

EMOTIONAL OBJECTS



(Emotional Objects) Is a project that brings together archival research, auto-ethnographic writing, and image making to explore the affects of imperfect garments in museum archives.

Type of output:
Group of
Artefacts

by
Ellen Sampson

Cover:
Emotional objects tryptic (2019)
Cyanotypes on Paper.
Photo credit: Ellen Sampson

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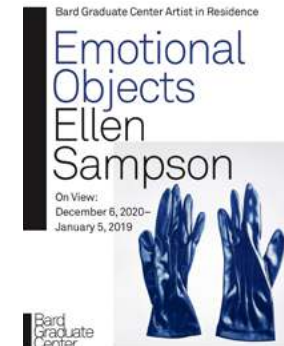
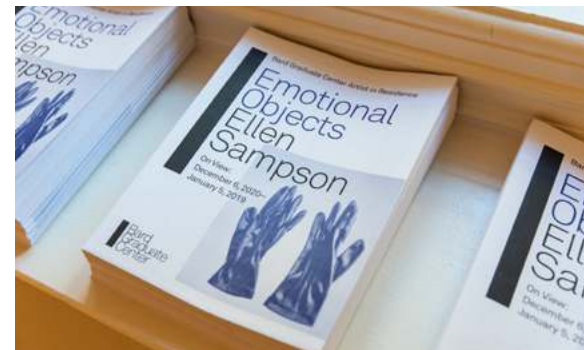
SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Emotional Objects is an extended body of practice generated during a fellowship at the Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2018-19) and an artist's residency at Bard Graduate Center, New York (2019- 2020). By exploring the selection/inclusion practices of archives and museums - the goal of this project was to initiate new conversations about used clothes as records of lived experience, and how these indexical objects create emotional responses to both our own and other's used clothing. The work comprises of an artist's film shot on 16mm in The Costume Institute archive (<https://vimeo.com/469575365/85d6d05615>), an exhibition of cyanotype prints (2019-20) – (an early form of photographic reproduction in which contact prints are made from negatives or objects using paper coated in a solution of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide) and associated catalogue, and a series of auto-ethnographic writings.

This research is situated in the context of growing concern about the impacts of “fast fashion” (Clark, 2008) and increasing interest in the value of imperfect garments (Bide, 2019, Davidson 2018, Evans, 2014). The methodology and concepts built upon Sampson's previous research *Worn* (2012-20), a portfolio of practice (comprising a monograph, photographs, garments and films) that explores how attachment to garments is created through the sensory experiences of wearing.

Right:
Details of fold out Catalogue
with poster in situ at Bard
Graduate Center Galleries 2019.

A mixed method approach was used in this research: primary archival research, contextualising secondary research and new creative practice (photography, writing, filmmaking). *Emotional Objects* has been disseminated in a variety of ways: inaugural exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center, associated catalogue, and complementary open studio (6th December 2019) a paper at Met Fellows Colloquium (2019), the visual essay “Affect and Sensation” (*Fashion Studies* Vol. 3. 2020) and a series of conference presentations (AAH, April 2019, CAA February 2020, American Everyday February 2020, Chicago Fashion Lyceum October 2020 and Costume Colloquium November 2020).



This essay and the exhibition it accompanies, explore garments as emotional objects: as containers of feeling. The material culture of emotion is well documented—from happy objects (c.f. Ahmed 2010) to moment mori, objects of loss absence and grief (c.f. Stallybrass and Jones 2001)—Though emotions are immaterial and transitory they are often transposed onto things. Garments in particular are emotional objects: sites where multiple feelings are produced, performed and contained. Though the capacity to contain and induce emotion is a common to all material things, those we associate with garments are often particularly potent. The reasons for this potency are multiple: clothes are central to identity performance: objects through which rights of passage and changes of status are negotiated and enforced. Equally our tactile relationship with clothes—the embodied experience of wearing—lends them a particular intimacy. Clothing touches and holds us, containing our bodies and recording our gestures and interactions with the world. As clothes as are worn they become records of the actions and bodies which resided within them. This entanglement—the transposition of thing into per-

son and person into thing which take place through wearing—is evident both in one's own clothes and the clothes of others:—clothes which are no longer worn. So that the imitate and over-signified nature of the things we wear renders them—sources of emotions even away from the body. Often it is our own garments or those of loved ones which have the greatest affects. However, garments remain powerful even when their provenance is unknown to us—an affect located both in projection and the dissonance of unknowing. How then does one understand the idea of a garment as a site of emotion, not in the context of the familiar but when its original meanings have gone from it. Garments in archives are both containers and producers of emotion—an affect which in part stems from the bodies that once resided within them, but also from the multiple meaning that they acquire through use, storage, preservation and display. Equally, archives themselves, both as spaces and taxonomic systems are emotional objects—constructed to induce and retain certain feelings. So that the dress archive is a space of emotion containment—a space in which different and at times, conflicting emotions reside.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Objects extends methodologies and concepts of sensory engagement with, and attachment to, garments emerging from Sampson's *Worn* (2014-20) and broader research activities. *Worn* explored everyday garments as records of lived experience in dialogue with the work of historian Stallybrass, curator De la Haye, and fashion theorist Evans.

In turn, *Emotional Objects* draws on these ideas of emotion, affect and imperfection but applies them to damaged garments in museum collections (in particular those bearing bodily traces, such as stains). In doing so it builds upon methods of "close looking" described by Mida (2018) to generate an innovative methodology in which photography and filmmaking were used as the primary modes of archival research, drawing on sensory ethnography methods outlined by Pink (2015) and psychoanalytic theories of attention, affect and memory.

Key to the contextualisation of the work was the Bard Graduate Center's decision to intentionally place Sampson's work in conversation with their 2019/20 exhibition '*French Fashion, Women, and the First World War*'. This entailed reflection upon and response to themes of clothing, emotion, and loss. The activities undertaken sought to interrogate and make accessible academic discourse surrounding clothing, bodies, memory and trace.

Right:
Cyanotype from series
'index and signifier' 2019.





Above: Stills from 'Peripheries of the archive' (2020) Costume Institute, 2019.
<https://vimeo.com/469575365/85d6d05615>

TIMELINE

2012 - 18	2018	2019	2020
<p>'Worn' Research (monograph Published December 2020).</p>	<p>Formative Research: September 2018-August 2019: Polaire Weissman Fellowship at Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.</p> <p>Conference paper: 29th September 2018 "Affect and Embodiment: Why Worn Things Matter" at Fashion Unraveled Colloquium, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York https://archiveondemand.fitnyc.edu/items/show/1059.</p>	<p>Performance lecture: 1st March 2019 – 'Affect and Sensation' performed at Met Fellows Colloquium https://www.academia.edu/44110030/Affect_and_Sensation_A_Phenomenology_of_the_Clothing_Archive_Met).</p> <p>Conference paper: April 2019 "Affect and Sensation" at Association of Art Historians, 2019, Brighton.</p> <p>Installation: April 2019 in 'Material Requiem' Horse Hospital, London https://www.thehorsehospital.com/events/requiem-material-memory.</p> <p>Artist Residency: Autumn 2019 Bard Graduate Center, New York, https://www.bgc.bard.edu/gallery/exhibitions/103/artists-in-residence.</p> <p>Exhibition: December 2019-January 2020, Bard Graduate Center, New York, + Catalogue.</p> <p>Open studio : 6th December 2020: Open studio https://www.bgc.bard.edu/events/1126/06-dec-2019-open-studio.</p>	<p>Conference paper: 14th February 2020 exploring methodology of project "Fashioning Research—Embodied Knowledge, Bodily Practices and the Role of Practice-based Research in Fashion Studies." 108th CAA Annual Conference, Chicago.</p> <p>15th February 2020: "Archives of the Everyday" American Everyday, Columbia College Chicago. https://drive.google.com/file/d/19hP7efPIZsY5kWBIPXkslresvWkqNH1n/view.</p> <p>Article: March 2020: 'Archives of the Everyday' in Public seminar (The New school) https://publicseminar.org/essays/archives-of-the-everyday-fashion/.</p> <p>Online Showcase: May 2020 to replace postponed UCA exhibition https://www.uca.ac.uk/galleries/events/online-emotional-objects/.</p> <p>Conference paper/ presentation: 11th October 2020: - Film peripheries of the archive- Screened at Chicago Fashion Lyceum – Fashion at the periphery (online) https://chicagofashionlyceum.com/schedule/.</p> <p>Conference paper/ presentation: 13th November: - Affect and sensation performed at Costume Colloquium, online conference Florence (online).</p> <p>Film Screening and Workshop: 17th November at Colombia College, Chicago- With BA Fashion and BFA fine art students.</p> <p>Article: 23rd November 2020: visual essay and text "Affect and Sensation in Fashion Studies. Vol.3 https://www.fashionstudies.ca.</p> <p>Event: 24th November 2020: Fashion Studies Issue Launch Event -In conversation with Alison Matthews Davis Ryerson University, Toronto (online) https://www.ryerson.ca/the-catalyst/Events/2020/11/fashion-studies-volume-3-launch/.</p>

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

This research sought to challenge current thinking about the ‘value’ of imperfect garments in museums and everyday life: shifting the focus from consumption, novelty and desire, to attachment, emotional investment and materiality. The exhibition, writings and film, present clothing archives as repositories of affect, emotion, and the traces of use (stains, creases and repairs etc.) asking what is the significance of used and damaged clothes and why do they have the power to affect us?

Research aims:

- To critically examine the value of damaged garments in museums: those often considered unappealing or too fragile to display.
- To explore the role of artist led practice-based research in shifting perception of these overlooked aspects of museum collections and the ways that filmmaking and photography can effectively highlight the power of these objects.
- To initiate conversations within fashion and museum studies and with gallery visitors about clothes as records of lived experience and the emotional response we have to used clothing.

“The images Sampson produces are captivating material testimonies of her theoretical concepts, the analogue quality of the photographs engender new ways of looking at and interpreting bodily traces in garments.”

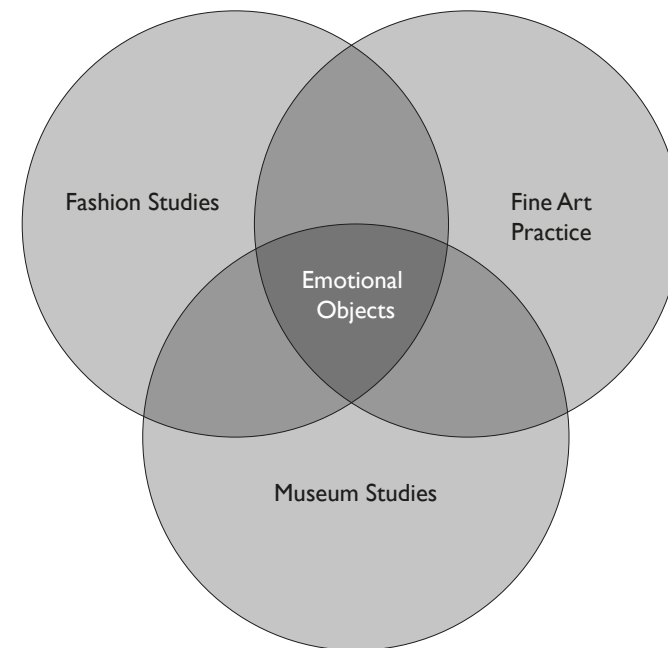
Karen Van Godtsenhoven,
Associate Curator,
The Costume Institute of the
Metropolitan Museum of Art.

CONTEXT

Emotional Objects is situated between fashion studies, fine art practice and museum studies and informed by the material (Latour, 1993, Miller 2005) and affective turns (Ahmed 2010, Berlant 2011) of the humanities and social sciences.

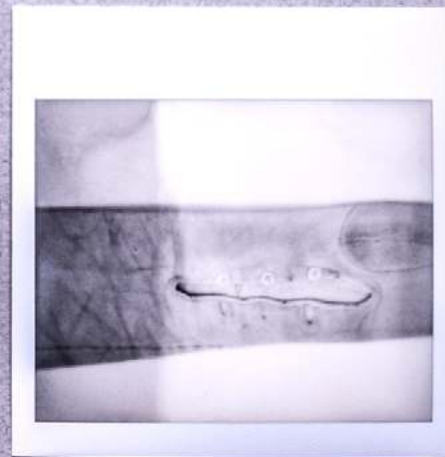
At a time when fashion exhibitions play an increasingly important role in both cultural institutions and the fashion industry (Petrov, Clark and De la Haye, 2014) and equally as museums move to frame their clothing collections as 'fashion' rather than 'costume' (e.g. changes in collecting focus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Brooklyn Museum- see Petrov 2019), *Emotional Objects* explores the power of unfashionable or 'orphan objects'. It asks how in a field where absent bodies and narratives are increasingly understood as problematic, engagement with the traces of use and repair can create a more nuanced discourse about the things we wear.

Fast fashion currently dominates many of our relationships with clothing (Clark, 2015), creating a fashion system dependant on novelty and contributing to systems of production and distribution which create profound environmental impacts and reinforce labour and gender inequalities as outlined in the British Fashion Council's white paper (2019). Through a focus on imperfect garments in museum collections, this research challenges understanding of perfection and imperfection in fashion - highlighting the ways that everyday objects can be made powerful through wear.



Practice-based research occupies an increasingly large space in the field of fashion studies from research into making processes and design techniques, memory and materials to archival research. *Emotional Objects* draws upon the knowledge and methodologies developed through these projects to foreground how an artist's intervention can highlight overlooked objects as valuable records of lived experience. By selecting garments which would not otherwise be displayed and creating images which highlight their value as material records, Sampson reframes these objects, reasserting their status within museum collections.

Below:
Polaroids of objects in Costume
Institute Collection, 2018.



METHODS AND PROCESSES

The project was undertaken in three parts, utilising a combined methodology of archival research, image making and auto-ethnographic writing. The images and text work together to highlight the affective potential of these overlooked objects and create a phenomenological record of the research process, of looking closely within the context of the archive. Working with analogue photography (Polaroid, Cyanotypes, medium-format slides, and 16mm film,) the research sought to build both an archive of the marks of use and to create larger works that highlight the entangled and intimate nature of these objects. These images form the core of the project - in-depth visual “biographies” which are juxtaposed with film and text examining museum and archival encounters.

Focusing on accessories, objects which Jones and Stallybrass term “detachable parts” of the self (2001b:116), the project sought to highlight the bodily practices of wearing and maintaining clothes, clothing as lived and embodied experience, in objects where little or no biographical evidence exists. Archival research was undertaken at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York with secondary research at Fashion Institute of Technology, New York and Smith College, Massachusetts, collaborating with archivists and conservators to identify damaged garments in the collections and develop strategies to film and photograph them safely.

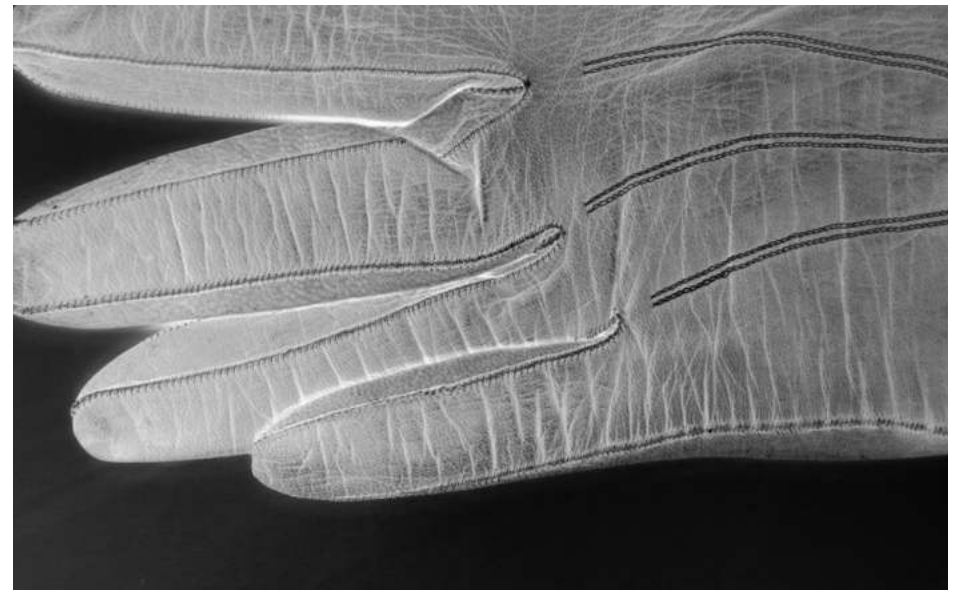
Right:
Polaroids of objects in Costume
Institute Collection, 2018.



The film work (<https://vimeo.com/469575365/85d6d05615>) and writing drew upon phenomenological and auto-ethnographic methods to interrogate the position of these objects within the archive and to highlight subjective and embodied experience of Sampson as archival researcher. In doing so they seek to analyse and materialize these archival encounters and make present the complex position of the archival researcher in their research.

Digital and analogue photography (Polaroid, Cyanotypes from digital negatives, and 16mm film) were used to highlight the bodily and intimate nature of these objects. These processes and materials were selected for their capacity to amplify the material qualities of these garments, drawing upon Didi-Huberman's (1984) framing of both analogue photographs and stains as indexical imprints and on Barthes' positioning of photographs as both "there then" and "here now,": objects which like archival garments sit between two times.

The second stage of the project, a residency and exhibition at Bard Graduate Center utilized photographs taken at the Costume Institute to develop a series of cyanotypes which highlighted the emotional resonance of discarded accessories. The work was displayed alongside a fold-out catalogue containing the text of a talk delivered at the Met Fellow Colloquium in March 2019. Dissemination took place through an open studio in which Sampson shared her work, processes and ideas with members of the public, five conference papers (AAH, CAA, American Everyday, Chicago Fashion Lyceum, Costume Colloquium,) and two publications.



Right:
Developing digital negatives from
photographs of gloves in Costume
Institute Collection, 2018.



Above: *Emotional objects* series, Cyanotypes on paper, 2019.

DISSEMINATION

This research has been effectively shared through a number of contexts including the exhibition at Bard Graduate Center, catalogue, conference papers, film screenings and publications in *Fashion Studies* and Public Seminar (see timeline). Early stages of the project were shared through public presentations at FIT, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Association of Art Historians Conference (see timeline).

The exhibition at Bard Graduate Center, which ran from December 2019 to January 2020 was visited by an average of 362 visitors per week in the period (1551 total). The accompanying fold-out catalogue (featuring text from the Met lecture and a poster) were distributed to the public during the event. An online showcase of works from the exhibition was published by University for the Creative Arts in June 2020.

A conference paper on the methodology of the project delivered at “Who’s In and Out of Fashion studies” panel at CAA 2020 (https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/cmrudeen/files/whos_in_and_whos_out_in_fashion_studies.pdf) and Archives of the Everyday delivered at American Everyday February 2020.

The film component of the project “Peripheries of the Archive”- was screened at Chicago Fashion Lyceum (October 2020) and at Costume Colloquium, (Florence November 2020). Further dissemination activities undertaken in autumn 2020 include a panel discussion with Alison Matthews David and Ben Barry of Ryerson University, Toronto and a workshop and lecture at Colombia College, Chicago.



Left:

Stills from 16mm film ‘Peripheries of the archive’ (2020) shot at Costume Institute in 2019.

<https://vimeo.com/469575365/85d6d05615>

Contextually the project is supported by two publications, a visual essay and text “Affect and Sensation” in *Fashion studies* Volume 3 (2020) and “Archives of the Everyday” in *Public Seminar: The New School’s* public facing platform for opinion and comment (<https://publicseminar.org/essays/archives-of-the-everyday-fashion/>).

Through exhibition screening, conference papers and publication, *Emotional Objects* realised its objectives in challenging current thinking about the ‘value’ of imperfect garments in museums and our daily lives. The first practice-based project to be awarded the Met’s Polaire Wiessman fellowship- the project presented an innovative approach to the selected archives and the methodology highlighted the ways that artists’ intervention could generate discussion amongst museum staff about the position of damaged garments within their own archives and the selection processes which frequently exclude them from display.

As a contribution, the artworks and writings present an alternate approach to archival research, one which foregrounds the embodied experience of the researcher and the materiality of the artefacts. In making images which allowed these fragile and overlooked items to be transported from archive to gallery and screen the project served to stimulate conversations within academia, museums and the public about the ways that clothes can act as repositories and producers of emotion.

The affect of these ‘detachable parts’ of the body stems from their capacity to ‘trouble the conceptual opposition between person and thing’ (Stallybrass & Jones 2001: 118) to blur the line between animate and inanimate.

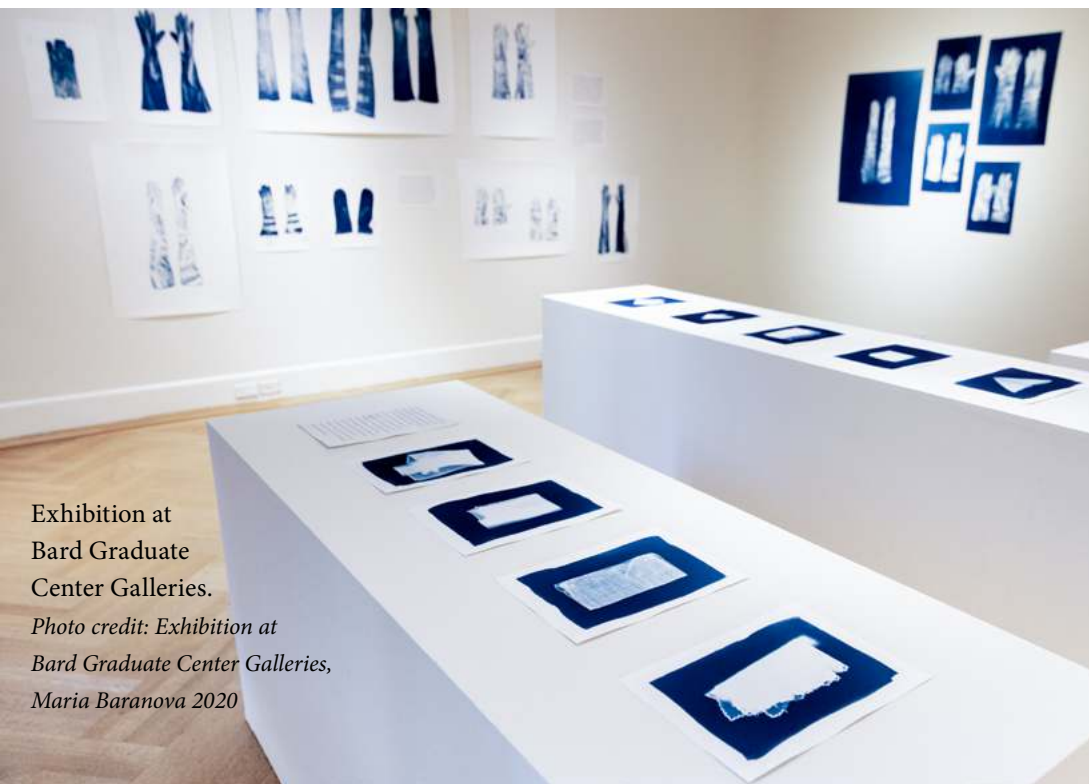


Left: Visitor at Bard Graduate Center Galleries.

“Ellen’s exhibition was a beautiful meditation on absence – the cyanotype garments acting as ghosts of human presence. French Fashion, Women, and the First World War sought to tell the story of French women’s experience of the war through clothing and the labor associated with garment manufacture—Ellen’s exhibition spoke to wider themes of grief and mourning than ran through the show and the power objects have as conduits of presence and memory.”

Emily Reilly

Director of Public Programs and Associate Gallery Director,
Bard Graduate Center.



Exhibition at
Bard Graduate
Center Galleries.
Photo credit: Exhibition at
Bard Graduate Center Galleries,
Maria Baranova 2020

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Left: *Emotional objects* series, Cyanotypes on paper, 2019.

