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Body styles: Redirecting ethics and the question of embodied empathy in fashion design

The activity of designing fashion is intimately connected to the bodies of others. While the garments designers conceive enclose wearers' bodies in direct physical contact, those garments also create opportunities for participation, social connection and inclusion as well as possibilities for amorous encounter, novelty and self-expression. Drawing on the outcomes of a research project investigating somatic experiences in fashion, this article examines the notion of embodied empathy in design practice. The article addresses the potential for fashion designing to be understood and enacted as an empathic practice; one that is grounded in a sensitivity to the embodied experiences of others. In doing so, it advances the notion of body style, a dynamic design lens for fashion that foregrounds movement and somatic experience, based in the unfolding interaction between fashion garments and bodies in co-creative acts of wearing. The article argues such an embodied orientation for fashion design provides an opportunity for designers to redirect their design practices beyond appearances to enable and support bodily comportments. This article raises the question of embodied empathy in the context of current discourses on ethical fashion and responds to the following questions: How might an increased sensitivity to the embodied experiences of wearers shift fashion design practice? And following that, what might be the outcomes of such a shift in orientation?

Keywords: fashion design, empathy, embodiment, movement, ethical fashion, practice-based research

Introduction

There is no doubt the practice of designing fashion is intimately bound to the bodies of others. While the garments designers conceive create a material envelope in direct physical contact with wearers bodies, garments provide opportunities for social participation and connection as well as possibilities for self-expression, amorous encounter and novelty. (Barnard 1996; Sweetman 2001; Wilson 1985 ; Crane 2000 ; Hebdige 1979; Geczy and Karaminas 2020; Entwistle 2015). Moreover, the capacity of garments to deliver these opportunities is based on a designer's implicit understanding of what it is to be and have a body and what it means to participate in an embodied sartorial life. Yet while scholarship has developed in fashion studies that acknowledges wearing clothing is an embodied, sensory and affective phenomenon which is central to the way wearers experience, use and understand their bodies (Craik 1993; Entwistle 2015, 2000; Negrin 2016; Ruggerone 2017) little research has explored how enhanced sensitivity to the bodily experiences of others could inform the way we think about the ethical dimension of fashion design. In this article I raise the issue of embodied empathy in the context of current discourses on ethical fashion and pose the following questions: How might an increased sensitivity to the embodied experiences of wearers shift fashion design practice? And following that, what might be the outcomes of such a shift in orientation?

The notion of embodied empathy in fashion is not entirely new. The notion has been mobilised in fashion studies in recent years primarily in relation to the way fashion images can register strong physiological effects on viewers. This work addresses the impact of fashion images, across editorial photography, fashion film and the fashion

runway to advocate for more nuanced analysis of fashion images and their effects, whereby concepts of ‘affect’ and ‘sensorial empathy’ foreground the embodied, sensory and visceral dimensions to the encounter with fashion images. For example Shinkle (2013) examined fashion photography via the embodied and visceral dimension of perception; Filippello (2018) considered opportunities for forms of queer attachment and worldmaking in relation to fashion imagery while Hunt (2018) examined sensorial correspondences between filmic works and runway fashion presentations.

An important thread intersecting these studies is the commonality of embodied experiences and the way in which forms of spectatorship can invite embodied, tactile and haptic modes of viewing. Sobchack (1992) phenomenological account of film experience as well as Marks (2000) work on intercultural cinema are common touch points, whereby shared sensory ways of experiencing the world are understood to render moving images meaningful to observers. For Marks examples of haptic cinema create opportunities to transcend gaps in cultural understanding. Pink points out reflexive, body-conscious and embodied knowledges at play in these visual encounters can evoke ‘empathetic and intercultural understandings’ in others (2009, 50). In this sense encounters with moving images take place on the basis of shared sensory and perceptual ways of understanding the world. For example, emotional and physical experiences depicted in films are experienced viscerally whereby audiences are physically moved to cover their eyes or cower from the screen in particularly frightening or suspenseful moments. These physical reactions are based on an identification of our own situated felt-lived-experiences and those experiences depicted on screen. It’s also noteworthy that such an embodied perspective reflects an affective and embodied turn within the

social sciences (Clough 2007; Knudsen and Stage 2015; Seigworth and Gregg 2010) as well as more recently in fashion studies (McNeil and Bellanta 2019).

This focus upon affective and visceral experiences which resist conventional visual or semiotic analysis is also central to this research, but rather than addressing our shared visceral encounters with images, I address a relationship relevant to design and designers that considers the sensorial correspondences between designers and wearers. My argument pivots on two key contentions. The first is there exists a differential relationship between the material form of fashion garments and how the body moves and is experienced. What is meant by this is, the material form of fashion influences bodies by producing qualitative inflections in sensation, movement and bodily comportment. The second contention is by becoming attuned to these qualitative differences there lies the potential to develop a novel design orientation. This orientation does not focus solely on the appearance of fashion garments, but rather integrates a sensitivity to the ways in which fashion produces viscerally felt sensations, in other words a sense of being-dressed; and that this sensitivity would inform ethical approaches to design.

This perspective draws on a practice-based research project titled ‘Soma Poiesis: An exploration of the redirective potential of somatic experience in fashion’ (Robinson 2018). The primary objective of the research was to develop an approach to explore somatic experience in fashion and to create a set of re-directive resources that support makers and wearers of fashion becoming sensitized the somatic dimension of fashion. ‘Redirection’ and ‘redirective practice’ are strategies designed to shift the way practices are enacted to effect broader societal change (Fry 2009). Redirection is a concept that

emphasizes practice transformations and the development of resources that support the way design practices can change. The principle of redirection means practices on their own are not equipped to generate shifts in orientation, they require re-directional resources that enable them to be understood and enacted in different ways by practitioners. Resources may take the form of exemplary practice, theoretical work, case studies or new processes and systems, all of which support and assist practice change. As a practice-based project a primary outcome included a series of resources in the form of video studies, that focused on the interaction of bodies and garments in very close detail. The aim of the research is to produce resources that enable the body in fashion to be understood, researched, experienced and designed for differently. There are though significant challenges when investigating bodily experiences in fashion. The first is associated with the very nature of bodily experiences which are non-verbal, experienced at the margins of conscious awareness and are largely invisible to an outside observer. Despite these challenges the research approach identified somatic experiences as closely associated with sartorial movements where the body and the garment are in mutual interaction.

The following article is organised in three parts. The first addresses the ethical domain with reference to discourses on sustainability and ethical fashion, more recent discourses on diversity and inclusion in fashion as well as feminist philosophy of embodiment. This serves to problematise conceptions of ethical fashion, as primarily associated with human-material systems of production and consumption as well as a mediatised system of global fashion. The second section details the research approach and includes discussion of research reflections and insights on how increased sensitivity to the relationship between embodied sensation, movement and clothing opens a novel

design perspective. This foregrounds the redirective potential for designers to attend to the embodied dimension of fashion, by drawing attention to how aspects of a design can influence and shape movement, embodied sensation and bodily comportment. The final section reflects upon the potential outcomes of an empathic shift towards wearers' embodied sensations and movement discussing how it opens an ethical perspective. This ethical orientation is identified in the way design can make possible variations to individuals' body comportment which can in turn lead to wider forms of societal change. In doing so I advance the value of embodied perspectives becoming a more central concern for fashion design practice wherein it carries the potential to catalyse forms of personal and societal change, currently obscured by dominant visual models of design and practice.

Ethical fashion

A defining feature of the contemporary fashion landscape over the last decade is the increasing significance of ethical perspectives. Within scholarship the notion of ethics is closely intertwined with discourses associated with sustainability, most often situating 'ethics' and 'ethical fashion' within the broader purview of sustainable fashion; and a set of inter-related issues associated with the global fashion system including fast-fashion and over-consumption, resource depletion, environmental degradation, carbon emissions and exploitative labour practices.

In this sustainable fashion context 'ethical fashion' refers to approaches to address the negative environmental and social impacts associated with the production and supply processes of the fashion system involved in the manufacture, distribution of

fashion goods and apparel (Haug and Busch 2016). These impacts stem from the energy-, material-, and labour-intensive nature of contemporary fashion production and distribution, as well as the dynamics of fashion consumption, based upon a model of obsolescence, oscillating between novelty and disposal. 'Ethical fashion' is also associated with the negative human and animal impacts associated with fashion production notably problematic labour practices including worker exploitation and mistreatment, poor working conditions, low pay as well as ill-treatment of animals and use of their byproducts as material inputs. Scholarship on sustainable and ethical approaches to fashion is by implication critical of current ways of making and consuming fashion and aims to reduce impacts through development of more sustainable approaches for fashion and their advancement through arguments and advocacy for the adoption of alternative models.

Given the focus on the negative environmental and social impacts of fashion over the last decade, the primary focus of ethically responsive fashion scholars and practitioners has been on developing and promoting more environmentally and socially sustainable production and consumption models that ameliorate detrimental effects of the fashion system. Considerable work from sustainable fashion researchers have identified and developed a range of responses that attempt to re-configure one-way fashion processes of production consumption and disposal towards circular models seeking to minimise waste and resource consumption; to developing and identifying ethical and ecological material inputs, through recycling of both materials and garments, to repair and consumer advocacy (Black 2008; Fletcher 2013; Gwilt and Rissanen 2012; Hethorn and Ulasewicz 2015; Rissanen and McQuillan 2016).

This focus on systemic issues is also reflected in scholarship which address 'ethics' as a primary theme. Of the scholars to consider ethical fashion explicitly the majority of these attend to ethics in relation to global fashion supply and production chains, and fashion and consumption (Joergens 2006; Niinimäki 2010; Shen et al. 2012; Skov 2010; Thomas 2018). Skov (2010) is an exception in this survey by including representations of idealized gender and body images in discussions of ethical fashion. Despite the significant value of this work, there remains as Haug and Busch (2016) point out, issues in this discourse due to simplification as well as confusion as to who indeed the relevant actors are and the kind of ethical action that is available to them. For example fashion garments have both material and immaterial dimensions (Kawamura 2005) as well as being a product of complex systems involving large numbers of people, there is considerable mutual influence making the scope and possibility for ethical action challenging.

Dunlop points out critiques of fashion to advance ethical fashion, 'focus almost exclusively on the establishment of standards for enacting social and environmental sustainability, either through redesigning clothing or systems through which it is made and distributed' (2012, pp. 195-196). She argues there is an issue with a notion of ethics governed by the pursuit of a 'teleological outcome', that is the achievement of a 'right action towards a just outcome', which fails to take account of the complex role design plays in enabling and shaping human practices (that is enabling and constraining particular kinds of action) as well as taking account of the way designed things themselves are products of historical, social and geographic circumstances. A teleological notion of ethics promises, if we can determine the right kinds of actions, problem solved.

Despite the value of these contributions to ethical thinking and practice there is a rationalistic as well as disembodied aspect to such a conception of ethics that foregrounds material processes at the expense of embodied and intersubjective relations. Such a constrained conception of ethics is in danger of failing to account for the way fashion is not only a human-material system enabling production and consumption of fashion products, but also a socio-material practice that will enable and constrain particular kinds of actions, agencies, subjectivities and other material practices. As such fashion cannot only be ethical by ameliorating the ecological and social impacts of its realisation it must also attend to the kinds of social, economic and cultural possibilities or lack thereof that arise through participation in fashion.

A mood for change

Ethical concerns in the field of fashion are also associated with a somewhat more nebulous, self-reflective mood pervading the fashion world and scholarship. Trend forecaster and fashion insider Li Edelkoort's (2015) manifesto, 'Anti_Fashion: Ten Reasons Why the Fashion System Is Obsolete' has become a key reference point for a number of scholars who identify fashion's current introspective and self-reflective orientation. Vänskä (2019) refers to fashion's 'self-critical' mode and a need to redefine fashion beyond commodity-based human-centric models, while von Busch (2019) raises the question of agency of fashion industry actors to effect change.

Whereas Breward points out that despite fashion's historical propensity for self-critique, the current mood suggests things are 'ripe for reconstruction'(2016, xvii)

Elsewhere inflections of ethical thinking in fashion studies emerge in discussions of 'diversity' or 'inclusion' that seek to address fashion's historical euro-centric, white, ableist, body-norming tendencies. For example a recent Fashion Theory special issue 'Decoloniality and Fashion' (Slade and Jansen 2020) addressed fashion's euro-centricity, while a published round-table discussion in the same journal featuring leading scholars and UK based industry professionals addressed the notion of diversity in fashion in relation to advertising, fashion shows, model casting, male-dominated decision making and industry power, as well as emergent forms of fashion activism associated with social media (Entwistle et al. 2019).

A notable element to this diversity discussion is a focus on the way fashion's lack of diversity is reflected in the absence of differently raced, gendered, sexed, abled and sized bodies within fashion's representational practices. Historically fashion has tended to valorise particular kinds of bodies and bodily characteristics – bodies that are mostly young, able, white, thin and normatively gendered. This discussion also links the lack of representation of non-normative bodies to decision-making processes in fashion and the embedment of decision-makers within established power structures that perpetuate particular conventions and practices. It is the case though, much of this discussion remains wedded to notions of appearance, visibility and identifiable physical traits in bodies and the way in which these traits propagate conceptions of gender, beauty and desire

Why is an embodied ethics important for fashion?

These practices and associated conventions of fashionable representation tend to promote narrowly prescribed bodies and bodily characteristics. It might also be said such practices and conventions promote normalising rather than ethical fashion practices. In short, we might ask: are our fashion practices liberating or restraining us? I do not wish to moralise about the way which we participate in fashion. I support Otto von Busch's general principle that we should make fashion our own (2007).

It is the case though literature addressing fashion and embodiment most relevant for issue of an embodied conception of ethics emerges from critical debates on women's historical engagement in fashion, corporeal representation of women in fashion and feminist phenomenology (Bartky 1998; Bordo 1993; Hanson 1990; Young 1994, 2005). Negrin's work around fashion, embodiment and appearance opens important questions of power, corporeal agency and fashion design (2010, 2012, 2016). This work addresses critical questions about the extent to which the culturally ingrained ways of representing and understanding bodies in fashion can limit other ways of fashionable participation. For example, if we only think of dressed bodies exclusively within a realm of representation, and practices of dressing as primarily acts of signification, we are in danger of not noticing how fashion potentially disables some kinds of embodiments and enables others.

Moreover, the issue of embodied ethics has emerged in relation to feminism and more recently, critical race and disability studies (Weiss 2015). Much of this work has

addressed the way bodily norms determine and regulate what bodies are valued and not others. Underpinning this work is the idea that these norms are both harmful and limiting (Lennon 2019). According to Bergoffen and Weiss (2012) the importance of an embodied ethics is the way it can sensitize us to the transformative potential of the way we deal with others. This kind of ethical orientation frames the relation to otherness in terms of the embodied capacities and vulnerabilities of those we encounter (Gonzalez-Arnal, Jagger, and Lennon 2012).

When set in a design context, this kind of ethical relation opens thinking about what it means to design for someone else and what do we hope to achieve for that person? What kinds of experiences do we wish to engender and what do we wish to enable? On what basis do we empathise with a wearer, if at all? Interestingly, a concern for wearer's experiences has emerged in the context of performance and costume research. This research area brings together costume design, bodily movement and sensorial experience. Bugg (2014) focused on the development of a costume design approach which integrated a performer's sensorial experiences as a feedback mechanism to inform aspects of the wider performance design. While Sally. E. Dean's work conceives the somatic aspects of costume as central to the generation of movement and aesthetics of a performance piece. The rationale underpinning this work is relevant, as according to Dean the cultivation of somatic reflexivity through design makes possible a 'repatting of psychophysical selves' via the creation of new habits and forms of movement (2020, 230).

While in the field of fashion research, fashion's unsustainable and damaging effects is a central concern to many research focused practices and organisations.

Systemic critiques can be operationalised through forms of overt activism, in for example Extinction rebellion's runway incursions and boycotts (Gallois 2021); Chain worker's mobilisation of fictional designer Serpica Naro in Milan fashion week 2005 (Vanni 2020); to more experimental and 'tactical' practices (Payne 2021) that provide important resources by which fashion can be understood and practiced in new ways. Recent research focusing on practices of self-representation of queer and trans men that actively challenge normative masculine embodiments in fashion (Barry 2019); non-ableist tailoring techniques (Paganelli 2021) to 'vital' fashion design for older people (Kivnick 2021) demonstrate the way in which diverse embodiments are also crucial to any reordering of the systemic order of fashion.

Whereas research on industry fashion practice suggests what designers do is to wrangle with a complex matrix of aesthetic possibilities in an emergent context of consumer fashion. context. According to researchers on fashion creativity Eckert and Stacey (2001) designers work to imaginatively visualise innovative fashion garments while evaluating their appropriateness within the contemporary fashion context. Designers look to fashion aesthetics to identify particular novel garment features as well as colours, materials and details of fashion value relevant to the contemporary. (Eckert and Stacey 2003). Designers act as interpreters of this information, combining visual elements in novel ways that align with current trends. At the same time designers, with support of marketing professionals, interpret consumer behaviour with reference to symbolic values associated with fashion images and products.

It is important to point out this account of fashion design practice emphasises the visual properties of fashion garments, and the field of fashion as a context populated by

fashion images, ordered by consumer tastes, attitudes and lifestyles. Moreover, this model of fashion design creativity implies the designer is engaged in work that while creative, operates in a predominantly visual register and does not acknowledge how garments are embodied and experienced. Fashion education has also relied on a reductive vocabulary of design elements such as line, shape, colour, texture, silhouette etc. and their application (Kim 2006) very much aligned with a visual representation of fashion garments, with little emphasis on the way in which consumers or wearers are likely to move in and experience garments as material, sensory and tactile objects.

The research approach

The concerns above emerge from long-term engagement with issues of fashion and the body informed by fashion practice and doctoral research. A key objective of the research was to develop a method and a framework to explore somatic experience in fashion. The research developed an approach integrating the design of a series of fashion garments and their use in participatory ‘sartorial sessions’ which were documented using digital video for analysis and interpretation. The use of digital video to capture and document action enabled the exploration and analysis of sartorial movements and bodily gestures with a focus upon very close readings of these movements, in order to examine the interaction of the body and the garment as an unfolding flow of embodied movement or vitality (Robinson 2020).

The research employed a small range of purpose-designed fashion garments which were used in conjunction with sensory-tactile materials that were used as sensory prompts or provocations. The methodology and use of these materials are designed to

elicit physical and sensory responses from participants which can be captured, documented and analysed. This enables a close and extended examination of how participants' bodies interact with garments and serves to draw out and make visible the inter-relationships between the bodies of participants and garments. In this sense analysis focuses on the relationship between visible human movements and behaviours and the embodied sensations and meanings associated with them. Two small ranges were produced. The first is made up of a series of simple black women's wear garments, including a skirt, dress and top, the second a men's range consisting of two identical designs, trousers and coat in black, blue and a sand colour. Five individuals including three women and two men participated in the sartorial sessions which involved the trying on, exploring and wearing of these garments.

The garments were designed on one level to conform to contemporary design aesthetics while on the other to coordinate as a range to offer variety of sartorial possibilities and associated physical and somatic experiences. The tactile prompts including sand, water or beads were integrated into sessions either directly into garments in channels and pockets or dispensed onto the surface of the garment, when worn by participants. These prompts serve to intensify the physical, tactile and kinaesthetic sensations associated with wearing clothing and to register in physical movement.

Moreover, the garments were designed to enable particular movements while constrain others. In this respect different garments in the range relate to different parts and zones of the body. Some garments are in direct contact with the body, while others produce more space around it. In one instance, a dress design has a narrow pencil

shaped skirt shaped section which is fitted closely around the hips yet is combined with an oversized blouse section. While other garments such as a pleated skirt, trousers and coat produce a sense of space internal to the garment around the body enabling ease of movement and increased scope for interaction and play with the garment. Participants were free to select pieces they wished to wear, often teaming them with items from their own wardrobe.

An observational framework

An important outcome of the analysis was an observational framework to understand sartorial behaviour that is based on the embodied, sensory and perceptual aspects of being dressed. The framework drew on sensory ethnography (Pink 2009) and a phenomenological orientation (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1969; Todes 2001). The primary analytical focus was ascribing meaning to sartorial movements. Central to this was a way of understanding the movements of the dressed body as associated sartorial modalities.

The modalities encompass modes of ‘touching’, ‘incorporation’, ‘orientation’ and ‘adaption’ that relate to a variety of bodily-sartorial compartments and processes (Robinson 2019). Many of these modalities were arrived at through identification and subsequent close analysis of small sequences or movement, figuring as gestural or corporeal clues of body-garment interaction while a fifth modality ‘body style’, which is the focus of this article was associated with the movements of the body in its entirety. The body style of participants is revealed in the distinctive way participants moved and was observed to be related to the specific ensemble of garments they wore. For

example, one participant Narmine (Figure 1) way of moving was observed to emerge in relation to their body in constant movement. This distinctive body style was evidenced in lively and continuous movement, as well as the playful and expressive gestures and movements of the hands. This lively and animated way of moving was typical of the movements throughout the entire session.

Another participant Bruno's energetic body style (Figure 2) was expressed through more dynamic physical movements. While a third participant Zepp, shown in (Figure 3) displayed movements characterised as languid and smooth coordination of the body in mutual interaction with garments. This highlighted a dynamic chiasmic interplay of the body and garment as a material artefact both touching and being touched by the body. Whilst the fourth participant Joy, body style was expressed in fluid movements of the limbs as well as a grounded quality. In this instance the participant was less mobile around the space but expressed movement through the limbs from a static position.



Figure 1: Narmine (expressive gesture) (2019) HD video still compilation

Re-directing fashion design

The rationale underlying research approach is the cultivation of reflexive forms of knowing that enable enhanced sensitivity to one's own as well as other's embodied experiences. It is important to note the approach is speculative and open-ended through the use of design probes (Dunne 1990; Gaver, Dunne, and Pascenti 1999) and was directed towards developing 'sensitising' resources, such as video works and an observational framework rather than systematic design principles or guidelines. It is also important to point out the video studies are conceived to be perceived and experienced through a reduced sensory frame. That is the specific framing strategy removes audio and the face directing an observer's attention to the body, torso, limbs and the embodied sensations associated with their movement.



Figure 2: Bruno (sand) (2019) HD video still compilation



Figure 3: Zeppe (wet) (2019), HD Video still compilation

As such the videos are designed to sensitize observers to the embodied dimension of sartorial experience through the commonality of sensorial experiences. In other words, the research and its outcomes point towards to the corporeal significance and meaning of movements and behaviour in fashion. This sensory focus enables observers and practitioners to critically reflect their own bodily sensations and movements and to consider how bodily experiences can be associated with specific aspects of a design.

For example, design considerations about how the garments relate to specific parts of the body and their associated sensations and interactions with the body, are tied to specific design deliberations: How for example should I finish and shape this jacket collar? Should it wrap a little higher at the back, perhaps to contact the skin above the shirt worn beneath, producing a sensation of contact, contour and movement that releases as it sweeps around the front? But what fabrication should I use? Should it be cut in the main fabric or perhaps something different, maybe a knit? Perhaps a knitted rib would provide that pleasing sense of support and gentle resistance when turning one's head this way or that?

While these considerations are relevant to the design of a jacket, the design of a pair of trousers or a skirt, would throw up several different considerations, associated with the lower part of the body, legs and movement. Such as how and where should the skirt contact the body? Maybe fit it snugly on the hips, then extend it low, skimming the body as it travels to finish just below the knee, accentuating a body consciousness, and perhaps a sense of constraint or diminished mobility. Or maybe start higher up the waist and pitch it out beyond the body producing a sensation of expansiveness, interior warmth and enclosure as one walks and moves through space. The way in which garments coordinate within an ensemble would also have a set of kinaesthetic and proprio-perceptive sensations produced in and around the body.

A designer necessarily draws reflexively upon their own embodied experiences of wearing and making garments in these deliberations. Yet while there is no exact correlation between the embodied experiences of designers and future wearers there is a

common intersubjective ground upon which designers can be more sensitive to. This common ground reflects implicit understandings of what it is to be and have a body, and the way in which garments generate a variety of somatic experiences and ways of experiencing one's body in co-creative acts of wearing.

Discussion

The approach outlined above enabled a close, fine-grained observation of bodily movement and body-garment interaction, while extending these to bring a sartorial-somatic meaning to those movements. In this respect the research is based on the notion of the intelligibility of human movement and its significance within a socio-cultural domain (Noland 2010, 2008; Laban 1980; Young 2005). This provides an opportunity to engage with design and movement as not merely visual phenomena but rather as understanding styles of movement a possessing somatic, purposive and expressive dimensions while at the same time embedded within human practices.

An important insight of the research is that participants display divergent 'body styles' or body comportments. While the term 'comportment' is defined somewhat vaguely in everyday usage as 'bearing', 'conduct', 'demeanour' or 'behaviour' Merriam-Webster (n.d.) the term is utilized with more precision in corporeal philosophy whereby it refers to the potential or capacity of the body to realise particular tasks or activities through physical action. Iris Young (2005) in her famous essay 'On Female Body Experience : Throwing Like a Girl ' addresses differences in body styles between men and woman. She argues that due to realities of women's socio-historical situation there are particularly 'feminine modalities of bodily comportment'. This comportment

relates to women's orientation and movements in space specifically in relation to purposive practical action in the world. She also points out this comportment is revealed in the 'observable' ways in which women adopt a 'manner of moving' and 'relation to space' and that these movements, can be ascribed an intelligibility and significance (Young 2005, 29). Whilst this work has been critiqued by some feminist scholars on essentialist grounds as well as construing a normative femininity as inhibited and subordinate to masculine comportment, it does offer a way of conceptualising the relationship between fashion design and garments, movement and agency.

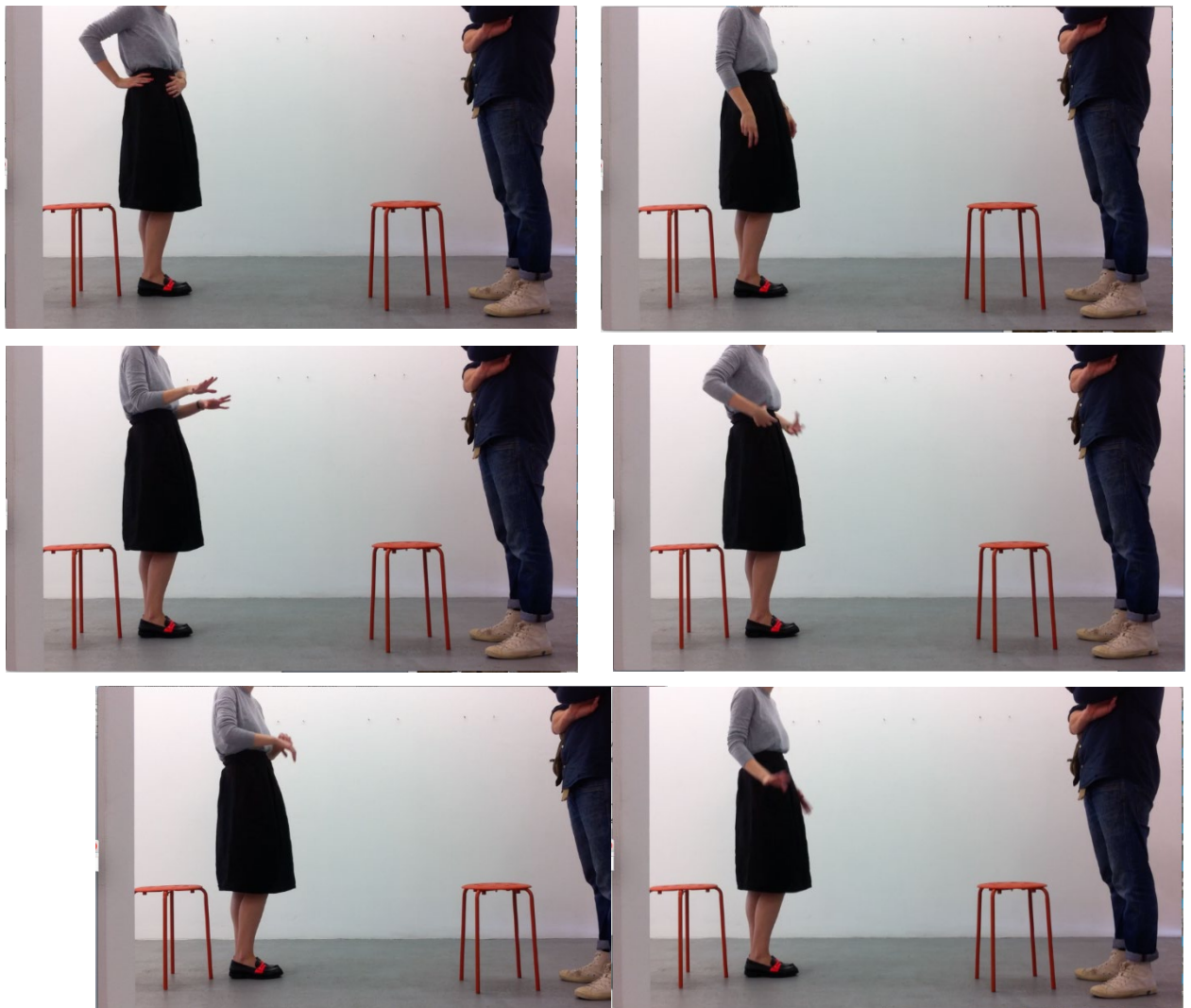


Figure 4: Joy (expressive gesture) (2019) HD video still compilation o

For example, the first participant Narmine displayed a bodily style that was dynamic, active and lively. She selected a skirt and top to wear, which was teamed with her own black leggings she happened to have the day. She also chose to wear the skirt over the leggings and the top over a singlet. The way she coordinated those garments either reinforced a style of moving typical of her everyday movements, or those garments enabled a way of moving the body that was not normally expressed or only expressed in garments that afforded a particular way of moving and experiencing the body. The bodily style could be characterised as sporty, mobile and active corporeal attitude, towards the environment and social context. Another participant Joy (figure 4) also coordinated the garments with her own to create an ensemble that produced a distinctive body style. Her movements were fluid and expressive, conveyed predominantly through arms and hands. These movements formed shapes that rolled out as successive actions, each with a slightly different inflection. The expression of these movements was clear and grounded. The movements were undertaken from a poised, stationary position and expressed themselves through the torso, arms and hands. While another participant Sam (Figure 5) movements tended towards discontinuousness, with less fluency across the different kinds of movements she made. For example, some movements were sharp and intense, when they tucked in a top while at others, firm and sensual, when they smoothed and pressed their hips.



Figure 5: Sam (Attuning Touch) (2019), Todd Robinson, video still compilation

In as much as all participants displayed a distinctive manner of movement inflected by the ensembles they wore; this also implies ways in which they are comported towards a wide range of activities and interactions as well as a style in which these activities would be realised. For example, Narmine's corporeal attitude suggests particular manner of doing things, a sense of individualism, physicality and efficiency, while Joy's poised and freely expressed yet stationary movements would concern communication, dialogue as well as aesthetic ideals. The making of these kinds of qualitative distinctions are valuable as they link the actual design of clothing to social and cultural possibilities and would support particular kinds of practices and orientations

According to several theorists, style reflects our embedment within culture. Laban argues 'certain epochs' ... 'particular occupations' or 'cherished aesthetic

creeds' display variations in styles of movement that indicate preferences for particular 'bodily attitudes' (Laban 1980, 84). Whereas, Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus argue 'style is the ground of meaning in human activity' (1999, 20). By this they mean style is the way in which human beings conduct themselves in the manifold activities that comprise human life. Style is what distinguishes ways of doing things that can be observed across cultures. What they in fact are talking about is the way in which human beings are observed amid human practices. It is the texture of what transpires, and what links together specific actions and movements that comprise practices. (Noland 2008)

This perspective that links styles of movement to human practices provides a valuable opportunity to redirect design away from a focus exclusively upon solely appearances to consider how design shapes how people participate with the world. As historical studies of power dressing have showed, it was not only a style of dress but rather a new mode of bodily comportment, that realised political as well as economic consequences for women (Entwistle 1997). Moreover, by taking account of these qualitative dynamics of human movement in fashion (that is how we move but also might move differently) as a kinaesthetic ground whereby normative embodiments form over time through habituated movement, while variations in those movements, either intentional or otherwise can create new possibilities for our embodiment. As Noland points out there are far more variations in movement required to simply maintain the habitus and it is within these variations potential for differential embodiments exist.

She writes:

Kinaesthetic sensations are a particular kind of affect belonging both to the body that precedes our subjectivity (narrowly construed) and the contingent, cumulative subjectivity our body allows us to build over time. [...] they help constitute the “embodied history of the subject,” a history stored in gestural “I can’s,” that determines in large part how that embodiment will continue to unfold. Kinaesthesia allows us to correct recursively, refine, and experiment with the practices we have learned (Noland 2010, 4)

In this respect, by becoming more sensitive to not only historical precedents but more so, how design shapes our everyday movements make possible alterations to habituated routines on an individual level but also can contribute to wider forms of social change.

Conclusion

The extent to which designers can become attuned to body styles, through increased sensitivity to their own reflexive embodiments, and the way in which fashion can support the realisation of a wider range of embodiments, both in and outside normative bounds, opens new grounds for fashion practice. I note here norms are context specific, and bodily movement in one context may be conventional, yet in another, a form of cultural innovation. A significant challenge though for designers is not think this exclusively in terms of appearances, and the kinds of ‘fashion statements and visual tropes that foreground a variety of at-times agonistic binaries and positionalities, inclusion/exclusion, fashion/anti-fashion, gender conforming/non-

conforming and so on. Rather the redirection is an agential one and is tied to how particular ensembles of clothing enable wearers to explore, experiment with and potentially repattern existing body comportments beyond their conventionalised ways of moving and being.

Moreover, fashion designers through their capacity to realise fashion garments have the capacity to influence and shape everyday patterns of movement, as well as making possible the unfolding of more experimental sartorial embodiments. For example, they can enable a wearer to re-new or re-focus existing sartorial embodiments that may over time become more marginal. Alternatively, garments could potentially offer ways of refining existing embodiments to become more central in a wearer's dress practices. It is important to note here experimental does not connote 'experimental fashion' rather it is ways in which a wearer may explore ways of dressing and associated comportments, in an experimental mode, that would fall outside their conventionalised dress and clothing choices.

While fashion's self-reflective mood continues for the foreseeable future, it provides a fertile ground to explore new conceptions of what fashion might be, as well as what it might do. As I have demonstrated in this article, by raising the question of embodied empathy in fashion, in terms of an empathic relationship between designer and the bodies of those they design for, I foreground a largely unacknowledged ethical dimension of fashion design associated with the notion of body style. I have argued by attending to styles of movement and not solely appearances, there lies a significant re-directive potential embedded within fashion design practice and an enhanced agency for wearer largely obscured by visual models of fashion. The articulation of this perspective

is meant to complicate as well as enrich current understandings and practices of ethical fashion design, rather than to create an artificial distinction between visual aesthetics and questions of movement and agency. As any ardent participant of fashion will know, fashion's power lies, not only in its capacity to enhance one's appearance but rather, how it can also transform the way in which we experience ourselves acting in the world.

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