

Activating the Archive: Uses and Reuses of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of Fashion Companies

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The proposals received in response to the Call for Papers *Activating the Archive: Uses and Reuses of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of Fashion Companies* testify to the current centrality of the topic, and the interest it arouses among different generations of scholars with heterogeneous methodological approaches and fields of research. The six papers selected for the monographic section offer a significant cross-section of the plurality of trends that characterise current research. They come at a particularly lively time for the debate on the enhancement of fashion archives, recently animated by the possibilities offered by digital transformation. However, a common thread links the essays in this issue: the corporate archive is explored in its function as an “active agent”, no longer understood exclusively as the custodian of historical legacy, but as a dynamic means capable of stimulating the creative use and reuse of the resources it preserves. This approach highlights the archive’s role in supporting the development of new products and collections and implementing narrative and exhibition practices to enhance the value of a heritage of inestimable historical and cultural interest.

The issue opens with an essay by Federica Vacca, who proposes that the company archive is essentially a repository of *living cultural heritage*. The reflection underlines that the function of this type of archive is not limited to the preservation of the company’s historical memory. If correctly approached, the corporate archive is configured as a cognitive intermediary, capable of generating knowledge and skills that can be transformed and used in management, design and production processes. In this sense, the essay analyses recent strategies adopted by fashion companies to exploit the potential inherent in their heritage.

In this perspective, the following two papers demonstrate how resources inherited from the past, both tangible and intangible, can be used as key input for projects. They explore their reuse in new creative scenarios through reverse engineering and experimentation with digital technologies. Throughout the project *Prato Phygital: synergies creative per la competitività (Prato Phygital: Creative synergies for competitiveness)*, Paolo Franzo and Margherita Tufarelli investigate the transdisciplinary use of materials stored in textile archives. The analysis shows how 3D animation and modelling programmes, together

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with VR and MR applications, have made it possible to reinterpret these resources and promote the development of products and narratives that combine know-how and innovation. Similarly, the essay by Giovanni Maria Conti, Irene Sapuppo, Federica Vacca, Diego Dani and Martina Motta examines the potential of knitwear archives, through the experience of the Gianfranco Ferré Research Centre of the Politecnico di Milano. In this context, the archive is not understood exclusively as a repository but as a source of stratified knowledge and skills that can be re-actualised. The paper looks at the redesign or digital rematerialisation of archival items and how these practices have made it possible to tap into the scientific and technological culture and knowledge they contain.

However, the archive is not only a design tool or an inexhaustible source of inspiration to support the creative process. Indeed, the following two essays highlight how heritage is becoming an integral part of fashion shows and fashion films, with positive repercussions for the enhancement of companies' historical and cultural heritage.

As Vittorio Linfante points out, heritage is increasingly important in corporate communication. An example is the fashion show, the article's central theme, which still needs to be explored and deserves in-depth study. Traditionally dedicated to presenting new collections, catwalks are increasingly becoming spaces dedicated to staging archival pieces or the brand history, triggering the coexistence of past and present, sometimes seamlessly intertwined. On the other hand, Dorothea Burato's contribution introduces a new perspective for analysing the now consolidated relationship between archives and fashion films, shifting the focus from the methods of documenting and communicating the historical and cultural value of a brand to the potential for safeguarding, preserving and transmitting heritage offered by the strategic use of audiovisual narration.

The monographic section concludes with an essay by Francesca Morelli, dedicated to one of the main tools of heritage marketing: the corporate museum. The contribution aims to propose good practices for the design of an innovative museum system based on a holistic approach, peculiar of the discipline of design, and also to highlight how digital technologies can redefine the use of the archival items on display, transforming the visit into an interactive, immersive and highly informative experience.