

Sustainable Practice: The Future Mode of Temporality in Fashion
Harah Chon

Volume 8, Number 4, 1 October 2021, pp. 377-385(9)

https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc_00097_1

ABSTRACT

Fashion is indicative of time and, serving as the interpretive and representational forms of a society, is measured against the cyclical rhythms of trend diffusion and style adoption. This article examines the function of time within the framework of historical research, reviewing the construction and translation of contemporary fashion. The temporality of material objects is further probed by an analysis of the socio-cultural development of current sustainable practices to grasp the affective nature of time and its relationship to the fashion system. With an overview of emerging sustainable design practices, the relationship between time and meaning creation is critically examined, analyzed and discussed. The social production of design and its utilization of the body-as-space is presented in relation to the social construction of time, explicated as part of a subjective, embodied experience. This article presents a new modality of time in how it is articulated, imitated, reproduced and reinterpreted through material culture and future sustainable practices.

Keywords: fashion theory, social theory, fashion experience, design systems, temporality, slow fashion, sustainable practice

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of fashion, comprising style and dress, sets its own rhythms in accordance with society. Throughout centuries, the social impact of fashion has resulted in the mass adoption of trends to link and fix historical dress against notions of time. Fashion has evolved from its original utility and fundamental function of clothing to develop new forms of meaning for establishing social phenomena. The act of dressing, assembling articles of clothing onto the surface of the body, produces a representation of individual style. In the same manner that the body uses gesture to communicate, clothing is the language by which one presents an outward expression of oneself. Defining the relationship of the body against the forces of the external world further clarifies the role of clothing and its social significance.

It is the natural instinct of human experience, guided by perception, imagination, recollection and judgment, to assign value to objects (Rinofner-Kreidl 2012). When interpreting human values as mediating action, one's natural moral code of behavior can be seen as the foundation upon which a personal orientation of values is formed (Kim 2001). These values are not static but susceptible to external influences, such as social or cultural change. This argues that social movements, as change agents impacting self-awareness, create a state of self-dissatisfaction through the form of moral confrontation when an individual is confronted with changing values, attitudes and behaviors (Ball-Rokeach and Tallman 1979). Against the rapid conditions of change brought forth by globalization, the state of fashion must enter into a new mode of temporality to reinstate its position as a socializing force.

This article addresses the theoretical perspectives framing the social impact of fashion through a discussion of the body and phenomenological experience. An overview of emerging sustainable practices is introduced as resolving and reconciling the tensions within individual-collective relationships and proposes a future modality of fashion practice that is slow, mindful, culturally appropriate and socially inclusive.

THE BODY AND DRESS

Human existence is marked by the mode of being-in-the-world within the ability that one is able to present bodily modifications to change one's environment through manipulations of the body (Kim 2001). The integrated system of the body serves as an outward representation of the self, allowing for one's views and understanding of the world to manifest. This schema is instrumental for unifying mind and self in relation to other people and things, utilizing the physical boundaries of the body to demarcate internal and external perceptions of the world. Fashion can be interpreted as a response to "humanity's infinitely irrelevant place in the universe" (Stafford 2006: 122). The nature of fashion poses a structure that allows freedom to represent oneself by way of a simulated understanding of the world, utilizing objects to constitute symbolic significance.

The relationship between the body and the external world is intrinsically linked, where the embodied experience of human existence is captured through perception (Merleau-Ponty 2004). As individuals develop subjective perception, fashion is one mode by which personal expressions can be transferred and read. While the external world frames one's existence, it is the individual who uses bodily expression to simulate an interpretation of the world. This assumes that each individual develops a unique experience of the environment and, through a process of internalization, it is communicated through the space afforded by the body. If the external world can be seen as a correlate of the self, each individual constructs a perceptive world resulting in different forms of self-expression (Scheler 1973). The body is the means by which one senses and experiences the world, transferring and communicating itself to other perceivable bodies through behaviors and relationships to the environment (Heinamaa 2012). In this manner, the body serves as the medium through which the external world is received, processed, transformed and expressed in a recursive manner.

Fashion can be defined as a circular process of social interaction that involves the individual, society and objects (Nedelmann 1990), forming a sense of cohesion when individuals conform to a group norm. The production of objects serves as the interface between the inner and outer environments confronting one's existence (Simon 1996) and it is through the body that one is made known and becomes relatable to other people and things. If society can be seen as facilitating a continual self-creation process through the use of material objects defining one's identity, social affiliation and lifestyle practices (Miller 1987), fashion acts as a homogenizing force in promoting the intrinsic values of objects as a form of social inclusion and recognition. Accepting that one does not exist alone in the world, the body poses a common link among individuals where separate rhythms are synchronized and related through developing commonality of values and the use of objects.

Barthes (2006) defines fashion as a system that creates value through the arrangement of objects on a concrete wearer. The conscious effort that an individual makes in dressing translates as the actualization of meaning, which shift with the reorganization of objects on the body. Each object forms one component of the system, which can be ordered in any number of combinations. The linking of objects is what constitutes the structure of dressing as a medium for self-expression and fashion becomes a process of communication, projecting appearance as a representation of self onto the external world as a means to connect one individual to another. Thus, the concept of dress becomes a language by which human beings can relate through commonalities. If clothing represents the human persona, then fashion links the relationships between

man and body to body and society (Barthes 2006). The theoretical perspectives discussed in this section define fashion as providing the interface for social interaction between the socially constituted mind and individual actions to implicate objects with meanings (Mead 1934).

TOWARDS A NEW TEMPORALITY

Fashion is governed by trend cycles that create new rhythms, resulting in changing styles through hegemonic structures of knowledge diffusion. As an integral part of culture, fashion serves as the interpretation and representational form of society within concepts of time, utilizing the space of the body to create social and cultural meanings. Through visual expressions of the self that embed the individual development of subjectivity and perception, the experiences of the common whole are framed and governed by social conditions (Mead 1934). This produces a shared and meaningful world through the internalization and embodiment of experience (Bourdieu 1984).

Fashion objects represent the tangible materialization of design, containing the knowledge and ongoing dialectic between the intended applications of designers and inferred interpretations of users. Jimenez-Narvaez (2000) categorizes knowledge of design into the levels of empirical-analytical, hermeneutical-historical, and socio-critical. Design objects represent knowledge that communicates and transfers an interpretation of a social reality. These objects are fixed against notions of time and space, serve as repositories of memory and contribute to varying modes of knowledge to produce new physical and mechanical forms, semiotic and communicative processes, and effective modifications to human behavior. In this manner, fashion is a phenomenon that evolves over the course of time and, at the height of its appeal, becomes an indication of the present (Nedelmann 1990) while setting a rhythm that allows adjustment in an orderly and unified way (Blumer 1969).

According to Cassirer (1944), the whole of human life is defined by adapting to a symbolic system, where human existence guides perception, imagination, recollection and judgment into assigning value to objects (Rinofner-Kreidl 2012). Heavily influenced by social forces of change, the role of fashion goes beyond the functional use of clothing to serve basic human needs (Shaw and Newholm 2002). Within this understanding, social meanings are constructed based on a group's collective actions and beliefs as part of cultural production (Johnston and Klandermans 1995).

The practices of fashion constitute society's cultural orientation in the manner that beliefs, values, ideas and experiences are expressed (Barnard 1996). Individuals who embody these norms become communicators of cultural phenomena, thereby producing and reproducing social values through the expression of a collective identity through group membership. Therefore, the wide adoption of social practices involves the negotiation of cultural production to generate new symbolic meanings and associations. The social significance of fashion requires collective participation and acceptance towards a process of social change, questioning how the recent shift towards the adoption of sustainable principles will set new rhythms in fashion to impact future patterns of interaction.

Fashion embodies a process of communication, wherein individuals participate through the medium of clothing to express or send messages that elicit responses or

changes in others (Barnard 1996). The body is turned inside out to expose the surface as an open space for experience to be texturized (Emberley 1987), suggesting that individual choices and preferences can be read and interpreted as an indication of and alignment to one's beliefs. The growing social movements adopting sustainable practices set new standards for fashion production and consumption, challenging previous concepts and theories of the fashion system as demanding conformity through the hierarchal structures of fashion leaders and followers to confront the individual-collective dimensions of interaction. Acknowledging the slow movement of design as a proposed shift for how individual identities are expressed and values are redefined, fashion is in need of a temporal turn to signify the changing roles and distinctions of the lived body in everyday experience.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE AS A NEW TEMPORAL MODE

The concept of slow fashion is based on a framework of sustainable living stemming from the Slow Food movement, which advocates slow principles and applications for everyday life as a means to develop a new time concept to produce and consume in more conscious and thoughtful ways (Clark 2008). Slow fashion exists as part of a culture of remodeling what is meant by development and success in fashion, leading towards the transformation of values through sustainability (Fletcher 2010). This requires an understanding of the different speeds of activity that define the significant role of sustainability against social, cultural, economic and ecological systems of change.

Fletcher (2010) discusses slow culture as a gestalt switch that has shifted consumption and production emphases towards a set of new values and behaviors, calling for the adoption of slow fashion practices. The act of sensing and perceiving allows individuals to relate to one another (Heinamaa 2012), signifying that a collective adoption of actions and beliefs further supports the implication that collaboration, co-creation and co-design are necessary to lead fashion towards adopting slower rhythms for future practice. As the body provides a common link between individual perspectives in social situations (Scheler 1973), new movements and shared experiences are constructed, communicated and redefined by changing conceptions of time against the conditions of fashion. The principles and philosophies of slow fashion define the significance of individual action, proposing a temporal turn through which fashion practices can redefine the assigning of meanings to material objects and produce a new form of social interaction.

Clark (2008) presents a framework for slow fashion that provides future directions for thinking about sustainability and moving towards socially aware design. The slow fashion approaches challenge designers, producers and consumers to reimagine future working relationships by emphasizing collaboration, the ecological concerns of fashion and a return to tradition. This allows for a focus on materiality, rather than material culture, as a form of human involvement and social practice. It proposes a new conception of fashion that shifts values toward preservation and conservation while engaging the individual through a bottom-up, as opposed to the traditional top-down, approach of participation. The slow principles of fashion encourage a more sustainable future, demanding a redefinition of the fashion system to present a different ideology and cultural orientation.

Slow Fashion Approaches	
<i>Approach</i>	<i>Implications</i>
Challenge existing hierarchies of “designer”, “producer”, and “consumer”	<i>Collaboration Co-Creation/Co-Design</i>
Question the notion of fashion being concerned exclusively with the “new”	<i>Re-Use/Re-Cycling/Up-Cycling Tradition/Craft</i>
Challenge fashion’s reliance on image	<i>Materiality</i>
Present fashion as a choice rather than as a mandate	<i>Inclusivity/Relatability Bottom-Up Diffusion</i>
Highlight collaborative/cooperative work – providing agency especially to women	<i>Social Innovation/Enterprise, Social Contribution, Education</i>

Table 1. *Slow Approaches to Fashion (Source: Adapted from Clark 2008)*

Culture reflects a collective response to meaning-making (Geertz 1973) and provides clues of the phenomenal world to determine the types of objects available (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). As everyday life is socially constructed through a dialectic process involving both the individual’s objective and subjective realities (Berger and Luckmann 1966), the body serves as a physical boundary separating the concept of self from the external world. The impressions that one receives from the environment are reified, in the selection and adoption of objects, to develop an aesthetic hermeneutic utilizing the space of the body to symbolically represent one’s self-identity through a process of continual modification and juxtaposition. It is proposed that individual perceptions will be further influenced and changed by external shifts adopting the slow culture of fashion.

The current landscape of sustainable approaches to fashion is indicative of a collective shift towards slow fashion practices from the perspectives of designers, producers and individuals. Georg Simmel defined fashion as forging class differentiation, allowing individuals to adopt styles for achieving a desired identity or particular social status (Blumer 1969). In contrast to the traditional top-down diffusion of style and aesthetics, slow fashion is indicative of a social movement that confronts the individual to adopt new principles and patterns of consumption by consciously purchasing for new ways to use, reuse, recycle and discard (Lang et al. 2016). The implications of fashion as being a mechanism that “tricks the consumer into superficiality and frivolity of one’s appearance to others” (Diaz-Meneses 2009: 355) is challenged by the emergence of ethically-sourced, sustainable design solutions that resist the social pressures dictating fashion. These shifting approaches to fashion provide evidence of the impact that external forces impose on social development, indicating that the adoption of slow fashion will generate new cultural values to present a future mode of temporality in fashion.

Time is socially constructed and developed from everyday life to frame all social activities against temporal and spatial dimensions (Nowotny 1992). Fashion exists in the socializing act of conformity, emphasizing a reliance on collectivity as an indication of shared values and social rhythms. Therefore, the widespread adoption and acceptance of a slow culture presents a new social condition for the conceptualization of time, articulated through a growing awareness of opportunities to embed ecological, ethical and socially responsible actions in the designing, producing and consuming of fashion. This ideology of fashion practice redefines spatio-temporal

conditions, presenting a shared cultural experience that shapes and forms new rhythms and impacts for society.

Slow fashion begins by questioning the sociocultural implications and ecological consequences of human action, accepting that fashion exists as a subsystem governed by and operating within larger systems. As the human body is experienced, represented and read in relation to space, time and objects, it is posited that sustainable practices serve as an indication of a significant temporal turn for the fashion system to adapt to a new mode of practice.

CONCLUSION

Fashion movements produce a cyclical rhythm of change that begins with innovators and leaders who standardize social norms for its participants. Tensions framing the social aspect of fashion confront its members and participants with the choice to either conform to an adopted norm or deviate through expressions of distinction. If, as argued by Clarke and Miller (2002) that individuals prefer to follow social standards as a form of reassurance in matters of taste and aesthetic choice, then a mass adoption towards sustainable fashion sets a new social condition wherein individuals may contribute to defining a new ideology for the meaning of dress.

This article has discussed fashion as setting its own rhythms in accordance to society by amplifying the role of designers, producers and individuals to assign meaning and significance to objects in relation to time. Designers are called to focus on more culturally relevant objects through sustainable methods and processes, embedding a slower rhythm of production and consumption. The objects produced will serve as the spatio-temporal, symbolic representations of culture. Individuals, who adapt to the new temporal mode of fashion, will continually be confronted by the social and cultural movements defined by fashion. The emergence of sustainable practice presents a growing social phenomenon that redefines the involvement of individuals, giving opportunity to actively participate in the social construction of time through bodily representations that serve as the articulation of embodied experience.

Fashion utilizes the space of the body to communicate subjective experience, contributing to the social production of meaning. The external world, framing human existence, accounts for the changes occurring in social situations that are diffused into local cultural systems. As the current state of design continues to shift toward sustainable practices as a new temporality, the cultural context of creating and consuming will undergo a change in values. Notions of time and the tensions presented by individual-collective relationships are reconciled through the implications of adopting a slow culture to present a more sustainable, inclusive and culturally appropriate mode of temporality.

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Author Address

Harah Chon
LASALLE College of the Arts
Faculty of Design
1 McNally Street
Singapore 187940

Author Biography

Harah Chon is a design practitioner, researcher and educator. She holds a PhD in Design Epistemology and her current research activities focus on design theory and philosophy across the themes of collaborative design frameworks, disruptive approaches to interdisciplinary design, intangible culture and heritage, and knowledge transference. Currently, her research advocates the furthering of discourses on design and cultural sustainability, social design and design knowledge.