

University of Antwerp, Belgium

Responsible Fashion Series

Can fashion save the world?

Wednesday 20 October till Friday 22 October 2021

<https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/conferences/responsible-fashion/>

Conference theme. Breaking the economic system

How can we change the fashion economic system, one that has been based on fast fashion, hyper consumerism and exploitation into a more circular, and socially more balanced ecosystem?

Designing agile digital manufacturing tools and systems for UK micro garment factories.

Reshoring, agile manufacturing, micro tools, cobots, digital twins, COP26, carbon neutral .

This position paper will chart the development of recent UK government policy which is focused on digitally enhanced manufacturing and reshoring in the UK . I will develop themes for policy interventions for fashion manufacturing which, as an industry, has largely been ignored by the UK government. I will examine the new industrial strategy, reshoring , micro prototyping factories and the development of robotics, cobots and agile manufacturing microsystems with a focus on modernising UK fashion manufacture to enable producing and consuming less. I will show how the application of existing policies to fashion manufacture could address the future of meaningful work, upskilling of workforces, localism and place-based manufacture, innovations in infrastructure and the design of new forms of tooling . These insights are the result of my Policy Fellowship with the Royal Academy of Engineering, my role as Co-Investigator on the 5-year AHRC funded Creative Clusters Project, Future Fashion Factory, and the micro projects developed therein, my engagement with the Creative Clusters Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) and my role as Senior Tutor (Research) in the Fashion Programme at the Royal College of Art, London.

UK fashion academics have steered policy discussions towards consumption, underinformed ideas of climate crisis, and wellbeing/nudge agendas. Their hopes of influencing policy have been unsuccessful because they have been unable to engage with why modernising manufacturing for UK made fashion is important both in a local and global sense. In the new economic environment that will be created post Covid and Brexit, and as the UK hosts COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow in the Autumn of 2021, aiming to have carbon neutral manufacturing through the Green Ten Point Plan by 2030, it is vital that the UK is seen to be a leader in sustainable manufacturing. A lack of understanding of international manufacturing capabilities has hampered the development of the UK

fashion industry since the 1980s. Even though we have some of the most advanced engineering in industries such as automotive and aerospace in the UK the fashion industry has not been a beneficiary of this expertise. Much of the research into circular economic models has been widely criticised as being impossible to implement without wider policy initiatives and legislation.

The siloing of the design process away from sites of manufacture is a historic problem for UK fashion. Usually, fashion designers are not encouraged to consider how the design of tools and machinery might change aesthetics or aid the design process. As localised production, an increase in on-line sales, and a focus on domestic consumer preference leads to the demand for region specific and niche products, fashion designers will need to fully engage in developing products for these emerging markets. I propose strings of prototyping and micro factories producing on demand fashion in small batch production, using agile robotics and tooling as the way forward. Working with engineers, economists, urban planners and experts in digital technologies and human robot interaction, often in transdisciplinary teams, fashion designers can engage in the design of ecosystems to create an exemplar carbon neutral fashion industry.

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