This talk proposes a theoretical framework for the reconstruction of dress as a scholarly research method. It argues that there is a need to integrate methods from the arts and humanities with analytical techniques from the natural sciences and the social sciences. The triangulation of data - well established in natural and social science – rigorously cross references evidence from a range of investigative methods.

A robust reconstruction reflects dress as the product of the complex interaction of resources, technology, and society. A systematic deployment of well-researched evidence from a variety of sources is a prerequisite for a credible research method. The different types of evidence demand a range of specific knowledge and skills, including the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, and specialist labour, which are not the conventional tools of dress history. This requires the integration of a range of scholarly disciplines and, from outside traditional academia, craft expertise too.

There is a well-established tradition of investigating extant material with the latest advances in instrumental analyses to provide data such as fibre and dye identification, condition assessment, and radiocarbon dating among textile archaeologists. These tools are also routinely applied to historical material by conservators. There is an opportunity for dress historians to exploit similar techniques and data in similar ways.

Accurate reconstruction demands interdisciplinary collaboration: from the interrogation of fibres at the micro level to how garments were worn at the macro level. This calls for new ways of working with integrated methodologies in pragmatic multidisciplinary teams which include experts from the humanities, sciences and craft.