

Editorial

Anne Marr, Josie Steed and Helena Britt

The challenges of recent years have brought about significant changes to fashion and textiles education, research and industry practices. Environmental, societal, ethical, cultural and political change, technological and material innovations, decolonisation, diversity and inclusivity have proliferated thinking, making and production. In addition, the devaluing of creative subjects in schools, further education and higher education changes and funding cuts continue to impact. Industry requires and values skills from specialist fashion and textiles training; however, there is scope to increase the visibility of the breadth of career opportunities for graduates. Evidencing the value of fashion and textiles education beyond the higher education sector and engaging wider society have become vital agendas. Working collectively and collaboratively brings new opportunities for investigation surrounding fashion and textiles.

Set against this context, 'Conscious Communities' was the overarching theme of the most recent conference in the Futurescan series, organised by the Association of Fashion and Textile Courses (FTC). Hosted by the University of Leeds, UK, at Nexus, the *Futurescan 5: Conscious Communities* conference ran as a hybrid event from 7th – 8th September 2022. The conference included keynote presentations, full papers, short papers and examples of practice-based work presented in a two-day exhibition (figures 1 and 2) curated by Professor Andrew Groves (University of Westminster, UK) and Dr Jo Jenkinson (Manchester Fashion Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK). Submissions were encouraged that discussed, challenged, and provoked debate concerning one or more of the following five sub-themes: Environmental and Resilient Communities; Societal and Political Communities; Technological and Material Communities; Collaborative and Participatory Communities and Cultural and Ethical Communities. The conference included two keynote presentations. The first keynote, 'Conscious Collaborations: Honouring creative crafts, culture and heritage', was by Avis Charles, fashion designer, consultant and philanthropist, with Varsha Mahendra, fashion designer, entrepreneur and craft revivalist based in Hyderabad, India. The second keynote, 'Growing a Responsible Fashion Design Company through Craft, Creativity and Community', was by Christopher Raeburn, designer and founder of RÆBURN. Both keynote presentations provided thought-provoking and inspiring insights surrounding the conference theme. This special issue of the *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* brings together nine articles developed from presentations at the conference that build on the Conscious Communities conference themes. The authors provide original lenses on innovating materiality to develop future collaborative, sustainable, interdisciplinary practices involving diverse communities.



Figure 1: Futurescan 5: Conscious Communities Exhibition, University of Leeds, Nexus, 7th – 8th September 2022. Garments in foreground ‘A circular design model for the luxury fashion industry using a zero-waster design approach’ by Debbie Moorhouse, Rina Arya, Parikshit Goswami, University of Huddersfield, UK. Photography by Helena Britt.



Figure 2: Futurescan 5: Conscious Communities Exhibition, University of Leeds, Nexus, 7th – 8th September 2022. Installation in foreground ‘Raisons D’être’ by Katherine Soucie, Kingston University London, UK. Photography by Helena Britt.

Under the Environmental and Resilient Communities theme, Hall et al., Piper et al., McHattie and Sherrod, as well as Coulter respond to ecological and economic crisis points by rethinking circular material streams as well as reimagining craft heritage to grow community livelihoods. 'BROKEN BUTTERFLY WINGS: Exploring the role of textile blends in the circular economy for recycling and disassembly' by Hall et al. proposes new design solutions for textile blends, which are traditionally difficult to recover as the circular economy champions mono-materiality. The authors identify different strategies to blend technical and biological materials through recyclability and disassembly, demonstrating how multiple perspectives are necessary to address complex systemic issues. In their article 'Resilience, Resourcefulness and Creativity: Learning from the diversification of Guatemalan artisans during the pandemic to sustain textile traditions' Piper et al. focus on the creative resilience of indigenous Guatemalan artisans during Covid-19 regional lockdowns through a series of case studies. The article centres on how five groups in the Lake Atitlán area diversified their entrepreneurial practices and actioned strategies to support their communities during the crisis. This led to a regional sharing economy and a new engagement with digital platforms to support local indigenous communities. McHattie and Sherrod's article 'Designing In-Between: Innovation from Field to Fabric' advocates for the radical re-imagining of production cycles within the wool industry from selectively breeding Shetland sheep to designing for decomposition and conscious stewardship of the land. Reflections on lived experiences and novel practices highlight the importance of local terrain, transparency and traceability and the value of regenerative textile cycles. Coulter's article 'Feeling well: Using the augmented touch of E-Textiles to embody emotion and environment as a 'self-health' intervention for female students' explores how female students can take a 'self-health' approach by drawing upon the restorative powers of nature as a coping mechanism. It considers individuals' relationships between their personal environments and somatosensory experiences through the medium of e-textiles. It uses the design of three crafted e-textile concepts to explore alternative approaches for self-managing student mental well-being.

Under the Technological and Material Communities strand, Power and Steed et al. explore new digital and hands-on textile innovation opportunities. In 'Thinking with my hands: Embodied cognition in practice' Power's positioning article proposes a new methodology for examining and reinterpreting the embodied nature of material reflective thinking through her practice-based work that responds to and reinterprets walking acts through methods of stitching-*in* and stitching-*on* action. Correlations of mind and body wandering through physical and metaphorical space are drawn upon and considered in the context of material thinking and tacit and haptic knowledge. Steed et al.'s article 'Collaborating with a Scottish heritage brand towards enhancing and preserving sustainable artisan hand-weaving practices through a Knowledge Transfer Partnership' discusses a knowledge exchange project between academics from two creative design schools and a Harris Tweed brand. They outline the different aspects of the work that impacted both the company towards their ambitions for embedding sustainability and circular practices and the

implications of their work for textile design practice, education, and research within the design framework for sustainability.

For Collaborative and Participatory Communities, Kapsali and Hall, as well as Coulter, invite interdisciplinary research engagement from different communities of textile practice. Kapsali and Hall's article 'Bioinspired Textiles; observations from the evaluation of a novel practice-based framework linking lessons on sustainable/ circular design from biology to textile practice' evaluates how their novel Bio-inspired Textile (BIT) design framework can enhance sustainable and circular design processes. Their study invited textile makers from small enterprises (SMEs) to craft practitioners to apply enhanced knowledge of structures and properties of biological materials to inform more efficient usage of materials and resources during the design and production of textiles. In 'Using E-Textiles to Challenge Gender Perceptions in STEM, Design and Career Aspirations of Secondary School Students', Coulter investigates issues of gender bias in the secondary school curriculum across science, technology, art and design. The article explores approaches to shifting student mindsets and perspectives for future academic choices by encouraging multidisciplinary teaching methods to create a more gender-equitable environment through co-designing electronic textile projects.

Responding to the Cultural and Ethical Communities theme, Farley and Hillyard's 'A visual exchange of everyday history, a creative exploration to build contextual awareness within parallel learning communities' is a dialogue between the two academics, both designers and makers. The exchange began while teaching online and reflects on the value of this 'community of two' where co-mentoring occurs, and conversations act as sounding boards and springboards. This submission diversifies from the practitioner interview format offered by the *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice*, and offers potential for further exploration for data collection and analysis for practice-based research.

Positive change can only happen through collective action and shifting mindsets. Anderson (1991) points out that a community requires a shared imagination. The authors in this issue powerfully articulate why Fashion and Textiles are fundamental in creating a sense of belonging to a community by inspiring diverse identities, encouraging collaborative practices, and enabling communal action. Conscious local and global communities are critical drivers in evolving existing cultures and ecologies to diversify, repair, innovate and transform collaboratively.

Futurescan Conference

Further information about the conference and FTC Futurescan conference series can be found at <https://ftc-online.org.uk/futurescan-5/>, on Instagram @futurescan_5 and at <https://futurescan.figshare.com/>.

Association of Fashion & Textiles Courses (FTC)

Formed in 1977, the FTC is a subject association that exists to promote and develop fashion and textiles through academic debate, education and research. The Association, through its networks, has links with industry, public and professional bodies and acts to advise on quality in educational matters. The Association actively supports and promotes fashion, textiles and related research through conferences, symposia and events.

Issue Editors

This special issue is a collaboration between guest editors Anne Marr and Josie Steed, supported by Dr Helena Britt; all are Steering Group members of the Association of Fashion & Textile Courses (FTC).

Notes on Contributors

Anne Marr is the Programme Director for Jewellery, Textiles and Materials at Central Saint Martins, UAL. Her research explores interdisciplinary textile-based approaches responding to societal needs to co-create more empathetic communities. Recent projects such as *LEAD* with the Jaipur Rugs Foundation empowered participants through novel co-design methodologies and collective leadership skills. *Patterns of Perception* with the UCL Wellcome Centre for Human Neuroimaging investigates lived experiences around Parkinson's dementia to support dialogue and awareness as well as improve care and support.

Additional information can be found at <https://engagement.fil.ion.ucl.ac.uk/projects/pop-pd/>

Josie Steed is a Senior Lecturer and Design Researcher for Sustainability and Knowledge Exchange at Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University. Her research focuses on exploring the role and relevance of new technologies, towards valuing textile heritage and craft making. Projects include Augmented Fashion to determine how immersive interactions can be used to communicate the experience and value of creative, artisan making, with a focus on sustainable clothing consumption and a 2-year Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Harris Tweed Hebrides.

Further information can be found at <https://rgu-repository.worktribe.com/person/74886/josie-steen>

Helena Britt is Programme Leader for Textile Design at The Glasgow School of Art. Her research intersects historical and contemporary textile design practice and pedagogy using archive and practice-based methods, oral testimony and exhibition curation. Ongoing research examines how designers and design groups act as curators, collectors and archivists, appropriating and reinterpreting design practices, motifs and procedures. Helena is co-editor for the *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* and co-chair for *Futurescan 5: Conscious Communities*.

References

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (2nd ed.). London and New York: Verso.