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Collaborative Space: An Exploration of the Form and Function of Fashion Designer and Architect Partnerships

Stacy Anderson, Karinna Nobbs, Stephen M. Wigley & Ewa Larsen

Introduction

Architecture and store design are increasingly significant to fashion brands as powerful media for the expression of brand image and story (Riewold 2002). While this relationship is not entirely new, fashion brands such as Fiorucci, Pierre Cardin and Biba have augmented their image using store design since the 1960s (Mores 2006). Battista (2010) identifies that the overtly collaborative relationships between fashion and architecture are embryonic and will be an area of growth for practitioners and academics alike. As the boundaries between fashion, retail, art and architecture continue to blur, architects have actively sought collaboration with fashion brands, and vice versa (Bingham 2005). Contemporary collaborations have developed beyond the design of spaces for selling apparel, extending now to the synergetic creation of products and cultural experiences which are visually spectacular, creatively influential and commercially significant. Meanwhile, hybrid exhibitions in New York (2006) and London (2009) have stimulated a dialogue for exploring the relationships between the disciplines (Menkes 2009). The paper proposes an inquiry into this phenomenon and the nature and characteristics of contemporary instances to identify the key drivers of fashion and architecture collaborations.

The following section of the paper elaborates on instances of fashion designer-architect collaboration and provides an exploration of the fashion brands involved in such activity.

FORM

Three main sources of collaboration have been identified: stores; products; and ‘third space’.

Store Collaborations

The most obvious, and historically the most popular type of collaboration between architect and fashion designer has been store design (Battista 2010; Tungeate 2009). In early twentieth century France, Couture fashion designer Madeleine Vionnet worked with architect Ferdinand Chanut to create a ‘Temple of Fashion’ on Avenue Montaigne in Paris (Golbin 2009). In Milan, in 1967, Elio Fiorucci collaborated with architects Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi and Franco Marabelli to create the designer’s ‘personal inclusive vision of fashion’ (Mores 2006). In the last decade the flagship store has become the major focus of fashion-architect collaborations (Reynolds et al 2008). Flagship stores are characterised as being larger than average, in an exclusive location, at the top of the product distribution hierarchy and being exceptionally well designed (Moore and Docherty 2007). The level of investment and planning necessary in these projects imply a longer-term and more involved relationship than evident in alternative fashion designer-architect collaborations. The collaboration between architect John Pawson and designer Calvin Klein for a Fifth Avenue flagship in 1996 is noted as significant in providing momentum to the evolution of these relationships (Barreneche 2005). Concurrently, the term ‘starchitect’ was coined by journalists to describe architects who attracted celebrity status partly due to their work on behalf of high profile fashion brands (Chow 2003) - examples include Frank Gehry (Issey Miyake), Future Systems (Marni) and Renzo Piano (Hermes). One of the most prolific ‘starchitects’ is New York based Peter Marino, responsible for flagships with Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Fendi and Dior. Marino’s ability to capture the essence of the brand whilst bringing new perspectives has allowed him to become one of the pre-eminent fashion flagship architects (Jana 2007). His most recent fashion project, the London Louis Vuitton ‘Maison’ (Bond Street), exemplifies his status, where the store integrates LV’s heritage with his contemporary design credentials in an innovative environment (WGSN 2010).
Prada has become equally synonymous with innovative products and avant-garde design and materials, as with its store designs which have set the standard for luxury fashion flagships (Barreneche 2005). Labelled 'epicentres', Prada created three highly conceptual and technologically advanced stores: New York (2001); Tokyo (2003); and Los Angeles (2004). Designed in partnership with Rem Koolhaas and Herzog & de Meuron, each epicentre has a unique design while sharing a conceptual theme of integrating smart technologies such as RFID (Radio-frequency identification), 'intelligent' changing rooms and interactive screens within distinctive, multi-utility environments (Moore and Docherty 2007; Prada et al 2010). The distinguishing characteristic of the epicentres is their innovative
and experimental role in fusing the commercial purpose of a retail space with a creative and cultural purpose. The result is that each epicentre is a destination as much for lovers of design and architecture as fashion and shopping (Curtis and Watson 2010).

Figure 4: Prada 'Epicentre: Tokyo'. Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan. Architects: Herzog & de Meuron (Interior view)

Figure 5: Prada 'Epicentre: Tokyo'. Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan. Architects: Herzog & de Meuron (Interior view)

Figure 6: Prada 'Epicentre: Tokyo'. Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan. Architects: Herzog & de Meuron (Detail view)
Alternatively, the temporary aspect of store collaborations must also be acknowledged, and is evident in visual merchandising strategies. Laub (2010) noted the growing number of fashion designers collaborating with architects and product designers at the Milan Furniture Fair to create installations and collections within flagship stores and curated in window displays. Similarly, July 2010 saw various London-based architects collaborate with Regent Street fashion stores to produce visual displays celebrating London’s Festival of Architecture (Dickenson 2010).

Product Collaborations

Fashion designers have often found inspiration in architecture; some, such as Hussein Chalayan, Martin Margiela and Issey Miyake have had collections described in architectural terms such as 'structural' and 'engineered' (Miles 2009; Almeida 2009). However, specific collaborations between fashion designers and architects developing new products have become evident only in the last five years. Zaha Hadid, another 'starchitect', is recognized for her dynamically fluid architecture which is particularly well-suited to apparel and accessory design experimentation (Almeida 2009). Hadid has worked on a large number of fashion product collaborations, including Louis Vuitton (2006), Melissa (2008), Swarovski (2009), and Lacoste (2009). Iconic flip flop brand Havanais regularly collaborates with architects, designers and architects, emphasizing or manipulating specific dimensions to solidify or obtain a novel brand position (Kapferer 2004; Aaker 2003).

Brand Positioning

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This enabled global consumers to experience the brand heritage, solidifying Chanel's associations with art and architecture, and contributing to a more sophisticated, and dynamic brand identity and position.

Kapferer (2004) suggests consumers identify brands primarily from a product perspective; however the creation of experiences allows for a more holistic brand identity to be expressed. Leading fashion store architect, Michael Gabellini suggests that store design is a most prominent means of brand communication and interaction: "the store design doesn't so much 'symbolize' a brand as embody it" (Wigley and Larsen 2010). When carefully crafted stores are the product of a synergetic relationship between fashion and architecture, the results can be inspiring examples of brand positioning for both the architect and the fashion designer (Moore and Docherty 2007). As Quinn (2003: 16) reiterates, "Just as dress can be adopted and adapted as a means of personal expression, architecture has been used to express collective identity, values and status". Through consistently emphasising or introducing new values, collaboration, can provide a strong mechanism for positioning and brand identity development lending credibility and authenticity (Wasik 1996).

As previously indicated, Prada's patronage to architecture has been regarded as significant to its influence on fashion design (Quinn 2003). The 'Prada Transformer' was described by its architect, Koolhaas, as being 'a single tool to serve the purposes of two or three sides of Prada" (Vezzoli 2008). Koolhaas confirms the positioning capabilities served by the project - through its ability to associate different dimensions of both Prada and Koolhaas' respective identities - but also posits the structure itself as a communications tool. Herein lies the second function of architectural and fashion design collaborations - as a marketing and communications tool. Collaborations on projects such as the 'Prada Transformer' overtly explore the potential of using permanent or temporary architectural spaces as a communications medium, from which a fashion brand may transcend the confines of a garment into an interactive spatial system (Quinn 2003); "the Prada Transformer is a machine for making publicity" (Heathcote 2009:26). David McNulty, Head of Architecture at Louis Vuitton (LV) confirms by explaining how they "utilize architecture as an advertising instrument for the label" (Hansich 2006). The benefits of marketing hype aside, fashion and architecture collaborations also act as articulation devices to consolidate a brand's identity across international markets (Quinn 2003).

The opportunity to complement or extend a brand identity is often manifested in appeals to new target markets or the development of new products. As well as providing new revenue streams, extensions have the capacity to strengthen the core values of established brands (Aaker 2000; Urde 2001). A successful extension is typically derived from considering product portfolio gaps in the context of anticipated market developments (Elliott and Percy 2007), implying that branding strategy may be altered by developments independent of the brand itself. Thus, fashion companies' collaborations with architects may be motivated by a desire to benefit from of an apparently sympathetic engagement with a recognised wider popular interest in architecture and design. Whether overt or covert communication presides, the collaborations may reveal insight to specific benefits sought. For example, Gucci's sponsorship of Richard Serra's architectural exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2001 was subtle, aiming to associate its brand with the architect's creative credibility rather than place their own brand in the limelight (Quinn 2003). Such an association lends opportunities to connect with potential new consumer groups whose values and interests are pertinent to the collaborators' work. Conversely, Hadid's shoe design collaboration with Lacoste was more overt in intention, garnering publicity for both the brand and the architect. As well as accruing coverage for Lacoste (a brand less commonly noted for creativity), this partnership proved successful for Hadid, leading to a second fashion design commission with Brazilian footwear label Melissa (Almeida 2009). Hadid's success in partnering with fashion brands has brought her own brand into mainstream consciousness and further cemented her 'starchitect' status. Similarly, Giorgio Armani manipulates brand positioning through his architectural collaborations with Studio Fuxas, adapting the design aesthetic of his stores to target different segments of consumers (Fuxas 2010). Here, Armani leverages the partnership to support the brand's multi-dimensional growth strategy of continual market and product diversification (Hansich 2006; Moore and Wigley 2004).
Figure 8: Armani '5th Avenue', Concept Store, New York City. Architects: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas (Detail view)

Whichever the function of or motive for collaboration between fashion designers and architects, both must be equally cognisant of consumer and brand issues, needs and desires (Urde 2001; Quinn 2003; Wigley 2010). This dual focus further emphasises the innate and intimate relationship between fashion and architecture in their fundamental roles of influencing and organising space.

Summary

To summarise, this paper has highlighted a growing global trend for fashion designer and architect collaborations within the last decade specifically. Three major sources of partnership were identified: stores, products and ‘third space’ cultural projects. Stores were the most traditional area for joint development and this phenomenon is characterised through the extravagant co-designing of the permanent flagship stores of luxury fashion brands. Product collaborations have been a more recent movement and have taken the form of a temporary range of co-branded items with the design signature of the architect complimenting the fashion brand’s core product design, this has been evident at all levels of the market. The form of third space collaborations are again temporary in nature and are most often focused on art and on magnifying the cultural and experiential connection between fashion and architecture. Again it is predominately the luxury fashion brands who have engaged in this type of project.

With respect to the function of fashion designer and architect collaborations, the nature of the collaborative program may be both influenced by or influence the function which it serves. Three such motives for pursuing architect-fashion designer relations are identified as to serve brand positioning, marketing communications and growth strategies. These partnerships extend beyond traditional tactics to enhance branding strategy and create a layering of meanings that may strongly resonate with consumers, industry and media. Whether through product, store design or third space, architecture and fashion design collaborative projects can be read as opportunities for covert or overt associations and meanings. Figure 9, below, proposes a typology of the relationship between architect and fashion designer in relation to the form and function of interaction and benefits sought.

Figure 9: A Typology of Fashion Designer and Architect Collaborations (Stacy Anderson)

The paper also highlights opportunity for additional research and investigation on the factors that influence collaborative suitability and collaborative success. Though the design palette may differ, the mentalities shared between architect and fashion designer towards organizing space around the human form perpetually unite these disciplines in an intimate discourse of mutual exchange; as asserted by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright asserts, "form and function are one" (Lentz 2009).

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