

# Art worlds apart: An exploration of fashion curation's legitimation as art within critical reception



Annie Leibovitz. 2020. Photo of the MET's Costume Institute exhibit, "About Time: Fashion and Duration". Retrieved from <https://www.vogue.com/article/costume-institute-about-time-preview>

Name: Gkresa Mechili  
Student number: 544810  
Supervisor: Dr. Julian Schaap

Master in Arts, Culture and Society  
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the artistic legitimization of fashion curation, or the lack of it, within critical reception. It looks into the opportunity space, the use and mobilization of resources, and the framing involved in the legitimization of fashion curation as art, but also the opposition to its artistic legitimization. Alongside the historical account of fashion curation, I conduct a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of fashion exhibition reviews and articles found in influential publications that originate from the US and UK during the last decade, in order to investigate fashion curation's framing by critics.

Fashion is a cultural product that is frequently found in art institutions but at the same time encounters strong dissent over its artistic legitimization. An originally market-oriented genre, widely identified as entertainment, that is increasingly moving towards the broader realm of the arts, but its commerciality and utilitarian nature are seen as the biggest threats to its legitimization, aspects regarded as opposed to other art forms. At the same time, a new discipline has appeared, that of fashion curation; a genre closely related to fashion that emerged through fashion's entry in museums and the rise of fashion exhibitions. These exhibitions are held in respected museums around the world and attract media attention through reviews and articles. The present thesis explores whether and how fashion curation, given its relation to fashion, may be acknowledged as an art form based on critics' framing, by addressing the following research question: "How is fashion curation framed by art critics during the last decade, from 2011 to 2021?". The attention is focused on the critics' framing because, according to Baumann's (2007) theory of artistic legitimization, the role of the artworld agents, including critics, is fundamental in legitimizing a cultural product, since their judgements can inform the way cultural products are perceived by the audience.

In order to provide an answer to the research question posed, I apply a mixture of qualitative and quantitative content analysis to analyze 58 fashion exhibition reviews and articles found in influential newspapers and art magazines originating from the United States and the United Kingdom. Quantitative content analysis is used to detect patterns in the way critics discuss about the fashion exhibitions, while qualitative content analysis is employed for the interpretation of the text data gathered. Thematic analysis is used for coding and grouping the data into two overarching themes: *Legitimation* and *Lack of legitimization*. Complementary, the historical developments in fashion, which manifest signs of artistic legitimization, or lack of it, are used to arrive into conclusions concerning fashion curation's legitimacy as an art form, based on Baumann's (2007) *opportunity space* and *resources* factors.

Altogether the data revealed the ambiguity surrounding fashion curation's position in the artworld. The main arguments supporting fashion curation's legitimacy as an art form are confronted with the considerable number of signs indicating its lack of legitimacy. Overall, it can be argued that fashion curation is not legitimized as an artform within critical reception.

**Keywords:** *artistic legitimization, fashion curation, fashion, art world, museums*

“art is art and fashion is an industry”

(Boodro, 1990/2011, p.369)

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Museums have become important sites for fashion; the number of fashion exhibitions held in high status museums around the world has been growing, attracting big audiences and sponsors (Steele, 2008). A characteristic example is the blockbuster fashion exhibition “Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty”, an exhibition dedicated to the fashion designer Alexander McQueen held both at the MET in New York and the V&A in London, in 2011 and 2015 respectively. The answer to the question of whether fashion is art may appear obvious to some, but its artistic status remains highly contested. This question was intensely posed during the mid-twentieth century when the first fashion exhibitions started to appear, and since then it has become a subject of debate among fashion theorists (Miller, 2007, Steele, 2008; Melchior, 2011; Clark, 2012) and agents from the artworld (Boodro, 1990/2011). Despite its significant role in contemporary society, as it is indicated by Bruzzi, & Gibson (2000), fashion is not a cultural product easily absorbed by the art world institutions as it was historically treated with suspicion. An often-discussed limitation of fashion’s artistic legitimation has to do with its perceived commercial and utilitarian nature. Fashion is often identified with the consumerist culture; it has been even characterized by cultural critics as “capitalism’s favourite child” (Steele, 2013). According to Bourdieu (1993), high art is characterized by a rejection for profit, and this premise comes in contradiction with the perceived role of fashion in society and its connection to the market.

The relationship between fashion and museums is often seen as problematic. In this paper I present literature tackling the issues surrounding fashion within the museum. While museums have historically collected clothing and fashion items, this was usually for anthropological or historical reasons, rather than artistic or aesthetic ones. The introduction of fashion in museums as we know it today followed a similar path both in the United States and the United Kingdom, with the establishment of fashion departments at the MET and the V&A respectively (Petrov, 2019). An analysis of fashion’s trajectory, since it first appeared in the museums, points to the fact that it managed to enter and remain within the museum environment due to its popularity with the audience, which lead to an economic success (Steele, 2008; Clark & Vänskä, 2017; Mida, 2015; Petrov, 2019). However, its entry in the museum was not accompanied by scholarly acceptance. Steele (2008) writes about how fashion is thought to be of low status by academia, perceived as entertainment used to draw the crowd without acknowledging its educational role

within a museum. Even though it is recognised that fashion ended up in museums for economic reasons, rather than aesthetic ones, it is not clear whether this image of fashion is still holding today, and more importantly why this is or isn't the case, especially since it can be argued that the arts have become more approachable and inclusive in comparison to the past, encompassing a variety of medium. The reasons why fashion exhibitions have become so popular in recent years, but also the reasons why they are so controversial, are not often discussed by scholars (Steele, 2008). And even though the number of scholars occupied with this subject is constantly growing it is still limited to the fashion circle. For instance, the work of academics like Valerie Steele and Hazel Clark, is highly influential in this subject but Steele is a fashion curator and fashion theorist and Clark is a professor of fashion studies.

Nevertheless, the popularity of fashion exhibitions resulted in the development of the practice of fashion curation, which has been increasingly attracting scholarly attention, while it is also embraced by academia, included in respected academic programs and courses (Vänskä, & Clark, 2017). While fashion is seemingly being slowly absorbed by the art world, through the popularity of the fashion exhibition, fashion curators have gone from anonymous professionals working behind the scenes to recognizable figures to whom the creation of the exhibition is attributed to (Petrov, 2019). Still, fashion curators are constantly called to fight the prejudices attached to fashion and their own practice (Teunissen, 2016). More specifically, the subject of sponsorship is quite delicate because fashion exhibitions are often accused of merely serving the economic interests of the fashion designers exhibited (Steele, 2008). In terms of fashion curation's position, it is rarely, if ever, questioned whether it can be classified as a new artistic practice. At the moment the story of fashion curation is still being written; the academic work on fashion curation is growing with more publications expected in the future.

Considering that fashion was, and may still be, labeled as entertainment or, in Bourdieu's (1993) terms, part of the large-scale/mass production, in this research I explore whether and how fashion curation achieves artistic legitimation by trying to answer the research question: "How is fashion curation framed by art critics during the last decade, from 2011 to 2021?" I am focusing on how fashion exhibitions are discussed by critics with the aim to bring an insight on how fashion curation is perceived in the contemporary art world. According to Baumann (2007), framing is decisive for the success of an art world because through framing the targeted audience is instructed on how to perceive and interpret events and objects. Moreover, critics working for influential publications are key agents contributing to the legitimation process of cultural

products (Baumann, 2007). In addition, it can be argued that the role of the critics in the legitimization process is more determinative than the role of the museum since, as discussed above, museums are also motivated by economic incentives. Therefore, the coverage of the fashion exhibitions in popular publications will indicate to a great extent whether fashion curation is legitimized as an art form. A further reason for analysing critic reviews, especially when it comes to fashion exhibitions is the fact that critics' reviews can be seen as the 'middle person' bridging the differences created by scholarly boundaries as many traditional scholars find it hard to accept fashion within institutions destined to host high art (Palmer, 2008).

The chosen method of analysis is content analysis, since it allows the review of any form of communication, which in this case is written (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In this research I employ a mixture of qualitative and quantitative content analysis; even though it is qualitative in its basis, quantitative strategies are employed to enhance the understanding of the findings. Quantitative content analysis is used for spotting patterns in the fashion exhibition reviews and for facilitating a comparison between them. Qualitative content analysis is used for interpreting the gathered data and for capturing the differences in the way that reviewers talk about the exhibitions. Tying them together gives a broad, in-depth overview of the critical reception of fashion curation over the last ten years. Moreover, cross-national differences are explored through comparisons made in terms of the evaluative criteria used by the critics in each country. The data gathered during the quantitative analysis are qualitatively analysed with the use of thematic analysis from which the two encompassing themes of *Legitimation* and *Lack of legitimation* arose.

This study contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, as discussed, fashion curation is a relatively new practice for which there is still little literature, and limited to the fashion studies. This research aims to contribute to the existing literature on fashion curation while bridging the differences raised by academia between fashion and other cultural products. Second, this thesis aims to contribute to the theory of artistic legitimation by exploring the unique case of fashion curation, which is characterized by ambiguity; fashion curation is dependent on fashion, a genre whose place within the museum is often treated with hostility, while it has emerged and developed within the institutionalised art world, the museum.

This research is underpinned by the work of Baumann (2007) on artistic legitimation. Therefore, the following chapter begins with an analysis of his theory and the development of the three factors Baumann argues contribute to artistic legitimation, namely 1) opportunity space,

2) resources and 3) framing. In the second part of the chapter the relationship between fashion and art, and the institutionalization of fashion are explored as key themes in the emergence of fashion curation, in association with the impact of the curator on how fashion curation is understood today. The historical background of fashion and fashion curation is presented and discussed in relation to Baumann's (2007) legitimation factors, *opportunity space* and *resources*. Lastly, drawing on the work of perception theorists on cultural classification is formulated the expectation that differences will be found between the United Kingdom and the United States in the way they evaluate fashion curation. Next, chapter five refers to the research design, the sampling method chosen and how the sample of fashion exhibition reviews and articles was collected and analyzed. In this chapter I describe how the 58 chosen reviews and articles found in the US and UK newspapers and art magazines are investigated for the presence of a number of legitimizing and delegitimizing indicators. In the operationalisation section I offer a detailed list of the indicators used in the analysis and a justification for their employment based on literature. The methodology is followed by the results chapter, in which the findings are interpreted based on theory and organized in the two overarching themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, *Legitimation* and *Lack of Legitimation*. Finally, in the last chapter the conclusions of this research are presented and discussed, while an answer to my research question is reached.



## Chapter 2: Theoretical framework: A theoretical and historical account on fashion curation

### 2.1 Introduction

Fashion has long been subject of sociological interest; well-known and respected sociologists like Veblen (1899/1912) and Simmel (1904) have developed theories which assess and confirm fashion's social and cultural importance. And even though fashion may still be considered socially and culturally significant today, that does not answer the question of whether fashion is art or whether it deserves a place in museums. The question of whether fashion can be considered art raises the more general question of what can be considered art. Despite the numerous attempts of philosophers and theorists over time, art's definition remains elusive. Instead of contributing to the witch hunt of what art may be, and by following Bourdieu's (1993) rejection of romantic notions related to the inherent aesthetic value of artworks and ideologies of the artistic independence from exogenous factors, in this thesis I ask what I consider a more appropriate question: when is a cultural product considered art? Again, there might not be a straightforward answer to this question, but in this quest I acknowledge the crucial role of the artworld's gatekeepers in a cultural product's legitimation as art.

This section begins with a description of the legitimation process, as discussed by Baumann (2007) with an emphasis on the framing of cultural products by the critics. The primary goal of this research is to find out whether fashion curation is legitimately included in the realm of the arts. For a better understanding of the practice and its place in the contemporary artworld, fashion curation is investigated in relation to fashion, fashion exhibitions, and the relevant developments in art curation. After Baumann's (2007) theory, I present the history of the fashion exhibition, which led to the emergence of fashion curation as a genre, in association with developments in the fashion world and the rise of the curator as the star of art exhibitions. In that part I use Baumann's theory as a framework for tracking how the aforementioned developments are linked to fashion's legitimation process. Fashion curation's legitimation, due to the fact that fashion is its subject, is susceptible to changes occurring in the way fashion is presented and perceived. That doesn't mean that fashion curation's positioning is solely reliant on fashion, as fashion curation has emerged as a distinct discipline and is examined as such. In the last part, by

primarily drawing on the work of DiMaggio (1987;1992) on cultural classification, I discuss whether the national context plays a role in fashion curation's legitimation.

## 2.2 The process of artistic legitimation

Baumann (2007) has developed a theory in which he analyses the process by which cultural products are legitimized as art. Artistic legitimation is the endorsement and validation of new and previously unaccepted cultural products as art, either high or popular (Baumann, 2007). Many studies have been conducted in this regard, such as the legitimation of folk art, which emerged in the United States in the twentieth century, that was made possible due to its framing as authentic by agents in the art world (Ardery, 1997), or the repositioning of novels, such as the Afro-American novel *Their eyes are watching god*, from "Negro folklore" to being a central canonical text, due to changes in social conditions, to the provided institutional context and the framing from literature critics (Corse, & Griffin, 1997). The list goes on with different cultural products, from film (Baumann, 2001), to music genres like jazz and metal (Lopes, 2002; Berkers & Schaap, 2018).

Baumann (2007) embraces the idea introduced and developed by Becker (1974;1982) and Bourdieu (1993) that the production, reception and legitimation of a cultural product is the result of collective action. Becker (1982) argues that the art worlds, which are essentially organized networks of people, produce artworks through their cooperative activity. Apart from the artists who create the artwork, there are agents embedded in artworlds who attach meaning and value to artworks, while they also create and make use of conventions in order to judge them (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). Critics are actually among those agents who attach value to artworks and mediate between the production of the artworks and the audience's perception of the artworks (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). In other words, artworks do not display an inherent value determined by artistic standards. Value is assigned to cultural products with the aim to legitimize them as art by artworld agents, like critics, who have acquired the status to make such claims (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). The key point is that the artworks and their status as art are shaped by the whole system that produces them, not just by people we think of as artists. Moreover, influenced by the work of sociologist Morris Zelditch (2001), Baumann (2007) holds that legitimation is achieved when consensus is reached on an internal level and/or an external level. The internal level includes the art world members, and the external the

audience. For consensus to be reached there must exist a justification explaining how the until then unaccepted cultural product was deemed accepted, based on the contemporary system of values and rules (Baumann, 2007). Therefore, cultural products gain value as artworks through the achievement of consensus and the application of the aesthetic standards determined by the artworld agents.

In view of the fact that the recognition of a cultural product as art is not solely based on objective criteria, but it is rather a social process, Baumann (2007) concluded in a general statement of how artistic legitimation can be achieved:

Discrete areas of cultural production attain legitimacy as art, high or popular, during periods of high cultural opportunity through mobilizing material or institutional resources and through the exercise of a discourse that frames the cultural production as legitimate art according to one or more pre-existing ideologies (Bauman, 2007, p.60).

It is important to analyze and explain the parts of this statement for better understanding the legitimation process. By mentioning the periods of cultural opportunity Baumann (2007) refers to conditions that are favorable to an artworld's legitimation. It is argued that factors outside, but also within, the art world allow for the re-evaluation of already existing cultural products. But because different factors have different impacts on the legitimation process, Baumann (2007) stresses the need to make a distinction between the kinds of exogenous factors. The first distinction is made between social changes and changes within the art world itself. The second distinction is made between *structural* and *symbolic* factors in terms of what causes them. In the first case legitimation is considered the result of organizational changes in the artworld while the latter is associated with changes in notions like status and prestige which may allow for the legitimation of a cultural product. The third distinction involves the identification of when the exogenous factors are operating during the legitimation process. Lastly, a distinction is made between factors that the art world members are conscious of, and strategically manipulate, and the ones that they are unaware of.

By mobilizing material and institutional resources Baumann (2007) refers to the ability of an artworld to get the tangible or intangible resources necessary and effectively manipulate them in order to achieve legitimation. Tangible resources, such as supplies or equipment, are used for

the practical work performed in artworlds while the intangible resources, like status or prestige, are employed for fulfilling the symbolic work. Baumann (2007) considers museums, art galleries, auction houses and universities to be providers of those resources, because these institutions have the authority to label cultural products as art. For example, museums may offer both kinds of resources to an artworld; they collect and display cultural products, which, once they appear in their environment, become accepted as legitimate by the members of other artworlds and the public. On the role of the museums, art galleries and auctions he seems to be in line with Bourdieu (1993) who argued that the value of an art form is connected to the spaces it is exhibited; the more respected and recognized the space of exhibition the more value is attributed to the art form. In other words, the fact that an object is displayed in a legitimate exhibition space, adds to the legitimacy of the object itself. On the other hand, universities contribute to the legitimation of an art form by creating curricula which preserve and propagate knowledge of the art form and by creating departments dedicated to the art form which maintain the position of the art form among the arts. But, as mentioned earlier, the acquisition of the resources is not enough, non-physical resources must be manipulated in a strategic way by the art world members who wish to achieve legitimation. Strategies and tactics followed by art world members are rarely discussed in the sociology of the arts as such a behavior is not always evident, but that does not mean that it does not exist (Baumann, 2007). This brings to mind examples of American stage, opera and dance, which successfully managed to be included in the realm of high culture by detaching themselves from the market and connecting to academia which was a primary cultural authority at the time (DiMaggio, 1992).

Finally, by the use of a discourse that frames cultural products as art according to ideology, Baumann (2007) suggests that the explanation of why a cultural product is deemed as art is based on the way it is framed by art critics and other actors who aim in educating their audience on what should be perceived as art and what not. Both Bourdieu (1993) and Becker (1982) have developed the theoretical framework through which the importance of the role of critics can be understood. According to Bourdieu (1993) critics are among the agents who create meaning and value and they educate the audience on how to perceive a work of art. And ideology provides the ideas employed in framing in order to convince the audience (Baumann, 2007). Drawing on Becker's (1982) work on the role of the art critic, Baumann (2007) claims that art critics use ideology to frame cultural products as art, also, by using a certain vocabulary for distinguishing art from non-art. According to Becker (1982), art worlds have developed criteria and procedures

through which artists, artworks, artforms etc. are judged and distinguished. Art critics are among the ones who develop and establish those criteria, which are not in any case considered objective (Becker, 1982).

The three factors discussed in Baumann's theory can be tracked to his own research on the artistic legitimization of film, and more specifically its repositioning from being entertainment to being art (Baumann, 2001). Even though today film is considered art and filmmakers artists, in the United States during the 1920s film was considered a medium for entertaining the working class, and only from the 1960s the idea that film could be art, got accepted (Baumann, 2001). The process of film's legitimization was driven by three factors. Firstly, changes in the American society opened up an opportunity space for film to develop into an artworld. An example is the prevalence during that time of the television as the medium for the masses which led to less audience and profit for the cinema, which in turn allowed film to be seen as what Bourdieu (1993) had coined a 'restricted field', and contributed to its legitimization (Baumann, 2001). According to Bourdieu, high art is a restricted field characterized by rejection of popularity and profit (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993).

Secondly, within the film industry occurred changes which allowed for film to be aligned with other established art worlds. Members in the film industry tried to elevate film into an art form through the institutionalization of resources (Baumann, 2001). Such an example was the emergence of film festivals which awarded films according to their artistic merit, as decided by juries of experts, which supplied film with artistic value.

Finally, a crucial phase in film's legitimization was the critics' construction of a discourse of aesthetic standards based on which they framed films as art (Baumann, 2001). Baumann (2001) analyzed film reviews in popular publications for indications that critics reviewed films based on aesthetic criteria associated with art. The ideology of film as art, constructed and propagated by art critics, was able to reach and affect a wider audience through those popular publications (Baumann, 2001). Baumann (2001) argued that the critics in film reviews during the 60s employed a number of terms and techniques commonly seen in highbrow reviews which indicate that films were analyzed in a deep and critical way like artworks, rather than entertainment. For example, those reviews contained a mix of both positive and negative commentary, and this complex way of reviewing films is an indication that they are treated as art. Moreover, the film critics started making comparisons between films and between directors which is considered an intellectual way to evaluate an art work and artists. It was also noticed

that the name of the director was mentioned and that they were recognized as the creators of the films, like an artist is recognized as the creator of an artwork. In addition, film critics in the 60s started interpreting the meanings and messages found in films, enhancing the idea that it is an artform through which the director, like an artist, communicates something to the audience. Lastly, Baumann (2001) also investigated the lack of legitimation of films through the existence of words and phrases manifesting films' inferiority.

The theory on artistic legitimation is constantly updated due to the contribution of theorists like Alexander and Bowler (2021) who add that legitimation is actually an ongoing process and van Venrooij and Schmutz's (2010) who argue that the process of legitimation is also affected by the classification system of the country within which the cultural product is evaluated. Van Venrooij and Schmutz's (2010) concluded that the difference in national repertoire determines the critical evaluation of the cultural products as high art or popular. For assessing the evaluation of popular music in Germany, the Netherlands, and the US, they use some of Baumann's indicators but they also introduce new ones for identifying high art and popular art criteria employed by critics in popular music reviews. For instance, they consider that by situating the cultural product within context, critics establish their place as high art experts who provide the audience with the knowledge needed for them to understand and appreciate it. Moreover, they consider that when reviewers make connections between the cultural product and an established artform, it contributes to the cultural product's legitimation as high art. Drawing from Becker (1984) and Bourdieu (1984), and instead of looking into high art terms like Baumann (2001) did, van Venrooij & Schmutz's (2010) searched for the following evaluative criteria: originality and innovation, complexity and ambiguity, seriousness and intelligence, and finally, timelessness. Nevertheless, they were not only limited to the identification of high art criteria, they also examined the critics reviews for popular art criteria, such as the use of opposite to high art criteria, the use of adjectives related to experience or food, and judgements related to the audience of the cultural product.

In view of all this it is made clear that critics are key agents who impose legitimation. In this thesis I employ Baumann's (2007) theory on artistic legitimation for tracing fashion curation's legitimation as art over time, while making use of the indicators which both Baumann (2001) and van Venrooij & Schmutz's (2010) applied in their own research in order to analyze the discourse critics employ for framing fashion curation and whether this framing could result in its legitimation as art.

## 2.3 Fashion in the museum

Fashion curation is deeply related and partly dependent on fashion's legitimation as art. By looking into the history of fashion exhibitions, fashion's relation to the arts is manifested, although its place is still questionable, alongside how fashion curation emerged as a discipline. It is interesting to see how fashion, widely recognized as an entertainment genre, managed to occupy a place within the museums by relying on the two factors discussed by Baumann (2007): opportunity space and resources.

Fashion has a long history in museums, from the eighteenth and nineteenth century till today. While today we discuss permanent collections and museums dedicated to fashion, clothing was first exhibited in smaller departments within museums (Steele, 2008; Petrov, 2019). Clothes have been collected and exhibited several times by different respected institutions, but before WWII they were not included in museums because fashion was treated as unworthy of the museum setting by the male dominated museum personnel (Steele, 2008; Clark & Vänskä, 2017; Clark, 2013). This attitude relates to the dominant notion of the time which identified fashion with feminine attitudes, and therefore inferior, in contrast to masculine seriousness. Only when men were called to join the war, women got the possibility to occupy higher level positions in museums, and with the entry of women in curatorial positions clothing pieces appeared in museums (Clark & Vänskä, 2017; Clark, 2013). In other words, it created a period of cultural opportunity for fashion, an undermined genre, to occupy even a small place in the museum, as a result of the organisational changes that took place within the museum due to social changes that occurred during the WWII (Baumann, 2007).

Regarding fashion's association with academia, scholars during the eighteenth and nineteenth century treated the idea of exhibiting fashion in museums as a joke and to this day they challenge the objectivity of institutions operating in a capitalist society (Petrov, 2019; Steele, 2008). The tension derives from fashion's commerciality, an aspect contradicting the museum's perceived 'essence' (Petrov, 2019). This notion is linked to Bourdieu's (1993) field theory which holds that economically profitable genres are positioned lower in the cultural hierarchy. High art is not associated with profit, on the contrary, there is a negative relationship between profit and artistic value (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). However, fashion's connection to the economy is one of the main reasons why it was accepted within the museum in the first place (Petrov, 2019). Petrov (2019), who explores the historical representation of fashion in museums

in the United Kingdom and the United States, argues that fashion exhibitions in both countries are closely related to the fashion industry (Petrov, 2019). For example, the Metropolitan Costume Institute was founded during the American depression era in a governmental attempt to boost the industry during that hard time (Petrov, 2019). Again, it is here evident that exogenous factors permitted fashion to enter the museum environment (Baumann, 2007). At the same time, the Institute kept a close relationship to the fashion industry, which proved to be mutually beneficial (Petrov, 2019). It is since common for the Costume Institute to collaborate with fashion brands in order to receive funding or loaned objects (Petrov, 2019).

From the end of the nineteenth century fashion has been the subject of academic study, but its aesthetic aspect has been consistently overlooked (Kim, 1998). According to Kim (1998), this was intentional because aesthetics is mostly associated with the arts. This was clearly a strategy employed by academia to keep fashion and art separated, because, as Miller (2007) discusses, if fashion is an art form, then there should be an aesthetics of fashion. This idea is traced back to Kant who identified artworks as exceptional objects generating an aesthetic experience which is outside of the ordinary experience (Allison, 2001). According to Kant the aesthetic experience presupposed the enjoyment of the pure beauty exempt from any purpose (Miller, 2007). Based on that premise, Kant used to frame fashion with degrading words; he identified fashion with vanity and personal interests and presented it as a cheap replica of true art (Miller, 2007). Steele (2013) argues that the ideas about fashion's inferiority are still employed in contemporary discourses; fashion, despite its aesthetic aspect, is mostly identified with its commercial nature. However, this evaluation is sometimes presented as outdated; Clark (2019) claims that the rise of the fashion exhibition has created a place for fashion in the cultural world and allowed a development of critical discourse concerning fashion's place.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, established institutions exhibited clothes in their costume departments (Steele, 2008). As Steele mentions those exhibitions drew the audience but not much attention from the press. From the mid-twentieth century museums started promoting and celebrating the aesthetic importance of fashion rather than its commercial aspect (Petrov, 2019). Curators manipulated strategies and techniques used in art museums and galleries





**Image 1.** Brooklyn Museum. 1962. House of Worth exhibition  
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/902>

and framed fashion with the same narrative used in high art (Petrov, 2019). They wanted to show that they are aesthetically pleasing objects that have substance and reflect culture, a characteristic of high art (Petrov, 2019). For example, in Image 1 we can see that the curators of the fashion exhibition “House of Worth” framed the fashion objects like paintings on a wall. This can be seen as an effort

from fashion curators to manipulate their resources in a strategic way in order to attach fashion to the arts, while separating it from commerciality. Nevertheless, there is still a debate on whether fashion can escape its commercial nature and be transformed into art by entering the museum environment (Geczy & Karamina, 2013; Petrov, 2019).

During the twentieth century, some changes occurred in relation to the status of the fashion designer, which, according to Crane (2012), led to fashion’s partial legitimation. More specifically, a number of dressmakers constructed a narrative through which they were identified as artists, and many times were recognized as such by the fashion world, their clients and the media (Steele, 2013). Moreover, this attitude is considered to have contributed to fashion being displayed in art magazines and museums (Pedroni & Volonté, 2014). This idea flourished thanks to a number of exogenous factors which allowed them to be legitimized as artists (Steele, 2013; Bauman, 2007). Firstly, during that period there was the rise of mass production in clothing which gave the chance to those designers to distinguish themselves (Steele, 2013). Secondly, they tried to establish their connection to the arts by creating clothes referencing famous artworks and artists. Finally, they started adding labels to their clothes analogous to an artist’s signature (Steele, 2013). According to Steele (2013), fashion was mostly accepted as art in Paris, in comparison to anywhere else, confirming the idea that taste patterns and classification systems may vary depending on the country (DiMaggio, 1987). Nevertheless, fashion designers were criticized, and even made fun of, by respected figures for their “artistic” attitudes (Steele, 2013). Moreover, while fashion designers tried to reposition themselves as artists, artists tried to

distinguish themselves from them by even attacking fashion (Steele, 2013). Therefore, despite the voices within the fashion world that produced the idea that fashion can be seen as art, members of the art world strived to maintain the distinction between the two disciplines.

Fashion's position within the museum rapidly changed during the 1990s; it was increasingly used for the museums' marketing purposes, due to the fact that fashion drew much media attention, while it also became an academic subject of interest (Clark, 2013). It is once again suggested that fashion's association with the market was seen as an asset for entering the museum environment, since it could bring in the audience and sponsors. At the same time, it is indicated that fashion started being involved with one more cultural authority discussed by Baumann (2007), academia. Nevertheless, as Steele (2008) discusses, scholars were actually rarely occupied with the subject of fashion, despite the rise of fashion exhibitions, and when they did, it concerned controversies around fashion, like its commerciality.

Today, popular fashion exhibitions are held in respected museums around the world, many of which are dedicated to fashion designers from the twentieth century. These exhibitions combine art and commerce, and it is even argued by Clark and Vanska (2017) that this is a sign that fashion is accepted within the wider framework of the arts. On the other hand, Crane (2012) maintains that even when fashion is exhibited in museums, most times it is actually exhibited in very specific, specialised ones, and not in museums where autonomous art, in terms of its connection to the market, is exhibited. By drawing on Baumann's (2007) theory it can be argued that fashion is a genre which has historically undergone phases that indicate its partial legitimisation as an art form. Fashion managed to occupy a place within the museum thanks to a number of exogenous factors, social and structural, which allowed a previously undermined genre to enter its environment. In addition, the fact that fashion designers have been framed as artists, and their work as art work, by their peers, clients and some media, has certainly contributed to them being perceived as such. However, as was already discussed, the main reason for allowing fashion to enter museums was financial, not an acknowledgement of its value. Moreover, there are other indications pointing out that fashion is not treated as an actual art form; despite the constant effort by fashion designers and fashion curators to frame fashion as art, there has been several attempts by academia, and the artworld members, to ridicule fashion and maintain the distinction between fashion and art, by constantly undermining its cultural significance and identifying it with an industry. As found in studies on other cultural fields, the economic legitimisation of a genre may prevent its artistic legitimisation (Berkers & Schaap, 2018)

## 2.4 The fashion curator

The curator of an institution, such as the museum, is a professional that holds a wide range of responsibilities. Their practice involves research and decision making to create an exhibition, preserve and safeguard the artworks, mediate between the artists and the audience, but also keep a balance between the needs of the different stakeholders (Neuendorf, 2016; Tannenbaum, 1994; Fowle, 2007).

During the mid-twentieth century a change occurred in the fashion curator's status, who emerged as a professional identified with the fashion exhibition; the fashion curator was no longer just the carer working backstage but the visionary and creator of the fashion exhibition. The curator evolved from being part of the support personnel to being part of the core personnel (Becker, 1982). This was mostly evident in the case of fashion curator Diana Vreeland (see Image 2), whose work often got media attention and who is being credited for the popularity that has accompanied the fashion curator since then. Moreover, literature indicates that this phenomenon was closely related to the establishment of the art curator as the author of the art exhibition during the 1990s (Clark & Vänskä, 2017).

As discussed, even though clothes started being displayed in museums quite early, the fashion curator, as known in the contemporary world, emerged in the mid-twentieth century when the V&A museum hired curators of dress (Clark & Vänskä, 2017). At the time, they introduced the display of fashion in mannequins to communicate their narrative and they often paired the clothes with paintings in an attempt to provide with context (Clark & Vänskä, 2017) and, as Petrov (2019) adds, to show a relation and continuity between fashion and art. After a couple of decades, another fashion exhibition at the V&A was deemed a commercial success and what is interesting is that the clothes exhibited were judged by using the same criteria as in



**Image 2.** Benson, H. 1973. Diana Vreeland curating her first exhibition The World of Balenciaga <http://www.artnet.com/artists/harry-benson/diana-vreeland-and-mannequin-in-balenciaga-at-the-a-3So9FaHF3B0Ktaw14kbzZg2>

paintings (Clark & Vänskä, 2017). It was then that the fashion curator slowly started to be seen as a professional and started gaining some popularity (Clark & Vänskä, 2017).

This attitude towards the fashion curator is closely related to developments in the art world (Clark & Vänskä, 2017). Since the late twentieth century, the radical developments in the art world demanded the active role of the curator as the interpreter (O'Neill, 2016). The rise of the independent curator promoted the curator as the exhibition maker and an essential element of art exhibitions, which increased their visibility (O'Neill, 2016). During the 1980s curating was considered a creative activity, similar to artistic practice, and it was framed that way by theorists and agents in the artworld (O'Neill, 2007). The notion of the curator as artist was intensified during the 1990s with the biennials, partly because curators identified themselves as curatorial artists (O'Neill, 2007). Whether curators can be considered artists is also a subject of ongoing debate among well-known art theorists like Boris Groys (2006) and Claire Bishop (2007). An interesting opinion on the reasons for this debate is that scholars oppose the elevation of the curator to the artist level, because they want to protect the current structure, the distinction of labour (Ventzislavov, 2014).

But even though curating in the art world is mostly emphasized during the 1990s, the famed fashion curator Diana Vreeland managed to make the fashion curator the centre of the fashion exhibition from the 1970s (Clark & Vänskä, 2017). Before Vreeland, the fashion curator was just a professional working backstage (Steele, 2008). Vreeland transformed fashion exhibitions from monolithic events to spectacle, and significantly contributed to the emergence of the genre (Steele, 2008; Steele, 2013; Clark & Vänskä, 2017; Petrov, 2019). Moreover, her exhibitions were often discussed by influential publications such as *The New York Times* (Steele, 2008). Even though her work is much-celebrated today, it was often criticized for its connection to the fashion industry and sometimes for historical inaccuracies (Steele, 2008). As Steele (2008) emphasizes, Vreeland was not interested in historical accuracy but in creating a spectacle for the audience (Steele, 2008). Steele (2008) acknowledges that much of the criticism concerning the historical accuracy was valid, but she points out the fact that receiving commercial support from sponsors is a common practice followed by museum curators of any kind and should not be judged, unless, they interfere with the content of the exhibition.

The criticism on fashion exhibition's relation to the market is also evident in Vreeland's, retrospective on Yves Saint Laurent, a designer that was still alive at the time of the exhibition, held by the Metropolitan Museum (Steele, 2008). The entertainment industry, a profitable

industry, was now exhibited in museums, something that contradicted the perceived role of the museum, which was to exhibit high art that is not related to profit. Apart from the commercialization of the exhibition, the controversy was mostly caused due to the fact that the exhibition was linked to the interests of the designer (Steele, 2008). But it was also a turning point for fashion because other museums took MET's example and started displaying fashion in an artistic context (Kim, 1998). The commerciality attached to fashion exhibitions, when they are dedicated to living designers, is one of the main reasons fashion exhibitions are scholarly discussed (Steele, 2008). According to Steele (2008), it must be acknowledged and accepted that fashion is related to commerce and whether sponsorship affects the curatorial integrity must be looked into (Steele, 2008). It may be true that many times fashion exhibitions serve the interests of fashion designers, but they also provide content and context related to their contribution (Steele, 2008). Stevenson (2015) argues that the identification of fashion retrospectives with commerciality can be avoided by developing fashion curation into a discipline grounded on research and open mindedness.

## 2.5 Fashion curation's place in the contemporary art world

The many changes that have occurred in fashion since the twentieth century displayed fashion's interplay between commerce and culture and led to the emergence of fashion curation as a distinct discipline (Clark, 2019). The rise of the fashion exhibition had a positive impact on the practice of the fashion curator, which became established as a profession and a subject of academic literature, but also gained a place in academia in the form of courses and curricula (Petrov, 2019). Fashion curation became a practice closely linked to authoritative institutions such as academia, which according to Baumann (2007), can be seen as the providers of the resources it needs to be legitimized as an art form.

Some contemporary theorists try to separate fashion curation from notions like superficiality and entertainment, and support that fashion exhibitions can be both seductive and substantial (Steele, 2008; Clark & Vänskä; 2017). Clark & Vänskä (2017, p.2) treat fashion curation as a collaborative practice and introduce the term "critical fashion curating" to identify form of fashion curation which is based on research and has educational purposes; the role of the curator involves promoting critical thinking, social engagement and analysing culture. This form

of fashion curation creates a dialogue between an audience within and outside academia. Nevertheless, there is also scepticism related to fashion curation. The fact that even fashion stores nowadays are curated and include art works, and the fact that everyone is considered a curator in the fashion world, makes it harder for fashion curation to be considered critical rather than a means for generating consumption (Clark & Vänskä, 2017).

In fashion studies the fashion curator is often presented as a creative genius whose work is based on research and aesthetics and who guides the audience's interpretation of the works exhibited. Exhibitions, according to Steele (2008) are an interpretation from the curator's side which informs the audience's interpretation. Curators no longer just present fashion trends through fashion, but they also provide context and explore clothes on deeper theoretical levels (Stevenson, 2015). Moreover, as discussed, promoting the aesthetic aspect of fashion is



**Image 3.** Magnolia Pictures. 2016. Andrew Bolton in a scene from a fashion exhibition [https://www.thesunchronicle.com/features/stories/met-curator-andrew-bolton-quiet-defender-of-fashion-as-art/article\\_bc5c9c1c-0b04-11e6-9887-c370ee080a00.html](https://www.thesunchronicle.com/features/stories/met-curator-andrew-bolton-quiet-defender-of-fashion-as-art/article_bc5c9c1c-0b04-11e6-9887-c370ee080a00.html)

important and fashion curators are responsible for creating and communicating an aesthetic experience (Clark & Vänskä, 2017). Petrov (2019) argues that the rise of the fashion exhibition has also created the curatorial cult personality; the fashion curator is framed as an artist, the creative force behind the exhibition. The fashion exhibition is increasingly perceived as the work of a genius individual (Petrov, 2019). Petrov

supports this argument by referencing Anna Wintour's words, who is chair of the MET Gala, in which she frames fashion curator Andrew Bolton as the creative force behind the Costume institute's fashion exhibitions. However, being framed as artists by the institution that hires them or by professionals in the fashion world does not necessarily legitimize them as such.

Considering what is discussed in the theory chapter, fashion curation appears to be accepted by the artworld, at least partially, due to its association with museums and academia. Moreover, the changes that occurred since the late twentieth century allowed the fashion curator

to occupy a central position in fashion exhibitions and develop into a figure to whom artistic characteristics are attributed. Nevertheless, the aspects that could contribute to fashion curation's rejection must be also taken into consideration, such as the fact that fashion curation is still inescapably connected to fashion, a genre often associated with commerciality rather than the arts, but also the profession itself is sometimes linked to marketing purposes. Therefore, the question of whether fashion curation is indeed accepted as an art form in the contemporary art world cannot be answered by solely relying on the *opportunity space* and *resources* factors (Baumann, 2001). Based on Baumann' (2007) theory, in order to answer that question, it is crucial to investigate whether critics' reviews in influential publications frame fashion curation as art, and curators as artists, since they are among the agents with the authority to legitimize cultural products. For that purpose, 58 reviews and articles about fashion exhibitions are analysed and the findings are shown in the results chapter of this paper. Since most of what is discussed in this paper takes place in the Western context, the reviews and articles analysed are found on popular newspapers and art magazines originated from the United States and the United Kingdom, which can be considered a representational sample of the Western world.

## 2.6 Evaluation pattern based on national cultural classification

Driven by the premise that the process of artistic legitimation is also dependent on the national classification system (van Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010), in the present section I discuss how fashion curation may be evaluated differently in the United States and the United Kingdom based on the practices underlying their cultural classification.

Studies on the reception of cultural products have manifested variations on the way cultural products are appreciated based on the country. For example, Bourdieu (1984) argues that in France there exists a distinction, in terms of cultural product appreciation, between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" taste. Legitimate taste applies the schemes of form over function in art, of perceiving art works in a "disinterested" way, meaning not in connection to everyday life, and of being distanced from the superficial and simple emotions derived from art works (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). On the contrary, illegitimate, or popular, taste insists on perceiving art in a more simplistic way, expecting art to represent everyday life while it is also characterized by a need for participation (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993).

On the other hand, Halle (1993) studied the way cultural products are perceived in the United States and found that, in Bourdieu's terms, the American cultural elites apply the schemes of illegitimate taste when evaluating high art.

DiMaggio (1987) maintains that different countries exhibit differences in terms of the hierarchy, universality and boundary strength of their respective cultural classification systems. Hierarchy refers to the extent that genres are ranked based on their prestige, universality to the extent that classifications are acknowledged by all members and groups in society and boundary strength to the extent to which the boundaries between genres are defended both in production and consumption (DiMaggio, 1987). DiMaggio (1987) uses the term "genre" to refer to groups of cultural products that are classified based on who consumes them. The distinction between high and popular art is an example of such a classification in cultural products.

The said differences are dependent on the social structure, social stratification, social networks, and the education system of each country (DiMaggio, 1987). For example, artistic classification systems are considered more universal when the education system is less differentiated, while they are more hierarchical when education is hierarchically structured (DiMaggio, 1987). Moreover, hierarchical artistic classification systems are characterized by less interaction between social groups (DiMaggio, 1987). According to DiMaggio (1991, 1992), in the United States, due to structural changes in society and the rise of accessibility in the market of cultural goods, the cultural classification system is less hierarchical and less strictly bound. This indicates the existence of more omnivorous taste patterns. And even though the many changes through which the Western society has undergone might have developed the expectation that omnivorousness would have been evident in the United Kingdom as well, Gayo & Savage's (2006) research showed that distinction boundaries are still holding in Britain. Furthermore, this is a more hierarchical cultural classification system accompanied by a universal cultural classification due to the fact that education is more standardized in the United Kingdom, where schools operate under a nationally prescribed curriculum (Machin & Vignoles, 2006). When applied to the context of this thesis this would mean that US critics tend to be more flexible in framing fashion curation as an art form by using both high and popular criteria in their reviews. UK critics on the other hand, are more likely to display a commitment to the high and popular art distinction, and use high art criteria as their reference point for legitimizing fashion curation as art.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Research design

According to Baumann (2001), even though the public may consider certain cultural products as art, they may not seriously accept them as such until it is confirmed by the gatekeepers. Acknowledging that writings and texts are crucial for the appreciation of a cultural product, because they reintroduce the product through a certain discourse to an extended public (Ferguson, 1998), Baumann (2001) argues that reviews in popular publications are the ideal data source for documenting the legitimation of a cultural product and how this procedure is disseminated to the public. Considering the significance of ideology, critical discourse and framing in the legitimation of cultural products as art works, and the fact that content analysis of reviews is a suited method for identifying important elements of an ideology of a cultural product as art (Baumann, 2001, 2007), I investigate the fashion curation's legitimation by quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing critics' reviews and articles concerning fashion exhibitions.

Content analysis is considered a useful method for analysing communication, in every form (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In this thesis I use a mixed methods analysis, a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. More specifically, I make use of some methodological guidelines found in quantitative analysis for identifying patterns while I enhance the procedure by including text interpretation through qualitative text analysis, since qualitative analysis offers a deep understanding of the text (Mayring, 2014; Neuendorf, 2017). This approach has many advantages but the crucial one is that through this combination the researcher is able to reach the goal of explanation (Neuendorf, 2017).

According to Hsieh, & Shannon (2005) there are different approaches to qualitative content analysis. In the conventional content analysis approach the researcher does not use preconceived categories in the coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This process allows for the categories to derive directly from the gathered data and is called inductive category development (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This kind of analysis captures the complexity in the data and the findings are grounded in the actual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the directed content analysis approach the goal is to further develop or validate a theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher uses the existing theory to determine the initial codes and their relationship; this

is called deductive category application (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), commonly known as deductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In addition, the creation of categories, subcategories, codes, is guided by previous literature and research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Lastly, the summative content analysis approach involves both manifest and latent content analysis of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is not just word counting, but also involves discovery and interpretation of the underlying meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis which is frequently used for analyzing journals and other texts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). There is a description, interpretation and evaluation of the content; during this procedure the researcher identifies and observes the frequency of specific words, but with an attention to the context within which the words are used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In this research I draw from all the three approaches mentioned. Firstly, driven by the literature, I created a codebook with a number of initial indicators for guiding me through the analysis of the review and articles (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). This codebook was further developed and revised during the analysis of the articles and reviews; new codes emerged and the already existing underwent some changes (Appendix C) (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). The final and detailed list of indicators can be found in the operationalization section of this chapter. Secondly, the texts are examined with the aim of understanding the meaning given to these words within that specific context and the process of how the messages are presented, a crucial step in qualitative content analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Lastly, the data gathered from the critic's reviews are quantitatively presented with the help of the statistical software SPSS. Even though I created a numerical listing of words and phrases that are presented in this research in the form of percentages (Appendix D), this was only used to enhance the understanding and interpretation of the data (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Complying with the interpretivist approach, the findings are interpreted in association with my theoretical framework (Bryman, 2016).

The qualitative data gathered are analysed with the use of thematic analysis, which is considered a useful method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is used for analyzing and interpreting information (Boyatzis, 1998). It is a process entailing the recognition of the data relevant to the phenomenon investigated and requires the involvement of the researcher in identifying the implicit and explicit ideas behind the data, as well as their interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Through the encoding

process, the relevant data are identified, combined, and developed into themes which organize the observations and interpret aspects of the phenomenon of the artistic legitimation (Boyatzis, 1998). The data analysis and research software Atlas.ti proved to be a helpful tool in marking the codes in the reviews, from which the sub-themes and themes derived. The thematic approach is generally considered flexible but the data processing is done systematically. The first step was to code the collected reviews and articles. This process entailed the labeling of segments of the data, depending on what I observed in relation to the subject of my research. The codes that re-appeared during the readings of the reviews and articles composed my sub-themes from which my final themes occurred. The themes that emerged from the data analysis are: a) Legitimation and b) Lack of legitimation, which correspond to the theoretical framework of this research (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 3.2 Sampling and sample

This cross-national research looks into whether fashion curation is perceived as an art form by uncovering the stance of critics on fashion curation. For this purpose, reviews and articles about fashion exhibitions, found in popular newspapers and art magazines in the United Kingdom and the United States, are analyzed and compared based on the existence of certain evaluative criteria. The sample consists of reviews released in the course of the last decade, from 2011 to 2021.

The sampling method used in this research is purposive sampling, meaning that the sample is chosen based on theoretical expectations. The selected sample shares common characteristics that are associated with the research, but at the same time the goal was to achieve a variety in the units of analysis (Bryman, 2012). The selection of the newspapers and art magazines was made based on whether they are influential in their countries of origin and on whether they write and review fashion exhibitions. Additionally, I made a distinction between newspaper formats and this thesis will focus on the most common, broadsheet, rather than tabloids. Due to the wide reach of the newspapers, as it was expected, critics with an arts and culture background contribute to these popular publications. In this research the influence of the newspapers is based on their circulation, while for the art magazines is based on how often they are referred to as popular and influential. This information is available in multiple sources when

running a web search (YouGov, n.d.; Statista, 2021; Agity PR solutions, 2021; Statista, 2020; Agity PR solutions, 2021b)

To enhance comparability there was an effort to gather reviews and articles concerning the same or similar fashion exhibitions, while reviews written by fashion editors were excluded. Fashion criticism remains unrecognized as a form of cultural criticism, even in comparison to popular culture criticism (Granata, 2019). And even though fashion criticism on fashion exhibitions in museums is growing as a form of cultural criticism, it is still going through its own legitimation process (Granata, 2019). Therefore, and in addition to their biases towards fashion, I decided to exclude fashion editors from my sample in order to be less perplexing. The sample consists of reviews and articles about the same or similar fashion exhibitions found in at least two publications each time. However, in order to also bring a diversity in the sample I included reviews and articles about fashion exhibitions that may be featured just in one publication but offer a variety in terms of the institutions that the exhibitions took place in, the themes of the exhibitions and the authors of the reviews and articles. Moreover, even though the initial aspiration was the sample to consist solely of newspapers, this was not possible because the number of reviews and articles written in newspapers by art critics did not offer a satisfying pool from which the results could have been generalized. Instead, I incorporated a number of art magazines in the sample, to make the sample more diverse and inclusive, as well as to engage in more interesting comparisons. I therefore expected and looked for both cross-national differences and differences between the framing in newspapers and art magazines.

The newspapers *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *New York Post*, and the art magazines *Art Forum*, *Art News* and *Art in America*, are the sources of fashion exhibition reviews/articles in the United States. The newspapers *The Independent*, *The Standard UK*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The Times*, and art magazines *Apollo*, *Frieze* and *Aesthetica* are the source of fashion exhibition reviews/articles in the United Kingdom. The difference in the inclusion of a couple more UK newspapers in comparison to the US newspapers lies in the fact that fashion exhibition reviews were sporadically found in UK publications, whereas, in the US publications fashion exhibition reviews were concentrated on the aforementioned US newspapers. The results presented are based on the analysis of 58 fashion exhibition reviews and articles in the two countries. I gathered an almost equal number of reviews/articles from the UK and US, while most of them are reviews and not articles; 46 are reviews and 12 articles. From the 58 reviews/articles, 26 are from the United Kingdom and 32 from the United States. Moreover,

43 are newspapers and 15 are art magazines. Analytically this information can be found in Appendix A. Despite the international character that most of these publications demonstrate, they are chosen and treated as US or UK publications respectively based on the location of their headquarters. Nevertheless, all fourteen publications are widely circulated and considered to be opinion-leading in their countries, but also worldwide. The selected fashion exhibition reviews and articles were identified and collected by running a search through the newspapers and magazines online archives.

### 3.3 Operationalization

Content analysis approach is considered flexible but the data processing is done systematically (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). I first created a list of information related to the reviews and articles that are not actually included in the review text (Berger, 2014). More specifically, for every review/article I recorded the year of publication, the country of the publication, the medium, whether it was a review or an article, the title of the review or article, the length of the text, in which section of the publication was found, the theme/subject of the fashion exhibition, the institution that each fashion exhibition took place, the position/profession of the author, the gender of the author, the educational background of the author and finally a few background information to help understand the reputation of the author. All the reviews and articles mention the name of the author so this was easily accessible. The background information on the reviewers was found online through a search for biographical details on each one of them. After gathering this information for each review and article I analyzed them quantitatively, which provided a basis for my findings.

Legitimizing a cultural product as art presupposes the justification of its legitimation by conventions (Baumann, 2001). According to Baumann (2001) the application of aesthetic standards is crucial in promoting a cultural product as art. To explore the criteria by which critics review the fashion exhibitions I look for the presence of a number of indicators. These indicators can be words or phrases used for showing the positive or negative associations critics make between fashion curation and art when reviewing fashion exhibitions (Berger, 2014). In my analysis these words and phrases are identified considering the context, counted and interpreted.

The following table lists the indicators employed in the data analysis, along with the way they were employed and a justification for their use.

The seven indicators of Legitimation, providing positive associations with art, are the following:

<i>The creator</i>	The art critic reviews of the American films of the 1960's, highlighted the role of the director as the creator, resembling the role of the artist when creating an artwork (Baumann, 2001). Investigating if this is also the case in fashion exhibition reviews, I looked into whether fashion curators are framed as the creators by the critics. One of the first things to notice was whether the fashion curator's name was mentioned, like it happens with artists (Baumann (2001). Moreover, given the old-fashioned notion that an artwork is created by a single individual, I also examined whether the fashion curator is framed as the sole curator or whether the fashion exhibition is considered the result of a cooperative effort (Becker, 1984). Nevertheless, from the analysis arose also a couple of codes that contribute to the perception of the curator as the creator, such as the discussion about the fashion curator's background or their framing as connoisseurs.
<i>Critic expert</i>	Van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010) discuss how the critic of high art is introduced as the expert whose knowledge is needed for understanding the cultural product by providing context. I therefore looked at whether the fashion exhibition and all its aspects were placed within a context. But apart from providing context, critics can also employ other strategies in order to establish their position as experts. These strategies emerged while coding the reviews and articles. For example, the fact that critics provide context that is not found in the exhibition, or the fact that they make indications to the exhibition's organizers on how to better do their job.
<i>Interpretation</i>	The film critics in the 1960s United States started interpreting the meanings and messages found in films, enhancing the idea that it is an artform through which the director communicates something to the audience like an artist (Baumann, 2001). In my analysis I look into whether art critics discuss meanings and messages, obvious or underlying, found in the fashion exhibitions. Moreover, during the analysis it was made obvious that critics do not only discuss the underlying meanings and messages, but they also discuss intentions, the exhibition's and the fashion curator's.

<i>High art criteria</i>	Van Venrooij & Schmitz's (2010), drawing on Becker (1984) and Bourdieu's (1984) "aesthetic disposition" they employed in their research an indicator looking into whether the art critic reviews comment on the originality, seriousness, complexity and timelessness of the fashion exhibitions. Influenced by their research I examined my sample for the existence of the same comments when addressing the fashion exhibition and the fashion curator.
<i>Association to high art</i>	According to Van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010) linking a cultural product to accepted art forms is considered a legitimation strategy in high artworlds. Following their argument, I looked into whether the critic makes a connection between the fashion exhibition or fashion curator and artworks and artists respectively.
<i>Comparisons</i>	According to Baumann (2001), it is considered an intellectual way to evaluate an art work in contrast to another artwork. I therefore looked at whether critics make comparisons between fashion exhibitions. In addition, I also looked for comparison to other exhibitions that are not related to fashion. Moreover, Baumann (2001) in his research also looked for comparisons between directors, which in my research was translated as comparisons between fashion curators.
<i>Mixed commentary</i>	Bauman (2001) argues that reviews which treat a cultural product as art must be more complex, involving a mixture of positive and negative commentary. In my analysis I looked for the existence of both positive and negative commentaries addressed to the curatorial work.

On the other hand, I looked for the following four indicators suggesting a Lack of Legitimation:

<i>Commerciality</i>	Bourdieu (1993) argues that high art is a restricted field distanced from profit. Therefore, artistic legitimation and economic legitimation have a negative relationship; commercial success can often be an obstacle for a genre to achieve artistic legitimation (Berkers & Schaap, 2018). In my analysis I first investigate whether and how often the commercial success of the fashion exhibition is discussed by the critics. During the analysis another indicator of commerciality arose, the connection of the exhibition to the market in other ways, for example, through sponsorship. This is a
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significant indicator due to the common association of fashion to commerciality.

- Opposite to high art criteria* The texts were investigated for the existence of opposite to the high art criteria mentioned above. In other words, I looked into whether the reviews opposed the high art criteria of originality, complexity, seriousness and timelessness when addressing the fashion exhibition and the fashion curator.
- Popular art criteria* Taken from the popular aesthetic indicator that Van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010) employed in their own research, this indicator refers to the existence of adjectives related to experience when reviewing the fashion exhibitions. Based on van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010), the existence of a mixed set of criteria, meaning both high and popular, can still contribute to a cultural product's legitimation. Nevertheless, the usage and meaning depends on the cultural classification systems of the countries within which they are evaluated (van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2010). This idea is important in this research because depending on whether popular criteria are used by US or UK critics will have a different meaning based on their different classification systems.
- Fashion's lack of legitimation* This indicator emerged during the analysis of the reviews and articles. It relates to the way the critics perceive and frame fashion in terms of the existence or lack of its artistic value. During the analysis a pattern surfaced; critics keep mentioning fashion's positive or negative association to art. By constantly circling back to fashion's relationship to art, critics feed the controversy over whether fashion belongs into the museum.



## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Quantitative findings

As mentioned in the operationalization section, the analysis started by gathering and quantitatively analyzing a number of data related to the reviews and articles. The first thing to notice is the frequency by which fashion exhibition reviews and articles appear in newspapers and art magazines over the last decade. The 58 reviews and articles included in the sample of this research are spread from 2011 to 2021. However, since 2013 more reviews from critics appear in the publications (6 to 8 fashion exhibition reviews per year), in comparison to the years 2011 and 2012 (1 to 2 fashion exhibition reviews per year), showing a growth in interest in fashion exhibitions during the past eight years. Even though for the past years the interest in fashion constantly reaches a new high, it is not clear what mediated in 2013 which resulted in this sudden increase in the number of fashion exhibition reviews and articles. In terms of the length of these reviews and articles it is found that the average length of a review in words is 998.72 words, the lengthiest being 2.463 words and the shortest being 155 words. The word count of each review/article can be found in Appendix B. The most interesting finding in terms of length is that the reviews and articles in art magazines are shorter in comparison to the newspapers. This is interesting because, according to Baumann (2001), lengthier reviews are a manifestation of a more analytical and deep review by the critics.

The reviews and articles were found in different sections ranging from lifestyle to arts, but most of the reviews, both in the US and UK, are found in the arts and culture sections of the publications, while only a few on the fashion and lifestyle sections (Appendix B). This can be seen as a positive sign towards fashion's legitimation. There is also a variety in the position of the authors and their reputation. Many of the reviewers are award nominees and winners for art criticism and writing, among them are some reputable and respected figures. However, there is a homogeneity in the gender of the authors and their educational background; most of them are women (84.5%) and have an arts and culture education (79.3%). The fact that the majority of the critics are women could be related to stereotypical notions that treat fashion as a feminine occupation.

What is also interesting is that most of the reviews and articles are about fashion exhibitions held at the MET and V&A, while almost no reviews about fashion exhibitions held in

galleries (Appendix B). This brings in mind Crane's (2012) assertion that even though fashion entered the museums, it is mostly exhibited in specialized museums such as the MET Costume Institute and the V&A. Obviously, the MET and V&A museums are two established institutions which explains why there is interest in their exhibitions, but the lack of interest in other exhibitions, outside the museum environment, could be interpreted as an indifference to the subject of fashion by the critics, except when it is deemed worthy by museums.

## 4.2 Qualitative findings

### 4.2.1 Introduction

In order to answer the research question, the data gathered from the reviews and articles are analysed and structured in two overarching themes, namely *Legitimation* and *Lack of Legitimation*. The first one features the sub-themes *The creator*, *Critic expert*, *Interpretation*, *Mixed commentary*, *Comparisons*, *High art criteria*, and *Association to high art*, and the latter the sub-themes *Commerciality*, *Opposite to high art criteria*, *popular art criteria* and *Fashion's lack of legitimation*. These themes and sub-themes are examined and presented in that same order in this chapter, while a detailed presentation with percentages can be found in Appendix D. In both themes I primarily use Baumann's (2001, 2007) and van Vernooij & Schmutz's (2010) theories as a framework for structuring the findings based on the indicators that signal fashion curation's legitimation as a form of art. Even though this research is focused on the legitimation and lack of legitimation of fashion curation, throughout this chapter the way the fashion designers and their work are framed by the critics is also discussed. Fashion and fashion curation are interconnected and this is also evident from the fact that critics, while reviewing the fashion exhibitions, often comment on the fashion designers exhibited and the fashion objects, and even the relation of fashion to the arts. The last sub-theme, *Fashion's lack of legitimation*, takes note of the fact that critics use these fashion exhibition reviews as a platform to comment on the artistic value of fashion.

## 4.2.2 Legitimation

The sub-themes included in the Legitimation theme discuss whether and how the fashion exhibition reviewers employ strategies and rhetoric that indicate that fashion curation is treated as a serious art form. From recognising the fashion curator as the creator to employing high art criteria to frame the fashion exhibitions, critics have at their disposal a range of techniques to manifest fashion curation's legitimation, or otherwise.

### 4.2.2.1 *The creator*

Beside some minor cross-national differences, and similar to the recognition of the filmmakers as the creators of films during the 60's in the United States, the fashion curators are acknowledged both implicitly and explicitly as the creators of the fashion exhibitions (Baumann, 2001). One example is the framing of the V&A's curator by The Guardian's reviewer as the creator who conceived, and organised accordingly, a bags exhibition:

“Savi has taken a broadly thematic approach. Downstairs are sections devoted to travel, to status, and to so-called “It bags”, like the sequined Fendi Baguette Carrie totes in *Sex and the City*. Upstairs, the focus is on craft and construction. Nevertheless, at the start of the show, Savi makes good use of the V&A's historical collections.”

*The Guardian*, “Bags: Inside Out review – totes fabulous”, 2020



**Image 4.** V&A. 2020. Installation view of the exhibition Bags: Inside Out. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/inside-the-bags-inside-out-exhibition>

The fashion curator's recognition as the mastermind behind the fashion exhibition is significant because, according to Baumann (2001), it could indicate that they are treated as artists and the fashion curation as a serious art form. This idea is enhanced by the fact that their names are mentioned in the majority of the reviews. Even though in around 70% of the reviews and articles the fashion curators are recognised as the creators, both in the US and UK, the name of the curator is mentioned almost every time (90.3%) in US publications, while half of the times in the UK (53,8%) publications. Moreover, even though their names are stated in the majority of the newspapers (72.1%) and art magazines (66.7%), it happens fewer times in art magazines. Certainly, fashion curators are no longer just professionals working behind the scenes, their names are known since they are the ones responsible for bringing into existence the fashion exhibition, from its conception to its realisation. This aspect can be attributed to the shift that occurred in the popularity of the fashion curator during the late twentieth century, when the fashion curator Diana Vreeland managed to make the fashion curator the centre of the fashion exhibition (Clark & Vänskä, 2017). Moreover, in half of the reviews, the fashion curator is presented as the sole creator of the fashion exhibition. This is less occurring in US publications (41.9%), in comparison to UK publications (65,4%), in which this phenomenon is evident in the majority of the reviews and articles. This aspect confirms, at least partly, Petrov's (2019) thesis that the fashion exhibition is increasingly perceived as the work of one talented individual, the fashion curator. In addition, in a considerable number of reviews and articles (32.8%) the fashion curator's words are cited, showing that their opinion and view matters and that they are the ones that can guide us through their work.

Fashion curators in more than half of the reviews (53.4%) are framed as connoisseurs. They are presented as knowledgeable figures whose work is underpinned by theory and research. That way their position as the creators is justified and their authority is enhanced. Furthermore, in some reviews and articles (29.3%), the critics make a reference or connection to academia with the exhibition or the curator. This does not happen in many cases but I argue that when it happens it manifests a way of upgrading the status of the exhibition and the curator. An example of how the reviewer frames the fashion curator as a connoisseur by emphasizing their connection to academia is given by the Independent's art critic:

“Stanfill's [the fashion curator] scholarship is most evident at the beginning of the exhibition”.

*The Independent, "How the V&A's glamour of Italian fashion exhibition fell flat", 2014*

However, their background is rarely discussed; only in 13.8% of the reviews and articles, and actually never in art magazines. The lack of biographical context on the fashion curator could be of importance as it is common in reviews to provide even a few biographical information on the artist. Nevertheless, when this happens it can be seen as a further indication that the curator is seen as the artist/creator whose background we want to access in order to better understand their work. The few times critics discuss the curator's background they refer to their previous exhibitions and styles and the majority of them are about the well-known fashion curator of the MET, Andrew Bolton. The next passage from a review of the co-chief art critic of The New York Times is a clear example in which the fashion curator is framed as the creator whose previous work is taken into consideration and is used to inform our opinion on their current work:

“Bolton’s previous exhibitions for Rei Kawakubo, “China: Through the Looking Glass” and “Manus x Machina” are among his greatest. He and his curatorial efforts are by now fixtures in the worlds of art and fashion”

*The New York Times, “‘Camp’ at the Met, as Rich as It Is Frustrating”, 2019*



**Image 5.** Hilty, Z. 2019. Installation view of exhibition Camp: Notes on Fashion. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2019/camp-notes-on-fashion>

As mentioned earlier, the fashion curator is seen as the creator of the fashion exhibition, consequently, the review is in essence the assessment of the curatorial work, even though critics rarely make comments addressing the fashion curator directly. The fashion exhibitions are analysed to their parts and aspects almost every time (89.7%) in both countries and mediums, giving the impression that the critics analysed the exhibition like they would have done with any artwork:

“It’s big, occupying all of the sixth floor’s galleries for temporary exhibitions, which hasn’t happened since the de Kooning extravaganza of 2011. Brilliant use is made of video and slide shows. Around 30 prototypes, including 20 newly commissioned by the museum, add sparks of ingenuity”

*The New York Times, “MoMA Plunges Headfirst Into Fashion”, 2019*

But apart from the curatorial work, the critics discuss the composition of the clothes and fashion objects exhibited in a significant number of the reviews and articles (67.2%), sometimes in a dramatic tone which reinforces their perception as artworks:

“Entire gardens of Eden creep into view as scenes from Hieronymus Bosch and Lucas Cranach the Elder and various stained-glass designs are screen-printed or embroidered on gowns and shoes.”

*Apollo magazine “Haute couture and holy robes at the Met”, 2018*

#### 4.2.2.2 Critic expert

During the analysis of the sample, it was made clear that the reviewers self-identify as experts by employing a number of techniques. This image of the critic is a criterion commonly found in high art worlds (van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2010). It’s existence in the analysed fashion exhibition reviews and articles is perceived as a sign of fashion curation’s legitimation. It is impressive that in almost all reviews and articles (93.1%) in both countries and mediums the critics provide some kind of context, historical, social, biographical etc. By discussing the context, the art critic is introduced as the expert whose knowledge is needed for understanding the cultural product (Bourdieu, 1993). Moreover, critics often (79.3%) show their expertise by providing context and information beyond what can be found in the exhibition. This happens in considerable cases both in the US (80.6%) and UK (76.9%), and mostly in art magazines

(86.7%) in comparison to newspapers (76.7%). They show they are connoisseurs by emphasizing what they know more than the masses (Becker, 2008). A strategy clearly followed by respected co-chief art critic of the New York Times:

“Its inspiration is unmistakable: the habit of Zurbarán’s painting of St. Francis of Assisi, the rough brown cloth evoked through Madame Grès’s pilling angora wool.”

*The New York Times*, “‘Heavenly Bodies’ Brings the Fabric of Faith to the Met”, 2018



**Image 6.** Tullo V. 2018. The art critic Jason Farago, left, and the columnist Ross Douthat observing a Dior ensemble at the Met’s Heavenly Bodies exhibition. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/20/arts/design/met-museum-heavenly-bodies-catholic-imagination.html>

Lastly, critics sometimes act as experts by indicating how the fashion exhibitions could have been done better (27.6%), mainly in the US (38.7%) and less so in the UK (11.5%). Intervening or recommending alterations to an artist’s work is not a common strategy followed by art critics when reviewing artworks. It can be perceived as disrespectfulness towards the artist, and in this case demonstrates that the critics of these exhibitions treat the work of the

fashion curator as inferior to artistic practice while promoting themselves as the authority who can make indications. Such an example is given by the award winning co-chief art critic of the New York Times, who in a review of an exhibition about jewels wrote the following:

“Especially with the gap between the wealthiest and everyone else so wide, it is dicey for a major museum to celebrate the often frivolous objects on which the rich spend their ever increasing surplus income. Such a show must be beyond reproach in every way: transparent in organization, impeccable in exhibition design, illuminating in catalogue and labelling and, most of all, self-evidently excellent in the quality of the objects on display. Unfortunately, the exhibition “Jewels by JAR,” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, largely falls short in every respect.”

*The New York Times, “All That Glitters (and a Lot That Shines)”, 2013*

Here the reviewer accuses the organisation of the exhibition of not succeeding to create a substantial exhibition complying with contemporary ethics. The critic is presented here as a knowledgeable person with critical thinking, whose experience with similar exhibitions in other museums is used to justify their right to critique the quality of the curatorial work and make indications of what would have been the right way to approach the subject of the exhibition.

#### *4.2.2.3 Interpretation*

The fact that critics discuss the underlying messages and meanings of the exhibition can be perceived as another manifestation of their expertise. At the same time the interpretation of the exhibition is considered a legitimation strategy (Baumann, 2001). By interpreting the latent meanings and messages deriving from the fashion exhibitions, critics show that they go beyond the superficial aspect of the exhibition and analyse them in depth, while they also convey the notion that the fashion curators, just like artists, try to communicate something to the public (Baumann, 2001). This approach is seen in the majority of the reviews and articles (74.1%), especially in the US (77.4%) and in newspapers (79.1%). In addition, when interpreting the fashion exhibitions, 41.4% of the time critics discussed questions that the exhibitions raised, which can be argued that it is a characteristic of artworks which raise questions by which they promote critical thinking. The idea that the curator creates exhibitions that provoke critical



thinking is confirmed by the words of the Pulitzer Prize winner, senior critic at large at the Washington Post:

“Fashion will continue to wrestle with technology, trying to determine how best to use it. What should we savor from the past and what should we shake off. This exhibition ponders this question calmly and deliberately. Bolton [the fashion curator] doesn't provide a definitive answer.”

*The Washington Post* “Can machine-made fashion dazzle like handmade couture? Yes, and the Met proves it.”, 2016



**Image 7.** MET. 2016. Installation view of exhibition Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/manus-x-machina>

As part of their interpretation of the fashion exhibition and in their attempt to further establish their authoritarian position, critics tend to discuss the intentions of the exhibition, as well as the curator's. Especially the exhibition's intentions are discussed almost every time (86.2%), mostly in the UK (92.3%) and less often in art magazines (66.7%). The curator's intentions are also discussed in more than half of the reviews (53,4%) in both countries, but again fewer times in art magazines (40%).

“The curator, Andrew Bolton, apparently keen to avoid anything that might smack of blasphemy, errs on the side of an exaggerated reverence”.

*Apollo magazine* “Haute couture and holy robes at the Met”, 2018

The fact that the intentions of the fashion curator are mentioned suggests the confirmation of the notion that the fashion curator is the creator of the exhibition and their intentions are discussed as part of their vision. It can be perceived as a legitimization of their image as artists.

#### *4.2.2.4 Mixed commentary*

According to Baumann (2001), in high art criticism critics review cultural products in a complex way. The existence of both positive and negative commentary is an indication of that approach (Baumann, 2001). In a considerable number of reviews, almost in 40% of the cases, the critics make both positive and negative comments on the curatorial practice. This is mostly evident in US (45.2%) publications and less so in the UK (30.8%), and especially in newspapers (41.9%) in comparison to art magazines (33.3%). In one example, the critic of Frieze magazine manages to address in just one sentence both the strength and weakness of the fashion exhibition:

“While the show excels in highlighting the beauty and craft of the kimono, the historical context is, at times, startlingly short”

*Frieze magazine, “V&A Kimono Review – Sartorial Abundance and Sketchy History”, 2020*

But even though the number of the reviews and articles that this phenomenon was noticed in is considerable, it refers to less than half of the publications. Right now, this finding does not contribute to fashion curation’s legitimization as a serious art form but it is definitely an aspect that needs to be investigated over time. Nevertheless, there is almost never harsh criticism of their work, something that can be regarded as a sign towards the practice’s legitimization.

#### *4.2.2.5 Comparisons*

Another intellectual approach in art criticism is the comparison between artworks and between artists (Baumann, 2001). In the analysed reviews critics do not tend to compare fashion curators to other fashion curators (3.4%), but they often make comparisons between fashion exhibitions. This approach was evident in almost half of the reviews and articles (44.8%). It is definitely a considerable percentage showing that the fashion exhibition is increasingly treated in a more

serious way. This phenomenon is mostly seen in the US (48.4%), in comparison to the UK (38.5%), and mainly in the newspapers (55.8%), but rarely in art magazines (13.3%).

What is even more interesting is that sometimes the fashion exhibition is compared to art exhibitions held in museums. Even though the percentage is pretty low, only in 19% of the reviews and articles, its meaning is still significant since it indicates that fashion exhibitions' status is in some cases elevated to the point that they are even compared to art exhibitions. This comparison between the fashion exhibition and the art exhibition takes place in terms of their commercial success and the way the subject is approached. In a characteristic passage from a review written by a famous English art critic for the Times, the fashion exhibition is compared to established institutions such as the Tate:

“Organizations such as Tate Modern or the Serpentine Gallery seem determined to privilege style over content in their jog-throughs. Their cutty, awkward, frightened films have failed in the single most useful task an online tour can achieve - to give you a tangible sense of the event. That is not true of the V & A's charming five-part YouTube tribute to the kimono”

*The Times, “Art review: Kimono: Kyoto to the Catwalk”, 2020*

This kind of comparison is mainly witnessed in the US (22.6%), but in terms of medium it appears almost never in art magazines (6.7%).

#### *4.2.2.6 High art criteria*

Based on Van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010), when critics review high art, they evaluate the cultural products in terms of their complexity, ambiguity, originality, innovation, seriousness, intelligence, and timelessness. As shown in Appendices D and E, US critics use high art principles more extensively to frame the fashion curator and exhibition, but also the fashion designer and the fashion objects. In addition, this phenomenon is mostly encountered in newspapers rather than art magazines.

In the reviews and articles analysed, critics, around 40% of the time, make high art comments and evaluations concerning the curator and the exhibitions, especially in the US (41.9%) publications, but not with a big difference from UK publications (34.6%). A similar difference is also evident when comparing mediums, with 41.9% seen in newspapers and 33.3%

in art magazines. 40% is a considerable percentage, showing a tendency towards treating fashion curation as art, but because it is not applied in the majority of the reviews and articles it does not reach significance. Besides, the criterion of timelessness is never referred to the curatorial practice, or the exhibition. An example of how originality is discussed is given by the The New York Times art critic:

“But “Kimono: A Modern History,” quietly folded into the museum’s Arts of Japan Galleries, is a different kind of fashion show.”

*The New York Times, “A Little Thing to Wear That Speaks Volumes”, 2014*

In another case, the co-chief art critic of The New York Times comments on the complexity of a fashion exhibition, as shown in the following review segment:

““Camp,” the show, struck me as the most idea-driven, Conceptual, intellectual exhibition theme the Costume Institute has ever used.”

*The New York Times, “Camp’ at the Met, as Rich as It Is Frustrating”, 2019*

Lastly, sometimes critics emphasize the seriousness of a fashion exhibition, as does the critic in the following The Telegraph review:

“That this doesn’t have the ridiculous Zoolanderish<sup>1</sup> pretension so much fashion trades in, or any whiff of irony or retro nostalgia, is even more unusual”

*The Telegraph, “Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty, V&A, review: ‘less shock, more awe’”, 2015*

But critics seem to follow this high art approach more frequently, actually in half of the articles and reviews, when it comes to the fashion designers and their work. Again, especially in the US (51.6%) in comparison to the UK (42.6%). By taking into consideration Van Venrooij & Schmutz’s (2010) thesis, in combination with the findings, it can be argued that to a certain degree fashion is more widely accepted as a serious art form in comparison to fashion curation.

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<sup>1</sup> In this last passage from the Telegraph, the critic in order to describe the pretentious seriousness that fashion often conveys, makes a reference to an American comedy, Zoolander, which is basically a mockery of the fashion industry.

Nevertheless, even if fashion is framed with high art criteria more often, this approach is still limited to half of the reviews.

#### *4.2.2.8 Association to high art*

According to Van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010), the association of a cultural product to accepted art forms is a common strategy followed in high artworlds, which may lead to legitimization. Moreover, as discussed in the theory section, historically fashion designers compared themselves to artists, and their works to artworks, in an attempt to eventually be accepted as such (Steele, 2013). This strategy seems to have worked in some cases, in which the couturiers of the twentieth century were acknowledged by a part of the audience, the media and their peers as artists (Steele, 2008). Likewise, art curators in the late twentieth century often presented themselves as artists (O'Neill, 2007), while today their practice is undergoing its own legitimization process as art, one which has caused many scholarly debates over the years (Groys, 2006; Bishop, 2007). From the analysis it is found that the fashion curator and the exhibition are only in a few cases (27.6%) connected to established art forms in some way. It is however more common in art magazines (40%). Most importantly, even when this occurs, neither the exhibition nor the fashion curator are paralleled by the critic to artforms and artists respectively. The exhibition is usually connected to artforms by having artworks within the exhibition, next to the fashion objects, or by making reference to art through the way the fashion objects are exhibited. One example is the description of Alexander McQueen's exhibition which was curated in an academic way, resembling an art exhibition:

“The curators argue that McQueen was a romantic artist, and the early rooms of clothes are hung reverentially and academically like static sculptures or paintings, thematically arranged around the designers' references and obsessions.”

*The Telegraph*, “Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty, V&A, review: 'less shock, more awe'”, 2015



**Image 9.** Sham, E. 2015. Installation view of exhibition Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty at the V&A. <https://elensham.com/blog/2015/5/21/alexander-mcqueen-savage-beauty-at-va-museum>

In contrast to fashion curation, critics most of the time make connections between the fashion designers and their work and established art forms (70.7%), especially in the US (77.4%) and newspapers (74.4%). This is sometimes manifested by relating the fashion designers to art movements or by emphasizing that the source of the designers' inspiration is art, like the art critic at the New York Times does in the following passage:

“There are collections influenced by art, like “Dada” (1983), “The Surrealists” (2006-07), “Constructivist (Russian)” (1986-87) and “Tribute to Frida Kahlo” (1998);”

*The New York Times*, “Originator of the Man-Skirt and Corset Revivals”, 2013

Other times the fashion designers' work is identified with art, as it is here done by the awarded co-chief art critic at the New York Times:

“Produced by the likes of Prada and Miu Miu (the most flamboyant), Christian Louboutin (the kinkiest) and Roger Vivier (the most farsighted) as well as unfamiliar names past and present, each of these “sculptures” is also a Pandora’s box of meanings and implications: cultural, historical, sexual, physical, economic.”

*The New York Times, “Fantasies From Pandora’s Shoe Box”, 2014*

But hardly ever is the designer elevated to the same level as an artist by art critics as it happened in this review in the *The New York Times*:

“Maybe that's enough. If Jeff Koons's "Puppy," a giant terrier made of flowers, evoking more joy than gravitas, can land in the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, there's no reason Mizrahi can't qualify for museum status.”

*The New York Times, “Isaac Mizrahi Unbound at the Jewish Museum”, 2016*

The fact that fashion designers, even in rare occasions, are elevated to the same level as artists makes more apparent the lack of such an approach towards the fashion curator. As it was shown earlier, the fashion curator and the exhibition, even when associated with high art forms, are actually never identified as artists or art works respectively.

#### 4.2.3 Lack of legitimation

This theme, contrary to the previous one, consists of sub-themes discussing the existence of indicators suggesting that fashion and fashion curation are not compatible to the art world criteria, and that may lead to them not being legitimized as art. The sub-theme of commerciality addresses fashion exhibition’s relationship to the market. The next two sub-themes refer to the existence of words and phrases found in the reviews which demonstrate that fashion curation is not treated seriously as an art form, and the last sub-theme reveals where fashion is positioned in terms of its relationship to art.

### 4.2.3.1 Commerciality

Drawing from Bourdieu's (1993) field theory it is argued that commercially successful genres are not classified as high art, since high art is characterized by high artistic value and a disinterest in profit. What Berkers and Schaap (2018) coin as economic legitimation is seen as an obstacle for reaching artistic legitimation. However, the commercial success of the fashion exhibitions is barely mentioned (17.2%) in the reviews and articles. It is more often brought up in US publications (19.4%) and art magazines (20%), and it is mostly expressed in the form of a "blockbuster" exhibition.

On the other hand, in half of the reviews and articles the fashion exhibition is connected to the market in some way, more often in UK (53.8%) publications and less often in art magazines (26.7%). This includes the identification of fashion with the market, while other times the critic may emphasize in the sponsor's input and impact on the curatorial work. For example, in *The Guardian* a reviewer writes the following about Alexander McQueen's *Savage Beauty*:

"I could not escape the feeling that the Gucci group, the owners of Alexander McQueen, had sought somehow to control the show"

*The Guardian*, "Alexander McQueen: *Savage Beauty* review – superficially magnificent", 2015

The connection to the market is more intense, though, when referring to the designers (62.1%), which seems to confirm what was discussed in theory concerning the inseparable connection of fashion to the industry. In the following quote the *New York Times* critic does not fail to emphasize that Miuccia Prada, a billion-dollar worth fashion designer, now managed to also acquire artistic status by being displayed at the MET's fashion exhibition:

"Ms. Prada's career is still, for all its fame and influence, a work (not to mention a zillion-dollar business) in progress, to which the Met has now awarded canonical high-art status"

*The New York Times*, "Speaking of fashion", 2012





**Image 10.** Fremson, R. 2012. Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations. A video of Miuccia Prada plays behind outfits she and Elsa Schiaparelli designed at this Costume Institute exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/11/arts/design/schiaparelli-and-prada-impossible-conversations-at-met.html>

Again, this approach is less evident in art magazines (46.7%). Fashion's close relation to the market is clearer than the relationship between the fashion exhibition and the market, but the two are intertwined. Fashion's commerciality is still a big chapter in how fashion and the disciplines associated with fashion are perceived.

#### *4.2.3.2 Opposite to high art criteria*

Baumann (2001) discusses how the lack of legitimation as serious art is apparent when critics frame cultural products as too easy to access and enjoy, or when certain words are used in order to show their inferiority. Critics, in the majority of the reviews and articles (58.6%), frame the exhibition and the curator with opposite to high art criteria. This is more intense in the US (64.5%) publications and less so in art magazines (46.7%). These negative high art criteria are manifested in different ways, sometimes by portraying the fashion exhibitors as lacking originality, as shown in the following review segment:

” So I expected the show to shake me up. But once beyond the historical material, it looked surprisingly predictable and not very coded, either”.

*The New York Times, “ ‘ Camp’ at the Met, as Rich as It Is Frustrating”, 2019*

In other cases, critics comment on the lack of complexity, as in the following review:

“Unfortunately, the exhibition “Jewels by JAR,” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, largely falls short in every respect. It is one of the most superficial shows I have ever seen at this great museum.”

*The New York Times, “All That Glitters (and a Lot That Shines)”, 2013*

Last, they apply criticism related to a lack of seriousness:

“This intermarriage of religious art and secular fashion feels refreshing in places, silly in some; either way, it’s an event.”

*The New York Times, “Heavenly Bodies’ at the Met shows just how much fashion and Catholicism have in common”, 2018*

Moreover, critics, in more than half of the cases (55.2%) also frame the fashion designers and the objects exhibited with opposite to high art criteria. They are, however, much less in art magazines (33.3%) than in newspapers (53.8%). In the New York Times review of the Pierre Cardin exhibition, the critic uses opposite to high art criteria to frame both the fashion designer and his work:

“Mr. Cardin, one of the most commercially successful of all French designers (and still working at 97), was never a great artist in the manner of Christian Dior, Cristóbal Balenciaga and Yves Saint Laurent.”

And later in the same review the critic framed the fashion designer’s work with derogatory comments:

“Most of Mr. Cardin’s evening gowns are tacky and uncreative”

*The New York Times, “Pierre Cardin’s Space-Age Fashion Takes Us Back to the Future”, 2019*



**Image 11.** Pierre Cardin. 2019. Installation view from exhibition Pierre Cardin: Future Fashion

The usage of high art criteria is certainly showing a negative relationship between fashion and art and does not indicate the legitimation of fashion and fashion curation as artforms. When compared to the frequency that critics use high art criteria to evaluate the fashion exhibition and the fashion exhibited, the overwhelmingness of the opposite to high art criteria makes evident the fact that critics tend to position them as entertainment rather than serious art.

#### *4.2.3.3 Popular art criteria*

The reviews and articles were also examined for the existence of adjectives related to experience, such as thrilling, exciting, jaw-dropping, entertaining, delightful etc. The findings reveal that critics in both countries use similar adjectives to a great extent, in 72.4% of the reviews and articles. According to van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010), critics may use a combination of both high and popular art criteria to legitimize a cultural product, but the extent to which critics use

either varies according to cross-national differences of their cultural classification systems. Therefore, the classification systems established in the United States and the United Kingdom can determine the meaning of the results. Considering that the cultural classification system of the US is characterized by openness (DiMaggio, 1991, 1992), the fact that US critics use popular criteria to frame the different aspects of the fashion exhibitions is not determinant of whether fashion curation is treated as an artform. However, taking into account that the distinction between high and popular art is rooted in the UK cultural classification system (Gayo & Savage, 2006), and that high art criteria is necessary for legitimizing a cultural product, the fact that the UK critics in the majority of the reviews and articles (69.2%) use popular criteria when evaluating the fashion exhibition is a sign of fashion curation's lack of legitimation.

#### *4.2.3.4 Fashion's lack of legitimation*

In a number of reviews and articles critics either make some kind of connection between fashion and art, or they separate them. In any case, fashion is hardly ever explicitly identified with art. In 29.3% of the reviews and articles fashion is separated from art; this percentage clearly is not decisive, but still considerable. This is evident mostly in the US (35.5%) and in newspapers (34.9%), but rarely in art magazines (13.3%). The separation between fashion and art is often manifested by presenting them as two different disciplines/fields, and more specifically when fashion is presented as a genre constantly trying to be perceived as art but rarely succeeding. Other times the separation is made explicit by the fact that designers are characterized as tailors, or something close to artists, but not actually artists. In a less subtle way fashion is portrayed as “stuff to wear”, and in an extreme case the idea of fashion being art is treated as absurd, as the award-winning art critic of the New York Times argues:

“The chief problem with the fashion-as-art fad of the 1990s was precisely that it didn't ask them.”

*The New York Times, “Designer as Dramatist, and the Tales He Left Behind”, 2011*

But fashion is also connected to the arts in 32.8% of the cases. This connection is sometimes made by arguing that fashion and art have shared elements, by claiming that designers transform fashion into art or that some fashion pieces are art, by arguing that fashion in museums is treated like art or associated with art, by maintaining that fashion and art are

intertwined, or even by mentioning examples of when artists use fashion in their works. But even when fashion is close to being perceived as art, the separation is still well maintained. This is evident in the Guardian's reviewer words in which they make clear that no matter how beautiful a fashion piece is it will never reach an artistic status.

“Many of these clothes are exceptionally beautiful; they're as close to being works of art as fashion ever comes”.

*The Guardian, “Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty review – superficially magnificent”, 2015*

The overall pattern is that fashion is still presented as a genre lacking depth, inferior to other art products and even today its place in the museum is sometimes openly questioned as manifested at the Washington's post review title:

“Fashion may be art, but does it belong in a museum?”

*The Washington Post, 2016*

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion

In this thesis I set out to answer the research question “How is fashion curation framed by art critics during the last decade, from 2011 to 2021?” in an attempt to explore whether fashion curation is legitimized as art or not. Considering fashion curation’s trajectory in the institutionalized art world and, most importantly, its framing by critics in influential publications found in the US and UK, this paper argues that fashion curation is not yet legitimized as art. Despite the existence of some indicators that suggest otherwise, the existence of indicators contradicting fashion curation’s legitimation is overwhelming. The findings presented in the results section are further discussed in this chapter in order to provide an understanding of fashion curation’s present failure to achieve artistic legitimation.

Starting with a historical account of fashion, it was shown that from the nineteenth century the changing opportunity space and the institutionalization of resources paved the way for fashion’s legitimation. But those changes could not support fashion’s legitimation as art since they occurred sporadically and because fashion’s aspirations were not shared by the artworld and academia. On the other hand, fashion curation, a practice highly connected to fashion and cultural institutions, involves many aspects, some of which are considered to be artistic. The growing number of fashion exhibitions over the years gave space to the notion that the fashion curator is an artist, a brilliant individual responsible for the creation of fashion exhibitions.

Nevertheless, by solely relying on fashion curation’s theoretical and historical perspective it is not made clear whether fashion curation is indeed an artform or whether the fashion curator is an artist. Considering that critics have played a central role in the creation of legitimizing ideologies and the promotion of legitimizing discourses for other art forms, such as films, in this research I made use of Baumann’s (2001, 2007) and Venrooij & Schmutz’s (2010) theories as a framework for investigating fashion curation’s legitimation by the critics. The empirical material – fashion exhibition reviews found in US and UK publications with a wide reach – were investigated for the existence of aesthetic criteria applied by critics in their framing of fashion curation. By employing a mixture of qualitative and quantitative content analysis I managed to provide with more nuanced findings rather than solely lists of percentages, which presented alone could have been misleading in some cases.



In the analyzed reviews and articles, I identified the existence of strategies similar to those applied in art criticism, which can be regarded as a sign towards legitimation. Firstly, the fact that critics present themselves as the experts that have the knowledge to guide the audience on how to perceive the fashion exhibition and all its parts is a common characteristic found in high art criticism (Baumann, 2001). Critics actually establish themselves as the experts with the authority to even make indications to the fashion exhibitions' creators. It is questionable, though, whether critics would have had the same attitude towards an artist and their work. Secondly, critics analyze the exhibition in detail while they also tend to discuss the meanings and messages underlying the fashion exhibition, to the degree that they even talk about the exhibition's and the fashion curator's intentions. This approach contributes to the idea that they analyze the fashion exhibition in a deep level, like they would have done with an art form, rather than superficially (Baumann, 2001). Thirdly, critics often make comparison between fashion exhibitions, an approach commonly followed by critics when reviewing art (Baumann, 2001). However, critics refrain from making comparisons between fashion curators. Another aspect that emerged from the analysis, is that there is a small percentage of publications where the critics make comparisons between the fashion exhibitions and art exhibitions. This is rare but its existence could still be meaningful. Even though right now it is not determinative, I suggest that it should be further investigated in the future in order to see how often it will occur over time.

But the somehow positive tone of these fashion exhibition reviews is ultimately countered by commentary manifesting fashion curation's lack of legitimation. Based on the critics' framing, the fashion curator is acknowledged as the creator of the fashion exhibition and, because of that, their names are almost always mentioned. This is in line with theories that treat contemporary fashion curators as the central figures of fashion exhibitions (Stevenson, 2015; Petrov, 2019). But critics do not tend to provide with biographical context of the fashion curator as they would have done with any other artist, while, as mentioned above, they sometimes make indications on how the fashion exhibition could have been done better. According to Baumann (2001), since the fashion curator is framed as the creator, they can therefore be seen as the artist who created an artwork. But in this case, the fashion curators' acceptance as the creators of the exhibitions does not necessarily confirm that they are indeed treated as artists, as their main characteristic is not artistry but their capacity to create visual narratives underpinned by research and their own cultural capital. Fashion curators are framed as respectable figures, connoisseurs with authority, but in the rare cases that the fashion exhibition and the fashion curator are

associated with established art forms, neither the exhibition nor the fashion curator are paralleled by the critic to artforms and artists respectively.

What is more, critics do not seem to approach and frame the curatorial work, nor the fashion exhibition, with high art criteria to a great extent, even though this phenomenon is evident in 40% of the cases. Most importantly, in the majority of the reviews, critics tend to use negative high art criteria or popular criteria instead, confirming fashion curation's lack of legitimation as serious art. In addition, fashion curation is consistently seen in the light of commercialization, which further hampers its legitimation. As discussed in the theory section, fashion curation is struggling with accusations of being a practice driven by sponsorships with the intention to generate profit. In the analyzed reviews, not only the fashion designers and their work are constantly connected to commerciality in a number of ways, but also the fashion exhibition itself and the curatorial practice are many times associated with the market, even though their commercial success is not always mentioned.

Lastly, throughout the findings, but especially in the last sub-theme of Fashion's lack of legitimation, it is indicated that fashion is considered commercial by its nature, but also involves practices that are close to being art. Fashion designers are connected to established art forms in a number of ways, but also to the market. Moreover, even though critics use high art criteria to frame the fashion designers and their work, they use opposite to high art criteria to a greater extent when referring to them. Even the fact that the question of whether fashion is art still hovers over the reviews and articles is one more indication that fashion's position, even within the broader artworld, is not stabilized. The overall pattern is that fashion is still treated as inferior, but in a subtle way.

In terms of cross-national differences, the results suggest that the US and the UK critics employ high and popular criteria to a different extent. US reviewers seem to comply with the concept of omnivorousness by incorporating both high and popular criteria in their evaluations of the fashion exhibitions. This confirms the expectation formulated earlier in the theory chapter that due to a less hierarchical classification system and weaker boundaries, the US critics would employ a combination of high art and popular aesthetic criteria. This, however, cannot be regarded as a sign towards or against legitimation of fashion curation. On the other hand, the UK critics seem to resist the intellectualization of fashion exhibitions, an attitude that can be attributed to the country's uncompromising classification system. This result is in line with van



Venrooij & Schmutz (2010) theory, which holds that the classification system of a country affects the legitimation process.

The results also add two elements for discussion. Firstly, based on the quantitative findings it is made clear that the majority of the critics are women. Earlier in this paper I suggested that this pattern may be related to stereotypical notions about fashion being a feminine occupation. If this is the case, that male art critics refrain from reviewing fashion exhibitions because they consider it a female field, it is certainly a negative sign towards fashion's and fashion curation's legitimation. But interpreting this finding may be more complicated and therefore I suggest that more research is needed towards that direction. Secondly, even though the fact that critics took the time to review those fashion exhibitions is initially perceived as a positive sign towards legitimation, what I argue is that the reviewers, many of whom are reputable and respected art critics, engage with the reviewing of those fashion exhibitions because they are organized within museums. This idea can be confirmed by the fact that almost all the reviews are about fashion exhibitions held in museums, and especially at the MET and V&A. Therefore, the subject of fashion and fashion curation may not be of interest for the art critic, unless it is accepted within a museum. This association with the museum is probably also the reason why most of the fashion exhibition reviews and articles are found in the arts and culture sections of the publications and not in the entertainment or lifestyle section where fashion is often classified.

It is acknowledged that the arguments raised are not indisputable. A different set of aesthetic indicators or the decision to include fashion critics' reviews could have resulted in different conclusions. But this thesis, as mentioned above, draws primarily from the work of Baumann (2001, 2007) and van Venrooij & Schmutz (2010) and the indicators derive from that framework. Moreover, my decision to exclude fashion critics' reviews aimed at a sample of more objective reviews, since fashion professionals have more incentives in framing fashion as art. Another limitation concerns the chosen method of analysis; content analysis is considered highly interpretative and therefore easily disputable. In this research, I tried to address this limitation and increase accuracy by making use of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative content analysis, while at the same time I provided a detailed representation of the process followed. Lastly, I must also point out the limitation of this research's sources to English texts. Even though the initial plan was to investigate the cross-national differences in fashion curation's framing in more countries, including the Netherlands, the idea had to be abandoned because I

can only accurately understand and analyze English written reviews and articles. I trust though that it could have been profitable for the generalization of the findings to have a bigger data set from a variety of countries.

In line with the above, and considering that the legitimation process is ongoing (Alexander & Bowler, 2021), it would be interesting for further research to apply the legitimation theory in other countries as well and compare the way critics evaluate and frame fashion curation in different periods of time. Moreover, future research can focus on some aspects that emerged from the analysis, which were out of the scope of this research, and therefore were not addressed. For instance, the findings showed a less open way of evaluating fashion exhibitions in art magazines in comparison to newspapers. This is already evident by the fact that the reviews and articles in newspapers are lengthier in comparison to the ones in art magazines. The current study, even though it identifies this pattern, does not pinpoint the reasons for its occurrence, something that could be established by future research. Lastly, another interesting topic that appeared in the findings and can be further analyzed, is the reasons behind the increase in the number of fashion exhibition reviews and articles from 2013 onwards.

This research aimed at contributing to the limited existing literature on fashion curation, but also to the legitimation theory, by exploring the unique case of a practice emerging from the artworld, which is connected to a genre often identified as entertainment, fashion. In conclusion, the results reveal that the legitimation process goes beyond the acceptance of a cultural product or practice by cultural institutions. By using Baumann's (2007) theory as a framework, this study showed that fashion's endorsement by museums, which is mostly attributed to their economic interests (Steele, 2008; Petrov, 2019), is not sufficient for fashion curation to be accepted and identified as art by the artworld gatekeepers. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that fashion curation is not similar to other cultural products that emerge from art world institutions, because of its connection to fashion, whose placement in museums is often treated with hostility.

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## Appendix A: Fashion exhibition reviews and articles

Country & Publication	Number of reviews and articles
USA Art Magazines	
<i>Art In America</i>	1
<i>ArtForum</i>	3
<i>ArtNews</i>	3
USA Newspapers	
<i>New York Post</i>	1
<i>The New York Times</i>	17
<i>The Washington Post</i>	7
UK Art Magazines	
<i>Aesthetica</i>	2
<i>Apollo</i>	3
<i>Frieze</i>	3
UK Newspapers	
<i>Standard UK</i>	2
<i>The Guardian</i>	6
<i>The Independent</i>	4
<i>The Telegraph</i>	4
<i>The Times</i>	2
Total	58



## Appendix B: List of fashion exhibitions, by institution, publication, reviewer, year, wordcount

<b>Fashion exhibition</b>	<b>Institution the fashion exhibition was held</b>	<b>Publication</b>	<b>Section published</b>	<b>Reviewer</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Words</b>
China: Through the Looking Glass	MET	The Washington Post	Art and Entertainment	Senior critic at-large	2015	1.485
China: Through the Looking Glass	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2015	1.525
Rodarte	National Museum of Women in the Arts	The Washington Post	Museums	Senior critic at-large	2018	1.108
Heavenly Bodies	MET	The Washington Post	Style	Senior critic at-large	2018	1.376
Heavenly Bodies	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Critic at-large	2018	1.980
Heavenly Bodies	MET	Apollo	Reviews	Contributor	2018	854
The Glamour of Italian Fashion	V&A	The Independent	Life-style - Fashion	Art critic	2014	1.134
The Glamour of Italian Fashion	V&A	Apollo	Reviews	Art historian and curator	2014	667
Ballerina: Fashion's Modern Muse	Museum at Fit	ArtForum	Critic's Picks	Assistant editor	2020	308
Liberty: Art Fabrics and Fashion	Dovecot Studios	Apollo	Reviews	Art historian and curator	2018	1.237
Liberty: Art Fabrics and Fashion	Dovecot Studios	The Independent	Culture, Art, Features	Arts and theatre critic	2018	1.204
Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty	MET	Frieze	Reviews	Contributor	2011	959
Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2011	1.431
Pierre Cardin: Future Fashion	Brooklyn Museum	Frieze	Articles	Contributor	2019	288
Pierre Cardin: Future Fashion	Brooklyn Museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Critic at-large	2019	1.066
Pierre Cardin: Future Fashion	Brooklyn Museum	New York Post	Fashion	Writer, reporter and editor	2019	605
JAR	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2013	1.325
A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk	Museums at FIT	ArtForum	Slant	Contributor	2014	844

Kimono: Kyoto to catwalk	V&A	Frieze	Reviews	Contributor	2020	825
Kimono: Kyoto to catwalk	V&A	The Telegraph	Culture – Art – Reviews	Journalist and literary critic	2020	578
Kimono: Kyoto to catwalk	V&A	The Guardian	Culture – Design	Writer, theatre critic	2020	1.095
Kimono: Kyoto to catwalk	V&A	The Times	Arts and Culture	Art Critic	2020	1.180
Bags: Inside Out	V&A	The Telegraph	Culture- Art	Senior Arts editor	2020	692
Bags: Inside Out	V&A	The Guardian	Lifestyle - Fashion	Journalist, tv critic, novel reviewer	2020	972
Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty	V&A	The Telegraph	Culture - Art	Music and Arts commentator	2015	656
Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty	V&A	The Guardian	Lifestyle-Fashion	Journalist, tv critic, novel reviewer	2015	1.255
Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty	V&A	The Independent	Lifestyle - Fashion	Art critic and author	2015	491
Mary Quant	V&A	The Telegraph	Culture- Art	Journalist and literary critic	2019	1.049
Mary Quant	V&A	The Guardian	Art and Design	Arts and heritage journalist	2018	581
Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion	V&A	The Standard UK	Culture - Review	Artist	2017	255
Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion	V&A	The Guardian	Lifestyle - Fashion	Journalist, tv critic, novel reviewer	2017	883
The Vulgar: Fashion redefined	Barbican Centre	The Standard UK	Arts	Deputy arts editor	2016	336
Fashion on the Ration	IWM	The Times	Features	Journalist, writer	2015	776
Kimono: a Modern History	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Contributing editor/ Art critic	2014	760
Is Fashion Modern?	MoMA	The Guardian	Culture ad Design	Reviewer	2017	670
Is Fashion Modern?	MoMA	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2017	1.297
CAMP: Notes on Fashion	MET	The Washington Post	Style - Review	Senior critic at-large	2019	1.305
CAMP: Notes on Fashion	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2019	2.643
CAMP: Notes on Fashion	MET	The Independent	Lifestyle - Fashion	Culture writer and opinion columnist	2019	1.618

Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art	American Folk Art Museum	ArtNews	News	Contributor	2014	432
Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art	American Folk Art Museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Contributing editor/ Art critic	2014	789
The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk	Brooklyn museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Art critic	2013	1.028
The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk	Brooklyn museum	ArtNews	News	contributor	2013	1.238
Christian Dior: Designer of the dreams	V&A	ArtForum	Guide	Contributor	2019	155
Killer Heels: The Art of the High-Heeled Shoe	Brooklyn museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2014	1.333
Killer Heels: The Art of the High-Heeled Shoe	Brooklyn museum	ArtNews	News	Contributor	2014	328
Manus x Machina	MET	The Washington Post	Art and Entertainment	Senior critic at-large	2016	1.200
Manus x Machina	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2016	1.525
Manus x Machina	MET	Art in America	Interviews	Contributor	2016	1.191
PUNK: Chaos to Couture	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2013	1.397
PUNK: Chaos to Couture	MET	Aesthetica	Reviews	Contributor	2013	548
Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s	V&A	Aesthetica	Not specific section	Art and Culture journalist	2013	669
Missing Sneakers	Brooklyn museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Art critic	2015	1.142
Missing Sneakers	Brooklyn museum	The Washington Post	Arts and Entertainment	Senior critic at-large	2015	672
Isaac Mizrahi: An Unruly History	Jewish Museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Art critic	2016	950
Isaac Mizrahi: An Unruly History	Jewish Museum	The Washington Post	Arts and Entertainment	Senior critic at-large	2016	1.028
Contemporary Muslim Fashions	De Young Museum	The New York Times	Art and Design	Contributor	2018	1.511
Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations	MET	The New York Times	Art and Design	Co-chief art critic	2012	1.480

## Appendix C: Codebook

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Legitimation	This theme combines the elements of criticism, commonly found in art criticism, which indicate that fashion curation is treated as a serious art form, or not.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The creator</li> <li>- Critic expert</li> <li>- Interpretation</li> <li>- Mixed commentary</li> <li>- Comparisons</li> <li>- High art criteria</li> <li>- Association to high art</li> </ul>
Lack of legitimation	This theme emphasizes the critic's expressions which show their rejection of fashion curation as art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commerciality</li> <li>- Opposite to high art criteria</li> <li>- Popular art criteria</li> <li>- Lack of fashion's legitimation</li> </ul>

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Codes</b>
The Creator	Includes the codes that show that the curator was framed as the creator by the critics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name of the curator</li> <li>- Curator as the creator</li> <li>- Curator connoisseur</li> <li>- Connection to academia</li> <li>- Curator's words cited</li> <li>- Background of the curator mentioned</li> </ul>

Critic Expert	Encompasses all the codes showing how the critics introduce themselves as the experts educating the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Context</li> <li>- Stylistic devices</li> <li>- Critic's indications for changes in the curatorial practice</li> <li>- Context beyond what is seen in the exhibition</li> </ul>
Interpretation	Contains the codes dealing with how the fashion exhibition was analyzed in terms of its messages and underlying meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underlying meanings and messages</li> <li>- Questions raised</li> <li>- Exhibition intentions</li> <li>- Curator's intentions</li> </ul>
Mixed Commentary	Combines the codes related to positive and negative commentary by the critic for the curatorial practice and the curator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mixed review on curatorial practice</li> <li>- Harsh criticism on curatorial practice</li> </ul>
Comparisons	Contains all the codes that mention comparisons made by the critics in terms of the curator and the exhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compare fashion exhibition to another fashion exhibition</li> <li>- Compare fashion exhibition to a museum exhibition</li> <li>- Curator compared to another curator</li> </ul>

High Art Criteria	Encompasses the codes of phrases and terms used by the critics indicating that they judge the different aspects of the exhibition as high art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comment on complexity, ambiguity, originality, innovation, seriousness, intelligence, timelessness of the exhibition and curator</li> <li>- Comment on complexity, ambiguity, originality, innovation, seriousness, intelligence, timelessness of the designer and objects</li> </ul>
Association to High Art	Includes the codes that make a connection between fashion and established artforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect fashion designer and their work to established art</li> <li>- Connect exhibition and curator to established art</li> </ul>
Commerciality	Encompasses all the codes that connect the fashion exhibition, and its aspects, to the market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commercial success mentioned</li> <li>- Exhibition connected to the market</li> <li>- Designers connected to the market</li> </ul>
Opposite to High Art Criteria	Includes the codes referring to aspects of the criticism which indicate that the exhibition, curator, designer and objects exhibited are not treated as serious art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opposite to high art criteria, and terms, comments on the curator or exhibition</li> <li>- Opposite to high art criteria, and terms, comments on the designer and objects</li> </ul>
Popular Art Criteria	Emphasizes on the code referring to the usage adjectives related to experience by the critics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experience</li> </ul>

Lack of fashion's legitimation	Contains all the codes in which critics explicitly refer to fashion's relationship to the arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Connection between fashion and art</li><li>- Separate fashion from art</li></ul>
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## Appendix D: Legitimation and Lack of Legitimation themes, sub-themes, and codes in percentages

	Total	UK	USA	Newspaper	Art magazine
<b>Legitimation</b>					
<b>The creator</b>					
Name of the curator	74.1%	53.8%	90.3%	76.7%	66.7%
Curator as the creator	70.7%	69.2%	71%	72.1%	66.7%
Curator connoisseur	53.4%	53.8%	51.6%	58.1%	40%
Connection to academia	29.3%	23.1%	32.3%	32.6%	20%
Curator's words cited	32.8%	34.6%	29%	32.6%	33.3%
Background of the curator mentioned	13.8%	11.5%	16.1%	13.8%	-
<b>Critic expert</b>					
Context	93.1%	92.3%	93.5%	93%	93%
Stylistic devices	34.5%	38.5%	29%	37.2%	26.7%
Critic's indications for changes in the curatorial practice	27.6%	11.5%	38.7%	32.6%	13.3%
Context beyond what is seen at the exhibition	79.3%	76.9%	80.6%	76.7%	86.7%
<b>Interpretation</b>					
Underlying meanings and messages	74.1%	69.2%	77.4%	79.1%	60%
Exhibition intentions	86.2%	92.3%	80.6%	93%	66.7%
Curator's intentions	53.4%	53.8%	51.6%	58.1%	40%
Questions raised	41.4%	42.3%	38.7%	48.8%	20%
<b>Mixed commentary</b>					
Mixed review curatorial practice	39.7%	30.8%	45.2%	41.9%	33.3%
Harsh criticism curatorial practice	6.9%	3.8%	9.7%	6.9%	-
<b>Comparisons</b>					
Compare fashion exhibition to another fashion exhibition	44.8%	38.5%	48.4%	55.8%	13.3%
Compare fashion exhibition to a museum exhibition	20.7%	19.2%	22.6%	25.6%	6.7%



Curator compared to another curator	3.4%	-	6.5%	3.4%	-
<b>High art criteria</b>					
Comment on complexity, ambiguity, originality, innovation, seriousness, intelligence, timelessness of the exhibition and curator	39.7%	34.6%	41.9%	41.9%	33.3%
Comment on complexity, ambiguity, originality, innovation, seriousness, intelligence, timelessness of the designer and objects	50%	42.6%	51.6%	51.2%	46.7%
<b>Association to high art</b>					
Connect fashion designer and their work to established art	70.7%	61.5%	77.4%	74.4%	60%
Connect exhibition and curator to established art	27.6%	19.2%	32.3%	23.3%	40%
	Total	UK	USA	Newspaper	Art magazine
<hr/> <b>Lack of legitimation</b>					
<b>Commerciality</b>					
Commercial success mentioned	17.2%	15.4%	19.4%	16.3%	20%
Exhibition connected to the market	50%	53.8%	48.4%	58.1%	26.7%
Designers connected to the market	62.1%	57.7%	67.7%	67.4%	46.7%
<b>Opposite to high art criteria</b>					
Opposite to high art criteria, and terms, comments on the curator or exhibition	58.6%	50%	64.5%	62.8%	46.7%
Opposite to high art criteria, and terms, comments on the designer and objects	55.2%	53.8%	54.8%	62.8%	33.3%
<b>Popular art criteria</b>					
Experience	72.4%	69.2%	74.2%	76.6%	60%
<b>Lack of fashion's legitimation</b>					
Connection between fashion and art	32.8%	19.2%	41.9%	37.2%	20%
Separate fashion from art	29.3%	23.1%	35.5%	34.9%	13.3%

## Appendix E: Frequency of High Art criteria usage

### High art criteria addressing the curatorial practice and the exhibition

	Total	UK	USA	Newspaper	Art magazine
Complexity, ambiguity or similar meaning phrases and words for the curatorial practice and the exhibition	25.9%	19.2%	29%	25.6%	26.7%
Innovation, originality or similar meaning phrases and words for the curatorial practice and exhibition	31%	23.1%	38.7%	32.6%	26.7%
Seriousness, intelligence or similar meaning phrases and words for the curatorial practice and the exhibition	29.3%	19.2%	35.5%	30.2%	26.7%
Timelessness	-	-	-	-	-

### High art criteria addressing the fashion designer and fashion objects

	Total	UK	USA	Newspaper	Art magazine
Complexity, ambiguity or similar meaning phrases and words for the fashion designer and fashion objects	17.2%	19.2%	12.9%	18.6%	13.3%
Innovation, originality or similar meaning phrases and words for the fashion designer and fashion objects	36.2%	34.6%	35.5%	37.2%	33.3%
Seriousness, intelligence or similar meaning phrases and words for the fashion designer and fashion objects	15.5%	15.4%	12.9%	16.3%	13.3%
Timelessness attributed to the fashion designer	3.4%	3.8%	3.2%	4.7%	-