Fashion as Creative Economy

Learning from London, Berlin and Milan

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Introduction: Why Fashion as Creative Economy?

The bulk of fashion scholarship still emanates from dress history as a sub-section of art history and more recently from curatorial studies. For many years fashion studies undertaken from within sociology, communications studies and cultural studies have occupied a lesser place, although this has changed in recent years as a quick glance through the leading journal *Fashion Theory* will show. There remain however disadvantages for sociologists of fashion on the bigger fashion circuit, as it is the fashion and dress history tradition that commands attention on policy issues while it is also more able to draw on the great designer legacy to develop exhibitions and shows at major art galleries and museums that attract huge audiences and equally extensive media attention. These exhibitions have now become a standard and defining feature of fashion culture across the world.

Of course, there is a fine tradition of fashion sociology most notably the writing of Georg Simmel who demonstrated fashion as a social phenomenon that played a role in defining and giving shape to urban modernity (Simmel 1904/1957). A turning point arrived at two later moments in time, Dick Hebdige's analysis of punk style in the late 1970s established the presence of subcultural studies especially in the British context (Hebdige 1978). This was then followed through the 1990s with a more emphatic sociological body of work, often influenced by Bourdieu with an emphasis on both the cultural production of fashion, and with cultures of consumption (see for example Rocamora 2011; 2017). More recently a case for fashion as creative economy can be made (on the basis of the findings from the 'AHRC CREATe'[1] project outlined below) even though as a sector its prominence within creative industry debate has not been as visible as might be hoped (McRobbie et al. 2022).

The creative industry policy initiatives in the UK date back to the early 2000s, the era of the New Labour government and coinciding with the publication of the

1 Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK: CREATe (Creativity, Research, Enterprise and Technology) is the UK Copyright and Creative Economy Centre at Glasgow University.

celebratory and upbeat account of this field by Richard Florida, a text that was with some excitement adopted by politicians across the world, and then quickly subjected to sustained critique by sociologists and geographers most notably by Jamie Peck in 2005 (Florida 2004; Peck 2005). Situating my own various contributions to critical debate in the early 2000s I later went on to argue that the enthusiasm for the creative industries by the government at the time could be seen as a feature of the unfolding of a neoliberal rationale for the future of post-Fordist work, coming as it did with support for the freelance career, with self-entrepreneurship made seductive by the idea of self-actualisation through the seemingly democratic edict that 'Everyone is Creative' (McRobbie 2016). This arguably can be understood as a *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense, an orchestrated incitement to 'be creative' as a policy directive unburdening capital from its legally enshrined obligations to a workforce now required to attend to their own insurance protection including working hours, maternity, sickness and holidays etc. The encouragement to self-entrepreneurship is also an enticement to find 'pleasure in work' often accompanied by ideas of the 'artist as pioneer of the new economy'. The address as such to a population of young creatives took on an institutional shape in the form of various degree courses and training pathways in music production, digital editing, fashion communications and so on.

So why then has fashion not occupied an important place both within this constellation of governmental activities and also in the considerations of the various scholars of the creative economy? Dave O'Brien and others have pointed to stark inequalities of class alongside patterns of self-exploitation and unpaid internships (O'Brien et al. 2017; 2018; 2021). But as a feminised sector of work and employment fashion has been overlooked by the spokespersons from the more masculine-dominated areas of broadcasting, film, gaming, fine art, graphic design. Fashion has long been seen as ephemeral, overtly commercial, and populated by less serious journalists and commentators than other spheres of media and communications. The absence of fashion representatives on the various platforms and panels for creative industry policy discussion is because the organisations and bodies that do exist such as the British Fashion Council and the think-tank *Fashion Roundtable* emerge very much from the heart of the global fashion industry, nowadays almost synonymous with the clothing sector and so an economic sphere akin to other major industries. In our recent research there is an attempt to re-position fashion and bring it more firmly into the fold of creative industry research. In the wider field of social and cultural theory there is an abiding concern with work, employment and with the post-Fordist shift to 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato 1996). The conditions of precarious labour have been at the centre of a large range of officially funded programmes of research across the UK. This encompasses studies undertaken by leading figures such as Dave O'Brien, Mark Banks, Kate Oakley, David Hesmondhalgh, in Italy by Tiziana Terranova, Alessandro Gandini and Franco Berardi, and in France by Maurizio Lazzarato. But up until very recently issues of low wages, exploitation, and precarious

labour and specifically questions of poverty, inequality and unemployment or 'under-employment' have been marginal in fashion scholarship (Mensitieri 2020).

Why Fashion Independents?

What then are the advantages of attempting to bring the fashion sector into this creative industry fold? It introduces a gender dimension, and thus contributing to the works that have analysed the gender inequalities pervasive in so many of the various culture industries (e.g., Scharff 2017). The difference here being that fashion is widely perceived as an already feminised sector, this requiring a more fine-tuned and intersectional analysis alert to questions of race, class and geography. What fashion would bring to the creative industry research profile is a widening of the vocabulary, paying more attention to the whole production workforce, the machinists and pattern cutters, the supply chains and the labour input from the global south [see Sark and Gotthardsen's as well as Lawson Jaramillo's chapter in this volume]. But the main challenge for the small-scale fashion design sector is to find ways of being listened to by government at a policy level. In the UK the situation is so bleak that without some immediate steps being taken this cultural wealth could be squandered. Arguably the key players to undertake the job of ensuring that the worst does not happen will be the teachers and academics in the art and design schools across the country. There is a dearth of fashion policy-makers and those few fashion policy figures that do currently have influence adhere to the 'talent-led' economy narrative which tends to fix upon the winners and those who go on to become household names. They make the point that the UK fashion design sector is best known for its global talent and its cohorts of world-renowned figures such as Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen and Vivienne Westwood, all of whom quickly moved from being small-scale designers to entering the world of the leading luxury brands. But this narrative is both weary and out of date. There is a good deal more to the field of fashion design than the handful of stars and prize-winners which nowadays in fact means as few as one 'star' per year from the annual cohorts of graduates[2].

The major brands (companies owned by *LVMH* or the *Kering Group*) operate with an entirely different political economy from the tiny and often hand-to-mouth independent designers. Existing outside of the haute couture circuit are these small-scale independent designers many of whom have been past prize- winners or who have achieved success, meaning that they are quite well-known. They run studios and take part in events such as London Fashion Week, they may even sell their collections in outlets such as Dover Street Market. But how they operate, what kind of business models they adopt, how they keep going during periods of financial crisis

2 In the UK assessed to be 4000 per year (Elan 2016).

and 'austerity' remains under-investigated. The business studies researchers look towards the mainstream of the industry and the fashion historians and indeed the fashion theorists are more likely to direct their gazes to the major players, the 'auteurs'.

My interest in this sector dates back many years (McRobbie 1998). There is now a danger that this kind of practice will fade away and even disappear unless steps are taken. Yet it is here that some of the most experimental work takes place, especially with projects that are environmentally friendly, and that find new ways of working with non-toxic textiles and fabrics. Many if not most of the 'indie' designers who work hard to maintain their studio practice are female. They have developed multiple strategies for maintaining their labels. It is here that we have seen in the course of our research a more social model of fashion emerge. It is on the basis of the observations and analysis of these designers at work that allowed the concept of 'social fashion' to develop as demonstrated below, likewise the idea of the 'milieu of fashion labour' and more widely the 'degradation of labour'.

Fashion has the potential to be re-imagined as a creative economy with strong spatial and neighbourhood dimensions [see Trasciani et al.'s chapter in this volume]. New labour markets can be supported where there are local government initiatives and local universities with training opportunities. Here we can also envisage an agenda that supports climate-friendly policies, Fair Trade and a living wage for the workforce. But this would also require a different and expanded calibre of fashion policy-makers and advocates with strong regional and local commitments.

The Limits of London as Fashion Talent Incubator?

From late 2013 to the end of 2018 the CREATe AHRC fashion study based at Goldsmiths, University of London aimed at investigating the business practices and modes of working for cohorts of independent fashion design studios in London, Berlin and Milan. In each city we assembled a group of between ten and thirteen designers. Our criteria were to have been in business for more than five years and to have a studio and a schedule of collections. Within each of these groups there were typically three or four well-known names, with the others having achieved success, and media attention but working in what we described as a more professional capacity and without necessarily showing at the major Fashion Weeks. Underpinned by the idea of the fashion mobilities between these three cities as a 'space of flows', this was not planned as a comparative study rather it was a qualitative interview and conversation -based research programme grounded on sociological premises and with the explicit intention of drawing in several of the designers to take part as professionals with whom we would collaborate and also provide, in the spirit of research reciprocity, some actual opportunities to reflect on and extend their

practice. This was one methodological tactic and the other most distinctive feature was the idea of event research where we improvised around the more academic convention of the panel of speakers' format to an invited audience and ending with a q and a and refreshments. We generated the findings from these ongoing multi-methodological encounters, and likewise with the concepts that eventually emerged from that familiar process of working through the 'data' and interfacing it with existing relevant and adjacent scholarship.

The three-city study, the meetings and collaborations with a wider spread of colleagues in each city and the sociality of the undertakings brought to the project an interrupted but continuous and reflexive 'seminar' quality. Time and space factors across the five years of discussion where different people played key roles in each location and often across all three, allowed for a team spirit to emerge. Ideally, we might have formed a longer-term research, policy and advocacy network or think tank[3].

What we have learnt from London can be summed up as the pernicious impact of neoliberalism in not just the cultural sector and the university system but also in the politics of space. This triage of factors, culture, education and space have both bolstered London's success as a global fashion city in the past where they were embedded within a more social democratic regime, but now threaten its future due to the rapid and deleterious impact of the political economy of neoliberalism over the last two decades. The thrust of the analysis presented below is not angled to retrieve London's former glory but rather to radically re-distribute its 'fashion cultural capital'.

With a median age of 35 the group of four-star designers (Teija Eilola, Basso and Brooke, and Carlo Volpi) had all earlier in their careers won awards and gained various forms of support and sponsorship within the existing 'winner takes all' ethos that has been a defining feature of London fashion culture. All of these designers were graduates of the well-known art and design schools, the Royal College of Arts, Central Saint Martins, and Goldsmiths, University of London. They had received wide publicity in the leading fashion journals including *Vogue* magazine. These awards gave them a good deal of buoyancy in the early years of practice. All had managed what is nowadays almost impossible i.e., studio space in good London locations. Three of these designers had also won additional press coverage from having items from their collections worn by Michelle Obama. Carlo Volpi's had been praised extensively in Italian *Vogue*. With a good decade of studio work behind them it was possible to see some of the defining features of this kind of exemplary independent practice. This included those factors which have presented huge obstacles to all four and have also hindered the prospect of future generations being

3 Projects like this often have a long afterlife, spawning various activities and new small projects, drawing in old and new participants.

able to pursue this same pathway. In each case these designers have been astonishingly inventive and forward thinking to sustain their creative practice. Carlo Volpi described a weekly commuting arrangement between London and Milan which allowed him to keep his subsidised studio space in the *Cockpit Space* in London, to plug into producer services for high quality knitwear in Milan meanwhile also being able to stay there with family, and alongside this developing a teaching career and specialism in knitwear at the Royal College and Art (though previously he was holding down part-time teaching elsewhere in London).

> "I got the Cockpit space free for a year and I'm still there several years later, I need to do a million jobs to support myself, to keep going" (Carlo Volpi, 2016).

By the time our research project ended Volpi was focusing more on teaching and on keeping his own practice going on a scaled down basis through exploring knitwear contracts in Hong Kong. The design couple Basso and Brooke like Volpi trained in the prestigious London art and design school tradition, had pioneered digital print techniques in the early years following graduation and this brought them a lot of success allowing them to take out a mortgage on a home in South London that also doubled as studio space. When the sponsorships slowed down however and then the press coverage also faded and finding it hard to produce for the *London Fashion Week* shows, they diversified with some teaching and with other smaller contracts, before deciding to move their practice to Portugal. From there they could live more cheaply and extend their digital print skills to lifestyle fabrics and increasingly to wallpaper.

> "We now have a wallpaper company called Jupiter 10. We pioneered the digital print process in the fashion industry in the early to mid 2000s. We had an instantly recognisable aesthetic and quickly established ourselves with the backing of the Italian giant Aeffe. (…) With interior design (…) the shelf life is almost limitless (…) the transition into this industry has allowed us to focus with time on the longevity of a print" (Chris Brooke, 2021, Email).

Teija Eilola has, of all four, found the resources needed to expand her high quality and distinctive womenswear collections with the accolade of having a space at Dover Street Market. When we first met in 2014, she was London-based and had a small studio space at *Dreamworks* in Islington, but just before the pandemic she relocated with her family to Cornwall where she was able to build her own dedicated studio space in the garden of the new family home. In addition, she of all the designers in the CREATe project was most drawn to the enabling vocabulary of the creative industries and found this also to be established in Cornwall and Devon as a result of new regional initiative.

> "I have three organisations who are able to offer the label small grants as part of the Cornwall-focused business developments. There is a huge amount of 'Creative Industries in Cornwall', projects/support hubs etc happening. I was invited to apply to be on a small course to be trained in 'creative leadership". (Teija Eilola, 2021, Email).

Alongside these the regional art and design schools in the South West of England have allowed Teija to develop a teaching career alongside her design work. In all four cases what Ulrich Beck called 'biographical solutions to structural contradictions' in the 'brave new world of work', prevailed (Beck 2000). The intense individualisation effect confirms the absence of an extensive and open network for fashion policy, designers are really left to rely on their own ingenuity. All were hit badly by Brexit, it interrupted the flows of items, materials and distribution outlets for the work. It made the kind of short-term work contracts impossible and it soured the good relations which had prevailed with shops and outlets in France and in Italy as well as elsewhere in the EU that the designers had nurtured over the years. There were also huge obstacles to be overcome with the shift to online sales as well as complicated and unreliable dealings with some of the high-end online retailers such as *Farfetch* and *Net-a-Porter*. (These concerns were only really becoming tangible at the every end of the CREAte research and so we were only able to sketch out how the new economy of 'click and collect' was operating.)

To sum up our London study revealed a lack of a social vocabulary in regard to fashion culture and the experiences of the small scale independent sector[4]. There was no reference to social enterprise across the cohort, and where this did exist in the small print of a few programmes it was shown to have a quite different meaning from that associated with creative industry programmes. It was rather tied to prize-winners being offered additional support such as mentoring. Consequently, the conceptual frames that were most apposite for the London research were drawn with some amendments from the Marxist geographer David Harvey (as well as from Foucault) (Harvey 2002). At the heart of the analysis and key to the analysis are the leading art schools that arguably have a 'monopoly rent' on fashion culture. Their status means they function as the 'milieu of fashion labour' in London providing distribution of graduates across the sector. They have, in line with the logic of neoliberalism, become major brands subject to the laws of competition which means they are able to lift themselves out of and above other provisions in the sector and exert their power particularly to attract the lucrative international student market.

4 Only the black female designers Rosalind Sinclair and Christine Checinska mentioned family background, the risk of debt, and the pathways in fashion that avoided the potential hardship and finance crises so many independent designers experience. They both said they could not afford uncertainty and high levels of precarity.

Despite their commitments to Equality Diversity and Inclusion policies, in fact there are subtle forms of exclusion at work given the high cost of living never mind studio space in London, hence middle and low income and ethnic minority students can no longer afford to study in these prestigious institutions which also are in a key position to provide exclusive 'pipelines' into the industry for their students. It is this function as brands which means that the names of the prestigious universities on a CV already play a kind of passport function for junior assistant jobs in the high end fashion companies, that makes them the primary 'milieu of fashion labour' able to channel and distribute star graduates into the major global powerhouses in Paris and Milan. The major schools' reputation and status are consolidated by the politics of space operating in and around their locations which have become 'urban glamour zones' (Sassen 2002). With university leaders having to work alongside property developers in order to improve their infrastructure in the now competitive environment heavy borrowing allows some spectacular building and regeneration in for example Kings Cross, but the cost is high levels of debt and more significantly the surrounding apartment buildings being part of the property housing boom, with exorbitant rents and with a further anti-social impact which is the exclusion if not removal of working class and low income people from the whole area. This pattern not only applies to Kings Cross but also to Hackney Wick which sits alongside the new premises of the London College of Fashion at Stratford City London, and indeed spreading across the new East London where luxury student accommodation which is a euphemism for exceptionally high rents has sprung up from Tottenham Hale to Blackhorse Road. The neoliberal politics of space in these respects has meant that students have become 'futures assets' for speculative capital investment. In short, the future of the culture of young designers finding their feet with an independent practice is severely jeopardised by the factors outlined above. Only the already privileged and wealthy will be able to benefit from the education system as it is.

This in itself calls for a major reform inside the schools, and greater awareness of these socio-economic factors. Not only the star designers who took part in the CREAte project but also the more mainstream professional cohort all benefited through their years of training from a less aggressively neoliberal regime, and this is especially true for the three black women designers in the CREATe study who all commented on the economic as well as social hurdles that they faced in the early days of their own careers. Previous generations from lower income backgrounds had been able to complete their studies without taking on large debts and most aspiring designers were able to find working space that was affordable or they might even have been offered a reduced cost studio at The Trampery on Mare Street (now closed) or in the LCF Centre for Fashion Enterprise also now re-located. Thus, we see an absurdly dysfunctional scenario replace one that had indeed been successful on the world stage.

Milan and the Female-led Revival of the Artisan Tradition

What justified the research including Milan as a fashion city was ironically not the presence of the global labels such as Prada, Missoni and so on. We were pointed to Milan on the basis of our prior knowledge of emerging forms of radical activism in certain neighbourhoods where alternative fashion had come to prominence (Romano 2018). This had taken the form of dramatic interventions in the glamorous shows and Fashion Weeks by a number of campaigners driven by concerns about exploitation in the production process and by environmental issues for the fashion industry as a whole. Through prior creative industry events in London the CREATe team were aware of these activist projects leading to an approach to the research that was adjusted to reflect some structural differences in Italy, notably the absence of any extensive creative economy policy landscape, and the more low key role of the art and design universities in providing a pipeline for graduates into the major fashion companies in the city. Thus what, in the other cities, we were able to designate as the 'fashion milieu of labour' as an organising system, a power hub from which various possibilities for practice are made available, could not be pointed to in Milan. The independent fashion designers that were recruited and who played an active role fell into two categories, either they were loosely connected to the campaigners and activists or else they were not politically involved, and quite autonomous having achieved some visibility with their studio work in recent years. As with the other two cities the project in Milan had between 10 and 13 participants.

The other fact to be taken into account accrued from fashion's much more pervasive presence right across the length and breadth of Italy as a key manufacturing sector and major industry not just in clothing but especially in leather goods, bags and shoes in particular. There are thousands of factories producing in high volume for the major labels, a longstanding tradition. There are even whole towns given over to the production of one leading global company such as Solomeo in Perugia[5]. There are also migrant centres especially in the North comprising a new kind of sweatshop system. Indeed, in the early 1980s fashion and clothing design and production in what came to be known as the Third Italy were taken by Marxist economists to embody the decisive turning point of post-Fordism. This argument was made in a leading article titled Benetton Britain (Murray 1989).

However, the decisive factor that supported and extended the triage of concepts developed in the course of the CREATe research was the high level of graduate unemployment in Italy following the financial crisis of 2008 and still marked at the onset of the study. This marked a specific instance of the 'degradation of labour' in that a good deal of the self-employment and self-entrepreneurship we encountered

5 The Perugian town is the headquarters and production base for the global luxury label Brunello Culcinello.

emerged out of the hopelessness of unemployment and the reliance of young people on the parental income well into their twenties. The move into the field of creative labour offered a pathway to better mental health and well-being, even when the actual income remained small. These factors led us to argue that the 'milieu of fashion labour' comprised the extended family and local networks which were able to provide support in the form of studio space and other forms of undergirding for the mostly young women who launched their own fashion start-ups. A further enabling factor was also the community know-how stemming from the traditions of textile production and the whole artisan production system which existed across the region. The young women could easily plug into those channels of knowledge about sourcing fabrics and equipment since it was almost literally on their doorsteps and as affordable resources. Their enthusiasm and energy and overall relief to be 'in work', represented something new and distinctive which was a female-led revival of what had been the male dominated artisan tradition.

> "For us it is a family philosophy, my sister produces shoes and follows the same values, she makes a long lasting product (…). I think things are changing, I feel part of a bigger movement of like-minded independent fashion designers" (Interview with Camilla Vinciguerra, BeConvertible, 2014).

> "I was not interested in all the glamorous world of impossible clothes, I was inspired by the more artisanal side of fashion, the very 'making' side of it" (Interview with Camilla Vinciguerra, BeConvertible, 2014).

> "We are learning how to be entrepreneurs; we don't know how it will go but the point is now we are happy (…). If we don't go on holiday who cares? And at parties we can say truthfully that we are designers" (Interview with Erica Agogiati, Flatwig, 2014).

By the early 1990s, this system of male-led artisanship was fading out with retirement and with the cheaper outsourcing processes from the main contractors, but three decades later with a well-educated generation of creative talent determined to become economically active and to draw on the resources at hand there were clear signs of revival with young women leading this development. To end this section we might ask, what is the social fashion potential here? While this would require more a more pro-active national and regional cultural and creative policy regime to emerge, there are nonetheless some signs that this was happening from within the activist and campaigning circles as they found ways of being effective and finding support for projects including the European Union Social Fund programmes (Romano 2018).

Social Fashion Berlin?

Why might Berlin stand as a useful model for re-imagining a more equitable fashion culture? The key elements are the social engagement issues that come into play as a condition of access to subsidised space, the priority across the board given to green and ecologically non-toxic processes of production, the neighbourhood and community and social enterprise ethos, the less hierarchical fashion culture, with due place given to social and welfare concerns such as the living wage for employees, and support for migrant people through numerous participation programmes. But first we must clarify that the account that follows does not amount to a rose-tinted narrative, the obstacles confronting the designer sector in Berlin are considerable. Most markedly there is not the range of high street and mainstream labels with headquarters in the city unlike in London where these alongside the haute couture companies can often offer lifelines of support in the way of short contracts, possible 'collabs' and even just part-time work. Nor are the art and design universities known for their production line of stars who command media attention and are typically picked up and offered contracts in Milan or Paris. This means that despite all their efforts even the *Berlin Fashion Weeks*, the newly energised *German Fashion Council* and the leading fashion magazines still struggle to propel the new fashion talents into the limelight and the global stage. And finally, there is a constant concern about the market, especially in an environment where green issues are uppermost and clothes made to last, where designer collection items are often costly (with living wages paid to the workforce) and where younger consumers including teenage girls will remain tempted by *H&M* and *Primark*. The consumers for the Berlin designer pieces are primarily three cohorts, friends and colleagues in the cultural scenes in the city, young professional women and subcultural clubbers i.e., people linked with the established music scenes including tourists.

The 'milieu of fashion labour' in the city takes the form of the local government initiatives in conjunction with federal government programmes and European Union Social Fund projects. These institutions fully recognise independent fashion design as a key part of the urban creative economy. Of course, they function in a Janus- headed way, facilitating and controlling. Much also depends on the nature of the political make up of the Senate, and there have been two recent waves of change since the start of the CREAte programme: first by 2018–19 a shift away from the more social democratic and green support for local neighbourhood regeneration and a swing back towards funding for the mainstream arts and culture (opera, theatre, the main galleries etc) and then in December 2024 a series of what are seen as catastrophic cuts in arts and culture finding across all sectors in the light of a worsening economic situation in Germany as a whole. How this will impact on the independent fashion designers in the city remains to be seen, since so far it is arts and community groups who are at risk of losing their funding. As one of our

participants, Oliver MacConnell, points out there are still other initiatives available for young designers to apply for support[6].

So, these changes do not mean that there are not propitious infrastructures that can still be gleaned and might well be ripe for revival and for a roll-out in other locations particularly to envisage a regional social fashion model. The facilitating features in place during the time of the CREAte study were as follows:

A) access through the Quartier Management offices, to subsidised studio-workshop and retail space in pleasant and busy locations, and alongside this affordable rent for living accommodation, with some degree of rent control in place. Both of these factors were changing by the end of the research project but all who took part had managed to retain their ateliers and their homes. The rent control system brought some security which in turn allowed for future planning.

B) Incentives to connect with the neighbourhood in the form of social obligations to disadvantaged local communities as a condition of access to affordable quality work-space, in effect a strong social enterprise and not-for-profit model.

C) Encouragement to work in multi-disciplinary teams including geographers and sociologists to maximise grant applications processes for regeneration and other relevant creative industry programmes such as migration-integration women's initiatives. The fashion design studios being linked in some cases with job centres with the designers able to gain accreditation for providing vocational training in-house for employees. (See *Rita in Palma* for a good example of this ethos).

D) The benefits of a wide range of Berlin-based science and technology projects for reducing carbon footprints, many of which involve new forms of environmentally-friendly textile production, which permits the development of expertise within the green fashion field and hence job creation.

E) Last but not least there is the 'social wage' even as it is constantly threatened with being shrunk. This takes the form of public services, including a range of provisions for working parents (such as *Kindergeld*, nursery provision, free education etc) With these in place self-employed creatives, like the fashion designers can sustain their studio practice and keep their shops open during times where their incomes may be modest, where sales are not so buoyant. Inevitably many of the designers already had second or third jobs, in teaching, or in other social projects.

> "I became more aware of the wastage of unsold stock accumulating in the shop when items had to be made up in many different sizes. My costing puts the pieces out of reach for middle range income customers but this is also because I pay the production team fair wages. So I have opted for a bespoke or on demand only business model …this means that I'm not overproducing. (…) I work like an artist. From the start I was not really able to think commercially (…) the thing about Berlin is

6 See the EXIST programme at the Fashion Practice Academy, Berlin.

that I am able to think through what it is I am doing the slower pace allows this." (Interview with Michael Sontag, 2016).

'I could see the value in specialising in upmarket fashion accessories and I realised there were many women in the neighbourhood, at that point mostly Turkish German who had crochet skills and who could also work for me in a safe environment and also earn money when otherwise they were at home' (Interview with Ann-Kathrin Carstensen, Rita in Palma, 2016).

The social fashion ethos is also able to embrace the full range of genres of work, from experimental fashion-art (see the work of Esther Perbandt), to high end couture (Michael Sontag), to subcultural urban-wear and craft, to jewellery and haute couture accessories. The designers who took part in the research project spanned this spectrum. They had all been supported over the years by the programmes set up by the Senate (local government) and with the prioritising of green initiatives across the city and stretching to its outskirts new jobs and projects became available. Taking part in the UK CREATe project also proved rewarding, including the organised trip in 2016 to the Glasgow School of Art for a two day event funded by the research project. As was the case in London at least one key figure (Marte Hentschel) who participated found career pathways opening up in the form of university teaching and in advocacy roles for fashion as creative economy and indeed leading a key initiative for the *Berlin Fashion Hub* of 2022.

Some Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the foundations of what could be a more social fashion system, one that does not compromise on experimentalism and innovation, and which finds a new circuit of value in the form of localised production networks which also generate jobs [see Trasciani et al.'s chapter in this volume]. There is much scope for moving fashion activity to rundown regions and towns as well as smaller cities. And this could become a key feature of new government regeneration programmes while the global brands could also be encouraged to invest in the small scale indie designers outside the capital cities and under the rubric of job creation and living wages. The stubborn question of the 'degradation of labour' persists. In London this means being priced out of viable space, and so not be able to have a studio practice at all, or be at risk of closure and so losing one's 'labour'. In Milan it takes the form of graduate unemployment and under-employment and in Berlin designers have to confront the reality of wage stagnation that cannot wholly withstand the now shrinking public services and rising rents. And despite the existence of a 'social wage' or welfare

system the designers are also stymied by the difficulty of being able to consider expansion and considerable growth.

These are all conditions that nowadays the designers share with other creatives and also with so many self-employed workers. We are witnessing a process wherein being creative increasingly becomes a more normal more mainstream way of making a living. In the course of this essay the three main concepts are key to the kind of sociology of fashion that a creative industry approach permits, with the possibility of finding application on other fields of cultural production[7]. Alongside this triple analytic for fashion as creative economy, what remains of key importance is the need for new cadres of policy-makers and cultural intermediaries able to negotiate across various public bodies as well as gain leverage with the industry as a whole. Whether operating inside the art and design schools or in a more independent capacity it is these kinds of new fashion professionals who will determine how a vibrant, regional and diverse studio practice might become a more integral feature of the cultural landscape. To sum up there is a strong case to be made for the art and design schools, often adjacent to business schools, to be less driven by fashion management programmes and more tilted to creative industry studies addressing there the urgent need for graduates in fashion policy studies who would be able to extend the social fashion model and the regionalisation of fashion with an emphasis on enhancing women's employment in these different towns and cities away from the over-priced fashion capitals[8].

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7 For example, social music, the milieu of music labour, the 'degradation of music labour'.

8 Thanks to the UK AHRC and to the CREAte colleagues including co-authors Daniel Strutt and Carolina Bandinelli. In this case I have single authored the chapter drawing for quotations from McRobbie, Strutt and Bandinelli (2022).

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