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INSUFFICIENT ALLURE:

THE LUXURIOUS ART AND COST OF CREATIVE PATTERN CUTTING

KEY WORDS: ALLURE, CREATIVE, CUT, LUXURY, COST

INTRODUCTION

Creative pattern cutting really pushes the boundaries of design. It is a luxury that breaks all traditional rules in order to innovate new and exciting ideas and shapes. Patterns produced are a variety of weird and wonderful forms that need to be placed imaginatively onto fabric. The whole process however is costly, in both the use of cloth and the time it takes to produce a pattern. This paper examines creative cutting from final year fashion students. It celebrates the student's individual philosophies towards creative cut and examines how the industry promotes pattern cutting to students as a viable career option. The role of the pattern cutter can have as much glamorous allure as the role of the designer although it is at a lower key. Its allure comes from creative satisfaction and integrity. The paper also discusses the realistic and commercial cost implications in the production of creatively cut garments and suggests pragmatic ways to maintain this luxurious creativity with cost effectiveness.

CREATIVE PATTERN CUTTING – A REVIEW

Pattern cutting is essentially a series of body measurements that ultimately creates a three dimensional shape that fits a human body. It is both a technical and a craft based skill that can be taught in a variety of ways. The most traditional method is through flat pattern cutting, either through scale or the direct measure system. This involves creating a block shape that fits the human form and adapting and manipulating the block to create the desired shape, as dictated by the design. Other methods of cutting include moulage or draping on the stand and bespoke cutting and tailoring. Methods can be combined as Helen Joseph-Armstrong said; 'Draping does not rely on the aid of a pattern to create designs, although a draper may choose to incorporate part(s) of an existing pattern in the preparation of the muslin (cloth) to assist in the drape. It is also true that those using the flat patternmaking method may incorporate some aspects of draping in creating a specific design. This does not minimise the value of either patternmaking method, but it does enhance the patternmaker's ability to create design patterns accurately and within time constraints.' (Joseph-Armstrong 2008 p, vii)

Market levels are differentiated through creative pattern cutting. High end designer fashion and couture can often be defined through innovative cutting, luxurious fabrics and exquisite

finishes. These garments have to be toiled, fitted and sampled several times. This justifies their cost. The lower end of the market place, particularly fast fashion is limited by price constraints, with garments produced in inferior fabrics. As Karin Schacknat said 'This labour intensive process is much too expensive for mass-produced, ready to wear garments. For this reason it may even sometimes be left out, but generally a highly simplified version is used.' (Duburg/Van der Tol 2008 p,15)

Creative pattern cutting has added cost implications such as expensive lays due to irregular shaped patterns that cause excessive wastage. The direction of the grain can also have a massive impact on cost. Few high street retailers have successfully embedded creative cut in their product. All Saints is probably the only high street store to have successfully built their business on innovative pattern cutting at high street prices. Their production runs are relatively large taking in to account the amount of stores they have in the UK. In achieving the desired silhouette the fabric is often compromised to hit target margins, otherwise the garment would have to retail at a higher price point.

It is rare to discover a fashion student who really wants to pursue a career in pattern cutting unless their particular course has emphasised this. As Annette Fischer says,

'Like all craft skills, pattern cutting can at first seem difficult and intimidating but with a basic understanding of the rules to be followed (and broken!) the aspiring designer will soon learn interesting, challenging and creative approaches to pattern cutting.' (Fischer (2008) p 25)

A fundamental understanding of cut however, is essential in determining the creativity and the initial price point of the intended garment. In an industry associated with glamour and hype, this route lacks the allure and glitter associated with the role of the designer and the activities involved in designing and styling ranges of clothes. The pattern cutter is however the back bone of every collection. As journalist Marc Karimzadeh said,

'Most designers require pattern cutters to make sometimes impossible-seeming creative ideas take shape.' (M Karimzadeh, Drapers Record, 29th May 1999).

Michael Thierry, design director of Coats Viyella, backed this up,

'Without a creative pattern cutter the design just doesn't work so it's an integral part it's like a marriage that unless the two are together, creativity will not exist. With a creative pattern cutter they are as important as each other.' (Michael Thierry, Coats Viyella, British Fashion Council film 2000)

Traditionally a fashion student was taught to design, cut and make their first sample. Joanne

Brogden former Professor of Fashion at the Royal College of Art said,

'No designer worth his or her salt would simply produce a range of drawn designs.' (Brogden 1971 p, 90).

This role has diversified with the huge expansion and diversification of fashion education over the past twenty years. This has created a breadth of courses that incorporate a cornucopia of fields of study including promotion, marketing, styling, design, illustration, digital fashion and image making. This breadth of study, side lines the traditional notions of design and make. A student can design a collection and promote it, or design a collection, then style it, however fundamentally the product whether it is a simply designed shirt or an intricately cut Comme Des Garcons dress needs to be cut and fit beautifully.

There have been several significant attempts by the industry and in education over recent years to both promote pattern cutting as a career and to give it creative integrity and allure.

The British Fashion Council introduced its 'Student Creative Pattern Cutting Award' in 1996 and its influential film 'Innovative Pattern Cutting' in 2000. As Anne Tyrell Chairman of the Student Forum Council at the British Fashion Council has said,

'We must try to glamorise the field. The idea of the award is to meet the need for people with craft and technical skill. There is huge demand out there and huge job prospects.' (A Tyrell, Drapers Record 29th May 1999).

Both London College of Fashion and Central St. Martins offer a Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Pattern Cutting for the Industry. This course is designed to:

'Provide students with advanced technical skills and understanding of the creative process of design interpretation related to the womenswear market. This is achieved through the implementation of advanced principles of pattern cutting and manufacture and through personal development, to enhance creativity in solving design problems.' (London College of Fashion website, 2009)

These students develop advanced, creative technical skills that enable them to pursue careers with noted designers, retailers, or in setting up their own label businesses. The courses do not, however emphasise the cost implications of such levels of creativity.

The real secret of making pattern cutting appear dynamic is to emphasise its absolute creativity from day one. Hilary Hollingworth identified creativity in her MA Dissertation about Creative Pattern Making, she put forward a view from Anne Sutton (1989) in which she quotes Carl Rogers,

'...the three characteristics a creative person must have are; openness to and an awareness of experience; self-reliance, independent approach to finding solutions; flexible playful attitude towards manipulating concepts. (Rogers in Sutton 1989 listed in references) (Hollingworth 1996 p 20,)

This awareness of experience, self reliance and manipulation of concepts as a link to creativity should be highlighted to the many students who are initially put off by pattern cutting. It is often presented as a technical and mathematically complex science. It would have more appeal if presented as an art form with basic rules; once these rules have been acquired they can all be broken or manipulated. This concept of rebellion makes it more exciting and creative to the student. The designer Robert James Curry said

'I am a great believer in the idea of having to destroy in order to create, so once I have the first toile it gets cut into, pieces added, fabric taken away and seams shifted into new positions or taken away.' (Fischer (2008)p,134)

Designer Betty Jackson said,

'What you don't want is someone (a pattern cutter) pedantic who says this is how a jacket is cut and these are the rules and you can't break these rules. What any designer needs is to work with a creative pattern cutter who will break those rules.' (Betty Jackson, British Fashion Council film 2000).

The process of toiling in a cheap, cotton calico or an inexpensive jersey can appear initially strange and unwieldy. The student designer needs to be convinced that this is the clay, from which they have to sculpt, as Claude Montana once said,

'I thought my first toile was barbaric. Such a form in that awful cotton was hideous. But once your able to read such a form only then do you see how beautiful it is a means of expressing what it is you actually want, what you intend.' (Duburg and Van der Tol, 2008 p,9)

The designer Rei Kawakubo from Comme des Garçons takes these notions even further. She encourages her team of pattern cutters to make mistakes. This innovates new and interesting explorations of cut and design and amazing garments. This was demonstrated in the BBC television programme 'Undressed Fashion in the Twentieth Century', which filmed her team of pattern cutters at work in Japan. The huge cost implications of these mistakes were justified by the innovation in cut that customers of Comme Des Garçons expect to pay high prices for. Fashion students are at the beginning of their careers and often their knowledge of garment construction is unsophisticated and rudimentary. Students are however ambitious and are expected to research and acquire the skills relevant to the particular type of garments they

wish to produce. It should be emphasised however that Pattern cutting is never completely mastered as Annette Fischer says;

'Designers who have been cutting patterns for twenty years can still learn something new, the process of learning never stops.' (Fischer (2008) p 25)

The challenge for the tutor and technician is that each year they are presented with a group of students who want to create diverse and varied garments. The department however may not necessarily house the equipment and expertise to manufacture them. To achieve a professional look the student, tutor and technician often has to collaborate on new and innovative methods of cut and manufacture in order to realise a professional looking collection. This is hugely challenging and exciting for the staff, the secret is never to say 'No' but attempt to recognise if the student has the necessary breadth and understanding to embrace the look, cut, fabric and make of their desired garments. This also makes a comparison of student creations with designer garments interesting because students often innovate a fresh approach to garment realisation.

CREATIVE PATTERN CUTTING - STUDENT'S EXPERIENCES AND EXPRESSIONS

A Teaching and Learning, pattern cutting project was developed at University of Huddersfield to inspire other students when developing collections and to emphasise cut as a luxurious and creative force. This comprised of an exhibition of creative pattern cutting in calico curated from selected pieces from final year student collections. The exhibition encouraged not only investigation of the pattern, but through its catalogue, emphasised each student designers philosophy towards cut and an examination of the three dimensional form in its calico stage. What emerged were some extremely interesting and varied approaches that ranged from both the creative and technical standpoint.

Cost implications were not initially considered in the garments selected for the exhibition. The original intention was to inspire. Students were then asked to breakdown the garments by considering the pattern and the construction and suggesting ways that the garments could be cut, that both retained the essence of the style, but were far more economic in cost. Most students considered how the high street would reinterpret the looks at a more competitive price point. The following analysis compares the student's individual approach to creative cut with an emphasis on the realistic costs involved in such a creative exercise and it's financial viability within the mass market. This emphasises the luxurious art of creative cut and its cost implications.

Hayley Carroll whose draped dress in jersey skims the body (fig 1 and 2) felt that 'Creative pattern cutting enables me to explore new techniques and investigate ideas to challenge shape, cut and silhouette that lead to ideas. New ways of cutting come to life through a mixture of ideas, luck and mistake. I can produce patterns onto paper or model on the stand, for me I find modelling fabric a much more responsive technique as it leads to much more responsive ideas.' (Carroll, personal statement, 2009)

This approach contrasts with that of Hannah Custance whose pattern cutting was very much inspired by the play of light, as it twists and turns in its reflection on glass chandeliers. (fig 3 and 4).

The benefits in using creative pattern cutting in my work are that it pushes the boundaries in garment shape and construction. Creating silhouettes that create illusions of figure shape and in deforming the body. Creative pattern cutting is vital when designing, innovative, boundary breaking garments.' (Custance, personal statement, 2009)

Hayley combines emotional response to the three dimensional form with a mixture of ideas, luck and mistake. Hannah is more strategic in that she is inspired directly by the patterns created by light and interprets this through her experimental cutting. She acknowledges the importance of creative cut in innovative design. Close analysis of the toiles and patterns reveals some elements of their cost. Hayley has eliminated the shoulder seam to create drape at the shoulder, this creates an awkwardly shaped pattern. The mass market would have kept the shoulder seam so the pattern pieces became more cost effective in the lay plan. Hannah's outfit is extremely complex in cut and requires many pattern pieces to achieve its fit and volume. The large quantity of seaming also emphasises the translucent quality of the design. This outfit serves as an example of one that would be difficult to reinterpret as a lower priced garment. Elimination of many of its seams whilst attempting to retain an impression of its silhouette would ensure the manufacturing process were more cost effective, however this would eradicate much of the integrity of its design. The example of Hannah's jacket is used in a later paragraph that details the accurate financial costs in its production.

Marian Campbell's work is a historically inspired, subversion of late eighteenth century dress (fig 5 and 6). She explained,

'Creative pattern cutting is not just about constructing a garment through a series of lines and measurements; it is the process of creating something which pushes the boundaries and the

balance between shape, cut and silhouette. Creative pattern cutting doesn't necessarily have to begin with the pattern block; sometimes the most challenging ideas can arise simply from working straight from the cloth through a series of fabric manipulations, a strategically placed cut, twist or drape. (Campbell, personal statement, 2009)

Comparatively for Nathalie Hollingsworth (fig 7 and 8);

'Pattern cutting is about possibilities, experimentation and surprises. Creative pattern cutting involves a designer envisaging, and then recreating a design into a modern and fashion forward piece. Starting with a straight forward block and developing each edge and contour into obscured and unusual shapes is amazing.' (Hollingsworth, personal statement, 2009)

Marian advocates the manipulation of cloth whereas Nathalie manipulates the block pattern. Both of these approaches have differing cost constraints. Marian's is the more expensive and is an example of the labour intensive process of moulage (or draping on the stand). This process consists of working up the three dimensional design in cloth, then developing or tracing a pattern from the draped pieces. The pattern then needs to be made up and fitted. The fit process refines the pattern in readiness for the final garment to be made up. Beginning with the flat block pattern, eliminates the drape process and can be quicker. It can however inhibit creativity in that it is a two dimensional way of working, as opposed to the three dimensional. This presents a real sense of the body shape.

The art of dance and movement inspired Rachel Vickers; (fig 9 and 10),

'My influence came from dance which I consider to be free flowing and self expressive. I believe that this is how pattern cutting should be and this is my approach in creating the pattern for my outfit,' (Vickers, personal statement, 2009)

In contrast Tina Li stated (fig 11 and 12);

'My creative pattern cutting used flat pattern blocks which I used to create something different. Although it is simple, it is an effective and unusual concept. The main inspiration for my twin dress is the deformity of Siamese twins and how the bodies are joined in different places. It focuses on creating different and new shapes by connecting different types of garments in unconventional places.' (Li, personal statement, 2009)

The fluidity of Rachel's garments was achieved by both her choice of fabric and her combined use of moulage and flat pattern cutting. Tina's approach is unique in that she used flat pattern cutting to make garments that connected in unusual ways, a simple idea yet highly creative. Rachel reworked a garment from her collection and submitted it to a competition set by

retailer River Island. The garment won first prize in the competition and was then mass produced for sale in its stores. This provided a real insight in to how the mass market re-worked a creatively cut garment. The volume in the garment was radically reduced and a cheaper fabric and print sourced to align it to its objective price point. This also provides an excellent example of a luxuriously cut designer garment's journey towards lower priced mass production.

Tina's dress is creatively cut through its initial, avant garde design idea. It also presents us with the idea that we could sew together pattern pieces in unexpected ways for instance a shoulder seam and a side seam sewn together to create an unexpected cut. This is something that does not necessarily incur greater cost in the garment as the process could initiate a creative idea using fewer pattern pieces.

Keri Cowdell explained her philosophy; (fig 13 and 14)

'I believe that patterns have movement and they are not all about measurements, instead it is by the experimentation between space and balance. I looked at how fabric can fold, twist and fall by moulage; seeing the process unfold on a stand. I also incorporated the use of deconstruction, getting an existing garment and manipulating the shape to create something new. I found this technique very creative as it shows new ways of looking at the perception of space; where seams can be placed, how it can be shaped around the form.' (Cowdell, personal statement, 2009)

Yeung Cheung's (fig 15 and 16) thoughts centred upon creative cutting directing the future of fashion;

'I believe that creative pattern cutting is important in order to move fashion forward and create new shapes. The boundaries will always be pushed by fashion designers; this is why fashion will always be exciting, because the possibilities are endless.' (Cheung, personal statement, 2009)

Its interesting that Keri combines mathematics with spatial awareness, whilst Yeung emphasises the boundless prospects creative pattern cutting can offer. Both designers highlight new ways of looking at shape and form. The use of deconstructed garments as discussed by Keri is particularly significant in relation to cost. Designers such as Martin Margiela introduced this idea in fashion in the 1990's at designer price points. Deconstructed garments demanded creative cutting in their re-interpretation. The trend was phenomenal and

the mass market followed with multiple versions which still permeate in fashion garments today. An undergraduate dissertation, supervised by the author looked at the influence of deconstruction on fashion and innovative design and pattern cutting. She defined the term of deconstruction in fashion literally as deconstructing garments to reconstruct them as something else and she quoted B Quinn's description in *The Fashion of Architecture*, 'deconstructive fashion can be traced back at least thirty five years: Sonia Rykiel's visible seams were sewn on the surface of her garments in the 1960's; Karl Lagerfeld's 'le flou' dresses were free flowing with un-finished hems; Zandra Rhodes' interpretation of punk fashion resulted in her unfinished 'ad hoc' creations. (Quinn p, 71)

As an example of the realistic cost implications of creative cut and manufacture at designer price points, the following is a detailed examination of the costings for the jacket from Hannah Custance (fig 3, 4, 17 and 18). All the fashion students at university of huddersfield have to produce a manufacture report about their collection. This is a document that details how the individual garments would be graded, manufactured and costed for production. The jacket from Hannah Custance would cost £111.45 to manufacture. This includes a fabric price of £49.00, a wastage of fabric cost of £2.45 and a production cost of £60.00. The mark up, wholesale price to the retailer would be 100% giving a total cost of £222.90. The mark up price a retailer can add varies, however for a retailer that sells luxury designer garments such as Harvey Nichols it could be 300% or 400%. In this case hannah has indicated 300%. this takes the price to £668.70, with vat at 17.5% the actual price of the jacket to the customer is £785.00. If hannah's jacket were to retail in all saints for instance, it would realistically need to sell to the customer for about £140. Even though the jacket would be difficult to reinterpret as a lower priced garment, as already stated. the most sensible approach for the pattern cutter, would be to create something that captures its spirit but takes far less time to cut. Elimination of many of the seams and ruffles would achieve this, it would also half the time taken to assemble the jacket. If All Saints, as a high street retailer needed to put a 100% mark up on the wholesale price from the manufacturer, the actual manufacture price would need to be £28.87. in order to meet this costing, a far less expensive fabric would need to be sourced. As has been suggested, All Saints could make its greatest compromise from the far less expensive fabric, leaving the bulk of cost to maintaining the spirit of the creative pattern cutting and the manufacture.

The comparison of the various approaches to creative cut from the students and their thoughts on the different approaches to cut in the luxury market through to the mass

market, provide an interesting analysis. This, supported by the example of the actual manufacture costs including creative pattern cutting in the Hannah Custance jacket, serves to emphasises both the luxurious art and realistic cost of creative pattern cutting. These are the overriding themes investigated in this paper. It is also particularly apparent that creative cutting holds a significant allure and glamour for all these students and that emphasising creativity allows the student and tutor to celebrate and refine this technological process. The creative pattern cutter has to think in a different and more pragmatic way, when reinterpreting ideas for the mass market. this, however this should be viewed as a realistic creative challenge, in order for it to still be exciting, innovative and alluring.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The paper focuses on two strands of enquiry. It celebrates the luxury of creative pattern cutting through an investigation of the work and philosophy of final year fashion design graduates and tempers this with a discussion of the economic implications of such unbridled creativity, in the market place. There cannot really be an ultimate conclusion as through the research a new question emerges. this being the practical way a pattern cutter needs to reinterpret a creatively cut garment at a lower price point, for the mass market. Further study into how to generate ingenious and imaginative pattern cutting at mass market prices, could inspire an insightful and original solution to this issue. It could also suggest ways in which to retain the allure of creative pattern cutting and could in turn generate greater business, more cost effectively.

Luxury in fashion has become a broad and accessible commodity. Previously luxury was limited to the couture and branded products produced by highly revered names such as Hermes, Bulgari, Chanel, Dior, etc. The products designed by these houses used, as stated in the introduction, innovative cutting, luxurious fabrics, exquisite finishes and the skills of experienced craft people. This all justified the high price of the product. The luxury was only accessible to the very rich. As Ilse Metchek, executive director of the Californian Fashion Association said;

'To me, luxury is something you want to reach for, that is unattainable. You wanted to look at society's ladies and you wanted to live like them, and it was unattainable.' (Thomas p,323)

Today this has changed and luxury has broadened its reach to the middle and lower ends of the market place. It was always, just possible to buy into a luxury designer name, with the

purchase of a perfume or an accessory. Today fast fashion companies at the lower end of the market, employ designers to create collections for them that not only bear the designer name but retail at high street prices. Consider Karl Lagerfeld (Head of design for Chanel), Stella McCartney and Viktor and Rolf for H and N, Roland Mouret for Gap, Hussein Chalayan and Sophia Kokosalaki for Top Shop. Even middle market department stores such as Debenhams employ designers such as Betty Jackson and Jasper Conran. Apart from a quality of make and finish why would the consumer need to pay couture prices to buy into a luxury brand? The answer could be cut and in particular creative cutting. As discussed probably the only high street retailer to really attempt to successfully embed creative cut in their product is All Saints, who have successfully built their business on innovative pattern cutting at high street prices. Unless other retailers exploit the opportunities creative cut has afforded All Saints, the consumer will still need to look to the luxury designer and couture end of fashion, when purchasing garments that are innovatively cut. All Saints do have to compromise however, as in order to achieve the desired silhouette, the fabric quality is often negotiated, to hit target margins. Otherwise the garment would have to retail at a higher price point. Perhaps this indicates that creative pattern cutting is one of the last surviving strongholds of what was traditionally considered to be luxury fashion? Further research into how to maintain the allure and luxury of creative cut at mass market price points could shatter this perception.

The title 'Insufficient Allure' emphasises the perceived lack of glamour in pursuing pattern cutting as a career. Its promotion as one of luxury fashion's last surviving bastions, could ensure its absolute allure to future generations of fashion students and with further research this luxury could be maintained at lower price points. The paper also emphasises the absolute joy in the process of creative cutting. The final year students discuss their various individual approaches developed throughout their work yet also stress their absolute enthusiasm and passion for the subject. This infatuation stems from their tutor's passion for the subject which permeates throughout the fashion curriculum, both in projects and delivery. The teaching and learning project discussed also disseminates a celebration of creative cut through the work of the students.

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Christine Browett, Senior Lecturer in Fashion, University of Huddersfield

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1.) Hayley Carroll, final collection toile, 2009
- 2.) Hayley Carroll, final collection toile, 2009
- 3.) Hannah Custance, final collection toile, 2009
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- 5.) Marion Campbell, final collection toile, 2009
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- 13.) Keri Cowdell final collection toile, 2009
- 14.) Keri Cowdell, final collection toile, 2009
- 15.) Yeung Cheung, final collection toile, 2009
- 16.) Yeung Cheung, final collection toile, 2009
- 17.) Hannah Custance, final collection toile detail, 2009
- 18.) Hannah Custance, final collection toile detail, 2009



FIG 1

FIG 2



FIG 3

FIG 4



FIG 5

FIG 6



FIG 7

FIG 8



FIG 9

FIG10



FIG11

FIG12



FIG13

FIG14



FIG 15

FIG16



FIG 17

FIG18