

Towards an ethics of fashion.

Challenges and advances

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This paper arose out of a summer course I participated in at the Chrisobal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria, northern Spain entitled, 'Towards an ethics of fashion, challenges and advances'. It prompted me to confront a whole series of issues and debates within fashion industry practice through the rubric of ethics, questions I'd only briefly touched on before (Entwistle, 2016). In the paper I presented there, I wanted to consider how we might develop a broad based, inclusive new ethics of fashion and in this paper I want to continue that discussion and argue for a new, broad-based 'ethics of care' to address the many problems associated with fashion: the contributing role of fashion production, distribution, consumption, care and disposal to climate change, the welfare and rights of all fashion workers, alongside the rights of animal and natural environment. However, for this to emerge we need to make connections between literatures and debates that have so far been kept separate.

First, there is a tendency to separate out debates about *physical production* of clothing with the attendant environmental and social problems, and the *symbolic production* of clothing, in terms of images and ideals of the fashionable body and the challenge of diversity and representation. In Part I, I consider how we can bridge the gap between these two silos of research and activism by considering all fashion production as materially significant. Rather than thinking of these in terms of physical/material versus symbolic/immaterial production, both are material practices and of equal concern, socially, politically, ethically.

Second, there is a tendency to separate debates on sustainability/nature and debates about ethics/human within the literature. This fault line may be a by-product of the 'purifying' categories (Latour, 1993, 2007) of nature/culture, human/non-human, which we have inherited from Enlightenment and modern thinking. Drawing on actor-network-theory or ANT, which provides a robust challenge to these categories, ANT dissolves artificial ontological distinctions between actors and methodologically follows or traces interconnections between them. This is an appropriate approach for understanding fashion as a complex modern 'hybrid' of natural and cultural material and actors.

What can tie these separate issues together is an ethics of care. In providing a broad foundation on which to follow and connect different actors, processes and practices, a notion of care fulfils what Mora et.al., (2014) suggest is the need for a broad analytical and methodological frame of reference to address pressing concerns facing the industry. While ethics has been considered in relation to fashion by some scholars (Fletcher, 2015; Thomas 2018) an ethics of care approach, derived from ANT has not been fully developed and these silos in debate persist.

In Part I the problems associated with the fashion industry are briefly set out as the historical, social and political context for the fashion system we have today. Fashion involves the coordinated activities of a vast range of interconnected actors in the production of garments (and other goods) and actors in the production of value around them, as to what garments count as being 'in' fashion. Thus, fashion production in terms of garment manufacture and symbolic production are shown as connected. What this brief overview of the industry indicates is that that fashion participates in domination, the creation of inequalities and exploitation and unsustainable practices which damaging impacts on human and non-human health and well-being.

In Part II I explore how we might further develop a new fashion ethics that takes on the challenges of this industry, theoretically and methodologically. It is largely through the ethics of care that we can broaden out the debate on ethics, to embrace both the physical production of garments and the symbolic production.

Part 1 The fashion system

Fashion systems refer to networks of interconnected agents who make, distribute, promote and retail clothing. As Fletcher(2013: 6) puts it,

[A]n elemental web of interconnectedness ties the activities of a farmer growing fibre crops for commodity markets, a designer in his or her studio conceiving of a new season's collection, a supplier factory working to supply a global brand, fashion buyers, retailers, marketing specialists and of course, the users of those clothes – 'people' - you and me'.

To develop an inclusive ethics of care, these interconnections first need to be acknowledged and a concern for all actors, in terms of care, emphasised. We need to identify how the changing aesthetics of fashion are motored by a complex set of agents who design, manufacture, promote, distribute and sell clothing, are broadly coordinated to produce and distribute the raw material –clothing – that is the basis of most people's daily experience of their bodies. Hence, first I set out a brief overview of fashion history, arguing the need to see connections between often separate moments in fashion – namely, manufacturing and symbolic production, before discussing in Part I how we might address these interconnections in terms of ethics of care.

Fashion's problematic history and development

The ethical concerns of the fashion industry today have their origins in the history of the fashion industry within modernity: to paraphrase Wilson (2003), fashion is

a child of modernity. In other words, the central idea and ideal of fashion, which centrally places value on 'the new' and generates changing styles and ideals is a defining feature of 'modernity'. Playing a central role in the first industrial revolution in terms of technological developments, fashion is also part and parcel of the speeded up experience of modern life, with the pace of aesthetic change a critical factor in the formation of material and symbolic practices that constitute modern day fashion systems. As Fletcher and Tham (2015:3) argue, fashion involves both formalized and institution-based activities and 'hard' production, and subtler and more elusive domains of emotions, symbols and identity'. However, within literature and debate there is a tendency to separate the history of this 'hard' production in terms of the physical manufacture of objects from the symbolic production of ideas/ideals of fashion (Leopold, 1992). In order to fully account for the system and develop a broad-based ethical approach to fashion we need to connect these various practices and processes.

Fashion has played a central part of the history of the industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalism. Textile production sits at the heart of the industrial revolution in Britain: emerging innovations in spinning, weaving and sewing spurred on the rapid economic and social changes that produced the industrial revolution to see Britain become the 'workshop of the world'. Technologies in sizing were equally revolutionary according to Godley (1997: 3) 'ready-made clothing industry is, perhaps, the single most important industry in the economic history of the western world'.

A central aspect of modernity, fashion was, however, always built upon forms of exploitation. The factory system relies upon cheap labour, from the industrial revolution in the north of England, through to today's factories in places like Bangladesh, labour pay and conditions have been at the fore of much criticism and activism in terms of their unsustainable impact upon human health and well-being. Thus, from the 19th century, to today's anti-sweatshop activism, this exploitation has run along lines of inequality, both gender and race. Women have long been associated with textile and garment production – the idea of 'nimble fingers' for example – and the wages associated with this labour often seen, quite literally as 'pin money'. Today's fashion system depends upon the continued intersection of gender, race and ethnicity, as typically much of the world's garments are made by immigrant communities in northern countries, such as Jews in the East End of London in the 19th century, while today the exploitation is of workers located in poorer countries in the south. (Godley, 1997; Ross, 1997).

Today's fast fashion system exacerbates these inequalities: the cheap price point of fast fashion has resulted in an endless search for the cheapest labour market - the 'race to the bottom' – that means long sub-contracting chains, pushing profit margins through poor wages and conditions. (Klein, 2000; Ross, 1997) Farmers, women and children in Asia, especially in Bangladesh and China, work for poverty wages in poor conditions for brands in the north/west who have little oversight the longer the chain grows. Sub-contracting pushes the risk down the chain and obscures these poor labour conditions to those further up the chain, and, ultimately, to consumers. Similar sub-contracting through the homeworking labour of ethnic minority women on European and US soil also occur (Gardetti and

Torres, 2013). This negative impact on human health and well-being of harsh factory systems of production has been documented widely by geographers, historians and activists (Dixon and Warren, 2020; Klein, 2000; Ross, 1997) with fast fashion subcontracting only the latest iteration of labour exploitation that began in the industrial revolution.

Speed and rapid change are the motors of modernity; they are also the root cause of unsustainable growth (Ehrenfeld, 2015). By definition, capitalism is inherently unsustainable. With faster cycles of fashionable clothing under the fast fashion model, cheap, throwaway clothes frequently replaced have become the norm. With production largely moved away from northern to the southern hemisphere, the problems associated with this unsustainable pattern have been outsourced as a result. While countries in the global north are gradually trying to develop alternatives to unchecked growth in numerous industries, through notions of 'slow' (with food and fashion obvious examples, discussed below), countries in the global south are now suffering the attendant negative impact on human and non-human life that had been a prominent feature of Victorian Britain, namely, poor pay and working conditions for workers, smog, pollution, destruction of the natural environment, and species extinction.

Countries in the global south their unique problems associated with development compared to those in the north who industrialised earlier. While World Bank and IMF promotes countries in the global south/east to perform 'development' along the same lines already established by older 'developed' economies in the global north/west, 'progress' means something different in the south and there are clear inequalities emerging within the sustainability agendas (Ziai, 2016). Thus, while northern countries may acknowledge sustainability issues (de-carbonising their economies, for example), in part to the emerging consensus of climate science and the activism of groups like Extinction Rebellion, those in the developing south are still playing catch up in terms of industrialisation and are less able to push ahead with more sustainable technologies and practices. Consequently, the negative impacts of unsustainable development is not felt evenly across the globe, although the entire globe will be impacted by rising sea temperatures and climate change.

There have, for centuries, been such connections between north and south, east and west, as European Empires established its trade routes and patterns of colonisation and exploitation over the course of many centuries of exploration and exploitation. (Riello and McNeill, P. 2010) Thus, European fashion – from early court societies in France or England through to the industrial revolution – has long connected centres of style and elegance (for example, in the Napoleonic court in Paris, see Bourhis, 1989) to other parts of the world through colonial patterns of domination. For example, the European taste for materials such as cotton (Lemire, 1992) are part and parcel of histories of colonisation linked to the plundering of raw materials in the global south or east, and the exploitation of human and natural resources as a result.

Fashion production also negatively impacts the physical environment in a multitude of ways. The destructive impact on soil, insect and animal life of pollutant pesticides and other chemicals for dyeing cloth, have been well documented (Claudio, 2007; Fletcher, 2014; Mukherjee, 2015), and so too, the damage of

transporting raw materials and garments in search of the cheapest labour to stitch and sew, through to the damaging impact of disposal of clothes at the other end of its life. (Fletcher and Tham, 2015) There is often no dividing line between these harms: the overall impact on human and non-human life of carbon emissions which are emitted across all points in the cycle from production, distribution and consumption, and the increasing climate emergency, impacts all life on the planet.

These issues are not simply about production but also concern consumption practices, which fashion the ultimate expression of capitalism's incessant energy and vitality for the 'new' that drives this production regime. (Entwistle, 2015) Thus, consumption practices and desires underpin the logic of fashion, meaning that consumers come to see the need to change their clothes more frequently, not when they are worn out or damaged, but when they are no longer 'in fashion'. This restless vitality inherent in the capitalist production system has speeded up this cycle of novelty, with fast fashion increasing the turnover of styles and clothes. Fashion is, therefore, not just about physical production of new textiles and garment, but other developments central to emerging consumer markets. Urbanisation in newly expanding cities led to new spaces for the consumption of fashion and for performances of fashionability, such as department stores in the late 19th century (Wilson, 2003; Nava, 1996, 1998), while meditation has helped to spread new styles and trends more rapidly. (Rocamora, 2012)

Symbolic production – the materiality of image making

Material production of clothing, is, however, only one part of the story, namely the 'hard' production noted by Fletcher and Tham (2015). Of equal importance, but usually separated out from these debates, are the seemingly 'subtle' aspects of symbolic production in the making of fashion imagery and meanings (Barthes, 1983; Jobling, 1999, 2014) The acceleration of fashion production over the course of modernity has come as a direct result of work on consumption and how it is prompted, stimulated, invoked through work on emotions, values, behaviour, created by means of *symbolic production*. However, how might we connect up the physical production of clothing with the symbolic production of fashion meanings to see how they are interconnected and coordinated? What are the ethical concerns of symbolic production that need to be integrated into a broad ethics of care? Numerous symbolic practices stimulate a desire for new things, promoting production of goods that are part and parcel essential to the fashion system. These symbolic practices are, however, not purely about signification and meaning; they are material and there are many ways in which the practices of image making both reflect and reproduce inequality. There are, indeed, unsustainable labour practices in the symbolic production of fashion that mirror the patterns of inequality and unsustainability in physical manufacture of garments. Before outlining these problems, I give brief overview of fashion communication.

Different technologies of fashion communication have developed over centuries. The earliest forms of fashion communication were early fashion dolls that travelled around the great courts of Europe showing the latest fashions (Bartlett, et.al., 2013; Kawamora, 2018). As technologies for printing developed so did

forms of fashion text, illustrations, pamphlets, early fashion magazines, through to electronic media like film and television. Today's fashion communication is spread through various digital formats texts. These symbolic forms have been typically generated, edited and distributed within the industry through the work of elite cultural intermediaries, to use Bourdieu's (1984) term (see also Smith McQuire and Matthews, 2014). Thus, from fashion designers like early couturiers such as Charles Worth in the 19th century, to journalists and writers, key public figures of notable style, from dandies to today's celebrities, though to street styles of sub-cultures, many actors have played their part in disseminating new styles. Today's social media platforms have opened up this elite communication with fashion trends now co-produced by consumers themselves, or 'prosumers' (Ritzer, et.al., 2012; Ritzer, 2015) which means fashion ideas and imagery is produced outside the confines of the industry, but equally, the industry increasingly co-opts consumers and so-called 'influencers'. (see, for example, Pedroni, 2016; Pedroni and Pofi, 2018) This digital symbolic production motors the material production of fashion at increasingly faster pace.

However, while we can distinguish between physical/manufacturing and symbolic/meaning making, I am not arguing that this is a split between the material and immaterial production. Quite the contrary: we need to see symbolic production as material practice involving the coordinated work of bodies and objects to produce and disseminate fashion images. Symbolic production involves real material labour. For example, model bodies, conventionally styled in conventional fashion images, are 'manufactured', worked upon by models themselves, as they strive to ensure their body is appropriate size and shape to fit into the clothes; they are also worked upon by others through the way clothes are styled and photographed using cameras and lighting, for instance. The resulting images are also conveyed through material objects of paper, iPhone, etc. Thus, while symbolic production may be apparently concerned with ideas and aesthetics, not just of clothes but of bodies as discussed below, it is very much dependent upon material production.

Understanding symbolic production in this way, as material practice, matters to the development a broad, inclusive ethics of fashion built around care. Indeed, any discussion of the ethics of representation needs to consider a whole range of issues raised by material symbolic production in terms of who is represented and who is not, and there are broader implications of this symbolic work in terms of the way it entangles *all* bodies within. Particularly significant for a discussion of a broader ethics of care, is the lack of diversity in fashion imagery, with increasing academic literature, and activist campaigns, focusing attention on representation. As I now argue, there are important reasons to connect symbolic production to the physical production of fashion objects rather than treat them as separate moments and different practices.

Fashion representation and diversity

The aesthetics of fashion, portrayed in the symbolic form are styled *on* and *oriented towards* real bodies. Indeed, fashion is never solely about clothes, but promotes and circulates ideas and ideals of the fashionable body, telling us 'this is

what a fashionable body should look like', 'this is the legitimate body of fashion'. Thus, fashion aesthetics speak to and about particular bodies deemed suitable to wear them. Representation is about participation. The specific aesthetic look may be constantly changing but what is apparent is that fashion throughout history tells a story of the human body and of body aesthetics and ideals, as Hollander (1993) persuasively argues. She outlines how our ways of seeing the body come to us via the aesthetics of fashion of the day so that naked bodies in art are 'dressed' according to the prevailing fashions of the day. Women's bodies, in particular, have been the focus of radical changes in shape and size, with corsetry, cages and other accoutrements moulding the body into various shapes over the 18th and 19th centuries. For example, narrow waists create curvaceous expanses of breasts and crinolines shaping hips which find an echo in female nudes whose bodies are dressed in with these aesthetic conventions. Men's bodies have also been subject to fluctuating styles of dress and, at least in early fashion history, were just as heavily adorned as women and similarly radically shaped through corsets and padding. Clearly today's corsets are made of muscle not whalebone (Wilson, 2003, see also, Entwistle, 2015) but they are just as telling of the prevailing body aesthetics which find form in new materials such as Lycra and Elastin that help further mould and sculpt the contemporary body.

Hollander's analysis underlines the very significant way in which we need to critique fashion and why the symbolism of fashion is relevant to a broad discussion of ethics. Body ideals in fashion are not just about representations; they are also materially instantiated in industry practices, shaping design practices, modelling, the production of fashion representations, and sizing in retailing practices. Fashion powerfully informs how we see and value bodies so when we look at these body ideals we can see and critique what bodies it values. Throughout much of the 20th and 21st century, the bodies valued were chosen, dressed, styled and photographed by elite cultural intermediaries and celebrated a narrow, genetically rare configuration of bone and fat – a very thin, even skinny body, usually very tall, very young, able-bodied and generally white. (Mears, 2011; Wissinger, 2015) In this way, implicit (sometimes explicitly) racist, ageist, sexist notions of the appropriate fashionable body have been reproduced across multiple material practices in mainstream fashion media. (Mears, 2010; Wissinger, 2012)

We can examine the material practices that make up dominant fashion representations and connect these practices to wider industry practices by looking at one dominant aspect of the fashionable body - the idea of thinness. As Volonte (2017) argues, technologies in the physical manufacture of clothing and symbolic production intersect to maintain the thin ideal body of fashion. Drawing on practice theory, Volonte argues the thin ideal has become entrenched because it is instantiated in routine practices within the industry and he focuses particular attention on design studio sampling and industry sizing practices along with fashion models. He argues that these have become firmly established and produce an 'inertia' to change by those inside the industry. Thus, small sample sizes necessitate thin models and help to perpetuate the ideal of thinness that then percolates through sizing regimes of retailers. In this way, manufacturing and symbolic practices are materially connected and inform one another. Thus, images of thin mod-

els are not just of semiotic significance, to be decoded, but part and parcel of production regimes in clothing manufacture and representation.

There are, indeed, problems with the sample sizes in studios and how sizing in the industry has established normative standards of the body. These very small sample sizes dictate the size of models who need to be very thin, and often also very young/under-developed, to wear them. The strictures of this thin ideal therefore reverberate around the industry, impacting upon the aesthetic labour of models who have to work hard on their bodies as a result. (Entwistle and Mears, 2013; Entwistle and Wissinger, 2007) Ethical concerns have periodically been raised when models so skinny they fall ill or even die (for example, the deaths of Uruguian models Luisel and Eliana Ramos in 2006 and 2007 were reported globally) but the insidious effects of small sizes works its way through the fashion sizing regimes less spectacularly. For example, US teen brand, Brandy Melville, is wedded to a small, 'one size fits all' policy, while some designers and retailers do not produce or buy garments over a UK size 16. Other research on modelling employment (Entwistle, 2009; Mears, 2011; Wissinger, 2015) evidences how those involved in image making - designers, model agents and models - develop a shared taste for very thin, and very young and predominantly white bodies across the whole industry. While Volonte (2017) acknowledges the industry makes some concessions to larger bodies, there remains a preference for the thin body in studios (the perfect 'hanger' for clothes), which permeates through the industry as a whole. What this discussion evidences is that garment production and image production, both material practices, exist in a symbiotic relationship, mutually informing one another and reproducing the thin ideal ad nauseum.

A lack of diversity in terms of race and ethnicity is also problematic with fashion reproducing white ideals of beauty. Black fashion models are much less visible and not likely to grace front covers of magazines or win big contracts with design houses (Mears, 2010; Wissinger, 2012). There are also very few differently abled bodies and there are still only a few token older bodies making it onto runways. In terms of the preference for able bodies, a lack of diversity within fashion imagery feeds and helps to reproduce ideas about the fashionable body as able-bodied. This prejudice finds its way into design in insidious ways. Taken for granted aspects of clothing design, such as zips and buttons and buckles, are designed for the able-bodied and, similarly, the design of shops/retail environments that are not wheel chair friendly, excludes participation by differently abled bodies.

In recent years, there have been increasing attempts to shift the focus from thin bodies to seeing different sizes and shapes in mainstream media (with 'body positivity' a theme in Dove's campaigns in recent years). In terms of modelling, a new generation of boutique model agencies, like Bridge which features 'curve' models and Zebedee, which promotes differently abled and trans models, have arisen and are trying to open the industry to diversity. However, until dominant practices such as sample sizes, are produced in wider size ranges, showrooms and runways will never be accessible to differently abled bodies who fall outside the dominant norm will not be booked. Differently abled consumers may feel excluded as there are so few places for them to find clothes. Hilfiger's Adaptive Col-

lection range is one rare exception to the normative samples of designers and retailers that are designed around able-bodied people.

Clearly then, as this discussion evidences, representation matters in very real, material ways. Previously exclusionary, the lack of diversity within the industry, most evident in the sorts of bodies celebrated in fashion imagery, has impact in terms of the bodies that are valued and designed for. Caryln Franklin, fashion journalist and activist, argues “Repetition is key - when we see something over and over again we normalise it. That’s why it’s important to see a range of body shapes.’ (London Fashion Week: Representation is ‘still a problem’ - BBC News) If representation speaks to participation, then there are many questions we need to ask of the industry: who can participate in fashion and who is excluded and what industry practices underpin these inclusions/exclusions? Clearly these are ethical issues that need to be fully included in a broad ethics of care approach that would seek to overcome a separation between debates about the material production of fashion objects with debates about the material production of fashionable ideals. In Part II I set out to discuss what such a broad ethics of care might look like.

Part II - A new ethics of fashion

A second major issue relating to debates about fashion is the way in which there is a tendency to separate out concerns about sustainability from concerns about ethics, with sustainability typically focused on nature/environment, and debates about ethics focused on human problems. This divide is understandable but problematic as it reinforces an artificial distinction between humans and non-humans. The dichotomy nature/culture that is a residue of long held beliefs since the Enlightenment, which, according to Latour (1993), are a product of the ‘purifying’ practices of modernity that seek to maintain a separation between natural and cultural entities despite the evidence of ‘hybrids’. Fashion is one such modern hybrid, with its mix of the natural and the cultural and to pull them apart is impossible: unsustainable depletion of Earth’s environment (water, cotton, and the like) impacts humans and non-humans alike, causing damage or harm to all, while equally, if we do away with this distinction we are automatically bound to extend ethical obligations to all actors human and non-human. These issues I unpack here, firstly, by discussing how both terms have been defined within the literature and exploring how definitions and distinctions might be overcome through an ANT-inspired approach that is both intellectually and methodologically more fruitful. Secondly, I explore how an ethics of care, already developed by others in relation to fashion (Ehrenfeld, 2008, 2015; Fletcher, 2015; Thomas, 2018) might be expanded further to include more actors.

Sustainability and ethics

While understood commonsensically, ‘sustainability’ and ‘ethics’ have been variously defined and need clarifying here. Indeed, Thomas (2017: pg?) suggests, ‘the words *ethics* and *sustainability* are used in reference to the same garments

or company as if they meant the same thing. But they don't. A garment can be *ethical* yet not sustainable, and vice versa.' Indeed, she goes on to suggest that 'ethics are the structure upon which sustainability is built' (2017: pg). We might simply define ethics as 'moral principles, rules of conduct' (Thomas, 2017: pg) which set out the terms upon which make choices as to values, such as what to sustain. Of the two words, however, sustainability has been more widely used and deployed in the literature, though not always defined clearly from the outset, and often used in quite narrow, even technical ways. It is, according to Ehrenfeld (2015:57) an 'empty word', and, at its emptiest, refers to 'the capacity of a system or object to produce something desired over an extended period' but unless or until that something is named, 'it has no practical significance'.

There are, however, examples of how this word is filled, even if, as is often the case, it is not always overtly defined but implicit, assumed to be self-explanatory and therefore not always unpacked. For example, in the introduction to their edited collection, Fletcher and Grose (2012) offer a definition of fashion but *not* a full definition of sustainability from the outset. Their assumptions as to what sustainability means become clear in their discussion, which focuses on the natural world and to environmental damage, depletion or costs. Thus, they surmise sustainability in terms of three sorts of challenges: that of fashion product (the fibres, processes, relations with the natural world), fashion system/business models; and design practice. Similarly, Fletcher and Tham (2015:3) are concerned to see sustainability through 'products, processes and services'. Responses to calls to change product, for example, have generated numerous new technological solutions in fibre production, such as the Wonderland project conducted by Ryan and Storey that included the disappearing dress (WONDERLAND: Plastics is Precious: The disappearing dresses — Ulster University, see also, Peters, et.al., 2015 ; Collet, 2015) to harness science and technology in the creation of new materials that might be more eco-friendly or efficient. Pedersen & Andersen (2015, p.315) also focus on natural resources to include "energy use and generation of greenhouse gas emissions, water use, toxicity, hazardous waste and effluent". Added to these are further environmental costs in terms of energy needed for the distribution/transport of textiles and garments, as well as the associated costs of packaging (Lawless & Medvedev, 2016). Another significant focus of attention has been the impact of user/consumer practices in terms of water and energy consumption in the cleaning and maintaining of clothes post-consumption. As this literature suggests, sustainability debates typically focus on, and are often limited to, the use, depletion and damage of finite natural resources and negative environmental impacts.

However, while sustainability has typically tended to focus on natural resources, such as materials and environmental impacts, another body of literature entirely has focused on human resources and costs and tends to be related to ethical concerns about human labour and exploitation. This literature was gained traction in the 1990s and focuses attention on the producers of garments who have historically been poor and exploited by a system that seeks to push down costs (Ross, Klein go here). For example, Phizacklea (1990) has examined how gender, racism and class have long impacted on the division of labour within the supply chain. This literature therefore focuses on issues that refer specifically to

human workers' and their rights, with only some also including environmental concerns in conjunction (Thomas 2018). Indeed, she argues that they are rarely dealt together, with the entire supply chain or garment lifecycle considered as part of fashion ethics. It would seem, therefore, there is a separation of these different aspects, with sustainability/ethics reproducing an age old split of human/ethics and nature/sustainability. This limits the ability to connect up the various impacts and harms of the fashion industry and impedes political action. Clearly, a system of exploitative working practices, which puts enormous pressure on the world's poor (leading to death as with the Rana Plaza fire in 2013) could easily be discussed in terms of unsustainable working practices on human bodies and well-being.

One important point to note in terms of debates in this area is the distinction drawn by Fletcher and Tham (2015:3) between 'sustainability' and 'sustainable' which are 'often employed as synonyms': sustainability is

a system property that is dependent upon the relationships between things that evolve through time and towards *the aspirational goal of thriving* while *sustainable*, by contrast, describe the process of attempting to achieve this goal, often in instrumental, bounded, static ways.' (emphasis added)

There are two things of importance worth noting here. First, a definition of sustainability included here goes beyond narrow understandings of continuation to refer to 'thriving', derived from Ehrenfeld (2008, 2015, more on this below). Second, how we achieve this is critically important: it is often discussed in terms narrow sustainable processes that are 'instrumental'. In other words, much of what is described under the banner of sustainable development comes from systemic changes that may be limited and 'static'. For fashion, this means sustainability is often concerned with whether we can have more or less of one or the other: 'the more fashion equates to less sustainability and vice versa.' (Fletcher and Tham, 2015: 5). If our current model of fashion is unsustainable, depleting, or damaging natural resources which are finite, one response – favoured one for the industry - is to have a bit less of fast fashion and a bit more sustainable fashion. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives tend to be orientated to 'maintaining the status quo with key adaptations' (2015: 5) to lessen environmental impacts. As Fletcher and Tham (2015: 3) go on to note, these adaptations while worthy, 'fail[s] to engage with fundamental underlying structures contributing to the unsustainability of fashion' Thus, '[P]inning hopes on technological (eco-efficiency) or technocratic(rules and regulations) fixes is a losing approach' (Ehrenfeld, 2015: 58). In other words, we need to do more than mitigate the impact of harmful practices and we cannot merely try limit ourselves to 'playing catch-up and clean-up' or 'eco-efficiency which means 'providing more or equal value...at less environmental impact.' (Ehrenfeld, 2015: 60) Indeed, for Ehrenfeld, such technical fixes may not prevent ultimate destruction of Earth's habitat and, more dangerously, lead us to believe they are 'saving the earth' with these adjustments (2015: 59) when they only delay rather than avert destruction. They are merely 'reducing unsustainability'.

Likewise, much of Mora et al. (2014) details the specific responses within the industry to address particular technological issues or problems (of water and chemicals, consumer clothing maintenance). They argue that these piecemeal,

issue-by-issue solutions are not sufficient but what unites these broad issues is that they call attention to the overall ethos of the fashion industry and beg the question, how can the fashion industry best meet the challenges it faces in terms of addressing human, animal and environmental rights and welfare and secure a future that puts these concerns at the centre of its practice? More radical solutions need to go 'beyond the current paradigm' (Fletcher and Tham, 2015:3) and instead of 'commerce, novelty, premature product obsolescence – and the narrow spectrum of fashion this values and promotes' (2015: 5); in other words, we need radical alternatives to the fashion system based on different moral and political values.

What this (brief) discussion and definition of sustainability/sustainable demonstrates is the absolute requirement for a carefully defined but wider definition than is often offered. If sustainability is typically narrow in focus and limited to 'technical' solutions and 'tweaks' it will be limited in its impact. Mora et al. (2012) argue for the need to bring together a whole range of issues that might be sychoned off into separate domains (corporate social responsibility CSR), compliance, or single issue concerns like water contamination. This narrowness is challenged by some, for example, Ehrenfeld, (2015: 57), who argues '[S]ustainability does not refer only to the state of the environment. It has come to refer to the state of human life on the plant as well' concerned not only with planetary issues but 'the social conditions of human societies', especially as it concerns levels of poverty produced as a by-product of unsustainable capitalist growth. Moreover, as Ehrenfeld (2015:58) argues, 'it is meaningless to talk of sustainability without an explicit vision of the future for all life on earth', prompting the question: 'what should we be striving to sustain?' (2015: 58). In answer, Ehrenfeld (2015: 59) offers an expanded definition of sustainability: 'the possibility that humans and other life will flourish on the planet forever' and he arrives at the compound 'sustainability-as-flourishing' as embracing this ambition. Rather than reducing unsustainability, a notion of flourishing goes far beyond narrow definitions of how we manage resources, raising issues that are more concerned with ethical values and practices.

From sustainability to ethics of care

What such a 'sustainability-as-flourishing' entails is a concern to move beyond Enlightenment understandings of 'progress', development and growth that underpin western modernity. It means challenging the very foundations and categories of this development narrative. Indeed, as discussed in Part I, in so far as the western fashion system has spread across the globe, it has encountered (and more or less obliterated) other approaches to earth management in its wake, destroying or diminishing the lives of many indigenous peoples in the global south whose value systems, ironically, have managed earthly resources far more effectively for millennia. These alternative cosmologies are often founded upon continuities between nature and culture, such as the Dreaming in Aboriginal culture which sees all life on earth in terms of the inter-relation between all things, starkly contrast to the purified dichotomy of western modernity. Ironically, such wisdom destroyed in the name of 'progress' was far more effective in terms of sustainability-as-flourishing.

However, under conditions of the near dominance of capitalism, with its exported language of economic value measured by GDP and supported by IMF and World Bank, we have arrived at understandings of growth and development that are both impoverished (GDP can never be a measure of well-being or happiness) and unsustainable, because we are reaching the end of planetary resources. If GDP as a measure is 'inadequate' (Ehrenfeld, 2015: 58) what we need is a more ambitious approach would reevaluate fashion and consumption entirely. For Ehrenfeld (p. 60), sustainability-as-flourishing takes us far beyond the technical sustainable solutions: it involves 'a change in the belief system' that would see 'raised consciousness of the users' multiple connections to the world, and further guided subsequent behaviour towards a caring, responsible stance toward that world.' What might this new caring consciousness look like? Specifically, can we develop an ethics of care and how might it be developed and applied to examine relations between/across the entire fashion system?

Ethics of care

In this final part of the discussion I want to first define review some of the existing literature on care before discussing ways in which it can be expanded and developed in relation to fashion. As summarised briefly below, this concept has wide application explored by others in relation to a host of different industries, practices and concerns (The Care Collective), with some discussion already applying it to fashion. Second, I want to argue that we can draw upon ANT to aid us analytically and methodologically to produce a more robust framework in our analysis of fashion.

According to the authors of this Manifesto, (2020), the notion of care has become of increasing political import in recent years as an important moral, ethical and political corrective to the 'carelessness' that has dominated the political landscape in recent decades. After years of 'rolling back the state' and free market capitalism post-Thatcher and Regan, the dominance of 'individualised notions of resilience, wellness and self-improvement, promoted through a ballooning "self-care" industry' has relegated ideas of care for our community wellbeing and social welfare. Increasingly, with social care and health care undermined and underfunded, care has come to be 'something we are supposed to buy for ourselves on a personal basis'. (The Care Collective, 2020: 2). As an important corrective to this devaluing of care and individualised notion of it, the ethics of care they set out provides an alternative intellectual, moral and political approach. While the pandemic has produced a recognition of the importance, indeed, reliance on care and careworkers (with 'clap for carers' occurring all over the world), they argue it will take more to undoe the low value historically placed on care with its feminized low status and low pay.

What this Manifesto, provides is a range of alternative approaches, local initiatives and ideas that are flourishing as alternatives to neo-liberal models of privatised care and which reinstate other forms of value over the purely economic. They are clear that this notion of care extends to our ethical obligations to all non-humans and in this way provides a more 'holistic' approach to the problem of split-

ting environmental sustainability from ethical concerns. Instead, their exploration of care in the very broadest sense, and moving from the very local to global schemes, encourages us to think through the connections and relationships between all living things.

Care is evidently gaining traction within fashion literature, from Ehrenheld to others (Fletcher, 2015a; Thomas, 2017). Fletcher calls for the need to develop a 'fashion commons' (Fletcher, 2015b) and in her 'Local Wisdom' project, she explores ways to challenge the dynamics of fashion in terms of new relationships and values beyond novelty and obsolescence. Thus, she notes the need to develop a 'broadly held morality linked to caring for others... and the natural world' (2015: 21) Such an ethics is founded on fundamentally different political understandings that diverge from individualistic, materialistic values upon which fashion is based, and instead engage and acknowledge shared 'relational' interests which entails care for all things, human and non-human.

Actor-network-theory

For these relational interests to become important and for them to be acted upon they need to be traced, rendered visible. An ethics of care that draws on ANT, I suggest, provides for a more inclusive analytical approach that avoids falling into dualist distinctions of culture/nature, and it also promotes a methodological framework that enables us to trace these relations and connections. First, by dissolving the ontological, humanist bias in research, an ANT approach to fashion can trace the connections between *all actors* – human and non-human – entangled within a network (like fashion). Without discriminating between harmful effects/impacts on either natural or human world an ANT methodological framework which 'follows the actors' (natural, human, animal objects in the making of fashion) allows us to trace and render visible what distance obscures. For example, adopting this approach might allow us to give a fuller account of cotton production. Following cotton as an actor we could trace how different actants (human and non-human) become entangled and make up the final fashioned body hybrid, enabling us to connect actors at a distance: from early cotton plantations, slave and slave owners in USA, to textile workers in Lancashire mills and seamstresses in sweatshops of the 19th century and onto the wardrobes of the fashionable in metropolitan centres around the world and to today's teenagers in Topshop on Oxford Street, London. What this tracing does is open up clothing which is normally a 'black box': this methodological practice unpicks the object's components, rendering visible the connections between plant, animal, human body. It allows us to trace movements and translations from organic plant, to pesticides and water, the labour of spinning and stitching, transportation, promotion and wear. The cotton-dress-human wearer at one end of the network can be seen as a hybrid creation of plant life and human life. This hybrid construction can be connected to other actors, human and non-human; to other bodies and to the environment. Tracing hybrids and identifying actors – human, plant and machinery and onwards –, we can follow the journey of material objects through production, retail, consumption and onto disposal where it is further transformed/unpicked post-wear.

How does this ANT approach relate to an ethics of care? In tracing fashion objects methodologically, and in opening up the black boxed hybrids created by the fashion system, this approach can help erase the distances between actors. As it is, these black boxes are only momentarily opened when actors collide disastrously, as when a poorly maintained factory collapses on workers at Rana Plaza and renders the factory arrangements in one place spectacularly visible at a distance to consumers in far flung north who wear the finished garments. Other material traces connect actors, for example, messages stitched into garments by workers in poor working conditions in a (desperate) effort to connect to/with distant, unknowable future consumers to inform them of the conditions of its production.

Methodologically, ANT's insistence to follow the actors is already developing within fashion literature. In another paper, I explore the value of Latour's thinking applied to fashion (Entwistle, 2015) and the challenge of this tracing of actors is executed clearly in Payne's (2020) approach to fashion design. Her analysis provides for the sort of inclusive, critical conceptual framework needed to really interrogate sustainability intellectually and practically. In focusing on materials, design practices and people, her approach breaks down artificial divisions and boundaries between actors to show the interconnections - between the natural and the human world, designers and design education and consumers. Her analysis locates these within a broader understanding of sustainability that will require wide-spread, root and branch reimagining of fashion design practices and processes. Her approach, partly inspired by ANT, hints at how we can creatively reposition sustainability and locate it within broad intellectual, social, ethical and practical context. Finally, her concern to trace networks of material and immaterial fashion production, promotion, use and destruction demonstrates how we need to think in terms of scales - from understandings of design practice (at micro level) to the macro/global processes. Practical interventions can also challenge the dominance of fashion and its 'codes'. A variety of different forms of activism have arisen in recent years: for example, Von Busch (2009) (see also Von Busch and Palmas 2006) have shown how there are different ways to 'hack' the fashion code, informing consumer/citizens in making and mending clothes, with 'swap shops' and stitching clubs and other local initiatives alternatives to purchasing more new clothes and slow down the fashion cycle.

Conclusion

What I have outlined in this paper is that the context for our current fashion system, with all the attendant problems of this industry impacting human and non-human life and well-being, have a long history. I have argued that divisions within the literature – between physical and symbolic production, and between sustainability and ethics debate – need to be overcome if we are to see the connections between various practices of the industry and develop a more robust, sustained and broader based approach to dealing with them.

The history of capitalist production and manufacture to consumption briefly outlined, clearly works to disconnect and render these relations and connections

invisible. Complex sub-contracting chains are usually blamed for abuses and exploitation precisely because of their invisibility. Opening up the fashioned actor-network in terms of hacking and unpicking fashion materials and processes, and tracking the associations and translations that produce fashion is politically significant. By exploring the materialities of fashion production from the ground up (literally from the seed and soil), through the material production of garments and symbolic image production, we arrive at widest possible viewpoint to discuss new fashion ethics with regard to traditional debates about sustainability, to debates about representation and diversity. We can see and therefore respond to – and take care of – all those actors caught up within the fashion network.

The ethical challenges of fashion are huge and I have suggested that an ethics of care approach, informed by ANT, can provide a good analytic and methodological basis to overcome some of the divisions in the literature and open up a critical study of fashion. A fully developed ethics of care can broaden out the terms on which we can challenge the multiple and over-lapping inequalities and harm of the fashion system.

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