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Class and Co-opting Creativity in Fashion and Textile Education: **A Comparison of the Evolving Pedagogies of Making and Design at British Technical Schools and Art and Design Schools, 1870s-1950s**

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Abstract

Discourses of creativity play a crucial role in shaping cultural perceptions of what constitutes creative labour, who performs it, and where it is located. This article explores the historical role that businesses, policymakers and education-providers played as co-producers of discourses about creativity in fashion and textile design education. Beginning with the emergence of new vocational courses for textile design and manufacture in the 1870s, it traces how the language used to describe conceptions of creativity evolved in relation to educational provision for textiles, dressmaking and, later, fashion over the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, creativity became associated with labour related to designing fashion and textile goods – such as illustration – rather than the labour of making them. This shift resulted from the establishment of fashion and textile design as respected courses within art and design schools, which backed the ideal of a professional designer. It was implemented at the expense of, and with the effect of undermining the creative labour of staff and students in vocational trade schools. As a result, this article challenges the idea that the development of fashion and textile design courses in art and design schools democratized the creative labour of design in the British fashion industry by opening opportunities for the middle-classes. Rather, it finds that discourses around creative labour worked to exclude the creativity of the predominantly working-class students at technical schools, with long-term implications for the relationship between socio-economic status and access to the creative industries.

Keywords

Design Education, Vocational Education, Creativity, Professional, Trade School, Art School

With 102 higher education providers offering more than 347 related courses, fashion and textile design education has arguably never been more accessible in the United Kingdom (UCAS 2020). Yet fashion and textile design, like other areas of the creative industries, still struggle to achieve diversity, suggesting access to fashion and textiles education and employment is not equally distributed across socio-economic or ethnic groups (Arts Council England 2020). The reasons behind this are complex and multiple. They include the barriers imposed by business models that have normalized unpaid internships (Leonard et al. 2016), the expensive locations in which these industries are based and the influence of socio-economic factors on career choice and expectations (Shade and Jacobson 2015). But underlying many of these factors is the particularly individualistic cultural discourse that surrounds the types of creative labour performed by those working in the fields of fashion and textile design, both in academia and beyond. This discourse locates creativity in a narrow range of design roles, rather than something found throughout the various processes through which garments and textiles are produced. It champions the status of competition and celebrates innovation as an individual, rather than collective, endeavour (Mould 2018).

Higher education institutions perpetuate and embed these ideas about creative labour. They prepare students seeking employment in the competitive world of fashion and textile design to understand that they will often find themselves working long hours for low, or even no, wages. Tutors explain that, in order to succeed, students will be expected to be flexible with their time and to continually produce exceptional work in spite of their fatigue. It is important, they argue, to prepare students for the realities of working in the creative industries. However, in equipping students with this cultural knowledge they also give credibility to an exclusionary definition of creative labour that is responsible for high levels of burnout and a lack of socioeconomic diversity.

The problematic relationship between class, higher education and the creative industries has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention since the 2010s (McRobbie 2015). As Kate Oakley and Dave O'Brien (2016) argue, design education can provide a rich source for considering the contemporary relationship between the production and consumption of cultural value, and the relationship between these factors and inequality. But historical research, too, has much to contribute to our understanding of the problems with current educational processes, provisions and institutions (Green 1995). This is clearly demonstrated by Angela McRobbie's (1998) exploration of the connections between ideas of creativity and

the cultural economy through the changing art school system in the second half of the twentieth century. This article argues that the language used to distinguish certain activities as creative labour by educational institutions can, in fact, be traced back much further than McRobbie's findings (1998: 9–10). Moreover, studying the evolution of this discourse over a longer period increases our understanding of 'how creativity has come to be seen in certain ways and not others' in design education (Bill 2012: 52), and provides further reflection on the exclusionary nature of contemporary constructions of creative labour in higher education.

Beginning with the foundation of the Textile Industries Department at the Yorkshire College of Science in the 1870s, this article argues that there is evidence of a more inclusive idea of creative labour in the discourse that shaped the activities and curriculum of early British technical education for textile and dress design in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even if this was not necessarily described using the term 'creativity'. It then traces the ways in which ideas about creativity were re-constructed, subverted and manipulated in relation to the education offered by art and design schools in the middle decades of the twentieth century in order to undermine the relationship between making, innovation and creativity in technical education. In doing so, it demonstrates how government and industry organizations, as well as individual educational institutions, successfully used ideas of creativity to legitimize new fashion and textile design courses by creating a discursive differentiation between art and design schools and technical education.

Researching creative labour is complicated by the fact that definitions of creativity, and therefore the types of work that are considered creative, have changed over time. Although the term creative became increasingly associated with the production of art from the middle of the nineteenth century, creativity was not widely used as an abstract noun in English until the mid-twentieth century (Pope 2005: 19, 39). As such, it is important to acknowledge that the language of creativity is not necessarily shared between the past and the present. Moreover, although creativity is widely discussed in both contemporary university prospectuses and academic writing as a key component of fashion and textile education, it is still often poorly defined (Cheng 2018: 1071).

This may be because interrogating the meaning of creativity in design education can create uncomfortable reading for educational institutions and members of industry alike. As McRobbie (2015) evocatively describes, since the 1990s the language of creativity has been

used to reframe the resilience required to survive the extreme precariarity of jobs in the creative economy. Moreover, McRobbie considers that the neoliberal university has played a key role in championing ideas of self-entrepreneurship and individual advancement. In this, university management has aligned itself with exploitative structures in which 'charismatic tendencies' (Bourdieu 1993) encourage young people to believe that 'the romance of being creative' provides sufficient satisfaction and cultural capital to compensate for low pay and minimal job security (McRobbie 2015: 33). This view is echoed by Oli Mould, who similarly argues that creativity has been redefined to fuel the growth of neoliberal capitalism and charts changing ideas of creativity over the past millennia in Western society from 'a divine power, to a socialized and collective endeavour, to an individual characteristic that could be traded' (2018: 4–8). McRobbie and Mould's work both highlight the importance of unpicking the historic development of discourses of creativity in order to interrogate what we understand creative labour to be, who performs this labour, and how our understanding of this is shaped.

To achieve this, it is first necessary to set a working definition of creative labour against which historic materials can be studied. For this purpose, creative labour is defined as the labour involved in the transformation of materials into new and innovative forms, and creativity is understood as the conditions that enable people to perform this labour. This draws on two definitions of creativity: the 'standard definition' of creativity as something that requires both 'originality and effectiveness' (Runco and Jaeger 2012: 92) and Mould's definition of creativity as 'the power to create something from nothing' (Mould 2018: 4). The first of these definitions is useful because it destabilizes existing cultural hierarchies, which position couture design and bespoke making as more creative than the labour involved in the production of mass-market ready-to-wear. If 'originally and effectiveness' define creativity, then the labour of pattern cutters, machinists and dyers producing economical products in a novel range of colours and styles demonstrates creativity. The second definition provokes us to pay attention to the processes and networks by which people are empowered to create something from nothing. It demands we consider how access to time, training, materials, tools and studio space is a vital enabler of creative labour, and thus how educational institutions play a significant role in the systems that empower some groups of people while disempowering others.

This research utilizes the written and visual materials produced by educational institutions, government organizations and industry groups in the eighty years between the emergence of

vocational textile design education in the 1870s and the establishment of fashion design courses in art and design schools in the 1940s and 1950s. It uses methodologies of discourse analysis to explore the influence of these actors in evolving definitions of creativity and, consequently, creative labour. It understands discourse as comprising both words and images (Rocamora 2009: 59) and considers discourse as a dual process, both the 'groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act upon the basis of that thinking' (Rose 2001: 136). It also builds on Liz Morrish and Helen Sauntson's research demonstrating the power of discourse analysis in the study of the role and public perception of educational institutions (2019). With this in mind, the article focuses on sources intended to promote particular institutions and pedagogies, including committee reports, press coverage and pamphlets. It particularly draws on course prospectuses, which served the dual function of student recruitment and institutional promotion, advertising the relevance of courses to industry and demonstrating their alignment to the education policy of institutional and government funders.

Together these sources reveal how certain people and places were excluded from definitions of creative labour. As Mervyn Romans (2005: 11) noted, historians need to rethink histories of design education by paying close attention to whose stories are absent from established historiography. This problem is exacerbated by the role of archival survival bias, which privileges the histories of successful modern institutions (Pokewitz 2013: 13). This article therefore looks comparatively across a range of fashion and textiles courses from both widely studied schools of art and design and more overlooked trade schools.

Although fashion and textiles are distinct subjects, they have a long history of sharing teaching staff, buildings, faculties and pedagogies at British educational institutions. Further, both areas have historically attracted large numbers of female students, allowing for consideration of the intersection between class and gender in relation to creative labour. The gendered nature of labour in the fashion and textile industries makes this an especially important consideration due to the ways in which design history has traditionally excluded women, particularly those working in roles designated as female (Buckley 1986). However, this research has not entirely succeeded in escaping archival survival bias. Aside from discussing the Yorkshire College, which pioneered early textile education in partnership with the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers, it mainly focuses on the provision of technical education in London since it was highly developed due to the city's large fashion industry

and the coordination of the London County Council. While more work is required to consider broader national geographies of creative labour, the variety of different educational approaches within London offers a caution against the tendency to treat London as a homogenous whole. The city's diversity is made plain by the divide between design and trade schools, as well as the adaptation of trade school courses to serve their local demographic.

Creativity in nineteenth-century technical education

Issues surrounding class, gender and access can be traced right back to the origins of design education in Britain. Minutes from the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacturers, whose work led to the formation of the Government School of Design in 1837, reveal that British design education was founded on the belief that improving the 'taste' of the 'lower orders' through education was a moral and social imperative (Romans 2005: 42–45). However, early curricula at these Schools of Design primarily focused on drawing copies of existing works and contained few activities we might, using Runco and Jaeger and Mould's definitions, understand as creative. It was not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century that, inspired by the emergence of the Art Workers Guild and the Arts and Crafts movement, institutions such as Birmingham School of Art began to take a more-hands on approach where students were taught to experiment with design ideas through making as well as drawing (Swift 2005: 77).

Although this development in design schools was described as innovative, such pedagogies had been in use in textiles education since the 1870s. During the late 1860s and early 1870s, a crisis in the wool trade fueled interest in improving provision for textiles education. British woolen cloth, which had previously been a global leader, was becoming rapidly less competitive. This was partly due to increases in the price of raw wool, resulting in higher prices for woolen cloth (Holroyd 1872). However, manufacturers also faced a more existential threat from other wool-producing countries, such as Belgium and Germany, who were becoming more competitive in terms of innovative design. During the 1860s, the demand for 'fancy woolens' resulted in full employment for both pattern designers and dyers, indicating that Britain was failing to produce enough skilled practitioners in these areas. In contrast, Belgium and Germany were training ample designers and dyers in their new Schools of Art, which taught not just technical skills around textile manufacture but also design (Nussey 1867). Although Britain already had art and design schools, representatives from the wool trade believed they did not cater to the mill workers in northern England who

oversaw the production of the bulk of British woolen goods since they did not teach the practical application of art to the design of mass-produced goods (Lupton 1872).

Textiles and fashion goods were explicitly commercial products that did not always sit comfortably within the Romantic notions of art, craft and design that dominated thinking by staff at the Schools of Design during this period (Bell 1963). Instead, industry representatives and the Leeds Chamber of Commerce envisaged a different type of design education, one where innovation in both technology (particularly colour chemistry) and design were taught through making (Lupton 1872). They used pamphlets, speeches and newspaper articles to create a persuasive discourse that stated the need for textiles education that fused innovation and novel manufacturing techniques with the study of 'art as applied to design' (Nussey 1867). These texts were received with interest by The Worshipful Company of Clothworkers – one of the City of London's trade guilds, known as Livery companies – who were also keenly investigating the role that education could play in promoting innovation in textile production (Clothworkers Company 1871–76: 32).

The Clothworkers Company already supported technical education through bursaries and prizes, but many company members believed that more needed to be done with regards to training to improve the competitiveness of British cloth (Clothworkers Company 1871–76: 60). It is notable that the majority of the ideas discussed by the Superintendence Committee around this time focused on encouraging research and innovation through financial prizes for 'designs and patterns,' and scholarships to enable students of textile manufacture to travel internationally 'to gain information about the trade overseas' (Clothworkers Company 1871–76: 43). This highlights a recognition that, in order to produce well-designed products, it was necessary for those making them to be given the time and space to research and experiment. The solutions proposed by the Clothworkers Company Committee for improving technical education – namely providing the resources for students to gain inspiration through research and the space and equipment to experiment with new designs and technologies through making – align with Mould's definition of creativity.

The ambitions of Leeds Chamber of Commerce and the Clothworkers Company were realized in the establishment of a professorial chair in Textile Industries at the newly formed Yorkshire College of Science in Leeds in 1874, funded by the Clothworkers Company. The language used to describe the ideal candidate for this new position, someone 'who shall

instruct pupils to arrange and design new patterns, classify and mingle colours with taste and judgement and otherwise give instruction,' highlights the way that this new course borrowed ideas about teachable 'good taste' from existing design education,[1] but combined them with a focus on innovation through experimentation with developing technologies of mass-manufacture in order to create a form of technical education that focused on the production of commercial goods (Clothworkers Company 1871–76: 191).

Reports compiled by the Clothworkers Company describe considerable industry demand for the type of education offered by the Textile Industries Department, which supplied 'a want long felt in the trade' for employees able to improve the offerings of mills 'by the skillful introduction of new materials and novelty in design' (Clothworkers Company 1876–78: 78). The success of the Department was attributed to the close relationship between local industry and the college, which catered for students who already had jobs in the nearby textile industry by offering both day and evening classes. Being a student in the Textile Industries Department gave existing textile workers space to create new designs through experimental making. Students were able to draw inspiration from the extensive collections of historic and contemporary textile samples held in the Department's own Textiles Museum, before seeing how their designs worked when made up on the latest technologies – including power looms and jacquard looms (Clothworkers Company 1876–78: 303). The most innovative and novel of the designs produced through this process were then shared with other educational institutions and subscribing members of industry through the departmental publication, the *Yorkshire College Textile Magazine* (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 here.]

Enrolling on a course in the Textile Industries Department empowered students as creative practitioners by giving them access to equipment and by providing the time and space for them to use these resources to develop their skills as both makers and designers. In fact, although 'creativity' was not explicitly mentioned in the department's promotional materials,

[1] The view that taste could be trained through looking and reading was widespread amongst the members of the Select Committee of Arts and Manufactures who advised on the formation of the first public art school, the Government School of Design, in 1837. It continued to underpin the pedagogical approaches of this school and related institutions for much of the nineteenth century (Quinn 2012: 28–32).

the language of inspiration, innovation, experimentation and novelty runs through the documents about the formation and early years of the Textile Industries Department. This is also evident at other educational institutions supported by the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, demonstrating that there was a great emphasis on teaching what we might now term as 'creativity' at these vocational institutions.

Creating at technical schools vs. copying at art and design schools, 1890s-1920s

The idea that creativity (defined as originality and innovation) were skills that could – and should – be taught is also visible in the new dressmaking courses that emerged as part of the growing availability of technical education for girls around the turn of the twentieth century. These were pioneered by the Borough Polytechnic Institute, which opened a class for 'Professional Dressmakers' in 1894 in response to a discrepancy in their provision for male and female students, and concern from the London County Council about the low wages paid to unskilled female workers (Millis 1932: 141–2). Reporting on dressmaking classes at Borough in 1906, Clementina Black noted that the students produced garments to their own designs and developed greater 'taste, skill and originality' in their work the longer they attended (Black 1906: 452) (Figure 2). Moreover, Black observed that these design skills were demanded by the employers invited to critique student work, who provided feedback to some students that the 'sewing is all very well, but the line is not right' (Black 1906: 451).

[Insert Figure 2 here]

In contrast, there is a notable absence of language related to creativity in the prospectuses of courses for textiles, needlework and dress design at art and design schools in the early twentieth century. For example, although the Central School of Arts and Crafts described their needlework and dress designing courses as aimed 'to encourage the industrial application of decorative design' (Central School of Arts and Crafts 1900: 3), they primarily focused on teaching students to produce replicas of existing designs and objects. Courses may have included visits to the South Kensington Museums and lectures on 'Historic Arts and Crafts,' but there was little interest in using this historical material to inspire new, contemporary designs or otherwise engage in work that falls under Mould's definition of creativity. Embroidery students were taught to 'transfer and trace' designs, and the 'Fashion

Drawing' course aimed to produce 'competent' fashion artists, capable of replicating the designs presented to them (Central School of Arts and Crafts 1907: 12; 1914: 37).

The course descriptions presented in art and design school prospectuses from this period indicate that textile and fashion design were not taken seriously as professions. The courses instead focused on teaching skills for domestic consumption (Central School of Arts and Crafts 1914: 37). Inevitably this resulted in a lack of investment in these subjects in comparison to those courses related to the manufacture of goods to be sold for profit (Buckley 1986). Unlike in vocational institutions, courses at the Central School of Arts and Crafts were largely taught by skilled craftspeople without interest or connection to a rapidly industrializing fashion and textile industries, resulting in a disconnect between the educational opportunities they offered and industry needs. Although dressmaking 'with some design' was introduced in 1905 and retitled in 1914 to 'Dress Design and Dressmaking,' the course taught students to make adroit reproductions of historical costumes, and was led by Janetta Cochrane, a theatrical costume designer with little interest in the fashion industry (Buruma 2000: 91). Despite the growing economic importance of the fashion industry to the city of London (Board of Trade 1907; 1924), the Central School of Arts and Crafts announced a new 'Costume and Fashion' course in 1919, which catered specifically to the needs of the theatre industry, rather than the fashion industry (Central School of Arts and Crafts 1919: 17).

Marie McLoughlin (2017) has argued that this focus on faithful copying rather than design innovation reflected the lack of industry demand for fashion designers. The dominance of Paris as a fashion capital during the first decades of the twentieth century meant that Parisian designs were widely copied by London's growing ready-to-wear and wholesale couture industries, keeping fashion design a 'closed shop' until the 1930s, where only the extremely well-connected and those with considerable financial means were able to undertake unofficial apprenticeships with London's couture designers in order to gain enough industry knowledge to set up their own design houses. However, evidence from trade schools suggests that design work was a necessary skill for those training to go into the growing ready-to-wear industry right from the start of the twentieth century. In 1906 the London County Council opened a new school to teach 'the designing and making of ready-made clothing' in Shoreditch to meet demand for 'skilled workers able to design new garments, make up samples from a sketch, and reckon out the cost of such samples produced in bulk' (Black 1906: 454). This indicates

that designing was considered an important skill for garment workers, but one for which they were not widely credited.

Catching up with trade schools: identifying fashion design as creative labour in 1930s art and design schools

The lack of recognition of the design work involved in ready-to-wear fashion production changed in the 1930s due to a combination of individuals working within design education and the changing labour requirements of the British fashion industry. In 1931, Muriel Pemberton was awarded the first ever 'Diploma in Fashion' by the Royal College of Art. Pemberton, a student, had designed her own course of study through negotiation with the college's Professor of Design. It combined artistic training, the historical study of fashion (as taught by James Laver at the Victoria and Albert Museum), and the acquisition of technical knowledge through pattern-cutting, sewing courses and shadowing a London couturier (Taylor 1993). Pemberton developed this combination further in her subsequent employment, teaching fashion illustration and, later, fashion design at St Martin's School of Art. Prospectuses from St Martin's School of Art after Pemberton joined the staff during the 1930s show a renewed interest in contemporary fashion illustration with a focus on its relevance for the needs of the fashion industry and fashion press. Pemberton was also instrumental in the introduction of a new dress design course in which students would learn to make garments from their own designs 'for the trade' (St Martin's School of Art 1938: 12–13). This lies in stark contrast to what was being offered at the nearby Central School of Arts and Crafts, where the curriculum still focused on the design and construction of historical costumes 'for the stage' rather than contemporary fashion design or manufacture (Central School of Arts and Crafts 1935: 24).

But for all her legacy of innovation, Pemberton's pedagogical approach had much in common with the way that originality and fashion business were already being taught in vocational institutions. By 1937 the Barrett Street Trade School had grown to be largest trade school for women in the city, with particularly strong dressmaking and ladies tailoring courses that were shaped by a strong awareness that the industry needed creative practitioners (L.C.C. February 1937). This success can be attributed to the Principal, Ethel Cox, who fostered strong relationships with the trade (Edwards 1984). Cox was a particularly effective networker and built a series of powerful 'consultative committees' comprised of trade representatives from retailers and manufacturers including Mercia, Reville, Harvey Nichols

and Liberty & Co. These industry connections made a real impact and are credited by the London Country Council's education committee with increasing enrollment, although notably Cox was not rewarded for this success but criticized by the committee for taking a competitive position against other institutions (Thoms 1972: 197–202).

Industry connections provided opportunities for students to gain real-life experience by going 'into the workrooms as young assistants' during the industry's busy period in March each year, providing the first step on a trajectory to take up positions as undercutters and underfitters in wholesale manufacture (Barrett Street Trade School a 1937). But they also provided materials and inspiration to fuel the students' creative work, for example through the donation of materials by manufacturers for students to use when designing and making original outfits for their annual December exhibition and dress parade, to which distributors, buyers and workroom heads were invited (Barrett Street Trade School a 1944). The Shoreditch Technical Institute for Women had similarly close connections to the industry that surrounded it. Students received lectures from well-known industry figureheads, including the directors of Jaeger and Marshall & Snelgrove, as well as representatives from retail and press, including the head buyer at Austen Reed and fashion journalist Alison Settle (Shoreditch Technical Institute 1934, 1936 and 1938). The importance of exposing students from the working-class neighbourhoods of London's East End to a spread of successful people from different areas of the industry – ranging from manufacture to promotion – demonstrates that the school recognized that, in order to perform well in the highly competitive world of fashion, students needed to have a holistic understanding of the changing needs of fashion businesses, as well as the latest fashionable styles and manufacturing techniques.

These activities add nuance to Marie McLoughlin's claim that British trade schools did not 'teach their students the complex skills needed to become elite fashion designers' at that time (McLoughlin 2017: 4). Trade schools were already discussing the organization of fashion businesses and encouraging students to produce original garments. However, the destinations of students trained at both the Shoreditch Technical Institute for Women and Barrett Street Trade School tell us that skills nor industry experience were enough to enable their students to break through into the closed world of fashion and textile design in a society that was still deeply divided along class lines. As the Ministry of Labour explained in 1934, the lack of prospects for rising to the 'highest positions' within sectors such as ladies' tailoring made

technical training ethically 'problematical' for institutions such as Barrett Street Trade School, raising questions within the Ministry about whether the School should continue teaching these subjects (L.C.C. 1934). This recontextualizes the claim that Pemberton's appointment to teach fashion illustration at Saint Martin's School of Art was a moment of change that enabled Britain to realize its 'strength as a training ground for fashion designers of all social classes' (McLoughlin 2017: 16). While it is certainly true that Pemberton drew on the relative strength of the cultural capital of the institutions where she worked to pave an educational route for middle-class women into the closed world of fashion design, this came at the expense of the many students who trained at trade schools.

Looking at course prospectuses from this period it becomes clear that the truly revolutionary aspect of Pemberton's development of fashion courses lies in her employment of creative design as a linguistic distinction between activities such as illustration taught on her courses at Saint Martin's School of Art, and the manufacturing skills taught to vocational students. Although trade schools had taught drawing and encouraged students to make up original designs since the early twentieth century in order to prepare them with the skills needed to creatively copy, adapt and translate designs from sketch to sample in workrooms, this work had never been described or credited as creative design. Pemberton exploited this by creating a linguistic divide between making and designing, stating that 'The Department's main emphasis is upon the creative design side of the craft, and we do not teach Dressmaking as an end in itself' (McLoughlin 2017: 12). As a result of this discourse, Pemberton was also able to repackage many of the educational tools already used by the technical schools – such as the presentation of work at fashion shows – as new, innovative and 'creative.'

Instrumentalizing creativity discourses against vocational education

Government regulation during the Second World War encouraged the growth of inexpensive, mass-manufactured ready-to-wear goods (Bide 2020), leading to a growing demand for fashion designers and the emergence of new courses in fashion design within art schools across the country (*Fashions and Fabrics* January 1947: 54). This simultaneously decreased demand for skilled garment workers, and institutions such as Barrett Street Trade School struggled to sustain their close relationships with industry bodies and firms. By 1947, Barrett Street Trade School no longer maintained an active committee of 'representatives of employers', and the governing body contained very few representatives from wholesale manufacturers or the newly formed industry bodies, the Incorporated Society of London

Fashion Designers and the London Model House Group (Barrett Street Trade School a 1946). Without these connections, the curriculum struggled to keep pace with the changing skills required by the fashion industry. Outdated methods such as hand embroidery and hand finishing continued to be taught in spite of the fact the industry's need for these techniques had decreased (Barrett Street Trade School a 1949).

In contrast, art and design schools had become increasingly focused on improving their industry connections following publication of the Board of Education's highly critical 'Hambleden Report' in 1936 and the Council for Art and Industry's 1937 report 'Design and the Designer in Industry' (Jewison 2015). One of the key recommendations of the Hambleden report was the re-organization of the Royal College of Art, which resulted in the launch of a new fashion design course in 1948. Notably, it was not run by someone with experience as a designer or maker, but by Madge Garland, former editor of *British Vogue* and the College's first Professor of Fashion.

Garland extended Pemberton's use of discourse on creativity, utilizing connections and skills developed during her time as a fashion journalist to escalate the discourse that located creative labour exclusively in processes of design rather than manufacture. Garland established fashion at the Royal College of Art as a subject that required academic credentials and creative skills rather than technical ones (*Picture Post* 19 February 1949: 25). This was a continuation of the campaigns she had run as *British Vogue* editor, calling for more formal training for fashion designers and stylists in order to elevate British fashion reputation and cultivate 'good taste' (*Fashion and Fabrics* January 1947: 45). Course materials promoted an understanding of fashionable creativity as a top-down structure, disseminating from a small group of designers, rather than something that could be found in a wide group of skilled makers and their processes. As a result, in its early years the fashion course differentiated itself from other institutions offering fashion education in London by explicitly fostering creative design talents in the form of sketching, while shunning practical skills, to the point where it employed 'craftsman staff' to 'reduce to the minimum the amount of purely repetitive work which students would otherwise have to do at the expense of designing' (Royal College of Art 1949: 4).

Instead, students learned skills of self-presentation and networking. Garland secured access for her students to representatives from large ready-to-wear firms, invitations to attend dress

shows in both London and Paris, and opportunities to visit the headquarters and workrooms of British fashion businesses. In turn, this led to strong graduate employment at firms with which the school had the closest connections, including Jaeger, Susan Small, Dorville and Percy Trilnick, or as fashion journalists for magazines including *British Vogue* (Royal College of Art 1950: 20). This approach reflects the broader influence of the Council of Industrial Design's push for the professionalization of design in response to increasing industrialization and specialization of labour, and the widespread acceptance of their ideal of the designer as a 'gentleman professional' (Armstrong 2019: 105). As Robin Darwin (who would take over leadership of the College in 1948) stated in a 1946 Council of Industrial Design report, designers needed to be trained to 'hold their own in the sort of Club where members of the Council of Industrial Design sat opposite Cambridge dons,' demonstrating his understanding that it was important to teach designers the skills of self-presentation necessary to 'pass' in society (Frayling 1987: 131). But the successful social 'polishing' of art and design school students further exacerbated the difficulties that students from trade schools like Barrett Street had securing design work, in spite of the fact the curriculum continued to offer elocution lessons to make their working-class backgrounds more palatable for employers until at least 1947 (Barrett Street Trade School a 1946).

The wholesale ready-to-wear industry also benefitted from both the publicity Garland's course attracted and its construction of discourses that located creativity in the activities of design rather than manufacture. As the womenswear fashion industry moved away from producing complex, tailored outerwear and towards simpler, mass manufactured garments with longer production runs, traditional methods of marketing that promoted the quality of fabrics and construction were no longer fit for purpose (Bide 2020). Instead, the discourse of the creative designer offered an inherent value in garments designed by certain figures or brands, without regard to (or even in spite of) the quality of their manufacture. However, the gap between the work student's produced and discussions of their creativity in press coverage of the course was often stark. Images of garments made for end-of-year fashion shows demonstrate many were poorly cut and not terribly original in their design. For instance, the 'Afternoon Dress' by a Royal College of Art fashion design student in 1950 (Figure 3) sported a pencil skirt and neckline derivative of the London Model House Group collections shown that spring, and an ill-fitting bodice cut, with badly positioned bust darts, a poorly inserted zip and puckered seams. This was not a problem unique to the Royal College of Art. Students of Pemberton at St Martin's School of Art were producing similarly uninspiring

garments during this period, drawing heavily on copying historical styles and displaying little understanding of the fundamentals of cut and construction (St Martin's School of Art 1947: 4).

The failure to teach three-dimensional visualization or cutting skills left graduates of these courses heavily reliant on skilled pattern cutters to translate their illustrated designs into wearable garments once working in industry. Often these pattern cutters were trained in trade schools and, like Lily Silberberg who trained at Barrett Street Trade School between 1942 and 1945, came from working-class backgrounds. Silberberg had a successful career working at a number of London factories as a skilled freehand pattern cutter, but she had originally wanted to be a designer. Barrett Street Trade School was unable to provide her with the industry connections to make this a possibility, and Silberberg instead made a career creatively cutting patterns to improve the designs sent to her from distant designers she imagined were 'in an ivory tower somewhere' (Silberberg 2003). Silberberg's work as a pattern cutter is an example of the amount of uncredited creative design work that was undertaken during the manufacturing process, and which the discourse about creative design perpetuated by figures like Garland sought to erase from public view.

In parallel with the growing use of creativity as a marker of status in art and design schools, higher education drew increasingly distinct lines between 'scientific' and 'artistic' courses in a way that similarly sidelined processes of making. At the University of Leeds (formally the Yorkshire College of Science), the Department of Textile Industries expanded their course output in 1950 to include a Bachelor of Arts in Textile Design, intended for students 'whose interest in textile technology is artistic rather than scientific' (Department of Textile Industries 1950: 5). This move resulted from a need to adapt to processes of industrialization, specialization and rapid developments in textile technology, particularly in synthetic textiles (Blaszczyk 2006). But it also conclusively separated design as an 'art' from the 'science' of textile manufacture and meant that, for the first time since the Department's founding as part of the Yorkshire College, students studying for a Bachelor of Science in Textile Industries were not expected to study modules in 'Principles of pattern design' alongside the complexities of textile testing and colour chemistry (Department of Textile Industries 1949). This act of separation and the way the two courses were discussed in prospectuses and promotional material devalued the acquisition of technical skills for designers and removed opportunities for textile technologists to experiment with design through making.

The division between art and science in the discourse employed by the Textile Industries Department demonstrates how language was increasingly being used to divide creativity, technical skills and scientific innovation. This further entrenched gender and class divisions about the types of labour that were considered creative in the fashion and textiles industries since students in the Department of Textile Industries were predominantly male. Women had limited access to the academic degrees offered by the Department in the 1950s because of the course entry requirements: only a third of A-Level entries were female during this period (Department for Education and Skills 2007). In contrast, student lists from the first few years of the Royal College of Art's Fashion course reveal that it was overwhelmingly attended by women, highlighting a clear gendering of the types of design labour they described as creative. Neither institution catered for the working-class communities traditionally served by trade schools or technical institutions. In 1950 only 3 per cent of those studying in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom came from the lowest social classes (Connor et al. 2001) and the Royal College of Art's fees amounted to £60 per year, many times the amount charged by nearby trade schools.

Conclusion

Who gets to perform – and to be credited with performing – the creative labour associated with the production of fashion and textile goods is important because they are cultural products that shape the way we understand our identity (Oakley and O'Brien 2016). During the 1930s and 1940s, British fashion and textiles education witnessed a shift from training skilled craftspeople and makers to training non-maker designers. This agenda was shaped by broader conversations about the professionalization of design and the importance of training designers for industry, but it was enabled by individuals such as Pemberton and Garland who used their communication skills to attribute creativity to activities of design rather than manufacture. They achieved this by working with industry professionals who were keen to help redefine the value of designed fashion and textile goods to suit an industry that was more reliant than ever on trading in symbolic value.

The success with which figures such as Garland and Pemberton integrated fashion and textiles education as accepted, and even celebrated, subjects in art and design schools demonstrates their ability to leverage language and cultural capital to market the value of a conception of creativity in the education they offered. It was arguably necessary for these

pioneering women to use their cultural capital to elevate the status of fashion design as an activity within art schools, against discourses that framed garment making as repetitive, non-creative and unskilled women's work. But through their success, they rewrote the histories of fashion and textile education and erased the creative pedagogical contributions made by figures such as Ethel Cox at Barrett Street Trade School (Edwards 1984). From this perspective, their success was inevitably achieved at a cost to diversity: in order to create symbolic value in design work, the creativity of vocational training was sidelined and denied. While it may have been easier for middle-class art school graduates to rise through the fashion and textiles industries as designers from the 1950s onwards, there were arguably more barriers for working-class students. Since the small group of prestigious art and design schools did not draw from such socially and geographically diverse pools of students as their trade school counterparts, working-class students were considerably less likely to attend.[2]

This matters because these mid-century discourses continue to provide symbolic capital for institutions, like the Royal College of Art, that possess the archival resources to control them (Johns 2017). In this way, the historic exclusion of certain types of creative labour from histories of art and design education continues to have a gatekeeping function. However, understanding the way that discourses of creative labour have been coopted and used to promote exploitative behaviours by both businesses and educational institutions also offers a model through which these same discourses can be subverted and resisted by reframing creativity. This article begins this work by looking beyond the education offered by art and design schools in order to recognize creative practice in different forms – such as the creative labour in the cooperative and experimental work undertaken by students at the Yorkshire College in the late nineteenth century and the creative making of students at trade schools in the 1920s and 1930s. In taking up this challenge to recognize broader definitions of creative labour, educators and students on fashion and textile design courses may build a more diverse and equitable fashion industry.

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[2] The Register of Fees for Barrett Street Trade School from 1944–47 shows a very diverse geographical spread of addresses across Greater London and beyond – from suburban Teddington in the West to Chelmsford in the East (Barrett Street Trade School b 1944–47).

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