

Title: **Critical Approaches to Footwear Design Practise**

Abstract:

Conceptual design offers a space, free from market pressures, in which design can engage in and explore new areas in order to experiment and develop alternative methodologies related to larger social and cultural issues and anticipate possible futures. Such critical and speculative design methodologies can contribute to different ways of thinking about footwear.

The footwear designers' projects discussed in this article are thought provoking about our current way of life in different ways. Salguero and Cope use associative design, exploring non-functional aspects of shoes to be used as a medium, a vehicle for social-cultural dialogue pointing out critical areas where footwear design can function. The two designers turn footwear into poetic art objects that operate by means of "making the familiar strange" in order to question our modes of thinking.

Ten Boehmer's practice is investigative, experimental, indicative and open ended in offering critical engagement through deconstruction. She uses a strictly technical vocabulary to question the act of walking in all its technical and cultural aspects, with the anatomical pressure points from which she designs and questions the high-heel as a construct. Salguero, Cope and Ten Boehmer critically approach footwear through association and negation, raising political and socio-cultural issues through artistic and sculptural expressions.

OurOwnSkin and Kristina Walsh use both critical and speculative design. They project fictional scenarios, imaginary but believable everyday situations in which footwear or footwear-related products play a part. By anticipating incorporation of new technologies and sciences in ordinary life, they contribute to a better understanding and critique of the implications of new technological developments before they enter our daily lives as daily products.

Entire areas of fashion are promoted by capitalism's culture of transition that does not connect to real human issues anymore. All the designers mentioned here are putting human elements at the center of the design experience: Cope by discussing human intimacy, Salguero by referencing objectification, Ten Boehmer with the anatomical pressure points from which she explores the high-heel as a construct, OurOwnSkin with taking inspiration from the workings of human skin and the possibilities this technology might have for producing footwear, and Walsh by

questioning real and ideal bodies. Different methodologies and cross-disciplinarity have informed these works involving diverse backgrounds such as jewelry, fashion, biomechanics, kinematics, orthopaedics and plastic surgery to develop alternative visions, not of style (i.e. superficial and transitional, characteristic of capitalist fashion), but real alternatives - alternative aesthetics, alternative modes of production, alternative ways of life, i.e. something that is made to endure and to change things in a fundamental way. These critical and speculative approaches are used to counter "what we are dealing with now (in contemporary society, which) is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their pre-corporation: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture" (Fischer 2012) and in so doing reinforcing the status quo, the normative. This is why design as critique is so important, because in our capitalist consumer culture it can: "pose questions, encourage thought, expose assumptions, provoke action, spark debate, raise awareness, offer new perspectives, inspire and entertain in an intellectual way." (Dunne & Raby) In doing so the footwear projects in this article use the ideologies and values that are imbedded in the materiality and production of design to contend a form of decadence inherent in current market product culture and ask us to consider what kind of society and future we want to shape.

Keywords: Footwear Design, Critical Design, Speculative Design, Experimental Design, Fashion Footwear, Decadence, Critique of Ideology, Capitalist Reality

Footwear in capitalism's culture of transition

Little research has been carried out in identifying areas of critical approaches to Footwear design practice. As in architecture, furniture design, fashion and industrial design we need to look at the discipline of footwear in order to redefine what it can mean in the 21st century.

Associated to fashion, yet very different from it, footwear as a design discipline and industry embodies all aspects of capitalist reality in every way: landfills contain millions of discarded shoes made of non-biodegradable material; cultural heritage is swept away or commoditised by market forces where child labour as well as underpaid labour is implemented and a marker of social inequality; fast fashion increases demand for cheap quality footwear that is neither sustainable nor healthy for the body; foot health is an overlooked area in medicine with major health consequences. These few examples, raising global issues that are social, cultural, political, technological and economic, illustrate the need to re-examine footwear's position within fashion footwear, within industry and the way it is produced as well as within society and its relationship to the body.

Products are the main exponent of capitalist culture and fashion in that products are capitalism's main driver in providing an illusion of alternative choice. Fashion, caught in an endless cycle of transitions between seasons and shifting hierarchies, is instrumental in achieving this differentiation. Design has become fully integrated into the neoliberal model of capitalism as

pointed out by Hal Foster in *Design & Crime* (2002). Fashion is a discipline characterised by “controlled consumption that is based upon automation, accessory features and inessential differences”. (Baudrillard); ‘normal’ objects present themselves as reassuring factors of equilibrium as transitional objects, marking an illusionary sense of identity and stability. We see them and are re-affirmed in our being and our self, or our slightly desired difference in the form of a variation from a homogenized automated core.

It is noteworthy that “technically speaking, changes in form and style are signs of immaturity; they mark a period of transition. The error of capitalism as a creed lies in the attempt to make this period of transition a permanent one.” (Lewis Mumford quoted in Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects*)

What contemporary discussions about the “end of fashion” (Edelkoort) really are about is that fashion has come to a point of decadence that fashion is not addressing. Footwear, as part of fashion, has been overlooked and so this article deals with how footwear is addressing the issues of this decadent culture.

Decadence as Transition

For this investigation we start from the premise that a period of transition is characteristic of decadence. A term with intensely contradictory meanings, decadence here is perceived as a tendency, a feeling of *malaise*, rather than a period. “There are no historical contents that can be characterised as decadent in themselves’. Decadence is not *in statu* but *in motu*”. Decadence therefore is not a structure but a direction or tendency. (V. Jankelevitch)

Although decadence is from all ages, the modern idea of decadence is inherently tied to the idea of progress and includes dissatisfaction with materialism at its root. However in earlier periods “the term progress was conceived by analogy with growth and particularly the intellectual development of the human individual. But after centuries of close association with scientific research and technological advance, the concept of progress reached a level of abstraction at which older organic and specifically anthropomorphic connotations could no longer be retained. Progress came to be regarded as a concept more to do with mechanics than with biology”. (Calinescu) This technocratic world view with advances in biotechnology and computer science has materialised also in our contemporary neoliberal organisation of society where an illusion of measurability of life is at odds with that which defines us as human. This results in a feeling that that which is human is under threat.

The idea of decadence that we will engage with here is Nietzsche’s. Nietzsche described periods of transition as marked by being an area of decadence that is meant to be overcome and saw this neither as something positive nor negative.

Seeing modernity as a transitional state in itself was not unique at the time. Emile Durkheim for example also saw modern times as a period of transition and moral mediocrity, but to identify this tendency as decadent, and as a period of transformation to happen within the individual and society at large is particular to Nietzsche’s theory of decadence.

“Nietzsche’s theory of decadence is ultimately a theory and critique of ideology. Although the current notion of ideology in the sense of “false consciousness” comes from Marx, it should be observed that Nietzsche’s analysis of decadence, and specifically modern decadence, constitutes a first attempt at a comprehensive and radical critique of ideology in general, with a particular

emphasis on modern bourgeois ideologies (political, social, cultural) including the ideologies of modernity." (Calinescu)

The works discussed in this article can be perceived as a *product* of decadence but not as a style of decadence. They are often illustrative and aim to appeal to the imagination. Both aspects were identified with decadence by Nisard when analysing the work of Victor Hugo in his article "*M. Victor Hugo in 1836*": "the profuse use of description, the prominence of detail, the elevation of imaginative power to the detriment of reason". (Calinescu)

Decadence as Critique

Contrary to this conservative view, Gautier, in the introduction to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (1868) and, later, the Decadents used the idea of decadence consciously as a style of critique. The glorification of death and decay as style feature, an extension of romanticism, is not relevant here, and will not be investigated thematically.

What does resonate with decadence is, firstly, that the projects discussed in this article can be seen as decadent in that they embrace different disciplines to inform new works. This coincides with the speculation of Baudelaire in his article *L'art Philosophique* (1859) where he described the characteristic of decadence as the breaking down of the barriers between the diverse arts. And, secondly, the projects described in this article aim to appeal to the imagination, and try to seduce the viewer into the works by using everyday objects that we all can relate to. They are purposely thought-provoking objects that address issues linked to capitalism's culture of decadence in a critical way.

I propose to inform this critique by linking footwear not to fashion but to industrial and product design methods, and in particular to Critical and Speculative Design.

In line with the idea that fashion footwear design needs to do away with its insularity (Edelkoort), new design roles, new contexts and new methods within footwear design need to be investigated with the help of concepts and methodology drawn from other or related disciplines such as film, science, ethics, politics and art. Critical and Speculative Design methodologies investigate just that.

In this article therefore we first look at how critical design thinking can be used in footwear through a play with visual references in order to produce awareness. Secondly, we examine how critical design principles can be applied to rethink footwear design and production so as to develop speculative alternatives, not only by offering new products but also in aiming to question social and cultural implications of these products on larger global issues mentioned at the start of this writing.

We do this through investigation of several cross-disciplinary footwear design approaches that might, or might not, consciously apply critical methods. The goal of these alternative methodologies is to approach and investigate footwear by going beyond fashion. We will ask what cross-disciplinary methodologies they apply, how they can be seen as critical and in what way they can inform footwear design.

Critical approaches



Critical design is a form of conceptual design, that is, not the conceptualization process of design but the use of concept as a tool for cultural analysis. "Critical design focuses on present social, cultural and ethical implications of design objects and practice. It is grounded in critical social theory. Its designers scan the cultural horizon today, offering a critique of what already exists." (Dunne & Raby)

Jewellery designer Noëllie Salguero's "Trophy" (2012) approaches footwear by the juxtaposition of familiar imagery wherein her high heels have merged with a hunting trophy. The work is associative by referencing both the way women are sexualised through wearing high heels and fur and objectified 'as animals' (again the fur), prey to be caught and boasted about, whilst at the same time discussing the use of animal products in footwear. The Trophy's power lies in the fact that its meaning constantly oscillates between those two areas. Also, it clearly uses design techniques in its making and references wearable shoes, while the finished object enters the realm of art or ornament as a trophy to be hung up on the wall, the shoes having totally lost their usefulness but not their symbolic power.

Image 1 Noëllie Salguero "Trophy" (2012) © HEAD – Genève

The technique used here is that of defamiliarisation. A method often used in critical design for promoting a heightened sense of perception through attracting and holding attention by stepping away from the functionality and/ or familiarity of an object. It is not so much a device but a multitude of devices that make the familiar seem strange. The aim is to produce a unique poetic narrative that attracts the viewer into the designer's thinking.

Salguero's project illustrates how footwear can function as language, a vehicle to communicate a story that deals with contemporary issues through defamiliarisation. In Critical Design this type of work is best characterized by what is called Associative Design, because "the critical narrative in the works [...] is embedded into the object form - typically conveyed through familiar archetypes" *i.e.* by using familiar things to produce new meaning through their unusual association. (Malpass)



This form of conceptual design generally raises questions outside the boundaries of production design, allowing objects to relate to larger socio-cultural issues. This potential use of “the *language of design* to pose questions, provoke, and inspire is conceptual design’s defining feature.” (Dunne & Raby)

Through footwear Joe Cope’s ‘The Language of Feet in the Walk of Life’ (2017) makes us question and think about our interpersonal relationships and socio-cultural behaviours. The critical value of this piece lies in the artistic way it is done.

Also essential in Cope’s investigation is the use of footwear as language. Psychology of gait and foot positions were researched to see how feet express psychological feeling in order to inform a series of footwear installations.

Defamiliarisation is used by slightly altering familiar shoe stereotypes and then arranging them into symbolic configurations to reach a level of abstraction that is meant to draw the viewer. in through a play with presence and absence of the body as is very prominent in *Legs Open Eyes Shut* (2016) . Shoe always seem to hold a body when left empty behind because the wearer’s character and whereabouts are visibly inscribed in the wear and tear of the shoe.

Image 2 — Joe Cope “Legs Open Eyes Shut” (2016)



Image 3 Joe Cope "Love Triangle" (2016)

In "Love Triangle", the shoe is explored as a powerful sexual and gendered object. The stiletto as image and symbol talks of power, desire and is traditionally equated with feminine seduction. The Oxford shoe embodies classic masculinity and the Chukka boot on the other hand is purposely non-descriptive creating an anonymity that represents a third person who could be either a man or a woman.

The use of stereotypes of gender creates a familiarity through which the viewer is seduced into the work. This, in combination with the arrangement in a circle or triangle or otherwise abstract configurations, resembles the secret mystical symbols found in religious or sectarian cults. This all together creates an installation piece producing an abstract narrative that opens imaginative approaches within the viewer. The colour red is essential as it is the key factor for directing the works in an erotic context and it acts as a defamiliarising device and links the shoes with the realm of legends and fairy tales, wherein shoes with magical powers are often red.



Image 4 "Twisted Stiletto" (2016)

Twisted Stiletto (2016) is a frozen act of aggression. Is this act of violence an aggression of male desire against a female? The object is a fossil, a remnant, and turns the work into a psychological questioning of gender relations and erotic engagement.

Cope explores and opens up what footwear can mean and provides us with objects of reflection. She is making us aware of the importance of human contact by touching on the absence of intimacy and real connections in an age of technologies such as internet dating, WhatsApp, Facebook, and the like. Cope brings the body back in, because shoes show body language by pointing in the direction wished for, which is not necessarily in tune with the polite social codes of behaviour displayed in social interaction. She shows this by materialising these hidden lines. Furthermore she investigates foot psychology and shows how this can be used to inform the design of footwear. In this way her project can re-inform the process of footwear design as well as function as a narrative that questions our interpersonal relationships.

“All good design is critical. Designers start by identifying shortcomings in the things they are redesigning and offer a better version. Critical design applies this to larger, more complex issues. Critical design is critical thought translated into materiality. It is about thinking through design rather than words and using the language and structure of design to engage people.” (Dunne & Raby) This is what Footwear designer Marloes Ten Boehmer establishes in ‘A Measurable Factor Sets the Conditions of its Operation’ (2013) Design is also used here as language, but the language is technical and not referential. It is the language of product design. Presented as the result of her Stanley Picker Fellowship in the Stanley Picker Gallery at the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture Kingston University, the piece is set up as an immersive installation. The result of the installation are investigative pieces, processes, tests and trials for a new footwear collection informed by engineering principles, as well as a video.

The projected video *Material Compulsion* investigates 'the woman in motion' as an engineering problem. Analysed through filming a high-heeled woman on alternative substracts (ground surfaces) she 'dismantles' her as a complex construct: “When placed in alternative settings (through the narrative of a film, for example) or when forced to walk through unique substrates, a woman in heels loses her equilibrium (both physically and culturally) and begins to slip, trip, sink or stumble, thereby transforming her perceived identity”. (Boehmer)

In this way, through an exploration of the physics of walking, Boehmer exposes and questions the role high heels play in the cultural construction of female identity in contemporary society.

STANLEY PICKER FELLOWSHIP / A MEASURABLE FACTOR SETS THE CONDITIONS OF ITS OPERATION

images: © Ellie Laycock

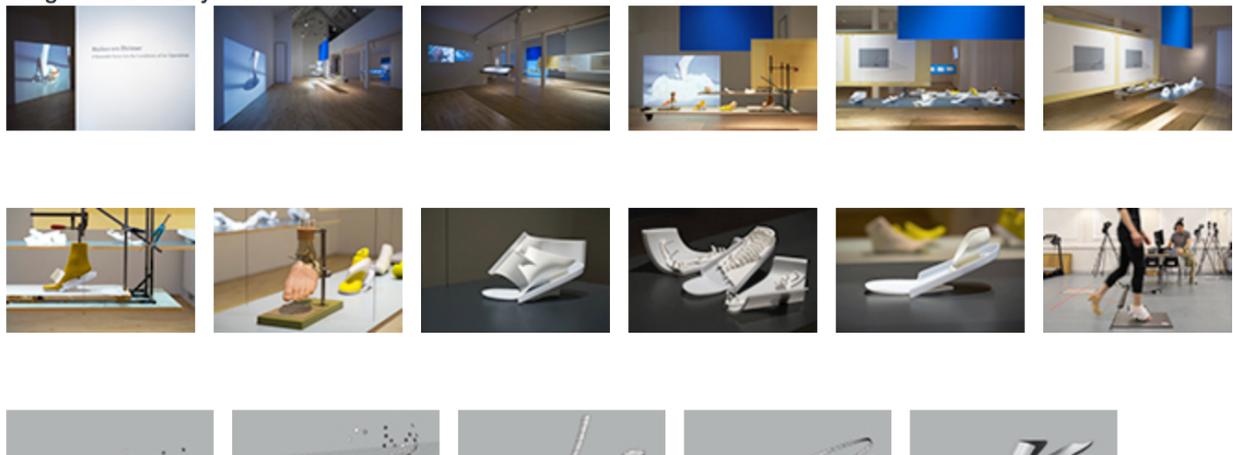


Image 5 Marloes Ten Boehmer "A Measurable Factor Sets the Conditions of its Operation" (2013) Overview image of the project

Image 6 "White Prototype" (2013). Images: Ellie Laycock

Rationalised parameters, aesthetic intuition and structural understanding are utilized through deconstructing and reconstructing the process of footwear by applying methodologies used in biomechanics such as measuring gait.

For example, *White Prototypes* displayed on the shelves are test pieces, mapping out specific combinations of foot and ground contact points derived from anatomical and kinematic studies. These have informed a series of design possibilities that challenge conventional culturally defined stereotypes.

Image 6, a case in point, seems a cross section exposing half the foot. A structure resembling a corrective insole puts the foot in position and is also utilised as closing system to hold the foot. It is in this way that our attention is directed to a narrative that is entirely communicated through shoe-technical references and *in construction*.

The project's focus on the engineering of a highly charged type of shoe neglects the symbolic issues that this type of footwear is laden with. She also ignores all standard approaches to footwear construction.



This is a purposeful approach because with this method she aims to “shirk fashion trends and styles, (and) is based on research into the structural parameters required to support a foot (in a high-heeled position) while in motion” (Boehmer)

It is in this sense that her work should also be seen as critical.

The project offers striking abstract footwear solutions that show new ways of holding the foot in a high heel structure. Here she references the issues evolving around foot health and the body in an unnatural culturally defined position.

Ultimately a new aesthetic for footwear and the fashion silhouette emerges out of her functional – biometrics – kinetic – kinematic research as well as a potential alternative approaches to footwear



design for the industry to function in.

Image 7 Marloes ten Boehmer “White Prototypes” (2013) test pieces displayed on the shelves.

Images: Ellie Laycock





Image 8 Marloes ten Boehmer "White Prototypes" (2013) test pieces displayed on the shelves.
Images: Ellie Laycock

Image 9 Marloes ten Boehmer "White Prototypes" (2013) test pieces displayed on the shelves.
Images: Ellie Laycock



Image 10 Marloes ten Boehmer "White Prototypes" (2013) Images: Ellie Laycock



Image 11 Marloes ten Boehmer "White Prototypes" (2013) Images: Ellie Laycock

One of the *White Prototypes* has been translated in production 'Bluepanelshoe' showing how a project developed completely outside the parameters of the market place can enter this market after.

Over the past 15 years or so, footwear has seen a huge drive for experimentation in form evidenced in extravagant catwalk designs, as well as in designs exploring the application of 3D printing and how far that can be pushed. Examples are the collaborations between the brand United Nude and product designers and architects such as Ross Lovegrove and Zaha Hadid. This is an area of conceptual design aimed at producing sculptural and 'artistic' objects on the fringes yet remains within the bounds of the commercial world. An example of this form-related discipline are concept cars, concept kitchens. In the area of fashion and fashion footwear this type of conceptual design comes in the form of catwalk shows or shops that promote brands and designers by displaying the latest potential applications of state of the art technologies. In this context, conceptual design is in fact a kind of entertainment. This is not the conceptual design we need.

Many changes are also already happening in fashion footwear, with brands that aim to work sustainably (Veya, Stella McCartney) or to apply technology (notably sportswear companies such as Nike and Adidas).

However interesting and technically innovative these projects are, they don't deal with nor discuss social and cultural implications. They function much in the same way as current social and humanitarian design still operates within the limits of reality as it is.

We need to apply another conceptual design approach that offers product proposals and suggestions that do not revolve around adding aesthetic variations, or applying new materials and

technologies alone; these procedures are in essence solving merely aesthetic problems, answering only the requirements of a culture of transition. "Existing outside the market place new ideas, approaches and issues can be developed within this conceptual space and inform new possibilities for design itself, new aesthetic possibilities for technology research; or large-scale social and political issues such as democracy, sustainability, and alternatives to our current model of capitalism". (Dunne & Raby) Critical design uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions, and givens about the role products play in everyday life." (Malpass)

OurOwnsKIN (2015-2017) is an on-going project involving artist Rhian Solomon whose practice investigates collaborative practices between medical specialist and designers for exploring the possibilities of skin, and footwear/ 3D concept development designer Liz Ciokajlo whose focus is on materials, emerging processes and design construction.

Supported by Ravensbourne College London, MV works program (funded by Knowledge Transfer Network, Innovate UK and the Arts Council) and Innovate UK the project explored whether leather could be replaced as a source and guide to design construction in footwear. Can it be replaced with a material that takes its physical characteristics from human foot skin? Can this approach subsequently be useful to developing designs for growing materials such as artificial leather? This raises all kinds of questions and potentials: 'can we not grow the whole shoe?' and "what do you grow that shoe on?" If so, it needs a structure. In the medical world scaffolding is created in order to grow things on. Hence inspiration for the design of the scaffolding is taken from medical approaches and methodologies used by plastic reconstructive surgeons.

"We used the principles of skin tension lines (Langer Lines) to inspire a computation framework. Springy cells called *auxetics* were placed into the computation framework to address how the material and design construction can provide fine variations in fit needed in mass produced footwear. The auxetics also seemed to provide a responsive 360 degree structure. From here we pushed the code out to form the sole of the shoe, keeping the code simple. The approach was to design the footwear structure from the inside surface of the foot to the outsole. Our research only scratches the surface of the potential to customise the structure for bespoke performance



application". (OurOwnsKIN)

Image 12 OurOwnsKIN 'OurOwnsKIN' (2016)

Historically, footwear design construction has evolved from the manipulation of the material leather, another animal's skin. Manufacturing machines have evolved to automise how we hand manipulated the material leather to make shoes. With the introduction of new footwear materials, such as polymers, footwear design constructions evolved under the influence of how to manipulate leather." (OurOwnsKIN)

One area in which shoe design is being reconsidered today is in 3D print which can construct features so fine that the line between materials' structure and design construction starts to blur, so shoes do not have to be constructed but can actually be grown.

In working with the material skin as an artisan shoemaker, questioning how it behaves and how to cut it, the characteristics and techniques used on human foot skin are explored to rethink how to design for future manufactured 3D printed and grown shoes.

The result is not a shoe but a design construction and a system conceived for designers to work with in search of new opportunities in the field of shoe design made out of 3D printed TPU done with laser sintering.

One of the benefits for designers would be the ability to exploit the process with the computer and have an unlimited amount of aesthetic freedom. More importantly, the template allows the creation of design constructions that maximise the benefits of 3D printing for shoemaking. This could have wide-ranging implications both for the manufacturing of shoes and for the final wearer. Not only could it lead to a more efficient production in making shoes, allowing a more sustainable production, reducing significant amounts of waste in shoe manufacturing. It would also lead to more comfortable shoes by utilizing computer technologies for a customised process / measuring for a better 'fit' through and better performance. Insoles correcting gait for example could be in the shoe already and correcting the way people walk avoiding possible future foot health issues. This has potential in a more human-centred design approach, a new kind of bespoke footwear.

The strength of this project does not lie in the use of footwear as language. The design possibilities remain still un-explored since what is offered as yet is a construction to be designed with. This is innovative, and its critical strength lies in the speculative opportunities and socio-cultural implications offered by this technique.



Image 13 OurOwnsKIN 'OurOwnsKIN'- installation shot at the MV Works exhibition Into the Wild



at Somerset House, London (2016)

Image 14 OurOwnsKIN 'OurOwnsKIN'- installation shot at the MV Works exhibition Into the Wild at Somerset House, London (2016)

By putting a product into a future-driven scenario critical questions about our current way of life are explored.

For example, the project raises fundamental ethical, social and cultural concerns: how could this help in solving foot health issues, how could it help eradicate the use animals and polluting products for our shoes. Ultimately it speculates on growing our own skin and so rectifying a body part for optimal function. In this case the shoe becomes second skin literally through becoming a prosthesis. In this way the project raises questions about what it means to be human.

Kristina Walsh's project "FOOTWEAR BEYOND THE FOOT: Extensions of Being" (2017) investigates if footwear design can be used as a tool to improve psychological well-being of lower-limb amputees, and how it can facilitate new empathetic relationships with others as well as with oneself. Amputees and research in this area have spoken about the importance of addressing prosthetics and the multifaceted components of quality of life in conjunction with fashion and design.

In recent years amputees have been used in fashion contexts in order to raise awareness, for example model cum athlete Aimee Mullins in an Alexander McQueen's catwalk show. Walsh takes this further by looking into the practices of the prosthetics industry and the nuanced psychological experiences some amputees face after amputation. This led to a focus on designs that encourage interactions, relating to clinical research finding, interview responses, or techniques employed in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The interviews were led with people who weren't public persona such as athletes or models who perform in a superlative way to answer the ideals of our performance obsessed society. The interviews aimed to collect material about day-to-day basic needs in such mundane activities as going shopping and going to work or getting on the bus, and about how to fit, put on and wear the prosthesis in a normal daily context, and how the interviewees felt amputees were represented in fashion.

The project is a collection of footwear tools which redefine the parameters of footwear by both proposing new potential products, a more emphatic approach to the revalidation process, as well as offering design tools that are currently not used in Behavioural health.

The designs "encourage a positive body image and emphasize social support and questions the limited set of emotional experiences offered through products in the prosthetic industry." (Walsh) The set of products to help the amputee in the rehabilitation process are fully prototyped in appropriate materials.

The 'Meditation Station' (image 15) is a teaching tool by behavioural therapists. It is a transportable space creating an environment for self-reflection to aid body reconceptualisation after amputation. "An essential element since clinical psychology studies have theorised that the first milestone in post-amputation rehabilitation is that one must reconceptualise body image" (Walsh)..



Image 15 Kristina Walsh "Meditation Station" (2016)



Image 16 Kristina Walsh "Foot Feeler" (2016)

This tool is designed as part of the therapy session where the partner is introduced to the process. The objects are to be used between two people- the amputee and a loved one- in order for both to get familiar with the residual limb and thereby restoring intimacy.

The form is abstract yet sensuous, facilitating the foot yet at the same time hoping to tempt the partner into touching; caressing the bottom of the foot leaving space for the thumb to move over the amputation. This helps the amputee to build up a renewed positive self-image.



Image 17 Kristina Walsh "The Healing Helix" (2016)

The Healing Helix is an extravagant pair of footwear pieces that aim for the amputee to claim their identity by expressing themselves proudly back into society. This piece is for when the therapy is ending. It aims to showcase the possibilities that could exist for prosthetics to be designed: aesthetic qualities contribute directly to a positive experience of the quality of life and are in this way therapeutic. The Healing Helix redefines fashionable prosthetics, and are that Walsh's research has found to be an area of interest both from the point of the manufacturer as well as some amputees.

All these projects focus on re-establishing human connection, either to the person themselves through the Meditative Station, between two people with Foot Feelers, or with the prosthesis reconnecting with the outside world.

In doing so, this project goes beyond merely innovation through inclusivity in that it also aims to enlighten the public perception of prosthetics and support the psychological well-being of amputees. As such, this is a project where product design, footwear design and fashion merge. The critical element in Walsh's project is the questions raised about the imperfect body by addressing disability. It does this by creating new images of the human body as well as to provide real product proposals that are imaginative and implementable. The project addresses the issue of social insurance, as an amputee-athlete gets sponsoring for several pairs of prostheses whereas social insurance pays only for more basic prostheses which don't include state of the art technology nor high tech materials. (Fischer 2016)

Conclusion

We have seen that conceptual design is design about ideas and how conceptual space offers design a field to explore free from market pressures. We have distinguished between conceptual design within a market led context and critical approaches that fully step away from the market place and enter the fictional. We have seen that design can engage in and explore new areas in this space in order to experiment and develop alternative methodologies related to larger social and cultural issues and anticipate possible futures.

We have also seen the various opportunities in which these critical and speculative design methodologies can contribute to different ways of thinking about footwear.

The footwear designers's projects discussed in this article are thought provoking about our current way of life in different ways. Salguero and Cope use associative design, exploring non-functional aspects of shoes to function as language. They both explore the potential for footwear to be used as a medium, a vehicle for social-cultural dialogue pointing out critical areas that footwear design can function in.

Here the designer functions as an artist in the sense that they turn footwear into an art object. Both Cope and Salguero have a formalist approach to design where the object is seen to be poetic imagery or have a poetic function. Their approach is informed by art and studio jewellery backgrounds and in doing so they produce artistic objects that operate by means of "making strange" in order to question our thinking. «The habitual way of thinking is to make the unfamiliar as easily digestible as possible. Normally our perceptions are "automatic", however "if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been". Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are *perceived* and not as they are *known*. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception". (Schklovsky)

Ten Boehmer's practice on the other hand is investigative, experimental, indicative and open ended, nevertheless offering critical engagement through deconstruction. She uses a strictly technical vocabulary offering a different form of abstraction than, for example, Cope's work.

The result of Salguero, Cope and Boehmer are approaches to footwear that are critical through association and negation however remaining artistic and sculptural expressions that contain critical ideas, each expressed differently.

The design proposals by OurOwnSkin and Kristina Walsh can be considered both critical and speculative because they project fictional scenarios in which footwear or footwear-related products could function. Through anticipating incorporation of new technologies and sciences they can help better imagine, critique and facilitate the effects and possibilities of new technological futures before they enter our daily lives as everyday products. They are "new technological developments within imaginary but believable everyday situations that would allow us to debate the implications of different technological futures before they happen." (Dunne & Raby)

We established that entire areas of fashion as promoted by capitalism's culture of transition do not connect to real human issues anymore. All designers mentioned here are putting human

elements at the centre of the design experience. Cope by discussing human intimacy, Salguero by referencing objectification, Ten Boehmer with the anatomical pressure points form which she designs and questions the high-heel as a construct, OurOwn Skin with taking inspiration from the workings of human skin and the possibilities this technology might have for producing footwear, and Walsh by questioning real and ideal bodies.

Different methodologies and cross-disciplinarity have informed these works involving diverse backgrounds, such as jewellery, fashion, biomechanics, kinematics, orthopaedic, and plastic surgery, to develop alternative visions, not of style, but real alternatives- alternative visions, alternative modes of production, alternative ways of life, i.e. something made to endure, to last, to change things in a fundamental way, not just superficial and not to pass, to transition. Styles are always passing, superficial in capitalist fashion.

These approaches are used to counter "what we are dealing with now (in contemporary society, which) is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their pre-corporation: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture." (Fischer 2012) and in doing so reinforcing the status quo, the normative.

This is why design as critique is so important, because in our capitalist consumer culture it can: "pose questions, encourage thought, expose assumptions, provoke action, spark debate, raise awareness, offer new perspectives, inspire and entertain in an intellectual way." (Dunne & Raby) In doing so the projects in this article use the ideologies and values that are imbedded in the materiality and production of design to contend a form of decadence inherent in current market product culture and ask us to consider which society and future we want.

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