

Pattern Cutting as Societal Manifest: the pioneering case of Contour Cutting

Ulla Ræbild

Design School Kolding, Denmark

ur@dskd.dk

Structured Abstract

Purpose: The paper sheds light on an almost unknown pioneer in fashion. The case of Preben Hartmann is the tale of a craftsman who, formed by years of training in traditional tailoring and haute couture during the 1950s and 1960s, opens shop and studio in Copenhagen in 1970 in the midst of the youth revolution. From his work with bespoke designs for costumers Hartmann develops the Contour Cutting system and thinking. A shape making system that is based on values such as user involvement, craft, creativity, body and beauty diversity, citizen resilience and designer autonomy.

The purpose of the study is first, to understand if, and possibly in what ways, the Contour Cutting System and the thinking behind it pre-empted current movements in fashion design practice related to pattern cutting and shape making with emphasis on overlapping issues such as creativity, waste reduction, body mobility, production and aesthetics , and as such pre-empted topics within the larger discourse on fashion design for sustainability. Second, as the Contour Cutting System is largely unrecognized, to discuss the relevance of the systems' agenda for today's acute challenges in the fashion sector and beyond. In other words, to examine in what ways Hartmann's past thinking, may, or may not, inspire us in the present to re-shape the future of fashion design in terms of clothes and cultures of making.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper is constructed as a case study of the Contour Cutting System. The empirical material consists of a series of articles written by Hartmann for the Danish journal named Husflid (meaning craft or home industry) in 1985 in which Hartmann describes and illustrates the Contour Cutting pattern making system and the thinking. The case study sets the premise, to read the article collection as a manifest, in that they convey manifest traits, that is, a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer. Following introduction and background, the paper provides an account of Preben Hartmann's life and career based on an extensive Curriculum Vitae written by Hartmann in 1991. It then analyses the Contour Cutting pattern system and manifest (CCSM) followed by a discussion of CCSM in relation to contemporary creative pattern cutting systems. Finally, the paper address CCSM

through the perspective of recent fashion design manifests and use this to discuss key elements of the CCSM against current discourses in fashion design for sustainability.

Findings: Through examination of the Contour Cutting case, the study uncovers eight key themes embedded in the Contour Cutting system and thinking: Personal agency, Responsibility, Value of clothes, Fashion system critique, Body address, Health and well-being, Fit and (physical) freedom, Common good - common freedom. Moreover, the case study unfolds how pattern cutting and societal agenda has been linked in fashion design early in the rise of the sustainability discourse and prior to the critique of fast fashion.

Research limitations/implications: Due to limitations in paper length, only two pattern cutting systems were included in the discussion.

Practical implications: It has not been possible to access the Hartmann collection at the Danish Design Museum at the time of the study, due to Museum renovation and temporarily closing of archives. This has limited the empirical material in terms of photographic material and garments.

Originality/value: Through examination and discussion of the Contour Cutting case the paper contributes with new knowledge for research and practice on how an alternative approach to 3D shaping and pattern cutting occurred with Contour Cutting in the 1960's. Based on the insights, the paper argues that fashion design making and pattern cutting, as exemplified in the CCSM, holds a potential for social engagement and critical consumption awareness, that it is timely to activate in light of the current fashion system break down, as a way to make fashion relevant in the future.

Keywords: Pattern cutting, designer autonomy, fashion pioneer, craft, fashion social agency, design manifest, fit, made-to-measure, sustainability, slow fashion

Article Classification

Case study

ISBN: 978-989-54263-1-7