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Fashion Design Rediscovered: A Theory on Dressmaking Practice

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ABSTRACT Fashion design is often understood as one of design's subfields that lacks critical reflection on its domain-specific situation. Research on fashion design practice has either simply adopted research results from design studies or been overshadowed by its social and cultural implications from fashion studies. This paper questions this overgeneralization of design, especially the practice of design. For this inquiry, distinctive features of fashion design's

dressmaking practice are presented via a theoretical sampling of the literature on fashion design and design practice. Grounded theory was employed to construct a theory on dressmaking practice based on empirical data gathered from the fashion design profession.

KEYWORDS: design thinking, design practice, fashion design, dressmaking

Introduction



Fashion design, as a subfield of design, can be understood simply by combining the term ‘fashion’ with design. The term is often associated with clothing or garments when used together with design (Aakko 2016; Finn 2014; Kawamura 2011). However, a more profound understanding requires a thorough investigation, as the notion of fashion adds a whole new complexity beyond its seven-letter word.

In design, research on fashion design has been underdeveloped, as argued by Nixon and Blakley (2012), and Finn (2014). They advocated the importance of acknowledging fashion design’s domain-specific knowledge and methods in order to expand its potential. Meanwhile, a shortcoming to the overgeneralization of design subfields was noted in a number of earlier studies (see Badke-Schaub, Roozenburg, and Cardoso 2010; Kimbell 2011). Particularly, according to Visser’s cognitive perspective (2009), various subfields of design have both similar and different characteristics depending on the situation, the designers, and the artifact. On the one hand, common characteristics—problem-solving, ill-defined problems, and pluralistic approaches—exist regardless of different design situations (Visser 2009). On the other hand, different forms also occur in diverse situations. While comparing studies in several subfields of design, including architecture, mechanical and software design, she noted three-dimensions of the design process, the designers, and the artifact that influence design form differently (Visser 2009). However, due to her hypothetical argument in the conceptual paper, she suggested conducting empirical studies to further explore the different forms of design.

Thus, conducting an empirical study that explores the practice of fashion design is required in order to understand the ways in which fashion design is situated differently or similarly to design practice, which is often described as ‘design thinking’ (Kimbell 2011). Without sensing the contextual difference that each design subfield possesses (Badke-Schaub, Roozenburg, and Cardoso 2010; Visser 2009), directly implementing research outcomes and theories from design research to fashion design involves limitations. In fact, there is a gap in the literature on fashion design in both fields of design and fashion. In design studies, the voice of fashion designers is often absent in empirical studies on design practice. For instance, in introducing ‘how designers think,’ Lawson (2005) provided multiple examples to note the peculiarities of fashion design. The major shortcoming

of this study is that the examples of fashion design were not based on empirical data from professional fashion designers though they were used to support his arguments on design practice. Meanwhile, research on fashion tends to stay on the social and symbolic level rather than incorporating the actual practice of fashion designers (Finn 2014). In order to both highlight the aspect of designing in fashion and separate it from generic design practice, the notion of ‘dressmaking’ is adopted in this study to refer to the practice of individual fashion designers. There are a number of benefits to using the term ‘dress,’ including the avoidance of using culturally biased words, contextualizing use, among many others (Kawamura 2011, 10).

The strategy of grounded theory was suitable for exploring this under-researched topic, evolving and fragmented in the literature, by bringing in other studies to support theorizing on the dressmaking practice of fashion design, instead of limiting this study within a specific predefined theory. The following sections will first introduce the research methods of this study, present the findings, then conclude with implications.

Research Methods: Grounded Theory

The study employed the main principles of grounded theory in its methods (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Grounded theory tends to construct a theory from a certain empirical context (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The location of Helsinki provided a convenient research condition for this study. The fact that most Helsinki-based fashion designers are self-employed and run his/her own business offered a distinctive advantage in comparison to major fashion cities, including Paris, London, Milan, and New York, where fashion designers tend to work for larger companies (e.g., Malem, Miller, and König 2009). As noted by Sinha (2002), this particular condition of Helsinki provides convenient access to study fashion designers’ practice, as they have autonomous decision-making and higher involvement in design, rather than being restricted by other actors’ decisions in the company, including managers and marketers. In this section, the method of data gathering and interpretation will be introduced.

Sampling and Data Collection

During an eight-month period (from February to September 2016), a series of semi-structured interviews with Helsinki-based fashion designers was conducted. Through a purposive sampling approach, interviewees were selected with the following criteria:

- Individuals who are currently working as a fashion designer;
- Individuals who have more than five years’ professional experience as a fashion designer.

For the first criterion, fashion designers refer to individuals who are involved in designing a broader range of commercial items,

including apparel, accessories, and shoes. The second criterion is supported by the study of Lawson and Dorst on design expertise (2009). They noted that an ‘expert’ level designer can express a certain set of values through his/her design practice. Therefore, designers who have developed expertise in their work and field were suitable for this study.

Two factors influenced the number of interviewees selected for this study. Firstly, the small scale of the Finnish fashion scene restricted identification of qualified interviewees. Secondly, the author determined that data saturation had been reached due to repetition of findings in the early stage of interpreting the data. Accordingly, the data collection process was discontinued after 18 interviews (see [Appendix, Table A1](#)). Interview participants were anonymized when citing particular quotes (e.g., Respondent 1, Respondent 2), as the unit of observation for this study is fashion design practice rather than a specific designer.

Prior to each interview, secondary sources on the designer, including fashion magazine articles and the official website, were used to formulate guiding questions. These sources were mediated data, which was produced for different purposes than this study. Therefore, the sources only functioned as supportive information separated from the main dataset.

The process of each interview started with an informal conversation about the designer’s academic/professional background. Relevant questions then followed based on his/her responses. In this way, conducting the interview as natural ‘conversations’ was possible rather than formal exchanges of question and answer (Kvale 1996). For the same purpose, each interview was held at the designer’s studio or workspace to ensure his/her most natural status and to document tangible examples that support his/her explanations during the interview. During or after the visit, field notes were taken to document observed relevant information about the designer, including the general atmosphere of the workspace, personality and organization of the work. Overall, the average duration of the interviews was one hour. After each interview and while transcribing the recorded voice data, memos were taken to capture tentative thoughts for reviewing the data.

Coding Phases

For the study, all recorded interviews were transcribed and then combined with field notes. These datasets were reviewed through grounded theory coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Throughout the open and axial coding, Atlas.ti software was used to digitize the process. This was necessary to ensure convenience in the handling of the gathered data, which totaled 20 hours and 19 minutes. The data were first broken down into small portions of meanings. Initial codes were generated and compared with each other to identify concepts. Categories related to the dressmaking practice of fashion designers emerged while refining concepts. Then the relationships among the

key categories were further explored. While identifying the relationships, initially coded data were also printed out and analyzed manually. This manual activity often provided a new perspective to view the already identified concepts and categories. Selective coding was followed to articulate and validate the categories.

Throughout the coding process, the relevant literature was identified constantly to compare with the emerged categories. For the identified literature concurrently to this coding phase, the theoretical scope was restricted to seminal works on design practice. From a vast amount of literature on design thinking, a number of discourses has been identified (Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla, and Çetinkaya 2013). Instead of exploring all, three discourses from Schön (1983), Cross (2006) and Lawson (2005), and Buchanan (1992) were selected due to their direct connection to design practice.

Findings

As the findings of this study, three categories of continuity, collection and context were identified. While continuity was emphasized in the process dimension, collection was observed from within the outcome dimension. Lastly, the category of context emerged from the dimension of use. Each category consists of several key concepts. In the following sections, relevant quotes from the interviews are presented first, to build the description of each concept, which is then compared with previous studies on fashion design and design practice. Following the typical design phase from the designer's perspective, the order of introducing the categories starts with the process dimension, then moves to the dimensions of outcome and use. For each category, four concepts were identified. They are introduced in an order moving from the more abstract to tangible actions.

Dimension of Process: Continuity

The first category is related to the process dimension of dressmaking practice. Instead of simply adopting the linear process introduced by Lamb and Kallal (1992) and LaBat and Sokolowski (1999), this study intends to identify concepts describing features of fashion design. As a result of the coding phases, the category of continuity emerged for the process dimension. The practice of fashion design tends to require both creating a strong signature look and offering constant novelty (e.g., Lipovetsky 1994). To balance between these two, fashion designers employ certain actions. From the data, four concepts that support this category of continuity were emerged: trusting a personal vision, mixing external sources of inspiration, longitudinal evolution of design over collections, and modifying a specific element of design.

Trusting a Personal Vision

Through accumulated experience in the field, fashion designers learn how to trust themselves and what they have made. Respondent 6

noted that while designing, ‘you have to trust yourself because the customer is not always right’ (interview, March 1, 2016). Instead of being calculative and only relying on feedback from their customers, fashion designers tend to trust their taste and intuition during the design process. Related to this, Respondent 4 explained that ‘you need to approve [of] what you have done’ (interview, February 23, 2016).

In a study on creativity in fashion, Sinha (2002) noted the importance of intuition in fashion designers’ thinking. As useful knowledge for decision-making, intuition was stressed, while rational decision-making is also required based on measurable factors, including sales figures and perceived changes (Sinha 2002). In comparison, Nixon and Blakley (2012) emphasized the strong role of personal taste of fashion designers in judging what is aesthetically good or bad. When discussing contextual knowledge of fashion designers, Aspers (2006) noted that this ‘gut-feeling’ or how to interpret available information to develop a new collection is based on ‘a stock of knowledge’ constructed from the socialization process in designers’ experiences, including education and previous collections.

From previous studies on design practice, it is not difficult to find similar concepts. The importance of trusting one’s personal vision in the intuitive design process was emphasized by Schön (1983) as ‘reflective practice.’ Buchanan (1992, 13) described designers’ intuition as an ability to apply and modify useful sets of flexible design methods to a situation for the final outcome. When introducing examples of expert designers, Lawson (2005, 133) also noted their ability to connect intuition with concrete outcomes.

Mixing External Sources of Inspiration

Fashion designers use a range of external sources for inspiration throughout their design process, including certain groups of people, photos, artworks, materials, structures, and silhouettes. Respondent 13 responded, ‘I try to do some kind of research. I have my Pinterest board as well. [...] It is like references’ (interview, April 8, 2016). Designers often build their own archive of various items. ‘From form to details, there are a lot of ways that [designers] can use what [they] have collected’ (Respondent 4, interview, February 23, 2016), and these various sources of inspiration are frequently visited to create new collections. Numerous respondents (Respondent 1, 6, 12 and 13) emphasized the inspiration from the strong sensations gained through touching, seeing, and feeling the material.

A systematic investigation was conducted by Eckert and Stacey (2000) on the sources of inspiration for designers in the fashion industry, especially knitwear designers. They noted that, ‘designers’ stocks of remembered previous designs and other sources of inspiration enable them to use these combinations to imagine and reason about complex structures’ (p. 527). Their study also identified

domains for the designers to apply collected sources, including individual designs to styles and moods, in order to communicate with the designer his/herself, fellow specialists, other designers, superiors, customers, and unknown audiences (Eckert and Stacey 2000). Additionally, this tendency to mix different sources of inspiration was characterized as an attribute of fashion designers' creativity by Aspers (2006). He listed many sources, including books, magazines, movies, and music, regarding the issue of inspiration. He further argued that creative fashion designers 'copy, or at least sample, a lot from the history as well as from the contemporary scene' (Aspers 2006, 749) during the development of a new collection.

Schön (1983) noted representations in design appear externally in a visual or material form and internally in a mental form. For him, this 'conversation' between external and internal representations occurs throughout the design process. Aligning with this, Buchanan (1992, 14) characterized designers' ability 'to discover new relationships among signs, things, actions and thoughts.'

Longitudinal Evolution of Design

The practice of fashion designers evolves through seasons. Throughout this evolution, they refine certain items or styles, which is often referred to as the 'signature look' of the designer. Respondent 9 explained that 'iteration exists throughout collections. If I have an item that is not good, I try to make it better for the next' (interview, March 18, 2016). Meanwhile, the conflict of continuity during the long-term process is also observed. 'I may think that it is an old piece already, but if I think from the perspective of buyers or audiences, no one has seen it' (Respondent 9, interview, March 18, 2016). From the designer's perspective, the evolution of design over multiple seasons can be seen as a repetition of their old work, but for the customers, this gradual development still provides newness and continuity with small changes. Thus, for many respondents (Respondent 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 16, and 18), there was a coexistence of two approaches. Designers develop a 'classic' line reinforcing their signature style alongside a 'trendy' line presenting new styles for a particular season.

Exploring fashion design methods, Ræbild (2015) coined the canon metaphor, adopting it from music theory. She defined the metaphor as 'structured staggered repetitions in an on-going flux of transformation' (Ræbild 2015, 222). It emphasizes the variation of design applied by fashion designers over time. In other words, for fashion design, 'it is about a continued development of the existing, hence an ongoing exploration of a theme' (Ræbild 2015, 223).

Regarding this longer-term evolution of design, Schön (1983) explained that design concepts often emerge from one's own previous design works or existing works of other influential designers. Instead of simply transferring these works into a new situation, a new

design concept is restructured in response to the conditions of the situation (Schön 2011). This evolution in the design process is also discussed by Lawson (2005) and Cross (2006).

Modifying a Specific Element of Design

During the process of designing a new item for a collection, fashion designers employ different types of iteration. Respondent 10 said, 'I don't change the pattern. I only change materials [but] it comes in totally different looks' (interview, April 1, 2016). Fashion designers often modify a specific element of design, including colour, material, length, and fit. However, making a prototype or mock-up also helps them transform a two-dimensional drawing into a three-dimensional garment. Additionally, this rapid prototyping happens concurrently with other tasks. In other words, designers do not stick to modifying or improving only one design element; they rather apply changes in multiple elements concurrently. Through this quick modification, fashion designers can minimize their efforts in designing new items in a limited time and become more productive. The vital moment for this modification occurs when they have an event of 'fitting' with models. Near the end of the design process, designers often have this event to examine the fit of clothes on the actual human body.

This fitting was remarked upon by Ræbild (2015, 158) as the key method for three-dimensional ideation. However, other methods were also identified as fashion design practice, including directly shaping materials, using opposite elements, reducing and adding shapes on the body of the mannequin, among many others (Ræbild 2015, 237-244).

Similar to this emerged concept in fashion design, Cross (2006) referred to the concept of modification as 'mutation.' He argued that this mutation 'involves modifying the form of some particular feature, or features, of an existing design' (p. 53). Similarly, with exemplary cases of expert designers, Lawson (2005) demonstrated how an early stage idea matures through iterative modification.

Dimension of Outcome: Collection

Closely related to the process dimension but with a distinction, the second category resides in the outcome dimension of dressmaking practice. Although the process dimension was discussed earlier in this study, the consideration of outcome can also take place first during the practice of an individual designer (Dieffenbacher 2013). Regarding the outcome, the data of this study revealed that fashion designers emphasize the notion of collection. For the fashion design profession, each presentation of new design outcomes usually consists of a collection of items, rather than a single product. Types of the items vary from a garment to accessories, including hats, bags, shoes, and other accessories, and one collection includes approximately 50 looks—ensembles of items—and 120 items (Skov et al.

2009). In this category of collection, four encompassing concepts were identified: building design concepts, having a holistic view, stressing the visual outcome, and combining different elements.

Building Design Concepts

Fashion designers commonly stress the importance of building strong design concepts. By creating design concepts, they propose an 'ideal-world' for projecting their own values. Respondent 12 said the concepts are 'coming from the values that I hold dear in my life than fashion—what is cool, what is new and what is amazing in this world' (interview, April 7, 2016). In other words, the concepts are proposals by designers to their audiences or a way to persuade a particular audience why they need to accept the proposals. Respondent 11's comment supports this description:

It is important to create concepts because that way you convince and make the people understand why to maybe buy the weirdest coat you have. Because they trust the concept, get the idea and then are inspired by it. (interview, April 6, 2016)

This conceptual proposal is to deliver certain experiences to potential wearers. This dialogue between wearers and designers via material clothes is described by Loschek (2009). She noted that a collection of individual dialogues can drive a new fashion to emerge. While fashion designers present 'the assertion of an (innovative) collection' periodically based on their interpretation of social processes, the 'acceptance' of this assertion is bound to the individual audience (Loschek 2009, 95-98). Then, the acceptance from a group of individuals signals the assertion becoming fashion for the community.

Schön's notion of 'framing' (1983) can be compared to this concept building process of fashion designers. He considered a frame as a window drawn on the world to make complex real-world situations easier to address. Additionally, Lawson (2005) introduced the notion of 'schema,' which refers to an internalized mental image. 'This schema represents an active organization of past experiences which is used to structure and interpret future events' (Lawson 2005, 133-134).

Having a Holistic View

The fact that fashion design outcomes usually consist of many pieces encourages fashion designers to think holistically while designing. They tend to think in terms of a 'complete package,' or a collection, and develop the whole area gradually instead of completing one piece then moving to the next. 'It is about the bigger picture and seeing what is lacking' (interview, February 23, 2016). This comment of Respondent 4 illustrates how fashion designers pay attention to presenting a coherent aesthetic, or 'feeling,' through various items in their

collection. Accordingly, the pieces have to go all together in the same direction to provide the orchestrated theme. Respondent 1 explained: ‘when I make a collection, I think there are certain pieces that go together’ (interview, February 3, 2016). The integrity can emerge in many levels of materials, colours, shapes, among others. However, this does not mean designing identical items. Creating different yet harmonized collections of items is essential for fashion designers’ dressmaking practice.

A study by Ræbild (2015, 206-209) introduced diverse classification systems for designing a collection. This reflects the required effort of fashion designers in order to have a holistic view when creating a set of items. The items can be graded depending on the garment’s proximity to the body from inner to outer; temperature from cool to warm; and design input from basic to complex. Various ranges of colour, material, price, and style also add complexity to presenting a coherent collection.

This holistic approach was also portrayed by previous studies on design practice (e.g., Lawson 2005). Particularly, Cross (2006, 16) argued that design thinking tends to be ‘multi-faceted and multi-levelled.’ When illustrating examples of industrial designers, he noted that ‘the designer is thinking of the whole range of design criteria and requirements’ (Cross 2006, 16). These criteria and requirements emerge not only from clients and external issues, including clients, technology, and legislation, but also the designer’s preference for certain aesthetics and practical decisions.

Stressing the Visual Outcome

‘[While designing a collection,] I am thinking about styling, which is actually the end result’ (Respondent 9, interview, March 18, 2016). As Respondent 9 commented, the visual aesthetic was identified as a crucial factor for fashion designers in this study. From styling for a photoshoot to a press presentation and a runway show, the ways in which their design outcomes are seen and adopted by others were highlighted by fashion designers. At the same time, most respondents noted this visual orientation of fashion design also makes the field more superficial. This occurs as their proposals are judged and visual presentations need to attract before being worn and ultimately becoming fashion.

Ræbild (2015) introduced fashion design methods with visual-driven approaches, including creating a visual overview of items for a collection and developing a look-book that presents photographed styles for sales purpose. These methods exemplify the visual orientation of fashion design practice. Additionally, Sinha (2002) acknowledged the ways in which fashion designers communicate visually for effectively presenting their design. The role of drawing was highlighted in their earlier stage meeting with clients (Sinha 2002).

This orientation to the visual aesthetic is also observed in previous studies of design practice. Lawson (2005) noted that ‘the end

product of such design will always be visible to the user who may also move inside or pick up the designer's artefact. [...] [W]hat is clear is that designers express their ideas and work in a very visual and graphical kind of way' (p. 13). He asserted the importance of drawing, which designers often employ to communicate and to visualize their concept (Lawson 2005). Meanwhile, Cross (2006) argued that after all, 'a design' for a designer is the description for a client, which highly focuses on the end result.

Combining Different Elements

Complex layers of fashion design offer room for designers to play with different elements. They often try to combine contrasting elements to create unexpected results. For instance, Respondent 2 described as, 'a combination of two like the technical part and artistic, I try to combine' (interview, February 5, 2016). Contrasting approaches can be adopted in one collection due to a range of items and the aesthetic taste of the designer. More specifically, Respondent 5 said, 'I want to have something loose and stiff, so I can get different feelings' (interview, February 24, 2016). Various elements, including proportions, colours, shapes, and materials, can be used to present different feelings in one collection, but this flexibility has to make sense as a whole.

Loschek (2009) introduced various types of 'crossing' that fashion designers employ in order to turn new clothes into fashion. With inclusion or fusion, explicitly or implicitly defined borders can be crossed. Loschek (2009) provided various examples, including 'art-crossing' that applies art techniques to designing clothes, 'fashion-crossing' that combines old and new designs, and 'multi-crossings' that mix a variety of styles (e.g., workwear and sportswear). Through these crossings, fashion designers can come up with 'an infinite generation of the new' (Loschek 2009, 135).

Regarding these various types of combinations, Cross (2006, 51) noted that 'creative design can occur by combining features from existing designs into a new combination or configuration.' More broadly, Buchanan (1992) emphasized designers' ability to generate 'new integrations of signs, things, actions and environments' for more profound changes to deal with complex problems, rather than a 'technological quick fix' (pp. 20-21). He referred to this ability as 'the new liberal art of design thinking,' which is very different from approaches of natural science (Buchanan 1992).

Dimension of Use: Context

As the last category, the notion of context derived from the dimension of use, where designers' creations are represented and reinterpreted by wearers in the real world in order to become fashion (Loschek 2009). In ordinary circumstances, most human beings need to dress in something regardless of their interest in fashion. Thus, the aspect of being used or worn is essential for fashion

designers, as it provides a specific context of designing. Four concepts that support this contextual aspect of fashion designers' dressmaking practice were identified: articulating personalities, setting placements of the design, negotiating physicality in use, and creating sensorial experiences through materials.

Articulating Personalities

The practice of fashion design emerges through a conversation of two personalities between designer and wearer. While the designer is the creator who constructs a garment, if the wearer who actually uses the garment is not taken into consideration, the collection cannot exist. The following two comments illustrate this relationship. Respondent 9 highlighted that, 'actually the person is the main thing. The garment is an aid or tool for that person to express their personality. It is actually about their personality and what they see in the garment and what makes them want to wear it' (interview, March 18, 2016). Moreover, Respondent 8 described how, 'I keep in mind our target group and where and when they would wear it; also, the fact that we want to make items that are wearable, easy to wear and care' (interview, March 18, 2016). Accordingly, fashion designers constantly think about the needs and interests of the wearers. The garment becomes a medium that enables the wearer to express his/her own personality through continuous use.

Loschek's view (2009) on fashion as a system of social communication supports this concept. She described the ways in which individual personalities coexist in fashion:

The individual understands himself or herself (or is observed) as a single being within an entirety. In turn, this overall constellation has a defining impact on one's individuality. This corresponds to the definition of fashion as a personal aesthetic perception in the collective. (Loschek 2009, 162)

From this quote, an analogy can be drawn that one aspect of dressmaking practice is to help the individual realize his/her personal aesthetic perception through creative interpretation of society in temporality.

From the design research perspective, this consideration of personal expression is more discussed with regard to fashion design, as a garment is often used in a specific context (see Lawson 2005, 94). Lawson also highlights that 'this idea of creating a product with a "personality" to express some features of the lifestyle of its owner' is one of guiding principles for design practice (Lawson 2005, 176). In fact, most artifacts are designed for specific groups of people. Hence, he argued that 'designers must understand something of the nature of these users and their needs' (Lawson 2005, 13).

Placements of the Design

'In fashion, you have to think even more about the things that are going on now' (interview, April 6, 2016). As this comment by Respondent 11 demonstrates, fashion designers need to understand topical issues of the moment, as the use of their artifacts will reflect on those issues once they are presented. A collection is a proposal for potential uses; thus, the designed items have to be relatable to the particular context of potential audiences. To understand the context of use, designers identify a place of situation and condition where they can construct their design. For instance, Respondent 7 explained that, 'I am thinking the colours in Helsinki are different than Japan' (interview, March 16, 2016). Instead of having complete freedom for designing, this restriction of context offers designers a useful boundary on which to focus and to differentiate in comparison to other designers.

As Loschek (2009) introduced, for fashion designers to join a conversation while creating a meaning, they need to specify a conversant. She noted that: 'Which of the products are accepted and become fashion is determined by the society, a group within society or a single community' (Loschek 2009, 134). The ways in which fashion designers identify audiences differ, from physical spaces to genders, ages, lifestyles, subcultures, among others (Loschek 2009).

From the perspective of design practice, Buchanan's concept of 'placement' explains this process of contextualization (1992). For Buchanan, placements are flexible boundaries for designers to include various conditions of a specific situation while developing new ideas of design. This placement can be compared to Schön's notion of 'naming' and 'framing' (1983). Schön noted that designers define a problem that they choose to address ('naming') and formulate possible solutions to explore further ('framing'). Throughout this process, designers can set boundaries within which to employ their design practice and impose relevant solutions to deal with problems.

Negotiating Three-Dimensional Forms

The space fashion designers work within, the intimate and private body of individuals, offers opportunities and challenges. Due to the shape of the human bodies that they deal with, fashion designers have to consider how to transfer a flat pattern into a three-dimensional item. Respondent 1 commented thus: '[designing a garment] is never just a sketch. I have to think three-dimensionally and make patterns' (interview, February 3, 2016). Moreover, body types are very different individually and ethnically. Respondent 18 said, 'women's bodies are very different from each other' (interview, November 30, 2016). The average size of women's bodies in e.g. Finland and Japan differ, therefore impacting the size of clothes. Designers also need to consider gender differences of the physical body, which adds complexity to designing.

Ræbild (2015, 199-206) presented the body as one of the main themes identified in her study on fashion design practice. She noted four settings: a design by three-dimensional drawing based on past personal bodily experiences with clothes, a design by testing on the designer's own body, a design by testing on a user's body proxy, including a model's body and dummy, and a design by 'handing,' a bodily practice of touching and moving with the hands. In these diverse settings, fashion designers interact with the three-dimensionality of the body.

Although the scale of the artifact varies, fashion design shares certain similarities with architecture. In particular, regarding the users of architecture, Lawson (2005) noted that 'users are all different and likely to make differing demands on the final design. The different kinds of users involved in buildings often makes this extremely complex' (p. 169). Additionally, regarding practical aspects, Lawson (2005, 103) listed examples of various 'technological problems' of producing, making or building the design. For various types of designers, from architects to graphic and product designers, these problems need to be considered for not only the construction of objects, but also their working life in use.

Offering Sensorial Experiences Through Materials

Respondent 1 commented, 'when I see new fabrics, then I have new ideas about what I could do with them' (interview, February 3, 2016). Similarly, for many fashion designers, fabrics are the starting point of designing. Finding a new fabric immediately sparks new ideas as soon as the texture of the fabric is sensed. Beyond the material being an inspiration source, the sensation of touching is closely connected to the experiences that designers want to offer through the use of their design. Besides texture, many other elements, including comfort, colour, and weight, are considered depending on their use of materials. Combinations of different materials can provide a new sensorial experience for wearers and thus become an essential feature, offering unique experiences to the wearer beyond visual aesthetics. Accordingly, the quality aspect of materials is often emphasized, and understanding the property of materials is vital in order for fashion designers to create what they intend to offer to their potential wearers.

Ræbild (2015, 163-167) discussed the ways in which fashion designers attempt to 'own' the material. To both understand and create material, they apply diverse techniques in a 'transformation process,' including washing, crinkling, tearing, laddering, patchwork, embroidery, stitching, and tumbling. These techniques take place on the surface level of fabric or when the garment is constructed. Besides understanding the material in relation to the sensation of touch, designers' consideration of colour was acknowledged, as the visual sensation can affect the personal aesthetic perception of clothes.

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	CONCEPT			
		← ABSTRACT			→ TANGIBLE
Process	Continuity	Trusting a Personal Vision	Mixing External Sources of Inspiration	Longitudinal Evolution of Design	Modifying a Specific Element of Design
Outcome	Collection	Building Design Concepts	Having a Holistic View	Stressing the Visual Outcome	Combining Different Elements
Use	Context	Articulating Personalities	Placements of the Design	Negotiating the Physicality in Use	Creating Sensorial Experiences through Materials

Figure 1.
Three categories of dressmaking practice.

Similarly, Cross (2006) explained that designers ‘understand what messages objects communicate, and they can create new objects which embody new messages’ (p. 9). He argued that this ability to ‘read’ and ‘write’ through materials is at the core of their thinking. Buchanan (1992) also wrote about design being material objects but with deeper experiences to offer. Traditionally, the view on design has been more concerned with the form and visual aesthetic of everyday products. For Buchanan (1992, 9), this view has expanded to include ‘a more thorough and diverse interpretation of the physical, psychological, social, and cultural relationships between products and human beings.’

Discussion and Conclusion

Figure 1 summarizes the concepts that are used in constructing three categories of fashion design practice. It demonstrates how fashion design practice requires a complex set of actions at both abstract and tangible levels. Although the level of employing each action can vary depending on the designer’s condition and preference, it can be argued that continuity, collection and context situate dressmaking practice within the dimensions of process, outcome and use. In other words, this is how design should be considered when the term ‘fashion’ is added.

This effort to theorize dressmaking practice aims to contribute in two ways, to give voice to fashion designers in research on design practice and, secondly, to rediscover the aspects of designing that are less visible in fashion research. When introducing ‘fashion thinking,’ a set of actionable strategies of fashion design, Nixon and Blakley (2012) remarked that the underdevelopment of studying fashion design is due to social prejudices rendering it a gender-specific and frivolous practice. Uncovering dressmaking contributes to overcoming these issues while providing the language for fashion designers to explain how they design instead of mystifying. Its significance is comparable to design thinking discourses that have contributed to expanding designers’ role (Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla, and Çetinkaya 2013; Kimbell 2011).

The objective of this study was to construct a theory on the dressmaking practice of fashion design in order to understand the various situations that fashion designers may face compared to other

designers. Alongside critically examining the literature on design and fashion, an empirical study with professional fashion designers was conducted to elaborate upon fashion design practice through a dialogue between the literature and the data. The study findings make explicit a careful translation of fashion design for a fuller understanding of fashion design in relation to design practice discourses and the fragmented research on fashion design.

This study lacks the depth of reviewing a range of studies on design practice in presenting the findings. However, its main intention was to fill the empirical gap of studying fashion design practice, and to compare fashion designers' practice with generic design practice. The emerged concepts and categories of dressmaking are an invitation for future studies to take place at the intersection of design and fashion studies.

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Biography

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Appendix

Table A1. Key information about the interview respondents.

<i>Respondent ID</i>	<i>Professional Experience (Y: Years)</i>	<i>Type of Product</i>	<i>Business Size (N: Number of employees)</i>
1	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Men's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
2	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
3	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear, accessories	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
4	$Y \geq 20$	Women's wear, accessories	Small ($3 \leq N < 10$)
5	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Small ($3 \leq N < 10$)
6	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
7	$10 \leq Y < 15$	Women's wear, accessories	Small ($3 \leq N < 10$)
8	$10 \leq Y < 15$	Women's wear	Small ($3 \leq N < 10$)
9	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
10	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Medium ($N \geq 10$)
11	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
12	$15 \leq Y < 20$	Women's wear, accessories, home	Medium ($N \geq 10$)
13	$10 \leq Y < 15$	Women's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
14	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear, accessories	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
15	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Unisex	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
16	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Women's wear	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
17	$5 \leq Y < 10$	Unisex	Micro ($1 \leq N < 3$)
18	$Y \geq 20$	Women's wear	Small ($3 \leq N < 10$)