

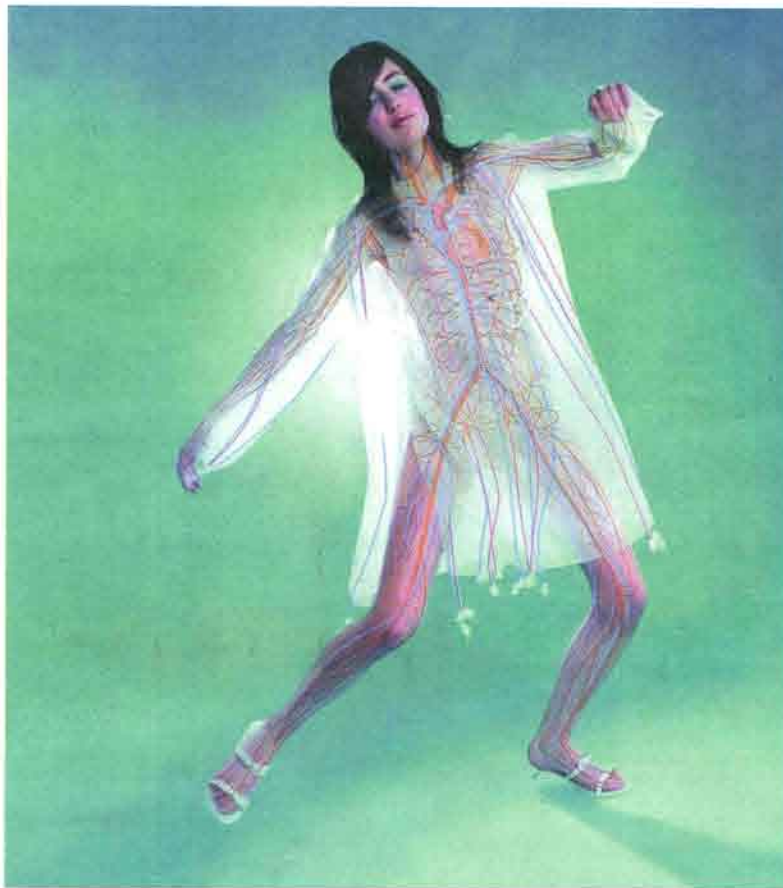
CSM IS 20

Continuing our anniversary series, alumna and senior research fellow Jenny Tillotson looks back

St Martin's was somewhere exotic I'd read about in *I-D* while I was growing up in Cambridge. In 1985 I did the foundation at St Martins and spent my nights clubbing at Taboo with Boy George and Matthew Glamorre, wearing fluorescent clothes and listening to acid house, before joining the BA Fashion 'sandwich' degree.

I think it was the music scene that got me into fashion. I liked high-energy disco, punk and goth. I was also into the rave scene in a big way. This was the era of illegal raves, of pioneering acid house clubs in Amsterdam and London. The summer of love in 1988 was key. We ditched our suits. I lived in pink platforms and day-glo raving gear.

I studied Fashion Communication with Promotion in a tiny room in the fashion school overlooking Greek Street, but spent most of my time in Dave's coffee bar in the Charing Cross Road building – the coolest place for fashion, fine art and graphic design students to hang out – and drinking at the Cambridge pub in Soho. There was a really exciting buzz at St Martins. We had some great tutors – Felicity Green, Iain R Webb, Sally Brampton and Lee Widdows, who was appointed our pathway tutor in 1989.



Scentsory Design by Jenny Tillotson



Jenny Tillotson with Matthew Glamorre at taboo 1986

In 1989 the colleges merged. Jane Rapley became Dean of CSM Fashion & Textiles (I have vague memories of canary yellow legwarmers). I did work placements at BMG Records (Simon Cowell was A&R consultant), Stephen Jones and *Elle*, in between further acid house raving and meeting my husband, who worked for Thierry Mugler, in Japan. My husband introduced me to science fiction and my 'science fashion' story began. From the start, Japan has been a big influence on my life, work and research.

CSM has been a major part of me for nearly 25 years and I'm now a senior research fellow. My final degree project in 1991 was a pointer to my current research practice. I created a multi-sensory book with microchips called 'WONDER'.

Around this time I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Back then there was little support at college for students with mental health issues. However, the illness shaped my career and I swapped fashion styling for research into wearable sensory systems for wellbeing. Health & safety was a rather vague notion in those days. We smoked in the studios and I had live rabbits at my degree show! The big stars – Alexander McQueen, Giles Deacon, Hussein Chalayan – were there, graduating after me.

Jane Rapley has been central to the success of my research career. I told Jane about my diagnosis in 2003 by accident at an appraisal (and regretted it immediately!). But this was a major turning point for me. I had never talked about my diagnosis professionally before, and it liberated my work and



The 'WONDER' rabbits



Jenni Thompson, Claire Corrigan, David Kappo, Tony Purcell in the Cambridge pub 1989



The WONDER Teaparty with CSM FCP students 1991

improved my wellbeing. Before 2003 I was 'stuck' in the sense I found it hard to manage work and mental health together.

FCP itself was also a key to my research. When 'communicating' became a problem for me thanks to my illness, I put sensory design (and scent in particular) at the centre of my studies because they open up new pathways and systems of communication.

CSM has helped me manage my illness throughout a long journey. I'm now developing design-led wearable technologies that promote wellbeing through 'controllable fragrance and targeted delivery' and have shown my work at Warp Factor 09 in Japan and China (currently at the Lethaby Gallery).

I'm now commercialising my research with the help of UAL Ventures. I'm back in Cambridge having come full circle. I'm establishing a spinout company, Sensory Design & Technology Ltd, at Cambridge University, with plans for a Science Fashion Lab@.

I still read *I-D* and I still wear bright clothes. I don't go to raves, but I still love disco and house, and I'm still doing projects for Lee Widdows!

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