

## **Interrogating Fashion: Is the Future of Fashion Digital ?**

*Sandy Black, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, UK*

This paper discusses fashion in the digital age and particularly the impact of emerging technologies, based on inter-disciplinary debates which have recently taken place within the Digital Fashion strand of *Interrogating Fashion*, a Designing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century EPSRC/AHRC research cluster.

Fashion is one of the few remaining craft-based industries, relying on manual labour for manufacturing across its wide spectrum of levels from couture to mass production. The continuing impact of digital technologies for traditional skills and processes raises complex issues for the industry. Fashion is a fast-moving industry often condemned as frivolous and unimportant, but represents one of the major economic players on the global stage. Everyone has a strong personal relationship with clothes, one which is intimate and far from passive. Textiles and clothing are now the focus of increasing research as the carriers of ever-growing functionalities, from odour eating and moisture management to self-cleaning and therapeutic properties.

The integration of electronic responsiveness into fabrics via new technologies, materials and processes will render clothing more 'intelligent' and responsive to our needs for protection, care and wellbeing, in addition to its aesthetic qualities and will change our relationship with what we wear. If our intimate and emotional states can more easily be revealed through electronic textiles and programmable functionalities, will our clothes know more about us than we do? Can we be in control of our identity and social interactions when the environment is embedded with sensors, cameras and tags? In the foreseeable future, we will be able to walk into a service bureau with our scanned body measurements on a card and come away with a new outfit in a matter of hours. Could a paradigmatic shift to 'fashion on demand' be a partial solution to the waste and obsolescence inherent in the cycles of fashion?