

## Publication Review

**Crafting Anatomies: Archives, Dialogues, Fabrications**, Katherine Townsend, Rhian Solomon, Amanda Briggs-Goode (eds) (2020), London: Bloomsbury, 344 pp., ISBN: 978-1-3500-7548-1, ePDF, £61.20

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With the human body as its central focus, *Crafting Anatomies* explores the ‘relationships makers have with the fabric of, and for the body’ (Townsend, Solomon and Briggs-Goode, 2020: 2). Following Glenn Adamson (2019), its broad, transdisciplinary definition of craft concerns the actions and concepts of practitioners who use the body ‘as a form of “material intelligence”’ (Townsend, Solomon and Briggs-Goode, 2020: 3). As such, and staying true to the original intentions of the 2015 exhibition at the Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, from which it developed, the book centres around creative practice.

The volume editors, who also curated the exhibition, each take the lead for the three parts in both the Introduction chapter and the organisation of the volume. It was interesting to read how the themes of the original exhibition, Material, Performance, and Identity, had evolved in line with the editors’ research interests to become: ‘The Archived Body’ (ed. Briggs-Goode, 27-110); ‘The Body in Dialogue’ (ed. Solomon, 111-188); and ‘The Fabricated Body’ (ed. Townsend, 189-286). In all three sections the body is a ‘catalyst for craft-based collaborative research’ and/or a direct ‘response to the corporeal’ (Townsend, Solomon and Briggs-Goode, 2020: 1).

In parts there is a blurring in the framing of fashion and dress/clothing with the terms sometimes used interchangeably and occasionally fashion is a synonym for clothes and other bodily adornment. While not necessarily problematic the decisions around this positioning, and the specific and selective framing of ‘materials (textiles) and product (fashion) design’ (Townsend, Solomon and Briggs-Goode, 2020: 1), could be more clearly unpacked and be given more context in broader literature from both fields. The concluding line of the Introduction suggests that ‘the comingling of fashion and textiles with craft, science, medicine, and art make it challenging to begin to ascertain where the materials of the self/body end, and dress/culture begins’ (Townsend, Solomon and Briggs-Goode, 2020: 20). This felt like a missed opportunity to contribute more to the discourse on the differences between these terms and even to propose more clear definitions, particularly in relation to craft practices in contemporary fashion and textile design. But this was my only real criticism of the volume content. Its diverse chapters each merit a level of discussion not permitted within the limitations of a review word count.

The book content will be of interest to a wide range of readers and will certainly be added to my Undergraduate unit reading lists. The volume, which acknowledges its focus on explanation and potential as much as conclusions, discusses a range of projects, emergent ideas, new technologies, and innovative processes. ‘Part 1: The Archived Body’, begins with a chapter by Briggs-Goode and Baxter (2020) on the use of lace archives and heritage in creative practice. Artist Cope, in conversation with Reponen, discusses how archives inspire her contemporary practice (Cope and Reponen, 2020). Sadkowska’s (2020) phenomenological research into memories and experiences of menswear, which aligns with my own research interests into memories of dress and contributes to men’s narratives of clothing memories and experiences of ageing, develops this further to show how primary

research with human participants might inform and inspire contemporary making. These opening chapters each offer strong examples about how to present the work of creative practitioners (including interview research) alongside theoretical ideas in both first and third person writing. The final chapter in this section, by Townsend, Kettley and Walker (2020), draws on a late 19th Century advertisement for an electronic corset as a foundation for the discussion of both contemporary and future wearable technologies and the role of archival sources more widely in contemporary design and production.

‘Part 2: The Body in Dialogue’ opens with a chapter by Cook and Pullin (2020) about a prototype service offering prosthetic hands to disabled people that puts fashion aspirations, the personal identity of the wearer, and personal choice at the heart of the creative process with a real sensitivity in its discussion of the issues and perspectives involved. Congdon, Di Silvio and Collet’s (2020) chapter presents an interview-style discussion on textile designer and embroiderer Congdon’s doctoral research, which resulted in a hybrid exploration across textiles and science through its collaboration with Di Silvio, a Professor of Tissue Engineering. Using case studies of zero-waste fashion, McQuillan and Rissanen (2020) ask readers to question value and scale in clothing production through a holistic ‘Mind-Body-Garment-Cloth’ approach. Tomasello and Almeida’s (2020) feminist analysis of design for the female body seeks to empower self-awareness, care, and knowledge of ‘intimate care and urogynaecology health’ (p. 186).

‘Part 3: The Fabricated Body’ focuses on future fabrication: Papastavrou, Ciokajlo and Solomon’s (2020) chapter proposes new design approaches, in the context of traditional design processes, that use biomaterials inspired by human skin for 3D-printed footwear; Winters (2020) takes a DIY approach that considers how sensory engagement can inform the creation of new ‘soft’, body-responsive materials and technological interfaces in textile design for fashion garments; Peacock’s (2020) chapter discusses his use of Speculative Design to explore how the internet and image-based communication impacts attitudes to genetically inherited characteristics, societal body ideals and in turn how we feel about our own bodies, with a focus on questioning the future potential of genetic engineering and how this might impact consumer culture. In the final chapter of Part 3, Torres’ (2020) post-productivist fashion practice expresses ideas of making and unmaking the body, including themes of materiality and immateriality, and representations of trace, memory and archive through ‘thought experiment’ films inspired by fashion, cultural and feminist theory (p. 300). The close of Torres’ chapter cites Barnard’s (2002: 11) explanation of the complexities of ‘rigid definitions’ in fashion communication, to highlight the challenges involved in attempting to define the ‘entangled’ terms of fashion, dress and clothing particularly for practitioners such as Torres whose work lies outside of tradition discipline boundaries (Torres, 2020: 282-283; see also Entwistle and Townsend, 2020: 298).

The closing discussion chapter, ‘On Fashioning Anatomy’ by Entwistle and Townsend (2020), offers a detailed summary and analysis of the preceding chapters. Alongside the Introduction, this chapter includes a comprehensive literature review of the volume’s contribution to research and practice around craft and the body. Entwistle and Townsend describe the volume as ‘surprising’ in terms of its focus on practice research (p. 289). I am not sure I agree; as someone who teaches contextual studies in dress, fashion and textiles at Undergraduate level, I would describe the focus as refreshing rather than surprising. There is some work left to be done on where and how the diversity, complexity and multiplicity of transdisciplinary work fits (or does not fit) into traditional disciplines and their accepted definitions, but the focus on ‘exploratory, open-ended and creative’ research (Entwistle and

Townsend, 2020: 308) in this volume offers a strong collaboration-focused summary of creative contemporary practice and debate around textiles, fashion and dress centred on the human body.

The only real negative to report resulted from a lack of access a physical review copy due to the Covid-19 restrictions and journal submission deadlines. As a result, this review was undertaken using the ePDF version. I should be used to digital academic reading after eighteen months of restrictions in the UK, but the challenges of detailed reading, cross-checking references and flicking between sections on an electronic device are worth mentioning. Whilst the search function, links to external URLs and digital headings are useful, for a book so clearly focused on a tactile relationship with the human body, it felt limiting not to experience it as corporeally intended: I missed being able to hold the book in my hand and flick through the pages. It was novel to encounter an academic volume that includes a significant number of full colour illustrations (over 100), but the image quality in the ePDF version was also not as sharp as it could be. Therefore, I would recommend this volume to a diverse range of readers, from academics, to students, and creative practitioners, but would advise that you try to get hold of a physical copy if you can.

The conclusion acknowledges that much of the content of this book is dependent on material developments and technologies that have come into fruition in the last decade, the results of which counter earlier perceptions of fashion and textiles as academic fields ‘associated with the “feminine” and “frivolous”’ (Entwistle and Townsend 2020: 299). I found it slightly frustrating that it was deemed necessary to include a line that harked back to out-of-date criticisms in the conclusion of a volume of such contemporary, diverse, transdisciplinary content. It made me question where I have done this in the past. Perhaps part of our role in further progressing fashion and textiles, and broader craft practices, is to stop apologising for the past positioning of our academic tradition by outsiders and to instead – as this book does so well – focus on a future where the true value and potential of the centrality of cloth and clothing in human life is recognised. As we look forward to the potential of returning to normal life after the Covid-19 pandemic, I am sure that *Crafting Anatomies* will become one of the germinal texts that precedes new ways of working and thinking about our disciplines.

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