Local Design Ecosystems: Fashion Making in New York’s Garment Center

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At the start of the 20th century, New York City’s Garment Center emerged as the nucleus of American fashion manufacturing. The district in Midtown Manhattan was purpose-built for garment production -- despite considerable changes over the past century this design and manufacturing cluster remains a vital source of innovation within the global fashion industry. Across the world, fashion cities are becoming hubs of sustainable fashion, where creative ideas and production move together in real-time, maximizing efficiency and minimizing waste. From 3-D printing to advanced robotics and wearable technology, the advances of recent years have created an agile manufacturing landscape that offers new possibilities for small producers. Simultaneously, a globally-oriented network of shared knowledge has emerged, connecting geographically dispersed communities with knowledge and software to enable creative design practices. What are the potentialities for globally-minded, locally-informed design? How has the built environment of the Garment Center shaped, and sustained, this design ecosystem? What role do urban manufacturing hubs, like the Garment Center, play in building more equitable and resilient cities?
To explore these questions, I propose a presentation taking the example of New York City’s Garment Center as a case study. This vibrant cluster of designers and specialist producers, geographically proximate by historical necessity, remains one of the most interconnected examples of integrated design thinking with responsible manufacturing practices. This presentation will delve into the dynamics and challenges of fashion-making in this unique environment, sharing findings from an ongoing digital humanities project to explore and document the nuanced, and often hidden, interdependencies within New York’s Garment Center.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

_Tessa Maffucci_ teaches in the Fashion Department at Pratt Institute, currently acting as the Departmental Sustainability Coordinator to help advance campus-wide curriculum and programming goals for sustainable design strategies. She is the recipient of the Made in NYC Fellowship and an editor for _The Fashion Studies Journal_. Her research focuses on the intersection of fashion and labor, with an emphasis on sustainability, technology and material culture. She holds degrees from New York University’s Gallatin School and The Graduate Center at the City University of New York.