

A Short Introduction to the Film *Glove and Touch Studies*

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Kerstin Kraft is Professor of Cultural Studies of Fashion and Textiles at the University of Paderborn, Germany. **Susanne Schmitt** is a sociocultural anthropologist and sensory ethnographer and facilitator. **Laurie Young** is a dance artist who focuses on the embodiment of unauthorized histories and their representation. **Regina Lösel** studied Comparative Textiles, Art History, Philosophy and Cultural Studies. **Andrea Keiz** is a video artist, biologist and dance pedagogue.



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Moving beyond the research of others' movement experiences and traces, *Glove and Touch Studies*, a fourteen-minute film essay, foregrounds the movement experiences of the research team itself.

This film is part of the research project “Dresses in Motion: An Object-Based Examination of Clothing as a Reconstruction of Movement in the Textile Form,” which received funding from the *VolkswagenStiftung* conducted from 2015 to 2021. During the project, we held transdisciplinary workshops focusing on object-based research. To share our insights and experiences while considering the pandemic's limitations, we chose video calls as the research medium. We collaborated with a videographer to document the process by producing a film designed and realized as a methodological experiment.

Initially, we experimented with the medium of film, with the inherent distance and simultaneous intimacy of virtual workshops held via Zoom. The selection of the research object was significantly influenced by the research format. The pandemic forced us to completely rethink our research concept and approach. Originally, we planned to use the museum archive to generate expansive movements related to the site's spatiality. However, the pandemic forced us to downsize these movements to make them suitable for the space between the desk and the mobile phone holder.

In order to be able to show more than just garment details, we chose an item of clothing that was small, easily accessible to everyone, and commonly found in households.

The choice came down to the glove (the German word “Handschuh” combines the body part “hand” with the word “shoe,” which derives etymologically from “barn”). The manageable, ready-at-hand, and easily available became the focus of the inquiry (in German, these terms all contain the word “hand”), and as we dealt with the clothing of the hands, the originally expansive body movements we had imagined prior to the pandemic were now reduced to hand movements and gestures. The film’s authors sent each other “gloveboxes” containing different types of gloves and wrapping materials, filmed the unboxing, researched cultural studies literature, exchanged ideas via video call, conducted simultaneous movement exercises on-screen, and developed their own unique approaches.

The outputs of this process — object-like, textual, and immaterial — came together, and what was initially conceived as an experiment is now ready to be shared.

The workshops, experiments, and the resulting film serve two main purposes: first, to shift the research focus onto a subject that is widely neglected in cultural studies – textiles and dresses, here: the glove; second, to engage in a transdisciplinary collaboration that develops new formats of its own.

Glove and Touch Studies therefore contain elements of artistic research strategies, scientific research methods, as well as the evaluation of implicit (body) knowledge to develop a common, visual, gestural, and object-associated language.

What was special about this collaboration was the associative working attitude filled with curiosity, disregarding academic categories, disciplinary ideas, and origins, and giving space to the object. During this process, we met virtually about once a month for recording sessions. Accordingly, the film did not follow a script but consisted of the edited sequences of the Zoom meetings fueled by object-driven inquiry, choreographic scores, and physical-material improvisation prompted by artworks from M.C. Escher or Erwin Wurm, as well as by philosophical and archival/cultural-historical literature. In retrospect, the description of our project reveals a kind of theoretical framework. We discussed concrete texts (Ingold 2010; Barad 2012, Marks 2014) and worked associatively with images and terms, drawing on concepts from Donna Haraway, Erin Manning, Gilles Deleuze, and Vilém Flusser.



Figure 1 Filmstill 1 provides an impression of the experimental character in dealing with the gloves and textile materials.

We never intended to reflect these discussions in the film, and due to length constraints, many other interesting aspects and themes had to be omitted from the film. I aim to explore some of these themes and develop them further in the remainder of this article.

The cultural and social significance of the glove as a simple item of clothing has already been researched in the history of fashion and dress studies. A number of studies explore concrete cultural studies questions, such as the work by historian Ariel Beaujot (2002). In her differentiated analysis, she follows the (Foucaultian) insight that belonging to a class is inscribed in the body (Beaujot 2002, p. 32) and that gender is constructed equally through gestures and movements. She argues that the glove was an important component in constructing Victorian femininity. Another scholar who delves into the study of gloves is Susan Vincent (2012). Her research focuses on the period around 1900, which she identifies as the heyday of the glove (Vincent 2012, p. 190). In her work, she names some reasons for the subsequent decline of the glove, such as the emergence of tanned skin as a new ideal and a shift towards more practical fashion for women since the 1920s. A more recent publication on the subject, “Gloves: An Intimate History” by Anne Green (2022), provides an excellent overview of the cultural history of the glove and a (English) bibliography.

This and similar works tell the story of the glove, its manufacture, its occurrence in literature and idioms, its symbolic meaning, its artistic designs, such as Schiaparelli's, its decline, and its often-invoked comeback. There is a technical-functional specialization and differentiation among gloves (touchscreen gloves, antifouling gloves, sailing gloves and many more), which can certainly be interpreted as a characteristic of a consumer-oriented present. Historically, the glove was an integral part of the clothing ensemble of both men and women. In modern times, it has almost completely lost this fixed place in the wardrobe as well as its symbolic power. Production facilities are being closed, and the ability to knit gloves oneself has become scarce.

Object-based research has always had a firm place within dress studies and achieved more importance due to the material turn and the boom of musealization. Lou Taylor notes a positive development at the beginning of the 2000s and a 'multi-disciplinary atmosphere' (Taylor 2004, p. 279). An example of object-based research is Margarete Braun-Ronsdorf's work, which examines "The Gloves of Elizabeth Stuart" (1963) as a then-new addition to the Bavarian National Museum in Munich as part of its collection. Braun-Ronsdorf discusses the dating and exact provenance in addition to her analyses, and in comparison with other objects. An unmet need persists in ethnographic studies (e.g., wardrobe studies) that focuses on the specific garment of the glove and its handling.

Nowadays, these scholarly explanations are complemented by social-artistic interventions that were produced primarily through the possibilities of the internet and other participatory structures.

Long before Nick Cave captured the poignancy of the single, lost glove in photographs, this idea was conveyed through projects like 'oncoldhand.com.' The single glove, neither worth keeping and collecting nor of any practical use, stands in everyday life as a metaphor for separation and loneliness.

The pandemic forced the public to wear medical gloves and to meet virtually. Through this, gloves gained a new symbolic meaning. In their material form as disposable products, they now represent social distancing and the fear of touch. Consequently, the fashion magazine's attempts to revive the glove as a fashionable accessory (*Vogue*, *Elle*, *Bazaar* 2021) were largely unsuccessful.

In preparation for the film, the usual aspects — production, materiality, and history of the glove — were developed first, and then other sources were consulted to delve into the cultural practice of dressing and the handling of clothing. Reading literary descriptions (partly spoken as quotations in the film) had an inspiring effect, and the medium of film made it possible to implement experiences and associations directly.

The experimental sequences in the film range from very concrete bodily experiences to philosophical reflections on gestures, actions, and touch. Filling the glove with different materials makes it possible to experience the object as a volume. Measuring establishes a connection between production and the standardized sizing of the human body. Both of these processes serve to achieve some form of metric objectivity in the sense of measurability. Dropping the glove reveals its physical properties and visualizes its weight. At the same time, a connection to its symbolic power is created. In the interplay of real (historical) objects and a historical instruction from 1909, eight hands in the film demonstrate how to put on a glove “correctly.”

The de(con)struction (like a medical section) of a glove enables pattern and material analyses.

This specific approach to handling the objects was only possible because we did not work with museum objects, which led us to the crucial moment of the experiment, namely the authors' own physical experience. The concrete work of touching gloves with gloves and observing this synchronously in the fourfold split screen reinforced the experiences from the museum archive. It led from themes of foreign and own corporeality to reflections on feeling, the body, and the skin. The technical possibilities, such as zooming in on one's skin, facilitated the comparison with animal skins (the different types of leather).



Figure 2 Filmstill 2 shows the experience of touching animal skin (goatskin leather glove) with human skin.

The view through the camera and the perception of one's own hands on the display creates a distance from one's own body. Furthermore, the joint filming in real time and simultaneous viewing of the others' actions (four tiles, four to eight hands, many gloves) generated new insights and findings as well as playful and artistic elements. From these interactions — actions with gloves — further reflections and research emerged. The gloves can be touched, cut, turned inside out, and worn. Thus, both the glove's gestural and material nature were explored.

Our project strives to bridge material and sensorial insights and to develop multisensory approaches. The film *Glove and Touch Studies* attempts to translate these ideas into a visual language.

Therefore, I would like to conclude these brief remarks with a quotation from the philosopher Vilém Flusser that unites hands, gloves, and film: "The symmetry of our hands is such that one would have to turn the left hand into a fourth dimension in order to bring it into alignment with the right hand. Since this dimension is not really accessible to the hands, they are condemned to mirror each other endlessly. Certainly, we can imagine their correspondence brought about by a complex manipulation with gloves or by a film trick." (Flusser, 1994, p. 49).



Follow the button below to watch the film, *Glove and Touch Studies*, or copy and paste the link below in your browser.

<https://fashionstudies.ca/glove-and-touch-studies>

CLICK HERE TO WATCH

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Laurie Young is a dance artist who focuses on the embodiment of unauthorized histories and their representation and how relationships are choreographed between human and other than human beings in the theater, museum, and city. She has been working in transdisciplinary projects across the fields of dance studies, sensory ethnography, and archival practices.



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Andrea Keiz is a video artist, biologist and dance pedagogue. Since 2000 she works as a freelance artist in the field of video documentation of performing arts. Her current focus is documentation as (part of) artistic research. Besides filming and editing, she is advising students in documentation, camera work and archiving in several dance programs in Germany as well as offering workshops in video/dance and perception.



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