

**Connected Spaces: experimental and social business practices of Here Today Here Tomorrow**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** For fashion to transform into a more sustainable industry, it needs experimental fashion enterprises that challenge and innovate its current systems. Yet dominant assumptions that a business's primary contribution must be financial growth and profit impede such experimentation from taking place. The Here Today Here Tomorrow design collective (HTHT), practices an alternative approach to fashion entrepreneurship. In this paper the HTHT 'shop studio' offers a case study for fashion enterprise where prosperity is defined by creative freedom, wellbeing, community connectedness and opportunities to participate meaningfully in common projects.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A research process of self-reflection and literature review forms the basis of this case study. Three key observations are offered of alternative fashion entrepreneurship and sustainable prosperity that stem from direct experience.

**Findings:** Firstly, exploring 'Multiple Narratives of Sustainability' as integral to HTHT's function and fluid evolving practice. Secondly, 'Collaborative and Cooperative Working', a cornerstone of sustainable practice, as HTHT's organisational structure; an explicitly non-hierarchical and empathic approach to business partnership. Lastly, the need for 'Freedom for Experimentation', for there to be space and time available for organisations of diverse scale and social contribution.

**Originality/value:** This paper will be relevant to educators, academics and fashion industry leaders looking to foster experimental or cooperative models for sustainable fashion. We highlight challenges and restrictions posed by current economic, social and industrial systems and offer suggestions to provide conditions for more alternative projects.

**Keywords:** sustainable prosperity, experimental spaces, collaboration, alternative fashion practices

**Article Classification:** case study literature review

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## **Introduction**

Fashion, like all industries reliant on material resources and energy, must find a way to adequately respond to the unfolding human-made ecological crisis. Climate change and biodiversity loss are two of the major challenges that demand an urgent restructuring of human activity at every level. Fashion as an industrialised sector has a relatively high environmental footprint compared with other products and is sometimes seen as a ‘poster child’ for wasteful consumption practices and inbuilt obsolescence (Fletcher and Tham, 2015: 2-5). Specific issues associated with fashion include ‘water stress caused by the growing, dyeing, and finishing processes; modern-day slavery endemic to fashion supply chains; and feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement that are exacerbated by fashion imagery and consumption levels’ (Williams, 2018: 78). That fashion has such a broad impact across environmental, social and psychological areas is indicative of its reach throughout structures of human society. However, as a key part of our society, fashion also contributes to livelihoods, fosters social connections and creative expression across all cultures and therefore offers great potential for human flourishing at many levels (Fletcher and Tham, 2015).

Yet the majority of efforts to reposition fashion towards sustainability focus not on the social nature of fashion but rather use technocentric or eco-efficiency approaches, defined by improvement strategies like switching to recycled materials, or other managerial changes that merely ‘minimise’ negative economic, environmental, and social impacts. Such reforms make positive improvements to the environmental impact of individual products but because they still function within a system of growth, waste and inequity, they fail to contribute to a net change towards sustainability (Fletcher, 2017; Fleming and Chamberlain, 2016; Thackara, 2015; Ehrenfeld, 2015). To become a sustainable contributor to society, fashion business, along with other industries, will instead need to challenge the systems and priorities of growth and profit that most companies are unable or unwilling to change. For this it will be incumbent on new models for the fashion industry, to start with a radical definition of sustainability, one of doing no harm to the environment, rather than slowing down the ‘march toward the abyss’ (Ehrenfeld, 2015: 59). The realities of the carrying capacity of our planet and consequences of continuous growth mean that from such radical work is the only territory where meaningful sustainability change will come (Fleming and Chamberlain, 2016; D’Alisa *et al.*, 2015).

In this paper the authors, as members of the Here Today Here Tomorrow (HTHT) design collective [1], describe the HTHT ‘shop studio’ as a case study to explore new models for fashion enterprise (as part of the required larger transformation of the fashion industry). The following insights stem from a collective process of testing and reflection over the six years of running the shop studio followed more recently by a focused combined reflection on the opportunities and challenges of sustainable fashion enterprise. As already described, the recommendations herein are aligned to approaches which prioritise social and ecological approaches to sustainability, rather than technocentric ones. Our experience

running a physical shop has convinced us of the necessity for sustainability efforts to acknowledge the intricate social reality of fashion on the ground, in people's lives and connected to communities as a web of complex motivations, relationships, local influences and material resources (Fletcher, 2018). As such, fashion sustainability must be part of larger conversations of how society is structured including how prosperity or value to a community is measured.

Against this backdrop we've identified themes worth considering in setting a course for sustainable fashion entrepreneurship. This includes embracing multiple approaches to sustainability and exploring new narratives, rather than attempting a one-size-fits-all solution (Fletcher, 2010; Smith and Tyszczyk, 2014). This has been integral to HTHT's fluid evolving practice and we discuss it as an alternative to more easily marketable sustainability simplifications. Next we describe how collaborative and cooperative working, a cornerstone of sustainable practice, (Thackara, 2005; Todeschini, 2017) has evolved as HTHT's organisational structure, helping it to be based on an explicitly non-hierarchical, supportive and empathic approach to business partnership that resonates with descriptions from design disciplines of 'cultures of resilience' (Manzini and Till, 2015). Lastly, we explore a vision of fashion entrepreneurship defined by progressive measures of sustainable prosperity: creative freedom, wellbeing, community connectedness and opportunities to participate meaningfully in common projects (CUSP, 2018). This means protecting space and time for enterprises to fill niches organically, in ways that enrich communities and local high streets by adding to the diversity of scale and social contribution (Sims *et al.*, 2005; Manzini 2011) rather than getting squeezed out by immediate overbearing pressure of competitive profitability (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013; Uluorta, 2014).

A note on language: included in this paper are the experiences and self-reflections of the three authors as members of the HTHT design collective. We have therefore elected to write it in the first person as is appropriate to this discussion.

### **What does a new model for fashion look like?**

The following is a critique of how success in fashion business is usually defined. It is based on the worldview that nature and society should be prioritized over the economy and a rejection of the assumption that universal prosperity most 'naturally' follows a booming economy. Such a viewpoint is expounded by the findings of ecologists (McKibben, 2007) progressive economists (Ostrom, 2009; NEF, 2018a; CLES, 2018; Schumacher, 1973) and the Degrowth movement (D'Alisa *et al.*, 2015). One argument these approaches share is that traditional measures of prosperity are not fit for purpose. For instance, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is often used as shorthand for the prosperity of a country but does not take into account social costs, depletion of natural resources, welfare losses resulting from unequal distribution of income, the costs of pollution and environmental damage, or the gendered nature of unpaid work largely carried out by women (Jackson, 2009; Ehrenfeld, 2015). The success of fashion

enterprises is generally measured monetarily first, with social and environmental contribution further down the list, if present at all. This can be seen by analysing reports on the state of the fashion industry; headline topics are without fail about sales, profits and growth projections (See *The Business of Fashion* and McKinsey & Company, 2017; *Mintel Clothing Retailing Report*, 2017).

However, in fashion business, the current economic structures must not be taken as absolute. We can and should build economies and industries that support a socially and environmentally just world (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013: 8). For instance, Jackson advises that sustainability should be rewarded fiscally by shifting the tax burden from rewarding economic output (profits from manufactured goods and wages) to punishing negative ecological impacts. Strategies in this vein operate by making businesses feel the burden of their often 'invisible' environmental impact, to level the playing field so that those who do take such qualities into account are not penalised for it (2009).

Jackson's argument that prosperity should be measured using social indicators connects with a turn in the international sustainable development community (i.e. in the UN and OECD) towards emphasising the social and cultural aspects of sustainability (Duxbury and Jeannotte, 2010). Since the 1990s traditional sustainable development approaches which formerly focused on physical environmental and economic concerns are being joined by 'unquantifiable' agendas to do with quality of life (Lilley, 2007, 2009 in McMahon and Bhamra, 2015: 368). In answer to this Manzini finds that over the last few decades, a mix of projects by institutions, enterprises, non-profit organisations and individuals have proved the success of working outside of mainstream economic models and have therefore provided 'benchmarks that might well provide the answers to the most pressing concerns and challenges of our time' (Manzini, 2011: 100).

Likewise, in fashion and sustainability, a dissatisfaction with the dominance of (ineffectual) reformist approaches and the contradictory requirement for increased growth (Klepp and Tobiasson, 2017) has brought about a new wave of work emphasizing social processes instead of material issues (Fletcher and Tham, 2015: 7). Fletcher calls for a new framework for fashion to focus on alternative fashion formulations to the current one (2017) and Todeschini *et al.* find that new fashion business models are emerging to meet cultural and socio-economic macro-needs in novel ways. This includes experimentation with how to position 'sustainability not as an afterthought, but as a crucial design element' shaped by movements such as lowsumerism and slow fashion. (Todeschini *et al.*, 2017: 761). However, because fashion sustainability efforts that challenge dominant social structures are emergent and often in conflict with prevailing priorities, there is much work to be done in developing knowledge and testing strategies for change in this area. Furthermore, this must include work both in commercial and non-commercial experiences of fashion, acknowledging the opportunities for sustainability

potential in the cultural or social spheres as well as more formalised or institution-based activities (Fletcher and Tham, 2015).

Progressive economics and the degrowth movement offer guidance on what sustainability and prosperity in the fashion industry should actually look like. Alternative fashion endeavours should follow Lilley's description of sustainability to focus on delivering a positive environmental impact, adding to social equality, acting on a concern for the quality of life of all the people in a business, promoting democratic participation and trust communities, basing their organisational structure on harmonious and cooperative behaviour and helping to preserve social and cultural dynamism (2007, 2009 in McMahon and Bhamra, 2015: 368).

A major obstacle to sustainability is that alternative businesses models based on the priorities outlined above can find it challenging to succeed when competing for space and attention against conventional businesses where monetary profits come first. There is an argument that such things should be looked after by the public sector and that the private must be free to pursue profit first. Warren and Jones however find that there is an important role for 'non-state' cultural intermediaries, particularly in straightened economic times (2015: 1739). We argue that at least all businesses which claim to be interested in sustainability should be working to bring these things about. These are the goals that must be core business if sustainability is to be achieved.

### **Here Today Here Tomorrow**

As members of the Here Today Here Today design collective, we will next describe the experience of running a shop and studio, where many of these issues affected our business both directly and indirectly. HTHT is a collective of the authors, three designers with backgrounds in the field of sustainable fashion: Anna-Maria Hesse, Julia Crew & Katelyn Toth-Fejel [2]. From 2010 to 2016 the collective ran a physical space on a high street in Dalston, London. Instead of operating solely as a conventional retail shop, the space was an active design studio and practical workshop, the tools of this practice visible alongside the display of varied sustainable and ethical designers' work for sale. It hosted exhibitions, workshops and events; linking art, music and local people with ideas around sustainability and fashion.



*Image 1 Caption: The Here Today Here Tomorrow Shop Studio, 2014*

Our philosophy was to design, make, mend, showcase, sell and educate, all under the same roof, accessible and visible to all (which is why it felt natural for us to refer to the space with the compound word of ‘shop studio’). We embraced a holistic approach to sustainability, celebrating diversity and recognising that there is no ‘one-size fits all’ solution. The name itself Here Today Here Tomorrow is a play on the phrase ‘here today gone tomorrow’, representing our commitment to a more meaningful and long-lasting relationship with fashion.

As part of our experience running a small business in East London we were founding members of the East End Trades Guild (EETG) [3], an alliance of over 200 owner occupied businesses. Through Guild meetings and projects, we were exposed to the crisis that many such small and local businesses find themselves in and continue to struggle against. Demand for space in East London has risen dramatically, and in the last 10 years some businesses have faced rent hikes of almost 300% by landlords cashing in on the area’s popularity (NEF, 2018b). An area known for its creative and unique character and businesses is in danger of becoming a ‘clone town’, described as a place where the high street is virtually indistinguishable from ones up and down the country. Where ‘retail spaces once filled with a thriving mix of independent butchers, newsagents, tobacconists, pubs, bookshops, greengrocers and family-owned general stores are becoming filled with faceless supermarket retailers, fast-food chains, and global fashion outlets’ (Sims *et al.*, 2005).

Aside from individual livelihoods, such a shift has been shown to have detrimental economic and social effects. In the UK, ‘for every £1 spent with a small or medium-sized business, 63p stayed in the local economy, compared to 40p with a larger business’ (O’Connell, 2013). Small and locally owned businesses also contribute to the social fabric of a place to a far greater degree than chain stores as those local pounds represent important locally maintained relationships and investment in community (Ferm,

2016). The unique narrative of the area is also suppressed as locally owned businesses are far more likely to adapt to place, to showcase local projects and respond to local needs (Fletcher, 2018).

Even as a locally owned business, our role in opening up a new shop in Dalston, East London, an area of rapidly changing demographics is not a simple one. In a classic example of gentrification, we were drawn to the area by the inexpensive rent and creative local community, both made possible by the area's recent history of its warehouses made empty by manufacturing moving overseas (The Gentle Author, 2017). We acknowledge that our story is part of a far larger one, connected to power dynamics that constantly drive displacement and competition for space in cities like London (Ferm, 2016), something we do not have space to discuss in depth here. Instead our focus is in investigating the way that unchecked free-market competition for space is in direct conflict with a proliferation of alternative, creative fashion enterprises that challenge a homogenous unsustainable model of fashion.

To that end we offer three key observations from our six years running the shop studio as an alternative fashion enterprise. HTHT's collective practice can be described as often a process of thoughtful experimentation; driven on the one hand by purpose and curiosity influenced by our academic backgrounds and on the other striving to meet the requirements of running a business. As such these real world investigations fulfil Ehrenfeld and Hoffman's call for understanding of systems that 'comes from a keen sense of observation and continuous learning about the system in which one lives' (2013: 94 in Fletcher, 2018). The observations below have emerged through this practice, including iterations of observation, evaluation and testing among the three of us, both at the time and on reflection in the years since.

### **Multiple Narratives of Sustainability**

The first observation is that new models for sustainable fashion require *multiple narratives of sustainability*. There is no one-size fits all solution to the issues facing our society. Sustainability requires paying more, not less attention to the requirements of a complex world with varying needs in different places and to devising clever approaches to meet these needs ethically and with integrity (Ehrenfeld, 2015). The HTHT shop studio aimed firstly to exhibit and showcase diverse approaches to the material side of sustainability through garments and accessories that included the use of organic fabrics, natural dyes, fair trade and ethical manufacture, durability and high-quality construction, recycling and upcycling. These products were invariably made by small-scale designer makers and independent brands that are not otherwise seen on the high street. The value of these goods represented much more than the price on the tag. We acted as enthusiastic advocates of these processes and uniquely for a retail environment visitors would be speaking to a person who had designed and crafted many of the items in the space.





*Image 2 Caption: Interior of the Here Today Here Tomorrow shop studio, 2012*

Additionally, as was mentioned previously, we used the space for diverse events such as gigs, research activities, and exhibitions meaning that we, and a wide range of other designers, creatives and researchers, could present and discuss different speculative narratives for sustainability. Examples include Tara Baath Mooney's My Pockets My Space research event [4], an acoustic performance by musician Alessi Laurent-Marke [5] and an exhibition of artist Charlotte Warne Thomas' sculptures and window project referencing environmental architect, Paolo Soleri [6]. Our goal was to further embed this ethos in the small details of our business as standard - from reclaimed materials and furniture used as shop fittings, recycled and recyclable product packaging, to our newsletters and social media platforms, used as often to inform our network about local events or worthwhile campaigns such as Fashion Revolution [7] as it was to promote sales.



*Image 3 Caption: Tara Baoth Mooney's 'My Pockets My Space' event, 2012*

It was important that we offered our customers knowledge and choice. Not only through the variety of products for sale and the diverse approaches to sustainable design that these represented, but for those that didn't want to buy anything through attending creative workshops, for those who didn't have time for a workshop by engaging with us through social media. Our experience was as Jackson describes (2009) that people often find a greater sense of well-being and fulfilment in taking part in such activities than they do from the time-poor, materialistic relationships which are all many shops have to offer. To be clear we are not describing a novelty experiential customer engagement strategy to boost profits - a growing trend for brands and retail in the past two decades (Sorescu, *et al.*, 2011). While that may have sometimes been a benefit, the activities described were part of a lived experience and a dedication to values of social and human interactions, community and education around skills for sustainability.

In the years preceding the opening of the shop studio, there was a zeitgeist in mainstream UK and US media for seemingly just discovered simple solutions of how to 'green' one's wardrobe. In 2006 mainstream fashion magazines like Vogue and Elle came out with their first 'Green Issues' (Lee, 2007). Similarly, at this time there was increased interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), one example being M & S's Plan A which set out targets to reduce carbon emissions and replace plastic with hessian shopping bags, amongst other initiatives (M&S, no date). Whilst unquestionably laudable, the trend set at that time was a tendency to communicate one-size fits all solutions that leave consumption patterns unchallenged. Our observations from this period is exemplified by the frequent question from customers of, 'what's the one fabric I should wear in order to be sustainable?'. The very makeup of our space offered a rebuttal to the premise behind this question by promoting a range of ways people could engage with sustainability and clothing, aiming to communicate the fact that it

wasn't about a simple quick fix but the start of a whole new narrative, required to guide us away from the ecological crises (Fletcher, 2010; Smith and Tyszczuk, 2014). Unlike many mainstream media and CSR efforts at the time (and to a great extent still today), we wanted to showcase the complexity of the issues rather than gloss them over to create a slick 'marketable' story. We were honest about the challenges and sometimes messiness involved in trying to be sustainable, and the parts we didn't have the means to address. Rather than a pre-packaged narrative, the HTHT shop studio offered a showcase for a curious, critical and evolving approach to fashion sustainability.

### **Freedom for Experimentation**

In the case of HTHT, the ability to experiment with and change the function of the shop studio space was central to both the business, our process as a collective of creative and adaptive practitioners, and our way of engaging with our local community and passers-by. We are reluctant to refer to this community as consumers or customers, as this reduces the relationship to one of simple monetary exchange. We ran workshops in craft skills such as knitting, natural dye and leathercraft. We produced small-scale collections of products using waste materials from local businesses including an upholsterers and leather sellers both within a few minutes' walk from the shop. We held events and parties in collaboration with artists, illustrators, musicians, researchers and fashion activists. Our shop window itself we used as a canvas to creatively express ideas or share positive messages in a vibrant and eye-catching way. This diversity of activity, most of which cannot be measured in terms of productivity or profit, was crucial in creating a meaningful and rich environment - both for ourselves and the local community.



*Image 4 Caption: A natural dyeing workshop in the shop studio, 2011*



*Image 5 Caption: Anna-Maria Hesse working at her knitting machine in the same space*

Far from prioritizing financial gain, our motivations in setting up HTHT included the continued exploration of fashion sustainability through creative practice and community building, the sharing of skills with the public and pursuit of knowledge. But profit is the primary purpose of nearly all competition on the high street, leading to diminished neighbourhoods. The 2005 New Economics Foundation (NEF) Clone Town report stated that many local authorities and town councils were using planning law to protect and enhance diversity and community environments (Sims *et al.*, 2005). However, from 2010-2016 in East London that was not our experience and indeed the 2009 updated NEF report showed that all 18 of London areas surveyed had moved more into Clone Town status (NEF, 2010). Warren and Jones say ‘for the last three decades, UK governments have been attempting to capture the activities of small independent businesses and third sector organisations’ but largely without success as austerity policies have not led to increased local influence in that direction (2015: 1738). This is in part because local governments have also been stripped of their power to make decisions about the makeup of their streets through the creation of quangos, competitive tendering and austerity as well as national legislation to this effect (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015). Local governments therefore variously cannot or will not do enough about the market forces that lead to formulaic neighbourhoods and make it difficult for an organic and diverse array of experimental, traditional or creative endeavours to exist and thrive (Jenkins, 2018; Portas, 2011).

In fashion, as discussed above, the uniformity of retail is detrimental to possibilities for sustainable living. Diversity is a well-known characteristic of resilient ecosystems partly because diversity correlates to options. Currently for many people the most readily available clothing experiences are ones of homogenous and passive consumption, a model which stifles alternatives and diminishes choice

thereby preventing systemic innovation (Fletcher, 2014). Some areas are similar to Dalston where, including the options offered by our shop, commercial choices for interacting with clothing could be found in independent boutiques, second hand shops, fast fashion chain stores, market stalls, fabric and haberdashery shops, vintage shops, charity shops, a weekly car boot sale, occasional swaps, local sewing groups and classes and access to locally made, upcycled and ethically made clothing. Some of these actively support non-commercial and potentially more sustainable activities of making, repairing, sharing and lending. This contrasts starkly with many areas of the UK where the only choices offline may be chain stores or charity shops. Local diversity means access to a range of materials, knowledge and options and this promotes agency. A liveable city is one made up of small neighbourhoods with their own character where people can meet their diverse needs (Horgan, 2017).

Freedom for us in 2010 came from having a physical space where we could interact with the public in an imaginative and flexible way, where we could take risks, learn from our mistakes and where the cost did not prohibit our endeavours. Unfortunately, over time as our running costs invariably went up, the continuation of the business in that location became untenable unless we turned all our efforts to generating profit through sales, thereby vastly reducing our freedom to experiment which we were unwilling to do. Our activities that did make money became less able to cover the costs of the shop (rent, business rates, utilities, banking fees, etc.), which were steadily increasing each year. This meant the space gradually became more a burden than an opportunity. The stress of dealing with a mercenary landlord was another factor. In 2016, in order to maintain our ethos, we decided to leave the space in Dalston and continue with the activities of our collective beyond the conventions of a permanent, physical space.

Our argument here is not that businesses with shop spaces should not be responsible for covering their costs but that the balance of spiralling prices and competition for space is too far in one direction. The same pressures that are transforming high streets into clone towns or making physical retail untenable (i.e. intense competition for urban space and property speculation, the squeezing of council budgets, competition from cheaper retail online and out of town retail, etc.) (Pratt, 2009) also discourages the possibility of public facing experimental fashion enterprises, thereby cutting off one avenue for new sustainable fashion business models to exist.

### **Collaborative and Cooperative Working**

Despite all members of the HTHT collective being ambitious and entrepreneurial, we are all in agreement that none of us would have attempted this venture alone. This is because we deeply valued each other's ethos, skills and integrity and sought the 'prosperity' of a convivial, collaborative working practice. Our experience of collaborating together aligns with the definition presented by Todeschini *et al.*, that collaboration 'allows the creation of a supporting ecosystem that drives resource and knowledge

sharing, promotes the diffusion of sustainable practices, and ultimately allows business model experimentation' (2017: 764). But further to this, our partnership has been defined through generosity, compassion, empathy and trust - all defining characteristics of resilient cultures (Manzini and Till, 2015). Our shared values and sense of purpose, together, were at the core of the business.

Inevitably this collaborative and cooperative approach was present in our dealings with our wider network of creatives and local businesses, and our customers. An important (but hard to measure) aspect of diverse and idiosyncratic businesses are the things that they offer incidentally alongside their commercial purpose (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2006). For example, a haberdashers where advice is freely and informally given on sewing projects or where a businesses is deeply invested in its local community by virtue of it being the owner's place of residence. 'The market economy represents only a minority of the important non-monetary transactions of products and services that sustain society, such as mentoring and volunteering' (Warren and Jones, 2015: 1741). The British Council calls this 'hidden work' that thrives where there is a diverse mix of SME's not-for-profits, and creative formal and informal organisations (Dovey, *et al.*, 2016: 16). This hidden work partly happens because the people running micro-businesses have different objectives, not all of which involve creating highly efficient companies (Dellot, 2015), which indeed was our own experience with HTHT. These might include personal enjoyment or to have the flexibility to look after relatives. Such diverse objectives contribute richness to the resilience of communities. However, when the only businesses that can exist and succeed in an area are those that focus on commercial profit to the exclusion of all else, the area loses these other, often invisible, services. The British Council acknowledges that measuring such value that businesses contribute is difficult (Dovey *et al.*, 2016), they can't be calculated using traditional quantitative measures. One option borrowed from ecological resilience work is to establish rules of thumb of what factors in a community indicate social and cultural sustainability and health (Cabell and Oelofse, 2012).

Finding evidence of interconnections and interdependencies is one method of measuring how elements of a community benefit it socially. A resilient neighbourhood is one with a rich web of such connections (Norris *et al.*, 2008). Part of understanding how to live with ecological intelligence is to have as Wendell Berry says, 'a sense of the impossibility of acting or living alone or solely in one's own behalf, and this rests in turn upon a sense of the order upon which any life depends and of the proprieties of place within that order' (Hooks, 2009: 65). Any business setting up a premises in a new area should be looking to enrich their community and one way to do that is to build connections and to be willing to need those people around you instead of aspiring to stand alone by virtue of money in the bank. As HTHT was much more than a retail space we could adapt to the needs of the people around us, building a more collaborative and participatory relationship with those who came through our doors.

## **Challenges & Opportunities**

The observations of this paper have focused on the experiences of running a physical shop studio for 6 years in London, but HTHT was never just about this space. It was, and continues to be, a collective of like-minded individuals looking to combine our efforts and expertise to find ways to not only speak and write about sustainability, but to proactively contribute to this movement - to walk the talk if you will. In 2011, one year after the shop studio opened, we started designing knitwear and accessory collections under the HTHT name and began working with fair trade craft producers in Nepal. This brand still exists, although without a physical retail space we now focus on direct sales through our website and wholesale to other retailers in the UK and Europe.

Although now freed from the financial obligations and other associated difficulties with the shop studio in its later years, we still face challenges related to running a fashion brand. How can we use our platform to be radical changemakers? How can we be more than a company that, albeit with the best intentions and ethics, is still locked into the yearly fashion calendar of producing more 'stuff' for people to 'consume'. For us this is quite a fundamental dilemma. In the two years since the shop studio closed, we have come to realise just how important the space was for exploration and experimentation, to being invested in a community and interacting with people in personal and meaningful ways. We are constantly looking at how we can evolve, including switching our production schedule to one dictated by bespoke customisation -whereby a customer can design their own product, allowing us to sidestep the relentless cycle of designing and producing new collections. We hope this will also give us a chance to engage with our network in a more personal way again.

We have described the challenge of measuring the value of enterprises like ours (British Council, 2016; Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2006; Warren and Jones, 2015) and this paper is our attempt to meet this challenge; to articulate and define the value and purpose of HTHT to a wider audience, to try and ensure opportunities are created and space is available for like-minded enterprises in the future. This is based on our own experience and observations, in a particular place and time - by no means do we feel that we have an easy answer, or that our approach is the best or only solution, it is one of many.

None of the members of HTHT have a background in business, marketing or retail - we were all trained in art and design fields. As designers disillusioned with mainstream fashion practices, we relished having a public space as a canvas to experiment with what an alternative sustainable fashion system might look like. Alastair Fuad-Luke notes that 'designers are, after all, licensed to imagine, to realize what John Wood calls "attainable micro-utopias", to make the unthinkable possible' (Fuad-Luke, 2009; xx-xxi). Design is a tool to change the world and connect things not currently connected, and designers have both the skill sets and mindset to experiment with new ideas and challenge the underlying forms, 'design is critical imagining' (*ibid.*). This is a far more important definition of entrepreneurship for us,

‘recombining different approaches, resources, and competencies with synergic effects’ (Todeschini *et al.*: 769) but to come up with a new formulation for social benefit. The experimentation of HTHT in the shop studio was partly a practice of trying to re-design the relationship designers, makers and customers have with fashion as an industry.

In this our suggestions for fashion and sustainability is to focus less on reforming existing systems and to develop new ways to support a flourishing of experimentation, true innovation at the social level, rather than the technical. This should take place at many levels, just one of them being the one we’ve talked about in this paper, the context of local studios and shops. In this, there must be some availability of space for people and organisations to exist for other reasons than pure competitive profitability. Such activities are often contained in domestic or hidden away spaces, but an area is more effectively enriched when public spaces also offer endeavours of a wide variety of scale and purpose (Uluorta, 2014).

If sustainability with meaningful effect is to take hold this is one important place for it to happen, where new narratives for fashion sustainability, relationships and process are accessible to the public and embedded in local communities. With the HTHT shop studio, we joined fashion enterprise, experimentation and values driven projects appropriate for the time and place but there are countless other configurations taking place in other places. In our experience the most important way to allow such experimentation to occur is to not expect all fashion entrepreneurship activities to compete directly with business operations that are solely interested in profit and return to stakeholders. At the moment in many places like London, the same market forces that are driving out traditional small businesses are making it increasingly difficult for any business or organisation to operate as a mix of commercial and social interests. Our experience in running the shop studio is linked to complex overlapping issues to do with how cities and neighbourhoods are managed but this doesn’t change the fact that as a society we need to feel empowered to take back control of our industries at the local economic level for social good.

## Footnotes

[1] <http://www.heretoday-heretomorrow.com/>

[2] Past members include Emma Rigby (2010-2014) and Ines Vicente (2010-2011).

[3] See more at <http://www.eastendtradesguild.org/uk>

[4] See more at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8lk2ly2qVM&list=FL6TpXzdBMC95cIx3C3jQZA>

[5] See more at <https://www.musicglue.com/alessisark/>

[6] See more at <http://www.charlottewarnethomas.com/post/94158480462/arcology-lives-2013-residency-at-here-today-here>



[7] See more at <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/>

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