



OVERVIEW

FASHION AND CLOTHING ARE PART OF A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE, THE TEXTILE AND CLOTHING INDUSTRIES OCCUPYING A POWERFUL GLOBAL POSITION IN BOTH ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL TERMS. IT IS HOWEVER UNDER-RESEARCHED AND UNDER-REPRESENTED ACADEMICALLY. THE INTERROGATING FASHION RESEARCH CLUSTER TAKES A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF FASHION IN ITS BROADEST SENSE AND ESTABLISHES A MUCH-NEEDED FORUM FOR DISCUSSION OF ISSUES SURROUNDING FASHION IN THE 21ST CENTURY. THE CLUSTER CREATED SYNERGIES ACROSS A RANGE OF PERSPECTIVES (DESIGN, MANUFACTURING AND MARKETING, CULTURAL THEORY, ARTISTIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, SCIENTIFIC. . .) TO INTERROGATE AND CHALLENGE THE PRACTICES AND PROCESSES OF FASHION, DELIBERATELY INTEGRATING THE TRADITIONAL DIVISIONS OF PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND REPRESENTATION. THREE OVERARCHING THEMES WERE ESTABLISHED FOR THE CLUSTER FRAMEWORK - DIGITAL FASHION (FROM CRAFT TO MASS CUSTOMISATION), THE FASHION PARADOX (THE CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN FASHION'S ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE AND INBUILT OBSOLESCENCE) AND FASHION IN CONTEXT (PRESENTATION AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT) - WHICH ALTHOUGH SETTING AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA, WERE ESSENTIAL IN CREATING AN OVERVIEW OF THE KEY ISSUES FACED BY THIS MAJOR GLOBAL INDUSTRY, WHOSE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE IMPACTS MANY ASPECTS OF DESIGN, CULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL PRODUCTION. THE CLUSTER AIMS TO DEVELOP RESEARCH PROJECTS FOR FASHION PRODUCTS AND PROCESSES WHICH WILL HAVE GENUINE IMPACT ON THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR AND WHICH WILL, BY DESIGN, BE INHERENTLY MORE SUSTAINABLE.

Activities

The 38 cluster members comprised a wide ranging group of fashion and textile practitioners, artists, designers, computer and material scientists, cultural and marketing theorists, musicians and creative industrialists. During the first six months, three one-and-a-half day workshops, one on each theme, were held to 'seed' concepts and to fuel debate. These generated really positive energy through knowledge sharing and presentation of work, and consolidated the cluster itself. The Digital Fashion strand held a joint press briefing with BT with resulting press coverage, and the Fashion Paradox debate led to further targeted industrial involvement. The website became an increasingly important communication and development tool for the final two-day event which took place at the end of November. This comprised a public debate and performance demonstrations of Digital Fashion concepts at the ICA London, and a symposium at LCF addressing the emerging issues, with a participative 'fashion exchange' and an experimental artists performance. Bringing issues alive in performative ways was effective in engaging everyone to participate.

Insights

The Fashion in Context theme highlighted the importance of fashion as a tool of communication and engagement to raise social issues and generated new project ideas. The Fashion Paradox and the Digital Fashion themes have created opportunities and research concepts on the future of fashion. Emerging technologies are being harnessed creating new paradigms for production which may lead to more personalised and localised 'fashion on demand', minimising waste and using materials in a more sustainable manner, and considering the entire life cycle of design, production, usage and disposal. Companies who have been part of the problem in unsustainable production are becoming part of the solution in ethical and environmental terms. With such a large agenda to tackle, the work of the cluster has only just begun and will continue.