

# Editorial

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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, craftsmanship 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 initiative, one of twenty-one networks of academics established across all design disciplines under the *Designing for 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.

Multidisciplinarity, 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 nuances 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 increased 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 livelihoods 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.

The first issue of *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process and the Fashion Industry* illustrates some of the breadth and

diversity of approaches to the practices of fashion. The evolution of the fashion practitioner becoming researcher, working at the interface of fashion presentation and experimental artistic practice, is explored in Jessica Bugg's article. This phenomenon, found in experimental and cutting-edge designers from the UK, Belgium, and Japan for example, sits uneasily between fashion, performance, and conceptual art and its reception by audiences initially ranged from ridicule to hostility, but gradually became accepted into the mainstream. Perceptions of fashion as a research practice eschewing commerce, and of fashion as a key industry, embracing economic importance are diametrically opposed; the concept of "wearable art" exists in the USA and in south Asia, but is little used in the UK. Here, the same designer may produce experimental showpieces (such as, for example, Hussein Chalayan's *Aeroplane Dress* and *Video Dress*) alongside a high-end fashion business and consultancy, attempting to reconcile the two opposites through sponsorship of spectacle. Similarly, experimental practitioners such as Kei Kagami or Gareth Pugh can rarely rely on commercial sales for success, but seek to maintain their practice through sponsored shows, promotional activities, exhibitions, and design for performance. This is territory still being mapped, and is therefore fertile for discussion, alluded to in the interview with Shelley Fox, discussed below.

Alongside exploration of aesthetics, movement, form, and context, some practitioners extend the remit of fashion into realms of functional and responsive clothing, predicting a future where technologies are invisibly embedded in textiles to provide a personal domain where, for example, scents can provide therapeutic effects for well-being and potential health benefits. Jenny Tillotson writes about her research journey into this arena, covering a number of years, in which science and technology are harnessed to fabric and fashion as an interface between private and public spheres. The development of such interdisciplinary collaborations can be fraught with pitfalls and disappointments, therefore results often emerge slowly. We are reminded of the fact that current technologies such as Spandex fibers and desktop computers, now taken so much for granted, were once tentative steps into the unknown.

The perceived differences between the US and UK contexts for fashion education are illuminated by the conversation between Penny Martin (known for her work curating innovative fashion website SHOWstudio) and Shelley Fox, a London-based fashion designer whose personal practice has moved, over more than a decade, from research-led fashion collections utilizing fabric and pattern cutting experimentation, towards installation and other forms of fashion communication. Her recent appointment as the Donna Karan Professor of Fashion Design at Parson's School of Design in New York exemplifies the current dialogue about the position of fashion in today's global industry, the practical knowledge of students and new approaches to fashion education.

Moving from design practice to the development of innovation in footwear, two articles reflect on aspects of product development in the fast moving sportswear market. An interview by Marilyn DeLong with the Director of Innovation at Nike gives insights into the corporate design philosophy and processes in a global company. This can be contrasted with the much slower internal processes of assimilating a computer-based design system in a large manufacturing company as described in the article by Juyeon Park. The author investigates the acceptance and implementation of new technology and working methods for footwear design, where it is found that technology alone cannot achieve change and productivity, and that human resource management is a significant factor in success. This article also highlights the fact that, despite cutting-edge developments in the field of 3D virtual design systems for footwear, and emerging rapid manufacturing technologies based on 3D printing systems, implementations in manufacturing companies can lag behind, due to the cost, scale, and complexity of implementing new systems. Park's article represents a snapshot of one such scenario.

Finally, a totally different aspect of fashion practice is highlighted in Joseph Hancock's article analyzing the visual merchandising and retail environment of Abercrombie & Fitch in their New York flagship store, within which he discerns parallels with the notion of "hypermasculinity" developed by Martin Levine. The deliberate appeal to the gay market is one that, somewhat paradoxically, also proves attractive to the female customer, thus creating a shopping experience that intertwines icons of homoeroticism with narrative structures into a branded culture transcending gendered identity.

The breadth of *Fashion Practice* is therefore sketched out in this first issue of the journal with a cross-section of themes, concepts, and processes mapping across the continuum of the fashion industry and its cycles of design, production, promotion, and consumption. These articles can but touch the surface of the potential for *Fashion Practice*, and the editors look forward to continuing and developing these dialogues, ideas, and critiques with both readers and authors in the following volumes.

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## Reference

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