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MORRISH, David <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7932-0343>>

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Sustainable fashion tailoring: an approach for creating a heightened emotional attachment to garment apparel at undergraduate level, through pedagogy, story telling, digital technologies and traditional craftsmanship

Morrish D.

Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, England

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Abstract

Higher Education undergraduate programmes of study have a responsibility to educate learners within their discipline, bridging the gap between education and the real world. Never before has it been so important to equip learners who can adapt and accommodate change within their practice responding to external socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental concerns. With sustainability a key global concern, it is imperative that educational institutions educate its learners to help change the direction of a throwaway and environmentally unsustainable industry.

“Fast Fashion Is the Second Dirtiest Industry in the World, Next to Big Oil”
Sweeny (2015)

This paper is a case study of second year undergraduate learners on a UK fashion design degree programme who were challenged by the luxury brand Ted Baker to design a collection of men's formal wear suits, combining sports detailing with traditional tailoring for the brands DNA and customer demographic. The primary argument of this paper arises from the need to further develop the theoretical aspect of the design process to improve learners understanding of the key principles of design, consumer behavior and basic human psychology. The inquiry adopted a practice based approach gathering data from workshop/seminar observations, client feedback and assessment of student 2D and 3D outcomes. Learners were exposed to the technical challenges of tailoring and encouraged to embrace and experiment with CAD/CAM technologies and unorthodox design and pattern cutting methodologies as well as traditional methodologies in order to affectively communicate a considered narrative. While assessment of outcomes indicate an improvement to the depth of thinking and creative application of story telling by the majority of learners, surface learning was still evidenced as a concern, encouraging further analysis of future pedagogy approaches.

Introduction

It is widely reported through mixed media channels about the impact fashion and textiles industries have on the global environment and its mass contribution to landfill, pollution, climate change and encouraging a throw away consumer behavior – fast fashion.

“Cheap garments, often made from manmade materials which cannot be recycled easily, are being worn just a few times and then binned,” (Telegraph, 2008)

Higher education institutions have an important and fundamental impact on shaping the mindsets of future generations of designers as the majority of new

designers entering the fashion and textile industry have predominantly some form of under or post graduate qualifications due to the highly competitive nature of the application and selection processes.

Encouraging a deeper and critical level of thinking is particularly pertinent during the conceptualization stage of the design process (Aspelund, 2010) and gives focus and further meaning to design practice and philosophies, moving away from a “design because I like” or personal design practice (Dorst, 2008) approach moving towards a “responsible design for consumer” acumen. During semester 1 in the second year of a BA Fashion Design

degree at Sheffield Hallam University, learners were set a Live client brief by the British brand Ted Baker and challenged to combine sports detailing with formal menswear tailoring to create a new “Sports Luxe” tailored aesthetic, one which compliments the brands DNA while also connecting in some capacity to the consumer. Learners were encouraged to focus on a relevant sport(s) in order to create an informed narrative which is not only fitting and marketable by the brand itself but also one which the customer can relate to on an emotional level. Ramakers (1999) argues that ‘the only difference between designer and user is that the designer has made a career of creating meaningful experiences. The theory is that by creating an emotional experience (connection) to the garment, it will increase the care the owner places on the product and thus reducing the need to replace or prematurely dispose of, ultimately reducing waste and environmental damage. This is a view support by Chapman (2005) who states that,

“A revolutionary consumer relativity is born, catalysed by new provocative genres of emotionally durable objects and experiences that are designed for empathy” he continues by linking consumers to manufacturers and object care “ Radical new commercial environments are pioneered in which objects provide conversation pieces that link consumers with manufacturers, facilitating upgrade, servicing and repair”.

Ted Baker states “From the beginning Ted has had a very clear, unswerving, focus on quality, attention to detail and a quirky sense of humour, gaining the title of ‘No Ordinary Designer Label’. Everything produced under the Ted Baker name has his personality woven into its very heart.”

With this in mind learners were encouraged to risk take, innovative and approach this project with humor and an open, inquisitive and emphatic mindset.

Story Telling Through Tailoring

Pedagogy – Setting the thought process.

Typically on undergraduate fashion design courses, the first year of study focuses on introducing core skills, in this case CAD, visual communication, research methodologies and ideation strategies, pattern cutting and construction. Theory is introduced by a carefully scaffolded approach, thus considerably less in comparison to the second year, where learners are more prepared to challenge processes; theories and ready to formulate considered and informed arguments and opinions. To enable this to take place, it was therefore imperative to educate learners on key theoretical design principles fundamental to setting the context of designing for a brand and client. Through discussions, lectures, workshops and observational analysis, learners developed a heightened critical and questioning approach to the application of their intended outputs displaying a higher order of thinking expected at undergraduate level. Dorset (2008) highlights the need for learners to engage in situations

that involve strategic choices before the final realization of a product. Experiential learning methods enabled the learning of the practical skills of tailoring and history of, highlighting the importance of quality and craftsmanship as opposed to fast and cheap fashion. Immersive learning through field trips to cloth manufacturers, Savile Row and Ted Baker itself enabled learners to experience the atmospheric and emotional environment of time served experts, historic surroundings and the brand store, thus developing an emotional connection between designer, heritage and appreciation of this craft. By educating learners of key design principles, sustainability, design for want, need, (Maslow, 5 levels of need psychology) form and function, semantics and semiotics (including colour theory and symbolism), ergonomics, ethics, morals and basic human psychology (through analysis of branding strategies) it was intended that learners design thinking became informed and directional with an increased ability to forge a connection between designer and tailoring and customer and product.

Researching and Collating.

Learners were encouraged to carry out independent extensive research from a wide variety of sources and approach styles in order to forge an informed and appropriate narrative. Qualitative research methodologies included customer shopping behavioral observations, interviews with customers, store operatives brand designers, questionnaires to selective consumers of suitable demographics, all in an attempt to analyse and gauge consumer needs, wants and expectations. History of the brand and brand success was researched through secondary research, via publications, documentaries, HMRC submissions, company reports etc. Quantitative research was evident through the investigation of the market place and competitors, Mintel reports and other accessible statistical sources. This type of research developed a better understanding of brand product offering and factors affecting business decision-making. Global trend and lifestyle forecasts were discussed through seminars and workshops by analysing key web and social media applications as well as reliable publications. Learners chosen themes were researched via a combination of all the aforementioned research strategies, with primary research encouraged over secondary, it an attempt to ensure originality and authenticity.

Figure 1 shows an example of a football related narrative and some of the scope of research carried out by this learner. Here we can see primary and secondary investigation into fabrication, branding, equipment, clothing, player movement, historical archives and a photograph taken from attending a match first hand. This is just one page of many, with others covering, ticket stubs, trading cards, memorabilia, stadium analysis, pitch markings, team formations, team loyalty, fan behavior and comradeship etc. Football was a popular choice of sport amongst learners, due to the British origins and its popularity, providing various scope for exploration and interpretation (see figure 2). It was identified amongst Ted



Figure. Generating primary and secondary research.



Figure 5. Jacket lining enhanced by applying both digital and sublimation printing processes.



Figure 2. Looking beyond the obvious.



Figure 6. Screenprint applied to the external of the jacket and buttons.

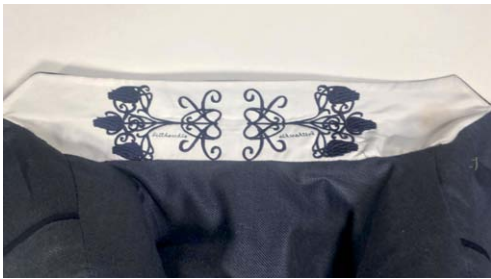


Figure 3. Digital embroidery used to add decoration to the jacket undercollar.



Figure 7. Handpainted lining using paint inks and dyes.



Figure 4. Combining creative cutting with digital technologies.



Figure 8. Handembroidery applied to the inside of the trouser waistband creating a more artisan and crafted aesthetic.

consumers that football has or does play an integral part in their life experiences, either as a child playing in the park with friends, part of a school team or even collecting trading cards and playing football on games consols. The levels of connectivity to football varied considerable based on the consumers experiences. Tutor to learner discussions on levels of experiences and connectivity were encouraged throughout the project either individually or within a group environment.

Technology and Craftmanship

It is important that traditional craftsmanship skills survive and are appreciated for the benefits they can offer a designer maker within their practice, however technology driven processes need to be harnessed and understood in order to develop the employability skills of learners, meeting the expectations of future employers. At higher education; given time restrictions and the multi disciplinary demands of fashion design itself, manageable, selective craftsmanship sewing skills were taught alongside digital CAD/CAM technologies and traditional printing methodologies. Learners were educated on menswear design and design for detailing and encouraged to design for not only the visible aspects of the garment but also the hidden areas which are not noticeable without searching. It was an agreed consensus that the Ted man is inquisitive by nature and relishes the high level of seen and unseen attention to detail that can be located on a Ted Baker tailored suit.

Figure 3 shows how CAD/CAM technologies have been used to embroider on the under collar of a suit jacket.

Figure 4 shows a mixture of experimental pattern cutting with contrasting piping detailing, combined with digitally printed lining and hand woven wool chest paneling.

Figures 5 & 6 combine screen printed exterior check patterning with digital and sublimated printed interior lining. Hand sewn detailing on the buttons add to the detailing.

Figure 7 shows a hand painted lining using inks, paints and dyes, creating a unique, personal and energetic outcome symbolic of uniqueness and exclusivity.

In figure 8 we can see how the application of hand embroidered detailing on the underside of the waistband has added an artisan and craft feel to the garment, with each fish slightly differing in stitch quality.

Narratives and Themes

Once the learners understood the key design principles and an improved understanding of the consumer, brand, menswear tailoring, manufacturing processes and soci economic factors affecting design, it aided in forming a relevant and thought provoking narrative which was intelligently devised and creatively communicated. Narratives and themes covered: Nostalgic and Historic, Rivalries and Conflict, Hero Worship and Role Models,

Family and Loyalty, Strategic Sports, Patriotism and Royalty, Status and Class, Heroism and Adventure, Geographic, Objects and Mechanics. Often these themes overlapped, but all could be linked to identified attributes of either the brand, consumer or both.

Figure 9 is based on the British past time of fishing, drawing on inspiration from British ports and docklands, wreckages, historic portraits and paintings, fish, stories and sayings. This narrative is a development from a current Ted Baker fly-fishing theme and introduces detachable hoods, waterproof fabrication and ribbing. Learners who chose this pastime linked fishing to relaxation and also to the parental bond between father and son, building on the emotional memories of the importance of belonging and family.

Strategic Sports narratives included Snooker (this also linked Sheffield to the Crucible home of the UK Snookers World Masters), crochet (figure 10), archery, show jumping, golf and cricket. These types of sports connected to Ted Bakers unswerving attention to detailing, accuracy and quality all of which appeal to the Ted Man as highly important. The skill and control required to perform the fore mentioned sports to a high level, reflected on the intellectual and analytical mindset of the consumer.

Figure 11 linked TEDs origins back to Scotland and the traditional and favored sport of Golf. This narrative focused on the Ryder Cup and Rivalries between Europe and the USA, particularly that of Rory McElroy and Tiger



Figure 9. Paying homage to fishing.



Figure 10. Crochet used to connected to the brands unswerving attention to detailing, accuracy and quality.

Woods. Although learners on occasions chose the same sport, the chosen avenue for exploration created differing narratives. While Golf is focusing on competitiveness, patriotism and rivalry, in figure 12, (below) we see how golf is explored through its Royal and military heritage, with a focus on the banning of the sport by King James II in preference of archery to increase military excellence in war. The narrative also explored the secret up take of the prohibited sport by the upper classes and Royalty, creating exclusivity and divide in the social class system.



Figure 12. Exploring golf through its historical origins.

Figures 13 & 14 paid homage to combat sports and looked into “fight or flight” and male behaviors particularly when threatened or provoked. Here the learner was interested in self control in confrontation and rising above the situation i.e “Being the better man”. Traits identified within the brand ethos and consumer personalities. Investigating and analysing Taekwondo and spiritualism resulted in a more relaxed cleaner cut tailored aesthetic with embroidery creating an optical illusion effect, symbolizing the idea of restraint, control and things not always seeming what they first appear.



Figure 13. “Fight or flight” and male behaviors.

In figure 15, spiritualism, war, conflict and patriotism is also explored in the contact sport of Mia Tia and translated through the lining print and embroidered literal narrative on the inside paneling of the jacket. The floral print is a sacred plant indigenous of the natives who popularized the sport.



Figure 14. Embroidery applied to create an optical illusion effect, symbolising restraint, control and things not always seeming what they first appear.

Spiritualism, mindfulness and a heightened sense of emotional self control and awareness were attributes learners associated with identified consumers through observational analysis, conversations and additional studies of buying habits and behavioral traits. Other sports covered in this category included medieval jousting, karate, kendo and boxing.

Hero worship was a popular narrative with inspiration drawn from iconic British sports personalities, to include



Figure 11. Golf to focus on competitiveness, patriotism and rivalry.



Figure 15. Embroidered narrative on the inside paneling of the jacket.

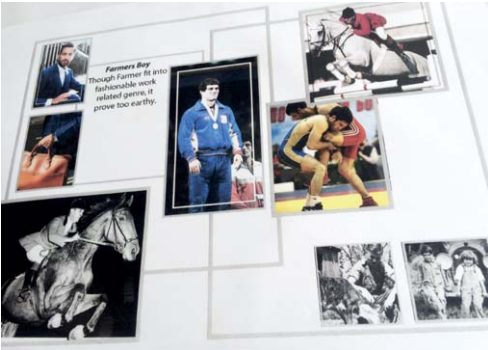


Figure 16. Hero worship - hero worship.



Figure 17. Inspired by the biography, life style and reputation of Len Hutton.

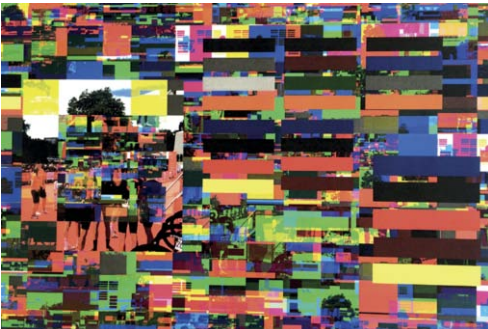


Figure 18. Abstract print fusing an interpretation of scientific O2 data and scenic photography.



Figure 19. Exploring thrill seeking, rebellion and adventure.

the British formula one champion James Hunt, the horse rider and wrestler Harvey Smith (figure 16), superbike champion Carl Fogarty, British cyclist Sir Bradley Wiggins and (figure 17) the cricketer Len Hutton the highest scoring batsman in test cricket. Inspiration was not only drawn from the sport itself but also biographies, life style analysis and reputation. Learners in this instance linked the desire to succeed in the consumer with icons who were aspirational and excelled in their sport.

The print in figure 18 was created by the oxygen sample provided by a professional cyclist in the British Tour Da Yorkshire (The brother of the learner). Each colour represents an O2 score at a given point within the race. The abstract print is combined with a photograph taken of the finish line scene creating an unrecognizable pattern. The learner was keen to create a print that was not obvious until further analysis and study, symbolising the multi layers and depth in the consumer personality.

Controlled thrill seeking, rebellious and adventurous traits were identified in the TED man and covered through sports such as cross country skiing and shooting, in the example in figure 19 linking to James Bond, the ultimate fictitious British special agent, who lived life on the edge and was idolised by men and loved by women.



Figure 20. A humorous print symbolising the wearers inner rebellion to tradition and rules and conformity.



Figure 21. Team sports and the Ashes.

Gambling, adrenaline rush and risk taking were also evident through formula one and horseracing narratives. In figure 20, the learner has focused on creating a humorous print of a horse sticking its tongue out, symbolizing the wearers inner rebellion to tradition and rules emphasized by the contrasting the detailed interior contrasting with the clean cut minimal exterior of the jacket.

Team sports featured a lot within narratives particularly through contact sports such as football; local Derbies and iconic occasions or events e.g. 1966 England world cup win. Tennis and the Davis Cup, Golf and the Ryder Cup, Cricket and the Ashes (figure 21), Rugby and the Seven Nations. Learners in these instances were interested and keen to play on the consumers loyalties to their friends, families, clubs and patriotism to England. Learners also identified that TEDs customers were habitable in nature and loyal to brands, stores, hairdressers, garages etc.

Conclusions

The approach to this live client project does indicate that by firstly educating learners on the key influencing variables affecting design; that of the principles of design, consumer needs and wants, human psychology, semantics, socio – environmental, and sustainability, all contribute in the creation of a foundation in which to formulate a theoretic narrative offering focus for research exploration. This knowledge combined with the practical skills of tailoring and introduction and access to technologies and resources enables learners to experiment and risk take in the visualization of their ideas.

The narrative and underpinning are paramount in the success of the outcomes in order to appeal to the consumer on an emotional level in some form of capacity. Learners in the above approach understood their role and responsibilities as a designer and the need to create an opportunity for an experience or connection to evolve between the consumer and object. By encouraging learners to reflect on their own behavior and their relationship to their own clothing and other objects of possession, through its life cycle – purchase, care and discard, it helps create future designers who have a better understanding on considered, social responsible design through a developed understanding of emotional consumer connectivity, empathy and how improved quality can positively impact on reducing waste through changed consumer behavior. Educating learners on the impact fashion and textiles plays globally on the environment and encouraging self-reflection increases a desire to make a difference and by providing strategies and opportunities to problem solve in a supportive and encouraging environment should be the responsibility of education providers within their disciplinary area. This project shows one approach which could be adopted across design related disciplines and helps to set the path for a more sustainable design approach while still maintaining an enjoyable and engaging learner experience.

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Photographs

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