

Fashion Design: Facilitating Generational Change



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Opinion

Traditional design disciplines are no longer a clear-cut categorization of design professionals, and new hybrid roles are emerging, particularly within the area of maker spaces [1]. Where designers are learning that co-creation, rather than individual authorship, is becoming a more effective way to understand and meet social needs and new tools and platforms are becoming more effective than finished artefacts [2]. This is part of a shift towards transmaterialiation, where service design concepts are evolving in parallel to product design development to construct to scenarios of use, reuse, design and redesign. To work this way, designers need to acquire new skills, knowledge and experience to enable them to act as social innovators and become agents of change. Currently, there are limited practical examples and it is unknown if it is truly possible to implement close the loop supply chains and on what scale. This opinion piece focuses on one research concern of the authors, investigating the practice of textile and fashion design in the UK to consider a more holistic approach for designing and manufacturing. Within the UK textile sector, there is increasing awareness of the requirement for new textile initiatives to be linked with the concept of the circular economy [3-5], but there is a lack of innovation tools and practical knowledge and accessible evidence available to provide support. Within the UK, the RSA's 'The Great Recovery: re-designing the future (2012-2016)' [6] focused on the role of the design community in delivering a more circular economy. Most recently, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation has partnered with world leading design agency IDEO (2016) [7] to explore how design might play a strategic role in supporting circular innovation to support systemic change. Both initiatives, (especially the RSA's to date), highlight the importance of acknowledging it is not the designer's sole responsibility to change whole supply chains; businesses must begin to develop design briefs around new business models that take account of provenance, longevity, impacts and end of life, therefore partnerships will be essential. Moving forward knowledge exchange will be essential to support joined-up thinking to connect all stakeholders involved in the

lifecycle of textile material journeys and new supply chain models.

There is greater need for interrogation of the modus operandi of the fashion and textile design industries, but the contention in this article is there is the same need for an interrogation of sustainability, ethics, diversity and inclusion as core elements of fashion and textile design education. Not in a top-down model of business rather a middle-out, centrally connected manner: a human centred model of leadership. A debate about what this means is required, if a new model is to be universally adopted by design practitioners and by the fashion design and textile engineering industries and education, internationally and in general.

Much of the design research behind this opinion piece is positioned in the context of design for social innovation: a collaborative approach to solving complex problems where everyone designs [8,9]. In our research, the new agenda of Fashion Design and the issue of future textile design education is investigated as an example of Designing for Social and Cultural Innovation. What we know from our research is that material scarcity requires innovative experimentation; consumption models are changing due to social media; new business models are emerging to support social enterprise and innovation; design schools provide a safe place to pilot, prototype, take risks (failing fast and often in order to succeed) in a supportive environment. Today the fashion designer and textile engineer's journey should include the testing of new ways of working [10].

The winds are changing for fashion design and textile engineering education and this currently means a need to work against the status quo. This is seen as Activism. It is challenging the traditions and common held values which are held dear. If designers and design education want to see changes in the consumption patterns of fashion or the attitudes among consumers, they or rather we - you and I - must be the revolution, and design systems which includes consumers and takes their role in the lifecycle of clothing seriously.

We must create a “declaration of dependence” between producers and consumers as the production phase is a miniscule part of a garment's life and its environmental affect. The potential is for exploring ways that textile engineers and or fashion designers might begin to replace the need for constant consumption by offering viable alternatives. Designers, engineers and educators must begin to view a product as something that will forever need completion, and the designer's role, as one of facilitation of this process as opposed to the finalization of a product.

In closing, our view fuelled by our research is dealing with a complex issue: a problem of increasing intensity, requiring more attention and mindful development and application of effort and implementation.

Activism is a future fashion design practice. Focusing on the future of fashion and textile design practice and education is a remit and responsibility of all. The exigency is for an inter-generational and international dialogue. Let's get to it! Together, we will do it.

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