

BLACK Sandy (UK)

Surface and form - towards a topology of three dimensional fashion knitwear - paper

Keywords: Knitting, maths, technology, fashion

The space between traditional disciplines is increasingly the site for innovative development, where objects, artworks and interventions occupy ambiguous positions, defying immediate categorisation and stimulating further investigation. The *space between* is also occupied by more familiar textile practices which can remain hidden and overlooked, undervalued or misunderstood. My career has largely been spent in one such aspect of constructed textiles - knitting - which has received relatively little academic attention. Knit combines the areas of craft, design, maths, technology, fashion and art in various proportions according to who is approaching it and from what perspective and intention. (Sandy Black is the author of *Knitwear in Fashion* published by Thames and Hudson 2002, the first examination of knit in the context of contemporary design, including artworks, interiors and accessories)

I originally studied maths because it represented a space between arts and sciences. I then discovered knitting as a creative space between the logic of maths and the untapped decorative design potential of a familiar technology. As a designer, I discovered that knit had no real place of its own but occupied a space between textiles and fashion, and not entirely understood by either discipline. Knitting is contradictory - both domestic craft and industrial production, and can be perceived and practised within a broad spectrum between art, craft and industry. Since the 1960's, artists have increasingly turned to clothing and the structural possibilities of knitting or the symbolic connotations of knitwear to communicate meaning and emotion, or articulate a critique of the modern condition. Examples are Rosemarie Trockel, Erwin Wurm, Maria Blaisse, Naomi London and Freddie Robins (the latter having traversed the boundaries in the opposite direction from textiles to art practice).

The structure of knitting has endless potential as three dimensionality is uniquely intrinsic to the process - whether made by hand or machine. The flexibility inherent in the knitted structure can be exploited in terms of stretch, drape, distortion and reversibility. Innovative fashion designers exploit knitted fabrication within clothing to create unusual garments and wrappings which take form only when worn around the body, exploring new contours and silhouettes. Examples can be seen in the designs of Azzedine Alaïa, Yohji Yamamoto, Comme des Garçons, Atsuro Tayama and Delphine Wilson .

This presentation will explore current practice utilising knit within fashion, interior design and artworks by artists and designers who are blurring boundaries between art and fashion, illustrated with visuals of relevant work. It will also indicate the potential for new forms of knitwear production using unconventional construction and embracing advanced knitting technology. New developments in my own knit design experiments are derived from the mathematical ideas within the topology of surfaces and space, which position knitting as a hybrid of craft, fashion, textiles, art, design and technology.

Sandy Black is a designer, lecturer and researcher in the field of textiles and fashion, specialising in knitwear and knitted fabrication utilised across disciplines including fashion, art and product design. She is particularly interested in design interfaces with old and new technologies, and concepts drawn from mathematics and science. She is the author of *Knitwear in Fashion* a comprehensive survey of international knit design and technology for fashion, artworks, performance and interiors, published by Thames and Hudson, 2002
