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Fashion micro-enterprises in London, Berlin, Milan

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Fashion micro-enterprises in

LONDON BERLIN MILAN

Phase 1

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an account of a series of interviews, observational visits and hosted events with 8-10 fashion designers in three cities: London, Berlin and Milan, carried out from 2012-2016.

In some cases we interviewed the same designers two or three times over a period of nearly three years. The research project also entailed documented conversations and meetings with a range of fashion experts, consultants, legal advisors and policy makers in each city. Often these took place within the context of organised events undertaken as part of the research process. The aim was to investigate the kind of start-ups or micro-enterprises which have come into being in the last decade. We were interested in whether these were the outcome of pro-active urban creative economy policies or if they were self-organised initiatives, a reaction to the crisis of the euro-zone of 2008 and the consequent recession. Was it the case that long-term austerity policies and exceptionally high rates of youth and graduate unemployment across Europe had spawned these kinds of seemingly independent economic activities? We were also minded to consider the role of intellectual property (IP) and copyright in fashion as part of the wider UK government agenda for growth and wealth creation within the creative economy as a whole.

BERLIN RESEARCH 2012-2016

In Berlin our research activities pinpointed a distinctive urban milieu of micro-enterprises that are mostly female-led. The fashion scene in Berlin has benefited from pro-active cultural policies undertaken at Senate, Federal and EU level. There have been modest but highly effective modes of support, often providing a bridge from unemployment or semi-employment into self-employment or self-entrepreneurship. Of key significance is the availability of affordable space even as this is increasingly a contentious issue as rents rise (albeit within a framework of secure and protected tenancies). We found three forms of creative practice among our cohort.

1. The fine-art oriented avant-gardist designer for whom working with and alongside artists in the city was important. As Esther Perbandt said, 'my accessories such as bags and purses are mobile art objects'.
2. The unique and embedded set of fashion social enterprises led by women who were also constantly developing new ways of re-imagining fashion as a creative activity especially in regard to socially-valuable employment in the city.
3. Hundreds of female fashion micro-producers spread across the city (as evidenced by the NEMONA work¹) but mainly concentrated in the poorer, though now rapidly gentrifying, neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukoelln. Many were often living on a low income and producing one off items for sale in local outlets or online.

Our conclusions in the Berlin study showed a relatively low importance of IP and copyright in the light of wider issues to keep going, make a living, and participate in a lively, creative, and socially meaningful practice. Overall we encountered patterns of *socialised models of fashion co-operation* in Berlin. However the obstacles facing Berlin designers should not be under-estimated. As one of the leading fashion consultants, Prof Oliver MacConnell commented, 'the mainstream of the fashion industry across Germany does not pull its weight when it comes to supporting or even engaging with young talented designers'. This lack of support can lock the highly-trained Berlin designers into a situation whereby it is difficult to envisage higher returns and any degree of financial security. In effect they have to get used to the idea of living like an artist.

LONDON RESEARCH 2012-2016

In London, in contrast to our study of Berlin, we found an exceptionally competitive environment for upcoming fashion designers and a low level of fashion social enterprise activity. The high cost of rental space militated against a wider range of small-scale fashion micro-enterprises being able to establish and sustain themselves. Instead there were clear signs of a 'winner takes all' ethos. But not everyone can be a prize-winner, and the difficulties facing many talented young fashion designers graduating from some of the best UK art schools and universities do not surface in policy discussions. This may be partly because there is a strong self-organised network or professional culture which recognises the different levels of creative practice including those extending into the middle range of companies and high street fashion retailers. The long history of outstanding fashion pedagogy in the UK art school system has contributed to this idea of professional fashion practice with the result that working for the 'high street' carries prestige, with many designers moving from jobs in high fashion to the more mid-range fashion companies. Thus we discovered three forms of professional practice in London.

1. Independent designer status, reliant however on forms of sponsorship by, or collaborations with, major fashion, accessory and other lifestyle companies.
2. Small-scale independent designer micro-enterprises which have been established over a longer period of time pre-dating the escalating rents and high cost of space in London and having created a high quality niche identity.
3. Professional designers working in the mainstream of the fashion industry but in a context where designer status is not compromised but instead accentuated for what high design content and innovatory styling brings to the label.

Overall collaborations and consultancies provide economic lifelines for London designers. But there are clear and manifest problems resulting from the over-centralisation of fashion culture in London. This has contributed to a severe urban imbalance despite the existence of high calibre art schools in almost every city across the UK, and given the

1. NEMONA is the name of the not-for-profit network agency for fashion producers founded by Dr Ares Kalandides, one of the CREAtE team in Berlin. See www.nemona.de

obvious advantages of living and working in less prohibitively expensive places. There is then an agglomeration effect with the fashion industry and so many of its adjacent institutions including the fashion media based in London and the SE of England. This is the context in which our cohort of designers have sought to develop and protect their careers and occupational pathways through *self-organised professional fashion urban networks*.

MILAN RESEARCH 2013-2016

In Milan the very early signs of a start-up culture, one that seemed to emerge directly from the widespread unemployment among young graduates across the country, confronted us. This social problem of unemployment was especially severe in the light of the euro-zone crisis of 2008. The young designers we interviewed were often working in pairs but at this stage were not yet part of a wide network of producers. Most apparent among the predominantly female cohort was the psychological relief found through setting up as a micro-enterprise, even though the returns so far were small and the family still needed to support their offspring with 'bed and board'. This relief, to be at least active and in the labour market, exists in a context where there was little to nothing in the way of government-funded programmes for job creation. However, the Milan designers were able to plug into the rich industrial and artisanal networks which have been long recognised as being at the forefront of post-industrial and post-Fordist fashion and textile production (as various sociologists have shown). The young people we interviewed understood how to be entrepreneurial and how to bring together creativity with brand building. They possessed, in difficult circumstances, a kind of instinctive sense of Italian cultural production. We also noted the forceful presence of young women challenging the older patriarchal culture in this field and thus embodying something, which could be described as *gendered social innovation through creative artisanship*.²

In all three cities, Berlin, London and Milan, we found worries about IP and copyright theft to be deeply embedded and interwoven with all the other pressing anxieties we cited above. Many of those we interviewed stated an inability to afford costly legal fees to pursue possible infringements of their work.

We recommend: A Voluntary Code of Practice for Intellectual Property be established. This would be comparable to the various other social awareness campaigns in regard to ethical, environmental and labour issues for the fashion industry. Fashion media, various lobbying bodies, schools of art and design and universities, as well as companies, would also promote and sign up to the code of practice. We also recommend: that the Berlin model of fashion social enterprises, as the most egalitarian and socially inclusive model, is one that could be of value for the development of regional and local fashion economies. It would be advantageous for those wanting to work in an alternative mode of fashion production in the UK to have strong contacts with their counterparts in both Berlin and Milan. More broadly we recommend that current debates about both 'start up culture' and 'creative economy' pay more attention to questions of job creation and youth unemployment, especially in euro-zone countries and that gender issues alongside those of ethnicity are more foregrounded. We flag the value of international networking for learning support within this field of professional practice. Finally we see this whole sector of fashion micro-enterprises not as a weak alternative to conventional employment, nor as simply a precarious outcome of the modern work society, but as a sector of the global fashion industry which has the potential for developing a more engaged and critical creative economy partly through the high degree of self-reflexivity and the dense social networking required of these young professionals. In addition we cite the key role to be played by the universities and art schools here, in the context of 'lifelong learning'.

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2. The concept of 'gendered social innovation' is developed by Lindberg 2016.



CREATe designers and Goldsmiths staff at Glasgow School of Art

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CHAPTER ONE

THE THREE CITY STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research has been to investigate what we call the labour process of fashion design in the working lives of young, mostly independent, designers in three cities: London, Berlin and Milan.

We were particularly concerned with small or micro-businesses in fashion. (We were also keen to gain another perspective through examples from some major brands.) We wanted to find out how small enterprises, often comprising just one or two key persons (mostly women) and a number of freelancers and interns, came into existence. We asked, did this happen as a response to the economic crisis and high levels of youth unemployment across Europe since 2008? Had the enterprises been carved out of austerity? Or did they emerge as part of the wider landscape of the urban creative industries? How did particular policies impact on the shape and scale of the enterprises that were located in one city and country to the next? We also wanted to know how the designers and their small teams executed their work on a daily basis. How did they conduct their businesses? What kind of ideas informed and drove their creative practice? How did they deal with risk and uncertainty? Did they have a business model? Or did the studio work emerge on a more intuitive basis? We also wanted to focus on how intellectual property (IP) and copyright impacted on their practice.

IP and copyright are at the heart of the AHRC CREATE research project of which this study is part. In many sectors across the creative economy, intellectual property is understood to be a key source of value. The energies of creative talent, arguably, have the possibility of recouping economic gains stemming from original thinking, imagination and skill over the long term. (We cite the success of Vivienne Westwood in this regard). We already knew that in fashion, the question of IP and copyright was to some extent countered by the long-established design traditions of copying, 'quoting' or 'paying homage' to the work of past leading figures in the field. This, alongside the rapid growth of 'fast fashion' could be seen as partly compromising the very idea of intellectual property.

Young designers in most art and design schools across the world, typically learn through a kind of process of copying or emulating a particular look while also adapting or updating it to fit with their own creative visions. We wanted to see whether this aspect of fashion design training impacted on how questions of IP and copyright were understood. There is a rationale for a more relaxed attitude to some degree of copying or of being strongly influenced by this or that designer from the past (under the auspices of both contemporary post-modernism and the above-noted history of fashion education). There is an additional need for a more precise definition of copying. We need to unpack the economic complexity of such terms as 'being inspired by' as against simple counterfeiting. Unfortunately dissecting the way in which designers employed by fast fashion companies like *Zara* actually translate looks from the catwalk into *Zara* items, is beyond the scope of this present study. For sure it would be an important aspect of the design labour process to investigate this more closely. And as far as copying issues are concerned, the sheer scale of the global fashion industry (clothing and apparel) makes comparisons with other sectors in the creative economy difficult. Everyone, young and old, buys and wears clothes, whereas only a fraction of the population buy music CDs or download tracks from Spotify. With this global demographic in mind, and because of the cyclical nature and assumed ephemerality of fashion, the notion of reviving past styles can be a significant part of the creative process. Indeed the more day-to-day business of working in the mainstream or middle market of the fashion design industry relies in part on meshing old with new. In this respect reviving past styles or bringing something of the past back into circulation is far from unusual. We draw attention to this now, not to imply that IP or copyright is irrelevant to fashion, but rather to provide an initial context for the exploration that follows.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The starting points for the investigation have come mainly from sociology and cultural studies. Economic and cultural geography disciplines have also played a key role in shaping debates about the creative economy and fashion in particular. Our guiding principles have been informed by research which looks inside the organisations of the cultural sector. We investigate their structures and their distinctive ways of working. Thus the research has been shaped by the institutional ethnographies of Georgina Born and also by Schlesinger et al, in addition to recent studies of people working in the creative sector (Born 1995, 2005, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, Schlesinger et al 2015). Another important influence has been Ulrich Beck's concept of individualisation as underscoring the modern work society which is also a 'risk society'. His work emphasises the role of autobiography in the construction of a self-identity in the new world of 'abnormal work' (Beck 2000). Foucault's writing on biopolitics has further helped us to understand how far-reaching the changes are which see the young creatives take up the challenges of 'enterprise culture' (Foucault 2008). With provision per se so directed now towards individual coaching and mentoring, we were keen to see how these tools and instruments coming from the world of business actually impacted on their designer subjects.

A study such as this needs to be sensitive to the level of risk and the many demands on designers who have taken the pathway of developing their own label, especially in relation to the high costs of starting up (e.g. equipment, studio space, fabric, additional labour costs). We were aware that many of the participating designers worked long hours often moving from one location to another in the course of the working week. We had to be prepared to track and trail the designers through the different spaces and places in which they worked. Sometimes we met them in a local café or bar, sometimes at their studios or in their shops. At other times we met in the colleges or universities where they were teaching. An earlier qualitative investigation with fashion designers based in London usefully shaped the current project (McRobbie 1998). The focus of that mid-1990s study was on small-scale micro-enterprises, many of them teetering on the edge of economic viability. By the early 2000s there had been a



Kick off at October Galerie Kreuzberg 2012, Augustin Tebul (designer), Marte Hentschel (Common-Works) Maria Exner (Zeit-online)

policy shift in the UK. This attempted to impose a more professional model for fashion graduate pathways into work. The current study (initiated in 2013 but with some pilot work undertaken in 2012) updates the earlier work and charts some of the details of the professional training packages now in place, albeit for a select handful of London designers. The new research also identified the need to move beyond the familiar discourse around the UK creative industries and to undertake parallel studies in Berlin and Milan. These cities were chosen because Berlin was known to have an embedded creative industry policy which to some extent contrasts with the UK and London. Additionally, both Berlin and Milan have high rates of youth and graduate unemployment worsened by the economic crisis of 2008. This CREAtE project wanted to investigate the kinds of micro-enterprises which were coming into existence in the light of austerity politics and the shrinking role of local and national subsidy.

METHODOLOGY

Despite the considerable body of research now available within the field of the new creative economy or the new culture industries, there has been little debate or exploration on methodology. We aimed to highlight and critically interrogate some key methodological issues, which emerged as we undertook the interviews for this study. As Schlesinger et al describe: 'We worked out what to do as we went along' (Schlesinger 2015). This approach very much corresponded with our time spent fixing up interviews and studio visits and also staging events. The 'invisible labour' was incalculable within the standard terms of funded research. And it was the immediate socio-economic environment which impregnated itself most markedly on our examinations of the field. In the light of the financial crisis of 2008 we engaged with a paradox. Could we assume there to be both an expansion in the numbers of those seeking an escape from unemployment through creating their own small enterprises, whilst at the same time finding themselves plunged into a much tougher economic environment? We could see small units of production springing up across all three cities and these were a key focus for the research. We were interested in their specific character, and the precise ways in which they carved out spaces for themselves in this risk-laden milieu.

For the research to happen we had to create a distinctively friendly and sociable environment or ambience, one that reflected the 'network sociality' which has been a key characteristic of the creative work milieu as it has developed over the last two decades (Wittel 2001). Something of the friendship ethos of the Facebook generation rubbed off on the way we had to project an ethos of sociability and this corroborated Melissa Gregg's notion of the labour of friendship (Gregg 2011). Our respondents saw this as a kind of project to get involved in, like many of the other projects that came their way, with no immediate economic benefit but with some future potential. The second factor was the role of the university as a brand, a kind of centre of gravity, which gave the research topic credibility. It was only, directly or indirectly,

through our university contacts that we were able to secure the agreement of the participants.³ In the speeded-up worlds in which the designers we met moved, from one job or contract to the next, where cash flow was always tight, they nonetheless responded positively to our requests. This was also predicated on the university brand value. The university offers something, even if it is not quite clear exactly what the offer is. Many art and design graduates maintain active relationships with their former universities and their tutors. This is particularly the case in London, because the arts and design departments have for many years been expected to work closely with industry. Employability of students has been one of the many criteria against which they are judged. Of course this raises the question of how designers or micro-entrepreneurs can be disadvantaged if they do not have access to the universities and art schools that have the introduced graduate mentoring schemes and sometimes provide incubator spaces and business advice centres. Is there a new horizon of inequality opening up? This question is certainly applicable outside the UK in Germany and Italy where graduate mentoring schemes, incubator spaces and business advice centres have not been part of the academic programmes.

A dilemma also arises around the need to name our respondents rather than adopt the more conventional strategy in sociological research, which is to disguise the names of interviewees. This break with sociological orthodoxy⁴ emerges out of the personal nature of the relationships forged, as mentioned above, which would make it awkward at some later stage to anonymise the participants. Brand identity is one way in which designers present their work to friends and colleagues as well as to the market and consumers. Consequently, the idea of disguising their voices would seem counter-intuitive when everything about their work and how they talk about it is so heavily personalised. In addition to their reliance on social media is the fact that many of the designers are regularly interviewed for magazines. The readers of our report and publications would be able to identify very quickly who it was we were talking

3. Personal contacts permitted interviews with one menswear designer thanks to Malcolm McGhee.

4. Sociologists have tended to anonymise to allow respondents to speak more freely, if for example they are employees, or if they are holders of confidential information.

about. This is an example of what is a 'double individualisation' movement: the designers are nowadays mentored in the contemporary skills of self-branding (even if some just learn this from YouTube), but they also inherit the legacy of past generations or schools of artists and designers, and so they assume something of the aura of the artist or the *auteur* in their presentation of self. So strong and overwhelming is the *auteur* identity among fashion designers, that the idea of disguising their identities at a later stage, a valued tradition in sociology as a way of allowing difficult subjects to be aired, does not make sense in this study.

The research was originally designed around straightforward, one-hour semi-structured interviews; they were to be carried out concurrently in the three cities of London, Berlin and Milan.

In practice this plan had to be extended and accompanied by a wider range of activities in order to secure the agreement of respondents to take part. The experience of undertaking this research, in particular the emphasis on social relationships, has brought the project closer to the field of social or cultural anthropology. This is because there is a dynamic which involves countless emails, telephone calls, long periods of observation, conversations, studio visits, time spent travelling to events with respondents or sitting in a bar or restaurant after a show or performance. There has been a regular cast of actors/respondents with whom we as a team have forged ongoing and open-ended social relations. This in turn entails lengthy periods of 'hanging out'. One of the ways we have sought to create a manageable frame for the research has been through the idea



Textile studio
Glasgow
School of Art

of event research. This has the value of bringing various people together in the form of carefully planned afternoon workshops. This method gave a social role to the participants, many of whom are actively looking for new ideas about how to work and with whom. They are also able to benefit from some sense of international exchange (i.e. London, Berlin and Milan). From an organisational perspective it has simply been an expedient way of gathering respondents together and listening to them talk. We were able to analyse the data from one-to-one interviews later on. This too has been a slightly unorthodox and experimental approach. We provide the format of the university seminar with some time for socialising afterwards.⁵ As it transpires this seminar format has become one of the appealing factors of the research generating a lively experience of 'knowledge exchange'.

Our research belongs to a tradition of work often referred to as cultural production, that is to say it is concerned with a range of factors (industrial, post-industrial, educational, aesthetic) which come into play in the process of making a set of cultural objects. In addition, the wider context to which we refer includes the expansion of higher education and the kinds of courses which produce large numbers of fashion and textile graduates each year. Bourdieu predicted that this would lead to higher unemployment among the ranks of the now better qualified youth population (Bourdieu 1984). He saw only the cruel dashing of expectations on the part of these new recruits especially those coming from the upper working classes and lower middle classes. However, he failed to predict the 'enculturalisation' of the economy and the subsequent expansion of the whole field of consumer culture. This includes fashion, as Western countries developed a post-Fordist infrastructure, underpinned by vast panoply of services and it was particularly concentrated in large capital cities. Nor did Bourdieu envisage the remarkable growth of the creative economy. Countless economic geographers and sociologists have analysed the agglomeration effect of the creative industries in urban areas and they have discussed the 'transaction rich nexus of communication' upon which the media and cultural industries rely. This

leads to the kind of hubs of employment, semi-employment or freelance work in key cities across the world (Lash and Urry 1994). The Bourdieu paradigm could not have foreseen the adaptation of a younger workforce to these new and fast-changing conditions of labour. Paradoxically this adjustment, not to say endorsement, is underpinned by something close to Bourdieu's idea of the anti-economy of artistic production. The seeming purity of art working or creative labour (i.e. disregard for commercial gains) rationalises and justifies low returns. Today this leads to a normative expectation of economic hardship, which can only be offset by undertaking various other jobs to support the more auteur activity.

5. For dates, times and places see the Appendices.

GOVERNMENTALITY

We also need to take into account the various complex forms of ‘governmentality’, which have played a role of overseeing or managing young people’s pathways through school and higher education as well as the changing nature of these provisions. In the UK under the New Labour government, especially between 2000-2007, this sector of the economy was deemed to be a potential source of growth (the talent-led economy). In the light of a significant loss of a manufacturing base, this prominence was more marked: and by promising to increase the number of young people completing higher education to over 50% (while also encouraging various forms of ‘modern apprenticeships’ for the non-academic), the chances of first generation, degree-achieving students were optimised.⁶ However the most marked factor was the emphasis on creativity as an individual asset or form of human capital. Here the aim was to engender a more competitive and entrepreneurial spirit. In short a case study of New Labour reveals itself to be highly readable within a Foucauldian script in regard to the proliferation of toolkits, devices, mentoring and coaching schemes and creative partnerships all designed along these lines. Foucault, across the expanse of his writing, shows that power is not only embodied in the smallest but nevertheless regular and discernible gestures and statements and forms of instruction, but also that power is enticing and invitational and not necessarily constraining or coercive.

Georgina Born’s thinking also has a key place in this undertaking (Born 1995, 2005, 2010). She has undertaken a number of very substantial institutional ethnographies in the arts and cultural worlds (at the IRCAM Centre in Paris and the BBC in London). Born points to the genres of work, which are deeply shaped by socio-historical conditions of production. She demonstrates the scope for innovation and invention within these constraints, i.e. in television, and in classical modernist music. There is always a tension between the structural conditions which shape the types of cultural production being undertaken and the creative ambitions of the individuals. In our case we surmise that it is the immediate city environment which exerts such a force on what the designers actually do. Overall Born argues for a stronger theory of agency in that the various actors in these worlds are constantly navigating and negotiating in and around the institutional structures. She shows how subjects are called upon to respond to changing conditions of work and labour. This ‘configuration of individual subjectivities’ alongside the ‘calculative agency’ of the creative teams, leads Born to argue for the value of empirical research which can lead to the ‘amendment of theory’ (Born 2010).

6. OECD (2010) shows that 50% of women in the UK between 24 and 35 now have degree qualifications.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

One of the defining criteria of this current project is its three-city dimension: Berlin, London and Milan. The cities reveal sharp, even polarized differences, while also showing how there is a good deal to be learnt from looking at the ways in which locally-developed urban cultural policies can produce different forms of micro-enterprises. There is of course some degree of exchange and dialogue between policy-makers in all three cities. London is seen by some in the Berlin Senate to take the lead in encouraging more business-oriented fashion enterprises. Several Berlin designers look to the kind of business support provided by the British Fashion Council as exemplary. Berlin in turn is attractive to young designers from both Italy and the UK because of the seeming abundance of relatively cheap spaces to live and work, and for the independent spirit the city seems to foster. Milan is the most desired location for those graduating with a Masters degree from a London university notably for a job as a designer assistant in one of the major fashion houses. This is seen as a stepping-stone into the elevated or high-end world of the major fashion brands. It is rare for a Berlin designer to get a job in Milan, however there is constant traffic between London and Milan as the Italian companies seek out 'emerging talent'.⁷ Despite this activity our cohort in Milan had no contact with these kinds of exchanges since they all took place at the elevated level of the major fashion companies with HQs in the city.

We can also gain some insight into how these urban environments present specific kinds of opportunities for independent fashion designers to form collaborations or pursue related and slightly more lucrative pathways. These may help to stabilize incomes and thus pay the rent or the mortgage. The sheer size of London clearly presents a much wider set of possibilities for additional jobs. There are a number of art schools and universities in London and the South East which means that for those graduates who remain plugged into the graduate networks the reality of being offered some regular teaching slots provide a welcome opportunity. The UK, in general, is seen as the leader in embracing of the creative

economy. There have been close conversations between government, higher education funding councils and the universities. One outcome of this is not just a proliferation of Masters courses in the field of creative economy, but a rise in part-time or fractional teaching posts needed to staff these courses. This is especially true for practitioners who will bring their real life experience to the students they interact with. As one of our respondents, Carlo Volpi, said: 'In London it was mainly teaching jobs I got after the MA, not creative jobs'.

Another unexpected pathway that has emerged involves the flow of young people from outside the UK to London. They have been able to muster the funds to complete their training in Britain. After graduation, they then attempt to set up as a designer in London through the various awards and competitions available for spaces. They can also access mentoring schemes approved by the British Fashion Council. Volpi also fits with this pattern, coming from Italy to take his BA in Design at Goldsmiths then winning a place at the RCA. This in turn later opens doors into teaching and tutoring as well as other jobs in London and beyond. So popular is this route that the world of young fashion designers in London is more global than is imaginable. This diverse population is reflected in the design and design-related activities which are so visible within the city's creative economy. However this is an expensive undertaking. It is one possible for young people who have the funds to study and stay on in London. Of those we interviewed in London, several had come to study for a Masters in the most prestigious places such as the Royal College of Art. Overall we might say such phenomena reflect London's uniquely 'lifted out' status (perhaps with the exception of New York). However, it is also apparent that this gilded position has many downsides. In Berlin our sample of respondents was much more homogenous, although there are a few UK-trained designers based in Berlin with their own studio practice. In Milan we interviewed mostly Italians but also one or two designers from the former Eastern Europe who are now permanently living and working in Italy. Despite Milan's leading place in fashion's global culture, and home to some

7. Our visit to the Jil Sander HQ in Milan included a comment by the Art Director to this effect 'we are always looking out for emerging talent in London' (November 2013).

of Italy's most famous fashion houses, it has maintained a closed identity until very recently. It is notoriously hard for outsiders to penetrate the aura and mystique that wraps themselves round the day-to-day practices of the still often family-run companies such as Missoni, Marni and Prada, Patrizio Bertelli, CEO of Prada and husband of Miuccia Prada said 'Family companies especially in Italy struggle with the very idea of disclosure, let alone its implementation' (Bertelli 2005).

In this context the only opportunities for gaining any insider insight in Milan are given to carefully selected journalists timed to coincide with the shows and overseen by elaborate public relations strategies. Likewise the busy lines of communication, which run between the London fashion colleges and their former students, are not duplicated in Milan's high-end companies. This means that who gets which jobs is a more nebulous matter and the networks are much harder to decipher. London therefore figures like New York as a 'space of flows' (Castells 1996), where Milan adheres to the ethos of the old-fashioned family firm. Berlin, on the other hand, is right off the map of the major fashion houses but has invented its own fashion scenes. An emphasis on social enterprise paired with avant-garde subcultures, intersect with street fashion which also overlap with club culture and the famous Berlin techno underground. These connections between leading cities and fashion economies are indeed the subject of extensive analysis by various cultural and economic geographers (Scott and Power 2004, Breward and Gilbert 2006, and Norma Rantisi 2004 and 2006, and Jakob 2009).

CHAPTER TWO

BERLIN FINDINGS

**'I myself am copying clothes
that are older than 100 years,
and taking ideas from this time'**

Stefan Dietzelt of The Director's
Cut in interview Berlin...

**'this jacket is inspired by a
vintage fencing jacket dating
back from the late 19thC'**

website The Director's Cut
accessed 19th Dec 2015

'I am doing everything myself'

Stefan Dietzelt

**'We were brought up on
punk and the avant-garde'**

Marte Hentschel, Fashion Sourcebook

SUBSIDY AND SPACE

Berlin as a city is in the unique position of having had a high volume of office space available and indeed an abundance of unoccupied space. This is one of the outcomes of the city's historic role during the Cold War when it was divided in two. The western sector was surrounded by the famous Wall. Directly connected to this is that fact that fashion designers, alongside other creative people, have come to rely on more substantial support from the local Senate than the designers we have interviewed in both London and Milan. This dates back to earlier decades when the city worked hard to attract enough residents from the rest of what was West Germany. The policy agenda in Berlin, though always seeking to reduce levels of subsidy to the creative workforce, retains more identifiably social democratic elements than can be found in its UK equivalents.⁸ For example a key report from 2008 mentions that in the early days of business creative enterprises will not necessarily be expected to show a profit. This point in turn suggests the need for sustainable support beyond the immediate start-up phase (Creative Industries Report Berlin 2008). The same report also identifies the need to bolster female employment and self-employment in the creative sector for the reason that women remain under-represented. However since 1989 the city has struggled with debt and with the high cost of reunification has taken the step, in the face of much local opposition, of selling off valuable land assets for foreign investment. This in turn gives rise to speculative property development and the appearance of so-called luxury condominiums in key locations, for example in the historic Mitte neighbourhood, Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg districts. There is an extensive literature from economic geographers on the various objections to these developments.⁹ At the same time, there is also a strong anti-gentrification movement.



It is outside the scope of the current research study to summarise the range and complexity of these accounts and references beyond drawing attention to the fact that what seems like relatively generous systems of support (e.g. welfare-to-work provisions and self-employment start-up grants¹⁰) are themselves subject to much critical scrutiny from applicants and beneficiaries. Many designers report that the grants for subsidized rent for studio and shop space do not last long enough. Hien Le for example, one of the best-known designers in the city, told us in interview that it takes more than seven years to get established. This is a view shared and strongly corroborated by other designers including Esther Perbandt. The designers also refer to the recent rises in rents across the neighbourhoods which in the past were affordable (see Kalandides for CREATE 2014). Rent controls are still in place and this is a boost for the creative economy. There is also a permitted threshold for annual rent rises but despite these protections tenants still find themselves increasingly under (often subtle) pressure to move out to make way for businesses more able to pay much higher rents.

Esther Perbandt
Berlin

8. It should be noted that Creative Scotland policies share more in common with the Berlin reports see <http://www.creativescotland.com/resources/our-publications/plans-and-strategy-documents>

9. For example Bernt and Holm 2004 and Jakob 2009.

10. Hien Le received an award under the programme to 'start your own fashion business' in s/s2011.

Many of these fashion enterprises are really sole trader outfits. They comprise one female producer knitting or crocheting often with 'an initial idea' for 'a single product' and then attempting to sell these either to shops, or through an online shop window or through friends and other networks (Kalandides 2014). There is a high degree of informality in these operations. Many of the women are working from home with a tiny cash flow bringing them close to the brink of the informal economy. Kalandides examines this sector of fashion design and production, which is less likely to appear in the spotlights at Berlin Fashion Week. His survey points to minimal earnings. His respondents also show there to be a vacuum in the policy initiatives in that they are lacking the most rudimentary of business skills including keeping systematic note of costs, sales and expenditure.¹¹ Although less competitive than London, as indicated previously, the availability of opportunities for intensive coaching is by no means open to all.

Of the various forms of support, one key provision has proved the most useful, the 'Zwischennutzen' system. Although now managed by an independent company called Quartier Management, the 'Zwischennutzen' system allows micro-companies to apply to landlords whose buildings are currently empty to have access to such premises for a limited amount of time for a rudimentary rent. In the past this also meant for the cost of heating and lighting. The conditions of the rudimentary rent require the users to show that there will be a social benefit in the work they plan to do, for example involving disadvantaged communities. The possibilities for good quality space have a positive effect, making the idea of setting up in business without any substantial financial backing a realistic option. One of our respondents, Stefan Dietzelt, said that to begin with he had the use of a studio space and shop for free, another mentioned that she was 'really happy right now because I still have a good renting contract' (Majaco label). Esther Perbandt had a substantially reduced rent for her atelier and shop on the basis of acting as a concierge for the whole building.

The programmes, which help young people find cheap space, have been used by many young designers. Many sewers, knitters and makers are based in the Neukoelln neighbourhood where for some years properties were lying empty. Designers embellish the shop/studio/salon space to convey the image of the enterprise. Some, like *Nadelwald*, *Rita in Palma* and *NEMONA* adopt a slightly ironic aesthetic of crumbling elegance and grandeur. Their high-ceilinged chandeliered spaces are furnished to create the ambience of a French haute couture atelier, but with obviously second-hand or upcycled pieces. Antique chairs, vintage coffee tables, and evidence of a flurry of activity can be seen in the background where machinery and equipment can be spotted as well as bales of fabric and balls of wool for knitting. The visibility of the work process is a hallmark of these spaces and also a signal of pride in the process of making, what Claire Colomb has referred to as 'post-Fordist place-making strategies' (Colomb 2012).



Esther Perbandt
Berlin

11. Kalandides points to the need for business administration skills, those who had taken up this option through the NEMONA project were grateful for the format of training workshops, see Kalandides 2014.

‘That you are working 18 hours a day, without making much money, my family are proud.’

‘It’s just me I do everything with two interns and sometimes one freelancer’

Hien Le, Berlin

There is, in these symbolic gestures, which include the serving of tea or coffee to visitors, a careful interweaving of place and neighbourhood. The persona of the designer and the creative dynamics of her own working practice are visibly present. The city is not just a backdrop, but also a *raison d’être* to be doing work in this kind of way. However this is a fast changing scene and sometimes micro-enterprises that seem buoyant and have had been able to locate themselves in these busy streets often sporting a shop at the front and a studio and production room at the back, disappear after 3 or 4 years. This happens for a number of reasons, the subsidy runs out, there is simply not enough income coming in, if working in pairs, perhaps one person gets ill, or finds a more regular job.

Despite the open door and less commercially-driven policy agenda, clear hierarchies do emerge as a few designers are invited to compete for valuable space at the Berlin Showrooms in Paris and New York. Overall there are around 30 well-known designers whose collections are discussed widely in the press and media. They are the ones that command the attention of buyers at Berlin Fashion Week. Then there are newcomers and up and coming avant-garde designers just out of art school alongside them, and alongside this are the hundreds of micro-entrepreneurs seeking to make a living by producing small quantities of items and selling them through various networks. Support at this level exists within the realm of welfare-to-work

benefits meaning that many recipients are closer to the edge of unemployment. The salient point here is that in stark contrast to this approach, UK welfare payments no longer allow for this kind of creative activity. They are too small in financial terms to cover the cost of any kind of equipment or materials. ‘Jobseekers allowance’ claimants must attend so many interviews and take whatever low-paid job is available, that this facility to use unemployment time to develop new skills and attempt to set up a micro-business is foreclosed.

For the Berlin designers the challenge is to marry the fashion imagination with a viable business perspective. This, in a context where there are undeniable difficulties in creating strong markets, all the more so since the economic crisis of 2008. Almost none of our respondents spoke directly about a business plan as such, nor did they make much use of the word ‘brand’. One or two (for example Michael Sontag and Sissi Goetze) even mentioned that to begin with there was no commercial aspiration whatsoever and that they had to learn from scratch. Others felt that they could not afford to take the time out to concentrate on the business aspects, but neither could they afford to bring in a business partner to do this work for them (Kalandides 2014). The *Rita in Palma* label owner, Ann-Kathrin Carstensen, like several others in our sample, is a mother of young children, and her business model as a social and cultural entrepreneur is organized so that she can work hours which fit in with childcare. She sought support from a local ethical bank after initially receiving some funding from her parents. This is a well-organised undertaking with a strong focus and clarity of direction. Ideally Carstensen would like to find partners among big brands (*Chanel*, *Swarovski*). She also looks to collaborate with traditional German glove makers in the ‘Mittelstand’ tradition. She finds herself mid-way between enjoying the social and community aspects of the work, for example crochet evenings with Turkish women, and the more press-oriented activities. This involves red carpet work with actors who will wear a piece of her work for a special event, with an eye towards the resulting publicity.¹²

12. This pathway is one of the secrets to success for UK designers. Having an actor or celebrity wear a piece and be photographed in it, is increasingly a fast-track to orders and sales flowing in. In Berlin these relationships are less managed and overseen by PR companies and much more hit and miss and a matter of existing social networks.

This is a niche social enterprise model. Over the last year the label has attracted a lot of media attention, at the same time, as an accessory business Carstensen does not have the high costs of putting on runway shows. Recently she expanded to offer online sales with 14 successful online boutiques. Concurrently, she employs interns who help in the store. There are also the women who crochet, and those who make the jewelry as part of the existing welfare-to-work programmes. This is one example of the kind of grounded social enterprise model, which is common in Berlin. They are often led by working mothers. Other designers such as Michael Sontag have pursued a more conventionally fine art approach from the outset. He relies on Senate-funded programmes to pursue a relationship with the Paris and New York Showrooms. Sontag's business plan as such combines the strength of his signature styles with the aim of opening his own shop. When possible he supplements his income from collaborations with bigger and more mainstream German fashion companies.

In contrast to both of these designers (*Rita in Palma* and *Michael Sontag*) another of our respondents (the *Majaco* label) had refined her business strategy over the last five years by reducing the scope and the scale of the undertaking. This has meant no longer doing shows but instead concentrating on making 'basic classics' which could be sold directly from her own shop. Like many others the *Majaco* founder had enough space at the back of the shop to carry out most of the sampling and pattern cutting. When the shop was quiet she herself would be busy in the studio preparing the next pieces for the coming season. This designer reported how she had slowly built a stable clientele from local people, tourists and visitors to the city. A similar pattern was described by menswear designer Stefan Dietzelt (*The Director's Cut*) who also had a stable rent contract in an area, which had become busier over the years. Passing trade was much more likely. He also had a specific repertoire of trousers, shirts and jackets, which he re-worked from one season to the next. He relied on local manufacturers in Poland just an hour's drive away by car.



In summary, the important role of Berlin Senate policy, despite funding cut backs, has been to oversee pro-active job creation schemes. Success is possible because workspaces and their shop fronts are located in relatively busy but pleasant urban neighbourhoods. They are able to attract local customers and tourists who pass by. As Hien Le, himself a recipient of several rounds of support from the Senate said, 'in Berlin it is still possible to pay for both a home and a studio'. Overall the Berlin designers are less commercially driven, and are more committed to working to maintain the integrity of their creative visions. These auteurs are accustomed to working long hours with relatively low take home pay. What we might describe as a residual welfare state, backed up by the strongest economy in the EU, permitted creative work to be sustained in a convivial, social environment.

Rita in Palma
Berlin

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND COPYRIGHT

In Berlin IP and copyright protection simply do not figure as important or indeed as directly relevant to the design activity. However, when we asked our respondents, they all had a story to tell, whether as small micro-producers or as best-known names in the city. Our research shows a tendency to 'shrug it off'; implying that theft of ideas is seen as merely one of the occupation's pitfalls, something that can sometimes be contested, most effectively through use of social media. Legal consultant Alexander Bretz who took a strong position confirms this situation. He argued that in fashion 'IP does not matter' and that 'copyright law for fashion is a nonsense'. For Herr Bretz the damages won following an exchange of letters for infringement have been tiny, often not more than 800 Euro to the wronged party. Indeed in one case even this small amount would not have been agreed had it not been for a journalist publicizing the case in the press. Bretz summed up the overall picture by arguing that social stigma was the best deterrent because it showed how in the field people had to 'play by the rules'. He also said, perhaps with some cynicism, that in some cases 'it would be worth doing a deal with the copiers especially if they could provide the funding for a future collaboration'.

One knitwear designer said to Kalandides 'I saw someone wearing the exact same knitwear I had designed. I found out that it was produced and sold by the same person who had once knitted for me' (Kalandides 2014). Ann-Kathrin Carstensen of *Rita in Palma* said 'it could happen, but I have plenty of ideas all the time, so for me it's not a problem. It is easy for someone to copy something and then change a button'. Most striking was the case described by Esther Perbandt where a cheap copy of one of her leather bags (selling at 380 Euros) was boldly displayed in the window of a shop round the corner from her own boutique for just 80 Euros. Her partner went out at night and covered the window with stickers showing the name and logo of Esther Perbandt. This tactic worked. The bag was quickly removed and never once re-appeared. Perbandt also described other incidents. Friends sent her photographs of the copied items in question. She told us that copying was not an uncommon practice. For example with orders on a sale or return basis, companies like the firm XX in SE Asia returned goods after they had been copied extensively. Perbandt has been the most vociferous of all the Berlin designers in denouncing the bad practice of having her ideas stolen: 'it is just to tell the world, listen your copying did not go unnoticed'. Naming and shaming by social media may well be one of the most effective ways of protecting originality for the reason that the cost of going to court is prohibitive for small scale designers. *Majaco* for example reported that despite having what they thought was a strong case against a Munich company the judge found against them saying the items were not so similar and in the end some mutual agreement was reached. However, the settlement did not compensate for *Majaco's* time or costs.

'On IP? Friends are often sending me pictures of things 'similar' ...but maybe they have copied, maybe not'.

Hien Le

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Social Enterprise emerges as one of the strongest, defining tendencies of the Berlin research. Several of our female respondents were keen to foreground the socially engaged elements which played an important role in the development of their fashion businesses. It is worth noting that many female fashion designers we did not manage to interview also fit into this category. They typically combine a local neighbourhood focus with an ecological fashion project.¹³ This is a distinctive Berlin phenomenon not found in London or Milan. As mentioned above *Rita in Palma*, the label owned by Ann-Kathrin Carstensen is one of the most interesting examples. Carstensen works closely with community associations and with Turkish-German women in the neighbourhood of Neukölln. When we met her she was learning Turkish herself in order to feel closer to her team of crocheters ('crochet queens') and knitters. Recently she expanded to set up an associated enterprise to help Turkish women learn German (Rita's Haekel Club EV). Similarly one of our experts and advisors began as a designer herself and then became more involved in fashion as social enterprise in the city. Marte Henschel (founder of CommonWorks) consciously applied her ideas of neighbourhood engagement in the production services enterprise she built up. She developed various job creation strategies for women in the process of making her company a lively centre. This involved managing and overseeing the production needs for most of the well-established designers in Berlin, while at the same time emphasizing the use of environmentally-friendly strategies. This further entailed outreach work with under-achieving girls at local schools. It involved various forms of in-house training to improve the skills of unemployed women and make them more likely to find work. This model is not duplicated in London or indeed in the rest of the UK, where fashion as a creative industry has been defined in more fully corporate and professional terms.¹⁴



Rita in Palma
Berlin

13. e.g. *The Green Showroom* and also Magdalena Schaffrin.

14. The fashion enterprise in North London *Fashion Enter* reflects an attempt to resurrect the small-scale factory in a not-for-profit mode see www.fashion-enter.com

THE LABEL AND THE WORK ITSELF

Auteur identity is one of the most important factors amongst the designers we interviewed in Berlin, London and Milan. And yet in Berlin this feature is more relaxed than in the speeded-up environment of London. Several of the respondents emphasise their ideal of developing their labels at a slower pace, and the importance of not succumbing to the idea of overnight success. The *Rita in Palma* owner Carstensen was training in medicine when she changed to study fashion. Her shop has been opened for five years. It is a salon space, hosting evening events and meetings, and it has a studio/atelier in the back. *Rita in Palma* is a distinctive fashion accessory business featuring crochet pieces, jewelry, as well as designed leather bags. This label is a good example of how it is possible to grow a fashion and craft enterprise. In the year since we first interviewed the label founder Ann-Kathrin Carstensen has gained 14 shop outlets across Germany and Switzerland including a pop-up shop in the famous department store *KaDeWe* in Berlin as well as concession spaces in stores in both Japan and China. The niche here is the slightly retro image which the crochet items suggest, e.g. '40s style ankle socks, lingerie and burlesque 'bra tassles', crochet jewelry necklaces and collars to be worn with evening dresses. The owner conveys a sense of enjoyment in her work, especially for its socially integrative aspects, making it something of a feminist enterprise. We could surmise that the long hours worked without huge returns is countered by high volume of 'happiness at work', especially because of this social action element.

A more dramatically *auteur* approach can be seen in the well-known label of Esther Perbandt, and this has involved not only the distinctive androgynous fashion collections but also a clearly avant-garde sexually radical aesthetic. Perbandt has had a good deal of media coverage in experimental art magazines like *Kalt-Blut*. She herself says it is always hard-going running a label in Berlin but she loves what she is doing. One of her distinctive strategies has been to develop collaborations with artists, actors and dancers. For example, a recent project involved her designing costumes for a choir led by the musician, composer and conductor

Sven Helbig. Likewise in 2014 Perbandt staged a rock band for just one night (GROTESQUE) with herself as the singer in lieu of a catwalk show. Prior to this event, she produced a collection in conjunction with the Italian artist Marco Grassi. More than all the others the Perbandt collections absorb and re-work aspects of Berlin's urban history in the pre-war and Weimar period.¹⁵ In the Berlin context she is typically *auteur*, art director, performance artist and business manager.

A key question emerges. What does it mean to say that the urban culture insinuates itself into the fashion imagination in Berlin? Conventional glamour and feminine stereotypes associated with mainstream Italian designers such as *Versace*, *Dolce e Gabbana* and *Gucci* are rejected. The low-key and sometimes austere Berlin modernist aesthetic is one which arguably takes its lead from Germany's most famous designer Jil Sander and her ideas of gender equality, as much as it does from green, upcycling and ecological matters. This distinctive style, also influenced by youth culture, is followed through as much in the workplace wardrobe as it is in street wear and in club scenes. These themes taken together account for the image of fashion in the city as counter-cultural.

Esther Perbandt
Berlin



15. One collection by Perbandt highlighted the distinctive image and persona of the Brecht actor Valeska Gert see www.estherperbandt.com/valeskagert

BERLIN ANALYSIS

Berlin's urban fashion scene is partly shaped by social underpinning. This permits the existence, over a considerable period of time, of three kinds of fashion practice:

First the subcultural/avant-gardists whose auteur identity encourages them to look to the fine arts and Berlin's reputation for being home to a wide network of film-makers, artists, writers, dancers and musicians. Fashion designers whose work fits this category inhabit the same kind of anti-economy space described by Bourdieu as reflective of the artistic field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). However, this happens with the qualification that Bourdieu understands the ethos of 'money and commercial success do not matter' as part of the entrance to the field. In this context, current creative economy research shows that nowadays such candidates are forced to find pathways for later stage careers in the same sector.¹⁶ They do not leave if the enterprise fails, but neither do they necessarily expect financial success to follow from recognition and even awards.

Second are the female designers who combine a creative ethos with a strong social enterprise element. The designers' not-for-profit enterprises include social action projects for equality, diversity and environmental objectives. There is innovation and creative development in the contemporary life of Berlin. This builds on something which emerged from the late 1960s radical social movements but is now translated into the field of fashion. This has consequences for the kind of counter-cultural and gender-aware fashion provision in the city.

Third, fashion activity comprises self-entrepreneurship as job creation in a city with a post-industrial economy and relatively high levels of graduate unemployment or semi-employment. Fashion fits well into this space of creative activity for the reason of reasonably low start-up costs in a context of 'network sociality' (Wittel 2001). The 'single item' of which Kalandides writes, most often a piece of knitwear or a dress, can be expanded, developing a micro-business on the basis of single orders from friends and sales to small shops dotted about the city (Kalandides 2014). The various job-centre programmes, which permit this kind of enterprise, are a key feature of the creative economy policies. They are successful to the extent that the status anxiety of the job seeker is at least assuaged and the person can legitimately self-define as being a fashion designer. This in itself has an egalitarian effect and makes for a more socially inclusive urban culture. The Senate programmes alleviate some of the pain and stresses of under-employment and the feeling of wasted talent. By the same token, the dense hub of cultural and social activities permits extra jobs to be undertaken, sometimes for cash in hand. Events management, club promotion, paid internships and gallery assistant roles, for example. Thus we can consider Berlin at the forefront of a 'new fashion imagination within a framework of job creation' underpinned as this is by significant forms of social welfare (McRobbie 2015). Here the 'creative industry agenda is socially inclusive and egalitarian rather than simply 'talent-led' (ibid). As the sociologist Anja Schwanheuser said 'the work is done for its own sake' (quoted in McRobbie 2015). A strong link is forged between fashion and social enterprise. Alongside this there is an evocation of a German spirit of pride. The skills and craft elements in fashion production are valued.

16. Esther Perbandt says 'everyone knows I do not have money but somehow they are inspired by me and people will even work for no fee'.

CHAPTER THREE

LONDON FINDINGS

'For young designers now the cost of the right technology and software is prohibitive, then getting that insured if its kept in a studio even more. I got interested in the technology early on and I now have about £40,000 worth in the secure office space I work from near to my home'.

Rose Sinclair

**'At the moment in London there is no incentive for fashion start-ups, the costs are prohibitive'...
'There is a lack of government support, despite the talk about regenerating manufacture, the only place you see people working on looms or weaving is in the art schools'.**

Kenneth MacKenzie

'The fashion industry is becoming more business oriented. The items are the image, but it is the other stuff that generates the revenue – not your best work'.

Basso and Brooke

SUBSIDY AND SPACE

The opportunities for subsidized studio space for aspiring fashion designers in London has for the last decade been circumscribed by creative economy policies devised specifically for the fashion sector. This has given a more prominent role to the British Fashion Council which in turn works closely with the London College of Fashion, the RCA and Central St Martins School of Art and Design. At the same time, there are a number of professional ventures, the most significant of which is the Centre for Fashion Enterprise in Mare Street Hackney.¹⁷ There are other similar social enterprises (or not-for-profits) including Fashion East, Fashion Fringe, and Cockpit Arts (for designer-makers only). It is worth noting here that the Tramperry Fashion Lab at London Fields, which had provided rentable desk-space for designers was forced to shut in late 2015 as rent rises of 400%, made the venture unviable. The way in which fashion fits into creative industry policy discourse has a wide impact across the sector. It shapes the vocabularies with which fashion talks about itself. This has entailed a top down, and London-centred approach. It has been led by a promotional rhetoric of glamour, success and talent. This sits comfortably with the kind of editorial style and big business ethos established by the recent and influential online journal www.thebusinessoffashion.com. The overall result is that for London's fashion design sector, issues such as financial hardship, working conditions, social enterprise, and equal opportunities tend not to be incorporated into public debate. The celebrity-status of London's star designers goes hand in hand with the reputation of Central St. Martins, London College of Fashion and the Royal College of Art. In the last two decades the provision for students has been extended, on a highly competitive basis, with a range of organisations giving advanced business support. The support is customised for the level of entrants to the programmes. They will in effect have either won a prize or have graduated with the highest honours and accolades from the press. In London widespread praise and publicity are virtually a prerequisite for gaining a place in the available support programmes.¹⁸ This system can elevate prizewinners into well-known names in a short space of time. One of our interviewees described her experience as follows:

'I had been on maternity leave after 5 years with Ted Baker and I thought this is the time to see if I can set up my own label, I had just three weeks to apply for a place as part of the Fashion Fringe/Colin McDowell Programme and be accepted onto their programme. I had to develop a full business plan almost on the spot. To get a place you have to be one of three chosen from so many, I didn't win the first prize but I was among the first three and I could not believe it when I got a call from Christopher Bailey (of Burberry) inviting me in to a meeting'

Teija Eilola

For Teija, whose studio and office is based at the Islington Screenworks space, the mentoring programme included many networking opportunities. Of all of our respondents Teija fits most closely with the model promoted by the official agencies and by government. A prizewinner in every sense, getting a place at the RCA (in itself a passport to jobs in the industry and to support for starting-up as an independent), she accumulated many contacts working in the industry over five years. This provided her with consultancy work and freelance contracts, which in turn help cover the costs of producing her own label. Teija also won support in the early days of her business through being part of the Fashion Fringe initiative. As we describe below, the various elements of the programmes made available to her can be seen as among the major successes which current policy-making in the field of the 'talent-led economy', endorses. Teija represents a sound investment from the viewpoint of her mentors.

17. The funding arrangements involve support from the Greater London Assembly.

18. See www.centreforfashionenterprise.com/programmes

The exceptionally competitive ethos, which has become part of the policy environment for own label young fashion designers in London, is just one element of an urban economy. This is increasingly led by the high costs of real estate and inflated by the presence of foreign capital in the city. The significance of the financial sector despite the economic crisis of 2008 coupled with the ethos of de-regulation and risk-driven entrepreneurship, has had a profound impact. This has a trickle-down effect on the field of small-scale creative entrepreneurship. It means that, in reality the option of setting up independently in London is only possible for a tiny number of individuals or partners who are already in possession of significant resources. These factors contribute to a de facto fashion creative economy which prohibits newcomers to the field. It is no longer possible in London to set up a fashion own label enterprise with the help of youthful energy alone. Unemployment benefits and some degree of subsidised or social housing are no longer available.

We see some of the repercussions of this in regard to questions of space and subsidy. There are significant discrepancies between those who have been working in the field for over 15 years and newcomers who find it much more difficult to afford even a hire a desk in a co-working space. On a visit to the long-established Cockpit Arts spaces in Holborn London¹⁹ we were able to interview two fashion designers. One knitwear designer, Sine Fiennes, had managed to hold onto the studio for a period of over 15 years with certain benefits accruing including low levels of rent rises. Carlo Volpi, a native Italian who completed an MA at the Royal College of Art more recently won a studio space at the Cockpit following an application and interview. He was successful in what was a highly competitive environment but he was already known as an avant-garde knitwear designer with media coverage in Vogue magazine. Although Cockpit offers various possibilities for applying to trusts to cover the cost of the studio and for access to equipment, the majority of designers and makers have to pay for the space. Most of the available space is shared with up to four others. For someone like Volpi the value of a centrally located space is offset by the several jobs



Teija Eilola
London

he must hold down. This includes two teaching jobs and other freelance contracts which he does in order to cover the costs of his production process. He notes 'I got the Cockpit space free for a year and I'm still here several years later... but I'm not living off my own brand ...I need to do a million jobs to support myself, to keep going.' The pressure is magnified by the need to keep the wheels of publicity moving so as to see success at the next level. The age gap emerges as an unexpected aspect of the study. Younger prizewinners, upon whom so many hopes are placed by the creative economy, find it difficult to squeeze in an hour for an interview for the current project, in contrast to those who have over the years found a manageable formula for continuing the work. This reflects the increasingly speeded-up entrepreneurial culture of London in the last decade (McRobbie 2002/2015).

19. Part funded by GLA originally funded by GLC as a craft and making as well as artists' space.



Carlo Volpi
London

We surmise that for newcomers or recent graduates in London wanting to start their own label, the only way to gaining some support is through the programmes mentioned above, even if only a tiny minority of the programmes include studio space. Of course like artists, fashion designers can embark on a more open London-wide search for space, but they are also confronted with the problem of being able to afford expensive equipment and software. At the CFE only one of the various programmes actually includes space. The majority offer intensive business support. The Cockpit has strict limits on who can apply for space. Their remit is for craft-oriented makers and fashion and accessory designers who are not contracting out their production but who produce one off items in-house. The Cockpit-based designers who took part in the research were all doing knitwear collections on a small-scale basis. However in contrast to the more commercially driven programmes offered by organisations linked with the British Fashion Council, the Cockpit operates on a more open basis. Applications from people who

have been unemployed are actively encouraged. They range in age and social background.²⁰

This has the effect of widening participation to candidates who have not been able to be part of the so-called talent-led economy. At the same time it raises the relevant question of access to the creative economy following graduation, and of the barriers which exist for those who are unable to find the kind of investment needed to cover day-to-day living, for example childcare expenditure in addition to business start-up costs.

Today, it is more realistic for design graduates in London to look for jobs in the mainstream of the fashion industry. It is possible, even in a crowded labour market, to find work in the sector as a junior design assistant. The expectation here is to work one's way up, or else move between similar companies. We need to flag up this 'high street' option up as a distinctive feature of London's status as a global fashion city. For the few who do set up independently, they will need to rely either on private resources or have a partner with

20. While it is clearly more difficult now than in the past for young graduates to get a foothold in regard to studio space and support, a case has to be made for older people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds to be able to do likewise.

a stable salary to ensure bills are paid. If they are exceptionally lucky they will have, or have had, the full force of financial backing from a global brand behind them for example with *JW Anderson* with *Loewe*, *Basso* and *Brooke* with *Aeffe*.

In London fashion, the idea of new talent is skewered towards the tiny few who are already to some extent privileged or at least cushioned from the risk of losing all. Speaking from an industry perspective, one leading fashion lawyer noted, 'it is enough to produce just four or five stars a year' (*NotJustALabel* event May 2016). This scenario stands in sharp contrast to the situation that prevailed in the late 1990s when there was a proliferation of new young independent labels in London. Many of them were run on a shoestring with some help from welfare-to-work schemes such as the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and with well-located and relatively cheap space to rent. Some of this generation were able to build outstanding reputations even when the labels they had set up eventually ran out of steam. One of our respondents coming from this generation Kenneth MacKenzie (of the label 6876) had

managed to rent an office/studio space in 1995 in the highly desirable London Brunswick Centre in Bloomsbury. Similarly, Rose Sinclair pursued a wise strategy over a decade ago of renting space in an unused office block near to where she lives in the suburbs of South London.

London's 'lifted out' status as a world city and as a space of de-regulated flows of finance for over twenty years has been famously investigated by David Harvey (the 'entrepreneurial city') and Saskia Sassen (the 'global city'). The extent to which London exemplifies the contemporary neoliberal city can be seen in the organisational features of the city's fashion design economy. Attendance at one of the prestigious schools can be seen as something which promises a 'return on investment' (Brown 2015). Many of our younger respondents mention the help they have had from their parents. Parental support means not just cost of fees, rent and living expenses for a one-year Master's but also assistance with studio space, rent and for start-up costs and equipment. As already mentioned what subsidy there is tends to be instrumentally focused on prize winners only.



Rose Sinclair
London

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND COPYRIGHT

Although one designer, Carlo Volpi, said emphatically that copying did not worry him 'I would feel quite privileged if my work was copied...I'll have other ideas', most often there is bemusement tinged with discomfort when the question of IP and copyright is raised. Our London designers, almost without exception, deal with copyright issues by adopting three clearly expressed stances on the topic; first, it is a fact of professional life and if it happens there is little one can do about it. Sometimes it can even be seen as a sign that the original work is having some impact. Second, the fact that copying in the form of being inspired by, or being strongly influenced by, or indeed of having the idea of re-working or re-cycling past works, is a fundamental part of the design training. This surfaces inevitably in professional practice. There is a thin line between being inspired by the past and being overly influenced by peers and by competitors. Third, there is the recognition that, in certain circumstances, it is quite unacceptable. For designers whose work has been stolen, it should be possible to seek recourse in law.

Our research study found, not surprisingly, that the bigger and well-established fashion companies, in our case Vivienne Westwood and Margaret Howell, were able to deal quickly and effectively with design theft.²¹ The head of legal counsel for Vivienne Westwood at the Milan headquarters of the company described the very meticulous process which Westwood had developed from the early years of her career. Every drawing, he told us, is photographed and filed, and every item in each collection is likewise photographed and added to her extensive archive. The company pursued infringements aggressively. However, they also took into account Westwood's wider influence on other work produced in the whole fashion field. Westwood's legal team adjudicated the cases. One case in particular clarified these procedures. This involved what was described as a blatant copy by a well-known high street fast fashion company of Westwood's famous 'pirate boots'. They date back to the earlier

period of Westwood's work. A photograph of the original boots alongside a photograph of the copies (paying particular attention to a strap detail) was sent together with a lawyer's letter requesting redress of this infringement. An out-of-court settlement was quickly secured, and the item withdrawn from stock.

This case was exemplary in many ways. We were told that often vague copying is tolerated only to be followed by a tough approach on key items. This was particularly true for those styles that exemplified brand identity. Staff at the company are encouraged to keep an eye open at all times for items in stores or shown in magazines which seemed similar to Westwood's work. The above case relied on loyal staff to report the similarity. The use of social media also permits a 'name and shame' mechanism and threat of loss of reputation when an obvious case is exposed. It seems to be the case that in recent years large companies and small independent designers alike rely on social media, loyal customers, and friends to report items which have been copied.

Margaret Howell's reputation rests partly on very high quality linen-wear in classical cuts for both men and women. Although not strictly speaking theft of ideas or of intellectual property, the following case reported to us by the designer showed how unreasonable reference to the high brand value of her label could be construed as akin to infringement.

'A well-known High Street brand was quoted as saying they use the same linen supplier as Margaret Howell but produced the shirt for nearly half the price. This was misleading and resulted in a legal letter without further action and the High Street retailer never made the claim again'.

21. Although our primary focus in this study has been on young designers or entrance level graduates, we were fortunate to be able to interview legal counsel for Vivienne Westwood in Milan and Margaret Howell and her business partner at their headquarters in London.

**'I would feel quite privileged
if my work got copied...
I'll have other ideas!'**

Carlo Volpi

Knitwear is one of the areas where most of the respondents in Berlin, London and Milan reported on their work being copied. For example, Sine Fiennes produces highest quality cashmere tops, cardigans, wrap rounds and scarves. She has become resigned to the fact that her work is bound to be copied for the reason that she sources the most unusual colour yarns. She often then sees that it is the colour as well as the designs, which are copied for cheaper versions in the windows of leading retailers who pride themselves on producing cashmere jumpers and cardigans at lower costs. She states: 'I wasn't able to do anything when I saw what looked very much like my work in the shop window of XX. It happens all the time, but of course they cannot compete with the actual quality of the designed work'. Sine has developed a unique way of creating seamless knitwear and has taken steps as best she can to protect this technique, to the extent that it remains her 'trade secret'. She commented that especially for small producers like herself legal services needed to be more widely available and made less expensive. Rose Sinclair, also a knitwear designer, described seeing versions of her work in mainstream retailers, noting: 'It just happens all the time and you have to find ways of dealing with it... I keep copies of all my knitted swatches and drawings of all work, it is all dated'. Kenneth MacKenzie founder of the label 6876 is also protective of his trademark. It is clearly displayed on all items in his collections. He, unlike many small designers, has made the time available to document and archive every garment that he produces. The drawings and photographs as well as the patterns are stored in box files in his studio. For MacKenzie this is also a way of ensuring he has the history of his work easily available for press enquiries but also for the book project he will embark on in the near future.



Rose Sinclair
London

In summary, there is a similar thread running through respondents' attitude to IP and copyright in both cities so far. Professional conduct acknowledges the reality of some degree of copying in terms of being influenced or inspired by the work of others. This is confirmed through education and training where designers are taught to expect that they will be copied and that they must have confidence in their ability to have a constant stream of new ideas to withstand this likelihood. It can even be the case that the situation of having more or less invented a look or style for the season is then widely taken up by becoming an item of fast fashion. However, this can actually benefit the designer if she/he is credited in the press for being the person who created the original garment.

'On copying? I would only say that fashion is a moving thing – if it's being copied, it's already over. I don't worry about it at all, though of course I don't think it's right'.

Basso and Brooke



Kenneth MacKenzie
6876
London

THE LABEL AND THE WORK ITSELF

The participants we interviewed were smaller in number than originally planned, slightly older, more culturally diverse (a good thing) and predominantly female.²² We outlined in previous paragraphs why our ideal contributor group of young prize winners were almost impossible to reach. In effect, only four such winners were able to be part of our study with the timeframe we set. Consequently, can see the value of site-specific research. Had we rather defined our research aims in terms of reaching respondents within two specific locations in London e.g. CFE and Cockpit Arts, it may be that 'institutional ethnographies' would have provided the larger number of respondents we sought (Born 2010). Given the dispersed locations of our contributors, we were faced with the challenges of identifying key defining features of their creative practice. What emerged most clearly was a dual strategy, to build a strong brand identity and one which was absolutely distinctive. We listened closely to the stories we were told and saw that in many ways the narrative was the de facto business plan. This can also be seen as a kind of creative solution to a commercial dilemma. Margaret Howell in the interview said 'The key idea has been to realise what I could do very well and stick to this using it as the basis for the brand identity'. As she continued, 'Since almost the beginning I have worked in partnership in Japan with the same company who also part owns the label *Margaret Howell*'... success in Japan in turn has financed the growth of our European distribution'.

The unique way of working was also a key part of the brand identity. As previously stated, the knitwear designer Sine Fiennes has developed a unique way of creating seamless cashmere jumpers and cardigans. These are perfectly assembled and knitted in the most unusual colours and are sourced from personal contacts. As a consequence, she was offered a single contract with an up-market London store for which she has worked over the years as a sole supplier. Her financial model has been based on how many she could make each week. The overheads paid for one or two freelancers to come in and help on a good rate per hour. Equipment and raw materials, the monthly rent for her studio at the Cockpit were also covered. This contract continues

and she is paid per piece and she estimates that the store doubles or triples the cost of the items for their customers. Nonetheless, this business model has worked well for her and she could fit the work in with her responsibilities as a parent.

From 1990-1995 Kenneth MacKenzie had worked for the successful menswear label *Duffer of St George*. He then set up his own design company named 6876²³ in 1995. Perceiving too much nostalgia in menswear, he pursued a more specifically 'modernist' image, 'forward looking in terms of fabric and manufacturing and designs'. Swerving away from overt commercialism, the brand image continues to look to youth cultures for what they can bring to present-day fashion sensibility. His approach to work is craftsman-like with a strong business acumen. The ranges (sweatshirt, shirts, jackets, coats) are finely tuned to what can be manufactured in proximity to London. There is a 'meticulous attention to detail', clean sharp cuts, and a strong and distinctive colour palette. The work combines functionality with a relaxed styling, using the highest quality Italian fabrics, and also using the finely woven British cotton fabric Ventile. MacKenzie has, over the years, worked with various partners including Kangol and the Japanese designer Kazuki Kuraishi. The clothes and the brand as a whole are evocative, they point to black and white documentary films, Northern Soul, and Godard's cinema of the late 60's. The tone is low key, youth culture in an art direction, and never too loud.

Nevertheless the expectations of the British Fashion Council tend to be pitched towards younger designers such as Teija Eilola, Carlo Volpi and Bruno Basso and Chris Brooke. The latter work together as design partnership *Basso and Brooke*. Teija went to work in the industry, including the High Street label Ted Baker after the RCA and this provided her not only with business skills, but also a wealth of contacts as well as valuable opportunities for consultancy or freelance work. As previously mentioned, Teija was also helped through the support she won from Fashion Fringe which included intensive mentoring. *Basso and Brooke* gained a lot of publicity with their earliest pioneering collections in digital design and print.

22. Of our 10, two black British women, 4 men, 2 women of non-UK nationality, 2 men of non UK nationality, 3 older than the age of 40.

23. 1968 in Paris, 1976 punk in the UK.



Basso and Brooke
London

This aroused the interest of the well-known Italian powerhouse *Aeffe* group who offered them an exclusive licensing agreement for manufacture and distribution of their womenswear. The business support and experience this agreement offered helped them to develop and fund their own label a few years later. Once established as an independent label they attracted further attention from other big brands interested in their menswear digital prints which have wild bursts of colour and elaborate patterning.

Carlo Volpi had his sculptural knitwear celebrated in Italian *Vogue* soon after graduation. The regular coverage he has had in *Vogue* since then brought in many valuable contracts including work with *Pitti Filati* in Florence. Now in his third collection Volpi also sells his pieces through two online platforms.

His menswear is indeed immediately noticeable; combining knits in electric colours with unorthodox shapes like bubbles or bouquets of flowers. The body of the wearer is almost totally taken over by these strange horticultural-looking garments.

From these examples, we can see that a strong narrative along with a highly distinctive genre of work seems to define professional practice. This not only gets the designers noticed but also gets them seen as highly creative and forward-looking. In addition one collection already looks forward to the next. The designer has to convey the idea that there is a wealth of ideas upon which he or she can draw. As with everyone we interviewed in London, these designer's stories established a strong brand and more specifically a unique way of working.

LONDON ANALYSIS

Despite the above stories of recognition and relative success, the surprising yet rational strategy for most talented young fashion designers now leaving art school, is to find a job in one of the hundreds of London-based fashion companies, which fill the middle-market range of fashionable clothing. These are now all led by a high design content (*Ted Baker, Hobbs, Cos, Reiss, Whistles, Jigsaw* etc). Why had we not anticipated this from the start? Why did we assume that start-ups and small independent labels still marked out the creative ideal for young graduates? It transpires that start-ups in effect mean prizewinners who will one way or another find financial support from the major luxury brands, directly or indirectly, the best-known example of the moment being JW Anderson. But as start-ups for a wider cross section of the designer community are priced out of the market, there has been a more grounded solution to the question of how to maintain one's creative talent. This involves plugging into the high-street brands all of which now rely on much higher levels of design input than was the case in the past. Christine Checinska explained this with clarity.

'I left art school with the offer of a place on the MA at CSTMs, but I wanted to earn money so I took a job in the Burton Group (including Topshop). Right from the start we were given a free range, there was a large design team and in many ways it was like being back at art school but we also learnt a lot more about the business. We were encouraged to use our imaginations and show our work, we did our research, we went to look at exhibitions and all the things you do while still studying'.

Christine Checinska

Christine had the same kind of experience even in the mid-market *Laura Ashley* where she worked before being taken on by *Margaret Howell*. She worked as a senior designer alongside Howell accompanying her on study trips and was fully involved in all aspects of the runway collections. Christine was eventually made redundant but she then took the opportunity to study for an MA. At the same time she worked freelance for *Anne Tyrell Designs*, which was another small company employing dozens of UK trained designers (now folded). They produced wholesale collections to Japanese and other non-UK companies. Here too Christine worked in a highly creative environment, meanwhile going on to complete her PhD at Goldsmiths in the 1950s history of Jamaican migrant men's fashion and style.

In summary, the relatively recent development in fashion design employment pathways in London is something that dates back to the early 2000s. Christine pointed to the success of the *Cos* label which was owned and overseen by the global high street retailer of fast fashion *H&M*.

'Cos have employed just about all the talent that leaves the RCA, they are given a free hand, and you can see the results, they produce beautiful designed items for working women with high quality textiles, and they are not expensive'.

Over the last 20 years, graduate designers in London have created their own professional networks. This encompasses those working with their own labels alongside those working full time for mainstream labels from *Fred Perry* to *Cos*. These networks often date back to university days, and they also perform the function of providing contacts and recommendations for work when this need arises. This often happens by word of mouth. Interestingly this kind of support system resists the hierarchy and elitism of the prize system and the winner takes all ethos that was discussed earlier. There is a more pragmatic recognition of the working conditions across the industry and the real burdens on those who go it alone, working long unsociable hours while holding down multiple jobs in order to fund their 'own label'.

The reason why London and the British Fashion Council can afford to be complacent in regard to government creative industry policy is that there are presumed to be jobs in the city for young graduates. This observation needs unpacking. There is an unbalanced tilt towards London where almost all the major high street retailers have their design studios and headquarters. This only intensifies the London-centric nature of the field making it unlikely that companies, even with incentives from government, would re-locate to other parts of the UK and thus enhance employment prospects outside London and the South East. Some of the best design schools are dotted all over the Scotland as well as the UK, ie Glasgow, Dundee, Nottingham, and Newcastle. However, the job opportunities are almost wholly in London and the South East. This uneven effect cries out for more attention among policy-makers and leading figures in the world of high street retail which is where the power is really concentrated.

We could also ask what kind of design jobs are these? How do careers develop in this sector? How do designers develop and extend their skills in what may be deemed a less creatively driven environment? If so many graduates find work in the design studios of larger high street brands, it would seem important to better understand the occupational cultures inside these companies. It would be important to know more about how designers, working in this sector, define their own roles. It may be wrong to assume that personal creativity requires the space of the 'own label' company, especially when so many designers who achieve this ideal must spend so much of their time working in the exact same capacity as those who do not have their own labels and simply choose to work instead for a company like Cos.

The difference can be summed up as follows. At this moment in London, 'own label' designers almost inevitably must have a freelance contract with a major brand to keep their own work afloat. They must also commit themselves to working night and day more or less seven days a week. Their counterparts may have jettisoned the idea of their own studio, company or label, and the major success, which might follow, but they have a strong professional identity. They also have relative job security within a notoriously volatile industry, and they partake in the same wider cultural and creative activities as their own label colleagues. This reality of working lives in London perhaps forces a shift away from the romanticised idea of being an independent designer towards an industry perspective. If so few can go it alone, then there is a flattening of hierarchies, meaning that designers themselves understand the professional pressures and see the opportunity to work for Topshop or Asos as something that will extend their creativity. This gives them a fuller understanding of the fashion sector as a whole. Here we see a kind of realism and maturity becoming embedded.

CHAPTER FOUR

MILAN FINDINGS

‘I have invested everything for Matthan Gori... I haven’t slept at night for Matthan Gori. I love Matthan Gori’.

‘This is creative, to create something out of nothing. My creation is Matthan Gori, not a single dress’.

Matthan Gori

‘I have a registered trademark, so potentially I can sue whoever copies me. But I think to be copied is a real success! For instance, I have seen these bags that are very similar to mine, but I don’t mind, mine are much more beautiful! Plus, I constantly copy! I take inspiration from everything and then I mix and match!’

BeConvertible

SUBSIDY AND SPACE

In Italy, there is little in the way of organised creative economy policy and discourse conducted at a national level. However since the Euro-zone crisis of 2008, and more recently with the election of the Renzi government, we find something of a kick-start atmosphere. Indeed our three years of investigation reveal significant changes in the landscape of Italian fashion at every level. During the early stages of the research we were faced with difficulties in gaining access and found the door was closed to the big fashion companies whose headquarters are in Milan. This exclusive culture pervades the high end of the industry. Only journalists from magazines like *Vogue* and *The New Yorker* are able to arrange interviews and get inside the workshops and premises (D'Ovidio and Pradel 2014). Consequently, we adjusted the plan to search out and investigate the scatter of micro-enterprises that were beginning to appear and in the light of the dramatically high rates of unemployment among art and design graduates. There were also new opportunities available with e-commerce platforms such as etsy.com. This chasm between exclusive high-end fashion and bottom-up experimentation sums up the tensions that define the emerging framework for creative economy discourse in Italy. Indeed it is really only in the last few years that a more coherent approach to cultural industry policy has developed. These initiatives reflect the landscape of previous industrial and manufacturing policies in Italy insofar as they are defined by a strongly regional dynamic (see for example Albanese et al 2014). Italy remains a country of 'economic districts'. (Estimated at 138 in number and employing 1.5m.) Albanese et al refer to a range of recent papers including *ReStart, Italia*, *Mind to Bridge Survey*, and *L'Italia che verra* (Albanese et al 2014, Mind to Bridge 2012, Unioncamere Symbola 2012). However although there are academic studies, there seems to have been little attention paid to key cities like Milan, Florence and Rome (D'Ovidio and Pradel 2013). Overwhelmingly the starting point for the reports is the tradition of Italian craft and manufacturing as activities, which go hand-in-hand with the role of design. This is understood as integrated into the

idea of the high-skill workshop although this is an ageing and heavily male-dominated space. It is in this context that we came across the term 'creative artisan'. To add a further anomaly, in the one widely available report titled *I am Culture (Io Sono Cultura 2013)* almost all sectors of the creative economy are mentioned apart from fashion and textiles. We assume that this is because fashion counts more as a major manufacturing sector rather than a culture industry. There is little commentary coming out of the universities either.²⁴ It is only relatively recently that the universities and the departments of design are seen to play a role in the sector as a whole. Finally, there is no reference to any set of policies aimed at improving the situation of women creative workers, or of women who choose to become self-employed. Nor do we find mention of keywords more familiar across most EU cultural policy, such as equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming, social inclusion, tackling unemployment and so on.

What attention there is, has been prompted by the scale and concentration of global competition. This has threatened, and in many cases, destroyed a good deal of the traditional network of manufacturing expertise in clothing, fashion, textiles, footwear and leather goods, Hadjimichalis has described this as the 'end of the Third Italy' (Hadjimichalis 2006).²⁵ In the past these industries have been at the heart of a wide geographical spread in the Italian economy, what Santagata has referred to as the 'local concentration of cultural production' in specialist 'industrial districts' (Santagata 2009, quoted by Albanese et al 2014). Shoes for example are mainly produced in the Treviso and Marche regions, fashion in Prato, leather workshops in Tuscany, tailoring in Naples and so on. Space per se is understood in regional terms as economic geography. The various municipalities and their business and development programmes take a leading role in carving out distinctive policies with specific agendas. Some academics suggest that the creative economy in Italy is therefore a matter of 'localisation'. We note for example, recently, various regional bodies coming together with municipal government, NGOs, think tanks and local universities, along with European Social Funds,

24. Exceptions would be Milan University, (see the work of Adam Arvidsson, and Marina D'Ovidio, and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan (see the work of Laura Bovone).

25. Usually taken to refer to the distinctive and pioneering path to post-Fordism undertaken by Italian companies such as Benetton, and relying on a core of manufacturing technology and a periphery throughout the industrial district of micro-producers and home-workers.

**‘I am learning how to become a business woman,
an entrepreneur and its fun, and the more I make money
from my creations, the more I gain self confidence’.**

Camilla Vinciguerra, BeConvertible

working together on specific creative economy topics relevant to the region (Santagata 2009). This is a fragmented process but one nevertheless one which is gathering momentum under a wider recognition of the need for ‘innovation’ of a type which reflects the scattered nature of creative work. This is in smaller towns and rural areas as well as the larger cities like Milan. In this respect we draw attention to our current *Area Progetti* project which is one of the few to focus on improving employment and self-employment prospects for women and young people in the creative economy in the Veneto Region. This new investigation, running from 2015 to 2018, looks specifically to the UK for insight on creative industry policy and to Sweden for policies on ‘gendered social innovation’ (see Lindberg 2016 and www.areaprogetti.com)

Most recent reports that exist point to closures and decline as manufacturers look to countries that offer cheap labour. It is with this in mind that the more generic idea of culture, laden with heavily Italian connotations of heritage, tradition and fine arts, emerges as a possible driver for economic regeneration. This idea now resounds across the Italian political sphere and is noted also elsewhere, for example in the *Financial Times* and in the online businessoffashion.com. Thus there is a sudden upsurge of activity, which seeks ways of cross-fertilising different areas of creative entrepreneurship while retaining the *Made in Italy* stamp of heritage, craft and artisanship for the new media age of start-ups, crowd funding and the role of ‘business angels’. Into this mix, gastro-tourism and the museum sector are also seen as central. One survey undertaken by a confederation of business groups and local authorities found that the sprinkling of start-ups that existed had sought initial funding almost exclusively from family

and friends (Mind the Bridge 2012). The biggest disincentive to micro-enterprises is the requirement in Italian law to pay tax on transactions prior to payment being received. We can only surmise that this pushes many young people, of the type we interviewed, into the realm of the shadow economy.

Self-organised initiatives have come to the attention of a handful of academics who have observed the way in which widespread casualisation and redundancies in the fashion industry have come about. This has also happened in the advertising agencies whose budgets were cut following the financial crisis. This has resulted in new types of networked activities across both sectors often taking place in under-used or derelict spaces such as the Isola della Moda in Milan (Arvidsson et al 2010, D’Ovidio and Pradel 2014). In many circumstances this scale of activity has intersected with the upsurge of political awareness among young people. To an extent this dates back to 2000 Euro-Mayday. A small number of radicals had been protesting against unemployment and the spread of precarious jobs. This kind of activism gathered much greater momentum after 2007 (Fantone 2009). However we cannot draw any hard and fast connection between our observations and interviews in Milan and the rise of precarity politics. Fashion is a field, which tends to steer away from overt radicalism. There are good examples of fashion activity now thoroughly integrated into new radical social movements. These include the Milan maker space titled WeMake led by Zoe Romano and Constantino BonGiorno, and the ‘alternative quarters’ at Isola della Moda in Milan, which D’Ovidio and Pradel have documented (2013). Nevertheless the initiatives that we have investigated tend to be small groups of young people as well as individuals working

from home or in a more makeshift space. They produce work for either online sales through Etsy.com or for local markets and customers. This emerges through friendship networks. Many of these designers will have strong views about the problems in the existing fashion scene in Italy, but by and large they are not self-defined radicals. Their activities are quite separate from the more organised undertakings of radicalised fashion producers hoping to sell 'critical fashion products'.

Despite this difference D'Ovidio and Pradel in their discussion describe the attempts on the part of young designers to combine 'quality and sustainability and community' in their practice. They make a number of important points, which converge with our own research findings. Many fashion start-ups take the chance to go it alone because of the poor working conditions, low pay and extensive casualisation within orbit of the large, well-known Milan companies. But despite the sociality of the co-working space at the *Isola della Moda* the designers are constantly living on the 'edge of going under'. They rely on parents for a home, subsistence and in some cases for free childcare. The authors refer to this as 'familistic solidarity'. D'Ovidio and Pradel bewail the total 'lack of city initiatives' to really extend and develop these 'bottom up' ventures. The fashion industry doesn't seem to be an asset for the city as a whole. Overall, it is the idea of the typically male-dominated firm or the small family-owned firm, which has underpinned public policy thinking in

Italy. This has included the trade unions as well as the employers, with scant attention to informal labour, to young people and to women who often have been working unpaid in the family enterprise. There has been a specific lack of attention to both gender and generational dynamics and instead a reliance on tradition and high skill combined with a degree of complacency.

If this has now changed it is also at a point in time when that landscape of small firms, the backbone of the so-called Third Italy, has almost disintegrated, as Hadjimichalis (2005) discusses at length. Young Italian people do not want to do the mundane routine labour of their parents in these geographically scattered fashion and textile workshops. They express a strong preference to work in the image industries of fashion, as models or designers, and they want to live in the city and become part of the urban creative economy (Arvidsson et al 2010). This then forms the backdrop for our investigations, a skeletal support system typically provided by family and friends, a strong and instinctive skill base, knowledge of textiles and small-scale production. This is coupled with an ability to plug into social networks alongside an extensive use of social media. However in the absence of the more typical features of support, including social enterprise programmes, business training, active job creation schemes, welfare to work provision etc. our interviews and studio visits take a more personal and subjective character.

'We applied for so many jobs and got so many rejections. We were both depressed.'

'To start Flatwig we invested 500 Euro, very low budget!'

Flatwig

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND COPYRIGHT

Despite all the other differences in circumstances, designers in Milan similarly expressed worries about theft of ideas and copying. This view reflected exactly those in London and Berlin, with the proviso that here there was even less of a sense of legal awareness or the possibility of taking action against infringement. Once again we were reminded of the chasm that exists in Italy between the major companies with their extensive legal departments, and the informal start up activities on the ground. None of these young people had benefited from basic business training in any format. There was a sense in which the sheer effort to establish a small business meant that fear of being copied is just one of many things to consider. What concerned them most was cash flow, sales and the possibility of developing a brand. This idea of brand awareness took precedence in all the interviews as the main organisational principle for the micro-enterprises and a possible way of protecting IP. The priority was seen to lie in brand development as a wider process going well beyond the drawing board. One designer from the label Matthan Gori put this clearly,

‘My creation is the brand, not the single dress. Sometimes you go to a fair and see a dress that looks like yours. But how can you say that they have copied?’ ...‘Its your cultural background that makes up your style’. It’s really annoying but there is not much you can do about it. The difference is not in what or how you produce, but in the way you communicate it’.

Matthan Gori

‘Well there’s a difference between copying like getting inspired, or copying in the sense that you do something that looks exactly like something else without elaborating it! The first way of copying is endemic in the fashion industry.... The second is annoying, but maybe unavoidable?’

BeConvertible

Stronger evidence for the need for protection was present in only one of our respondents, the bag maker and founder of *BeConvertible*. Camilla Vinciguerra. Her mother had given her studio space after she had proved herself as capable of developing her business in leather goods. Coming from a family of artists (with a sister making shoes) she knew how to trademark her work, and how to sue if she found blatant copying. However, at the same time Vinciguerra, in both a positive and professional way, confessed to copying herself as part of the creative process. She thus embodies in these two or three sentences exactly the paradox of fashion IP. Fashion relies on history and past works for inspiration and even some degree of copying although blatant theft of ideas cannot be condoned. One other Italian designer from Flatwig said ‘The way we do things is easy and we don’t consider it a secret. The difference is not in what and how you produce but in the way you communicate it, in the story telling’.

THE LABEL AND THE WORK ITSELF

In the Milan interviews, in contrast with London and Berlin, we found a different and more intense atmosphere surrounding the activities of those we interviewed. The respondents expressed themselves often in highly emotive terms. One young designer said: 'My brand is about emotion, and I don't want to waste that by playing marketing games'. The key thing, they said, was to be working, to have some status, and self-respect and to emerge out of the cloud of unemployment and of being turned down for jobs. In addition it was the sociality of working as against the isolation of staying at home, which was also important to them. There was a real sense of uplift and enthusiasm on discovering this as a possible pathway to a working life and career when so many doors seem to remain shut. Most of the interviewees stress the escape from being in a state of depression to suddenly feeling excited about what they are doing. In all the interviews, we found a strong emphasis on the emotional toll of being rejected from so many job applications. The sheer euphoria

of being able to 'do something' and to feel valued within the creative world has to be seen in this light. 'Own label' work is seen as an intimate part of personal identity. Matthan of Matthan Gori said 'I was doing an internship in my last year at the Politecnico and there were many lay-offs, I used to see employees just praying to not lose their jobs. Then I thought, if I need to pray, then I want to pray for my own job, not someone else's.'

The idea of a start-up solves these problems both personally and socially as now one is, once again, a 'somebody'. Thus self-entrepreneurship is a personal and practical solution to a structural labour market situation. Two young women had studied architecture and then found their way into making and selling fashion jewellery pieces. One said 'We were both depressed. Now we are learning how to be entrepreneurs. But the point is we are happy'. Another young designer with a PhD in marketing could only find call centre jobs, so she launched on Etsy.com by making a few items with a friend and herself modelling what she made for the



Elochka
Milan



Ela Siromascenko
Milan

website images. She then started to study fashion design using online courses and YouTube videos: 'And so here I am! I just design and sew in my room. I do everything myself and this is it'. Another set of design partners who made T-shirts using a specialist fibre summed up this sense of relief and achievement in adverse economic circumstances. One said 'Every day we wake up and ask ourselves what are we doing? But in the end we know it is the passion ... doing something that is ours'. This sense of happiness and satisfaction is rooted in the feeling of expressing the self, and do not necessarily relate to economic success. In fact, most of the interviewees were currently facing financial difficulties and could not foresee how long they would stay in the business. A duo of female designers admitted: 'As a start-up we don't have any benefits... we have to do a budget plan each week!'. A woman who left a promising career in a big firm to set up her own fashion brand remarked: 'The main obstacle is to find a market... a continuity... shops get big brands and then they buy only a few items from independents...'. Yet, the sense of personal fulfilment derived from running one's own company seems to compensate for the financial difficulties and the long working hours. One interviewee explained: 'I work long hours, sometimes even until midnight, and I don't even realise it, I am not tired, because I work for myself. I am free and autonomous'.

Without belonging to any organised radical political movement, and without having any experience of the vocabulary of social enterprise, nevertheless many of the young fashion designers had the idea that by running their own company in a distinctive way, they could have a positive impact on society. Most interviewees were keen to express their ethical values through their business. They demonstrated a sense of dissatisfaction with the way the fashion industry works and wanted to 'do things differently'. A woman in her early thirties who designs knitwear and accessories claimed: 'I try to do fashion in another way. In the industry nowadays the point is to design collections that then become obsolete after a season... This cannot be sustainable!'. Sustainability is an important value for the new generation of fashion designers.

As the bag designer Camilla Vinciguerra also said:

'I think there is a new tendency in the culture of fashion now, the whole idea of fast fashion has become nonsense nowadays... I think things are changing, I feel part of bigger movements of like-minded independent fashion designers'.

Camilla Vinciguerra

Overall, interviewees showed a particular interest in ethical issues regarding production, distribution and consumption in fashion. They saw their entrepreneurial role as an opportunity to do things in a way that reflect these values.

We found that there was a strong, seemingly instinctive, entrepreneurial competence and talent for business among the respondents. Despite having little or no coaching on the importance of the business plan, these young people seemed to emerge as designers with a strong sense of confidence in business, especially an understanding of the brand as the asset. The brand is more than just about a collection, it is something into which several different kinds of items, products and collections of clothes could be incorporated. This was expressed clearly by the Flatwig founders who said

'The point is we won't always make jewellery, I mean we are not jewellery designers... Flatwig is meant to be a brand that will propose various types of product but with an aesthetic consistency. The idea is in the concept of the brand... We are a design brand, not a fashion brand; we don't want to follow the fashion trend but to create our own 'world'. Fashion is seasonal, we don't want to be seasonal, ideally we would like to be ever-green!...we are learning how to be entrepreneurs, we think we are doing well so far!'

And Matthan of Matthan Gori echoed this:
'I feel more of an entrepreneur than a designer or a stylist. I prefer...making decisions for the brand, thinking how to hit a new market'.
He continued:

'My strength is that I have a one-to-one relationship with all my costumers. In my on-line store you can choose a model, and then we discuss together the colour, the fabric, the details... In other words, there is a process of co-design involved. Customer care is at the basis of my business. I can even spend fifteen days discussing via email with a costumer before actually making and selling the dress. I can even send samples of fabrics to let them choose between a few options.'

Thus entrepreneurship, brand awareness and the importance of having a personal narrative, or a flair for storytelling are again uppermost.



BeConvertible
Milan

'Everything I do is made in Italy, everything is handmade. The buttons are handmade, the leather is from Tuscany, the fabrics of the handlers are unique, I source them from everywhere in the world. Some are from India, or Turkey, some from the UK...'

BeConvertible

MILAN ANALYSIS

A compelling picture emerges. There is evidence of 'gendered social innovation' across these various activities we have recorded (Lindberg 2016). The most noted factor amongst these contributors is the determination to escape the monotony and lack of status that unemployment carries, and to do this through start-up or self-entrepreneurship with very little if anything in the way of capital investment. This is achieved through a re-working of the heritage and traditional aspects of the Italian high-skill approach to fashion, textiles, leather goods and other localised forms of production, with women (and in this case one gay male couple) prominent and self-identifying strongly as designer-entrepreneurs. The innovatory element comprises the attempts to transform fashion by means of micro-enterprise and the way in which they work and the values they espouse. Added to this is the ability to make use of the new opportunities for selling these goods by means of the e-commerce platforms. Social commitment and innovation seem to emerge spontaneously, including a concern with environmentalism and sustainability. In addition, there is an aim to make better working conditions something visible and valuable in the field of fashion. We could surmise that the ease with which an entrepreneurial identity was taken up was something imbued or inherited. Certain values had been handed down through generations, but now there was an over-turning of the old patriarchal order of the workshop with women claiming their place. We find this in the words of Camilla: 'For us it is a family philosophy, my sister makes shoes, with the same values'. Financial hardship compounded by the need in many cases to remain reliant on the parental home, meant that the start-up culture for young fashion designers in Milan comprised a hand to mouth economy, something, which doubtless accounted for the emotional language used by the interviewees.

Still these activities suggested a determination to succeed. Without the, albeit competitive, pathways by now quite long established in London and the UK and without the embedded welfare-to-work programmes which exist in Berlin, it seems these young women, tapped into something else, a regional and local set of cultural influences of craft and skill which could be translated into a kind of social innovation fashion scene, comprising of female-led creative artisanship.

However our argument about Italy and Milan cannot just rest on the enormous efforts to gain self respect by getting out of unemployment and into self-employment as a kind of Herculean task, in itself worthy of support. We need to take note of the psychological states of anxiety, which could also be perceived, the absolute uncertainty that confronted the young women on a daily basis. Fear and uncertainty are endemic for those subjects caught up in the particularly Italian shift from the old order of protected work to the totally unprotected labour markets of the last decade. This is a transition clearly evoked by Mole in her recent study of the chronic anxiety and states of mental ill-health found among precarious workers in Padua, and the quite vicious ill treatment (mobbing or bullying) they are subjected to as casual, freelance or temporary workers (Mole 2010). The emotional tone we referred to as a characteristic of the CREATE interviews can be understood as a kind of upbeat and enthusiastic performative affect, nuanced to the more normative atmosphere of the fashion world, while at the same time elated by the freedom of being self-employed and thus not subject to the vacillations and expectations of over-work of those on temporary contracts. Pride too plays a role across all of the interviews. There is interplay between the anxiety of earning enough money to keep going and pay the overheads, and a professional self-confidence about having found a role within the Italian fashion economy.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The CREATe research has shown that the strategies for self-employment in fashion design, and the establishment of micro-enterprises in both Berlin and Milan have indeed reflected wider social anxieties about unemployment in the light of the euro-crisis of 2008 . In many respects they are the products of the absence of regular full-time jobs for graduates in both cities. The rise of self-employment becomes a practical solution to a range of structural impediments to existing labour markets. We flag up this dimension as characteristic of young creative people's understanding of the new world of work. Nothing is fixed in today's fashion economy.

Self-employment and setting up a micro-enterprise play a number of important roles.

- Giving status and meaning to the lives of the start-uppers
- Asserting an active presence in the professional world of design
- Keeping contacts and networks alive
- Keeping an eye open for new opportunities.
- Allowing young designers to develop use of new social media and e-commerce platforms.

In Berlin the social commitment to city, neighbourhood and to creating a new kind of fashion economy has produced a more embedded and distinctive fashion identity. While not without its critics, this fashion activity has been supported by the Senate, with a social democratic agenda for job creation, for more than a decade. The key impediment here however is, as the consultant and academic Oliver MacConnell so starkly puts, the indifference of the successful but dull and complacent High Street retailers who could do so much to support a more prominent place for German fashion internationally by working with the talented designers in Berlin who in comparison with their UK counterparts feel isolated from the possibilities of wider success.

In Milan although there is no equivalent of subsidised provision, the possibility of setting up as a micro-enterprise has significantly altered the outlook and psychological state of mind of design graduates otherwise facing unemployment. The wider world of professional fashion in Milan and elsewhere in Italy takes the form of an industrial and post-industrial backdrop. This functions as a resource for the reason it has been at the heart of the Italian post-war economic miracle, and this means that start-uppers can, to an extent, tap into a wealth of manufacturing knowledge as well as to the expertise from the artisan, leather and textiles workshops dotted around the entire country from the North to the South.

The small number of independent fashion designers in London all showed a high degree of professional confidence, even if there were worries about the cash-flow or the funding of the next collection. They seemed to have found ways to protect themselves against economic insecurity either through having quick access to freelance work or else having other options such as teaching. We came across no mention of words such as unemployment or poverty in the London interviews. And, in contrast to several in Berlin, no one had been part of any kind of welfare-to-work programme. But of course there are limits to the numbers of graduates who get these London-based jobs, and overall high levels of inequality prevail in that talented young people are not able to set up a micro-enterprise unless they have some access to private wealth or are one of a handful of prize winners who are able to attract support in the form of sponsorship and collaborations.

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APPENDICES

1. Contributors and Respondents: Berlin. Issever Bahri, Augustin Teboul, Esther Perbandt, Rita in Palma, Nadelwald, Stefan Dietzelt, Michael Sontag, NEMONA, Hien Le, Majaco, ...and special thanks to Agnes Zelei for additional research, and to fashion consultant Oliver MacConnell, Tanja Muelhans (Berlin Senate), Alexander Bretz, Marte Hentschel (fashion-sourcebook.com), German Fashion Council, Bastian Lange, Ares Kalandides, Maria Exner (zeit.online), Melissa Drier (WWD Germany), and Elke Ritt (British Council Berlin).
2. Contributors and respondents London: Basso and Brooke, Kenneth MacKenzie (6876), Teija Eilola, Carlo Volpi, Sine Fiennes, Rose Sinclair, Christine Checinska, Birdsong, Malcolm McGhee and, at the very start of the project, Susie Stone...and special thanks to designer Margaret Howell, and experts Sian Prime, Susan Scafidi, Wendy Malem and Dan Henderson (London College of Fashion), Prof. John Miles (University of Huddersfield). Thanks also to PhD researcher Tania Phipps-Rufus (Bristol University) who provided invaluable fashion legal input in the early stages.
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6. Please note all interviews took place between 2013 and 2016 in different venues and studios in London, Berlin and Milan as well as within Goldsmiths, University of London. We have also drawn on later comments, email exchanges and conversations as well as conference papers and talks contributed by our respondents. We have made every effort to implement corrections suggested by our participants throughout. We offer the warmest thanks to all of these who so willingly gave their time to the project.



Top: **Teija Eilola, Esther Perbandt and Marte Hentschel** at Glasgow School of Art.

Bottom left: **Prof Philip Schlesinger, Glasgow University, Prof Chris Breward, Edinburgh University, Prof Janis Jefferies, Goldsmiths University of London,** at Glasgow School of Art.

Bottom right: **Basso and Brooke with Dr Dan Strutt, Goldsmiths,** at Glasgow School of Art.



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