

Institution: The Courtauld Institute of Art		
Unit of Assessment: 32 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: 'Fashion Interpretations': Medium and Diversity in Fashion History		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Rebecca Arnold	Senior Lecturer in History of Dress & Textiles	2009 – Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Rebecca Arnold has succeeded in engaging a large, diverse public in discussions of fashion history which include findings from her research into the work of lesser-known fashion designers and models – often people of colour – with new insights from significant and well-known collections of fashion photography, illustration, and film. Drawing on a wide range of non-traditional sources, including amateur photography, popular films and previously unpublished correspondence, she has used multiple platforms to share insights with both the interested general public and specialist practitioners which build on an understanding of the importance of the 'everyday' alongside haute couture in 20th century fashion. Arnold has worked to revise the prevailing white, elite narrative of fashion history and reinterpreted the significance of the media through which fashion is disseminated and discussed. She has also used her research into fashion media to develop 'Fashion Interpretations' a network of fashion illustrators, curators, critics and historians who have collaboratively advanced understandings of how the medium – film, illustration, photography, writing, exhibition – impacts on interpretations of fashion, and have influenced each other's approach to practice, criticism, and analysis.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Dr Rebecca Arnold (Senior Lecturer in History of Dress and Textiles) has undertaken extensive research into 20th-century fashion, generating insights into the collaborative work fundamental to the creation of fashion photography [R2] and exploring the effects of intersections of professional, amateur and personal photography on representations of women's fashion in the 20th Century [R1]. Arnold's interests in links between medium and representation have led her to work across photography, film, fashion journalism and illustration. She has also explored lesser known sources, including vernacular photography, amateur film making, personal diaries and correspondence, and archives of little-known designers and photographers. Examining an expanded field of photography has enabled Arnold to explore the work of overlooked photographers, often people of colour, as key sources both for visual and aesthetic analysis and to engage fully with the cultural, social, economic and political contexts within which images of dressed bodies circulate.</p> <p>Arnold's analyses show how relationships between the artist, subject and viewer differ in each medium, noticeably for example in amateur photography where the three roles are often blurred. Through the analysis of relationships between producers, consumers, viewers and wearers, she expands definitions of agency and gaze in the dissemination of fashion. This has allowed her to highlight issues of identity, inclusivity, and diversity within the representation of fashion and expand the narratives of fashion history from the elite into the everyday.</p> <p>This approach to fashion research has fed into publications demonstrating that fashion photography is a key medium of interaction between creator and viewer [R3,R4], and which foregrounds the wearer's experience as pivotal to understanding fashion and the senses</p>		

[R5,R6]. Arnold's forthcoming book *Documenting Fashion: Dress and Visual Culture in Interwar America* (Bloomsbury, 2023) draws on this to explore the history of fashion in relation to popular visual culture and through the lens of sensory theory. These areas of research have also been explored by Arnold in the two special issues of *Fashion Theory* she proposed and edited which focus on underexplored histories of fashion and groups within the fashion community - 'Posing the body' in 2017 with K. Faulkner, K. Pantelides, and E. Shinkle, and 'Passing' in 2020 with E. Kutesko.

Arnold's research into the impact of medium on the reception and interpretation of fashion in the 20th Century, and her collaboration with Professor Judith Clark (Professor of Fashion and Museology, London College of Fashion) led to the AHRC-funded 'Fashion Interpretations' network (October 2019 – December 2020). With Arnold as Principal Investigator, its goal was to foreground considerations of medium at a time when digital media was causing major changes in the ways fashion is represented and disseminated. The project encapsulated aspects of Arnold's research on how fashion's meanings mutate within and across mediums, and the role of translation and re-presentation at the core of fashion's creation for different audiences.

The network, with 13 core participants, consisted of fashion journalists, illustrators, authors, designers, stylists, curators and specialists in film, gender, and aesthetics who met regularly to discuss materials and interrogate their individual and intersecting approaches to fashion analysis, criticism, and writing. The network brought together interdisciplinary and international voices to produce new insights into the role of medium in representations and reinterpretations of modern and contemporary fashion, and to explore the potential for collaboration across different forms of media: the digital, the photographic, and the illustrative. Several participants were drawn from the connections Arnold had made through sharing her research on Instagram, where the digital medium had enabled scholarly, academic work to be translated into accessible posts that, both alone and taken together as a feed, had provoked discussions with diverse practitioners. For Arnold, diversity of discipline, approach and the specific medium, was key; she invited participation from a fashion illustrator, whose drawings of queer culture and fashion questioned the use of traditional drawing versus the digital, and a University of Calgary professor whose research on amateur film, especially of Asian Americans, presented an alternative view of mid-century American fashion and its representation. This built on Arnold's research on foregrounding diverse and inclusive histories of fashion. The final output of the group, *Archive Addendum*, was delayed due to Covid-19 but is due to be shared in Spring 2021.

This body of research has emphasised the importance of engaging with a wide range of visual sources and media to ensure inclusivity, particularly in terms of race and class, and to demonstrate an alternative to fashion being presented as an exclusively white, elite practice and industry.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] R. Arnold, 'The Kodak Ensemble: Fashion, Images and Materiality in 1920s America' in *Fashion Theory*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2019.1638166> This article was peer reviewed.

[R2] R. Arnold, 'Behind the Scenes with Louise Dahl-Wolfe and Toni Frissell: Alternative Views Of Fashion Photography In Mid-Century American' in *Fashion Studies*, no. 1, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38055/FS010110>

This article was peer reviewed and featured in the inaugural issue of this open access academic journal based at Ryerson University.

[R3] R. Arnold, 'Imagining New Lives: Avedon's Advertising Legacy' in *Avedon Advertising*, eds. Richard Avedon, The Richard Avedon Foundation, Laura Avedon, James Martin and Rebecca Arnold, (New York: Abrams Books, 2019)

[R4] R. Arnold, 'Fashion in Ruins: Photography, Luxury and Dereliction in 1940s London', *Fashion Theory*, 21:4, 2017, pp. 341-363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2016.1254426> This article was peer reviewed.

[R5] R. Arnold, 'Luxury, Luxe, Luxus. Redefining fashion for the new millennium', in *Margiela: The Hermès Years*, catalogue to accompany the exhibition of the same name at MoMu Fashion

Museum, Antwerp, 31 March – 27 August 2017.

The catalogue was winner of 'Le Grand Prix de Livre de Mode' in 2018:

<https://www.momu.be/en/news/margiela-de-hermes-jaren-bekroond-als-het-mooiste-modeboek-van-2018>

[R6] R. Arnold 'The New Rococo: Sofia Coppola and Fashion in Contemporary Femininity', in *Rococo echo: art, history and historiography from Cochin to Coppola*, eds. Katie Scott and Melissa Hyde, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2014). **[Submitted to REF2 as an output]**

Grants awarded

Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2019: AHRC Research Networking scheme grant, October 2019 – December 2020, awarded to Dr Rebecca Arnold (PI) and Professor Judith Clark (Co-PI) to support the formation and activities of the Fashion Interpretations network. Grant reference: AH/S012346/1. Award: £28,864.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The body of research produced by Arnold on the significance of the visual medium in fashion history, interpretation, and dissemination has meshed strongly with her effective use of social media and podcasting as platforms for conversation and research dissemination tools. Both have allowed Arnold to distribute her research findings widely through a medium which is accessible and designed for discussion and response. Her Instagram account '[Documenting Fashion](#)' set up in 2015, had 108,000 followers by December 2020 [4]. The account was initially conceived as a research tool to explore how visual analysis written as captions for diverse images from her research could support a decolonised, racially inclusive history of fashion.

Arnold's research is also disseminated through *Bande à part*, a collaborative podcast with Beatrice Behlen (Senior Curator, Fashion & Decorative Arts, Museum of London). Established in January 2018, it uses audio to share fashion histories and provides intermedial links to other visual and moving image sources. The listenership is wide: 1,214 listens per week; 379 SoundCloud followers; the most heard episode 'Love, Cecil' (March 2020) 2,852 listens to date [10]. The podcast has an international audience; besides 50,800 UK listens, USA attracted 82,700, Australia 13,100, Mongolia 2,883, and New Zealand 2,311 [10]. Arnold's profile as a prominent fashion historian, achieved through this public dissemination of her research, has led to invitations for expert contributions to mainstream and specialist fashion publications alike since 2015, e.g. being the only fashion historian in the 25th anniversary edition of fashion magazine *Self Service* in 2019 [1,2,3]. She is frequently asked to comment on issues as diverse as whitewashing nostalgia in American West fashion trends (Vogue, 2018), the political nuances of women's power suit (Bustle, 2019), and the social context of jewellery (NYT, 2017) in mainstream publications including the Independent, Harper's Bazaar and Vogue international editions [3]. She has been asked by major fashion brands, including Cos, to write articles which integrate fashion history with current fashion trends [2].

Both Instagram and podcast have been well received by non-academic audiences engaging with fashion history. Arnold's 'Documenting Fashion' account frequently appears in 'must follow' Instagram lists compiled by designers such as Christian Lacroix, and non-academic fashion writers [4]. She appeared as one of 'The Most Influential Women in Sewing in the 21st Century', alongside designer Vera Wang; specific reference was made to her accessible Instagram approach which '*break[s] down the nuances of fashion, both everyday and haute couture, for home sewists and consumers*' and that her feed was '*definitely a must for any aspiring designers*'. [4]. Organisations, such as the Jeu de Paume gallery, approached Arnold to participate in Instagram takeovers relating to fashion and imagery because of her engagement with and use of the platform. She integrates Instagram into her public events, inviting participants to engage with it as a new medium of fashion interpretation [4]. A participant in the Fashion Interpretations symposium invited to use Instagram to explore her research said '*it was so challenging to take over the Fashion Interpretations Instagram – for me it was a new genre of scholarly activity*' [7].

The *Bande à part* podcast has featured in numerous 'best of' lists, including Vogue, the Guardian, and IT Fashion [5]. Reviewers praise it for making academic content accessible and enriching their understanding of fashion history: '*The charm and rapport between its cohosts*

*make it as accessible as podcasts come'; 'Arnold and Behlen wear their erudition lightly, but their knowledge and experience always shine through'; 'The laid back but thoroughly well informed discussions in this podcast have provided an amazing entry point for me to understand and appreciate fashion' [5]. One reviewer particularly noted that *Bande à part* gives 'a much better idea of how fashion historians work, and the trains of thought and research they have' [5].*

The 'Documenting Fashion' account has had positive impact on public attitudes towards diverse and inclusive racial representations of fashion and fashion history. Sharing images drawn from her research, from fashion photography, film, and illustration at professional, amateur, and personal levels, Arnold presents a racially diverse range – whether models and or individuals in everyday situations – ensuring people of colour are represented in the fashion histories she explores and disseminates. By connecting such images to her research resources and insights, she draws attention to underexplored histories, empowering her audience to learn more. The platform allows for comments and insights from followers, which Arnold often integrates into her captions to further enhance their educational impact. Instagrammers of colour, who share this interest in diversity, particularly within fashion, direct their own followers to 'Documenting Fashion' as a source of information and imagery for diverse histories of fashion. The host of the podcast *Shade*, which focuses on representation and creativity, has stated that Arnold '*upholds all of our stories*' in her work [9]. Followers have expressed their deep engagement with her attention to issues of representation in fashion history: '*I really truly love what you've been doing. Black joy, black expression, black fashion and art are all something to celebrate*'; '*The power in your feed in recent weeks is breathtaking: your choice of images and pared back commentary screams quietly "POC are here and always will be here"*'. Others note that Arnold's public dissemination of diverse, inclusive research materials and findings has shaped their own presentation of fashion histories on Instagram and in blogs and podcasts. One follower included Arnold in a list of Instagrammers who '*are helping me to better understand and be a better educator*' (June 2020) in the realm of racism in the fashion industry, and the host of the fashion podcast *Dressed: The History of Fashion* and writer of the blog *The Art of Dress* stated in January 2017 that Arnold '*explore[s] such a diverse range of subjects*' and has '*really been instrumental in expanding [beyond] the singular 'white' history of fashion so often propagated*' and asked Arnold for further '*suggestions of digitized visual resources for more diverse non high-fashion images*' [9]

This approach has led to the development of strong working relationships with fashion practitioners – designers, stylists and critics – with similar interests. The resonance of themes of race and ethnicity in her Instagram and the '*well thought out analysis*' of her podcast led to connections with *The Conversations*, a fashion and culture podcast with concerns around fashion and representation, particularly for young Black fashion professionals [8] and with founding members of '[The Kelly Initiative](#)', a network of Black fashion professionals working to make the industry more equitable. Both cited the influence of Arnold's research and approach to imagery and continue to discuss representation, inclusivity, identity and the fashion industry's shifting engagement with varied media with her. Arnold was the first guest on *The Conversations* podcast in January 2018 and invited the hosts to record a further episode at The Courtauld with an audience of fashion journalists, design and fashion-history students, academics, curators and members of the public, many Arnold's Instagram followers [8] with active discussion at both events. Arnold also provided guidance for the 17 October 2019 *Business of Fashion* OpEd '[Inclusivity Demands More Than a Show](#)' written by one of *The Conversations* hosts, a fashion stylist and the founder of the JC Report, a major international fashion trend website [8].

Arnold's research had a two-fold impact through the *Fashion Interpretations* AHRC-funded network. The primary impact was through strong working connections created between participants, both from academia and the wider fashion industry. Each contributed a discrete project within the network themes, drawing on their disciplinary or practical approaches to media – as curators, illustrators, editors, writers, and stylists. This interdisciplinary, inter-institutional group arose from individual connections Arnold had formed through participants' engagement with her research through 'Documenting Fashion'. Arnold deliberately instigated Instagram takeovers and blog posts, creating collaboration between different network participants to bring

together diverse perspectives and expertise, hosting online meetings to share work in progress. Through this process, she created space for conversations around hitherto unexplored links between members' different bodies of research, artwork and writing. One stated: it was '*exciting to see the unexpected connections*'. Another called Arnold '*visionary*', adding '*you made this happen*' [7]. Members reported on collaborations they had undertaken. A fashion illustrator sketched mannequins styled by a museum curator, who found it '*energizing*' in returning movement to the stillness found in exhibitions. A fashion editor observed that engaging with the work of curators raised '*issues of...grouping together of images, which as an editor, is part of my job*' [7]. The final network outcome - the inaugural issue of *Archivist Addendum* (COVID-19 delayed, forthcoming 2021), edited by two network members and responding to the network – is a new type of publication. Presented in an archive box, showcasing interpretations of members' work in a variety of different media, it provides a platform for approaches to fashion journalism, history, and criticism that engage with new mediums of representation.

The second group impacted by the network were the public, who were able to attend a five-night online symposium 'Fashion Interpretations: Dress, Medium and Meaning' hosted by Arnold (30 November – 4 December 2020) marking the end of the project. Project members reflected on their individual contributions to the network themes. Over 850 attendees, with international spread [6], responded positively to the Covid-necessitated online format. Many who might otherwise have been unable to attend for geographical, family or accessibility reasons reported a feeling of inclusion [6]. The network participants' strong sense of connection was mirrored by audience members who noted that it '*felt more like community building than the typical academic conference event*'. [6]. The content was '*Very informative [...] inspirational*'; they were '*inspired to look for new ways to see fashion in its manifestations*' and '*have since done some research into artists and images*' that were previously unfamiliar. One said it '*gave me new tools for the future I want*'; another said '*the diversity of perspective and approaches felt "just in time"*'. Many expressed a desire for further online events hoping that the Fashion Interpretations network would continue in the future; others praised the '*emotional responses*' of the participants to their research, stating that they '*felt really connected on a personal level*.' One museum professional noted how important the symposium had been in '*helping me grapple with some essential issues I'm having about what our Museum should be doing and how we should be doing it.*' [6]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Links to and copies of sources have been provided as PDFs. Individuals who can corroborate evidence have been listed with the sources they have provided and their details have been submitted.

- [1] Selection of articles written by Arnold for mainstream media publication
- [2] Selection of articles written by Arnold for specialist fashion publication
- [3] Citation of Arnold in mainstream media articles
- [4] Selection of reviews of 'Documenting Fashion' Instagram, follower numbers and examples of interaction through Instagram.
- [5] Selection of reviews of Bande à part podcast
- [6] Fashion Interpretations Symposium audience feedback
- [7] Email correspondence and blog posts from participants in the Fashion Interpretations network. Corroboration: Professor at the University of Calgary.
- [8] Correspondence with the hosts of *The Conversations* podcast and links to relevant episodes. Corroboration: *The Conversations* podcast host.
- [9] Responses to issues of diversity and representation on the 'Documenting Fashion' Instagram, including an email from the writer of '*The Art of Dress*' blog (January 2017)
- [10] Podcast listener statistics. Corroboration: Co-Host and Senior Curator, Fashion and Decorative Arts, Museum of London.
- [11] Corroboration: Fashion Interpretations Project Co-I, Professor of Fashion and Museology, London College of Fashion