



Northern Renaissance: Art and the Birth of Fashion, a collaborative progression from multidisciplinary through interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary

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Textiles and Apparel “by nature requires the consideration of multi-and interdisciplinary studies” (Damhorst, 2014, p. 1). Interdisciplinary within our own field, we are also subject to some of the same divisions that have been called academic “silos” (Linton, 2009). We cross into other disciplines for theory and literature, but less frequently directly collaborate to build something that expands the larger body of knowledge and creates greater meaning (Lattuca, 2001). Cross-discipline work has been organized in three general categories. Multidisciplinary is when each faculty approach the topic from their own perspective without an attempt at integration. Interdisciplinarity is characterized by an integration of the parts, identification of common themes, and creation of a new approach beyond discipline-specific perspectives. Transdisciplinarity is where faculty develop a new and synthesized knowledge which blurs disciplinary boundaries (Bandy, 2017; Dyer, 2003; van den Besselaar and Heimericks, 2001)

The purpose of this paper is to present a research and course project, Northern Renaissance: Art and the Birth of Fashion, which was developed between an Art Historian and a Costume Historian at a large Midwestern University. This experience went beyond multidisciplinary to employ interdisciplinarity and begin the process of transdisciplinarity. Costume historians rely heavily on artworks, especially in the period before photography or until extant examples are readily available, using visual evidence as illustrative examples of items, materials, styles, and settings within the chronological progression of fashion change. Dating is crucial, but the artist or the context in which the work was made is generally of secondary importance. Art historians focus on the artist, medium, and context within artistic movements. Yet, both fields (or silos) require careful seeing, attention to detail, interpretation, and reflection. We use similar periodization (eg. Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, etc.) and center our educational presentations on slides. In Art History, scholars consider the dress depicted, and in Costume History, scholars consider artistic movements. In many ways, we operate in very similar, yet parallel universes.

Initial discussions furthered possibilities and opened the door to proposing and gaining approval from two departments to offer a cross-listed Special Topic for Fall 2016. The faculty worked in tandem to plan the Northern Renaissance: Art and the Birth of Fashion course covering the period of 1350-1580, spanning most of Europe with the exception of Italy, although Italian influences were included as reference and context. As the Art Historian came to the collaboration with a refined course outline for the period, it provided the foundation for a general multidisciplinary organization of art taught one day a week and fashion depicted in the art on the other day. Both faculty members had challenges in the preparation, although they were quite

different. The Art Historian was charged with paring 15 weeks of content in half. Continual editorial decision-making led to retention of some images coupled with replacement by works that, through interdisciplinary collaboration, were deemed to better express changes in textiles, appearance, and fashion. The Costume Historian's challenge was the opposite, expanding small Northern Renaissance sections of costume and textile survey courses into a half semester without the benefit of a single or even a small group of sources with adequate deep focus on fashion in this period. Over time, a system of placing art chronologically then collaboratively aligning with a timeline of fashion change greatly aided the process and resulted in greater interdisciplinarity.

Reception to the initiative was surprisingly positive and fostered by the mix of students enrolled including fashion and art history undergraduates, art history graduates, fashion honors, and senior guest students; expanding within their subject area and beyond. The two scholars learned considerably more about each other's knowledge base, increasing curiosity and awareness; especially in artistic expression and the unbreakable connection with communication and dissemination of fashion change. There were many transdisciplinary "ah ha!" moments including the realization that the date of a painting could be pinpointed through fashion chronology; identifying a starting point for the wearing of lace in court portraits; status, identity, and allegiance communication through textile materials, colors, motifs, garments, and accessories; geographic movement of fashion styles with artists; influence of patrons in depictions of individuals and items of dress; artist life experience and relationship with subjects and treatments; the movement of ideas impacted by trade, merchants, textile production, and commerce; as well as the larger integrated topics of class, gender, diversity, and inclusion. These transdisciplinary intersections infused the project with energy for further discovery and learning. The faculty are currently developing a virtual exhibition and laying plans to prepare a text to expand this new and synthesized knowledge which blurs disciplinary boundaries.

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