

# Fashion Design as a Means to Recognize and Build Communities-in-Place

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## Abstract

This article explores how fashion design—an activity that fundamentally weaves together the practices, skills, and materials associated with clothing the body—can begin to weave together people in places. I reflect on collaborative encounters emerging from participatory design practice to consider how fashion-related activity might recognize and inspire deeper relational connections between people, and between people and their environment. I explore the role of the *designer as host*: one capable of creating conditions that lead to interactive movement among people and dialogue that expresses and explores intent. The designer as host activities of the action research project described here—*I Stood Up in Chrisp Street*—demonstrate fashion design’s capacity to inform not only localized sustainability practices, but also Fashion and Design for Sustainability research, education, and business practice.

## Keywords

Designer as host

Inside-out

Outside-in

Meaning-making

Matter-making

Cultures of resilience

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## Highlights

- Explores fashion as a social process.

- Presents participatory design encounters that provide and realize opportunities to weave people and place.
- Findings show that it is possible to listen, learn, and act towards a more resilient society by recognizing and building communities-in-place through community-embedded fashion and textile exploration.

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## Introduction

The domain of this research is in the emerging field of Fashion Design for Sustainability. Its purpose is to find ways that fashion-related activities can recognize communities-in-place and inspire relational connections between people and between people and their environment. Here I employ a broad definition of fashion derived from a variety of sources: the action or process of making<sup>1</sup> with reference to attire; a particular cut or style.<sup>2</sup> In a contemporary setting, fashion becomes the product of activities—“which are industrial, economic, cultural, and aesthetic”<sup>3</sup>—and represents the “tastes and concerns of all social groups.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, fashion encompasses the design, making, marketing, buying, wearing, caring, and end of life of clothing—garments and other items worn on the body.

The field of fashion design research is relatively young.<sup>5</sup> Fashion education is a little older; one of its earliest institutions was the London College of Fashion, where this research is based. Established in 1906, early photographs of its skills-based teaching and learning feature men sitting crossed-legged on top of tables, intently engaged in the cutting and stitching together of pieces of material with needle and thread. This technique of garment construction is still fashion’s most typical practice, albeit with the aid of cutting and sewing machines. However, fashion students are now predominantly female. Fashion design education has changed considerably in other respects. Educators also place emphasis on clothing construction and fitting, and teach commercial and technological elements of production and consumption, usually relating to fashion at industrial scale.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the impacts of fashion’s industrial activity have increased exponentially in economic, social, ecological, and cultural terms. Social scientists are making important contributions to fashion research that relate to some of these impacts in cultural studies, including Agnes Rocamora’s discussion of fast fashion<sup>7</sup> and Joanne Entwistle’s situating of the dressed body in the social world.<sup>8</sup> Researchers such as Kate Fletcher<sup>9</sup> and Sandy Black<sup>10</sup> are expanding the study of fashion and sustainability in holistic terms and in relation to fashion technology and business, but there is a paucity of action research into the role and methods of fashion design for sustainability that can counteract these swelling impacts.

This research, as part of Cultures of Resilience<sup>11</sup> project, draws on methods applied in earlier participatory fashion design research carried out in Ahmedabad, India, where UK and India-based researchers, designers, and a photographer captured connections between place,

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<sup>1</sup> David Ormerod, “Faith and Fashion,” in *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 69.

<sup>2</sup> OED Online, s.v. “fashion,” accessed March 7, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fashion>.

<sup>3</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 220.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agenda: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 135.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Faerm, “Towards a Future Pedagogy: The Evolution of Fashion Design Education,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 23 (2012): 212, available at [http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_2\\_No\\_23\\_December\\_2012/24.pdf](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_23_December_2012/24.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Agnès Rocamora, “New Fashion Times: Fashion and Digital Media,” in *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, ed. Sandy Black et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 68.

<sup>8</sup> Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth B. Wilson, eds., *Body Dressing* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (London: Earthscan, 2008), 117.

<sup>10</sup> Sandy Black, *The Sustainable Fashion Handbook* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ezio Manzini, “Weaving People and Places: Art and Design for Resilient Communities,” (unpublished introduction to this journal) *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation* 4, no. 1 (2018) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji>.

self, and clothing in an increasingly socially divided and environmentally depleted urban location. Outcomes were exhibited at the Unbox Future Cities Festival, and the researchers' findings published.<sup>12</sup> I based the title of the exhibition on a simple and profound response to a question I had asked to an Ahmedabad resident about her attire: "I wear my culture." These four words simultaneously describe the personal and wider societal nature of fashion. Christopher Breward describes the practical and rational elements of garment making and wearing, and their representative messages, as "a site for the production of objects and beliefs, an event both spectacular and mundane, cyclical in its adherence to natural and the commercial seasons."<sup>13</sup> Fashion garments are born out of nature and community; they always and only exist via these elements.

### **Defining Fashion as Inside-out and Outside-in**

Fashion involves an active interplay between an expressive intent and all that goes into making clothes. This interplay is not always apparent. People often think of fashion pieces as inert, manufactured objects made of individual parts. While each component affects the world, people think of these parts as inactive. Fashion's value is often assessed only in relation to the market, while its contents, relationships, and costs and benefits spread far beyond. In terms of the sustainable or unsustainable aspects of the fashion system, it is more accurate to think of the system as a network of related elements that have systematic impact as they work together. Fashion's social, economic, environmental, and cultural materials and actions are worn on the body as both *inside-out* and *outside-in*.

Our clothing is part of a reciprocal process in our search for meaning, belonging, and recognition. It is a way to tell others how we feel about ourselves, relative to a time and place. It is about fitting in, or standing out, or both. Richard Sennett describes clothes, when worn and seen, as "guides to the authentic self of the wearer."<sup>14</sup> This powerful form of self-expression affords fashion designers a role beyond the creation of clothes with market value as the creators of these guides. Such is the inside-out of fashion.

At the same time, fashion plays a role in prevailing customs, acceptable socio-economic practice, and production and consumption methods. It is endorsed by influencers, and can be a visible descriptor of place and time. All of these instances are examples of the outside-in of design. The fashion industry, a huge intercontinental system, draws directly and significantly on nature's materials and human labor to materialize its elements. Its designers are tastemakers and spotters; they capture opportunities to present the zeitgeist. They are skilled in all that goes into the physical matter-making that brings the outside in.

All that goes into the meaning-making of the inside-out is not always as apparent or recognized in the designer's role. In recognizing this reciprocal process, we might detect a dichotomy between a representation of our cares, needs, hopes, and aspirations (inside-out) and the commoditization of style (outside-in) that contributes to the fragility of our social and ecological systems. When viewed as an expression of intent—meaning-making—plus all that

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<sup>12</sup> Tom Corby, Dilys Williams, Vivek Sheth, and Virkein Dhar, "I Stood Up: Social Design in Practice," *Art and Design Review* 4, no.2 (2016): 30–36, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4236/adr.2016.42005>.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of the Public Man* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 112.

goes into the making of clothes to wear—matter-making—the scope of fashion design extends and its remit expands.

In order to advance any subject in design, one has to “engage in the activity of designing.”<sup>15</sup> The research I describe here takes place in what Ezio Manzini calls “design mode” and thus combines “three human gifts: critical sense, ... creativity, ... and practical sense.”<sup>16</sup> The application of design mode to fashion-related methods and activities, with a range of participants, and with the intention of creating a connection between nature, community and self, is an exploration of how fashion design for sustainability activities can recognize communities of place.

When engaging critical senses by reflecting on fashion as a means to express intention and to absorb the world, making is useful as a tool to experiment with one’s ideas. For design to be engaging however, “it must be cultivated”<sup>17</sup> and this is where the interplay between critical thinking, creativity, and practical making come into play. John Ehrenfeld extends the role of design beyond its recognized aesthetic and functional product specification into “a conscious, deliberate effort to change the systemic presuppositions—[the] beliefs and normal practices ...—underlying action so that the desired end may be attained.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, fashion design can be considered in terms of its interactions with nature, the social relationships it enables that foster a sense of community, and the stuff of personal reflection enabling a search for and communication of the self. This is exciting and daunting for fashion designers; it opens a Pandora’s box and a wealth of responsibilities and opportunities. This expanded role provides fashion designers with opportunities for creative possibilities that respond to humanity’s most critical environmental, social, and cultural sustainability challenges.

## A Threefold Crisis

There is a profound dislocation between flourishing<sup>19</sup> through living in concert with each other and nature and our current ways of living. Félix Guattari describes our actions on the world as creating an irreversible loss of nature leading to changes in the conditions for life.<sup>20</sup> Our actions towards each other may lead to inexcusable losses of dignity, increases in social inequality, and crises in employment and livelihoods—all exacerbated by technology. An increasing gap between our outside (public) activities and our inside (personal) sources of creativity and presence points to a sense of personal disconnection. It has become increasingly evident that fashion’s industrial-scale practices are contributing to what Guattari describes as a crisis in the three ecologies<sup>21</sup>—the environmental, social, and mental, all of which are interrelated. Specific symptoms include water stress<sup>22</sup> caused by the growing, dyeing, and

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<sup>15</sup> Stuart Walker, *Sustainable by Design: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (London: Earthscan, 2006), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*, trans. Rachel Coad (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> John R. Ehrenfeld, “The Roots of Unsustainability,” in *The Handbook of Design for Sustainability*, ed. Stuart Walker and Jacques Giard (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 25.

<sup>19</sup> John R. Ehrenfeld, *Sustainability by Design: A Subversive Strategy for Transforming Our Consumer Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> World Bank Group, *High and Dry: Climate Change, Water, and the Economy* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016), available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/publication/high-and-dry-climate-change-water-and-the-economy>.

finishing processes; modern-day slavery<sup>23</sup> endemic to fashion supply chains; and feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement that are exacerbated by fashion imagery and consumption levels. How we shape and respond to these three ecologies depends on our intentions, knowledge, creative capabilities, and the scope of our agency.

There is an increasing level of both scholarly and industry interest in fashion in the context of changes to natural ecologies. Outputs include material innovation, manufacturing efficiencies, recycling and reuse initiatives, closed loop fashion systems, and new business models such as clothing hire and leasing. These contributions to alleviating the symptoms of the fashion industry's environmental and social issues, while often collaborative and uniting in their approach, rarely evidence a deliberate effort to change the systemic presuppositions of design. This fact is hampering sustainability efforts that seek to move beyond instrumental adjustments to the existing unsustainable system. Reducing the fashion industry's impact is, by implication, often viewed as reducing fashion's scope. Unsurprisingly, this has not been well received by the majority of designers in education or in industry practice. New sustainability-related departments are appearing in fashion businesses, but positions are rarely held by designers or by those working directly with design teams. "Sustainable fashion" is often seen as the destination—an end goal that, once achieved, will solve our current unsustainability problems. One size does not fit all. Guattari suggests that it is essential to form "new micro political and micro social practices ... together with new aesthetic and new analytic practices,"<sup>24</sup> which suggests an opportunity for fashion designers to show united and distinctive approaches that fit in and stand out from commonly agreed assumptions.

Through fashion design practices that extend interactions with nature, stimulate social relationships and thereby a sense of community, and create space for personal reflection, this research seeks to fill the gap between research that is instrumental in its approach to fashion sustainability and design for sustainability research that takes place outside of fashion's creative, critical, and practical activities.

Fashion designers must re-design themselves and their ways of operating.<sup>25</sup> This involves a revision of fashion design practices, techniques and—critically—outcomes, while drawing on fashion's creative, practical, and communicative elements. This re-framing of intentions, capabilities and endeavors Stuart Walker and Jacques Girard describe as a "call upon human creativity to imagine, conceptualize, visualize, and effectively communicate alternative pathways for living meaningful lives whilst consuming far less in terms of energy and materials."<sup>26</sup>

Those beyond as well as within its professional naming are capable of design. Nigel Cross identifies design ability as possessed by everyone<sup>27</sup> and Ezio Manzini refers to professional and citizen designers as proponents of design activities.<sup>28</sup> Fashion design practices also extend beyond the activities that professional designers undertake. Fletcher

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<sup>23</sup> Quintin Lake et al., "Corporate Leadership on Modern Slavery: How Have Companies Responded to the UK Modern Slavery" (summary report, Hult International Business School and The Ethical Trading Initiative, Cambridge, MA, November, 2016), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Walker and Jacques Giard, "General Introduction: Design for Sustainability—a Reflection", in *The Handbook of Design for Sustainability*, ed. Stuart Walker and Jacques Giard (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Nigel Cross, *Designerly Ways of Knowing* (London: Springer, 2006), 20.

<sup>28</sup> Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 53.

discusses everyday and extraordinary sustainable fashion practices undertaken by citizens in the craft of use.<sup>29</sup> By engaging professional designer researchers, student designers, and citizens, my research takes a participatory approach to activities of designing. Through exploring fashion as a means to express the inside-out and the outside-in, this research seeks ways to potentially render the generalized narrative of social division and man-made climate change more poignant and meaningful on a professional, community, and personal level.

## **Towards a New Role for the Fashion Designer**

This article describes the fashion designer in terms of three broad archetypes: designer as determiner, designer as co-creator, and designer as host.<sup>30</sup> They are neither definitive nor mutually exclusive, but rather offer approaches that are suited to a range of circumstances in which fashion design activities are undertaken.

*Designer as determiner* is the role most often seen in traditional industrial hierarchies, where infrastructures allow designers to make choices based on knowledge and values that can permeate industry activities and actions. This role involves acquiring knowledge in order to make better decisions, for example through materials indexes, labeling, and lifecycle analysis—practices that are increasingly common in education and industry contexts. The determiner’s focus is on efficiency relating to diminishing returns<sup>31</sup> and scarcity.<sup>32</sup> However, this is not enough to prevent us from crossing ecological boundaries from which we cannot bounce back.<sup>33</sup> As David Owens asserts in describing the Jevons paradox, “Efforts to improve energy efficiency can exacerbate the problems they are meant to solve, more than negating any environmental gains.”<sup>34</sup>

*Designer as co-creator* connects a wider frame of engagement in situations where roles are less strictly defined and direct interaction takes place between elements in the production and consumption process. This role applies knowledge to an intention towards sustainability-led actions and practices, and considers implications for and interactions with makers, users, and others. Co-creation is increasingly part of the fashion industry through face-to-face and digital interactions and across a range of business sizes, and is most often realized as user-centered design. It is also being developed through education. The co-creative origins and mode of application in the professional and education spheres tends towards adding value to business practice. While co-creation has application in fashion as social innovation, that value is often limited by its proximity to fashion’s current systems.

*Designer as host* inverts the traditional model of fashion design. The host foregrounds public agency by creating conditions where a series of autonomous, authentic progressions of

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<sup>29</sup> Kate Fletcher, *Craft of Use: Post-Growth Fashion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 17.

<sup>30</sup> Dilys Williams, “Fashion Design and Sustainability,” in *Sustainable Apparel: Production, Processing and Recycling*, ed. Richard Blackburn (Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing, 2015), 177, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-1-78242-339-3.00006-6>.

<sup>31</sup> John Wood, “The Creative Quartet: A Tool for Metadesigners,” (paper presented at The Centre for Sustainable Design 18<sup>th</sup> International Sustainable Innovation Conference, University for the Creative Arts, Epsom, Surrey, UK, November 4–5, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Jon Goodbun, Michael Klein, Andreas Rumpfhuber, and Jeremy Till, *The Design of Scarcity* (Moscow: Strelka Press, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> “The Nine Planetary Boundaries,” Stockholm Resilience Centre, accessed March 7, 2018, <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>.

<sup>34</sup> David Owen, *The Conundrum: How Scientific Innovation, Increased Efficiency, and Good Intentions Can Make Our Energy and Climate Problems Worse* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), 859.

garment wearing and making might take place over time with a range of participants. This less usual role can be seen in self-organizing, horizontal networks, or in hierarchies with less conventional or predictable activities. The host seeks to evolve fashion design as a consideration of inside-out and outside-in by integrating sustainability skills and capabilities. It extends the co-creation process through a wider engagement of design skills relating to values, culture, aesthetics, knowledge, and exhibition.

The long-term objective of my research exploring the archetype of designer as host is to contribute to the field of fashion design for sustainability through an understanding of the capabilities and practices that can be used to strengthen community ties, deepen the connections people have to nature, and the ways people can use fashion to articulate their senses of selves. A more immediate objective is to develop participatory practices, conditions, and design methods that can create opportunities for meaningful encounters in communities. In the first instance, I hypothesize that a four-part designer as host research process can help us to recognize communities in place. The designer as host process, discussed in detail below, uses a recognizable fashion garment to create opportunities for collaborative encounters.

### ***I Stood Up at Chrisp Street Market***

This research took place in Autumn 2015, and engaged the efforts of two sets of researchers: members of the University of the Arts's Centre for Sustainable Fashion (CSF), based at the London College of Fashion; and MA Fashion Futures (MAFF) students, based at the College. Each followed "the designer as host research process," a four-part, experimental, hybrid, ethnography/social design research process. CSF researchers (research group 1) employed participatory design methods and developed specifically designed fashion garments to gather text-based and visual data. The focus here was on design relating to fashion as an expression of intent (inside-out). MAFF students (research group 2) focused on design relating to the fashion production and consumption lifecycle (outside-in). The process, in each case, was

"a cluster of practices but also a form of life ... it contains being in a relationship with people: it is being receptive; it is being patient; it is not knowing what to do or say next; it is having fun and being scared; it is going to new, strange and even threatening places; but it is also repetitious and mundane."<sup>35</sup>

The designer as host research process culminated in a pop-up event<sup>36</sup> involving the researchers and community-in-place of Chrisp Street, London. The research was supported by Poplar HARCA, an East London housing and re-generation community association, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of *Being Human, A UK Festival of the Humanities*.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Locale***

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<sup>35</sup> Chris Jenks and Tiago Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side: Urban Ethnography Meets the *Flâneur*," *Cultural Values* 4, no.1 (2000): 3, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797580009367183>.

<sup>36</sup> The term "pop-up event" is used instead of "exhibition" to distinguish the fact that it was not an occasion to showcase finished works in a space for guests to walk through and view. It was an open-ended, participant- and researcher-created space.

<sup>37</sup> "About us," *Being Human: A Festival of the Humanities*, accessed March 7, 2018, <https://beinghumanfestival.org/us/>.





Figure 1. Chrisp Street Market. Copy right © 2017 Renee Cuoco.

Markets are often less formal than other public forums within the city; they are distinct spaces which are congruent with ideas of communities-in-place, and this is particularly so in London.<sup>38</sup> Historically, markets are where convivial metropolitan cultures are made,<sup>39</sup> acting as sites of commercial exchange and social interaction.<sup>40</sup> Chrisp Street Market (Figure 1) is London's oldest covered pedestrianized market<sup>41</sup> and exhibits four elements of the threefold crisis:

- It falls within an area of deficiency for access to nature,<sup>42</sup>
- Local unemployment figure is 8.9 percent (London average: 5.2 percent),<sup>43</sup>
- 50 percent of the area's residents live in rented social housing (London average 24.1 percent),<sup>44</sup> and
- More than two thirds (69 percent) of its borough's population belong to minority ethnic groups.<sup>45</sup>

The area around Chrisp Street Market, Poplar (borough of Tower Hamlets), is on the cusp of urban redevelopment. Much of London that was once marginal and affordable has been expensively reconstructed<sup>46</sup> through regeneration and gentrification. Chris Jenkins

<sup>38</sup> Nick Dines, "The Disputed Place of Ethnic Diversity: An Ethnography of the Redevelopment of a Street Market in East London," in *Regenerating London: Governance, Sustainability and Community in a Global City*, ed. Rob Imrie, Loretta Lees, and Mike Raco (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 256.

<sup>39</sup> Alex Rhys-Taylor, "The Essences of Multiculture: A Sensory Exploration of an Inner-City Street Market," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 20, no. 4 (2013): 393–406, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2013.822380>.

<sup>40</sup> Dines, "The Disputed Place of Ethnic Diversity," 257.

<sup>41</sup> "Markets in Tower Hamlets," Tower Hamlets, accessed March 7, 2018,

[http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/business/markets/markets\\_in\\_tower\\_hamlets.aspx](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/business/markets/markets_in_tower_hamlets.aspx).

<sup>42</sup> "Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2014–2019," Tower Hamlets, accessed March 7, 2018,

<http://www.towerhabitats.org/5/Tower%20Hamlets%20Local%20Biodiversity%20Action%20Plan%202014-19.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> "Poplar Ward Profile," Tower Hamlets, accessed March 7, 2018,

[http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough\\_statistics/Ward\\_profiles/Poplar-FINAL-10062014.pdf](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/Ward_profiles/Poplar-FINAL-10062014.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Ethnicity in Tower Hamlets: Analysis of 2011 Census Data," Tower Hamlets, accessed March 7, 2018,

[http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough\\_statistics/Ward\\_profiles/Census-2011/RB-Census2011-Ethnicity-2013-01.pdf](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/Ward_profiles/Census-2011/RB-Census2011-Ethnicity-2013-01.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Ben Campkin, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture* (London: I.B Tauris & Co, 2013), 11.

specifically describes East London as having in several senses an “edge” which is as recognizable to the outsider as it is to the inhabitant. The East End “both ‘includes’ and ‘excludes,’ it is an enclave from the mainstream of city dwelling and is recognized as such by all.”<sup>47</sup> Chrisp Street retains elements of the coexistence between center and periphery, inside and outside, stranger and local, commerce and festivity,<sup>48</sup> so in undertaking this research, care had to be taken so as not to replace diversity and richness with a commoditized version of community, removing the life-giving part of its original essence.<sup>49</sup>

Fashion related activities and practices take place in many locations. The dominant fashion system extravaganzas of concept store, department store, mass-fashion retailer, and particularly the catwalk are where fashion is seen as a spectacle of the infrastructure of consumption—established, polished, and fixed. Viewing fashion’s spectacle depends, however, on where and how we look. The “moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts.”<sup>50</sup> A public declaration or spectacle that involves the live participation of people in a place such as Chrisp Street flips Guy Debord’s notion of the spectacle on its head. It flips the designer from creator of the “autonomous movement of non-life,”<sup>51</sup> into a host<sup>52</sup> of the interactive movement of the living. This involves setting up conditions for self-organizing groups to interact, gather, and creatively communicate through fashion-related activities.

## **The Designer as Host Research Process: Research Group One—Inside-Out**

Taking a hybrid approach conversant with fashion design’s mixed methods—“operating as bricoleur”<sup>53</sup>—two designer researchers engage in (deep) observation of nature through an experiential and visual documenting process. Using a familiar fashion garment, the researchers employ techniques of participatory design, which make it possible to engage in meaningful dialogues in a community. The findings from this process begin to create opportunities towards sustainability that go beyond the fashion industry’s symptoms of crisis to question their underlying causes. The experimental, small-scale and exploratory nature of this research generates questions in form rather than definitive solutions, advancing both the enquiry and understanding of Fashion Design for Sustainability.

### ***1. Observation: Walking, Noticing and Gathering***

Observation involves being physically, mentally, emotionally, and sensorily present; being led by curiosity; and capturing what one sees, smells, touches, hears and tastes via photography, notebooks, video, and sketching. Similarities can be drawn with Charles Baudelaire’s concept of the *flâneur*,<sup>54</sup> defined as “one who walks without haste, at random

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<sup>47</sup> Chris Jenks, “Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of the Flâneur,” in *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 2003), 157.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgressions* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 131–46.

<sup>50</sup> Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 5, accessed March 7, 2018, [http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The\\_Society%20\\_Of%20\\_The%20\\_Spectacle.pdf](http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The_Society%20_Of%20_The%20_Spectacle.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Dilys Williams, “Fashion Design,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion*, ed. Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 237.

<sup>53</sup> Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Jenks and Neves, “A Walk on the Wild Side,” 5.

abandoning himself to the impressions and sights of the moment.”<sup>55</sup> In assuming the role of this metaphoric figure, researchers act as spectators of city life. A creative practice in itself, this approach has proved a useful tool for urban inquisition in fields such as psychogeography and in design practice.<sup>56</sup> With this attitude of passive attentiveness in mind, it is important to note that the intention of designer as host practice is also to capture the experience of a place through describing nature’s form in plants, animals, and birds as parts of the ecosystem underpinning a community’s resilience.

Beginning at the bustling heart of the market, it is easy to get distracted by sounds of trading and the fragrant scents that attract the lunchtime crowd. Observation requires momentarily shutting out the clamor and being present—looking up, down, and around; and taking in the views from different perspectives. In the market itself, nature can be seen pushing its way through cracks and crevices in the walls and pavement, while individually styled gardens and small open spaces are more public and intentional natural forms in residential streets beyond the market itself.



Figures 2a and b. Chrisp Street Locale. Copyright © 2017 by Renee Cuoco.

Turning to the south, Canary Wharf’s financial district is bordered by carefully managed trees, flower beds, and grass squares placed in between clean reflective glass (Figure 2a). A desire to manage nature is made clear. Heading east, walking through wider spaces, busy roads appear, the noise of traffic exacerbated by the wind. Beyond here, a construction site is the only occupant in an empty, eerily quiet approach to Bow Creek (Figure 2b). In meeting the water’s edge, a shift to greater habitation takes place, evidenced by overgrown grass and reeds, sprawling trees, bushes, and weeds wrapping themselves through and over unused structures, bridges, and underpasses.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>56</sup> Jenks, “Watching Your Step,” 40.

Researchers' analyses of recorded observations and desk-based environmental data collection form the basis for stage two.

## 2. Reflexivity

This stage incorporates a critical perspective-taking, applying self-conscious enquiry to observations to develop ideas for participatory design encounters. The researcher can be subject to bias<sup>57</sup> and can only be open-minded through becoming reflexively aware; in this case, this means tracing and mapping un-routed steps, and considering spaces covered and those avoided. A critical analysis of the findings, through a playful reordering, repositions the captured images in an effort to derive a new synthesis of the Crisp Street data (Figure 3). Photojournalists use this creative process to open up possibilities of imaginative theorizing. Guy Debord refers to this particular technique as a *détournement*<sup>58</sup>—a hijacking of or “diversion” from original or traditional contextual interpretations. The process of reconfiguring the Crisp Street area based on findings and interpretations of imagery and text is a similar approach. This examination and synthesis creates stimuli that can feed participants' thoughts and expressions during the later stages of the project.



Figure 3. Crisp Street Locale. Copyright © 2017 by Dilys Williams and Renee Cuoco.

## 3. Prototyping

In the case of this research, prototyping involves the initial shaping and employing of fashion artifacts—garments, items, and other making- or caring-related objects—in a nature-based discourse with members of the local community. It includes the design and making of easily adaptable, recognizable pieces of clothing as design outcomes in themselves that are simultaneously conduits to other outcomes. Through reflection on the *I Wear My Culture* research and exhibition, to make explicit the opportunity of fashion to express a personal (inside-out) and collective (outside-in) statement, the *I Stood Up* slogan was designed as a graphic onto a t-shirt using aesthetic references relating to the location of the project. Prototyping here necessarily involves physical environment creation, using references from parts 1 and 2 of the process, to create the means for design activities to take place involving citizen and professional designers.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Maton, “Reflexivity, Relationism and Research: Pierre Bourdieu and the Epistemic Conditions of Social Scientific Knowledge,” *Space & Culture* 6, no.1 (2003): 58. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331202238962>.

<sup>58</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 60.

Researchers erected an open-sided photo booth to capture images of participants wishing to engage in the forthcoming element of the process. The public space was open to whoever wished to step in, look around, and take part in a dialogue. Desk-based research had been developed into posters on display, with copies for participants to take away. Dialogue was instigated by the offer of an *I Stood Up* t-shirt in exchange for sharing thoughts relating to the images of nature in the room and on their own clothes—the t-shirts, and anything else they wished to reference. Most participants put on the t-shirts without prompting, its message acting as a conversation starter. Participants were subsequently invited to have their photograph taken in or with the t-shirts. The process did not set out to establish specific data, but rather sought to witness the voicing of matters of importance, interest, and concern, and to offer participants the opportunity to be heard. Asking people how they felt about nature and community was not an easy conversation starter, but the t-shirts became conduits for such conversations to take place. The inherent adaptability of a t-shirt means it can physically and culturally stretch and be re-styled without professional tools or skills. The *I Stood Up* (ISU) graphic offered an opportunity to finish the statement, while not leading any particular kind of response. It became a statement of action written on the body and, if decided by the wearer, began a potentially ongoing activity within and beyond the event itself.

#### **4. Making It Public**

A pivotal part of the designer as host research process is to visualize and build community through a spectacle of place-based participation that is recognized both inside and beyond the community itself. The space where the pop-up event took place was originally designated for commercial transactions; according to remaining store signage, it had been “ShoeWorld.” The vacant shop, like much of the area around Chrisp Street, stood in limbo awaiting planned redevelopment. Dirt, stains, ripped-up flooring, and holes in the walls characterized it. As designers, we had to fight our instincts to put up white stud walls and make it look fixed and finished in ways that we wanted to avoid. Dirt, degradation, and disorder are a product and a fundamental part of the city.<sup>59</sup> Attempting to achieve a level of “cleanliness and order ... can be at the expense of risk, sociability, imagination and creativity.”<sup>60</sup> Had we attempted to cleanly redesign the space, we might have “wash[ed] away the spirit of the city.”<sup>61</sup> Had we modified the shop to mimic formalized spaces, we might have inhibited participation, messiness, and openness—the very characteristics of resilience that we sought to support.

Over the course of the one-day pop-up event, one hundred and forty passers-by took part. In the space, research groups 1 and 2 (discussed below) each hosted participatory design encounters, which involved both the making of objects and socio-material relationships. The ISU photo booth was an example of a participatory design encounter using an object to make socio-material relationships; other examples are given below. Having designed these collaborative encounters during the prototyping phase, the two groups previously met in the space to establish connections between elements through curiosity and mutual interest. The relational quality of the work and distinction of the parts enabled the layout for the pop-up event to take shape. The location, in a space previously designated for the sale of fashion

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<sup>59</sup> Campkin, *Remaking London*, 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

products, had been subverted into a space of fashion-related activity that more visibly involved the contributions of everyone involved.



Figure 4. *I Stood Up* Chrisp Street participants. Copyright © 2015 by Emmi Hyppa.

### Research Group Two—Outside-In

The second research group consisted of fifteen students, aged between twenty-two and forty-four, from a range of cultural, geographical, and social backgrounds, representative of the international student base at the University of the Arts, London. These student researchers did not match the population of the Chrisp Street community, but did represent a perspective that was culturally diverse in outlook—there were students from the UK, East, Southeast and South Asia, Europe, Australia, and Canada. The students undertook workshops in participatory design methods prior to commencing fieldwork and then embarked on the designer as host research process, this time focusing on elements relating to objects in fashion’s production and consumption cycle, arranged into five elements:

- Conceive—places/activities that might instigate fashion garment creation;
- Make—places/activities where fashion garments are made;
- Acquire—places/activities where fashion garments are exchanged, bought, and sold;
- Care for—places/activities of care in which fashion activities are involved; and
- Retire—places/activities of discard in which fashion activities are involved.

Documenting observation and reflexivity through notebooks, drawings, photographs, and objects, and working in groups, they created a set of questions to explore during the public participatory event. These included

- What is the connection, if any, between materials sold in the market and making garments?
- What making skills are used, shared, and requested by the community?
- How do you find garments for your wardrobe beyond going to established fashion retailers?
- How does the community consider care in broad as well as practical garment-related terms?
- How do you decide what and when garments are discarded from your wardrobe?

I encouraged the students to experiment with writing, performance, and a variety of forms of visual representation that entailed venturing beyond their typical skillsets. Through collaborative studio work, the students prototyped the five elements based on their observation and reflexivity findings, and designed a collaborative encounter to host at the pop-up event. Two of the five elements are described in more detail below.

The *acquire* sub-group focused on ways in which clothes are obtained that differ from commonly recognized practices. These include bartering at the market and unplanned searching in local charity shops. To better understand the thought processes of local people when acquiring clothes around Chrisp Street, researchers built a wardrobe installation that filled a front window of the pop-up shop. A variety of garments from the market and local charity shops were hung in the wardrobe for participants to view. They were invited to note thoughts and responses on cards or through conversation, and pin cards to pieces in the wardrobe. The encounters became evident in the wardrobe (Figure 5) as a visual and informative collection of insights—a brief for designers to respond to in future work. This increased understanding of community need, intent, and activity enabled the students to reflect on their own intentions as designers and how they might realize these in industry contexts, thus cross-referencing personal, economic, social, and environmental considerations in design.



Figure 5. Chrisp Street installation by sub-group *acquire*. Copyright © 2015 by Emmi Hyppa.

The *make* sub-group observed that most clothes found in the market were not made in the UK.<sup>62</sup> The researchers observed, however, that several nearby places to buy fabrics by the meter nearby were of particular interest to the local Bangladeshi community. While clothes in the market did not represent items made in the community, the fabric stores and stalls showed traces of garment-making. These findings prompted questions about how different members of the community participated in the formal or informal making of clothing. To gain a better understanding of this and any connection between acts of making and the area's (now dissipated) history of textile and garment manufacturing, researchers prototyped a dialogue with participants around garment-making skills. This they realized through a physical and visual activity. They designed and made a collection of laser-cut symbols representing different skills such as weaving, sewing, spinning, knitting, printing, and embroidery. Participants were invited to select symbols that represented skills they had and wished to learn and place them onto two separate canvases. A visualization emerged of the range of making skills possessed and desired by representatives of the community in the space on the day (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Crisp Street installation by Ssub-group *make*. Copyright © 2015 by Emmi Hyppa.

## Findings

### *New and Existing Design Capabilities and Activities*

The designer as host research process involves distinct and connected activities, starting with being present and conscious in the moment from a range of perspectives. This is an immersive research gathering experience and also a creative process in itself—one that is important when making a conscious, deliberate effort to change current limiting systemic presuppositions. By noticing and noting nature's diversity, the researcher begins to view the city through a new lens and thereby expand his or her capacity for creative imagining, adaptability, improvisation, conceptualization, and aesthetic development.

Being in the world can provoke a type of thinking and learning that is not fostered in the classroom or design studio.<sup>63</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau views nature and education as

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<sup>62</sup> As of 2011, 90 percent of UK clothing was imported. Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, *Sustainable Clothing Roadmap: Progress Report 2011* (London: DEFRA, 2011), 1, published 2 June, 2011, available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/69299/pb13461-clothing-actionplan-110518.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69299/pb13461-clothing-actionplan-110518.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Siobhan Lyons, "The Scenic Syllabus," *New Philosopher*, May/July, 2016, 107.



inseparable, advocating for “natural education”<sup>64</sup> that references Epicurus’s and Aristotle’s teachings amongst the plants and the trees. This engages with the idea that nature is to be followed, and that by not following nature we are, in fact, disconnecting ourselves from our autonomy, our emotions, and our intellect.<sup>65</sup> Following nature and community is something we are no longer familiar with. Daniel Bell and Avner de-Shalit talk of a practice of letting the environment “talk,” allowing it to reveal itself through buildings and conversations with inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> This process of place-based learning enables the reimagining of relationships in the world through participating in them. For many fashion designers, this is unfamiliar territory, but by loosening the grip on the process and outcome, while carefully applying professional know-how and providing making tools, designers—both citizen and researcher—can form enabling systems from which we can listen, learn, and act in ways that seek to recognize and build communities-in-place.<sup>67</sup>

In the reflexivity and prototyping stages, design activities include the playful re-ordering of images as a means to critically analyze findings, leading to the development of multi-layered questioning and idea forming, where participants—again, citizens and researcher designers alike—are able to both follow and lead the discourse. The designer as host research process removes the usual control of the design process to reveal not only opportunities, but also dilemmas. Strategic capabilities are needed here, to combine openness and even vulnerability with the familiar protection of fashion design’s regularly practiced methods of sketching, photography, pattern cutting, and garment construction. The domains of education and industry often lack opportunities for location and community informed production and place-based learning.<sup>68</sup> A garment becomes a non-piece when we can no longer see the labor or the contents in its making; by engaging in relationship forming, pieces and places are re-connected to community via design activities that relate to possibility creation, taking design beyond its problem-solving role.

### ***Collaborative Encounters through a Widely Recognizable Fashion Artifact***

The t-shirt has become one of the world’s most ubiquitous fashion artifacts. This arguably makes it inclusive in terms of gender, age, size, and cultural background, notwithstanding the Western aspect of its origin and the permutations that create specific appeal or relevance. In the case of this project, the t-shirt acts as a familiar and adaptable item of attire. Its familiarity is exemplified by the ways a variety of community members readily and comfortably put it on. For the researchers, it acts as a mediator brokering otherwise difficult conversations in non-formal ways.

“At times, I felt out of my comfort zone, but the t-shirt became a token of courage—a physical and tangible starting point which seemed to genuinely interest and positively engage participants.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Zan Boag, “Following Nature,” *New Philosopher*, November/January, 2016, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Manzini, “Weaving People and Places.”

<sup>68</sup> Dilys Williams and Katelyn Toth-Fejel, “The Will and the Skill in Education for Sustainability,” in *Handbook of Theory and Practice of Sustainable Development in Higher Education*, Vol. 4, Walter L. Filho, Ulisses M. Azeiteiro, Fátima Alves, and Petra Molthan-Hill (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017): 82, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47877-7\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47877-7_6).

<sup>69</sup> (researcher notebook reflections, undertaken during I Stood Up in Chrisp Street November 2015: unpublished).

Through its location-relevant graphic, the t-shirt became part of a local community narrative, which was continued through the parallel process of the workshops where other familiar items of clothing, collected locally, acted as a conduit to elicit a new kind of brief for fashion design students. User-centered design ideas relating to fashion abound, from the technical approaches of high performance sportswear companies such as Nike through to Chapman's<sup>70</sup> emotionally durable design practices. In the majority of cases, however, the artifact is explored in relation to the wearer's actions—not to the wearer as part of a community. This project starts such an exploration and suggests the need for further research.

### *Contribution to a Community-in-Place: Being Heard and Being Visible*



Figure 7. *I Stood Up* Chrisp Street participants. Copyright © 2015 by Emmi Hyppa.

Through fashion relating to object and individual and collective activity (Figure 4), a community-in-place can be visualized in ways that are recognizable to the community. Designers cannot change the world, but they can be a part of the world that is changing.<sup>71</sup> While change is the only constant, and fashion is about change, it is the intention and direction of change that we must consider. “Designers must work in this world rather than about or upon it.”<sup>72</sup> In this micro-scale interaction, people met and started a conversation about their concerns relating to their physical and personal contexts, alongside a discussion of the wider context of their location. Through the visual and oral dialogues mediated by the *I*

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences and Empathy* (Abington: Routledge, 2015), 18.

<sup>71</sup> Ian Grout, “Resilience in a Convivial Society: Some Possible Innovations, Activities and Opportunities for Design” (paper presented at Crafting the Future: 10<sup>th</sup> European Academy of Design Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden, April 2013), available at [http://meetagain.se/papers/nine/resilience\\_in\\_a\\_convivial\\_society\\_formated.pdf](http://meetagain.se/papers/nine/resilience_in_a_convivial_society_formated.pdf).

<sup>72</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 17.

*Stood Up* t-shirt and five-element workshop, a spectacle of fashion at Chrisp Street Market (Figure 7) was amplified through its visibility as part of the UK-wide Festival of the Humanities.<sup>73</sup> This process ascribes meaning to fashion related activities beyond the dominant message of economic transaction and availability for consumption that has little relationship to community and lacks opportunities for the kinds of collaborative encounters that build and shape them.

The images of the locale and the wearing of the t-shirts both prompt the kind of exchanges that allow issues of climate change and social inequality to be understood at a personal, human scale. This is exemplified in the statements captured from participants. For example, one participant voiced concern about the loss of nature and grief at that loss:

“Where have the birds gone? I used to see finches on the lamppost, now they’re not here at the times that they used to be, in fact I hardly see birds at all these days.”<sup>74</sup>

Another sought to explore the importance of nature for our wellbeing:

“Nature can influence my mood—it can lift me to see a beautiful flower or a carefree bee and so can fashion, if it’s colorful and lovely. When I think about the two, I can see how they each affect me.”<sup>75</sup>

And another spoke of the connection between nature and fashion:

“Well, clothes are made of materials and materials come from nature, right?”<sup>76</sup>

Paper-based surveys capture responses to specific questions; open-ended conversation is recorded at the end of the event through anonymous reflections. Such direct personal insights evidence the acts of listening and of being heard.

“Steve said that he’d been past a few times the previous day and had seen us setting up. He wasn’t in a hurry, as he wasn’t working. He wanted to know why we’d put up pictures in an old shop. He recognized some of them and told me where they were from. He liked the idea of the t-shirt; he took it and immediately put it on over the jumper that he was wearing. He said that he comes to the market every day but he doesn’t go into the shops as he’s not going to be buying stuff—he doesn’t really need anything anyway. ‘Nature is all around us,’ he said, ‘but it’s human nature that we don’t see the best of round here, that’s just what I think.’”<sup>77</sup>

“A conversation with an elderly woman, who has lived in the same council flat close to Chrisp Street market for decades: she asked about what we were doing here in the old shoe shop and I explained to her what was happening in the space and talked her through the images on the wall. She asked me about some of the locations in the pictures, recognizing them and she spoke personally about how much the area had changed over the years, commenting on the number of buildings that had appeared. She

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<sup>73</sup> Anna Fitzpatrick, “Being Human in Chrisp Street Market,” *Being Human: A Festival of the Humanities*, posted 27 November, 2015, <https://beinghumanfestival.org/being-human-in-chrisp-street-market/>.

<sup>74</sup> I *Stood Up* in Chrisp Street participant questionnaire. November 2015 Unpublished

<sup>75</sup> I *Stood Up* in Chrisp Street participant questionnaire. November 2015 Unpublished

<sup>76</sup> I *Stood Up* in Chrisp Street participant questionnaire. November 2015 Unpublished

<sup>77</sup> Excerpt from notebook reflections, 16 November, 2015.

revealed concerns about changes to the neighborhood encouraged by much more expensive housing. Having lived in the same flat for years, she was worried that her building would also soon be developed into new and expensive flats.”<sup>78</sup>

These and other deep personal insights offered us the possibility to increase our understanding of the needs and intents of the community-in-place, and, in so doing, prompted the designer and student researchers to reflect on their own needs, hopes, and intentions.

Important practical outcomes of the project accompany the research findings. These may not map directly onto the objectives of the research, but do align with a mix of further location-based activity for Chrisp Street, including

- A continued interest in supporting art and design activities in Chrisp Street, with the Poplar HARCA housing association offering space for a Cabinet Stories project<sup>79</sup>—a small exhibition for audiences who cannot usually access museum displays;
- The amplification of the Chrisp Street community-in-place’s concerns, visualized through exhibition of the research outputs at the year-long exhibition *City Now City Future* at the Museum of London (June 2017-8);<sup>80</sup> and
- Plans to develop a Fashion Manufacturing Hub in the area. This research contributes to the discourse and network creation necessary to ensure that the hub supports the community-in-place at Chrisp Street.

## Final Remarks

Fashion related activities are implicated in the three interconnected crises of our times, bound together through their economic, artistic, social, and educational practices. Such activities are personal and professional and, just as we are all designers, we are all engaged in fashion-related activities. Through expressing our selves in the world (inside-out) and manifesting the world’s material, human, economic, and social elements, fashion is one of the most immediately recognizable ways to identify the times we live in and who we consider ourselves to be. Just as fiction writer William Morris uses the unlikely attire of a waterman to signal that the character seemed from another time and place<sup>81</sup>—”his dress was not like any work-a-day clothes I had seen”—so do we dress in ways that reflect where we are and what we do. Designers have the opportunity, through engaging in activities of designing and using participatory practices as a guide, to recognize communities-in-place and inspire personal and professional understanding of the inter-related nature of our personal and collective activities.

In the first instance, this four-part designer as host research process entails questions, possibilities, and dilemmas that weave backwards and forwards between practical, critical, and social elements. Resolving these dilemmas requires a longer process of iteration than fashion design’s usual toile-making—prototyping a sketch into 3D form—product-making, and selling process. For the fashion design researcher, this is challenging while also offering

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<sup>78</sup> Excerpt from notebook reflections, 16 November, 2015.

<sup>79</sup> “London College of Fashion Presents Cabinet Stories,” The Culture Diary, accessed March 7, 2018, <https://www.theculturediary.com/events/london-college-fashion-presents-cabinet-stories>.

<sup>80</sup> “25 Ways to Fix the City: Meet the London Initiatives,” Museum of London, accessed March 7, 2018, <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/london-initiatives-25-ways-fix-city>.

<sup>81</sup> William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, an Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*, ed. Stephen Arata (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004), 5.

an opportunity to exemplify well-honed fashion design skills. The immediate objective to develop participatory practices, conditions, and design methods that create opportunities for meaningful encounters in communities is realized through a method based on 1) observation as experience of place; 2) reflexivity as creative re-configuring; and 3) prototyping as a multidimensional creation of conditions in which self-organizing groups can themselves become the main players in realizing resilience through communities-in-place. Thus, this method establishes an “elastic connection between assertion of individuality, connectivity within community, and wider contribution to societal infrastructures”.<sup>82</sup> Making these collaborative encounters public recognizes the active roles of citizen and professional designers in the building of community.

The form in which fashion takes shape is deeply determined by economic arrangements, social relationships, and political systems, alongside cultural elements of family and community. The resulting forms that fashion provides give shape to these arrangements and relationships. The designer as host process engages in critical observation and reflection, creative imagining and participating, and practical prototyping and visualizing of interwoven personal, environmental, and social concerns. The research I describe here offers a replicable model for recognizing and weaving together communities-in-place through fashion-based collaborative encounters and objects. Designer researchers and participants together invert the top-down approach often practiced in commercial fashion design. The designer as host process is one way to address the need for the fashion industry to work both inside and outside of its current boundaries if it wishes to make fashion’s social, economic, cultural, and personal practices more sustainable. This research also represents a step towards understanding how fashion design for sustainability can render generalized narratives of social inequality, personal disenfranchisement, and human-made climate change poignant and meaningful at personal and community levels. Such an exploratory step subverts the dominant city spectacle, where fashion often contains messages and materials that are imported and relate to elsewhere.

This research, as with the other Cultures of Resilience projects, focuses on micro-scale interactions. These constitute the building blocks of communities-in-place: the meaningful encounters that happen when conversations are oriented at doing something together. Such exchanges establish different forms of relationships among community members and between members and their physical contexts.<sup>83</sup> The role of designer as host subverts the usual hierarchical system of fashion design to more openly engage and recognize a network of actors in the design process. The designer as host process recognizes contributions to resilience-building that individual community members make and addresses the need for multiple approaches at multiple levels across socio-economic systems.

This research tests out ways in which researchers engaging in design-related activities in locations far from fashion’s usual industry and education practices might recognize and amplify the resilience of such places and apply what they have learned back inside education and industry establishments. The designer as host process enables the reimagining of

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<sup>82</sup> Dilys Williams and Renee Cuoco, “Co-creating a City Spectacle: Fashion as Facilitator of Social Ties and Forms: An Opportunity to Explore Fashion as Participatory Design in a City Locale,” *Cultures of Resilience*, accessed March 7, 2018, <http://culturesofresilience.org/category/wip/projects/page/4/>.

<sup>83</sup> TBC

relationships in the world through relationship-building practices; how this will contribute to cultures of resilience will be played out by those who take part.