

Ricarda Bigolin and Robyn Healy
RMIT University

Any Other Fashion System: Changing Fashion Design Knowledges and Beliefs in Australia

Keywords: Australian Fashion, Fashion Systems, Fashion Education, Curriculum, Place

Acknowledgement of Country

Australia is a colonised country that still sits unreconciled with Indigenous sovereignty. This paper commences with a Bundjil Statement that has been developed to deepen RMIT University community's ngarn-ga (understandings) of how we live and work lawfully and respectfully on the Kulin Nation where RMIT University stands (RMIT University, 2020). As a public university it sets up how we work as a community of professionals, academics, education practitioners and researchers. In support of the development of Bundjil's Statement, we acknowledge Elder N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs' contribution and guidance.

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business. (RMIT University, 2020)

1. Introduction



Figure 1: Education Week, Fashion Display, from the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy in 1930 -1939, which amalgamated with RMIT in 1979. From the RMIT University Archives Image Collection.

1.1 Background

This paper is about the practice of changing fashion design curricula over recent years in the School of Fashion and Textiles at RMIT University. It proposes the key concerns that influence the design, implementation, and experience of a 'living' fashion curriculum in Melbourne, Australia. It addresses the need to challenge knowledge systems around ethics, place, environment, industry systems, gender and reconciliation.

To start, we use an image of a 1930s 'Fashion Display' from the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy, see Figure 1. Decades later in 1979 this College would be amalgamated with Melbourne Technical College to become part of our institution, the Royal Melbourne University of Technology (RMIT University, n.d.). Founded as the College of Domestic Economy, it was first established in 1906 on the representation of the Australian Institute of Domestic Economy (Goodchild, 1930, p. 5). Later named Emily McPherson due to a request from a benefactor of the same name (p. 8), it was officially opened in 1927. The work on display is noted as 'dressmaking', one of the diploma courses of study at Emily McPherson, set up for the clothing industry in Melbourne (Docherty, 1981). Women studied the diploma to obtain knowledge for use in their own homes, to qualify as teachers, prepare for domestic employment or to work in industry (p. 14). This *mise en scene* is familiar to

RMIT Fashion Design courses still today: the presentation and showcasing of student work in exhibition display. What is apparent, however, is that the work on display is all dress-like forms specifically for 'women', signalling the origins of fashion as a discipline in dressmaking by and for women, prior to any intersectional approaches. Whilst much has changed at RMIT Fashion Design since this time, we suggest elements of fashion design knowledges have been anchored to this.

2. Contextual and Theoretical Review

2.1 Transforming Fashion Design Education

We began work on reimagining fashion curricula across multiple education programs and levels. With Barad's (2007, p. 185) 'ethico-onto-epistemology' in mind, the fundamental moves we took were to try to address inequalities in learning experience and ethical paradigms of disciplinary knowledges and belief systems. The research aims to contribute to scholarship around 'transforming' fashion education, decolonial contexts and curriculum for diversity inclusion specifically in an Australian context. Scholars such as Ben Barry (2021), now currently Visiting Associate Professor of Equity and Inclusion at Parsons School of Fashion, has written a manifesto on approaches to transform fashion education for 'equity, inclusion and decolonisation'. Barry's research includes collating a variety of approaches from various theorists, practitioners and other institution to propose guidelines for transforming fashion education.

Our methodology differs as we use the praxis of developing curricula over recent years as a key research method, analysed in this paper with the aid of a contextual and theoretical review. Other scholars advocate for the importance of fashion design championing social change and justice, as well as for educators to be 'guardians possibility' (Rissanen, 2017). Across scholarship, we noticed a gap in the field where most studies provided frameworks to change curricula but not the active practice of doing it. This paper addresses the essence of this curriculum we have developed elaborated by critical knowledge frameworks. We call out that our context in Australia, as a colonised country that still sits unreconciled with Indigenous sovereignty, offers a valuable perspective towards quests for change in knowledge systems.

2.2 Fashion and Dress Systems

Our study also addresses how education is a complicit part of the industrial fashion system (Mensitieri, 2020, p. 6). Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System* (1990) is well

known in scholarship as a structuralist analysis of fashion, understood also as a semiotic tool that reveals a network of signification and re-signification. The nomenclature 'the fashion system' was coined by Barthes during the rise of the burgeoning *prêt à porter* 'ready to wear' fashion industry mid-twentieth century and the increased mediatization of high fashion in the famed fashion city of Paris. The fashion system is used widely to connote industrial practice and economic systems.

Our study aims to address bias within the fashion industry and the implications of being part of the 'Global Fashion System' (Mensitieri, 2020, p. 1), with its environmental impact and ethical labour issues on a massive scale (Niessen, 2020a) (2020 b, p. 860). This affirms the need to acknowledge how fashion systems and education neglect non-western dress and clothing practices (Niessen, 2020a), or as George Simmel refers to it 'non fashion' (Simmel, 1957). Ethnocentric bias (Niessen, 2020 b, p. 861) in the fashion system and education has privileged practice and institutions from famous fashion capitals such as Paris, London and New York. Paris is perceived as the apex of fashion cities, (Mensitieri, 2020, p. 133) and subsequently still influences much of the fashion system. Niessen (2020a) describes this as 'an erasure of the systems of dress belonging to all other peoples on the globe while highlighting the western, and now globalized fashion system.'

Certain cities are celebrated as fashion capitals whilst 'on a global scale, cities and nations that have historically fallen "outside fashion" vie for status recognition' (Niessen, 2020 b, p. 862). In *Paris, Capital of Fashion*, Valerie Steele (2019) refers to ranking by data research and media analytics company 'Global Language Monitor' based on various metrics of media impact and circulation (Steele, 2019). In looking at the rankings for Australian cities, Melbourne was ranked 24 in 2019 and Sydney was ranked 40 (Global Language Monitor, 2020). Our students still aspire to and seek legitimacy in the top capitals due to the precedents set in the promotion and prestige of these branded milieus. Changing this is to acknowledge there are multiple fashion systems, not recognised as capitals or, to refer to Niessen, 'outside fashion'. This means asserting various models and methods to design, make and do fashion, beyond courses aligned only to prepare students for designing high end and exclusive practice models.

2.3 Indigenous Perspectives on Fashion Education and Fashion Systems

The meaningful integration of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies into fashion school is an important step in decolonizing a space that has so often engaged Indigenous design with an ever-present ethno-graphic gaze. (Bedford, 2020)

The known deficiency in the regard of other knowledge systems in western fashion curriculums is reiterated in the above quote by First Nations fashion student Charlotte Bedford. The article was published in the journal *Fashion Theory* as part of a cadetship at University of Technology Sydney (UTS). This reiterates the importance of place in reference to curricula and how geopolitical aspects of fashion systems have been omnipresent. The acknowledgement of other fashion systems in Australia has recently been activated with an attempt to formalise a First Nations fashion and design industry.

The First Nations Fashion and Design organisation is:

... a national voice representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, creating ongoing access to opportunities, skill development, and industry engagement ... working towards a self-sustaining ecosystem of Aboriginal Fashion Designers, Textile Artists, Jewellery Designers, Photographers, Models, Hair + Makeup Artists, Stylists, Curators, and Fashion Industry Professionals ... 100% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of Directors and Executive team. (FNFD, 2021)

2.4 Australian Fashion and Textile Ecosystem

More engagement with the complex ecosystems of our own industry and acknowledging how education is part of this is a necessary part of developing curriculum. The Australian Fashion Council (AFC) commissioned a report by Ernst & Young (EY) to investigate the complexity of the Australian fashion network. Australia's fashion and textile economy is diverse, involving a complex ecosystem of contributing factors and the system is 'much broader than designer labels' (Ernst & Young, 2021). In this report education is acknowledged as part of this.

Australian fashion and textile industries contribute more than \$27.2 billion to economy, generating \$7.2 billion in exports each year. Sussan Ley (2022), Australian

Minister for the Environment, acknowledges the significant impact of this ecosystem and problems of textile waste. Around 800,000 tonnes of textile waste go into landfill each year in Australia and we are the second highest consumer of textiles per person in the world (Ley, 2022). The industry employs more than 489,000 people, 77% of whom are women (Ernst & Young, 2021) (Ley, 2022). The environmental complexities of local and global industry conditions need to be constantly addressed in education.

2.5 Critical Posthumanities and Pedagogies

Frameworks such as philosopher and feminist Rosi Braidotti's critical posthumanities (2019b) and the late activist bell hooks' 'critical pedagogies' (hooks, 2010), derived also from the framework led by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogies of the Oppressed* (2000), are key to our methodology. Hooks (2010) describes 'critical pedagogy' as 'encompassing all the areas of study that aim to redress biases that have informed ways of teaching and knowing in our society' (p. 23). Critical pedagogies are based on hope, transformation and equality (Hodgson, et al., 2017, p. 15). In more recent scholarship 'Post critical pedagogies' is described as supporting the commitment to achieving equality and the deficiencies in critical pedagogies due to a position outside of capitalism (Lewis, 2017). We connect this to addressing how bias abounds in knowledge systems and place. How 'place' applies to the local context and site of our institution and the fashion system as connected industries of place is important. The fashion system is a known accomplice of capitalism, 'fashion is lodged deep within the heart of contemporary capitalism' (Mensitieri, 2020, p. xv). This aspect of the discipline is essential to address in curriculum and how this predicates inequalities, exploitation and environmental destruction.

Braidotti's (2019b) framework of critical posthumanities relates to rethinking the domains of disciplines and sub disciplines and a 'post disciplinary' pursuit. These are inherently transdisciplinary, being about 'different subjects of knowledge' (Braidotti, 2019a), and emerging not only around the edges of other disciplines but as offshoots (p. 77). Fashion design becomes variously categorised in knowledge networks, sometimes as part of design or art and sometimes out on its own distinct disciplinary networks.

Fashion is referred to as a 'sub discipline' of art and design disciplines (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 5) and as part of a grouping of 'creative subjects' or the 'creative industries'. Field of research codes also dictate this broader departmental

categorisation, and currently Textile and Fashion Design falls under a 'Design Practice and Management' general code and 'Built Environment and Design' within Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This categorisation notably umbrellas Textile and Fashion Design as a STEMM aligned discipline. In 2020 RMIT School of Fashion & Textiles was recognised as a STEMM aligned discipline and one of the STEMM Schools in the University. Our curriculum research seeks to reconcile the various categorisations and broader field alignments the discipline has had, impacting the essence and foundation of approaches to knowledge and learning. Fashion has been marginal to and an off shoot of several other disciplines.

We return to Braidotti's notion of critical posthumanities, being 'critical and creative in equal parts', which has as its basis a fundamental concern:

Class, race, gender and sexual orientations, age and able-bodied-ness continue to function as significant markers in framing and policing access to 'normal' humanity. (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 85)

These represent the ethical domains we need to address in a posthumanities framework, and what needs to be an ongoing framework governing inclusivity in education.

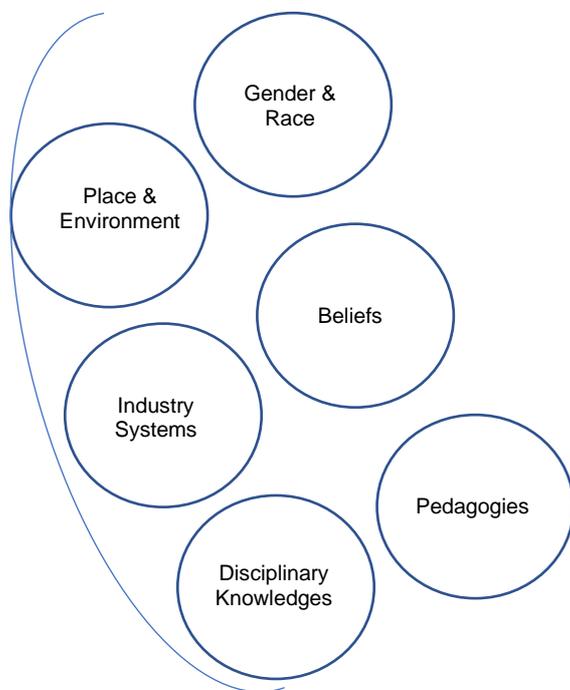


Figure 2: Working diagram of contributing factors and concerns in knowledge systems

2.6 Place, Education and Networks

We examine place in curriculum and how this affects knowledge systems. The feminist tradition of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) approaches space and place with reference to complexity but also the geopolitical aspects. We outline core contributing factors (see Figure 2) that influence knowledge systems governing curriculums. Geographer Edward Relph (2016) states:

Within every place there lies a contradiction. No matter whether places are defined as containers, geographical localities, communities, territories of meaning, nodes in networks, or exceptional buildings and public spaces, their identity is always a function both of difference from, and similarities with other equivalent places. A truly unique place would be incomprehensible, and if all places were the same the very idea of them would be nonsense. To appreciate the distinctive identity of somewhere requires understanding its sameness with elsewhere. This is the paradox of place. (Relph, 2016, p. 1)

The paradox of place is useful in considering how fashion education and knowledges are derived from *other* places. Major fashion capitals in the Global North dictate the model for how fashion is taught, promoting a sameness in fashion schools (Niessen, 2020b, p. 862). Since the 1990s there has been an increase in fashion degrees offered, with the UK leading this expansion and the structuring of fashion departments (Mensitieri, 2020, p. 5). Braidotti (2019a, p. 77) also refers to a 'cartographic approach' in reference to the feminist traditions of politics of locations, such as by Haraway (1988) – epistemological, ontological, ethical, and political planes of thinking through knowledge systems. This is about integrating one location in terms of both space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical memory or genealogical dimension), thereby grounding political subjectivity. These provide the key frameworks for interrogating knowledge systems and beliefs.

3. Methodology

This paper discusses key findings from the ongoing work of changing fashion curricula, these in turn reveal the key factors that influence the curriculum design process. The investigators of this research are part of the Senior Executive Team of the School of Fashion and Textiles at RMIT, including Professor Robyn Healy, Dean of the School and Associate Professor Ricarda Bigolin, Associate Dean of Fashion and Textiles Design. This emerging research is based on the practice of developing a

new curriculum and as part of a major School-wide project. The authors have been School and discipline leaders of this project, developing the academic case for the new curriculum across multiple academic programs in collaboration with staff across programs in the School.

Our approach to the notion of 'curriculum' is best aligned to the dimensions of 'knowing, acting and being' by Ronald Barnett and Kelly Coate (2005, p. 2). This favours student centred 'knowing' and 'acting' as a student's engagement and interpretation of their learning, as well as the responsibility of mindfully and ethically 'being' individuals of the discipline community (p. 48). In establishing curriculum design as practice-based research, it is framed in the context of complex networks of knowledge, place and discipline. The research draws on theoretical frameworks to contextualise curriculum design and is proposed as a co-mingling of various epistemologies.

Physicist-philosopher Karen Barad (2007) coined the term 'ethico-onto-epistemology', which refers to the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology when engaging in knowledge systems or knowledge production (2007, p. 185). The implicit ethical domains nascent in curriculum design are the foundation of this research, and the aim is to exert these key strategies in relation to the Discipline. Braidotti's (2019b) framework of critical posthumanities has been important to this study as it frames approaches to the curriculum that support diversity and equality. This framework makes reference to place and 'situated knowledges' in the feminist tradition, such as by Donna Haraway (1988), and the 'post disciplinary'. These theoretical frameworks enable a deciphering of the key factors and concerns needed to address complex knowledge systems and networks.

The methodology of this research is fundamentally practice based, using emerging curricula as a case to analyse in reference to key contextual and aforementioned theoretical frameworks. Through our discussion we sketch a lineage of our place within the discipline and the origins of our institution and broaden this discussion to scholarship on the way fashion design has been classified subordinate to other design disciplines (Payne, 2021, p. 1) and aligned with various categories and fields, seeking legitimisation. We will also discuss the way the discipline itself has various gendered personae (also in Payne, 2021, p. 1) – manifesting in high female identifying student enrolment numbers and echoed in industry workplace metrics. In

concluding, we draw on key principles of the curriculum and emerging responses to this.

4. Discussion



Figure 3: 'Five dolls or maquettes dressed in period costumes', Emily McPherson School, Handcraft display c.1927-35, (Museums Victoria Collections, 2021)

4.1 Origins of RMIT's Fashion Design Curriculum

Academic institutions have geographical locations, ours being placed in Naarm (Melbourne) on the unceded land of the peoples of Boonwurrung and Woiewurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation. The origins of our programs derive from the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy. 'Fashion design' as a discipline area has been classified as various other subject areas and still is sometimes referred to as the embodied and feminised craft practices of 'dressmaking'. Dressmaking emerged as a distinct economy in mid-nineteenth century, adjacent to (men's) tailoring practices (Aldrich, 2003, p. 144) (Cruise, 2007, p. 116). Industrialisation meant the mass scale manufacture of domestic sewing machines, readymade patterns and other garment and apparel technologies influenced the establishment of the craft (2003). Interestingly, Aldrich distinguishes 'dressmaking' from 'tailoring' as:

Tailors worked from the 'outside', moulding and fitting the outer cloth to the form of the body and then inserting a lining; dressmakers worked from the 'inside', creating a lining that fitted the figure, then covering it with the cloth. (Aldrich, 2003, p. 144)

Payne (2021, p. 2) further discusses the hierarchies of fashion practices, establishing how what is understood broadly as fashion is derived from luxury and high-end fashion brands. Whilst in the nineteenth century dressmaking was more closely aligned to fashion, throughout the twentieth century it became firmly relegated to a domestic craft, whilst fashion became a global economy. As depicted in Figure 3, part of the syllabus of dressmaking at Emily McPherson was producing marquettes of European period costumes, learning through historical precedents in the field. Throughout the imagery there is a noticeable European influence.

In Figure 4a the Head of Dressmaking is shown walking down the stairs of the State Library of Victoria in a fur coat. The difference from Europe in local environmental conditions is also shown, with images of students learning to sew outdoors (see Figure 4b). The continued challenge for education around Reconciliation is alluded to in these images, with Indigenous beliefs and practices oppressed by European influence and colonisation.

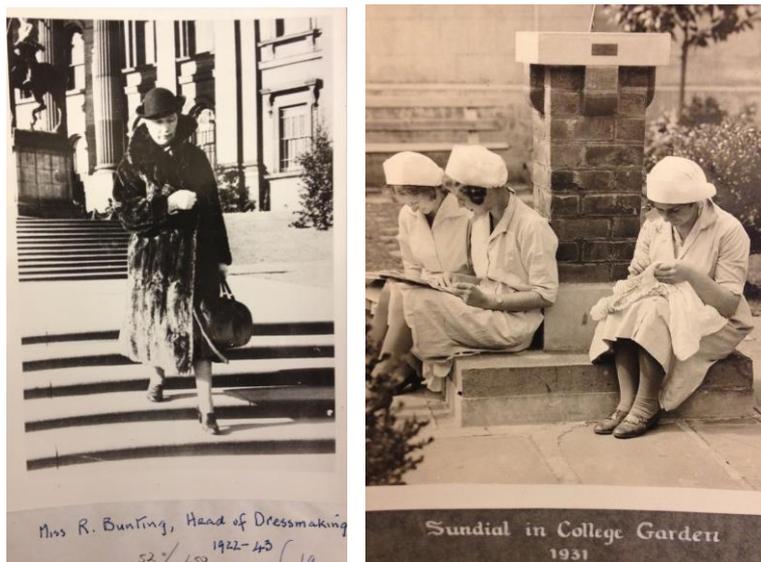


Figure 4 a) Head of Dressmaking Miss R. Bunting (1922-43) outside the State Library of Victoria and b) outdoor sewing classes 1931. From: Docherty, 1981, p. 54.

4.2 Place 'On country'

Figure 5 shows the State Library of Victoria, which represents a housing of Western Knowledge frameworks, juxtaposed in 2019 with hoarding artwork by Indigenous designer and RMIT Graduate Taylah Cole. The artwork represents the Indigenous knowledges of Country from the River Yarra now, past and anticipating the future. Included in the imagery are examples of Cole's basket weaving, showing the presence of Victoria's Indigenous peoples before and after European Settlement,

blended with images from the State Library's photographic archive. Displayed for over four months, this work was made possible by the generous support and permission of the Wurrung Foundation and N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, who at that time was Elder in Residence at RMIT University's Ngarara Willim Centre (Van Houten, 2019). This work calls out the obligation for the non-Indigenous to grasp understandings of place and 'to reconcile with the truth about our history, justice and systematic change' (Healy & Wilson, 2021). It reminds us of the Aboriginal sovereignty over the land and what lies beneath the building – Aboriginal Land, the cultural heritage and understandings of over 60,000 years, and possibilities for respecting and sharing knowledge.



Figure 5: State Library Victoria – hoarding design by Indigenous textile designer Taylah Cole with Nikita Castellano, Bachelor of Arts (Textile Design) graduates 2019.

Australia is a colonised country that still sits unreconciled with Indigenous sovereignty. Australian academic and Indigenous feminist Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes:

In the Australian context, the sense of belonging, home and place enjoyed by non-indigenous subject-colonizer-migrant is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law. It is a sense of belonging derived from ownership... (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 3).

This dispossession of place, of Country, is essential to grapple with as Australian educators. In reviewing the Indigenous population of Australia from Census data, we

see an increase from 1971 to 2011 in those who openly 'identify' as Indigenous (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a). The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was estimated at more than 770,000 at the time of the invasion in 1788, prior to the subsequent genocide (2016a). It fell to a low of around 117,000 people in 1900, an 84% decrease, and this population (those who identify) remained static until the 1970s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a). There were 798,400 Indigenous people in Australia in 2016. The median age of the Indigenous population is 20.3 years, the non-Indigenous population is 37.8 years. The Indigenous population increased by 19% during 2011–2016. There is an obligation to respond to this in any quest to decolonise education.

4.3 European Diaspora

As a colony, Australia in the twentieth century was subject to migratory waves, with a majority from UK/Europe. Particularly at the time when the Emily McPherson College was established, staff member Miss Royena Chisholm travelled to similar institutions in the UK and USA to establish ways of working (Docherty, 1981, p. 67). Bringing in Eurocentric views on dressmaking and clothing practices was part of the development of the College, and various staff had experience from the European fashion industry, such as Willy Pascal Biolley from 1920s French fashion house Patou (p. 80). The influence of Europe on place and subsequently on knowledge systems is also evident in comparing Census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 1921 to 2011. The majority of migrants came from Europe/UK in 1921 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In 2011 the majority came from the UK and New Zealand, with China and India third and fourth and other countries in the Asia Pacific region represented in the top 10 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

4.4 Fashion Systems and Gender

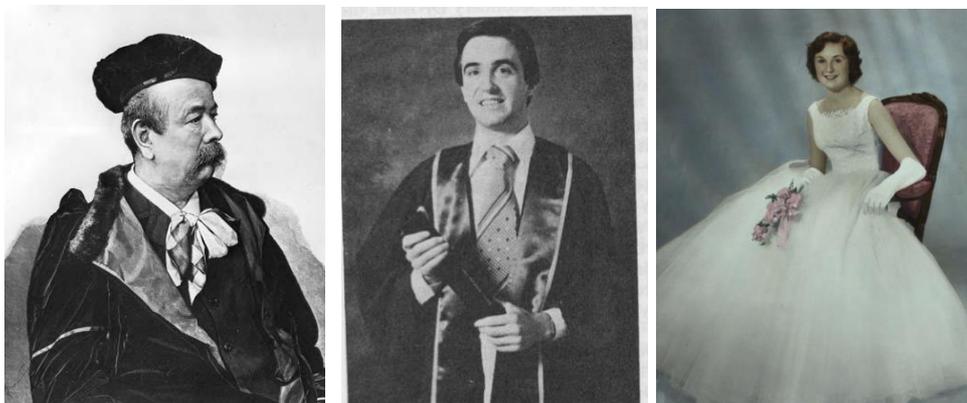


Figure 7a Charles Frederick Worth, 'the father of Haute Couture', by Nadar 1895, b) Chris Armstrong, first male to graduate from the Diploma of Fashion Design and Production 1977 (Docherty, 1981, p. 254), c) Margaret Mayne, 1958 final year student in the Diploma of Needlecraft at Emily McPherson College, wearing white debutante dress created during this period (Museums Victoria Collections, 2012).

The birth of 'fashion' established under the guise of *Haute Couture* is attributed to Charles Frederick Worth, (shown in Figure 7a) also known as the 'father of fashion' (Payne, 2021, p. 6) (De Marly, 1990). Worth is regarded as founding many modes of fashion practice still operating today. Part of this was formalising systems of practice, establishing industry governing bodies that set rules for how practice should happen (Bigolin, 2013, p. 44). Whilst Worth was the 'father of fashion', the clothing produced was only for women. This might also contribute to why the discipline has an associated gender and gender bias. Queensland University of Technology fashion scholar Alice Payne makes reference to this:

Viewed this way, fashion design is but a naughty little sister to the more serious, masculine design disciplines. She is wayward, mercurial, impossible to contain, and her products come in 150 billion forms produced year after year... Despite the fact that all bodies require clothes, fashion design retains a perception as being the most feminine of all the design disciplines. Fashion itself is highly gendered, whether in its modes of production – both creative and technical labour – or in its consumption. (Payne, 2021, p. 1)

In the archive of Emily McPherson Graduates, there is a difference in the depiction of gender in graduates. Figure 7c is a photograph of a final year student in the Diploma of Needlecraft, 1958, wearing the white debutante dress created as part of her studies for her to wear for 'coming out' in society (Museums Victoria Collections, 2012). The origins of fashion design as a gendered practice are evident in the student, Margaret Mayne, making dresses during the course for herself to wear. In contrast, Figure 7b shows Chris Armstrong, who became a media story as the first male to graduate in 1977 from the Diploma of Fashion Design and Production. Armstrong post-graduation took his industrial focus to London to work with Freddie Fox, the Queen's milliner (Docherty, 1981, p. 254). The contrast between dressmaking for oneself and the global and entrepreneurial spirit and fashion experience is evident in the two graduates and is gendered.

In a survey of the UK Fashion and Textile industry called 'Shattering the Glass Runway' McKinsey & Company (2018) report gender inequalities in high executive or creative director roles of fashion brands. For example, only 14% of brands surveyed are run by females, despite the dominance of 'womenswear' focused businesses and, similar to Australia, the majority of workers in the industry being women (McKinsey & Company, 2018). In our School these gender polemics play out in our enrolments, which have always been dominated by female-identifying students. Currently 86% of our students are female identifying, see Figure 8. How gender inequalities in fashion industries are still so pervasive is something education must confront.

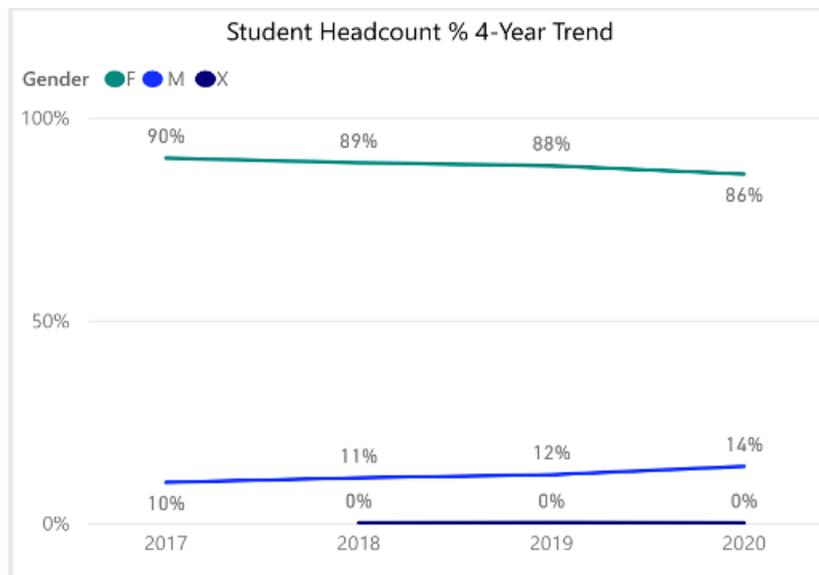


Figure 8: Gender profile for students in the School of Fashion and Textiles in 2021 from the Athena SWAN Gender Equity Report

5. Emerging Fashion Curricula

Serial Pattern Clasher
Subverter of the Feminine Ideal
Material Skin Specialist
Creative Designer of the Fashion Interrogator
Immaterial Fashion Designer
Material Innovator
Extreme-wear designer
Intuitive Knitwear Designer
Character Costumier
Multidisciplinary Practitioner
Sustainable Menswear Explorer
Craft Preservationist
Alternative Dressing Designer
Sustainable Fashion Producer
Fashion Recycler
Designer of Emotions as Aesthetics
CEO of the Colour Orange
Digital Fashion Creator
Cross-disciplinary Performance and Installation
Practitioner
Printed Smocking Artist
Virtual Angel
Employed
Slow Fashion Designer
Future Resort wear Print Designer
CGI Content Designer
Virtual Reality Fashion Director
Principle Memory Facilitator
Combating Consumerism and Re-valourising Waste
Fashion Waste Explorer
Body and Garment Relationship Designer
Social Responsibility Design Strategist
ReUse Print Designer
Sentimental Jewellery Designer
Speculative Material Creator
Textile Surface Designer
Nostalgia Designer
Creative Director of Queer Fashion
Material Memory Archiver
Uniform Costumier
Fashion Communicator
Fashion Design Navigator
Speculative Formalwear Designer
Sustainable Functional Clothing Developer
Designer of Movement
Fashion Medium
Digital Couturier
Mail Order Couturier
Fashion Persona Designer
Autonomous Fashion Designer

Figure 9: List of careers from RMIT Bachelor of Fashion (Design)(Honours) graduates in 2020 from an anonymous class poll

This paper has outlined a variety of complexities, contributing factors and concerns that knowledge systems and curricula should address. As we have been working with new academic programs and an emerging curriculum since 2020, we grapple further with the complexities of this. Whilst detail of this curriculum is outside the scope of this paper, we include in Figure 9 results of an anonymous class poll where we asked our 2020 Bachelor of Fashion Design Honours graduates: 'What is your future career or job role in fashion design?'. In reference back to Braidotti, 'critical posthumanities' and the 'post disciplinary', we can see a range of hybrid and transdisciplinary career ideas emerged from the students. In fact, several of the factors we have described are highlighted in these careers such as 'Subverter of the Feminine Ideal' or 'Alternative Dressing Designer'. There are also connections to the origins of the discipline in a reimagined localised context and this might be in part due to this new curriculum launching during the global pandemic.

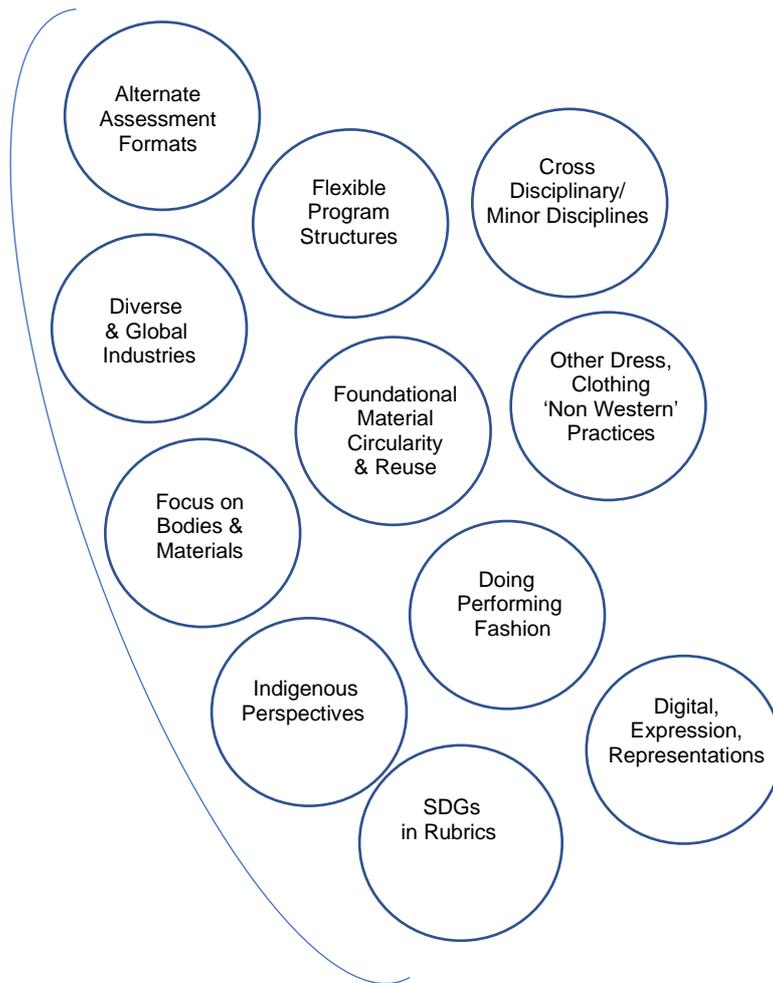


Figure 10: Diagram of emerging approaches and elements to disciplinary knowledges and pedagogies.

As our new curriculum emerges, see Figure 10, an unbundling of the curriculum is evident, beyond the classifications of being 'codified into topics, and curriculum [suggesting] a content-delivery approach in higher education where topics are introduced and closely controlled' (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 19). As discussed, the unbundling largely addresses how one system of fashion practice that connects to the global capitalist fashion economy has been favoured, oppressing local, indigenous and non-western dress. Connecting to diverse and global fashion industries, various non-fashion capitals as distinct from the European fashion systems, also helps readdress our migratory local conditions and Asia Pacific location.

An example of this is the significant shift in our curriculum of theoretical and historical courses outlining mostly European or American exemplars of practice. We now

introduce students in Bachelor programs to the discipline through exploring place, in the subject for all first-year students 'Fashion and Textiles Place and Story'. Other courses expand on non-western forms of dress, such as the course 'Fashion and Dress', as well as 'Fashion Design Strategies and Environments' which relates socio-ethical paradigms to design contexts. In embedding Indigenous perspectives in our curriculum we acknowledge the heavy-lifting work of reconciliation is for the non-Indigenous. Robyn Healy and Rachel Wilson (2021) as part of Reconciliation week at RMIT describe this:

It is our obligation to stop, listen and engage respectfully. Our Indigenous leaders have been clear about what they need from us. To tell the truth about our history, justice and systemic change, and most importantly, voice and treaty. In higher education where we have the privilege of helping shape the world daily, this obligation is even greater.

Our curriculum also sees a focus on defining the human within the discipline, and, in reference to the origins of the discipline in dressmaking, a focus on bodies and materials as central, not only fashion design, genre or market categories. Various bodies, wearers and makers of fashion have historically been erased (Niessen, 2020a). Various courses across programs privilege ethical material reuse, practice and transformation. In 2022, we have launched the course 'Fashion Design Diversity' in our Bachelor program, which challenges students to question normative standards in the discipline around body, race, ableness, gender and sexuality.

In reference to the massive scale of environmental impact of the fashion and textile industries (Ley, 2022), a scaffolding and levelling up of principles of material reuse and circularity have been introduced as foundational design learning, not special projects. Students learn foundational design methods in 'Fashion Design Reuse' where they are limited to design with and for post-consumer waste textiles. This shifts the focus immediately for students from designing aesthetically interesting things to to their impact on the environment. This scaffolding is across courses and academic levels, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals embedded into rubrics in assessments. The focus on material circularity and practices of reuse also support equality in learning experience for students of lower socio-economic status (SES). The use of expensive and imported European materials is not privileged, with a focus on material use and life cycle being part of assessment. A key shift in all programs has been unhooking the notion that students must design and produce a

garment or collections of garments across key core courses. This previously privileged students with specific material dexterity and hand eye coordination, the able-bodied or those with the considerable means to pay for production of their work externally. Students can now opt to not produce garments, instead opting to explore digital design, image making, film, performance, or exhibition approaches to the exploration of fashion ideas. Alternate assessment formats are offered throughout programs, acknowledging various ways of doing and performing fashion.

5. Conclusion

This paper discusses our emerging curricula alongside a critical posthumanities framework, as well as 'ethic-onto-epistemology' asserting the interconnected and inseparability of place, industry, gender and Reconciliation. The links between fashion systems and education as symbolic places and those oppressed by this system, such as other dress and non-western practices, needs to be revitalised in the discipline. The initial investigation into Emily McPherson through image archives suggests the need for a deeper analysis of the curriculum, and perhaps it may be useful to delve further into key moments of the twentieth century. The prevailing and pervasive gendered nature of the discipline and its gender inequalities need to be further addressed.

The research extends across and around a number of new Higher Education programs and courses, collating the broad foundations of new curricula. Further research of these curricula will entail various other methods as a longitudinal study into student outcomes. Mixed methods involving exhibition, case studies and object analysis of works produced as part of the new curriculum would testify to the interconnectedness of knowledge systems curriculum is part of.

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