
Product Designing through Refashioning

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ABSTRACT

The Fashion Industry epitomises unsustainability with its fast changing trends, high minimums and planned obsolescence. Modern patterns of consumerism coincide with an increase in 'throwaway' fashion, contributing millions of tons of clothing to landfill, incineration and third world dumping. Fast changing trends, reduced price and diminished intrinsic value, encourage consumers to replace and dispose of products before their real life cycle has ended. In contrast to the usual cradle-to-grave customer approach, smaller clusters of consumers, aware of environmental and ethical issues and interested in societal change are turning to alternative models and niche interventions. Significant steps are taken to introduce more sustainable, environmentally friendly manufacturing techniques. Consumer and enterprise consciousness is increasing with regards to environmental sustainability and zero-waste products. One such step is refashioning. Refashioning is the skill of using creative processes to transform used fabrics, textiles, and/or clothing into something else that better fits the individual's needs via the process of sewing, upcycling, embroidery, or other craft.

Keywords: *ReFashion, overproduction, over-consumption, sustainability, second-hand, post-consumer textile waste*

Introduction

The eternal demand for changing is the process that keeps fashion alive. The importance of fashion is well demonstrated by the large number of people involved in this branch of industry having historical roots. Fashion senses the changes taking place in the world and response to them sensitively and immediately. These changes can be directly perceived in the way the individuals dress, giving unambiguous information about the wearers, their wealth, taste, age, national characteristics, etc. to fulfill the requirement and urge of consumers for newer products the design is continuously gaining importance in the development of the products. All these factors have become key elements of the development in the present economic and social situation. Advancements in technologies are taking to new frontiers. For example the merging of clothing and footwear sector with electronics is resulting in an emergence of smart clothes that combine medical, fitness and wellness features to monitor heart rate, calories burned and other biometric data. Furthermore, the textile industry is now enhancing consumer experiences by applying nanotechnology to clothes. Smart textile and wearable technologies are penetrating the sector, the lines between apparel and technology are blurring while increasing the need for different industries – apparel, electronics, and science – to work together.

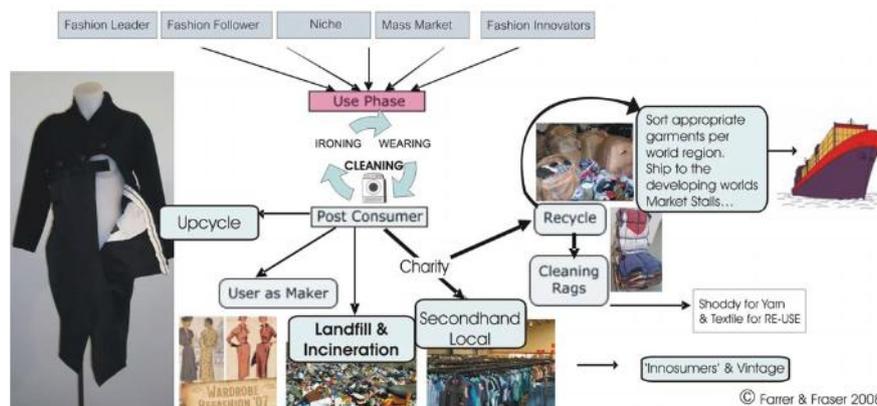
But on the other hand significant steps are taken to introduce more sustainable, environmentally friendly manufacturing techniques. Consumer and enterprise consciousness is increasing with regards to environmental sustainability and zero-waste products. Clothing industry is well-known for its high consumption of material, water and energy to produce, pack, and ship merchandise across the globe. Previous studies shows that the cotton required for a single t-shirt consumes up to 2,700 litres of water; dyeing and printing requires vast amounts of water and chemicals and releases volatile agents; and footwear manufacturing uses difficult-to-recycle, petroleum-based material and hazardous chemicals. In addition to production waste post consumer waste is also increasing day by day. Modern patterns of consumerism coincide with an increase in 'throwaway' fashion, contributing millions of tons of clothing to landfill, incineration and third world dumping. Increasing consumption now goes hand in hand with increasing disposal, (Farrer & Fraser, 2008). Fast changing trends, reduced price and diminished intrinsic value,

encourage consumers to replace and dispose of products before their real life cycle has ended. In the U.K. textiles discarded to landfill originate mostly from household sources (Kim Fraser 2009)

In order to deal with this high alert environmental issue the textile industries are heading their way towards refashioning where post-consumer textile waste (PCTW) is viewed as an untapped commodity, a fibre/textile resource to be conserved, re-used, recycled, refashioned and transformed into contemporary fashion. Hence in contrast to the usual cradle-to-grave customer approach, smaller clusters of consumers, aware of environmental and ethical issues and interested in societal change are turning to alternative models and niche interventions. Mountains of discarded clothing from landfill or incineration are diverted into a second life through innovative design and new business practices. To emphasise waste minimisation and end of pipe pollution controls both the manufacturing site and management level are working hand in hand. The idea of designing products from the outset to minimise waste at its point of use and through its entire life-cycle is considered within the textile industry' (Heeley, 1999). The process has become more cyclic in nature with the introduction of refashioning.

Refashioning is the skill of using creative processes to transform used fabrics, textiles, and/or clothing into something else that better fits the individual's needs via the process of sewing, upcycling, embroidery, or other craft. Refashioning, also called reconditioning, "fuses thrift with creativity and embellishment" (Fletcher & Grose, 67). This process gives a garment new life in the sense it is not discarded by the user and sent to a landfill, but instead continues to cycle within society. This practice of recycling these goods back into the community is quintessential to refashioning in that re-cycling offers the ability to re-fashion an item. This process

could potentially reduce the mountain of waste, whilst reducing the demand on raw materials required in the manufacture of new textiles. Furthermore, refashioning goes beyond a consuming sphere. Reusing and recycling secondhand goods throughout communities is a very important choice and act as a consumer. There are some fashion brands and designers that have made a business out of the practice of refashioning/reconditioning such as From Somewhere, Junky Styling, Goodone, and William Good (Fletcher & Grose, 69; Brown). This is a great beginning to sustainable design practices from within the fashion industry. McDonough and Braungart (2002) compare the 'cradle-to-grave' model with earth's natural systems, where one organism's waste becomes food for another, therefore eliminating the concept of waste. Fletcher (1999) also describes the current product design approach as linear (compliance driven, waste minimisation with end-of-pipe pollution controls), promoting the 'Lifecycle' approach alternative to minimise environmental impact across the entire lifecycle. This approach relies on design to constantly analyse and re-evaluate the product in light of environmental constraints in production, use and disposal.



Farrer and Fraser's (2009) diagram (Figure 6:1) visually charts the potential fate of PCTW.

Steps in refashioning

Sourcing:

The first action to take in the physical practice of refashioning is sourcing and accumulating the secondhand/used materials to work with. The most common places to source materials are thrift stores, charity

shops, clothing swaps, reuse centers, and simply asking neighbors, friends, or community members for “old” clothes.

In the workspace:

Then, a refashionist introduces material into workspace, continuing to brainstorm the limitless possibilities this fabric can take on the second time around

Utilization of skills:

Once all the materials have been procured, a refashionist begins transforming the garment or fabric into something different.

Simultaneous Blogging:

Often, different activities are practiced simultaneously, so this process takes a great deal of focus. For the purpose of creating a refashion blog, a refashionist must be able to document process of refashioning. So, every step of the way pictures must be taken i.e. cutting fabric, sewing fabric, pressing fabric, dyeing fabric, and before & after pictures of the garments and/or accessories. This is a basic structure to a refashion blog post. The structure is composed of a series of pictures beginning with a “before picture” of the garment before it has been refashioned by the refashioner. Normally, every necessary step of the project is shown in photograph format with an accompanying caption describing each step explicitly so that readers online can get a greater understanding without being in the room with the refashioner. Finally, at the end of a post, there is an after picture with the refashionist wearing the garment.

The Benefits of Refashioning for the Individual

There are a myriad of benefits that stem from the practice of refashioning, namely body and self-image, individual agency, skill cultivation, and community building. Refashioning also is a beneficial practice in the sense it gives the individual participant a sense of agency. Refashioning transforms the role of the consumer into a producer and a creator. Through the practice, an individual controls what they are wearing by reframing these garments to their body and also equipping their bodies with skill sets that are not necessary for an average consumer that depends on just the apparel industry to clothe themselves. Thus, refashioners become agents with ability. Ultimately, refashioning secondhand clothing is not just a process or an act, but it is a mindset, a lifestyle, a way of being. It’s one that goes (& sews) against the grain of clothing oneself in mainstream society. Refashioning exemplifies many of the “re-” principles that are necessary for a sustainable transition to occur in our lives-- reuse, reduce, recycle, reimagine, re-do, revamp, repurpose, rethink, etc. etc. It is an activity that brings agency to the individual that allows them to reinvent their role in the cycle of apparel. They transform themselves into more than just a consumer. Rather, they also take on roles of producer, inventor, innovator, crafter, and even bricoleur. Additionally, the process of blogging adds another layer of skill and time commitment. There are skills cultivated such as writing to a greater public as well as graphic design.

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