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Dressmaking Rediscovered
When Design Meets Fashion in Helsinki

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Abstract:
Fashion design as a combined term conveys a different connotation than separate words of fashion and design. This is due to the complexity of the fashion system that also involves certain social prejudices, such as gendered practice and being shallow. This has set a gap for considering fashion design as a serious topic to study in comparison to other design subfields, such as architecture and industrial design. However, this paper argues by emphasizing the dressmaking aspect in designing fashion, prejudices can be overcome. Finland, especially its capital Helsinki, is an established place for design and an emerging place for fashion. The recent development of the place where the encounter of design and fashion took place provides a unique condition for exploring the contemporary dressmaking practice of Helsinki-based fashion designers. A number of aspects identified from the context are shared to demonstrate how fashion design can be revisited besides the image-making aspect.

Keywords: dressmaking, fashion design, design, Helsinki, Finnish fashion

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1. Fashion and Design vs. Fashion Design

Fashion design is more than a combined term of fashion and design. The complexity of ‘fashion’, the word placed before design, is what makes them very different. British design historian John Walker (1989, p. 90) acknowledged the connotation of fashion while introducing the theory of change in design history (see Barthes, 1985). Fashion design that has embraced this disruptive rhythm of change over centuries has a distinctive nature. Alongside this change aspect of fashion, the strong influence of fashion in people’s appearance and behavior attaches additional complexity while viewing fashion design (Walker, 1989). What locates fashion designers in a unique position compared to other types of designers is the fact that their practice is related to this unique and complex system of fashion encompassing both the symbolic and material worlds.

However, in the development and expansion of the design profession in both practice and academic discussion, fashion design is often understood without critical questioning on its authenticity or difference compared to other subfields of design, such as product design, design engineering and architecture. In particular, when the notion of ‘design thinking’ shed light on the design profession and contributed to the expansion of the field, the discussion often omitted the perspective of fashion design (Nixon and Blakley, 2012). At the same time, it has been observed that fashion research has lacked an interest in the ways in which fashion is actually designed (Finn, 2014). In fact, the discussion on a certain level of prejudice towards fashion is not novel for academics in the field (e.g. Lipovetsky, 1994; Kawamura, 2005).

As a serious endeavor, this paper aims to reexamine these issues in regards to fashion design. Throughout the context of Helsinki/Finland as both an established place for design and an emerging place for fashion, the key issues behind the neglect of fashion design in design and fashion research as well as how Helsinki-based fashion designers have addressed these issues are explored. For this inquiry, the conceptual approach was taken while reviewing the literature from design and fashion studies. This theoretical investigation mainly took place during ethnographic research on the local fashion scene conducted between 2015 and 2018 (see Chun, 2018). The main contributions of this paper are the identification of the gaps between design research and fashion research, and the initiation of discussions on “designing fashion” to overcome the issues. The introduction of the lesser-known context of Helsinki and Finland to fashion is an additional contribution to the field.

In the following, the gaps between design and fashion design due to social prejudices identified in the literature are introduced first. In order to overcome these gaps, the importance of revisiting the forgotten tradition of dressmaking for fashion designers is discussed. Then, the context of Finland and Helsinki and their relevance to
the topic; and a number of aspects that situate Helsinki-based fashion designers as well as their implications for the dressmaking practice are followed.

2. Social Prejudices on Fashion Design

This section explores the literature on design and fashion to identify the gaps between the neighboring yet distanced fields. It departs from the question: what prevented fashion design to be studied compared to other design subfields?

While referring to design thinking as an inspiration, Nathalie Nixon and Johanna Blakley (2012) proposed “fashion thinking” as a set of actionable strategies to apply in broader domains beyond the conventional fashion industry. They emphasized that insufficient efforts have been made to embrace the greater potential of studying the application of fashion design. Nixon and Blakley (2012) identified three reasons for the overshadowing of fashion design in design. The first reason emerges from its implicit association with a specific gender. In other words, the fact that fashion design is often considered to be the work of women or homosexual men influences the status of fashion designers. Citing Davis (1994) and Crane (1993), who studied fashion in a sociological perspective, Nixon and Blakley (2012) argued that this preconception regarding fashion discouraged people from considering it a “serious and important job”. This frivolity of fashion is a much discussed topic in sociological and historical studies (e.g. Lipovetsky, 1994; Kawamura, 2005; Vinken, 2005). Besides these contexts, this issue was also clearly observable from the development of British fashion design education (McRobbie, 1998).

Second, conflicting attitudes to fashion in society also have influenced the absence of fashion design in design research. Although fashion is an essential element of everyday life due to the daily practice of dressing for various social events (Buckley and Clark, 2017), it is not accepted as something worth talking about. Although several studies remarked on the importance of fashion as a “second skin” and how it embodies personality (e.g. Kaiser, 1996; Entwistle, 2015), extensive interest in fashion and discussions about it are perceived as superficial and “shallow” (see Lipovetsky, 1994, p. 3-4). Lastly, but more related to the academic discussion on design practice, Nixon and Blakley (2012) noted the existence of a hierarchy among subfields of design. Architecture tops the pyramid, while the fashion design profession appears only after industrial design, graphic design and digital design.

Regarding the last point, Julier (2013) noted the hierarchical relationship between architecture and design subfields. While presenting the development of the design profession, he introduced the notion of “design entryism”, which refers to the lack of normative systems in design that are “established by both the state and their own institutional arrangements—education and professional bodies” (Julier, 2013, p. 52). In other words, neither a specific training nor educational background is required for an individual to claim to be a professional designer or to be perceived as one. This factor sets
design in a ‘minor’ position in comparison to other creative fields, especially in comparison to architecture (Julier, 2013). To become an architect, an individual needs to acquire a license from a specific authority in the field. For instance, in the United States, the American Institute of Architects is responsible for the task of issuing licenses to formally registered architects. Meanwhile, the design profession involved in highly conceptual practice or skill-based production has a relatively lower barrier to entry for allowing outsiders to transfer to the field (Julier, 2013). In this respect, the absence of a standardized normative system and traditional prejudices combined together to place fashion design at the bottom of the hierarchy. Moreover, this tendency in the profession has led to implicit disdain from academia for studying fashion design.

In comparison to these issues of fashion design as having ‘minor’ status in design, Australian fashion designer/researcher Angela Finn (2014) presented additional issues involved in studying fashion design from the perspective of fashion scholarship. In her doctoral dissertation exploring a new methodology for practice research in fashion design, she introduced the issue of “academicizing” fashion research (Biggs and Buchler, 2007, p. 63, cited in Finn, 2014). Referring to Friedman’s description (2003) of the transitional moment around 1990 for practice research in design, she argued that a similar issue emerged due to the perspective change in teaching technical skills of fashion design (e.g. design process and methods) to establishing academic research through fashion design practice (Finn, 2014, p. 20). In her view, practitioner research in fashion that simply adopts research methodology from other fields is an “incomplete paradigm shift”. The interdisciplinary and unsettled state of the study of fashion has also been discussed in terms of the development of domain-specific theory and methodology (Tseëlon, 2001; McNeil, 2010; Kawamura, 2011; Granata, 2012; Black et al., 2013; Jenss, 2016). Finn (2014) further problematized existing practice research models in fashion design that blurred into design research:

Although relevant to developing process for effective design practice, these models do not engage with the theoretical or methodological approaches that accommodate the fashion aspect of design practice in fashion. The process model is criticised here as too focused on design methods, in the same way that design researchers have been criticised for becoming ‘fixated’ on research methodologies, rather than the ontological and epistemological aspects of design (Finn, 2014, p. 26).

More importantly, Finn (2014, p. 27) criticized the lack of ‘design’ in the research domain of fashion. In other words, while the academic discussion on fashion is often constructed in relation to objects, the discussion has not been expanded to include the designing of fashion objects. In response to this absence of design in fashion research, she defined fashion design practice as “the action of creating fashion objects (designing and making
fashion garments or accessories)” in professional practice (Finn, 2014, p. 28). This
definition offers a useful viewpoint to not just add the design aspect but also avoid
academicizing in fashion research. Additionally, this definition provides a device to
contain both the symbolic and material worlds that fashion designers are deeply
associated with.

Although this research is not about the history of studies on fashion design,
acknowledging where the conventional practice of fashion design originated from and
how it is different from the development of generic design is relevant. In the following,
the dressmaking tradition—the ‘forgotten’ root of fashion design practice—will be
explored while reviewing the development of the modern empire of fashion. In fact, this
review on the change in fashion design practice resonates with previously mentioned
prejudices (e.g. Nixon and Blakley, 2012); thus, the emphasis will be on the importance of
the dressmaking aspect.

3. The Forgotten Tradition of Dressmaking
In Wim Wenders’ film Notebook on Cities and Clothes (Released in 1989), Japanese fashion
designer Yohji Yamamoto described himself: “I’m not a fashion designer, I’m a
dressmaker”. This internationally acclaimed designer’s refusal to use the term fashion
designer seems self-contradicting and confusing. However, in addition to Yamamoto –
who is considered a “postfashion” designer, having disrupted the conventional idea of
fashion (Vinken, 2005), – many ‘in-fashion’ designers, including Coco Chanel and Karl
Lagerfeld, have also chosen to use the term dressmaker to describe their job (McRobbie,
1998). This offers a departure point to conceptualize dressmaking as the practice of
individual fashion designers.

In fact, this association of dressmaking with fashion designer can be easily found
from the simple translation of the French word couture in English (Oxford English
Dictionary, Collins English Dictionary). More precisely, based on both Collins and
Cambridge French-English dictionaries, couturière, which is a feminine noun, is
translated as dressmaker while couturier (a masculine noun) is fashion designer. Although
the French words in both genders have a neutral position, the English translations reveal
the tradition that still dwells in the meaning of the word in regards to the modern history
of the development of the fashion industry.

In order to understand what these translations actually imply, revisiting the origin
of modern Western fashion, which was born in Paris, is important (Lipovetsky, 1994;
Kawamura, 2005; Vinken, 2005). Modern French fashion evolved alongside the
reformation of the Western world in the 19th century. In the early establishment of
fashion, the first professional fashion designer in history was, arguably, a British man,
Charles Frederick Worth (e.g. Lipovetsky, 1994; Kawamura, 2005; Godart, 2012). He was
not just a dressmaker (couturière) for elite female clients but also a fashion designer
(couturier) who presented his proposals to them. French author and couture expert Didier Grumbach noted that:

For the first time, men were creating fashion. By raising the status of the dressmaker, Worth also transformed the way people dressed. [...] Recognized as a creator in his own right, the couturier moved from the status of an anonymous artisan to that of designer; and could now label his creations (Grumbach, 2014, p. 22).

Worth was also talented in the promotion of his image to the public; thus, he successfully seduced more clients (Kawamura, 2005; Grumbach, 2014). Altogether, he demonstrated the power of seduction that later contributed to the birth of high dressmaking (haute couture in French) and this was the beginning of the firm institutionalization of the ephemeral in fashion (Lipovetsky, 1994; Kawamura, 2005).

Regarding this power shift in dress from elites to fashion designers, in the book The Empire of Fashion (1994), French sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky presented how the idea of fashion evolved together with the Western society to become more democratic. He argued that:

haute couture contributed to the great commercial revolution that is still under way. The aim is to encourage people to spend and consume without guilt, through strategies that use advertising displays and product overexposure. [...] At a deeper level, the seduction process works through intoxication with change, the multiplication of prototypes, and the possibility of individual choice (Lipovetsky, 1994, p. 78).

This view may have resulted from a theoretical investigation but it is useful to perceive fashion as a driver for change. Particularly, the change was noticeable in the modernization of fashion. After this ‘exercise’ for the modern right to individual freedom, ready-to-wear (prêt-à-porter in French) was introduced in the 1950s (Lipovetsky, 1994). Despite the similar role of the makers, while haute couture employed custom-made production based on the measurement of particular clients, this new mode of fashion was produced without having anyone specific in mind (Grumbach, 2014). This new fashion was “an industrial production of clothing accessible to all that would nevertheless be ‘fashion,’ inspired by the latest trends of the day” (Lipovetsky, 1994, p. 90). Thus, the second shift of power in fashion emerged in the form of “open fashion” where the constant dialogue between different fashion designers and individual wearers introduced new fashions, rather than being dictated by a particular group. Mass production in the 1960s and 1970s brought another wave to the empire of fashion. The constitution of industrial production demanded “humanization”; thus, the design aspect of fashion was
highlighted in order to allow individual freedom for “the voluntary adventure of the new” (Lipovetsky, 1994, p. 149).

Besides the French context, this ready-to-wear approach expanded more rapidly in the global context, enforced by industrial production. In particular, with the economic development of the United States even before the 1920s, large clothing manufacturers were dominant in the local market, while the trend of French couture was still imported by individual dressmakers and designers at American firms (Crane, 1993, p. 136-140). Kawamura (2005) explored how fashion designers evolved after the dawn of contemporary fashion, when making clothes and dressing the public were no longer an issue. She described the transformation of the designer from a dressmaker to an image-maker, which did not entirely derive from his or her own choice:

Today’s designers place the strongest emphasis in recreating and reproducing their image, and the image that is projected through clothing is reflected on the designer’s personal image as an individual (Kawamura, 2005, p. 35).

This is due to the social construction of fashion that is legitimized by the institutionalized system of fashion, which is a collective activity of individuals who are part of the system. Not every piece of clothing becomes fashionable. However, fashion designers make clothes with the intention of constructing fashion through their “star quality” (Kawamura, 2005, p. 57-64). Moreover, as this legitimation of designers’ creativity is practiced by both their clients and other actors in the system, such as fashion journalists and editors, a label that conveys refined products of image-making became more relevant than the dressmaking tradition.

In a more recent historical analysis of fashion, McRobbie (1998) noted the disavowal of the dressmaking tradition in the development of fashion design education and the profession of fashion design in the British context. Among other studies that remarked on this issue, her argument is aligned with the domain of dress history that acknowledged the neglect of home dressmaking in broader academic discourse (Burman, 1999). As discussed earlier with respect to prejudices against fashion design due to its perception as a frivolous and domestic activity, these views have influenced the delayed development of the fashion design profession in comparison to overall design. McRobbie (1998, p. 29) explained:

Indeed, it was during the inter-war period that we first see the term ‘dress designer’ or ‘fashion design’ appear in popular usage. While there are no official definitions available, ‘design’ in these contexts appears to be based on the practice of the established designers in Paris to describe work based on an original sketch, drawing or set of drawings and translated into a model or prototype garment.
From this late introduction of the English term fashion design, McRobbie (1998) argued that fashion design in the British context needed to be differentiated from the dressmaking tradition in order to secure its place in art schools. In the competitive condition, fashion design education emphasized the image-making aspect rather than dressmaking, reinforced by the rise of the status of fashion designers as artists and celebrities since the 1980s. Conversely, garment-making practice was labeled as a shameful activity although it was inseparable from fashion design. Rather, this encouraged sustaining the separation between fashion design and production. McRobbie (1998, p. 39) noted:

Fashion education finds it difficult to integrate the skills and techniques upon which it is dependent into its professional vocabulary because these are too reminiscent of the sewing and dressmaking tradition, or else because they conjure up images of sweat shops or assembly lines.

Despite this tension around the practice of fashion design, McRobbie (1998, p. 186) concluded her investigation into the development of British fashion design with the strong suggestion for the rediscovery of dressmaking: “I argue for the dressmaking dimension to be retrieved, revalued and recognised in fashion culture”. As introduced earlier (Julier, 2013), a definition tends to be discursive as a reflection of specific position and status regarding the term. In the current era when the contribution of the fashion design profession is unclear, their role in society is obscured and this condition urges rethinking what fashion designers can do. The rediscovery of fashion design practice can be fully achieved by embracing this forgotten or ignored tradition of dressmaking into its definition rather than revisiting the importance of the meaning-making aspect.

Emphasizing the dressmaking tradition of fashion design practice shares a certain degree of commonality with craftsmanship. While reviewing the development of fashion design practice, Loschek (2009, p. 175-178) described changes in how clothes have been classified. In the 19th century, clothes were classified as handicraft products made by various types of craftspersons, including tailors and seamstresses, among many others. However, due to the modernization of fashion through haute couture and prêt-à-porter, clothes became a product of designers working together with a team of craftspersons. Thus, referring to Sennett’s study (2008) on craftsmanship, Loschek (2009, p. 176) argued that the quality of design is no longer strongly associated with its craftsmanship in the contemporary world of fashion, although designers and craftspersons coexist in the production of clothes. However, other aspects involved in examining quality, such as aesthetics, functionality, form, added values, and emotion, are emphasized. Thus, viewing clothes as design, not as craft helps in understanding the dressmaking tradition and rediscovering it for fashion design practice.
Moreover, the significance of using the term dress rather than clothes can be traced back to Kawamura’s more recent work (2011). Beyond the use of the term in everyday language to describe Western clothes mostly worn by women, Kawamura (2011) introduced the following definition of dress:

Our definition of dress as body modifications and body supplements includes more than clothing, or even clothing and accessories. Our definition encompasses many ways of dressing ourselves. In addition to covering our bodies, we apply color to our skins by use of cosmetics, whether paints or powders, and also apply color and pattern through tattoos (Eicher, Evenson and Lutz, 2008, p. 4).

This definition questions the eurocentric perspective that considers a dress or clothing as a body supplement placed upon the body (Eicher, Evenson and Lutz 2008, p. 6). Kawamura (2011, p. 10) further noted four advantages of this definition: (1) the avoidance of the possibility of using culturally biased words, (2) the understanding of dress as a form in both physical artifacts and practice in relation to the body, (3) the recognition of a social context in use, and (4) the emphasis on the relationship between wearers and any form of dress or dresses. These advantages reinforce McRobbie’s emphasis on dressmaking (1998) and revisit the ignored historic roots of fashion design practice (Lipovetsky, 1994; Kawamura, 2005).

Accordingly, in this paper, regardless of the earlier mentioned gender issue encountered when translating the original French words into English, the term dressmaking was advocated to describe fashion design practice, embracing both the material and physical dimensions. Then, the term dressmaker refers to the conventional role of the fashion designer who dresses the public in the ephemeral empire of fashion. In other words, one of central inquiries in this research is to rediscover the dressmaking practice of fashion designers in tandem with their meaning-making, which is already strongly emphasized due to the image-making tendency. Considering these physical and symbolic dimensions of fashion design practice, one scenario of rediscovering dressmaking can be found in a certain ‘place’ beyond the empires of fashion, or ‘fashion capitals’ such as Paris, New York, London and Milan.

4. Helsinki/Finland as an Emerging Place for Fashion

Finland is one of the Nordic welfare states, which can be categorized as a postindustrial Western society despite its peripheral geographical location between Eastern and Northern Europe (Lavery, 2006). It has recently sought to proactively position itself in the global fashion landscape (Pöppönen, 2016). Various Finnish efforts can be observed, ranging in scale from global to local. At the global level, young generations of Finnish fashion designers have won awards in international competitions, such as Hyères
International Festival of Fashion and Photography and the LVMH Prize. Several new fashion brands from Finland, such as Samuji and Makia Clothing, have expanded in international markets beyond the Nordic region. Concurrently, at the local level, ambitious new initiatives, including Pre Helsinki and Helsinki New, have emerged to promote Finnish fashion to the outside world as collectives.

As a response to this development, several international fashion media began describing Finnish fashion as ‘up-and-coming’ (see Szmydke and Folcher, 2013; Petersen, 2015; Sjöroos, 2016). The description implies both the emerging and uncertain status of Finnish fashion. The lack of recognition for Finnish fashion in both academic and industry contexts reflects its fluctuating status. This recent growth of Finnish fashion is comparable to the Belgian fashion phenomenon in the 1980s (see Grayson, 2013; Moreno, 2015; Pechman, 2016). Belgian fashion first established its reputation due to the global recognition of six Belgian designers, the so-called ‘Antwerp Six’. Since then, the phenomenon of Belgian fashion as a whole has attracted interest from the industry to academia (Gimeno-Martínez, 2007; 2011; Teunissen, 2011). Additionally, the work of individual Belgian fashion designers, such as Martin Margiela, has been studied as a mode of “postfashion” (Vinken, 2005). However, Finland, which can be categorized as a “second-tier region” in fashion based on Skov (2002), has not been introduced in the academic context (see, however, Ainamo, 1996; Gurova and Morozova, 2016; Chun, Gurova and Niinimäki, 2017; Chun and Gurova, 2019). Similarly, from the global fashion industry point of view, Finland has not been considered as a ‘fashion nation’. Marimekko is an internationally known Finnish company known for its bold prints in a broader use, such as interior textiles and ceramics, rather than for exclusively wearable products. Due to its print-focused approach to clothes, the company is often described as a “cult” in the fashion industry (Sherman 2014). In particular, from the industry perspective, several master’s level theses from local universities and industry reports noted the rising challenge facing smaller Finnish fashion companies to survive in international competition after Finland became a member of the European Union. These studies commonly suggested reconstructing the Finnish fashion ecosystem in order to support local fashion businesses (Lille, 2010; van Eynde and Wiinamäki, 2012).

Despite this unstable status of local fashion, Finland is commonly recognized as a “design nation” together with other Nordic countries, especially Denmark and Sweden (Riegels Melchior 2010, 2011; Skov 2011). In fact, the tendency of Finnish fashion designers to seek global recognition through international fashion competitions can be traced back to the history of Finnish design. Since the early 19th century, the country has introduced iconic designers, such as Eliel Saarinen, Ilmari Tapiovaara, Alvar Aalto, Tapio

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1 See the official website of the Hyères Festival (http://www.villanoailles-hyeres.com/) and the LVMH Prize (http://www.lvmhprize.com).
2 See master’s theses on the Finnish fashion industry (Salonoja, 2013; Colliander, 2015; Takkinen, 2015).
Wirkkala, and Kaj Franck, through international events, including the Paris World’s Fair of 1898 and 1937, New York World’s Fair of 1939 as well as Milan Triennials of 1952 and 1960 (Davies, 2002). This was achieved through the country’s strong tradition in applied arts and knowledge in materials, such as wood, ceramic, plastic, and textile (Korvenmaa, 2010; Hohti, 2011).

According to a study by Finnish design historian Pekka Korvenmaa (2010), the development of the design profession in Finland aligns with the overall history of design (c.f. Walker, 1988; Julier, 2013). Korvenmaa (2010, p. 9) noted that the terminology shifted from “applied art” (taideteollisuus) to “design” (muotoilu) in Finnish mainly due to the introduction of industrial design, but the artistic tradition of Finnish design remains strongly present in the work of contemporary designers. This tradition was derived from the domestic material-based industry, especially paper and timber, that implemented handcraft- and workshop-based production (Korvenmaa, 2010). In parallel, as Finnish industrial design evolved with the rise of globally successful companies such as Nokia, team-driven collaborative works became vital for national competitiveness, more so than strong individual designers. Throughout the turbulence of modernization, industrialization and digitization between the 1960s and the 1990s, this tradition was challenged; but as it evolved, design was recognized in the national-level policy program approved by Finland’s Council of State in 2000 (Korvenmaa, 2010). Helsinki, the capital of Finland, also has a strong connection to the heritage of design. Not only was it selected as the World Design Capital in 2012, but it has also fully embraced design in various domains from education to policy making. In particular, Helsinki became the first city in the world to hire a Chief Design Officer in 2016. The creation of this position clearly demonstrated how vital the role of design is for the city.

This importance of design for Helsinki and Finland was also noted by Nikodemus Solitander (2010) from the perspective of creative industries. He introduced the ways in which the country harnessed the design industry as part of its national-level strategy to increase its competitiveness and internationalization through its restructuring policy, industry and education. Solitander (2010, p. 52) appraised “the human-centered, more beautiful and safe” approach that Finland had demonstrated through incorporating design actively. However, as has been observed from the grassroots development of Finnish fashion, this government-driven strategy had limitations in terms of recognizing barriers between subfields of design and supporting the reformation of the local fashion ecosystem. In other words, prior to its recent emergence, Finnish fashion was often considered simply as one subfield of Finnish design. Additionally, policymakers had not yet fully recognized fashion as either a separate field requiring extra developmental

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3 World Design Capital is a biennial city-scale event organized by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design to celebrate successful implementations of design in the selected city. See the official website http://wdo.org.
support or a viable source to contribute to improving the global competitiveness of Finland. Then, how does fashion still matter to Helsinki/Finland?

5. Helsinki as a Place for Contemporary Dressmaking
In relation to the sociocultural context, four aspects that demonstrate the ways in which the place of Helsinki/Finland embrace both fashion and design are identified. These aspects are: (1) the tendency to engage in small-scale business operations relying on evident dressmaking practice, (2) the launch of designer-centered grassroots fashion initiatives, (3) the increased visibility of Finnish fashion through an emphasis on its artistic approach, and (4) the clustered community of Finnish fashion designers in Helsinki.

First, as mentioned earlier (see Lille, 2010; van Eynde and Wiinamäki, 2012), the current Finnish ecosystem may not be friendly for developing fashion businesses. However, in contrast, this condition is actually advantageous for exploring the dressmaking practice of individual fashion designers, as they are actively involved in operating their own business rather than being part of big companies. When a designer runs his/her business independently, the engagement level tends to be higher for manual design work, including sample making and fabric experimentation (Sinha, 2000; 2002). The designer in the small business can make his/her own decisions while designing, rather than being influenced by other factors (Sinha, 2000). Thus, this condition of Helsinki offers an ideal condition for exploring the dressmaking practice of individual fashion designers.

Second, to tackle the issue of internationalization, multiple initiatives began emerging in the Helsinki fashion scene. Starting from Pre-Helsinki in 2012, Helsinki-New in 2016 and Fashion-In-Helsinki in 2017, fashion designers and business experts from Finland initiated new platforms to support the local fashion scene (Chun, Gurova and Niinimäki, 2017; Chun and Gurova, 2019; Chun, Niinimäki and Gurova, 2019). In particular, Pre-Helsinki has become an internationally recognizable fashion event organized in the country. It is not merely another fashion week that periodically coordinates seasonal fashion shows of multiple Finland-based labels, but is instead a designer-centered and designer-driven platform that promotes young Finnish fashion talents, including winners of international fashion competitions (Chun and Gurova, 2019). Beyond the purpose of increasing the visibility of Finnish fashion designers, the platform has been developed and operated mostly by fashion designers. Through this initiative, the fashion scene in the city has not just brought international recognition to local designers but has also formed active platforms to communicate with the global fashion industry. Additionally, the diverse involvements that fashion designers have demonstrated both inside and outside the platform can exemplify the value of their refined dressmaking practice.
The emergence of these initiatives is related to the third point regarding Finnish fashion’s increased visibility in the global landscape. Most Finnish fashion designers involved in the initiatives were incubated at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture (formerly known as the University of Arts and Design Helsinki). The recent success stories from the earlier mentioned global fashion competitions were influenced by the educational transformation at the university alongside the applied art tradition. Since 2010, the university has carried out a gradual reformation of fashion and textile design education in order to minimize barriers between fashion and textile design programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Niinimäki, Salolainen and Kääriäinen, 2018; Salolainen, Leppisaari and Niinimäki, 2018). By infusing the textile- or material-driven approach into fashion design, its students have not just avoided the curse of image-making that McRobbie (1998) noted but have also overcome the lack of local infrastructure and resources in comparison to fashion capitals. Accordingly, the recently graduated fashion designers from Aalto University have demonstrated highly skillful dressmaking practice with deep material knowledge that has earned recognition in competitions and resulted in their recruitment by major fashion houses (Pöppönen, 2016). Thus, the context of Helsinki metropolitan area where the university is located provides a rich condition for witnessing the rise of new dressmakers / fashion designers.

Lastly, the fourth aspect stems from the fact that this recent growth of Finnish fashion is mostly observable in the Helsinki metropolitan area. This aspect is intertwined with the first aspect of the higher tendency to be self-employed in the fashion business in Helsinki/Finland. While the territory of Finland is relatively large, the smaller scale of Helsinki has been a home for most fashion-related business owners and viable activities, including Pre-Helsinki and Fashion-In-Helsinki. Additionally, the evolving stage of the fashion community in Helsinki offers a convenient condition to observe relevant activities relating to dressmaking. These activities are organized by both professional fashion designers who are capable of demonstrating their own ways of thinking and working as well as other actors, such as educators, marketing experts, journalists and civil servants, who are involved in reshaping the status of Finnish fashion.

6. Discussions and Conclusion
This paper departed from the question what makes fashion design different from generic design. Throughout the theoretical investigation on fashion and design, the neglect on studying fashion design and the forgotten tradition of dressmaking were discussed. The context of Helsinki/Finland was introduced to present how design and fashion are intertwined in the recent development. With four aspects that are situated from the

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4 Aalto University was launched in 2010 through a merger of three independent universities in the Helsinki metropolitan area, the Helsinki University of Technology, Helsinki School of Economics and University of Art and Design Helsinki, with a strong emphasis on multidisciplinary education.
specific conditions of the place, the ways in which fashion designers have demonstrated the embodiment of design and fashion through their dressmaking practice were presented.

Implications for future studies on the notion of place can be found at the intersection of design and fashion research. While fashion designers’ conventional practice of dressmaking has eclipsed by image-making, new proposals to apply design practice have been introduced in relation to the notion of place (Julier, 2013; Manzini, 2015). From the perspective of fashion design, it seems logical to adopt these proposals of Julier (2013) and Manzini (2015) that connect design with a social and physical space. As discussed earlier, since the birth of modern democracy in the Western society, the idea of fashion has been discussed as a certain level of changes in symbolic and material worlds involving a wide range of individuals (Lipovetsky, 1994). Fashion has been strongly attached to these multidimensional ideas of space not just in the historic development of modern fashion in particular cities, such as Paris and New York (Rantisi, 2002; Kawamura, 2005), but also in the contemporary condition where geographic and economic bonds of clothes are inseparable (Skov, 2001; Crewe, 2017). However, designing fashion, or the practice of fashion design, needs to be further explored. The reminder on dressmaking from Helsinki/Finland hints what to focus in order to design the future fashion, instead of being consumed by surplus images.

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