Engagement with classical archaeology and the ethics of contemporary clothing production: exploring the interface of citizen engagement through technologies at the London Bloomsbury Festival 2020

Digital engagement through contemporary fashion design

Claire FRAMPTON, Oxford University Gardens, Libraries and Museums, UK

Setting the scene

The Atelier Tammam Sustainable Couture Roving Fashion Show in London presented a catwalk of sustainable fashion, in October 2020. This was part of the Bloomsbury Festival, which is an annual showcase of culture in an area of central London. The Tammam show combined various aspects: sustainable fashion practice, engagement with heritage and the environment of London, the models wore facemasks which were part of the collection, essential in the era of COVID. Online information about the show stated that it 'selected to pass some of Bloomsbury's iconic sites' this included the British Museum, where 'ancient textiles and draped statues have all given influence to Tammam's couture practice' (BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL 2020). The photograph Fig.1 documents the show outside the British Museum. Tammam promotes ethical practice and in the publicity invited interested people to follow the process of ethical clothes production through Instagram. People were encouraged to upload their photos to social media (BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL 2020). After the 2020 show, documentation was posted on internet social media by citizen participants, and on the Tammam and Bloomsbury Festival digital platforms. This included a film documenting the models walk through the streets of London which showed on the Bloomsbury Facebook channel (BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL 2020), which featured use of technologies documenting the project i.e. cameras, mobiles and tablets by models, citizen participants and official media personnel. It showcased a colourful collection; one piece a draped dress in grey silk. The caption for a Tammam Instagram post with a photograph of this item showcased outside the British Museum stated that this was 'cool steel #peacesilk chiton' that the 'fabulous silk skims the body like water', see the photograph Fig. 2. (HOUSEOFTAMMAM 2020). A type of classical garment, Koda wrote that a chiton is a 'chemise-like shift … Constructed of two rectangles of fabric … seamed together' (Koda 2003 p.219).

Fig. 1. Atelier Tammam Sustainable Couture Roving Fashion Show (2021) photograph taken by C.Frampton.

The Creative Process

In an interview after the event, Ms. Tammam said that the initial idea was for the show to take place in the British Museum, however this idea was dropped because of the lockdown. About the creative process of taking inspiration for the design of new garments from various historical eras, she spoke about her influences including 1940s vintage; she developed her sustainable fashion practise through working with historical methods. She said that 'the idea of Greek draped dresses… came from this idea of zero waste pattern cutting which obviously is… one way to be very sustainable'. She had learnt about the Greek chiton stye and recognised this in classical sculpture. About the contemporary use of historical methods, she said that:

'I think there's a lot to be said for how clothing was made in the past, as opposed to very mass produced fast fashion … the way we try and make clothes is going backwards into the time when things were made for you as an individual… In terms of sustainability it makes so much more sense in terms of supporting the crafts people who are making it … I actually think it's the future' (Tammam 2020).

About the relationship of her practice to a cannon or history of fashion inspired by classical sculpture', Ms.Tammam said that 'Fashion is cyclical, it goes round and round', in the 1930s Greek style draped dresses were in style. The online information about the 2020 show included a photograph of a show-

case of models posing on a staircase wearing white dresses with classical design influence (Blooms-bury Festival 2020). It was from a Tammam roving couture fashion show 10 years ago, taken at St.Pancras station, London. This referenced the Tammam archive and gave a taste of Tammam style (Tammam 2020). About the 2010 show, its documentation and photographic archive, Ms.Tam-mam said that interaction through social media such as Twitter wasn't significant, photos were stored on a hard disc, at that time there wasn't an online archive (Tammam 2020).

To quote recent related academia, an essay 'Material form and the dynamic archive' discusses ideas about historical archives of photographs, proposing to 'stop thinking of photographs and their ar-chives simply as passive "resources"', rather 'as actively "resourceful" – a space of creative intensity, of ingenuity, of rich historical force' (Edwards 2019 p.528). With the reuse of archival photos to pro-mote a recent show, and the encouragement of photography with social media, Tammam facilitated dynamic engagement with its' house archive, also with historic reference to classical influence on fashion, through digital technology.

Fig. 2. Atelier Tammam Sustainable Couture Roving Fashion Show (2021) Stuart Keegan for Bloomsbury Festival.

Citizen engagement, part of the Bloomsbury Festival

About citizen engagement, Ms.Tammam said the annual Bloomsbury Festival is 'very much about engaging the local community'. The encouragement of engagement with the show through technologies related to the development of understanding about Tammam and its locale; including QR codes and being able to link to the festival site (Tammam 2020). A short film on the Bloomsbury Festival YouTube channel featured a clip of the fashion show with the models walking past a red telephone box- a classic symbol of London, the shots allowed the viewer to appreciate the show within the context of the festival which included a range of art forms. Text at the end of the film states that the festival was successful despite the challenging times (BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL 2021). A page with information about the festival report on the festival website features statistics about records

of participant engagement including digital engagement for the whole festival, for instance records of '11,106 Social media followers' (BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL 2020).

Author Contributions

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