

Dis-Comforting, Pioneering, and Re-Materializing: Crafting understanding of older men's experiences of ageing through their personal archives

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Pioneering, Nonconforming, and Rematerializing

Crafting Understanding of Older Men's Experiences of Fashion Through Their Personal Archives

Ania Sadkowska

Introduction

When talking about fashion as a social phenomenon, we cannot escape the complexity of the relationships between many intertwined fields and concepts. Style, apparel, psychological attitudes, subcultures, clothes and the body, are just a few of many elements defining fashion and influencing its dynamics (e.g. Kaiser, 2012; Entwistle, 2015). But often when speak of fashion we tend to automatically default to womenswear and youth (e.g. Twigg, 2013), somewhat overlooking the involvement of mature men and the importance of sartorial self-expression (e.g. McCauley Bowstead, 2018). Therefore, in establishing this research project it was important to consider how to capture the different values encompassed within older men's experience of aging through fashion. In particular, this project's aim was to develop an in-depth understanding of contemporary older British men's experiences of aging and the associated changes to the body through the lens of fashion and clothing (Sadkowska, 2016).

By virtue of the project's focus on male aging and fashion, exploration of issues such as masculinity, embodiment and identity emerged as significant. Furthermore, as a fashion and textile designer, seeking novel ways of extending standard interpretative research processes was equally important. This method of enquiry enabled experimental design responses, linked to personal artistic skills, expertise and sensitivities. These approaches were key to analysing the study participants' experiences, while discovering and responding to their personal fashion and clothing archives. This chapter explains stages of the

research process in regards to three emergent themes and corresponding artefacts; Pioneering, Non-Conforming and Re-Materialising.

Methods of inquiry

To enable understanding and further the field of practice-based research on older men and fashion, a novel methodology was required. This was achieved through creating a fusion of the qualitative processes of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith 1996; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009) with the practice-based procedures of arts-informed research (Cole and Knowles 2008; Butler-Kisber 2010). This novel fusion elicited a rigorous and integrative research and included methods of semi-structured interviews (captured via a series of audio recordings), personal inventories of the participants' private fashion and clothing archives (evidenced via a series of field notes and photographs), and the intertwined practices of interpretative writing and making, i.e., practical explorations to gain further insights into their thoughts. The "writing practices" were stimulated through immersion in the data and personal reflexivity (Etherington 2004), while the "making" contained elements of creative techniques and artful material explorations, in this case, located within the field of fashion and clothing design.

Inquiry in action

In his seminal text Steinar Kvale (1996: 125) offers a useful definition of a research interview: "[it] is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue."

In his later text (Kvale 2006: 480), he supplemented this definition by describing dialogical interviewing as potentially sensitive, powerful, and "a democratic emancipating form of social research." While this highlights the unique role of the interviewees as experts in their experiences, it also acknowledges the important role of the interviewer in the process of listening and reacting to given accounts.

As described elsewhere (e.g., Sadkowska, Wilde, and Fisher 2015; Sadkowska et al. 2017) for the purpose of this project, five men were interviewed (Table 4.1). The interviewees' main characteristics were deliberately consistent: they were British, white, heterosexual, middle-class, professionally active, appearance-

Table 4.1 Sample characteristics

Name^a	Age	Occupation	County of Residence
Eric	60	Artist	Nottinghamshire
Grahame	61	Social care worker	Derbyshire
Henry	54	Academic	Leicestershire
Ian	58	Company director	Nottinghamshire
Kevin	63	Lecturer	Nottinghamshire

Note:

^a Pseudonyms are used to preserve participants' anonymity.

conscious men located in, or strongly connected to, Nottingham, UK, which made the sample homogenous.

Each interview lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and was recorded with consent from each participant. The interview schedule consisted of eight open-ended questions about the different aspects of their experiences of fashion and clothing, including questions about the participants' personal definition of the term "fashion." This included their past and present fashion practices, such as purchasing, wearing, storing, or styling their clothes, and future expectations. They were also asked about their current relationship with fashion and clothing and how this has changed over time, encouraging them to describe occasions when they felt really good/bad about the way they looked, their perfect fashion item, and fashion artifacts that were personally meaningful for them. The interviews were conversational in style and prompts and probes were used to encourage the participants to elaborate further when unexpected, but potentially interesting, areas of discussion arose, and to clarify ambiguities and avoid misunderstandings; these included a variety of standard interviewing phrases such as: Can you give me an example of this? Can you tell me more about that? How do/did you feel about that? It looks like you are saying... / I just would like to make sure that I got it right.

Personal fashion and clothing archives

While the in-depth interviews allowed for the generation of research material that revealed both the richness and complexity of the participants' experiences, "interviews can be made more productive when based around artifacts" (Martin and Hanington 2012: 102). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981: 1)

comment that in order “[t]o understand what people are and what they might become, one must understand what goes on between people and things.” Since the aim of the research was to explore the variety and complexity of the types of relationships that participants have developed with fashion and clothing as they matured and grew older, gaining access to, and the use of objects that were personally meaningful to the participants as the stimuli for conversation was pertinent for it. This led to employing the method of personal inventories which in turn allowed for the uncovering of the participants’ private fashion and clothing archives. These archives took different forms, from carefully stored and preserved objects (garments, accessories, textiles, etc.) and photographs, to vivid and fond memories of no-longer-existing items and experiences linked to them.

With the intention of conducting personal inventories, prior to the interview each participant was emailed with the brief instruction to bring along three or four fashion-related objects (e.g., pieces of clothing, accessories, textiles, photographs, or other relevant artifacts). This was addressed as the final part of the interview in which the participants were invited to speak about these objects. It is important to highlight that one of the themes was to explore the participants’ “meaning making” of their experiences, and so it was critical to allow them not only to freely choose the artifacts they wanted to bring to, and discuss during, their interview, but also to be open as to what kind of artifacts they were to be.

As a consequence of the limited instructions, the personal inventories conducted differed significantly from case to case; the participants presented a variety of different types of artifacts from accessories such as rings and ties, to garments such as shirts and jackets, but also different amounts of them. Three of the participants presented the researcher with the photos of their favorite items, two of the participants wore their “favorite” outfit/garment to the interview, and four participants showed their “special” garments, of whom two extended an opportunity for a viewing of their entire wardrobes. Arguably, such diversity of the types of artifacts and the ways in which they were presented in an otherwise small sample accentuates the diversity of the participants’ experiences. But it also highlights the need for a more holistic approach to understanding individuals’ unique lived experiences, and acknowledging the role of the past episodes and artifacts in their present experiences.

While personal inventories as a research method might give an impression of being rather straightforward to implement, allowing the participants to have an entirely autonomous selection of the objects proved to be problematic when it came to their documentation. The challenge rested precisely in how

to capture the richness and diversity of the presented material. There was a significant discrepancy between the numbers of objects brought by each of them; one participant, Eric, presented as many as twenty-two objects (eight clothing pieces and fourteen photos), while Kevin did not bring any artifacts at all. Only two participants followed the given parameters and brought four items each (Table 4.2).

Such discrepancy can be interpreted in a twofold way; first, the two participants who were interviewed in their own homes, Eric and Grahame, presented more artifacts than the three participants who were interviewed within the university settings. This could easily be explained by the fact that these two participants simply did not need to carry these objects with them to the interview, and in a sense they did not even need to plan in advance showing them. Such an explanation would be in line also with the fact that, in general, the three interviews conducted at the university were shorter, suggesting that perhaps home settings did influence how relaxed the participants felt and potentially influenced the depth of the interview. On the other hand, however, to create distance from any such theories, it is important to highlight that all the participants in this study, while having certain characteristics in common, varied

Table 4.2 Personal inventories

Pseudonym	“Special” Outfit Worn (Y/N)	Artifacts Demonstrated	Photos
Eric	N	8 (4 Paul Smith suit jackets, 1 tie, 1 hat, 2 silver rings)	14 (collection of images from his childhood to the present time)
Grahame	Y (favorite shirt)	13 (2 rain jackets, 1 suit jacket, 1 Levi’s denim jacket, 1 denim shirt, 2 tops, 2 hoodies, 1 scarf, 1 hat, 2 bags)	0
Henry	Y (suit and shirt by Gresham Blake)	3 (2 Vivienne Westwood suits, 1 tie by Barbara Hulanicki)	1 (Henry aged 18 in his first suit)
Ian	N	3 (G-Force cardigan, Paul Smith shirt, Nick Coleman jacket)	1 (image of the Johnson’s shirt; emailed to the researcher after the interview)
Kevin	N	0	0

significantly in the way they explained their experiences and offered their interpretations.

In this sense, an interpretation is that it may well be that Kevin, who was the only participant who did not bring any artifacts with him, although admitting to having a rather large private fashion archive at home, simply did not feel the need to do so, which would be consistent with his interview's narrative, where he often compared his past and present experiences of fashion. This comparison was based on highlighting the difference between his active participation in various male-dominated youth subcultures where having certain clothes allowed him to simply "fit within" a group's standards, and the current time when he valued originality and being "a little bit different" more. Overall, in his

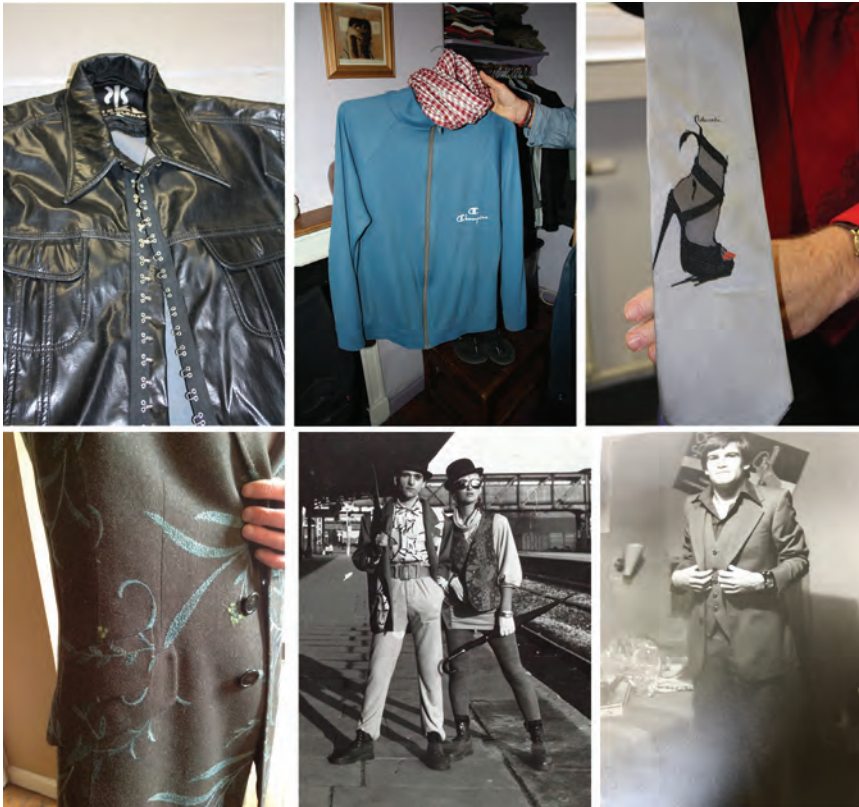


Figure 4.1 The artifacts and photos the participants presented during their interviews. Top, left to right: Ian's leather jacket; Graham's hooded jacket; Henry's Biba tie. Bottom left to right: Eric's Paul Smith suit jacket; Eric modeling c. 1981, photo P. Edmondson, image courtesy of T. Brack for Olto Ltd.; Henry in 1978, photo courtesy of the owner. Artifacts photographed by Ania Sadkowska.

interview, on multiple occasions he expressed his confidence in his individual style and displayed a strong, rebellious disconnection from any forms of social participation.

Additionally, it is also worth noting that on many occasions this potential research data was presented in a rather chaotic manner; for example, in the case of two interviews conducted in the participants' homes, the interviewed men tried on some of their garments, changing them quickly and often providing little verbal commentary about them, even when prompted. This indeed posed certain challenges of how to record this potentially rich research data. Consequently, adopting photography as a means of documentation enabled the sensory richness of these material objects to be captured. This generated a series of photographs capturing the participants themselves wearing their artifacts, as well as the photos shown by the participants (Figure 4.1). However, while such a variety of the generated images accurately reflected the diversity of the participants' personal archives and the richness of their experiences, it required being selective when it came to the analyzed material.

Crafting understanding

As a result of implementing the hybrid methodology of Arts-Informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Sadkowska 2016), the analysis of the data had three interconnected stages. At the first stage the interview recordings and transcriptions were analyzed using techniques standard to IPA (e.g., Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009; Finlay 2011). At the second stage a series of photographs of the participants' outfits was analyzed. Both these stages were completed in a close relation to the participants' fashion and clothing archives revealed via a series of personal inventories. The final stage of the data analysis was based on a series of practical explorations.

Stage 1: Interview coding

IPA as a methodology deals nearly exclusively with text; the analyzed text comes usually from interview transcriptions, which can be supplemented by the researcher's comments, reflections, field notes, photographs, etc. (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). Consequently, conducting an IPA analysis is based mainly on the activity of reflexive writing. In this vein, the first stage of data analysis was devoted exclusively to written coding of the five interview transcriptions and

included the following steps: reading and rereading of the interview transcripts; initial note-taking; developing emergent themes; searching for connections across emergent themes; moving to the next case; and, finally, looking for patterns across cases (ibid). This stage of IPA textual analysis concluded in identifying a set of emergent themes.

Stage 2: Image analysis

However fruitful, the stage of interview coding opened up the important question of how to code the visual material gathered via the participants' personal inventories and how to even begin understanding their unique fashion archives. Moreover, it was crucial to facilitate the analysis conditions to enable the moving back and forth between the images and the participants' verbal accounts, so one informed the other in a form of interpretative dialogue. The extremely diverse empirical material was challenging to analyze in a systematic and unified way and, for this reason, identification and analysis of the common factor for each participant, a photograph of what they were wearing on the day of the interview, would be the most stable factor (Figure 4.2). This was significant

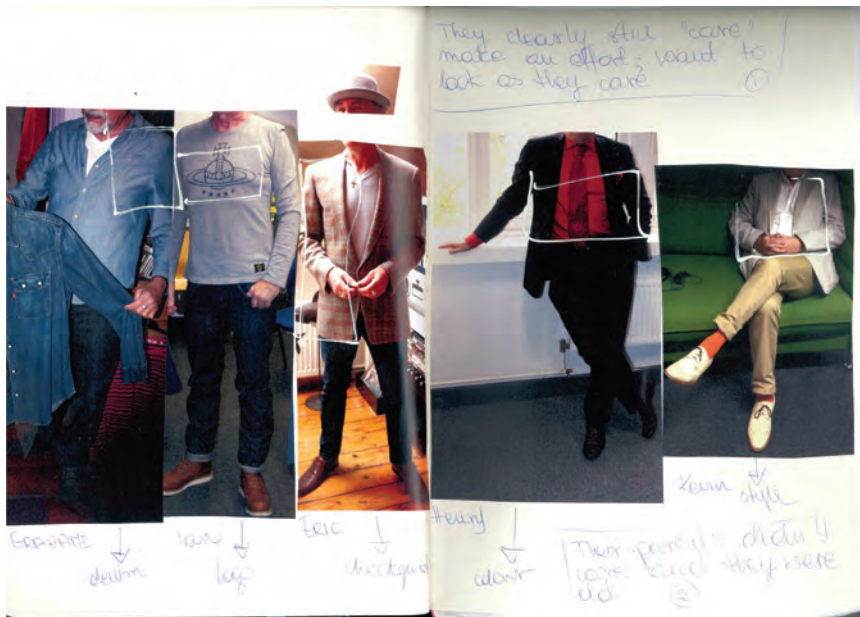


Figure 4.2 The participants on the day of their interviews; left to right: Grahame (61), Ian (58), Eric (60), Henry (54), and Kevin (63). Photographs by Ania Sadkowska.

because all of the interviewed men admitted during their interview that they very carefully crafted their attire on the day for the purpose of projecting themselves as stylish individuals.

Drawing on the framework developed by Boden and Eatough (2014), in which the researchers proposed to interpret an image on three interconnected levels, namely, how it was made, how it was composed, and its potential meanings, first, the stage of visual data analysis was devoted to a detailed description of each outfit. Subsequently, it was modified to this study's conditions by extending it to take into account the relationship between clothing and the body. The visual data was then analyzed and interpreted alongside the data from the interview transcripts following a similar procedure: describing in detail the image (through the framework), followed by its interpretation in relation to the commentary provided by the participants during their interviews as well as field notes. This was done separately for the image of each participant of the study on the day of the interview and resulted in five cases of "outfit analysis" which influenced the emergent themes and allowed for the creation of a final table of three superordinate (master) themes with three subordinate themes each (Table 4.3). When labeling each theme the intention was to directly reflect the participants' words and thoughts but also develop interpretations. This enabled responding to the gathered data by creating a series of initial interpretive accounts based on the co-construction of meanings and understandings between each participant and myself (Sadkowska 2018).

Stage 3: Practical explorations

Finally, the stage of practical explorations was when the processes of final shaping and crafting an understanding of older men's experience took place by re-approaching each of the nine subordinate themes. For this, engaging with

Table 4.3 Final superordinate and subordinate themes in the study

SUPERORDINATE THEMES		
Learning Fashion	Defining the Fashion-Self	Fashion-Age(ing) Performance
SUBORDINATE THEMES		
Mirroring	Pioneering	Presenting
Discomforting	Nonconforming	(Un-)fashioning
Peacocking	Distancing	Rematerializing

various artful creative practices as a way to stimulate and enhance thinking about the data and initial findings (Table 4.3; subordinate themes) was used. It was at this stage that the unique embodied processes and creative responses really came to the fore. The process of adopting practical explorations as an analytical and interpretative tool is explained below in regards to three selected subordinate themes: Pioneering, Non-Conforming, and Re-Materialising.

Pioneering

Pioneering emerged as a strong and relatively straightforward theme, touching upon the participants' past connections with the various subcultures, which resulted in their current attitudes toward aging stylishly (Sadkowska, Wilde, and Fisher 2015). All five participants expressed their beliefs that, in the past, they pioneered certain youth movements and related menswear styles, as explained by Henry (54): "Having grown up in the '60s and '70s I have probably lived through [...] some of the most exciting changes and developments in male clothing."

While all of the participants felt very strongly about their pioneering past, they also felt that currently their generation of men is actively influencing and redefining what it means to grow older. Bovone (2012: 67) comment that the dressed body is "a basic element of our identity"; in this vein, throughout history it played a central role in how men age and how they enact what it means to be a man. Inspired by this, a process of practical explorations was initiated by looking into the relevant historical aspects, including the history of menswear from the 1950s to 1980s. This was a significant first step toward developing a deeper understanding of the theme, because it allowed a better understanding of the social aspects of the youth fashion, which started in the 1950s. Admittedly this is how we understand fashion to be today; however, for the participants in this study, youth-oriented fashion was something that was associated with cultural change or, for some, even a kind of rebellion or revolt (Hebdige 1979; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Polhemus 2010). Furthermore, it was interesting to note how, for some participants, pioneering became so deeply engraved in who they have become that it is an inherent part of their everyday practices and behaviors, as discussed by Grahame (61): "I never needed anybody to tell me that a new band's in fashion, you know, music. Because I am already there. I know it's in fashion because I bought it last week."

To deepen this primary understanding of the theme, firstly a mind map exercise was completed and, secondly, all relevant passages from the interviews

and the images from the participants' past were revisited. Especially useful here were images provided by Eric (Figure 4.3), who presented a collection of fourteen photos starting from his early childhood; his attire in each of these photos was a direct representation of the contemporary fashion trends forming an interesting form of visual fashion archives. These photos revealed something of value and worth exploring further and were used to create a short fashion film illustrating how his clothing style has changed over the years and exploring how this might relate to the pioneering theme.

However, before being able to truly embrace the interpretative potential of the practical explorations within the Pioneering theme, it required further understanding from a sociological point of view. For this reason, embarking upon reading various sources related to subcultures and their theories, two books, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by Hebdige (1979) and *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1976) edited by Hall and Jefferson, were especially relevant. It is from reading this literature that came the realization of the importance of the various contexts surrounding these



Figure 4.3 Eric's old photos (visual archives; selection of). Photo credits: P. Edmonton and D. Sedgwick.

subcultural movements, and the key elements of attire adopted by them as a form of identification and affiliation. Especially influential was this quote from Clarke (1976: 178): “[w]hat happens is not the creation of objects and meanings from nothing, but rather the *transformation* and *rearrangement* of what is given (and ‘borrowed’) into a pattern which carries a new meaning, its *translation* to a new context, and its *adaption*” [emphasis in original].

This quote resonated strongly with the Pioneering theme: (new) context(s) influencing (fresh) meaning(s). Inspired by this, and the review of historical accounts and images (both from Eric’s archives and books) of menswear from the period of the 1950s onwards, enabled identification of the various elements typical to different groups; the focus of the analysis lay primarily on men’s suits. These were, for example, velvet collars for Teddy Boys, narrow lapels and the use of the Union Jack for Mods, or safety pins and raw edges for Punks. Here, the aim was to enable an understanding of the context in which these elements are normally used in order to give them new meanings; this appeared to draw a direct parallel to the current generation of the third-age men (including the participants) actively influencing new meanings of male aging.

At this stage, the purchase of a second-hand men’s jacket took place which was selected because of its black-and-white dogtooth pattern wool alluding to the Mod aesthetics. Once the jacket was photographed a series of collages were completed in a sketchbook; these collages become a method of visual exploration for how to incorporate the identified “typical” elements of different subcultures within the jacket. Also, in parallel to this activity, through noting conceptual ideas regarding the theme, writing was stimulating making and vice versa. With especially strong convictions about the idea of creating new concepts, finally the jacket was deconstructed,¹ removing the sleeves and the collar. These were then reapplied as well as other elements in different forms, shapes, and positions; a sleeve hole became a neck hole, the collar was changed to a black velvet collar (Teddy Boys and Mods) and the safety pins (Punks) were used as a method of joining the elements superseding standard stitching, as well as the black and white safety pins that were used to emphasize the dogtooth pattern, and to imitate the tartan pattern (Punks). Throughout this process, it was important to use a sketchbook to visually document and continuously reflect on how applying these elements differently was influencing the unfolding interpretation. Consequently, completing the Pioneering jacket (Figure 4.4) enabled the verbalizing and interpretation of how the participants and their contemporaries are influencing our fresh perceptions of mature men, how they view their fashion-oriented masculinities, and how this affects their interpretation of their bodies.



Figure 4.4 Ania Sadkowska, “Pioneering”; sketchbook pages—deconstructing and reconstructing a second-hand jacket; the Pioneering jacket; front and back. Photographs by Fraser West.

Nonconforming

The Nonconforming theme, similarly to the Pioneering one, emerged as a theme linking the participants’ past affiliations with various youth subcultures to their current attitudes and values. However, in contrast to the Pioneering theme, the connection was less direct and overt; instead, it was more of a general and settled tendency to go against the flow of mainstream trends and behaviors. In some sense, the Nonconforming theme was also linked to the rupture of these past subcultural connections; it emerged as a theme that was especially complex, multifaceted, and open to various creative interpretations.

Before starting practical explorations of it, it became important to reread all the relevant passages, including the results of the outfit analysis. This was especially important because the participants often talked about the objects from their pasts that allowed them to actively rebel against the existing clothing norms and expectations. In the following extract, Henry describes his current feelings toward such a clothing piece. Interestingly, in his utterance, he displays a certain level of regret, indicating a peculiar sense of loss or even grief caused by this artifact’s absence in his life:

There is only one thing that I really regret uhm. . . getting rid of. I would never wear them now. But they were fabulous at the time. Fabulously disgraceful I’m sure. Early ’80s post new romantic uhm. . . trousers that were, sort of, khaki

green. But streaked almost like they were tie-dyed. They had darker streaks through them. Which had uhm. . . brass zips from the ankle to the thigh. Uhm. . . on the front. And you could wear them zipped up and they were quite narrow trousers. But you could undo the zips and they ballooned out into baggie, sort of, new romantic-y type of trousers, which were fabulous. But people must have thought that they were horrible bottoms I was wearing. But I loved them. And I wish I had kept them. But I wore them out! You know, I couldn't afford many clothes.

Special attention was given to a particular section from Henry's interview where he commented on the various color associations linked with the male and female genders. In the passage he openly discussed his liking of the color pink, and how, through wearing pink clothes, he felt he was "going against" the dominant male clothing standards:

[As a young boy] I wore colours that boys wouldn't wear. But boys. . . I mean Hippies would wear the colours I wore. But no ordinary schoolboys in the north-east of England would wear pink. And I still find men still comment on me wearing pink. . . I wear a lot of pink. And a lot of men still have difficulty with that. And still mention it. And they come to me and say: "I wish I dared to wear it." And I think: "Well, why daren't you?" Yeah, it is a lovely colour. And there is nothing wrong with it.

Significantly, this sentiment was further reflected via his personal archive:

So can you tell me about a time that you felt really good about the way you looked? About your best fashion experience?

This is the suit I brought in, I will show you. This is the one that I had the most fun and wonderful times I had that involve clothing. I will show you. It is not just my clothing. You can see it is a Vivienne Westwood suit from about uhm. . . five years I think, five years. Again I would call that a sort of squashed raspberry colour. . . it's pink.

Coincidentally, at the same time, a JOOP aftershave advert was released in which a young and muscular male model commented that "Real men wear pink."² This was especially intriguing, particularly the disconnection between what Henry reported and the alleged new norms of masculinity, as presented in the aforementioned advert. With this in mind, and having purchased a black plain corduroy jacket, this led to the instinctive exploration of the process of change from what Henry as a young man viewed as the norms of masculinity and what contemporary young men might view as such; the progress from dark, sober masculinity to the "pink" image, as presented in the advert.

A series of practical experimentations was begun in which the aim was to attach to the purchased jacket a row of parallel panels that were black on one side, and pink on the reverse. Perhaps such a “device” would enable the quick change of the color of the garment from one to another; just as the social norms of masculinity and male attire are in constant flux. Importantly, the aim was not to mimic the fashion trends, but, instead, an attempt to understand the changing social norms regarding masculinity (indeed, arguably the pink color on the menswear catwalks might be just a reflection of quickly changing trends³).

Through metaphorically exploring the coloring processes more generally, the underlying question to answer was: If and how was it possible that a black garment could become a pink garment? This corresponded to how it evolved that the “old” masculinity became the “new” one. As an integral part of this process the question being explored was: Is it possible that the limitations of the social norms that the participants experienced in the past might in fact have changed with younger generations of men being no longer restricted by them? And, in turn, how might this relate to the various nonconforming attitudes clearly so important to these participants? Furthermore, how were these concepts, even in their past state, influencing their current experiences of aging? It was at this stage that the ideas evolved and moved from using this panel device; instead, starting a series of experimentations in which a bleached black cotton corduroy was dyed pink (Figure 4.5). The resultant shade of pink, which was intense and deep (closely resonating with “shocking pink” used often by Elsa Schiaparelli), was particularly interesting and relevant to what could be described as the “contemporary shade of masculinity.” This was indeed an intriguing idea of an interplay between the old-black and new-pink masculinities, one that would not be able to explicate in any other way but via these practical experimentations.

Having returned to the purchased corduroy jacket and unpicked all its elements; this was significant because it appeared that the Pioneering and the Nonconforming themes had a lot in common and, for these reasons, some steps of the practical analysis should also correspond, i.e., deconstruction processes. This was followed by bleaching all the elements, which were then dyed pink and restitched together. What was interesting in this process was that, while the black jacket was indeed transformed from black to pink, the old threads stayed black in spite of the intense bleaching and dyeing processes. This contributed to the verbalizing of the interpretation of the Nonconforming theme focusing on newly established understanding, while the various social norms regarding masculinity



Figure 4.5 Ania Sadkowska, “Nonconforming”; sketchbook pages—bleaching and dyeing experimentations; the Nonconforming jacket; front and back. Photographs by Fraser West.

and masculine attire might have changed in the last few decades significantly, in this study, participants might still relate to the norms present when they were younger and ones that they once rebelled against.

Rematerializing

Finally, the Rematerializing theme emerged as a relatively straightforward theme based on a series of accounts in which participants referred to particular garments from their past toward which they had a strong sentimental connection. Importantly, most of these objects no longer existed and, therefore, were not available to the participants, offering a peculiar form of intangible and very emotional personal archives. But while this aspect of the theme was rather straightforward, it was the way in which the participants reported the desire of having these garments back nowadays that brought a certain level of complexity into the potential understanding of it, as explained for example

by Kevin (63): “I’ve had a thing about three-quarter-length coats ever since the ’60s when I came into possession of a three-quarter-length green leather coat, which was just the bee’s knees. You know... and I never wore anything else.... I lost it and I really wish I’d still got it. I’d probably have it framed.”

First, some participants reported their willingness to wear these garments again in the present. This suggests that the desire to rematerialize the idealized artifact can often be interpreted as their hidden wish to relive the joy they experienced while wearing those items.

Second, others reflected that, due to the changed trends in fashion, as well as their altered physicality, they would no longer wish nor be able to wear them. These participants still, however, had a strong desire to have them back, to look at them, and still be able to engage with them on a tactile level. It is in the situation of a material contact with the garment, and embodied and haptic experiences of it, that this desire to repossess the garment from the participants’ past came to function so distinctively.

This was an interesting idea and one which, to a designer, is especially intriguing. Taking this as a first step in the practical exploration of this theme, and returning to the relevant images and passages, a note was taken of all these sentimental garments as their owners explained them. The objects described by the participants were as follows: a green leather three-quarter-length coat (Kevin), Jonson’s *Clash of the Titans* shirt (Ian), and khaki green trousers, with zips from the ankle to the thigh so they could be worn in a tight or loose style (Henry). Design interpretation led to attempts to find a way to combine all these garments into one jacket, to create a form of a “fashion collage” using the key elements from each of these significant garments.

Next a second-hand jacket was purchased, which had both red and green stripes within its pattern. The significance of this garment was within retaining the colors that the participants mentioned as part of their “special” garments. Simultaneously, a mind-mapping exercise which was completed, through which the various possibilities of creating such a “collage” artifact were explored and visualised. Consequently, the jacket was produced with poppers on the bottom that could be used to elongate it to a three-quarter-length coat⁴ with inserted circular green leather collar.

At this stage, experimentation with different kinds of leather, as well as dyeing, printing, and embellishing was explored. However, none of these practices provided any stimuli or enhancement for understanding of the theme, which triggered the process of questioning this through reflective writing. It was



Figure 4.6 Ania Sadkowska, “Rematerializing”; sketchbook pages—“special” artifacts collages; the Rematerializing jacket; front and back. Photographs by Fraser West.

important for the understanding of the theme more generally, that somehow this struggle as a maker to utilize these elements was significant to the way the participants were able or not to wear these garments. Something really important was there; however, it evaded being verbalized, even to the researcher herself. Having looked through all the photos from the participants' pasts again, however this time looking not only at the garments but at the participants wearing them was particularly interesting in regards to the interplay between the garment and the body. In other words, gaining an understanding of the essence of the embodied experience of a fashion garment was important.

This triggered a second series of experimentations, this time questioning not the intended garment itself but to create the experience it could bring to its potential wearer. It was at this point when it was realized that, in fact, what these participants had shared and revealed about themselves was not only the importance of these objects, but even more significantly the memories of how they *felt* when wearing them. They all had very positive embodied experiences while wearing them and this realization informed me that the aims for this garment was to create something contemporary and wearable, yet something that would encompass those identified elements.

Having completed another series of drawings and collages (Figure 4.6), it was chosen to produce the design in which the original jacket collar was replaced by a circular green leather collar. This was a highly tactile experience of engaging with various materials and tools that, in turn, allowed for the exploration and expression of ideas via stimulating embodied responses. It was a simple, wearable, and contemporary solution appropriate for the participants which would also be appropriate for them to wear; furthermore, each of them would connect to those elements relevant to them while wearing it.

Summary

The approach outlined brings together a focused multimodal methodology using a novel method and is further exploited by the inclusion of a series of practical creative experimentations involving various tools, materials, and artifacts. The objects revealed as part of the participants' personal archives were unique for each participant and included garments, accessories, and photos. All of the study participants clearly expressed the importance of maintaining and preserving their personal archives; various past garments functioned as

reminders of their past fashion selves. In many instances the men reflected upon how they thought that their past bodies and experiences were imprinted on those garments which were often discussed with a tone of nostalgia over the elapsed time. At the same time these men presented themselves as forward-thinking fashion individuals, sensitive and responsive (yet selective) to quickly changing fashion trends and their aging physicality. In this sense these past objects were significant for the research process at the stage of data gathering because they worked as a stimulus for the conversation; and, while the body was not addressed explicitly by the interviewer, through describing and reflecting on these past objects, all of the participants discussed the body and bodily changes at great length.

Second, these past objects were important also at the stage of data analysis due to being able to experience them in a haptic way, that is to touch and feel the quality and texture of the fabric, see the colors, and inspect the details; such an embodied engagement was enabling to the creative practitioner. It was this series of embodied practical explorations that stimulated interpretation of the phenomenon under study; inevitably, some elements and details of these artifacts are represented in the garments produced. It could be argued that such complex data analysis was enhanced by the embodied, visual, and tactile interrogation of the participants' fashion and clothing archives, and thus permitted a stronger appreciation of the research material, which in turn enabled the production of highly interpretative written accounts and corresponding fashion artifacts. The process of interpreting through "making" facilitated development of alternative insights into the participants' lived experiences that could only be achieved through creative artful practices. The unique composition of the textual and visual research outcomes more fully represents the complexity of mature men's relationships with fashion and clothing as they grow older, and their bodies and outlooks change.

Notes

- 1 Here, informative and inspirational were designers such as Martin Margiela, Vivienne Westwood, Helmut Lang, and Rei Kawakubo whose works often allude to "the philosophical projects of deconstruction, to rethink the formal logic of dress itself" (Evans 2003: 250).
- 2 JOOP! Homme.
- 3 See, for example, catwalk collections from Christopher Raeburn S/S 2014, Sibling F/W 2015/16, or Moschino S/S 2016.

- 4 A three-quarter-length coat aesthetically alludes to a drape coat popular among the Teddy Boys and Mods in the 1950s and 1960s, once again highlighting the significance of the participants' past experiences of fashion and clothing and their individual histories.

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