Fashion Fictions: Unmaking the Mainstream Fashion System

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Abstract

Purpose: Fashion Fictions is an international participatory research project that aims to influence and energise the emergent post-growth fashion movement by bringing people together to create, experience and reflect on fictional visions of enticing alternative fashion cultures and systems. This paper considers the ways in which the project's generative activity, in the form of discursive world-building, practical prototyping and embodied enactment, provides a platform for participants to question – or "unmake" – the socioeconomic order of the real-world fashion system.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper focuses on the second stage of the project, where participants work in small groups to create an object or image to represent life in a fictional fashion world. It draws on qualitative data generated via four two-day prototyping workshops run between November 2021 and March 2022, each involving up to twelve participants.

Findings: The making involved in the collaborative prototyping activity provided fertile ground for unmaking the status quo. The focused act of speculating about an intentionally outlandish fictional world acted as a conduit for a more open-ended and powerful sense of wonder that led participants to question the assumptions and structures underpinning the mainstream fashion system.

Originality/value: The paper introduces the notion of "unmaking" to the post-growth fashion context and argues that taken-for-granted norms must be challenged as a necessary precursor to change. The participatory workshops discussed provide a practical and accessible way to support unmaking.

Keywords: ethics and aesthetics, processes of change, speculation, post-growth, unmaking.

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