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**Disembodied Garments  
and  
The Lost Garment Archive  
A Deep Exploration**

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**Disembodied Garments  
and  
The Lost Garment Archive  
A Deep Exploration**

**by**

**Jessica R Lowerre**

**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the garment workers who were victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911, the Rana Plaza Factory Collapse of 2013, and all other garment factory disasters.

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## **Abstract**

# **Disembodied Garments and The Lost Garment Archive A Deep Exploration**

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This is an artist's exploration of her materials. Costume Designers artfully combine their knowledge of dress with the bodies of performers in order to generate characters that convey narrative. A costume designer's medium is clothing, and the human body is the canvas. Just as a painter might deepen their knowledge of their art form by studying the qualities and histories of paints and pigments, I have engaged in an exploration of empty clothing in order to deepen my knowledge of Costume Design. I have explored this topic by studying sites where empty garments are gathered together, by generating and archiving a collection of empty garments, and presenting my work in an installation, The Lost Garment Archive.

Observing collections of empty clothing separated from the complexity of the human form offers insight into garment histories. Because garments are intrinsically connected to our bodies, their stories are our stories.

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## **Introduction**

There is a special moment during the costuming process when a performer puts on their whole costume and transforms into the character right before your eyes. It is a very satisfying moment for designer, performer, and the all people that support them. All have been working for months in order to bring this character to life in order to tell a story. The performer has been perfecting the embodiment of the character, while the designer has been perfecting the costume. The embodiment of character and costume together can result in a complete transformation. It's as if the consciousness of the character slips into the body of the performer, just as they are slipping into their costume.

The power of this kind of transformation is shared between both the bodies of performers, and the costumes that are designed for them. A designer responds to the body of the performer, and the way their bodies express the character, with their knowledge of dress practice and history. Together, they combine body and costume to create characters that convey narrative. Bodies and garments are the essential materials that are used in the art of costume design. In order to increase my knowledge and understanding of the Costume Design Process, I have sought a deeper understanding of its materials.

## **THE QUALITIES OF DRESS**

There are many ways to speak about dress practices, and many terms carry multiple meanings. "Dress," and "The practice of Dress" refer to any behavior performed by a body on a body that changes the way it is perceived by the senses as experienced by the dressed individual, and/or the individuals in their community. Modifications and

supplementations applied to the body during dress can be either temporary or permanent. The way that the body is seen, the visual sense perception, is the one most modified by dress, and many people consider that to be the only modification of note. However, the sense perceptions of sound, touch, smell, and even taste can be modified by dress behaviors. This requires us to include tattoos, the way the hair is groomed, skin care, diet, physical activities, and many other behaviors, in addition to the application of garments, when thinking about dress (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz 2000 4-24). Dress is an everyday, human experience. It is often overlooked as a matter of course. It seems like an innate or natural occurrence, like how all humans are born as infants and grow into adults over a period of years. However, the practice of dress differs from innate behaviors because it is learned.

Related to the practice of Dress are, “Clothing” and “Garments.” These are the objects, commonly made from textiles, that are worn on bodies. These terms can also refer to jewelry, accessories, or any other item applied to a body while practicing dress.

“Costume” has traditionally referred to the “total look” of an individual who is fully dressed. Archives of clothing are traditionally referred to as “costume archives” and the study of dress history as “costume history.” The current use of the term, however, commonly refers to a set of garments used to transform the visual presentation of one individual into a different individual or a character, usually for a performance, event, or holiday.

The practice of dress is a powerful tool. We have used this practice to expand our territory to include every continent on Earth. Although our bodies are capable of short-

and long-term physiological adaptations that have facilitated this expansion, the practice of dress allows us to adapt more quickly, and intentionally, to our environments (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz 2000 175-181). We can live and work in environments that are hostile to human survival. Without the garments that expand the capabilities of the human body, our species would only be able to thrive in temperate regions. We would also not be able to do the work required in our industrial and post-industrial economies without the protective garments that are used in factories, hospitals, and other dangerous worksites. Hard hats, scuba equipment, and medical masks are some examples of garments that either expand the capability of the body, or serve a purely protective function.

Dress is such an effective adaptation that it has even been witnessed in non-human species. The Sponge crab will carve a “hat” out of a piece of sponge that it will wear on its carapace. It serves as camouflage, disguising its tasty crabbiness with icky sponginess. The bearded vulture will rub its white feathers in iron rich dust, giving them a rusty-red hue, and, perhaps, displaying status, or serving an anti-parasitic function (Bates 2015).

The methods, materials, and reasons that we practice dress are varied and complex. Some important considerations for how an individual might dress themselves are described by Joanne B. Eicher, Sandra Lee Evenson, and Hazel A. Lutz in their book, “The Visible Self.” They describe how communities of people distinguish themselves from others by adhering to a shared dress code. Individuals prove their belonging to a community by adhering to its code, and practicing their dress in accordance with other members of the group. They can rebel by defying those codes. Such rebellions can be met

with fascination, amusement, and wonder at one end of the spectrum, and anger, banishment, and violence at the other. This censoring behavior that occurs within groups, also occurs between groups. Humans tend to view difference with suspicion.

Ethnocentrism can cause a person or community to believe that their way of life is natural, progressive, and right, while others' lifeways are unnatural, backwards, and wrong. This is why there can be so much cross-cultural misunderstanding concerning dress practices. What might be fashionable, comfortable, or empowering for individuals in one community, might be ugly, intimidating, or oppressive to those in another. The tension created between the intention and the interpretation of dress practices mirrors the tension between the needs of individuals and the needs of the community. It is a constant negotiation (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz 2000 48-50).

Beyond group association, dress can be used to communicate status, wealth, nationality, gender, occupation, and many more aspects of an individual's identity. Every person practices dress differently because every body is unique. Even when trying to achieve a similar visual presentation, different bodies will require different dress practices in order to achieve the same look. Additionally, every person is influenced differently by their cultures and communities and will balance their need for individual expression with their need to conform to societal expectations. (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz 2000).

## **RESEARCHING EMPTY GARMENTS VS. UNDRESSED BODIES**

When I began researching topics for my thesis, I knew I wanted to focus on the materials of a costume designer, human bodies and garments. I began to see garments as a much more accessible area of research compared to bodies.

It would have been difficult to focus my research on Human bodies separated from clothing since encountering such bodies is very rare. Most people, over a certain age, practice some kind of dress. Infants are an exception because they are not able to dress themselves. They lack agency and must be dressed by a caretaker. So, we often encounter undressed infant bodies. Another exception where we might encounter undressed human bodies is when they are being forced through a dehumanizing process, as in when prisoners are stripped of their clothing upon intake into a correctional facility. The intent is to take away their humanity, or at least their individuality. This is accomplished through the removal of their chosen garments, and the enforcement of nakedness or conformity.

We encounter empty garments in a variety of spaces every day, in our closets, clothing stores, etc. Indeed, empty garments seem to be a universal presence in the human experience. I chose to focus my research on garments separated from the complexity of the human body to see if there was a simple, universal aspect to our garments that is obscured by the usual presence of the human form.

## **Chapter 1: Sites of Disembodied Garments**

I began to investigate all of the different places clothing exists without the body. I wondered which people or forces were forming these collections, what effect did those people and forces have, what distinguished these places from one another, and how that distinction was reflected in the collections of items they contained. Furthermore, I wondered what stories and characters were present in these collections of clothing. I did a theoretical exploration of some sites of disembodied garments including clothing of the deceased, archives of clothing, costume stocks, the garment industry, second-hand clothing, individual wardrobes, the waste stream, and lost garments.

### **CLOTHING OF THE DECEASED**

This category includes garments that belong to people who are no longer living. They carry a feeling that, although the body is gone, the individual continues to own these garments. The full collection of garments left in a wardrobe after a death is not often kept together. Many items change ownership by being sold, given away, or thrown away. However, some garments carry such a strong connection to the deceased person that they cannot be parted with easily. They remain in the possession of their loved ones and continue to represent them emotionally, visually, and physically.

My grandmother, Marion Thomas Lowerre, passed away the summer after I graduated from high school. She loved to sew, and would spend most of her free time making gifts for others. Occasionally, she would make herself a new shirt. They had short sleeves, a fall collar, and buttons on the front. She made them from calico fabric. Most

were light or navy blue with small printed flowers. She had over 50 of these shirts when she passed away. Some of them were soft and faded from years of wear. They were items that she had made for herself, worn every day, and had come to represent the essence of who she was. We have turned her shirts into quilts that have given my family a great deal of comfort. They look and feel like her.

Empty garments owned by the deceased hold a strong connection for their living loved ones. They remain as powerful examples of who the person was. It is interesting to note which garments maintain this connection and which do not. It is also interesting to note whose garments remain meaningful, and whose are discarded easily. The selection of garments speaks to the memories of those who are still living and how they remember deceased persons.

## **ARCHIVES OF CLOTHING**

The Victoria and Albert Museum maintains one of the largest collections of garments spanning from ancient Egypt to modern times (V&A · Fashion). Their mission is to “enrich people's lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience.” (V&A · About Us). Museums, enthusiasts, and historians collect and maintain empty garments in archives, making them available for future study and enjoyment. These items are sourced from a variety of spaces including archeological sites, cluttered and neglected family homes, donations from family archivists who have kept the material record of their predecessors, and unsold clothing stock from closed and neglected stores (Taylor 2004 4-15).

The purpose of a garment changes when it enters the archive. It was an item of dress meant to be applied to a human form. It is rarely ever worn by a human body again after it is entered into an archive. Instead, it serves as a precious document that reveals information about when, where, why, and how it was created, who wore it, and who bought it. It remains as trace evidence of those human stories and experiences (Taylor 2004 18).

Archives of clothing are a rich resource for costume designers and students of dress history. However, it is important to note how and why these sources are incomplete. They can only contain those garments that can be accessed. Disintegrated garments are lost to history because they no longer exist in their physical form. Although records may still exist within pieces of art or sculpture, they do not have the same quality as the garment itself. Garments may also be lost to history when families and foundations in possession of old garments do not donate those items to institutions, choosing not to share them with the wider public. Depending on their emotional and/or economic value, they may be destroyed, sold, given away, or thrown away before anyone ever thinks of entering them into an archive (Taylor 2004 4-21).

Limited space causes costume archives to contain only those garments that the curators have acquired and deemed most important. When Sarah Scaturro came to the University of Texas to speak about her work as the Head Conservator at the Metropolitan Costume Institute, she admitted that womenswear made up a significantly larger percentage of the archive than menswear and children's wear (Scaturro 2017). Women's garments serve as better historical markers than menswear because of their significant



fashion changes over shorter periods of time (Taylor 2004 12). Many of the items that end up in the archives are high class, special occasion garments because these symbols of opulence are more likely to be saved than less flashy items. This means that lower class, everyday garments are underrepresented in archives of clothing. Even with these shortcomings, archives of garments represent a major source of knowledge and inspiration.

### **COSTUME STOCK**

Costume stocks, or rental houses, are a resource for film, television, theatre, and live performance projects. They are usually found in stand-alone warehouses, or within a theatre building. They hold empty garments that have been made, or bought, for previous productions. After a show closes, or a shoot ends, the costumes are cleaned, sorted, and stored in costume stocks and remain available for future productions.

With limited space, the garments that remain in stock must meet certain requirements. Unlike items in traditional archives of clothing, which will never be worn again, the items stored in costume stock must remain functional for performance, meaning that the garment must be able to be worn by a person during a performance without injuring their body, falling off, or impeding whatever physical activity is required. Garments that are rented more often, or are harder to find elsewhere, are more likely to be stored in costume stock. Men's collared shirts are used often in theatrical productions, and are easy to store, so costume stocks usually keep a wide array of them. Unique items, like a handmade 17<sup>th</sup> century fairy ball gown, and all of its required

undergarments, are difficult to source and must often be made new for performances, unless they have been made previously, and stored in costume stock for future use.

Garments found in these collections reference the bodies that wore, built, and designed them. The bodies that wore them leave their trace in sweat, body oils, wear and tear, and nametags. (I recently performed alterations on a dress that was once worn by Michelle Pfeiffer that still had her nametag in it.) Garments that are specially made for a performance are produced by Drapers and other costume technicians in costume shops. They employ traditional and modern techniques when they create these pieces, and their craftsmanship is evident in their work. The look, style, and materials of these garments is determined by the costume designer. Indeed, practically everything within a costume stock will have been designed or decided on by people serving a design role.

When we read into the collection of garments in a costume stock, we can learn about the kinds of stories that have been told by those garments, what periods in history are popular for setting stories, and the kinds of bodies that have been used to tell them. The garments that are absent, however, may be even more informative. Many costume stocks that I have entered contain a small “Ethnic” section with garments from, not only many non-western countries, but many different centuries, all in the same section. This lack of multicultural garments illustrates the predominance of western stories that get told in the theatres associated with the costume stocks that I frequent. I would be curious to see if this pattern was common among most costume stocks.

## **PERSONAL CLOSETS AND WARDROBES**

I define a wardrobe as the complete set of resources that an individual uses in order to create their visual expression of self. We can only wear a certain number of garments at a time, and we do not, generally, wear the same things every day. So, we collect and maintain sets of empty garments in our closets and drawers. These make up the majority of our wardrobes.

Wardrobes broadcast a lot about the individual who owns them. From a purely physical perspective, they give information about the size and shape of the individual, and how it may have changed. Garments will also tell us about their activities, gender identity, color preferences, age, group associations, style preferences, occupation, shopping habits, brand preferences, and how these aspects have changed over time.

As I have been thinking through my work, wardrobes feel like the next space of exploration because of the dense information they contain about each individual and their identity. I can imagine documenting the contents of an individual's wardrobe garment by garment. I hypothesize that I would learn a lot about the categories listed above and how wardrobes reflect personalities.

## **THE GARMENT INDUSTRY**

Humans have been making garments for millennia. In some cultures, and locations, it may be possible for an individual to make all of the garments that they, themselves, wear. In most traditions, however, the manufacturing of garments is a complex task that requires many differently skilled craftspeople. Common processes involved in the manufacturing of garments include cultivating the fiber, processing it and

spinning it into yarn, weaving the yarn into cloth, and transforming that two-dimensional material into a three-dimensional garment by cutting the cloth and sewing it back together. Garments do not even have to be made of cloth, adding another realm of possibilities for different kinds of garments and ways of manufacturing them. The artistry of a craftsperson has the potential to be present within any and every step of this process resulting in a remarkably complex art form (Zahn, Gliszczyński, Suhrbier, & Raabe 2016).

The Industrial Revolution began in the textile business. Since then, the manufacturing of fabric has moved out of the home and small shops, into mass-production facilities. Although progress is being made in automation, the basic manufacturing unit of the garment industry currently remains an individual person, moving a needle through a piece of fabric, one stitch at a time (Entwistle 2015 213). In order to increase their profits, many garment manufacturers attempt to scale up production while keeping their costs low. They create a more efficient factory line by reducing the number of actions performed by individual employees. They may move their facility to a lower income nation, where workers do not have to be paid as much. They may cut corners on safety procedures and equipment to save time and money. They may overwork their current employees instead of hiring more. To get away with this, facilities are often established in places with weak regulations or little oversight (Zahn, Gliszczyński, Suhrbier, & Raabe 2016). All of these unfortunate decisions result in a lower quality of life for the lowest level employees. There is a stark difference in value

between the bodies of those who make clothing, and the bodies for whom clothing is made (Entwistle 2015 208-244).

New garments are manufactured in anticipation of consumer demand. There is a part of the fashion industry that studies this demand and production cycle like a science. Through observation and analysis of their consumer, and the application of marketing techniques, brands are able to generate both the objects of consumer desire, and the desire itself.

When observing what garments a particular store carries in their stock, one can learn about their intended customer. A store can appeal to a certain gender by carrying menswear versus womenswear, to families with children by carrying both children's clothing and adult's, to niche markets, such as "DXL Men's Warehouse" a store for men who are extra-large and larger, and certain subcultures by carrying those styles and garments used by those consumers, such as ties and suits for professionals and spikes and chains for punk rockers. All of these choices speak to the intended market of the company.

## **SECOND HAND CLOTHING**

Garments can move through the fashion system more than once. Thrift stores, garment charities, consignment stores, fashion resale shops, and vintage stores are spaces where gently used garments are sold or given to new owners.

Thrift stores, such as The Salvation Army and Goodwill, accept donations of garments, home goods, electronics, books and more. Items that are too worn out or dirty

are separated from those that can be resold. Unsellable items may be recycled or discarded. The sellable items are sorted into categories and put out for sale on the shop floor. Charities operate in a similar way, only they give the donated items away for free to the homeless and needy. Consignment stores do not accept donations, but rather sell items on behalf of the original owner who receives a percentage of the sale. A fashion resale shop, such as Buffalo Exchange or Plato's Closet, will buy clothing from their customers in exchange for cash or store credit. Vintage stores collect and sell curated sets of clothing from past decades. All of these locations help to extend the lives of garments by connecting them with new owners. They also provide space for used items to re-enter the market, extending their economic influence, and decreasing their environmental impact.

Items are donated to thrift shops from all kinds of people for many different reasons. An individual's clothing might be donated after they have passed away. Items that no longer fit after weight loss, weight gain, or surgery might be donated. A person may experience a personal change that gets reflected in a new wardrobe, in this case, the old wardrobe might get donated. A desire to minimize the number of belongings an individual owns will lead them to donate their surplus.

Items are donated to charities for similar reasons, but those reasons may also include feelings of generosity, duty, or guilt. Some garment charities collect only certain items, like business wear or winter coats, and distribute them to particular communities in need of those garments. Individuals may also purchase and donate new items, especially socks and underwear. They do this because the idea of sharing these items between

strangers is unsavory. It is interesting to note that the availability of low cost, low quality clothing donated to third world countries has decreased the demand for traditional garment production. As a result, many traditional garment manufacturing techniques are being lost and forgotten (Zahn, Gliszczyński, Suhrbier, & Raabe 2016).

A need or desire for extra money may encourage someone to sell their clothing in a consignment store or fashion resale shop. They are also lower cost options for someone who enjoys changing their wardrobe often. These spaces will often maintain a certain aesthetic, or level of quality in their stock. So, they are pickier about which items they accept and sell when compared to thrift stores and charity locations.

Vintage stores sell a feeling of nostalgia with their retro collections. They do not source their stock from donations or customers, like the other second-hand sites. The buyers for these locations are actually quite secretive about where they source their garments. Traditionally, buyers would hand pick items from thrift stores, estate sales, and collectors (Messy 2017). A recent trend has been to source from bulk suppliers, like Bulk Vintage Warehouse, who will sell unsorted vintage items by weight (Saslow). The clothing put out for sale is highly curated to suit a certain aesthetic, like consignment and fashion resale shops. The prices can vary quite widely depending on the quality, and type of garment.

These spaces represent a kind of garment limbo where items could languish unowned, be resurrected to a new life with a new owner, thrown away, bundled with thousands of other unwanted items and shipped away, or sent to a textile recycling company. The intersection of histories and different economic and personal needs that are

served by these spaces make them interesting sites to observe the flow of pre-owned, disembodied clothing.

### **The Waste Stream**

Human waste tends to be gathered together in spaces that are, ideally, distant from where humans live. Empty garments that have been thrown away can be found in the spaces where human waste travels and gathers. They enter the waste stream in a variety of ways. Individuals may discard clothing that is worn out or no longer suits them. Although some garments get reused or converted into other things, like rags or insulation, they also eventually move into the waste stream. Unsold clothing might be thrown away by retailers or factories, and is sometimes destroyed before being thrown away to prevent consumers from wearing the items without purchasing.

The items we find in the waste stream can relate back to their previous owners, but en masse they lose their individual meaning and speak more about the current fashion system and consumer practices. The EPA estimates that 10,530 thousand tons of textiles went into American landfills in 2015. This number has increased from 6,280 thousand tons in 2000, 4,270 tons in 1990, and 2,320 tons in 1980. The main source of this textile waste is discarded garments. The increase in waste is mirrored by an increase in production (EPA 2018). The increase in the speed and quantity of garment production, and the disposable nature of these items, has facilitated the increase of garment waste that we are experiencing.



## **LOST GARMENTS**

Lost garments exist in a liminal state, between being owned and being trash. They are on their way through the waste stream after having recently been separated from their owners. Lost garments we encounter may have been on a body before falling off on accident, in a gym bag or backpack before being dropped, or in a laundry basket on the way to the laundromat. Some items may have been deliberately abandoned. They are technically in the waste stream, but they do not feel like trash because they carry the trace of their previous owner. The lost garments we encounter were left by a previous person traveling through the same, or nearby, space. They are evidence of a vague shared experience between the body that has discovered the item and the body that lost it. There is often as much information given from the context of discovery (where the item was found) as from the item itself.

Although I am interested in all of these sites of disembodied clothing, I chose to focus on lost garments for an archive project and eventual thesis presentation. Since lost garments are not typically collected for an intended audience or purpose, I assumed that the contents of my collection would be quite random. I was curious about what kinds of garments I would find by studying them. I wondered, without knowing the past or future of these items, is it possible to gain any understanding of the meaning that they hold within them? What can the context of discovery tell us about the previous owner?

## **Chapter 2: The Lost Garment Archive**

I began a collection of Lost Garments as an assignment in an Anthropology course at The University of Texas at Austin called “Archives and Ephemera” that was taught by Dr. Craig Campbell in the Fall semester of 2017. The assignment was to create a collection, and experience the archival process.

A collection is a group of materials that all have something in common. A collection becomes an archive when it is stored in a way that makes it accessible, searchable, and useful for a future purpose. An archive is not only the collection of materials, but can also be the place where it is stored, whether it be physically, or digitally (Zeitlyn 2012).

I had been noticing the lost and abandoned garments in my everyday life and was immediately interested in documenting them for my project. I knew I would have a lot of material, so I felt confident about generating a collection of size. I also knew that the subject matter was deeply connected to the human story, although I was unsure of how much story could be held in an empty garment, or even a collection of them. I was able to look into these garments in a deeper way through the archival process. I hoped that the archive I would create could become a worthwhile tool for myself, other storytellers, and other students of dress.

I began by taking pictures and gathering the items. However, I quickly discovered that I would not be able to archive physical items effectively with the space and resources that were at my disposal. I was also troubled by the idea of accidentally stealing an item. If I left the items I felt were going to be found, and only took the ones I was “sure” were

lost, my collection would be incomplete. I also discovered that I did not want to possess many of these items as they were filthy. I decided to take detailed pictures of each garment and document metadata with the pictures. In this way, I began creating a digital archive.

## **THE PROCESS**

I stored the first version of the archive in an Evernote folder. Evernote is an application usually used for taking notes or writing papers. I thought that, with this system, I could create a visual, searchable, and shareable archive that would be of value for future students.

My process began with noticing a lost garment. I developed a habit of scanning my surroundings for textiles. I experienced a sense of excitement whenever I happened upon a garment. It is interesting to note that I was sometimes fooled by the corpse of a bird or squirrel. Their fur and feathers are a lot like our clothing, even in how they reflect light. I struggled with whether to add them to the archive or not. An argument could be made that an individual's consciousness wears and, eventually, discards their physical bodies. However, I was not prepared to defend this argument. So, these bodies remained undocumented.

I would begin taking pictures after confirming that the object was a garment. I would take pictures of it as I had found it, trying to capture the context of the site. I would also manipulate the garment so I could take a picture of it laid out. I would store those pictures as a note to my Evernote folder. Along with the photos, I could add a title

and text to each note. I would title the note in a simple way with the kind of garment it was and maybe something interesting about it or how I found it. The archive was also numbered at this time. In the text, I would enter the time, date, location (street or building names, city, state etc.) a detailed physical description, what I was doing when I found it, and what the items made me wonder about. Here is a sample of an entry from that archive:

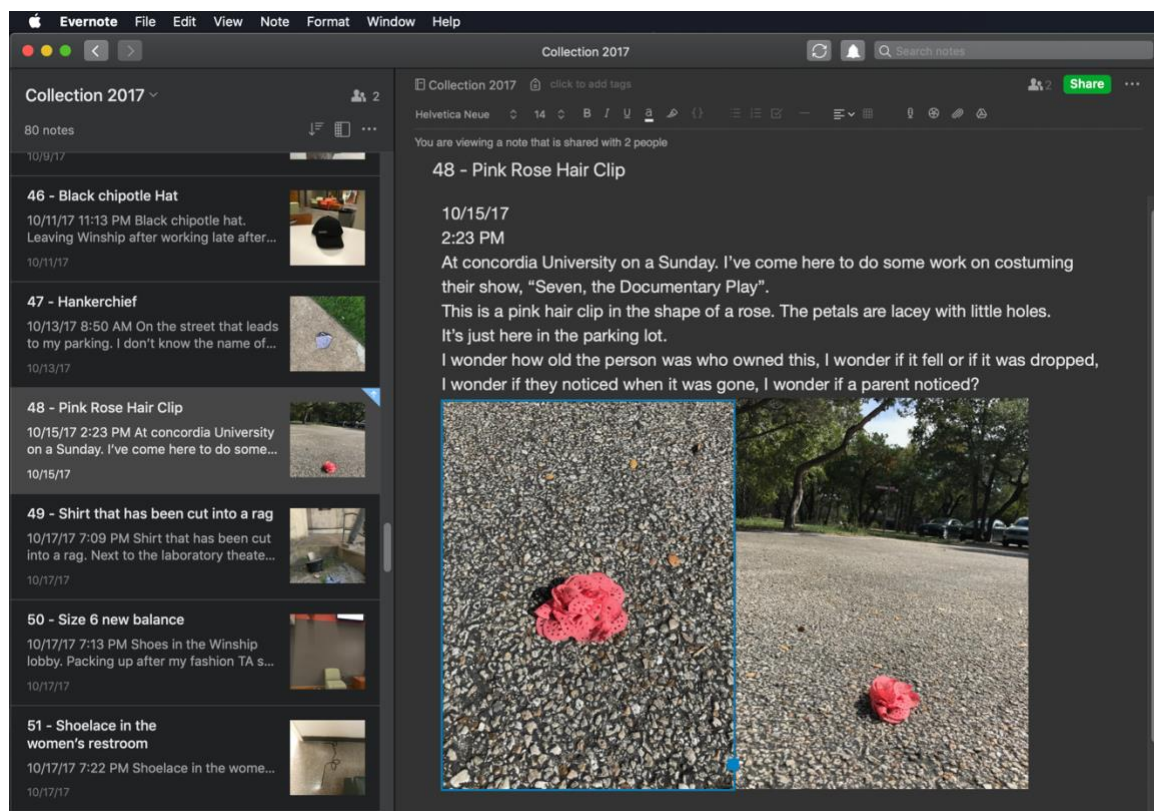


Figure 1: Screen capture of an Evernote Entry

While the process was rather quick, it was still tedious and I was longing for a simpler system. I also had mixed feelings about including so much about myself in each entry. What value was there in describing my activity? How much was my biased

perspective affecting the objectivity of the archive? Nevertheless I continued gathering in this way in order to complete the project. When it came time to turn it in, I found that I had not used the “tag” function properly, making the archive difficult to search and impossible to sort in any meaningful way. Additionally, it was difficult to share with my professor. Overall, I was disappointed in the manner I had chosen to store the archive.

For my final class project using the archive, I attempted to generate characters from the items I had found. I wondered if I could generate a complete and complex characters only from items of dress. I set up a rule that the items had to have been found in proximity to each other in space, but not in time. I documented a hard hat, safety vest, dust mask, safety glasses, and various work gloves in the area behind the theatre building, and created the character of a construction worker. In student-frequented spaces at the University of Texas, I documented a pair of red sunglasses, a black sweater, a black scrunchie, and a pair of yoga pants, and created the character of an undergraduate female student. In similar spaces, I documented a pair of apple earbuds, a baseball cap, a pair of boxer shorts, and a maroon polo shirt, and created a male UT student. In Grant Park, in Chicago, I documented some baby socks, a baby’s knit cap, a baby’s bib, and a fitted zipper hoodie, and created a mother and baby. I created costume renderings of these characters with references to the items that they were wearing from the archive. Engaging in this process led me to discover the ease of character creation from a costume reference. I could develop four distinct characters from sets of completely disembodied garments without a script or any other kind of character description.



Figure 2: Renderings of a Construction Worker, Female UT Student, Male UT Student, and Chicagovan Mother and Child.

The success of my final project led me to believe that the archive I was creating could be of some value and interest. I chose to pursue the archive as part of my thesis research. As I moved forward, however, I chose to archive with two different methodologies.

I created an Instagram account, @LostGarmentStories, and set about transferring the archive from Evernote onto Instagram. Having the archive on social media made it easy to share and gave my work some much needed exposure. This was important to me since it sparked conversations with my peers, and proved even more that my archive could connect with an interested audience. From an aesthetic perspective, it felt right that the anonymous lost garments of the archive were being shared in the anonymity of an online space. Instagram seems to work best when only one picture is shared at a time. So, I chose just one photo of each garment to share. I also reduced the amount of metadata, including only the facts about where and when I found each item, and what the item was.

I plan to continue posting, so you, whoever is reading this, might still be able to view the Instagram collection. If not, here is an example of a post. You will notice that it only contains one picture, and does not include any information about my activities or thoughts.

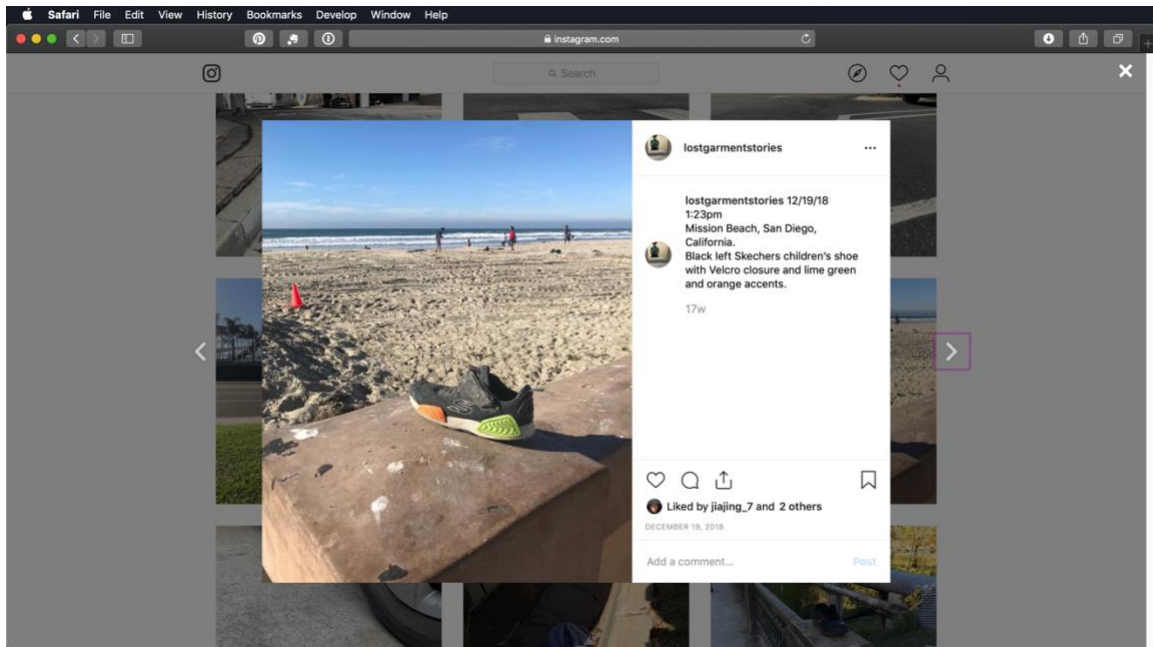


Figure 3: Screen capture of the @LostGarmentStories Instagram Collection

While I am satisfied with how sharable the collection is on Instagram, it does not qualify as an archive, since it cannot be searched or sorted systematically. If an interested party were to ask me a simple question like, “How many hats did you find?” I would not be able to find that answer using my Instagram collection. One of the joys of the archival process is analyzing its contents in an attempt to discover its patterns. Since I had been using my Apple iPhone to take photos for the archive all along, I decided to use Apple’s Photos program to form a complete, and functional, Lost Garment Archive.

There is an “info” box associated with each picture in Apple Photos. One can add data to the info box including titles, descriptions, and tags. Having learned from my previous experience with Evernote, I decided to excessively tag each photo with the following information: color, garment type (shirt, hat, bra, etc.), intended area of the body



(head, torso, hands, legs, feet, or accessory), found inside or outside, in the street, on the sidewalk, in a parking lot, or classroom. The tags allow me to search and sort the archive effectively. If an interested party asks me, “How many hats are in the archive?” I can easily do a quick search and give them an answer. As it stands, the archive contains 17 hats.

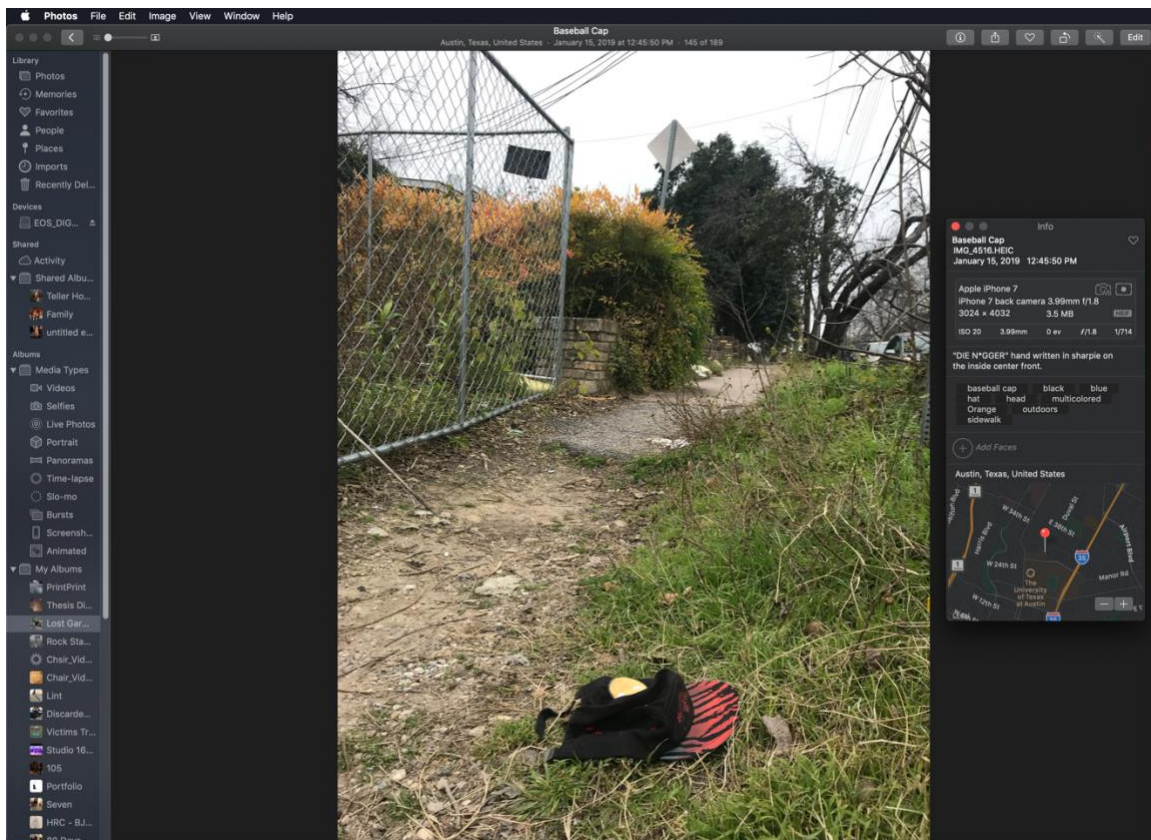


Figure 4: Screen capture of an Apple Photos Lost Garment Archive Entry with info box.

I had enabled my geolocation settings so the program would automatically store where the photo was taken. The archive can also be sorted into where the items were found by using the tags. 40 entries were found indoors, versus 133 outdoors. 6 entries were found in classrooms, 12 in parks, 11 in parking lots, 29 on sidewalks, and 28 in a

street. There were 98 entries found on the University of Texas at Austin's campus. The geolocation feature makes the user able to view the archive on a map. This map visually reflects how I have moved through space over that last two years that I have been collecting entries for the archive.

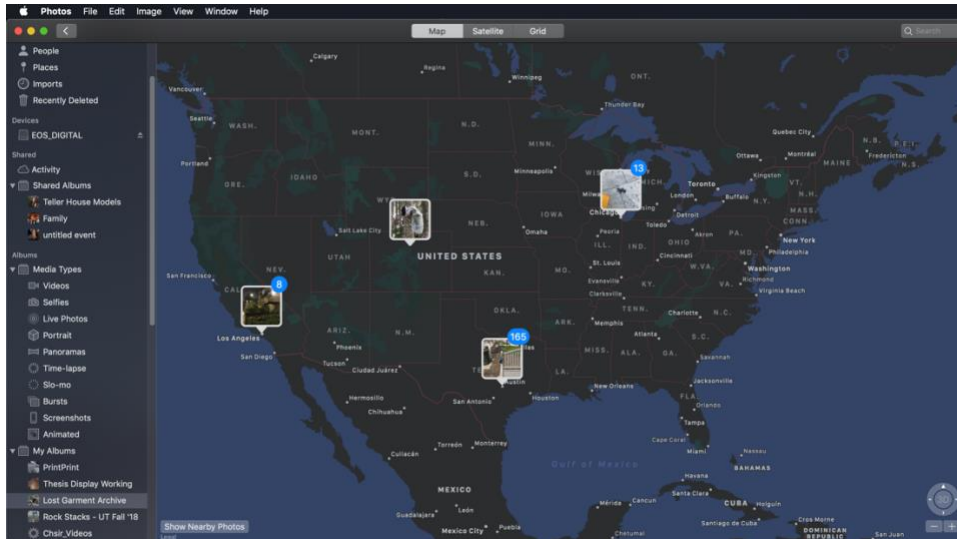


Figure 5: Screen Capture of the Lost Garment Archive Apple Photos Map, United States of America.

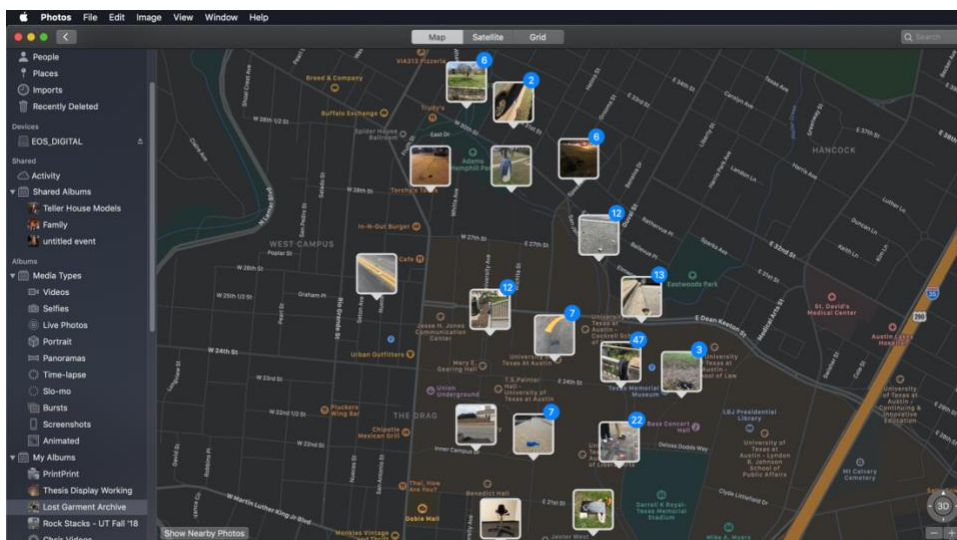


Figure 6: Screen Capture of The Lost Garment Archive Apple Photos Map, University of Texas at Austin, between Lamar Blvd and IH 35, and MLK Jr. BLVD and 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

I found that the simplest way to categorize the archive was by the intended area of the body. These five groups included items worn on the head, torso, hands, legs, or feet. I created two additional categories, one for accessories, which can be worn on various areas of the body, and one for “groups” for when multiple items were found together. As it currently stands, the archive contains 45 garments intended for the head, 46 for the torso, 24 for hands, 11 for legs, 37 for feet, 20 accessories, and 14 group entries. Using these seven categories is not a perfect way to sort the archive (the group entries, for example, tend to get counted multiple times) but is a very accessible way to view the archive since all people are familiar with the parts of the human body, and the seven categories are able to encompass all of the entries without omissions.

## **THE INSTALLATION**

I wanted to host an event where a live audience could encounter and interact with the archive. My goals for the installation included presenting the most complete version possible, and for the audience to be able to navigate and interact with the installation. Presenting the complete archive was important because sharing it in its entirety was, for me, a marker of success. The ability of the audience to navigate the archive was important because I did not want my guests to feel lost. I did not want the organization of the archive to interfere with the audience’s exploration and enjoyment.

I also wanted my presentation to be site-specific. I wanted the space of my presentation to be in conversation with the archive. I partnered with Treasure City Thrift, an employee owned thrift shop in Austin Texas. They are a socially responsible company

whose mission includes zero-waste practices, an alternative economic structure, public education, supporting underserved and marginalized communities, and supporting artists (*About Us*, Treasure City Thrift). I was partnered with a member of their community, Semente, an artist and PhD student in African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. We worked together to plan my thesis installation around the needs of the business. I was allowed one evening after closing to install, present, and break down my archive. Most traditional archives have a sense of permanence, so the presentation of my archive felt relatively ephemeral. This feeling reflected the ephemeral qualities of the garments in my project.

I intended to take responsibility for all of the materials I used in my presentation. I created six walls for my display out of white wire hangers. I hung each wall of hangers on a rolling “z-rack” from the costume department. I had a picture of each garment in the archive printed at a Photo Center. I stamped a form to fill out onto the back of each photo. The form had spaces to fill out that matched all of the metadata stored in the archive. In order for the images to hang nicely in a way that allowed the audience to interact with them, I used an overlock machine to surge the two long sides of each picture, leaving a loose loop of surged threads at the top. This loop went around the hooks on the wall of hangers.

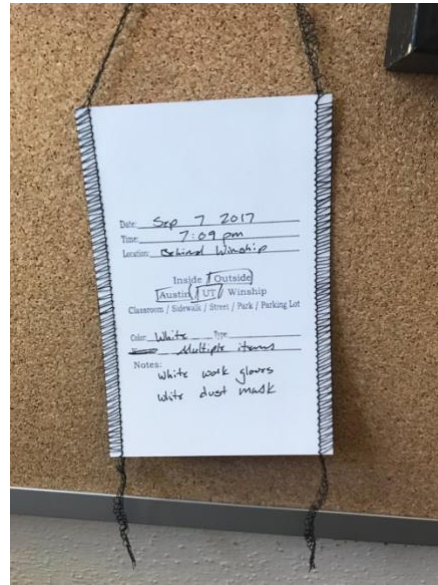


Figure 7: Front and back images of a photo document from The Lost Garment Archive Installation

The archive was divided into six sections, the garments' intended areas of the body, with items intended for legs, and group entries hanging together. Each section was hung on its own hanger wall in the installation. A plastic bin was placed near each rack to gather garment donations brought by audience members. Having the audience bring garments to donate, and having them sort them themselves into the bins, facilitated an initial tour of the archive. After sorting their garments, audience members were familiar with how the archive was organized and could continue their exploration on their own.





Figure 8: Jessi Rose (author) posing in front of The Lost Garment Archive Installation at Treasure City Thrift Store.

I had my laptop with the Apple Photos version of the archive open and accessible. Having this version of the archive available during the event facilitated discussions with my audience, and helped make up for any deficiencies in the display. The map was an especially popular feature since it demonstrated the relationship between my experience and the contents of the archive.

There were snacks, drinks and music. The installation was ready right on time as audience members began arriving. They sorted their garments and navigated the archive effectively. The store's register remained open and some audience members took the

opportunity to do some shopping. I was serving as a docent for the archive and was there to hand out catalogues and encourage the audience to interact with the photos.

The audience had many questions about my process. Some wondered how I had curated the archive and were surprised when I told them that the installation included all of the entries I had created, and omitted only those gathered so recently as to not have been processed in time for the display. My experience was, therefore, the only curatorial force in the archive. Some wondered how I had determined whether an item was lost, or merely left (especially those items I documented inside a theatre building). I explained that, in those situations, I had to make a judgment call, and generally included any items that were alone, even if it seemed likely that their owner would return for them later. Since I was not gathering the physical items, I did not see a harm in being overzealous.

The audience made several observations of the archive. One guest noted the unexpected emotional impact of the “feet” section. This surprised me because I had felt uninspired by those socks and shoes. This demonstrated my bias and proved to me that any garment can carry emotional weight and meaning. Guests were intrigued and inspired by the kind and quality of data included in each garment entry, and found them to be excellent “jumping off points” for stories. This makes me excited about the possible future uses for this archive and archives like it.

I was surprised by the popularity of a single entry. It was an image of a tree with two trunks that split close to the ground. Someone had applied a pair of jeans to the tree, adding panels of denim to the side seams in order to make them fit. This created the impression of a wooden figure diving into the ground. I had questioned whether to

include this image in the archive because the jeans were not lost, but rather deliberately placed as a piece of graffiti art. I am glad it was included since it expresses some of the fantasy and whimsy of the stories that humans tell.



Figure 9: Lost Garment Archive Entry – Jeans artfully applied to a tree.

The accurate history of the garments within the archive remains elusive. Without making assumptions, it is impossible to ascertain the actual age, sex, gender, career, past or future of the individual who owned the garment. I discovered that these elusive facts might not be important. The value of the archive is in the way it inspires stories and characters. What is revealed by the garments in the archive is the universal understanding of the dressed human experience, and the stories that our dress helps to tell.



## **Conclusion**

I plan to continue documenting lost garments and adding them to the Instagram collection and the Apple Photos Archive. I hope to create more archives, perhaps of individual wardrobes, in order to continue my study of disembodied garments. I hope that my work inspires storytellers, and students of dress.

I have discovered that, even when attempting to study garments that are separate from the human form, an empty garment will always reference the absent body. That body could belong to the person who made it, wore it, or will wear it. The intention of a garment is to be applied to a body, and clothing is made by people for this purpose. We need garments because the human experience is dressed. So, when we study the meanings and histories held within empty garments, we study the meanings and histories of ourselves and each other. Exploring this essential relationship has given me a great deal of insight into the histories of garments and how they might add nuance to a costume design. Furthermore, it has given me an appreciation of the dressed human experience that we all share.

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## **Vita**

Jessica Rose Lowerre was born in Orange County California. After completing her work at Troy High School, she attended Fullerton Community College and transferred to California State University Fullerton, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology in 2010. She returned to Fullerton Community College and completed four costume trade certificates in Stitching, Wardrobe, Cutting and Draping, and Assistant Costume Design in 2016. In August of 2016, she entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin.

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This thesis was typed by Jessica Rose Lowerre.