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Raiding the past, designing for the future

### Original Citation

Almond, Kevin (2013) Raiding the past, designing for the future. In: Futurescan 2: Collective Voices Association of Fashion and Textiles Courses, 10th - 11th January 2013, Sheffield Hallam University. (Submitted)

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## RAIDING THE PAST, DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

KEY WORDS: FASHION, TEXTILES, RESEARCH, RETROSPECTIVE, PAST, FUTURE

### ABSTRACT:

Academic staff involved with fashion and textiles are often concerned at the level of research engagement by students; much of it tends to be over-reliant on internet search engines and magazines. This is also something that external examiners often comment upon. Many students lack understanding of the value of wider-ranging and deeper engagement with research at both primary and secondary levels. There is a clear need to demonstrate the ways in which meaningful research can underpin and inform their practice, allowing for stronger design outcomes and a richer understanding of the contexts in which they operate, both as lifelong learners and as future professionals. This paper investigates the meaning and background of retrospective research in fashion and textiles in order to assess its relevance and importance in developing student's research skills. It describes two initiatives that asked students to *raid the past in order design for the future*. Although the initiatives focused upon looking at the past, they were devised to promote and establish an understanding in students about the need for expansive and relevant research, away from the 'Google culture'. The first initiative was an interdisciplinary symposium, held to consider the impact of visual culture in the 1970s. Fashion and textile students were asked to produce research that required them to reflect upon the visual and cultural significance of the period under investigation, then produce design outcomes based on the event. The second initiative describes a live project that drew on the valuable collection of menswear held in Leeds Museums and Galleries and on existing research into the Leeds tailoring industry. It asked students to investigate this rich heritage to inspire the design and production of a range of contemporary tailored garments. These garments were amalgamated with the historical garments in a curated exhibition, which highlighted the importance of referring to historical textile artifacts when understanding how to research, design and produce future products.

### METHODOLOGY

Through conducting this research I developed my knowledge about research processes in fashion and textiles and was able to draw on my own experience as a fashion designer and lecturer. I focused on action and object based research through developing designs and garments with students and examination of research, design work, garments in retail outlets and museum collections. Secondary research came from literature that investigated research processes and methodologies in both art and design and in fashion and textiles (Denscombe 1991, Foster & Zaccagnini Flynn 2009, Gray & Malins 2004, Hickman 2009, Jenkyn-Jones 2002, Seivewright 2007, Sternberg 1988, Sullivan 2010, Trochim 2006, Walker 1990). A questionnaire was sent out to over three hundred fashion students and academics in a large UK University fashion and costume department and asked for opinions about various aspects of the research process. The questions included:

- What is your understanding of primary research?
- What is your understanding of secondary research?
- What are your thoughts about retrospective research (i.e. raiding from the past in order to create a design theme for the future).
- Do you find historical research exciting or inspirational?
- What do you hate or find difficult about research?
- What do you like or love about research?

The replies provided valuable commentaries and revealing thought processes. Answers demonstrated a positive enthusiasm for retrospective research, many considered it a fundamental skill, as today's fashion is tomorrow's costume. Understanding historically what has been done helps us to understand what new technologies, processes and designs are possible and how they can be adapted into cutting edge contemporary design. A small proportion of replies criticised it consciously rejecting historical references in favour of taking a more anti historical

perspective, yet still considered this type of enquiry interesting. One lecturer who had also studied history remarked: "I subscribe to the maxim that there is nothing new in the world - simply new interpretations and applications of the same old issues. Applying this to my interpretation of design, as noted above, then I'd suggest that without understanding the past, the future cannot be understood" (questionnaire response). The majority found it both exciting and inspiring, one declared "I love historical research; it is part of who we are today" (questionnaire response). In considering 'who we are today' and the future market this investigation aims to consider the importance of in-depth retrospective research and how this can be used to both understand the research process and inform its future depiction and perception. The main objectives being to:

- i) Identify why many students lack understanding of the value of wider-ranging and deeper engagement with research at both primary and secondary levels.
- ii) Identify the meaning and background of retrospective research in fashion and textiles and its relevance and importance in developing student's research skills.
- iii) Identify the ways meaningful research underpins and informs practice, allowing both for stronger design outcomes and a richer understanding of the contexts in which student designers operate, both as lifelong learners and as future professionals.

#### WHAT IS RESEARCH IN FASHION AND TEXTILES?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines research as:

"The study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions" (Soanes, 2006, p.640)

Research is a search for knowledge and new facts and applies to all academic disciplines including, science, art and history. The goal of the research process is to produce new and original knowledge and ideas. This mainly takes three forms; investigative, productive and observational. From this, the data collected falls into two definitive types;

- Primary - is the collection of original material and data
- Secondary – is the collection and synthesis of existing research and data

Much written research involves;

'Conducting the study, collecting data and preparing the written document, including recording and interpreting the results. It is accepted that the written results of research are factual, limited to interpreting the data collected, and devoid of unsupported opinions and that they add something to the field.' (Flynn and Foster, 2009, p.7).

On commencing research a pattern develops beginning with the research question; establishing issues; collecting data; analysing data; taking action; evaluating the results of the action; formulating new questions. Research is either undertaken to prove an idea or uncover different approaches to exploring an idea and during the process of analysis new questions develop (Denscombe 1991, Foster & Zaccagnini Flynn 2009, Gray & Malins 2004, Hickman 2009, Jenkyn-Jones 2002, Seivewright 2007, Sullivan 2010, Walker 1990).

Visual research is usually pictorial or practice based. Creative works such as photographs, paintings, designs or artefacts and the majority of other visual sources in the world: from the natural world to technology, can often be considered the object of the research. This differs from scientific and written methods. The artist or designer uses research in order to inspire creative endeavours as opposed to developing new knowledge or theory. New knowledge or theory can however be developed through the visual solution. In fashion and textiles this constitutes new and innovative products for the consumer and products that will move fashion forward.

Fashion and textiles products constantly change and the practitioner must always strive to create something new in order to sustain a marketable cycle. Designers have to burrow deeply and search further for new inspiration and ways of interpreting this in their work. There are those members of the artistic community who disregard research as being at best unnecessary and at worst damaging to art. Eisner and Day (1974) puts

forward the theory that training in art schools has not tended to develop analytical skills in the use of language and theory as the reason why research in arts is seen by some to be alien to the study of art. When he suggests that some art educators believe that creativity is incapable of being understood, he is talking about the ethos of the art department. Fashion and textile design education is very much concerned with the visual process, through research, to idea, from production, to product. It is the designer's ultimate job to produce an artefact that has visual, aesthetic and marketable appeal. Unlike fine art it does not necessarily have to be completely original. The judgement of a work of art as original is negated if it seems to be the result of an application of appropriated techniques. In design this does not necessarily matter as the past can be raided and reinterpreted as a future design providing it looks good and has commercial appeal.

Visual research needs to consider influences such as; colour, print and surface embellishment, details, structures and shapes, contemporary trends, textures, culture and history, this is not an exhaustive list. This all needs to be judged in the light of both definitive primary and secondary research. In art and design this can include the following;

- Primary sources – findings that have been individually sourced or collected. These could be objects that have been found directly from, for example, historical costume from a costume museum or sketches taken by observing people or events. Primary sources are generally recorded through drawings or photographs.
- Secondary sources – These are the findings of other people. These may be found in books, the internet, journals, and magazines. They are as important as primary sources of research and allow them to see and read about things that are not easily accessible.

Sources of inspiration can include –, books and journals, magazines, street and youth culture the internet, museums and art galleries, nightclubs and bars, costume, people watching, travel, forecasting and trend agencies, architecture, science, markets and second hand shops, artist and designer case studies, nature, film, theatre and music, new technologies. It's essential that the practitioner clearly grasps the meaning of primary and secondary research and that a good balance of both is maintained. Primary findings draw upon abilities to visually record findings and secondary employs the ability to be inspired and investigate. The fashion writer Sue Jenkyn-Jones made this sound incredibly exciting when she said: 'Fashion expresses the Zeitgeist, or spirit of the times, and therefore mirrors changes in society. In their search for inspiration, designers must learn to keep their eyes and ears open' (2002, p.146). Designers need to be aware of a cornucopia of influences and to mix and match this research at the design stage in order to innovate exciting ideas. It is essential to be out and about visiting shops, shows, cafes, clubs, film, theatre and galleries and consuming newspapers, books and magazines in order to digest the many aesthetic changes in society and reflect this through research and design work. This also helps to develop and maintain awareness of markets, trends and technological shifts within the industry.

Teaching students how to successfully conduct research is a challenge. This relates to our contemporary social and cultural environment. We live in an instant culture in which it is easy to access visual information, predominantly through the internet. As Allen and Evans said: "The 'Google generation' are about to enter higher education. This generation is often criticised for skittering their way through continuous streams of information, constantly multitasking and never focusing in on any one thing for long" (2011, p.4). It has to be consistently emphasised to students that this is only secondary information and is predominantly some else's work. It is also a challenge to help students understand the relevance of both primary and secondary research and how this can be analysed and developed into a successful art or design proposal. The illustrations below from fashion students demonstrate both successful and poor analysis of research. Both students have developed collections of co-ordinated outfits from their sketchbook references. Figure 1, is a good example. The page from the student's sketchbook demonstrates fabric experimentation, a surreal photograph of a doll, experimentation with colour and texture, drawings of insects and her own rough notes and sketches of designs. The collection of garments

demonstrates a clear visual connection to the research, in colour, texture, fabrication and even the silhouettes of the garments.



Fig 1: Example of good analysis of research

The work in figure 2 is a poor example of research. The page from the sketchbook is shallow and visually confusing. There is a postcard of an emaciated female figure that contrasts with the sketch of the healthier figure. There is also a photograph of the student's own manipulation of calico that mimics the skeletal folds of the body in the postcard. The collection of garments does not really relate to the research as it shows healthy voluptuous bodies in strapless corsets and dresses with healthy manes of hair. The idea for the collection was based on anorexia, a controversial enough idea however this is not clearly demonstrated through the research and the subsequent designs which actually appear rather voluptuous.



Fig 2: Example of poor analysis of research

## THE SYMPOSIUM

The overriding philosophy for mounting the Symposium was to promote the value and importance of research to undergraduate students in art and design. The 1960's and 1970's, has great currency for students, for whom retrospective research is often relevant to their studies. The decades were an exciting combination of glam, camp,

retro, kitsch and overall hedonism in visual and popular culture. By focusing upon these key decades it helped to emphasize how the design industry revives art and design styles from significant periods of history. This helps to make research appear more easily identifiable and accessible. Students rarely fully appreciate the breadth and depth of historical visual culture and often demonstrate a superficial awareness of this in their research and design outcomes, focusing on the most obvious stylistic references attached to a period and re-interpreting these in a contemporary and often uninspiring way.

Four speakers were engaged who were experts on the 1960's/1970's and who through their own work had made a considerable impact either during or about the period. Each speaker outlined the research methods they utilised within their work, and described how both primary and secondary research informed their outcomes.

The four key speakers were:

- Sylvia Ayton MBE, Chair of the Costume Society. Talk; '*My Love Hate Relationship with Couture*'
- Professor Lou Taylor, Dress Historian. Talk: '*On Their Own Terms- an assessment of the development and impact of 'youthquake' fashions, 1958-68.*'
- Michael Bracewell, writer/cultural commentator, author of '*Re-make/Remodel: Art, Pop, Fashion and the making of Roxy Music*'. (2007).
- Dominic Lutyens, writer/journalist, co-author of '*70s Style and Design*' (2009).

A range of research methods was described and discussed. The speakers were experts on aspects of the visual culture of the period. Each approached research from a different standpoint of interest/expertise/discipline that included: fashion design, costume/dress history and theory, cultural commentary/popular culture and design history. This breadth of approaches provided a varied platform to inform and inspire the students and allow them to reconsider their own approach to research methodologies. Distinctions between primary and secondary research and the value of each were outlined. This demonstrated the need for a more analytical and relevant approach to both visual and written work, leading to a more informed level of dialogue within both studio practice and theory.

The symposium also had several other key aims and objectives:

- The intention was to create a dialogue between students and staff across subject disciplines, to network and exchange ideas with creatives beyond individual disciplines.
- To promote and establish an understanding of the need for wide-ranging and relevant research, away from the 'Google culture'.
- To promote the link between the practical and the theoretical.
- To promote an interdisciplinary approach to design research.

Design students attended in large numbers and some of them entered fully into the spirit of the day by dressing in retro styles, recreating the fashion and flair of the 1960's and 1970s. This was also timely as it co-incided with a brief '70's revival in fashion celebrated in English Vogue's February article *We Love the 70's*, (Avansino, 2011). One student wore David Bowie's distinctive "Aladdin Sane" make-up and hair from 1973 (Bowie, 1994, p.1) make-up and another sported a huge 1970's afro wig, another emulated the peroxide blonde glamour of late 1970's icon, Debbie Harry. The students were given the opportunity to use the way they decorate their bodies through a "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959, p.1) as an authoritative means of making visual statements and in turn inspiring others. This level of active participation in research is both fun and informative as it flooded the lecture theatre with various stimulating attempts to appropriate the styles of the period. The symposium's co-organiser, Ian Massey, Subject Leader in Communication Arts and Design, rejects the "Decade that Style Forgot" (Turner, 2006, p.1) tag so often associated with the 1970's, but said: "There was a lot of kitsch in the 70s, a lot of new technology and the use of new materials, such as plastics, in different ways. The period was about camp and a kind of hedonism, so you did get those quite extreme hairstyles and platform shoes. As a decade it was incredibly

rich and interesting and it did bring together and fuse these various historical styles with things that were happening in society to do with gender and sexuality” (personal communication 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2011).



Fig 3: Aladdin Sane make-up



Fig 4: Debbie Harry hair



Fig 5: 1970's Afro wig

All of the students were set a mini project in connection with the event. It asked them to select a theme from the symposium and produce a mood board, then a fashion or costume design inspired by the research. Although the project was basic in its requirements and simplistic enough to be a preliminary project at first year level, students felt enriched by their experiences in the symposium and in general their enthusiasm and increased knowledge resulted in far more in-depth visual research and design solutions. Mood boards are fundamental tools used to convey research ideas in the design industries, considered “A vital part of the design process, facilitating creative and innovative thinking and application” (Cassidy, 2011, p.225). In this case they were used to convey research into historical aesthetics in order to *design for the future*. As one student commented: “This form of research can provide a foundation for working in a contemporary way. Understanding the context of a time helps the understanding of why something was done in a particular way and lead to new developments in design and technology. Ideas have to have a beginning, a stimulus and historical research can be a rich source of starting points” (questionnaire response).



Fig 6: Mood board and design based on punk



Fig 7: Mood board and design based on The Cockettes



Fig 8: Mood board and design based on the 1960's

The result of the event is that design students at University of Huddersfield were able to make much more intelligent, informed use of 60s and 70s influences, which are often revived in fashion and textiles. Designers tend to be magpies and take influences from past styles and genres without necessarily understanding what they were ultimately about. They revive and celebrate the way periods in history visually presented themselves without necessarily understanding their wider social and political contexts and how those styles came into being in the first place. The key point about the symposium is that it placed the styles of the 60s and 70s into the wider sphere not only of visual culture but what was going on in society. It was all about understanding the social context of design rather than just appropriating it in stylistic terms. Ultimately, this leads to more intelligent, creative and individualistic design that has a depth of intellectual rigor beyond its facade.

## THE LEEDS TAILORING ARCHIVE

The second initiative investigated in this paper, was a live brief for second year fashion students and focused upon a specialist module in tailoring in which students are taught to design, cut and make a tailored jacket. Leeds Museums and Galleries invited the fashion department to collaborate on a project that directly linked to this. It asked the students to research the vast heritage of the Leeds tailoring industry. This provided an exciting opportunity to investigate their huge archive held in an atmospheric, old industrial factory, Armley Mills, which had been turned into a museum. The costume curator wanted to revitalise the displays. Her idea was for the students to create tailored fashion garments that reflected the heritage of the industry and to curate an exhibition that combined their garments with those from the archive, demonstrating how raiding from the past could inspire a forward thinking fashion collection. In a similar way to the 1960's/1970's symposium, this project was important because it provided the students with multiple research opportunities beyond the visual that enriched their wider knowledge. It included investigating the importance of Leeds in the design and production of men's fashion in the period after the Second World War and to draw on the valuable collection of menswear held in Leeds Museums and Galleries and on the existing research about the Leeds tailoring industry. It also integrated the history of menswear to an understanding of consumerism in post war Britain and the impact of this on fashion and design. With its focus on ready-to-wear garments and the way in which designers shaped fashion in the high street, the students investigations counterbalances much existing scholarship that associates fashion with designer ready to wear and couture. It also highlights the contribution of Leeds manufacturers such as Hepworths and Burtons to the social change in fashion in the post-war decades.

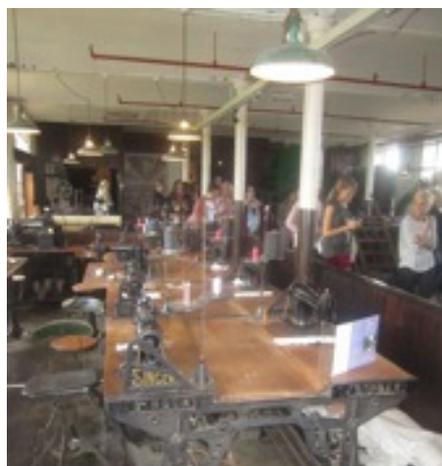


Fig 9: Costume curator Natalie Raw  
Discussing the tailoring archive

Fig 10: The interior of the Leeds Industrial museum

The students had the opportunity to listen to an in-depth talk from the costume curator Natalie Raw as she guided them through the archive and the industrial museum. For much of the twentieth century, the buoyancy of the Leeds economy depended upon the making and selling of men's suits. The firm of Montague Burton alone clothed 25 per cent of men in the UK in the years before the Second World War and its unique marketing strategy shaped the consumption habits of two generations of men. Other important multiple tailors such as Hepworth, Prices (later Collier) were based in Leeds and became national household names. The Leeds tailoring industry first adapted and then provided leadership for the ready-to wear men's fashion sector. They sought survival by raising the quality and fashionability of their garments through the employment of designers. This strategy met with short-term success and ensured the survival of several firms, including Berwin and Berwin and Sumrie, into the twenty first century. The designs of Leeds manufacturers such as Hepworths and Burtons and their shop layouts enhanced their customers' shopping experience and maximized sales. In 1961, for example, Hepworths held the first fashion catwalk of men's ready to wear; and introduced a range of coordinated shirt and tie packs. Burton too held fashion shows.

Artefacts in the archive included tailored garments that were mass-produced as opposed to bespoke. As the students had to produce a mass produced tailored garment as part of their project this afforded them the opportunity to recognise the different levels of make in tailoring. Bespoke or made to measure tailoring is pitched at the luxury end of the fashion industry. A tailor produces a made-to-measure garment for his client that fits their exact size specifications. It is usually hand made, using luxurious fabrics. Mass produced, structured tailoring is created by manufacturers and is graded to the standard size specifications used by the fashion industry. The students follow a similar path as they produce tailored garments for sample UK size 12 (if put into production they would be graded up or down in size according to retailers orders). Students are instructed about the use of canvassing, interfacing and padding that make up the inside of a garment to give it its tailored appearance yet produce their garments by machine in a mass produced way. Other artefacts from the archive included leaflets and brochures from the 1930s to the 1970s that marketed and promoted the Leeds tailoring companies, these included patterns, photographic records of factories and tailors at work, archive fabrics and industrial machinery. The industrial museum displays evoked the feel of the Leeds tailoring industry through mock-ups of the inside of a traditional factory, with work benches, cutting tables and sewing machines. The students were encouraged to utilise all of this experience to inspire their design research, from considering detailing in the archive garments through to the look of the vintage garments and even the workings of the factory, which could inspire prints for linings or seaming and darting on jackets.



Fig 11: 1950's tailoring brochure



Fig 12: 1940's tailored de-mob suit by Burtons

The overriding value of the collaboration between the fashion department and Leeds Museums and Galleries was in the introduction to the various research methods the initiative afforded. There was also a dual value to this in that even though the students used these methods to inspire and inform their visual research they could also be used to inform any historical or theoretical enquiry connected to the project. For instance some students chose to further research the history of this industry in their cultural studies and dissertation preparation modules. The research methodologies included: object based research which helped students understand the physical nature of the vintage garments in terms of design, construction and silhouette and their intellectual and social value through increased knowledge about how they were worn and in what circumstances. Ethnographic research enabled the students to consider the professional and cultural environment in which the Leeds tailors worked through the simulated displays of industrial workshops. This also allowed the students consider exemplar case studies based on in-depth investigation of individuals, groups or events related to the archive and the skills and technology used to make tailored garments for mass production. The students were expected to record their research through drawings, photographs and written notes that would inform both the design and technical aspects of their project, taking them through initial design concepts through to the cut and make of their tailored jackets and the eventual curation of the exhibition.



Fig 13 and 14: Students working on tailored jackets

The final exhibition enlivened the archive and showcased combinations of the historical and contemporary student work. Students on the BA (Hons) Fashion Communication and Promotion course had taken both the archived and student garments and shown how the qualities inherent in the West Yorkshire tailoring tradition were relevant by creating ideas for lifestyle brands using the jackets. Both the physical jackets and the design and promotional material were mingled together to emphasise how the past had been raided in order to design for the future. Under the title 'Cut, Cloth and the Luxury Brand' the exhibition emphasized that "Today's fashion consumer is one who seeks value. However value does not mean cheap; the brands which thrive today are those which offer quality, distinctiveness and style, irrespective of price. Burberry, Mulberry and Barbour encapsulate British qualities and traditions and offer products of auspicious design credentials and impeccable workmanship despite their high prices these brands thrive in the UK and beyond. Perhaps by re-inventing the skills and techniques of the past, contemporary British brands may prosper in the future."





Fig 15, 16, 17 and 18 images from 'Cut, Cloth and the Luxury Brand' the students curated exhibition the combined the Leeds tailoring archive with contemporary tailored design and promotion work from the students

## CONCLUSIONS

Essentially this investigation seeks to consider the importance of in-depth retrospective research within fashion and textiles and how this can be used to both understand the research process and inform its future depiction and perception. In order to assess students understanding of wider-ranging and deeper engagement with research at primary and secondary levels it is important to assess the links between ideas. I return to the three main objectives in order to synthesise a coherent understanding of the meaning and background of retrospective research in fashion and textiles and to assess its relevance and importance in developing student's research skills. In order to do this I address each objective sequentially and in relation to the two initiatives discussed. I also suggest how this could inspire areas for further research using different methodologies within the wider fields of art and design.

- 1) Identify why many students lack understanding of the value of wider-ranging and deeper engagement with research at both primary and secondary levels.

The discussion throughout the paper emphasises that in fashion and textile design the future cannot be understood without some empathy for the past. Much research in design involves studying visual information from the past and applying this information to the development of future design projects. In the commercial world of fashion and textiles, in which the product changes rapidly, retrospective research plays an important part in developing designs that are both creative, stylish and commercially viable. Research should not only inspire the creation of garments, but also the textiles used to make a garment and the way a garment could be styled and worn or appropriated as a fashionable item. The two initiatives described in this paper introduced students to wide ranging research opportunities and promoted deep engagement in both primary and secondary research through the many visual examples that were observed and discussed. Exploring the two rich visual and technological heritages provided an opportunity to engage in thorough investigations and allow the students to make judgements about what constitutes superficial and comprehensive explorations. They also indirectly

emphasised different methodological approaches, including action, ethnographic and object based research. In some ways this addresses issues that fashion and textiles students have in understanding in-depth primary and secondary research and how to apply this to the development of design and visual work. It broke down perceptions of research as being stuffy, solitary and library orientated, as both events involved a great deal of active participation and social interaction. This made research appear to be accessible, great fun and hugely inspiring.

- 2) Identify the meaning and background of retrospective research in fashion and textiles and its relevance and importance in developing student's research skills.

'Retro' designs have been popular in many design disciplines at different times – for example the late 90s early 2000s emergence of the 'remade' Mini in the car industry. I think it is significant as each instance of it serves to emphasise the power or value of the original design – i.e. the classic status of the 'original' car in each case is reinforced by their reinterpretation for contemporary times – as a possibly timeless or especially significant or influential piece of work. I would suggest that this represents the fundamental paradox of design in any given discipline including fashion and textiles – there are very limited opportunities for something genuinely 'new' to be created and so any 'new' item is inevitably, informed by items and practices from the past. The close examination of 1960's/1970's visual culture and the tailoring archive both examined the past. The criticism applied to retro design is that it is contrary to the ethos of the design discipline's creative progression but it can also have importance and relevance to developing student's research skills through increasing their understanding of what is good or poor design. Also the role of the consumer or end-user plays a role. Very few designers have the opportunity to engage completely with their creativity and imagination as inevitable commercial demands require that their products perform a particular function, have a particular price or satisfy the desires of a particular group of consumers. Thus to a degree a purist may suggest that design that harks too strongly back to previous eras becomes banal. I believe for creative design to flourish there has to be a balance between designers who push boundaries forward and those who perhaps take a more deliberate view of the past and it is important to emphasise this in all aspects of pedagogy to fashion and textile students.

- 3) Identify the ways meaningful research underpins and informs practice, allowing both for stronger design outcomes and a richer understanding of the contexts in which student designers operate, both as lifelong learners and as future professionals.

There are several key examples of meaningful retrospective research within the two initiatives discussed that have developed stronger design outcomes. The symposium tapped into two twentieth century decades from which design styles are often revived within the fashion and textiles industry. The visual culture of the decades was examined in relation to sociological, cultural and industrial perspectives that emphasized the depth and breadth of their influences. The students had the opportunity to visually participate by wearing retro '60's and 70's clothes to the event which was fun but allowed them to experiment with and observe different looks on the three dimensional body. The sketchbooks and design work inspired by the event demonstrated some lively design solutions balanced by an increased understanding of the context in which they operated. The tailoring project asked the students to research the vast heritage of the Leeds tailoring industry through a real life analysis of their huge archive held in the industrial museum. This gave added relevance to the activities as the researchers operated within an environment that simulated the historical setting in which the original garments were produced. Therefore in both initiatives students were able to combine action, ethnographic and object-based research.

What can ultimately be learnt from this investigation? The students were provided with two events that promoted in-depth research from which they could both be inspired by and comprehend in-depth research methodologies. The success of these events should really be measured when students have to self-initiate and research their own projects independently. They would need to draw on the depth of research and analysis provided by the two

initiatives and apply these methodologies to their own self-initiated projects. Students could be encouraged to produce a checklist from such endeavors that enables them to compare and contrast what they have learnt. One of the limitations to independent research lies in diminished tutor guidance however students develop a greater sense of their own research and design abilities through shaping such projects. Although the two initiatives discussed have looked specifically at fashion and textiles, the methodologies discussed could also be applied to the wider creative industries. This could link to further research investigating design process theories from analysts who consider the way a designer thinks (Lawson, 1980; Ambrose, 2011; Cross, 2011; Lawson, 2011). These theories base their understanding on evidence from observation and investigation of design practice, designers at work and interviews with designers. I have tried to discuss the process of research in fashion and textiles design from a hands-on perspective in order to arrive at a similar point. I believe this methodology has added credibility with fashion educators and the wider design industry because the research results have been arrived at from practical experience. I also believe there is a lot further to go with this marrying of the historical, museological and the practical and it could be an exciting methodology used in the future analysis of fashion issues.

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