

Fashion Practice

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The landscape of research in fashion has blossomed over the last decades. A marked increase in academic debate and a burgeoning number of publications have begun to map the diversity, complexity, and breadth of fashion as simultaneously a major industry and a cultural medium, often dismissed as superficial and “merely” commerce. Fashion is by its complex nature multidisciplinary, comprising: design in both two and three dimensions, textile development, old and new technologies, crafts- man ship and artisan skills, business and production, marketing, promotion and consumption, global economics, material and visual culture, history, social anthropology, and so on.

The concept behind the development of fashion Practice emerged from wide-ranging discussions focused on the fashion sector during the project Interrogating fashion, a research network I convened at the London College of Fashion during 2005. This was a design-led initia- tive, one of twenty-one networks of academics established across all design disciplines under the Designing {or the 21st Century scheme. The scheme itself was cross-disciplinary, being jointly funded by two very different UK Research Councils, Arts and Humanities, together with Engineering and Physical Sciences—a key recognition of the importance of design in research, commerce, communication, and practice.

Multidisciplinary, together with the topics of sustainability, creative design process, and innovative applications of technology to fashion are key themes underpinning the ethos of the journal. Fashion Practice seeks to provide space not only for those who theorize fashion, but for those who practice as designers, empirical researchers, communicators and image makers at the interface of the global fashion industry and the emerging fashion academy. This potentially highly diverse remit opens a new space between existing publications, and especially aims to give voice to those who might previously have felt excluded from academic debate. fashion Practice therefore seeks to define new territories, whilst connecting with established areas—from social sciences to product design and business—and provide a site to encourage

new readers and practitioners to join the debate.

Inevitably, there are differences in opinion as to what might constitute “fashion practice,” or the practices of fashion. Even the words used to discuss the subject of fashion—clothing, apparel, dress, costume, and fashion itself—have developed different meanings, usage, and nu-ances in different disciplines and across countries. For some, fashion represents purely the froth on top of a commodity-driven industry, for others fashion is a vital component of social interaction, and essential driver of commerce. This is a worthwhile debate in developing an in- creased understanding across different cultures, especially between UK, European, and American perceptions. Contradictions between desire, consumption, and need, the transience of fashion versus the concept of sustainability, and the hard-nosed economics of businesses and liveli- hoods dependent on fashion, are all issues that we encourage within Fashion Practice, both as articles and as commentary. As the issues (in both senses) unfold, the pages of this journal will reflect and help to develop greater understanding of the diverse perspectives represented.

The unique nature of the fashion industry, with its speed to market

And responsive (but alas not always completely responsible) methods of production, is of increasing interest to the wider research community, for example, in product design, engineering, and automotive development. New collaborations and hybrid practices are, in addition, evolving across a range of scientific and technical subjects that connect diverse areas, through design and the performance of the body. The approach of “design thinking” (Cross et al. 1992) is one which has gained currency within business in recent years, utilizing the creative approach of designers for innovation and communication between sectors. Design, rather than representing only final aesthetics, has come to be pivotal in resolving fundamental issues, increasingly taking a systems approach to problem solving in order to reconcile personal, financial, social, and environmental needs whilst satisfying the innate desire for novelty and delight.

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