

UNPICKING THE FASHION SYSTEM: PRACTICE AS RESEARCH WORKSHOP

THEME: DESIGN AND APPROACHES FOR
SUSTAINABILITY

10AM - 6PM TUESDAY 9TH JUNE 2015

ORGANISER: RUBY HOETTE

CONTACT: RUBYHOETTE@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT

During this workshop participants will experiment with methods of dissection and collage as tools with which to actively engage with the fluid and dynamic relationships that constitute fashion and the shifting role of the fashion designer.

Unpicking garments along original seam-lines functions as a metaphor for the unravelling of the mechanisms that constitute pervasive fashion practices and production processes. The resulting loose garment elements will then be rearranged into new formations or mappings - proposals for collective ways of engaging with fashion production and a new fashion 'collection'. The workshop will draw on the concept of the personal wardrobe, within which various styles, brands and materials are brought together. It will activate the tacit knowledge embedded in the practice of curating we each employ in the daily act of dressing. This will inspire and inform a wider discussion around the roles of designer and wearer in contemporary fashion culture.

This workshop functions as a platform to collectively explore innovative and inclusive modes of 'doing' and 'being' fashion.

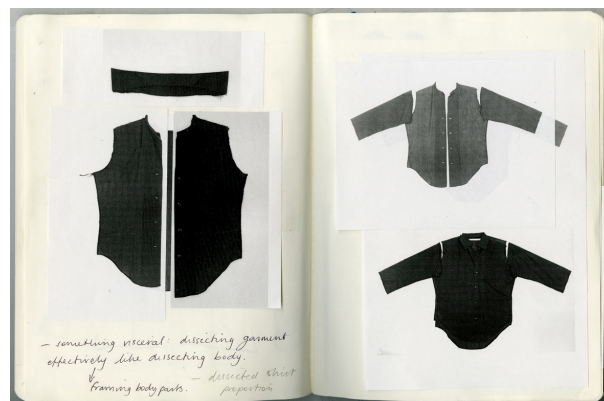


Figure 1: Extract from sketchbook: experimenting with dissection of garments.

INTRODUCTION

The workshop aims to draw attention to the very complex reality of fashion production. It will encourage critical reflection on the roles and processes within the fashion system both through making and dialogue and create the space and flexibility (literally and metaphorically) for the imagining of and experimenting with possible alternatives.

The central theme of the workshop is de- and re-construction or in other words dissecting and collaging, cutting and pasting of second-hand garments. This working method can be compared to the bricoleur. The bricoleur puts existing things to new purposes (Luvaas 2010). In doing so participants will become aware that they are also dissecting and reapplying cultural symbols and meanings and intervening in existing systems.

Participants will explore how their tacit wardrobe knowledge and practices may be useful to gain new perspectives on the fashion object and the design process. Simultaneously through dialogue, participants can apply their intuitive process conceptually as a way of understanding the fashion system and identifying moments where there is potential for inclusive ways of 'doing' and 'being' fashion.

During the workshop the conversations and visual experiments will be facilitated and guided in an open and inclusive way with a focus on generating knowledge through process and experience rather than physical outcomes. Documentation of the process will be edited and compiled in a format to be shared.

MORNING SESSION: UNPICKING

The act of taking apart or undoing to generate knowledge and understanding plays a central role in this workshop. Each participant is invited to bring a garment to contribute to the process. The garments are dissected, documented and analysed: Is there a personal story connected to the garment? Are there traces of use and wear? What sort of information is revealed in taking the garments apart? What sort of materials and techniques have been used? Where was it made and by whom? How has value and meaning been created in the garment?

The process of working with second hand garments methodically unpicking and unravelling them offers a new perspective on reality of fashion/garment production. It will give the participants a physical experience of the crafting of the object – by completing the act in reverse (taking it apart). The process also allows for contemplation of the complex materiality of the garment, the many who have been involved in its conception and construction and a sense of how long this may have taken.

By dissecting or fragmenting the garments into pieces along original seam lines each garment essentially becomes a collection of loose elements (sleeves, collars, labels etc.). Through dissection the clothing can be understood not as something stable or fixed but transient both in its material form and embedded meaning. Just like fashion itself, the garment becomes moveable: a fluid object. Simultaneously mechanisms of the fashion system are unravelled and opened up to the possibility of reformatting.

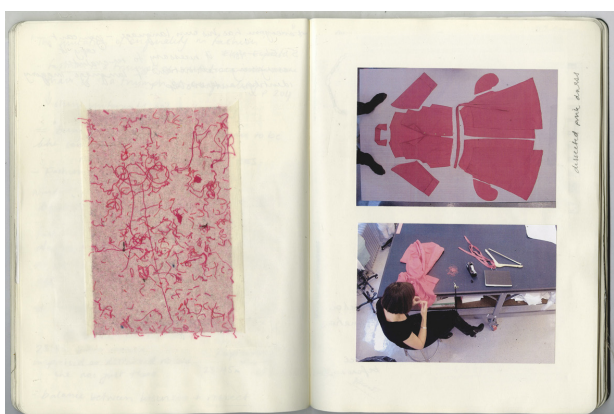


Figure 2: Extract from sketchbook: the dissection process.

AFTERNOON SESSION: REFORMATTING

Using the resulting collection of garment elements, participants will be invited to work collaboratively to create collages. The elements can be combined and layered in different ways. This process will be used to collectively piece together a new 'collection' - each new garment collage will contain elements from various participants. Engaging in this activity as collective

'design' process will enable the discussion around the following questions: What is the role of the fashion designer? In what ways does the wearer add meaning and value to a garment? Could this also be considered 'design'. What might be the benefits of a fashion system that functions in a more inclusive way?

As an introduction to this part of the workshop we will discuss the concept of the wardrobe. In addition to its very personal meaning and relevance the collected contents of a wardrobe also reflects the diversity of the fashion industry. It brings together different brands and types of clothing as well as the social and cultural codes and multitude of nuanced values these represent. The owner of a wardrobe is constantly monitoring and adjusting the content of this collection and curating its display with the choice of each outfit. It is in the creativity and authenticity of these acts of curating and wearing that great potential can be found. The aim of the workshop is to strengthen the role of the wearer as an active participant in the 'design' process and the creation of meaning and value in fashion.



Figure 3: Example of collaged garment elements

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Each participant is asked to bring a garment to contribute. Please be aware that this garment will be dissected and become part of a collective process during the day. Tools and materials will be provided (scissors, seam rippers, needles, thread, paper, drawing/writing materials). Participants may also bring their own. The workshop is suited to max 15 participants. Participation is open to all - No sewing skills are necessary. During the day the process will be photographed/filmed. By registering participants consent to these photographs being used in further documentation of the project.

REFERENCE

Luvaas B., 2010. 'Designer Vandalism: Indonesian Indie Fashion and the Cultural Practice of Cut 'n' Paste', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 26 (1), pp.1-16