

The space between.

When I first heard the title of the conference recently put on by Curtin Institute of Technology in Perth Australia, I envisioned a small gap, a creak in the door, a sliver of space. Curtin proposed the space between be a meeting ground for artists, designers, curators, makers, and thinkers who explore the relationships between textiles and technology. I envisioned two very large camps- textiles and technology, with a small overlap in-between. Certainly from my own practice and my own experience I hadn't met many people as fascinated by the intersection of computing and knitting. But after 22 hours of travel and 6 rigorous days in Perth, what I realized is that is that the space-between is actually a bit larger than I thought.

The Space Between centered on the new artistic and theoretical potentialities that have emerged as a result of the blurring of the boundaries between art, fashion, and textiles. In recent times new, hybrid forms of practice have developed combining elements from fine art, contemporary textiles, computing, and fashion design. This process of interdisciplinary synthesis has given rise to modes of artistic expression that elude the restrictions of traditional categorizations based on medium or technique. Today many innovative international artists and designers work in the fluid spaces between the familiar domains of traditional disciplines. The conference program included a range of corresponding activities including exhibitions, performances, public art projects, workshops, and fashion shows.

I had gone to the conference not really knowing what to expect. I, personally was interested in the conceptual intersection between computer codes and the structural make up of cloth (as that is my own research interest which I was there to present.) What I soon realized is that there were a lot more intersections between technology and textiles than my narrow vision had perceived. Practices I had only read about in National Geographic, seen on the runways in London, and some never even fathomable to me were suddenly all gathered in one place right in front of me.

Among those I'd only heard of via the Discovery Channel was Andrew Hutchinson's presentation "What is she wearing!?" outlined cutting edge possibilities in active wearable textiles. Hutchinson predicted the very near possibilities in creating interactive textiles for everyday uses. Using 'luminex' a fiber-optic cable which emits light as a knitting tool holds the possibility of programming cloth. Creating garments that could transform from school uniform to club clothes by the push of a button. Hutchinson also predicted the marketability to potential corporations for advertising on digital garments in the same manor companies currently advertise on LED boards and megatons. Soon making us walking advertisements programmed by the designer allowing it to change while we fashion.

Presenting their active textiles in another context were the collective known as "Tissue Culture & Art". These biologists presented active textiles as those which were actually living growing organisms. Using cell samples and cultures, the duo is working on "growing sweaters" in a laboratory. Questioning notions of skin and skin covering, they sought to cover skin with another skin. For obvious ethical reasons, their presentation spurred much debate regarding ethical practice in creation of works and introduces me to an entire art practice knew almost nothing about. Turns out, Western Australia and New Zealand have several well established research labs for the use of live culture in the production and manipulation of cloth, something which drew many locals and international creators alike to the conference.

down under and in-between.

The nothingness in-between is where for no reason at all every practical thing that one actually takes the time to do sits up the dregs that they're no longer sitting as we thought on the bottom -Cage

Other mad scientists included Janet Stoyel who uses military industry standard lasers to sculpt fabric into lace. The one of a kind patent creates plastic like mysterious finishes to intricate details lasered out of cloth.

In balance with presentations of physical technological works were several compelling papers questioning the theoretical structures which exists in the space between. Among those most intriguing were Jane Harris & Berard Walsh from the UK delivering their thesis via tag team debate style discussed the "Virtuous Dress" and the possibilities of expression when the body is absent from the work, noting fashion as the space between image and object. "The Abrasive Gaze: Luminosity, Texture and the Sublime" was Patrick Feury's contribution, showing a lineage of desire ± consumption ± possibility ± hopefulness.

Questioning the use of everyday objects as tools included Maria Blaisse's hat and dress forms all constructed from single cuts into automobile tires; and cloth stained with melted rubber bands and rusty nails by Reiko Sudo's NUNO Design Corporation. Sudo constantly questions materials and processes not ordinarily applied to cloth, "I'm always thinking what if it were fabric?"

Amongst the approximately 250 attendees and participants, I found two whose research was hand in hand with my own. Kelly Thompson and Margo Barton, a New Zealand duo also exploring the ideologies behind conceptual computing structures and the creation of cloth. While excited to meet others who were interested in the exact intersection of my own interests, I was also refreshed (and relieved) to know the objects they were producing looked nothing like mine. Still, somehow, I'd envisioned meeting many more people like Thompson and Barton, who saw the space between as I did. Although different from my original expectations of the conference, meeting only two who shared my identical interest ended up not a disappointment at all. Instead, the realization of the vastness within the space between became a thrill and anticipation, to be apart of such a space which included so many others.

I had traveled half way around the world, down under, and into the space between. What I realized was this space where I situate myself, the space between, is actually much larger. Potentially larger than the flagpoles that stand on each end. I now see the space where technology and textiles intersect beyond the simple conceptual connections I had made on my own. Swimming here in-between we have everything from the already established camps, but have the opportunity to further these technologies, textiles, theories and practices through their intersection. I think about Reiko Sudo's ponder always wondering "what if it were fabric?". That is the beauty of the space between, playing match maker with elements who wouldn't otherwise meet if they weren't there, knit together in the space between. The space consists of gene cells, industries, hats, lasers, shoes with pistols, dresses with out bodies, safety pins, videos, genomes, artificial intelligence, sheep for cloning, and sheep for knitting. And somewhere nestled in between, the space between, I too found a new home for my own practice amongst many others who also situate themselves in between.

the space between conference was initiated by the Textile Exchange Project and was hosted by Curtin University of Technology, Faculty of BEAD (Built Environment Art and Design) in and around Perth, Western Australia. <http://www.thespacebetween.org.au>