

Fashion Criticism in Museology -The Charles James Retrospective-

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Abstract

This paper proposes a multi-disciplinary approach for fashion criticism in museology through an analysis of the 2014 Charles James's retrospective. It includes the following elicitations. First, it explores a critical discussion of “dress museology” as well as “fashion museology” and the complexity of fashion in museums. Second, this paper reorganizes Fleming's (1974) artifact study and Crane and Bovone's (2006) critical theory for fashion criticism in museology by comparing “object-based” research with an “academic” approach. Third, it applies fashion criticism methodology as a case study to the aforementioned museum fashion exhibit, entitled <Charles James: Beyond Fashion>. We can subsequently begin to reconsider concepts of art and fashion within present culture based on inclusive fashion criticism of aesthetic and cultural events.

Key words: Fashion, Criticism, Charles James, Dress museology, Fashion museology

I. Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, the museum has increasingly become a meaningful site for fashion in contemporary society, along with the runway, the retail store, the on-line blog, the film industry, and so on. This phenomenon does not just exemplify a mutual fascination between fashion and art, but also reveals the potential of museums as innovative, cultural institutions for fashion.

However, Anderson (2000) states that prejudice, fear and suspicion still surround the status of fashion within many museums. So, the issue of fashion in museums, “the institutional spaces sacred to art” (Steele, 2008, p. 18), remains problematic. In fact, there exists a dilemma between “education” and “entertainment” in the role of fashion in museums: On the one side, it is necessary for museums to mount clearly-curated and well-researched exhibitions which are educational and pro-

vide cultural, intellectual resources. On the other side, considering the constantly changing and “living” nature of fashion, fashion in museums should be entertaining and fun (Anderson, 2000; Riegels Melchior, 2014). In addition, museum fashion exhibits are sometimes linked with the fashion industry and fundraising, which causes more hostility to the concept of fashion museums. When focusing on the complexity of museum fashion exhibits, fashion in museums needs to be examined in both terms of historical and educational contexts, and from contemporary and entertainment perspectives.

This situation necessitates the discussion of “dress museology” and “fashion museology”, which in turn results in the need to develop a critical approach for fashion in museums. Riegels Melchior (2014) explains the concepts of “fashion museology” and “dress museology” as key to understanding the recent developments and challenges of fashion-based exhibits. Under “new museology”, a balance of two different approaches is needed in order to further seek a more critical and reflective approach to museums. This requires both “fashion museology”, an approach that is relevant and

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appealing to contemporary society and new visitors, and “dress museology”, which focuses on the more traditional role of museums.

As Riegels Melchior (2014) regards the aim of new museology as reflection on our cultural heritage and its multi-vocality, this paper aims to propose a multi-disciplinary and inclusive method of fashion criticism for future fashion museology through using the 2014 Charles James's retrospective to illustrate this point. In fact, despite the exorbitant influence of fashion on contemporary life, the methodology with which to criticize fashion properly and artfully has not been established yet. In addition, McNeil and Miller (2014) argue that in order to be a critic of fashion, one must first be informed about fashion in all its complexity: aesthetic, social, cultural, economic and historical. Referring mainly to Fleming's (1974) artifact study and Crane and Bovone's (2006) critical theory, the multi-disciplinary criticism method in this paper integrates artifact study, art criticism, cultural study, sociology and material culture.

Thus, this paper firstly explores a critical discussion of “dress museology” and “fashion museology” and the complexity of fashion in museums. Secondly, it purports a multi-disciplinary approach for fashion criticism, especially in museology when considering two approaches of fashion research. Thirdly, as a case study, it ultimately applies the fashion criticism methodology to a museum fashion exhibit, <Charles James: Beyond Fashion>, held at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2014.

The reasons why the author chooses the Charles James retrospective for the case study are as follows: On the one hand, the museum exhibit explored Charles James, a legendary figure who would be almost hidden in fashion history in terms of dress museology. In fact, preceding researches about Charles James have been very rare, except for Martin's (1997) book, Koda and Reeder's (2014) exhibition catalogue, and small chapters in fashion designers' biographies (Alford & Stegemyer, 2010; Milbank, 1985; Polan & Tredre, 2009). On the other hand, the Charles James retrospective introduced various technologies and practices to maximize the couturier's characteristics by adopting a variety of agents, other than curators in fashion museology. So,

the author considers the Charles James retrospective to be appropriate for this case study, compared to other fashion museum exhibits so far, including Giorgio Armani's (2000), Yves Saint Laurent's (2006, 2008), and even Alexander Macqueen's (2011) retrospectives.

Therefore, this paper seeks to integrate the art-historical aspects of a fashion designer's museum objects with contemporary practices in museology by multiple mediations from curatorship to spectatorship. In general, the author hopes to open up further research into fashion criticism, suggesting new theoretical and practical directions in this area.

II. Fashion in Museums: Dress Museology and Fashion Museology

Considering the rise of fashion in museums since the late twentieth-century, museums today seem to be embedded in discourses of fashion and the attraction of the new, readdressing the nature of fashion. Riegels Melchior (2014) attributes the popularity of museum fashion exhibits to a shift from “dress museology” to “fashion museology”. Fashion in museums now is interested not in the fashionable objective, but in an image-based analysis of fashion phenomena and spectacular scenography that visually illustrate an analytical narrative (Riegels Melchior, 2014), which make museums newsworthy of art and culture. Also, this shift entails the controversy of the commercialization of museums. Some fashion companies which operate on a seasonal fashion system try to bring about public interest and commercial success by incorporating their business needs into crowd-pleasing museum strategy (Palmer, 2008).

Confronting this issue, Steele, at a FIT conference called Museum Quality, raised a notable debate around the significance and value of museum fashion exhibits as interpretative apparatus. At the center of the museum quality debates was Diana Vreeland, a former editor-in-chief of 『Vogue』 and a special consultant to the Costume Institute of MET in the 1970s. Beyond the simple presentation of garments and antiquarianism, Vreeland drastically transformed the presentation method of the Costume Institute, especially by employing stylized, lifelike mannequins, window-dressing te-

chniques, and dramatic lighting. Through her “block-buster” exhibitions, this new approach to presentation enlivened exhibitions and enticed a larger public, and, more significantly, showed up-to-date looks (Koda & Glasscock, 2014).

However, although undeniably attractive, Vreeland's shows were subject to the criticism that they give birth to “commercialism and historical inaccuracy” (Steele, 2008, p. 10). On the controversy around commercialism, Smith (as cited in Anderson, 2000) argues that scholarly curatorship must acknowledge the commercial character of fashion itself, otherwise it will only lead backwards to approaches that decontextualize objects. Focusing on the other criticism of historical inaccuracy, Harold Koda (as cited in Steele, 2008), a curator-in-charge of the Costume Institute since 2000 and former assistant to Vreeland, said in an interview by Melissa Drier, “I've always felt that as a curator, you have to engage the eye before you can instruct, or communicate”. Furthermore, Koda and Glasscock (2014) explain that various installation techniques support curatorial narratives and conceits or helped to engage and inform the viewer. This case does not justify the historical inaccuracy of museum exhibits, but it shows the necessity for museum visitors to be seduced into really looking at and estimating fashion.

When looking at the encounter between museums and fashion designs, or curators and designers, Teunissen (2014) considers this to be a new exhibition practice of fashion and that is “new museology”. According to Teunissen (2014), although these exhibitions take tangible fashion objects to be the crucial foundation, the underlying concepts and narratives are visualized by means of films, installations, lighting, and scenography, portraying the underlying layers and processes in contemporary fashion. The new fashion exhibitions tend to be “both entertaining and seductive in form, [and] historically accurate in content”. In this way, new museology provides newness in more visibility in museums and attracts new visitors. However, it fundamentally regards a fashion museum, not just as a “new” place for the understanding of fashion designers' work, but also as part of our visual culture in a broader context.

Thus, the discussion returns to “dress museology”

and “fashion museology”, as mentioned earlier. Svensson (2014) notes that one of the main distinguishing traits of museum research as “dress museology” is connoisseurship”, not just the justification of the authenticity of artifacts, but also distinguishing the skills related to the artifact. It conveys knowledge of construction, color, and form; skill, provenance, origin, and authenticity; manufacturing conditions and processes in artifact study. Whereas, as Riegels Melchior (as cited in Svensson, 2014) puts it, “fashion museology” is connected with “audience-friendly contemporary designers”, “creativity and imagination”, and also “commerce and branding”.

Therefore, the trajectory of fashion in museums moving from “dress museology” to “fashion museology” reveals the change from a previous focus on dress to a present focus on fashion, from a focus on the object to a focus on the experience of exhibitions and other front-stage, public museum activities (Riegels Melchior, 2014). In terms of new museology, fashion exhibits in museums should strive to keep the original museum value as a center for knowledge and object preservation and also deliver the spectacle of the fashion world as a new institution for entertainment, and most importantly, provide visual and material context to broaden cultural understanding of fashion and develop a critical approach for it.

In this paper, the author intends to support the combination and balance of both “dress museology” and “fashion museology”, rather than focus on turning from the one to the other. The inclusive approach that this paper pursues includes not only the content of exhibitions and fashion objects, but also exhibition installations and fashion imagery which show fashion systems and attract non-standard visitors. Here, various individuals involved in new museology play core roles in fashion exhibitions, embracing them as being “both beautiful and intelligent, entertaining and educational” (Steele, 2008, p. 14).

III. Methodology: Multi-disciplinary Approach for Fashion Criticism

<Charles James: Beyond Fashion>, curated by Ha-

rold Koda and Jan G. Reeder, was held at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from May 8 to August 10 in 2014. The exhibition explored the career of legendary Anglo-American couturier Charles James (1906-1978) and his design process to construct revolutionary ball gowns and innovative tailoring through approximately sixty-five works. Each of them was presented in two separate locations: James's ball gowns in special exhibition galleries; James's day wears and evening wears in four categories and ephemera from James's life and work in the Anna Wintour Costume. Not only various digital technologies, but the exhibition also provided various events, from a fashion journalist and editor, Alina Cho's audio interview with James's former clients, assistants, muses and friends, called "Recalling Charles James" to one of the co-curators, Jan G. Reeder's Sunday interview with a fashion designer, Zac Posen, to illuminate James's life and work.

This case study aims firstly to show an example of both historical and contemporary museum fashion exhibitions through the 2014 Charles James retrospective, and secondly to propose a multi-disciplinary perspective for fashion criticism by introducing Fleming's (1974) and Crane and Bovone's (2006) approaches.

Based on Feldman's (1994), Barrett's (1994), and Frye's (1957) definitions of criticism, the author defines fashion criticism as "a linguistic analysis and interpretation about a variety of discursive networks around fashion as well as an aesthetic analysis of it".

As Taylor (1998) put it, there is a division between the "object-centered" approaches of the curators or collectors and the "academic" ones from social/economic history and cultural theory in fashion research methodologies. On the one hand, "object-based research" focuses necessarily on examination of the details of fashion objects or artifacts, which may include shape, color, fabric, and technical descriptions, or information on individual object labels, such as date, garment type, designer's name, donor or wearer (Palmer, 2008; Taylor, 1998). On the other hand, the "academic" method derived from cultural studies puts emphasis on analyzing the meanings invoked by cultural objects and practices. It underlines the value of images or repres-

entations, not only the garments themselves (Anderson, 2000). Therefore, the divided fashion research methods lead to the current museological debates. However, many scholars, including Anderson (2000), Breward (2008), Steele (1998), Taylor (1998), and so on finally share their views of multi-disciplinary approaches to museology.

Thus, the multi-disciplinary fashion criticism in this paper seeks for the museum, as an inclusive institution, to integrate all the aspects, such as object-based research of curatorial process, cultural studies, and socio-economic history in order to fully contemplate museum fashion exhibits. The framework for fashion criticism in museology mainly owes to Fleming's (1974) artifact study because his model is useful for identifying and interpreting both artistic and cultural artifacts, such as fashion objects. Simultaneously, it reflects Crane and Bovone's (2006) material culture analysis and Entwistle's (2000) socio-cultural approaches to fashion.

Fleming (1974) suggests a conceptual model for the analysis and interpretation of both practical and artistic objects, focusing on the interrelationship of the artifact and its culture in a discipline of artifact in museums. The model utilizes two conceptual tools, which are a fivefold classification of the basic properties of an artifact and a set of four operations to be performed on these properties: The five basic properties are a formula for including and inter-relating all the significant facts about an artifact, which are composed of its history, material, construction, design, and function. The four operations are a successive process of "Identification" – "Evaluation" – "Cultural Analysis" – "Interpretation", each of which involves each of the five properties.

"Identification" is a body of distinctive facts about the artifact, which includes 'Classification', 'Authentication', and 'Description': 'Classification' is to specify the general class to which the particular object under consideration belongs, such as function, material, construction, iconography, and subject matter. 'Authentication' is to determine whether the object is genuine, which is related to connoisseurship or laboratory analysis. 'Description' is the concise and orderly delineation of the physical aspects of the object. "Eva-

uation” is a set of judgments about the artifact, usually based on comparisons with other objects of its kind in terms of our culture's value standards. It can compare the given artifact with other artifacts made by the same craftsman, by other craftsmen in the same subculture, or by other region with similar artifacts. “Cultural Analysis” is the various interrelationship of an artifact to aspects of its own contemporary culture. Fleming classifies “Cultural Analysis” into several artifact studies, which are ‘Functional Analysis’ and ‘Historical Analysis’; ‘Sampling’; ‘Product Analysis’ and ‘Content Analysis’. “Interpretation” suggests the meaning and significance of the artifact in relation to values of our own present culture, and an artifact is not subject to just one correct interpretation, but many interpretations, suggesting the particular values of the object. In this way, Fleming's (1974) model includes many components applicable for aesthetic and cultural approaches of fashion. Thus, Fleming's (1974) model is fundamentally subject to an art historian or a curator's own research ability to criticize an artifact, rather than social discourses.

Fashion is a product of social discourse and a medium for material culture to embody symbolic values of a variety of individuals and groups within a society, and change or reinforce their values. At this point, both Crane and Bovone's (2006) approach to material culture, and Entwistle's (2000) the network of bodies within aesthetic, cultural economy provide useful theories to understand the sociology of fashion.

Crane and Bovone (2006) conceptualizes fashion as an example of a broader phenomenon, the creation and attribution of symbolic values to material culture, and suggests a partial list of ways of studying fashion phenomenon, which is implicated in different levels of social organizations and perspectives. First one is analysis of “meaning-making processes”, such as analysis of texts, discourses, symbols, cognitive maps, and cultural repertoires. Second way is analysis of “systems of cultural production” in which symbolic values are attributed to material culture through the collective activities of personnel with a wide range of skills. Third method is analysis of “the communication of symbolic values and the processes” whereby they are disseminated to consumers through the media. Fourth

one is analysis of “the attribution of symbolic values to material culture by consumers”, and the symbolic values to fashion by consumers have generally been characterized as those that are associated with class, life styles, or subcultures, and more recently, consumers' tastes and life styles, rather than their classes. Final method is “cross-national studies of symbolic values expressed in material goods” in different countries and regions. Thus, Crane and Bovone (2006) present several critical methods to examine the symbolic values which are attributed to fashion and its cultural meaning within a certain society.

Entwistle (2000) argues that the study of fashion covers the dual concept of fashion as a cultural phenomenon and as an aspect of fashion system with technology of production and consumption. In particular, such sociological approach to fashion involves with the collective activities of personnel with a wide range of skills. According to Entwistle (2000), fashion requires understanding the relationship between a number of overlapping and interconnecting bodies operating within the fashion system, moving from production to distribution, consumption. In addition, aesthetic values and cultural concerns of fashion created by the different fashion agents are inter-wined with economic values of fashion as a commercial product. Therefore, empirical studies of the matrix of various social, cultural agents around an aesthetic object like fashion can result in the implicitly collective meaning of fashion objects and the nature of fashion system within a culture.

Fashion as an interesting form of aesthetic object and material culture is implicated in different scopes from artifact studies in cultural history, material culture theories, to art criticism theories. So, the multi-disciplinary melding of aesthetic, socio-economic, and cultural perspectives results in an inclusive fashion criticism model, of which major parts are explained on the author's another paper under review. Here, the author epitomizes a part of the inclusive fashion criticism as follows.

Based on the Fleming's (1974) model, the fashion criticism framework in aesthetic, cultural perspective appears in the orderly and sequential process of “Identification: Classification and Description of Formative Features” – “Evaluation: Aesthetic Value” – “Cultural

Analysis: Contemporary Symbolic Value” – “Interpretation: Current Value and Significance”. “Identification: Classification and Description of Formative Features” is involved in a body of distinctive facts which leads to classification and description of a given fashion object. Classification specifies a general class of the fashion object on the basis of its style, dress history, theme or concept, clothing category, function, material or technique, and so on. Description is offered to identify the formative features of the fashion object and to analyze their structural relationships with fashion design principles. Thus, this stage is mainly an information gathering stage from describing the formative features to extracting aesthetic features through classification. “Evaluation: Aesthetic Value” judges the properties of a fashion object based on comparisons with other cases and in terms of aesthetic value criteria. A range of grounds for evaluation in fashion can include expressiveness of style or concept, appropriateness of design elements and effectiveness of design principles by style or concept, technical completion and craftsmanship, originality, and sometimes, market or consumer research. “Cultural Analysis: Contemporary Symbolic Value” involves in depth evaluation of the various inter-relationships of a fashion object and its contemporary culture. The functional analysis of fashion of several types of “Cultural Analysis” (Fleming, 1974) can involve its various functions to satisfy not just individuals’ functional or decorative needs, but also the vehicles of communication, conveying their status, values, feelings, and meanings in contemporary society. In addition, it can sometimes demonstrate a designer’s innovation to lead a new trend or change in contemporary fashion. For the historical analysis, the social place of a fashion object can be investigated. Sampling operations can establish a chronology of design traits or construction techniques of a fashion object. From the standpoint of product analysis, a specific culture leaves its mark on a particular fashion object; and from the standpoint of content analysis, a particular fashion object reflects its culture as evidence of the culture. Thus, the importance of “Cultural Analysis” in fashion criticism lies in the understanding of historical context towards a fashion object. “Interpretation: Current Value and Significance” is to

suggest the meaning and significance of a fashion object in relation to aspects of our own culture. This stage makes sense out of all partial meanings at the previous stages, and leads beyond them to higher levels of meaning, and a fashion object can be subject to interpretations as varied as a fashion agents’ class, gender, race, ethnicity, ideology, or national interests, rather than any single interpretation.

The socio-economic · cultural perspective of this model maintains the notion that fashion is a product of social discourse. It becomes a medium of material culture to embody symbolic values of a variety of individuals and groups within a society and changes or reinforces their values. Such an approach is intertwined with the network of various fashion agents who contribute to a collaborative decision-making process to analyze what a given fashion object or product means, how it is communicated, and how a fashion system operates in a given culture. The socio-economic-cultural perspective interweaves with each stage of aesthetic-cultural perspective, but it particularly focuses on “Cultural Analysis: Contemporary Symbolic Value” and “Interpretation: Current Value and Significance” to show the relationship of culture to fashion. On the basis of Crane and Bovone’s (2006) critical method, the socio-economic · cultural approach reflects that the symbolic values of fashion objects in museums are embodied by a number of interconnecting fashion agents involved in the exhibit; designer/artist, curator, historian/critic, viewer/spectator, and media/journalist; all of whom are engaged in analyzing texts, discourses and symbols expressed in a fashion object, and media/journalists contribute to analyze the communication of symbolic value and its disseminating process within the culture.

With the matrix of various cultural agents around fashion, the socio-economic · cultural perspective is interwoven with the aesthetic · cultural perspective in this model. More specifically, “Identification: Classification and Description of Formative Features” and “Evaluation: Aesthetic Value”, the two stages for a conceptual generalization can be contributed mainly by fashion professional groups, including designer/artist, historian/critic and curator, and in particular, constitute the special scope of curatorship for a fashion

museum level. A historian/critic group can play the most important role in "Cultural Analysis: Contemporary Symbolic Value". There can be a variety of interpreters at the stage of "Interpretation: Current Value and Significance", including designer/artist, historian/critic, curator, media, viewer/spectator in museums or galleries. The public's role, associated with class, life styles, or taste will be highly influential in making and disseminating social discourses and economic values about a given fashion object or product.

Therefore, the inclusive approach for fashion criticism implicitly brings about the collective aesthetic, socio-cultural meanings and values of museum fashion objects and "new" museology by the collaboration of many fashion agents who merge art-historical research with contemporary styling and viewing practices.

Since this case study deals with fashion objects in museums, rather than commercial products in markets, it focuses more on aesthetic and cultural perspectives. Although it tries sampling Charles James's representative works, this study is a meta-study on the whole of the historical designer's retrospective, led by curatorship at large. More specifically, this study shows an empirical study with evidence such as interviews with a curator and spectators and observations of the whole of the exhibition, as well as accompanying literature reviews about historians' and journalists' viewpoints of the exhibition.

The interviews included an e-mail interview with a fashion historian and co-curator of the exhibition, Reeder, taken on July 18 in 2014, and face-to face interviews with 10 exhibition spectators, conducted between May 12 and July 1 in 2014. As consulting curator in the Costume Institute for the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at the MET, Reeder is a James expert who has spent three years, researching James's biography and three hundreds of his artworks. In addition, the author also refers to the accompanying exhibition catalogue, the exhibition information on the MET website, and other Costume Institute's archives to complement the co-curators' viewpoints. 10 spectator's professional areas were composed of 1 banker and fiber artist, 2 fashion designers, 1 architect, 1 film producer, 2 lawyers, 1 hospital manager, 1 nutritionist, and 1 high

school student. The author adds interview scripts with Reeder and 10 spectators to appendix at the end of this paper.

IV. Case Study: The Charles James Retrospective

1. Identification: Classification and Description of Formative Features

This first stage is connected to identifying all visual facts of the retrospective, such as exhibit locations, display technology, designer's biography, and other facts, mainly regarding curatorship. Most of all, the first stage focuses on classifying the representative works of the Charles James's exhibit and describing their formative features by main category.

The exhibition, <Charles James: Beyond Fashion>, shed light on the life and works of an Anglo-American designer, Charles James (1906-1978), with approximately sixty-five of his most notable designs on display. It was based on a wide range of James's archives, including garments, dress forms, sculptures, sketches, pattern pieces, scrapbooks, accessories, and a variety of ephemera, transferred from the Brooklyn Museum in 2009 and also retrieved from the Chelsea hotel which was James's final studio and residence.

The Charles James exhibition was presented in two separate locations, which were the special exhibition gallery on the museum's first floor and the newly renovated Anna Wintour Costume Center (including Lizzie & Jonathan Tisch Gallery and the Carl & Iris Barrel Apfel Gallery) on the ground floor. The special exhibition gallery dramatically spotlighted the lavish glamour and breathtaking architecture of James's fifteen ball gowns from the late 1940s to early 1950s, his particularly fertile period (Fig. 1). The Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Gallery showed some of his innovative creations from the 1930s and significant postwar daywear and eveningwear, composed of James's four signature categories: Spirals & Wraps, Drapes & Folds, Platonic Form, and Anatomical Cut (Fig. 2)-(Fig. 3). Also, the Carl and Iris Barrel Apfel Gallery presented his beginnings as a milliner for sculptural forms, with the trove of his archives from James's life and work,

including drawings, pattern pieces, dress forms, jewelry maquettes, scrapbooks, and accessories (Fig. 4). The exhibition galleries set up camera monitors with robotic arms and video animations <Fig. 1>, produced by an architectural company, Diller, Scofidio+Renfro, as well as texts, X-rays, and vintage images (Fig. 2)–(Fig. 3).

To begin with the “Classification”, the general styles of the exhibited works reflected both Charles James's historical references to the nineteenth century and Jamesian idiosyncratic style. More specifically, even though his work covered from Directoire through to Regency dresses, his historical references focused more on the late nineteenth century. According to Koda

(2014), a co-curator, James was majorly inspired by the boned bodices of Charles Frederick Worth, the crinoline hoops and bustles of the 1860s-1870s, the padded hips of the 1880s, and the long, straight back in the 1890s. And, the elaborate construction and complex cut found in James's coats and capes also alluded to the great age of tailoring in the late nineteenth century (Koda, 2014).

Most importantly, according to the interview (by the author, July 18, 2014, e-mail) with Reeder, “There were five signature approaches or techniques that James used throughout his career that acted as the organizing principle of the show”: “Architectural Construction”, “Spirals and Wraps”, “Drapes and Folds”, “Platonic Form”,



Fig. 1. Ball gowns with robotic arms and video animations in the special exhibition gallery.
From Charles James: Beyond Fashion, Behind Clothes. (2014). <http://www.theblogazine.com>



Fig. 3. Evening wears with digital images in the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Gallery.
From Charles James: Beyond Fashion, Behind Clothes. (2014). <http://www.theblogazine.com>



Fig. 2. Day wears with texts, X-rays, and images in the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Gallery.
From Charles James: Beyond Fashion, Behind Clothes. (2014). <http://www.theblogazine.com>



Fig. 4. Eiderdown jacket with Charles James's archives in the Carl and Iris Barrel Apfel Gallery.
From Charles James: Beyond Fashion, Behind Clothes. (2014). <http://www.theblogazine.com>

and “Anatomical Cut”. The five approaches, classified by construction and technique, fundamentally reflect James’s design process, as well as key Jamesian design elements.

For “Description of Formative Features”, the author sampled James’s representative works by five signatures, based on the interview with Reeder. In the exhibit, each of following five iconic works appeared in representative examples of James’s five signatures: the “Clover Ball Gown” (1953) in “Architectural Construction”, the “Taxi Dress” (1932) in “Spirals and Wraps”, “La Sirene” or the “Lobster Dress” (1941, 1951-1952) in “Drapes and Folds”, the “Gothic Coat” (1954) in “Platonic Form”, and the “Ribbon Dress and Cape” (1938-1940) in “Anatomical Cut”.

Firstly, the hallmarks of James’s works in the exhibition were revealed most obviously in his ball gowns. In particular, the “Clover Leaf Ball Gown” <Fig. 5>, considered his masterpiece, provided the essence of his “Architectural Construction”. It showed a typical hourglass silhouette, which was common in the middle and late nineteenth century. However, it also presented Jamesian technical and artistic elements: The strapless fitted bodice included a slightly curvy front upper bodice, peaked breast parts with empire curves below it, tucks to introduce an asymmetric lines at the center front bust, and a curved waistline to dip to the center front and back. However, the most remarkable part of this gown was the shape of the skirt, which had four separate corners to represent a clover when specifically viewed from above. The skirt was divided into three separate pieces, including an upper white satin panel, an undulating band of black velvet, and a lower panel of white silk faille. On its center back, there were very deep inverted pleats. As a whole, the gown looked well-balanced in relation to the different textures of fabrics with black and white color, which were delicately joined to make its weight balanced.

Secondly, “Spirals and Wraps” for the body showed James’s other sculptural virtuosity, and presented the technique James had employed in his works mainly from the late 1920s to 1930s. In the interview, Reeder said that “His first design from 1929 was an iconic piece that exemplified his first innovative design idea, to

wrap and spiral cloth around the body”. It alluded that the “Taxi Dress” <Fig. 6>, which evolved from the period as early as the 1920s, was the most archetypal dress of “Spirals and Wraps”. Martin (1997) said that the “Taxi Dress” was called that by James himself as it was a spiral wrapped dress to be so easy to be put on in the back seat of a taxi. The “Taxi Dress” with one side of the top and the spiral wrap-over skirt without seams (Koda, 2014) wrapped the body one and a half times. The construction resulted in a deeply angled neckline skewed toward the underarm to create a caftan style and it was closed with fastenings, like clasps or zips. Thus, despite having such a complicated construction as a bias-cut with no side seams, the wrap-around piece made of black wool ribbed knit not only showed a simple design, but also displayed a body-conscious fit and comfort.

Thirdly, the “Drapes and Folds” category covered a wide range from tailoring to ball gowns in the exhibition. Reeder in the interview regarded the most notable representative piece of “Drapes and Folds” as being “La Sirene” or the “Lobster” dress (Fig. 7). Its original version in 1941 consisted of a black body-conscious sheath, with upward tucks taken on a central spine-like panel with regular drapes from the bust to the knees and on the short sleeves, which resulted in a lobster-like shape to form a hard crust. “La Sirene” dress was off-the-scale with the supplement of silk crepe fabrics before folding to give the full and airy effect around the body. In this way, such folds, drapery, and gathers went together with careful manipulations of large amounts of fabrics on the form, which Koda called *alla prima* (Koda, 2014).

Fourthly, the “Platonic Form” addressed James’s insistence on transforming the conditions of the natural body into his platonic ideal to impose a new silhouette on the wearer. Koda (2014) noted that the James’s figure represented a perfected female form through strong contours of “the modest bust-line, fecund abdomen”, and bouffant “hips, and thighs of a Cranach Eve or a *Directoire Merveilleuse*” (Koda, 2014, p. 135). At the same time, cocoon shape and empire line with sinuous seams had also become a model for James’s coats. “Platonic Form” especially revealed itself in a series of sculptural tailoring in the 1940s to 1950s. In the



Fig. 5. Charles James, Clover Leaf Ball Gown (1953).
From Reeder. (2012).
<http://www.metmuseum.org>



Fig. 6. Charles James, Taxi Dress (1932).
From Images. (2014).
<http://www.metmuseum.org>



Fig. 7. Charles James, La Sirene (1941).
From Reeder. (2012).
<http://www.metmuseum.org>

interview, Reeder said that “The sculptural coats, such as his pink “Gothic Coat” with a curved arc above the bust line represented the idea of recreating the proportions and shape of the body”. The “Gothic Coat” <Fig. 8>, made of pink cashmere, was an A-line shaped coat with a high waist, evoking the Empire. The primary features of the design were the serpentine curves, which included the collars connected with the front shoulder yoke, the sinuous curves from the collars to the high waste-line, cuts and darts from the waistline, and the S-curved back seams over the hip from the underarm panel.

Fifthly, the “Anatomical Cut” also showed James's signature, mainly curvaceous seams and shapes, which hinted at the body. Reeder in the interview noted that James's “iconic “Ribbon Dress and Cape” were examples of construction and cut that were directly related to the anatomy of the female form”. The “Ribbon Evening Dress” were created unconventionally by manipulating the width of silk satin ribbons to fit to the body in the late 1930s: The “Ribbon Evening Dress” <Fig. 9> was constructed with panels of asymmetrically-cut ribbons from shoulder to hip consisting of five kinds of satin ribbons of the same fabric, and the “Ribbon Evening Dress” was “a petal shape with ribbon and wings” (Martin, 1997, pp. 14-15). The 1930's

body-clinging evening wear, as a result, represented the human body's anatomy and also showed a sense of rhythm with various peach, gold, yellow and ivory color combinations.

Until now, looking through Charles James's five signature approaches, the author identified James as a historical Anglo-American courier in the post-war period, and his work as a combination of the couture tradition



Fig. 8. Charles James, Gothic Coat (1954).
From Gothic. (2009). <http://www.metmuseum.org>



**Fig. 9. Charles James,
Ribbon Evening Dress (1938-1940).**

From *Dressing Gown*. (2009). <http://www.metmuseum.org>

in the 1930s and 1940-1950s, alluding to the nineteenth century and James' own signatures.

2. Evaluation: Aesthetic Value

To evaluate Charles James and his work, the author compared him with Christian Dior (1905-1957) and Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972), his contemporaries in his prime period. Although choosing James's contemporaries were based on the interview with Reeder, main reasons to compare James with Dior and Balenciaga were as follows: Firstly, in James's ball gowns, Dior's feminine style, culminating with "New Look" shared contemporary commonalities with James's ball gowns alluding the nineteenth century. Secondly, in tailoring, Balenciaga at the same period was a master of tailoring constructions and structural forms, compared to James in architectural cut.

Dior was a French fashion designer, best known as the founder of the "New Look" in 1947. He was a revolutionary figure in the post-war, who stood for "a true Parisian allegory" (Pochna & Dior, 1996, p. 4), such as elegance, femininity and taste to evoke the French Belle Epoque. As Polan and Tredre (2009) suggested, James's lush gowns [were] completely in step with Dior's New Look (Polan & Tredre, 2009), Dior was

also a master at fixing on feminine and curvaceous silhouettes, similar to James's ball gowns. According to Reeder in the interview, "Dior said that it was James who gave him the idea for his New Look in 1947. Dior was a traditional French couturier, who worked within the rubrics of couture dressmaking. James was on the other hand always experimenting and was unencumbered by rules of any sort. His clothes therefore are more innovative and have certain signature elements and shapes not found in other garments of the period". It implied that James's background, a non-French couturier who had not gotten a formal dressmaking education, made the foundation for him to develop his unconventional idiosyncratic aesthetics, which even inspired Dior, a master of couture.

Another of James's contemporaries was Balenciaga, a master of tailoring with a perfect construction toward greater simplicity and purity of form (Arzalluz, 2011). In the interview (by the author, July 18, 2014, e-mail), Reeder put forward the idea that, "Balenciaga and James shared ideas of sculpting with fabric, especially in relation to the air that is between the body and the garment and re-proportioning the body's shape". Balenciaga, like James, expressed the relationship between the body and the garment, and corrected the imperfections of the human figure through cutting. Reeder continued to say: "Balenciaga, however, worked within the confines of the couture establishment, and himself acknowledged that James was the only couturier to raise fashion to a pure art form". Thus, it was obvious that, although Balenciaga was considered a master of couture from the 1950s to the 1960s with his spare sculptural creations, James was a true artist of structure with the ability to invent original, architectural shaping between abstract design and ponderous construction.

The exhibition showed that the aesthetic value of James's works lay in the structure of the designs from the five self-invented signatures. The idiosyncratic shaping was based on his scientific exploration of the anatomy of the body and the architectural, engineering approach towards the relationship between structures and the materials of garments. To his ball gowns, James would add multi-layered interior fabrics, rather than crinoline-style boning and heavy corsetry to cre-



Fig. 10. Multi-layered structures inside Charles James's ball gowns.

From Social Media. (2014). <http://www.metmuseum.org>

ate a majestic, well-balanced, and wearable outer structure (Fig. 10). Thus, although heavy, James's evening gowns could enhance fit, comfort and movement.

As the title <Charles James: Beyond Fashion> alluded, co-curators evaluated Charles James as an artist, architect and engineer, not only a couturier, and proved it by exploring his design process which combined art with science with uncharted innovation. Reeder mentioned "James was an artist who chose working with cloth as his medium ..." in the interview.

The technology and installation employed in the exhibition also reflected the curatorship. Reeder continued to say: "To emphasize the sculptural aesthetic of Charles James's work, we mounted the clothes on invisible forms. We emphasized the mathematical, architectural and engineering aspects of his work through analyzing the cut and construction with our technological component ... To underscore that James's work went beyond dressmaking into other disciplines, we have on display idiosyncratic materials that narrate his process".

From this, the author concluded that curatorship and all the devices in the exhibit were concentrated on Charles James's architectural construction, technical approaches, and outlandish materials to show his idiosyncratic autograph, merging art with science and engineering.

3. Cultural Analysis: Contemporary Symbolic Value

At this stage, the author went back to the historical context of James's work and analyzed its contemporary symbolic value, in terms of its status and meaning, the feminine ideal, fashion trends and innovation and other artistic and cultural values. They were based on the grounds of the views of curators and historians and also the transcripts of a fashion journalist and editor, Alina Cho's audio interview entitled "Recalling Charles James" in conjunction with the exhibition.

In the post-war period, Charles James's garments spelled the culmination of the elite society in America and Europe. In this regards, Reeder noted in the interview (by the author, July 18, 2014, e-mail) that, "James won prestigious awards for his mastery of color and draping in eveningwear as well as for the sculptural shapes of his tailored suits and coats, so he was recognized in his time as a master. It was a status symbol of the highest order to wear one of his dresses. His eveningwear set the gold standard for American post war elegance and glamour". Many historical facts also proved that James's ball gowns had been worn by members of high society. Among his private patrons, there were lots of glamorous and elegant clients, including Austine Hearst. In Cho's audio interview, Hecht (2014), James's client and close friend in the mid-1950s, stated: "He had worked with some very remarkable clients, both abroad, in London, and in this country: His high society people and his wealthy people, who were, you know, newspaper figures and magazine figures and all these people". Thus, the author could recognize that James's dresses symbolized the highest status, which the world's best-dressed women were willing to pay astronomical prices for, and meant a level of taste, refinement and a social profile at that time.

According to Koda (2014), "with the resumption of grand balls and charity soirees came the opportunity for opulent display and dresses of riveting elegance" in the late 1940s and 1950s. Dior's "New Look" in 1947 is credited with beginning a romantic style which climaxed in the 1950s. However, this romantic style was emerging in America even before World War II. In fact, some American designers, including James,

had already reacted to the ladies wanting elegance and glamor, even before the “New Look” (Baker, 1991; Milbank, 1989). In addition, the postwar return of a feminine allure coincided with James's female ideal and architectural approach. He molded not to actual female figures, but transfigured them into the ideal of the perfect woman in his mind, so that his postwar work showed the most constructed silhouette with an enhanced bust, a highly constricted waist, a fecund abdomen, a burgeoning hip and a full skirt, which evoked grand historical styles and female erotic allure.

Noting Betty Friedan, Steele (1991) referred to women's fashions in the 1950s as “ultrafeminine”, the highly artificial style with exaggerated feminine curves, which almost amounted to a parody of a male-defined “femininity”. Even though this style reflected James' natural impulse for the structural body, his garments represented the cultural value of femininity in the postwar, too. His return to nineteenth-century restraints of built-in corsets and built-out fullness connoted the conforming women, that is, the ideology of wife-dressing and feminine mystique during the 1950s. At the same time, James's achievement with the Surrealist movement, accompanying many artists' erotic language, imparted an archetypal eroticism. James's figure represented the voluptuous female body, which evoked lust for the feminine. A gallery text explained it self-sufficiently: “[Fashion is] what is rare, correctly proportioned, and though utterly discrete, libidinous”. Thus, Charles James, captivated by “feminine mystique”, reacted to the desires of American women postwar, and his glamorous gowns took a step forward before Dior's “New Look”.

Meanwhile, Cho's audio interviews with James's contemporaries showed his credentials as an artist. Strong-Cuevas (2014), his close friend and a sculptor, herself appreciated James as a sculptor and artist, saying, “Well, he was basically a sculptor, probably ... he was an extraordinary artist ...” Hay (2014), James's close friend in the late 1960s and early 1970s, noted that James also regarded himself as an artist, saying that “when he looked in the mirror, he saw Charles James, the artist. He never saw Charles James, a designer”. Caranicas (2014), a painter and James's acquaintance, said “But back then, an artist had a vision, and he wanted to realize it. So he was basically in the wrong profession ... because you

have to collaborate with a million people when you're making clothing ... And so then he would get very frustrated and very angry”. Through the oral history of Charles James, co-curators would expose him as a singular and unorthodox artist rather than a commercial designer, in both his work and his egomaniacal personality.

However, James's works had an enormous impact on the American fashion industry during World War II. Reeder mentioned James's three innovative styles in the interview: “His innovative styles have perpetuated through the decades, even though he has not been credited with the idea. The wrap dress, puffer jacket, and culottes are three examples of this”. Firstly, the most representative example of James's wrap dress was the “Taxi Dress”, which was successful commercially as well as artistically. Although his wrap dress has not been credited as being the first one, James's initial idea of it came from the spiral design as early as 1929, and also represented his own methods in manipulating materials, such as weighty fabrics, fabric blends, and a zipper around the body (Milbank, 1989). Secondly, James's puffer jacket was the “Eiderdown Jacket” (1937), made of white celanese satin with eiderdown filling. Although the puffer jacket was originally created for pilots, James's “Eiderdown Jacket” revealed his idiosyncratic sculptural form with biomorphic lines in relation to the human anatomy. In this regard, Reeder in an interview by an editorial assistant, High (2014), regarded it as “wearable art”, “a soft sculpture”. Thirdly, James's “culottes” indicated that he brought his design sources from the mid- to the late-nineteenth century, and simultaneously represented an American sports look after the war.

Therefore, James worked with idiosyncratic artist's virtuosity rather than getting caught up in commercial endeavors, and also symbolized the elegance of American high society in the contemporary trends of the recovery of French fashion and the rise of the American market.

4. Interpretation: Current Value and Significance

In this stage, the author considered what Charles Ja-

mes and his work meant in current value and significance, especially in terms of curatorship and spectatorship.

In the interview (by the author, July 18, 2014, e-mail), Reeder mentioned the meaning of Charles James's works in current culture: "Many people who have viewed the show have recognized shapes and styles that seem current to them and are amazed that James initiated these ideas 60 or 70 years ago. So his innovative styles have perpetuated through the decades". Such evaluations were also revealed in spectators' statements in the interview (by the author, May 13 2014, the Costume Institute). Spectator 3 (a footwear designer) said, "It is very impressive - just how current it seems to look. It looks wearable, today". Spectator 4 (a film producer) indicated that, "Today if you look at the coats, they will keep coming up again and again ... I think a lot of people will copy these clothes". Spectator 7 (a nutritionist) also stated that "I'm sure that this dress will work in the present". Those comments show how well James interpreted the tradition of the nineteenth century into current values, and how he was ahead of his time, reflecting modern aesthetics. In that sense, Caroline Milbank called James's dresses "timeless", because he "existed outside contemporary fashion" (Milbank, 1985, p. 328).

The exhibition played its role in educating the public about this lesser-known, historical Anglo-American couturier and his creative artistries. Caranicas, in Cho's audio interview, explained about James's current value, saying "If you look at it from a point of view of the American dream, yes, it's a tragedy he didn't become like the most famous. He didn't become Balenciaga. But so what? He's becoming it now". Hocht, in the same interview, also said "He is the unique American designer. To me, head and shoulders above others, who were talented, there's no question". Therefore, the author could realize that James deserved to be one of the most significant American designers of the twentieth century even if he has been relatively less known and mythologized.

This exhibit also inspired current or future designers and led them to reinterpret the significance of the legendary designer and his design process. For instance, Reeder's discussion with a current promising des-

igner, Zac Posen, at the Costume Institute (June 22, 2014) exemplified the educational role of the museum and the communication with the audiences by showing how to link artistic talents with practical designs through James's works. In spectatorship, spectator 5 (a designer) in the interview, emphasized James's ceaseless and perfectionist efforts, saying "I think it is very important for young designers to realize how much work went into the place he spent 12 hours, and how he felt the time he even spent 12 hours until finding the fabrics and the seams somehow to let him know or get him into the right way". Spectator 3 (a footwear designer) in the same interview, stated "I've never known his name ... Now, I'll definitely go back to Charles James for my own research". Thus, the museum provided designers with a meaningful chance to reestimate the legacy and current value of Charles James, as "a designers' designer" (Fonti, 2014).

Other than enlightening the audience, the retrospective also provided them with enjoyable entertainment through the displays of photographs, images and digital devices, not only garments. In particular, technology, such as monitors with robotic arms and animations on video screens, played an important role in not just informing the viewers about what to look at, but also appealing to them. Spectator 8 (a lawyer) mentioned in the interview (by the author, July 1, 2014, the Costume Institute), "I did appreciate the structure, what we saw underneath ... The infrastructure was so easy to follow for me ... You could realize the work and the creativity. It was amazing". It alluded that the use of technology contributed to spectators understanding the inventiveness of James as an architect. Spectator 9 (an architect), focused on the deconstructive aspects of the exhibit, saying "The deconstruction of the clothing and what they have done digitally have never been seen before ... Seeing the clothing deconstructed and digitized, and understanding what he did with fabrics, in weight, and in physics". The architectural devices enabled viewers to analyze the inner structures and anatomical pattern combinations of garments, providing static fashion objects with movement, and emphasized the affinity of James as an architect in cloth. In this way, technology made the audience engage in the exhibit more enjoyably,

and it provided them with visual pleasure to gaze at the interior of a dress.

Above all, the Charles James retrospective in curatorship eventually placed fashion as art on a firm base. Furthermore, it put such a cultural event into discourses on the concept of art and fashion. Reeder explained in the interview what the museum fashion exhibit means: "The concept of what is art is of course a perennial question and is expanding in the contemporary age. While clothing is not created as a pure art form, the best of it- created by the most innovative minds and accomplished hands of their time - can undeniably be categorized as art. Because he approached his work with an artistic vision, as a sculptor approaches a block of stone or a painter a blank canvas, Charles James's clothes represent the highest form of art achieved by any dressmaker". Regarding James's innovative mind, artistic vision and skillful virtuosity as the features of an artist, Reeder revealed that fashion in museums itself produced the discourses on fashion as art and what art is.

In terms of spectatorship, interviews with the public (by the author, May 13, 2014, the Costume Institute) proved that the aesthetic directions of the exhibition encouraged spectators to interpret James's artistry and masterpieces, and finally arrive at a common consensus of fashion as art: Spectator 1 (a bank and fiber artist) said "Fantastic. Well, the workmanship, the attitude to the creativity ... He doesn't translate what people wear every day ... This is art of fashion". Spectator 5 (a designer) suggested that "I think it is [on] the border of art. When he started his taste, you could realize an artist. I think he talked very much in the same terms as an artist's way". Moreover, the audience moved forward to agree on fashion as art. Spectator 4 (a film producer) said, "Fashion is always art in my opinion. How you put [it] on, expressing art on your body". Spectator 5 (a designer) also said, "Absolutely. Fashion is an art. Any talk is exactly the same terms as other artists start". However, other spectators took the position that fashion is art because the fashion exhibit was presented at a museum and that whether fashion is art or not relies on the genres of fashion or the ways to wear it. Spectator 7 (a nutritionist) stated that "Fashion is an art, especially in an

exhibition in a museum". Spectator 1 (a banker and fiber artist) said, "This is art. Design is art ... I think it depends on how you put it together. How you create ... How you dress can be art".

As a result, the author could say that there was a collective discourse that fashion is art in current culture. In fact, all agents involved in the exhibit played their roles in showing fashion as art, which implied that art was the act of being creative, especially in the museum context.

V. Conclusions

The Beyond Fashion aspect of <Charles James: Beyond Fashion> referred to an unfinished project of James' own memoir, according to Thurman (2014) of *The New Yorker*. It meant his work was part of an art form, beyond the general fashion industry. The Charles James retrospective dealt with ideas beyond fashion, not simply representing his work in the museum, but also critically reinterpreting them with new museology.

With debates surrounding fashion in museums, this paper exercised inclusive fashion criticism on the Charles James retrospective, presenting an example of "dress museology" and "fashion museology". In regards to "dress museology", the museum educated the public in historical knowledge of Charles James, a legendary figure who otherwise would be buried in fashion history, and his incredible works within the creative process. In accordance with "fashion museology", the museum presented the exhibit with one of the most elaborate multi-media installations, not just to amplify the viewers' understanding of the innovative couturier's architectural virtuosity, but also to entertain and engage them in the live and enjoyable exhibit with compelling spectacles.

The multi-disciplinary approach, applied to the Charles James retrospective, integrated all the aspects, including aesthetic object-based research, historical and cultural studies, and socio-cultural approach. Various mediations of the agents created knowledge and value about James as an artist, engineer, and architect, and also produced aesthetic and cultural discourses on fashion as art and the meaning of art.

In this way, the communication of critical thinking

from curatorship to spectatorship could bring about multiple meanings and dynamic interpretations of the past and present of art, society and culture around the mythological Anglo-American couturier. Through this aesthetic and cultural event, we can engage in the creative process to contribute to new concepts of art and fashion within present culture.

This paper shows limitations and suggestions as follows: Firstly, since it focused on case study of the Charles James retrospective, rather than the inclusive fashion criticism model itself, this paper only introduced the multi-disciplinary criticism model briefly. Secondly, although the case study was for a museum fashion exhibition, its socio-economic perspectives in the fashion criticism model were limited relatively. In addition, spectators' number and information at the stage of "Interpretation: Current Value and Significance" were too short to show limitations to figure out the public's views. However, the critical approach, shown in this paper can be also applied to catwalk shows or commercial markets, beyond the other museum fashion exhibits.

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Appendix

The interview script with a co-curator, Jan Glier Reeder (July 18, 2014)

Q1. What did you intend to emphasize most in Charles James exhibition? (How do you identify Charles James himself, or his works?)

R. We wanted to express the idea that James was an artist who chose working with cloth as his medium. To emphasize the sculptural aesthetic of Charles James's work, we mounted the clothes on invisible forms. We emphasized the mathematical, architectural and engineering aspects of his work through analyzing the cut and construction with our technological component. It was important to us that the technology enhance[s] the appreciation of the clothing, not take precedence over it. To underscore that James's work went beyond dressmaking into other disciplines, we have on display idiosyncratic materials that narrate his process.

Q2. What are his representative works among his works exhibited? Why?

R. There are five signature approaches or techniques that James used throughout his career that act as the organizing principle of the show: spirals and wraps, drapes and folds, platonic form, anatomical cut and architectural construction. The Clover Ball Gown, which he considered his masterpiece, is representative of the latter. The Taxi dress that spirals around the body, his first design from 1929, is an iconic piece that exemplifies his first innovative design idea, to wrap and spiral cloth around the body. His “La Sirene” or “Lobster” dress, a sheath with upward tucks taken on a central spine-like panel, is a representative of the Drapes and Folds category. The sculptural coats, such as his pink Gothic coat with a curved arc above the bust line represent the idea of recreating the proportions and shape of the body, and the iconic ribbon dress and cape are examples of construction and cut that is directly related to the anatomy of the female form.

Q3. How do you evaluate Charles James as a designer, compared with other contemporary fashion designers, for instance, Christian Dior, or the others?

R. Dior and James were friends. Dior considered him a colleague and said that it was James who gave him the idea for his New Look as 1947. Dior was a traditional French couturier, who worked within the rubrics of couture dressmaking. James was on the other hand always experimenting and was unencum-

bered by rules of any sort. His clothes therefore are more innovative and have a certain signature elements and shapes not found in other garments of the period. Balenciaga and he shared ideas of sculpting with fabric, especially in relation to the air that is between the body and the garment and re-proportioning the body's shape. Balenciaga, however, worked within the confines of the couture establishment, and himself acknowledged that James was the only couturier to raise fashion to a pure art form.

Q4. What do you think Charles James's works might mean in his contemporary culture?

R. James won prestigious awards for his mastery of color and draping in eveningwear as well as for the sculptural shapes of his tailored suits and coats, so he was recognized in his time as a master. It was a status symbol of the highest order to wear one of his dresses. His eveningwear set the gold standard for American post war elegance and glamour.

Q5. What do you think Charles James's works mean in current culture?

R. Many people who have viewed the show have recognizes shapes and styles that seem current to them and are amazed that James initiated these ideas 60 or 70 years ago. So his innovative styles have perpetuated through the decades, even though he has not been credited with the idea. The wrap dress, puffer jacket, culotte[s] (skirt) are three examples of this.

Q6. What does fashion exhibition in museums mean from your point of view? (in terms of the relationship between fashion and art)

R. The advantage of showing fashion in an art museum is the ability to between the artworks in other departments and the costume Institute collection. The concept of what is art is of course a perennial question and is expanding in the contemporary age. While clothing is not created as a pure art form, the best of it-created by the most innovative minds and accomplished hands of their time – can undeniably be categorized as art. This is the point of view taken in the acquisition of fashion at the Costume Institute. Because he approached his work with an artistic vision, as a

sculptor approaches a block of stone or a painter [does] a blank canvas, Charles James's clothes represent the highest form of art achieved by any dressmaker, as Balenciaga once said.

The interview scripts with 10 exhibition spectators (May 12 and July 1, 2014)

Q1. What do you think about Charles James's work? (How important is Charles James to American fashion?)

S #1. (Banker and fiber artist, Canada) Fantastic (well) [in] the workmanship, attitude to the creativity, (it's [such]) kind of fashion. There was a black dress that had blue [color] in the back and then came down straight. Fantastic design.

S #2. (Hospital manager) Very nice, especially structures [of the garments] in 1932. Very nice costume. That's better than (I think) costumes people [wear now]. It's still modern.

S #3. (Footwear designer) Very impressed, (just) about how current it seems to look [although it was made] so long ago. It looks (like) wearable today. I would wear it ... I [will] follow fashion. Now I [will] definitely go back to my own research (about James).

S #4. (Film producer, Canada) Especially, coats. Today if you look at the coats, they [will] start to keep coming up again and again ... I think a lot of people will copy these clothes. Purple coat, dolman coat ... They [can be] still made these days. I can wear a lot of [his] coats.

S #5. (Designer, Australia) I think it's wonderful. He is a great master in construction and the way he looked history and retailoring. [He] reinvented and went back into his own way, using all knowledges he gathered. I think it is very important for young designers to realize how many works go into the pace (he said0 he spent about 12 hours, and how he felt the time [while] he (just) spent even 12 hours until he found the fabrics and knew the right way to incorporate them into particular places.

S #6. (Lawyer) ... Compared to other exhibitions, I'm not so impressed. Usually, simple. I was a little bit disappointed ... [However], in terms of the cuts of clothes, I think [they're] groundbreaking, especially in

that era. I think it (James's work) is appropriate for the era, the American history that was in that transition, ... in terms of colors, materials, and cuts, all that impressing.

S #7. (Nutritionist, France) Very good. I'm interested in ball gown dresses. I'm sure that this dress would be in the present ... I'm nostalgic from this. That's why I like this. I would like to wear this dress. I would like to try this. Black and white ... Four clover leaf is my favorite, totally.

S #8. (Lawyer) I don't think I'm qualified to say. But I didn't fully appreciate for his contribution to the exhibition. I did appreciate for the architecture with structure underneath the designer's appreciation of the way exhibition has done. The infra-structure was so easy to follow. [It] just made us the ultimate ways and products. You realize the work and the creativity. It was amazing.

S #9. (Architect) I work in architecture, actually with the firm ... They (curators) did researches [in] deconstruction of clothing. See what they've done digitally. I think I've never seen that before. See the clothing deconstructed and digitalized, understanding what he (James) did with fabrics and their weight in physics. It is remarkable. A director, my sister [who] worked with him and [she] said that his genius was in knowing how to handle materials on forms obviously and learning how to dress on the body ...

S #10. (High school student) In general, I really liked it. I thought [the exhibition was] usually interesting. I'm looking at sort of a lot of modern fashion designers that kind of ... structure.

Q2. Have you ever heard the designer's name, Charles James?

S #3. ... I've never known his name ...

S #4. ... (I think) I [have] never heard him briefly, but (I think) he [didn't have] paparazzi out there like other designers. He's just more [like] couture ...

S #8. Maybe. This is terrific. I've heard his name, associated with volume. But not so much [about] the architecture what he did; what he brought volume, the creativity of flounces to [his] design, and how to put them together.

S #10. No, I didn't know him.

Q3. Do you consider Charles James's work to be art? Does fashion become art once it is exhibited in the museum, or can it be art when show as the runway?

S #1. ... because he has to always be great. But he doesn't translate what people wear every day ... This is art of fashion. This is a dream art. This is art. Design is art. I don't think [what] normal people wear [when] going outside. This is the art ... I think it depends [on] how you put it together, how you create ... I mean history is not ... how you dress [in order that] it can be art

S #2. It's an art.

S #3. I think fashion is an art.

S #4. Fashion is always art in my opinion. How you put [it] on, expressing art on your body

S #5. Yes, I think it is [on] the border of art. When he starts his taste, you [will] realize [he is an] artist. I think he talks very much [in] the same terms with artists' ways. He looked the torso and the body very sculpturally. You can see [his] works, you can see the constructions of each dress. You can see he was working inside the torso and the body but also outside [them]. Absolutely, fashion is an art.

S #6. Of course, fashion is art. Yes, usual fashion is an art. It is an intentional thing people do. Alexander McQueen, that was the most stunning, a speechless exhibition.

S #7. Yes, this is art. In Paris, one wing in the Louvre is just for fashion. Fashion is an art, especially in an exhibition in museums.

S #8. Yes I do, I do ... Fashion is art and function.

Q4. Why did you come to this exhibition? Have you visited any other fashion exhibition in the last 3 years?

S #1. This is the first time when I come to here. So this but I've been to a fashion museum in Paris ... Whenever, I can see it. My living is artist[']s].

S #2. ... This is my second chance [to visit an exhibition].

S #3. I come to every collection, every exhibition.

S #5. I come here once a year. I'm a designer. [This is] very inspiring museum.

S #6. I've seen a great museum [exhibit] in the MET. Compared to other exhibitions, I'm a bit biased.... Yes, I come every year. [But], I have never heard of Charles James. I'm not the member of MET.