn and reattached as well. The underskirt has taken the brunt of the damage, with a torn waistband and missing closures. The embroidery at the base of the skirt is still in fairly good shape but has two holes, the size and shape of which suggest it was made with the heel of a shoe snagging on the fabric. The top third of the skirt lining has several large rust-coloured stains, suggesting dried blood. The outer skirt's waist band has been tucked and taken in and out on several occasions, the clips having been reattached (threading suggests possibly a modern repair). The hem of the skirt had an addition of almost three inches added to the length. Some staining and discolouration suggest water damage to the outer skirt. Developing an observatory practice around the garment's designs, alterations, and damage reinforces the object's unique history and its connections to the body it housed historically and how it may have been cared for contemporaneously.



Fig.27, 28, & 29 Details of Damage to the Cotton Blouse, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection

With an overview of the garment's qualities and repair history, the case study can be further explored through reflection. The reflection stage, as part of the slow approach that I outlined

previously, explores the garment's broader design connotations within its history and how its function and design are reflective of the social conditions within which it was produced while also considering how these perceptions change within the present social (Mida & Kim, 2015). The garment suggests the influence of styling from the Gibson Girl look of the turn of the century through the slightly oversized blouse and simple bell-shaped silhouette of the skirt (Manzur, 2014; Patterson, 2010). The elongated, exaggerated sleeves are gathered but not fully puffed. This suggests the dress was likely designed in 1895 or later, when the mutton and puffed sleeves began to decline in popularity (Eaton Co., 2024; McCord Stewart Museum Online, 2024; ROM online, 2024). The skirt is floor length but offers no train and does not fully enclose the feet. The use of a skirt's train served to situate social status, as the longer skirt and train were often symbolic of higher social standing. As a symbol of femininity, the skirt held certain expectations that were used to guide the mobility and behaviours of the wearer (Petu & Helvenston, 2009). Alternatively, the length and shape of the skirt in the case study allow for a fair amount of movement and ease despite the heavier fabric choice. Its primary role, even in its decoration, is practical. This suggests an interesting change in the practicality of skirt design that reinforces ease of movement over an idea of modesty. Adding pockets to women's clothing was a contested and political issue (Carlson, 2023; Burman, 2002), so the at-home addition of a large and public pocket was a statement-maker.



Fig.30, 31, & 32 Details of Skirt Pocket and Hem Extension, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection

In terms of the sensory qualities of dress, because of the volume of the fabric in the skirt, a slight swishing noise is present when in motion (as explored by simulating a walking gait while holding the skirt on a smaller mannequin). It makes a noise rather like the sound of modern Velcro rubbing and it is meant to draw attention to the wearer's gait. The skirt has the scent of musk in places where the fabric has discoloration and water damage. Areas of wear, like the armpits and waistline, also have a residual odor. With its more relaxed style, this ensemble suggests more about the temperament of the wearer and their considerations for comfort and style as celebrated in the ideals of the "New Woman," within the commercially acceptable fashion practice of more leisured garments, like our case study walking skirt (Collins, 2010; Albanese, 1999). The fact that repairs have been made by hand throughout, and in some cases in obvious ways, suggests less financial stability than some of the wearers of other dress examples from this period. However, it could also simply imply that this was a favoured piece by its wearer and worn frequently. As other dress historians have explored in their approaches to dress "readings" (Palmer, 2013; Prown, 1982; Arnold 1977), the simplicity of the pieces suggests a carefully constructed presentation of femininity while still attempting to be fashionable. The use

of pockets makes the case study of interest to current studies of history and feminism, as the dress hints at some of the ways dress reform was appearing in every woman's wardrobe. Dress Reform, as discussed in the first case study on girlhood development, was also significant in adulthood examples of dress, as one of the ideas surrounding the "New Woman" and social liberty in dress (Jungnickel, 2015; Pecora, 2011). The dress example here, having a more relaxed fit with a skirt above the ankles, suggests a more commercially acceptable form of rational dress and a movement towards the more relaxed clothing styles of the coming decades when women continued to have active roles in the social sphere. The case study offers a compelling perspective on the social history of the late Gilded Age for women. In my argument, this evidence of the social history within the dress through its use highlights both the subjective development of fashioning and the personal within this social formation. We can explore the case study example to index the more extensive history of dress while also exploring how the individual navigated their development during a time of contention and change (Seys, 2021; Noddings, 2011).



Fig.33, 34, & 35 Details of Damage to Walking Skirt, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection

This style of walking dress became very popular among young women at the turn of the century (Eaton Co. Archives, 2024; Condé Nast, 2024; Peteu & Helvenston, 2009). The "Gibson

Girl” was a standard of beauty and an example of modern womanhood that many young women tried to capture in their wardrobes (Manzur, 2014; Patterson, 2010). However, it is essential to note that the Gibson Girl was not without its criticisms as this “modern” physique was attained through the s-curve corset (Steele, 2001a; Summers, 2001b), a corset most reformers saw as more restrictive rather than symbolic of liberation (Downie, 2024; Seys, 2022; (Kortsch, 2016, pp. 69-70). This case study ensemble attempts to emulate this popular styling through the fitted bell-shaped black skirt, oversized white cotton blouse with puffed sleeves, and feminine trims, including lace and ruffle details (Gibson, 2012; Patterson, 2010). It suggests a more publicly driven type of wearer whose clothes allow for the traversing of city streets. This is evidenced by the shorter and looser hem of the skirt and the uncomplicated styling of the ensemble, with adjustable straps at the waist, which allows a greater degree of movement for travel and leisure pursuits (Petu & Helvenston, 2009; Wood, 2006). Adding a pocket allows for a level of independence from a male chaperone and hints at the shift in the lifestyles of certain women (Carlson, 2023; Bari, 2019; Burman, 2002). While the piece is a common example of day-to-day wear, it is not overly expensive or aesthetically interesting. It can be found in a variety of styles and price ranges from catalogue sources of the day (Condé Nast, 2024; Bloomingdales Archive, 2024; Eaton Co Archives, 2024); the skirt with the added pocket is a more unique collection item (Carlson, 2023; Harris, 2002). The case study offers a helpful guide to the day dressing of a more middle-class woman (Archer & Blau, 1993; Horowitz, 1985). It is made of finer materials, but nothing ornate or decorative has been added, and the blouse appears to be store-bought rather than custom-made. I purchased the ensemble from a private collection that offers little regarding the original wearer’s history. Based on the location of the pieces purchased, they were likely worn by a woman in the midwestern region of the United States. A part of the conventions of

case studies of dress “readings” (Mida & Kim, 2015), it is important to situate the geographical location of the garment, which can provide some perspectives on the social conventions the wearer was operating within: for example, rural versus city life will change the timeline the garment was likely worn and its social uses (Prieto, 2020; Shukla, 2015).

Like the childhood garment study, this ensemble was purchased from the same historical costume collection. Following the conventions of the slow approach (Mida & Kim, 2015) and other conventions of object-based analysis, it was useful to have some continuity between the case studies; especially because I consider developmental issues evident within the construction of the dresses. Therefore, it was worth having similar cultural contexts from which to draw on, even if the wearers were unrelated (Maresca, 2023; Taylor, 2004; Prown, 1982). For this case study, I wanted an example of casual day wear, and something emblematic of the Gibson Girl look, including a white shirtwaist and darker walking skirt, in order to highlight ways the concept of the “New Woman” might factor into a woman’s everyday act of dressing.⁴³ I chose the walking skirt from this case study for two reasons: the first was the garment’s addition of the pocket (Burman & Fennetaux, 2022; Myers, 2014), and the second its rich green colour, a popular aesthetic choice during my era of study (Wass & Anderson, 2000). I liked that the skirt and underskirt had some signs of wear but were still in good enough order for display.

Continuing the tradition of object-based analysis, signs of wear help index the personal uses of the dress object; when and how it may have gotten its wear tells a story of the individual who

⁴³ My initial consideration for my personal collection was a lookbook (created by the seller and sent via email), which I used to inform the basis of my case studies primarily because of the seller’s distance during travel restrictions and the flexibility of the budget she offered me as a student. As my research was conducted during COVID-19, it was much more difficult to access anything from a museum collection, which informed the start of my own collection and the use of lookbooks to guide me. The booklet included several skirts, some finer and more aesthetically pleasing but out of my price range, and a couple of walking skirts, one significantly damaged and beyond my study concerns (One Moon Mercantile, 2020).

used it (Banning, 2018; Weber, 2010a; Tulle, 2010b). The shirtwaist was selected for me based on my remaining budget while the underskirt was part of a separate collection of foundational garments (underwear) that I ordered from the collection (One Moon Mercantile, 2020). My choices for this example were limited by budget constraints as I could not afford a historic corset or a sash belt that would have been worn with this skirt initially. Family and friends donated additional items for my personal collection, so I had no control over quality, rarity, or aesthetic interests. This walking skirt is different from many of the walking skirts I have cataloged in museum collections, as it is more on the informal side. It is not highly decorative, or an example of the upper-class garments (Clarrington Museum and Archives, 2019; Parkwood Estates, 2018; KCI, 2024; FIT Digital Collections, 2024). The pocket is not the only example I have seen in other collections (MET Open Access, 2024; V&A, 2024), but the one in my collection is more obviously a homespun addition. I valued its middle-class qualities and had sought to collect something more casual to highlight everyday aspects of dressing, rather than focusing on formalized dress collections. The question of value is another aspect that arises when one applies the slow approach to studying the artifact. I considered the potential bias I created in sourcing these case study garments, just as I also attempt to acknowledge collection biases that occur in object-based analysis within the field of fashion. I do so by addressing object analysis within a personal and embodied approach to fashion that considers developmental understandings of the body and its relation to time as it continues to be understood in collection practices, whether individually or in broader contexts (Mida & Kim, 2015; Prown, 1982).



Fig. 36, 37, 38, & 39 Details of Damage to Underskirts, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection

For the final stage in applying the slow approach, that of interpretation, I consider where a garment like this can be understood in the more extensive index of adulthood, as it is understood developmentally both historically and contemporaneously (Parikka, 2023; Twigg, 2018), particularly its place in the Gilded Age women's projection of the social self. The interpretation stage of analysis considers the approach each dress scholar brings to a particular case study of a garment (Mida & Kim, 2015, p. 78). For my purposes, the women's walking garment will be explored through the indexes of embodiment and the role of the personal within aging and concepts of time (Weber, 2010; Entwistle, 2000). Historically, as a period considered very restrictive for women of all classes and backgrounds, women in the last half of the 1890s made significant strides in reconsidering where a woman could go and what she could do (Evans, 2013; Noddings, 2011a; Pecora, 2011b; Collins, 2010). The look of the Gibson Girl was developed from this understanding of fashion as a place of power and reform (Manzur, 2014; Patterson, 2010; Buckley, 2002). The girl, while still attempting to be sexually pleasing and desirable by society, also wanted more comfortable dress options that would allow for activities outside the home (Chinn, 2019; Stetz, 2010; Albanese, 1999). While it may not seem that a

walking dress like that of my case study speaks of liberation, its relatively simple and loose construction in fact challenged the restrictive garments of earlier decades (Johnson, 2014; Timpani, 2005). Further, this walking ensemble is distinct from a working dress, as it was in this period that women were under increasing pressure to become consumers of clothing, in that a more varied wardrobe for different activities was used to perform class. The dress's influences through the aesthetic movement, dress reform, and early women's liberation movements, as demonstrated by critics (Seys, 2021; Jungnickel, 2015; Peteu & Helvenston, 2009), are evidenced in its combining practical elements with stylistic features (pockets and embroidery). A simple, easy-wear skirt marked a change in an understanding of dress as something that could enhance and free the body it clothed. I arrive at this conclusion for the case study based on indexes of the new fashions that it attempts to emulate and through an understanding of dress histories that highlight the influences of ideals of modernity on subjectivity and the act of dressing (Noddings, 2011; Wood, 2006; Horowitz, 1985).

The addition of the pockets to garment manufacturing, I argue, is one of the most important clothing adaptations we have come to use. The history of the pocket is long and fraught with issues of gender and practicality (Carlson, 2023; Myers, 2014), while the pocket's size and use are still an ongoing issue in women's clothing (Burman & Fennetaux, 2020). Podcast narrator Truffelman (whom I use here to exemplify how issues of the pocket continue to be contentious cross historically and contemporaneously) argues that women's dress will frequently perform utility without offering utility. For example, pockets are more often included as ornamentation rather than for their practicality (Truffelman, 2018). The pocket is symbolically tied to a way of life and the ability to access it easily (Bari, 2019). A pocket suggests that the wearer has access to the tools they need to work within a public capacity. Historically, for

example, the pocket was symbolic of the privilege of the male sex, exemplifying his preparedness for the social sphere and ready access to money. As Carlson offers in a nineteenth-century periodical: "...the *Weekly Visitor* ran a story about a young woman intrigued by the sight of a peddler's wares. She was hoping to make a purchase but had to admit that she couldn't because she didn't have any money. The reason? She hadn't worn a pocket" (Carlson, 2023, p. 111). A pocket is interior and private; one can fill it up and then forget it is there until it is needed (Bari, 2019; Trufelman, 2018). Historically, garment-making featured large exterior pockets on men's and women's dresses, but gradually, over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they became non-existent in women's fashion, in part because of this belief that women belonged in the domestic and that men should be in control of the household wealth (Carlson, 2023; Burman & Fennetaux, 2020; Trufelman, 2018). The Rational Dress or Dress Reform movement (Dowling, 1979; West, 1955), which I mentioned previously in the case study, sought as part of their challenge to women's fashion to reinstate the pocket in women's dresses as part of this leisured practicality. As a larger social context, the pocket represented within women's rights the right to engage in the public sphere and present themselves as productive beings with access to their own resources.

Burman, as an early scholar of the pocket's history within fashion theory, argues that pockets change as we age, and so too, do their purposes and meanings (Burman & Fennetaux, 2020; Buman, 2003). The pockets of childhood are separated from the so-called "disciplinary pocket" of adulthood (Bari, 2019). In womanhood, the shift away from girlhood means pockets carry the weight of responsibility (Mathews, 2010). While a girl's pocket is one of possibility and imagination, the woman's is one of expectations as wife, mother, daughter, and subject. In her pockets, she must think about what she, as a woman, should be carrying (Burman, 2003, p.

79). The Gilded Age's removal of the interior tie pocket of earlier periods resulted from the fashionable tighter silhouette. Consider the form-fitted bustle skirt of the 1870s, which had the front of the dress positioned close to the hips and legs (Timpani, 2005), or the crinoline skirt, which featured voluminous layers over a rounded structure (Johnson, 2014), both designs making the addition of pockets difficult and cumbersome for actual use (KCI Digital, 2024; FIT Digital, 2024; V&A Collections, 2024). This new fashion meant eliminating any form of storage in dresses for many years. When a more public outer pocket was added to garments, it was associated with cash and the ability to access it freely (Carlson, 2023; Bari, 2019). Finances were traditionally considered men's domain, so women's pockets were often met with suspicion and hostility by their male counterparts (Mathews, 2010). A gradual shift in the market system during the Gilded Age saw shops move from credit to cash, which signaled women's shift from the domestic space to the marketplace (Quereshi, 2023). A woman's pockets carried her allowance or wages, with which she could purchase what she wished, in opposition to shopping on her husband/ father's accounts, where she would have to obtain permission beforehand (Carlson, 2023; Meyers, 2014). While the man was still the primary controller of the family's wealth in most cases, the pocket signaled a level of control for the woman and her buying power (Burman, 2003, pp. 88-89).



Fig. 2.40, 2.41 V&A Digital Collections, Dress Circa 1878-1880, CIRC.606-1962, Fig.2.42 FIT Digital Archives, Afternoon Dress, circa 1867, P90.22.2

Pockets, as symbolic of independence, suggest that one need not be reliant on others when one has a pocket with which to carry the comforts of home out into the world (Qureshi, 2023; Myers, 2014). Scholar Bari compares bags and pockets to surrogate mothers, replacing, albeit temporarily, a reliance on others (Bari, 2019, pp. 263). These repositories allow for a level of privacy and preparedness, allowing women access to the areas around her home, out in the city, and on longer journeys abroad (Nordstrom, 2001). When women began to take on more active roles in the workplace, including waged work of the middle class (think of the shopgirls that emerged through the growth/ evolution of the department store) (Cox & Hobley, 2014; Porter-Benson, 1996; Leach, 1984) large pockets, and even the introduction of proper handbags, suggested a level of mobility for women's lives. Outer pockets made women's clothing more closely associated with men's and signaled a more active role in the workplace (Qureshi, 2023; Burman, 2003, p.94). This was more about symbolic control as opposed to reality. While women

still relied on their husbands and fathers to take care of the finances, the act of donning a pocket signaled to the world that a woman was ready for the responsibility and wanted a say in where her money went. The obvious use of pockets in the woman's walking dress I examine suggests the wearer was attempting to create more practicality in her wardrobe through its addition, which in turn signifies for us her status as a wage earner. Stylistically, her wardrobe offers an example of a modern woman like the character of the Gibson Girl that meets the reality of dress reform practices.

The Gibson Girl was a figment of a male artist's imagination (Gibson, 2012; Collins, 2010), and yet her characterization had a lasting impact on late Victorian dress culture and the ideals of women as young idealists and active social subjects (Manzur, 2014). Within the more extensive traditions of Rational and Aesthetic dress⁴⁴, the Gibson Girl was a palatable counterpart of the two movements made for mainstream dress culture (Calvert, 2012; Curtis, 2007). The Gibson girl arose in modern dress practice through an understanding that dress can work as an expression of specific identities and politics (Patterson, 2010; Wilson, 1985, p. 218). The Gibson Girl acted as a counterpart to the New Woman, and both emerged as a concept in the 1890s (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015; Albanese, 1999). The Gibson Girl was a descendant of the aesthetic movement and a more palatable example of the tenets of the Aesthetes' bohemian lifestyle (Curtis, 2007; Wilson, 1985, p. 216). Gibson's drawings of these girls presented a sexually autonomous woman with an active lifestyle. Depictions of her in the department store,

⁴⁴ Rational Dress, as previously stated, was a movement that reconsidered women's wardrobes to account for health and leisure. The Aesthetic Dress was another movement in response to Rational Dress that sought to create comfortable dresses that accentuated the natural body but celebrated ideas of the natural in art through embroidery and dyes. It was also considered more artistically pleasing than the reform garments. The aesthetic dress was a more palatable version of Rational Dress that became part of mainstream fashion through commercialized variants like the Liberty and Co. Tea dresses of the early 1900s (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015; Zukowski, 2006).

restaurants, and at sporting or other events suggest that she was not only active in the social seasons of the upper classes but also actively engaged in activities outside the domestic sphere (Gibson, 2012). The clothing style that emerged out of these depictions was meant to reflect a lifestyle that took the ideals of Dress Reform and made them fashionable for everyday women.

A Gibson Girl's wardrobe featured a slimmer silhouette and offered fewer decorative elements in her dress, both suggesting ease of movement in the styling (Becker, 2021, p. 77). Gibson's depiction of the girls in his 1895 print *The Coming Game: Yale vs. Vassar*⁴⁵ Gibson depicts the "Gibson Girls" as relatively indistinguishable from their male counterparts. Their clothing is the same as the males, except for the curves of their chests in the vests. While Gibson's drawings were immensely popular (Simon & Mamp, 2021; Manzur, 2014; Patterson, 2010), the girls depicted were more fantasy and products of the day's advertisement culture (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015; Collins, 2010). The intersection of gender only took place in the mid-1890s when women of the upper classes (or those able to attain grants) began to pursue post-secondary educations at both the early women's colleges and in rarer cases, at male-dominated institutions (Becker, 2021; Gordon, 1987). The tenets of the New Woman were more acceptable in these settings as the women found themselves in direct competition with men in education (Becker, 2021, pp. 78-80; Gordon, 1987). The role of the Gibson Girl was to challenge current modes of femininity. While she was still depicted as part of a male fantasy and often a commercialized version of the "New Woman" (Simon & Mamp, 2021), the presentation of her dress became desirable and even actively promoted through the fashion industry by the end of the century.⁴⁶ In the case study, the shirtwaist and simple walking skirt are quintessentially

⁴⁵ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.38.

⁴⁶ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.39 adverts in the fashion industry that show the lasting impacts of the Gibson look on feminine depictions.

Gibson Girl fashion. While the wearer was unlikely to have been a college graduate, she was able to find comfort and flexibility in her clothing choices because of the influential styling of the Gibson Girl. She was a byproduct of the commercial culture in her attempts to emulate a popular style. However, it also expresses something about her personal desires to look young and feminine while attempting to engage an idea of liberation in her dress choices.

Fashion has always expressed ambivalence by highlighting the role of appearance in shaping one's identity. The Gibson Girl and the New Woman as fashionable beings were viewed as powerful representations of womanhood and as art (Simon & Map, 2021, pp. 76-77) (Patterson, 2010). Part of this ambivalence in presenting modern women came from the various factions of femininity in dress. Rational Dress reform primarily presented new modest and practical dress wear (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015; Curtis, 2007). As such, fashionable clothing as a practice to dress reformers suggested immodesty and immorality. Dress reform had two very different politics that promoted Rational Dress wardrobes. One in which reformation would allow new positions for women outside the home and in the workforce through easy-wear clothing. The other faction saw reform as allowing for healthier and more natural mothers in at-home loungewear. Dress Reformers primarily associated their movement with celebrating the qualities of purity and temperance rather than a fashion-forward and social woman (Steele, 2001, pp. 145-147). A further constraint in presenting the feminine ideal were that the Gibson Girl was a cultural character and not a woman attempting to navigate the social milieu of Gilded Age culture.

Illustrations of the Gibson Girl were not only a presentation of femininity but of a consumer product used in advertisements (Simon & Mamp, 2021, p. 62). As an image marker, she was made acceptable to the public (Simon & Mamp, 2021, pp. 66-67; Stetz, 2010; Albanese, 1999).

She was not her own person but a part of culture's sign systems, standing in for various ideals and politics without presenting herself as her own woman. She was a place maker for other people and their ideologies. The Gibson Girl, as a product of fashion, was also an advertisement for the new styles of clothing women could purchase and make. Her freer style promoted a large output in the American apparel industry, as she had an outfit for every occasion, which suggests she was seen as having an active lifestyle and also was there to sell clothing (Stetz, 2010; Curtis, 2007). As a character, the Gibson Girl found herself out of time as part of several modern revivals (starting in the late 1940s) (Simon & Mamp, 2021). She had a lasting impact on the fashion industry and the fashioned subjectivity of modern womanhood well into the 1970s.⁴⁷ While the walking dress case study is a casual presentation of day-to-day walking clothes from the era, its presentation of femininity expresses a youthfulness and an artistic presence in dress, which found its stylistic roots in the New Woman movement. The complicated associations of historical dress and its presentation as consumerist, individualist, politic, and feminine highlight the challenges in cultural production to fix the body and its place within a certain social condition, in this case, a middle-class Gilded Age society.

Sexuality and Femininity in Women's Dress

Sexuality and the expression of femininity in fashion are a large consideration in the development of the body and the subjectivity performed through the expression of either active

⁴⁷ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.40 and 2.41 for depictions of the revival of the Gibson Girl fashion style.

or passive sexuality in dress choices (Flodin, 2019; Evans, 2013). The female child in development is expressed as feminine but not sexual (Marten, 2014; Feixa, 2011), while adult women take on a variety of approaches to sexuality in dress dependent on the life stage in adulthood in which she positions herself (Parrika, 2023; Twigg, 2013). This, again, challenges a strictly linear approach to fashion objects, and I intend to highlight that it supports a more personal reading of dress that situates a woman's social position, culture, and interests within the sexual expressions of fashion and her perceived development. While adulthood is marked by the end of maturation for the adolescent, the Gilded Age woman entering the next stage still had to express a level of childhood innocence to secure her place within the social system. Whether she was sixteen or twenty-six, her wardrobe was set to express her availability to her male peers as a future wife and mother, but she had to ensure that she did not express these sexual desires for herself (Wood, 2006; Dowling, 1979). Women expressed a complicated symbolism through the clothing of someone sexually available while still angelically innocent. The dress had to strike a balance of maturity and innocence. Patterns, colours, and shapes all came to support a certain type of being (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015; Wass & Anderson, 2000; Lurie, 1981). Red, for example, carried a host of meanings on the female form as it could express aggression and desire. A deep red suggested a passionate person, while an orange hue suggested the wearer was more aggressive or unsatisfied (Lurie, 1981, p. 196; Nicklas, 2014). Pink, as a softer hue of red, suggested a different sort of passion and was often worn by older women, adolescents, and unwed women because it implied a level of girlish innocence separate from the red hues. The wearer expressed strong affection or even love, but never passion (Durrani & Niinimäki, 2021; Kodzma, 2019). The ballgown, considered a necessary part of early entrance into adult society for the upper-class woman, was often produced in pastel hues, the most popular of which was a

true pink, suggestive of innocence on the cusp of maturation (Nicklas, 2014; Rubinstein, 2001). Consuelo Vanderbilt's first coming-out dress was a white gown for a *bal blanc* (a ball that served as an introduction for marriageable girls), a tradition in America based on the English "white ball." While it was a dress that marked her entrance into adulthood, she still had to express a childhood purity. The pink gown would come further in the season when married women were allowed to attend dances, suggesting a level of "readiness" for marriage (Vanderbilt-Balsan, 1956, p. 29). Pink in this case was used to express a woman on the cusp of sexual maturity because she moved away from the pure white gown of adolescence.

The use of motifs and patterns also played a part in the adult woman's symbolically feminine nature. Florals, especially the rose, were popular in the Gilded Age for suggesting an ideal femininity and beauty (De La Haye, 2020; Kodzoman, 2019; Rubenstein, 2001). The symbolism of the rose could be manifold. The rose in fashion worked both on debutante gowns and mourning dresses as it was meant to express beauty, delicacy, and resilience (Franklin, 2022, p.101; De La Haye, 2020). The frequent appearance of the rose suggests it could carry a host of meanings, from "delicately beautiful" to "it should not be touched" (Seaton, 2012). In trying to create this discreet sexuality, such formal dress does more than express a level of sexual awareness: it also expresses an idea of ideal Victorian beauty (modest but willing). The woman is considered as a discreet being but also a body to be looked at and shown off by her family in social circles. The skin was considered an erogenous zone, as the young woman was dressed for the first time with her hair up and off her face, in gowns that exposed her neck and part of her shoulders. The role of erogenous zones in beauty standards suggests that a deflected sexual desire comes through looking before the act of touching (Steele, 1985, p. 41). This partial exposure suggests a sexually desired body underneath.

Beyond creating desire in the suitor, or prospective husbands, dress also shows status-based fashion as an image or “look”, a more modern term of fashion that emerged as part of a consumerist index for modern society (Gonzalez & Bovone, 2012; Noddings, 2011). As an emerging woman, the girl should be seen in the latest alterations and styles, suggesting, “wouldn’t you like to look like this?” (Steele, 1985, p. 47). Her family perceived the emerging woman as a leader for her gender and one to be looked to in the future for both the moral and social guidance of her social circle (Crouse-Dick, 2012). As an image maker, a sexual fantasy, and a moral director for the household, the Gilded Age woman faced numerous contradictions in this innocent façade (Crouse-Dick, 2012; Tischleder, 2005). Corsetry was considered a protective property in the emerging woman, serving to contain her desire and create a barrier to the public (Summers, 2001; Steele, 1985). As the psychologist Carl Flugel suggests, the protective properties of the young girls’ undergarments also apply to the ideals of morality. The garment’s ability to stiffen and create an upright carriage became the visual presentation of the integrity and persistence of the young woman’s character (Summers, 2001, p. 84). The corset was a barrier between a fall from innocence and the chasteness one still wanted to preserve. The paradox of the corset was in its contentious and contradictory presentation of the body and the sexual silhouette it created for the Gilded Age woman attempting a discreet sexuality.

In childhood development, a celebration of the ethereal and inhuman was promoted through fashion choices that suggested the angelic (Scholz, 2020; Bowman, 2017; Wolcott, 2015). For the adult woman, a presentation of the innocent angelic self was still at the forefront of popular fashion (Crouse-Dick, 2012; Rubinstein, 2001). The removal of the corporeal in fashion was the goal of many dressmakers. For example, many used drapery to create a movement designed to separate the body from bipedal motion, while the sighing of silks

performed an ethereal sound (Steele, 1985, p. 85). The inhuman in dress was important for connecting to morality and spiritualism. Concealing the feminine body suggests a moral superiority through alterations that hide the erotic. While the body was rooted in the sexual and corporeal, dress sought to hide it and promote a spiritual essence (Crouse-Dick, 2012; Steele, 1985, p. 89). An attempt at perfection and widespread appeal were considered of moral import, and the material aspects of beauty were considered a reflection of a good moral character. The distinction was that women should instill admiration and affection rather than a sexually derived beauty. This could be done through clothing rather than through an aesthetically pleasing face or body (Evans, 2013a; Mitchell, 2013b). The act of dressing could bring about moral superiority, one that suggested an understanding of materiality that was not tied to vanity.

In Vanderbilt's autobiography she addresses mothers' concerns about creating the "right" kind of beauty in their daughters. The concerns of sexuality were also tied to considerations of beauty and vanity: a beautiful woman had to take pains to show she was not aware of her attractiveness or her potential sexuality as part of this. As a relatively attractive woman of the time, Consuelo remembers her mother constantly putting her down so that she would not become vain about her appearance (Balsan, 1956, p. 15). Based on the views of sexuality at the time her mother was likely trying to instill in her that physical beauty should not be valued over a presentation of moral beauty, a beauty tied to false modesty and a presentation of materiality that equates to a better morality (Breward, 1994; Helvenston, 1980; Vanderbilt-Balsan, 1956). The complicated nature of beauty-based goodness was the balancing act: how to present "beauty" that implied a lack of vanity, even though great time and attention had to be put into the presentation of this moral version of womanhood (Summers, 2001; Steele, 1985). In a time when a wife and mother were considered the state of moral excellence that all young girls should

aspire for, slovenliness and selfishness were to be avoided (Helvenston, 1980, p. 39). Women were seen as being the more morally motivated and religiously superior of the sexes, and it was their job to instill these values into their children and husbands. Social writings of the day, such as *Mixing in Society: A Complete Manual of Manners, London and New York* (1870), *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentleman* (1876), and Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House" (1862), placed a firm emphasis on aesthetics as part of the moral order, for the domestic and the family's appearance was set in the domain of wives and mothers (Helvenston, 1980, p. 46). Those in upper-class society would have a much easier time presenting a morally upright family than a middle-class household because of the expense they could put towards wardrobes that kept to the "virtuous" standard of moral dress (both cleaner and newer). If a woman suggested a level of morality that exceeded the respectable budget of her station, she was condemned. By this, I refer to the newly rich families being morally questionable for purchasing clothes that were "too fashionable," considered a sign of excess. While morality was part of a quest for more profound meaning and a dependence on a higher power (deity), the economics of beauty and fashion would always be at the forefront of these considerations in the presentation of the self.

The Economics of Womanhood and Fashion

Economics and fashion are intrinsically linked. The choices given for performing class and personhood via politics, religion, and gender are contingent on the ability to pay for this presentation of self via cloth. Economics as tied to the value of fashion is still in practice today; as I mentioned in the child's garment case study, the youth's subjectivity in dress is determined

through the choices of the parents, not the child themselves (Trufelman, 2018). During the Gilded Age, the role of women within the private sphere began to shift toward the end of the century, and a greater significance was placed on how fashion could perform femininity both within the public and private spheres. In my case study, we see some of these attempts to bridge the public and private spaces through the presentation of the traditional feminine (lace, ruffles, and silhouette) and through the adaptive functions of the skirts to increase mobility within the city streets. Fashion journals attempted to link the act of feminine presentation to the public sphere by suggesting that striving for perfection and the fashionably feminine were reflective of the demands of their gender concerning conducting business and socializing in the public sphere in ways that would be socially approved of (Breward, 1994, p. 88). The upper-class woman held the future of her family's fortunes through a marriage dependent on her finding an acceptable match, which would elevate her family's fortunes. In this case, I refer to both the British and American "husband hunting" which was a performance primarily of the upper classes (McColl & Wallace, 2012). However, the middle class attempted this to a lesser extent through arranged marriages that attempted to consider family business and upholding the morality of their "station" (Archer & Blau, 1993). Beauty and its role in fashion were considered primarily part of the business transaction of the marriage market that these households used to further their economic interests. While sexuality was frowned upon, women had to suggest a shift from asexual childhood to the role of desirable partner, striking a balance between modesty while capturing the male gaze in a socially suitable way (Lebling, 1985, p. 93).

The importance of the economy in dress is perhaps best depicted in the works of Edith Wharton from 1900-1938. As a woman of the upper class and "women's writer," Wharton created stories about the practice of fashion in the upper-class marriage market of the Gilded

Age, focusing on the subjectivity of her characters through the performance of dress (Joslin, 2009; Thornton, 2001). Her novels considered the conventions of the age while simultaneously reflecting on the anxiety and disgrace that occurred when one did not fulfill the duties of polite society. Dress, as one of the most visual aspects of taste and intent, was seen as the most important within Wharton's works and high society itself (Chrisman, 1998, p. 21). Women's choice in adornment allowed their motivations to be displayed even in the act of covering and obscuring; the practicality of the ephemeral garments conferred a particular type of subjecthood (Vainshtein, 2020; Chrisman, 1998, p. 30). As scholar Joslin stipulates, there is a quality to the thingness of dress culture tied to desirability and economic promise. Shopping and the practice of fashion excess were linked to the creation of sexual desire and economic security (Joslin, 2009, pp. 100-103). Despite this striving for moral fortitude in dress practice, the donning of the dress was largely used as a performance. The so-called "useless" adornments of fashion became highly valuable in attaining the upper hand in relationships (Joslin, 2009, p. 109), which I argue is entrenched in this economic market of matchmaking. If one could gain the adoration that families sought for them, then the play at dress became translated into actual status and opportunity. For the upper-class families of New York and as part of the "New World", status and lineage were tied to buying power (Block, 2021; Cable, 2018). If status could be bought, then any of these up-and-coming families could find themselves in the matchmaking lottery if they could strike the right balance of opulence and modesty. In Wharton's novel *The Custom of the Country* (1913), Undine becomes the subject of desire long after her youth has faded. Wharton suggests it is not her natural beauty that is the cause but rather her ability to understand the quality of dress and adornment for its hidden potential and power (Ohler, 2010; Joslin, 2009). As not only a nouveau riche but also a divorcé, Undine is arguably not the feminine ideal of the

period (Jenifar & Devi, 2023). Wharton suggests her success lies in understanding how her wardrobe can act out this ideal that she does not inhabit. Her maturation is reached when she can gain the suitor she wants through objects of adornment that suggest a knowledge of dress and the ability to secure the wealth needed to keep them (Jenifar & Devi, 2023; Vainshtein, 2010; Joslin, 2009).

In the larger visual culture of the Gilded Age, there are further complications to this idea of the young woman as an economic commodity. I highlight visual culture as part of the understanding that fashion and its resonances were not only found within the industry itself but through the various cultural outputs that shaped its conventions, such as paintings, music, photography, etc. Fashion's significance within art and design was representative of modernist sympathies that were considered morally suspect (Mida, 2020, p. 135). The artists of the Gilded Age, including William Merritt Chase (Indiana), Thomas Eakins (Philadelphia), Cecilia Beaux (Philadelphia), and John Singer Sargent (Florence), were often criticized for being too modern in their art, as they offered the act of fashioning as part of this transient age (Kiely, 2020; MET, 2024). In Sargent's painting *Portrait of Madame X (1884)*⁴⁸ the subject serves as a beautiful mask for the beauty ideal he attempts to express through her modern dress. Her depth of character is only present in her clothing, given that her face, which is positioned in profile, allows the objects around and upon her to do the talking. Her characterization outraged the public; her loose dress strap (later repainted) suggested a level of promiscuity and carelessness in her dress choice (Mahon & Centeno, 2024). While Virginie Amelie Gautreau's (Madame X) portrait was deemed unacceptable, her standing as a professional beauty allowed her to find an economically sound marriage. The richness of her textiles commands the room and not the

⁴⁸ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.42. Sargent Portraits.

woman herself. While physical beauty is subdued, the clothing reflects the sensual and aspirational aspects of the social realm.

In Tissot's famous painting *Political Woman (L'Ambitieuse)* (1883-85)⁴⁹ we see evidence of the aspirational in Gilded Age high fashion. Accounting for fashion's relationship to the economic systems of the Gilded Age, it is worth noting how visual culture viewed the fashionable woman who was outside the match-making market; in this case, considering her larger positionality within the social systems that related to economics, albeit indirectly, through aspirational dress. A woman of politics in a time when one could not vote suggests a manipulation behind the scenes. She is gaining power and increasing that of her family through her presentation within the social. Her goal is to find the ideal situation (more than likely through marriage) that will advance her family and the influence it might hold over society. The woman, despite advancements in the public realm, is heavily contained and controlled through her dress (Mida, 2020, p. 145). In both paintings, *Political Woman* and *Portrait of Madame X*, we are given images of upper-class fashionable women who offer a different type of self-fashioning than my walking dress case study. However, in both the case study and these examples, the wearer's subjectivity and economic positions are reflected through their clothing. Our case study exemplifies an image of womanhood focused on practical choices. For example, the relative looseness of the walking dress skirt, its ankle-length hemline, and the large pocket suggest a need to move easily and to have the space to carry objects outside the home. This signals her economic position as a potential wage earner for the family, just as these fashionable women who situate their economics roles in marriage through their fashionable dress.

⁴⁹ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figure 2.43. Sargent's Portraits.

Women in White: How the Innocent and Ghostly Continue to Preside in Adulthood

In the first garment case study, I outlined the role of the angelic and innocent in the child, looking at how the colour white can emulate the moralistic subjectivity of its wearer, reflecting the Anglo-Christian tradition of the time (Bowman, 2017; Marten, 2014; Schlereth, 1985). In my case study of the walking dress, an example of adulthood fashion, the innocence in dress evident through the use of white and the heavenly/ghostly aura of its silhouette was a way to reinforce the “Angel in the House” stereotype that was part of this culturally sanctioned development of women’s sexuality (Crouse-Dick, 2012a; Kodzoman, 2012b). The presentation of dress within the matchmaking market became a large part of social concerns for womanhood; it is not surprising that the use of white continued to be a large part of defining subjectivity, particularly in the role of wife (Bloomingdales Bros, 2024; Condé Nast, 2024; Nicklas, 2014; Breward, 1994). The evolution of the wedding gown in this era led to a host of characterizations of the woman in white through literature and fashion. Part of this was presenting the virginal girl, but an even more significant element was trying to capture such qualities in dress, both real and imagined. While Gilded Age literary figures are from an author’s imagination, they highlight the real anxieties and issues of becoming a bride and mother for women in the Gilded Age. Bridal whites continue to dominate in fashion culture today. Fashion shows and high-end markets often feature the wedding gown as the culminating garment in a collection and the finale of a show. High-end designers are still drawn to bridal dress’s symbolism as promoting good fortune and the promise of hope and security (Hughes, 2005, p. 157).

The attention to what the dress says was, and perhaps still is a significant part of characterizing the bride and her intentions as a woman. In this chapter, I have attempted, using garment case studies, to highlight how clothing's process across the life cycle can be contested in understandings of time cross-culturally and historically. In understanding how dress "speaks" within both the historical and personal context of individual development, dress, as performed in womanhood, may be seen as multifaceted in its presenting of subjective qualities and the developing/aging form. In Georg Moore's novel *A Drama in Muslin* (1886), the author takes pages to describe the materiality of the debutante's bridal dress. He suggests that the way it falls and the textiles with which it is made will express the ideal virtue and charitable aspect of the role of wife that her family hopes to impress upon an audience at the wedding ceremony. How the dress veils the true character implies, at least in part, that the wearer is leaning into artifice in presenting the perfect and pure through an elaborate gown. The gowns elicit a promise and offer a dream rather than a reality with respect to marriage (Seys, 2018, pp. 57-58). The wedding dress acts as a buffer between the fantasy of the wedding and the reality of the marriage. The dress provides an idealized dream for the bride, in that she has reached the pinnacle of her girlhood dreams (or the dreams of her family and its connections) of finding an ideal social match and a promise of familial security.

The walking dress case study does not represent a bridal gown, as the intent of my case study was to expand upon the role of dress artifacts outside of the more formal special occasion garments, like the wedding gown (MET, 2024; KCI, 2024; Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). However, I focus here on the bridal gowns and the use of white in Gilded Age womanhood to highlight the life/death associations that wearing white had and continues to have in fashion symbolism and the aging body. My chosen case study also trades on the contrast of the

innocent and angelic and the woman of the world through its balance of the white lace blouse and the practical dark green skirt (Durrani & Niinimaki, 2021). The wearer suggests elements of virtue and innocence in her feminine blouse, harkening to her youth and early adulthood, but in pairing it with darker clothing, she signals like the novel heroines of the day, her desire to engage with the worldly influences and the public sphere through dress, offering both innocence and maturity through her clothing choices.

Dress scholars have identified an additional connotation to the colour white linking it to the supernatural. If we develop these connotations, white in women's dress may also signal the woman who acts as a ghost or is haunted by the wedding gown in marking her transition to adulthood. In scholar Clair Hughes' analysis of the supernatural associations inherent in white she highlights several mainstream novels of the nineteenth century that use white to imply "haunting". In Dicken's novel *Great Expectations* (1860), the character Miss Havisham haunts the other characters throughout the novel. While she is still living, she wanders the spaces of the home in the bridal dress of her youth despite having aged beyond the marriage market. Her girlhood gown suggests she is caught in the past. She symbolizes the failed marriages of the 19th-century marriage market. She chooses to marry her groom based on a financial decision, and when the marriage never takes place, she finds herself trapped between the two life stages. She cannot enter adulthood with other women but can no longer consider herself a girl. She also cannot remove the dress because if she does, she becomes the non-bride and a failure in every aspect of ideal femininity for the era (Ban, 2009; Hughes, 2005, p. 167).

The second wife, the woman who re-marries or marries a widower, could not wear white, as to do so was to suggest she was the first bride retaining virginity and childhood innocence. According to advice columns of the day wearing white to a second wedding marked the failure

of the first and suggested that you foresaw the second one failing as well (Wehrle & Paoletti, 2013). Understanding the balance between the worldly and innocent was contentious in the fashionable marriage market. In the example of the second bride or widowed bride we see that the politics of identity through colors and their symbolism was carefully and self-consciously practiced. Dressing as an innocent when you were a fully developed adult, as in the case of any second bride's use of white, was to ignore your age and therefore infantilize your dress in a way that suggested a lack of social understanding and the ability to continue developing gracefully (Vainshtein, 2020; Twigg, 2013).

My walking dress case study likely represents middle-class dress, but there are elements that make it emblematic of upper-class fashion. The fabricator and wearer attempts to be fashionable but not overly opulent. The garment presents a careful balance between maturation and innocence, careful to create an ideal of modesty while not appearing overly childish. The use of the case study garment's white blouse and traditionally feminine elements offers the wearer a positioning of their development and life stage. The walking dress exemplifies a careful balance between innocence and maturity in dress choice. She presents herself as young and modest via the lace trims, girlish puffed sleeves, and crisp white blouse, but also as sexually mature by depicting herself as a fashionable consumer with a defined waist and mature colour palette (referents to the New Woman and Gibson Girl, in silhouette and skirt trims) marking her as a woman who has successfully left the nursery.

The Aesthetic Movement and Positioning of the Body Cross-Culturally

Understanding how a person might position themselves developmentally using white and the bridal motifs, we can see how Gilded Age maturation might be considered biologically and morally. However, it is also worth evaluating how the cultural indexes of the time shaped an idea of personhood that is specific to fashion production within a larger understanding of cultural idealism. Today, when working within the tenets of high art, fashion designers attempt to create a new codex of dress that celebrates making art of the mundane and every day. Making meaning through art at the point of consumption is about creating design referents to cultural ideals (McRobbie, 1998, p. 102). As feminist and cultural theorist McRobbie clarifies, designers have brought high art to their shows through references to historicism, as in Galliano's show *Le Incroyables* or Westwood's *Rococo* (McRobbie, 1998, p. 110). Historicism used in a consumable art form that can be actively worn has led to an understanding that fashion is about crafting a persona within a larger cultural lexicon. Rather than just wearing a beautiful dress, the performance of art in fashion can work to craft a specific ideal that offers greater meaning behind the dressed form. This ideal was performed in the Gilded Age through the Aesthetic Movement, which was about both art and consumption (Calvert, 2012; Rubinstein, 2001). While the Rational Dress movement tended to be more strongly associated with early feminism, it failed to understand in its practical utilitarian wear what made women want to be fashionable. Steele argues that women find joy in a level of freedom in their dress choices (Steele, 1985, p. 60). The Aesthetic movement allowed for women to be both artist and muse as they were both products of the movement and active participants in its formation. In part, although a fringe faction, the Aesthetic Movement was able to gain some popularity in the public's opinion (Curtis, 2007;

Steele, 1985). Gaining popular opinion was necessary as the acceptance of the movement and women's role within it might lead to a greater acceptance of women taking on these cultural roles in subsequent movements and industries.

The Aesthetes of the Gilded Age saw their clothing as a sign maker for their beliefs and values and as a way of expressing a way of life and personality (Casto, 2009, p. 128). As scholar Curtis clarifies:

Writing in 1880 Mary Haweis encouraged a style of dress that followed the natural lines of the female body, while Mrs. Oliphant included a chapter on “Ancient Costume” in her study of dress as artistic expression. Mrs. Charles Bernard delivered a lecture to aspiring actresses in New York in 1873 which encouraged them to assume a stage costume of simple natural lines. (Curtis, 2007, p. 126)

The role of the Aesthetic movement for these women of fashion was to decouple the association of the aesthetic life with glittery objects. Instead, they used the beautification of the every day through aestheticism to argue that, as women, they had value in terms of intellect and as participants in the economy (Stetz, 2015, p. 161). In the walking dress case study, we see evidence of this in its similarity to the dress styles of the Gibson Girl. The practical elements of its design, including the pocket and looser fit, suggest a public garment and one that could take part in the workforce and economy. Beyond the right to dress beautifully and be comfortable, the Aesthetes argued that women had a right to culture creation, not just as consumers, but also as change makers. The Aesthetic movement was more acceptable for women to join than other cultural movements of the past because women were believed to be natural proponents of the movement, and their gender was associated with design and the materialist culture of the home (Casto, 2009, p. 131). As the critics of aestheticism have argued, not only were women able to

produce art through the costuming they created or wore on the stage, but also through their thoughts and opinions of the Aesthetic tenets (Stetz, 2015; Steele, 1985; Wilson, 1985).

Women became active shapers of the fashion and arts industry in the late nineteenth century, allowing for a shift in perspective on the importance of women's work and the desire for usefulness beyond the domestic. In the novel *The Beth Book* (1897) by Sarah Grand, the character Beth finds herself and her peers in unique positions as young women of the nineteenth century, having been raised to act as passive ornaments as part of their womanhood. When the working world shifted under industrialization, factories took over domestic practices such as textile production (Purdue, 2013). Beth gains purpose and a way to support herself when she has her grandmother teach her how to hand stitch (part of a valued intergenerational knowledge transfer). In doing so, she associates the material world with the ability to engage in the intellectual sphere and she becomes an active cultural shaper (Kortsch, 2016, pp. 146-147). Beth not only finds purpose in sewing but also finds a way to express her thoughts and perspectives through the work of thread (Kortsch, 2016, p. 152; Heilman, 2004). Beyond the practical elements of domestic work, the ability to sew opens new ways of expressing the self and desires to be active in public space. While fashion attempted to make this shift from basic products to consumable art forms, women tried to renegotiate their rights as creators and as people by working with the power of the cloth. In the walking set case study, the wearer suggests an interest in shaping their wardrobe through decorative elements that have been added to the blouse and skirt, such as the addition of the black cotton ruffle near the hem of the walking skirt and the practical addition of the outer pocket. Both elements have evidence of being added after purchase by the wearer.

As I previously mentioned, part of the contentiousness of evaluating dress development through the consideration of time is an understanding of how the wearer's subjectivity will shift perceptions of development and challenge some of these conventions depending on their cultural referents. In the garment case study example of adulthood, we see several fashionable styles and cultural indexes present in the garment and its alterations and embellishments. The differences between a dress from its place of origin and how it is used in the new fashion system will differ depending on the values of each social milieu. One additional index alluded to in the women's walking dress example concerns the idea of the natural. This evolved in the nineteenth century as ideas of health and well-being changed, and worldly influences became a way of expressing naturalism by the later part of the century (Wilson, 1985, p. 213). A celebration of the outdoors and a desire for gardening spaces that celebrated naturalism meant including a collection of flora and fauna in dress design, thus health reform existed alongside the aestheticism in dress (Casto, 2009, p. 132). Aesthetic dress could take the romanticism of the past and apply the idea of craftsmanship to health and beauty (Steele, 1985, pp. 152-153). The culturally othered, in this case, Eastern design, became a prevalent mode of projecting health and well-being. In the Gilded Age, society became interested in Japanese design, which manifested in the movement of "Japonism", which led to an interest in Japanese-style artworks, furnishing, and textiles (Pantzer, 2017; Fuxai, 1996). The most notable example of fashionable dress was the rise of the tea gown (V&A Digital Collections, 2024; ROM Archive, 2024), inspired by Japanese traditional kimonos (KCI Digital, 2024; MET, 2024). Day wear also featured layered fabrics and elaborate sleeves. Further, eastern embroiderers had their designs simulated to express a level of craftsmanship in American footwear (BATA online, 2024).⁵⁰ In the 1890s, renewed interest and a new way of

⁵⁰ See Appendix B Visual Resource Guide Figures 2.44 and 2.45.

looking at naturalism led to a resurgence in other forms of culturally inspired dress. The adulthood case study I have been examining offers some indication of this in its silhouette, which could be associated with Eastern dress. However, the addition of floral motifs and vines throughout the blouse suggests that naturalism was present in even the simplest of garments. This offers an interesting connection between a woman's casual dress and some of the far-reaching influences of the Aesthetic movement and Eastern design in the performing of Gilded Age womanhood through dress.

The idea that naturalism could be expressed in dress led to the popularity of naturalist elements in clothing to express a certain view of humanity. We see this for example, in the paisley shawl and other Victorian wrappers (ROM archive, 2024; V&A Digital Collections, 2024) or the various beetle-wing and embroidery tea gowns (MET, 2024; KCI Digital, 2024) which were used to present some of these naturalist ideals and the ideal of being well "traveled" (Calvert, 2012; Zukowski, 2006). In aesthetic and rational dress reform, the focus on fashion and fashionable objects was set to blur the boundaries between gendered spaces and cultures and nations. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (members of the Aesthetic movement) often depicted their figures in the outdoors and promoted more natural colours in their clothing choices (Becker, 2021, pp. 76-77). Aestheticism was seen as a desire for an international flavour that crosses not just city centers but even continents (Stetz, 2015, p. 165). The idea was to express not only awareness regarding naturalism but also a level of worldly knowledge which brought a resurgence in dress-making practices from India. Beetle wing fashion (elytra) was used in American and European dress as both a presentation of Imperialism (wives who had been to India as part of the expansion) and also as currency for a level of scientific knowledge (Carberry, 2021a; Stearns, 2021b; McCartney, 2006). The woman who wore beetle wing embroidery

suggested in its use that she rejected the styles of modern fashion that her peers wore (Libes, 2021, p.93). As an example, the various Lepidoptera-based patterned gowns and adapted paisley shawls and dressing gowns associated with the Aesthetic movement can be found in various upper-class iterations of artistic dress (MET, 2024; FIT, 2024; ROM, 2024). In wearing beetle wings as ornament, the aesthetic woman suggests she was rooted in nature and scientific exploration. The walking dress case study offers little concerning Imperialist dress, which was arguably presented in garments of the upper-class social elite (those who could afford to travel). However, the effects of fashion trends will exist outside the class that creates them. While the walking dress does not have anything as exotic as beetle wing embroidery, the decorative elements throughout the garment suggest an interest in this naturalism. The adjustable waist and looser blouse suggest a wearer who understood the Rational Dress and hygienic movements and attempted to apply them to their walking garments. This further implies that the woman from the case study, while likely not an Aesthete herself, liked something within the movement's tenets that she wanted to apply to her own dress through the addition of naturalist embroidery. While likely not having the luxury of travel, she attempted to define her wardrobe as cultured in implementing some Eastern design influences.



Fig. 2.50 Tea Dress by Jean Philippe Worth, MET, Circa 1905, 2009.300.377, Fig. 2.51 Dressing Gown, FIT, Circa 1890, 70.65.1, Fig. 2.52 Victorian Cape from Paisley Shawl, ROM, Circa 1860-1869, 2021.35.1

Part of this celebration of the traveler and their desire for exoticism as an expression of nineteenth-century naturalism was divorced from the original cultural production of garments. For the purposes of my argument, it is important to understand how the cultural meanings within dress can shift depending on the cultural context in which it is being displayed, as this changes the nature of both time and place. The case study subject, as a woman likely from the Midwest of America, was using these indexes of fashion primarily within the cultural milieu of Imperialist American connections; the conditions of making her dress would be completely different from the maker's origins. Beetle wings serve as an example of a species collection on dresses that were popularized through the Aesthetic movement in opposition to their original use of fashionable decoration in India (Libes, 2021, pp. 88-89). The worldly influence in the late Gilded Age dress symbolizes this attempt to recreate tradition and reposition the body and its wrappings as symbolically new and important. The various ways in which the New Woman both challenged

and conformed to fashion set herself up as a subject resisting the constraints of both the social conditions of her gender and the bodily considerations of her time by attempting to make her body and its clothing eternal through an idea of science and art that outlasts the aging form itself.

As I have argued for a consideration of fashion that acknowledges both the mortal and immortal, I have attempted to address how aging bodies consider the quest for larger ideals in dress (like the angelic in the use of white or the use of naturalist tenets to perform scientific curiosity) to combat the reality of the aging form and the conventions of time. Placing fashion within the context of arts and sciences attempts to make its practice something that exists beyond its means of production to something that may speak to the future and that is, in this sense, timeless. Paradoxically, because it is corporeal, such garments both present the embodied practices and personal choices of their wearer while attempting to fix these practices as beyond the body it houses.

In both my childhood and adulthood garment case studies, the role of fashion within what might be called death dialects of time and mortality is not just about delineating a certain life stage or even a certain social movement in dress. It is about fixing the individual within a social condition outside of the corporeal register that clothing as part of the body exists within. The body and its wardrobes are reinscribed by the conditions of their cultural production, a new way of considering aging and the passage of time that the fashion system tries to exist outside of. As I addressed in chapter one, the fashion object continues to be examined as something both ghostly and eternal in its existence in display and its contextualization within larger cultural indexes. Scholarship struggles to contend with fashion's attempt to position itself for future designs, when it holds connotations with past bodies that are mediated in display practices for present culture and its interests or values (Van De Peer, 2014; Heike, 2013; Babula, 2022). As I have

highlighted, clothing operates as autobiography, I have attempted to show this by studying two case study garments through the lens of their social period and ideas of bodily development. I ground these considerations in the evidence of the personal or the body in the garment examples I have examined, considering traces such as stains, alterations, and stylistic details. I do this in order to highlight how the individual and their chosen garment might consider and respond to their social influences to create an idea of subjectivity or selfhood. I emphasize a person's life stages because the fashion object's historical and stylistic timelines have become a dominant part of the framing and understanding of fashion in cultural theory. In examining two case studies of garments that highlight childhood and adulthood life stages, I have attempted to showcase past and present struggles to respond to an idea of time and aging through dress. I argued that the often-contradictory attempts to fix individuals' ages and the time period of their social condition (like the Gilded Age) through fashion demonstrates the problematic approach to historicism that we continue to rely on in our current cultural cataloging systems. Such systems include guidelines for identifying and preserving the historic artifact, which, while valuable, still sees the fashion object struggle for specific definition within this system. Further, cataloging practice does not address the gaps in the archive pertaining to working and racialized bodies which other critics have been addressing (Scaturro, 2024; Kuchler, 2021a; Calia, 2021b). In the next chapter, I will examine how our attempts to capture fashion history can benefit from a focused embodied approach to fashion artifacts through dress reconstruction practices. In doing so, I will once more highlight the subjective quality of garments that reinforce the uniqueness of the fashion object while providing potential readings of the artifact that further demystify the past and reconsiders its timelines from both within and outside our present cultural perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRESENT'S ATTEMPT AT THE PAST: HOW HISTORIC RECONSTRUCTIONS COMPLICATE DRESS HISTORY TIMELINES- PART ONE

In this chapter, I will address the phenomenon of contemporary dress reconstructions and consider ways of re-examining the fashion history timeline. I am interested in moving away from the biases of fashion artifact history I have examined in the thesis as a whole, including concerns about the corporeal in the museum space, such as attempts to vivify the stationary mannequin in display practices while contending with the restrictions of historic artifact display (Pecorari, 2020; Negrin, 2015). I also wish to move away from the presentation of historic time through linear evolutionary timelines and the categorizing of dress through thematic approaches representing the present culture's interests (Hjemdahl, 2014; Crawley & Barbieri, 2000). Instead, my argument will focus on the process of democratizing the fashion museum space, which is restricted by the collection practices of fashion archives in the past (Mills, 2020; Jenkins, 2018). In chapter one, I addressed some of the concerns fashion critics have regarding the conventions of fashion artifact studies that tend to neglect the embodied practice of dressing (Wurst, 2007; Springgay, 2003; Entwistle, 2000). I now wish to advocate for the potential of fashion reconstructions and reconstruction practice in addressing histories that are missing from the archives, including the representation of the aging body, the plus-sized body, the racially "other" body, and the impoverished body. I will argue that by examining the role reconstructionists have as contemporary designers who reflect on dress motivations of the past, one sees that they offer a unique relationship between past and present ideas that could address the biases of Westernized timelines that fashion scholarship exists within. At the same time in this chapter, I address some of the issues I see as present within the reconstructionist community, including a lack of industry

standards, monetary gatekeeping, and the commodification of historic artifacts. These barriers, in turn, raise issues involved in relying on public memory or discursive formations about the past. I conclude with an analysis of my own reconstruction project, outlined in this chapter, and argue that the potential within reconstruction lies in the embodied practice of making, which connects past practices to those of the present. What needs to be considered, however, is a new and foundational theory for reconstructionists to operate within that will acknowledge the ever-present biases towards aestheticism in fashion while also exploring embodied identities in the wearing and manufacturing of garments. Part of this insight comes from a reconsideration of object analysis that I defined in chapter two. When applied to reconstruction practice, the slow approach and its insights offer a framework or a manner of apprehending the fashion object that focuses on the individual, which I argue is where the strength of reconstruction practice resides.

As part of this solution to traditional biases, I propose reconsidering historic narratives and stereotypes regarding past fashion production. These issues (aestheticizing, commercialization, and gatekeeping) which also exist within the reconstructionist community limit the practice of reconstruction as a field in its own right. At the same time, monetary gatekeeping, as noted by fellow reconstructionists in the field,⁵¹ creates a scholarly and theoretical division between professional reconstructionist industries and amateurs within the community (Thompson, 2012). The significance of this is that the democratization of fashion objects continues to be restricted, as those disadvantaged economically and academically are not offered the same value and space for their reconstructions. This results in the persistence of some of the biases I have noted, including the lack of representation of the marginalized, the poor, and the disabled, who have

⁵¹ See survey responses in Appendix D, Part Two of this chapter, where reconstructionists surveyed expressed a concern for the monetary controls that the practice of reconstruction exists within, i.e., my project is of more value because I spent more time/money than you.

something to offer but continue to be left out of the theoretical field. Finally, commodifying historical items because of the fashion industry's quest for the "new vintage" (a dress era of the past that can be reworked for modern clothing interests) challenges ideals of historic value and authenticity. These matters complicate the analysis and perception of cultural artifacts and create the potential for the "fast fashion" marketing of reproductions. I will address these issues by observing reproductions' environmental and economic impact as part of non-historic settings and will question how these considerations shape our understanding of fashion history and design. "Non-historic settings" are places outside of the academic or museum space that challenge the timeline of the object and its place in history. Popular events like the "1920s Night" take the fashion object to a new historical epoch in a contemporary setting. This contemporary setting includes the present tastes of a culture, further influencing past objects in order to be useful to new audiences and their social conditions. In addition, I focus on the democratization and problematization of reproductions as visual entertainment by studying the sellers' market for reconstruction (Etsy, and commercial-based recreation sites), social media platforms used in disseminating dress histories (Instagram and YouTube accounts), and the festivals and re-enactment balls that many reconstructions projects are created for (Jane Austen balls, etc.).

The outcomes of such practices surrounding reproduction are two-fold; the first is negative in that it reinforces the bias surrounding public or shared memory through the emphasis on timelines based on a historiography that has more to do with present cultural values than the dress practices of the past (such as the fast fashion market of "vintage" style) and because it continues to exist as an exclusionary practice of the fashionable elite: the reproductions that cost more are seen as more valuable both for historical and contemporary use, which limits a reproduction's democratic potential through financial barriers. However, a second outcome of

these practices has the positive potential of reconditioning the practice of history through reproductions that are more democratically representative than in the academic and museum space. How this might work is that there is a greater flexibility for approaches and participants in reproduction, including people outside of traditional academia. There is also a freedom in creating, from which museum and heritage centers are restricted because of their reliance on original artifacts. I contend that this democratic aspect to reproduction practice, together with its potential to reframe absent histories, is largely underdeveloped and has not been fully examined. However, community members' interest in addressing these issues in their reconstruction designs highlights the potential to move away from a linear projection of fashion history to emphasize the embodiment of the fashion object or garment. This in turn, can challenge traditional chronologies by addressing the personal value of the bodily habitus (the practices of the body/embodiment), both past and present.

I will investigate the roles of garment reproduction practice in two stages in this chapter: First, I present a dress reconstruction of my own design to reflect on an embodied approach to Gilded Age fashion. I achieve this first through the fabrication of my garment, then, through an analysis of its design principles, historic foundations, and overall project limitations that ultimately challenge its role within the principles of reconstruction. I will argue that reconstruction practice reframes the contemporary understanding of historic dress's value within the museum space as well as for the public by reconsidering the value of active participation and embodiment in the analysis of the fashion artifact. This further challenges the stasis of museum display, which could become livelier and more active for its participants. Second, in part two of this chapter, I study the assumptions and practices of the larger reconstructionist community through a survey I disseminated to some of its members (May, 2023). My interviews with

individual practitioners from the North American reconstructionist community through the Costume Society of America examine the reconstructionists' beliefs around reconstruction practice. As I argue, these concern ideas of authenticity and the "original" artifact, as well as an exploration of the reconstructionist role and understanding of public memory's relationship to historic reconstructions. In my analysis I question whether reconstruction practices reinforce the misconceptions of public memory regarding clothing and fashion through an aestheticizing bias that reflects our own cultural beliefs and interests rather than conditions of the time, or whether reconstructionists in fact play a key role in keeping history alive for future generations. Our understanding of fashion history as a linear progression of styles and materialities continues to negate the potential of reproductions to bridge the gaps between past and present cultural habitus through a reliance on historical appropriation in most reproduction practices. By this I mean reliance on an ideal presentation of the past that continues to ignore the realities of a period's history. In the first chapter, I explored some of this criticism around the conventions of Western temporal frameworks and the conditions of globalization that impact how fashion artifacts are disseminated and idealized (Maresca, 2023; Johnson, 2015; Fliss, 2009). By appropriation, I am referring to the selective approach of fashion rather than the reference to cultural appropriation that is more commonly considered in present scholarship. However, historic appropriation often contains elements of cultural appropriation. An example of this appropriation can be seen in popular ballroom events based around famous authors and literary periods (typically Regency and Victorian), in which an idealized version of the era, its food, and dress is exemplified through an understanding of the past based on an amalgamation of inaccurate ideas about the last 250 years that depict life typically from an upper-class perspective or idealized literary framework, such as Jane Austen's English countryside. Rather than an accurate portrayal,

reconstruction practice here is typically based on a broad scope of fantasies, including popular fiction, television series (“*Bridgerton*”), and surviving fashion illustrations, such as those from the *Vogue* archives (Condé Nast, 2024) or examples of their chosen era’s portraiture (in my reconstruction, for example, I looked at several of Sargent’s works). Such costumed balls have very little to do with the actual period of their theme. Still, the general public has taken this version of events as an understanding of the history and its social cultures, even though such views are more entrenched within our own social system and values that reinforce fashion’s aestheticism. While most understand that the balls themselves are a fantasy of the past, the costuming surrounding these events is treated as authentic portrayal of fashionable dress (Thompson, 2012) that tends to oversimplify the dress realities of the past (e.g. not everyone had the benefit of living in Jane Austen’s countryside during the Regency Period).

As discussed in my previous two chapters, fashion exhibitions and depictions of dress for the public tend to focus on what is avant-garde and new rather than looking at dress practice from everyday perspectives. In my two garment case studies, by approaching the fashion object as an individual example of dress, I attempted to show through object analysis where the personal fits within the larger dress contexts, exploring the process of everyday dressing. In addressing the use of timelines and death dialects within dress (as scholars tend to struggle with the “ghostly aura” of historic dress in communicating fashion displays) (Negrin, 2015; Weber, 2010; Arnold, 2001), I argue that we can allow for a less biased approach, avoiding one that tends to ignore the embodied nature of fashion artifacts and prioritizes a thematic approach to dress that groups dress artifacts as communally representative. Instead, we can move to a view of historic fashion that will account for more regional, communal, and individual tastes in dress in both reconstruction practice and in the practice of fashion museum display. This method of

inquiry constitutes an approach to fashion's embodied practice through the personal fashion object and its relationship to the positioning of bodily subjectivity. In turn it permits a more balanced understanding of dressing ideals across socioeconomic levels regarding garment production and reproduction.

Continually addressing the personal in fashion reinforces the unique nature of each garment and its relationship with the body as part of fashion's corporeal register. This could be applied in museum practice by considering including object-based analysis in fashion displays, highlighting the personal and individual nature of fashion artifacts. By engaging with the theoretical approaches within fashion history in the first chapter and deconstructing Gilded Age dress samples and their relation to life course development in the second chapter, I have argued for a reconsideration of fashion's relationship to timelines and the embodied nature of dress through examples of subjectivity, where the body is influenced by its own experiences and the culture/community it produces/develops within, applied to both past and present fashion objects. We can see this emerge in the practice of object-based analysis that focuses on the role of memory in the cultural productions of dress (Pecorari, 2022; Babula, 2003) and in museology that redefines concepts of timeliness (currently famed as a relationship of the past to present as progressive and something that cannot be returned to) in the fashion archive (Crawley & Barbieri, 2013; Riccini, 2003).

Through an examination of reproductions and their role in contemporary cultural understandings of historic fashion, as well as the dissemination of dress artifacts through historic-themed events and social media platforms, I intend now to address the use of historical time as positioned in the museum and academic practice through reconstruction practice. Working from an understanding that clothing, as part of the corporeal register, acts as part of the

body, my larger argument offered a critical examination of fashion museum display (vivifying the museum space) discussed in chapter one and was further analyzed through the influences of individual development in the second chapter's garment studies. In the current analysis, I intended to highlight the personal and subjective quality of garments that reinforce the uniqueness of the fashion object, while also providing potential readings of the artifact that demystify the past and reconsider the role of public memory in the present cultural understanding of fashion display. Public memory is a collective recollection of a cultural idea shared communally rather than individually. As it applies to history, it is problematic, for it relies on the values and priorities of the present culture rather than the culture of the period it was originally produced within (Cox, 1995). One example of this would be public memory's role in the corsetry debate, in which modern audiences have created a particular narrative around the corset as an anti-feminist fashion item that women used to reinforce tight-lacing practices. Television series like the Bridgerton spin-off series "Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story" (Shondaland, 2023) and the Canadian mystery series "Murdoch Mysteries" (CBC, 2008) have female characters bemoaning the tyranny of having to wear corsets and defining the fashion object according to tightlacing practices, suggesting their dress was entirely the choice of the patriarchal rule. Further, reconstructionists on social media platforms have constantly had to defend their use of corsetry to their audiences, several even creating educational posts or videos about the myth-building of corsetry (makethishistoricallook, 2018; @Karolina Zebrowskax, 2012). Public memory reinforces the concept of dangerous corsetry for modern audiences through costuming, film, television, and literature but does not address the attitudes and motivations of those who wore the item (Summers, 2001).

In a speech to the American Historical Association in 1931, Carl Becker claims that history is not enacted communally but individually. As personal historians, we only select facts relevant to personal interest. Like artists, we artificially recreate events from personal experiences. These personal experiences are based on situations, not whole truths and we make the events significant through our interests (Becker, 1931). I would agree with this understanding of history in part. For example, reconstructions rely more on the personal than other forms of historic cataloging. However, the use of the collective values surrounding historicism lies behind these personal choices, as the “everyman” does not exist isolated from his or her community. A reconstructionist (one who recreates an object of the past, typically a dress object) may be influenced by their personal interests in design (what looks good on them, colour preference, a chosen era, etc.). However, these decisions will still largely be informed by the conditions of the public they perform within (reinforcements through film, television, and even the museum space). I argue that we must address Becker’s claim of history and its ties to the personal as a potential value in reconstruction while acknowledging a communal influence in this personal collection practice. By addressing reconstructions as part of public memory practice, I intend to challenge some of the reconstructionist practices of myth-making while also exploring reconstruction’s potential to re-read objects of the past from a more personal and individualist perspective that reconsiders influences both past and present in dress design. In chapter one, I attempted to address the practice of evaluating dress objects without considering the personal in theoretical works concerns of dress. In chapter two, I attempted to present the value of the personal in a re-examination of object-based analysis by focusing on two garment case studies and the developmental and subjective positionality of the potential wearers. In this current chapter and its projects, I again attempt to define the value of the personal by evaluating the embodied practices

of reconstruction as a response to the corporeal concerns (such as the loss of the original body), that I considered in the first two chapters.

Museum practice often prioritizes an idealized fashion history that reconstruction practice continues to rely on for source material, not from a lack of care for perspectives outside the idealized fashion object but due to limitations of the fashion archive. Again, what people are willing to donate and what has survived from the past tends to be formal versions of dress that has been well preserved. Youth-based, high-fashion wardrobes survive. Evidence of the poor and the old in dress is rare because examples of such constructions were not well kept compared to something like a special occasion gown (e.g. wedding dress, court dress, the family heirloom, etc.). Peirson-Smiths (2020), Riello (2011), and Smith and Stannard (2016) all address the continued reliance on an aesthetic and linear approach to fashion history that misconstrues historic reality. As Riello clarifies in his analysis of the different approaches to fashion scholarship, it is challenging to present an analysis of fashion objects that will account for both their material value and their value in relation to other objects:

Dress history has found it difficult to reconcile these different approaches and tends to emphasize the “special” object more than the common one, paying more attention to the stories of unique artifacts rather than to ordinary ones. In the cases where systems of objects are examined over time, dress history furthermore tends to create a linear history of evolution, that implies the existence of a perfect congruency between different objects through time. The validity and utility of this principle is today increasingly refuted by historians. (Riello, p. 8867)

This special object offers the public a skewed sense of history and cultural production. An example would be our continued reliance on more formal (evening wear/occasion) and classed

(expensive) examples of dress that ignore subcultures, race, and economics for the majority of a society in any given period, and which is then presented in many fashion-based exhibitions and depictions of dress in film, television, and stage productions. As I offered in chapter one, if fashion objects are understood through their connections with the body they house, what happens when the fashion object is taken out of its intended space and place? While these rarified garments are useful for capturing both historic and modern considerations of textile culture (that is, the use of textiles to codify a culture's customs, memories, and heritage practices that are site and community-specific [Kettle, 2019]), the fashionably novel (the avant-garde or unusual) will usually not allow for a complete story of a period's dress culture. Part of this problem in public memory is finding a means of seeing these innovative textiles that would include not only the materiality of the textile, such as wool quality, but also the way a textile might be shaped for its region. For example, not to see the use of Indian elytra in Gilded Age tea dresses is to ignore its historic origins. When textiles are viewed as communally representative, this may lead to misconceptions and an appropriation of history that misconstrues the reality of our ancestors' textile cultures. For example, traditional dress is often formal, regardless of class. Archives may contain several examples of children's christening gowns from the upper classes to the working class (e.g. McCord Stewart Museum, 2024; Clarrington Museum and Archives, 2019). However, the working-class examples were likely heirloom pieces and had little to do with how the family typically dressed. Public memory performs historic appropriation in this case, as the general public has come to accept what are in fact inherent biases in the collection and preservation of historic fashion and will take what might be accessible in museums as being the communal standard for all dress; further, not understanding that the reality for most people did not include

fashion items made popular by today's interests. By understanding that textile cultures⁵² acknowledge movement between places and histories, textile culture has the opportunity to create that dialogue between past and present design methodology. As Alice Kettle argues in "Textile and Place" (2019), textile cultures are active in making change happen through their relationship with place and history, since textile culture can speak to specific and local conditions as well as to a larger system of international relations (Kettle, 2019). Historic reconstruction practice through a more active relation and understanding of textile culture can potentially reframe fashion history cultures more inclusively and dynamically, bridging the divide between past and present design ideals.

Bearing this in mind, questions that need to be considered when addressing the recreation of historic dress include: 1) how does this understanding of fashion as a cultural index and narrative challenge our understanding of history and the inherent problems in trying to produce a historic narrative through reconstructed cloth? 2) where do we fall short in our reconstructions of textiles (i.e., trying to capture Scottish fashion history without accounting for different region's textiles and how they cut/ produce these), and in our understanding of time and aging through theoretical approaches to reconstructed fashion? By studying practitioners or reconstructionists from the North American fashion community, I will address some of the underlying problems we still have in relying on public memory and understanding fashion artifacts as representative of a community rather than an individual.⁵³ Both reproductions in non-historic settings, as well as high-fashion couturier dress practices, attempt to create ongoing relevance to the past's

⁵² Textile cultures consider the values of textiles as an active shaper of a community, based on the physical process of making, the locations of a textile's origins, and its value within circulation and exchange as indicative of a culture and its processes (Kettle 2019; Harris 2020).

⁵³ The survey identified key factors that costumers and historians contend with when taking on a reconstructionist project, such as regional focus and budget limitations. This helped to highlight some of the biases we as a community still undergo in trying to capture historic periods through dress.

dressmaking by keeping past textile trades (for example, the process of creating artificial silk flowers) alive through re-enactment. Reconstruction practice allows for the democratization of textile studies⁵⁴, but it can also become problematic in its focus on visual entertainment that may in turn reinforce misconceptions rooted in public memory.

In analyzing re-enactment approaches such as Smith & Stannard's surveys (2016), I argue that we should allow for a less biased approach to historic fashion that will account for more regional, communal, and individual tastes in dress. In what follows, I will further examine how reconstructions and those who take part in them handle the larger theoretical frameworks of fashion used in Westernized museum displays, including the attempt to bring life to dress artifacts outside of their historic setting. By examining reconstructionist use of historic re-enactment and exploring embodied practices of making that connect the present to the actions of the past. I will address what I call the historic gatekeeping function of reproduction that continues to complicate aspects of historic appropriation, such as prizing certain dress narratives over others and associating expenditure and historic background with offering greater value to particular historic reproductions. Finally, this chapter will address my own reconstruction project, the creation of an 1890s dinner reception dress. I will consider its attempts to conform to the standards enacted by the current community of dress re-creators and some of the ways the project attempted to challenge reconstruction practice I attempted to address these historic dress biases. As I have argued in the first and second chapters, the practice of embodiment and a renewed focus on addressing the personal in the fashion object should allow for a more dynamic

⁵⁴ Textile studies are sometimes classified as separate from the more prominent fashion studies canon. They focus on other forms of textiles and their production, including things like quilts, tapestries, etc. The study analyses aspects of textile culture and the manufacturing process of cloth and fibers (Cieselska-Wrobel & Van Langenhove, 2012).

approach to cataloging in the archives, one that moves away from an evolutionary and thematic approach to garment history to one that values the dress artifact on its own merits and in relation to other objects of the garment's history. Fashion scholarship's struggle to address the personal in communal recollection is evident in fashion exhibitions that showcase thematically organized or designer collections in which dress speaks to an idea rather than functioning as an artifact with its own merit. Our attempt to fix reconstructions within a linear continuum of dress history rather than as an individual project's approach to the past speaks to today's cultural mores. By studying the personal in re-enactments, we reinforce the unique nature of each garment and its relationship with the body as part of fashion's corporeal register. In my own project, I intend to work within a cyclical rather than a linear understanding of fashion and its history because the evolutionary perspective of the linear timeline tends to negate the interrelation of the present to objects of the past and ignores cross-cultural and cross-temporal elements of fashion design.

I present cyclical timelines as an alternative to linear time both to humanize the past and to understand fashion's balance of what might be called nihilism (its design cycle of constantly replacing itself) together with renewal in its production process. As I have addressed in the previous two chapters, such a cyclical timeline is significant for evaluating the personal in the fashion artifact, thus furthering a re-evaluation of fashion history that would stand as livelier and more active for present cultural production and its relation to the past. As Thompson (2023) argues, linear time is used predominantly in Western cultures and is marked as irreversible and progressive. The key is understanding that this timeline has a start and end point, suggesting a natural progression. Linear timelines tend to be objective and present outside human perceptions and experiences (Thompson, 2023). Alternatively, cyclical timelines, used mainly in Eastern cultures, involve an understanding of time as a repetition of patterns and events that suggest

interconnection between time periods and events (Thompson, 2023). Linear time has been used as a measurement tool for physical events; however, cyclical time and its processes are used to characterize life events such as heartbeat, respiration, etc. While such cyclical structure accounts for bodily time, it also operates to account for bodily memory, for instance, the muscle memory of an individual, like playing a piano or typing (Fuchs, 2018). Despite this, the linear timeline has been established in Western societies for centuries, often in tension with a cyclical perspective, thus creating conflict for individuals and societal structures (Fuchs, 2018). I apply this idea by arguing that fashion and its artifacts have been defined by their bodily value (the corporeal and the so-called “second skin” that is fashion) and that despite this, museums and academia try to place fashion’s history within a linear perspective and negate personal approaches to clothing as well as the memorial element found in clothing as evidence of the past. For example, I addressed the use of memory practices in dress history in chapter one (Pastoureau 2020; Almond, 2021). Current theory tends towards the use of several event sequences to create timelines. I contend that history’s capacity for storytelling should offer a more adaptive timeline to engage with multiple narrative points, as it merits a fuller timeline that moves away from the narrow analysis that linear time allows (Brehmer, 2017). I would suggest this can include a variety of scholarly formats, such as embodied practices for museum and cultural heritage visitors like the Textile Museum of Canada’s “Textile Learning Hub” (TMC, 2024), in which the public is allowed to practice past methods like weaving; the use of reconstructions and its processes introduced within fashion displays; and a return to object-based analysis of the fashion artifact in thematic displays to offer a level of nuance between our interests and the interests of the past.

Historicism as an analytical approach emerged in the mid to late 18th century to account for history, not as a social science or process, but as a hard science legitimated like the natural sciences with its own goals and methodology (Beiser 2021; Žižek 2010; Kroner, 1946). However, these methods and goals were not streamlined and were often disputed among scholars, and they are arguably still under dispute today (Beiser, 2021). While some define historicism through laws of history, others clarify it as a way of understanding historical events and peoples individually (Beiser, 2021). As current thought comprehends it, historicism is the attempt to historicize the world as a product of history. These divisions of historicism have come to be inferred as empirical and speculative: the first is an attempt to recreate the methodology of the natural sciences based on objectivity, whereas the second attempts a philosophy of historic knowledge that already exists within history (Kroner, 1946). Given this, I argue that historic reproductions tend towards a historicism that lies within a speculative approach. For example, a reconstructionist will attempt to recreate based on notions of objectivity in their specific dress sample, but their re-creation goals tend to be an expansion of historical knowledge and an attempt at the embodied practice of making in the past (Tulle 2015; Horsley 2014). Under historicism, discourse is evaluated not on an inherent truth value but within a socio-political status with a holistic wisdom considered more progressive than mechanical recording. This relativist approach to history relies on preconceived ideas of human knowledge and its realities (Žižek, 2010). While the process of historicism versus history as a theoretical approach is still contested, it helps explain where historic cataloging within the museum space has conflicted with such ideas of time and historic understanding within historicism as a philosophy. Fashion events or exhibitions tend to rely on objective historicism, in an attempt to present a historic event without bringing in present subjectivity or bias. Examples include thematic displays of fashion

that explore big picture concepts of past fashion movements, such as Aestheticism, by placing objects in line with the philosophy rather than speculating on the individual object's intent. This is in opposition to the speculative nature of dress artifacts, which have personal histories tied to the sociopolitical nature of the artifact. I use both objective and speculative historicism as an attempt to join the two fields of thought to legitimate the practice of historic reproduction, as well as to refine fashion history's attempt to recreate ideas of the past through personal and collective approaches. By this, I mean there could still be value in presenting big picture and thematic analyses of fashion artifacts (such as feminism in 19th-century dress). However, the subjective approach would consider different artifacts and intentions within the sociopolitical landscape of its time, i.e., how this particular dress conforms to traditions of femininity and why. This approach accounts not only for the objects of artistic value but also addresses some of the objects absent from most archives; further, by addressing both objective and speculative historicism, reconstructions can bridge the divide between past and present ideas of historic embodiment and the personal tied to these biases.

Given this tension between the objective and subjective approaches in historicism, I argue that an understanding of dress as a corporeal object problematizes its role within the museum space, as the latter attempts to bring the past to the present day as a lived entity without full consideration of the role of present bias and public memory in its understanding. By attempting to bridge both the past and present, the fashion object has worked as a time machine (Petrov, 2019) that has been understood as evidence of the past and its considerations. As Petrov clarifies:

The museal mind-set is one of self-conscious temporality—an awareness that the present is different from the past but that the past is not unrecognizable for this distance. Equally, it is often infused with a moral purpose—to learn the lessons of the past by applying them

to the present. In this way, the past is always seen through a filtered lens of today's needs.
(Petrov, 2019 p. 184)

However, by not acknowledging present cultural needs and values that shape the museum space, the fashion artifact has taken on a mythos that supports an idealized linear timeline of history. For example, many collections that show the changes to dress artifacts over a hundred-year timeline will refer to this as an “evolution” of fashion; in other words, invoking the linear timeline that suggests the individual and personal choices of the past have all led to what we wear today as supposedly the moral, physical, intellectual improvement on past choices or, if not always an improvement on the past, as part of a larger understanding of the past's novelties and its use to present fashion. A museum example would be the Victoria and Albert's “Costume Court,” established in 1913 and reconstructed in 1962, which showcased the evolution of English fashion (V&A 2024; Petrov 2019) or the Fashion Institute's database “The Fashion History Timeline” (FIT, 2024).

Issues of the linear timeline in cultural display have not been limited to the fashion object. As an example, in the philosophical novel *Ishmael* (1995), the student and master discuss the myth of humanity as supported by the basis of historical timekeeping. While this text does not address the fashion artifact, it considers the implications of cultural production as a verification tool for the present's purposes of its own cultural production, and in so doing, it highlights the issues of creating a conclusion about the past and its systems through our current biases in cultural production. The following dialogue highlights what I see as the current questionable approach to cultural cataloging in fashion studies:

They were looking at the evidence of their own history.

Exactly. They were looking at a half of one percent of the evidence, taken from a single culture. Not a reasonable sample on which to base such a sweeping conclusion. (Quinn, 2017, p. 88)

This dialogue highlights a bias towards the past that continues to be reproduced and perpetrated in current historical cataloging (Cobb et al. 2020; Barbieri & Pantouvaki 2014; Lilley 1964). I want to point out that this kind of cataloging takes artifacts as evidence of a whole, rather than as part of a history, and ignores the individual and communal realities of people within subcultures related to larger cultural milieus. By misconstruing and highlighting only certain aspects of historic fashion, the artifact has become a mythical art object that often ignores past realities like poverty, one that suppresses the potential for different readings or reconsiderations of the past and its timelines. In this chapter, I argue that the use of reconstructions, when reordered through a more standardized framework, will challenge such mythologized perceptions through personal approaches to cloth that deconstruct a collective understanding of the past and allow for presentations of different bodies. Such bodies would ideally encompass questions of poverty and race, including non-idealized bodies, that must move the fashion object away from art towards lived realities. This approach to the fashion artifact does not guarantee such inclusions. However, I argue that reconstructions have at least the potential for rereading fashion histories if the community accepts designs that consider older bodies, plus-sized bodies, disabled bodies, and bodies of different cultures among those who want to take part in reconstruction practice but who currently feel limited by the industries that reconstructions operate within.

I shift my argument now to the question of the “original” in artifact history to highlight one of the key issues reconstructions have within fashion scholarship, which is the tendency to be devalued as a copy and as inauthentic because the garment did not exist within the time it

references. The ideal of the original and the authentic is part of a bias that stems from a notion of idealized time that museum theory continues to evaluate the fashion object within. The idea of the “original” (something that exists as the first of its kind) complicates our understanding of fashion artifacts and their purposes. Clothing is designed as a functional object meant to encase the body; however, within the museum space, its functionality is transformed into that of an object of art. An object of art operates in part in the realm of ornamentation and relative rarity rather than function. When fashion is presented as art and has an art aura, this changes its use from that of everyday object to one of curiosity. For example, clothes classified as vintage (typically 1920-1980) are not considered art objects or original artifacts because they are still relatively familiar and function within the present through public memory (McColl et al., 2013). The object’s purpose changes with its rarity, becoming something more closely related to hypothetical use rather than as part of current cultural understanding. We can consider the mythic quality that corsetry has acquired in current culture despite the continued use of bras and shapewear (Spanx, “bum boosters”, and control top underwear). These serve similar purposes, but while one is a functional object for everyday dressing the other has become an “original” artifact of bygone eras (Summers, 2001). The authentic or “original” validates a mythology of progression from the past, in that objects appear to offer material evidence of a precursor to current design, which is perceived as “improved”: for instance, the bra as an improved iteration of the corset. Despite this, little research has been undertaken to show how such objects have produced a mythos around fashion culture and its timelines perpetrated under current cultural values and understandings. I will explore this mythos as it relates to practices of reconstruction and through a critical analysis of studies that evaluate ideas of authenticity and of garments and fashion as art objects in museum and cultural heritage spaces.

A 2020 research study in Germany analysed the public's perceived valuing of an original or authentic artifact (Schwan & Dutz, 2020). I use this study to connect public perceptions of fashion's value and uncover where cataloging practices are biased in presenting fashion artifacts and excluding reconstructed or altered artifacts. The results showed that the public had greater admiration for an original object. At the same time, cultural history museums believed that authentic objects were better for stimulating fantasy and transporting the public to the exhibit's historical period (Schwan & Dutz, 2020). Authenticity complies with or fits the required regulations of museum industry standards and norms and is understood for its use in current social verification and to mark cultural belonging. An original refers to something that is the first of its kind or from a specific maker, as when we consider one of Da Vinci's famous paintings, as there can only be one original. Authenticity could still be bestowed on objects that have undergone some form of restoration, according to those surveyed in the study (Schwan & Dutz, 2020, p. 230). However, there was an understanding that there were limits to what a restoration could undergo before it became a reconstruction. A garment with a repair to a torn hem would be considered authentic. In contrast, a turn-of-the-century dress that had an alteration made to its design to fit the fashion standards of the 1930s would be considered a reconstruction. Within museum theory, the attitudes towards altered clothing have been debated as being both highly valuable and problematic (Claypool 2020; Coburn et al. 2010). Although recent scholarship has fought for alterations' value as evidence of reconstructive practices in the past, scholars still tend to frame these as devaluing the original (Baumgarten, 1998). However, in the 2020 study, no clear limits could be defined by the surveyed public about the point at which something would be considered reconstructed (Schwan & Dutz, 2020). Despite this, the public validates such altered objects of the past over most reconstructions and uses them to reinforce current bias toward what

a culture has been and should be. They do so by participating in and perpetuating the stories and themes presented to them by the museum and entertainment industries and by reinforcing ideas of authenticity through the market systems, i.e. the belief that an unaltered garment is worth more because it is closer to an industry's authenticity standards. According to the results of the study: "the visitors of all museum types agreed that museums should explicitly indicate that an object is a replica, which was stronger affirmed by visitors of cultural history museums than by visitors of science museums" (Schwan & Dutz, 2020, p. 230). Reproductions that are replicas of objects of the past, for example, are deemed more authentic than a reconstruction based on a new design idea. The former reinforces a current understanding of fashion cultures of the past, while the latter may challenge this understanding by considering lesser-known designs or designs not present in current cataloging practice. The Schwan and Dutz survey suggests the public would consider something more authentic, despite its status as a replica, if it expands upon the original artifact and exhibition themes (2020). As the researchers clarified: "The results also suggest that the overarching exhibit theme remains a priority for visitors, resulting in an acceptance of both replicas or historical artifacts that have been modified for conservation or operational value" (Schwan & Dutz, 2020 p. 237). This belief offers some potential for demystifying fashion history and its artifacts because it suggests we can challenge public perceptions of the past and its artifacts through a standardizing and validation of reconstruction practice within cultural industries. If reconstructions are validated in the museum space through adherence to a museum's thematic requirements for exhibition, this suggests that attitudes towards artifacts could evolve with a reframing of academia and museum practice.

I want to shift the argument again to discuss the community of reconstruction in response to this potential reframing of museum practices and the evaluation of authentic versus

inauthentic dress artifacts. I will argue that the embodied practice of reconstruction allows for a reevaluation of fashion cataloging that would attempt to support alternative approaches to authentic time through its cyclical approach to dress and its practices as opposed to the linear value of dress that we see performed in ideas of the “original”. The reproduction community itself is a broad collective of historic costumers who are invested both in reinterpreting history and in living historical concepts through the practice of making and remaking historically inspired garments. The reproduction community works to demystify the fashion artifact by moving away from concepts of the artifact as an art object, to one with functional uses. Further, they use reproductions to challenge ideas of the past’s linear timelines and traditional narratives. Reconstructionists and their communities, I would argue, have a basis in experiential learning which can serve as a foundation for a new methodology (Davidson, 2019). The experiential process of making connects practices of the past to present purposes; understanding the construction work of something like the boning in corsetry offers the researcher insight into the making practices of historical dressmakers and highlights where the process of production overlaps both past and present. Further, in performing such a makers’ process for a present body, the reconstructionist considers the subjective value of makers of past artifacts as it relates to their own (for example, where did the maker have to make concessions and what kind of allowances would women of the past have to make in their own sewing?). This knowledge is produced in part by the individual reconstructionist’s reproduction of artifacts of the past but also by their performance of ideas of the past. What performative history allows, according to DeGroot, is an entry into the past from a contemporary perspective; one that produces an idea of the past while also creating a relationship for the public to use to mediate and translate past perspectives (DeGroot, 2011). Performativity occurs not just in reconstruction but also in the practice of

heritage itself, through a negotiation of the social values of the past through a production that bridges the gap between time periods towards one of present identity. The heritage site itself performs an idea of the past (DeGroot, 2011). For example, Historic Williamsburg exists as a living museum but also acts as a large-scale social experiment in colonial American town life. The cobbled streets, the trade shops (blacksmiths, tannery, etc.), the gas lights, and horse-drawn carts all allow the visitors to suspend their own timeline to live within the colonial period (Colonial Williamsburg, 2024). In Canada, Kings Landing Historical Settlement is another example in which the site performs Nineteenth-century town living with original logging mills and dirt-packed roads, which allow visitors to imagine East Coast living in the late 1800s (Kings Landing, 2024). Therefore, performativity in history is not new, but the reframing of the artifact and its potential in reconstruction is. Reconstruction summons the corporeal register of the past for performativity that also considers the gaps found in the collective remembrance of artifacts to include the embodied practice of making.

Reconstruction is about performative memory that can produce an idea of collective agency (Arps, 2022; Davidson, 2019; DeGroot, 2011). Reconstruction's value lies within the practice of public memory which deconstructs the connotations of the past within a Western linear timeline. For historic recreations and their performances, it is about understanding and humanizing an idea of the past through a form of cultural recall (Arps, 2022). The living body, in reconstruction, functions as a medium to perform memory. Memory performance works by inserting the body as a medium into the operation of history and its various recordings (Almond 2021; Weber, 2004). Memory is understood to be enacted through the movement of the clothing when worn, which is what the performative aspect allows. The reconstructionist's role is that of both producer and creator of ideas of the past through performance (Arps, 2022). As a practice reconstruction has

the capability to offer a reconsideration of ideas of historicism but does so from a contemporary perspective that needs to be acknowledged. Without a concrete framework within which to produce a historically inspired design, reconstruction still could reinforce ideas of historicism that have been supported through traditional Westernized timelines for the past century. By reinforcing the traditional timeline, the reconstruction could still work within the aestheticizing and mythification of the past and our ancestors.

The problem with reproduction practice as it is currently framed within fashion theory, I argue, is that it exists as an illusionary aesthetic rather than as a challenge to current scholarship or as a method to alternatively catalog cultural practice. Film and theatre are not the only spaces that work to aestheticize the past because this is what audiences tend to enjoy watching. Museum exhibits, books, and archives also tend to prize what is unique and interesting rather than offering a more complete version of history. The community of reconstructionists works from a frame of reference that is part of this aestheticizing tradition. Reconstructions are made typically with the knowledge and use of current archival practices that prioritize the expensive and the novel in clothing items. Fashion exhibitions often highlight designers from a particular era including the National Gallery of Victoria's "Alexander McQueen: Mind Mythos, Muse" (AGV, 2023), the numerous Dior exhibits on tour and at La Galerie Dior (2023), or examples of dress from specific social movements, like artistic dress worn by famous artists of a period, for example, The MET's "Women Dressing Women (MET, 2024). Reconstructionists will frequently use these exhibits as the basis for their designs. As referenced in my survey of reconstructionists that will follow this chapter, exhibitions, photography, and archive illustrations tend to provide the basis of a reconstruction project. Rather than challenge these collection ideals, makers continue to want to produce something aesthetically pleasing or interesting and something that will sell well

within the public sphere. Reconstructionists within my survey tended to develop a more marketable design in their own projects; a consideration of designs often came after a framework was established for the event and the garment's wearer (Samulski, 2023). As seen in my interview results, client interest is driven by the desire for something that will look appealing for their own body and for photography. As one reconstructionist suggested: "My work is very client specific. I love exploring different dress adaptations, but ultimately, I make something they will like and feel beautiful wearing. It must photograph well and be comfortable for the client (L.L, 2023). The reconstructionist must meet their client's needs and the demands of the industry before attempting something that challenges these aesthetically driven design biases.

One way to reframe the practice of reconstruction, which is important for demystifying historic dress collection bias, is to consider the role of intergenerational knowledge in providing authenticity to cultural practice. Intergenerational knowledge transfer in dress design may be key to reframing museum cataloging attempts and streamlining the reconstructionist community's approach to historicism. This could contribute to a way of seeing historic traditions transcend timelines and permit the practice of making dress to exist beyond its initial production, where present ideas can meet embodied practices of the past. The use of intergenerational knowledge is a way to legitimate present dress practices' attempts at the past, as its inclusion ensures a continuation of ideas and production from one generation to the next, rather than considering design as being isolated within each cultural period. An understanding of what this intergenerational knowledge transfer does and how reconstructions are part of this tradition (e.g. the use of intergenerational practices like hand embroidery in a reconstruction project) would allow for a reconsideration of what "counts" within ideas of historic dress in relation to an "original." The UNESCO foundation posits as one of their key mandates the safeguarding of

intergenerational knowledge as a practice, particularly in preserving Indigenous languages and culture (UNESCO, 2023). While this is primarily applied only to Indigenous traditions such as storytelling practices that preserve language, it can be reinscribed in other cultural practices, in particular textile practices and practices of reconstruction. For example, McInnis and Medvedev (2024) explore the value of intergenerational knowledge within the fashion industry workforce to support fashion creativity processes via mentorship between multiple generations, whereas scholar Kestler explores the relationship of intergenerational knowledge as it impacts fashion influences between mothers and daughters (Kestler, 2009). Finally, from a technological perspective, Murphy contends that intergenerational knowledge is useful in creating engagement for community-based projects in heritage spaces (Murphy, 2012). While none of these examples explores the role of this transfer within reconstruction practices, they do suggest that there is value in this transfer within the textile arts. The UNESCO foundation argues that intergenerational knowledge is a practice both dynamic and living; however, if the previous generation is reticent to exchange their knowledge it is in danger of disappearing or being misappropriated (UNESCO, 2023). Intergenerational knowledge exchange is also a useful concept in fashion and historic fashion systems. It can include the teaching of past textile trades such as embroidery and hand stitching (Davidson, 2019; Entwistle, 2000). Engaging with these processes' reconstructions has the potential to legitimize their place within cultural theory and cataloging practices because they are providing a ritual of making rooted within making processes of the past. This situates reconstruction practice not just as a process of recreation but also as one that preserves previous generations' textile arts.

What I want to argue is that a reconsideration of intergenerational knowledge as part of current cultural collective practices should include the practice of reconstruction. However,

attempting to produce a textile reconstruction that includes intergenerational knowledge is not easily defined or achieved. Intergenerational knowledge, according to UNESCO (2023) and McInnis and Medvedev (2024), tends to be both exclusive and selective to a particular culture or family line that may resist sharing an intergenerational practice with outsiders. Further, very little is recorded for definition and such transfer of textile knowledge tends to be taught as a domestic practice passed down a female line. As a result, it is often discounted by museum theory and cultural theory as being less legitimate than other forms of knowledge transfer. Thus, in the past, it hasn't benefited from physical recordings or transcriptions, such as within history books or as part of a curation practice (Cortellesi et al, 2018). Trommsdorff's analyses of intergenerational relations as part of cultural transmission suggest that cultural production falls into two categories of transmission. The first involves persistent absolute reproduction, and the second involves selective transmission. In other words, the textile practice can be intended as a transmission of knowledge or function as the unintended results of a practice or event that results in cultural transfer (Trommsdorf, 2012). Intergenerational knowledge of historic fashion considers these transfers as similar to a practice passed down from a (grand)parent to a child (such as embroidery), which is an example of persistent transfer, versus the cultural knowledge gained from taking part in a practice, like reenactments, which is selective transfer. According to Cortellesi et al. (2018) and Trommadorff (2012), both engage with intergenerational knowledge but in very different ways. The first is a specific practice passed along with the intent of teaching a familial skill set. The second represents unintended knowledge gained from engaging with a like-minded community, like learning lacing at a Renaissance fair. Reconstructionist practice in historic design principles is a process that lends itself to the principles of authenticity outlined in museum practice. In approaching these practices in terms of intergenerational knowledge

transfer, reconstructionists will differentiate their designs from historic costuming. This distinction between forms of costume production is important for the purposes of legitimating the practice of reconstruction for the museum and academic space. Reconstruction can be used as a research tool and embodied practice that advances an idea of historic cultural production and values. A costume does not have to engage with any past production or process of the past. It can carry an idea of “pastness” to be considered a historic costume (for example, in Renaissance Fair garments). The garment does not necessarily exhibit the same qualities of current dress, by which I mean contemporary fashion, but neither is it an example of a specific historic period. The costume can be an amalgamation of several periods of dress as long as it represents the “past,” such as the corsetry of the medieval period paired with the bustle skirt of the 1870s, for example.

To challenge current museum and academic cataloging attempts as well as to reinforce the potential of historic reconstructions, I argue for a reconsideration of the practice of reconstruction that would include focused designs: ones that answer a specific research question or explore a specific design principle i.e. beetle wing embroidery in the 19th century. These in turn might reframe overlooked histories, as well as attempt to capture the everyday aspects of dressing which includes items often discounted from the archives. I will also look at where the practice of reconstruction has emerged, how the community engages within its subcultures, and where consensus within the community has supported its practice and has fallen short in challenging the dominant narratives of historicism. In doing so, I hope to highlight how the practice of reconstruction has the potential to advance the practice of fashion history towards being more diverse, engaging, and accessible. I want to challenge reconstruction to include ideas of intergenerational knowledge while considering examples of dress that exist outside of the aestheticizing tradition.

Part One: A Dinner Reception Dress and A Reconstructionist's Attempt at Gilded Age Dress Adaptions

The Goals of My Gilded Age Dinner Reception Dress Reconstruction Project

I address my reconstruction project of a Gilded Age dinner reception dress now as a tool for evaluating the embodied practice of historical dress-making and to consider the values and limitations of the reconstruction practice as it relates to fashion cataloging and historic time. The role of a reconstructionist is to make and display a garment of historic value (Mearns 2020; Davidson 2019; Ribeiro 1998). However, how one approaches one's own reconstruction project will differ substantially, depending on the rules of the organization the reconstructionist works within, the overall purpose of the reconstruction, and the audience for which the garment is being designed. For my project, I designed and sewed a Gilded Age dinner and reception dress. Why a garment study is important for my argument is that it allows me to engage in the embodied value of reconstruction firsthand; further, the garment serves as an experimental process by which I can evaluate the personal approach to the fashion object and the larger social milieu that influences its design. By examining its construction process, I will demonstrate that my dinner and reception dress was designed to capture the personal and subjective quality of garments and their making. In my previous chapters, I have outlined why the personal values in dress are key for understanding the value of dress artifacts in their corporeal nature. This is also important in permitting understanding of dressing ideals that demystify the past's culture of dressing through a re-evaluation of cataloging practices which should in fact consider the use of reconstruction. My reconstruction example exemplifies the uniqueness of each reconstructed garment by considering its place within the practice of artifact collection as well as its countering of the biases that arise in its construction rooted in the present cultural memory of the Gilded Age.

What this practice reveals are the challenges to reconstructions in terms of balancing ideas of historic authenticity while still personalizing the garment and its uses, which in turn counters the idea of fashion as an art object, moving it towards something more accessible and livelier for our present culture. Within museum practice there has been an active interest in vivifying the museum space, as I outlined in chapter one; this vivification of practice is part of fashion theory's attempts to democratize the exhibition space and engage with the corporeal conditions of dress, which make the past contemporary to the museum space (Davies 2020; Wurst, 2003; Davis 1995). What my own design explores, and I hope to offer, is a reconsideration of the past's dressing ideals that combines the ideals of the designer with designs from the period. Further, by highlighting the importance of performing memory in demystifying ideas of the past and its cultural production, my reconstruction attempts to reconsider its value as part of an embodied tradition rather than as a faithful copy of historic dress. By recreating garments for a modern body, I also intend to present a reconsideration of historicism that engages with ideas of accessibility, class, and race, which current collection archives have struggled to express in display due to limitations in surviving examples of dress in the archives (Calia 2021; Claypool 2020; Naumova 2015). While my reconstruction attempts to deconstruct present issues with historicism, the design still exists within many of the aesthetic biases that most reconstructionists rely on. However, by acknowledging its place within reconstruction bias, I intend to highlight the conditions of reconstruction practice, including limitations created by historic fashion industries (including the museum space, the high fashion industry and the reconstructionist market) and by the changing conditions of the current maker's market since the nineteenth century (such as changes in fabric and sewing technologies) to address how the reconstructionist community might develop a standardized practice and a unified theoretical framework.

For my dinner reception dress reconstruction, I based the preliminary drafts for its design on a set of beaded epaulets from the turn of the twentieth century⁵⁵. I sourced these epaulets from an antique market outside Cobourg, Ontario, from a booth that had a collection of vintage accessories (primarily jewelry and buckles). At the time of their purchase, I had no intended purpose for them other than finding them aesthetically pleasing, and the seller was willing to part with them for well below market value. The utilization of these beaded epaulets is what informed the basis of the rest of the dress's design, including colour schemes, decorative elements, and the materiality of the garment. I started with the epaulets from a sentimental standpoint, as these were the first antique clothing accessory added to my collection, and because in wanting to capture the adaptive nature of the dress through my project, I thought that a pair of detachable shoulder pieces spoke to the significance of accessories in changing a garment's formality and social intent in Gilded Age dress practice. These epaulets are typically found on a more formal piece, which informed the background of the person I imagined would wear this type of dress: in this case, someone of the upper-middle class. While the project attempted to approach historic design, it also endeavored to marry modern technologies and materiality with an idea of dress constructions of the past. Rather than a traditional research-creation project, this reconstruction acted as a medium for ideas around the personal in reproduction dress practice. I use it to examine how the contemporary consideration of the personal would impact the idea of historical authenticity in dress history. I will approach these considerations by outlining how other reconstructionists consider questions of authenticity in design and where my design fits within those definitions. I will determine where intergenerational practices have been used and performed within the making process and how that might impact my processes in relation to past

⁵⁵ See Appendix C, Figure 3.1 "Beaded Epaulettes."

making. Finally, I will evaluate the embodied practice's conditions related to making, wearing, and performing in the gown and how these may be used to evaluate these processes historically.

A key part of the dress design and in considering questions of authenticity was accounting for the Gilded Age and past dressmakers' approaches to adaptable dressing. Adaptable dressing is defined as the inclusion of design elements in a garment that allows it to be interchangeable with other items from the person's wardrobe, such as an adjustable waistband or attachable sleeves. In late nineteenth-century examples, bodices are often interchangeable with skirts and will have decorative elements (like my garment's epaulets) that can be added or removed to dress the piece for certain occasions. This project was approached with two primary goals in mind. The first was to appear as historically accurate as possible. Historical accuracy, as a key consideration in the design, places the project within a reconstruction practice rather than a practice of historic cosplay. It was important to make this designation to understand the community's approaches to past dressmaker practices and the conditions for historicism set out by the academic circles within the community. By following the more regimented understanding of history through accurate historic elements, the project contends with issues of historic reconstruction as opposed to costuming. As part of this goal, the design approach had to consider interchangeable dress elements that would take the garment to different settings, both historically and contemporaneously. The second goal was for the garment to be personally pleasing, as a reconstructionist project will often contend with what the model feels comfortable wearing and what will display well for the purpose of the design. This was at the forefront of this project as well.

To attain the first mandate of the project and be historically accurate, the dress design had to include elements of the past. While this project is not a direct adaption of a historic garment,

such as a reproduction of a famous person's dress, or based on an archival garment at a museum, it did need to include historical elements from the time period to fulfill its mandate. An investigation of textile objects from my past exhibition as part of the Clarington Museum's textile archives was undertaken. The "Clarington Clothing" exhibit at the Clarington archives aligned with the type of garment examples this project attempted to recreate (Samulski, 2019). One of the museum displays featured undergarments and dress trimmings to show how Gilded Age women accessorized and adapted their dressing. An item of particular interest included in the display was a black jet-beaded jabot from the mid-1890s, originally included with a dinner reception dress that was no longer part of the collection (Clarington Museum and Archives, 2019). Unlike other jabot examples in the collection, this was a more formal evening piece that was attached to evening wear for modesty, depending on the event and time of day.

The tradition of the jabot, plastrons, and fichus in evening dress wear was one important consideration in deciding how to attempt adaption and accuracy in the reconstruction design and was fulfilled by the inclusion of trimming and embellishment from the 1890s time period. The epaulets that inspired the start of the design were one such element, but the modesty collar influenced by the jabots was something I would have to reproduce based on modern size restrictions.⁵⁶ A rose embroidered collar from the late 1890s, along with a series of trim pieces dating from the 1880s to early 1900s, was purchased to help fulfill the goal of historic accuracy and dress adaption.⁵⁷ These pieces were purchased from the same collection as items for the case studies in Chapter Two. The source collection was based in Wisconsin and featured hundreds of items covering a 170-year period. The collar was still attached to a mounting with a signature

⁵⁶ As a plus size model the original collar had to be adapted to include an adjustable band for a larger head and neck width than the original accounted for.

⁵⁷ See Appendix C, Figure 3.2 and 3.3 "Victorian Dress Trims."

and date on the back. The trim pieces, like the clothing examples purchased, were compared to examples within both the CSA guide *Clothing and Textile Collections in the United States* (Queen & Berger, 2006), and the collectors' book *Victorian and Edwardian Fashions for Women 1840-1919* (Harris, 2002), to determine approximate dates of production. The collar had evidence of being attached to some form of bibbing in the past, as rotting and torn organza can be seen through the ribbon and boning inserts.⁵⁸ The use of these trim pieces determined the direction of the research for this gown and its purposes, and an investigation of the trims and where they might have been used informed the construction of the overall design.

Reconstruction practice considers the accuracy of its project history through the available source material. Often cited by dressmakers is portraiture, film, and personal and museum collections (Smith & Stannard, 2016). In my reconstruction project, I consulted a series of source materials, including paintings by Sargent⁵⁹, museum archival materials inclusive of the jabot, a collection of *La Mode Illustrée* fashion prints from the 1890s,⁶⁰ and finally, archival images through digital based museum archives and print publications from the era.⁶¹ An important consideration to be made, however, is that often, this source material, along with those cited by other dressmakers, works from a highly stylized version of historical events that promotes aesthetic looks over details that may have been culturally significant. The frame of references that I have cited may assume a genteel consideration in dress and my reproduction will be defined and reinforced through those standards (middle-class predominantly Caucasian versions of dressing). To attain accurate presentation in dress reproductions, Smith and Stannard's study

⁵⁸ See Appendix C, Figure 3.4 "Beaded Rose Embroidered Collar."

⁵⁹ See Appendix C, Figures 3.5 and 3.6 *James Singer Sargent's paintings*.

⁶⁰ See Appendix A, Figures 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10 "La Mode Illustre Prints."

⁶¹ See Appendix C, Figures 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13 "Dinner Reception Dress."

of a reconstructionist community suggests that there are generally three aspects for authenticity to be considered in a reconstruction project: accurate construction, methods of construction, and overall material accuracy (Smith & Stannard, 2016). However, in Smith and Stannard's interviews, the reconstructionists often argue that their reconstructions did not need all three aspects of authenticity for their designs to be considered an authentic dress project (Smith & Stannard, 2016). In my dress reproduction project, there are elements of all three forms of authenticity, but arguably, the garment doesn't fulfill any of these requirements fully, which in turn challenges the level of authenticity that this project can claim to account for. I attempted some methods of construction, but not all, as I didn't attempt to do my own boning for the bodice. I practiced certain methods of construction, like hand stitching, but I purchased machine-stitched embroidery to add some of the more decorative elements and to save time. Finally, the material construction of the garment contains mostly natural fibers and the inclusion of antique materials, but given budget constraints, I chose a modern satin blend for most of the skirt and bodice.

A disagreement over what counts as authentic is only one part of the complicated nature of historical dress as a timekeeper or a memorial or capsule of its original production period. As other researchers have suggested, the issues in defining accuracy are not limited to one dress industry but any industry that works in dress adaptation. Jablon-Roberts and Sanders suggest in their analysis of historic theatrical costume adaptations that there is no industry agreement on what level of accuracy historical costuming should attend to or account for. Additionally, they looked at theatrical productions at the highest level and did not address community theatres or traveling engagements that would further challenge a streamlined approach to reenactment (Jablon-Roberts & Sanders, 2019). Something that I had to contend with in attempting to produce a

historic dress was when and where modern adaptations could occur and deciding whether these adaptations would take away from the design and the idea of historical accuracy. My budget and skill level greatly impacted what was possible regarding historic authenticity. The fact that I didn't sew my own boning, draft my own pattern, or produce my fabric design meant that any outcomes of my finished gown were prescribed in part by what was available to me (patterns, materials, etc.) which means that only certain types of historical making were possible. Not all of the items I gathered for the design would be deemed "authentic."

Defining Authenticity and the Use of Reconstruction to Validate Dress Histories

Notions of authenticity and the "original," as I have previously outlined, contradict the public's perception of the value of historical collection processes. The reconstruction community's challenge in being accepted into historical theory and archival spaces is to create a clear definition of authentic historical making as opposed to creating historically inspired costuming. As noted earlier, Schwan, and Dutz argue that the public they surveyed would consider something as authentic (including reconstruction examples) if it was able to articulate its place within artifact collection and historical theory (Schwan and Dutz, 2020). Reconstruction has the potential to change perceptions of historical garment collections and reframe the timeline bias that the fashion artifact exists within, but only if the process can define its place within cultural theories' definitions of the "authentic."

In modeling a garment that attempts historical accuracy, the reconstruction design for my project had to account for what makes a garment a historical piece as opposed to a costume and

attend to how the reconstructionist community engages with the idea of historical timelines and authenticity. The general consensus among the larger community is that there is no way to attain full accuracy. To be given the status of an accurate construction is more about an honest attempt rather than a reality of the past. The process of intention, in this case, is more important than the material outcomes of the project. In my reconstruction project, my use of original textile trims and reliance on conforming to ideas of silhouette, colour, and pattern from the time is arguably enough to deem the project as somewhat authentic. My attempt to conform to ideas of the past designs that accommodate present realities, such as material access, is made up for in the level of historic knowledge behind the project. According to Smith's interviews (2021), reenactors often negotiate personal needs in a project, including their desires for the outcomes of a piece. This often means an attempt to highlight the choice of a particular design element or style over another. In my case, I emphasized the use of period-specific trim pieces and a garment that is adaptable with a switchable bodice.⁶² As a result, secondary materiality and foundational elements were less important to the overall design and to the idea of accuracy. A specific element, such as the use of an authentic dress material, is one way that the historic reconstruction market has tried to signify or offer a shortcut to authenticity.

Working as a hobby seamstress who had not attempted other historic reconstruction projects, my design was limited by skill level and timing (when the reconstruction needed to be completed to meet survey deadlines). Beyond the idea of a "focused" element of accuracy (like a historic portrait or a case study that a reconstruction attempts to replicate), we are further confined by the limitations of modern making, including material and intellectual access to certain design elements of the past, as well as to constraints of the industries within which the reconstruction

⁶² See Appendix C Figure 3.14 "Detachable Modesty Collar."

community works. Smith clarifies that skills, knowledge, and deadlines are a key part of negotiating needs versus desires in a reconstruction project (Smith, 2021). While my knowledge of historic costuming was not limited to my reconstruction project, access to a reconstructionist community was. A lack of access to community members to engage with had a bearing on how accurate the dinner reception piece could be. Working independently meant it was difficult to get direct feedback on construction and design, and therefore, third-party sources and visual aids were the main elements for evaluation. I didn't have access to the same resources as those within a membership-based community of reconstruction would have, so I did not have anyone directly address my design, nor did I have a way of approving the design as "authentic" other than comparing my reconstruction to other makers projects, who were willing to share their design process and limitations.

For this project's design, the methods followed to create authenticity were not focused on one industry or organization but adapted based on access to the industries. This meant a blend of touch points to consider from museum, film, and commercial spaces, each with their own idea of what counts for authenticity. Project deadlines also have an impact on the level of authenticity a project can attain. The timeline (in the business sense understood as deadlines) for this project was three months, and certain parts of the design had to be simplified to keep on track. Most of the foundational garments, such as corsetry, crinolines, and petticoats, were outsourced to meet the deadline. Making a historically accurate corset from the outset would cost several hundred dollars in materials and add a few weeks of construction.⁶³ This didn't work for this design's timeline, budget, or skill level, so purchases from other reconstructionists were made. As a result,

⁶³ Based on historically accurate pattern guides and available materiality it would add about 2 months and around 500.00 to produce a basic corset.

the project ended up being more collaborative, which has some bearing on how authentic the overall garment is or would count for in most historic dress industries. The solo designer or partnership on a project tends to be more highly valued by those working in reconstruction. My attempts to combine other pieces with the primary garment would be considered a limitation towards the overall quality of the reconstruction.

While skill as well as the constraints of a set deadline affected the outcome of this project, these are not the only ways to evaluate the effectiveness or accuracy of a design. The key elements to consider in a historic reconstruction design as addressed by the makers in Smith's survey include functional needs, expressive needs, aesthetic needs, and a piece that aligns with design principles (Smith, 2021). For functional needs, the primary purpose of any design is to ensure enough mobility for the wearer and a level of comfort that considers the role of the model, such as whether they will be dancing or performing a reenactment (Smith, 2021). While this project did not consider comfort a key tenet of design, it did still require some mobility considerations, such as the ability to climb stairs, and the ability to stretch or bend within a normal range of motion. As in other projects, the functional needs depend on if it is to be worn and the ways it will be worn. High motion, as in the case of reenactments (those with actors performing a range of motions beyond that of a model), require greater functionality.

Expressive needs are ones that consider the core ideas of the design, the values the creator wants to highlight, and the roles the model is expected to play (Smith, 2021). Expressive needs are key to the process of garment personalization, which allows the historical garment to be more accessible to the present wearer's needs and values. Further accounting for expressive concerns offers reconstructionists a way to consider the wearer's requirements that existed for designers historically, personifying the past and allowing a demystification of their design choices. In my

design project, that meant expressing the ways historic dresses were adapted for the time of day. One of the ways this versatility was attained involves designing means of dressing up or down a garment to suit different social occasions, such as a formal dinner or evening reception. Additionally, the dinner dress project had to present a certain classed being: in this case, it was to express a wearer with bourgeois middle-class values. This altered the design to a level of formality as well as a certain expectation around modesty (Harris, 2002). Both elements were factors in the design, which again impacted the authenticity of its construction and presented a particular dress narrative for public consumption and storytelling. I cannot guarantee that I have attained the ideals of class and modesty in my dress design. I have attempted to gain legitimacy through the approval of members of the reconstructionist community (during the making process, I addressed some of my design elements and ideas on the Costume Society of Americas community forum). However, these approvals continue to evade how I authenticate this narrative, as each museum and community member has a different idea on how to evaluate this mandate. As a reconstructionist, I can only work within the material sources I have access to and an idea of the past's dress cultures that are offered to me through both the museum and fashion industries. While offering a clear narrative in the construction is important, the personal decisions in the making process are often not fully addressed. Modern influences have a bearing on the presentation of timelines, just as cataloged authenticity of design has a bearing on Westernized linear timelines, as classified in historicist practice and historical fashion display. An investigation of key elements in a historic construction is important for understanding the choices of the makers and how that impacts historic storytelling.

The response to or inclusion of aesthetic needs, as outlined by Smith, requires a design that is pleasing to the model and its viewers as well as a garment that feels good to the wearer (Smith,

2021). What this entails for most designers is a consideration of what they would like to wear. To contend with these aesthetic needs means that designs should suit a specific age and body type, which was highlighted by the reconstructionists and their models in my interviews. For example, older designers tended to like making designs that older women would have worn historically. For my reconstruction project, a reliance on aesthetic value was a key motivation for my design. Colours and trims were chosen based on source material but were also considered through colour and design preferences I have previously held, and what I thought would look best for display purposes. Further, body type had a bearing on the design. While the garment is designed around a younger woman (I designed for myself, a woman in her mid-twenties), the design had to account for height (I am 5'7 and most historic patterns were for women 5'5 or shorter) and weight adjustments, including a larger bustline and longer hemline (I am considered plus size for most sewing patterns and the pattern guides sizing went up to a modern size 8 which I had to adjust for). My own aesthetic interests for this garment were shaped not only by colours and trims that I found personally pleasing but also guided by what I thought others might like to see and display. My aesthetic frame of reference was informed by what other reconstructionists have done in their own designs to look more universally pleasing. As part of this, I attempted to make the design appear more slimming on my frame and paid particular attention to colours and trims that would still be appealing by today's aesthetic standards.

Smith highlights design principles as another key element in historic reconstructions, which include line, form, and texture (Smith, 2021). Accounting for the basics (such as silhouette) of a history's design principles gives credence to the reconstructionist's design process. A large part of operating under principles of historic authenticity is ensuring that the practice is guided by some of the aesthetic ideals from the period that the design is emulating. A design is given more

value as an accurate piece if it can follow the basic design principles of a given era. For the designers in Smith and Stannard's study, this meant emulating an empire-shaped waist in their gowns, usually sourced with natural fibres and in lighter hues (Smith & Stannard, 2016). What these design principles suggest is that the outcomes for accuracy in a historic dress project can be superficial. If the gown looks like a piece from a given period based on the public's knowledge of a dress culture, then it counts as a thoughtful reconstruction. Consider the BBC's historic costuming department and its place in period television dramas, in that the broadcasting company is largely celebrated for its attention to period accuracy even though it adapts costumes to suit modern filming requirements and present tastes. The problem is that the basic silhouette can still fail to tell the full story of dress history. In my dinner dress reconstruction project, a Butterick dress pattern was the basis for the design.⁶⁴ While the pattern comes from a historic collection rather than a costume catalogue, it works from the basic assumptions of a turn-of-the-century dress rather than from an in-depth analysis of historic fashion. As the designer, I had to adapt the pattern to give it a more period appropriate hem and bustline.⁶⁵ However, the basis of the design is a silhouette that has become synonymous in the public memory as a typical 1890s dress. The dress's shape can count towards accuracy but the fact that I didn't have the skill to draft my own pattern would be a strike against full authenticity even though it follows the principles of period design.

⁶⁴ See Appendix C Figure 3.15 "Butterick Victorian Dress Pattern Front and Back."

⁶⁵ See Appendix C Figure 3.16 and 3.17 "Fabric Cutting and Pattern Adaption."

Public Memory in Reconstructions and Intergenerational Knowledge

The problem of public memory or remembrance is that memory is unequal across spaces and periods, gender, and age. We prize and collect what was used at the peak of someone's life, and as a public we focus on what was unusual and exciting historically and not on the everyday norms of a period (Hjemdahl, 2014; Ambry, 2013; Weber, 2010). As I have outlined previously, we have come to consider reproductions through an illusionary aesthetic of the past rooted within such public memorial biases that continue to reinforce ideas of the fashionably novel, ones that ignore the realities of most of a historic period's dress culture, including aged, imperfect bodies and working-class bodies. Our culture's understanding of the past is rooted in the narratives recorded in the history books. These narratives are ones that focus on times of turmoil, such as war, and tend to focus on the young, on physically fit, and well-off people and those who were active in framing these narratives. In general, the public prefers to watch and see something aesthetically pleasing, and we can consider dramas like *Downton Abbey* (Fellows, 2011), *The Paradise* (Gallager, 2012), or *The Gilded Age* (Fellows, 2022) as good examples of period dramas that focus on the wealthy or the avant-garde in dressing rather than addressing some of the other classed considerations of fashion and culture. While each of these programs does contain storylines that follow different class dynamics, they still do so from a more aesthetic perspective. For example, *Downton Abbey*'s downstairs characters are positioned in working-class occupation but are situated as the staff in one of the most affluent houses in the region, in contrast to the working classes of the city or even those who work within the village. The clothing and wages provided by the household show a simpler wardrobe styling but not one that offers the full reality of classed dress. I cite examples across media and within museum

cataloging to show that the aesthetic approach to fashion history is far-reaching across a multitude of disciplines.

The use of reconstructions within the film and theater industry works within an aestheticized ideal of the past. However, as I have offered, museums have also operated within an idealized collections process that has complicated reconstructionists' attempts to capture a more complete social history. The community's referents in dress continue to be defined under this aestheticizing tradition, which complicates a more nuanced idea of authenticity in past dress cultures. Traditionally, reconstructions will focus on upper-class dress or, if not upper-class, a garment that would be considered for a special occasion. In Smith and Stannard's study, the surveyed members produced dresses primarily for Regency dances, so that even if they were designing a gown for a lower-class woman, it would be based on her formal dress, not on something she worked in (Smith & Stanaard, 2016). In identifying class or race concerns in dress the focus of display will still have a bias towards an aesthetic value.

As part of this tradition, my reconstruction largely plays into this bias that I have argued we need to address as part of reconsidering a more comprehensive version of history. The garment's design does still attempt to be an aesthetic piece, and my frame of reference is primarily that of upper-middle-class dress. The final product is an example of an expensively produced reception dress and of a woman who had some security. The reconstruction, in this case, does play into the bias of aestheticism that I have been describing. As the maker, I still wanted to feel pleasing and have my design validated as conforming to an acceptable standard of historic beauty. While the dress reinforces this aestheticism, its conditions of production are augmented through an ideal of what counts as beautiful in the current market. Again, the reference materials for historic dress that I could access, the patterns I used, and the dress

examples available within the reconstructionist community were all reflective of this bias that we continue to reflect and are what ultimately led to the biases in my own reconstruction. What my project attempted to do, however, was to address the process of making and the experience of wearing a historic dress as part of a reconsideration of reconstructions embodied practice. What the final product contends with is its place within the reconstructionist market and as part of a tradition of bringing modern design and ideals to the past. Rather than approaching this design as something specific to a historic period, it encompasses the making and wearing of a garment as a way of connecting the body to a past through intergenerational knowledge. The dress project was put together using elements of my grandmother's old sewing kits and through the knowledge that my mother passed down to me. Working as a seamstress in the past, my mother taught me tools of the trade she had learned from the fashion industry of the previous generation. This represents knowledge transfer within a family cultural system, with a practice steeped in tradition validating my dress practice as a continuation of the trade knowledge of different generations, combining the different social milieus of each generation into the practice of making. Intergenerational knowledge transfer is key to furthering our understanding and preservation of the past.

The UNESCO Foundation's recent attempts to preserve not only the artifacts of a culture but also their practices of intergenerational knowledge transfer give a deeper meaning to the practice of reconstruction that is undertaken today. Reconstruction, as one of the ways in which to preserve a period's intergenerational skills, including beadwork and embroidery, challenges the museum's attempts at historic cataloging by including a more nuanced understanding of the past and incorporating cultural values outside of elite circles. My dress reconstruction attempts to consider such textile trades in its design to account for intergenerational knowledge. This

included an endeavor to bring in beaded embroidery and the use of hand stitching⁶⁶ found throughout the bodice and skirt, both of which harken to previous dress practices.⁶⁷ Moreover, it meant engaging with other members of dress communities and exchanging design approaches. While interacting within an intergenerational knowledge exchange it is hard to link textile practices to a specific period or generation, as each community and member will bring their own considerations and biases.

While intergenerational knowledge in reconstruction practice is key to validating the practice of the community, the attempt to standardize approaches or even define them has proven to be problematic. The access to different types of generational knowledge is complicated by the exclusivity of the practice. As I have previously clarified, intergenerational knowledge has its foundations in the domestic arts and so has very few records historically apart from word of mouth. In Trommsdorff's analysis of transmissions, she suggests three ways to consider the direction of transmission, including vertical transmission from one generation to the next, which can include the exchange of knowledge between parent and child. In my reconstruction project, this was accessed by having my mother teach me the skills required for pattern cutting and hand stitching on a more formal piece. Another example of knowledge transmission is oblique transmission, which is a more general transfer from one generation to the next. For my reconstruction project, this lay in a general knowledge exchange of sewing technologies, such as how to use a machine and pattern guide. Finally, horizontal transmission is one between peers (Trommsdorff, 2012), in which those of the same generation and similar backgrounds exchange a

⁶⁶ Hand stitching in this project was used to attach the beaded organza cut outs to the front of the bodice and skirt as well as to attach the sleeves and hem. The main stitch process was a back stitch and slip stitch ideal for bonding two fabrics together (Master Class 2024).

⁶⁷ See Appendix C Figures 2.18, 2.19, and 2.20 "Close up Details of Trims and Finishes on the Reception Dress."

personal skill set based on common interests. In the dress project, this was attained by engaging with fellow reconstructionists who have already attempted historic dress design and adapting some of their approaches.

The role of intergenerational knowledge in reconstruction is intrinsic to ideas of historic authenticity. The fashion world of haute couture claims to be one of the last industries to invest in fashion artisans and craftsmanship, including trades such as feather and flower molders, as well as pleater artisans. The company Lemaire Plumassier in France boasts of using heritage cutting and embossing tools to ensure the safekeeping of the original form of craftsmanship (Cenac & Delhomme, 2019). Design houses and their partners argue for the importance of keeping heritage practices in their development of the new. The Atelier Montex, for example, is known for offering cutting-edge designs but does so using an embroidery technique, Cornely, developed from a machine invented by Emile Cornely in 1865 (Cenac & Delhomme, 2019). These companies and textile trades suggest that true craftsmanship comes from intergenerational knowledge. Many cite that they are the grandchild or great-grandchild of a tradesperson who passed this skill along, giving their practice a level of authenticity in design that cannot be replicated in something new (Cenac & Delhomme, 2019). Despite being an industry that grounds itself in its constant innovation and newness, haute couture relies on practices of the past to legitimize its purposes.

The industry of haute couture and high fashion is often kept separate from the realms of dress history and fashion in the museum space. However, their shared attitudes towards intergenerational knowledge and practice are how they provide authenticity in design, both in historical and contemporary contexts. These cross-industry attitudes approach the idea of the public memory and its understanding of history and the historical in interesting ways. Historic

reconstructionists, like the large design houses, give credence to practices that are grounded in heritage and the idea that through heritage-based creating via intergenerational knowledge, we can replicate past fashion moments. Any modern approach and attitudes, however, will always affect what the garments can provide. For example, the designer and fashion house Chanel is known for being playful in its balance of the authentic and inauthentic in design, such as the use of costume jewelry juxtaposed with more expensive elements or finer pieces. While a high-end brand suggesting heritage is a key element to its design mandate, Chanel mixes elements of the old and new and blurs the distinction in terms of what classifies authenticity.

The use of reconstructions should not be to reproduce the past; rather, it is to produce interpretations of the past. The French firm Causse is a glove artisan shop that has been in business since 1892, and while it works in partnership with couturier design houses, the company has also been given the distinction as a “site of cultural heritage” by UNESCO. This is a designation given by UNESCO to a company for safeguarding a cultural heritage practice; in Causse’s case, for furthering traditional glove-making practices for future generations (Cenac & Delhomme, 2019). While the company works within a century-old tradition of making, artisans are also employed to create innovations for the needs and desires of the current society. Balancing the needs of the present with an idea of the past, companies like Causse assert that to attain authenticity in fashion does not equate to producing only from the past but rather acknowledges past traditions used for today’s interpretations. While the use of intergenerational knowledge in a reconstruction offers a connection to the past, it arguably does not provide a perfect link to the people or objects of the past. If authenticity is more about an attempt to reproduce a cultural tradition, one has to consider what the value of a reconstruction is. Museums and heritage centers have some access to dress artifacts from the past but continue to produce

reproduction garments. This suggests that the value of reproduction is not solely for the use of copying but rather lies in its interpretive value and use by bodies of the present.

The Embodied Turn and the Value of Reconstructions as a Practice

The process through which fashion is tied to the body responds to an embodied nostalgia and the personal memories of the viewer or wearer, and as a result, it doesn't factor in a rational critical distance initially (Petrov, 2019). In suggesting that dress is a corporeal object, fashion theory attempts to posit that signs of wear transmit the corporeality of the past to the present day. A living model, whether dressed in a reconstruction or an actual period piece, acts as an illusionary idea of a person of the past, as people of the past will never be available to enter contemporary space. The fashion object acts primarily as a fantasy and time machine to the present's conception of the past (Petrov, 2019). Historic dress culture works for the present cultural system by applying the present to the past. We use these dress pieces to verify our own purposes, so any historic article is placed in a lens of today's needs (Petrov, 2019). While this opens the museum and other cultural spaces to pertinent conversations, we risk presenting the artifact as evidence of past considerations rather than as something influenced by our present cultural needs and values.

As part of this embodied nostalgia, fashion history, and reconstructions in particular, have been criticized for their interpretive value within the material turn. It was in the emergence of new semiotic readings that the material turn was first considered and this 'turn' in cultural thought allowed for a new consideration of fashion as text, one in which agency can take place

through objects. More simply, it offered the idea that these objects have their own unique agency outside of the traditional cultural human context (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016, pp. 8-10). As objects made to be worn, garment history goes beyond the relationship of body to object and contends with the corporeal value of dress and its connections to both past and present.

Davidson, a fashion theorist and reconstructionist, proposes a new theoretical approach specific to the practice of fashion that she calls the “embodied turn.” According to Davidson, the embodied turn is the material turn’s acceptance of the bodily experience of doing history, through re-enactment and reconstruction (Davidson, 2019). As part of the embodied turn the process of making and remaking operates collaboratively between the curator and conservator, which allows for knowledge transfer that is key to the practice of history. This practice of history is understood as one formed in Western tradition that accounts for the objects of the past by their reproducibility and their mythmaking for the present, including that of reproductions (Glassie, 1994). The practice of embodiment, however, has no clear theorization of what a reconstruction methodology should be. The designer, be they institutionally or individually driven, works through their own methods according to the perceived requirements of a given design (Davidson, 2019). Despite not operating with a streamlined methodology, the embodied turn accounts for a more personally driven research practice suited to the study of reconstructions.

The practice of making within the embodied turn involves looking at the qualifiable elements rather than the quantifiable ones (Davidson, 2019). Instead of a reconstruction operating as a specific period-accurate sample of dress, the practice should be led by the interpretive experience of the making and wearing of a garment based on past practices. In my project, the reconstruction of the dinner dress’s connection to the past occurred primarily through the practice of sewing and drafting, including the process of hand stitching and embroidery. While

the dress itself is made to look as if from a particular period, it was less important to perfect a particular design from the 1890s than to reproduce some of the practices from that period with both past and present tastes in mind, such as the design and use of adaptable dress elements like the epaulets and pick-up train. As Davidson argues, the attempt to reproduce a garment perfectly isn't useful to the embodied turn; rather, every object should be seen as unique. She uses the example of a pelisse said to have been worn by Jane Austen that has had two main variations produced by reconstructionists. The differences in these designs derive from the environment in which they were produced (Davidson, 2019). In these designs, environmental factors included the various industry standards involved in fashion or garment production (such as university requirements, which could include thematic interests of the program the university runs, its funding, and deadlines for applications or research projects) and regional access to types of materials, which changed the outcome of the two productions, despite having similar goals in mind (Davidson, 2019). While the question of accuracy remains, by approaching these items as unique objects, the process of producing and the environmental factors of making and living in these garments is highlighted.

As there is no agreed-upon methodology for reconstructions, the understanding is that historical re-enactors conduct amateur experiments and draw on experiential knowledge of their own (Entwistle, 2000). This knowledge is produced in part by the act of reproducing but also by performing. In Gapp's article on the relationship between historical accuracy and reproductions, he analyzes the role of military re-enactors as living monuments. He clarifies that it is through the performative aspects of reconstruction that the community produces ideas of historical authenticity (Gapps, 2009). The primary goal of museums and cultural centers is to produce a clear and accurate representations of the reality of the past. Gapp suggests that historic nostalgia,

while more commemorative than accurate, still has a key part to play in collective remembrance of shared events (Gapps, 2009). Another case for the role of public memory within our understanding of history is that, while not always true, it provides the clearest link to the past and its events. There is a self-reflective attention to historic accuracy, for unlike heritage sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, objects are open-ended in their historical context, as they can exist and be used beyond the time in which they were produced (Gapps, 2009). Here, Gapps is referring to the fact that when attending a historic site like colonial Williamsburg, the visitor enters a specific region and time and that objects and environments are set to a specific story of early American history. However, an object from that period, like a garment, can be reconsidered in a variety of ways due to its transferability. A historic dress can be read outside of the story of the colonial site and connected to various other cultural dress histories, dependent on its subsequent relocation and reframing. While Gapps primary case is for reenactors, he clarifies that such production of the past in the present allows for a more flexible and personal approach to historic timelines and approaches for analysis in dress reproduction.

Applying the need for a personal approach to historic timelines that account for self-reflexivity meant that at the forefront of my reconstruction project was an attempt at embodying dress practices of the late nineteenth century. For the dinner reception dress, the purpose of the design was to produce an idea of late nineteenth-century dressmaking by considering the ways that women in the past prepared their dresses to suit the times of the day. While the garment is not a perfect example of adaptable dressing from the 1890s it was, for the designer, an attempt to capture some of the ways women repurposed their wardrobes to address the expanding expectations for types of dress while still maintaining budgets. The dress itself is aesthetically close to some of these historic reception dresses, but the materiality and skill required lends itself

to a more modern reproduction. Rather than being more concerned with material authenticity, the dress served as a challenge to this approach of creating adaptable evening wear. The connection as the designer was in the making of these adaptations and attempting some of the early sewing practices. As part of the embodied turn, understanding that embodiment is about actively taking part in practices of the past, the reconstruction served as a gateway to dressmaking, which connected present ideals of making to ideals of making in the past. The design process intended to delve into these practices and to experience some of the ways of making formalized pieces, such as the use of boning and embroidery.⁶⁸

What the experience of embodied making allowed me to know about the dressmaking of the past was the level of time and detail that goes into traditional production practices. I discovered that a certain amount of resourcefulness is required to make a garment adaptable to its social conditions (such as the reworking of seams and some of the detachable elements I attempted to create for the garment which would have to fit perfectly into the design). This differs from the contemporary dress-making skills I have used apart from reconstruction, in which I found a more flexible approach to garments that are both adjustable and more expendable than these examples of the past. This practice led to questions about what these types of garments would have cost and the time and labour required by the working class to produce examples like this reception gown for a lady's wardrobe. Further, the skill level that is required to make a piece a more successful iteration of past practices does limit some of the ways in which people can engage with reconstructionist practice for the present. I found my own lack of experience in things like hemstitching and pleating made the garment feel like a less successful practice of Gilded Age dressmaking than other reconstructionist examples from the community. The embodied practice

⁶⁸ See Appendix C Figures 3.18, 3.19 and 3.20, dress trim details and adaptive closures.

of making also led to a certain level of awareness of how foundational garments shape and transform the body. When making the garment, I paid careful attention to my measurements but neglected to fully consider how the foundational garments (such as the corset, petticoat, and bustle pad) would change the way my body was positioned within the dress. When I finally wore the dress together with these, I found a need for adjustments to my back, shoulder, and bustline because of the way these garments shifted both my measurements and the ways in which I could move within the piece.

Beyond making a period garment, the project also attempted the embodied turn through the wearing and experience of the dress in movement. Most reproductionists have some experience in attending events in their historically inspired garments. In England and the United States, there are many events centered around fancy dress balls. In Canada, while there are fewer opportunities for costumed reenactments, there are several hobbyist groups that host gatherings in Toronto. Since the pandemic, few groups have resumed events for historic reconstructions, but membership remains in larger cities (Jane Austen Dancing, 2020). For the reception dress, there was no such event in which to take part in a full re-enactment. However, the practice of wearing the boning and corsetry of the period formed a large part of understanding how wearing such garments felt for a woman at that time. One of the main aspects of embodiment was exploring the ways that corsetry modifies how a garment is worn and changes the ways in which the wearer can move.⁶⁹ As I mentioned previously, as a maker, these modifications meant a change to my measurements, but beyond the making practice, the experience of wearing these garments positioned my body differently than in contemporary types of clothing. I felt I had to put more thought and care into my movements by considering the weight of the gown and the reach of my

⁶⁹ See Appendix C Figures 3.21, 3.22, and 3.23, corsetry and shapewear.

limbs. The garment lends itself to a more formal type of movement and carriage, and I felt that in inhabiting this embodied practice of moving within the gown, I was called to be a more formal subject. In addition, the way in which my movement was restricted and enhanced drew some interesting perspectives on the class divide. I found the taking on and off design elements of the garment extremely difficult to do without assistance. Such formal gowns require someone to help one dress and undress, which offered me some perspective on who could wear this type of gown (in this case, someone with money for staff).

To take this example of experiential practice further, I partnered my reconstruction project with the historic site of Glanmore in Belleville, Ontario. Glanmore is a large family home that has been restored to its original architecture of the late 1880s (Glanmore, 2022). Wearing the dinner reception dress, I was taken through the main entertainment spaces and allowed to position my historically clothed body in various spaces and positions that offered a sense of how women might have moved through an evening event. The use of soft historic lighting, original furniture, and displays allowed for an air of authenticity for the dress project.⁷⁰ The thought that had to go into the way I sat upon certain types of seating and the way I had to account for the range of my skirts, both ascending and descending the various staircases, led to an awareness of the body that is not as present in contemporary clothing. In this way my bodily habitus was dwarfed by the clothing and how the latter shaped the performance of my body. However, it was also interesting to observe the manner the clothing both hid and corrected certain aspects of my shape and the way it performed. The dress construction hinted at some of the interesting ways that clothing historically dealt with imperfect bodies, such as the overweight or aging form. While moving through the space gave an idea of how a woman would have to navigate the space

⁷⁰ See Appendix C Figures 3.24, 3.25, 3.26, Photography at Glanmore Estates Reception rooms, 2022.

wearing these kinds of clothes, the practice is also steeped in nostalgia. Returning to Petrov's claims about the fantasy of the ghost in the museum space, the role of re-enactment and reconstruction is to produce an idea of time that is neither past nor present; it is a false sense of time and history (Petrov, 2019). While the embodied turn challenges the traditions of material approaches it struggles to answer how to account for time and aging in the dress artifact in a way that moves beyond historical fantasy. Rather than claiming a perfect understanding of the past and its motivations, embodiment offers a compelling way to address the body in the cultural space, accounting for our own motivations as well as the different bodies of past and present that connect through the senses (including touch, sight, and smell). This connection can be experienced through movement within these different types of clothing of the past.

One of the ways in which fashion theorists have worked to consider the complicated nature of aging and time in dress culture is to produce methods that account for both past and present approaches in design. Mida and Kim's work offers an adaption of Berger's theory of the slow approach to seeing, suggesting a systematic and stylistic approach to identifying aspects of dating and reusing historical garments. By relying on material cultural analysis (with a focus on the embodied nature of dress), they attempt to clarify a relationship between objects and how we produce narratives of the past based on them (Mida & Kim, 2015). It is inherently understood in design and production practices that choices are reflective of cost and availability. An authentic dress adaption's key to success is to balance one's desires with the limitations of practice (Smith & Stannard, 2016). Part of what Mida and Kim's as well as Davidson's theoretical approaches allow for is a practice-based framework that is unique to the dress as an artifact. At the observational stage, as the authors suggest, the experience of making may offer embodied empathy and the cognition of not just wearing but also doing as a practice (Davidson, 2019). The

role of reflection, as a stage in this approach to slow seeing (Mida & Kim, 2015, p.33), is key for identifying cultural and personal bias by accounting for reactions that are guided by a belief that differs between the time the artifact was originally produced and the present. While this does not clarify the issues of historic timelines in dress history, it addresses the potential bias in trying to capture a specific period.

Identifying the potential bias in interpretation between the periods of the artifacts and our own is one way in which we can attend to the appropriation of the past and its various cultures. However, there is still the consideration of where the reproduction exists in a historic context and framework. As Rosner stipulates, design, including the textile arts, should not find value solely in the artifact itself but through the practice of engaging with narrative interpretations (Rosner, 2018). Rosner's research suggests that rather than having a concern for how the present may bias perceptions of the past, we should instead reconsider what is traditional in textile production and conceive of an embodied heritage. What this entails is a more active acceptance and engagement with reconstructions in the professional museum space as a way for people to experience the practice of historic dressing directly and personally. Furthermore, this implies an active reframing of textile studies that encapsulates more of the personal aspects of clothing artifacts rather than focusing on an overarching style or theme to organize dress timelines. This potentially allows other classed and racialized individual a space within dress history. In reconsidering design, Rosner argues that we should reinvest in different bodies and practices that will showcase absent histories (Rosner, 2018). I argue that this is largely what the practice of reproductions allows: a reconsideration of histories, both known and unknown. While the embodied turn further complicates this understanding of timelines and aging in the dress artifact space, it allows for a reconsideration of what the study of history could be and should entail.

In my own reconstruction practice through the dinner reception dress, I previously highlighted a desire to produce a garment that fits the reconstructionist community's standard of authenticity and to produce something aesthetically pleasing to myself within the aesthetic standards of reconstruction examples I have seen performed both in the museum space and in high fashion industries. In attempting to attain this authenticity and aesthetic standard, I discovered that I was inadvertently reinforcing the bias that we see continue to be performed in dress histories, which is the idealized version of high fashion and novel examples of garment making worn by only a small percentage of historic bodies. My analysis came primarily after the experience of the design, so that while I reinforced a lot of the reconstruction bias, it was only after I finished the garment that I realized where this bias lay. For example, my dress is an upper-middle-class example because I found that most frames of references from which I worked were upper-middle-class examples of dress. This included both pictorial, literary, and museum archive examples. In attempting to recreate something of the lower class, the primary examples that exist are garments that still work within the category of the fashionably novel. There are many examples in museums of various nursing garments and garments representative of service uniforms and while these reconstructions are useful examples of less formalized depictions of garment making, they are still working from an understanding of fashion history that highlights examples of a select few within the class system (female nurses were not the majority and not every youth worked in an affluent household). In attempting to create a garment worn in the evenings, my reconstruction goal was to move away from the formalized ballgowns of upper-class dress but in doing so I was still recreating a garment that reinforced a formal way of living. A more accurate depiction could have consisted of a simpler afternoon dress, but as the designer,

I wanted to try my hand at the more complicated aspects of Gilded Age dressmaking, including applique and embroidery.

While I have sewn in the past, most reconstructions I have worked on would be considered “vintage” rather than “antique” examples of history, having primarily reproduced dresses in the 1950s pin-up style. Gilded Age reconstructions are a lot more complicated than anything I have worked on or was prepared for. As I mentioned previously, I needed to work from an existing pattern, which limited other design opportunities I could have taken and placed me in a position where I was more likely to produce a garment based on present dress history bias. Conversely, I could not produce an upper-class garment like a ballgown because the patterns were well beyond my experience level, which is how I ended up with upper-middle-class reproductions as the foundation from which I could reproduce historical fashions. What I could not know from the direction I took with this dress design was how different bodies fit within ideas of the “ideal” body of this historical period. I worked from a young white woman’s perspective with no physical disabilities and as a result, could only draw conclusions based on my own bodily experience of historic fashion and not from any of the bodies that I have argued continue to be absent in archival practice. While I argue for a more personalized and embodied practice going forward in reproduction, the biases that I have encountered matter. Without addressing these gaps for reconstruction projects in order to produce alternative narratives, designs will continue to reinforce such biases and reproduce garments that ignore the nuance of dressing other bodies (including racialized, aging, and disabled bodies). I have acknowledged where I have failed to account for these biases; as a novice reconstructionist, it is harder to move away from the reproductions of the past when one is limited by skill level, budgets, timelines, and general

knowledge. Acknowledging these issues is part of the solution, but we also need to consider what can be done for future practices in reconstruction.

From my own experience of garment reproduction, it would have been helpful to have a greater diversity of options starting out. My reconstruction exists primarily as a mirror to other designs I was able to access within the community. For this limitation to be properly addressed support needs to be put in place to encourage other forms of reconstruction. Sewing even a non-historical item has increasingly become more expensive to undertake without financial support (my project even with a partial grant cost over \$600 to produce)⁷¹. The different types of reproductions being made currently are created primarily through large institutions such as university fashion programs and larger museums which can support research-based reconstruction projects. The people in the financial position to do so should challenge some of the dominant discourses beyond what is primarily found in artifact collections. Further, while some reconstruction forums have been extremely helpful and supportive, I find finances are often a barrier to accessing these communities (such as membership fees or required skill sets from a more formalized education), and as a result, novice reconstructionists (like myself) are restricted by what supports we can access. From my own experiences I believe that by creating more accessible spaces to share reconstruction practices and further incentivizing more research-based reconstructions, the community will welcome designs outside the dominant discourse and a variety of voices will be able to engage with this practice of embodiment. In part two of my analysis of dress reconstruction, I discuss the results of a survey I disseminated to the reconstructionist communities in North America to explore where these constraints continue to create dress biases in reconstruction practice. In doing so I hope to highlight not only my

⁷¹ See Appendix C Visual Source Materials Figure 3.27.

approaches to reconstruction and the limitations I faced personally, but also how others reconstructionists and their practice of historical embodiment shape the garments they create. In doing so, I also hope to feature where the potential inequities in reconstruction occur and what may be a more universal solution to reframing and diversifying reconstruction practice so that more diverse bodies can become involved.

CHAPTER FOUR, PART TWO:

A SURVEY OF THE HISTORIC RECONSTRUCTIONIST COMMUNITY: TOWARDS FURTHER UNDERSTANDING OF RE-ENACTMENTS' USE OF HISTORIC TIME

Thus far, I have analyzed the thread of intergenerational knowledge of fabrication techniques and the importance of reconstructing dress history through embodied practice, which allows for a more personal approach to the fashion artifact. I have also considered not only the parameters of my own reconstruction but also other projects and approaches to historic reconstructions to demonstrate the challenges of streamlining reconstruction practices between disciplines and across reconstructionist skill levels. I argue that beyond the work of theoretical writers, the knowledge of the fashion reconstructionist community's approaches to design provides a more applied understanding of historic time than the issue of authenticity. For my own reconstruction of the dinner reception dress, a set of goals was approached, including budget, skill level, and time limit, which likely differ substantially from other projects. My own reconstruction, as part of this chapter, will be compared to other reconstructionist projects to understand the various approaches that can be taken and the differences that emerge between organizations and individuals. Additionally, these reconstructionist groups approach their own guidelines and compromises that shift the outcomes of their historic designs, which in turn challenge understandings of historic authenticity for viewers. By highlighting these challenges to authenticity, I will outline the issues that reconstructionists have in working within current Western historical theory. As I have outlined in the previous chapters, the current field of fashion theory and its cataloging process within museum and heritage spaces struggles to account for the embodied practice of dress despite scholarship attempts to address the corporeal in fashion. As a

result, current display practices shape fashion artifacts through an evolutionary and Western linear production of time that tends to ignore the artifact as having an individual value. In this final chapter, I consider the larger field of reconstruction as the community relates to their own practices of embodiment in reproducibility. I suggest from the results of this investigation that we can use the practice of reconstruction to reframe theoretical cataloging processes to consider historic narratives of fashions absent in the archives (old age, racialized, disabled examples of dress) and to account for the personal and subjective quality of each fashion artifact. This in turn allows a more nuanced approach to considerations of historic time outside of thematic groupings.

Demographics and Survey Limitations

For my dress reconstruction project and to support my argument that the practice of reproductions allows a reconsideration of histories, both known and unknown, I created and disseminated a survey, which featured twelve questions that were approached during the draft stages of my own reconstruction work.⁷² This detailed survey allowed me to address ideas of the embodied turn and how it further complicates an understanding of timelines and aging in the dress artifact space, allowing a reconsideration of what the study of history could be and should entail. The participants were found primarily through the online community forum of the Costume Society of America (CSA, 2024), as well as through contacts previously gained in work in the Ontario museum industry. This survey intends to highlight the biases and contentions that reconstructionists deal with when recreating historic dress and, ultimately, how this complicates

⁷² See Appendix D, Figure 4.1 “Historic Reproduction Survey” Blank, May 2023.

ideas of authenticity and the understanding of historic timelines. The different conflicts and industry standards that fellow reconstructionists must account for often serve to reinforce the misconceptions of public memory. Despite this, most reconstructionists defend their practice as a more egalitarian approach to history that keeps history alive for future generations. By highlighting their own practices and limitations, the survey results addresses some of the complications that reproductionists face and the potential of continuing to reinforce historical appropriation.

The initial sample for the survey consisted of thirty people involved in the reconstructionist community. Of that initial sample, eighteen participants submitted a completed questionnaire, two of which were filled out by a partnership or team. Part of this study's purpose was to gather a variety of design perspectives from reconstructionists both within and outside of museums and academia. While a range of people participated in the survey, almost all the participants had a formal education in history and in fashion costuming (Samulski, 2023). Many of the participants designed historic pieces as freelance retailers. While their primary role was as a designer and shop owner, several mentioned working in various industries as part of their sales process. For example, over half cited having designed re-enactment dress. Also, some had working relationships with museums, gaining commissions to reproduce items from a collection so the museum would have something to display while protecting the original.⁷³ The survey sample suggests that an array of industries are involved in the practice of reconstruction, although their practices are reinforced by a formalist education rooted in the conventions of a

⁷³ See Appendix D, Figure 4.2, Graph Results of Costuming Backgrounds, May 2023.

history that reinforces the traditional timelines of Western historicism. The initial bias factors around an idea of authenticity and the idea of an original artifact that these projects stem from.

None of the participants surveyed worked within the film and television industry. Still, several reproduction retailers mentioned working with specific film and television crews to recreate period-accurate jewelry, hats, and clothing pieces. An interesting aspect of historic costuming were the responses of fashion publishers, who mentioned doing several recreations as part of their press house's process as both authors and editors.⁷⁴ Despite identifying a specific industry and background, most of the surveyed members had been exposed to different disciplines. Further, most participants cited that outside their field, they had experiences recreating dress for volunteer events such as fancy-dress balls or community re-enactment days, during which almost all surveyed had recreated pieces for themselves specifically.⁷⁵ This is an important factor in the consideration of embodied practice for reconstruction, as almost all the participants have some connection and experience wearing historic garments. This is often a significant motivating factor behind reconstruction practice. Reconstructions insofar as they offer a personal connection to the practice of history play a large part in reframing Western historic timelines to consider the present's relationship to the past. The cross-disciplinary approach of the surveyed members highlights the complexity of defining reconstruction as its own field, as it often bridges industries that have intrinsically different approaches to disseminating history and ideas of authenticity.

One limitation of the initial survey demographic is that the participants are all women. While there are examples of men working in reconstructions, they tend towards military

⁷⁴ See Appendix D, Figure 4.2, Graph Results of Costuming Backgrounds, May 2023.

⁷⁵ Samulski, "Historic Reproduction Survey" May 2023.

reenactment and are in the minority within the larger community. While the hope was to attain a male perspective, no willing participant was found. The general perspective of those represented was that of women in an older age bracket, including those who have made it to the top of their industry or recently retired. There were two surveyed members on the younger end, one in a school program and the other a recent graduate. As a result, the perspective was skewed towards an older and more industry-oriented perspective (Samulski, 2023). While several cited working towards a culturally diverse perspective, only two declared themselves as racialized. Therefore, for the results of this survey, the participant sample exemplifies primarily white, traditionally educated reconstructionists whose perspectives on historical accuracy may differ from other racial groups and educational backgrounds. While this is a slanted perspective (although this tends to be the broader demographic for reconstruction communities in North America currently), it gives some insight into where the current understanding of reproductions and its framework resides. Through a traditionalist approach to history and historicism grounded in the conventional timelines in Western studies of history, there is still a tendency to ignore accounts of different class and racial backgrounds in dress stories (the stories or memories behind a dresses construction and its place within the wearer's history).

The Dress Eras and The People Reconstructions Account For:

Preconceived biases shape current cultural ideals in fashion and history, framing what reconstructionists want to make. The general interest in certain timelines, bodies, and backgrounds means reliance on designs that appeal to and reinforce traditional understandings of

fashion history. As many of the surveyed members have a long history in historic reconstructions, they tended to focus on more than one design period, with most citing having worked in at least two design periods within their own work histories.⁷⁶ The most active periods for reconstruction are the Regency period and late nineteenth century, including Victorian and Edwardian dress. While one partnership focused on Medieval dress, very little reconstruction work was done on pieces earlier than the 17th century.⁷⁷ Early dress histories, when used in reconstruction, tended towards cosplay, such as at a Renaissance fair, rather than as garments attempting historical accuracy.

Industry standards also changed how eras impacted a design and its timeline (in this case the design's linear historical development). For example, those from the museum industry appeared the most restrictive in design timelines. As the main industry that reconstructionists rely on for guidance on the legitimacy of their practices, the museum industry's possessive attitudes toward these timelines reinforce the Western tradition's bias in historic costuming. The survey participants who work in the museum industry suggest limitations in their designs, producing garments that represent only the years in which the estate was active or within the historic epoch in which the museum was erected. Rather than an overarching theme in historic dress a particular decade or two of dress styling tended to be the focus.⁷⁸ While this sort of framing will often make sense for the thematic approach to a space (e.g., an 1880s house focusing on fashion from the same years), the limitations are to the nuances of fashion's development. The participants offered that they only looked at designs that members of the historic household would wear (typically upper-class formalized pieces) and as part of this tradition would negate any other

⁷⁶ See Appendix D, Figure 4.3, Graph Results of Designers Era, May 2023.

⁷⁷ See Appendix D, Figure 4.3, Graph Results of Designers Era, May 2023.

⁷⁸ Survey Question One, "Which historical period does your organization design for?" May 2023.

types of classed dress in their making. Even if lower-class garments may have been addressed, they would typically read as garments that showcased servant/staff uniforms related to the household rather than the independent wardrobes of the staff that worked there. Further, by focusing on a particular historical epoch, the garments tend to be created and read through a very specific framework of the relevant dates rather than through individual design processes (such as a focus on wartime fashion uniforms for a museum erected in the 1940s).

Theatrical designers have a much broader perspective on dress timelines, designing anything from Shakespearean dress to Belle Epoque and often tending towards an aesthetic choice rather than an authentic period piece.⁷⁹ As authors Jablon-Roberts and Sanders have argued, costuming, while in the realm of reconstruction, is not the same as fashion itself, even though it involves the same concepts. Further, in theatrical design, authenticity is gained through an audience's perceptions of historic costume. Costuming elevates the status of authenticity through its communication and the believability of the history within the theatrical story (Jablon-Roberts and Saunders, 2019). This entails an understanding of public memory's power in authenticating the mythmaking of dress historicism. If the audience understands the story and its place through the costuming presented, then authenticity is gained, despite both costume and historic storyline being authenticated by the present public's preconceived notions of the past, which doesn't rule out bias. Several surveyed reconstructionists mentioned having worked on period-accurate pieces and cosplay or theatrical pieces. A key component of the design eras that continues to be the focus of dress histories is their use within historic storytelling and for entertainment value. Most surveyed participants cited making at least one design for a themed

⁷⁹ Survey Question One, "Which historical period does your organization design for?" May 2023.

event. Regency events focusing on the novelist Jane Austen tended to be the most frequently cited.⁸⁰

While the popular design eras are a key component of understanding of design history and timelines, the resources used by reproductionists further complicate what is being designed and its impact on historical understanding. The primary resource those surveyed mentioned was access to physical dresses from the era of their research.⁸¹ Those working in an academic setting cited having large collections of period-accurate textiles in their university archives and a large digital database in design labs as well.⁸² Those working in museums had the advantage of the site's archives, which usually held a collection of similar textiles and dress pieces to those they attempted to recreate. Further, museum recreators generally had written accounts of dress as well as estate records which they used in tandem with physical pieces.⁸³ A resource that almost every participant surveyed cited using were period-specific dress books and vintage magazines. Those who tended to be guided towards dress restrictions through their organization (such as a chosen era or industry guidelines for authenticity) also used period fashion plates and patterns (either from the era or recreated by an approved source guide).⁸⁴

Reconstructionists who did not have ready access to archives and design labs tended to use photographs and paintings as preliminary sources in the drafting process, suggesting the images helped them get an idea of social uses and ways of wearing a dress. Despite this, just as many surveyed dismissed the use of paintings for their inability to capture detail.⁸⁵ Online

⁸⁰ Survey Question One, "Which historical period does your organization design for?" May 2023.

⁸¹ See Appendix D, Figure 4.4, Graph Results Designers Resource Choices, May 2023.

⁸² Survey Question Two, "What resources do you rely on for a historical reproduction project (for example The Met fashion archives)? May 2023.

⁸³ Survey Question Two, May 2023.

⁸⁴ See Appendix D, Figure 4.4, Graph Results Designers Resource Choices, May 2023.

⁸⁵ Survey Question Two, May 2023.

databases are largely considered a better alternative, specifically the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A, 2024) as well as Colonial Williamsburg (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2024), which were viewed as the best sources for label history and construction details. Overall, the use of social media platforms has become increasingly acceptable, although this still operates within a generational divide. Only two surveyed cited consistent use of the platforms Pinterest and YouTube in their drafting process.⁸⁶ Each participant cited working from multiple resources rather than one. However, each operated with an idea of authenticity based on a picturesque version of history and dress designs. This picturesque quality is found in paintings, photography, and other artworks that form part of an aestheticization of the past (this holds true in primary sources as well when one considers what we have access to in the archives, typically formalized special occasion garments). By making this the guiding foundation for reconstructions, the designs move away from the potential to address historical issues such as poverty, gender, race, and disease to focus on things more pleasing and palatable for a general audience. There are cases where the potential to develop these issues (poverty, gender, race) is greater, such as through certain journalistic sources. Still, the majority tend to continue to rely on pictorial evidence more than anything to inform their reconstruction practices.

Beyond using a variety of contemporary and historical resources, the reconstructionists also draw on designs and designers that influence and further complicate their approaches to historic dressmaking.⁸⁷ Those surveyed mentioned that their main design influences were era-specific designers, with French modistes of the 1920s proving to be the most popular for the surveyed demographic. Inspiration also came from designers who specifically work on historic

⁸⁶ See Appendix D, Figure 4.4, Graph Results Designer Resource Choices, May 2023.

⁸⁷ See Appendix D, Figure 4.5, Graph Results Designer Influences, May 2023.

reproductions, including film costumers and other reconstructionists in the larger community.⁸⁸ Several claimed that costume designers of television and film productions were the most inspiring to their own work. The costumer Terry Dresbach of the production *Outlander* [2014] was mentioned as doing theatrically excellent and more historically accurate reproductions. Textile designers and plate illustrators were also considered excellent sources of inspiration as opposed to couture-based designs.⁸⁹ While the surveyed mentioned working on pieces to be displayed for exhibition, only a couple mentioned finding their source of inspiration in exhibition shows and museum exhibits and instead, a reliance on film and other imagery was more important for design inspiration.⁹⁰

The variety of influences in design is similar in scope to resources that the reproductions rely on in that most participants suggest a variety of people and brands they turned to before undergoing a project, rather than citing one particular inspiration. Despite this, there is still a reliance on high-end aestheticized examples of design. As in the case of theatrical and television production designers, there is a tendency to have the designs adapted to suit the tastes of modern audiences rather than to suit historicism. Shiman Li's discussion of Tang Dynasty costume dramas suggests inspiration in costuming comes from the ancient source material of the Magao caves as a way of fulfilling a historicism in contemporary dramas. However, she clarifies that many of the original details from the caves have been modified or even removed to suit the contemporary tastes of modern China, including references to other Asian cultures (Li, 2023). Further, relying on these source materials, even if carefully done, does not guarantee a historical

⁸⁸ Survey Question Eight, "Do you have any particular sources of inspiration (for example a fashion designer)?", May 2023.

⁸⁹ Survey Question Eight, May 2023.

⁹⁰ See Appendix D, Figure 4.5, Graph Results Designer Influences, May 2023.

reality, especially when the images themselves have only been partially excavated.⁹¹ The use of art from the past still offers a picturesque quality to clothing, but even when produced in the same era, it is unlikely to capture the complete reality of dress. As in other cases, the production of dress in the contemporary setting is unlikely to offer a comprehensive historic reality but would be shaped by a contemporary view.

Dress communities will often address the reception and feedback of those within their communities, but few have evaluated how outsiders interact with and evaluate the projects that are produced (Smith & Stannard, 2016). By neglecting to address outsiders' interpretations, the subculture of reconstructions tends to remain insular, allowing the feedback that they are given to reinforce the biases already in place. Part of the intent of this survey was to address what target groups members of the reconstructionist community designed for or attempted to engage with in their designs.⁹² The survey revealed that the community itself is broadly defined to fit any person interested in costuming. However, industry standards changed answers regarding who was being designed for.⁹³ For example, those who worked in theatre production and design tended to suggest that the target wasn't the actors or stage people but the audience themselves, in which case actual authenticity could give way to suggested authenticity based on the physical distance to the stage.⁹⁴ Those surveyed did not factor in a specific period or date in market design and few mentioned working within a specific era, but rather they attempted to capture a larger cultural movement through dress. Regional restrictions tended to be a larger deciding factor for reconstructions, especially in the museum space and academia. Common regional markets

⁹¹ Shiman LI CSA Midwest Regional Symposium 2023, Cleveland Ohio.

⁹²Survey Question Three, "Are there any specific target groups that you address in your designs (for example a specific historical person or community)?" May 2023.

⁹³ See Appendix D, Figure 4.6, Graph Results Target Market of Designs, May 2023.

⁹⁴Survey Question Three, May 2023.

included French and broader European design, as well as North American design. In some cases, the reconstructionist focused specifically on Native American and Indigenous dress (the survey included both American and Canadian respondents).⁹⁵ The role of targeting a specific market appears to be heavily reliant on the industry standards and rules that the reproductionists work within.

Class is an interesting factor over which survey members were divided in terms of what should be the desired outcome.⁹⁶ This division suggests resistance to challenging the dominant dress narrative, as the aesthetic of class narratives and attitudes tends to rule over other considerations in historic dressing. Half surveyed preferred to make formal pieces for specialty events, which tended towards upper-class standards of dress. On the other hand, those who said class-specific restrictions were their main target for design, suggested that they focus more on middle-class and working-class dress to give a better understanding of dress practice for a majority.⁹⁷ However, many surveyed did not have the ability to design for one specific aspect of dress, stating that as a business, it was up to the clients and the budgets given to them to make a recreation that could be as authentic or inauthentic as the client required. This hints at some of the current imbalances we find in historic recreations, with the focus of design relying on a commercial value heavily tied to an aesthetic look.

Such flexibility in design is important but the drawback is the influence that specialist consumers can have in driving a subculture of commerce through their idea of “vintage” (Davidson, 2019). Vintage as a fad has become a more enduring trend in recent years while entering the mainstream industry of fashion. Its target audience is not just one consumer market

⁹⁵ Survey Question Three, May 2023.

⁹⁶ See Appendix D, Figure 4.6, Graph Results Target Market of Designs, May 2023.

⁹⁷ Survey Question Three, May 2023.

but includes a variety of ages and backgrounds that invest in the idea of the “vintage”. Their motivations are also varied; while some consumers approach vintage from an ethical sustainability perspective, others are focused on a rarity or nostalgic factor (McColl et al., 2013). The definition of vintage has become paradoxical, as it lacks consensus such as a defined period range or clothing classification: for example, ‘vintage’ versus ‘antique’ dress. This is an issue for the reconstructionist community as they attempt to fix their practice both within the museum and fashion industry as representing a standardized practice of historic dressmaking, which is challenged by this lack of consensus on the past’s fashions and what is defined as vintage consumerism versus the practice of history. This ambiguous definition has led to a flexibility in what is described as vintage or old. While classification puts vintage as 1980s or earlier, retailers have marketed used clothing from the last couple of years as “vintage” to its consumer markets (McColl et al., 2013). The continued division of the subculture commerce that drives a lot of reconstruction practice complicates what is produced and why its produced as part of historic making. Again, aestheticization takes precedence over a thorough analysis of the class and culture divisions of the past. A focus on nostalgic values rather than reality still drives the maker’s market. While an analysis of the past is not the role of the consumer markets, many reproductionists who produce an idea of history through said markets find themselves struggling to define their practice as something beyond aesthetic nostalgia while often having to work against preconceptions of what dress reproductions should be.

We also tend to consider fashions within a broad cultural scope primarily grounded in European traditions, which influence our attempts to approach other cultural traditions. Additionally, these attempts to address class and race in design still focus on placing modern sensibilities and taste into dress rather than considering some of these cultures’ historic realities.

We continue to approach dress projects as singular entities rather than something that existed within a complex cultural milieu. A desire for originality and personal choice in dress did not suddenly emerge in the modern era. Despite this, most cultural centers and museums will organize artifacts by category to make the concepts of history easy to understand (Glassie, 1994). Generalizations like “women wore white cotton muslin in the Regency period” (Smithsonian, 2012 pp. 168-169) lead to a simplification of the dress culture of any given period, which accordingly does not address a person’s personal tastes, budget, as well as regional considerations. Not every woman had the experiences of Jane Austen’s England for example. Reproductions today attempt to bridge both the cultural spaces of past and present but often fail to address their own desires for a garment that exists in relation to constructs of the past that they have been reinforcing. Introducing considerations of class and race from a contemporary perspective doesn’t necessarily address what considerations of class and race would have looked like in the past.

Restrictions to Reconstructions and the Planned Outcomes of Historic Industries:

The reconstructionists from the survey suggested a variety of resources that influence the shape of their historic dress projects, including target markets and inspiration sources. However, even with more historically valued resources, a project’s largest probability of success will lie its overall limitations, such as budgets and approaches to project planning. These approaches can include the ‘must haves’ of a client or industry, the research question, or accommodations for budgets and timelines. As Smith clarifies, historic knowledge is not enough to merit the title of

authentic in a dress project. One also requires the skills necessary to carry out a project's aims as well as a performance competency that encompasses historic knowledge and skill (Smith, 2021). By asking participants to discuss their own project limitations and parameters, we get a better sense of the various skill levels as well as different industry standards that challenge the designation of authentic dressmaking.⁹⁸

Similar to the approaches to target markets, reconstructionist project limits were mainly impacted by what the client wanted and were willing to pay for. While two participants were lucky in not having restrictions, for most budget was the main factor for any design.⁹⁹ Several suggested that having a limited budget compromises the volume and quality of any materials used. Knowledge of a particular style is not the only factor in a successful design. Budgets planned by the individual or set by an organization will shape how feasible it is to carry out a more historically accurate reconstructionist piece. Those who work on an industry-specific project had to consider regional differences for their designs. A focus on a Western dress anywhere from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and more specifically, French dress in Canadian museum industries, was common. Several reconstructionists suggested a new focus on different regions of Native American and Indigenous dress both in America and Canada. However, many were cautious about recreating dress from a specific region or culture for fear of cultural appropriation if they included components that were deemed inauthentic.¹⁰⁰ Another limitation was access to proper materials, especially in dress based in the 1600s and earlier. Even with a large budget, many retailers do not carry original materials, such as certain kinds of

⁹⁸ See Appendix D, Figure 4.7, Graph Results of Project Limitations and Parameters, May 2023.

⁹⁹ See Appendix D, Figure 4.7, Graph Results of Project Limitations and Parameters, May 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Survey Question Five, "Do you have any limitations on the parameters for your projects (for example time period, culture, or location)?" May 2023.

silk.¹⁰¹ What these restrictions contend with is the challenge to achieve authenticity in relation to the ‘original,’ as even the strictest adherence to practices of the past is influenced by the conditions and availability of the present. A careful reconstruction is still going to be a product of its time.

A key factor for those who worked in independent retail was that the projects were largely shaped by whom they were consulting with. Some only worked with museums, so they were restricted by the rules of the museum industry. Participants working on film or theatre projects had to consider the vision of the people hiring them, along with practical concerns such as an actor’s ability to get in and out of a garment.¹⁰² The timeframe was also a large issue, as most surveyed were only taking on one reconstruction at a time (rather than multiple projects) and having to simplify the design of the garment to meet a deadline. Two surveyed members suggested seasonal concerns since all of the participants live in North America, and most have worked in four-season climates. As a result, dress reproductions needed to include winter outerwear as well as lighter-weight pieces for in-between seasons.¹⁰³ In most cases a consideration of design came after an understanding of the event and wearer.

Beyond the project limitations and parameters of a particular reconstruction, it is also important to understand how individuals and their industries shape the outcomes of a project through approaches to project planning and the goals of each project. As an example, time constraints, while a limitation, are also considered a large factor in project planning.¹⁰⁴ Most participants cited having to work towards a particular deadline as part of scholarship programs or

¹⁰¹ See Appendix D, Figure 4.7, May 2023.

¹⁰² Survey Question Five, May 2023.

¹⁰³ Survey Question Five, May 2023.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix D, Figure 4.8, Graph Results of Project Planning Matrix, May 2023.

the season in which their industry operates. Museums tend to be busier in the summer, so that is when repairs happen, rather than new projects being taken on. In academia, designers are often dependent on when journal abstracts are due, and the reconstructionists only have a certain amount of time to produce their dress sample before submitting their research for publication, usually a turn around of a few months.¹⁰⁵ Independent dress reproductionists cite specific events restricting when new dress projects can occur. Membership within certain societies requires completing a certain theme and project, usually at least once a year.¹⁰⁶

Distance as its own factor was a huge part of timing for independent dress makers who had to account for distance between themselves and their clients, as well as planning when fittings would be available for both parties, which changed the scheduling of the project.¹⁰⁷ Access to material is a deciding factor for most projects. Those surveyed cited they were only willing to take on a project if they knew they could source pieces to work with the ensemble they were making, for example, period-accurate shoes or shapers. In the case of patterning, which is either too hard to come by or to produce a project will be canceled or delayed, especially when specific products need to be shipped.¹⁰⁸ This suggests part of the reason historic source material often is not included in the realm of historic reproductions is that access to material and patterning makes it out of reach for the conditions of authenticity.

Functionality was a deciding factor in cases where re-enactors needed to move about in the project design. For example, one participant surveyed cited scrapping a project when the item

¹⁰⁵ Survey Question Nine, “What metrics do you use for project planning (for example timeline, budget, outcomes)?” May 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Survey Question Nine, May 2023

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix D, Figure 4.8, Graph Results of Project Planning Matrix, May 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Survey Question Nine, May 2023.

proved too restrictive for classroom purposes.¹⁰⁹ The idea of budget is also an issue in project planning, but more importantly, the role of funding often leads to restrictions for working hours and desired outcomes, and having to work within specific guidelines, including certain materials and guided practice, is part of this. If there were certain restrictions about the use of technologies or a specific desire by a client, this led to a longer design process, with several stating it was about having an informed process between themselves and the client.¹¹⁰ Finally, several participants suggested that they follow a particular modeling or process in project planning. One partnership suggests using a scientific modeling approach for dress recreation practices, while others use business and managerial models like SMART, which is the managerial acronym for setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-bound. Alternatively, some practiced the three-legged stool approach, which includes budget, time, and resource/labour. These models were applied before ever picking up a needle and thread. The implementation of managerial and scientific models is used to provide legitimacy to the practice of reconstruction within the project planning stages. By relying on scientific approaches to designs, the designers are attempting to provide a framework and set of conditions that can be replicated for each project, creating a more streamlined practice in reconstruction.

The impacts of project planning and project limitations contribute to the idea of a false historic timeline as well as how we perceive authenticity. The project impacts do so by challenging attempts at authenticity through the restrictions of modern materials and budgets. Additional factors include considerations of the functionality of reconstructions to suit modern spaces and ethical considerations rather than the costume considerations of the past. As each

¹⁰⁹ Survey Question Nine, May 2023.

¹¹⁰ Survey Question Nine, May 2023.

surveyed member suggested, their project metrics shaped what they made, and this was often impacted by contemporary concerns and values. As Smith clarifies in their analysis of attitudes towards authenticity, most reconstructionists work within a low interpretive value (i.e. aesthetic and comfort values are put before accuracy, to create more of an idea of a period's dress rather than a specific example of dress). In other words, personal needs are placed over interpretive needs on the whole. It is enough to work with materials and patterns deemed authentic by the organizations (Smith, 2021). Highly favorable interpretive values of authenticity are given to projects that work from an object that already exists (Smith, 2021). These reconstruction projects tend to comprise the minority of reconstructions and exist outside of the field of reenactments. What discerning these limitations allows for is a better conception of parameters most reconstruction projects work within, offering a sense of where ideas of historicism will be sacrificed.

Who Has a Right to Dress Historically and How Does It Shape Perceptions of the Past?

My survey of dress recreation practices has already shown through outlining the various industry goals and limitations that historicism and the idea of authenticity are flexible and project-dependent. The rules around historic dressing and who is allowed to dress historically further challenge the idea of authenticity and conflate the role of public memory's understanding of the past. As an example, period dramas and attitudes towards historic clothing rely on a perception that all people in the past were petite, slender, and usually Eurocentric in looks.

Working in the museum industry and as a re-enactor it was not uncommon for most of the more “desired” costumes made for women to be for slender builds, most not carrying more than a size eight in the more formal garments. Part of this misconception is rooted in what can be found in dress archives, which are the pieces people deem worthy to donate, often the formal gowns and wedding dresses worn by family during the most significant parts of their histories. As a result, there is a surplus of garments that represent people during a time of life when they were typically younger and in peak physical health. A recent publication from the Smithsonian’s fashion collection gives an overview of historic costuming which in fact relies on dress samples that are formal and worn by people in their teens and early twenties (Smithsonian, 2012). Women typically had their most important social seasons and weddings in their late teens and early twenties. As reconstructions have operated to recapture the past, there’s a tendency to focus on the young, wealthy, and fit in clothing designs: again, because this is what survived in the archives and what people of the past have deemed worthy of donating.

Despite misconceptions about the past and its bodies, the results of this survey suggest there has been a shift in perceptions around models and re-enactors. Most participants suggested that the model was not much of a restriction in recreations anymore. For example, two participants suggested that they actively look for models of different sizes to try their hand at adaptation patterning, which they argue has been around for centuries.¹¹¹ The evidence of pattern adaptations in old patterning books suggests that not every person fit the standard sizes, despite the abundance of standardized costuming found in the archives. Those surveyed worked primarily in women’s fashion, with most only having experience in dressmaking, not in men’s tailoring.

¹¹¹ Survey Question Seven “Do you have specific parameters for the models/re-enactors you use, what factors go into choosing models/re-enactors?” May 2023.

Further, none of the participants referred to dressmaking for children, although none suggested being opposed to making period children's dress.¹¹² This suggests while there is not a bias against other forms of clothing, the reconstruction industry relies heavily on women's garment making. This could be in part due to who is willing to finance these industries, since children do not have their own incomes and men are a smaller interest market. Over half of the participants claimed they had no say in who wore their recreations. A design often comes after they receive a client or their industry's chosen re-enactors' specifications and measurements.

Models are selected depending on the hiring process.¹¹³ In the museum industry, those surveyed were often looking to hire a person to fulfill a particular role, in which case the industry standards would be a huge deciding factor (these standards will include museum mandates, regional requirements, and equity/diversity standards in which the business resides).¹¹⁴ Those who worked in collaboration similarly suggested that the look the client or employer wanted would decide on the model and their looks as a challenge to or reflection of ideas of historicism. As part of the industry standards, most suggested their organizations had refocused on increasing diversity as their main consideration.¹¹⁵ They were actively looking to get a variety of ethnic backgrounds to develop a greater interpretive practice in reconstructions. While a worthy endeavour, the practice suggests it is creating narratives around ethnicity for the present by dressing women in the pieces of the past that often don't reflect either class reality or traditional ethnic dresses of the model, for instance, dressing a woman in a Eurocentric Regency dress rather than looking to the past and what their ancestors actually would have worn.¹¹⁶ Within this

¹¹² See Appendix D, Figure 4.9, Graph Results of Model Factors, May 2023.

¹¹³ Survey Question Seven, "Do you have specific parameters for the models/re-enactors you use, what factors go into choosing models/re-enactors?" May 2023.

¹¹⁴ See Appendix D, Figure 4.9, Graph Results of Model Factors, May 2023.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix D, Figure 4.9, Graph Results of Model Factors, May 2023.

¹¹⁶ Survey Question Seven, May 2023.

practice, there is also a risk of overcorrecting, in which case individuals become restricted in reconstruction practice by the reverse. For those who designed for themselves, their reconstructions focused on garments that highlighted their own bodies, including their age and height.¹¹⁷ The results of this survey suggest that the larger historic community has changed its industry standards, which is a good start to combatting ideas of past bodies that public memory has mythologized, but they do so by relying on present bodies and ideals.

Jablon-Roberts and Sanders suggest that accuracy and authenticity are, in fact, two different parts to historic costuming, with the distinction being between accuracy as an exact reproduction of the past, and authenticity as the link to allow spectators an idea of the past. It's about selective subjectivity, in which accurate dress is not dependent on the garment itself but on its interrelationship with the body (Jablon-Roberts & Saunders, 2019). While the authors are working from a theatrical perspective, this differentiation has a bearing on how reconstructions continue to be used and understood as part of history and part of the present. The choice in models is only one aspect of this presentation of bodies in the past. Another factor is the role of original artifacts and the continued debate over whether one should be able to use artifacts in reconstructions.¹¹⁸ The majority in my survey claimed they have only ever created or used reproductions as wearable garments. Those who worked in theatre or commercial rental and retail tended to only have access to mock-ups rather than historic artifacts. However, those who work in museums and academia suggest having access to original clothing but claim that the items are for display only.¹¹⁹ According to the respondents, a key component of using recreations

¹¹⁷ See Appendix D, Figure 4.9, Graph Results of Model Factors, May 2023.

¹¹⁸ Survey Question Four "Do any of your target markets ever wear something from the period you are recreating for, why or why not?" May 2023.

¹¹⁹ See Appendix D, Figure 4.10, Graph Results of Use of Original Artifacts, May 2023.

was to save the original artifacts from damage. In this case, the recreation is the only useable form, not the original.¹²⁰

Original artifacts are transformed from clothing objects with a functional purpose to objects with the aura of art within the museum and academic spaces. One of the participants surveyed went so far as to say their designs were also not meant to be worn but were meant for viewing purposes only, as a placeholder for the original museum object that could no longer be displayed.¹²¹ The original and the reproduction thus serve as nonfunctioning dress pieces that exist without a body. The clothing is taken out of its primary role and purpose to exist as a placeholder for past lives that attempts to remove the subjectivity and possibility of the present's influence. The corporeal value of the garment is, in effect, ignored, and the object is seen as something solely to be viewed, despite the fact it was worn in the past. As an object of art, the garment's bodily conditions are removed from the clothing's primary purpose, which was to be worn. In such cases, practices of embodiment are next to impossible. In cases where those surveyed did allow either themselves or one of their organizations to wear an original artifact, less than half suggested that they would allow the donning of an item created earlier than the 1920s.¹²² The age of the dress object changes the role it plays as a functioning or nonfunctioning garment. In cases in which objects are no longer deemed to be original artifacts but rather as "vintage," their values change. Something newer while still an object of the past and part of a past body's experience doesn't have the rarity or association of the art object and appears to exist on its own historic timeline (one outside the mythos of the artifact and the testimonial to a remembered past) that is valued less because of its relative familiarity.

¹²⁰ Survey Question Four, May 2023.

¹²¹ Survey Question Four, May 2023.

¹²² See Appendix D, Figure 4.10, Graph Results of Use of Original Artifacts, May 2023.

While some surveyed suggested they could allow earlier artifacts to be worn, this was dependent on the rarity and stability of the clothing item in question.¹²³ Anything fitted and formal tended to be ruled out, but in a few cases, an open garment or outerwear dress was used in interpretive efforts and encouraged to be worn by multiple people.¹²⁴ Interestingly, those who worked in recreation projects that involved fashion not directly shaped by the body, for instance, items such as jewelry, hats, and shoes, tended to be much more supportive of the wearing of original artifacts outside of the “vintage” context.¹²⁵ This makes the questions of the corporeal interesting, in that the items worn outside the body, such as accessories or overcoats, are considered accessible but for most participants surveyed, the use of original underwear or dress was not allowed. The dress and underwear are worn closest to the skin and marked with the presence of previous wearers. So, while the coat or accessories are still items for the body, they are placed on the outside and therefore contain less of a corporeal aura. The pieces shaped by a previous body are unable to operate in the same way. Part of this comes from this understanding of fashion as having an aura of art through an idea of rarity, which is why vintage pieces aren’t held in high regard in quite the same way as antique pieces. The overcoats made from stiffer fabric tend to outlast the silken underwear. Despite this, makers consistently clarify that their dresses exist through the lens of today and that there is an awareness that objects can not exist out of time (Jablon-Roberts & Saunders, 2019). However, original artifacts in museums continue to be preserved and treated as existing outside of the present time and situated as objects embodied by a ghostly aura of “pastness” rather than worn by another living body.

¹²³ See Appendix D, Figure 4.10, Graph Results of Use of Original Artifacts, May 2023.

¹²⁴ Survey Question Four, May 2023.

¹²⁵ Survey Question Four, May 2023.

This contention around past and present bodies also has a bearing on the role of makers and their adherence or resistance to the use of modern technologies. Modern technologies signal that a recreation piece, no matter how accurate it is deemed, is current to the time it was produced. By using a modern invention like synthetic fabrics, the clothing item becomes a response to history rather than a garment from history. Makers' resistance to modern technologies suggests that, as a practice, reconstruction is attempting to reproduce the past rather than respond to it. This is largely why reconstructionists work in what might be termed illusions, as they survive as part of an ideal of history and time that suggests one can exist and create outside one's own time. Almost all the participants surveyed suggested that they would make use of some modern technologies in their dress reconstruction.¹²⁶ For those working on projects reliant on quick changes, like theatre and film, the use of modern technologies like zippers was considered necessary. From a practical standpoint, the actors or interpreters often must dress themselves, so clips or other types of fastenings would be next to impossible to manage on their own.¹²⁷ Outside of the theatrical industry, there was consensus that no zippers or modern closures should be used. However, compromise is often still necessary from a practical standpoint: for example, one participant who creates reproduction jewelry has to substitute certain stones for cut glass, as producing the originals would be completely beyond any budget.¹²⁸ Most museums also make use of modern technologies, especially when it comes to dressing their interpreters. In special cases, the use of period items may not fit the worker's rights guidelines, so the use of certain synthetics, for example, is necessary for avoiding human rights violations.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ See Appendix D, Figure 4.11, Graph Results of Use of Modern Technologies, May 2023.

¹²⁷ Survey Question Six "Would you ever allow the use of modern technologies (zippers, Velcro, etc.)? Would you allow synthetic fibers (cloth, threading, beads, etc.)?" May 2023.

¹²⁸ Survey Question Six, May 2023.

¹²⁹ Survey Question Six, May 2023.

Those who were strict in their use of original technologies did not have to contend with living models, most working in a display-only capacity (using stationary mannequins) for their designs. Some participants designed pieces that didn't have to go through the same restrictions as those who made dresses, creating items such as particular accessories (hats, shoes, jewelry).¹³⁰ Recreationists designing stationary mannequins make pieces that can pierce or restrict, or cause overheating, and ignore mechanics. Alternatively, live models have a right to refuse to wear garments that are difficult to work in or that make them uncomfortable, which changes the ways in which a recreation project can be approached. The present-day living bodies have an outcome with regard to the past's making process. Those who rigidly work on a dress object not meant for its original intended purpose (wearing) negate the corporeal register, instead relying on a ghostly persona of the past that never actually wore the piece they have designed. While many working in a consulting capacity were project-dependent, some clients did not want completely original garments or offered a very restricted budget, which led to compromises.¹³¹ Almost all members surveyed suggested that while from the outside of the garment they wanted their reconstruction to be period accurate, often compromises were made on the interiors, such as in liners or boning.

Those who suggested that the use of modern technologies was project-dependent also cited difficulties in finding certain patterns and original textiles.¹³² For example, a poly blend thread is next to impossible to avoid in most fabric shops today. Two participants stated that they produce pieces that are as period specific as possible but have used computer-generated pattern printing for textile patterns that no longer exist or cannot be purchased.¹³³ Participants exhibited various

¹³⁰ Survey Question Six, May 2023.

¹³¹ Survey Question Six, May 2023.

¹³² See Appendix D, Figure 4.11, Graph Results of Use of Modern Technologies, May 2023.

¹³³ Survey Question Six, May 2023.

levels of strictness in their use of modern technologies depending on the industries that they worked in. Those creating a museum display garment had to produce the piece as close to the original as possible, including copying the stitchwork and the fiber count of an artifact from the archive collection. At the same time someone who worked for a client might make a garment that looked the part but substitute a synthetic fabric to save on cost. Arguably none were completely exempt from relying on some form of modern materiality. The “original,” as opposed to the reconstruction, has taken on the status of the truly authentic, while historical reconstructions have come to represent an illusionary ideal of the past.

In the nineteenth century, there was an increased interest in narrating and presenting history for the public, and a large part of this interest represented the beginning of accurate historical costuming (Jablon-Roberts & Saunders, 2019). The continued divide between the original and the reproduction is established through the flawed ideal of the “original” that really doesn’t exist. While it was in the nineteenth century that an interest in creating historic costumes began, the role of dress adaption has been around much longer. In Wilcox’s discussion of Kashmir wraps and paisley shawls, she examines the Victorian practice of what we now term upcycling. While we consider upcycling dress a modern practice, Victorian women had been doing this long before through the repurposing of Kashmir shawls, which they altered to make dolmans or mantles to suit their contemporary fashions (Wilcox, 2023). What dress historians often don’t account for in this quest for the original is the role that alterations have in muddling the idea of an exact date and history for a garment. The use of alterations only became class-synonymous in the modern era, as even the wealthiest of women practiced regular alterations and adaptations of their wardrobes in the past (Baumgarten, 2013). When we acknowledge alterations as part of historic dress practice there is a further depth added to these garments that approaches

an immediate ancestry (Baumgarten, 2013). However, the tension between the original and the reproduction has complicated this relationship and challenges our ideals of what the past is or should be. By making the past a pure unadulterated process (by suggesting that a garment exists without alteration or adaption) we limit the potential for engagement with its cultural practices for fear of positing our own values and interests into the process, while simultaneously ignoring the fact that in the past people engaged with their own ancestry (their relationship to the past and its practices) as a process to be built upon rather than perfectly preserved.

The value of altered clothing is that it speaks to a continuum rather than an isolated succession of specified events (Baumgarten, 2013). As Baumgarten argues, historians like David Lowenthal have continued to claim that there is a need for a stable past (an idea of the past that reflects and contains connections to the present) and for a product that will validate traditions (of the dominant culture the history is based within). She counters that there is a constant alteration of the past without collective consciousness of this alteration occurring. Rather than seeing alterations of historic items as necessary evils, they should be treated as valuable survivals (Baumgarten, 2013). This should not be a revolutionary concept, as clothing is and should continue to be caught up in a process of making and remaking despite generational divides. While some pieces logistically can no longer be worn, items that have signs of wear and alteration should be no less valuable to an understanding of the past. By including and analyzing these lived artifacts, the recollection of a life lived can be considered through garments that are perfectly preserved for one moment in time. In a research report on a seventeenth-century waistcoat, the researcher examined alterations made to the knit waistcoat in order to understand its historical uses. The findings suggested that the more recent alterations that took place in the garment were made to fit the late nineteenth century's idea of what Elizabethan costume should

be (O'Neill, 2023). As O'Neill's case study highlights, ideas of historical accuracy will be shaped by a period's understanding of the past and its attempt to recreate or preserve it.

Alterations also gain significance through the passing on of clothing through the phenomenon of wills, where the clothing is passed down by the deceased with the hope that through alterations the clothing would receive a new life by fitting to a new body (Baumgarten, 2013). Despite such historical understandings of alterations, reproductions continue to be scrutinized for their approximation of the authentic. As they are created, they may be evaluated in terms of whether they accurately capture a specific part of the past, one that exists without contemporary influence. At the same time, the community may not take into consideration that this view of the past and of the "original" is not truly possible.

What the participants offered within the survey was a passion for reinterpreting and engaging with the past. However, the majority is still biased towards the idea of a perfect dress artifact that reinforces a traditional timeline. The resistance to types of modern inventions and the attitudes towards bodies of the past and present, as well as the scrutiny that reconstructionists face, creates a divide within historic dress research. Reconstructionists not only encounter scrutiny by the industries of historic fashion but also experience division amongst themselves through the inherent value placed on the authentic dress artifact and its "perfect" recreation. By reconsidering both how we approach timelines as well as the bias brought to considerations of the past through the dress artifact, we may achieve a more adaptable approach to historicism that accepts the individual reality and personal aspects of clothing. This furthers an understanding of historic fashion's development regionally, communally, and personally, beyond the time the garment was originally designed and worn, to consider how it has continued to exist and be understood.

Online Historic Reproductions and Aestheticizing the Past

By considering the aesthetic and market value of historic dress recreations it would be remiss to not include some of the ways digital platforms have further conflated this aesthetic value in recreations with public memory's continued influence on fashion history. The public and their approach to the aestheticization of the past as understood as the complete past (the aesthetic dress is understood as the only example of historic dress because it is the only thing exhibited in museum practice) limits the potential interpretive value that many reconstructions hold, including questions of regional, race, and class significance. In the survey, participants were asked to discuss their own interactions with costumers and reproductionists whose community was based in social media.¹³⁴ The main advantage to social platforms, as suggested by the participants, is the democratization of dress historians' knowledge and the ease of access to resources.¹³⁵ On Pinterest, resources like patterns and fashion plates are made readily available, while sites like Facebook and Instagram offer free memberships to fashion societies. It was YouTube, however, that was considered the most effective tool for disseminating factual information, as it was considered less accessed by the mainstream for fashion history, and with longer runtimes, the platform lends itself to more research-based videos.¹³⁶ The ease of access as a democratizing tool allows those outside of the financial and academic background typical of the community to engage with ideas of the past and its dress cultures. As Bevan highlights, the emergence of videos from the beauty culture industry has found subversive meaning through the

¹³⁴ Survey Question Eleven, "How effective do you think social media platforms like Pinterest, YouTube, or Instagram have impacted the understanding around historical fashion and reproductions?" May 2023.

¹³⁵ See Appendix D, Figure 4.12, Graph Results of Social Media's Influence, May 2023.

¹³⁶ Survey Question Eleven, May 2023.

involvement of different classes and backgrounds, in tutorials based on ideas of the past (Bevan, 2017). This includes communities of Latina women who have found a way to engage with the fashion industry on these video platforms by highlighting some of their own ancestry and cultural approaches that are left out of most archives and Western historicist timelines. This access is significant in allowing other ideas around historicism to emerge that exist outside of the current bias of upper-class Eurocentric clothing collections.

The main issue for the use of social media is the potential reinforcement of myth-making by people who don't have a background in fashion history.¹³⁷ This myth-making challenges both current understandings of historic timelines and limits potential readings of historic dress by provoking the public's understanding of fashion artifacts. As an example, several survey participants brought up the corset debate which is firmly entrenched in the idea of tightlacing and perceived as a fashion object that has killed numerous women. This myth is reinforced by Hollywood productions and fashion enthusiasts. Without the historical context, many posters create their own dress histories based on personal bias. Facebook and Instagram are considered the worst offenders for reinforcing mythmaking, but other platforms also perpetuate these myths.¹³⁸ In the tutorials Bevan analyses, historicity is found through hypertextual devices that offer an intertextual engagement with videos that are historical, even if they do not directly cite historical sources. The videos reference other forms of reproducibility and historicism without drawing on traditional academic sources to support their claims, relying on others in their community as well as their performance within public memory to give credence to their process. Rather than reference sources, they mobilize signs that are associated with "pastness" (Bevan,

¹³⁷ See Appendix D, Figure 4.12, Graph Results of Social Media's Influence, May 2023.

¹³⁸ Survey Question Eleven, May 2023

2017). Such an approximation of the historical does hold value in that it alludes to ideas of the historic as something approachable and still aligned with contemporary values and interests. In doing so, it increases public interest and allows those traditionally left out a way of implementing their own ancestral traditions. The platforms have become a modern way for intergenerational knowledge transfer to occur, as they allow new generations to contemplate concepts of fashion history while acknowledging personal items of familial ancestry within a framework that is different for each online community, such as the Latina community that Bevan highlights in her article.

The popularity of these sites has allowed for a renewed interest in the costuming/reproduction industry, which has led to positive changes, such as general enthusiasm and increased funding. However, as my survey participants have also claimed, it has also contributed to an increase in copycats who make pieces without a specific idea of research or intent, often basing their designs on a false assumption about historic design practices.¹³⁹ Another consideration is the role these platforms have in stealing from designers of historic reproductions. There is now a surplus of fast fashion websites that have begun to produce mock vintage clothes that are most often inaccurate, poorly made, and environmentally problematic as a result of such theft.¹⁴⁰ The survey participants claim that these platforms are good for creating visually exciting content, but often from a sensationalist perspective and one based in personal bias, where the goal of the content creator is to create something visually appealing rather than informative.¹⁴¹ This is the main problem with such social platforms, in that for the most part they work as a primarily economic platform, rather than offering new opportunities to engage with

¹³⁹ Survey Question Eleven, May 2023

¹⁴⁰ Survey Question Eleven, May 2023

¹⁴¹ Survey Question Eleven, May 2023

ideas of the past. Instead of challenging timelines and ideas of culture or class, they reinforce the aesthetic ideal found in many costume dramas in the hope of selling rather than increasing engagement. This is also true of the market-based commissions in reconstruction practice. However, the salient issue, as the community views it, is that the use of social media was ideally intended to perform separately from market practice as a platform to engage with personal projects and alternative ideas of history outside the museum space. By being driven by viewership and economics, the platforms have become inundated with the market system that the community hoped to separate from these platforms. There is potential for social media to engage with alternative perspectives on fashion history that challenge traditional timelines, but by focusing on resale value, they reinforce the aesthetic dimension in historic dress, falling back on preconceptions that don't advance new thoughts or considerations for the fashion object.

Such online sources are not designed for discourse, and, in fact, algorithms tend to simplify the potential to engage with different ideas by creating restrictions on the ways one can interact with others on these platforms. These can include restrictions on video lengths and the ways that one can respond to comments. While some make use of devices like reaction videos, the tendency is still to group engagement based on what people want to see, creating a feedback loop that tends to limit alternative viewpoints and outsider engagement. Survey participants suggested that with better algorithms in place, they could be a useful tool for connecting people in the community and as a way of educating, but social media is currently too inundated with sales pitches and influencer entertainers.¹⁴² This is not to suggest that there is not potential for online forms of historical dissemination. Economou stipulates, vintage and historic fashion approaches in cultural media practice are about nostalgically manipulating ideas of the past to

¹⁴² Survey Question Eleven, May 2023.

promote personal representations through a creative imagining or re-remembering of the past, which suits current cultural practices (Economou, 2015). This reimagining practice allows women from a variety of backgrounds and class systems to engage with ideas of the past even if their bodies don't fit within the dominant framework of Western historic timelines. Social networks create content that moves away from fashion industry powerhouses to content made by individuals who repurpose garments to express their own identities and narratives. While historically marginalized groups are still in the minority for these practices, the platforms have increased their potential to express both resistance and forgotten histories (Morris, 2017). Online fashion platforming can offer a more varied look at history that would account for alternative perspectives and forgotten pasts. Social platforms allow free access to these ideas, and if scholarship were more willing to engage with such platforms and perspectives, the field might begin to move away from the aestheticizing tradition to a more varied approach to historic dress and timelines.

Why Reconstruction? The Community's Value in Reinterpreting the Past

An understanding of the ever-evolving scholarship around authenticity in dress has led to a shift in purposes around reconstruction practice. If the reconstruction as viewed within a linear timeline is largely artificial (the reconstruction was not actually made in 1720), then what is the real benefit to historic reconstructions? The embodied turn as a case for wearing and producing garments of the past is a strong one and offers a form of personal connection to people of the past, through practices of making that are passed down generationally. As part of the survey, it

was important to understand who in the community wore their reproductions and what sort of personal connections they have to the garments they had made.¹⁴³ The division of participants was almost half when it came to whether they wore a historical dress or not; however, those who did were passionate about their purpose and had very specific reasons as to why they wore the garments.¹⁴⁴ In addition to a personal connection, many alluded to a sense of what they saw as a kind of duty. As one participant suggests: “It shows an appreciation of what came before us” (M.T., 2023). The act of reconstruction is one that connects the past to the present and acknowledges intergenerational knowledge transfer. This transfer comes from attention to practices of the past in reconstructions worn, as well as in reconstruction that is passed onto others, as in the case of commercial work. Such a transfer occurs not just in the wearing but also in the plying of trades shared across the community through sales and presentations of reconstructions. Another participant claimed that her strongest connection to pieces were to ones that linked her to different generations within her family, such as a Renaissance gown her mother helped make for her prom and the wedding dress that she hoped to pass down and alter for her daughter (D.S.G, 2023). The appreciation for the past and its practices here is not relegated to distant pasts but to recent and familial pasts as well. The value of personal history is a strong motivating factor in reconstruction.

The corporeal register was a consideration that most participants referred to in some way. The embodiment of the garment worn offers the ability to slip into another character or person. Corporeality, in this case, is enacted through the presentation of past bodies through one that is physically present in this age. Participants mentioned feeling more themselves in the clothing of

¹⁴³ Survey Question Ten “Why would you, or your models/re-enactors, wear historical clothing, do you have any personal connections to the pieces/ do they make you feel a certain way?”, May 2023.

¹⁴⁴ Survey Question Ten, May 2023

the past, identifying with a certain sensibility and aesthetic that they cannot find today.¹⁴⁵ As one respondent clarified, the real value of the reconstruction lies in its intersectionality with different time periods and people:

I have a keen interest in the ‘interface’ or intersection or negotiation between maker and wearer – both in the past and in the present. The embodied experience of wearing clothing that has been cut as in the period, constructed using the techniques of the period, and made in the closest possible textiles all contribute to credible “performances” and interpretation. Wearing period clothing suggests and encourages different ways of standing, moving and comporting oneself in ways that cannot be achieved through verbal instruction or archival research. I am personally connected to the clothing that I make through the embodied experience I have as the maker. (R.O., 2023)

Moving beyond the artifact and reproduction, the practice of negotiating past and present requires a more in-depth and personal approach to the history of dress that removes it from the more static timeline that scholarship tends to rely on, allowing different bodies an opportunity to engage with ideas of the past. Such interaction demystifies the bodies absent from the historical record by recreating clothing that accounts for different bodies and backgrounds that have been both neglected and forgotten in traditional archival practice. Further, in wearing and creating these pieces, participants gain a more active engagement with the past that connects people in terms of lived experience rather than as objects of historical narratives.

Participants mentioned an interest in a “lived” history that historical garments and garment-making allow. This lived history reconsiders the standard timelines that traditional

¹⁴⁵ Survey Question Ten, May 2023.

approaches to history have supported by offering a more cyclical version that connects both past and present practices. Beyond the obvious work that goes into reconstructionist projects, the wearing of the garment, as several participants suggested, allowed them to fully embrace the practice and allowed them to understand what values people of the past put into their clothing. The main role, as many suggest, is to make history both personal and approachable.¹⁴⁶ This allows for a reconsideration of history for people outside of academic circles. It takes into account approaches to a variety of class and background considerations of the people doing the reconstructions that may fall outside of a traditionalist Eurocentric perspective. As one participant clarified, the traditional museum collection tends towards stagnation. When the public is able to see and touch something that mimics the past, this allows for greater inspiration (C.M., 2023). The aim is not only to teach aspects of dress history but also to make it an experience that is rewarding and credible (R.O., 2023). The practice of donning these garments is to make the self an active part of a living history as well as allowing one to shape the dress culture's understanding for future generations. The reconstructionist repertoire as a history through lived performance serves as a complement to the archives that furthers the understanding of history through the act of spending time in the space of the past. This in turn offers a variation on the ethnography of the past's cultures (Johnson, 2015). The performance of history as embodiment practice forms a social memory of living or relived traditions experienced kinaesthetically (Johnson, 2015).

Beyond the relationship between maker and wearer, the reproduction process also allows for re-enactments. Re-enactment is the practice of acting out a historic event or period by a group of history enthusiasts. Types of re-enactments include combat demonstrations, battle re-

¹⁴⁶ Survey Question Ten, May 2023.

enactments, and immersion events (like dances or trials) that serve as entertainment for their members and offer an educational experience for the public (LivingHistoryArchive, 2023). Not all reproductions are used for re-enactment, but many reproductionists do work in partnership with these groups and their events. The wearing of these historically inspired garments lends itself to a more interactive experience of history on which re-enactment depends. While re-enactment enhances the experience of wearing re-created garments, it also can lead to a greater level of what might be seen as historical time bending. Often attending costumers may shift an event to suit their available clothing options, as for example, wearing one of their garments designed for the 1880s to an 1840s-themed dance. Theatrical dress adds another element to this as productions will frequently adjust costumes on hand to suit narratives such as a Shakespearean story set in the 1920s (F.G., 2023).

Attending the Gatsby Garden party every year at the Spadina House in Toronto was one such event that many reproductionists, including myself, have attended and dressed for.¹⁴⁷ By attending this event people attempt to reconnect with ideas of personal ancestry through the space and place of an imagined 1920s Toronto, Canada. The event provides an embodied experience of the original household and its experiences through an act of historical time bending. The event includes period music, dance lessons, and food, which together work as a fantasy of the 1920s. While this gives the public some perspective on what was considered socially relevant for the time, it does so with an acceptance of costumes that would have little to do with the historic reality. Despite this, the event still provides an experience that connects the public with dialogues on the past and with room to engage various perspectives, including

¹⁴⁷ Note the Pandemic and Subsequent reframing of the museum have put an end to this event, the last occurrence in 2019 (Toronto History Museums, Spadina House).

questions of class and race. By blurring the boundaries of the costume's timelines there is a potential to reframe present approaches to ideas of an authentic history.

Despite the ongoing challenges in defining and reinforcing an authentic dress history through reconstruction practices, the costume community continues to want to recreate items of the past. In my study, each participant emphasized their own experiences, which coloured their understanding of the practice of creating dress histories. While everyone was passionate about the industry in which they worked, they tended to be quite divided when it came to what the end results should be. Few hesitated to suggest that the practice did not complicate the understanding of history in some way.¹⁴⁸ As one participant clarified, reproduction is only as effective as the approach and interpretations that are undertaken by the reproductionists and their industry. The participant also suggested that the varied backgrounds of the community lead to a variety of motives and purposes, which has meant dress history suffers from not having a more uniform approach that could help the process of design to avoid bias and inaccuracies (R.O., 2023). Another participant similarly agreed that the issues lay in the question of creating a good versus bad reproduction that might reinforce the public's understanding of history and dress practice. However, they further argue for the importance of allowing the public to engage with materiality as part of engaging in cultural practice. Reproductions afford the opportunity to consider issues such as status, style, race, and social standing in ways that other cultural products cannot. Further, actual antique garment tends to be class-restrictive, where reproductions allow anyone to engage with ideas of history (B.T., 2023). In “doing” reconstructions, reconstructionist practice may offer greater cultural access to those outside the museum and academia.

¹⁴⁸ Survey Question Twelve, “How effective have reproductions of historical fashion been in understanding and interpreting history?”, May 2023.

The consensus of the surveyed members, while broad in approach, is that fashion reproductions can connect dressmakers past and present to an audience in a way that a simple visual image or text cannot. While each industry did have a distinct approach to historic reproductions, many of the surveyed participants had a similar value system in place. First and foremost, research methodology for these designers is all about doing and not just seeing.¹⁴⁹ Through intergenerational knowledge transfer, one can embody traditional practices and engage with values of the past. As one participant clarified in their work with museums, reproducing pieces from the archives has allowed them to understand some of the construction methodologies of the past (L.L., 2023). Another participant suggested that her work has given her an in-depth perspective on the practice of cutwork and machine-made lace. She argued that there is value in reproduction using contemporary processes, as the look will be similar in visual authenticity, but that the approach bridges past methods of design with the present in compelling ways (D.S.G., 2023). This experience of engaging with materiality is about exploring the reasons behind a design. As another participant claims, it was only through drafting a pattern and working through a sewing process that they were able to achieve a visceral engagement with a piece and its past (C.M., 2023). From a practical research-based perspective, the use of reproductions allows for a more complete embodiment of dress practice. By recreating its process, one is not just studying the artifact but also inserting oneself into its history in a manner that also makes bias clear.

Returning to this engagement with the public, I would argue that reconstructions allow for an approachable means for the storytelling of history and its concepts. In theory, they also engage anyone interested in understanding historic dress, regardless of education or background. The survey participants claim a value for reproduction as a continued practice through its

¹⁴⁹ Survey Question Twelve, May 2023

potential to connect the public to considerations of the past in new and interactive ways.¹⁵⁰ The practice allows them to see themselves within social systems of the past, even if they don't fit the current modes of fashion storytelling about dress practices performed historically including a space for the poor, disabled and racialized bodies. Even those hesitant to see a historic value still argued for reproductions as being a valuable part of our cultural practice and storytelling. As one participant clarifies:

Since I am a theatrical designer, I'm all about storytelling and helping audiences imagine what it would be like to live in the clothes. Those who participate in costumed interpretation do get to live the period life in the proper clothing that educates them about why the garments are made the way they are. When I handle an extant garment, I feel privileged to reach back in time and tangibly feel the past! (M.G., 2023).

This understanding that the past can be made tangible for the present, suggests that the concept of the past is flexible. Reproductions work to fill in the gaps left by historic artifacts; however, some argue that reproduction is not about capturing the past or organizing historical design but is rather a way of engaging in design research that bridges the gap between the past and present.

Suppose reproductions are to be understood as a medium to engage with concepts of the past but not as the product of a strict understanding of timelines. Where does the community factor in truth separate from illusions? Part of the problem, as one participant put it, is reconstructionists must often work against a person's preconceived notions of what a costume should or should not be. Having worked with actors and re-enactors who have misconceptions grounded in public memory's current approach to historic costuming, this participant frequently

¹⁵⁰ Survey Question Twelve, May 2023

must compromise an ideal to fit budgets and aesthetics (L.L., 2023). As another participant argues, reproductions aren't about authenticating or clarifying the past. When asked, she suggested that the purpose of reproductions is all about the illusion of being there. In a theatrical production, it is more about storytelling rather than an actual understanding of the conditions in which historical figures existed, which might include the presence of disease or the use of chamber pots: the theatrical reality is a reality without poverty (F.G., 2023). This is primarily the point where reproduction practice exists today, in that it is more about enjoying an illusionary aesthetic rather than challenging the conventions of scholarship or ways of cataloging culture. However, the practice is shifting, as we see in attempts to recreate with a purpose, to engage with these absent histories and to acknowledge the biases inherent in aestheticizing historic dress.

The problem, then, in current reproduction practice may lie in the community of gatekeepers who situate themselves as experts or as perhaps caring more about history because they put more funds towards their projects and designs. This gatekeeping functions to leave those who can't afford full accuracy on the margins of dress conversations. This tendency, as a participant argued, offers only limited opportunities for new and relevant research that reconsiders other cultures and approaches to design: "It makes most people afraid to do original research because if they venture to say (or wear) anything that contradicts the received opinion in their peer group, they are torn apart. And the 'accuracy' is usually only about clothes, not other aspects of society" (F.G., 2023). By limiting who can engage in reconstruction, the community also limits the fostering of other kinds of scholarship. This creates potential problems regarding how to address issues of historic appropriation, or how we might avoid the myth-making practice of historic costuming while still allowing other voices a space to create and address missing histories. I argue that a clear and concise approach that addresses the ways

design can engage with missing histories and which also acknowledges design grounded in historic practices and indexes will compliment a contemporary perspective on reconstruction without negating the past.

The role of perceived gatekeeping, as suggested by the participants, is likely a large part of the industry's problem with unifying. By this, I mean fashion scholarship's tendency to separate ideas of reconstruction from the curating of historic fashion, which results in a division between reconstructionist practice and its place in scholarship. By unifying the industry of reproductions, makers will be able to produce a more focused approach towards ideas of authenticity and historic dressmaking. This in turn would offer a more rigorously vetted process that avoids the aestheticizing entertainment umbrella under which most reproductions currently reside. Part of the hesitancy to undertake one of these reconstruction projects is understanding where one is to draw the line between accuracy and interpretation. For example, "Do I have to greatly exceed a comfortable budget to offer a culturally valuable dress reproduction?" Still, the practice as a whole does more to unite people and appears at least in part to have a broader appeal to the public. Reproduction practice has a way of allowing even a newcomer to engage with the cultural lexicon of fashion and history in interesting ways. Cultural exploration as a new facet in dress recreation practice and associated events offers a new generation of learners a space to explore cultural ideas. The participants from the study suggest that the reproductions market will only expand from here as museums and other cultural industries come to rely more on dress reproductions for the presentation and dissemination of fashion history and design timelines. I argue that reconsidering what these practices allow is important in clarifying dress histories and historic appropriation. By taking some of the theoretical approaches outlined by Mida and Kim (2015) when addressing interpretive aspects and the personal approaches to design, we can at

least address the biases we bring to costume recreation. As we acknowledge some of the missing histories (those fashion objects that exist outside of the upper-class social system of fashion) and cultural practices (including the use of intergenerational knowledge to bridge this gap between cultural timelines) we can create a broader framework through which to engage with design history and style.

In analyzing the reconstruction practice of surveyed members from the community, I have argued that the solution to many of these biases would be a truly democratic process in which more people from different backgrounds might wear historic clothing and reiterate their own embodied experience of historic designs. The problem currently is that the practice of reconstruction continues to be performed primarily by play actors from predominantly middle-class white backgrounds and settings. In the first part of this dress reconstruction and survey project, I clarified what I, as a designer, would need to avoid reconstruction bias in future projects, such as access to different types of designs and a supportive structure for newcomers to the community. A more impactful version of design would involve allowing a variety of voices and bodies to engage in this embodiment practice, which in turn would allow for such a democratic approach to take root in dress history design. Those performing outside of the support systems of the reconstruction community (including university grants, museum programming budgets, and fashion-based funding for artists) are more aware of budget constraints and material access. The resale value of a reconstruction is often tied to its aesthetic value in the present market system, which is, in part, why more novel items continue to be designed. For those working on their own, there is only so much exploration of past practices they can undertake from a practical standpoint. The funding tends to go to those able to access a more formal education (either through university/college programs or acceptance to specialty art schools).

Staff at the conservation labs at the Cleveland Museum of Art, for example, suggested that entering specialty programs like theirs has been extremely class-restrictive because of the amount of time and money required to be initially accepted. The organization has developed a series of funding opportunities including specialist grants, scholarship programs, and adaptive timelines for program completion to help bridge some of these gaps. The hope is to incentivize different bodies and voices to join in museum practice and reconstruction practice. A challenge to these collection and display practices can and should occur by means of welcoming a variety of bodies and perspectives into these educational sites.

Beyond the formalist spaces (like academia) there can still be a more democratic approach to design. In my project, I explored my subjective considerations in design, my likes and dislikes, and my restrictions both of body and background. It stands to reason that if other bodies were able to explore practices of the past through an analysis of embodiment within reconstruction, a broader and more diverse collection of garments would be produced. For example, disabled bodies have existed in the past, but reconstruction practice is limiting for those who want to approach historic making with bodies that require adjustments (novices need to work from existing patterns, but most patterns will not account for a wheelchair, for example). One of the ways in which reconstruction as a practice can become more democratic is to reconsider the community and its points of access. Many starting out in reconstruction find themselves struggling from a lack of support and guidance (only having their pieces verified after the making is done). By verification, I am referring to the broader community's acceptance or denial of the value of a piece historically, which is still largely based on a subjective bias. While there are online and in-person reconstruction communities, the gatekeeping that the surveyed members highlighted has been a significant issue in recruiting new members. Most feel

like they should have some hands-on experience before joining a community; however, without support in place, the first project can often be the most daunting. Social media platforms that continue to be a contentious space for the reconstruction community are perhaps the best spaces for a democratic approach to take place. For example, groups of people identified as racialized have developed a historic makers community through online platforms like YouTube, which has allowed, albeit slowly, for changes to historic making to occur. As scholars like Economu (2018) and Bevan (2019) have suggested. However, until we acknowledge the divisions within the makers' community and the separatist platforming that occurs through social media, a more collective democratic making won't occur. Validating and engaging with embodied practices of making is the first step in legitimizing the practice of reconstruction and allowing for these other voices to engage with dress history.

Conclusions: Where Do We Go from Here?

In the previous chapter, I have examined how our attempts to capture history continue through the medium of dress in reconstruction practices. In doing so, I have highlighted the subjective quality of garments that reinforce the uniqueness of the fashion object while providing potential readings of the artifact that further demystify the past. This allows me to reconsider the fashion artifact's use of linear trajectories within Westernized historical timelines to create cultural patterns from both within and outside our own cultural perspective (including other cultural backgrounds and different categorizations of historic events, including a cyclical understanding of history's artifacts). By considering not only the sequential cataloging of timelines (our current cataloging approaches to artifacts which I addressed in the first chapter) but also the social and individual patterns that exist within personal perceptions of time (considerations that are outside of this linear trajectory), we can break down and demystify the idea of fashion's static nature and its fixed condition within a culture. We can also reevaluate fashion productions' reliance on public memory and memorials by acknowledging what we collectively remember, how it has been framed socially, and how this impacts what we decide to remember about the past and its perceived value for today's moral and cultural values.

In the second chapter of this thesis, an examination of two garment case studies representing childhood and adulthood was conducted using the framework of the "slow approach" articulated by Mida and Kim (2015). This approach is significant because it focuses on the individual artifact as part of a larger theoretical framework. It thereby accounts for the personal and subjective qualities of the dress artifact that I argue are needed to deconstruct the

thematic linear approach to dress cataloging that exists in archival practice. Such garment case studies, I argue, impact our cultural perceptions of personhood through considerations in their design that focus on the developing body, further highlighting the metamorphic quality of fashion and its place within understandings of a life/death dichotomy inherent in a corporeal artifact, worn by an individual but persisting in museums and archives as well as in public memory (Ravnlokke et al., 2023; Springgay, 2003; Colls, 2003). Our cultural obsession with interest in the corporeal register of fashion is also showcased in reconstruction practice through designs that highlight the age and body type of the designers and their notions of memory through fashion. For example, some of the older participants in the survey only liked making clothes based on designs for older women of the past, designing what they considered “appropriate” for age and body type from preconceived biases regarding age and a notion of what older women liked wearing historically. The continued investment to create designs that are produced within an idea of a life/death dichotomy in fashion (the contrasting state of fashion as existing first for the body it housed and moving beyond the body to other bodies and eras) problematizes the cultural cataloging of fashion and the role that the fashion object has as cultural memory keeper, which I have examined throughout the thesis. I have attempted to showcase our struggles, both past and present, to fix an idea of Western linear timelines and aging through dress. This struggle involves cataloging dress as a universal process that continuously evolves the ideas of each period by attempting to negate dress’s associations with the personal and the mortal aspects of the subjects that wear the garments. The often-contradictory attempts to fix the individual’s age and the era of their social condition (like the Gilded Age) through fashion has, I argued, shown the problematic approach to historicism that we continue to rely on in our current cultural cataloging system.

Throughout this thesis, I have explored museum theory within a Westernized tradition while considering its biases within fashion collections and museum exhibitions. By including reconstructionist frameworks and combining them with fashion theory I have offered an alternative approach to dress attitudes in memorial and memory practices that considers alternative personal timelines and embodied practices of dress design. This, in turn, I have argued, demystifies some of these traditional Western timelines (the past as situated both chronologically and by events of significance), making space for an approach to the corporeal that allows for both past and present considerations of subjectivity to be considered in dress history. A more flexible understanding of fashion theory that includes approaches outside of the current academic framework, like reconstructions, considers the cultural product beyond chronological categorizations of historic objects. This evaluation of more personal and subjective approaches to dress histories and their artifacts allows for an expanded view of fashion's role: existing not only within a Westernized canon of social progressions but also in terms of the nuances of dress outside of current historical records. By including more globalist perspectives through a reconsideration of historic cataloging, items lost to archive collection practices (such as working-class examples of dress) can be reassessed and included as future topics of dress history.

In the first chapter, I examined current approaches to displaying historic dress based on myth-building in museum dress practice, including the "original" artifacts and their presentation of the idealized body as being the only body historically. Further, I have addressed the collection framework that supports an idealized version of dress design and its subjects through our own cultural ideals and aesthetics. I have argued that our understanding of dress history is not based on reality but rather is reinforced through our own concerns drawn from present cultural systems.

In both displaying dress artifacts and reconstructed pieces, we work from an assumption regarding the wearer's conditions and their beliefs, attempting to align their beliefs with our own. These conjectures about the past have led to a bias in dress timelines that we reinforce through elitist examples of designs, including a reliance on wealthy or celebrity dress histories. We consider dress history as evidence for the past's public memory (how the people of the past recalled ideas of their histories that helped shape their social condition) as a reflection of our own public's memory (what we have collectively decided about the past to shape the current cultural milieu), such as a consideration of gendered clothing that is situated in a current understanding of traditional femininity and a general belief on what the past considered traditional femininity.

Our compulsion to delineate different historic periods in a way that both immortalizes and contains evidence of historic time's progression has led to anxiety surrounding the dress artifact. By understanding dress history through a traditional Western linear timeline (one that categorizes history through major events such as cultural production during the Cold War), we have considered objects of dress and their stylings from an evolutionary standpoint that ultimately reflects our present culture's tastes and values. In attempting to capture dress within a specific space and place in history we present dress as a referent to both a specific cultural moment and as evidence of a person's existence, fixing ideas of their body within the garment. As we continue to struggle with concepts of time and legacy within historic cataloging, dress has become an artifact closely linked to this anxiety and our attempts to fix it for the present social system.

In this thesis, I have also examined a selection of reconstructionists within a North American practice of design history. In doing so I have highlighted one area of historic dress shaped by specific public memories and a chronological approach to history that exists as part of

the larger cultural geography of North America. In my use of garment case studies, I offered two examples of subjectivity performed upon a developing body through an idea of public memory (the era's collective understanding of their social condition within a communal belief of what their history is) and a dress timeline that is rooted in Gilded Age cultural values. However, in another project, researchers could examine other life stages and other cultural periods as part of this question around the subjective quality of garments within an understanding of historic timelines (as influenced by their own cultural understanding of historicism). They could also consider the place of subjectivity in linear categorizations of dress artifacts. In my work as a whole, I have attempted to provide a framework in which to consider these issues of the corporeal that, in the future, could be used to address other geographical locations and cultural perceptions of public memory outside of a North American tradition. I hope that this examination of a historic time and a consideration of the field of reconstruction will lay the groundwork for other theorists to consider their own cultures' use of public memory in the cultural cataloging of dress practice.

By concluding this thesis project with an attempt to create the foundations of a reconstructionist theory, my intent is both to address potential cataloging bias within museum and heritage spaces that we have reinforced through our present public memory, while also offering more credence to the past's public memory and its impact on the subjectivity associated with artifacts of fashion we attempt to understand today. By repositioning reconstruction practice within museum theory, we can access ideas of subjectivity, personal timelines (the life of the individual wearer and their approaches to concepts of time and aging), and the role of the corporeal. These concepts serve as part of an approach to defining the dress artifact that both demystifies fashion as art and makes the past more accessible to the present. Reconstruction as a

practice has existed for many years, but as a field within theoretical approaches to museum and fashion cataloguing, it is still very underdeveloped. By highlighting some of the members of this community and their challenges designing within a Western linear understanding of time, I suggest the need to reconsider the aestheticizing tradition of fashion and its artifacts.

Reconstruction has the potential to highlight the personal and subjective quality of fashion while offering a different approach to museology which accounts for public perceptions, rather than reinforcing stereotypes of idealized fashion bodies. These different social and individual perceptions of time move beyond a linear trajectory of history that we have attempted to reinforce since the development of historicism, which emerged in Western thought in the nineteenth century. In reconsidering this trajectory, not only will we account for other forms of historic cataloguing that exist beyond current Western historical practices, we can also deconstruct life/death perceptions performed in design, including attempts to conceal aspects of the aging and developing body, that have existed through a cultural anxiety about the corporeal and its attempts to fix concepts of time.

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- Bata Shoe Museum. Exhibition “The Great Divide: Footwear in the Age of Enlightenment” Toronto, 2022-March 27, 2023.
- Cleveland Museum of Art, *Egyptomania Fashion’s Conflicted Obsession*, Arlene M. and Arthur S. Holden Textile Gallery, Gallery 234, 107, October 9, 2023, Through January 28, 2024.
- Cleveland Museum of Art, *Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism*, The Kelvin and Elanor Smith Foundation Gallery, October 9, 2023, Through January 14, 2024.
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- Design Museum London. “Rebel: 30 Years of London Fashion” London, September 2023-February 2024.
- Fashion and Lace Museum. Exhibition “Diane Von Furstenberg. Women Before Fashion” Brussels, January 2024.
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- Metropolitan Museum of Art. Exhibition “Women Dressing Women”, New York, December 2023- March 2024.
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- MFA Boston. Exhibition “Fashioned by Sargent,” Boston, October 2023-January 2024.
- MFA Boston. Exhibition “Dressing up Children’s Fashions 1720-1920,” Boston, November 1996- March 1997.
- MOMU Fashion Museum. Exhibition “Echo. Wrapped in Memory” Ethiopia, Mode Museum

- Antwerp, October 2022-February 2024.
- Musee Orsay. Exhibition "James Tissot (1836-1902), Ambiguously Modern", Paris, June 23-September 13, 2020.
- National Gallery of Victoria. Exhibition "Viktor & Rolf: Fashion Artists" Melbourne, October 2016-February 2017.
- National Gallery of Victoria. Exhibition "Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse" Melbourne, April 2023.
- Parkwood Estate National Historic Site. *Historic Millinery Show and Tea*, November 2023.
- Palais Galliera. *A History of Fashion, Collecting & Exhibiting at the Palais Galliera*, Paris France, October 2, 2021-June 26, 2022.
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APPENDIX A-VISUAL RESOURCE GUIDE CHAPTER ONE

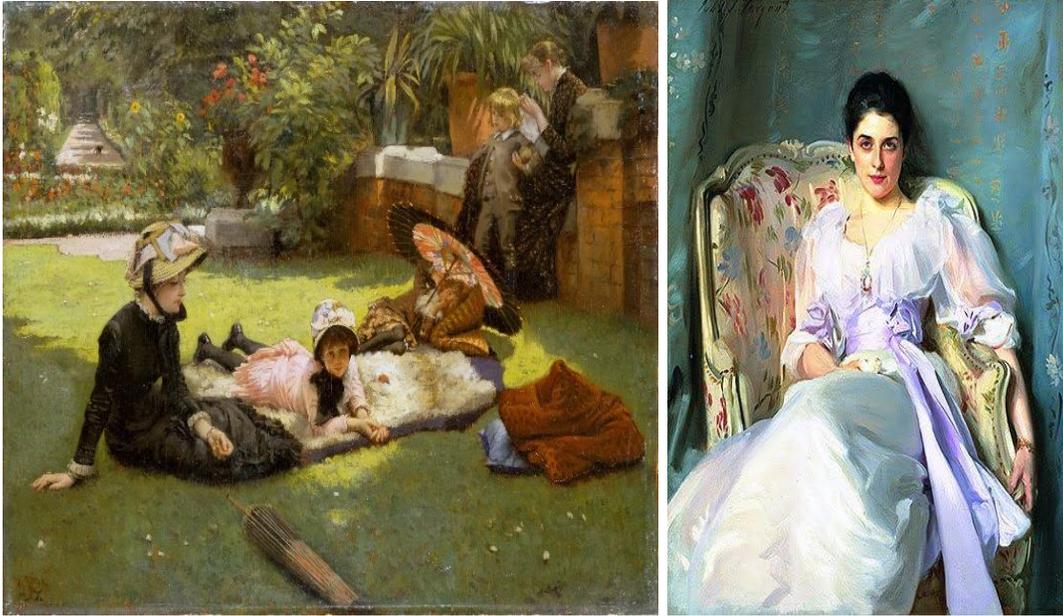


Figure 1.1 and 1.2 Paintings by James Tissot *In Full Sun* Circa 1881 and James Singer Sargent *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* circa 1892.



Figures 1.3 and 1.4 Portrait of Sybil Sassoon Dutchess of Rocksavage, 1922 and House of Worth fancy-dress costume for Sybil Sassoon Dutchess of Rocksavage, 1922, Boston Museum of Art Copyright 2023



Figure 1.5 and 1.6 Alice Posing in her Electric Light Dress 1883, The Electric Light Dress designed by Worth 1883, Images in Public Domain.



Figure 1.7 and 1.8 Princess Diana in Black Sheep Sweater, Getty Images Georges De Keerle and Tim Graham.



Figure 1.9 and 1.10 Tilda Swinton with Chanel, and Tilda Swinton with Madame Gres *The Impossible Wardrobe* Photo Credit Piero Biasion.



Figures 1.11 and 1.12 Empire Parlor and Wade Parlor *Fashion After Dark*, Photo credit Personal Collection October 2023.



Figure 1.13 and 1.14 Gallery Space *A Life in Style The Wardrobe of James E. Mulholland* Photo Credit Personal Collection October 2023.

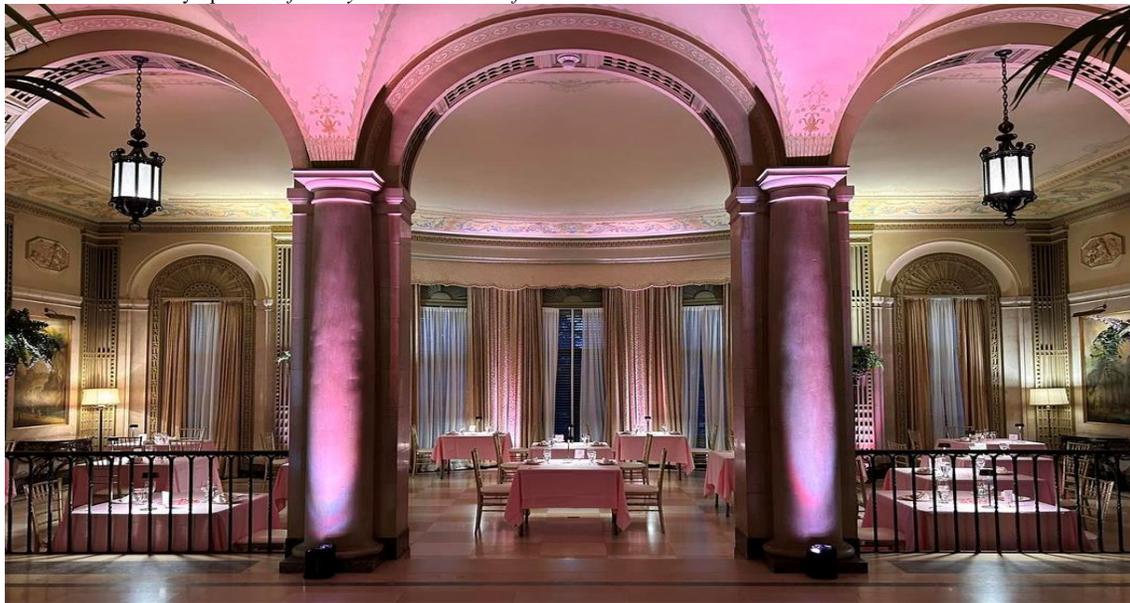


Figure 1.15 Parkwood Estates Event Space (Logia) Historic Millinery Show and Tea Photo Credit Parkwood Events Page Facebook.



Figure 1.16 and 1.17 Gallery 107 and Gallery 234 *Egyptomania Fashion's Conflicted Obsession*, Photo Credit Personal Collection October 2023.



Figures 1.18, 1.19, and 1.20 Gallery Space *Degas and the Laundress: Women, Work, and Impressionism*, Personal Collection October 2023

APPENDIX B- VISUAL RESOURCE GUIDE CHAPTER TWO



Figures 2.1 and 2.2 Summer lawn dress circa 1900, personal collection, 2023



Figures 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5, additional examples of construction. Chemical stain or burn in which fabric has hardened and cracked, eyelets at the waist reattached in several places, stain from where dress label was removed.

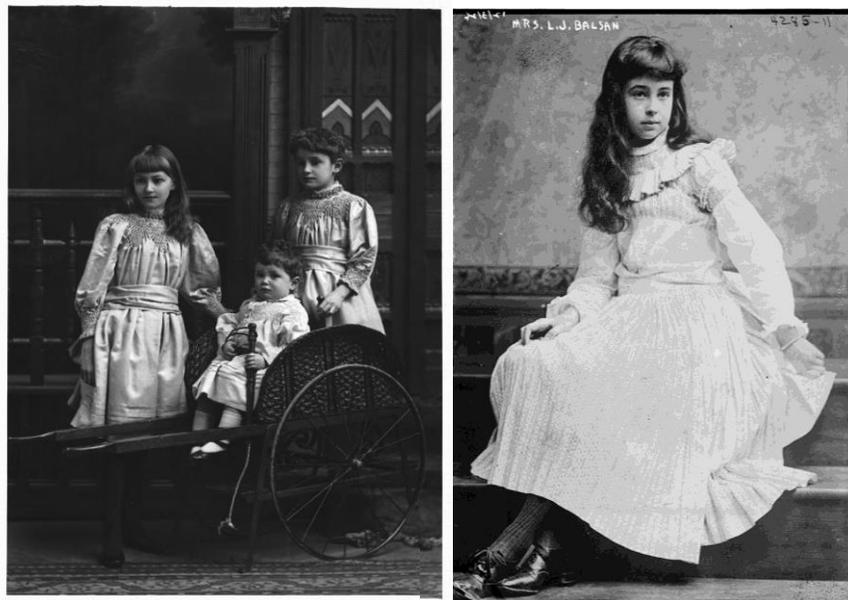


Figure 2.6 Mrs. Claxton's children and rickshaw, Montreal, QC, 1890 by Wm. Notman & Son, II-92169, McCord Stewart Museum Figure 2.7 Portrait of Consuelo Vanderbilt age 10, Southampton History Museum

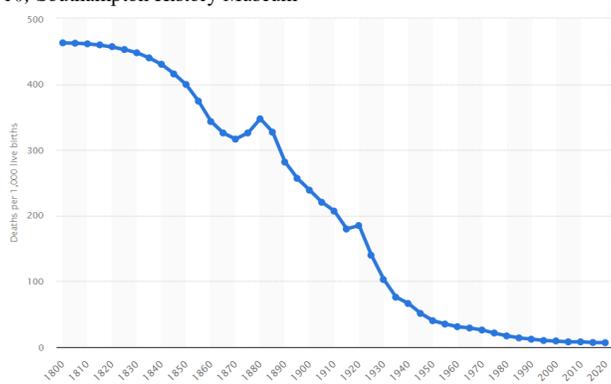
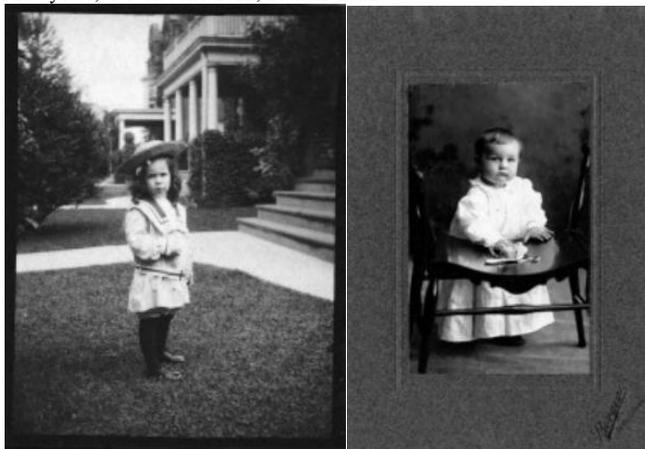


Fig.2.8 Child Mortality Rates Over 200 years, O'Neil June 2022, Statista 2022



Figures 2.9 and 2.10 Portrait of Marriot Jr 1903, Elliston Jr 1899, courtesy of the Morris Collection, copyright 2015



Figures 2.11 and 2.12, Renoir's, *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont*, 1884, Renoir's, *The Daughters of Catulle Mendes*, 1888

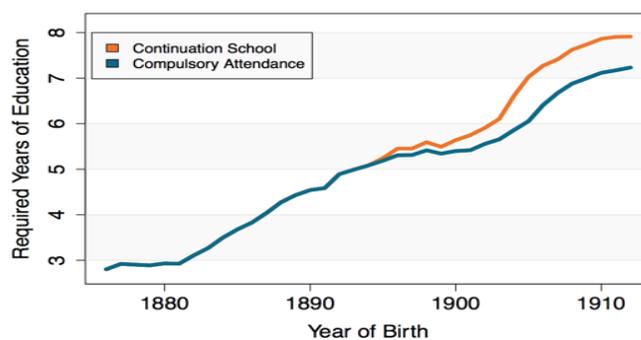


Figure 2.13 Compulsory Education chart from Center for Universal Education, 2022

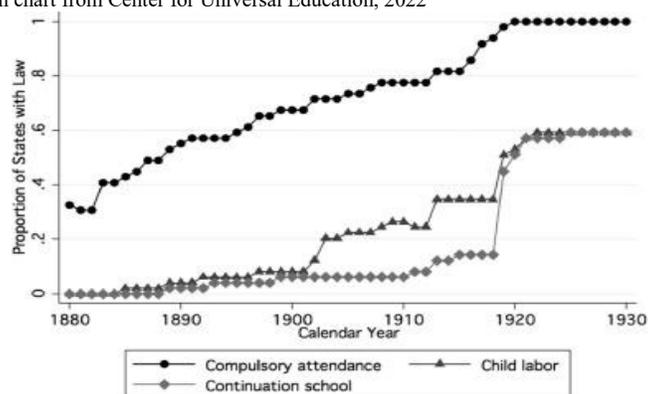


Figure 2.14 From *Laws, Educational Outcomes, and Returns to Schooling: Evidence From the First Wave of U.S. State Compulsory Attendance Laws*, Labour Economics, January 2021



Figure 2.15 Late 19th-century school portrait courtesy of the Bedfordshire Records, Figure 2.16 1890 school portrait Granville School



Fig.2.17 Dr. Bernardo's Home Children, Photo Outside Group Home Circa July 1883, Library and Archives Canada



Figure 2.18 Collection of Children's Shoes Circa 1870-1910, Personal collection



Figures 2.19, 2.20, and 2.21 Side, Front, and Back of Walking Outfit Circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection



Fig.2.22 Eaton Co. Archives, Spring and Summer Catalogue No.27 1894 Fig. 2.23 Bloomingdale Bros, Illustrated Fashion Catalogue: Summer, 1890



Figures 2.24, 2.25, 2.26 and 2.27 Close Up Details of Lace and Shirring on White Blouse, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection



Figures 2.28, 2.29, and 2.30 Details of Damage to the Cotton Blouse, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection



Figures 2.31, 2.32, and 2.33 Details of Skirt Pocket and Hem Extension, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection



Figures 2.34, 2.35, and 2.36 Details of Damage to Walking Skirt, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection



Figures 2.37, 2.38, 2.39, and 2.40 Details of Damage to Underskirts, circa 1890-1900, Personal Collection



Fig.2.41 Dress Circa 1878-1880, CIRC.606-1962, V&A Digital Collections, Fig.2.42 Afternoon Dress Circa 1867, P90.22.2, FIT Digital Archives



Figures 2.43 and 2.44 Charles Dana Gibson, *The Coming Game: Yale vs. Vassar*, 1895, Lucile's Walking Dress sketch from her Autumn 1905 collection, from Valerie D. Mendes and Amy De La Haye, 2009



Figures 2.45 and 2.46 The Mercantile Newspaper ad 1952, Front and Back of Velveteen Jacket by Carlyle, 1952, Personal Collection



Figures 2.47 and 2.48 Portrait by John Singer Sargent *Portrait of Madame X*, 1884 and Painting by James Jacques Tissot, *Political Woman*, 1885



Figures 2.49 and 2.50 Embroidered Boots, Bata Shoe Museum, Accession Number p95.78



Fig. 2.51 Tea Dress by Jean Philippe Worth, MET, Circa 1905, 2009.300.377, Fig. 2.52 Dressing Gown, FIT, Circa 1890, 70.65.1, Fig. 2.53 Victorian Cape from Paisley Shawl, ROM, Circa 1860-1869, 2021.35.1

APPENDIX C- VISUAL RESOURCE GUIDE DINNER DRESS REPRODUCTION AND
RELATED SOURCE MATERIALS



Figure 3.1 Beaded epaulettes circa 1890s-1900s, personal collection



Figure 3.2 Lace collars and cuffs circa late 1800s, personal collection



Figure 3.3 Embroidered trim and cuffs circa late 1800s, personal collection



Figure 3.4 Beaded Rose Embroidered Collar circa late 1880s, personal collection



Figures 3.5 and 3.6 John Singer Sargent *Mrs. Hugh Hammersley* 1892, John Singer Sargent *Portrait of Mrs. Cecil Wade* 1886



Figures, 3.7 La Mode Illustre 1891, 3.8 La Mode Illustre 1896, 3.9 La Mode Illustre 1892, and 3.10 La Mode Illustre 1894



Figures, 3.11 Stern Brothers Evening dress circa 1894 New York, V&A Digital Collections, T272&A-1972, 3.12 Mrs. Arnold Dinner dress circa 1894-96, MET open access, 2009.300.643 a b and 3.13 Worth Dinner Dress circa 1892, KCI Digital Archives, Ac9206 95-7



Figure 3.14 Photograph of Front, Right, and Left side of the Completed Modesty Collar, October 2022, Personal Collection

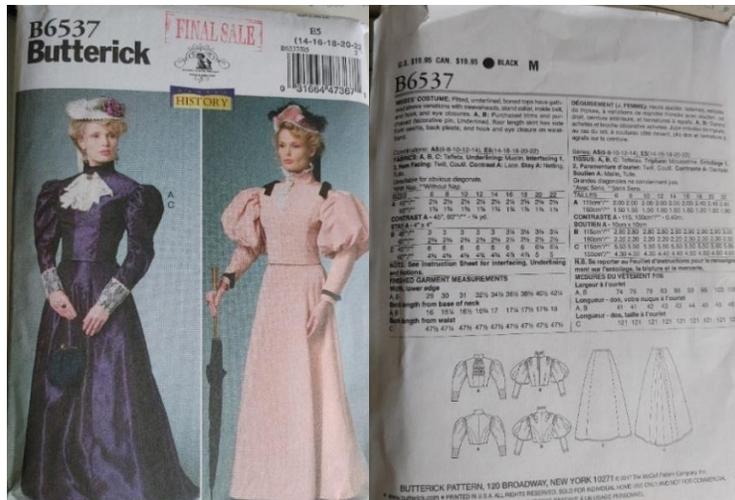


Figure 3.15, Butterick History Victorian Dress Pattern Front and Back



Figure 3.16 and 3.17 Photographs of skirt pattern pieces and Bodice laid out on my kitchen table, altered with graph paper, July and August 2022



Figures 3.18, 3.19, and 3.20 photographs of dress detailing and adaptive closures August 2022



Figures 3.21, 3.22, and 3.23 photographs of Corsetry and Foundational pieces



Figures 3.24, 3.25, and 3.26 Pictures of full Reconstruction in Glanmore's Reception rooms, December 2022

Distributor	Item	Cost
One Moon Mercantile	Nineteenth century Ivory silk collar with ribbon	30.00 USD (41.12)
One Moon Mercantile	Nineteenth century set of collars and cuffs (x2)	40.00 USD (54.82)
Chu Shing Textiles	Embroidered organza fabric	62.15 CAD
Affordable Textiles Inc.	Satin fabric (6 meters)	119.71 CAD
Fabricland	Factory Cotton (6 meters) Hook and Eye notions Twill tape	78.16 CAD
Yahya Enterprises (Etsy)	Ivory s-bend cotton corset	128.00 CAD
Fabricland	Cotton lace trim (4 yards) Nonwoven fusing fabric (1/2 meter) Organza (1/2 meter)	27.74 CAD
Fabricland	Pattern Guide (Butterick)	30.84 CAD
Flea Market	Nineteenth century beaded epaulettes	3.00 CAD
Antiques Dealer	Nineteenth century cage crinoline	Gifted
Purchased from former sewer	Residual heavy gage cotton lining	20.00 CAD
Items purchased before the project for another reproduction	Cotton under slip Leather reproduction 1890s walking heels Stockings	Shoes 130.00 (retail) Slip (20.00) Stockings (20.00)
Total Expense (not including gifts/repurposed)	565.54 CAD	

Figure 3.27, Chart of My Reconstruction's Expenditures December 2022

APPENDIX D- HISTORIC REPRODUCTION SURVEY AND GRAPH RESULTS

Name:

*Organization or Costuming Background:

*This information is only gathered in relation to what industry you approach fashion reproduction from. Your place of business/personal information will not be revealed in the larger project.

Historic Fashion Reproduction Survey

- 1.) Which historical period does your organization design for?
- 2.) What resources do you rely on for a historical reproduction project (for example The Met fashion archives)?
- 3.) Are there any specific target groups that you address in your designs (for example a specific historical person or community)?
- 4.) Do any of your target markets ever wear something from the period you are recreating for? Why or why not?
- 5.) Do you have any limitations on the parameters for your projects (for example time period, culture, or location)?
- 6.) Would you ever allow the use of modern technologies (zippers, Velcro, etc.)? Would you allow synthetic fibres (cloth, threading, beads, etc.)?
- 7.) Do you have specific parameters for the models/re-enactors you use? What factors go into choosing models/re-enactors?
- 8.) Do you have any particular sources of inspiration (for example a fashion designer)?
- 9.) What metrics do you use for project planning (for example timeline, budget, outcomes)?
- 10.) Why would you, or your models/re-enactors, wear historical clothing? Do you have any personal connections to the pieces/ do they make you feel a certain way?
- 11.) How effective do you think social media platforms like Pinterest, YouTube, or Instagram have impacted the understandings around historical fashion and reproductions?
- 12.) How effective have reproductions of historical fashion been in understanding and interpreting history?

Any additional comments?

Thank you for your time. The information from this survey will be used in tandem with research of a dress reproduction. All individual information will be kept private. Information is gathered for the use of the research project only.

Figure 4.1, Sample of Survey Questionnaire Sent to Participants

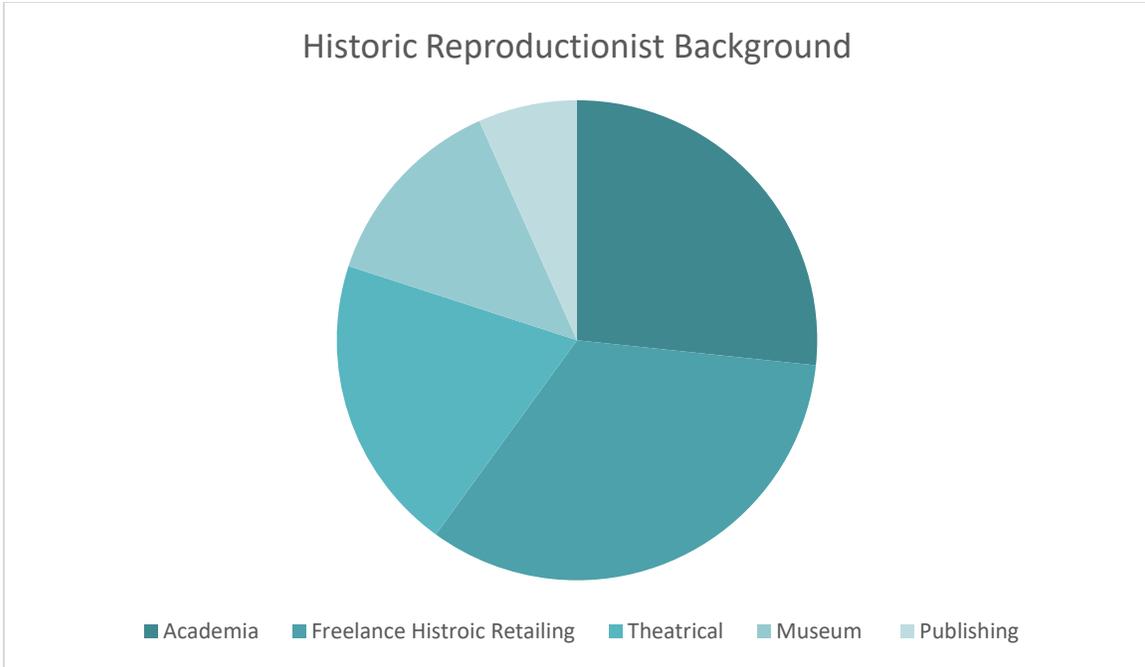


Figure 4.2, Graph Results of Costuming Background of Participants, May 2023

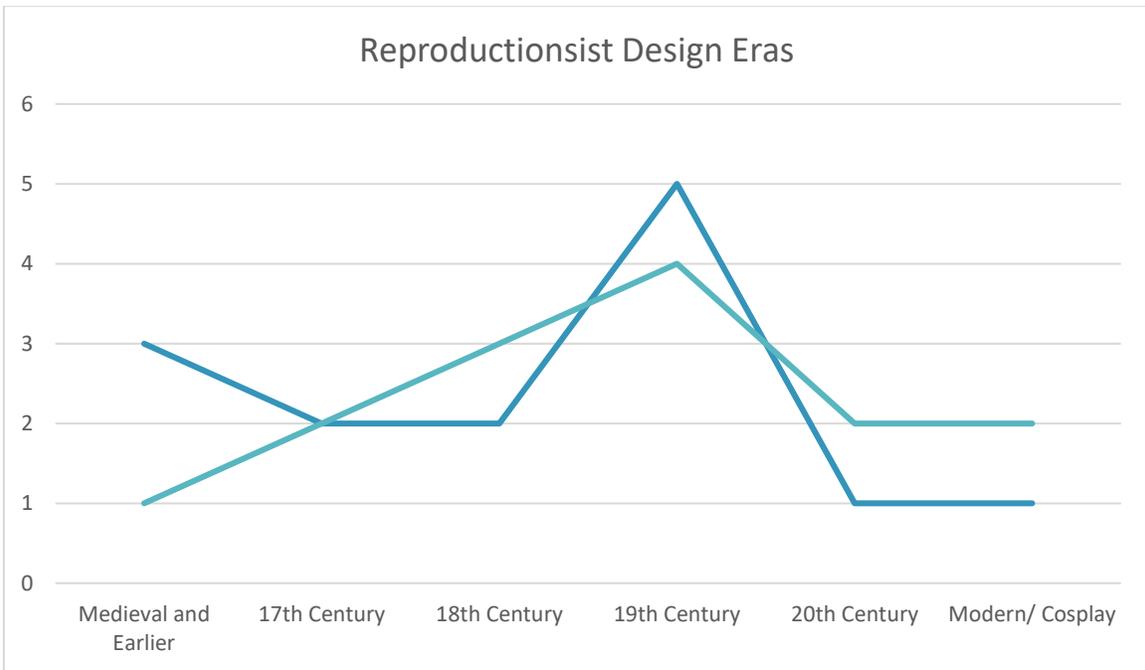


Figure 4.3, Graph Results of Survey Question 1, Designer's Chosen Era, May 2023

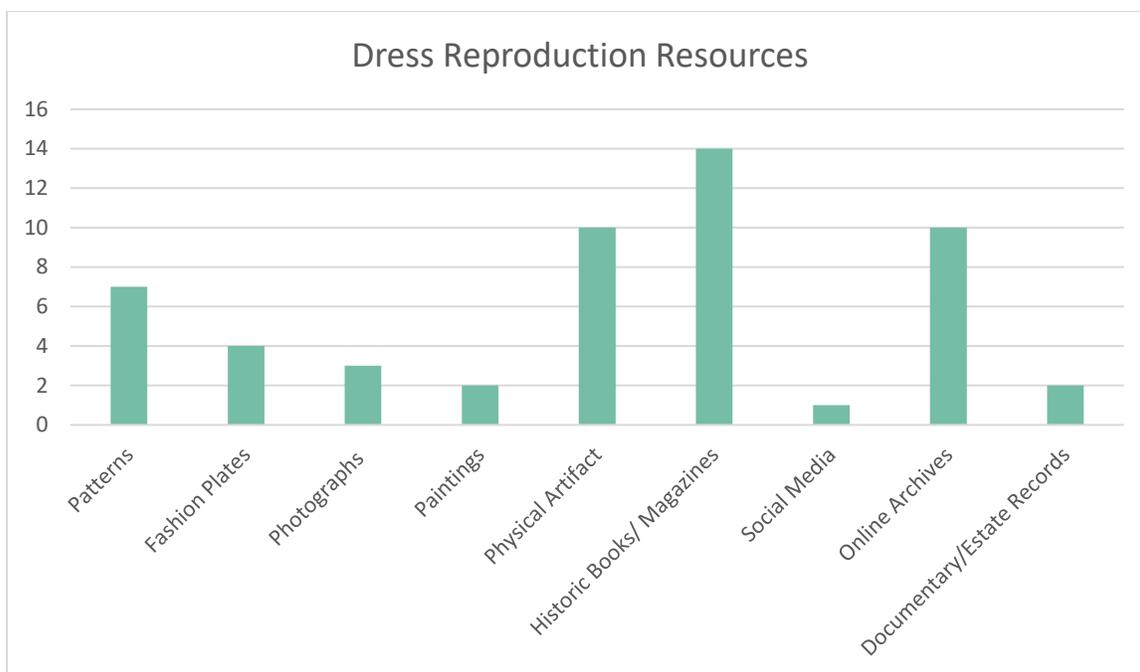


Figure 4.4, Results of Survey Question 2, Designers Resource Choices, May 2023.

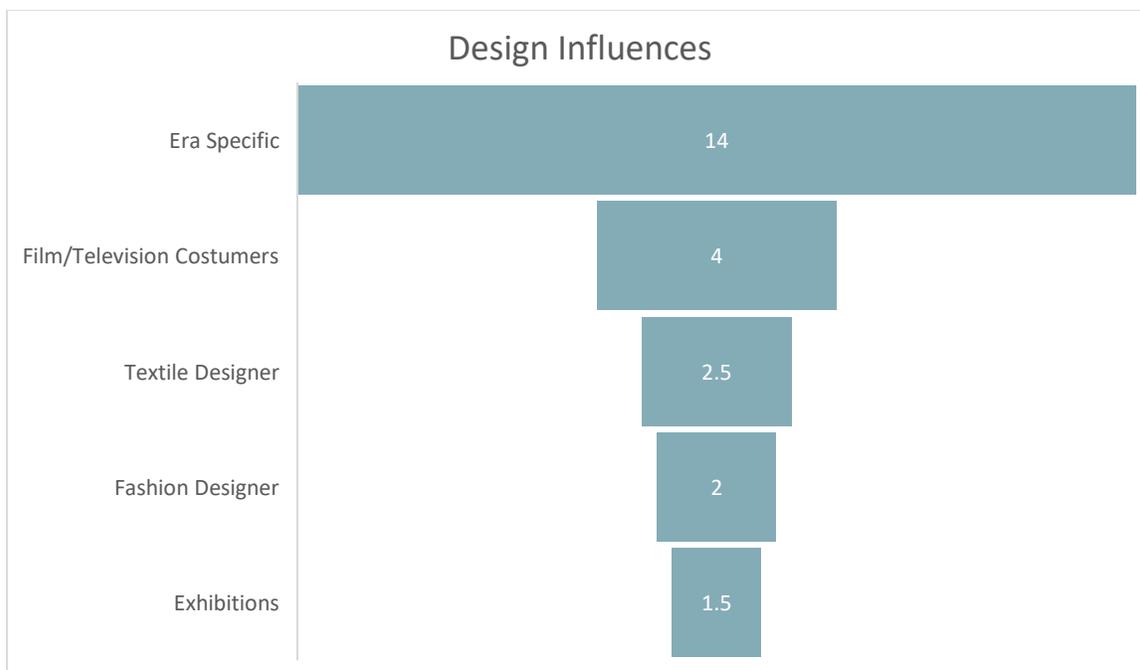


Figure 4.5, Results of Survey Question 8, Do Reproductions Have A Specific Influence?, May 2023.

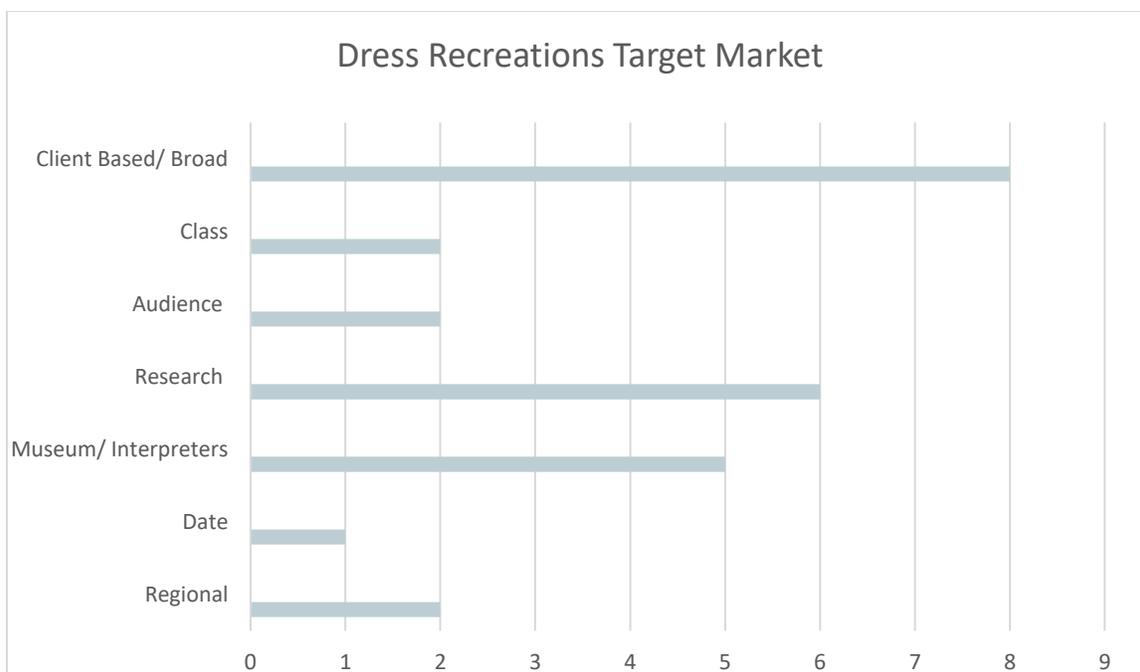


Figure 4.6, Results of Survey Question 3, Target Market of Designs, May 2023.

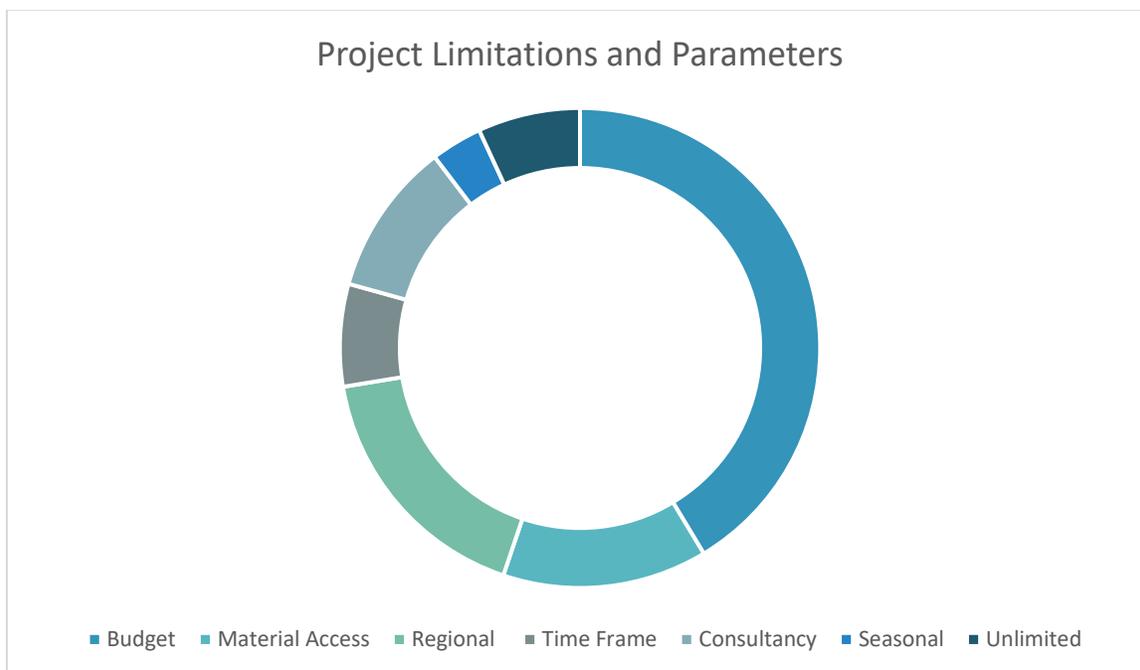


Figure 4.7, Results of Survey Question 5, What Limitations Or Parameters Go Into Project Planning? May 2023.

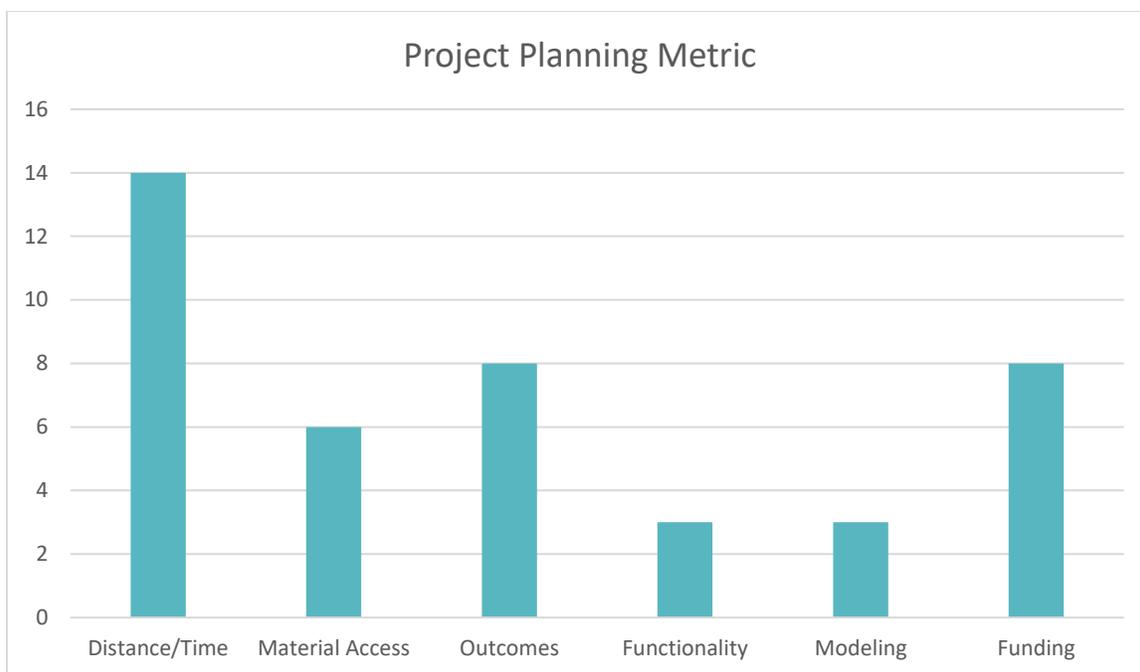


Figure 4.8, Results of Survey Question 9, Project Planning Metric, May 2023.

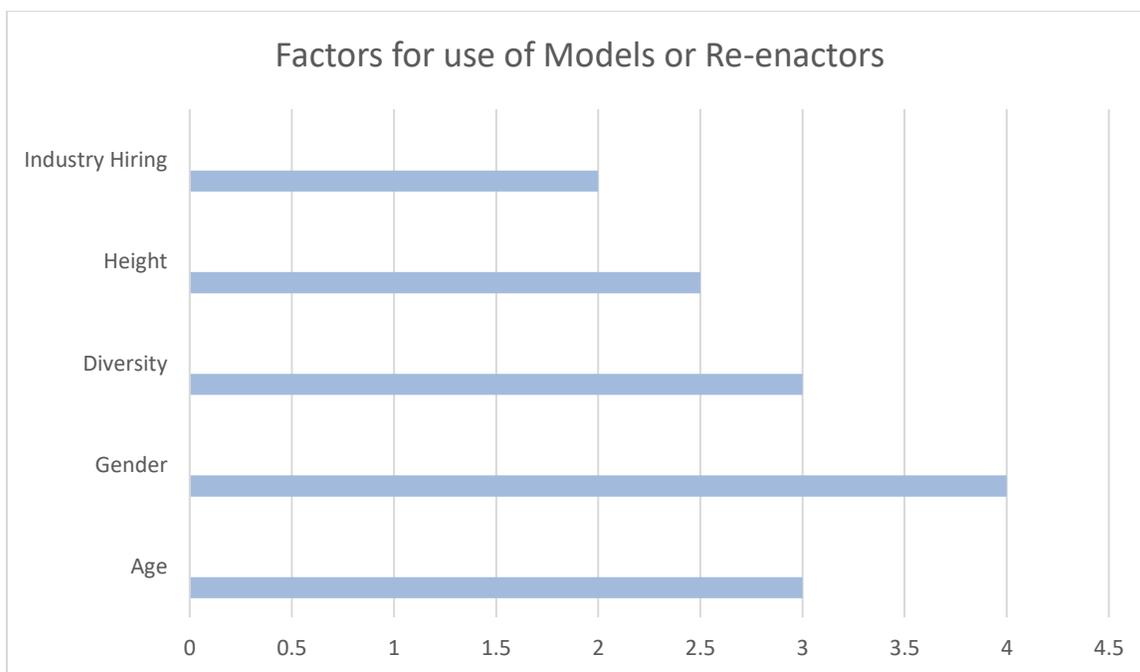


Figure 4.9, Results of Survey Question 7, What Factors Go Into Choosing Models? May 2023.

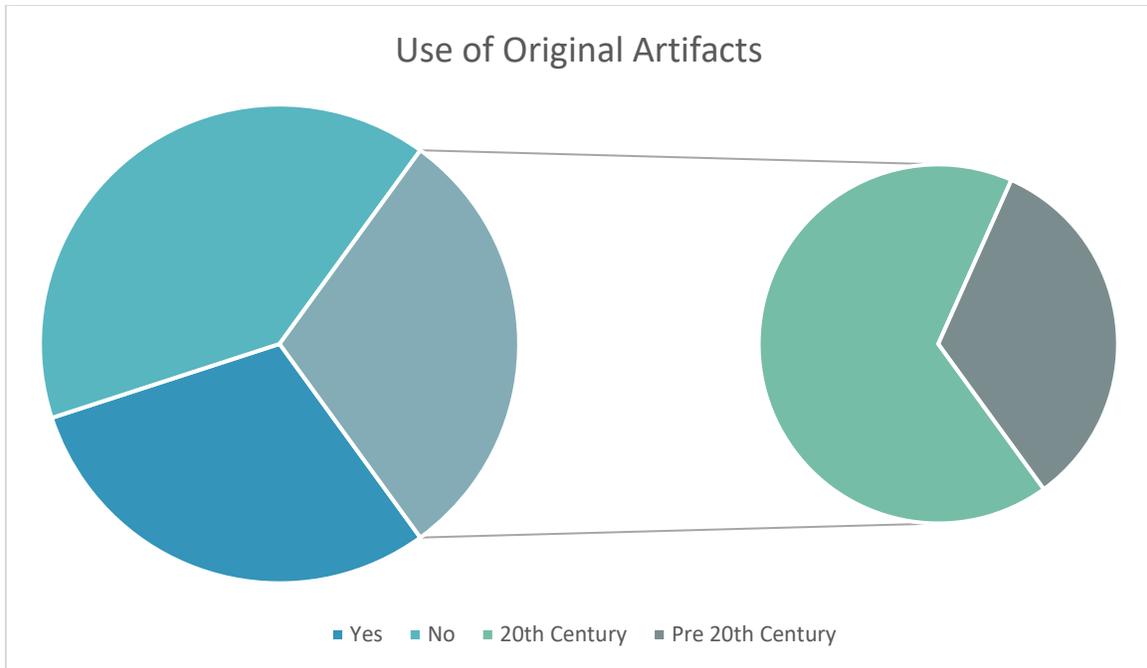


Figure 4.10, Results of Survey Question 4, Do Dress Reproductionists Allow The Use Or Wear Of Original Artifacts? May 2023.

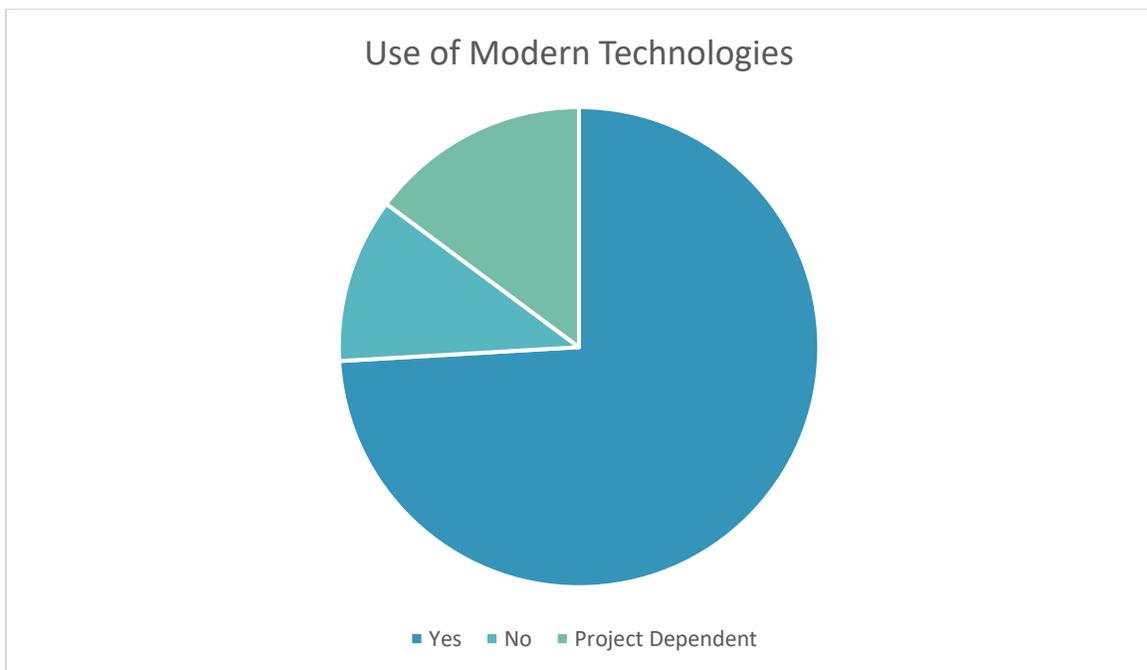


Figure 4.11, Results of Survey Question 6, Do Reconstruction Projects Use Modern Technology? May 2023.

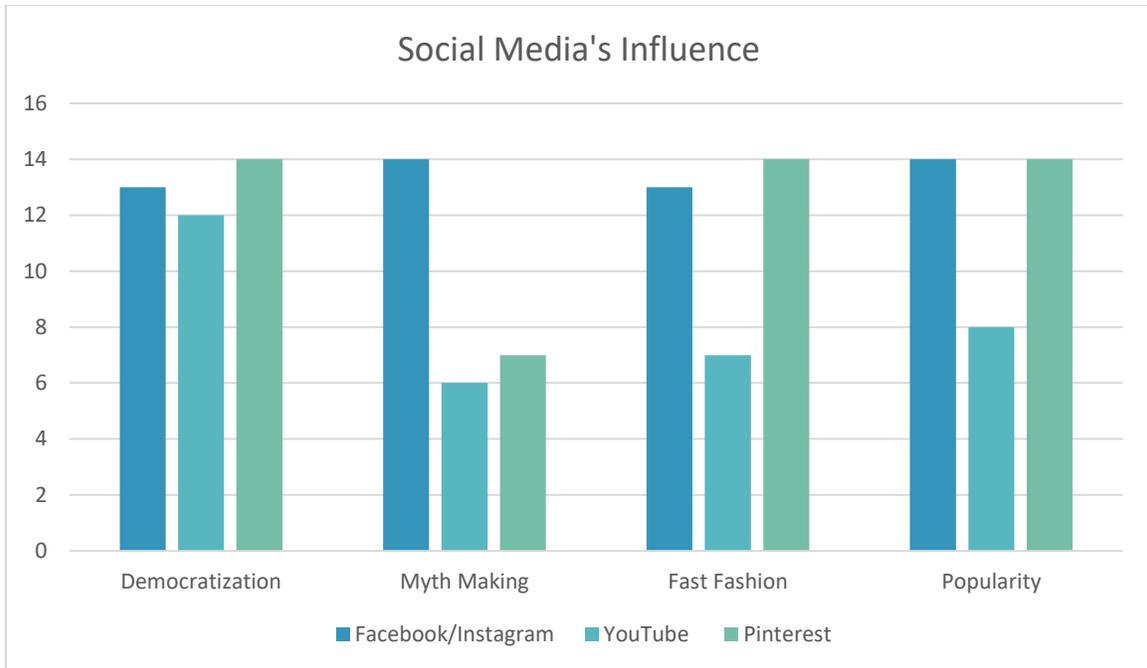


Figure 4.12, Results of Survey Question 11, What Influence Does Social Media Have On Reproduction Projects? May 2023.