PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH IN FASHION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Pesquisa prática em moda: Uma revisão de Literatura

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Abstract: This paper looks into the academic production in fashion within a practice-based enquiry. It reviews four selected journals, with international recognition, with fashion practice in their scope of interest. To conduct this investigation, publications are systematically evaluated. The study indicates prominences and gaps in the field and concludes with remarks on the future of practice-based research in fashion.

Keywords: fashion practice, practice-based research, fashion design

Resumo: Este trabalho analisa a produção acadêmica de pesquisas práticas em moda através de uma revisão de literatura. O conteúdo de quatro revistas acadêmicas, selecionadas por seu escopo e reconhecimento internacional, é sistematicamente analisado. O estudo indica proeminências e falhas no campo. Como conclusão, este estudo discute possíveis caminhos para a pesquisa prática em moda no futuro.

Palavras-chave: práticas em moda, pesquisa prática, design de moda

Introduction

Seeking to understand how the field of practice-based research [3] in fashion has developed until present this paper looks into the first decade of dissemination of knowledge through academic publications. It provides researchers and practitioners with a brief overview of published works. In order to conduct this investigation, four international journals were chosen for encompassing the practice of fashion within their scope of interest and being

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[3] In this paper we use the term 'practice-based research' as a general term to describe different approaches to enquiries that include practice, such as research through design, practice-led research, amongst others. When referring to academic publications with a clear stand leaning towards one of these terms, the original term will be maintained.

recognized as relevant sources of high-quality academic discussion. They are: Clothing Cultures, dObra[s], International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology & Education and Fashion Practice. All publications are examined from their first issue to March 2018 and selected articles analysed. An extensive and systematic evaluation of the data provided by the articles is made in regards to their topic and research approaches. This work serves as a source of information for identifying gaps in the literature and further development of the field.

This paper starts off by providing the reader with a brief overview of fashion studies. Next, it introduces the methodology behind the study and the data collected. In following, an analysis of the data discusses the present state of practice-based research in fashion. As a closing remark, the concluding section discusses the possible paths for the field in the future.

Practice-based research in Fashion Studies

Fashion as a field of knowledge has been left aside in scholarly matters until recently, often labelled as one of frivolity (KAWAMURA, 2009; LIPOVETSKY, 1994). But the fact is that fashion is intrinsic to our everyday lives as we all dress with either clothes, body modifications, textiles, feathers or beads (EICHER, EVENSON and LUTZ, 2008) and contribute to some extent to the flow of fashion. Aware of the relevance of wearing and dressing practices, intrinsic to human existence, scholars have started to consistently investigate fashion as a scholarly affair. Emerging in the 80's, most of these contributions that looked into fashion stemmed from other fields, such as history (EVANS and THORNTON, 1998), sociology (LIPOVESTKY, 1994), psychology (KAISER, 1990) and semiotics (DAVIS, 1994). They have along the decades supported the growth of fashion as a self-standing discipline, shaping what is referred today as fashion studies.

Recent publications, which intend to provide an overview of the development of fashion studies, saw a common agreement among authors on its interdisciplinary nature (TSEËLON 2001; MCNEIL 2010; KAWAMURA 2011; BLACK et al. 2013; JENSS 2016). The gradual emergence of fashion studies occurred as a problematization to view fashion as simply a binary system of classification, such as urban versus rural and civilized/modern/Western versus primitive/traditional/non-Western (JENSS 2016). This Euro-centric way of thinking was challenged through an infusion of various perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, and economics (KAWAMURA 2011; JENSS 2016; ALMILA and INGLIS 2017). Moreover, the importance of developing domain specific theory and methodology was discussed while contextualizing and interweaving methods from other fields, such as material culture, visual culture, film and performance, design, as well as curatorial studies (GRANATA 2012; FINN 2014; JENSS 2016).

However, directly adopting methodologies from other fields without careful contextualization was a target of criticism. Australian practitioner-researcher Angela Finn (2014) argued that practitioner research in fashion has simply changed from teaching technical skills for fashion design to incorporate methodology from more established academic research domains. What follows this 'academicizing' of fashion is an 'incomplete paradigm shift' as it fails to construct the groundwork for studying fashion, a task that requires understanding contextual differences of fashion studies in comparison to other subfields in design.

Finn (2014) further noted the lack of design practice in fashion studies. While the academic discussions on fashion generally focus on objects, the ways in which the objects are resulted in are underdeveloped (FINN 2014). In the development of fashion studies, the contribution of practitioners has been

neither welcomed nor seen as necessary by some scholars. From a report on fashion research at the design school context, Danish fashion researcher Else Skjold (2008) introduced a quote from Valerie Steele, editor of Fashion Theory:

> […] to ask someone who is essentially a design practitioner to do the equivalent of a Ph.D. with all the academic apparatus and theoretical structure. I think that is actually unreasonable. Because it would be as though, Valerie, you are not allowed to write about fashion, you can drape a pattern and sew. Sew a book. (SKJOLD 2008, p. 81)

This comment connotes a clear segregation of practitioner research within fashion studies. However, as Finn (2014) argued against the issue of academicizing, we argue that the contribution of practitioners is vital in order for fashion studies to identify domain specific theory and methodologies. In fact, practitioners who hold skills and knowledge for designing fashion artefacts have demonstrated ways for weaving practice into research. The neighbouring field of design research can be an inspiration for perspective change and fully embrace the aspect of practice in fashion. In comparison to design studies, which cover a broader spectrum of its discipline, including history and theory, the term design research can be traced from Design Research Society, founded in the 1960s (MARGOLIN 2002). With a strong emphasis on design practice, this Society has contributed to place the practitioner in the core of its field. In this way, design research has been exploring various aspects of design practice, including the design context, design process and research based design practice (CLARK and BRODY, 2009).

However, one relevant issue to note in bridging design research to fashion studies has been the generalization of design practice, which ignores specificities such as those of fashion design (VISSER, 2009; BADKE-SCHAUB et al., 2010; KIMBELL, 2011). For instance, while a common characteristic of design practice has been explored and described as a way of solving problems (e.g. DORST, 2011), fashion design practice lacks an orientation towards

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problem solving. Instead, it tends to highlight 'introducing a difference' (HALLNÄS, 2009, p. 59). Thus, a careful investigation of the contextual difference between practices in design and fashion is needed. Through that, fashion designer-researchers can develop domain specific methodology, based on the firm foundation of understanding what fashion design practice is (FINN, 2014; RÆBILD, 2015; CHUN, 2018). The last two decades saw the beginning of consistent academic publications from fashion designer-researchers, bringing ashore a plurality of approaches, methods and theoretical articulations. While these works do not abandon the clear transdisciplinarity natural to the field, they do add a new perspective: that of the practitioner.

Selecting the literature

This literature review aims at providing the reader with a clear overview of how practice-based research in fashion[4] has developed throughout the years. It starts with the mapping of recognized journals in the broad field of fashion as rated by the Finnish Research Forum[5]. Despite scarcity in numbers, some academic publications have given space and voice to research based in practice in the field of fashion. Their scope of interest and academic recognition were examined, leading to a selection of four journals. The journals selected in this literature review have advocated for the relevance of practice-based research to the development of fashion studies and throughout the years gained recognition and solidity. Due to our limitations in regards to languages, only journals in English and Portuguese were investigated. They included practice in their scope of interest and/or dedicated special issues to the topic. The table below introduces the four selected journals in

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[4] Here, by practice-based research in fashion we mean those that have clothing items as outcomes, leaving aside others such as textiles.

[5] Julkaisufoorumi, or the Publication Forum, is a Finnish system that classifies and rates academic publications in levels 0-3. More information can be found at http://www.julkaisufoorumi.fi/en/.

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regards to their launch date, location, accessibility, periodicity and number of practice-based articles published.

Table 1. List of selected journals and their characteristics

Journal Title	Launch Year	Language	Location	Open Access	Periodicity*	Impact Factor	Number PB Articles
Clothing Cultures	2014	English	United Kingdom	No	2 issues/vol	n/a	2
dObra[s]	2007	Portuguese, Spanish, English, French	Brazil	Yes	2 issues/vol	n/a	2
Fashion Practice	2009	English	United Kingdom	No	2 issues/vol	0.57	10
International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education	2008	English	United Kingdom	Yes	3 issues/vol	0.33	14

All the issues of the journals published between their launch date and March 2018 were systematically analysed. At first, we looked into abstracts to refine selection, and later articles were read through or skimmed for collecting further details. These details were: specific subfield of research, research methods used, number of participants involved in the study (if any), general findings and number of times the article was accessed, when available.

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Chart 1. Practice-based publications in four academic journals categorized by topic


Journal Publications . Practice-based Research in Fashion
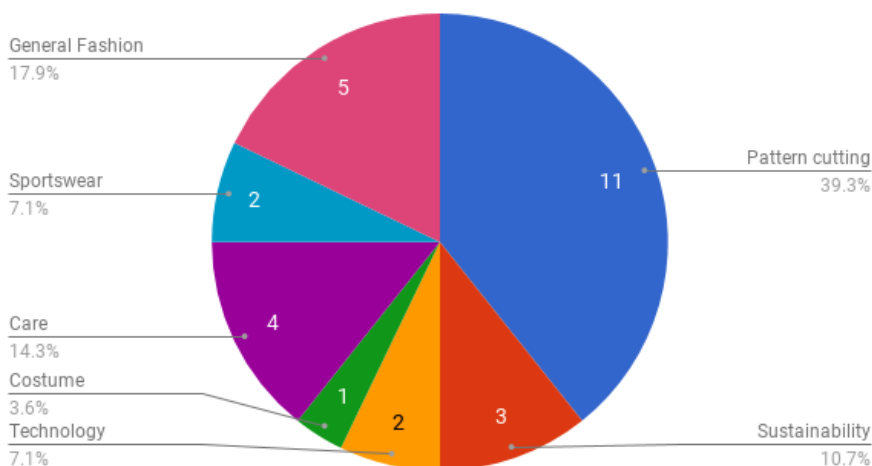
Subfields of research took into consideration the keywords used and the general topic discussed. Some works shared topics (e.g. pattern cutting and sustainability). In such cases, the main focus of the work suggested the categorization. The category 'general fashion' includes creative and experimental research projects with clothing collections as outcomes. A total of 28 articles were included in the analysis. Chart 2 presents the number of articles per subfield, proving a plurality of interests by practitioner-researchers.

Reviewing the literature

As noted in the previous section, practice-based research in fashion is still in its infancy with the first internationally recognized academic journal dedicated to the field (Fashion Practice) launched in 2009. At the time, the journal was created as a response to the lack of practice-oriented works in the most prominent journal, Fashion Theory. Finn (2014) notes that despite the intention, practice-based research is still a minority within the works published in it. This finding indicates that
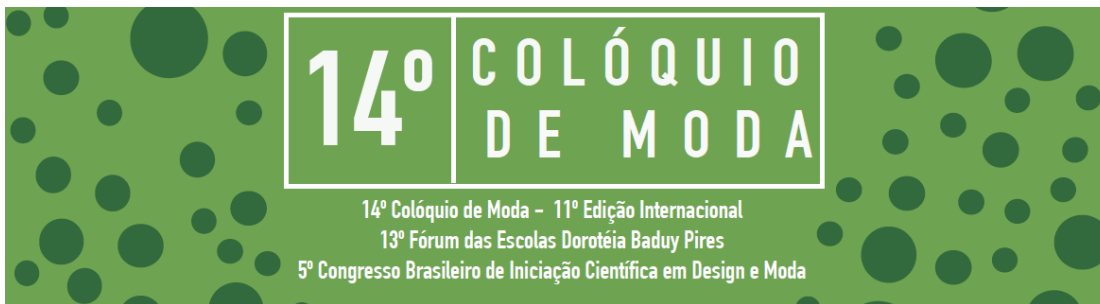
even though a clear increase in such endeavours has taken place within academia, the efforts to publish work via serial publications are still rare.

The low number of publications, on the other hand, does not minimize the plurality of topics addressed, done via quantitative and qualitative approaches. A clear predominance of works in pattern cutting is justified by the two special issues of the International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education in 2013 and 2016, edited by researcher Kevin Almond and responsible for placing the journal as the one with the largest amount of practice-based publications in our sampling. They included eleven selected works from the International Conference for Creative Pattern Cutting (ALMOND 2013) in Huddersfield. Out of these eleven articles, four discuss zero waste, indicating a successful development of the specific approach to pattern cutting, which unfolds into works of sustainability (ANICET and RUTHSCHILLING, 2015; MCQUILLAN et al. 2018), technology (PAGE, 2013) and industry (JAMES et al. 2016).

Works in general fashion, with five articles, loosely follows pattern cutting. Here, each practitioner-designer discusses her creative processes. Some examples are the application of leucodyes to garments (KOOROSHNIA et al. 2015), formalwear (LAPOLLA 2017) and experimental fashion (FRASER, 2014; CATERALL, 2017;). Investigations on the creation of clothing related to 'care' total four contributions, which include topics in design for health and minorities. They present works in redesigning a hospital gown (BLACK and TORLEI, 2013; GORDON and GUTTMANN, 2013), inclusive design (RADVAN, 2013) and design for elderly women (TOWNSEND et al. 2017). Sustainability appears as a topic of concern in a many of the works reviewed here, but is investigated with more focus in Cao et al. (2015) use of a sustainability performance measurement tool in the design process, Janigo and Wu (2015) investigation on up-cycling as a business opportunity, and Cao et al. (2014) design and satisfaction survey on apparel and footwear using biomaterials. Responsive and electronic garments (DUNNE, 2010;

BERZOWSKA and LAFLAMME, 2011), sportswear for rowers and golf players (HO and AU, 2017; CHAE and EVENSON, 2014) and costume design (BUGG, 2009) are topics of interest addressed. Other frequently seen interdisciplinary interests intersected with fashion were not found in this review, such as fashion and architecture, performance and gender studies, suggesting gaps.

Out of the 28 articles analysed, fifteen assess their outcomes via: questionnaires (5), interviews (6), short-term user tests or fittings (7) and group discussions or workshops (4), some of which employ a combination of approaches. The study also shows a recent tendency in including empirical studies to the research, present in the majority of works published after 2014 against a minority in those published before the date. Many of these approaches combine methods from other areas such as engineering and sociology, but also from design in a broader sense as well as specific from the field of fashion. One common method to evaluate the quality of clothing is borrowed from the professional practice of fitting clothes in short time assessments. This proves the interdisciplinarity of the field and supports the position of academics that strongly stand for an enmeshing of practice and theory in order to support fashion as a self-standing field of knowledge (FINN 2014; RÆBILD 2015; CHUN 2018; SAMPSON 2018). As practitioners dwell in research, they are able to articulate more suitable methodologies for the field of fashion.

Conclusion

Our study has covered some of the most relevant academic journals dedicated to the field of fashion that provide space for practice-based research to flourish. The study indicates to geographical prominences, with a high concentration of publications stemming from the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, and highlights the field of pattern-cutting as receiving the largest amount of contributions, followed by works within care and

sustainability. Despite this concentration, they bestow us with a variety of topics and methodologies bridging out to other fields. In this way, practice-based research in fashion supports Granata's definition of fashion as a field 'in-between' that often reaches out to other disciplines despite speaking from within its own realm (2012).

From our previous knowledge on practice-based academic publications in fashion it becomes relevant to note the differences between research done in a doctoral level, resulting in doctoral dissertations, and those published in academic journals. The constraints of a journal article, especially in regards to word limitation and restriction to the use of media can be seen as bringing obstacles to the intensification of practice-based research in such dissemination platforms. Projects that target these limitations and propose new forms of disseminating practice-based research are restricted to the visual arts (see, e.g., The Journal of Artistic Research and Ruukku[6]) and have not yet reached fashion specific journals. These academic journals invite contributions that hold more traditional approaches in regards to methods employed and the presentation of outcomes. On the other hand, doctoral dissertations allow more freedom in how the content is approached enjoying a more fruitful development of the field.

Some of the works reviewed here draw their cases from the industry, developing successful collaborations between academia and the professional field of fashion. But apart from those that specifically target the industry, many of the methods used to evaluate outcomes or verify user satisfaction could be adapted and used in the industry, revolutionizing how they are approached

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[6] The Journal of Artistic Research and Ruukku are two online-based academic publications dedicated to the field of arts in a general sense. By allowing authors to both create their own layout of the articles and refrain from limiting the use of audio-visual material, they suggest alternative forms of disseminating artistic research.

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today. Another potential seen is within collaborative approaches, often borrowing from co-design, which could benefit both designers and customers.

This study has clear limitations in regards to coverage as only four journals, in English and Portuguese languages, were covered. Despite that, the prominence of academic fashion journals in the English language, with contributions coming especially from the western north, mirrors a reality of the field. With this we do not mean that nations other than those do not produce knowledge in fashion but rather that their visibility is restricted. This may also reflect on the audience of such publications, which might stem especially from the same nations, reinforcing the unbalanced provenance of contributions. Practice-based research on fashion can adopt the polycentrism perspective to global fashion business (SKOV 2011). This perspective challenges the conventional idea to fashion that places have a hierarchy (e.g. fashion capitals, including Paris and New York, and emergent fashion cities, including Helsinki, Shanghai and São Paulo). Instead, it acknowledges the coexistence of multiple centres that together create the dynamic world of fashion. Similarly, practice-based research on fashion, as a young research domain, needs to embrace alternative approaches to further expand the academic discussion while celebrating the practitioner's unique contribution to the field that breaks the dichotomy of theory and practice.

Recently, designer-researchers have proved a positive account of merging theory and practice by proposing new methodologies that can better account for fashion's ontology and agencies. Examples are the work of Sampson (2018), who proposes wearing and a methodology to further understanding on fashion and dress practices and Lee (2012), who uses seamlessness as a metaphor to the conceptual and physical becomings of garment and wearers as they produce and reshape each other. These works suggest a clear gap within the literature reviewed here, which lacks experience-

based methodologies or methods to collect data that take longer use-phase time-frames assessments.

With this study we'd like to outline the present state of practice-based research in fashion and, especially, invite our peers to contribute to this exciting field. Through such contributions, we seek to reinforce the idea that the various practices in fashion matter.

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