



Fabric Mending & Repair Practices in the Advent of Fast- Fashion

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Abstract: Fashion and clothing have been inseparable attributes of one another. While fashion reflects the latest trends, clothing demarcates the association of fabric material to the body. Clothing seeks to represent a visual celebration of the body that, eventually echoes the thematic epiphany of the fashion world. However, fashion also leads to massive clothing waste due to the early disposal of clothes ending up in landfills each year. An alternate paradigm to address this issue of early disposal of clothes is the restoration of clothes through mending and turning back to needlework. Although mainstream consumers surmount emotional intelligence and, are profoundly conscious of the environmental impacts, there is a wide gap between this intellectual awareness and the echoed consumer behavior. Thus, my research examines modern consumer behavior to enumerate the early disposal of clothes under the influence of fast- fashion. It also focuses on the declining trivial exchange between the clothes and their meaning that further weakens the metaphysical bond between the consumer leading to early disposal. Thus, my paper is an approach to review various reasons that contribute to the early disposal of clothes. It examines the reasons behind the degeneration of metaphysical bonding between consumers and clothing. Thereafter, my research shall establish repair practices and needlework as an alternate approach that can facilitate the postponement of early disposal of clothes.

Index Terms - consumer behavior, fast-fashion, mending, metaphysical bond, needle-work

INTRODUCTION

Clothes are an extension of the body and represent once individuality and self-expression. In other words, clothes are a second skin to the body that serves as status symbol, modesty, protection and cultural representation. However, the bond between clothes and body that surmounts a deeper meaning has drastically degenerated in the 21st century. The sub-conscious bond between the clothes and the body has altered due to the advent of fast-fashion leading to an untimely disposal of clothes. As mentioned by Annamma Joy [1] (2012), low-cost clothing produced as a part of fast fashion imitates luxury brands, produces trendiest clothes at a much faster pace and escalates disposability (Fletcher 2008). The very concept of fast-fashion relies on the availability of the latest of the trends in no time at an affordable price. Modern consumers today desire for the most updated, exclusive and trendiest fashion at the most affordable price; and fast-fashion provides all these with ease. As quoted by Annamma Joy, 'affordable prices mean that consumers are buying more clothes more frequently. But it also means they're truly disposable' [1]. The overwhelmingly fashionable clothes produced under the umbrella of fast -fashion, though, rate higher on the scale of being trendy but, they lack the pursuit of quality quotient.

This further enumerates that although fast-fashion clothes are following the latest trends but they somewhere compromise on quality to fit withing the affordability factor. Since, these are affordable and fulfil the consumers desire of being trendy, the consumers seldom hesitate to keep shopping for new one's that either leads to over-crowded closets or early disposal of clothes. Thus, the process keeps recurring and more clothes face consequence of early disposal. Fast-fashion, in fact, has summoned the increase of clothing disposal as stated by Sonali Diddi (2019) [2] . These revelations suggests that, consumers end up purchasing more than required and eventually dispose them either due to space constraint in the closets or inability to establish an emotional attachment with the clothes. Some of the alarming fact about such mindless overconsumption and disposal are greenhouse emission, hazardous chemicals, scarcity of water and monstrous heap of dreadful landfills [2]. The consumers of the 21st century seldom realize the connection between their body and the clothes, as they are worn for shorter period of time. Clothing repair practices and a move towards needle work may serve as an alternate approach to the rising concern about fast-fashion and increasing landfills. Thus, my paper examines the following:

- i. To examine the reasons behind the degeneration of metaphysical bond between consumer and clothing.
- ii. To examines the modern consumer behaviour and enumerate upon the early disposal of clothes under the influence of fast-fashion.
- iii. To establish repair practices and needle-work as an alternate approach that can facilitate postponement of early disposal of clothes.

2. Clothes and wearer: degeneration of metaphysical bond

Clothing manifests a metaphysical connection with the 'wearer'. It is of utmost importance to explore this concept to enumerate on the emotional bond that establishes between the consumer who wears the clothes. The body encompasses a metaphysical phenomenon that gets established between wearer and clothes on regular usage. Clothes have been referred to as an extended skin by various scholars that embodies visual celebration of the body by virtue of concealing or better to say, adorning the body with clothes. This metaphysical relationship has been highly time-sensitive and complex in its existence. Era before the 20th century witnessed a strong metaphysical bond by virtue of adornment of the bodies with crafted, opulent costumes. The wearer considered their clothes as timeless possessions due to its hand-craftsmanship, emotional connect and to some extent economic hardship. However, the 21st century illustrates a meagre indifferent story altogether.

A piece of clothing acquires the connotation of timeless possession when it is either luxurious or memories of the wearer are attached to the material. The older the clothes, the weaker the yarns, more the wear and tear, strong are the memories. Thus, fashion, clothes and memory at a metaphysical plane encompasses timeless meaning to the clothes that probes hindrance to disposal. As quoted by Karen about 'pauperization' that illustrates 'a garment being worn beyond its natural replacement time and honored wear and ageing' [3]. She further illustrates that fashion despite its inherent characteristic of change also honors wear and ageing of clothes [3]. The phrase of George Simmel about 'fashion's psychological shimmer of permanency' entail that, old clothes represented the essence of longevity and desire for permanence [3]. The clothes that adorn our bodies are the bearers of countless memories, witness of time and history, carry identities of an individual [4]. The semantics of clothes reinforce memories, experiences, membership that creates a commitment between the body and the wearer. Clothes bear the lives we live, represent narratives and embody a succulent array of material that age with the times we live. Clothes inherit an essential component of narrative, memory and, particularly possess reminiscence of moment, event or relationship [4]. They not only bear the moment with the wearer, but also become a part of the moment as these clothes metaphysically are the extended bodies.

The first clothes ever worn by a new born is often well-kept-up with utmost care as a symbol of the emotion, moment and the fact that the material was once a part of the body of the new born. Thus, material objects formulate as 'memory triggers' stimulating memories through their visual, tactile and sensory properties [4]. Memory is materialized through 'the relationships between embodied action and material objects. Thus, the material object, decay and ageing, feel and handling of the material engage the wearer with the material and embodies an emotional bonding. But, as mentioned by Kopytoff, "physical objects and people are polarized, at one end, physical objects represent the natural universe of commodities while at the other, people represent the natural universe of individuation and singularization" [3]. Kopytoff further describes commodity as an "item with use value that has an exchange value" [3]. At some point of time, commodities polarize and attain a potential for 'decommodification' where they elevate to status of being priceless by virtue of memory, timeless possession or inheritance [3]. Clothes inherit tangible and intangible meaning when they are accepted by the body, worn next to the skin to embed a cognitive association with the material culture. This emotional connect with the material object has deteriorated in today's time. Availability of affordable clothes, profit-making economy, fast pace of fashion trends and consumers constantly trying to keep up with the latest fashion seldom offers the time and opportunity to establish the metaphysical bond with the clothes. In addition, attractive visual merchandising, hot-deals and discounted prices further leads consumers to indulge in impulsive buying that leads to purchases 'more than required'. Mindless shopping effects the psychology of consumers who feel less connected to their clothes. Thus, clothes get replaced way before the connection could be established. Mindful education of consumers is the need of the time that can facilitate revival of the metaphysical bond and formulate a sensitive approach towards clothes and our ecosystem.

Attachment to the clothes due to other reasons is also deteriorating. As quoted by Kendra Lapolla, change in the fashion trends have escalated clothing waste and consumption in past decades [5]. Over-consumption and plenty of income to dispose has led to a trigger in waste mentality of modern-day consumers. Around 62 % of population in Sweden dispose unwanted, usable clothing straight to the garbage. Such alarming fact indicate that a considerable number of clothes are bought as a result of impulsive buying behavior, but, nonetheless, not all of them are worn, that remain unused in the wardrobe. These clothes considered as unwanted and outdated are viewed thrown away adding to the landfills.

There is a dearth of active involvement with the material object that eventually leads to detachment with clothes. However, the question is about the ways to induce the active involvement with the material object. As quoted by Kirsi Niinimäki, the using time of garments can be extended by virtue of establishing a sense of attachment with the clothing [6]. Fostering person-product attachment would be one way to postpone disposal of garments. Failed pleasurable user-experience and meaningful memories with the material object are the factors that have somehow got neglected at the consumer level that has eventually led to detachment with clothes. In order to postpone the replacement of clothes, strategy to enhance the person-product relationship needs to be enhanced that has the potential to alter the early replacement of clothes [7].

The consumers need to be induced with a sense of irreplaceability. The user-experience between the clothes and the consumers play a significant role to establish a sense of attachment and emotional connect. Clothing must express a sufficient degree of novelty to anchor a strong impact in the mind of the users. Enhancement in the value and meaning of the clothes shall facilitate longevity and delay the disposal time. The consumers accomplish an inner satisfaction and fulfil their vanity needs during the phenomena of purchase, which is most of time undertaken in an impulsive manner. However, this accomplishment is momentary pleasure and seldom contribute towards establishing a long-term emotional connection between clothes and consumer. Increased length of ownership and frequent interaction with the clothes may be viewed as factor that has the ability to enhance the longevity of the clothes. As quoted by Niinimäki, attachment is one way to create a caring attitude towards product and postpone its replacement [6]. When a product is deeply valued and, its meaningful and precious, it deserves to be well taken care of [6]. The clothes that are nurtured for their memory, are carefully repaired and cherished well, and this becomes vital towards their meaningful sustenance and a long-life.

A piece of clothing material object is cherished for its memory, if it is a remembrance of friend, family, gift or memoir of an important event of life. A tangible piece of material attains an intangible sense of momentous status when connected with

unforgettable memories. Thus, the material object no longer remains a material made of thread and fabric but surpasses these to become a witness of moment that leads to its care and increased length of ownership. Deep attachments with material object are created through emotions, meanings and memories that lead to care and desire for maintenance; that further contribute in extending the life of the material object. Some of the core attributes to attachment with material object that increases product-emotion status are functionality, memory, emotional satisfaction, design and style, fabric and material, personal values, quality, effort invested and financial value [6]. Thus, material object seldom discern from attachment with the wearer. Significant research in this direction shall earn positive impact in promotion of longer possession of clothes among the modern-day consumers.

3. Repair practices and needlework

An alternative approach that possesses the ability to extend the life of material object is repair practices. Traditionally, repair practices through mending were performed by the women who would invest time to bring life to clothes. Repair practices were extremely relevant during the traditional times. Needle work had been a part of the household chore whether it was about embroidery of bed linen or repair of a torn sock. As far as possible, new purchase were restricted, while priority was given to the usage of material object till the time it was not worthy to be either used as a rag or thrown away. Repair practices not only prolong the garment life but also reflect care in relation to bodies and materialities by virtue of careful unravelling and mending [8]. They echo numerous stories about embodied and domestic learning. As far as possible, new purchase were restricted, while priority was given to the usage of material object till the time it was not worthy to be either used as a rag or thrown away. These practices that required patience and excellent skill were passed on from one generation to other and the women who practiced these were extremely proficient, skillful and perfect in their works. Women would take out time of long sitting hours from their daily chores to devote to the practice of needlework. A logical reason for such whole-hearted devotion can be devoured to the non-availability of fast-fashion, limited or no disposable income, poverty and scarcity of resources that could facilitate the procurement new clothes. It had been primarily a lower-class activity who did not enjoy the benefit of new material object and left with the option to continue wearing mended clothes resulting from drudgery and poverty. According to Anna Konig, clothes were considered durable due to their potential exchange value during the 18th century [9]. Mending practices like darning, patchwork was a regular household chore during before the 20th century. It was more than a household chore symbolizing domestic drudgery, scarcity and poverty. In fact, mending practices have been no more than a mind-boggling, time-consuming chore that seldom evokes any creative process [3]. Mending has been typically considered as women's sector, unpaid and an invisible work [9]. However, the scarcity of material experienced by the general population and military forces during World War II encouraged a widely promoted phenomenon of 'Make, Do and Mend' to combat the material scarcity. Thus, a phenomenon that was once an indication of domestic drudgery became the need of the time during the war years. The trivial activity of mending bears the potential of not only to prolong the life of the garment but also prominent from environmental, social and economic terms [9].

However, repair practices have declined in the postmodern world. The fundamental reason behind the loss of needlework focuses on the lifestyle of modern-day consumers. As quoted by McLaren, no one needs to mend anything anymore in the age of overconsumption [10]. Mending in today's time has been considered a sheer insignificant bustle due to availability of affordable fashion. Another anecdote regarding mending is the absence of knowledge and required skill among today's consumers to undertake mending and repair practices. There is a lack of technical know-how required for mending among the modern generation due to lack of time, affordable fashion and multiple options of fashion choices. But there is an increasing awareness globally about going back to mending practices as an alternate paradigm of sustainability. Craft practitioner Tom of Holland states through his 'Visible Mending Program' that relation between wearer and garment needs to be reinforced and consumers needs to be persuaded that shop-bought clothes also deserve care and attention [10]. An attitude towards treating the clothes with care and attention shall contribute towards a sustainable environment. Fletcher asserts that consumers also play a vital role in extending the product lifecycle of clothes through maintenance and use [11]. However, the barriers faced in today's times are the interest of consumers to involve in mending, devotion of time and the raw skill levels that they possess.

Although, consumers in today's time are well aware and empathize with the depleting environment yet their direct role to contribute towards the environment is undermined and, is a global challenge. There exists a tacit difference between consumer's behavior and attitude about the threat posed by massive heaps of landfill caused due to fast-fashion. While preference is inclined towards sustainable material objects but during the purchase, they end up buying low quality fast fashion brands. Reconditioning of material object with practices such as reuse, recycle can certainly breathe new life into discarded, torn clothes and divert or delay waste to end up in landfills [12]. As quoted by Mengersen, reposition of needlework skill can provide an effective stimulus to sustainable practices other than the conventional norms of recycling [13]. The skills of needlework possess the epitome to effectively carry out the application of reuse, recycle, repair and recondition [13].

Needlework technique have primarily been the major contribution towards work that require high-end visual appeal such as embroidery or any decorative stitch and regarded as bespoke luxury, and gain limelight of paparazzi. But, needlework skills like invisible and visible darning, patchwork rarely catch attention and often been neglected. As young generation experiences a rising awareness about sustainability and environmental concerns, a move towards a basic skill like needlecraft shall be fruitful to achieve this goal with small steps. An alternate aesthetics to accept repaired material objects as mainstream fashion shall not only prolong life of the garment but also save a lot from being ended in the landfills. Needlework can prove to be an effective tool to the wagon of sustainability and facilitate every individual to become part of this humongous challenge to delay garments reaching landfills. Some of the paving ways to combat ignorance on this skill is to introduce needlework at mid school level education solely justifying the purpose. Organization of workshops to teach novice consumers needlecraft to mend their own garment and witness the garment transformation could be effective tools to spark interest among the consumers to take up this skill with passion and meaning. Some basic techniques of needlecraft that may become a part of the textile curriculum at an early stage of schooling can definitely enhance practical application of sustainability [13]. It is pertinent to mention that there is a considerable loss of needlework in domestic array in the recent times yet; community workshop can facilitate propagate the resurgence of this skill among the people and motivate them to practice this skill; and give a breath of new life to their long unused, damaged garments. Thus, a move back towards

traditional needlework can prove to be an essential element to practice sustainability that bears the power to change both consumer behavior and attitude [13].

5. Sustainability versus consumer behavior

Sustainability has far reached manifestations today as defined by many stakeholders. To closely understand the term, Fletcher illustrates that, in its true sense, it calls for less water, pollution, harm, devastation, depleted soil etc. [12]. The overall notion of sustainability seeks to provide a better world devoid of pollution, resource availability for the next generation and co-existence for all on the blue planet. Although, concrete efforts by stakeholders, designers and end consumers are seemingly undertaken but overall, the impact refrains from being impressive and vivid. Circular economy does manifest upon a shift towards renewable energy, system thinking, cradle-to-cradle, product life cycle analysis, resource efficiency and performance economy, but the effectiveness of all such models still await visibility [2]. Fashion industry has been making sincere efforts to shift from a linear economy - 'take-make-use-dispose model to a circular economy model of production and consumption but even then, concepts of sustainability take a backseat when it come the consumer attitude and behavior.

Today's consumer is a well-aware hyper-breed conscious about the updated trends, obsolete throw-away and alarming global concerns. The success of a sustainable credential is always reliant on upon the production system, business model and the behaviour of the consumer. At a consumer's level, non-engagement with the material object has result in depersonalization [12]. The absence of meaning and empathy in the material object along with their availability at a lower price and ease of purchase has been key factor of deviation and switch over to unsustainable fast-fashion only to be disposed early. A substantial lack of communication lies between the sustainable business model and consumer involvement in that model in the light of fast-fashion. This hyper breed may appreciate the material objects virtually to express concern for the environment but realistically, they inadvertently end-up making purchase that are cheap and not ever lasting. To sum up, an urgent need to provide the ease to be able to buy sustainable material object at an affordable price, availability of green and eco fashion at mass market level rather the limited to niche are some of the measures that could bridge the gap between sustainability and consumer behavior.

Conclusion

It may be concluded that clothes are an extension of the body, represent once individuality and self-expression and thus need due care, attention and longevity. A contentious and stimulating conversation between clothes and body that surmounted a deeper meaning has significantly degenerated in the contemporary times as a result of fast-fashion. Fast-fashion has been one of the major factors that has contributed to the disposal of clothes prematurely. The consumers today desire for the most updated, novel and trendiest fashion at the least expensive price; and fast-fashion provides all these without a burden on the pockets of consumers. Thus, consumers, manufactures and designers are in the mid of a vicious circle igniting a chain reaction. While manufactures are in a bullfight to produce clothes against time constraints, consumers eagerly wait for the new collection to be purchased once on the racks.

However, clothes also inherit an essential component of narrative, memory and, particularly possess reminiscence of moment, event or relationship at a metaphysical level. A strong emotional bond that existed between the wearer and the material object has deteriorated in the modern times. Availability of cheap clothes, low quality, excessive access of clothes, over-consumption, clothes considered outdated, failure to undertake repair activities are some the practical reason behind early disposal of clothes and fading of the metaphysical bond. Most consumers are unable to mend their clothes due to lack of interest involved in mending, devotion of time and the raw skill levels that they possess. These barriers could be addressed through responsible training, repair workshops and education among consumer to revive the metaphysical bonding, stimulate awareness to formulate a sensitive approach toward retaining clothes.

A substantial lack of communication also lies between the sustainable business model and consumer involvement in that model in the light of fast-fashion. Consumers may appreciate the material objects virtually to express concern for the environment but realistically, they end-up making purchase that are cheap and not ever-lasting due to affordability factor. There is an urgent need to provide the ease to consumers to be able to buy sustainable material object at an affordable price and availability of green and eco fashion at mass market level that could bridge the gap between sustainability and consumer behavior.

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