

Breaking the Script - Fashion Critiques and Conversations Thoughts in Progress

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ABSTRACT

The role of the fashion designer is broadening and shifting and in our academic, as well as our roles as creative practitioners, we feel a responsibility to develop new tools and resources for coming generations. A critical reflection on the fashion system – informed by a wide spectrum of roles and reaching from student to industry – is emerging in isolated pockets and on the fringes. We now need to nurture and connect these through the educational structures and institutions in which we work. From our conversations and critiques themes, challenges and mostly questions are emerging. We've identified that we miss fashion-owned language to describe the new paradigm as well as updates in fashion methodology. As educators we experience the disconnect between students' expectations of their education/curriculum, the fashion industry and their future roles within it and the reality of the current fashion system. We encounter fear of owning up to responsibilities within fashion in general and in particular to one's role and agency within and beyond the field and ultimately a lack of honest and potentially vulnerable critical debate. Together, we try to identify issues and opportunities of the fashion system and investigate ways to break the 'script' that we see embedded in fashion education.

Keywords

Fashion, Methodology, Education, Critique, Conversation

EDUCATION AS MATERIAL – AN OPEN DISCUSSION

At the EEM conference 2017 we want to share our 'thoughts in progress' through an evolving and participatory manifesto – not as a finished document but rather as a series of live provocations towards re-imagining the very structures and material of fashion education as we have experienced it through the institutions we have studied and worked within.

We will use the conference as a platform to pose some of the questions we have been discussing to a wider audience with the aim of creating a safe and open space to share frustrations as well as alternative strategies. We hope that by discussing the challenges we face and revealing where we feel vulnerable or lack certain knowledge due to a different educational background, opportunities will emerge for experimentation and risk taking as well as alternative assessment criteria and definitions of success. We hope this 'working manifesto' will act as a starting point and then evolve through contributions and on-going dialogues.

MANIFESTO THROUGH QUESTIONS:

If fashion is based on re-referencing and recontextualising, is fashion able to be relevant outside of its own cultural milieu? (Marloes ten Bhomer)

What is the relevance of trench coats in the age of drone wars? (Marloes ten Bhomer)

How can everyday garments and dress practices help to re-language fashion? (Ruby Hoette) [1]

In times of globalisation and technocracy, who and how does fashion represent? (Alexa Pollmann)

Ronald Barnett argues that learning for an unknown future forms the basis of all education. He suggests, however, that newly, students' focus is towards self and identity, as part of 'a world order that is characterised by ontological dispositions', in the face of extreme chaos, complexity and

fragmentation. If this is seen as problematic how and what systems in academia and industry can be interrogated for change? (Susan Postlethwaite) [2]

Why is there so much resistance from fashion educators to challenge the way fashion is taught, done and understood? (Kat Thiel)

How can we foster a meaningful exchange between educators and students, considering each group having their specific field of expertise (generational, access to technology, culture, knowledge and understanding of sub-cultures, ect.)? (Kat Thiel)

Picking up on Ingrid Loschek's consumer-influencer dichotomy: Who creates culture/fashions and how does education play a role within this? (Kat Thiel) [3]

MANIFESTO THROUGH QUOTES/CHALLENGES: [4]

Challenge #1: Fashion is a large industry under the scrutiny of many voices, but the system of fashion seems to impede on change. Can grassroots movements in fashion be encouraged and replace the status quo?

"If You're Riding a Horse and It Dies, Get Off"

Jim Grant and Char Forsten [5]

Challenge #2: Encourage fashion as a way to experiment with a collective future beyond the illusion of individual self expression:

"The trick has to be that it allows you still to feel you are an independent individual. The hyperindividualism of our age is not going to be going back into the bottle. You've got to square the circle. You've got to let people still feel they're independent individuals, yet they are giving themselves up to something that is awesome, greater, and more powerful that carries them into the future beyond their own existence. That's what people are yearning for."

Adam Curtis [6]

Challenge #3: Support and encourage students who are imagining other modes of fashion:

"Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what can be, and this is enough to re-move to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake (as though it were possible to make a bigger mistake)"

André Breton [7]

Challenge #4: Encourage expanding the field of fashion and explore unknown territories and connections:

"As a result the fashion world is still working in a 20th-century mode, celebrating the individual, elevating the it-people, developing the exception... in a society hungry for consensus and altruism. This places fashion out of society and de facto makes it old-fashioned."

Lidewij Edelkoort [8]

Challenge #5: Use fashion as a tool to educate, read and create social innovation and political voices in times of globalisation without a pure adoption and cultural appropriation of cultures uncommon to the 'French' Fashion System.

"Fashion is a collective activity and breaking the conventions is not an individual task. (...) What is most important in the French Fashion System is who has the power to decide, judge and evaluate that creativity. It is the process of legitimation that needs to be focused in understanding the success of any designer. The avant-garde Japanese designers would not have been noticed by the fashion professionals worldwide without the legitimation mechanism of the French Fashion System."

Yuniya Kawamura [9]

MANIFESTO THROUGH RELATIONSHIP: [10]

A	B
Fashion	...
Fashion objects	Body-related output (objects / behaviour) that speak of subject matters both related and unrelated to the body
...	Relevant outside the field
Design star	Inclusive communities of practice
Inspired by	Informed by / about / paying attention to
Trend led	Initiating, beyond a response to
...	...
Clothing types	New types for alternative contexts
Seasonal	Time, subject, object and location relevant
Collections	Content and context underpinned materialised output
Mood board	Illustrated contextual, formalist, aesthetic and material understanding and designer positioning
Consumer led	Society-led, situation-led, question-led opportunities and alternatives
Customer focus	Considering all players involved
Fashion audience	...
Student as client	Student participant / custodian / community of practice
Lockup in a fashion role	Ownership through expanding understanding and consequent accountability
Self-expression through fashion	...
...	...
Fashion identity	...
Locked in the system	Adapting the system
Catwalk show	Context and audience relevant dissemination of fashion
Curriculum	...
Assessment Criteria	...

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank all fashion educators and colleagues who have shared their thoughts and experiences with us.

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