Fashion Otherwise
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Abstract

How can we understand ourselves when everything is moving, all the time?

As we hurtle through the 2020s, the earth spinning on its axis at a calculation of 460 metres a second, we wrestle with the super-complexity of ecological, technological, political, social and economic entanglements. With our multiple frames of understanding in a more than human and unknowable world, this can be exciting and daunting. How we perceive, imagine, know and interact in the world, involves a sense-making through an unravelling and embracing of ideas and contexts. We are in a state of profound epistemological and ontological crisis described by Bateson (1972)[1] , Guattari 2014) [2] (Harraway (2016) [3] Escobar (2017) [4] and Akómoléfé[5] (2013) with symptoms and signs of the self-harm that parts of humanity is inflicting on humanity itself and on all life forms. Fashion demonstrates this self-harm in arresting and imbalanced ways, the fashion consumption carbon footprint target for 2030 is exceeded in 14 of the G20 countries. On average, the fashion emissions per capita of the richest 20% were 20 times higher than the emissions of the poorest 20%. This ratio varies substantially across countries, consistent with levels of income inequality. (Luca Coscieme et al. 2022) [6]
Fashion's habits of self-harm have become normalised. Letting go of bad habits is difficult but might be humanity's greatest demonstration of commitment to life and the ability to imagine otherwise, beyond the dominant current status quo and received wisdom. Humans are a social species, without a togetherness, with other humans and other forms of live, we can't exist. Our being is relational; as individuals, species and societies, we are embedded in the cyclical processes of nature. This lies at the heart of our ability to thrive.

[1] Bateson, G. (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology.* Chicago, US. The University of Chicago Press.
[2] Guattari, F. (2014) *The three ecologies.* London, England ; New York, New York: Bloomsbury Academic (Bloomsbury revelations).
[3] Harraway, D. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble.* U.S. Duke University Press
[4] Escober, A. (2017) *Designs for the Pluriverse.* U.S. Duke University Press
[5] Akómoléfé, B. (2013) Nothing is Original (https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/nothing-is-original)
[6] Luca Coscieme, Lewis Akenji, Elli Latva-Hakuni, Katia Vladimirova, Kirsi Niinimäki, Claudia Henninger, Cosette Joyner-Martinez, Kristian Nielsen, Samira Iran, Erminia D'Itria. 2022. Unfit, Unfair, and Unfashionable: Resizing Fashion for a Fair Consumption Space. Hot or Cool Institute, Berlin.

Full Paper

'In the first decades of the 21st century, we have reached a crucial juncture in our history. We are on the threshold of a new stage of social, spiritual and cultural evolution, a stage that is as different from the stage of the earlier decades of this century as the grasslands were from the caves and settled villages from life in nomadic tribes.'

World Futures (2023) [7]

What happens in the present evolves out of how we have lived in the past and is inextricably linked to our future health. We are evolving out of nation based industrial societies, borne out of colonial and industrial paradigms. We are in social and ecological crisis due to these paradigms. (ref) However, we are learners and explorers with the ability to reflect on our past thinking and to evolve our perceptions, develop new knowledge and experience deep understanding. Although this is not always apparent, when we look at societies, governments and communities around us today. Possibly the greatest demonstration of our ability to learn and understand would be to consider, in this present, how our interconnectedness in human and biosphere terms, can help us towards mutuality, deepen our knowledge and hone our capabilities towards manifesting a social, spiritual and cultural evolution in and of our more than human worlds.

What we do in the next 50 years, will determine life on earth for the next 10,000 years.

Rockstrom, J. (2017) [8]

To know about our future health, we don't need to look far, it is written in our current diets, lifestyles and values. On a personal scale, this links directly to what we eat and wear, on a societal scale, what we grow and make and on a biosphere scale, what we take in relation to the earth's carrying capacity. Possibly the greatest concern is our apparent inability to see our more than human identities and the links across these scales. Our fashion diets, lifestyles and values are writ large on our bodies, on the street, on social media and on the runway. Fashion holds up a mirror for us to glimpse where and whether we can recognise our more than human existence and that planetary, societal and personal health are bound up together. Over a recent cup of coffee conversation with one of the wisest thinkers and writers in design in our times, John Thackara, ideas arose around the role of fashion designers as health care workers, creating beauty and relevance in terms of soil health being as fundamental to good design as aesthetic prowess, technical precision and cultural and commercial resonance. To recognise this vital role, we need to consider what kind of education and what kind of success we pursue.

Fashion is an apt medium for questioning epistemological and ontological assumptions worldviews and paradigms, at a meta scale in questioning neoliberal logic, through to our daily, personal habits at micro scales – and the myriad of activities, relationships, materials and interactions in between. All of this makes up one of the fundamental elements of our social lives, the clothing of our bodies. Our failure to connect these levels to wider earth systems, is our potentially lethal blind spot. In 2024, the revenue in the fashion market worldwide is estimated to reach a staggering US$1.79tn, equivalent to GDP of between the 11th and 12th largest world economies. Statista, (2023) [9] The sector employs more than 300 million people. [10] Fashion is a

[7] WORLD FUTURES 2023, VOL. 79, NO. 348–352 https://doi.org/10.1080/02604027.2022.2150044
[8] Rockstrom, J. (2017) *'World Development Within Planetary Boundaries Lecture'* [Online] Available at: https://www.cusp.ac.uk/event/planetary-boundaries/ (Accessed 12th November 2017)
[9] Statistica (2023). https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/apparel/worldwide
[10] https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/fashion-and-the-circular-economy-deep-dive#:~:text=boosting%20clothing%20care.-,The%20fashion%20industry%20of%20today,in%20some%20low%2Dincome%20countries.

great place to explore relationships across scales from the personal to the biosphere levels of human being. The discourse in fashion and its ecological and societal cost, and contribution, has amplified dramatically over the past decade, with a much longer history of concern, Kingsley (1850)[11] The Fur, Fin and Feather Folk of 1889 Ehrman (2018)[12] forerunners to the Royal Society of the Protection of Birds (RSPB), published postcards and pamphlets as well as staging anti-feather protests with placards, in the late nineteenth century. The second and third decades of the 21st century marks a significant expansion of the sources, subjects, mediums and audiences of fashion and sustainability in academic, public and sector terms. E.g. Labour Behind the Label (various) [13], Greenpeace (various) [14], WWF, (various) [15] Black, (2008)[16] Fletcher, (various) [17] McKinsey (2017-2024)[18], GFA (2017-2019)[19], Ellen MacArthur (2017)[20], and the work of designers around the world from micro to globe spanning businesses. However, there is little sign of a new stage of social, spiritual and cultural emergence into a paradigm of interdependence, where fashion exemplifies equity and balance in a more than human world. At the current pace, the sector's emissions is heading towards nearly double the maximum required to stay on the 1.5°C pathway Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021)[21]

Removing the binaries and the blinkers

A prominent barrier to social, spiritual and cultural evolution is the ways in which pervasive enlightenment, industrial, colonial, rational thinking seeks simplicity through binaries of human and nature, fact and feeling, ethnicity and humanity and other dualistic concepts. The human–nature dualism of the western world, is seen as the underlying cause of the ecological and social crises. (Merchant, 1980)[22] Ideals of progress and development, contingent on a worldview that privileges economic growth and short-termism, is dismissive of the evidence of ecological and social devastation. Techno-centric approaches to alleviating concern are, however, ignoring their own scientific approach, as well as a moral and self-preservation imperative. Scientists themselves are publishing papers that not only send out a red alert based on scientific evidence of the transgressing of planetary boundaries and runaway climate breakdown, but also the interdependence of climate and biodiversity crisis and intergenerational, intragenerational and intersectional justice. Rockström, et al (2023)[23]

Rational logic, exceptionalism and technocentric solutions to the crisis are yet to realise real change in fashion. Amelioration in an ongoing othering of nature and those whose who do not look like and live like 'us' continues the extractive, exploitative practices that have been manifest through many guises over the centuries. There is a need to look for new imaginaries, to call upon

[11] Kingsley, C. (1850) *Cheap Clothes and Nasty.* By Parson Lot. W. Pickering, 1850

[12] Ehrman, E. (2018) *Fashioned from Nature.* London: V&A publishers.

[13] https://labourbehindthelabel.org/resources/reports/

[14] https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/62308/how-fast-fashion-fuels-climate-change-plastic-pollution-and-violence/#:~:text=A%20recent%20investigation%20revealed%20that,clothes%20were%20imported%20into%20Kenya.

[15] https://www.wwf.org.uk/myfootprint/challenges/fast-fashion-disaster

[16] Black, S. (2008) *Eco-Chic The Fashion Paradox.* London. Black Dog.

[17] Fletcher, K. https://katefletcher.com/publications/

[18] https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/state-of-fashion-archive

[19] Global Fashion Agenda https://globalfashionagenda.org/pulse-of-the-industry/

[20] Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future (2017).

[21] Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021) https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/fashion-examples

[22] Merchant, C. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution.* U.K. Harper and Row

[23] Johan Rockström. et al. (2023) *Safe and Just Earch System Boundaries* https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06083-8

myriad wisdoms and systems of knowledge based on a relational ontology, recognising interdependencies and interactions in humans in nature. The academic discourse in fashion and sustainability is dominated by western based, western authored scholars. I count myself in this category. The concern shown by these scholars, their students, designers and organisations is real, felt and valid but not complete. As designers and researchers there is a need to honour, recognise and make reparations that are grounded in plural, multiple, indigenous and other non-western world views. To think and design otherwise. There is a need to develop interactive, respectful, participatory practice with those with whom we teach, learn and practice and those whose work we have yet to know.

English is so hierarchical. In Cree, we don't have animate-inanimate comparisons between things. Animals have souls that are equal to ours. Rocks have souls, trees have souls. Trees are 'who', not 'what'.

Tomson Highway (2005) [24]

Impermanence

I write this chapter as part of an ongoing reflective, autoethnographic and phenological study as founder, director and professor of fashion design for sustainability at Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts, London. I established the centre, through the wisdom, expertise and enthusiasm of many people: students, tutors, researchers, designers, entrepreneurs, friends and other members of the fashion sector. The centre set out to challenge the status quo in fashion, exploring its distinctive social, ecological, cultural and economic practices in the world. It connects diverse perspectives, multiple generations and geographic and disciplinary locations in a site for participatory, anticipatory practice. It bridges between what is and what might be, a place of critical discourse concerning current parameters of knowledge, understanding and success and an evolving understanding of ourselves in the world. It plays out critical considerations of fashion's role in equity in a more than human world through material and immaterial interactions of fashion's identity-formations, products, mindsets and capabilities.

The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.

Marcel Proust [25]

This work draws on hope and the optimism of designing as an emergence into multiple realms, plural worlds, of what it means to be human in a more than human world. It does this through a symbiotic interplay between exploring, teaching and learning fashion design for sustainability as an education practice at MA, BA, PhD and open access courses; by undertaking research and developing new knowledge through interdisciplinary, participatory, transformation design methodologies; and by engaging in co-inquiry with professionals in the fashion sector, citizens and other stakeholders in organisations around the world. Through study of the projects and activities of the centre, I have been able to develop a framework, borne out of observations from student, small- and large-scale design practices, and my own practices as a designer researcher. This heuristic model, first conceived through observation of MA Fashion and the Environment students between 2008 and 2012. It involves a mapping of context, agendas, mindsets of

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[24] Banerjee, S. B. & Arjaliès, D-L. (2021). *Celebrating the End of Enlightenment:* Organization Theory in the Age of the Anthropocene and Gaia (and why Neither is the Solution to Our Ecological Crisis). Organization Theory, 2(4), doi:10.1177/26317877211036714

[25] Proust, M. first published 1923, (2000) *La Prisonnière (À la recherche du temps perdu #5)*. London: Folio.

wellbeing. Williams 2019)[26] It aligns with wellbeing economy principles (Coscieme, at al.2019) [27] and involves a patterning between dimensions to consider design within a context and as a context shaping phenomenon.

The scientific method is a pattern of problem-solving behavior employed in finding out the nature of what exists, whereas the design method is a pattern of behavior employed in inventing things of value, which do not yet exist.

Gregory (1966)[28]

In this chapter, I celebrate a letting go of the usual conventions of academic writing, a loosening, a reorienting of process and content, by following a design practice of gathering, conceiving, reflecting, sketching, prototyping, refining and making ideas public in an ongoing process that is never fixed, never finished. It does, however, act as a marker of what I and others in the centre are letting go of and outlines and exemplifies a heuristic framing for designing and related capabilities and mindsets for application in education and professional practice. The findings from my research are drawn from a longitudinal study involving a myriad of research projects, teaching experiences and partnerships. My role in these works varies too from principal investigator, co-investigator, academic lead, to guide, mentor and reviewer, all encompassed within my role as director of a multi-dimensional, plural-minded community at Centre for Sustainable Fashion.

On Being a Fashion Designer: from an uncomfortable fit to a practice of Otherwise

Fashion Designing is an active, relational, never solo endeavour, involving subject, material, object, philosophy, knowledge, methods, world-perspective, an enactment, an embodiment, a realisation of research (**Prendeville and Koria 2022**)[29]. More than that, it realises visions in 2D and 3D, analyses insights from the living world, from diverse human and non-human relationships, and is, in and of itself a research process. Its methodology involves conceiving, sketching, prototyping, applying, reflecting, building capabilities and refining perspectives and practices based on values, knowledge and experience. This might be explicit or implicit in bringing matters of the context of design into the medium of designing, revealing the inside knowledge and perceptions of designers, to the outside world. (Williams, 2018)[30] It is explicit in the collections, products and services relating to worn clothing. As a commercial designer for twenty years, I know well the focus on the explicit and the often-unrecognised elements of the implicit in a designer's work.

[26] Williams, D. (2019) *Fashion Design for Sustainability: A framework for participatory practice.* LeNS network, Milan.

[27] Coscieme, Luca, Paul Sutton, Lars F. Mortensen, Ida Kubiszewski, Robert Costanza, Katherine Trebeck, Federico M. Pulselli, Biagio F. Giannetti, and Lorenzo Fioramonti. (2019.) "Overcoming the Myths of Mainstream Economics to Enable a New Wellbeing Economy" *Sustainability* 11, no. 16: 4374. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11164374

[28] Gregory, S.A. (1966) *The Design Method.* London: Butterworths.

[29] Prendeville, S. and Koria, M. (2022) *Design Discourses of Transformation* **she ji** *The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation* Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 2022

[30] Williams, Dilys (2018) *Fashion Design as a Means to Recognize and Build Communities-in-Place.* She-ji: The Journal of Design, Economics and Innovation, 6 (4) Elsevier.

Through my work with students, tutors, professional designers and researchers, I see the emergence of an expanded role of the fashion designer, where acts of designing involve a re-orienting, a transitioning and transforming of the content and context of fashion. *a designing otherwise*, based on implicit and explicit parameters. This expansion of designing is based on a long-term observation, reflection and analysis of activities taking place at a range of scales and locations. It demonstrates fashion designing as professional and social practices in contributing to wellbeing across fashion's ecological, social, economic and cultural dimensions.

Fashion Designing Otherwise questions the premise of accepted practices.
Fashion Designing Otherwise is a critical questioning of what is, a developing of what might be?
Fashion Designing Otherwise counters imbalances in power and agency.
Fashion Designing Otherwise relates to rebellion. It says enough, no further.
Fashion Designing Otherwise invites an inversion of a hierarchy of knowledge and wisdom, to a patterning, where the eye is drawn to what is taking place in the margins.
Fashion Designing Otherwise moves from a focus on the object to a focus on the felt experience.
Fashion Designing Otherwise, is non-judgemental, it is a magnitude of possibilities.
Fashion Designing Otherwise, is multi-wise, pluri-wise.

Ideas of otherwise

Otherwise proposes an expansion in the remit of the designer, a diversification of what is recognised as the activities of designing and its participants. It calls for a dispersing of power and agency in the fashion system. It references ecological and social justice thinking, Escobar (2007)[31] It recognises activity across scales of transformation from awareness raising to a shift in the goals and rules of the fashion system, towards an earth and equity of fashion.. It draws on the writings of ecologists and philosophers and on the tacit knowledge and practice of designers working across scales from sole traders to teams within global fashion brands. It expands the role, opportunity and responsibility of being a designer, it changes *why* as well as *what* we design. Otherwise methodologies are drawn, written, spoken, practiced, felt, lived. They might involve transformation design, transition design, speculative design, and emergent ways of knowing, being and interacting, not previously recognised as methodologies.

Designers traverse a spectrum of roles over time. These roles depend on the context of the role, capabilities of the designer and the agency to act. These roles can be broadly described in three domains, the designer-leader, often in conventional contexts, where teams are formed in a hierarchical manner, and roles defined by job description. In these roles, designers are boundary object developers, where expectations fall within garment categories. The scope of otherwise here involves relationship building and knowledge development to develop decision-making processes that factor in cause and effect. The designer co-creator, often in smaller, more agile businesses, where the designer takes of a variety of roles and works closely with other members of the value system. In these roles, designers are learning object creators, responding to the needs of those directly and indirectly involved in the business' activities. The scope of otherwise here involves relationship nurturing, knowledge development and reflexive practice. The designer as host, found in places where the designers' roles are more loosely defined, there is scope for shaping the context and content of the work. Ecologically and socially led designers, who are not bound by specific outputs, and have the capabilities and mindsets that thrive in

[31] Escobar, Arturo. "WORLDS AND KNOWLEDGES OTHERWISE. The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 179–210. doi:10.1080/09502380601162506.

ambiguity, and in guiding emergent outcomes, are well places to take on these roles. Through a three year, UK based study, Fostering Sustainable Practices, designers in micro and small to medium sized businesses took part in a reflective discourse relating to the centre's fourfold framework of ecological, social, cultural and economic agendas at play in their work. The research team found that by considering their values, visions, capabilities and practices of fashion designing, designers can navigate complexities of livelihood creation, ecological and social contribution. Micro and small-scale design entrepreneurs are recognised as agile, creative, pragmatic and strive for the freedom to design beyond dominant conventions in business and education. By being small, to retain creative freedom, these fashion design entrepreneurs are often diverse, plural in approach and place based. Their autonomy is however limited by the magnitude of large-scale businesses, societal infrastructures and economic hegemonies that foreground volume, financial profit and power for the few.

The kind of co-operation necessary in 21ˢᵗ century is far beyond anything that our species has ever before accomplished.

Hoffman, A. (2015) [32]

In the western world location in which I carry out my research, The term Fashion Designer is becoming increasingly in need of an expanded explanation. It is a term that some find uncomfortable, due to the awareness of the complicity of fashion in extraction and exploitation and the challenging of convention, the practices of otherwise, that exist and are missing from the narrative of fashion. Through research with fashion designers and fashion students and design researchers, I have garnered an understanding that the ambitions of many fashion designers don't fit what the term conjures up. Additionally, many designers, especially those working in micro, small and medium sized organisations, do so on a freelance, or part-time basis. This often means juggling roles and activities in which a designers' capabilities, mindsets and interests are applied in myriad ways.

Practices of Otherwise: plurality and participation

Fashion designing otherwise involves a shift in perception, practice and agency, to realise a radical departure from the status quo in fashion. Whilst bold and anticipatory in approach, it is important to proceed with care and consideration of those involved in the designing, directly and indirectly. In the context of large-scale fashion businesses, where designer's job security depends on sales and profit, volume and margin, the tension between personal and professional goals can be challenging. The ethos of Centre for Sustainable Fashion is to work across the system and its scales, to demonstrate that designers can make interventions at different levels of change, using different methods and approaches. In one of our research projects, a speculative design methodology was co-created between academic researchers and designers in a large-scale fashion retailer, to develop future scenarios and design into them. The research was applied into a re-modelling fashion methodology, tested with design teams in large and small businesses and with students in a range of locations. The seeking of a participatory, democratic, equitable approach to designing necessitates recognising and responding to the tensions and power structures in play in the system, and the context of power that the designing is taking place within. Plurality must

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[32] Hoffman, A. (2015) *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate*. Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press.

be approached as part of an understanding that ecosystems, political, cultural, economic and social systems shape and respond to each other in interdependent ways. (Leventon et al. 2022)[33]

The roots of participation can be traced from the work of Paulo Freire on critical pedagogy, Freire, (1968, trans. 1970)[34]. Through foregrounding real-world experiences as the location from which theories emerge, Freire asserted that human activity is theory and practice, it is reflection and action. Freire (2000)[35] Fashion designer-researchers might recognise this process of knowing through doing and the importance of the ability to reflect whilst immersed in the action of designing. Freire's work is best known for its social justice elements of participatory practice; however, he recognised the nested systems of social practice within conditions of environmental violence. Concerns of antropo-bio-centric gaps refers to his concerns of world-earth de-distancing. (Misiaszek,2023) [36] Acts towards participation do not guarantee a foregrounding of social and ecological concerns, practices of equity or de-centring of power and knowledge bases. Even with the aim of co-creation, participation can be instrumental, legitimising the status quo, dependent on the agency of the participants, designers' capabilities and mindsets and contextual factors. In large scale business settings, the risks of challenging the status quo might lead towards such a stance. When participants have agency and an enabling context, the participation can become substantive, to incorporate a wider set of knowledges and perceptions or transformative spaces. In research terms, this involves co-inquiry and praxis to learn with and from all involved, to ensure that manipulation does not take place to apparently legitimise those in positions of power. (Pereira et al., 2020)[37] By engaging in participatory approaches that honour diverse ways of knowing, being, and interacting, a decentring and decolonizing of western-centric approaches to participation can take place. (Banerjee et al. 2021). [38]

Whilst a spotlight has been shone on fashion's inequality in business terms, we do well to consider the power dynamic between business and academia and within academia too. Participatory research practice lends itself to co-operative inquiry methods (Heron and Reason, 2001)[39] the recognition of the value of tacit knowledge and mutual benefit from the research. The conventions of academic research funding and research assessment foreground a hierarchical process, and publishing conventions that are western and theoretically led. The shift towards a recognition of wider sources of knowledge, from beyond the published canon and recognition of collaborative research is increasing. There is a role for researchers to themselves challenge the status quo of academia and to demonstrate research, otherwise too. Equitable participatory processes must consider access to participation in practical terms too. In a predominantly female sector, flexible working around caring responsibilities, vulnerability, precarity and safety can require particular attention. And, as frequently witnessed across the

[33]Leventon, Julia & Suchá, Lenka & Nohlová, Barbora & Vaňo, Simeon & Harmáčková, Zuzana. (2022). *Participation as a pathway to pluralism: A critical view over diverse disciplines.* In Pluralism in Ecosystem Governance 1st Edition, Volume 66 - June 20, 2022 Editors: Jennifer Holzer, Julia Baird, Gordon M Hickey. Elsevier.

[34] Freire, P. *(1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Seabury Press.
[35] **Freire, P.** *(2000). Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum.
[36] Misiaszek, G. W. (2023) *Freire and Environmentalism.* Bloomsbury Academic. London.
[37] Pereira, Laura & Davies, Kathryn & Belder, Eefje & Ferrier, Simon & Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Sylvia & Kim, Hyejin & Kuiper, Jan & Okayasu, Sana & Palomo, Maria & Peterson, Garry & Sathyapalan, Jyothis & Schoolenberg, Machteld & Alkemade, Rob & Ribeiro, Sónia & Greenaway, Alison & Hauck, Jennifer & King, Nicholas & Lazarova, Tanya & Lundquist, Carolyn. (2020). *Developing multiscale and integrative nature–people scenarios using the Nature Futures Framework.* People and Nature. 2. 10.1002/pan3.10146.
[38] Banerjee, S. B. & Arjaliès, D-L. (2021). Celebrating the End of Enlightenment: Organization Theory in the Age of the Anthropocene and Gaia (and why Neither is the Solution to Our Ecological Crisis). Organization Theory, 2(4), doi: 10.1177/26317877211036714
[39] Heron, J. and Reason, P. (2001) '*The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry: Research with rather than on people*', in *Handbook of Action Research.* first edition. London: Sage, pp. 179–188.

community of the centre, co-inquiry, collaboration and active participation involves navigating dissensus, as consensus can sometimes mark a warning that active participation is constricted. When designers can create constructive conflict within a process, opportunities for new learning abound, along with a demonstration of addressing power imbalances.

Designing Change and changing design

Reflexivity can refer to the need to consider one's own roles and influence in a process, with consideration of expectations, relationships, interactions and power dynamics. Reflexivity is a process of critical examination of our own, and participant's, worldviews and problem framings, and shifting action in response, rather than remaining fixed to a dominant way of thinking (Augsburg, 2014).[40] This can be challenging, especially when what arises demonstates the insufficiencies in the status quo, and indeed the status quo being problematic in fundamental ways. Such emergent understanding requires a shared recognition of what must be done to achieve equity and fair practice. Reflexivity is therefore important for participants in a process, meaning that designers of a process require capabilities and interests in hosting spaces and creating conditions for societal learning, alongside their own learning (Wittmayer and Schapke, 2014)[41]. Reflexivity is a core principle of transformation through participation and co-production through a process of awareness raising, ideation within a current context, towards transformation of both content and context. As part of the framework of fashion design for sustainability at the centre, a scales of transformation process is mapped out, to make the steps through a process of transformation explicit.

CSF Scales of Transformation

AWARENESS: ideas, reflection, consideration and knowledge development about sustainability. It identifies problems, recognises them, and cares for those affected.

IDEATION: ideas, prototypes, tests to develop activities and practices for sustainability. It focuses on problem solving within the limits of current industry and recognises the value of diverse approaches in resolving challenges.

SHIFT: re-imagining co-existence, creating an earth and equity first paradigm. It's about sustainability in action, demonstrating practices that recognise and display our ecological identities.

There is a longstanding and rich discourse in design as change and changing design in relation to social and ecological design, Manzini, (2015)[42] Schön (1983) [43] Cross (2006) etc. We have been fortunate enough to work with Ezio, Manzini through research entitled Cultures of Resilience[44] and through participation in the longstanding, ongoing DESIS network [45]. Through working with designers in the UK through the Fostering Sustainable Practices project[46], case studies have been developed to articulate sustainability led approaches to the development of valued relationships, interactions, objectives and mindsets.

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[40] Augsburg, Tanya. *"Becoming Transdisciplinary: The Emergence of the Transdisciplinary Individual."* World Futures 70, no. 3–4 (2014): 233–47. doi:10.1080/02604027.2014.934639.
[41] Wittmayer, Julia & Schäpke, Niko. (2014). Action, research and participation: roles of researchers in sustainability transitions. Sustainability Science. 9. 10.1007/s11625-014-0258-4.
[42] Manzini, E. (2015) *Design, when everybody designs: an introduction to design for social innovation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press (Design thinking, design theory).
[43] Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. Routledge London and New York.
[44] Cultures of Resilience https://culturesofresilience.org/
[45] https://desisnetwork.org/
[46] Williams, Dilys and Burcikova, Mila and Black, Sandy (2023) *Net Zero as a Catalyst in fashion micro and small enterprises: Contributing to a wellbeing economy in the UK*. Discussion Paper. Creative Industries: Policy and Evidence Centre.

Taking a rebellion stance

To consider otherwise can involve taking a rebel stance, which in the words of Camus, means saying, so far, but no farther. (Camus, 1953)[47] Acts of rebellion go beyond refusal, to a rejection of the conditions taking place. From facts in a personal situation to values of a set of rights, a commoning. Rebellion is an assertion of an infringement, not only on the rebel, but with all, even those who have created the infringement. This understanding of a common humanity is an essential part of creating balance. Rebellion has a long-standing association with fashion, and the arts more broadly, as a medium through which to speak out and to make change. Fashion is about change, the nature, manner and morals of change is what fashion designers can consider in their work of change. There are numerous, well documented historical as well as contemporary examples of fashion and clothing as acts of rebellion. Whilst rebellion suggests a resistance to current conditions, rebellion must respect the limits that it discovers in itself, limits where minds meet and in meeting, begin to exist (Camus, 1953)[48] Such a recognition of the we over the I, is acknowledgement of the many hands, minds and perspectives that are involved in clothing the body. I *rebel* therefore we *exist*. (Camus, 1953)[49] resonates with sustainability principles of interdependence, as well as cultural systems such as Ubuntu (I am because We Are) and belief systems of interbeing. [50] If humans cannot refer to common values, then humans is incomprehensible to themselves (Camus, 1953.)[51]

Mindsets of possibility

Wrestling with the entanglement of social, ecological, cultural and economic dimensions of fashion, each with contextual, philosophical and pragmatic elements can be overwhelming for designers, already working in the complexities of fashion's material dimensions. Through observation of designers' approaches to designing, I have developed a heuristic model of mindsets of designing that can help to guide designers, tutors and students in finding where and how they are best placed to use their visions, apply their values, draw on their capabilities and hone their practices. Seeking to contribute to equity in a more than human world involves socially engaged design considerations of the human at personal, community and societal levels. Ecologically engaged design considers social aspects within wider biosphere interactions. Holding this systemic thinking whilst working at micro level requires recognising the constellation of these factors whilst deciding where you can shine brightly, supported by a community that recognises the potential livelihoods of the graduates whom they support... to expand towards a range of new and exciting roles.' [52] Capra and Luisi (2014)

The ability to imagine that-which-does-not-yet-exist, and to make it appear in material form as a purposeful addition to the real world, is an exciting prospect for a designer. In these times of deep concern felt particularly by student designers, mindsets of designing can guide fashion designers to contribute in and beyond the realm of fashion as garment or collection. Mindsets of Possibility draw on a longstanding practice in fashion design, research, and education, grounded in participatory, transformation design principles. Through this practice, I have been able to gather, and reflect on ways in which a range of undergraduate and post-graduate students approach fashion design in the context of our times. I am keen to flip the question of how

[47] Camus, A. (1953) *The Rebel.* Hamish Hamilton, London, United Kingdom
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] https://plumvillage.org/community/order-of-interbeing
[51] Ibid.
[52] Capra, F. Luisi, P (2014) *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* Cambridge University Press

designers can solve complex problems of extractive and exploitative symptoms and related errors in our habits of mind, to explore how the crisis changes what and how we teach and learn fashion designing as an exploration of possibilities. This is not to make light of the complexities of the crises, but to recognise a future wellbeing that might be evolving.

This heuristic model of eight mindsets of possibility was developed through analysis of a five year programme, co-created between academia and industry, involving 1600 students, between 2016 and 2020. The study was based on a selection of bachelors' and masters' students' submissions (shortlisted by tutors and industry partners for excellence in design for sustainability) and is being used in teaching at undergraduate and post-graduate levels at the university where I am based and in programmes with design teams in a range of industry settings, from micro to global enterprises. A more detailed account of these mindsets can be found in (Williams 2023)[53]

Resilience
The ability to be flexible in a rapidly changing world, and to recover from disruption in a way that catalyses renewal.

Resourcefulness
Practising ingenuity and thriving on what is there; solutions driven by frugality and creativity in challenging circumstances. Doing more with less.

Equity
Recognising the equal, inalienable rights of all humans; and that access to opportunities and support must vary according to individual circumstances and needs.

Sufficiency
Recognising the limits to nature. Connecting values, making, materials and aesthetics in ways that enable fashion to sustain itself.

Authenticity
Acting with integrity, honesty and accountability.

Collaboration
Working across disciplines and other traditional boundaries to share knowledge, resources and experience.

Activism
Standing up for what we believe in, and maintaining empathy for others.

Ecological thinking
Placing nature at the centre of all considerations.

Fig.1. Mindsets of Possibility (Williams, 2023)

From product as focus to capabilities of possibilities

A distinction between fashion practice in a commercial and an education setting is a focus on product as the unit of evaluation, where measures of success are related to its economic, and sometimes recognised social, cultural and ecological profit and loss. In education, the focus is on the learner, where measures of success are related to graduate attributes, knowledge, skills and capabilities. In practice, however, product remains the key unit of evaluation. In the design for sustainability discourse, recognition is given to the importance of a capabilities approach to wellbeing. For designers to contribute to social and ecological health, balanced with economic and cultural thriving, a capabilities approach can link identification of opportunity, agency, skills,

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[53] Williams, D. (2024) *Mindsets of Possibility* in Routledge Handbook of Sustainable Design. Second Edition. Ed Rachel Beth Egenhoefer. Routledge, UK, US.

knowledge, and freedom of choice, within an understanding of context. The conceptual and tangible elements of Sen's (1999)[54] approach to wellbeing, can be applied in fashion design and its education as it connects economic and social dimensions of wellbeing, manifest through entrepreneurial actions in the social and commercial spheres. Whilst not explicitly referencing ecological dimensions, it is implicit in the ambitions of wellbeing of self and others.

Fashion is predominantly recognised as a system of overstimulation, a machine of stuffocation, an extractive and exploitative means for wealth for a few, poverty for the vast majority who work in the sector. In a world of consumer capitalism, designers are seen as the pushers, dopamine hit creators, pedlars of more. In this world, fashion design is all about product, the unit of analysis is the garment. Indeed, it is the garment that the economic value of fashion is measured by. It is also an easier metric than mapping the activities, relationships, feelings, needs, sense-making, embodied in the awe and wonder of clothes that makes fashion a distinction of humanity. In consumerist societies, these distinctions of fashion prop up and extend of the cultivation of the self, involving designers in an empowerment – exploitation paradox. A propping up, rather than a challenging of the status quo.

The concept of freedom, explored by Freire, Escobar and others can be applied at personal, community and societal levels. Capabilities are a lens though which to view agency towards wellbeing (Sen 1999)[55] which is key to participation. Of specific importance in fashion designing is a shift from product focus to capabilities focus so that knowledge and skills can be aligned to analysis of emotional health of participants, their capacity to generate income, active participation, equity and ecological dimensions, as identified in designers' work.

An important aspect of the capabilities approach to designing is that it recognises relational factors of wellbeing, that nothing exists in isolation, which aligns to living systems thinking. It extends the concepts of seeing, knowing, doing and being, (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2012)[56] to being, having, doing and interacting (Max-Neef et al, 1991)[57] This debunks the myth that a product holds the key for measures of success and recognises interaction at human and more than human scales, thus supporting an understanding of our interdependencies. The importance of context in all these considerations cannot be understated. For designers in contexts where human rights, safety, housing and food needs are not met, such as in the Z'atari project[58], where designer-researcher, Professor Helen Storey exemplifies the expanded role of the designer as involved in practical dimensions of ingenuity to meet fundamental, practical and psychological needs and through the activities of making clothes as a means for economic freedom and social connection.

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[54] Sen, A. (1999) *Development for Freedom.* New York: Oxford University Press.

[55] Ibid.

[56] United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2012) Learning for the Future. Available from: https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/ESD_Publications/Competences_Publication.pdf.

[57] Max-Neef, M.A., Elizalde, A. and Hopenhayn, M.N. (1991) *Human scale development: conception, application and further reflections.* London: Zed Books.

[58] https://www.sustainable-fashion.com/zaatari-action

Ongoing

The ideas and reflections articulated through this chapter seek to contribute to a discourse in entanglement, in navigating the tension between ecological and social emergencies, requiring swift action to amplify designing otherwise and simultaneously negating the pervasive nature of dominant extractive and exploitative practices. In emerging from ecological and societal emergency, we do not require more evidence or data but rather, designing, as professional and personal acts, that realise an otherwise imaginary. The eco-social crisis offers an opportunity to consider ourselves as interbeings, and, as such to consider health and wellbeing as having economic, cultural, social and ecological parameters. Fashion Designers, educators and researchers challenge the present, and must also challenge the discourse on the past, to evolve creative praxis that serves our students, sector and societies. Through this sharing of hope and concern,

I invite all those who imagine, who have ideas, (ie everyone) those who consider a sense of being, to contribute to making, writing, manifesting and sharing the possibilities of fashion designing described in this chapter, to de-bunk assumptions, pre-conceptions and misconceptions and to magnificently shift fashion activities from consumptive to regenerative. To situated, embodied, felt as well as counted. Suggested rather than proposed, shared rather than modelled, ongoing, rather than finished. There has never been a more exciting time to be a fashion designer, never a time more challenging and potentially more rewarding one. Thank you to the thousands of students and professional designers who have engaged in the centre's work over the past 15 years, its time now to cross the threshold into designing otherwise.

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