

# Fashion's Pimp Up Posse: Leather, Sneakers and Community ID

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to assess the value of an alternative production approach to leather (specifically customisation — noun — the action of modifying something to suit a particular individual or task) and examine the sub cultural sneaker group who subscribe to, or are central to the craft of customisation. The people who are defined by the need for individuality. The study seeks to establish if this sub-group are rethinking and developing a new relationship towards dress and creating an alternative leather fashion aesthetic through their pursuit of unique. The spectacle of these items, in this case sneakers, becomes the display, the piece by which the wearer wishes to be noticed. But it also serves to question our fundamental philosophies of ready-to-wear fashion, and if our clothing and footwear can be honed and changed into new and unique items, the desirability and wanton aspect is altered. Style elevation, ownership and longevity improve the life cycle of these fashion items. This rethinking between sneaker and wearer who will pimp up, restore, custom and convert in order to sustain and nurture the item develops a new, more ethical and flexible connection towards attire. One which could influence future ways of seeing leather fashion items.

**Keywords:** Leather; Sneakers; Sub-culture; Customisation; Unique.

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## The Metamorphoses of Leather and the Drivers

Leather affects us indelibly with its singular texture and feel. A living mould, sculpted by the body's habits which leave their mark in the memory of its folds and scratches ... As an identity, revealing second skin that defies the seasons and stays with its owner for years (until it is handed-down to the next generation), leather acts as a witness to every age and era.<sup>1</sup>

The fashion industry is changing, sustainability and ethics are core considerations. Ethical and environmental issues surrounding animal hide production has created a culture of constructing new versions of leather and non-leather, and as a result, leather as a material is differentiating. It can now be grown from animal cells, fruit and fungi. Exotic leathers are more rigorously regulated, meaning new methods of creating leather and faux versions are coming to the fore. Techniques to mimic finishes, surface texture, branding etc. are increasingly tested. This has led to the rise of adaptability, personalisation and customisation within leather goods. Opening up innovation and ownership, in terms of design, manufacture, materials and processes.

Assessing alternative leather production techniques and deconstructing the leather fashion aesthetic has led to the analysis of the impact of customisation from a fashion context, specifically, the customisation of sneakers. This research aims to examine our cultural meaning of leather as a second skin by materialising it via custom techniques, discarding previous notions of being unethical and environmentally harmful, by displaying it as an art object wholly artisan, unique and valuable. Examining the sub cultural groups who exist within this genre. Specifically, subscribers to customisation and the craftsmen who pimp up sneakers. Those who are not satisfied with being seen in the latest garbs, but rather driven by the desire to be part of another fashion sector who strive for uniqueness and innovation. Their fulfilment comes from others not being able to acquire the fashion items that are intrinsic to their style. Giving new meaning to standing out from the crowd, achieving a rare and unattainable aesthetic, existing at the vanguard of fashion.

Within this pimp up posse exist sneaker loving, visionary creatives for whom constructing one's own exclusive fashion items is their symbol of desire. The artisanal aspect required to be part of this sector provides new material contingencies for leather from a sneaker context. One which no-one else can own. Setting aspiration at such a niche level that these items become even more covetable. Offering new perspectives and redefining the agency of leather materiality and wearer as designer.

Conducting research of peoples within sneaker culture with their customs, habits, and mutual differences and establishing when the opportunity and desire to seek out or create unique products began. It is possible to gain understanding of the value and meanings surrounding these behaviors, and look at, describe and record the experience, ideas, beliefs and values within the world of sneaker pimps and collectors. Providing an appreciation of how sneaker enthusiasts construct an informal network group in virtual as well as physical spaces. Framing how their passion for sneakers has been produced, reproduced, spread, expanded and maintained by competitiveness or other needs, provides research that contributes to various fields of discipline, such as sociology, anthropology, cultural, subcultural, youth, gender and fashion studies. Shedding light on topics and subcultures that are often overlooked or forgotten. Sneakers are a subtle and a latent expression of conspicuous consumption. The general public would not recognize the value, and only the insiders are able to share the meaning, and that is the very reason that the community can be called a subculture.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Anne-Laure Quilleriet, *The Leather Book* (New York: Assouline, 2004), 7–8.

2. Yuniya Kawamura, *Sneakers: Fashion, Gender, and Subculture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3.

## The Review of Literature

This research makes use of literature that historically frames and defines leathercraft. The *Leather Book* by Anne-Laure Quilleriet is an excellent case of an anthology of leather. It is the first ever published record that chronicles the history and transformations of this fabric; from prehistoric caves to the houses of haute couture. Quilleriet's study has been followed by many other anthological records such as; Harris and Veldmeijer's pioneering volume *Why Leather? The Material and Cultural Dimensions of Leather* (2014) where specialists from contemporary craft and industry are brought together with archaeology experts to examine both the material properties and cultural dimensions of leather. As in Quilleriet's book, the common occurrence of animal skin products through time, attest to its enduring versatility, utility and desirability. Unlike Quilleriet's study, Harris and Veldmeijer also features vegetable tanned leather in the research alongside fat-cured skins and rawhide. In addition, a more recent reproduced leather anthology by Allyne entitled *Something About Leather* (2016) is a book which has been selected by scholars as being culturally important, and is part of the knowledge base of civilisation as we know it.

Sterlacci, in her 2010 book *Leather Fashion Design*, claims to be the most complete textbook available on the subject. Not only providing a thorough, comprehensive overview of the history of leather production throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but also giving an extremely detailed outline of the tanning process itself. The book covers everything from what to look for when choosing a skin to work with, through to pattern cutting, sewing techniques and finishing. The final chapter includes working with leather-like materials, such as faux patent and ultrasuede. The book illustrates how to make various types of leather garments as well as providing resource lists for relevant and associated organisations and publications.

Handbooks such as Schwebke's *How to Sew Leather, Suede, Fur* (1970), West's *Leatherwork: A Manual of Techniques* (2005) and Newman's *Leather as Art and Craft: Traditional Methods and Modern Designs* (1973), explain and clarify how to work with leather, and how leather has traditionally been used. Key texts on leather production from Saravanabhavan *et al.*'s article on "Reversing the Conventional Leather Processing Sequence for Cleaner Leather Production" (2006) to Weijun *et al.*'s review on "Carbon Dioxide Delimiting in Leather Production" (2015) highlight environmental, ethical and sustainable issues.

However, there are very few books that celebrate the luxury of leather artisanship from a fashion custom context. Maki (2008) in his visual record of personalised kicks features artists from around the world, who employ inventive techniques to originate unique sneaker creations. The book *Sneakers* (2017) by Rodrigo Corral *et al.*, comes close, a chronical of one hundred interviews investigating sneakers, not as a product but as an idea. They too address the sneaker phenomenon from a sub cultural perspective. Recognising that sneakers define behaviour, capture imagination, are habit forming and generate feelings of lust or even love. The focus is on the wearer, and how sneakers make them feel, not how some sneakers are created as one-off customs.

*Sneakers: Fashion, Gender, and Subculture* (2016) written by sociologist Yuniya Kawamura was the first academic book dedicated solely to sneakers. An in-depth theoretical and conceptual analysis of cultural, social, aesthetic, and economic interpretations of sneakers. The first comprehensive non-academic book about sneaker phenomenon is probably Tom Vanderbilt's *The Sneaker Book: Anatomy of an Industry and an Icon* (1998), which talks about the history of sneakers, the background of major sneaker manufacturers, marketing strategies to sell sneakers, and the social environments that surround the sneaker development. Followed by, Bobbito Garcia's *Where'd You Get Those? New York City's Sneaker Culture: 1960-1987* (2003). Bobbito Garcia is known as the father of the sneaker sub-culture. Garcia traces the history of sneakers since the 1960s through a series of stories and anecdotes told by Garcia himself, about his personal experiences and attachment to sneakers.

Since Garcia's publication, further publications dedicated exclusively to sneakers have emerged. Unorthodox Style published *Sneakers: The Complete Collector's Guide* (2005) and *Sneakers: The Complete Limited Editions Guide* (2014). Neal Heard, a well-known sneaker connoisseur, has published a number of books: *The Trainer* (2003); *Sneakers* (2005); *Sneakers (Special Limited Edition): Over 300 Clas-*

sics from *Rare Vintage to the Latest Designs* (2009), and *The Sneaker Hall of Fame: All-Time Favorite Footwear Brands* (2012). *Art & Sole: Contemporary Sneaker Art & Design* (2012) was published by Intercity, a graphic design studio, which focuses exclusively on contemporary, cutting-edge sneaker design, and explores the creative side of sneaker culture showing the most original items and collaborations. These publications are written by sneaker experts and connoisseurs for sneaker fans and collectors and are not academic in nature, which is an indication that sneakers as a topic in academic research is overlooked or neglected in spite of their complex and powerful sociocultural meanings.

Therefore, the literature review highlights that, research is available which provides contemporary analysis for the predominant understanding of leather as a material, these are crucial for establishing how leather has been used both historically and currently and the impact this has had on the use of leather within a fashion context over the decades. There is also significant research concerning new advancements within leather production and sneaker technology, both scientifically and technically. However, sneaker books are often non-academic and gender specific, certain socio groups are under-represented and the pimping up of leather from a sneaker context is not significantly recorded. The review establishes that current notable research is concerned with individual facets which pertain to this study, rather than an analysis which explores the interface between each one; advancements in leather customisation, the material development of sneakers and the sub-cultures that subscribe to, and provide the unique and unattainable. Identifying ways in which these fashion manifestations may deviate from, or hybridise a new leather aesthetic. It is only through establishing the visual assumptions and material contingencies incorporated within this field of research and maintaining dialogue on the subject that developments can occur.

## Theoretical Framework - Sneaker Sub-culture

It is important to understand how a sub-culture acquires subjective meaningful identities. As Stone writes: “when one has identity, he is situated — that is, cast in the shape of a social object.”<sup>3</sup> It determines one’s placement in a social context which inadvertently affects his behaviour and thoughts. For sneaker enthusiast, it is the type of sneakers that they put on their feet which in turn manifests their identity and the level of fashion they can achieve.

Bourdieu<sup>4</sup> implies that the working class is not interested in adopting aesthetics, but this can be proved otherwise among sneaker enthusiasts. Sneaker enthusiasts are the most fashionable groups of people. They always feel the need to be in fashion. Buying off the shelf sneakers, which in itself has implications, but then going to the additional enterprise to either customise them or commission someone else to customise them, so as to aesthetically stand out from the crowd, disproves this theory.

Sneaker enthusiasts compete for uniqueness, they have high regard for one another. They exchange and share information about sneakers that they attain or create, post them online, and nonverbally acknowledge those who are part of the same sub-culture. The love and passion for, and obsession with sneakers that they share establishes camaraderie, and there is the undeniable emotional attachment and involvement that they feel by being part of the community. Muggleton applies Weberian interpretation of meaning to his study of a sub-culture phenomenon and emphasises the significance of subjectivity and also the social factors that influence the meanings that each individual creates.

[A] Weberian study of subculture must be based upon an interpretation of the subjectivity held meanings, values and beliefs of the subculturalists themselves. This is the premise upon which Weber’s *verstehen* being “human understanding” ... We must therefore take seriously the subjective meanings of subculturalists, for these provide the motivation for their conduct. This makes the subjective dimension a central component in any explanation of social phenomena.<sup>5</sup>

3. Mary-Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne Eicher and Kim Johnson, *Dress and Identity* (New York: Fairchild, 1995), 23.

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1984).

5. David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 10.

Those who prefer to be part of a sub-culture are often not in favour of mainstream tastes, beliefs, or lifestyles. Sarah Thornton<sup>6</sup> suggests that sub cultural capital includes the objects, practices, and beliefs that members of a sub-culture use to distinguish themselves from outsiders and to prove their authentic status to insiders. Thornton builds on the work of Bourdieu, who discusses several types of capital, including cultural capital used to distinguish oneself from others and project a certain image. The members in this case, enjoy the process of searching for, creating or commissioning one-of-a-kind items that no-one else has, or is wearing. This sets them apart and they believe, adds value not only to their possessions, but to their status within the sub-group.

Theoretical applications and explorations within this research are based on empirical work, which contribute to various fields of discipline in academia, such as sociology, cultural studies, fashion and dress studies. As an academic, it is important to shed light on topics and themes that are often forgotten, dismissed, and marginalised as unimportant. It is a way to raise awareness on both parties, the general public and the academics, and to bridge a gap between the two. Tangible objects all contain social meanings as long as they are situated and placed in a culture or society.

## Method

The main objective of this research was to identify the craftsmen and artisans who create and provide new versions of leather for subscribers to custom sneakers and to draw attention to the leather techniques and processes harnessed by this sub cultural group. The desired research method qualities were that they could demonstrably be applied to practical applications and that the detailed methods of research were emergent rather than hypothesis-testing. Grounded theory<sup>7</sup> was used to focus on the studies of diverse populations from the customisation sub-culture. To help close the gap between theory and empirical research. Grounded theory demands that analysis begins as soon as there are data, which is equivalent to letting practice generate the artefacts as data. It assumes no theory or hypothesis in advance.

Identifying the sub cultural group who subscribe to sneaker customisation took a mixed method approach. In order to examine the relationships between subscribers and artisanal creators it was imperative to take on an empirical approach by occupying global sneaker specific events such as Sneakerness, Sneaker Con, Crep City the UK's original sneaker and streetwear event, SOLE BLOC and Laces Out Fest, where subscribers and shoe fanatics come together to celebrate their passion. These events were an opportunity to gather local and global insights of perspectives on the sneaker scene. It was here that I was not only able to identify the subscribers but also the craftsmen and artisans who are leading figures within the field of sneaker customisation. Dominic Chambrone (aka The Shoe Surgeon), Mache Custom Kicks, and Joshua Vides all highly respected in the sneaker community. Customising has transformed from a niche market into a big part of sneaker culture over the past few years. The game is littered with DIY professionals who sell their services, along with members of a newer, more rebellious sub-culture who take a product and make it theirs, by giving it a unique work-over. It is fair to say that nowadays it is apparent that there is a specific sub-culture dedicated to breaking free from the norm and adding individuality and exclusivity to their kicks.

Custom sneakers are extremely popular right now, arguably more than they have ever been. While there are still some who trivialise its place in sneaker culture, most people would agree that, when done well, custom kicks are works of art and often better than what's on the shelves. The rise of custom sneaker popularity has created a position which is undoubtedly legitimate fashion. Many hours are spent prepping, painting, sewing, and gluing leather, suede, and rubber so that someone can wear a pair of sneakers that they know they won't see on anyone else, they believe that creating something, or having something made especially for them feels much better than being an average consumer.

6. Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

7. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London-New York: Routledge, 1967).

It was at these sneaker forums that I discovered and established contact with the craftsmen and artisans who create and provide new versions of leather for subscribers to sneaker customisation. Assuming the role of insider-in I immersed myself within the sub cultural practice. Signing up to sneaker making and customisation workshops, participating, adopting the skills, and observing the behaviours, drive and ambition first-hand. To gain credible qualitative data and examine said relationships, a long-term approach had to be taken to foster trust and develop networks where research subjects were as aware and as committed to the potential of the study as the researcher. As an outsider, I do not necessarily share their passion and values, nor do I follow their code or share their sub cultural knowledge<sup>8</sup> my views are completely objective. I do not make any personal judgements on different custom sneakers. Within the process it was crucial to reflect on a regular basis, to remain focus without getting too involved with the research subjects and their beliefs and opinions. Scrivener<sup>9</sup> takes Schon's<sup>10</sup> theory of reflective practice as a starting point for his recommended framework. Scrivener maintains that reflection-in action provides us with ways of thinking about the nature of the creative-production process, and also allows past experience (both personal and collective) to be brought to bear on a project. A way of identifying categories or themes, insights from reflection, review and qualitative data.

Case studies and interviews with individual craftsmen from the sneaker customisation sub-culture were undergone. Artisans such as David Charlesworth aka Vintage Trainer Repairs, who is developing bespoke hybrid approaches to customisation and is the only known originator of spike conversions. Where an original spike sports shoe is blended with another sneaker to produce a new casual shoe. (Figs. 1-4)



Figure 1: David Charlesworth @vintage\_trainer\_repairs68, adidas Running Spike Conversion, June 16th 2018

8. Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

9. Steven Scrivener, "The Practical Implications of Applying a Theory of Practice Based Research: a Case Study," *Working Papers in Art and Design* 3, 2004.

10. Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1991).



Figure 2: David Charlesworth @vintage\_trainer\_repairs68, adidas Running Spike Conversion, June 16th 2018



Figure 3: David Charlesworth @vintage\_trainer\_repairs68, adidas Running Spike Conversion, June 16th 2018



Figure 4: David Charlesworth @vintage\_trainer\_repairs68, adidas Running Spike Conversion, June 16th 2018

Both shoes are old and worn, but are recycled, restored, recrafted into a new version of its old self. Breathing new life into what would have been considered landfill worthy. Adding true value to an item that once had none. Transforming the sneakers into one off must haves. David describes some customisation practices as cannibalisation he feels authenticity is compromised. He is a purveyor of tradition, of the OG, meaning original. He is all about blending the past with the mass, maintaining tradition rather than losing the legitimacy of the artefact. Giving new meaning to reuse and rework. Encapsulating heritage, aesthetics and ethics.

Exploring the obsessions and idiosyncrasies surrounding the creators of the one-off sneaker conversion and custom phenomenon, also led me to Lee aka Refreshed Kicks, who takes off-the-shelf versions of sneakers, predominantly (and preferably for him) adidas. Then switches them up via a request for restoration, custom or personalisation specifications. For example, taking an adidas Stan Smith and delicately removing the original figure head tongue label and replacing it with the customers favourite musician or film star. Stripes are colour changed, names are removed and new relevant ones added, the heel tab themed and laces changed. Creating a new version of an old classic. Adding value and personality, a one off, bespoke fashion item for the owner. Unique and personal. (Figs. 5–10)

The craftsmen samples were purposefully kept small in order to build longevity, trust and authenticity to the research. And although small, these studies were incredibly valuable, not only to provide a better understanding of the research subjects' opinion, behaviour, experiences and the customisation phenomenon, but it was also through building these relationships that it became clear, that there was a distinct possibility and danger of losing these bespoke, artisan skills, knowledge and processes, and subsequently the sub-cultures and new ways of looking at leather, from an ethical and sustainable fashion context. The unique originators and purveyors of these crafts were not handing down this knowledge and skill. There are no protégés currently wishing to fill the void. So, when these craftsmen finally hang up their shoe making tools for good, will the expertise be forever lost?





Figure 5: Lee Brown @refreshed.kicks, adidas Sneaker Custom: Star Wars Commission, September 5th 2019



Figure 6: Lee Brown @refreshed.kicks, adidas Sneaker Custom: Star Wars Commission, September 5th 2019



Figure 7: Lee Brown @refreshed.kicks, adidas Sneaker Custom: Star Wars Commission, September 5th 2019



Figure 8: Lee Brown @refreshed.kicks, adidas Sneaker Custom: Star Wars Commission, September 5th 2019



Figure 9: Lee Brown @refreshed.kicks, adidas Sneaker Custom: Star Wars Commission, September 5th 2019



Figure 10: Lee Brown @refreshed.kicks, adidas Sneaker Custom: Star Wars Commission, September 5th 2019

This notable finding led to the focus of the research shifting and the outcome becoming archival rather than physical fashion. The empirical data gathering, required preservation. In order to maintain this heritage and sub-culture it was essential to not only collect the data, but also to present it in a format that would aid conservation and be desirable enough for future generations to want to access it and eventually use it.

Ultimately the goal of the research became to validate and safeguard the materials, techniques and processes allied to leather customisation and conversion for future generations to access.

Data gleaned from the literature review and data gleaned from the work/process/qualitative collection methods constructed appropriate theories and set concepts in context. Re-aligning the study and finding a way to tell the story and represent each stage of individual bespoke sneaker customisations and conversions undertaken by the key subjects.

## Progression and Preservation - 3D Archiving

With digital media it is easier to create content and keep it up-to-date. Unlike traditional analogue objects such as books or photographs where the user has unmediated access to the content, a digital object always needs a software environment to render it. These environments keep evolving and changing at a rapid pace. With the complexities of contemporary society and social mechanisms that shape behaviours, developing a digital 3D archive for fashion preservation purposes makes sense. This is how we view fashion. It is three dimensional in form, flexible, identity changing and acts as an indicator to the self we choose to portray to the world. By recognising the relevance of how contemporary society operates in an increasingly virtual world and designing an archive accordingly to suit, it is hoped that future generations will access and use the platform.

Digital archiving is different from traditional archiving. Traditional archiving practice seeks to preserve physical objects that carry information. Digital archiving seeks to preserve the information regardless of the media on which that information is stored. Computer disks and other magnetic and optical media degrade, and the information on them is lost unless it has been moved to other media. Software and hardware change rapidly: the physical media on which digital data are impermanent. Other methods are necessary to ensure wide access to and long-term preservation of digital data.

The British Library is responsible for several programmes in the area of digital preservation and is a founding member of the Digital Preservation Coalition and Open Preservation Foundation. Their digital preservation strategy is publicly available. The National Archives of the United Kingdom have also pioneered various initiatives in the field of digital preservation. In the most part these archives digitally capture artefacts and even places and spaces where these artefacts are held. Offering a user experience which feels life-like in terms of being there and observing in real time. The artefacts are often captured in three dimensions for full archival records. However, although the materiality and scale of each artefact can be captured, the skills, techniques and processes are not. The goal of the 3D digital social heritage fashion archive<sup>11</sup> is the accurate rendering of authenticated content in order to achieve access and preserve research and development in terms of material, techniques and processes specifically applicable to the custom and conversion of leather sneakers. It is hoped that three dimensional digital preservation will ensure that key records in the area of customisation and conversion remain accessible for future generations in case they are lost, or deteriorate over time.

Artec Studio Pro 14<sup>12</sup> is a software program for 3D scanning and post processing. Data is captured and split into several scans which are then processed. Artec's 3D scanners are structured light scanners. They operate by projecting light in a pattern, usually in the form of parallel beams, onto, in this case the sneaker. By projecting a grid pattern on the shoe, the scanners are able to capture the formation or

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11. 3D digital social heritage fashion archive — the platform developed because of this research. \*please note this aspect is under construction and not yet available for public view.

12. Artec Studio Pro 14 is the software program being used to build the above archive.

distortion from multiple angles and then calculate the distance to specific points on the object using triangulation. The three-dimensional coordinates obtained are used to digitally reconstruct the real sneaker. Industry acclaimed Artec Studio Pro 14 was the software of choice for the 3D digital social heritage fashion archive, as it is powerful enough to pick up dark, shiny or fine areas of the leather. Artec analyses the surface of the sneaker and automatically adjusts the sensitivity of the scanner to pick up uneven and tricky areas. Scanning the sneakers in various states, from donor shoe to deconstruction, to new sole implant (in the case of a conversion) to new colour, texture, logo or custom technique, provided invaluable capture data of each stage of each individual customisation or conversion. Finalising the documentation by knitting these stages together using Adobe After Effects software to develop 3D rotating animations of the materials, techniques and process evolution.

Recording each process then putting the story together as a time lapse style 3D rotating sneaker, will showcase not only each stage of the customisation or conversion process, but also the material contingencies, development and juncture digitally. So, to offer a 3D tutorial for future interested parties to maintain the skill and showcase the niche craftsmanship involved.

## Discussion - Rethinking and Developing a New Relationship Towards Attire

Leather has always been a sign of luxury. The grain, the smell, the touch and the richness. Its versatility also makes leather one of the paramount materials to work with; but the toxic tanning process raises issues of sustainability and environmental impact. This has gained considerable attention among leather industry customers, consumers and the community at large, and the industry has been addressing the subject for some time. There is a growing demand for ensuring that no harmful substances are present in leather, and that more eco-social production methods such as vegetable tanning and the increased use of recycled leather are utilised to combine first-class leather quality with economic and ecological benefits. As well as environmental, production and historical factors other influences of fashion are consequential to trend agents, appealing for the most varied animal species to be used in fashions transformational process; sheep, cattle, deer, reptiles, marine mammals, fish and birds. In this total fusion of body and apparel, human and animal, leather stands out as never before in fashion. Today, this chameleon-like material, half protection and half ornamentation, is still a bastion against uniforms and the standardization of appearances.

Material innovation stands at the vanguard of good design. Testing new ways to develop material opens up opportunities for new ways of seeing, using and representing leather within a fashion context. Drawing attention to the leather techniques and processes harnessed by this sub cultural group provides significant grounding for new ways of transforming the leather surface into artistic canvas, but also an actualised possibility for re-alignments and new approaches to leather production, consumption and value as a starting point for cultural discussion. Challenging the fashion industry in terms of ethical, environmental and social aspects and presenting a new slow, flexible and creative way of using leather. One where the user has ownership and belongings become investments because of their flexibility.

## Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this research was to discover new leather production methods and explore the potentiality of leather, by examining the experimental custom techniques adopted by sneaker enthusiasts. Observation of subscribers and craftsmen as well as experiential research via attending sneaker festivals and learning first-hand customisation skills, established a valuable sample of both customisers and those that subscribe to and adopt a custom approach to their sneakers, in the pursuit of unique. The main themes of this research have brought an acute awareness of the value this pimp up posse place on maintaining, cherishing, hand making, customising, upcycling etc. The requirement to blend hand-craft with new technologies, rather than employ one over the other is relevant. Bridging the gaps and

exploring the intersections between contemporary, historical and theoretical approaches to dress, pushing social and ethical boundaries, and blurring the relationship between consumer and attire, unearthing the sub-culture of wearer as designer. Creating novelty and uniqueness.

This research provides a database that highlights the dynamic between new knowledge of leather customisation, the subscribers and the preservers who have adopted this phenomenon. This research challenges some of the traditional boundaries relating to sneakers, leather and craftsmanship, raising opportunities for elongating product life cycle, uniqueness and desirability and in-turn improving current sustainability, and ethical issues surrounding leather fashion goods, an area which has lacked prominence. Contextualising this and placing the subject within arenas for larger debate raises awareness and bridges gaps within the field. Forming fundamental requirement for future progress within this area. In this context, this research could provide efficient and sustainable options for companies using leather within a fashion context. Academically, this research could influence a new generation of designers and potentially inspire individuals from all aspects of the fashion industry, to push social boundaries and continue to blur the relationship between consumer and fashion, taking this research as an example, where the wearer becomes the designer and total ownership is achieved.

New information that arose inspired the development of a 3D animated archival platform where the goal was to preserve and support further, the potential value of the techniques and processes concerned with the art of customisation and conversion from the context of sneakers. This experimental and developmental 3D digital social heritage fashion archive is the first of its kind, and supports the progressive approach being adopted. This original research will bring a unique dataset and serve to record a new genre of fashion, a sector where social norms are set by the individual. Those that strive for uniqueness and innovation and those that create it. A testimony which details the craftsmanship for future reference to a sub-culture as broad and diverse as it gets. This study determines the permanent value of preserving the craftsmanship, materials, techniques and processes connected to the pimping up, conversion and customisation of sneakers and captured a key time in sneaker history where the desire for unique was integral to the subcultural ethos and existence. The greater the importance of digital materials, the greater the need for their preservation: digital preservation protects, investment, captures potential and transmits opportunities to future generations and our own.

## Limitations and Future Research

This research continues to raise questions as ideas and theories are investigated and challenged. The outcome will be developed into a dynamic and experiential 3D digital platform. Using software such as Artec Studio Pro 14 opens up potential for further developments, in terms of the ability to 3D print models in maximum resolution. Various stages of customisation and/or conversion can be realised three dimensionally, directly from the archive. Whether that be the initial sneaker and end result, to evidence the creative and dramatic cycle undertaken within the parameters of customisation or conversion. Or to capture in 3D model form, specific points of custom or conversion, to aid and inspire users own practice. Meaning material surface textures, sewing, gluing, or manufacture processes can be captured and finishes can be studied. The digital archive can take on screen or physical formats for future tutorial purposes.

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