

## **Fashion Colloquia Milan**

### **Feeding Fashion Energy: New Pathways for Fashion Education**

## **The Fashion Rhizome: An Alternate View of Fashion History and Education**

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*Our idea for the Fashion Colloquia Milano is to present the concept of 'the fashion rhizome'. We want to open up a discussion about design education and fashion history by exploring a theory that encourages creative, lateral and fluid thinking. Our proposal builds on our previous experiences when engaging with presenting fashion histories. We will also be referring to the development and feedback from the Fetish Moment Performance presented by Nottingham Trent University at the IFFTI/Polimoda Conference in May 2015.*

The visualisation of our proposal will contain key words and images.

### **What is the Rhizome?**

The rhizome, as a philosophical concept, was developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) as a way of perceiving the unpredictable changes that shape and reformulate the world around us. It metaphorically uses the organic development of a mass of botanical roots as a way of thinking that embraces multiplicities and rejects the notion of a clear beginning, middle and end. This approach provides a conceptual model for mapping the cultural terrain of fashion as a self-defining creative process and, importantly, for challenging the outdated paradigm of fashion history that relies so heavily upon viewing changes in design decade-by-decade. Through its intuitive alignment with creative learning, a rhizomatic approach to fashion presents a radical departure from the predominant educational model.

### **21st Century Fashion and Textiles**

Contemporary fashion has taken a self-reflexive turn, asking questions about what it stands for, how it communicates meaning, and how designers and creative thinkers learn about and engage with design. Li Edelkoort has indicated that 'for the first time in its history, fashion, supposedly ahead of the times, [...] is unable to react to the period' (Edelkoort in Dewintre, 2015: online). A

preoccupation with creating branded images rather than focussing upon clothes; an outdated affiliation with principles of 'unsociable individuality' in an era of social networks and shared creativity; and a lapse of engagement with the sensuality of fabrics – the touch and feel of materials – present a series of challenges to innovation within fashion design and education. A rhizomatic approach to fashion history encompasses a more anthropological and humanist position; it recognizes the creative process as driven by desire and sensuality rather than being dominated by the mechanisms of the marketplace. As part of this questioning process, we want to utilize the heuristic qualities of the rhizome to reformulate how we think about fashion history and the cultural ideas that shape design.

### **Non-Linear, Unpredictable, and Creative Development**

Within design education, conventional fashion history tends towards the linear. It follows a teleological model based not upon creativity but upon chronology. And yet, when we speak of fashion it is always as cyclical, non-linear, unpredictable and transgressive. Why should our approach to fashion history and design be limited by an imposed system of thought that assumes continual and logical progress, when the reality is driven by serendipity, experimentation and subversion? How we draw upon the past informs the present and shapes the future. We want to encourage students in the fashion sector to immerse themselves in fashion history by pursuing cultural concepts rather than approaching the past chronologically; to construct personally informed cultural 'maps' as part of their creative process, understanding ideas from the past in order to be innovative, informed and free thinking in the present. Taking a rhizomatic approach enables deep learning and personal engagement within a fluid framework that embraces creative thinking.

### **An Alternate Vision of Fashion History and Design Education**

Beauty in art and design emerges as a 'pleasant surprise' (Hickey, 2009: 80) rather than from a pre-planned formula. The most compelling narratives within fashion history – and no doubt the future of fashion – are not found within a conventional chronology but are situated on the periphery. It is on the edge of culture where fashion develops and evolves (Evans, 2007: *passim*), idiosyncratically excavating the past to define the present. We want to see cultural depth and historical knowledge driving individual creativity within fashion history and design education. Fashion has never been linear. It may no longer even be cyclical. Fashion is rhizomatic in its awareness of how ideas blur

and cross-fertilize as a means of innovation. A rhizomatic approach to fashion sees history as a fragmented map – a network of creative and cultural associations intuitively pieced together, much like the saccadic movements of the eye construct an image. It is an approach free from the limitations of outdated academic conventions: the rhizome offers an alternate vision of fashion history and design.

## **Bibliography**

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