ZoneModa Journal. Vol.15 n.2 (2025)
ISSN 2611-0563

Sensory Explorations: A Critical Multisensory Approach to Fashion Pedagogy

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Submitted: July 15, 2●25 – Accepted: October 1, 2●25 – Published: December 22, 2●25

Abstract

The sensory experience of fashion is complex and nuanced. Yet visual dominance creates an inherent ocularcentric bias that overlooks a rich diversity of sensory knowledge and experience in fashion education.
This article explores sensory approaches to fashion design education as a method for cultivating inclusion and innovation. Three fashion educators, two who are sighted and one who is legally blind, offer a critical reflection on their multisensory teaching practice, represented by workshops and course description on sonic fashion, olfactory considerations of clothing, and sensory design.
In these case studies, sensory experience serves as both subject and method, inviting a critique of norms while considering multiple embodied ways of exploring, knowing and creating fashion. Situated in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework from fashion studies, sensory studies, and disability studies, the findings suggest that this approach creates deeper engagement and access for disabled and nondisabled students, enriching the creative processes by challenging normative visual-centric methods.
The article demonstrates how multisensory fashion pedagogy accomplishes three critical transformations that reimagine fashion education: it displaces visual dominance to expand design possibilities, advocates for the legitimacy and value of embodied knowledge, and builds communities that celebrate diverse ways of knowing to invite authentic representation and counter ableism.

Keywords: Fashion Education; Sensory Design; Sonic; Tactile; Smell.

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Introduction

Fashion is primarily approached as a visual ontology consisting of definitions, theories, and methods based on visual language. This extends to fashion design education, where traditional pedagogical approaches have emphasized visual aesthetics and design principles. However, emerging scholarship increasingly challenges this ocularcentric tendency, advocating for more embodied and multisensory approaches to understanding fashion and dress.[1] While fashion designers fundamentally rely on multiple senses, a visual bias towards the appearance of garments reduces attention to the multisensory nature of the material world, such as the tactile qualities of materials, their inherent scents, and the sounds made by different fabrics. This limitation is particularly problematic given that clothing and textiles are (typically) designed to be worn, touched, and experienced on and through the body.

This article presents an investigation of sensory approaches to fashion design education through three case studies on teaching sonic fashion, exploring fashion smellscapes, and applying sensory design principles. We examine how these different multisensory approaches create more inclusive and innovative fashion education. Situated in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework from fashion studies, sensory studies, and disability studies, the article contributes to existing literature on inclusive fashion education. Our central argument is that multisensory fashion pedagogy accomplishes three critical transformations: it displaces visual dominance to reveal unexplored design possibilities, supports the legitimacy and value of embodied knowledge, and builds communities that celebrate diverse ways of knowing to invite authentic representation and counter ableism. These transformations suggest that multisensory approaches represent not merely pedagogical techniques, but a fundamental reimagining of what fashion education can become.

Sensory Approaches in Fashion Education

Over the past decade, studies in fashion design education have documented a significant shift toward pedagogical models that integrate sensory and experiential learning approaches. This reflects broader recognition that traditional lecture-based instruction may inadequately prepare students for complex design challenges or fully engage learners in embodied design creation. Workshop-based pedagogical models have proven effective in teaching both theoretical knowledge ("ways of knowing") and practical skills ("ways of doing") in design contexts, emphasizing the integration of conceptual understanding with hands-on application.[2] This aligns with contemporary calls for more participatory and experiential learning formats that move beyond traditional instructional methods.[3]

Material-led and sensory approaches to fashion design education recognize the fundamentally intertwined relationship between body and dress. This is evident in recent research, for example, Erin Lewis and Vidmina Stasiulytė suggest that experiential learning workshops introducing somaesthetics (bodily sensory awareness) can increase sensory competencies and enrich the exploration of sensory-material expressions in textile design.[4] Similarly, Susanna Suurla describes how iterative sensory methods when teaching students costume design increased sensory engagement with materials through movement and mindfulness.[5] This increased sensory awareness recognizes that materials are sensed and known through

1. John Lee Clark, *Touch the Future: A Manifesto in Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2024).

2. Rachael L. Paine and Bree Mcmahon, "The Workshop Model: Teaching Ways of Knowing and Doing," in *The 7th International Conference for Design Education Researchers*, ed. Derek Jones et al. (London, United Kingdom, November 29 – December 1, 2023), https://doi.org/10.21606/drslxd.2024.032.

3. Henry Mainsah, "Exploring Creative Pedagogies for Research Methods: Reflections from a Workshop Series," *Methodological Innovations* 15, no. 3 (2022), 251-262, https://doi.org/10.1177/20597991221114572.

4. Erin Lewis and Vidmina Stasiulytė, "Introducing Sensory-Material Aesthetics in Textile Design Education," *Diseña*, no. 20 (2022), 7-7, https://doi.org/10.7764/disena.20.Article.7.

5. Susanna Suurla, "Bringing 'It' Out of the Body and Into Matter: Fostering a Contemplative and Corresponsive Methodology for Costume Design Pedagogy," *Studies in Costume & Performance* 9, no. 2 (2024), 115–132, https://doi.org/10.1386/scp_00114_1.

embodied interactions, producing impulses for their use by the design student.[6] In a stimulus-response approach, Jan Tepe used a sensory-altering bodysuit in a workshop with four fashion design students to explore "perceptive drift".[7] The disruption of the body-dress distinction achieved by the bodysuit created sensory estrangement to highlight the interrelated importance of the body and textiles as sensed materials in the fashion design process. These examples demonstrate how fashion designers engage in co-creation of meaning through bodily experiences with materials and design environments.

Sensory workshops may also focus on particular senses, developing specific methods and competencies to explore embodied knowledge. *Beyond Seeing: Innovative ways of sensory fashion design* was a research and exhibition project of the Goethe-Institut Paris with Esmod, Berlin; IFM (Institut Francais de la Mode), Paris; La Cambre, Brussels; and the Swedish School of Textiles, Borås.[8] It involved collaboration with people with vision impairments and blindness in various participatory activities, focusing on a specific sense in relation to sensory design, for example, smell, gesture/movement, touch, and sound. The focus on nonvisual senses aimed to address visual dominance and consider the possibilities of neglected sensory experiences. In another example, the Awareness Project at the Design School Kolding, Denmark employed (blindfolded) repertory grid and tactile sensing experiments to explore how tactile competencies can support fashion and textile design development.[9] Attending to the tactile sensibility of fashion and textiles demonstrates how sensory experience contributes to material-affective relationships.[10] However, it should be noted that the use of simulation techniques, like blindfolding, common to many experiential approaches can mimic and perpetuate power imbalances between blind and non-blind people.[11] This provides an opportunity for fashion educators and institutions to improve representation, contribution, and leadership for people with disability within fashion education.

A sensory design approach emphasizes the importance of integrating disability representation into fashion education. Design impacts all members of society, including people with disability and those multiply marginalized. Historically, people with disability have been excluded from mainstream society through the design of spaces, systems, and products, evidenced by disability history.[12] A sensory design approach combats ableism through systematizing multi-modal engagement and literacy of disability justice movement. Ableism, as discussed by TL Lewis, is a bias against disabled people's bodies and minds based on different factors that are socially constructed.[13] When designers take accountability for ableism by designing products that are inherently accessible through multi-sensory modes of engagement, they create social and cultural conditions that include people with and without disability.

Therefore, the integration of sensory approaches in fashion design education aligns with broader calls for inclusive and transformative pedagogies. Manifestos by scholars like Timo Rissanen advocate for de-

6. Suurla, "Bringing 'It' Out of the Body and Into Matter".

7. Jan Tepe, "Investigating Sensory Perception as a Material for Fashion Design," in *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Extended Abstracts* (New York, NY: ACM, 2021), 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1145/3411763.3450384

8. Goethe-Institut Paris, "Beyond Seeing: Innovative Ways of Sensory Fashion Design", 2016, https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf134/pressedossier-beyond-seeing-english1.pdf.

9. Vibeke Riisberg et al., "AWARENESS: Tactility and Experience as Transformational Strategy" (paper presented at Shapeshifting: A Conference on Transformative Paradigms of Fashion and Textile Design, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, NZ, 2014), https://hdl.handle.net/10292/8566.

10. Karen Marie Hasling and Anne Louise Bang, "How Associative Material Characteristics Create Textile Reflection in Design Education," *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* 3, no. 1–2 (July 3, 2015), 27–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/20511787.2015.1210916; Anne Louise Bang, "The Repertory Grid as a Tool for Dialog about Emotional Value of Textiles," *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* 1, no. 1 (November 2013), 9–25, https://doi.org/10.2752/175183513X13772670831038.

11. Arielle M. Silverman, Jason D. Gwinn, and Leaf Van Boven, "Stumbling in Their Shoes: Disability Simulations Reduce Judged Capabilities of Disabled People," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6, no. 4 (May 2015), 464–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614559650.

12. Bess Williamson, *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), accessed December 11, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvwrm3zv.

13. Talila A. Lewis, "Working Definition of Ableism – January 2022 Update," *TALILA A. LEWIS*, accessed July 11, 2025, https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/working-definition-of-ableism-january-2022-update.

sign education that functions as "guardians of possibility", challenging students to design not just new products but to "design itself while concurrently designing the world at large".[14] This transformative vision extends to inclusive fashion education that centers Indigenous, Black, brown, fat, disabled, trans, queer, and immigrant worldviews, histories, and bodies.[15] In this context, the emergence of sensory design workshops and courses represents a significant pedagogical innovation that challenges fashion education's traditional ocularcentrism while fostering more embodied, inclusive, and materially-engaged approaches to design learning.

Methodology

This paper employs collaborative autoethnography to examine our distinct but related pedagogical approaches.[16] Collaborative autoethnography allows for a multivocal, democratic approach where different perspectives are given equal representation.[17] In this case, the three authors of this paper represent academic institutions in different geographic areas (RMIT University, Australia; Swedish School of Textiles, Sweden; and Parsons School of Design, United States), positions within the academic hierarchy (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Assistant Professor), and approaches to research (qualitative research and creative practice research). Of relevance to sensory experience, two of the authors are sighted and one is legally blind and an Indian immigrant, with all authors working in disability-inclusive contexts.

Each author began by conducting a reflexive analysis of a specific sensory course or workshop they have run. The data for this analysis was drawn from embodied knowledge, experiences and recollections, course or workshop content development, observation during course and workshop activities, written, audio and visual documentation of activities and assessment, and written and verbal feedback from participants. While recollection and personal observation can be a limitation of autoethnographic methods, due to subjective memory and experience, the inclusion of participant voices and feedback helped to balance and inform the analysis. Then, by discussing our individual approaches with one another in preparation for this article, we aimed to increase rigor and present richer insights. While there can be complexity in representing diverse approaches,[18] the benefits of this collaborative approach allowed us to honor and examine individual perspectives while identifying patterns and commonalities across our shared research interests and pedagogical practices.

The next section presents case studies delivered by each author. The images used in the case studies include Image Description (ID) as an access point for readers with low vision and blindness.

Case Study 1: Sensory Design Studio, Sugandha Gupta

This case study outlines the origin of sensory design and its principles, rooted in contemporary disability discourses, disability justice principles, and my embodied experiences as a visually impaired person. My pedagogy is applied in the graduate course PSOF 5030 Sensory Design Studio, offered every spring (15 weeks with 13–17 students in each class) at Parsons School of Design. The students in this course represent different disciplines and are from undergraduate, graduate and associate degree programs. I will share examples of my students' work that demonstrates the application of this approach. My objective is to highlight authentic ways for centering disability and representation in the creative process. This

14. Timo Rissanen, "Possibility in Fashion Design Education — A Manifesto," *Utopian Studies* 28, no. 3 (2017), 528–546, https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.28.3.0528.

15. Barry and Christel, *Fashion Education: The Systemic Revolution.*

16. Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez, Heewon Chang, and Faith W. Ngunjiri, "Collaborative Autoethnography as Multivocal, Relational, and Democratic Research: Opportunities, Challenges, and Aspirations," *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 32, no. 2 (2017), 251–254, https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2017.1288892.

17. Hernandez, Chang and Ngunjiri, "Collaborative Autoethnography as Multivocal, Relational, and Democratic Research," 253.

18. Hernandez, Chang and Ngunjiri, "Collaborative Autoethnography as Multivocal, Relational, and Democratic Research," 252.

transforms the design process and positions final outcomes in the social model of disability presented in multi-sensory modalities.

Origin of Sensory Design and its framework

Sensory Design germinated from Sensory-Textiles, which I created to be accessible to a broader audience.[19] The senses of touch, sound, smell, and sight through my textiles and wearables invite participants to use their strengths while experiencing the work. My own strengths lie in the sense of touch and sound for access, for example, I dress the loom by touching each heddle and use auditory senses to learn techniques. I share prototypes with low-vision and blind patrons to understand the diverse ways blind and low-vision people engage with color, texture, and materials.

Sensory Design Studio offers an approach to design that centers disability scholarship, challenges ableism, and is non-transactional. In his disability design report, disabled scholar Josh Halstead shares how disability representation, justice-centered frameworks, and embracing the social model lead to innovative ideas through the new knowledge.[20] Theories and literary works that inform my practice include *Phenomenology of Perception* by Maurice Marleau Ponty, Disability Justice framework and principles by Sins Invalid, *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art* by Georgina Kleege, and *Extraordinary Bodies* by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson.[21]

Course Framework and Structure

Sensory Design Studio is a graduate course structured as a part seminar and part studio course. The first half of the course focuses on learning disability history and theory, discussions about disability culture with disabled guests, a visit to the NY Public Library for tactile literacy by blind experts, disability justice principles, and reading reflections accompanied by classroom discussions.

Students learn and create social media content and presentations in accessible formats such as tactile graphics, live captions, and high contrast slides. Visual bias is addressed through image descriptions, creating tactile surfaces, and sound studies. Artists, designers, authors, and performers with and without disabilities who exemplify the social model of disability are discussed. Students learn about various models of framing disability and euphemisms that perpetuate harm.[22]

The mid-semester research project challenges students to understand the disabled lens through independent research. Students are prohibited from interviewing disabled people unless they are an immediate family member or spouse to avoid extractive research practices. Instead, researching public figures with disabilities in the discipline of their choice is encouraged. Mediums including podcasts, books, memoirs, documentaries, and reviews are used for data collection. Students discuss their chosen person's biography, barriers, accomplishments, and portrayal in media. Finally, students critically examine and discuss repositioning the narrative through the social model which positions barriers in constructed environments instead of the disabled person.[23]

19. "Sensory Textiles," Sugandha Gupta, https://sugandhainhere.wixsite.com/website/gallery.

20. Joshua A. Halstead, "Disability Design: Summary Report from a Field Scan," National Endowment for the Arts, accessed March 13, 2025, http://www.arts.gov/impact/accessibility/disability-design-report.

21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Sins Invalid, accessed July 10, 2025, https://sinsinvalid.org/; Georgina Kleege, *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

22. Emily Ladau, *Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to Be an Ally* (New York: Random House, 2021).

23. Carol J. Gill, "Disability, Constructed Vulnerability, and Socially Conscious Palliative Care," *Journal of Palliative Care* 22, no. 3 (September 2006), 183–189, https://doi.org/10.1177/082585970602200309.

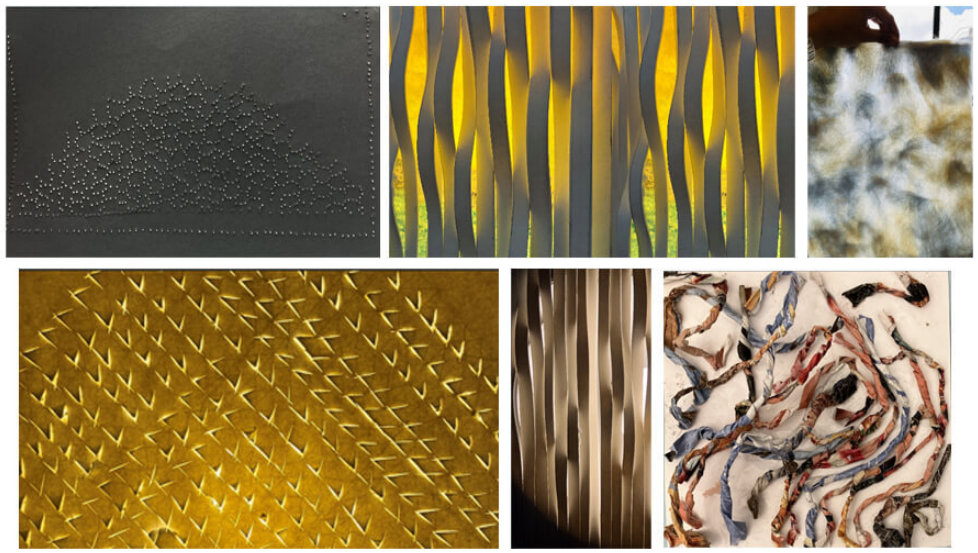

Figure 1: Beauty Diary, Bhoomika Manjunath, Spring 25. This image highlights 6 mixed media collages, cutouts, and felt explorations that reflect the student's perception of beauty based on her interactions in nature. She has cut strips of paper and created waves, punched holes to create the texture of water, and played with photography with her felt to play with reflection and color modification through light

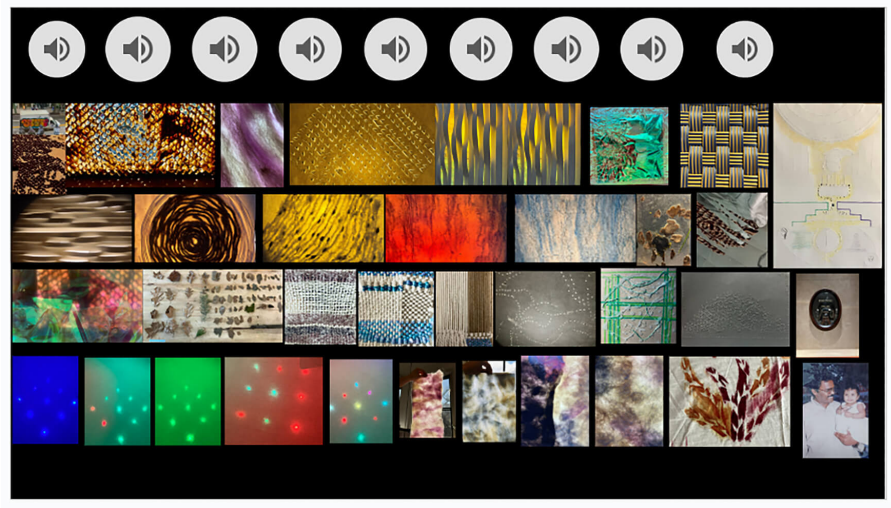

Figure 2: Beauty Diary Compilation, Bhoomika Manjunath, Spring 25. This image showcases thumbnails of the student's 45 studies and explorations with sounds, as well as photographs of her physical, tactile, and visual depictions of her understanding of beauty. Some images are using a play of light and color whereas others have tactile elements such as waves, punched holes, and cuts to demonstrate her idea of beauty borrowed from nature

The Beauty Diary Project helps students dismantle beauty conventions and create their own relationship with beauty. The "Ugly Laws" and "Freak shows" of the late 19th centuries deemed disabled people as not being beautiful.[24] Garland-Thomson illustrates this othering of disabled people and how anything different from the perceived normal is deviant.[25] In response, students document or create collages, sounds, videos, and textures in the form of studies (45 in total) to express their understanding of beauty.

Students apply and build on their own embodied experiences to create a framework for their final projects. Students without a lived experience of disability or an immediate family member, find purpose for their finished products or art pieces, borrowing from their idiosyncrasies.

Definition and Principles of Sensory Design

Sensory Design Studio approaches the context of making through embodied experience and knowledge. This approach to sensory design bridges access barriers for disabled and non-disabled bodies by using access as a generative tool for creation. It broadens the scope of engagement through multi-sensory interactions. Sensory design encourages designers to reevaluate, recognize, and reconsider their idiosyncrasies and the foundation of design rooted in functionality to serve humanity. This approach calls on creative people to add variety and versatility to their creations through critical thinking, centering disability and authenticity in their process. The following principles embedded in the course offer a framework for making borrowed from embodied knowledge, disability justice principles and my practice as a visually impaired designer and artist. These principles ground designers and artists and provide a structure for them to build their concepts and products of off.

1. We offer and add multi-sensory modes of engagement in/to our design
2. We acknowledge/credit our sources of influence/ inspiration/information
3. We work from our embodied knowledge/lived experience/idiosyncrasy/pain/joy/commitment
4. We are intentional/thoughtful about the environment in context of our practice and materiality
5. We work by enhancing, exaggerating and/or elevating diverse bodies and experiences
6. We recognize our privilege and intersectionality of lives and foster uplifting and innovative/ingenuous design experiences
7. We work by centering respect, care and community engagement to develop new creations
8. We think critically to constantly learn and grow by learning from disability scholarship and culture.

Student Work Examples

The final projects shared below exemplify these principles and are the culmination of centering disability and embodied experiences through multi-modal engagement. Students challenged themselves by using their own seeming vulnerabilities as a starting point for their design ideas and offer them in multi-sensory formats to include wider communities. Thea Yazbeck's tactile make-up brushes were designed to add her imprint while also making her pieces sculptural and versatile. She wrote:

> I was influenced by the everyday needs of anything that requires ergonomic solutions for daily use objects. Drawing from personal observations and experiences, I utilized air dry clay to handcraft ergonomically shaped containers.

24. Brigham A. Fordham, "Dangerous Bodies: Freak Shows, Expression, and Exploitation," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2007), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1604168.

25. Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies.*

Figure 3: Final Project, Thea Yazback, Spring 2024, Parsons School of Design. ID: Depict the makeup brushes created by the student with tactile handles made with air clay. Each object has hand or finger indents creating organic shapes and a better grip for the product

Claire Ammirato's shawl coat was designed to be versatile for multiple bodies and abilities; it is fully collapsible. Her own experience and commitment drove her to create a garment that draws from a disabled artist and her ingenuity. She said:

> This piece, entitled Cocoon Coat, reflects my experience with mental health by embodying the creative process of textile artist Judith Scott. The act of bundling and concealing materials and the body is the central throughline that connects both.

She garnered inspiration from her research project on Judith Scott and her experience with mental health challenges and perception in society.

Reflections

This case study demonstrates that understanding disability history and culture manifests in thoughtfully designed, versatile, and multi-sensory products. The representation of a disabled faculty member helps avoid the perpetuation of harmful practices in fashion and design.[26] Multi-sensory design expands the knowledge and embodied experience of creative practitioners while also expanding access. The inclusion of disabled experts in learning tactile technologies and other sensorial forms of design enables students to gain a deeper understanding of visual bias as well as the social model that celebrates disability instead of seeking a cure or problematizing disability.[27]

This sensory design approach shows the interconnections with disability justice principles. For example, one of the principles professes that disability is whole in itself and that we embrace leadership of those

26. Halstead, "Disability Design: Summary Report from a Field Scan."

27. Halstead, "Disability Design: Summary Report from a Field Scan."

Figure 4: Final Project, Claire Ammirato, Spring 2025, Parsons School of Design. ID: An Asian model posing with Claire's shawl coat in seated and standing positions. The coat has ties to expand and create closures. The hand felted fabric in alpaca wool embeds small scraps in shades of pink, blue and brown with maroon lining

most marginalized as they possess an authentic understanding of the systemic harms.[28] Yazbeck's air clay beauty brushes demonstrate the impact of tactile technologies on her design aesthetic and vocabulary. Her initial inkling as a non-disabled student was to add braille on pre-existing beauty packaging. Through our discussions, she realized that while adding braille to products can be helpful, in this scenario, it wouldn't make her design original or accessible. Only a small percentage of the blind population can read braille.[29] Also, adding braille to packaging is nuanced and not an add-on. Low-vision people wouldn't benefit from this either. Instead, her tactile exploration of clay transformed mundane beauty brushes into a novel tactile object. Using tactility as a creative prompt, took her design beyond the access checklist.

Therefore, design questions and problem-solving need to be reformed. The perceived problems or challenges of the disabled are part of their lived experiences. When designers learn from disabled experiences with humility, they gain from these lived experiences to make more informed sensory experiences. Also, multi-sensory design and accessible offerings can shift power imbalances by making products accessible to wider audiences, which increases representation and belonging.

Case Study 2: Teaching Sonic Fashion, Vidmina Stasiulytė

A big part of my research revises fashion by approaching it from a different — sonic — perspective wherein sound is considered not a negative aspect but a potential source of new theory and methods.

28. Sins Invalid, *Skin, Tooth, and Bone* (Dancers Group, 2021), https://docdrop.org/download_annotation_doc/Sins-Invalid---Skin-Tooth-+-Bone-1--6pbqk.pdf.

29. From the Community, "Despite Braille's 200th Anniversary, There Is a Braille Literacy Crisis," *The Stanford Daily*, October 7, 2024, https://stanforddaily.com/2024/10/06/braille-literacy-crisis-stanford/.

An investigation into sonic expressions is seen as a disruptive fashion practice. It could be described as a process of "unlearning", encouraging one to leave behind pre-existing knowledge of fashion expressions by focusing on something else when defining and designing. My doctoral and postdoctoral research became the foundation for the practice of experiential research workshops on Sonic Fashion. My take on non-visual aspects on fashion and textiles comes from my own experience as a seeing person, however, the aim and motivation of my research and education practice is to develop and suggest alternative and inclusive methods for designing and presenting fashion. The research practice was highly inspired and motivated by the interviews and co-designing practices with people with visual impairment that I had at the beginning of my PhD research and within the project *Beyond Seeing*.[30]

The series of workshops that will be presented in this case study have taken place at four different places: 1) at the conference TEI '25 in 2025 (University of Bordeaux, France, 7 participants, 3 hours), 2) conference IFFTI'25 in 2025 (London College of Fashion, United Kingdom, 20 participants, 2 hours), 3) a workshop at The National Oslo Academy of the Arts in 2025 (Norway, 5 participants, 3 days), 4) and a workshop at The Swedish School of Textiles in 2022 (Sweden, 16 participants, 3 days). The paper presents two alternative teaching tools, which are used for the workshops: Sound to Wear[31] and Sonic Palette,[32] and introduces five experimental teaching methods, such as Sonic Meditation, Sound Embodiment, Expanded Vocabulary, Sonic Prototyping, and Co-Sounding. The workshops included Master students, PhD students, researchers, and participants with visual impairment (workshop 1 and 4) who were invited as co-design team members rather than customers to design for. The participants come from a variety of disciplines, including Costume Design, Textile Design, Fashion Design, Human-Computer Interaction, Cognitive Neuroscience, and Assistive Technology. It is important to note that in my Sonic Fashion research and workshops, I use analogue materials and their inherent sounds rather than embedded digital ones, participants co-define and co-analyse using analogue sound-tools and textile-instruments, and co-design with sound from found material. The workshops on Sonic Fashion aim to develop creative, inclusive methodological practices that expand disciplinary boundaries and invite a radical approach towards such a visual field as fashion and textiles.

Methods and Tools for Teaching Sonic Fashion

The workshop usually begins with the introductory part, such as the Sonic Meditation. Sonic Meditation as an introduction to the field of Sonic Fashion aims to shift focus from visual to auditory dimensions. During the Sonic Meditation participants are sitting or lying on the floor with eye-masks and listening to the instructions given by me, preferably with curtains/blinds closed and lights off in the room where the meditation is given. Critically, this exercise with blindfolds is not the simulation of blindness but aims to block vision, so the focus shifts to other senses.

Instructions for Sonic Meditation

> *Breath slowly in and out, in and out...*
> *Do you hear someone breathing?*
> *Is it close or far away?*
> *Try to put the cone to your left ear and listen.*
> *What do you hear?*
> *Change the cone to the right ear, turn the wider or narrower opening of the cone to your ear.*
> *Focus on listening and the direction of sound that comes to your ears.*
> *Put down the cone.*
> *Are you wearing a garment, footwear or anything that makes sound?*
> *Play all together these sounds for some time so they merge into a polyphonic sonic event, co-sound*

30. Goethe-Institut Paris, "Beyond Seeing."

31. Developed during the PhD studies, granted by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 642328.

32. Developed during the artistic research project Sonic Fashion, funded by The Swedish Research Council, grant agreement ID: 2021-01399.

together;
Listen to the sound, what do you hear?
Can you identify a garment or its details?
Can you hear any identifying sound of a person you know?
Where does the sound come from?
Which direction? Does it come from above or below?
What emotion does it elicit?
Stop playing and listen to the silence for a while...
Now I will play some sounds, just listen for a while...
Remove the blindfolds.

Sound Embodiment is conducted by using the educational toolkit Sound to Wear that is the collection of 33 sound-tools worn on the body for listening and sounding practices (see fig. 5). Sound to Wear is a collection of thought — and body-provoking playthings with whom workshop participants are invited to listen and make sounds in different rhythms, tempos, explore the direction, mono/stereo aspects of sound, reflection and absorption, sound intensity, and sound timbre/character. The relationship between mediating object(s) and the wearer(s) is in focus and aims to inspire new meanings and relationships through the active creation of 'sonic events' in body-object intra-actions.[33] Sound to Wear encourages rethinking fashion expressions while introducing non-visual, temporal fashion expressions such as sound as well as unexpected, playful practices of a dressed body such as listening and sounding.

Figure 5: Teaching tools: Sound to Wear, 2020. Image by Vidmina Stasiulytė. ID: The 14 sound-tools presented in this collage are made from various found materials: a ping-pong ball, wooden plate, black bicycle inner tires, yellow foam, metal cleaning sponges, sandpaper, sink plungers, plastic and paper thread tubes, fingers of latex gloves, and metal bells

33. Vidmina Stasiulytė, "Sound to Wear," *VIS-Nordic Journal for Artistic Research*, no. 11 (2024), https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1161037/2241576?c=1.

Figure 6: Teaching tools: Sonic Palette, developed in collaboration with Dr Razieh Hashiemi Satnagar. Image by Vidmina Stasiulytė. ID: 56 sonic textiles samples hang from metal hangers on a rack with two bars. The smaller size (A4 format) textile samples are hanging on the top bar and the bigger size (A3 format) textile samples are hanging on the lower bar

Expanded Vocabulary is built on the Material Driven Design approach[34] and the co-analysis of defining the sonic expressions of textile-instruments from the educational toolkit Sonic Palette. Sonic Palette is a collection of 60 3D geometrical forms printed on different textiles with different filaments, such as PLA, PLA mixed with wood, steel, carbon or copper (see fig. 6). Each textile makes different sounds and participants are asked to define the sonic textiles using five experiential levels: sensorial, performative, affective and interpretive,[35] as well as functional (see fig. 7). The task is done together with other participants in a group setting using the template on the MIRO board. This task invites exploring co-analysing and co-defining practices in a group setting, as well as expanding the vocabulary in the field of fashion and textiles with sonic terms.

Sonic Prototyping involves designing practice: sound-thinking and designing with sound on the moving body while having in mind the threefold interaction of moving-touching-sounding where sound becomes as a result of kinetic-tactile interaction. Students are encouraged to think about different methods of designing with sound for the moving body — they are provided by the scheme of possible sonic design variables, such as Source, Spacing and Timing. Workshop participants are either provided by the collection of various materials that make sounds, or they are invited to bring the material that is intriguing in relation to the sonic expression. Two examples of the sonic prototypes are presented in figure 8.

34. Elvin Karana et al., "Material Driven Design (MDD): A Method to Design for Material Experiences," 2015.

35. Elisa Giaccardi and Elvin Karana, "Foundations of Materials Experience: An Approach for HCI," in *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2447–56, 2015.

Figure 7: Teaching methods: Expanded Vocabulary, conference Tangible Embedded and Embodied Interaction (TEI), Bordeaux, France, 2025. Image by Vidmina Stasiulytė. ID: A desk with educational materials and three 3D sonic textile samples printed on white mesh fabric. One sample with light green structures lies on the desk, while two participants examine the other samples by touch; one holding a sample with cylindrical structures, the other with spherical structures

Figure 8: Teaching methods: Designing with Sound, National Oslo Academy of the Arts, Oslo, Norway, 2025. Sonic Prototypes by students: a. Idunn Johanne Feyling, b. Hanne Haug Johne, and c. Pål Mikael Sterk-Hansen. Image a. By Idunn Johanne Feyling, b. and c. by Vidmina Stasiulytė. ID: Three sonic prototype headpieces worn by students: a 20cm rigid piece with metal rings on red threads and cotton backing (left), a collection of buttons sewn to the sole of stockings (middle), and a wool headpiece with 60 cm hair extensions tipped with metal needles (right)

Co-sounding is an alternative way of presenting fashion/textiles through experimental dance performance with the designed sonic pieces that were created in the Sonic Prototyping task. This task is done either by inviting workshop participants to make sounds together until they feel it is time to end the experimental performance, or they are instructed that they can make a specific number of sounds (e.g. three) throughout the co-sounding practice. At the same time, it is not just sounding exercise, but a deep listening practice.[36]

Reflections

To summarize the workshops on Sonic Fashion, the introductory part is not just inspiring but necessary as participants tend to engage and go back to the visual dimension. Sonic Meditation is a successful method to introduce sensory perception that goes beyond visuals. The most difficult task, according to the participants, is Expanded Vocabulary. The participants were missing sonic-tactile-movement-based terms to define the expressions of materials or prototypes. However, all participants agreed that this task should always be a part of the workshop. Although it is challenging to describe materials in nonvisual terms, it expands the vocabulary to become richer and more inclusive. The task of designing the Sonic Prototypes is the most exciting for workshop participants as it is usually a new experience of learning and applying alternative design methods in relation to movement and touch. It seems to work best if I invite participants to bring their own materials rather than introducing a material library. The last task of Co-Sounding is perceived by the participants as a very important part of the workshop: it not only summarizes and invites participation through a deep listening experience but also encouraging new ways of presenting the designed artifacts.

Case Study 3: Fashion Smellscapes, Julie Gork

Fashion education has largely ignored the olfactory dimension of clothing, overlooking connections to memory, culture, gender, social stratification, and consumer behavior. I first explored the relationship between smell and clothing in my master's thesis, continuing into PhD research on the sensory experience of fashion for people who are blind. As a sighted person, examining visual bias and privilege, particularly my own, has informed my approach to fashion pedagogy.

I conduct sensory workshops within the School of Fashion and Textiles at RMIT University in the option course Fashion Design Diversity, a course founded on a norm-critical approach to fashion design, Disability Justice principles, and practices of allyship. However, this case study discusses a workshop on fashion and smell I delivered in a core first-year course in 2022. While the two-hour workshop did not explicitly address disability studies, it aimed to expand sensory possibilities for students by challenging visual dominance in design. The two-hour workshop explored smell through experiential learning activities including a guided neighborhood walk to two clothing retailers and a collaborative mapping exercise, with 16 student participants.

Threads of Smell and Memory

Drawing from sensory studies, sociology, and material culture, the workshop began with a contemplative exercise designed to surface olfactory memories associated with clothing and textiles. Sensory scholars Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott explain that "smelling an article of clothing belonging to a person will often give a much stronger impression of that person's presence than seeing a piece of clothing".[37] Students were asked to write down a memory, guided by the following prompts if needed:

36. Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (iUniverse, 2005), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=yzL3QjZpFoUC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=deep+listening&ots=mel3K6TwyT&sig=DTdV52EPSjlDh1JWI7S3vIQHv_U.

37. Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 116.

- Describe a piece of clothing that holds a meaningful scent.
- What is the first clothing smell you remember?
- Do you have any smell and clothing memories related to particular people, places or events?

Methods that encourage sensory awareness must consider the potential for sensory stimulus to elicit a range of experiences and involuntary responses. To address this, students were informed of sensory triggers prior to the workshop and that they were able to participate in the activities according to personal levels of comfort.

Many students shared powerful memories of inheriting clothing from loved ones or family members, describing how these olfactory connections provided comfort and maintained emotional bonds across time. A common theme emerged around perfume and cologne, particularly those worn by parents, grandparents, and romantic partners. The evanescent yet lingering possibilities of smell are exemplified when perfume is sprayed on the dressed body, offering a way to re-experience memories through scent caught in fabric. Other memories shared by students recalled associations with specific places and activities, including the salty smell of a swimsuit after the beach and the pungent smell of sweat in exercise clothes. These smell stories speak to the porosity of material and its potential to act as a sense repository.[38] Sharing these material-smell stories led students to think about laundering practices, specifically why and when we wash clothes: Do we remove smell for hygiene reasons, as part of the social conventions of cleanliness, or as an act of forgetting the body that wore the garment?[39]

Collaborative Smellscapes

The guided neighborhood walk left the classroom to visit two local retail environments: a secondhand clothing store and a fashion retailer. The School of Fashion and Textiles is situated in a diverse, inner-city suburb, offering a dense olfactory environment. Students were equipped with a template to take smell notes along the walk, with prompts directing them to note the location, intensity of the smell, and their affective and/or cognitive response. This approach follows the sensory mapping methods developed by Kate McLean,[40] while students were also encouraged to consider how different kinds of materials emit and capture smell.

Walking along the street primed our noses to the aromas, perfumes, scents, odors, stenches, and smells of the neighborhood. Consciously attending to smell caused some students to feel overwhelmed, describing a feeling of sensory overload as they attempted to notice and distinguish between different olfactory cues. This illustrates the focus required to attend to different senses as we build sensory capacity and skills.

A visit to a charity secondhand store caused the most intense reactions, with students describing the smell of the store and garments using words like musty, old, and dirty. These evocative reactions were often intertwined with the materiality of garments, for example, the particular smell of denim jeans or a leather jacket. However, these smells were also layered with the scents of past owners and environments, prompting a reflection on the possibilities of material to communicate garment history. In contrast to this history, students noted no discernable smell in a fashion retailer selling retro and vintage-inspired clothes, leading to a discussion about the olfactory characteristics of new and old clothes. For some students, this absence of smell created a sanitized retail environment that felt inauthentic, while others noted the "old" smell of textiles and the body may deter people from shopping in secondhand stores.

38. Julie Macindoe, "A Sense of Forgetting and Remembering: Memories of Smell and Clothing," *Clothing Cultures* 5, no. 3 (2018), 377–89, https://doi.org/10.1386/cc.5.3.377_1.

39. Macindoe, "A Sense of Forgetting and Remembering"; Ingun Grimstad Klepp, Madeline Buck, Kirsi Laitala, and Marit Kjeldsberg, "What's the Problem? Odor-Control and the Smell of Sweat in Sportswear," *Fashion Practice* 8, no. 2 (2016), 296–317, https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2016.1215117.

40. Kate McLean, https://sensorymaps.com/.

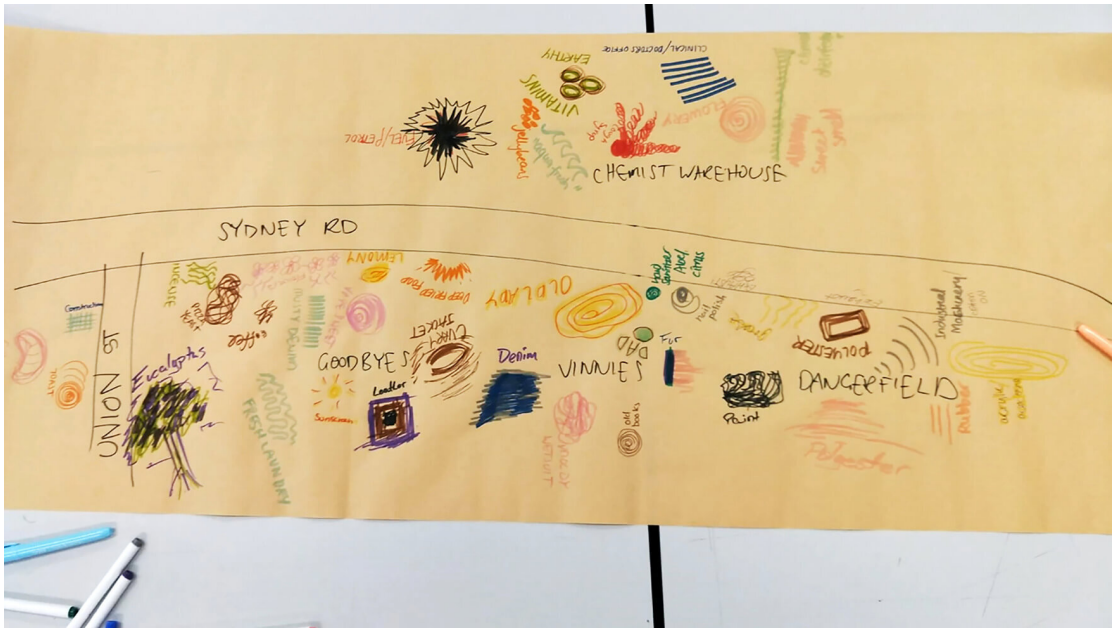

Figure 9: The Smellscape Map. Photo by Julie Gork, 2022. ID: A large sheet of brown paper is spread across the table with colored shapes, squiggles, starbursts and scratch marks drawn to depict landmarks, retail stores, and various materials along a local street

Students returned to compile their notes into a collective "smellscape", mapping the olfactory geography of the neighborhood to understand how smell can create distinct atmospheres and social meanings.[41] Using colored markers, students plotted the locations and types of smells, noting intensity levels and illustrating emotional associations through creative notations. While the map was ultimately a visual outcome, it offered a point of intersensory connection, with the visual notations acting as memory cues for embodied and material smell experiences.

Reflections

The smell stories and collaborative smellscape revealed how fashion serves not merely as visual communication but as a complex sensory medium intertwined with materials, place, and time. In their post-workshop reflections, students noted they were more aware of the smells in everyday life, and some had since gone through their wardrobe to consider how different materials carry scent.

The challenges and limitations of the workshop may reflect the neglect of smell in social understanding, illustrated by language. There was a consensus that while there are many words available to describe the visual appearance and tactile feel of garments, it is hard to find the words to describe smell. While terminology was discussed in the first exercise, this could be further expanded through creative exercises. It was interesting that some students avoided using the word smell, instead preferring the more appealing "scent" or in one extreme, the generalized term "sensory".

Future iterations of the workshop might consider alternative presentation of the smellscapes to create multisensory outcomes and specific thematic approaches, for example, an exploration of fashion, smell and memory; a textile science approach; a focus on the cultural nuances of and connections to smell; or smell as a strategy of sustainability.

41. Chris Perkins and Kate McLean, "Smell Walking and Mapping," in *Mundane Methods: Methodological Innovations for Exploring the Everyday*, ed. S. Hall and H. Holmes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

Conclusion

The case studies presented in this article demonstrate how multisensory fashion pedagogy accomplishes three critical transformations that reimagine fashion education. First, by encouraging an approach using "inventive methods" and "remix methods"[42] to bridge multiple fields, the workshops and course design successfully displace visual dominance to explore and expand design possibilities. An "antiocular" approach[43] prompted sonic, kinetic, olfactory, and tactile explorations of fashion/dress. This was illustrated by the creation of Sonic Prototypes as artefacts that reimagined dress through temporal and auditory dimensions, the mapping of fashion smellscapes to identity social-material intersections, and by interrogating beauty through multisensory modes. This approach to methodology enabled students to shift from visual-material thinking to facilitate new forms of expression.

Second, these sensory approaches to design advocate for the legitimacy and value of embodied knowledge by encouraging students to unlearn preconceptions about fashion, dress, and sensory experience. The visuality of fashion is deliberately challenged by expanding to multisensorial, multimodal, relational, and performative aspects. Unfamiliar combinations of material-body-objects and a change in sensory perspectives allows for learning through unlearning.[44] For example, the sociocultural ambivalence to smell offers provocation for designers, while the educational toolkits of Sound to Wear and Sonic Palette exemplify what Levin calls "ontological" thinking, triggering the cognitive shift necessary for unlearning.[45] Attending to the senses in fashion education also enhances creative capacities, improves the ability to articulate tacit knowledge,[46] and deepens process understanding.[47] So, by challenging students to base design development on their embodied experiences and idiosyncrasies, this approach recognizes diverse experiences of fashion as foundational to the design process.

Third, the Sensory Design Studio framework demonstrates how multisensory pedagogy builds communities that celebrate diverse ways of knowing and invites authentic representation. The course balances disability scholarship, disability justice principles, and authentic representation of embodied knowledge through the integration of multiple disabled experts in the class curriculum. Students are challenged to take accountability for making their design more versatile and offering their work in accessible formats. Creative tactile and auditory studies informed by personalized understanding of beauty help students move away from visual to multiple non-visual modes of design. Additionally, students learn to extend their own aesthetic and areas of interest through an added sensory layer, such as the integration of tactile elements and image descriptions of their finished pieces to their presentations.

Our sensory approaches to fashion design aim to challenge visual dominance by suggesting more inclusive non-visual, temporal, and interactive modes. Our work advocates to show the importance of understanding fashion as a platform for new knowledge and critical thinking, along with unlearning and rethinking preconceptions of what fashion/dress is and could be. It also invites the inclusion of people with disabilities and other under-represented groups in leadership roles as contributors and not merely subjects of study. Exploring the interface of fashion and other disciplines within this research has revealed the importance of embedding these ideas and methodologies. The experiential aspect of the workshops and course design can be seen as an "expanded field" practice which has the potential to expand fashion and move it forward as a discipline.[48] The purpose of this is to facilitate long-term effect

42. Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, *Inventive Methods* (London: Routledge, 2012), https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203854921&type=googlepdf; Annette Markham, "Remix Cultures, Remix Methods: Reframing Qualitative Inquiry for Social Media Contexts," in *Global Dimensions of Qualitative Inquiry* (Routledge, 2013).

43. Anthony Gritten, "The Subject (of) Listening," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 45, no. 3 (2014), 203–19.

44. Sarah Pink, Yoko Akama, and Shanti Sumartojo, *Uncertainty and Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

45. Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002).

46. Riisberg et al., "AWARENESS: Tactility and Experience as Transformational Strategy."

47. Suurla, "Bringing 'It' Out of the Body and Into Matter."

48. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979), 31–44.

— inclusive fashion pedagogy that considers non-visual aesthetics and critical sensory design as a part of the education program.

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